

CURRENT NEWS

EARLY BIRD



January 18, 2008

**Use of these news items does not reflect official endorsement.
Reproduction for private use or gain is subject to original copyright restrictions.
Item numbers indicate order of appearance only.**

GATES BRIEFING

1. **Defense Secretary, Facing Criticism, Hails NATO's Forces In Afghanistan**
(*New York Times*)....Judy Dempsey
Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates said Thursday that NATO countries were playing a “significant and powerful role in Afghanistan,” after some of Washington’s closest European allies assailed him for comments cited in a news report about their counterinsurgency operations in the volatile south.
2. **Defense Secretary Lauds Role Of NATO**
(*Boston Globe*)....Lolita C. Baldor, Associated Press
Defense Secretary Robert Gates said yesterday that sending Marines to Afghanistan will keep pressure on the Taliban and doesn't "reflect dissatisfaction" with NATO countries' performance.
3. **Gates Sings Canada's Praises**
(*Ottawa Citizen*)....Mike Blanchfield
U.S. Defence Secretary Robert Gates said yesterday he made a special effort to reassure Canada after he criticized shortcomings in the NATO efforts in Afghanistan in a American newspaper.
4. **Gates Looks To Calm Nato Allies**
(*Financial Times*)....Demetri Sevastopulo
...Separately on Iraq, Mr Gates said he hoped General David Petraeus, the top US commander in Iraq, would in March be able to recommend withdrawing soldiers at the current pace, which would leave 100,000 troops in the country by the end of this year.
5. **Gates Seeks Troop Estimates**
(*New York Times*)....Thom Shanker
...Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates disclosed on Thursday that he had instructed the top officer in Iraq, those responsible for the broader Middle East and those back at the Pentagon in charge of worldwide deployments to prepare to make their cases about the best way to proceed.

IRAQ

6. **75% Of Areas In Baghdad Secure**
(*USA Today*)....Jim Michaels
About 75% of Baghdad's neighborhoods are now secure, a dramatic increase from 8% a year ago when President Bush ordered more troops to the capital, U.S. military figures show.
7. **Iraq May Need Military Help For Years, Officials Say**
(*Washington Post*)....Ann Scott Tyson
Senior U.S. military officials projected yesterday that the Iraqi army and police will grow to an estimated 580,000 members by the end of the year but that shortages of key personnel, equipment, weaponry and logistical capabilities mean that Iraq's security forces will probably require U.S. military support for as long as a decade.

8. **General Charts Iraq Capability**
(*Chicago Tribune*)....Amer Madhani
...Lt. Gen. Ray Odierno, the No. 2 commander in Iraq, suggested some U.S. military presence would remain in Iraq for some time, while the size of the American footprint would probably diminish as Iraqi security forces progress. Odierno, who made his comments from Baghdad during a video news conference with Pentagon reporters Thursday, added that Iraq's most significant problem remains in equipping itself.
9. **U.S. Moves To Shift Troops' Role In Iraq**
(*Los Angeles Times*)....Julian E. Barnes
Military has begun moving soldiers out of combat positions to supervisory duties to assist and train Iraqi security forces.
10. **Suicide Bomber Strikes At Shiite Mosque**
(*Washington Post*)....Amit R. Paley
A suicide bomber killed at least eight people Thursday in front of a mosque in volatile Diyala province as worshipers gathered for a Shiite holiday, another sign of continuing unrest in northern Iraq despite the launch last week of a major U.S. offensive against Sunni insurgents in the region.
11. **Pre-Holiday Blast Kills 9 In Iraq**
(*Los Angeles Times*)....Ned Parker
...Meanwhile, U.S. Air Force B-1 bombers dropped 34,000 pounds of munitions Thursday on two bunkers that the military said were used for training Al Qaeda in Iraq recruits. The strikes occurred in Arab Jabour, a sparsely populated farming community just south of Baghdad, where the military dropped nearly 50,000 pounds of munitions in airstrikes last week.
12. **Troops Try To Gain -- And Keep -- Ground**
(*USA Today*)....Charles Levinson
...Mancuso's service then and now puts him in a good position to judge the counterinsurgency doctrine implemented by Gen. David Petraeus, the overall U.S. commander in Iraq. The strategy takes advantage of a greater number of U.S. troops in Iraq to "clear, hold and build" on captured territory, rather than grabbing a few bad guys and heading home.
13. **US-Iraqi Troops Sweep Al Qaeda Village Haven**
(*Christian Science Monitor*)....Scott Peterson
Soldiers find major weapons caches, a bunker, and an insurgent expense report in Diyala Province.
14. **Tensions Over Future Troop Levels In Iraq**
(*CNN*)....Jamie McIntyre
...As conditions in Iraq improve, there is an uneasy tension building between Pentagon planners anxious to reap a peace dividend by bringing U.S. troops home faster and front-line commanders such as Lieutenant General Ray Odierno.

GATES INTERVIEW

15. **Gates: No Immediate Military Threat From Iran**
(*NPR*)....Renee Montagne and Steve Inskeep
...Well, I think Iran is, certainly, one of the most significant challenges. We continue to be concerned about their ongoing enrichment programs, their unwillingness to suspend in the face of broad international pressure to do so.

AFGHANISTAN

16. **U.S. Helps In Rebirth Of Afghan Air Force**
(*Seattle Times*)....Jason Straziuso, Associated Press
Calling it the "birth of our air force," Afghan President Hamid Karzai opened a new \$22 million U.S.-funded military hangar Thursday to house a fleet that is expected to triple in the next three years.
17. **Analyst Backs Gates' NATO Criticism**
(*Washington Times*)....Leander Schaerlaeckens
Support for Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates' criticism of other NATO members' performance in Afghanistan

appeared from an unexpected source yesterday — a European defense specialist who is closely linked to senior NATO officials.

18. **Marines Will Bolster Canadians In Kandahar**

(Toronto Globe and Mail)....Paul Koring

Hard-pressed Canadian troops in Kandahar will get help - and fewer may get killed - as more than 2,000 battle-hardened U.S. Marines with counterinsurgency training and experience start arriving next month in southern Afghanistan.

ARMY

19. **Army Task Force Finds Gaps In Brain-Injury Care**

(USA Today)....Gregg Zoroya

An Army task force found major gaps in the care of traumatic brain injury last year, but officials say they are moving rapidly to correct the problems.

MARINE CORPS

20. **Inquiry Yields Little Clarity In Marines Shooting**

(Los Angeles Times)....David Zucchino

An investigator expressed frustration Thursday at what he said were incomplete and sometimes inconsistent accounts by Marines involved in a March shooting in Afghanistan that left up to 19 Afghans dead.

NAVY

21. **Judge Sets Aside Some Restrictions On Sonar**

(Los Angeles Times)....Kenneth R. Weiss

A federal judge in Los Angeles on Thursday temporarily set aside some of the tough restrictions on upcoming naval exercises off Southern California that employ a type of sonar linked to the injury and death of whales and dolphins.

22. **Naval Academy Rite Might Slip Away**

(Washington Post)....Nelson Hernandez

In the name of safety, the U.S. Naval Academy is considering an overhaul of one of its most bizarre traditions: the annual ritual in which a thousand first-year midshipmen struggle to conquer a 21-foot granite obelisk coated with 200 pounds of lard.

23. **Nimitz Carrier Group To Deploy**

(Los Angeles Times)....Associated Press

More than 7,000 sailors and Marines will deploy next week when the Nimitz Carrier Strike Group leaves San Diego for the Western Pacific.

CONGRESS

24. **Entrepreneur Defends His Veterans' Charities**

(USA Today)....Unattributed

A San Diego entrepreneur accused of mismanaging charities he started for veterans and enriching himself rebutted congressional critics Thursday, insisting his group "does right by its donors and hospitalized vets."

25. **Vets Care Gets \$3.7 Billion**

(Atlanta Journal-Constitution)....Unattributed

President Bush on Thursday released \$3.7 billion in emergency money that Congress requested to care for veterans, including those returning from Iraq and Afghanistan.

MIDEAST

26. **Nuke-Capable Missile Tested**

(Washington Times)....Unattributed

Israel tested a missile yesterday, prompting speculation about its ability to launch nuclear strikes on Iran after Israeli

warnings and accusations about Tehran's atomic ambitions.

27. **Cat-And-Mouse Games By Iranians Aren't Child's Play**
(*Arizona Daily Star (Tucson)*)....Sally Buzbee, Associated Press
Just how close might a military confrontation between Iran and the United States be?
28. **Ahmadinejad Decries Bush's Iran Speeches**
(*San Diego Union-Tribune*)....Associated Press
Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said yesterday that President Bush sent a “message of confrontation” during his recent Mideast trip.

ASIA/PACIFIC

29. **Bush Envoy To N. Korea Criticizes Six-Party Talks**
(*Washington Post*)....Foster Klug, Associated Press
A U.S. official, in a rare public departure from Bush administration policy, yesterday criticized the nuclear talks with North Korea, contending that Pyongyang is not serious about disarming.
30. **U.S., Iran Lobby Chinese Over Proposed Nuclear Sanctions**
(*Houston Chronicle*)....Christopher Bodeen, Associated Press
U.S. and Iranian envoys lobbied China on Thursday over proposed new sanctions on Tehran's nuclear program, underscoring Beijing's key role in determining U.N. involvement in the dispute.

PAKISTAN

31. **CIA Places Blame For Bhutto Assassination**
(*Washington Post*)....Joby Warrick
The CIA has concluded that members of al-Qaeda and allies of Pakistani tribal leader Baitullah Mehsud were responsible for last month's assassination of former Pakistani prime minister Benazir Bhutto, and that they also stand behind a new wave of violence threatening that country's stability, the agency's director, Michael V. Hayden, said in an interview.
32. **Frontier Insurgency Spills Into A Pakistani City**
(*New York Times*)....Jane Perlez
For centuries, fighting and lawlessness have been part of the fabric of this frontier city. But in the past year, Pakistan's war with Islamic militants has spilled right into its alleys and bazaars, its forts and armories, killing policemen and soldiers and scaring its famously tough citizens.

EUROPE

33. **Russia Revives Military Boast Of Soviet Days**
(*Washington Times*)....David R. Sands
Reviving yet another iconic image from Soviet days, Russia's military announced plans to stage a parade of ballistic missiles, tanks and platoons of soldiers this May through the Kremlin's Red Square.

AMERICAS

34. **Colombia's Military Toughens Up**
(*Los Angeles Times*)....Chris Kraul
U.S. aid has helped the once-outmatched force gain strength and retake territory. But the change has been marked by rights abuses and security breaches.
35. **Chavez Buildup Concerns The U.S.**
(*Philadelphia Inquirer*)....Associated Press
The United States is deeply worried by what it deems a dangerous arms buildup by President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela, the top American military officer said yesterday.

STATE DEPARTMENT

36. **State Doubles Military Advisers**
(Washington Times)....Nicholas Kralev
 The State Department is doubling the number of resident diplomatic advisers that it sends to the offices of the nation's top military commanders at home and overseas — a move encouraged by the Pentagon as its uniformed leaders take on larger public roles abroad.

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

37. **CDC Enlists Military To Study Skin Ailment**
(Washington Times)....Jennifer Harper
 ...The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) officially call it the "unexplained illness." Yesterday, the federal agency announced it would formally investigate the condition — known as Morgellons syndrome — and is bringing in the military to help it do it.

BUSINESS

38. **Iraq Moves To Break Up Kurds' Oil Deals**
(San Diego Union-Tribune)....Associated Press
 The Iraqi Oil Ministry has decided to stop cooperating with international oil companies participating in production-sharing contracts with the Kurdish regional administration in northern Iraq, an official said yesterday.
39. **Checklist**
(Washington Times)....Unattributed
 L-3 Communications, which lost a \$4.6 billion Army contract to a rival provider of translators last month, protested the award and said the Army intends to take "corrective" action.

OPINION

40. **The New 'Lepers'**
(New York Post)....Ralph Peters
 I'VE had a huge response to Tuesday's column about The New York Times' obscene bid to smear veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan as mad killers. Countless readers seem to be wondering: Why did the paper do it?
41. **Federalism, Not Partition**
(Washington Post)....Mowaffak al-Rubaie
 A system devolving power to the regions is the route to a viable Iraq.
42. **The Polish Lesson: America Must Give Something In Return For Support**
(Christian Science Monitor)....A. Wess Mitchell
 This week, Polish Defense Minister Bogdan Klich traveled to Washington to negotiate his country's participation in the US antiballistic missile-defense system. In a break with previous policy, the new center-right government of Prime Minister Donald Tusk has demanded fresh concessions – cash, Patriot missiles, and security guarantees – in exchange for hosting the bases on Polish soil.
43. **Atomic Non-Allies**
(Asian Wall Street Journal)....Henry Sokolski
 ...With more nuclear programs in more Middle Eastern states, history is likely to explosively repeat itself. Surely France, the U.S. and Russia can and should do better than this. A good start would be for these three countries to rethink how best to help develop energy options for the Middle East without going nuclear.
44. **Homeless Vets Reveal A Hidden Cost Of War**
(USA Today)....James Key
 ...Veterans make up one in four homeless people in the USA, though they are only 11% of the general population, according to The Alliance to End Homelessness.
45. **Fight In Afghanistan**
(Washington Post)....Editorial
 It's becoming clear that the war must be won by U.S. troops, and not by NATO.

New York Times
January 18, 2008
Pg. 10

1. Defense Secretary, Facing Criticism, Hails NATO's Forces In Afghanistan

By Judy Dempsey

BERLIN — Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates said Thursday that NATO countries were playing a "significant and powerful role in Afghanistan," after some of Washington's closest European allies assailed him for comments cited in a news report about their counterinsurgency operations in the volatile south.

Speaking at a news conference in Washington, Mr. Gates said that the allies "had stepped up to the plate" in Afghanistan.

Mr. Gates was quoted, in an interview this week with The Los Angeles Times, as saying that most of the European forces "are not properly trained" in counterinsurgency. He added, referring to the operations in southern Afghanistan, that he was "worried we have some military forces that don't know how to do counterinsurgency operations."

The interview hit a nerve inside the 26-member NATO alliance, which is debating its future role in fighting terrorism, particularly in Afghanistan.

The Dutch government, seeking clarification, on Wednesday summoned the American ambassador. The government only recently agreed to extend its mandate in the south, where it has 1,600 troops.

On Thursday, Mr. Gates called the Dutch defense minister, Eimert van Middelkoop.

"Mr. Gates telephoned Eimert van Middelkoop and apologized," Joop Veen, a Dutch Defense Ministry spokesman, said, Agence France-Presse reported.

Geoff Morrell, the Pentagon press secretary,

confirmed that Mr. Gates had made the call but said there was nothing for which Mr. Gates needed to apologize. "The secretary called his Dutch counterpart this afternoon and tried to clear up any misunderstanding caused by the article and expressed regret for any consternation it has caused the Dutch government," Mr. Morrell said.

NATO went to Afghanistan in August 2003 with a focus on providing security and carrying out peacekeeping missions, while American troops focused on counterinsurgency.

Last year, NATO became much more involved in heavy combat missions in the south. Until now, there was little public criticism over the way the two missions cooperated.

"Gates seemed to have forgotten or does not know that the Dutch armed forces have been completely changed since the end of the cold war. We have become an expeditionary force with wide experience," said Maj. Gen. Kees Homan, a security expert at Clingendael, the Netherlands Institute of International Relations.

"By singling out those countries that are doing most of the fighting in Afghanistan, Gates has committed a tactical error, both politically and among Dutch public opinion," he said. "Why did he not criticize those NATO countries which stay well away from the fighting?"

Boston Globe
January 18, 2008

2. Defense Secretary Lauds Role Of NATO

Gates tries to ease feelings in Europe

By Lolita C. Baldor,
Associated Press

WASHINGTON - Defense Secretary Robert Gates said yesterday that sending Marines to Afghanistan will keep pressure on the Taliban and doesn't "reflect dissatisfaction" with NATO countries' performance.

Gates was trying to smooth over comments a day earlier that sparked an international furor. The Los Angeles Times reported Wednesday that the defense secretary said US forces in eastern Afghanistan are doing a terrific job but that he is concerned that NATO allies are not well trained in counterinsurgency operations.

"Allied forces ... have stepped up to the plate and are playing a significant and powerful role in Afghanistan," Gates said at a Pentagon news conference, which officials said had been rescheduled for earlier in the day to meet European news deadlines.

"They are taking the fight to the enemy in some of the most grueling conditions imaginable," Gates said of NATO forces. "As a result of the valor and sacrifice of these allies, the Taliban has suffered significant losses."

But Gates also repeated his concern that NATO forces were better trained for Cold War-era fighting than they are for today's threats, such as insurgencies.

Gates said he had personally phoned his Canadian counterpart Wednesday to explain his position.

In Toronto, Defense Minister Peter MacKay described the call. "I spoke to him and he said, 'Canada was the last country I would make those comments about,' and they were not meant to be disparaging or to diminish the effort Canada has put forward," MacKay said.

Yesterday Gates called the Dutch minister of defense "to clear up the misunderstanding caused by the article and express regret for the difficulties it has caused," said Pentagon press secretary Geoff Morrell. During his briefing Gates noted that the Dutch parliament had just voted to extend its troop commitment to Afghanistan for another two years.

Other officials and

specialists have quietly acknowledged that NATO nations don't have the capabilities needed to fight an insurgency.

Ottawa Citizen
January 18, 2008
Pg. 4

3. Gates Sings Canada's Praises

U.S. defence secretary tries to mend fences after criticism of NATO forces in Afghanistan

By Mike Blanchfield, The
Ottawa Citizen

U.S. Defence Secretary Robert Gates said yesterday he made a special effort to reassure Canada after he criticized shortcomings in the NATO efforts in Afghanistan in a American newspaper.

"I did reach out to the Canadian defence minister yesterday. They had suffered a loss near Kandahar, I think the day before, and I wanted to make sure they understood our respect for their contribution and how much of an impact they are making," Mr. Gates told a news conference in Washington one day after the Pentagon moved to avert a diplomatic row with its allies after an interview he gave to the Los Angeles Times, which quoted him as being critical of NATO's ability to fight a counterinsurgency.

Mr. Gates praised Canada by name, along with its other major allies for their "valour and sacrifice" in fighting on the front lines of the Taliban insurgency in southern Afghanistan. His list also included Britain, the Netherlands and Denmark.

"The transatlantic alliance is in Afghanistan together," said Mr. Gates.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper also responded to the controversy yesterday, saying the comments made by Mr. Gates should not be misinterpreted.

"Officials from the United States at all levels have always conveyed their appreciation and confidence in Canadian

Forces and I've heard that from both military and non-military sources and I believe Secretary Gates conveyed that to Minister MacKay yesterday. So there should be no misinterpretation of those comments vis à vis Canada," the prime minister told a news conference in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Harper also said the American contribution to the mission in Afghanistan has been "significant" and "we need to see NATO as a whole step up to the plate."

Mr. Gates had already made a round of telephone calls to NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, as well as his alliance counterparts -- including Defence Minister Peter MacKay -- on Tuesday to give them advance notice of the Pentagon's attempt to deploy an additional 3,200 marines to the south in a bid to counter the expected spring offensive by the Taliban.

By chance, that was the same day that Canada suffered its 77th military fatality in Afghanistan, so Mr. Gates was also able to offer his condolences.

But once the imbroglio over the Times story erupted Wednesday, Mr. Gates was on the phone again to Mr. MacKay to reassure him that none of his remarks was directed toward Canada.

Mr. MacKay said Mr. Gates told him he had been quoted out of context, but expressed "regret and embarrassment" over the report.

Mr. MacKay said he was originally "taken aback" by the report, but that he accepted Mr. Gates' explanation.

Mr. Gates reiterated that NATO as a whole has had a lot to learn about fighting counterinsurgencies.

He said he has aired his views on NATO's shortcomings in the past, including at the recent gathering in Edinburgh, Scotland, of countries fighting in the south. The U.S. is urging

its allies to seek counterinsurgency training in Kabul with American forces, he added.

"We have to acknowledge the reality that the alliance as a whole has not trained for counterinsurgency operations even though individual countries have considerable expertise," he said.

Financial Times
January 18, 2008

4. Gates Looks To Calm Nato Allies

By Demetri Sevastopulo, in Washington

Robert Gates, US defence secretary, on Thursday said the recent decision to send an additional 3,200 marines to Afghanistan did not reflect dissatisfaction about the military performance of US allies in the country.

Speaking at the Pentagon, he was attempting to quash controversy over recent comments that appeared to disparage Nato allies fighting alongside the US in Afghanistan.

In recent months, Mr Gates has stepped up the pressure on Nato allies to fulfil commitments to provide extra troops and equipment for the war effort in Afghanistan. Earlier this week, however, he appeared to go one step further.

In an interview with the Los Angeles Times, Mr Gates suggested that US forces in the east of Afghanistan were having much more success with counterinsurgency operations than Nato allies in the southern Afghanistan.

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

His comments sparked controversy, particularly among the Dutch, British and Canadians, close US allies who are providing the bulk of Nato

troops in the south for a mission that is politically unpopular in their countries. Mr Gates on Thursday said that he was referring to Nato as a whole, including the US, saying the alliance needed to transition from an organization focused on the Cold War.

"We have gone out to people to try to clarify that I wasn't talking about any particular allies, but that the alliance as a whole, having spent 40 years training and exercises to deal with the Soviet Union coming through the Fulda Gap has not re-focused in terms of its overall programme, in terms of counterinsurgency, despite the expertise of individual countries."

Mr Gates on Thursday said he recently told Nato defence ministers in Scotland that allies with less experience in counterinsurgency operations take more advantage of a US counterinsurgency academy in Kabul. In the LA Times interview, Mr Gates said he expressed his concerns about counterinsurgency training, but noted that "No one at the table stood up and said: 'I agree with that.'"

Separately on Iraq, Mr Gates said he hoped General David Petraeus, the top US commander in Iraq, would in March be able to recommend withdrawing soldiers at the current pace, which would leave 100,000 troops in the country by the end of this year.

New York Times
January 18, 2008
Pg. 10

5. Gates Seeks Troop Estimates

By Thom Shanker

WASHINGTON — When they decided last September to begin a slow withdrawal of troops from Iraq, the White House, Pentagon and senior military officers put off a harder decision about how long those withdrawals should continue.

Now, that battle is

beginning again.

Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates disclosed on Thursday that he had instructed the top officer in Iraq, those responsible for the broader Middle East and those back at the Pentagon in charge of worldwide deployments to prepare to make their cases about the best way to proceed.

The process is meant to allow President Bush to balance troop requests from Gen. David H. Petraeus, the senior American commander in Iraq, against other pressing national security needs, whether in Afghanistan or for a crisis elsewhere.

The overwhelming question is whether Mr. Bush will decide to halt the drawdown in July, when the number of troops is scheduled to revert to the 130,000 or so in place before the current troop "surge" began, or instead decide to order that the reductions continue, which would help ease strain on the overall force.

The answer will influence both the level of American commitment to Iraq and the future shape of the Army.

At a session on Wednesday sponsored by the Association of the United States Army, Gen. George W. Casey Jr., the Army chief of staff, made clear his service's desire to reduce those burdens, which have forced the lengthening of Army tours in Iraq to 15 months, three months longer than the service would like.

General Casey, who was General Petraeus's predecessor in Iraq, said the ground force was "being so consumed" by deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan that the Army was having "difficulty sustaining the all-volunteer force."

By contrast, General Petraeus's principal goal no doubt will be to seek sufficient troops to guarantee that security gains under the surge do not slip away, even as he reshapes the military commitment to focus more on

training, supplying and otherwise helping Iraqi forces take over the country's security.

Some outside experts have begun to warn in stark terms that to continue the drawdown beyond July could put at risk what the surge has accomplished.

Gen. Jack Keane, a retired Army vice chief of staff, said in Congressional testimony on Wednesday that it would be "an unacceptable risk" to reduce troop levels in Iraq below the cuts currently planned.

"We should not squander the gains that we've made," he said.

Senior American commanders in Iraq declined to predict what troop levels might be at the end of the year, stating that their recommendations to the president would be based on security conditions on the ground.

"Everything I see now is, we will continue to make progress going down to 15 brigades," Lt. Gen. Raymond T. Odierno, the No. 2 commander in Iraq, said Thursday, referring to the level of combat troops now planned for July. "But to predict now whether we can go lower or not is difficult, and I would not want to make that prediction right now."

The process that Mr. Gates outlined on Thursday would precede Congressional testimony that General Petraeus is scheduled to deliver in March or April, when his next troop request is due. It is similar to what Mr. Gates put in place last fall, before General Petraeus announced the decision to reduce troop levels from their peak of 20 brigades.

"I want to make sure that the president has the opportunity to hear from these different perspectives and to ensure that his senior military advisers and commanders have the opportunity to present their views directly and unvarnished

to the president," Mr. Gates said at a Pentagon news conference.

Among others who will present their views to the president are Adm. William J. Fallon, the overall American commander in the Middle East, who is being asked to assess military challenges and force requirements across the region.

That includes the current mission in Afghanistan as well as readiness for potential turmoil in Pakistan or hostile action by Iran.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff, representing the institutional armed services, which provide trained forces for military operations, will also weigh in.

The Joint Chiefs, Mr. Gates said, "will look at the situation in Iraq and the situation in the region against the backdrop of our global requirements, stress on the force and all these other considerations."

Gen. James E. Cartwright, vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs, acknowledged the differences among commanders trying to balance the demands of the current mission in Iraq, preparing for unexpected contingencies and relieving stress on the force. But he said there was no major rift.

At the briefing with Mr. Gates, General Cartwright said that when the Iraq force levels were debated last fall, all the senior officers in the discussion "came very, very close."

"We had very few issues that we disagreed on," he said, "and we worked through those issues to consensus to understand how we wanted to move forward."

Both Mr. Gates and Mr. Bush have said that they want General Petraeus, when he puts forth his troop request, to think only of how to succeed in Iraq.

"I've asked General Petraeus to make his evaluation of the situation in Iraq and what he needs, and the situation on the ground, completely based on what's going on in Iraq," Mr. Gates

said. "He doesn't need to look over his shoulder, think about stress on the force or anything else."

Mr. Bush spoke addressed the issue in a direct manner after meeting with General Petraeus and Ryan C. Crocker, the United States ambassador to Iraq, during his recent visit to the region.

After their closed-door discussion in Kuwait, Mr. Bush offered General Petraeus any support he might need for deciding that troop levels in Iraq could drop no further at this time.

"My attitude is, if he didn't want to continue the drawdown, that's fine with me, in order to make sure we succeed, see," Mr. Bush said. "I said to the general, 'If you want to slow her down, fine; it's up to you.'"

USA Today
January 18, 2008
Pg. 1

6. 75% Of Areas In Baghdad Secure

Figures show dramatic gains since U.S. buildup

By Jim Michaels, USA Today

About 75% of Baghdad's neighborhoods are now secure, a dramatic increase from 8% a year ago when President Bush ordered more troops to the capital, U.S. military figures show.

The military classifies 356 of Baghdad's 474 neighborhoods in the "control" or "retain" category of its four-tier security rating system, meaning enemy activity in those areas has been mostly eliminated and normal economic activity is resuming.

The data given by the military to USA TODAY provide one of the clearest snapshots yet of how security has improved in Baghdad since roughly 30,000 additional American troops arrived in Iraq last year.

U.S. commanders caution that the gains are still fragile, but at the moment U.S. and Iraqi forces "basically own the

streets," said Col. Ricky Gibbs, a brigade commander in southern Baghdad.

The fight to control Baghdad is the centerpiece of the counterinsurgency strategy launched a year ago by Gen. David Petraeus, the commander of U.S. forces in Iraq. The plan, popularly known as the "surge," seeks to reduce sectarian and other violence by moving troops off large bases and into dangerous neighborhoods to protect civilians.

The 310 neighborhoods in the "control" category are secure, but depend on U.S. and Iraqi military forces to maintain the peace. The 46 areas in the "retain" category have reached a level where Iraqi police and security forces can maintain order, a more permanent fix. The remaining areas have fewer security forces based there, though they are not necessarily violent.

In February 2007, when additional U.S. forces began arriving, only 37 Baghdad neighborhoods were in the "control" and "retain" categories.

The drop in violence in Baghdad and elsewhere helped avert a religious civil war, said Thomas Hammes, a retired Marine colonel and author.

Risks remain. Iraq's government has been slow to restore basic services such as electricity and water in some areas. "In areas that are in 'control' status, the complaint is not security," Gibbs said. "The complaint is essential services."

The U.S. military is wary of handing over security responsibility too quickly to Iraqi forces. "There are concerns we'll pull out of here too fast just because we have such great gains," Gibbs said by phone from Iraq.

The Iraqi government has also failed to take full advantage of the improved security by passing major laws, such as a plan to share oil revenues, that could ease tensions between Sunnis and

Shiites.

Meanwhile, U.S. troop levels are scheduled to start coming down again by the middle of this year. Although weakened and pushed out of Iraq's major cities, al-Qaeda remains focused on trying to dominate the capital, Lt. Gen. Raymond Odierno, the No. 2 U.S. commander in Iraq, said Thursday. "Their long-term sights are still set on Baghdad," he said.

Washington Post
January 18, 2008
Pg. 15

7. Iraq May Need Military Help For Years, Officials Say

By Ann Scott Tyson,
Washington Post Staff Writer

"The truth is that they simply cannot fix, supply, arm or fuel themselves completely enough at this point," said U.S. Army Lt. Gen. James Dubik, head of the Multi-National Security Transition Command in Iraq.

The Iraqi government has been increasing its forces "much more aggressively" in response to the high violence levels witnessed in 2006 and early 2007, Dubik said in testimony before the House Armed Services Committee.

Iraqi security forces now consist of nearly 500,000 personnel, after a 55 percent increase in the size of the Iraqi army over the past year, Dubik said. The Iraqi government envisions increasing that number to 580,000 by the end of 2008, with an ultimate goal of building a force of as many as 640,000, he said.

Part of the rapid growth, however, has resulted not from additional recruits but because the Iraqi government has placed other existing security forces under the oversight of the ministries of defense and interior, Dubik said. In addition, the latest count is based on Iraqi government data rather than on U.S. military data, a change detailed in a

Pentagon report released last month.

Dubik described Iraqi security forces as "bigger and better" than ever before, but he said significant problems are keeping them dependent on U.S. military support.

Iraq "remains reliant on the coalition" for critical gear, such as helicopters, mortars, artillery and intelligence-gathering equipment, he said. Moreover, Iraq's shortage of mid-grade leaders represents "a very real and very tangible hole in proficiency that ... will affect them for at least a decade."

Rampant corruption and lingering sectarianism within the Iraqi security forces are also major hurdles that Iraqi defense and police leaders must overcome in order to take responsibility for Iraq's security, Dubik said.

Iraqi officials predict that their forces will be able to assume responsibility for internal security sometime between early 2009 and 2012, and that they will be able to handle external security by 2018 or 2020, according to Dubik.

U.S. commanders have agreed that some U.S. forces will probably have to remain in Iraq for as long as a decade -- albeit at a level far lower than the current 160,000 troops.

The second-ranking U.S. commander in Iraq, Army Lt. Gen. Raymond T. Odierno, said yesterday that Iraq could require a U.S. military presence for many years. For example, the United States could provide helicopters and other aircraft to support Iraqi combat operations for "five to 10 years," with "an appropriate number of ground forces that go along with that," Odierno told a Pentagon news conference.

However, such U.S. air support could also be provided by forces stationed outside Iraq at existing U.S. military bases in the Middle East, said Mark Kimmitt, deputy assistant secretary of defense for Middle

Eastern affairs, who also testified before the House panel yesterday.

The United States and Iraq intend to negotiate this year the role of U.S. forces in Iraq as part of a long-term security arrangement that will also define the legal status of U.S. troops there.

Pressed by lawmakers to offer a timeline for the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq, Dubik and Kimmitt said only that it would depend on security conditions on the ground. In a separate news briefing, Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates reiterated his hope that the current pace of troop withdrawals -- five Army combat brigades by July -- will continue for the rest of the year, but he said he would wait for the recommendations of the top U.S. commander in Iraq, Army Gen. David H. Petraeus, and other U.S. military leaders.

Odierno, who next month will complete his 14-month tour as the commander of day-to-day military operations in Iraq, emphasized that the transfer of responsibility to Iraqi security forces must be carried out in a "slow, deliberate manner."

The U.S. military must focus on "making sure that we don't make some of the mistakes we've made in the past, turning it over too quickly, where we lose ground and give some of these extremist elements a chance," Odierno said. "We don't want to give them another chance. We don't want to give them anything back... That's probably the biggest challenge."

Chicago Tribune
January 18, 2008

8. General Charts Iraq Capability

Says at least 10 years before nation can defend its borders

By Aamer Madhani,
Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON—Iraqi officials have indicated that they cannot take full

responsibility for internal security in their country until as late as 2012 and that it could be 10 more years before Iraqi security forces are able to properly defend their own borders, a senior U.S. commander told a House panel Thursday.

Lt. Gen. James Dubik, who heads the Multi-National Security Transition Command, said Defense Minister Abdul-Qader al-Obeidi has repeatedly told him that Iraqi forces need to significantly boost their air and fire support before they would be able to properly defend themselves.

Dubik told the House Armed Services Committee that the Iraqi security forces have made much progress, but "the truth is that they simply cannot fix, supply, arm or fuel themselves completely enough at this point."

In conversations with U.S. commanders, al-Obeidi has estimated that the Iraqis will be able to take responsibility for internal security between 2009 and 2012 and establish proper border security between 2018 and 2020.

Iraqi security forces, which for much of the first four years of the war were largely ineffective, have made great strides in recent months, according to U.S. commanders. Dubik said that Iraq is expected to add 80,000 soldiers and police by the end of 2008.

The Iraqi army, in particular, has made significant progress in developing its leadership, adding 1,300 officers and 9,900 non-commissioned officers over the past year. But Dubik added that there is still a shortage of midlevel officers.

But the dour projection on the Iraqi security forces' readiness caused concern among some lawmakers, who were looking for at least the rough edges of a timeline for U.S. withdrawal. Rep. Roscoe Bartlett (D-Md.) said Americans are looking for clarification of when U.S. troops will finally come home,

something that seemed only more uncertain after Dubik's projections.

"I think all Americans would like to have on their refrigerator a chart which they can follow that looks to a time that we can get out," Bartlett said.

Dubik declined to give a date when U.S. forces would be able to pull out.

"Sir, when I talk to my dad about these kinds of things, my advice to him is put no number on the refrigerator," Dubik said.

Lt. Gen. Ray Odierno, the No. 2 commander in Iraq, suggested some U.S. military presence would remain in Iraq for some time, while the size of the American footprint would probably diminish as Iraqi security forces progress. Odierno, who made his comments from Baghdad during a video news conference with Pentagon reporters Thursday, added that Iraq's most significant problem remains in equipping itself.

"I do not see it going that far at all," Odierno said of al-Obeidi's timeline. "I see it happening much quicker. But I do see us having some sort of long-term security relationship at a lower level ... for some period of time that will be determined between the government of Iraq and the government of the United States and our coalition partners."

In violence in Iraq on Thursday, a suicide bomber struck Shiites as worshipers prepared for their most important holiday, killing at least 11 at a mosque in violent Diyala province, The Associated Press reported. The attack came one day after a similar bombing by a woman in a nearby village.

Meanwhile, the U.S. military announced a second major wave of air strikes in a week against Al Qaeda positions southeast of Baghdad. It said 10,000 pounds of munitions were dropped Wednesday.

Los Angeles Times
January 18, 2008

9. U.S. Moves To Shift Troops' Role In Iraq

Military has begun moving soldiers out of combat positions to supervisory duties to assist and train Iraqi security forces.

By Julian E. Barnes, Los Angeles Times Staff Writer

WASHINGTON — U.S. commanders have begun shifting the mission of military forces in Iraq by moving more American troops out of front-line combat and into assignments that allow soldiers to monitor and support Iraqi units, senior military leaders said Thursday.

In their changing capacity, U.S. troops increasingly will be positioned to back up Iraqi forces in a role that commanders outlined in recommendations in September and have termed "overwatch." Under the recommendations, the overall U.S. troop level in Iraq will be reduced to about 130,000 by July from about 160,000. One combat brigade already has left Iraq.

"With the withdrawal of that first brigade combat team, we began the process of a transition of mission," Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates said in a news briefing Thursday. "Ultimately, the mission will be one that we call strategic overwatch, which is basically where we are not engaged on a daily basis and where the Iraqis are in the lead and we are providing support."

Senior military and Defense officials are scheduled to make their next major progress report on Iraq in March. In that report, Army Gen. David H. Petraeus and other military commanders are expected to outline their views on the pace at which the military can continue reductions in the second half of 2008.

In a separate briefing, Army Lt. Gen. Raymond T. Odierno, the commander of

day-to-day military operations in Iraq, emphasized that he did not know how quickly U.S. troops would be drawn down. But he emphasized that the troop reduction would continue, with duties handed over to the Iraqis.

"When -- not if -- when we reduce our forces over time and the Iraqis take primacy for security, we will be here to assist them when they need it," Odierno said. "And so we have to determine over time what that right number is and how we would assist them."

Odierno pointed to the northern city of Mosul as an example of the strategy. Since 2004, the U.S. has drastically reduced the number of combat troops there and in the surrounding area. But Mosul now is the only large Iraqi city with a significant Al Qaeda in Iraq presence, according to military estimates. As a response, Odierno said he planned to send additional U.S. forces there to assist Iraqi forces.

"And that's how I see our role, frankly, in the future here, is that we'll have forces available that are able to, when necessary, reinforce Iraqi security forces," he said. "So in reality, I see what we're doing in Mosul as a model for the future."

Lt. Gen. James M. Dubik, who oversees the training of Iraqi security forces, told lawmakers that Iraq's army still was not self-sufficient.

"The truth is that, right now, they cannot fix, supply, arm or fuel themselves completely enough," Dubik told members of the House Armed Services Committee.

Iraq's defense minister, Abdul-Qader Mohammed Jassim Mifarji, has said Iraqi forces will not be able to assume responsibility for internal security until 2012 or be able to defend the country's borders before 2019.

But Odierno said that with U.S. help, the Iraqi forces could be ready sooner.

"We'll have some people

here, if the government of Iraq wants it, for some period of time. That could be five to 10 years," Odierno said. "But it will not be at the levels we're at now. I don't believe that that will be necessary."

Washington Post
January 18, 2008
Pg. 15

10. Suicide Bomber Strikes At Shiite Mosque

Iraqi Worshipers Killed on Eve of Holiday; Elsewhere in Diyala, Women Die in U.S. Raid

By Amit R. Paley, Washington Post Foreign Service

Elsewhere in the province, U.S. forces killed two women and injured two others during an air and ground attack on a building that armed men refused to exit, the U.S. military said in a statement that also expressed regret for civilian deaths.

The attack on the Shefta mosque in the provincial capital, Baqubah, struck Shiites pounding their chests to mark the upcoming holiday of Ashura, which commemorates the 7th-century death of Imam Hussein, the grandson of the prophet Muhammad and one of the holiest figures in Shiite Islam.

At least 13 people were wounded in the explosion. Witnesses said it would have been far deadlier if not for a policeman, identified as Riyadh al-Zubaidi, who stopped the bomber from entering the mosque. Security had been tight to guard against Sunni insurgent attacks on the 500 Shiite worshipers inside.

"I was expecting such an incident would happen because al-Qaeda wants to eliminate all Shiites on Earth," said Ali Hussein al-Zubaidi, 28, as he was treated at a local hospital for wounds to his right hand, head and back.

U.S. and Iraqi military officials insisted that the recent campaign against al-Qaeda in Iraq, a homegrown Sunni

insurgent group that U.S. officials say is led by Arabs from outside the country, has been a success.

"It is not easy to discover and stop suicide bombers," said Lt. Gen. Abdul Kareem al-Rubaie, commander of Iraqi military operations in Diyala. "These sorts of attacks could take place anywhere in the world, not just Diyala."

A land of lush palm and citrus groves, Diyala has become one of the most dangerous provinces in Iraq since insurgents fled there from Baghdad and the western province of Anbar, which became less hospitable bases of operations because of the buildup of U.S. and Iraqi forces in those areas.

The unusually large campaign that began last week was designed to root out insurgents from an area of the Diyala River Valley known as the Bread Basket. "This place was one of the biggest strongholds of the terrorists," Rubaie said.

There were conflicting reports about the results of the ongoing operation. Rubaie said 20 suspected insurgents had been captured in Diyala, in addition to 18 killed. 1st Lt. Stephen Bomar, a military spokesman in northern Iraq, said 53 had been captured. The difference could not be immediately reconciled. Bomar did not provide a tally of deaths.

Asked to explain the recent string of spectacular bombings in Diyala, Bomar noted that violent attacks in the province decreased from 1,091 in June to 409 in November.

"However, the attacks now are more sensationalized, such as suicide-vest attacks," he wrote in an e-mail. Referring to the recent joint U.S.-Iraqi operation, he added: "Signs are pointing towards success."

The U.S. military acknowledges that the operation prompted many fighters to escape from the Bread Basket to other parts of Diyala. "Recent success in the

Diyala River Valley region pushed these terrorists to seek safe haven" farther north near Hamrin Lake, the military said in a statement.

Three insurgents and at least two civilians were killed during a firefight on Thursday near the lake, the statement said.

According to the military account, U.S. troops and an aircraft engaged gunmen in a building where occupants refused orders to come out. After the gunfire stopped, soldiers discovered that two women had been killed and two others wounded during the incident, the military said. In another operation, U.S. forces killed a man who ignored instructions and warning shots when he was ordered to leave a building, the military said.

The U.S.-led coalition "deeply regrets when civilians are hurt or killed during operations to rid Iraq of terrorism," Maj. Winfield Danielson, a military spokesman, said in the statement. "These terrorists deliberately place innocent Iraqi women and children in danger by their actions and presence."

Special correspondents Zaid Sabah, K.I. Ibrahim, Saad al-Izzi, Naseer Nouri and other Washington Post staff in Iraq contributed to this report.

Los Angeles Times
January 18, 2008

11. Pre-Holiday Blast Kills 9 In Iraq

A suicide bomber strikes outside a Shiite mosque in Baqubah where worshippers are preparing for Saturday's festival of Ashura.

By Ned Parker, Los Angeles Times Staff Writer

BAGHDAD — A suicide bomber killed at least nine people Thursday outside a Shiite mosque in the Iraqi city of Baqubah during the run-up to the Islamic sect's major religious holiday, police said.

The attacker detonated his explosives as worshippers were

making evening preparations for the festival of Ashura, which falls on Saturday. Police said 14 people were wounded in the blast.

The attack in the capital of Diyala province came a day after a female suicide bomber struck in the nearby town of Khan Bani Saad, killing eight people.

A witness to Thursday's blast said he watched a stranger arguing with a police officer who had been searching people entering the area by the mosque.

"I saw the bomber explode like a balloon with my own eyes," said Nussaif Jasim, a cafe owner. "It was so fast, something unbelievable. Many people were outside the mosque. Many were harmed, even children.

"The policeman was torn to pieces," Jasim said.

Sunni extremists targeted Ashura celebrations in 2004, with suicide bombings killing about 180 people in attacks in Karbala and at the Shiite shrine of Kadhimiya in Baghdad.

For this year's Ashura, the government has put a vehicle ban in effect, with some exemptions, in Baghdad and much of central Iraq in hope of staving off large-scale attacks against Shiite pilgrims.

On Ashura, the 10th day of the Muslim month of Muharram, Shiites mourn the death of Imam Hussein, a grandson of the prophet Muhammad. Hussein and his followers were slaughtered in 680 on the plains of Karbala by the forces of Islamic ruler Yazid. Hussein's martyrdom and the death of his father, Ali, before him were the root of the schism between Sunni and Shiite Islam.

The celebrations for Ashura, in which hundreds of thousands flock to Karbala to mourn Hussein's death and reenact his last battle, have become symbolic of the ascendancy of Iraq's Shiite majority. Shiites were restricted in celebrations of their faith under Saddam

Hussein's Sunni-dominated regime.

Diyala province, with its mixed Sunni-Shiite population, has been a magnet for sectarian violence. Many Sunni militants who fled Baghdad in the face of a U.S. military crackdown last year are believed to have taken refuge in Diyala, to the north and east.

Red, black and green flags were aloft across Shiite areas of Iraq as the faithful prepared for Ashura. At the Kadhimiya shrine, the scene of the violence in western Baghdad on Ashura four years ago, Iraqi army troops and police officers had sealed off streets to protect the thousands of pilgrims who will celebrate this year's festival there.

Many Shiites observe the holiday by beating drums and lashing their chests with chains, in memory of the death centuries ago.

Meanwhile, U.S. Air Force B-1 bombers dropped 34,000 pounds of munitions Thursday on two bunkers that the military said were used for training Al Qaeda in Iraq recruits. The strikes occurred in Arab Jabour, a sparsely populated farming community just south of Baghdad, where the military dropped nearly 50,000 pounds of munitions in airstrikes last week.

No one was believed to be in the bunkers.

Two 500-pound bombs also razed two houses that the Army said had been rigged with explosives southwest of Arab Jabour.

Elsewhere, two women and a male civilian were killed Thursday during two U.S. raids in a follow-up to sweeps last week in the Diyala River valley, aimed at driving Sunni militants from their sanctuaries, the U.S. military said in a statement. A clash with militants erupted in the town of Jalula when U.S. soldiers raided a building.

The Americans called in an airstrike and the shootout left three militants and two women dead, the military said.

Two other women were wounded and treated by U.S. medics, it said.

In the same area, a male civilian apparently panicked when U.S. soldiers asked residents to leave a building. He started to walk toward the Americans but ignored warning fire and was fatally shot by U.S. soldiers, the military said. No weapons were discovered on him.

The military said it regretted the civilian deaths.

Times staff writers Caesar Ahmed and Saif Hameed contributed to this report.

USA Today
January 18, 2008
Pg. 6

12. Troops Try To Gain -- And Keep -- Ground

Military shifts tactics in fight to secure Iraq

By Charles Levinson, USA Today

NEAR ARAB JABOUR, Iraq-- On his first tour of duty two years ago, Vincent Mancuso was unable to subdue these sprawling farmlands south of Baghdad, where Saddam Hussein loyalists and al-Qaeda militants led a feared insurgency.

He says he has come back to fight a different-- and more effective-- kind of war.

"Before, we were hitting and leaving," says the gruff, barrel-chested Mancuso, pushing out toward the front line of a massive U.S. offensive against al-Qaeda in Iraq that began here in late December.

"Back then, we'd move in, hit some houses, seize some weapons, arrest some guys and then leave. And as soon as we left, the bad guys just moved back in," he recalls of his last tour.

Mancuso's service then and now puts him in a good position to judge the counterinsurgency doctrine implemented by Gen. David Petraeus, the overall U.S. commander in Iraq.

The strategy takes

advantage of a greater number of U.S. troops in Iraq to "clear, hold and build" on captured territory, rather than grabbing a few bad guys and heading home.

"Now we're hitting it and keeping it, which is how the war should be fought," Mancuso says.

In recent months, violence nationwide has plummeted to levels not seen since the summer of 2005, according to data in a U.S. military report issued in December.

The U.S. military has turned its focus to areas where al-Qaeda in Iraq has refused to retreat, such as Diyala province or a region south of Baghdad, where Mancuso's unit operates. The area, roughly the size of West Virginia, is home to farms owned by former supporters of Saddam Hussein and other Sunni Arabs-- fertile ground for al-Qaeda and other insurgent groups to take shelter.

"This is the tip of the spear" of the new U.S. offensive, said Maj. Gen. Rick Lynch, the commander of U.S. forces in the area.

Mud-walled livestock sheds and single-story cement block homes dot the bucolic sprawl. From the rooftop post of one abandoned Iraqi farmhouse, soldiers look out onto palm trees and eucalyptus groves. A patchwork of canals crisscross fields for as far as the eye can see.

The U.S. military briefly turned the territory over to Iraqis in early 2006, but things spiraled further out of control. Iraqi Lt. Naseer Ibrahim was among the handful of Iraqi soldiers left to fend for themselves.

"It was crazy," he says with a laugh. He and his men retreated as al-Qaeda in Iraq cemented its hold on the territory. They hunkered down in their bases, afraid to venture out, leaving the sprawling countryside a lawless vacuum. Extremists seized on the absence of authority to turn these fields into a sanctuary

where they assembled car bombs to be funneled into Baghdad.

When the 3rd Infantry Division arrived here last spring there was one company of American soldiers, or roughly 100 troops, responsible for the whole area.

Last weekend, U.S. planes dropped more than 40,000 pounds of bombs in 10 minutes, targeting buried improvised explosive devices, weapons caches and suspected al-Qaeda in Iraq safe houses.

The boom-thud-boom of outgoing artillery is a reminder that these soldiers are still at battle. Nearby, a pair of Kiowa attack helicopters dart through the air, the buzzing of their engines punctuated by rockets exploding nearby in an irrigation canal where insurgents may be taking shelter.

Spc. John Berberick, a returning infantryman, was here from January 2005 to January 2006, among the darkest months of the post-invasion period, when sectarian fighting consumed the country.

"Last time, we did mostly mounted patrols. We didn't get out of the vehicles much," recalls Berberick, 33, from Bayonne, N.J. "We're doing a lot more walking around this time, talking to people, getting to know the population. And we seem to be getting a lot more done."

At the front of the U.S. advance, a new patrol base is under construction. U.S. officers such as Capt. Christopher O'Brien hope the dozen cargo containers that have been flown in by Chinook helicopters to supply the base have sent a clear message to local residents and insurgents that, unlike in the past, this time the U.S. military is sticking around.

Each incremental gain is accompanied by days of building bases, recruiting residents to assist with security and attempting to rev up the economy-- steps Lynch hopes

will make the gains stick.

"It's a march of clearing towns, making sure it's secure, establishing local citizens groups, bringing in the Iraqi army, jump-starting the economy with micro-grants and trying to get local government up and running," says Lt. Col. Mark Solomon, 40, from Burlington, Mass. "Only then do the soldiers look forward to the next town on the map."

O'Brien, 26, from Herndon, Va., and the four platoons he commands have advanced 11/2 miles in two weeks.

"I can jump forward quickly and take a lot of ground, but if we just clear the bad guys and don't make sure it stays secure, we'd have done it all for nothing because they'd just come back in again," O'Brien says.

Christian Science Monitor
January 18, 2008

13. US-Iraqi Troops Sweep Al Qaeda Village Haven

Soldiers find major weapons caches, a bunker, and an insurgent expense report in Diyala Province.

By Scott Peterson, Staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor

HUSSEIN AL-HAMADI, IRAQ -- The first sign of the presence of Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) looms out of the frozen darkness on the edge of this remote village. A white car is found hidden under a canopy of trees. It's not rigged to explode, but it was used by the insurgents. Inside, they've left behind a list of expenses on a yellow notepad.

For the month of November, the ledger notes that AQI paid snipers 273,000 Iraqi dinars (\$230). Roadside bombers got twice that amount. The largest single expense: \$3,000 paid to "martyrs" and their families.

The document is topped with an obscure name for the militant cell, and signed

simply: "The Management."

Inserted overnight by helicopter earlier this week, US Army soldiers (from Troop A, 2nd Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment) and an Iraqi Army platoon, crept into this village along the Diyala River, 20 miles northeast of Baghdad, hunting for insurgents – and for local villagers willing to take them on. This patrol is part of a broader US-Iraqi military effort in the Diyala Province, the heart of the insurgency in recent months.

The detailed expenses – and the fear on the Iraqi residents' faces in this Al Qaeda stronghold – speak to the insurgents' continued influence here. Yet the hit-and-miss nature of gleaning information and detaining suspects, who often claim ignorance to avert suspicion, makes the mission difficult.

"Everyone is so scared. They don't want to do or say anything," says Capt. Joe Byerly of Savannah, Ga. American troops swept through here last October, and in that three-day operation killed five militants and freed a severely beaten hostage. US officers understand why the locals are hesitant to cooperate.

"They know we will leave, and those people they are scared [that Al Qaeda] will just come right back," says the troop commander, Capt. Dustin Heumphreus, from Austin, Texas.

To prevent AQI's return and allay the villagers' fears, the US and Iraqi troops are trying to create a US-funded band of armed locals, called Concerned Local Citizens, or CLCs, to guard newly erected checkpoints in the area. It's a strategy that has helped quell violence in other parts of Iraq, especially Baghdad.

Later, a Predator drone is called in to destroy the white car with Hellfire missiles – so it won't be used again by the insurgents. They also take out another car without license plates that had excited the US Army's explosives-sniffing

dog. Other sites yield more lists, including one with some names crossed out – perhaps individuals already assassinated, or militants killed.

"There are many bad guys here," says the senior Iraqi Army officer, 1st Lt. Ahmad Ashab Ahmad, as his 25 soldiers lead the search, going door to door with the Americans and working from two lists of potential suspects. "The US 'Most Wanted,' the first, second, third, fourth and fifth on the lists, they are all here."

The village of Hussein al-Hamadi is largely cut off from US or Iraqi military support by roads seeded with bombs, and masked men of Al Qaeda in Iraq often transit the village, using the overgrown areas between the village and the river as a haven.

Once half Sunni and half Shiite, the village a year ago witnessed Sunni militants systematically "cleanse" the area of all Shiites, blowing up their houses to discourage any from returning. The dramatic results are mounds of rubble similar to villages ethnically cleansed in the 1990s throughout the Balkans.

"Up until yesterday, Al Qaeda were here," says one fearful man, as his children raced to gather documents from the family truck to prove ownership. "Then they heard that coalition forces were coming, and they left."

US soldiers asked him to call if he sees anything suspicious, but he refuses, initially, to accept the phone numbers of a help line. Others in the village refuse point blank, saying that Al Qaeda in Iraq had swept through in the past, checking every mobile phone for known coalition numbers.

"If you be our eyes, we will be your guns," Captain Heumphreus tells the farmer.

This man finally relents, agreeing to help. But he is shaking with fear. His family has been whisked into a back

room so as not to hear the exchange. "Before coalition forces came, I was too afraid to speak," he explains in hushed tones. "But now I will talk."

"It's dangerous," warns another older man standing at his metal gate, his family out of sight. "I don't want to talk about it. I don't know anything about Al Qaeda. They come here with covered faces, and they go."

The rubble from Shiite houses is not the only thing left behind by Al Qaeda in Iraq fighters, who villagers say frequently come from the east side of the river.

Over three days, US forces come across several weapons caches, take gun and mortar fire from across the river, and call in airstrikes to destroy a bunker with a grass-covered trapdoor and bedrolls in it. Neither the weapons caches nor the bunker are rigged to blow, suggesting the militants never expected these sites between the village and the river to be found.

As troops move through the reeds and the pomegranate and citrus groves along the banks of the river, they find rich pickings. Caches include rockets, antitank mines, 15 hand-held radios, 3,000 feet of detonation cord, 25 remote-fire initiation devices, bulk explosives, and a video camcorder with three tapes. "We could have spent a month out there, searching and finding stuff. There is so much," says Staff Sgt. Chris Jackson, a US Air Force explosives expert from Albuquerque, N.M. "To find a cache like that in this day and age is a big deal, because [AQI] are so much better at running and hiding."

The Americans detain one man who pops up on one of their watch lists, provided by a local sheikh. Another man is taken in after several rolls of copper wire (often used in making roadside bombs) are found in his house. At one point during the sweep, a man is handcuffed and his eyes

covered with a band of cloth after telling several conflicting stories about the flatbed truck in his driveway.

"I swear by God I am not Al Qaeda!" the man pleads with the senior Iraqi officer. At first he claims masked men dropped off the vehicle, hid the license plates, and then disappeared. He says "the terrorists" also took his identity card.

But then an identity card appears. It's for the Diyala Province health authority, valid throughout 2008. And as the arrest is made, the man tries to throw off his jacket. Inside the pocket are the keys for the truck. "A friend gave it to me!" the man insists. The Iraqi and US troops laugh at the changing story. A woman and group of children wail as the man is led away.

CNN

January 17, 2008

14. Tensions Over Future Troop Levels In Iraq

Lou Dobbs Tonight (CNN), 7:00 PM

DOBBS: Good evening, everybody. New questions tonight about the Bush administration's plans to withdraw our troops from Iraq. The Joint Chiefs vice chairman, General David Cartwright today admitted there are tensions between Pentagon planners and military commanders in Iraq about future troop levels. Meanwhile, the White House today declared President Bush will present his ideas on a possible stimulus package for this economy tomorrow. But that package, when it does come, may be too late to save this economy from recession. We'll have much more on that tonight. But first, Jamie McIntyre with our report from the Pentagon -- Jamie.

JAMIE MCINTYRE, CNN SR. PENTAGON CORRESPONDENT: Well, Lou, with things getting better

in Iraq, you might think that U.S. troops would be coming home sooner but that's not the way some U.S. commanders are thinking.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

MCINTYRE: As conditions in Iraq improve, there is an uneasy tension building between Pentagon planners anxious to reap a peace dividend by bringing U.S. troops home faster and front-line commanders such as Lieutenant General Ray Odierno.

LT. GEN. RAYMOND ODIERNO, CMDR., MULTINAT'L CORPS IRAQ: What we don't want to do is suddenly pull out a whole bunch of U.S. forces and suddenly turn things over to Iraqi security forces. I would like to see it done very slowly over time.

MCINTYRE: The Pentagon says its goal of going from 20 to 15 combat brigades by July is on track. In fact, one brigade is already home. That will drop U.S. troop levels to roughly 130,000 by summer. But the hope for additional force cuts in Iraq from 15 to 10 brigades down to 100,000 troops will depend entirely on the judgment of top Commander General David Petraeus who has been told by both President Bush and Defense Secretary Gates, he'll have the final word.

DEFENSE SECRETARY ROBERT GATES: I've asked General Petraeus to make his evaluation of the situation in Iraq and what he needs. And the situation on the ground, completely based on what's going on in Iraq. But he doesn't need to look over his shoulder, think about stress on the force or anything else.

MCINTYRE: General Petraeus' cautious go slow approach is budding right up against pressure from generals like George Casey, the Army chief of staff who told the "Wall Street Journal" the surge has sucked all the flexibility out of the system. The vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs

acknowledges there's tension in the upper ranks, but insists it's a good thing.

GEN. JAMES CARTWRIGHT, JOINT CHIEFS VICE CHMN.: The important part here is we don't want everybody looking at the problem from the same direction.

MCINTYRE: Despite U.S. military maps like these showing al Qaeda's waning influence and briefing charts like these showing attacks, IEDs and U.S. casualties all nose diving, the U.S. faces the same old problem, Iraqi forces are simply not ready. That's what the U.S. general in charge of Iraqi training just told Congress.

LT. GEN. JAMES DUBIK, SECURITY TRANSITION COMMAND: But the truth is, right now, they cannot fix, supply, arm or fuel themselves completely enough at this point.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

MCINTYRE: And Lou, even though the general, General Dubik says that Iraq is on track to add some 80,000 troop this year, it still won't be self-sufficient for at least four years and cannot defend its borders for at least 10 years. That means, at least for the short term, the U.S. is going to be doing more pulling back than pulling out because it's going to have to maintain a significant force in Iraq to backstop the Iraqis -- Lou.

DOBBS: If that indeed is the case as General Dubik portrays it, then there should be a complete congressional investigation as to how the United States is going to about building Iraqi security because it makes absolutely no sense from any possibility. On the other point, as you talk about the tensions, Jamie McIntyre, between the planners at the Pentagon and the commanders in the field and Iraq, I have to say that sounds like one of the most positive developments of this entire war, that we are hearing an expression of views that are in conflict, that are

different, and giving us some sense of transparency and life in the thinking of the general's staff.

MCINTYRE: There are two things that are real worries. One of them is, obviously, there's a lot of stress on the U.S. military. The sooner the U.S. can pull some of those troops out of Iraq, it can relieve the stress, and by the way it might need some of those troops for Afghanistan as well. But at the same time, these gains in Iraq have been very hard won and the commanders who are in charge there don't want to see those slip away. So they want to have the flexibility to do what they think they need to maintain that momentum. So it's two competing forces and it is a lot of tension.

DOBBS: And as I say, it seems also -- although there is tension, it also seems to me at least to me a positive development that this administration and this general's staff is now beginning to express itself in more than monolithic terms and sometimes not very productive monolithic terms -- Jamie, thank you very much. Jamie McIntyre from the Pentagon.

NPR

January 17, 2008

15. Gates: No Immediate Military Threat From Iran

Morning Edition (NPR), 7:10 AM

RENEE MONTAGNE: The man who now runs the Pentagon is quieter than the celebrity he replaced. He also has less time than Donald Rumsfeld did.

Secretary Robert Gates has finished a year in the job and has about a year to go. The time is relatively short considering his two biggest problems -- wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

STEVE INSKEEP: We sat down to talk with Gates about those conflicts. He faces

decisions about pulling troops out; five brigades are leaving Iraq soon.

MONTAGNE: Or when to send troops in. Just over 3,000 more are now headed to Afghanistan. It's a balancing act.

INSKEEP: And with those two countries as his priorities, Gates seems less concerned about the nation between them on the map.

Is Iran the greatest threat that the United States is likely to face in the final year of this administration?

DEFENSE SECRETARY ROBERT GATES: Well, I think Iran is, certainly, one of the most significant challenges. We continue to be concerned about their ongoing enrichment programs, their unwillingness to suspend in the face of broad international pressure to do so.

So I think it will continue to be a challenge.

INSKEEP: Is there a reason you described them as a challenge rather than a threat?

GATES: Well, when I think of a threat, I think of a direct military threat and while the jury is out in terms of whether they have eased up on their support to those opposing us in Iraq, I don't see the Iranians in the near term as a direct military threat to the United States.

INSKEEP: You have commented on Iran's role in Afghanistan, which is the next country that I want to ask about. Do you expect that NATO, which is currently involved in combat operations in the southern part of the country, will have a significantly different role in Afghanistan one year from now?

GATES: No. I think the role will be very similar and I think it's one that combines military action with economic development and civic action. Our NATO allies are playing a significant role; particularly Canada and the United Kingdom and the Dutch, this kind of role, even with the addition of our Marines will

remain essentially the same.

INSKEEP: Although you mentioned Canada, this is a country where the government is under a lot of domestic political pressure because of the casualties they have suffered. Are you concerned that if they remain in that exposed position that you could end up losing an ally, as opposed to perhaps putting them in a less exposed area of the country?

GATES: My hope is that the addition of the Marines will provide the kind of help that will reduce the levels of casualties. Part of the problem that NATO confronts is that a number of governments are present in Afghanistan, but many of them are in minority or coalition governments where support for the activity in Afghanistan is fragile, if not difficult to come by and one of the reasons why I decided to tone down the public criticism is that, frankly, I think they're doing as much as they can.

INSKEEP: Should I understand you to mean that under ideal circumstances, you wouldn't have to be sending extra U.S. troops to Afghanistan right now? That NATO might be putting an extra 3,000 troops in there?

GATES: Well, I think, certainly, in the near term that's the case. We clearly had an unmet requirement from the NATO commander in Afghanistan. We are providing 2,200 Marines and we will partially satisfy the training requirement with another 1,000 Marines.

INSKEEP: Is there a danger that as you try to reduce the strain on the U.S. armed forces by pulling some troops out of Iraq, if possible, over the coming months, that that's going to be cancelled out at least partly by sending more troops to Afghanistan?

GATES: Well, we certainly don't have any plans to send further troops to Afghanistan beyond what we've just announced.

INSKEEP: As you look at

your multiple roles of focusing on Afghanistan, focusing on Iraq, focusing on the overall health of the armed forces, are you in a situation where you may need for the health of the armed forces to bring out troops from Iraq more rapidly than General Petraeus might like?

GATES: Well, the way I've structured this process is the same way that we did it last August and September. General Petraeus will make his evaluations based solely on the situation in Iraq. Central Command will independently analyze the situation in Iraq, but also in the context of the region. The Joint Chiefs of Staff will do a third independent evaluation, not only taking into account Iraq, but also the region and also global pressures.

Now, it happened last fall; all were agreed in supporting General Petraeus' recommendations on what to do. So we'll go through that process again in February and March and my hope is there will be an agreement, if not, the President will be in a position to hear independently from each of those groups and make his own valuation and decisions.

INSKEEP: But aren't you going to hear from the military personnel about the need to reduce the operational tempo for the armed forces overall, which is a demand to bring troops out of Iraq, in effect, regardless of the situation?

GATES: Well, first of all, taking five brigade combat teams out of Iraq does relieve the pressure to some extent, and I think we are on a path where there is some reasonable chance that by next fall, units that are deploying will no longer have to have a 15-month deployment.

INSKEEP: Do you think that by the time this administration leaves office in about a year that the military will be in a sustainable position?

GATES: Well, I think that

withdrawal of the five brigade combat teams will be in a sustainable position. I think that as the drawdowns continue in Iraq, stress on the force will continue to be relieved.

INSKEEP: I'm trying to get the numbers in my head. You'd go down to maybe 135 (thousand), 140,000 troops in Iraq? That's a sustainable number?

GATES: You can debate and people do debate in this building what that number is and I'm not going to get into those numbers. The goal here is to be in a position to have some modest sized force considerably smaller than the one we have now for some years to come.

INSKEEP: Well, given that, do you assume just for planning purposes that the administration that follows you will pursue roughly the same policy in Iraq?

GATES: Well, first, I would say I don't do politics and I certainly will not be here after January 20th, 2009, but I was heartened in the debate among the Democratic candidates a few weeks ago that when asked if they would commit to having all U.S. troops out of Iraq by the end of their first term, the leading candidates all declined to make that commitment and my goal is to try and put the situation in Iraq in the best possible place for the next President so that we can have a sustained policy in Iraq.

My whole experience is shaped by the Cold War where we followed a basic strategy that had bipartisan support through multiple presidencies. Iraq is a long-term problem.

INSKEEP: Does your experience in the Cold War also inform some of your recent remarks about so-called soft power – I'll summarize, encouraged the United States to spend more money and effort on non-military means of influence abroad, diplomacy, improving the U.S. image and so forth?

GATES: Absolutely. I

mean when the Cold War was at its height, the U.S. Agency for International Development had something like 16,000 employees. It has 3,000 now. One of the points that I make if you took all foreign service officers in the world, about 6,600, it would not be sufficient to man one carrier strike group and right now, frankly, I think, that the diplomacy, international economic assistance and so on have been significantly weakened.

INSKEEP: Isn't there though a basic budget choice that someone is going to have to make, though? Either you get six more fighter planes, for example, or you get a few thousand extra Foreign Service officers?

GATES: Well, the reality is that the cost of increasing your capabilities on the diplomatic, economic side is really pretty modest. The entire State Department budget is \$36 billion. We spend that in the Pentagon on healthcare.

INSKEEP: Would you say it would be worth it to slow down the growth of the Defense Department budget to allow for greater diplomacy and other efforts?

GATES: Well, I don't think you'll ever find a Secretary of Defense who will say it's a good idea to cut the Defense Department budget.

INSKEEP: Secretary Gates, thanks very much.

GATES: My pleasure.

INSKEEP: He spoke with us at the Pentagon yesterday and after Secretary Robert Gates stood up, he said he was going to Capitol Hill. The next Pentagon budget goes to Congress early next month.

Seattle Times
January 18, 2008

16. U.S. Helps In Rebirth Of Afghan Air Force

By Jason Straziuso, Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan —

Calling it the "birth of our air force," Afghan President Hamid Karzai opened a new \$22 million U.S.-funded military hangar Thursday to house a fleet that is expected to triple in the next three years.

Standing in the cavernous hangar opposite Kabul's international airport, Karzai thanked the U.S. for helping to buy six refurbished Mi-17 transport helicopters and six refurbished Mi-35 helicopter gunships from the Czech Republic, as well as four An-32 transport planes from Ukraine.

The newly acquired aircraft will help transport Afghan troops — who are taking on an increasing role in the battle against the Taliban — on missions across the country.

The new aircraft and upgraded flight facilities are part of a \$183 million U.S.-funded program to bolster the Afghan air force.

Afghanistan once had a strong air force that included hundreds of helicopters and Soviet-built MiG-21 and Su-22 warplanes, but that fleet was devastated by two decades of war.

"Today is again the birth of our air force," Karzai told a crowd of U.S. and Afghan military personnel. "We should strengthen this air force because it's very necessary for the Afghan government to have it."

Air Force Brig. Gen. Jay Lindell, the U.S. commander in charge of helping train and equip the Afghan air force, said that before six of the Czech helicopters were delivered in December, the Afghan air force had only four working helicopters.

Some of the new aircraft, acquired at a total cost of \$90 million, were delivered last month. The rest are to arrive by April. Ten Mi-17s donated by the United Arab Emirates also are to be delivered in the spring.

Today, the Afghan force has 22 helicopters and planes,

and the goal is to have 61 aircraft by 2011. The most important missions for the aircraft are to transport and help supply Afghan army troops, Lindell said.

Karzai said the international community has agreed to supply the country with fighter jets such as F-16s, although Lindell previously said plans drawn through 2011 don't call for any military jets for Afghanistan.

Washington Times
January 18, 2008
Pg. 11

17. Analyst Backs Gates' NATO Criticism

Says performance of troops symptom of Continent's defense

By Leander Schaerlaeckens,
Washington Times

BRUSSELS — Support for Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates' criticism of other NATO members' performance in Afghanistan appeared from an unexpected source yesterday — a European defense specialist who is closely linked to senior NATO officials.

"Mr. Gates is absolutely right," said Giles Merritt, director of the Security and Defense Agenda, an influential military think tank in Brussels which counts NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer among its patrons.

"It's quite clear that the Europeans as a whole have not lived up to their commitments [in Afghanistan]," Mr. Merritt said in an interview.

"There seems to be widespread agreement that NATO just isn't getting it right," Mr. Merritt added. "The NATO performance in Afghanistan is rather symptomatic of the European disarray in defense in general.

"There's no question that European allies, with the exception of the British and to some degree the French, have sat on their hands and haven't been keeping up their defense effort, and this has reflected on

the situation in Afghanistan."

Mr. Merritt referred to Mr. Gates' comments this week to the Los Angeles Times, which quoted him saying: "I'm worried we have some military forces [in Afghanistan] that don't know how to do counterinsurgency operations.

"Most of the European forces, NATO forces, are not trained in counterinsurgency ... this is not something they have any experience with," Mr. Gates added. The article quoted several senior U.S. officers saying the tasks carried out by other nations were of an inadequate standard.

Mr. Gates sought to soothe the allies' hurt feelings yesterday, saying at a Pentagon press conference that allied forces "have stepped up to the plate and are playing a significant and powerful role in Afghanistan."

"They are taking the fight to the enemy in some of the most grueling conditions imaginable," he added. "As a result of the valor and sacrifice of these allies, the Taliban has suffered significant losses."

But Mr. Merritt suggested the secretary's original remarks may have been a deliberate attempt to provoke the allies into thinking more about Afghanistan.

"I think it's rare that top politicians just let things slip out by accident," he said. "It's a common gambit by politicians to carefully plan something and then say they were misquoted, but meanwhile the message has gotten out loud and clear."

The United States has privately expressed its frustration at the lack of support from NATO's European members on several occasions. Unable to secure new troop commitments from Europe, the Bush administration this week announced that 3,200 U.S. Marines would temporarily be added to the 27,000-strong American contingent in Afghanistan.

"The defense secretary must have grown tired of [the

lack of support] and wondered if he'd get more support if he said it in public. It may be a catalyst," Mr. Merritt said.

Mr. Merritt also agreed with Mr. Gates that European troops are poorly trained for counterinsurgency duties — a comment the secretary repeated yesterday.

"Nobody is [trained for that] really," Mr. Merritt said. "The American troops have had a crash course in Iraq and Afghanistan on counterinsurgency.

"To say that the British have no experience in counterinsurgency is plainly wrong. All the NATO armed forces, probably including America, have a lot yet to learn about the counterinsurgency operation."

Toronto Globe and Mail
January 18, 2008

18. Marines Will Bolster Canadians In Kandahar

Reinforcements for thinly stretched troops in the region should help reduce casualties, U.S. Defence Secretary says

By Paul Koring

WASHINGTON — Hard-pressed Canadian troops in Kandahar will get help - and fewer may get killed - as more than 2,000 battle-hardened U.S. Marines with counterinsurgency training and experience start arriving next month in southern Afghanistan.

"My hope is that the addition of the marines will provide the kind of help that will reduce the levels of casualties," U.S. Defence Secretary Robert Gates said yesterday when asked about the disproportionate number of Canadians killed battling the Taliban.

Mr. Gates, still dealing with the brouhaha caused by published reports that suggested he had faulted the ability of Canadian, Dutch and British troops for counterinsurgency warfare, said he never intended his general criticism of NATO training to apply to Canada's

troops in southern Afghanistan.

"I have no problems with the Canadians," he said at a Pentagon news conference yesterday.

"Our allies, including the Canadians, the British, the Dutch, the Australians and others, are suffering losses as they demonstrate valour and skill in combat."

In Canada, the nation is deeply divided over whether to extend the fighting mission in Afghanistan beyond its current mandate of February, 2009.

The arrival of the marines, expected to reinforce NATO forces in southern Afghanistan for this year's so-called summer fighting season, will add a massive punch to the thinly stretched Canadian and Dutch forces in Kandahar and neighbouring Uruzgan province.

Although Canada has about 2,500 soldiers deployed to southern Afghanistan, only about 500 are "outside the wire" directly involved in counterinsurgency operations at any time.

A much bigger percentage of the 2,200 marines will be available for combat because the U.S. military already has a huge logistics, support and administrative structure in Afghanistan.

The marines will report to Canadian Major-General Marc Lessard, who takes over command of NATO's southern regional command next month as part of a rotation including the British and Dutch.

The 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit will provide "a manoeuvres force so it has the flexibility to move wherever in Regional Command South that the Canadians deem is necessary to go after the enemy. I mean, this is a fighting force that will greatly enhance the capabilities of the Canadians and our allies who are down there taking it to the enemy," Pentagon spokesman Geoff Morrell said earlier this week.

"There is a fighting season in Afghanistan. And so we're

getting those marines there at the beginning of that fighting season," General James Cartwright, vice-chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said yesterday.

"We learned last year that if you're there and ready to go in the spring, it makes a big difference."

But the one-time, seven-month deployment of the marines will mean that at least three battalions will be required to replace them and Mr. Gates served notice yesterday that NATO allies are needed to fill the gap.

He said he wanted "them to be thinking seriously about who can backfill against the marines when the marines leave early next winter, so that that capability won't be lost."

Mr. Gates also ordered another 1,000 U.S. Marines to Afghanistan to act as trainers and mentors to the Afghan army, which despite showing significant improvement, lacks the equipment, firepower, training and numbers to take on the Taliban insurgency in southern and eastern Afghanistan.

The 3,200 U.S. Marines will partly fill a 7,000-soldier shortfall in Afghanistan that NATO nations have refused to address for more than a year.

About 45,000 foreign troops are currently deployed in Afghanistan. About two-thirds are American.

Most of the rest, including sizable contingents from Germany, France, Italy and Spain, are stationed far from the insurgency in the south and forbidden by their governments to deploy close to the fighting.

For months, Mr. Gates has been pushing some of the European allies to share more of the combat burden.

But in a radio interview yesterday he acknowledged that "many of them are in minority or coalition governments where support for the activity in Afghanistan is fragile, if not difficult to come by.

"And one of the reasons

why I decided to tone down the public criticism is that, frankly, I think they're doing as much as they can."

USA Today
January 18, 2008
Pg. 7

19. Army Task Force Finds Gaps In Brain-Injury Care

But improvements made to identify, treat victims of wars' signature wound

By Gregg Zoroya, USA Today

An Army task force found major gaps in the care of traumatic brain injury last year, but officials say they are moving rapidly to correct the problems.

A task force study--completed last May but not made public until Thursday--found fault with several issues, including efforts to identify and treat soldiers suffering mild traumatic brain injury often resulting from exposure to roadside bomb blasts.

Although victims often show no outward sign of the injury, it can affect brain functions dealing with short-term memory, problem solving and sleep, and cause nausea, dizziness and headaches. Treatment often involves pulling a soldier out of combat temporarily or permanently, and treating the symptoms.

Screening efforts show 10% to 20% of Marines and soldiers returning from Afghanistan and Iraq may have suffered this wound, according to the Army. The task force last May found that "major gaps" in identifying and treating the injury "were created by a lack of coordination and policy-driven approaches."

This was despite the fact that researchers at the Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center--the Pentagon's premier clinical research office for brain injury--had developed ways of identifying the wound in 2004, the study said.

USA TODAY reported in November that at least 20,000 U.S. servicemembers returning from combat have been diagnosed with, or shown signs of, brain injury.

"There is clearly a problem when the most common injury of the war is the least understood," said Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash. "This task force is a long-overdue step forward in diagnosing and understanding the signature wound of this war."

In a news conference Thursday, the task force's chairman, Brig. Gen. Donald Bradshaw, lauded the Army's efforts to improve care in recent months. Not only are soldiers screened for brain injury immediately after exposure to blasts, they are screened again as they come home, Bradshaw said. Computer-based cognitive testing that provides a better understanding of the brain damage have been introduced into the war zone and at military installations. Standard guidelines for treating brain injury were completed in October.

"Since the release of the report (in May) we've been working arduously to put these recommendations into action," said Col. Judith Ruiz, a task force member and program manager for traumatic brain injury.

The task force applauded the brain-injury program at Fort Carson, Colo., where 17% of returning soldiers have shown signs of the injury. As a result, the Army is replicating Fort Carson's program at other installations.

The task force said most soldiers suffering mild brain injury recover completely. Army Col. Robert Labutta, a neurologist and member of the task force, added that research is underway to determine long-term effects.

Out of 48 task force recommendations in May to improve the diagnosis, treatment and research into brain injury, nine have been

implemented, and 31 are being addressed.

"This is a very complex process and so the fact that we've made headway on all of these recommendations is really very, I think, laudatory," Bradshaw said. Most important, he said, the Army has moved aggressively to educate soldiers, commanders and medics in the field about mild traumatic brain injury, how to identify it and take steps to have it treated.

Task force recommendations still to be addressed include:

*Better ways of tracking the incidents of brain injury, and identifying former soldiers who may have suffered a brain injury, but left the service. An estimated 1.5 million servicemembers have served in the current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

*Broader baseline testing of a soldier's brain functions before he or she goes into combat so deficits can later be gauged accurately. This specialized computer-based testing has already been given to 40,000 servicemembers.

*Standardizing the care and treatment of brain-injured soldiers at all Army medical hospitals.

Los Angeles Times
January 18, 2008

20. Inquiry Yields Little Clarity In Marines Shooting

The March incident in Afghanistan left at least 19 people dead. Marines have said they believed their convoy was under fire, but testimony has been inconsistent, an investigator complains.

By David Zuchino, Los Angeles Times Staff Writer

CAMP LEJEUNE, N.C. — An investigator expressed frustration Thursday at what he said were incomplete and sometimes inconsistent accounts by Marines involved in a March shooting in Afghanistan that left up to 19 Afghans dead.

"We were trying to put pieces together and some of them just don't fit," David Kurre, a Naval Criminal Investigative Service agent, said on the eighth day of testimony in a court of inquiry reviewing the incident.

The 30-man convoy from Marine Special Operations Company F has been accused by an Afghan human rights group of firing indiscriminately at civilians after being attacked by a car bomb March 4. An Army colonel apologized for the killings, paying \$2,000 to the family of each of the alleged victims.

Kurre interviewed members of the convoy in Kuwait after their unit was ordered out of Afghanistan. Asked in court Thursday whether their accounts were generally consistent, Kurre replied firmly: "No."

He said that Marines gave differing accounts of where they believed the gunfire had originated and where on the highway in eastern Afghanistan they had heard shots.

"We're not sure of anything," Kurre said at one point, referring to the NCIS team investigating the incident.

A government lawyer, Maj. Phillip Sanchez, said: "We're dealing with the fog of war. We're going to have many statements that are different."

Several Marines have testified that they believed they were attacked by small-arms fire as part of a "complex ambush" moments after the car bomb exploded. The Marines, who said they heard shots and saw tree branches hit by bullets, testified that they did not see any gunmen.

Kurre said a Marine gunner in the fourth of six vehicles told agents that he had seen "an armed individual" shooting at the convoy. The gunner returned fire, Kurre said.

Those in the convoy have testified that gunners followed military rules of engagement during the incident, firing

warning shots and shooting into vehicles' engine blocks. They described the military gunfire as controlled -- with far fewer rounds fired over a much shorter distance than alleged by the human rights group.

Only one Marine, a counter-intelligence specialist, has been critical in court of the convoy's armed response, calling it "excessive."

Some Marines have testified that they did not have a clear view of events. The gunners who fired had the best view of the highway because they were posted atop the Humvees, but their lawyers have told them not to testify without immunity from prosecution. The active-duty Marines who have testified were granted immunity.

The inquiry is a fact-finding body, not a court of law. Its panel of three Marine officers, all with combat experience, is probing the conduct of the convoy and two of the unit's top officers.

No one has been charged in the case. Maj. Fred C. Galvin, the company commander, and Capt. Vincent J. Noble, the convoy platoon commander -- both of whom were on the convoy -- are "designated parties" represented by defense lawyers.

The panel will report its findings to the commander of the Marine Corps Forces Central Command, who will decide on any further action.

One panel member, Col. Barton Sloat, seemed to acknowledge the murky and incomplete nature of the testimony after Kurre said late Wednesday that agents were unsure of many aspects of the incident.

"That's the most accurate statement I've heard in the court so far," the colonel said.

Los Angeles Times
January 18, 2008

21. Judge Sets Aside Some Restrictions On

Sonar

The jurist grants two concessions to President Bush on naval exercises off the Southland.

By Kenneth R. Weiss, Los Angeles Times Staff Writer

A federal judge in Los Angeles on Thursday temporarily set aside some of the tough restrictions on upcoming naval exercises off Southern California that employ a type of sonar linked to the injury and death of whales and dolphins.

The decision by Judge Florence-Marie Cooper defers to President Bush, who moved earlier this week to exempt the Navy's exercises from environmental laws that formed the basis for a long-running court case between the Pentagon and environmentalists.

But Cooper granted only two concessions to Bush and the Navy, signaling that she will consider arguments next week from conservation groups that are urging her to hold her ground on more stringent safeguards.

"We are pleased," said Cmdr. Jeff Davis, a Navy spokesman.

"This ruling means that the USS Abraham Lincoln carrier strike group will be able to start the exercise next week without two restrictions that threatened the realism of our training."

The Navy says it must train personnel to detect quiet diesel-powered submarines that are deployed in worldwide hot spots such as the Persian Gulf.

Although lawyers for the Navy have vigorously protested nearly all of Cooper's safeguards, they asked her to temporarily set aside the two they considered the most intrusive: requirements to shut down sonar if a marine mammal ventures within 2,200 yards of a sonar device, and to reduce sonar power under certain sea conditions that allow powerful sonar blasts to travel farther than normal.

After months of inquiry, a

visit to Navy ships and analysis of scientific literature, Cooper ruled Jan. 3 that these and other measures were needed to safeguard whales from the potentially debilitating effect of the powerful sound waves.

Under her order issued Thursday, the Navy will have to comply with other safeguards, such as staying away from the waters between Santa Catalina and San Clemente islands as well as those within 12 nautical miles of the coast.

These are areas known for their abundance of marine mammals.

To comply with the order, the Navy will also have to step up its surveillance for whales before and during exercises, deploying specially trained spotters aboard ships and aircraft.

It will have to reduce power when marine mammals are spotted within about 1,000 yards and shut down if the mammals come within about 200 yards.

Meanwhile, conservation groups began working on legal arguments they hope will convince the judge that Bush has not followed the law in waiving environmental law on the grounds of national security and an urgent need to train sailors.

"We remain optimistic that we will prevail in opposing the waivers," said Joel Reynolds, a senior attorney with the Natural Resources Defense Council. "It's an abuse of the term 'emergency' and flatly inconsistent with the National Environmental Policy Act."

Washington Post
January 18, 2008
Pg. B1

22. Naval Academy Rite Might Slip Away

Safety of Lard-Slicked Herndon Climb Is Evaluated
By Nelson Hernandez,
Washington Post Staff Writer

The Herndon Climb has occupied a hallowed place in Naval Academy tradition for

decades. For members of the plebe class, the climb represents what a former midshipman called "our final exam of all finals." The starter gun fires, and the plebes, working together, race to replace a blue-rimmed sailor's cap, known as a "dixie cup," with a midshipman's cap.

The scene is unforgettable to those who watch, as the sweating, grunting, red-faced midshipmen at the bottom, their arms linked, support a human pyramid surging to the top of the monument. The pyramid often collapses, but the plebes invariably make it to the top whether it takes them minutes or hours.

But at the ever-changing academy, the climb may be going the way of the sailing ship and the smoothbore cannon.

"Similar to how our Navy looks at all traditions in the Fleet, we are evaluating the Herndon Monument Climb to ensure the event remains a valid part of our heritage but it is conducted with professionalism, respect, and most important, safety in mind," the academy's public affairs office said in a statement.

It is unclear what changes might be imposed. This year's climb is scheduled for 9 a.m. May 15.

Deborah Goode, a spokeswoman for the academy, said that she could not recall any serious injuries resulting from the Herndon Climb and that the reevaluation was part of a broader reconsideration of the end-of-year events for plebes.

Alumni scoffed at the risk of someone's getting hurt, especially given the school's mission to prepare officers for combat.

"It's not dangerous. That's a lame excuse," said Dwight Crevelt, who made it to the top of the monument in 1976. Crevelt never graduated from the academy, because his eyesight went bad after two years at the school. But his

memory of scaling the mud- and lard-spattered obelisk -- and the week of glory that followed as he was feted like an admiral -- remains strong.

"It's the wrong move to make," Crevelt said. "You're trying to build team spirit, camaraderie, and that's the ultimate in team effort... the team going after that."

Herbert McMillan, a 1980 graduate who became an airline pilot and Annapolis politician, also opposes a change.

"We're going to send these guys to war but they can't climb a monument because they might get hurt? Come on," he said. "It just seems like a solution in search of a problem."

Los Angeles Times
January 18, 2008

23. Nimitz Carrier Group To Deploy

SAN DIEGO--More than 7,000 sailors and Marines will deploy next week when the Nimitz Carrier Strike Group leaves San Diego for the Western Pacific.

The commander of the Navy's Third Fleet says the Nimitz will leave San Diego on Jan. 24 to take over in the Pacific for the carrier Kitty Hawk while it undergoes scheduled maintenance in Yokosuka, Japan.

Among the ships deploying with the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier are the guided-missile cruiser Princeton and the destroyers John Paul Jones, Higgins and Chafee.

The Nimitz carrier group returned in September from a six-month deployment in the Persian Gulf.

--Associated Press

USA Today
January 18, 2008
Pg. 5

24. Entrepreneur Defends His Veterans' Charities

A San Diego entrepreneur accused of mismanaging charities he started for veterans and enriching himself rebutted congressional critics Thursday, insisting his group "does right by its donors and hospitalized vets."

Roger Chapin, 75, president of Help Hospitalized Veterans and other groups, testified before the House Government Reform and Oversight Committee. When committee Chairman Henry Waxman, D-Calif., accused him of misleading donors, Chapin responded, "Absolutely not!"

Thursday's hearing focused on Chapin and his enterprises. An earlier hearing found pervasive problems with veterans' charities. Waxman said committee research showed that Chapin's charities raised more than \$168 million from 2004 to 2006 but only 25% of that was spent on veterans. During those years, Chapin and his wife received more than \$1.5 million in compensation and hundreds of thousands of dollars more in reimbursements, the committee said.

Atlanta Journal-Constitution
January 18, 2008

25. Vets Care Gets \$3.7 Billion

President Bush on Thursday released \$3.7 billion in emergency money that Congress requested to care for veterans, including those returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. Bush released the emergency funds even though he said he thought the money should have been considered as part of the normal appropriations process. The emergency money was tucked in a \$550 billion government spending measure that Congress passed last month before leaving for the holidays.

Washington Times
January 18, 2008
Pg. 13

26. Nuke-Capable Missile Tested

JERUSALEM — Israel tested a missile yesterday, prompting speculation about its ability to launch nuclear strikes on Iran after Israeli warnings and accusations about Tehran's atomic ambitions.

Photographs posted on Israeli news Web sites showed a white plume in the sky above central Israel — suggesting a test of a large missile.

Israel Radio said the missile was capable of carrying an "unconventional payload" — an apparent reference to the nuclear warheads that Israel is assumed to possess.

Arizona Daily Star (Tucson)
January 18, 2008

Analysis

27. Cat-And-Mouse Games By Iranians Aren't Child's Play

By Sally Buzbee, Associated Press

CAIRO, Egypt — Just how close might a military confrontation between Iran and the United States be?

Though a war of words eased a bit recently, President Bush's strong Iran warnings during his just-completed Mideast trip, coupled with a vessel standoff, are raising fears that a small incident could someday spiral — even by accident — into a real fight.

Iran's hard-line President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad accused Bush Thursday of sending "a message of confrontation" during his trip to the region. It was a sharp response to Bush's tough rhetoric that Iran remains a serious threat.

Tensions slackened somewhat late last year when a U.S. intelligence report concluded Iran had halted a nuclear-weapons program four years ago. But Bush went out of his way while visiting Persian Gulf countries to reiterate that "all options" against Iran remain on the table.

Pointedly, he also warned of "serious consequences" if Iran attacked a U.S. ship in the Persian Gulf, even if it had not been ordered by the Tehran government but was the result of a rash decision by an Iranian boat captain.

At the same time, Bush said he has told leaders of Sunni Arab states — who want the United States to keep Shiite Iran's ambitions in check but are nervous about the impact of any military confrontation — that he wants a diplomatic solution.

In part, Bush seemed to be trying to assure both Arab allies and Israel that the United States remains intent on pressuring Iran. He also seeks reluctant European support for another round of Iran sanctions.

But the scenario Bush outlined — a rash decision on the water, spilling over into real fighting — is just the thing that many U.S. military officers, and much of the Persian Gulf Arab world, are sweating over.

Adm. William J. Fallon, the top U.S. military commander in the Mideast, told The Associated Press last week that Iran runs the risk of triggering an unintended conflict if its boats continue to harass U.S. warships in the strategic Persian Gulf.

"This kind of behavior, if it happens in the future, is the kind of event that could precipitate a mistake," Fallon said. "If the boats come closer, at what point does the captain think it is a direct threat to the ship and has to do something to stop it?"

Key details of the Jan. 6 incident — when five small Iranian boats swarmed three U.S. warships in the narrow Strait of Hormuz — remain unclear, including the source of an accented voice heard warning in English: "I am coming to you You will explode after ... minutes."

Iran called the tapes fabricated.

Notably, the U.S.

commanders did not fire any warning shots and the Iranians eventually retreated. But in a mid-December incident, publicized by the Navy for the first time last week, a U.S. ship did fire a warning shot at a small Iranian boat that came too close, causing the Iranians to pull back.

The worry: That in a heated political climate, such cat-and-mouse maneuvers could spiral into a more-serious exchange of fire, difficult for either side to pull back from.

Of course, Bush could succeed in getting Iran to be less aggressive with his strong words.

But a major Persian Gulf paper, the Dubai-published Khaleej Times, fretted publicly about the potential for an "ugly flare-up," comparing the confrontation to last year's Iranian seizure of British sailors.

Iran eventually freed the British sailors, but then — as now — its motivations were deeply obscure.

Ahmadinejad is struggling to retain domestic political support, in dire need of a boost to keep any real political influence during his last year and a half in office before seeking re-election.

Standoffs with the United States often give him just such a boost, as the country draws together despite the bitter differences dividing its hard-line and pragmatic factions.

San Diego Union-Tribune
January 18, 2008

28. Ahmadinejad Decries Bush's Iran Speeches

CAIRO, Egypt — Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said yesterday that President Bush sent a "message of confrontation" during his recent Mideast trip.

Bush spent much of his visit to the region, which he wrapped up on Wednesday, rallying support among Arab

allies for a strong stance against Iran — calling the country the world's top sponsor of terrorism.

"President George Bush sent a message to the Iranian people and all the nations worldwide," Ahmadinejad said during an interview in Farsi with Al-Jazeera television. "This message reflects his own conceptions and it is a message of rift, a message of sowing the seeds of division. It is a message of confrontation demeaning the dignity of mankind."

The Iranian president said Bush's statements were made for domestic political reasons.

--Associated Press

Washington Post
January 18, 2008

Pg. 16

29. Bush Envoy To N. Korea Criticizes Six-Party Talks

By Foster Klug, Associated Press

A U.S. official, in a rare public departure from Bush administration policy, yesterday criticized the nuclear talks with North Korea, contending that Pyongyang is not serious about disarming.

Jay Lefkowitz, President Bush's envoy on North Korean human rights, said the North will likely "remain in its present nuclear status" when the next U.S. president takes over, despite four years of nuclear disarmament efforts.

"North Korea is not serious about disarming in a timely manner," Lefkowitz told an audience at the conservative American Enterprise Institute, referring to that country's recent missed deadlines and a surge in what he called "bellicose language."

"We should consider a new approach to North Korea," he said.

Lefkowitz suggested that negotiators link human rights and security concerns, something not achieved under the six-nation talks aimed at

reaching an agreement under which North Korea dismantles its nuclear program. The North's treatment of its people, he said, is "inhumane and, therefore, deeply offensive to us."

"The key," Lefkowitz said of his proposal, "is to make the link between human rights and other issues explicit and non-severable, so that it cannot be discarded in any future rush to get to 'yes' in an agreement."

Lefkowitz's comments are at odds with recent statements by other Bush administration officials. But White House spokeswoman Dana Perino, when asked to comment, said the administration believes that six-party talks remain the best opportunity to reach the goal of a denuclearized Korean Peninsula.

Early in the administration, U.S. officials took a hard line on North Korea. But recently they have been cautious not to criticize Pyongyang for fear of unraveling the delicate nuclear negotiations.

When the North missed an end-of-2007 deadline to declare all of its nuclear programs, the comments by the chief U.S. envoy to the nuclear talks were measured. Assistant Secretary of State Christopher R. Hill pushed the North to quickly produce a "complete and correct" declaration. But he also indicated that the United States is prepared to wait.

Lefkowitz, when asked if he was speaking on behalf of the Bush administration, said U.S. policies "are under review right now."

Houston Chronicle
January 18, 2008

30. U.S., Iran Lobby Chinese Over Proposed Nuclear Sanctions

By Christopher Bodeen,
Associated Press

BEIJING — U.S. and Iranian envoys lobbied China on Thursday over proposed

new sanctions on Tehran's nuclear program, underscoring Beijing's key role in determining U.N. involvement in the dispute.

Visiting U.S. Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte urged China to back proposed new U.N. measures aimed at convincing Iran to reveal more about its nuclear program, insisting that its alleged uranium enrichment and missile development programs remain a threat.

China has repeatedly opposed new measures. Underscoring the difficulty of his mission, Negroponte's comments in Beijing coincided with a visit by Iran's senior nuclear negotiator, Saeed Jalili.

The hard-line Jalili, who replaced moderate Ali Larijani in October, met with Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi to discuss bilateral ties and the nuclear issue, a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman said.

The diplomatic tug of war illustrates the importance of China, one of five veto-wielding members of the U.N. Security Council, in resolving the dispute.

State media said that Jiechi urged renewed talks on Iran's nuclear program.

"The Iranian nuclear issue is now at a crucial moment," Yang was quoted by the Xinhua News Agency as telling Jalili late Thursday. "China hopes all concerned parties, including Iran, make joint efforts to resume negotiations as soon as possible in a bid to promote the comprehensive and proper settlement of this issue."

Xinhua said Jalili told Yang that Iran's nuclear program was "completely of a peaceful nature." Iran rejects U.S. claims that it is seeking nuclear weapons.

Jalili said Iran wanted talks and was willing to boost cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency, Xinhua said.

Energy-hungry China, which has extensive business interests in Iran, supported

earlier U.N. resolutions against Tehran, but has sided with Russia in opposing a new sanctions resolution being sought by Washington and its allies, instead calling for more intensive negotiations.

That opposition has hardened since the December release of a U.S. National Intelligence Estimate that said Iran stopped working on a secret nuclear weapons program in 2003, contradicting Washington's previous view that Tehran was continuing such activities.

However, Negroponte said the report showed only that Iran has suspended work on warhead design but it was pressing ahead on uranium enrichment and missile development.

"Work continues by Iran on two out of those three parts of that program," Negroponte told reporters in Beijing before departing for the southern city of Guiyang, which is hosting a semiannual U.S.-China Senior Dialogue.

"We think it's important that there be an additional Security Council resolution because Iran is out of compliance on previously passed resolutions," Negroponte said.

He said he planned to raise the Iran issue at the talks with Chinese Deputy Foreign Minister Dai Bingguo, along with matters concerning Taiwan, Sudan, human rights and efforts to dismantle North Korea's nuclear program.

China's Yang is to meet with Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and foreign ministers from the three other permanent Security Council members and Germany over the Iran nuclear issue in Berlin on Tuesday.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Jiang Yu indicated Thursday there were no changes to China's opposition to new sanctions. Beijing hopes the international community will "intensify diplomatic efforts for an early resumption of negotiations,"

she said at a regular news briefing.

China and the U.S. are increasingly linked through trade and international cooperation, although the potential for instability in ties was underscored by Beijing's barring of U.S. Navy ships from Hong Kong late last year.

In Hong Kong, the head of the U.S. Pacific Command said Thursday he does not expect China to refuse future requests for American naval ships to visit there.

Adm. Timothy Keating said he had spoken with Chinese military and government officials about their refusal to allow the USS Kitty Hawk battle group and 8,000 sailors to dock in Hong Kong for a Thanksgiving break, and that they had indicated future visits were possible.

China said the ships were turned away because the U.S. military did not follow correct procedures in requesting the port visits. But some analysts suggested China was reacting to a congressional decision to grant an award to Tibet's spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama.

Beijing accuses the Dalai Lama of trying to split Tibet from China.

Washington Post
January 18, 2008
Pg. 1

31. CIA Places Blame For Bhutto Assassination

Hayden Cites Al-Qaeda, Pakistani Fighters

By Joby Warrick, Washington Post Staff Writer

Offering the most definitive public assessment by a U.S. intelligence official, Hayden said Bhutto was killed by fighters allied with Mehsud, a tribal leader in northwestern Pakistan, with support from al-Qaeda's terrorist network. That view mirrors the Pakistani government's assertions.

The same alliance between

local and international terrorists poses a grave risk to the government of President Pervez Musharraf, a close U.S. ally in the fight against terrorism, Hayden said in a 45-minute interview with The Washington Post. "What you see is, I think, a change in the character of what's going on there," he said. "You've got this nexus now that probably was always there in latency but is now active: a nexus between al-Qaeda and various extremist and separatist groups."

Hayden added, "It is clear that their intention is to continue to try to do harm to the Pakistani state as it currently exists."

Days after Bhutto's Dec. 27 assassination in the city of Rawalpindi, Pakistani officials released intercepted communications between Mehsud and his supporters in which the tribal leader praised the killing and, according to the officials, appeared to take credit for it. Pakistani and U.S. officials have declined to comment on the origin of that intercept, but the administration has until now been cautious about publicly embracing the Pakistani assessment.

Many Pakistanis have voiced suspicions that Musharraf's government played a role in Bhutto's assassination, and Bhutto's family has alleged a wide conspiracy involving government officials. Hayden declined to discuss the intelligence behind the CIA's assessment, which is at odds with that view and supports Musharraf's assertions.

"This was done by that network around Baitullah Mehsud. We have no reason to question that," Hayden said. He described the killing as "part of an organized campaign" that has included suicide bombings and other attacks on Pakistani leaders.

Some administration officials outside the agency who deal with Pakistani issues were less conclusive, with one calling the assertion "a very

good assumption."

One of the officials said there was no "incontrovertible" evidence to prove or rebut the assessment.

Hayden made his statement shortly before a series of attacks occurred this week on Pakistani political figures and army units. Pakistani officials have blamed them on Mehsud's forces and other militants. On Wednesday, a group of several hundred insurgents overran a military outpost in the province of South Waziristan, killing 22 government paramilitary troops. The daring daylight raid was carried out by rebels loyal to Mehsud, Pakistani authorities said.

For more than a year, U.S. officials have been nervously watching as al-Qaeda rebuilt its infrastructure in the rugged tribal regions along the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, often with the help of local sympathizers.

In recent months, U.S. intelligence officials have said, the relationship between al-Qaeda and local insurgents has been strengthened by a common antipathy toward the pro-Western Musharraf government. The groups now share resources and training facilities and sometimes even plan attacks together, they said.

"We've always viewed that to be an ultimate danger to the United States," Hayden said, "but now it appears that it is a serious base of danger to the current well-being of Pakistan."

Hayden's anxieties about Pakistan's stability are echoed by other U.S. officials who have visited Pakistan since Bhutto's assassination. White House, intelligence and Defense Department officials have held a series of meetings to discuss U.S. options in the event that the current crisis deepens, including the possibility of covert action involving Special Forces.

Hayden declined to comment on the policy meetings but said that the CIA

already was heavily engaged in the region and has not shifted its officers or changed its operations significantly since the crisis began.

"The Afghan-Pakistan border region has been an area of focus for this agency since about 11 o'clock in the morning of September 11, [2001], and I really mean this," Hayden said. "We haven't done a whole lot of retooling there in the last one week, one month, three months, six months and so on. This has been up there among our very highest priorities."

Hayden said that the United States has "not had a better partner in the war on terrorism than the Pakistanis." The turmoil of the past few weeks has only deepened that cooperation, he said, by highlighting "what are now even more clearly mutual and common interests."

Hayden also acknowledged the difficulties -- diplomatic and practical -- involved in helping combat extremism in a country divided by ethnic, religious and cultural allegiances. "This looks simpler the further away you get from it," he said. "And the closer you get to it, geography, history, culture all begin to intertwine and make it more complex."

Regarding the public controversy over the CIA's harsh interrogation of detainees at secret prisons, Hayden reiterated previous agency statements that lives were saved and attacks were prevented as a result of those interrogations.

He said he does not support proposals, put forward by some lawmakers in recent weeks, to require the CIA to abide by the Army Field Manual in conducting interrogations. The manual, adopted by the Defense Department, prohibits the use of many aggressive methods, including a simulated-drowning technique known as waterboarding.

"I would offer my

professional judgment that that will make us less capable in gaining the information we need," he said.

Staff writer Robin Wright and staff researcher Julie Tate contributed to this report.

New York Times
January 18, 2008
Pg. 1

32. Frontier Insurgency Spills Into A Pakistani City

By Jane Perlez

PESHAWAR, Pakistan — For centuries, fighting and lawlessness have been part of the fabric of this frontier city. But in the past year, Pakistan's war with Islamic militants has spilled right into its alleys and bazaars, its forts and armories, killing policemen and soldiers and scaring its famously tough citizens.

There is a sense of siege here, as the Islamic insurgency pours out of the adjacent tribal region into this city, one of Pakistan's largest, and its surrounding districts.

The Taliban and their militant sympathizers now hold strategic pockets on the city's outskirts, the police say, from where they strike at the military and the police, order schoolgirls to wear the burqa and blow up stores selling DVDs, among other acts of violence.

Suicide bombings, bomb explosions and missile attacks occurred an average of once a week here in 2007, according to a tally by the city's police department. In 2006, while there were occasional grenade attacks and explosions, the authorities did not record a single suicide bombing or rocket attack inside the city.

The proximity of Peshawar to the tribal areas where the Taliban and Al Qaeda have regrouped in the past two years makes the city a feasible prize for the militants in Pakistan's quickly escalating internal strife that pits the Islamic extremists against the

American-backed government of President Pervez Musharraf.

Though few here believe that the Taliban will rule anytime soon, the police and residents say that by the standards of counterinsurgency warfare the extremists are doing well. They have undermined public faith in the government, sown distrust and made the police fearful for their lives. "People feel the insecurity is so high, no one can fix it," said Humair Bilour, the sister-in-law of Malik Saad, a popular Peshawar police chief who was killed in a suicide bomb attack last year. "How can the government do anything when the government itself is involved in it?"

She said she and her friends were now afraid to go out. "People go to the bazaar and make jokes: 'Is this going to be my last trip?'" she said.

The extremists have selected the police and the army, two important pillars of the Pakistani state, as particular targets.

Last week, rockets were fired at an army barracks in Warsak on the city's perimeter, a warning of the power of the militants to strike from Mohmand, a district in the tribal areas adjacent to Peshawar, an area that a few months ago was considered free of the Taliban.

The army headquarters in the center of the city were struck last month by a bomber who was hiding explosives under her burqa that were set off by remote control. The assassination a year ago of the police chief, Mr. Saad, who was killed while on duty trying to control a religious procession in one of the bazaars, shook the city.

"It's asymmetrical warfare against an established state," said Muhammad Sulaman Khan, chief of operations for the Peshawar police and a close friend of Mr. Saad. "The terrorists only don't have to lose it, we need to win it."

At the core of the troubles here, many say, lie demands by

the United States that the Pakistani military, generously financed by Washington, join in its campaign against terrorism, which means killing fellow Pakistanis in the tribal areas. Even if those Pakistanis are extremists, the people here say, they do not like a policy of killing fellow tribesmen, and fellow countrymen, particularly on behalf of the United States.

The Bush administration is convinced that Al Qaeda and the Taliban have gained new strength in the past two years, particularly in the tribal regions of North and South Waziristan and Bajaur. It has said it is considering sending American forces to help the Pakistani soldiers in those areas. Mr. Musharraf has scoffed at the idea.

Any direct intervention by American forces would only strengthen the backlash now under way against soldiers and the police in Peshawar, said Farook Adam Khan, a lawyer here. That reaction spread last week to Lahore, the capital of Punjab Province, where a suicide bomber killed almost two dozen policemen at a lawyers' rally, he said.

"Pakistani soldiers never used to be targets," Mr. Khan said. "Now we have the radicals antagonized by Musharraf and his politics of cozying up to the United States. The actions taken by the army in Waziristan and Bajaur and Swat are causing the problems here." Swat is an area 100 miles north of Peshawar, where the Pakistani Army is currently battling a Pakistani Taliban insurgent group with mixed results.

The standing of the Pakistani military is being further harmed by an increasing awareness here that it is for the first time suffering significant numbers of defections, mostly among soldiers reluctant to fight in the tribal areas. The defections gain only scant mention in the press, but people talk about them.

There are rumors of courts-martial, although the information is tightly held by the army, former officers said. Morale among the police in Peshawar has plummeted amid a series of police killings, making the city far from the glamorous posting it once was, when the police were fighting smugglers and other outlaws.

Terrorist activities around Peshawar began to increase, Mr. Khan said, after a major attack on a madrasa in Bajaur in October 2006, in which 82 people, including 12 teenagers, were killed. The Pakistani Army said intelligence had shown that the madrasa was used as a training base by Al Qaeda. Local residents said the killings were the work of an American remotely piloted drone, a charge that Washington denied.

A few months later, government schools for girls around Peshawar began to receive threats that they would be blown up if the students did not wear burqas.

At one such school, in Shah Dhand Baba, a town on the northern fringes of Peshawar, the principal, Gul Bahar Begum, said she received a handwritten letter in the mail last February demanding that the students cover up or the school would be blown up.

Ms. Begum, who wears lipstick and lightly covers her hair with a scarf, and whose office is filled with sports trophies won by her students, said that about 70 percent of the girls now wore burqas when they stepped outside the school.

"It is the Islamic way to cover," she said of her instructions to the girls to cover up. "So the militants were right, but the way they imposed their decision was not."

The students, dressed in loose white pants and long shirts, suggested that they accepted the demands because they had to, not because they believed it was a religious

necessity.

Maryam Sultan, 16, who wore a denim jacket over her uniform, said she and her friends came to school in burqas "for security." Ms. Sultan, who was more interested in talking about her desire to become a doctor, said there was little choice but to cover up.

The outward bravura at the school masked a deeper problem: the inability of the police or any other authorities to deter the militants. At another school where a threatening letter was received, the principal protested.

She made contact with the militants, saying that burqas were too expensive for some of the girls. The militants replied, saying, "If the girls can afford makeup, they can afford burqas," according to officials in the district. Days later, the girls were in burqas.

Himayat Mayar, the local mayor, blamed the government for the threats against the girls.

He said that during the five years that Mr. Musharraf and his allies in a coalition of Islamic parties, the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal, had governed the North-West Frontier Province, they had allowed madrasas for young Islamic jihadists to flourish.

"There are so many madrasas run by mullahs that train jihadis and get funds from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait," Mr. Mayar said. "These jihadis know only jihad. They should be brought into the mainstream." If it wanted to, he added, the government could easily provide teachers and computers to the madrasas, and register them.

Peshawar's booming business in illicit Western and Indian DVDs has been another target of the militants. Many of the city's myriad retail outlets have closed after being bombed, or threatened with violence.

At the Bilal DVD Parlor, the owners, Bilal Javed and Akhtar Ali, said their sales — ranging from "Pride and

Prejudice” to “Die Hard 4.0,” to the latest Bollywood films and old Bruce Lee movies — had fallen by 90 percent. Their decade-old wholesale business in the tribal region was finished, they said.

On a recent day, their modern retail store, fitted with polished chrome, was packed floor to ceiling with DVDs. There were no customers. They said people had been afraid to shop there since a bomb hidden in a water cooler exploded at a DVD store across the street last year, killing five people, including a 7-year-old boy who wanted to buy a computer mouse.

“The police chief said, ‘We can’t secure ourselves, how can we secure you?’” Mr. Javed said.

Washington Times
January 18, 2008
Pg. 1

33. Russia Revives Military Boast Of Soviet Days

Plans to parade arsenal
By David R. Sands,
Washington Times

Reviving yet another iconic image from Soviet days, Russia's military announced plans to stage a parade of ballistic missiles, tanks and platoons of soldiers this May through the Kremlin's Red Square.

The display of military hardware, the first of its kind since 1990, will be held May 9, the day Russians mark the victory over Germany in World War II, and could coincide with the inauguration of Dmitry Medvedev, close aide to outgoing President Vladimir Putin, as Russia's new leader.

Similar displays, typically held May 1, were a high point of the old Soviet calendar, with leaders such as Josef Stalin and other top Communist Party figures perched on the reviewing stand above Lenin's Tomb to witness the country's military prowess and send a message to the Soviet Union's

Cold War adversaries.

The announcement comes at a time of rising tension between Russia and the West, on issues ranging from a planned U.S. missile defense system in Eastern Europe, to human rights to the future of Serbia's Kosovo province. Mr. Putin also has struggled to rebuild Russia's military forces, which deteriorated badly in the wake of the Soviet Union's collapse.

"You can't teach an old imperial bear new tricks," said Ariel Cohen, a Russian specialist at the Heritage Foundation. "The current regime's craving for international prestige is as high as the insecurity of its rulers."

British Foreign Secretary David Miliband yesterday accused Moscow of following the old, hostile Soviet pattern in an escalating dispute over Russia's order that two British cultural outreach offices in Moscow and St. Petersburg be shut down. Russia claims the centers are operating illegally, but Mr. Miliband said Russian authorities were trying to intimidate the British employees.

"We saw similar actions during the Cold War, but frankly thought they had been put behind us," Mr. Miliband told the House of Commons.

According to Russia's Interfax news agency, the May 9 parade lineup will include the newest version of the Topol-M SS-27 intercontinental ballistic missile, armored personnel carriers, tanks, and 6,000 troops decked out in a newly designed uniform.

Mr. Putin has made restoring Russian national pride and reclaiming some of its lost international influence central to his presidency.

He revived a reworked version of the old Soviet anthem as Russia's new national anthem and once called the collapse of the old Soviet empire "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century."

With Mr. Putin's

endorsement, Mr. Medvedev is expected to win the March 2 presidential vote handily. He already asked Mr. Putin to serve as his prime minister.

The official May Day parades were discontinued after 1990. In recent years, the day has been marked in Moscow and other cities primarily by protest marches by the declining Communist Party and by right-wing nationalist parties.

President Boris Yeltsin began staging military parades — without the weaponry — through Red Square in 1995, the first one marking the 60th anniversary of the Allied victory in Europe.

Pavel Felgenhauer, a Russian military analyst for the Washington-based Jamestown Foundation, said the revived display is one of a number of recent symbolic moves by the country's military. They include the resumption of strategic bomber patrol flights over the Atlantic and Pacific in August and plans for major naval exercises in the Mediterranean for the first time since 1991.

Mr. Felgenhauer noted that the traditional route for the May parade must now be altered in part because of the construction of a new shopping mall.

"One can only hope that ... no ancient building will collapse as tanks and ICBMs roll into central Moscow to serve the vanity of Russia's leaders," he said.

Los Angeles Times
January 18, 2008
Pg. 1

34. Colombia's Military Toughens Up

U.S. aid has helped the once-outmatched force gain strength and retake territory. But the change has been marked by rights abuses and security breaches.

By Chris Kraul, Los Angeles Times Staff Writer

FLORENCIA, COLOMBIA — Seven years

and \$4.35 billion since the advent of a massive U.S. aid program, the Colombian military has been transformed from an outmatched "garrison force" that had yielded huge swaths of terrain to leftist guerrillas, to an aggressive force that has won back territory.

The transformation, however, has had a dark side. Soldiers and police officers have committed rising numbers of human rights abuses, even as U.S. training intensifies, rights groups charge. During the five-year period that ended in June 2006, extrajudicial killings increased by more than 50% over the previous five years, according to figures compiled by human rights groups.

The military also has fallen victim to spectacular security breaches, a result of too-rapid expansion, Defense Minister Juan Manuel Santos acknowledged. "It's like a child who grows too fast. There are going to be problems," Santos said, adding that to clean house, his ministry has dismissed 360 officers in the last two years.

But even critics don't dispute that the military has become a more professional and capable fighting force. And that's quite a turnaround for an institution that a decade ago was dismissed by Colombian and U.S. observers as no match for the leftist Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC.

One U.S. Embassy official once referred to the armed forces as "the Apple Dumpling Gang," after the Walt Disney movie starring Don Knotts as a bumbling outlaw.

In the late 1990s, the army was best known for its disasters. Half a dozen bases, mostly in southern jungle and border states, were overrun by the FARC, resulting in the killing or kidnapping of hundreds of soldiers. The names of the bases, such as Patascoy, Las Delicias and El Billar, became emblematic of

the military's ineptitude.

When President Alvaro Uribe took office in 2002, rebels had encircled the capital, Bogota, and the military seemed impotent to do anything about it. His predecessor, Andres Pastrana, had ceded a Switzerland-size chunk of Colombian jungle to the FARC in the vain hope the move would lead to a peace agreement.

Now the military seems to have the upper hand, say analysts at the Pentagon's Southern Command headquarters in Miami.

In a recent interview, Santos said the military had "fundamentally been transformed... Before, the Colombian army was only on the defense. Now it's totally on the offense and gaining great prestige."

Here at Ft. Larandia, a sprawling plantation-turned-army base in the southern state of Cauca on the edge of the Amazon basin, Joint Task Force Omega embodies the new Colombian military. Teams of commandos trained by U.S. Army Special Forces and who deploy aboard Black Hawk helicopters take the fight to the guerrillas using satellites, special listening devices and high-tech "smart" bombs.

Among recent strikes was the killing in September of Tomas Medina "Negro Acacio" Caracas, a top FARC commander in charge of drugs and weapons logistics. In June, an Omega unit killed Milton Sierra, a FARC commander believed to be responsible for the kidnapping of a dozen state legislators in 2001 and for the rebels' Pacific Coast drug trade.

That Ft. Larandia functions at all is a sign that the military has turned a page. A former cattle ranch donated to the nation by the family of Olivero Lara, who was killed by rebels in 1965, the base is in the heart of what used to be termed "The Republic of the FARC."

Many of the base's 14,000 soldiers, sailors and airmen were involved in a military campaign launched in 2004 to reoccupy this zone of Cauca, and rooted out many FARC units from the area. The operation also deprived rebels of what for decades was their combination storehouse, backyard and training and recreation area, said military analyst Alvaro Valencia Tovar, a retired army general and columnist for Bogota's El Tiempo newspaper.

"The campaign may have produced a strategic turnaround," Valencia Tovar said.

Although the FARC has by no means been defeated, it is on the run and has been for the last few years, Colombian and U.S. military analysts say.

Statistics provided by the Southern Command show that across the country homicides have declined 40% and kidnappings by 75% since Uribe, a strong U.S. ally, took office. Drug seizures and raids on drug-processing labs are up.

Boosters here and in the United States cite the successes in urging the continuation of Plan Colombia, a U.S. taxpayer-funded effort to counter drugs and terrorism that has been in effect since 2000. Even under more skeptical Democratic leadership since 2006, Congress has continued to fund Plan Colombia, although it has reduced direct military aid in favor of economic programs to fight drugs and terrorism.

But Plan Colombia critics say that the invigorated military is committing an increasing number of human rights abuses, despite promises in 1999 by Washington that the aid package would bring about a reduction. They highlight cases known as "false positives" of soldiers who, pressed for results, killed civilians and then labeled them as insurgents killed in action.

According to statistics compiled by the Colombian Commission of Jurists, a

human rights group, the armed forces committed 1,035 extrajudicial killings in the five-year period that ended in June 2006, compared with 685 in the previous five years.

Lisa Haugaard, executive director of the Latin America Working Group in Washington, said that as right-wing paramilitary groups were demobilized, they committed fewer human rights abuses. But at the same time, the number of abuses by the military increased.

"You can speculate why: that the demobilized paramilitaries aren't doing the dirty work anymore, or as much of it, and so the army has to do it. Or that they are being pressured for results," Haugaard said.

"We found a number of cases where people were taken from their homes in civilian clothing and later found dead in guerrilla clothing," she said. "I was shocked by the quantity and pattern that seemed to exist."

And security lapses have made headlines. In May 2006, soldiers killed 10 U.S.-trained anti-narcotics police officers near the town of Jamundi, allegedly on orders of drug traffickers. Last year, a high-ranking admiral was charged with having sold the coordinates of vessels to drug traffickers so they could avoid interdiction.

In October, an undercover FARC guerrilla, Marilu Ramirez, was found to have infiltrated a War College class and to have inveigled a visit to the home of Santos, the defense minister.

But for average Colombians, the military's successes in restoring some measure of security outweigh the abuses and scandals. Recent polls show that 80% of respondents have a favorable image of the army.

Problems with the military's rapid growth have been twinned with successes. The key in reducing violence has been the increased number

of military and police personnel, financed in part by Plan Colombia. The ranks of Colombian soldiers, sailors, airmen and police have swollen by 45%, to 390,000, since 2000, and are set to grow by an additional 40,000 over the next two years.

In addition to quantity, quality is up. Colombian army officers credit training by U.S. Army Special Forces teams, who have brought Joint Task Force Omega officers up to speed on intelligence analysis, operations planning and tactics. According to a U.S. Army major here, who asked not to be identified for security reasons, the Colombian army is gathering more intelligence and acting faster on it. Crucial to that effort are 28-member "strike units" that he and others have trained as part of a new army emphasis on mobile brigades. The units are shuttled out to jungle targets by helicopter for rapid strikes or left out in the wild for weeks to gather intelligence, keeping guerrillas off balance.

"We've trained about 30 strike teams with the equivalent of the first phase of U.S. Army Ranger training," the major said. "We've tried to convince the Colombian command that smaller is better, and they have come around to that."

But the military faces daunting challenges if it is to triumph in the four-decade conflict with guerrillas. It has to gain control over the lawless areas bordering Venezuela and Ecuador, where rebels freely cross over to rest and resupply. It has to bring down human rights abuses and build an officer corps that has not kept pace with recruits.

Most important, the armed forces will have to learn to operate independently if Plan Colombia is phased out as expected over the next five years.

35. Chavez Buildup Concerns The U.S.

BOGOTA, Colombia - The United States is deeply worried by what it deems a dangerous arms buildup by President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela, the top American military officer said yesterday.

Navy Adm. Mike Mullen told reporters after meeting with top Colombian defense officials that Venezuela's buying of high-performance military aircraft and modern submarines is potentially destabilizing for a region already struggling with insurgencies, terrorism and drug running.

"They certainly are of great concern," Mullen said. The Bush administration has accused Chavez of seeking to foment terrorism and undercut democracies in the region.

--AP

Washington Times
January 18, 2008
Pg. 1

36. State Doubles Military Advisers

Rice, Gates back unions
By Nicholas Kralev,
Washington Times

The State Department is doubling the number of resident diplomatic advisers that it sends to the offices of the nation's top military commanders at home and overseas — a move encouraged by the Pentagon as its uniformed leaders take on larger public roles abroad.

The increase is part of Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's "global repositioning" of U.S. diplomats to areas where they are most needed, and a reflection of Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates' recent comments about the importance of "soft power" in fighting foreign conflicts, officials said.

"The great innovation here is to have foreign policy experts at midlevels in addition to top levels of the military," said State Department

spokesman Sean McCormack. "It's critically important in the 21st century for our two departments to work together on the ground."

Although the program has existed for more than half a century, the number of Foreign Service officers detailed to military commanders in recent years has usually been around a dozen, peaking at 16 after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

In the past 18 months, that number has jumped to 25 and will reach 30 by the summer, officials at the State Department and the Pentagon said, adding that further increases are likely in the near future.

"The military is very interested in having foreign policy advisers," said Bill McGlynn, the program's coordinator at State. "They treat our people with great respect."

Michael Coulter, principal deputy assistant secretary of defense for international security, said the program "seeks to integrate our 'soft' power and 'hard' power in the field, where it matters most, by synching our nation's diplomatic and military instruments."

Each branch of the military and each regional command has a diplomat-in-residence; currently there are 13 of them at domestic bases and 12 abroad. Most of the midlevel positions are in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The advisers travel and attend meetings with the military commanders and participate in planning, officials said.

Because of their close relationship with the military officers, Foreign Service candidates for the positions undergo a rigorous screening process, including extensive interviews.

The diplomats also help to "deliver the foreigners," as one official put it, whenever advice or assistance is needed from

allies or other countries. Sometimes, they simply offer their counsel on foreign affairs, ensuring that the commander is familiar with current U.S. policy before making public remarks.

They also provide practical advice on routine matters — for example, reminding their military colleagues that air missions cannot be flown over Venezuela.

During the 2006 Israel-Lebanon war, the adviser at Central Command in Florida played a significant role in facilitating the evacuation of thousands of Americans by coordinating military missions with the U.S. Embassy in Beirut, officials said.

"It's only natural that as the uniformed military sees its missions multiplying, it sees a concomitant need for more Foreign Service officers to help accomplish those missions," said a senior officer in Asia who has served as an adviser to the Air Force.

Military officers are also assigned as advisers to the State Department. Lt. Gen. Raymond T. Odierno, the top commander of U.S. ground forces in Iraq, used to be a senior adviser to Miss Rice.

The officer in Asia said the exchange program proves that the State and Defense departments can work well together despite occasional policy disagreements, such as those that occurred between Secretary of State Colin L. Powell and Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld during President Bush's first term.

"The military and diplomatic personnel on the ground are more focused on accomplishing the task at hand than on policy disputes and have learned they need each other," the officer said. "Iraq and Afghanistan may be the locales where this is most obvious, but it's happening all around the world."

Policy disagreements between Miss Rice and Mr. Gates have been scarce. They

have worked together to beef up the so-called provincial reconstruction teams in Iraq, where diplomats are embedded with the military to boost reconstruction efforts.

"We, as a nation, are most secure at home and best able to shape a secure international environment when all agencies and branches of national power are properly resourced and employed in unison," Mr. Coulter said.

Washington Times
January 18, 2008
Pg. 3

37. CDC Enlists Military To Study Skin Ailment

By Jennifer Harper,
Washington Times

The description alone is disquieting: Victims have bulbous pimples glugged with dark fibers, they feel crawling sensations under their skin, they're fatigued, confused, depressed.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) officially call it the "unexplained illness." Yesterday, the federal agency announced it would formally investigate the condition — known as Morgellons syndrome — and is bringing in the military to help it do it.

The cause and risk factors are unknown, though most of the cases are showing up in California, Florida and Texas, said Dr. Michele Pearson, CDC's principal investigator. The agency is spending \$545,000 and enlisting the help of the U.S. Armed Forces Institute of Pathology as well as the American Academy of Dermatology to conduct "immediate" and "rigorous" research.

"There is no textbook definition on this condition. There are many hypotheses about what might be causing and contributing to it. So it's a frustrating journey, not only for patients but for providers who care for them," Dr.

Pearson said yesterday.

"Clearly, the suffering these patients are experiencing is real," she added.

Public awareness of the condition has been intensifying.

Morgellons was first identified in 2002 by Mary M. Leitao, a biologist whose toddler displayed the spectrum of disgusting symptoms. She established the New York-based Morgellons Research Foundation (MRF) after failing to find what she considered appropriate care for her 2-year-old son. The advocacy group has since registered more than 11,000 people who say they have the condition or have been mistreated by the medical community.

Some doctors have dismissed Morgellons as dermatitis, hives, scabies or "delusional parasitosis," in which patients are obsessed with the idea that their bodies have been invaded by parasites — prompting them to seek unconventional cures. Some desperate victims have swallowed veterinary de-worming medicines or rubbed bleach on affected skin.

Limited research has revealed a potential link between Morgellons and the same bacteria that causes Lyme disease, according to the American Journal of Clinical Dermatology. To date, treatments have included antipsychotic drugs, antibiotics, antifungals, herbal supplements and light therapy. Morgellons cases have appeared in Canada, Australia and several European countries, though the CDC has not established that the syndrome is common in "underdeveloped countries."

The MRF, meanwhile, has long urged self-identified victims to write to public officials and contact the press.

The strategy has worked. Global interest spiked in 2006 after a series of alarming prime-time reports appeared on CNN, NBC and particularly

ABC — where Morgellons was showcased on "Medical Mysteries," with full color close-ups of ravaged skin and the victims' personal accounts. In spring 2006, the CDC acknowledged "the volume of concern" about the syndrome and last summer established an online contact for fearful victims.

The agency has since received about 1,200 inquiries, and is intent on providing "meaningful answers," said Dr. Pearson.

Over the next year, the CDC will track Morgellons patients in California who have reported symptoms in the past 18 months, using Kaiser Permanente facilities in Oakland.

San Diego Union-Tribune
January 18, 2008

38. Iraq Moves To Break Up Kurds' Oil Deals

By Associated Press

BAGHDAD — The Iraqi Oil Ministry has decided to stop cooperating with international oil companies participating in production-sharing contracts with the Kurdish regional administration in northern Iraq, an official said yesterday.

The decision is considered a first step toward implementing the ministry's threats to blacklist and exclude these companies from any future deals with Baghdad if they refuse to abandon their oil deals with the self-ruling Kurdish government.

Five companies are thought to have agreements with both the Oil Ministry and Kurdistan: the United Arab Emirates' Crescent; Canada's Western Oil Sands and Heritage Oil; India's Reliance Industries; and Austria's OMV.

A spokeswoman for Reliance Industries, who declined to be named, said the company has not received any official communication from the Iraqi government. She said

the firm hoped any possible issues will be resolved without affecting business.

The Oil Ministry's decision came days after 145 Iraqi Arab lawmakers from rival sects joined forces to criticize what they said is overreaching by the Kurds, alleging that the powerful U.S.-backed minority's go-it-alone style threatens national unity.

With the national oil and gas law stuck in dispute between the Kurds and Arab leaders over who has the final say in managing oil and gas fields, the Kurds have signed 15 production-sharing contracts with 20 international oil companies.

Washington Times
January 18, 2008
Pg. C9

39. Checklist

L-3 Communications, which lost a \$4.6 billion Army contract to a rival provider of translators last month, protested the award and said the Army intends to take "corrective" action. The Army informed the Government Accountability Office of its decision Jan. 15, L-3 said. DynCorp International won the contract Dec. 7, ending a yearlong challenge from L-3.

New York Post
January 18, 2008

40. The New 'Lepers'

The Times' Trouble With Vets
By Ralph Peters

I'VE had a huge response to Tuesday's column about The New York Times' obscene bid to smear veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan as mad killers. Countless readers seem to be wondering: Why did the paper do it?

Well, in the Middle Ages, lepers had to carry bells on pain of death to warn the uninfected they were coming. One suspects that the Times would like our military veterans to do the same.

The purpose of Sunday's

instantly notorious feature "alerting" the American people that our Iraq and Afghanistan vets are all potential murderers when they move in next door was to mark those defenders of freedom as "unclean" - as the new lepers who can't be trusted amid uninfected Americans.

In the more than six years since 9/11, the Times has never run a feature story half as long on any of the hundreds of heroes who've served our country - those who've won medals of honor, distinguished service crosses, Navy crosses, silver stars or bronze stars with a V device (for valor).

But the Times put a major investigative effort into the "sensational" story that 121 returning vets had committed capital offenses (of course, 20 percent of the cases cited involved manslaughter charges stemming from drunken driving, not first- or second-degree murder ...).

Well, a quick statistics check let the air out of the Times' bid to make us dread the veteran down the block - who the Times implies has a machine gun under his bathrobe when he steps out front to fetch the morning paper. In fact, the capital-crimes rate ballyhooed by the Gray Lady demonstrates that our returning troops are far less likely to commit such an offense.

Again, the Times' smear certainly wasn't an accident. The paper's staff is highly paid and highly experienced. Its editors know that a serious news story has to put numbers into context. But their sole attempt at context was to note that offenses by former soldiers have ticked up since we went to war.

The Times is trying to make *you* fear our veterans (Good Lord, if your daughter marries one, she's bound to be beaten to death!). And to convince you that our military would be a dreadful place for your sons and daughters, a death-machine that would turn them into incurable

psychopaths.

To a darkly humorous degree, all this reflects the Freudian terrors leftists feel when confronted with men who don't have concave chests. But it goes far beyond that.

Pretending to pity tormented veterans (vets don't *want* our pity - they want our respect), the Times' feature was an artful example of hate-speech disguised as a public service.

The image we all were supposed to take away from that story was of hopelessly damaged, victimized, *infected* human beings who've become outcasts from civilized society. The Times cast our vets as freaks from a slasher flick.

The hard left's hatred of our military has deteriorated from a political stance into a pathology: The only good soldier is a dead soldier who can be wielded as a statistic (out of context again). Or a deserter who complains bitterly that he didn't join the Army to fight ...

At the risk of turning to anecdotal evidence - a technique much-abused by the left - I have to declare that I personally know hundreds of veterans. (Can *anyone* at the Times head office make that claim?) Not a single one of them has committed a crime worse than exceeding the speed limit on the Interstate.

Not one vet I know is in prison for a crime he or she committed after taking off the uniform. And in nearly 22 years of active service, I encountered only two soldiers who committed violent crimes (no murders).

Contrary to the Times, veterans are consistently among the most upstanding members of their communities. They volunteer. They vote. They take pride in being good neighbors. And those I know have raised their children more successfully than the average liberal household.

But what's the image that the left, whether the Times or the silly people in Hollywood,

presents to us? Vets are nuts. Violently nuts. They kill their neighbors. They kill their own kind. And they're just waiting for the right moment of madness to kill *you*.

A longstanding goal of the left, recently invigorated, has been to drive a wedge between our military and our society. The real vet is the neighbor who fixes your kid's bike (or your computer). But the left's archetypal vet is the Marine colonel in "American Beauty" who, frustrated in his suppressed gay passions, murders poor Kevin Spacey.

Yes, war *is* a terrible crucible. Some vets, past and present, *do* need help. And they deserve the best help our country can give them. But the left-wing fantasy of hordes of psychotics driven mad by drill sergeants and Army chow is just that: a fantasy.

Of course, if the Times responds at all to the storm of protests their insult to our veterans aroused, the editors will try to fudge the numbers in their favor. You just can't argue with ideologues. They lie and they cheat. And they justify it as being for the greater good of ignorant fools like us.

So let me suggest the best-possible revenge on the veteran-trashing jerks at The New York Times: Instead of fleeing in terror the next time you see a veteran you know, just thank him or her for their service.

And let's save the leper's bells for dishonest journalists.

Ralph Peters is a retired Army officer who has yet to kill any of his neighbors (although they'd better keep their grass cut).

Washington Post
January 18, 2008
Pg. 19

41. Federalism, Not Partition

A System Devolving Power to the Regions Is the Route to a Viable Iraq

By Mowaffak al-Rubaie

BAGHDAD -- Iraq's

government is at a stalemate. As in the United States, there is much discussion here of the need for political reconciliation. What does that mean? That the majority Shiites and the minority Sunnis and Kurds must find a way to govern collectively at the national level. As national security adviser to the head of Iraq's governments since March 2004, I have participated in the development of democracy in my country. I strongly support the government and applaud its achievements. But I understand that the political objectives of Iraq's three main communities are unrealizable within the framework of a unitary, centralized state.

It has been impossible to maintain a political consensus on many important issues. For one thing, the U.S.-dominated coalition, which has its own objectives, must be accommodated. The regional "superpowers" (Iran and Saudi Arabia) meddle in Iraq's affairs, and their own sectarian tensions are reflected in the violence here. The absence of truly national political parties and leadership that reach the Iraqi people exacerbates the problem.

Overall, Shiites see their future based on two fundamental "rights": Power must be exercised by the political majority through control of governmental institutions, and institutional sectarian discrimination must be eliminated. Kurds see their future bound to their "rights" of linguistic, cultural, financial and resource control within Kurdistan. Sunni Arabs are driven by resistance to their loss of power, as well as fear of revenge for past wrongs and the potential for reverse discrimination.

The current political framework is based on a pluralistic democratic vision that, while admirable, is entirely unsuited to resolving this three-way divide. It ignores underlying issues and

expects that a consensus will emerge simply by enacting a liberal constitutional legal order.

Pluralistic democracy will not take root unless the national political compact recognizes and accommodates the fears and aspirations of Iraq's communities. Resolution can be achieved only through a system that incorporates regional federalism, with clear, mutually acceptable distributions of power between the regions and the central government. Such a system is in the interest of all Iraqis and is necessary if Iraq is to avoid partition or further civil strife.

Only through a new political compact among Iraq's main communities will a viable state emerge. A key condition for success is that the balance of power should tip decisively to the regions on all matters that do not compromise the integrity of the state. The central institutions must earn their legitimacy from the power that the three main ethnic groups are prepared to give them. Iraq needs a period during which the Shiites and the Kurds achieve political control over their destinies while the Sunni Arab community is secure from the feared tyranny of the majority.

The shape of a reconstructed, federal Iraq could vary, but it should permit the assignment of nearly all domestic powers to the regions, to be funded out of a percentage of oil revenue distributed on the basis of population. The federal government should be responsible only for essential central functions such as foreign policy (including interregional affairs), defense, fiscal and monetary policy, and banking. Regional parliaments and executives would govern their areas. A federal parliament with a new upper house could manage governance at the national level. A regional political structure would allow for the development of religious,

cultural and educational policies more suited to areas' populations than a central government could create. A regional framework for economic policy would also fit better with traditional trade patterns and markets.

Iraq's political geography suggests five likely federal units: A "Kurdistan province," including the current Kurdistan and surrounding areas; a "Western province," including Mosul and the upper Tigris and Euphrates valleys; a "Kufa province," built around the Middle Euphrates governorates; a "Basra province," including the lower Tigris and Euphrates valleys; and a "Baghdad province," built around Greater Baghdad, which may include parts of Diyala and Salah ad Din Governorates. The Kurdish region would be given a special constitutional status as a recognized society and culture with a unique identity (similar to the Canadian province of Quebec).

The new, national Iraqi identity will be forged over time as a result of peaceful, respectful participation in governance and growth, not by fear and terror as in our past. Iraq's constitution was ratified before its communities reached agreement on many vital issues, such as provincial powers. Without a process aimed at reaching a broad political consensus on the makeup of the Iraqi state, order and democracy are unlikely. This consensus would form the backdrop to a referendum on a reformed constitution. Each of Iraq's communities has leaders up to the task of creating a new political consensus. It is time for them to begin work.

The writer is Iraq's national security adviser. The views expressed here are his own and do not constitute an official position of the government of Iraq.

42. The Polish Lesson: America Must Give Something In Return For Support

By A. Wess Mitchell

WASHINGTON -- This week, Polish Defense Minister Bogdan Klich traveled to Washington to negotiate his country's participation in the US antiballistic missile-defense system. In a break with previous policy, the new center-right government of Prime Minister Donald Tusk has demanded fresh concessions – cash, Patriot missiles, and security guarantees – in exchange for hosting the bases on Polish soil.

The visit provided America with its first glimpse of a more assertive Poland, whose leaders are determined to drive a "hard bargain" for support of US policies. Warsaw's new mind-set is replicated across the capitals of the "New Europe," where officials are weary of what they see as Washington's failure to reward its allies for support in the Iraq war.

One notable exception to this trend is Romania. Like Poland, Romania sent troops to Iraq and has been disappointed by its exclusion from the US Visa Waiver Program. But unlike Poland, Romania has welcomed the construction of American military bases. Three features of US strategy toward Romania allowed it to succeed and could provide a blueprint for revitalizing relations with American allies worldwide.

First, in contrast to its dealings with Warsaw, Washington has worked to maintain a relationship with Bucharest on reciprocal footing. When Bucharest backed the US bid for exclusion from the International Criminal Court, Washington backed Romania's bid to join NATO.

When Bucharest granted America access to its airspace early in the Iraq war, Washington granted Romania

its coveted designation as a "functional market economy." And when Bucharest cosponsored a US push for Iraqi sovereignty at the United Nations, Washington agreed to locate lucrative US bases on Romania's Black Sea coast.

In each instance, Romanian assistance was matched – usually within one or two months – by US backing for a specific Romanian interest. By contrast, for years the Poles have watched their leaders fly to Washington seeking help – on oil contracts, military aid, visas – only to come away empty-handed. Hence the desire for upfront perks in the talks this week on missile defense.

Second, Washington has been careful to maintain the appearance of an equal relationship with Romania. In negotiations over US bases, the Bush administration stressed that ultimate sovereignty for the installations would rest with Bucharest. As David McKiernan, America's top Army general in Europe, often told the press, "We are guests, tenants." Such humility was necessary, Washington knew, for Bucharest to convince its citizens they were partners rather than pawns of US policy.

Failure to take a similar tack with Poland has done much to fuel problems on missile defense. By failing to consult Warsaw and Prague before offering Russian observers access to the bases, Washington unwittingly tapped into a deep-seated regional fear of being "talked over" by the Great Powers. As a former Polish diplomat told me, the move confirmed that America views Poland "as a playground rather than a player."

Third, in its dealings with Romania, Washington has eschewed the temptation to try to operate today's alliances on the logic that guided alliances during the cold war. This holds that countries stand with America in pursuit of common

values, over virtually limitless time horizons, and without any need for enticements. With Romania, Washington has pursued finite goals over a short time frame with frequent quid pro quos to incentivize cooperation.

Why not take a similar approach with Warsaw? A Pentagon official told me, "Romania is not likely to be as significant an ally as Poland over the long-term." That's right: current US thinking holds that it shouldn't reward its most valuable allies. In Washington's view, "mature" partners don't require coaxing – they support America for the sheer satisfaction of knowing they're friends with the sole remaining superpower.

The problem with this approach is that it no longer works. As the Pentagon discovered in meetings with Mr. Klich, Poland is not prepared to move an inch on missile defense until Washington provides offsets to justify hosting the system.

This is not, as some critics say, extortion; it is reciprocity – a feature of healthy, interest-based alliances from time immemorial. Like politicians anywhere, Poland's new leaders have to be able to show that risks undertaken on behalf of a foreign power bring tangible benefits to their own citizens. Failure to do so contributed to the fall from grace of Tusk's predecessor, Jaroslaw Kaczynski, Britain's Tony Blair, and Australia's John Howard.

A breakthrough on missile defense is unlikely this year: Congress doesn't want to release the funds and Bush doesn't have enough political capital to change their minds. Whatever the next president does with the system, he or she should take a close look at which methods have worked – and which ones haven't – in America's recent interactions with allies. Keeping their support in the post-unipolar age will probably prove more valuable than 10 missile

shields.

A. Wess Mitchell is director of research at the Center for European Policy Analysis, a Washington-based institute dedicated to the study of Central Europe.

Asian Wall Street Journal
January 18, 2008
Pg. 13

43. Atomic Non-Allies

By Henry Sokolski

Forty years after France's sale of "peaceful" nuclear technology to Saddam Hussein, the atomic twinkle in the Élysée's eyes is again on the Middle East. France has offered civilian nuclear cooperation to Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Jordan and Morocco. During this week's visit to the region, President Nicolas Sarkozy made similar proposals to the Gulf states and signed a cooperation deal with the United Arab Emirates, a first step in building a reactor for an estimated €6 billion (\$8.8 billion).

Mr. Sarkozy is at pains to sell his nuclear agenda as more than just a money-making proposition. Rather than increasing the military risks in the region, the power of the atom will miraculously bring peace -- or so the French president claims. Tell "a billion Muslims across the world that they don't have the right to civilian nuclear energy when they have no more petrol or gas," Mr. Sarkozy said last summer when he first developed this theory. Giving Muslim states nuclear power, he insists, is critical to prevent "a conflict between Islam and the West," to help Muslim states fend off "underdevelopment," and to prevent an "explosion of terrorism." The multibillion-euro deals are sold as hard-headed French altruism. But that's nonsense. And this nuclear diplomacy brings grave dangers.

To suggest that promoting nuclear power is somehow key to any country's economic

development, let alone to those of the oil- and gas-rich Middle East, is simply ludicrous. That's why the U.S. and its allies complained -- and rightly -- that the plan to build the Iranian nuclear reactor at Bushehr isn't motivated by economic or energy considerations.

Iran is awash with natural gas, a relatively clean-burning fuel that can produce electricity far cheaper than nuclear power plants ever could. Nearly all of its Middle Eastern neighbors sit on significant gas reserves or could have ready access to them through pipelines. Nuclear power, by contrast, is so costly that even in advanced economies it needs massive government subsidies and guarantees. True, many Middle Eastern states currently suffer from a shortage of natural gas. But this supply squeeze could be overcome relatively quickly once Middle Eastern states price electricity at market rates, develop their gas fields more fully and run pipelines to states with more gas on tap. This, though, would mean raising subsidized domestic energy prices, costly investments and solving outstanding border disputes.

Even if it were true that the transfer of nuclear technology had a hitherto unknown effect on economic development, it would hardly prevent an "explosion of terrorism." There is no observable link between Middle Eastern economic development and radicalism. The recent oil-price boom has led to a significant rise in per capita income, but the measures of political freedom moderation (check out the Freedom House index released Wednesday) have either remained static or gone south.

Besides, violent Islamic organizations tend to pick their leaders not from the huddled masses, but the middle and upper classes. Osama bin Laden may hide in caves, but he comes from a rich Saudi family. The Muslim

Brotherhood is controlled not by the poor, but by well-heeled Egyptian engineers. It is economic and political freedom rather than development that may serve as antidote to Islamic radicalism. Improving living standards is in everyone's interest for humanitarian reasons. But let's not fool ourselves into believing that "economic development" as such will neutralize the jihadis.

Behind closed doors one hears another rationale for the nuclear export: to spook Tehran. The *modus operandi* here is to fight Iran's "peaceful" nuclear power with Sunni nuclear equivalents. That's presumably the reason why Washington is offering nuclear-power cooperation agreements to Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Turkey and Jordan. French and American officials argue that these power plants won't be built any time soon. In the meantime, the announcement of such power plant programs should give the Iranians second thoughts, they argue.

Moscow, though, is more in a rush to actually build reactors in the region. It has already offered to do so for Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Algeria and Libya and has completed a power plant and provided extensive nuclear training for Iran. And the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Qatar have plenty of cash to quickly seal the deal. But don't Middle Eastern states have the right to develop peaceful nuclear energy? If it's really peaceful, that's certainly true. The problem is that past experience in the region shows that this technology inevitably gets militarized. We know that previous "civilian" nuclear programs in Iraq, Israel, Egypt, Iran, Algeria and Libya all served as covers for suspect nuclear activities. There is no reliable way to detect covert nuclear fuel-making once a country has a full-fledged "civilian" program. Even without a secret program, the

normal fuel produced in civilian nuclear power plants could be used to produce scores of crude nuclear bombs a year. The popular notion, therefore, that inspectors could reliably detect possible military diversions early enough to prevent proliferation is hope ignoring reality.

To assert that any state, including those in the war-torn Middle East, have a God-given right to build and operate nuclear reactors is to condemn the region to a nuclear 1914. We've had a small taste of what's in store. Israel bombed the French-built Iraqi Osiraq reactor in 1981 and recently raided what were probably nuclear installations in Syria. Iraq bombed the Bushehr reactor during the Iran-Iraq war during the 1980s. With more nuclear programs in more Middle Eastern states, history is likely to explosively repeat itself.

Surely France, the U.S. and Russia can and should do better than this. A good start would be for these three countries to rethink how best to help develop energy options for the Middle East without going nuclear.

Mr. Sokolski is executive director of the Nonproliferation Policy Education Center and editor of "Falling Behind: International Scrutiny of the Peaceful Atom," forthcoming from the U.S. Army War College.

USA Today
January 18, 2008
Pg. 11

Commentary

44. Homeless Vets Reveal A Hidden Cost Of War

By James Key

I was walking out of a grocery store recently when a homeless man approached me and said, "Excuse me sir, I'm trying to buy some food. Can you help me out?" After talking to him for a few minutes, I discovered that he

was a Vietnam War veteran. I gave him a few dollars knowing that my humble contribution might help him eat today. But what about tomorrow?

As I drove home, I thought about this man and the countless other homeless veterans who walk our nation's streets looking for a crust of bread and a corner to sleep in.

Veterans make up one in four homeless people in the USA, though they are only 11% of the general population, according to The Alliance to End Homelessness. There are myriad reasons for these dismal numbers: limited access to affordable housing, inadequate health care and employment instability. But many cases are fed by the fact that displaced and at-risk veterans often live with the lingering effects of post-traumatic stress disorder or substance abuse. These are the hidden costs of fighting a war.

Further, the Veterans Affairs Department (VA) reaches only 25% of an estimated 400,000 veterans who are homeless at some time during the year, leaving the rest to seek aid from local government agencies and community service organizations.

Homelessness is spreading beyond the middle-age and elderly veterans to include those who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan. The VA has identified 1,500 homeless veterans from the current wars and reports that just 400 have participated in its homeless programs. Today, the VA offers more service options--outpatient facilities, counselors and therapy--than for troops who returned from Vietnam. Unfortunately, many veterans don't seek help for mental and emotional problems until years after their return from combat, when the conditions have often worsened.

My father, James Key Sr., worked as a VA counselor. As

a teenager, I didn't put much stock in his work, but now that I'm in the military, I have a deeper appreciation for his profession. My father gave many homeless Vietnam War veterans in Los Angeles a second chance. But the VA can't shoulder this burden on its own.

Today, more help is needed from people like you and me taking ownership of this problem. Donations of food, clothing or money to homeless shelters can make an immense difference. Volunteers are always needed as well. The website of the non-profit National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, for one, lists organizations nationwide.

It's been said that the best way to judge a nation is to measure how it takes care of its old and young. Maybe we should add homeless veterans to the list as well.

Capt. James Key is a chaplain in the U.S. Army at Fort Irwin, Calif.

Washington Post
January 17, 2008

Pg. 22

45. Fight In Afghanistan

It's becoming clear that the war must be won by U.S. troops, and not by NATO.

THE BUSH administration's decision to dispatch an additional 3,200 Marines to Afghanistan raises the question of whether NATO's participation in the war has been a failure. Though the United States already provides more than half of the 53,000 foreign troops in Afghanistan, the additional Marines are needed because no other NATO country was willing, despite months of pleading and cajoling by Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates, to commit fresh forces to the troubled southern provinces where the Taliban has made a comeback.

What's more, Mr. Gates and other senior Pentagon officials seem to have

concluded that the three NATO countries that have been willing to operate in the south -- Britain, Canada and the Netherlands -- have been relatively ineffective. Mr. Gates told the Los Angeles Times this week that "most of the European forces, NATO forces, are not trained in counterinsurgency"; the Pentagon believes they are too averse to casualties, too reluctant to patrol and too dependent on artillery and airstrikes. The Post's Karen DeYoung reported that U.S. commanders criticize British troops for failing to retain control over areas taken from the Taliban and for advancing a "colonial" strategy of backing local militias rather than working with the national Afghan army.

European diplomats and NATO's defenders furiously respond that the American complaints are unfounded. Almost all of the alliance's members have increased their commitment to Afghanistan in the past year, they point out, helping to raise the troop level under NATO command from 33,000 to 41,000. The troubles in the south, they say, are the result of NATO forces penetrating an area that U.S. commanders had neglected, allowing the Taliban to flourish. British officials say their strategy in Helmand province is comparable to the successful U.S. alliances with Sunni militias in Iraq.

Certainly, NATO's involvement in Afghanistan has done some good. Deployments in more peaceful areas of the country, as well as Kabul, fulfill a peacekeeping role that might otherwise fall to American troops. The commitment of 25 other NATO governments (as well as 13 other countries) to the Afghan mission makes the operation more palatable both to Afghans and to Americans. Though many countries restrict their troops from combat, the British, Canadians and Dutch have made contributions in

blood, suffering a total of 177 fatalities; 480 U.S. soldiers have been killed.

It nevertheless is a good thing that Marines rather than European soldiers will deploy in Helmand province this spring to head off any Taliban offensive. Defeating the Afghan insurgency will require the United States to take on a larger part of the fighting. Success will also require U.S. commanders to insist that a more coherent, nationwide counterinsurgency strategy be pursued -- including aggressive training of the Afghan army and police, economic development that is centrally coordinated, and a focused attack on the opium business that supplies most of the Taliban's funding. If that means downgrading NATO's role or bruising the feelings of some allied governments, so be it.