

CURRENT NEWS

EARLY BIRD



January 19, 2008

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Item numbers indicate order of appearance only.

IRAQ

1. **Despite Deadly Clashes In Iraq, Shiite Pilgrims Spared**
(*New York Times*)....Alissa J. Rubin
Government troops in southern Iraq fought with a millennial religious militia group on Friday in clashes that left more than 40 people dead, but the troops successfully protected millions of pilgrims on the first day of Ashura, the largest religious holiday for Iraq's Shiite majority and one frequently marred by violence.
2. **Dozens Killed In Clashes In S. Iraq**
(*Washington Post*)....Amit R. Paley
...The attacks represented the first major test of Iraqi security forces in the south since they took over formal control of the area from the British military. Iraqi officials asked for surveillance information and for aircraft flights to intimidate the sect members, which British forces provided, but did not request ground troops.
3. **80 Killed In Clashes In Iraq**
(*Los Angeles Times*)....Alexandra Zavis
...Elsewhere in Baghdad, gunmen pinned down national security advisor Mowaffak Rubaie inside a mosque in the northeast neighborhood of Shula, a stronghold of radical Shiite cleric Muqtada Sadr. His political office denied followers had anything to do with it.
4. **Sadr's Militia Threatens To End 6-Month Truce**
(*International Herald Tribune*)....Associated Press
The anti-American Shiite cleric Muktada al-Sadr put the United States and the Iraqi government on notice Friday that he might not extend a six-month cease-fire declared by his militia.
5. **Surge Is Working But Jobs Are Best Way To Win, Says US Envoy**
(*London Times*)....Martin Fletcher
Iraq's fragile new peace was being put at risk by the Government's failure to provide jobs and services to undercut the militias, the US Ambassador in Baghdad has declared.
6. **U.S., Sunni Pacts Are Proving To Be Mutual Bargains**
(*San Diego Union-Tribune*)....Hamza Hendawi, Associated Press
Each side benefits from new alliances.

DEFENSE DEPARTMENT

7. **Armored Vehicle Supply Better After Early Delays**
(*New York Times*)....Thom Shanker
...But Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates, who flew here on Friday to inspect the factory that completes the armored troop transports, said he had been told that early glitches in acquiring enough of the vehicles had been resolved.
8. **Defense Secretary Lauds Military Truck Project**

(*Atlanta Journal-Constitution*)...Richard Lardner, Associated Press

A multibillion-dollar effort to produce bomb-resistant vehicles for U.S. troops in Iraq is moving "as fast as humanly possible," Defense Secretary Robert Gates said Friday after a visit to the military facilities playing a key role in the program.

9. **Gates: Increase In Attacks On US Troops Using Iran Bombs**
(*Wall Street Journal (wsj.com)*)...Agence France-Presse
U.S. soldiers have already been targeted in the first two weeks of January by as many suspected Iranian explosives as in all of December, U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates said Friday.
10. **Joint Chiefs Will Present Own View Of Iraq Troop Cuts**
(*Boston Globe*)...Robert Burns, Associated Press
The Pentagon's top generals and admirals will make their own assessment for President Bush on whether to continue pulling US troops out of Iraq in the second half of the year - independent of what Bush's commander in Baghdad recommends, the top US military officer said yesterday.
11. **Disharmony In The Spheres**
(*Economist*)...Unattributed
Modern American warfare relies on satellites. They make America powerful but also vulnerable, particularly in light of China's new celestial assertiveness.

AFGHANISTAN

12. **Bush Names General To Head Afghan Mission**
(*New York Times on the Web*)...Reuters
President George W. Bush has named the head of U.S. Army forces in Europe, Gen. David McKiernan, as the new leader of foreign forces in Afghanistan, the Pentagon said on Friday.
13. **Call To Woo 'Moderate' Afghan Rebels**
(*Financial Times*)...James Blitz
The international community must try to attract "moderate" Afghan insurgents away from the Taliban by giving them financial support that encourages them to support the Kabul government, according to a new report.
14. **Australian PM Pushes Stronger Line In Afghanistan**
(*Defense News*)...Gregor Ferguson
Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd has committed to a long-term military presence in Afghanistan, but he wants greater political and military coordination among the eight NATO member nations operating there to defeat the Taliban.

ASIA/PACIFIC

15. **US To Offer Pakistan Help Against Attacks**
(*Financial Times*)...Farhan Bokhari and Demetri Sevastopulo
A senior American military commander will visit Pakistan this month to discuss the growing unrest in the country and possible deeper US military engagement, according to senior Pakistani and western officials.
16. **C.I.A. Says Militant Was Behind Bhutto's Death**
(*New York Times*)...Mark Mazzetti
...Government officials in Pakistan and independent security analysts say they believe that the Qaeda network in Pakistan is increasingly made up of homegrown militants who have made destabilizing the government a top priority.
17. **Government Forces Kill 90 Militants**
(*Washington Times*)...Unattributed
Pakistani forces killed up to 90 militants in two battles yesterday in the South Waziristan region on the Afghan border, the military said.
18. **Bell: Extend South Korea Tours**
(*Pacific Stars and Stripes*)...Ashley Rowland

U.S. Forces Korea commander Gen. B.B. Bell said Thursday that a policy requiring most U.S. troops in South Korea to serve one-year tours without their families is an "outdated relic of the Cold War" that should have been changed years ago.

NORTH KOREA

19. **U.S. Sees Stalling By North Korea On Nuclear Pact**
(*New York Times*)...Helene Cooper
A debate is under way within the Bush administration over how long it can exercise patience with North Korea without jeopardizing the fulfillment of a nuclear agreement that President Bush has claimed as a foreign policy victory.
20. **U.S. Shuns Envoy's View Of Pyongyang's Actions**
(*Washington Times*)...Elizabeth Eldridge
The Bush administration yesterday rejected in-house criticism from its own special envoy on North Korea who suggested that Pyongyang is not serious about giving up its nuclear arsenal.

MIDEAST

21. **Bush Fails To Persuade Arab Allies**
(*Los Angeles Times*)...Borzou Daragahi
During his Mideast tour, the president did not shift regional opinion on his key issues, analysts say.
22. **Russia Supplies More Nuke Fuel**
(*Washington Times*)...Unattributed
Iran has received a third shipment of nuclear fuel from Russia for use at its Bushehr nuclear power station, the state-run Islamic Republic News Agency said yesterday.

EUROPE

23. **New Team In Poland Cool To U.S. Shield**
(*Washington Post*)...Craig Whitlock
Responding to surveys showing a large majority of Poles opposed to the defense plan, Prime Minister Donald Tusk said this month that his country is now in "no hurry" to sign a pact that would anchor a critical part of the U.S. missile shield on Polish soil.
24. **Prague Wants Missile Role**
(*Washington Times*)...Associated Press
The Czech Republic says it wants access to U.S. military research and a role in developing missile-defense technology as part of any deal allowing Washington to deploy a missile-defense system in the country.
25. **British Military Laptop Is Stolen**
(*Philadelphia Inquirer*)...Associated Press
Britain's Defense Ministry said a laptop containing personal details of 600,000 new or prospective military recruits was stolen last week from a Royal Navy officer in Birmingham.
26. **Putin Wins Backing For Gas Pipeline**
(*Boston Globe*)...Associated Press
Russian President Vladimir Putin yesterday won Bulgaria's support for a gas pipeline that would boost Moscow's control over supplies to the West.

NAVY

27. **Navy Helicopter Has Checkered Safety Record**
(*Houston Chronicle*)...Christopher Sherman, Associated Press
The type of Navy helicopter that crashed near Corpus Christi Wednesday, killing three crew members and injuring one, has a checkered safety history that makes it the Navy's most accident-prone helicopter.

STATE DEPARTMENT

28. **Burns's Exit Complicates Nuclear Negotiations**

(Wall Street Journal)....Jay Solomon

The surprise resignation of the Bush administration's point man on Iran and India, Undersecretary of State Nicholas Burns, injects more uncertainty into U.S. efforts to contain the spread of nuclear technologies.

INTELLIGENCE

29. **Former Secretary On Waterboarding**

(New York Times)....Associated Press

The first secretary of homeland security says waterboarding is torture.

BUSINESS

30. **From Texas To Iraq, And Center Of Blackwater Case**

(New York Times)....Ginger Thompson

PAUL SLOUGH may have worked as a cowboy growing up in this tiny town in northwest Texas, but soldiers who served with him were stunned to hear he had been accused of acting like one as a Blackwater security guard in Iraq.

OPINION

31. **The Murky Toll Of The Iraq War**

(Boston Globe)....John Tirman

ONCE AGAIN, a controversy has erupted over how many people are being killed in Iraq. It's an important debate, not only for beleaguered Iraqis, but for Americans seeking stability and a timely exit.

32. **Terrorist Tort Travesty**

(Wall Street Journal)....John Yoo

...The lawsuit by Padilla and his Yale Law School lawyers is an effort to open another front against U.S. anti-terrorism policies. If he succeeds, it won't be long before opponents of the war on terror use the courtroom to reverse the wartime measures needed to defeat those responsible for killing 3,000 Americans on 9/11.

33. **A Towering Cloud Of Uncertainty**

(Chicago Tribune)....Catherine Collins

In the last presidential race, the only issue on which President Bush and Sen. John Kerry seemed to agree was that the most serious threat to national security was nuclear proliferation.

34. **The Authors Respond -- (Letter)**

(National Journal)....Gilbert Burnham and Les Roberts

...The overwhelming confirmatory evidence of the Lancet study findings, the conventional nature of our survey procedures, and the abundance of internal consistencies in the data suggest that National Journal's critique of our work should itself be examined for political motivations.

New York Times
January 19, 2008
Pg. 8

1. Despite Deadly Clashes In Iraq, Shiite Pilgrims Spared

By Alissa J. Rubin

BAGHDAD

Government troops in southern Iraq fought with a millennial religious militia group on Friday in clashes that left more than 40 people dead, but the troops successfully protected millions of pilgrims on the first day of Ashura, the largest religious holiday for Iraq's Shiite majority and one frequently marred by violence.

The holiday, when pilgrims travel to the sacred city of Karbala, coincided with new criticism of the Iraqi government and Parliament from both a leading Shiite party that until now had backed the government and from a former political ally, the anti-American Shiite cleric Moktada al-Sadr. He signaled that he might allow his militia to become active at the end of February after a yearlong freeze.

Lifting the freeze could have troubling consequences for the American military, which has been able to use the calm to focus on those Shiite insurgents, most of whom it believes are linked to Iran, who have ignored the freeze. The Americans have also used the calm to stabilize Sunni and mixed neighborhoods in the Baghdad area. Since the freeze, the number of bodies found daily in Baghdad neighborhoods as a result of sectarian killings has dropped to about three after months of dozens being found.

Mr. Sadr's spokesman, Saleh al-Obaidi, said that in several provinces Mr. Sadr's militia had been unfairly singled out and that many had been detained but not charged by members of the Iraqi security forces. However, he said no final decision had yet been made to lift the freeze.

"Many officers in the Iraqi

police and army and have made bad use of the freeze to pressure our people, and hundreds of families have been pushed out of their homes," Mr. Obaidi said. "We've been thinking of renewing the freeze. We understand the situation, we are in a period of trying to rebuild Iraq and bring more security, but unfortunately our people are suffering."

The backdrop to the conflict is the longstanding struggle for power in the predominantly Shiite south of Iraq between followers of Mr. Sadr and followers of the Shiite cleric Abdul Aziz al-Hakim. Both are from clerical families that boast a lineage of revered, martyred ayatollahs. Both have militias linked to them. The party led by Mr. Hakim, the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq, has a wing of fighters trained by Iran's Quds Force, an elite element of the Revolutionary Guard. They no longer function as an independent militia, but many have joined the police and have singled out members of Mr. Sadr's militia, the Mahdi Army.

Mahdi militia members had been accused of acting as death squads, ousting thousands of Sunnis from their homes as well as targeting American and Iraqi government soldiers. However, some of the recent fights between them in the south have appeared to be about little more than which one will control a neighborhood or city.

The decision to consider lifting the freeze came after a fact-finding tour by several high-ranking members of the Sadr organization in which they visited Samawa, Diwaniya, Kut, Amara and Basra, according to Mr. Obaidi. He said that for Mr. Sadr to remain credible with his followers, he has to stand up for them when they become targets.

Mr. Hakim criticized the political process in Baghdad at an outdoor speech

commemorating Ashura, which celebrates the martyrdom of Imam Hussein, who is perhaps the Shiite sect's most revered figure other than his father, Imam Ali.

Mr. Hakim called on Parliament to become "real representatives" and hasten to pass legislation on sharing oil revenue and holding provincial elections.

While there was calm in Karbala, where the huge religious celebrations were held, in Basra and Nasiriya, farther south, an armed fringe group that calls itself the Soldiers of Heaven attacked Iraqi government forces. At several points during the day in Basra, Iraq's second largest city, the police said that there were clashes in as much as 75 percent of the city. Last year, during Ashura, the group attacked Iraqi and American forces.

The group, which had not previously been seen in Basra, according to the local police, believes that Imam Mahdi, who disappeared in the ninth century, is about to return and save the world from injustice.

The colonel of Basra's police force said 30 of the group's followers were killed and three policeman and 25 were detained.

In Nasiriya, where the group also struck, eight people were killed, mostly civilians.

In Baghdad, Mowaffak al-Rubaie, Iraq's national security adviser, was trapped in a mosque by a crowd of angry Shiites in the Shula neighborhood, which is controlled by followers of Mr. Sadr, according to Interior Ministry officials, who could not be identified because they were not authorized to speak to reporters.

Mr. Rubaie, who is Shiite, called Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki and he sent a force from the Interior Ministry, headed by the minister, Jawad al-Bolani, to extract him. Mr. Rubaie was allowed to leave, and there were no injuries.

There were conflicting reports of who was responsible for the incident. Mr. Rubaie told CNN that he had been trapped in the mosque by gunmen, who "I believe were the same people who had problems earlier today in southern Iraq." He was referring to the Soldiers of Heaven.

However, an Interior Ministry source and an official close to Mr. Rubaie said they believed that those who besieged the mosque were supporters of Mr. Sadr.

An American soldier died north of Baghdad on Friday when an improvised explosive device exploded near his vehicle during combat, according to a statement from the American military.

In Diyala Province, east and north of Baghdad, 11 people were killed in six incidents Friday, including two children who died when an improvised explosive device detonated near their house, police officials said.

Mudhafer al-Husaini contributed reporting from Baghdad, and Iraqi employees of The New York Times from Basra, Karbala and Diwaniya.

Washington Post
January 19, 2008
Pg. 14

2. Dozens Killed In Clashes In S. Iraq

Obscure Sect Presents First Major Challenge For Area's Iraqi Forces

By Amit R. Paley, Washington Post Foreign Service

BAGHDAD, Jan. 18 -- More than 40 people were killed Friday during clashes between Iraqi security forces and an obscure Shiite sect in southern Iraq, the deadliest violence since the U.S.-led coalition handed over control of the region last month, Iraqi officials said.

Wearing black uniforms and yellow bandannas, the followers of a group that calls itself the Soldiers of Heaven attacked crowds that had

gathered to celebrate one of Shiite Islam's holiest days in Basra, the country's second-largest city, and in the southern province of Dhi Qar, officials said.

The attacks represented the first major test of Iraqi security forces in the south since they took over formal control of the area from the British military. Iraqi officials asked for surveillance information and for aircraft flights to intimidate the sect members, which British forces provided, but did not request ground troops.

"The Iraqi forces handled themselves extremely well and got the situation under control," said Lt. Col. Derek Plews, a spokesman for the British military. "This is pretty much how we envisioned them dealing with an incident like this when we handed over security responsibility."

The group's attacks came as a spokesman for anti-American cleric Moqtada al-Sadr said Sadr might allow the Mahdi Army, one of the largest militias in the country, to become active again in February after a six-month freeze. U.S. military commanders believe the freeze has contributed to the drop in violence, but Sadr spokesman Ahmed al-Shaibani said the move "has not been met with a proper response from the government."

"The government is still relying on criminal elements among its security forces in the army and the police, especially in the provinces, without taking legal measures against them," Shaibani said. But he said that even if the freeze is not extended, members of the Mahdi Army "should remain disciplined and calm."

In Nasiriyah, the provincial capital of Dhi Qar, gunfire was heard on the streets past midnight despite the imposition of a curfew. The situation appeared calmer in Basra, according to witnesses, and Iraqi officials said the assault there by the Shiite

group had been repelled.

The sect, whose members say it must cleanse Iraq of corruption to speed the return of a revered Shiite figure who vanished 1,000 years ago, was involved in a major battle with U.S. and Iraqi forces a year ago that left hundreds of its fighters dead.

About 10 a.m., sect fighters attacked a procession in Nasiriyah commemorating the anniversary of the death of Imam Hussein, another revered Shiite figure, witnesses said. Safa al-Ghanim, a local journalist, said he saw three policemen burnt to death in a police car that had been struck by a rocket-propelled grenade.

A senior official with the provincial police, Naji Rustam, was killed after being ambushed by sect members hurling grenades, Ghanim said. He said two other officers were also killed in the clashes.

Nasiriyah police said 13 police officers and civilians were killed and 45 wounded in the attacks in the city, according to Ghanim and Abu Ahsan, another local journalist. They said the number of sect members killed was unknown.

Ahmed al-Sheik Taha, the deputy governor of the province, declined to provide a death toll because he said it was still rising.

In Basra, the fighting began about 1:30 p.m. and lasted for three hours, said Brig. Gen. Jalil Khahlaf, the provincial police chief. He said 30 fighters were killed, at least 25 wounded and more than 40 arrested. Three police officers were also killed, he said.

In restive Diyala province, north of Baghdad, six police officers were killed and six injured in separate incidents involving a booby-trapped house and clashes with militants, according to the Iraqi military.

Special correspondents Zaid Sabah, Naseer Nouri, Saad al-Izzi, K.I. Ibrahim and Dalya Hassan in Baghdad, special correspondent Saad Sarhan in Najaf, and other

Washington Post staff in Diyala and Basra contributed to this report.

Los Angeles Times
January 19, 2008

3. 80 Killed In Clashes In Iraq

Followers of a Shiite messianic cult clash with police in Basra and Nasiriyah as thousands of pilgrims mark Ashura, the most important holiday for the sect.

By Alexandra Zavis

BAGHDAD — Members of an obscure messianic cult fought Iraqi security forces Friday in two southern cities, leaving at least 80 people dead and scores injured, while spreading panic among worshipers marking Shiite Islam's most important holiday.

The clashes, which erupted as Shiites marched, chanted and beat their chests in Basra and Nasiriyah, represented the first major test for Iraqi security forces since Britain completed a transfer of responsibility for security in the region last month. They also pointed to dangerous divisions within Iraq's majority Shiite population at a time when U.S. and Iraqi forces are claiming progress in curbing attacks by Sunni militants.

Members of the cult, which calls itself the Supporters of the Mahdi, mingled with the crowds in at least three sections of Basra and in Nasiriyah, then fired shots at worshipers and the security forces, police and witnesses said.

Police said the cult's leader, Ahmed Hassan, who called himself "the Yemeni," was killed along with nearly 50 of his followers in the fighting in Basra, Iraq's second-largest city. About 60 gunmen were arrested and large quantities of weapons were seized from a mosque linked to the group, said the Basra police chief, Maj. Gen. Abdul-Kareem Khalaf.

About 20 gunmen were killed in Nasiriyah, police said. At least 10 policemen in

Nasiriyah and four in Basra also died, and at least 90 people were injured in the two cities, they said.

The Supporters of the Mahdi is named after a figure most Muslims believe will appear with Jesus and establish peace and justice worldwide. Most Shiites believe the Mahdi is their 12th imam, a descendant of the prophet Muhammad who they say went into hiding in 878 and is still alive and will return.

Southern Iraq, which is overwhelmingly Shiite, is home to a number of small doomsday-style cults whose leaders either claim to be the Mahdi, or who believe they can hasten his return by spreading chaos.

Prime Minister Nouri Maliki's office said the sect's gunmen targeted government buildings in Basra and a police special forces unit in Nasiriyah, whose commander was killed.

"This profane group, cloaking themselves in religion, have been exposed to our people, who cooperated with our armed forces to rout those evil schemes," said a statement from Maliki's office. "Our security and military apparatuses were able to take full control and bring tranquillity to the provinces of Basra and Nasiriyah."

In Nasiriyah, however, residents reported hearing mortar blasts and gun and rocket-propelled-grenade fire well into the night.

"The situation in Nasiriyah is really concerning and frightening," said Naeem Enad, a college student hunkered down in his home as shots echoed in the distance. "I heard from one of the rapid response individuals that they [the sect] are not more than 100 people, however their creed is to fight to the death."

Fearful that the bloodshed could spread, authorities imposed indefinite curfews in Basra, Nasiriyah and the holy city of Najaf.

Last January, U.S. and Iraqi forces fought and killed

hundreds of members of Heaven's Army, a messianic group they alleged was plotting attacks on the Shiite religious leadership in Najaf. The group's leader, Dhyaa Abdul-Zahra, claimed to be the Mahdi and was killed in the fighting.

The Supporters of the Mahdi believe that Hassan, their leader, is the son of the awaited Mahdi; it was not immediately clear whether the two groups are linked. Last month, security forces detained 12 members of Hassan's group in Basra, eight in Nasiriya and one of its leaders in Najaf, police said.

Friday's violence occurred as hundreds of thousands of worshipers across Iraq took part in Ashura rites commemorating the death of Imam Hussein, a grandson of Muhammad who was killed by the army of the Caliph Yazid on the plains of Karbala. Hussein's death in 680 made permanent the schism between Shiites and Sunnis over the succession after Muhammad.

The rites culminating late Friday and this morning have become an expression of the ascendance of Iraq's Shiites since the fall of Saddam Hussein's Sunni-dominated regime in 2003 -- and a frequent target of Sunni militants. In 2004, nearly 180 people were killed in a series of suicide bombings in Karbala and the Baghdad district of Kadhimiya, home to a key shrine.

Beating their chests and whipping their backs with chains, a sea of worshipers converged Friday on the tombs of Hussein and his half brother Abbas in Karbala in an emotional display of mourning. Others held processions in their neighborhoods. People set up tents along the routes, offering tea and a traditional stew of mincemeat and tomatoes to pilgrims.

Security was tight, with thousands of additional troops backed by Iraqi helicopters deployed in Karbala and other

major Shiite centers. Large vehicles were banned from the road across much of central and southern Iraq.

But for all the precautions, authorities were unable to prevent the day's charged emotions from flaring into violence.

During a reenactment of Hussein's slaying in Basra, the crowd turned on the actor who was performing the part of his killer and beat the man so badly that he returned with an assault rifle to exact revenge. At least one onlooker was killed in the crossfire when soldiers tried to subdue the man and his relatives, security officials said.

In an unrelated incident, at least two Iraqis were killed and four injured in a blast Friday as a U.S. convoy drove through north Baghdad, police said. The convoy escaped harm.

Elsewhere in Baghdad, gunmen pinned down national security advisor Mowaffak Rubaie inside a mosque in the northeast neighborhood of Shula, a stronghold of radical Shiite cleric Muqtada Sadr. His political office denied followers had anything to do with it.

In an interview with state-run Al Iraqiya television, Rubaie blamed members of the same cult that waged the attacks in Basra and Nasiriya.

Interior Minister Jawad Bolani drove to the mosque and helped defuse the situation so Rubaie could leave, according to an official in his ministry.

Meanwhile, the U.S. military announced the death of an American soldier in a bombing Thursday during operations north of Baghdad. At least 3,926 U.S. personnel have been killed since the American-led invasion of Iraq in March 2003, according to the independent website icasualties.org.

U.S.-led forces killed 13 suspects and detained three others in raids against militants in central and northern Iraq in the preceding 24 hours, the

military said in a statement.

Times staff writers Raheem Salman and Saif Hameed in Baghdad, special correspondent Saad Fakhrildeen in Karbala and special correspondents in Baghdad and Basra contributed to this report.

International Herald Tribune
January 19, 2008

4. Sadr's Militia Threatens To End 6-Month Truce

By Associated Press

NAJAF, Iraq--The anti-American Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr put the United States and the Iraqi government on notice Friday that he might not extend a six-month cease-fire declared by his militia.

The cease-fire by the Mahdi army militia, which is to expire next month, has been cited by U.S. commanders in Iraq as a major contributor to the nationwide reduction of violence over the past six months. American and Iraqi forces, however, have stepped up their hunt for the militiamen in recent months, arguing that they are members of rogue cells closely linked to Iran.

"The rationale for the decision to extend the freeze of the Mahdi army is beginning to wear thin," Salah al-Obeidi, a spokesman for Sadr, said in a statement. "This is because the government is supporting some criminal gangs operating inside security agencies and which refuse to abide by the law."

He did not elaborate, but he was alluding to Shiites from rival groups who have infiltrated security forces.

Obeidi said senior security officials remained in their jobs despite arrest warrants issued against them for human rights abuses. "This will force us to reconsider the decision to extend the cease-fire despite repeated public statements in the past that we will."

With Sunni militants, the Mahdi army, whose main

stronghold is in Baghdad, has long been blamed for the sectarian violence that followed the bombing in February 2006 of a major Shiite shrine in Samarra, north of Baghdad.

Clashes in south kill dozens

Iraqi soldiers and the police fought running battles with gunmen from a Shiite cult in two southern cities Friday, and dozens of people were killed and nearly 100 wounded in the clashes, Reuters reported from Basra, Iraq.

The police said that the head of the so-called Soldiers of Heaven cult in Basra had been killed in the fighting, which was reminiscent of clashes between the obscure group and Iraqi and U.S. forces a year ago.

Those battles near the holy Shiite city of Najaf left hundreds dead, mainly members of the cult.

The latest clashes were the biggest test for Iraqi military and police forces in the south since Britain finished handing back responsibility for security in the oil-rich region last month.

Major General Abdul Jalil Khalaf, the Basra provincial police chief, said that dozens of people had been killed in Basra, the second-largest city in Iraq, where gunmen carried out a series of hit-and-run raids, using heavy machine guns.

Khalaf did not give a precise number of those killed during several hours of fighting, but he said it included the head of the cult in the city.

Fifteen people including a police major general and two colonels were killed in the city of Nassiriya, officials said.

Hospital officials said 82 people had been wounded.

Witnesses said that gunmen from the Soldiers of Heaven had attacked four police stations in the city.

The fighting came as observations for the Ashura festival, one of the holiest events in the Shiite Muslim

religious calendar, approached their peak across southern Iraq, on Saturday.

London Times
January 19, 2008

5. Surge Is Working But Jobs Are Best Way To Win, Says US Envoy

By Martin Fletcher, in Baghdad

Iraq's fragile new peace was being put at risk by the Government's failure to provide jobs and services to undercut the militias, the US Ambassador in Baghdad has declared.

Iraq was "immeasurably better" than a year ago, Ryan Crocker told The Times, but Nouri al-Maliki's administration continued to disappoint. "Failure to consolidate security gains with progress in other areas would be highly dangerous," he said.

In an interview the Ambassador urged Britain to maintain a force near Basra, saying that it still had an important role in advising Iraqi commanders in that city, supporting reconstruction efforts and guarding US supply routes.

"My personal hope is that the UK will decide to maintain a division headquarters beyond 2008 as the Iraqi Government works to extend its authority in Basra," he said. "That's where the oil is. It is an important place." Mr Crocker said that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office had asked him to say nothing about the five British hostages seized from the Iraqi Finance Ministry in May. He said that Iran was still training and equipping Shia insurgents, and its interference could be "dangerously destabilising".

As Mr Crocker spoke, more than 50 people were killed in battles between Iraqi security forces and gunmen from the Soldiers of Heaven Shia cult in the southern cities of Basra and Nassiriyah, and a suicide bomber killed 11

people outside a Shia mosque in Diyala province.

The previous day a woman suicide bomber killed eight near another Shia mosque in Diyala. This weekend a 48-hour curfew has been imposed on large parts of Iraq to prevent attacks during the Shia festival of Ashura.

Mr Crocker, a notoriously understated man, offered an upbeat assessment, describing the drop in violence as "clearly more than a temporary ceasefire". He spoke of a "fundamental change" in the atmosphere, with a mood now of reconciliation, not retribution. He said he was relaxed about US troops levels returning to pre-"surge" levels by July, and insisted: "We are in an immeasurably better place in January 2008 than in January 2007."

The US military says that Iraqi security forces could be ready to take control of all 18 provinces by the year's end, and that 75 per cent of Baghdad's neighbourhoods are now secure — up from 8 per cent a year ago.

The American Ambassador expressed confidence that the Mahdi Army, led by the radical Shia cleric Hojatolislam Moqtada al-Sadr, would not return to violence when its six-month suspension of paramilitary activities ends next month. He said that Shias were sickened by the Mahdi Army's shootout with a rival militia that left 52 dead in the holy city of Karbala in August. The Sunni insurgent threat had receded so dramatically that they no longer needed al-Mahdi Army to defend them.

San Diego Union-Tribune
January 19, 2008

6. U.S., Sunni Pacts Are Proving To Be Mutual Bargains

Each side benefits from new alliances

By Hamza Hendawi,
Associated Press

HAWR RAJAB, Iraq — They know him as the sheik. But what that really means in this Sunni town is a bit of everything: community leader, public works supervisor, agricultural planner, militia captain.

It also helps explain why Maher al-Moaeini and his 500 men threw their lot with the U.S.-led fight against al-Qaeda in Iraq. The U.S. military could deliver the goods — from steady paychecks for the militiamen to seeds for the farmers.

Mutual bargains such as these — U.S. aid and respect to Sunnis in exchange for their fighting power — drive the so-called Awakening Council movement that has marked one of the most significant shifts in the power balance in Iraq since the insurgency took root in 2004.

But it also exposes possible long-term weaknesses of the pacts.

Sunnis across Iraq — more than 70,000 at last count — are turning to the Pentagon as generous patrons and allies. Yet it could all sour quickly if the U.S. assistance to Sunnis dries up or the Shiite-led government resists Washington's pressure to reward the Sunni militiamen with jobs in the security forces.

The first Sunni clans made cautious overtures to U.S. commanders last year in the western Anbar province, then the main insurgent staging grounds.

As more Sunni tribes joined the uprising, al-Qaeda in Iraq and its supporters found their footholds shrinking. And a delighted U.S. military kept sweetening the pot for more Sunni allies who felt ignored by the Shiite-led government.

For many Sunni community leaders, such as Sheik al-Moaeini, these are spoils they cannot easily pass up.

The U.S. military pays salaries of \$300 a month — good by Iraqi standards — to the more than 500 Sunni fighters in Hawr Rajab, a farming

community about six miles southeast of Baghdad. These are crucial forces these days as a major U.S. offensive targets al-Qaeda in Iraq pockets around the capital.

The military has provided the town's farmers with seeds and paid to clear irrigation canals and repair water pumps. The Americans offer grants to small businesses and create jobs such as trash collection and street sweeping.

Lt. Col. Mark Solomon, the local U.S. commander from the 3rd Infantry Division, wants to build an ice factory for Hawr Rajab before Iraq's suffocating summer arrives in May.

To the Sunnis, the projects and posts also represent important signs of honor and hope they say have not been forthcoming from the Shiite leadership that replaced Saddam Hussein's Sunni-centric regime.

"The government does nothing for us. It has kept us out of the army, the police and jobs," al-Moaeini said at an abandoned shoe factory that his Awakening Council fighters use as a headquarters. The U.S. military wants to revive the factory.

Baghdad has done little to improve basic services in Hawr Rajab, such as electricity and drinking water, or supply the town with heating fuel sorely needed during one of the harshest winters in years.

The Shiite-dominated government remains deeply worried the Sunni fighters will one day again turn their guns against the establishment.

The bigger question, however, is whether the U.S.-Sunni alliances will hold as the Pentagon tries to turn over more security responsibilities and policies to the government of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki.

Al-Moaeini, 37, who wears traditional Arab dress and sports a goatee, said if the Shiite government starts supporting his men, their ties with the Americans will

loosen. "But we will still be friends with the Americans and invite them to tea every time they drive through the town," he added, flashing a smile at Solomon, who was seated next to him on a recent tour of the old shoe factory, where the floors were littered with hundreds of dusty plastic sandals.

Al-Moaeini appeared to treat Solomon with respect, but not the kind of lavish welcome shown to the highest-ranking military brass. The two men, however, have grown comfortable in each other's company.

Al-Moaeini said as many as 200 residents had been killed – some execution-style – when al-Qaeda in Iraq ruled Hawr Rajab from 2004 until late last year.

"They went after the symbols of our town so they could control the simple folks. They killed the educated, the tribal chiefs and former army officers," he said, rubbing his hands close to a kerosene heater he placed in front of him and Solomon.

Al-Moaeini also recounted how he was detained by Americans for 18 months in 2005-06 after an arms cache was found buried near his home. He says he was unjustly imprisoned, but claims he bears no grudge.

"I was treated with respect as a clan chief. I was not humiliated," he said. "It was like a five-star hotel, really. Imagine if I had spent that time in an Iraqi jail?"

New York Times
January 19, 2008
Pg. 8

7. Armored Vehicle Supply Better After Early Delays

By Thom Shanker

CHARLESTON, S.C. — The Defense Department has now delivered more than 1,500 heavily armored ground transport vehicles to Iraq and Afghanistan in an accelerated

program to protect American troops from improvised explosives, senior Pentagon officials said Friday.

Production problems initially plagued the effort to speed the mine-resistant vehicles to Iraq and Afghanistan under a program begun last May. Pentagon officials and members of Congress have complained about the delay and about the time it has taken to equip the vehicles with specialized radios and advanced jamming transmitters, ship them to combat zones and train soldiers on how to operate them.

But Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates, who flew here on Friday to inspect the factory that completes the armored troop transports, said he had been told that early glitches in acquiring enough of the vehicles had been resolved.

As workers at the Space and Naval Warfare Systems Center in Charleston installed sensitive tracking systems, satellite communications equipment and bomb-jamming antennas into the armored vehicles, Mr. Gates described them as "a proven lifesaver on the battlefield."

The effort to buy what are officially known as Mine-Resistant Ambush-Protected vehicles is the largest current one-year acquisition program in the Department of Defense, with \$22.4 billion set aside for a fleet of more than 15,000 vehicles.

While it initially took 30 days to outfit each vehicle with specialized equipment once it had been manufactured, Mr. Gates was told, that time has been reduced to 7 days in most cases. About 50 vehicles per day now leave the factory here with all of their required equipment.

Mr. Gates cited Army reports that there had been 12 attacks on the heavily armored vehicles with improvised bombs since the new push began to send more of them into combat zones, mostly to

Iraq. Mr. Gates said all of the soldiers in the vehicles during those attacks walked away afterward.

"The need for these vehicles will not soon go away," he said.

John J. Young Jr., the under secretary of defense for acquisition, technology and logistics, said that civilian contractors and the military built 1,187 of the vehicles in December, finishing the month just eight short of the production target.

The basic armored vehicle costs about \$500,000, but adding antennas, radios, jammers and other specialized equipment can double that amount.

The new vehicles tower over Humvees, the military's standard troop transport vehicles, and their undercarriages are far higher off the ground. In addition to carrying more armor, they are designed with a V-shaped hull to deflect blasts away from the troops inside. Even armored Humvees have proven far more vulnerable to roadside bombs than the new vehicles.

Mr. Gates acknowledged that the Pentagon would continue to assess how to deploy its fleet of tanks, other armored vehicles and Humvees to assure the proper mix and the best tactics to protect the troops in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Atlanta Journal-Constitution
January 19, 2008

8. Defense Secretary Lauds Military Truck Project

By Richard Lardner,
Associated Press

Charleston, S.C.--A multibillion-dollar effort to produce bomb-resistant vehicles for U.S. troops in Iraq is moving "as fast as humanly possible," Defense Secretary Robert Gates said Friday after a visit to the military facilities playing a key role in the program.

The project to build

thousands of mine-resistant, ambush-protected vehicles--known as "MRAPs"--ought to be a case study for a Harvard Business School class on how to move a major manufacturing project from a concept to reality, Gates said.

"For all of the talk about how Washington can't get anything done, this is an amazing example of Republicans, Democrats, the executive branch, the Congress, manufacturers, government bureaucrats, everybody pitching in and doing the right thing," he told reporters during the flight back to Washington.

Congress has provided \$22.4 billion for as many as 15,000 of the vehicles, which weigh between 19 tons and 40 tons.

Lawmakers have complained that the consortium of military agencies and private companies has been moving too slowly to field the lifesaving MRAPs.

Gates, who made the speedy purchase of MRAPs the Pentagon's top acquisition priority last May, received briefings from the officers and civilian executives at a Navy facility where sensitive electronic gear and gun turrets are installed on the heavy trucks built by defense contractors.

The defense secretary also met with officers at Charleston Air Force Base, where airlifters fly MRAPs to the Middle East. MRAPs cost between \$500,000 and \$1 million, depending on their size and how they are equipped.

Wall Street Journal (wsj.com)
January 18, 2008

9. Gates: Increase In Attacks On US Troops Using Iran Bombs

CHARLESTON (AFP)--U.S. soldiers have already been targeted in the first two weeks of January by as many suspected Iranian

explosives as in all of December, U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates said Friday.

"During the first half of January there were as many IEDs (improvised explosive devices) as there were in all of December," Gates told reporters aboard a plane after a visit in Charleston, S.C.

Gates' military adviser, Peter Chiarelli, said later the secretary was actually referring to explosively formed penetrators (EFPs), which U.S. officials say Iran has been supplying to insurgents in Iraq.

Gen. David Petraeus, the commander of U.S. forces in Iraq, said Wednesday that EFP attacks had dropped in recent months but increased at the start of January.

"The signature attacks that employ Iranian-provided weapons have decreased substantially," he told a small group of reporters accompanying him on his visit to the Iraq-Iran border post at Zurbitiyah.

"The EFPs (explosively formed penetrators) had been running at a low level until about the first 10 to 12 days of this month, when we saw a noticeable increase but, in the last several days they have gone down again," he said.

US officials said they observed a steady reduction in the use of Iranian explosives between October and November. They said they believed that showed a possible reduction of weapons being sent from Iraq's neighbor.

Boston Globe
January 19, 2008

10. Joint Chiefs Will Present Own View Of Iraq Troop Cuts

To be independent of statements made by Petraeus
By Robert Burns, Associated Press

SAN SALVADOR - The Pentagon's top generals and admirals will make their own assessment for President Bush

on whether to continue pulling US troops out of Iraq in the second half of the year - independent of what Bush's commander in Baghdad recommends, the top US military officer said yesterday.

Navy Admiral Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told reporters traveling with him on the last stop of a six-day trip that the Joint Chiefs will take into account a range of issues beyond the security situation in Iraq.

They will consider, for example, the effects of growing strain on troops and their families from multiple tours in Iraq, as well as the outlook for troop requirements in Afghanistan and elsewhere, Mullen said.

"I've got to look, with the Joint Chiefs, at what we think the best way ahead is in Iraq, in the region and globally," Mullen said.

Defense Secretary Robert Gates announced at the Pentagon on Thursday that he had asked the Joint Chiefs for their Iraq assessment, to coincide with recommendations from General David Petraeus, the top commander in Iraq, as well as Admiral William J. Fallon, the commander of American forces in the Middle East.

Gates has said he hopes Petraeus will conclude that further troop cuts in the second half of 2008 are feasible.

Earlier this week, Fallon said he was encouraged by what he called signs of economic and political progress in Iraq, although he did not say whether he favored more troop cuts in the second half of 2008. He spoke in an interview in St. Petersburg, Fla., while hosting a conference of Middle Eastern defense chiefs with Mullen.

"My sense is, they are beginning to get it," Fallon said of Iraqi political figures. "There are good signs." He added, "I'm very pleased with where we are in Iraq,"

Mullen made his remarks

en route to San Salvador from Bogota, where he had met with top Colombian defense officials to discuss their war against rebel forces.

The Joint Chiefs intend to have their consensus view ready for Gates and the president by March or April, he said.

Bush needs to hear the views from a range of senior military officers, Mullen said, on "the risks that are associated with whatever we're going to do next" in Iraq, where about 160,000 US troops are on the ground in a conflict that appears to be leaning in favor of the US and Iraq governments.

Pressed for his view on whether more troop cuts were likely after this summer, Mullen declined to give one. He stressed that Petraeus constantly evaluates conditions on the ground in Iraq and that any number of events - positive or negative - could happen in the months ahead that would influence a troop-cut decision.

Economist
January 19, 2008

The militarisation of space 11. Disharmony In The Spheres

Modern American warfare relies on satellites. They make America powerful but also vulnerable, particularly in light of China's new celestial assertiveness

COMBINED AIR OPERATIONS CENTRE -- A hushed, dimmed hall in the nerve centre that controls America's air operations from Somalia to Afghanistan is dominated by giant video screens tracking coalition aircraft. Blue dots show the location of ground forces, with "troops in contact" highlighted for priority air support. Smaller screens show live black-and-white footage, relayed by satellite from unmanned drones which, in their turn, are remotely controlled by pilots in America.

The Combined Air Operations Centre's exact location in "southwest Asia" cannot be disclosed. But from here commanders supervise tens of thousands of sorties a year. Through aircraft surveillance pods they get a god's eye view of operations that range from old-fashioned strafing to the targeted killing of insurgent leaders with bombs guided by global positioning system (GPS) satellites, and emergency air drops to isolated soldiers using parachutes that steer themselves automatically to the chosen spot.

These days America fights not in a fog of war but, as one senior air force officer puts it, in a "huge cloud of electrons". Large amounts of information, particularly surveillance videos, can be beamed to soldiers on the ground or leaders in America. The officer says this kind of "network-centric" warfare is "as revolutionary as when the air force went from open cockpits to jet aeroplanes."

If Napoleon's armies marched on their stomachs, American ones march on bandwidth. Smaller Western allies struggle to keep up. Much of this electronic data is transmitted by satellites, most of them unprotected commercial systems. The revolution in military technology is, at heart, a revolution in the use of space. America's supremacy in the air is made possible by its mastery of space.

During the cold war space was largely thought of as part of the rarefied but terrifying domain of nuclear warfare. Satellites were used principally to monitor nuclear-missile facilities, provide early warning should they be fired and maintain secure communications between commanders and nuclear-strike forces. Now, by contrast, the use of space assets is ubiquitous; even the lowliest platoon makes use of satellites, if only to know its position.

Space wizardry has made possible unprecedented accuracy. As recently as the Vietnam war, destroying a bridge or building could take dozens if not hundreds of bombing runs. These days a plane with “smart” bombs can blast several targets in a single sortie, day or night, in good weather or bad. Needless to say, precise intelligence and sound judgment are as important to military success as fancy kit.

But might this growing reliance on space and cyberspace become a dangerous dependence, a fatal weakness? Air force officers talk of space being America's Achilles heel. Satellites move in predictable orbits and anybody who can reach space can in theory destroy a satellite, even if only by releasing a cloud of “dumb” pellets in its path—using a shotgun rather than a hunter's rifle to kill the orbiting “bird”.

The Taliban or al-Qaeda can do little about America's space power except hide themselves from its intelligence-gathering satellites. But the Pentagon worries about what would happen if America came up against a major power, a “near-peer” rival (as it calls China and Russia), able to intercept space assets with missiles and “space mines”, or to disable them with lasers and electronic jammers. “There are a lot of vulnerabilities,” admits an American general, “There are backups, but our space architecture is very fragile.”

The precise nature of these weaknesses is a well-guarded secret. But wargames simulating a future conflict over Taiwan often end up with the “Red Force” (China) either defeating the “Blue Force” (America) or inflicting grievous losses on it by launching an early attack in space, perhaps by setting off one or more nuclear explosions above the atmosphere. “I have played Red and had a wonderful time,” says the

general, “It is pretty easy to disrupt Blue. We should not expect an enemy to play by established norms in space. They will play dirty pool.”

One shot China has been practising became clear a year ago, on January 11th 2007. In a nuclear-proof air force command centre, built on giant shock-absorbing springs within Cheyenne Mountain, outside Colorado Springs, officers tracked a missile fired from a mobile launcher deep inside China. It followed what one American official said was a “strange” trajectory, designed neither to land a warhead nor to put a payload into orbit. Instead it intercepted one of China's ageing weather satellites. The impact about 850km (530 miles) above Earth created a huge field of space debris, contributing about 28% of the junk now floating around in space (see chart).

Litter louts do their worst

Creating all this rubbish seems a bit irresponsible for a country seeking to be a great space-faring nation. It is true that both America and Russia carried out scores of similar anti-satellite (ASAT) tests during the cold war. Then they stopped, not least because the celestial shrapnel was endangering their hugely expensive satellites. They also accepted that spy satellites provided a degree of mutual reassurance in nuclear arms control. The last piece of American ASAT debris fell back to Earth in 2006, say Pentagon officials. China's shrapnel, created in a higher orbit, could be around for a century to come.

The missile shot put America on notice that it can be challenged in space. The Chinese routinely turn powerful lasers skywards, demonstrating their potential to dazzle or permanently blind spy satellites. “They let us see their lasers. It is as if they are trying to intimidate us,” says Gary Payton, a senior Pentagon official dealing with space

programmes. The only conclusion, he argues, is that “space is no longer a sanctuary; it is a contested domain.”

In a report to Congress in November, a commission examining America's relations with China gave warning that “the pace and success of China's military modernisation continue to exceed US government estimates.” China's principal aim, the report said, is to develop the wherewithal to delay or deter American military intervention in any war over Taiwan.

The ASAT test intensifies the concern of those who already find plenty to worry about in Chinese military literature. A study for the American Enterprise Institute, a think-tank, cites a Chinese theorist who argues that China should adopt a policy of overt deterrence in space. Other Chinese argue that their country's territorial sovereignty extends to space. This kind of thing reinforces the hawkishness of American hardliners.

Ashley Tellis, a senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment, another think-tank, believes China ultimately seeks to build a “Sinocentric order in Asia and perhaps globally.” Any attempt to negotiate arms-control agreements in space would be futile, he argues, and America “has no choice but to run the offence-defence space race, and win.”

Other experts, such as Michael Krepon, co-founder of the Henry L. Stimson Centre, a security think-tank, play down the Chinese peril. Mr Krepon says that though similarly alarming conclusions could have been drawn from American or Soviet military literature in the cold war, a space war never took place. What is more, the greater China's economic reliance on satellites, the keener it will be to protect them.

Even those who doubt that America would really go to

war against China for the sake of Taiwan worry about the dangers posed by the growing number of countries that have access to outer space. Ten countries (or groups of countries) and two commercial consortia can launch satellites into orbit. A further 18 have ballistic missiles powerful enough to cross space briefly. By the end of 2006, 47 countries and other groups had placed satellites in orbit, either on their own or with help from others. In its crudest form, any object can become a space weapon if directed into the path of a satellite.

In testimony to Congress last year, General James Cartwright, a former head of America's Strategic Command, said that “intentional interference” with all types of satellites, “while not routine, now occurs with some regularity”. GPS signals are relatively weak and easy to jam. For several months in 2006 electronic jammers in Libya interfered with the Thuraya satellite telephone system, apparently because the Libyan government wanted to make life difficult for smugglers in the Sahara desert.

Satellites are not just military tools; they have also become a vital part of globalised civilian life. It is hard to disentangle military from civilian uses of space. Military GPS satellites support a myriad of civilian uses, including road directions for taxi drivers, navigation for commercial airliners, tracking goods in transit and time signals for cash dispensers. But the armed services' hunger for electronic data means that four-fifths of America's military data is transmitted through commercial satellites. A single Global Hawk unmanned surveillance aircraft flying over Afghanistan can eat up several times more satellite bandwidth than was used for the whole of the 1991 war against Iraq.

Star wars delayed

Space provides the high

ground from which to watch, listen and direct military forces. But the idea that countries would fight it out in space has so far been confined to science fiction. International law treats outer space as a global common, akin to the high seas. Countries are free to use space for “peaceful purposes” but may not stake territorial claims to celestial bodies or place nuclear weapons in space. “Peaceful” has been interpreted to mean “non-aggressive” rather than non-military. Space is highly militarised but for the moment nobody has placed weapons there, not openly at least.

During the cold war, under Ronald Reagan's presidency, America worked on plans for space-based weapons designed to shoot down ballistic missiles. But this “star wars” programme faded with the collapse of Soviet communism. Before being appointed defence secretary in 2001, Donald Rumsfeld chaired a special commission to review America's space policy. It issued a stark warning that America could suffer a crippling surprise attack on its space systems—a “space Pearl Harbour”—and argued that America “must develop the means both to deter and to defend against hostile acts in and from space.”

America then broke out of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, freeing itself to pursue a slimmed-down version of missile defence. The latest official statement on America's space policy, issued in 2006, affirms the country's freedom of action in space, the right of self-defence and the right to “deny, if necessary, its adversaries the use of space.” At the UN General Assembly, America has stood alone in voting against a resolution supporting negotiations on a treaty to prevent a space arms race, an idea pushed by China and Russia.

Yet the Bush administration has stopped short of taking the fateful step

of “weaponisation” in space. Perhaps it is too preoccupied with Iraq, and certainly the downfall of Mr Rumsfeld removed a powerful champion of space weapons. A year after China's ASAT shot, the defence budget passed by the Democrat-controlled Congress did not provide any money for a missile defence “space test-bed”.

One of the big disincentives to placing weapons in space has been the technical difficulty and cost of such an enterprise. A recent study by the Centre for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments (CSBA), a defence think-tank, concluded that ground-based systems were almost always more cost effective and reliable than space-based weapons, whether used to attack missiles, enemy satellites or targets on land.

America is still hedging its bets. With some tweaking, say experts, the ground-based interceptors for shooting down ballistic missiles could be used against satellites. A host of technologies under research, such as high-powered lasers to destroy missiles rising through the air, could be applied to anti-satellite warfare.

A game of celestial dodgems

The core fear is that any conflict in space would cause the most injury to America since America has the most to lose. Damaged planes crash to the ground and destroyed ships sink to the bottom of the sea. But the weightlessness of space means that debris keeps spinning around the Earth for years, if not centuries. Each destruction of a satellite creates, in effect, thousands of missiles zipping round randomly; each subsequent impact provides yet more high-speed debris. At some point, given enough litter, there would be a chain reaction of impacts that would render parts of low-Earth orbit—the location of about half the active satellites—unusable.

As matters stand, ground

controllers periodically have to shift the position of satellites to avoid other objects. This month, NASA was tracking about 3,100 active and inactive satellites, and some 9,300 bits of junk larger than 5cm, about 2,600 of them from the Chinese ASAT test. Given their speed, even particles as small as 1cm (of which there may be hundreds of thousands) are enough to cripple a satellite.

For America, then, avoiding a space war may be a matter of self-preservation. The air force has adopted a doctrine of “counterspace operations” that envisages either destroying enemy satellites in a future war or temporarily disabling them. But for the most part, America's space security relies on passive measures: sidestepping an attacker by moving out of the way of possible strikes; protecting the vital organs of satellites by “hardening” them against laser or electromagnetic attack; replacing any damaged satellites; or finding alternative means to do the job, for example with blips or unmanned aircraft.

More esoteric space research has ideas such as sending small satellites to act as “guardian angels”, detecting possible attacks against the big birds. It also includes plans for breaking up satellites into smaller components that communicate wirelessly, or deploying “space tugs” that would repair and refuel existing satellites.

Few of these options are cost-free. More manoeuvrable satellites are heavier, as they have to carry more fuel; protective equipment makes satellites cumbersome and more expensive; placing a satellite farther away from Earth, where it is more difficult to attack, means it will broadcast a weaker signal or require more costly sensors and antennae. The promise of cheap, reusable launch vehicles has yet to materialise. All this makes it hard for America to

achieve its goal of “operationally responsive space”: the ability to place satellites in orbit quickly and inexpensively.

The essential prerequisite for better space security is to improve “situational awareness”: that is, to know what is in space, who it belongs to and whether it is acting in a threatening manner. America already has the world's most developed space monitoring system with a network of radars and telescopes. But its surveillance is patchy. Objects in orbit are catalogued periodically rather than tracked continuously. Space surveillance is not really like air-traffic control: it is more akin to trying to track ships at sea with the naked eye, watching them leave port and predicting when they will next come in sight of land. There are gaps in coverage, particularly over the southern hemisphere, and much of the antiquated surveillance system cannot fuse the data to create an overall picture.

Space surveillance would seem to be ideally suited to international co-operation. Yet the Americans, Chinese, Russians and Europeans all seem intent on doing their own monitoring. They are frightened of giving away their space secrets to rivals. Accurate and timely information on space objects is vital for defending a satellite, but also necessary for attacking one.

Coming back down to Earth

Many strategists argue that the most vulnerable parts of the American space system are closer to home. Ground stations and control centres, particularly those of commercial operations, are exposed to conventional bombing, whether by armies or terrorists. Communication links to and from satellites are open to interference. In cyber-warfare, critical parts of the space system could be attacked from distant

computers. Even without external meddling, notes Tom Ehrhard, a senior fellow at the CSBA, American forces struggle to find enough bandwidth and to prevent the myriad of electronic systems from jamming each other.

Some remedial action is being taken. Backup ground stations are being set up in case the main GPS control centre outside Colorado Springs is disabled. New satellites will have a more powerful GPS signal that is harder to block. America is experimenting with satellite-to-satellite

communication by laser, which can carry more data and is less prone to interference than radio waves.

And the armed forces are starting to train for warfare with few or no data links. Simulated attacks by both space and cyberspace "aggressors" are being incorporated into events such as the regular "Red Flag" air-combat exercises over the Nevada desert. But, said an officer at one recent wargame, there are other ways of doing things. "If you really want to take us down, why go to space? You could just try to take out the control tower or bring down the electricity supply to the base."

New York Times on the Web
January 18, 2008

12. Bush Names General To Head Afghan Mission

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - President George W. Bush has named the head of U.S. Army forces in Europe, Gen. David McKiernan, as the new leader of foreign forces in Afghanistan, the Pentagon said on Friday.

McKiernan will head the 42,000-member NATO-led International Security Assistance Force. ISAF is responsible for fighting insurgents, training Afghan troops and reconstruction in northern and eastern

Afghanistan.

Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates on Tuesday ordered an additional 3,200 U.S. Marines to Afghanistan, including 1,000 who will conduct training with ISAF.

With the new Marine deployments in March and April, the United States will have around 30,000 troops in Afghanistan, about half in ISAF and the rest conducting missions ranging from counter-terrorism to training Afghan soldiers.

Financial Times
January 19, 2008

13. Call To Woo 'Moderate' Afghan Rebels

By James Blitz, in London

The international community must try to attract "moderate" Afghan insurgents away from the Taliban by giving them financial support that encourages them to support the Kabul government, according to a new report.

As Paddy Ashdown, the former British politician, prepares to take over as the new United Nations envoy in Afghanistan, the report, written by one of his former political aides, suggests the European Union should fund a "reconstruction benefit package" that could win over insurgents.

With Nato continuing to struggle against the Taliban, some western leaders, such as Gordon Brown, the British premier, have talked about the need for the international coalition to encourage insurgents to change sides. The new report - to be published next week and written by Daniel Korski of the European Council on Foreign Relations - goes further.

Mr Korski, who was political adviser to Lord Ashdown when he was UN high representative in Bosnia, suggests the EU should fund a €50bn (\$73bn, £37bn) pilot scheme under which money

can be paid in instalments to local leaders who want to develop clinics and schools.

He says: "The international community must encourage President Hamid Karzai to engage mid-ranking 'moderate' insurgents by developing a package of financial and other incentives which could encourage them to support the government rather than the Taliban."

Mr Korski says the EU needs to step up its security activity in Afghanistan. It should commit to meeting the shortfall in police trainers. Only 93 are currently working in Afghanistan compared with the 434 originally pledged.

He also notes that, in the short term, an extra 2,000 to 2,500 Nato troops are probably required for operations in the south, alongside the expected deployment of 3,500 more US marines.

The European council's report argues that EU governments should agree to lift the operational restrictions on existing deployments of troops to Afghanistan. Mr Korski believes that European states should begin to move their troops from the west to the east. This would allow the US to transfer its forces to the south, where fighting is heaviest, in support of the British, Canadians and Dutch.

Defense News
January 21, 2008
Pg. 8

14. Australian PM Pushes Stronger Line In Afghanistan

By Gregor Ferguson

Sydney — Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd has committed to a long-term military presence in Afghanistan, but he wants greater political and military coordination among the eight NATO member nations operating there to defeat the Taliban.

Rudd, in a lightning pre-Christmas visit, was one of

three coalition heads of government to reassure Afghan President Hamid Karzai that Australia will stay the course. President Nicolas Sarkozy of France and Italian Prime Minister Romano Prodi visited Kabul at the same time to deliver the same assurances.

Rudd also visited the 515-strong Australian Overwatch Battle Group in southern Iraq and told them they will be withdrawn by midyear. But another 1,000 Australian troops, ships and patrol aircraft serving in Baghdad, Kuwait and the Arabian Gulf will remain to train Iraqi forces, provide security in Baghdad, conduct airborne and maritime surveillance of southern Iraq and the gulf, and protect Iraq's offshore oil fields.

A spokesman for Australian Defense Minister Joel Fitzgibbon declined Jan. 15 to discuss reports that he would attend a meeting in Canada later this month of defense ministers of the eight NATO nations with forces in Afghanistan. The ministers will discuss a review of NATO's strategy in Afghanistan, which will be presented for formal endorsement during a NATO meeting in Bucharest, Romania, in April.

On his return to Australia, Fitzgibbon reaffirmed his country's commitment to its mission in Afghanistan's Uruzgan province, despite the news that the Netherlands will withdraw its 1,600-strong force from the area in 2010. The force includes Apache attack helicopters and self-propelled artillery, which have played an important role supporting coalition operations and protecting Australian troops.

But Fitzgibbon said the Australian Defence Force would be unable to take a more prominent leadership role in Afghanistan because it is already thinly stretched and because NATO's current strategy isn't delivering results.

"We just can't be playing a lead role in Afghanistan,

particularly when we are already so overstretched and there are so many potential contingencies in our own backyard where we will need to play a lead role," he told The Australian newspaper Dec. 28. "If we can demonstrate that we have a strategy and things are going well in Afghanistan, sometime in the near future, then the Netherlands parliament might take a different view and stick around [after 2010]. Alternatively, it will be easier to get alternative participants."

Dutch and Australian troops have worked well together, said Ross Babbage of the Kokoda Foundation think tank, Canberra. The practical problem on the ground is that other European nations aren't operating as effectively against the Taliban as U.S., British, Canadian and Australian forces, he said, all of whom, except the Australians, have sustained heavy casualties.

Defense analyst Alan Dupont of the University of Sydney's Centre for International Security Studies, said the NATO players in Afghanistan know their current strategy isn't coherent and effective. "We need to change things or we're heading for defeat," he said.

At the purely military level, each country with a force in Afghanistan is working under different rules of engagement. Like Babbage, Dupont believes many of the European NATO contingents have significant political constraints on effective combat operations. These differences are caused and compounded by the different aims and domestic political issues driving each government.

Moreover, nobody can agree on a common political strategy beyond the obvious so-called "motherhood statements," Dupont said.

For example, how should the Afghan government and its Western allies deal with farmers producing the opium poppies that underpin the

global narcotics trade? How can poppy-growers be weaned off their dependence on poppy production and onto other cash crops? What is the plan for transforming Afghanistan's economy from near-subsistence level into that of a modern state?

The military problems are most pressing, Dupont said, and "NATO governments must make the case to their own electorates that this [Afghanistan] is a cause worth fighting and dying for. It's in Europe's interests as well as that of the broader Western world."

Some key European NATO members haven't been prepared to take the political risks necessary to address the challenges in Afghanistan, Dupont said, pointing out that the United Kingdom's willingness to do so highlights what he termed "a degree of hypocrisy and lack of political courage among some NATO members."

Financial Times
January 19, 2008

15. US To Offer Pakistan Help Against Attacks

By Farhan Bokhari and Demetri Sevastopulo

A senior American military commander will visit Pakistan this month to discuss the growing unrest in the country and possible deeper US military engagement, according to senior Pakistani and western officials.

Admiral William Fallon, head of US Central Command, will hold discussions on whether the US could provide training to help Pakistani forces deal with the increasing attacks from militants inside its borders.

The US was already concerned about the regrouping of al-Qaeda in the mountainous border region of Pakistan and Afghanistan. More recently, it has become concerned about the growing

threat deeper inside Pakistan's borders.

On Wednesday, more than 20 Pakistani paramilitary soldiers were killed when Taliban militants attacked a remote fort in the south Waziristan region along the Afghan border. Yesterday, the Pakistani military retaliated when it killed at least 90 militants in two separate encounters.

Adm Fallon on Wednesday said the Pakistani military had begun switching from its traditional focus on the threat from neighbouring India to a counter-insurgency campaign internally.

"My sense is there's an increased willingness to address these problems, and we're going to try to help them," Adm Fallon told Agence France Presse.

The clashes on Wednesday and yesterday took place in a region ruled by Baitullah Mehsud, a Taliban militant linked to al-Qaeda. General Michael Hayden, director of the Central Intelligence Agency, this week told the Washington Post that he agreed with the Pakistani assessment that Mr Mehsud was responsible for last month's assassination of former prime minister Benazir Bhutto.

Gen James Cartwright, vice-chairman of the joint chiefs, this week said the US was evaluating whether the Pakistanis were able to handle the growing threat from militants inside Pakistan.

"Is it a threat that the Paks are ready to handle? Do they need training help? Do they need other types of help? That's what we're trying to assess right now," said Gen Cartwright.

Senior western defence experts in Islamabad believe that the Pakistani military, supported by the Bush administration in the war on terror, needs training and equipment to strengthen its capacity to fight insurgencies. "This is an army whose focus has traditionally been to fight

territorial battles, primarily against the Indians," said one expert.

Shaukat Qadir, a Pakistani defence commentator, said that while the Pakistani forces knew the local terrain better than American forces, "the psychological dimension will be very important, the idea that there are US trainers on the ground helping Pakistani forces".

New York Times
January 19, 2008

Pg. 8

16. C.I.A. Says Militant Was Behind Bhutto's Death

By Mark Mazzetti

WASHINGTON — The Central Intelligence Agency has concluded that the assassins of Benazir Bhutto, the former Pakistani prime minister, were directed by Baitullah Mehsud, a Pakistani militant leader in hiding, and that some of them had ties to Al Qaeda.

The C.I.A.'s judgment is the first formal assessment by the American government about who was responsible for Ms. Bhutto's Dec. 27 assassination, which took place during a political rally in the garrison city of Rawalpindi.

"There are powerful reasons to believe that terror networks around Baitullah Mehsud were responsible," said one American intelligence official, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak publicly on the matter.

The official said that "different pieces of information" had pointed toward Mr. Mehsud's responsibility, but he would not provide any details.

Gen. Michael V. Hayden, the C.I.A. director, discussed the agency's conclusion in an interview with The Washington Post published Friday.

Some friends and supporters of Ms. Bhutto

questioned the C.I.A. conclusions, especially since the former leader was buried before a full forensic investigation had been conducted. The British government has since sent a team from Scotland Yard to participate in the investigation into the assassination.

“The C.I.A. appears too eager to bail out its liaison services in Pakistan, who are being blamed by most Pakistanis,” said Husain Haqqani, a former adviser to Ms. Bhutto and a professor at Boston University.

“Given the division inside Pakistan on this issue, it might be better to have an international investigation under the aegis of the U.N.,” Mr. Haqqani said.

Within days of Ms. Bhutto’s assassination, Pakistani authorities announced they had intercepted communications between Mr. Mehsud and militant supporters in which they said the leader had congratulated his followers for the assassination and appeared to take responsibility for it.

Mr. Mehsud, through a spokesman, has denied responsibility for the killing and suggested that the assassins were directed by Pervez Musharraf, Pakistan’s president and a longtime rival of Ms. Bhutto’s.

Members of Ms. Bhutto’s political party, along with some of her family members, have also challenged Pakistani government accounts of the attack. They have blamed Mr. Musharraf for failing to provide Ms. Bhutto with adequate protection as she campaigned around the country, and some have hinted that elements of Pakistan’s government may have been behind the assassination.

American and Pakistani officials have blamed Mr. Mehsud’s followers for many recent suicide attacks against government, military and intelligence targets in Pakistan. Based in the South Waziristan

tribal areas along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, Mr. Mehsud runs training camps and dispatches suicide bombers beyond the border areas in both countries, the officials say. He is also believed to have links to the Arab and Central Asian militants who have established a stronghold in the tribal areas.

Government officials in Pakistan and independent security analysts say they believe that the Qaeda network in Pakistan is increasingly made up of homegrown militants who have made destabilizing the government a top priority.

American intelligence officials say they believe that Al Qaeda has steadily built a safe haven in the mountainous tribal areas of western Pakistan, constructing a band of makeshift compounds where both Pakistani militants and foreign fighters conduct training and planning for terrorist attacks.

This has led to mounting frustration among intelligence and counterterrorism officials, many of whom believe that the United States should take more aggressive unilateral steps to dismantle terrorist networks in the tribal areas. The Bush administration is currently considering proposals to step up covert actions in Pakistan against the Qaeda network.

Washington Times
January 19, 2008

Pakistan

17. Government Forces Kill 90 Militants

ISLAMABAD — Pakistani forces killed up to 90 militants in two battles yesterday in the South Waziristan region on the Afghan border, the military said.

The clashes came two days after hundreds of militants overran a paramilitary fort in another part of South Waziristan, dealing the military a setback in its efforts to defeat the al Qaeda-linked militants.

Government forces attacked a large number of militants who had gathered yesterday to attack another fort in the region, at Ladha, killing 50 to 60 of them. In the second incident, militants ambushed a convoy and 20 to 30 of them were killed when security forces fought back.

Pacific Stars and Stripes
January 20, 2008

18. Bell: Extend South Korea Tours

USFK commander calls single, 1-year assignments a Cold War relic

By Ashley Rowland, Stars and Stripes

DAEGU, South Korea — U.S. Forces Korea commander Gen. B.B. Bell said Thursday that a policy requiring most U.S. troops in South Korea to serve one-year tours without their families is an “outdated relic of the Cold War” that should have been changed years ago.

Instead, troops should serve in South Korea for three years with their families, he said.

“This is not a combat zone over here. This is a modern, first-world country,” Bell said at the end of a daylong visit to Camp Walker and Camp Henry. “It is unacceptable in the U.S. military today to have this kind of policy in place and in any way condone it.”

Approximately 27,600 U.S. servicemembers are stationed in South Korea. The U.S. military is reducing the number of troops stationed on the peninsula, but USFK previously allowed roughly 2,900 of 28,000 servicemembers to bring their families to South Korea. USFK is doubling the number of accompanied billets, while aiming toward an end strength of about 25,000 troops.

Bell said he has formally recommended that the Department of Defense extend tour lengths in South Korea, but he has gotten mixed reactions from the DOD and

members of Congress, with some saying it’s time to extend tour lengths and some saying the idea is “dumb.”

Bell said the U.S. Secretary of Defense and the South Korean government would have to approve the extended tour lengths.

Bell said he has spoken with “senior future members” of the South Korean government about changing the policy, but declined to say if South Korean president-elect Lee Myung-bak was among them. Bell met with Lee in a closed-door meeting Tuesday at Yongsan Garrison.

During his visit to Daegu, Bell met with representatives from Better Opportunities for Single and Unaccompanied Soldiers, ate lunch with military spouses, and recognized soldiers who helped clean up the recent oil spill off South Korea’s west coast. He also toured a child development center, a home day-care and the Army Community Services center, and spoke with about 15 high school students at Daegu American School.

The students told him they had difficulty being recruited by colleges for sports teams, and that they needed funding for sports, drama and JROTC events. A member of the wrestling team told Bell they needed a new mat to replace the used one given to them by the now-closed U.S. military school at Busan.

“The answer’s yes. We will get you a new wrestling mat,” Bell said and told students he would see what he could do about the other requests.

Bell said he’s seen facilities and services improve at the Daegu installations during his tenure as commander because the U.S. Army is putting more money into family services. He said that staffing at the ACS used to be “horrific,” with about half the number of workers it needed because the Army had terminated a contract that paid

for the workers.

New York Times
January 19, 2008

19. U.S. Sees Stalling By North Korea On Nuclear Pact

By Helene Cooper

WASHINGTON — A debate is under way within the Bush administration over how long it can exercise patience with North Korea without jeopardizing the fulfillment of a nuclear agreement that President Bush has claimed as a foreign policy victory.

With North Korea sending signals that it may be trying to wait out Mr. Bush's time in office before making any more concessions, administration officials are grappling with how the United States should react.

The debate has fractured along familiar lines, with a handful of national security hawks in Vice President Dick Cheney's office and at the State Department arguing for a more confrontational approach with Pyongyang.

On the other side, Mr. Bush's lead North Korea nuclear negotiator, Christopher R. Hill, has argued that the United States should continue a more restrained approach, one that is widely credited with bringing about an agreement last year that is intended eventually to lead to the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula.

While the restrained stance still appears to have support from Mr. Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, it is coming under fire from conservative critics, both in and out of the administration.

In a public departure from administration policy, Jay Lefkowitz, a conservative lawyer who is Mr. Bush's envoy on North Korean human rights, said this week the North would likely "remain in its present nuclear status" when the next president took over in January 2009.

"North Korea is not serious about disarming in a timely manner," Mr. Lefkowitz told an audience at the American Enterprise Institute, a conservative think tank. "We should consider a new approach to North Korea."

At issue is a declaration that North Korea was supposed to make by the end of last year formally stating everything in its nuclear inventory. When the North missed that deadline, administration officials initially sought to minimize the significance of the lapse, but they have expressed increasing concern in the wake of a North Korean statement on Jan. 4, in which the North insisted that it had already disclosed everything that it needed to.

The North has cited a list of nuclear programs that it provided in November, but the United States has rejected the list as incomplete.

"Some people make the argument that we're just pursuing a policy of talks that go nowhere," said one administration official with knowledge of the debate within the administration.

John R. Bolton, the former United States ambassador to the United Nations, argued in a Wall Street Journal op-ed article last week that the Bush administration should dump the nuclear pact with North Korea because, he said, Pyongyang was not interested in giving up its nuclear program. "They're in the classic North Korean role of deception," Mr. Bolton said in an interview. "It's like groundhog day; we've lived through this before."

Mr. Bush said the two countries needed to resolve three sticking points: the number of warheads that North Korea has built; the amount of weapons-grade nuclear material produced by North Korea; and the need for North Korea to disclose that it has passed nuclear material to others.

The proliferation issue has taken on new importance after

an Israeli strike in Syria in September, which American and Israeli officials said was conducted against a nuclear facility near the Euphrates River that was supplied with material from North Korea. Administration officials want North Korea to disclose what help it may have given Syria, although they also say that the help came before the North agreed to dismantle its nuclear reactor and disclose its nuclear programs.

Mr. Bolton and other critics of the agreement, including the officials in Mr. Cheney's office, never liked the pact to begin with, and advocates of the deal with North Korea say their second-guessing is expected.

They argue that the Bush administration's previous confrontational strategy with North Korea is part of what led to the North's detonation of a nuclear device in October 2006.

Besides the United States and North Korea, the other parties to the nuclear pact include China, South Korea, Japan and Russia.

"People lambaste the six-party process, and sure, it offers no refuge for those in need of instant gratification," Mr. Hill, the negotiator, said in an interview. "But when asked for alternatives" to the nuclear pact, Mr. Hill said, "even the noisiest critics fall silent."

Administration officials say that the North has remained true to one part of the October agreement: It has made great strides in disabling and dismantling its nuclear reactor at Yongbyon. "Bush can say, with credit, that he has achieved more than any other administration as far as dismantlement," said Gary Samore, a vice president at the Council on Foreign Relations who helped negotiate the Clinton administration's 1994 agreement with North Korea. "He can say that he managed to freeze further production, and handed the next administration a diplomatic process."

But Bush administration officials say that they want more than just dismantlement on their record, and insist that they have not written off their chances of getting North Korea to make a complete declaration of its nuclear programs before the end of the administration.

Bush officials say they will not ultimately be able to verify that North Korea has got rid of its nuclear weapons program unless they first know what is in the program.

"The issue of the declaration is important because that which they declare must later be abandoned," a senior administration official said.

The official, who asked that his name not be used because he was not authorized to speak publicly on the issue, said that the administration really wanted North Korea to provide an explanation for purchasing aluminum tubes that could be used to convert uranium gas into nuclear fuel.

In its Jan. 4 statement, North Korea accused the United States and the other countries in the six-party talks of renegeing on promises made under an October deal, including the shipment of one million tons of fuel and the removal of North Korea from the United States' list of states that sponsored terrorism.

So far, North Korea has received about 150,000 tons of fuel, and Bush administration officials say the removal of the North from the terrorism list will depend on whether it meets the requirements of the October deal.

North Korea agreed in October to dismantle its nuclear facilities and to disclose all of its past and present nuclear programs by the end of 2007 in return for 950,000 metric tons of fuel oil or its equivalent in economic aid. Last month, Mr. Bush reached out directly for the first time to the North Korean leader, Kim Jong-il, holding out the prospect of normalized relations with the United States

if North Korea fully disclosed all nuclear programs and got rid of its nuclear weapons.

Washington Times
January 19, 2008

20. U.S. Shuns Envoy's View Of Pyongyang's Actions

By Elizabeth Eldridge,
Washington Times

The Bush administration yesterday rejected in-house criticism from its own special envoy on North Korea who suggested that Pyongyang is not serious about giving up its nuclear arsenal.

The remarks Thursday by Jay Lefkowitz, State Department special envoy for human rights issues with North Korea, came amid delicate regional talks to end the nuclear crisis on the Korean Peninsula. North Korea, he said, "is not serious about disarming in a timely manner."

State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said Mr. Lefkowitz's comments "certainly don't represent the views of the administration."

"We believe that the six-party talks provide a forum, a mechanism and an opportunity to realize the goal of denuclearized Korean Peninsula," Mr. McCormack said.

Asked whether Mr. Lefkowitz's remarks would complicate the negotiating process, Mr. McCormack responded, "It shouldn't if North Korea truly intends to follow through on all of its commitments."

Mr. Lefkowitz, in remarks to the Washington-based American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research (AEI), predicted that "North Korea will remain in its present nuclear status when the [Bush administration] leaves office in one year."

In the "six-party talks" involving the United States, the two Koreas, Russia, Japan and host China, Pyongyang has pledged to end its suspect

nuclear programs in exchange for economic, security and other concessions.

Conservative critics are openly skeptical of the North's promises, and Pyongyang has already missed the deadline to supply a full accounting of its nuclear program.

Mr. McCormack characterized Mr. Lefkowitz as "a very bright, dedicated public servant who has taken on this responsibility on behalf of the secretary of state. He is not, however, somebody who speaks authoritatively about the six-party talks."

In his AEI address, Mr. Lefkowitz criticized U.S. reliance on China and South Korea in the talks, stating that the U.S. administration may have made the "misguided assumption" that "both countries shared our strong desire that North Korea not be permitted to possess a nuclear program and arsenal." The envoy said the primary concern for China and South Korea in the talks was regional stability.

Asked at the forum whether he was speaking for the U.S. government in his remarks, Mr. Lefkowitz replied that U.S. policies "are under review right now."

But White House spokesman Tony Fratto said the United States and its regional allies shared "a great deal of unanimity in dealing with North Korea."

Mr. Fratto said it was "unfortunate" that Pyongyang had missed the Dec. 31 deadline to produce a detailed accounting of its nuclear programs. But he insisted, "We do believe that the five parties of the six-party talks — who are encouraging North Korea to relinquish their nuclear program — stand together and are unified in that effort."

Los Angeles Times
January 19, 2008

21. Bush Fails To Persuade Arab Allies

During his Mideast tour, the president did not shift regional

opinion on his key issues, analysts say.

By Borzou Daragahi, Los Angeles Times Staff Writer

BEIRUT — Even as smiling members of the Saudi royal family feted President Bush and his entourage this week, presenting the lame-duck leader with an ornamental sword, Saudi Arabia's most prominent English-language daily stabbed him with a pen over his aggressive Iran policy.

"Whatever threat Iran may constitute, now or in the future, must be addressed peaceably and through negotiations," said an unsigned editorial in Tuesday's Arab News.

"In his confrontational remarks about Iran, [Bush] offers no carrot, no inducement, no compromise -- only the big U.S. stick," it said. "This is not diplomacy in search of peace. It is madness in search of war."

Bush and an entourage that included Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, White House advisor Elliot Abrams and Chief of Staff Josh Bolten toured the Middle East in recent days to hasten long-dormant Israeli-Palestinian peace talks, reinvigorate the administration's agenda to spread democracy, and forge an alliance of friendly states against Iran's regional aspirations and nuclear program.

But though Bush may have persuaded a Persian Gulf bank to curtail business dealings with Tehran, analysts say they're skeptical that the president managed to shift the momentum in the Middle East.

"All the politicians give [Bush] a very beautiful smile and give him a medal," said Turki Rasheed, a businessman in Riyadh, the Saudi capital, who runs a nonprofit civic organization called Saudi Election. "But following Bush is a kiss of death. Anyone who goes with that kind of philosophy is out of the race."

Bush's visit coincided with

fresh Israeli attacks in the Gaza Strip and Palestinian rocket strikes on southern Israel. Images of bloodied and crying Palestinian children being rushed to hospitals flickered across Arab news channels.

As Bush arrived in the Persian Gulf region, Al Jazeera, the Qatar-based pan-Arab television station, aired a live hourlong interview with Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki, who railed against the United States. A couple of days later, the Kuwaiti foreign minister arrived in Tehran.

"My country knows who is our friend and who is our enemy," Sheik Mohammed Sabah Salem Sabah told reporters Wednesday. "Iran is our friend."

Analysts say Bush got a mixed response from Arab leaders on his three top issues: He received encouragement in promoting Arab-Israeli peace, he was ignored on the expansion of democratic rights, and he was firmly rebuffed on confronting Iran.

"Bush has essentially one way of solving problems, which is head-on confrontation," Marina Ottaway, director of the Middle East program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, said in a telephone interview from Bahrain. "The message that he got from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates is, essentially, that's not the way we're going to deal with the Iran problem."

Though Bush administration officials downplayed Saudi Arabia's invitation to Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to attend the recent *hajj* pilgrimage in Mecca, the kingdom, under the independent-minded rule of King Abdullah, has been pursuing diplomatic initiatives in cooperation with Iran for nearly a year.

"They have a very strong feeling that they are neighbors with Iran, and as such they

have to build somewhat positive relationships," said Michel Makinsky, a Middle East expert at the Poitiers School of Business Management in France.

Bahrain's Ahli United Bank, which has strong ties to Tehran, has told the Reuters news agency that it has suspended business with Iran as a result of the Bush visit. For months, there have been indications that more gulf banks and businesses with interests in the U.S. might also curtail ties to Iran, which relies on the region's banking system to finance exports and imports.

Overshadowing Bush's trip to the Middle East was the legacy of Iraq, the one regional hot spot the president didn't visit or forcefully address during his eight-day trip. Though Iraq has receded as a leading issue in the American presidential campaign, it remains a sore point in the Mideast.

Arab leaders worry that they'll be left to address unforeseen consequences of any other Bush administration initiative, whether in the Palestinian territories or Iran, analysts said. As a consequence, they're hedging bets, seeking out additional Western powers for support. During Bush's visit, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar also invited French President Nicolas Sarkozy.

"They're sending signals that they're diversifying their support," Ottaway said. "There's a real concern. It's not just playing games. There's a real concern as to whether the U.S. can provide a security umbrella."

Washington Times
January 19, 2008

Iran **22. Russia Supplies** **More Nuke Fuel**

TEHRAN — Iran has received a third shipment of nuclear fuel from Russia for use at its Bushehr nuclear

power station, the state-run Islamic Republic News Agency said yesterday.

Russia delivered the first batch of about 80 tons of uranium fuel rods to Iran on Dec. 17 as part of international efforts to persuade Tehran to halt its uranium enrichment program. The second shipment took place on Dec. 28.

Iran says it will continue enriching uranium despite Moscow's nuclear fuel supplies for the \$1 billion Bushehr plant, which is being built by Russia. Russian nuclear fuel deliveries to the plant are to continue into next month.

Washington Post
January 19, 2008
Pg. 18

23. New Team In Poland **Cool To U.S. Shield**

Premier Conditions Support on More Aid

By Craig Whitlock,
Washington Post Foreign
Service

WARSAW -- Poland's new government is threatening to put the brakes on the Pentagon's drive to build a missile defense shield in Eastern Europe, insisting that the project cannot go forward unless the country receives a big increase in U.S. military aid and other commitments.

Responding to surveys showing a large majority of Poles opposed to the defense plan, Prime Minister Donald Tusk said this month that his country is now in "no hurry" to sign a pact that would anchor a critical part of the U.S. missile shield on Polish soil. Poland's previous government had stood firmly behind the project but was ousted by voters in October.

Poland's reluctance is the latest headache for the Pentagon in its effort to construct a global defense shield, which it says is needed to protect against a missile attack from Iran or other "rogue states."

Russia has blasted the proposal, arguing that it could

threaten that country in the long run by giving the U.S. military a beachhead in Eastern Europe. Public misgivings also remain strong in the Czech Republic, where the United States wants to base a key radar installation, although officials in Prague have shown a greater willingness to come to terms.

This week, Polish Defense Minister Bogdan Klich met with top officials at the Pentagon and the State Department to inform them that Poland expects a commitment from Washington to help rebuild its air defense systems and provide other military assistance before it will agree to join the shield project. The Pentagon wants to place 10 missile interceptors in Poland that could shoot down a missile launched by Iran before it reaches Europe or the United States.

In an interview with reporters and editors at The Washington Post on Wednesday, Klich said that he had had "promising talks" with U.S. officials but that overall the negotiations remained "tough."

He said that Poland would be exposing itself to risks if it agreed to host part of the shield -- Russia has threatened to aim missiles at Poland in retaliation -- and that it wants more American help in exchange. In particular, Poland wants Patriot missiles to bolster its aging air defenses as well as help modernizing its 140,000-member military.

"We would be glad to see another American proposal on how to balance these benefits and costs," Klich said. "The Polish government at this time hasn't seen the right, correct balance."

Poland's objections have prompted a flurry of diplomatic activity on both sides of the Atlantic. On Wednesday, Assistant Secretary of State Daniel Fried met in Warsaw with Poland's foreign minister, Radoslaw Sikorski, and offered some soothing words. The two

men also announced that Sikorski will visit Washington on Feb. 1 for further talks. Tusk, the prime minister, is expected to follow shortly afterward.

"We take Poland's considerations very much into account," Fried said. "Poland has made a sound case that the risk will increase, and we have to address this."

In a brief interview after his meeting with Fried, Sikorski reiterated Poland's stance that it was not in a rush to reach an agreement. "I'm glad there seems to be a greater sensitivity to our security needs," he said. "But it's a long-term project."

Poland also appears less willing to accept the Pentagon's primary rationale for the shield: that it will protect Europe, as well as the United States, from a potential Iranian attack.

After meeting with Czech officials in Prague on Wednesday, Air Force Lt. Gen. Henry A. Obering III, who oversees the shield program for the Pentagon, said Iran was rapidly developing long-range missiles that could reach Europe. "Currently, there's no protection in Europe against the intermediate-range or long-range weapons," he said.

But Polish officials said they don't consider Iran a risk to attack them. They also questioned the urgency of the project even from the Pentagon's perspective, citing a recent U.S. intelligence report's conclusion that Iran gave up its nuclear arms program in 2003. "We all agree that the threat from Iran is not imminent," Sikorski said.

Polish officials and analysts said part of the problem is that they feel taken for granted by the Bush administration. Warsaw is one of the United States' strongest European allies and has contributed thousands of troops to the U.S.-led military coalitions in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Poland's new government

decided last month to withdraw its remaining 900 soldiers in Iraq by this October. But it has pledged to send 400 more troops to Afghanistan, boosting its forces there to 1,600.

Many Polish firms had assumed they would be on an inside track for reconstruction contracts in Iraq, but that largely failed to happen. And lawmakers had hoped the United States would reciprocate in other ways, such as letting Poles visit the United States without visas -- a privilege given to citizens of Western European countries.

"People expected here that there would be some gains and that we'd receive something tangible in exchange," said Slawomir Debski, director of the Polish Institute of International Affairs. He said Polish leaders will not be able to win parliamentary approval for the missile shield unless Washington sweetens the deal.

"That is the difference with our new government," Debski said. "They are ready to say no if there is no fair deal."

Another factor hindering talks is the U.S. presidential election. Some Poles said they are reluctant for the country to commit to the missile shield if there is a chance that the next administration in Washington will mothball the whole project. Officials here said they are seeking a separate treaty that would formalize greater military cooperation between the two countries, regardless of who occupies the White House next year.

But the biggest sticking point appears to be Poland's demand for U.S. aid to overhaul its own air defenses. Poland relies on Soviet-era hardware that officials say will become obsolete in several years, a major worry in a country that sees a resurgent Russia as its primary threat.

"Several years from now, we'll be left with no air defense," said Janusz Zemke, chairman of the national defense committee in the Polish Parliament. "This is not

an invented problem. Without American assistance, we won't be able to deal with it."

Zemke said Pentagon officials have for years resisted Polish requests for help. "They say openly, 'If we start helping you, then we'll have to start helping the Hungarians and the Czechs and others,'" he said.

Geoff Morrell, a Pentagon spokesman, told reporters that the Bush administration was hopeful that it could smooth things over with Poland. He also said Poland was already "the biggest beneficiary within Europe of defense aid" from the administration.

But his comment irritated lawmakers in Warsaw, who said the Pentagon was including expenses it covers for Polish troops to fight in Iraq. Officials said Poland currently receives about \$28 million a year in U.S. military aid for projects at home.

Staff writers Ann Scott Tyson and Josh White in Washington contributed to this report.

Washington Times
January 19, 2008

24. Prague Wants Missile Role

PRAGUE (AP) — The Czech Republic says it wants access to U.S. military research and a role in developing missile-defense technology as part of any deal allowing Washington to deploy a missile-defense system in the country.

In Warsaw, a senior U.S. diplomat sought to address concerns of Poland over the plan.

"One of our requirements is to be able to take part in development and research," Czech Prime Minister Mirek Topolánek said in Prague. "We want to be among those countries that will be able to benefit from the results of the U.S. military industry and some of its technologies."

Mr. Topolánek met this week with Lt. Gen. Henry Obering, director of the

Pentagon's Missile Defense Agency, to discuss the proposed shield.

Gen. Obering said the United States intends to sign a contract with a consortium of Czech universities, the Academy of Sciences and other institutes, to study Czech industrial, research and technical capabilities in areas related to missile-defense technologies and industrial cooperation.

Washington wants to place 10 missile-defense interceptors in Poland and a radar system in the neighboring Czech Republic as part of a system it says is necessary to protect against attacks from Iran.

An increasingly assertive Russia, however, is incensed by the prospect of U.S. installations in a region that it controlled during the Cold War, and has threatened to attack the bases — causing deep anxiety in Poland.

Daniel Fried, the U.S. assistant secretary of state for European and Eurasian affairs, reassured Poland on Thursday that Washington is taking steps to cooperate more with Russia and NATO on the plans.

"In the course of our discussions over the past many months, Poland has made some suggestions that we take seriously," Mr. Fried told reporters in Warsaw. "Poles have urged us to seek to work with Russia cooperatively on missile defense, and we have done so."

"Of course, Poland has never urged us to give Russia a veto over this program, but it is reasonable for Poland — as well as other European countries — to encourage us to seek to work with Russia," Mr. Fried said after two days of meetings with Polish leaders.

Mr. Fried added that Poland has encouraged Washington to "increase NATO's role in the mission, and that "we have done so."

Amid concerns over Russia, Poland has asked the United States to strengthen Poland's short-range and

midrange air defenses — in the form of Patriot or THAAD missiles — as part of any deal.

"We did not interpret Polish suggestions as suggestions that Poland be paid off for missile defense but rather as serious suggestions from a serious ally to deepen military cooperation," Mr. Fried said.

There is some concern in both Central European countries about a strain in ties with Russia if they agree to the U.S. plan — only to see the next U.S. government scrap it after taking office next year.

Mr. Fried sought to reassure European leaders. "There is more bipartisanship on this issue than is commonly admitted publicly in Washington," he said. "I do not think it likely that the next administration would undo what is done here."

Philadelphia Inquirer
January 19, 2008

25. British Military Laptop Is Stolen

LONDON - Britain's Defense Ministry said a laptop containing personal details of 600,000 new or prospective military recruits was stolen last week from a Royal Navy officer in Birmingham. The ministry said it was urgently writing to 3,500 people whose bank details were included.

It is the latest in a series of government blunders over data. In December, Britain's top transport official said a disk drive with personal information on three million driving test candidates had been lost in the United States.

Last fall, two computer disks from a tax and welfare department containing names, addresses, national insurance numbers and, in some cases, banking details, for 25 million people disappeared in the mail.

--AP

Boston Globe
January 19, 2008
Bulgaria

26. Putin Wins Backing For Gas Pipeline

SOFIA - Russian President Vladimir Putin yesterday won Bulgaria's support for a gas pipeline that would boost Moscow's control over supplies to the West. Putin made the deal during a trip to the Bulgarian capital with the help of his presumed successor, Dmitry Medvedev, who chairs the Russian gas monopoly that is extending its grip across Europe. The 550-mile pipeline would undercut a prospective US-backed line designed to ease Europe's reliance on Russia.

--AP

Houston Chronicle
January 19, 2008

27. Navy Helicopter Has Checkered Safety Record

By Christopher Sherman,
Associated Press

McALLEN, Texas — The type of Navy helicopter that crashed near Corpus Christi Wednesday, killing three crew members and injuring one, has a checkered safety history that makes it the Navy's most accident-prone helicopter.

Investigations to determine what caused the MH-53E Sea Dragon from Naval Air Station Corpus Christi to crash in a muddy field could take months, but a check of the helicopter's accident history, referred to by the Naval Safety Center as "mishaps," shows the work-horse helicopter has accidents more than twice as often as the Navy's other helicopters.

Since the Navy began flying Sea Dragons in 1984, 27 people, including Wednesday's victims, have died in crashes, according to the Naval Safety Center. Its rate of serious mishaps — more than \$1 million in damage or a fatality per 100,000 flight hours — is 5.96. The average for Navy helicopters since 1980 is 2.26.

The Navy's Sea Dragons and the similar Super Stallion

flown by the Marines were grounded after fatal crashes in 1996 and 2000 that pointed to a faulty swashplate duplex bearing assembly in the main rotor. The 1996 Super Stallion crash that killed four members of a test flight crew at the helicopter's manufacturer Sikorsky Aircraft was also attributed to the part.

Three months after an Aug. 10, 2000, crash of a Sea Dragon in the Gulf of Mexico off Corpus Christi that killed four crew members, the helicopters were put back into service with improved swashplate duplex bearings and new bearing warning systems. The warning system immediately alerts the crew that the bearing was deteriorating and that the rotors could seize up.

A Navy spokesman, Lt. Cmdr. David Nunnally, said by e-mail that after the manufacturer corrected the bearing design problem and installed the warning system, "The aircraft were then returned to flight and there have been no further issues."

In 2001, the subcontractor that made the bearing assembly for Sikorsky, Kaydon Corp., pleaded guilty to charges stemming from the 1996 crash and agreed to pay \$7.5 million in criminal fines and civil damages. An investigation of that crash had concluded that the bearing assembly on the main rotor seized, causing a catastrophic failure.

Kaydon denied responsibility in the crash but admitted that employees faked tests on the same type of part blamed in the crash but not the actual one in the destroyed helicopter.

The Sea Dragon is the Navy's largest helicopter and is used as a mine sweeper. The Marines' version is used to transport troops and equipment.

The Navy's most deadly Sea Dragon crash occurred July 18, 1988 when eight service members were killed when their helicopter crashed

into the Pacific Ocean off San Francisco.

Wednesday's crash occurred a few miles south of Corpus Christi in sparsely populated farmland. The wrecked helicopter lay at the base of a 1,000-foot television transmission tower, whose owner said it had been struck by the helicopter. The area had been surrounded by dense fog the night of the crash.

The Navy identified the dead crewmen late Friday as Lt. Joshua Gross, 30, from Alameda, Calif., and Aviation Warfare Systems Operators Second Class Alexander LeMarr, 25, of Parker, Colo. and David Davison, 22, of Guthrie, Okla.

On Friday, the condition of the injured crewmember was upgraded from critical to fair, said hospital spokeswoman Sherry Carr-Deer.

Wall Street Journal
January 19, 2008

Pg. 4

28. Burns's Exit Complicates Nuclear Negotiations

By Jay Solomon

WASHINGTON -- The surprise resignation of the Bush administration's point man on Iran and India, Undersecretary of State Nicholas Burns, injects more uncertainty into U.S. efforts to contain the spread of nuclear technologies.

In the coming weeks, Washington aims to cinch key objectives concerning both countries: a new round of United Nations sanctions against Tehran and a nuclear-cooperation pact with New Delhi. But those policy initiatives, particularly in the case of Iran, haven't generated international consensus, and U.S. and European diplomats say both initiatives, which were spearheaded by Mr. Burns, the undersecretary for political affairs, might ultimately falter.

President Bush named

William Burns, U.S. ambassador to Moscow, to succeed Nicholas Burns beginning in April. (The two men aren't related.)

Nicholas Burns, who plans to leave the department at the end of March, is a career diplomat. Since Ms. Rice took the reins of the State Department in early 2005, Mr. Burns, 51 years old, has become one of her most trusted advisers.

In recent months, there have been increasing signs that Washington's strategies toward Iran and India aren't working. Mr. Burns has been particularly focused in recent weeks on pushing the U.N. Security Council to pass a third round of economic sanctions against Tehran aimed at forcing it to suspend its nuclear-development work. But many European and U.S. diplomats said it is increasingly unlikely that sanctions will be approved with any real bite -- especially since a recent U.S. intelligence report found that Tehran had scrapped its nuclear-weapons program in 2003.

The India issue has also tested Mr. Burns in recent months. Washington and New Delhi have agreed to allow the U.S. to share nuclear fuel and technologies with India in return for greater oversight of India's nuclear programs by the International Atomic Energy Agency and other international bodies. But communist and socialist parties, wary of a close alignment with Washington, are threatening to topple Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's government if he ratifies the agreement.

New Delhi is negotiating a new safeguards agreement with the IAEA, which, once passed, could allow Mr. Singh to formally sign the nuclear pact in the next two to three months. But U.S. officials said they remain uncertain as to whether Mr. Singh will challenge his government's political partners.

New York Times
January 19, 2008

29. Former Secretary On Waterboarding

By Associated Press

WASHINGTON--The first secretary of homeland security says waterboarding is torture. "There's just no doubt in my mind — under any set of rules, waterboarding is torture," the former secretary, Tom Ridge, said in an interview. Mr. Ridge offered the same opinion earlier in the day to members of the American Bar Association at a conference on national security. Mr. Ridge served as secretary from 2003 to 2005. He said: "I believe, unlike others in the administration, that waterboarding was, is and will always be torture. That's a simple statement." The Central Intelligence Agency has not used waterboarding as an interrogation technique since 2003, and the director of the agency, Michael V. Hayden, prohibited it in 2006, officials said.

New York Times
January 19, 2008

Pg. 4

The Saturday Profile 30. From Texas To Iraq, And Center Of Blackwater Case

By Ginger Thompson

DICKENS, Tex.--PAUL SLOUGH may have worked as a cowboy growing up in this tiny town in northwest Texas, but soldiers who served with him were stunned to hear he had been accused of acting like one as a Blackwater security guard in Iraq.

"I went on 20 to 30 missions with Paul. You could always depend on him," said Jeremiah Thompson, recalling his tour of duty with Mr. Slough in Iraq for the Texas National Guard. "He was always careful. He was always professional. I never knew him to break the rules of

engagement."

Today, Mr. Slough, 28, is at the center of a federal investigation into the Sept. 16 shooting deaths of 17 Iraqis in Baghdad by a convoy of Blackwater security guards. Authorities have refused to talk about the inquiry, except to say it has focused on one guard, identified only as "turret gunner No. 3."

Through a review of case documents and interviews in Texas and Washington, The New York Times identified the gunner as Mr. Slough, a former infantry soldier who joined Blackwater Worldwide after his dreams of joining the Army Special Forces were quashed by recurring problems from an old football injury.

His story offers a rare look at the men employed by the impenetrable private security company with the highest rate of shootings in Iraq. Military officials and executives of other contracting companies have long complained that Blackwater hired younger, financially struggling recruits; encouraged a shoot-first culture, and then used the company's deep political connections with the Bush administration to shield its guards from punishment when they killed innocent people.

The Sept. 16 shooting in Nisour Square is considered by the F.B.I., the Pentagon and the Iraqi government to be among the most egregious examples of unprovoked violence by private security contractors. It ignited such outrage that the Iraqi government threatened to ban Blackwater from the country.

The Bush administration changed the way it manages private security contractors. Congress is considering legislation aimed at closing loopholes that allow contractors to escape prosecution for abuses, though Justice Department officials have told legislators their actions would probably be too late to affect this case.

Blackwater has defended

the actions of its guards, saying they had come under attack and the shooting was justified, and it often points out that no one under its protection has ever been killed.

WITH his name withheld from public records about the shootings, Mr. Slough (pronounced like now) has not drawn much attention. Described as tall and lean with a carrot-colored beard, he lives with his wife in a well-to-do housing development near Fort Worth.

An uncle, Dewey Slough of Amarillo, said that the last time he talked to his nephew he was working at The Home Depot and looking to find something better. "I told him I had a friend with a construction business and would put in a good word," the uncle said. "He told me he had found something and was going back to Iraq."

Less than a month after the shooting, friends said, they saw Paul Slough and his wife at a tailgate party outside a Texas Tech football game in Lubbock. The group included Mr. Thompson, the former Texas National Guard member. He said Mr. Slough looked like the stereotype of a Blackwater guard: Oakley sunglasses, cargo pants, cropped hair and a chiseled physique.

"I asked him: 'Man, I heard there was some trouble over there. Were you involved?'" Mr. Thompson recalled. "He just nodded, and told me it wasn't like what I had read in the papers."

A Blackwater spokeswoman, Anne Tyrrell, would not comment for this article, saying the company did not want to interfere with a continuing investigation.

Mr. Slough also declined to be interviewed for this article, but his first statement to investigators was posted on the Internet, with just his first name, by ABC News.

In it, Mr. Slough recounted the mayhem in dry military language. He described coming under an elaborate attack that

he said had begun when the driver of a white four-door sedan ignored numerous hand signals and drove directly at the Blackwater motorcade.

"Fearing for my life and the lives of my teammates," Mr. Slough said, "I engaged the driver and stopped the threat."

He said he saw muzzle flashes from a shack 50 meters, or about 160 feet, behind the car; a man in a blue button-down shirt and black pants pointing an AK-47; small arms fire from a red bus that had stopped in an intersection; and a red car backing up toward his convoy.

"Fearing that it was a vbied," he said, using the military acronym for a car bomb, "I engaged in order to stop the threat."

Initial investigations by the Pentagon, the F.B.I. and the Iraqi government found no evidence to support Mr. Slough's account — no car bombs, no signs of enemy fire or insurgents. The F.B.I. concluded that at least 14 of the 17 fatal shootings had been unjustified, saying Blackwater guards had recklessly violated American rules for the use of lethal force. Military investigators went further, saying all the deaths were unjustified and potentially criminal. Iraqi authorities characterized the shootings as "deliberate murder."

Mr. Slough's lawyer, Mark Hulkower, said security contractors in Iraq work in "an extraordinarily challenging environment, where the enemy does not wear uniforms, unless disguised as Iraqi soldiers or police to exploit civilians."

He said contractors "cannot be asked to ignore real threats when making split-second, life-and-death decisions." And he said he was confident federal prosecutors would find that his client and the other Blackwater guards had acted appropriately under established rules of engagement.

"To conclude otherwise,"

he said, "would cause those now defending against terrorist threats to choose between dying in a foreign country and being branded as a criminal in their own."

This flat, arid corner of the country, settled by cattle ranchers, is not different from many small towns that propel young men and women into the military. It is a place where working-class people hold traditional ideas about what it means to be an American, where churches outnumber restaurants and children learn to handle weapons not long after learning to read and write.

Several people here said problems with alcohol made it difficult for Mr. Slough's father, Paul Slough Sr., to hold a steady job. (The father has since died.) They said the younger Mr. Slough grew up quickly, juggling schoolwork and a job roping cattle.

Mike Norrell, Mr. Slough's former teacher at Patton Springs School, recalled Mr. Slough as a boy who craved learning. He said that while other students memorized lessons, Mr. Slough questioned everything he read.

Rita Brandle, who runs a general store, said: "It was as if the child was the father, and the father was the child. We were happy to see him go off and join the Army."

Mr. Slough's military career was relatively brief. Joining in 1999, he served in the Third Infantry Division at Fort Stewart, Ga., conducted at least 100 patrols as part of the NATO peacekeeping force in Bosnia, and reached the rank of sergeant. After an honorable discharge in 2002, he enlisted in the Texas National Guard, and was deployed to Iraq in December 2004 as part of a personal security detail. He ended his yearlong tour with little more than the medals given to every soldier who serves in Iraq.

Still, James Kirksey and Mr. Thompson, who both served with Mr. Slough, said

they looked up to him for his maturity, discipline and intellect. He had a serious bearing and was the kind of soldier, Mr. Kirksey said, who obeyed an order whether he agreed with it or not.

WHEN asked what they knew about Mr. Slough's reasons for joining Blackwater, they cast about and came up with conflicting theories. Mr. Thompson said money was not a motive, though he acknowledged that Mr. Slough was worried about providing a comfortable life for his new bride. And Mr. Kirksey said the reason was not some chase for glory, though he acknowledged that Mr. Slough had once told him he "wanted to become an officer and lead men."

Both were emphatic, however, in saying that Mr. Slough had not become some kind of cowboy, high on adrenaline and quick on the trigger. They said it was true Mr. Slough liked the hardest assignments, which usually meant he served at the rear of their convoys, perched on a Humvee with his finger on the trigger of a .50-caliber machine gun.

"With some guys at the rear, I'd get nervous about an ambush," Mr. Kirksey said. "Some soldiers would panic and freeze up. You'd never have to worry about that with Paul." He added, "But you'd never have to worry about him being jumpy either."

Mr. Thompson and Mr. Kirksey remembered a mission that took them through a city near Nasiriya. As their convoy turned down a street, bullets were fired from an apartment building in the distance.

"Paul told me that shots were buzzing past his head like bees," Mr. Kirksey said. "He was standing at a weapon that was strong enough to cut one of those buildings in half. But he didn't fire a shot."

"After it was over, I asked Paul, 'Why didn't you light into them?'" Mr. Thompson recalled. "He told me because

he didn't have a clear target. He didn't want to hurt innocent bystanders."

Boston Globe
January 19, 2008

31. The Murky Toll Of The Iraq War

By John Tirman

ONCE AGAIN, a controversy has erupted over how many people are being killed in Iraq. It's an important debate, not only for beleaguered Iraqis, but for Americans seeking stability and a timely exit.

Mortality figures alone can tell a compelling story. Add to that other numbers that fill in our understanding even more - such as the scale of the flow of refugees or the women widowed by the war - and we have useful information.

So what are these statistics, and what do they tell us about this nearly five-year-old conflict?

Two kinds of accounts have emerged on the question of mortality. One is a literal count, body by body, from reports in the English language press. Because the media, mostly based in Baghdad, cannot grasp most of the violence, this is an undercount (now about 84,000) even by the reckoning of its authors, the UK-based Iraq Body Count.

The second method is to go out and ask the question in surveys of randomly selected households. This has been done five times under very dangerous conditions. Surveys of this kind during war are relatively new, and, as a result, it's not surprising that the numbers they've produced have varied. But there is significant congruence.

The surveys agree that mortality is much higher than is typically held in political discussions about Iraq. The highest figure, from Opinion Business Research, a private survey firm in London, is 1.2 million through August 2007. It is also the most recent.

About 15 months ago, a

survey commissioned by my center at MIT and published in The Lancet found that 601,000 had died by violence through June 2006. This figure has created a firestorm of criticism, but the methods are sound and none of the many peer reviews found anything greatly amiss. (One recalculation brought the death-by-violence total down to 450,000.)

Then last week, Iraq's Ministry of Health released its large survey, also ending in June 2006, finding that 151,000 had died by violence. But their data tables show an enormous "excess death" total of nearly 400,000 caused by the war, and a peculiarly flat rate of violence throughout the war. Because the interviewers worked for the government, it's likely that many respondents attributed deaths to nonviolent causes, in order to protect themselves from unwanted attention.

What to make of all this? The first conclusion is that hundreds of thousands of people have died as a result of the war - this seems incontrovertible. It is buttressed by the large number of displaced - some 3 million to 3.5 million caused by the war - and a reported total of 500,000 war widows.

The second conclusion, which helps us understand the violence, is that such a human catastrophe accounts for the insurgency in ways that no other explanation does. Whatever one makes of these insurgents, they appear to be fighting to defend their towns and tribes (apart from Al Qaeda's foreign operation). Violence begets violence, especially when foreigners are involved.

The third conclusion is that Iraq's devastation runs deep and wide. A generation of young men is being wiped out. Many of the most educated have left. The poverty of widespread widowhood may become chronic. The healthcare system is in shambles. Neighborhoods and

towns ethnically cleansed means long-lasting displacement for tens of thousands. The humanitarian aid challenge is vast, and will last for many years.

How this affects US strategy is complex, of course, but two things stand out. First is that strategies to reduce violence against civilians and to increase economic and physical security are paramount. US leaders seem to grasp this, but their actions (arming Sunni militias, for example) may prove foolhardy.

Second, Iraq's neighbors must be part of the solution, given the scale of misery. President Bush has never embraced this idea, but it seems more and more obvious as the war drags on. Yet on Bush's recent trip to the region, Iraq was nearly absent from his agenda.

The lessons from the killing fields and refugees and widows won't go away. The sooner we fully realize the scale of this catastrophe, the better we may be able to work on reconstructive remedies.

John Tirman is executive director and a principal research scientist at MIT's Center for International Studies.

Wall Street Journal
January 19, 2008

32. Terrorist Tort Travesty

By John Yoo

War is a continuation of politics by other means, the German strategist Carl von Clausewitz famously observed in his 19th-century treatise, "On War." Clausewitz surely could never have imagined that politics, pursued through our own courts, would be the continuation of war.

Last week, I (a former Bush administration official) was sued by José Padilla -- a 37-year-old al Qaeda operative convicted last summer of setting up a terrorist cell in Miami. Padilla wants a declaration that his detention

by the U.S. government was unconstitutional, \$1 in damages, and all of the fees charged by his own attorneys.

The lawsuit by Padilla and his Yale Law School lawyers is an effort to open another front against U.S. anti-terrorism policies. If he succeeds, it won't be long before opponents of the war on terror use the courtroom to reverse the wartime measures needed to defeat those responsible for killing 3,000 Americans on 9/11.

On Thursday, a federal judge moved closer to sentencing Padilla to life in prison. After being recruited by al Qaeda agents in the late 1990s, Padilla left for Egypt in 1998 and reached terrorist training camps in Afghanistan in 2000. American officials stopped him at Chicago O'Hare airport in 2002, based on intelligence gained from captured al Qaeda leaders that he was plotting a dirty bomb attack.

President Bush declared Padilla an enemy combatant and ordered him sent to a naval brig in South Carolina. After a federal appeals court rejected Padilla's plea for release, the government transferred him to Miami for trial for al Qaeda conspiracies unrelated to the dirty bomb plot. Federal prosecutors described Padilla as "a trained al-Qaeda killer," and a jury convicted him of conspiring to commit murder, kidnapping and maiming, and of providing material support to terrorists.

Now Padilla and his lawyers are trying to use our own courts to attack the government officials who stopped him. They claim that the government cannot detain Padilla as an enemy combatant, but instead can only hold and try him as a criminal. Padilla alleges that he was abused in military custody -- based primarily on his claim that he was held in isolation and not allowed to meet with lawyers.

But enemy prisoners in wartime never before received

the right to counsel or a civilian trial because, as the Supreme Court observed in 2004, the purpose of detention is not to punish, but to prevent the enemy from returning to the fight.

Under Padilla's theory, the U.S. is not at war, so any citizen killed or captured by the CIA or the military can sue. In November 2002, according to press reports, a Predator drone killed two al Qaeda leaders driving in the Yemen desert. One was an American, Kamal Derwish, who was suspected of leading a terrorist cell near Buffalo. If Padilla's lawsuit were to prevail, Derwish's survivors could sue everyone up the chain of command -- from the agent who pressed the button, personally -- for damages.

Padilla's complaints mirror the left's campaign against the war. To them, the 9/11 attacks did not start a war, but instead were simply a catastrophe, like a crime or even a natural disaster. They would limit the U.S. response only to criminal law enforcement managed by courts, not the military. Every terrorist captured away from the Afghanistan battlefield would have the right to counsel, Miranda warnings, and a criminal trial that could force the government to reveal its vital intelligence secrets.

America used this approach in the 1990s with al Qaeda. It did not work. Both the executive and legislative branches rejected this failed strategy. In the first week after 9/11, Congress passed a law authorizing the use of military force against any person, group or nation connected to the attacks, and recognized the President's constitutional authority "to deter and prevent acts of international terrorism against the United States."

In the spring of 2002, I was a Justice Department lawyer asked about the legality of Padilla's detention. There is ample constitutional precedent to support the detention of a suspected al Qaeda agent, even

an American citizen, who plans to carry out terrorist attacks on our soil. During World War II, eight Nazi saboteurs secretly landed in New York to attack factories and plants. Two of them were American citizens.

After their capture, FDR sent them to military detention, where they were tried and most of them executed. In *Ex Parte Quirin*, the Supreme Court upheld the detention and trial by military authorities of American citizens who "associate" with "the military arm of the enemy" and "enter this country bent on hostile acts." If FDR were president today, Padilla might have fared far worse than he has.

None of that matters to the anti-war left. They failed to beat President Bush in the 2004 elections. Their efforts in Congress to repeal the administration's policies have gone nowhere. They lost their court challenges to Padilla's detention. The American public did not buy their argument that the struggle against al Qaeda is not really a war.

So instead they have turned to the tort system to harass those who served their government in wartime. I am not the only target. The war's critics have sued personally Donald Rumsfeld, John Ashcroft, Robert Gates, Paul Wolfowitz and other top government officials for their decisions in the war on terrorism. Other lawsuits have resorted to the courts to attack the telecommunications companies that helped the government intercept suspected terrorist calls.

It is easy to understand why CIA agents, who are working on the front lines to protect the nation from attack, are so concerned about their legal liability that they have taken out insurance against lawsuits.

Worrying about personal liability will distort the thinking of federal officials, who should be focusing on the costs and benefits of their

decisions to the nation as a whole, not to their own pockets. Even in the wake of Watergate, the Supreme Court recognized that government decisions should not be governed by the tort bar.

In a case about warrantless national security wiretaps ordered by Nixon's attorney general, John Mitchell, the court declared that executive branch officials should benefit from qualified immunity. Officials cannot be sued personally unless they had intentionally violated someone's clearly established constitutional rights.

The Padilla case shows that qualified immunity is not enough. Even though Supreme Court precedent clearly permitted Padilla's detention, he and his academic supporters can still file harassing lawsuits that promise high attorneys' fees. The legal system should not be used as a bludgeon against individuals targeted by political activists to impose policy preferences they have failed to implement via the ballot box.

The prospect of having to waste large sums of money on lawyers will deter talented people from entering public service, leading to more mediocrity in our bureaucracies. It will also lead to a risk-averse government that doesn't innovate or think creatively. Government by lawsuit is no way to run, or win, a war.

Mr. Yoo is a professor of law at the University of California at Berkeley and a visiting scholar at the American Enterprise Institute. He is the author of "War By Other Means" (Grove/Atlantic 2006).

Chicago Tribune
January 18, 2008

33. A Towering Cloud Of Uncertainty

Candidates give nuclear issue little attention

By Catherine Collins

In the last presidential

race, the only issue on which President Bush and Sen. John Kerry seemed to agree was that the most serious threat to national security was nuclear proliferation.

The threat of nuclear catastrophe has increased markedly in the four years since.

The CIA tells us that Iran has shelved its nuclear weapons effort, but has made substantial progress toward enriching uranium, which could still result in a bomb within the next couple of years. North Korea tested a nuclear device in 2006, and the relief was palpable when it turned out to be a dud. Pakistan moved perilously close to chaos with the imposition of martial law and the murder of Benazir Bhutto, raising questions about the security of its nuclear arsenal. And I haven't even mentioned the rising threat of nuclear terrorism.

Voters might expect to be hearing plenty about these dangers from the candidates running to replace Bush. Instead, less is being said. With the exception of one question posed during a Democratic debate in New Hampshire, the silence has been deafening.

So I tried to fill the void by soliciting responses on nuclear issues from the major candidates of both parties. I submitted six questions to each campaign and gave them a month to respond.

The Democrats replied, but, despite repeated telephone calls and e-mails, Gov. Mitt Romney was the only Republican who answered, and then only with a copy of a speech he gave last year. To avoid leaving the Republican half of this issue blank, I mined debate transcripts and speeches to get a sense of their positions.

The Democrats' take

The Democrats are generally in sync. Their responses indicate that all of them would insist that the United States live up to existing international treaties

regulating nuclear technology. They are more apt to support broader disarmament and uniformly oppose developing new nuclear weapons, contradicting Bush's policy.

Former Sen. John Edwards reflects the sharpest departure from Bush's record. Promising to make reducing nuclear weapons stockpiles one of his top priorities, Edwards said, "This means opposing any plans to build new nuclear weapons and gradually reducing existing stockpiles in conjunction with other nations such as Russia."

The Democrats said they are open to direct negotiations with nuclear hot spots like Iran and North Korea. They all promised to pressure Pakistan to allow outsiders to interrogate A.Q. Khan, the Pakistani nuclear scientist who has been under house arrest for four years after confessing to selling nuclear technology to Iran, North Korea and Libya.

"It is essential that international investigators ... have direct access to Dr. Khan, who has firsthand knowledge of matters that are vital to the security of the United States and many other countries around the world," said Sen. Hillary Clinton.

Sen. Barack Obama, who was criticized last year for saying he would negotiate directly with Iranian leaders, stuck with his position. "I strongly support direct negotiations with Iran and North Korea, and I would be willing to lead those negotiations as president. We will be in a stronger position to put tough international sanctions in place if other nations see that the United States has gone the extra mile diplomatically," he said.

Pinning down the GOP

Discerning Republican positions is tougher, but outlines have emerged in public forums and voting records. The GOP candidates are more likely to equate nuclear issues with terrorism and they appear unwilling to

talk to Iran under current circumstances.

The Republicans have largely avoided discussing whether to build a new generation of nuclear weapons, a program pushed by the Bush administration.

Proliferation concerns are most often expressed in terms of putting the burden on non-nuclear countries to stop the development of weapons without addressing the U.S. obligations to reduce and eventually eliminate its own stockpile. Romney set himself apart from others in both parties by proposing a new body of international law that would make trafficking in nuclear technology a "crime against humanity." He also outlined a five-point plan for dealing with Iran's nuclear ambitions, extending the Bush policy by proposing tighter economic sanctions and diplomatic isolation.

While the Democrats share a similar outlook on proliferation, differences of degree emerged in the responses to a specific question about compliance with international treaties. All of them, including Rep. Dennis Kucinich, said they would push to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, which would inhibit the development of atomic weapons by prohibiting all nuclear explosions. The U.S. signed the treaty, but the Senate has refused to ratify it.

Clinton and Obama agreed that the U.S. should reduce the number of nuclear weapons gradually in concert with other nuclear powers, as required under the nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

Edwards seemed to go a small step further, saying Washington should take the lead in disarmament. "The U.S. will set the example for others to follow by making sure we abide by our own NPT commitments," he said.

On the Republican side, Sen. John McCain and former Sen. Fred Thompson are on record opposing the test ban

treaty, which suggests that they also support developing new nuclear weapons down the road. McCain has called the treaty broken because it failed to stop the spread of nuclear technology. Romney and former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee have opposed reducing the U.S. nuclear stockpile, as the treaty requires.

Rep. Ron Paul is the only Republican who advocates reducing the number of nuclear weapons in the U.S. arsenal. The four leading Democrats strongly oppose developing a new generation of nuclear weapons. "The Bush administration has dangerously put the cart before the horse, planning to rush ahead with new nuclear weapons without a considered assessment of what we need those weapons for and what the impact of building them would be on our effort to stop the spread of nuclear weapons around the world," Clinton said.

Mideast goals

Creating a nuclear-free zone in the Mideast is political dynamite because it would require Israel to officially admit the existence of its nuclear arsenal and abandon it. Edwards and Kucinich were the clearest on this, advocating both a nuclear-free Mideast and abolition of nuclear weapons altogether.

Clinton and Obama were more cautious, couching the prohibition of nuclear weapons in the Middle East in terms of dealing with Iran's atomic ambitions.

"The issue at hand today is preventing Iran -- a state sponsor of terrorism that openly threatens its neighbors -- from acquiring nuclear weapons," said Obama.

While the Bush administration has refused bilateral security talks with Iran and negotiated only reluctantly with North Korea, the Democrats said they would be willing to sit down at the negotiating table with both countries.

"We can best prevent Iran

from threatening our interests through a 'smart power' strategy that will combine 'carrots' and 'sticks,' direct engagement, and international pressure to convince moderate Iranians that they cannot and must not pursue nuclear weapons," said Edwards.

As president ...

In July, Clinton described Obama as "irresponsible and frankly naive" for saying as president he would meet with the leaders of rogue nations. In responding to my question about negotiating with Iran and North Korea, Clinton said she supports direct talks, but did not indicate that she would be involved personally.

Only Kucinich ruled out the first use of nuclear weapons while the other Democrats were reluctant to be pinned down.

Clinton said she supported the vision of a world without nuclear weapons and taking steps toward that goal. But for now, she said, "nuclear weapons remain an essential means of deterring and defending the United States and our allies, and we must ensure the continued reliability and effectiveness of our nuclear forces."

The Democrats offer a dramatically different agenda on nuclear proliferation than the Bush administration. While the GOP voices are quiet, their positions seem much closer to current policy.

The world has become a more dangerous and unstable place since the last election. The world's nuclear powers have not lived up to their promise to eliminate nuclear weapons and more countries are trying to acquire them. The time for silence is long past and the candidates of both parties should raise the volume on the nuclear debate.

Catherine Collins is co-author of "The Nuclear Jihadist: The True Story of the Man Who Sold the World's Most Dangerous Secrets ... and How We Could Have Stopped Him."

National Journal
January 19, 2008

34. The Authors Respond

The January 5, 2008, articles by Neil Munro and Carl M. Cannon ["Data Bomb," p. 12, and "Counting Corpses," p. 16] contain many innuendos, assumptions, and untruths that should be addressed.

[Editor's Note: The articles raised questions about a 2006 study published in *The Lancet* that estimated that 655,000 Iraqis had died in the war. The writers of this letter were authors of the study.]

To start with, at no time did either Les Roberts or Gilbert Burnham say that the study's release was timed to affect the outcome of the election. Roberts indicated that he wanted to promote discussion of the results, and Burnham said that he was anxious that the 2006 study be released well before the election to dispel any notion of trying to influence outcomes.

Dr. Riyadh Lafta [the researcher who did the fieldwork] has a long record as a solid partner for international research studies. In late 2004, when the World Health Organization feared that there was a polio outbreak in Iraq, a disease that after billions of dollars spent has almost been eradicated under United Nations leadership, Lafta was chosen to investigate and guide the U.N. on improving polio surveillance.

Four population-based studies have now shown a consistent pattern of mortality in Iraq. There are multiple points of internal consistency, which point to the solidity of the data collected by Lafta and his team. Lafta has asked that the media do not contact him in Iraq, because of concerns for his safety and that of his family.

The collection of data by locally trained and supervised teams is standard for international surveys. The

Johns Hopkins data on reduction of deaths in Afghanistan, quoted both by Munro and President Bush, were collected in the same way -- using cluster surveys managed by skilled local public health staff.

In the ethical review process conducted with the Bloomberg School of Public Health's Institutional Review Board, we indicated that we would not record unique identifiers, such as full names, street addresses, or any data (including details from death certificates) that might identify the subjects and put them at risk. Although we planned from the beginning to release mortality data (we were not "under pressure," as Munro and Cannon state), it has never been our intent to release data at the household, street, or neighborhood level that might identify and put study participants at risk. Children were not a part of the study. Onlookers -- both adults and children -- were told of the purpose of the project by the surveyors and asked to inform their neighbors, a common practice used by study investigators throughout the world, including the U.S. Census Bureau. Since most households were located within walled compounds, conducting interviews on the doorstep was judged to be best from the point of security and cultural acceptability.

The statement on missing certificates is wrong. Three clusters did not have the presence of certificates noted, and in all, there were 120 deaths in which the interviewers neglected to note their presence. It is also wrong to state that the survey was scheduled to end on July 1 and to suggest that clusters with deaths were added later. The survey took several months to complete and finished when it did. High mortality was found in some of the clusters done earlier as well as some of those done later.

It is inaccurate to suggest

that funding sources played some role in our research in Iraq. In 2004 and 2006, very modest levels of funding were sought after the projects were initiated. The fact that some of MIT's financial support in 2006 came from the Open Society Institute had no effect on these reports; the researchers knew nothing of funding origins. MIT played no role in the study design, implementation, analysis, or writing of the Lancet report.

Although frequent mention is made of the Iraq Body Count data, these data are based on media reports and not statistics. So it is not surprising that car bombs, which consistently make headlines, are considerably over-represented in IBC data. A recent review of four major U.S. newspapers for articles on deaths in Iraq found that 12 percent of the deaths reported in these papers were not included in IBC's data set. This would suggest that many and perhaps most of the press reports of deaths have not been captured by IBC, if 12 percent were missing from all of IBC's 200 sources. A soon-to-be-released study shows that even in Baghdad the vast majority of violent fatal events are not in IBC's database.

The overwhelming confirmatory evidence of the Lancet study findings, the conventional nature of our survey procedures, and the abundance of internal consistencies in the data suggest that *National Journal's* critique of our work should itself be examined for political motivations.

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Editor's Note: *National Journal* stands by its articles on the Lancet study and rejects

any suggestions that the stories contain "innuendos, assumptions, and untruths" or were politically motivated.

Current News Editor's Note: The articles referred to appeared in the *Current News Early Bird*, Jan. 5, 2008.