

CURRENT NEWS

EARLY BIRD



January 23, 2008

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Item numbers indicate order of appearance only.

IRAQ

1. **Iraq's New Law On Ex-Baathists Could Bring Another Purge**
(*Washington Post*)....Amit R. Paley and Joshua Partlow
...More than a dozen Iraqi lawmakers, U.S. officials and former Baathists here and in exile expressed concern in interviews that the law could set off a new purge of ex-Baathists, the opposite of U.S. hopes for the legislation.
2. **First U.S. Soldier In Iraq Dies In New Mine-Resistant Vehicle**
(*USA Today*)....Tom Vanden Brook
The U.S. military on Tuesday announced the first death of a soldier in a bomb attack involving one of its newest models of armored vehicles. The death occurred Saturday when a Mine Resistant Ambush Protected vehicle rode over a homemade bomb buried in a road in Arab Jabour, south of Baghdad.
3. **Pentagon Confident In Armored Vehicles Despite First Fatality**
(*Yahoo.com*)....Agence France-Presse
The Pentagon said Tuesday it was more confident than ever in the MRAP armored vehicle, even after a soldier's death in Iraq showed for the first time that they are vulnerable to roadside bombs.
4. **Top Marine In Iraq Sees Pluses, Minuses**
(*Los Angeles Times*)....Tony Perry
As he prepares to leave Iraq after a year as the top Marine, Maj. Gen. Walter E. Gaskin is upbeat about the future of Anbar province but candid about U.S. mistakes made in the early years of the war that allowed the insurgency to grow.
5. **Al Qaeda Chase Seen As Constant**
(*Washington Times*)....Sara A. Carter
Extensive military intelligence has allowed coalition forces to push al Qaeda out of numerous provinces in northern Iraq, but a top commander remained cautious, saying the terrorist group's ability to re-emerge is constant.
6. **Bomber Hits High School Near Baghdad**
(*USA Today*)....Christopher Chester, Associated Press
A suicide bomber pushing an electric heater atop a cart packed with hidden explosives attacked a high school north of Baghdad on Tuesday, leaving students and teachers bloodied. The bombing -- one of two attacks near Iraqi schools on the same day -- follows a wave of recent blasts against funerals and social gatherings.
7. **Iraq Parliament Purges Hussein Vestiges On Flag**
(*New York Times*)....Abeer Mohammed and Solomon Moore
Iraqi lawmakers adopted a modified version of the national flag on Tuesday, removing three stars that symbolized the Baathist ideals of unity, freedom and socialism, and Saddam Hussein's handwritten calligraphy of the Koranic incantation "Allahu akbar."
8. **How Fear Turns To Resolve In One Iraqi Village**
(*Christian Science Monitor*)....Scott Peterson

U.S.-Iraqi forces persuade a remote town in Diyala Province to fight against Al Qaeda insurgents.

9. **Army Commander Updates Leavenworth Officers On Iraq Security**

(Kansas City Star)....Scott Canon

Iraqis could be chiefly in control of the security in the north of their country within a year, says the general recently returned from commanding forces there.

10. **Web Site Assembles U.S. Prewar Claims**

(New York Times)....John H. Cushman Jr.

Students of how the Bush administration led the nation into the Iraq war can now go online to browse a comprehensive database of top officials' statements before the invasion, connecting the dots between hundreds of claims, mostly discredited since then, linking Saddam Hussein to Al Qaeda or warning that he possessed forbidden weapons.

DEFENSE DEPARTMENT

11. **Pentagon Tries To Cool Talk On Petraeus**

(Reuters.com)....Andrew Gray, Reuters

The Pentagon sought on Tuesday to cool talk about future assignments for Army Gen. David Petraeus, the U.S. commander in Iraq, following reports he was a candidate for the top NATO command post.

CONGRESS

12. **Military Measure Goes To President**

(New York Times)....Associated Press

The Senate approved a revised military spending bill on Tuesday and sidestepped a veto showdown with President Bush. The 91-to-3 vote sends the \$696 billion measure, which includes a 3.5 percent raise for troops, to Mr. Bush for his expected signature.

ARMY

13. **Army Off Target On Recruits**

(Washington Post)....Josh White

The study by the National Priorities Project concluded that slightly more than 70 percent of new recruits joining the active-duty Army last year had a high school diploma, nearly 20 percentage points lower than the Army's goal of at least 90 percent.

14. **Texas Is Top State For Army Recruiting**

(San Antonio Express-News)....Sig Christenson

A report released Tuesday by the National Priorities Project found that Texas and Harris County produced more Army recruits last year than any other state or county in America. Bexar County ranked fourth, sending 814 people to boot camp.

MARINE CORPS

15. **2 Afghans Testify At Marine Inquiry**

(Los Angeles Times)....David Zucchini

Two Afghan men testified Tuesday that a Marine special operations convoy fired on their vehicles without provocation during an incident last March in which as many as 19 Afghans were reported killed.

16. **Marine Corps' Leader Gets Local Geography Lesson**

(New Orleans Times-Picayune)....Paul Purpura

The Marine Corps' top brass was in New Orleans last week to discuss issues concerning that military branch while getting a feel for the local geography and its post-Katrina reality, the nation's top Marine said.

NAVY

17. **Bush's Sonar Order Is Unconstitutional, Coastal Panel Says**

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

The California Coastal Commission argued in federal court Tuesday that President Bush violated the U.S. Constitution by trying to overturn a court order that restricted the Navy's use of a type of sonar linked to the deaths of marine mammals.

GUANTANAMO

18. Guantanamo Chief Blasts Critics In Comments To Savannah Audience

(Savannah Morning News)...Pamela E. Walck

...And since Guantanamo first started taking detainees in America's global war against terrorism, Buzby said some of the base's detainees have been linked to the 9/11 bombings, the attack on the USS Cole, the embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania as well as the Taliban aggression in Afghanistan and Northern Africa.

EUROPE

19. Pentagon: U.S. Hopeful For Radar Agreement With Czechs Soon

(Wall Street Journal (wsj.com))...Agence France-Presse

The Pentagon said Tuesday it is hopeful about reaching an agreement with the Czech Republic within weeks on stationing a radar on its territory for a U.S. missile defense site in Europe.

AFGHANISTAN

20. Panel Questions Canadian Role In Afghanistan

(New York Times)...Ian Austen

A government panel said Tuesday that the Canadian military should withdraw from a combat role in Afghanistan next year unless it is reinforced with 1,000 additional troops from other NATO countries.

21. Afghan To Die For Insulting Islam

(Philadelphia Inquirer)...Associated Press

An Afghan court yesterday sentenced a 23-year-old journalism student to death for distributing a paper he printed off the Internet that three judges held violated the tenets of Islam.

PAKISTAN

22. Pakistan: U.S. Commander And Army Chief Hold Talks

(New York Times)...Salman Masood

Adm. William J. Fallon, the senior American military commander in the Middle East, arrived for a one-day visit and called on President Pervez Musharraf's successor as army chief, Gen. Ashfaq Parvez Kayani.

23. U.S. Dissatisfied With Intelligence On Terror Groups

(Washington Times)...Richard Lardner, Associated Press

The Bush administration isn't satisfied with the quality of information it's getting about terrorist groups operating in Pakistan's volatile tribal area, a senior U.S. official said yesterday.

NORTH KOREA

24. N. Korea Talks Left Out Details

(Washington Times)...Bill Gertz

North Korea's recent discussions with the United States about a required declaration under the six-nation nuclear talks omitted key data on Pyongyang's current nuclear arsenal and its covert uranium enrichment program, U.S. officials say.

25. N. Korea May Be Taken Off Terrorism List

(Washington Post)...Unattributed

North Korea may soon be on its way to being the second country taken off the State Department's list of state sponsors of terrorism during the Bush administration's war on terrorism.

IRAN

26. **Six Powers Back U.N. Draft On Iran**

(*Washington Post*)....Robin Wright

To break an eight-month deadlock, the Bush administration accepted a plan that includes largely voluntary monitoring of transactions involving two banks, and calls for restraints on export credits, cargo traffic and business involving individuals or institutions linked to proliferation. The toughest restriction is a travel ban on key officials, the European officials said.

TERRORISM

27. **'Enemy Combatant' Padilla Gets 17 Years For Conspiracy**

(*USA Today*)....Marisol Bello

Jose Padilla, who once symbolized the Bush administration's fight against homegrown terrorism, was sentenced to 17 years in prison Tuesday on terror support charges. He received a more lenient term than the life sentence prosecutors sought because the judge said the government did not prove he was a terrorist.

BUSINESS

28. **U.S. Moves To Ease Defence Trading Curbs**

(*Financial Times*)....Demetri Sevastopulo and Daniel Dombey

The US administration on Tuesday announced export control reforms aimed at facilitating the trade of defence products and sensitive dual-use technologies with its allies.

OPINION

29. **Remarkable Progress In Iraq**

(*Washington Times*)....Helle Dale

Economy, security continue to improve.

30. **Still Wrong In Afghanistan**

(*Washington Post*)....Richard Holbrooke

...But even without aerial eradication, the program, which costs around \$1 billion a year, may be the single most ineffective program in the history of American foreign policy. It's not just a waste of money. It actually strengthens the Taliban and al-Qaeda, as well as criminal elements within Afghanistan.

31. **Bad News Bear**

(*New York Post*)....Peter Brookes

...Defense spending rose as much as 30 percent in 2007 - following jumps of 22 percent and 27 percent bump-ups in the two prior years. After years of neglect, the \$200 billion modernization program leaves Russia with the world's second-largest defense budget.

Washington Post
January 23, 2008
Pg. 1

1. Iraq's New Law On Ex-Baathists Could Bring Another Purge

By Amit R. Paley and Joshua Partlow, Washington Post Foreign Service

But now, under new legislation promoted as way to return former Baathists to public life, the 56-year-old and thousands like him could be forced out of jobs they have been allowed to hold, according to Iraqi lawmakers and the government agency that oversees ex-Baathists.

"This new law is very confusing," Awadi said. "I don't really know what it means for me."

He is not alone. More than a dozen Iraqi lawmakers, U.S. officials and former Baathists here and in exile expressed concern in interviews that the law could set off a new purge of ex-Baathists, the opposite of U.S. hopes for the legislation.

Approved by parliament this month under pressure from U.S. officials, the law was heralded by President Bush and Iraqi leaders as a way to soothe the deep anger of many ex-Baathists -- primarily Sunnis but also many Shiites such as Awadi -- toward the Shiite-led government.

Yet U.S. officials and even legislators who voted for the measure, which still requires approval by Iraq's presidency council, acknowledge that its impact is hard to assess from its text and will depend on how it is implemented. Some say the law's primary aim is not to return ex-Baathists to work, but to recognize and compensate those harmed by the party. Of the law's eight stated justifications, none mentions reinstating ex-Baathists to their jobs.

"The law is about as clear as mud," said one U.S. senior diplomat.

The confusion has been compounded because the information on former party

members comes from the de-Baathification commission headed by Ahmed Chalabi, the former deputy prime minister who as an Iraqi exile sought to convince U.S. officials that Hussein's government had weapons of mass destruction. In light of the absence of such weapons, many Iraqi and U.S. officials are suspicious of his commission's statistics.

In an interview at his lavish home in the Mansour district, Chalabi said the new legislation would drive out some of the former Baathists his commission had allowed to return to government. The new measure, he said, is much harsher than the existing policy and a draft of the law that the United States had encouraged parliament to pass.

"Put this under the category of: Be careful what you wish for," Chalabi said. **'This Law Is Bait'**

The new law was supposed to ease the homeward passage of former Baathists such as Muhammed Kareem.

After 35 years as a civil servant in the Oil Ministry, Kareem fled his home in Basra after the U.S.-led invasion in March 2003. Four fellow Baathists from the ministry in Basra had turned up dead. Searching for him, militiamen had ransacked Kareem's house.

Kareem, 53, and his family moved to Amman, Jordan, where they live in a sparsely furnished basement apartment. He has one abiding wish: to return to Iraq. But sitting at his kitchen table last week, flipping through a draft of the law, he was despondent.

"This is a bomb on the road of reconciliation," said Kareem, a former director general in the ministry. "This law does not bring anything new. This does not serve national reconciliation that all Iraqis are hoping for. On the contrary, it envisions hostility, hatred, discrimination and sectarian strife."

Kareem, along with other Baathists who were purged from their jobs after the

invasion, argues that the law typifies the animosity that Iraq's Shiite-led government has for the bureaucrats of Hussein's regime. They say the climate is nowhere near safe enough for them to identify themselves to the government as former Baathists.

Kareem, who was a senior Baath Party member, said the new law does grant him the right to a pension, which would greatly benefit his family. He has not had a steady salary in five years, and has been living off the charity of friends and relatives, but said he would not attempt to claim the pension.

"This law is bait," he said. "I have to go back to Basra and apply for the pension through several measures. If I get killed, nobody will know who did it."

Kareem and other former Baathists advocate nullifying the law and the concept of de-Baathification in general. They say it discriminates against their political party at a time when other parties have also been associated with militias, death squads and major crimes. Trying to abolish an ideology and outlaw a political party seems to him both impossible and undemocratic.

"Aren't I the son of an Iraqi? Aren't I an Iraqi myself? Don't I have the right to live in Iraq?" he added. "This law is a punishment not only to the Baathists but to his sons and grandsons. So where is the justice in it?" **The Shiite-Sunni Divide**

The very first decree of the U.S.-led occupation government was to disband the Baath Party and purge its members from the government. Issued on May 16, 2003, Coalition Provisional Authority Order No. 1 also banned the top four ranks of the Baath Party from public-sector jobs.

U.S. officials believed the order would remove about 20,000 Baathists, or 1 percent of the 2 million people in Iraq said to be party members, according to L. Paul Bremer,

then the occupation administrator.

In an interview, Bremer said the decree was meant to retain the core of the bureaucracy and allow those who joined the party out of necessity during Hussein's rule to keep their jobs. Because it was difficult for non-Iraqis to discern who was or was not a true believer, Bremer said, he hastened to turn the implementation over to the Iraqis on the appointed Governing Council. "And there I made my mistake," Bremer said.

He blamed the Iraqi politicians who oversaw the de-Baathification process in mid-2003 for going beyond the intention of the order and purging thousands of additional people, including about 11,000 teachers.

The Iraqis tell a different story. According to Ali Faisal al-Lami, executive director of the de-Baathification commission, Bremer's order pushed 140,000 Iraqis out of their jobs. In addition to banning all members of the top four ranks of the party, it also forced out the senior government managers who belonged to the next two levels of the party.

When the de-Baathification commission started work in January 2004, it decided that Bremer's original order had gone too far, Lami said. He said the commission immediately allowed all ex-Baathists from the two lower levels to return to government, a group that included 102,000 people.

That left 38,000 ex-Baathists who were banned from government and whose status the commission would consider, Lami said. Most of them, about 32,000, belonged to the fourth level and held a rank of division member, or firqah, Lami said. The commission allowed all division members to apply to return to government and, over the four-year history of the commission, about half were

reinstated, Chalabi and Lami said.

Only 170 applications from division members were rejected, Chalabi said.

But many Sunnis and Western diplomats question those statistics and accuse Chalabi, a secular Shiite, of treating fellow Shiites more favorably than Sunnis.

"They gave exceptions only for one side," said Khalaf al-Elayan, head of the Iraqi National Dialogue Council, a Sunni group that represents many ex-Baathists. "If you were a Shia Baathist, you could return. If you were a Sunni Baathist, you could not."

Western diplomats agreed. "Chalabi has implemented the law in an extremely partisan fashion," said one diplomat, who, like others interviewed, spoke on condition of anonymity to avoid offending Iraqi officials.

Awadi, the police commander and a Shiite, said he took up his post two years ago at the request of the Interior Ministry, which told him that he had been granted a waiver by the de-Baathification commission.

The commission says he was a division member, based on his confidential case file. Awadi said he was a lower-level member.

Chalabi said that his commission has applied the law equally to Sunni and Shiites and that the agency does not maintain statistics on the sect of applicants. "We saved the lives of many Sunnis by helping them to come back to government," he said.

Abu Saif, a Sunni ex-Baathist division member who spoke on condition that only his nickname be used, said he applied to the commission 15 months ago to return to his job as a brigadier general at the Defense Ministry. The 55-year-old resident of the capital's Dora district lost his job after Bremer's original order and has been unemployed for most of the years since.

Abu Saif said he has yet to receive any response from the commission. "I think they are filled with corruption and sectarianism," he said. He plans to reapply under the new law and hopes he can return to his \$17,000-a-year job. Still, he is wary.

"I can't give my opinion about the law right now until the government implements it," he said. "We will wait ... we will see." **Exclusion From Key Ministries**

U.S. officials strongly encouraged the approval of a law dealing with former Baathists and circulated a draft bill to politicians, according to Falah Hassan Shanshal, chairman of the parliament's De-Baathification Committee, and other lawmakers.

But unlike the draft, the legislation approved by parliament on Jan. 12 would restrict division members from working in a host of government agencies, including the Defense, Interior, Foreign and Finance ministries. Since scores of division members -- at least 7,000, according to the de-Baathification commission -- occupy jobs in those ministries, that means the new law could purge them from their current positions.

"The new law is much harsher than what the Americans wanted," Chalabi said.

U.S. officials say they believe the law is likely to result in more ex-Baathists returning to government and hope none will be removed. But they recognize that the outcome depends on implementation, which will be overseen largely by a new seven-member commission nominated by the Iraqi cabinet and confirmed by parliament.

"Will they name people who are liberal and nonpartisan, or is it going to be perceived as in the control of the people who have an agenda to purge Sunni Arab influence?" said a senior U.S. official. "That's the first thing

people will look at."

Shanshal, head of parliament's De-Baathification Committee, said he wasn't sure how many former party members would be affected by the law, and whether more ex-Baathists would be forced out of government. But he said he did not understand why Americans are so focused on that question.

"Why is the United States not asking about the victims of the Baath Party?" said Shanshal, a member of the Shiite party led by anti-American cleric Moqtada al-Sadr. "I don't understand why you are so interested in the executioners and forget about the victims of Saddam and his bloody regime."

Partlow reported from Amman and Baghdad. Special correspondents Yasmine Mousa in Amman and Zaid Sabah, K.I. Ibrahim, Saad al-Izzi and Naseer Nouri in Baghdad contributed to this report.

USA Today
January 23, 2008
Pg. 8

Troops at Risk -- IEDs in Iraq

2. First U.S. Soldier In Iraq Dies In New Mine-Resistant Vehicle

WASHINGTON-- The U.S. military on Tuesday announced the first death of a soldier in a bomb attack involving one of its newest models of armored vehicles.

The death occurred Saturday when a Mine Resistant Ambush Protected vehicle rode over a homemade bomb buried in a road in Arab Jabour, south of Baghdad. Three other soldiers in the MRAP vehicle survived the blast, Maj. Anton Alston, a military spokesman, said in an e-mail.

Soldiers have died in the past in older-model MRAP trucks used by explosive ordnance teams and combat engineers. The death of Army Spc. Richard Burress, 25, of

Naples, Fla., was the first since Defense Secretary Robert Gates made fielding the vehicles for front-line infantry units the Pentagon's No. 1 priority last spring.

The truck's design-- a crew capsule that rides a few feet above the road with a V-shape hull to deflect a blast-- helps troops survive roadside-bomb attacks better than Humvees.

Saturday's attack came from a deeply buried improvised explosive device, Pentagon spokesman Geoff Morrell said. Such IEDs often use hundreds of pounds of explosives capable of flipping an armored vehicle.

Burress was the truck's gunner, Morrell said. Gunners serve atop the truck, in its turret, and are more exposed to attack than those inside. An investigation will determine whether Burress died in the explosion or when the vehicle rolled over, Morrell said.

The vehicle's crew compartment was not punctured, Morrell said. The soldiers inside sustained broken bones. Their injuries would have been worse in a vehicle with less armor, he said.

Gates, who last week visited an assembly facility for MRAP vehicles in Charleston, S.C., remains committed to the \$22 billion program, Morrell said. About 12,000 of the trucks have been ordered, and more than 2,200 have been shipped to Iraq.

-- by Tom Vanden Brook

Yahoo.com
January 22, 2008

3. Pentagon Confident In Armored Vehicles Despite First Fatality

WASHINGTON (AFP) -- The Pentagon said Tuesday it was more confident than ever in the MRAP armored vehicle, even after a soldier's death in Iraq showed for the first time that they are vulnerable to roadside bombs.

The soldier, a gunner who

was partially exposed, was killed Saturday when a buried roadside bomb exploded with such force that it blew the Mine Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) vehicle into the air and caused it to roll over.

The explosion failed to penetrate the vehicle's crew compartment, however, and three soldiers inside escaped with broken bones in their feet and bruises, Pentagon press secretary Geoff Morrell said.

Morrell said that Defense Secretary Robert Gates, who the day before the attack had paid a high profile visit to a military factory that equips the vehicles, "is not questioning the protection provided by MRAPs."

"He is in fact more convinced than ever that these vehicles do indeed save lives," Morrell said.

Gates has championed the deployment of the MRAP vehicles, launching a crash program in May that has produced 2,225 of them.

Of those, 1,508 are already being used by US soldiers in Iraq and while 45 of them are in operation in Afghanistan, Pentagon officials said.

With a budget of 22.4 billion dollars, the MRAPs have emerged as the Pentagon's top acquisition program with 12,000 MRAPs on order and plans to increase the total buy to 15,400.

The vehicles have a V-shaped hull that are designed to deflect the blast of under-belly explosions, but are heavier than the armored HUMVEES they are replacing.

Gates was sold on them when he learned that no one had been killed in an MRAP in Iraq.

But the attack Saturday in Arab Jabbour on the southern outskirts of Baghdad show that even the more heavily armored MRAPs are not impervious to roadside bombs.

"We're still in our preliminary stages of reviewing this particular attack," Morrell said, adding

that it was "a very large, deep-buried IED (improvised explosive device)."

"This MRAP -- and, again, I don't know which model it was precisely -- ran over that bomb. And the force of the explosion caused the MRAP to literally lift into the air and overturn," he said.

"Regrettably, of course, we lost the gunner," Morrell said, adding that it was still unclear whether he was killed by the blast or the rollover.

"But I think everybody is still amazed at the fact that, despite the size of this bomb, these vehicles are proving to be every bit as strong and as lifesaving as we hoped they would be," he said.

Los Angeles Times
January 23, 2008

4. Top Marine In Iraq Sees Pluses, Minuses

As the commander of forces in Anbar prepares to leave, he's optimistic about the province's future but critical of post-invasion U.S. moves.

By Tony Perry, Los Angeles Times Staff Writer

AL ASAD, IRAQ — As he prepares to leave Iraq after a year as the top Marine, Maj. Gen. Walter E. Gaskin is upbeat about the future of Anbar province but candid about U.S. mistakes made in the early years of the war that allowed the insurgency to grow.

U.S. officials created a "perfect storm" after the March 2003 invasion that allowed the insurgency to attract recruits, Gaskin said in interviews here this week. He listed the top three mistakes: disbanding the Iraqi army, banning members of Saddam Hussein's Baath Party from involvement in government and shutting down state-run enterprises.

"We created that storm that forces of Al Qaeda took full advantage of," Gaskin said.

The result, he said, was a wave of insurgent violence in Anbar, the sprawling province west of Baghdad. The Marines

have had major responsibility for the region since 2004 and fought two prolonged battles with insurgents in Ramadi, the provincial capital, in the first year.

Gaskin's comments echoed widespread criticism of the early U.S. policies not only from analysts and politicians but also from some senior military officials. They came as the Marines are in the process of handing off authority in several areas. On Tuesday, responsibility for western Anbar was transferred from the Camp Lejeune, N.C.-based 2nd Marine Regiment to the Camp Pendleton-based 5th Marine Regiment.

Early next month, Gaskin will return to Camp Lejeune after being relieved by Maj. Gen. John Kelly as commanding general of Multinational Force West. Kelly is commanding general of the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force (Forward) from Camp Pendleton.

Once considered the most violent area in Iraq, Anbar now is often cited by President Bush and others as an area where attacks against coalition forces have dropped dramatically.

Gaskin, who commands 35,000 Marines and soldiers, credits the turnaround to an alliance between U.S.-led forces and tribal sheiks who have turned against the insurgency.

"Nothing happens out here without tribal approval," he said. "They were tribal before they were Muslims."

Gaskin said the insurgency was still capable of attacks, particularly using suicide vehicles. But he expressed confidence that the progress made in Anbar was permanent, particularly when backed up by economic projects sponsored by the U.S.

He is effusive in his praise of the sheiks, who were initially shunned by U.S. officials as anachronistic. "They respect and trust us, and

we respect and trust them," he said.

The sheiks, particularly those from tribes who led the Anbar Awakening, a volunteer security force, are not reluctant to remind the Americans of their role in suppressing the insurgency and to press their status as valued allies of the U.S.

A week ago, sheiks from the Albu Mahal, one of the first tribes to side with the U.S., asked the Marines to release from jail a police chief suspected of corruption. The chief was released after the sheiks promised to monitor his conduct.

A few days later, sheiks from the Albu Mahal, Al Jugayfi and Albu Nimr tribes asked Gaskin to press the Baghdad government to certify a list of their tribesmen as potential police officers despite their previous links to the insurgency. The Marines promised to do so, with the caveat that they cannot force the Ministry of Interior to do anything.

In exchange for helping the sheiks, Gaskin has stressed to them that the future of Anbar has to include a legal system apart from tribal law, which often includes retribution and blood feuds.

"We have seen enough of violence," said Col. Patrick Malay, commander of the 5th Marine Regiment. "Now is the time to build, for the rule of law."

Washington Times
January 23, 2008
Pg. 3

5. Al Qaeda Chase Seen As Constant

Forces take fight to Iraq's north

By Sara A. Carter, The Washington Times

Extensive military intelligence has allowed coalition forces to push Al Qaeda out of numerous provinces in northern Iraq, but a top commander remained cautious, saying the terrorist

group's ability to re-emerge is constant.

Army Maj. Gen. Mark P. Hertling, commander of coalition forces in northern Iraq, told reporters yesterday that Operation Iron Harvest, meant to drive al Qaeda out of safe havens, has conducted 40 operations since mid-December with Iraqi security forces. Those operations led to the deaths of more than 130 extremists and the arrests of more than 370 others, including 40 "high-value individuals."

"It's also in this area that we have found significant weapons caches and had some very tough fights," said Gen. Hertling, who spoke to reporters at the Pentagon via satellite from Iraq. "Our soldiers have seen the effects of the enemy's intimidation of local citizens along with brutal murders and barbaric violence."

U.S. and Iraqi forces have focused during the past few weeks on an area known as the "Breadbasket," which comprises about 45 square miles in northeastern Iraq, in an effort to root out al Qaeda militants who have taken refuge in the region since being driven out of Anbar province.

While the rest of Iraq has seen significant decreases in violence over the past six months, the eastern Diyala province is proving difficult for coalition forces.

Yesterday, a suicide bomber detonated near a high school in Diyala's provincial capital of Baqouba, 35 miles northeast of Baghdad. Twenty-one persons, including students and one policeman, were wounded in the attack, the Associated Press reported.

The commander added that al Qaeda is receiving help from foreign fighters in the region. Coalition forces have captured extremists from Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Morocco and other neighboring countries since the operation began.

"I wouldn't want to put a percentage on it though

because I think that would allow our enemy to see just how much intel we have on them," he said.

Last month after coalition operations began in Muqadadiyah, U.S. military officials were informed that some al Qaeda leaders and militants had escaped the operational area but that they have "still seen significant success in these operations in Muqadadiyah," Gen. Hertling said.

Al Qaeda is facing a backlash, however, from the Iraqi people, who are now assisting coalition forces in locating extremists, he said.

In the town of Shirin, in the northern region, a 12-year-old girl "was brave enough" to sketch a map disclosing the names and locations of terrorists "who were still in the area and who had harassed her and killed two of her brothers," he added.

"They would come in; they would kill the local citizens; they would cut off their heads; parade heads down the streets of town — very brutal and violent tactics," the general said. "And what you would see as a result of that is people were afraid to either go to the police or stand up against these people."

USA Today
January 23, 2008
Pg. 8

6. Bomber Hits High School Near Baghdad

Roadside blast goes off near another school in capital

By Christopher Chester,
Associated Press

BAGHDAD -- A suicide bomber pushing an electric heater atop a cart packed with hidden explosives attacked a high school north of Baghdad on Tuesday, leaving students and teachers bloodied.

The bombing -- one of two attacks near Iraqi schools on the same day -- follows a wave of recent blasts against funerals and social gatherings.

The recent attacks

coincide with a U.S.-led offensive trying to uproot insurgents from strongholds around Baghdad.

In the suicide attack, the bomber posed as a shopper or merchant transporting an electric heater on a chilly winter day. The blast struck the front of a two-story schoolhouse in Baqouba a half-hour after classes began. Panicked parents rushed to find their children.

A 25-year-old male bystander was killed, and 21 people were wounded # 12 students, eight teachers and one policeman, said a doctor at Baqouba General Hospital who spoke to the Associated Press on condition of anonymity because he was afraid of being targeted by militants.

The school's headmaster, Ahmed Alwan, said he was in his office when the attacker blew himself up at the outside gate, leaving a crater in the street.

"After the tremendous explosion, there was total darkness in my room," he said. "The false ceiling and the books on the shelves fell on me, and an object hit my head."

"I can't think of any reason to target students," said Mohammed Abbas, 15, his head wrapped in a bandage. His father stood near his hospital bed in Baqouba, about 35 miles northeast of Baghdad. "We did not expect that explosions would reach our school," Abbas said.

In the other attack, a roadside bomb exploded next to a girl's high school in Baghdad's western district of Amiriyah, wounding a 7-year-old boy who was passing by. In recent attacks, insurgents have bypassed the heavy security at major events to strike less prominent targets.

During last week's observances of Ashoura, the most important religious day in the Shiite calendar, there were no attacks on the main procession in the holy city of Karbala, where hundreds of thousands marched.

Instead, militants struck with suicide bombings and rocket fire on small gatherings of worshippers north of Baghdad.

At a tribal gathering near Fallujah on Sunday, the bomber was a 15-year-old boy carrying a box of candy.

Women are being used more in suicide bombings -- four times in the past three months.

The U.S. military has gained command of many key areas in central Iraq with the help of Iraqi troops and "Awakening Councils" -- mostly Sunni tribal groups that have turned against al-Qaeda in Iraq. "There were no police or army inside my school," Alwan said. "I think that the goal of this attack was to destroy any sign of education and culture in this country."

New York Times
January 23, 2008

7. Iraq Parliament Purges Hussein Vestiges On Flag

By Abeer Mohammed and
Solomon Moore

BAGHDAD — Iraqi lawmakers adopted a modified version of the national flag on Tuesday, removing three stars that symbolized the Baathist ideals of unity, freedom and socialism, and Saddam Hussein's handwritten calligraphy of the Koranic incantation "Allahu akbar."

The incantation, which means God is great, will remain on the flag, though it will now be written in a different calligraphic style.

Members of Parliament voted 110 to 50 for the flag, which was introduced in 2004 and bears the red, white and black stripes of Iraq's original banner. The design preserves a sense of continuous national identity, while purging the flag of Baathist allusions, supporters say.

Kurdish politicians, many of whom survived the genocidal gas bombings by

Hussein forces in the Anfal, or spoils of war, campaign of the 1980s, were among the fiercest critics of the old flag. In 2006, Massoud Barzani, president of the semiautonomous Kurdistan Regional Government, refused to fly the flag from government offices, prompting fear of Kurdish separatism.

On Tuesday, however, Kurdish lawmakers pushed for a compromise, dropping their insistence on yellow lettering for the Arabic inscription, for a design without Baathist references.

Zuhair Humadi, a senior adviser to the Shiite-led Iraqi government, said the Kurds sought the deal before an international conference of members of Arab Parliaments in weeks.

"They won't come if only the Kurdish flag is flying," Mr. Humadi said of the Arab leaders. "And Barzani wanted that meeting to be in Kurdistan, and he will not allow Saddam Hussein's flag to be flown. So they agreed to this."

The new flag continues to generate disagreements and conflicting national narratives among Iraqis.

One supporter was Hameed Meala, a member of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq, which for years had waged an armed struggle with Mr. Hussein's forces.

Regarding the three stars, Mr. Meala said, "It is obvious that they refer to unity, freedom and socialism — the goals of the Baath Party, as announced during Saddam's regime."

However, two other Shiite factions, Fadhlila Party and the Sadr movement; the Sunni-led Tawafiq Party; and the nationalist Iraqia List favored keeping the stars.

"We wanted the verse to be written in Kufic script and to keep the three stars," said Ahmed al-Masody, a Sadrist lawmaker. "We would have announced that they don't symbolize the Baath Party, but other principles, like justice."

Several lawmakers said

that because the flag had been changed out of Kurdish expediency, they expected it to be changed again.

The flag is the second design to be introduced in Iraq since the American-led invasion in 2003. In 2004, the American-appointed Iraqi Governing Council announced a white, blue and yellow flag with a prominent Islamic crescent. That design was scrapped after Iraqis criticized it for being too radical a change from the original, and too similar to the blue and white flag of Israel.

Iraqi politicians then kept the old design, including the three stars, but replaced Mr. Hussein's writing with an angular pre-Islamic script that originated in Kufa, a city in southern Iraq.

During Mr. Hussein's 24-year dictatorship, his name and face adorned state buildings, national monuments and public squares. Since the American-orchestrated toppling of Mr. Hussein's statue in Firdous Square in Baghdad, Iraqis have aggressively removed Baathist references from the national landscape.

Last year, politicians decided to dismantle one of Iraq's most recognizable landmarks, two gigantic arms holding aloft crossed swords and a collection of helmets to symbolize Mr. Hussein's proclaimed victory over Iran during a 1980-1988 war. Mr. Hussein is believed to have provided the original cast for the arms.

Iraqis expressed varying opinions about the new flag.

"We refuse this change, because this flag does not favor any political group, but represents the unity of Iraq," said Sheikh Mohammad Saleh al-Butchery, a spokesman for the Falluja Tribal Council in Sunni-dominated Anbar Province.

Kareem Jameel, a 45-year-old journalist in Basra, a predominantly Shiite, called the change necessary. "If we

want to build a new Iraq, then we have to change Saddam's flag," he said.

But many Iraqis, burdened by uncertain security, frequent electricity failures, poverty and disenchantment with their leadership, complained that Parliament had more important things to worry about than flag designs.

"The government's priorities should be to make people happy by getting rid of terrorism, providing security and purging the country from gangs and militiamen," said Idress Yunis, 35, a Baghdad shop owner.

News of the adoption of the flag was released amid reports of sporadic violence throughout Iraq.

In Diyala Province, north of Baghdad, Iraqi police officers said they had found the bodies of a family, a father, his three sons and three nephews. They had been shot to death and discovered in Buhruz, the police said.

In Baquba, the provincial capital, a water boiler packed with explosives exploded near a high school and a checkpoint for an American-allied tribal security force, killing three people and wounding 12 students, the Iraqi police said, and, separately, a gunman killed a civilian near a medical clinic.

The bodies of two more Iraqis, a woman and a policeman, were discovered about 30 miles outside Hilla in the south, the Iraqi police said.

And in Basra, gunmen killed an Iraqi policeman, witnesses said.

Reporting was contributed by Alissa J. Rubin, Balen Y. Younis, and Wissam A. Habeeb from Baghdad, and Iraqi employees of The New York Times from Baghdad, Baquba, Hilla, and Basra.

Christian Science Monitor
January 23, 2008

Pg. 1

8. How Fear Turns To Resolve In One Iraqi

Village

US-Iraqi forces persuade a remote town in Diyala Province to fight against Al Qaeda insurgents.

By Scott Peterson, Staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor

DULIM, IRAQ -- Masked militants of Al Qaeda in Iraq have been defeated — for the moment — in their battle to control this frontline farming village. For two years, this remote outpost 20 miles northeast of Baghdad, endured an Al Qaeda presence that imposed its will with killings and intimidation, forcing one sheikh out of town a few months ago.

Last week, that same sheikh returned with a US Army Cavalry unit backed by an Iraqi Army battalion. He had persuaded the Americans that his people were "desperate" to create a US-funded militia to take on Al Qaeda in Iraq.

But Sheikh Thamir Hassan Ali miscalculated, underestimating Al Qaeda's fearful grip. The imam at the Dulim mosque refused to cooperate, adamant that setting up a Concerned Local Citizens (CLC) group would be a "declaration of war" against Al Qaeda. Only days before, militants had come, warning villagers that "collaborators" would die.

The story of how this village weighed the risks and eventually chose to side with the Americans — after days of rancorous debate and prodding by US officers, the safety of their families and survival of the village in the balance — shows in microcosm how Al Qaeda is losing ground across Iraq. But it also illustrates the challenges faced by US and Iraqi forces as they sweep across parts of Iraq long under militant sway, making promises of support and armed backup that villagers have heard many times in the past, with little positive result. The current four-province offensive has "caused significant

damage" to Al Qaeda and killed 130 militants, the US Army commander for northern Iraq Maj. Gen. Mark Hertling said yesterday.

Shortly before the pre-dawn US helicopter ride back to his village of Dulim last week, the beaming Sunni sheikh asserted, "People are so desperate to set up CLCs here, to protect their families. They need someone to be on their side. Absolutely this is a war against Al Qaeda. We are against them."

But the fear was palpable in the frigid muddy village, as dawn heralded a critical choice for villagers. The new American and Iraqi military presence – ushered in by the black-robed Sheikh Thamir – was initially seen as raising the danger level.

"If anyone registers for CLCs, [Al Qaeda in Iraq] will put them in the road and kill them," lamented one man, standing outside the school where villagers were supposed to sign up for the civilian militia. Only one person made the commitment that day. "We are afraid. We don't have enough weapons to protect ourselves, and with this gun I can't protect myself against mortars."

He had just received a text message on his cellphone: 150 members of Al Qaeda are gathering in a nearby district, ready for revenge. He heard of another town where "Al Qaeda in five minutes killed everyone, including women breastfeeding. They destroyed that town completely. We don't want to repeat that."

US Army Capt. Dustin Heumphreus, commander of Arrow Troop, 2nd Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment, tried to calm the man – and a host of others milling about in the background – using as examples several other towns made safe by effective CLCs. He also noted that now the US and Iraqi military presence itself had broken any deal the town may have had with Al Qaeda. Their best choice was

to join the CLCs.

"The whole process depends upon brave men willing to stand up and defend against Al Qaeda," said Captain Heumphreus. "We will eventually leave. When we do, what will be left in place? What is stronger, one man with an AK-47? Or a whole village coming together in a coordinated defense?"

The CLC concept, also called Sahwa or "Awakening" elsewhere in Iraq, spread last year throughout Sunni areas with heavy insurgent activity and is one reason violence has dropped nationwide. Elsewhere in Diyala Province, which has long been an Al Qaeda in Iraq stronghold, US forces have been surprised by the scale of turnout for CLCs. The \$350-a-month salary – \$450 for shift leaders – is a draw. Fatigue with insurgent brutality plays a role, too.

But the numbered green sashes CLC participants wear also make them targets. Here in prevaricating Dulim, the sashes were seen as a potential death warrant if too few signed up. After the first CLC registration attempt failed, the US captain privately took Sheikh Thamir to task.

"If I leave now, all we've achieved is a grand homecoming for you," Heumphreus told the sheikh. "If you don't stand up and keep the roads open, what will keep Al Qaeda from killing everybody?"

"The job you did was great, and I thank you for it!" pleaded the sheikh, his eyes watering up. "Some people still have fear in their chests. Please understand."

Even the soldiers tasked with creating the CLCs recognize that mustering yet another armed group in Iraq is controversial.

"Granted, it's working short term, but it's a short-term fix to a long-term problem," says a US intelligence officer who asked not to be named. "Once we pull out of here, it's just aiding ethnic violence. It

looks good on paper ... violence is down 10-fold. But ...they are still attacking us."

"Sure it looks like a militia and smells like a militia, but we really are trying to tie them to the Iraqi Army and Iraqi Police," says Capt. Timothy Gillett, executive officer of Arrow Troop. Armed CLCs are not meant to stray from their checkpoints. "It's a contract. It's security, but untrained. You have a kindergarten-level Blackwater," he says referring to the largest US private security contractor.

Vacillating by the people of Dulim meant that Heumphreus made a decision to extend the three-day operation for himself and one of three platoons, recognizing that the CLC effort would fail otherwise. An Iraqi unit also decided to stay on, boosting confidence among villagers that they would not again find themselves isolated.

Reminders of the dangers are close. A suicide bomber Tuesday struck a school in the provincial capital of Baqubah, killing one and wounding 21. In the neighboring province of Salahuddin on Monday, a suicide bomber targeted a funeral, killing 18.

Dulim has been cut off for more than two years by roadside bombs and therefore beyond easy reach of US and Iraqi troops. The village has had to fend for itself, and follow Al Qaeda rules. One young man says he was told at gunpoint to stop trimming his beard, and to hike his dishdasha robe higher around his ankles, in the custom of Sunni fundamentalists.

Masked gunmen made regular visits, he says, often surrounding the mosque to challenge the imam, who eventually hired his own crew of 10 guards so he could finish his sermons. "You are the only village that does not help us, so you are against us," says the man, quoting the militants. "None of your sons join us. You are with the Americans. You are with Sahwa."

One farmer finally ran out of patience three months ago when Al Qaeda members tried to steal the water pump used to irrigate his fields. Munir Rabiyyeh Abdu-Monem shot one of the militants and wounded two others. Days later, Al Qaeda returned, grabbed the farmer, and called the whole village around to watch.

"Whoever pulls a gun on us, this is what will happen," declared one militant, before shooting three bullets into the farmer's head. In this town he is now considered a "martyr."

"We call him a hero, because he's the only one who raised his gun," says the young man. "Everybody has his picture in his pocket."

On the third morning in the village, the American captain met with the imam and village elders and reminded them of Martyr Munir. Sunnis in western Iraq "decided they did not want outsiders telling them how they should dress, how they should act," Heumphreus told the men. "Unless you stand with a common defense, you will be weak."

The imam listened to the speech, and replied that past appeals for government help went unanswered. American promises of two years ago went unfulfilled. "So we tried with all our strength and all our wisdom to protect the people," the imam said. "We had a lot of dark days. God gave us the breath to survive."

In the warmth of the morning sun, the imam finally agreed that the men would join the CLC. But by dusk, only seven had signed up, gingerly putting on their bright sashes and praying for a larger turnout.

The American decision to stay a few more days in Dulim tipped the balance. By Tuesday of this week, 60 men had joined the CLCs in Dulim and were manning three checkpoints around the town. So far, Al Qaeda has not responded.

"The power [of the people] is bigger than what Al Qaeda was expecting," Sheikh Thamir said Tuesday, contacted by phone. US and Iraqi forces remain for the time being. "People are happy, and have started to work again on their farms. I hope other villages will make the same decision, to release people from the fear of Al Qaeda."

Kansas City Star
January 20, 2008
Pg. 12

9. Army Commander Updates Leavenworth Officers On Iraq Security

By Scott Canon, The Kansas City Star

LEAVENWORTH --

Iraqis could be chiefly in control of the security in the north of their country within a year, says the general recently returned from commanding forces there.

Army Maj. Gen. Benjamin Mixon told officers at Fort Leavenworth last week that he expected Iraqi security forces to take the lead in day-to-day patrols in the northern provinces within 12 to 18 months if U.S. commanders continue to build up the capabilities of the Iraqis and the population's confidence in them.

The first province transferred to Iraqi security was Muthanna in July 2006, followed by Dhi Qar, An Najaf, Maysan, part of Irbil, Sulaymaniyah, Dahuk, Karbala and Basra. The general thinks Diyala, Salah ad Din, Ninawa, Al Tameen provinces and the rest of Irbil could see Iraqis assuming the lead in security in little over a year.

Mixon said gains in the north came ahead of last year's U.S. troop surge and before the rewriting of American doctrine for fighting the insurgency.

As early as November 2006, he said, his troops were setting up smaller remote bases more in touch with the lives of

ordinary Iraqis and courting tribal sheikhs and provincial officials.

"I don't know what's new about counterinsurgency," Mixon said.

That runs counter to enthusiasm generated among officers by a new and much-lauded counterinsurgency manual published in 2006 under the direction of Gen. David Petraeus when he was the commander at Leavenworth. It was the first revision of U.S. counterinsurgency doctrine in decades, and was notable for the way it valued collaboration with a civilian population and de-emphasized the use of brute military power.

The adoption of the manual was followed quickly by President Bush sending a surge of 30,000 troops into Iraq and putting Petraeus in charge of troops in the country.

"It's a myth that all of a sudden we published the manual, then all of a sudden we got counterinsurgency," Mixon told a handful of officers from Leavenworth's counterinsurgency center.

Urban warfare studies at Fort Polk, La., for years have underscored the importance of winning the support of civilians in an occupied country through negotiation, he said. The military has long urged understanding local culture and improving people's living conditions.

When Mixon was the top commander in northern Iraq for a 15-month stretch that ended late last year, troops worked to secure the region's bountiful oil fields - although the general said exports could still be stifled by a single terrorist explosion - rebuilt schools, and repaired water and power facilities.

The effort included public relations work, from military commanders hosting regular radio call-in shows to arranging the telecasts of widows of suicide bombing victims receiving suitcases full of Iraqi currency in

compensation.

"We're not going to win by killing everybody," the general said. "You've got to kill the right people - the leaders, the bomb makers and the people who just don't want to give up the fight.

"But you can't kill everybody. You have to win them over."

New York Times
January 23, 2008

10. Web Site Assembles U.S. Prewar Claims

By John H. Cushman Jr.

WASHINGTON --

Students of how the Bush administration led the nation into the Iraq war can now go online to browse a comprehensive database of top officials' statements before the invasion, connecting the dots between hundreds of claims, mostly discredited since then, linking Saddam Hussein to Al Qaeda or warning that he possessed forbidden weapons.

The Center for Public Integrity, a research group that focuses on ethics in government and public policy, designed the new Web site to allow simple searches for specific phrases, such as "mushroom cloud" or "yellowcake uranium," in transcripts and documents totaling some 380,000 words, including remarks by President Bush and most of his top advisers in the two years after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks.

Warnings about the need to confront Iraq, by President Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney, Secretary of State Colin L. Powell, Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld, the national security adviser, Condoleezza Rice, and two White House press secretaries, among others, can be combed line by line, and reviewed alongside detailed critiques published after the fact by official panels, historians, journalists and independent experts.

There is no startling new information in the archive,

because all the documents have been published previously. But the new computer tool is remarkable for its scope, and its replay of the crescendo of statements that led to the war. Muckrakers may find browsing the site reminiscent of what Richard M. Nixon used to dismissively call "wallowing in Watergate."

The database is online at www.publicintegrity.org.

Charles Lewis and Mark Reading-Smith of the research center say their work has documented "at least 935 false statements" on hundreds of occasions, particularly that Iraq had unconventional weapons, links to Al Qaeda, or both.

The database shows how even after the invasion, when a consensus emerged that the prewar intelligence assessments were flawed, administration officials occasionally suggested that the weapons might still be found.

The officials have defended many of their prewar statements as having been based on the intelligence that was available at the time — although there is now evidence that some statements contradicted even the sketchy intelligence of the time.

President Bush said in 2005 that "much of the intelligence turned out to be wrong" but that "it was right to remove Saddam Hussein from power."

Reuters.com
January 22, 2008

11. Pentagon Tries To Cool Talk On Petraeus

By Andrew Gray, Reuters

WASHINGTON -- The Pentagon sought on Tuesday to cool talk about future assignments for Army Gen. David Petraeus, the U.S. commander in Iraq, following reports he was a candidate for the top NATO command post.

Pentagon press secretary Geoff Morrell said Defense Secretary Robert Gates was very pleased with the leadership provided by both

Petraeus and the current NATO commander, Army Gen. John Craddock.

"Until the secretary recommends to the president otherwise and the president approves otherwise, those two commanders will continue in the roles that they now have," he said. "But he greatly respects them both and appreciates their service."

Both the New York Times and the Washington Post reported this week that Petraeus -- a media-friendly counter-insurgency expert with a doctorate from Princeton University -- was being considered as the next NATO Supreme Allied Commander, Europe.

Craddock has held the job only since December 2006 and NATO commanders normally serve three years in the post.

Petraeus has been praised for implementing a new counterinsurgency strategy in Iraq which U.S. officials say played a big role in a decline in violence there last year.

He has been in his current post, one of the most grueling in the U.S. military, since last February and had already served two previous tours in Iraq.

Asked if it was fair to say that deliberations were under way on the future roles of Petraeus and Craddock, Morrell said the Pentagon made "contingency plans for virtually everything in the world."

"It would be neglectful of us if we didn't think long term about how our commanders should be functioning and where they are best utilized and when," he said.

"But I wouldn't read too much into the fact that there are discussions ongoing in this building about the way ahead in Iraq or Afghanistan or Europe or any other command that we have," Morrell added.

The New York Times on Monday quoted an unnamed senior Pentagon official as saying Petraeus deserved a new assignment and noting that the

NATO post was a highly prestigious job.

Petraeus was a candidate for the job but no final decisions had been taken, the official was quoted as saying.

There are a relatively small number of posts in the U.S. military for four-star generals.

The Times said one approach being considered was that Petraeus would be nominated and confirmed for the NATO post before the end of September, when the U.S. Congress is expected to break for the presidential election.

He might stay in Iraq for some time after that but would move to NATO before a new president takes office in January, it said.

New York Times
January 23, 2008

12. Military Measure Goes To President

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate approved a revised military spending bill on Tuesday and sidestepped a veto showdown with President Bush.

The 91-to-3 vote sends the \$696 billion measure, which includes a 3.5 percent raise for troops, to Mr. Bush for his expected signature.

The president had rejected an earlier version of the bill because of a provision that would have guaranteed that victims of state-sponsored abuse could sue a foreign government in court and collect judgments by seizing its assets inside the United States. Mr. Bush said that would have exposed the new Iraqi government to potentially costly lawsuits over abuse under Saddam Hussein.

The administration estimated that Iraq had more than \$25 billion of assets invested in the United States that could be tied up in litigation.

Democrats reluctantly revised the measure to allow Mr. Bush to grant immunity to Iraq, as long as he determines

that doing so promotes Iraqi reconstruction and that the Iraqi government remains a "reliable ally" in the fight against terrorism.

The House passed the new bill last week, 369 to 46.

The measure, which also includes money for veterans benefits, makes the 3.5 percent salary increase retroactive to Jan. 1.

Washington Post
January 23, 2008
Pg. 2

13. Army Off Target On Recruits

Percentage of High School Graduates Drops to New Low

By Josh White, Washington Post Staff Writer

The study by the National Priorities Project concluded that slightly more than 70 percent of new recruits joining the active-duty Army last year had a high school diploma, nearly 20 percentage points lower than the Army's goal of at least 90 percent.

The National Priorities Project, a Massachusetts-based research group that examines the impact of federal budget policies and has been outspoken against the Iraq war, said the number of high school graduates among new recruits fell from 83.5 percent in 2005 to 70.7 percent last year.

"The trend is clear," said Anita Dancs, the project's research director, who based the report on Defense Department data released via the Freedom of Information Act. "They're missing their benchmarks, and I think it's strongly linked to the impact [of] the Iraq war."

The study also found that the number of "high quality" recruits -- those with both a high school diploma and a score in the upper half on the military's qualification test -- has dropped more than 15 percent from 2004 to 2007. After linking the recruiting data to Zip codes and median incomes, it found that low- and middle-income families are

supplying far more Army recruits than families with incomes greater than \$60,000 a year.

"Once again, we're staring at the painful story of young people with fewer options bearing the greatest burden," said Greg Speeter, the project's executive director.

The Army previously acknowledged that it has not met the 90 percent mark since 2004, and yesterday officials at U.S. Army Recruiting Command disputed the group's numbers but not the trend. They said that 79.1 percent of its active-duty recruits in 2007 had a high school diploma, down from 87 percent in 2005.

"It's really an indication of the difficult recruiting environment we're in, both with the impact of the ongoing wars, an economy competing for high school graduates, and a decline in the percentage of students who graduate from high school," said Douglas Smith, a spokesman for the recruiting command. "But we're not putting anyone in the Army that we don't feel is qualified to serve as a soldier."

The independent study's data were based on more than 66,000 new recruits and did not include roughly 14,000 recruits who had prior military service and most of whom would have high school diplomas. It was unclear yesterday if the recruiting command's higher numbers included new recruits only or covered all recruits in 2007.

Both groups agree that the Army has met its high recruitment goals for the past two years by lowering acceptance standards, offering signing bonuses and loosening age restrictions.

The National Priorities Project said that Defense Department studies have shown that a high school diploma is an indicator of future success in the military, with about 80 percent of those with high school diplomas finishing the first term of enlistment and about half of

the others making it that far. When recruits are unsuccessful in the Army, the service loses on its investment in training and has to recruit again.

Edwin Dorn, a professor at the University of Texas and former undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness under President Bill Clinton, said such lapses are not of short-term concern but could be a long-term problem. "There is a relationship between high school graduation and how trainable people are, and more importantly there is a relationship between the likelihood that you'll stay on active duty," Dorn said.

San Antonio Express-News
January 23, 2008

14. Texas Is Top State For Army Recruiting

By Sig Christenson,
Express-News

A report released Tuesday by the National Priorities Project found that Texas and Harris County produced more Army recruits last year than any other state or county in America. Bexar County ranked fourth, sending 814 people to boot camp.

But the number of "high-quality" recruits has continued a downward slide nationwide since 2004. Recruits in that group hold a traditional high school diploma and score in the upper half of the Armed Forces Qualification Test. Only 44.6 percent did that last year, down from 60.9 percent in 2004.

"All of this is going to impact on the ability of the (Army) to perform the mission," University of Maryland military sociologist David Segal said. "They are not going to perform as well in Iraq, and they are far less prepared to go anywhere else."

The nonpartisan Northampton, Mass.-based group analyzed Army Recruiting Command data on more than 67,000 first-time recruits who entered basic

training in the 2007 fiscal year. It found that 70.7 percent of recruits nationwide graduated from high school in 2007, down from 83.5 percent in 2005.

Army Recruiting Command spokesman Douglas Smith said the service's numbers for recruits with traditional diplomas were higher than those in the National Priorities Project's report. He said 79.07 percent of active-duty recruits held high school diplomas last year.

But Smith agreed the numbers reflected a general downturn in graduates from the past — 81.2 percent in 2006, 87 percent in 2005 and 92.45 in 2004. He said his office had not seen the report and declined to comment.

One apparent difference in the numbers is the Army's inclusion of recruits with military experience. Once small, the segment of prior-service recruits has risen substantially since 2005. The National Priorities Project's Anita Dancs said her group has not included them in its analysis because the primary focus of past Pentagon and congressional research has been on first-time recruits.

Dancs said Texas recruits with a high school diploma were higher than the national average, at 75 percent. The state ranked 16th in "Tier 1" boots, those with a 12th-grade education or better.

Bexar County and Harris County, which produced 1,025 recruits, bested the nation last year in that category, too, but Texas reflected the nationwide drop in both the number of recruits and their quality — 85.6 percent Tier 1 recruits in 2005 compared with 76.1 percent the following year.

The number of Texans joining up, meanwhile, peaked at 2.4 per 1,000 in 2006 and fell to 2.2 last year, Dancs said. Harris and Bexar counties showed a similar drop-off, but both were higher than the national average of 1.6 per 1,000.

Dancs did not have education data for the Houston and San Antonio areas from previous years. But the Army's Alamo City recruiting battalion reported that just half of all active-duty boots and one in three reservists were high school grads.

The San Antonio Recruiting Battalion, No. 1 in the nation the past three years, signed 1,510 active-duty recruits in 2007 and 333 for the Army Reserve, said Maj. Neil Mahabir. When asked to explain why fewer recruits here held diplomas, he said, "The demographics in San Antonio and our region may be a lot less high school graduates."

National Priorities Project Executive Director Greg Speeter blamed the war in Iraq for the downturn, saying youths "are naturally thinking twice before signing up to fight an unnecessary war with no end in sight."

Retired Army Lt. Gen. Ted Stroup, deputy chief of staff for the Army from 1994 to 1996, said a dichotomy is developing as the war rages in Iraq and Afghanistan. People support the troops in public, but authority figures known as "influencers" may be warning young people away from service.

"You could say that 2008 may be the make or break year for Army recruiting," he said.

"Just on the basis of chance I would have expected to see one or two states go against the trend, and I'm just not seeing that here," said Segal, the University of Maryland military sociologist. "It means that it's a very robust trend. It means the Army is really in trouble, and I think the Army knows that."

The last time the Army looked this bad was in 1980, he recalled, when the service's then-chief of staff Gen. Edward C. "Shy" Meyer warned Congress that the service was going "hollow" — becoming a shell of its former self.

"I don't think it's hollow yet, but that's the direction

we're going in," Segal commented.

"We are weakening the Army, we are straining the Army, we are nowhere near a hollow army," said Brookings Institution analyst Michael O'Hanlon, who added that the Army is "in far better shape" than in that era.

But former Reagan administration assistant defense secretary Lawrence Korb disagreed.

"The Army is low quality," he said, noting that the service allowed 1,620 felons to join last year. "I think when you get down that low, you're broken."

Los Angeles Times
January 23, 2008

15. 2 Afghans Testify At Marine Inquiry

They say they had pulled over on the highway when a convoy in March shot at them without cause. As many as 19 died.

By David Zucchino, Los Angeles Times Staff Writer

CAMP LEJEUNE, N.C. — Two Afghan men testified Tuesday that a Marine special operations convoy fired on their vehicles without provocation during an incident last March in which as many as 19 Afghans were reported killed.

Testifying from Afghanistan by video link, the men told a court of inquiry that they had pulled their vehicles to the side of the highway when the Marines suddenly opened fire. They said they did not see anyone fire at the convoy, which had been struck by a van packed with explosives moments before. One Marine was slightly wounded in that attack.

The men were the first Afghans to testify at the court of inquiry, now in its third week of investigating the March 4 encounter near Jalalabad.

An Afghan human rights group has accused the 30-Marine convoy from Special Operations Company F

of firing indiscriminately at civilians. A U.S. Army colonel apologized to Afghans last spring, saying the killing and wounding of "innocent Afghans at the hands of Americans is a stain on our honor."

Haji Liwani Qumandan, a Pashtun tribal elder, said through a translator that the blue Toyota SUV that he was driving was riddled by "thousands of bullets" from three Marine vehicles. He said the gunfire killed his father and 12-year-old nephew, and wounded him in the back. "They were shooting at everyone," Qumandan said.

Several Marines from the six-Humvee convoy, along with their Afghan American interpreter, have testified that they heard gunfire after the bomb blast and believed they were under fire as part of a "complex ambush."

One Marine, Staff Sgt. Mohamed Sheik, testified that he saw a "Kalashnikov-type" weapon on the ground next to a blue Toyota SUV. Qumandan testified that no one in his car had a weapon -- "not even a knife."

Told of Sheik's testimony, Qumandan replied: "Whoever said that, this is an absolute lie. If I had a weapon, where is it?"

No weapons have been introduced at the inquiry. Marines have testified that they did not see any enemy gunmen. At least two Humvee gunners have told investigators they fired at gunmen shooting at the convoy. The gunners have been advised by lawyers not to testify because, unlike Marines who have testified, they have not been granted immunity from prosecution.

Defense lawyers sparred with Qumandan, pointing out inconsistencies in his testimony. Qumandan said he did not see or hear the car bomb. But other witnesses have described a large, powerful explosion and said the blue Toyota was parked next to the bomb site moments after the blast.

"I was in a panicked and nervous state," Qumandan explained.

Reminded that he had told a reporter last spring that he heard the explosion and stopped his car, Qumandan shrugged and said: "I can't remember what I said yesterday."

The lawyers said Qumandan told U.S. investigators last spring that a fourth person was in the vehicle in addition to his father and nephew. Qumandan said a headless corpse was brought to his home, along with the bodies of his father and nephew, by villagers who mistakenly believed the man had been shot in Qumandan's car. In fact, he said, the man was killed near his car.

Defense lawyers also suggested Qumandan faked his wounds, showing investigators old wounds from his days as a mujahedin commander fighting the Soviets. Qumandan said he provided security for U.S. operatives funneling cash and weapons to the mujahedin.

Asked if he now backed the Taliban or Al Qaeda, Qumandan replied: "We hate the Taliban and Al Qaeda."

A U.S. military intelligence officer testified Tuesday that Qumandan's name cleared a database of known Taliban and Al Qaeda members or supporters.

Qumandan demanded payment for his shot-up car and \$10,000 in Afghan currency that he said had disappeared from his car after the shooting. "You guys have done a lot of damage to me," he told the court.

The second Afghan witness, Nangyli, testified that as he approached the convoy in his red Toyota van, he obeyed Marines' hand signals to pull over. About 30 seconds later, he said, the Marines abruptly opened fire on his van, which carried seven passengers. "Their vehicles started moving and shooting at the same time," said Nangyli, who, like many Afghans, uses only one name.

Nangyli said he was wounded in the leg by the same bullet that struck his 15-year-old nephew in the neck. A video screen in court showed the boy in a wheelchair next to his uncle and father at the American base in Jalalabad from which the Afghan witnesses spoke.

The boy's father, a police official named Ziudin, was not present at the shooting but said he viewed it as an unfortunate incident. "I forgive [the Marines] with my heart," he said. He asked the court if his son could be taken to the United States for treatment, but he was told that was not within the court's power.

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

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

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

New Orleans Times-Picayune
January 20, 2008

Pg. 18

16. Marine Corps' Leader Gets Local Geography Lesson

He says fleet needs Gulf Coast shipyards

By Paul Purpura, West Bank bureau

The Marine Corps' top brass was in New Orleans last week to discuss issues concerning that military branch while getting a feel for the local geography and its post-Katrina reality, the nation's top Marine said.

New Orleans is home to

the Marine Forces Reserve headquarters, which was at the heart of a visit that included a bus tour of the 9th Ward, which Gen. James Conway called "tragic."

"I found myself wishing the nation would understand better and could take the bus ride I took, to be able to see how devastating it's been and how tough its going to be to recover from all of that," Conway, the Marine Corps commandant, said during an interview.

The quarterly meetings are usually held in Washington, D.C., to discuss of leadership and organizational issues, he said, "but this one was an exception, and it's because we have a couple of issues."

One, he said, is understanding New Orleans' geography, with its east bank, West Bank, the federal city plan for Algiers and the Naval Air Station-Joint Reserve Base in Belle Chasse, and its relationship to the Marine Forces Reserve headquarters.

"That's all pretty abstract to us in Washington, D.C.," Conway said. "And so we saw a need to get out and understand the whole lay of the land better for future discussions as a result of what happens with BRAC," the base realignment and closure process.

The other reason for the visit, he said, was to allow general officers to become more familiar with the amphibious shipbuilding operations on the Gulf Coast.

Northrop Grumman Shipyards builds the San Antonio class of amphibious transport dock ships in Avondale and Pascagoula, Miss., including the USS New Orleans, which was completed last year.

Conway said the Navy and the Marine Corps, which deploy to war aboard the vessels, need more of them.

"We have been told that as a result of Katrina, the Gulf Coast shipyards weren't in a condition where they can

provide that," he said.

Conway discussed ongoing operations in Iraq, an upcoming deployment of Marines to Afghanistan and how the Reserve force has helped relieve its active-duty counterparts from the stress of constant deployments.

Last week, the Defense Department announced that 3,200 Marines will be sent to Afghanistan in April, to bolster NATO-led forces because of an expected Taliban resurgence in the spring.

The call comes as Marines are still "at surge" in Iraq, he said, while the Marine Corps is trying to achieve a deployment schedule to allow his troops to be home for 14 months between seven-month deployments.

"This is going to hurt even more," Conway said of the Afghanistan deployment. "But the fact is that the nation is at war. Marines fight the nation's wars, and we're going to ask our people to endure it for a while... . In the meantime, we're going to ask people to stay with us, suck it up and do what has to be done to retain the gains that we've seen in Afghanistan. If the Taliban want to get frisky in the spring, we'll put a wooping on them."

Since the March 2003 invasion of Iraq, and the nation-building mission that followed, Conway said the "sustained effort over time is impacting greatly the ability of an all-volunteer force to carry that fight."

Reservists fit into the equation, he said. More than 350 Marine Corps reservists based in the New Orleans area are in Iraq, most are from the 3rd Battalion, 23rd Marine Regiment and Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 773, Detachment A, and a small military police unit. All are based at the Naval Air Station-Joint Reserve Base in Belle Chasse.

The squadron, whose pilots fly UH-1 Huey and AH-1 Cobra helicopters, helped relieve the tempo of an

active-duty squadron based on the East Coast that was home for five months between deployments of seven months, Conway said. Such stress affects families and potentially leads pilots to leave the service, he said.

"So being able to inject our reservists in and not lose one bit of quality in what we have to do in Iraq has really been a marvelous tool that we know that we've had all along," Conway said. "But we just, again, renewed our appreciation for what our reserve community brings."

Meanwhile, he said, the Marine Corps has gotten approval to add 27,000 Marines to its ranks, growing the military branch to 202,000 members. With the growth will be organizational changes and a look at those military jobs used most frequently overseas, such as engineers, military police and some intelligence billets.

He said he thinks the war on terrorism "is going to be a long fight."

"Some say a generational struggle," Conway said. "Depends on what you call a generation, I guess. But is it going to end with Iraq and Afghanistan? I don't think so. I think those are the first battles of this long war."

Los Angeles Times
January 23, 2008

17. Bush's Sonar Order Is Unconstitutional, Coastal Panel Says

By Kenneth R. Weiss, Los Angeles Times Staff Writer

The California Coastal Commission argued in federal court Tuesday that President Bush violated the U.S. Constitution by trying to overturn a court order that restricted the Navy's use of a type of sonar linked to the deaths of marine mammals.

The commission's attorneys said Bush's move to exempt the Navy sonar training exercises in Southern

California waters from federal law violated the Constitution's separation-of-powers doctrine.

"The notion that the president can act like some medieval autocrat and impose the law as he sees it violates the fundamental basis of the American Constitution," said Atty. Gen. Jerry Brown, whose staff lawyers represent the commission. "There are three branches of government. Each of the branches has to be respected."

President Bush issued an order last week that tried to overturn a ruling by a federal judge in Los Angeles who had directed the Navy to avoid conducting its sonar exercises within 12 miles of the coast and in the area between Santa Catalina and San Clemente islands, places where whales and dolphins are abundant.

The president justified his decision as a matter of national security, saying it was of paramount interest for the United States to train sailors to use mid-frequency active sonar to hunt for quiet diesel-electric submarines operated by potentially hostile countries in areas such as the Persian Gulf.

But Bush provided only a " cursory basis" for his decision and did not provide an explanation from the Secretary of Commerce, as required for an exemption to the Coastal Zone Management Act, the state attorney general's office argued.

Without such an explanation, Bush seems to be countermanding a judicial opinion simply because he does not agree with it, the court papers argue.

"He can appeal it," Brown said. "He can appeal it twice, to the [U.S.] Supreme Court... . But he cannot say he's above the law and invoke the idea of national security and do whatever he wants."

A U.S. Justice Department lawyer handling the case for the president and the Navy declined to comment. So did Navy Cmdr. Jeff Davis, who said Navy lawyers would

respond in court Friday.

Carl Tobias, a University of Richmond law school professor, said the Coastal Commission had raised a provocative argument that he expected to have ramifications on future conflicts that arise between national security and environmental protections.

"It's totally uncharted territory," Tobias said.

Tobias said Bush did not seek the exemption until after a court had weighed the government's national security arguments and ruled that some environmental protections nonetheless were warranted.

Peter Douglas, executive director of the Coastal Commission, said his agency wasn't seeking to set constitutional precedent but to do its job of protecting coastal and marine resources.

"The commission is doing this because we feel so strong that the commission action allows the Navy to conduct its exercises while providing reasonable protections to marine mammals," Douglas said.

Savannah Morning News
January 23, 2008

18. Guantanamo Chief Blasts Critics In Comments To Savannah Audience

By Pamela E. Walck

Few people can say they've caught a glimpse of life behind the wires of Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

But some 100 members and friends of the Savannah Council, Navy League of the United States can brag they have seen and heard more than most.

Tuesday night, the league's guest was Rear Admiral Mark H. Buzby, commander of the Joint Task Force based at Guantanamo. He spoke at the Hunter Club for the council's monthly meeting.

James Keller, president of the local league chapter, said it was a chance meeting during a

commissioning ceremony that brought the admiral to Savannah - the fact that Guantanamo has been in the news a lot lately was merely a plus.

During his remarks, Buzby shared personal insights and photos of America's oldest naval base - including images of the holding blocks and living conditions for 275 current detainees, all with suspected links to al-Qaida and other terrorist cell groups who have been housed there since 2002.

"I leaped at the opportunity to speak to people who like the Navy," Buzby said, "and because of the opportunity to speak about the most misunderstood command in the Navy."

Offering his version of the "truth," Buzby said he and his officers have a "very cordial" relationship with their Cuban counterparts on the other side of the base's wires.

And since Guantanamo first started taking detainees in America's global war against terrorism, Buzby said some of the base's detainees have been linked to the 9/11 bombings, the attack on the USS Cole, the embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania as well as the Taliban aggression in Afghanistan and Northern Africa.

"We have everyone from the higher-ups to the trigger-pullers, and everybody in between," Buzby said. "Basically, I have a rebuilt al-Qaida cell inside my camp."

And while some of that leadership has been holed up for the last six years, Buzby said many have a keen working knowledge of al-Qaida and the Taliban's current leadership because they once were underlings for many of those captured in 2002.

Buzby and others contend that since the detainees were captured during warfare, under the laws of conflict, those detained can be held without charges until the war ends.

But with America's War

on Terror entering another year, and with no end in sight, Buzby doesn't see Guantanamo's purpose changing much in the future.

In fact, the base is about to enter a new era later this spring when military commissions - similar to civilian court proceedings - will begin for as many as 100 detainees with ties to terroristic acts across the globe.

Six years later, these detainees are still providing valuable information.

Buzby said that recently, some detainees re-created detailed maps of the Tora Bora area of Afghanistan, using poster board paper and a crayon. It was information passed along to coalition forces in the area that enabled those forces to wipe out safe houses, trench lines and enemy supplies.

"For a Subway BMT, they will talk a whole lot," Buzby said.

Buzby acknowledged that many question the care and conditions at the base, but he insists it's nonsense.

He said there is one doctor for every three detainees - and many of the physicians also see the top members of Congress as patients.

"People who question the level of care don't know what the hell they are talking about," Buzby said to loud applause at one point.

Commander describes life at Gitmo

Prior to his address, Rear Adm. Mark H. Buzby - commander of the Joint Task Force at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba - sat down for a question and answer session with the Savannah Morning News:

SMN: What is a "typical" day for a detainee at Guantanamo?

Buzby: "Detainees are housed for the most part in individual cells that are about 8 feet by 10 feet roughly in size, all next to each other. They wake up around 5 or 6 in the morning, and they are given their breakfast. They are given

three meals a day, roughly about 4,500 to 5,000 calorie a day diet total. Morning prayer is called. They pray five times a day. Then after breakfast, it's varied.

"Everyone will get at least two hours of recreation, we stagger that. ... After recreation, they will shower and go back to their cells. Some may go to a medical appointment if they have some sort of ailment that requires them to be seen by a physician.

"Some, if willing, will go to an interview or interrogation that can last two to four or five hours.

"Lunch gets served around 11:30 ... there's more prayer times. ... Dinner is served usually around 6, and we turn the lights- they never go off, but they go down at 10 p.m., and that's kind of their day."

Since you've been assigned to Guantanamo, the number of detainees has been reduced dramatically. Is there a goal for when the base will be free of suspected terrorists, or do you think it will always function in that capacity?

Buzby: "The process is really controlled by the deputy secretary of the Department of Defense, Secretary (Gordon) England. He is what's known as the designated civilian official for detainee affairs, and he reviews the stats of all the detainees on a constant basis and makes a determination every year ... after reviewing the records as to whether they should be retained under U.S. government control, transferred to the control of another government - typically the country where they were born - or outright released.

"If they fall into that transfer category, the State Department works with host countries to arrange a transfer. Saudi Arabia, for example, has taken back almost all their detainees because they have a very well established rehabilitation program, which has been very, very successful. We feel very comfortable

releasing those detained back to their countries.

"(Others) such as Yemen don't have a good track record. A lot of the people they have captured have escaped. Afghanistan is somewhere in the middle there.

"And many will go before a military commission, which is a trial. They will be brought up on charges and tried before a military commission. (We have) about 100 or so that will go through that process.

"Depending on the outcome, they will then be prisoners and go into detention facilities someplace. But no decision has been made whether that will remain Guantanamo or in the U.S. prison system. That process begins this spring."

There have been reports that many detainees are fearful of returning to their home land for fear of being tortured or killed. Was that something the U.S. government ever expected? Is it a valid fear?

Buzby: "In some cases, we did. In some, cases we didn't. We did not with the Algerians. We sent a lot of Moroccans back - when I say we, I mean the U.S. government. We try very hard to ensure we are not going to put detainees back into dangerous circumstances."

What is your opinion of waterboarding as a form of information gathering? Do you regard it as torture?

Buzby: "Waterboarding, to the best of my knowledge, is not in accordance with the guidance of the Army field manual concerning interrogation - which is what I have to go by. So it would never be allowed and has never been allowed at Guantanamo and has never been done at Guantanamo. I have never had it done to me personally. The description of it sounds pretty gruesome, and it would not be something I would want to endure.

How many of the 275 detainees at Guantanamo will face charges?

Buzby: "About 100 are scheduled for trials. Others we're still developing cases."

"Many are enemy combatants that were removed from the battlefield - that was their major sin in this world: They were fighting against coalition forces."

"The law of war and conflict, which is the governing doctrine in this case, states two warring states have the right to remove combatants from the battlefield. You don't have to charge them with anything, and they don't have to be guilty of anything. They just have to be caught in the process of fighting the other guy."

"At the end of the conflict, you turn them loose. So some of them may fall into that category - so when the fighting is over, the door is open and they go home."

"The problem is: When does the global war on terror end? Who knows? But until I get told otherwise, I keep them behind the wire."

Wall Street Journal (wsj.com)
January 22, 2008

19. Pentagon: U.S. Hopeful For Radar Agreement With Czechs Soon

WASHINGTON (AFP) -- The Pentagon said Tuesday it is hopeful about reaching an agreement with the Czech Republic within weeks on stationing a radar on its territory for a U.S. missile defense site in Europe.

Geoff Morrell, the Pentagon press secretary, said talks with the Czech Republic "continue to go very, very well."

"We are moving ever closer to an agreement," he said. "Hopefully, we'll have something to announce within the matter of weeks, hopefully not much longer than that."

Morrell's upbeat characterization of the talks with the Czech Republic comes as a new Polish government is

pressing for security guarantees from Washington in return for deploying interceptor missiles on its territory.

Polish Defense Minister Bogdan Klich, who met in Washington last week with U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates, said Poland wanted U.S. help in modernizing its air defense system.

The U.S. move to install a missile defense system in Europe has angered Russia, which sees it as an encroachment in its former sphere of influence that could one day be turned against Moscow.

Morrell said there has been no progress in U.S. diplomatic efforts to engage the Russians on the missile defense shield.

New York Times
January 23, 2008

20. Panel Questions Canadian Role In Afghanistan

By Ian Austen

OTTAWA — A government panel said Tuesday that the Canadian military should withdraw from a combat role in Afghanistan next year unless it is reinforced with 1,000 additional troops from other NATO countries.

Canadians are divided about the role their military should play in Afghanistan after legislative approval for the country's current combat mission in the province of Kandahar ends in February 2009. The deaths of a diplomat and 77 soldiers, most of which have occurred since mid-2006, have caused some politicians to call for a return to a reconstruction role or even a complete troop withdrawal.

Canada has a combat force of about 2,400 soldiers in the country.

The report from the panel, a five-member group led by John Manley, a lawyer and former deputy prime minister, emphasized the importance of continuing the Canadian combat mission. But it also

echoed popular resentment in Canada that other NATO countries are sending troops to the region under orders to avoid combat.

"We are going to need to see more troops in Kandahar Province or this mission will not succeed," Mr. Manley told reporters after giving the report to Prime Minister Stephen Harper, a Conservative who appointed the panel. "We've heard it again and again: 'This is NATO's most important mission.' Well, it's time for the rhetoric to end."

During their three months of study, the panel members said, they heard criticism of the efforts of some other NATO countries, including comments from unidentified NATO commanders.

Some countries, the panel said in the report, notably the United States, Britain and Canada, "have borne more than a proportionate share of war fighting in Afghanistan."

Mr. Harper, who has suggested that Canada should stay at least until 2011, said he would study the report. Canada's Parliament, where no opposition party favors extending the combat mission, will vote on the country's next move, probably by this spring.

Philadelphia Inquirer
January 23, 2008

21. Afghan To Die For Insulting Islam

KABUL, Afghanistan -- An Afghan court yesterday sentenced a 23-year-old journalism student to death for distributing a paper he printed off the Internet that three judges held violated the tenets of Islam.

The three-judge panel sentenced Sayad Parwez Kambaksh to death for distributing a paper that humiliated Islam, said Fazel Wahab, the chief judge in the northern province of Balkh, where the trial took place. Wahab did not preside over the trial.

Kambaksh's family and the

head of a journalists group denounced the verdict and said Kambaksh was not represented by a lawyer at trial. Kambaksh's brother, Yacoubi Brahimi, described the proceeding as a "secret trial," saying the family did not know it had been scheduled. -- AP

New York Times
January 23, 2008

22. Pakistan: U.S. Commander And Army Chief Hold Talks

By Salman Masood

Adm. William J. Fallon, the senior American military commander in the Middle East, arrived for a one-day visit and called on President Pervez Musharraf's successor as army chief, Gen. Ashfaq Parvez Kayani. Mr. Musharraf is on a tour of European capitals. Little detail of the meeting with Admiral Fallon, held at military headquarters in Rawalpindi, was made available. The commanders discussed "the overall security situation in the region," a spokesman for the Pakistan Army said. Admiral Fallon was recently quoted as saying that the United States military would play a greater role in training Pakistani forces and would provide technical advice to its troops.

Washington Times
January 23, 2008

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23. U.S. Dissatisfied With Intelligence On Terror Groups

Will hold off on military strikes
By Richard Lardner,
Associated Press

The Bush administration isn't satisfied with the quality of information it's getting about terrorist groups operating in Pakistan's volatile tribal area, a senior U.S. official said yesterday.

Despite the shortcomings, the United States won't conduct military strikes on its own inside Pakistan unless

President Pervez Musharraf's government requests such direct support, said Dell Dailey, the State Department's counterterrorism chief.

"There's gaps in intelligence," Mr. Dailey said during a breakfast meeting with reporters. "We don't have enough information about what's going on there. Not on al Qaeda. Not on foreign fighters. Not on the Taliban."

Mr. Dailey, a retired Army lieutenant general with an extensive background in special operations, said the lack of information makes him "uncomfortable." Yet the solution to the problem rests mainly with the Pakistanis, who would likely perceive a strong U.S. presence as an unwelcome intrusion.

"We have to be careful conducting operations in a sovereign country, particularly one that's a friend of ours and one that has given us a lot of support," Mr. Dailey said. "The blowback would be pretty serious."

Mr. Dailey's comments came on the same day that Islamic militants in Pakistan attacked a fort near the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, sparking fighting with government forces that left at least five troops and 37 fighters dead, the Pakistani army said.

The attack occurred in South Waziristan, a lawless tribal region where al Qaeda and Taliban-linked militants operate.

Mr. Musharraf played down the impact of recent attacks in the region, saying yesterday they were "pinpricks" his government must manage.

Aside from political repercussions of the United States acting unilaterally, Mr. Dailey said trying to blend even highly skilled U.S. commandos into such a hostile area is extremely risky. Even a seemingly innocuous mistake, such as wearing a piece of clothing incorrectly, could tip off the enemy and undermine the mission.

"Folks like the special operations [forces] are pretty darn good, but the potential to be detected is pretty high," Mr. Dailey said. "So unless it's a very, very, very focused effort, it's pretty tough to be immediately effective."

Pakistan's new military chief, Gen. Ashfaq Kayani, already has shown he's an aggressive commander, and U.S. officials are confident he will make progress. If Pakistanis ask for assistance, the United States will provide it, Mr. Dailey said.

In a related development, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said the Bush administration will fight congressional efforts to curb billions of dollars in U.S. aid to Pakistan while also warning that Mr. Musharraf must support and promote democracy.

Prior to talks with Mr. Musharraf in Switzerland today, Miss Rice said it is critical that February legislative elections be free and fair.

Washington Times

January 23, 2008

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24. N. Korea Talks Left Out Details

U.S. seeks nuke arsenal data

By Bill Gertz, The Washington Times

North Korea's recent discussions with the United States about a required declaration under the six-nation nuclear talks omitted key data on Pyongyang's current nuclear arsenal and its covert uranium enrichment program, U.S. officials say.

The failure to provide the information in a formal declaration, combined with North Korea's Jan. 4 public statement asserting it already made the declaration, left the four years of talks frozen amid newly disclosed intelligence showing North Korea at one time had equipment with traces of 90 percent enriched uranium, said officials who

spoke on the condition of anonymity.

One official said North Korea some time ago provided the U.S. government with a sample of a specialty metal supposedly melted down from tubes the North Koreans claim were meant for non-nuclear purposes. Pyongyang had hoped the sample would dispel suspicions about the covert uranium enrichment program that North Korean officials have at different times both admitted and denied having.

Instead, ultrasensitive detectors found traces of the highly enriched uranium. "The North Koreans thought we would not be able to detect the traces," the official said.

A second official declined to comment on the uranium traces found on the sample, first reported in The Washington Post last month, because it involves sensitive intelligence.

However, this official, who has detailed knowledge of Asian affairs, said there is no change in the high level of confidence among U.S. intelligence agencies that North Korea sought to develop a enriched uranium for weapons at least since 2002. A slowdown in procurement activity led to change in the confidence level in 2006, but major concerns about the program remain.

"Uranium enrichment is a critical issue with North Korea," this official said. "Their efforts to acquire the fuel, the infrastructure necessary to enrich uranium has always been a critical issue in our discussions in the six-party talks, and it's still there. That's why with the declaration one would hope they'll be forthcoming on this issue."

Assistant Secretary of State Christopher R. Hill, the lead U.S. negotiator, recently spoke to a North Korean official about the declaration, and Mr. Hill thought the discussion was about what North Korea planned to put in

a formal declaration due by Dec. 31.

But on Jan. 4 a North Korean government spokesman announced that the declaration was made. The U.S. official said that if it was the declaration, it is "very deficient" and lacked details of both the current North Korean nuclear weapons arsenal and the covert uranium enrichment program.

"It wasn't comprehensive by any means, and they were told so, and we said 'this is what we're looking for in the declaration; you need to be forthcoming on these points,'" said the official, describing what was disclosed as "totally off the mark."

The North Koreans were asked to "rework" the issue and come back with a comprehensive statement, the official said.

On uranium enrichment, "no, they have not admitted to any procurement that speaks to any intent to enrich uranium," the official said. "They have continued to deny making any acquisitions" for "acquiring the capability to enrich uranium."

The lack of detail on current nuclear arms was a surprise to U.S. officials because North Korea tested a nuclear device, with partial success, in October 2006. The official said there are no "indicators that they are planning any additional tests."

Washington Post

January 23, 2008

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25. N. Korea May Be Taken Off Terrorism List

North Korea may soon be on its way to being the second country taken off the State Department's list of state sponsors of terrorism during the Bush administration's war on terrorism.

Dell Dailey, the State Department's coordinator for counterterrorism, told a group of reporters yesterday that

North Korea appears to meet the criteria for removal. "Taking countries off of the designation list is pretty specific," Dailey said. "You go back six months, you see if there's been any visible support or material support. We don't see that with North Korea. You also ask them to give an affirmation that they will not do things in the future... . It appears that North Korea has complied with those criteria."

Getting off the U.S. list was until recently hard to accomplish. North Korea was added two decades ago, after the bombing of a Korean Air Lines flight in 1987.

But the Bush administration has used the list -- which exposes countries to sanctions -- as a prod for better behavior. Libya was removed in 2006 after it promised to give up its weapons-of-mass-destruction programs and to make payments to the families of victims of Pan Am Flight 103, which was blown up over Lockerbie, Scotland, in 1988.

Tokyo has pressed Washington not to remove North Korea from the list until it provides a full account of Japanese citizens abducted by North Korean agents.

Ultimately, the decision on removal rests with President Bush, notwithstanding the legal criteria or diplomatic sensitivities.

Washington Post
January 23, 2008
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26. Six Powers Back U.N. Draft On Iran

Tough Sanctions Are Watered Down

By Robin Wright, Washington Post Staff Writer

To break an eight-month deadlock, the Bush administration accepted a plan that includes largely voluntary monitoring of transactions involving two banks, and calls for restraints on export credits, cargo traffic and business involving individuals or

institutions linked to proliferation. The toughest restriction is a travel ban on key officials, the European officials said.

The final talks in Berlin were dominated by intense negotiations between Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, according to U.S. and European officials. Announcing an agreement afterward, German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier acknowledged that the lengthy diplomacy to get a draft "was not always all that easy."

The U.N. Security Council passed two earlier resolutions, in December 2006 and March 2007, calling for Iran to suspend its enrichment of uranium, a process that can be used to produce peaceful energy as well as deadly weapons. It promised a third resolution if Iran did not comply in 60 days. Washington hoped that new sanctions would add more meaningful pressure.

But Russia and China, which do significant business with Iran, resisted earlier British and French drafts -- inspired by Washington -- that called for asset freezes on Iranian banks and parts of the military, including the elite Quds Force, as well as a ban on arms sales to Iran. All these measures were either dropped or watered down.

At this stage, the draft itself is the primary achievement, diplomats say. "This will come as a rude shock to the Iranians," departing Undersecretary of State R. Nicholas Burns said in an interview. "They had been predicting that the Security Council was no longer unified enough to pass a third resolution, and they were wrong. The council will pass this resolution in several weeks, and it will add to the international pressure on Iran to suspend its uranium enrichment."

European envoys say the

main impact of a new resolution may be the psychological effect on international financial transactions and institutions, which have already cut back their dealings with Iran. The new draft calls for U.N. member states to "monitor" financial activities with Bank Melli and Bank Saderat, two of Iran's biggest banks. It also calls for vigilance on export credits to Iran, a provision dropped from a previous resolution at China's insistence, diplomats say.

"It's going to be more difficult for Iran to do business," said a European diplomat. "It sends a useful political message that Iran is not off the hook and at a good time in the electoral cycle." Iran is set to hold parliamentary elections in March, usually a harbinger of what will happen in the next presidential election, due next year. The U.S. goal is to isolate the Tehran government in ways that would lead the population to turn against it at the polls.

Britain, France and Germany will co-sponsor the resolution, which will be shared with the 10 nonpermanent Security Council members this week. It is not expected to be put to a vote until next month, after Libya's council presidency ends.

USA Today
January 23, 2008
Pg. 1

27. 'Enemy Combatant' Padilla Gets 17 Years For Conspiracy

By Marisol Bello, USA Today

Jose Padilla, who once symbolized the Bush administration's fight against homegrown terrorism, was sentenced to 17 years in prison Tuesday on terror support charges. He received a more lenient term than the life sentence prosecutors sought because the judge said the government did not prove he

was a terrorist.

The sentencing caps a five-year journey in which the government accused the American of plotting to detonate a "dirty bomb" on U.S. soil, detained him for three years without filing charges and never charged him with the bomb plot.

After his conviction in August, Padilla could have received 30 years to life in prison. U.S. District Judge Marcia Cooke gave him and two other men convicted of conspiracy charges lesser sentences.

"There is no evidence that these defendants personally maimed, kidnapped or killed anyone in the United States or elsewhere," Cooke said. "There was never a plot to overthrow the United States government."

She said she also considered Padilla's "harsh treatment" while confined.

Padilla's attorneys said he was tortured by the military. The government held him in isolation in a Navy brig after his 2002 arrest and says he was not tortured.

"It humbles the government to a certain extent, but it can still count this in the victory column," said Laurie Levenson, a law professor at Loyola Law School Los Angeles and former assistant U.S. attorney.

After a three-month trial, jurors convicted Padilla, 37, and co-defendants Adham Amin Hassoun, 45, and Kifah Wael Jayyousi, 46, of terrorism conspiracy and material support. They were found to be part of a support cell that sent recruits, money and supplies to al-Qaeda and other Islamic extremists worldwide.

Cooke sentenced Padilla to 17 years and four months, Hassoun to 15 years and eight months and Jayyousi to 12 years and eight months. All could be free sooner with time served and good behavior factored in, their lawyers said.

Financial Times

January 23, 2008

28. U.S. Moves To Ease Defence Trading Curbs

By Demetri Sevastopulo and Daniel Dombey, Washington

The US administration on Tuesday announced export control reforms aimed at facilitating the trade of defence products and sensitive dual-use technologies with its allies.

The reforms apply to the licensing of defence products by the state department, in addition to the export controls on dual-use technologies managed by the commerce department.

The presidential directive, which does not require congressional approval, says the state department will be allocated more money to hasten the process for issuing licences. It also requires the department to make a decision on a licence application within 60 days. US manufacturers and allies, including the UK, have complained about long delays in obtaining approval for non-controversial defence goods.

John Engler, president of the US National Association of Manufacturers (NAM), said the directive was a "major step toward enhancing our national security while strengthening the global competitiveness of America's manufacturers".

The commerce department said it would develop a "regular process for systematic review of the list of controlled dual-use items".

While the administration touted the reforms as significant, some experts were unconvinced.

Donald Weadon, an expert on export controls, said the initiative was "remarkably underwhelming" and "fails to address the principal deficiencies of the current system, which are adversely impacting US technology companies".

Last year, the administration agreed a treaty on defence trade with the UK.

Washington Times

January 23, 2008

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29. Remarkable Progress In Iraq

Economy, security continue to improve

By Helle Dale

Not every dark cloud has a silver lining, but \$100 per barrel oil could have at least one: the boost it is providing for Iraq's long-suffering economy. Combined with greater political stability, and spreading zones of security, ascending oil prices are showing promise of making 2008 one of the best years Iraq has had in a long while.

In the department of "don't let good news from Iraq go unnoticed," this column brings you reports not only from the U.S. government, but also from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the United Nations as independent confirmation that Iraq looks to be headed for a good year. The argument that Iraq is a failure and a waste of American lives and dollars is getting harder to sustain, which is why we may not have been hearing it nearly as much from the Democratic presidential contenders as one might have expected.

According to a just-released report by the IMF, Iraq may see as much as 7 percent economic growth this year, and 7 to 8 percent next year. According to Mohsin Kahn, director of the fund's Middle East and Central Asia Department, this minor economic miracle is tied mainly to Iraq's growing production of oil — which again reflects an improved security situation. Iraq is currently pumping 2 million barrels per day, a figure that could rise by 200,000 barrels by next year. In the last quarter of 2007, Iraqi oil production rose by 250,000 barrels per day, mainly due to the improved security situation in Kirkuk in the Kurdish area of northern Iraq.

Not only that, but due to

the macroeconomic policies and reforms over the past year by the Iraqi government, it was able in December to repay early its entire outstanding debt to the IMF, amounting to some \$470 million. As a consequence, the fund approved a new stand-by package for Iraq of \$740 million on December 20.

"The Iraqi authorities have succeeded in keeping their economic program, on track, in 2006-7, despite the difficult security situation," stated Takatoshi Kato, deputy Managing Director of the IMF when the new package was approved. The IMF also commended the Iraqi government for its plans to keep up the good works in 2008.

Meanwhile, the United Nations also took note of progress in Iraq last week. U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon gave his report to the U.N. Security Council, calling "the reduction in the overall number of attacks reported across Iraq a welcome development."

He also reminded the Council that solidifying the gains depends on the continued engagement of the Iraqi security forces and the United States and its allies. It also hinges on the extension of a temporary ceasefire by radical Shi'ite leader Moqtada al-Sadr as well as the cooperation of the Sunni Arab groups that switched sides to work with the United States. All of this is true, and contains some major hypotheticals, but 2007 showed that it can be done.

The secretary-general pointed out that similar improvements in the political arena are needed, where political reconciliation has moved slowly. This is undoubtedly true, yet the expectations and demands by critics of the Iraq engagement here at home are often outlandish. After all, this is a political season where political divisions among Americans will be accentuated by our own

political process.

The Shi'ite-led Iraqi government recently took a controversial step in this direction, changing the law to allow many of the mainly Sunni former members of the Ba'ath Party to reenter the military and civil service. (The party was declared illegal after the U.S.-led invasion in 2003). An important step toward reconciliation between Iraq's two main religious groups, it will clearly be a difficult process and some criminals may slip under the radar. Under the circumstances, it is a risk that needs to be taken. There will be the possibility to challenge ex-members on their deeds under Saddam, after which they will be granted immunity from prosecution.

All of these gains, which are finally dawning on the international agencies, are dependent on all of the above — and then some on factions outside the control of either the U.S. or Iraqi governments. If this trend does indeed continue, however, there will be more to the silver for the lining of that dark cloud alluded to above. With the world's third-largest oil reserves, Iraq has the potential to help bring those prices back down — which is all the more reason for the U.S. and Iraqi government to stay committed to the gains that were made in 2007.

Helle Dale is director of the Douglas and Sarah Allison Center for Foreign Policy Studies at the Heritage Foundation. Her column appears on Wednesdays.

Washington Post

January 23, 2008

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30. Still Wrong In Afghanistan

By Richard Holbrooke

"I'm a spray man myself," President Bush told government leaders and American counter-narcotics officials during his 2006 trip to Afghanistan. He said it again

when President Hamid Karzai visited Camp David in August. Bush meant, of course, that he favors aerial eradication of poppy fields in Afghanistan, which supplies over 90 percent of the world's heroin. His remarks -- which, despite their flippant nature, were definitely not meant as a joke -- are part of the story behind the spectacularly unsuccessful U.S. counter-narcotics program in Afghanistan. Karzai and much of the international community in Kabul have warned Bush that aerial spraying would create a backlash against the government and the Americans, and serve as a recruitment device for the Taliban while doing nothing to reduce the drug trade. This is no side issue: If the program continues to fail, success in Afghanistan will be impossible.

Fortunately, Bush has not been able to convince other nations or Karzai that aerial spraying should be conducted, although he is vigorously supported by the American ambassador, William Wood, who was an enthusiastic proponent of aerial spraying in his previous assignment, in Colombia. Wood, often called "Chemical Bill" in Kabul, has even threatened senior Afghan officials with cuts in reconstruction funds if his policies are not carried out, according to two sources.

But even without aerial eradication, the program, which costs around \$1 billion a year, may be the single most ineffective program in the history of American foreign policy. It's not just a waste of money. It actually strengthens the Taliban and al-Qaeda, as well as criminal elements within Afghanistan.

According to the U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime, the area under opium cultivation increased to 193,000 hectares in 2007 from 165,000 in 2006. The harvest also grew, to 8,200 tons from 6,100. Could any program be more unsuccessful?

The program destroys crops in insecure areas, especially in the south, where the Taliban is strongest. This policy pushes farmers with no other source of livelihood into the arms of the Taliban without reducing the total amount of opium being produced. Meanwhile, there is far too little effort made against the drug lords and high-ranking government officials who are at the heart of the huge drug trade in Afghanistan -- probably the largest single-country drug production since 19th-century China -- whose dollar value equals about 50 percent of the country's official gross domestic product. There is a direct correlation between opium production and security. In relatively secure areas, production has dropped, but along the Pakistan border in the insecure south, production is increasing and amounts to about 80 percent of the overall crop.

Everyone talks about "alternative livelihoods" and alternative crops as the solution to the drug problem. This is true in theory -- but this theory has been tried elsewhere with almost no success. Poppies are an easy crop to grow and are far more valuable than any other product that can be grown in the rocky, remote soil of most of Afghanistan. Without roads, it is hard to get heavier (and less valuable) crops to market -- and what market is there, anyway? It will take years to create the networks of roads, markets and lucrative crops that would induce farmers to switch, especially when government officials, including some with close ties to the presidency, are protecting the drug trade and profiting from it. (Any Kabul resident can point out where drug lords live -- they have the largest and fanciest houses in town.)

Barnett Rubin, a leading expert on Afghanistan and a fellow at the Asia Society in New York and New York

University's Center on International Cooperation, writes in a forthcoming study that "the location of narcotics cultivation is the result -- not the cause -- of insecurity." He adds, "Escalating forced eradication" -- as the U.S. Embassy wants to do -- "will only make the effort fail more quickly because it actually builds the insurgency it is trying to eliminate."

To be sure, breaking the narco-state in Afghanistan is essential, or all else will fail. But it will take years, and American policies today are working against their own objective. Couple that with the other most critical fact about the war in Afghanistan -- it cannot be won as long as the border areas in Pakistan are havens for the Taliban and al-Qaeda -- and you have the ingredients for a war that will last far longer than the war in Iraq, even if NATO sends more troops and the appalling National Police training program is finally fixed. Solving this problem requires bold, creative thinking. Consideration should be given to a temporary suspension of eradication in insecure areas, accompanied by an intensified effort to improve security, build small market-access roads and offer farmers free agricultural support.

When I offered these thoughts on this page almost two years ago ["Afghanistan: The Long Road Ahead," op-ed, April 2, 2006], I was told by several high-ranking U.S. government officials that I was too pessimistic. I hope they do not still think so. Even more, I hope they will reexamine the disastrous drug policies that are spending American tax dollars to strengthen America's enemies.

Richard Holbrooke, a former ambassador to the United Nations, writes a monthly column for The Post.

New York Post
January 23, 2008

31. Bad News Bear

Russia's sure to keep on pushing hard

By Peter Brookes

The next American president will likely face an increasingly frosty relationship with an increasingly mighty Mother Russia.

With the liberal-democratic experiment plainly over, today's Russia is authoritarian and nationalistic at home, confident and assertive abroad, awash in oil/gas wealth and bent on reinventing itself - once again - as a great power on the world stage.

Soviet? No. Proto-imperialist? Maybe.

While we're unlikely to see a rivalry as bitter as in the permafrost days of the Cold War, Russia and America will clash on a host of issues.

Russia's feisty President Vladimir Putin steps down in March but he's expected to keep the real power, probably re-emerging as prime minister or "national leader." Certainly, his handpicked successor, Dmitry Medvedev, will closely cleave to "Putinism."

Since taking office in 2000, Putin worked to stabilize the Motherland and re-establish Russia as a global force - on par with the United States, China and the European Union. Medvedev's Kremlin is sure to continue pushing back against any "encroachment" on Russia's traditional sphere of influence in Eastern and Central Europe, the Baltic, the Caucasus and Central Asia - what Moscow calls its "near abroad."

Most recently, Russia objects to the United States putting a radar in the Czech Republic and deploying 10 interceptors in Poland to counter the Iranian nuclear and ballistic missile threat. (Moscow's complaint - that the bases undermine Russia's strategic nuclear deterrent - is simply false.) But the Kremlin surely dislikes seeing US bases in its old East European stomping grounds, where it

still wants to have sway - and a say.

Then there's Russia's defense buildup. Putinism sees a strong defense as a deterrent against attack - and a means of resisting outside pressure on its policies, foreign or domestic.

Defense spending rose as much as 30 percent in 2007 - following jumps of 22 percent and 27 percent bump-ups in the two prior years. After years of neglect, the \$200 billion modernization program leaves Russia with the world's second-largest defense budget.

The buildup is accompanied by Moscow's leaving the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe treaty last year, unnerving the Europeans, and may move it to vacate the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces treaty, too.

Russia's making security problems for the next prez in a host of other ways, too. With sales to emerging superpower China, troublemaker Venezuela and rogue states like Iran and Syria, Moscow is the world's largest arms supplier to the developing world. And it's building and fueling nuclear plants for Iran, with the Bushehr reactor set to finish late this year - just in time for the next commander-in-chief's inauguration. (Moscow has also agreed to help out Beijing's burgeoning space program - a boon to China's bid to challenge the US dominance in space.)

Russian intelligence operations in the US are back at Cold War levels once again, says the FBI. While fascinated with Washington political gossip, Russian spies are also targeting military-related high technology.

Bolstering both its intel and its military forces is a notable cyber-competence. In 2007, the Defense Intelligence Agency's director said Russia has the world's most "highly developed, capable and well-resourced IO [information operations] capability among potential adversaries." Estonia suffered a withering Russian

cyber attack last year, affecting state and commercial institutions, including newspapers and banks, as it planned to move a Soviet war memorial.

But Russia's chief source of influence and strength these days is its ample energy supplies. It's the world's largest producer of natural gas and second-largest pumper of oil. The energy boom has already allowed Moscow to pay off its international debt, build up the world's third-largest foreign-currency reserves - and establish a \$50 billion domestic stabilization fund, making "managed democracy" acceptable at home.

Vice President Dick Cheney has called Russian energy supplies "tools of intimidation and blackmail" - and it's certainly shown a willingness to use them as that. Just ask Ukraine, Georgia, Belarus and Moldova.

With record energy prices and demand anything but softening, Moscow will continue to throw its weight around by re-nationalizing domestic energy resources and industries, buying assets abroad, cutting supplies, ending subsidies or raising prices for those that displease it.

Our European allies are especially vulnerable. Europe gets 50 percent of its natural gas and 25 percent of its oil from Russia - and may be on track to grow more dependent in the years ahead. Moscow will use the energy wedge to divide NATO and weaken trans-Atlantic ties wherever possible.

And that's not all. Russia is seeking to maximize its energy muscle, promoting a natural-gas cartel along the lines of OPEC. Planned charter-members Russia, Qatar and Iran together hold 60 percent of the world's natural gas - and other countries, like Hugo Chavez's Venezuela, have expressed an interest in joining.

In fairness, the

US-Russian relationship hasn't been all bad news. Moscow has sometimes been helpful on North Korean and Iranian nuclear issues, agreeing to limited, targeted sanctions at the United Nations Security Council last year.

It was also supportive early after 9/11 on counterterrorism. But it has since pushed (along with China) for the closing of US bases in Uzbekistan (succeeded) and Kyrgyzstan (nearly succeeded), hindering our Afghanistan operations.

In the end, Moscow's new "Russian Doctrine" sees a world dominated by Washington - or anyone else - as a threat to its raw national interests and pride. In the name of standing up for itself, the Kremlin is clearly willing to check US power just about anywhere.

While Russia may not be looking to recover the lost Soviet empire, it's out to regain its Soviet-era international clout and significance. The Kremlin sees America in decline and Russia's tsar, er, star on the rise - again.

The United States and Russia can both benefit from a cooperative relationship. But the important thing for the next US president is to see Russia with a sober eye: It's not a "bury the West" Russia, but it's not a "make nice with the West" Russia, either.

Heritage Foundation senior fellow Peter Brookes is a former deputy assistant secretary of defense.