

CURRENT NEWS

EARLY BIRD

May 23, 2012

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Item numbers indicate order of appearance only.

AFGHANISTAN

1. **U.S. Ambassador To Afghanistan Will Leave Post**
(*New York Times*)....Alissa J. Rubin
The leading American diplomat in Afghanistan, Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker, will leave his post this summer for health reasons after serving here less than a year, a State Department official said Tuesday.
2. **Taliban, Afghan Neighbors Could Hamper NATO's Exit**
(*Yahoo.com*)....Deb Riechmann, Associated Press
The NATO summit's plan to "responsibly wind down" the Afghan war is not entirely in the hands of President Barack Obama and his fellow world leaders.
3. **Former Taliban Stronghold Faces The Post-U.S. Future**
(*NPR*)....Tom Bowman
...They pushed out the Taliban but at a heavy cost. Now, as NPR's Tom Bowman reports from Marjah, the question is whether those gains will endure after the Marines finally leave.
4. **Afghans In Training To Do For Themselves**
(*Fayetteville (NC) Observer*)....Drew Brooks
Two months ago, the Afghan soldiers at Forward Operating Base Arian could not change the oil in their Humvees.
5. **Afghans Back Chicago Deal, Warn West To Keep Promises**
(*Reuters.com*)....Mirwais Harooni and Rob Taylor, Reuters
People in Afghanistan were surprisingly optimistic on Tuesday about NATO's plan to pull combat troops out of their war-ravaged nation by the end of 2014, but warned Western leaders to stick to aid and security promises.
6. **Interview With Representative Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA)**
(*CNN*)....Wolf Blitzer
...Dana Rohrabacher was part of a congressional delegation to Afghanistan last month, ready to board a U.S. military plane from Dubai to Kabul. Suddenly he got a call informing him that President Hamid Karzai wouldn't let him set foot in Afghanistan.
7. **Afghanistan 'Worth The Sacrifice' For US: Powell**
(*Yahoo.com*)....Agence France-Presse
Former US secretary of state Colin Powell said Tuesday that Afghanistan has been "worth the sacrifice" of the US soldiers who died rooting out Taliban and Al-Qaeda fighters to stabilize the country.

MIDEAST

8. **Iran, U.N. Reach Deal**
(*Washington Post*)....Joby Warrick
Iran has agreed in principle to pull back the curtain on some of its most secretive nuclear research, U.N. officials said Tuesday, a concession that came hours before negotiators from the Islamic republic were due to begin crucial talks with six world powers on curbing its nuclear program.
9. **Iran, World Powers Seek Breakthrough In Baghdad**
(*Yahoo.com*)....Simon Sturdee, Agence France-Presse
Iran and six world powers meet for talks in Baghdad on Wednesday hoping to silence what US President Barack Obama called the "drums of war" and pave the way to a deal that will end decades of enmity.
10. **12,000 Troops Near Syria Train For War**
(*CNN*)....Barbara Starr
In the Middle East right now, thousands of U.S. and allied forces are training for a nightmare scenario: the region exploding in a full-fledged war. Our Pentagon correspondent, Barbara Starr, got some exclusive access to the mission in Jordan.
11. **Yemen, US Vow To Crush Qaeda After Troops Massacred**
(*Yahoo.com*)....Jamal al-Jabiri, Agence France-Presse
Yemen's army chief vowed Tuesday no let-up in an offensive against Al-Qaeda after a suicide bomber killed 96 soldiers in a massive attack in central Sanaa and two other would-be attackers were arrested.
12. **Turkey Says US Favorable To Sale Of Armed Drones**
(*Yahoo.com*)....Suzan Fraser, Associated Press
President Barack Obama's administration is inclined to sell armed drones to Turkey but has to convince Congress first, Turkey's president told reporters after a meeting with the U.S. leader.

DEFENSE DEPARTMENT

13. **Hampton VA Tapped As National Test Bed**
(*Newport News Daily Press*)....Hugh Lessig
...The two areas will serve as test beds for what Defense Secretary Leon Panetta billed Monday as "the world's largest electronic health record system." He and VA Secretary Eric Shinseki made the announcement at a press conference in North Chicago.
14. **Pentagon To Crackdown On Chinese 'Bogus Parts'**
(*Washington Times*)....Kristina Wong
The Defense Department on Tuesday said it would strengthen efforts to prevent Chinese counterfeit parts from ending up in the U.S. military's supply chain.
15. **Leader Vows To Protect Forces**
(*Tampa Tribune*)....Howard Altman
...U.S. Special Operations Command chief Adm. William McRaven says he knows the stresses the troops have faced and the damage they have endured that sometimes don't show up until years later. Pacing the floor of the Tampa Convention Center ballroom, McRaven said one of his biggest priorities is caring for a fighting force he acknowledges has been "frayed."
16. **U.S. Officials Guided Filmmakers On Bin Laden Raid Movie**
(*Bloomberg.com*)....Tony Capaccio and Gopal Ratnam, Bloomberg News
The Obama administration promised a Hollywood filmmaker unprecedented access to the top-secret Navy unit that killed Osama bin Laden to help her make a feature film on the operation at the same time it was publicly ordering officials to stop talking about the raid.
17. **Envisioning An Epic Journey, DARPA Takes First Small Step**
(*Washington Post*)....Brian Vastag

Humanity's journey to the stars is beginning with ... a modest government grant. The dreamers at the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency last week announced an award of \$500,000 to a former astronaut to launch an effort to - someday - send explorers to another star system.

LAW OF THE SEA TREATY

18. **Panetta, Clinton Push 'Law Of The Sea' Treaty**
(*DEFCON Hill (TheHill.com)*)....Jeremy Herb and Carlo Munoz
Three top Obama administration officials are headed to Capitol Hill Wednesday morning to try to persuade the Senate to ratify the "Law of the Sea" Treaty.
19. **Obama Administration In New Push To Ratify Sea Treaty**
(*Reuters.com*)....David Alexander, Reuters
A U.S. Navy surveillance vessel stumbled into a nerve-racking confrontation with five Chinese ships in 2009 while conducting ocean mapping operations in the South China Sea.

ARMY

20. **Fort Hood Bomb-Plot Trial Begins For Soldier**
(*Wall Street Journal*)....Nathan Koppel
A U.S. soldier of Muslim faith was on "a mission to kill" and just hours away from detonating a bomb near an Army base when he was arrested last year, a federal prosecutor alleged Tuesday on the opening day of the soldier's attempted murder trial in U.S. District Court here.
21. **Army Gets Pickier With Recruits And Stingier With Bonuses**
(*Philadelphia Inquirer*)....Lolita C. Baldor, Associated Press
...In sharp contrast to the peak years of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, the Army last year took in no recruits with misconduct convictions or drug or alcohol issues, according to internal documents obtained by The Associated Press. And soldiers already serving on active duty now must meet tougher standards to stay on for further tours in uniform.
22. **New York Giants Coach To Receive Army Honor In Va.**
(*Norfolk Virginian-Pilot*)....Mike Connors
New York Giants head coach Tom Coughlin will be among those honored at an Army service Wednesday in northern Virginia.

NAVY

23. **Naming Ship After Milk Wins Support**
(*San Francisco Chronicle*)....Rachel Gordon
It is official: The San Francisco Board of Supervisors backs the idea of the Navy naming a vessel after gay political leader Harvey Milk. But the decision came only after debating the power of symbolism and consulting with a spirit board.
24. **Oklahoma Plebe Grabs Dixie Cup In Naval Academy's Herndon Climb**
(*Baltimore Sun*)....Andrea F. Siegel
They are plebes no longer. It took two hours, 10 minutes and 13 seconds Tuesday for the freshman class at the U.S. Naval Academy to have one of its own knock a plebe's "dixie cup" hat from the top of the greased Herndon Monument and replace it with a midshipman's hat, symbolically morphing the group into 4th-class Mids.

MARINE CORPS

25. **Lockheed F-35B Fighter Has 1st Flight At Fla. Base**
(*Reuters.com*)....Reuters
The Marine Corps version of Lockheed Martin Corp's new F-35 fighter jet had its first flight out of Eglin Air Force Base in Florida on Tuesday, a critical step toward the start of pilot training on the new, radar-evading warplane.

MILITARY

26. **Wounded Soldiers Get Lesson In Resiliency**
(*Fayetteville (NC) Observer*)....Greg Barnes
Kyle Maynard implored Fort Bragg's wounded soldiers to set impossible goals for themselves and then strive to reach them.
27. **1,600 Museums Offer Military Families Free Tickets**
(*Yahoo.com*)....Brett Zongker, Associated Press
More than 1,600 museums across the country will offer free admission to active-duty military personnel and their families this summer in a program that has more than doubled in size since 2010.

PAKISTAN

28. **US Missiles Kill Four In Pakistan: Officials**
(*Yahoo.com*)....Hasbanullah Khan, Agence France-Presse
A drone targeted a compound near Miranshah, the main town of the tribal district where Pakistan has resisted US pressure to launch a sweeping offensive against militants fighting US troops in neighbouring Afghanistan.
29. **Levin And McCain: Don't Pay Pakistan Exorbitant Trucking Fees**
(*The Cable (thecable.foreignpolicy.com)*)....Josh Rogin
The United States should not pay upwards of \$5,000 for each truck Pakistan lets through to Afghanistan to aid the war effort, both leaders of the Senate Armed Services Committee told *The Cable*/i today.

ASIA/PACIFIC

30. **Panetta To Embark On Weeklong Asia-Pacific Visit**
(*DefenseNews.com*)....Marcus Weisgerber
U.S. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta will begin a weeklong visit to the Asia-Pacific next week, his first visit to the region since the Pentagon announced an increased focus on that area earlier this year.
31. **China Cancels High-Level Military Visit To Japan**
(*Yahoo.com*)....Agence France-Presse
China has cancelled a high-level military trip to Japan, state press said Wednesday, as the neighbours bicker over a disputed island chain and a recent Uighur symposium in Tokyo that angered Beijing.
32. **Cutter Dallas Turned Over To Philippine Military**
(*Charleston (SC) Post and Courier*)....Schuyler Kropf
The American flag came off the Coast Guard Cutter Dallas for the last time Tuesday, with its new owner saying the vessel will help ensure stability in a part of the globe vital to U.S. interests.
33. **N. Korea Upgrading Rocket Launch Site**
(*Yahoo.com*)....Matthew Pennington, Associated Press
Satellite imagery shows North Korea is upgrading its old launch site in the secretive country's northeast to handle larger rockets, like space launch vehicles and intercontinental missiles, a U.S. institute claimed Tuesday.

WHITE HOUSE

34. **Obama To Be In Colorado For Air Force Academy Graduation, Fundraiser**
(*Denver Post*)....Anthony Cotton
President Barack Obama will make his second visit to Colorado in less than a month today, giving a morning commencement speech at the Air Force Academy north of Colorado Springs before jetting to Denver for a fundraiser.
35. **Air Force One Costs Astronomical?**

(USA Today)...Bart Jansen

The next time airfare seems too expensive, consider the cost of Air Force One. The plane that is used to carry the president, which is typically a Boeing 747, costs the Air Force \$179,750 per hour to operate, according to a new Congressional Research Service report.

MISSILE DEFENSE

36. 'Golf Ball' Back After 2 Months At Sea

(Honolulu Star-Advertiser)...William Cole

The Missile Defense Agency's 280-foot-tall Sea-Based X-band Radar returned to Ford Island on Monday after being at sea during North Korea's failed April 13 rocket test.

CIA

37. CIA Discloses Names Of 15 Killed In Line Of Duty

(Los Angeles Times)...Ken Dilanian

The CIA on Tuesday disclosed the names of 15 of its operatives killed in the line of duty over the last 30 years, the result of a new effort to honor fallen officers whose sacrifices had long gone unrecognized by all but a few.

INTELLIGENCE

38. Spy Agency Seeks Cyber-Ops Curriculum

(Reuters.com)...Tabassum Zakaria, Reuters

The National Security Agency is trying to expand U.S. cyber expertise needed for secret intelligence operations against adversaries on computer networks through a new cyber-ops program at selected universities.

VETERANS

39. Disney To Hold Career Expo For Military Veterans This Week In Orlando

(Orlando Sentinel)...Steven Ford

Earlier this year, the Walt Disney Co. announced its "Heroes Work Here" initiative designed to hire, train and support military veterans. And on Thursday, Disney is sponsoring a veterans career expo here in Orlando.

COMMENTARY

40. Treaty Would Usurp Navy's Authority

(Politico.com)...Sens. Jim Inhofe, Roger Wicker and Jeff Sessions

The U.S. Navy has been the master of the seven seas since World War II, the pre-eminent maritime force. It seems odd, then, that Navy leadership has long pressed for what amounts to a redundant international hall pass.

41. Law Of The Sea Treaty Can't Wait

(Politico.com)...Sen. John Kerry

Wednesday begins a comprehensive discussion about whether the United States should join the Law of the Sea Convention. I've heard from countless military officials and conservative-minded business leaders who say it's urgent. I've also spoken with senators and interest groups who oppose it.

42. Getting A Good Deal With Iran

(Wall Street Journal)...Lindsey Graham, Joseph I. Lieberman and John McCain

As negotiations resume Wednesday in Baghdad between Iran and the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council plus Germany (the "P5+1"), there are growing hopes for a diplomatic breakthrough over Tehran's nuclear ambitions. This sense of optimism has been buoyed by the hopeful statements of the director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) after his visit to Tehran this week.

43. In Iran Talks, One Side Looks Ready To Bend

(Washington Post)....Reuel Marc Gerecht and Mark Dubowitz

Wednesday's meeting on Iran's nuclear program will be a competition of fears. Who is sufficiently terrified of an atom bomb in Iranian hands to credibly threaten military action? Who fears the immediate economic consequences of Persian petroleum coming off the market more than the longer-term menace of a nuclear-armed state that supports terrorism? Who dreads above all else an Israeli preemptive strike?

44. **The Least Bad Option On Iran**

(Los Angeles Times)....Chuck Freilich

It is a bad outcome -- but it is the least bad of the available options.

45. **Realistic Optimism On Nuclear Talks With Iran**

(Chicago Tribune)....Marvin Zonis

Iranian negotiators will meet for a second time with representatives of the United Nations Security Council plus Germany on Wednesday in Baghdad. Guarded optimism surrounds the talks. That optimism and caution is appropriate. Many obstacles must be overcome between these talks and an agreement. Failure is a real possibility. But the stars appear to be aligning for progress.

46. **Ugly Afghanistan Calculations**

(New York Post)....Max Boot

Back in late 2009, when President Obama announced that he'd send 30,000 more troops to Afghanistan but only for 18 months, many conservatives were highly critical of his decision, arguing that the president did not have the temperament to wage a war successfully and that he was only going to throw away troops' lives without trying to achieve victory.

47. **Washington Can Focus On Asia Only With A Robust Nato**

(Financial Times)....Geoff Dyer

It is almost a year since Robert Gates stepped down as US defence secretary yet his parting words were still ringing in the ears of the leaders assembled in Chicago for the two-day Nato summit.

48. **Messy Afghanistan War Heads For Uncertain Ending**

(USA Today)....Editorial

It's official. The United States and its war weary NATO allies are pulling out of Afghanistan — win, lose or draw. A year from now, primary combat responsibilities will belong to the Afghan army, and by the end of 2014 America's longest war will end, 13 years after it began, save perhaps for a small residual force.

49. **Pakistan Problem Complicates Afghanistan Drawdown**

(San Francisco Chronicle)....Editorial

The good news out of the just-completed NATO summit in Chicago is that the allies are united in their "irreversible" commitment to put Afghanistan in charge of its own security in 2014. Weary of war, and struggling with economic stresses at home, the allies have decided that 10 years is enough.

New York Times
May 23, 2012

1. U.S. Ambassador To Afghanistan Will Leave Post

By Alissa J. Rubin

KABUL, Afghanistan — The leading American diplomat in Afghanistan, Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker, will leave his post this summer for health reasons after serving here less than a year, a State Department official said Tuesday.

His departure comes as the American-Afghan relationship enters a new stage, with thousands of American troops beginning to come home and the Afghans taking on increasing responsibility not only for security but also for governance.

"Today, Ambassador Ryan Crocker confirmed to the Afghan government, U.S. Mission Afghanistan, and the ISAF community that he intends to depart his post for health reasons in midsummer, following the Kabul and Tokyo conferences," said Victoria Nuland, the State Department spokeswoman. ISAF is the International Security Assistance Force.

She said his 10-month tenure had included "enormous achievements" and cited the completion of a strategic partnership agreement between the countries as well as two memorandums of understanding, one on the transfer of responsibility of American detention operations here to the Afghans and the other on night raids carried out by Special Operations forces.

Mr. Crocker, 62, a career Foreign Service officer, negotiated the latter two agreements despite months of crisis and deep tension over the issues, which had to be worked through as side deals before the partnership agreement could be signed on

May 1. That broader deal charts a continuing relationship between the United States and Afghanistan for the next decade, and Afghans consider it a shield against the powerful and often hostile interests of its regional neighbors.

Mr. Crocker had come out of retirement at the request of President Obama to lead the embassy at a time when the United States' relationship with President Hamid Karzai was rocky, with Mr. Karzai often angry at the Americans — in part because of deep distrust fueled by leaked embassy cables that questioned his fitness as a partner.

Mr. Crocker's mandate was to rebuild the relationship, and he often said that people needed to appreciate that "President Karzai has the toughest job in the world and he has been doing it for 10 years."

The Afghan government credited Mr. Crocker with playing a crucial role in bringing the strategic partnership negotiations.

"He was vital, absolutely vital to the successful completion of the strategic partnership between Afghanistan and the United States," said Janan Mosazai, the spokesman for the Afghan Foreign Ministry. "He will be missed a lot."

Mr. Crocker's decision — he had originally said he expected to serve for two years — comes as the other senior diplomat in the region, the American ambassador to Pakistan, Cameron Munter, has also said he will step down.

His departure is likely to influence the timetable for appointing a new commander for the Afghanistan mission as well, Pentagon and military officials said.

The current senior officer in Afghanistan, Gen. John R. Allen of the Marine

Corps, is expected to be named commander of NATO forces, which would include leading the American military's European Command.

But officials said that the administration might not wish to change both the top diplomat and the top commander in Afghanistan at the same time, and so General Allen's appointment might not come for months. In the meantime, the current NATO commander, Adm. James G. Stavridis, could be asked to extend his tour beyond its scheduled conclusion this year, officials said.

American civilian government workers are set to begin leaving Afghanistan as well. Hundreds of civilian State Department employees serve in the provincial reconstruction teams in provinces as well as in local districts in some of the most dangerous areas of the country.

Mr. Crocker occasionally mentioned that when he retired in 2009, after serving for two intense years in Iraq, he had not planned to return to public service and to posts where he could not bring his family.

He had, however, unique qualifications for the Afghanistan post. He already knew Mr. Karzai from when he reopened and briefly led the American Embassy in Afghanistan in 2002. And he had a deep knowledge of Pakistan from his service there from 2004 to 2007, which gave him an appreciation of the two countries' antagonistic but also deeply intertwined relationship.

All that made him able to "open a new chapter" with the Afghan government, said Fawzia Koofi, a leading Afghan member of Parliament.

Mr. Crocker worked particularly hard to build relationships with many individual Afghan leaders, a

quality that is particularly important here, said several Afghan officials and politicians.

"I know the U.S. diplomats' positions are based on policy rather than individuals, but individuals make a difference, especially in Afghanistan," said Ms. Koofi, one of the leading female political figures in the country. "Especially that is true now, because we are not sure what is going to happen next, especially on reconciliation and negotiations with Taliban."

"With a new person, yes, the U.S. government's commitment doesn't change, its highlighted points on sovereignty rights and women's rights," she said. "But there are a lot of questions, and getting things done here depends on how the diplomats make themselves influential."

It was not clear who would succeed Mr. Crocker. One likely candidate would be his deputy, James B. Cunningham, who came to Kabul with him when he took the post last summer. Mr. Cunningham has worked closely with Mr. Crocker on the intense strategic partnership negotiations and has been closely involved in all policy decisions in the embassy, according to Western and Afghan diplomats here.

Yahoo.com
May 22, 2012

2. Taliban, Afghan Neighbors Could Hamper NATO's Exit

By Deb Riechmann,
Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan -- The NATO summit's plan to "responsibly wind down" the Afghan war is not entirely in the hands of President Barack Obama and his fellow world leaders.

The carefully orchestrated exit strategy could come

unhinged if the resilient Taliban stage a major comeback or Afghanistan's neighbors interfere with the process to bolster their position in a weak country soon to be without thousands of international combat troops.

In short, the Taliban, Pakistan and Iran still get a vote.

The Taliban, who continue to carry out attacks across the country and have shown little interest in negotiating peace with the Afghan government, described the NATO summit as a "show" with "no result."

"Nobody can trust their statements and lies," Taliban spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid said in an e-mail to the media on Tuesday, a day after the two-day summit closed in Chicago. "They are claiming that everything is fine in Afghanistan, which is far from the reality."

At the summit, the U.S.-led NATO coalition finalized its plan for Afghan forces to take the lead in providing security in the middle of next year. Foreign troops will move into backup support and training roles, then completely end their combat mission at the close of 2014. The goal is to pull back gradually to avoid a repeat of the civil war that followed the Soviet exit two decades ago — chaos that paved the way for the rise of al-Qaida and the Taliban.

Ivo Daalder, the U.S. permanent representative to NATO, said Tuesday on a conference call with reporters that the U.S. has been paying close attention to the role of Iran and particularly Pakistan in the transition strategy for Afghanistan.

"We are in a very active and in-depth set of dialogues with Pakistan to find ways in which we can cooperate to deal with the problems that exist in order to make sure that our strategy in Afghanistan will succeed,"

Daalder said. "That's why we have and will continue to find ways to cooperate on dealing with the terrorists."

Pakistan has said repeatedly that it wants a stable Afghanistan, and the U.S. has given that country billions of dollars in aid over the past decade to enlist its support in fighting Islamist militants. But U.S. officials also have accused Pakistan of being a fickle ally and even supporting Taliban insurgents fighting the American troops in Afghanistan. Pakistan has denied this allegation.

Last year, then-Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Adm. Mike Mullen said the Haqqani network, which is affiliated with the Taliban and al-Qaida, "acts as a veritable arm" of Pakistan's intelligence agency. Mullen accused the network last year of staging an attack against the U.S. Embassy and NATO headquarters in Kabul and being behind a truck bombing that wounded 77 American soldiers. He claimed Pakistan's spy agency helped the group.

Still, both Afghanistan and the U.S. need Pakistan's help to negotiate a peace agreement with the Taliban.

"It is in Pakistan's interest to work with us and the world community to ensure that they themselves are not consumed by extremism that is in their midst," Obama said in Chicago.

Afghan President Hamid Karzai met with Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari on the sidelines of the summit. The main subject was Pakistan's role in the peace process. Karzai's office said in a statement that Zardari invited the head of the Afghan peace process to Pakistan to discuss the issue.

Pakistan is not a NATO member but was invited to the summit because of its influence in Afghanistan and its role until last year as the major

supply route to landlocked NATO forces there. Pakistan closed those routes after a U.S. attack on the Pakistani side of the border killed 24 Pakistani soldiers in November. The routes remain closed because of a dispute over how much the U.S. will pay Pakistan to allow each truck to drive across its territory.

Iran also has the ability to complicate NATO's plans. Iran does not like the U.S. military footprint on its eastern border and will be closely watching negotiations on a U.S.-Afghan security agreement that will define the size and parameters of an American military presence in Afghanistan in the years to come.

Although the Iranians are cozier with Afghanistan's ethnic Hazara than with the majority Pashtuns who fill the ranks of the Taliban, NATO has accused Iran of providing the Taliban with weapons used against coalition forces.

Last year, NATO forces seized 48 Iranian-made rockets that officials said were intended to aid the Taliban. NATO officials said the shipment was evidence of a serious escalation in Iran's state support of the Taliban — an allegation Tehran denied. Western officials accuse Iran of conducting a proxy war against the U.S., which is in a standoff with Tehran over its nuclear program.

For now, Afghans are taking a wait-and-see approach to the summit's upbeat assessment of their future.

"We have witnessed a lot of international conferences on Afghanistan — conference after conference after conference," said Mohammad Qassim Zazai, a businessman from Paktia province who is living in Kabul. "The people say 'Let's see what's going to happen on the ground.'"

Abdul Khaliq Bala Karzai, a parliament member, said he was pleased that world leaders expressed their commitment to Afghanistan even as they are pulling out their troops.

"I was watching on TV and they said they are going to protect Afghanistan and the Afghan people. Security is like water — very vital," said the lawmaker from Kandahar province, the birthplace of the insurgency.

The world leaders now need to pressure Iran and Pakistan to cooperate, not interfere, in Afghanistan, he said.

"For the time being, the Taliban are not able to fight on the ground against the Afghan and foreign troops. They are able only to launch guerrilla attacks, plant mines and carry out suicide attacks," he said. "When the foreign troops leave, the Taliban will get stronger, especially if these two countries support them — give them weapons and sanctuary, which is going on now."

Mawlana Farid, a political analyst in Kabul, said he also was heartened to hear the international community's strong support going forward.

"The world leaders in Chicago announced their unity in protecting Afghanistan, but we still have concerns about our neighbors — Pakistan and Iran," he said.

Even in front of 60 world leaders, Pakistan was not willing to open up its borders to allow NATO convoys to move through its territory, he lamented.

"These convoys are the ones being used to help fight the terrorism. Pakistan is not ready to cooperate," Farid said. "Pakistan needs to give their word to the international community that they will not support insurgents or terrorism."

If not, the situation could get worse."

Associated Press Writer Amir Shah contributed to this report.

NPR
May 22, 2012

3. Former Taliban Stronghold Faces The Post-U.S. Future

All Things Considered (NPR), 4:10 PM

CORNISH: If there is a place in Afghanistan that represents the entire war in miniature, it's a district called Marjah. It was once Taliban territory. Then, two years ago, thousands of U.S. Marines, along with British and Afghan forces, descended on the checkerboard of villages, canals and fields. They pushed out the Taliban but at a heavy cost.

Now, as NPR's Tom Bowman reports from Marjah, the question is whether those gains will endure after the Marines finally leave.

(Soundbite of gunfire.)

TOM BOWMAN: February 2010, these are the sounds of the Marines slogging through Marjah, a bitter fight that cost them at least 66 dead, countless more were wounded.

This is the same area two years later, a bustling marketplace. The market is full of vegetables, cucumbers, looks like some sort of a squash, nuts, raisins, and looks like CDs.

An Afghan policeman, a slight man in a gray uniform cradling an assault rifle, he's guarding one crossroads in the market. His name is Abdullah Jan.

ABDULLAH JAN: (From tape, translated.) We have good security here. No Taliban. No enemy. The people working right now, you can see by yourself. There's a lot of stores open here. The people are working here right now.

BOWMAN: That policeman, Abdullah Jan, was just 19 years old when he was transferred here two years ago from the relative safety of the provincial capital.

JAN: (From tape, translated.) I was really upset. Taliban was here. Like they used to put the IEDs around. I was scared the time they transferred me from Lashkar Gah to here.

BOWMAN: Now he has moved his father and brothers here, now that Marjah is safer and he never has to change into civilian clothes to hide his job as a policeman.

JAN: (From tape, translated.) A year ago, it was hard for a police officer to go to their house, to their home. But right now, I can go with my uniform. I can walk around with my uniform.

BOWMAN: Just a few feet away, dozens of children cluster around an American Marine. He's 2nd Lieutenant Jonathan Ross. And he says back in 2010 Marines died on this very spot.

2ND LIEUTENANT JONATHAN ROSS: I know that they took, in the first few weeks they were here, four casualties. At least one killed in action, three wounded.

BOWMAN: He points to an abandoned mud-brick building. A sheet of plastic serves as its roof and flaps in the wind.

ROSS: This place was the main opium bazaar for the Taliban. This building compound you see right over here was actually the Taliban district headquarters. This is where they did all their government business.

BOWMAN: Lieutenant Ross, who's based out of Camp LeJeune in North Carolina, can report something extraordinary to those who remember Marjah from two years ago. None of his Marines has been shot at

in the past six months, so Marjah is relatively secure now. The key question is this: what happens when the Americans leave? In the coming weeks, Lieutenant Ross will head home with hundreds of other Marines and something of a skeleton crew will remain to work with Afghan forces. Can the Afghan army and police take over and keep the peace?

LIEUTENANT COLONEL MICHAEL STYSKAL: I think so. I think they want us to leave. They're ready for it.

BOWMAN: That's Lieutenant Colonel Michael Styskal, the top Marine officer in the area. He stopped by the small American combat outpost not far from the marketplace. Now, about 3,000 Afghan government forces are helping with Marjah's security, so Colonel Styskal isn't too worried about the Taliban returning. He worries more about the lack of international help in Marjah from the U.N. and aid groups that could let the area slide back into chaos.

STYSKAL: From the beginning, we put a lot of effort into it. To fail would be very bad.

BOWMAN: Many Afghan officers, both army and police, say the Americans can't leave just yet. The Americans have the surveillance equipment, the tanks, artillery and aircraft. The Afghans say they need all that to fight the Taliban.

Marine Colonel Styskal brushes off these requests.

STYSKAL: I think they'll do the job with what they have. They'll fight the way they need to fight. I don't think the Marjah people and the elders and the government and the security forces here worked so hard for something just to get, you know, let to kind of rot on the vine.

BOWMAN: The hundreds of Afghan police in Marjah

outnumber the Taliban and the Colonel says their weapons are better. Back in Marjah's marketplace, a group of men sit on a large raised mat sipping tea and selling vegetables. Can the Americans leave? The men in the marketplace think so.

JAN: (From tape, translated.) Yeah, they can leave.

BOWMAN: So does Abdullah Jan, the policeman in the bazaar. He's still at his post just across the street and he's confident enough to tell the Marines that he and his fellow Afghan police can handle whatever comes.

JAN: (From tape, translated.) Yeah. They're free to go to their home because they have a home, somebody waiting for them. The new support is good. Now we can do something for our country.

BOWMAN: That may be the greatest measure of success for Marjah, the willingness of men like Abdullah Jan to stay on the job.

Tom Bowman, NPR News, Helmand Province, Afghanistan.

Fayetteville (NC) Observer
May 23, 2012

4. Afghans In Training To Do For Themselves

By Drew Brooks, Staff writer

FORWARD OPERATING BASE ARIAN, Afghanistan -- Two months ago, the Afghan soldiers at Forward Operating Base Arian could not change the oil in their Humvees.

But on Monday, a crew of Afghans crouched over the front of one of the 10,000-pound vehicles and put the finishing touches on installing an engine.

Soldiers with the 307th Brigade Support Battalion, 1st Brigade Combat Team have been at Arian for about two months and have taken their

Afghan counterparts under their wings.

The maintenance and medical companies with the 307th have held training sessions on the Afghan part of the base. The maintenance unit, B Company, has worked to teach the Afghan drivers how to repair and maintain their vehicles and generators. The medical unit, C Company, recently began giving lessons to Afghan medics and allowing them to cross-train in the American aid station on base.

In front of a maintenance bay in the Afghan compound, Staff Sgt. Jesse Thompson looked on with pride.

More than a month ago, Thompson led the first training class for Afghan mechanics. Now, two of his former students were leading the class while Thompson stood in the background for support.

The classes are relatively small; the first had 10 students, and the second has nine. But the classes are forming the foundation of mechanics within the 6th Kandak of the Afghan National Army.

Before the classes, Thompson said, the maintenance either was not done or was sent to Ghazni city.

"They used these things until they broke," said Capt. Nick Carolas, B Company commander.

The maintenance classes were developed by B Company and are often tailored to whatever needs the Afghans have, Thompson said.

On Monday, the class involved swapping engines - trading a good engine in an unarmored Humvee for a bad engine in an armored one.

"We started off with basic stuff and taught preventative maintenance," Thompson said. "It's basically a crash course to get them going."

Thompson said the 6th Kandak did not have any mechanics when the 307th arrived. Instead, the unit's leaders sent Humvee drivers to the class. The drivers, Thompson said, had no mechanical training and could not even change the oil in their vehicles. Since then, they've made big strides.

"They're catching on," Thompson said. "When we first came over here, it was kind of like watching your kid when they're learning to walk. They're real clever and catch on very quick."

Thompson said he and other soldiers come to the Afghan maintenance bay about five days a week to offer their support, but the training is now led by Afghans.

"We're just kind of stepping back," he said. "If they have questions, we'll answer them."

Dawood Nazary, an Afghan soldier who was in the first class of mechanics, said he used to only know how to drive his Humvee.

"Before, I was a stranger to the Humvee," he said through an interpreter. "But I learned a lot. I learned all the work from my teacher, and if there are any problems, I ask him."

"Now I know every single part of this truck," Nazary said.

The only thing holding the Afghans back now is logistics, Thompson said. It's hard for the Afghans to get parts sent to them from their commands.

Medical training While the maintenance training has been under way for more than a month, the medical training is just beginning after several weeks of meetings between both sides to discuss the curriculum.

"We've learned lots of things," Maj. Abdul Maroof, the Afghan doctor on base, said through an interpreter. His comments came after a lesson

he and another medic attended on anatomy and physiology. "We didn't have this type of training before."

Maroof was speaking from a small Afghan clinic. In the coming weeks, the 307th will help him convert a nearby larger building into a clinic that is set up similar to the American aid station.

Maroof said the ongoing training will be good for the Afghan medics, and he expects to see good results.

"We need your help," he said.

Spc. Jordan Kurtz and Sgt. Justin Budrow oversee the training. Next week, they will move on to combat wounds.

Some of the medics have had training but others have had little to none, Budrow said. It's been key to find out just how much they know and cater the training to them.

"We're going to keep working with them until we leave," Kurtz said.

Medical training also takes place on the American side of the base.

Two weeks ago, some Afghan medics were allowed to work in the American aid station.

Sgt. 1st Class Michael Ortiz, the company noncommissioned officer in charge, said the cross-training is during regularly scheduled sick call. The Afghans, working with an interpreter and with an American medic watching, handle the entire patient visit, from greeting to goodbye, Ortiz said.

"The more patients they get, the better they become," he said.

By Mirwais Harooni and Rob Taylor, Reuters

KABUL -- People in Afghanistan were surprisingly optimistic on Tuesday about NATO's plan to pull combat troops out of their war-ravaged nation by the end of 2014, but warned Western leaders to stick to aid and security promises.

A Chicago summit meeting of the 28-member bloc, attended also by Afghan President Hamid Karzai and other world leaders, endorsed an exit strategy on Monday that calls for handing control of Afghanistan to its own security forces by the middle of next year.

But it left unanswered questions about how to prevent a slide into chaos and a Taliban resurgence after the pullout.

Despite the sense of combat fatigue in Chicago and frustration that nearly 11 years of military engagement had failed to defeat Taliban Islamists, Afghans were surprisingly upbeat. They said the agreement showed Western nations would not abandon their nation after a decade-long war and a massive aid and reconstruction effort.

"I don't think foreign nations will leave us as easily as they say. The international community has spent billions of dollars here now," said university student Tawab, speaking to Reuters at a park near a mosque in central Kabul.

"The conference has decided that some foreign forces will stay in Afghanistan, so it's like back-up support."

Housing prices in Kabul have jumped 15 percent since U.S. President Barack Obama, who declared on Monday that the 10-year war was "effectively over", visited Kabul to sign a long-term security deal with Karzai on May 2.

Reuters.com
May 23, 2012

5. Afghans Back Chicago Deal, Warn West To Keep Promises

Donor nations have been negotiating agreements with Karzai's government committing to ongoing aid and reconstruction support, as well as government and agricultural advisers, for at least a decade beyond the two-year NATO drawdown ending in 2014.

Since a U.S.-led coalition helped Afghan forces topple the Taliban government in late 2001, Afghanistan has been one of the world's largest aid recipients, with more than US\$57 billion spent on development to help counter support for insurgents.

In volatile southern Helmand province, one of the most violent parts of the country and the scene of several major clashes between the Taliban and Western troops, villagers said their lives had improved.

Ezatullah, a shopkeeper in the town of Marjah where NATO troops fought one of the bloodiest battles of the war, said a 35-km (22-mile) paved road connecting to the provincial capital Lashkar Gah had nearly been completed, cutting costs and travel time to prevent vital food supplies spoiling in the area's searing summer heat.

"And now we have a health clinic built three years ago which provides most services to people. But still people are facing problems, as it's not enough. There should be at least a clinic in every big village," he said.

Security had also improved since 15,000 U.S. and British surge troops ousted around 2,000 insurgents from the area, said Marjah resident Nisar Ahmad, draining support from the Taliban.

"Now this district is fully protected by Afghan Local Police. Almost all of our schools are open and boys and girls attend schools. But we still face a lack of electricity despite

the billions of dollars spent," Ahmad said.

In the Arghandab district of neighboring Kandahar province - where U.S. troops suffered heavy casualties in 2010 - local resident Hajji Shah Mohammad Ahmadi said economic progress had been spurred by roads, schools and new health clinics.

And even in restive eastern provinces, where Western troops are still fighting to choke off insurgent supply routes across the mountainous Pakistan border in one of the last major offensives of the war, local people counted improvements.

Abdul Naser, from Chapa Dara district in Kunar, said where once there had been no roads, water canals, electricity, schools, clinics or security, now there was vehicle traffic, power generators, doctors and education.

"We got two clinics during the past months with female doctors. We have paved roads. But some projects were not well built and people still face some security threats," he said.

However, an April poll by the privately-run Tolo TV channel found just over 50 percent of Afghans thought civil war would break out again after foreign troops withdrew, while 26 percent saw no change and 23 percent thought security would improve.

Still, property dealers in the capital Kabul - once convulsed by civil war but where cars have now replaced bicycles and some high-rise apartment buildings have sprung up - say business is thriving despite worries.

"People's morale and economic morale have gone up," said Mohammad Nader Faizyaar, the owner of the high-end Faisal Business Centre mall that retails everything from women's fashion accessories to furniture.

"People feel that the future of this country is stable and everyone can hopefully invest."

Sarwar Akbari, 38, a Kabul resident in the Wazir diplomatic district, said international backers had to now honor their promises not to abandon the country amid pressure on aid budgets, particularly in cash-strapped Europe. He also said they had to reach some kind of agreement with the Taliban.

"If they don't fulfill their promises, and if they don't stop neighboring countries from interfering in Afghanistan and reach a peace with the Taliban, then this conference and any others will be useless," he said.

Additional reporting by Jack Kimball.

CNN

May 23, 2012

6. Interview With Representative Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA)

The Situation Room (CNN), 5:00 PM

WOLF BLITZER: Congressman Rohrabacher is standing by. He'll join us in just a few moments to respond, but first, some background on a feud that played out overseas as well as right here in the "Situation Room."

Dana Rohrabacher was part of a congressional delegation to Afghanistan last month, ready to board a U.S. military plane from Dubai to Kabul. Suddenly he got a call informing him that President Hamid Karzai wouldn't let him set foot in Afghanistan.

It was a stunning turn of events, even more so because Defense Secretary Leon Panetta, and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton went along with it.

REPRESENTATIVE DANA ROHRABACHER (R-CA) [Foreign Affairs Committee]: She just felt

that another mini-crisis, which might erupt because Karzai hated me so much that he would create a crisis and she just thought it would be disruptive to our ability to get her job done.

BLITZER: We didn't know then, but we do know now that the Obama administration was then in the midst of delicate negotiations that led to President Obama's secret trip to Afghanistan and the announcement of the Strategic Cooperation Agreement.

As a key member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Rohrabacher has asked tough questions about the Afghan government, how it's run and how it's spending U.S. money, but President Karzai tells me Rohrabacher was interfering in Afghanistan's internal affairs and he's effectively banned from the country as a matter of principle.

And joining us now is Congressman Dana Rohrabacher. Congressman thanks very much for coming in. I want to discuss what's going on, but first to give our viewers the full perspective, here's the entire exchange I had about you and President Karzai in my interview with President Karzai yesterday. Watch this.

(Begin video segment.)

BLITZER: You said you're not going to let this democratically-elected congressman into your country. Why?

HAMID KARZAI [Afghan President]: A democratically-elected congressman of the United States of America should not be talking of an ethnic divide in Afghanistan, should not be interfering in Afghanistan's internal affairs, should not be asking the Afghan people to have a federal structure as against about the Afghan constitution has asked for, should not be speaking disrespectfully

about the Afghan people or the various ethnic groups in Afghanistan.

If an Afghan did that from Afghanistan, how would you react to him in America?

BLITZER: So you're not going to let him back into your country, Dana Rohrabacher?

KARZAI: Definitely not.

BLITZER: Ever, ever?

KARZAI: Until he changes his stand, until he shows respect to the Afghan people, to our way of life and to our constitution. No foreigner has a place asking another people, another country to change their constitution. Have we ever asked the United States to change?

BLITZER: Even after all that America has done for Afghanistan?

KARZAI: But that doesn't give you the right to play with our lives.

BLITZER: And you think he's that dangerous to you?

KARZAI: Not dangerous. It's a matter of principle. International relations are based on certain principles. We're not America. We're Afghanistan.

BLITZER: But there is a concept known as freedom of speech.

KARZAI: The freedom of speech is good. We respect that, but the freedom of speech with regard to other countries is another issue. He has freedom of speech within the United States and we have freedom of speech within Afghanistan, but if an Afghan member of parliament stood up and said the United States should be divided in five different regions, would you accept that?

(End video segment.)

BLITZER: Let's discuss what we just heard with Congressman Rohrabacher.

First of all, are you ready to apologize? Are you ready to back away from some of your earlier statements in order that

President Karzai would give you a visa to come back to Afghanistan?

ROHRABACHER: Well, I will tell you that if I thought that I was being inadvertently disrespectful to the Afghan people, I would apologize, but I obviously have a deep-felt respect for the people of Afghanistan and their courage and their principled behavior. They are tough people who are actually a model of courage in this world. So I respect them.

It's Karzai I don't respect and so I don't think I owe an apology to the people of Afghanistan and of course Karzai is a corrupt and incompetent leader and I certainly owe no apology for trying to get to Afghanistan to do some investigative work.

BLITZER: Let's talk about some of the specifics what he's complaining about. He says you speak of an ethnic divide in Afghanistan. Is that true?

ROHRABACHER: No, it's not. In fact, what we have now is a constitution that was written by foreigners, I might add, that was modeled for Karzai and his clique. And what it does is put all of the power in Kabul, which is totally inconsistent with Afghan culture and tradition.

And what I've been calling for is for all of the sides, both – all of the ethnic groups to get together, have some constitutional reform that – for example, Karzai appoints all of the provincial governors. That would be like our president appointing all the governors of the states. That is not dividing the country. That's a federalist approach that will keep the country unified because you have, as we have in the United States, different people operating at different levels and the people elect their leaders.

BLITZER: You can understand where he's coming

from when we just heard you say right now you believe there should be a change in their constitution. You're not an Afghan. You're an American. You think it should be changed. And so he has a point there.

ROHRABACHER: Well, I think – no, I think – yes. I think that they should be making sure that the Afghans make those changes and that the power in Afghanistan isn't being held by some corrupt clique. Now remember, I'm the chairman of the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee. I was going to Afghanistan, among other things, not just to talk about perhaps constitutional reforms that they might consider, but I was also going there to investigate corruption on the part of the Karzai administration.

BLITZER: He also says you're disrespectful of the president of Afghanistan, right, namely Karzai. You tweeted this – you tweeted – and I'll put it up on the screen. "Pak government controls rad, terrorists, Muslims, Karzai equals puppet, Pak puppet. His centralized regime contrary to Afghan tradition and values." What do you mean Karzai is a Pakistan puppet?

ROHRABACHER: That's our biggest problem right now is the Pakistanis, as you are well aware, are financing the insurgencies that we're having to put up with in Afghanistan. Karzai is a longtime ally of the Paks. He was – even before he was in power, these are the people he dealt with. So, yes. He is overly, overly associated with Pakistan, and he is not sitting down with his own people. He's sitting down with the Paks for guidance.

BLITZER: Well, I'm sure he disagrees strongly with you on that. What you're saying is in total disagreement with this new Strategic Partnership

Agreement that the U.S. and Pakistan have signed and also in total disagreement with what we're hearing from the Republican presidential candidate, Mitt Romney.

ROHRABACHER: Well, I don't know what Mitt is saying about it, but I am absolutely opposed to what the president just did. We should be looking for ways to get our troops out of Afghanistan at a quicker pace, not at a slower pace. We shouldn't be committing ourselves to another 10 years of military involvement in Afghanistan and we could do that if we worked with all of the Afghan leaders rather than just trying to put all of our eggs in the Karzai basket and trying to force everybody to accept his power.

BLITZER: What Governor Romney says is there should be an open-ended U.S. military and financial commitment to Afghanistan. He doesn't like the timelines, if you will, but he's even more aggressive in making sure that U.S. troops stay there to bolster that Afghan government and make sure that there's security there. What I hear you saying is you disagree not only with President Obama, but with Governor Romney, as well.

ROHRABACHER: I totally – yes, I totally disagree with the governor. If that is indeed his position, I would like to talk to him about it.

BLITZER: Congressman Rohrabacher, thanks very much for joining us. I suspect the story is not going to die down anytime soon.

ROHRABACHER: Thank you.

Yahoo.com

May 22, 2012

7. Afghanistan 'Worth The Sacrifice' For US: Powell

By Agence France-Presse

Former US secretary of state Colin Powell said Tuesday that Afghanistan has been "worth the sacrifice" of the US soldiers who died rooting out Taliban and Al-Qaeda fighters to stabilize the country.

"I think it was worth the sacrifice to give the Afghan people a chance to (have a) free government that was representative of all the Afghan people and to bring some stability to the country," said Powell, formerly a US national security advisor and chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

"Now, two years later, the Afghans are showing that they have more and more capacity. Their forces have been built up. Military and police forces," he told the NBC "Today Show" program.

But he added "you know, we can only do so much and go so far. They have to be in charge of their country," he said.

Powell conceded, however, that he is "not totally satisfied" that peace and stability will continue to reign once foreign troops depart and Kabul is fully in charge of keeping order.

"That is what remains to be seen. I'm not totally satisfied, in fact I'm hardly satisfied with the nature of the regime -- the corruption that exists, and a lot of the other problems that exist," he said one day after a NATO summit in Chicago to charted a path out of the war.

"But at the same time, we have to draw the line at some point," said the retired general, one of the country's most respected voices on military matters.

The iCasualties monitoring group reports that 1,979 US troops have died in Afghanistan in the decade since the US-led invasion there.

NATO plans to hand Kabul the lead in security matters from mid-2013 while

pledging continued support for the Afghan security forces.

In a Chicago summit declaration, President Barack Obama and his NATO military allies ratified an "irreversible" roadmap to "gradually and responsibly" withdraw 130,000 combat troops by the end of 2014.

They also ordered military officers to begin planning a post-2014 mission to focus on training, advising and assisting Afghan troops to ensure the government can ward off a stubborn Taliban insurgency.

Washington Post
May 23, 2012
Pg. 1

8. Iran, U.N. Reach Deal

Tentative Nuclear Pact; Plan could give inspectors access

By Joby Warrick

Iran has agreed in principle to pull back the curtain on some of its most secretive nuclear research, U.N. officials said Tuesday, a concession that came hours before negotiators from the Islamic republic were due to begin crucial talks with six world powers on curbing its nuclear program.

The tentative agreement, announced in Vienna by U.N. nuclear officials, could give inspectors access to Iranian scientists and facilities long shielded from international scrutiny. The move was greeted with a mixture of optimism and wariness by Western diplomats seeking to discern whether it represented a genuine breakthrough or an attempt by Iran to gain an advantage before the start of Wednesday's talks.

Officials from the United States and five other powers - Britain, China, France, Germany and Russia - are expected to press Iran to accept strict curbs on its nuclear activities during the negotiations, which many diplomats and security experts

see as a last chance to stave off a military confrontation.

Despite more conciliatory signals from Tehran in recent weeks - culminating with the inspection deal announced Tuesday - it was unclear whether Iran would agree to any new restrictions on a nuclear program that it consistently has said is for peaceful purposes.

"We're clear-eyed going into this," said a senior Western diplomat, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss diplomatically sensitive preparations for the talks, which were scheduled to last one day. "The signs from Iran so far have been positive and different from what we have seen before. But Iran needs to show a seriousness and a clear willingness to get on to the substance of the issues."

Tuesday's apparent accord between Iran and the United Nations' International Atomic Energy Agency attempts to resolve one of the thorniest disputes between Iran and Western governments in recent years: the nation's refusal to account for a secret program of alleged nuclear weapons research conducted as recently as 2003. Iran insists that it has never sought to manufacture nuclear weapons, but it has routinely blocked access to key scientists and to military installations where the work was alleged to have occurred.

After a previously unscheduled visit to Iran over the weekend, IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano said Tuesday that the two sides had essentially settled their differences and were formalizing a plan that would ease the investigation of Iran's past nuclear activities, ending a six-year stalemate.

"I can say it will be signed quite soon," Amano told reporters at the Vienna airport upon his return from Tehran. While a few obstacles remain, a

"decision was made to conclude and sign the agreement," he said.

In Washington, the Obama administration cautiously welcomed Amano's announcement, but several officials noted that similar agreements had fallen apart when Iranian officials refused to provide the promised access.

"It's an agreement in principle that represents a step in the right direction," White House spokesman Jay Carney told reporters. "We will make judgments about Iran's behavior based on actions."

The Israeli government, which has threatened military strikes against Iran to stop what it sees as Tehran's pursuit of nuclear weapons, was openly skeptical of the claim of a diplomatic breakthrough.

"The Iranians are trying to reach a 'technical agreement,' which will create the impression of progress in the talks," Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak said at the start of a Ministry of Defense meeting. By appearing to make concessions, Iran is seeking merely to deflect international pressure on itself, he said.

Neither Iran nor the IAEA provided details of the accord, although Amano spoke of progress on a "structural agreement" that laid out the terms under which Iran would give the agency information about its past nuclear research.

Tehran's chief nuclear negotiator, Saeed Jalili, spoke vaguely about what he said were "very good talks" with the U.N. nuclear agency. "God willing, we will have good cooperation in the future," he added.

To some former U.S. officials and arms-control experts, the apparent progress at the Tehran meeting was a positive sign.

"Now the task is to reach agreement on specific,

concrete proposals, followed by actions, that can help prevent a nuclear-armed Iran," said Daryl Kimball, executive director of the Arms Control Association, a Washington-based nonprofit organization.

Western diplomats in recent days have publicly aired their views about what some of the proposals and actions should be. In interviews, some have outlined a multistage strategy in which Iran would be called upon to immediately halt some nuclear activities, including its production of a more highly purified form of enriched uranium that could be used to build weapons. Iran also is likely to be pressed to shut down its newest uranium-enrichment plant, which is built in mountain bunkers beyond the reach of most conventional bombs and missiles.

Significant relief from international sanctions would come later, after Iran carried out the initial "confidence building" measures and agreed to permanent curbs that would keep the nation from emerging as a nuclear weapons state.

Current and former Obama administration officials acknowledged that the chances for a comprehensive agreement Wednesday were slim, given the complexity of the issues and the time needed for consultations between the negotiators and their governments. But several officials said they expected at least to have firm indications from Iran about its willingness to address Western concerns.

"One doesn't need to see a breakthrough in these talks - it's not realistic," said Dennis Ross, who until last fall was President Obama's chief adviser on Iran. "But you need to see indicators that they are willing to talk about some of these things."

Staff writer Karin Brulliard in Jerusalem contributed to this report.

Yahoo.com
May 23, 2012

9. Iran, World Powers Seek Breakthrough In Baghdad

By Simon Sturdee, Agence France-Presse

Iran and six world powers meet for talks in Baghdad on Wednesday hoping to silence what US President Barack Obama called the "drums of war" and pave the way to a deal that will end decades of enmity.

The one overriding issue is Iran's nuclear programme, which the Islamic republic insists is peaceful but which much of the international community suspects masks an attempt to join the elite club of nations with the bomb.

The fear is that a nuclear-armed Iran would destabilise the already volatile Middle East and sound the death knell for 60 years of international efforts to prevent the spread of atomic weapons, sparking a regional arms race.

Israel, Washington's closest ally in the region, feels its very existence would be under threat and has refused to rule out a pre-emptive strike on Iran's nuclear facilities.

Obama took office in January 2009 offering a radical change in approach to his predecessor, George W. Bush, in dealings with Iran, famously offering an "extended hand" to Tehran if it "unclenched its fist."

This failed, however, and Iran has since dramatically expanded its programme, enriching uranium to purities of 20 percent, a level within spitting distance, technically speaking, of the 90 percent needed for a nuclear weapon.

As a result, talk of war has increased and the

UN Security Council has imposed more sanctions on Iran. Additional US and EU restrictions targeting Iran's oil sector are due to come into force from July 1.

But now, both sides "have walked up to the abyss and they have both decided they don't want to go down it," said Trita Parsi, author of an acclaimed book about Obama's dealings with Iran called "A Single Roll of the Dice."

Obama, seeking re-election in November against a Republican challenger accusing him of dawdling over Iran and keen to oil prices come down, is impatient for results, while Iran is feeling the pinch from the sanctions.

The P5+1 and Iran met in Istanbul in mid-April and managed to find enough common ground to come to Baghdad, with both sides hailing what they said was a fresh approach from the other.

But the Baghdad meeting will put these renewed efforts to the test as they seek to set the parameters of what will be a lengthy and arduous process of compromise requiring hitherto unseen amounts of patience and trust.

One key way for Iran to win the confidence of the P5+1 will be a suspension of 20-percent enrichment, while another would be Iran shipping its stockpiles of enriched uranium abroad.

What might also help is Iran implementing the additional protocol (AP) of the nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty, which allows for more intrusive inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

The IAEA also wants Iran to address allegations made in its November report that until 2003, and possibly since, Tehran had a "structured programme" of "activities

relevant to the development of a nuclear explosive device."

IAEA chief Yukiya Amano said on Tuesday after talks in Tehran that a deal on ways to go over these accusations with the Iranians would be signed "quite soon."

The reaction of Western countries -- and Israel -- was cool, however, with White House spokesman Jay Carney saying Washington "will make judgments about Iran's behaviour based on actions."

Mark Hibbs, proliferation expert at the Carnegie Foundation for International Peace, told AFP, "the negotiation isn't over and done with until it's signed on the dotted line."

But Iran will likely be disappointed in Baghdad if it expects sanctions relief in return for any of these moves, with the most it can hope for being a pledge -- with strings attached -- not to impose any more, diplomats said.

The Financial Times reported that Western powers are prepared to offer Iran an "oil carrot" that would allow it to continue supplying crude to Asian customers in exchange for certain guarantees.

It cited diplomats and oil executives as saying that Washington and Brussels were likely to hold out the prospect of a possible suspension of an EU insurance ban on ships carrying Iranian oil.

In any case, it is far from certain that any firm promises will be made by either side in Baghdad, with one envoy playing down expectations by saying that even if the talks go well, the results might not be "tangible."

CNN
May 22, 2012

10. 12,000 Troops Near Syria Train For War

The Situation Room (CNN), 5:00 PM

WOLF BLITZER: In the Middle East right now, thousands of U.S. and allied forces are training for a nightmare scenario: the region exploding in a full-fledged war.

Our Pentagon correspondent, Barbara Starr, got some exclusive access to the mission in Jordan. That's right next door to one of the most dangerous powder kegs right now, Syria.

BARBARA STARR: Wolf, you've seen the carrot of diplomacy being used to encourage regimes like Syria and Iran to join the world community. Here in Jordan, we are getting a look at the military stick that might be used by a coalition if it comes to that.

Elite Jordanian troops train to assault a compound. U.S. Special Operations Forces practice a night raid. They can take down an enemy target in two minutes. Nineteen countries have sent 12,000 troops here to Jordan. Commanders say it's all about training, but there are worries unrest in neighboring Syria or tensions over Iran's nuclear program could spark a conflict.

Troops here believe the next time they go to war, they will go together.

MAJOR GENERAL KEN TOVO [Special Operations, Central Command]: The number one takeaway from this exercise is we are creating partnerships and friendships.

STARR: Troops train for what they may face on a moment's notice.

TOVO: Aiding refugees in refugee camp, attacking terrorists or safe houses, releasing hostages.

STARR: Meet U.S. Army Captain Rory (sp). We can't tell you his full name. We can't

show you his face, because Rory still runs a 12-man commando team, but here he says.

RORY [U.S. Army Captain]: The training has been eye-opening.

STARR: If war was to come here, Navy SEAL Captain Todd Tinsly might be a key player. He already runs a military task force watching the Persian Gulf for trouble from Iran. He says working together isn't just talk.

CAPTAIN TODD TINSLEY [U.S. Navy SEAL]: If we got called up to do a contingency, I think you would see something similar to what we're doing right now.

STARR: This military exercise is being watched throughout the Middle East just in case military training becomes a military reality. Wolf?

BLITZER: It could happen. Barbara Starr in Jordan for us. Thank you.

Yahoo.com
May 22, 2012

11. Yemen, US Vow To Crush Qaeda After Troops Massacred

By Jamal al-Jabiri, Agence France-Presse

Yemen's army chief vowed Tuesday no let-up in an offensive against Al-Qaeda after a suicide bomber killed 96 soldiers in a massive attack in central Sanaa and two other would-be attackers were arrested.

Also in the capital, a leading member of Yemen's dwindling Jewish community was stabbed and fatally wounded, the community's rabbi told AFP, urging the authorities to protect his co-religionists.

The attack on Monday, which also injured some 300 soldiers, drew sharp

condemnation from Western powers and a pledge by US President Barack Obama to work with Sanaa to crush Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), blamed for several attempts to blow up US airliners and cargo planes.

The suicide bomber, dressed as a soldier, detonated his explosives as an army battalion was rehearsing a parade at the capital's Sabeen Square scheduled for Tuesday to mark the 22nd anniversary of Yemen's reunification.

The parade was replaced by a low-key, sombre ceremony attended by President Abdrabuh Mansur Hadi, who watched from behind a bullet-proof shield and left as soon as the event ended without making a speech.

In south Yemen, meanwhile, police shot dead a protester during clashes as separatists called for a day of civil disobedience to mark the anniversary, medics and witnesses said.

The clashes took place after protesters used rocks to block roads, set tyres alight, and closed shops in the capital of Hadramawt province, witnesses said.

Amid the insecurity across the country, Harun Zindani, a leading member of Yemen's Jewish community, died in hospital after being stabbed by a vendor of the local narcotic known as qat.

The vendor reportedly attacked Zindani from behind shouting: "You Jew, you have hurt my business with your sorcery." He was overpowered by passers-by and other shopkeepers, who held and eventually handed him over to the police.

The community's rabbi, Yahya Yusef Mousa, appealed to the president to protect Yemen's tiny Jewish community.

"We are a weak people who have nothing against anyone, and I ask the authorities to apply Sharia (Islamic law which imposes the death penalty for murder) against this aggressor without trial," he said.

Zindani was originally from the northern province of Saada where Zaidi Shiite rebels fought a bloody war against the regime of former strongman Ali Abdullah Saleh.

Since 2007, authorities have moved members of the minority community from Saada to a safe neighbourhood in Sanaa near the US embassy.

Yemen's army chief of staff Ali al-Ashwal used the reunification anniversary to warn Al-Qaeda and its local affiliates that the "war" against them would continue unabated.

"The barbaric attack on Sabeen Square will not scare us and will not prevent us from going ahead with our war on these evil elements," Ashwal told the ceremony which was held amid tight security.

"Our war on them will not stop until we free our land," said Ashwal, who was among the officials, including defence minister Mohammed Nasser Ahmed, apparently targeted in Monday's attack.

Soon after the blast, Yemeni authorities arrested two men in Sanaa who were found hiding explosive belts under their military uniforms, a security official said.

The men, "wearing explosives belts each packed with 13 kilograms (28.6 pounds)" were arrested in Sanaa, the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity. "They were planning to carry out further attacks."

AQAP, Al-Qaeda's Yemen branch, claimed responsibility for the attack which it said targeted "the defence minister and other leaders of the US

war on our people in Abyan" province in the south.

Yemen's military launched a major offensive in Abyan on May 12 in a bid to drive Al-Qaeda linked jihadists out of towns and cities in the restive province where they have held sway since May last year.

Since the offensive began, 234 people have been killed, according to a tally compiled by AFP, including 158 Al-Qaeda fighters, 41 military personnel, 18 local militiamen and 17 civilians.

Local sources in Abyan told AFP on Tuesday that clashes erupted anew on the western outskirts of Al-Qaeda stronghold Jaar, where the army is currently focusing its assault.

At the same time, the sources said, fighting had subsided around Abyan's capital Zinjibar, which the jihadists have held since last year.

"The war on terror will continue until it is completely destroyed regardless of the sacrifices," President Hadi said after Monday's attack, the deadliest since he took power in February.

Obama said the United States was very worried about the threat posed by AQAP and pledged to work with the Yemeni government to crack down on the group.

"We are very concerned about Al-Qaeda and extremist activity in Yemen," Obama told reporters at a NATO summit in Chicago on Monday devoted to ensuring that Al-Qaeda is not allowed to regroup in another one-time terror haven, Afghanistan.

The United States has carried out regular drone strikes against AQAP suspects in Yemen.

12. Turkey Says US Favorable To Sale Of Armed Drones

By Suzan Fraser, Associated Press

ANKARA, Turkey -- President Barack Obama's administration is inclined to sell armed drones to Turkey but has to convince Congress first, Turkey's president told reporters after a meeting with the U.S. leader.

Washington, which is providing technical and intelligence to Ankara in its fight against autonomy-seeking Kurdish rebels, deployed four Predator drones from Iraq to Turkey last year. NATO-ally Turkey is now trying to acquire armed drones — the kind the U.S. has used to target militants in places like Yemen and the border region between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

But analysts say some Congress members may oppose the sale of armed Predator drones to Turkey due to its tense relations with Israel, a close U.S. ally. A botched Turkish military airstrike in December aimed at the rebels of the Kurdistan Workers' Party that killed 34 civilians is also likely to further complicate any sale.

"The administration's position (toward the sale) is favorable," Turkey's state-run Anadolu Agency quoted President Abdullah Gul as telling Turkish reporters after a meeting with Obama on the sidelines of a NATO summit in Chicago late Monday. "They are trying to convince Congress."

"President Obama, Secretary of State Clinton and their aides are trying their best," he added.

The Turkish president said he told Obama during their discussions that the armed drones are not as lethal as F-16 fighter jets, which Turkey already has in its

fleet, or the F-35 fighter jet whose development Turkey is involved in.

"This must be explained to Congress," Gul said. "They must not act begrudgingly toward an important allied country. They have to trust it."

Gul would not say how many armed drones Turkey has requested from the United States.

Last week, the Wall Street Journal said the attack, which struck a group of smugglers and resulted in one of the highest single-day death tolls in the long-standing conflict between Turkey and the rebels, was based on intelligence provided by a U.S. Predator drone.

U.S. officials reportedly told the newspaper that the Turkish military carried out the attack before more information on the men was obtained, raising questions about how Turkey uses intelligence provided by the Predators.

Turkish officials have dismissed the report, saying the first images of the group were captured by the Turkish military.

The Kurdistan Workers' Party, which took up arms in 1984, is labeled a terrorist organization by Washington.

Newport News Daily Press
May 22, 2012
Pg. 3

13. Hampton VA Tapped As National Test Bed

By Hugh Lessig

The Obama administration has selected the Hampton VA Medical Center and a site in San Antonio as launch points for a massive medical record-sharing program between the departments of Veterans Affairs and Defense.

The two areas will serve as test beds for

what Defense Secretary Leon Panetta billed Monday as "the world's largest electronic health record system." He and VA Secretary Eric Shinseki made the announcement at a press conference in North Chicago.

The idea is to create a single electronic health record for men and women, starting from their time as active-duty service members to their transition into the VA health care system.

Allowing the two departments to share information is aimed at filling gaps and erasing mistakes in patient records, allowing doctors to make better-informed treatment decisions, officials said.

The federal government will begin implementing the program at those two locations starting in 2014. It is expected fully ramp up in three years.

DeAnne Seekins, Hampton VA director, said she and her staff learned of their selection about two weeks ago.

"The physicians are definitely excited about this," she said. "They recognize the importance of sharing information."

The program is known as the Integrated Electronic Health Record system. It is a key piece of a 2009 initiative announced by President Obama called the Virtual Lifetime Electronic Record, or VLER.

The program is considered especially timely given the number of service members returning from Afghanistan in the coming months and years, increasing the workload at VA centers across the nation.

"The VA's requirements will continue to grow for a decade or more after the end of the mission," Shinseki said.

Hampton Roads not only has a large veteran population, but the Hampton VA already has experience as a pilot site for another records-sharing

initiative, said Roger W. Baker, VA assistant secretary for information and technology.

That initiative shares information between the VA, the Defense Department and private-sector providers. Hampton Roads was selected as a pilot site for that project, and Baker said one example from that project shows how sharing records can save lives.

A private sector doctor who had access to VA records noticed that his patient had listed an allergy. The doctor wasn't aware of it, and it turned out that the patient had told the VA, but not the doctor, Baker said.

The rollout in 2014 will begin deliberately, as staff in both federal agencies test the technology. The first shared records will relate to immunizations and lab work, said Beth A. McGrath, deputy chief management officer, Department of Defense.

Panetta said that VA and DoD "must break down the barriers between our departments that prevent us from partnering to deliver the highest-quality health care to those who need it."

He and Shinseki made the announcement at the Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center. The site is the first-ever partnership between the VA and the Defense Department that cares for active-duty military, their family members, military retirees and veterans under one roof.

Washington Times
May 23, 2012
Pg. 5

14. Pentagon To Crackdown On Chinese 'Bogus Parts'

1 million suspected counterfeits found in U.S. aircraft

By Kristina Wong, The Washington Times

The Defense Department on Tuesday said it would strengthen efforts to prevent Chinese counterfeit parts from ending up in the U.S. military's supply chain.

The Pentagon statement came after a Senate Armed Services Committee released a report saying that 1 million suspected "bogus parts" had been found in U.S. military aircraft, including the Air Force's largest cargo plane, in assemblies intended for special operations helicopters, and in a Navy surveillance plane.

"Our report outlines how this flood of counterfeit parts, overwhelmingly from China, threatens national security, the safety of our troops and American jobs," Sen. Carl M. Levin, Michigan Democrat and committee chairman, said in a statement.

"It underscores China's failure to police the blatant market in counterfeit parts - a failure China should rectify," Mr. Levin said.

Sen. John McCain of Arizona, the committee's ranking Republican, also said in the statement that "vulnerabilities throughout the defense supply chain allow the counterfeit electronic parts to infiltrate critical U.S. military systems."

A Chinese Embassy spokesman could not be reached for a comment.

"We are working very hard to try to sort this issue out, and take steps to further strengthen our supply chain," Pentagon press secretary George Little told reporters during a briefing Tuesday.

Peter W. Singer, director of the 21st Century Defense Initiative and a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, said even the smallest counterfeit

parts can cause considerable concern.

For instance, a computer that can operate a toaster or a Tomahawk missile could have a design that involves hundreds of people at multiple locations, he said.

"The result is a dangerous combination: The chips have become so complex that no single engineer or even team of engineers can understand how all their parts actually work," Mr. Singer said. "The process of design is so distributed that no one can know all the people involved, and they are manufactured in such a great number that not even a tiny percentage can be tested."

A 2011 Senate Armed Services Committee report found that a faulty chip in a sensor on a Navy helicopter deployed to the USS Gridley in the Pacific Fleet prevented the pilot from firing its missiles, he noted.

"The manufacturer, Raytheon, was completely unaware, as like most major defense firms, it didn't make the chips inside its systems, but instead buys them from Chinese vendors," Mr. Singer said.

"You think you're buying high-end tires for your sports car, but if they're counterfeit, they're not as good as what you're paying for and might fail," he said.

A greater concern, he added, is that a counterfeit part is designed to create some kind of covert effect, such as containing a "kill switch" that could shut down equipment.

"The chip might appear like it's working perfectly, but really it's sending information to someone else, dropping malware, or coordinating with other corrupted chips to carry out some kind of bigger attack," Mr. Singer said. "More like a cyberattack than just a fail."

Mr. Little said the Defense Department has stepped up its aggressive actions to address the problem on many fronts, including a memorandum issued in March designed to take initial steps to create an anti-counterfeiting program.

He added that the Pentagon has worked closely with the White House intellectual property coordinator to try to strengthen contractors' reporting requirements.

When counterfeiting problems are identified, the Pentagon works closely with law enforcement agencies to investigate the issues and, where appropriate, debars companies and supports the prosecution of counterfeiters, Mr. Little said.

He said that, to date, the Pentagon is unaware of any loss of life or catastrophic mission failure that has occurred because of counterfeit parts, or any demonstrable impact.

But "that doesn't mean we should stop addressing the issue," he added.

Tampa Tribune
May 23, 2012

15. Leader Vows To Protect Forces

By Howard Altman, The Tampa Tribune

TAMPA -- Special operations forces were the first troops on the ground in Afghanistan after the Sept. 11 attacks. They have been there ever since and have been deployed to dozens of countries in a multitude of high-profile, high-danger situations -- including the killing of Osama bin Laden and the rescue of hostages held by Somali pirates.

U.S. Special Operations Command chief Adm. William McRaven says he knows the stresses the troops have faced and the damage they have

endured that sometimes don't show up until years later.

Pacing the floor of the Tampa Convention Center ballroom, McRaven said one of his biggest priorities is caring for a fighting force he acknowledges has been "frayed."

"They have seen a lot of fighting," McRaven said. "If you have been in war, you have been changed."

McRaven, the highest-ranking Navy SEAL, said it is his responsibility to make sure Socom does what it can to take care of not just those who fight, but their families as well.

"If you have a broken leg, a broken heart or a broken psyche," McRaven said, "we will do what it takes to get you fixed."

McRaven was speaking at the opening of the general session of the Special Operations Forces Industry Conference, an annual event that brings the special operations community together with the companies that make the goods and services they need. Socom has an annual purchasing budget of more than \$2 billion, and the conference is a chance for industry to see what operators need and pitch existing products, and for operators to voice their opinions on the tools they require.

Speaking before an audience of hundreds of defense industry leaders and special operators force representatives from more than 90 nations, McRaven said the top priority is "winning the current fight."

Among other things, that will likely mean some U.S. special operations forces in Afghanistan beyond 2014, a deadline set by President Barack Obama for turning responsibility of security over to the Afghans.

"The role of special operations forces in

Afghanistan is crucial to success," said McRaven, the man who planned the raid that killed bin Laden. Although he did not talk about what that role will look like moving forward, he expressed confidence that whatever the U.S. special operations presence is in Afghanistan, Socom will also be able to meet the demands in the 77 other countries where U.S. special forces are currently operating.

As McRaven spoke one floor above in the exhibition hall, hundreds of companies were displaying products aimed at helping troops find and kill the enemy, protect themselves and communicate.

There were several unmanned aerial vehicle systems from the likes of Boeing and several other firms, large and small. A lumbering 56,000-pound truck from BAE Systems that was billed as the only armored cargo vehicle able to protect operators from improvised explosive devices. A dynamic marksmanship training simulator from Cubic that gives shooters pointers on what they are doing right or wrong.

At least one company was offering a product that speaks to McRaven's concern about preserving the force.

BAE Systems has already shipped 20,000 Headborne Energy Analysis and Diagnostic System devices to the Army. Planted in helmets, they read data on how a soldier's head is exposed to the concussive forces of IED blasts, bouncing around in vehicles and other potential injuries that might cause traumatic brain injury.

The data collected either can be read from sensor devices as soldiers return from action or a more complete analysis can be made if the data are downloaded onto a computer.

Bloomberg.com

May 22, 2012

16. U.S. Officials Guided Filmmakers On Bin Laden Raid Movie

By Tony Capaccio and Gopal Ratnam, Bloomberg News

The Obama administration promised a Hollywood filmmaker unprecedented access to the top-secret Navy unit that killed Osama bin Laden to help her make a feature film on the operation at the same time it was publicly ordering officials to stop talking about the raid.

The Pentagon's top intelligence official, Michael Vickers, offered Oscar-winning director Kathryn Bigelow interviews with a member of the SEAL team that helped plan last year's assault on bin Laden's compound, according to a transcript of a July 15 meeting that was released yesterday by Judicial Watch, a Washington-based legal organization.

The summary was among hundreds of pages of material on the Obama administration's cooperation with Bigelow and screenwriter Mark Boal on their proposed movie that Judicial Watch obtained under the Freedom of Information Act. The documents illustrate a conflict between the administration's public calls for shielding classified information related to bin Laden's death and its private effort to assist the filmmakers.

During the meeting with Bigelow, who directed the Academy Award-winning Iraq War movie "The Hurt Locker," Vickers also divulged the name of the normally secret Navy commando unit known as SEAL Team Six.

"Well, the basic idea is they'll make a guy available who was involved from the beginning as planner, a SEAL Team 6 Operator and Commander," said Vickers, the

undersecretary of defense for intelligence, according to the transcript.

Lieutenant Colonel James Gregory, a Vickers spokesman, said in an e-mail last night that Vickers was not referring to a SEAL Team Six member.

"The identity of a planner, not a member of SEAL Team 6, was provided by the U.S. Special Operations Command as a possible point of contact for additional information if the DoD determined that additional support was merited," Gregory said. "No additional official DoD support was granted, nor to our knowledge was it pursued by the film makers," he said. "This was a meeting to explore possibilities about supporting the film endeavor."

Judicial Watch sued the Defense Department in January for release of the records and received the material on May 18, the group said in a news release yesterday. The organization is also pressing for the publication of post-mortem photos of bin Laden and video, which the U.S. government has refused to release citing national security concerns.

The July meeting between Vickers, Bigelow and Boal, which was sanctioned by the White House, came two months after then- Defense Secretary Robert Gates and then-Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Admiral Michael Mullen urged military officials to stop talking about the raid on May 2, 2011.

"My concern is that there were too many people in too many places talking too much about this operation," Gates said at a at a May 18 news conference. "And we had reached an agreement that we would not talk about operational details. That lasted about 15 hours," he said.

At the July 15 meeting, Boal told Vickers he had already met that day with CIA

Deputy Director Mike Morell and earlier with White House Deputy National Security Adviser Denis McDonough and counterterrorism adviser John Brennan, according to the transcript.

Tommy Vietor, a spokesman for Obama's National Security Council, declined to comment on the documents and referred to the response given by White House press secretary Jay Carney on Aug. 10, when Republican Representative Peter King of New York called for an investigation into whether the filmmaker was given access to classified information.

"We do not discuss classified information," Carney said at the time. "The most specific information we've given from this White House about the actual raid I read to you from this podium. So it's simply false" that any special access was granted.

King's request was prompted by an Aug. 7 New York Times column by Maureen Dowd that said: "The moviemakers are getting top-level access to the most classified mission in history."

The Pentagon routinely provides technical assistance and location access to filmmakers, including the science-fiction movie "Battleship" that was released last week. In exchange for such access, equipment and personnel, filmmakers must modify a script if requested by the Pentagon or military service.

A summary of a June meeting between Vickers and Boal, the writer and producer of "The Hurt Locker," offers a glimpse of the Obama administration's possible motives for assisting the filmmakers -- aside from preventing inaccuracies

and disclosures of classified information.

Vickers said that based on the intelligence, there was a "60 to 80 percent certainty" that bin Laden was in the compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan, and that ordering the raid "was a 'gutsy decision by the POTUS,'" shorthand for President of the United States, according to the summary. Vickers also "recommended" that the filmmakers look at the raid from the Central Intelligence Agency, Pentagon and White House vantage points.

"White House involvement was critical," according to the summary of Vickers' discussion.

Bigelow is out of the country filming and can't be reached for comment, her publicist Susan Ciccone said yesterday.

Pentagon and special operations officials have never publicly acknowledged the official designation of the Navy unit known informally as SEAL Team Six and formally as the Naval Special Warfare Development Group, or Devgru, based in Dam Neck, Virginia.

When 17 members of the unit were killed last Aug. 6 in a CH-47 Chinook helicopter crash, the fact that they were members of that unit was not disclosed though their names were released.

Vickers had no such reticence when meeting with the filmmakers, though.

"He can probably give you everything you would want or get" from the top U.S. Special Operations Command Commander or direct raid commander, Vickers said, referring respectively to then-Admiral Eric Olson and Admiral William McRaven.

According to the documents, McRaven, then head of the Joint Special

Operations Command, and Olson would not speak with the filmmakers because military officials were concerned "that it's just a bad example if it gets out -- even with all sorts of restrictions and everything."

The SEAL Team Six planner whose name was blacked out in the transcript will "speak for operators and he'll speak for senior military commanders" because they are all "the same tribe and everything," Vickers said during the July meeting.

The commanders tell their troops never to talk about operations, and doing so now would jeopardize their leadership, Vickers told the filmmakers, according to the documents.

Still, filmmakers were ecstatic. "That's dynamite by the way," Boal told Vickers, according to the transcript. "That's incredible," Bigelow said.

Officials at the CIA also went to unusual lengths to cooperate with Bigelow and Boal. In a June 30 e-mail to a recipient whose name was redacted, then-CIA spokesman Marie Harf, who now works for President Barack Obama's re-election campaign in Chicago, said:

"As a Agency, we've been pretty forward-leaning with Boal, and he's agreed to share scripts and details about the movie with us so we're absolutely comfortable with what he will be showing."

"I know this is a little outside what we typically do as CIA officers," she continued later, "but Boal seems committed to representing the Agency well in what is a multi-million dollar major motion picture.

"(... we're trying to keep his visits at HQs a bit quiet, because of the sensitivities surrounding who

gets to participate in this types of things. I'm sure you understand...)"

Preston Golson, a CIA spokesman, said in an e-mail yesterday that "on some occasions, when appropriate, we arrange visits to the Agency for unclassified meetings with some of our officers."

Washington Post
May 23, 2012
Pg. 19

17. Envisioning An Epic Journey, DARPA Takes First Small Step

Agency makes a grant to turn interstellar travel into more than a dream

By Brian Vastag

Humanity's journey to the stars is beginning with ... a modest government grant.

The dreamers at the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency last week announced an award of \$500,000 to a former astronaut to launch an effort to - someday - send explorers to another star system.

It's a huge job, impractical with existing technology. That's why the 100 Year Starship Study project will start by building a community of space enthusiasts, engineers, technologists, futurists, scientists and dreamers to chip away at a panoply of technical, financial and social challenges - while seeking funds to keep the effort afloat.

"The first step is to get the seed money to grow into something more while also getting the public engaged," said Mae Jemison, the former astronaut whom DARPA chose to head the effort. "It has to become something that has its own momentum."

In 50 years of space exploration, humans have hardly made it out of the driveway of our home planet.

NASA's trips to the moon took three days each way. Mars, the next planet over, is nine months distant by robotic flier. At the speeds attained on those trips, the journey to the nearest neighboring star would take tens of thousands of years.

A starship, then, will need giant engines that draw more power than we know how to produce, said Les Johnson, a NASA scientist who has worked on designs for robotic probes to travel outside our solar system. "There's no law of physics that says it won't work," he said. "Maybe if we get creative in our engineering we can do this."

In its grant solicitation, DARPA wrote that it wants to "foster a rebirth of a sense of wonder" while encouraging research that will pay dividends here on Earth.

In Jemison, the agency tapped not only a space traveler - in 1992 she became the first woman of color to leave Earth, on the space shuttle - but a physician, engineer, entrepreneur and champion of science education. Her vision: Generate excitement for a grand human adventure.

"It's got to be a global aspiration," said Jemison.

Her first organizational challenge is getting a 100 Year Starship conference off the ground in Houston this September. Within a century, she wants the project to fund and foster the technologies needed to build a starship.

As a girl, Jemison was entranced with space journeys, real and imagined. She was 12 when she watched Neil Armstrong set foot on the moon, and she counts Nichelle Nichols, who played Lt. Uhura on the original "Star Trek" television series, as one of her heroes. (Jemison herself appeared on an episode of "Star Trek: The Next Generation.")

"I've always thought the public never lost fascination with space," Jemison said of the post-moon-landing era. "They just felt left out."

Johnson said a small but dedicated set of space enthusiasts has been mulling starships for decades. Most notably, the British Interplanetary Society published plans for a notional starship called Project Daedalus in 1978.

Paul Gilster, a writer and futurist who keeps close tabs on such work in his blog Centauri Dreams, likened the 100 Year Starship to megaprojects such as European cathedrals and Egyptian pyramids, whose construction spanned generations. "We need to acknowledge we won't see the end [of the project] ourselves," he said.

Public interest is sure to grow, Gilster added. He pointed to the discovery of hundreds of planets outside our solar system. "We're entering what I call the golden age of exoplanets," he said. "We should know within two years whether there are rocky worlds around Alpha Centauri," the star nearest our sun.

Finding these alien worlds naturally leads to the next question: How do we get there?

In beating out 20 competitors for the grant, Jemison tapped a group of scientists and engineers already studying how to travel to the stars. They call themselves Icarus Interstellar, and one of their advisers, planetary scientist Ralph McNutt of the Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Laboratory, called the 100 Year Starship "an opportunity to get beyond the realm of science fiction." He likened our current space vehicles to "dugout canoes." But someday, he said, we'll have the equivalent of ocean liners in space.

"I think it's a great idea," NASA's Johnson said. "If we're ever going to get to another star, we've got to start sometime."

DEFCON Hill (TheHill.com)
May 22, 2012

Defense Overnight

18. Panetta, Clinton Push 'Law Of The Sea' Treaty

By Jeremy Herb and Carlo Munoz

Three top Obama administration officials are headed to Capitol Hill Wednesday morning to try to persuade the Senate to ratify the "Law of the Sea" Treaty.

The Obama administration is trying to pass the treaty after it failed five years ago, which the administration argues is important to create a new legal framework for resolving territorial disputes.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta and Joint Chiefs Chairman Gen. Martin Dempsey will testify to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to make their case for Senate ratification.

But the treaty, which has been signed by 160 countries, faces resistance in the Senate led by Sen. Jim DeMint (R-S.C.), as critics argue it would impede the U.S. Navy's ability to operate as it sees fit could lead to the redistribution of oil-and-gas royalties.

A conservative lobbying push against the treaty is being lead by Heritage Action, and DeMint has at least 24 senators on a letter opposing the treaty. The House also passed an amendment in the defense authorization bill that would block funding to finance the treaty.

But the treaty received a stamp of approval from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce on Tuesday ahead of the

hearing. Sen. Carl Levin (D-Mich.), Senate Armed Services Committee chairman, said Tuesday that the treaty "ought to pass" and that he thought there was the necessary two-thirds support in the Senate to get it ratified.

Reuters.com
May 22, 2012

19. Obama Administration In New Push To Ratify Sea Treaty

By David Alexander, Reuters

WASHINGTON -- A U.S. Navy surveillance vessel stumbled into a nerve-racking confrontation with five Chinese ships in 2009 while conducting ocean mapping operations in the South China Sea.

Chinese ships bent on enforcing Beijing's expansive view of its rights under the Law of the Sea Treaty tried to snare the USNS Impeccable's towed sonars with a grappling hook, U.S. officials said.

Some of the vessels darted into the Impeccable's path, forcing the unarmed civilian crew to take emergency evasive action to avoid collision, they said.

When the United States protested the dangerous actions and insisted that China was asserting maritime rights far in excess of those conferred by the 1982 treaty, Beijing's response was right to the point.

"They had a perfect reply," said Myron Nordquist, associate director of the Center for Oceans Law and Policy at the University of Virginia. "Who is the U.S. to come and tell us to abide by a treaty to which you are not a party?"

Thirty years after the global community negotiated the U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea, the Obama administration, backed by senior military officials and business leaders, is

making a new push to win U.S. Senate ratification of the treaty.

Supporters say the agreement would vastly expand U.S. control of resource-rich maritime regions off the coastal United States and give the military firmer footing to assert rights of navigation and overflight around the world.

"It's urgent that we move on this because American economic interests are very much at stake," said Senator John Kerry, head of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, which takes up the treaty on Wednesday for the first time in five years.

"Other nations are moving to stake claims and to assert sovereignty in places that they perhaps shouldn't," he said, "and the United States needs to get off the dime and protect its economic interests."

Defense Secretary Leon Panetta and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton testify before the committee on Wednesday at the start of several months of hearings that Kerry said he believed would eventually lead lawmakers to ratify the treaty.

But critics, who have succeeded in blocking the accord since it first came to the Senate in the mid-1990s, said the United States stands to gain little beyond what it can already claim, while ceding some of its sovereignty to an international organization.

"When you view the pros and cons of the treaty, when you do the cost benefit analysis, the costs, the real costs are provable and supported by facts and law and logic whereas the supposed benefits are fairly conjectural," said Steven Groves, an analyst at the conservative Heritage Foundation think tank.

He said the treaty would expose the United States to lawsuits and siphon off billions of dollars in royalty payments to

fund the bureaucracy associated with the convention.

But Kerry dismissed much of the criticism of the accord as "mythology" and said the treaty carried "enormous benefits." He said companies had told him they would not invest in seabed mining unless the treaty was ratified.

"We have major economic interests in various parts of the ocean," he said. "We can't lay a claim to them and protect them under the Law of the Sea because we're not a party to the Law of the Sea."

The treaty, which originated in negotiations in the 1950s, established 12 nautical mile territorial seas, as well as rights of navigation and overflight.

It also created 200 nautical mile exclusive economic zones that give the coastal states rights of development and exploitation of natural resources but ensure other countries the right of transit and overflight.

The agreement has been ratified by 162 countries, including all permanent members of the U.N. Security Council except the United States. Other countries that have yet to join the treaty include North Korea, Venezuela, Syria and Iran.

Proponents say the United States, because of its extensive coastline and large navy, stands to benefit more than most other countries by joining the treaty.

It would bring vast areas of the ocean under recognized U.S. control, and put the military's worldwide rights of transit and overflight on more stable legal ground, officials said.

"Treaty law makes the firmest legal foundation upon which to base our global presence - on, above and below the seas," Panetta told a recent forum.

The defense secretary also underscored the importance of

the treaty in the context of the Pentagon's shift in strategic focus to the western Pacific, East Asia and Indian Ocean.

"By not acceding to the convention, we give up the strongest legal footing for our actions," Panetta said. "How can we argue that other nations must abide by international rules when we haven't officially accepted those rules ourselves?"

Kerry said the treaty could help resolve differences in maritime disputes in the Asia-Pacific before violence erupts.

"The United States will remain the world's pre-eminent power, but you don't want to resort to gunboat diplomacy for every issue," he said. "You'd like to have legal resources available to you. And this treaty gives it to you."

Wall Street Journal

May 23, 2012

Pg. 4

20. Fort Hood Bomb-Plot Trial Begins For Soldier

By Nathan Koppel

WACO, Texas—A U.S. soldier of Muslim faith was on "a mission to kill" and just hours away from detonating a bomb near an Army base when he was arrested last year, a federal prosecutor alleged Tuesday on the opening day of the soldier's attempted murder trial in U.S. District Court here.

Pfc. Naser Jason Abdo, a 22-year-old infantryman stationed at Fort Campbell, Ky., was arrested last July for allegedly planning an attack near Fort Hood in Killeen, Texas, the military base where army psychiatrist Nidal Hasan allegedly killed 13 soldiers in 2009.

A government witness testified Tuesday that Mr. Abdo told federal agents after he was arrested that he wanted to kill U.S. soldiers to show

solidarity with Mr. Hasan, a fellow Muslim with alleged links to radical Islam, and to avenge the U.S. military's killings of Iraqis. Mr. Hasan, who hasn't entered a plea in his case, is scheduled to be tried on murder charges in a military court on Aug. 20.

Mr. Abdo, who was born and raised in the Dallas area, has pleaded not guilty to charges that include attempted murder and attempt to use a weapon of mass destruction. He faces a possible life sentence if convicted of the weapon-of-mass-destruction charge.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Gregg Sofer said in his opening argument that Mr. Abdo left Fort Campbell on July 4 last year and traveled to Killeen, purchasing ammunition and other items along the way, including a pistol, a stun gun and handcuffs. He was arrested thanks to "good police work," Mr. Sofer said, after an employee at a Killeen gun store notified local police that Mr. Abdo had purchased gunpowder and was acting suspiciously.

Mr. Sofer told the jury of eight women and four men that Mr. Abdo was only hours away from assembling a bomb in his Killeen hotel room. "This man intended to commit mass murder," Mr. Sofer said.

Police officers discovered bomb-making components in Mr. Abdo's Killeen hotel room, along with an article titled, "How to build a bomb in the kitchen of your mom," according to court records.

In his opening argument, defense lawyer Zachary Boyd said that while jurors might not like some of the evidence presented about his client, the government still would not be able to prove that Mr. Abdo could readily assemble a bomb. He likened Mr. Abdo to someone who contemplates

suicide and purchases a knife, but never carries out the act.

"Suicide doesn't happen until you put the knife on your skin and start to cut," Mr. Boyd said. "The government can't prove its case."

Federal Bureau of Investigation agent Charles Owens, who testified for the government, said Mr. Abdo told him that he planned to detonate a bomb at a Chinese restaurant, because he considered Chinese buffets popular with soldiers, and then he planned to shoot any survivors.

"He said he wanted to go to Killeen to martyr himself," said Mr. Owens, who interviewed Mr. Abdo for about 11 hours after he was arrested.

Jeffrey Addicott, a former military prosecutor who is director of the Center for Terrorism Law at St. Mary's University School of Law, said that while the government had strong circumstantial evidence, it still faced the burden of proving that the defendant intended to commit a criminal act.

The trial is expected to last through the end of the week.

Philadelphia Inquirer
May 23, 2012
Pg. 6

21. Army Gets Pickier With Recruits And Stingier With Bonuses

By Lolita C. Baldor,
Associated Press

WASHINGTON -- Uncle Sam may not want you after all.

In sharp contrast to the peak years of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, the Army last year took in no recruits with misconduct convictions or drug or alcohol issues, according to internal documents obtained by The Associated Press. And soldiers already serving on active duty now must meet

tougher standards to stay on for further tours in uniform.

The Army is also spending hundreds of thousands of dollars less in bonuses to attract recruits or entice soldiers to remain.

It's all part of an effort to slash the size of the active duty Army from about 570,000 at the height of the Iraq war to 490,000 by 2017. The cutbacks began last year, and as of the end of March the Army was down to less than 558,000 troops.

For a time during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Army lowered its recruiting standards, raising the number of recruits who entered the Army with moral, medical and criminal - including felony - waivers.

Recruits with misdemeanors, which could range from petty theft and writing bad checks to assault, were allowed into the Army, as well as those with some medical problems or low aptitude scores that might otherwise have disqualified them.

A very small fraction of recruits had waivers for felonies, which included convictions for manslaughter, vehicular homicide, robbery and a handful of sex crimes. The sex crimes often involved consensual sex when one of the individuals was under 18.

In 2006, about 20 percent of new Army recruits came in under some type of waiver, and by the next year it had grown to nearly three in 10. After the Defense Department issued new guidelines, the percentage needing waivers started to come down in 2009.

Now, as the Army moves to reduce its force, some soldiers will have to leave.

Officials say they hope to make cuts largely through voluntary attrition. But Gen. Ray Odierno, the Army chief

of staff, has warned that as much as 35 percent of the cuts will be "involuntary" ones that force soldiers to abandon what they had hoped would be long military careers.

"This is going to be hard," said Gen. David Rodriguez, head of U.S. Army Forces Command. "This is tough business. As we increase things like re-enlistment standards, some of the people who were able to re-enlist three years ago won't be able to re-enlist again."

The Army, in an internal slide presentation, is blunt: "Re-enlistment is a privilege, not a right; some 'fully qualified' soldiers will be denied re-enlistment due to force realignment requirements and reductions in end strength."

In a memo earlier this year, Army Secretary John McHugh laid out more stringent criteria for denying re-enlistment, including rules that would turn away soldiers who have gotten a letter of reprimand for a recent incident involving the use of drugs or alcohol, or some soldiers who were unable to qualify for a promotion list.

Norfolk Virginian-Pilot
May 23, 2012

22. New York Giants Coach To Receive Army Honor In Va.

By Mike Connors, The
Virginian-Pilot

ARLINGTON -- New York Giants head coach Tom Coughlin will be among those honored at an Army service Wednesday in northern Virginia.

The Army will hand out Outstanding Civilian Service Awards, starting at 6 p.m., at Whipple Field at Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall, according to an Army news release. The event, which is free and open to the public, will be

hosted by Gen. Ray Odierno, the Army's chief of staff.

The awards go to civilians who have made a positive impact on the Army, the release said. Coughlin has been an active participant in the NFL-USO coaches tour of the Persian Gulf, and has made a habit of inviting Wounded Warriors to practices and games. He's also taken the team to Walter Reed Medical Center.

Also scheduled to be honored are Baltimore Ravens head coach John Harbaugh, former NBA referee Bob Delaney, Lynn Chwatsky, the vice president of Outreach for Sesame Street, and Linda Patterson, the founder and president of America Supporting Americans.

San Francisco Chronicle
May 23, 2012
Pg. C1

23. Naming Ship After Milk Wins Support

It is official: The San Francisco Board of Supervisors backs the idea of the Navy naming a vessel after gay political leader Harvey Milk. But the decision came only after debating the power of symbolism and consulting with a spirit board.

The nonbinding resolution, approved on a 9-2 vote, urges the secretary of the Navy to christen a ship the USS Harvey Milk. It supports the request of San Diego Rep. Bob Filner, the ranking Democrat on the House Armed Services Committee.

Milk, one of the first openly gay officeholders in the nation, was serving on the San Francisco Board of Supervisors when he was gunned down in 1978 by his former colleague Dan White.

Milk was a naval officer who served during the Korean War.

Tuesday's vote came on what would have been Milk's 82nd birthday.

"LGBT people have always served in our armed forces," said Supervisor Scott Wiener, who sponsored the resolution. "For many, many years, our community was hidden and oppressed in the armed services.

"Now, because of the repeal of 'don't ask, don't tell,' our community can serve openly and proudly," he added. "We must support our LGBT soldiers past and present. I can think of no better way to do that than to name a vessel for a Navy officer who went on to become one of the most important civil rights leaders in history."

But Supervisor Christina Olague voted against the legislation, not wanting to link Milk to the military.

"I just do believe that there are more appropriate ways to honor somebody who in their last days of their life was opposed to war," she said, noting Milk's public opposition to the Vietnam War. "I also have, my entire life, been against the military-industrial complex."

Supervisor John Avalos said he sees the merits of the arguments on both sides of the debate. He and his City Hall aides turned to a Ouija board to ask for Milk's opinion.

We "actually put our hands on the Ouija board and the letters g-o-o-d-r-i-d-d-a-n-c-e-d-a-d-t came out. We asked Harvey, and Harvey gave us these letters: 'Good riddance don't ask, don't tell.' It was quite clear that Harvey Milk would have been opposed to 'don't ask, don't tell.' I can honestly say that's one aspect of this resolution that's really valid."

Avalos joined Wiener and seven other supervisors to support the resolution. Only Olague and Supervisor Jane Kim were opposed.

- Rachel Gordon

Baltimore Sun

May 23, 2012

24. Oklahoma Plebe Grabs Dixie Cup In Naval Academy's Herndon Climb

Two hours, 10 minutes to cap the monument

By Andrea F. Siegel, The Baltimore Sun

They are plebes no longer.

It took two hours, 10 minutes and 13 seconds Tuesday for the freshman class at the U.S. Naval Academy to have one of its own knock a plebe's "dixie cup" hat from the top of the greased Herndon Monument and replace it with a midshipman's hat, symbolically morphing the group into 4th-class Mids.

Andrew Craig, 19, of Tulsa, Okla., achieved the goal in the noisy and slippery event that drew between 800 and 1,000 plebes, officials said. Tradition holds that the student who caps the monument will be first in the class to reach the rank of admiral, though that has yet to happen.

The climb up the 21-foot-tall obelisk on the grounds of the military college in Annapolis apparently isn't such a challenge if the monument is fat-free. The climb took just over two minutes in 2010, the last time the structure wasn't greased.

This year, 50 pounds of lard was slathered on the obelisk, dedicated to the memory of Commander William Lewis Herndon, who went down with his ship in 1857.

Gary and Karen Hinderland flew in from their home in Webster, N.Y., to watch their son participate in the rite of passage. Jack Hinderland, 20, was among the plebes at the bottom helping to form the platform, his father said.

"They were fighting hard. They'd come up and get so close and somebody's knees would buckle and they'd crumble," Gary Hinderland said, laughing as he recalled the sight of plebes piling onto each other, groping their way up and slip-sliding away before one made it to the top.

The climb is the final event for plebes as a freshman class, academy officials said. However, they won't stay 4th-class Mids long. They move up to 3rd class once the Class of 2012 graduates on Tuesday.

Reuters.com

May 22, 2012

25. Lockheed F-35B Fighter Has 1st Flight At Fla. Base

WASHINGTON (Reuters) -- The Marine Corps version of Lockheed Martin Corp's new F-35 fighter jet had its first flight out of Eglin Air Force Base in Florida on Tuesday, a critical step toward the start of pilot training on the new, radar-evading warplane.

Eglin is home to six Air Force or "A" variants of the F-35 fighter, which began flights at the air base in March, and 12 "B" models, which can take off from shorter runways and land like a helicopter. Tuesday's flight brings the total for all initial F-35 flights from the base to 47, a spokeswoman said.

The Marines plan more conventional flights of the F-35B planes in coming months, gradually expanding to short takeoffs and vertical landings and more complex aerial training, the Pentagon said.

"It's another milestone in what we are calling our execution year," said Air Force Colonel Andrew Toth, commander of the 33rd Fighter Wing at the base. The

base also provides certification classes for future F-35 pilots and extensive training for maintenance personnel.

The successful first F-35B flight comes a week after rising costs and delays forced Britain to reverse course and opt to buy the B version of the F-35, which does not require a catapult and arrester wires to be fitted to U.K. aircraft carriers.

F-35 pilot training was initially slated to begin last fall, but was delayed by the Pentagon after its chief tester raised concerns about the maturity of the new plane and its software.

Formal training of four to six pilots at a time will begin once officials receive approval from the Air Education and Training Command, a step that will come only after more local area flights and an evaluation of the plane's operational use.

The command says its timetable will be driven more by events than any specific dates, but officials have said they hope to begin pilot training this summer. Officials were now starting to validate flight instructions and a training syllabus.

The military needs trained pilots and maintainers in order to start using the new warplanes operationally.

The Marines are likely to be the first of the U.S. military services to declare them ready for "initial operational capability" because they do not plan to wait for more sophisticated software upgrades required by the other services.

Meanwhile, 3,650 machinists and other union workers are in the fifth week of a strike at the Fort Worth, Texas, plant where Lockheed builds the F-35, and two military bases where it is tested. Lockheed on Saturday said it had reached new contracts with

two smaller unions at the Texas plant.

Lockheed spokesman Joe Stout said no negotiations were slated with the union at this point.

Lockheed is developing the multirole stealth F-35 for the U.S. military and eight international partners at a projected cost of around \$396 billion.

Britain's BAE Systems is a key contractor on the project. Other subcontractors include Northrop Grumman Corp and United Technologies Corp.

Fayetteville (NC) Observer
May 23, 2012

26. Wounded Soldiers Get Lesson In Resiliency

By Greg Barnes, Staff writer

Kyle Maynard implored Fort Bragg's wounded soldiers to set impossible goals for themselves and then strive to reach them.

When he had finished speaking, about 300 strong from Fort Bragg's Warrior Transition Battalion responded with a standing ovation.

Maynard has that effect on people, especially wounded soldiers, who can empathize with a 26-year-old athlete who was born with arms that end at his elbows and legs that stop near his knees.

But the disabilities - if they can even be called such a thing - haven't stopped Maynard. They hardly even slow him down.

In January, Maynard crawled his way to the top of Africa's Mount Kilimanjaro, the tallest free-standing mountain in the world. He said he was able to make the grueling trek in 10 days by repeating the mantra of a Navy Seal: "Not dead. Can't quit."

At the summit, Maynard spread the ashes of a soldier killed in war, fulfilling the wishes of the soldier's mother.

Maynard's entire life has been a series of obstacles that he has overcome. In sixth grade, he decided to take up wrestling. He lost his first 35 matches, but his parents wouldn't let him quit. By the time he had finished high school, he was recognized as among the 12 best prep wrestlers in the country. He has set records in weightlifting and fought in a mixed martial-arts cage.

Maynard's accomplishments led him, as a 19-year-old college student, to write a book titled "No Excuses."

That year, Maynard landed an appearance on The Oprah Winfrey Show, making him an instant star and putting him on the path to become a motivational speaker for Fortune 500 companies.

Only one problem, Maynard told the wounded soldiers. He felt like a fraud. He was lonely, gaining weight and depressed.

For weeks, Maynard said, he complained and whined to his parents, only to be told - as he had been so many other times - to stick it out.

On the day he had finally decided to pack it in, Maynard had a chance meeting with two Fort Bragg soldiers, Alvin Shell and Wesley Spaid, at an airport.

He said Spaid and Shell had been riding in a convoy in Iraq when a rocket-propelled grenade struck a fuel truck. The explosion left them so badly burned that Shell was told he would probably never walk or talk again.

Shell and Spaid had recognized Maynard from an HBO Real Sports special and were amazed to see him sitting in the airport by himself. When they greeted one another, Maynard noticed the burns.

He said the soldiers' stories reinvigorated him.

"They have shown me my purpose," said Maynard, who now spends much of his time inspiring wounded service members.

He told the gathering at Fort Bragg's Main Post Theater that they need to find their own purpose.

"Find your why," he told them.

Sharing stories that were often hilarious and sometimes sad, Maynard told the soldiers to look past the ugly comments and stares they may receive from others.

"The way that someone else looks at us does not dictate who we are," he said.

But most of all, he said, seek to improve yourself, to reach your potential and more.

"You guys have the capacity to change lives," he said. "I challenge you not to give up on that, but to seek that."

Staff Sgt. Phillip Leonard listened to Maynard's speech from the back of the Main Post Theater. Leonard said he was injured when a roadside bomb exploded and insurgents attacked the soldiers he was leading. He said a rocket-propelled grenade hit his back, and he was shot in the leg and lower back.

Leonard walks with a cane now and said he suffers from chronic pain and a traumatic brain injury. Regardless, he said, he doesn't want to leave the Army and hopes commanders will allow him to stay.

Leonard said he knows of other soldiers in the battalion who complain and just want to leave the Army with full medical retirement benefits.

"This puts their injuries into perspective," Leonard said, referring to Maynard's speech. "Quit whining and do what you can for other people."

27. 1,600 Museums Offer Military Families Free Tickets

By Brett Zongker, Associated Press

WASHINGTON -- More than 1,600 museums across the country will offer free admission to active-duty military personnel and their families this summer in a program that has more than doubled in size since 2010.

The expanded Blue Star Museums initiative will be announced Tuesday at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City where more than 40 museums are participating. The offer of free admission runs from Memorial Day until Labor Day at sites nationwide.

The program began in 2010 as a partnership between the National Endowment for the Arts, Blue Star Families and the Defense Department. It's adding 300 new museums this year.

The participating sites include art museums, science centers, history museums, nature centers and about 70 children's museums.

New participants include the American Civil War Center at Historic Tredegar in Richmond, Va., the New Mexico Museum of Space History, San Francisco's Children's Creativity Museum and the World Figure Skating Museum and Hall of Fame in Colorado Springs, Colo.

First lady Michelle Obama and Jill Biden, wife of Vice President Joe Biden, also are helping to promote the effort this year through their Joining Forces initiative to support military families. It comes at an important time for military families and can be a way to welcome military families to new communities as they often relocate, said Navy Capt. Brad Cooper, executive director of Joining Forces.

"A large percentage of moves happen over the course of the summer," often from one end of the country to the other, Cooper said. Opening access to museums "really just opens up the aperture of what families are able to do in their travels and their vacation time," he said.

Rocco Landesman, chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, said it's good for museums, too.

"This is both an opportunity to thank military families for their service and sacrifice, as well as a chance to create connections between museums and these families that will continue throughout the year," he said in a statement.

Last week, the Interior Department announced it would give military families free access to every national park in the country with annual passes. The passes normally cost \$80 and provide access to more than 2,000 national parks, wildlife refuges and other public lands.

Obama and Biden also are focused on expanding job opportunities for military spouses and improving military health services and education for military children.

Yahoo.com
May 23, 2012

28. US Missiles Kill Four In Pakistan: Officials

By Hasbanullah Khan, Agence France-Presse

A drone targeted a compound near Miranshah, the main town of the tribal district where Pakistan has resisted US pressure to launch a sweeping offensive against militants fighting US troops in neighbouring Afghanistan.

"The drone fired two missiles on a house in the Tabai area near Miranshah," one of the security officials told AFP on condition of anonymity because

he was not authorised to speak to the media, adding that four militants were killed.

"It is not immediately known if an important target is among those killed," he said.

The area is a stronghold of the Haqqani network -- Afghan insurgents blamed for a series of spectacular attacks on Western targets in Kabul -- and Pakistani Taliban chief Hakimullah Mehsud.

Islamabad denies any support for Haqqani activities, but the former chief US military officer, Admiral Mike Mullen, called them a "veritable arm" of the Pakistan Inter-Services Intelligence agency.

US officials say its leaders are based in Waziristan, the most notorious militant stronghold in Pakistan's semi-autonomous northwestern tribal belt.

Washington considers the area the main hub of Taliban and Al-Qaeda plotting attacks on the West and in Afghanistan. US officials have accused Pakistani intelligence agents of playing a double game in supporting or at least turning a blind eye to Afghan insurgents.

A local administration official and another intelligence official confirmed Wednesday's drone strike and casualties.

Residents said the bodies had been charred badly and militants had cordoned off the area and were sifting through the rubble.

It was the third US drone strike reported in Pakistan since parliament in March demanded an end to the attacks on Pakistani territory, as part of new guidelines for Islamabad's often stormy relationship with Washington.

Relations plummeted into deep crisis after US air strikes killed 24 Pakistani soldiers on November 26, prompting Islamabad to shut its Afghan border to NATO supplies and

evict US personnel from an airbase reportedly used as a hub for drones.

Pakistan says the missile attacks are counter productive, violate its sovereignty, kill civilians and fuel anti-US sentiment.

The frequency of the drone strikes has diminished since November, but US officials are believed to consider them too useful to stop altogether.

They have argued that drone strikes are a valuable weapon in the war against Al-Qaeda and other Islamist militants.

Pakistan signalled last week that it was prepared to end the NATO blockade, but hopes of clinching a deal appeared to break down over the cost of transit rights.

US President Barack Obama snubbed Pakistan at this week's NATO summit in Chicago, only seeing President Asif Ali Zardari in passing and voicing frustration with Pakistan.

Islamabad has been incensed by Washington's refusal to apologise for the November air strikes and US officials have so far rejected Pakistani proposals to charge several thousand dollars for each alliance truck crossing the border.

The blockade has forced NATO to rely on longer, more expensive routes through Russia and Central Asia, even as it plans a large-scale withdrawal of combat troops and hardware from Afghanistan by the end of 2014.

According to an AFP tally, 45 US missile strikes were reported in Pakistan's tribal belt in 2009, the year Obama took office, 101 in 2010 and 64 in 2011.

The New America Foundation think-tank in Washington says drone strikes have killed between 1,715 and

2,680 people in Pakistan in the past eight years.

The Cable
(thecable.foreignpolicy.com)
May 22, 2012

29. Levin And McCain: Don't Pay Pakistan Exorbitant Trucking Fees

By Josh Rogin

The United States should not pay upwards of \$5,000 for each truck Pakistan lets through to Afghanistan to aid the war effort, both leaders of the Senate Armed Services Committee told *The Cable* today.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari met at this weekend's NATO summit in Chicago and President Barack Obama met with Zardari in a three-way exchange with Afghan President Hamid Karzai. But the United States and Pakistan were not able to finalize the details of a deal to reopen the ground lines of communication through which the U.S. sends goods to troops in Afghanistan. Those supply lines have been closed since ISAF forces accidentally killed 24 Pakistani soldiers in two border outposts last November and refused to apologize for it.

One American official told the *New York Times* that Pakistan wants "upwards of \$5,000" for each truck that crosses through its territory, whereas the fee paid by the United States before last November was about \$250 per truck.

"I think that's called extortion," Senate Armed Services Committee ranking Republican John McCain (R-AZ) told *The Cable* Tuesday. "We can't look at aid in that light. It's now becoming a matter of principle."

Senate Armed Services Committee head Carl Levin (D-

MI) told *The Cable* there's no way the United States should pay Pakistan fees anywhere near that level.

"Whatever the cost of the security has been, we ought to continue whatever level of support that was. This looks to me to be totally inappropriate," he said.

Levin's committee is working on the fiscal 2013 defense authorization bill this week behind closed doors. That bill could contain new restrictions on U.S. aid to Pakistan.

UPDATE: On Tuesday afternoon, the Senate Appropriations Committee proposed new restrictions on aid to Pakistan in their markup of the fiscal 2013 State and foreign ops appropriations bill. The bill would withhold all counterinsurgency funds for Pakistan until the Pakistani government reopens the cargo supply lines to Afghanistan.

DefenseNews.com
May 22, 2012

30. Panetta To Embark On Weeklong Asia-Pacific Visit

By Marcus Weisgerber

U.S. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta will begin a weeklong visit to the Asia-Pacific next week, his first visit to the region since the Pentagon announced an increased focus on that area earlier this year.

Panetta will attend high-level meetings with leaders from key U.S. partners and deliver a speech at the Shangri-la Dialogue in Singapore, a forum for discussing regional defense issues and equipment modernization.

He is scheduled to meet with leaders from Singapore, Japan, South Korea, Australia and a number of other nations, Pentagon Press Secretary

George Little said at a May 22 briefing.

Asian leaders are scheduled to discuss issues such as disputes in the South China Sea, submarines, cyberwarfare, unmanned aircraft and emerging threats, according to a draft agenda posted on the summit's website.

In addition to the dialogue, Panetta will spend two days in Vietnam, which his predecessor, Robert Gates, visited in 2010.

"The United States has a long-term commitment to advancing a strong bilateral defense relationship with Vietnam that is based on mutual trust and understanding," Little said. "[T]his visit will afford us an opportunity to continue to work on that very important relationship."

From there, Panetta will spend two days in India.

New strategic military guidance, issued in January, stated that the United States would invest in a "long-term strategic partnership with India to support its ability to serve as a regional economic anchor and provider of security in the broader Indian Ocean region."

"Further developing the U.S.-India relationship is a priority for the United States government, and our bilateral relationship is one of the defining partnerships of the 21st century for the United States," Little said.

Yahoo.com
May 23, 2012

31. China Cancels High-Level Military Visit To Japan

By Agence France-Presse

China has cancelled a high-level military trip to Japan, state press said Wednesday, as the neighbours bicker over a disputed island chain and a

recent Uighur symposium in Tokyo that angered Beijing.

Guo Boxiong, vice chairman of the powerful Central Military Commission and China's highest ranking military officer, will not visit Japan due to a "work commitment" at home, the China Daily said, citing the defence ministry.

The visit had been due to begin Thursday, with Guo scheduled to meet Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda.

The defence ministry refused immediate comment on Guo's trip when contacted by AFP.

But the cancellation comes after China condemned Japan for allowing the World Uyghur Congress, which Beijing considers an exiled "anti-China" separatist grouping, to hold a meeting in Tokyo last week.

Uighurs are a predominantly Muslim ethnic minority who mainly live in western China's Xinjiang region and have long chafed under Beijing's rule.

In April, Beijing also angrily condemned remarks by Tokyo Governor Shintaro Ishihara, who re-ignited a long-simmering maritime territorial dispute by vowing to purchase a group of uninhabited islands at the centre of the row.

Ishihara, an outspoken critic of Beijing who has made a career out of provocative nationalistic remarks, said he had approached the owner of the islands in the East China Sea, called Senkaku in Japan and Diaoyu in China.

In 2010, relations between China and Japan hit a low point after Japanese authorities arrested a Chinese captain for ramming his trawler against Japanese coastguard ships in the disputed area near the islands.

Despite their numerous political rows, China and Japan remain vigorous trading partners. Leaders of the two nations recently agreed to begin free trade negotiations that will also include South Korea.

Charleston (SC) Post and Courier
May 23, 2012

32. Cutter Dallas Turned Over To Philippine Military

By Schuyler Kropf

The American flag came off the Coast Guard Cutter Dallas for the last time Tuesday, with its new owner saying the vessel will help ensure stability in a part of the globe vital to U.S. interests.

In a ceremony meant to highlight decades of cooperation and friendship, the Dallas officially left American service behind to join the Philippine navy.

The boat's new name is the Ramon Alcaraz, to honor a Filipino naval officer who captained a torpedo boat in some of the earliest engagements with the Japanese during World War II.

Accepting the ship on behalf of the Philippine government, Armed Forces Chief of Staff Gen. Jessie Dellosa stressed the acquisition should not be seen as a threat to Pacific neighbors.

"Many might speculate on the timing of this acquisition because (of) our territorial disputes with China," he said in prepared remarks during the dockside ceremony in North Charleston.

But he said the goal is to use the ship, and hopefully a third later from the U.S., to develop the Malampaya Gas Projects.

Beyond foreign affairs, Tuesday's ceremony was the ending step in the Dallas' 45-year U.S. career, which in

recent times was heavy on drug interdiction missions in the Caribbean.

Most of her crew is leaving Charleston, or already has left, for other assignments. About 50 personnel are staying behind to help train and advise the takeover Filipino crew.

"I hope she will serve the Philippines as faithfully and capably as she has served the United States of America," Coast Guard Rear Adm. John H. Korn said.

Yahoo.com
May 22, 2012

33. N. Korea Upgrading Rocket Launch Site

By Matthew Pennington,
Associated Press

WASHINGTON -- Satellite imagery shows North Korea is upgrading its old launch site in the secretive country's northeast to handle larger rockets, like space launch vehicles and intercontinental missiles, a U.S. institute claimed Tuesday.

The U.S.-Korea Institute at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies said the upgrade of the Musudan-ri site began last summer and reflects North Korean determination to expand its rocket program.

The U.S. and other nations are worried such rockets could be developed to deliver nuclear weapons.

North Korea on Tuesday vowed to push ahead with its nuclear program because of what it called U.S. hostility. The international community is pressuring North Korea to refrain from conducting what would be its third nuclear test, following a failed attempt in mid-April to launch a satellite into space.

That launch, using its biggest rocket to date, the Unha-3, was from a more

sophisticated site at Sohae on the country's northwestern coast.

An April 29 aerial image of Musudan-ri on the opposite coast shows the initial stages of construction of a launch pad and rocket assembly building that could support rockets at least as big as the Unha-3, the institute told The Associated Press. A crane is visible where the launch pad is being built 1.1 miles from the old one. At the current pace of construction, the facilities should be operational by 2016-2017, the institute said.

"This major upgrade program, designed to enable Musudan-ri to launch bigger and better rockets far into the future, represents both a significant resource commitment and an important sign of North Korea's determination," said Joel Wit, editor of the institute's website, 38 North.

The institute says the assembly building shows similarities to one at the Semnan launch complex in Iran, which has a long history of missile cooperation with North Korea. But, officials there say it's premature to conclude the two nations cooperated in designing the new facility.

South Korea's National Intelligence Service said Tuesday it cannot comment on whether it has detected any new activity at the Musudan-ri launch site.

The upgrade could be of particular concern to Japan, as rockets launched from the site in the past have flown east over that country. The flight path from Sohae heads south over the Pacific Ocean in the direction of Southeast Asia, avoiding Japan and South Korea.

The April rocket launch drew U.N. Security Council condemnation, as the launch violated an existing ban. Similar technology is used for ballistic

missiles. The North, however, is not believed to have mastered how to wed a nuclear device to a missile.

The top U.S. envoy on North Korea, Glyn Davies, who is meeting this week with counterparts from Japan, South Korea and China, warned Monday that the North conducting an atomic test would unify the world in seeking swift, tough punishment. Both of its previous nuclear tests, in 2006 and 2009, followed rocket launches.

A separate analysis of satellite images of a site that North Korea has used for its nuclear tests suggests it has ramped up work there over the past month. James Hardy, IHS Jane's Asia-Pacific specialist, said in a statement that there has been heightened activity at the northeastern Punggye-ri site, including mining carts, excavation equipment and a large amount of debris taken from inside a tunnel and piled around its entrance. The most recent image was from May 9.

In its statement Tuesday, in which North Korea vowed to push ahead with its nuclear program, it made no direct threat of a nuclear test and said it was open to dialogue. An analyst, Koh Yu-hwan at Seoul's Dongguk University, said the statement, from the North's Foreign Ministry, was a message that "the U.S. should come to the dialogue table (with North Korea) if it wants to stop its nuclear test."

The 2006 and 2009 long-range rocket launches that preceded the North's previous nuclear tests were from Musudan-ri. Citing earlier satellite imagery of the site, the U.S.-Korea Institute said land-clearing for the new facilities there began in the fall, and work has proceeded at a fast pace for eight months.

The latest image, from a commercially operated satellite, shows four concrete footings on one side of the launch pad that appear to be for a gantry that would prop up a rocket at launch. It has bigger dimensions than the gantry at the more sophisticated launch site at Sohae.

On another side of the launch pad there is a deep "flame trench" to capture the blast from a launched rocket. Slightly further away, on either side of the launch pad, are two separate buildings designed to enclose the fuel and oxidizer tanks that would funnel propellant into the rocket.

Satellite imagery also shows that about 70 homes, five larger buildings and many sheds in the nearby village of Taepodong have been razed and foundations laid for a large T-shaped structure that appears intended for assembling rockets. A road is under construction that would lead from this building to the launch site, 1.2 miles away.

The building's dimensions are larger than at the comparable structure at Sohae, and the existing one at Musudan-ri, the institute said.

A State Department spokesperson declined to comment on the institute's findings Tuesday, describing it as an intelligence matter.

Associated Press writers Foster Klug and Hyung-jin Kim in Seoul contributed to this report.

Denver Post
May 23, 2012

34. Obama To Be In Colorado For Air Force Academy Graduation, Fundraiser

By Anthony Cotton, The Denver Post

President Barack Obama will make his second visit

to Colorado in less than a month today, giving a morning commencement speech at the Air Force Academy north of Colorado Springs before jetting to Denver for a fundraiser.

Locked in a tightening race against presumptive Republican nominee Mitt Romney, the Obama campaign has focused on states that may decide the November election. Besides Colorado, those include Florida, Iowa, Michigan, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia and Wisconsin.

When the president spoke at the University of Colorado in April, he made a stop at the University of North Carolina earlier in the day before visiting the University of Iowa the next morning. So far this month, either Obama or first lady Michelle Obama has made at least nine appearances in those swing states.

"Not to take anything away from the Air Force Academy, but the president is clearly making as many stops as possible in swing states — you'd have to wonder about him if he didn't," said Norman Provisor, a political science professor at Metropolitan State College of Denver. "When you come down to it, these 10 to 12 states become critical. ... Ten thousand extra votes in a state that you know will vote Democratic won't make much of a difference — but (10,000) to 20,000 votes in a state that could go either way could be very, very critical."

Gallup's daily tracking updates, based on interviews conducted May 8-14, showed Obama was preferred by 46 percent of voters, just 1 percentage point ahead of Romney.

Obama's Denver fundraiser will be held at the downtown Hyatt Regency Denver at Colorado Convention Center;

tickets for the event begin at \$250 a person and increase to as much as \$40,000.

USA Today
May 23, 2012
Pg. 4

35. Air Force One Costs Astronomical?

The next time airfare seems too expensive, consider the cost of Air Force One.

The plane that is used to carry the president, which is typically a Boeing 747, costs the Air Force \$179,750 per hour to operate, according to a new Congressional Research Service report.

Taxpayers cover the cost of trips for official business, and campaign organizations reimburse the government for whatever portion of a trip is deemed political.

"It is unclear how the White House designates travel that is not directly related to a governmental or political function," the report said, but vacations count as official travel. -- *Bart Jansen*

Honolulu Star-Advertiser
May 22, 2012
Pg. B3

36. 'Golf Ball' Back After 2 Months At Sea

By William Cole

The Missile Defense Agency's 280-foot-tall Sea-Based X-band Radar returned to Ford Island on Monday after being at sea during North Korea's failed April 13 rocket test.

Asked if the radar ship monitored the launch, agency spokeswoman Pam Rogers said, "We can't discuss the nature of the SBX's operations."

The radar, which has the appearance of a giant golf ball on a six-legged platform, sailed out of Pearl Harbor March 23,

about three weeks ahead of the North Korea test.

Rogers said the SBX is back in Hawaii to complete a change of contractors for some support functions and to reduce overall operating costs.

The Missile Defense Agency said in mid-March when the radar arrived that it was also then going to make a change in contractors.

The one-of-a-kind, \$1 billion SBX, part of the nation's ballistic missile defense system, is a combination of an advanced X-band radar mounted on a mobile, oceangoing, semi-submersible platform.

The agency said in February that it planned to sideline the missile tracker by placing it "in a limited test and contingency operations status" to save \$500 million over five years.

The change was detailed as part of the Defense Department's budget request for 2013, which set out \$487 billion in cuts over the next 10 years.

It remains unclear where the agency will keep the missile-tracking platform. Pearl Harbor's Ford Island has become its unofficial home port.

"The SBX will enter limited test support status in 2013," Rogers said. Its long-term location is still under consideration, she said.

North Korea reportedly is digging a tunnel for what could be a third attempted nuclear test, drawing another round of warnings from the United States.

"It is very important that North Korea not miscalculate again and engage in any future provocations," Glyn Davies, the U.S. special envoy for North Korea policy, said Monday in Seoul. "And that is the main message that we are conveying to North Korea. We are united

in our resolve to respond, not just the (U.S., South Korea and Japan), but Russia and China as well, if there are additional provocations."

Los Angeles Times
May 23, 2012
Pg. 9

37. CIA Discloses Names Of 15 Killed In Line Of Duty

By Ken Dilanian

WASHINGTON -- The CIA on Tuesday disclosed the names of 15 of its operatives killed in the line of duty over the last 30 years, the result of a new effort to honor fallen officers whose sacrifices had long gone unrecognized by all but a few.

Fourteen of the dead already had a star inscribed in their memory on the CIA's wall of honor in the lobby of the old headquarters building on the agency's Langley, Va., campus. But their names had been withheld. In a closed agency ceremony Monday their names were added to the Book of Honor, which accompanies the stars.

In addition, a new star was added this year for Jeffrey R. Patneau, who died at age 26 in Yemen in 2008 from injuries sustained in a car accident. He was the 103rd CIA officer recognized as having died in the line of duty.

"The 103 souls represented by the stars on the wall behind me all heard the same call to duty and answered it without hesitation -- never for acclaim, always for country," CIA Director David H. Petraeus said at the ceremony, according to a CIA statement. "Their words and deeds will inspire us forever, and their service and sacrifice will never be forgotten."

Many of the CIA officers were working under State Department cover, and some

are recognized in a memorial list kept on the website of the American Foreign Service Assn. of diplomats who died in the line of duty.

Some were identified as CIA employees in news media accounts at the time of their deaths. Several of them had been secretly awarded intelligence medals. But Tuesday's statement from the CIA marked the first official acknowledgment that any of them had been undercover operatives for the spy agency.

"Much of this disclosure is long, long overdue," said Ted Gup, author of "The Book of Honor: The Secret Lives and Deaths of CIA Operatives," who identified some of the 15 for his book. "These families who lost loved ones who were covert not only had to endure the loss -- they also were tethered to bogus cover stories for years and years. They had to raise their children without any details or specifics as to what their mothers or fathers gave their lives for."

Patneau's name had not been publicly linked to the CIA previously. The car crash in Yemen that killed him occurred on Sept. 29, 2008, the U.S. government said. Officials dispute a claim by Al Qaeda that he was killed during a well-publicized attack on the U.S. Embassy in the Yemeni capital, Sana, on Sept. 17 that year.

The list includes five officers -- Phyllis Nancy Faraci, Deborah M. Hixon, Frank J. Johnston, James F. Lewis and Monique N. Lewis -- who died in the April 18, 1983, bomb attack against the U.S. Embassy in Beirut. They were all listed at the time of the bombing as State Department employees.

And it includes four others who died in terrorist attacks. Jacqueline K. Van Landingham was shot and killed in Pakistan in March 1995. Matthew K.

Gannon was killed in the December 1988 bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland. Molly N. Hardy died in the August 1998 suicide bombing of the U.S. Embassy in Nairobi, Kenya. Leslieanne Shedd died in November 1996, when hijackers forced down her plane over the Indian Ocean, killing more than 125 people.

The agency also named Barry S. Castiglione, who died during the July 1992 ocean rescue of a colleague in El Salvador; Lawrence N. Freedman, killed in Somalia in December 1992; Thomas M. Jennings, Jr., who died in Bosnia-Herzegovina in December 1997; Freddie R. Woodruff, who was killed in Georgia in August 1993; and Robert W. Woods, who died in a plane crash in August 1989 with Rep. Mickey Leland on a humanitarian mission in Ethiopia.

Those five deaths, Petraeus said, are a reminder of "the sheer sweep of our global mission" and "the risks inherent to intelligence work, as well as the bravery and integrity of those who perform it."

Reuters.com
May 22, 2012

Exclusive

38. Spy Agency Seeks Cyber-Ops Curriculum

By Tabassum Zakaria, Reuters
FORT MEADE, Maryland -- The National Security Agency is trying to expand U.S. cyber expertise needed for secret intelligence operations against adversaries on computer networks through a new cyber-ops program at selected universities.

The cyber-ops curriculum is geared to providing the basic education for jobs in intelligence, military and law enforcement that are so secret they will only be revealed to

some students and faculty, who need to pass security clearance requirements, during special summer seminars offered by NSA.

It is not easy to find the right people for cyber operations because the slice of the hacker community that would make a quality cyber operator inside the government is only a sliver.

The "quality cyber operators" the NSA is looking for are few and far between, says Neal Ziring, technical director at the agency's Information Assurance Directorate.

"We're trying to create more of these, and yes they have to know some of the things that hackers know, they have to know a lot of other things too, which is why you really want a good university to create these people for you," Ziring told Reuters in an interview at NSA's headquarters in Maryland.

NSA has two main missions: to protect U.S. government computer networks and to collect foreign intelligence through electronic means like satellites and decode it.

Of 20 universities that applied, only four received this week the new designation of Centers of Academic Excellence in Cyber Operations: Dakota State University, Naval Postgraduate School, Northeastern University and University of Tulsa.

Out of 10 requirements, the two most lacking at many schools were courses on "reverse engineering" - or how to gain knowledge of a technology or product to reproduce it - and cellular communications and mobile technologies, NSA officials said.

"We found a lot of schools weren't emerging with the

technology, weren't keeping up," said Captain Jill Newton, who leads NSA's cyber training and education programs.

NSA officials say the program, which is part of President Barack Obama's national initiative to improve cybersecurity through education, aims to prepare students for careers at the U.S. Cyber Command, the NSA's signals intelligence operations and law enforcement agencies investigating cyber crimes.

U.S. officials from the Obama administration and Congress have been banging the drums loudly about the need for greater cybersecurity, accusing China and Russia of hacking U.S. systems for economic gain.

"Right now you hear a lot of talk about foreign countries, China in particular, coming into our networks. They get in, they look around, they see what they might want, they send it home, and you don't know what else they've left behind," Dickie George, a former NSA official, said. "Why wouldn't we want to do the same thing? It's not a one-way game."

Many universities are now focused on web technologies such as how to write applications for the iPhone, which is not what is required for cyber operations to collect intelligence or defend the government's systems, NSA officials said.

That requires knowing "the guts, the internals of the operating systems, having to understand how the hardware actually works," said Steven LaFountain, a senior NSA official who guides academic programs.

Newton said a cyber operation might involve altering computer systems to work to one's advantage and doing that "without being seen or without it being obvious that I was

changing the inner workings of the operating system."

"It could be very useful for a defender, so as you see your stuff being adjusted, corrupted, exploited, messed with, and being able to recognize when that is happening to you, to be able to better defend against it," she said.

About 15 years ago, there was a mindset that the computer system being compromised happened rarely and if the security was hardened that would be sufficient to secure it, but the security environment has changed, said Ziring, a computer scientist and the first non-mathematician in his position at NSA.

"What we've realized these days is that's hokum, that doesn't work any more, that systems are under attack constantly," Ziring said.

"For many systems, especially those that for mission reasons have to work in a very exposed space, being under some degree of compromise is sort of their new normal state."

That requires actively defending the systems by blocking and mitigating known problems and hunting for the unknown by looking for anomalies, Ziring said.

One mandatory requirement in the curriculum is covering legal and ethical issues so students understand the limits.

"We still found a lot of schools are still a little reluctant on how they characterize what they are teaching," LaFountain said.

"We are not asking them to teach kids how to break into systems, we're not asking them to teach that. And a lot of them have said they wouldn't teach that," he said. "We're just asking them to teach the hardcore fundamental science that we need students to have when they come to work here."

While the open education provides the basic knowledge, it is not until they arrive at the NSA that newly hired cyber operators get trained in their secret jobs.

"In our operational developmental organization, we would spend up to 12 months to give them the secret sauce, the tradecraft, the really deep technical training so that they could make themselves useful in doing what we need them to do, and that's with that technical underpinning," Newton said.

Ziring said it was important to figure out the next step in threat evolution so the technologies can be built to address it.

"The threat actor's action cycle is speeding up and getting shorter. The defender's cycle has to get shorter. So what technologies can we build that will help that?"

Orlando Sentinel
May 23, 2012

39. Disney To Hold Career Expo For Military Veterans This Week In Orlando

By Steven Ford, Orlando Sentinel

Earlier this year, the Walt Disney Co. announced its "Heroes Work Here" initiative designed to hire, train and support military veterans. And on Thursday, Disney is sponsoring a veterans career expo here in Orlando.

In announcing its "Heroes Work Here" program in March, Disney said it would provide at least 1,000 jobs for returning U.S. veterans during the next three years.

The company also said it would invest in select non-profit groups to offer job-training and other services for veterans. Organizations cited included Blue Star Families, The Mission

Continues, and Boys & Girls Clubs of America, plus others.

The website says the event will "provide the opportunity to meet and network with representatives throughout Disney – including veterans currently employed with the company."

The expo also will feature workshops on resume writing and interview tips, and will offer assistance with using Disney's career website.

The site does warn that the career expo is by invitation only, and space is limited.

Other similar career expos are being held in New York and California.

According to a Tuesday report by The Associated Press, Disney already has hired about 250 veterans through its program.

Politico.com
May 22, 2012

40. Treaty Would Usurp Navy's Authority

By Sens. Jim Inhofe, Roger Wicker and Jeff Sessions

The U.S. Navy has been the master of the seven seas since World War II, the pre-eminent maritime force.

It seems odd, then, that Navy leadership has long pressed for what amounts to a redundant international hall pass.

A steady stream of admirals and service chiefs over many years have advocated for the U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea, or the Law of the Sea Treaty — an accord rejected by President Ronald Reagan in 1982.

Gen. Martin Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, for example, said this treaty "codifies navigational rights and freedoms essential for our global mobility."

It is true that the treaty's navigational articles codify

noncontroversial traditional maritime rules of the road. But the Navy has successfully preserved and protected its navigational rights and freedoms for 200 years without it.

For the treaty to be "essential for our global mobility," the Navy would have to suffer a devastating decline — either from drastic budget cuts or a major reduction in its mission and capabilities. Ceding any authority to an international body is not only a threat to our sovereignty, it also creates another avenue for other nations to stop U.S. unilateral activity.

Some fear the Navy is at a tipping point. Increased global threats, combined with fewer resources, have created growing concern for its future. Devastating budget cuts under the Obama administration mean doing even more with much less.

If the proposed defense cuts through sequestration go into effect, potential cuts include the littoral combat ship, amphibious ships, a reduction in aircraft carriers and far fewer sailors. After sequestration, our fleet could be smaller than 230 ships — the smallest since 1915.

Could it be that some have decided to put their hope in a piece of paper rather than provide the resources necessary to maintain our Navy's traditional strength? Does this U.N. treaty provide real justification for such devastating cuts? If not, we need detailed explanations from our top military officials.

The Navy already operates within the bounds of international and customary laws. Shortly after World War II, the U.S. joined the Inter-Governmental Maritime Consultative Organization, now called the International

Maritime Organization. The purpose of the group is to set maritime laws that are now broadly enforced by national and local maritime authorities to improve safety at sea, facilitate trade among seafaring states and protect the marine environment.

These laws allow the U.S. to execute commerce and military operations around the globe — as an independent and sovereign nation. Thus, LOST is unneeded and redundant.

Most of the opposition to the Law of the Sea pact stems from the treaty's non-navigational portions that deal with the international taxation from natural resources revenue, issues related to U.S. sovereignty and the redistribution of wealth from the U.S. to the Third World. But even worse, this agreement would be an albatross that takes our nation's military down with it.

Proponents say the treaty exempts military activity from international litigation. But those of us opposing it are deeply concerned because this terribly flawed document fails to define what is included in that exemption. In addition, it opens the U.S. military to the jurisdiction of international courts and governing bodies.

Military training exercises that do not have the approval of other nations could be prevented because of potentially negative environmental impacts. U.S. military vessels could be stopped on the grounds that they are too heavy a polluter.

All the while, billions — if not trillions — in limited U.S. funds would be transferred from the U.S. Treasury to international coffers through the tax and redistribution provisions of the treaty. As we have seen, when funds are

limited, the first place to get squeezed is our military.

At the same time, nations like China and Iran, both signers of the treaty, have been flexing their muscles. Iran threatened to shut down the Strait of Hormuz and attack U.S. vessels. China's navy has engaged in acts of harassment meant to intimidate its neighbors in the South China Sea. In both cases, it is the might of the U.S. Navy — not the treaty — that maintains order.

The Senate should reject this dangerous hand over of U.S. sovereignty. Instead, it should provide the Navy with the resources necessary to keep it the best force on the high seas.

Sen. Jim Inhofe (R-Okla.) is the second ranking member of the Armed Services Committee. Sen. Roger Wicker (R-Miss.) is the ranking member of the SASC Subcommittee on Seapower. Sen. Jeff Sessions (R-Ala.) is the ranking member of the Budget Committee.

Politico.com
May 22, 2012

41. Law Of The Sea Treaty Can't Wait

By Sen. John Kerry

Wednesday begins a comprehensive discussion about whether the United States should join the Law of the Sea Convention. I've heard from countless military officials and conservative-minded business leaders who say it's urgent. I've also spoken with senators and interest groups who oppose it.

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee, in coming weeks, intends to provide a forum for debate on this issue for the first time since 2007. We'll look at it from all sides to allow members to consider it based on merit and the best interests of the United States.

Why now? We've effectively lived by its terms,

even as a nonparty to the treaty and a holdout. But we've deprived ourselves of its benefits for the past 30 years. We should instead be asking why it has taken us so long to have this discussion.

By not joining Law of the Sea, we've dealt ourselves out of the game that's unfolding right in front of us. Let me give you a few examples:

The pact will lock in the favorable navigational rights that our military and shipping interests depend on every day. It can strengthen our hand against China and others, which are staking out claims in the Pacific, the Arctic or elsewhere.

It is designed to give our oil and gas companies the certainty they need to make crucial investments to secure our energy future. It puts our telecommunications companies on equal footing with foreign competitors. And it will help secure access to rare earth minerals, which we need for computers, cellphones and weapons systems that allow us to live and work day in and day out.

If you slice through the fog of misinformation, the case for ratification is clear and compelling. This isn't President Barack Obama's treaty — and it isn't your father's Law of the Sea Treaty, either.

This was originally negotiated at President Richard Nixon's behest; refined and supported in part by President Ronald Reagan, and endorsed and aggressively pushed by President George W. Bush. Every member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff argued for its ratification. The U.S. business community — including the shipping, transportation, telecommunications and energy industries, as well as the U.S. Chamber of Commerce — joins the military in supporting it. The treaty's most committed

supporters are Republicans and conservative-minded business leaders, not Democrats.

This isn't about politics — it's about military effectiveness. As we focus more attention toward the Asia-Pacific region, it's more important than ever that we're part of this treaty. China and other countries are staking out illegal claims in the South China Sea. Signing this treaty would give an immediate boost to U.S. credibility as we push back against excessive maritime claims and illegal restrictions on our warships and commercial vessels. There's no doubt in my mind that it would help resolve maritime issues to the benefit of the United States and our regional allies and partners.

This is about energy security. Russia and other countries are carving up the Arctic and laying claim to its vast oil and gas riches. But we can't even access the treaty body that provides international legitimacy for these types of Arctic claims. We're sitting on the sidelines instead of taking every possible step to ensure our stake in this resource-rich area.

This is about rare earth minerals. China controls production of rare earth minerals, critically important for cellphones, computers and weapons systems. U.S. industry is poised to secure these minerals from the deep seabed. But they cannot do so unless we're a party to the treaty.

And it's about telecommunications. The treaty provides a legal framework to lay and protect submarine cables. We all know how critical the Internet is. We need to be able to protect the cables through which the Internet flows. The treaty does that — but don't take my word for it, listen to AT&T and Verizon, U.S. telecommunication giants.

The contentious political season has been inserting itself on the floor of Congress. It can, regrettably disrupt the Senate, though it was designed to be immune to the politics of the moment.

But perhaps in a calmer place, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee can do what, historically, it's done best: Away from the hyperpartisan shouting matches, we can spend a lot of serious, thoughtful time deliberating all questions of substance. My hope and expectation is that everyone will keep an open mind and carefully consider the arguments on both sides — so that senators can come to their own conclusions.

But one point, for me, rings true: America has never been content to sit at the back of the room and let others make decisions that affect our national security and our economic opportunities. Why should today be any different? Let's begin the discussion — which I believe will ultimately reaffirm that the treaty is good for security, jobs and America.

Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.) is chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Wall Street Journal

May 23, 2012

Pg. 15

42. Getting A Good Deal With Iran

Beware 'confidence-building' measures that never force Tehran to verifiably abandon its pursuit of a nuclear-weapons capability.

By Lindsey Graham, Joseph I. Lieberman and John McCain

As negotiations resume Wednesday in Baghdad between Iran and the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council plus Germany (the "P5+1"), there are growing

hopes for a diplomatic breakthrough over Tehran's nuclear ambitions. This sense of optimism has been buoyed by the hopeful statements of the director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) after his visit to Tehran this week.

We want to be hopeful, too. A negotiated settlement that verifiably ends Iran's illicit nuclear activities and prevents Iran from possessing the capability to assemble a nuclear weapon quickly is desirable and possible. But we must not allow these talks to become a movie we've seen before, in which success is defined less by the outcome of negotiations than by their mere perpetuation.

The Iranian regime's long record of deceit and defiance should make us extremely cautious about its willingness to engage in good-faith diplomacy. And its nuclear pursuit cannot be divorced from its other destabilizing actions — support for violent extremist groups such as Hezbollah and the Taliban, threats against Arab governments and Israel, attempts to assassinate foreign diplomats, and lethal assistance to the Assad regime in Syria.

In fact, Iran's new-found interest in negotiating is almost certainly a result of the strong pressure that the regime now faces from economic sanctions. Most important of all have been U.S. and European Union efforts to obstruct Iran's ability to derive revenue from international oil sales — a campaign whose full brunt won't be felt until later this summer.

Based on its past behavior, we should expect Iran's government to use the talks to buy time, undermine international unity, and relieve the mounting economic pressure it faces. The

U.S., in turn, must work with our partners to make clear that there will be no diminution of pressure until the totality of Iran's illicit nuclear activities has been addressed.

That will require much more than shuttering the underground enrichment facility at Fordow, removing from Iranian territory all uranium enriched to 20%, and suspending further enrichment at that level—the three steps that reports suggest the P5+1 negotiators will emphasize in Baghdad.

Remember that Iran had no uranium enriched to 20% until two years ago, nor was the Fordow site operational before then. Focusing only on these recent manifestations of Iran's nuclear program, without also addressing older and broader enrichment and proliferation-sensitive activities, would effectively reward the Iranians for their escalation and allow them to move back the goal posts.

Rather, the U.S. must make clear that international pressure will continue to build on Iran until it takes the concrete steps that will address the entirety of the threat, with a swift timetable for implementation. These must include:

- Full Iranian cooperation with the IAEA—not just promises to cooperate, but tangible action to resolve all outstanding questions about Iran's illicit nuclear activities.

- A new agreement to intrusive inspections based on the Additional Protocol under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty to ensure the Iranians aren't lying or cheating about the full scope of their program, as they have in the past.

- Full Iranian compliance with all resolutions of the U.N. Security Council, including its repeated demand for full, verifiable and sustained

suspension of all enrichment-related, reprocessing and heavy-water activities.

Given the Iranian regime's long-standing pattern of deceptive and illicit conduct, we believe it cannot be trusted to maintain enrichment or reprocessing activities on its territory for the foreseeable future—at least until the international community has been fully convinced that Iran has decided to abandon any nuclear-weapons ambitions. We are very far from that point.

Similarly, and just as importantly, Iran must not be permitted to possess sufficient fissile material for a nuclear weapon, or centrifuges in sufficient quantity or sophistication that would allow it to "break out" and build a nuclear weapon swiftly and covertly.

A diplomatic solution with Iran is possible if the Iranian regime genuinely wants one. But to achieve this outcome, we must not allow the Iranians to draw us into an extended negotiation with a continuing series of confidence-building measures that never ultimately force Tehran to verifiably abandon its pursuit of a nuclear-weapons capability. We've been sold that horse many times before, most notably in the failed efforts over two decades to end the North Korean nuclear program.

Our best hope for avoiding conflict is to leave no doubt that the window for diplomacy is closing. In the absence of a negotiated solution that addresses the totality of Iran's nuclear program, and soon, we must take the steps that President Obama laid out in February, when he said: "America is determined to prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapon, and I will take no options off the table to achieve that goal." The U.S.

must be prepared, if necessary, to use military force to stop Iran from getting a nuclear-weapons capability.

The meetings in Baghdad could be one of our best and last chances to peacefully resolve the Iranian regime's pursuit of a nuclear-weapons capability. But this opportunity will be lost if we allow Iran's negotiators to fool us into easing the pressure before the Tehran regime has truly abandoned its military nuclear ambitions.

Messrs. Graham and McCain are Republican senators from South Carolina and Arizona, respectively. Mr. Lieberman is an Independent Democratic senator from Connecticut.

Washington Post
May 23, 2012
Pg. 21

43. In Iran Talks, One Side Looks Ready To Bend

By Reuel Marc Gerecht and Mark Dubowitz

Wednesday's meeting on Iran's nuclear program will be a competition of fears. Who is sufficiently terrified of an atom bomb in Iranian hands to credibly threaten military action? Who fears the immediate economic consequences of Persian petroleum coming off the market more than the longer-term menace of a nuclear-armed state that supports terrorism? Who dreads above all else an Israeli preemptive strike?

The West's sanctions - the reason the Iranians are showing up in Iraq - have been an alternative to war. Those who want these talks to go on will be enormously tempted to make concessions to Tehran. Stand too firm and Iran's supreme leader, Ali Khamenei, might walk. Like his former patron Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani,

the true father of Iran's nuclear program, Khamenei has supported the atomic quest since the mid-1980s, when it was still covert. He has spent billions to develop what appears to be every component of a nuclear-armed missile.

Yet Western negotiators want to hope that sanctions have caused enough pain - and threaten more - that the supreme leader will have no choice but to view nuclear weapons as harmful to his rule. President Obama and his Western European counterparts have adopted a strategy of quasi-regime change: They don't really intend to overturn Khamenei's dominion, but they want Tehran's power players to think they will.

But given how advanced Iran's nuclear program is, the West's approach seems wildly underwhelming. As the tactician Anthony Cordesman recently noted, "the threat Iran's nuclear efforts pose [is] not simply a matter of its present ability to enrich uranium to 20 percent... [The regime] can pursue nuclear weapons development through a range of compartmented and easily concealable programs without a formal weapons program, and even if it suspends enrichment activity." If the West cannot stop Iran's technological advances in centrifuge production - and it remains unclear whether Western intelligence services know where the Iranian regime is manufacturing these machines - then even shutting down the known enrichment facilities at Natanz and Fordow offers, at best, a pause. Increasingly proficient centrifuges will allow for much smaller, hard-to-detect facilities that can rapidly process low-enriched uranium into bomb-grade material.

The Americans and the Europeans have chosen not to underscore, Cordesman also points out, the fact that Tehran's entire military strategy for a quarter-century has been to develop atomic weapons to compensate for an irreversible lack of conventional power. Take away the nuclear program, and Khamenei's stewardship of his country and creed looks enfeebled. Nuclear weapons are the supreme leader's legacy.

Given the enormity of the task, one would think that war-averse Western leaders would go in one of two directions. They would try to bribe Iran's ruling elite with really big, sanctions-ending "carrots." This approach, while likely to fail, would at least match the scope of the challenge with the reward. Or they would crater the Islamic Republic's economy and then offer to negotiate, presuming that financial desperation would perhaps match the determination and duplicity of Iran's pro-nuke elite.

But the West appears poised to, once again, take the easy way out. Despite U.N. Security Council resolutions saying the opposite, Western powers seem ready to concede to Khamenei the "right" to enrich uranium to 5 percent, which would, according to Olli Heinonen, former deputy director of the International Atomic Energy Agency, put Iran two-thirds of the way toward making bomb-grade uranium. By drawing the red line on enrichment at the higher level of 20 percent, the West will leave Tehran with about 13,000 pounds of low enriched uranium today, enough to make five nuclear weapons. Iran would be free to continue its 5 percent stockpile and its centrifuge development, the real key to an undetectable breakout.

Americans and Europeans certainly don't want to appear to cave - pride, politics and fear of the Israelis all matter. So they are likely to attempt to give Tehran economic relief by not strictly enforcing sanctions - on financial transfers between banks, technical assistance to the energy industry, shipping, insurance and imports of Iranian crude - already on the books. The Europeans could significantly diminish their embargo, slated to take full effect July 1, by ignoring "reflagged" Iranian crude shipped to Europe via Chinese-owned and -insured tankers. These steps could save Iran billions of dollars; they would clearly signal that the West wants the negotiations to continue.

Which brings us back to the Israelis, who are the primary reason everyone is so anxious. As long as the talks continue, the Israeli government would find it politically difficult to attack. It's unclear whether Jerusalem has the capacity to preemptively strike. But if the Israelis, or the Americans, know the location of Iran's centrifuge production facilities, air raids that could seriously retard the weapons program become more likely. A new red line at 20 percent enrichment would leave Jerusalem two options: strike or give up. The euphoria in Western and certain Israeli circles that Judgment Day has been avoided will vanish rapidly as it becomes obvious how much Khamenei can cheat with this new standard. For those who fear another conflagration in the Middle East, that ought to be a compelling reason to hang tough in Baghdad. Odds are, however, we won't.

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for Defense of Democracies. Mark Dubowitz is executive director of the foundation and head of its Iran Energy Project.

Los Angeles Times
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Pg. 17

44. The Least Bad Option On Iran

By Chuck Freilich

It is a bad outcome -- but it is the least bad of the available options.

When world powers meet with Iran on Wednesday in Baghdad, they may reach an interim nuclear deal. Its precise outline is unknown, but it reportedly includes Iran's agreement to cease weapons-grade uranium enrichment, ship its existing stockpile abroad for conversion into reactor fuel, and accept heightened inspections of its nuclear infrastructure. In exchange, Iran would be allowed to continue enrichment at low levels, and the punishing new American banking sanctions and European Union oil sanctions due on July 1 would be eased.

Iran has strategic reasons for wanting nuclear capability and has so far rejected all inducements to give up the effort. It has dangled the prospect of a diplomatic resolution in the past, only to renege, repeatedly using artifice and deceit, apparently in the attempt to gain time to complete development. It may be doing so again; however, the crushing weight of international sanctions -- those in place and those that are imminent -- may have finally changed Iran's strategic calculus.

Still, the purported deal is no more than a stopgap measure. It would not resolve the issue.

Iran would be able to claim that it had forced the West

to back off from the long-standing demand that it cease all enrichment activity and to accept its "right" to do so.

In practice, Iran would become a "nuclear threshold state," with its nuclear infrastructure intact, a reserve of fissile materials and the potential "breakout capability" to build a bomb quickly. The deeply buried mountain facility outside Qom, which Israel believes may already put Iran's nuclear production inside a "zone of immunity," would continue to exist.

Perhaps worst of all, there is the risk that with the immediate danger removed, the West would lower its guard and in effect "declare victory," turning its attention elsewhere. Ramping up serious multinational sanctions again would prove difficult.

Nonetheless, the interim deal would gain time, and that is the essential point. No other option, including a successful military attack, could achieve more. Iran has already developed the know-how and infrastructure needed to make a bomb; were a military attack to destroy all of its nuclear facilities, it could rebuild within a few years. An attack may still prove to be necessary, but if the few years can be achieved through diplomacy, this is obviously preferable.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu deserves credit for successfully forcing the international community to finally address the Iranian nuclear threat seriously. For 15 years Israel has argued that the only measures that might, conceivably, force Iran to compromise are those that the West is now belatedly imposing. Netanyahu's implied threats of military action were designed primarily to encourage those severe sanctions rather than to indicate an actual

intention to attack. No one prefers a diplomatic resolution more than Israel; it would pay the price in international opprobrium after an attack, no matter its motives, and it would bear the brunt of retaliation by Iran, Hezbollah and Hamas.

In Baghdad, Iran must be made to understand that this is its last opportunity to reach a deal. In the absence of this agreement, the full force of the sanctions must go into effect as planned on July 1.

Moreover, any concessions made by the West should be for a limited time and contingent on a final agreement providing for a full cessation of Iran's nuclear program. We can also hope that the processes of change underway in the region, which began with the Iranian demonstrations of 2009, may return to Iran and sweep away the mullahs, the best long-term solution to the threat Iran presents.

In the meantime, the least bad option may be good enough.

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Chicago Tribune
May 22, 2012
Pg. 19

45. Realistic Optimism On Nuclear Talks With Iran

By Marvin Zonis

Iranian negotiators will meet for a second time with representatives of the United Nations Security Council plus Germany on Wednesday in Baghdad. Guarded optimism surrounds the talks. That optimism and caution is appropriate. Many obstacles must be overcome between these talks and an agreement. Failure is a real possibility. But

the stars appear to be aligning for progress.

Iran operates with a historical precedent for reaching an agreement. In July 1988, Iraq, after eight years of war with Iran, launched strategic air raids against Iran's industrial plants and began sending rockets into Tehran. The rockets caused little damage but generated panic, leading Iranians by the thousands to flee the city. With great reluctance, Ayatollah Khomeini issued a message. "Happy are those who have departed through martyrdom," his statement read. "Unhappy am I that I still survive. ... Taking this decision is more deadly than drinking from a poisoned chalice."

The decision was to accept a cease-fire with Iraq. The announcement was actually made by Iran's then-president -- none other than Ayatollah Ali Khamenei -- now Iran's supreme leader. Khamenei operates under the legitimacy of Iran's having accepted a hateful deal with a hated enemy.

But he seeks to realize a set of complex goals. He must avoid being seen as caving in to foreigners. The Iranian revolution was made on the basis of freeing Iran from foreign interference -- of creating a truly independent Iran. The agreements Iran chooses to accept must be sold to the Iranian people as the choice of its leadership to the benefit of its people rather than as Iran's having been beaten into a deal.

That means no circumstances would allow Khamenei to give up nuclear enrichment capabilities. That is seen as the scientific triumph of the Islamic revolution and testament to its success.

Khamenei also, desperately, wants to get the international sanctions

lifted. The longevity of the revolutionary regime will depend on its ability to produce continuous economic growth. But the sanctions have begun to bite, and the Iranian economy is in "shambles," as President Barack Obama has said.

On July 1, the European Union will add new punishing sanctions -- an embargo on buying, financing, transporting and insuring Iranian oil -- further pressuring the economy.

Just how vulnerable the economy is to sanctions is revealed by the fate of the rial. Iranians had rushed to dump their currency for the relative greater safety of dollars. In 2011, 10,800 rials could buy a dollar. When the sanctions really took hold, the rial collapsed. Iran's central bank lifted the exchange rate to 12,260 rials to the dollar. But the currency traders were demanding 18,200. Eventually the bank relented and authorized trades at any level. The rial went to 20,000.

When negotiations began between Iran and the West in April, the rial strengthened as high as 15,000 to the dollar. Since then it has fallen, but that's an indication of how the Iranian public reacts to the possibility of the lifting of sanctions and Iran giving up some of its isolation.

If Khamenei could make a deal, it could assuage a nervous public. More important, it could lead to the lifting of sanctions.

That's the carrot. Then there are the sticks. The major one is the threat of an Israeli assault against Iran's nuclear infrastructure. Last week, for example, the U.S. ambassador to Israel, Daniel Shapiro, made it clear that: "It would be preferable to resolve this diplomatically and through the use of pressure than to use military force. But that doesn't mean that option is not

fully available. And not just available, but it's ready. The necessary planning has been done to ensure that it's ready."

The major obstacle to any deal with Iran may actually come from Israel and its supporters rather than from the ayatollahs. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu insists on Iran's meeting three of Israel's demands:

* Iran must stop the development of its second nuclear enrichment site at Fordo, deep under a mountain and immune from bunker-buster bombs.

* Iran must also ship its 20 percent enriched uranium out of the country to prevent a rush to enriching it to bomb strength.

* Iran must end all future enrichment.

If Israel is serious, the last of its demands is the deal breaker. Of course, Israel is not a direct party to the negotiations. But its supporters in the U.S. are extraordinarily important, particularly in the midst of the U.S. presidential campaign. "As the evidence of Iran's illicit activity continues to mount," the American Israel Public Affairs Committee recently declared, "Congress and the (Obama) administration must remain united in preventing the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism from acquiring the capability to build an atomic bomb."

The U.S. House, in parallel, just passed a resolution by a vote of 401-11 that declares it a "vital national interest of the United States to prevent the government of Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapons capability." AIPAC and its allies could certainly veto any deal the president believed to be in America's national interest.

The challenge for Iranian and U.S. negotiators is to balance the commitments of

their domestic constituencies with the need for Iran to get the sanctions lifted and the bombing threat eliminated and the U.S. to end the dangers of Iran's developing nuclear weapons.

The challenges are immense but the stars seem aligned for serious negotiations in Baghdad. That does not mean that an agreement will be reached soon. But this is certainly the best chance since Iran announced in 1982 that it would start importing nuclear technology again.

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New York Post
May 22, 2012
Pg. 23

46. Ugly Afghanistan Calculations

By Max Boot

Back in late 2009, when President Obama announced that he'd send 30,000 more troops to Afghanistan but only for 18 months, many conservatives were highly critical of his decision, arguing that the president did not have the temperament to wage a war successfully and that he was only going to throw away troops' lives without trying to achieve victory.

I wasn't one of them. I was willing to give Obama the benefit of the doubt, and I supported his move as a way to arrest the decline in Afghanistan. He sent more troops and first-rate commanders — first Stanley McChrystal, then David Petraeus, now John Allen. I thought Obama was committed to a successful outcome and couldn't risk backing down without calling into question one of his major commitments.

I still think the surge was the right thing to do because it arrested the Taliban's momentum in southern Afghanistan and at least gave breathing room for the development of Afghan National Security Forces. But in retrospect, the president's critics were more right than wrong. For evidence, look no further than this excerpt from New York Times reporter David Sanger's new book, which appeared on the front page of the Sunday Times. It quotes an unnamed Obama adviser as follows: "The military was 'all in,' as they say, and Obama wasn't."

Then Sanger writes that "by early 2011, Mr. Obama had seen enough. He told his staff to arrange a speedy, orderly exit from Afghanistan."

The critical decisions about drawing down troops — with 32,000 departing by the end of September 2012 — were apparently made by political aides in the White House without consulting Petraeus or other generals or, until the very end, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. This is breathtaking. Commanders on the ground and senior officials at the Department of Defense aren't always right, and the president doesn't always have to follow their recommendations. But the commander-in-chief at least has an obligation to solicit their views and take them into careful consideration.

Apparently, Obama didn't do that because he wanted to avoid the leaks that attended his previous decisionmaking on Afghanistan in fall 2009. So he decided to end the surge in September 2012, which Sanger erroneously describes as "after the summer fighting season" (the fighting season actually lasts until late

October or early November) and accurately describes as “before the election,” meaning, of course, our presidential election.

This confirms the worst suspicions of Obama’s critics — namely, that he was never committed to victory in Afghanistan and was instead committed to bringing troops home early so as to position himself advantageously for his re-election.

These revelations raise serious questions about the morality of the entire surge — about risking troops’ lives and limbs for a goal that isn’t worthy of their sacrifice.

Rest assured that if President George W. Bush had so nakedly put his own political calculations front and center in national-security policy, he’d have been flayed by the news media. Indeed, he was flayed for the “Mission Accomplished” banner and for supposedly invoking 9/11 for partisan advantage — and, most ironically of all, for supposedly disregarding the advice of senior generals by sending too few troops to Iraq.

But Obama, it seems, is getting a pass for not even bothering to consult the very generals he appointed.

From contentions, the commentary magazine.com blog.

Financial Times
May 22, 2012
Pg. 2

Global Insight

47. Washington Can Focus On Asia Only With A Robust Nato

By Geoff Dyer, Chicago

It is almost a year since Robert Gates stepped down as US defence secretary yet his parting words were still ringing in the ears of the leaders

assembled in Chicago for the two-day Nato summit.

Taking advantage of the freedom that comes from imminent retirement, Mr Gates told a Nato gathering last June that the alliance had a “dim if not dismal future” and warned of possible “military irrelevance”. He added that there was “dwindling appetite” in the US to keep supporting the organisation.

The questions he posed go well beyond the practicalities of defence co-operation. In between the G8 summit on Friday and Saturday and the Nato meeting in Chicago on Sunday and yesterday, this has been a weekend where the very idea of “the west” has been on trial.

Amid all the talk of decline or the current buzzword of “G-zero”, the flurry of summits has provided a live test of whether there is any vitality left in the transatlantic relationship. And given the problems besetting the euro and the EU, that puts even more emphasis on Nato.

If he were still in office, Mr Gates might find plenty of reasons to remain pessimistic about the future of Nato, given the economic malaise on both sides of the Atlantic.

European nations used to provide near to 40 per cent of Nato’s defence spending; now that figure is closer to 20 per cent and is likely to fall further as austerity kicks in. US defence budget cuts are focusing heavily on Europe, with two of the four combat brigades expected to leave.

The Libya operation ended up a success but along the way it exposed myriad weaknesses in Nato’s operational capacity. Only nine countries were willing or able to supply aircraft to the exercise and after three months some of them had run out of munitions, forcing the US to send emergency supplies.

And this was a small operation against a weak opponent.

For all the warm welcome to Chicago from Barack Obama, the US president, the European allies are also acutely aware that the signature piece of the Obama administration’s foreign policy has been the tilt towards Asia, the natural step for a president who by background and instinct is more focused on the Pacific than the Atlantic.

Yet stand back for a second and the view does not look quite so grim. The organisation was originally founded to counter Soviet aggression. The Nato leaders who watched the Berlin Wall fall might be surprised to find out that the alliance actually still exists 23 years later, let alone that it has been involved in military operations during three-quarters of the time since then.

Despite all the budget pressures in Europe and the pervasive pessimism among electorates about the war in Afghanistan, there are still 40,000 non-American troops in the country — which surely says something about Nato’s staying power.

Mr Obama might have been hamming it up a bit in when he said Nato was “the strongest and most successful military alliance that the world has known”. But it is the only one capable of conducting operations beyond its borders.

If Nato really were withering away, it would probably not attract so much attention. Chicago hosted almost as many heads of state from non-Nato countries as from its 28 members, many of whom were keen to learn more about organising regional defence and to tap into Nato’s crisis management skills.

Some are countries, such as Australia, that have helped

out in Afghanistan. Others are involved in Nato’s various partnerships in central Asia, north Africa or the Middle East.

There were also, as it happens, plenty of Asian leaders in Chicago. And that is the hidden point behind Mr Obama’s Pacific tilt and why the US will not abandon Nato. The “pivot” to Asia is not an alternative to Europe and Nato: on the contrary, a robust Nato is a precondition.

Washington can focus its attention on Asia only if it feels comfortable that the transatlantic alliance is still in working order.

USA Today
May 23, 2012
Pg. 8

48. Messy Afghanistan War Heads For Uncertain Ending

It’s official. The United States and its war weary NATO allies are pulling out of Afghanistan — win, lose or draw. A year from now, primary combat responsibilities will belong to the Afghan army, and by the end of 2014 America’s longest war will end, 13 years after it began, save perhaps for a small residual force.

This will happen even if the Taliban is recovering from its losses of the last year. And it will happen whether or not Afghanistan’s rapidly expanding but still undertrained military is ready. The timetable is “irreversible,” NATO proclaimed Monday.

President Obama and other leaders tried, not very successfully, to paint a pretty face on their plan. But the hard fact is that the Afghanistan conflict will go into the history books in much the same way that every major war since World War II has: an unsatisfying, incomplete mess.

There's no mystery about the reasons, and no shortage of blame to spread around.

The 2001 invasion that wiped out al-Qaeda's training camps degenerated into a fuzzy exercise in nation-building. Then, as the ill-conceived war in Iraq began to founder, resources were siphoned off and Afghanistan was orphaned.

By the time Obama came to office — proclaiming Afghanistan to be a "war of necessity" — it was already beginning to look like a quagmire. A year later, Obama concluded as much. According to an extraordinarily detailed account in *The New York Times*, he cut the military out of the decision-making, narrowed the war's objectives and committed to a rapid pullout on a fixed timetable, even as he announced a surge of U.S. forces.

Timetables and plans without generals are no way to win a war. But 13 years also is too long to fight one. With Americans and Afghans both turning against the war, a clear-cut victory is no more attainable than it was in Vietnam, Korea or Iraq.

In that light, Obama's decision is encouraging. It is the latest signal of his conclusion that the nation is ill-served by massive, optional ground wars. That's why there were no troops on the ground in Libya and why there are unlikely to be any in Syria.

There will instead be financial support for Afghanistan, without which the government would collapse, and a sharp focus on al-Qaeda, which continues to pose a threat to the United States.

That's hardly a happy ending, but given the poor options, it might turn out to be a smart one — particularly if the United States finally learns to fight wars only as a last resort and then only with precise

objectives and overwhelming force.

San Francisco Chronicle
May 23, 2012
Pg. 11

49. Pakistan Problem Complicates Afghanistan Drawdown

The good news out of the just-completed NATO summit in Chicago is that the allies are united in their "irreversible" commitment to put Afghanistan in charge of its own security in 2014. Weary of war, and struggling with economic stresses at home, the allies have decided that 10 years is enough.

The bad news is that "the Pakistan problem" has not gone away.

The withdrawal itself, and the postwar plight of Afghanistan, will be complicated immeasurably without the cooperation of a stable Pakistan.

President Obama took a decidedly bold gamble by inviting Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari to the summit on the assumption that it might seal the deal for a restoration of NATO supply lines from Pakistan into Afghanistan. Pakistan cut off those supply lines after U.S. air strikes hit two of its border posts on Nov. 26, killing 24 Pakistani soldiers. The United States attributed the strikes to a miscommunication after its forces were fired upon.

Zardari has refused to ease the supply-line blockage without an official U.S. apology for the air strikes.

Obama obviously underestimated the extent of domestic pressure on Zardari to not be perceived as overly subservient to the United States. Pakistanis at all levels are seething not only about the air strikes but also about the U.S. drone strikes along the Afghan

border that have resulted in civilian casualties, as well as the May 2011 U.S. raid on Osama bin Laden's compound near Islamabad. Even many Pakistanis who wanted bin Laden killed were rankled by what they regarded as a breach of sovereignty by a superpower with a history of treating Pakistan as a "transactional" partner.

The distrust - and indeed the transactional attitude - is mutual. Pakistan's condition for reopening the supply lines to NATO include raising the \$250-per-truck fee to \$5,000.

Neither Obama nor his NATO counterparts should accept such price gouging from a country that ostensibly is on their side in the Afghanistan effort.

Tempting as it might be for the United States to shun Pakistan, it does not have that luxury. The future of Afghanistan will be directly linked to a neighbor that has nuclear weapons, six times as many people and pockets of sanctuary for militants.

The diplomatic task in Pakistan will be every bit as challenging - and critical to American interest in the region - as the military drawdown in Afghanistan.