

CURRENT NEWS

EARLY BIRD

May 15, 2012

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Item numbers indicate order of appearance only.

PAKISTAN

1. **Pakistan Hints It Will Soon Reopen NATO Supply Routes**
(*Wall Street Journal*)....Tom Wright and Maria Abi-Habib
Pakistan's foreign minister on Monday indicated that the country is moving toward allowing the North Atlantic Treaty Organization to resume supplying allied troops in Afghanistan through its territory, using routes that have remained closed since 24 Pakistani soldiers died in a NATO airstrike in November.
2. **Pakistan Mulls Reopening Border Route For NATO**
(*New York Times*)....Associated Press
...Reopening the border risks a domestic outcry in Pakistan given Washington's refusal to apologize for the attack, which it says was an accident. But it could help ensure that Pakistan has a role in the future of Afghanistan as NATO prepares to retool its strategy there during a conference that starts Sunday in Chicago.
3. **Pakistan Fighting Uproots Hundreds Of Thousands**
(*Yahoo.com*)....Agence France-Presse
Nearly half a million Pakistanis are estimated to have fled fighting between soldiers and militia on the Afghan border with more than 264,000 registered for aid, officials said Monday.

AFGHANISTAN

4. **Top U.S. General In Kabul Likely To Leave Command For Europe Post**
(*Washington Post*)....Greg Jaffe
Marine Corps Gen. John Allen, the top commander in Afghanistan, is expected to leave his post early next year and take over the U.S. European Command, officials said.
5. **Pentagon Defends Afghan Local Police Program**
(*Yahoo.com*)....Dan De Luce, Agence France-Presse
The Pentagon defended a program Monday that recruits local police forces in Afghan villages despite a US-funded report that raises questions about the militia's performance and alleged abuses.
6. **Interview With Ryan Crocker, U.S. Ambassador To Afghanistan**
(*NPR*)....Renee Montagne
Ambassador Crocker said one key argument that will be made in Chicago for supporting Afghanistan security forces is that it's far less expensive than keeping NATO troops in Afghanistan. These days, the State Department is looking ahead to the 10 years after 2014, calling that time a transformational decade. Crocker in particular has been focused on how America can support Afghanistan in the coming years.

7. **Afghan Forces Will Take Control Of Some Volatile Areas**
(*Stars and Stripes*)....Matt Millham
More details about the third phase of Afghanistan's security transition released Monday indicate that Afghan forces will take the lead in some areas still under persistent threat from insurgents.
8. **Blast In Afghan Market Kills 9**
(*NYTimes.com*)....Rod Nordland
...A member of the Faryab provincial council was killed and seven others were wounded by the bomb, which was detonated remotely, according to Said Masod Yaqobi, the spokesman for the provincial police chief in Faryab.
9. **A Tentative Transition**
(*The Australian*)....Brendan Nicholson
Special forces are likely to stay on to help Afghanistan.
10. **U.S. Military Mission: Pushing Afghans To Take Lead**
(*NPR.org*)....Tom Bowman
The American military has two main jobs now in Afghanistan: sweeping the remaining Taliban from safe havens and getting Afghan security forces to take charge in the fight.
11. **Beyond The Sandbags And Steel, 12 Lanes To Another Afghanistan**
(*New York Times*)....Rod Nordland
...Welcome to Afghanistan's first bowling alley. The tale of how Strikers made Afghanistan the 91st country with a modern 10-pin bowling alley seems to be that rarest of things, an Afghan good news story.
12. **Steak Day Serves Up A Taste Of Home**
(*Fayetteville (NC) Observer*)....Drew Brooks
...The grind of the deployment makes many days blend together. But on Friday, hundreds of soldiers are on the same page. That's when dining facilities across the theater serve steak and lobster as a way to boost morale.

MEDAL OF HONOR

13. **Woman To Accept Medal Of Honor 4 Decades After Husband's Death**
(*Philadelphia Inquirer*)....Associated Press
...Sabo-Brown will accept the Medal of Honor, the nation's highest military decoration, on behalf of her late husband, Spec. Leslie H. Sabo Jr., four decades after he was killed while protecting his comrades from an ambush in Cambodia during the Vietnam War. President Obama will present the medal to Sabo-Brown, of Hickory, and her brother-in-law, George Sabo, who lives near Detroit, at a White House ceremony Wednesday, the Pittsburgh Tribune-review reported.

DEFENSE DEPARTMENT

14. **Women Closer To The Front Lines**
(*Washington Times*)....Kristina Wong
Pentagon opens 14,000 support jobs to female troops.
15. **8,000 Contractors Said Eligible For US Cyber Guard**
(*Reuters.com*)....Jim Wolf, Reuters
Up to 8,000 companies doing business with the Pentagon may be qualified to join a newly expanded U.S. effort to guard sensitive information on private networks, a senior Defense Department official said Monday.

DETAINEES

16. **9/11 Kin's Shocking Mission At Guantanamo To Spare Plotters**
(*New York Post*)....Josh Margolin

...But while there, the 62-year-old wine-company executive held a clandestine meeting with the terrorists' lawyers, in which he offered to testify against putting their clients to death. A vocal critic of capital punishment, Allison wants to convince the US government to spare the lives of KSM and his minions even if a military commission convicts them of a slew of death-penalty charges.

NAVY

17. Two Female Submariners Found Guilty Of Financial Fraud

(*New London (CT) Day*)...Jennifer McDermott

Two of the first female submariners in the U.S. Navy have been found guilty of financial misconduct in connection with fraudulent travel expense claims.

18. \$2.2 Million Sub Mishap Was 'Avoidable,' Report Says

(*NavyTimes.com*)...Sam Fellman

...The crew heard the sound as soon as they rolled the propulsion shaft — Whump! Whump! Whump! — but rather than shut it down, they kept the shaft spinning at various speeds for days trying to figure out the problem. Their “catastrophic” mistakes, a new Navy report concludes, sidelined the guided-missile submarine Georgia for three months, locking it up in the shipyard for repairs when it should have deployed for operations against Libya in early 2011.

CONGRESS

19. Panel Rejects Proposals To Raise Military Retirees' Health Care Premiums

(*GovExec.com*)...Kellie Lunney

At the same time the House passed a bill requiring civilian federal employees to contribute more to their pensions, lawmakers on the Armed Services Committee rejected the Obama administration's proposals to increase the amount military retirees pay for their health care insurance.

20. Republicans Order Navy To Quit Buying Biofuels

(*Danger Room (Wired.com)*)...Noah Shachtman

...But if the measure becomes law, it would make it all-but-inconceivable for the Pentagon to buy the renewable fuels. It would likely scuttle one of the top priorities of Navy Secretary Ray Mabus. And it might very well suffocate the gasping biofuel industry, which was looking to the Pentagon to help it survive.

21. Budget Time Bomb Sends Shivers Across Economy

(*Washington Post*)...Lori Montgomery and Rosalind S. Helderman

Anxiety grows around New Year's tax hikes and slashed spending.

22. Defense Cuts Would Cripple Va. Economy, Leaders Warn

(*Norfolk Virginian-Pilot*)...Bill Bartel

If Congress doesn't stop \$1 trillion in automatic budget reductions set to begin unrolling in January, Hampton Roads and Northern Virginia will see such dramatic cutbacks that a statewide recession is likely, a public policy expert warned Monday night.

23. Lawmaker Disputes 911th Cost Figures

(*Pittsburgh Tribune-Review*)...Tom Fontaine

The Air Force rates the Air Force Reserve's 911th Airlift Wing among the nation's costliest for flying outdated C-130 cargo planes, but that hasn't convinced Western Pennsylvania congressmen that closing the base would make financial or strategic sense.

MIDEAST

24. Iran Exile Group Nears U.S. Rebirth

(*Wall Street Journal*)...Jay Solomon and Evan Perez

The Obama administration is moving to remove an Iranian opposition group from the State Department's terrorism list, say officials briefed on the talks, in an action that could further poison Washington's relations with Tehran at a time of renewed diplomatic efforts to curtail Iran's nuclear program.

25. **Iran Sees Success In Stalling On Nuclear Issue**

(*New York Times*)....Thomas Erdbrink

As Iran starts a critical round of talks over its nuclear program, its negotiating team may be less interested in reaching a comprehensive settlement than in buying time and establishing the legitimacy of its enrichment program, Iranian officials and analysts said.

26. **Secret Prison Still Open In Baghdad, Group Claims**

(*Arizona Daily Star (Tucson)*)....Associated Press

Iraqis are still being held illegally at a Baghdad prison that the government was supposed to have shut down in 2011 after allegations that detainees were tortured and abused there, Human Rights Watch said Tuesday.

27. **Yemen: Military Attacks Militants**

(*New York Times*)....Associated Press

Yemeni warplanes attacked fighters with Al Qaeda on Monday, killing at least 16, while seven soldiers died in clashes with militants in the south, military officials said.

28. **Saudi Arabia Seeks Union Of Monarchies In Region**

(*New York Times*)....Kareem Fahim and David D. Kirkpatrick

Saudi Arabia pushed ahead Monday with efforts to forge a single federation with its five Persian Gulf neighbors as the conservative monarchy seeks to build a new bulwark against the waves of change sweeping the Middle East.

ASIA/PACIFIC

29. **Cold War Warning As China Hits Out At Defence Co-Operation With US**

(*Sydney Morning Herald*)....Philip Wen

...Underlining how seriously they viewed the decision to allow up to 2500 US Marines to be deployed through Darwin, senior Chinese officials raised their concerns with Senator Bob Carr in three separate meetings in Beijing yesterday, during his first official visit as Foreign Affairs Minister since replacing Kevin Rudd in March.

30. **Coinciding Fishing Bans Declared**

(*South China Morning Post*)....Stephen Chen

China and the Philippines have announced overlapping fishing bans in disputed waters in the South China Sea in what is being seen as a face-saving solution to a month-long stand-off at Scarborough Shoal for both countries.

31. **No Plan To Deploy Tactical Nukes In S. Korea: Pentagon**

(*Yonhap News Agency*)....Lee Chi-dong, Yonhap

The Pentagon said Monday that it will not redeploy tactical nuclear weapons to South Korea.

32. **N. Korea Stops Sending Out GPS Jamming Signals Against S. Korea: Source**

(*Yonhap News Agency*)....Yonhap

North Korea appears to have stopped jamming satellite signals in an apparent attempt to disrupt air and maritime traffic navigation systems in parts of South Korea, a high-ranking government source in Seoul said Tuesday.

33. **Taiwan Deploying More 'Carrier Killers': Report**

(*Yahoo.com*)....Agence France-Presse

Taiwan is arming more of its fleet with its new "carrier killer" anti-ship missiles as China conducts further sea trials of its first aircraft carrier, local media said Monday.

MILITARY

34. **Post-Traumatic Stress Now A Leading Concern For Military Families**

(*Christian Science Monitor (csmonitor.com)*)....Anna Mulrine

A new survey that ranks the top struggles and worries of military families finds that after more than a decade of war, soldiers and their spouses are feeling isolated and financially strapped.

35. **Military Families Also Pay Price For Repeated Tours Of Duty**

(*Tacoma News Tribune*)....Adam Ashton

Resilient, tough, experienced, professional. The Army uses words like these to describe U.S. soldiers in the post-9/11 era who have had to adapt to the new normal of repeat combat tours.

COMMENTARY

36. **Missile Defense Is Self-Defense**

(*Wall Street Journal*)....Jon Kyl

Obama may be 'flexible.' But the U.S. owes Russia nothing.

37. **False-Flag Operation On LOST**

(*Washington Times*)....Frank J. Gaffney Jr.

Treaty would compromise U.S. sovereignty, not enhance it.

38. **Few NATO Risks For Obama**

(*Chicago Sun-Times*)....Lynn Sweet

With the American public--and presumptive GOP nominee Mitt Romney--focused on the economy, President Barack Obama may not have much at stake politically if there are diplomatic flaps at the NATO Summit in Chicago.

39. **Iran Talks' Moment Of Truth Has Arrived**

(*Wall Street Journal*)....Gerald F. Seib

In the long and winding American quest to curb Iran's nuclear program, the next month is the most critical period yet. And there are three men to keep an eye on as it unfolds: President Barack Obama, Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak.

40. **The Beginning Of Welcome Change**

(*Norfolk Virginian-Pilot*)....Editorial

Monday marked a long-awaited shift in some of the Pentagon's policies excluding women from certain positions because of their gender. But it shouldn't mark the end.

41. **18th Airborne Corps Sees Return To A Familiar Role**

(*Fayetteville (NC) Observer*)....Editorial

Since 2001, the 18th Airborne Corps has gone far beyond its traditional rapid-response role. The corps, including Fort Bragg's 82nd Airborne Division, has instead dug into two wars, playing key roles in Iraq and Afghanistan. Now, as the war in Iraq has ended and troops in Afghanistan are drawing down, the corps looks at returning to its former role, training for those first strikes at enemies who could be anywhere in the world.

Wall Street Journal
May 15, 2012
Pg. 11

1. Pakistan Hints It Will Soon Reopen NATO Supply Routes

By Tom Wright and Maria Abi-Habib

Pakistan's foreign minister on Monday indicated that the country is moving toward allowing the North Atlantic Treaty Organization to resume supplying allied troops in Afghanistan through its territory, using routes that have remained closed since 24 Pakistani soldiers died in a NATO airstrike in November.

"It was important to make a point," Hina Rabbani Khar, the foreign minister, told a news conference carried live on Pakistani television, referring to the border closure. "Pakistan has made a point and now we can move on."

She didn't say when Pakistan would reopen the supply routes. But her comments were the clearest sign that Islamabad is moving to meet U.S. and allied requests to do so.

Ms. Khar's remarks come after U.S. Marine Gen. John Allen, the coalition commander in Afghanistan, and Gen. Sher Karimi, the chief of staff of the Afghan army, met Pakistan's army chief Gen. Ashfaq Parvez Kayani over the weekend. Gen. Allen said he was "very encouraged" by the outcome of his talks in Pakistan.

"Not only were these meetings a signal of a renewed desire of all parties to address important topics and issues, there was agreement these meetings are important to achieving continued progress toward our shared goals of a peaceful, stable and prosperous Afghanistan so that Afghanistan can no longer be a haven for terrorists again," Gen. Allen said.

"I think the meeting between Gen. Allen and Gen. Kayani has helped a lot," said Talat Masood, a retired Pakistani general.

If Pakistan were to reopen its borders, it would sharply lower the cost of bringing goods and equipment to resupply troops in Afghanistan. More importantly, the reopening of Pakistan's borders would ease the process of bringing home at least 100,000 containers of military goods and 70,000 vehicles that the U.S. and its NATO allies plan to withdraw by 2014. These goods are valued at least \$30 billion, military officials in Kabul said.

Pakistan's Parliament has demanded a formal apology for the November incident, during which U.S. helicopters mistakenly fired on two Pakistani border posts, as a prerequisite to allow supplies to resume. It also requested an end to U.S. drone strikes against Taliban targets on Pakistani territory.

The U.S. has met neither of these conditions. But Ms. Khar's remarks suggest Pakistan feels it has exacted enough retribution by keeping the routes closed for almost six months. The ultimate arbiter on the matter is Pakistan's army. Attempts to reach an army spokesman were unsuccessful on Monday.

Pakistan can't afford to get too isolated diplomatically by continuing to block the NATO supply routes, Mr. Masood said. Some Pakistani officials were concerned the U.S. might prevent Pakistan from attending a NATO conference in Chicago May 20-21 if it didn't reopen routes, he added.

The conference is set to discuss the future of Afghanistan after most international troops pull out in 2014. Islamabad is eager to ensure it has a major role in a

post-withdrawal Afghanistan as a way of guaranteeing its rival India doesn't play a larger role there.

The reopening of the routes could also lead the U.S. to pay out more than \$1 billion in military aid for Pakistan that Washington has withheld as relations between the two countries deteriorated in recent months.

The killing of the Pakistani soldiers came after the U.S. raid on a Pakistani garrison town a year ago that killed Osama bin Laden, and the killing of two armed men by a Central Intelligence Agency contractor on the streets of Lahore in broad daylight in early 2011.

Relations neared a breaking point after the November incident. High-level military and civilian contacts were suspended and have resumed again only recently. Pakistan also barred the U.S. from launching drone strikes from a Pakistan airfield, although the strikes have continued unabated from Afghan territory.

There is also immense pressure from Pakistani truck owners for the country to reopen the NATO routes. The owners, mainly ethnic Pashtun businessmen, make large profits by trucking the supplies from the port of Karachi via the two main supply routes into Afghanistan.

The suspension has forced NATO to move more supplies for its troops via airlifts and through the Central Asian republics.

When Pakistan closed its border last year, the U.S.-led coalition began negotiating logistics routes with at least six countries north of Afghanistan, including Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

"As long as we don't know the preconditions of each country, it's too early to tell the cost difference of the routes,"

said German Brig. Gen. Carsten Jacobson, chief spokesman for the coalition in Afghanistan.

New York Times
May 15, 2012
Pg. 10

2. Pakistan Mulls Reopening Border Route For NATO

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan (AP) — Pakistan's foreign minister suggested Monday that the country should reopen its Afghan border to NATO troop supplies, saying the government had made its point by closing the route for nearly six months in retaliation for American airstrikes that killed 24 Pakistani soldiers.

Reopening the border risks a domestic outcry in Pakistan given Washington's refusal to apologize for the attack, which it says was an accident. But it could help ensure that Pakistan has a role in the future of Afghanistan as NATO prepares to retool its strategy there during a conference that starts Sunday in Chicago.

Pakistan's presence would benefit the American-led coalition as well, because the country is seen as crucial to striking a peace deal with the Taliban and their allies in Afghanistan that would allow foreign troops to withdraw without the nation descending into further chaos.

The supply line running through Pakistan to Afghanistan will be critical to that withdrawal as NATO pulls out more than a decade's worth of equipment. It has been critical for shipping in supplies as well, although the United States has reduced its reliance on Pakistan in recent years by using a more costly route through Central Asia.

The foreign minister, Hina Rabbani Khar, said the government made the right

decision to close the border to NATO to send a message to Washington that the attack on its troops in November was unacceptable.

"It was important to make a point," Ms. Khar said at a news conference in Islamabad when asked whether she believed that Pakistan should reopen the supply route. "Pakistan has made a point, and now we can move on."

The United States welcomed Ms. Khar's comments, but said the two countries had yet to reach a final deal.

"Our team is still in Islamabad working on the land-route issue," the State Department spokeswoman, Victoria Nuland, said in Washington. "My understanding this morning is that they have made considerable progress but they are still working."

Pakistan's defense committee of the cabinet, which is responsible for deciding the fate of the supply route, was scheduled to meet Tuesday to discuss the issue and could authorize its reopening.

Shams Shahwani, a senior official in Pakistan's Petroleum Tanker Owners Association, said he was contacted Monday by Petroleum Ministry officials who told him the NATO supply route would probably be opened by Wednesday evening. They told him to assemble his tankers in Karachi so they would be ready.

The United States and Pakistan still disagree on the circumstances that led American helicopters to strike two Pakistani Army posts on the Afghan border, with Pakistan claiming the attack was deliberate.

The episode added to already rampant anti-American sentiment in Pakistan and plunged the troubled relations

between the countries to an all-time low, threatening the vital, if spotty, antiterrorism cooperation Washington has received since 2001 in exchange for billions of dollars in American aid.

Pakistan not only retaliated by blocking NATO supplies, but also kicked the United States out of a base used by American drones targeting fighters for the Taliban and Al Qaeda in the country's tribal region along the Afghan border.

The United States expressed its regret for the soldiers' deaths but stopped short of an outright apology.

Yahoo.com
May 14, 2012

3. Pakistan Fighting Uproots Hundreds Of Thousands

By Agence France-Presse

Nearly half a million Pakistanis are estimated to have fled fighting between soldiers and militia on the Afghan border with more than 264,000 registered for aid, officials said Monday.

Authorities say increasing numbers of women and children are fleeing Khyber, one of the seven districts that make up Pakistan's semi-autonomous tribal belt, which is considered a stronghold of Al-Qaeda and Taliban.

More than 500 families are arriving on a daily basis at Jalozai camp, near the northwestern city of Peshawar, camp administrator Noor Akbar told AFP.

"We have registered 56,842 families or 264,253 individuals so far since the offensive was launched in January," Akbar said.

"We expect more will flee as the fighting continues."

Save the Children said it estimated that 63,000 families, or nearly half a million people,

have already been displaced from Khyber.

A spokesman said the charity's estimate was much higher than the number registered because most people chose to live outside the camp and because new arrivals were mostly women and children put off by long registration queues.

"Save the Children estimates that over 600,000 in total will be displaced if military operations continue -- among which over 300,000 are expected to be children," the charity said in a report.

Last month, the UN refugee agency said more than 181,000 people had fled the fighting and that 85 percent of those registered chose not live in Jalozai.

The fighting started on January 20 when government troops attacked militant groups in the Khyber.

Officials say the fighting is concentrated in a large area, home to scores of settlements, between Tirah valley and Bara town on the outskirts of Peshawar.

Government troops have struggled since 2009 to defeat Mangal Bagh, a former bus conductor who founded Lashkar-e-Islam, a militia known for kidnapping and extortion, and locked in a turf war with local Taliban.

Washington Post
May 15, 2012
Pg. 3

4. Top U.S. General In Kabul Likely To Leave Command For Europe Post

Promotion planned; Allen would still play big role in Afghan policy

By Greg Jaffe

Marine Corps Gen. John Allen, the top commander in Afghanistan, is expected to leave his post early next year

and take over the U.S. European Command, officials said.

Allen has spent much of his tumultuous year in Afghanistan helping to negotiate a long-term security agreement with the Afghan government and overseeing the initial drawdown of U.S. forces from the country.

He has shifted American troops from a counterinsurgency strategy, with a focus on governance and reconstruction, to a more limited mission of training the Afghan army and fighting the Taliban.

The planned promotion to head the U.S. European Command will allow Allen to remain deeply involved in Afghanistan policy and work with NATO allies who have maintained a presence in the country despite the war's growing unpopularity in Europe.

Defense officials cautioned that the plan could change if conditions in Afghanistan shift.

"No final decisions have been made regarding a follow-on assignment for Gen. Allen or the future of European Command," said Capt. John Kirby, a Pentagon spokesman.

If the White House nominates Allen, the general will have to be confirmed by the Senate.

Allen, who had been expected to spend two years in Afghanistan, would leave his post early to take the job as the supreme allied commander in Europe, Defense officials said. Senior Pentagon and White House officials do not want to pull out the top commander in Afghanistan in the middle of the country's fighting season, which runs from spring through the fall.

Replacing Allen in the winter would give his successor a few months before the start of heavier fighting to learn the territory.

Adm. James G. Stavridis, head of the U.S. European Command, has been asked to stay a few months beyond the end of his four-year term so that Allen will have time to return from Afghanistan and prepare for his new command.

Allen's major task over the coming months will be to reduce the American force in Afghanistan to about 68,000 troops by the end of September, down from about 100,000 last year.

At the same time, he will have to rely increasingly on Afghan forces, bolstered by American training teams, to hold ground taken from the Taliban.

No decision has been made on who will replace Allen in Afghanistan. One possibility is Army Gen. David Rodriguez, who as the No. 2 commander in Afghanistan oversaw the buildup of American forces in 2009 and 2010.

Vice Adm. Robert S. Harward, a Navy SEAL who oversaw detention operations in Afghanistan, also is a likely candidate.

Yahoo.com
May 14, 2012

5. Pentagon Defends Afghan Local Police Program

By Dan De Luce, Agence France-Presse

The Pentagon defended a program Monday that recruits local police forces in Afghan villages despite a US-funded report that raises questions about the militia's performance and alleged abuses.

Top officers, including the former commander of US and NATO forces in Afghanistan, General David Petraeus, have portrayed the Afghan Local Police initiative as a crucial tool in rolling back the Taliban in rural areas.

But the unpublished study commissioned by the Defense Department and prepared by the RAND Corporation think tank offers a less optimistic analysis, according to the Los Angeles Times, which obtained a copy of the report.

The study found that one in five US special operations teams advising the local police units said the Afghan militia had committed violence or abused civilians, and there were recent allegations of bribe taking, rape and drug trafficking, the newspaper said.

The RAND Corporation, which prepared the study, acknowledged quoted details from its report as accurate, but took issue with how the newspaper interpreted its assessment of security in villages where the local police operated.

The report said violence usually increased after US special forces entered an area to clear civilians, and then once the Americans withdrew with local police in place, the violence usually dropped back to the level seen before US forces arrived.

James Dobbins, director of the International Security and Defense Policy Center at RAND, called that trend an encouraging sign, because he said it meant villages in the restive east and south were approaching a lower level of violence in line with the country as a whole.

"For violence in the east and south of the country to drop to the national norm would in fact represent progress.

"It is therefore not a sign of failure that this seems to have been achieved over time in those areas where Afghan Local Police elements have been established but, quite the contrary, a sign of some success," Dobbins said in a statement.

Previous coalition programs to establish local police were scrapped before this latest attempt.

Designed to extend the reach of the Afghan army to rural areas, the local police are supposed to guard checkpoints, turn over suspected insurgents to regular troops and provide some intelligence on the Taliban.

The effectiveness of Afghan security forces, including the local police, holds the key to NATO's planned withdrawal of combat troops by the end of 2014.

US officials argue the Afghan forces are steadily improving, but it remains unclear how the army and police will perform once the bulk of the NATO force departs.

Afghan officials quoted by the Los Angeles Times said the local police were often under the grip of political power brokers and were tainted by criminal activity.

US defense officials said NATO-led forces were aware of cases of corruption or abuse, which they said were not unique to the local police, and that actions had been taken to remedy the problem in particular units.

But the officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the overall effect of the local police was positive.

Pentagon spokesman George Little insisted the Afghan Local Police (ALP) program has proven effective and that Afghan security forces overall have made "tremendous progress" that he said has often been overlooked.

"We remain very committed to the ALP program," he told reporters.

"We realize they will continue to face challenges. They're on track, their capabilities are growing and we

will continue to support them," he said.

Petraeus, the former chief of NATO-led forces who now leads the Central Intelligence Agency, has described the ALP as a "night watch with AK-47s".

As commander, he often cited the program as a success.

"In some cases, they have 'flipped' communities who once even actively supported the Taliban," Petraeus said in a 2010 article published by the Defense Department's official press service.

NPR

May 14, 2012

6. Interview With Ryan Crocker, U.S. Ambassador To Afghanistan

Morning Edition (NPR),
7:10 AM

STEVE INSKEEP: Afghanistan's president, Hamid Karzai, travels soon to Chicago. He'll attend a summit of NATO, the North Atlantic Alliance, on whose troops Karzai's government depends. At that summit, NATO countries will be asked to pledge billions of dollars to support Afghanistan's security forces after NATO combat troops withdraw in the year 2014. The U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan will also attend that summit. And as he prepared to leave Kabul, he sat down with our own Renee Montagne.

RENEE MONTAGNE: When we talked, Ambassador Ryan Crocker said one key argument that will be made in Chicago for supporting Afghanistan security forces is that it's far less expensive than keeping NATO troops in Afghanistan. These days, the State Department is looking ahead to the 10 years after 2014, calling that time a transformational decade. Ambassador Crocker

in particular has been focused on how America can support Afghanistan in the coming years. He's the one who negotiated the long-term partnership agreement signed this month by Presidents Karzai and Obama.

AMB. RYAN CROCKER: The most significant thing about the agreement, in my view -- and I think that is a view shared by an overwhelming majority of Afghans -- is the agreement itself. As you know, from being around here so many times, there is a deep-rooted fear that 2014 means the West and the U.S. just vanish in a puff of smoke. This agreement says no, we don't. And, again, there are commitments. On our side, we are committed to seek funds on an annual basis to support Afghanistan's economic development and its security forces. Under our system, that's the limit of what we can say. Congress passes the budget annually, and that is Congress' prerogative. Reciprocally, they've got some obligations, too, on free and fair elections, on the further promotion of democracy, human rights, transparency and an all-out fight against corruption. These, again, are not insignificant commitments in a binding agreement.

MONTAGNE: Although it may be a binding agreement, but within the agreement itself, were these commitments not to be honored -- let's say, on the Afghan side -- their pledge to increase efficiency in their government and to curb corruption, were they to do nothing about that, in the agreement there is no punishment if they don't succeed and even if they don't try.

CROCKER: You're right in the sense that there is no court you take an agreement like this to. But they realize they

are bound by the commitments they've made. There is also a termination clause that could be invoked. I'd certainly hate to see it come to that, and I don't think it will. But that's a fairly powerful lever.

MONTAGNE: Clearly, when you talk about this country being transformed from 2014 to 2024, you're talking about a country that will no longer be part of what is, in fact, a false economy. It's an economy where billions of dollars of aid money and military funding has poured into this country. How do you envision that economy?

CROCKER: Part of it will be investment. We brought a trade mission out here in February that is looking at 20-odd million dollars of potential investment.

MONTAGNE: Of what nature?

CROCKER: Some manufacturing. We've got a significant private investment mining and processing marble, because some of the finest marble in the world comes out of Afghanistan. They've signed contracts with the Chinese and the Indians on copper and iron ore deposits, respectively, and they have a wealth of rare earths, like lithium. They've also already taken steps to limit the amount of money that can be exported from the country to \$20,000 and have made a number of seizures out of Kabul Airport.

MONTAGNE: Suitcases filled with billions --

CROCKER: Oh, yeah. Exactly.

MONTAGNE: -- of American dollars out of Kabul into parts unknown -- Dubai, other parts unknown.

CROCKER: Ironically, you know, the fact that vast sums of money have been expatriated may lessen the impact on the overall economy

of the true drawdown, because the money, in many cases, never made it into the Afghan economy. You know, I'm not saying that's a good thing, but it may significantly lessen the blow when we get to the end of 2014.

MONTAGNE: Meaning, of all the billions that poured into this country, enough of it went to make some people rich and didn't find its way into the economy, so that the economy will not be as hurt as it might have been had the money been more honorably distributed.

CROCKER: Absolutely. You know, in many cases, arguably, there was nothing illegitimate about a lot of it. I mean, these were contractors. They made their profits. Capital will go anywhere, where it's the best investment opportunity. That's where the capital will go, and that's what happened in many of these cases.

MONTAGNE: Well, then, let me ask you: There was talk -- certainly before this long-term strategic partnership agreement -- that this country could descend into its past history, basically, another civil war or an insurgency that's so powerful that it would keep out all capital. What's your thinking on that?

CROCKER: I don't see either as a possibility in terms of the civil war scenario. You know, it is a case of been there, done that. Nobody is talking about let's back off into our separate corners and repeat '92-'96.

MONTAGNE: The civil war, 1992 to 1996.

CROCKER: Yeah. And one of the most, I think, important indications of that is how those who play a role in that war are now very much oriented to the center, you know, both vice presidents.

MONTAGNE: They were warlords at some point.

CROCKER: They sure were. They sure were.

MONTAGNE: Tough guys.

CROCKER: Very tough guys.

MONTAGNE: And willing to fight.

CROCKER: Right. And now you're talking to either both of them, it isn't about conflict. It's about, you know, a state that will increasingly be able to secure itself and develop its economy. So I just don't see the elements that could bring about another start to a civil war, another '92. And you know how that happened. When the Soviets withdrew, they left behind a number of advisors to the Afghan security forces of the day and continued to provide financial assistance. And the army did quite well until Soviet funding stopped, and then it fell apart.

MONTAGNE: The army fell apart.

CROCKER: The army fell apart, and the war started. In falling apart, they, you know, everybody headed for their clan, tribe, ethnic group. So, again, why is Chicago important and why is sustaining, over the long term, a credible, capable Afghan national security force, why is it important? That's how you ensure we don't get on another road to 9-11.

MONTAGNE: Where does this country stand in terms of its insurgency?

CROCKER: Well, Secretary Clinton said it pretty well when she said: You know, we can fight and talk at the same time. In other words, you keep whacking them. You get reconciliation when your opponent no longer thinks he's winning, or that he's going to win. So I think it's a combination of the pounding they've taken and, again, the partnership agreement which says if you can't outlast us, we're

not going to win, is probably going to change calculations.

MONTAGNE: Thank you very much, ambassador.

CROCKER: Thank you, Renee. It's great to talk to you again.

MONTAGNE: That's America's ambassador to Afghanistan, Ryan Crocker, speaking with me at the U.S. embassy here in Kabul.

Stars and Stripes

May 15, 2012

Pg. 4

7. Afghan Forces Will Take Control Of Some Volatile Areas

By Matt Millham, Stars and Stripes

KABUL — More details about the third phase of Afghanistan's security transition released Monday indicate that Afghan forces will take the lead in some areas still under persistent threat from insurgents.

The announced transfer of areas such as Helmand province's Nahr-e Saraj district, where British forces are still fighting bloody battles with entrenched Taliban, was in line with ISAF commander Gen. John Allen's desire, expressed in an interview with The Washington Post, to have Afghan forces take charge of some contested areas while coalition troops are available to backstop them.

Still, most of the areas slated for transfer are in more peaceful parts of the country's north and west, including the provinces of Kapisa and Parwan, just north of Kabul. But even in those areas, as in areas already handed over to Afghan control, Afghan forces may face resistance, a coalition spokesman acknowledged.

"Nobody says that the insurgency stops ... in the areas that have been transitioned,"

Brig. Gen. Carsten Jacobson, a spokesman for the U.S.-led International Security Assistance Force, said at a news conference Monday. "That is why it is so important that the big step of Tranche Three is taken now, while ISAF still has quite strong forces in the country."

By transferring some violent areas now, it is hoped that Afghan forces will be better prepared for the last two phases of transition, which will occur after the U.S. has withdrawn all forces associated with the so-called "surge." Those phases, or tranches, will include some of the most hotly contested areas of the country's south and east.

After two previous rounds of handovers, Afghan forces have lead responsibility over areas that house about half the country's population. To varying degrees, coalition forces are still present in those areas to provide air, indirect fire, communications and logistical support.

In Sunday's announcement, Afghan President Hamid Karzai said his country's forces would assume the lead role for securing 122 more districts and cities over the coming months nearly as many as the last two phases combined — bringing the total districts under Afghan control to 260.

Ashraf Ghani, head of Afghanistan's transition commission, said he expects the new round of handovers to be complete within six months.

But significant numbers of coalition forces could remain in those areas to provide backup and support, Jacobson said.

"That will be based on conditions on the ground in the various areas and districts," he said.

The new round of handovers will include Kandahar province's

Arghandab district, an area that saw some of the war's heaviest fighting in 2010, and Helmand's Garmsir district, where a U.S. helicopter responding to an attack on Afghan police crashed last month, killing four U.S. soldiers.

Jacobson acknowledged that some areas in which Afghan forces would take the lead will be "more challenging" than others. But he highlighted the performance of Afghan forces in recent attacks in Kabul, which were squelched by local police and soldiers with little coalition help, as evidence that the country's security forces are improving.

A Pentagon progress report on the Afghan campaign in April described Afghan forces as "exceeding expectations," noting that of 156 Afghan army kandaks, or battalions, 13 are rated as "Independent with Advisors," the highest classification given. Only one army kandak received that classification in the Pentagon's last semi-annual report to Congress.

The Pentagon reported even greater improvement among Afghan police, who six months ago didn't have one unit assessed as "Independent with Advisors." In the latest assessment, 39 units had achieved that rating.

NYTimes.com

May 14, 2012

8. Blast In Afghan Market Kills 9

By Rod Nordland

KABUL, Afghanistan — Nine civilians were killed on Monday when a bomb exploded in a crowded bazaar in northern Afghanistan, Afghan officials said.

A member of the Faryab provincial council was killed and seven others were wounded

by the bomb, which was detonated remotely, according to Said Masod Yaqobi, the spokesman for the provincial police chief in Faryab.

The incident took place at the Ghormach District center in the community's main bazaar, which has about 200 shops. Authorities blamed the attack on Taliban insurgents.

"The enemy doesn't have a constant presence in the district and normally resorts to planting improvised explosive devices and remotely controlled bombs," Mr. Yaqobi said.

He said it was the first attack in the remote area in three months.

"We are still trying to figure out if the main target of the bombing was the killed member of the provincial council, but so far it seems that their target was the civilian shoppers," Mr. Yaqobi said.

Habib Zahori contributed reporting.

The Australian

May 15, 2012

Pg. 11

9. A Tentative Transition

Special forces are likely to stay on to help Afghanistan

By Brendan Nicholson, Defence Editor

ANYONE who thinks Australia's involvement in the Afghan war is all but over is reading the wrong signals.

A tangle of confusing messages from the US, Australia, Afghanistan and, indeed, from across the world have created the wide impression that an unpopular war has been won and it's time for troops from close to 50 nations to come home.

But it is clear that at the NATO summit on Afghanistan next week Australia will make a significant commitment to Afghanistan through a

“strategic partnership” that will include an ongoing military presence, probably with special forces at the heart of it, and considerable financial support to help keep the Afghan forces in the field.

Some level of insurgency, or plain banditry, is likely to continue and, despite all the talk of American withdrawal, a large US-led force of coalition troops will remain for some years to help keep it under control.

Australia will continue to play a substantial role in Afghanistan's artillery school and will provide instructors for a British-run officer training school that has been dubbed a “Sandhurst in the sand”, or “Duntroon in the desert”, by an opposition defence spokesman and former army officer, Stuart Robert, in parliament recently.

Peter Jennings, until recently a deputy secretary in the Defence Department responsible for strategy and now executive director of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, says the insurgency in Afghanistan is likely to continue for some time and coalition special forces will be required to help deal with it.

The US and Afghanistan want Australia to keep some of its very accomplished special forces in Afghanistan for some time, as a significant separate unit or operating within the self-contained American special forces and backed by US helicopters and other support, says Jennings.

Australia will be asked to continue to provide development assistance, which would include improving governance and improving the quality of the Afghan National Police.

President Hamid Karzai announced on Sunday that Australian troops would soon hand over responsibility for security in Oruzgan province

and, for some, the surprise was the inclusion of the whole province in the handover.

It had been expected that some parts of Oruzgan were not yet considered fully secure and Afghan forces there needed continuing support from the Diggers.

The official view is that they will have 12 to 18 months and possibly longer to bring the insurgency in those areas under control.

Australia has 1550 army, navy and RAAF personnel in Afghanistan and several hundred of them are directly involved in training the Afghan forces.

Australia provides the third biggest number of special forces in Afghanistan with its Special Operations Task Group of SAS and commandos. That group varies between 300 and 500 soldiers, depending on requirements, and already ranges widely across southern and eastern Afghanistan in search of Taliban hideouts and weapons caches.

After the transition it is expected that the SAS will coach its Afghan counterparts and, where necessary, carry out operations to prevent insurgents regrouping or massing for large-scale attacks.

There are also air and ground crews for two big Chinook helicopters and teams of explosives and forensic experts with the dangerous role of dealing with the improvised bombs that are the biggest killers of coalition troops and civilians in Afghanistan.

It is not yet clear whether these teams will stay but it's likely some, at least, will be in Afghanistan for some time.

It is also likely that intelligence specialists and operators of the unmanned intelligence-gathering drones, who have given coalition forces a serious edge by providing

warning of attacks, may also be asked to stay on.

Yesterday Julia Gillard built considerable flexibility into her comments when she welcomed Karzai's announcement about Oruzgan.

The Prime Minister said that meant the bulk of Australian forces could be out of Afghanistan in “from 12 to 18 months” but she left room for manoeuvre, saying Australia's previously announced target of completing transition in Oruzgan by the end of 2014, and possibly earlier, was on track.

Australians won't have clear answers until Gillard and Defence Minister Stephen Smith attend next week's NATO summit in Chicago, where our future role in Afghanistan will be mapped out.

In the meantime, it seems that Australian Defence Force numbers in Afghanistan are likely to increase before they drop with a 250-strong “force transition team” to be sent there soon to plan the Diggers' withdrawal and a new role for special forces and others who remain.

By then the Australian focus will swing away from Oruzgan to a nationwide effort based in Kabul.

The budget included funding of more than \$374 million to cover the transition team's work.

As the Diggers' withdrawal gathers pace, the level of involvement of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Australian Federal Police will increase and that will include \$286m in funding across two years to help build a self-reliant and effective Afghan police force and ensure a continued Australian diplomatic presence in Kabul.

If the emphasis is to switch to civil assistance, it is likely that a significant ADF presence

will be needed for some time to protect Australian aid workers.

Coalition planners, who include a significant number of Australian officers, will hold their breaths when the bulk of the troops leave Oruzgan.

Some in Afghanistan predict that once the coalition forces are gone, the Taliban will quickly sweep the Afghan forces away.

Senior Australian army officers insist the Afghan forces will hold their own, though they may well need strong backing from coalition special forces and air support for some time. US officials say more than 4000 former Taliban operatives have joined a peace and reconciliation process. Given the ferocity of the war and the likelihood their former friends will come looking for them, that is a significant number.

The US also reportedly says the number of insurgent attacks has declined for the first time in five years.

But it is clear that Karzai and his Afghan forces are not being handed an oasis of tranquillity.

Estimates of the number of insurgents still out there range up to 30,000 and the US officers admit that the Taliban remains a resilient and determined enemy with sanctuaries in Pakistan.

And one question no one can answer with any certainty is how much of the violence in Afghanistan is generated not directly by coalition forces but simply by the presence of foreign boots on Afghan soil. After 30 years of war, it has become a rite of passage for some Afghan boys turning 18 to go out looking for “American” soldiers to attack.

It's also easy to attribute every attack and atrocity to the Taliban but it is also clear that many other forces are at work in Afghanistan and it's near impossible to work out

how much of the mayhem is genuine insurgency and what is criminal activity from gangs making huge profits from the opium trade that helps fuel the war.

Well-armed groups in some areas run protection rackets and generate income by letting coalition supply convoys through their areas unharmed.

The term Taliban embraces a multitude of sinners and possibly even some saints. While many insurgent groups object to children, especially girls, going to school, other groups in different areas encourage them to seek education.

And while some in the Taliban have initiated peace talks with the Americans and the Karzai government, it is also not clear who is killing the peacemakers.

The US and Afghan government have had talks with Taliban groups and they insist that some insurgents, weary of war, want peace.

But key figures in this process have paid a terrible price.

It is not known who was responsible for last year's assassination of the head of Afghanistan's High Peace Council and former president, Burhanuddin Rabbani, who was killed by a suicide bomber in his own home.

Rabbani was a former mujaheddin leader and national hero in the war against Soviet occupation of Afghanistan.

Now Arsala Rahmani, a former Taliban member who came across to the Afghan government side and who filled in as head of the peace council, has been shot dead.

The assassins may have been insurgents confident of waiting out the coalition to claim military victory, or they may have been jealous political rivals within the

Taliban. They could have been criminal gangs fearing peace would derail lucrative operations or they could have been foreign intelligence services wanting to derail the Afghan administration.

And nothing illustrates the morale-sapping complexity of the war than the killings of coalition soldiers by Afghan troops and police. The Taliban has claimed that it orchestrated some of the 100 or so such killings by planting its people in the Afghan forces or by turning personnel who were already there.

But it is likely that most were spontaneous acts by individuals, sometimes reflecting poor leadership in an Afghan unit.

Coalition investigations have revealed that such incidents can be triggered by instructors using the sort of language a teenage might hear in a war movie, such as "motherf. . ker", which is seen as deeply profane to the Afghan Muslims.

A year ago, coalition officers in Afghanistan were pointing out that it was far from "five minutes to midnight" for the training operation and they had until the end of 2014 to get the Afghan forces into shape. That was three full years -- long enough for nations in World War I to have whole armies raised, trained and wiped out.

But the time available now appears to have been comprehensively whittled back with the deadline of late next year.

The reality is that while enough Afghan forces, army and police, will have been recruited to meet the target of 352,000, they will still require significant logistical support from the coalition for years to come.

And they will almost certainly need the special forces'

backing to head off insurgent attempts to regroup in large numbers.

In the fraught and dangerously unstable environment of Afghanistan, the army and police have to be able to protect themselves and defeat the insurgency on the ground, but these forces must also be imbued with a national ethos rather than a series of tribal ones and it must be disciplined enough to protect the population.

The sort of values held by Western armies for centuries have to be inculcated within a few years into the new Afghan forces, many members of which are illiterate. The consequences of failure will be rapid disintegration or civil war.

The road to sovereignty

Inteqal - the Dari and Pashtu word for transition - is the process by which security responsibility for Afghanistan is gradually transitioned from NATO/ISAF to Afghan leadership.

August 28, 2008: Lead security responsibility for Kabul city transferred to Afghan forces

November 19, 2009: President Hamid Karzai, having won a second term, expresses his ambition to see the Afghan National Security Forces take the lead security responsibility across Afghanistan by the end of 2014

July 20, 2010: Kabul Conference. The Joint Afghan-NATO Inteqal Board is established as the mechanism to assess districts and provinces for transition

November 20, 2010: NATO Lisbon Summit. The Inteqal process is agreed between the Afghan government and NATO

March 22, 2011: Afghan New Year.

President Karzai announces the first set of

Afghan provinces and districts to start the transition process

July 17, 2011: First Transition ceremony takes place in Bamiyan province

November 27, 2011: Karzai announces second set of Afghan provinces, districts and cities to start the transition process

May 13, 2012: Karzai announces a third set of Afghan provinces, districts and cities to start the transition process, including Oruzgan

The latest transition will put Afghan forces in control of security for 75 per cent of the population

Australia's contribution

* Training and mentoring the Afghan National Army 4th Brigade in Oruzgan province to allow transition of lead security responsibility for the province

* Building the capacity of the Afghan National Police to assist with civil policing functions in Oruzgan

* Helping improve the Afghan Government's capacity to deliver core services and generate economic opportunities for its people

* Operations to disrupt insurgent operations and supply routes utilising the Special Operations Task Group

Sources: NATO, Parliamentary Library

NPR.org

May 12, 2012

Weekend Edition Saturday

10. U.S. Military

Mission: Pushing

Afghans To Take Lead

By Tom Bowman

The American military has two main jobs now in Afghanistan: sweeping the remaining Taliban from safe havens and getting Afghan security forces to take charge in the fight.

On a recent day, the Afghan National Army, or ANA, is to

be out front on a joint Afghan-U.S. patrol in the countryside outside Kandahar in southern Afghanistan. It may seem like a small thing, but it's actually a big deal.

Sgt. Matthew McMurray lets his platoon know.

"ANA is going to lead, too. If they don't want to lead, just stop and make them walk ahead of you," he says.

McMurray and his soldiers are based at a combat outpost in the village of Zangabad, outside Kandahar. Its nickname is "Zangaboom" because of the roadside bombs around an open stretch of grape orchards and mud-walled compounds.

The mission this day is to probe just to the south of a Taliban-controlled village. The soldiers squeeze into their armored vehicles - called Strykers - and roll down the region's one paved highway to meet up with their Afghan counterparts.

Pfc. Dylan Reece, like the other Americans, has been in the area for only a month. He already has a mixed view of the Afghan troops.

"They know that they're going to be here forever. So they'll sit around and be like, 'No, we're not going to clear over there today; we'll do it tomorrow.' You can't do that, you got to go," he says with a laugh. "But then when you start taking rounds, their head's back in the game. Then they're warriors again."

There are some tough Afghan units. They fight hard but have trouble planning and supplying themselves in the field. Other Afghan units are reluctant even to go on patrol, the Americans say, and are led by timid officers.

'Still Working On Fundamentals'

The soldiers say the day's patrol is one more test. The convoy continues to roll down

the one paved road. Suddenly, word squawks over the radio: There might not be any Afghan troops going on patrol with the Americans this day.

A collective sigh, but no one is surprised - until the Afghans do show up, driving old Humvees and troop carriers, topped by tattered Afghan flags.

At last, the Americans and Afghans have teamed up. The armored vehicles head down the road, kicking up dust - until one of the American Strykers gets stuck in the mud. And all the troops pile out.

The American soldiers flop on their stomachs against a dirt berm on the side of the road, pointing their weapons toward a village on the horizon. The men scan for any threat.

The Afghan troops are not as concerned. They take off their helmets and stand around in clusters, smoking cigarettes and pulling out their cellphones.

Capt. Chris Longto of Schenectady, N.Y., is leading the mission. He stands on the road watching the Afghans, and smiles.

"We're still working on the fundamentals of pulling security," he says. "We're still working through a lot of that with them."

The Afghan platoon sergeant, Hyatulla Hakimi, stands with his soldiers. When asked why his soldiers seem so relaxed, he says there's no danger in this area - the security is good on this stretch of road - but it's a bit more dangerous ahead.

On Foot, Still Following Orders

The next time the Americans and Afghans stop, it's time to go on patrol - on foot.

The Americans prod the Afghans to go out front. With an Afghan minesweeper in the lead, a long, snaking line of soldiers crosses a stream. They head toward an encampment of

nomadic herders, which Taliban fighters often infiltrate.

The homes are a collection of huts with no doors. Reed mats and blankets cover the floors. Sheep, chickens and small children dart across the dirt. An American fighter plane keeps watch high overhead.

Longto sends the Afghan soldiers to search the camp.

"We don't go into people's homes. So the Afghans will go into the homes by themselves," he says.

The Afghan soldiers search the huts and help the Americans question a tall, bearded man. He is the only military-aged man there, so the Americans wipe his hand with a swab. The man tests positive for nitrates, a key ingredient in roadside bombs.

It's supposed to be an Afghan patrol, but Longto is giving the orders.

"The ANA should do a slightly more thorough search. See if they can find something," he commands.

Soon the Afghans emerge from the hut with something more interesting, a plastic bag full of a black, tarlike substance: heroin.

It's quickly confiscated, and the patrol moves on.

The pattern repeats itself all afternoon: The patrol arrives at a mud compound. The Afghans lead the search. And the Americans tell them they didn't do it right.

Will They Be Ready?

Finally, the sun is starting to set. The patrol is over.

McMurray, the platoon leader, has been in the area for a little over a month; he says that he is already frustrated. Training the Afghan troops, he says, will take a long time.

"We have to keep pushing them," McMurray says.

And when will the Afghan troops be ready?

"The ANA is a new army," says Afghan Brig. Gen. Ahmed

Habbibi, who commands the Afghan army in this area. He adds that they need training and equipment.

But he never answers whether his troops will be ready when the American combat mission ends in 2014.

When the same question is posed to Lt. Col. Wilson Rutherford, the American commander at Zangabad, he has this reply: "The answer for that is they'll have every opportunity to be successful."

Rutherford is pushing that process along. He was able to get Habbibi to fire two Afghan army commanders for incompetence.

"They understand they have to win," Rutherford says. "They have to get it right."

The Afghans have two more years to make that happen.

New York Times
May 15, 2012
Pg. 5

11. Beyond The Sandbags And Steel, 12 Lanes To Another Afghanistan

By Rod Nordland

KABUL, Afghanistan — Behind the black door in downtown Kabul is a place unlike any other in this city, even in the whole country.

It is an entertainment setting without alcohol — guards inside the half-ton fortified steel door turn away anyone with a trace of it on their breath. Patrons have to surrender even their cigarettes, which are put for safekeeping in lockers, along with the usual array of weaponry carried by some Afghan visitors.

From outside, it is marked only by a simple sign over the door that reads "Strikers." Beyond the gate, a covered, sandbagged driveway leads well away from the public

road — a precaution against bombers.

Inside, though, it is another world. A capacious and fastidiously clean restaurant space greets you. Walking past a wall of cubbyholes with crisp new bowling shoes in assorted sizes, you reach the main hall, with 12 lanes fitted with Brunswick pinsetters and multihued Day-Glo balls clacking out of the return races. A brightly colored sign above the pins shouts "Advertise Here."

Welcome to Afghanistan's first bowling alley.

The tale of how Strikers made Afghanistan the 91st country with a modern 10-pin bowling alley seems to be that rarest of things, an Afghan good news story. So far it has remained one, save for a spoilsport or two.

Though Strikers' opening last fall was the country's introduction to bowling, most of the bowlers now are Afghans, not expatriates. Strikers was started by an Afghan, not a foreigner. It was built with Afghan money, not funneled-off international aid. And the founder and owner is a 28-year-old woman, Meena Rahmani, who has managed to keep her mostly male staff of 25 working well despite Afghan society's deep bias against women.

"I knew how hard it would be," she said. "I'd be in a difficult condition with the labor, but it's my right, and if they get offended, I can't help that. I'm the boss."

Starting out, a few workers did not take well to the situation, and she fired them. "I made them respect me," she said.

Ms. Rahmani grew up as a refugee in Pakistan and later in Canada. She married a young Afghan man, and they lived in Toronto until they decided to return to Kabul last year.

The long Canadian winters indirectly provided the inspiration — besides skiing, there was nothing much to do but bowling, she said. When they arrived in Kabul, the first thing she noticed was how little opportunity there was to have fun. "I really found nothing in the entertainment sector, a place where everybody, children, even women could get affordable time out," she said.

So she persuaded her parents to let her sell some family land in Kabul (her father is a doctor, her mother a university lecturer), and she put up \$1 million to bring in the equipment from China, as well as three technicians from Brunswick to train her staff.

People took to it quickly, and soon Thursday and Friday nights, the big weekend nights here, were mobbed with bowlers. Even on a recent workday afternoon, a group of 40 Asia Foundation staff members, mostly Afghans, filled the lanes.

Ms. Rahmani said that what really amazed her, though, was to stumble onto an unsuspected bowling aptitude among Afghans, with several relative neophytes rolling respectable scores, even in the 200s.

One of those naturals was Karim Yusufi, a 26-year-old sales executive at the cellphone company Roshan. A friend invited him to bowl and taught him the basics, Mr. Yusufi said. "Then he said: 'We have to bet on it. If you have the low score, you pay,'" he said.

The lane fees — \$35 an hour — are not cheap by Afghan standards, though a lane accommodates six bowlers. Mr. Yusufi rolled 120 that first night, far higher than his gutter-hugging teacher, and the rest is Strikers history.

Mr. Yusufi went on to become a regular, but in the past

six months he has yet to pay the lane fees himself, since he always wins the wager, he said. Lest anyone think he is a ringer, he still cheerfully says, "Let's play bowling!"

As Strikers' top scorer, with a 214 game, Mr. Yusufi has his picture posted both on the bowling alley's wall and on its Facebook page. A travel agent has offered a free week in Dubai to the first person to best his score.

It has not all been smooth going. Ms. Rahmani was shocked by the rampant corruption as she dealt with local officials for permits and permissions. "After Canada, this was odd to me," she said. "Every step I went, they were asking for money. Every day, knocking on the door and asking for money."

Her guards caught two men who were detaching parts from customers' cars (the car parts bazaar here often helpfully sells victims their own mirrors and wipers back). The guards turned the thieves over to the police, and a block away they saw the officers take money to release them, Ms. Rahmani said.

Inside, Ms. Rahmani soon realized she needed a whip hand with a few of the customers, and she put up a warning sign: "Do not show your ugly side to our peacekeeping security staff." That staff included a couple of plainclothes officers in the bowling hall and a vigilant door crew that made sure young men were there only for bowling — if they brought women, they had to prove they were related.

"I'm very aware of our culture, and I value whatever is included in our culture," Ms. Rahmani said. There are precious few activities in Kabul that involve both sexes, even in family settings, and the last thing she would want to see is a fatwa against bowling.

It is obvious even to new visitors that people are having fun on the lanes, even if the records they are merrily breaking are on the low side. (According to the computerized scoring equipment, 14 is the lowest score so far — perhaps as difficult an achievement, in its way, as Mr. Yusufi's 214.) And the noise of the lanes is sometimes punctuated by the mortarlike thud of balls that fly nearly as far as they roll.

"It's cool," said Ali Sadaqat, who brushed aside suggestions of using Strikers' free coach. He was leading his foursome, all first-timers, with 16 after the third frame. "This is the first time Afghans are playing a game in Afghanistan, other than cricket," he said.

Although bowling is not an Olympic sport, Ms. Rahmani approached the Afghan Olympic Committee to register with the organization — she said she thought it would be an honor. She ran into trouble, though: an official there promptly asked her to turn over a share of her company in return for her registration, she said. She refused.

"Are they crazy? This is my company," she said. "We don't need that honor."

An official at the committee denied Ms. Rahmani's account. But he warned that the bowling alley, like all sports clubs in Afghanistan, was required to register with the committee and could be declared an illegal operation if it did not.

"The bowling game is not officially recognized as a sport by the Afghan Olympic Committee yet," said the official, Ghulam Jelani Ghrob. All new sports need to be evaluated by the committee, he said, to see what their social consequences may be.

"God forbid, we should avoid these kinds of sport clubs'

being used as a place for moral deviation," Mr. Ghrob said.

Ms. Rahmani said she was aware that she had opened the bowling alley at a difficult time, and not just because of red tape and corruption. As the international presence in the country begins to retract, more businesses are closing down than opening up.

"The war in Afghanistan has been going on since before I was born. We have no idea if it's going to end someday," she said. "We just have to carry on."

Fayetteville (NC) Observer
May 15, 2012

With The Troops

12. Steak Day Serves Up A Taste Of Home

By Drew Brooks, Staff writer

BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan -- At 10 a.m., the first steak hit the grill.

As the smell wafted across Bagram Airfield, a soldier somewhere remembered the day of the week.

In Afghanistan, Friday is steak day.

The grind of the deployment makes many days blend together. But on Friday, hundreds of soldiers are on the same page. That's when dining facilities across the theater serve steak and lobster as a way to boost morale.

At Bagram, one of the base's smallest dining halls gets the most attention on Friday.

The Pegasus Inn is the only dining hall in eastern Afghanistan run by soldiers. It is operated by Fort Bragg's 82nd Combat Aviation Brigade. And for a few hours each Friday evening, the 350-seat building is overrun by service members from various branches and countries, many of whom wait more than 30 minutes just to get in the door.

Earlier this month, the dining hall served more than

1,000 people on a Friday - when the menu traditionally includes New York strip, lobster tail and crab legs.

"They smell it," said Staff Sgt. Dwan James, shift leader at Pegasus Inn. "That tells them what day of the week it is."

It's 9:30 a.m. when Spc. Gabriele Harper and Pvt. Lazonio Anderson show up for work. They begin prepping a custom-made grill that can be towed to the Pegasus Inn. Within 30 minutes, the first of more than 1,000 steaks will be licked by the charcoal-powered flames.

Flash forward to 4:30 p.m. and a line has begun forming outside the dining hall.

By the time the doors open, the line will have snaked through a shaded walkway and back around the building. At its busiest, the line will back up past a nearby post office.

"We're their morale booster," said Spc. Melanie Credle, who was grilling asparagus in preparation for the dinner.

For as long as many soldiers can remember, Friday has been steak day in Afghanistan.

At the Pegasus Inn, the service members have the added bonus of seeing familiar faces - soldiers are the cooks and servers. And on Fridays, senior leadership within the 82nd Combat Aviation Brigade take turns scooping mashed potatoes and fried rice.

"There's a lot of people that feel at ease when they're over here," James said.

The dining hall manager, Sgt. 1st Class Michael Reid, said many service members are surprised to find a facility run by soldiers, especially in a war that has created thousands of jobs for civilian contractors.

"They don't know we're here," he said. "But when they

do, they'd rather eat here. We have more American fare."

Inside the dining hall, three soldiers who waited more than 20 minutes in line were munching away on crab legs.

Spc. Devaughn Mason, Spc. Courtney Moon and Staff Sgt. Rolanda Johnson said the food is well worth the wait, even though the main course would be the same elsewhere on base.

"The food isn't as good as those others," Mason said. "It's bland."

Back at the grill, Harper and Anderson cooked about 100 steaks at a time - busily flipping and prodding the seasoned meat while wiping sweat from their brows in the Afghan heat.

"It comes naturally," Anderson said.

Both soldiers come from Southern homes where a home-cooked meal was the norm.

"We've done this for seven months," Harper said. "We've got it down."

On Fridays, the two might be the most popular soldiers in Bagram. Not only do hundreds line up to eat their cooking, but many try to buddy up to them to get an early start on the feast.

The standard reply: wait like everyone else.

"We take a lot of pride in this," Anderson said. "The soldiers love these."

Philadelphia Inquirer
May 15, 2012
Pg. B1

13. Woman To Accept Medal Of Honor 4 Decades After Husband's Death

By Associated Press

HICKORY, Pa. — Rose Mary Sabo-Brown's "museum" is getting one more piece of hardware.

Sabo-Brown will accept the Medal of Honor, the nation's highest military decoration, on behalf of her late husband,

Spec. Leslie H. Sabo Jr., four decades after he was killed while protecting his comrades from an ambush in Cambodia during the Vietnam War.

President Obama will present the medal to Sabo-Brown, of Hickory, and her brother-in-law, George Sabo, who lives near Detroit, at a White House ceremony Wednesday, the Pittsburgh Tribune-review reported.

"A piece of metal won't bring back my husband," Sabo-Brown told the newspaper. "But my heart beams with pride for Leslie because he's finally getting what's due to him. I will show it proudly for him for the rest of my life."

The 22-year-old Army rifleman, who grew up in Ellwood City, was killed in Se San, Cambodia, on May 10, 1970. According to the White House, Sabo charged an enemy bunker after his platoon came under attack, killing several enemy soldiers while drawing fire away from his comrades.

Sabo then picked up an enemy grenade that landed nearby, threw it, and shielded a wounded comrade from the blast. Though wounded, Sabo renewed his charge and was shot. He crawled toward the bunker and threw a grenade into it, silencing enemy fire. He died in the blast.

"His indomitable courage and complete disregard for his own safety saved the lives of many of his platoon members," the White House said.

The Medal of Honor has been awarded to fewer than 3,500 people since the Civil War, including about 250 who served in Vietnam.

Sabo's widow plans to display a replica of the medal in her living room, a place she calls the "museum" because it's filled with photos and other memorabilia of her husband's

life. The real medal will be kept in a safe-deposit box.

Sabo met his eventual wife at a high school football game and proposed on June 13, 1968. He was subsequently drafted, but the military permitted Sabo to return to Ellwood City to get married. He was with his new bride for a month before returning to duty.

"We were together for 31 days. I never saw him again," said Sabo-Brown, who later remarried and had two children before divorcing her second husband. "It's a sick feeling that never goes away."

Washington Times

May 15, 2012

Pg. 1

14. Women Closer To The Front Lines

Pentagon opens 14,000 support jobs to female troops

By Kristina Wong, The Washington Times

Pentagon policies bar Staff Sgt. Marie Martinson from direct ground combat, but she nonetheless has taken on the No. 1 killer of troops in Afghanistan: improvised explosive devices, or IEDS.

What's more, disabling and dismantling roadside bombs is a job she loves.

"Defeating enemy IEDS? There's a rush you can't get any other way," says Sgt. Martinson, 29.

She is one of about 50 women who serve in the Air Force's 1,050 explosive-ordnance disposal technician positions — jobs that have taken female troops close to the front lines for years.

On Monday, the Pentagon opened for female troops about 14,000 support positions that previously had been withheld from them, allowing women to fill jobs below the brigade level.

Though still banned from ground combat roles, women

have more opportunities to serve in units closer to battlefields.

A veteran of 4.5 years, Sgt. Martinson is one of two female bomb techs in the 88th Air Base Wing Explosive Ordnance Disposal unit at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Ohio, and has been deployed twice to Afghanistan.

Roadside bombs "are their No. 1 weapon against us," Sgt. Martinson says of Taliban fighters and insurgents. "To be the one that's able to go and defeat that and be able to take them out ... it's very rewarding."

'There are no front lines'

The Air Force has long allowed women to be assigned to about 99 percent of its positions, so most of the new jobs for women have opened in the Marine Corps, the Navy and the Army.

The Marines opened 371 positions to women, and will allow female volunteers to participate in an officer infantry course as part of a research project this summer.

The Navy opened 60 positions, and the Army 13,139.

Women account for about 14.5 percent of the 1.4 million active-duty force.

Two years ago, Congress ordered a review of the Pentagon's policies on women in combat, spurred by reports of heroism by female troops in Afghanistan and Iraq — wars that often featured no clearly defined front lines.

Of the 6,376 U.S. military personnel who have died in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, 144 have been women.

"The last 11 years of warfare have really revealed to us there are no front lines," Brig. Gen. Barrye Price, director of human resources policy for the Army. "There are no rear echelons. Everybody was vulnerable to the influence of the enemy."

However, the Pentagon is maintaining its ban on women in combat roles, despite the recommendation of a blue-ribbon panel set up by a then-Democrat-controlled Congress in 2009.

The Military Leadership Diversity Commission, a group of civilians and active-duty and retired military members, recommended to President Obama a year ago that he remove all job barriers for women.

The last time the Pentagon reviewed women's roles was in 1994, three years after the Persian Gulf War. President Clinton lifted the ban on women serving on combat aircraft and ships.

Tough standards

For Sgt. Martinson, the question about whether women should serve in combat is moot: She says there are plenty of female troops already engaged in combat.

"We're not in jobs that are described as a combat jobs. But when you're out there, the enemy brings the fight to you. And we do fight back," she says. And she is ever ready to fight. Standing 5 feet 7 inches and weighing 150 pounds, Sgt. Martinson carries her 80-pound pack of ammunition, tools, firearms, body armor, food, water and explosives into the field on missions, just like her male counterparts.

In addition, she also often carries the 35-pound robot that detects and destroys roadside bombs.

Out in the field, "it's miserable, hot — really hot, like 110 degrees. You're sleeping in the dirt. But I don't know, some people like it," she says.

Training to become a bomb tech is an arduous endeavor: Recruits must endure a rigorous monthlong course that weeds out those unsuitable for the work.

Only then does the real explosive-ordnance disposal training actually begin — a nine-month course that pushes recruits to their physical, psychological and emotional limits as they learn how to handle and defuse everything from Civil War-era cannonballs to nuclear weapons.

Sgt. Martinson says no standards — physical or otherwise — should be lowered to accommodate women.

"I don't think it's about being a boy or a girl," she says. "It's 'Do you meet those standards?' Can you do three pull-ups and run that fast?"

When deployed, she usually works in a team of three, usually with two male bomb techs attached to Army infantry units. Just last week, she completed her first mission as team leader — the bomb tech who wears the cumbersome protective suit and makes all of the decisions during a mission.

She says the primary emotion she experiences while disabling an explosive is not fear, but frustration.

"It's too hot, the robot's not working right, someone got through the cordon — a local will walk right past it, and you get mad. We're just focused on the actual item."

Sgt. Martinson says civilians often are surprised to find out what she does for a living. Many say, "I didn't know there were girls in the bomb squad," she says.

When she wears a bomb-tech sweatshirt, some will ask her if her boyfriend is in an explosive-ordnance disposal unit.

"Yes, he is, but so am I," she says.

Reuters.com
May 14, 2012

15. 8,000 Contractors Said Eligible For US Cyber Guard

By Jim Wolf, Reuters

WASHINGTON -- Up to 8,000 companies doing business with the Pentagon may be qualified to join a newly expanded U.S. effort to guard sensitive information on private networks, a senior Defense Department official said Monday.

The Pentagon on Friday invited all of its eligible contractors to join the voluntary pact aimed at fighting what U.S. officials have described as growing cyber threats that allegedly originate, above all, in Russia and China.

The Defense Department will provide intelligence-derived information on malicious Internet traffic to the companies; the firms are to share information on any cyber penetrations of their networks with the government.

"We think there are as many as 8,000 that are already cleared and could be participants in the program," Richard Hale, the department's deputy chief information officer, said in a teleconference.

Perhaps 1,000 companies are expected to take part in the permanent new program initially and if it grows beyond this, "We would be pleased," he said.

The trial program began in 2007 and had been capped until last week at 36 participants. Of the three dozen, 17 had opted for an enhanced effort, begun about a year ago, under which their Internet service providers scanned their incoming traffic based on information provided by the National Security Agency, the communications-intercepting Pentagon arm.

Eric Rosenbach, deputy assistant secretary of defense for cyber policy, said

companies that make up the so-called defense industrial base had been under "unrelenting attack from sophisticated actors trying to steal intellectual property and sensitive information."

The service was not intended as a "silver bullet" to thwart cyber threats but a promising link of public and private interests, he said. He added that it could be readily scaled to help guard crucial U.S. infrastructure - power grids, financial networks, transportation services - if a decision to do so were made by the White House.

Three Internet service providers currently are providing filtering and remediation services using specialized intelligence on a pay-for-service basis, Rosenbach told the teleconference.

He declined to name the trio, citing what he called their preference in the matter. The intelligence information involved was relayed by the Defense Department to the Department of Homeland Security, which is responsible for dealing with the service providers, Rosenbach said.

Verizon Communications Inc is participating, Richard Young, a company spokesman, said by email. AT&T Inc and CenturyLink Inc - the two others widely reported to round out the group - did not return requests for comment.

Rosenbach said no "personally identifiable information" was being passed back to the government by the providers of the enhanced cybersecurity service.

The basic service is a kind of alert to cyber threats and suggestions for remedying them. To be eligible, a company must be cleared by the Pentagon to store classified information

on its networks and premises up to at least the "Secret" level.

Privacy and civil liberties had been front and center during development of the program, reviewed by the Justice Department and by privacy experts within the U.S. government, Rosenbach said.

The cyber threat to U.S. aerospace, defense and other high-technology companies is increasing at "a rapid and accelerating rate," Rear Admiral Samuel Cox, director of intelligence for the military's Cyber Command, told a conference last month.

The Office of the National Counterintelligence Executive, a U.S. intelligence arm, said in an unclassified report to Congress in October that China and Russia were in the forefront of keyboard-launched theft of U.S. trade and technology secrets.

New York Post

May 14, 2012

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Exclusive

16. 9/11 Kin's Shocking Mission At Guantanamo To Spare Plotters

'Just because I was hurt does not give me the go-ahead to take a life'

By Josh Margolin

The husband of a woman killed on 9/11 went to Guantanamo Bay on a shocking secret mission - to try to save the lives of the al-Qaeda monsters who planned the murder.

Blake Allison - one of 10 relatives of victims to win a lottery for tickets to the arraignment of confessed 9/11 mastermind Khalid Sheikh Mohammed and four of his evil accomplices - had told people he was making the trip because "I wanted to see the faces of the people accused of murdering my wife."

But while there, the 62-year-old wine-company executive held a clandestine meeting with the terrorists' lawyers, in which he offered to testify against putting their clients to death.

A vocal critic of capital punishment, Allison wants to convince the US government to spare the lives of KSM and his minions even if a military commission convicts them of a slew of death-penalty charges.

"The public needs to know there are family members out there who do not hold the view that these men should be put to death," Allison told The Post.

"We can't kill our way to a peaceful tomorrow."

Allison's 48-year-old wife, Anna, was a software consultant on her way to visit a client in Los Angeles when her plane, American Airlines Flight 11, was smashed into World Trade Center Tower 1 on Sept. 11, 2001.

In a lengthy conversation from his home in New Hampshire, Allison explained his controversial view - one he admits is not shared by his late wife's relatives or by the other family members of victims he met at Guantanamo.

"My opposition to the death penalty does not say I don't want the people who killed my wife and [the other 911 victims] brought to account for their crimes," he said.

"But for me, opposition to the death penalty is not situational. Just because I was hurt very badly and personally does not, in my mind, give me the go-ahead to take a life."

He said that "9/11 was a particularly egregious and appalling crime," but added, "I just think it's wrong to take a life."

Allison, who has remarried, is under no illusion that the terrorists have reformed - and

would not gladly kill more Americans.

After staring at the fiendish faces of KSM, Ramzi bin al Shibh, Walid bin Attash, Mustafa al-Hawsawi and KSM nephew Ali Abdul Aziz Ali, Allison said he is certain they have "no apparent remorse and would do it again."

Still, he said, "I've been opposed to the death penalty for decades, before my wife was murdered on 9/11.

"I'm still opposed to it."

He said he spoke to other family members at Guantanamo and came to realize he was alone in his view.

"I know they're sincere in their beliefs," he said.

"They want what they perceive as justice for their loved ones. I would never tell anybody in my position what they should feel."

The defense lawyers were pleased, but probably not terribly surprised to see him.

Allison had previously testified on behalf of 9/11 conspirator Zacarias Moussaoui - the so-called 20th hijacker - who had faced the death penalty but was sentenced to a life term, which he's serving in the Supermax prison in Colorado.

Allison said his hourlong meeting with the defense lawyers took place May 4, the day before the terror thugs were arraigned.

He quoted one of the attorneys as telling him, "We want you to understand now that there are probably going to be some things we do that are really going to upset you. But believe me, we are not doing anything with the intention of hurting you."

He believes they were alerting him to the "gamesmanship involved in their courtroom tactics."

He singled out defense attorney Cheryl Borman, who dressed in traditional Muslim

garb, leaving only her face uncovered, and who asked that all women in the courtroom be ordered to dress modestly for the sake of the five defendants.

"She looked like the angel of death, this black shrouded figure, as she got up and walked up and back in the courtroom," Allison recalled.

KSM and his cohorts employed a variety of tactics to turn the proceedings into a circus.

They refused to wear earphones so they could hear an Arabic translation of the hearing. Then they would not respond to questions from the judge or even cooperate with their attorneys.

They shouted out, stood up, bowed down and prayed.

In a particularly sick and tasteless gesture, bin Attash made a paper airplane and interrupted the session by resting it on a microphone.

He later ticked off the judge by tearing off his shirt to show scars he said he suffered in beatings from guards at Gitmo.

All the while, their lawyers questioned the judge's credentials and the validity of the military commission, and kept bringing up accusations of torture.

But none of that kept Allison from wanting to help.

He said his opposition to execution is rooted in his Episcopalian faith.

"When Martin Luther was being asked to recant by the hierarchy of the Roman church for all his Protestant actions, he said, 'Here I stand. I can't do otherwise.'

"That's the way I feel. First and foremost, I don't think it's right to take a life. It's grounded in my religious faith. The New Testament is very clear about this."

Allison also said he is not convinced that the military-commission system is

a legitimate way of trying accused terrorists.

He said he would have been more comfortable if the men were put on trial in a federal courthouse, as President Obama originally proposed.

"I'm going to try to keep an open mind about this process. I'm very skeptical about this. I know there have been changes to the commission but I'm going to keep an open mind," he said.

Allison said he also worries whether military prosecutors will carry out a pledge to keep out all evidence obtained through torture.

"Can the prosecutors credibly say that their evidence remains free of taint?" he asked.

New London (CT) Day
May 15, 2012

17. Two Female Submariners Found Guilty Of Financial Fraud

By Jennifer McDermott

Two of the first female submariners in the U.S. Navy have been found guilty of financial misconduct in connection with fraudulent travel expense claims.

Both were charged under the Uniform Code of Military Justice and found guilty of fraud and conduct unbecoming a naval officer at a disciplinary hearing, Cmdr. Monica Rousselow, spokeswoman for the commander of the submarine force, said Monday.

One of the women also was found guilty of falsifying an official statement, she said.

The travel claim fraud involved about \$4,500 per officer and occurred before the women, who were supply officers, reported to their submariners, Rousselow said.

Rear Adm. Joseph E. Tofalo, commander of Submarine Group 10, conducted the "masts," or

hearings, at Kings Bay, Ga. The Naval Criminal Investigative Service led the investigation.

The submarine force said in March that three of the first female submariners would be taken off their submarines during an investigation into alleged financial misconduct. The third woman later was found not to have been involved in the misconduct, and she returned to her boat, Rousselow said.

The two who were found guilty were reassigned to the Naval Submarine Support Center and Trident Refit Facility Kings at Kings Bay. The Navy Personnel Command will determine whether they remain in the service, Rousselow said.

Other Navy personnel who were not assigned to submarines were thought to be involved in the misconduct. NCIS confirmed Monday there were two other cases. One is ongoing, and no charges have been filed so far. In the other case, the Navy decided not to prosecute, according to NCIS.

The women involved were not identified because of federal privacy laws. Typically only those in leadership positions who are involved in wrongdoing are named, Rousselow said.

A female alternate who went through the training took the place of one of the women. The other woman will be replaced when the next group of female submariners graduates.

Rousselow said the incident had a "minimal" impact on the integration of women on submarines.

"Our feedback from the fleet continues to be that the women who are already assigned are integrating nicely and on track with their qualifications," she said.

May 14, 2012

18. \$2.2 Million Sub Mishap Was 'Avoidable,' Report Says

By Sam Fellman, Staff writer

The crew heard the sound as soon as they rolled the propulsion shaft — Whump! Whump! Whump! — but rather than shut it down, they kept the shaft spinning at various speeds for days trying to figure out the problem.

Their “catastrophic” mistakes, a new Navy report concludes, sidelined the guided-missile submarine Georgia for three months, locking it up in the shipyard for repairs when it should have deployed for operations against Libya in early 2011. It also cost an officer and a senior sailor in engineering their jobs, and three crew members went to mast for dereliction of duty; three others earned non-punitive letters of caution.

All because of a single bolt worth a few dollars or less.

Ignoring standard operating procedures and common sense, the crew kept turning the engines and shaft at varying speeds over the next two days in a vain effort to find the cause.

According to the command investigation, obtained by Navy Times through a Freedom of Information Act request and signed by Vice Adm. John Richardson, head of Submarine Forces, the bolt was accidentally left in Georgia’s gear housing during a routine inspection in December as a result of inadequate preps and oversight for the annual reduction gear inspection.

“This was an avoidable mishap,” Richardson wrote in his July 19 letter closing the investigation into the first known instance of main reduction gear damage on a submarine in three years.

“Had watch-standing principles of integrity, formality, procedural compliance, level of knowledge, questioning attitude and forceful backup been responsibly adhered to and executed, this incident would not have occurred and the ship would have deployed on time.”

The continued rotation of the shafts and gears after the noise was heard likely made the damage more severe, Richardson noted.

Failing to deploy was critical because the NATO mission against Libya needed missile-launching capability. Georgia’s sister sub, Florida, fired more than 90 Tomahawks in the operation — the first by a guided-missile sub.

Richardson discussed the incident last summer at a call for all Kings Bay-based commanding officers, executive officers, chiefs of the boat, department heads and engineering department master chiefs.

“The submarine force must recognize important lessons when they present themselves,” Richardson noted.

Navy officials would not release the names of those disciplined, citing privacy concerns.

The last instance of MRG damage in the submarine force was in 2008 on the Los Angeles-class attack sub San Juan, when a foreign object was believed to have fallen into the reduction gears without technicians’ knowledge, the investigation noted.

These inspections are nothing new. All of the Navy’s 283 ships and submarines conduct periodic inspections inside their main reduction gear assemblies to check the critical machinery for signs of wear and tear. Procedures are strict, and the steps are briefed: Leaders must oversee the opening of the casing. A tent

is put up around the opening so overhead objects can’t fall in, and a security watch is set up. A log tracks all items brought in and out. Tools hang on lanyards. Crew, engineers and technicians tape down their coveralls and remove all personal items, like rings, pens and watches.

But when Georgia was preparing for its Dec. 28, 2010, inspection, none of the technicians or supervisors reviewed the maintenance procedures in detail prior to starting, the report said.

Other findings: Oversight was insufficient, the inspection was performed without a sense of urgency, and participants had not been trained for the procedure.

Capt. Tracy Howard, then-commander of Submarine Squadron 16, wrote in his review of the investigation: “I conclude the ship demonstrated inadequate sensitivity to the risks inherent with a MRG inspection, as manifested by the inadequate preparations, supervisory presence and imprecise execution, which directly resulted in foreign material introduction.”

The sub’s remedy — continuing to turn the shafts after an abnormal noise was heard — made the situation worse.

A former submarine captain, after being told key findings from the report, agreed.

“How could you think that that’s not going to do additional damage?” he wondered. “If bombs weren’t coming down on Kings Bay, Ga. — and I expect they weren’t — what do you have to lose by taking the conservative path, tripping out the main engines, locking the shaft and calling for help?”

A second retired officer, who like the first asked for anonymity in order to comment, said: “That just shocks me.

It’s difficult to see how people could be desensitized to something like opening up the reduction gear.”

GovExec.com

May 14, 2012

19. Panel Rejects Proposals To Raise Military Retirees' Health Care Premiums

By Kellie Lunney

At the same time the House passed a bill requiring civilian federal employees to contribute more to their pensions, lawmakers on the Armed Services Committee rejected the Obama administration’s proposals to increase the amount military retirees pay for their health care insurance.

The committee advanced the fiscal 2013 National Defense Authorization Act Thursday, approving a 1.7 percent pay raise for military service members next year as well as limiting increases to enrollee pharmacy co-pays under the TRICARE program. A fact sheet from Armed Services called the TRICARE-related hikes in the markup “modest” vis-à-vis the administration’s recommendations for the program outlined in its fiscal 2013 budget proposal.

The panel’s bill would increase co-pays for brand and nonformulary drugs in 2013, ranging from an additional \$4 to \$19 either monthly or every three months, depending on the enrollee’s prescription refill schedule. It also would cap pharmacy co-pays beginning in 2014 so that such fees are in line with the annual retiree cost-of-living adjustment. The costs associated with the fee increases would be offset by a five-year pilot program requiring TRICARE for Life recipients to obtain maintenance drug refills through the mail.

But the panel rejected the administration's recommendations to raise premiums for military retirees based on their retirement pay, among other fee hikes. "These proposals went too far and were not included in the bill," committee Republicans said in a statement. TRICARE serves 9.3 million beneficiaries, including 5.5 million military retirees.

Under Obama's plan, premiums for TRICARE retirees under the family plan would increase between \$31 and \$128 per month, with those in the upper-income bracket seeing the biggest hike. The White House in its budget recommendations also proposed new co-pays, initiation of standard and extra annual enrollment fees, and adjustments to deductibles and catastrophic coverage caps, all in an effort to keep pace with medical inflation. The president proposed increases for drug co-payments in the brand and nonformulary categories that range from an additional \$14 to \$26 per month or every three months, depending on the refill schedule.

TRICARE beneficiaries would retain the \$5 monthly co-pay for generic drugs under both the House and administration proposals.

The administration said its recommended changes to TRICARE would save the Defense Department an estimated \$12.9 billion in discretionary funding and generate \$4.7 billion in mandatory savings on Medicare-eligible retiree health care over the next five years. It is projected to save the department \$12.1 billion over the next 10 years.

Increasing health care costs for service members and retirees has long been a politically sensitive subject, with lawmakers and military

advocates wary of appearing ungrateful for the sacrifices of service members. Participant fees under TRICARE were set in 1995 and have remained at \$460 per year for the basic family plan. "This has become one of those third-rail issues in American politics," said Todd Harrison, a senior fellow at the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, who follows Defense issues.

Defense implemented TRICARE Prime fee increases for new retiree enrollees beginning in fiscal 2012. New beneficiaries in TRICARE Prime now pay an additional \$2.50 per month for individual members and \$5 per month for family enrollment -- bringing the total annual fee to \$260 and \$520, respectively. Costs for retirees already in the program, as well as survivors of active-duty service members and medically retired participants, remain at \$230 per year for individuals and \$460 per year for families.

Like most federal agencies, Defense is under pressure to cut costs and streamline its operations. The \$554 billion authorization bill Armed Services approved is \$3.7 billion more than Obama's 2013 request, which has put lawmakers and administration officials at odds over where and how to make budget cuts. "They [committee lawmakers] are making the cost of military personnel higher than it would have been under the president's request," said Harrison. That means the department and Congress will have to come up with savings elsewhere, possibly in areas such as troop readiness, research and development, or procurement, he added.

The Senate's version of the authorization legislation, including the provisions related to TRICARE, likely will be

different from the House version, Harrison said. As it relates to TRICARE, the Senate's bill will look more like the administration's plan, according to Harrison. "They'll be more inclined to let some of these savings stand," he said.

Danger Room (Wired.com)
May 14, 2012

20. Republicans Order Navy To Quit Buying Biofuels

By Noah Shachtman

On Monday, the U.S. Navy will officially announce the ships for its demonstration of the "Great Green Fleet" — an entire aircraft carrier strike group powered by biofuels and other eco-friendly energy sources. If a powerful congressional panel has its way, it could be the last time the Navy ever uses biofuels to run its ships and jets.

In its report on next year's Pentagon budget, the House Armed Services Committee banned the Defense Department from making or buying an alternative fuel that costs more than a "traditional fossil fuel." It's a standard that may be almost impossible to meet, energy experts believe; there's almost no way the tiny, experimental biofuel industry can hope to compete on price with the massive, century-old fossil fuels business.

Committee Republicans, like Rep. Randy Forbes, insist this isn't an attempt to kill off military biofuels before they have a chance to start. "Now, look, I love green energy," he said in February. "It's a matter of priorities."

But if the measure becomes law, it would make it all-but-inconceivable for the Pentagon to buy the renewable fuels. It would likely scuttle one of the top priorities of Navy Secretary Ray Mabus. And it

might very well suffocate the gasping biofuel industry, which was looking to the Pentagon to help it survive.

"We'd be years behind if it wasn't for the military," said Tom Todaro, a leading biofuel entrepreneur whose companies have supplied the military with tens of thousands of gallons of fuel made from mustard seeds.

When Mabus took over as Navy Secretary, he declared that the service would get half of its energy from sources other than oil by 2020. The two-day Great Green Fleet demo, scheduled for the end of June in Hawaii, is supposed to be the biggest step yet towards that beyond-ambitious goal.

The destroyers *USS Chafee* and *Chung Hoon* will plow through the Pacific and F/A-18 jets will scream off of the *USS Nimitz's* flight deck, all thanks to a 50/50 blend of alternative and traditional fuel. It'll not only show the world that the Pentagon is serious about biofuels — a full-scale Green Fleet deployment is scheduled for 2016. It'll also serve as a signal to skittish investors that biofuel companies have a willing customer in the U.S. Navy.

But the Green Fleet's 450,000 gallons of fuel made from chicken fat and other waste greases (plus a dollop of algae oil) didn't come cheap. At \$12 million — arguably the biggest biofuel purchase in military history — the algae-chicken goop costs about four times more than an old-school petroleum product.

There were political costs, too. Committee Republicans — unhappy about shrinking defense budgets and skeptical about the White House's green initiatives — used the biofuel buy as a way to go after the administration.

"I understand that alternative fuels may help our

guys in the field, but wouldn't you agree that the thing they'd be more concerned about is having more ships, more planes, more prepositioned stocks," Rep. Randy Forbes said during a February hearing with Mabus. "Shouldn't we refocus our priorities and make those things our priorities instead of advancing a biofuels market?" Then he told Mabus: "You're not the secretary of the energy. You're the secretary of the Navy."

Mabus and his allies countered that the Republicans were taking an overly-simplistic view of things. *Of course* relatively small batches of a new fuel are going to be expensive — just like the original, 5GB iPod cost \$400 and held fewer songs than today's \$129 model, which holds 8 GB. That's the nature of research and development. With development time and big enough purchases, the costs of biofuels will come down, they argued; already, the price has dropped in half since 2009.

"It's a false choice to say that we should concentrate on more ships versus a different kind of fuel. If we don't get a different kind of fuel, if we don't have a secure domestic supply of energy at an affordable price... the ships and the planes may not be able to be used because we can't get the fuel," Mabus told the Senate Subcommittee on Water and Power in March.

What's more, Mabus added, there's a value in a more stable, domestic supply of fuel; every time the price of oil goes up by a dollar per barrel, it costs the Navy \$31 million. "We simply buy too much fossil fuels from places that are either actually or potentially volatile, from places that may or may not have our best interests at heart," he said. "We would never let these places build our ships, our

aircraft, our ground vehicles, but we do give them a say on whether those ships steam, aircraft fly, or ground vehicles operate because we buy so much energy from them."

None of those arguments managed to sway House Republicans, who last Wednesday voted to impose its ban on alt-fuels that cost more than the traditional stuff. InsideDefense.com first noted the measure.

Long before the congressmen made their decisions, biofuel industry insiders told Danger Room that their products would never be as cheap as petroleum-based ones.

"This idea that we can match [the price of] crude oil — I think it's such a bullshit question," Tom Todaro said back in October. "A car with airbags costs more than a car without. Society decides how valuable those airbags are. Society can decide the value of renewable fuels."

But the armed services committee didn't put limits on all alternative fuels — just the ones with environmental benefits. The Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007 forbids federal agencies from buying alternative fuels that are more polluting than conventional ones. Last week, the congressmen ordered to exempt the Defense Department from those regulations.

That would free the military up to start using the so-called Fischer-Tropsch method of squeezing fuel out of coal or natural gas, both of which America has in abundance. The process helped Apartheid-era South Africa survive sanctions against the regime, and enabled the Germans to produce 124,000 barrels of fuel per day during World War II. It could help make our military more energy-

independent, too. There's just one small problem: "you end up kicking a whole bunch of additional carbon dioxide out into the air," as Lt. Col. Bob Bateman once noted. "More carbon dioxide, in fact, than you do just using and burning the refined products you get from crude oil."

During his testimony in March, Mabus insisted that "the Great Green Fleet doesn't have an environmental agenda. It's about maintaining America's military and economic leadership across the globe in the 21st century." Still, it's hard to imagine him agreeing to a Great Green Fleet that polluted the planet even further.

Washington Post

May 15, 2012

Pg. 1

21. Budget Time Bomb Sends Shivers Across Economy

Anxiety grows around New Year's tax hikes and slashed spending

By Lori Montgomery and Rosalind S. Helderman

Defense contractors have slowed hiring. Tax advisers are warning firms not to count on favorite breaks. And hospitals are scouring their books for ways to cut costs.

Across the U.S. economy, anxiety is rising about the potential for widespread disruptions after the November election, when a lame-duck Congress will have barely two months to resolve a grinding standoff over taxes and spending.

The halls of the U.S. Capitol are already teeming with people warning of disaster if lawmakers fail to defuse a New Year's budget bomb scheduled to raise taxes for every American taxpayer and

slash spending at the Pentagon and most other federal agencies.

Last week, hospital executives came to complain about big scheduled cuts in Medicare payments. Next month, university presidents plan to raise the alarm about big scheduled cuts in federal research grants. And the chief executives of Lockheed Martin and other aerospace giants last Wednesday passed out digital countdown clocks ticking off the seconds until "over 1 million American jobs" will be lost to big scheduled cuts in defense.

"How do you plan for chaos?" Marion Blakey, president of the Aerospace Industries Association, sighed during a break between meetings with lawmakers, who could provide little assurance that the spending cuts would be averted. "It's almost a unique moment in government because there's so much at stake. And there's nothing that inspires confidence that this will get done."

The uncertainty is already prompting some firms to take action. Many more say they will be forced to contemplate layoffs and other cost-cutting measures long before the end of the year unless the Republican House and the Democratic Senate come up with an alternative path to tame deficits. But with control of the White House and both chambers of Congress in play on Nov. 6, aides say it is impossible to begin mapping a strategy for compromise until they know who wins the election, by how much and on which issues.

In the meantime, political leaders are focused less on finding solutions than on drawing lines in the sand. In a speech Tuesday, House Speaker John A. Boehner (R-Ohio) plans to address the issue of national debt, which will once again be nearing its legal

limit in January, just as the tax hikes and spending cuts are due to hit.

According to advance remarks provided to The Post, Boehner will insist that any increase in the debt limit be accompanied by spending “cuts and reforms greater than the debt limit increase” — the same demand that pushed the Treasury to the brink of default during last summer’s debt-limit standoff.

“This is the only avenue I see right now to force the elected leadership of this country to solve our structural fiscal imbalance,” Boehner plans to say at the Peter G. Peterson Foundation fiscal summit. “If that means we have to do a series of stop-gap measures, so be it.”

Last week, the House approved a plan to protect the Pentagon in January by reconfiguring \$110 billion in across-the-board spending cuts — known as “sequestration” — so they would fall exclusively on domestic programs, such as food stamps and health care for the poor.

But one aerospace lobbyist glumly noted that the House bill will be “dead on arrival” in the Senate, where Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) has vowed to block any effort to undo the defense cuts unless Republicans drop their opposition to higher taxes for the wealthy.

“The answer is very simple to our Republican colleagues who want to help with defense: Revenues,” said Sen. Charles E. Schumer (D-N.Y.). “The way to deal with sequestration is put revenues on the table.”

As lawmakers bicker, the approaching deadline has taken on the nightmarish “aspect of a slow-motion train wreck,” said Ajay Rajadhyaksha of Barclays Capital, with onlookers helpless either to prevent the carnage or to get out of the way.

“I feel like we’re really in uncharted waters,” said Robert Greenstein, president of the left-leaning Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. “On the one hand, you say: ‘We’re a functioning country. Somehow, we’re going to work this out.’ But then you ask: ‘What’s the scenario for a potential solution?’ And you can’t come up with anything that you can see actually passing Congress.”

The impending upheaval is the result of multiple policy changes all set to hit at the same time. The George W. Bush-era tax cuts are scheduled to expire in December, along with a temporary payroll-tax holiday sought by President Obama. Meanwhile, Congress last summer paired a debt-limit increase with \$1.2 trillion in across-the-board spending cuts over the next decade that almost no one wants to see happen.

For the moment, most economic forecasters are taking a sanguine view. Mark Zandi of Moody’s Analytics predicts that the lame-duck Congress will make a deal to rescind half the spending cuts and raise taxes for the wealthiest 2 or 3 percent of households — but leave everyone else alone.

“There’s a lot of room for compromise,” Zandi said, noting that Boehner and Obama came close to agreement last summer.

But others are skeptical that lawmakers, fresh from the combat of the campaign trail, will be able to agree on anything. Federal Reserve Chairman Ben S. Bernanke recently warned that the Fed would have “absolutely no . . . ability whatsoever” to cushion the shock to the economy if the nation sails over what he calls the “fiscal cliff” in January. And many analysts worry that the uncertainty will itself begin to dampen economic growth long before New Year’s Day.

Kaman Corporation chief executive Neal Keating said his firm is already scaling back hiring in Jacksonville, Fla., where the company builds cockpits for Blackhawk helicopters. He was hoping for new contracts to refit the nation’s aging fleet of A-10 Warthog attack planes.

“So many of those things are now uncertain,” Keating said, adding that plans to hire 200 workers have been put on hold. Without further clarity, Keating said, he could be forced to start ramping down purchases and cancelling shifts sometime this summer.

“One of the most frustrating things is [that] people in Washington say, ‘Well, we don’t think sequestration is going to happen,’” he said. “But we’re responsible for planning and running a business.”

Nicholas Wolter, chief executive of the Billings Clinic, a chain of nonprofit medical facilities in Montana, said a scheduled 2 percent cut in Medicare payments would hammer his finances. But options being circulated to replace those cuts could also hurt, he said. In addition, a formula that maintains Medicare rates for doctors is also set to expire.

“You’re not sure which of them might end up in legislation,” Wolter said. “They’re all potentially real.”

Tax policy is also causing heartburn. Kate Barton of Ernst & Young said she is advising clients not to count on the renewal of a slew of popular business tax breaks that expired in December. Even incentives for research and development, which are revered in both parties, could get caught in the year-end logjam.

“We’re not trying to be alarmist. But it’s a time when the telescope and the crystal ball

are really foggy,” Barton said. “You talk to one person and you hear one thing; you talk to another and you hear something else.”

This month, about 120 university lobbyists gathered near Metro Center in hopes that top aides to Reid and Boehner would shed light on the fiscal end game. They didn’t. Instead, Reid’s deputy chief of staff for policy, Bill Dauster, cited a “good, if dour,” independent analysis that “many election outcomes would produce dynamics not conducive to getting a deal” at all before the new Congress takes office in January.

“You just don’t get the sense that there’s even a secret plan yet. It’s scary,” said Maya MacGuineas, president of the bipartisan Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, who has been meeting with corporate leaders in an effort to build support for a comprehensive deficit-reduction plan.

During a recent dinner in Washington, Lawrence H. Summers and Robert Rubin mulled the situation. Both men led the Treasury Department during the Clinton administration, and Summers was Obama’s top economic adviser in 2009 and 2010. They concluded that, whatever happens on Election Day, exhausted lawmakers are likely to resort to a short-term deal that extends all the tax cuts, postpones the spending cuts and pushes the deadline for fiscal calamity into the spring of 2013.

But even that move would be risky, Rubin argued, potentially inviting another downgrade of the U.S. credit rating, roiling financial markets and shattering confidence that the United States will ever get its debt problem under control.

Solutions are easy to come by “when you’re sitting at the

Council on Foreign Relations in New York," said Rubin, the council's co-chairman. "It's a lot harder to do it when you're sitting in Washington and it's one minute of midnight."

Norfolk Virginian-Pilot
May 15, 2012

22. Defense Cuts Would Cripple Va. Economy, Leaders Warn

By Bill Bartel, The Virginian-Pilot

CHESAPEAKE--If

Congress doesn't stop \$1 trillion in automatic budget reductions set to begin unrolling in January, Hampton Roads and Northern Virginia will see such dramatic cutbacks that a statewide recession is likely, a public policy expert warned Monday night.

Professor Stephen Fuller of George Mason University told more than 500 people at a congressional listening session that the deep cuts, including about \$500 billion in defense cuts, would be "devastating," given that 10 cents of every defense dollar is spent in the commonwealth.

"These would be enough to drive the economy into a recession in 2013," Fuller said, noting that 20 percent of all the jobs in Virginia are dependent on military spending.

Fuller was among several speakers who voiced concern about the automatic budget cuts Monday at the first of several special meetings set up by U.S. Rep. Randy Forbes, R-Chesapeake, and other members of the House Armed Services Committee. The nationwide "Defending Our Defenders" tour aims to raise awareness about the impending automatic defense cuts, as well as the \$487 billion the Obama administration has proposed to cut at the Pentagon over five years.

The \$1 trillion in cuts were set in motion after congressional negotiators failed late last year to approve a plan to cut the federal deficit. When no agreement was reached, the law approved by Congress required that the cuts be made in the budget, half of the amount coming from defense and the other half from social programs.

"The purpose of this tour is not to say 'What is the best way to fix it?' but to say 'What are the repercussions if these cuts actually came to be?' " Forbes said before the two-hour session began in the Chesapeake Conference Center. The problem today, he said, is that the impact of the automatic cuts is not being discussed in Washington. He was joined by U.S. Reps. Scott Rigell, R-Virginia Beach, and Rob Wittman, R-Westmoreland County, both members of the armed services panel.

While Forbes and others have argued that the cuts would hinder the nation's ability to defend itself and protect its interests, many of the speakers Monday night were more focused on concerns about the direct impact on the region's economy.

Small-business owners, defense contractors and economic-development leaders all warned that the cuts would cost thousands of government and private-sector jobs as the federal dollars dried up.

"It will essentially stop outside investment in Hampton Roads," said Deborah Stearns, chairwoman of the Hampton Roads Chamber of Commerce.

"What we're talking about today is real eye-opening.... This is scary stuff," Eric Rivard, who works for the photo studio Lifetouch in Chesapeake, told the crowd. "Tell your neighbors.... Tell your friends.... Help us save our community and our state."

Norfolk attorney Kevin Cosgrove said the audience and the three congressmen need to remember that the root of the problem isn't the automatic spending cuts locked in place last year by Congress.

The problem is a \$15.7 trillion federal debt that is growing every year because leaders continue to borrow hundreds of billions every year to pay for federal spending, he said.

Cosgrove told the crowd that even if Congress finds a way to avoid the military cuts this year, it will not solve the problem until it deals with the rising national debt.

"If we don't," he said, "we're just going to be back here next year and the year after."

Pittsburgh Tribune-Review
May 15, 2012

23. Lawmaker Disputes 911th Cost Figures

By Tom Fontaine, Tribune-Review

The Air Force rates the Air Force Reserve's 911th Airlift Wing among the nation's costliest for flying outdated C-130 cargo planes, but that hasn't convinced Western Pennsylvania congressmen that closing the base would make financial or strategic sense.

The Air Force has said it could save \$354 million over five years by closing the 911th by September 2013. That would help the Air Force to meet a five-year goal of cutting spending by \$8.7 billion -- part of a larger government plan to reduce defense spending by \$450 billion in 10 years.

"Pittsburgh produced the largest savings that could be realized to the Air Force," Maj. Gen. Lori J. Robinson said in an April 26 letter to U.S. Rep. Tim Murphy, R-Upper St. Clair.

Robinson said the base has the sixth-highest cost-per-flying

hour among 28 bases operating C-130H aircraft, at \$18,473. Its seven C-130 cargo planes were built in the 1970s, making them among the oldest of the Air Force. They would be taken out of service and stored at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base in Tucson, along with 4,400 other aircraft.

"All along, I've told the 911th that if they don't make the grade, we can't save them," Murphy said. "If the base turns out to be inefficient and not cost-effective, OK, get rid of it. But I haven't seen anything to indicate that."

Closing the 911th would save \$144 million in personnel-related costs, \$92 million in base operations, \$77 million in aircraft maintenance and \$41 million in flying expenses, the Air Force said. Unlike some bases that are home to multiple wings, the Moon base houses only the 911th.

By comparison, the Air Force Reserve's 910th Airlift Wing near Youngstown, Ohio, costs \$17,284 per flying hour, the ninth highest rate; and the West Virginia Air National Guard's 130th Airlift Wing in Charleston costs \$13,314 an hour, 16th highest.

The 94th Airlift Wing at Georgia's Dobbins Air Force Base had the highest rate, at \$29,807; the Puerto Rico Air National Guard's 156th Airlift Wing had the lowest, at \$8,570.

Murphy disputes the data, saying the cost of maintaining the 911th's old planes is "like comparing an auto repair bill of a 1970 Ford Pinto to a modern Ford Fusion." He said he is awaiting additional financial data from the Air Force.

The numbers don't factor in other costs, Murphy said. The Pittsburgh International Airport-based 911th pays only \$20,000 to the Allegheny County Airport Authority for runway access, air traffic

control, airfield maintenance and fire protection, and the military poured about \$58 million into facility improvements since 2004. He could not compare those numbers to other bases.

Todd Harrison, a defense budget expert at the Washington-based Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, said it could be that the Air Force wants to realize immediate savings by closing the 911th. Air Force calculations put the number of full-time civilian employees there at fewer than 300 -- though local leaders say the base employs 318 civilians -- and that small number could enable the Air Force to sidestep a lengthier congressional approval process to close it, Harrison said.

"The fact (that the Air Force) hasn't already released a detailed financial analysis makes me suspect it won't, because the analysis doesn't support the argument that all of its moves make sense from a financial standpoint," Harrison said. "Congress can still take steps to block this."

Last week, the House Armed Services Committee passed a defense spending bill that includes measures to prevent the Air Force from retiring or transferring aircraft during the next fiscal year. That would include the 911th's C-130s and KC-135s at the Pennsylvania Air National Guard's 171st Air Refueling Wing, which would be scaled back under the cost-cutting plan.

U.S. Rep. Mark Critz, D-Johnstown, a committee member, said the measure "made it clear that we disagree with how the Air Force arrived at its unilateral restructuring decisions and how these proposals impact our

military readiness and local communities."

The House Appropriations Committee is expected to consider a similar measure this week.

Murphy believes keeping the 911th makes sense from a strategic standpoint.

Its "secure inland location" puts it within a two-hour flight of 75 percent of the U.S. population, including metropolises on the Eastern seaboard, he said. Its aero-medical squadron includes doctors, nurses and other medical workers from the region's elite hospitals. It trains with National Guard and Army Reserve units based in Moon, and the Navy is building a \$13 million operations support center at the 911th.

Wall Street Journal

May 15, 2012

Pg. 10

24. Iran Exile Group Nears U.S. Rebirth

State Department Is Moving to Take MeK Off Banned List at Risk of Angering Iran

By Jay Solomon and Evan Perez

WASHINGTON—The Obama administration is moving to remove an Iranian opposition group from the State Department's terrorism list, say officials briefed on the talks, in an action that could further poison Washington's relations with Tehran at a time of renewed diplomatic efforts to curtail Iran's nuclear program.

The exile organization, the Mujahedin-e Khalq, or MeK, was originally named as a terrorist entity 15 years ago for its alleged role in assassinating U.S. citizens in the years before the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran and for allying with Iraqi strongman Saddam Hussein against Tehran.

The MeK has engaged in an aggressive legal and lobbying campaign in Washington over the past two years to win its removal from the State Department's list. The terrorism designation, which has been in place since 1997, freezes the MeK's assets inside the U.S. and prevents the exile group from fundraising.

Senior U.S. officials said on Monday that Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has yet to make any final decision on the MeK's status. But they said the State Department was looking favorably at delisting MeK if it continued cooperating by vacating a former paramilitary base inside Iraq, called Camp Ashraf, which the group had used to stage cross-border strikes into Iran.

The group has already renounced terrorism, which was the main earlier sticking point. Residents have resisted leaving the camp because they feared retribution if they were returned to Iran and political irrelevancy abroad.

The U.S. officials said Mrs. Clinton would make her final decision on the MeK's status no less than 60 days after the last MeK member is relocated from Camp Ashraf to a new transit facility near Baghdad International Airport. The U.S. is working with the United Nations to resettle Camp Ashraf residents in third countries. Roughly 1,200 people remain at the camp from an earlier population of over 3,000.

"The MeK's cooperation in the successful and peaceful closure of Camp Ashraf... will be a key factor in her decision regarding the MeK's [foreign-terrorist organization] status," said State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland on Monday.

Western and Iranian diplomats are concerned that the MeK issue could draw serious

recriminations from Tehran, which has been fixated on neutralizing the group. Many of Iran's top leaders, including Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, were targets of MeK attacks during the 1980s.

Iran has regularly accused Western countries of hypocrisy for providing shelter to MeK members while criticizing Tehran's support for militant groups, such as Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in the Palestinian territories. "We believe that despite the claims that others make about fighting terrorism, they [Western nations] provide the most support for terrorist groups," Iran's foreign ministry spokesman, Ramin Mehmanparast, said last week. "In Europe, the MeK has already been removed from the list of terrorist organizations and they are completely safe to continue their activities."

U.S. officials said that the moves weren't related to coming nuclear talks, but are tied to the MeK's legal challenge to its designation in a Washington appeals court.

A judge ordered the State Department to review the MeK's status nearly two years ago, and congressional rules maintain the process should take only 180 days.

"There is a great deal of animosity among Iranian officialdom toward the MeK. But Our delisting has to be done by the facts and the law," said a senior U.S. official. "Any move to delist should not be seen as a sign of our support."

Other officials briefed on the MeK issue said Mrs. Clinton purposefully tied the closing of Camp Ashraf to the designation issue to defuse a thorny diplomatic issue between Washington and Baghdad. The U.S. military had provided security at the camp before pulling its forces

from Iraq last year. Baghdad now controls the camp and has threatened to return MeK members to Iran if it isn't swiftly closed.

These officials stressed that Mrs. Clinton could still rule against delisting the MeK due to other information gathered on its role in terrorism. But they acknowledged it would be difficult politically for Mrs. Clinton to maintain the designation after publicly stating the importance of the Camp Ashraf issue.

"The secretary's statement was clear that there's a relationship between delisting and closing Ashraf. It is also true that we are making progress," said an official briefed on the deliberations. "To make that assertion on your own that the MeK will be removed is a realistic one. But in policy making you never know for sure what will happen."

The MeK's status has become an explosive political issue inside Washington and a major irritant in U.S.-Iranian relations.

The group, despite its history of terrorism and anti-Americanism, reoriented itself after Saddam Hussein's 2003 fall and the capturing of Camp Ashraf by U.S. forces. The MeK renounced violence and turned over its weapons. And it has cooperated with the U.S. and U.N. in gathering intelligence on Iran's nuclear program.

This ideological shift by the MeK has been accompanied by an intensive lobbying campaign on Capitol Hill. A number of former senior U.S. officials said they were offered payments to speak on behalf of the MeK, including James Jones, President Barack Obama's former national security adviser, and James Woolsey, the former head of the Central Intelligence Agency.

Mr. Jones confirmed last year that he received a fee, but declined to specify how much. Mr. Woolsey said he waives his usual speaker's fee.

The Treasury Department has an continuing inquiry into payments made to MeK advocates, for possible violation of sanctions that prohibit financial dealings with terrorist groups. It is unclear how any delisting would affect that probe.

The deliberations over the MeK's status come as the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council, plus Germany, are gathering in Baghdad next week for negotiations with Iran aimed at curbing its nuclear program. Officials from the U.N.'s International Atomic Energy Agency met Monday with Iranian officials in Vienna and pressed for greater access to the country's nuclear facilities.

Diplomats and Iran analysts worry that any moves to delist the MeK could result in Iran driving up its demands at the negotiating table. Tehran denies it is seeking nuclear weapons, but also says it needs advanced weapons systems to guard against the U.S. and other hostile states. The MeK issue will likely be perceived in Tehran as another American-led effort to topple Iran's theocratic government, these analysts said.

"In the cynical, conspiratorial world view of the Iranian regime, delisting the MeK will be interpreted in Tehran as validation that Washington's underlying goal is regime change, not behavior change," said Karim Sadjadpour of Washington's Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Critics of the MeK allege that the organization has no major support inside Iran and that its leaders, who are based outside Paris, run the group like

a cult. They also worry that any perceived U.S. support for it could undercut the Iranian opposition, known as the Green Movement, which pushed for democratic change during 2009 street protests.

Still, the organization has large support on Capitol Hill. And some lawmakers are seeking to use the possible delisting of the organization to begin providing U.S. financial support. Congress took similar steps in the 1990s to provide funding to Iraq's opposition and, in particular, the exiled politician, Ahmad Chalabi.

"If there's a coalition against the mullahs, then we should fund that coalition, and the MeK should be a part of it," said Rep. Dana Rohrabacher (R., Calif.). He cautioned that for now, he wasn't advocating directly funding MeK. "The MeK has the resources to resist and fight the mullah dictatorship. They don't need our money, they just need us to get out of the way and take the shackles off."

New York Times

May 15, 2012

Pg. 8

25. Iran Sees Success In Stalling On Nuclear Issue

By Thomas Erdbrink

TEHRAN — As Iran starts a critical round of talks over its nuclear program, its negotiating team may be less interested in reaching a comprehensive settlement than in buying time and establishing the legitimacy of its enrichment program, Iranian officials and analysts said.

That is because though Iran finds itself under increased financial pressure from tightening sanctions, officials here argue that their fundamental approach has essentially worked. In

continually pushing forward the nuclear activities — increasing enrichment and building a bunker mountain enrichment facility — Iran has in effect forced the West to accept a program it insists is for peaceful purposes. Iranians say their carefully crafted policy has helped move the goal posts in their favor by making enrichment a reality that the West has been unable to stop — and may now be willing, however grudgingly, to accept.

"Without violating any international laws or the nonproliferation treaty, we have managed to bypass the red lines the West created for us," said Hamidreza Taraghi, an adviser to Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who is close to the negotiating team.

Iran's envoys met on Monday with officials with the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna to discuss the agency's desire to inspect facilities that it suspects have been used to test explosives capable of detonating a nuclear charge, which Iran denies. The talks, however, are also seen as an informal precursor to talks scheduled this month in Baghdad, between Iran and the United States and other nations.

While there remains a significant gap in trust between the two sides — and little likelihood that Iran will give the I.A.E.A. the access it wants to a military site — Iran's public posture fuels a sense that both sides are searching for a way to declare victory and defuse the crisis. For the West, officials have said that success, at least in the short term, would mean a deal that has Iran ship all its medium-enriched uranium out of the country, which would increase the amount of time needed to make bomb-grade material.

In Tehran, Mr. Taraghi was promoting a narrative that

might pave the way for public, and political, acceptance of a compromise over a program that has broad public support, even among competing political factions. Enrichment is seen as a matter of national sovereignty and pride.

Mr. Taraghi ticked off Iran's successes. First, he said, Western countries did not want Iran to have a nuclear power plant, but its Bushehr reactor was now connected to the national grid. Second, the West had opposed Iran having heavy-water facilities, he said, but it now has one in Arak.

Third, the West had said no to any enrichment.

"But here we are, enriching as much as we need for our nuclear energy program," Mr. Taraghi said with a smile, referring to the thousands of cascades of centrifuges spinning for years in the half-underground facility in Natanz. Since January, dozens more centrifuges have been online in the Fordo mountain bunker complex, near Qum, built to withstand a heavy attack.

Mr. Taraghi and other officials say their policy has forced the United States to accept enrichment, though five resolutions by the United Nations Security Council have called for it to suspend it. Obama administration officials dispute that view.

But some Iranian and Western officials have hinted that the White House may now be willing to accept some level of enrichment activity, in return for highly intrusive inspections and other guarantees. Tehran, too, may be willing to compromise, ending its enrichment up to 20 percent, a level at which it is easier to enrich it to weapons grade.

Even before a preliminary meeting in Istanbul last month, the head of Iran's nuclear agency, Fereydoon Abbasi,

announced that Iran was willing to stop enriching uranium up to 20 percent. Iran has said it was enriching uranium in order to power up a 43-year-old American-designed medical reactor to produce medical isotopes used to treat cancer.

Mr. Taraghi also said that in the Istanbul talks, Iran had managed to convince the West of the importance of a religious edict, or fatwa, by Ayatollah Khamenei, against the possession of nuclear weapons. He said that doing so helped sell its position that it is not pursuing nuclear weapons. "The West is secular, they do not believe that religious decisions are more important for us than political ones. This took some convincing from our side," he said. American officials describe it differently, saying that they brought up the fatwa in an effort to offer the Iranians a face-saving way to reach a compromise.

Iran's negotiators left the Istanbul meeting believing they had scored a major victory. "We have managed to get our rights," said Mr. Taraghi in his office in downtown Tehran. "All that remains is a debate over the percentage of enrichment."

But it is not clear from either Washington or Tehran where optimism ends and posturing for negotiations begins. American officials say no compromise on nuclear enrichment was offered in the Istanbul talks, which potentially sets the Iranian side up for major disappointment.

Instead, last week the United States called upon Iran to take "urgent, practical steps," without specifying what, before the meeting in Baghdad, on May 23.

Empowered by the opinion that escalating sanctions mixed with military threats have intimidated the Iranians, Western officials have leaked

several central demands they might make at the Baghdad talks.

One is for Iran to allow United Nations inspectors back into the Parchin military complex, to investigate accusations by Western intelligence agencies that Iran has been working on triggers for a nuclear weapon. There are also demands for Iran to close the Fordo complex, which is under I.A.E.A. supervision. And, if any deal is to take place, Western powers want the Islamic Republic to sign a voluntary agreement under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, allowing wider inspections.

United States officials have said they could imagine an enrichment program on Iranian soil — but only years from now and only under a series of conditions, including: full answers to all I.A.E.A. questions about possible work on weapons technology; allowing the I.A.E.A. to conduct inspections without warning at declared and suspected sites; and suspension of enrichment until these commitments are fulfilled.

"This illustrates that the nuclear case is just another pretext for trying to keep us down," said Aziz Shah Mohammadi, an expert formerly connected with Iran's National Security Council, which, together with Ayatollah Khamenei, maps out Iran's nuclear policy. "Therefore, we view each round of negotiations as a separate phase, not as leading to an all-out solution," he said.

Independence from the West is a pillar of the Islamic Republic's ideology, which makes it very hard for Iran's leaders to compromise on issues such as closing nuclear sites or foreign inspections beyond the current agreements under the

nonproliferation treaty, analysts here said.

Rather, expect the country to start a new nuclear project, if talks fail, one analyst said. "Wait for our leaders to announce, for example, a new mountain bunker so Fordo will be forgotten," he said, asking to remain anonymous because he was not authorized to discuss this topic. "In case of failure we will try to hold out again until better opportunities for reaching our goals arise."

Mr. Taraghi did not want to consider the possibility of the talks failing, though he said Iran would have demands of its own in Baghdad, including an end to sanctions against its Central Bank.

"We view the nuclear episode as a heavy retreat for the Western powers," he said. "But acceptance of our nuclear program takes time, we understand that."

David E. Sanger contributed reporting from Washington.

Arizona Daily Star (Tucson)
May 15, 2012

26. Secret Prison Still Open In Baghdad, Group Claims

By Associated Press

Iraqis are still being held illegally at a Baghdad prison that the government was supposed to have shut down in 2011 after allegations that detainees were tortured and abused there, Human Rights Watch said Tuesday.

The report by the New York-based rights group raises fresh concerns about the government's treatment of detainees after Iraqi authorities took over the country's prison system following the departure of U.S. troops last December.

Iraq's Human Rights Ministry has denied the Human Rights Watch claim as

inaccurate, saying the detention center in question, known by its former U.S. military designation as Camp Honor, was shuttered more than a year ago.

The prison is located inside the Green Zone in central Baghdad, which also houses government offices and foreign embassies.

The HRW report was based on interviews with 35 former detainees and their relatives and lawyers, as well as government officials who described ongoing interrogations at Camp Honor.

"Iraqi security forces are grabbing people outside of the law, without trial or known charges, and hiding them away in incommunicado sites," said Joe Stork, Human Rights Watch's deputy Middle East director.

He called on Iraqi authorities to immediately release names of all detainees and where they are being held, and to release those who have not been formally charged.

Asked for comment, Human Rights Ministry spokesman Kamil Amin said Camp Honor "was closed more than a year ago."

"All inmates were transferred to other prisons," Amin said. "We are confident that Camp Honor is not in use."

He denied that the government is running secret jails, and said all arrests and detentions follow legal standards.

The report said elite Iraqi troops controlled by Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki are running two more secret jails in Baghdad where detainees are interrogated by judicial investigators.

The rights group also said it is withholding the identities of the people who were interviewed out of concern for their safety.

New York Times
May 15, 2012
Pg. 11

27. Yemen: Military Attacks Militants

By Associated Press

Yemeni warplanes attacked fighters with Al Qaeda on Monday, killing at least 16, while seven soldiers died in clashes with militants in the south, military officials said. The fighting came a day after government bombings of Qaeda positions killed at least 30 militants. The strikes are part of the military's broader campaign against the militants who seized towns and territory across southern Yemen over the past year, taking advantage of a security vacuum linked to the country's political turmoil. Also Monday, an oil pipeline in Marib Province and a natural gas pipeline in Shabwa Province were blown up, said Yemeni officials, who added that militants were probably behind the attacks.

New York Times
May 15, 2012
Pg. 5

28. Saudi Arabia Seeks Union Of Monarchies In Region

By Kareem Fahim and David D. Kirkpatrick

MANAMA, Bahrain — Saudi Arabia pushed ahead Monday with efforts to forge a single federation with its five Persian Gulf neighbors as the conservative monarchy seeks to build a new bulwark against the waves of change sweeping the Middle East.

The Saudi foreign minister, Prince Saud al-Faisal, said after a meeting in Riyadh of the loosely allied, six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council that the group had distributed a draft plan for the union to its members' foreign ministers to review so they could resolve

any issues. "I am hoping that the six countries will unite in the next meeting," he said.

Several smaller gulf states have publicly balked at the idea, fearing Saudi domination of the group. The fact that no agreement was announced Monday, as some had expected, seemed to signal deep misgivings among several of Saudi Arabia's neighbors. But Prince Saud's public push forward despite their opposition underscored the kingdom's continuing scramble — with diplomacy, money and even arms — to preserve or rebuild what it can of the old regional order in the wake of the Arab uprisings.

Saudi Arabia's rulers fear that the contagion of popular revolt could reach their country's borders and stir its own disenfranchised citizens and residents, including dissidents, members of minority groups and foreign workers, analysts said. "They don't want the spirit of our uprising to reach their shores," said Sayed Hadi al-Mosawi, a Bahraini opposition politician.

The move also highlights the Saudi monarchy's preoccupation with its regional rival, Iran, which has been reflected in a series of Saudi interventions that have taken on distinctly sectarian overtones, including its support for Sunni opposition groups in Syria and its military intervention last spring on behalf of the Sunni monarchy in Bahrain.

Thousands of Saudi troops rolled into Bahrain last year to help Bahrain's monarch put down a popular uprising led by members of the country's Shiite majority. Bahrain, which is linked by a bridge to Saudi Arabia, is virtually the only country publicly endorsing the Saudi push for a tighter regional federation. In a statement released on Monday, the king

of Bahrain, Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa, said, "We are looking forward to the establishment of the Gulf Union."

Several Bahraini opposition activists rejected the idea and suggested it was not only government opponents who feared a closer union with its far more conservative neighbor. "We don't want to be subsumed by Saudi Arabia," said Ala'a Shehabi, a writer and opposition activist.

And several other states — including Kuwait, Qatar and Oman, have so far shown little enthusiasm for the kind of tighter union Saudi Arabia is pushing, perhaps modeled on the European Union.

"Each of them has its own reason not to be very warm to the idea of a more empowered Saudi Arabia," said Emile Hokayem, a Middle East analyst with the International Institute for Strategic Studies who is based in Manama. "Those tensions have been around forever, but what's different at this point is a number of countries don't feel they need a Saudi security umbrella. They're quite ambitious independently. They know how to leverage their wealth. It doesn't make sense to throw their lot right now in with Saudi Arabia."

Saudi Arabia has already made moves to try to stretch the Gulf Cooperation Council far beyond its original regional mission to try to turn it into an alliance of monarchies that might band together against the democratic trend. Its diplomats have made overtures to include the kingdoms of Morocco and Jordan.

Saudi and Kuwaiti officials last year even leaked the idea that Egypt might become some kind of member of the group, though Egyptian diplomats quickly dismissed the idea. At the time, one senior

Egyptian official suggested that Egypt's revolution would fundamentally change the nature of the relationship with Saudi Arabia, a longtime ally of the deposed president, Hosni Mubarak.

In recent weeks, Egyptians have taken to the streets to complain about the alliance, prompting the worst crisis in years between the countries. Saudi Arabia withdrew its ambassador after Egyptians, angered at the arrest of an Egyptian human rights lawyer while visiting Saudi Arabia, held protests outside the Saudi Embassy in Cairo. The lawyer, Ahmed el-Gizawy, had drawn attention to the detention of Egyptian workers in Saudi Arabia, who are employed under a restrictive sponsorship system.

But Egypt's military rulers, fearful of losing billions of dollars in pledged Saudi aid in the midst of a fiscal crisis, quickly tried to heal the rift. Senior Egyptian officials, including senior leaders of the Islamist-led Parliament, flew to Riyadh to make amends with the Saudi king.

Saudi Arabia appears to be trying to make up with Egypt as well. After more than a year of waiting, it has released to Egypt the first \$1 billion of a promised aid package, just in time to help Egypt land a larger loan from the International Monetary Fund.

And on Monday, Saudi officials said they were beginning reforms of visa rules that compel guest workers to maintain the "sponsorship" of their Saudi employer — a requirement many Egyptians say reduces guest workers to servitude. Although the planned reforms may be mainly cosmetic — Saudi government "sponsorships" will still be required — the Saudi announcement was played as

major news Monday in Egypt's state media.

Kareem Fahim reported from Manama, and David D. Kirkpatrick from Cairo. Mayy El Sheikh contributed reporting from Cairo.

Sydney Morning Herald
May 15, 2012
Pg. 1

29. Cold War Warning As China Hits Out At Defence Co-Operation With US

By Philip Wen, Herald
Correspondent

BEIJING--China has criticised Australia's close military alliance with the United States as an outdated throwback to the Cold War era in an apparent rebuke of Canberra's decision to allow a US military presence along Australia's north coast.

Underlining how seriously they viewed the decision to allow up to 2500 US Marines to be deployed through Darwin, senior Chinese officials raised their concerns with Senator Bob Carr in three separate meetings in Beijing yesterday, during his first official visit as Foreign Affairs Minister since replacing Kevin Rudd in March.

In a meeting with his Chinese counterpart, the Foreign Minister, Yang Jiechi, Senator Carr said he had explained the historical context of the Australia-US relationship and "why they were effectively a cornerstone of Australian policy". Senator Carr also met Lieutenant-General Wei Fenghe, a senior official of the Chinese military, and the director of the International Department of the Communist Party, Wang Jiarui.

"The most objective way of saying it is my three Chinese partners today invited me to talk about enhanced Australian defence co-operation with the

United States," he said of the Chinese response. "I think their view can be expressed that the time for Cold War alliances have long since past.

"Australia's view of course is that an American presence in the Asia-Pacific has helped underpin stability there and created a climate in which the peaceful economic development ... including that of China, has been able to occur."

But in an apparent reflection of China's rising influence as a strategic power in the world, Senator Carr said he would push for closer military co-operation with China.

"An extended underpinning of my conversation with the [People's Liberation Army] was that our defence co-operation has been very good and we would both like to see more of it," he said. "Defence co-operation is a confidence building mission. The more we understand about one another's approach to defence the less likely we are to misinterpret what the other side does."

In a news conference yesterday, Senator Carr also said the three Australians sentenced to lengthy jail terms in China - Stern Hu, Matthew Ng and Charlotte Chou - were in effect considered Chinese nationals by the Chinese government, despite holding Australian passports. The comments raise existing concerns that the Chinese government does not differentiate between Chinese citizens and foreign nationals who are ethnic Chinese.

He said he raised "three consular cases" with Mr Yang and was told that China "does not recognise dual nationality".

Asked whether that meant whether they were considered Chinese nationals rather than

Australians, Senator Carr responded: "I guess that's right."

He later clarified that "the Chinese government does not recognise dual nationality but where Chinese citizens have renounced their Chinese nationality and have entered China on Australian passports we can gain access to them under our bilateral consular agreement".

South China Morning Post
May 15, 2012
Pg. 1

30. Coinciding Fishing Bans Declared

China and Philippines may have found answer to Scarborough Shoal stand-off
By Stephen Chen

China and the Philippines have announced overlapping fishing bans in disputed waters in the South China Sea in what is being seen as a face-saving solution to a month-long stand-off at Scarborough Shoal for both countries.

The Ministry of Agriculture put a notice on its website saying it would enforce an annual ban on most fishing activities, including combined gill-netting, for most South China Sea waters from tomorrow to August 1. State media said the ban had been imposed at the same time each year since 2009.

The 2 1/2-month-long ban comes into effect in areas above a latitude of 12 degrees north, with Scarborough, at 15 degrees north, included.

The Philippines refused yesterday to recognise China's ban because it encompasses waters it considers its own. But the country's foreign secretary, Albert del Rosario, said Philippine President Benigno Aquino welcomed the chance to replenish fish stocks and that the Philippines would issue its own ban.

"We do not recognise China's fishing ban in as much as portions of the ban encompass our Exclusive Economic Zone," del Rosario said. "However, the president has decided that in view of the accelerated depletion of our marine resources, it would be advisable for us to issue our own fishing ban for a period of time."

Foreign Ministry spokesman Hong Lei said in Beijing yesterday that the ban was to protect marine life and not related to the stand-off at Scarborough Shoal - known as Huangyan Island on the mainland and Panatag Shoal in the Philippines.

"China's insistence on seeking solutions through diplomatic negotiations has not changed," he said.

However, a mainland expert said the bans represented a timely and convenient solution for both sides.

Du Jifeng, from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said China had banned fishing as a friendly gesture and the Philippines' response showed that China's message had been understood and accepted.

"The stand-off has become a standstill, as neither country can come up with an effective solution," Du said. "I believe it will quickly cool down as the ban comes into effect."

The Ministry of Agriculture's notice said fishing boats not licensed to operate outside the area covered by the ban must remain in harbours and their nets must be locked up. Licensed boats can only operate in waters south of the banned area.

Boats that breach the ban will face fines of up to 50,000 yuan (HK\$61,200) for a single violation, with repeat offenders subject to the loss of their licence and criminal prosecution.

The mainland's fishing authorities, with support from coastal provinces including Guangdong, Fujian, Guangxi and Hainan, will launch inspections in harbours and sea patrols with law enforcement vessels.

Professor Zhang Mingliang, a South China Sea expert at Guangzhou's Jinan University, said there was still potential for conflict because small boats with set gill-nets would still be allowed to operate in the waters covered by the ban.

The maritime stand-off, the worst between the two countries for years, began early last month when a Philippine warship tried to arrest Chinese fishermen at the shoal, but was stopped by Chinese marine surveillance vessels.

Deputy Foreign Minister Fu Ying said last week that China was prepared if tensions escalated, and state media warned of Beijing's resolve to protect its sovereignty.

However, an anti-China protest in Manila last Friday turned out to be much smaller than expected.

China has also increased economic pressure on the Philippines, calling back tourists and stepping up quarantine checks on banana imports.

Additional reporting by Agence France-Presse

Yonhap News Agency
May 15, 2012

31. No Plan To Deploy Tactical Nukes In S. Korea: Pentagon

By Lee Chi-dong, Yonhap

WASHINGTON -- The Pentagon said Monday that it will not redeploy tactical nuclear weapons to South Korea.

"Our policy remains in support of a non-nuclear

Korean peninsula. There is no plan to change that policy," a spokesperson for the Department of Defense told Yonhap News Agency on the customary condition of anonymity.

"Tactical nuclear weapons are unnecessary for the defense of South Korea and we have no plan or intention to redeploy them there," the official added.

The comments were the first formal confirmation of the Obama administration's policy on denuclearizing the peninsula since reports of a move by some Republican lawmakers to reintroduce forward-based nuclear weapons in South Korea.

Last week, the House Armed Services Committee, dominated by Republicans, approved an amendment to the fiscal 2013 national defense authorization bill that calls for the re-introduction of those weapons to South Korea.

The initiative, which still has a long way to go for becoming a binding act, drew keen media attention in South Korea.

The South faces longstanding nuclear and missile threats from its communist neighbor, North Korea.

Around 28,500 American troops are stationed in the South, a legacy of the 1950-53 Korean War, which ended in a cease-fire, not a formal peace treaty.

The U.S. withdrew all of its nuclear weapons from Korea in 1991 after the two Koreas signed a deal on the denuclearization of the peninsula.

Since then, the U.S. has provided a so-called nuclear umbrella for the South.

South Korean government officials also say the nuclear umbrella is sufficient to counter the North's threats.

The move by Republicans in Congress is viewed as intended to pressure North Korea, China and the Obama administration, which is campaigning for a nuclear-free world.

Yonhap News Agency
May 15, 2012

32. N. Korea Stops Sending Out GPS Jamming Signals Against S. Korea: Source

SEOUL (Yonhap) -- North Korea appears to have stopped jamming satellite signals in an apparent attempt to disrupt air and maritime traffic navigation systems in parts of South Korea, a high-ranking government source in Seoul said Tuesday.

The North has been blamed for global positioning system (GPS) disruptions that affected hundreds of commercial flights and ships in and out of South Korea since April 28, although no damage was caused as all had backup navigational systems.

"GPS jamming signals from North Korea have not been detected since May 14," the source said on condition of anonymity, adding the South's military is keeping "close watch" on the North's activities.

The source did not rule out the possibility North Korea could send such signals again.

The South's military is analyzing why North Korea sent the GPS jamming signals from its western border city of Kaesong, officials said.

The signal-scrambling may have been intended to "test electronic warfare devices by the North Korean military or block mobile phone signals inside the North," said an official at the South's military, who also spoke on the condition of anonymity.

"We are closely watching activities in military units in

Kaesong where the signals were detected as originating," the military official said.

On Monday, South Korean President Lee Myung-bak and Chinese President Hu Jintao held talks in Beijing and pledged to cooperate closely to deal "more effectively" with North Korea, Lee's office said, as concern grows Pyongyang could stage additional provocations after last month's rocket launch.

The North's GPS attacks began after Pyongyang voiced anger at what it called insulting remarks made by South Korean leaders in connection with its failed rocket launch and costly birthday anniversary celebrations for late founding leader Kim Il-sung.

Lee estimated the costs of the rocket launch at US\$850 million and said the North could have been better spent the money to feed its hungry people.

North Korea vowed retaliations, threatening last month to launch "special military actions" to reduce the Lee government to ashes in minutes. Seoul officials said the GPS attacks appear to be part of the North's latest threats.

Pyongyang has been blamed for jamming GPS signals in South Korea since 2010.

GPS is a satellite-based navigation system widely used by aircraft, ships and the military as well as private vehicle owners.

South Korean military fighters, cargo planes and precise guided bombs are not affected by the disruption of GPS signals as they are equipped with military-only satellite navigation systems, officials said.

33. Taiwan Deploying More 'Carrier Killers': Report

By Agence France-Presse

Taiwan is arming more of its fleet with its new "carrier killer" anti-ship missiles as China conducts further sea trials of its first aircraft carrier, local media said Monday.

Five of the Taiwanese navy's eight Perry-class frigates have been armed with the supersonic Hsiung Ffeng (Brave Wind) III weapons, the Taipei-based China Times said.

Some of its smaller patrol boats have also been equipped with the missiles, which are designed to cruise at a speed of Mach 2.0, or twice the speed of sound, with a range of up to 130 kilometres (80 miles), the newspaper said.

The defence ministry declined to comment on the report.

The China Times said the navy plans to deploy 120 such missiles -- dubbed "aircraft carrier killers" by their developer -- in a project costing an estimated Tw\$12 billion (\$400 million).

The missiles were first unveiled by Taiwan in August last year on the same day that China began sea trials for its first aircraft carrier, a reconconditioned 1980s-era warship originally commissioned by the Soviet navy.

China has conducted seven sea trials of the ship since mid-2011, the paper said, without identifying its source.

Taiwan's defence ministry has expressed alarm at China's recent naval expansion, although one expert said the People's Liberation Army (PLA) was still years away from operating a fully-equipped aircraft carrier.

Kevin Cheng, editor-in-chief of the Taipei-based Asia-Pacific Defense Magazine, told

AFP: "It will take the PLA at least five years to operate a carrier group with full combat capability."

The biggest challenge to the navy will be the implementation of software, he added.

Ties between China and Taiwan have improved significantly since the Beijing-friendly Ma Ying-jeou became the island's president in 2008, vowing to adopt a non-confrontational policy towards the mainland.

But China still regards Taiwan as part of its territory awaiting reunification, by force if necessary, although the island has governed itself since the two sides separated in 1949 after a long civil war.

Christian Science Monitor
(csmonitor.com)
May 15, 2012

34. Post-Traumatic Stress Now A Leading Concern For Military Families

The nonprofit Blue Star Families surveys military families and identifies their Top 5 concerns. Other concerns include shrinking retirement benefits and the effect of deployment on kids.

By Anna Mulrine, Staff writer

Washington--A new survey that ranks the top struggles and worries of military families finds that after more than a decade of war, soldiers and their spouses are feeling isolated and financially strapped.

The vast majority -- 95 percent -- point to a civil-military divide, agreeing with the statement that most Americans "do not truly understand or appreciate the sacrifices made by service members and their families." Another 40 percent say their community "did not embrace

opportunities to help military children."

For the first time, post-traumatic stress was a top concern for families -- a development that the survey's creators found "most surprising," says Stephanie Himel-Nelson, spokesman for Blue Star Families, the nonprofit made up of troops, veterans, and their spouses that conducted the survey.

Equally surprising, she adds, is that of those who had reported post-traumatic stress in family members, more than 60 percent had not sought treatment for it.

"Post-traumatic stress has never been in the Top 5 [concerns] before," Ms. Himel-Nelson says.

The questionnaire of some 4,200 military families is designed to uncover "key trends in military family relationships," according to Blue Star Families. Conducted last November, it delves into views on stress, financial prospects, and the effects of deployments.

It finds that the prospect of shrinking retirement benefits is the No. 1 source of concern for 31 percent of the survey's respondents. One-fifth cited potential changes in pay and benefits as their top concern, while 7 percent reported that the effect of deployment on their kids was No. 1. And for 6 percent, post-traumatic stress/ combat stress was their No. 1 source of concern.

"Multiple deployments, longer separations and the sustained level of OPTempo [operational tempo] are taking their toll on military children," the study notes. "There are lots whose parents have been gone more than half their lives," adds Himel-Nelson.

According to another study by the RAND Corp., school-age children whose parents

frequently deploy have a higher likelihood of developing behavioral problems. More than 60 percent of military families in the Blue Star Families survey said their child's participation in extracurricular activities was negatively impacted by deployments.

Most of the survey's respondents say they don't feel that most Americans understand the plight of the military family. Though striking, the finding is not particularly surprising, Himel-Nelson argues, since less than 1 percent of Americans serve in the US military.

"It's difficult if you're not living the life to truly understand it," she says. "We all agree that appreciation for the troops is so much higher than it was during the Vietnam era – and I don't think that people are denying that."

The scarcity of employment prospects for veterans – and the dearth of jobs for spouses of service members – rounded out the Top 5 concerns of respondents. More than half of spouses felt that being a military wife or husband had a negative impact on their ability to pursue a career. Of the 60 percent who were not currently employed, 53 percent said that they wanted to be.

Tacoma News Tribune
May 13, 2012

35. Military Families Also Pay Price For Repeated Tours Of Duty

By Adam Ashton, The News Tribune

Resilient, tough, experienced, professional. The Army uses words like these to describe U.S. soldiers in the post-9/11 era who have had to adapt to the new normal of repeat combat tours.

The Army's No. 2 officer, Gen. Lloyd Austin, said on

a visit to Joint Base Lewis-McChord this spring that the "high up-tempo" of soldiers going on multiple overseas missions was challenging but had left the military with a "highly trained and incredibly resilient force."

The same words apply to the spouses, children and other loved ones of oft-deployed troops. Thousands of families in the South Sound are now coping with the absence of soldiers who have gone to do dangerous work in Afghanistan for the better part of a year.

Tommie Polizzotti is one such spouse. She will spend Mother's Day today without her husband around to make pancake breakfast for their four kids.

"It takes a special woman," said Maj. Dave Polizzotti, a Lewis-McChord officer on his third deployment. "She is a smart, strong, capable wife."

The bulk of America's warfighting is still done by less seasoned soldiers on their first or second tours.

About 10 percent of the 2.4 million service members who have fought in Iraq and Afghanistan deployed three or more times. The Lewis-McChord Stryker brigade sent to Afghanistan this winter has about 3,900 soldiers, of whom about 380 had served on at least three previous tours, according to Army data released to The News Tribune.

But the growing ranks of multiple-deployment soldiers and their families are more exposed to the problems that can affect all service members. They face a greater likelihood of a serious combat-related head injury or post-traumatic stress disorder.

In another sign of strain, the Army's latest annual suicide study showed seasoned veterans taking their own lives more often. In the past, soldiers who

had never deployed or deployed only once were far more likely to commit suicide. They represented about 75 percent of Army suicides in the past; by last year, that number had dropped to 61 percent.

The perpetual cycle of coming and going also has exacted a hard toll on marriages. The number of military divorces is climbing and surpassing the civilian rate, countering research from early in the Iraq War that suggested soldiers who deployed tended to have more resilient marriages. The Pentagon's latest reports show the annual military divorce rate at 3.7 percent – its highest point since 1999 and greater than the 3.5 percent civilian rate. That means 3.7 percent of all military marriages end in divorce in any given year.

In southern Afghanistan, where Lewis-McChord soldiers are currently serving, Maj. Victor Delacancela recently finished a year's duty running a combat stress clinic in Zabul province. His team advised soldiers who had deployed several times to re-create whatever coping skills worked for them in the past. For some, that means calling home frequently, while others give their spouses more space to run their households independently.

Some find the balance to sustain their relationships. Others do not.

"A good number of soldiers are having their spouse calling them and saying, 'I'm booking; I can't take this anymore,'" Delacancela said.

A New England Journal of Medicine study in 2010 found that wives of soldiers deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan were nearly 20 percent more likely to have mental health problems than wives of soldiers who stayed home.

The longer the soldiers were gone, the greater the odds

a spouse would be diagnosed with depression, the study found.

Addressing stress

Army leaders are aware of the stress repeated deployments can place on a soldier and a military family.

"For over a decade, nearly every leader and soldier serving in our Army has lived in a near constant state of anticipation – whether anticipating an upcoming deployment, anticipating the next mission or convoy, or anticipating the challenges of returning home," wrote former Army Vice Chief of Staff Gen. Peter Chiarelli in a comprehensive study on the health of the Army released early this year.

"The prolonged stress and strain on them and their families must be effectively addressed," Chiarelli added.

But as long as the nation is at war, the military can't pledge to shield a service member from a combat tour. They're working to shorten the length of deployments – they dropped from one year to nine months as of this year – and to build up resiliency among soldiers accustomed to fighting overseas every other year.

War-tested veterans are more likely than less experienced soldiers to seek help for behavioral health resources, according to a recent mental health survey carried out among troops in Afghanistan in 2010.

But concerns about service members snapping under prolonged exposure to hard conditions and hard fighting were raised this spring after a rampage in southern Afghanistan. Staff Sgt. Robert Bales, a decorated veteran with Lewis-McChord's 3rd Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division, is charged with murdering 17 Afghan villagers on March 11.

He had a wife and two children back home in Lake Tapps and was reportedly not eager to go on his fourth deployment.

It's too simplistic, however, to connect sensational war crimes with multiple overseas tours. The leader of the so-called Stryker "kill team" tried for the 2010 slayings of three Afghan civilians was a three-tour combat veteran, but the other three who were convicted in the homicide cases were impressionable younger soldiers on their first tour.

On the battlefield

The Army manages stress on the battlefield with support personnel such as psychologists and chaplains. Commanders play a role, too, in keeping up their soldiers' morale.

In Afghanistan this year, Army I Corps Command Sgt. Major John Troxell from Lewis-McChord visited an austere base on the Pakistan border. He found soldiers in surprisingly good spirits despite their hard assignments patrolling a hostile environment.

Troxell learned that their commanders expected them to do 10 days of hard work on patrols and then consistently gave them three days of down time to rest and catch up with their families.

Those promised days of rest provided enough incentive to carry the soldiers through the long days and nights sleeping on the ground and eating packaged meals, Troxell said.

Delacancela's team in Zabul included two enlisted behavioral health specialists trained to coach soldiers on how to talk through problems. They hung a sign on their door that read, "Don't knock, come in," and traveled to bases wherever service members were killed. They listened to soldiers share memories about fallen comrades.

They offered one-on-one classes to teach coping techniques and encouraged the troops to have their spouses make similar efforts at home. It's not uncommon to see self-improvement books about relationships, such as "The Five Love Languages," lying around Army bases in Afghanistan.

"What we talk about a lot is not post-traumatic stress. It's post-traumatic growth," Delacancela said. "A lot of guys with multiple deployments will show signs of post-traumatic stress; with a little work, they can experience a little growth."

Army chaplain Lt. Col. David Shoffner remembers a wave of divorces that followed his first deployment to Iraq in 2003-04. Back then, combat was a new experience for soldiers who signed up in peacetime and did not anticipate a period of repeated deployments to battle hard-to-find insurgents.

Today, Shoffner says the soldiers who sign up and re-enlist expect a different lifestyle, one based on the probability that they'll fight overseas several times in their careers.

"Nowadays most of the soldiers we re-enlist are soldiers who enlisted after 9/11," said Shoffner, the deputy chaplain for Lewis-McChord's I Corps. "They don't know what the Army was like before 9/11."

By anecdotal experience, military chaplains and counselors say younger soldiers' marriages are more likely to break because of deployments than ones that have been tested by several yearlong missions.

"Once you've gone through that second deployment, you come to expect that this is a way for life," said Sgt. 1st Class Cliff Magness of I Corps.

He's a retention noncommissioned officer for I

Corps — his job is to keep tried-and-true soldiers wearing the uniform — and he says probable deployments are not among the concerns preventing soldiers from re-enlisting these days. The end of the war in Iraq and the drawdown in Afghanistan offer some assurances that the pace of the fighting will decline, he said.

"We finally see the light at the end of the tunnel," Magness said. "They're not so worried about two or three more deployments. They're thinking there's maybe one more."

Still, Magness knows firsthand the strain that repeat overseas tours can put on family relationships. His 18-year marriage ended after the last of his four deployments. He and his wife thought they knew what worked for them after his previous tours, but too much had changed by the time he returned to the states in October.

"Sometimes the divorce isn't an event, it's just something that happens," he said. "You're gone so much you don't know the person anymore."

This story was reported in Qalat and Kabul, Afghanistan, and at Joint Base Lewis-McChord.

Wall Street Journal
May 15, 2012

36. Missile Defense Is Self-Defense

Obama may be 'flexible.' But the U.S. owes Russia nothing.
By Jon Kyl

Within hours of reassuming the Russian presidency this month, Vladimir Putin demanded that the United States provide "firm guarantees" that a U.S.-led missile-defense system in Europe won't be aimed against Russia. President Barack Obama can't offer any "legally binding" guarantee, because when he sought

ratification of the New Start Treaty in 2010 he promised to accept no limits on U.S. missile defenses. But he can offer Mr. Putin a political assurance—what he might have been signaling when a "hot mic" recently caught him telling Russian leaders that he'd be "more flexible" after the November elections.

Offering any such assurances would be a serious mistake. American missile defenses aren't targeted at Russia—they're meant to defend against strikes by Iran and North Korea (and accidental or rogue launches, whatever their origin). But that's not the point.

The right to self-defense is not one for which we must negotiate; it's certainly not something for which Russia would negotiate. Yet, in an increasingly dangerous world, President Obama might be putting this most fundamental right on the table, presumably as a quid pro quo for the yet-to-be-realized benefits of "reset" with Russia.

We've been down this road before. In 1972, U.S. officials agreed to the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, effectively signing away America's capacity to defend against nuclear attack. That decision was driven by the theory that missile defenses would spur an arms race, leading the Soviets to build more missiles to overcome our defenses. But the Soviets built those missiles anyway, increasing their number of strategic nuclear warheads to more than 11,500 in 1989 from about 2,500 in 1972. (U.S. warheads grew to about 13,500.)

Giving up the right to self-defense did nothing to improve security on either side, so in 2002 the U.S. wisely withdrew from the treaty in

order to develop an effective U.S. ballistic missile-defense system. President George W. Bush provided no written assurances to Russia that our systems would not be directed toward Moscow, but he offered to cooperate on missile defense, given an assumed collective interest in defending against emerging threats from nations such as Iran and North Korea.

Such cooperation has proven elusive because Russia is less interested in cooperating against Iran than in degrading our missile-defense capability. Going back to the Reykjavik Summit between Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev in 1986, Russia has wanted to prevent the U.S. from developing effective missile defenses. That's why Russia insisted that the New Start Treaty link offensive and defensive forces, and why it conditions cooperation with NATO on legally binding limits on the capabilities and numbers of our missile-defense systems.

NATO has said that its defensive systems aren't directed against Russia, but the Russians are insisting on proof. In recent weeks, NATO officials have seemed to imply that they may provide the political assurances Mr. Putin is seeking. If they don't, says the chief of the Russian general staff, "a decision to use destructive force pre-emptively will be taken if the situation worsens."

But do the Russians provide us written assurances that their new mobile ballistic missile systems won't be directed against Europe or the U.S.? Or that their nuclear bombers and submarine-launched ballistic missiles won't target us? No, they do not.

Why then, must the United States and NATO justify missile-defense deployments that pose no offensive threat and

are intended to defend chiefly against Iran but—depending on future developments—might be effective against Russian missiles as well? Well, says Mr. Putin, because otherwise he will withdraw from New Start and engage us in another arms race. That didn't work out so well for the Soviet Union, and it would be foolish now.

President Obama has a responsibility to defend America against all threats. Assuring any nation that our missile-defense systems will be ineffective against their nuclear ballistic missiles is clearly at odds with that responsibility. Mr. Putin must be made to understand that a desire to cooperate is not the same thing as a willingness to trade away our fundamental right to self-defense, and that America will always retain the right to defend itself.

Mr. Kyl, a Republican, is a U.S. senator from Arizona.

Washington Times
May 15, 2012
Pg. B4

37. False-Flag Operation On LOST

Treaty would compromise U.S. sovereignty, not enhance it
By Frank J. Gaffney Jr.

Here we go again: The usual suspects - the environmentalists, the one-worlder transnationalists, the Obama administration (to the extent that is not redundant) and assorted shortsighted special interests including, regrettably, the United States Navy - are dusting off the hopelessly outdated and inequitable United Nations Law of the Sea Treaty (better, and more accurately, known as LOST) in the hope of jamming its ratification through the Senate as was done two years ago with the defective New Start Treaty.

Amazingly, they are doing so under what intelligence professionals would dub a "false flag" operation - an initiative that presents itself as one thing, in this case the "American Sovereignty Campaign," when it is exactly the opposite. If ever there were an anti-sovereignty treaty it is LOST. It speaks volumes about the lengths to which this accord's proponents have to go to conceal the reality that they are masquerading as advocates of U.S. sovereignty, not what they really are: champions of an effort to greatly reduce it.

As it happens, the poster child of this bait-and-switch may be former-Sen.-turned-lobbyist Trent Lott. In October 2007, former Senate Majority Leader Lott actually circulated a letter to his colleagues urging that the Law of the Sea Treaty be withdrawn from consideration by what was once known as "the world's greatest deliberative body."

This letter warned: "To effect the treaty's broad regime of governance, we are particularly concerned that United States sovereignty could be subjugated in many areas to a supranational government that is chartered by the United Nations under the 1982 Convention. Further, we are troubled that compulsory dispute resolution could pertain to public and private activities including law enforcement, maritime security, business operations, and nonmilitary activities performed aboard military vessels."

Today, however, Mr. Lott represents Shell Oil. His job is to lobby his former colleagues not to sign a letter that has that exact same language in it, word for word. Is that because the treaty is no longer a threat to U.S. sovereignty at the hands of "a supranational government that is chartered

by the United Nations under the 1982 Convention"? Or is it simply that Mr. Lott is now a gun for hire, willing, like the campaign he is helping advance, to do or say whatever it takes to get a seriously defective treaty ratified?

How defective is LOST? Consider the following illustrative examples of its fatal flaws:

First, as Mr. Lott once warned, ratification of LOST would commit the United States to submit to mandatory dispute resolution with respect to U.S. military and industrial operations. While LOST proponents argue that the United States will choose available arbitration mechanisms to avoid legal decisions from the International Court of Justice or the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea, such arbitration panels are no less perilous for U.S. interests since the decisive "swing" arbiters would be appointed by generally unfriendly U.N.-affiliated bureaucrats. The arbitration panels can also be relied upon to look to rulings by those two bodies to inform their own decisions.

Furthermore, while there is a LOST provision exempting "military activity" from such dispute resolution mechanisms, the treaty makes no attempt to define "military activity," virtually guaranteeing that such matters will be litigated - in all likelihood to our detriment - before one or another of LOST's arbitration mechanisms. The rulings of such arbitrators cannot be appealed.

Subjecting our military to the risks of such mandatory dispute resolution is all the more imprudent given that LOST provides the Navy with no navigational rights and freedoms beyond those

it already enjoys under customary international law and the U.S. Freedom of Navigation program. The Navy has successfully protected American interests on the seas for more than 200 years without the United States becoming a party to LOST - including during the 30 years since LOST was concluded, in 1982. There is no compelling reason to believe that record will be improved upon by entrusting the job to international legal arrangements.

Second, the Law of the Sea Treaty contains provisions that risk putting sensitive - and in some cases, militarily useful - information and technology in the hands of America's adversaries and its companies' commercial competitors. Claims by LOST's proponents that this problem was fixed by a 1994 agreement that was not signed by all of LOST's parties cry out for close examination by the Senate and the nation.

Third, the Law of the Sea Treaty entails commitments that have far-reaching implications for U.S. businesses, far beyond the possibility of mandatory technology transfers. These include: embroiling this country in treaties bearing on commercial activities to which it is not a party; wide-ranging, intrusive and expensive environmental obligations; creating standing for foreign nationals to pursue alien torts in our courts; and jeopardizing our rights under the World Trade Organization, which was established after 1994.

Of particular concern is the fact that LOST creates an international taxation regime. It does so by empowering the International Seabed Authority to tax Americans for the purposes of meeting its own administrative costs and of

globally redistributing revenue derived from the exploitation of seabed resources.

It is a travesty to portray a treaty with such clearly sovereignty-sapping provisions as an enhancement to our national sovereignty. LOST should be rejected this time - as President Reagan did 30 years ago and as Mr. Lott urged 25 years later.

Frank J. Gaffney Jr. is president of the Center for Security Policy (SecureFreedom.org), a columnist for The Washington Times and host of Secure Freedom Radio, heard in Washington weeknights at 9 p.m. on 1260 AM.

Chicago Sun-Times
May 14, 2012
Pg. 8

38. Few NATO Risks For Obama

By Lynn Sweet

WASHINGTON — With the American public--and presumptive GOP nominee Mitt Romney--focused on the economy, President Barack Obama may not have much at stake politically if there are diplomatic flaps at the NATO Summit in Chicago.

And since Obama already signed a "Strategic Partnership Agreement" with Afghanistan to have most U.S. troops out in 2014 — he flew to Kabul for the May 1 signing — there may not be much of a price to pay domestically if pressure comes from the new president of France and other NATO partners in Afghanistan to shorten the timetable.

And if all heck breaks loose in Obama's hometown from protesters? Well, a riot in a president's hometown at a global summit is obviously not good. But the ramifications may not be far reaching. As political

time goes, the presidential election is light-years away.

"Nobody in November will remember what happened," an Obama team source told me. It will be a short news cycle on the cable outlets "and a month in the [Chicago] papers."

Romney's team headquartered in Boston is hardly paying attention to the NATO gathering and was not, when I visited on Friday, sizing it up as an obvious political opportunity for them because they want an almost exclusive focus on the economy.

The rapidly expanding Romney operation (overlooking the Charles River) on Friday was ramping up the "message of the week" theme for this week — on government spending. Romney hits the Chicago area Tuesday for a fund-raiser at the Winnetka home of insurance mogul and civic activist Pat Ryan and his wife, Shirley.

The Romney campaign could mull commenting on some policy difference that emerges — but that would depend on the specifics and if strategically it paid for them to go off message. Same goes if protests get ugly or if there is some serious security incident. It all depends on the situation, I'm told.

Obama's biggest diplomatic stake

The biggest diplomatic stakes for Obama are the package of issues surrounding Afghanistan, made more complex because of the election of a new French president.

Three announcements are expected at the Chicago NATO Summit: When in 2013 the combat mission in Afghanistan shifts to supporting the Afghan National Security Forces; how much support, financial and otherwise the "ANSF" will get from NATO partners; and agreement on a "roadmap"

for NATO's post-2014 role in Afghanistan.

France's new president, Francois Hollande, a Socialist, will be sworn in Monday. He campaigned on a platform to pull out French combat troops by the end of 2012.

During a Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing on the Chicago NATO Summit on Thursday, Assistant Secretary of State Philip Gordon was asked by committee chair Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.) about Hollande.

Obama at the last NATO Summit — in Lisbon, Portugal, in 2010 — got the Afghanistan partners to agree to the 2014 timetable, Gordon noted.

"The French assure us that they are committed to our common success in Afghanistan, and I'm sure we'll find a way forward that ensures that common success. All I can do is speak to our own view, which is that this principle of 'in together, out together' remains critical," Gordon said.

Mayor Rahm Emanuel has much more at stake in the summit — as Obama's former chief of staff, he grabbed the Summit, seeing it as a terrific opportunity to showcase Chicago. But he neglected to get buy-in from rank-and-file Chicagoans who see the inconveniences more than the advantages.

Emanuel has just one portfolio for the NATO Summit as host mayor. Though he once did while in the White House, Emanuel this week doesn't have to worry about the future of NATO, transatlantic security, ballistic missiles, Russia, free and fair elections in Afghanistan and how to make NATO allies take on their fair share of financial responsibilities and spend two percent of their gross domestic product on defense.

Obama wanted the summit to be in Chicago in part because he wanted to show off for foreign leaders a city that relishes its diversity — with almost every ethnic group that is part of NATO and its partners.

The last U.S. NATO Summit was in 1999; this is the first outside of Washington.

"In addition to the opportunity to showcase one of our nation's great cities, our hosting of the summit in Chicago is a tangible symbol of the importance of NATO to the United States. It is also an opportunity to underscore to the American people the continued value of this alliance to security challenges we face today," Gordon said at the Senate hearing.

Emanuel, on the other hand, wanted the summit to drum up business for Chicago.

My thought is Emanuel far more than Obama owns the summit if things go wrong — and will likely bear the brunt even though the Secret Service is taking the lead coordinating security.

Emanuel will find it harder to change the subject if there are horrible demonstrations. Obama, working off a national and global stage — will be able to move on if all that goes wrong are protests.

"Foreign policy in the minds of the American people right now is not nearly as important as it has been in past elections," Brookings Institution scholar William Galston told me. "... They are focused almost exclusively on the economy."

Former White House Chief of Staff Bill Daley noted when we talked that demonstrations at world summits "are not unique to Barack Obama or to America today.

"Demonstrations happen every time there is a big gathering now of any leaders

of the world anywhere," Daley said.

I asked him if the fact the summit is in hometown Chicago raises the stakes for Obama. He said no. "Just cause it was his hometown people would say, 'boy, he could not control his home therefore we are not going to vote for him as president.' ... I don't see it. ... Obviously, it wouldn't help. But I don't see the American people holding him responsible for what may or may not happen by demonstrators who come from all over the country and all over the world to the city."

Wall Street Journal

May 15, 2012

Pg. 2

Capital Journal

39. Iran Talks' Moment Of Truth Has Arrived

By Gerald F. Seib

In the long and winding American quest to curb Iran's nuclear program, the next month is the most critical period yet. And there are three men to keep an eye on as it unfolds: President Barack Obama, Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak.

U.S. officials and their partners from other big world powers meet Iranian negotiators in Baghdad on May 23. That meeting will show whether the oft-discussed, never quite real, diplomatic track for stopping Iran from developing the ability to make nuclear weapons actually exists.

The conditions for hopping on that diplomatic track have never been better. Economic sanctions on Iran—particularly a growing international ban on buying its oil—are biting, to the point that oil tankers loaded with Iranian oil are loitering off its coast, with nowhere to go because customers are melting away. And the oil embargo

tightens considerably when a European Union ban on Iranian oil purchases goes into effect July 1.

The U.S. and its world-power partners—China, Russia, France, Britain and Germany—met with Iranian negotiators in mid-April for the first negotiating session in more than a year. U.S. officials say that meeting was the first time the Iranians engaged in a serious conversation about their nuclear program, one free of bluster and preconditions.

That meeting set the stage for this month's encounter in Baghdad, where a serious proposal from the world powers will be put on the table, asking Iran for specific steps to show it is willing to pull back its nuclear activity. The proposal won't take Iran by surprise; quiet conversations are under way between Europeans and Iranians as the meeting approaches, explaining in general what Tehran will be asked to do.

So if the Iranians show up and talk in Baghdad, it won't be because they wonder what the world expects of them, but because they already know in general and are willing to discuss the ideas. If the meeting comes off successfully, U.S. officials think there will be, for the first time, an actual diplomatic track under way.

In other words, if serious diplomacy is going to take root, this month is when it will have to happen. If not, Israeli or American military action to stop Iran becomes much more likely.

What the U.S. and its partners seek from Iran at the May 23 meeting likely will be a variation on an idea floated before: Iran curbs its enrichment program and gives up uranium it already has enriched—depleting its stockpile of potential nuclear-weapons fuel—in return for

safe nuclear reactor fuel made elsewhere.

Specifically, that probably means a plan calling for Iran to ship out of the country the uranium it already has enriched to 20% purity, and to stop enriching any more uranium above the safer 5% level. That probably would mean stopping enrichment at a sensitive nuclear facility near the holy city of Qom—the one that most scares both U.S. and Israeli officials.

In return, Iran would get processed nuclear fuel from abroad, a sign the world accepts a peaceful nuclear program for civilian power and medical research. And, of course, there would be the prospect of easing sanctions.

Presumably, Iran, if it is willing to move down this path, will want European leaders to agree not to implement the full embargo on Iranian oil purchases set to kick in this summer. But U.S. officials say that isn't likely to happen, at least not at this stage. "They'd really have to wow us" for the oil ban to be eased, says one official.

As this drama unfolds, the first person to watch is President Obama. His goal at this point is simply, in the phrase officials use, "to push the timeline to the right"—that is, to slow down the Iranian march to nuclear weapons capability enough to buy time for a broader solution. He may soon face tough judgment calls on which Iranian moves are real, and which are sufficient.

The second key figure is Iran's Ayatollah Khamenei. Western officials have virtually dropped the pretense that President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad really matters on nuclear decisions, and think the only voice that counts is that of the spiritual leader. That is why Mr. Obama in March

sent Ayatollah Khamenei a back-channel message via Turkey saying the ayatollah's recent religious declaration that possession of nuclear weapons is immoral provides the basis for negotiation.

The third key figure won't be involved in the negotiations at all, and isn't even the leader of his country. He is Israeli Defense Minister Barak. American officials don't hold out much hope his boss, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, will find any negotiating progress sufficient to conclude the threat has been contained and justify putting aside the option of a military strike.

But Mr. Barak is another matter, and as deputy prime minister he would have to agree on any military move. There will be many opinions in Israel on the diplomatic dance ahead, but his matters most.

Norfolk Virginian-Pilot
May 15, 2012

40. The Beginning Of Welcome Change

Monday marked a long-awaited shift in some of the Pentagon's policies excluding women from certain positions because of their gender. But it shouldn't mark the end.

The practical effect of the move is that nearly 14,000 assignments closed to women are now open. The Army alone will change the rules for about 13,000 billets. The Marine Corps will adjust requirements for 371 assignments.

Under the 1994 rules, women were excluded from some jobs for a variety of reasons, including simply because they were "co-located" with combat units. That will change, according to a statement from the Pentagon:

"(O)ccupations will no longer be closed to women solely because the positions

are required to be co-located with ground combat units; and second, a sizable number of positions will be opened to women at the battalion level in select direct ground combat units in specific occupations."

The military, however, has not made a wholesale change in its employment policies. That's overdue. Women constitute 14.6 percent of the active force and roughly 17 percent of the reserves. They've proven they're as capable as men, on and off the battlefield. They should be considered for assignments based on their training, experience, leadership potential and physical requirements for the mission, not eliminated from consideration simply because they're female.

Although the Pentagon focused on the billets newly available to women, it said relatively little about the thousands of positions that remain closed. If women can now find a slot in a company with a combat unit, they are still excluded from an actual combat post.

The 1994 rules required the military to exclude women from military positions based on five basic considerations: "direct ground combat; berthing and privacy; co-location; long range reconnaissance and special operations forces; and physically demanding tasks."

As of Monday, the 60 new Navy positions open to women include 18 medical officer positions, 19 chaplain officer positions and 23 chief and petty officer first class hospital corpsman positions. The Pentagon report notes that 99 percent of all Air Force positions, officer and enlisted, are open to women. The figure is 66 percent for the Army, 68 percent for the Marines, and 88 percent for the Navy.

Among the positions for which women are not eligible:

SEALs, Riverine squadrons and Marine Corps support in compliance with direct ground combat rule.

Differences between the sexes means that some positions are likely to remain closed, at least at first. "Practical barriers... require time to resolve to ensure the services maximize the safety and privacy of all service members while maintaining military readiness," The Pentagon statement said. "Building upon analysis and experience, the services will develop gender-neutral physical standards for use by all members."

Pentagon officials stress that this significant rule change is the beginning. Said Acting Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness Jo Ann Rooney: "The department intends to continue to remove barriers that prevent service members from serving in any capacity in which they qualify."

In six months, the Defense Department is expected to update its report on the new policy and the progress toward gender-neutral physical standards. That's appropriate. Women have been killed and wounded in combat and noncombat incidents in Iraq and Afghanistan. It's time the military acknowledged the realities of modern war and updated accordingly.

Fayetteville (NC) Observer
May 15, 2012

41. 18th Airborne Corps Sees Return To A Familiar Role

Since 2001, the 18th Airborne Corps has gone far beyond its traditional rapid-response role. The corps, including Fort Bragg's 82nd Airborne Division, has instead dug into two wars, playing key roles in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Now, as the war in Iraq has ended and troops in Afghanistan are drawing down, the corps looks at returning to its former role, training for those first strikes at enemies who could be anywhere in the world.

The corps commander, Lt. Gen. Frank Helmick, is leaving the Army today. In June, Lt. Gen. Dan Allyn will succeed him. Their transition marks a turning point for the corps too.

Under Helmick, corps divisions oversaw the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq. Helmick himself was in charge of Iraq operations during the American departure. And today, the 82nd is continuing its work in security and the training of Afghan soldiers and police officers who will take increasing responsibility for their nation's order until most U.S. forces leave in 2014.

When Gen. Allyn arrives, he will oversee plans to return the corps to its more traditional role. He will deal too with the defense budget cuts that are coming.

We have seen the future, and it looks a lot like the past.