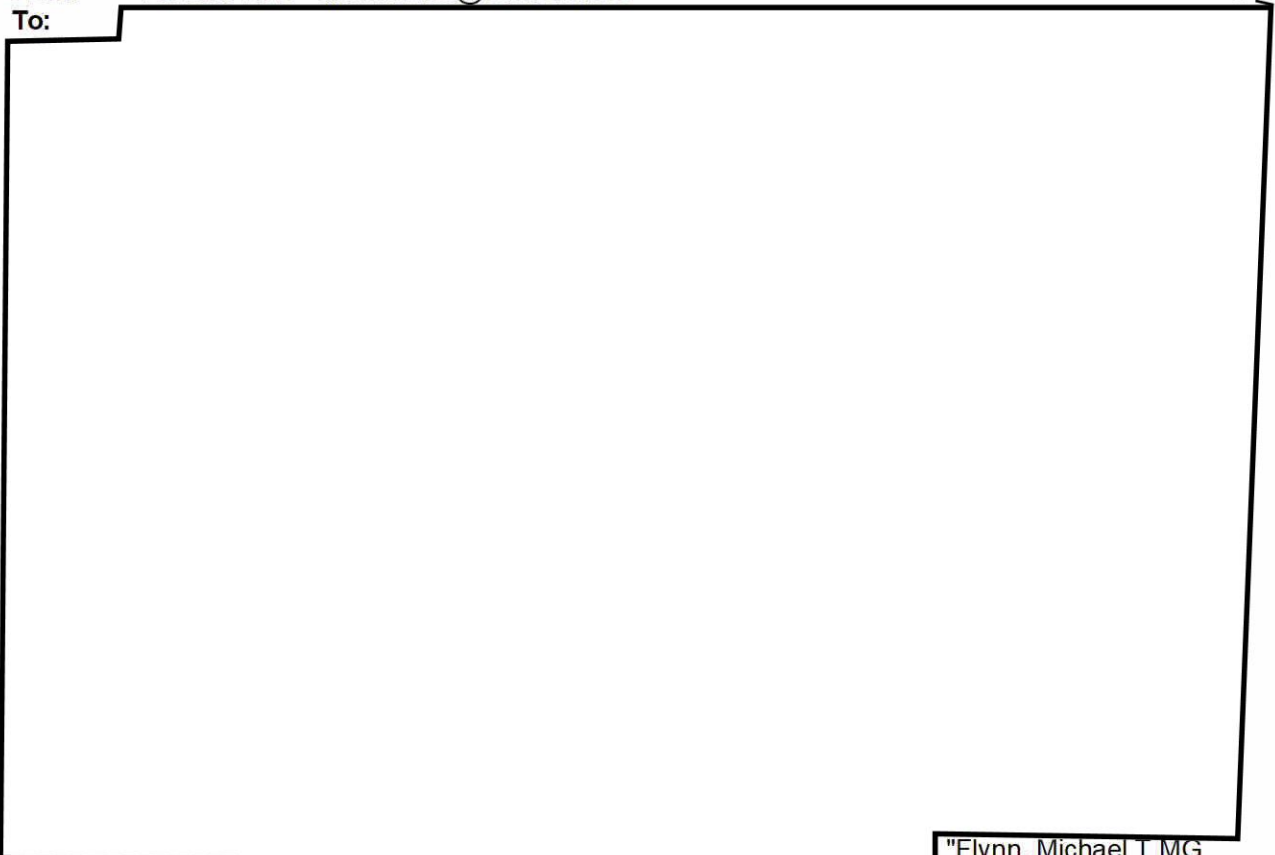


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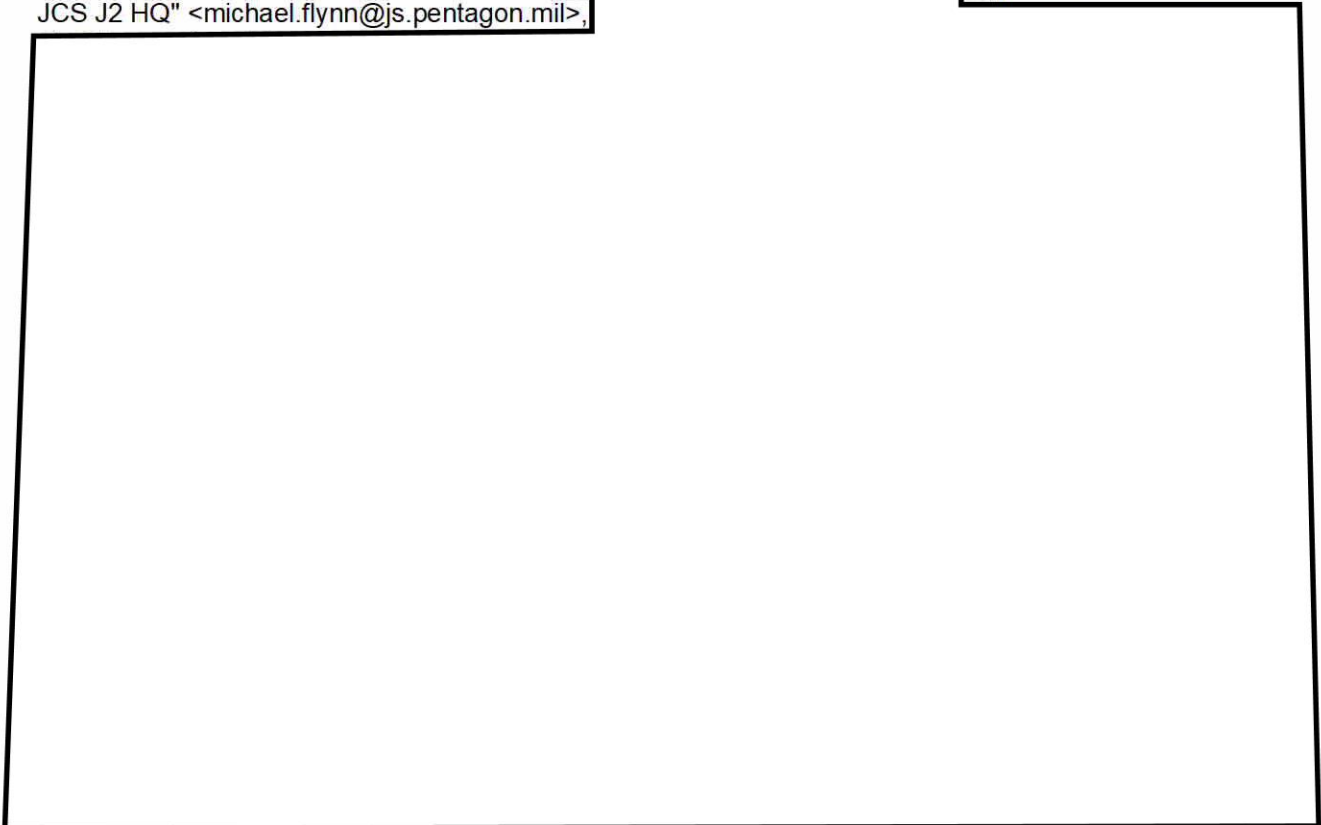
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Sent: Fri, 26 Jun 2009 21:05:11 -0400
From: Thomas Neis <thomasneis@comcast.net>
To:



JCS J2 HQ" <michael.flynn@js.pentagon.mil>.

"Flynn, Michael T MG



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Subject: Kirby Klips 27 June Morning Edition

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Kirby Klips for 27 June attached (morning edition).

Tom Neis



KIRBY KLIPS

Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff
Saturday, June 27, 2009



Morning Edition

TOP STORIES:

1. Obama Raises Doubts About Dialogue With Iran

(NEW YORK TIMES 26 JUN 09) ... Nazila Fathi and Alan Cowell

TEHRAN — Despite new criticism from President Obama, the Iranian authorities showed no sign Friday of bending to domestic or foreign pressure, saying that the disputed presidential vote on June 12 was the “healthiest” in three decades.

2. China 'Deeply Committed' To North Korea Sanctions: US Official

(AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE 26 JUN 09)

WASHINGTON — China has given its word to the United States that it is “deeply committed” to implementing tough new nuclear sanctions against North Korea, a senior US official said Friday.

CHAIRMAN’S TRAVEL:

3. Mullen Welcomes Kyrgyz Base Decision, Talks Missile Defense With Russians

(VOICE OF AMERICA 26 JUN 09) ... Al Pessin

The top U.S. military officer has welcomed progress toward reversing the Kyrgyz government decision to end U.S. use of a key base for supplying the allied mission in Afghanistan.

4. General: Russia, U.S. To Sign Military Cooperation Deals During Obama Trip

(XINHUA 26 JUN 09)

MOSCOW, -- Russia and the United States will sign military cooperation documents during U.S. President Barack Obama's upcoming visit to Moscow, Russian news agencies reported on Friday, citing the chief of the country's General Staff.

5. Top US Officer Hopes For Better Ties With Russia

(GEORGIAN DAILY/AP 26 JUN 09)

The top U.S. military officer said he was encouraged by meetings with Russian leaders Friday and that both sides were willing to improve military ties.

6. US Russia Agree On Military Cooperation

(PRESS TV 26 JUN 09)

The United States has received Russia's promise of military cooperation against what Washington deems looming worldwide menaces to both countries.

RUSSIA:

7. Medvedev To Arrive In Angola For One-Day Official Visit

(ITAR TASS, RUSSIA 26 JUN 09)

MOSCOW -- Russian President Dmitry Medvedev arrives in Angola this Friday for a one-day official visit. It will be the last stop on his African trip. The Russian president this week has visited Egypt, Nigeria and Namibia. It was the first visit by a Russian leader to Nigeria and Namibia in the history of bilateral relations.

8. Russia's Plans For Africa

Dmitry Medvedev's Visit To Africa This Week Is Russia's Latest Attempt To Shift The Global Balance Of Power Away From The West

(THE GUARDIAN, UK 26 JUN 09) ... Irina Filatova

Russia's president Dmitry Medvedev spent this week in Africa, visiting four countries, Egypt, Nigeria, Angola and Namibia. Russian official sources present the visit as purely economic, stressing that its goals are to assist Russian business and to develop mutually beneficial relations with African countries.

9. Medvedev Looking For Diamonds In The Rough In Angola

(RUSSIA TODAY 26 JUN 09)

Diamonds are every country's best friend when it comes to trade relations with Angola. Russia's President Dmitry Medvedev is due in this gem-rich country on the final stage of what's been dubbed his "African safari".

10. NATO And Russia Set To Resume Formal Relations

(EARTH TIMES 26 JUN 09)

Corfu, Greece - NATO and Russian diplomats are set to break a months-long standoff when they meet Saturday on the Greek island of Korfu. Russia broke off relations with the Western mutual defence organization last August when NATO expressed dismay about a short war between Russia and Georgia over Georgia's breakaway republics, which have since been recognized as independent nations by Russia.

11. Preparing For Round 2 Of War With Georgia

(ST. PETERSBURG TIMES, RUSSIA 26 JUN 09) ... Yulia Latynina

Peacekeepers deployed by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe must leave Georgia by June 30 after Russia vetoed on June 15 all attempts to keep their mission in force. That is about the same time General Nikolai Makarov, commander of Russia's forces in the war with Georgia in August and the commander of the "Caucasus 2009" military exercises planned for June 29 to July 6, announced that "Georgia is brandishing its weapons and is preparing to solve its territorial problems in any way it sees fit."

12. Russia Sick And Tired Of Europe's Criticism

(PRAVDA 26 JUN 09)

The session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) is closing in Strasbourg on Friday. This session may become the last one for the Russian delegation. Russia may be deprived of the voting right in Europe's largest organization already this autumn or winter, the chairman of the Committee for International Affairs of Russia's State Duma, Konstantin Kosachev said.

13. Russia To Take Part In Indian Diesel Submarine Tender

(RUSSIAN INFORMATION AGENCY NOVOSTI 26 JUN 09)

ST. PETERSBURG - Russia will participate in an expected tender to supply diesel-electric submarines to the Indian navy, the Russian state arms exporter said on Friday.

14. Russian Firm Pledges To Deliver Frigates To India On Schedule

(RUSSIAN INFORMATION AGENCY, NOVOSTI 26 JUN 09)

ST. PETERSBURG - Russia will fulfill its obligations on schedule to supply three Project 11356 frigates to India by 2012, a shipbuilding industry official said on Friday.

15. Russian Navy Goes Straight To The Bottom?

Russia May Start Purchasing Foreign Warships Abroad.

(PRAVDA 26 JUN 09) ... Sergey Balmasov

"We do not exclude a possibility to purchase foreign vessels from other countries," Vladimir Vysotsky, the Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Navy, stated June 24 at the opening of the International Naval Salon in St. Petersburg.

16. St. Petersburg Plays Host To Naval Salon

(ST. PETERSBURG TIMES 26 JUN 09) ... Irina Titova

More than 350 firms from 28 countries have been participating in the Fourth International Naval Salon that opened in St. Petersburg this Wednesday, and is set to run through Sunday 28th.

AFGHANISTAN:

17. 'It's Pretty Unfriendly Down There'

Villagers Tell U.S. Troops Area Is Secure, But When Americans Leave, Enemy Resurfaces

(STARS AND STRIPES 26 JUN 09) ... Dianna Cahn

CAMP CLARK, Afghanistan — The shell flew over Camp Clark in the early afternoon last week, sending residents of this U.S. base in eastern Afghanistan's Khost province into a familiar scurry for cover.

18. Rodriguez Assumes New Afghanistan Post

(AFPS 26 JUN 09) ... Jim Garamone

KABUL-- Lt. Gen. David M. Rodriguez arrived in Afghanistan yesterday to assume his post as deputy commander of U.S. Forces Afghanistan.

PAKISTAN:

19. Pakistan Army's Challenge: Holding Onto Gains Against Militants

As The Government Prepares For A Major Operation In South Waziristan, It's Eyeing Lessons Learned From Previous Campaigns That Were Cut Short In The Face Of Weak Public Support.

(CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR 27 JUN 09) ... Issam Ahmed

Islamabad, Pakistan - As the Pakistani military zeros in on Taliban leader Baitullah Mehsud in South Waziristan, it is trying to break a pattern in which initially successful operations have lost ground, allowing militants to regain their strength.

20. Zardari, Kiyani At Loggerheads

(PRESS TV 26 JUN 09)

Pakistan's President Asif Ali Zardari has locked horns with his army chief and argues that the Taliban, and not India, are the greatest threat facing the country.

IRAQ:

21. Elite Iraqi Troops In Forefront After US Pullback

(ASSOCIATED PRESS 26 JUN 09) ... Qassim Abdul-Zahra

BAGHDAD — As Iraqi security services prepare to take back their towns from the Americans on Tuesday, the sharpest arrow in their quiver is an elite, American-trained force with a reputation that leads many Iraqis to call it "the dirty brigade."

22. US Military Feels Exposed In Iraq

(FINANCIAL TIMES 26 JUN 09) ... Ernesto Londoño

US military officials fear that the closure of inner city bases and restrictive guidelines that go into effect next week will leave American troops and civilians in Iraq more vulnerable.

IRAN:

23. Iran Cleric Calls For Protest Leaders To Be Punished 'Harshly'

(BLOOMBERG 27 JUN 09) ... Ali Sheikholeslami and Heather Langan

A leading Iranian cleric urged authorities to punish demonstration organizers to deter the opposition from seeking to annul the June 12 re-election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

24. Iranian Cleric Calls For Harsh Punishment For Riot Leaders

Obama Rejects Demand That He Apologize For Criticizing Actions Against Protesters

(WASHINGTON POST 26 JUN 09) ... Thomas Erdbrink and William Branigin

TEHRAN, -- An influential Iranian cleric told worshippers Friday that those stirring unrest in connection with the recent election should be punished "ruthlessly and savagely" and convicted for waging war against God, a crime that under Shiite Islamic law is punishable by death.

25. Iranian Protesters Avoid Censorship With Navy Technology

(WASHINGTON TIMES 26 JUN 09) ... Eli Lake

Iranians seeking to share videos and other eyewitness accounts of the demonstrations that have roiled their country since disputed elections two weeks ago are using an Internet encryption program originally developed by and for the U.S. Navy.

MIDDLE EAST:

26. Arab Activists Watch Iran And Wonder: 'Why Not Us?'

(WASHINGTON POST 26 JUN 09) ... Sudarsan Raghavan

CAIRO, -- Mohamed Sharkawy bears the scars of his devotion to Egypt's democracy movement. He has endured beatings in a Cairo police station, he said, and last year spent more than two weeks in an insect-ridden jail for organizing a protest.

EUROPE:

27. G8 Foreign Ministers Lament Afghan Corruption

(ASSOCIATED PRESS 26 JUN 09) ... Alessandra Rizzo

TRIESTE, Italy— Foreign ministers from the Group of Eight countries meeting in Italy lamented corruption and the lack of basic services such as health and water in Afghanistan, saying Friday that better cooperation among countries in the region was needed to promote stability.

GERMAN LEADER'S VISIT TO U.S.:

28. Obama, German Leader Optimistic For Climate Bill

(THE HILL 26 JUN 09) ... Sam Youngman

Shortly before the House is set to vote on President Obama's energy bill, the president and German Chancellor Angela Merkel said Friday they are hopeful the climate change legislation will pass.

29. Obama, Merkel Warm Up In White House Talk

(AGENCE FRANCE-PRESS 26 JUN 09) ... Stephen Collinson

WASHINGTON – US President Barack Obama and German Chancellor Angela Merkel put on a public display of respect and affection on Friday, mollifying reports of discord that dogged previous meetings.

NORTH KOREA:

30. US Will Not Use Force To Inspect NKorean Ship

(ASSOCIATED PRESS 26 JUN 09) ... Jae-soon Chang in Seoul, and Pauline Jelinek

SEOUL, South Korea — The United States will not use force to inspect a North Korean ship suspected of carrying banned goods, an American official was quoted as saying Friday.

PACIFIC:

31. S. Korea, U.S. Hold Security Talks

(THE KOREA HERALD 26 JUN 09)

U.S. Defense Undersecretary of Policy Michele Flournoy yesterday discussed with officials here pressing security issues, including the latest crisis imposed by North Korea.

32. Security Forces Prepare For A Fresh Offensive Against Maoists In Lalgarrh

(THE HINDU, INDIA 26 JUN 09)

KOLKATA: Security forces deployed in Lalgarrh and its adjacent areas in West Bengal's Paschim Medinipur district are preparing for a fresh offensive to flush out Maoists and activists of the Maoist-backed Police Santrosh Birodhi Janasadharaner Committee (PSBJC) from the region.

33. US Security Adviser Holds Talks With Singh

(DAWN, PAKISTAN 26 JUN 09)

NEW DELHI: A top aide of US President Barack Obama held talks with Indian leaders Friday on Washington's revamped security policy in the region.

WOUNDED CARE:

34. Soldiers Urged To Take Advantage Of Mental Health Resources

(COLORADO SPRINGS GAZETTE 25 JUN 09) ... Brian Newsome

In recent years, the military has invested millions of dollars in mental health care, fueling a proliferation of treatment programs while attempting to reshape fundamental attitudes about mental illness.

35. Amputee Combat Vets Return To Iraq For 'Proper Exit'

(ARMY NEWS SERVICE 23 JUN 09) ... Sgt. Kat Briere

CAMP VICTORY, Iraq -- Six amputee combat veterans put their uniforms back on and returned to Iraq Sunday for the first time since sustaining their injuries in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

36. Help Available For Post-Traumatic Stress

(FORT LEAVENWORTH LAMP 25 JUN 09) ... James W. Cartwright

ABERDEEN PROVING GROUND, Md. - Anger is an innate response that is useful for confronting threatening circumstances. Anger rallies Soldiers to engage in combat. "Anger keeps you pumped up, alert, awake and alive," according to Battlemind training.

37. Military Members To Donate Their Brains To Science

(DISCOVER MAGAZINE 25 JUN 09)

Researchers hoping to literally get inside the heads of soldiers will have their chance: 20 retired and active members of the U.S. military have pledged to donate their brains for research on the physical effects of war on the brain.

VETERANS:

38. The Welcome They Want

Time To Focus On Reliable Benefits As New York Veterans Meet Here

(THE BUFFALO NEWS 26 JUN 09) ... Editorial

Women and men fighting for this country should be a constant on the minds and in the hearts of all Americans, and that gratitude should be demonstrated not only in words but in action. It's all the 3,000 Veterans of Foreign Wars and their supporters want as they open a statewide convention in downtown Buffalo.

LEGISLATIVE:

39. Obama Issues Signing Statement On \$106B War Bill

(THE HILL 26 JUN 09) ... Michael O'Brien

President Obama signed the \$106 billion war-spending bill into law Friday, but not without taking a page from his predecessor and ignoring a few elements in the legislation.

OP-ED:

40. Will Russia's Retrial Of The Politkovskaya Murder Bring Justice?

(TIME MAGAZINE 26 JUN 09) ... John Wendle

When the trial of four men accused of being involved in the 2006 murder of Russian investigative reporter Anna Politkovskaya ended in acquittal in February, many, including Politkovskaya's family, were relieved.

41. Hezbollah Keeps Its Eye On The Ball

(ASIA TIMES 25 JUN 09) ... Sami Moubayed

DAMASCUS - Many years ago, French president Charles de Gaulle said, "France has no friends; only interests." These words came to mind as Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah recently met with anti-Syrian Druze leader Walid Jumblatt, a man who has loudly been critical of Hezbollah, for the first time in three years.

OTHER:

42. Military Brass Bite Their Tongues Over The 'Hollow Army'

Why Generals May Be Playing Down The Exhaustion Of The Canadian Army

(CANADIAN BROADCASTING CENTRE 25 JUN 09) ... Brian Stewart

It is an extraordinary testament to the resilience of Canadian troops that they've been able to conceal how much this country's combat forces have been exhausted by years of war in Afghanistan.

TOP STORIES:

1. Obama Raises Doubts About Dialogue With Iran

(NEW YORK TIMES 26 JUN 09) ... Nazila Fathi and Alan Cowell

TEHRAN — Despite new criticism from President Obama, the Iranian authorities showed no sign Friday of bending to domestic or foreign pressure, saying that the disputed presidential vote on June 12 was the “healthiest” in three decades.

The uncompromising words emerged as the Group of Eight countries, including the United States, fired a fresh broadside Friday, saying they “deplored” the post-election violence and demanding that the “the will of the Iranian people is reflected in the electoral process.”

In Washington, President Obama accused Tehran of violating “universal norms, international norms,” and saying that the bravery of the Iranian people is “a testament to their enduring pursuit of justice.”

“The violence perpetrated against them is outrageous,” the president said, with German Chancellor Angela Merkel by his side. “And despite the government’s efforts to keep the world from bearing witness to that violence, we see it, and we condemn it.”

The president also conceded that the crackdown would complicate his plans to have a dialogue with Tehran, saying: “There is no doubt that any direct dialogue or diplomacy with Iran is going to be affected by the events of the last several weeks.”

Chancellor Merkel, too, was harshly critical of the Iranian leadership, declaring in German that Iranians should be able to demonstrate peacefully and to have their votes count. “The rights of human beings, of individuals, of citizens are indivisible the world over and also apply, therefore, to the Iranian people,” she said.

But there seemed little likelihood that the Iranian authorities would be swayed by the harsh words, as a senior cleric called for demonstrators to be punished “ruthlessly and savagely.”

At Friday prayers at Tehran University, a senior cleric, Ayatollah Ahmad Khatami, referred to the demonstrators as rioters and declared, “I want the judiciary to punish leading rioters firmly and without showing any mercy to teach everyone a lesson.”

Reuters quoted him as saying that demonstrators should be tried for waging war against God. The punishment for such offenses under Islamic law is death, Reuters said.

The cleric’s remarks represented a significant hardening of official rhetoric as the authorities confronted the biggest political challenge since the Islamic Revolution in 1979. Yet, because Ayatollah Khatami is not regarded as a high-profile figure, it was not clear how much weight his words carried.

However, he is a member of the influential Assembly of Experts and his threats seemed likely to further intimidate protesters whose presence on the streets has dwindled in the face of large numbers of police officers and Basij militias.

A week ago, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran’s supreme leader, used the platform of Friday prayers to dismiss charges of electoral fraud and warned of harsh measures against the protesters if they continued to flood the streets.

After the elections, the losing candidates, led by a former prime minister, Mir Hussein Moussavi, lodged bitter complaints that the vote was rigged in favor of President

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who was proclaimed the victor in official results that gave him almost two-thirds of the ballots.

The authorities have repeatedly dismissed the opposition complaints. In remarks quoted on the official IRNA news agency on Friday, Abbas-Ali Kadkhodaei, a spokesman for the 12-member Guardian Council charged with vetting elections, said the panel had “almost finished reviewing defeated candidates’ election complaints,” which the council said earlier numbered in excess of 600.

“The reviews showed that the election was the healthiest since the revolution,” Mr. Kadkhodaei said. “There were no major violations in the election.”

The statement fell short of formal certification. But it offered further evidence that despite mass demonstrations and violent confrontations with those who call the election a fraud, the authorities are intent on enforcing their writ and denying their adversaries a voice.

Initially, three losing candidates registered complaints of electoral irregularities, but one of them, Mohsen Rezai, a former commander of the Revolutionary Guards, withdrew his objections on Wednesday. Mr. Moussavi said Thursday he had come under pressure to drop his complaint.

Internationally, European countries were the first to criticize the authorities’ handling of the protests but President Obama, initially cautious, has issued ever more critical comments, drawing a taunt from Mr. Ahmadinejad on Thursday that he sounded like former President George W. Bush and should apologize.

At the news conference on Friday, President Obama dismissed Mr. Ahmadinejad’s gibe. “I don’t take Mr. Ahmadinejad’s statements seriously about apologies, particularly given the fact that the United States has gone out of its way not to interfere with the election process in Iran,” he said. “And I’m really not concerned about Mr. Ahmadinejad apologizing to me.”

Rather, Mr. Obama said, the Iranian president should “think carefully about the obligations he owes to his own people. And he might want to consider looking at the families of those who’ve been beaten or shot or detained.”

At a meeting in Trieste, Italy on Friday, the foreign ministers from the Group of Eight issued a joint statement saying they “deplored post-electoral violence which led to the loss of lives of Iranian civilians” and urged Iran to respect human rights, including freedom of expression. Along with the United States and Italy, the group includes Japan, Russia, Canada, France, Germany and Britain.

The statement called on Iran to “guarantee that the will of the Iranian people is reflected in the electoral process,” but it said the door must remain open to dialogue with Tehran on its contentious nuclear program, news reports said.

The joint statement was a compromise between some European countries seeking a harder line, and Russia, whose foreign minister, Sergey V. Lavrov, said at a news conference in Trieste that while Moscow wanted to express its “most serious concern” over use of force in Iran, “we will not interfere in Iran’s internal affairs.”

“Our position is that all issues that have emerged in the context of the elections will be sorted out in line with

democratic procedures,” The Associated Press quoted him as saying. Unlike other G-8 members, Russia has recognized the election result and played host to Mr. Ahmadinejad.

Mr. Moussavi has maintained a defiant posture but has few options other than to express his outrage, and he is growing increasingly isolated.

He does not have a political organization to rally, and during the height of the unrest he attracted a large following more because of whom he opposed — Mr. Ahmadinejad — than because of what he stood for, political analysts said. And on Friday, his personal Web site was shut down by what his associates described as hackers. Mr. Moussavi also seemed to be sending mixed messages. After vowing on Thursday not to “back down even for a second” to the “election criminals,” he later said he would ask for permission to hold future rallies, noting that Mr. Ahmadinejad had been granted two permits in the last week. With most demonstrations suppressed or canceled, a few dozen people arrived Friday at the Behest-e Zahra cemetery to mourn Neda Agha-Soltan, a 26-year-old woman shot dead last Saturday whose image went round the world as an instant emblem of the protests.

According to Tehran residents, members of the government’s Basij militia, ordered to prevent any gatherings, have beaten even small groups of passers-by so the mourners arrived in groups of two or three, muttered brief prayers and left, The A.P. reported, quoting unidentified witnesses. Opponents of the election result said they planned to release thousands of green and black balloons bearing a message in

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2. China 'Deeply Committed' To North Korea Sanctions: US Official

(AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE 26 JUN 09)

WASHINGTON — China has given its word to the United States that it is “deeply committed” to implementing tough new nuclear sanctions against North Korea, a senior US official said Friday.

The official also said that as part of the effort to put a straitjacket on Pyongyang after its latest nuclear test and missile launches, Washington had set up an inter-agency team to coordinate the sanctions with other nations.

“They are certainly saying quite strenuously that they are deeply committed to full implementation of the provisions that are in the resolution,” the senior administration official said, referring to China.

“The real test now will be in implementation,” the official said.

“We are going to obviously take their word seriously, but we’ll see in the end what they are prepared to do.”

Beijing is often criticized in the United States for its willingness to join, or carry out tough sanctions regimes against North Korea, particularly in congressional circles.

On Thursday, Republican Senator John McCain said that China had been “unhelpful, especially on the issue of North Korea.”

“I think it’s time we told the Chinese that an important part of our relationship is how they react as far as North Korea is concerned, but also as far as Iran is concerned,” the defeated 2008 presidential candidate said.

McCain dismissed “toothless” UN sanctions to curb North Korea’s alleged spread of weapons and nuclear know-how, pointing to news reports that a North Korean ship, potentially

Ms. Agha-Soltan’s memory.

There were other signs of continued resistance. A few conservatives have expressed revulsion at the sight of unarmed protesters being beaten, even shot, by government forces. Only 105 out of the 290 members of Parliament took part in a victory celebration for Mr. Ahmadinejad on Tuesday, newspapers reported Thursday. The absence of so many lawmakers, including the speaker, Ali Larijani, a powerful conservative, was striking.

There was still no word from a former president, Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, a Moussavi supporter who is considered one of the nation’s most effective political operatives and coalition builders. His absence raised the prospect of behind-the-scenes maneuvering that might challenge the status quo, political analysts said.

Some people have begun to identify and embarrass plainclothes agents by circulating photographs of those who infiltrated protests and beat demonstrators. In another indication of the depth of divisions that remain, a senior cleric, Grand Ayatollah Nasser Makarem-Shirazi, called for “national conciliation.”

“Definitively, something must be done to ensure that there are no embers burning under the ashes, and that hostilities, antagonism and rivalries are transformed into amity and cooperation among all parties,” he said in comments posted on the state-run Press TV Web site.

carrying arms, was headed for Myanmar.

Since it left the western North Korean port of Nampo on June 17, the Kang Nam 1 has been shadowed by a US Navy destroyer under UN sanctions on suspicion of carrying missiles or related parts.

South Korea’s YTN television news channel, citing an unnamed intelligence source, has said the 2,000-tonne ship was heading for Myanmar via Singapore.

The new team of US officials, under the leadership of former US ambassador to Bolivia Philip Goldberg, will head to China soon to engage a similar Chinese government team in Beijing, the official said.

The official also said that Washington believed that unlike previous sanctions regimes, the new set of punishments for Pyongyang could work in convincing it to change its strategy regarding its nuclear program.

“Now we have some very powerful tools, and the challenge is to make effective use of them,” the official said.

“It’s going to take time to actually have a bite, but we are trying to get out of the box very fast.”

Tensions on the Korean peninsula have been running high since Pyongyang carried out its second nuclear test last month.

After the underground test and subsequent missile launches, the Security Council adopted a UN resolution last week that includes financial sanctions designed to choke off revenue to the regime.

North Korea had already vowed to build more bombs and to start a new weapons programme based on uranium enrichment in response to the sanctions.

CHAIRMAN'S TRAVEL:

3. Mullen Welcomes Kyrgyz Base Decision, Talks Missile Defense With Russians

(VOICE OF AMERICA 26 JUN 0) ... Al Pessin

The top U.S. military officer has welcomed progress toward reversing the Kyrgyz government decision to end U.S. use of a key base for supplying the allied mission in Afghanistan.

The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Mike Mullen said he discussed that and other controversial issues during meetings in Moscow Friday with senior Russian defense officials.

Admiral Mullen welcomed the Kyrgyz parliament's approval of a new lease for the base at Manas, reversing an order to leave issued by the Kyrgyz parliament and government earlier this year. Reports from Kyrgyzstan said the rent will be \$60 million a year, more than triple the previous rent, and that there will be restrictions on exactly how the base can be used. But Admiral Mullen said the new accord will enable the United States to continue supplying the allied effort in Afghanistan, which is at a critical stage.

"It will do what's necessary. It's a critical base. There were other options, but this option is one that because it is in place and because physically where it is, it's a very viable option for us, and so I'm very pleased with what I see as a lot of progress to creating the change which will allow us to stay there," he said.

U.S. soldiers patrol Manas Air Base, located near the Kyrgyz capital of Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan (file photo)

Admiral Mullen said during Friday's meeting, his Russian counterpart General Nikolai Makarov welcomed the development, as Russia's President Dmitriy Medvedev did on Thursday, even though Russia had opposed U.S. use of the Kyrgyz base in the past. The admiral said General Makarov also indicated Russia wants to keep the land supply route through its territory open, which is used for non-lethal items.

Admiral Mullen had wide-ranging defense talks with General Makarov and other top Russian officials. He said there was agreement on many issues, including the need to stabilize Afghanistan. But the admiral said the two sides disagreed on other issues, including the U.S. plan to build missile defense installations in Poland and the Czech

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Republic, known as the 'third site.'

"One of the most difficult issues is the missile defense issue, the third site, and we certainly didn't solve that. We recognize that that's being handled at the political level, and particularly in the United States where we're undergoing a missile defense review that won't be completed until later this year," he said.

The admiral said General Makarov repeated President Medvedev's position that there will be no agreement to extend the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty when it expires in December unless President Barack Obama abandons the Bush administration's plan to build the European missile defense system. The United States says the system is designed to defend against Iran's growing missile capability, and would not be a threat to Russia.

Admiral Mullen also confirmed that early next month, during the U.S.-Russia summit in Moscow, he and General Makarov will sign an agreement to expand U.S.-Russian military cooperation.

"He and I are very committed to making this work plan actionable, with concrete steps, so that we can actually turn the discussions into meaningful, substantive output that strengthens the relationship," said the admiral.

This will be another step toward normalizing U.S.-Russian military relations following a freeze caused by Russia's invasion of Georgia last year. Admiral Mullen said all the Russian officials he met with on Friday were interested in doing that.

"They know the significant upside of having the United States and Russia aligned, and I think, by implication, they understand the downside in a pretty dangerous world," Mullen added.

Admiral Mullen said Russian officials particularly want to work with the United States to fight the drug trade and the global terrorist threat, both of which are related to the effort to defeat the Taliban and al-Qaida in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

4. General: Russia, U.S. To Sign Military Cooperation Deals During Obama Trip

(XINHUA 26 JUN 09)

MOSCOW, -- Russia and the United States will sign military cooperation documents during U.S. President Barack Obama's upcoming visit to Moscow, Russian news agencies reported on Friday, citing the chief of the country's General Staff.

"We have determined the main issues of military cooperation for 2009 and beyond, and intend to sign these documents during U.S. President Barack Obama's visit to Moscow in early July," Gen. Nikolai Makarov said after a meeting with Adm. Michael Mullen, chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, who was currently on a three-day visit to Russia.

Makarov said they discussed a wide variety of issues,

ranging from the Middle East, Afghanistan, the nuclear test of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to the U.S. missile shield plan.

Mullen, for his part, said he was looking forward to the summit. "We have a lot of common challenges in the security area, whether in Afghanistan or the challenges in missile defense, or in Iran or particularly for security in Europe," said the U.S. military chief.

They provided no further details about the talks or the military agreements.

Obama is due to visit Russia on July 6-8 in an effort to reset ties with Russia, which have sunk to a post-Cold War low due to a series of rows, including last August's Georgia

war, NATO's eastward expansion and the U.S. plan to deploy a missile defense system in Central Europe.

Relations between Moscow and Washington have gradually improved over the past months, particularly since Obama took office in January.

Obama has pledged to "reset" relations with Russia, but major issues remain, such as the dispute over the planned U.S. missile shield.

The former U.S. administration of George W. Bush planned to place 10 missile interceptors in Poland and a radar system in the Czech Republic which it claimed to protect its European allies from missile threats by "rogue states."

The U.S. plan has met strong objections from Moscow.

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5. Top US Officer Hopes For Better Ties With Russia

(GEORGIAN DAILY/AP 26 JUN 09)

The top U.S. military officer said he was encouraged by meetings with Russian leaders Friday and that both sides were willing to improve military ties.

Adm. Michael Mullen, the chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, met in Moscow with his Russian counterpart, Gen. Nikolai Makarov, and Russian Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov.

Relations between two countries sank to their lowest point since the Cold War under the U.S. previous administration amid Moscow's fierce criticism of the U.S. plans for a missile defense system in Europe and Russia's war with Georgia.

"I'm very encouraged by our meeting and also by our mutual commitment to continue to address these issues and to straighten our military relationship," Mullen told reporters after the talks.

Makarov said he and Mullen discussed the ongoing U.S.-

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6. US Russia Agree On Military Cooperation

(PRESS TV 26 JUN 09)

The United States has received Russia's promise of military cooperation against what Washington deems looming worldwide menaces to both countries.

Following a Friday meeting with the head of the Russian General Staff, Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Michael Mullen hailed 'an absolutely identical understanding' on "many more threats and challenges that we should solve on the political and military levels," Interfax reported.

The Russian official, Nikolai Makarov said the two sides are to ink a related joint military accord during US President Barack Obama's upcoming visit to Moscow in July.

"We have determined the main issues of military

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which insists that the missile defense system, if deployed, will pose a threat to Russia's national security.

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev said last week that Russia was ready to conclude an agreement to replace the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START I) due to expire in December only if the United States addressed Russian concerns.

"We cannot agree with U.S. plans to establish a global missile defense. I would like to emphasize that the reductions we are suggesting are possible only if the United States addresses Russian concerns," he said.

Russian talks on a successor deal to the 1991 START I arms control treaty that expires on Dec. 5, and other issues, including U.S. missile defense plans, the situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the North Korean standoff and possible joint action against sea piracy.

"We have come to a conclusion that there are many threats and challenges that we must tackle together," Makarov said.

Makarov added that he and Mullen outlined issues of potential cooperation between the U.S. and Russian militaries for this year and more distant perspective. He said that an agreement on that could be signed during President Barack Obama's visit to Moscow set for July 6-8.

Makarov and Mullen wouldn't provide any details of the prospective military deal.

Obama's visit to Moscow is part of his efforts to improve U.S.-Russian relations.

cooperation for 2009 and after it," he added.

Issues like North Korea, Afghanistan and the pending installation of the US missile shield in Eastern Europe were reportedly discussed during the session.

"I'm very encouraged by our meetings and our mutual commitment to address these issues and strengthen our military-to-military cooperation," said Mullen.

Washington has long been trying to ensure Russian routes to supply American troops in Afghanistan.

On the other hand, Moscow has been attempting to prevent the deployment of 10 US missile interceptors in Poland and a radar base in the Czech Republic, saying the deployment would be a threat to Russia's sovereignty.

RUSSIA:

7. Medvedev To Arrive In Angola For One-Day Official Visit

(ITAR TASS, RUSSIA 26 JUN 09)

MOSCOW -- Russian President Dmitry Medvedev arrives in Angola this Friday for a one-day official visit. It will be the

last stop on his African trip. The Russian president this week has visited Egypt, Nigeria and Namibia. It was the first visit

by a Russian leader to Nigeria and Namibia in the history of bilateral relations.

The main themes of the talks in Angola with President Jose Eduardo Dos Santos will be promotion of major joint projects, including in the field of high technologies, the Russian leader's aide Sergei Prikhodko said.

Russian companies are expected to participate in the creation of Angola's national satellite communication system ANGOSAT.

One of the economic cooperation areas is diamond mining in Angola. The mining companies Catoca and Luo with the Russian company ALROSA's participation successfully operate in the country, and joint geological prospecting on the Cacolu field is under way.

Another promising area of Russian-Angolan business cooperation is exploration of hydrocarbon reserves, Prikhodko said.

Aside from ALROSA, which has received the right for geological prospecting for oil in the basins of the Cuanza and Congo Rivers, a number of other Russian companies take steps to enter the Angolan raw material market. Ties are being established between Zarubezhneft and Angola's state-run oil company Sonangol.

There are good prospects for development of cooperation in electricity power engineering, the aide noted. The HydroChicapa joint company with ALROSA's participation

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8. Russia's Plans For Africa

Dmitry Medvedev's Visit To Africa This Week Is Russia's Latest Attempt To Shift The Global Balance Of Power Away From The West

(THE GUARDIAN, UK 26 JUN 09) ... Irina Filatova

Russia's president Dmitry Medvedev spent this week in Africa, visiting four countries, Egypt, Nigeria, Angola and Namibia. Russian official sources present the visit as purely economic, stressing that its goals are to assist Russian business and to develop mutually beneficial relations with African countries. The president is accompanied by a 400-strong business delegation, and a number of important economic agreements have been signed, particularly in the sphere of energy resources and nuclear power.

This seems logical. A number of big Russian companies, such as Alrosa, Rusal, Renova, Rosneft and Gazprom are either involved in Africa or are seeking deals there, yet Russia's trade with the continent falls far behind that of China or India, let alone the US. Russia's own enormous energy resources are located in areas that are not easily accessible, sparsely populated and have extremely unfriendly climatic conditions – so developing them would be a much costlier business than developing the same resources in Africa.

But historically, visits of Russia's (Soviet) heads of state to Africa always had a political agenda – for example the 1961 visit by Leonid Brezhnev to Ghana and Guinea and the 1977 visit of Nikolai Podgorniy to Tanzania, Zambia and Mozambique. Each marked a new stage of Soviet involvement in Africa. Is Medvedev's visit completely different?

Not quite. There is, indeed, a serious business element to it – much more serious, in fact, than during the African visit of Medvedev's predecessor Vladimir Putin three years ago. However, there is hardly any doubt that Medvedev's visit is at least as much about policy as it is about business – and

completed hydroelectric station construction on the Chicapa River in 2008. Tekhnopromexport participated in the construction of Angola's largest Capanda hydroelectric plant. Under consideration now is joining of Tekhnopromexport to the construction of two large stations on the Cuanza River.

Military technical cooperation is unlikely to be discussed in detail during the visit. It is more important to maintain weaponry and train personnel than to supply arms, a presidential administration source said.

Besides, systems of remote examination and control, such as a satellite network, are more important for Angolan partners at present. So, military technical cooperation is not viewed as a priority direction, a Kremlin source noted.

Particular attention will be paid to international issues for further consolidation of foreign policy cooperation between Russia and Angola, Prikhodko said.

A deep exchange of views is planned for the visit on dealing with global financial and economic crisis consequences and creation of a more effective and just international system to control economic processes and ensure international energy security, the situation in Africa and development of integration processes on the continent.

The talks will result in a joint communique and signing of a number of agreements between the governments, departments and companies of the two countries.

perhaps much more so. It has to be considered in the context of Russia's final withdrawal from its negotiations to join the WTO, and the two summits that Medvedev hosted in Yekaterinburg – that of Bric countries and of the members of the Shanghai Co-operation Organisation. The US asked to participate as an observer, but the request was not granted. All these moves are a sign of a new stage of Russia's policy of disengagement with the west and of its leaving western financial and economic space. This tendency has been developing for a few years, but now it has obviously reached a new active phase. During his second term as president Putin often spoke of the need to transform the global economic order in order to diminish its dependence on the west. The Yekaterinburg summits sought to achieve exactly this.

In effect, Medvedev's visit to Africa should be seen as a move to create a bloc of countries rich in energy resources. The existence of such a bloc, in Russia's thinking, would increase the political weight of its participants and thus change the balance of power and influence in the world.

This may be more difficult to achieve than some Russian politicians think. Some African leaders may still be grateful to Russia for its assistance in their liberation struggles, but they need delivery, not just deals. Russia's record on this is not great. More importantly, however, the competition for the control of energy resources is exactly the field where Russia is bound to find itself in a head-on collision course not just with the west, but also with China, Russia's prize political ally in the new global order as it is seen from Moscow. It remains to be seen, how effective Russia's new engagement in Africa is

going to be, and what effect it will have on its bigger goals. But for now it will certainly increase Medvedev's political

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9. Medvedev Looking For Diamonds In The Rough In Angola

(RUSSIA TODAY 26 JUN 09)

Diamonds are every country's best friend when it comes to trade relations with Angola. Russia's President Dmitry Medvedev is due in this gem-rich country on the final stage of what's been dubbed his "African safari".

Medvedev's whistle-stop tour has already included layovers in Egypt, Nigeria and Namibia.

Angola is one of the richest African countries in terms of resources and one of the biggest oil producers on the continent. However, up to 70% of the republic's populations live on less than a dollar a day.

The main purpose of Medvedev's visit to the country is to promote Moscow's economic interests. Last year, trade turnover between the two countries reached \$76.3 million and the Russian president is determined to boost that figure.

Read more

Presidential aide Sergey Prikhodko said the talks between Medvedev and Angolan President Jose Eduardo Dos Santos will be the promotion of major joint projects, including in the field of technology, diamond mining and exploration of hydrocarbon reserves.

Russian companies are expected to participate in the creation of Angola's national satellite communication system "Angosat".

Prikhodko also said there are good prospects for development of cooperation in electric engineering.

During the Soviet Union arms trading was one of the main fields of relations between the two states, but military technical cooperation is unlikely to be discussed in detail during the visit. It is more important to maintain weaponry and train personnel than to supply arms, a presidential administration source told TASS.

Soviet phantoms of Angolan war

Following the war for independence from Portugal in 1975, Angola faced a civil war that lasted for 27 years and claimed thousands of lives.

The South African regime, eager to establish control over the region, wanted to overthrow the government and put the opposition movement UNITA in power.

In 1988, South African troops reached Cuito Cuanavale where one of the definitive battles in the Angolan Civil War took place.

It is also known as "Africa's largest land battle since World War Two". The lesser known fact is that Soviet

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10. NATO And Russia Set To Resume Formal Relations

(EARTH TIMES 26 JUN 09)

Corfu, Greece - NATO and Russian diplomats are set to break a months-long standoff when they meet Saturday on the Greek island of Korfu. Russia broke off relations with the Western mutual defence organization last August when NATO expressed dismay about a short war between Russia and Georgia over Georgia's breakaway republics, which have since been recognized as independent nations by Russia.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov is set to meet

weight at the coming G8 meeting.

military specialists were working with every Angolan brigade. Officially, however, the thousands of Soviet translators and consultants were never there.

Today, the veterans of Angola look back and tell their stories with a bitter smile. Andrey Polikanov, a military translator said:

"Take some of our boys in the Navy, for example. They were there, but their papers said they'd never left their navy base in Russia. When they found out, they were asking each other if they should just throw out the photos of them under the African palm trees."

With time, the shroud of secrecy began to lift in Russia. In 2002, the Angolan Veterans Union was established. Last year, all those who served in Angola came under an amended Russian Veterans Law, but problems still remain.

According to Vadim Sagachko, the Chairman of Angolan Veterans Union, there are too many legal and bureaucratic hang-ups.

"For example – young translators who came to Angola and were in battle zones – in order to prove that they'd been there, they had to get a bunch of signatures from superiors, which they were totally unaware of. So they came home and got nothing," he said.

They had to live in whatever conditions were available, knowing that should anything happen – they would vanish in Angola, because, according to Soviet officials – they weren't there.

Yury Andrianov, former operations specialist for Angolan liberation forces believes "a Russian will try to make a home wherever he is."

So, he recalls, "when we all got there – we tried to build a banya, hang some curtains – you know, make it homely."

But, he continues, "if we were moved to the battle zones – well, there you do what everyone else does. Sleep in trenches, eat from the same pot – or not eat for days. In the end, Angola for us became more than just another posting. It became special."

It was Angola which first thanked these men for their help. Their motherland chose to make them phantoms of war. Only years later did these men begin to be given a voice, but for many this has come too late.

with the 28 foreign ministers of the NATO countries on the sidelines of a meeting of the Organization of Security and Co-operation in Europe, reviving a tradition set up in 2002.

NATO has expressed interest in restarting the meetings since December, but had been rebuffed by Russia. Talks in May fell through over Russian anger at NATO manoeuvres in Georgia and accusations of NATO spying.

NATO officials say the main goal is to simply restart

negotiations with Russia. But there are a host of issues to discuss, including the basing of US missile defence systems in Eastern Europe, Russia's moratorium on the Treaty on

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11. Preparing For Round 2 Of War With Georgia

(*ST. PETERSBURG TIMES, RUSSIA 26 JUN 09*) ... Yulia Latynina

Peacekeepers deployed by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe must leave Georgia by June 30 after Russia vetoed on June 15 all attempts to keep their mission in force. That is about the same time General Nikolai Makarov, commander of Russia's forces in the war with Georgia in August and the commander of the "Caucasus 2009" military exercises planned for June 29 to July 6, announced that "Georgia is brandishing its weapons and is preparing to solve its territorial problems in any way it sees fit."

This raises a question: If Georgia is really planning to start a war, why is Russia going to such lengths to expel international observers who will be able to testify to the whole world how Georgia started the war?

The Akhalkgori district is key to any future war in Georgia. In violation of all agreements signed by Moscow at the conclusion of the August war, Russia never withdrew its troops from Akhalkgori — territory that was previously under Georgian control and located only 30 kilometers from Tbilisi. If Russia starts a war, Akhalkgori would be the obvious launching area. If, however, Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili initiates the war, Akhalkgori would be one of his first military targets.

Only a few journalists have managed to visit Akhalkgori.

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12. Russia Sick And Tired Of Europe's Criticism

(*PRAVDA 26 JUN 09*)

The session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) is closing in Strasbourg on Friday. This session may become the last one for the Russian delegation. Russia may be deprived of the voting right in Europe's largest organization already this autumn or winter, the chairman of the Committee for International Affairs of Russia's State Duma, Konstantin Kosachev said.

The Kremlin has repeatedly said before that Russia would be ready to leave the Council of Europe in case the organization introduces such a sanction. If it happens, Russian citizens will not be able to address to the European Court for Human Rights to appeal the decision of Russian courts and authorities. For the time being, Belarus is the only country in Europe which does not hold the PACE membership.

PACE did not discuss the consequences of the war between Russia and Georgia, which took place last summer. The full-scale discussion of the issue will take place during the next session in autumn.

Georgia's delegation was collecting signatures at the Palace of Europe to deprive the Russian Federation of the voting right. Georgian officials claim that Russia does not meet many requirements of PACE's resolutions. For example, the Council of Europe demanded an independent investigation be filed into the events of August 2008 and Russian troops be pulled out from the region. To crown it all, PACE offered Moscow to decline its recognition of Abkhazia's and South Ossetia's independence.

Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) and continuing joint operations in Afghanistan.

but those who succeeded have painted a somber picture of conditions there. Marauding and killing by South Ossetian "civil guardsmen" have become part of everyday life. Akhalkgori has been transformed into a military base: It was from Akhalkgori, by the way, that Russian Sergeant Alexander Glukhov deserted into Georgian territory in January.

Is Akhalkgori just a big mismanagement problem? Perhaps, but if Russia intends to strike Tbilisi from Akhalkgori it naturally does not need any witnesses hanging around — above all journalists and international observers. One way is to control events is to deny journalists access and veto motions to continue OSCE peacekeeping operations. Another way is to get rid of other witnesses by using the South Ossetian "civil guardsmen" as a blunt instrument to remove them.

Russia's foreign policy did not become more peaceful following the war with Georgia. To the contrary, it fought a "gas war" with Ukraine in January and has recently fought a "milk war" with Belarus. If before the war with Georgia, Russia's position toward the rest of the world was "They don't love us." Now it is "They attacked us."

Of course, Russia would be crazy to start a new war with Georgia now. Unfortunately, it was just such madness that prompted its "gas war" with Ukraine.

The Russian delegation at PACE says that those requirements are provocative and unrealizable.

"I'm afraid that there is a big conflict looming in the future. It will be a different discussion. They used to discuss whether Russia was right or wrong, but now they will wonder whether Russia executes the resolution of the assembly or not. We can not demonstrate the execution of any of those decisions because we originally disagreed with them," the head of the Russian delegation at PACE, Konstantin Kosachev said.

In addition to the war in Georgia, PACE will discuss the issue of politically motivated trials and pay special attention to the case of Mikhail Khodorkovsky, the former head of Russia's oil giant Yukos. In addition, PACE decided to discuss the issue of the falsification of history.

Many Russian politicians say that Russia does not have to stay at the Council of Europe and listen to criticism over the over again. Mr. Kosachev said that Moscow may decide to pull out from the organization once PACE deprives Russia of the voting right.

Mr. Kosachev added that the Russian delegation had a thought-out plan to struggle against the attempts to deprive Russia of the voting right at PACE. The official did not clarify any details of the plan, though. However, the position of the Russian delegation at the Council of Europe may improve considerably if a Russia-friendly person chairs the board.

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13. Russia To Take Part In Indian Diesel Submarine Tender

(RUSSIAN INFORMATION AGENCY NOVOSTI 26 JUN 09)

ST. PETERSBURG - Russia will participate in an expected tender to supply diesel-electric submarines to the Indian navy, the Russian state arms exporter said on Friday.

"We will offer India an export version of the Lada class diesel submarine - the Amur class vessel. We will take part in the Indian tender when it is announced with these submarines or vessels of another class," said Oleg Azizov, head of Rosoboronexport's delegation at the International Maritime Defense Show 2009 in St. Petersburg.

"We have a bilateral cooperation agreement [in the military-technical sphere] until 2020, which includes the possibility of supplying submarines to this country," Azizov added.

The Project-677, or Lada class, diesel submarine, whose export version is known as the Amur 1650, features a new anti-sonar coating for its hull, an extended cruising range, and advanced anti-ship and anti-submarine weaponry, including the Club-S integrated cruise missile systems.

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14. Russian Firm Pledges To Deliver Frigates To India On Schedule

(RUSSIAN INFORMATION AGENCY, NOVOSTI 26 JUN 09)

ST. PETERSBURG - Russia will fulfill its obligations on schedule to supply three Project 11356 frigates to India by 2012, a shipbuilding industry official said on Friday.

Russia is building three Project 11356 Krivak IV class guided missile frigates for the Indian Navy at the Yantar shipyard in Russia's Baltic exclave of Kaliningrad as part of a \$1.6 billion contract signed in July, 2006.

"The contract's deadline is 2012. We are not expecting any delays at this point," general director of the Yantar shipyard Igor Orlov said at the 4th International Maritime Defense Show in St. Petersburg.

The official said the hulls of all three vessels had been laid down at the shipyard.

"The first ship will be floated out this year, the second, probably, in spring 2010, and the third - a bit later," he said, adding that the Indian government had provided sufficient and

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15. Russian Navy Goes Straight To The Bottom?

Russia May Start Purchasing Foreign Warships Abroad.

(PRAVDA 26 JUN 09) ... Sergey Balmasov

"We do not exclude a possibility to purchase foreign vessels from other countries," Vladimir Vysotsky, the Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Navy, stated June 24 at the opening of the International Naval Salon in St. Petersburg.

Russia has been either purchasing foreign warships or building the ones of its own with the participation of foreign specialists for a very long time. It happened during the Northern War of 1700-1721 against Sweden, when Dutch specialists built many of Russian vessels. It also happened so during the 19th and the 20th centuries, when Russia was forced to buy ships from other countries due to the nation's lag in the technological development. Russia's legendary cruiser Varyag, for instance, was built in the United States.

The Soviet period was not an exception. Russia also had

Azizov also said Vietnam and Egypt were studying the possibility of buying Russian Project 636 Kilo class diesel submarines.

"Vietnam is still studying various possibilities for the development of its submarine fleet. If they choose Project 636 submarines, offered by Russia, we will start talks on the issue," the official said, adding that the same approach applied to Egypt.

The Project 636 Kilo class submarine is thought to be one of the most silent submarine classes in the world. It has been specifically designed for anti-shiping and anti-submarine operations in relatively shallow waters.

Russia has built Kilo class submarines for India, China and Iran.

Azizov earlier said Russia could sell up to 40 fourth-generation diesel-electric submarines to foreign customers by 2015.

timely project financing.

A delegation of Indian military officials, led by India's deputy chief of the naval staff, Vice Adm. Raman P Suthan, visited the Yantar shipyard in October last year and said it was satisfied with the pace and the construction quality.

Russia previously built in 2004 three Krivak class frigates - INS Talwar, INS Trishul and INS Tabar - for India, but they all were delivered late.

All of the new frigates will be armed with eight BrahMos supersonic anti-ship cruise missile systems and not the Club-N/3M54TE missile system, which was installed on previous frigates.

The Krivak class frigate has deadweight of 4,000 metric tons and a speed of 30 knots, and is capable of accomplishing a wide range of maritime missions, primarily hunting down and destroying large surface ships and submarines.

to resort to the help of foreign countries, particularly Germany, to strengthen its navy. In 1940, Russia received the Lutzow cruiser from Germany, which subsequently became a part of the Russian Navy as the Petrovavlovsk.

Why did Admiral Vysotsky make such a statement? Russia's defense export corporation, Rosoboronexport, said that it was planning to increase the sales of naval engineering from the current 9 percent to 20 percent by 2011. Russia particularly plans to sell its Molnia and Sobol boats to Turkmenistan, 636 project submarines to Algeria and Gepard frigates to Vietnam.

In addition, Russia offers over 50 titles of warships at the International Naval Salon in St. Petersburg - from patrol boats to missile cruisers and mini-submarines.

Oleg Azizov, a spokesman for Rosoboronexport, said that the volume of export orders for Russian naval engineering was evaluated at \$6.5 billion, which would keep home producers busy before 2012.

These pieces of information do not match the plans to purchase naval ships from abroad.

"There is nothing surprising about the statement from Vladimir Vysotsky. Russia's Navy is having hard times now. Russia's Soviet resources will expire before 2015, and the nation will be forced to do what the admiral said we would do. Why do we have many vessels incomplete at our major shipbuilding enterprise? The reason is the same: no one pays any attention to the problems of the navy. They keep telling us that there is nothing frightening about the situation, that Russia purchased warships from Poland, for example. We did, that's true, but it was the USSR's support of socialism in Poland," Konstantin Sivkov, a commander of the Russian navy told

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16. St. Petersburg Plays Host To Naval Salon

(ST. PETERSBURG TIMES 26 JUN 09) ... Irina Titova

More than 350 firms from 28 countries have been participating in the Fourth International Naval Salon that opened in St. Petersburg this Wednesday, and is set to run through Sunday 28th.

Exhibitors include well-known Russian firms such as United Shipbuilding Corporation, Rosoboronexport, Baltiyskiy Zavod marine engineers, Northern Wharf, Admiralteisky Wharfs, and the Rubin Central Design Bureau for Marine Engineering. Companies from the Netherlands, India, Germany, Greece, Cyprus, Finland, and France are also participating in the salon.

The exposition covers all aspects of shipbuilding and naval weapons manufacture, from propulsion system construction to naval aviation, navigation systems, hi-tech materials and the latest technologies.

The show includes Russian and foreign vessels, two displays by the famed Russian formation flying team Russkiye Vityazi, and shelling demonstrations at the Rzhevka firing range. At the city's Sea Terminal, visitors will be able to see Russian Navy ships, the British frigate St. Albans, the Spanish anti-torpedo ship Turia and French minesweepers Sagittaire and Pegase.

Competitors will race for the Salon Prize at the sailing regatta taking place in parallel with the show.

The salon also includes four international scientific conferences dedicated to shipbuilding.

Deputy Prime Minister Sergei Ivanov explained that in recent years, the St. Petersburg Salon has made its name as one of the biggest events of its kind in the world.

"The [St. Petersburg] salon is now one of the three major world navy salons," Ivanov said at the opening ceremony, Interfax reported.

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AFGHANISTAN:

17. 'It's Pretty Unfriendly Down There'

Villagers Tell U.S. Troops Area Is Secure, But When Americans Leave, Enemy Resurfaces

(STARS AND STRIPES 26 JUN 09) ... Dianna Cahn

Pravda.Ru.

"Nowadays, it would be extremely dangerous for Russia to purchase warships from abroad. The radio and electronic equipment of foreign vessels differs from that of ours. Foreign companies will be able to block the equipment and make these vessels useless in case a war breaks out," Mr. Sivkov said.

"Russia is unable to build enough warships for its navy. Officials said in St. Petersburg that Russia would proceed to multi-purpose sea-based aviation complexes instead of conventional carriers of naval aviation. Who is going to build them? The shipyards, which would be good for the construction of the vessels of this class, were left in Ukraine after the collapse of the Soviet Union," Anatoly Tsyganok, an expert with the Institute for Military and Political Analysis told Pravda.Ru.

Vladimir Vysotsky, Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Navy, said on Wednesday that in 2010-2011, the Russian Navy will be ready to present samples of new naval equipment at international exhibitions.

"I hope that 2011 will be a turning point and that we'll be able to show something that we haven't ever exhibited before," Vysotsky said.

Vysotsky added that Russia plans to build aircraft carriers using new technologies that will form the backbone of "naval aviation complexes".

"The Russian Navy's plan envisages the construction of new aircraft carriers, but rather than simply carrying jets, they should form the basis of whole naval complexes integrating space, aviation and navy components," Vysotsky said, Interfax reported.

Vysotsky said that the Russian Navy is currently at "the very beginning of the process of creating a new image for the Russian fleet."

Meanwhile, according to a press release from Rosoboronexport, the state company that produces military equipment for export, analysis of the foreign market reveals that up to 40 brand-new Russian submarines could be sold worldwide by 2015, RIA Novosti reported.

"The export potential of Russia in this sector is very high thanks to project 636 and Amur-1650 submarines equipped with the Club-S integrated rocket system," the press release stated.

"These fourth-generation diesel submarines have a long range, good battle capabilities, and high maximum speed, and so they are generating a lot of interest from potential foreign buyers," said Rosoboronexport.

CAMP CLARK, Afghanistan — The shell flew over Camp Clark in the early afternoon last week, sending residents of this U.S. base in eastern Afghanistan's Khost province into a familiar scurry for cover.

The single mortar shell fired from Shembowat, the village on the next hill, missed the camp just minutes before village elders were due to arrive at the adjacent Afghan army base to talk about insurgents and how they have threatened residents not to cooperate with the government.

Give us weapons and we will fight them, they told American and Afghan commanders.

Right in Camp Clark's backyard, Shembowat is a reality check for the hardened military camp, where good food, air-conditioned huts, Internet and even a swimming pool offer a comfortable respite from the war outside the gates.

Shembowat is a typical farming village, far removed from the political landscape. Residents often sit on the fence between the warring forces in their midst. Under threat of violence, villagers and some leaders lie low, giving free rein to insurgents who wander the mountain terrain they call home.

For many, it seems a safer course of action. Local Afghan politicians are often assassinated by insurgents. And there is harsh retaliation against villagers perceived as supporting the government or U.S. troops. A villager told Israr during his visit to Shembowat that, two days earlier, a resident was taken from his home and beheaded on such a suspicion.

An hour after meeting with the elders, Lt. Col. Pete Molin, commander of the Embedded Training Teams at Camp Clark, and Brig. Gen. Mohammad Israr, the Afghan National Army's 203rd Corps' 1st Brigade commander at neighboring Camp Parsa, fired up an armored convoy and headed down the road to Shembowat.

They marched up past the bombed-out school that the U.S. helped build, and stood on the high ground overlooking the stunning landscape of the village and its farmland pouring into the valley below.

To the south, Clark and Parsa were readily visible, while the view into the wadi, or dry riverbed, and the mountains beyond spoke of the challenges U.S. and Afghan forces are facing here.

"It's pretty unfriendly down there," Molin said.

In February and March, shells were flying at Clark on a regular basis. One hit the dining facility and Molin said he and his staff were working hard to keep folks calm.

In a 3 a.m. attack on June 4, 13 mortars and rockets were fired at Clark, some containing white phosphorous, with burning debris landing just feet from the artillery motor pool's ammunition stock, said Staff Sgt. Wilson Suarez of the 1st Battalion, 321st Field Artillery Regiment.

"That would have been fireworks," said Suarez, whose 3rd Platoon, Battery B is attached to Task Force Steel in Khost.

Even the elders who work with the U.S. and Afghan forces sometimes deliver cryptic messages. During their visit to Israr's office, village elder Haji Nazeab told the commanders, "If we weren't with you, you'd have all the rockets coming at you," leaving some to question whether that was intended as a threat, or just a statement of reality.

Reaching out

The wadi behind the madrassa leads north past Shembowat and into a series of remote mountainside villages in the Nadir Shah Kot district in western Khost province. The

area is not easily accessible, and U.S. forces in their cumbersome mine-resistant armored vehicles hadn't penetrated that hostile area for some time.

Recently, 1st Lt. Nick D'La Rotta, from the 4th Brigade Combat Team Airborne, 25th Infantry Division out of Alaska, led a joint mission to push up the wadi and get with locals about polling places for the August presidential elections.

Flanked at times by 20- to 30-foot cliffs, the soldiers remarked how easily men with guns could fire down on them from the ridgelines. One soldier dubbed the route "Ambush Valley."

When they reached the village of Chirmir, perched along the mountainside several miles past Shembowat, the convoy stopped. Beside them was a single house at the bottom of the steep slope.

Afghan soldiers made contact with the homeowner, then D'La Rotta sat down with his translator and the man for a chat in the shade.

The conversation was amicable. But when asked about security, the villager gave a familiar answer: There are no problems, security is good. It was a scenario repeated several times that day, as the forces climbed up to Chirmir and then later up to the village of Kanay, where they located a mosque that is slated as a polling site in August.

"We get a lot of those same responses from people," D'La Rotta said later. "It's a different attitude of 'Inshallah' (God willing) — anything can happen. It can be easy to talk to the people. They will give you some information, but as soon as we leave, it's back to normal for them. The enemy can be back in there without us even knowing it. We were out there for four days and the day after we left a guy was beheaded and rockets were fired at Clark."

To keep up a presence, the troops are working with the Afghans to set up checkpoints at key locations ahead of the elections.

Given the difficulties, it is easy for troops to feel that they've made few inroads in this battle to forge relationships with the Afghan people.

But D'La Rotta takes encouragement from their work with the Afghan forces. There are still problems — the Afghans rescheduled the mission three times before it actually got on the road, and then, only after D'La Rotta woke up his counterpart — but D'La Rotta and other mentors say Afghan National Army forces are learning.

"Sometimes it feels like we can't build the relationships we'd like to," D'La Rotta said. "I think the most progress come with the ANA. ... I think the relationships have come a long way."

'Best FOB'

Clark is described by Molin, its top officer, as "the best FOB (forward operating base) in Afghanistan." Many of the troops agree.

Until recently, Clark was an intimate camp, with fewer than 200 people.

Most knew each other by name and soldiers gathered nightly in the gym to play volleyball or at the smoke shack, a screened-in wooden shack that looks more like a safari lodge than a base on the front lines. When more than 100 new forces arrived here last week, some expressed concern that Clark would lose its close-knit feel.

"I loved it when it was 150 people," said Suarez, who puffed on a cigar in the smoke shack on a recent day off.

"Now our numbers grew, so some of our luxuries are diminishing a bit, like good food and open spaces."

But the luxuries can't belie their location.

A day after D'La Rotta's mission, the 2nd Platoon, Company D hit a roadside bomb about 800 yards outside the camp's gate. It knocked the gunner unconscious and rattled everyone in the truck, though no one was badly hurt, said Sgt. 1st Class Joseph Delage, who was in the vehicle's front seat.

"It's a win for them to be able to set something up so close. Nobody saw it, nobody could do anything about it," said Delage, 32, of Applegate, Mich. "But then again, we are not too far from Shembowat. Once we get that cleared up, it

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18. Rodriguez Assumes New Afghanistan Post

(AFPS 26 JUN 09) ... Jim Garamone

KABUL-- Lt. Gen. David M. Rodriguez arrived in Afghanistan yesterday to assume his post as deputy commander of U.S. Forces Afghanistan.

He'll serve in that capacity on an interim basis as NATO officials set up a new intermediate command that Rodriguez will head in the alliance's International Security Assistance Force to oversee day-to-day military operations.

Earlier this month, Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates explained the rationale behind the new command structure and where Rodriguez will fit in under Gen. Stanley A. McChrystal, who commands both U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan.

"The problem we needed to address is [that] the commander of ISAF under the current arrangement has far too many responsibilities to be able to guide the tactical battle on a day-to-day basis across the country," Gates said. "The plan is for General McChrystal and the [British] deputy commander -- Royal Marines Lt. Gen. Jim Dutton -- to have more of a strategic role in looking across the country at a more elevated level in terms of cooperation between civil and military efforts."

The command as proposed would be an intermediate headquarters under the ISAF commander that would focus on

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should be quieter around here."

And on Saturday, a convoy about six miles from base was ambushed. First Sgt. John Blair, from the 48th Brigade Combat Team of the Georgia National Guard, was killed when his vehicle was struck by a rocket-propelled grenade.

"I tell my men they have to be thinking warriors," Capt. Bobby Davis of Columbus, Ga., whose platoon went out to help the convoy, said the following day. "You have to be able to go out and talk to people and in the flick of a switch, like yesterday, to kill and then continue the mission -- go out again and talk to people."

the tactical situation. "It would be very much like the corps commander in Iraq under the Multinational Force Iraq commander," Gates said. "So you've got somebody with the overarching responsibility for strategy, but somebody working the day-to-day battle."

The secretary said he hopes the new NATO command structure will be in place by August. "Immediately on the establishment of this ISAF headquarters," he said, "[Rodriguez] will take off the U.S. hat and put on an ISAF hat, and his only role will be in an alliance role."

This is the second tour of duty in Afghanistan for Rodriguez. As commander of the 82nd Airborne Division, he led Combined Joint Task Force 76, based at Bagram Airfield, from February 2007 to April 2008.

As deputy commander of U.S. Forces Afghanistan, Rodriguez will direct the day-to-day operations and ensure efficient command and control of U.S. forces and continue effective integration and coordination between U.S. and coalition forces operating under ISAF, officials said.

Rodriguez most recently served as Gates' senior military assistant.

PAKISTAN:

19. Pakistan Army's Challenge: Holding Onto Gains Against Militants

As The Government Prepares For A Major Operation In South Waziristan, It's Eyeing Lessons Learned From Previous Campaigns That Were Cut Short In The Face Of Weak Public Support.

(CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR 27 JUN 09) ... Issam Ahmed

Islamabad, Pakistan - As the Pakistani military zeros in on Taliban leader Baitullah Mehsud in South Waziristan, it is trying to break a pattern in which initially successful operations have lost ground, allowing militants to regain their strength.

Previous operations to flush out militancy have faltered for a number of factors. This time, say analysts, the military is better prepared in counterinsurgency tactics, as seen in its recent battle in the Swat Valley. Most crucially, the government's efforts have popular support, something that's often been lacking in previous operations.

"A lot has changed both globally and domestically," says Badar Alam, a senior editor at Herald, a leading political

magazine. "All these factors have ganged up to give the operation the force that it has."

Unsustained operations

Brig. Mahmood Shah (ret.), a security analyst and the former senior bureaucrat of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, says that governments in the past have not been willing to fully tackle militants because of public skepticism.

Brigadier Shah cites a peace deal struck in the aftermath of the first major-scale operation in February 2005.

"We had Baitullah on the ropes," he says, adding that Mr. Mehsud, at the time, was forced to seek refuge in North Waziristan. But fighting stopped, and Mehsud negotiated a fresh peace deal -- which, because it was negotiated with militants, as opposed to the entire tribe, quickly fell apart.

Former military ruler Gen. Pervez Musharraf was unpopular for conducting these operations and was "constantly struggling to legitimize his rule," adds Shah.

The military next attempted to venture into the area in February 2008, when 350 Pakistani troops were forced to abandon the Ladha Fort in the militant stronghold of Makeen, in South Waziristan. That operation was also called off.

But now, a growing familiarity with the territory, which the Army had never entered prior to 2002, as well as experience gained from previous operational errors, should help, says Gen. Athar Abbas, an Army spokesperson.

And, because of the Army's gains against the Taliban in the recent offensive in Swat Valley, Mehsud's militias are now increasingly hemmed in. Recent media reports have suggested that Mehsud's men are falling back to their home turf.

"Swat, Bajaur, and Mohmand are under attack. He knows he is going to be the next target – it's only a question of when," says Ismail Khan, Peshawar bureau chief of Dawn, a leading English daily.

Suicide bomb in Kashmir

On Friday, Mehsud's forces claimed credit for a suicide bomb attack in Pakistani-administered Kashmir – the first attack of its kind in the region – which killed two soldiers and injured three others. The attack was widely interpreted as a retaliation following a week of preoffensive aerial attacks in South Waziristan, aimed at softening up the militants.

"We are in a position to respond to the Army's attacks, and time will prove that these military operations have not weakened us," Hakimullah Mehsud, a deputy of Baitullah Mehsud, told the Associated Press.

Hassan Abbas, a research fellow at the Belfer Center at Harvard University in Cambridge, Mass., also cites as a stark change the gradual delinkage of Pakistan's military and intelligence establishment from its nexus with militants, whom the military traditionally viewed as a strategic asset.

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20. Zardari, Kiyani At Loggerheads

(PRESS TV 26 JUN 09)

Pakistan's President Asif Ali Zardari has locked horns with his army chief and argues that the Taliban, and not India, are the greatest threat facing the country.

Zardari had made it clear in his plans to move the troops and aircraft deployed on the India-Pakistan border and position them against the Taliban and al-Qaeda militants who are creating havoc in Pakistan.

Army Chief General Ashfaq Kiyani, who is locked in a power struggle with Zardari, is opposing his plans, according to Britain's The Daily Telegraph on Friday, which said that senior army officers were alarmed at the president's plans to ease tensions with India.

His comments that India no longer posed a military threat

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IRAQ:

21. Elite Iraqi Troops In Forefront After US Pullback

(ASSOCIATED PRESS 26 JUN 09) ... Qassim Abdul-Zahra

BAGHDAD – As Iraqi security services prepare to take back their towns from the Americans on Tuesday, the sharpest arrow in their quiver is an elite, American-trained force with a

"From the military establishment's perspective, there's a realization that those who we thought can be our friends, in fact have other agendas as well," he says, citing the growing existential threat faced by the state at the hands of militants it had nurtured for strategic depth in Afghanistan.

The upsurge in suicide bomb attacks on key security installations, including the recent bombing of the Inter Services Intelligence headquarters in Lahore, have played a large part in this change of perspective, he says.

Boots on the ground?

Much now hinges on whether the government is willing to send ground troops deep into South Waziristan to fight Mehsud's militia, estimated by General Abbas to be around 10,000 men.

"There won't be an effective campaign if it's aerial strikes only. What we need to see now is boots on the ground," says Dr. Abbas, the analyst.

Should that happen, the Pakistani military is likely to confront old weaknesses, including a lack of real-time intelligence provided by satellite intelligence, according to Shah.

But the relative success of the Swat operation proves that the old adage about the Army not being equipped to fight a counterinsurgency is simply not true, according to another Army spokesperson, Lt. Col. Baseer Malik. Still, he concedes, "we lack certain equipment: night-vision devices. And we could do with more helis and surveillance."

Though the military will be better prepared this time around, so, too, will the Taliban, according to Shah.

"Mehsud has become very powerful and the Army has to have an operation that has to be much more comprehensive than what we did [during my time]. He's become the center of gravity of terrorism, and you have to be a much more determined effort. He's well dug-in; he's more prepared."

to Pakistan and "the greatest threat came from the Taliban militants in its tribal areas along with Pakistan's frontier with Afghanistan", raised hopes of a thaw in the frosty relationship between India and Pakistan, the report said.

During a meeting with EU officials in Brussels earlier this week, Zardari said, "I do not consider India a military threat. India is a reality, Pakistan is a reality, but Taliban are a threat, an international threat to our way of life and at the moment, I'm focused on the Taliban".

Quoting analysts, the report in the British daily said that they did not expect Zardari to win his fight to redeploy the army.

reputation that leads many Iraqis to call it "the dirty brigade."

Its real name is the Counter Terrorism Bureau, and its commander insists it's professional, nonsectarian and not dirty

at all.

Violence is already rising and will likely continue after the handover as different factions test the government's ability to manage without American backup. But Kalib Shegati al-Kenani, the Iraqi Army general who heads the bureau, is confident his force can cope and that his country will not slide into renewed sectarian warfare.

The elite units, armed with high-tech U.S.-made equipment, often pair up with American special forces to go after Iraq's most wanted foes — both al-Qaida extremists and Shiite militants.

They are thought to have been the main force that assisted the Americans during an offensive in Baghdad's Sadr City quarter last year to rout Shiite militias, and on operations targeting Sunni insurgents.

Formed soon after the 2003 U.S.-led invasion, the force became known as the "Dirty Brigade" because it was secretive and until recently operated outside the Iraqi chain of command, reporting directly to its U.S. handlers.

It was so little known that it even was rumored to be used against the Shiite-dominated government's opponents in the political mainstream — a charge denied by the Iraqis and the Americans.

Originally numbering about 4,500 members, it is reported to have doubled in size and now reports directly to Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki.

"We are professional and not sectarian forces, and we bring together people from all sections of the population. Each member of the bureau signs a document vowing not to speak about sectarianism, partisan affairs and nationalities. Their commitment is only to Iraq," al-Kenani told The Associated Press in an interview this week.

Al-Kenani, a 59-year-old veteran of the eight-year Iran-Iraq War and the first Gulf War, is a Shiite, his deputy is a Sunni and one of his top generals is a Kurd.

The force has sought to reinforce its nonpartisan makeup by refusing to accept recruits who previously served in sectarian militias. Also, says Maj. Gen. Abdul-Wahab al-

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22. US Military Feels Exposed In Iraq

(FINANCIAL TIMES 26 JUN 09) ... Ernesto Londoño

US military officials fear that the closure of inner city bases and restrictive guidelines that go into effect next week will leave American troops and civilians in Iraq more vulnerable.

Of particular concern is a new rule that bars US troops from using mine-resistant armoured vehicles in urban areas during the day, said officials.

Also worrying, they say, is the recent closure of a small outpost in eastern Baghdad that is adjacent to a site used to launch rockets towards the Green Zone.

Thousands of US combat troops will remain at a handful of bases in Baghdad and on the outskirts of other restive cities, such as Mosul and Kirkuk in northern Iraq, after the June 30 deadline.

But soldiers fear that their ability to respond quickly to attacks could be eroded because Iraqi officials will have an unprecedented degree of authority over their mobility and missions in urban areas.

"We won't be providing the same level of security for ourselves and Iraqis," said 2nd Lt Jason Henke, a Military

Saedi, a senior commander, it "does not allow any minister or government official to enter its headquarters to prevent any interference in investigations and security operations."

Its ranks are made up of Shiites, Sunnis and Kurds, al-Saedi said, but it does not publish breakdowns.

A statement in Arabic posted on the U.S. military's Web site acknowledged the public's "misconceptions about this very viable and important unit."

It picks its targets on the basis of rigorous checks, the statement said. "In short," it added, "the CTB's mission is targeting terrorists, not the Iraqi public or political foes."

Al-Kenani said the bureau has a good intelligence-gathering machine and "cooperation with all ministries."

The Americans are already leaving the towns and cities, and once they are gone full responsibility will fall to the Iraqi police and military, which numbered 654,362 members at last count.

Although some troops will remain as trainers and advisers, the remaining 133,000 U.S. military personnel will be confined to base unless called in by the Iraqis. A full withdrawal is envisioned by the end of 2011.

The Iraqi government has declared Tuesday a public holiday.

"June 30 is considered an Iraqi victory day," al-Kenani said, "and we will all celebrate the withdrawal of American forces."

Explosions around the country have claimed more than 160 lives since June 20, when a truck bomb in the northern city of Kirkuk killed 82. A bombing in Baghdad's Shiite district of Sadr City killed at least 61 people on Wednesday.

But al-Kenani said the days of mass violence and near-civil war were over. "Whoever carries out explosions and security breaches after the withdrawal of forces will have no excuse," he said.

"They were repeatedly bragging about fighting the occupation; now the occupation is out."

Police platoon leader who will remain at one of the few inner city bases in Baghdad.

"With only a small window of time that we are allowed to operate in, it's going to be easier to target US forces when we are outside the wire."

Lt Henke's concerns were heightened this week by a string of powerful roadside bombings near his base in central Baghdad.

On Tuesday, one of his squadrons was attacked with an armour-piercing bomb that struck the passenger side of a mine-resistant armoured vehicle, igniting the fuel line.

As soldiers rushed to help their comrades, insurgents opened fire on them with AK-47s in a densely populated area.

The soldiers escaped unharmed, said Lt Henke. But had they been in a Humvee, the less robust vehicles that will be used during daytime hours from next month, "they would have all been killed — all of them", he said.

Two other powerful roadside bombs were placed on the same route that day, not far from Iraqi National Police checkpoints, Lt Henke said. One seriously wounded a female

soldier, another killed an Iraqi National Police commander.

Attacks on US troops remain low compared with other periods of the six-year war, but US commanders say they expect a spike in coming weeks as insurgents seek to make a statement to mark the first deadline for the withdrawal of US soldiers.

In the past few days, a string of attacks in urban areas, including two that killed more than 75 Iraqis apiece, have heightened concern about the readiness of Iraq's security forces to operate with limited American assistance.

Brig Gen Stephen R. Lanza said US troops would depend on their Iraqi counterparts more than ever to detect and respond to threats. "We'll be relying a lot on the Iraqis for situational awareness," he told reporters.

Several soldiers and officers said they doubted Iraqi security forces would be able to thwart the types of attacks traditionally used against US soldiers. These include strikes

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with armour-piercing grenades and armour-piercing roadside bombs.

"The vulnerability of our soldiers will increase when the Iraqi police and the Iraqi army come to the realisation that they don't need to take suggestions from our soldiers," said a top US military official on condition of anonymity.

"The only reason they listen to us is we give them equipment and money. Once we pull out, much of that stops."

Under the security agreement that includes the June 30 deadline, US soldiers have the right to self-defence. But US commanders have struggled to define how that right will be exercised.

Any perceived overreaction or violation of the security agreement will anger Iraqi leaders, many of whom have tied their political futures to the US pull-out and their ability to handle security with minimal help from the Americans.

IRAN:

23. Iran Cleric Calls For Protest Leaders To Be Punished 'Harshly'

(BLOOMBERG 27 JUN 09) ... Ali Sheikholeslami and Heather Langan

A leading Iranian cleric urged authorities to punish demonstration organizers to deter the opposition from seeking to annul the June 12 re-election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

"I ask the judiciary to behave harshly and cruelly with the leaders of the protests, as they are fed by the U.S. and Israel, so that it will teach a lesson to others," Ahmad Khatami told worshippers yesterday in Tehran. Protesters who use weapons should face the death penalty, he said.

Khatami's remarks, in a sermon cited by the state-run Iranian Students News Agency, came hours before President Barack Obama and German Chancellor Angela Merkel called on Iran's government to halt the violent crackdown on demonstrators and said the Persian Gulf nation must be blocked from gaining a nuclear weapon.

"A government that treats its own citizens with that kind of ruthlessness and violence and that cannot deal with peaceful protesters who are trying to have their voices heard in an equally peaceful way I think has moved outside of universal norms," Obama said at a joint news conference with Merkel at the White House.

Merkel said the Iranian people have a right "to have their votes be counted" and to see that the election results are substantiated.

Ahmadinejad's main challenger on the ballot, former Prime Minister Mir Hossein Mousavi, this week repeated his demand for the election result to be scrapped due to vote-rigging and urged demonstrators to continue the protests, saying they are legal under the constitution.

'Words of Force'

Khatami, who is one of 86 clerics in the Assembly of Experts, a body that elects and can remove the Shiite Muslim-led nation's supreme leader, said calls to annul the vote are "words of force."

The Guardian Council will set up a commission to oversee the recounting of 10 percent of the presidential votes and issue a public report on the findings, the state-run Iranian Students News Agency said. The media will be able to attend

the recount by the commission, which will include former Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati, ex-parliament Speaker Gholam-Ali Hadad Adel and Prosecutor General Qorban-Ali Najaf-Abadi.

"None of Mousavi's claims were right and we've had the healthiest election," a council spokesman, Abbas Ali Kadkhodaei, was cited as saying by the Khabar newspaper on its Web site. "Except for small breaches that are seen in every election, no major violation has been committed. I can firmly say that no election fraud has been committed."

Week's Notice

The Interior Ministry told the Mousavi camp that requests for permission to hold a rally must be received a week in advance, a demand that hasn't been made of Ahmadinejad's supporters, according to Mousavi's Web site. Previous requests for permission to hold pro-Mousavi rallies have been rejected.

Protesters who defied a ban on opposition demonstrations in the two weeks since the election have been met with water cannon, tear gas and clubs as security forces tried to disperse crowds. Independent confirmation of the events has been limited, with foreign journalists expelled or ordered to remain in their offices.

The government said 13 protesters and eight Basij militiamen died, with hundreds of demonstrators arrested.

Iranians circumventing government disruption of the Internet and mobile phone networks have used social-networking Web sites to allege that dozens of protesters were killed by police and the militia. The subjects of the postings include Neda Agha Soltan, a young woman whose death from gunshot wounds was captured in a video shown around the world.

'Completely Destroyed'

The state is entitled to act against protesters who are "ruining public places, setting fire to mosques and buses, making society insecure and frightening people" and "fight with them until they are completely destroyed," Khatami said in his Friday prayers sermon.

Rioters who use weapons are "mohareb," a word for those who fight against society, and "Islam suggests that maximum punishment should be given to moharebs," Khatami said, in a reference to the death penalty.

The Group of Eight foreign ministers, meeting in Italy, yesterday rebuked Iran over its crackdown on post-election demonstrations and called for a speedy end to the crisis "through democratic dialogue and peaceful means."

Similar Sermons

Clerics at Friday prayers across Iran delivered a message similar to Khatami's, including a denunciation of the West and foreign news media, according to reports on the state-run Mehr news agency. Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei gave last week's Tehran sermon, an internationally televised event in which he backed Ahmadinejad, upheld the election result and deemed the protests illegal.

"Foreign media, especially the British and American

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24. Iranian Cleric Calls For Harsh Punishment For Riot Leaders

Obama Rejects Demand That He Apologize For Criticizing Actions Against Protesters

(WASHINGTON POST 26 JUN 09) ... Thomas Erdbrink and William Branigin

TEHRAN, -- An influential Iranian cleric told worshippers Friday that those stirring unrest in connection with the recent election should be punished "ruthlessly and savagely" and convicted for waging war against God, a crime that under Shiite Islamic law is punishable by death.

In Washington, President Obama Friday condemned recent violence against protesters as "outrageous" and dismissed a demand by Iran's president that he apologize for similar previous comments. Obama suggested that it was President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad who should be apologizing to Iranian victims and their families for the violent actions of security forces.

In a sermon at Tehran University that was broadcast live to the nation, Ayatollah Ahmad Khatami amplified the ominous tone that the state has adopted this week toward the tens of thousands of demonstrators who have massed in the streets to question the results of the June 12 presidential balloting. The government has deemed the gatherings illegal.

"I want the judiciary to . . . punish leading rioters firmly and without showing any mercy to teach everyone a lesson," said Khatami, an influential cleric close to Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. "Based on Islamic law, whoever confronts the Islamic state . . . should be convicted as mohareb. . . . They should be punished ruthlessly and savagely."

Iran's judiciary said Tuesday that a special court would be set up to make an example out of "rioters" arrested during the demonstrations. According to Iranian state media, more than 450 have been arrested. International human rights groups say the number is higher and includes both demonstrators and well-known dissidents who have called for years for more political freedom in Iran.

A spokesman for the Guardian Council, Iran's electoral watchdog, reiterated Friday that the council has found no fraud or significant problems with vote-rigging in the disputed election, in which Ahmadinejad is said to have beaten challenger Mir Hossein Mousavi by a margin of nearly 2 to 1.

"After 10 days of examination, we did not see any major irregularities," Abbas Ali Kadkhodai told the official IRNA news agency.

media, showed extreme evil," said Khatami, who isn't related to former President Mohammad Khatami. "I'm surprised they are allowed to wander in the country and report with their satellite phones."

Khatami reminded followers that Khamenei's word is to be obeyed like a "command from God," a possible reference to Mousavi's criticism this week of the supreme leader for his support for Ahmadinejad.

"The supreme leader's support of the government in normal conditions is useful, but it is not in the country's interest that the supreme leader and the president are considered as one," said Mousavi, who is among those in the current Iranian political establishment who took part in the Islamic Revolution that ousted the monarchy in 1979.

Ahmadinejad won 63 percent of the vote to 34 percent for Mousavi, according to the official tally.

But the council later announced the formation of a "special committee" to review the election process and invited Mousavi and another opposition candidate, Mehdi Karroubi, to send representatives to participate in it. The council gave the two candidates 24 hours to name their representatives. It said 10 percent of the ballot boxes would be recounted in the presence of the committee, which would then issue a report about the election.

There was no immediate response from Mousavi or Karroubi. Mousavi has previously criticized the Guardian Council as biased toward Ahmadinejad.

The council on Tuesday announced a five-day extension of an inquiry into the election, a probe that was to have been completed Wednesday. But Kadkhodai said Friday that even though the formal inquiry now will not conclude until early next week, the vote will not be overturned, because no fraud has been found.

In his Friday sermon, Khatami also harshly denounced Western news media, leveling accusations of false reporting. He singled out Britain for special criticism.

The cleric, a member of the Assembly of Experts and a supporter of Ahmadinejad, claimed that protesters were responsible for the slaying of a young woman, Neda Agha Soltan, who has become an opposition icon since she was shot June 20 on a Tehran street and cellphone cameras captured her dying moments. Khatami asserted that "evidence shows that [protesters] have done it themselves and have raised propaganda against the system." Witnesses said Soltan was shot by a member of the pro-government Basij militia.

Speaking at the White House after a meeting with visiting German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Obama praised the Iranian demonstrators "bravery in the face of brutality," adding: "The violence perpetrated against them is outrageous. And despite the government's efforts to keep the world from bearing witness to that violence, we see it and we condemn it."

He said the Iranian people would be the ultimate judges of their government's actions. "But if the Iranian government desires the respect of the international community, then it

must respect the rights and heed the will of its people," he said.

Later, in response to questions, Obama said that Mousavi appears "to have captured the imagination or the spirit" of those in Iran who were "interested in opening up." He indicated that direct U.S. engagement with Iran on the issue of Tehran's nuclear program would have to wait until the situation in Iran becomes clearer.

On Ahmadinejad's demand Thursday for an apology, Obama said, "I don't take Mr. Ahmadinejad seriously about apologies, particularly given the fact that the United States has gone out of its way not to interfere with the election process in Iran." He said Ahmadinejad should "think carefully" about his "obligations to his own people," notably the "families of those who have been beaten, shot or detained."

On Thursday, Ahmadinejad lashed out at Obama, warning him against "interfering" in Iranian affairs and demanding an apology for criticism of a government crackdown on demonstrators protesting alleged electoral fraud.

Despite an increasingly harsh response to the protests, Mousavi pledged to continue challenging official results. He vowed to resist growing pressure to end his campaign and said he remains determined to prove that those who rigged the election are also responsible for the violence unleashed on opposition protesters.

The two rivals issued their dueling statements -- neither mentioning the other by name -- a day after security forces broke up the latest demonstrations, then temporarily detained university professors who had met with Mousavi.

Two grand ayatollahs, leading figures in Iran's predominant Shiite Muslim faith, also waded into the fray, as did European foreign ministers from the Group of Eight world powers at a meeting in Italy.

In a speech at a petrochemical plant in southern Iran, Ahmadinejad said Obama was behaving like his predecessor, George W. Bush, and suggested that talks with the United States on Iran's nuclear program would be pointless if Obama kept up his criticism. Obama, who has expressed interest in talking to the Iranian leadership about the nuclear issue, said at a news conference Tuesday that he was "appalled and outraged" by recent violence against demonstrators, and he accused the Iranian government of trying to "distract people" by blaming the unrest on the United States and other Western nations.

"Do you want to speak with this tone?" Ahmadinejad responded Thursday, addressing Obama. "If that is your stance, then what is left to talk about?"

He added: "I hope you avoid interfering in Iran's affairs and express your regret in a way that the Iranian nation is informed of it." He asked why Obama "has fallen into this trap and repeated the comments that Bush used to make" and told the U.S. president that such an attitude "will only make you another Bush in the eyes of the people."

Ahmadinejad also praised Iran's election as demonstrating "the great capabilities and grandeur of the Iranian nation" and declared that his country is practicing true "freedom," as opposed to "this unpopular democracy which is governing America and Europe." Americans and Europeans "have no right to choose and are restricted to . . . two or three parties" in voting for their leaders, he said.

In Washington, White House spokesman Robert Gibbs dismissed Ahmadinejad's criticism. Obama has said "that there

are people in Iran who want to make this not about a debate among Iranians in Iran, but about the West and the United States," Gibbs said. "And I would add President Ahmadinejad to that list of people trying to make this about the United States."

Iran's government has declared that Ahmadinejad decisively won the election with nearly 63 percent of the vote, while Mousavi received less than 34 percent and two other candidates trailed far behind. Mousavi immediately challenged the results, charging that massive fraud "reversed" the outcome and cheated him of victory.

The 67-year-old former prime minister posted a statement on his Web site Thursday saying he was being pressed to withdraw his challenge and had been severely restricted in his ability to communicate with supporters.

"However, I am not prepared to give up under the pressure of threats or personal interest," he said.

"The truth . . . is that a major fraud has taken place in these elections, and the people who tried to show their dismay with this event were attacked, killed and arrested," Mousavi said. "Not only am I not scared of responding to their false accusations, but I'm ready to show how the people responsible for the presidential fraud" are also to blame for having "spilled the blood of the people." Mousavi asked his followers to "continue your legal and responsible protest, which is born out of the Islamic revolution, with calm and by avoiding trouble."

His Web site also said 70 academics were arrested Wednesday night and early Thursday after meeting with him. It said that authorities released all but four and that those still detained included Mousavi's former campaign manager.

The pro-government Fars News Agency denied the account. Quoting an "informed source," it said that prosecutors questioned "certain participants" after Mousavi's meeting with members of the Islamic Association of University Lecturers but that "none of the said people were arrested."

A senior Shiite cleric, Grand Ayatollah Nasser Makarem Shirazi, called for the election dispute to be settled through "national reconciliation," saying in a statement Thursday that recent events "have caused deep regret and sorrow in all Iranians loyal to the Islamic establishment and revolution . . . and have gladdened the enemy," state-run Press TV reported. "Definitively, something must be done to ensure that there are no embers burning under the ashes" and to turn "hostilities, antagonism and rivalries . . . into amity and cooperation" he said.

But a leading dissident cleric, Grand Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri, said an "impartial" committee should resolve the election dispute, which he warned could ultimately undermine the government if it is not addressed. "If Iranians cannot talk about their legitimate rights at peaceful gatherings and are instead suppressed, complexities will build up which could possibly uproot the foundations of the government, no matter how powerful," Agence France-Presse quoted him as saying.

At a G-8 meeting in Trieste, Italy, foreign ministers sought to forge a united stand against the Iranian crackdown but ran into opposition from Russia. Italian Foreign Minister Franco Frattini said Iran "must now choose whether or not it wants to keep the door open to dialogue with the international community, because the open hand from the United States, that we supported, must not be greeted with a hand covered in

blood."

British Foreign Secretary David Miliband deplored a "profound clampdown" in Iran and said a "crisis of credibility" is dividing Iran's government from its people.

But Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov opposed any condemnation of Tehran, saying after talks with Frattini that "isolating Iran is the wrong approach."

The streets of Tehran were largely quiet Thursday after another opposition presidential candidate, Mehdi Karroubi, postponed plans for a demonstration to mourn protesters killed by security forces. Karroubi said he has not "succeeded in booking a particular location" for a mourning ceremony, apparently because the government has banned demonstrations. He said he still wants to organize a gathering that would "match the dignity of the martyrs of the past few days."

Karroubi also charged that the government has acted

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25. Iranian Protesters Avoid Censorship With Navy Technology

(WASHINGTON TIMES 26 JUN 09) ... Eli Lake

Iranians seeking to share videos and other eyewitness accounts of the demonstrations that have roiled their country since disputed elections two weeks ago are using an Internet encryption program originally developed by and for the U.S. Navy.

Designed a decade ago to secure Internet communications between U.S. ships at sea, The Onion Router, or TOR, has become one of the most important proxies in Iran for gaining access to Web sites such as Twitter, YouTube and Facebook.

The system of proxy servers that disguise a user's Internet traffic is now operated by a nonprofit, the Tor Project, that is independent from the U.S. government and military and is used all over the world.

According to the Tor Project, connections to TOR have gone up by 600 percent since mass protests erupted after the June 12 vote, which gave a purported landslide victory to incumbent President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

"Over the past two weeks, we have seen a doubling to tripling of new client connections," Andrew Lewman, executive director of the Tor Project, told The Washington Times Thursday. "We are up to a thousand new clients a day."

Tehran was relatively quiet on Thursday, but opposition leader Mir Hossein Mousavi vowed not to back down and Iranians found novel ways to continue their protests combining high and low technology.

An Iranian who asked not to be named to avoid government retribution told The Times that Iranians are writing protest slogans on their paper money. Mass e-mails have been sent out telling people approached by the authorities to say they got the money from someone else, he said.

Among the slogans the Iranian saw scrawled over the image of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the leader of the 1979 Islamic Revolution: "What happened to our vote, dictator?" "Death to the coup d'etat guard." "Supreme leader equals Shah." "The government cheats, the supreme leader approves."

Iran, a country of 70 million people, has more than 20 million Internet users - the highest percentage in the region outside Israel - and a well-developed blogosphere.

For Iranian Internet users, TOR allows them to visit

illegally in banning demonstrations and arresting political activists. He called for the immediate release of political detainees, and he challenged the Interior Ministry to allow separate but simultaneous demonstrations by Ahmadinejad supporters and the opposition to see which side would draw more people.

At least 17 people have been reported killed in violence after the presidential election, state-run media have reported. But Press TV, an English-language version of state television, put the death toll at 20 and quoted "informed sources" as saying that eight of the dead were members of the pro-government Basij militia. There was no independent confirmation of the claim, which marked the first mention in official media of deaths among security forces in the recent violence.

government-banned Web sites and avoid detection by the authorities. The Tor Project does this by routing Web requests among several different computer servers all over the world. While there are other proxy servers that "anonymize" Web surfing, TOR is considered the best product available on the Internet.

"There are plenty of programs political dissidents can use to route their Internet traffic through third parties and escape censorship and avoid monitoring," said Noah Shachtman, the editor of Wired.com's national security blog, Danger Room. "But TOR is different because it is an encrypted network of node after node, each one unlocking encryption to the next node. And because of this, it is all but impossible for governments to track Web sites a TOR user is visiting. TOR is a great way to give Ahmadinejad's Web censors headaches."

Since the mass demonstrations began, the Iranian government has tried to denigrate the protests as being instigated by the CIA and other foreign intelligence agencies - a charge that President Obama and other foreign leaders have repeatedly denied.

While U.S. officials and Iran specialists say that the demonstrations are homegrown and reflect pent-up Iranian frustration with the lack of liberty in their country, the U.S. government has in the past invested in communications technology to help Iranians organize and improve their access to the West.

In 2007, the State Department spent \$31 million to promote democracy in Iran. An additional \$60 million was appropriated for the program in 2008, but much of it has not yet been spent, former State Department officials said.

Some Iran specialists have criticized the program, noting that it was used by the Iranian government to taint recipients as agents of the West.

David Denehy, the Iran democracy program coordinator for the State Department from 2005 to 2007, said, "Our goal was to promote freedom of speech for Iranians to communicate with each other and the outside world. We funded and supported innovative technologies to allow them to do this via the Internet, cell phones and other media."

Mr. Denehy added, however, that Iran's democracy movement is being directed by Iranians.

"What we are witnessing now is the Iranian people utilizing these new technologies and that is on their own accord," he said. "They have done it themselves. I hope the projects we funded have been helpful to them, but this is an Iranian-led movement."

Another agency in the U.S. government that has provided seed money to help Iranians avoid Internet censorship is the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG), the body that oversees the Voice of America (VOA) and Radio Farda, a Farsi-language radio station that stepped up shortwave broadcasts recently to counteract Iranian government efforts to jam the signal.

Ken Berman, acting director of engineering for the BBG, said he oversees a three-person anti-censorship team that focuses on China and Iran. He declined to provide the exact budget for the project, saying only that it was "under \$5 million" a year.

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MIDDLE EAST:

26. Arab Activists Watch Iran And Wonder: 'Why Not Us?'

(WASHINGTON POST 26 JUN 09) ... Sudarsan Raghavan

CAIRO, -- Mohamed Sharkawy bears the scars of his devotion to Egypt's democracy movement. He has endured beatings in a Cairo police station, he said, and last year spent more than two weeks in an insect-ridden jail for organizing a protest.

But watching tens of thousands of Iranians take to the streets of Tehran this month, the 27-year-old pro-democracy activist has grown disillusioned. In 10 days, he said, the Iranians have achieved far more than his movement has ever accomplished in Egypt.

"We sacrificed a lot, but we have gotten nowhere," Sharkawy said.

Across the Arab world, Iran's massive opposition protests have triggered a wave of soul-searching and conflicting emotions. Many question why their own reform movements are unable to rally people to rise up against unpopular authoritarian regimes. In Egypt, the cradle of what was once the Arab world's most ambitious push for democracy, Iran's protests have served as a reminder of how much the notion has unraveled under President Hosni Mubarak, who has ruled the country for 30 years.

"I am extremely jealous," said Nayra El Sheikh, 28, a blogger and Sharkawy's wife. "I can't help but think: Why not us? What do they have that we don't have? Do they have more guts?"

The frustration comes against a backdrop of deep-rooted skepticism among pro-democracy activists that U.S. policies under President Obama will help transform the region, despite his vow to engage the Muslim world in a highly publicized speech here last month. Some view Obama's response to Iran's protests, muted until Tuesday, as a harbinger of U.S. attitudes toward their own efforts to reform their political systems. The Egyptian government, they note, is a key American ally, and U.S. pressure on Egypt for reforms began subsiding in the last years of the Bush administration.

"When Obama does not take a stance, the very next day these oppressive regimes will regard this as a signal. This is a test for his government," said Ayman Nour, a noted Egyptian

"We have realized that Iran has a growing audience of young activist Internet users and we have repurposed our tools to work in Farsi and make it available to Iranians," he said. "We open up the channels so the Iranian blogosphere is more accessible to Iranians in Iran."

Mr. Berman said that one project his group funded was to design the Firefox Web browser to embed the TOR proxy system.

The anti-censorship operation has also benefited VOA, whose "traffic has gone up exponentially" since the unrest began in Iran, he said.

Mr. Berman said that this is not U.S. "meddling" in Iranian affairs.

"All we are doing is providing an open channel so Iranians can get information coming in and out," he said.

Suad Jafarzadeh contributed to this report.

opposition politician who was recently released from jail. "If they can turn a blind eye to their enemy, they can turn a blind eye to any action here in Egypt."

When the Iranian protests erupted, Ahmed Abd el-Fatah wrote on his blog, "We Egyptians are like youth watching pornography because they can't practice sex. Congratulations to Iran for its democracy."

"I was very happy about what was happening. But I was also very sad. I know I can never do this here," the thin, 22-year-old activist said. "You need a far greater movement than in Iran to achieve any change in Egypt."

For years, Egypt's democracy movement has used Internet technology, banners and slogans to galvanize its supporters, rallying often against U.S. policies and taking the lead in championing core Arab causes such as the plight of Palestinians or opposition to war in Iraq. Today, the movement is facing a crisis of leadership and vision and is torn by internal disputes, activists said.

Meanwhile, the government has taken advantage of the void to crush the opposition through arrests, beatings and round-the-clock surveillance. Dissent, even online, is not tolerated. Egyptian security officials routinely monitor cellphones and social networking sites such as Facebook and hack into the e-mails of anyone they deem suspicious, activists said.

"We have a very weak opposition. We don't have a civil society. The police are very powerful," said Fahmy Howeidy, a columnist for Ahram, an independent newspaper. "In Iran, at least there are real elections. We've never had any real elections here in 50 years. Our society has been weakened. We have not allowed political groups to grow."

Many believe Nour is one leader capable of capturing the imagination of Egyptians. But the government keeps a close watch. He's not allowed to work. He can't have a bank account, and his travel is restricted.

Fatah noted that many of the Iranian protesters appear to be from the social elite. In Egypt, most people are more concerned about food and other basic necessities than politics.

More than a quarter of Egypt's 80 million people are illiterate, and only 8 percent have access to the Internet.

"The elite here are limited, and most are working in hand with the regime," Fatah said. "And the only reason the Egyptian street has risen up is over money, salaries or prices. The minute the police arrive, there is silence."

"We're too passive," El Sheikh said. "Protesters go downtown, perhaps 20 or 30 at a time. The security forces come. They beat them senseless. They detain them. And that's as good as it gets."

Ali el din Hilal, chief spokesman for the ruling National Democratic Party, noted that opposition newspapers and parties are allowed to operate in Egypt. "It isn't true that the government cracks down on every movement or demonstration," he said. "Egyptians have many freedoms."

On Wednesday, Fatah said he received a Facebook message announcing a protest in downtown Cairo the next day to support "democracy" in Iran and to mourn the death of Neda Agha Soltan, the young woman whose killing, captured on video, has become a global symbol of the Iranian uprising.

On Thursday, 10 large green trucks filled with riot police arrived at the meeting place. Not a single protester showed up.

"It's a demonstration. It doesn't matter what it is about. They will stop it," Fatah said.

Arab activists on the street have not been inspired by the Iranian protesters as they have been by Palestinians or Iraqis in recent years. In part, this reflects the religious and ideological fissure between the mostly Sunni Arab world and an ascendant Shiite Iran that has deepened across the region since the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq.

"There are some religious groups who stress that they are Shiites and that they are different than Sunnis," said Mohamed Mustafa, 35, a lawyer who has participated in anti-government demonstrations. "It is easy to manipulate the feelings of Egyptians through religious beliefs."

"Shiites are more disciplined and organized. It's a part of their culture and religion," said Anwar Ahmed, 62, another lawyer, offering his explanation for why predominantly Sunni Egypt has not risen up against Mubarak.

The two sat with other lawyers in a courtyard of the lawyers' syndicate building, a hot spot for demonstrations in downtown Cairo.

Most of the group said they admired Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and wanted him to remain in power --

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chiefly because he was America's foe. "Anyone who can stand up to the United States and force his nation's interest forward, we'll support him," said Ahmed Mattar, 29.

In the blogosphere, too, activists are divided into two camps, further explaining the subdued Arab response to Iran's clashes. One side views Iran's disputed June 12 election as fair and argues that the protests were orchestrated by the West. The other side views the protests as a mass movement that needs to be supported. Many question whether opposition leader Mir Hossein Mousavi is actually a reformist.

"I am somewhere in the middle," Fatah said. "But I support Ahmadinejad."

Resentment is also growing among Arabs over the condemnations by European nations and by Obama on Tuesday of the state-sponsored violence against Iranian protesters. Many say they see a double standard.

"Here, in the last presidential election, the police used live ammunition," Sharkawy said. "Why didn't the West speak out against what was happening to us, when we had much smaller numbers? You become skeptical. We understand the United States and the West will pursue their own interests. They don't want a strong Egyptian government that will have separate opinions from the West."

Egypt and other Sunni Arab governments have also been silent on Iran, despite their wariness of the Iranian regime's influence on Shiite militant groups in Lebanon and Iraq and on Palestinian Islamist groups. Some analysts say the governments worry about triggering similar popular upheavals at home. Hilal, the ruling party spokesman, acknowledged that Egypt did not want to interfere because it expects other nations not to interfere in its domestic affairs.

"We may face a similar situation in the future," he said.

That's precisely what 28-year-old blogger Ahmed Maher wants. He said he was arrested and beaten last year for organizing a Facebook protest. Today, he keeps a low profile, changing his online passwords and cellphone numbers frequently.

But the Iranian protests have inspired him to think of new ways to organize people and raise political awareness in Egypt. He said he has two years to figure it out.

"It makes me think of 2011 -- our next presidential election," Maher said. "I think we will become like the people they are beating up in Iran now."

EUROPE:

27. G8 Foreign Ministers Lament Afghan Corruption

(ASSOCIATED PRESS 26 JUN 09) ... Alessandra Rizzo

TRIESTE, Italy — Foreign ministers from the Group of Eight countries meeting in Italy lamented corruption and the lack of basic services such as health and water in Afghanistan, saying Friday that better cooperation among countries in the region was needed to promote stability.

The foreign ministers from the world's industrialized nations endorsed Pakistan's battle against Taliban insurgents and promised to work more with the country's government "in the face of terrorism, extremism and militancy." They called for better regional cooperation in fighting terrorism and drug trafficking in the region.

Improving security in the troubled region is a focus of the three-day meeting in this northeastern Italian city.

Italy, the host of the meeting, sought to broaden participation in the talks, arguing that Afghanistan is a problem that needs to be addressed regionally. As a result, the foreign ministers of Pakistan and Afghanistan participated in Friday's session, and a joint statement was issued.

In the statement, the ministers said that, despite some efforts by the Afghan government, "insecurity, widespread corruption and capacity shortfalls continue to complicate the delivery of basic services at the local level, including health,

education and water."

President Hamid Karzai has been criticized both at home and abroad for corruption in his administration but he is the favorite in the Aug. 20 vote in Afghanistan. The administration of President Barack Obama in its early days called Karzai's government inefficient and corrupt, but U.S. officials have toned down criticism of a leader who may win a second five-year term.

The statement said the G-8 countries "acknowledge that the pursuit of peace, stability and development in Afghanistan, Pakistan and the region are linked."

"The G-8 remains committed to working with the Pakistani government as it endeavors to strengthen functioning democratic institutions, and its civil society in the face of terrorism, extremism and militancy," it said.

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GERMAN LEADER'S VISIT TO U.S.:

28. Obama, German Leader Optimistic For Climate Bill

(THE HILL 26 JUN 09) ... Sam Youngman

Shortly before the House is set to vote on President Obama's energy bill, the president and German Chancellor Angela Merkel said Friday they are hopeful the climate change legislation will pass.

Obama, who acknowledged Thursday that he expects a close vote, said the U.S. has been behind Europe in combating climate change.

"I'll be the first to acknowledge that for the last several years, the United States has not been where it needs to be," Obama said.

The president, joined by Merkel in the East Room of the White House, said he was very "blunt and frank" with Merkel that even if the bill passes, the U.S. is "still developing the framework" to become a global leader on the issue.

"I think we all recognize that there's going to be more to do," he said.

Merkel said she sees a "sea change" in how the U.S. views its role in battling climate change, noting that the country is on the verge of passing legislation she "would not have thought possible a year ago."

"I hope you will come to good results when the vote is taken," Merkel said.

The two leaders also presented a unified front on the unrest in Iran, condemning the violence against protesters there following Iran's disputed presidential election.

"The violence perpetrated against them is outrageous," Obama said.

The president was asked by a reporter at the press conference if he would apologize to Iran for interference as

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29. Obama, Merkel Warm Up In White House Talk

(AGENCE FRANCE-PRESS 26 JUN 09) ... Stephen Collinson

WASHINGTON – US President Barack Obama and German Chancellor Angela Merkel put on a public display of respect and affection on Friday, mollifying reports of discord that dogged previous meetings.

The US president paid a warm personal tribute to Merkel, who had been reportedly cool toward him at the start of his presidency, calling her smart and trustworthy, while she

The statement also looked at drug trafficking and the opium trade, which help fund extremists, saying that it was urgent to find alternative sources of income.

Italy had also invited Iran to attend the talks, arguing that it could play an important role in talks on Afghan stabilization. But Rome retracted the invitation after Iran failed to respond, and amid concerns over Iran's violent crackdown on protesters.

Talks Friday were devoted to cultural cooperation, border management and illicit trafficking. On Saturday, the delegates will look at economic development, refugees and migrations, and food security, with other international players joining the discussions.

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said recently that he should. Ahmadinejad compared Obama unfavorably to former President George W. Bush.

"I don't take Mr. Ahmadinejad's statements seriously about apologies," Obama said, smiling.

Obama said the U.S. "has gone out of its way not to interfere," and he suggests the Iranian president pay more attention to "the obligations he has to his own people."

The president acknowledged for the first time that there is "no doubt" that what is happening in Iran will affect his pledge to have direct talks with the country's leadership about its nuclear program, but he said it is too early to say what that effect will be.

"We are still waiting to see how the situation in Iran plays itself out," Obama said.

On the sticky situation of closing the detainee facility at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, Obama said he has not asked for nor received a commitment from Merkel that Germany would take any of the detainees.

The president conceded that it is "politically difficult" for some European leaders to lend a hand on the matter, but he said he will be "looking for help from our friends and allies."

Merkel said Germany will not "shirk our responsibilities" when it comes to closing the facility, but both she and Obama said the discussions are still in the preliminary stages.

"We have seen a positive response from countries across Europe in a general sense and a wanting to help," Obama said.

praised Obama's climate change effort.

The White House talks included a one-on-one encounter in the Oval Office, expanded talks with delegations and a joint press conference and lunch.

Previous meetings, in April and in Dresden this month, ended with both leaders denying stark differences on economic policy, but the tone of the White House talks

seemed warmer.

The heads of state adopted a united front on Iran's political crackdown, with Merkel taking the toughest line, promised to work together to tackle global warming and the economic meltdown and vowed to build stronger ties with Russia.

"I've now dealt with a lot of world leaders, and I think that Chancellor Merkel is smart, practical, and I trust her when she says something," Obama said.

"So that kind of approach is exactly what you want from an international partner, and I've very much enjoyed my interactions with her and her team."

Hours before a climate change bill -- a big part of Obama's domestic program -- faced a crucial vote in Congress, the president drew a proud smile from Merkel by praising wind turbines he saw while helicoptering across Germany.

Merkel, who has been critical of the kind of large-scale stimulus spending used by the United States to fight the economic crisis, pointedly praised Obama's recently announced plan to rein in untamed Wall Street.

"You have made very important steps here in the United States as regards financial market regulation," she said.

"We and the European Union are also working on that, and in the summer of this year we can then sort of take stock and see where these regulations meet."

As the economic crisis escalated early this year, Germany and the United States were seen at opposite ends of the debate over whether more regulation or massive economic kick-start spending was the best route to recovery.

Merkel was also optimistic about the prospects for the Group of Eight summit in Italy next month and the looming Group of 20 economic crisis summit, to be held in September in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

"We're on a good path here. I think there's been progress," Merkel said.

The chancellor also praised Obama's efforts to battle

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climate change, even though the bill in Congress falls short of the European Union's commitment to tackle global warming.

"I hope that you will get a good result when the vote is taken," Merkel said, adding it was important to work with developing and developed nations in the run-up to global climate talks in Copenhagen later this year.

"The fact that with the United States we stand where we stand today is an enormous success, which I would not have thought possible a year ago -- let me be very serious."

The bill on the table in Congress would cut US greenhouse gas emissions by 17 percent from 2005 levels by 2020, while the EU has collectively pledged to cut its greenhouse gas emissions by 20 percent from 1990 levels by 2020.

Feathers were previously ruffled in the US-German relationship by the Obama administration's push to secure greater German contribution to the war in Afghanistan.

But the war is highly unpopular in Germany, and Merkel, with elections looming later this year, cannot afford to buck public opinion.

Her arrival in Washington came just days after three German soldiers were killed in a firefight with insurgents in Afghanistan.

"We honor those who serve there, including American and German soldiers who gave their lives there this week," Obama said.

Merkel also said that Germany would not "shirk our particular responsibility" to the US request for help in resettling inmates of the Guantanamo Bay war on terror camp that Obama has vowed to close by early next year.

But both leaders said discussions on possible inmates were still taking place at a very general level.

"There have been no particular requests made about 'X' number of detainees being placed by such and such a date, and Chancellor Merkel has not made commitments that are specific in that sort," Obama said

NORTH KOREA:

30. US Will Not Use Force To Inspect NKorean Ship

(ASSOCIATED PRESS 26 JUN 09) ... Jae-soon Chang in Seoul, and Pauline Jelinek

SEOUL, South Korea — The United States will not use force to inspect a North Korean ship suspected of carrying banned goods, an American official was quoted as saying Friday.

An American destroyer has been shadowing the North Korean freighter sailing off China's coast, possibly on its way to Myanmar.

Defense Undersecretary Michele Flournoy met with South Korean officials in Seoul on Friday as the U.S. sought international support for aggressively enforcing a U.N. sanctions resolution aimed at punishing Pyongyang for its second nuclear test last month. The North Korean-flagged ship, Kang Nam 1, is the first to be tracked under the U.N. resolution.

North Korea has in response escalated threats of war, with a slew of harsh rhetoric including warnings that it would unleash a "fire shower of nuclear retaliation" and "wipe out the (U.S.) aggressors" in the event of a conflict.

On Thursday, the communist regime organized a massive

anti-American rally in Pyongyang where some 100,000 participants vowed to "crush" the U.S. One senior speaker told the crowd that the North will respond to any sanctions or U.S. provocations with "an annihilating blow."

That was seen as a pointed threat in response to the American destroyer.

Flournoy said Friday that Washington has ruled the use of military force to inspect the North Korean freighter.

"The U.N. resolution lays out a regime that has a very clear set of steps," Flournoy said, according to the Yonhap news agency. "I want to be very clear ... This is not a resolution that sponsors, that authorizes use of force for interdiction."

Flournoy said the U.S. still has "incentives and disincentives that will get North Korea to change course."

"Everything remains on the table, but we're focused on implementing the resolution fully, responsibly and with our international partners," she said.

Flournoy's trip came as the U.S. sought international

support for aggressively enforcing the U.N. sanctions.

It is not clear what was on board the North Korean freighter, but officials have mentioned artillery and other conventional weaponry. One intelligence expert suspected missiles.

The U.S. and its allies have made no decision on whether to request inspection of the ship, Pentagon press secretary Geoff Morrell said Wednesday in Washington, but North Korea has said it would consider any interception an act of war.

If permission for inspection is refused, the ship must dock at a port of its choosing, so local authorities can check its cargo. Vessels suspected of carrying banned goods must not be offered bunkering services at port, such as fuel, the resolution says.

A senior U.S. defense official said the ship had cleared the Taiwan Strait. He said he didn't know whether or when the Kang Nam may need to stop in some port to refuel, but that

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the ship has in the past stopped in Hong Kong's port.

Another U.S. defense official said he tended to doubt reports that the Kang Nam was carrying nuclear-related equipment, saying information seems to indicate the cargo is banned conventional munitions. Both officials spoke on condition of anonymity in order to talk about intelligence.

North Korea is suspected to have transported banned goods to Myanmar before on the Kang Nam, said Bertil Lintner, a Bangkok-based North Korea expert who has written a book about leader Kim Jong Il.

South Korea, meanwhile, plans to use high-tech surveillance and weapons systems to counter North Korea's missile and nuclear programs, Defense Minister Lee Sang-hee said in a Friday briefing.

South Korea plans to employ unmanned reconnaissance planes and add "bunker-buster" bombs to its arsenal in case of signs that the North planned to launch an attack toward the South, Lee said.

PACIFIC:

31. S. Korea, U.S. Hold Security Talks

(THE KOREA HERALD 26 JUN 09)

U.S. Defense Undersecretary of Policy Michele Flournoy yesterday discussed with officials here pressing security issues, including the latest crisis imposed by North Korea.

The undersecretary talked about the risks posed by Pyongyang and the need for coordinated response from Seoul and Washington, according to diplomatic sources.

She met with Defense Minister Lee Sang-hee, Vice Defense Minister Chang Soo-man and Deputy Foreign Minister Lee Yong-joon during her one-day stay in Seoul.

Flournoy is currently touring Asia, including China and Japan.

North Korea was at the top of the agenda during Flournoy's visit to Beijing, including the sanctions that were put in place earlier this month by the U.N. Security Council following Pyongyang's May 25 nuclear test.

The U.S. navy is currently tracking the Kang Nam, a North Korean ship suspected of carrying illicit weapons and related material. It may be the first ship to be searched under the new U.N. Resolution 1874.

North Korea has lately been further seeking to raise international tension with threats of possible missile launches,

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32. Security Forces Prepare For A Fresh Offensive Against Maoists In Lalgah

(THE HINDU, INDIA 26 JUN 09)

KOLKATA: Security forces deployed in Lalgah and its adjacent areas in West Bengal's Paschim Medinipur district are preparing for a fresh offensive to flush out Maoists and activists of the Maoist-backed Police Santrosh Birodhi Janasadharoner Committee (PSBJC) from the region.

Six additional companies of the central forces arrived at Goaltore, about 20 km from Lalgah, from where they, along with the State police, went on the job on Thursday.

The joint operation by the paramilitary forces and the State Armed Police against Maoists holed up in the Lalgah area entered its eighth day.

Ever since the forces reclaimed the police station there on

this time longer-range ballistic missiles, which would be in violation of U.N. Security Council resolutions.

On May 25, the North launched five short-range missiles in addition to its nuclear test, the second of its kind.

Seoul and Washington have, in the aftermath of such provocations, been closely cooperating regarding the North.

The allies, along with the other four members of the six-nation talks aimed at ending Pyongyang's nuclear ambitions, are now planning a consultative meeting without the North.

The communist state has boycotted the talks following the U.N. Security Council's presidential statement in April condemning the North's April 5 rocket launch.

There is now a more stringent resolution in place consisting of harsh sanctions toward the North.

The Seoul government is expected today to submit a report on effective implementation of the sanctions, according to U.N. protocol. The U.S. navy is currently tracking the Kang Nam, a North Korean ship suspected of carrying illicit weapons and related material.

June 20 the operation has progressed steadily, though on a low key, with security personnel scouring the area for landmines and other explosives.

The operation will continue until normality is restored in the troubled area and a sense of security returns among the people there, according to Chief Secretary Ashok Mohan Chakraborty.

More companies of the central forces were expected to arrive to supplement the forces engaged in the operation, he said.

A base camp was set up by the security personnel in the Lalgah Police Station and plans were on to make forays into

the Ramgarh area, a Maoist stronghold, reports reaching here said.

The government had reiterated that the operation should not be viewed as one aimed at "occupying" the area but to provide protection to the victims of months of violence in the area and instil in them a sense of security.

It was difficult to estimate how long the operations would continue "but the end objective is to restore law and order, see development work resumes and schemes implemented and proper rule of law established," Mr. Chakraborty told journalists during a visit to Lalgah on Wednesday.

He said the government was always willing to hold talks

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33. US Security Adviser Holds Talks With Singh

(DAWN, PAKISTAN 26 JUN 09)

NEW DELHI: A top aide of US President Barack Obama held talks with Indian leaders Friday on Washington's revamped security policy in the region.

US National Security Adviser James Jones, who arrived in New Delhi late Thursday after stops in Afghanistan and Pakistan, met Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Indian National Security Adviser M.K. Narayanan, a government spokesman told AFP.

No details of the discussions were made available but an Indian government official said: 'Pakistan and terrorism emanating from there against India,' were the issues on the agenda ahead of the meetings Friday.

Jones' visit comes the day after Defence Minister A.K. Antony reportedly warned a group of senior military commanders that the 'turmoil within' Pakistan could spill over into India - a reference to Islamabad's battle with Islamic militants in its northwest.

'We must be vigilant about the happenings on our western

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with the leaders of the PSBJC, but it was asking them to surrender their arms before discussions could be held.

The PSBJC leaders recently said they were agreeable to talks if the security operations were stopped.

The government said that it would look into specific complaints of police highhandedness on some local villagers in the course of the operations. "The police have repeatedly been told to ensure that local villagers are not harassed in any way ... The central security forces and the police have no discord with the people. Rather they are here to safeguard the people's interests," according to Mr. Chakraborty.

border, while at the same time, try to make peace with our neighbour,' the Press Trust of India news agency quoted Antony as saying.

Jones is due to meet Antony later Friday.

Since Obama's January inauguration, Washington has put Pakistan at the heart of its global fight against Al-Qaeda and the Taliban, which it says are holed up in the country's porous border area with Afghanistan.

India says funds and weapons given to Pakistan as part of a plan to tackle extremists could find their way to militants plotting to attack India.

Singh met Pakistan's president Asif Ali Zardari earlier this month on the sidelines of a regional summit in Russia with the two sides agreeing to meet again.

But New Delhi says that official peace talks to solve a series of disputes, including Kashmir, will be restarted only after Islamabad acts against the alleged perpetrators of the Mumbai attacks.

WOUNDED CARE:

34. Soldiers Urged To Take Advantage Of Mental Health Resources

(COLORADO SPRINGS GAZETTE 25 JUN 09) ... Brian Newsome

In recent years, the military has invested millions of dollars in mental health care, fueling a proliferation of treatment programs while attempting to reshape fundamental attitudes about mental illness.

But the stigma persists among the rank-and-file, keeping many troubled soldiers from taking advantage of help that is readily available, according to two Army generals.

The Army's top psychiatrist, Brig. Gen. Loree K. Sutton, and Fort Carson commander Maj. Gen. Mark A. Graham spoke with reporters, civilian health care providers and others Wednesday as part of an Army-sponsored Warrior Care Summit in Colorado Springs.

A 2007 scandal at Walter Reed Army Medical Center that revealed widespread medical neglect, coupled with a rash of soldier suicides and homicides, has led to major strides in how the military approaches health care.

Sutton described the Walter Reed revelation as a tragic "blessing."

"We're really good at the life-saving, white-knuckled, adrenaline-charged stuff," she said about the military's medical team.

But until recently, the military fell short when it came to taking care of soldiers coming off the battlefield or in need of longtime rehab.

This "cultural transformation," Sutton said, has changed medical protocols to place a greater focus on the "whole" soldier. Mental health, she said, is now taken as seriously as physical health. Her job title might serve as an example. She is the founding director of the Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury, a Defense Department organization charged exclusively with addressing the psychological needs of the military.

The changes aren't just at the top. Platoon leaders and medics, for example, are being trained to recognize signs of stress among their troops and to help those soldiers get help.

Army doctors and counselors have honed their questions to better identify conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injuries. Fort Carson recently opened a center designed solely to help soldiers with traumatic brain injuries.

Yet such efforts are hampered by a tough-guy culture where words such as "stress" and "mental health" make people

bristle. Graham said soldiers fear that if they seek psychological help, it might be seen as a sign of weakness and could jeopardize promotions or admission into selective programs.

Graham is a vocal advocate in addressing those stigmas. One of his two sons committed suicide, and the other died in combat in Iraq. And at Fort Carson, 14 soldiers were accused or convicted of homicides from 2005-08, he said.

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35. Amputee Combat Vets Return To Iraq For 'Proper Exit'

(ARMY NEWS SERVICE 23 JUN 09) ... Sgt. Kat Briere

CAMP VICTORY, Iraq -- Six amputee combat veterans put their uniforms back on and returned to Iraq Sunday for the first time since sustaining their injuries in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

In the rotunda of Al Faw Palace at Camp Victory on the outskirts of Baghdad, they introduced themselves to hundreds of their brothers and sisters in arms in support of yet another operation, "Operation Proper Exit."

Operation Proper Exit is a pilot program being introduced by the Disabled American Veterans, a non-profit organization dedicated to enhancing lives of disabled veterans. The program is supported by Army Vice Chief of Staff Gen. Peter Chiarelli and Sgt. Maj. of the Army Kenneth O. Preston.

The program is run by the Troops First Foundation, which is supported by the USO. It allows troops who sustained injuries in combat to return to the camps or bases at which

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36. Help Available For Post-Traumatic Stress

(FORT LEAVENWORTH LAMP 25 JUN 09) ... James W. Cartwright

ABERDEEN PROVING GROUND, Md. - Anger is an innate response that is useful for confronting threatening circumstances. Anger rallies Soldiers to engage in combat. "Anger keeps you pumped up, alert, awake and alive," according to Battlemind training.

Anger can also stay with a Soldier after exposure to combat. On the battlefield, anger can be purposeful. On the homefront, being "pumped up" or angry and ready to do battle is an inappropriate response that damages relationships in the social environment.

After deployment, Soldiers become part of an elite group of men and women who generally share a great sense of pride and honor in having served their country. Although the experience may have been difficult, it fosters a new self-respect. For some it nurtured a meaningful and positive emotional growth. For most Soldiers, homecoming is a time to recover and reconnect with friends and loved ones. Many Soldiers readjust with very few difficulties. Unfortunately, for a few Soldiers, homecoming is the beginning of long, nightmarish journey to recovery and readjustment.

Exposure to combat and the atrocities of war can impair the "strongest and toughest" of Soldiers. Research shows that exposure to combat, violence and atrocities increases the risk for developing post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD. Soldiers suffering from PTSD have problems shutting down the responses conditioned by the traumatic events of their deployments. Trauma experiences can also include sexual assault and sexual harassment in military settings by service members.

"We take it very hard when a soldier goes downtown and does something horrific," he said. The question, he said: "How do we see that red flag?"

One of Sutton's strategies is a new \$1.8 million public awareness campaign built largely on telling the stories of soldiers who sought help.

they were stationed when injured.

"This was their idea. They wanted to come back," said Staff Sgt. Alejandro Perez, the administrative noncommissioned officer for Multi-National Force-Iraq's command sergeant major. Working directly with and for Command Sgt. Maj. Lawrence Wilson, Perez has planned and orchestrated the week-long visit of wounded warriors back to Iraq.

Brig. Gen. Heidi V. Brown, deputy commanding general, Multinational Corp-Iraq, introduced herself to each returning servicemember and gave each one a coin. She said she was glad they came back and that she hopes their visit here "closes the loop."

The troops and their entourage are scheduled to visit seven locations in Iraq during their visit this week.

There are specific criteria for determining if a Soldier is suffering from PTSD. Generally, the symptoms of PTSD include the following: the traumatic event is re-experienced; things that remind the Soldier of the event are avoided and reactions are numbed; and the Soldier is keyed up much of the time.

In addition, PTSD sufferers have difficulties with regulating their moods. This could include angry feelings that can lead to impulsive behaviors such as verbal abuse and threats, or even physically violent acts. Because their brains are now wired with a short fuse, Soldiers with PTSD can be vulnerable to having conflicts with others. Since moods are difficult to regulate, anger can escalate. Soldiers succumbing to anger can unwittingly perpetrate emotional and physical harm to their girlfriends, boyfriends, spouses and children. In this manner, loved ones can become the victims of deployments too.

Uncontrolled anger can cause Soldiers to destroy meaningful relationships and lose health and productivity. Unchecked anger can ruin professional relationships and lead to loss of employment. Misguided efforts to cope with unmanageable moods can lead to substance abuse and addictions. Soldiers under the influence of drugs or alcohol will have even less control of angry feelings and could further endanger themselves and others through impaired judgments, loss of inhibitions, and impulsive and/or aggressive acts.

Soldiers who find that they are unable to regulate their moods after their deployments should seek help immediately to learn strategies to manage angry responses before negative

patterns of behavior become well established and more difficult to change. Soldiers who develop PTSD can recover from the condition by seeking out appropriate interventions. PTSD need not be a mental illness with a lifelong journey to recovery.

There are effective treatments for PTSD that can help Soldiers regain control of their lives.

PTSD treatment often includes both medication and psychotherapy. This combined approach can help improve Soldiers' symptoms and teach them skills to cope better with the traumatic event and its aftermath. The psychotherapy treatment can be individual or group or a combination of both. Individual psychotherapy addresses the specific symptoms of PTSD that trouble Soldiers. Group therapy is a way to connect with others going through similar experiences.

The treatment of PTSD often incorporates learning anger and stress management skills. Soldiers learn to understand what triggers their anger. They learn to observe how thoughts translate to feelings. Soldiers are often surprised to discover that anger can be addictive and serve to give them a faulty

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37. Military Members To Donate Their Brains To Science

(DISCOVER MAGAZINE 25 JUN 09)

Researchers hoping to literally get inside the heads of soldiers will have their chance: 20 retired and active members of the U.S. military have pledged to donate their brains for research on the physical effects of war on the brain.

The program will be looking for evidence of brain damage caused by explosions and other wartime trauma, and the researchers involved have already examined the brains of athletes for similar problems. According to the New York Times:

Just as researchers at the Boston University center and elsewhere have linked some athletes' later-life emotional problems to their on-field brain trauma, the research on military personnel will try to determine whether some soldiers

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sense of being in control when they feel overwhelmed. Anger can serve to avoid responsibilities and uncomfortable feelings. Techniques are easily learned and include taking time-outs, communicating assertively rather than aggressively, and practicing deep breathing and other relaxation drills.

Anyone who feels out control should seek assistance immediately. PTSD is not a good legal defense for any acts of violence. Do not allow acts of courage on deployments to be diminished by a lack of courage to get help for symptoms of PTSD when returning home.

Soldiers are entitled to emotional health and physical well being; it is their right and duty to feel good again. Demand to be seen and treated appropriately by a behavioral health provider if experiencing any of the reactions indicated above. With professional treatment and support from family, friends and battle buddies, Soldiers can become healthy again.

Editor's note: James W. Cartwright is a social worker at the U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine.

with post-traumatic stress disorder—a psychological diagnosis—actually retain physical brain damage caused by battlefield blasts. Some signs of P.T.S.D., particularly depression, erratic behavior and the inability to concentrate, appear similar to those experienced by concussed athletes.

Such a link could have effects beyond medicine. Disability benefits for veterans can vary depending on whether an injury is considered psychological or physical. And veterans with P.T.S.D. alone do not receive the Purple Heart, the medal given to soldiers wounded or killed in enemy action, because it is not a physical wound.

VETERANS:

38. The Welcome They Want

Time To Focus On Reliable Benefits As New York Veterans Meet Here

(THE BUFFALO NEWS 26 JUN 09) ... Editorial

Women and men fighting for this country should be a constant on the minds and in the hearts of all Americans, and that gratitude should be demonstrated not only in words but in action. It's all the 3,000 Veterans of Foreign Wars and their supporters want as they open a statewide convention in downtown Buffalo.

They are correct in assuming a warm and heartfelt welcome from the City of Good Neighbors, but such sentiments also should be demonstrated in the efficient delivery of veterans' benefits. This year, especially, veterans' health benefits need to be an important part of President Obama's effort to reform health care.

Some things are fundamentally wrong. One is the dubious milestone of 1 million outstanding claims the U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs is poised to reach.

The VA's Web site shows more than 722,000 current claims, with more than 172,000 appeals, for a total of about

900,000. And that's an increase from about 800,000 total claims in January, according to the site. About 13,000 claims are pending in New York State.

The VA says the average wait for a claim is 120.9 days. And in many cases, veterans who were severely injured in Afghanistan and Iraq are living off credit cards and loans, losing their homes and suffering financial indignity. At times, files are misdirected across states before landing on the proper desk.

The Associated Press reported a case of a former Marine corporal from Virginia who was fortunate enough to get a job after being severely burned and having his right leg amputated after a roadside bomb explosion in 2006. Good thing, because he said his first claim was lost, the second ended up at a VA office in Colorado and the third was finally processed after a couple of months.

Veterans Affairs Deputy Undersecretary Michael Walcott

recently testified at a meeting of the House Subcommittee on Disability Assistance in which he bemoaned the steady and sizable increase in workload and the need to hire more claims processors and update how the system operates. It takes roughly two years to hire and train claims processors.

And then there are factors ranging from the complexity of processing mental-health related claims of Iraq veterans, to a change that made it easier for Vietnam veterans exposed to the herbicide Agent Orange to qualify for disability payments.

Obama has called for a 15.3 percent increase in funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs, which includes 13

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LEGISLATIVE:

39. Obama Issues Signing Statement On \$106B War Bill

(THE HILL 26 JUN 09) ... Michael O'Brien

President Obama signed the \$106 billion war-spending bill into law Friday, but not without taking a page from his predecessor and ignoring a few elements in the legislation.

Obama included a five-paragraph signing statement with the bill, including a final paragraph that outlined his objections to at least four areas of the bill.

President George W. Bush was heavily criticized for his use of signing statements, declaring he'd ignore some elements of legislation by invoking presidential prerogative.

The Obama administration announced in the statement it would disregard provisions of the legislation that, among other things, would compel the Obama administration to pressure the World Bank to strengthen labor and environmental standards and require the Treasury department to report to Congress on the activities of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF).

"Provisions of this bill...would interfere with my constitutional authority to conduct foreign relations by directing the Executive to take certain positions in negotiations or discussions with international organizations and foreign governments, or by requiring consultation with the Congress prior to such negotiations or discussions," Obama

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percent more for veterans' health care. The House Appropriations Committee recently approved the spending bill. Also, the House passed four bills that will benefit veterans, not the least of which is legislation giving Congress the ability to fund the VA a year before the start of the next fiscal year.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer's pledge to make veterans' bills a top priority on the legislative schedule is a promise that must be kept.

said in a statement.

"I will not treat these provisions as limiting my ability to engage in foreign diplomacy or negotiations," he added.

The sections in question would compel the administration to direct its World Bank representatives to pressure that institution to use metrics that "fairly represent the value of internationally recognized workers' rights. Organized labor groups had pushed for a revision of those standards.

The World Bank section would also push the bank to account for the costs of greenhouse gas in pricing out projects, and would require development banks to more fully disclose operating budgets.

The other section would require Treasury Secretary Tim Geithner to develop a report with the heads of the World Bank and IMF "detailing the steps taken to coordinate the activities of the World Bank and the Fund" to eliminate overlap between the two.

According to the University of California at Santa Barbara's "American Presidency Project," Obama has issued five other signing statements since taking office.

OP-ED:

40. Will Russia's Retrial Of The Politkovskaya Murder Bring Justice?

(TIME MAGAZINE 26 JUN 09) ... John Wendle

When the trial of four men accused of being involved in the 2006 murder of Russian investigative reporter Anna Politkovskaya ended in acquittal in February, many, including Politkovskaya's family, were relieved. It meant the investigation into the crusading journalist's shooting would continue and, they hoped, would finally catch the real culprits: the person who ordered the assassination and the person who pulled the trigger. But on Thursday, Russia's Supreme Court overturned the acquittal and ordered a retrial, sparking fears that a guilty verdict the second time around will end the search for Politkovskaya's killers.

In its ruling, the Supreme Court said there were numerous procedural violations in the previous trial, and an improper bias against the defendants, which necessitated a retrial on the same charges in the same court. (By citing procedural

violations, the Supreme Court renders the first verdict void, and so sidesteps the issue of double jeopardy which states a person can't be tried for the same crime twice.)

Politkovskaya's family and lawyers oppose a retrial, saying a guilty verdict for the alleged accomplices could end the investigation and allow those directly responsible for the murder to remain free. Meanwhile, journalists and human rights advocates can't help but note that the announcement comes little more than a week before U.S. President Barack Obama is due to visit Russia. (See pictures of Obama in Europe.)

"There is no basis for the verdict to be overturned," Anna Stavitskaya, the lawyer for Politkovskaya's son and daughter, told the judges, according to Russian media. "We are more interested in the mastermind and the killer," said Sergei

Sokolov, deputy editor of Novaya Gazeta, the newspaper for which Politkovskaya worked, speaking to Ekho Moskvy, an independent radio station. "It's obvious that today's ruling was based on a political decision - not on a procedural one. For the authorities, the most important thing was simply to make sure someone goes to prison."

Politkovskaya, who reported on human rights abuses during Russia's war in Chechnya and was a fierce critic of then-President Vladimir Putin, was shot in the head and killed in her apartment building in central Moscow on Oct. 7, 2006. During the four-month trial which ended in acquittals in February, Ibragim Makhmudov was accused of acting as a lookout and calling his brothers to tell them that the journalist was on her way home, while his brother Dzhabrail Makhmudov allegedly drove the shooter, believed to be the third brother, Rustam Makhmudov, who remains at large. The third defendant, former police officer Sergei Khadzhikurbanov, allegedly recruited the Makhmudov brothers and supplied the pistol, and Sergei Ryaguzov, a former Federal Security Service officer, was accused of extortion in a case unrelated to the murder. (Read: "Murder, Russian-Style: Political Assassination.")

Many observers see an ulterior motive behind the Supreme Court's call for a retrial, which may start in the fall. "This decision sounds okay - as though the 'good' Supreme Court has corrected problems and justice has triumphed," said Yulia Latynina, an investigative journalist, during the political talk show she hosts on Ekho Moskvy. "In Russia, everything is rigged: the police, the prosecution and the courts. This is just P.R. to create the impression that there is a legal process taking place."

But with a summit between Obama and Russian President Dimitri Medvedev scheduled for July 6-8, others posit that perhaps the retrial is a real quest for justice, however misguided. "There may be recognition in the government that the failure to hold someone to account for the murder of Politkovskaya is a glaring omission - and there should be accountability for such crimes, but within the bounds of fair trial protections," Allison Gill, director of Human Rights Watch in Russia, tells TIME. "It might be that the Kremlin

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41. Hezbollah Keeps Its Eye On The Ball

(ASIA TIMES 25 JUN 09) ... Sami Moubayed

DAMASCUS - Many years ago, French president Charles de Gaulle said, "France has no friends; only interests." These words came to mind as Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah recently met with anti-Syrian Druze leader Walid Jumblatt, a man who has loudly been critical of Hezbollah, for the first time in three years.

Meeting with Jumblatt, head of the Socialist Cooperative Party, raised eyebrows in Lebanon on whether the leader of Hezbollah had changed after the June 7 elections. Many had expected the Hezbollah-led opposition to sweep parliament. Gulf states were holding their breath, preparing to cut off all aid to Lebanon in the event that happened, believing that then, the small Mediterranean country would become a launching pad for Iranian activities in the Middle East.

United States President Barack Obama had sent an indirect message to the Lebanese during his June 4 speech in Cairo, saying that he would respect the outcome of any democratic elections, even if they brought parties to power

wants to show that they want to get the job done." (See pictures of Russia celebrating Victory Day.)

Gill emphasizes that the decision may have been a cynical move, one not indicative of the broader "Medvedev Spring" - a trend towards liberalization that some in the media have been noting since Medvedev took office in May 2008. "I think it's too early to judge to what extent there is a thaw," she says. "But I do think there is an awareness that on some of these really high-profile cases there was a brazenness during the Putin years that was just intolerable." The public's mistrust of Russia's legal system was reinforced earlier this week when the Council of Europe released a draft report saying that shortcomings in the country's justice system "are reason for concern" and that some cases "give rise to concerns that the fight against 'legal nihilism' launched by President Dmitri Medvedev [in his inauguration speech] is still far from won."

According to statistics from the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), Russia is the third most dangerous country to work in for journalists, with 50 killed since 1992. Most recently, in January Anastasiya Baburova, another Novaya Gazeta journalist, was shot and killed alongside human rights lawyer Stanislav Markelov in broad daylight in central Moscow. "President Medvedev and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin have pledged to enforce the rule of law by investigating crimes against the press. Nonetheless, attacks on journalists continue to occur with impunity," wrote CPJ director Joel Simon in a letter to President Obama ahead of his trip to Moscow. "This record of impunity is a matter of international importance. Deadly violence against journalists has led to vast self-censorship, leaving issues of global significance underreported or entirely uncovered ... When Russia does not uphold press freedom and human rights for its own people, it undermines them for all."

On the surface of it, the Supreme Court's call for a retrial in the case of Politkovskaya's murder seems to signal that Russia is finally tackling its culture of impunity. But clouded by murky motivations and the possibility that it could leave the real culprits running free, it may actually be doing just the opposite.

that were at odds with the US.

France bluntly said that it would deal with any government, even if it was packed with members of Hezbollah. The results of the elections proved otherwise, however, with Hezbollah and its allies maintaining the status quo by winning 57 seats, while the majority went to the pro-Western March 14 coalition.

Nicholas Blanford, the well-informed Beirut-based journalist, wrote: "The March 14 victory is a setback for Hezbollah which had hoped that an opposition win would provide a protective seal around its military wing. Contrary to scare-mongering rhetoric from some Israeli and Western officials, Hezbollah had no desire or interest in assuming control of the state if the opposition had triumphed."

Shortly after the elections, Nasrallah spoke to his supporters, saying he accepted the election results "with sportsmanship". He then quickly added that the results meant maintaining the status quo, and not a defeat for Hezbollah

since the party had won with tremendous ease all of its contested seats. By no means did this mean that Hezbollah's popularity had waned, or that the party was starting its long march into history.

Nasrallah warned, as he has repeatedly done since 2006, that any talk about disarming Hezbollah was a red line that nobody could cross, regardless of the election results. Members of March 14 - who had tried to tackle Hezbollah militarily in May 2008, in vain - praised Nasrallah's calmness, which clearly triggered positive vibrations throughout Lebanon.

A "gentleman's agreement" was seemingly reached in Lebanon, where Hezbollah would accept the new administration (which will probably see Saad Hariri as prime minister), while March 14 would incorporate Hezbollah - and its demands - into the new cabinet.

Lebanese have seemingly grabbed at the perfect opportunity when everybody generally involved in the Lebanese issue has been focused on the unrest in Iran. Syria is preparing to turn a new leaf with the US, after Washington announced this week that it would be sending a new ambassador to Damascus to fill a post that has been vacant since 2005.

The Lebanese took the chance to settle their problems from within and build on common ground between conflict parties, thus explaining the Jumblatt-Nasrallah summit.

This proves that contrary to what many people thought, Nasrallah has not changed after June 7. In his own mind - and in numbers throughout its constituencies - Hezbollah did not lose the elections. The coalition, of which Hezbollah was a member - did not win.

Nasrallah still gets to keep his arms, all 11 seats in parliament (and another 46 seats for his allies), in addition to the post of speaker, which on Wednesday went to his friend and colleague Nabih Berri. A staunch ally of Hezbollah, Berri has been head of the Lebanese parliament for nearly 20 years, and legally speaking, since his group does not enjoy a majority any longer, the post of speaker should go to a member of March 14.

But again, in the spirit of reconciliation, all parties decided to "side-step" parliamentary norms and restored Berri

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to the post with 90 out of 128 votes. His deputy, Farid Makari, a member of March 14, was also voted into office once again. Berri's re-election pleased Nasrallah, as did a meeting shortly after the elections between a Hezbollah parliamentarian and Javier Solana, the European Union chief negotiator. If anything, this was proof that the EU still takes Hezbollah very seriously.

Let us pretend that Israel were to withdraw from the occupied Sheba Farms in what remains of 2009. What would the position of Nasrallah be? Theoretically, the man would give up his arms - as the West has been calling for years - and transform into the head of an unarmed political party, just like many Lebanese leaders did after the civil war ended in 1990.

Anybody who knows Nasrallah well realizes that this is much smaller than the grand ambitions of the 48-year-old leader. Some claim that he is bent on ruling Lebanon. Many who know him, and understand Lebanese dynamics, realize that Nasrallah, a smart and pragmatic man, would never try his luck at such a coup, because no matter what, a Shi'ite cannot rule Lebanon and Nasrallah would never think of upsetting the nation's delicate sectarian balance.

He might try to rule by proxy, through a Christian heavyweight like Michel Aoun, but if this is the case, that dream vanished when Aoun lost his last chance to become president in 2008. The next time the Lebanese go to the polls, Aoun will be 78, certainly too old for presidential office, putting a damper on Hezbollah's ambitions.

Others argue that Nasrallah is like a "lion in a canary's cage". Meaning, his ambitions and dreams are much larger than the limited borders of Lebanon and the Sheba Farms. Advocates of this theory claim that Nasrallah wants to become a modern Saladin, resembling the ancient Muslim sultan who liberated Jerusalem. If that were the case, the man would stop at nothing to achieve his goals.

Instead, Nasrallah is prepared to talk to Jumblatt - and practically everyone else in Lebanon - to peacefully survive in the Lebanese system. Protecting his weapons then, while also upholding Shi'ite rights, rather than running the Lebanese state, is the real drive behind Nasrallah.

Sami Moubayed is editor-in-chief of Forward Magazine in Syria

OTHER:

42. Military Brass Bite Their Tongues Over The 'Hollow Army'

Why Generals May Be Playing Down The Exhaustion Of The Canadian Army

(CANADIAN BROADCASTING CENTRE 25 JUN 09) ... Brian Stewart

It is an extraordinary testament to the resilience of Canadian troops that they've been able to conceal how much this country's combat forces have been exhausted by years of war in Afghanistan.

The refusal of the military to acknowledge the weariness means Canadians are unaware that the exhaustion of the combat mission is far worse than it has appeared. It's a fighting mission, we need to remind ourselves, that will continue for another 2½ years (until the end of 2011).

Other allies have not been so silent about the drain of fighting Taliban in Afghanistan's southern provinces. British counterparts there, by comparison, frequently go to the mass media with complaints about lack of weapons and equipment,

inadequate and overstressed forces, even poor tactics.

Here, only Lt.-Gen. Andrew Leslie, the head of Canada's army, has said enough to raise eyebrows. He insisted in the spring that his troops will need a year's rest after Afghanistan, along with replacement of worn-out equipment.

It's known within military circles that Leslie is far more concerned about the state of the army than he's admitted publicly. And so are his immediate superiors, including Gen. Walt Natynczyk, chief of the defence staff.

'The hollow army'

While preparing my documentary about Natynczyk, which aired on The National this week, I was able to obtain a leaked internal military report on the state of the forces, signed

by Leslie. The report actually refers to "the hollow army."

The restricted report, circulated several months ago only within the uppermost levels of the Defence Department, points out the current efficiencies in all branches of the military. Its most searing conclusion is that the army "is now operating beyond its capacity."

"The war in Afghanistan," the report warns, "illustrates deficiencies in the army and the Canadian Forces."

In blunt terms, the report warns the army can't continue at the current pace, which demands it deploy 4,000 troops a year to Afghanistan while preparing and training 12,000 others for combat rotation. "The Afghanistan mission is particularly taxing on army capabilities and the current operations tempo is not sustainable," it says.

The key concern is an "army leadership deficit," as thousands of army officers and sergeants leave the service — many having had more than enough tours of Afghanistan — a loss compounded by a lack of military trainers to prepare troops for combat there.

This situation, in turn, is made more serious by the military's deficit in highly skilled technicians, who in many cases are simply not available, at least to be recruited into wartime military. To fill gaps on the ground, hundreds of sailors and air personnel have been plucked from ships and airfields to take on infantry duties in Kandahar. Reservists, meanwhile, already make up more than 20 per cent of the combat mission and this civilian source cannot be squeezed further for backup soldiers.

When I recently asked Natynczyk about the report, his naturally upbeat demeanour changed to something more somber.

"It's tough right now because we don't have enough soldiers on the ground to do the job," he said, adding that some in the military are tired. "The senior NCOs [non-commissioned officers] and officers especially ..."

The tough grind of service

Outside military observers insist the army still downplays its problems. Even the term "hollow army" is not stark enough; it's now close to being a "broken army," suggests Doug Bland, a highly regarded military lecturer and historian from Queen's University in Kingston, Ont.

Bland recently suggested the military is so battered and worn by Afghanistan that any further service abroad, after Afghanistan, is unlikely for the foreseeable future.

"Soldiers are actually tired, you know, physically tired," Bland said, stressing the term exhaustion is not just an overused figure of speech and adding that the military is seeing more cases of mental illness and depression. The concern, he said, should be less about leaving in 2011 and more about getting to 2011.

A large part of the problem is that service in Afghanistan is actually far tougher for the tiny force that carries virtually the whole weight of Canada's commitment to the war.

Because Canada's land army has only 19,000 troops, just to maintain 3,000 in Kandahar means the round-and-round

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rotation of units. Troops have to train for a year before going, then spend much of a year in theatre-rotation (including getting there and back) only to face upon their return another prolonged period away from families on retraining.

Two Afghan rotations and more are becoming customary and this means, for many, intolerably long periods away from families. Even four and five tours are no longer uncommon.

The other serious drain is equipment. The army recently estimated it is going to need \$5 billion to spend on new armoured and transport vehicles, and a good part of that will simply replace or repair equipment broken or worn out in Afghanistan.

The "hollow army" report reveals that an astonishing 35 to 60 per cent of vehicles are off-road for repair at any one time. Here, too, of course, the hollowness shows: there's not enough personnel to repair them.

Not given to mincing words, the report warns that "staff capacity is being overwhelmed."

Given the state of the army, generals Leslie and Natynczyk have done a remarkable job plugging gaps, keeping up appearances and, perhaps above all, maintaining morale of troops and their families throughout the service — all the while running a war abroad.

It's likely the most difficult operation pulled off by generals since the end of the Second World War and, of course, has enormous political implications.

Not ready to concede defeat

It's not clear whether Stephen Harper's Conservative government is grateful, but it should be, given the lack of public debate over Afghanistan in Ottawa. If exposed, deficiencies like these would have caused a furious political uproar anywhere else within NATO.

The Ottawa attitude seems to be: "Oh well, Canada will be out of there soon." Which Canada won't be, unless you consider 2012 a short time away during wartime.

Generals have several reasons to put the best possible face on the mission by playing down "hollow army" talk in public. Politically, they need good relations with Ottawa if they're to get needed new funding, especially in this economic climate.

At heart, also, generals are not "defeatists" by nature and none of the top command of the Canadian Forces is ready to concede a sour conclusion to this mission.

They still believe Afghanistan may yield a positive outcome as more U.S. reinforcements arrive and new strategies are tried. They also expect the Canadian Forces, widely respected throughout NATO for its efforts, will be involved in some significant capacity well beyond 2012.

They feel a real need to let government know the Forces need rest and serious repair — but at the same time don't want to let the impression get around that they'll be unable to return to big overseas missions in future.

So as much as possible they've kept a lid on the "hollow army" talk, even though it's a condition the nation surely deserves to know much more about.