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Secretary of State

The Consequentialist: How The Arab Spring Remade Obama's Foreign Policy (NYORKER)	3
The Mirage Of An Afghanistan Exit (WP).....	14
Laughing Liberally Pours On The Tea Party Jokes (WP).....	15
Haiti's 'Sweet Micky' Martelly Turns Presidential (WP).....	16
NH GOP Primary Not Just A Republican Party (AP)	17
The Real Value Of False Choices (WP).....	19
Lessons From America's Last Brush With Default (Fortune).....	20

State Department

Classified Files Offer New Insights Into Detainees (NYT)	22
WikiLeaks Discloses New Details On Whereabouts Of Al-Qaeda Leaders On 9/11 (WP)	25
WikiLeaks Releasing Documents On Guantanamo (LAT)	27
WikiLeaks: Secret Guantanamo Files Show U.S. Disarray (MCT)	28
Judging Detainees' Risk, Often With Flawed Evidence (NYT) ...	30
Libyan Shifts From Detainee To Rebel, And U.S. Ally Of Sorts (NYT)	33
As Acts Of War Or Despair, Suicides Rattle A Prison (NYT).....	34
WikiLeaks And The Espionage Act (WSJ).....	36
State Department Shifts Digital Resources To Social Media (HILL)	36

Leading International And Global Issues

McCain Raises Specter Of Libyan Stalemate (NYT)	37
Libya Stalemate Would Draw In Al-Qaeda: McCain (AFP).....	38
Graham: Bomb Gadhafi's Inner Circle, End Stalemate (AP)	39
Kuwait Gives \$180 Million To Libyan Rebels (AFP)	39
Libyan Rebel Group Says It Will Receive \$181 Million From Kuwait (BLOOM)	40
Strike On Gadhafi Compound Badly Damages Buildings (AP) ..	40
Kadhafi's Office Destroyed In Air Strike (AFP).....	42
Libyan Rebels Say They Have Control Of Misurata (NYT).....	42
U.S. Drones Hit Targets In Libya (WSJ).....	43
Misrata Struck By Rockets In Fresh Fighting After U.S. Drone Fires Missile (BLOOM)	43
Gaddafi Shells Misurata Again; NATO Hits Complex In Tripoli (WP).....	44
Misrata Fighting Rages On Despite Tripoli Vow (AFP).....	45
U.S. Drones May Provide Psychological Edge In Libya (LAT) ...	46
In Libya's Remote West, Rebels Say They're Winning A Tough Fight (MCT).....	48

Berber Rebels In Libya's West Face Long Odds Against Qaddafi (NYT):..... 49

An 18-hour Journey Away From The Misery Of Misurata (WP) . 51
Libyan Rebel Oil Production Down For 4 More Weeks (AP) 52
Alitalia: Passenger Wanted Flight To Go To Libya (AP) 53
Odd Man Out At Sea (NYT)..... 53**Af/Pak**

Pakistan Rally Halts NATO Supplies For Afghanistan (AP)	54
Pakistan Re-Opens NATO Supply Route (AFP).....	55
Dubai Group Looking To Buy Afghan Bank (AP).....	55
Taliban Break More Than 450 Out Of Afghan Prison (AP).....	56
Hundreds Escape From Afghan Prison, NATO Says (LAT)	57
Roadside Bombs Kill 3 NATO Troops In Afghanistan (AP)	58
U.S. Authorities Probe Facts Of Author's Pakistan Story (MCT) 58	

National News

Obama Paints Rep. Ryan As The GOP Face For 2012 (MCT).. 60	
Coburn Says Medicare, Medicaid Must Be Part Of Budget Talks (BLOOM)	61
Senators Concede Feeling Pressure On Deficit Issue (AP)	62
Republicans Downplay Urgency Of Raising Debt Ceiling (HUFFPOST)	62
Elderly Face Lack Of Geriatric Specialists, New Report Warns (USAT)	63
States Vs. Data Collectors At The Supreme Court (USAT)..... 63	
Celebrating Easter With The Rising Sun (WP)	65
Bloomberg: Hands Off The Rich (POLITCO)	66
Times/USC Domsife Poll: California Voters Want Public Employees To Help Ease State's Financial Troubles (LAT)66	
Ohio Is Spending \$1.4 Billion To Attract Jobs. Will It Work? (USAT)	67
Past House GOP Tactic Proves Useless To Democrats (AP).... 70	
Giffords Standing On Own, Trying To Improve Gait (AP)..... 71	
Scientists Worry About Funds To Study Gulf Oil Spill (WP)	72
Dearborn Mosque Imam Says Quran Burning Comments Misunderstood (FREEP)	73
Noncriminals Swept Up In Federal Deportation Program (LAT). 74	
Blagojevich Says Retrial An Attack On His Legacy (CHIT)	76
Charter Schools Suffer Leadership Shortages (WP)	77
A Trial Run For School Standards That Encourage Deeper Thought (NYT)	78
Federal Lawsuits In New York Accuse New Chicago Schools Chief Of Race, Age Discrimination (AP)	80

FBI Identifies Suspect In Attempted Bombing At Colorado Mall (LAT)	80	Mubarak To Be Moved To Military Hospital (AFP).....	114	
Police Tap Technology To Compensate For Fewer Officers (USAT)	81	Egypt Revolution Hero To Leave Google, Set Up NGO (AFP)	114	
Lawmaker Wants DNA From Suspects When Arrested For State Crimes (WP).....	82	Bahrain Sees Hezbollah Plot In Protest (WSJ).....	115	
Court Asked To Balance Information Age Advances With Constitutional Protections (WP)	83	Bahrain RSVP: Unrest Foils Royal Wedding Plans (AP).....	115	
Supreme Court Confronts Whether Nev. Conflict-of-interest Law Violates Free Speech (WP).....	84	Moroccan Cities See New Political Protests (AP).....	115	
Lawmakers Seek To Unclog Road To Confirmation (NYT)	86	Peaceful Pro-Democracy Protests In Moroccan Towns (AFP)	115	
Political News				
Freshmen Feel The Heat Back Home (POLITCO)	88	Easter Attacks Near Churches Rattle Christians As Spike In Iraq Violence Continues (WP)	116	
Democrats, Allies Hope To Flip The Script On Town-hall Rage (HILL)	89	7 Wounded In Easter Bombing Outside Baghdad Church (AP).....	117	
In A Life Filled With Firsts, One More (NYT)	90	Iraq Tackles Its Next Oil Bottleneck (WSJ)	117	
Mitch Daniels Sounds Fiscal Alarm, But Indiana Republican Hesitant To Run In 2012 (WP)	92	Iran, Iraq Sign Agreements On Iranian Opposition (AP).....	117	
Hume: 'If The Election Were Held Today In My View, Barack Obama Would Lose. He Might Lose Big' (CALLER)	94	US Appeals Court Revives Iraq Blackwater Case (AFP).....	118	
Rev. Franklin Graham A Birther? (POLITCO)	95	Palestinian Police Kill Israeli In West Bank (WP)	118	
Palin Not Running, Graham Says (POLITCO)	95	Palestinian Police Kill Israeli Visiting West Bank Holy Site (NYT).....	119	
Ensign's Quitting Spurs Political Jockeying For Seats (WT)	95	Israeli Killed In West Bank As Palestinian Forces Fire (WSJ)	120	
Unlike 4 Years Ago, Heavy Independent Participation Likely In GOP Presidential Primary (WP/AP)	96	Israeli Killed, 4 Wounded In West Bank (AP)	120	
Spring Fundraising Quarter Tests Likely GOP Presidential Hopefuls (WP/AP)	98	Iran's Ahmadinejad In New Showdown With Conservatives (AFP)	121	
McCain Says Trump's Having 'Time Of His Life' (POLITCO)	99	Europe & Eurasia		
Bloomberg: 'Birther' Issue 'A Terrible Mistake' For GOP Candidates (HILL)	99	Embassy Row (WT)	122	
Near East & North Africa				
Middle East Peace Process Set For New Airing (AFP)	100	Armenians Mourn Victims Of Mass Killings By Turks (AP)	122	
President Obama And The Peace Process (NYT)	101	Turks Increasingly Commemorate Armenian Massacre (AP)	123	
Yemen Police Injure Dozens, Disperse Protest (AFP)	101	English-Language Press Flexing Its Muscles In Eastern Europe (NYT)	124	
Opposition In Yemen Divided Over Offer From President (NYT)	102	Europeans Shift Long-Held View That Social Benefits Are Untouchable (WP)	126	
Opponents Of Yemen's President Divided Over Deal (AP)	103	Ireland Police Seize Dissident Weapons (AP)	128	
Yemen Opposition Deadlock Delays New Deal (WSJ)	104	Serbia's Opposition Leader Ends Hunger Strike (AP)	128	
Yemen Protesters Reject US-Backed Transition (AFP)	104	Chernobyl A Milestone On The Road To Ukrainian Independence (WP)	129	
Protests In Yemen Continue Unabated By Saleh's Agreement To Yield Power (BLOOM)	105	East Asia & Pacific		
In Yemen's "Change Square," Demonstrators Remain Defiant (MCT)	106	On Army Anniversary, NKorea Threat To Destroy US (AP)	130	
U.S. Seeks To Raise Heat On Syria (WSJ)	107	Seoul Sites Rockets Near N.Korea Border: Reports (AFP)	130	
5 Killed In New Syria Clashes, Witnesses Say (AP)	107	Jimmy Carter, Other Former Leaders To Visit NKorea (AP)	130	
More Syrians Are Missing, Hinting At A Wider Crackdown (NYT)	108	North Korea Visit To Focus On Food Crisis: Carter (AFP)	131	
Syria Targets Activists In Pinpoint Raids (AP)	109	Ruling Party Hurt In Japan Election (WSJ)	131	
Syria Rounds Up Opponents After 120 Dead (AFP)	110	Japan PM Braced For Vote Blow (AFP)	131	
Syria Detains Anti-Assad Activists After Deadliest Protests Against Regime (BLOOM)	111	Trade Will Help Japan Quake Recovery: Ministers (AFP)	132	
Syrian Crisis Tests The Mettle Of Its Autocratic Ruler (NYT)	112	Illnesses Surge Among Quake Victims (WSJ)	132	
The Freedom Movement Comes To Syria (WSJ)	113	Japan To Launch Massive Search For Quake Bodies (AP)	132	
Egypt Prosecutor Orders Mubarak To Army Hospital (AP)	113	Japan To Launch New Major Tsunami Body Search (AFP)	133	
		Japan's Most Famous Tsunami Survivor Comes Home (WT)	134	
		Thailand And Cambodia Clash Again In Border Dispute (NYT)	135	
		Thai-Cambodian Border Fighting Enters 3rd Day (AP)	135	
		Cambodia Says Thai Shells Damaged Ancient Temples (AP)	136	
		China Cracks Down On Bloggers (USAT)	137	
		China Detains Church Members At Easter Services (NYT)	138	
		Beijing Police Arrest Group Of Christians (WSJ)	139	
		Shanghai Lowers Truck Fees (WSJ)	139	
		Truck Drivers In Shanghai Plan To Resume Protests (NYT)	139	
		Strong, Shallow Earthquake Hits Eastern Indonesia (AP)	140	

Western Hemisphere

Leftist Leads Poll On Peru's Presidential Runoff (AP)	140
Mass Graves In Mexico Reveal New Levels Of Savagery (WP).....	141
Body Parts Found In Upscale Mexico City District (AP)	142
Hated At Home, Deported Haitians Still Dream Of US (AFP)...	143
Haiti's "Sweet Micky" Martelly Turns Presidential (WP).....	144
Raul Castro's Same Old Cuba (WP)	145
Kirchner Copies Peron's Model (WSJ)	146

Sub-Saharan Africa

Sudan Says To Hold Darfur Referendum On July 1 (AFP)	146
At Least 105 Dead In Clashes In Southern Sudan.(AP).....	147

Election Fuels Deadly Clashes In Nigeria (NYT)	147
Group: At Least 500 Dead In Nigeria Election Riots (AP).....	148
Nigerian Rights Group Says More Than 500 Killed In Unrest (AFP).....	149
Nigeria Radical Muslim Sect Vows To Keep Fighting (AP)	150
Hotel Blast In Northeast Nigeria Kills 2; 8 Hurt (AP)	150
Strongman's Fate Indicator For Ivory Coast Future (AP).....	150
The Big Picture:	
Headlines From Today's Front Pages.....	152

SECRETARY OF STATE**The Consequentialist: How The Arab Spring Remade Obama's Foreign Policy (NYORKER)**

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The New Yorker

By Ryan Lizza

Barack Obama came to Washington just six years ago, having spent his professional life as a part-time lawyer, part-time law professor, and part-time state legislator in Illinois. As an undergraduate, he took courses in history and international relations, but neither his academic life nor his work in Springfield gave him an especially profound grasp of foreign affairs. As he coasted toward winning a seat in the U.S. Senate, in 2004, he began to reach out to a broad range of foreign-policy experts--politicians, diplomats, academics, and journalists.

As a student during the Reagan years, Obama gravitated toward conventionally left-leaning positions. At Occidental, he demonstrated in favor of divesting from apartheid South Africa. At Columbia, he wrote a forgettable essay in Sundial, a campus publication, in favor of the nuclear-freeze movement. As a professor at the University of Chicago, he focussed on civil-rights law and race. And, as a candidate who emphasized his "story," Obama argued that what he lacked in experience with foreign affairs he made up for with foreign travel: four years in Indonesia as a boy, and trips to Pakistan, India, Kenya, and Europe during and after college. But there was no mistaking the lightness of his résumé. Just a year before coming to Washington, State Senator Obama was not immersed in the dangers of nuclear Pakistan or an ascendant China; as a provincial legislator, he was investigating the dangers of a toy known as the Yo-Yo Water Ball. (He tried, unsuccessfully, to have it banned.)

Obama had always read widely, and now he was determined to get a deeper education. He read popular books on foreign affairs by Fareed Zakaria and Thomas Friedman. He met with Anthony Lake, who had left the Nixon Administration over Vietnam and went on to work in Democratic Administrations, and with Susan Rice, who had served in the Clinton Administration and carried with her the guilt of having failed to act to prevent the Rwandan genocide. He also contacted Samantha Power, a thirty-four-year-old journalist and Harvard professor specializing in human rights. In her twenties, Power had reported from the Balkans and witnessed the campaigns of ethnic cleansing there. In 2002, after graduating from Harvard Law School, she wrote "A Problem from Hell," which surveyed the grim history of six genocides committed in the twentieth century. Propounding a liberal-interventionist view, Power argued that "mass killing" on the scale of Rwanda or Bosnia must be prevented by other nations, including the United States. She wrote that America and its allies rarely have perfect information about when a regime is about to commit genocide; a President, therefore, must have "a bias toward belief" that massacres are imminent. Stopping the execution of thousands of foreigners, she wrote, was, in some cases, worth the cost in dollars, troops, and strained alliances. The book, which was extremely influential, especially on the left, won a Pulitzer Prize, in 2003. Critics considered her views radical and dangerously impractical.

After reading "A Problem from Hell," Obama invited Power to dinner. He said he wanted to talk about foreign policy. The meal lasted four hours. As a fledgling member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and an ambitious politician with his sights set on higher office, Obama agreed to have Power spend a year in his office as a foreign-policy fellow.

In his first news conference after winning election to the Senate, the press asked whether he intended to run for President, but he assured reporters, as well as his aides, that he would not even consider it until 2012 or 2016. He knew that he could not have a serious impact on issues like Iraq or the Sudan as a junior committee member, but he was determined to learn the institution and to acquire, as Hillary Clinton had, a reputation not for celebrity but for substance. In foreign affairs, as in so much else, he was determined to break free of the old ideologies and categories. But he would take it step by step.

Obama entered the Senate in 2005, at a moment of passionate foreign-policy debate within the Democratic Party. The invasion of Iraq was seen as interventionism executed under false pretenses and with catastrophic consequences. Many on the left argued that liberal interventionists, particularly in Congress and in the press, had given crucial cover to the Bush Administration during the run-up to the war. Hillary Clinton, who often sided with the humanitarian hawks in her husband's White House, and who went on to vote for the Iraq war, in 2002, seemed to some to be the embodiment of all that had gone wrong.

One reaction among liberals to the Bush years and to Iraq was to retreat from "idealism" toward "realism," in which the United States would act cautiously and, above all, according to national interests rather than moral imperatives. The debate is rooted in the country's early history. America, John Quincy Adams argued, "does not go abroad in search of monsters to destroy. She is the well-wisher to freedom and independence of all," but the "champion and vindicator only of her own."

In 1966, Adams's words were repeated by George Kennan, perhaps the most articulate realist of the twentieth century, in opposing the Vietnam War. To Kennan and his intellectual followers, foreign-policy problems are always more complicated than Americans, in their native idealism, usually allow. The use of force to stop human-rights abuses or to promote democracy, they argue, usually ends poorly. In the fall of 2002, six months before the invasion of Iraq, Kennan said, "Today, if we went into Iraq, as the President would like us to do, you know where you begin. You never know where you are going to end."

As Obama sorted through the arguments, other foreign-policy liberals were determined to prevent Iraq from besmirching the whole program of liberal internationalism. Humanitarian intervention—which Power helped advance, though she vigorously opposed the Iraq War—should not be abandoned because of the failures in Baghdad. Nor

should American diplomacy turn away from emphasizing the virtues of bringing the world democracy. Anne-Marie Slaughter, a professor of international affairs at Princeton and a Democrat, wrote in the liberal journal *Democracy* that an overreaction to the Bush years might mean that "realists could again rule the day, embracing order and stability over ideology and values."

After little more than a year in the Senate, Obama was bored, and began to take seriously the frequent calls to run for President. To be a candidate, he needed to distinguish himself from his foremost potential opponent, Hillary Clinton, as well as from President Bush. One of the clearest paths to distinction, especially in the primaries, was to emphasize his early opposition, as a state senator, to the Iraq war. He started to move away from the ideas of people like Power and Slaughter. He pointedly noted that George H. W. Bush's management of the end of the Cold War was masterly. The President had sometimes kept quiet about the aspirations of pro-democracy activists in Russia, Ukraine, and elsewhere, in order to maintain the confidence of Mikhail Gorbachev in the Kremlin. It was just the sort of political performance to which Obama aspired.

In making the case against Hillary Clinton, Obama slyly argued that the George W. Bush years were in some ways a continuation of the Bill Clinton years, and that the United States needed to return to the philosophy of an earlier era. The proselytizing about democracy and the haste to bomb other countries in the name of humanitarian aid had "stretched our military to the breaking point and distracted us from the growing threats of a dangerous world," Obama said in a speech in 2006, a few weeks before he announced his Presidential candidacy. He spoke of "a strategy no longer driven by ideology and politics but one that is based on a realistic assessment of the sobering facts on the ground and our interests in the region. This kind of realism has been missing since the very conception of this war, and it is what led me to publicly oppose it in 2002."

In 2007, Obama called Zbigniew Brzezinski, President Carter's national-security adviser and the reigning realist of the Democratic foreign-policy establishment. Obama told him that he had read his recent book, "Second Chance," in which Brzezinski criticized Presidents Clinton and George W. Bush and their handling of the post-Cold War world. They began to speak and exchange e-mails about policy, and Brzezinski travelled with Obama during a stretch of the campaign. In September, 2007, Brzezinski introduced Obama at an event in Clinton, Iowa, where the candidate discussed the

failures in Iraq. "I thought he had a really incisive grasp of what the twenty-first century is all about and how America has to relate to it," Brzezinski told me. "He was reacting in a way that I very much shared, and we had a meeting of the minds—namely, that George Bush put the United States on a suicidal course."

As he campaigned in New Hampshire, in 2007, Obama said that he would not leave troops in Iraq even to stop genocide. "Well, look, if that's the criteria by which we are making decisions on the deployment of U.S. forces, then by that argument you would have three hundred thousand troops in the Congo right now, where millions have been slaughtered as a consequence of ethnic strife, which we haven't done," he said. "We would be deploying unilaterally and occupying the Sudan, which we haven't done."

At a campaign event in Pennsylvania, Obama said, "The truth is that my foreign policy is actually a return to the traditional bipartisan realistic policy of George Bush's father, of John F. Kennedy, of, in some ways, Ronald Reagan."

In the end, Barack Obama overcame Hillary Clinton's campaign warnings that he was too callow, too naïve about dealing with rogue regimes, too untested to respond to the "3 A.M." emergencies from all corners of the globe. Obama entered the White House at a moment of radical transition in global politics, and one of his most significant appointments was Clinton as his Secretary of State. Although he had made plain in the campaign that he disagreed with some of her foreign-policy views, he admired her discipline and believed that, as a member of the Cabinet, she wouldn't publicly break with the President. And he would need her. Obama faced economic catastrophe at home and American wars in Iraq and Afghanistan; serious regional threats from Pakistan and Iran; global terrorism; the ascendance of China and India; and a situation that was almost impossible to discuss—a vivid sense of American decline.

American values and interests are woven together, and no President is always either an idealist or a realist. Officials who identify with the same label often disagree with one another. Humanitarian interventionists were divided over the Iraq war; Cold War realists had split over détente with the Soviet Union. The categories describe only broad ideological directions and tendencies. But, as Richard Haass, the president of the Council on Foreign Relations, observed, "the battle between realists and idealists is the fundamental fault line of the American foreign-policy debate."

After the Inauguration, the realists began to win that debate within the Administration. The two most influential foreign-policy advisers in the White House are Thomas Donilon, the national-security adviser, and Denis McDonough, a deputy national-security adviser. Donilon, who is fifty-five, is a longtime Washington lawyer, lobbyist, and Democratic Party strategist. McDonough started out as a congressional staffer and campaign adviser to Obama, a role that has given him a reputation as a non-ideological political fixer.

The National Security Council is a bureaucracy that helps the President streamline decision-making, and Donilon seems to have thought extensively about how that system works. Like the President, he values staff discretion. His rule for hiring at the N.S.C. is to find people who are, in his words, "high value, low maintenance." Obama's N.S.C. adopted the model of the first Bush Administration. "It's essentially based on the process that was put in place by General Brent Scowcroft and Bob Gates in the late nineteen-eighties," Donilon told me, speaking of Bush's national-security adviser and his deputy, the current Secretary of Defense. The most important feature, Donilon said, is that the N.S.C., based at the White House, controls "the sole process through which policy would be developed."

One of Donilon's overriding beliefs, which Obama adopted as his own, was that America needed to rebuild its reputation, extricate itself from the Middle East and Afghanistan, and turn its attention toward Asia and China's unchecked influence in the region. America was "overweighted" in the former and "underweighted" in the latter, Donilon told me. "We've been on a little bit of a Middle East detour over the course of the last ten years," Kurt Campbell, the Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, said. "And our future will be dominated utterly and fundamentally by developments in Asia and the Pacific region."

In December, 2009, Obama announced that he would draw down U.S. troops from Iraq and Afghanistan by the end of his first term. He also promised, in a speech to the United Nations General Assembly last year, that he was "moving toward a more targeted approach" that "dismantles terrorist networks without deploying large American armies."

"The project of the first two years has been to effectively deal with the legacy issues that we inherited, particularly the Iraq war, the Afghan war, and the war against Al Qaeda, while rebalancing our resources and our posture in the world," Benjamin Rhodes, one of Obama's deputy national-security advisers, said. "If you were to

boil it all down to a bumper sticker, it's 'Wind down these two wars, reestablish American standing and leadership in the world, and focus on a broader set of priorities, from Asia and the global economy to a nuclear-nonproliferation regime.'

Obama's lengthy bumper-sticker credo did not include a call to promote democracy or protect human rights. Obama aides who focussed on these issues were awarded lesser White House positions. Samantha Power became senior director of multilateral affairs at the N.S.C. Michael McFaul, a Stanford professor who believes that the U.S. should make democracy promotion the heart of its foreign policy, landed a mid-level position at the White House.

Most of the foreign-policy issues that Obama emphasized in his first two years involved stepping away from idealism. In the hope of persuading Iran's regime to abandon its nuclear ambitions, Obama pointedly rejected Bush's "axis of evil" terminology. In a video message to Iranians on March 20, 2009, he respectfully addressed "the people and leaders of the Islamic Republic of Iran." In order to engage China on economic issues, Obama didn't press very hard on human rights. And, because any effort to push the Israelis and Palestinians toward a final settlement would benefit from help from Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia, Obama was not especially outspoken about the sins of Middle Eastern autocrats and kings.

Despite the realist tilt, Obama has argued from the start that he was anti-ideological, that he defied traditional categories and ideologies. In Oslo, in December of 2009, accepting the Nobel Peace Prize, Obama said, "Within America, there has long been a tension between those who describe themselves as realists or idealists—a tension that suggests a stark choice between the narrow pursuit of interests or an endless campaign to impose our values around the world." The speech echoed Obama's 2002 address to an antiwar demonstration in Chicago's Federal Plaza. In Chicago, he had confounded his leftist audience by emphasizing the need to fight some wars, but not "dumb" ones, like the one in Iraq. In Oslo, he surprised a largely left-leaning audience by talking about the martial imperatives of a Commander-in-Chief overseeing two wars. Obama's aides often insist that he is an anti-ideological politician interested only in what actually works. He is, one says, a "consequentialist."

Meanwhile, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton turned her department into something of a haven for the ideas that flourished late in the Clinton Administration. She picked Anne-Marie Slaughter as her director of policy planning—a job first held

by George Kennan, in the Truman Administration. She also brought in Harold Koh, the State Department's legal adviser and a scholar on issues concerning human rights and democracy. Walking around the mazelike building in Foggy Bottom, you get the sense that if you duck into any office you will find earnest young women and men discussing globalization, the possibility that Facebook can topple tyrannies, and what is called "soft power," the ability to bend the world toward your view through attraction, not coercion.

Not long ago, I met with Kris Balderston, the State Department's representative for global partnerships. He started working with Clinton ten years ago, when he guided her through the politics of upstate New York during her Senate race. Now he works on an array of entrepreneurial projects that complement traditional diplomacy. He talked excitedly about working with Vietnamese-Americans to build stronger ties to Vietnam and about distributing vaccines in partnership with Coca-Cola. He pointed to a bookcase stocked with devices that looked like a cross between a lantern and a paint bucket. These were advanced cookstoves. "This is a problem that the Secretary saw when she was First Lady," Balderston said, explaining how lethal cooking smoke can be. "One half of the world cooks in open fires. Two million people die a year from it—that's more than malaria and tuberculosis combined, and nearly as much as H.I.V." On a trip to Congo in 2009, Clinton met a woman in a refugee camp who had been raped in the jungle on the outskirts of the camp while gathering wood for her stove. Telling the story at the State Department, Clinton was angrier than Balderston had ever seen her. "We have got to do something about this," she said. Balderston spends much of his time trying to build a market for inexpensive, clean-burning cookstoves in the developing world.

But Clinton's involvement in soft-power initiatives was matched by the kind of hardheadedness about foreign policy she had displayed during her Presidential campaign. She has repeatedly aligned herself with the most consistent realist in the Obama Administration: Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, who was deputy national-security adviser in the first Bush Administration and Secretary of Defense under George W. Bush. Clinton's advisers told me that, during her first two years in Foggy Bottom, Clinton agreed with Gates on every major issue.

"Secretary Clinton can push the agenda she pushes because she is tough and people know she is tough," Slaughter said. "It's very interesting—you've had three women Secretaries of State, and

she's the first one who can stand up and say publicly, 'We are going to empower women and girls around the world. We are going to make development a priority of foreign policy. We are going to engage people as well as governments.'

"Madeleine Albright believed in the importance of those issues, but she could never have made it the core of her public agenda. She was the first woman Secretary of State, which meant that she had to out-tough the tough guys. She did that on the Balkans. Condi Rice helped double foreign aid, but she was first and foremost a Cold Warrior, and she could throw around 'I.C.B.M.'s and 'S.L.B.M.'s and 'MIRV's with the best of them. That was the only way she could make it, not only as a woman in the nineteen-eighties but as an African-American woman. You had to be way tougher and way more knowledgeable about weapons than any man." A former Administration official said, "Hillary has to guard her flank. And one of the ways she guards her flank is she rarely deviates from Gates. If she and Gates both weigh in, they are much more likely to get their way."

Obama's first test at managing the clashing ideologies within his Administration came during the review of Afghanistan policy in 2009. During the campaign, Obama said that he would add troops in Afghanistan, a war, he argued, that Bush had neglected. But Obama's campaign promise bumped hard against the judgment of several new advisers, including Richard Holbrooke, who tried to convince the President that sending forty thousand more troops to Afghanistan, as the military urged, was counterproductive. It would prevent Obama from rebalancing American foreign policy toward the Pacific, and it would have little impact on Al Qaeda, which is based largely in Pakistan. Obama had appointed Holbrooke his Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, and Holbrooke, a brash and influential diplomat, found himself in the unusual circumstance of being ignored. He wanted to send far fewer troops and reenergize regional diplomacy, including reconciliation talks with the Taliban. He believed that the lesson of Vietnam was that the diplomats, rather than the generals, needed to be in charge, but he could rarely penetrate the insular world of Obama's White House to make that case to the President.

Holbrooke had been a devoted supporter of Hillary Clinton during the Presidential campaign, and she protected him from Obama aides who viewed with suspicion his sizable ego and stream of positive press clippings. When a top official at the White House tried to push Holbrooke out, in early 2010, Clinton intervened on his behalf. But Holbrooke

still could not get a one-on-one meeting with the President. And at the crucial national-security meetings on Afghanistan Clinton did not adopt Holbrooke's views. She sided with Gates and the generals in calling for the maximum number of soldiers to surge into Afghanistan. Obama agreed to send thirty thousand more troops, although he insisted that they would start coming home in July, 2011. Holbrooke's widow, the writer Kati Marton, who has been reviewing her husband's memos and archives, told me that they "tell a dramatic story of a fractured relationship between the State Department and White House."

On December 11, 2010, while meeting with Clinton at the State Department, Holbrooke suffered a split aorta, and he died forty-eight hours later. Bill Clinton spoke at Holbrooke's memorial service, held on January 14th at the Kennedy Center. "I loved the guy—because he could do," Clinton said. "Doing in diplomacy saves lives." He went on, "And I never did understand how people would let a little rough edges, which to me was so obvious what he was doing, it was so obvious why he felt the way he did—I could never understand people who didn't appreciate him." Several people told Marton they thought that Bill Clinton was sending a message to Obama.

In the end, Obama made a decision about Afghanistan that was at odds with his own goal of rebalancing toward Asia and the Pacific. "The U.S. has been on a greater Middle East detour largely of its own choosing through a war of choice in Iraq and what became a war of choice in 2009 in Afghanistan," Haass said. "Afghanistan is entirely inconsistent with the focus of time and resources on Asia. If your goal is to reorient or refocus or rebalance U.S. policy, the Administration's commitment to so doing is at the moment more rhetorical than actual."

Obama came into office emphasizing bureaucratic efficiency, which he believed would lead to wise rulings. But the Afghanistan decision, like all government work, was driven by politics and ideology. Obama's eagerness to keep his campaign promise, the military's view that reducing troops meant a loss of face, Clinton's decision to align with Gates, and Holbrooke's inability to influence the White House staff all ultimately conspired to push Obama toward the surge.

Obama's other key campaign promise—to engage with the leaders of countries hostile to the U.S.—sometimes meant deemphasizing democracy and human rights, which had been tainted by Bush's "freedom agenda" in the Middle East. Tyrannical regimes are less likely to make deals with you if you talk persistently about overthrowing them.

Obama's speech in Cairo, delivered on June 4, 2009, and devoted to improving America's relationship with the Muslim world, was organized as a list of regional priorities. He discussed the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, Arab-Israeli peace, and Iran's nuclear ambitions. He then gave a hesitant endorsement of America's commitment to democracy in the region. He began, "I know there has been controversy about the promotion of democracy in recent years, and much of this controversy is connected to the war in Iraq. So let me be clear: no system of government can or should be imposed upon one nation by any other."

A week later, however, a disputed Presidential election in Iran triggered large demonstrations there, which were soon labelled the Green Revolution. For the first five months after his Inauguration, Obama had tried to engage with the regime of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in an effort to persuade Iran to abandon its nuclear ambitions. Now he faced the choice between keeping his distance and coming to the aid of the nascent pro-democracy movement, which was rallying behind Mir-Hossein Mousavi, who had finished second behind Ahmadinejad. Obama chose to keep his distance, providing only mild rhetorical support. In an interview with CNBC after the protests began, he said that "the difference between Ahmadinejad and Mousavi in terms of their actual policies may not be as great as has been advertised."

During the peak of the protests in Iran, Jared Cohen, a young staffer at the State Department who worked for Slaughter, contacted officials at Twitter and asked the company not to perform a planned upgrade that would have shut down the service temporarily in Iran, where protesters were using it to get information to the international media. The move violated Obama's rule of non-interference.

White House officials "were so mad that somebody had actually 'interfered' in Iranian politics, because they were doing their damnedest to not interfere," the former Administration official said. "Now, to be fair to them, it was also the understanding that if we interfered it could look like the Green movement was Western-backed, but that really wasn't the core of it. The core of it was we were still trying to engage the Iranian government and we did not want to do anything that made us side with the protesters. To the Secretary's credit, she realized, I think, before other people, that this is ridiculous, that we had to change our line." The official said that Cohen "almost lost his job over it. If it had been up to the White House, they would have fired him."

Clinton did not betray any disagreement with the President over Iran policy, but in an interview with me she cited Cohen's action with pride. "When it came to the elections, we had a lot of messages from people inside Iran and their supporters outside of Iran saying, 'For heaven's sakes, don't claim this as part of the democracy agenda. This is indigenous to us. We are struggling against this tyrannical regime. If you are too outspoken in our support, we will lose legitimacy!' Now, that's a tough balancing act. It's easy to stand up if you don't worry about the consequences. Now, we were very clear in saying, 'We are supporting those who are protesting peacefully,' and we put our social-media gurus at work in trying to keep connections going, so that we helped to provide that base for communicating that was necessary for the demonstrations."

One suggestion that came up in interviews with Obama's current and former foreign-policy advisers was that the Administration's policy debates sometimes broke down along gender lines. The realists who view foreign policy as a great chess game—and who want to focus on China and India—are usually men. The idealists, who talk about democracy and human rights, are often women. (White House officials told me that this critique is outlandish.)

Slaughter, who admired Clinton but felt alienated by people at the White House, resigned in February, and in her farewell speech at the State Department she described a gender divide at the heart of Obama's foreign-policy team. She argued that in the twenty-first century America needed to focus on societies as well as on states. "Unfortunately, the people who focus on those two worlds here in Washington are still often very different groups. The world of states is still the world of high politics, hard power, realpolitik, and, largely, men," she said. "The world of societies is still too often the world of low politics, soft power, human rights, democracy, and development, and, largely, women. One of the best parts of my two years here has been the opportunity to work with so many amazing and talented women—truly extraordinary people. But Washington still has a ways to go before their voices are fully heard and respected."

On August 12, 2010, Obama sent a five-page memorandum called "Political Reform in the Middle East and North Africa" to Vice-President Joseph Biden, Clinton, Gates, Donilon, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the other senior members of his foreign-policy team. Though the Iranian regime had effectively crushed the Green Revolution, the country was still experiencing

sporadic protests. Egypt would face crucial parliamentary elections in November. The memo began with a stark conclusion about trends in the region.

"Progress toward political reform and openness in the Middle East and North Africa lags behind other regions and has, in some cases, stalled," the President wrote. He noted that even the more liberal countries were cracking down on public gatherings, the press, and political opposition groups. But something was stirring. There was "evidence of growing citizen discontent with the region's regimes," he wrote. It was likely that "if present trends continue," allies there would "opt for repression rather than reform to manage domestic dissent."

Obama's analysis showed a desire to balance interests and ideals. The goals of reform and democracy were couched in the language of U.S. interests rather than the sharp moral language that statesmen often use in public. "Increased repression could threaten the political and economic stability of some of our allies, leave us with fewer capable, credible partners who can support our regional priorities, and further alienate citizens in the region," Obama wrote. "Moreover, our regional and international credibility will be undermined if we are seen or perceived to be backing repressive regimes and ignoring the rights and aspirations of citizens."

Obama instructed his staff to come up with "tailored," "country by country" strategies on political reform. He told his advisers to challenge the traditional idea that stability in the Middle East always served U.S. interests. Obama wanted to weigh the risks of both "continued support for increasingly unpopular and repressive regimes" and a "strong push by the United States for reform."

He also wrote that "the advent of political succession in a number of countries offers a potential opening for political reform in the region." If the United States managed the coming transitions "poorly," it "could have negative implications for U.S. interests, including for our standing among Arab publics."

The review was led by three N.S.C. staffers: Samantha Power, Gayle Smith, who works on development issues, and Dennis Ross, a Middle East expert with a broad portfolio in the White House. Soon, they and officials from other agencies were sitting in the White House, debating the costs and benefits of supporting autocrats. A White House official involved said the group studied "the taboos, all the questions you're not

supposed to ask." For example, they tested the assumption that the President could not publicly criticize President Hosni Mubarak because it would jeopardize Egypt's cooperation on issues related to Israel or its assistance in tracking terrorists. Not true, they concluded: the Egyptians pursued peace with Israel and crushed terrorists because it was in their interest to do so, not because the U.S. asked them to.

They tested the idea that countries with impoverished populations needed to develop economically before they were prepared for open political systems—a common argument that democracy promoters often run up against. Again, they concluded that the conventional wisdom was wrong. "All roads led to political reform," the White House official said.

The group was just finishing its work, on December 17th, when Mohamed Bouazizi, a vegetable vendor in Tunisia, set himself on fire outside a municipal building to protest the corruption of the country's political system—an act that inspired protests in Tunisia and, eventually, the entire region. Democracy in the Middle East, one of the most fraught issues of the Bush years, was suddenly the signature conflict of Obama's foreign policy.

On January 25th, the first, crucial day of the protests in Egypt, and eleven days after the removal of President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, in Tunisia, Secretary Clinton declared her support for free assembly, but added, "Our assessment is that the Egyptian government is stable and is looking for ways to respond to the legitimate needs and interests of the Egyptian people." That evening, Obama delivered his State of the Union address, in which he praised the demonstrators in Tunisia, "where the will of the people proved more powerful than the writ of a dictator," and expressed support for the "democratic aspirations of all people." But he did not mention Egypt. Shady el-Ghazaly Harb, one of the leaders of the coalition that started the Egyptian revolution, told me that the message the protesters got from the Obama Administration on the first day of the revolution was "Go home. We need this regime."

A number of familiar ex-diplomats and politicians, led by Dick Cheney, Henry Kissinger, and Zbigniew Brzezinski, criticized the treatment of Mubarak, and Israel and Saudi Arabia called on the Administration to stick with him. But, as the protests strengthened, it became clear that Mubarak was doomed. According to a senior Administration official, "The question in our mind was 'How do you manage that?'"

Obama's instinct was to try to have it both ways. He wanted to position the United States on the side of the protesters: it's always a good idea, politically, to support brave young men and women risking their lives for freedom, especially when their opponent is an eighty-two-year-old dictator with Swiss bank accounts. Some of Obama's White House aides regretted having stood idly by while the Iranian regime brutally suppressed the Green Revolution; Egypt offered a second chance. Nonetheless, Obama wanted to assure other autocratic allies that the U.S. did not hastily abandon its friends, and he feared that the uprising could spin out of control. "Look at all the revolutions in history, especially the ones that are driven from the ground up, and they tend to be very chaotic and hard to find an equilibrium," one senior official said. The French Revolution, for instance, he said, "ended up in chaos, and they ended up with Bonaparte." Obama's ultimate position, it seemed, was to talk like an idealist while acting like a realist.

This wasn't an easy balance to maintain, and the first major problem arose when State Department officials learned that if Mubarak stepped down immediately, the Egyptian constitution would require a Presidential election in sixty days, long before any of the moderate parties could get organized. Egyptian officials warned the Administration that it could lead to the Muslim Brotherhood's taking over power. "My daughter gets to go out at night," Ahmed Aboul Gheit, Egypt's then foreign minister, told Secretary Clinton during one conversation. "And, God damn it, I'm not going to turn this country over to people who will turn back the clock on her rights."

Obama decided not to call for Mubarak to step down. Instead, the U.S. would encourage a transition led by Mubarak's newly installed Vice-President, Omar Suleiman. The strategy was to avoid the constitutional process that the State Department feared would lead to chaos. The senior official told me in the midst of the crisis, "I don't think that because a group of young people get on the street that we are obliged to be for them."

On January 29th, the White House made two major decisions: the U.S. would announce that it supported a transition in Egypt, and Obama would send an emissary to Mubarak to explain that, in the judgment of the United States, he could not survive the protests. The emissary would tell Mubarak that his best option was to try to leave a positive legacy by steering the country toward a real democratic transformation. Frank G. Wisner, the former U.S. Ambassador to Egypt, who has long known Mubarak well, would deliver the

message. The next day, Clinton appeared on five Sunday-morning talk shows to announce that Obama supported an "orderly transition" in Egypt. That afternoon, Wisner boarded a U.S. government plane for Cairo.

On January 31st, Wisner met with Mubarak in Cairo. The next day, word leaked out that Mubarak would address the country. That afternoon, Obama's national-security advisers met in the Situation Room to discuss two issues: whether Obama should call Mubarak and whether Obama should make a public statement. Obama joined the meeting unexpectedly. As the discussion continued, Mubarak's speech appeared on television, and the President and his aides paused to watch. "I am now careful to conclude my work for Egypt by presenting Egypt to the next government in a constitutional way which will protect Egypt," Mubarak said. "I want to say, in clear terms, that in the next few months that are remaining of my current reign I will work very hard to carry out all the necessary measures to transfer power."

In Tahrir Square, the protesters erupted in rage at the meandering and confusing speech. Obama now seemed to be uncomfortable taking an attitude of cool detachment from the people in the street. He called Mubarak, and tried to find a graceful way for the Egyptian President to exit that would also take care of the constitutional concerns Egyptian officials kept raising. He asked Mubarak if there was a way to alter the constitution to allow for a stable transition. He asked if there was a way to set up a caretaker government. A White House official summarized Mubarak's response as: "Muslim Brotherhood, Muslim Brotherhood, Muslim Brotherhood."

Obama then made a public statement that was more confrontational: "An orderly transition must be meaningful, it must be peaceful, and it must begin now." The urgent message alienated Israel and Saudi Arabia, among other allies. It also startled some people in the State Department. Clinton "walked a very narrow line and managed to do it without making the Egyptians too angry on either side," a senior State Department official said. "After the President gave his statement, the people surrounding Mubarak began to get quite angry."

The inherent contradictions of an Administration trying to simultaneously encourage and contain the forces of revolution in Egypt broke into the open on February 5th, when Wisner, who was then in New York, participated via videoconference in an international-affairs conference in Munich. After outlining the constitutional argument for keeping

Mubarak in power, he said, "I therefore believe that President Mubarak's continued leadership is critical; it's his opportunity to write his own legacy. He's given sixty years of his life to the service of his country." According to friends, Wisner, who had talked with Obama before he went to Cairo, believed that his statement was consistent with the policy he was told to follow.

Clinton was at the conference in Munich, and, shortly after Wisner made his remarks, a senior Administration official gathered the press corps travelling with her in a small dining room at the Charles Hotel to brief us on the Secretary's meetings. The official hadn't heard Wisner's comments, but when a reporter read a long excerpt off his BlackBerry the official blanched, his mouth agape.

"Wisner," the official said, "was not speaking for the U.S. government or the Obama Administration. He was speaking as a private citizen."

The public and private components of the Administration's Egypt policy were at odds, and Wisner had risked blowing everything up. His tenure as an envoy was over. "They threw me under the bus," a close friend remembers him saying.

Wisner referred dismissively to the "reelection committee" at the White House, according to the friend. But in this case Obama's political interests—needing to be seen as on the side of the protesters—aligned with the policy views of the idealists. An Obama adviser declared, "Obama didn't give the Tahrir Square crowds every last thing they sought from him at the precise moment they sought it. But he went well beyond what many of America's allies in the region wished to see."

In March, I travelled to Cairo with Secretary Clinton. One evening, she was scheduled to meet with Egyptians who had been prominent in the protests that brought down Mubarak. However, one group, called the Coalition of Youth Revolution, which includes leaders from the activist movements and opposition parties in Egypt, boycotted the meeting. As Clinton talked with other civil-society members upstairs at the Four Seasons Hotel, four members of the abstaining coalition agreed to talk with me and three other journalists in the lobby.

I asked why they weren't upstairs with the Secretary of State. "Hillary was against the revolution from the beginning to the last day, O.K.?" Mohammed Abbas, of the Muslim

Brotherhood, said. "Obama supported this revolution. She was against."

Abbas and Shady el-Ghazaly Harb, a member of the liberal Democratic Front Party, said that if Obama was upstairs they would meet with him. Abbas lit up at the idea. "We respect Obama's attitude toward our revolution, and when we were in Tahrir Square we were following all of the leaders all over the world and what were their views," Abbas said.

"His speeches were more understanding and more appreciative of what we were doing, especially his second one," el-Ghazaly Harb said, referring to Obama's demand that the transition "begin now." He added, "We were in Tahrir Square and people were cheering for Obama's speech, because they felt he was saying that we"—America—"were inspired by the Egyptian people and we understand what the teen-agers were saying. Maybe he's using us, but that's what I see."

Later, when I relayed these comments to Clinton, she told me she didn't take the snub personally. She said, "Many years ago, I was active against the Vietnam War, and I was involved in all kinds of student politics, and so I understand there's always a full range of people in movements like this. And I remember refusing to meet with people." She was unmoved by the fact that these protesters had been integral to starting the revolution. "The people who start revolutions may or may not be the people who actually end up governing countries."

The activists she did meet with were not as organized as she had hoped. "As incredibly emotional and moving and inspiring as it was," she said, speaking of the demonstrations, "I looked at these twenty young people around the table, and they were complaining about how the elections are going to be held, and the Muslim Brotherhood and the Islamists are so well organized, and the remnants of the old National Democratic Party are so well organized. I said, 'So, well, are you organizing? Do you have an umbrella group that is going to represent the youth of Egypt? Do you have a political agenda?' And they all looked up and said no. It made my heart sink."

On March 16th, Clinton flew from Cairo to Tunis to continue her tour of revolutionary North Africa. The route took us over the Mediterranean just off the coast of Libya. The G.P.S. maps in the cabin of Clinton's Air Force plane lit up with the name "Benghazi," reminding everyone that, on the ground, Muammar Qaddafi's men were marching on that city. Earlier in the day, Qaddafi had gone on the radio to warn the citizens of Benghazi. "It's

over. We are coming tonight," he said. "We will find you in your closets."

Protesters had started to gather in Benghazi on February 15th. Qaddafi's security forces reacted with violence four days later, firing on a crowd of some twenty thousand demonstrators in Benghazi and killing at least a hundred of them. On February 26th, the United Nations passed a resolution that placed an arms embargo and economic sanctions on the Libyan regime and referred Qaddafi to the International Criminal Court. Two days later, the U.S., through lobbying led by Clinton and Power, helped remove Libya from its seat on the U.N. Human Rights Council. By tightening an economic noose around Qaddafi and isolating him diplomatically, Obama and the international community were beginning to use the tools that Power had outlined in "A Problem from Hell."

The debate then narrowed to whether the United States and others should intervene militarily. The principal option was to set up a no-fly zone to prevent Libyan planes from attacking the protest movement, which had quickly turned into a full-scale rebellion based in the eastern half of the country. The decision about intervention in Libya was an unusually clear choice between interests and values. "Of all the countries in the region there, our real interests in Libya are minimal," Brent Scowcroft told me. For a President whose long-term goal was to extricate the U.S. from Middle East conflicts, it was an especially vexing debate.

Within the Administration, Robert Gates, the Defense Secretary, was the most strenuous opponent of establishing a no-fly zone, or any other form of military intervention. Like Scowcroft, Gates objected to intervention because he did not think it was in the United States' vital interest. He also pointed out a fact that many people didn't seem to understand: the first step in creating a no-fly zone would be to bomb the Libyan air defenses. Clinton disagreed with him and argued the case for intervention with Obama. It was the first major issue on which she and Gates had different views.

The days leading up to Obama's decision were perplexing to outsiders. American Presidents usually lead the response to world crises, but Obama seemed to stay hidden that week. From the outside, it looked as though the French were dragging him into the conflict. On March 14th, Clinton arrived in Paris, but she had no firm decision to convey. According to a French official, when Clinton met with President Nicolas Sarkozy she declined to endorse the no-fly zone, which

Sarkozy interpreted as American reluctance to do anything. "We started to wonder where, exactly, the Administration was going," the official said.

Late that evening, at her suite at the Westin hotel in Paris, Clinton met for forty-five minutes with Mahmoud Jibril, a representative from the Libyan opposition. I waited in the lobby with a number of reporters, hoping to talk to Jibril after the meeting. But all we got was Bernard-Henri Lévy, the French philosopher, who had taken up the cause of the Libyan opposition and was shepherding Jibril to his meetings with diplomats. We later learned that Jibril was dejected by Clinton's unwillingness to commit to the no-fly zone and, not wanting to face the press, left the hotel by another exit.

The next evening, Obama held a meeting in the Situation Room. By then, it had become clear that the rebels, who had once seemed on the verge of sweeping Qaddafi out of power, were weak, and poorly armed; they had lost almost all the gains of the previous days. In New York, the Lebanese, the French, and the United Kingdom had prepared a U.N. resolution to implement a no-fly zone, and the world was waiting to see if Obama would join the effort. The White House meeting opened with an assessment of the situation on the ground in Libya. Qaddafi's forces were on the outskirts of Ajdabiyah, which supplies water and fuel to Benghazi. "The President was told Qaddafi is going to retake Ajdabiyah in twenty-four hours," a White House official who was in the meeting said. "And then the last stop on the train is Benghazi. If he got there, he would complete the military offensive, and that could be the place where he goes house to house and where a massacre could occur."

Obama asked if a no-fly zone would prevent that grim scenario. His intelligence and military advisers said no. Qaddafi was using tanks, not war planes, to crush the rebellion. Obama asked his aides to come up with some more robust military options, and left for dinner. At a second meeting that night, he was presented with the option of pushing for a broader resolution that would allow for the U.S. to protect the Libyan rebels by bombing government forces. He instructed Susan Rice, the U.S. Ambassador to the U.N., to pursue that option.

On March 17th, I interviewed Clinton in Tunis. She was sitting under a canopy by the hotel pool, eating breakfast. Although she had been noncommittal with the diplomats in France two days earlier, she now made it clear that the Obama Administration had made a decision. It was well known that she favored intervention, but she

was frank about the difficulty in making such decisions. "I get up every morning and I look around the world," she said. "People are being killed in Côte d'Ivoire, they're being killed in the Eastern Congo, they're being oppressed and abused all over the world by dictators and really unsavory characters. So we could be intervening all over the place. But that is not a—what is the standard? Is the standard, you know, a leader who won't leave office in Ivory Coast and is killing his own people? Gee, that sounds familiar. So part of it is having to make tough choices and wanting to help the international community accept responsibility."

Clinton insisted that the U.S. had to have regional support before it took action, and emphasized that it was crucial that U.N. action had been supported by the Arab League. "So now we're going to see whether the Security Council will support the Arab League. Not support the United States—support the Arab League. That is a significant difference. And for those who want to see the United States always acting unilaterally, it's not satisfying. But, for the world we're trying to build, where we have a lot of responsible actors who are willing to step up and lead, it is exactly what we should be doing."

The French and the British were shocked by the quick turn of events. Instead of the President announcing the Administration's position from the East Room of the White House, the U.N. envoy quietly proposed transforming a tepid resolution for a no-fly zone into a permission for full-scale military intervention in Libya. Some officials thought it was a trick. Was it possible that the Americans were trying to make the military options appear so bleak that China and Russia would be sure to block action?

Gradually, it became clear that the U.S. was serious. Clinton spoke with her Russian counterpart, Sergey Lavrov, who had previously told her that Russia would "never never" support even a no-fly zone. The Russians agreed to abstain. Without the cover of the Russians, the Chinese almost never veto Security Council resolutions. The vote, on March 17th, was 10-0, with five abstentions. It was the first time in its sixty-six years that the United Nations authorized military action to preëempt an "imminent massacre." Tom Malinowski, the Washington director of Human Rights Watch, wrote, "It was, by any objective standard, the most rapid multinational military response to an impending human rights crisis in history."

As the bombs dropped on Libyan tanks, President Obama made a point of continuing his long-

scheduled trip to South America. He wanted to show that America has interests in the rest of the world, even as it was drawn into yet another crisis in the Middle East.

This spring, Obama officials often expressed impatience with questions about theory or about the elusive quest for an Obama doctrine. One senior Administration official reminded me what the former British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan said when asked what was likely to set the course of his government: "Events, dear boy, events."

Obama has emphasized bureaucratic efficiency over ideology, and approached foreign policy as if it were case law, deciding his response to every threat or crisis on its own merits. "When you start applying blanket policies on the complexities of the current world situation, you're going to get yourself into trouble," he said in a recent interview with NBC News.

Obama's reluctance to articulate a grand synthesis has alienated both realists and idealists. "On issues like whether to intervene in Libya there's really not a compromise and consensus," Slaughter said. "You can't be a little bit realist and a little bit democratic when deciding whether or not to stop a massacre."

Brzezinski, too, has become disillusioned with the President. "I greatly admire his insights and understanding. I don't think he really has a policy that's implementing those insights and understandings. The rhetoric is always terribly imperative and categorical: 'You must do this,' 'He must do that,' 'This is unacceptable.' " Brzezinski added, "He doesn't strategize. He sermonizes."

The one consistent thread running through most of Obama's decisions has been that America must act humbly in the world. Unlike his immediate predecessors, Obama came of age politically during the post-Cold War era, a time when America's unmatched power created widespread resentment. Obama believes that highly visible American leadership can taint a foreign-policy goal just as easily as it can bolster it. In 2007, Obama said, "America must show—through deeds as well as words—that we stand with those who seek a better life. That child looking up at the helicopter must see America and feel hope."

In 2009 and early 2010, Obama was sometimes criticized for not acting at all. He was cautious during Iran's Green Revolution and deferential to his generals during the review of Afghanistan strategy. But his response to the Arab Spring has been bolder. He broke with Mubarak at a point when some of the older establishment advised against it. In Libya, he overruled Gates and his

military advisers and pushed our allies to adopt a broad and risky intervention. It is too early to know the consequences of these decisions. Libya appears to be entering a protracted civil war; American policy toward Mubarak frightened—and irritated—Saudi Arabia, where instability could send oil prices soaring. The U.S. keeps getting stuck in the Middle East.

Nonetheless, Obama may be moving toward something resembling a doctrine. One of his advisers described the President's actions in Libya as "leading from behind." That's not a slogan designed for signs at the 2012 Democratic Convention, but it does accurately describe the balance that Obama now seems to be finding. It's a different definition of leadership than America is known for, and it comes from two unspoken beliefs: that the relative power of the U.S. is declining, as rivals like China rise, and that the U.S. is reviled in many parts of the world. Pursuing our interests and spreading our ideals thus requires stealth and modesty as well as military strength. "It's so at odds with the John Wayne expectation for what America is in the world," the adviser said. "But it's necessary for shepherding us through this phase." □

The Mirage Of An Afghanistan Exit (WP)

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Washington Post

By Jackson Diehl

Afghanistan has been mostly out of the headlines the last few months, in part because its winter freezes most fighting and in part because it's been overshadowed by the Arab revolutions. As warmer weather brings back both the war and the debate over policy in Washington, the starting point could be summarized this way: Thanks to the U.S. military, the Taliban has been driven out of most of its southern strongholds since last summer.

So in the coming months the Taliban will be trying to get back into Afghanistan. The U.S. military will try to hold on. And President Obama and his civilian political team will be searching desperately for a way out.

Obama will have to decide soon how many American troops to withdraw this summer in keeping with his promise to begin in July to wind down the surge of reinforcements he ordered in late 2009. The Post's Rajiv Chandrasekaran has reported that Obama's civilian aides are pushing for a deadline of fall 2012 for the withdrawal of all of the 30,000 troops he sent. Why fall 2012? Even most Afghans realize the date has nothing to do with their country.

The military drawdown appears likely to be accompanied by a new attempt to promote a political settlement between the Afghan government and the Taliban. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton promised a "diplomatic surge" in a February speech in which she seemed to soften previous conditions for talks with the Taliban. The administration is said to be quietly encouraging a Turkish initiative to allow the Taliban to open an office in Turkey, which would provide a clear channel for communications.

The idea of a quick political fix is seductive. There's just one problem: It's an illusion. Not only is there no chance of striking a workable deal with the Taliban, but the pursuit of one is only likely to make an already difficult political situation in Afghanistan worse.

I was reminded of this last week by Abdullah Abdullah, the former Afghan freedom fighter, foreign minister and presidential candidate — and one of the country's stronger advocates of political democracy. Abdullah was in Washington to make the case that the United States should keep investing its resources in building a democratic Afghan state.

"My concern is that there is an attitude here that the military campaign, as well as talks with the Taliban, will get us out of this," Abdullah said during a visit to The Post. "As part of that, a conclusion is being made that in Afghanistan democracy is not needed, or not possible, after all."

Abdullah, of course, knows very well what evidence can be offered for that conclusion — his own 2009 presidential race against Hamid Karzai was tilted by massive fraud. But the soft-spoken former ophthalmologist says believing in Afghan democracy is more sensible than supposing the Taliban — which has yet to respond positively to many offers of engagement — can be induced to make a political deal. "The Taliban is not fighting this government in order to become part of the system," he said. "They want to bring the system down."

Pakistan, which just agreed to set up a commission with the Afghan government to explore peace talks, would be crucial to any deal. The supposition is that its military leaders would push the Taliban chiefs who have been their clients to accept power in Pashtun-populated areas of the south, but leave the rest of the country under something like its present government.

But, Abdullah argues, Pakistan doesn't really want an Afghan settlement, either. A Taliban-dominated territory could quickly become a base for the

fundamentalist factions who aspire to overthrow the government in Islamabad. "Pakistan would like to have the Afghan decision in its hand," he said. "But what is it they would like to see happen? I don't think they have an answer."

Karzai, who has grown steadily more hostile to the United States, may find bargaining with the Taliban and Pakistan preferable to more elections. "Democracy is no longer convenient for him," Abdullah says. But Karzai still needs a U.S. alliance — in fact, he has been seeking to negotiate a formal agreement with Washington that would lock in U.S. economic and military support for years to come.

So the only workable way forward, Abdullah says, is for the Obama administration to keep investing in Afghan institutions. "What the United States must do is stand firm when it comes to issues of governance. Be consistent on democratic process," he advises. "Put some conditions on assistance, and don't back off."

"I know this is difficult, but it is the reality," Abdullah argues. "You have to deal with the ineffectiveness of the Afghan government, with the local political process. This is the reality. It is a long-term problem." There is, alas, no easy way out.

Laughing Liberally Pours On The Tea Party

Jokes (WP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Washington Post

By Emily Wax

In a grungy basement comedy club on West 46th Street, Elon James White, 32, bursts onstage in a hooded sweat shirt, hip-hopistan baseball cap askew, and lobs an opening joke about Rep. Michele Bachmann. ¶ "I'm a fan of Republicans. They are just so damn entertaining. They're the best reality show — ever. Forget the Kardashians, I want to know what the Bachmanns are up to," he hoots. ¶ "That's right, everyone. I'm a Negro in a hoodie, and I know who Michele Bachmann is," he continues, as the audience claps and roars. "Sorry, but I'm paying attention!" ¶ White is one of a dozen rotating acts in "This Ain't No Tea Party," a progressive comedy revue in the midst of a 10-week off-Broadway run. It often draws a packed audience filled with young Midwestern tourists in Uggs, dreadlocked blipsters from the Bronx, retired Upper West Side theater buffs, along with political wonks and human rights activists. The traveling show, Laughing Liberally, plans to tour nationally soon. ¶ Like all good comedy, the show relies on timing. In a cultural moment that finds liberals dismayed by the tea party's popularity and

disheartened by Democratic losses in the 2010 midterm elections, the left is in need of a good laugh. ¶ "Among liberals there's no euphoria, that's for sure," says Laughing Liberally co-founder Justin Krebs, 33, who wears a rumpled suit and sports a loose ponytail as he ushers the audience inside. The goal, he says, is "to energize our base — in the same way the tea party does for the right. The left really needs this. It allows us to vent."

Laughing Liberally is part of a national volunteer organization called Living Liberally, a social networking organization for like-minded progressives. It is best known for its offshoot, Drinking Liberally, a social club where progressives are invited to cry over a pint in bars and other venues while dishing on politics. "Like many liberals during the George W. Bush years, I realized I needed a drink," Krebs says. He was not alone. Drinking Liberally grew to have chapters in 50 states.

Laughing Liberally began as a scrappy activist comedy show that entertained liberal protesters and others at St. Paul's Ordway Center during the 2008 Republican National Convention in Minnesota. Justin's father, Eric Krebs, a longtime theater producer, saw more in his son's project than street theater.

"The tea party movement gives Laughing Liberally more urgency than ever," says Eric Krebs, a curly-haired professor of theater at Baruch College in New York City.

Conservatives in the early 1990s turned to talk radio as their main venue to hash out politics while liberals dominated fake comedy news shows on television, says Paul Lewis, a Boston College English professor and author of "Cracking Up: American Humor in a Time of Conflict."

"Inspired by Rush Limbaugh, conservative radio relies on what I call 'rage-icule,' an angry form of mockery that not only criticizes but also scorns its targets," Lewis says.

Though conservative comedians exist — Dennis Miller or "Saturday Night Live's" Victoria Jackson — conservative comedy hasn't had as much mainstream success, Lewis says. In early 2007, Fox News attempted to launch a conservative version of "The Daily Show" called "The ½ Hour News Hour." But after just 13 episodes, the show was canceled.

The show took lobs at "easy targets," poking fun at Hillary Rodham Clinton, Al Gore and global warming — but a lot of material was off-limits

because they feared Republicans being branded racist or insensitive, says a former co-producer.

One of the few right-leaning comics is Nick Di Paolo, who has written for "Saturday Night Live." Di Paolo, who is socially liberal but economically conservative, has a one-hour special, "Nick Di Paolo Raw Nerve," airing Saturday on Showtime, in which he takes swipes at favorite targets, such as President Obama and labor unions.

"But comedy has been liberal for so long," Di Paolo says. "There's a point of view that is so politically correct that the audience clams up — and laughter is contagious."

Indeed, the Laughing Liberally show's young comedians seem to be struggling with the mutable demands of political correctness: Which rules are funny to break and which aren't?

With her heavy Upper West Side accent and frequent references to Zabar's, comedian Katie Halper often stuns the audience by giving voice to the Palestinian plight — as a Jewish liberal.

"You've heard about the movie 'Miral' opening, right?" Halper asks the audience, referring to the recently released film about an orphaned Palestinian girl who finds herself drawn into the conflict.

"Like we really need yet another movie that looks at the conflict from a Palestinian perspective? Way to shatter the stereotype that Hollywood is run by Palestinians. And Palestinian women, specifically," Halper exhales sarcastically. "Because there are so many Palestinians running Hollywood."

Some in the audience laugh. But some clearly experience what Halper, a Laughing Liberally co-founder, calls the "PEP Phenomenon," or Progressive Except on Palestine.

Dean Obeidallah, a boyish-looking Palestinian Italian comic, sees Laughing Liberally as part of a rich American tradition in which performers such as Richard Pryor and Lenny Bruce were able to raise sensitive issues such as race and sex.

Obeidallah is also the co-creator of Comedy Central's Internet series "The Watch List," which features a cast of Middle Eastern American comedians. Dressed in jeans, sneakers and a hipster-pink plaid shirt, he's an angsty Arab Chris Rock.

"One of the benefits of having a Muslim name in the U.S. is that you are immune to identity theft," Obeidallah tells the audience. "I have an Arab American friend whose first name is Osama — he can leave his driver's license and credit cards in a crack house and no one will pretend to be him."

Many of the evening's laughs are uneasy, but a central premise soon emerges: When in doubt, make fun of the tea party.

Comic Jamie Jackson flutters onstage in drag — faux Chanel suit, mousy brown bouffant wig — as Lady Margo Barnesly Farnsworth, a visiting Brit struggling to understand tea party politics.

A friend patiently explains to her that guns don't actually kill people, and she launches into a bring-down-the-house ditty called "Guns Don't Kill People. People Kill People."

"It's wonderful logic, isn't it?" Lady Farnsworth croons. "So, let's keep going." And the audience claps and sings along.

Haiti's 'Sweet Micky' Martelly Turns Presidential (WP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Washington Post

By Lee Hockstader

Haiti's president-elect, Michel Martelly, known universally to his countrymen as "Sweet Micky," is — let's be delicate about this — a new kind of political figure.

Wildly popular during his two-decade career as a singer, he was notorious for wearing a diaper during performances, for mooning his audiences and for gleefully leading his fans in obscene chants and taunts. Given that stage persona, Haitians barely batted an eye at revelations during this year's presidential campaign that Martelly used to snort cocaine and that several homes he owned in Florida were foreclosed on.

But the "Sweet Micky" of yore was gone last week when he arrived in Washington for meetings with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and international aid organizations. In his place was a spruced up president-elect, wrapped in a dark suit, sporting a sober tie and escorted by an entourage of thin-skinned advisers who bristled at questions about his past.

Martelly wants to be taken seriously. And thank goodness.

"Sometimes I feel like people don't give me credit — I didn't win the Lotto. There were 19 candidates, and I debated them and I beat them all," he said during a visit to The Post.

If ever a country needed no-nonsense leadership, it's Haiti right now. And if ever a country has suffered from an onslaught of political calamity combined with cataclysmic disasters, it's Haiti for the last, well, pick your time period.

The earthquake that struck Port-au-Prince in January 2010, on the heels of devastating back-to-back hurricanes, crippled the hemisphere's poorest nation. No amount of media marveling at the resilience of the Haitian people or the full-court press of international relief efforts could change the facts: hundreds of thousands of kids orphaned and out of school, a million people left homeless, a capital city carpeted in rubble and an economy on life support.

Even as Haiti skirted post-quake fears of looting and violence, it was further ravaged last fall by one of the world's worst recent outbreaks of cholera, an epidemic that has killed 5,000 people, infected a quarter-million and is still not finished claiming victims.

Haiti's already weak government, which lost at least a third of its senior civil servants when the ministry buildings collapsed, was rendered almost irrelevant. The listless President Rene Preval, his term coming to a close, all but disappeared.

That sets the bar low for Martelly, who promises a new start when he is inaugurated next month. He is busy fleshing out his mostly vague campaign promises, stressing the rule of law, free public education, jobs and new homes for the throngs still living in tent cities, and help for poor farmers.

"I must admit that my popularity [as an entertainer] has helped me," he said. "But the election was not about my popularity. It was about my character traits — honesty, determination, combativeness and preparation."

It was also about being a fresh, vital force on the political scene, bringing with him energy and a new (mostly untested) crop of advisers, unbothered to any recent political establishment. Little wonder that in the runoff election, Martelly, who is 50, beat a professorial 70-year-old former first lady 2 to 1.

The president-elect has a troubling reputation for having pals that include some of the worst thugs and coup-plotters from Haiti's dark recent decades. But in person, many of his instincts seem spot-on. I asked about his plans for Haiti's gleaming white presidential palace — long a symbol of opulence and repression — which collapsed in the earthquake. "I must say, that's the least of my worries," he answered with a shrug. "I can stay at my house."

Asked about Jean-Claude Duvalier and Jean-Bertrand Aristide — divisive former presidents who have recently returned to Haiti from exile and who might face prosecution — he passed, saying he

preferred not to interfere with any judicial proceedings.

Martelly was quizzed about his plans to resurrect the Haitian army, an infamously cruel, corrupt and repressive institution abolished by Aristide in 1994. At that, his advisers got their backs up, especially at the suggestion that a reconstituted army would be a Praetorian Guard used, as in the past, as muscle to enforce the president's personal will. They insisted that this time around, the army would fight smugglers and stay clear of politics — with the added benefit of providing jobs. But it is not clear that money exists for an army, and foreign donors are not likely to pay for one.

Questioned about his future as an entertainer, or his one-time pledge to perform naked on the palace roof if he were elected president, Martelly demurred, presciently. "After three or four years, if I see everyone in school and people with jobs and progress," he said, "I'll be happy enough to sing a song."

Fully dressed, one suspects.

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NH GOP Primary Not Just A Republican Party (AP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Associated Press

By (AP)

CONCORD, N.H. (AP) — At fundraising dinner after dinner, state Republican Party Chairman Jack Kimball earns loud applause when he declares that New Hampshire will send forward "a good strong conservative nominee for the presidency of the United States."

But it won't be just Republicans who pick a winner in the first-in-the-nation presidential primary next year.

Independent voters, who make up nearly 42 percent of registered voters in the state, can participate in either party's primary. And, given that President Barack Obama has no serious Democratic challenger, most independents are expected to cast ballots in the GOP race next February, unlike in the last presidential campaign.

That means Republican White House hopefuls who have been courting Republicans at party fundraising dinners and holding private meetings with tea party activists will have to branch out: beyond talking about things like the Declaration of Independence and conservative Republican talking points. They'll also have to talk to New Hampshire independents.

"The discourse so far here in New Hampshire really mirrors the very conservative discourse we're hearing with the tea party and among conservative elites around the country," said political analyst Dean Spiliotes. "The question is, how much of that is going to appeal to independents?"

Independent voters in the "Live Free or Die" state are notorious for, well, being independent. And sometimes so much so that they've helped upend presidential primary contests.

In 2008, more chose to vote in the Democratic primary between Barack Obama and Hillary Rodham Clinton than in the sleepier GOP contest between a slew of Republican contenders. Exit polls showed that 6 in 10 independents voted in the Democratic contest. Although Obama won more independent votes, they contributed to the coalition Clinton stitched together to stage a comeback victory after a disastrous Iowa defeat. Independents also were critical to Republican John McCain's victory here, which set him on the path to winning the GOP nomination.

Four years earlier, the Democratic primary took center stage because President George W. Bush faced only token opposition on the Republican ballot. More than 75 percent of the ballots cast in the New Hampshire primary that year were on the Democratic side, and according to exit polls, nearly half of those voting in the Democratic primary were registered as independents.

That suggests potentially heavy independent participation in next year's Republican primary, which is tentatively set for Feb. 14, 2012.

Also, a University of New Hampshire Survey Center poll in February found about 40 percent of independents — or "undeclared" as they're called here — said they plan to vote in the Republican primary, about 30 percent said they plan to vote in the Democratic primary, even though it's not expected to be contested, and 30 percent weren't sure.

Former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney led the field in that poll. But it means little; nearly 80 percent of likely GOP primary voters said they were still making up their minds. And independents tend to wait longer than others to pick a candidate, sometimes as late as Election Day.

Many Republican hopefuls, including former Pennsylvania Sen. Rick Santorum, dismiss questions about whether they're focusing too much on GOP voters in the state, saying their messages will resonate because independents

appreciate fiscal conservatism as much as Republicans.

In a visit to the state last week, former House Speaker Newt Gingrich ticked off the high costs of gasoline and heating oil, joblessness and budget-busting spending and said: "I think there are a lot of independent voters who have an interest in those kinds of real, substantive issues, and I would try to appeal to them" with suggested solutions.

Like Gingrich, former Minnesota Gov. Tim Pawlenty argues that his record on taxes and spending will appeal to independents as well as Republicans. But he says that as a former governor of a Democratic-leaning state, he has an edge over other candidates because he has proven he can reach beyond his party to win.

"I have not just the rhetoric of saying I can or will do this, but I've actually done it," Pawlenty said in a phone interview, adding that he's mindful that the New Hampshire primary will include independents. "I welcome that."

Still, the challenges for the Republican candidates are great because independent voters by nature are a fickle bunch.

Just ask Ron Morse, an independent from the town of Weare.

He voted for Clinton in the 2008 primary and Obama in the general election but isn't hot on anyone this time and doesn't know what he will do come 2012.

"I switch when it feels right. Right now, I don't feel the president's doing a good job," said Morse, 60, as he had breakfast at a Manchester diner recently when Mississippi Gov. Haley Barbour stopped by. "There's nobody so far that I want to vote for." He said he "definitely" wouldn't back Romney. "And definitely not that Alaskan chick," he said, referring to former Alaskan Gov. Sarah Palin.

It turns out that Barbour doesn't sit well with him either; Morse said he was annoyed that Barbour brushed off his concerns about potential cuts to Medicare and Social Security.

Wayne Gagne, a co-chairman of the "New Hampshire Independents for McCain Coalition," in 2008, said last week he doesn't know which primary he'll vote in next year, though he, too, has ruled out Romney and Palin, and Gingrich, too. He thinks Obama is on the right track on health care, but he has friends who think highly of Pawlenty, and he likes the way Donald Trump thinks.

"Sometimes he thinks like me: just get it done. He's right to the point, and I like that feature in anybody, frankly," said Gagne, 60, a retired

locomotive engineer from Nashua, said of Trump. "But how will he do politically in the world's problems? I don't know. Nothing impresses me yet."

The Real Value Of False Choices (WP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Washington Post

By E.J. Dionne Jr.

The idea that "false choices" are distorting our politics is under attack. I want to defend the concept for both substantive and personal reasons.

The canary in the coal mine was my colleague Ruth Marcus's column on April 1 in which she argued directly: "It's time to retire the false choice."

"As a rhetorical device, particularly as a political rhetorical device, the false choice has outlived its usefulness, if it ever had any," she wrote. "The phrase has become a trite substitute for serious thinking. It serves too often to obscure rather than to explain."

While I empathize with Marcus's frustration that false choices are sometimes invoked to evade choices altogether, I respectfully but passionately disagree with her. And she has company in her skepticism.

A few days after her column appeared, NPR's Ari Shapiro offered a resolutely fair, balanced and entertaining piece about President Obama's affection for calling out false choices. He included the views of Mary Kate Cary, a false-choice critic and former speechwriter for President George H.W. Bush: "It's tempting for the speaker to distort the two extremes in such a way that it makes the critics angry and invites a response like, well, that isn't at all what I said."

Cary is right that the false choice idea is easily misused. My favorite recent rendering of what a classically false false choice — sorry about that — looks like was offered by my friend Hendrik Hertzberg on his New Yorker blog.

Praising Obama's George Washington University budget speech earlier this month, Hertzberg said he was relieved that the president did not descend into the worst kind of false choicer. "I know it's silly," Hertzberg wrote, "but I was a little worried we might get something uncomfortably akin to 'We must reject both extremes, those who say we shouldn't help the old and the sick and those who say we should.'" Me, too; I'm glad Obama didn't go near that sort of thing.

But if there are false false choices, there are also real false choices. And here I should acknowledge

my personal stake in this debate. Twenty years ago, I wrote a book called "Why Americans Hate Politics" arguing that liberals and conservatives often imposed a series of false choices on voters that prevented them from expressing their true preferences. Many voters preferred an Intelligent "both/and" politics to an artificially constrained "either/or" approach.

The classic case for me was the phony division of Americans into "feminist" and "pro-family" camps. I noted that most Americans accepted the equality of men and women but were concerned about how new work arrangements were affecting family life.

"Women who take time off from their careers to care for young children are routinely 'punished' by having their opportunities for promotion reduced," I wrote. "Is it 'feminist' or is it 'pro-family' to suggest that this practice is unfair? Is it 'feminist' or 'pro-family' to contend that this practice shows how little value society really places on the work that parents do?"

There were and are a slew of other paralyzing false choices in our political dialogue. President Bill Clinton wrote generously about the impact of my false choice argument on his own views in his memoir "My Life" and then proffered an excellent catalogue of false choices we needed to avoid. Among them: between "excellence or equity in education"; between "quality or universal access in health care"; between "a cleaner environment or more economic growth"; between "crime prevention or punishing criminals."

Unmasking false choices is especially important to progressives for whom the task of finding the proper balances — between government and the market, between greater equality and the need for incentives, between a respect for tradition and a commitment to individual freedom — is close to the heart of their political philosophy. In the current budget battle, the quintessential false choice is the core assertion of the House Republicans' plan: that we have to choose either program cuts or tax increases. They go only for program cuts. Our purpose should be about finding the right balance between the two.

Marcus, Cary and other false-choice critics can perform a useful service if they push politicians away from using the term either to caricature views they disagree with or to avoid making choices altogether. But we should not abandon the idea that battling false choices is essential to an honest framing of the choices we truly and urgently need to make.

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04/25/11 19 of 152 pages

Lessons From America's Last Brush With Default (Fortune)
Monday, April 25, 2011
Fortune (blog)
By Tory Newmyer

Here's the scene from 1995: A default on the federal debt is looming; young, newly-empowered Republicans on Capitol Hill are looking to use that threat as leverage to push their budget proposal; a Democratic White House is straining against their demands for major reforms in the name of deficit reduction; and the Treasury Secretary is broadcasting calm to keep the markets from spooking while trying, simultaneously, to impress the doomsday consequences of a default.

Sound familiar? That was the last time the United States seriously flirted with a debt ceiling collapse. The scenario, of course, is replaying now, as policymakers brace for the next installment of a partisan showdown over the size and scope of government. The feds are on track to reach their \$14.29 trillion borrowing limit in mid-May, and the Obama administration says juggling accounts can only buy time until July 8. After that date, the government will default on its debt -- a nightmare event that would gut investor confidence in U.S. bonds, send our borrowing costs soaring, and in all likelihood, precipitate another global financial meltdown.

For months, the White House has been working behind the scenes to avert that outcome by lobbying for a simple, so-called "clean" hike of the debt ceiling. But Congressional Republicans are intent on demanding that any raise come with at least some of their deficit-cutting priorities. With market watchers nervously tracking the face-off as the clock winds down, it's worth taking a look back at the last time a political fight nearly ended in default.

Largely forgotten now, even inside the Beltway, that standoff on the debt limit actually framed what would become a much noisier fight over a government shutdown. Starting in the spring of 1995, then-House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) and his allies in the new GOP majority were plotting to use a vote on the debt ceiling to force President Bill Clinton to adopt their seven-year balanced-budget plan. The issue had prompted partisan skirmishes over the years, but what appeared to distinguish this round was that Gingrich and others in the GOP were actually threatening to follow through and force the nation's first-ever default if the White House didn't agree to its terms.

A quaint-sounding \$4.9 trillion ceiling

Clinton administration officials, understanding the consequences of a default, had trouble believing that the Republicans could be serious. But then-Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin nevertheless moved to prepare for it. Early that year, he tasked Ed Knight, the department's chief counsel, with assembling a team of the best legal minds at Treasury and the Department of Justice. Their mission was to quietly explore Rubin's available legal options for continuing to meet the government's obligations beyond the ceiling.

The debate ramped up that fall as the \$4.9 trillion debt ceiling swung into view. Publicly, Gingrich kept the heat on the White House by pledging not to blink. "I don't care what the price is," he said in a mid-September speech that year to a securities group. Privately, he was telling the administration that while he hoped to avoid an impasse, he wasn't sure he could contain the newest members of his own conference.

More than 150 mostly first- and second-term populist GOP lawmakers had organized themselves into the Debt Limit Coalition, vowing not to raise the debt roof until Clinton accepted the Republican budget.

Treasury officials had been reaching out to lawmakers in both parties and both chambers since the summer, trying to explain the stakes. "We didn't want to overly politicize it, but we did begin to quietly educate people," says Penny Rostow, Treasury's then-deputy assistant secretary for domestic finance and banking legislation.

John Hawke, then-under secretary for domestic finance, recalls briefing John Boehner, the fourth-ranking House Republican at the time, and finding him notably reasonable. "Some guys were rather truculent about it," Hawke says. But the current House Speaker, his party's point man in the coming debate, "was relatively easy to get along with. We had several meetings, and he's a smart guy, and he understood what the issues were."

The government hit the debt ceiling at the end of October, but Treasury had enough cash to keep things running until November 15. The game of chicken between Congressional Republicans and the Clinton administration continued to the brink of the deadline. On November 12, with no compromise in sight, Rubin decided to make use of an unprecedented emergency maneuver that Ed Knight had discovered, pulling \$61 billion from two federal retirement accounts.

The move made use of a Reagan-era law designed to give that administration the authority to head off a similar threat from a Democratic-controlled Congress. Known as "disinvestment," it involved

converting securities in the funds into cash, and effectively replacing them with IOUs to repay the sums later, with interest. The maneuver allowed the feds to meet obligations through the end of the year -- and freed Clinton to veto a temporary debt limit hike that Republicans had packaged with restrictions on Treasury's ability to keep dodging default.

The Treasury's equivalent of nuclear war

Rubin's gambit had a political impact, as well: it melted one lever Republicans were aiming to use to pry tax and program cuts out of the Clinton White House. "It created a fair bit of umbrage amongst those who thought they could force President Clinton into accepting their budget," says Rubin, now chairman of the Council on Foreign Relations. With the threat of default deflated for the time being, Republicans took the fight over their budget proposal to a parallel debate over government funding, prompting the first of two shutdowns that quickly came to dominate headlines out of Washington.

But while the debt limit debate moved off the front page, it remained a consuming preoccupation inside Treasury. Servicing the nation's debt is at the core of department's mission. A default, especially as a political statement, says Rubin, "should be absolutely unthinkable," and yet the threat was real. After blowing past the debt ceiling, senior Treasury staffers gathered daily in the conference room outside Rubin's office for afternoon meetings to review the latest news from the Hill, any progress toward new time-buying tactics, and overnight tax receipts, as a measure of how close they had moved to the edge.

And they also planned for what they would do if they careened over it. "It's a worst-case scenario," says Knight. "The Defense Department equivalent would be nuclear war." The mood inside the department was proportionate. Rostow recalls joking to Rubin at one point that people were going to start referring to Treasury bonds as "fallen eagles" -- a riff on "fallen angels," a Wall Street handle for junk bonds. Rubin didn't laugh. "He was really burned by the idea we might default," Rostow says.

On the Hill, meanwhile, Republicans were intensifying their attacks on Treasury. They howled that Rubin's maneuver ran afoul of the Constitution, which grants borrowing authority to Congress. In early December, Gingrich appointed a task force to explore suing the department. Some called for Rubin to resign; others talked about starting impeachment proceedings. But Knight's

careful legal work withstood the assault, and Republicans never so much as filed suit.

That was the good news. The bad news was that Treasury was out of options for delaying a default. Rubin in mid-December bought the government's last extension by withholding a \$14.5 billion year-end interest payment due to one of the funds, forestalling the crisis until March.

Then, in the New Year, the storm clouds started to break. Wall Street stepped up pressure on Republicans to back down, as Moody's and Standard and Poor's both issued warnings that the government's credit rating was at risk. More importantly, President Clinton had won the public argument over the government shutdown, and a weakened GOP suddenly lost its appetite for confrontation. In March, Republicans folded, agreeing to a long-term extension of the government's borrowing authority along with some face-saving items for the conservative wing of the party.

Rubin: "We were at the end."

Rubin had warned early in the standoff that even approaching default would roil financial markets, but they remained surprisingly untroubled throughout. "When I talked to people I knew, not at the time, but later, what people said to me was nobody ever really believed that the United States government would default on its debt," Rubin says. "But I tell you, we were worried about it."

At the time, Republicans speculated that Rubin had more tricks up his sleeve. Rubin says now that he didn't. "When we got to the end, we were at the end," he says. And he still doesn't know what President Clinton would have done if Republicans hadn't backed down and instead forced him to choose between their budget and default. "I've always wondered," he says.

In the years since, Treasury has expanded its toolkit for delaying a default if the federal government passes the debt ceiling. But none of the options buy as much time simply because the deficit is so much bigger. Heading into the debate, Republicans appear to have a stronger hand today than they did 15 years ago.

"I don't think people were as energized as they are today about the structural size of the deficit," Hawke says. And the public is highly skeptical about the need to lift the limit, with 63% opposing a hike in a recent CBS/ New York Times poll, and only 27% supporting one.

On the Hill, a much more concerted effort is already under way to sell the necessity of taking action. Business groups, led by the U.S. Chamber

of Commerce, are lobbying lawmakers, with a focus on the House Republican's sizable freshmen class. Wall Street executives are weighing in, too, telling Republicans that a delay could wreak havoc on the markets.

Boehner, a student of Gingrich's overreach and its political consequences, has privately assured industry executives he understands the gravity of a default. The price of GOP support, however, will be steep spending cuts and structural reforms, as-yet unnamed.

A Republican operative and veteran of the last showdown says the party, now as then, wants to find a resolution. "It's about forcing the other side to negotiate toward a deadline, which is a good thing in a political system designed to avoid making decisions," he says. But as Rubin notes, in the intervening years, as our deficits ballooned, our system lost credibility on fiscal matters. "Now the world is looking at us, and we face these enormous deficits," he says, "and there's just a lot more concern about whether our system is going to deal effectively with all this."

STATE DEPARTMENT

Classified Files Offer New Insights Into Detainees (NYT)

Monday, April 25, 2011; A1

New York Times

By Charlie Savage, William Glaberson And Andrew W. Lehren

WASHINGTON — A trove of more than 700 classified military documents provides new and detailed accounts of the men who have done time at the Guantánamo Bay prison in Cuba, and offers new insight into the evidence against the 172 men still locked up there.

Military intelligence officials, in assessments of detainees written between February 2002 and January 2009, evaluated their histories and provided glimpses of the tensions between captors and captives. What began as a jury-rigged experiment after the 2001 terrorist attacks now seems like an enduring American institution, and the leaked files show why, by laying bare the patchwork and contradictory evidence that in many cases would never have stood up in criminal court or a military tribunal.

The documents meticulously record the detainees' "pocket litter" when they were captured: a bus ticket to Kabul, a fake passport and forged student ID, a restaurant receipt, even a poem. They list the prisoners' illnesses — hepatitis, gout, tuberculosis, depression. They note their serial

interrogations, enumerating — even after six or more years of relentless questioning — remaining "areas of potential exploitation." They describe inmates' infractions — punching guards, tearing apart shower shoes, shouting across cellblocks. And, as analysts try to bolster the case for continued incarceration, they record years of detainees' comments about one another.

The secret documents, made available to The New York Times and several other news organizations, reveal that most of the 172 remaining prisoners have been rated as a "high risk" of posing a threat to the United States and its allies if released without adequate rehabilitation and supervision. But they also show that an even larger number of the prisoners who have left Cuba — about a third of the 600 already transferred to other countries — were also designated "high risk" before they were freed or passed to the custody of other governments.

The documents are largely silent about the use of the harsh interrogation tactics at Guantánamo — including sleep deprivation, shackling in stress positions and prolonged exposure to cold temperatures — that drew global condemnation. Several prisoners, though, are portrayed as making up false stories about being subjected to abuse.

The government's basic allegations against many detainees have long been public, and have often been challenged by prisoners and their lawyers. But the dossiers, prepared under the Bush administration, provide a deeper look at the frightening, if flawed, intelligence that has persuaded the Obama administration, too, that the prison cannot readily be closed.

Prisoners who especially worried counterterrorism officials included some accused of being assassins for Al Qaeda, operatives for a canceled suicide mission and detainees who vowed to their interrogators that they would wreak revenge against America.

The military analysts' files provide new details about the most infamous of their prisoners, Khalid Shaikh Mohammed, the planner of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks. Sometime around March 2002, he ordered a former Baltimore resident to don a suicide bomb vest and carry out a "martyrdom" attack against Pervez Musharraf, then Pakistan's president, according to the documents. But when the man, Majid Khan, got to the Pakistani mosque that he had been told Mr. Musharraf would visit, the assignment turned out to be just a test of his "willingness to die for the cause."

The dossiers also show the seat-of-the-pants intelligence gathering in war zones that led to the incarcerations of innocent men for years in cases of mistaken identity or simple misfortune. In May 2003, for example, Afghan forces captured Prisoner 1051, an Afghan named Sharbat, near the scene of a roadside bomb explosion, the documents show. He denied any involvement, saying he was a shepherd. Guantánamo debriefers and analysts agreed, citing his consistent story, his knowledge of herding animals and his ignorance of "simple military and political concepts," according to his assessment. Yet a military tribunal declared him an "enemy combatant" anyway, and he was not sent home until 2006.

Obama administration officials condemned the publication of the classified documents, which were obtained by the anti-secrecy group WikiLeaks last year but provided to The Times by another source. The officials pointed out that an administration task force set up in January 2009 reviewed the information in the prisoner assessments, and in some cases came to different conclusions. Thus, they said, the documents published by The Times may not represent the government's current view of detainees at Guantánamo.

Among the findings in the files:

-- The 20th hijacker: The best-documented case of an abusive interrogation at Guantánamo was the coercive questioning, in late 2002 and early 2003, of Mohammed Qahtani. A Saudi believed to have been an intended participant in the Sept. 11 attacks, Mr. Qahtani was leashed like a dog, sexually humiliated and forced to urinate on himself. His file says, "Although publicly released records allege detainee was subject to harsh interrogation techniques in the early stages of detention," his confessions "appear to be true and are corroborated in reporting from other sources." But claims that he is said to have made about at least 16 other prisoners — mostly in April and May 2003 — are cited in their files without any caveat.

-- Threats against captors: While some detainees are described in the documents as "mostly compliant and rarely hostile to guard force and staff," others spoke of violence. One detainee said "he would like to tell his friends in Iraq to find the interrogator, slice him up, and make a shwarma (a type of sandwich) out of him, with the interrogator's head sticking out of the end of the shwarma." Another "threatened to kill a U.S. service member by chopping off his head and hands when he gets out," and informed a guard that "he will murder him and drink his blood for lunch. Detainee also stated he would fly planes

into houses and prayed that President Bush would die."

-- The role of foreign officials: The leaked documents show how many foreign countries sent intelligence officers to question Guantánamo detainees — among them China, Russia, Tajikistan, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Kuwait, Algeria and Tunisia. One such visit changed a detainee's account: a Saudi prisoner initially told American interrogators he had traveled to Afghanistan to train at a Libyan-run terrorist training camp. But an analyst added: "Detainee changed his story to a less incriminating one after the Saudi Delegation came and spoke to the detainees."

-- A Qaeda leader's reputation: The file for Abd al-Rahim al-Nashiri, who was charged before a military commission last week for plotting the bombing of the American destroyer Cole in 2000, says he was "more senior" in Al Qaeda than Khalid Shaikh Mohammed, and describes him as "so dedicated to jihad that he reportedly received injections to promote impotence and recommended the injections to others so more time could be spent on the jihad (rather than being distracted by women)."

-- The Yemenis' hard luck: The files for dozens of the remaining prisoners portray them as low-level foot-soldiers who traveled from Yemen to Afghanistan before the Sept. 11 attacks to receive basic military training and fight in the civil war there, not as global terrorists. Otherwise identical detainees from other countries were sent home many years ago, the files show, but the Yemenis remain at Guantánamo because of concerns over the stability of their country and its ability to monitor them.

-- Dubious information: Some assessments revealed the risk of relying on information supplied by people whose motives were murky. Hajji Jalil, then a 33-year-old Afghan, was captured in July 2003, after the Afghan chief of intelligence in Helmand Province said Mr. Jalil had taken an "active part" in an ambush that killed two American soldiers. But American officials, citing "fraudulent circumstances," said later that the intelligence chief and others had participated in the ambush, and they had "targeted" Mr. Jalil "to provide cover for their own involvement." He was sent home in March 2005.

-- A British agent: One report reveals that American officials discovered a detainee had been recruited by British and Canadian intelligence to work as an agent because of his "connections to members of various Al-Qaeda-linked terrorist

groups." But the report suggests that he had never shifted his militant loyalties. It says that the Central Intelligence Agency, after repeated interrogations of the detainee, concluded that he had "withheld important information" from the British and Canadians, and assessed him "to be a threat" to American and allied personnel in Afghanistan and Pakistan. He has since been sent back to his country.

-- A journalist's interrogation: The documents show that a major reason a Sudanese cameraman for Al Jazeera, Sami al-Hajj, was held at Guantánamo for six years was for questioning about the television network's "training program, telecommunications equipment, and newsgathering operations in Chechnya, Kosovo, and Afghanistan," including contacts with terrorist groups. While Mr. Hajj insisted he was just a journalist, his file says he helped Islamic extremist groups courier money and obtain Stinger missiles and cites the United Arab Emirates' claim that he was a Qaeda member. He was released in 2008 and returned to work for Al Jazeera.

-- The first to leave: The documents offer the first public look at the military's views of 158 detainees who did not receive a formal hearing under a system instituted in 2004. Many were assessed to be "of little intelligence value" with no ties to or significant knowledge about Al Qaeda or the Taliban, as was the case of a detainee who was an Afghan used car salesman. But also among those freed early was a Pakistani who would become a suicide attacker three years later.

Many of the dossiers include official close-up photographs of the detainees, providing images of hundreds of the prisoners, many of whom have not been seen publicly in years.

The files — classified "secret" and marked "noforn," meaning they should not be shared with foreign governments — represent the fourth major collection of secret American documents that have become public over the past year; earlier releases included military incident reports from the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and portions of an archive of some 250,000 diplomatic cables. Military prosecutors have accused an Army Intelligence analyst, Pfc. Bradley Manning, of leaking the materials.

The Guantánamo assessments seem unlikely to end the long-running debate about America's most controversial prison. The documents can be mined for evidence supporting beliefs across the political spectrum about the relative perils posed by the detainees and whether the government's system of holding most without trials is justified.

Much of the information in the documents is impossible to verify. The documents were prepared by intelligence and military officials operating at first in the haze of war, then, as the years passed, in a prison under international criticism. In some cases, judges have rejected the government's allegations, because confessions were made during coercive interrogation or other sources were not credible.

In 2009, a task force of officials from the government's national security agencies re-evaluated all 240 detainees then remaining at the prison. They vetted the military's assessments against information held by other agencies, and dropped the "high/medium/low" risk ratings in favor of a more nuanced look at how each detainee might fare if released, in light of his specific family and national environment. But those newer assessments are still secret and not available for comparison.

Moreover, the leaked archive is not complete; it contains no assessments for about 75 of the detainees.

Yet for all the limitations of the files, they still offer an extraordinary look inside a prison that has long been known for its secrecy and for a struggle between the military that runs it — using constant surveillance, forced removal from cells and other tools to exert control — and detainees who often fought back with the limited tools available to them: hunger strikes, threats of retribution and hoarded contraband ranging from a metal screw to leftover food.

Scores of detainees were given disciplinary citations for "inappropriate use of bodily fluids," as some files delicately say; other files make clear that detainees on a fairly regular basis were accused by guards of throwing urine and feces.

No new prisoners have been transferred to Guantánamo since 2007. Some Republicans are urging the Obama administration to send newly captured terrorism suspects to the prison, but so far officials have refused to increase the inmate population.

As a result, Guantánamo seems increasingly frozen in time, with detainees locked into their roles at the receding moment of their capture.

For example, an assessment of a former top Taliban official said he "appears to be resentful of being apprehended while he claimed he was working for the US and Coalition forces to find Mullah Omar," a reference to Mullah Muhammad Omar, the Taliban chief who is in hiding.

But whatever the truth about the detainee's role before his capture in 2002, it is receding into the past. So, presumably, is the value of whatever information he possesses. Still, his jailers have continued to press him for answers. His assessment of January 2008 — six years after he arrived in Cuba — contended that it was worthwhile to continue to interrogate him, in part because he might know about Mullah Omar's "possible whereabouts."

WikiLeaks Discloses New Details On Whereabouts Of Al-Qaeda Leaders On 9/11 (WP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Washington Post

By Peter Finn

On Sept. 11, 2001, the core of al-Qaeda was concentrated in a single city: Karachi, Pakistan.

At a hospital, the accused mastermind of the bombing of the USS Cole was recovering from a tonsillectomy. Nearby, the alleged organizer of the 2002 bombing in Bali, Indonesia, was buying lab equipment for a biological weapons program. And in a safe house, the man who would later describe himself as the intellectual author of the Sept. 11 attacks was with other key al-Qaeda members watching the scenes from New York and Washington unfold on television.

Within a day, much of the al-Qaeda leadership was on the way back to Afghanistan, planning for a long war.

A cache of classified military documents obtained by the anti-secrecy organization WikiLeaks presents new details of their whereabouts on Sept. 11, 2001, and their movements afterward. The documents also offer some tantalizing glimpses into the whereabouts and operations of Osama bin Laden and his Egyptian deputy, Ayman al-Zawahiri.

The documents, provided to European and U.S. news outlets, including The Washington Post, are intelligence assessments of nearly every one of the 779 individuals who have been held at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, since 2002. In them, analysts have created detailed portraits of detainees based on raw intelligence, including material gleaned from interrogations.

Detainees are assessed "high," "medium" or "low" in terms of their intelligence value, the threat they pose while in detention and the continued threat they might pose to the United States if released.

The documents tend to take a bleak view of the detainees, even those who have been ordered

released by the federal courts because of a lack of evidence to justify their continued detention. And the assessments are often based, in part, on reporting by informants at the military detention center, sources that some judges have found wanting.

In a statement, the Pentagon, which described the decision to publish some of the material as "unfortunate," stressed the snapshot and incomplete nature of the assessments, known as Detainee Assessment Briefs, or DABs.

"The Guantanamo Review Task Force, established in January 2009, considered the DABs during its review of detainee information. In some cases, the Task Force came to the same conclusions as the DABs. In other instances the Review Task Force came to different conclusions, based on updated or other available information," said Pentagon press secretary Geoff Morrell and Ambassador Daniel Fried, the Obama administration's special envoy on detainee issues. "Any given DAB illegally obtained and released by WikiLeaks may or may not represent the current view of a given detainee."

Regardless of how detainees are currently assessed, many of the documents shed light on their histories, particularly those of the high-value detainees. When pieced together, they capture some of the drama of al-Qaeda's scattering in the wake of the Sept. 11 attacks. They also point to tensions between certain members of the terrorist group.

Among other previously unknown meetings, the documents describe a major gathering of some of al-Qaeda's most senior operatives in early December 2001 in Zormat, a mountainous region of Afghanistan between Kabul and Khost. There, the operatives began to plan new attacks, a process that would consume them, according to the assessments, until they were finally captured.

A hectic three months

Four days after the Sept. 11 attacks, bin Laden visited a guesthouse in Afghanistan's Kandahar province. He told the Arab fighters gathered there "to defend Afghanistan against the infidel invaders" and to "fight in the name of Allah."

It was beginning of a peripatetic three months for bin Laden and Zawahiri. Traveling by car among several locations in Afghanistan, bin Laden handed out assignments to his followers, met with some of the Taliban leadership and delegated control of al-Qaeda to the group's Shura Council, presumably because he feared being captured or killed as U.S. forces closed in.

At some point, bin Laden and Zawahiri used a secret guesthouse in or relatively near Kabul. The al-Qaeda leader welcomed a stream of visitors and issued a series of orders, including instructions to continue operations against Western targets. He dispersed his fighters from training camps and instructed women and children, including some of his wives, to flee to Pakistan.

In October, bin Laden met in Kabul with two Malaysians, Yazid Zubair and Bashir Lap — both of whom are now at Guantanamo Bay — and lectured them on history and religion. On the day that the U.S.-led coalition began bombing Afghanistan, bin Laden met in Kandahar with Taliban official Mullah Mansour. Bin Laden and Zawahiri also met that month with Taliban leader Jalaluddin Haqqani, who continues to lead a deadly insurgency against the United States and its allies in Afghanistan.

Bin Laden, accompanied by Zawahiri and a handful of close associates in his security detail, escaped to his cave complex in Tora Bora in November. Around Nov. 25, he was seen giving a speech to the leaders and fighters at the complex.

He told them to "remain strong in their commitment to fight, to obey the leaders, to help the Taliban, and that it was a grave mistake and taboo to leave before the fight was completed."

According to the documents, bin Laden and his deputy escaped from Tora Bora in mid-December 2001. At the time, the al-Qaeda leader was apparently so strapped for cash that he borrowed \$7,000 from one of his protectors — a sum he paid back within a year.

Internal tensions

In December, al-Qaeda's top lieutenants gathered in Zormat. They included Khalid Sheik Mohammed, the self-described mastermind of the Sept. 11 attacks; Abd al-Rahim al-Nashiri, the alleged planner of the USS Cole attack; and Abu Faraj al-Libbi, a key facilitator for bin Laden.

The place was teeming with fighters who were awaiting for al-Qaeda to return their passports so they could flee across the border to Pakistan.

Mohammed later stated that while he and the others were in Zormat, they received a message from bin Laden in which he delegated control of al-Qaeda to the Shura Council. And the senior operatives began to plan new attacks.

Nashiri reported that while at Zormat he was approached by two Saudi nationals who wanted to strike U.S. and Israeli targets in Morocco. Nashiri said he had been considering an operation in the Strait of Gibraltar and thought that the British

military base there, which he had seen in a documentary, would be a good target.

Nashiri's willingness to approve a plot on his own was later the source of some tension within the organization, particularly with Mohammed.

In May or June 2002, Mohammed learned of the disrupted plan to attack the military base in Gibraltar and was upset that he had not been informed of it.

Nashiri separately complained that he was being pushed by bin Laden to continue planning aggressive operations against U.S. interests in the Arabian gulf region without much regard for his security.

Indeed, Nashiri was arrested in the United Arab Emirates in late 2002.

Back in Pakistan

After the Zormat conclave, Mohammed and other senior al-Qaeda figures began to return to Karachi.

The documents state that Mohammed "put together a training program for assassinations and kidnappings as well as pistol and computer training." It was not intended for specific operations but to occupy the bored fighters stuck in safe houses.

At the time, money was flowing into the country for Mohammed, according to the documents, allowing him to acquire safe houses and fund operations.

In November 2002, his nephew Baluchi took a delivery of nearly \$70,000 from a courier. Mohammed, at one point, gave \$500,000 to a Pakistani businessman, who is also being held at Guantanamo bay, for safekeeping, much of it wrapped in cellophane and inside a shopping bag. Mohammed also gave Riduan Isamuddin, the Indonesian known by the nom de guerre Hambali, \$100,000 to congratulate him for the Bali bombing.

Gradually, Mohammed and the other operatives were picked off by Pakistanis working with the CIA and the FBI. When Ramzi Binalshibh, a key liaison between the Sept. 11 hijackers and al-Qaeda, was arrested at a safe house in Karachi on the first anniversary of the Sept. 11 attacks, there was a four-hour standoff while the Yemeni and two others held knives to their own throats and threatened to kill themselves rather than be taken.

There are few geographic references in the documents for bin Laden after his flight into Pakistan.

He apparently sent out letters from his hiding place through a trusted courier, who then handed them to Libbi, who had provided the secret guesthouse in Kabul immediately after the Sept. 11 attacks.

After the capture of Mohammed in March 2003, Zawahiri fled from the house where he had been staying. The documents state that Zawahiri left on his own and sought out an Afghan, who delivered him to Libbi.

In May 2005, while waiting for bin Laden's courier at a drop point, Libbi was arrested by Pakistani special forces.

Zawahiri, in response, moved again. His residence, documents state, "was changed to a good place owned by a simple old man."

He remains at large.

WikiLeaks Releasing Documents On Guantanamo (LAT)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Los Angeles Times

By Richard A. Serrano

Most of those remaining at the Guantanamo Bay military prison are considered "high-risk" detainees who if released would pose grave threats to the U.S. and its allies, as did a third of those set free earlier, according to thousands of pages of classified documents being made public by WikiLeaks.

Release of the more than 700 separate documents dealing with the prison, opened under the George W. Bush administration to house detainees in the war on terrorism, drew a sharp rebuke Sunday evening from the White House, which said the documents were obtained illegally.

"We strongly condemn the leaking of this sensitive information," the White House said.

The materials were obtained and released by WikiLeaks as part of its ongoing publication of classified documents dealing with the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as secret State Department cables and other material.

Army Pfc. Bradley Manning, who is accused of leaking documents, is being held at Ft. Leavenworth, Kan., while he awaits trial. He faces nearly two dozen charges, including aiding the enemy.

The new posting, in which the documents were passed to various news organizations, is the first time WikiLeaks has released a trove of material on the prison operation at the U.S. naval base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

Organizations with copies of the documents included the New York Times, National Public Radio, the Washington Post and the Daily Telegraph in London. But the New York Times took pains to say that it had received the documents from some other source. Some documents were posted on media websites, where the Los Angeles Times viewed them.

Although much has been reported in the last decade about the Guantanamo detainees and how they have been handled, the new information includes threats from detainees that Al Qaeda would unleash a "nuclear hellstorm" on the West if its leader Osama bin Laden were captured or killed.

The documents also show that dozens of detainees turned out to be innocent, but were held for lengthy periods. Hundreds more apparently underwent aggressive interrogation techniques before it could be ascertained that they were low-level fighters of little consequence.

But one former detainee who was set free, identified as Abu Sufian Ibrahim Ahmed Hamuda bin Qumu, is apparently training with rebel forces in Libya and has close ties to Al Qaeda that Guantanamo officials did not realize when they released him.

Qumu allegedly has a history of training at two Al Qaeda camps, fighting the Soviets and the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan, and joining up with other Al Qaeda operatives in Sudan — all warning signs that the U.S. should have considered before releasing him, the documents say.

Another detainee, Tariq Mahmud Ahmad al Sawah, is a senior explosives expert who reportedly came up with the design for the failed shoe-bombing attempt in late 2001 on a plane headed to the U.S. Yet the documents suggest he was released after he cooperated with U.S. authorities.

At the same time, the documents state, at least two other men were known to be innocent and their prison files carried that notation. But they were not returned to their home countries for months.

There are 172 detainees remaining at Guantanamo, and the vast majority are considered of grave risk to the U.S. and its allies if released — or freed without sufficient rehabilitation. Of 600 others who have already been released over the years, about 200 were also at one time given the same high-risk designation and sent home anyway.

Many have rejoined the fight.

The documents also provide new details about some of the most high-profile detainees.

For instance, Khalid Shaikh Mohammed, the self-proclaimed mastermind of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks who has been ordered to stand trial in a military tribunal in Guantanamo, told his U.S. captors that in March 2002 he ordered a former Baltimore resident to kill Pakistan's then-President Pervez Musharraf.

Mohammed wanted him to wear a suicide bomb vest and approach Musharraf at a mosque. But the task turned out to be just a test to measure his "willingness to die for the cause."

Much of what Mohammed has said came after intense interrogation techniques, including repeated waterboarding.

The documents also include new details about Abd al Rahim al Nashiri, the alleged mastermind of the 2000 attack on the U.S. destroyer Cole off the coast of Yemen that killed 17 American sailors.

The documents state that Nashiri, who last week became the first detainee to be charged at Guantanamo by the Obama administration, met with Bin Laden in Afghanistan to discuss who would carry out the ship bombing. Nashiri also ordered the bombers to attack the first U.S. ship that stopped in the port of Aden, which turned out to be the Cole two weeks later.

But much of what Nashiri told his U.S. captors came after he was forced to undergo harsh interrogation techniques, including two instances of waterboarding.

There also is new information about Mohammed Qahtani, the so-called 20th hijacker, who reportedly tried to join the 19 others who commandeered the planes in the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks. The Saudi man was leashed like a dog, sexually humiliated and left to urinate on himself, the documents say.

Yet despite the harsh treatment, the files say, much of what Qahtani said appeared "to be true" and was "corroborated from other sources."

The White House statement condemning the documents' release said the Obama administration had transferred 67 detainees out of the prison, and the Bush White House transferred 537.

"Both administrations have made the protection of American citizens the top priority," the White House said, "and we are concerned that the disclosure of these documents could be damaging to those efforts."

The statement added that the Obama administration would "work toward the ultimate closure of the Guantanamo detention facility, consistent with good security practices and our values as a nation."

WikiLeaks: Secret Guantanamo Files Show U.S. Disarray (MCT)

Monday, April 25, 2011

McClatchy

By Carol Rosenberg And Tom Lasseter

WASHINGTON — Faced with the worst-ever single attack by foreigners on American soil, the U.S. military set up a human intelligence laboratory at Guantanamo that used interrogation and detention practices that they largely made up as they went along.

The world may have thought the U.S. was detaining a band of international terrorists whose questioning would help the hunt for Osama Bin Laden or foil the next 9/11.

But a collection of secret Bush-era intelligence documents not meant to surface for another 20 years shows that the military's efforts at Guantanamo often were much less effective than the government has acknowledged.

Viewed as a whole, the secret intelligence summaries help explain why in May 2009 President Barack Obama, after ordering his own review of wartime intelligence, called America's experiment at Guantanamo "quite simply a mess."

The documents, more than 750 individual assessments of former and current Guantanamo detainees, show an intelligence operation that was tremendously dependant on informants — both prison camp snitches repeating what they'd heard from fellow captives and self-described, at times self-aggrandizing, alleged al Qaida insiders turned government witnesses who Pentagon records show have since been released.

Intelligence analysts are at odds with each other over which informants to trust, at times drawing inferences from prisoners' exercise habits. They order DNA tests, tether Taliban suspects to polygraphs, string together tidbits in ways that seemed to defy common sense.

Guantanamo analysts at times questioned the reliability of some information gleaned from other detainees' interrogations.

Allegations and information from one Yemeni, no longer at Guantanamo, appears in at least 135 detainees' files, prompting Navy Rear Adm. Dave Thomas, the prison camps commander in August 2008, to include this warning:

"Any information provided should be adequately verified through other sources before being utilized."

The same report goes on to praise the captive as an "invaluable intelligence source" for information about al Qaida and Taliban training, operations, personnel and facilities," and warns that he'd be at risk of retaliation if he were released into Yemeni society. He was resettled in Europe by the Obama administration.

In fact, information from just eight men showed up in forms for at least 235 Guantanamo detainees — some 30 percent of those known to have been held there.

In many cases, the detainees made direct allegations of others' involvement in militant activities; in others, they gave contextual information used to help build the edges of a case.

While many other intelligence sources were referred to in those detainee assessment forms, including in some cases confessions by the detainees themselves, the inclusion of information from such a highly questionable group of men would seem to raise serious issues about a key piece of the "mosaic" process at Guantanamo and the decisions that followed.

The documents also show that in the earliest years of the prison camps operation, the Pentagon permitted Chinese and Russian interrogators into the camps — information from those sessions are included in some captives' assessments — something American defense lawyers working free-of-charge for the foreign prisoners have alleged and protested for years.

There's not a whiff in the documents that any of the work is leading the U.S. closer to capturing Bin Laden. In fact, the documents suggest a sort of mission creep beyond the post-9/11 goal of hunting down the al Qaida inner circle and sleeper cells.

The file of one captive, now living in Ireland, shows he was sent to Guantanamo so that U.S. military intelligence could gather information on the secret service of Uzbekistan. A man from Bahrain is shipped to Guantanamo in June 2002, in part, for interrogation on "personalities in the Bahraini court."

That same month, U.S. troops in Bagram airlifted to Guantanamo a 30-something sharecropper whom Pakistani security forces scooped up along the Afghan border as he returned home from his uncle's funeral.

The idea was that, once at Guantanamo, 8,000 miles from his home, he might be able to tell interrogators about covert travel routes through the Afghan-Pakistan mountain region. Seven months later, the Guantanamo intelligence analysts concluded that he wasn't a risk to anyone — and had no worthwhile information. Pentagon records show they shipped him home in March 2003, after more than two years in either American or Pakistani custody.

McClatchy Newspapers obtained the documents last month from WikiLeaks on an embargoed basis to give reporters from seven news organizations — including McClatchy, The Washington Post, the Spanish newspaper El País, and the German magazine Der Spiegel — time to catalogue, evaluate and report on them. WikiLeaks abruptly lifted the embargo Sunday night, after the organization became aware that the documents had been leaked to other news organizations, which were about to publish stories about them.

Marked "SECRET // NOFORN," the documents consist of more than 750 intelligence summaries, each consisting on average of between 2 to 12 pages, of the more than 500 detainees who've been transferred from the prison and for the 172 who still remain there. The summaries were written between 2002 and 2008. Many include photographs of the men, information about each man's physical and mental health as well as recommendations on whether to keep them in U.S. custody, hand them over to a foreign government for imprisonment, or set them free.

They make little mention of the abuse and torture scandals that surrounded intelligence gathering — both at secret CIA detention centers abroad and at the Guantanamo camps.

Of an Australian man who came to Guantanamo in May 2002, Army Brig. Gen. Jay Hood noted two years later that the captive confessed while "under extreme duress" and "in the custody of the Egyptian government" to training six of the 9/11 hijackers in martial arts. He had denied the ties by August 2004 and was repatriated five months later.

The documents make clear that intelligence agents elsewhere showed photos of Guantanamo prisoners to prized war-on-terror catches held at secret so-called CIA black-sites, out of reach of the International Red Cross. Notably the reports reflect that at times some captives faces were familiar to Abu Zubayda — whom the CIA waterboarded scores of times.

At times the efforts seem comedic. Guards plucked off ships at sea to walk the cellblocks note who has

hoarded food as contraband, who makes noise during the Star Spangled Banner, who sings creepy songs like "La, La, La, La Taliban" and who is re-enacting the 9/11 attacks with origami art.

But they also hint at frightening plots.

If you believe the intelligence profiles, the alleged Sept. 11 mastermind Khalid Sheik Mohammed schooled four men now at Guantanamo in the summer before 9/11 in English and American style-behavior for an ancillary 9/11 attack — on U.S. military sites in Asia.

The documents also show military intelligence offering what appears to be little more than prurient gossip about the detainees.

Saudi Abd al Rahim al Nashiri, 45, who made headlines just week as the first Obama administration candidate for a death penalty tribunal at Guantanamo, is cast in his risk assessment as a high-risk captive. The assessment makes no mention of that the CIA waterboarded him in a secret black-site interrogation before his transfer to military custody but includes his supposed strategy to not be distracted by women:

"Detainee is so dedicated to jihad that he reportedly received injections to promote impotence," an analyst writes, without explanation of the source.

Elsewhere in the files, U.S. military intelligence analysts discussing the dangerousness of two Iraqi men captured in Mazar-e-Sharif, Afghanistan, include this observation: One Iraqi boasted that he had an affair with the other Iraqi's wife, in the husband's house. Both have since been repatriated to Iraq.

And they show how they got it wrong right from the very start. On Day One, the camps commander declared the first airlift of 20 men "the worst of the worst," handpicked hardened terrorists plucked from the battlefield and shown shackled on their knees to their world in mute, blinded submission.

Not so, according to the military's own analysis, which has so far set free eight of the first 20 men — the first of that batch just nine months later as a nobody swept up in the war on terror.

They also show the arc of American understanding of the men who were first locked up at the crude prison camp called X-Ray. Early on in the enterprise, the U.S. military at Guantanamo profiled "The Dirty 30" — that number of men captured along the Afghan-Pakistan border near Parachinar — as Bin Laden bodyguards who had

traveled in a pack from Tora Bora to escape the American forces.

But by the time Bush left office, his interagency process had freed 10 of the men. Mostt were sent to Saudi Arabia, some after concluding they were probably not part of the al Qaeda founder's security detail.

Among those men is a convicted war criminal — Guantanamo's lone lifer, Ali Hamza al Bahlul of Yemen — convicted not as a "Dirty 30," but for serving as Bin Laden's media secretary and an al Qaida filmmaker who fed the terror group's propaganda machine.

Judging Detainees' Risk, Often With Flawed Evidence (NYT)

Monday, April 25, 2011; A1

New York Times

By Scott Shane And Benjamin Weiser

WASHINGTON — Said Mohammed Alam Shah, a 24-year-old Afghan who had lost a leg as a teenager, told interrogators at the prison at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, that he had been conscripted by the Taliban as a driver before being detained in 2001. He had been caught, he said, as he tried to "rescue his younger brother from the Taliban."

Military analysts believed him. Mr. Shah, who had been outfitted with a prosthetic leg by prison doctors, was "cooperative" and "has not expressed thoughts of violence or made threats toward the U.S. or its allies," according to a sympathetic 2003 assessment. Its conclusion: "Detainee does not pose a future threat to the U.S. or U.S. interests."

So in 2004 Mr. Shah was sent back to Afghanistan — where he promptly revealed himself to be Abdullah Mehsud, a Pakistan-born militant, and began plotting mayhem. He recorded jihadist videos, organized a Taliban force to fight American troops, planned an attack on Pakistan's interior minister that killed 31 people, oversaw the kidnapping of two Chinese engineers, and finally detonated a suicide bomb in 2007 as the Pakistani Army closed in. His martyrdom was hailed in an audio message by none other than Osama bin Laden.

The Guantánamo analysts' complete misreading of Abdullah Mehsud was included among hundreds of classified assessments of detainees at the prison in Cuba that were obtained by The New York Times. The unredacted assessments give the fullest public picture to date of the prisoners held at Guantánamo over the past nine years. They show that the United States has imprisoned hundreds of men for years without trial based on a difficult and

strikingly subjective evaluation of who they were, what they had done in the past and what they might do in the future. The 704 assessment documents use the word "possibly" 387 times, "unknown" 188 times and "deceptive" 85 times.

Viewed with judges' rulings on legal challenges by detainees, the documents reveal that the analysts sometimes ignored serious flaws in the evidence — for example, that the information came from other detainees whose mental illness made them unreliable. Some assessments quote witnesses who say they saw a detainee at a camp run by Al Qaeda but omit the witnesses' record of falsehood or misidentification. They include detainees' admissions without acknowledging other government documents that show the statements were later withdrawn, often attributed to abusive treatment or torture.

A Growing Wariness

Written between 2002 and 2009, the assessments reflect a growing wariness on the part of Guantánamo analysts. Early on, the reports are just a page or two and often sanguine in tone. By 2008, after scorching publicity about released detainees who joined Al Qaeda and the dwindling of the prison population to hard-core detainees, the assessments are decidedly more cautious.

For every case of an Abdullah Mehsud — someone wrongly judged a minimal threat — there are several instances in which prisoners rated "high risk" were released and have not engaged in wrongdoing. Murat Kurnaz, a German resident of Turkish ancestry, was judged in a 2006 assessment to be a member of Al Qaeda who fell into the most dangerous category: "high risk" and "likely to pose a threat to the U.S., its interests and allies."

Nonetheless, American authorities, under pressure from both Germany and Turkey, overruled the analysts and sent Mr. Kurnaz home to Germany three months later. He did not join the global jihad but instead became a prominent critic of Guantánamo, writing a book and making countless media appearances to denounce the American prison.

Among the most revealing of the leaked documents is a 17-page guide for analysts, evidently prepared by military intelligence trainers, on how to gauge the danger posed by a detainee. It lists major clusters of detainees, including the so-called Dirty 30, who were the bodyguards of Mr. bin Laden, as well as the large group of accused Qaeda operatives captured with Abu Zubaydah, an important terrorist facilitator, at two guesthouses in Faisalabad, Pakistan, in 2002. It

lists nine mosques associated with Al Qaeda, in Quebec, Milan, London, Yemen and Pakistan.

The guide shows how analysts seized upon the tiniest details as a potential litmus test for risk. If a prisoner had a Casio F91W watch, it might be an indication he had attended a Qaeda bomb-making course where such watches were handed out — though that model is sold around the world to this day. (Likewise, the assessment of a Yemeni prisoner suggests a dire use for his pocket calculator: "Calculators may be used for indirect fire calculations such as those required for artillery fire.")

A prisoner caught without travel documents? It might mean he had been trained to discard them to make identification harder, the guide explains. A detainee who claimed to be a simple farmer or a cook, or in the honey business or searching for a wife? Those were common Taliban and Qaeda cover stories, the analysts were told.

And a classic Catch-22: "Refusal to cooperate," the guide says, is a Qaeda resistance technique.

Yet the guide appears to be the product of years of experience at trying to turn bits of evidence of varying reliability into a conclusion. Notably, it cites as a cautionary tale the early misjudgment about Abdullah Mehsud, the Pakistani suicide bomber, who had claimed he was forced to join the Taliban. He was "an example," the guide says, "of a detainee who successfully applied the conscription cover story as a means to secure his release from U.S. custody."

Guantánamo emerges from the documents as a nest of informants, a closed world where detainees were the main source of allegations against one another and sudden recollections of having spotted a fellow prisoner at a Qaeda training camp could curry favor with interrogators. The assessments of many detainees amount to long lists of fellow prisoners' claims about them.

Among the prison's many informants, few outdid Yasim Basardah, a Yemeni whose statements are cited in the assessments of 30 detainees — even though at least three federal judges have questioned his credibility, citing his serious psychiatric problems. (In a curious twist, a judge ordered Mr. Basardah released last year, in part because she concluded that his ties to Al Qaeda had been effectively severed by his record of cooperation with American authorities. He was transferred to Spain.)

Or there is Abu Zubaydah, the Qaeda facilitator who was waterboarded while in the custody of the Central Intelligence Agency and whose

interrogations are cited in the risk assessments of more than 100 prisoners. His lawyers have noted that his accusations against others have been systematically removed from government filings in court cases, an indication that officials no longer are certain of his reliability.

A few assessments acknowledge the hazards of rewarding detainees for information. "Detainee admitted that he provided information in a deliberately misleading manner in order to receive incentives from his debriefers," said a report on Abdul Bukhary, a Saudi militant with a jihadist résumé stretching back to the Soviet-Afghan war. Mr. Bukhary told interrogators that "his memory was very bad," to which the analysts added a skeptical note: "Feigning memory problems is a common counter-interrogation technique."

Yet Mr. Bukhary's observations are cited in the assessments of a dozen other prisoners without any caveat about his admitted deceptions or his claim of a poor memory. And though in July 2007 Mr. Bukhary was rated "high risk" and "likely" to pose a threat to American interests, he was sent home to Saudi Arabia and its rehabilitation program for militants just two months later.

The Release Lottery

The documents, originally obtained by the anti-secrecy group WikiLeaks but provided to The Times by another source, portray Guantánamo as a lottery with the highest stakes for both the prisoners and their American captors. A critical factor was a detainee's country of origin. Most European inmates were sent home, despite grave qualms on the analysts' part. Saudis went home, even some of the most militant, to enter the rehabilitation program; some would graduate and then join Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. Yemenis have generally stayed put, even those cleared for release, because of the chaos in their country. Even in clearly mistaken arrests, release could be slow.

One Afghan, Mohammed Nasim, was sent to Guantánamo in May 2003 under the belief that he was a notorious Taliban military commander of the same last name. By March 2004, analysts had realized their error: "It is assessed that the detainee is a poor farmer and his arrest was due to mistaken identity." Yet, a review tribunal considered his case later that year as if he were the Taliban commander, and he was not sent home until April 2005 — two years after he arrived at the prison.

In some cases, the analysts showed a willingness to reconsider their judgments in light of new facts. An Afghan prisoner, Shawali Khan, was caught

with what appeared to be deeply incriminating documents: a Qaeda training manual on assassination, surveillance and counterfeiting that even contained a plan to kidnap the American president, as well as a notebook from a Qaeda camp on the maintenance and use of the AK-47 and other weapons.

The problem was that the documents were all in Arabic, and six years after his capture, Mr. Khan had finally convinced interrogators that he could not read Arabic. That conclusion, analysts wrote, "lends more credence to detainee's claim" that he had looted the material from possessions abandoned by Arab fighters who had fled Kandahar in southern Afghanistan.

A single footnote can call into question the entire case against a detainee: Abdul Haddi bin Hadiddi, a Tunisian who had spent time in Italy and was once arrested there for counterfeiting, was rated "high risk" and was believed to have received training from Al Qaeda. His assessment describes phone calls by the detainee, intercepted by Italian intelligence, with gunfire in the background.

But if the Italian dates are right, the reported calls were made after Mr. Hadiddi's arrest. A footnote tries to sort it out: "If this was the detainee," it says, then the reported dates of the calls must be wrong. "If this is not the detainee, it may indicate detainee's claimed name is not his" — an astonishing acknowledgment about a man imprisoned since August 2002.

Judges Weigh In

Such frustrating case studies seem to beg for an independent evaluation of the evidence, some way of shedding light on the quality of the Guantánamo analysts' work. As it happens, federal judges have heard nearly 60 cases brought by detainees challenging their imprisonment, and they have ruled in many of them that the government's evidence was too thin or contradictory to justify holding the prisoner.

The 2008 assessment of Alla Ali bin Ali Ahmed, for instance, a Yemeni who denied that he had fought in Afghanistan, concluded that he was a "committed member of Al Qaeda" who posed a "high risk" to the United States.

But a federal judge who saw all the classified evidence in the case found that all four witnesses who claimed to have seen him in Afghanistan were unreliable. (The judge, Gladys Kessler, ordered Mr. Ahmed released, and he went home to Yemen in 2009.)

One witness, Judge Kessler wrote, was said by American military doctors to be suffering from

"psychosis." The assessment of that witness, a Yemeni named Musab al-Madoonee, described him as "in overall good health" and made no mention of his mental illness.

But in another case this month, another judge offered far more support for the Guantánamo analysts. Writing about another Yemeni detainee, Yasin Ismail, Judge Laurence H. Silberman of the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit said he found the detainee's account "phonier than a \$4 bill" and rejected his challenge.

Judge Silberman showed sympathy for counterterrorism analysts who erred on the side of caution. In an ordinary criminal case, a judge may vote to overturn a conviction on evidentiary grounds even if he is virtually certain the defendant is guilty, Judge Silberman wrote. With a potential terrorist, he said, the stakes are different.

"When we are dealing with detainees," Judge Silberman said, "candor obliges me to admit that one can not help but be conscious of the infinitely greater downside risk to our country, and its people, of an order releasing a detainee who is likely to return to terrorism."

By the Pentagon's count, as of Oct. 1, 2010, of the 598 detainees transferred from Guantánamo, 81 were "confirmed" and 69 "suspected" of engaging in terrorist or insurgent activities after their release. Accepting the highest Defense Department total, even the 25 percent rate would be lower than most estimates of recidivism rates for federal and state ex-convicts.

An Elusive Subject

But those numbers may be one reason Guantánamo officials have been loath to take a chance in the befuddling case of Detainee 257, known as Omar Hamzayavich Abdulayev, a 32-year-old Tajik. He arrived at Guantánamo when he was just 23, a month after the prison opened. Interrogators have questioned Mr. Abdulayev for nine years, intelligence officers from both Russia and Tajikistan have visited to talk to him and countless other prisoners have been asked what they know about him.

The most serious allegations came from a Kuwaiti prisoner who claimed that Mr. Abdulayev told him he was trained by Al Qaeda in poisons and explosives and had met top Qaeda operatives. But the Kuwaiti's own assessment questioned his credibility, saying details of his account were "conflicting and vague."

Then there is the documentary evidence: Mr. Abdulayev was caught with notebooks containing notes on explosives and lists of mujahedeen fighters. And an undated Qaeda training roster found in Afghanistan listed "Abdallah al-Uzbeki" among the trainees. An analyst, grasping for data on his elusive subject, wrote that "Abdallah" might be a variant of Abdallahyiv, a Tajik version of Abdulayev, and that al-Uzbeki "is an alias which can also be adopted by Tajiks and Afghans due to similar facial features and shared cultural beliefs and customs."

Mr. Abdulayev appears to be an example of the most controversial category of Guantánamo detainees: the 47 whom the Obama administration has judged too dangerous for release but for whom it lacks the evidence necessary to hold a military tribunal.

Hence the haunting conclusion of his 2008 assessment: "Detainee's identity remains uncertain."

Scott Shane reported from Washington, and Benjamin Weiser from New York. Reporting was contributed by Charlie Savage from Washington, and William Glaberson, Andrew W. Lehren and Andrei Scheinkman from New York.

Libyan Shifts From Detainee To Rebel, And U.S. Ally Of Sorts (NYT)
Monday, April 25, 2011
New York Times

By Rod Nordland And Scott Shane

DARNAH, Libya — For more than five years, Abu Sufian Ibrahim Ahmed Hamuda bin Qumu was a prisoner at the Guantánamo Bay prison, judged "a probable member of Al Qaeda" by the analysts there. They concluded in a newly disclosed 2005 assessment that his release would represent a "medium to high risk, as he is likely to pose a threat to the U.S., its interests and allies."

Today, Mr. Qumu, 51, is a notable figure in the Libyan rebels' fight to oust Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi, reportedly a leader of a ragtag band of fighters known as the Darnah Brigade for his birthplace, this shabby port town of 100,000 people in northeast Libya. The former enemy and prisoner of the United States is now an ally of sorts, a remarkable turnaround resulting from shifting American policies rather than any obvious change in Mr. Qumu.

He was a tank driver in the Libyan Army in the 1980s, when the Central Intelligence Agency was spending billions to support religious militants trying to drive Soviet troops out of Afghanistan. Mr. Qumu moved to Afghanistan in the early

1990s, just as Osama bin Laden and other former mujahedeen were violently turning against their former benefactor, the United States.

He was captured in Pakistan after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, accused of being a member of the militant Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, and sent to Guantánamo — in part because of information provided by Colonel Qaddafi's government.

"The Libyan Government considers detainee a 'dangerous man with no qualms about committing terrorist acts,' " says the classified 2005 assessment, evidently quoting Libyan intelligence findings, which was obtained by The New York Times. " 'He was known as one of the extremist commanders of the Afghan Arabs,' " the Libyan Information continues, referring to Arab fighters who remained in Afghanistan after the anti-Soviet jihad.

When that Guantánamo assessment was written, the United States was working closely with Colonel Qaddafi's intelligence service against terrorism. Now, the United States is a leader of the international coalition trying to oust Colonel Qaddafi — and is backing with air power the rebels, including Mr. Qumu.

The classified Guantánamo assessment of Mr. Qumu claims that he suffered from "a non-specific personality disorder" and recounted — again citing the Libyan government as its source — a history of drug addiction and drug dealing and accusations of murder and armed assault.

In 1993, the document asserts, Mr. Qumu escaped from a Libyan prison, fled to Egypt and went on to Afghanistan, training at a camp run by Mr. bin Laden. At Guantánamo, Mr. Qumu denied knowledge of terrorist activities. He said he feared being returned to Libya, where he faced criminal charges, and asked to go to some other country where "You (the United States) can watch me," according to a hearing summary.

Nonetheless, in 2007, he was sent from Guantánamo to Libya and released the next year in an amnesty for militants.

Colonel Qaddafi has cited claims about Mr. Qumu's past in statements blaming Al Qaeda for the entire Libyan uprising. American officials have nervously noted the presence of at least a few former militants in the rebels' ranks.

The walls of buildings along the road into Darnah are decorated with the usual anti-Qaddafi and pro-Western slogans, in English and Arabic, found all over eastern Libya. But there are notable additions: "No Qaeda" and "No to Extremism."

Darnah has reason to be touchy. The town has a long history of Islamic militancy, including a revolt against Colonel Qaddafi's rule led by Islamists in the mid-1990s that resulted in a vicious crackdown. Activists from here are credited with starting the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, which later announced that it was affiliating with Al Qaeda, and which sent militants like Mr. Qumu to fight in Afghanistan.

Most famously, though, Darnah has a claim to being the world's most productive recruiting ground for suicide bombers. An analysis of 600 suicide bombers in Iraq by the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point found that of 440 who listed their hometowns in a recruiting roster, 52 were from Darnah, the most of any city, with Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, 40 times as populous, as the next biggest source, sending 51.

In addition to Mr. Qumu, local residents say the Darnah Brigade is led by Abdul-Hakim al-Hasadi, another Libyan thought to be a militant who was in Afghanistan during the Taliban's rule, when Al Qaeda had training camps there.

Mr. Qumu did not turn up for a promised interview last week, but Mr. Hasadi did, in crumpled fatigues with a light beard and a lazy left eye, perpetually half-closed. He denied that Mr. Qumu was in his group, recently renamed the Martyrs of Abu Salim Brigade, after a prison in Tripoli where 1,200 inmates were slaughtered in 1996. Two of Mr. Qumu's sons are in his brigade, he said.

"I don't know how to convince everyone that we are not Al Qaeda here," Mr. Hasadi said. "Our aim is to topple Qaddafi," he added. "I know that you will never believe me, but it is true."

For now, Western observers in Benghazi, the temporary rebel capital 180 miles from here, seem content to accept those assurances. "We're more worried about Al Qaeda infiltration from outside than the indigenous ones" one said. "Most of them have a local agenda so they don't present as much as a threat to the West."

Rod Nordland reported from Darnah, and Scott Shane from Washington. Kareem Fahim contributed reporting from Benghazi, Libya.

As Acts Of War Or Despair, Suicides Rattle A Prison (NYT)

Monday, April 25, 2011

New York Times

By Charlie Savage

WASHINGTON — By October 2004, two years into his detention at the Guantánamo Bay prison, Ali Abdullah Ahmed had established a corrosive

reputation among prison officials. Mr. Ahmed's classified file said he was a hunger striker, "completely uncooperative with interrogators," and "had a history of aggressive behavior in the camp, often defiantly failing to comply with instructions."

Twenty-one months later, the military announced that Mr. Ahmed, a Yemeni, and two other prisoners had simultaneously hanged themselves.

Their deaths in June 2006 — the first at Guantánamo — fueled a debate between military officials, who deemed the suicides "an act of asymmetric warfare waged against us" by jihadists seeking martyrdom, and prison critics, who interpreted them as an act of despair by men with little hope of a fair trial or release.

Since then, two other detainees have succeeded in killing themselves — one in 2007, and another in 2009. Against that backdrop, a collection of secret detainee assessment files obtained by The New York Times reveal that the threat of suicide has created a chronic tension at the prison — a tactic frequently discussed by the captives and a constant fear for their captors.

The files for about two dozen detainees refer to suicide attempts or threats. Others mention informants who pass on rumors about which prisoner had volunteered to kill himself next and efforts to organize suicide attempts. Two prisoners were overheard weighing whether it would create enough time for someone to end his life if fellow prisoners blocked their cell windows, distracting guards who would have to remove the obstructions.

While medical officials struggled to keep hunger strikers alive, other officials were on constant alert for signs of trouble. In May 2008, a detainee ordered fellow prisoners to "stop singing that song; we will sing it on Monday when our brothers leave." His file noted: "It was assessed he meant planning suicide attempts."

Even stray remarks about suicide could have consequences. When assessing detainees' risk level, analysts noted whether they were said to have expressed support for suicides — lowering their chances of release.

And both sides were focused on the public-relations implications: one prisoner told others in February 2006 that a detainee's death would "open the eyes of the world and result in the closure of the base."

In the early years at the prison, where many detainees experienced mental health problems, suicide attempts were typically described as a medical issue. A Saudi who incurred brain damage

after trying to hang himself had been "treated here for depression," his 2004 assessment noted. The file for another detainee with 12 "serious suicide attempts," including cutting his throat in December 2005, said he suffered from a "major depressive disorder."

Over time, though, officials appeared to take a more wary view, the documents suggest. In January 2005, a prisoner tried to hang himself after being placed in a cell next to another detainee he suspected of being an informant. An analyst noted that he "knows how the logistics work" and that "if he 'attempted suicide' that he would be moved from his cell and away from" the other detainee.

'But the death of Mr. Ahmed and two others in June 2006 was a turning point. It marked the climax of a period of intense mass protests and turmoil, including a failed attempt at a multiple suicide the previous month by several detainees who swallowed prescription drugs they and others had hoarded.

The three deaths have gained particular notoriety among prison critics, with some skeptics even saying that they may have been homicides. The three men's assessments do not address how they later died.

The records, part of a collection leaked last year to the anti-secrecy organization WikiLeaks, show that the men shared a history of hostile, defiant behavior toward their captors, but also that the evidence against them varied widely.

Mr. Ahmed was arrested during a raid on a guesthouse in Pakistan that officials believed had links to Al Qaeda. He said he was a religious student who had never been to Afghanistan. Analysts thought he was lying, his file shows, because several other detainees claimed they had seen him at training camps and with members of Al Qaeda.

The second detainee, a Saudi named Mani Shaman al-Utaybi, was arrested at a Pakistani checkpoint in a taxi with four other men, all hiding under burqas. He said he was a preacher for an Islamic missionary group, an organization officials believed had sometimes helped extremists.

Mr. Utaybi's file said had been carrying someone else's passport and made "inconsistent statements." One of the men arrested with him had been to a terrorist training camp — but two others had already been released. Analysts said he knew little, and recommended sending him to Saudi Arabia for continued detention.

By contrast, the file for the third detainee, a Saudi named Yasser Talal al-Zahrani, said he freely admitted that he went to Afghanistan to be a jihadist fighter. It also said he had laughingly shouted "9/11 you not forget" at a prison staff member and told a guard "he would use a knife to cut his stomach open, cut his face off, and then drink his blood, smiling and laughing as he said it."

Several later assessments of other detainees make references to the three suicides. One such file, for example, mentions in passing that a prisoner reported that another detainee had told him "he had been approached and recruited by the three detainees who had committed suicide."

And Mr. Ahmed's brother, Muhammaed Yasir Ahmed Taher, who was also a detainee until his repatriation in 2009, wrote to a family member depicting Mr. Ahmed "as a martyr," according to an assessment. An analyst concluded that both brothers "viewed the suicide as a continuance of their jihad against the US."

WikiLeaks And The Espionage Act (WSJ)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Wall Street Journal

By L. Gordon Crovitz

Full-text stories from the Wall Street Journal are available to Journal subscribers by clicking the link.

State Department Shifts Digital Resources To Social Media (HILL)

Monday, April 25, 2011

The Hill

By Alicia M. Cohn

With little fanfare, the State Department has abandoned America.gov – an ambitious digital project launched three years ago to promote Democracy abroad – and shifted its resources to social media projects.

A message on the front page of America.gov informs visitors that as of March 31 is not being updated and will be archived. A notice directs visitors seeking information on U.S. foreign policy to the range of U.S. embassy and consulate websites or State.gov.

The manpower once devoted to the site, provided through the State Department's Bureau of International Information Programs (IIP), is being redirected towards the department's "social media assets," which use Twitter, Facebook and YouTube. IIP Deputy Assistant Secretary Duncan MacInnes called it shift to a "more proactive" web engagement strategy.

Although MacInnes said the department's official site of record, State.gov would still serve as a resource, a "static website" like America.gov is no longer the best way to promote understanding of policy.

"The new paradigm, particularly for reaching youth, is you have to go to where people already are on the web. People don't visit you, you have to go to them," said MacInnes. "The material we produced for the America.gov centralized site is now pushed out to the embassy sites."

The role of social media in recent revolts in Egypt "validated" the shift in strategy following a major review that took place from September to January of this year, according to MacInnes. "It was a moment of revelation for many people," he said. "The government is not particularly entrepreneurial as an organization generally, but we need to be because things change every year, every six months. We will continually look for new ways to get things out."

The State Department – through embassies, consulates and U.S. missions – sponsors about 400 sites overseas, and IIP hosts training webinars on social media "best practices."

"We're teaching people to write shorter," MacInnes said. "Chunky; chunk the information down."

The America.gov site, launched by the State Department on January 15, 2008, was designed to foster "two-way conversation between America and people in other countries," according to then-Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.

The site provided original content translated into at least three languages besides English. It was meant to be a resource for cultural and policy information serving America's interests abroad. At its launch in early 2008, it was an "exciting" foray into the latest multimedia tools for engaging an online audience.

Social media tools – like Twitter (launched in 2006) and Facebook (2004) – have expanded dramatically in use overseas since the launch of America.gov. These tools are particularly popular with the younger generation. According to the IIP Bureau, 80 percent of the nearly 155,000 Facebook users following their popular Democracy Is page – a companion to the department's annual Democracy Video Challenge – are under the age of 24.

"Half the world is now under the age of 30," said MacInnes. "We've also discovered ... that the web has gone from 75 percent English three or four years ago to 70 percent foreign languages now."

The bureau is "ramping up" their translation efforts, MacInnes said.

"We'll produce an article, we'll reduce that to a 200 word piece that can be used for a Facebook page, and three or four tweets that can be used on a Twitter feed and instant messaging," he said.

This "package" of social media material could include photo albums, polls, and discussion points to stimulate discussion. Social media and mobile content sent out to embassies overseas is now translated into six major languages including Arabic, French, Spanish, Russian and Chinese.

LEADING INTERNATIONAL AND GLOBAL ISSUES

McCain Raises Specter Of Libyan Stalemate (NYT)

Monday, April 25, 2011

New York Times

By Dan Bilefsky

Senator John McCain warned on Sunday that he feared the conflict in Libya was heading toward a "stalemate" and threatened to create a vacuum that could result in Al Qaeda gaining control of the North African country.

Speaking from Cairo, Mr. McCain, a strong advocate of intervention in Libya, said that Al Qaeda could take advantage of an encroaching stalemate as a tenacious Colonel Muammar el-Qaddafi continued to cling to power.

"I really fear a stalemate," said Mr. McCain, Republican of Arizona, speaking on CNN television's "State of the Union" program after visiting the rebel strongholds in Libya. He said the rebel fighters were "badly outgunned in armor, in equipment, in training" against forces loyal to Col. Qaddafi.

Mr. Qaddafi's forces bombarded Misurata on Sunday, a day after rebels celebrated a retreat of government forces from the western Libyan city, Reuters reported, citing a telephone interview with the rebel spokesman Abdelsalam from Misurata. "Qaddafi's brigades started random bombardment in the early hours of this morning. The bombardment is still going on," he said.

Mr. McCain said he feared it was "very possible" that Al Qaeda could come in and take advantage a potential stalemate, but he insisted he did not agree with calls for the United States to bomb Tripoli or put troops on the ground. "We have tried those things in the past with other dictators, and it's a little harder than you think it is," he said.

Senator Lindsey Graham, Republican of South Carolina, also called for robust air support for the rebels and told CNN that NATO forces should bomb Col. Qaddafi's inner circle. "I think the focus should now be to cut the head of the snake off," he said.

Mr. McCain told CNN that he supported the first missile attack from a drone aircraft in Libya as fighting in the rebel-held city of Misurata became increasingly bloody. "I'm glad the Predator is now in the fight," McCain said. "We need the American air assets back in a heavier way."

The unmanned plane was used for the first time in the conflict in Libya on Saturday to attack a site near Misurata. But the Obama administration is deeply resistant to expanding American military involvement. The administration last week authorized the use of armed drones in Libya and a \$25 million contribution of nonlethal military surplus for the rebel forces.

Mr. McCain's warning of a stalemate in Libya echoed comments on Friday by the top American military officer. Adm. Mike Mullen, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said that a month of airstrikes had destroyed 30 percent to 40 percent of the capabilities of the military forces loyal to Col. Qaddafi, but had not yet drastically tilted the conflict with opposition militias one way or another. He cited shifts in tactics by Libyan forces that made it difficult for NATO warplanes to distinguish them from the rebel fighters and civilians.

Britain and France have been leading air strikes against Col. Qaddafi's forces in a NATO-supported operation mandated by the United Nations Security Council in the name of protecting civilians from atrocities.

Mr. McCain said on NBC's "Meet the Press" program that the United States should increase its role in North Atlantic Treaty Organization air attacks against Libya, saying that only six NATO nations were engaged in the conflict. He also reiterated his call for the United States to recognize the rebels' governing council as the country's legitimate government, as France, Italy and Qatar have done. He has previously called for the United States to provide the rebels with money and arms on a scale similar to what the United States did in support of those who fought the Soviet Union's occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s.

He also insisted that destroying Col. Qaddafi's television broadcast capabilities could prove instrumental in depriving him of the propaganda

machine he was using to try and frighten the Libyan people in submission.

Libya Stalemate Would Draw In Al-Qaeda: McCain (AFP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

AFP

By Ken Maguire

WASHINGTON (AFP) - Senator John McCain urged the United States on Sunday to step up its involvement in NATO air strikes on Libya, warning that a stalemate would likely draw Al-Qaeda into the conflict.

Speaking from Cairo fresh from a visit to the Libyan stronghold of Benghazi, McCain welcomed President Barack Obama's authorization of Predator drones but urged him to recommit crucial American fighter planes as well.

"The longer we delay, the more likely it is there's a stalemate," he told NBC's "Meet the Press". "And if you're worried about Al-Qaeda entering into this fight, nothing would bring Al-Qaeda in more rapidly and more dangerously than a stalemate."

At the start of the popular uprising threatening his four-decade rule, Libyan leader Moamer Kadhafi accused the rebels of being stooges of Al-Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden.

This theory was discredited by the West, but top NATO commander and US Admiral James Stavridis did say last month he had seen "flickers in the intelligence of potential Al-Qaeda" and Hezbollah, Lebanon's Shiite Muslim militia, amongst the rebels.

The raising of the specter of Al-Qaeda by McCain comes as Obama faces increasing pressure to do something to prevent the conflict in Libya from drifting into an aimless stalemate.

There has been little further sign of the regime crumbling since the defection almost four weeks ago of then Libyan foreign minister Mussa Kussa, one of Kadhafi's closest confidants.

McCain opposes putting American troops on the ground but said he doubts the rebels can succeed in toppling Kadhafi unless the United States redeploys its ground-attack aircraft that have unique close-air support capabilities.

"By taking US leadership out of it and US air assets out of it, we've really reduced our ability to prevail on the battlefield. We need the AC-130s and A-10s back in. We need the American air assets back in, in a heavier way," the senator told CNN's "State of the Union."

Senator Lindsey Graham -- who like McCain is a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee -- told CNN's Sunday program that his advice to NATO and the White House is "to cut the head of the snake off, go to Tripoli, start bombing Kadhafi's inner circle."

But McCain warned that such a strategy is "a little harder than you think it is" and carries the risk of civilian casualties in Tripoli. Instead, he called for arming and training the rebels.

In his interview with NBC, McCain went as far as to question whether NATO, aided by a clutch of Arab Gulf allies, had either the capacity or the political will to see the mission through.

"It's pretty obvious to me that the US has got to play a greater role on the air power side," he said. "Our NATO allies neither have the assets, nor frankly the will -- there's only six countries of the 28 in NATO that are actively engaged in this situation."

Washington coordinated operations in the first days of the allied intervention after the UN Security Council approved "all necessary means" to prevent Kadhafi from launching an all-out assault on Benghazi.

It transferred command to the NATO alliance earlier this month, leaving the Pentagon primarily providing refueling and surveillance aircraft.

Obama on Thursday authorized the use of unmanned Predator drone aircraft -- which can pinpoint and strike specific targets from lower altitudes -- and the US carried out its first drone strikes in Libya on Saturday.

The US president promised his war-weary nation, when he joined the military action that American involvement would be limited and suggested sanctions and diplomatic pressure might eventually force the regime to crack.

He told Americans in a nationally televised March 28 address that a "massacre" had been averted and bluntly warned that although Kadhafi must go, making regime change the military mission risked splintering the coalition and leading to another Iraq.

On Friday during his visit to Benghazi, McCain urged the international community to arm and recognize the rebel Transitional National Council (TNC) as the "legitimate voice" of the Libyan people.

France, Gambia, Italy and Qatar are the only countries so far to have recognized the TNC, Libya's parallel government in the east.

McCain, the losing Republican presidential candidate in 2008, also called for strikes on the Libyan regime's television network.

"It would be very helpful if we took out Gadhafi's television," he said. "When the Libyan people see Gadhafi on television, it scares them."

Graham: Bomb Gadhafi's Inner Circle, End Stalemate (AP)
Monday, April 25, 2011
Associated Press

WASHINGTON - Fearing a stalemate in Libya, three members of the Senate Armed Services Committee want immediate military aid for the rebels fighting Moammar Gadhafi's forces, stepped up NATO airstrikes and more direct U.S. involvement.

They said they interpreted the U.N. Security Council resolution — authorizing military action to protect Libyan civilians and imposing a no-fly zone — as also allowing moves necessary to drive Gadhafi from power.

"I think it gives justification if NATO decides it wants to, for going directly after Gadhafi," said Sen. Joe Lieberman, an independent from Connecticut. "I can't think of anything that would protect the civilian population of Libya more than the removal of Moammar Gadhafi."

A protracted stalemate and a divided Libya, with Gadhafi and the opposition controlling different parts, could open the door to the al-Qaida terrorist network, said Arizona Sen. John McCain, who visited a rebel stronghold this past week. He described the opposition in Benghazi as "this very legitimate government."

Even with more arms for the rebels, said Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., there isn't enough momentum for them to reach Tripoli, the capital, and there isn't "deep support" for Gadhafi's continued rule.

"So my recommendation to NATO and the administration is to cut the head of the snake off, go to Tripoli, start bombing Gadhafi's inner circle, their compounds, their military headquarters," he said.

"The way to get Gadhafi to leave is have his inner circle break and turn on him. And that's going to take a sustained effort through an air campaign," Graham said.

While saying it's good to have international coalitions and U.N. involvement, "the goal is to get rid of Gadhafi," he argued.

"The people around Gadhafi need to wake up every day wondering, 'Will this be my last?' The military commanders in Tripoli supporting Gadhafi should be pounded," Graham said. "So I would not let the U.N. mandate stop what is the right thing to do. You cannot protect the Libyan people if Gadhafi stays. You cannot protect our vital national security interests if Gadhafi stays."

He urged actions that are in the best interests of the U.S., the Libyan people and the world, without being hamstrung by U.N. politics.

"You can't let the Russians and the Chinese veto the freedom agenda. So any time you go to the United Nations Security Council, you run into the Russians and the Chinese. These are quasi-dictatorships, so I wouldn't be locked down by the U.N. mandate," Graham said.

McCain was not as enthusiastic about targeting Gadhafi, saying "we have tried those things in the past with other dictators, and it's a little harder than you think it is." Gadhafi is elusive and "a great survivor, and there's the potential for civilian casualties, which could turn the Libyan people against the U.S., he said.

"The point is that we can't count on taking Gadhafi out. What we can count on is a trained, equipped, well-supported liberation forces which can either force Gadhafi out or obtain victory and send him to an international criminal court," said McCain, the top Republican on the Senate committee.

"My emphasis is on winning the battle on the ground, not taking a chance on taking him out with a lucky air strike."

Lieberman and McCain want increased use of U.S. precision weapons and American air power returned to the mission.

"We need our allies. I appreciate that they've come in. But we're the heart of NATO and it's not exactly as if we took the ball and gave it to NATO," Lieberman said. "We're still NATO, and I think some of our assets that we removed ... ought to go back into the fight."

He said that "every time we pull back, it says to Gadhafi that he can tough this out. And I want him to feel that we're just going to squeeze and squeeze until he decides it is time to go because that's the only end that will be meaningful here."

Lieberman and McCain appeared on CNN's "State of the Union" broadcast on Sunday; Graham's remarks, aired on the same show, were taped on Friday.

Kuwait Gives \$180 Million To Libyan Rebels (AFP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

AFP

KUWAIT CITY, Kuwait (AFP) - Kuwait on Sunday gave 50 million dinars (\$180 million) to the Libyan opposition Transitional National Council (TNC), its chief Mustafa Abdel Jalil said.

"This amount will help us pay part of the salaries of employees," Jalil told reporters after talks with Emir Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Sabah. "We are in need of urgent assistance."

Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammad Sabah al-Salem al-Sabah said "Kuwait will provide large and urgent humanitarian aid through the national council."

Sheikh Mohammad said Kuwait and the TNC "will work closely so that it becomes the legitimate channel of the Libyan people," but stopped short of officially recognising the council.

"Recognition is a secondary issue," Abdel Hafiz Ghoqa, spokesman for the TNC in Benghazi told reporters, adding that the quality of cooperation with Kuwait showed the friendly nation's "approval" for east Libya's nascent government.

France, Gambia, Italy and Qatar are the only countries so far to have recognised the TNC, Libya's parallel government.

The Kuwaiti foreign minister also said the emir informed Jalil that Kuwait fully complies with UN Security Council resolution 1973 which called for using all means necessary to protect Libyan civilians.

Jalil, on his first visit to Kuwait, said the TNC welcomes any initiative that would lead to Libyan leader Moamer Kadhafi and his sons leaving the country, "but there is no initiative on the ground right now."

He also repeated allegations that Kadhafi used Algerian planes to fly African mercenaries to fight with his forces.

"We have evidence that there are mercenaries from Mauritania and Serbia, military experts from Russia and women from Columbia," Jalil said.

Libyan rebels have not received any weapons or military training from Arab neighbours Egypt or Tunisia, said Jalil, adding that the TNC understood their situation.

Libyan Rebel Group Says It Will Receive \$181 Million From Kuwait (BLOOM)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Bloomberg News

By Dahlia Kholaif

Kuwait has contributed 50 million Kuwaiti dinars (\$181 million) to the Libyan rebels' Transitional National Council, the group's chief, Mustafa Abdel Jalil, told a news conference in Kuwait today.

Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed Al-Sabah, appearing at the same news conference, did not immediately confirm Abdel Jalil's statement. The foreign minister said "actions speak louder than words" when asked if Kuwait had officially recognized the transition council.

Abdel Jalil said the money from Kuwait will be used to pay employee salaries. "We are in urgent need of aid," he said.

Strike On Gadhafi Compound Badly Damages Buildings (AP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Associated Press

By Karin Laub And Diaa Hadid

TRIPOLI, Libya - NATO airstrikes targeted the center of Moammar Gadhafi's seat of power early Monday, destroying a multi-story library and office and badly damaging a reception hall for visiting dignitaries.

Gadhafi's whereabouts at the time of the attack on his sprawling Bab al-Azizya compound were unclear. A security official at the scene said four people were lightly hurt.

Monday's strike came after Gadhafi's forces unleashed a barrage of shells and rockets at the besieged rebel city of Misrata, in an especially bloody weekend that left at least 32 dead and dozens wounded.

The battle for Misrata, which has claimed hundreds of lives in the past two months, has become the focal point of Libya's armed rebellion against Gadhafi since fighting elsewhere is deadlocked.

Video of Misrata civilians being killed and wounded by Gadhafi's heavy weapons, including Grad rockets and tank shells, have spurred calls for more forceful international intervention to stop the bloodshed in the rebel-held city.

In Washington on Sunday, three members of the Senate Armed Services Committee said that more should be done to drive Gadhafi out of power, including targeting his inner circle with air strikes. Gadhafi "needs to wake up every day wondering, 'Will this be my last?'" Sen. Lindsey Graham, a Republican on the committee, told CNN's "State of the Union."

Early in the campaign of airstrikes against Gadhafi, a cruise missile blasted an administration building in Bab al-Azizya last month, knocking down half

the three-story building. The compound was also targeted in a U.S. bombing in April 1986, after Washington held Libya responsible for a blast at a Berlin disco that killed two U.S. servicemen.

At least two missiles struck Bab al-Azizya early Monday, and the booms could be heard miles (kilometers) away.

A multi-story building that guards said served as Gadhafi's library and office was turned into a pile of twisted metal and broken concrete slabs. Dozens of Gadhafi supporters climbed atop the ruins, raising Libya's green flag and chanting in support of their leader.

A second building, where Gadhafi received visiting dignitaries, suffered blast damage. The main door was blown open, glass shards were scattered across the ground and picture frames were knocked down.

NATO's mandate from the U.N. is to try to protect civilians in Libya, split into a rebel-run east and a western area that remains largely under Gadhafi's control. While the coalition's airstrikes have delivered heavy blows to Gadhafi's army, they have not halted attacks on Misrata, a city of 300,000 people besieged by Gadhafi loyalists for two months.

Still, in recent days, the rebels' drive to push Gadhafi's men out of the city center gained momentum.

Late last week, they forced government snipers out of high-rise buildings. On Sunday, rebels took control of the main hospital, the last position of Libyan troops in the center of Misrata, said a city resident, who only gave his first name, Abdel Salam, for fear of reprisals. Throughout the day, government forces fired more than 70 rockets at the city, he said.

"Now Gadhafi's troops are on the outskirts of Misrata, using rocket launchers," Abdel Salam said.

A Misrata rebel, 37-year-old Lutfi, said there had been 300-400 Gadhafi fighters in the main hospital and in the surrounding area that were trying to melt into the local population.

"They are trying to run way," Lutfi said of the soldiers, speaking on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisals. "They are pretending to be civilians. They are putting on sportswear."

Ali Misbah, a captured Libyan soldier who had been wounded in the leg, was held under guard in a tent in the parking lot of the Al Hikmeh Hospital, one of the city's smaller medical centers.

Misbah, 25, said morale was low among Gadhafi's troops. "Recently, our spirit has collapsed and the forces that were in front of us escaped and left us alone," he said.

Misbah said he and his fellow soldiers were told that they were fighting against al-Qaida militants, not ordinary Libyans who took up arms against Gadhafi.

"They misled us," Misbah said of the government.

A senior Libyan government official has said the military is withdrawing from the fighting in Misrata, ostensibly to give a chance to tribal chiefs in the area to negotiate with the rebels. The official, Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Kaim, said the tribal chiefs were ready to send armed supporters to fight the rebels unless they lay down their weapons.

Kaim also claimed that the army has been holding its fire since Friday.

Asked about the continued shelling on Misrata, Libyan government spokesman Moussa Ibrahim said the army was responding to attacks by rebels. He insisted that most of Misrata was still under government control.

Rebels on Sunday dismissed government claims that tribes in the area were siding with Gadhafi and that troops were redeploying voluntarily.

"It's not a withdrawal. It's a defeat that they want to turn into propaganda," said Dr. Abdel-Basit Abu Mzirig, head of the Misrata medical committee. "They were besieging the city and then they had to leave."

In addition to the casualties, thousands of people, many of them foreign workers, have been stranded in Misrata. Hundreds of migrants, along with wounded Libyans, have been evacuated in aid vessels through the port in recent days.

One of those wounded, Misrata resident Osama al-Shahmi, said Gadhafi's forces have been attacking the city with rockets. "They have no mercy. They are pounding the city hard," said al-Shahmi after being rescued from Misrata.

"Everyone in Misrata is convinced that the dictator must go," said al-Shahmi, 36, a construction company administrator who was wounded by shrapnel. His right leg wrapped in bandages, al-Shahmi flashed a victory sign as he was put into a waiting ambulance upon arrival in Benghazi.

In Rome, Pope Benedict XVI offered an Easter prayer for Libya. He told a crowd of more than 100,000 Easter pilgrims in St. Peter's Square that he hopes "diplomacy and dialogue replace arms"

in Libya and that humanitarian aid will get through to those in need.

Kadhafi's Office Destroyed In Air Strike (AFP)
Monday, April 25, 2011

AFP

TRIPOLI (AFP) - Libyan leader Moamer Kadhafi's office in his immense Tripoli residence was destroyed in an air strike early Monday, an AFP journalist said.

A Libyan official accompanying journalists at the scene said 45 people were wounded, 15 seriously, in the bombing. He added that he did not know whether there were victims under the rubble.

"It was an attempt to assassinate Colonel Kadhafi," he affirmed.

A meeting room facing Kadhafi's office was badly damaged by the blast.

NATO warplanes had already late Friday targeted the Bab Al-Aziziya district, where the presidential compound is located.

Libyan Rebels Say They Have Control Of Misurata (NYT)

Monday, April 25, 2011

New York Times

By Rod Nordland

BENGHAZI, Libya — Rebel leaders said they had consolidated their control of the western city of Misurata on Sunday, taking over the last two government outposts there even as government forces continued to shell the city from its outskirts.

Government spokesmen asserted that Libyan forces had withdrawn from the city voluntarily on Saturday to allow for a 48-hour cease-fire, during which tribal leaders could negotiate the rebels' surrender.

There was no sign of a cease-fire, however, or negotiations.

The shelling diminished Sunday, but it still killed eight people and wounded 38, according to a rebel spokesman in Misurata, reached by Internet telephone and identified only as Mohammed for his security. On Saturday, as government forces withdrew, he said, 36 people were killed and more than 100 were wounded.

Mohammed said that among those killed Saturday night was his father, Ali. He said his father died along with a cousin who was trying to rescue him when their neighborhood came under heavy shelling.

"The shelling was unprecedented yesterday, both in the intensity and the size of the shells," he said Sunday, describing the bombardment as using heavy artillery, Grad missiles and Katyusha rockets.

Mohammed said he continued to work as a spokesman after burying his father on Sunday. "It is very tough, but we are in a war and it's my duty, it's my way of taking revenge for my father," he said.

Rebel leaders disputed claims that forces loyal to Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi had withdrawn voluntarily, insisting that they had been defeated in battle.

In Tripoli, the capital, two bombs were seen falling in the vicinity of Colonel Qaddafi's compound shortly after midnight and the blasts were heard a mile away, part of what Libyan officials complain is an intensifying NATO campaign in recent days.

A normally stoic Foreign Ministry official watching the coverage of the blasts in the lobby of the Rixos Al Nasr Tripoli Hotel exclaimed that the bombing had gone too far, and in evident exasperation warned that Libya would be justified in launching terrorist attacks against the cities of NATO members.

Misurata, which has been besieged by government forces for the past two months, is the third largest city in Libya and the only major rebel stronghold in the west. Mohammed said the rebels had captured 180 government soldiers in the past week of fighting and were treating them as prisoners of war.

"They even left their wounded behind," said Jalil el-Gallal, spokesman for the rebels' de facto governing body, the Transitional National Council. "They were fleeing, not withdrawing."

Mr. Gallal and Mohammed said rebel forces had taken complete control of the city, and accounts from journalists there generally confirmed that account. "There are none and absolutely none of them in the city now," Mohammed said of Colonel Qaddafi's troops.

A reporter for the British newspaper The Guardian reported seeing six destroyed tanks in the vegetable market, the scene of particularly heavy fighting last week. The market was where the first American Predator strike in Libya took place on Saturday.

The Guardian also confirmed that the last two buildings held by Qaddafi forces in the city on Saturday had been cleared, and that green Libyan

military uniforms had been found that were discarded by retreating troops.

A ship chartered by the International Organization for Migration arrived in Benghazi on Sunday from Misurata, carrying 995 more stranded migrant workers, most of them from Niger, as well as 17 wounded civilians.

The organization said it planned to make at least two more trips into Misurata to rescue 1,500 more migrants, many of whom have been camped near the port in hopes of fleeing. The group said that it expected that other migrants who had been hiding in parts of the city previously controlled by Colonel Qaddafi's forces might swell that number, now that they could move safely.

In all, the migration group has gotten 4,100 migrant workers from 21 nations out of Misurata.

In Benghazi, the rebel capital, opposition leaders were upbeat about their financial situation. While they have not yet gained access to \$30 billion in Libyan money in frozen accounts abroad, as some countries have suggested they should, they have found donors to tide them over.

On Sunday, officials announced that Kuwait had donated about \$180 million to the governing council. And Wahid Bugaighis, the interim government's oil minister, said that while the rebels had not been able to pump any oil from fields in eastern Libya, Qatar had stepped in with an open-ended commitment to finance their fuel and energy needs "with whatever we need during this transition period, with no fees attached."

U.S. Drones Hit Targets In Libya (WSJ)

Monday, April 25, 2011; A9

Wall Street Journal

By Julian Barnes And Charles Levinson

Full-text stories from the Wall Street Journal are available to Journal subscribers by clicking the link.

Misrata Struck By Rockets In Fresh Fighting After U.S. Drone Fires Missile (BLOOM)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Bloomberg News

By Todd Shields And Glen Carey

The U.S. carried out its first missile attack from a drone aircraft in Libya as fighting continued in the rebel-held city of Misrata.

The Predator drone fired its missile yesterday, the U.S. Defense Department said in an e-mailed statement, without elaborating. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization said a Predator strike

destroyed a multiple-rocket launcher that had been used against civilians in Misrata.

Rebels in Libya have been fighting to end Muammar Qaddafi's 42-year rule since mid-February. NATO war planes operating over the capital Tripoli struck near Qaddafi's Bab al-Azizia compound, AP reported yesterday. Bursts of automatic weapons fire and rocket explosions could be heard in the city of Misrata, the BBC reported today, citing its correspondents.

Yemen's President Ali Abdullah Saleh agreed yesterday to accept a plan that allows him to cede power in exchange for immunity, a government official said. He would be the third leader forced from office since popular unrest spread through the Middle East, ousting the presidents of Egypt and Tunisia.

U.K. Foreign Secretary William Hague said he doesn't anticipate a partition of Libya to create an area for current Qaddafi's supporters and another for those opposed to him. "I don't think a partition" is likely "because this is not an east-west split," Hague told the BBC's Andrew Marr Show in London today.

Fighting has lasted more than six weeks in Misrata where 25 people died and 100 were hurt yesterday in shelling by troops loyal to Qaddafi, unidentified medical personnel told Al Jazeera television.

Libyan tribal leaders are trying to get rebels in Misrata to lay down their arms within 48 hours, AP reported, citing Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Kaim. If negotiations fail, tribal chiefs may send armed supporters into the city of 300,000 to fight the rebels, AP reported Kaim as saying.

Rebel control of Misrata would leave Qaddafi in charge of one major city, Tripoli, W. Andrew Terrill, a research professor of national security affairs at the Strategic Studies Institute of the U.S. Army War College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, said in an interview.

"If the rebels have Benghazi and Misrata, they're looking like a viable force and a legitimate government" and it could make a stronger case for other nations to join France, Italy and Qatar in recognizing them, Terrill said.

NATO is leading what it calls a United Nations-sanctioned mission to police a no-fly zone, protect civilians and enforce an arms embargo against Qaddafi's regime.

France, Italy and the U.K. have sent military advisers to the rebels. The U.S. has said it would provide \$25 million in non-lethal aid, such as radios and body armor.

President Barack Obama approved the use of Predator drones, U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates said April 21. The drones are made by closely held General Atomics of San Diego and armed with air-to-ground Hellfire missiles made by Lockheed Martin Corp. (LMT)

The price of oil has advanced 23 percent in New York this year as unrest spread in the Middle East and North Africa.

Libya's production of crude oil fell to 390,000 barrels a day in March from an average of 1.6 million barrels a day last year, according to a Bloomberg News survey. The country has Africa's biggest proved oil reserves.

U.S. Senator John McCain visited Benghazi, the center of the Libyan uprising, on April 22. McCain, the 2008 Republican presidential nominee and the ranking member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, urged the U.S. to recognize the rebel Transitional National Council as the country's government and provide financial assistance and more military aid to the insurgents.

The Obama administration called on all parties in Yemen to implement a plan brokered by the Gulf Cooperation Council that allows President Saleh to cede power in return for immunity. Saleh accepted the proposal yesterday, Tarik al-Shami, spokesman at the ruling General People's Congress, said.

The council's plan could "resolve the political crisis in a peaceful and orderly manner," the administration said yesterday in an e-mailed statement from the White House.

Saleh, 68, a U.S. ally in the fight against al-Qaeda, became leader of North Yemen in 1978 and has ruled the Republic of Yemen since the north and south merged in 1990.

Gaddafi Shells Misurata Again; NATO Hits Complex In Tripoli (WP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Washington Post

By Simon Denyer And Leila Fadel

TRIPOLI, Libya — NATO sent at least two large bombs into the sprawling office, residential and military complex where Libyan leader Moammar Gaddafi lives in the heart of Tripoli early Monday, badly damaging at least two buildings but apparently causing no significant injuries.

At the same time, troops loyal to Gaddafi continued their heavy bombardment of the besieged city of Misurata from its southern outskirts on Sunday, after the last of those forces

were routed from the city itself, residents and rebels said.

The indiscriminate shelling of the strategic port city over the weekend, some of the heaviest since the siege began in late February, killed at least 58 people, rebels said, belying the Libyan government's claim that its army was standing aside to let local tribes settle the issue of Misurata.

In Washington, three members of the Senate Armed Services Committee called for immediate military aid for the rebels, stepped up NATO airstrikes and more direct U.S. involvement, with Sen. Lindsey O. Graham (R-S.C.) saying the alliance should go after Gaddafi himself.

NATO almost seemed to be listening, sending at least two guided bombs just after midnight into the Bab al-Aziziyah complex — part residence for Gaddafi, part government offices and part military base — and also the scene of nightly celebrations by hundreds of civilians offering themselves as human shields to protect Gaddafi against NATO. Officials at the scene said no one had been badly hurt.

Reporters first heard two huge explosions and saw a red flash from the roof of their hotel in Tripoli. Later they were taken to the scene, to see a destroyed building that officials said contained offices and a library used by Gaddafi, its roof caved in and debris spread over a large area. A fire engine trained water on part of the building, while civilian supporters of the regime, let in with the media members, clambered on the rubble chanting pro-Gaddafi slogans as dust swirled through the air.

An adjacent building where Gaddafi met a delegation of South African President Jacob Zuma and four other African presidents looking to broker a peace deal earlier this month was also badly damaged. Although the attack may not have been an assassination attempt, it was certainly symbolic. NATO has been striking at Gaddafi's command and control facilities in recent weeks, although there was no obvious military use for the complex of buildings struck by the bombs.

Early on Sunday, Deputy Foreign Minister Khalid Kaim tried to put a positive gloss on his army's retreat in Misurata. He said tribal leaders from the area were angry with the rebels because they could not gain access to Misurata port. They wanted to negotiate, he said, but if talks failed, tribal leaders were ready to send in 60,000 armed men to storm the city, in what he feared could be "very, very bloody" warfare.

But Libya is not like Afghanistan or even Iraq, and tribal leaders do not command huge militias they can mobilize in the blink of an eye. Gaddafi, experts said, appeared to be using the tribal issue as a smoke screen to mask his failure to retake Misurata. He was also sending a threat, experts said, both to the citizens of Misurata and anyone abroad who might be thinking of sending in ground troops to protect the city, that he still had the ability to sow chaos by deploying thousands of ground troops, perhaps a mixture of lightly armed civilians and regular soldiers who have shed their uniforms.

"It's an attempt to spin the rebellion as a tribal issue, but it's probably not going to work, because what we've seen is a broad-based rebellion against Gaddafi," said Shashank Joshi, an associate fellow of Britain's Royal United Services Institute. "The other aspect is that it's a threat."

British Foreign Secretary William Hague told the BBC he doubted Gaddafi's forces were really going to withdraw. "This may be cover for using more insurgent type warfare without any uniforms and without tanks."

Graham and Sens. Joseph I. Lieberman (I-Conn.) and John McCain (R-Ariz) said they interpreted the U.N. Security Council resolution — authorizing military action to protect Libyan civilians and imposing a no-fly zone — as allowing attacks on Libya's top leadership in Tripoli. "I can't think of anything that would protect the civilian population of Libya more than the removal of Moammar Gaddafi," Lieberman told CNN's "State of the Union."

Worried that the rebels do not have the momentum to reach Tripoli, Graham suggested that NATO and the Obama administration "go to Tripoli, start bombing Gaddafi's inner circle, their compounds, their military headquarters."

But experts said it was unrealistic to expect the West to assassinate the Libyan leader. "The symbolism of an assassination would be terrible for the United States," said Joshi, especially after President Obama went to such lengths to secure international support and legal cover for action in Libya and avoid a front-seat role.

Misrata Fighting Rages On Despite Tripoli Vow (AFP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

AFP

By Marc Bastian

MISRATA, Libya (AFP) - The most powerful explosions to hit the Libyan capital in weeks of fighting shook downtown Tripoli early Monday

after a day of heavy violence in the besieged third city of Misrata.

AFP journalists said the Tripoli explosions came at 2210 GMT Sunday in several districts of the capital, which has been the target since Friday of intensive NATO raids.

On Sunday, grad rockets exploded in Misrata, where at least 12 were reported killed in fresh fighting, despite a vow by the Libyan regime to halt its fire in the western port city where the humanitarian situation has stirred international concern.

Two captured pro-Kadhafi soldiers told AFP that loyalist forces were losing their grip in the battle for Misrata.

"Many soldiers want to surrender but they are afraid of being executed" by the rebels, said Lili Mohammed, a Mauritanian hired by Libyan leader Moamer Kadhafi's regime to fight insurgents in the country's third city.

Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Kaim said the army had suspended operations against rebels in Misrata, but not left the city, to enable local tribes to settle the battle "peacefully and not militarily."

But Colonel Omar Bani, military spokesman of the rebels' Transitional National Council (TNC), said Kadhafi was "playing a really dirty game" aimed at dividing his opponents.

"It is a trick, they didn't go," Bani said in the eastern rebel stronghold of Benghazi. "They have stayed a bit out of Tripoli Street but they are preparing themselves to attack again."

Libyan authorities want the conflict to look like a civil war between rival tribes, he argued.

"Most of the tribes around the Misrata area are inter-related so they won't fall for that trap," said Abdel Hafiz Ghoga, another TNC spokesman.

Bursts of automatic weapons fire could be heard and Grad rockets exploded in the city, the scene of deadly urban guerrilla fighting for several weeks between rebels and Kadhafi loyalists.

At least 12 people were killed and 60 wounded in Sunday's fighting, said Doctor Khalid Abu Falra at Misrata's main private clinic.

The city suffered its heaviest toll in 65 days of fighting on Saturday, with 28 dead and 100 wounded compared with a daily average of 11 killed, according to Falra.

"We're overwhelmed, overwhelmed. We lack everything: personnel, equipment and medicines," he said.

In western Libya, Kadhafi's forces bombed areas close to the rebel-held Dehiba border post with Tunisia in a bid to recapture the nearby town of Wazzan, witnesses said.

And NATO warplanes staged raids on civil and military sites in Tripoli and other cities, state news agency JANA said, without giving casualty numbers. An explosion rocked the east of the capital, according to witnesses.

US Senator John McCain, who visited the rebel stronghold of Benghazi last week, urged Washington to increase its air strikes on Libya, warning a prolonged stalemate would probably draw Al-Qaeda into the conflict.

"The longer we delay, the more likely it is there's a stalemate... Nothing would bring Al-Qaeda in more rapidly and more dangerously than a stalemate," McCain told NBC's "Meet the Press."

"It's pretty obvious to me that the US has got to play a greater role on the air power side."

Kadhafi's regime accused the United States, which launched its first Predator drone strikes over the weekend, of "new crimes against humanity" for deploying the low-flying, unmanned aircraft.

Drone strikes have so far targeted a rocket launcher targeting Misrata and an SA-8 surface-to-air missile in Tripoli, according to NATO officials.

With the fighting that has drawn in Western powers in its second month, Pope Benedict XVI called for "diplomacy and dialogue" in Libya during his traditional Easter Sunday message.

"In the current conflict in Libya, may diplomacy and dialogue take the place of arms and may those who suffer as a result of the conflict be given access to humanitarian aid," he said.

Meanwhile, cabin crew overpowered a Kazakh man on an Alitalia flight from Paris to Rome after he pulled out a small knife, threatened an air hostess and demanded that the flight be diverted to Tripoli. The suspect's motives and identity remained unclear.

A French journalist, 24, shot in the neck in Misrata was in intensive care on Sunday after undergoing surgery, medics said. Friends refused to identify the journalist, a blogger who worked for "alternative media."

At the western gate into Ajdabiya, a lull in the fighting has given families some respite in their search for loved ones who have gone missing in and around the strategic crossroads city.

"As things calm down, people are building up the courage to come out and report," said Najim

Miftah, a volunteer who has a binder of missing people that has doubled in two days with more than 70 new records.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, meanwhile, said it would press on with air strikes on Libya and urged civilians to shun areas around regime military installations and arsenals.

An aid ship delivered 160 tonnes of food and medicine to Misrata on Saturday and evacuated around 1,000 stranded migrant workers and wounded civilians to Benghazi on its return.

Hundreds of people had lined up along the harbour front in hope of getting on board the vessel chartered by the International Organisation for Migration.

The fourth such rotation brought to 4,100 the number of people of 21 different nationalities evacuated by the IOM from Misrata since the launch of a humanitarian programme on 14 April, the organisation said.

Tunisian officials, meanwhile, said a Qatari vessel has evacuated 90 wounded people to Tunisia, including children, women and elderly people.

The UN refugee agency says about 15,000 people have fled fighting in western Libya into Tunisia in the past two weeks and a much larger exodus was feared. Over 570,000 people are also believed to have fled Libya since February 15.

Kuwait gave 50 million dinars (\$180 million) to the TNC, its chief Mustafa Abdel Jalil said.

And in another diplomatic success for the rebels, Italian Foreign Minister Franco Frattini said he would soon visit Benghazi to open a consulate, following in the footsteps of McCain.

Massive protests in February -- inspired by the revolts that toppled long-time autocrats in Egypt and Tunisia -- escalated into war when Kadhafi's troops fired on demonstrators and protesters seized several eastern towns.

The battle lines have been more or less static in recent weeks, however, as NATO air strikes have helped block Kadhafi's eastward advance but failed to give the poorly organised and outgunned rebels a decisive victory.

U.S. Drones May Provide Psychological Edge In Libya (LAT)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Los Angeles Times

By Ned Parker And Patrick J. McDonnell

The first missile strike by an unmanned Predator against Moammar Kadafi's forces underscores how

the drones have become the go-to weapon for an Obama White House wary of being drawn deeper into another messy conflict. But few believe the remote-controlled aircraft are likely to tip the balance in the Libyan stalemate.

Anti-Kadafi rebels who have grumbled about the limited U.S. role in the international air war in Libya were buoyed by Saturday's strike on a rocket launcher in the besieged port city of Misurata.

"The drones will make the difference, God willing," Tareq Khalil Shihbani said as he and fellow fighters gathered amid a warren of heavily damaged villas in Misurata, awaiting their next target.

However, only two patrols of armed Predators — with each drone capable of carrying a pair of Hellfire missiles — have been assigned to Libyan airspace. The limited deployment tends to mitigate the drone's strengths, such as advanced targeting capabilities and an ability to hover over the battlefield.

"The effect in Libya is going to be largely psychological," predicted Anthony Cordesman with the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington. "You're not going to have enough of them to conduct a war of attrition against a dispersed force."

Last week, the Obama administration approved the use of the Predators, best known for blasting alleged terrorist haunts, to augment aerial assaults by other NATO nations against Kadafi's troops.

In the Libya campaign, the president has endeavored to balance concerns about "mission creep" with demands from European allies and others for a more robust intervention in a conflict that seems deadlocked. The drone deployment was widely seen as an administration move to satisfy those favoring greater force in Libya while not substantially escalating the U.S. involvement.

"The Predators have proven in other theaters to be an incredibly effective surveillance as well as weapons system," Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.), a vocal supporter of the Libyan revolt, said during a recent visit to the rebel capital, Benghazi. "So I am hoping they will have a beneficial effect on the battlefield."

In Pakistan, President Obama has stuck to a policy of drone attacks targeting alleged Al Qaeda operatives despite complaints from Pakistani officials, human rights groups and others about the scores of civilian deaths that ensue in that nation's tribal zones.

The decision to unleash the drones in Misurata, where civilians have endured a punishing

campaign of rockets and sniper fire by Kadafi loyalists, delighted a rebel leadership desperately in need of enhanced weaponry from abroad to have any chance of toppling Kadafi after his more than four decades in power.

"We are thrilled about the drones," said Col. Ahmed Omar Bani, a spokesman for the Benghazi-based rebel army. "This means America is with us."

One clear psychological advantage to the use of drones is that word of their presence will make pro-regime forces even more uncomfortable out in the open. In a bid to be less obvious targets, Kadafi's men are already said to have switched to civilian vehicles and have dug in around urban areas at the front lines. Charred tanks and other military vehicles destroyed by NATO aircraft in the early days of the campaign still litter roads near Benghazi.

"This system [an armed Predator] can loiter for hours and strike without warning," Cordesman said. "That has some psychological impact."

What breathing room the weapons will provide to the people of Misurata after weeks of fighting and shelling remains a question mark.

Rebels said they weren't aware that a drone had taken out a regime rocket launcher until some time after Saturday's strike. Nonetheless, Shihbani, the insurgent fighter interviewed here, voiced the hope that drones could stop government forces now outside town from hitting Misurata with rocket, mortar and artillery fire from beyond the city gates.

Predators, equipped with advanced sensors and live-video surveillance cameras, are capable of precision strikes in urban areas, hitting tanks or artillery pieces while limiting civilian casualties, analysts say. Still, critics say repeated civilian casualties in drone attacks in Pakistan undermine the argument that Predators are somehow safer for civilians than other military aircraft.

But from the Pentagon's perspective, the remote operation provides perhaps the Predator's biggest strength: It means no chance of losing pilots and a Mogadishu-like "Black Hawk Down" disaster on the streets of Misurata. Kadafi's troops are known to possess a variety of shoulder-fired antiaircraft weapons that can down low-flying aircraft.

"Nothing will cause people's support to fall faster than an urban warfare scenario," said Shashank Joshi, an analyst with London's Royal United Services Institute.

The Obama administration, Joshi noted, "doesn't want another Fallouja," referring to the Iraqi city largely destroyed in a 2004 U.S. invasion that routed Sunni Muslim insurgents hunkered down there.

But experts cautioned that it was wrong to think of the robotic aircraft as capable of turning the tide of battle — either here in Misurata or in Libya as a whole. Despite their cachet, drones function more as a complement to other weapons systems.

"It would absolutely be a grave error to see the drones as some kind of magic bullet," Joshi said. "What is likely to turn the conflict in Misurata is the conduct of the forces of the regime and of the rebels on the ground, rather than anything that NATO can or cannot do."

The Pentagon initially led the U.N.-authorized bombing campaign designed to protect Libyan civilians. But the North Atlantic Treaty Organization has since taken command and officials said the U.S. role would be limited to providing surveillance, refueling and other noncombat support operations. The Obama administration seems determined to let Europeans remain out front.

Even while applauding the administration for deploying drones in Libya, Sen. Joe Lieberman criticized the White House on Sunday for removing other U.S. attack aircraft from front-line roles in support of rebel forces.

Appearing on CNN's "State of the Union" with McCain and Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.), the Connecticut independent said, "You can't get into a fight with one foot."

In Libya's Remote West, Rebels Say They're Winning A Tough Fight (MCT)

Monday, April 25, 2011

McClatchy

By Shashank Bengali

NALUT, Libya — Fresh from seizing a key border crossing from Moammar Gadhafi's forces, rebels in this rugged mountain town said Sunday that they're winning a tough and largely unseen war in western Libya but need foreign intervention to finish the job.

The fall on Thursday of a Gadhafi military post at Wazin, on Libya's southern border with Tunisia, opened an important supply route for the rebels and a safety valve for thousands of besieged civilians, who've streamed over the newly open border carrying bulging suitcases and colorful foam mattresses to seek refuge in Tunisian towns.

On a rare visit by a Western journalist to the remote area since fighting began, rebels described a swift morning shootout that ended after scarcely an hour, when about 100 pro-Gadhafi fighters beat a sudden retreat over the sandy hills and into Tunisian territory. They left behind a trove of anti-aircraft weapons, rockets, automatic rifles and three pickup trucks mounted with machine guns, which the under-equipped rebels happily gobbled up.

As the war in eastern Libya settles into a stalemate and pro-regime forces continued on Sunday to bombard rebel-held Misrata — despite claims that they'd withdraw from the coastal city — one of the few places that the anti-Gadhafi forces can lay claim to victory is the western mountains. The seizure of Wazin has buoyed the opposition movement, but whether the rebels can use it as a springboard to challenge Gadhafi's four-decade grip on the capital, Tripoli, remains far from clear.

"When this gate came into our hands, Gadhafi must have felt like he was falling," said a bearded, wild-haired rebel leader named Ayman, who asked that his last name be withheld to shield family members in Tripoli, the capital, from reprisals. "Politically and militarily, it was like breaking his legs."

A hospital accountant before the uprising, Ayman met a McClatchy reporter in the rebel enclave of Nalut, 30 miles inside the border along a snaking hilltop highway. He was huddling with a handful of middle-aged rebel commanders inside the town's former government compound, where a large poster of Gadhafi had been torn down and young fighters wearing "Free Libya" t-shirts loitered in the courtyard.

The fighting in Libya's craggy, wheat-colored western mountains has largely escaped international attention because the area was all but inaccessible to journalists when Gadhafi held Wazin. Rebels now control the 100-mile mountain highway from the border north to Zintan, the largest town in the area and scene of some of the fiercest fighting of the war, but pro-regime forces are said to lurk in villages just miles from the road. Whether the rebels can consolidate their far-flung gains and challenge Gadhafi's four-decade grip on Tripoli remains far from clear.

While the inexperienced fighters here have proven more adept than their fellow rebel counterparts in eastern Libya — who've tended to run from gunfire and sometimes shoot each other — controlling Wazin doesn't solve their most pressing challenges: few high-powered weapons, a lack of communications equipment and a forbidding

terrain that makes it easy for Gadhafi's forces to hide in hillsides and crevasses.

Rebels complained that there had been no NATO airstrikes in the area around Nalut, and they pleaded for assistance from the United States and other countries that say they want Gadhafi to go.

"We have a lot of fighters but we don't have a lot of weapons," Ayman said.

The rebels say they're in close contact with the opposition military leadership in the east, calling them several times a day by satellite phone and transmitting locations of suspected Gadhafi positions. But they're not under the authority of the fractious Benghazi-based commanders _ which could help explain their recent successes. The uprising here has evolved town by town, linking Arabs in the northern mountains with the mostly Berber, or Amazigh, people in places farther south, like Nalut. The Berbers were historically marginalized by Gadhafi, who barred them from giving their children non-Arab names or speaking their native language, but whatever rivalries existed between the two sides seem to have vanished in the fight against the regime. In the battle for Wazin, rebels from Nalut, Zintan and two other towns joined together, each led by an officer who defected from Gadhafi's military. The night before the attack, about 150 rebels camped in a village called Meraba, in a dusty valley just over the hills from the border. Just after dawn they began their advance. Although they were outgunned _ Gadhafi's forces had a half-dozen machine-gun-mounted pickups, to just two for the rebels _ they remained in formation and withstood barrages of gunfire, coming to within 500 yards before the loyalists fled. "They ran off so quickly," said Ayman Askar, a 32-year-old fighter, "that we couldn't even chase them." The regime seemed caught off-guard when Wazin fell, at first denying the reports. The area lies at the midway point of a pivotal 300-mile supply line for Gadhafi's forces between Tripoli and a military airport at Ghadames, near the borders with Tunisia and Algeria, which rebels say the regime is using to bring in fuel and fighters.

"When we heard that Gadhafi forces were shifting from Misrata, we began to think that they'll come here. We're preparing for that. We have a plan," Ayman said, declining to elaborate.

As he spoke, the crack of a machine gun shook the hills. The rebels, he said with a smile, were practicing on their newly acquired weapons.

Apart from the fighters and a handful of sad-looking grocery stores and tea stalls, Nalut, which rebels have held since the start of the uprising, is

all but deserted. Most of the 25,000 residents have escaped to Tunisia, including Ayman's wife and son.

Besides allowing families to leave, the opening of the Wizan border makes it easier for the rebels to transport their wounded to Tunisian hospitals _ several fighters have died as rebel trucks traced long, off-road paths around the checkpoint and into Tunisia _ and to restock food and other supplies.

On Sunday morning, Askar's brother loaded up an SUV with cartons of milk, diapers, latex gloves and painkillers in the Tunisian border town of Dehiba and raced up the mountainside to deposit them in Nalut. An hour later, he was back on the road to the border to make another run _ a treacherous commute that Askar said was just part of the war effort.

"We are fighting for our rights, so we're not scared to die _ not like them," Askar said. "When you're fighting for your city and your country, you are not scared of anything."

Berber Rebels In Libya's West Face Long Odds Against Qaddafi (NYT)

Monday, April 25, 2011

New York Times

By Scott Sayare

DHIBA BORDER CROSSING, Tunisia — For decades, the remote mountains of western Libya have simmered with resentment. An enclave of the Berber minority, mistrusted and neglected by Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi's Arab nationalist government, the region's isolated hamlets were among the first to join the uprising, raising the rebel flag on the first day of the revolt.

But the Nafusah Mountain range, which rises out of the desert at the Tunisian border as a sudden, hazy shadow and runs several hundred miles east in a narrow chain, is hardly a rebel stronghold. Rebel fighters in the region estimate their ranks at just a few hundred ill-equipped and untrained young men.

It came as a shock, then, when they captured a border crossing near Wazin last week, a strategic victory for the beleaguered rebel forces that thrust the desert region under the world's gaze. Colonel Qaddafi has also turned his attention to the region, escalating a low-grade war of attrition into what may prove an important battlefield.

Having put down more serious challenges to his rule in Zawiyah and Zawarah, on the northern coast between Tripoli and Tunisia, and pulled troops out of Misurata, the second largest western

city, on Saturday, Colonel Qaddafi has massed troops along the mountains and launched missiles on its towns, according to residents and rebel fighters.

The fighting has driven about 30,000 Libyans into Tunisia, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Libyans there said they had been under siege weeks before the recent escalation. Government troops have held the desert plains below the mountains since mid-March, they said, cutting off supplies of food, gasoline and medicine, and, several witnesses said, poisoning the wells of at least one town.

"He has been trying to starve us," said Jamal Mahrouk, 47, a gaunt, weathered former soldier of Colonel Qaddafi's army, now a rebel fighter. He had driven to a Tunisian hospital in Tataouine, about 50 miles northwest of the Libyan border, to visit a young cousin wounded in battle outside the town of Zintan and secreted across the border for treatment.

Like other fighters, Mr. Mahrouk insisted that rebel actions in the area were purely defensive. "By my god, these are peaceful people fighting against an evil regime," he said.

The government denies that it has cut off food and utilities, poisoned wells or even that the refugees in Tunisia are really refugees.

Moussa Ibrahim, a spokesman for the Qaddafi government, said the refugees were lying in order to win support from NATO. He said the government had intercepted and recorded phone calls among rebels planning to stage a bogus refugee crisis by forcing members of their families to cross the border into Tunisia and report atrocities.

"They are fake refugee camps," he said. "Qatar is paying for them."

Before the rebels captured the border crossing at Wazen, the region seemed to hold little strategic value, raising questions about why the government would divert resources from more pressing battles elsewhere. The border crossing, which now gives the rebels a supply route in the west, may be part of the explanation.

But Colonel Qaddafi has long harbored antagonism toward the Berbers, a non-Arab ethnic group of mostly Ibadi Muslims in a country that is majority Sunni. He has accused them of being Zionists and agents of the C.I.A., said Mansouria Mokhefi, the director of the Middle East and Maghreb program at the French Institute of International Relations in Paris.

Berbers and the region in general have been largely excluded from the distribution of oil revenues, she said, and residents complain of little government investment in schools or infrastructure. "Development never came all the way to them," she said. "They have truly lived in a sort of exclusion."

Beyond neglect, Colonel Qaddafi has forbidden citizens from giving their children Berber names, disallowed the teaching of the Berber language in schools and banned Berber festivals and holidays. Protests in the 1990s demanding the right to practice their culture openly were put down forcibly by the police and followed by a series of public hangings, instilling a profound animosity toward the government.

Shortly after the uprising began in mid-February, Colonel Qaddafi offered the families of Zintan and other towns across the Nafusah range a bribe, residents said, a onetime payment of about \$1,200 in exchange for their allegiance. Most declined.

The missile strikes began soon after.

Salim Issa, 50, an electrician, fled the town of Nalut on Friday after what he called heavy missile strikes the night before. He arrived in Medenine, Tunisia, with his wife, sister and nine of his children. Fearing for the two sons he left behind, he declined to give his full name.

He said there were rumors that loyalist forces had orders to kill everyone in the city, and that soldiers had been given Viagra and explicit orders to rape.

The town of Yafren, about 100 miles east of Nalut, was reported to have been captured by government forces over the weekend. But by then the town was all but deserted. Just a handful of rebel fighters and elderly residents, too weak to flee, were thought to remain, hiding in basements.

Salim, 32, a nurse's assistant, said Yafren had been surrounded by Qaddafi forces and under fire for about a month, leaving it with no water, food or electricity. "No nothing," he said, adding that the only food had been smuggled in across the desert.

Perhaps even more than on the eastern front, the rebels in the Nafusah Mountains are outmatched.

Mounir Ramdan, 25, a youthful fighter from Nalut who was visiting his family in Tataouine, said about 40 government pickup trucks mounted with heavy machine guns and rocket launchers were stationed near the road between Nalut and Zintan, to the east. Mr. Ramdan, who has no gun, has been acting as a scout.

For each rebel fighter with a weapon, "you find 50 without guns," said Fathi, a rebel being treated at the hospital in Tataouine.

He had been operating a machine gun mounted in the back of pickup when he was tossed from the vehicle during a skirmish near Zintan, breaking his left femur and dislocating his right hip. At the time of his injury, the rebels in Zintan had four or five 14.5-millimeter machine guns, stolen from government troops, he said, but most were armed with antique Italian rifles, knives or home-forged iron swords.

The government forces have been ordered to "clean" Zintan, he said, and he had little doubt about their ability to do so. Without heavier NATO airstrikes against Colonel Qaddafi's armor and more weapons, he said, it will be "90 percent impossible" for the rebels to hold their ground in the western mountains.

Colonel Qaddafi, he warned, "will kill us all."

Other fighters were less bleak. Puffing on the stub of a cigarette at the Tunisian border, a tall, bearded fighter named Toufik guessed that the rebels in the region were outnumbered by loyalist troops five to one.

Asked how they had succeeded in capturing the border post last week, he grinned and pointed an index finger to the sky.

"God gave us a victory," he said.

An 18-hour Journey Away From The Misery Of Misurata (WP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Washington Post

By Leila Fadel

ABOARD THE RED STAR 1 — Some walked to the port and slept for weeks in squalid camps less than a mile from the docks. Some went from house to house searching for safety before concluding that there was no secure place in the Libyan city of Misurata. And some, injured by indiscriminate artillery fire, cluster bombs and bullets, were sped to this ship in ambulances.

All shared a common goal: to get away from Misurata. Even as rebels claimed victory and Moammar Gaddafi's forces were said to be withdrawing, the shelling, rocket fire and mortar attacks continued, and the port was the only way out.

As migrant workers, the injured and the displaced lined up Saturday to board the Red Star 1, everything they had left with them was packed in small bags. The ship's trip marked the fourth

rescue mission to Misurata arranged by the International Organization for Migration.

In the city, the violence continued. Thirty-one people were killed and more than 80 injured on Saturday, according to doctors at the Hikma hospital in Misurata, where the streets have been renamed for those who have died in the nearly two-month-long siege.

On Red Star 1, Jeremy Haslam, who works for IOM, an intergovernmental organization, looked around, his eyes tired and face drawn. He made difficult choices about who could board the blue-and-white ship for the 18-hour trip to Benghazi, the de facto capital of the Libyan opposition, and who would be turned away.

The boat could take no more than 1,000 passengers. At times, more than 10,000 foreign workers had been sleeping at the port. Now about 2,400 are in the camp, according to the Libyan Red Crescent. But more come every day.

"It's heartbreaking every time I say no," Haslam said.

As the ship pulled away, a Libyan family clutching brown suitcases and pink blankets watched their hope for an escape leave the docks. They would try again tomorrow. Maybe they would pile on to a small fishing boat, maybe a ship funded by the government of Qatar.

Omar Hussein walked to the port three weeks ago in an ill-fitting green suit. The Niger national, who worked in a Misurata shop that sold curtains and kitchenware, had been stranded amid the fighting. As bombs exploded around him and gunfire filled the air, he walked for three hours, toward what he hoped would be his escape route.

On Saturday night, sitting on a wooden chair in the cruise ship's cafeteria, he dozed off. The mostly Albanian and Romanian crew had turned in for the night, after serving a late lunch of pasta and green bean salad. Hundreds of other men from Niger slept on the green carpeting of the top deck and the wooden dance floor of a disco. Their bodies blanketed every space of the floor.

"I've been waiting for so long," Hussein said, holding his gold-rimmed glasses in his hand. "I was so scared. There were so many bombs."

This was the first part of his journey home.

All his worldly possessions were in the cargo hold below, along with the injured, sprawled out on mattresses. Many had shrapnel wounds to their legs, arms and other parts of their bodies. Intravenous drips were attached to some of the wounded, as family members sat with them.

"My family doesn't know if I'm dead or alive," Hussein said.

Signs posted in the bathroom urge passengers to conserve water during the trip and wished those leaving Misurata a "pleasant and safe trip home." But the 136 Libyans who were making the journey were fleeing the only place they have ever known.

Umm Mohammed left behind everything she had when she fled her western Misurata neighborhood.

Gaddafi forces broke down the door, she said, taking her son and four other men from the house. She fled with her six other children and grandchildren.

She said her neighborhood is controlled by Gaddafi's forces and has been severely damaged. There is no water, food or toiletries, she said. Rebel leaders estimate that more than half of the city's 500,000 people have been displaced because of the violence.

"I can't believe what Gaddafi did to his people," she said early Sunday as most people slept.

She lived in mosques, schools and homes of relatives for 20 days and then made the trip to the port Saturday. She was too afraid to give her name, worried her son would be killed.

"I have no house now. No place to live," she said. "If my son is alive, I will come back to Misurata. If he's not, I can never come back."

She looked away, her face framed by a delicate flowered scarf.

"They wouldn't let me give him his shoes," she said, tears streaming down her face. "That's what bothered me most. He left the house barefoot. And he's walking somewhere without his shoes."

By 10:30 on Sunday morning, Umm Mohammed was in Benghazi and eager to meet her mother, who lives there.

Hussein went on to a transit camp, hoping to travel to Egypt and, if the IOM could pay for his plane ticket, then go home to Niger.

Those who had made the journey felt safe. But they were all too aware that the suffering continued in the city they had left behind.

"There are places in Misurata that no one can get to and it's all killing," Umm Mohammed said Sunday. "No one understands what's happening there. No one understands the things I've seen."

Libyan Rebel Oil Production Down For 4 More Weeks (AP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Associated Press
By Sebastian Abbot

BENGHAZI, Libya - Libyan rebels fighting Moammar Gadhafi won't be able to produce more crude oil for at least another four weeks and are taking steps to conserve precious supplies of fuel and money, the top oil official in the breakaway east said Sunday.

The rebels need to repair equipment to pump oil from two key fields in the rebel-controlled east, Messla and Sarir, that were damaged in fighting, said Wahid Bughaigis, who serves as oil minister for the rebels.

"We just finished the assessment, and we are in the process of mobilizing the repairs," Bughaigis told reporters in Benghazi, the de facto capital of the rebel-held east. "We believe we need a minimum of four weeks to get back on stream."

OPEC-member Libya sits atop Africa's largest proven oil reserves. But Libyan exports have largely disappeared from the international market since the uprising began, helping drive oil prices to their highest levels in more than two years.

Earlier this month, the Gulf state of Qatar helped rebels complete the sale of 1 million barrels of crude that netted roughly \$129 million for the anti-Gadhafi forces.

But Bughaigis said he believed the rebels have spent much of that money on things like imported gasoline.

"To put things in perspective, one cargo of gasoline of 25,000 metric tons costs us \$75 million, so you don't go far with \$129 million," he said.

Gasoline is sold at highly subsidized prices in eastern Libya. But Bughaigis said the rebels may have to re-examine whether the current consumption is sustainable.

"If it was only up to me, I would certainly put some rationing into the system, but we don't want to give any satisfaction to Mr. Gadhafi," said Bughaigis. "We want to show him we can run the country."

To conserve fuel, the rebels have cut electricity production in Benghazi by 25 percent, said Bughaigis. The main plant providing power to the city used to be run with natural gas supplied from the oil facilities in Brega, now under government control.

Now power plants are must rely on imported diesel fuel, he said.

The reduction in electricity production, which has been achieved by cutting power for up to 3.5 hours in different parts of the city, is meant to give the rebels "some breathing time between arrivals of tankers," said Bughaigis.

"We didn't have this problem when the gas was supplied to the plants, but now we have to supply it (diesel) by sea and get it from the road," he said.

Bughaigis said previously that the equipment that was damaged at the oil fields included a power generation system, one oil tank and several small diesel tanks that fueled the generators.

The rebels say the equipment was hit by pro-Gadhafi forces. The government, however, has blamed British warplanes for the damage — a charge NATO denied.

The 12 billion-barrel Sarir oil field is the country's largest, and Messla has 3 billion barrels. The two fields have a production capacity of about 400,000 barrels per day.

Alitalia: Passenger Wanted Flight To Go To Libya (AP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Associated Press

ROME — An agitated passenger aboard an Alitalia flight from Paris to Rome on Sunday night attacked a flight attendant and demanded the plane be diverted to Libya but other attendants subdued the man, the airline said.

The flight landed safely in the Italian capital as scheduled, Alitalia said in a statement. All 131 passengers aboard flight AZ329 disembarked safely in Rome.

"A clearly agitated passenger attacked a flight attendant, asking that the flight be diverted to Tripoli," Alitalia said. "Thanks to the prompt intervention of attendants, the aggressor was immobilized and (kept) in his seat, and the flight continued on to Rome," where it landed at 9:55 p.m. (1955 GMT) as scheduled, the airline said.

Alitalia didn't identify the passenger. The Italian news agency ANSA reported that he was a middle-aged man from Kazakhstan with no criminal record. ANSA said the man had brandished a nail-clipper against the flight attendant.

Police took the man into custody for questioning at Rome's Leonardo da Vinci airport, Alitalia said.

Alitalia said the female flight attendant was checked by staff at the airport's first-aid office as a precaution but she was reported to be unharmed.

The man's motive was not immediately known. Italian police were in contact with French authorities over the incident, ANSA said.

Odd Man Out At Sea (NYT)

Monday, April 25, 2011

New York Times

By Thad W. Allen, Richard L. Armitage And John J. Hamre

IT'S been in place for nearly 30 years; nearly 160 countries (plus the European Union) have signed it. But the United States has yet to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. As a result, the United States, the world's leading maritime power, is at a military and economic disadvantage.

The convention codifies widely accepted principles on territorial waters (which it defines as those extending 12 miles out to sea), shipping lanes and ocean resources. It also grants each signatory exclusive fishing and mining rights within 200 miles of its coast (called the exclusive economic zone). Although the United States originally voted to create the convention and negotiated many provisions to its advantage, Congress has never ratified it.

With nearly 12,500 miles of coastline, 360 major commercial ports and the world's largest exclusive economic zone, the United States has a lot to gain from signing the convention. It is the only legal framework that exists for managing international waters; joining it would allow us to secure international recognition of a claim to the continental shelf as far as 600 miles beyond our exclusive economic zone in order to explore and conserve the resource-rich Arctic as the polar ice cap recedes. It would also provide American companies with a fair and stable legal framework to invest in mining projects in the deep seabed.

Ratification makes sense militarily as well. According to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the convention "codifies navigation and overflight rights and high seas freedoms that are essential for the global mobility of our armed forces." In other words, it enhances national security by giving our Navy additional flexibility to operate on the high seas and in foreign exclusive economic zones and territorial seas. This is particularly important in the Asia Pacific region and the South China Sea, where tensions among China, Japan and Southeast Asian nations have increased because of conflicting interpretations of what constitutes territorial and international waters.

Perhaps most important of all, ratification would prove to be a diplomatic triumph. American power

is defined not simply by economic and military might, but by ideals, leadership, strategic vision and international credibility.

Of course, there are those who would prefer that we have nothing to do with the United Nations, who believe that international treaties hurt our national interests and restrain our foreign policy objectives.

All three of us have struggled while working with and through international organizations — they are unwieldy and not always responsive to American interests. But as we see in Libya today, the United Nations and other international alliances are indispensable in providing legitimacy and reinvigorating American partnerships in times of crisis. And they will ensure needed balance as rising powers inevitably challenge America's economic and military strength.

Last July, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton gained much respect by reassuring the Southeast Asian nations that the United States strongly supported multilateral efforts to address those territorial disputes in the South China Sea, and denounced China's heavy-handed, unilateral tactics. But strong American positions like that are ultimately undermined by our failure to ratify the convention; it shows we are not really committed to a clear legal regime for the seas.

For all of these reasons, ratification is more important today than ever before. At a time when America's military and economic strengths are tested, we must lead on the seas as well as on land.

Thad W. Allen, a senior fellow at Rand, was the commandant of the Coast Guard from 2006 to 2010. Richard L. Armitage, the president of a consulting firm, was the deputy secretary of state from 2001 to 2005. John J. Hamre, the president of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, was the deputy secretary of defense from 1997 to 2000.

AF/PAK

Pakistan Rally Halts NATO Supplies For Afghanistan (AP)

Sunday, April 24, 2011

Associated Press

By Riaz Khan

PESHAWAR, Pakistan - Pakistan halted NATO supply shipments to Afghanistan on Saturday after thousands of protesters rallied on the main road to the border to demand Washington stop firing

missiles against militants sheltering inside the country.

The stoppage was temporary and the demonstration was held by a small political party seeking a populist boost, but the events highlighted the vulnerability of the supply route running through Pakistan at a time of tensions between Washington and Islamabad.

Much of the non-lethal supplies for foreign troops in landlocked Afghanistan come through Pakistan after arriving at the port in the southern city of Karachi. Militants often attack the convoys, and last September Pakistan closed the border for 20 days to protest a NATO helicopter strike inside its borders.

NATO commanders said then that the halt did not affect the war effort. The alliance has been opening new routes into Afghanistan from the north in recent years to try to reduce its dependency on the Pakistan route, which gives Islamabad leverage when negotiating with the West.

Police officer Khurshid Khan said supplies had been stopped until Monday morning because of the protest.

The demonstration was held by the political party of Imran Khan, a former captain of Pakistan's cricket team. He has called for peace talks with the Pakistani Taliban and has long opposed the drone strikes in the border region. Last year, there were more than 100 such attacks, the most yet.

"We will continue our campaign until America stops killing our innocent people," he told around 3,000 protesters on the outskirts of Peshawar, around 35 miles (57 kilometers) from the Afghan border. "It is our start against American slavery. The people have risen up. They will neither let the corrupt leaders nor their American bosses stay in this country."

Khan also offered his services to act as mediator for talks with militants.

"I am ready to broker," he said, referring to any possible peace talks with the Pakistani Taliban, adding that if America was ready to do that in Afghanistan why wouldn't Pakistan do it here.

Tensions between Pakistan and the United States have been brewing since the arrest in January of a CIA contractor for killing two Pakistanis. The incident infuriated Pakistan's army, which was forced to answer embarrassing questions about why an armed American was traveling apparently freely in the country.

Since then, the army and the government has taken a tough line on drone strikes, which they had quietly tolerated in the past and at the same time publicly complained about. That policy had allowed them to be insulated from some of the anti-American sentiment that runs strong in the country.

Earlier Saturday, Pakistani army chief Gen. Ashfaq Parvez Kayani said his force had broken "the backbone" of Islamist militants in the country, in an apparent attempt to counter American criticism of its progress in confronting extremism.

But hours later, a suicide bomber on foot detonated his explosives in a convoy of soldiers and elders of an anti-Taliban militia in the town of Salarzai in Bajur tribal region. Four militiamen and a paramilitary soldier were killed, said police official Fazal Rabbi.

The military in late 2009 had declared victory over insurgents in the area.

Pakistan Re-Opens NATO Supply Route (AFP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

AFP

PESHAWAR, Pakistan (AFP) - NATO can resume supplying its troops in Afghanistan through a key Pakistani route on Monday after protesters against US drone strikes lifted a blockade, an official said.

Supporters of former cricketer Imran Khan's political party on Sunday ended a two-day sit-in at a Peshawar road, which was called to compel the US to end a covert missile campaign against Islamist militants in Pakistan's tribal belt.

"Peshawar ring road has been cleared and reopened for vehicular traffic," senior local administration official, Muhammad Siraj Khan told AFP.

Trucks will only be able to use the route from Monday morning because of security reasons, he added.

Imran Khan -- who leads the Tehreek-e-Insaf (Movement for Justice) party -- earlier said his supporters would "block supplies for NATO in different parts of the country if drone attacks are not stopped within one month."

"We will also stage sit-in in Islamabad if the government fails to stop these strikes," he told a crowd of some 5,000 people at the end of the two-day sit-in.

Supporters waved party flags and chanted slogans such as "stop the drone attacks, stop killing innocent people and down with the government,"

during the speech, an AFP reporter at the scene said.

"We want a sovereign Pakistan," Khan said, adding that "the American people will hold even bigger demonstrations if they come to know that the innocent civilians are being killed in the drone attacks."

The party called the demonstration in protest at US missile attacks from unmanned aircraft in Pakistan's lawless tribal areas, which many feel infringe Pakistani sovereignty and which locals say sometimes kill civilians.

The covert strikes targeting militants in Pakistan's lawless border regions, which are believed to be operated with the tacit consent of Islamabad, stoke rampant anti-American sentiment throughout the South Asian nation.

Public anger intensified after a March 17 drone attack killed 39 people including civilians.

NATO supply trucks and oil tankers are the targets of frequent attacks blamed on insurgents attempting to disrupt supplies for the more than 130,000 international troops fighting in Afghanistan.

Most supplies and equipment required by coalition troops in Afghanistan are shipped through Pakistan, although US troops increasingly use alternative routes through central Asia.

Dubai Group Looking To Buy Afghan Bank (AP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Associated Press

By Adam Schreck

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates - A Dubai-based conglomerate is seeking approval to buy a bank in Afghanistan as authorities there try to restore confidence in the scandal-tainted financial industry.

The CEO of Alokozay Group's Afghan operations said in an interview Sunday the family company sees "great potential" in the nation's banking sector despite decades of war and the near collapse of the country's largest private lender amid corruption problems last year.

"We want to bring in professionals and set up a bank that's basically recognized worldwide," Jalil Alokozay told The Associated Press. "If someone comes in and has a proper plan and empowers the professionals, then there are lots of opportunities here in Afghanistan."

Alokozay declined to name the bank the company is aiming to buy or provide financial terms of the

deal, which he said was at an advanced stage. The lender is a relatively small bank involved in extending microfinance loans to poor borrowers, he said.

Afghanistan's central bank has already conducted background checks on the Dubai suitor and is in the process of reviewing the acquisition, Alokozay said. He hopes to complete the deal in the next six to eight weeks.

Authorities in Kabul have granted licenses to 17 private banks, according to the central bank, but a spokesman was unable to provide information on the Alokozay Group's bid.

Alokozay Group's move could inject new life into Afghanistan's troubled banking industry. It is reeling from a still unresolved scandal involving Kabul Bank, the country's largest private lender, that sparked a financial panic when it nearly collapsed last year.

Afghan officials are stepping up efforts to recover an estimated \$909 million worth of fraudulent loans and accrued tax and interest tied to Kabul Bank. They have had little success so far.

Troubles at Kabul Bank — now under the control of the central bank — have raised alarm bells for Afghanistan's international donors by calling into question the soundness and oversight of the country's fledgling banking system.

Kabul Bank had close ties to Afghanistan's political elite, including the brother of President Hamid Karzai, and plays a key role in the local economy by handling the payrolls for government workers and security forces.

The Alokozay Group is a consumer products distributor that also has interests in the oil and gas and property sectors. It is perhaps best known in Afghanistan and beyond for making a popular brand of tea.

The company last week announced a \$60 million exclusive deal with PepsiCo Inc. to bottle and distribute the company's products from a plant in Kabul. Pepsi products currently are shipped into Afghanistan from nearby countries, Alokozay said.

Taliban Break More Than 450 Out Of Afghan Prison (AP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Associated Press

By Mirwais Khan And Heidi Vogt

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan — Taliban militants dug a lengthy tunnel underground and into the main jail in Kandahar city and whisked out more than 450

prisoners, most of whom were Taliban fighters, officials and insurgents said Monday.

The massive overnight jailbreak in Afghanistan's second-largest city underscores the Afghan government's continuing weakness in the south, despite an influx of international troops, funding and advisers. Kandahar city, in particular, has been a focus of the international effort to establish a strong Afghan government presence in former Taliban strongholds.

The 1,200-inmate Sarposa Prison has been part of that plan. The facility has undergone security upgrades and tightened procedures following a brazen 2008 Taliban attack that freed 900 prisoners. Afghan government officials and their NATO backers have regularly said that the prison has vastly improved security since that attack.

But on Sunday night, about 475 prisoners streamed out of a tunnel that had been dug into the facility and disappeared into Kandahar city, prison supervisor Ghulam Dastagir Mayar said. He said the majority of the missing were Taliban militants.

"This is a blow," presidential spokesman Waheed Omar said. "A prison break of this magnitude of course points to a vulnerability." He did not provide details on the incident, saying that the investigation had just started.

Taliban spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid said insurgents dug the 1,050-foot (320-meter) tunnel to the prison over five months, bypassing government checkpoints and major roads. The diggers finally poked through to the prison cells Sunday night, and the inmates were ushered through the tunnel to freedom by three prisoners who had been informed of the plan, Mujahid said in a statement.

He said more than 500 inmates were freed, and that about 100 of them were Taliban commanders. The prisoners were led through the tunnel over four and a half hours, with the final inmates exiting around 3:30 a.m., all without drawing the attention of prison guards, Mujahid said.

Four of those who escaped were provincial-level Taliban commanders, said Qari Yousef Ahmadi, another Taliban spokesman.

The highest-profile Taliban inmates would likely not be held at Sarposa. The U.S. keeps detainees it considers a threat at a facility outside of Bagram Air Base in eastern Afghanistan. Other key Taliban prisoners are held by the Afghan government in a high-security wing of the main prison in Kabul.

A man who Taliban spokesmen said was one of the inmates who helped organize the escape from the inside said a group of inmates obtained copies of the keys to the cells ahead of time.

"There were four or five of us who knew that our friends were digging a tunnel from the outside," said Mohammad Abdullah, who said he had been in Sarposa prison for two years after being captured in nearby Zhari district with a stockpile of weapons. "Some of our friends helped us by providing copies of the keys. When the time came at night, we managed to open the doors for friends who were in other rooms."

He said they woke the inmates up four or five at a time to get them out quietly. Abdullah spoke by phone on a number supplied by a Taliban spokesman. His account could not be immediately verified.

There are guard towers at each corner of the prison compound, which is illuminated at night and protected by a ring of concrete barriers. The entrance can only be reached by passing through multiple checkpoints and gates.

An Afghan government official who is familiar with Sarposa Prison said that while the external security has been greatly improved, the internal controls were not as strong. He said the Taliban prisoners in Sarposa were very united and would rally together to make demands from their jailers for better treatment or more privileges. He spoke anonymously because he was not authorized to talk to the media.

The area outside the prison was swarming with security forces — both Afghan and American — after the prison break. Many of the international troops were focused on a house nearby the prison — perhaps an indicator that it was the starting point for the tunnel. Police mounted a search operation Monday to recapture the prisoners and Omar said 13 had been caught by midday.

Asked how the tunnel was dug without anyone noticing, Wesa said only that the incident was still under investigation.

In the 2008 attack, dozens of militants on motorbikes and two suicide bombers assaulted the prison. One suicide bomber set off an explosives-laden tanker truck at the prison gate while a second bomber blew up an escape route through a back wall. About 900 inmates escaped, including 400 Taliban fighters.

Hundreds Escape From Afghan Prison, NATO Says (LAT)
Monday, April 25, 2011

Los Angeles Times

By Molly Hennessy-fiske, Los Angeles Times

More than 400 inmates, many of them Islamic insurgents, escaped overnight from the main prison in the southern city of Kandahar, the spiritual home of the Taliban movement, according to NATO officials.

The inmates escaped through a nearly 400-yard tunnel they had spent six months digging, Taliban spokesman Qari Yousef Ahmadi said.

The escape at the prison, which holds 1,200 inmates, began after dark and finished just before daybreak, said Maj. Tim James, a spokesman for NATO forces in Kabul.

James said Afghan officials, who run the prison and are managing the investigation into the prison break, reported that 476 inmates had escaped, while the Taliban claimed there were 541 escapees.

"We don't know the exact number or how it happened," James said. "We know there's an operation ongoing to try to recover some of them."

He said NATO forces were on standby early Monday to assist with tracking down the escaped prisoners.

Kandahar, Afghanistan's second-largest city, has been a flashpoint for violence in recent days. Earlier this month, Taliban insurgents assassinated the Kandahar police chief at his headquarters after several previous attempts.

Ahmadi, the Taliban spokesman, claimed that 106 of the escapees were "important commanders" of the Taliban. James said it was unclear whether the prisoners who escaped were leaders likely to mount attacks on coalition troops.

"Any escaped prisoners are always a concern," James said, "It's too early to say whether those prisoners pose a particular threat to [NATO] forces."

The escape is not the first at the Kandahar prison. In June 2008, nearly 900 prisoners broke out amid a well-coordinated attack by Taliban insurgents.

In that escape, an enormous truck bomb blew open the front gate of the prison and a suicide bomber also struck the back of the facility. In the fierce battle that ensued, the militants also fired rockets at the prison.

And in March 2010, four suicide bombers killed more than 30 people as they struck near the prison, a hotel and a police station, possibly in an attempt to free Taliban militants from the prison.

molly.hennessy-fiske@latimes.com

Special correspondent Aimal Yaqoubi in Kabul contributed to this report.

Roadside Bombs Kill 3 NATO Troops In Afghanistan (AP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Associated Press

By Rahim Falez

KABUL, Afghanistan — Roadside bombs killed three NATO service members and a gunman shot dead a prominent local official in southern Afghanistan, where thousands of Afghan and international troops are bracing for an expected spring resurgence of Taliban attacks, officials said Sunday.

NATO said one service member died in a blast Sunday and two others were killed in an explosion on Saturday. Earlier, the alliance said that a fourth foreign service member died Saturday when a coalition helicopter crashed in Alasay district of Kapisa province in the east.

It did not provide any further details, or the nationalities of the service members. The deaths brought to 134 the number of NATO troops killed in Afghanistan so far this year.

Afghanistan's spring fighting season is expected to be in full force by the end of this month or early May. Before last winter set in, tens of thousands of U.S. and NATO reinforcements routed the Taliban from their strongholds, captured leading figures and destroyed weapons caches, especially in the east and south. The militants, known for their resiliency, have responded with high-profile attacks across the nation.

A gunman assassinated Abdul Zahir, deputy of the Helmand provincial peace council and former top civilian chief in Marjah district, late Saturday in the provincial capital of Lashkar Gah, the Ministry of Interior said Sunday. Zahir also was a member of the local improvement council for the area and a leading member of the Alizai tribe.

The Taliban claimed responsibility for the killing in a telephone call to The Associated Press.

Afghan President Hamid Karzai said he was saddened by the death of Zahir, a man he described as "a brave son of this homeland."

Zahir's appointment as Marjah district chief early last year became controversial when court records and news reports in Germany showed that Zahir served part of a more than four-year prison sentence for attempted manslaughter for stabbing his son in 1998. A U.S. official confirmed that

Zahir had a criminal record in Germany, but Zahir denied ever spending time in a German jail.

His criminal record was at issue because at the time he was the man tasked with convincing residents of Marjah that the Afghan central government could better provide for them than the Taliban. Afghan and coalition forces launched a major offensive in Marjah in February 2010 to rout insurgents from their strongholds in Helmand. Afterward, Zahir was appointed the face of a new local government — a key test of NATO's counterinsurgency strategy.

NATO also confirmed Sunday that Afghan and coalition forces have killed three leaders of the Haqqani network, an insurgent group with close ties to al-Qaida that operates primarily in Paktika, Paktia and Khost provinces. So far this year, more than 15 Haqqani leaders and more than 130 other insurgents affiliated with the network have been captured or killed.

More than 90 of those captured were taken in Khost province, where the three died on Friday.

Among those killed was Salih Khan, a senior Haqqani leader in Nadir Shah Kot district. According to the coalition, he trained bomb makers, orchestrated car bombings and handled logistics and communications for insurgents in the area. During the past week, Khan led 20 fighters in two attacks on coalition forward operating bases, the coalition said.

U.S. Authorities Probe Facts Of Author's Pakistan Story (MCT)

Monday, April 25, 2011

McClatchy

By Saeed Shah

LAHORE, Pakistan — In Pakistan, the country where the American writer and philanthropist Greg Mortenson made his name, many angry people had long known that important parts of his story did not stack up.

Mortenson, author of "Three Cups of Tea," a best-selling account of how he found his life's mission after being rescued from a mountain by Pakistani villagers, is under suspicion for fabricating parts of his inspirational story and accused of financial impropriety after a recent U.S. television exposé on CBS News's 60 Minutes.

Mortenson's charity is now under investigation by U.S. authorities following the allegations made on 60 Minutes last Sunday. He has defended his work, admitting to only "some omissions and compressions." He issued a statement denouncing the 60 Minutes report as distorted, inaccurate and

misleading. Email queries to his spokesmen for this story got no response.

But Pakistanis who encountered him and know the areas he's written about say that the two most striking tales in the book are fabrications. He now faces the possibility of lawsuits from Pakistanis who believe they were unfairly maligned in *Three Cups of Tea* to make it a more compelling read.

He was never kidnapped by the Taliban, as recounted in the book, say the tribesmen in Pakistan's lawless Waziristan region who actually hosted him. And, say locals, he never got lost coming down off an expedition to climb Pakistan's highest peak, K2, the central part of the story.

Badam Gul, the man in *Three Cups of Tea* who befriended Mortenson in a hotel in the northwest city of Peshawar and took him to his native Waziristan in 1996, said that the American had been an honored guest in his home, in the Laddah area of South Waziristan near the Afghan border, and was not held hostage by "Taliban."

"We even made Greg Mortenson the chief guest at a football tournament we held for the children and put a special ceremonial turban on him," said Gul, 55, who collects specimens of insects for research purposes. "We are not rich people, but we did our best to make his stay comfortable. We got vegetables and meat and bread for him to eat."

One day, when the American wanted to take a bath, he took his host to a stream and washed his host's mud-caked feet with his own hands.

Mortenson told his Mahsud tribal hosts that he was a doctor, a urologist, which meant that there were a queue of locals wanting to consult him, especially women, said Gul.

In his book Mortenson says he's a trained trauma nurse.

"He would be writing prescriptions for people. He would diagnose people with serious conditions, like cancer and heart disease, there and then on the spot, with no tests from a laboratory or anything. People became very anxious with the news," Gul said.

In the book, Mortenson describes a terrifying ordeal while in Waziristan, when the Taliban took him captive for eight days, but then released him — why they let him go is left somewhat unclear.

However, according to Gul and another tribesman he met there, Mansur Khan Mahsud, Taliban did not enter Waziristan until 2002, when they fled across the border from Afghanistan after the U.S.-led invasion of the country in late 2001.

When the tribe that hosted him learned years later that Mortenson had claimed in his memoir that he had been kidnapped by the "Taliban" during his trip to Waziristan, they were both amazed and angered.

Mahsud is one of the men featured in a photograph of Mortenson's supposed Taliban "abductors" used in his second book, *Stones into Schools*.

"The way that he's portrayed the Mahsuds, as hash-smoking bandits is wrong. He's defamed me, my family, my tribe. We are respected people in my area. He's turned us into kidnappers," said Mahsud, a highly educated research director for a think tank in Islamabad that specializes in the tribal area.

"I am looking into how to sue him," said Mahsud, adding that he was in contact with a lawyer in the U.S.

Also considering suing Mortenson is Mohammad Ali Changazi, a mountain-trekking tour operator in Skardu, northern Pakistan, where the American built his first schools. Changazi's "scheming and dishonesty" is described at length in *Three Cups of Tea*.

Changazi, speaking by satellite phone from a base camp at Mount Everest, where he was part of an expedition, said that he had largely carried out some of the charitable works in Skardu that Mortenson had claimed sole credit for.

"From his book, I lost all respect. It is a bunch of lies," said Changazi. "I lost a lot of money as a result of the way he wrote about me. My business was finished."

At the start of *Three Cups of Tea*, Mortenson describes how he got lost and separated from his companions coming down off K2 in 1993. He says he staggered into the first village he came across, Korphe, where the people took him in and saved him. In return, he vowed to build a school in Korphe.

But the head of a non-governmental organization, with years of experience in the Skardu area, said that the route he took down K2 meant that he would have to cross two other villages before he got to Korphe.

In fact, the NGO leader, who did not want to be named because of the sensitivity of the issue, said that Mortenson returned a year later to the area with the idea of building a school in a village called Askole. When the people of Askole turned his offer down, the village elder from nearby Korphe came

across a dejected Mortenson and told him that he could build the school there instead.

After his inspiring memoir was published in 2006, Mortenson raised tens of millions of dollars, mostly in the U.S., for building schools in Pakistan and Afghanistan, two countries under grave threat from Islamic extremists. His book became required reading in the U.S. military ahead of deployments to Afghanistan.

"He's done a little bit of work here but the amount of money he's generated in the name of this area shows he's got no integrity," said the NGO leader. "From page one of the book, it's all about self-glorification."

Locals in Skardu believe that the description given in the book of the scenic mountain area, in northeast Pakistan, as a place on the verge of being overrun by the hardline Wahhabi Islam and Talibanization, has hurt tourism, which is the main industry there.

Skardu is one of Pakistan's most peaceful areas. Its population comes from the anti-Taliban Shiite sect of Islam, and its gentle traditions have kept the gun culture and extremist religion at bay.

Fazil Ali, the regional manager for Skardu of a non-governmental organization, the Marafie Foundation, said that the book was "a good read" with a genuine portrayal of the warm hospitality of the area.

However, Ali added: "In our area there is no Talibanization. The credit for that goes to our culture and everyone who does good work here," said Ali. "It is not down to one American opening 20 schools."

NATIONAL NEWS

Obama Paints Rep. Ryan As The GOP Face For 2012 (MCT)

Monday, April 25, 2011

McClatchy

By Steven Thomma

WASHINGTON — Eager to start campaigning for re-election next year, President Barack Obama isn't waiting for the Republican Party to nominate a rival. He's running against Rep. Paul Ryan, R-Wis.

Obama professes to like Ryan, the 41-year-old chairman of the House Budget Committee. But in increasingly personal and pointed terms, Obama is attacking Ryan as the face of a Republican Party that he says would use the government's debt crisis to turn America in a radical new direction.

He's doing it for two key reasons. Obama wants to shift the public focus away from own contribution to the nation's skyrocketing debt — which hurt Democrats in the 2010 congressional elections — and onto the Republican Party's proposed solutions. And he wants to frame the election as a choice between two very different visions of America: The Republican one he calls a dark place for the poor and middle class, and the other his own view of a friendly, more utopian place.

Obama, his top advisers and fellow Democrats believe that Ryan handed them a gift when he proposed a budget plan that would cut taxes by \$2 trillion over 10 years and also cut federal spending by \$6.2 trillion, cuts which include possibly wrenching changes in the popular Medicare program.

Some Republicans think, however, that Obama already is overplaying his hand. His attacks on Ryan may make it harder for him to strike a bargain with congressional Republicans, and could alienate voters focused on the enormous debt problem. And he also could turn off independents who chafe at partisan warfare.

Either way, it's Obama versus Ryan for the foreseeable future.

"This is the beginning of a year-and-a-half argument about how to save the country's economy," said Peter Brown, assistant director of the Polling Institute at Quinnipiac University in Connecticut.

Obama all but dared the Republicans to go first, signaling that he thought it foolhardy for him to make the first move in proposing specifics on big, long-term budget changes.

"This is not a matter of you go first or I go first," he said when he rolled a budget proposal in February that did not propose any substantial debt-reduction.

"If you look at the history of how these deals get done, typically it's not because there's an Obama plan out there; it's because Democrats and Republicans are both committed to tackling this issue in a serious way."

Obama let Ryan go first. The Wisconsin congressman unveiled his budget blueprint in early April.

The White House said it didn't like it, and Democrats quietly started keeping track of which potential 2012 Republican presidential candidates endorsed the plan.

"I applaud Rep. Paul Ryan," said former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney, a likely

candidate. "Anyone who has read my book knows that we are on the same page."

Romney's endorsement was noted in the White House, and stored away for later use.

Two months after Obama said there was no need to have an "Obama plan out there," the president announced that he'd give a major speech outlining his long-term budget ideas. Aides said he'd always planned it, that he wasn't just responding to Ryan.

With Ryan sitting in the audience as an invited guest at George Washington University near the White House, Obama didn't just propose his own plan — he launched his first broadside at Ryan's plan.

"This vision is less about reducing the deficit than it is about changing the basic social compact in America," Obama said. "Ronald Reagan's own budget director said, 'there's nothing serious or courageous about this plan.'

"There's nothing serious about a plan that claims to reduce the deficit by spending a trillion dollars on tax cuts for millionaires and billionaires. And I don't think there's anything courageous about asking for sacrifice from those who can least afford it and don't have any clout on Capitol Hill. That's not a vision of the America I know."

Ryan said he was stunned.

"When the president reached out to ask us to attend his speech, we were expecting an olive branch," he said afterwards. "Instead, his speech was excessively partisan, dramatically inaccurate, and hopelessly inadequate to address our fiscal crisis. What we heard today was not fiscal leadership from our commander-in-chief; we heard a political broadside from our campaigner-in-chief."

The next day, Obama ripped Ryan while speaking to campaign contributors in Chicago, in what he thought was an off-the-record session.

"When Paul Ryan says his priority is to make sure, you know, he's just being America's accountant ...," Obama said in remarks taped through an open microphone by CBS reporter Mark Knoller, "this is the same guy that voted for two wars that were unpaid for, voted for the Bush tax cuts that were unpaid for, voted for the prescription drug bill that cost as much as my health care bill — but wasn't paid for. So it's not on the level. And we've got to keep on, you know, keep on shining a light on that."

Then last week in California, Obama reacted almost with anger when asked to respond to pundits who credit Ryan with being bold and

courageous in making the first detailed proposal to cut deficits.

"The Republican budget that was put forward I would say is fairly radical. I wouldn't call it particularly courageous," Obama said. "I do think Mr. Ryan is sincere. I think he's a patriot. I think he wants to solve a real problem, which is our long-term deficit. But I think that what he and the other Republicans in the House of Representatives also want to do is change our social compact in a pretty fundamental way."

Polls suggest that Obama may have the upper hand. A McClatchy-Marist poll last week, for example, found that voters by 2-1 support raising taxes on the wealthy, and by 4-1 they also don't want to cut Medicare.

Obama wants to raise income and other taxes on incomes above \$200,000. He also wants to raise Social Security taxes on income above 106,800.

Ryan proposes to slash top income tax rates on high incomes from 35 percent to 25 percent, but also would eliminate some unspecified deductions and loopholes.

Republicans concede that it was politically risky for Ryan to propose a detailed plan to curb deficits. But they think voters will reward him for stepping up to the problem, and that Obama will pay a price for appearing more partisan than serious.

"Of course there's risk. But it is a sincere effort to address the problem," said Republican pollster Whit Ayres of Ryan's effort.

"The president's attacks are not the actions of someone who's trying to find a solution, they're the actions of someone who's trying to find a political edge. ... This is the sort of thing that independents hate — partisan attacks rather than solving problems."

Coburn Says Medicare, Medicaid Must Be Part Of Budget Talks (BLOOM)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Bloomberg News

By Ian Katz And Jesse Hamilton

Medicare and Medicaid programs must be part of the U.S. effort to reduce the budget deficit, Senator Tom Coburn said.

"You can't have Medicare out of the equation," Coburn, an Oklahoma Republican and member of the Senate Budget Committee, said on NBC's "Meet the Press" program broadcast today. "You can't have Medicaid out of the equation. To lead on this issue and create a false predicate that says we

can solve our problems without addressing our entitlements hurts the country."

As part of the debate on government spending, which includes completing a 2012 budget, President Barack Obama has offered the outlines of a plan to reduce the debt by \$4 trillion over 12 years through a combination of spending cuts and tax increases.

House Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan, a Wisconsin Republican, has proposed cutting spending by \$6 trillion over a decade in part by privatizing Medicare and capping Medicaid spending. Republicans reject Obama's push for tax increases on the wealthiest Americans to help reduce debt.

Senator Kent Conrad, a North Dakota Democrat and chairman of the budget committee, said on "Meet the Press" that the U.S. is "headed for a fiscal cliff" if it doesn't address the deficit. Conrad and Coburn are part of the bipartisan "Gang of Six" seeking a budget compromise.

Conrad said he wouldn't support raising the government's \$14.3 trillion debt limit for more than a year "without a plan or a proposal or process in place to deal with the debt." He said he would vote for a short-term extension.

Congress is facing a vote as early as next month on raising the debt ceiling. The Treasury Department projects that it will hit the cap on May 16, though it could use emergency measures to avoid default until about July 8.

Obama and members of his economic team have said that failure to approve an increase could have catastrophic consequences for the U.S. economy and financial markets.

Senators Richard Blumenthal, a Democrat, and Mark Kirk, a Republican, presented opposing views on the debt ceiling while appearing today on the CBS program "Face the Nation."

Blumenthal, from Connecticut, said "unequivocally yes" the limit should be raised. Failure to do so "would be catastrophic for our economy."

Kirk, from Illinois, said he wouldn't vote for it "unless we have comprehensive, dramatic, effective and broad-based cuts" to spending, including on entitlements. "Without that, we should not send a blank check to the administration."

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Senators Concede Feeling Pressure On Deficit Issue (AP)
Monday, April 25, 2011
Associated Press

WASHINGTON - The Democratic chairman of the Senate Budget Committee says if members of a Senate deficit group fail to come to grips soon with the deficit problem, "we won't be relevant to this discussion."

But North Dakota's Kent Conrad declined in an appearance on NBC's "Meet the Press" to say specifically where the so-called "Gang of Six" Democrats and Republicans stand in discussions on various debt-reduction strategies.

Appearing on the same show Sunday, Oklahoma Republican Sen. Tom Coburn said, "The country can't afford for us not to have an agreement."

Neither Conrad nor Coburn would get into specifics about the group's discussions. Coburn did repeat his general opposition to tax increases. Conrad said he believes the American people would support tax reform as one way toward deficit reduction.

Republicans Downplay Urgency Of Raising Debt Ceiling (HUFFPOST)
Monday, April 25, 2011
Huffington Post
By Elise Foley

WASHINGTON -- Failing to raise the nation's debt ceiling would be less damaging than allowing the deficit to continue to swell, Sen. Tom Coburn (R-Okl.) said on Sunday, fueling a brewing battle over whether the government can take on more debt.

The Treasury is expected to hit its debt ceiling in May, at which point it will need authorization from Congress before it can take on additional loans. Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner told members of Congress the debt limit needs to be raised by early July to prevent the government from defaulting on its loans.

Leading economists say that failing to raise the debt limit could be disastrous for the economy, with major implications on markets worldwide. But some Republicans downplayed the effects of allowing the government to hit its debt limit, arguing on Sunday talk shows that concern about the hitting the debt ceiling is overblown.

"The debt limit doesn't really mean anything because we've always extended it," Sen. Coburn

said on NBC's "Meet the Press." "The Treasury secretary has the ability, even if this debt limit is not extended, to continue to pay interest on our loans. The idea that this is catastrophic is wrong -- what is catastrophic is to continue to spend money we don't have."

Freshman Republican Rep. Joe Walsh (R-Ill.) pointed to previous times Congress has voted against raising the debt limit and then approved an increase in the weeks that followed.

"Over the course of those few months when the debt ceiling wasn't raised, Armageddon didn't hit, the government paid its bills -- we've got enough government revenues to certainly pay, to service all of our debt," he said on CBS's "Face the Nation."

"And the administration knows that," he added. "The administration's got to get serious and recognize that we're not just going to give them a vote to raise the debt ceiling unless they fundamentally change the way this city works."

Elderly Face Lack Of Geriatric Specialists, New Report Warns (USAT)

Monday, April 25, 2011

USA Today

By Janice Lloyd

Doctors who specialize in aging are in short supply and their shortage will grow worse as the population ages in coming decades, a new report concludes.

The report, published this month in the Journal of the American Geriatric Society, warns that as the proportion of older adults spikes from 12% to a projected 20% by 2030, caring for 70 million people 65 and older and 10 million 85 and older will be a challenge.

Other types of health care providers will need to work in teams with the doctors to help coordinate patient care, according to the report.

"There are not going to be enough geriatricians," says physician Gregg Warshaw, an author of the report and chair of the division of geriatrics at the University of Cincinnati. Currently, he says, "80% of pediatric patients see pediatricians, while 80% of geriatric patients see primary care doctors or internists."

Earlier studies by physicians groups predicted 36,000 additional geriatricians will be needed by 2030. But the new report calls that "impossible and unrealistic." Fewer than 320 physicians entered geriatric medicine fellowship training from 2004 to 2008, the report said, noting a lack of geriatricians in some rural areas is acute.

The authors call on policymakers and health care systems to change payments to reward team members other than physicians — such as nurses and social workers — and to improve training in care for the elderly.

Physician Steven Counsell, director of geriatric medicine at Indiana University School of Medicine, says one of the problems with current Medicare policy is "so much of the payment is based on the face-to-face visit between the doctor and patient."

Success stories involving teams of health care providers working in concert with geriatricians are good models for others to pursue, Counsell says. He helped create the Geriatric Resources for Assessment and Care of Elders (GRACE), which aligns low-income adults living in their homes with two medical teams.

The support team includes a nurse practitioner and social worker who visit patients at home to assess their needs. Then a larger team, including a geriatrician, pharmacist and physical therapist, develop a care plan. The support team, rather than the doctor, follows the patient.

A report in the Journal of the American Medical Association in November praised the program as one of the models that would be most effective and efficient in caring for the complex needs of older adults. GRACE saved money for the sickest (three to four chronic diseases). It decreased emergency room visits and lowered admission rates.

"In half a day, a geriatrician meeting with one team can impact 500 patients," Counsell says.

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States Vs. Data Collectors At The Supreme Court (USAT)

Monday, April 25, 2011

USA Today

By Joan Biskupic

WASHINGTON — When a doctor writes a prescription and the patient has a pharmacist fill it, the transaction generates information

companies have increasingly sought out, compiled and sold to drug manufacturers.

What often happens next, say Vermont officials trying to block disclosure of prescription records, is that "doctors' names and prescribing habits travel from pharmacy records to the laptop computers of pharmaceutical sales representatives."

Those sales reps, Vermont Attorney General William Sorrell tells the Supreme Court in a case to be argued Tuesday, show up at doctors' offices armed with a marketing strategy, samples and gifts, intended to persuade doctors to switch patients to new and expensive drugs.

That scenario, counters Randy Frankel, a vice president at IMS Health, challenging Vermont's law restricting this data, is "an attempt to show a darker side to the process." Frankel stresses that patients would suffer if pharmaceutical companies could not track and market to physicians whose patients most need new medications. Information in the hands of those sales reps, Frankel says, can get new drugs for Alzheimer's and other diseases to the doctors who treat those diseases.

Vermont's law, similar to measures in Maine and New Hampshire, prohibits pharmacies from selling prescription information for drug marketing without a physician's consent. The U.S. Court of Appeals for the 2nd Circuit declared the law an unconstitutional restriction on commercial speech. (A separate U.S. appeals court upheld the similar New Hampshire law.)

The Supreme Court case pitting states against data collectors and the drug industry comes at a time of national concern about escalating medical costs.

Vermont officials say its measure was intended to protect the doctor-patient relationship and ensure patients are not unnecessarily steered to brand-name drugs over generics. They say there is no First Amendment right to information pharmacies collect under state and federal drug regulations.

The challengers, IMS Health and, separately, the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America, counter that not only do private companies have a free speech right to use the information but that making it available enhances drugmakers' ability to swiftly pass on medical breakthroughs to the doctors and patients who need them.

Vermont's law traces back to 2006 when members of the Vermont Medical Society, attending a meeting in New Hampshire, heard from physicians there that pharmacies were selling records to pharmaceutical companies. Until then, says Paul

Harrington, executive vice president of the Vermont society, "physicians were completely unaware that pharmaceutical companies had access to this information when they were coming to the physicians' offices." He said doctors had two concerns: that their private relationships with patients could be breached and that the information could be used to promote more expensive drugs, driving up the overall costs for all patients.

At the Vermont Medical Society's urging, the state Legislature in 2007 passed the law prohibiting pharmacies from selling the records for drug-marketing purposes without the physician's consent. The information includes the name of the physician, the patient's age and sex, the type and strength of each drug and the date and locale of prescription. Though patients' names are encrypted, pharmaceutical companies are able to track the types of patients seen and prescribing patterns.

When the appeals court invalidated the law, it said that concerns about doctor-patient privacy were "speculative" and that Vermont had other ways to hold down health care costs without infringing on speech, such as by requiring generic drugs as a first course of treatment for patients on Medicare.

In the state's appeal, Assistant Attorney General Bridget Asay, who will argue the case Tuesday, says, "Pharmacies have this prescription information only by virtue of government regulation. They do not have an unfettered right to sell or use it for purposes unrelated to the patient's care."

The U.S. Department of Justice, backing the state, agrees in a court filing: "There is no First Amendment right to obtain information that is in private possession solely as a result of such governmental regulation." Justice Department lawyers add that drugmakers "spend nearly \$8 billion each year on marketing efforts directed at doctors" and limiting the use of data would lower spending on prescription drugs without harming public health.

Lawyers for IMS Health say Vermont's law wrongly restricts "truthful speech" on a matter of public concern, such as the health benefits of particular drugs.

Asked about physicians' privacy assertions, Thomas Goldstein, who will argue for the challengers Tuesday, said, "When it enacted the law, Vermont admitted its purpose was to keep information about drugs out of doctor's hands, not improve the doctor-patient relationship. Doctors are always free not to visit with drug

representatives, and many do. And none of this information contains any information about individual patients."

Celebrating Easter With The Rising Sun (WP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Washington Post

By Michelle Boorstein And And Hamil R. Harris

At one end of the Mall, Easter morning was beginning delicately: A crowd of birds chirped at the Capitol, the lights of a recycling truck blinked in the dawn, a lone jogger's feet struck the pebble path with rhythmic crunches.

But the Lincoln Memorial, at the other end, was rocking.

"We want to welcome you to a very unpolitically correct celebration!" Pastor Amos Dodge boomed through loudspeakers from the plaza in front of the memorial. Some people didn't like his claim that Jesus Christ was the only way to God, he said. "Someone said: 'Why aren't you more inclusive?' I want to be clear: This is our party, and we're going to party hearty!"

And for the few thousand worshipers at Amos's annual Easter sunrise service, the party meant prayer, patriotism, the sun coming up over a backdrop of monuments, and a joking pastor. He teased the crowd, some of whom had jogged and biked to the service, about how he had forgotten the words to his own sermon. And about their fear of letting loose and waving their arms while they prayed.

"I want those of you who don't feel comfortable putting up two or one arm to just put an arm up halfway," said Dodge, a Vienna pastor who began the service 33 Easters ago with 120 people at the Reflecting Pool. "You'll remember Easter 2011 as the time 'I went crazy!'"

In another quintessential Washington Easter scene, members of Shiloh Baptist Church endured metal detectors, Secret Service agents and a phalanx of D.C. police to get into a service the Obamas would be attending.

"I was so excited, I forgot to make my Easter eggs," said Rosa Peak, 84, who was among those in line at dawn for the 10 a.m. service at Shiloh, which was founded by freed slaves in the 1860s in the city's Shaw neighborhood.

Peak was one of the first African American teachers to work in then-all-white Southern High School in Baltimore, starting in 1956. But overcoming that hurdle wasn't as powerful to her, she said, as living to see a black president.

The Obamas came in the side door and were among the 3,000 people who heard the Rev. Wallach Charles Smith's sermon, "The Resurrection Changes Everything." They took to their feet for raucous hymns and watched as several children and an adult were baptized.

After welcoming the president, Smith offered him the opportunity to speak from the pulpit. Obama raised his hand, waved and smiled, but declined, as he has done each year of his presidency.

At the same time, a few dozen homeless men streamed into the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church for an Easter breakfast, a few blocks from the Obamas' home.

"The weather is beautiful. I just had a cup of coffee. I'm feeling well — it's a good Easter," said Amos Smith, 48, of Baltimore, who said he has been living in the neighborhood near the White House for about two years.

Sitting in one of the uppermost seats at the Lincoln Memorial service were Erich and Carol Hoernle of New Jersey, who were on the final day of a week-long vacation in Washington. Because Carol, 59, is a teacher, they often travel on the holiday and find sunrise services wherever they go by asking the National Park Service — since public parks are often inspiring places for worship. Or, if they're home, they attend a sunrise service at a nearby beach.

"A lot of ministers don't really inspire you, but this one did," Erich, 66, said of Dodge and his sermon about Christianity providing "doors" to get in, out of and through situations in life. "It was poignant."

The couple said they were next headed for the U.S. Botanic Garden once it opened.

Dodge, pastor of the evangelical Capital Church In Vienna, was a blend of tour guide, pastor and talk show host, walking through the crowd on the steps, cracking jokes and praising the city's monuments.

He spoke about Easter, when Christians mark the resurrection of Jesus, as a real story about — not a metaphor for — second chances.

"What's your greatest fear? Hope? Dream for yourself and your family?" he asked.

The crowd ranged from sweaty joggers and bikers with their earbuds off to sleepy little girls in fancy dresses, families in matching sweatshirts and ushers in suits. By a show of hands, the crowd was largely first-timers. Veterans of the service knew to bring blankets and beach chairs for the wet grass and sunglasses for the view down the Mall, directly into the rising sun.

Dodge said Sunday was the warmest service in 33 years — it was 60 degrees at sunrise — and he recalled Easters that have come with pouring rain and subfreezing temperatures.

"It's nice to be with people outside just your regular community," said David Wall, 36, who biked with his wife, Carrie, from Annandale. The couple met at an Easter lunch four years ago, and on Sunday they were considering going home, showering and going to a second Easter service at their own church.

By 8 a.m., the Lincoln Memorial service was over, and workers were breaking down the chairs and the stage. A fresh crowd of tourists was heading up the stairs to see the memorial as different Easters were beginning to unfold across the city.

Bloomberg: Hands Off The Rich (POLITICO)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Politico

By Glenn Thrush

Billionaire New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg says it's not time to soak the rich - yet.

Appearing on "Fox News Sunday," Bloomberg praised Rep. Paul Ryan's moxie for proposing a comprehensive budget plan but wouldn't say which plan -- Ryan's or Obama's -- he backed.

"I don't know that we are in big trouble, but we certainly could be very easily - this is a warning," he said when host Chris Wallace asked him about S&P's outlook on downgrading on U.S. treasury bonds.

A Democrat turned Republican turned independent, Bloomberg said he favors an all-of-the-above approach to deficit reduction but thinks hiking taxes on the rich at the moment would kick the U.S. economy into a tailspin.

"Today, no," Bloomberg said when asked if he backed White House plans to raise \$1 trillion from tax hikes on families earning more than \$250,000. "This economy is at a point, nationwide, where it could go either way. I do think we should have taxes. I do think that people should pay their fair share. I do think that the majority of the money is going to come from the wealthy, that's where the money is. On the other hand, today is not the right ways to do it."

Times/USC Dornsife Poll: California Voters Want Public Employees To Help Ease State's Financial Troubles (LAT)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Los Angeles Times

By Shane Goldmacher, Los Angeles Times

California voters want government employees to give up some retirement benefits to help ease the state's financial problems, favoring a cap on pensions and a later age for collecting them, according to a new poll.

Voter support for rolling back benefits available to few outside the public sector comes as Gov. Jerry Brown and Republicans in the Legislature haggle over changes to the pension system as part of state budget negotiations. Such benefits have been a flashpoint of national debate this year, and the poll shows that Californians are among those who perceive public retirement plans to be too costly.

Voters appear ready to embrace changes not just for future hires but also for current employees who have been promised the benefits under contract.

Seventy percent of respondents said they supported a cap on pensions for current and future public employees. Nearly as many, 68%, approved of raising the amount of money government workers should be required to contribute to their retirement. Increasing the age at which government employees may collect pensions was favored by 52%.

Although pension costs today account for just a fraction of the state budget, they are putting local governments under considerable financial strain, and analysts say effects on the state may not be far off.

"It's pretty clear that there's broad support for making changes in the area of pensions," said Democratic pollster Stanley Greenberg, who co-directed the bipartisan poll for The Times and the USC Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences.

Many public safety officers can retire at 50 with a pension equal to 3% of their final salary for each year worked — for example, 60% of salary after 20 years on the job. Many other state employees can retire at 55, with 2.5% of salary for each year worked. And tens of thousands of public workers may also purchase "air time" — credit for years they do not actually work — to boost their retirement income.

Guaranteed pensions have faded from corporate America in recent decades, replaced largely by 401(k) accounts that workers pay into and that rise and fall based on the fluctuations of financial markets. Voters back an integration of such plans into the government retirement system, with 66% supporting a blend of the traditional pension and a 401(k).

"It's just gotten way out of hand," said Beverly Marcelja, a 67-year old Democrat and retiree living in Tracy, in the Central Valley.

David Martinez, 59, a nonpartisan voter who lives in Rowland Heights, said existing retirement plans reflect a time when private-sector workers were afforded the same pensions.

"It's come to the point where the government is paying much more than private industry is," he said. "It should be equal."

The public sentiment is a cause for concern for organized labor. Public employee unions that spent millions of dollars helping to elect Brown are working aggressively to keep their pensions intact. But the governor has made clear that he believes they must make concessions as the state struggles.

Art Pulaski, executive secretary-treasurer of the California Labor Federation, said the public is trapped in a "moment of envy" over benefits that he maintains are far from lavish.

His union's position is that every worker should be entitled to a pension, not an unsecured retirement reliant on Wall Street earnings. Policy makers should focus on winning back a stable retirement for private-sector workers rather than demonize public employees, he said.

Some state and local public employee unions have already agreed to some changes, such as a delay in the retirement age for new hires.

"It's one thing for Republican governors in Wisconsin and Indiana to support these types of changes, but seeing this type of support from California voters, even California Democrats, is really remarkable," said Dan Schnur, director of the Jesse M. Unruh Institute of Politics at USC and a former GOP strategist.

Among Democratic respondents, 71% supported increasing retirement contributions for future hires and 66% backed a pension cap for both current and future workers. However, fewer than half of the Democrats surveyed favored cutting benefits and raising the retirement age for current employees.

Majorities of Republican and nonpartisan voters favored every potential money-saving pension change they were asked about.

Linda DiVall, a Republican pollster who co-directed the poll, said the results show that on the subject of retirement benefits, the public believes it is "unfair what the state employees have going for them."

Although Republicans have crusaded for years against what they view as bloated government pensions, California voters are not confident that they are best suited to tackle the issue. Only 29% said Republicans would best handle a revamping of the pension system, whereas 43% would prefer that an overhaul be left in the hands of Brown and his fellow Democrats.

And although voters strongly supported downsizing parts of the pension system, they were divided on whether most public employees were compensated appropriately. Forty-three percent said wages and benefits were too high; 33% said they were about right; 12% said they were too low.

The Times/USC Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences poll surveyed 1,503 registered voters from April 7 to 17. It was conducted by a bipartisan team of polling companies based in the Washington, D.C., area: Greenberg Quinlan Rosner, a Democratic firm, and American Viewpoint, a Republican firm.

The margin of error is plus or minus 2.53 percentage points. Some pension questions were posed to half the respondents and have a margin of error of plus or minus 3.58 percentage points.

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Ohio Is Spending \$1.4 Billion To Attract Jobs. Will It Work? (USAT)

Monday, April 25, 2011

USA Today

By Dennis Cauchon

VAN WERT, Ohio — The farmland is flat. The houses are few. The property owners have agreed to sell.

All that's missing is a manufacturer who wants to build a giant factory on 1,600 acres of farmland in northwest Ohio. As the town's website says: whyvanwert.org.

Van Wert's speculative industrial site — complete with a rail line, gas lines, land-acquisition options and anything else a manufacturer would need — is just one \$10 million slice of an extraordinary government experiment to revive this state's declining economy.

Ohio has launched what appears to be the biggest intervention in the private economy by a state government since at least the Great Depression, according to a USA TODAY review of historical data. The state is preparing new industrial parks and high-tech office buildings, loaning money and giving grants to businesses, and subsidizing clean

energy, websites, nanotechnology and warehouses, among other things.

The state will spend \$1.4 billion on economic development this year. Indiana, by contrast, will spend \$37 million; Florida \$11 million. California has 25 people working full-time on economic development. Ohio: more than 400.

Ohio's attempt to revive its economy is a real-life case of how states act as a laboratory of democracy. This industrial state is testing a provocative economic question: Can government direct the economy into the future, or is that best done by a free market?

In a political twist, Ohio's economic intervention was a Republican idea, started a decade ago by Gov. Bob Taft. Republican legislators boasted of the effort as a "stimulus" program until the word became associated with Democratic President Obama's economic recovery plan.

The program has enjoyed broad support from Ohio's voters, businesses, unions and Republicans and Democrats alike.

"We had to do something in a dramatic way," Taft says. "It's a long-term strategy, not an overnight attitude. It's how states like Ohio must transform themselves. We don't have any other choice."

Ohio has lost more than 500,000 jobs in the past decade — 80% of them well-paying manufacturing jobs. Only Michigan has suffered more from the nation's industrial decline.

It's unclear whether Ohio's gamble will pay off.

A USA TODAY review of two dozen of Ohio's state-funded projects found many behind schedule or failing to deliver the jobs or investment returns promised.

For example, a proposed multibillion-dollar plant that would make synthetic natural gas in Lima (population 38,771) is still an artist's rendering in search of financing. It has received \$70 million in federal, state and local aid and has been in the works for a decade.

However, the recession and other economic forces — such as low natural gas prices — make it difficult to judge the long-term success of the Lima project or other projects financed by the government.

The Van Wert site is one of two new mega-industrial sites Ohio is preparing in hopes that a car company or other manufacturer will choose Ohio rather than Tennessee, Alabama or a foreign nation.

A few miles down the road from Van Wert (population 10,263), the state is creating a 471-acre industrial park in Wapakoneta (population 9,867) that could supply the mega-site. That site's website has a similar ring: "whywapakoneta.com."

The question the state is asking itself is: Why Ohio?

Companies build elsewhere

Dozens of once-prosperous towns — Akron, Coshocton, Defiance, Mansfield, Newark, Van Wert, Zanesville — are shells of what they once were.

The state is losing young people, and because of the 2010 Census it will lose two of its 18 U.S. House seats.

When Facebook or Google build data centers — buildings that could be located anywhere — they have chosen rural, high-unemployment parts of Oregon and North Carolina.

Ohio is heading down a path Michigan tried on a smaller scale but is abandoning.

Michigan spent about \$100 million to \$250 million annually on economic development during the past decade, first under Republican Gov. John Engler, then under Democratic Gov. Jennifer Granholm. The effort — even with an extra, one-time injection of \$400 million in 2007 — couldn't stop the state's economic slide from a collapsing auto industry.

Michigan's new governor, Republican Rick Snyder, plans to cut economic development spending to \$50 million. Instead, he wants to reduce business taxes by more than \$1.5 billion and shift the burden to the personal income tax.

Ohio State University economist Mark Partridge says government efforts to plan an economic revival seldom work.

"Politicians and economic development officials overestimate their ability to forecast the future — to predict the next Silicon Valley or even to know beforehand that a Silicon Valley is going to occur," Partridge says.

Government's poor record of picking winners and losers means that even well-intentioned programs can hurt more than help, he says.

"A tax incentive for one firm means I have to raise taxes on everyone else or cut services," Partridge says.

Ohio's business leaders are more optimistic.

"We're looking to get industry up and moving again," says Andrew Doehrel, president of the Ohio

Chamber of Commerce. "We're not saying pick Company XYZ because it has a chance of success. We're saying pick Company XYZ because they're into plastics and Akron is successful in that field. It's targeting that is necessary and useful."

A long partnership

Ohio's tradition of big government, big business and big unions dates back a century and sometimes has worked well.

The auto industry bailout halted Ohio's employment collapse and restored some manufacturing jobs. The state's unemployment rate fell to 8.9% in March, just above the national average.

In a state devastated by foreign competition, free trade is held in unusually low esteem, even among Republicans. When Republican Gov. John Kasich was elected in November, exit polls showed voters by a 7-1 ratio said free-trade agreements had taken away jobs.

Ohio's \$1.4 billion in economic development spending does not include many tax breaks or other programs that provide additional assistance to targeted industries such as clean coal.

Most states offer similar programs. What's different in Ohio is the scale.

The state has started directing cash, loans and tax breaks to nearly every imaginable part of the economy — dairies, auto suppliers, business incubators, plastics research and biotechnology. It's building modern industrial and office parks — and fixing up old ones — even though prospects for filling the sites is speculative.

The push to reinvent Ohio's economy began in 2002 when voters approved borrowing for an economic development program called "Third Frontier." Voters have extended the \$2.3 billion program — part of the state's larger economic development effort — through 2015.

From that, the economic development effort has expanded to nearly every sector of the economy in every town in this state of 11.5 million.

"We still want to be the state that makes things," says Mark Kvamme, a Silicon Valley venture capitalist brought in to help reorganize the economic development effort.

Kasich, the new governor, has moved some programs into a quasi-private operation called JobsOhio that he hopes will be faster and more effective.

This new approach positions the government to act more like a risk-taking investor, Kvamme says. For

example, JobsOhio might own a share of an upstart business in return for its investment. "Ohio should be able to do what Stanford University has done — own some of the upside," Kvamme says. "When Google went public, Stanford made billions. Think what that could mean for Ohio." Stanford made money by licensing technology to Google in exchange for shares and fees.

Kasich is expanding Ohio's tradition of large-scale, government-directed development programs. His new budget proposes spending an extra \$100 million a year in liquor profits on economic development. That amount alone dwarfs economic development spending in almost every other state.

An unusual marriage

Quasar energy group is the poster child for what Ohio is trying to accomplish — a marriage of business and academics.

The start-up company converts waste — sewage, cow manure, food — into natural gas. It got a \$2 million state grant, a \$3 million state loan and \$1 million in federal funds to build a waste-to-energy plant in Columbus.

Quasar will move into a new government-subsidized office building on the Wooster campus of Ohio State University. This 57-acre BioHio Research Park, Ohio's effort to create a "food and agriculture technology cluster," got about \$10 million in state and local subsidies.

The state's matchmaking has helped both sides. "Entrepreneurs make it sound easier than it is. Academics help you get over the hurdles," says Mel Kurtz, Quasar's president.

Kurtz's slice of the hundreds of millions of dollars Ohio is spending on alternative energy shows the ambitious scale of Ohio's efforts. North Carolina awarded \$1 million in state money to alternative energy businesses last year. No single grant was bigger than \$100,000.

Ohio hopes for thousands of waste-to-energy plants, not just a few, Kurtz says. "This is building an industry, not a business," he says.

The size of Ohio's economic development spending has made subsidies part of everyday life for its major businesses.

Cincinnati-based Procter and Gamble, the consumer giant, got \$250,000 in November to pave a parking lot.

"It's sort of a rich-gets-richer situation," complained state Sen. Ray Miller, a Democrat who voted against the grant.

American Greetings, a holiday card giant, is getting state subsidies to move its 2,000-employee operation from one Ohio town to another. Restaurant chain Bob Evans is getting state money to move its headquarters from a low-income neighborhood in Columbus to an affluent suburb.

Ohio cities and counties routinely add tax breaks for almost any business or developer that asks. One unusual Ohio subsidy: collecting municipal income taxes from workers and giving half the money to their company as a location award.

Free-market advocates say subsidies and tax breaks favor bigger businesses skilled at lobbying. That pushes the burden onto others and unintentionally smothers small entrepreneurs.

"The best thing a city or state can do is make itself attractive to every business. Taxes should be low, regulation moderate and don't play favorites," says Clint Bolick, president of Arizona's Goldwater Institute, which successfully sued Phoenix for subsidizing a shopping mall.

Overdrive, a successful Ohio technology firm, shows the blurry line between business-friendly and business subsidy.

Entrepreneur Steve Potash was a Cleveland lawyer who turned his computer hobby into a major distributor of audio books and e-books to 10,000 libraries. Overdrive has 130 employees, is riding the e-book boom and has never had an unprofitable quarter.

When Overdrive needed a bigger office, the company called the state and got a \$484,000 tax credit.

"There wasn't a lot of red tape. The state was a pleasure to do business with," Potash says.

The company will move from one Cleveland suburb to another. It never considered leaving the area. The state aid will help the company speed hiring and growth, Potash says.

Past House GOP Tactic Proves Useless To Democrats (AP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Associated Press

By Jim Abrams

WASHINGTON - A year ago, when Republicans were in the minority on Capitol Hill, they drove Democrats crazy by using an obscure parliamentary maneuver to change, delay and even kill Democratic priorities.

Now that Republicans are running the House, Democrats have tried to stymie the GOP agenda

by relying on the tactic, known as the motion to recommit. But they've failed on every one of their 23 attempts this year.

That motion is almost always the last step just before the final vote on a bill. It gives the minority party, which has little voice and few rights in the House, a last chance to amend a bill, or in a more traditional sense, return it to the committee level for further work.

Often, the maneuver is aimed at forcing members of the majority into an untenable choice between opposing their party's position or casting a vote that opponents could use against them in election campaigns.

For a recommit motion to work, the minority party must pick off at least some members of the majority. Thus Democrats would need at least a few dozen of the House's 241 Republicans to vote with them this year. Their best showing so far on any motion: two GOP votes.

Republican leaders may have a hard time keeping their troops in line on the budget and social issues, but there's near ironclad unity when it comes to keeping Democrats in their place.

A Democratic motion on a recent bill to cut off federal dollars for National Public Radio would have continued money for Amber alerts on NPR regarding abducted children. The motion didn't get a single Republican vote. Nor did Democrats get a nibble when they called for federal air marshals on high-risk flights as part of aviation legislation.

On a highway spending bill, Democrats were shut out when they tried to cut off federal aid for "bridge to nowhere" projects in Alaska. They drew a single vote on a motion to the last short-term spending bill stating that there would be no cuts to Social Security or Medicare. "That is simply a fog screen," GOP Rep. Hal Rogers of Kentucky, chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, said in opposing it.

Such motions rarely succeed for either party. But Republicans in the recent past have managed to entice conservative and vulnerable Democrats with motions on sensitive subjects such as guns, abortion and immigration.

Republicans nearly succeeded in derailing the health care act last year with a motion to recommit that contained anti-abortion provisions. Democratic leaders had to appease their own anti-abortion wing to secure their votes against the GOP motion.

In 2007 Democrats had to withdraw a bill giving residents in the District of Columbia a vote in the

House because of a motion to repeal the city's tough gun laws.

Last spring Republicans succeeded in changing a bill to subsidize people who buy energy-efficient products for their homes. GOP lawmakers made the changes part of a recommit motion barring contractors from hiring child molesters.

A week later they watered down a science and technology bill by attaching their version to a proposal to fire government workers who view pornography on the job. Many Democrats, envisioning election-year attack ads claiming they supported pornography, had to go along.

In December, Republicans used a similar tactic to force Democrats to withdraw temporarily a bill expanding child nutrition programs. By voting against the Republican alternative, a lawmaker could be portrayed as supporting federal food money for institutions that hire convicted sex offenders.

Norm Ornstein, a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, said Republicans have developed the procedure as "a potent weapon of embarrassment." They focused, he said, not so much on offering alternatives as entrapping Democrats with "gotcha" proposals.

"The Democrats have not been as relentless or adept as Republicans as far as crafting" the motions, Ornstein said.

Democrats predict they'll have more success as the 2012 election approaches. "It depends on whether the Republican rank and file come to listen to their constituencies," said Jennifer Crider, spokeswoman for the House Democratic campaign committee. "Right now they are listening to their leadership."

Republican leaders have explained to their members that Democrats are given opportunities to offer amendments, and that the motions are merely procedural votes on issues where Democrats are trying to score political points.

It wasn't always that way.

In 1909, opponents of autocratic Speaker Joe Cannon, R-Ill., forced a rule change giving priority to an opponent to offer an alternative before a final vote. In 1932 that was changed to give the minority party a last shot.

Democrats increasingly squelched that right in their many decades of controlling the House. When Republicans took over in 1995, they promised that the right to offer a motion to recommit would be honored even as they united in defeating Democratic proposals.

The Democratic return to power in 2007 was accompanied by the continued trend, starting under the Republicans, of limiting the minority's right to offer amendments. The motion to recommit was often the only chance to affect legislation.

"In recent years, and not just under the current majority, the minority has been forced to use the motion to recommit, often in ways that are painful for the majority, to ensure the minority's voice is heard," Ohio Rep. John Boehner, then the minority leader, told the American Enterprise Institute in a speech last September. "And in turn, the majority has responded by conjuring up new ways to shut the minority out even further. It's a cycle of gridlock."

Online:

Congressional Research Service:
<http://tinyurl.com/3zstryw>

Congressional Glossary: <http://tinyurl.com/3rftfwh>

Giffords Standing On Own, Trying To Improve Gait (AP)
Monday, April 25, 2011
Associated Press

PHOENIX – Doctors say Rep. Gabrielle Giffords can walk a little and is even trying to improve her gait. But the report Sunday in The Arizona Republic adds the congresswoman herself is planning to "walk a mountain."

Giffords uses her left side and has begun making limited use of her right arm and leg, a common effect of a bullet wound on the left side of the brain, said Dr. Gerard Francisco, chief medical officer at Houston's TIRR Memorial Hermann who works with Giffords daily.

"Her left side is perfect," said Pia Carusone, her legislative chief of staff. "She can do whatever you can do."

She said that even in her wheelchair Giffords has stringent posture: tall, tight, strong — like always.

Nurse Kristy Poteet said Giffords pushes a cart up and down the hospital halls as therapy, focusing on using the correct muscles. More therapy comes from games of bowling and indoor golf.

The Republic report — containing interviews over the past few days with her husband, doctors and others close to her — gives the latest picture of her recovery 15 weeks after a gunman opened fire in a Tucson parking lot, killing six people and wounding 13 others, including Giffords.

The physicians place her in the top 5 percent of patients recovering from her type of brain injury, the newspaper said.

"She shows a lot more independence right now," Francisco said. "She's her own person."

Giffords' husband, Mark Kelly, said in an interview with CBS News that she'll attend Friday's launch of his space shuttle mission in Florida. It will be the first time Giffords has traveled since she was flown from Tucson to Houston more than three months ago to undergo rehabilitation for the gunshot wound to her head.

"I've met with her doctors, her neurosurgeon and her doctors, and ... they've given us permission to take her down to the launch," said Kelly, who is commanding the shuttle mission.

CBS released excerpts of the interview Sunday, and it was scheduled to air Monday on "CBS Evening News with Katie Couric."

Kelly told the Republic that Giffords longs to leave the rehab center for good, repeating "I miss Tucson." When that day comes, Giffords told Poteet she plans to "walk a mountain."

Dr. Dong Kim, the neurosurgeon who oversees Giffords' care, said most of the physical and speech recovery happens within 12 months.

Those closest to Giffords tell of a woman progressing from severe brain trauma, but their words are without heightened expectations.

She speaks most often in a single word or declarative phrase: "love you," "awesome," those close to her said.

There were hopeful language signs even in March when Kelly said Giffords learned about the people killed during the Tucson rampage Jan. 8.

Kelly said he was reading a newspaper story about her out loud when she noticed he skipped a paragraph. That paragraph told of the casualties in the Tucson shooting — news that set Giffords grieving.

"So many people, so many people," Giffords repeated. Poteet said she would find Giffords with heavy looks on her face, repeating "no-no-no-no-no."

For that reason, Kelly said he hasn't told her that the victims included her friends and colleagues Gabe Zimmerman and Judge John Roll, or a 9-year-old girl, and three others, the kind of older constituents she loves to help.

Kelly said he wants her to be able to process the emotions without fighting so hard for the words.

"The challenge is she knows what she wants to say, and she knows everything that's going on around her," Carusone said, but can't always express it.

The Republic reported that Kelly comes in the morning with coffee and the newspaper, heads to work at NASA, and returns to Giffords at night to talk. Sometimes, he takes a nap with his wife in her hospital bed, holding her close.

When he comes into the room, Giffords breaks into an oversized smile, Poteet said, reaching out her good arm to beckon him to her side, give him a half-hug.

Though doctors have not yet approved the trip to Cape Canaveral for the shuttle launch, they said it should be safe.

"We're very comfortable with her traveling," said Kim.

Kelly, who has been to space before, said his job "will be a little bit harder this time, just because I want to look out for her."

He intends to phone Giffords during the mission, but he expects the conversations will be different than on his last flight.

Now, he will ask her "how things are going and how she's doing and what's her day like," he said.

They have a particular phone goodbye, "but that's a secret," he said.

Scientists Worry About Funds To Study Gulf Oil Spill (WP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Washington Post

By Cain Burdeau

NEW ORLEANS — Scientists say it is taking far too long to dole out millions of dollars in BP funds for badly needed Gulf of Mexico oil spill research, and it could be too late to assess the crude's impact on pelicans, shrimp and other species by the time studies begin.

The spring nesting and spawning season is a crucial time to get out and sample the reproduction rates, behavior and abundance of species, all factors that could be altered by last year's massive spill. Yet no money has been made available for this year, and it could take months to determine which projects will be funded.

"It's like a murder scene," said Dana Wetzel, an ecotoxicologist at the Mote Marine Laboratory in Florida. "You have to pick up the evidence now."

BP had pledged \$500 million — \$50 million a year over 10 years — to help scientists study the spill's

impact and forge a better understanding of how to deal with future spills. The first \$50 million was handed out in May 2010 to four gulf-based research institutes and to the National Institutes of Health.

Rita Colwell, a University of Maryland scientist who chairs the board overseeing the money, said the protocol for distributing the remaining \$450 million would be announced Monday at the National Press Club in Washington. After that, scientists will be allowed to submit proposals, but it could take months for research to be chosen.

Michael Carron, a Mississippi marine scientist selected to head the BP-funded post-spill research project, the Gulf of Mexico Research Initiative, doubted money would be available before June. He acknowledged that not being able to study the spring spawning in full bloom would be a problem.

"This will be the first good glimpse of what happened to larvae, the first class" of species born during and after the spill, he said.

With the BP funds so slow to get out the door, scientists are trying to get funding from federal grants and other sources. And it's possible the BP money will be handed out on an expedited basis, Carron said.

From the outset, the pledge has been fraught with problems and questions over how the \$500 million would be distributed and how much scientists would be influenced by BP. The result has been paralysis.

It took until last month for BP and the Gulf of Mexico Alliance, a nonprofit headed by Gulf Coast governors, to finally agree on how to spend the rest of the \$450 million. Under the agreement, BP pledged that research would be independent of the oil giant and the gulf alliance and that scientists could publish their results without BP approval.

Still, BP will exert some control. For example, the funds will be overseen by a BP-hired contractor, and the oil giant has appointed half of the members on a 20-member board that will decide what research to do.

BP declined to comment and referred questions to the gulf research initiative.

Larry McKinney, director of the Harte Research Institute for Gulf of Mexico Studies at Texas A&M University at Corpus Christi, said the science board overseeing the money was solid and unlikely to be heavily influenced by BP.

Scientists who take the BP money will have to credit the oil giant for funding the research, and BP may be able to obtain patents for inventions

derived from the research. McKinney said those requirements were standard.

The delay in BP funds has rankled scientists. There was a dearth of scientific investigation to understand the effects of the massive 1979 Ixtoc spill in the gulf's Bay of Campeche, scientists said, and there are fears the same could happen in the wake of BP's spill.

"The science was abysmal to start with," George Crozier, head of the Dauphin Island Sea Lab in Alabama, said about the effect of oil spills in the gulf. "But, golly, the questions have become bigger and more important."

— Associated Press

Dearborn Mosque Imam Says Quran Burning Comments Misunderstood (FREEP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Detroit Free Press

By Niraj Warikoo

During the trial of Pastor Terry Jones, Dearborn's Police Chief testified in court that the head of the Islamic Center of America told him that for some Muslims burning the Quran was worse than 1,000 deaths. Wayne County prosecutors used that testimony as part of the reason why Jones should not be allowed to protest in front of the Islamic Center because they said it could lead to a breach of the peace.

But the head of that mosque, Imam Hassan Qazwini, said Saturday that his comments were about Muslims living abroad, not in metro Detroit or from his mosque.

"I was not talking about my congregation," Qazwini said. "I know my congregation. They will not do anything."

Instead, Qazwini said he was talking about Muslims living in foreign countries who might commit acts of violence that could endanger U.S. troops.

In his testimony, Dearborn Police Chief Haddad said:

"Imam Qazwini ... expressed to me concern with the 19- to 30-year-old people. He indicated to me that the burning of the Quran for some Muslims, it's worse than a thousand deaths. He feared that other people may use this ... to exploit their harsh feelings."

Wayne County prosecutors used Haddad's comments as part of the reason why Jones should not be allowed to protest outside the mosque.

"As the chief of police told us, this is worse than a 1,000 deaths," said Assistant Prosecutor Robert Moran in court. "That's what the citizens of this community believe...it's equivalent to more than a thousand deaths...the chief of police said this is a risk, that if these individuals go there (to the Islamic Center) ... could cause a breach of the peace."

But Imam Qazwini said his comments to the chief were about Muslim living in foreign countries like Afghanistan or in the Middle East. Qazwini was worried that Jones' actions could hurt U.S. troops or Christians living in foreign countries with Muslim-majority populations.

"There was no mention of my congregation," Qazwini said.

In his closing arguments, Jones said that the testimony about Quran-burning being worse than 1,000 deaths concerned him.

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Noncriminals Swept Up In Federal Deportation Program (LAT)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Los Angeles Times

By Lee Romney And Paloma Esquivel

More than once, Norma recalls, she yearned to dial 911 when her partner hit her. But the undocumented mother of a U.S.-born toddler was too fearful of police and too broken of spirit to do so.

In October, she finally worked up the courage to call police -- and paid a steep price.

Officers who responded found her sobbing, with a swollen lower lip. But a red mark on her abuser's cheek prompted police to book them both into the San Francisco County Jail while investigators sorted out the details.

With that, Norma was swept into the wide net of Secure Communities, a federal program launched in 2008 with the stated goal of identifying and deporting more illegal immigrants "convicted of serious crimes."

But Norma was never convicted of a crime. She was not charged in the abuse case, though the jail honored a request to turn her over to immigration authorities for possible deportation.

"I had called the police to help me," said Norma, 31, who asked that her last name not be used because she fears that speaking out may jeopardize her case. "I think it's unjust... Even with a traffic ticket we can now be deported."

Under the program, fingerprints of all inmates booked into local jails and crossed-checked with the FBI's criminal database are now forwarded by that agency to Immigration and Customs Enforcement to be screened for immigration status. Officials said the new system would focus enforcement efforts on violent felons such as those convicted of murder, rape and kidnapping.

But Secure Communities is now mired in controversy. Recently released ICE data show that nearly half of those ensnared by the program have been noncriminals, like Norma, or those who committed misdemeanors.

In addition, hundreds of ICE emails released in response to litigation by immigrant and civil rights groups show the agency knowingly misled local and state officials to believe that participation in the program was voluntary while internally acknowledging that this was not the case.

U.S. Rep. Zoe Lofgren (D-San Jose) on Friday accused ICE officials of lying to local governments and to Congress and called for a probe into whether ICE Director John Morton and Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano, who oversees the agency, were aware of the deception.

San Francisco and Santa Clara counties are among those jurisdictions that sought to prevent fingerprint data from being automatically routed to ICE. Although that data will still be forwarded to immigration authorities, both counties are now crafting policies that would deny ICE hold requests for inmates booked on minor infractions.

There is still much confusion over what legal authority states have to change their participation agreements with ICE, which now says they are unnecessary.

A bill sponsored by Assemblyman Tom Ammiano (D-San Francisco) to be heard in committee Tuesday would require California to modify its agreement with ICE so that only fingerprints of convicted felons are run through the immigration database. The bill also contains protections for domestic violence victims and juveniles and would make the program optional for counties.

"With punitive methods that sweep them all up, there's no trust," said Ammiano, noting that with 11 million illegal immigrants in the country, the policy should be specifically tailored to dangerous criminals. "We have had children come home from school and their parents are not there. That is not an enlightened policy."

A similar bill is pending in Illinois, while Colorado managed to negotiate a modified agreement that includes some protections for domestic violence

victims. Washington recently became the first state to refuse to join the federal program, and Washington, D.C., withdrew altogether.

Federal officials now contend that all states and counties must participate in Secure Communities by 2013. They said Washington, D.C., was allowed to temporarily terminate its agreement only as a courtesy.

But the program's legality remains an open question. Homeland Security officials say they need no approval from counties or states because Secure Communities is merely "an information-sharing program between federal partners." Lofgren and other critics, however, question the federal government's right to impose the program on local jails. Backers of Ammiano's bill say that ICE has exceeded its authority and plan to move forward with proposed changes to California's agreement.

ICE spokeswoman Nicole Navas said that the Secure Communities program resulted in the deportation of 72,000 convicted criminals last year, more than at any time in agency history. Of those, 26,000 had committed major violent offenses.

"By removing criminal aliens more efficiently and effectively, ICE is reducing the possibility that these individuals will commit additional crimes in U.S. communities," she said.

Some who appear in the data to be noncriminals or low-level offenders have gang affiliations, were arrested for drunk driving or were previously deported and returned, she said. Of California's fingerprint matches, 22% to date are fugitives who had ignored deportation orders or were expelled and returned illegally, data shows.

Norma, for example, had left the country voluntarily after an immigration arrest in 2002 but returned the same year, ICE officials said.

In 2009, California signed one of the earliest agreements with ICE to participate in Secure Communities. The program is now in 41 states and 1,211 local jurisdictions, including all California counties.

Critics say the program discourages immigrants from reporting crimes and encourages racial profiling because officers might book individuals on minor infractions knowing that their fingerprints will be screened by ICE. They point out that the program does not screen out those arrested but never charged with a crime.

A Homeland Security official said the department has hired a criminologist to examine arrest

statistics for signs of racial profiling and is looking to "enhance the decision-making process" to reduce the number of noncriminals being deported. The department also will soon unveil a policy for domestic violence victims.

Supporters applaud Secure Communities for replacing ad hoc immigration enforcement with a nationwide effort that targets criminals.

"Before what was happening was the local officers had no way of knowing or had to take special steps to find out if the people they arrested were potentially removable from the community," said Jessica Vaughan, director of policy studies for the Washington, D.C.-based Center for Immigration Studies, which advocates for tougher immigration enforcement. Los Angeles County Sheriff Lee Baca also supports the program.

But Lofgren and others are upset over what they see as the deception with which the Secure Communities program was implemented.

The congresswoman was most angered by the hundreds of ICE internal documents recently released by order of a federal judge. A review of the correspondence reveals an agency that misled local and state officials as it struggled to defuse what one email called "a domino effect" of political opposition.

As early as November 2009, Secure Communities Acting Director Marc Rapp declared in an email that "voluntary" meant "the ability to receive the immigration response" about fingerprint matches, not the ability to decline to provide the data in the first place.

But for nearly a year that was not made clear to local agencies. "They said, 'You set up a meeting and you opt out.' That's why we're pretty unhappy," said Santa Clara County Counsel Miguel Marquez.

San Francisco County Sheriff Michael Hennessey also unsuccessfully sought to opt out of the program last summer. Hennessey is developing a policy that would honor ICE detainer requests only for felons and misdemeanants whose crimes involve "violence, guns, and certain sex offenses." Santa Clara County is exploring a similar policy.

In July, Lofgren wrote Napolitano and U.S. Atty. Gen. Eric Holder seeking "a clear explanation of how local law enforcement agencies may opt out of Secure Communities by having the fingerprints they collect ... checked against criminal, but not immigration databases." In September, she received letters back stating that locals need only submit the request in writing to state and federal officials.

ICE officials knew the language was misleading. "I like the thought. But reading the response alone would lead one to believe that a site can elect to never participate should they wish," an FBI staffer wrote to ICE colleagues in an August email exchange about the draft. In October, Napolitano and Morton finally held a news conference to clarify that opting out of Secure Communities is not possible.

A Homeland Security official said Friday that "Secure Communities is not voluntary and never has been. Unfortunately, this was not communicated as clearly as it should have been to state and local jurisdictions."

Meanwhile, Norma is preparing to testify on behalf of Ammiano's bill. She attends a domestic violence support group and cares for her 3-year-old son, Brandon, in a rented room while wearing a bulky ankle monitor.

"Now that I know my rights, I want to fight," said Norma, who recently graduated from a leadership program to help other abuse victims.

Immigration visas are available for domestic violence victims who meet specific criteria. If she loses her case, Norma said, she will return to Mexico.

"This strength they've given me, this sense of security, this I will carry with me anywhere I go."

Blagojevich Says Retrial An Attack On His Legacy (CHIT)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Chicago Tribune

In the run-up to his corruption retrial, Rod Blagojevich portrayed himself in a blitz of media appearances as the victim of entrenched interests out to derail his enlightened populist agenda.

"I am fighting for my life's work," Blagojevich declared in a recent live TV appearance, one of many such public comments that prompted prosecutors to complain the impeached former governor was improperly seeking to sway potential jurors with pleas for sympathy.

But for many who dealt with his administration over the years, Blagojevich's sunny assessment of his accomplishments conflicts sharply with what they see as a pattern of fiscal recklessness and emphasis on show over substance.

Take Lewis Jorgenson, an owner of a Canadian Internet pharmacy hired to fill prescriptions for a showcase Blagojevich initiative called I-Save Rx.

The program, aimed at supplying consumers with a source of low-cost drugs from abroad, initially

garnered a wave of national headlines for Blagojevich. He claimed I-Save Rx, set up in defiance of a disapproving Bush administration, could save \$91 million annually for the state.

None of that materialized, and Jorgenson puts the blame squarely on Blagojevich and his aides. Promises to promote and expand the program were ignored after the headlines faded, said Jorgenson, whose Calgary-based online pharmacy is now known as Genesis Health Group Inc.

The state auditor general once calculated that fewer than 3,700 Illinois residents had placed orders through I-Save Rx, but Jorgenson said company records put the real number at fewer than 500. He said his firm lost at least \$2 million on the deal.

"It turned out to be a nightmare," he said. "They promised a lot, delivered nothing."

Blagojevich, in an interview, said I-Save Rx grew from an idea suggested in 2003 by Rahm Emanuel, now Chicago's incoming mayor but at the time a Democratic congressman. Any problems promoting it were the fault of Democratic leaders in the legislature who refused to grant him money for that purpose, he charged.

Even so, Blagojevich insisted I-Save Rx worked as advertised. "It was a very good program, and it helped a lot of people," he said.

Blagojevich's stewardship of Illinois is not on trial, though he has sought recently to frame his legal troubles as a kind of referendum on his political legacy.

"I was hijacked from office," Blagojevich told a WLS-AM audience during a recent stint as guest host, explaining how Gov. Pat Quinn and other Springfield "scoundrels" raised the income tax after he was forced from office and undercut the progress he was making for Illinoisans.

But Blagojevich's self-image as a tireless crusader took a beating in his first trial, which ended with jurors convicting him on one count of lying to the FBI but deadlocked on 23 corruption counts including charges he tried to sell President Barack Obama's old U.S. Senate seat.

A top aide to Blagojevich testified it was rare for the boss to show up in his government office, but when he did he would sometimes hide in the bathroom to avoid his budget czar. Many wiretaps played for jurors found Blagojevich at home during the workday, and the sounds of children's cartoons or the clunking of weightlifting equipment could be heard in the background.

James Matsumoto, the jury foreman, said many on the panel were infuriated by what they saw as Blagojevich's irresponsibility. "We were saying if he's not found guilty, we should sue him for being a bad governor," Matsumoto recalled in an interview. "He wasn't even trying."

Blagojevich appeared to be wearing out his welcome with Illinois voters even before his arrest in December 2008. Just weeks earlier, a Tribune poll found his approval rating had fallen to just 13 percent, a dismal showing that triggered a Blagojevich rant about the ingratitude of Illinois voters that was captured on a wiretap and played at his first trial.

"Blagojevich was quite disinterested in public policy, and it was all about Rod Blagojevich," said Charles Wheeler III, a veteran political expert at the Springfield campus of the University of Illinois. "He had a very cavalier attitude toward the Constitution, toward the statutes and rules and regulations."

That attitude extended to his relationship with the legislature. At a state Capitol renowned for backroom deals, lawmakers grew so fearful of being double-crossed by him that they took the unprecedented step of requiring him to put promises to them in writing.

Blagojevich's activism tailed off with his re-election in 2006, but his first term crackled with attention-getting plans that often fizzled.

Charter Schools Suffer Leadership Shortages (WP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Washington Post

By Sarah Butrymowicz

One Sunday in 2009, the principal of Potomac Lighthouse Public Charter School in Northeast Washington called the school's board to tell them she was quitting. The next day, school officials said, she didn't come to work.

A national search team immediately placed advertisements in newspapers and on job boards but received just 15 applications. Of those, only five had the qualifications school officials were seeking. And it was already a month into the school year.

Potomac Lighthouse soon solved its problem — appointing an interim principal before settling on one of the candidates for the permanent position — but such leadership quandaries are growing more common in the District and in other locations where charter-school movements are robust. The

supply of skilled, experienced talent is not keeping up with demand.

Charter school supporters say the shortage of high-quality leaders could significantly slow the movement at a time when some 400 new charters are opening annually — creating several hundred top positions that must be filled.

"It is hard to find a good charter leader," said Regan Kelly, vice president of Lighthouse Academies in the District. "It's not an easy problem, but it's one that people need to get their heads around."

Unlike traditional public schools, most charters don't have the resources of a school district — such as recruitment teams or pools of resumes — to find new leaders quickly. And turnover at the top level in charters is high. Seventy-one percent of charter leaders plan to leave their positions in the next five years, according to the Center on Reinventing Public Education at the University of Washington Bothell, which studied the issue last year.

There is also a dearth of training programs specifically geared toward charter leaders, who tend to have more responsibilities than their counterparts in traditional public schools.

Experts say good leadership is key to improving student performance. New Leaders for New Schools, a New York-based nonprofit group that prepares principals and other top administrators for urban schools, found in 2009 that more than half of a school's impact on student achievement can be attributed to principal and teacher effectiveness. In the 2009 study, principals accounted for 25 percent and teachers 33 percent of the effect.

"I think [the leadership shortage] has already substantially throttled the growth" of charter schools, said Eric Premack, director of the Charter Schools Development Center, a Sacramento-based nonprofit group that offers training, resources and technical assistance to charters nationally. "We would have two to three times as many schools operating if we didn't have this problem."

One weekday, aspiring principal Danalyn Hypolite and Shawn Hardnett, a leadership coach for the New Leaders for New Schools program in the District, walked down the wide hallways of Paul Public Charter School in Northwest. Each carried a plate of King Cake that Hypolite, a New Orleans native, had brought for the staff.

It was only Tuesday morning, but Hypolite's week had already been hectic. "I was here until eight last night," she told Hardnett.

He just laughed. "Welcome to the rest of leadership," Hardnett said.

Hypolite is more than halfway through a 15-month New Leaders for New Schools program, one of only a handful nationwide that offer extensive, personal training for potential leaders of charter schools. (The program also trains those who want to work in traditional public schools.)

Hardnett has become a trusted confidant of Hypolite's. They meet weekly, dissecting encounters she has with students and parents, planning academic projects and preparing for observations and meetings with teachers.

The training program begins in the summer and continues with year-long paid residencies. Participants spend the summer together, and by spring the program separates those who are preparing to work at traditional schools from those focused on charters.

The charter leaders, who will operate with more autonomy than principals at traditional schools, must learn to recruit students and balance budgets. They often have to raise money and secure their own facilities.

"Good leaders need to have not only the core skills around improving student achievement and evaluating teachers," said James Merriman, director of the New York City Charter School Center, a nonprofit group that helps new charters get started and supports existing ones. "They also need to know how to manage upwards to their board of trustees . . . and navigate the shoals of living in and working in a community."

Comprehensive training programs spend time on all of these issues, but there is a limit to how many graduates they can produce. With programs in 12 urban districts across nine states and the District, New Leaders for New Schools accepts about 100 applicants — 7 percent of those who apply — each year. At the D.C. program this year, six out of 12 residents are being trained to be principals at charter schools. Nationally, about 25 percent of new leaders go on to run charters.

Some charter schools are starting to train teachers from within their own ranks to take leadership roles. But far more schools don't have any plan should their principals retire tomorrow.

Only half of the nation's charter schools said they had succession plans in 2010, and many of those plans were weak, said Christine Campbell, author of the Center on Reinventing Public Education study.

The D.C. Public Charter School Board, which oversees the District's 98 charter schools, makes recommendations to schools about developing succession plans. "It's nothing enforceable," said Tamara Lumpkin, deputy director of the board. "We want to respect schools' autonomy, but we do think it's a good thing to have."

This story was produced by The Hechinger Report, a nonprofit, nonpartisan education-news outlet based at Teachers College, Columbia University.

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A Trial Run For School Standards That Encourage Deeper Thought (NYT)

Monday, April 25, 2011

New York Times

By Fernanda Santos

Until this year, Ena Baxter, an English teacher at Hillcrest High School in Queens, would often have her 10th graders compose papers by summarizing a single piece of reading material.

Last month, for a paper on the influence of media on teenagers, she had them read a survey on the effects of cellphones and computers on young people's lives, a newspaper column on the role of social media in the Tunisian uprising and a 4,200-word magazine article titled "Is Google Making Us Stupid?"

A math teacher, José Rios, used to take a day or two on probabilities, drawing bell-shaped curves on the blackboard to illustrate the pattern known as normal distribution. This year, he stretched the lesson by a day and had students work in groups to try to draw the same type of graphic using the heights of the 15 boys in the class.

"Eventually, they figured out they couldn't because the sample was too small," Mr. Rios said. "They learned that the size of the sample matters, and I didn't have to tell them."

In three years, instruction in most of the country could look a lot like what is going on at Hillcrest, one of 100 schools in New York City experimenting with new curriculum standards known as the common core.

Forty-two states, the District of Columbia and the Virgin Islands have signed on to the new standards, an ambitious set of goals that go beyond reading lists and math formulas to try to raise the bar not only on what students in every grade are expected to learn, but also on how teachers are expected to teach.

The standards, to go into effect in 2014, will replace a hodgepodge of state guidelines that have

become the Achilles' heel of the No Child Left Behind law. Many states, including New York, lowered standards in a push to meet the law's requirement that all students reach grade level, as measured by each state, in English and math. President Obama has expressed a desire to rewrite the law, and many experts predict the common core will be a centerpiece of the effort.

The new standards give specific goals that, by the end of the 12th grade, should prepare students for college work. Book reports will ask students to analyze, not summarize. Presentations will be graded partly on how persuasively students express their ideas. History papers will require reading from multiple sources; the goal is to get students to see how beliefs and biases can influence the way different people describe the same events.

There are a number of challenges.

There are guidelines for what students are expected to do in each grade, but it is still up to districts, schools and teachers to fill in the finer points of the curriculum, like what books to read.

There is no national body responsible for seeing that the standards are carried out, because of fears of giving too much control of education to the federal government. So far, only a few other large cities, including Boston, Cleveland and Philadelphia, have begun to apply the standards in the classroom. And depending on how No Child Left Behind is refashioned, it may still be left to each state to measure its own success.

"The standards create a historic opportunity in that we now have a destination worth aiming for, but only time will tell if they'll create historic change," said Chester E. Finn Jr., an assistant secretary of education in the Reagan administration and the president of the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, a group that supports national standards.

With 3,200 students, Hillcrest is the second largest school in the city's pilot. Its size and diversity — whites are a minority (4 percent), Muslims are the religious plurality (about 30 percent) and one-tenth of students are learning English — made it an ideal laboratory to test how the standards might work in the city, officials said.

On a recent Wednesday, Jill Lee, an English teacher, closed a unit on the meaning of the American dream not by assigning a first-person essay, as she once did, but by asking each student to interview an immigrant and write a profile of the person.

Eleni Giannousis made a change in her 10th-grade English class that might make some purists

blanch. She had students watch the filmed stage performance of "Death of a Salesman," starring Dustin Hoffman as Willy Loman, before they read the play. The idea was to have students absorb information through a medium they use for entertainment, one way she was experimenting with her lesson plans to try to meet the new goals.

"It wasn't about making things easier for the students, but about challenging them to experience a classic in a different way," Ms. Giannousis said.

While English classes will still include healthy amounts of fiction, the standards say that students should be reading more nonfiction texts as they get older, to prepare them for the kinds of material they will read in college and careers. In the fourth grade, students should be reading about the same amount from "literary" and "informational" texts, according to the standards; in the eighth grade, 45 percent should be literary and 55 percent informational, and by 12th grade, the split should be 30/70.

Shael Polakow-Suransky, the city's chief academic officer, said the city plans to create an instructional package with exercises that teachers at Hillcrest and other schools have used; student work they have assigned; and guidelines for evaluating the work.

At a training session last month, teams representing several schools in the pilot were asked to list lessons they had learned. Teachers from the Forward School of Creative Writing, a middle school in the Williamsbridge section of the Bronx, wrote on a piece of cardboard: "Visuals help students make meaning" and "Many students are reading far below grade level."

Timothy Shanahan, a professor of urban education at the University of Illinois at Chicago who helped write the common core standards for how to incorporate reading into science instruction, said that as a whole, the standards make no adjustments for students who are learning English or for children who might enter kindergarten without having been exposed to books.

"If I'm teaching fifth grade and I have a youngster in my class who reads as a first grader, throwing him a grade-level text is not going to do him any good, no matter what the standards say," he said.

Mr. Polakow-Suransky, too, cautioned against overly optimistic expectations.

"This isn't one of those things where you flip the switch and tomorrow, everything is going to be different," he said.

Federal Lawsuits In New York Accuse New Chicago Schools Chief Of Race, Age Discrimination (AP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — Chicago Mayor-elect Rahm Emanuel

's pick to be the city's next schools chief has drawn two federal lawsuits questioning his practices during his contentious three years as superintendent of the school district in Rochester, N.Y., Chicago media outlets reported.

The lawsuits were filed in New York last July against Jean-Claude Brizard, Emanuel's first major personnel appointment as he prepares to take over City Hall from retiring Mayor Richard Daley, according to the Chicago Tribune, WLS-TV and the Chicago Sun-Times.

One lawsuit accuses Brizard, 47, of firing Rochester's 58-year-old former deputy superintendent for teaching and learning "without cause" last year after making derogatory comments about her age. Marilyn Patterson Grant had worked for the 34,000-student Rochester City School District for 35 years.

According to the lawsuit, Brizard told Grant and other high-ranking school officials "you all are old," adding that during a citywide principals' meeting he remarked "in teaching, age matters." Brizard also allegedly suggested tension between Grant and two other black women during a meeting was a "case" of "strong black women."

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission found probable cause last June that Grant had been fired because of her sex, age and race.

Brizard has an unlisted home telephone number in Rochester and could not be reached for comment Sunday. But he has told the Rochester Democrat and Chronicle that Grant's claims were "without basis," that he had had "concerns" about her performance and "would never disparage someone with experience."

"I value people with experience," the newspaper quoted him as saying.

In the other lawsuit, a former coordinator for homeless children and families accused Brizard of routinely sending teachers under investigation to a "rubber room" as punishment for educators the district sought to fire. Roseann Kilduff said she had been assigned for five months to an alternative work site "where she languished doing nothing all day," never told of the allegations against her.

The Rochester Teachers Association filed class-action grievances against the "punitive and insensitive" practice; since then, union president Adam Urbanski said, referrals to the rubber room have declined.

Brizard, a native of Haiti who worked for more than two decades in New York City schools before taking the helm in Rochester in 2008, was introduced April 18 as Emanuel's choice as chief executive of Chicago's public schools, which have more than 400,000 students.

Brizard replaces interim schools chief Terry Mazany, who Daley named to the post in November. Mazany took over because the previous schools chief, Ron Huberman, resigned from the \$230,000-a-year job after Daley said he would retire.

Brizard has said he makes no excuses for wanting to overhaul public education and called himself a "completely effective" leader in Rochester, where members of the teachers union recently gave him a resounding no-confidence vote that the Chicago Teachers Union has called concerning.

Urbanski said Brizard promoted policies that teachers found unpalatable, such as promoting charter schools while wanting to close poorly performing public schools.

As a self-professed "reformer," Brizard has said recently he understands large school systems and "how you move a battleship and turn it around quite effectively," adding that "you cannot have progress without things moving and changing."

"I've always been pro-teacher ... but you also have to weigh the work versus the person," Brizard added. "You don't want to be a block or barrier to what needs to be done. We're talking about children and their future. That has to be the focus of everything we do. So you can't have one person or a team of people being in the way."

Emanuel, who takes office May 16, said he chose Brizard because Brizard was unafraid of making tough choices. Emanuel, whose push to remake Chicago's schools includes crusading for reforms to improve student learning and teacher quality, has pressed that improvements are needed in graduation rates, test scores and the district's finances.

FBI Identifies Suspect In Attempted Bombing At Colorado Mall (LAT)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Los Angeles Times

By Nicholas Riccardi

The FBI identified a 65-year-old man with a raft of aliases as the suspect in the attempted bombing of a suburban shopping mall on the anniversary of the Columbine massacre and issued a nationwide alert Sunday, warning that he is probably armed and dangerous.

Earl Albert Moore is the lone suspect in the case, the Federal Bureau of Investigation said. It listed five aliases for him and said he had an "extensive" criminal background.

One week before Wednesday's attempted bombing, the FBI said, Moore had been released from federal prison after serving a sentence for armed bank robbery in West Virginia.

Authorities found a pipe bomb and two propane tanks while extinguishing a small fire in the Southwest Plaza food court. The mall is less than two miles from Columbine High School, where in 1999 two students killed 13 people before turning guns on themselves. The mall, which can have as many as 10,000 shoppers at its busiest, was evacuated for hours.

There was no explicit link to the high school massacre, but the timing made people suspicious and anxious. The local school district restricted access to 25 schools as a precaution.

Attention swiftly turned to grainy pictures captured by surveillance cameras of a balding man with a mustache who was spotted leaving the area at the time of the attempted bombing. Investigators were not able to identify him until Sunday.

It remained unclear whether Moore was still in Colorado. In a statement, the FBI said it was conducting a nationwide hunt and asked the media to distribute images of Moore.

The agency said Moore is about 6 feet tall, weighs 200 to 220 pounds and has a gray mustache and multiple tattoos, including one of a viking. His aliases include Earl Buchanan, Morelli Buchanan, John Lindzy, Donald Morelli and Gary Steele.

Authorities urged anyone with information about his whereabouts to call 911 or the Jefferson County tip line at (303) 271-5615.

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Police Tap Technology To Compensate For Fewer Officers (USAT)

Monday, April 25, 2011

USA Today

By Kevin Johnson

WASHINGTON — Police agencies increasingly rely on controversial technology and social media to make up for the loss of thousands of officers and

other resources to deep budget cuts, law enforcement officials and criminal justice analysts say.

Some, including the city of Albuquerque, have taken the unusual step of sharing real-time investigative information with private business groups on interactive websites to help stop theft rings, locate violent crime suspects and track fugitives.

The Albuquerque model, which is being replicated by agencies in Georgia, Minnesota, Washington and California, represents a significant break with law enforcement's long tradition of walling off the public from information about developing investigations, Albuquerque Police Chief Raymond Schultz said. He said the networks help to make up for the loss of about 60 positions in the past 2½ years.

That is only part of a emerging movement in law enforcement's attempt to hold its ground with fewer cops, detectives and analysts on the job.

"Technology can never fully replace an officer," said Camden, N.J., Police Chief Scott Thomson, whose 250-officer department has been nearly cut in half since 2006. "We're just trying to leverage technology ... to appear bigger than we are."

Camden uses a combination of global positioning systems, gunshot detectors placed in elevated areas throughout the city and closed-circuit cameras to identify problem areas and dispatch officers to those locations more efficiently instead of waiting for calls from the public, which sometimes never come.

After installing the shot-spotter technology last fall, the department learned that residents, many of whom had become conditioned to gunshots, were not reporting incidents of gunfire at least 30% of the time.

In especially troubled neighborhoods, a computerized patrol program ensures that police vehicles pass through designated areas several times a day or even by the hour. If a trip is missed, an e-mail alert goes to the area commander.

"It's all about establishing a presence," Thomson said.

In Austin, Police Chief Art Acevedo is confronting a different kind of problem: Officers are not waiting for "lagging" public funding to purchase their own miniature video cameras concealed in writing pens.

About 50 officers use the devices, which cost as little as \$50 each, to guard against false

allegations of misconduct or abuse. Acevedo supports the technology, but this month, his staff scrambled to develop guidelines for the cameras' use to address potential privacy concerns and other issues.

"Sometimes the (public) funding stream just doesn't catch up with the available technology," Acevedo said.

This month, a survey of 70 large police agencies by the Police Executive Research Forum, a Washington law enforcement think-tank, found that 90% planned to increase their use of various technologies, primarily aimed at deterring crime by adopting more efficient surveillance, patrol and response strategies.

"Departments are looking to technology as a force multiplier," said Chuck Wexler, the forum's executive director. "They are using this technology to better manage fewer resources, because just saying, 'We don't have enough officers' isn't cutting it with the public."

The forum's survey found that 86% of agencies used some form of social media, including Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, YouTube and Nixle to monitor or follow up on leads and potential threats, despite reports that some police employees misuse the sites.

At least 57% of agencies reported dealing with some problem related to employees' possible misuse of social media sites, according to the forum's survey.

The abuses include posting inappropriate messages and photographs.

"These are still emerging technologies," said Nancy Kolb, who oversees the International Association of Chiefs of Police Center for Social Media. "It's a struggle for law enforcement to know how they can be used in a beneficial way."

In Albuquerque, Schultz said the department's information-sharing partnerships with the retail, banking, construction, hotel and housing industries produced some early successes.

The interactive websites, which allow industry security officers to immediately post security camera photographs of suspects involved in theft and other offenses, have factored in the 18% decline in property crimes in 2010.

Police use the information to identify the suspects quicker and to warn other member businesses that could be future targets of the offenders.

Schultz said the victimized members can track the progress of police investigations on the websites.

They also receive regular updates on the status of prosecutions.

"We're leveraging the technology (networks of security cameras) that private industry already has," Schultz said, adding that up to 200 businesses participate. "It has really taken off."

Lawmaker Wants DNA From Suspects When Arrested For State Crimes (WP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Washington Post

By Rob Hotakainen

In 2001, King County Sheriff Dave Reichert relied on a DNA match to solve the case of Washington state's Green River Killer, who murdered 49 women and ranks as the nation's most prolific serial killer.

Now a Republican congressman, Reichert wants Congress to expand the use of DNA testing by getting more states to collect DNA samples, just as they do fingerprints, when suspected felons are arrested for state crimes.

Such testing already is allowed for anyone arrested by a U.S. law enforcement agency for a federal crime.

Critics, including the American Civil Liberties Union, say it's an invasion of privacy and that DNA testing should be reserved for convicted felons. They note that hundreds of thousands of people are arrested each year but that many of them are never charged or convicted.

To promote his effort on Capitol Hill, Reichert has teamed up with Jayann and David Sepich of Carlsbad, N.M., whose 22-year-old daughter, Katie, a graduate student at New Mexico State University, was raped, strangled, set on fire and abandoned at a dump site in August 2003.

Three months after Katie was killed, Gabriel Avilla was arrested on suspicion of aggravated burglary. No DNA sample was collected from him. He wasn't linked to the Sepich slaying until he was apprehended, and later convicted, for another burglary in December 2006.

Reichert and the Sepich family say the case could have been solved three years earlier if a DNA sample had been taken at the time of the first arrest.

A patchwork of laws is now in place for DNA testing.

Under a law Congress passed in 2006, DNA samples have been taken from those arrested on suspicion of federal crimes since January 2009, with the information going to a national database.

Federal crimes can include anything involving interstate travel, including heists and the transport of illegal contraband, and such things as tax evasion, immigration offenses and counterfeiting of money.

In addition, 24 states have passed laws covering state crimes. Each state has its own criminal code, so something that's a felony in one state may not be in another.

Reichert, who sponsored his bill with Rep. Adam B. Schiff (D-Calif.), wants to spend roughly \$30 million over five years to provide incentives for the remaining 26 states to pass similar laws. The bill is called the Katie Sepich Enhanced DNA Collection Act, or Katie's Law for short. Similar legislation has been introduced in the Senate.

If more states participated, more crimes would be solved earlier, Reichert said, adding: "Not only that, there would be some innocent people in prison released."

If Congress provided incentive money, Reichert said, he suspects that most states would participate, given their money troubles. But none would be forced to do so.

"There are certain members of Congress in both houses that believe that states should maintain control, especially over local crime issues, unless they cross over into federal jurisdiction, and most of the time the crimes that we're talking about don't," he said.

Reichert acknowledged one big sticking point: With Congress in a budget-cutting mode, "the big hurdle that we have to overcome is how we're going to pay for this."

On average, Jayann Sepich said, it costs \$30 to collect a DNA sample.

But in the long run, she said, states would save money. In the case of her daughter's murder, Sepich said, an extra \$200,000 was spent investigating the case over the three years before the killer was found.

"So \$200,000 could have been saved with a cheek swab," she said.

Some of the state statutes already have been tested in the courts, including in California, where voters approved a law in 2004.

Lily Haskell became the lead plaintiff in an unsuccessful lawsuit, filed by the ACLU, challenging the constitutionality of the California law. She was arrested in San Francisco in 2009 at a rally opposing the Iraq war, on suspicion of trying to help another protester who was being

held by police, a felony in California. She was forced to provide a DNA sample, even though she was never charged. She complained that her genetic information is now "stored indefinitely in a government database."

With other challenges under way, Sepich predicted that the issue won't be resolved until it hits the Supreme Court. She said she thought it would be upheld.

"I wouldn't be spending my life working so hard if it was just going to be struck down," she said.

— McClatchy-Tribune

Court Asked To Balance Information Age Advances With Constitutional Protections (WP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Washington Post

By Robert Barnes

It's a wide, wired world out there, more so every day, and the Obama administration is asking the Supreme Court to let law enforcement take advantage of it to build cases against the bad guys.

The administration wants the justices to overturn a decision last year by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit that said police must get a warrant before launching a long-term surveillance of a suspect using a global positioning device attached to the man's car.

In overturning the conviction of a D.C. nightclub owner accused of being a prominent cocaine kingpin, Acting Solicitor General Neal Katyal said the appeals court decision was not faithful to a Supreme Court ruling that people have no expectation of privacy when traveling along public streets.

"Prompt resolution of this conflict is critically important to law enforcement efforts throughout the United States," Katyal told the court in a petition asking them to take the case of *United States v. Antoine Jones*.

Appeals courts in two other parts of the country have sided with law enforcement on the issue, saying police do not need a warrant for the kind of prolonged surveillance the GPS devices can provide.

The decisions come as judges increasingly are asked to unravel the connection between modern technology and constitutional protections of privacy and against unreasonable searches. GPS devices in cell phones and cars contain a wealth of information about a person's movements, and a

smartphone can provide law enforcement with vast amounts of information.

"This case is really going to confront the court with the problem of adopting the Fourth Amendment to a new information age," said Daniel Prywes, a Washington lawyer who wrote a brief in the Jones case for the American Civil Liberties Union and the Electronic Frontier Foundation.

"I think it's the seminal privacy case of the 21st century."

Jones had been sentenced to life in prison and ordered to surrender \$1 million in drug profits before the appeals court overturned his conviction last year. For a month, police had recorded his trips around the Washington area — from his home to Levels, his nightclub in Northeast D.C. — and repeated trips to a stash house in Prince George's County, where police eventually found mounds of cocaine and \$850,000 in cash.

The government contends that the court has already answered the question of whether the surveillance of Jones was proper.

In 1983, the court ruled in *United States v. Knotts* that police were within their power to track a beeper device they had placed in a can of chemicals used for drug production. "A person traveling in an automobile on public thoroughfares has no reasonable expectation of privacy in his movements from one place to another," it said.

But an ideologically diverse panel of the D.C. circuit was unanimous in saying that the justices in *Knotts* specifically did not decide the issue of whether a more intrusive government action, such as "twenty-four hour surveillance," would require a warrant.

Circuit Judge Douglas H. Ginsburg wrote that the 28-day tracking of Jones's every movement in his Jeep was too much. Although the travel evidence submitted to the jury was all on public streets, he said "the whole of a person's movements over the course of a month is not actually exposed to the public because the likelihood a stranger would observe all those movements . . . is essentially nil."

While no single trip can prove a pattern of a person's life, Ginsburg wrote:

"A person who knows all of another's travels can deduce whether he is a weekly churchgoer, a heavy drinker, a regular at the gym, an unfaithful husband, an outpatient receiving medical treatment, an associate of particular individuals or political groups."

When the full circuit declined to review the panel's decision, Chief Judge David Sentelle provided the opposing arguments for three other dissenters.

A person's reasonable expectation of privacy while traveling on public highways is zero, he said, and "the sum of an infinite number of zero-value parts is also zero."

He said the panel's decision calls into question "any other police surveillance of sufficient length" to establish a pattern.

Katyal told the court that GPS tracking is a vital tool for government in establishing the kind of probable cause necessary to get a warrant. Stifling its use at the early stages of an investigation, he said, "will seriously impede the government's ability to investigate leads and tips on drug trafficking, terrorism and other crimes."

It could be months before the Supreme Court decides whether to take the case.

Supreme Court Confronts Whether Nev. Conflict-of-interest Law Violates Free Speech (WP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Washington Post

By Robert Barnes

SPARKS, NEV. — Reprimanded by his state's ethics commission for a conflict of interest on a development vote, Sparks City Council member Michael A. Carrigan arrives at the U.S. Supreme Court with an unusual status.

"I have the distinction of being the only elected official in Nevada to ever be brought up on ethics charges for losing a vote," Carrigan said.

The question is whether Carrigan should even have participated in an application for a new casino in this boomtown near Reno. It has turned into a major constitutional showdown with national implications for how states may police public officials who face a potential conflict of interest in conducting the people's business.

It also comes at a time when ethics and conflict-of-interest issues haven taken on a new resonance in the nation's political discussions.

Carrigan's state has been rocked by the scandal involving Sen. John Ensign (R), who announced last week he is resigning. The U.S. Supreme Court strode into the conflict-of-interest issue in 2009, ruling that an elected judge should have recused himself when a major campaign donor came before him. And the justices themselves are under increasing scrutiny from the left and right about

whether their activities outside the courtroom cast doubt on their neutrality inside it.

Against such a backdrop, Carrigan's case seems like routine municipal politics. The ethics commission said Carrigan crossed the line when he voted on the casino issue after his longtime friend and volunteer campaign manager was hired by the developer.

The Nevada Supreme Court elevated the matter when it agreed with Carrigan that restricting his ability to vote on council business violated his First Amendment right of free political speech.

John Elwood, the Washington lawyer representing the Nevada Commission on Ethics, told the justices — who will consider the case Wednesday — that the ruling is "literally unprecedented."

Backed by 14 other states, Elwood said such a finding endangers "bedrock conflict-of-interest rules in virtually every state," including basic laws "that have been an accepted and necessary part of representative self-government since before the ratification of the First Amendment."

Carrigan's attorney, Joshua Rosenkranz of New York, said the worries are hyperbole. It is Nevada's conflict-of-interest law that is unprecedented, he said, if it means that a public official who has no financial or family ties to an issue cannot represent his constituents.

To rule that Carrigan cannot vote because of his campaign manager's interests is to ignore reality, Rosenkranz told the court: Politicians and their supporters are naturally aligned on the issues.

The Nevada Commission on Ethics, Rosenkranz said, "wants to take the politics out of democracy."

The casino

The Lazy 8 casino project was clearly the political issue of the year in Sparks's 2006 city elections.

Carrigan, a Naval Academy graduate and aviator who began a second career as a journalist after retiring in 1992, represents the ward where the casino was to be built.

It is the fastest-growing part of a fast-growing city — Carrigan says the town's population has increased from 35,000 to 95,000 in the past two decades. The snowcapped Sierra Nevada mountains still dominate the horizon, but ranches and sagebrush have given way to neat subdivisions, Pilates studios and emerald artificial-turf ballfields.

Outside one strip shopping center, oversize American and Nevada flags fly from disguised cellphone towers.

The proposed casino was part of a development that had received preliminary approval years earlier, before Carrigan was first elected. He said as a councilman that he negotiated with the company for concessions the town's newcomers wanted: hotel rooms, movie theaters, restaurants and a police or fire station.

As another vote on the plan neared in the summer of 2006, the company hired Carlos Vasquez, a local politico who was Carrigan's friend and reelection campaign manager. Carrigan asked the city attorney to research the state's conflict-of-interest law to see if it caused him a problem; the attorney said Carrigan could vote as long as he disclosed the relationship.

He did, and voted for the casino, but the plan was defeated 3 to 2. (After a flurry of lawsuits, the casino project was eventually approved but for economic reasons has never been built.)

Opponents of the project filed complaints against Carrigan.

Nevada's law forbids a public official from voting on an issue when a "reasonable person" would suspect a conflict because of financial ties or the interest of a spouse or family member. It also includes a catch-all category for "any other commitment or relationship that is substantially similar to a commitment or relationship" like those spelled out.

Caren Jenkins, the ethics commission's executive director, said the panel thought Carrigan's friendship with Vasquez fit into the catch-all category, although she acknowledged that the commission had some trouble deciding exactly which relationship it resembled.

Jenkins said Carrigan also saw the potential problem, or else he would not have sought a legal opinion.

"We can't help it that he got bad advice," she said.

The ethics charges seemed to have little impact on Carrigan's campaign. His support of the casino was the main issue in the race, and he was reelected with 73 percent of the vote.

"I told the ethics commission, you know the people ought to be the ones to really decide if somebody did something unethical," he said. "Clearly, they didn't buy into it."

But even some of Carrigan's friend questioned his decision.

Jake Highton, a longtime journalism professor at the University of Nevada at Reno who taught

Carrigan and then taught alongside him, said Carrigan should have sat out the vote.

"I think he's as honest as the day is long," Highton said. "But to me it's a profound ethical question."

The challenge

Profound enough that Carrigan was unwilling to let the mild rebuke from the ethics commission stand.

He challenged the law at the Nevada Supreme Court. In a 5 to 1 ruling, the court said that voting by public officials on governmental issues was protected speech under the First Amendment and that efforts to restrict such voting have to meet the strictest standards.

While disclosure of potential conflicts of interest are clearly a compelling interest of the state, the majority said, Nevada's catch-all provision was too broad to be constitutional.

The dissenting justice said the decision "opens the door to much litigation and little good."

The ethics commission's brief says the Nevada court made a fundamental mistake — a public official's vote is not a matter of speech but of governing.

"The premise that the First Amendment entitles local legislators to cast votes on any matter, particularly one on which private interests would materially affect their independent judgment, is alien to the American constitutional tradition and to first principles of self-government," the brief states.

Carrigan said the ethics commission is wrong to think a public official has a conflict when voting on issues important to his supporters.

"People usually volunteer for your campaign because they like you or they want you to do something they want, whether it's lowering taxes or whatever," Carrigan said. "It's kind of politics in the United States of America. Is it right or wrong? I don't know. But isn't that why you support the people you do?"

The case is Nevada Commission on Ethics v. Carrigan.

Lawmakers Seek To Unclog Road To Confirmation (NYT)

Monday, April 25, 2011

New York Times

By Carl Hulse

WASHINGTON — Hoping to unclog the Senate and spare scores of presidential appointees from what is often a grueling confirmation process, leading lawmakers in both parties are moving to cut the

number of administration posts that are subject to Senate approval.

The proposal to end Senate review of about 200 executive branch positions would be the most serious effort in recent years to pare the chamber's constitutional power of advice and consent. It amounts to a rare voluntary surrender of Congressional clout, and it has high-caliber, bipartisan support with the endorsement of the Senate majority leader, Harry Reid of Nevada, and the Republican leader, Mitch McConnell of Kentucky.

"We are losing very good people because the process has become so onerous, so lengthy and so duplicative," said Senator Susan Collins, Republican of Maine and a leading advocate of the bill. "Why should there be a full F.B.I background check back to age 18 for an individual serving on a part-time board?"

Ever since the Senate rejected President George Bush's selection of John G. Tower as secretary of defense in 1989, Senate confirmations have become bruising public affairs that delve deep into a nominee's background. President Obama's initial picks for several cabinet posts withdrew their nominations after the process turned up embarrassing details.

Several presidents, frustrated by delays, have sought to bypass the process by making so-called recess appointments while Congress is not in session. Mr. Obama used that tactic last summer to install the administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

Backers of the confirmation measure say they want to ease what they call an arduous chore for midlevel nominees trying to navigate the Senate in a supercharged partisan era. While it would not affect senior positions, the legislation, and a related proposal to expedite filling about 250 part-time positions, is intended to reverse an explosion in confirmable posts from about 280 when President John F. Kennedy took office in 1961 to 1,400 today.

Yet it is never easy to tinker with the rules in an institution renowned for its resistance to change.

Looking at the list of assistant secretaries, department directors, chief financial officers and advisory board members who would be removed from the Senate docket, some conservatives see an effort to give the White House carte blanche to extend bureaucratic sprawl. The change would also limit the leverage that lawmakers have over the administration by reducing the number of

appointments they could block in order to win concessions or other considerations.

Writing for the conservative Heritage Foundation, David S. Addington, who served as chief of staff to Vice President Dick Cheney, urged defeat of the bill, saying the drafters of the Constitution "did not give the president the kingly power to appoint the senior officers of the government by himself."

Conservative senators have raised similar objections.

"Allowing the president to appoint czars and bureaucrats without Congressional oversight adds to the problem of an ever-expanding, unaccountable government," said Moira Bagley, a spokeswoman for Senator Rand Paul, Republican of Kentucky, who has expressed objections to the measure.

Others worry that officials exempted from confirmation will lose stature among colleagues who will consider the posts to be downgraded.

And some say the Senate, where the slow pace and partisan maneuvering over confirmations has kept high-level offices vacant for extended stretches, is being too timid and should consider more far-reaching changes for all presidential appointees.

"This is a start, but it doesn't address the real problems with the rules or with the confirmation process," said Senator Tom Udall, Democrat of New Mexico, who has proposed shortening the time that lawmakers can debate a nomination after cutting off a filibuster to 4 hours from 30. "These are baby steps."

Mr. Udall helped push the Senate into considering an overhaul of the confirmation process early this year when he threatened to force a floor fight on a proposal to limit filibusters. To avert a showdown, the leadership agreed to look at procedural changes, and the proposal to cut the number of Senate confirmations was one result.

Senator Lamar Alexander of Tennessee, the No. 3 Republican in the chamber and a former cabinet secretary, said the jump in jobs that require confirmation has cut into the Senate's time for more pressing issues and put an unnecessary burden on nominees.

"We drag some unsuspecting citizen through this gauntlet of investigations and questioning," said Mr. Alexander, who has dubbed the process the "innocent-until-nominated" syndrome. "They are very fortunate if they get all the way through without being made to appear a criminal."

The legislation, which cleared the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee this month, would remove roughly 200 positions — many of them public affairs or Congressional-relations jobs for various agencies — from Senate scrutiny. Among the more notable positions on the list are the United States treasurer, which officials say has become a mainly ceremonial position, and the director of the Mint.

Authors of the bill said they picked positions they did not consider central to setting policy or spending money. For instance, the list includes the assistant secretary of agriculture for Congressional relations; the assistant secretary of defense for networks and information integration; and the assistant attorney general for legislative affairs, among others. The bill also proposes to end confirmation of the chief financial officers in many agencies.

Senator Joseph I. Lieberman, the Connecticut Independent who leads the governmental affairs committee, said the reduction in jobs requiring confirmation should enable presidents to fill vacancies more quickly.

"Eighteen months into the Obama administration, 25 percent of his nominees were still unconfirmed," Mr. Lieberman said. "This is not an aberration."

In addition to exempting the 200 jobs, the measure would create a working group in the administration to report within 90 days on proposals to create a single "smart form" intended to allow nominees to "answer all vetting questions one way, at a single time."

The legislation — which would need to be approved by both chambers of Congress, though the House generally defers to the Senate on such matters — is intended to be supplemented by a new Senate rule that would automatically place the names of dozens of appointees to boards and commissions on the Senate calendar for approval once they have submitted a required questionnaire. Senators would have 10 days to intervene.

"Instead of spending our time confirming an appointment to the Literary Society Board or the Morris K. Udall Scholarship Fund, we should be working on reducing the debt," Mr. Alexander said. "We still end up with more than 1,000 nominees, which is more than President Clinton had and four times more than President Kennedy appointed."

POLITICAL NEWS**Freshmen Feel The Heat Back Home (POLITICO)**

Monday, April 25, 2011

Politico

By Marin Cogan

LANSFORD, Pa. — Any lawmaker in a swing district can expect to take criticism from his right flank at a town hall meeting. But at an American Veterans outpost tucked deep in the Pocono Mountains this week, freshman Republican Rep. Lou Barletta took heat from every direction — from Democrats angry with the tax cuts in the GOP budget, to conservatives who thought he caved on the last continuing resolution vote, to a precocious 16-year-old critical of the lawmaker's environmental record.

First Barletta was told "not to be steadfast in Paul Ryan's Republican plan," to "bend a little, work and come together to pass something that's agreeable to everybody." Moments later, another constituent told him, "I don't want you to bend; I want you to stand firm" on spending, even if that means a national debt default.

And hardly anyone in his senior-heavy district wants to see Congress touch their Medicare benefits.

Barletta's district is one of a handful that Democrats have zeroed in on this spring break: One of 13 that voted for John Kerry in 2004 and Barack Obama in 2008 but elected a Republican to Congress in 2010. The town halls in Pennsylvania showed deep concern about the national debt but extreme wariness of cuts to entitlements, and constituents are starting to vent their frustrations with the new House GOP majority, bolstered by 87 freshmen, all but one of whom voted for Ryan's budget plan. Five of the Kerry-Obama districts are in eastern Pennsylvania — and three are represented by freshmen, including Barletta, Rep. Patrick Meehan and Rep. Mike Fitzpatrick.

In his blue collar Scranton-area district — birthplace of Vice President Joe Biden, hometown of Secretary of State Hillary Rodham and represented for the past 26 years by former Rep. Paul Kanjorski, a Democrat — Barletta is trying to strike a balance that stays true to his conservative campaign but is sympathetic to an aging constituency fearful about entitlement reform.

In the middle of Barletta's presentation on the national debt, a man in the front row interrupted him. "As a senior, did I not pay for these Medicare and Social Security benefits? Didn't I give

Washington my dollars so that as a senior I could live on them?"

Barletta replied "Yes, and it is going to be there. It's not being touched for any of the senior citizens now, but for my daughter—"

The man cut him off again. "It should be there for her as well."

And so it went for the roughly 90-minute meeting, as voters peppered the congressman with questions about his budget vote and concerns about an upcoming deadline to raise the debt limit.

"Some seniors still do not realize that this will not affect them," Barletta said later. "If members do not go back and make sure seniors are informed, then the scare tactics work."

But liberal groups are already working to make these members' votes for Ryan's budget plan — which would turn Medicare into a program that provides federal subsidies for seniors to purchase private plans — work against them. The Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee was planning ads in some of these districts depicting senior citizens mowing lawns and stripping to pay for their health care under Ryan's budget. MoveOn.org emailed supporters this week encouraging them to attend Barletta and Meehan's town halls. And Social Security Works and the Alliance for Retired Americans — advocacy groups for older Americans — plan to hold events in each of the three freshmen Republicans' districts to highlight their opposition to the vote.

"A lot of us are scratching our heads wondering what there is to be gained from this. None of these folks I considered moderates espoused any of the principles espoused in Ryan's bill during the election," said TJ Rooney, former chairman of the state Democratic Party and a former member of the state's House of Representatives.

Daylin Leach, a Democratic member of the state Senate, said it will be difficult for the new lawmakers to square those votes for the Ryan budget with their moderate-leaning districts in 2012. "The TV commercials are already written; we know what they're going to say."

"A lot of people are walking around in this state saying they've given us the defining issue of this campaign. Do we end Medicare and do away with safety net and give away tax breaks [to the wealthiest Americans]? In a lot of campaigns it is going to be that simple for the moderates who have put their necks out," Rooney said.

Democrats are hoping that in districts like Barletta's — which, at more than 115,000, has one of the highest populations of senior citizens in the state — voters will sour on Republicans once they look at their voting record on Ryan's budget.

"The national Republicans are trying to create this distinction with the president. It's a distinction that these new members can't walk away from. It's one thing to campaign saying that we're going to cut, cut, cut, but it's a whole other thing to cut specific investments that benefit your local community," said Josh Shapiro, a state assembly member in southeastern Pennsylvania.

At Barletta's town hall, there were indications that the spending votes could become the defining debate for his first term in Congress. Early in the meeting, a man critical of the tax cuts in Ryan's plan had to be escorted from the smokey, faded banquet hall by police. A woman interrupted the congressman's presentation several times to question or criticize him. One retired veteran repeatedly demanded to know why Barletta had voted to cut veteran's benefits, despite his repeated insistence that he hadn't taken any such vote.

"Kanjorski was my man," he told Barletta, "and I want you to be my man, too."

"It wasn't unusual," Barletta said of the town hall. "There's a lot of bottled up frustration ... it was good for me as well as the people there to hear the many different sides. There were people who came from the right who had frustrations, who thought I wasn't doing enough, who wanted me to stand tough and not increase the debt ceiling, and others who came from the very far left."

"I would imagine many are going to experience the same thing — frustration from both sides," he said.

Earlier that day, Meehan ditched the podium at his town hall and stood close to a group of 15 seniors that gathered in a mostly empty gymnasium outside of Philadelphia. No one shouted or lobbed harsh criticism at the congressman — but even in the more subdued setting, he was asked whether he'd be willing to support legislation put forward by Democrats.

"That's why I do town hall meetings," Meehan said. "You get an unfiltered sense of where people are at."

Even with their votes, and the 1.2 million person registration advantage Democrats gained in 2008, Democrats in the state aren't feeling overly confident about their prospects at winning back seats in 2012. Redistricting, for example, could

strengthen Barletta's Republican constituency. And the state's insiders describe the soft-spoken Meehan as a good fit for his moderate-leaning district.

Others point to another factor that might give the new lawmakers cover as they take tough votes.

"The ironic thing is that these votes in the House right now are symbolic votes because they aren't going anywhere," said Larry Ceisler, a Pennsylvania based Democratic strategist.

"If I'm Joe Congressman from Pennsylvania, I can tell my tea party right wing I voted for them but Democrats in the Senate wouldn't get it through. When I talk to independents, I say, 'Look, I'm a moderate; I knew it wasn't going anywhere. If I thought [the] vote had ramifications, it might have been a different vote.' That's the two-step they're going to do."

Democrats, Allies Hope To Flip The Script On Town-hall Rage (HILL)

Monday, April 25, 2011

The Hill

By Daniel Strauss And Emily Cahn

If video of angry constituents haranguing members of Congress over healthcare reform captured the tone of that policy debate, Democrats and their allies hope that similar clips will emerge in 2011 to define the coming battle over Medicare and entitlement reform.

Left-leaning groups pushed the idea last week that Americans all over the country are outraged at Republican legislators and have been confronting them at town halls to voice their opposition.

In emails and press statements, Democratic organizations have trumpeted examples of town-hall meetings where Republican legislators were criticized by constituents. An email sent out by House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi's (D-Calif.) press office on Thursday cited a recent town hall in which House Budget Committee chairman Paul Ryan (R-Wis.) was booed while discussing his deficit-reduction plan.

"Even Chairman Ryan's constituents don't approve of his plan to deliver tax breaks to the wealthiest Americans while ending Medicare," the email read. "At a recent town hall in Wisconsin, Chairman Ryan was booed as he defended his budget's continuation of low taxes for the richest people in our country."

On Friday, the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee published a roundup of town-hall events titled "Town Hall Meeting Alert: House Republicans Under Fire For Voting to End

Medicare." The roundup described town halls around the country as ones where Republicans faced "tough questions" about their support for the Ryan budget.

An email from the liberal organization Americans United for Change listed recent town halls under the headline "House GOP Facing 'Angry,' 'Booing,' 'Tough Crowds' Back Home After Voting to End Medicare, Give Millionaires Another Tax Break..."

A handful of Republicans were asked pointed questions from their constituents at town-hall meetings last week, including freshmen Reps. Robert Dold (R-Ill.), Pat Meehan (R-Pa.) and three-term Rep. Gus Bilirakis (R-Fla.).

But, as of yet, those confrontations – measured in numbers and vitriol – have not matched the passion seen at healthcare town halls in 2009.

One attendee at a Meehan meeting on Wednesday accused the congressman of voting to abolish Medicare with his vote on the Ryan budget bill, CNN reported.

"Did you not vote for Paul Ryan's bill?" the attendee asked. "Well, that is to abolish Medicare and give people some money. It will not be the Medicare that we know."

But Meehan shot back, saying "No ma'am, I did not vote to abolish Medicare. And that is factually untrue."

Rep. Robert Dold (R-Ill.) cut a presentation on the federal deficit short at a town-hall meeting he held last week after audience members began firing questions at him about the Ryan budget and its changes to entitlement programs, including Medicare and Social Security, according to the The Daily Herald, a Chicago-area newspaper.

Senior citizens in the audience expressed their discontent with turning Medicare into a voucher program, calling the change a "shell game" that would bog senior citizens down with uncertainty in dealing with private healthcare companies.

In a town hall event on Wednesday held by Rep. Lou Barletta (R-Pa.), an audience member was removed after she became loud and disruptive.

Moveon.org sent an email to residents in Barletta's district asking them to attend the congressman's town hall to "ask the congressman why he voted for a budget that that puts millions of seniors, children, and people with disabilities at risk of losing their health care, so we can give millionaires trillions in tax cuts."

The group did not ask its members to disrupt the event.

An article in the Pennsylvania Morning Call compared the recent town halls to the highly confrontational meetings in 2009 over healthcare legislation, describing the more recent vintage on the GOP's budget as "reminiscent" of the healthcare events.

But there are differences between this year's early examples and the sustained string of events in 2009.

The town halls that liberal organizations and Democrats have been touting haven't been nearly as crowded as those in 2009. And none of those being touted as examples of extreme public discontent with the Ryan budget have gotten so heated that violence could have broken out.

By contrast, in 2009, event organizers at a town hall in Florida threatened to cut the event short when attendees began violently pushing and shoving each other between stints of heckling.

In A Life Filled With Firsts, One More (NYT) Monday, April 25, 2011

New York Times

By Lizette Alvarez

WESTON, Fla. — Open lunchboxes are sprawled on the kitchen counter. Four dogs dart in and out. And three children rummage through backpacks. With the predawn bedlam at its height, the harried mother asks: Do you have your baseball glove? What do you want for a snack? How about the form I have to sign?

Rebecca, 11, who like most of her peers has embraced the eye roll as a punctuation mark, announces she is wearing leopard-print flats to school.

"Why don't we start with, 'Mom, is it O.K. if I wear these shoes to school today?'" chides Representative Debbie Wasserman Schultz, in white sneakers and head-to-toe pink sweats, her mass of curly hair pulled back. "Choppity-chop, let's go."

In less than two weeks, Ms. Wasserman Schultz — mother, wife, Girl Scout leader, legislator, fundraiser and House vote counter — will add another job to her monumentally orchestrated life. She will become the first woman elected to lead the Democratic National Committee, a role that requires grit, exaltation and inspiration. At 44, she will be the youngest committee leader in decades.

As the country races toward the 2012 presidential election, it will be her task to rally Democrats to give money and time, swatting away Republican barbs and defending President Obama at every turn. It is a job she is well prepared to handle,

having served years on the House's Democratic campaign committee.

Later that morning, in a nearby deli, Ms. Wasserman Schultz, now wearing a businesslike gray suit and pumps, said, "The timing is right for a retail politician."

But the symbolism of her selection is not lost on her.

"It's a big deal, a very big deal," said Ms. Wasserman Schultz, whose toughness was admired by her colleagues even before she grappled with breast cancer in 2007. "My generation is significantly unrepresented in terms of public policy and decision making. As a woman today, it's very different living through raising children and balancing work and family. It's an opportunity to reach out to so many families. And women who work outside the family can say Democrats get it."

"It doesn't hurt that I'm from Florida," she added. "It's a huge priority."

Ms. Wasserman Schultz is a New Yorker who graduated from the University of Florida and never left the state. In her Broward County district, which includes a sliver of Miami-Dade County, she is largely beloved. In 2010, she was re-elected to the House, where she has served since 2004, with 60 percent of the vote. Before that, she served 12 years in the State Legislature, becoming — at age 26 — the youngest woman elected to the Florida House.

At a recent town hall-style meeting at a senior center, where she talked about Medicare's future and what she said was the irresponsibility of Republicans, the audience swarmed her.

"I think you're a gutsy lady," one man said. "I like your talking points. We need to stress what Obama has done."

"They gave me a megaphone now and I'm going to use it," she told him.

But not everyone in Florida is so enthusiastic about Ms. Wasserman Schultz. James Gleason, a possible opponent in 2012, said she would only increase the partisan comments in her new job and magnify the country's polarization.

"I think to be an effective legislator, you have to come together with your own party but also work with the other side and not just be antagonistic," said Mr. Gleason, a Republican business owner who lives in Coral Springs.

A Republican friend and colleague, Representative John Culberson of Texas, said Ms. Wasserman

Schultz had always been congenial. But he, too, worried that the post may push her far from those values.

"I measure a person beginning with their heart, and she has always impressed me as having a good heart," Mr. Culberson said. "It's important that you never make any of this personal. None of our debate should be personal or exaggerated or strained."

With her trademark curls, Ms. Wasserman Schultz has long been one of the '-est' girls: youngest, smartest, funniest, toughest. Her Democratic colleagues extol her fund-raising prowess, her ease on television and her indefatigability, which is legendary among her colleagues.

Melissa Bean, a former Congressional Democrat who shared a town house in the capital with Ms. Wasserman Schultz and Representative Carolyn B. Maloney, Democrat of New York, said she came to Washington expecting a house full of slackers, at least compared with her business brethren in Chicago.

Ms. Bean said Ms. Wasserman Schultz would fall asleep with "her head on her laptop or on top of her briefing book. Not only does she not quit. She won't even quit on herself."

The congresswoman's newest housemate, Frederica Wilson, who shared a house with her in Tallahassee more than a decade ago, said she mapped the route to the hospital because Ms. Wasserman Schultz was pregnant with twins and "her stomach was about 10 feet away from her body. But she never stopped, right up until the day she gave birth."

When Ms. Wilson, a Democrat and former state legislator, arrived in Washington, after being elected to the House in 2010, Ms. Wasserman Schultz found out she had no place to live. Shortly after, she was ensconced in the basement of Ms. Maloney's town house, dining on popcorn and pot pies with the women.

Then there was Ms. Wasserman Schultz's slide into second base during the charity softball game she organizes every year. She broke her ankle because she had to get on base.

Ms. Wasserman Schultz's take-charge instinct also kicked in after her breast cancer diagnosis in 2007. She told only her closest friends. Her children knew only that their mother was going to have surgery. Once she conquered the cancer, she told them the truth. She scheduled her operations for a double mastectomy during Congressional breaks.

"I didn't want it to define me," she says. "I didn't want my name to be Debbie Wasserman Schultz who is currently battling breast cancer."

Back home in her jumbled, playful house chockablock with the Seven Dwarves and other Disney characters, Ms. Wasserman Schultz plunges back into parent-teacher meetings and baseball games. Her children, like those of many working parents, are used to seeing the suitcase by the door. She tries never to miss milestones like birthdays, and managed a stint as Girl Scout leader. The three children — 11-year-old twins and a 7-year-old daughter — grumble on occasion. But they know her job brings them perks, like meeting President Obama and watching Miley Cyrus do a sound check.

Ms. Wasserman Schultz, though, gives credit to her husband, Steve Schultz, a community banker, for managing the household without a baby sitter. When she is home, they sit side by side on the couch watching separate TVs: he plugs headphones into his set to watch sports.

"Everybody has to make sacrifices for their jobs," Mr. Schultz said. "Successful people are very busy. That's where society is today."

For her part, Ms. Wasserman Schultz says, "I promote that you don't have to choose between work and family." But, she adds, "I married a great guy."

Mitch Daniels Sounds Fiscal Alarm, But Indiana Republican Hesitant To Run In 2012 (WP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Washington Post

By Dan Balz

No prospective Republican presidential candidate has done more to highlight the issue of debt and deficits than Indiana Gov. Mitch Daniels. He calls it the "new red menace," an ocean of red ink that he says is every bit as dangerous as the Soviet nuclear threat during the Cold War.

His call to arms gives him a provocative though politically risky platform for a potential 2012 presidential candidacy. Daniels thinks dealing with the debt problem will require a potentially dramatic restructuring of Medicare for future recipients, revamping Medicaid to slow its spending, and altering Social Security for today's younger workers by raising the retirement age and recalculating the cost-of-living formula.

What Daniels has long been advocating dovetails with the budget blueprint recently unveiled by House Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan (R-

Wis.). His entry into the race could ensure that a debate between President Obama and Ryan becomes a central issue of the 2012 campaign. More than any other potential candidate, Daniels would test whether voters are ready for the kind of stiff medicine he prescribes.

But Daniels also would challenge his own party, with a message that calls for focusing on fiscal issues over social ones, for appealing seriously to voters who are not part of the conservative coalition and for being prepared to compromise with Democrats to solve the debt problem.

As he put it in a speech this year: "Should the best way be blocked . . . then someone will need to find the second-best way. Or the third, because the nation's survival requires it. Purity in martyrdom is for suicide bombers."

For more than a year, Daniels has been on the fence about running for president. Now, with the legislative session in Indiana ending, he says he owes it to potential supporters to make a decision. "It's time to cut bait," he said in an interview in his statehouse office.

His decision will come just as the campaign for the Republican nomination is about to heat up. The first debate of the cycle is set for May 5 in South Carolina, though with only a partial cast likely to be onstage.

Mitt Romney, Tim Pawlenty and several lesser-known candidates have formed presidential committees. Newt Gingrich and Mississippi Gov. Haley Barbour, who have been moving around early states, are expected to make their final decisions soon.

Businessman Donald Trump, who has leaped to the upper tier in the polls with a media blitz, will make a decision over the next month or so, as will Rep. Michele Bachmann (R-Minn.). Former Utah governor and U.S. ambassador to China Jon Huntsman Jr. will return to the country soon and indicate whether he will run. Mike Huckabee and Sarah Palin are hanging back.

Daniels has looked to others to seize the issue of the country's fiscal problems, hoping that would give him a good reason not to run. He has examined from various angles the question of whether he should run. Can he advocate as effectively for action on the debt problem if he does not become a candidate? Does the debate touched off by Ryan's plan and Obama's response guarantee that the issue will be front and center in 2012 even without him? Will he set back the cause if he runs and does poorly?

Daniels has an answer only for the last question: No. "I would choose to believe that doing it and failing, which is maybe even the likely outcome, would somehow [have] advanced things," he said.

As the time draws nearer, those who know him best see the tension rising as he weighs the political challenges and family trade-offs. "There's a fight going on inside him that's pretty rare," said one adviser who asked not to be identified, in order to speak candidly.

Asked where he was in his thinking, Daniels replied with a laugh, "Oh, muddled." Then he turned serious: "I don't want to leave a misimpression. If we get in, we will go all out, and we know a little about how to do that. So reluctance or hesitation about running doesn't mean we would be a reluctant candidate if we got there."

Asked about family considerations — friends say his wife has been opposed — Daniels goes quiet. "I don't have much more to say about that," he said. "It's just a very important factor."

As he deliberates, calls come into his office, and the offices of his political advisers and friends, with words of encouragement. He has drawn praise from a number of conservative commentators. They see him as someone who can espouse conservative ideas but who believes the GOP must avoid appearing harsh or braying.

Former Florida governor Jeb Bush told a Jacksonville audience in February that, among prospective GOP candidates, Daniels was the "only one who sees the stark perils and will offer real detailed proposals."

Democrats, too, are taking him seriously. Obama advisers see him as a credible general-election candidate, if he can survive a nomination battle. Democrats, with some encouragement from Washington, have begun to step up their criticism of him and to question whether his record will hold up to serious scrutiny.

Potential appeal

Daniels's potential supporters see him as the anti-Obama, a 5-foot-7-inch, motorcycle-riding, balding politician who lacks the charisma Obama displayed during his 2008 campaign but who they believe has the intellectual heft and plainspoken appeal to go toe-to-toe with the president.

In reality, no one can predict how he would fare. His biography includes two terms as governor, service in the Reagan White House, and stints at the conservative Hudson Institute think tank and

as an executive at Eli Lilly before joining the George W. Bush administration as budget director.

Daniels's retail candidate skills — honed by nights spent in the homes of strangers and encounters with voters in coffee shops, fairs and flea markets along the back roads of his state — could play well in Iowa and New Hampshire. But his capacity to generate real enthusiasm across the party remains in question. He is still a blip in the polls.

In a field with many candidates who carry baggage, Daniels's biggest burdens might be how he would run. Although he is solidly antiabortion, he has called for a truce on social issues to keep the focus on the country's fiscal problems. That has riled social and religious conservatives and is already drawing criticism from potential rivals.

Daniels's stock rose earlier this year after he spoke to the American Conservative Union's annual Conservative Political Action Conference, where he delivered a sobering speech outlining the fiscal threat he sees looming.

"We cannot deter it," he said. "There is no countervailing danger we can pose. We cannot negotiate with it, any more than with an iceberg or a great white."

Daniels also said that night that the changes he advocates require big majorities. "We will need people who never tune in to Rush [Limbaugh] or Glenn [Beck] or Laura [Ingraham] or Sean [Hannity]," he said at CPAC, "who surf past C-SPAN to get to [ESPN's] 'SportsCenter.'"

In the debate between Ryan and Obama, Daniels knows where he stands. He called Ryan's proposal for ending Medicare's defined-benefit structure "exactly the right direction to head," though he says he is open to other serious alternatives. Asked about Ryan's proposal to convert Medicaid into a block grant with full flexibility for states, he replied, "Bring it on." He says that means testing should be part of any solution to restructuring Social Security and Medicare.

Daniels said he was "deeply disappointed" by Obama's recent budget speech. "At a time when we should seek to unify Americans around the big changes necessary to deal with this life-and-death issue, he was divisive and partisan," he said. "In terms of content, it was worse than empty."

The Bush years

Daniels's focus will prompt questions about his service as budget director during the first 2 1 / 2 years of Bush's presidency, as the country was beginning to move from surpluses to sizable deficits and a big increase in the national debt.

Daniels argues that the problem has ballooned dramatically under Obama, that debt and deficits today represent a far bigger share of the overall economy than in the Bush years. "We'd give anything to be within a country mile of that now," he said.

But he also argues that the best judge of his record is as a governor who set his own priorities. "Nobody's perfect," he said, "but if you go look at our record, I think it's by most measures a strong one."

That record includes shrinking state government employment to its smallest level since the late 1970s (and to the lowest per capita of any state in the country), keeping his budget in the black through the worst of the recent recession without raising taxes,**< b />** and a package of education proposals that he hopes will be enacted by the end of the month. Daniels says he's also proud of the work he has done to improve the business climate in the state.

Democrats see his record in less glowing terms. State Rep. B. Patrick Bauer, the Democratic leader of the House, called Daniels's approach to budgets "slash and burn." Dan Parker, the chairman of the Indiana Democratic Party, said Daniels's record earlier in his term on taxes — a sales tax increase that was part of a broader plan that lowered property taxes and a cigarette tax increase to fund health care for low-income families — could draw criticism from conservatives.

One questionable decision was his attempt to privatize parts of the state welfare system. Indiana turned over the processing of eligibility claims to private contractors, including IBM. After widespread complaints, Daniels and other state officials decided to terminate the contract and have instituted a hybrid system.

The result is a nasty lawsuit. IBM lawyers want to depose Daniels; he is resisting. Daniels's critics say the details of the privatization plan, as they become better known, will raise questions about the governor's judgment and management oversight.

In his first days in office, Daniels ended collective bargaining for state employees. Unlike what has happened in Wisconsin and Ohio this year, where Republican governors and legislators have pushed to do the same, Daniels's decision, done by executive order, created almost no controversy.

Daniels has also avoided confrontational tactics when it suits him. This spring, when Democratic legislators, angry over a legislative proposal to make Indiana a right-to-work state, staged a

walkout, Daniels successfully persuaded Republican legislators to shelve the bill. He feared that a battle with unions would jeopardize his education agenda.

Daniels still hopes other candidates will take up the banner of fiscal reform. Friends say he is now dubious that they will. That leaves him where he has been for more than a year — on the fence — but with the clock about to expire.

Hume: 'If The Election Were Held Today In My View, Barack Obama Would Lose. He Might Lose Big' (CALLER)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Daily Caller

By Jeff Poor

While many in the media and elsewhere criticize the current crop of prospective Republican presidential candidates and question whether any of them could pose a serious threat to President Obama, Fox News senior political contributor Brit Hume has a different take: he doesn't seem to think that it will be a problem defeating President Obama in 2012.

On "Fox News Sunday," Hume explained that the economic problems the country is facing could be problematic for the political status quo.

"If these high gas prices were unaccompanied by higher prices that people are feeling at the grocery store and elsewhere, it wouldn't be nearly so large a problem," Hume said. "This is the season of the year when gas prices tend to spike anyway, which is why it's unfair to compare Jan. 20 a few years ago with today. But be that as it may, he will receive blame for this. In addition, I think it's very important — people's feelings about the economy, despite declining unemployment, despite the fact that there is now steady growth have not improved and when the conventional wisdom in Washington settles, as it seems to recently on the idea that the president is a sure bet for re-election."

Hume disputed that so-called "conventional wisdom" and said that if the economy remains how it is, Obama will lose in 2012, just so long as Republicans don't nominate a "freakish candidate."

"I think it's upside down," Hume said. "If the election were held today, in my view, Barack Obama would lose. He might lose big. Obviously, he's got some time. Events change. He would lose to any reasonable nominee from the Republican Party. The Republican Party might be able to lose the election if they nominate some extremely colorful freakish candidate, but my view of this is this election, Juan [Williams] — as you may have

heard me say before, is unlikely to be about the Republican nominee. It will be about President Obama and his record and if the public decides it wants to make a change, and it would do that if the election were held today, they will elect a Republican."

Watch:

Hume's co-panelist Juan Williams was skeptical of Hume's declaration, since it's not yet clear who the Republican nominee will be for the 2012 presidential election. But Hume invoked the 1980 presidential election, in which Ronald Reagan ultimately defeated incumbent Jimmy Carter, as a parallel to our current era since many of the same criticisms were then being leveled against the Republican field.

"Thirty-two years ago, 1979, the Republican field was in chaos," Hume said. "It had the aged former actor followed by the right named Ronald Reagan. It had an assortment of other candidates that nobody thought was presidential timber as the election year approached, and look what happened. The fact that people are discontent with the field now, how many times have we seen this? How many times?"

Rev. Franklin Graham A Birther? (POLITICO)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Politico

By Jake Sherman

Rev. Franklin Graham wonders: Why can't Barack Obama produce a birth certificate?

The son of the legendary evangelist Billy Graham told Christiane Amanpour on ABC's "This Week" that the president "has some issues to deal with" when it comes to proving he is indeed an American.

"He can solve this whole birth certificate issue pretty quickly," Graham said in an interview aired Sunday. "I was born in a hospital in Asheville, N.C. And I know that my records are there; You can probably go and find out what room my mother was in when I was born. I don't know why he can't produce that. It's an issue it looks like he can answer pretty quickly."

Graham, who has prayed with Obama, said the president has told him that he's a Christian, but allowed that "there are many people that do wonder where he really stands on" his religion.

"But the debate comes...what is a Christian?" Graham said. "For him, going to church means that he's a Christian. But for me, the definition of a Christian is whether we have given our life to Christ, and are following him in faith. And we have

trusted him as our lord and savior. That's the definition of a Christian."

"It's not as to what church you're a member, a membership doesn't make you a Christian," Graham said.

Palin Not Running, Graham Says (POLITICO)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Politico

By Jake Sherman

Sarah Palin doesn't like politics and is not running for president, Rev. Franklin Graham says.

The influential - and controversial - pastor has traveled with Palin to Haiti and said the former Republican vice presidential candidate "likes speaking on the issues, and I agree with many of the issues she brings up. I don't see her as running for president."

He is otherwise undecided on the other presidential candidates, he said in an interview aired Sunday on ABC's "This Week."

Mitt Romney has "proven himself" and is "a very capable person," Graham said.

"Donald Trump, when I first saw that he was getting in, I thought 'Well this has got to be a joke,'" Graham said. "But the more you listen to him, the more you say to yourself, 'You know maybe the guy's right.'"

When ABC host Christiane Amanpour asked whether he might support Trump, Graham said, "Sure, yeah. Sure."

President Barack Obama, whom Graham has met with, is "a very nice man."

"He's a very gracious person," Graham said. "But I think our country is in big trouble."

Ensign's Quitting Spurs Political Jockeying For Seats (WT)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Washington Times

By Sean Lengell

Nevada Republican Sen. John Ensign's resignation last week, along with the expected gubernatorial appointment of Rep. Dean Heller to fill the remaining 18 months of his term, has set off a game of political musical chairs in the Silver State.

The scenario also is expected to help the GOP hang on to the Senate seat by giving Mr. Heller, a Republican, a leg up on any Democratic challengers next year.

"This has created a great opportunity for Heller to get a big head start to prepare for the 2012

election," said Ron Bonjean, a Republican strategist. "He'll be much more high profile with all the powers of incumbency at his disposal."

Mr. Heller, a three-term Republican, already had announced he would run for Mr. Ensign's seat after the senator said last month he wouldn't seek re-election in 2012 because of an ongoing ethics investigation.

But Mr. Ensign's announcement Thursday that he instead would resign May 3 opens the door for Republican Gov. Brian Sandoval to pick a replacement to serve out the Ensign term. The governor, who endorsed Mr. Heller minutes after the congressman made his Senate campaign announcement, is widely expected to give Mr. Heller the job.

Mr. Sandoval said Friday he expects to name a replacement before May 3.

The governor was tight-lipped about his choice, however, saying he "take* very seriously the importance of this appointment, so to speculate on potential candidates ... before then would be premature."

The potential appointment would create a scramble for Mr. Heller's seat in the U.S. House, which already has attracted significant interest from both parties, including Republican Sharron Angle, who lost a Senate challenge last year to incumbent Democrat Harry Reid.

If the governor chooses Mr. Heller, then under Nevada electoral rules the Democrat and Republican candidates who run for the seat in a special election would be handpicked by their respective state party committees - a scenario that could be particularly damaging to Mrs. Angle, a tea party favorite who isn't widely popular in Nevada's GOP establishment.

On the Democratic side, Nevada Rep. Shelley Berkley has been rumored to be exploring a run for the Ensign seat.

Mr. Ensign cited the toll of the ongoing investigation on himself and his family as the reason for his resignation.

His action is expected to trigger a winding down of the Senate Select Committee on Ethics' investigation, though the panel may release more findings of its probe later.

Committee Chairwoman Barbara Boxer, California Democrat, and Vice Chairman Johnny Isakson, Georgia Republican, said in a joint statement that Mr. Ensign "has made the appropriate decision."

Mr. Ensign, 53, admitted in 2009 to having an extramarital affair with Cynthia Hampton, a member of his campaign staff at the time. The senator is accused of helping her husband, Doug Hampton, a former top Ensign aide, set up as a lobbyist after he found out about the affair.

Federal law bars former Senate aides from lobbying in the Senate for a year after they leave their congressional jobs.

Mr. Ensign's legal staff said last year the Justice Department had dropped a criminal investigation into the matter. The Federal Elections Commission also previously halted its own investigation.

Mr. Ensign has insisted he did nothing illegal.

"I was hopeful that, with the closure of these investigations against me, the wear and tear on my family and me would soon be over," said Mr. Ensign in a statement Thursday. "This was not the case."

Unlike 4 Years Ago, Heavy Independent Participation Likely In GOP Presidential Primary (WP/AP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Washington Post

By Associated Press

CONCORD, N.H. — At fundraising dinner after dinner, state Republican Party Chairman Jack Kimball earns loud applause when he declares that New Hampshire will send forward "a good strong conservative nominee for the presidency of the United States."

But it won't be just Republicans who pick a winner in the first-in-the-nation presidential primary next year.

Independent voters, who make up nearly 42 percent of registered voters in the state, can participate in either party's primary. And, given that President Barack Obama has no serious Democratic challenger, most Independents are expected to cast ballots in the GOP race next February, unlike in the last presidential campaign.

That means Republican White House hopefuls who have been courting Republicans at party fundraising dinners and holding private meetings with tea party activists will have to branch out: beyond talking about things like the Declaration of Independence and conservative Republican talking points. They'll also have to talk to New Hampshire independents.

"The discourse so far here in New Hampshire really mirrors the very conservative discourse we're hearing with the tea party and among

conservative elites around the country," said political analyst Dean Spiliotes. "The question is, how much of that is going to appeal to independents?"

Independent voters in the "Live Free or Die" state are notorious for, well, being independent. And sometimes so much so that they've helped upend presidential primary contests.

In 2008, more chose to vote in the Democratic primary between Barack Obama and Hillary Rodham Clinton than in the sleepier GOP contest between a slew of Republican contenders. Exit polls showed that 6 in 10 independents voted in the Democratic contest. Although Obama won more independent votes, they contributed to the coalition Clinton stitched together to stage a comeback victory after a disastrous Iowa defeat. Independents also were critical to Republican John McCain's victory here, which set him on the path to winning the GOP nomination.

Four years earlier, the Democratic primary took center stage because President George W. Bush faced only token opposition on the Republican ballot. More than 75 percent of the ballots cast in the New Hampshire primary that year were on the Democratic side, and according to exit polls, nearly half of those voting in the Democratic primary were registered as independents.

That suggests potentially heavy independent participation in next year's Republican primary, which is tentatively set for Feb. 14, 2012.

Also, a University of New Hampshire Survey Center poll in February found about 40 percent of independents — or "undeclared" as they're called here — said they plan to vote in the Republican primary, about 30 percent said they plan to vote in the Democratic primary, even though it's not expected to be contested, and 30 percent weren't sure.

Former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney led the field in that poll. But it means little; nearly 80 percent of likely GOP primary voters said they were still making up their minds. And independents tend to wait longer than others to pick a candidate, sometimes as late as Election Day.

Many Republican hopefuls, including former Pennsylvania Sen. Rick Santorum, dismiss questions about whether they're focusing too much on GOP voters in the state, saying their messages will resonate because independents appreciate fiscal conservatism as much as Republicans.

In a visit to the state last week, former House Speaker Newt Gingrich ticked off the high costs of gasoline and heating oil, joblessness and budget-busting spending and said: "I think there are a lot of independent voters who have an interest in those kinds of real, substantive issues, and I would try to appeal to them" with suggested solutions.

Like Gingrich, former Minnesota Gov. Tim Pawlenty argues that his record on taxes and spending will appeal to independents as well as Republicans. But he says that as a former governor of a Democratic-leaning state, he has an edge over other candidates because he has proven he can reach beyond his party to win.

"I have not just the rhetoric of saying I can or will do this, but I've actually done it," Pawlenty said in a phone interview, adding that he's mindful that the New Hampshire primary will include independents. "I welcome that."

Still, the challenges for the Republican candidates are great because independent voters by nature are a fickle bunch.

Just ask Ron Morse, an independent from the town of Weare.

He voted for Clinton in the 2008 primary and Obama in the general election but isn't hot on anyone this time and doesn't know what he will do come 2012.

"I switch when it feels right. Right now, I don't feel the president's doing a good job," said Morse, 60, as he had breakfast at a Manchester diner recently when Mississippi Gov. Haley Barbour stopped by. "There's nobody so far that I want to vote for." He said he "definitely" wouldn't back Romney. "And definitely not that Alaskan chick," he said, referring to former Alaskan Gov. Sarah Palin.

It turns out that Barbour doesn't sit well with him either; Morse said he was annoyed that Barbour brushed off his concerns about potential cuts to Medicare and Social Security.

Wayne Gagne, a co-chairman of the "New Hampshire Independents for McCain Coalition," in 2008, said last week he doesn't know which primary he'll vote in next year, though he, too, has ruled out Romney and Palin, and Gingrich, too. He thinks Obama is on the right track on health care, but he has friends who think highly of Pawlenty, and he likes the way Donald Trump thinks.

"Sometimes he thinks like me: just get it done. He's right to the point, and I like that feature in anybody, frankly," said Gagne, 60, a retired locomotive engineer from Nashua, said of Trump. "But how will he do politically in the world's

problems? I don't know. Nothing impresses me yet."

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Spring Fundraising Quarter Tests Likely GOP Presidential Hopefuls (WP/AP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Washington Post

By Associated Press

NEW YORK — Mitt Romney is organizing a phone bank fundraiser in Las Vegas next month. Tim Pawlenty is holding regular "friendraising" meetings in big-money California and elsewhere. Haley Barbour hunkers down soon with finance operatives in cash-rich New York and other lucrative places.

Republican presidential hopefuls are in the midst of a fundraising frenzy as they seek to raise mounds of campaign cash and assemble influential donor networks. With the 2012 campaign starting several months later than it did four years ago, the contenders are under intense pressure to demonstrate their ability to bring in the dough before the slower summer season begins.

"Money is hardly the only indication of a candidate's potential, but it's an important indication," said Lew Eisenberg, a top Romney fundraiser who was finance chairman for Arizona Sen. John McCain, the party's 2008 nominee.

For now, the field is eschewing wall-to-wall public appearances with campaign speeches and interaction with voters. Instead, they're scurrying between private meetings and dialing phone lists to persuade donors to come aboard in hopes of meeting closely kept fundraising goals for the three-month period that ends June 30.

They're trying to prove that they are savvy money collectors and ready to challenge President Barack Obama, a record-breaking fundraiser who could raise as much as \$1 billion. They also need to raise enough money to pay for full-fledged campaigns in early voting states such as Iowa, New Hampshire, Nevada and South Carolina.

Beyond that, each contender has other objectives:

—Romney, the multimillionaire former Massachusetts governor, raised \$63 million and kicked in \$44 million of his own money before dropping out of the primary race in 2008. He's hoping to use his fundraising prowess to lay down a marker that he's the candidate to beat in a field that lacks a true front-runner.

—Barbour, Mississippi's governor, an ex-lobbyist and a former Republican National Committee chairman, and former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, who has an enormous e-mail list through his American Solutions organization, are trying to show they can move swiftly to mobilize their existing network of backers.

—Pawlenty, the former Minnesota governor and a newcomer to national politics, simply is trying to demonstrate that he can compete in their league.

—The same could be said for Minnesota Rep. Michele Bachmann and former Pennsylvania Sen. Rick Santorum. She's a proven fundraiser as a House candidate and is a favorite among tea party backers but hasn't run nationally. Santorum isn't well known around the country and hasn't held office since losing his seat in 2006.

None will disclose his or her fundraising goals. Doing so would raise expectations that they may not be able to meet.

Of those who have taken initial steps toward formal campaigns, Romney arguably has moved the quickest. He's secured pledges from top supporters to raise as much as \$25,000 apiece. He's been meeting potential donors individually and in small groups, leading up to a major "phone day" event May 16. That's when he and his supporters plan to gather in Las Vegas to raise money and recruit new contributors. After that, aides say Romney will launch a heavy schedule of fundraising events.

"He's working. He's moving every day, investing the time," Eisenberg said.

Pawlenty has been introducing himself to the Republican finance crowd at meetings that his aides describe as "friendraisers." Some big supporters of both McCain and former President George W. Bush have agreed to join Pawlenty's team. His aides say he's made inroads in Texas, fertile fundraising territory, and several veterans of past GOP presidential campaigns are hosting an event for him in Dallas on May 10.

"He's not in the front-runner position, so he'll have to make a lot more friends before raising money," said Phil Handy, a former Bush and McCain fundraiser in Florida now helping Pawlenty. "We have some ground to make up, but we feel good about it."

Barbour, who's expected to join the field as early as this coming week, has met with potential donors while traveling to early voting states. He has an extensive fundraising network from his political and lobbying careers but aides are playing down what he will raise in the April-June period.

They say it will take some time for those contacts to bear fruit for Barbour.

Several potential contenders probably will be able to sidestep the scrutiny that will come when the three-month totals are reported in mid-July.

Former Utah Gov. Jon Huntsman won't return from China, where he is serving as U.S. ambassador, until the end of this month. He has been legally barred from making any significant campaign moves until then. He's expected to disclose in the coming weeks whether he will run. Expectations are high that he will. His personal wealth and links to the moneyed Mormon community could help his fundraising; his work in the Obama administration could hurt.

Former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee, who won the 2008 Iowa caucuses but little else, and former Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin, the 2008 GOP vice presidential nominee, are well-known national figures. Because of that, they may have an easier time raising cash than others if they decide to get in the race. Donald Trump, the real estate developer and reality show host, has said he will announce his plans in June.

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McCain Says Trump's Having 'Time Of His Life' (POLITICO)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Politico

By Glenn Thrush

Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) shrugged off Donald Trump's presidential flirtation on Sunday, telling NBC's "Meet the Press" that he admires The Donald's capacity to grab free publicity.

"I'm staying out of it. .. He's having the time of his life. I congratulate him for getting all of the attention," McCain said appearing via satellite from Cairo, according to a Tweet posted by the show's executive producer, Betsy Fischer.

Fischer also wrote that McCain tried to wriggle out of the Trump question by talking up the possibility of a Sarah Palin candidacy.

McCain, fresh from his trip to Libya to visit with rebel leaders, also said the U.S. needs to get more involved in the NATO "air fight," Fischer Tweeted, and described the current situation there as "a bloody situation [that] has all the hallmarks of being a stalemate."

Bloomberg: 'Birther' Issue 'A Terrible Mistake' For GOP Candidates (HILL)

Monday, April 25, 2011

The Hill

By Gautham Nagesh

New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg said if Republicans continue to focus on the issue of whether President Obama was born in the U.S. instead of housing and the economy, it will cost them electorally.

Bloomberg said on "Fox News Sunday" the American public is primarily concerned with being able to hold onto their jobs and wants Congress to focus on immigration, the debt and the economy, not a futile quest to prove the president was born abroad.

"I think Republicans are making a terrible mistake in making this a big issue," Bloomberg said with regards to birthers, prefacing his remarks by clarifying that Obama was born in the United States.

"My girlfriend always says that it's all about housing and jobs. My house, my job. That's what the public cares about. And if the Republican party doesn't start addressing that they will lose and they deserve to."

The incorrect "birther" argument, which began during the 2008 campaign, has been brought back into the spotlight largely by Donald Trump, the reality TV star and real estate mogul who is flirting with a run for the Republican presidential nomination.

But Bloomberg said it's not about Trump. "I'm a friend of Donald Trump's -- he is a New York icon," the mayor said. "This birther issue is more than one person. There are a lot of roots that have glommed on to this."

With regard to immigration reform, Bloomberg argued lawmakers should embrace immigration along with a path to citizenship for the 11 million illegal immigrants currently in the U.S. He said it would be unrealistic to deport all illegal residents, so instead lawmakers should find a way to make them more productive in the U.S. economy.

"Slamming our thumb with a hammer because it feels good when we stop is a nice thing to talk about but it's not very good policy," Bloomberg said.

"You're not going to solve the problem ... by yelling and screaming at those people. They came here, they broke the law, and let me tell you this country encouraged them to come here and made sure that we didn't stop them," he added, arguing illegal workers were welcomed by relatives and industries seeking workers.

The mayor argued New York's economy is thriving in part because of the influence of immigrants and said cities such as Detroit are attempting to recruit more immigrants to recover some lost population.

When asked if he is planning to run for president, Bloomberg replied with a definitive "no."

NEAR EAST & NORTH AFRICA

Middle East Peace Process Set For New Airing (AFP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

AFP

By Christophe Schmidt

WASHINGTON (AFP) - Shelved since late 2010 and eclipsed by the pro-democracy Arab uprisings, the faltering Middle East peace process may soon be back in focus as Palestinians push for UN recognition of their state.

Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas has already unveiled his plan to achieve the long-cherished dream of Palestinian statehood which he hopes will win backing at the annual United Nations General Assembly in September.

And Abbas believes some of his European peace partners are ready to support his unilateral move to secure UN recognition of a Palestinian state based on the 1967 borders with Jerusalem as its capital.

Frustrated by seven months of stalemate, which has only compounded decades of failed initiatives, Abbas's diplomatic initiative has been gaining ground even if he still seeks a negotiated comprehensive peace deal with Israel.

After talks in Paris last week, he travels to Berlin on May 5 to press his cause. If France backs the unilateral move, other European nations may follow, much as a slew of Latin American countries followed Brazil's recognition late last year.

But neither Israel nor the United States wants to see a unilateral declaration of Palestinian statehood.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is now under mounting pressure to present his own peace plan rather than be faced with an imposed solution.

President Shimon Peres, Israel's elder statesman and a Nobel peace laureate, Friday urged the premier to act before events overtake him. According to Israeli media reports Netanyahu will unveil his own plan in a speech to the US Congress in late May.

"If we don't want foreign plans, the best way would be a plan of our own, and if we do that, others won't go ahead with theirs," Peres said.

Peres was responding to reports that US President Barack Obama is preparing to lay out his own vision for a peace settlement.

Obama would make a speech on the Middle East "perhaps soon," one US official confirmed to AFP.

"He will be talking about what's been going on in the Middle East, the various revolutions. It's not going to be a speech for just the peace process."

The Arab uprisings sweeping many Middle East nations -- traditional partners in helping bring Israel and the Palestinians to the negotiating table -- have complicated the equation for the United States.

"A lot of this, we're still sorting out. When you look at what's happening in Syria... For any peace to work, Syria has to be a part of that," the official said.

The outlines for any peace deal have long been drawn -- the Palestinians insist on a state based on the 1967 borders before the Israeli occupation, while Netanyahu has refused a total withdrawal from the West Bank where thousands of Jewish settlers live.

The two sides also remain at odds over the status of east Jerusalem, which the Palestinians want as capital of their future state, while the Israelis maintain the city must remain their undivided capital.

So there is little room for any new initiatives.

According to the New York Times, the White House will propose a Palestinian state based on the 1967 borders with Jerusalem as a joint capital. But it won't envisage the right of return for Palestinian refugees -- something which will anger the Palestinian side.

Without confirming any details, a senior US official said: "We're looking at ways to re-energize the process but mindful of fact that no outside party can impose a solution."

"At end of day, this is about the two sides sitting at the table and finding ways to resolve these hard issues."

For observers however the differences over the core issues at the heart of any peace deal are still too wide.

"Negotiations remain the only realistic path forward, but the gaps on the core issues are too large to bridge at present," wrote former diplomat

Aaron David Miller, a veteran of the peace negotiations.

He judged the chances of success of any new Washington initiative as "slim to none" in a commentary published by the Council of Foreign Relations.

President Obama And The Peace Process (NYT)

Monday, April 25, 2011

New York Times

President Obama began his presidency vowing to negotiate an Israeli-Palestinian peace. He backed off in the face of both sides' obstinacy and after a series of diplomatic missteps. Since then, the stalemate, and the mistrust, have only deepened, and it is clear that nothing good will happen until the United States fully engages.

It is time for Mr. Obama — alone or, better yet, in concert with Europe, Russia and the United Nations — to put a map and a deal on the table.

The outlines of a deal are no secret. They were first proposed by President Bill Clinton in 2000. But neither side has been willing to make the necessary concessions — on land swaps, how Jerusalem can be shared and how many displaced Palestinians can go home, or not. The Israelis need to know that their closest ally won't enable more inaction. The Palestinians need to know they will have American support so long as their demands are realistic. Mr. Obama needs to speak up before Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel pre-empts the debate with what is certain to be an inferior proposal when he addresses a joint meeting of Congress next month.

Mr. Netanyahu has made some concessions, most notably giving Palestinians more control over their own security in the West Bank. But he has long insisted that the Palestinians aren't serious about negotiating a final deal, and he is now hinting that he will unilaterally offer them an interim, step-by-step arrangement that will put off statehood to some undefined future.

He also has used the upheavals in the Middle East as one more excuse not to act, rather than a reason to reinforce Israel's security with a durable peace deal.

Mr. Netanyahu — who is coming to speak at the invitation of Representative John Boehner, the House speaker — seems to think that the Republicans' new power means he has carte blanche in Washington. So long as Mr. Obama sits on the sidelines, he will surely continue to believe that.

The address to Congress isn't the only deadline Mr. Obama has to worry about. The Palestinians are threatening to ask the United Nations General Assembly — which admitted the state of Israel in 1949 — to declare a Palestinian state when it meets in September. Israel and the United States dismiss this as theater. But it is certain to pass, further isolating Israel. If Washington votes against it, as it inevitably will, it would further isolate this country.

President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority and his aides have been building their capacity to govern in the West Bank. But Mr. Abbas isn't helping his cause by refusing to return to the negotiating table. He suspended talks last fall after Israel refused to extend a moratorium on settlement construction. Holding to his position only gives Mr. Netanyahu an excuse not to seriously engage.

The status quo is not sustainable, as a recent surge of violence should make clear. And the options on the ground for creating a territorially coherent Palestinian state keep narrowing as Israel steps up settlement construction in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Israel could oust the settlers — and will have to in certain areas. But the more settlers they let in, the harder it will be politically for any Israeli leader to cut a deal.

Last month, Robert Gates made the first visit to the West Bank by an American defense secretary to reinforce Washington's commitment to a Palestinian state. But President Obama's peace envoy, George Mitchell, who is supposed to move the process forward, hasn't been to the region since December.

Mr. Gates was absolutely correct when he declared in Israel that despite the uncertainty caused by the upheaval in the Arab world, "there is a need and an opportunity for bold action to move toward a two-state solution." He was talking to the Israelis and the Palestinians. We hope President Obama was listening closely, too.

Yemen Police Injure Dozens, Disperse Protest (AFP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

AFP

SANA (AFP) — Yemeni security forces wounded dozens of people as they fired bullets and tear gas to disperse hundreds of thousands of protesters in the flashpoint city of Taez on Monday, witnesses said.

Large crowds gathered in Taez, south of Sanaa, to pressure President Ali Abdullah Saleh to step down

immediately despite a US-backed Gulf plan for a transition, they said.

The protesters, who have been demonstrating across Yemen since late January, rallied against a Gulf Cooperation Council plan under which Saleh would quit in 30 days with immunity from prosecution.

"No rest, no respite for the executioner," protestors shouted as tension gripped the area.

The witnesses said security forces erected concrete barriers to block access roads leading to the Taiz governor's office and deployed armoured vehicles on the streets.

The latest flare-up came after the United States urged a peaceful transition after Saleh's ruling General People's Congress said on Saturday it accepted the transition plan drawn up by Yemen's oil-rich Gulf neighbours.

"No negotiations, no dialogue," read banners carried by the demonstrators on Monday.

Bahraini flags were also spotted in a show of solidarity with pro-democracy demonstrations in the kingdom, where street protests were crushed in mid-March after a deployment of a joint Gulf force.

Opposition In Yemen Divided Over Offer From President (NYT)

Monday, April 25, 2011

New York Times

By Laura Kasinof

Street demonstrators and youth leaders voiced skepticism on Sunday over an offer by President Ali Abdullah Saleh to leave office in 30 days after agreeing to a plan that would grant him and his sons immunity from prosecution for any crimes, saying they did not trust his intention to step down and would continue their protests.

Mr. Saleh's offer, which was mediated by his Arab neighbors, has accentuated the divisions within his opposition. The opposition coalition, known as the J.M.P., which includes seven political parties, said Sunday that it welcomed the initiative, but only if a national unity government was formed after Mr. Saleh stepped down, not immediately as the current proposal put together by the Gulf Cooperation Council, which includes six member nations, calls for. The coalition parties do not want to be part of a government with Mr. Saleh.

The protesters are taking a harder line, and say that the J.M.P. is out of touch with the demands of what are known as the "independent" youth not

affiliated with standing political parties. Leaders of some of the tens of thousands of street protesters — originally young people but now Yemenis from all segments of society who have set up permanent protests camps in cities throughout the country — said they suspected that Mr. Saleh could wiggle out of the deal at a later date, and try to extend his 33-year rule.

Many said they were inspired by the youthful protests in Tunisia and Egypt, which forced autocrats in those countries out relatively quickly and without conditions. They said they wanted a similar outcome here.

Some protesters rejected the offer outright. Others, like Atiaf Alwazir, a youth organizer in Sana, said that her feelings were mixed, at best. "It's just another game," she said. "Let the J.M.P. do what they have to do politically, negotiate, and the youth will do what they have to do and stay in the streets."

Ms. Alwazir said the idea of immunity for Mr. Saleh and his sons had divided many as well.

Protesters have repeatedly voiced their rejection of the offer of immunity for the president, though on Sunday there was some chatter via social networking Web sites arguing for a more pragmatic approach if it meant ushering Mr. Saleh to exit.

Other protesters feel that Mr. Saleh's acceptance of the Gulf Cooperation Council's proposal was typical of his political cunning and a move to put the opposition in a bad light and make it seem as if he were the one working to stop the country from falling into chaos.

"This initiative is for the sake of the regime," said Tawfiq al-Shaoubi, a protest leader in the central city of Taiz, home to Yemen's largest demonstration. "We will keep protesting," he said. "This is regime must go so we can build a new modern society in Yemen."

In Sana, protesters who have camped out for weeks appeared to have no intention of moving and continued with their demonstrations on Sunday, chanting, "No negotiation, no dialogue — resign or flee," according to Reuters.

In an interview with BBC Arabic television on Sunday, Mr. Saleh said he would not hand over power to what he termed "insurrectionists."

"Who shall I hand it over to?" he told the BBC. "Those who are trying to make a coup? No. We will do it through ballot boxes and referendums. We'll invite international observers to monitor. Any coup

is rejected because we are committed to the constitutional legitimacy and don't accept chaos."

Mr. Saleh also said that Al Qaeda, which is known to have a presence in the country, had infiltrated protest camps. "Al Qaeda are moving inside the camps, and this is very dangerous," he said. "Why is the West not looking at this destructive work and its dangerous implications for the future?"

His call to use the ballot box added to the distrust among his opponents. "The G.C.C. announced that he agrees to leave after 30 days, and he says he's only leaving through the ballot box," said Ms. Alwazir, the youth leader. "There's not trust," she said. "Especially since he's contradicting himself right now."

An independent Yemeni diplomat, who did not want to be identified, said that Mr. Saleh seemed confused and reluctant to step aside, but that he had drawn his own lessons from the experience of Egypt and knew he should take advantage of this offer of immunity.

He said that some in the opposition understood Yemen's delicate state, with violence in outlying provinces increasing and the economy floundering, which is why they were willing to compromise slightly.

"Some J.M.P. leaders understand the current state of the Yemeni scene," the diplomat said. "They realize that Yemen is on the brink of total collapse and might face a civil war." But others, he said, chiefly Islamists from the Islah Party, want to keep pushing until they seize power, signaling a split not just between protesters and the formal political parties but also within the coalition itself.

Opponents Of Yemen's President Divided Over Deal (AP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Associated Press

By Ahmed Al-Haj And Jason Keyser

SANAA, Yemen – Deep divisions within Yemen's opposition appeared to doom an Arab proposal for the president to step down within a month, raising the prospect of more bloodshed and instability in a nation already beset by deep poverty and conflict.

President Ali Abdullah Saleh, who has ruled for 32 years, agreed Saturday to the Gulf Cooperation Council's formula for him to transfer power to his vice president within 30 days of a deal being signed in exchange for immunity from prosecution for him and his sons.

A coalition of seven opposition parties generally accepted the deal. But thousands stood their ground Sunday in a permanent protest camp in

part of the capital, Sanaa, and their leaders said they suspect Saleh is just maneuvering to buy time and cling to power. The protesters say the established opposition political parties taking part in the talks with Arab mediators do not represent them and cannot turn off the rage on the streets.

"President Saleh has in the past agreed to initiatives and he went back on his word," said Khaled al-Ansi, one of the youth leaders organizing the street protests. "We have no reason to believe that he would not do this again."

So far, Saleh has outrun more than two months of protests pressing for him to immediately step down, thanks in large part to the unwavering loyalty of the country's best military units, which are controlled by one of his sons and other close relatives.

That seems to have insulated him even as outrage over the severity of his crackdown on protesters has stripped him of many close allies in his party, his tribe and the military.

International pressure is also bearing down on him to leave, including from the United States, which had backed his rule with millions in financial assistance and military aid for fighting the active al-Qaida branch that has taken root in the country.

A bloc of Gulf nations, including powerful Saudi Arabia, has been trying to broker an end to the crisis, fearing the potential blowback of more instability in the fragile country on the southern edge of Arabia.

But the protesters in the streets, who are from an array of different backgrounds and are not represented in the talks, reject the proposal outright and want nothing short of Saleh's immediate resignation and his trial on charges of corruption and for the killings of unarmed protesters.

The proposal's steps call for the established opposition parties to join Saleh in a unity government. The president would then submit his resignation to a parliament dominated by his own party, which would have to approve or reject it. What happens if they reject it is unclear. If approved, he would transfer his power to his vice president.

Mohammed al-Sabri, spokesman for the opposition political parties, said the coalition does not want to discuss a unity government until after Saleh is out of power.

"How could we form a government that gets sworn in by a president who has lost his legitimacy?" he said.

The protesters, meanwhile, are calling for more demonstrations in the next few days to intensify the pressure.

In response, the government signaled it would not agree to any adjustments in the Gulf proposal, with a statement on the official SABA news agency saying the initiative must be implemented in its entirety.

That raised the prospect that Saleh was counting on the opposition to reject the deal and only agreed to it to make them look like the spoilers.

Thousands of protesters, meanwhile, held onto their camp in the capital's Change Square, where they are ringed by military units that defected to join and protect them. Army officers in desert camouflage uniforms mixed with the crowds, pumping their arms into the air and flashing victory signs.

Their anger has been fed by the heavy crackdown. More than 130 people have been killed by security forces and Saleh supporters since the unrest began in early February. At least 40 were killed in a single attack on March 18 by rooftop snipers overlooking Change Square.

Saleh offered earlier in the crisis to step down by the end of the year and guarantee that his son Ahmed would not succeed him. When that failed to ease the unrest, he rolled back and insisted he would stay until the end of his term in 2013. Seeking to ease the international pressure on him, he warned the country would slide into chaos and al-Qaida would seize control if he left early.

The U.S. is concerned about the possibility of a security vacuum as well as political and economic paralysis if Saleh leaves office without a clear deal in place, said a former U.S. ambassador to Yemen, Barbara Bodine.

But she did not think any new government would partner with al-Qaida.

"I do not think we need to be concerned that a Taliban-like government is going to come in, one that is going to support and facilitate al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula," she said in an interview on Saturday night.

Her assessment of the Gulf mediation effort was that it would not bring a quick end to the crisis.

"We are not at the end. We may be at the beginning of the end, but we are not at the end of this process," she said.

Saleh, a shrewd politician and former military officer, has held power for decades by using his security forces to put down opponents and deftly

negotiating with powerful tribes that hold sway in Yemen's remote hinterlands.

He has fended off numerous serious challenges. The country's al-Qaida offshoot has attacked his forces, an armed rebellion has battered the north of the country and a secessionist movement has reappeared in the once-independent south.

At the same time, the country is rapidly running out of water and oil and is the poorest in the Arab world.

The United States has watched the uprising with particular concern because Saleh has been an ally in fighting al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula, which has been behind two nearly successful attempts to attack U.S. targets in recent years and has an estimated 300 fighters.

Washington is now backing a transition of power to end the crisis. The White House on Saturday urged all parties in Yemen "to move swiftly to implement" a deal transferring power.

Yemen Opposition Deadlock Delays New Deal (WSJ)

Monday, April 25, 2011; A9

Wall Street Journal

By Margaret Coker And Hakim Almasmari

Full-text stories from the Wall Street Journal are available to Journal subscribers by clicking the link.

Yemen Protesters Reject US-Backed Transition (AFP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

AFP

By Hammoud Mounassar

SANA (AFP) - Yemen's protest movement insisted Sunday on President Ali Abdullah Saleh's rapid exit and prosecution after his party accepted a Gulf plan for him to quit in 30 days in a move hailed by Washington.

The United States urged a peaceful transition after Saleh's ruling General People's Congress (GPC) party said late Saturday it accepted a Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) plan under which he would quit following months of protests.

However, Saleh himself said any change of regime can only be through "ballot boxes and referendums," and said he could not give into a "coup."

"You call on me from the US and Europe to hand over power," Saleh told the BBC in an interview. "Who shall I hand it over to? Those who are trying

to make a coup? No. We will do it through ballot boxes and referendums."

He accused the West of supporting his opponents whom he said were backed by Al-Qaeda.

The opposition Peaceful Change Revolution issued a statement reiterating its rejection of the Gulf plan and demanded that Saleh be prosecuted, contrary to the GCC proposal which calls for immunity.

"The committee... utterly rejects any initiative that would not stipulate the departure of Saleh and his family (from power) and putting him and his staff on trial," it said.

The Gulf plan would see Saleh submit his resignation to parliament 30 days after tasking the opposition with forming a "national accord government" shared equally between the GPC and the opposition.

His resignation would also follow the enactment by the parliament of laws providing "immunity against legal and judicial prosecution of the president and those who worked with him during his rule," the text of the initiative says.

Saleh's deputy, Yemen's vice president, would then take over as interim president and call for a presidential election within 60 days.

The newly elected president would form a committee to draft a new constitution which would be voted on in a referendum, paving the way for parliamentary elections.

The GCC, the European Union and United States would sign the resulting agreement as witnesses.

Saleh's party said on Saturday it accepted the plan in its "entirety."

Yemen's parliamentary Common Forum opposition coalition also welcomed the Gulf plan, but insisted Saleh has to go before a national unity government is formed.

The protesters' statement on Sunday slammed the Common Forum position, however, saying it "represents only itself."

The committee urged the Common Forum "to refrain from entering into dialogue with Saleh and his regime, and to merge fully with the revolution, and call clearly for an immediate departure of Saleh and a speedy trial of his regime."

The White House on Saturday welcomed the plan for Yemen's long-time president to step down, urging all sides to "swiftly" implement a peaceful transfer of power.

Washington also urged "all parties to move swiftly to implement the terms of the agreement so that the Yemeni people can soon realise the security, unity, and prosperity that they have so courageously sought and so richly deserve."

Officials in Washington, which has regarded Saleh a key ally in its fight against terrorism, are alarmed at the fallout in Yemen, where Al-Qaeda has already exploited the violent power struggle between Saleh and his opponents.

More than 130 people have been killed in clashes with security forces and Saleh supporters since protests broke out in late January.

In Yemen's southern province of Lahij, fresh clashes broke out between armed tribesmen and Republican Guard forces on Sunday, killing nine people, six of them soldiers, police said.

The renewed fighting erupted in the same area where eight people -- six tribesmen and two soldiers -- were killed three days ago, police said.

Protests In Yemen Continue Unabated By Saleh's Agreement To Yield Power (BLOOM)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Bloomberg News

By Mohammed Hatem And Glen Carey

Protests in Yemen showed no signs of ending after President Ali Abdullah Saleh and the opposition agreed to a Gulf Cooperation Council-brokered peace plan.

Demonstrators today rallied in Sana'a, the country's capital, chanting "Down, down with the regime" and demanding the president's unconditional departure. In al-Turbah, a district of Taiz province, six people were wounded when police fired on thousands of protesters, Bushra al-Maktari, a protest leader, said in a phone interview.

GCC officials want to avert an escalation of violence in Yemen or a deadly military divide like the one in Libya. Rising social unrest also threatens to strengthen al-Qaeda as it seeks to use Yemen, the poorest Arab nation, as a base from which to destabilize neighboring Saudi Arabia, the world's largest exporter of crude oil.

Saleh agreed to a GCC plan that would give him immunity in exchange for ceding power, Tarik al-Shami, spokesman at the ruling General People's Congress, said in a phone interview yesterday. Saleh would transfer power to a deputy within 30 days and hold elections 60 days after that, he said. The opposition must end protests, accept immunity for Saleh and his aides, al-Shami said.

The ruling party said today that it still supported the GCC plan based on the terms of the agreement and within the framework of the constitution, the official Saba news agency reported, citing an unidentified government official.

Yemeni youth protest groups rejected the GCC initiative and called for continued rallies against Saleh, the Revolution Coalition of Peaceful Change said today in a press conference in Sana'a. The government "doesn't keep its word and its existence has become dangerous not only to Yemen but to the entire region," the group said.

The Joint Meeting Parties, a coalition of six opposition groups, have agreed to the GCC plan. They wouldn't participate in a national unity government under Saleh during the 30 days he'd remain in power, Mohammed al-Sabri, a leader in the opposition, said. They also support the right to protest.

The ruling party has already informed GCC Secretary-General Abdel Latif al-Zayyani that it endorses the plan, according to spokesman al-Shami. Saleh met with him on April 21, al-Shami said. The GCC, which includes Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Oman, Bahrain and Kuwait, has also had talks with representatives of Yemen's opposition this month.

Saleh would be the third leader forced from office since popular unrest spread through the Middle East, resulting in the ouster of Hosni Mubarak in Egypt and Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in Tunisia. In March, Saleh, 68, agreed to an opposition proposal to hand over power by the end of the year, then backtracked by saying he'd stand down only after a newly elected government was formed and power was transferred to safer hands.

"It is possible that Saleh is maneuvering," Theodore Karasik, director of research at the Dubai-based Institute for Near East and Gulf Military Analysis, said today in a phone interview. "The more time he gets the better it is for himself and his supporters. Thirty days is a long time in Yemeni politics and there is likely to be more squabbling."

Police and snipers killed 46 demonstrators in the Yemeni capital Sana'a last month, prompting several military and government officials to abandon Saleh's regime. A total of 109 protesters have been killed since Feb. 11, according to Majed al-Madhaji, a spokesman at the Arabic Sisters Forum for Human Rights in the city.

A weak central government in Yemen also risks mirroring the situation in Somalia across the Gulf of Aden, where there hasn't been a functioning

administration since 1991. Somalia has become a breeding ground for pirates who attack shipping lanes.

United Arab Emirates Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed al-Nahyan urged all parties in Yemen to agree to the GCC plan in a meeting yesterday with his Yemeni counterpart, Abu Bakr Al-Qirbi, Emirates News Agency said. The GCC "is keen on the stability and unity of Yemen," the news service cited Abdullah as saying.

The GCC's plan for the transfer of power in Yemen could "resolve the political crisis in a peaceful and orderly manner," the Obama administration said yesterday in an e-mailed statement. "We encourage all parties to move swiftly to implement the terms of the agreement," the White House said.

In Yemen's "Change Square," Demonstrators Remain Defiant (MCT)

Monday, April 25, 2011

McClatchy

By Adam Baron

SANAA, Yemen _ Protesters in Yemen remained committed Sunday to continuing demonstrations despite President Ali Abdullah Saleh's seeming acceptance of a Gulf-mediated proposal that would lead to his exit soon.

Under terms of the Gulf Cooperative Council (GCC) plan, the embattled leader will receive legal immunity in exchange for handing power to his vice president within the next thirty days. The plan, which has been welcomed by leaders in the United States and Europe, calls for elections to follow sixty days after Saleh's resignation. Leaders of the Joint Meeting Parties (JMP), a coalition of Yemen's opposition parties, have conditionally accepted the deal.

Since February, widespread protests have gripped the nation of Yemen. Sanaa's University Square, since dubbed "Change Square," has been the center of a sprawling tent city as tens of thousands of protesters have maintained a sit-in as they call for the fall of the Yemeni regime. Within the carnival-like campsite, which has spread over dozens of city blocks, vendors hawk goods while music and speeches are broadcast from the center of the square.

Despite reports of the president's acceptance of the GCC plan, protesters continued to pack the square on Sunday, the mood remaining one of defiance rather than celebration. Opinion among protesters remained strongly against the deal despite the JMP's acceptance of it. Protesters insist that they cannot accept any deal that gives Saleh

legal immunity, preserves the structure of the existing regime, or does not lead to his immediate departure.

While leaders of the JMP — an eclectic grouping that includes secular, socialist and Islamist parties — have participated in the anti-government demonstrations, many activists remain deeply skeptical of the parliamentary opposition, viewing them as a part of Saleh's regime.

"The GCC plan is unacceptable," commented Salah Sharafi, a prominent youth activist. "They have failed even to consult us."

"The JMP is not leading this revolution," echoed Hossam al-Sunaidy, another youth activist. "Our party is the revolution," he added, "Our leader is our goals."

These attitudes were not confined to the so-called revolutionary youth. On the other side of the square, some seven dozen tents away, Abdullah Auraimy, a 57-year old former soldier, echoed the youth leaders' comments.

"We will not leave until he does," he vowed. "What the parties say is meaningless if the people are against it."

Entisser al-Hadali, a school principal, said that "the women of the revolution will continue to support our sons and brothers in peacefully struggling for a better Yemen. We cannot stop until we obtain our goals of human rights and the fall of the regime."

For his part, President Saleh sent mixed messages Sunday, referring to the protests as a "coup" during an interview with the BBC.

"I will not be subject to a minority," Saleh said, reported Saba, Yemen's state news agency, noting that Saleh has agreed to step down only if the majority of the Yemeni people demanded it. During the interview, the Yemeni leader referred to the Gulf Initiative as a "temporary treatment," repeating that he would deal with the Gulf Initiative within the framework of the nation's constitution, implying that he intends to stay on until the holding of elections.

Saleh's continued maneuvering comes as no surprise to many protesters. "Our president is known for saying one thing in the night and the opposite in the morning," commented Taha Yahya, a teacher in Sanaa. "This is why we will not leave the square until the fall of the regime."

U.S. Seeks To Raise Heat On Syria (WSJ)

Monday, April 25, 2011; A1

Wall Street Journal

By Jay Solomon, Nour Malas And Adam Entous

Full-text stories from the Wall Street Journal are available to Journal subscribers by clicking the link.

5 Killed In New Syria Clashes, Witnesses Say (AP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Associated Press

By Elizabeth A. Kennedy

BEIRUT — Syrian troops backed by tanks stormed at least three towns early Monday and snipers fired from rooftops, killing at least five people as the crackdown intensifies on a five-week uprising against President Bashar Assad's authoritarian regime, witnesses and activists said.

The most serious violence appeared to be in the southern city of Daraa, where the protest movement kicked off more than a month ago after authorities arrested a group of teenagers who scrawled anti-regime graffiti on a wall. Since then, more than 300 people have been killed across the country as the anti-government demonstrations have swelled.

"We need international intervention! We need countries to help us!" shouted a witness in Daraa who said he saw five corpses after security forces opened fire on a car. He spoke to The Associated Press by telephone.

Activists on social media posted footage of what they said were troops firing throughout Daraa.

The crackle of heavy gunfire punctuates the footage, as well as the labored, frightened breathing of the activist filming the footage. The activist repeats the date and location and says: "The army forces are entering Daraa. They are shelling the city of Daraa."

The video could not be independently verified and all witnesses spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisals. Syria has banned nearly all foreign media and restricted access to trouble spots since the uprising began, making it nearly impossible to get independent assessments of the situation on the ground.

Also Monday, witnesses said Syrian security forces had opened fire in the suburbs of Damascus and in the coastal town of Jableh, where witnesses said police and army units fired from rooftops over the weekend even though there were no apparent threats and no protests in progress.

On Monday, witnesses said security forces in camouflage uniforms — some with their faces covered — and masked gunmen dressed in black were roaming the streets.

"Jableh is surrounded by security forces," the witness said, speaking by telephone. "The dead are in the mosques and the houses. We can't get them out."

The rising level of violence in Syria — more than 120 people have been killed since Friday — has brought calls from the watchdog group Human Rights Watch for a U.N. inquiry.

Since Saturday, Syrian security forces have detained dozens of opposition activists as authorities turned to pinpoint raids to quell the revolt.

The strategy, described by a rights activist, appeared aimed at rattling the opposition's leadership and showing that the state's ability to conduct sweeping arrests has not changed despite abolishing nearly 50-year-old emergency laws last week.

The raids were concentrated around the capital Damascus and the central city of Homs, a hotbed of demonstrations against Assad's authoritarian rule, said Ammar Qurabi, head of the National Organization for Human Rights in Syria.

"These people are not being arrested in a legal way. They are being kidnapped," Qurabi said, claiming the plainclothes security agents did not have formal arrest warrants.

Qurabi did not have full figures for those detained, but said at least 20 people were arrested in Homs.

A resident in the Damascus suburb of Douma said at least five people were taken into custody and authorities cut Internet and telephone lines.

Assad has blamed most of the unrest on a "foreign conspiracy" and armed thugs trying to sow sectarian strife. The state-run news agency SANA said 286 police officers have been wounded since the uprising began. It did not give further details.

But possible cracks could be emerging from within.

Two members stepped down from the provincial council in the southern region of Daraa, which has the highest death toll in the country. The resignations came a day after two lawmakers and a religious leader from Daraa also turned their backs on Assad in disgust over the killings.

Such internal rifts have added resonance since nearly all opposition figures have been either jailed or exiled during the 40-year dynasty of the Assad family.

More Syrians Are Missing, Hinting At A Wider Crackdown (NYT)
Monday, April 25, 2011

New York Times
By Anthony Shadid

BEIRUT, Lebanon — Dozens of residents have disappeared in Syria since Friday, many of them from the restive city of Homs and towns on the outskirts of the capital, Damascus, human rights activists said Sunday, amid signs that the Syrian government may widen its crackdown on a five-week uprising that has already killed hundreds.

The disappearances were yet another indication that the government's decision to lift emergency rule, in place since 1963, might prove more rhetoric than reform. Though the government has proclaimed the law's repeal on Thursday as a sweeping step, the past few days have proven some of the bloodiest and most repressive since the uprising began.

On Friday, at least 109 people were killed, as security forces fired on protesters in 14 towns and cities. At least 12 more were killed Saturday, when mourners sought to bury the dead from the day before. Another person was reported killed Sunday in Jabla, where security forces fired on residents after the visit of the governor. "We don't trust this regime anymore," one protester there said. "We're sick of it."

Human Rights Watch called on the United Nations to set up an international inquiry into the deaths and urged the United States and Europe to impose sanctions on officials responsible for the shootings and the detentions of hundreds of protesters.

"After Friday's carnage, it is no longer enough to condemn the violence," said Joe Stork, the deputy Middle East director at the organization, which is based in New York.

Residents reported Sunday that security forces had surrounded some towns on the capital's outskirts, where some of the highest death tolls were reported Friday. Anyone leaving or entering was searched, they said, in an apparent attempt to stop protesters from marching on the capital, a bulwark of the Assad family's 40 years in power.

An organizer in Saqba, one of the towns, said 100 people were missing. "No ruler has ever defeated his people," she said. "The people always prevail."

Wissam Tarif, executive director of Insan, a Syrian human rights group, said it had compiled the names of 217 people who had disappeared since early Friday. At least 70 of them were from a region near the capital, and 68 others were from Homs, Syria's third largest city and the site of especially vigorous protests in the past week. Taken together, he said, the group had

documented the names of missing people from 17 cities and villages.

"It just doesn't stop," he said. "Names keep pouring in."

The government has prevented most foreign journalists from working in Syria, making the reports impossible to verify. The government has appeared to signal a willingness to offer some reform while cracking down on those who oppose the government publicly. It has yet to deploy the full force of the military.

"This is not going to stop," Mr. Tarif said. "There is going to be much more bloodshed."

Syria Targets Activists In Pinpoint Raids (AP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Associated Press

By Bassem Mroue

BEIRUT — Syrian security forces detained dozens of opposition activists and fired from rooftops in a seaside town Sunday as authorities turned to pinpoint raids after days of bloodshed brought international condemnation and defections from President Bashar Assad's regime.

The strategy, described by a rights activist, appeared aimed at rattling the opposition's leadership and showing that the state's ability to conduct arrest sweeps has not changed despite abolishing nearly 50-year-old emergency laws last week.

The rising level of violence — more than 120 people dead since Friday — brought calls from the watchdog group Human Rights Watch for a U.N. inquiry. But Sunday's tactics also suggest a government effort to head off the round of protest marches.

The police raids, which began late Saturday, concentrated around the capital Damascus and the central city of Homs, a hotbed of demonstrations against Assad's authoritarian rule, said Ammar Qurabi, head of the National Organization for Human Rights in Syria.

"These people are not being arrested in a legal way. They are being kidnapped," Qurabi said, claiming the plainclothes security agents did not have formal arrest warrants.

Qurabi did not have full figures for those detained, but said at least 20 people were arrested in Homs. A resident in the Damascus suburb of Douma said at least five people were taken into custody and authorities cut Internet and telephone lines.

Later, security forces moved into the coastal town of Jableh, claiming they were searching for

weapons, said Qurabi. He cited witnesses saying that police and army units opened fire from rooftops even though there were no apparent threats and no protests in progress. At least one person was killed and three wounded, he said.

"I am terrified ... People in the street are getting shot," a resident of Jableh told The Associated Press by phone.

The accounts could not be independently confirmed because Syria has expelled journalists and restricted access to trouble spots. Witnesses spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisals.

Assad has blamed most of the unrest on a "foreign conspiracy" and armed thugs trying to sow sectarian strife. The state-run news agency SANA said 286 police officers have been wounded since the uprising began. It did not give further details.

But possible cracks could be emerging from within.

Two members stepped down from the provincial council in the southern region of Daraa, which has the highest death toll in the country. The resignations came a day after two lawmakers and a religious leader from Daraa also turned their backs on Assad in disgust over the killings.

Such internal rifts have added resonance since nearly all opposition figures have been either jailed or exiled during the 40-year dynasty of the Assad family.

"I pay my respect to the martyrs," said Bashir Mohammed al-Zoebi, one of two provincial council members who left their posts Sunday.

More than 300 people have been killed since the uprising against Assad's regime began five weeks ago, according to rights groups, which said that Friday was the deadliest day to date with 112 killed.

"After Friday's carnage, it is no longer enough to condemn the violence," said Joe Stork, deputy Middle East director for Human Rights Watch. "Faced with the Syrian authorities shoot-to-kill strategy, the international community needs to impose sanctions on those ordering the shooting of protesters."

Earlier this month, U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called Assad to say he was "greatly disturbed" by the reports of violence. Many Western leaders, including President Barack Obama, have condemned Syria's harsh tactics to quell dissident.

Britain's Foreign Office advised against all travel to Syria because of the violence. It added that "in

light of the deteriorating security situation, British nationals in Syria who have no pressing need to remain should leave by commercial means."

In Jordan, 150 Syrians living in the kingdom protested outside their embassy in Amman. "Out, out with the tyrant Bashar Assad," shouted the group, which also burned a portrait of Assad.

Syria Rounds Up Opponents After 120 Dead (AFP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

APP

DAMASCUS (AFP) - Security forces shot dead four people and made arrests across Syria on Sunday, as funerals were held for protesters and mourners killed in a bloody crackdown which activists said cost 120 lives.

Despite a relative lull, the four people were shot dead and several others wounded in the Mediterranean town of Jableh, near the port city of Latakia, a human rights activist said.

He said the latest violence broke out after a visit to the town by a new regional governor who met local dignitaries in a mosque.

Students, meanwhile, called for a strike and two MPs resigned after bloodshed on Saturday when Syrians swarmed the streets to bury scores of demonstrators killed in protests the previous day.

At least 120 people were killed in the two-day crackdown, the Committee of the Martyrs of the 15 March Revolution said.

It issued an updated list of names of 95 people it said were killed on Friday in massive protests which swept across Syria. And the death toll for Saturday has risen to 25 people killed by gunfire, it said.

Most were killed in the southern protest hub region of Daraa and in and around Damascus, during funerals of people killed on Friday.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) urged the United Nations to probe the "carnage" from the massive "Good Friday" demonstrations and called for sanctions against officials responsible for the killings.

About 10 people were arrested on Sunday in Damascus, Homs, Daraa and other towns, activists said.

A group of more than 100 intellectuals and journalists, in a joint statement, condemned the regime's crackdown and urged state media workers to resign.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said dozens of people were detained in northern Syria on Friday, just a day after President Bashar al-Assad lifted decades of emergency rule.

It gave the names of 18 men rounded up in the northern cities of Idlib, Raqqa and Aleppo, but said "dozens more were arrested in other Syrian towns."

Police checkpoints have gone up across Damascus, with some neighbourhoods locked down and only residents allowed in after identity checks, witnesses said.

On Thursday, Assad signed decrees ending a draconian state of emergency, imposed by the Baath Party when it seized power in 1963, to placate more than a month of pro-democracy protests.

He also abolished the state security court that has tried scores of regime opponents outside the normal judicial system and whose verdicts cannot be appealed.

Tens of thousands swarmed cities and towns across Syria on Friday to test implementation of the reforms, but security forces used live rounds and tear gas against them, activists said.

"After Friday's carnage, it is no longer enough to condemn the violence," Joe Stork, deputy Middle East director at Human Rights Watch, said in a statement.

"Faced with the Syrian authorities' 'shoot to kill' strategy, the international community needs to impose sanctions on those ordering the shooting of protesters," he said.

Thousands of people on Sunday attended the funerals in the southern town of Noa of five of those killed on Saturday and later demonstrated without any police intervention, an activist told AFP.

They carried banners calling for the abrogation of an article in the constitution designating the Baath party as leader of the state and society, the activist said.

Several weeks of protests have been demanding across-the-board political reforms as well as dissolution of the feared security services who have cracked down mercilessly against demonstrators.

The Syrian Revolution 2011 group, a driving force behind the protests, indicated it would keep up the pressure. "We are going out (on the streets) today, tomorrow and the day after," said a statement on its Facebook page.

Meanwhile public figures, including independent Daraa MPs Nasser al-Hariri and Khalil al-Rifai, have resigned in frustration at the crackdown.

Daraa's top Muslim cleric, Mufti Rizq Abdulrahman Abazeid, also quit, as did Daraa city council member Bassam al-Zamel, who told Al-Jazeera television "it is a duty on us to present our resignation."

"I call on the president to contain the security forces," Zamel said.

Students in Daraa and Damascus declared a general strike in all Syrian universities until "massacring the peaceful protesters comes to a stop and all prisoners of conscience and opinions are released," a statement said.

More than 352 people have been killed in Syria since protests began on March 15, according to figures compiled by AFP.

Syria blames "armed gangs" for the unrest aimed at fuelling sectarian strife among its multi-religious and multi-ethnic communities.

The crackdown unleashed a chorus of international condemnation.

On a positive note, authorities freed prominent militant Daniel Saud a day after arresting him without a warrant at his home in the northern city of Banias, said Ammar al-Qurabi of Syria's National Organisation of Human Rights.

Syria Detains Anti-Assad Activists After Deadliest Protests Against Regime (BLOOM)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Bloomberg News

By Donna Abu

Syrian security forces detained at least 200 people in widespread sweeps as some officials announced their resignations following the killing of dozens of anti-government protesters, activists said.

Mahmoud Merhi, who heads the Arab Organization for Human Rights, said in an interview from Damascus that 200 to 300 people have been detained since April 22. Many of those arrested were taken from their homes at night, according to Haitham al-Maleh, a member of the Syrian Human Rights Committee, who estimates "hundreds" were arrested.

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has failed to quell protests after pledging steps to meet activists' demands and end a 48-year state of emergency. Khalil al-Rifai and Nasser al-Hariri, lawmakers from the southern town of Daraa, the scene of the deadliest clashes, resigned yesterday. The city's top government-appointed religious

leader, Mufti Rizq Abdel Dayem Abazid, also said he quit yesterday.

Sheikh Ahmad al-Sayasneh, the imam of the Omari mosque in Daraa who was a member of a delegation that met with Assad after the first wave of violence last month, said today he has joined the protesters. In an interview with al-Jazeera, the imam said he is in hiding as security forces were looking for him because he had denounced them as "killers."

"We have reached a point of no return with them after they killed our sons, and there is no room for discussions anymore," he said.

Faisal al-Haymad, deputy president of the Daraa chamber of commerce, told al-Jazeera today he is resigning to protest the regime's repression and said he has now joined the opposition.

Security forces opened fire today to prevent movements on the streets in the coastal city of Jableh and in a town near Daraa, according to Razan Zaitounah, an activist. Al-Jazeera also reported the shooting in Jableh.

"The situation is being pushed to the brink," Haitham al-Maleh, said in a telephone interview from Damascus.

Merhi said 126 people were killed in the past two days, 113 of them during April 22 demonstrations and 13 during funerals yesterday, making them the deadliest clashes since protests began March 15. More than 2,000 people have been detained, with half of them released since mid-March, he said.

The United Nations should set up an international inquiry into the Syrian shootings, Human Rights Watch, a New York-based advocacy group, said in a statement today.

Canada, Britain

"It is no longer enough to condemn the violence," said Joe Stork, deputy Middle East director at Human Rights Watch. "Faced with the Syrian authorities' 'shoot to kill' strategy, the international community needs to impose sanctions on those ordering the shooting of protesters."

Canada and Britain have called on their citizens who are in Syria to leave while commercial options are still available.

U.K. Foreign Secretary William Hague said in a statement that the action has been taken because of the "increasing violence" in Syria and the killing of demonstrators.

"Further information has come to light about the extent of Friday's violence, despite the attempts of the Syrian authorities to hide it from the world," Hague said.

Canada's foreign ministry urged Syria to "exercise restraint and to respect the rights of the Syrian people to freedom of expression and assembly."

U.S. President Barack Obama condemned Syria for "outrageous use of violence," saying yesterday that Assad must "change course now and heed the calls of his own people."

U.S. 'Instigation'

"Assad is blaming outsiders while seeking Iranian assistance in repressing Syria's citizens through the same brutal tactics that have been used by his Iranian allies," Obama said.

A Syrian official who wasn't identified by name "expressed regret" over Obama's remarks, according to the official Syrian Arab News Agency, or SANA. The U.S. "shows a lack of responsibility and represents a part of the instigation that puts Syrian citizens at risk," the official was quoted as saying.

Syrian officials have blamed the unrest on armed criminal groups and foreign instigators. In a statement today, the Interior Ministry said the number of security forces injured since March 15 reached 286 as of April 23, according to SANA.

SANA reported yesterday that protesters were using clubs and swords against security forces and had bottles filled with blood to be used in filming "fabricated acts of violence."

Hassan Abdel-Azim, a spokesman for the opposition Democratic National Group, said if armed groups were firing at demonstrators, "why don't the security forces arrest them?"

"Are these so-called criminals parachuting from the sky?" he said in an interview today from Damascus.

Abdel-Azim said the violence "nullifies the positive effects that the president's political measures had."

Syrian Crisis Tests The Mettle Of Its Autocratic Ruler (NYT)

Monday, April 25, 2011; A1

New York Times

By Robert F. Worth

CAIRO — For years, President Bashar al-Assad of Syria has nourished a reputation as a youthful and forward-looking leader in a region full of aging autocrats, a man who might yet reform the

repressive police state he inherited from his father, given time and opportunity.

His country's worsening crisis — a bloody battle between the police and protesters that is being closely watched around the world — would seem to be a chance to stave off the violence with restraint or even bold reforms, a path his father never took. But as the death toll mounts, and the ominous disappearances of dissident figures increase, his time appears to be running out. International pressure is growing, and so is the outrage his violent crackdown has inspired.

Mr. Assad could still succeed in quelling the unrest, diplomats and analysts say. But to do so he would have to realize the hopes once placed in him when he inherited power from his father 11 years ago and confront his own family, which controls Syria's thuggish security apparatus and appears to be pushing hard for a continued crackdown. At least 120 people have been killed since Friday, the bloodiest day of the five-week-old uprising.

In the past day or two, mixed signals have emerged about which path he will take. On the one hand, Mr. Assad has hinted at a willingness to enact greater reforms than those announced last week, when he officially lifted Syria's draconian emergency powers law. But there have been dark warnings of harsher repression as well. In Syria's notoriously opaque political environment, it is impossible to tell which way the president is leaning.

"This is the moment of truth for Bashar al-Assad," said Jean-Pierre Filiu, a visiting professor at Columbia University who has written extensively on Syria. "He has potentially the ability to impose reforms on his own Baath Party, but has he the will to do so?"

The consequences of his decision could be momentous, perhaps more so than in any of the other revolts yet seen in the Middle East. Unlike Egypt and Tunisia, Syria is home to a checkerboard of defensive religious and ethnic minorities, and many fear that the end of the Assad family's 40-year dynasty could unleash brutal revenge killings and struggles for power. The chaos could easily spill over Syria's borders, to neighboring Lebanon and beyond.

The Obama administration has already accused Iran of helping to prop up Mr. Assad. If Syria fell, it would mark a striking setback for the theocratic regime in Tehran, which has depended on Syria for its influence in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and elsewhere. Yet Iran's nemeses — including Israel, the United States and Saudi Arabia — are also deeply unsettled by the prospect of regime change

in Syria, which could set off a messy Iraq-style civil conflict.

Even if Mr. Assad survives, the turmoil is likely to have profound effects on Middle Eastern politics, some analysts say. "Our entire Syria policy for the past two and a half years has been based on getting Syria and Israel back to the peace table," said Andrew Tabler, an analyst with the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. "Now that Bashar has accused Israel and the United States of fomenting this challenge to him, it will be even harder for him to do that."

In a sense, the crisis Mr. Assad now faces is the same one that has defined his years in power: Again and again, he has inspired hopes, both at home and abroad, only to disappoint them. Western leaders courted him, in hopes he would democratize his country, make peace with Israel and stop supporting the militant groups Hamas and Hezbollah. Syrian liberals enjoyed a brief "Damascus Spring" of greater openness after his accession, but it soon faded. His personal style helped foster those illusions. Unlike his stern father, Hafez al-Assad, who took power in a coup in 1970, Bashar al-Assad seemed quiet and almost meek. He had studied ophthalmology in London, and had an elegant British-born wife. He speaks fluent English and French, and reads widely.

Even until recent weeks, "there was a tendency to see him as separate from the regime, that he could step out of his role," said one Syria-based analyst, who spoke on condition of anonymity. But that patience seems to have ended. Calls for reform have turned into demands for an end to the Assad government, something unheard of until now.

Like other autocrats, Mr. Assad may be cushioned from the reality of the uprising; Syrian state media have portrayed it as the work of agents provocateurs from Israel, Saudi Arabia and even Lebanon. Some diplomats who know him personally say they believe Mr. Assad understands what is happening — and what he needs to do to stop it — but is too hesitant, or too timid, to carry it out.

"I think Bashar knows there has to be a political solution," said one former European diplomat who spent years in Damascus. "But he doesn't have the courage to do what he needs to do for the sake of the country, and perhaps for his own survival."

In part, that may be a matter of family dynamics. Mr. Assad is surrounded by relatives with reputations for ruthlessness, including his brother Maher al-Assad, who commands the army's Fourth Armored Division, and his brother-in-law Assef

Shawkat, an intelligence chief. The family is said to fear that easing up on protesters could embolden them, bringing much larger crowds into the streets.

"They're damned if they do, and damned if they don't," said Joshua Landis, a Syria expert at the University of Oklahoma. "Bashar knows what the regime is built on: fear and patronage. And the fear is gone now."

Mr. Landis and other analysts said they believed Mr. Assad could still master the situation by announcing major concessions like relinquishing the Baath Party's hold on power or announcing free elections. But so far, his gestures have been too little, too late. If he had lifted the emergency law at the start of the uprising in March, instead of waiting until hundreds of protesters had been killed, it might all have ended there, Mr. Landis said.

Mr. Assad's options are now limited by a grim sectarian logic. His family, which has led Syria since 1970, is Alawite, a religious minority that represents perhaps 12 percent of Syria's population of 23 million. They have maintained a tight grip on Syria's feared security services, generating deep resentment among the country's majority Sunni Muslims.

In recent weeks, fearing a split in the army, the Assad government has relied almost exclusively on Alawite-dominated units, including the army division led by Mr. Assad's younger brother Maher al-Assad, analysts say. But that tactic has reinforced resentment of the Alawites among the rest of the population, and raised greater fears of sectarian bloodletting.

"Bashar is totally cornered," said the former diplomat. "And I'm sure that he is surrounded by people who are telling him: 'We're all in the same boat.'"

The Freedom Movement Comes To Syria (WSJ)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Wall Street Journal

By Fouad Ajami

Full-text stories from the Wall Street Journal are available to Journal subscribers by clicking the link.

Egypt Prosecutor Orders Mubarak To Army Hospital (AP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Associated Press

By Diaa Hadid

CAIRO - Egypt's prosecutor general ordered Sunday that former president Hosni Mubarak be moved from his hospital in a Red Sea resort town to a military medical facility, according to his website.

Mubarak was originally supposed to be moved to Cairo's Tora prison hospital, but it was deemed not yet ready to receive him, said a spokesman for Prosecutor General Abdel-Maguid Mahmoud.

Instead the former president will stay in a military hospital until the prison facility is ready, said the spokesman Adel Said in a statement posted up on the prosecutor's Facebook page.

"The public prosecutor addressed the interior minister, informing him to take the necessary steps to move the former president ... to a military hospital, to implement a custody order," the statement said.

A report by a top forensic medical official said Mubarak could be moved without endangering his health, as long as he was given appropriate medical treatment, added the statement.

Mubarak was hospitalized with heart problems after he and his sons were ordered into custody on April 13 while being investigated for corruption allegations and their role in the shooting of protesters during the 18 days of demonstrations against his rule. Under the pressure of those demonstrations, Mubarak stepped down on Feb. 11.

Mubarak is scheduled to stay in custody for 15 days — until April 28 — but his detention will most likely be extended.

Thousands of Egyptians had demanded that Mubarak be placed in a prison compound, where his sons and many of his former ministers and officials are housed, instead of staying in hospital.

Mubarak's sons and the top officials of the former ruling party are being held in Cairo's Tora prison while they are investigated on charges ranging from corruption to squandering public funds to ordering the violent suppression of anti-government demonstrators.

Mubarak To Be Moved To Military Hospital (AFP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

AFP

CAIRO (AFP) - Egypt's state prosecutor on Sunday ordered ex-president Hosni Mubarak's transfer to a military hospital after a medical exam showed his health was stable enough for the move.

The move would be temporary until preparations are completed at a Cairo prison hospital for the former strongman, who is under detention in a Red Sea resort hospital on suspicion of involvement in the deaths of protesters.

The military hospital was not specified but security sources have said it was likely to be the International Medical Centre on the outskirts of Cairo.

Prosecutor Abdel Maguid Mahmud's office said a medical team he sent to the Sharm el-Sheikh hospital determined that Mubarak was "in stable condition with medical treatment."

Mahmud "tasked the interior minister to expedite preparations in the hospital" of Tora prison, where Mubarak's two sons and a growing number of ex-regime officials have been detained, it said in a statement.

The hospital would need intensive care facilities to deal with any sudden deterioration of the 82-year-old's heart condition, it said, adding the preparations could take one month.

When Mubarak was first remanded earlier this month, the prosecutor asked the interior minister to prepare for his transfer to the prison hospital but was told it was not equipped to handle an intensive care case.

Mubarak, who has denied any wrongdoing and pledged to die in Egypt, had become a thorn in the side of the ruling military council to which he handed power on February 11, despite his past as an air force commander.

His trial was a key demand of tens of thousands of protesters who staged mass demonstrations in Cairo's iconic Tahrir Square.

An official commission set up to investigate deaths during the 18 days of protests that forced Mubarak out of power said in a summary of its report released last week that 846 civilians and 26 policemen died in the revolt.

It found that most of the dead were shot in the head and chest, indicating the use of snipers.

Mubarak himself was complicit in the killings, according to the secretary general of the commission, who told reporters he must have been consulted before the use of live fire against protesters was approved.

Egypt Revolution Hero To Leave Google, Set Up NGO (AFP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

AFP

WASHINGTON (AFP) - Wael Ghonim, the Google executive who became the hero of the Egyptian revolution, on Sunday said he planned to take an extended break from the Internet giant to set up his own NGO in Egypt.

"Decided to take a long term sabbatical from @Google & start a technology focused NGO to help fight poverty & foster education in #Egypt," Ghonim wrote in a message on the micro-blogging site Twitter.

Ghonim, Google's head of marketing for the Middle East and North Africa, administered the Facebook page that helped spark the uprising that toppled president Hosni Mubarak's regime.

The 30-year-old gave an emotional television interview shortly after he was released from 12 days in police custody that is credited with re-energizing the movement just as it appeared to be losing steam.

In an interview with CBS's "60 Minutes" after the regime started to crumble, Ghonim said the protests that led to the Mubarak's ouster would never have happened without online social networks.

"If there was no social networks it would have never been sparked. Because the whole thing before the revolution was the most critical thing. Without Facebook, without Twitter, without Google, without YouTube, this would have never happened."

TIME recently placed the Egyptian-born Ghonim on its list of the 100 most influential people of 2011 -- on the magazine's website he appeared as the first name, although TIME insists there is no actual ranking.

"Wael Ghonim embodies the youth who constitute the majority of Egyptian society," read a profile in the magazine penned by former UN atomic energy chief and potential Egyptian presidential candidate Mohamed ElBaradei.

"But, as with many of his generation, (he) remained apolitical due to loss of hope that things could change in a society permeated for decades with a culture of fear.

"By emphasizing that the regime would listen only when citizens exercised their right of peaceful demonstration and civil disobedience, Wael helped initiate a call for a peaceful revolution."

Bahrain Sees Hezbollah Plot In Protest (WSJ)

Monday, April 25, 2011; A6

Wall Street Journal

By Jay Solomon

Full-text stories from the Wall Street Journal are available to Journal subscribers by clicking the link.

Bahrain RSVP: Unrest Foils Royal Wedding Plans (AP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Associated Press

MANAMA, Bahrain - Bahrain's crown prince will be a no-show at Britain's royal wedding, saying he doesn't want the Gulf nation's unrest to tarnish the celebration.

An official statement says Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa sent his regrets Sunday to London after questions over opening the guest list to a member of Bahrain's Sunni monarchy, which has waged a wide-ranging crackdown against Shiite protesters calling for more freedoms.

The crown prince says he didn't want his nation's troubles to overshadow Saturday's wedding between Prince William and Kate Middleton.

Bahrain's rulers have imposed martial law and are backed by a Saudi-led military force to try to quell the uprising.

Moroccan Cities See New Political Protests (AP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Associated Press

RABAT, Morocco - Several thousand protesters have staged protests in cities around Morocco to demand more political changes.

A participant said that a group of fewer than 5,000 protesters organized a march through a working-class neighborhood of the capital Rabat to call for constitutional reforms and new parliamentary elections.

The state news agency MAP says around 4,500 demonstrators also marched in Casablanca.

The protests were organized by the February 20 movement, which has led protests for the past two months, with support from Morocco's best-known Islamist movement, Adl wal Ihsan, which is barred from politics in the kingdom.

King Mohammed VI has pledged changes to the constitution for the first time in 15 years, amid a push for greater democracy across the Arab world.

Peaceful Pro-Democracy Protests In Moroccan Towns (AFP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

AFP

RABAT (AFP) - Several thousand demonstrators marched peacefully in Moroccan cities Sunday to demand more democracy and social justice despite King Mohammed VI's concessions, including the release of political prisoners.

Protest rallies began Sunday morning in Casablanca, Tangiers and Marrakesh, correspondents said, while another was held in Rabat in response to a call by the pro-reform February 20 Movement.

The movement is named after the date of Morocco's first countrywide protests that came amid the wave of popular uprisings that swept across the Arab world.

"We want more equality and less corruption," "We want a king who rules but does not govern," demonstrators chanted in Casablanca.

In Casablanca, nearly 10,000 people, according to an AFP correspondent, massed in the city centre and later marched to Mohammed VI square. Organisers however put the turnout at nearly 20,000.

"I am here because I want a more just Morocco in which opportunities are the same for all young people, particularly in the area of jobs," said a 23-year-old university graduate who identified himself only as Mohammed.

Key demands of the marchers in Casablanca -- February 20 Movement activists for the most part -- were curbs on the powers of the king, an independent judiciary and steps against corruption.

In Marrakesh, an AFP correspondent said more than 500 people took to the streets to press for political reforms while in Tangiers, more than 2,000 marched to demand the resignation of the mayor, Fouad El Omari, and lambast his administration.

The Rabat march drew 6,000 people according to organisers and was held in the working class Yacoub El Mansour district. However, police put their numbers at around 2,000.

In a March 9 speech, King Mohammed VI announced major political changes to increase judicial independence and the separation of powers.

The next day, he established a commission tasked with proposing changes to the constitution by June.

Ten days ago, the king pardoned or cut the sentences of 190 detainees, including Islamist and Sahrawi political prisoners.

Easter Attacks Near Churches Rattle Christians As Spike In Iraq Violence Continues (WP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Washington Post

By Aaron C. Davis

BAGHDAD - An improvised explosive device detonated near a church and a firefight broke out in front of another here Easter Sunday, further raising safety concerns for Iraq's besieged Christian community, even as it remained unclear if worshipers or police were the primary targets of the attacks.

Iraqi police said the bomb earlier in the day outside a Baghdad church was situated to explode when an Iraqi police pick-up truck pulled away from Sacred Heart church, which it did after all parishioners had been cleared from the area following Easter Mass.

In a second attack not far away, four Iraqi police officers were wounded in a firefight with gunmen outside Mary the Virgin Catholic Church as congregants huddled inside.

"Thank God, no one was hurt, every follower member made it out safely," said one church member who said Mass had begun when the gunfire erupted. He spoke on condition of anonymity out of fear for his personal safety.

At least two Iraqi policemen and two passersby suffered shrapnel wounds from the bomb outside Sacred Heart in Baghdad's relatively upscale Karrada neighborhood. But a cameraman for Reuters reported seeing three injured officers and four injured civilians at a Baghdad hospital. Four Iraqi police officers suffered gunshot wounds in the firefight.

Late Sunday, a police spokesman said an explosion near an Iraqi Army checkpoint in northern Baghdad wounded seven, though witnesses said there were casualties.

The violence came despite a stifling security presence in the Iraqi capital Sunday, following a string of recent attacks against Iraqi police, army officers and government workers.

There were also mixed reports about whether Iraqi security forces suffered additional casualties Sunday. Iraqi government sources said as many as 10 police officers were killed across the country, but the Ministry of Interior's Baghdad office reported no deaths.

Regardless, the blast sent another shockwave through Baghdad's Christian community. Last fall, 51 members of another Catholic congregation and

seven Iraqi security officers were killed when gunmen stormed Our Lady of Salvation Church during a Sunday Mass, and later detonated suicide vests as Iraqi police closed in during a rescue mission.

Around Christmas, a series of about 10 coordinated bombings in and around Baghdad targeted homes of Christians, killing at least three and wounding more than a dozen more.

On Saturday night, Iraq's state-run television broadcast an evening Mass, allowing many Christians in the Iraqi capital to worship from home rather than venture out in public.

Hundreds of thousands of Christians have fled Baghdad and other southern portions of the country, including the Biblical area known as Babylon that is dominated by Shia Muslims.

Many have left Iraq or settled in and around the semi-autonomous northern Kurdistan region, home to the purported tombs of Jonah and the prophet Daniel..

Estimates of the number of Christians remaining in Iraq -- which under Saddam Hussein numbered more than 1.5 million -- now range between 650,000 and 850,000.

In one hopeful sign for Christians in Baghdad, a church leader at Our Lady of Salvation, which is now surrounded by concrete blast walls and razor-wire, said so many people arrived for services there Sunday that the church had to hold three services.

"It was more than before," the official said, referring to the size of the congregation before last fall's massacre.

7 Wounded In Easter Bombing Outside Baghdad Church (AP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Associated Press

By Saad Abdul-Kadir

BAGHDAD - At least seven people were injured when a bomb outside the entrance of a Baghdad church exploded on Easter Sunday, an Iraqi police official said.

The blast took place just yards (meters) from the Sacred Heart Church in Baghdad's Karrada neighborhood. Shrapnel from the bomb struck the outside of the building, and at least four of the church's windows were shattered. Shards of broken glass lay on the street in front of the building.

Like many Baghdad houses of worship, the church is surrounded by blast walls to protect it from such attacks.

The officer said no parishioners were inside and services had not been held in the building.

Four policemen and three civilian bystanders were wounded, said the official, who declined to be identified because he was not authorized to brief the media.

Iraqi Christians have faced a recent wave of violence, including an attack last year against a Baghdad church that killed 68 people. Before Christmas services, al-Qaida-linked militants threatened a wave of violence against Christians, forcing many to tone down their ceremonies.

There was no such threat ahead of this Easter Sunday but authorities nonetheless stepped up security in the capital and two main northern provinces where Christians live, tightening hundreds of checkpoints that already dot the streets and snarling traffic for hours.

About 700 Christians attended Easter services at Baghdad's St. Joseph's Chaldean church where security forces closed off the roads leading to it, laid razor wires and searched all worshippers before entering the church.

"Our life in Iraq is full of fear," Father Hanna Saad Sirop told worshippers. "But we have to live in faith and trust ... we have to trust almighty God," Hanna added.

Christians also marked Easter peacefully in the northern cities of Kirkuk and Mosul.

Since the 2003 U.S.-led invasion, Iraqi Christians have suffered repeated violence and harassment from Sunni Muslim extremists who view them as infidels and agents of the West, forcing many of them to flee the country either to the safer northern Kurdish self-ruled region or abroad.

Iraq Tackles Its Next Oil Bottleneck (WSJ)

Monday, April 25, 2011; C1

Wall Street Journal

By Hassan Hafidh

Full-text stories from the Wall Street Journal are available to Journal subscribers by clicking the link.

Iran, Iraq Sign Agreements On Iranian Opposition (AP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran - Iran and Iraq on Sunday signed agreements to return each others' detainees,

which could lead to the forced repatriation of an Iranian opposition group based in Iraq, Iranian state TV reported.

The countries' respective justice ministers signed agreements that including provisions for the repatriation of each others criminals and convicts to their country of origin, which could include members of the People's Mujahedeen, an Iranian opposition group long based in Iraq.

Iraqi Justice Minister Hassan al-Shimari took the opportunity of the signing ceremony to repeat his country's stance that the group, once close to previous ruler Saddam Hussein, would be expelled from the country by the end of 2011.

The People's Mujahedeen Organization of Iran won refuge at Camp Ashraf years ago during the regime of Saddam, who saw them as a convenient ally against Iran. But since then, the exiles have become an irritant to Iraq's new Shiite-led government, which is trying to bolster ties with Iran.

Iran considers the group a terrorist threat and has long urged they be expelled.

The Iraqi army on April 8 raided the group's camp killing 34 of its members.

Spokesmen for the group say camp residents are willing to move to the United States or countries in the European Union if those governments will give them asylum.

They also said the group would be willing to return to Iran but only if it is certain they will not be attacked or oppressed by the government in Tehran.

According to Iranian state TV, there are 302 Iranians in Iraqi prisons and 184 Iraqi nationals in Iranian prisons, mostly due to illegal crossing of the borders.

US Appeals Court Revives Iraq Blackwater Case (AFP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

AFP

WASHINGTON (AFP) - A US appeals court has reopened the prosecution of four former Blackwater security guards accused of killing 14 Iraqi civilians in 2007, documents obtained by AFP Sunday showed.

The decision overturns a 2009 ruling by a district judge that cleared the Blackwater guards of the allegedly unprovoked attack saying prosecutors had broken State Department immunity rules.

"The district court made a number of systemic errors based on an erroneous legal analysis," the three-judge panel wrote in Friday's unanimous decision.

Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki welcomed the move.

"This confirms the ability of the US justice system to make right and achieve justice, and we are confident that the families of the victims will receive their rights and the criminals will be punished," Maliki's spokesman, Ali al-Mussawi, told AFP.

The 2009 ruling had outraged the Baghdad government, which maintains 17 people were killed. Twenty people were also wounded.

The Nisoor Square case was among the most sensational that sought to hold Blackwater employees accountable for what was seen as a culture of lawlessness and lack of accountability in the company's Iraqi operations.

Blackwater was then the largest private security firm employed by the Americans in Iraq, but it pulled out of the country in May 2009 after the government refused to renew its contracts.

It has always maintained that its guards opened fire in self-defense.

A fifth security guard has been cleared over the Nisoor Square incident while a sixth employee of Blackwater, which is now known as Xe, pleaded guilty in December to attempted homicide.

Palestinian Police Kill Israeli In West Bank (WP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Washington Post

By Joel Greenberg

JERUSALEM — Palestinian police opened fire on a group of Israelis who sneaked in to pray at a Jewish holy site in the West Bank city of Nablus on Sunday, killing one and wounding four others, officials on both sides said.

Palestinian officials said that the worshipers, who were in three cars, had ignored warning shots after arriving in the early-morning hours for an unauthorized visit. The officials said that the policemen involved were held for questioning. The incident was under joint investigation by Israeli and Palestinian officials.

The shooting occurred near Joseph's Tomb, a site inside Palestinian-controlled Nablus where Jewish settlers and strictly Orthodox Jews arrive periodically to pray under Israeli army escort, in coordination with the Palestinian police.

Sunday's visit by members of the Breslov Hassidic sect was unauthorized, the army said. Palestinian officials told Israeli liaison officers that a policeman opened fire at the worshipers after "identifying suspicious movements," according to an army statement.

A member of the Israeli group told the Israeli news Web site Ynet that they had removed a spike roadblock set up by the Palestinian police, sped toward the tomb as warning shots were fired in the air, and then came under fire when they returned to their vehicles.

Groups of Breslov Hassids and settlers regularly sneak in to Joseph's Tomb to pray in addition to those who arrive on the visits coordinated by the Israeli army, according to organizers of the authorized pilgrimages.

Jibril al-Bakri, the Palestinian governor of Nablus, told Israel Radio that the police officers involved in the shooting had been detained. He said that warning shots were fired in the air and that if the policemen had indeed fired at the Israelis, it was by mistake.

The dead man was identified as Ben-Yosef Livnat, 25, a nephew of Limor Livnat, an Israeli cabinet minister from Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's Likud party. As the victim's funeral headed for Jerusalem, attacks were reported on Palestinian property near Nablus, including the burning of a car, an attempt to torch a house, and stone-throwing at Palestinian vehicles.

Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak issued a statement calling the killing "a murder."

"A coordination problem cannot justify such an incident and shooting at innocent people," Barak said.

Palestinian Police Kill Israeli Visiting West Bank Holy Site (NYT)

Monday, April 25, 2011

New York Times

By Ethan Bronner

JERUSALEM — The Palestinian police shot and killed one Israeli and wounded four others early Sunday after the Israelis surreptitiously visited a Jewish holy site inside a Palestinian-controlled area, officials on both sides said.

The shooting occurred outside Joseph's Tomb in the West Bank city of Nablus after three carloads of religious Israeli Jews visited the site to pray, without coordinating their plans through the Israeli Army. Twice-monthly trips to the tomb have been organized with army escorts for the past four years without incident.

Palestinian security officials said they were questioning the Palestinian police officers who fired their weapons during the episode. The dead man was identified as Ben-Yosef Livnat, a 24-year-old father of four from Jerusalem and a nephew of Limor Livnat, the minister of culture and sport from the Likud Party in Israel. Mr. Livnat grew up on a settlement near Nablus, where his parents still live.

After the shooting, Palestinian youths set fires outside the tomb. Israeli and Palestinian security officials extinguished them. Later, at a funeral procession for Mr. Livnat that began at the nearby settlement, dozens of masked Israeli settlers attacked Palestinians along the way, smashing their cars and wounding a boy.

The procession ended at a grave site on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem where Ms. Livnat, the minister and aunt of the dead man, called his killing "a cold-blooded murder."

A statement from Defense Minister Ehud Barak, who is responsible for Israeli security in the West Bank, also used the term "murder," adding, "No failure of coordination can justify an event of this kind and firing on innocent people." Mr. Barak instructed the army to investigate and demanded that the Palestinians do the same and that they take all necessary measures against those who fired.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu condemned the killing as well.

The Palestinian governor of Nablus, Jibril al-Bakri, told Israel Radio that the shooting was a result of lack of coordination between the worshipers and the Israeli Army. He said that Palestinian police officers who were on a regular patrol shot a warning into the air before firing at the cars. He stressed that the shooting was a mistake.

An Israeli military spokesman said at day's end that Israeli and Palestinian security officials had met and exchanged what they knew and were continuing their inquiries.

The Palestinians, he said, accused the Israeli worshipers of having thrown rocks at the police before the shooting began.

David Ha'Ivri, a Jewish settler spokesman who is involved in coordinating visits to Joseph's Tomb with the Israeli Army, said some worshipers refused to visit in this way and sneaked in on their own.

"We do not endorse that," Mr. Ha'Ivri said. "We call on people to be responsible." He added that the organized visits to the tomb were nonetheless

still too infrequent to accommodate all who wished to go. Most of those who sneak in are members of the Breslov Hasidic sect who live in Jerusalem, he and others said.

The military spokesman said that on Jewish holidays — it is Passover now — it was not uncommon for some devout Jews to sneak into holy sites under Palestinian control. If caught by the Palestinians, they are nearly always handed over to the Israelis without violence, he said.

Many Jews believe that Joseph's Tomb is the final burial place of the son of Jacob, the biblical patriarch.

A spokesman for the Israeli rescue service, Magen David Adom, said that the cars had been fired upon after visiting the tomb. He said that apart from Mr. Livnat, who died of a gunshot wound to the head, two others in a second car were evacuated by helicopter. Others were lightly wounded and treated on the spot.

Israeli Killed In West Bank As Palestinian Forces Fire (WSJ)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Wall Street Journal

By Joshua Mitnick

Full-text stories from the Wall Street Journal are available to Journal subscribers by clicking the link.

Israeli Killed, 4 Wounded In West Bank (AP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Associated Press

By Matti Friedman

JERUSALEM — A Palestinian policeman opened fire Sunday at a group of Israelis who had come to pray at a Jewish holy site in the West Bank without authorization, killing one and wounding four, the Israeli military said.

The shooting threatened to inflame tensions in the West Bank, where Jewish settlers and Palestinians live in uneasy proximity and where settlers have responded to attacks in the past with violent reprisals.

Israeli police identified the dead man as Ben-Yosef Livnat, a Jerusalem resident in his mid-20s. Ben-Yosef was a nephew of Limor Livnat, a prominent hardline Cabinet minister from the ruling Likud Party.

Limor Livnat, who attended the funeral, told reporters that her nephew was killed by a "terrorist disguised as a Palestinian policeman."

She said her nephew was unarmed and "murdered in cold blood because he was Jewish."

"I hope he is the last victim," Livnat said.

Ben-Yosef Livnat and several companions entered the Palestinian city of Nablus early Sunday to visit a site known as Joseph's Tomb.

Jewish worshippers regularly enter the city with a special military escort to pray at the small building traditionally identified as the gravesite of the biblical Joseph, located inside a Palestinian-controlled area. Those visits are coordinated with Palestinian security forces. Israeli and Palestinian officials said Sunday's visit was not cleared with either side.

Palestinian officials notified the Israeli military that the Israelis "were shot by a Palestinian policeman who, after identifying suspicious movements, fired in their direction," the Israeli military said.

Israeli and Palestinian security forces work closely together to prevent violence. A meeting between the sides was scheduled Sunday to discuss the shooting, the military said.

Jibril al-Bakri, the Palestinian governor of Nablus, said the Palestinian Authority was investigating. "The main problem is that they (the Israelis) entered the city without coordination," al-Bakri said.

Israel's defense minister, Ehud Barak, termed the shooting "murder."

"No coordination error can justify such an incident and shooting at innocent people," he said in a statement.

Shortly after the incident, a crowd of Palestinians gathered at the tomb and vandalized the empty building, setting fires inside and throwing stones.

The Yesha Council, an umbrella group representing Jewish settlers, said the shooting proved the Palestinian government could not be trusted.

"The murder committed this morning by Palestinian policemen cannot be ignored," the group said.

Hours later, Jewish settlers attacked Palestinian cars south of Nablus, setting fire to one after its passengers fled and stoning passing vehicles before Israeli soldiers dispersed them.

The Palestinian Authority governs parts of the West Bank, though Israel retains overall security responsibility. Nablus moved from Israeli to Palestinian control in the mid-1990s as part of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

In 2000, after deadly fighting around the tomb, Israel's military pulled out and turned the tomb

over to the Palestinians. A mob subsequently ransacked and burned the building.

The tomb was later restored. In recent years, thanks to improving security conditions, Jewish worshippers have been traveling to the tomb in organized convoys.

The West Bank has been largely quiet for several years, but tensions remain. The last attack against Israelis in the West Bank occurred in the same area on March 11, when attackers infiltrated a Jewish settlement near Nablus and killed five members of a family, including parents and children ages 11, 4 and three months.

The Israeli military has arrested two Palestinians for that killing.

Iran's Ahmadinejad In New Showdown With Conservatives (AFP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

AFP

By Siavosh Ghazi

TEHRAN (AFP) - Iran is bracing for a fresh showdown between supporters of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and some conservatives as simmering tensions build in the run-up to the March 2012 parliamentary election.

The aborted resignation of Intelligence Minister Heydar Moslehi set off a conservative storm against the president's entourage, with the focus on his chief of staff and key adviser Esfandiar Rahim Mashaei.

On April 17, Iranian media announced Moslehi, close to all-powerful supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, had been dismissed after he tried to sack one of his deputies, who reportedly has close ties to Mashaei.

But minutes later, Ayatollah Khamenei, who holds the ultimate authority in the country, personally intervened to overturn the dismissal.

Under the constitution, the president is in charge of appointing ministers -- who then need to be approved by the parliament -- as well as dismissing them.

But an unwritten law requires top ministers, including the intelligence, defence, interior and foreign affairs, to have the tacit approval of the supreme leader.

Khamenei's intervention also provided a supreme opportunity for the conservatives to mount fresh attacks against Ahmadinejad, with their media accusing Mashaei of orchestrating the "current deviation".

Mashaei, a close relative of Ahmadinejad, and who is rumoured to be the president's choice to succeed him in 2013, has for years been the bane of the religious traditionalists in the Iranian regime.

In July 2009, Khamenei ordered the hardline Ahmadinejad to reverse the appointment of Mashaei as his first vice-president following a bitter outcry from the conservative camp.

Mashaei was then strongly condemned for holding nationalistic views pertaining to the pre-Islamic Iran, and for remarks attributed to him despite his denial that Iran was "friend of the Israeli people" -- a deep-seated taboo considering that Tehran does not recognise Israel.

And these days, he is also criticised for his efforts to push for an "Iranian school of Islam" and his liberalism on cultural and social issues.

"The diversionary trend is hiding behind a popular, accepted and justifiable figure," Brigadier General Mohammad Ali Jafari, commander of the powerful Revolutionary Guards, said on Sunday in an allusion to Mashaei.

"This movement will definitely act against the (Islamic) revolution in the future," Jafari warned.

Mashaei, who has worked closely with Ahmadinejad for over 25 years, has not even been spared from the wrath of the president's mentor, ultra-conservative cleric Ayatollah Mesbah Yazdi who has accused him of seeking to create a "Masonic organisation" and "to deal a blow to Islam on a daily basis."

On Saturday, a top presidential adviser, Ali Akbar Javanfekr who also heads the official IRNA news agency, responded to the mounting criticism, saying the attacks "could intentionally or unintentionally put the plan into action to overthrow" the Ahmadinejad presidency.

The crisis forced Khamenei on Saturday to calm the brewing storm, issuing a warning to officials against rising gaps among the ranking echelons which he said were benefiting "the enemy".

He explained that as the supreme leader he only intervenes in the country's politics if the Islamic republic's interests are being "neglected," but pledged his ostensible support for Ahmadinejad and his government who in his words "are working day and night to serve the country."

But what the new wrangling portends to be is the flexing of power against the backdrop of a looming battle for the parliamentary election in 2012, as well as the one that would appoint the successor of Ahmadinejad the next year.

With the absence of the reformists in the next vote, who have been marginalised after disputing the re-election of Ahmadinejad in 2009, analysts believe the battle for power has already started among the conservatives.

"The president and his comrades, including Mr Mashaei, have a laid-out plan to contest the future election," said Hojatoleslam Abbas Amiri-Far, head of the cultural council of the presidency.

"And they will definitely beat the conservatives in the competition," he said, while predicting "more divisions" among the ranks in the coming months.

EUROPE & EURASIA

Embassy Row (WT)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Washington Times

By James Morrison

TURKISH ANGER AT OBAMA

The Turkish ambassador accused President Obama of pandering to the American-Armenian lobby in weekend remarks, while Armenians denounced him for failing to use the word "genocide" to describe a widely disputed World War I massacre.

"President Obama's statement is a wrongful, distorted and unilateral political description of history," Ambassador Namik Tan said of Mr. Obama's annual remarks Saturday on the eve of the anniversary of what many call the Armenian genocide.

"Such unfair statements will further complicate efforts to find a fair recollection about the common history of Turks and Armenians," he added. "The USA should not prevent it with unilateral and politically motivated statements."

Those are harsh words for any foreign ambassador to direct toward an American president, but they reflect growing tension in U.S.-Turkish relations.

Mr. Obama's statement was similar to the ones he issued two years in a row, when Turkish officials reacted with mild criticism.

Over the past year, however, ties between Washington and Ankara have been strained over Turkey's diplomatic tilt toward Muslim nations. Relations between the two NATO allies also have been tense over Israel, as Turkey increasingly takes sides with Palestinians.

Mr. Tan unleashed his tirade against Mr. Obama, even though the president avoided using the word "genocide" to describe the killings of up to 1.5

million Armenians under the Ottoman Turkish Empire in 1915.

Turkey claims the killings resulted from clashes between Turks and Armenians during the war but not from a deliberate policy to wipe out the Armenian people. Turkish officials also note the massacre occurred under the old Ottoman Turks and not the modern republic established in 1923.

Armenian-Americans were angered because Mr. Obama again refused to describe the killings as genocide.

"He has, in addition to betraying his own words and compromising America's moral standing, gravely disappointed Armenians here in the United States, in Armenia and around the world who had looked to him as an example of courage, conviction and conscience," said the Armenian National Committee of America.

As a presidential candidate, Mr. Obama promised to describe the massacre as a genocide if he was elected. That promise drew heavy support from Armenian-Americans.

In his Saturday remarks, Mr. Obama referred to "horrific events" and "contested history," a phrase the Armenian-American committee called "shameful."

Armenians Mourn Victims Of Mass Killings By Turks (AP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Associated Press

By Avet Demourian

YEREVAN, Armenia - Hundreds of thousands of Armenians laid flowers Sunday at a monument to the victims of mass killings by Ottoman Turks, creating mounds of blossoms that rose higher throughout the day.

This year's 96th anniversary of the start of the slaughter has added poignancy because it coincides with Easter and the Christian celebration of rebirth.

Armenians say that 1.5 million Armenians were killed by Ottoman Turks around the time of World War I, which Armenians and several nations around the world recognize as the first genocide of the 20th century.

Turkey denies that the massacres were genocide, saying the death toll is inflated and Armenians were killed in civil unrest as the Ottoman Empire collapsed.

President Serge Sarkisian said in a national address that Armenia now strives for peace with Turkey. But while praising Turkish intellectuals and

others who have spoken out for reconciliation, he had stern words for the Turkish government.

"Today in Turkey, more than ever, reasonable voices are being heard," Sarkisian said. "Nevertheless, the official policy of Turkey carries on with the course of denial. ... For us one thing is incontestable: The policy of denial is a direct continuation of the Armenian genocide."

Several thousand young Armenians burned a Turkish flag before marching to the monument on the eve of the anniversary.

On Sunday, hundreds of thousands of Armenians from across the country, joined by members of the extensive Armenian diaspora, marched to the monument on a hill overlooking Yerevan, the capital. Some carried banners reading: "Genocide never gets old" and "Nobody and nothing will be forgotten."

Simon Avakian came with his children from the U.S. state of Massachusetts. "Living in America they must not forget about this and must do everything for international recognition of genocide," he said.

Among those laying flowers at the monument was U.S. Ambassador Marie Yovanovitch, who said that Americans and their government stood with Armenians across the world on this day.

By late afternoon, flowers around the memorial's eternal flame were piled seven feet (two meters) high.

On Saturday, President Barack Obama described the killings as "one of the worst atrocities of the 20th century," but once again stopped short of branding them genocide.

As a candidate for president, Obama vowed to recognize the genocide once in office, but since 2009 he has declined to use the word in the face of furious resistance from Turkey, a key NATO ally.

The slayings began with the rounding up of about 800 Armenian intellectuals on April 24, 1915. The Ottoman authorities then evicted Armenians from their homes in actions that spiraled into the mass slayings of the Armenian population.

Turks Increasingly Commemorate Armenian Massacre (AP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Associated Press

By Christopher Torchia

ISTANBUL — Tourists flocking to see carpets and calligraphy at one of Istanbul's most renowned museums were met Sunday by a rare public display of opinion on perhaps the darkest episode

of Turkey's history, the massacres of Armenians during World War I.

Several dozen demonstrators held red roses and photographs of the dead outside the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Art, an Ottoman-era building where historians say Armenian intellectuals were briefly detained at the outset of the 1915 slaughter.

Hours later, bigger crowds held similar events in Istanbul's Taksim square, a bustling transit hub, as well as in the capital, Ankara, and Izmir, a coastal city. It was the second consecutive year that Turkish demonstrators marked the anniversary of what many international experts say is the first genocide of the 20th century.

While the Turkish government fiercely refutes that assessment, the rate of legal action against people who dispute the official version has dropped sharply amid a gradual loosening of curbs on debate about the sensitive topic.

The small, officially permitted demonstrations are a remarkable sight in a country where the Armenian massacres remain one of the most sensitive topics, a threat to a proud, nationalist narrative of Turkish history that views outside powers and internal minorities as challenges to unity.

One easing factor was the 2008 amendment of a law that made it a crime to insult the Turkish identity and was used to prosecute Nobel laureate Orhan Pamuk for his comments about the killings of Armenians. Europe has encouraged Turkey, an EU candidate, to implement reforms, though some progress has been sidetracked by conflict between Turkey's Islam-based government and its secular opponents.

"We have to come face to face with our history," said Dogan Ozkan, a member of the Human Rights Association, a group whose work on prison conditions, Kurdish rights and other political issues led to conflict with the Turkish state over the years.

Plainclothes police stood with their backs to the demonstrators at the museum, providing security. Hardline nationalists are considered a threat to safety. In 2007, ethnic Armenian journalist Hrant Dink, who received death threats because of his comments about the 1915 massacres, was shot dead outside his office in Istanbul.

Across the border, in the Armenian capital of Yerevan, hundreds of thousands of Armenians laid flowers at a monument to the victims a century ago, and President Serge Sarkisian said Armenia strives for peace with Turkey. He praised Turkish

intellectuals and others who have spoken out for reconciliation, but had stern words for the Turkish government.

"Today in Turkey, more than ever, reasonable voices are being heard," Sarkisian said. "Nevertheless, the official policy of Turkey carries on with the course of denial... For us one thing is uncontested: The policy of denial is a direct continuation of the Armenian genocide."

Many historians believe 1.5 million Armenians died in a campaign of deportation and murder. However, Turkish leaders contend the figures are inflated, saying there were many deaths on both sides as the Ottoman Empire collapsed during World War I. Turkey has proposed a joint study involving scholars from both sides, and has lamented what it says is Armenia's refusal to open some archives about the period to research.

Hundreds of Armenian luminaries, including politicians, journalists, teachers, merchants and artists, were rounded up in Istanbul on April 24, 1915 in the first sweep against an ethnic group suspected of plotting against their Ottoman rulers, according to historians.

They were held at a police station, transferred to the stone building that has since become the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Art, and then transferred by boat across the Bosphorus Strait to the imposing Haydarpasa train station, built by Germans. From there, most were ferried to their deaths in the Anatolian interior.

The stone building, which has been restored, was once the palace of Ibrahim Pasha, the top adviser, or Grand Vizier, to Suleiman the Magnificent, a sultan who ruled at the height of Ottoman power in the 16th century. It sits near the iconic Blue Mosque, built in the early 17th century, and the former Byzantine church of Hagia Sophia.

Dr. Taner Akcam, a Turkish historian who chairs the Armenian Genocide Studies department at Clark University in the U.S. state of Massachusetts, said the roundup location was recorded in the memoirs of survivors.

"Some of them are very detailed and tell the story of all that happened on that day," he said. "They were brought together in that location because it was a prison at the time. They were sent to other places from there."

The debate about 1915 contaminates efforts to normalize ties between Turkey and Armenia, whose border remains closed and whose efforts to reconcile through a U.S.-backed agreement in 2009 have foundered. It has also been a source of tension between Turkey and the United States,

where congressional efforts to declare a genocide have conflicted with concerns about a rupture with a key NATO ally.

On Saturday, President Obama marked the anniversary of the massacre by calling it a "horrific" slaughter and "one of the worst atrocities of the 20th century," but he stopped short of branding it genocide even though he had promised to do so as a presidential candidate.

Turkey's foreign ministry said the statement distorted the facts and was based on "domestic political considerations," an allusion to the powerful Armenian-American lobby in the United States. The Armenian National Committee of America, in turn, said the president succumbed to pressure from Turkey and resorted to "euphemisms and evasive terminology."

About 60,000 ethnic Armenians, mostly Orthodox Christians, reside today in Turkey, which is predominantly Muslim. They keep a low profile in any public discussions about 1915.

At the museum commemoration, protesters held large photographs of some of who perished, including Daniel Varoujan, a poet and school headmaster; Atom Yarjanian, a poet who studied philosophy at the Sorbonne in Paris; and Krikor Zohrab, a lawyer, novelist and parliamentarian.

One demonstrator, Ayse Gunaysu, made a documentary about Zabel Yessayan, the only female intellectual targeted in the April 24, 1915 sweep of leading Armenians. Yessayan hid in a hospital for three months, escaped to Bulgaria, sought to document Ottoman atrocities and died in the early 1940s during Stalinist purges in Soviet-occupied Armenia.

"This is the start of a long and difficult process of recognition," Gunaysu said at the commemoration. "Whether the recognition will take place or not, we'll never know."

English-Language Press Flexing Its Muscles In Eastern Europe (NYT)

Monday, April 25, 2011

New York Times

By Andrew E. Kramer

KIEV, Ukraine — Brian Bonner, the editor of The Kyiv Post, a small English-language newspaper here in the Ukrainian capital, received the first phone call even before his journalists had returned from their interview with the minister of agriculture. Other calls followed, growing increasingly shrill.

And soon enough, Mr. Bonner, a former reporter at The St. Paul Pioneer Press who moved here a few

years ago for the adventure of working at an English-language newspaper abroad, found himself on a bizarre trip through the journalistic norms of former Soviet states.

Minutes later, an aide to the newspaper's publisher began calling the editor, expressing concern about the tone of the questions to the minister, Mykola Prysyazhnyuk.

Eventually, the publisher called demanding that the newspaper drop the project and not write about the interview, Mr. Bonner said.

The ministry of agriculture later said it had not contacted the publisher asking that the article be withheld.

Media rights groups say that all too often at newspapers in this region, a phone call is all it takes to kill an article, even if only to save face for a public official who misspoke.

But when that approach was applied to an English-language newspaper with Western ideals, the phone calls did not work as intended. Mr. Bonner refused to kill the article and was fired, and the newsroom went on strike to support him.

The episode highlighted the spunky role English-language newspapers play in many Eastern European capitals, particularly in countries with repressive policies toward publications in the local language.

Distributed free in racks at bars and hotels, the papers blend nightlife reporting for tourists with hard-hitting news aimed at a highbrow audience of businesspeople and diplomats.

In Ukraine and Russia, these newspapers come under less scrutiny than their local counterparts, which made the move to muffle reporting at The Kyiv Post unusual. English-language newspapers like The Moscow Times, The Prague Post, The Budapest Times, The Slovak Spectator, The Baltic Times and The Krakow Post have been springboards for a generation of American journalists interested in working in the former East Bloc — though not in the servile role of many local publications.

"Kyiv Post had a great tradition of editorial independence," Mr. Bonner said in an interview. "I don't want the job if it's not independent journalism. Who would want it?"

In the interview, reporters at The Kyiv Post, whose name is an alternative spelling for the Ukrainian capital, had asked Mr. Prysyazhnyuk about a hot topic in Ukrainian business circles — the appearance of favoritism in awarding grain export quotas to a trading company, Khlib Investbud,

suspected of having insider ties with government officials. At one point, he said he did not know who owned the company, and "should not know this." Later in the interview, he said he did know who the owners were.

After disregarding the calls from a representative of the publisher — Mohammad Zahoor, a British citizen with other business interests in Ukraine — Mr. Bonner was fired on the day of publication, April 15.

Most of the staff of 23 Ukrainians and seven Western journalists and editors then struck in protest, taking laptops to a city park and posting updates about the dispute on a Facebook page.

The recourse to social networking sites "shows how hard it is to practice censorship these days," Mr. Bonner said.

While on strike, reporters and editors wrote that they were told by representatives of Mr. Zahoor's publishing company, the Istil Group, that "independent journalism potentially threatens the company's other investments in real estate, media and other areas."

Repression of free speech has taken many forms in the former Soviet space, some far more violent than the pressure on publishers.

In Russia, four reporters for the opposition newspaper Novaya Gazeta have been killed in the last decade, in what appeared to be a poisoning, an assault with a hammer and two shootings. In Kazakhstan, an opposition journalist was once held down while assailants carved an X — the mark of the censor — on his chest with a knife. In Ukraine, prosecutors are pressing charges against a former president, Leonid Kuchma, related to the killing of the opposition journalist Georgy Gongadze in 2000. Mr. Gongadze was beheaded.

But in Ukraine, as elsewhere in the former Soviet Union, a major obstacle to routine public service journalism today is the ownership of newspapers and television stations either by the state or by publishers whose other business is beholden to government favors, Natalia Ligacheva, the director of Telekritika, a media monitoring group in Kiev, said in an interview.

"Nobody goes to the printer at midnight and seizes the print run these days," Mr. Bonner said. "It's all understandings with the publishers."

In a compromise reached after publicity created on blogs by the journalists elicited a statement of support by an American Congressional delegation that happened to be visiting Kiev recently, Mr. Zahoor rehired Mr. Bonner, though as one member

of a four-member board, rather than as editor in chief.

In a meeting with staff members, Mr. Zahoor acknowledged that they disagreed with his reasons for firing Mr. Bonner, but praised their commitment to editorial independence.

Mr. Bonner said the standoff was ultimately good for the Kyiv Post's reputation. "Nobody wants to edit a paper that isn't read, or doesn't stir up controversy from time to time," he said.

Europeans Shift Long-Held View That Social Benefits Are Untouchable (WP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Washington Post

By Edward Cody

PARIS — From blanket health insurance to long vacations and early retirement, the cozy social benefits that have been a way of life in Western Europe since World War II increasingly appear to be luxuries the continent can no longer afford.

Particularly since the global economic crisis erupted in 2008, benefits have begun to stagnate or shrink in the face of exploding government deficits. In effect, the continent has reversed a half-century history of continual improvements that made Western Europe the envy of many and attracted millions of immigrants from less fortunate societies.

In the new reality, workers have been forced to accept salary freezes, decreased hours, postponed retirements and health-care reductions. Employees at Fiat's historic Mirafiori plant in Turin, rolling back a tradition of union privileges, even pledged to cut back on the number of workers who call in sick when the local soccer team has a match.

Unlike in the United States, where conservatives are so resolved to cut spending that they threatened a government shutdown, Western Europe's generous welfare programs had generally been embraced by the right as well as the left. Against that background, the new wave of cutbacks seems to signal a dramatic shift in attitude toward benefits that many Europeans had come to see as a birthright and that politicians of any stripe could challenge only at the risk of their careers.

Many Europeans, particularly in left-wing political parties and labor unions, have interpreted the new winds as a triumph for ruthless free-market extremists who want to protect private wealth from higher taxes and as an aberration that can be undone by electing governments that are more worker-friendly. But many others, resigned to the

new reality of globalization, have come to view the shift as the end of a golden era, perhaps never to be revived.

The social welfare system no longer plays its role, said Claude Bernard, a union organizer at Renault's struggling car factory in Sandouville, a suburb of Le Havre in western France. The very system of redistributing wealth through taxes and welfare programs has been called into question.

In a measure of the shift, Manuel Valls, a presidential hopeful in France's Socialist Party, challenged party doctrine recently by declaring that it should not make an issue of preserving the 35-hour workweek if French factories have to compete with Chinese factories where the workweek starts at 60 hours and goes up from there. In Denmark, Prime Minister Lars Loekke Rasmussen rattled many in that icon of Scandinavian cradle-to-grave welfare by suggesting Danes should work longer before retiring, to peel back the deficit by \$2.8 billion.

Britain's Conservative-led government decided in the fall to attack deficits by cutting more than \$130 billion over the next five years, hitting welfare benefits hard and setting off protests by raising university fees.

But deficit pressures have forced leftist governments to seek savings as well. Some of the most painful cuts — pensions reduced, wages stalled and retirements pushed back — have been imposed by two Socialist prime ministers, George Papandreu in Greece and Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero in Spain.

"The world has changed," said Michel Godet, a member of the French government's Council of Economic Analysis who teaches at the National Conservatory of Arts and Industries.

Despite the crisis cutbacks, Western Europeans have retained a vast and often lavish social safety net. Although fees have risen in recent years, for example, most European universities remain faithful to the principle that higher education should be free — or at least cheap by U.S. standards. And as President Obama struggled last year to extend health insurance to more Americans, Europeans blessed with universal coverage shook their heads in wonder and even disdain.

"We are aware that France is one of the richest countries on the planet," said Fabrice Le Serre, a colleague of Bernard's in the General Labor Confederation at Sandouville. From the workers' point of view, he explained, the problem is that

welfare programs that have been expanding for 60 years have started to recede.

"We should continue trying to improve things, not move backward," he protested.

New kinds of trade-offs

Florian Andre, a 50-year-old metal specialist at the Sandouville plant, has always viewed French social protections as a natural extension of the country's human values. Slight and graying now with middle age, Andre was raised as a ward of the state. With help from generous government programs, he went on to a 30-year career as a skilled worker, blessed with a wife and three daughters and enough in the bank to buy a home in Le Havre once owned by a sea captain.

"With our system, we just don't allow a widow or a child to end up in the streets," he said. "Our social system should take responsibility for all stages of life, from the youngest age to the time of death. Of course, it's a trade-off. Everything has a cost."

But recently, the government has begun to trade off in a new direction, whittling away at services to save on costs. President Nicolas Sarkozy, a market-oriented conservative, has started to "unknit" the long-standing web of protections, Andre explained, using a term in vogue at his union, the General Labor Confederation.

Most markedly, he said, the government has shifted an increasing percentage of medical costs out of the national health insurance program and into the private complementary insurance that has become part of a new reality — at \$68 a month per person in Andre's case.

Deductions from his monthly check still amount to 23 percent of the total, leaving him with about \$2,400 in take-home pay. But the curtailment of reimbursements has added a list of new health-care costs that have to come out of the family budget.

When Andre's mother-in-law had an operation recently, for instance, the doctor charged \$500 more than the national health insurance would reimburse. Andre's private insurance shouldered only \$40 of the difference, leaving the family to come up with \$460.

Similarly, when his wife was operated on for a herniated disc, the doctor charged \$200 more than the fee allowed by France's national health insurance. Of that, his complementary insurance ponied up \$40, leaving Andre to pay the remaining \$160.

"Their main concern has become to save money," he complained. "And they have erected new barriers to getting treatment."

Sarkozy's program of not replacing one of every two retiring civil servants has meant that the health insurance administration is overtaxed, leading to long delays in handling reimbursement requests, he added. Moreover, cost-cutting programs have led to the closure of neighborhood offices and the creation of large, impersonal regional centers.

The approach is a far cry from the tradition Andre thought was a national treasure never to be relinquished. When he was young, he recalled, not only were medical costs paid without question, but medicine prescribed by the doctor was also eligible for total reimbursement.

"Now," he smiled, "you have to be almost dead to get a 100 percent reimbursement."

Privileges have become a 'ball and chain'

France, emblematic of Europe's social advances, has considered a generous protection system part of the landscape ever since Charles de Gaulle embraced a program put forward by Communist resistance groups immediately after World War II. With subsequent additions under the Socialist Party's two turns in power since then, including the 35-hour workweek and more vacation time, the welfare state has since been taken to a level that made this country the envy of many.

When the global crisis hit, the French social protection net — which helps push government expenditures to 54 percent of gross domestic product — cushioned people from the worst effects. But now, as Europe struggles to return to growth, conservatives in and outside the government have said the protections are threatening the health of public finances and holding back the economy.

Godet, the economist, calculated that with a legally mandated five weeks of vacation, national holidays and compensatory time off for working more than 35 hours, French workers and functionaries have accumulated 55 days a year in paid time off. Combined cleverly with "bridges" over workdays that fall between off days, he found, that in effect gives them a week off every month.

As a result, he said, French workers on average show up at the office or factory 620 hours a year, compared with about 700 in Germany and 870 in the United States. Also as a result, an hour of work costs \$43 on average in France, compared with \$36 in neighboring countries that also use the

European currency, the euro, giving those other countries, particularly Germany, the edge in globalized competition.

"The problem we have is that we can't get people to understand that these privileges are in fact a ball and chain," Godet said.

Sarkozy's government, in seeking to persuade the population that change must come, has emphasized the ballooning costs of health care and retirement pensions as the main culprits in a 2010 deficit amounting to more than \$200 billion, or 7.7 percent of the gross domestic product. Health insurance alone accounted for \$30 billion of the shortfall.

But Sarkozy also revamped the pension system last fall, tightening early-retirement rules and raising the benchmark retirement age from 60 to 62 despite howls from unions and left-wing political leaders. In explaining the shift, he said a rising number of long-lived retirees, combined with a smaller base of active workers to pay into the system, had forced the government to rely increasingly on borrowing to keep the system afloat.

As the global crisis exacerbated deficits, leading to collapses in Greece and Ireland, he said, France found it could no longer run up more debt to keep the pensions coming.

"People began to understand that the whole system could come crumbling down," Godet said.

Sarkozy's opposition on the left accused him of betraying the national consensus begun by De Gaulle in 1944, asserting that the debt burden should be lightened instead by forcing the rich to pay more taxes.

"Don't talk to me about the public deficit," shouted a woman at an anti-government rally in Concarneau, on the Brittany coast, organized by the Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions and Citizen Action (ATTAC). "No, there is no public deficit. There is just the possibility for the powers of big money to redistribute, to give money back, and so on."

The Socialist Party and other leftist groups have interpreted such outrage as a chance for change in the next presidential election, in 2012. "Something is happening," predicted Youenn Le Flao, who heads Concarneau's ATTAC branch. But it remains to be seen whether the indignation will translate into votes against Sarkozy when he seeks reelection to a second term.

One indication came when France's highly politicized labor unions staged a series of general

strikes and massive demonstrations in the fall to try to stop the change in retirement age. From the beginning, Sarkozy's majority in parliament meant passage was assured, infusing the protests with a dispirited tone. Soon after the final vote in October, they sputtered out entirely, and the president's conservative backers suggested the 35-hour workweek should be the next target.

NIreland Police Seize Dissident Weapons (AP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Associated Press

LONDON - Northern Ireland police have charged three men with a series of terrorist offenses linked to the discovery of suspected dissident firearms.

The three suspects, aged 34 to 39, were arrested on Friday. Police found guns and ammunition in their vehicle after stopping it close to the Irish border.

The men were charged Sunday with possession of firearms with intent to endanger life, preparing to commit an act of terrorism and possession of items likely to be of use to terrorists.

The arms seizures on Friday was the first of three similar hauls recovered in south Armagh in two days.

They come as police remain on high alert across Northern Ireland amid fears of a terror attack to mark traditional republican commemorations of the 1916 Easter Rising against British rule.

Serbia's Opposition Leader Ends Hunger Strike (AP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Associated Press

BELGRADE, Serbia - Serbia's main nationalist opposition leader has ended his weeklong hunger strike that he had started to try to force early elections.

Tomislav Nikolic left a Belgrade hospital Sunday to attend an Easter service. His lawyer Vladimir Bozovic said he ended his hunger strike during a reception held afterward by the head of Serbia's Orthodox Church, Patriarch Irinej.

Nikolic stopped taking water and food April 16 when about 50,000 of his supporters rallied in Belgrade demanding an early parliamentary vote. He started drinking water Thursday while hospitalized.

President Boris Tadic has rejected Nikolic's demand for early elections, saying Serbia first has to get European Union candidate status before he calls the vote.

Chernobyl A Milestone On The Road To Ukrainian Independence (WP)**Monday, April 25, 2011****Washington Post****By Will Englund**

KIEV — After Chernobyl, there was no turning back. The Soviet Union had already set out on its long road to collapse, but 25 years ago on Tuesday, April 26, 1986, the explosion of Reactor No. 4 marked the moment when control at the top, and faith at the bottom, began to unravel.

Even today, Ukrainians, who achieved independence five years after the disaster, remember the fear of radiation and of the unknown — but more pointedly, they remember their sense of betrayal.

Now they hear distant echoes of Chernobyl as Japan struggles, not always transparently, to deal with the Fukushima crisis. But the contrast with the Soviet response is stark.

Igor Zhdanov was a first-year university student here in spring 1986. April 26 came and went and no one seemed the wiser. Six days after the explosion, with only a small and inaccurate story about it in the papers, Communist officials went ahead with a big May Day parade down Kiev's main street, the Kreshchatik, 70 miles from Chernobyl. Some of Zhdanov's classmates marched together as a university contingent. It was a glorious day.

Five or six days later, a professor called him. "Why are you here? You're done with your exams. Get out of Kiev," he barked. Zhdanov, who'd still been hearing only rumors, decided to go. He remembers how he got to the train station to find it jammed with people, a crowd on the edge of panic. Luggage was everywhere. He went to buy a ticket and the clerk shouted at him, "What are you talking about? Just get on a train!"

That's how Zhdanov, who today runs a political think tank here, realized how bad the situation was — not how bad the radiation was, because there was still no information released on that, but how bad the reaction was.

The first real account didn't appear in the press until a few days later. The scene at the train station, though, showed the power of the grapevine. People were saying that Communist leaders had gotten their families out of Kiev ahead of everyone else, and that Moscow had ordered the May Day parade to proceed despite the apparent danger.

Rumors flourished in the absence of news, and they have since become durable (and in some cases accurate) legends. The Chernobyl Museum here features a poignant photograph of young women marching down the Kreshchatik on May 1, smiling and oblivious.

In Pripyat, where Chernobyl's workers lived, it was less of a secret. On April 27, residents encountered soldiers wearing gas masks. Anatoly Vinokur was an ambulance driver, among the first to respond to the disaster. He worked two shifts in a row. It nearly killed him.

His wife, Lyudmila, now 62, remembers asking him as he was being taken to the hospital why he hadn't thought of his family before risking his life. "Don't worry," he told her. "The Motherland will take care of you."

But she thinks the Motherland turned its back on them. It wasn't just the authorities' silence in the first two weeks. Official indifference became an enduring part of the Chernobyl story. As if they were lepers, no one wanted to hire the Vinokurs. Financial assistance they were entitled to usually fell short. Medical care, she feels, was inadequate, and doctors misleading. Anatoly eventually got his old job back, at Chernobyl, rotating out every two weeks to limit his exposure to radiation. Today he's an invalid.

In the summer of 1986, while he was being treated at a Moscow hospital, she remembers they were told not to talk to reporters, especially foreigners. "We were great patriots back then," she said. "But we were cheated. We were abandoned."

Those feelings lingered in households throughout Ukraine. Chernobyl's legacy joined the great current of troubles afflicting the Soviet Union in its last days. Although President George H.W. Bush came here in 1991 and urged Ukrainians not to give up on Moscow, no one listened. The country was teetering: a wrecked economy, a failed coup in August, an upsurge in nationalist feeling, the three Baltic republics going their own way, an exhausted ideology.

On Dec. 1, 1991, Ukrainians overwhelmingly voted for independence. That was the irrevocable moment. By Christmas, the U.S.S.R. was history.

Chernobyl's role? It galvanized the fledgling environmental movement, which, as Canadian historian David Marples points out, joined in the push for independence and seemed poised in 1991 to become an important political player. But that moment passed.

A more fundamental legacy of Chernobyl, said Zhdanov, was the mistrust it sowed. It wasn't the accident itself that embittered people, but the way the authorities handled it. Chernobyl made it clear that Moscow wasn't going to look after Ukraine, and when a sea of other troubles descended, people remembered that one lesson.

EAST ASIA & PACIFIC

On Army Anniversary, NKorea Threat To Destroy US (AP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea - North Korea has again threatened to destroy the United States and South Korea. The communist North issued its latest war rhetoric on the eve of its army's anniversary.

The official Korean Central News Agency says that People's Armed Forces Minister Kim Yong Chun issued the warning Sunday in a Pyongyang national meeting ahead of the army's founding anniversary.

KCNA cites Kim as saying the North's military knows no mercy and will "wipe out" the allies if they ignite a war.

The United States and South Korea launched annual joint drills in late February. Seoul's Defense Ministry says some part of the training are still under way.

North Korea has repeatedly threatened war over the drills, which it views as an attack preparation.

Seoul Sites Rockets Near N.Korea Border: Reports (AFP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

AFP

SEOUL (AFP) - South Korea has deployed rockets on two islands near its tense Yellow Sea border with North Korea to guard against possible attacks, reports said.

The Chosun Ilbo newspaper, citing government sources, said more than 10 130-millimetre Kuryong multiple rocket launchers have been positioned on Yeonpyeong and Baengnyeong islands.

The North attacked Yeonpyeong with artillery and rockets last November, killing four people including two civilians and damaging dozens of buildings. Baengnyeong is the closest island to the North's coastline.

Each launcher has 36 rockets with a range of 23-36 kilometres (14-22 miles), Chosun said.

"This is the first time for us permanently to deploy multiple rocket launchers to the northwestern islands," it quoted a Seoul official as saying.

Yonhap news agency carried a similar report but did not specify the number of rocket launchers.

Cross-border tension has been high since the North's alleged torpedo attack on a Seoul warship that killed 46 sailors in the Yellow Sea in March 2010. Pyongyang has denied it was to blame for the sinking of the warship.

Since the island attack the South has been strengthening troop numbers and weapons on its five frontline islands near the disputed border.

Jimmy Carter, Other Former Leaders To Visit NKorea (AP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Associated Press

BEIJING - Ex-U.S. President Jimmy Carter and three other former leaders arrived in Beijing on Sunday en route to North Korea to discuss the revival of nuclear disarmament talks.

Carter and the group of veteran statesmen known as the Elders are to travel to Pyongyang on Tuesday as part of international efforts to restart the negotiations on ending North Korea's nuclear program.

The group, which includes former Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari, former Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Brundtland and former Irish President Mary Robinson, said it also plans to discuss North Korea's chronic food shortages.

International disarmament talks with North Korea have been stalled for the past two years amid growing concerns over its nuclear programs.

"At a time when official dialogue with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea appears to be at a standstill, we aim to see how we may be of assistance in reducing tensions and help the parties address key issues including denuclearization," Carter was quoted as saying in a statement.

Carter, a Democrat from Georgia who was president from 1977 to 1981, is well regarded in North Korea despite its longtime animosity with the U.S. He has visited several times in a private capacity, most recently last August to secure the release of an imprisoned American.

Carter told reporters earlier this month that he would "try to induce the North Koreans to give up their nuclear weapons" and help the country work out a peace treaty with South Korea and the

United States. No peace treaty was ever signed after the 1950-53 Korean War.

North Korea Visit To Focus On Food Crisis: Carter (AFP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

AFP

By Robert Saiget

BEIJING (AFP) - A group of former statesmen led by ex-US president Jimmy Carter said Monday they will focus on food shortages, human rights and denuclearisation when they visit North Korea this week.

A delegation of "The Elders" group of retired state leaders will visit Pyongyang on Tuesday in a bid to ease tensions over North Korea's nuclear weapon programmes, they told a news conference in Beijing.

The four-member group, led by Carter, includes former Finnish president Martti Ahtisaari, ex-Norwegian prime minister Gro Harlem Brundtland and former Irish president Mary Robinson.

Besides discussing ways in which to push forward multi-nation talks on the denuclearisation of North Korea, Carter said he would be looking at how to ease sanctions on Pyongyang that have exacerbated a serious food crisis.

"It is a horrible situation there and we hope to induce other countries to help alleviate (the food crisis), including South Korea, which has cut off all supplies of food materials to North Koreans," Carter told journalists.

"When there are sanctions against an entire people, the people suffer the most and the leaders suffer the least."

Robinson said one-third of North Korea's children had suffered stunted growth due to a lack of food, while up to 3.5 million people were vulnerable to the widening crisis that saw average food rations cut in half this year to 700 calories a day per person.

"It is very, very important to ensure that the women, children and the elderly do not suffer because of a political situation," Robinson said. "We will very much be emphasising this."

"We really feel that the humanitarian and human rights issues are also very important."

United Nations food agencies that recently visited the North say more than six million people -- a quarter of the population -- urgently need food aid.

Carter said the delegation hopes to meet with North Korean leader Kim Jong-Il, but so far such a meeting has not been announced. The trip was arranged at the invitation of top North Korean leaders, he said.

The delegation was to meet with China's Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi and other Chinese experts on North Korea later Monday. The group, which will issue a report on their findings, will fly to Seoul Thursday.

Six-party disarmament talks between the two Koreas, China, the United States, Japan and Russia have been at a standstill since Pyongyang walked out in April 2008 and staged its second nuclear test a month later.

Cross-border tensions were heightened when North Korea bombarded a border island in November, killing four South Koreans, including two civilians, and sparking fears of war.

The first attack on civilians since the 1950-53 Korean War came weeks after Pyongyang disclosed an apparently operational uranium enrichment plant to visiting US experts.

The North claimed it was a peaceful energy project but experts said it could be reconfigured to produce weapons-grade uranium.

Carter has mediated in North Korea before. In 1994 he visited Pyongyang after the United States came close to war with North Korea over its nuclear weapons programme.

Last August the 2002 Nobel Peace Prize winner visited Pyongyang to secure the release of jailed US citizen Aijalon Mahli Gomes.

Some analysts believe Carter will also seek to secure the freedom of a Korean-American detained by the North since last November who is facing trial for unspecified crimes against the nation.

A source has said the man was involved in missionary work.

Ruling Party Hurt In Japan Election (WSJ)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Wall Street Journal

By Toko Sekiguchi

Full-text stories from the Wall Street Journal are available to Journal subscribers by clicking the link.

Japan PM Braced For Vote Blow (AFP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

AFP

TOKYO (AFP) - Japan's opposition Liberal Democratic Party is expected to win a lower house by-election on Sunday in a blow to Prime Minister Naoto Kan who has been criticised for his handling of the nuclear crisis.

In the by-election in central Aichi prefecture, candidates focused on disaster countermeasures after the March 11 earthquake and tsunami which triggered the world's worst nuclear disaster since Chernobyl 25 years ago.

LDP candidate Hideki Niwa, 38, is expected to win the seat, beating four rivals, local media reported.

While Kan's ruling Democratic Party of Japan, which controls the lower house, failed to field a candidate, Niwa and the conservative LDP fiercely criticised his handling of the Fukushima nuclear crisis as "irresponsible."

Japan also held a second round of local elections on Sunday, picking 73 new city mayors and 63 town and village leaders, with hundreds of municipalities also voting in local assembly elections.

Public attention has been focused on reconstruction of the country's disaster-hit northeast and stabilising the crippled Fukushima nuclear plant.

In Fukushima prefecture, many municipalities, including those evacuated, postponed their vote.

Trade Will Help Japan Quake Recovery: Ministers (AFP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

AFP

By Harumi Ozawa

TOKYO (AFP) - Trade ministers from Japan, China and South Korea on Sunday said ensuring free trade would help reconstruction following the March 11 tsunami, as Tokyo stressed its exports were safe despite a nuclear crisis.

Japan's Trade Minister Banri Kaieda and his Chinese and South Korean counterparts, Chen Deming and Kim Jong-Hoon, met as Japan struggles with the massive destruction from the 9.0 magnitude quake and the monster wave it triggered.

The ministers agreed that swift reconstruction of the disaster-hit areas would be vital for the regional economy.

"We share the view that the recovery of the stricken region as well as Japan as a whole is in the interests of all the three countries," they said in a joint statement.

"We arrive at the common understanding that it is important to continue to secure the prompt and smooth flow of goods and persons in the Asian region."

Manufacturers across Japan shut production lines or cut back output because of damage or power shortages and supply chain problems after the magnitude 9.0 earthquake and tsunami, which crippled an atomic power plant, triggering the worst nuclear crisis since Chernobyl.

"The maintenance and development of a free and open trade system will not only enormously support the recovery process of the stricken region of Japan but also effectively secure vigorous and sustainable growth of all three countries," the statement said.

China and South Korea have imposed bans on food products from prefectures near the stricken nuclear plant, which has been leaking radiation.

Kaieda stressed that Japanese exports were safe and called on China and South Korea to "handle the issue based on scientific grounds", a trade ministry official told AFP.

"Trade Minister Kaieda told them that Japanese products are safe because authorities are taking food samples and checking on radiation levels while industrial products are manufactured indoor," he said.

Japan has also earmarked 700 million yen (\$8.6 million) to help cover exporters' radiation screening expenses, the trade ministry said.

In addition to banning food from areas near the plant, Chinese authorities have demanded that food imports from other areas be accompanied by certificates showing they were free of radioactivity and giving their places of origin.

South Korea has banned the sale of vegetables and some other food items from four prefectures closest to the Fukushima plant.

Similar bans have been imposed by Russia, the United States, Taiwan and Singapore.

Illnesses Surge Among Quake Victims (WSJ)

Monday, April 25, 2011; A11

Wall Street Journal

By Gordon Fairclough

Full-text stories from the Wall Street Journal are available to Journal subscribers by clicking the link.

Japan To Launch Massive Search For Quake Bodies (AP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Associated Press
By Shino Yuasa

TOKYO - Japan will send nearly 25,000 soldiers backed by boats and aircraft into its disaster zone Monday on an intensive land-and-sea mission to recover the bodies of those killed by last month's earthquake and tsunami, the military said.

Agriculture officials also plan to send a team of veterinarians into the evacuation zone around a stricken nuclear plant to check on hundreds of thousands of abandoned cows, pigs and chickens, many of which are believed to have died of starvation and neglect. The government is considering euthanizing some of the dying animals, officials said.

About 14,300 people have been confirmed dead so far in the catastrophic March 11 tsunami and earthquake. Another 12,000 remain missing and are presumed killed. Some of their bodies were likely swept out to sea, while others were buried under the mass of rubble.

Cleanup crews have discovered some remains as they gingerly removed rotting debris to clear the area for rebuilding.

But the two-day military search operation will be far more extensive, Defense Ministry spokesman Ippo Maeyama said Sunday.

"We will do our utmost to recover bodies for bereaved families," he said.

A total of 24,800 soldiers will scour the rubble, backed by 90 helicopters and planes, he said. Another 50 boats, along with 100 navy divers, will search the waters up to 20 kilometers off the coast, he said. Police, coast guard and U.S. troops will also take part.

"It's been very difficult and challenging to find bodies because the areas hit by tsunami are so widespread," he said. "Many bodies also have been swept away by the tsunami."

The operation will be the third intensive military search for bodies since the disaster last month. With the waters receding, Maeyama hopes the teams will have more success.

The search was complicated by the decomposition of some of the corpses, he said. Some had already turned into skeletons.

"You have to be very careful in touching the bodies because they quickly disintegrate. We cannot tell the bodies' gender anymore, let alone their age," he said.

The searches will continue, however, "as long as families want us to look for their loved ones," Maeyama said.

Meanwhile, the government in the Fukushima prefecture will send a team of six veterinarians into the 12-mile (20-kilometer) evacuation zone around the radiation-leaking Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear power plant to survey the livestock there.

Farmers in the area were estimated to have left 3,000 cows, 130,000 pigs and 680,000 chickens behind when they hurriedly fled the area last month when the nuclear crisis started.

With no time for burials, veterinarians who find dead livestock will spray lime over them to prevent them from spreading disease, agricultural officials said.

The government is also considering euthanizing dying animals, but only after getting permission from their owners, said Yutaka Kashimura, an agricultural official in Fukushima.

"Killing animals is the very last resort," he said.

Japan To Launch New Major Tsunami Body Search (AFP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

AFP

TOKYO (AFP) - Nearly 25,000 Japanese troops will Monday start a massive new search for bodies along the Pacific coast where some 12,000 people are still missing after the earthquake and tsunami, the military said.

Some US forces will join the 24,800 soldiers and members of Japan's Coast Guard and police for the third search since the disaster struck on March 11, devastating towns along the northeast.

"They will broadly cover the Pacific coast, areas around major river mouths and other tsunami-hit places," said a spokesman for Japan's Joint Staff.

In the past two major operations they found total 438 bodies, the defence ministry said.

More than 14,000 people were killed in the disaster and some 12,000 are still missing.

In a separate operation launched last Monday, some 2,500 Japanese troops have been searching for bodies within the 30-kilometre (19-mile) evacuation zone around the crippled Fukushima nuclear plant.

Officials from the local livestock department will also enter the 20-kilometre no-go zone around the plant to inspect the condition of the thousands of cattle, pigs and other animals abandoned as farmers fled the area.

"We haven't had any idea what it is like in the area now. This will be the first time we've entered the zone," said an official of Fukushima prefecture's livestock department.

Some animal rights activists who have entered the area have said there are a considerable number of cattle and other livestock dying.

"When we find dead animals, we will cover them with calcium hydroxide (caustic lime) due to sanitary concerns," the official said.

"We will slaughter those dying after getting permits from owners if they say it's too cruel to leave them like that."

Local officials will also check on the condition of horses that many in Minamisoma city, north of the plant, keep for the community's traditional folk festival, he said.

The no-go zone around the plant came into effect Friday, with police erecting checkpoints to prevent people returning to their homes within the high-radiation area. There is a wider 30-kilometre area where people have been encouraged to leave.

Japan's Most Famous Tsunami Survivor Comes Home (WT)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Washington Times

By Christopher Johnson

ISHINOMAKI, Japan -- Riding a bus, the 80-year-old lady with sparkling eyes laughs when asked how she escaped the tsunami.

"I didn't escape it. I was the one they found trapped in my home for nine days," Sumi Abe says on a bus to Ishinomaki, a city of 160,000 where more than 6,000 are registered as dead or missing. "That was my experience of the tsunami. And I am 80 years old."

Perhaps the most famous of the tsunami survivors, Mrs. Abe personifies the enduring spirit that many believe will help Japan overcome its worst crisis since World War II. Her plight also shows how thousands of tsunami victims still have little choice but to fend for themselves, despite a massive national and international aid effort.

She is alone on the bus, going back to her old neighborhood to see whether she can get a prescription from her doctor, if he's still alive. "I don't know if I can find him," she says. "Everybody is in a different place now than they were before."

Mrs. Abe doesn't seem to realize that people around the world have seen videos of rescuers finding her teenage grandson Jin waving for help

atop a demolished home and then hoisting both of them up to a helicopter.

Of the estimated 500,000 tsunami survivors who lost their homes, she perhaps endured more than anyone else. Her skin is still rippled from nine days of exposure to damp winter weather, surrounded by a swamp of dead neighbors.

After spending five days recovering in an Ishinomaki hospital, she and her grandson have been staying with relatives in Sendai city, about 90 minutes away by bus. Jin, who has a "bad leg" from the ordeal, is looking for a new high school in Sendai, she says.

"I'm fine, but my hands and legs still ache, and my nerves are not so good," Mrs. Abe says.

Though using a cane for the first time, she insists on carrying her own bags, and won't accept money for bus fare, food or any other offering. She just wants to be left alone.

"I don't want to cause trouble for anybody," she says. "Somebody told me I was in the news, but I am not interested in that. I am embarrassed about what happened. I can take care of myself."

After her husband died 23 years ago, her children often brought her food and water, and dropped off their children to stay with her. "I was lucky because they brought me food and water the day before the tsunami."

When the March 11 earthquake hit, many villagers ran to hills. But she was too old to run, Mrs. Abe says. Along with Jin, she stayed in her house in Minamihama, hoping to ride out the wave. Her house was more than a half-mile from the seaside, and a warren of factories and solid buildings would block the sea's advance, she thought.

But the tsunami demolished everything in sight and ripped her home from its foundation.

Trapped in the wreckage, she couldn't move, and shivered under a blanket that Jin put over her. She was lucky to have been trapped in the kitchen. "I counted everything we had left: eight cups of yogurt, one bottle of Coca-Cola, a few water bottles. We had just enough to survive," she says.

Stuck in wet clothing, she endured freezing nights in total darkness and long days in which she heard helicopters overhead, but no rescuers came.

"I prayed most of the time," she says.

Mrs. Abe recalls a trip to Nara, the ancient capital of Japan and site of some of its holiest temples and shrines. "I used to go to the shrine near my home every week, and I prayed that God would save me."

Her son Akira, 57, refused to believe that Mrs. Abe and Jin were dead, according to Kyodo news. He knew his mother was tough and patient, like many of her generation. After the quake, his son Jin managed to make a 50-second call on his cellphone to his brother. He said the house was destroyed, but he and his grandmother were surviving in the kitchen.

Efforts to find the pair failed until one Sunday, nine days after the tsunami, when four police officers saw the teenager calling for help on a rooftop.

Mrs. Abe says she never gave up hope. "I am 80 years old, and I had a good life," she says, laughing with a glint in her eye. "Imagine an experience like that at my age. I guess it just wasn't my time."

Arriving at Ishinomaki station, she let everybody else get off the bus first. "I was the last survivor to be found," she says. "So I want to get off the bus last as well."

Thailand And Cambodia Clash Again In Border Dispute (NYT)

Monday, April 25, 2011

New York Times

By Seth Mydans

BANGKOK — Thai and Cambodian troops clashed for a third day on Sunday in the first major territorial encounter since an informal cease-fire that followed four days of fighting in February. At least 10 people were killed and thousands of residents were evacuated from border areas, according to reports from both sides.

The United Nations called on the countries to settle the conflict peacefully, with an effective and verifiable cease-fire. The exact cause of the latest clash, which began early Friday, was unclear, with the two sides accusing each other of making the first move in what was mostly a long-range artillery duel.

The fighting was reported at border areas 100 miles west of Preah Vihear, an 11th-century temple that has been the focus of armed tensions since it was listed in 2008 by the United Nations as a World Heritage site under Cambodian administration.

Both nations claim ownership of a strategic area of 1.8 square miles near Preah Vihear. Two other ancient Hindu temples in the border area are the focus of the latest eruption of fighting.

In his weekly television address, the prime minister of Thailand, Abhisit Vejjajiva, accused

Cambodia of starting the fighting. "When there is firing into Thailand, we must fire back," he said.

Mr. Abhisit added: "We must not fall into Cambodia's trap in trying to spread a picture of conflict, or say the conflict is unsolvable through bilateral talks."

A sticking point in efforts at negotiations is Thailand's resistance to Cambodia's demand for mediation by international bodies. In the past, outside judgments have favored Cambodia. In 1962, the World Court ruled that Preah Vihear, which stands on a border bluff overlooking the Cambodian countryside, belonged to Cambodia.

The disputes involve border demarcations between the two countries made by former French colonial administrators and include references to competing maps and interpretations of maps.

The conflicting claims are a rallying cry for nationalists on both sides. In Thailand, they have become a focus of the antigovernment "yellow shirt" protests in recent months.

In February, the United Nations forwarded a Cambodian request for mediation to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in which both sides agreed to allow unarmed military observers to be posted along the border.

But the Thai military resisted that plan, and the country's foreign minister, Kasit Piromya, said that his government was trying to secure the cooperation of the armed forces to find a peaceful settlement.

Cambodia accused Thailand over the weekend of firing artillery shells "loaded with poisonous gas" and of flying jet fighter sorties over Cambodian territory. Thailand rejected the accusations as groundless.

Thai-Cambodian Border Fighting Enters 3rd Day (AP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Associated Press

By Thanyarat Dokson

BANGKOK — Thai and Cambodian troops exchanged artillery fire Sunday in a third day of fighting that has killed 10 soldiers and uprooted thousands of villagers from their homes.

Officials from both sides said the clashes over disputed territory lasted about two hours Sunday morning. Cambodian military officials said the shooting resumed in the afternoon for several hours.

U.N. chief Ban Ki-moon called for a cease-fire, but the prospects for peace appeared shaky, with the

two sides disagreeing on what triggered the fighting and differing on how to negotiate the conflicting territorial claims underlying the crisis.

Thailand reported no new casualties, after four of its soldiers were killed and 17 wounded over the previous two days. Witnesses saw one Cambodian soldier and a Cambodian television journalist wounded Sunday. Colleagues said the journalist suffered a head wound but did not appear seriously hurt. Cambodia earlier reported the deaths of six soldiers.

The dispute between the neighbors involves small swaths of land along the border, with nationalistic politics fueling tensions. Clashes have erupted several times since 2008, when Cambodia's 11th-century Preah Vihear temple was given U.N. World Heritage status over Thai objections.

The current round of clashes is the first reported since February, when eight soldiers and civilians were killed near the Preah Vihear temple. The latest fighting is about 100 miles (160 kilometers) west of there.

Indonesia, a fellow member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, has tried to mediate, but its efforts have been stymied so far by Thailand's reluctance to allow Indonesian military observers in the area of dispute. Thailand insists the problem should be solved through bilateral talks with Cambodia, but Cambodia wants third-party mediation.

Indonesian Foreign Minister Marty Natalegawa is to visit Cambodia on Monday in another attempt to mediate the conflict, according to a ministry official who oversees Asian-Pacific affairs, Hamzah Thayeb.

"We are trying to do the best for the two sides to continue to resolve their differences through peaceful means," Thayeb said, adding that observers could only be sent if approved by both sides.

On Saturday, Thai Foreign Minister Kasit Piromya said his government is willing to accept Indonesia's assistance in solving the crisis, but he was awaiting approval from Thailand's defense ministry.

U.N. Secretary-General Ban has called on Cambodia and Thailand to implement an effective and verifiable cease-fire.

A U.N. statement late Saturday said Ban believes the dispute cannot be resolved by military means, so the two countries must engage in a serious dialogue to resolve the underlying problems.

Each side has accused the other of starting the latest fighting, which has mainly involved artillery duels at long range.

Thailand rejected accusations Saturday that it had used chemical weapons against Cambodian troops.

A Cambodian defense ministry statement charged that Thailand had fired 75- and 105-millimeter shells "loaded with poisonous gas" into Cambodian territory, but did not elaborate. Col. Suos Sothea, a Cambodian field commander, said separately that Thailand had used both cluster shells — anti-personnel weapons banned by many countries — and artillery shells that gave off a debilitating gas.

Kasit said the allegations were not true.

Cluster munitions contain dozens or hundreds of small bomblets that scatter over vast areas. Some can lie dormant for decades until disturbed, posing enormous danger to civilians.

Thailand acknowledged using cluster-type munitions in border fighting in February, but argued that they were not of the type banned from use by 108 countries under an international treaty. Thailand has not signed the pact, but has publicly pledged not to use such weapons.

The fighting comes as Thailand's military raises its profile in domestic politics ahead of general elections expected by early July. The army previously effectively vetoed a plan to station Indonesian observers to monitor the border situation.

Cambodia Says Thai Shells Damaged Ancient Temples (AP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Associated Press

By Sopheng Cheang

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia — Cambodia accused Thailand of damaging two ancient temples during three days of border clashes that killed 12 people, as Southeast Asian diplomats struggled Monday to find a way to end the repeated deadly flare-ups.

A precarious calm held Monday in the disputed border region where Ta Moan and Ta Krabey temples lie. The nearly 1,000-year-old stone temples date back to the Khmer empire that once ruled over much of both Cambodia and Thailand.

The land around the temples and several other crumbling stone monuments has fueled profound nationalistic fervor in both countries for decades. While a wider war seems unlikely, several cease-fires have failed to prevent new border violence.

Cambodian government spokesman Phay Siphan said the two temple complexes, caught in crossfire

over the weekend, had been hit by bullets and shells, but there was no word on how bad the damage was. Thailand authorities had no immediate comment on the allegation.

The latest fighting comes as Thailand prepares for general elections expected by early July. The Thai army, which staged a coup in 2006 and continues to hold influence in domestic politics, has effectively vetoed a plan to station Indonesian observers to monitor the border situation.

Cambodian government spokesman Phay Siphan alleged Sunday that Bangkok was stirring up fighting "for their (own) political issues." He did not elaborate.

Indonesian Foreign Minister Marty Natalegawa was in "intense" talks with both sides to secure an end to the conflict in his role as current chair of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, according to foreign ministry official Hamzah Thayeb.

Natalegawa postponed a scheduled trip to Cambodia, Thayeb said, as Indonesia continued to push to send military observers to the region — a move that Thailand has so far vehemently rejected. The trip's cancellation cast doubt on hopes the simmering dispute might be resolved quickly.

The conflict involves small swaths of land along the border that have been disputed for more than half a century. Fierce clashes have broken out several times since 2008, when Cambodia's 11th-century Preah Vihear temple was given U.N. World Heritage status over Thailand's objections.

In recent years, political groups on both sides have accused their opponents of using the skirmishes to stir nationalistic fever and further their own domestic political agendas.

Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen has harnessed the dispute in the past to build political support. And during the last round of fighting in February around the more well-known Preah Vihear temple, Thai nationalists launched a sit-in outside government buildings in part to demand the country take a tough stand against Cambodia. The group is widely seen as playing the patriotism card in a bid to exercise more influence over politics at home.

The current round of clashes are the first since February, when eight soldiers and civilians were killed near Preah Vihear, which suffered minor damage from exploding artillery and mortar shells that knocked small chunks out of a few of its walls.

The latest fighting over the last several days broke out about 100 miles (160 kilometers) west of

Preah Vihear. After easing earlier Sunday, fighting resumed later that night, both sides said, raising the toll from 10 to 12.

Thai Army spokesman Col. Sansern Kaewkamnerd said Cambodian troops opened fire, killing a Thai soldier. Chea Samrach, a Cambodian soldier on the front line, said Thai snipers killed one Cambodian soldier and wounded two others. Ten soldiers died in the first two days of the clashes.

Cambodia's Defense Ministry said Thai forces fired 1,000 artillery and mortar shells Sunday. Some shells landed about 12 miles (20 kilometers) inside Cambodian territory, forcing 17,000 people to flee and destroying one school and a dozen homes and setting ablaze some farming fields, the ministry said.

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has called for a cease-fire, but the prospects for peace appear shaky.

Indonesia's efforts to mediate have been stymied for weeks by Thailand's refusal to allow Indonesian military observers in the area of dispute. Thailand insists the problem should be solved through bilateral talks with Cambodia, but Cambodia wants third-party mediation.

China Cracks Down On Bloggers (USAT)

Monday, April 25, 2011

USA Today

By Calum Macleod

CHENGDU, China — The desk where Ran Yunfei wrote books and a daily blog stands idle, his computer confiscated by police. His dog Dickens, a white Samoyed, barks on the outdoor patio. Inside the book-crammed study, his wife Wang Wei speaks quietly, fighting back tears.

"He was at his happiest talking about books and articles, as he drank tea or beer with friends," recalls Wang at their home in Chengdu, southwest China.

Detained on Feb. 20, and later charged with "inciting subversion of state power," Ran could face years in jail before enjoying those freedoms again.

A self-described bookworm and tireless blogger, Ran, 46, is among nearly 60 Chinese citizens detained in the past two months amid the harshest government crackdown against dissent in years, according to China Human Rights Defenders, a Hong Kong-based rights group.

During human rights talks in Beijing this week the U.S. government will raise "the recent negative trend of forced disappearances, extra legal

detention, and arrests and convictions," the State Department said. China has rejected foreign criticism of the crackdown as interference in its judicial affairs.

Spooked by revolts in the Arab world and convinced the Internet lends dissident voices too much space, China's ruling Communist Party appears determined to restrict free speech even further, says Joshua Rosenzweig, a researcher in Hong Kong for the Dui Hua Foundation, a group that lobbies for China's political prisoners.

"Events in North Africa and the Middle East have given them the excuse or opportunity to carry this out, as it gives them a concrete example of what could happen, even if very few people think what happened in Tunisia, Egypt or Libya could happen in China right now," he says.

The current atmosphere "is the most tense for the past 20 years," says banned Chinese writer Liao Yiwu.

"If even he has 'gone inside,' then many others are in danger too," says Liao, 53, who served a four-year jail term in the 1990s for his criticism of the government.

"After 30 years of reform and opening up, China is still a police state," concludes Wang Yi, the leader of a "house church" not controlled by the government who insists his friend poses no real threat to the authorities.

"Ran Yunfei is a typical example of a liberal intellectual who opposes violent or overnight change, and instead tries to gradually build up China's civil society, not bring about revolution," says Wang, 38.

Ran's journey from peasant to poet to political prisoner began in a Sichuan mountain village, where he was born to a farming family.

He won a scholarship to Chengdu's Sichuan University in 1983 and later was an editor at a provincial literature magazine.

When students held pro-democracy protests in Beijing's Tiananmen Square in 1989, Ran joined other Chengdu writers showing support in the streets, Wang Yi says. Ran kept his job but turned from writing poetry to addressing social issues, in books and especially online in the past decade.

He wrote a popular blog and used Twitter. It is likely that Chinese authorities targeted Ran for mentioning the Arab revolts, and the "Jasmine Rally" silent protests in China, on one or more of his social media outlets, despite being blocked in China.

Ran has defended his outspoken behavior as the basic responsibility of a citizen. "It's unacceptable for there to be no one who criticizes this society," Ran told the Southern Metropolis Daily newspaper last year. "If no one criticizes it, then this society will have an even greater deficit of morality and justice."

China Detains Church Members At Easter Services (NYT)

Monday, April 25, 2011

New York Times

By Andrew Jacobs

BEIJING — The authorities stepped up a three-week campaign against an underground Christian church on Sunday, detaining hundreds of congregants in their homes and taking at least 36 others into custody after they tried to hold Easter services in a public square, church members and officials said.

The church, Shouwang, or Lighthouse, an evangelical Protestant congregation that was evicted from its rented quarters this month, has been at loggerheads with the government since announcing plans to gather outdoors rather than disband or return to worshiping in private homes. The authorities have repeatedly stymied Shouwang's efforts to lease or buy space for its 1,000-member congregation, one of the largest and most prominent so-called house churches in the capital.

The Chinese Communist Party tightly manages religious activity, requiring the faithful to join state-run churches, mosques or Buddhist temples. Until the most recent crackdown on Shouwang and a handful of other unregistered big-city churches, such congregations had enjoyed relatively wide latitude from religious authorities.

Founded 18 years ago in a private home, Shouwang insists that it has no political agenda and seeks only government forbearance that would allow it to occupy the \$4 million space it bought in 2009. Church leaders say the owner of the space, under pressure from the authorities, has refused to hand over the keys. Last week, a Foreign Ministry spokesman defended the government's stance, saying that Shouwang had "no legal basis" to operate.

Most of those seized on Sunday morning were taken away in buses after they showed up at the plaza, which is not far from several of the country's top universities. Members of a CNN crew said that they were briefly detained and that their credentials were confiscated before they were turned away by the police.

Several church members, all of whom requested anonymity for fear of further provoking the authorities, say they were confined to their homes by security agents, some as early as Thursday, in an effort to keep them from joining Easter services. ChinaAid, a Christian advocacy group based in the United States, put the number of those under temporary house arrest at 500, although that figure could not be immediately verified.

On Sunday night, Shouwang's Web site was blocked and its chief pastor, Jin Tianming, could not be reached by phone. In an e-mail circulated last week, church leaders asked parishioners to make their way to an elevated walkway where services were supposed to take place, even though they would probably be intercepted by the police.

The message took note of the Easter holiday and likened the congregation's struggles to those endured by Jesus Christ.

"We pray especially for those brothers and sisters who in the past week or two have already been forced to move or leave their jobs," it said. "We ask God to remember the price they have paid for holding on to their faith and ask him to take care of their families and their daily life needs."

Beijing Police Arrest Group Of Christians (WSJ)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Wall Street Journal

By Brian Spegele

Full-text stories from the Wall Street Journal are available to Journal subscribers by clicking the link.

Shanghai Lowers Truck Fees (WSJ)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Wall Street Journal

By James T. Areddy

Full-text stories from the Wall Street Journal are available to Journal subscribers by clicking the link.

Truck Drivers In Shanghai Plan To Resume Protests (NYT)

Monday, April 25, 2011

New York Times

By David Barboza

SHANGHAI — A group of truck drivers who helped stage a three-day strike here last week over rising oil prices and high government fees said Sunday that they planned to resume their demonstrations this week, despite this city's promise to eliminate

some freight transportation fees and reduce others.

"This is really small money," one truck owner said of the city's concessions in an interview Sunday. He asked not to be named because he feared the government would punish him.

"The real problem is high oil prices and the way the government has cheated us with fines and extra fees," he said. "The whole system stinks."

The huge demonstrations that took place here last week, with as many as 2,000 drivers, disrupted one of this city's biggest ports. Some protesters threw rocks, smashed windows and even tried to overturn police cars.

Several truck drivers were arrested after scuffles with the police, witnesses said, while others were detained for questioning.

Shanghai officials could not be reached for comment on Sunday and a spokeswoman for the Shanghai Port did not answer her cellphone.

On Sunday, police cars were stationed in the city's port districts and operations seemed normal. But some truck drivers who participated in the protests said that many trucks were idled because the owners wanted to express dissatisfaction with the government.

"You can see a lot of abandoned trucks along the roads nearby," said another driver, who declined to be named. "A lot of truck owners are doing that to show they don't like the system."

The demonstrations last week were the latest sign of growing unease in China about soaring inflation. People in many parts of the country say their incomes can no longer keep pace with rising food, energy and housing prices.

Some evidence of the problem came just over a week ago, when China said its consumer price index — its main gauge of inflation — rose 5.4 percent in March, its biggest increase in 32 months.

Beijing has promised to make fighting inflation its No. 1 priority this year. In recent months, the government has announced a raft of new anti-inflation measures; including a tightening of bank credit and offers of subsidies to farmers and taxi drivers.

But the moves do not appear to be working well. Food prices jumped 11.7 percent in March, and energy prices continue to climb.

The government recently raised the price of gasoline to keep it in line with global oil prices. That move set off the truck protest in Shanghai,

which is similar to a taxi driver protest a few years ago in the city of Chongqing in central China.

In that protest, Chongqing officials quickly offered concessions, apparently because the government did not want the demonstrations to spread.

Several other cities followed by offering their own taxi subsidies.

The truck drivers and owners protesting in Shanghai seem to be hoping for a similar outcome. Some complain that the Shanghai government recently offered local taxi drivers \$36 to \$70 a month in fuel subsidies, while ignoring companies owned by truck drivers, most of whom are not Shanghai residents.

"Why is the city giving so much money to the taxicab drivers?" the first truck owner asked Sunday. "We are transporting goods for the export market and helping the country. Taxicabs are a luxury. Many of their customers can take a bus or subway."

Another common complaint is that state-owned companies are reporting record profits, mostly in industries where they operate monopolies. As state companies, critics say, they should lower prices and give bigger benefits to the people.

On Sunday afternoon a group of truck drivers and owners gathered at a depot to complain about the government's policies, saying that the local police impose stiff fines for small infractions and that the city's port operators often demand bribes to process shipments.

Many of the drivers said they were organizing through text messages. And they vowed to smash the windows of drivers — or even harm them — if they tried to pass the blockades.

Several drivers said the police had taken down their cellphone and license plate numbers and used police dogs to harass organizers. But they said they were teaming up to demand that the government reduce fees and put an end to corruption and mistreatment of trucking companies.

One driver shared a poem he said the demonstrators were passing around. It read, in part: "We borrowed money to buy a truck to earn a living; not knowing that making money is this difficult; we endured all the bitterness and rudeness; submitting to all the mistreatment with flattering smiles; those who wear the clothes of the government hold all the power; and they look upon us with unsightly donkey faces; like we owe them money for a sacrificial offering."

Strong, Shallow Earthquake Hits Eastern Indonesia (AP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Associated Press

By Ali Kotarumalos

JAKARTA, Indonesia - A strong and shallow earthquake hit eastern Indonesia early Monday, sending residents, hotel guests and patients from a hospital fleeing in panic. Some homes were damaged, with windows shattered and walls cracked, but there were no immediate reports of injuries.

The U.S. Geological Survey said the magnitude-6.2 quake was centered 45 miles (75 kilometers) southeast of Kendari, a town on Sulawesi island, at a depth of just 6 miles (9 kilometers). It was followed by three strong aftershocks.

Andre Wijaya, a geological official in Kendari, said the earth shook violently beneath his feet.

"Women and children were screaming as they ran from their homes and into nearby fields," said Lt. Laode Surachman, a police officer in Kendari, adding that hotels emptied out and patients in a hospital were evacuated to safety. "Even officers taking part in morning roll call scattered and fled."

Indonesia straddles a series of fault lines that make the vast island nation prone to volcanic and seismic activity.

A giant quake off the country on Dec. 26, 2004, triggered a tsunami in the Indian Ocean that killed 230,000 people, half of them in Indonesia's westernmost province of Aceh.

WESTERN HEMISPHERE

Leftist Leads Poll On Peru's Presidential Runoff (AP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Associated Press

LIMA, Peru - A leftist former army officer is leading the race for Peru's presidential runoff, according to the first poll released since he and the daughter of imprisoned ex-President Alberto Fujimori survived the first round of voting.

An Ipsos-Apoyo poll published Sunday gives Ollanta Humala 42 percent support against 36 percent for Keiko Fujimori. Just over 20 percent don't like either candidate or are undecided about the June 5 ballot.

The poll has an error margin of 2 1/2 points.

The free-market friendly Fujimori is ahead in Lima while Humala leads outside the capital. Humala

says he'll redistribute wealth while respecting institutional democracy.

Humala won the April 10 first round with 32 percent. Fujimori was second with 24 percent.

Mass Graves In Mexico Reveal New Levels Of Savagery (WP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Washington Post

By Nick Miroff And William Booth

SAN FERNANDO, Mexico — At the largest mass grave site ever found in Mexico, where 177 bodies have been pulled from deep pits, authorities say they have recovered few bullet casings and little evidence that the dead were killed with a gun.

Instead, most died of blunt force trauma to the head, and a sledgehammer found at the crime scene this month is believed to have been used in the executions, according to Mexican investigators and state officials. The search continued Sunday, with state officials warning they expect the count to rise.

They say as many as 122 of the victims were passengers dragged off buses at drug cartel roadblocks on the major highway to the United States.

The mass killings of civilians at isolated ranches 90 minutes south of the Texas border mark a new level of barbarity in Mexico's four-year U.S.-backed drug war.

As forensic teams and Mexican marines dig through deeper and darker layers here, the buried secrets in San Fernando are challenging President Felipe Calderon's assertions that his government is winning the war and is in control of Mexico's cities and roads.

In the past four years, more than 35,000 people have been killed and thousands more have simply disappeared, since Calderon sent the military to battle Mexican organized crime with \$1.6 billion in U.S. support. U.S. officials in Mexico worry that criminal gangs are taking over sections of the vital border region not by overwhelming firepower but sheer terror.

On Thursday, cartel gunmen sacked the city of Miguel Aleman, across the river from Roma, Texas, tossing grenades and burning down three car dealerships, an auto parts outlet, a furniture store and a gas station. Three buses were strafed with gunfire Saturday in separate attacks, wounding three people.

The U.S. State Department issued new warnings Friday advising Americans to defer nonessential

travel to the entire border state of Tamaulipas and large swaths of Mexico because of the threat of armed robbery, carjacking, kidnapping and murder by organized crime.

In the red dirt tombs of San Fernando, almost all the bodies were stripped of identification, meaning no licenses, bus ticket stubs or photographs of loved ones, according to interviews with local and state officials, making the job of notifying next of kin especially difficult.

Forensic photographs shown to The Washington Post depict mummified bodies caked in dirt and badly decomposed, with signs of extreme cranial trauma. In the largest two graves, holding 43 and 45 bodies, the corpses were piled atop one another in a 10-foot-deep pit dug by a backhoe, that criminals filled over in the past four months.

The red nail polish on a young victim's toe stands out in one photograph, along with her XS-size undergarments.

Officials in Tamaulipas say they have found 34 grave sites scattered in a wide arc around this farming town of 60,000, where Mexican marines last week established a military camp for ground and helicopter patrols.

Evidence suggests that the dead include Mexicans and Central American migrants traveling to the United States to work. Only a few of the exhumed bodies have been identified, including those of a local car salesman, a federal social worker and a Guatemalan immigrant.

Authorities have arrested 76 suspects, including alleged local Zeta boss Martin "El Kilo" Estrada, a husky, menacing figure covered in tattoos who authorities paraded before television cameras and charged as the mastermind of the homicides.

Motives for the mass killings remain a matter of speculation. "Perhaps we are seeing in the graves the results of several different confrontations and crimes committed over many months," said Morelos Canseco Gomez, the lieutenant governor of Tamaulipas.

Canseco said authorities are still looking for an entire bus loaded with passengers that vanished on the border in March.

Savage discoveries

At least nine graves scattered around San Fernando contained only a single corpse, and some of the burial sites might hold not kidnap victims but fallen cartel comrades killed in shootouts with rivals, Canseco said.

The families of passengers taken off buses here did not receive ransom demands, investigators say, and so the victims appear not to have been killed for large sums of money, only what they might have had in their wallets and purses. The savage method of execution is also unexplained, with shuddering investigators left guessing at the mental state of the killers.

Officials say some victims may have been snatched to serve as forced recruits for the Zetas crime organization, according to five bus passengers abducted but later rescued.

San Fernando is the same place where 72 migrants from Central and South America were kidnapped and fatally shot last August, bringing condemnation from the United Nations and new focus on the perils faced by travelers crossing Mexico en route to the U.S. border.

After the massacre, Calderon sent the Mexican military to retake the town, vowing to "protect migrants and Mexican families." But as attention on San Fernando faded, federal forces withdrew and locals say the crime gangs quickly muscled their way back in.

"People began to disappear," said Ramon Ruiz, an apprentice priest in San Fernando. "First it was people with money, then it was anyone. They kidnapped a local farmer's son and demanded \$10,000, and when he gave them \$5,000 — everything he had — they sent him half of his son."

The criminals commandeered nearby ranches, killing the owners or driving them off, then converted barns and sheds into holding pens and execution chambers.

Silence choked the town until late last month, when state authorities received calls that large groups of bus travelers were kidnapped along the Highway 101 on March 24 and 29. Soldiers followed a tip down a maze of dirt roads out to a ranch miles off the main highway, where they freed five kidnapping victims and captured nine Zeta cell members, after killing four gunmen who were standing guard.

The suspects talked. Mexican authorities began to dig.

Hunting for loved ones

Most of the bodies recovered from San Fernando were taken to the morgue in Matamoros, across the Rio Grande from Brownsville, Texas. Families of the missing there have taped photocopied fliers about their loved ones to the walls of state forensic

offices there, and more than 400 people have arrived to provide DNA samples.

"MISSING," the fliers read: Eli Octavio Juarez, 17, last seen March 20 in a 1995 Ford Explorer with tinted windows. And Emmanuel Alejandro Zuniga, missing March 9, en route to Ciudad Victoria — "call his mama."

Raul Lopez Zunun, a 70-year-old farmer, traveled 1,100 miles by bus from his home in southern Mexico to the forensic lab in Matamoros, clutching a photocopied picture of his son Israel Lopez. He went missing in the area in late March while en route to a job in Ohio.

"We're looking for him in all the hospitals here," said Lopez, who grows corn and coffee on a small farm in Chiapas. "I told him not to go."

On Thursday, Mexican authorities arrested the police chief in San Fernando, and 16 of the department's 25 officers are now in custody, suspected of working for the Zetas to help the gang kidnap, kill and bury their victims.

Marines patrol the streets of San Fernando, brandishing grenade launchers and heavy machine guns, but local authorities will not venture out to surrounding villages without a military escort.

In an interview, San Fernando Mayor Tomas Gloria Requena said it wasn't true that his town was especially corrupt, or evil.

"San Fernando is Mexico," he said. "It's just like anywhere else."

Body Parts Found In Upscale Mexico City District (AP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Associated Press

By Nacha Cattan

MEXICO CITY — The dismembered body of a woman was found scattered in a leafy, upscale Mexico City district, while authorities investigated possible drug gang links in the deaths of five females whose throats were slashed in Acapulco.

The mass slaying of women is unusual in Mexico's drug war, and there was no indication the cases in the two cities were related.

Residents of the capital's tree-lined San Miguel Chapultepec neighborhood discovered the woman's upper body on one block and her left leg and right leg on two other blocks, the city prosecutor's office said Saturday. The body parts were stuffed into three plastic bags and the fingers of the victim's left hand had been cut off.

The prosecutors' office provided no details on the woman's identity or a possible motive for the killing. Officials did not return requests for comment Sunday.

The neighborhood is next to Chapultepec Park, the capital's huge green space that also houses major museums and the presidential residence.

Mexico City has been somewhat of an oasis from the cartel violence engulfing border states, but a spate of recent killings and decapitations has residents fearing the drug war is encroaching.

City authorities blame the violence since late last year on street gangs fighting over an increasingly lucrative local drug market, which has grown dramatically the past decade. Some of the high-profile violence comes from groups that are remnants of the Beltran Leyva cartel, which has splintered and moved closer to the city since Mexican marines killed leader Arturo Beltran Leyva in December 2009. Some of the gangs are imitating brutal cartel tactics seeking to gain turf.

Meanwhile in Acapulco, police said they were not ruling out drug or organized crime links possibly related to prostitution in the killings of four women and a 14-year-old girl whose bodies were found Saturday.

All five worked at a beauty parlor in a neighborhood known for prostitution and drug dealing, the chief of detectives for the Guerrero state police told The Associated Press on Sunday.

"It's an area with many social problems," Fernando Monreal Leyva said.

"On the second floor where the events occurred — in this case, the beauty parlor — a massage parlor was found where sexual acts may have been performed, although this is still under investigation," Monreal Leyva said.

The teenage girl had begun working at the salon five days prior to her death, he added.

Three of the bodies were found at the salon located outside the tourist district. They had been stripped of their clothes and their hands and feet were tied, police said.

The other two victims were found separately in other parts of Acapulco — one in an abandoned car and the other on a street behind a church. All of the women were 30 years old or younger.

Police had no suspects or motives and were trying to determine whether all of the women were killed at the same spot, Monreal Leyva said.

Also in Acapulco, two bodies were left in the trunk of an abandoned car, state authorities said Sunday. Both men appeared to have been shot.

In another Guerrero state resort town, Zihuatanejo, a severed head was found Sunday on a street outside the central bus terminal.

Guerrero state has seen a spike in violence since rival factions of the Beltran Leyva cartel began fighting over territory following the death of Arturo Beltran Leyva.

Farther north on Mexico's Pacific coast, a young man was shot to death in the lobby of a luxury hotel Saturday in Cabo San Lucas, the Baja California Sur state prosecutor's office said. State police said the man was hit by seven bullets in his back and head, but did not provide details of a possible motive for the killing.

It was unclear if the killing was drug-related. Drug gang violence — which has claimed more than 34,600 lives in Mexico over the past four years — has been extremely rare in Cabo San Lucas, a resort dotted-area at the southern tip of the Baja California peninsula.

Hated At Home, Deported Haitians Still Dream Of US (AFP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

AFP

By Clement Sabourin

PORT-AU-PRINCE (AFP) — They were children when they left Haiti for better lives in US cities such as Boston, New York or Miami. But convicted of crimes as adults, they are being sent back to the streets of Port-au-Prince after having served part of their sentences. Hated by their countrymen, foreigners in their own land, the "deported" dream of only one thing: returning to the United States.

Washington had suspended expulsions on humanitarian grounds after last year's earthquake killed more than 220,000 Haitians and flattened the capital city, where 1.5 million people remain homeless.

Until then, the United States annually sent back about 700 Haitian nationals with criminal records.

But early this year, the US government resumed expulsions. Twenty-seven of the "deported," as they are called on the island, were sent back in January, followed by 19 others earlier this month.

Rights groups and others say it is an unfair burden to impose on a country that is struggling to recover from a devastating earthquake, as well as trying to stop an epidemic of cholera.

"Seeing the return of notorious criminals, who are not carpenters or mechanics but bandits who ... want to continue with the same activities, this certainly constitutes a problem for us," Edmond Mulet, head of the United Nations mission in Haiti, told AFP.

At the national police headquarters, asked if the returning Haitians were joining violent gangs, the officer in charge of the matter said only: "I don't know, I don't know anything about it."

The office was packed with relatives of the April arrivals, vouching for their son, nephew or cousin. A file with names, ages and crimes sat on the table. The crimes are marked "violence," "sexual abuse," "armed robbery," and "homicide."

Upon their arrival via US military aircraft, the young Haitians are met by local authorities.

Jean-Daniel Maurice, a 25-year-old who lived in the New York suburbs, was arrested for burglary six years ago.

"My girlfriend was pregnant and I had no money," he explained.

Before serving his full sentence, he was deported in January. Haitian police placed him in an overcrowded prison.

"A room with a single mattress for 11 people," he recalled. "If you have no family, no one brings you anything to drink or eat."

After being questioned at length by police -- "they were looking for drug dealers and wanted to know about weapons I had used," he said -- he and four others were jailed for 11 days.

"We each had to pay about \$300," he said.

But one of the 27 men deported in January was not as lucky -- he died after four days in prison, from what appeared to be cholera, a bacterial infection that has killed an estimated 4,856 Haitians since last year.

The Organization of American States, among others, has urged Washington to halt the deportations. The OAS's human rights commission noted the deplorable, inhumane conditions of Haitian jails, which provide little or no medical care.

The US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) said that once a deportation order is obtained on a non-citizen criminal, that person cannot be detained beyond six months.

"As a result, after a year of suspended removals, the US government made the difficult decision to restart removals of a limited group of Haitian

nationals to ensure the safety of US communities," the ICE statement said April 1.

When prioritizing deportations, ICE said it considers factors "such as the severity, number of convictions, and dates since convictions, and balance these against any equities of the Haitian national, such as duration of residence in the United States, family ties, or significant medical issues."

The returning Haitians, arriving with only the prison clothes they wore in their US cells, discover an extremely poor country whose inhabitants detest them.

"They hate us because everyone dreams of emigrating to the United States, and we wasted our chance," said 40-year-old Harry, deported 15 years ago for armed robbery.

Behind dark glasses, he hides the fact that he lost an eye last July, he said, when a police officer hit him after accusing him of being deported.

At police headquarters where they must sign a register once a week. Jean-Daniel and his friend George Desroches were met with contempt by police officers. "You are deported? Tsss," said one officer.

The two lower their heads and nod.

"Life is hard here, there are no jobs, there's nothing," said Desroches, speaking with a New Jersey accent picked up when he lived in the eastern US state. "Now, I dream of one thing: Go."

Harry, the 40-year-old, added: "Haitians don't like the way we speak Creole, how we dress. We are marked 'deported.' All this is not fair."

Haiti's "Sweet Micky" Martelly Turns Presidential (WP)
Monday, April 25, 2011
Washington Post
By Lee Hockstader

Haiti's president-elect, Michel Martelly, known universally to his countrymen as "Sweet Micky," is — let's be delicate about this — a new kind of political figure.

Wildly popular during his two-decade career as a singer, he was notorious for wearing a diaper during performances, for mooning his audiences and for gleefully leading his fans in obscene chants and taunts. Given that stage persona, Haitians barely batted an eye at revelations during this year's presidential campaign that Martelly used to snort cocaine and that several homes he owned in Florida were foreclosed on.

But the "Sweet Micky" of yore was gone last week when he arrived in Washington for meetings with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and international aid organizations. In his place was a spruced up president-elect, wrapped in a dark suit, sporting a sober tie and escorted by an entourage of thin-skinned advisers who bristled at questions about his past.

Martelly wants to be taken seriously. And thank goodness.

"Sometimes I feel like people don't give me credit — I didn't win the Lotto. There were 19 candidates, and I debated them and I beat them all," he said during a visit to The Post.

If ever a country needed no-nonsense leadership, it's Haiti right now. And if ever a country has suffered from an onslaught of political calamity combined with cataclysmic disasters, it's Haiti for the last, well, pick your time period.

The earthquake that struck Port-au-Prince in January 2010, on the heels of devastating back-to-back hurricanes, crippled the hemisphere's poorest nation. No amount of media marveling at the resilience of the Haitian people or the full-court press of international relief efforts could change the facts: hundreds of thousands of kids orphaned and out of school, a million people left homeless, a capital city carpeted in rubble and an economy on life support.

Even as Haiti skirted post-quake fears of looting and violence, it was further ravaged last fall by one of the world's worst recent outbreaks of cholera, an epidemic that has killed 5,000 people, infected a quarter-million and is still not finished claiming victims.

Haiti's already weak government, which lost at least a third of its senior civil servants when the ministry buildings collapsed, was rendered almost irrelevant. The listless President Rene Preval, his term coming to a close, all but disappeared.

That sets the bar low for Martelly, who promises a new start when he is inaugurated next month. He is busy fleshing out his mostly vague campaign promises, stressing the rule of law, free public education, jobs and new homes for the throngs still living in tent cities, and help for poor farmers.

"I must admit that my popularity [as an entertainer] has helped me," he said. "But the election was not about my popularity. It was about my character traits — honesty, determination, combativeness and preparation."

It was also about being a fresh, vital force on the political scene, bringing with him energy and a

new (mostly untested) crop of advisers, unbothered to any recent political establishment. Little wonder that in the runoff election, Martelly, who is 50, beat a professorial 70-year-old former first lady 2 to 1.

The president-elect has a troubling reputation for having pals that include some of the worst thugs and coup-plotters from Haiti's dark recent decades. But in person, many of his instincts seem spot-on. I asked about his plans for Haiti's gleaming white presidential palace — long a symbol of opulence and repression — which collapsed in the earthquake. "I must say, that's the least of my worries," he answered with a shrug. "I can stay at my house."

Asked about Jean-Claude Duvalier and Jean-Bertrand Aristide — divisive former presidents who have recently returned to Haiti from exile and who might face prosecution — he passed, saying he preferred not to interfere with any judicial proceedings.

Martelly was quizzed about his plans to resurrect the Haitian army, an infamously cruel, corrupt and repressive institution abolished by Aristide in 1994. At that, his advisers got their backs up, especially at the suggestion that a reconstituted army would be a Praetorian Guard used, as in the past, as muscle to enforce the president's personal will. They insisted that this time around, the army would fight smugglers and stay clear of politics — with the added benefit of providing jobs. But it is not clear that money exists for an army, and foreign donors are not likely to pay for one.

Questioned about his future as an entertainer, or his one-time pledge to perform naked on the palace roof if he were elected president, Martelly demurred, presidentially. "After three or four years, if I see everyone in school and people with jobs and progress," he said, "I'll be happy enough to sing a song."

Fully dressed, one suspects.

The writer is a member of the editorial page staff.

Raul Castro's Same Old Cuba (WP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Washington Post

IT HAS NOW been five years since Raul Castro assumed control of the Cuban regime from his ailing older brother, Fidel. In that time, the younger Mr. Castro — an accurate, if strange, description for a man who will turn 80 in June — has repeatedly reflected on the economic failings of the Cuban Revolution and promised to correct them. Over the past year, in fact, Raul Castro has

sounded almost apocalyptic. "Either we change course, or we sink," he declared in December. "We have the basic duty to correct the mistakes we have made over the course of five decades of building socialism in Cuba." Such rhetoric raised expectations that Raul would at last bring the free enterprise and political opening that Cuba so desperately needs.

But Cuba's Communist Party congress last week, the first such meeting since 1997 and the first ever under Raul's direction, confirmed that talk of reform in Cuba is mostly just that. Instead of liberating the economy, Raul sketched a program of limited privatization that could take "at least" five years to phase in. The most dramatic measure would authorize Cubans to buy and sell houses and cars for the first time since 1959, but Raul provided few details, except to assure Cubans that no one would be allowed to accumulate too much property. The plan calls for more licenses for small service businesses — a measure partly aimed at converting black market enterprises into taxable ones.

Even more disappointing was the lack of political reform — or even a shake-up of the Communist hierarchy. Yes, Raul suggested choosing more non-Communists for government posts, but he offered no plan for elections or actual party competition. Instead, Raul promoted Jose Roman Machado Ventura, a longtime crony and fellow octogenarian, to the No. 2 spot in what is still the "vanguard" Communist party. Nor was there any indication that Cuba plans a conciliatory gesture toward the Obama administration, such as the release of Alan Gross, the 61-year-old U.S. aid worker recently sentenced to 15 years on trumped-up subversion charges.

The Cuban "revolution" has devolved into a confused gerontocracy. Raul ostensibly recognizes that the "mistakes" of the past half-century have left the country nearly bankrupt; yet this clashes with his "firm conviction and commitment of honor that the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party has as his main mission and meaning of his life: to defend, preserve and continue perfecting Socialism, and never allow the capitalist regime to return," as the Cuban state media put it. This is a contradiction that his bid to "update" the Cuban model cannot square — any more than the previous reform campaigns that litter the revolution's history could.

Raul Castro's speeches at the congress were full of the usual attacks on slothful Cuban workers, inefficient party cadre and perfidious U.S. imperialism. But the truth is that Cuba's problems are mostly of the Castro brothers' own making.

They may never end until the Castros' regime does.

Kirchner Copies Peron's Model (WSJ)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Wall Street Journal

By Mary Anastasia O'Grady

Full-text stories from the Wall Street Journal are available to Journal subscribers by clicking the link.

SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Sudan Says To Hold Darfur Referendum On July 1 (AFP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

AFP

KHARTOUM (AFP) — Sudan's National Election Commission announced on Sunday that a planned referendum on how the war-torn Darfur region should be governed will take place no later than July 1.

"The National Elections Commission will work on completing the administrative referendum to determine the permanent status of Darfur no later than July 1, 2011, with voting to take place over a period of two days," the NEC said in a statement.

The vote will determine whether Darfur should be granted regional status, which it had before 1994 and which the rebels have called for, as it would lead to a greater degree of autonomy, or whether it should remain as individual states.

The government says it is committed to holding the referendum under the Abuja peace accord signed in 2006.

But Darfur rebel groups have warned that to go ahead with such a unilateral move before a political agreement has been reached will torpedo the foundering Doha peace talks.

In addition, Minni Minnawi, the only rebel leader who signed the 2006 peace accord, resumed hostilities against the Sudanese army in December, which renders the terms of the agreement obsolete, according to his rebel faction.

Last month, a presidential committee endorsed a recommendation to add two new states to Darfur's existing three, a move that still has to be approved by the local and national assemblies but which the rebels condemned as a policy of "divide and rule."

The NEC said it would take the necessary steps to conduct the referendum, including updating the voting register from elections in April last year, as

well as raising awareness of and explaining its purpose to voters, and setting out the timetable.

At Least 105 Dead In Clashes In Southern Sudan (AP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Associated Press

By Philip Mabior

JUBA, Sudan - At least 105 people have died in violence between government forces and rebel militias in Southern Sudan this week, an official said Sunday, raising concerns of southern instability ahead of the region's independence declaration in July.

Brig. Malaak Ayuen, the head of the Southern Sudan's Army Information Department, said fighting on Saturday between a group of rebels led by Maj. Gen. Gabriel Tanginye in Jonglei state and southern government forces led to 57 people being killed and scores being injured.

Ayuen said that five days of fighting between government forces and those loyal to another rebel chief, Peter Gatdet, in Unity state which is northwest of Jonglei, led to the deaths of 48 people. He did not give a breakdown of the number of civilians, rebels and the army killed in both incidents.

Since its January independence referendum, Southern Sudan has seen a wave of violence that has killed hundreds.

The south voted nearly unanimously to secede from the north, but there are many issues that still remain unaddressed including the sharing of oil revenues, the status of southerner and northerner minorities living on both sides of the border, and who controls the disputed border region of Abyei, a fertile area near large oil fields.

Southern officials now claim the militia groups they are fighting are being funded by the north to cause instability with the goal of taking over the oil fields in the south.

Before this week's violence the U.N. said that at least 800 people had been killed and 94,000 displaced because of violence in Southern Sudan this year.

The fresh clashes between Tanginye's forces and the army erupted on Saturday morning in Kaldak village north of Jonglei state, where his forces have been assembled for reintegration into the Sudan People's Liberation Army, poised to become Southern Sudan's regular force in July.

Tanginye said his base was attacked by the southern army because he refused to disarm his

men ahead of the reintegration process, an allegation the army has dismissed as a "lie".

Tanginye was a Khartoum-sponsored warlord who burned and looted southern villages along the Nile River during the decades-long north-south civil war. He continued serving for the north after a 2005 peace deal ended the war. Although he accepted an amnesty and reintegration package with the southern army late last year, it is now unclear which side Tanginye is fighting for.

The fighting in Unity state erupted on Tuesday and continued until Saturday, with both the army and the rebels claiming control of Mankien village in Mayom County, where the fighting was concentrated.

The army field commander in Mayom, Brig. Peter Makal said on Saturday that his forces defeated the rebels. He accused them of being funded by the north to invade the area with an aim of taking over Mayom's oil fields.

However, a spokesman for the rebels, Bol Gatkuoth, claimed they tactfully retreated to regroup for a fresh attack aimed at reaching the state capital, Bentiu, which lies further south.

Nearly 4,000 civilians in the area have fled their devastated villages for safety, Charles Machieng, Mayom's County Commissioner said on Saturday.

"The whole town was burnt down. There was no single structure remaining because people are using houses made from grass," Machieng said. "There is still fear in the entire community because they heard heavy artillery fire, they have seen heavy fighting."

The state authorities responded by ordering the northern and foreign employees of the oil companies working in the state to evacuate.

Southern Sudan's referendum was part of a 2005 peace deal ending a two-decade civil war that cost some 2 million lives.

Election Fuels Deadly Clashes In Nigeria (NYT)

Monday, April 25, 2011

New York Times

By Adam Nossiter

The death toll and destruction from a wave of election-related violence in Nigeria last week may exceed similar outbursts of the past, though the underlying causes remain the same, experts said.

Ethnic and religious tensions between Muslims in the north and Christians in the south, discrimination by southerners against immigrants from the north, and frustration over corruption in a

country where most subsist on less than \$2 a day while top officials have access to billions in oil revenues have set off the latest round of clashes, much as they have in the past.

While more than 300 were killed in Nigeria's presidential election four years ago, the death toll appeared to be higher this year, as the violence that flared in the wake of the re-election of Nigeria's president, Goodluck Jonathan, a Christian from the south, instigated a cycle of action and reaction.

Mobs of Muslim youths in the north began rioting after the defeated opposition candidate, Muhammadu Buhari, a Muslim from the north, failed to rein in his supporters. That set off a wave of retaliation against Muslims in Kaduna State in the north, according to Shehu Sani, the head of a leading Nigerian civil rights group.

Mr. Sani, who lives in Kaduna, said Sunday that more than 500 people, mostly Muslims, had been killed in three villages in Kaduna alone since the April 16 presidential election. There was no independent verification of the figure; the authorities have been chary of releasing death tolls for fear of inflaming further violence.

Human Rights Watch said that about 140 were killed in political violence between November and April 17, the day after the election, while acknowledging that many more had died since. Mr. Sani said the total number of victims in the recent violence could top 1,000.

"For presidential elections, on this scale, it's new," said Chidi Odinkalu of the Open Society Justice Initiative, adding that the only comparable episodes of violence occurred in the mid-1960s and early 1980s, both times leading to the overthrow of incumbent governments.

A researcher for Human Rights Watch said Sunday that one village in Kaduna "looks like a war zone," with "not one building standing" and a mosque that had been "gutted." The researcher, Eric Guttschuss, said he had seen a mosque in another village, Marada Rio, that had been burned down, with anti-Islam graffiti scratched into the ruins, next to inscription reading, "Jesus is Lord." In other villages, entire streets had been burned down, Mr. Guttschuss said.

Sunday was a day of relative calm in the worst-hit areas like Kaduna, as residents observed a curfew, cleared debris, buried their dead and attended Easter services amid a heavy military and police presence. But there were fears that next week's elections for governors might bring a renewal of the mayhem.

Mr. Odinkalu said that it was "difficult to come up with a single organizing theory" for the violence. But the persistent cleavage between the country's relatively wealthier, oil-producing south and its impoverished north, fueled by the intermingling of populations and religions, appeared to lie at the base of this episode, as in previous ones.

Riots in the Muslim north followed Mr. Jonathan's decisive defeat last week of Mr. Buhari, 57 to 31 percent, in a vote that foreign-observer groups said was perhaps Nigeria's fairest ever. Mr. Buhari, a former military dictator, swept the north, and after his defeat knife- and machete-wielding youths in northern towns like Kano rampaged through the streets, chanting the general's name and attacking supporters of Mr. Jonathan's majority party.

Unlike Mr. Jonathan, Mr. Buhari had refused to condemn, in advance, a possible violent reaction to the election result — a silence analysts said nearly amounted to an invitation to his supporters to take to the streets.

Analysts said the rioting reflected, in part, northern frustration that the dominant party did not allocate its slot on the presidential ballot to a northerner, as would have been expected under an unwritten practice of alternating northern and southern rule of the country.

Group: At Least 500 Dead In Nigeria Election Riots (AP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Associated Press

By Jon Gambrell And Shehu Saulawa

BAUCHI, Nigeria - At least 500 people died in religious rioting that followed Nigeria's presidential election, a civil rights group said Sunday, as volatile state gubernatorial elections loom this week.

Meanwhile, police in the northern state of Bauchi said at least 11 recent college graduates who helped run polling stations as part of the country's national youth service corps have been killed in postelection violence, while other female poll workers have been raped.

The Civil Rights Congress of Nigeria said that the worst hit area was Zonkwa, a town in rural Kaduna state, where more than 300 people died in rioting.

The Civil Rights Congress, led by a Muslim activist, said killings also took place in the towns of Kafanchan and Zangon Kataf, as well as the state capital of Kaduna.

Muslim opposition supporters began riots as results from the April 16 election showed Christian

President Goodluck Jonathan had won the vote. Many here in predominantly Muslim north of Africa's most populous nation felt the next president should have been from their region because a Muslim president died last year before he could complete his term.

Retaliatory violence by Christians soon followed, and officials say more than 40,000 people have now fled their homes. Authorities are fearful that releasing any official death toll will only prompt more fighting, but witnesses believe hundreds have been killed across the north.

The violence also took a toll on Nigeria's National Youth Service Corps. Authorities are trying to assure members they will be safe for them to take part in Tuesday's gubernatorial elections being held in 29 states, though some have already fled their posts.

In Bauchi state, police have arrested 68 suspects in connection with the deadly riots that were sparked by the presidential election, Police Commissioner Amane John Abakasanga told The Associated Press.

Nigeria's National Youth Service Corps is a mandatory yearlong assignment for all Nigerians who graduate from university before the age of 30. Most serve as teachers, but the April national elections have brought extra responsibilities — and danger — to their work.

The founders of the program created it in 1973 to promote national unity in a country with more than 150 ethnic groups and to help reconcile Nigerians after a 31-month civil war claimed more than 1 million lives. By encouraging young graduates to explore new parts of the country, the goal was to dispel negative stereotypes.

At least four of the young poll workers were killed in Bauchi last week when an angry mob locked them inside their youth hostel and set it ablaze. The vote for governor has been delayed in Bauchi and Kaduna states until Thursday because of security concerns there.

Nigerian Rights Group Says More Than 500 Killed In Unrest (AFP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

AFP

By Aminu Abubakar

KANO, Nigeria (AFP) – The explosion of unrest that followed Nigeria's presidential election has left more than 500 people dead, a local rights group said Sunday, as fears mounted over upcoming governorship ballots.

Authorities have declined to confirm any death toll figures fearing reprisal attacks, though the Red Cross has spoken of many killed and says some 74,000 were displaced.

"The updated figure is about 516," said Shehu Sani, head of the Civil Rights Congress organisation based in the northern state of Kaduna.

He said most of the deaths counted occurred in southern areas of Kaduna state. The organisation gathers the numbers through its coordinators on the ground, Sani said.

"It can be a lot more," he said. "We are still getting the compilings."

The violence erupted over President Goodluck Jonathan's election win over his northern rival Muhammadu Buhari in April 16 polls.

Rioting broke out in the country's mainly Muslim and impoverished north over the election that saw Jonathan, a southern Christian, defeat Buhari with 57 percent of the vote compared to the northerner's 31 percent.

It quickly spread across the region, leading to mobs roaming the streets with machetes and sticks, dragging people from cars and burning victims' homes and shops.

Churches were also set alight, and Muslims were targeted in revenge attacks. A number of communities in southern Kaduna state are Christian-dominated, and Muslims have accused them of instigating the violence in those areas.

Analysts say the riots had more to do with poverty and economic marginalisation in the north than religion.

Many in the north had turned their hopes to Buhari, an ex-military ruler known for his "war against Indiscipline" during his time in power in the 1980s.

Nigeria remains on edge following the unrest, particularly ahead of governorship elections on Tuesday in most of Nigeria's 36 states.

In the main northern city of Kano on Sunday, some attended Easter mass at military and police barracks where they have taken refuge, while others went to their regular churches.

An overflowing crowd sought to attend the mass at one police barracks, many standing outside and listening to the service through a loudspeaker.

The sandy ground where they have been sleeping was not far away, with clothes and cooking materials drying in the sun.

"I've been here with my family since Monday," said Eyo Anthony, a 41-year-old aluminum vendor.

"Although it's been calm in the past two days, I don't intend to go back to my house ... until after the governors' elections. I know how I managed to escape with my family and I don't want to relive the same experience."

He said he, his wife and two children fled on Monday when rioters arrived in the neighbourhood and began burning shops.

In the tense central city of Jos on Sunday, Christians attended church but were screened with metal detectors on entry.

The ruling party is projected to lose governorships in a number of states, raising concerns that desperate politicians may attempt to rig in certain areas.

Allegations of rigging are believed to have set off some of the initial riots following the presidential election.

Some analysts say the upcoming elections may hold the most risk for violence because of the large budgets and patronage networks governors control.

Nigeria's enormous effort to hold credible elections this year has made it more difficult for politicians to commit electoral fraud.

The presidential vote was hailed by observers as a huge step forward in Africa's largest oil producer, which is seeking to overcome a history of deeply flawed ballots, though they have noted that serious problems remain.

Buhari has challenged the results but has disassociated himself from the violence. Many have criticised him for not publicly coming out more strongly against the rioting in the days after the vote.

Nigeria Radical Muslim Sect Vows To Keep Fighting (AP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Associated Press

MAIDUGURI, Nigeria - A radical sect blamed for killings in northeastern Nigeria is vowing to fight until its says Muslims regain their freedom all over Nigeria.

In a statement released Sunday, the group known as Boko Haram called on the Nigerian government to embrace Islam, drop the constitution and adopt the laws in the Qur'an.

Boko Haram's message comes amid deadly postelection rioting elsewhere in the north following the election of a Christian president.

But the town of Maiduguri where it is based has seen little of the vote-related unrest reported elsewhere in northern Nigeria this month.

Boko Haram members have targeted police and clerics in a string of killings over the last year, and also have attacked churches and engineered a massive prison break.

Hotel Blast In Northeast Nigeria Kills 2; 8 Hurt (AP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Associated Press

MAIDUGURI, Nigeria - Authorities in northeastern Nigeria say an explosion at a hotel has killed two people and wounded eight others.

Police chief Mike Zuokumor said the blast went off Sunday evening in Maiduguri, a town that has been wracked by violence related to a radical Islamic sect.

There were no immediate claims of responsibility for the hotel blast, but it came hours after the radical group known as Boko Haram released a statement vowing to keep up its fight.

The violence also comes after deadly postelection rioting elsewhere in the north, but Maiduguri has seen little election-related unrest. Gubernatorial elections have been delayed in two northern states as a result, though voters in Maiduguri are still due to cast ballots Tuesday.

Strongman's Fate Indicator For Ivory Coast Future (AP)

Monday, April 25, 2011

Associated Press

By Michelle Faul

ABIDJAN, Ivory Coast - The fate of former strongman Laurent Gbagbo, who turned mortar shells and rockets on his people, will be an indicator of how calls for reconciliation play out in this West African nation blighted by tribal, religious and land rivalries.

Ivory Coast's new leader — installed at the cost of thousands of lives — is calling for reconciliation in the country, but says that cannot come at the price of justice.

President Alassane Ouattara has said impunity for Gbagbo and those who fomented violence is out of the question, a clear challenge to a practice that often reigns in Africa for those who fall from power.

Ouattara wants the 65-year-old Gbagbo to be tried in national and international courts.

At least one other African leader says Gbagbo should be allowed to live peacefully in exile. Another says he should be able to retire to a farm in Ivory Coast.

His supporters say without his release, there cannot be reconciliation.

Gbagbo was arrested April 11 and is now under house arrest in the country's northern Korhogo town, Ouattara's stronghold. His wife Simone, who at one point was being investigated by the United Nations for human rights abuses including organizing death squads, is being held separately in the northwest town of Odiende.

The bad blood between Ouattara and Gbagbo goes back decades. Ouattara oversaw Gbagbo's arrest on charges of inciting violence in 1992, when Ouattara was prime minister and Gbagbo a beleaguered opposition leader. Gbagbo was tried and sentenced to two years in prison but was released after six months.

Gbagbo took power in 2000 in elections boycotted by all other opposition parties, a sore point among Ouattara supporters. An attempted coup in 2002 ballooned into a rebellion that divided the country between a rebel-held north and government-run south. Gbagbo repeatedly delayed promised elections.

Nov. 28 elections were supposed to reunite the nation that once was a symbol of progress and prosperity on the continent.

Though Gbagbo lost, nearly half of the electorate voted for him. Ouattara bagged 54 percent of votes, Gbagbo 46 percent. Refusing to accept his defeat, Gbagbo took a last stand in Abidjan, as former rebel forces swept down from the north in a lightning assault,

Ouattara, very conscious that Gbagbo still enjoys a lot of support in Ivory Coast and not wanting to make a martyr of him, gave orders that he was to be taken alive at all costs.

Senegal warned against impunity last week. Senegal's Foreign Affairs Minister Madicke Niang told reporters in Ivory Coast: "Being against all forms of impunity, we must find the means, soon, to ensure that such acts never again see the light of day."

But the nation appears to be selective about who should be punished. For years Senegal has resisted African and other international pressure to try ousted President Hissene Habre, who is accused of thousands of political killings and

systematic torture when he ruled Chad, from 1982 to 1990, before fleeing to Senegal.

Botswana's President Ian Khama said Ivorians should just let Gbagbo retire to a farm, even though he had taken a hard line against the intransigent leader.

Kenyan Prime Minister Raila Odinga, himself the victim of an electoral crisis in which more than 1,000 Kenyans died in a conflict rooted in old tribal and land rivalries, last week suggested that Gbagbo should be allowed to go into exile.

Odinga was widely seen as the victor in December 2007 elections but agreed to form a power-sharing government to halt the bloodshed.

The Kenyan prime minister, who admitted Gbagbo is a friend, acknowledged that he failed in his role as an African Union mediator to convince Gbagbo to step down to save the lives of innocents.

"Mr. Gbagbo had quite a lot of support in the last elections. The situation in the Ivory Coast is fairly complex. You have got this north and south divide, you have got the religious divide and you have also the ethnic divide and all that needs to be resolved," he said on CNN television network.

"I really don't want to see a situation where Mr. Gbagbo becomes a hero in trial," he said.

The death toll caused by Gbagbo's refusal to step down peacefully will probably never be known. As people began emerging from homes in which they had locked themselves for two weeks and more as the city was besieged, have been seen burning decomposing corpses. Others have collected bodies of family members from overflowing morgues where no records were kept.

Few doubt the man with the most blood on his hands is Gbagbo.

About 30 members of Gbagbo's Cabinet, party and family are under house arrest and U.N. protection in an unlooted family home in Grand Bassam, the seaside resort near Abidjan that is Simone Gbagbo's birth place.

The arrested president of Gbagbo's Ivorian Popular Front party, Pascal Affi N'Guessan, on Saturday sneaked out a news release calling for "the liberation of the president, Laurent Gbagbo, and all the other political prisoners."

Gbagbo's rabble-rousing youth minister Charles Ble Goude, who spoke before going into hiding, also warned that "there can be no reconciliation" without Gbagbo.

THE BIG PICTURE:

Headlines From Today's Front Pages.

New York Times:

Classified Files Offer New Insights Into Detainees
Judging Detainees' Risk, Often With Flawed Evidence
Syrian Crisis Tests The Mettle of Its Autocratic Ruler
Lawmakers Seek to Unclog Road to Confirmation
A Trial Run For School Standards That Encourage Deeper Thought
One Size Fits Nobody: Seeking a Steady 4 or a 10

Washington Post:

New Revelations On al-Qaeda's 9/11 Movements
Conflict Of Interest V. Free Speech

The GOP's Anti-Obama Still Reluctant On 2012 Run

Benefits A Birthright No More In Europe

Getting Harder To Keep A Stiff Upper Lip

Wall Street Journal:

After QE2: Fed Searches For Next Step
US Seeks To Raise Heat On Syria
Insurer Blames Tough Tests For Lack Of Agents

USA Today:

Experts Temper Economic Forecast
If You Build It, Will They Come?
Nail-Biters Could Kill A Sports Fan

Washington Times:

Abortion Votes Will Trail GOP in 2012 Campaign
Sex Trafficking A National Epidemic
Senators Vexed With 'Moribund' Tone This Year
Confidence In US Bonds Slipped Well Before Threat Of Downgrade
'It Just Wasn't My Time' Says Tsunami Victim, 80
Archbishop Celebrates Easter Mass

NYP:

KNOCKED OUT!
CROOKS & BOOKS
Felons teach our kids

NYDN:

MR. FIX-IT
Fighting a summons? He's jus the ticket
OVER
Knick rally falls short

Story Lineup From Last Night's Network News:

ABC: NASA-Giffords To Attend Launch; Giffords Recovery; Severe Weather; Royal Wedding Preparations; Pope-Middle East Peace; Syria-Crackdown; Yemen-President To Step Down; First

Family Attends Easter Services; Politics-Medicare Debate; Economy-Gas Prices; Royal Wedding.

CBS: Libya-Misrata; Pope-Middle East Peace; Severe Weather; Severe Weather Warning Systems; Education-Grading Teachers; Giffords Status; Life Insurance-Unpaid Claims; Economy-Gas Prices; Politics-Immigration; Royal Wedding.

NBC: St. Louis Tornado; Unrest In Syria, Libya; Oil Profits-Gas Prices;

Story Lineup From This Morning's Radio News Broadcasts:

NPR: WikiLeaks Guantanamo Documents; NATO Targets Gadhafi Compound; Israel-Palestinian Police Shooting; St. Louis Cleanup; Wyoming-Missing Skiers Bodies' Found; Washington State-Deadly House Fire.

ABC: St. Louis Tornado; North Carolina-FEMA Aid; Obama Laments Guantanamo WikiLeaks; NATO Targets Gadhafi Compound; Libya-Misrata Under Siege; Afghanistan; Kandahar Prison Break.

CBS: Giffords To Watch Launch; Giffords Wants To Return To Congress; Syria-Crackdown; NATO Targets Gadhafi Compound; Afghanistan-Kandahar Prison Break; Idaho Mine Worker's Body Recovered; Gas Prices-Ohio Pastor Gives Out Free Gas; St. Louis Tornado Cleanup.