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Kirby Klips for 29 Jun (morning edition) attached.

Tom Neis



KIRBY KLIPS

Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff
Monday, June 29, 2009



Morning Edition

TOP STORIES:

1. Honduran Military Ousts President Ahead Of Vote

(WASHINGTON POST/AP 28 JUN 09) Will Weissert and Freddy Cuevas

TEGUCIGALPA, Honduras -- Soldiers ousted the democratically elected president of Honduras on Sunday and Congress named a successor, but the leftist ally of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez denounced what he called an illegal coup and vowed to stay in power.

2. Honduran President Ousted In Coup; Replacement Is Named

The Head Of The Honduran Congress, A Foe Of President Manuel Zelaya, Is Named Acting President. Global Outcry Against The Coup Is Growing.

(LOS ANGELES TIMES 28 JUN 09) ... Tracy Wilkinson and Alex Renderos

Reporting from Mexico City and San Salvador -- Honduran army troops seized President Manuel Zelaya early today and sent the leftist president into exile in a coup reminiscent of Latin America's unstable past. Later, a hastily convened Honduran Congress voted to replace Zelaya with one of his fiercest opponents.

3. British Fury As Iran Takes Embassy Men Hostage

(LONDON TIMES 29 JUN 09) ... Martin Fletcher

Britain reacted angrily yesterday to the arrest of at least eight Iranians working for the British Embassy in Tehran, calling the move unacceptable "harassment and intimidation".

CHAIRMAN'S TRAVEL:

4. Chairman Sees Opportunity In Struggles Shared With Russia

(AFPS 28 JUN 09) ... Samantha L. Quigley

Moscow, Russia -The United States and Russia's shared struggles offer great opportunities, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff said today during an address at Russia's Military Academy of the General Staff in Moscow.

5. Top US Officer Says Iraqis Ready For Handover

(VOICE OF AMERICA 28 JUN 09) ... Al Pessin

The United States' top military officer says he believes Iraqi forces are ready to take full control of their country's cities on Tuesday, as called for in the U.S.-Iraq security agreement. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mike Mullen spoke to reporters traveling with him in Europe.

HONDURAS:

6. Honduran President Is Ousted In Coup

(NEW YORK TIMES 28 JUN 09) ... Elisabeth Malkin

MEXICO CITY — The Honduran president, Manuel Zelaya, was ousted by the army on Sunday after pressing ahead with plans for a referendum that opponents said could lay the groundwork for his eventual re-election, in the first military coup in Central America since the end of the cold war.

7. Honduran Coup Early Test For Obama's Latam Policy

(REUTERS 28 JUN 09)

WASHINGTON - The Honduran military's ouster of President Manuel Zelaya on Sunday could be an early test for U.S. President Barack Obama as he tries to mend the United States' battered image in Latin America, a regional expert said.

8. Cuba Condemns Honduras Coup As "Criminal, Brutal"

(REUTERS 28 JUN 09)

HAVANA - Cuba on Sunday condemned the military coup in Honduras as "criminal, brutal" and demanded the immediate return to office of deposed leftist President Manuel Zelaya.

9. Chavez: CIA Behind Coup In Honduras

(PERIODICO, CUBA 28 JUN 09)

CARACAS, - Venezuelan President, Hugo Chavez requested Sunday that US President Barack Obama, to be pronounced against the military coup in Honduras, which he considered is carried out with the participation of the Central Intelligence Agency.

EUROPE:

10. EU Warns Tehran Over Detained British Embassy Staff

(DEUTSCHE WELLE 28 JUN 09)

Iran is accusing the British Embassy of inciting riots on the streets of Tehran. The European Union agreed on Sunday that intimidation and harassment of European diplomatic staff by Iran in Tehran would be met with a "strong and collective response."

11. West Skeptical On Russian Security Plan For Europe

(REUTERS 28 JUN 09) ... David Brunnstrom and Ingrid Melander

CORFU, Greece - The West told Russia on Sunday that its proposal for a pan-Europe security pact must not undermine NATO or a continental security and human rights group.

12. Merkel Shifts Nuclear Stance, Backs Electric Cars To Win Votes

(BLOOMBERG 29 JUN 09) ... Tony Czuczka

June 29 -- Chancellor Angela Merkel's party shifted ground on nuclear power and said it wants to make Germany a nation of electric-car drivers, signaling an attempt to broaden its appeal to voters in Sept. 27 national elections.

IRAQ:

13. U.S. Commander Says Iraq Forces Ready

(NEW YORK TIMES 28 JUN 09) ... Derrick Henry

Gen. Ray Odierno, the American commander in Iraq, said on Sunday that Iraq's military and police units are ready to operate on their own, ahead of Tuesday's deadline for the withdrawal of American combat troops from Iraq's cities and towns.

14. Gen Odierno On Fox News

(FOX NEWS 28 JUN 09) ... Transcript from Fox News Site

"years ago today the US transferred sovereignty to Iraq. And a few days from now US troops will withdraw from all major cities in Iraq here to talk about these milestone.

15. Iraq Steps Up Security Ahead Of US City Withdrawal

(ASSOCIATED PRESS 28 JUN 09) ... Patrick Quinn

BAGHDAD -- Iraqi security forces bolstered checkpoints and banned motorcycles from the streets of Baghdad as they prepared Sunday for more violence before this week's withdrawal of U.S. combat troops from the capital and other cities and towns.

16. Unease Mounts As U.S. Troops Leave Iraq's Cities

Some Residents Worry About End Of Boots-On-The-Ground Strategy Ahead Of Tuesday's Deadline For An American

(WALL STREET JOURNAL 29 JUN 09) ... Gina Chon

BAGHDAD -- American commanders and Iraqi officials and residents are watching with growing unease as U.S. combat forces end their duty in Iraq's urban areas this week, amid almost daily reports of violence.

17. U.S. Troops Snubbed By Iraqi Forces

(USA TODAY 28 JUN 09) ... Aamer Madhani

ABU GHRAIB, Iraq — Iraqi army Col. Kassem Latif Jassim is convinced that he can get by with minimum support from U.S. forces.

IRAN:

18. Iran Escalates Its Fight With Britain; New Clashes Erupt

(NEW YORK TIMES 28 JUN 09) ... Michael

CAIRO — Iran's government said Sunday that it had arrested Iranian employees of the British Embassy, while the police in Tehran beat and fired tear gas at several thousand protesters who joined a demonstration at a mosque in support of the defeated presidential candidate Mir Hussein Moussavi.

19. Iranian Police Clash With Up To 3,000 Protesters

(WASHINGTON TIMES/AP 28 JUN 09) ... William J. Kole

Riot police clashed with up to 3,000 protesters near a mosque in north Tehran on Sunday, using tear gas and truncheons to break up Iran's first post-election demonstration in five days, witnesses said.

20. Axelrod: Ahmadinejad Not In Charge Of Iranian Foreign Policy

(JERUSALEM POST 28 JUN 09)

US President Barack Obama's top adviser, David Axelrod, said the US remains open to meeting, alongside its European allies, with Iran in Paris in an effort to curb Teheran's nuclear ambitions.

21. Influential Iranian Cleric: Vote Fallout A 'Tangled Mess'

(CNN 28 JUN 09)

TEHRAN, Iran -- After more than two weeks of silence amid Iran's violent election fallout, former President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani -- a key Iranian cleric -- emerged Sunday to call out "suspicious sources" who are creating a rift between the public and the Islamic government.

AFGHANISTAN:

22. Afghan Minister Says Drug Strategy Is 'Perfect'

(ASSOCIATED PRESS 28 JUN 09) ... Rahim Faiez

KABUL -- Afghanistan's counternarcotics minister said Sunday that his country's drug policy is "perfect," a day after the United States changed course and announced it would no longer support efforts to eradicate opium poppy plants.

23. U.S.-Built Bridge Is Windfall For Afghan Drug Trade

(MCCLATCHY NEWSPAPERS 28 JUN 09) ... Tom Lasseter

NIZHNY PANJ, Tajikistan — In August 2007, the presidents of Afghanistan and Tajikistan walked side by side with the U.S. commerce secretary across a new \$37 million concrete bridge that the Army Corps of Engineers designed to link two of Central Asia's poorest countries.

PAKISTAN:

24. 13 Soldiers, 18 Taliban Killed In N Waziristan: Officials

Thirteen Pakistani Troops And 18 Taliban Militants Have Died In Clashes And Air Bombardments In The Tribal Belt As Violence Spikes In The Northwest Region, Officials Said Sunday.

(PAKISTAN DAWN 28 JUN 09)

Security forces, wrapping up a two-month campaign against Islamist militants in and around northwest Swat valley, are opening up a second front against Taliban chief Baitullah Mehsud in the lawless Afghan border region.

25. Pak Army Operation Hinders Taliban Efforts In Afghanistan: US

(PAKISTAN TRIBUNE 28 JUN 09)

WASHINGTON: Pakistan's military offensive against the Taliban has slowed the flow of arms and fighters into Afghanistan, U.S. officials say, and has prompted intelligence analysts to issue cautiously upbeat new assessments of Islamabad's ability to contain the threat of violent extremists.

26. Pakistan Offers Reward For Taliban Chief, 'Dead Or Alive'

(AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE 28 JUN 09)

PESHAWAR, Pakistan – Pakistan on Sunday offered a 615,000-dollar reward for information leading to the capture, dead or alive, of local Taliban head Baitullah Mehsud, currently holed up in the tribal belt.

27. Indo-Pak Talks Sans Kashmir Won't Deliver'

PM Says Nation Wants Peace By Eliminating Terrorists Forever

(PAKISTAN DAILY TIMES 29 JUN 09)

LAHORE: Pakistan has always wanted cordial relations with all neighbouring countries, but it is not possible to have peace with India until the Kashmir issue is resolved, Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani said on Sunday.

28. Kayani And Petraeus Take Up Waziristan Action

(THE NATION PAKISTAN 29 JUN 09)

ISLAMABAD - Commander US CENTCOM General David H Petraeus who was on a daylong official visit here on Sunday exchanged information with Chief of Army Staff General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani on anti-terror operations underway along the Pak-Afghan border.

MIDDLE EAST:

29. Barak Open On Israel Settlement Freeze Before U.S. Trip

(REUTERS 28 JUN 09) ... Jeffrey Heller

JERUSALEM - Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak left open the possibility on Sunday of a limited freeze on building in Jewish settlements in the occupied West Bank.

NORTH KOREA:

30. Japan, S.Korea In United Stance Against N.Korea

(AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE 28 JUN 09) ... Kyoko Hasegawa

TOKYO – South Korea and Japan "will never tolerate" a nuclear-armed North Korea, South Korean President Lee Myung-Bak said on Sunday after talks with Japanese Prime Minister Taro Aso.

31. New North Korea Sanctions Will Have Impact: US

(AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE 28 JUN 09)

WASHINGTON – New UN sanctions intended to force North Korea to abandon its nuclear program will have an "impact" when they take full force, US ambassador to the United Nations Susan Rice said Sunday.

32. Uranium Gives Nkorea Second Way To Make Bombs

(ASSOCIATED PRESS 28 JUN 09) ... Kwang-Tae Kim

SEOUL, South Korea – After repudiating negotiations on dismantling its plutonium-based nuclear program, North Korea admitted this month to having an even more worrying way to make bombs.

PACIFIC:

33. 'Cha-Cha' Plotters Tap AFP

Plot On To Cut Ibrado's Term By October

(MANILA TIMES 29 JUN 09) ... Jefferson Antiporda

A plot was allegedly being hatched to shorten the term of Chief of Staff Victor Ibrado and to replace him with a general who would support changing the Constitution to allow President Gloria Arroyo stay in power after 2010.

AFRICA:

34. Somali Leader Says Islamists Use Child Soldiers

(REUTERS 28 JUN 09) ... Ibrahim Mohamed

MOGADISHU, - Somali President Sheik Sharif Ahmed accused hardline Al Shabaab Islamist rebels on Sunday of forcing children to fight in battles to oust his government in the Horn of Africa country.

OP-ED:

35. Understanding Iran: Repression 101

(*NEW YORK TIMES* 27 JUN 09) ... David E. Sanger

WASHINGTON — When the rallying cry on the streets of Tehran turned from “Death to America!” to the stranger-sounding “Death to the Dictator!” there was a great temptation to conclude that the days of the mullahs were numbered.

36. US Misunderstanding On Iran Lingers

(*ASIA TIMES* 27 JUN 09) ... Ali Gharib

WASHINGTON - After 30 years of enmity closed off most lines of communication, the recent crisis in Iran has suddenly engendered a boom of American interest in the Islamic Republic.

37. Do Not Forget Burma

(*WASHINGTON POST* 28 JUN 09) ... Laura Bush

For two weeks, the world has been transfixed by images of Iranians taking to the streets to demand the most basic human freedoms and rights. Watching these courageous men and women, I am reminded of a similar scene nearly two years ago in Burma, when tens of thousands of Buddhist monks peacefully marched through their nation's streets. They, too, sought to reclaim basic human dignity for all Burmese citizens, but they were beaten back by that nation's harsh regime.

OTHER:

38. Univ. Of Wisconsin Reaching Out To Military

(*MILITARY TIMES/AP* 28 JUN 09) ... Ryan J. Foley

MADISON, Wis. — The University of Wisconsin-Madison, which saw some of the fiercest Vietnam War protests in the nation, is shedding its long-standing antimilitary image by hiring a military historian and teaching a new course for military officers.

TOP STORIES:

1. Honduran Military Ousts President Ahead Of Vote

(WASHINGTON POST/AP Will Weissert and Freddy Cuevas

TEGUCIGALPA, Honduras -- Soldiers ousted the democratically elected president of Honduras on Sunday and Congress named a successor, but the leftist ally of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez denounced what he called an illegal coup and vowed to stay in power.

The first military takeover of a Central American government in 16 years drew widespread condemnation from governments in Latin America and the world, and Chavez vowed to overthrow the country's apparent new leader.

President Manuel Zelaya was awakened Sunday by gunfire and detained while still in his pajamas, hours before an unpopular constitutional referendum many saw as a power grab. An air force plane flew him into forced exile in Costa Rica as armored military vehicles with machine guns rolled through the streets of the Honduran capital and soldiers seized the national palace.

"I want to return to my country," Zelaya said in Costa Rica. "I am president of Honduras."

Congress voted to accept what it said was Zelaya's letter of resignation, with even Zelaya's former allies turning against him. Congressional leader Roberto Micheletti was sworn in to serve until Jan. 27 when Zelaya's term ends. Micheletti belongs to Zelaya's Liberal Party, but opposed the president in the referendum.

"My slogan will be the reconciliation of the grand family of Hondurans ... and a grand national dialogue," Micheletti said after Congress gave the military a long standing ovation.

Zelaya denied resigning and insisted he would serve out his term, even as the Supreme Court backed the military takeover and said it was a defense of democracy.

His ouster came hours before polls were to open on a constitutional referendum that Zelaya was pushing ahead even after the Supreme Court and the attorney general said it was illegal. The constitution bars changes to some of its clauses, such as the ban on a president serving more than one term, they said.

Some businesses in the capital, Tegucigalpa, closed earlier this week amid the rising tension, and many speculated there would be a coup. Those who opposed the referendum warned against voting, fearing violence at the polls.

Countries throughout Latin America and the world condemned Zelaya's expulsion, and Chavez said before Micheletti was sworn in that if he was appointed president, "we will overthrow him." Chavez said Venezuela "is at battle" and put his military on alert.

In Havana, Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez vowed to work with allies to push for Zelaya's return to power.

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He said Cuban Ambassador Juan Carlos Hernandez was held briefly in Tegucigalpa after he and other foreign diplomats tried unsuccessfully to prevent soldiers from taking away Honduran Foreign Minister Patricia Rodas.

Chavez said troops in Honduras temporarily detained the Venezuelan and Cuban ambassadors and beat them.

President Barack Obama said he was "deeply concerned" and U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said Zelaya's arrest should be condemned.

"I call on all political and social actors in Honduras to respect democratic norms, the rule of law and the tenets of the Inter-American Democratic Charter," Obama's statement read.

Coups were common in Central America for four decades reaching back to the 1950s, but Sunday's ouster was the first military power grab in Latin America since a brief, failed 2002 coup against Chavez. It was the first in Central America since military officials forced President Jorge Serrano of Guatemala to step down in 1993 after he tried to dissolve Congress and suspend the constitution.

"We thought that the long night of military dictatorships in Central America was over," said Costa Rican President Oscar Arias, who sat beside Zelaya at a news conference.

Zelaya told the Venezuela-based Telesur network that he was awoken by gunshots and the shouts of his security guards, who he said resisted troops for at least 20 minutes. Still in his pajamas, he jumped out of bed and ducked behind an air conditioner to avoid the bullets, he said.

He said eight to 10 soldiers in masks escorted him onto an air force plane that took him to Costa Rica.

Zelaya said he would attend a scheduled meeting of Central American presidents in Nicaragua on Monday and that Chavez, who also plans to attend, would provide transportation.

Zelaya called on Honduran soldiers to back him, urged citizens to take to the streets in peaceful protests, and asked Honduran police to protect demonstrators.

About 100 supporters congregated in front of locked gates outside the national palace, where they hurled rocks at soldiers and shouted "Traitors! Traitors!" They hung a Honduran flag.

"They kidnapped him like cowards," screamed Melissa Gaitan. Tears streamed down the face of the 21-year-old, who works at the government television station. "We have to rally the people to defend our president."

The vote did not take place on the referendum, which asked whether another vote should be held on convoking an assembly to rewrite the constitution.

2. Honduran President Ousted In Coup; Replacement Is Named

The Head Of The Honduran Congress, A Foe Of President Manuel Zelaya, Is Named Acting President. Global Outcry Against The Coup Is Growing.

(LOS ANGELES TIMES 28 JUN 09) ... Tracy Wilkinson and Alex Renderos

Reporting from Mexico City and San Salvador -- Honduran army troops seized President Manuel Zelaya early today and sent the leftist president into exile in a coup reminiscent of Latin America's unstable past. Later, a hastily

convened Honduran Congress voted to replace Zelaya with one of his fiercest opponents.

Roberto Micheletti, head of the Congress, was named acting president even as world condemnation of the coup grew.

The military action followed weeks of confrontation between Zelaya and conservative forces in Honduras that came to a head over possible changes to the nation's constitution. Zelaya had scheduled a referendum for today to measure support for the changes, including one that would allow the president to be re-elected. The vote was canceled.

"This has been a brutal kidnapping," Zelaya told reporters in the Costa Rican capital of San Jose. He said he was roused from his bed by masked army officers who shouted, fired warning shots and pointed a gun to his chest and head. Still in his pajamas, he said, he was hauled away to an aircraft, in which he was flown to Costa Rica.

Zelaya declared that he remained the president of Honduras and called on international support to "defend democracy."

Troops moved through the Honduran capital, Tegucigalpa, and surrounded the presidential palace and other government buildings. The state television network was off the air as hundreds of angry Honduran citizens poured into the streets and shouted support for Zelaya.

Army leaders opposed the referendum vote, which they, Congress and election officials said was illegal. In response, Zelaya last week fired the top military commander and then ignored a Supreme Court order to reinstate him.

President Obama, in a statement issued by the White House, said he was "deeply concerned" about the developments.

"As the Organization of American States did on Friday, I [Return to Index](#)

3. British Fury As Iran Takes Embassy Men Hostage

(LONDON TIMES 29 JUN 09) ... Martin Fletcher

Britain reacted angrily yesterday to the arrest of at least eight Iranians working for the British Embassy in Tehran, calling the move unacceptable "harassment and intimidation".

The eight, who are thought to work in the embassy's political section, are accused of playing a "significant role" in opposition protests. Their detention has dismayed Western governments. EU foreign ministers demanded the release of the eight and said that intimidation of their diplomatic staff in Tehran would provoke a "strong and collective response". Sources told The Times that if Britain was forced to close its embassy the 26 other EU states would probably follow suit.

David Miliband, the Foreign Secretary, said: "These are hard-working diplomatic staff and the idea that the British Embassy is somehow behind the demonstrations and protests that have been taking place in Tehran in recent weeks is wholly without foundation."

Sources close to Mr Miliband said that the Foreign Secretary's carefully calibrated message masked a deep anger at what is considered a cynical attempt by Iran's rulers to distract attention from their domestic problems.

About 2,000 supporters of Mir Hossein Mousavi, the challenger to President Ahmadinejad in the election, have been arrested and hundreds more are believed missing.

Iranian sources said that the eight arrested worked for the embassy's political section, although the Foreign and Commonwealth Office would not confirm that. They do not have diplomatic immunity. Four were later released, but one Iranian analyst feared that the others could be forced to "confess" that they had conspired against the Government in Tehran.

call on all political and social actors in Honduras to respect democratic norms, the rule of law and the tenets of the Inter-American Democratic Charter," the president said. "Any existing tensions and disputes must be resolved peacefully through dialogue free from any outside interference."

Honduran Foreign Minister Patricia Rodas called on the public to support the missing president. "We will fight in the streets for the president to return to Honduras," she said. "We will resist until he returns."

Janina del Veccio, minister of security for Costa Rica, confirmed that Zelaya was in her country. She told CNN that the president said he had been kidnapped from his bedroom and bundled into an aircraft, in which he was flown to Costa Rica.

Xiomara de Zelaya, the president's wife, told a television network that soldiers fired shots as they swept into the presidential residence before dawn. "They beat him and took him away," she said, adding that the rest of the family was scattered but unharmed.

Latin America had been the site of a series of army takeovers in the '60s and '70s but had since moved solidly into civilian democratic rule. Zelaya is one of a new crop of leftist presidents who have been elected in recent years in Latin America.

Another of them, Hugo Chavez of Venezuela, said today, referring to the coup: "This is a troglodyte act of the 19th century."

The British Embassy employs about 100 Iranians in roles ranging from political advisers, consular officials and translators to security guards.

In February the British Council had to suspend its operations in Tehran after the regime intimidated its 16 Iranian staff and forced them to resign.

The arrests are the latest move in Iran's concerted campaign to paint those challenging President Ahmadinejad's re-election as pawns of Britain and Western powers determined to destroy the Islamic republic.

In recent days Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the Supreme Leader, had labelled Britain the "most treacherous" of those powers. Two unnamed British diplomats and the BBC's Tehran correspondent have been expelled; officials have accused British intelligence and its Iranian "stooges" of fomenting the unrest; and a British-Greek journalist has been arrested.

Iran demonstrated in 2007 its willingness to provoke Britain when its forces arrested 15 British naval personnel in the Shatt al-Arab waterway. They were held for 12 days.

Last week Ahmed Khatami, a hardline cleric close to the regime, used a nationally televised sermon at Friday prayers in Tehran to attack Britain: "In this unrest, Britons have behaved very mischievously and it is fair to add the slogan of 'Down with England' to the slogan of 'Down with USA'."

Gholam Hossein Mohseini Ejei, Iran's Intelligence Minister, accused some British Embassy staff of mingling with protest crowds. He accused Britain and the US of wanting to carry out a "velvet revolution" in Iran but said that this was impossible.

"People are wise and they are very close to their system," he said.

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CHAIRMAN'S TRAVEL:

4. Chairman Sees Opportunity In Struggles Shared With Russia

(AFPS 28 JUN 09) ... Samantha L. Quigley

Moscow, Russia -The United States and Russia's shared struggles offer great opportunities, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff said today during an address at Russia's Military Academy of the General Staff in Moscow.

"We must seize these opportunities and learn from each other," Navy Adm. Mike Mullen said. "Instead of merely settling for a relationship defined by differences, we have the opportunity to forge one based on mutual respect and the realization that our joint leadership must continue to be a cornerstone of security and stability for the world."

Today, the two countries' shared history and challenges bring them closer together, he said. But there are more significant challenges ahead.

The spreading extremist insurgency in and around Afghanistan requires a regional approach. Nuclear proliferation in North Korea, the prospect of nuclear arms in Iran, and a global terrorist threat requires international efforts to overcome, he added.

"Today we live in a time of extraordinary change," Mullen said. "Our rapidly changing battlefields range from cyberspace to wherever terrorists might strike next."

"As globalization, energy needs and economics shape our shared future, we as military leaders, must likewise adapt," he added.

But even military leaders look to their warriors to make their visions reality. The two best warriors the United States and Russia have were not recently discovered on the battlefield, but written about decades ago.

"In his classic work 'War and Peace,' Tolstoy wrote that the strongest of all warriors are these two, time and patience," Mullen said. "What Tolstoy knew then as our current struggle against violent extremism teaches us now that only our most deliberate and persistent efforts will take hold and root."

The two countries have emerged from more than 40 years

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5. Top US Officer Says Iraqis Ready For Handover

(VOICE OF AMERICA 28 JUN 09) ... Al Pessin

The United States' top military officer says he believes Iraqi forces are ready to take full control of their country's cities on Tuesday, as called for in the U.S.-Iraq security agreement. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mike Mullen spoke to reporters traveling with him in Europe.

In a conversation with a small group of reporters, Admiral Mike Mullen was asked whether he is confident the Iraqi forces can handle the duties they are about to take on.

"I am, and I take that from not only my own interaction there, which is infrequent, but really the reports I get back routinely and the leaders I talk to, not just General Odierno but others that have that confidence as well," Mullen said. "They're going to need some support. They're going to need some enablers. But the United States military leadership in Iraq is confident that they can do that."

of Cold War with a new opportunity for increased and unprecedented cooperation on the challenges they face, he said. The United States and Russia share more than common dangers, however.

Members of each country's military share the traditions of selfless service to a greater good, a boundless love for their countries and the desire to create better lives and a brighter world for their families, he said.

"In this very room sit the future military leaders who will see this way ahead," Mullen said. "Now is the time. Here is the place for the armed forces of Russia and the United States to commit themselves to a new and better relationship, a relationship forged in trust and founded on our common desire to secure our citizens from harm."

"It is a new world out there, a new era. We need to rise to meet it," he said. "Let us pledge to each other that, though we may not always see this world in quite the same way, we will nevertheless see our way clear to dialogue and discussion and debate."

It is from these things that understanding and cooperation come, he said.

"It encourages me to know that my counterpart, General of the Army [Nikolai] Makarov, shares my belief in the power of our present opportunity," Mullen said.

Mullen, who left for Russia on June 24, will round out his weeklong trip with a stop in Poland for talks with his counterpart there. He'll also stop in Stuttgart, Germany, where he and Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates will preside over the European Command's change of command ceremony. Army Gen. John Craddock will turn over EUCOM's reins to Navy Adm. James G. Stavridis at Husky Field on Patch Barracks on June 30.

U.S. and other international forces will continue to provide air support to the Iraqi forces, as well as help with logistics, reconnaissance and other functions that enable combat troops and local police to do their jobs.

Al-Qaida and other insurgent groups have already begun an expected surge in attacks to challenge the new arrangement. Admiral Mullen says he is concerned, but his commander in Iraq, and the former commander who now heads all U.S. military operations in the region, tell him the Iraqi forces are ready.

"All the engagement I've had with General (Ray) Odierno and General (David) Petraeus is (that) the Iraqi security forces are ready to do this," Mullen said. "We've been out of many of the cities for, I think, well over a year. Baghdad and Mosul are the two biggest challenges that we have right now. We're in a

tough fight in Mosul, but the leaders have a plan to get through that. And I think we will."

Admiral Mullen accepted some harsh comments by Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, who referred to the coming handover of the cities as a victory over occupiers. But the admiral was more focused on the prime minister's comments after the recent attacks, in which he did his best to prevent al-Qaida from sparking another outbreak of sectarian violence.

"I was happy to see the prime minister respond so strongly because I think that leadership is critical, and the leadership of the Iraqi security forces," Mullen said. "And if we're going to get this right in the future, it's clearly going to be up to them."

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HONDURAS:

6. Honduran President Is Ousted In Coup

(NEW YORK TIMES 28 JUN 09) ... Elisabeth Malkin

MEXICO CITY — The Honduran president, Manuel Zelaya, was ousted by the army on Sunday after pressing ahead with plans for a referendum that opponents said could lay the groundwork for his eventual re-election, in the first military coup in Central America since the end of the cold war.

Soldiers entered the presidential palace in the capital, Tegucigalpa, and disarmed the presidential guard early Sunday, military officials said. Mr. Zelaya's private secretary, Eduardo Enrique Reina, confirmed the arrest.

Mr. Zelaya flew into exile in Costa Rica, telling a local television station, "They are creating a monster they will not be able to contain."

Much of the capital was without electricity on Sunday and residents stood on long lines to buy kerosene for home generators. Military tanks patrolled the streets and military planes flew overhead. Soldiers were on guard at all the main government buildings and military trucks dropped off police at strategic crossings throughout the city, residents said.

Political tensions have increased in recent weeks, as Mr. Zelaya pressed ahead with plans for a nonbinding referendum that opponents said would open the way for him to rewrite the constitution to run for re-election despite a one-term limit.

In the weeks leading up to the referendum, supporters and opponents of the president held competing demonstrations.

Last week, the Supreme Court and Congress both declared the referendum unconstitutional. But on Thursday, the president led a group of protesters to an air force installation and seized the ballots, which the prosecutor's office and the electoral tribunal had ordered confiscated.

After the armed forces commander, Romeo Vazquez, said that the military would not participate in the referendum, Mr. Zelaya fired him. But the Supreme Court declared the firing

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7. Honduran Coup Early Test For Obama's Latam Policy

(REUTERS 28 JUN 09)

WASHINGTON - The Honduran military's ouster of President Manuel Zelaya on Sunday could be an early test for U.S. President Barack Obama as he tries to mend the United

Admiral Mullen notes that, overall, violence in Iraq is down substantially from recent years, but he acknowledges more violence is possible.

"I'm optimistic, not naïve, about the challenges," Mullen said. "There are lots of them. And we need to not lose focus on Iraq in any way, shape or form."

That will be a key challenge for the admiral and other U.S. officials, as they stress that their priority now is Afghanistan, where U.S. forces are just starting to implement a new strategy aimed at applying hard lessons learned through years of bloodshed in Iraq to what has been a difficult and even longer fight.

illegal.

President Obama said Sunday that he was deeply concerned by the reports from Honduras about the detention and expulsion of the president.

"I call on all political and social actors in Honduras to respect democratic norms, the rule of law and the tenets of the Inter-American Democratic charter," Mr. Obama said in a statement. "Any existing tensions and disputes must be resolved peacefully through dialogue free from any outside interference."

Administration officials said the president spoke with his national security adviser, Gen. James Jones, about the situation and was receiving updates throughout the day. The call from Mr. Obama echoed a statement from the Organization of American States on Friday.

Mr. Zelaya, who has the support of labor unions and the poor, is an ally of President Hugo Chávez of Venezuela. During his three years in office, opposition to the president has mounted from the middle class and the wealthy business community who fear that he is planning to introduce Mr. Chávez's brand of socialist populism into the country, one of Latin America's poorest.

Opponents of Mr. Zelaya charged that he was following the example of Mr. Chávez, who has repeatedly called Venezuelans to the polls to approve his re-election.

Mr. Chávez was quick to react to the events unfolding in Honduras. In comments to Telesur, the regional news network backed by Venezuela's government, he said: "Behind these soldiers is the Honduran bourgeoisie, the rich who converted Honduras into a banana republic, a military and political base for the North American empire."

States' battered image in Latin America, a regional expert said.

"This is a golden opportunity to make a clear break with the past and show that he is unequivocally siding with

democracy, even if they (Washington) don't necessarily like the guy," former Costa Rican Vice President Kevin Casas-Zamora told Reuters in Washington.

Shortly after news of the coup broke, Obama issued a statement expressing his "deep concern" at Honduran troops arresting Zelaya at his residence and exiling him to Costa Rica. The leftist president had angered the army, Congress and the courts by pushing for constitutional changes to allow presidential re-election.

Casas-Zamora said he had heard reports that the U.S. State Department had got wind of plans for a coup and had tried to prevent it, but this could not be independently confirmed.

Obama's statement urged Hondurans to resolve the dispute peacefully but did not explicitly call for Zelaya's reinstatement as president. A senior administration official said later, however, that the United States recognized only Zelaya's government as legitimate.

"He is still the legitimate president. Obama should demand that he be reinstated. That is very important. Given the political history of Latin America, the commitment of the United States to democracy has been questionable," said Casas-Zamora, now a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution think tank in Washington.

U.S. DENIES INVOLVEMENT

Obama won praise from Latin American leaders after promising at a Summit of the Americas in April to improve ties and break from past U.S. policies in the region.

Washington supported a number of coups and military governments in Central America and South America during the Cold War as it sought to curb the spread of Communism.

In the post-Cold War era, relations between leftist Latin

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8. Cuba Condemns Honduras Coup As "Criminal, Brutal"

(REUTERS 28 JUN 09)

HAVANA - Cuba on Sunday condemned the military coup in Honduras as "criminal, brutal" and demanded the immediate return to office of deposed leftist President Manuel Zelaya.

The Honduran army ousted Zelaya and exiled him on Sunday in Central America's first military coup since the Cold War, after he upset the military by proposing an extension of his four-year term in office.

"I denounce the criminal, brutal character of this coup," Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez told a news conference in Havana.

Zelaya is viewed by Cuba's communist leadership as a leftist ally and former Cuban leader Fidel Castro had expressed backing for his efforts to hold an unofficial public vote on Sunday to gauge support for his plan to hold a November referendum on allowing presidential re-election.

"This coup has removed a legitimate and constitutional government simply for wanting to carry out a consultation ... in Honduras there is only one constitutional government, one constitutional president who should return immediately without conditions to the palace," Rodriguez said.

The Cuban foreign minister also denounced what he called the violent treatment by Honduran troops of several

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American governments and the United States took a dive under former President George W. Bush, who was in office from 2001 until he was succeeded by Obama in January.

Venezuela's Hugo Chavez accused Washington of backing a coup against him in 2002 and last year followed Bolivia's lead by expelling the U.S. ambassador to Caracas. The United States responded by expelling Venezuela's envoy, but under Obama, Venezuela and the United States moved last week to reinstate their ambassadors.

In 2002, the Bush administration initially welcomed Chavez's brief ouster but denied taking part.

With that history in mind, Zelaya called on the United States in a television interview to clarify what role it had played in his ouster. Chavez also said there should be an investigation to see if Washington had a hand in the coup.

The White House denied any U.S. involvement in the action.

The United States has about 550-600 troops stationed at Soto Cano Air Base in Honduras who conduct counter narcotics, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations.

While former President Bill Clinton dispatched troops to Haiti after a military junta installed itself in a coup there in 1994, Casas-Zamora said he doubted Obama was considering intervening militarily in Honduras.

"They are going to take the matter to the OAS (Organization of American States). They are going to put a lot of pressure on them (the military) to reinstate the president," he said.

(Additional reporting by David Morgan in Washington and Frank Jack Daniel in Caracas, Editing by Frances Kerry)

foreign ambassadors in Tegucigalpa, specifically those of Cuba and Venezuela.

Earlier, Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez said Honduran soldiers took away the Cuban ambassador and left the Venezuelan ambassador on the side of a road after beating him during the coup. The Cuban ambassador was later released.

Rodriguez said the Cuban, Venezuelan and Nicaraguan ambassadors in Tegucigalpa had been seeking to give diplomatic shelter to Zelaya's Foreign Minister Patricia Rodas when a band of Honduran soldiers, their faces hooded, had tried to take her away. He said he was extremely concerned for her safety.

Chavez on Sunday put troops on alert over the coup in Honduras and said he would respond militarily if his envoy to the Central American country was kidnapped or killed.

Rodriguez said there were 84 people, including diplomats, women and children, at the Cuban embassy in Tegucigalpa and said Cuba was "ready to defend the integrity of our embassy".

(Reporting by Marc Frank, Editing by Pascal Fletcher and Philip Barbara)

9. Chavez: CIA Behind Coup In Honduras

(PERIODICO, CUBA 28 JUN 09)

CARACAS, - Venezuelan President, Hugo Chavez requested Sunday that US President Barack Obama, to be pronounced against the military coup in Honduras, which he considered is carried out with the participation of the Central Intelligence Agency.

In statements to television channel Telesur, Chavez stated that he rejected the coup "right from its bone marrow" and asked the Honduran military troops not to face the people that went out to the streets to request the return of President Manuel Zelaya.

"The United States has a lot to do with this, Obama should be pronounced to reject the coup right from the marrow," the Venezuelan leader stated.

He specified that elements, such as the fact that the Honduran press media are broadcasting cartoons instead of information, corresponds with the format of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) for the coup.

The format is to misinform the people, if it were not for Telesur that is locating in the heroic level in this battle, the images of the coup would not be transmitting, Chavez said.

The South American leader assured that behind the coup, it is the bourgeoisie and the rich people that transformed Honduras into a banana republic, a political, military and terrorist base of the US and of the US empire.

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Chávez added that the coup was caused because he wanted to consult the people and asked the military troops to meditate and not to generate a genocide.

He also said that the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA), of which nine countries are already members, among them Honduras and Venezuela, are in consultation and elaborating an anticoup strategy.

Related

° President Hugo Chavez to Travel to Extraordinary ALBA Summit on Situation in Honduras

EUROPE:

10. EU Warns Tehran Over Detained British Embassy Staff

(DEUTSCHE WELLE 28 JUN 09)

Iran is accusing the British Embassy of inciting riots on the streets of Tehran. The European Union agreed on Sunday that intimidation and harassment of European diplomatic staff by Iran in Tehran would be met with a "strong and collective response."

Speaking at an informal EU foreign ministers meeting, Czech Foreign Minister Jan Kohout, whose country currently holds the rotating EU presidency, called on Iranian authorities to release all embassy local staff.

"We have made clear to Iranian authorities that the arrest and intimidation of foreign and Iranian staff working at EU embassies will be met with a strong and collective response," Kohout said.

At least 25 people have been killed during crackdowns by Iranian police and religious militia in recent demonstrations which erupted over alleged vote rigging in Iran's June 12 presidential election.

Kohout said that while the EU respected Iran's sovereignty it was concerned about the ongoing internal political crisis.

"The EU strongly denounces arbitrary arrests and repression against members of the civil society...we call on authorities to stop the hostilities against EU member states and to release an EU journalist still in custody," he said.

Immediate release requested

Street protests have ebbed in Iran, but the anger remains

On Sunday, police arrested eight Iranians working for the British Embassy in Tehran, claiming they played a role in the post-election riots.

British Foreign Secretary David Miliband said the ministers at a meeting on the Greek island of Corfu unanimously called for the immediate release of British embassy local staff detained by Iranian authorities.

Iran has repeatedly accused Britain and the United States of stoking the unrest that swept the country after the June 12 election, which returned hardline President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to power amid complaints or irregularities at the polls.

The international community continues to voice alarm at the violent crackdown on opposition protesters in the election aftermath, but the Iranian government has hit back, accusing Western nations - particularly the United States, Britain, France and Germany - of meddling in the country's internal affairs.

Opposition leaders reject partial recount

Mir Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karubi, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's strongest rivals in the June 12 vote, have insisted that the election be annulled, while demanding an independent probe into allegations of fraud.

The opposition is up against a triumvirate of power

Iran's ruling clergy have declared Ahmadinejad the winner and ruled out holding a new election.

The country's top electoral body, the Guardian Council, headed by Ahmed Jannati, has proposed a recount of ten percent of the ballots.

Mousavi said on Sunday that "the most suitable solution to restore public confidence" would be a nullification of the results and a new round of polling.

Karroubi has called for a panel to probe irregularities, saying "if an independent panel is set up by the Guardian Council with full responsibility to investigate all aspects of the election, I will welcome it and later nominate my representative."

Meanwhile, the streets of the capital, Tehran, remain quiet with the country's supreme leader, Ayatollah Khamenei,

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11. West Skeptical On Russian Security Plan For Europe

(REUTERS 28 JUN 09) ... David Brunnstrom and Ingrid Melander

CORFU, Greece - The West told Russia on Sunday that its proposal for a pan-Europe security pact must not undermine NATO or a continental security and human rights group.

Greek Foreign Minister Dora Bakoyanni, after a meeting of foreign ministers of the 56-nation Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, said discussion of Moscow's proposal had been "frank" -- diplomatic shorthand for sharp disagreement.

"We don't need a new structure. We have many at our disposal -- U.N., EU, OSCE, Council of Europe. We have the principles, we have the structures, let's strengthen them," French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner told reporters.

The ministerial meeting of the OSCE grouping European nations, the United States and Canada, took place against a backdrop of tension between the West and Russia over Georgia.

Moscow, for its part, is concerned at NATO expansion, possibly into former Soviet territory and U.S. plans for a missile shield in central Europe.

Russia sent troops into Georgia, a NATO "partner" country, last August to prevent Tbilisi retaking a rebel region. Though the U.S.-led alliance and Russia on Saturday agreed to restore formal ties frozen after the five-day war, suspicions linger.

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev has said Cold War-era institutions like NATO are unable to ease friction in a multipolar world. "Security can be either common or illusory," his foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, said last week.

Medvedev's proposed Treaty on European Security would
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12. Merkel Shifts Nuclear Stance, Backs Electric Cars To Win Votes

(BLOOMBERG 29 JUN 09) ... Tony Czuca

June 29 -- Chancellor Angela Merkel's party shifted ground on nuclear power and said it wants to make Germany a nation of electric-car drivers, signaling an attempt to broaden its appeal to voters in Sept. 27 national elections.

Merkel's Christian Democratic Union and its Bavarian sister party, the Christian Social Union, ruled out building nuclear plants for the first time in a campaign platform agreed on in Berlin yesterday. While the blueprint sticks to a policy of extending the lifespan of existing plants, it describes nuclear power as merely a "bridge" to greater use of renewable energy.

"The language can be interpreted so broadly that everyone can agree with it -- supporters of nuclear power as well as opponents," Karin Brinkmann, an energy analyst at Unicredit Group in Munich, said in a phone interview. Party delegates will vote on the joint platform at a convention in Berlin today.

warning that the authorities would suppress any further protests over the vote, which triggered the worst unrest since the 1979 Islamic revolution.

At least 17 people have been killed in clashes with security forces and police have rounded up scores of reformist leaders, journalists and political activists.

grant equal status to participating countries, rule out military alliances adopting policies detrimental to the security of the other parties, and deny any country or alliance the right to maintain peace and stability on the continent.

European Union officials said after the meeting on Corfu that delegates agreed to weigh new pan-European security scenarios, but that nothing could replace NATO or the OSCE.

Bakoyanni, whose country currently holds the chair of the OSCE, said work would continue to find new ways of meeting European security challenges. Progress would be reviewed at an OSCE summit in Athens in December, she said.

STALEMATE OVER GEORGIA

There was no progress to break a deadlock over OSCE peace monitors in Georgia. Their mission expires on Tuesday and Moscow has blocked a decision to extend their presence by insisting on recognition of independence for Georgia's pro-Moscow, breakaway South Ossetia region and a separate OSCE mandate there.

EU officials fear the monitors' departure could reignite fighting, with Russian forces still in parts of Georgia.

"(This is) maybe the beginning of a serious process in which we will take a look at the architecture of security in Europe," EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana said outside the meeting.

"There are many (aspects of security) we can develop further (but) without putting at risk the basic structures that have provided fantastic stability for many, many years," the former NATO secretary-general said, alluding to NATO and the OSCE.

Seeking re-election during Germany's worst recession since World War II, Merkel is casting a wide net in a bid to ditch her Social Democratic coalition partners and ally with the pro-business Free Democrats. Polls suggest she has the support to reach that goal, yet Merkel is taking nothing for granted after her vote collapsed in the final weeks of the 2005 campaign.

Merkel and her Social Democratic challenger, Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, are locked in a struggle to attract voters as the global recession hurts foreign sales that account for one in every third job in Germany, the world's biggest exporter.

'Depend on Me'

"We have the strength to lead our country out of a crisis the likes of which the Federal Republic has never seen," Merkel said yesterday after the CDU/CSU national executive board met. "People can depend on me."

Merkel's campaign platform includes plans for what she called "moderate" tax cuts: paring the lowest income-tax bracket to 12 percent from 14 percent and raising the threshold for the 45 percent top rate to 60,000 euros (\$85,000) from 52,000 euros.

The program aims to build on Germany's automotive expertise to make it a "world leader" in electric cars. A model region will be identified to develop electric-car technology, with the aim of putting at least 1 million vehicles on the road by 2020.

While Merkel and German utilities want to overturn a policy backed by the Social Democrats to close Germany's 17 nuclear plants by about 2021, the Christian Democrats watered down their stand on nuclear energy compared to 2005, said Gerd Langguth, a University of Bonn political scientist and Merkel biographer.

'Open to All'

"This platform is meant to signal that the Christian Democrats are open to all parties, except the Left" led by former Finance Minister Oskar Lafontaine, Langguth said in an interview.

Merkel, a former environment minister under Chancellor Helmut Kohl, renewed her support for nuclear power in a June 24 speech to an energy industry conference, while adding it "will not solve all our problems."

"Nuclear is part of the future," Lars Josefsson, chief executive officer of Vattenfall, said in a June 24 interview. "I'm sure it's going to be discussed over the next years, but

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IRAQ:

13. U.S. Commander Says Iraq Forces Ready

(NEW YORK TIMES 28 JUN 09) ... Derrick Henry

Gen. Ray Odierno, the American commander in Iraq, said on Sunday that Iraq's military and police units are ready to operate on their own, ahead of Tuesday's deadline for the withdrawal of American combat troops from Iraq's cities and towns.

"I do believe they're ready," General Odierno said on CNN's "State of the Union" from Baghdad. "They've been working towards this for a long time. And security remains good."

American troop strength will remain at roughly 130,000 until next September, most of them living in operating bases away from cities. The Iraqis will be able to call on those troops if needed, but there will be pressure to make sure that doesn't happen too much.

Mr. Odierno, who also appeared on "Fox News Sunday," said that he had seen "constant improvement" in the security force and governance in the region despite some high-profile attacks in the last week.

On Wednesday, four days after the American base in Sadr City closed, a bomb killed at least 76 people and wounded more than 150 in a market in the neighborhood. And on Thursday, at least seven bombs exploded around the country in what appeared to be a message from extremists.

The deadline has worried some Iraqi officers and provoked uncertainty among average Iraqis who worry that the withdrawal of American troops will invite more violence.

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how that's going to turn out, I don't know at the moment."

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development revised down its outlook for Germany June 24, saying the Europe's largest economy will manage only 0.2 percent growth in 2010 after shrinking 6.1 percent this year.

Latest Polls

Merkel's bloc has benefited the most of the coalition parties from its handling of the crisis. The CDU/CSU shed one percentage point to 35 percent support compared to 24 percent for Steinmeier's Social Democrats, also down one point, an Infratest poll showed June 26. The Free Democrats led by Guido Westerwelle had 15 percent, enough to form a coalition with Merkel's party. Infratest polled 1,000 voters June 23-24 with a margin of error of as much as 3 percentage points.

The Social Democrats backed a campaign platform on June 15 including plans to raise the top rate of income tax to 47 percent while cutting the level at which it kicks in; cut the lowest tax rate to 10 percent; and introduce a universal minimum wage. Steinmeier also championed state aid for companies where jobs are at risk.

In 2005, Merkel saw a 23 point lead over then Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder's party shrink to a single point, forcing her into a grand coalition with her Social Democratic rivals at the expense of her favored ally, the Free Democrats.

"We will do our utmost to get such a coalition and to ensure Angela Merkel stays chancellor," CSU leader and Bavarian Prime Minister Horst Seehofer told reporters.

Brig. Gen. Mahmoud Muhsen, a commander with the First Division of the Iraqi National Police, has said that sectarian violence could return. He also warned that control of Iraq's borders remained ineffective, allowing more foreign fighters to enter.

Meanwhile, Qassim Daoud, an independent Shiite legislator and former national security adviser, said that the Status of Forces Agreement between Iraq and the United States should be extended to 2020 or 2025. The agreement, which the Iraqi Parliament ratified in November 2008, calls for American troops to pull out of most Iraqi cities by this summer and sets the end of 2011 as the date by which the last American troops must leave the country.

General Odierno said that if Iraqi forces do seek help after the deadline, any responses would be coordinated within the bounds of the security agreement.

"We agreed to abide by Iraqi sovereignty," General Odierno said. "So everything that we do today is transparent."

Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki has called the withdrawal of American troops from Iraqi cities as a "great victory," a repulsion of foreign occupiers. However, General Odierno said he did not agree with that view.

"That's not exactly how I read it," he said on "Fox News Sunday." "They're seeing it as a progression in their capacities, and I think that's the important point."

14. Gen Odierno On Fox News

(FOX NEWS 28 JUN 09) ... Transcript from Fox News Site

"years ago today the US transferred sovereignty to Iraq. And a few days from now US troops will withdraw from all major cities in Iraq here to talk about these milestone. Commanding officer in charge general Ray Odierno we comes to a slot from Baghdad general welcome to FOX News Sunday. Thank you -- General William make the deadline of June 30 to pull US troops out of major cities inside Iraq. Well Brett -- we've already -- met the deadline we have already moved out of the cities have been slowly doing it over the last eight months. In the final units have moved out of the cities over the last several weeks. So there are more than 130000. US troops still on the ground in Iraq and in recent days there has been. Serious uptick in violence. At least 200 people killed in in recent days in these spectacular attacks. What is happening with this recent uptick in violence in your thing."

" Well again I would say that overall stability in Iraq remains good. What we've had is we've had some extremist elements trying to bring attention to themselves. As well as divert attention from the progress being made in Iraq and so we've seen a couple high profile attacks. Aimed at the aimed at innocent civilians. I think what this is done frankly is what the aero. Iraqi citizens against these groups. And I think you'll pardon them and supporting them and frankly I believe we'll make it much more difficult for them to continue to operate inside of Iraq over the long term. Turn on April you said that this deadline might have to shift based on what you are seeing on the ground. What changed for you'd be able to get to this point. Yep well bred in May we had the lowest level for instance we've ever had on record in Iraq in the end in the first. Three weeks of June we do as well you've seen a slight uptick this past week with these high profile attacks but again I would say. These are just extremist elements that are attempting to bring attention to themselves. And I I think this is the right time for us to turn responsibility over to the Iraqis."

" Understanding that this is part of the agreement that the US signed with Iraq. Are the Iraqis ready how confident argue that they can handle the task of providing security in these cities."

" But I'm fairly confident -- obviously you're working in close partnership with them for very long time we've seen constant improvement. An Iraqi Security Forces over the last two years. We've also seen improvement in local governments and provincial governance we've seen some improvement in the federal government. We've also seen the resilience of the citizens in the fact that they want the Iraqi Security Forces to take over security and I think all these factors. Combined with the continued improvement. In overall stability and security makes this the right time for us to turn this over to the Iraqi Security Forces. "

" General Iraqi prime minister nori Al Maliki calls this a great victory for the Iraqis he described it as a -- whole ocean of the foreign occupiers. He compares it to the rebellion against British troops in 1920s. Now understanding he's playing to an Iraqi audience here ahead of an election in January. The US has spent hundreds of billions of dollars in Iraq we've lost one of 4300 men and women there you find this terminology. Acceptable."

" frankly that's not exactly how I read I believe this is a

celebration. We've seen the last few days as a talking about this as a celebration of Iraqi being able to Iraqis. Iraqi Security Forces being able to take over responsibility. Inside their cities and they're seeing and as a progression. In their capacities. And I think that's the important point and we've seen an emphasize more and more over the last several days while all Iraqi leaders both in the local press and an international pressure. And I think that's the appropriate tone. And I believe I agree -- and I think it is time for them. -- to take responsibility inside the cities he doesn't talk publicly about the American role of providing security what does he said privately to -- Well -- we've had a partnership we build a heart partnership here over the last two and happened three years. Through the search through the dark days here in Iraq when attacks war. Ten times what they are today when there are significant amount of more civilian casualties we worked very hard together. Two and -- this improvement has been sacrifices by Iraqi Security Forces the sacrifices by the coalition forces they recognize this. We are continuing this partnership. But it's time for this partnership to have an Iraqi league it's time for this partnership to have Iraqis up front it's time for us to support that."

" The rules of this agreement today barred US troops from. Using armored vehicles inside cities during the day there was a report to that effect. And is this possibly more dangerous for US troops in this different scenario being outside the city's."

" first there's nothing in the security agreement that bars us from using any type of vehicles. All our units have several sets of vehicles they have. Tanks Bradley humvees and wraps. The commanders get to decide which vehicles -- used based on the situation. That there and then that will not change. After the security agreement. I believe that with the coordination we've set in place with the trainers advisers are coordinating ailments we have established at each level of command. I believe we'll build and maintain the necessary. Oversight. And and situation awareness to protect our soldiers sailors airmen Marines as we continue operations general what's -- reaction inside Iraq to the situation on the ground in Iran its -- Well I think it's been so they're just watching. I don't think has been any overreaction. What I do believe though is that it gives them. A more confidence in their government in the fact that they just went through legitimate and credible elections to elect their provincial leaders. And the fact that they're going to go through. A credible and legitimate elections. Here for their national leaders in January. And that they will oversee those elections and they will have UN and international observers will validate those elections. And I think that will also encourage them to continue to move towards democracy. The couple quick questions are -- fears as the US. I -- I'm sure that some people have those fears. My assessment here. Is that Iraqis want to control their own destiny. They don't want anybody else filling that gap. So when we leave they won't they will we will leave and they will have the capability to do that they will not allow anyone else to come in here. And try to fill the gap instead they believe they are Nationalists. They want to control their own -- they they understand and want to have full sovereignty. Over their own country lastly general what's your biggest concern going

forward what makes you stay up -- night. Well I mean it it has to do with the potential political drivers of instability that remained. We still have much work to do in terms of our current relations. We still have. Reconciliation. To go through we've made some good steps towards reconciliation but they have to continue. Two. Address the area of reconciliation Iraq's I think it's these political issues. That will be the most important as we move towards the

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15. Iraq Steps Up Security Ahead Of US City Withdrawal

(ASSOCIATED PRESS 28 JUN 09) ... Patrick Quinn

BAGHDAD – Iraqi security forces bolstered checkpoints and banned motorcycles from the streets of Baghdad as they prepared Sunday for more violence before this week's withdrawal of U.S. combat troops from the capital and other cities and towns.

Despite the increased checks, a roadside bomb targeting a U.S. convoy in eastern Baghdad wounded six bystanders. It was unclear if anyone in the convoy was injured, police said.

A car bomb also exploded in the parking lot of a police academy in western Baghdad, killing one police officer and wounding six others, police said, speaking on condition of anonymity as they were not authorized to speak to the media.

Iraq's main Sunni political bloc joined Shiite Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki in describing the June 30 deadline for the U.S. withdrawal from urban areas as a turning point for the country.

Al-Maliki's government has declared Tuesday National Sovereignty Day and decreed a public holiday.

"June 30 is an important turning point on the civilian, security and political levels, and this is the feeling shared by all Iraqis," Salim al-Jubouri, spokesman for the Sunni Iraqi Accordance Front, said in a statement.

He also said "terrorist elements" would try to disrupt the withdrawal but added that Iraqi forces were capable of ensuring security. Although considerable progress has been made at reconciling Sunnis and Shiites, there is still a divide between the two Islamic sects that nearly brought the country to the brink of civil war in 2006-2007.

In Sunday's attacks, insurgents were apparently taking advantage of a major sandstorm that blanketed the capital and reduced visibility to just a few yards in some places.

Police banned all motorcycles from Baghdad's streets until further notice after motorcycles were used last week in three separate attacks that killed more than 100 people — including a June 24 bombing in the Shiite enclave of Sadr City that killed 78 people and wounded more than 100.

Iraqi officials have warned people to stay away from crowded places and al-Maliki appealed for national unity.

The top U.S. commander in Iraq, Gen. Ray Odierno, said the attacks ahead of Tuesday's pullout were aimed at diverting attention from the progress made by Iraqi security forces as

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16. Unease Mounts As U.S. Troops Leave Iraq's Cities

Some Residents Worry About End Of Boots-On-The-Ground Strategy Ahead Of Tuesday's Deadline For An American

(WALL STREET JOURNAL 29 JUN 09) ... Gina Chon

BAGHDAD -- American commanders and Iraqi officials and residents are watching with growing unease as U.S.

national elections. And I think these could cause some instability and that's what I worry about. What I hope -- it will be solved through politics and diplomatic measures and not through violence. General Odierno thanks for taking the time with us this morning thank you for your service. And good luck. Thank you very much credits and it's a pleasure to be with -- is more."

well as local and national government.

More than 250 people have been killed since June 20 in a spate of bombings that have marred Iraqi plans to celebrate the pullout of U.S. troops from cities as part of an agreement that will see all American forces out of the country by the end of 2011.

"I think these are some extremist elements who are trying to bring attention to their movement that's been fractured," Odierno said on CNN. "They're trying to use this timeframe and this date to first gain attention for themselves, and also to divert attention from the success of the Iraqi security forces."

Iraqi officials have blamed al-Qaida in Iraq for the attacks, and the U.S. military believes the terrorist group is struggling to regain a foothold after being beaten back over the past two years. U.S. military officials believe the group has plunged from thousands at its peak in 2006-2007 to hundreds now.

Odierno told CNN he believes that Iraqi forces are ready to take over and that it was the right time for the U.S. withdrawal.

There have been concerns that Iraqi forces will not be able to provide adequate security after U.S. combat troops completely pull out. Over the weekend, few if any of the more than 130,000 U.S. troops still in Iraq were visible in its cities, as most already pulled out of urban centers in recent weeks. They have assembled in large bases outside urban centers and will continue to conduct combat operations in rural areas and near the border.

"They've been working towards this for a long time. And security remains good," Odierno said. "We've seen constant improvement in the security force, we've seen constant improvement in governance. And I believe this is the time for us to move out of the cities and for them to take ultimate responsibility."

Sunday's sandstorm forced Baghdad's airport to close and delayed by a day Iraq's first oil bidding process in over 30 years because it prevented representatives of international oil companies from landing in the capital. Iraq had been planning to award eight oil and gas fields to international oil companies for long-term development on Monday and Tuesday.

combat forces end their duty in Iraq's urban areas this week, amid almost daily reports of violence.

U.S. officials worry that as they continue to battle the remnants of an insurgency and efforts to reignite sectarian strife, they will be losing critical, on-the-ground intelligence gleaned from the neighborhoods they once lived in and patrolled. The boots-on-the-ground approach was crucial to the Pentagon's mostly successful surge strategy in Baghdad.

Many Iraqis are still deeply suspicious of the sectarian leanings of the country's nascent security forces. For them, the pullout of American troops means the disappearance of an effective check on suspect Iraqi soldiers and police officers.

U.S. soldiers and Iraqi police leave their base for their last joint patrol in Khan Bani Saad, Iraq, ahead of Tuesday's deadline for the American pullback.

In Khadra, a neighborhood in western Baghdad, those fears are already playing out.

Earlier this month, American soldiers from the Army's 5th Squadron, 4th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division, handed over their base to an Iraqi unit. The same week, a local television station, Al-Sharqiya, reported that some residents believed the Iraqi army colonel in charge of the area was behind several kidnappings for ransom.

A few days later, the same station broadcast pictures of homes in Khadra that had been spray-painted with red check marks, X's and other symbols. One Khadra resident, who awoke one morning to find a big red X on the wall surrounding his home, said he thought the symbol had sectarian significance since it seemed, from talking to neighbors, that the mark appeared on homes belonging to Sunni families.

"We're very scared about the meaning of this," the Sunni resident said in an interview. "Maybe we will be targeted for something."

Tuesday is the deadline for American combat troops to withdraw from cities and move to bases outside population centers. The date was established in a security pact approved last year that also sets the deadline for the complete withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq at the end of 2011.

Iraqi officials have hailed the American pullout from Iraqi cities as a victory against insurgents. June 30 is an official holiday here.

But headline-grabbing attacks have increased. At least 200 Iraqis have been killed in the 10 days leading up to the June 30 deadline.

U.S. military spokesman Brig. Gen. Stephen Lanza acknowledged that with most U.S. combat forces pulling back to the big bases, American troops will mostly be getting their information from local sources.

"There is a chance we could be flying blind at times because we won't always be able to see with our own eyes what is going on," said one American officer. "But that's the chance we have to take with this transition."

More worrying for Iraqis is the sudden evacuation of a

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17. U.S. Troops Snubbed By Iraqi Forces

(USA TODAY 28 JUN 09) ... Aamer Madhani

ABU GHRAIB, Iraq — Iraqi army Col. Kassem Latif Jassim is convinced that he can get by with minimum support from U.S. forces.

"I really don't need them anymore," Jassim said about U.S. troops who are to patrol with him in a wide swath of rural land west of Baghdad. "I might need their support now and

force seen as a neutral buffer between Shiite and Sunni neighbors, and security forces long thought to have been infiltrated by Shiite militia. Top security officials have worked to root out personnel with sectarian agendas.

In Khadra, a largely Sunni, middle-class neighborhood, residents are worried about alleged sectarian leanings after reports this month on the Al-Sharqiya TV network. Khadra had once been seen as a stronghold for al Qaeda in Iraq, but security began improving after U.S. troops set up bases there in 2007. The area west of Khadra, however, is still believed to be an al Qaeda safe haven.

Iraqi Army Col. Khaim Rusin Rahim, head of the 6th Infantry Division's 3rd Battalion, denied the kidnapping accusations, saying the local TV station had a personal agenda against him. He said the markings were meant to show which homes were empty, and declined to comment further.

Col. Rahim, a Shia, said he is popular with the Sunni residents of Khadra. He showed a reporter a video of him going out in the neighborhood earlier this month and being greeted by residents with claps and banners hailing him.

"If the people were against me, why would they come out to greet me?" Col. Rahim said.

U.S. officers who were stationed at the base said they were unaware of the accusations against Col. Rahim and the markings on the homes, and would look into the matter.

But Capt. Maxwell Scott, an intelligence officer, and other officers, said the Iraqi soldiers largely worked on their own and "didn't really seem to need us anymore." They said that meant they wouldn't always know the details about what was going on in Khadra.

"We can't blame them, because this is about them taking over," Capt. Scott said. "And a lot of times, their intelligence is better than ours, anyway."

Still, many residents are uneasy. One Sunni resident, who had just moved back to Khadra three months ago after fleeing from an insurgent attack near his home last year, said he was worried about security again.

"I don't think our soldiers can control the situation," he said. "It's better to still have the Americans here. They are our quality assurance for our own forces."

Separately, the Iraqi Oil Ministry said Sunday it had pushed back by one day the announcement of winners of a closely watched oil-bidding round, citing a sandstorm that forced the shutdown of the Baghdad airport. The ministry said it will try to announce the awards on Tuesday.

The winners are to develop six existing oil fields and two gas fields, marking the first opening of the petroleum sector to Western companies since Iraq nationalized the industry in 1972.

BP PLC, Royal Dutch Shell PLC, Exxon Mobil Corp. and Total SA are among the 35 companies that qualified to bid.

then when there is a big operation, but I don't need them on the day-to-day."

Despite Jassim's confidence, thousands of U.S. troops have been shifted into rural areas, such as the one Jassim controls, before Tuesday's deadline for U.S. combat troops to leave control of urban areas to Iraqi forces.

U.S. soldiers shifted to Jassim's sector in southern Abu Ghraib have met some resistance from their Iraqi counterparts. When the Iraqis do agree to joint missions, they sometimes fail to show up, said Capt. Blu Kostelich, an officer with the 1st Battalion 63rd Armor Regiment.

"There seems to be this idea among the Iraqis that after June 30, coalition forces will sit back on the big bases and won't come out unless they call us," Kostelich said. "That's not what the security agreement says."

Under the security pact, U.S. forces can conduct combat operations in rural areas only with Iraqi security forces. They have more flexibility with non-combat operations — such as clearing roads of bombs and humanitarian missions — without Iraqis by their side. In practice, Lt. Col. Jim Bradford and other U.S. commanders want all missions to be joint.

One evening last week, Kostelich drove with his platoon to link up with an Iraqi army captain for a joint patrol set up by their leaders. When Kostelich arrived, the Iraqi officer wasn't wearing his uniform and said he hadn't been informed of the mission.

Kostelich wasn't able to persuade the Iraqi officer to go on patrol together, but the officer mentioned that he could use some bomb detection equipment.

"We really want to help (Iraqi forces) and get them where they need to be," Kostelich said. "But we can only help if they want to take it."

First Lt. Dan Grogan, 26, a platoon leader, said he's concerned that a diminished U.S. presence on the ground could lead to a setback in security.

Grogan noted that days after the U.S. military moved out of a station last week in Baghdad's Sadr City, a bombing there killed 78 people.

"When we're not partnering with them, they just don't seem to practice the same TTPs (tactics, techniques and procedures) that keep the insurgents from having the opportunity to strike," Grogan said. "You're going to see all the progress we've made go down the drain."

For the past two years, the area west of Baghdad has been

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fairly quiet. A 322-square-mile area stretching from western Baghdad to the outskirts of Fallujah has averaged less than two attacks per day since April, according to U.S. military statistics. But there has been a recent spike of violence in the area.

Last week, a car bomb exploded near a government building in Abu Ghraib, killing three Iraqi civilians and wounding three U.S. soldiers, Grogan said. U.S. soldiers have discovered several roadside bombs and weapons caches since moving into the area a few weeks ago.

Just beyond the western edge of Abu Ghraib, a bomb detonated late last month near a U.S. convoy heading to Baghdad, killing a senior State Department official, a Defense Department employee and a U.S. sailor.

"I think people have to realize that while it's getting better every day, there are still people out here capable and ready to do harm," said Bradford, commander of the 1st Battalion 63rd Armor Regiment.

Over the weekend, hundreds of U.S. and Iraqi soldiers fanned across southern Abu Ghraib to hunt for weapons caches and terrorist suspects. The mission was led by Jassim's unit, and the U.S. military played an advisory role.

Early in the operation, Jassim's soldiers rounded up a half-dozen suspects wanted on outstanding terrorism warrants. By mid-day, the operation seemed to fizzle.

Jassim told Bradford to meet him at one of his unit's outposts before going after more targets. He asked Bradford to send some soldiers to another area with metal detectors to assist.

What Jassim said would be a brief pause turned into a nearly three-hour break. The soldiers Bradford dispatched with the metal detectors were stood up by the Iraqis. Jassim scoffed when asked by a reporter whether he was having trouble coordinating with U.S. troops.

"Coordinating with the Americans is all I do," Jassim said. "It is what I am doing 24 hours, seven days a week."

IRAN:

18. Iran Escalates Its Fight With Britain; New Clashes Erupt

(NEW YORK TIMES 28 JUN 09) ... Michael

CAIRO — Iran's government said Sunday that it had arrested Iranian employees of the British Embassy, while the police in Tehran beat and fired tear gas at several thousand protesters who joined a demonstration at a mosque in support of the defeated presidential candidate Mir Hussein Moussavi.

A protest in Tehran swelled on the anniversary of the death of a founder of the 1979 revolution.

The government's arrest of nine Iranian employees of the British Embassy was a significant escalation in its conflict with Britain, which Tehran has sought to cast as an instigator of the unrest since the disputed June 12 election. It said the embassy employees played a significant role in organizing the protests, which have reached across the country and across social and economic lines.

Tehran also continued to charge journalists with working as agents of discord, publishing one editor's "confession" while continuing to keep others behind bars without charge, or

barred from working.

The arrests, detentions and restrictions added to Iran's growing international isolation, as European Union foreign ministers meeting in Corfu, Greece, warned in a statement that there would be a "strong and collective E.U. response" to any intimidation of its members' diplomatic staffs. The British Foreign Ministry said some of its personnel had been released, but declined to provide details.

In the past, international pressure was enough to rally the nation behind its leaders and silence critics. But this time, that did not seem to be the case. Instead, the government's actions, coupled with renewed calls for national unity, added to a growing sense of uncertainty over where Iran was headed as its leaders tried to pull out of a crisis that has undermined its legitimacy and divided the political and clerical elite.

In spite of all the threats, the overwhelming show of force and the nighttime raids on private homes, protesters still

flowed into the streets by the thousands on Sunday to demonstrate in support of Mr. Moussavi.

Mr. Moussavi, who has had little room to act but has refused to fold under government pressure, had earlier received a permit to hold a ceremony at the Ghoba mosque to honor Mohammad Beheshti, one of the founders of the 1979 revolution who died in a bombing on June 28, 1981, that killed dozens of officials.

Mr. Moussavi used the anniversary as a pretense to call a demonstration, and by midday the streets outside the elaborately tiled mosque were filled with protesters, their arms jabbing the air, their fingers making a “V” symbol, for victory.

The demonstrators wore black, to mourn the 17 protesters killed by government-aligned forces, and chanted “Allahu akbar” or “God is great.”

“There was a sea of people and the crowd stretched a long way onto the main street on Shariati,” said one witness, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because he feared retribution.

What started as a peaceful demonstration turned into a scene of violence and chaos by late Sunday, witnesses said.

Some described scenes of brutality, telling The Associated Press that some protesters suffered broken bones and alleging that the police beat an elderly woman. The reports could not be independently verified because of tight restrictions imposed on journalists in Iran.

The leadership seems to recognize that ending the street demonstrations is far easier than turning the clock back to the days before the election, when there was still some degree of trust in a system that sought to marry religious authority with popularly elected institutions, political analysts said.

“I think no one can predict Iran’s political future,” said an Iranian intellectual who asked not to be identified for fear of reprisal. “I do believe some things have changed after this recent upheaval and that events will play out in months and years to come.”

The supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who has ruled out any compromise with the opposition, said Sunday that the only solution to the crisis was to follow legal procedures. And he urged political leaders not to be what he called tools of foreign influence, returning to a theme of foreign intervention that historically has resonated across Iran but that so far has failed to silence the opposition.

“If the nation and political elite are united in heart and mind, the incitement of international traitors and oppressive politicians will be ineffective,” he said.

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19. Iranian Police Clash With Up To 3,000 Protesters

(WASHINGTON TIMES/AP 28 JUN 09) ... William J. Kole

Riot police clashed with up to 3,000 protesters near a mosque in north Tehran on Sunday, using tear gas and truncheons to break up Iran’s first post-election demonstration in five days, witnesses said.

Witnesses told Associated Press that some protesters fought back, chanting: “Where is my vote?” They said others described scenes of brutality — including the alleged police beating of an elderly woman — in the clashes around the Ghoba Mosque.

The reports could not immediately be independently verified because of tight restrictions imposed on journalists in

In spite of the unrelenting pressure of the state, including threats that protesters should be jailed and even killed, there were still high-ranking insiders who refused to endorse the government’s narrative. They were not agitating for the opposition — or even for defiance — but by carefully not endorsing the leadership, were seen as challenging it, political analysts said.

“As one colleague said, the train has left the station, and I don’t think even the leaders of the country know exactly where it is heading,” said Ali Ansari, a professor of Iranian history at St. Andrews University in Scotland.

The former two-time president, Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, a bitter opponent of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, made his first public remarks on Sunday, also under cover of a ceremony honoring those killed in the 1981 bombing. His comments suggested support for the public’s actions.

“The recent events were a complex plot by suspicious elements that wanted to create a gap between people and the establishment and was aimed at people to lose their confidence in the establishment,” he said, according to the ILNA news agency.

He added: “Whenever people have entered the scene such plots have been neutralized.”

The leadership has maintained its two-track approach to the protests that began shortly after the polls closed on June 12. It has ordered its security forces, including the police and the Basij militia, to frighten, beat and detain opposition figures — as well as independent-minded citizens and journalists not involved in the protests or political activities. It also has tried to offer an alternate route for resolving the dispute by asking the Guardian Council, responsible for monitoring the elections, to set up a review committee to include representatives of the opposition candidates.

But the opposition, led by Mr. Moussavi, has rejected the call, noting that the Guardian Council has earlier indicated its support for Mr. Ahmadinejad — and has twice said that there were no signs of rampant fraud and that it would not nullify the outcome. The council is scheduled to certify the election as valid any day.

Instead, Mr. Moussavi sent a letter to the Guardian Council calling for the creation of an arbitration committee to investigate what he says are widespread irregularities. He repeated his belief that nullifying the disputed vote would be the most “appropriate” solution and “a means to rebuild public confidence.”

Iran.

North Tehran is a base of support for opposition leader Mir Hossein Mousavi, who has alleged massive fraud in Iran’s disputed June 12 presidential election and insists he — not President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad — is the rightful winner.

Sunday’s clashes broke out at a rally that had been planned to coincide with a memorial held each year for Ayatollah Mohammad Beheshti, who came to be considered a martyr in the Islamic Republic after he was killed in a 1981 anti-regime bombing.

It was Iran’s first election-related unrest since Wednesday,

when a small group of rock-throwing protesters who had gathered near parliament was quickly overwhelmed by police forces using tear gas and clubs.

Iran's standoff with the West over its crackdown on opposition protesters escalated Sunday after authorities detained several local employees of the British Embassy in Tehran — a move that Britain's foreign secretary called "harassment and intimidation." The European Union condemned the arrests.

Iranian media said eight local embassy staff were detained for an alleged role in postelection protests, but gave no further details. British Foreign Secretary David Miliband said "about nine" employees were detained Saturday and that four had been released.

EU foreign ministers meeting in Corfu, Greece, issued a statement Sunday condemning the arrests and calling for the immediate release of all those still detained. The 27-nation bloc also denounced Iran's continuing restrictions on journalists.

"They make clear to the Iranian authorities that harassment or intimidation of foreign or Iranian staff working in embassies will be met with a strong and collective EU response," the statement said.

Iran has accused the West of stoking unrest, singling out Britain and the U.S. for alleged meddling and for expressing concern about the ferocity of the regime's crackdown on protesters. Last week, Iran expelled two British diplomats, and Britain responded in kind. Iran has also said it's considering downgrading diplomatic ties with Britain.

On Sunday, the semiofficial Fars news agency reported that the embassy staffers were detained for what was described as a "significant role" in postelection unrest.

The British Foreign Office says the embassy has a staff of more than 100, including at least 70 locally hired Iranians. Last week, Britain sent home 12 dependents of embassy staff because the protests had disrupted their lives.

Miliband, in Corfu for the EU meeting, said Britain lodged a protest with the Iranian authorities over the detentions. He described the step as "harassment and intimidation of a kind that is quite unacceptable."

"The idea that the British Embassy is somehow behind the demonstrations and protests that have been taking place in Tehran... is wholly without foundation," he said.

Iran's government has tried to discredit opposition supporters by alleging they have been directed by the West.

On Friday, a senior Iranian cleric, Ahmed Khatami, lashed out at Britain in a nationally televised sermon. "In this unrest, Britons have behaved very mischievously and it is fair to add the slogan of 'down with England' to the slogan of 'down with USA,'" he said.

Britain, a former colonial power in the region with a long history in Iran, has been a prominent target. Britain and the U.S. were behind the 1953 coup that toppled Prime Minister

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20. Axelrod: Ahmadinejad Not In Charge Of Iranian Foreign Policy

(JERUSALEM POST 28 JUN 09)

US President Barack Obama's top adviser, David Axelrod, said the US remains open to meeting, alongside its European allies, with Iran in Paris in an effort to curb Tehran's nuclear ambitions.

"Let's be clear that we didn't meddle in the election in

Mohammad Mossadegh, who nationalized Iran's oil industry. Britain had almost complete control over Iran's oil industry for decades.

The British have also drawn fire because of the BBC's prominent role as a trusted broadcaster in Farsi inside Iran.

This is a reversal from the way the state and publicly funded BBC was perceived in the run-up to the Iranian Islamic Revolution. At the time, the BBC was widely listened to because it extensively covered anti-Shah demonstrations and activities of the Islamic Republic's founder, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, who was in exile in France.

Iran's leaders have countered Western condemnation with increasingly angry rhetoric. The confrontation appears to be dashing hopes for a new dialogue, as initially envisioned by President Barack Obama when he took office.

Obama wants to engage Iranian leaders in talks over the country's suspect nuclear program which the U.S. and other western countries worry is aimed at developing nuclear weapons. Iran defends its nuclear program as civilian in nature. On Sunday, EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana said the bloc would "like very much" to restart nuclear talks with Tehran despite the rising tensions.

Senior White House adviser David Axelrod played down Ahmadinejad's accusations against the U.S., saying Sunday they aren't credible and are meant for domestic consumption. "This is political theater," he said on ABC's "This Week."

Iran's rulers have unleashed club-wielding militiamen to crush street protests and arrested hundreds of journalists, students and activists.

On Sunday, Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, called for national unity, appealing to both sides in the dispute, even though he has come down firmly on the side of Ahmadinejad.

"I admonish both sides not to stoke the emotions of the young or pit the people against each other," he said in comments carried on state TV. "Our people are made of one fabric."

Mousavi signaled he is not dropping his political challenge.

In a new statement, he insisted on a repeat of the election and rejected a partial recount being proposed by the government. However, Mousavi's challenge seemed largely aimed at maintaining some role as an opposition figure.

The latest statement by Mousavi, who has been increasingly isolated, appeared Sunday on Ghalamnews, a Web site run by supporters. Mousavi-related Web sites have frequently been blocked by the government, and one was shut down by hackers last week.

Kole reported from Cairo. Associated Press writers Shaya Tayefe Mohajer in Cairo, Shawn Pogatchnik in London and Elena Becatoros in Corfu, Greece, contributed to this report.

Iran," Axelrod said. "The dispute in Iran is between the leadership in Iran and their own people, and plainly, Mr. Ahmadinejad thinks that by fingering the United States, that he can create a political diversion. So I'm not going to entertain his bloviations that are politically motivated."

He said Ahmadinejad's accusations are meant for domestic consumption and to quell unrest after his re-election that his opponents call a fraud.

Axelrod stressed that the Obama administration's willingness to hold diplomatic talks with the Iranian leadership was not to be regarded as a reward.

"We are not looking to reward Iran. We are looking to ... sit down and talk to the Iranians and offer them two paths. And one brings them back into the community of nations, and the other has some very stark consequences," Axelrod said.

But he was careful to signal that the White House doesn't think Ahmadinejad has the final say over Iran's interaction with the West.

"We are also mindful of the fact that the nuclear weapons in Iran and the nuclearization of that whole region is a threat to that country, all countries in the region, and the world. And we have to address that. We can't let that lie," Axelrod said.

Iran has accused the West of stoking unrest, singling out Britain and the United States for alleged meddling. Last week, Iran expelled two British diplomats, and Britain responded in kind. Iran has also said it's considering downgrading diplomatic ties with Britain; the US does not have diplomatic relations with the country.

Axelrod said Teheran faces a choice between engaging the West or facing further isolation in the wake of a presidential election that sent protesters to the streets and amid questions of its validity.

Susan Rice, the US ambassador to the United Nations, made similar comments on Sunday, saying that Ahmadinejad is falling back on his government's usual strategy of blaming the West and the US in particular for its internal problems.

"This is a profound moment of change. And what Ahmadinejad says to try to change the subject is, frankly, not going to work in the current context, because the people understand that the United States has not been meddling in

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21. Influential Iranian Cleric: Vote Fallout A 'Tangled Mess'

(CNN 28 JUN 09)

TEHRAN, Iran -- After more than two weeks of silence amid Iran's violent election fallout, former President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani -- a key Iranian cleric -- emerged Sunday to call out "suspicious sources" who are creating a rift between the public and the Islamic government.

He called the aftermath of the June 12 presidential election "a tangled mess, perpetrated by suspicious sources whose objectives are to create differences and separations between the people and the system and eroding the trust of the people in the Islamic system," the Iranian Labor News Agency reported Sunday.

Rafsanjani was speaking to a gathering of family members related to the victims of a June 28, 1981, explosion, in which 70 people were killed at a bombing at the Islamic Republic party headquarters. The explosion -- known as "Hafte Tir," referring to the date on the Iranian calendar -- killed several prominent Islamic revolutionaries, including Chief Justice Ayatollah Mohammad Beheshti.

Rafsanjani is chairman of Iran's Assembly of Experts, which is responsible for appointing or removing the supreme leader. But despite the chaos that's plagued the Islamic republic for the past two weeks -- even resulting in the brief detention of his daughter -- he remained silent and largely

their internal affairs," she said.

The legitimacy of the government, while questioned by the people of Iran, is not the critical issue for the US goal of preventing Iran from developing a nuclear weapons capability, Rice said.

"It's in the United States' national interest to make sure that we have employed all elements at our disposal, including diplomacy, to prevent Iran from achieving that nuclear capacity," she said.

Obama and Ahmadinejad upped their war of words over the weekend, trading harsh rhetoric over Iran's actions, and Washington indicated that it was recalibrating its approach of dialogue with the Islamic republic.

The Obama administration has rescinded invitations from early in the spring to Iranian diplomats to attend July 4 celebrations at American embassies around the world, which had constituted a break with years of protocol and a sign of efforts to ease the relations between the two countries in a prelude to direct talks.

And although the White House pointed out that no Iranians had accepted the invitations in any case,

a senior State Department official described engagement as currently "on ice" as the US watches the developments in Iran unfold and reassess how it wants to interact with the new leadership.

Since Obama's election, Axelrod, who was chief strategist of the US president's election campaign, has repeatedly stressed the administration's commitment to engage with Middle East leaders.

"The president-elect has said repeatedly that he intends to engage early and aggressively with diplomacy all over the world and using the men and women, the professionals who are in place, who are great, and, where appropriate, special envoys," Axelrod told CNN in January.

unseen until Sunday's commemoration.

The last time the world saw Iran's assembled leadership was June 19, when at Friday prayers Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei endorsed the victory of hardline incumbent President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in the hotly contested June 12 election. But Rafsanjani -- who supported opposition leader Mir Hossein Mousavi, a reformist and Ahmadinejad's chief rival -- was missing among the group of Islamic powerbrokers.

On Sunday, referring to Khamenei's backing of an extension granted by Iran's election authority to address voting complaints, Rafsanjani said the decision is "valuable in order to gain the trust and conviction of the people in the electoral process, effectively, and I hope those involved in this matter can precisely observe fairness and justice and in cooperation with the candidates so that complaints can be addressed completely."

He added, "Wrong actions must not renew hate and differences between the people and all of us must, with cooperation and with one heart, move forward, in order to eliminate obstacles and difficulties."

Rafsanjani is a very influential figure in Khamenei's circle, but he's made "a real break with the supreme leader in

this case," Hooman Majd, an Iranian-American author, told CNN Saturday.

"Whether the leadership will come together again and say we have to solve all of these problems internally rather than

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AFGHANISTAN:

22. Afghan Minister Says Drug Strategy Is 'Perfect'

(ASSOCIATED PRESS 28 JUN 09) ... Rahim Faiez

KABUL – Afghanistan's counternarcotics minister said Sunday that his country's drug policy is "perfect," a day after the United States changed course and announced it would no longer support efforts to eradicate opium poppy plants.

Gen. Khodaidad, who like many Afghans goes by one name, said that Afghanistan has achieved "a lot of success" with its anti-drug strategy — which relies heavily on manual eradication of poppy fields, monetary incentives and public relations campaigns to persuade farmers not to plant poppies.

Afghan counternarcotics police have for years used tractors or hand tools to plow under or chop down poppy plants — which yield opium, the main ingredient in heroin — but they often came under attack and dozens have been killed by militants.

Because the country plants so much poppy, the Taliban and other militants were still believed to have reaped tens of millions of dollars in yearly profits. Eradication "might destroy some acreage, but it didn't reduce the amount of money the Taliban got by one dollar," Richard Holbrooke, the U.S. envoy for Afghanistan and Pakistan, said Saturday in Rome, on the sidelines of a Group of Eight foreign ministers' meeting.

A recent U.N. survey showed eradication's mixed results. Out of 23 villages where Afghan officials had eradicated poppies in 2008, 11 of those villages — 48 percent — still planted poppy for 2009.

Khodaidad said the Afghan government was waiting to see details of the new U.S. strategy and that officials would work with their American counterparts on it.

"Whatever program or strategy would be to the benefit of Afghanistan, we welcome it," Khodaidad said. He added later: "We are happy with our policy ... so I'm not seeing any pause or what do you call it, deficiency, in our strategy. Our strategy's perfect. Our strategy's good."

Afghanistan is the world's leading source of opium,

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23. U.S.-Built Bridge Is Windfall For Afghan Drug Trade

(MCCLATCHY NEWSPAPERS 28 JUN 09) ... Tom Lasseter

NIZHNY PANJ, Tajikistan — In August 2007, the presidents of Afghanistan and Tajikistan walked side by side with the U.S. commerce secretary across a new \$37 million concrete bridge that the Army Corps of Engineers designed to link two of Central Asia's poorest countries.

Dressed in a gray suit with an American flag pin in his lapel, then-Commerce Secretary Carlos Gutierrez said the modest two-lane span that U.S. taxpayers paid for would be "a critical transit route for trade and commerce" between Afghanistan and Tajikistan.

Today, the bridge across the muddy waters of the Panj River is carrying much more than vegetables and timber: It's

have them be public for the sake and security of the government and the system is a question that is an open question," Majd added.

cultivating 93 percent of the world's heroin-producing crop. While opium cultivation dropped 19 percent last year, it remains popular in Afghanistan's southern provinces where the Taliban is strongest and last year earned insurgents an estimated \$50 million to \$70 million, according to the U.N. drug office.

According to a recent U.N. report, opium eradication reached a high in 2003, after the Taliban were ousted from power, with more than 21,000 hectares (51,900 acres) destroyed. In 2008, only 5,480 hectares (13,500 acres) were cut down, compared with 19,047 hectares (47,000 acres) in 2007.

In a change of strategy by international troops, U.S. and NATO forces in recent months have begun attacking drug labs and opium storage sites in an effort to deprive the Taliban of drug profits.

The new U.S. policy calls for assisting farmers who abandon poppy cultivation.

Holbrooke told G-8 ministers that Washington was increasing its funding for agricultural assistance from tens of millions of dollars a year to hundreds of millions of dollars, said Foreign Minister Franco Frattini of Italy, the current G-8 president.

In eastern Afghanistan, meanwhile, a suicide car bomber attacked a police vehicle in Nangarhar province on Sunday, killing a child nearby and wounding nine people, including four policemen, said Ahmad Zia Abdulzai, the spokesman for the provincial governor.

The bomber struck the vehicle in Behsud district, Abdulzai said.

The resurgent Taliban regularly use suicide bombers against Afghan and foreign troops, but most of the victims in such attacks are civilians.

paved the way for drug traffickers to transport larger loads of Afghan heroin and opium to Central Asia and beyond to Russia and Western Europe.

Standing near his truck in a dusty patch on the Afghan side of the river, Yar Mohammed said it was easy to drive drugs past the Afghan and Tajik border guards.

"It's an issue of money," Mohammed said, to the nods and grins of the small group of truckers gathered around him near the bridge at Nizhny Panj. "If you give them money, you can do whatever you want."

The roots of the global drug trade are often a murky tangle of poverty, addiction, violence and corruption.

However, it's clear why the dirt-poor former Soviet Central Asian republic of Tajikistan is on the verge of becoming a narco-state.

After the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, the United States and other Western powers looked the other way as opium and heroin production surged to record levels, making Afghanistan by far the world's biggest producer.

Much of the ballooning supply of drugs shipped across Afghanistan's northern border, up to one-fifth of the country's output, has traveled to and through Tajikistan. The opium and heroin funded rampant corruption in Tajikistan and turned the country, still hobbled by five years of civil war in the 1990s, into what at times seems like one big drug-trafficking organization.

Every day last year — extrapolating from United Nations estimates — an average of more than 4 metric tons of opium, which can be made into some 1,320 pounds of heroin, moved on the northern route. Put another way, the equivalent of nearly 6 million doses of pure heroin — at 100 milligrams each — is carried across the northern Afghan border each day.

After it's cut with other substances and sold on the street corners and in the apartment stairwells of Russia and Western Europe, the main retail markets for Central Asian heroin, that could produce at least 12 million doses.

Nevertheless, it's clear even to a casual visitor at the bridge that neither the Afghan or the Tajik border guards have much interest in curbing, or even inspecting, the exports that pass in front of them.

In fact, as the Afghan drug supply has grown, Tajik seizures have fallen. In 2004, Afghanistan produced 4,200 metric tons of opium, and some 5 metric tons of heroin or its equivalent in opium were seized in Tajikistan, according to U.N. figures. Last year, with Afghan cultivation rising to 7,700 metric tons of opium, Tajik authorities seized less than 2 metric tons of heroin.

Although the United States wields enormous influence in both countries, their drug problems have taken a back seat to the war against the Taliban. Until the past year, Afghanistan's growing drug production was at best a midlevel priority for Washington, and the U.S. hasn't pressed Tajik President Emomali Rahmon to rein in his country's drug trafficking, Western officials said. Nor, they said, has any other Western government with troops in Afghanistan.

All along the Afghan-Tajik border, smugglers for years have thrown sacks of heroin over the Panj River, waded across when the water is low, set up flotillas of car tires and used small ferries or footbridges.

The U.S.-financed bridge has made drug trafficking even easier, truck driver Mohammed said with a toothy smile: "You load the truck with drugs."

The ferry that used to operate at Nizhny Panj carried about 40 trucks a day. The bridge can carry 1,000 vehicles daily.

Organized crime groups now are focusing on using official checkpoints to move their drugs, a senior official at the Tajik State Committee for National Security said, speaking to a recent meeting of Central Asian counter-narcotics officers.

"Especially through the Tajik-Afghan bridge on the Panj River," Davlat Zarifov said.

Zarifov apparently didn't know that a reporter was present, and he declined further comment and quickly walked

away.

To try to get the Tajik government's side of the story, a McClatchy reporter approached Sherali Mirzo, the official in charge of the country's border guards, a man with a full mustache and medals across his uniformed chest. Mirzo said he didn't talk to the media.

Rustam Nazarov, the director of the country's drug control agency, said in a brief interview that the declining heroin and opium seizures suggested that there was less trafficking of those drugs through Tajikistan, an analysis that the facts on the ground would seem to contradict.

Nazarov, however, did allow that, "There is corruption in Tajikistan; no one denies that. Unfortunately, we have some civil servants who are corrupt."

A few days later at the Afghan-Tajik border, as the sun began to dip below a horizon framed by jagged mountains, Mohammed Zahir, an Afghan truck driver, gave a simple explanation for how drugs get across the bridge.

"People involved with the drug business know the guards," Zahir said. "Before sending their drugs across, they pay them money."

A second driver, Qand Agha, chimed in: "If high officials on the border weren't involved, then people like me couldn't take drugs into their country."

Down the road, a line of trucks was crossing the bridge.

'DENGI, DENGI'

Sitting in a \$40,000 SUV with soft leather seats and a dark orange paint job, a man named Negmatullo hitched up his shirtsleeve to show the sore on his arm from the heroin he'd been shooting up. He fiddled with his designer sunglasses, absentmindedly brushed his hair and said in a junkie's mumble that, "If you pay someone at the border, you can bring drugs up."

Negmatullo, a thin man with dirty blond hair, had just come out of a drug treatment clinic in the town of Kurgan-Tyube, a halfway point between the border and the Tajik capital of Dushanbe. He asked that his last name not be used for his own security.

When Negmatullo was asked why guards and other Tajik law-enforcement officials would be susceptible to corruption, he rubbed his fingers together and muttered "dengi, dengi," Russian for "money, money."

The car's license plate flashed by as Negmatullo pulled away; it was number 7777, a calling card of those connected to the president's inner circle.

The spoils of the drug trade are as obvious as the shiny new BMWs speeding down the dusty roads that cut from south to north across the steppes of Tajikistan, passing hunched old men who tend the cotton fields with hoes. It's an ancient setting: Alexander the Great and his men conquered parts of the territory in the fourth century B.C., and they're said to have crossed the Panj River by floating on leather hides.

These days, in a nation where some 50 percent of the population makes less than \$41 a month, there's a steady stream of new Mercedes and Lexus sedans, not only in Dushanbe, but also in the hamlets that dot the way to the Afghan border.

Locals say the cars often are given in trade for loads of heroin shipped north to the Russian border. The stuff is easy to get.

"You can just take two bags over your back, walk across the Panj and bring them back filled with heroin. It's no

problem," said Vazir, a Tajik who was released from a Russian prison last February after he was caught trying to take 600 grams of heroin through a Moscow airport. During an interview in Dushanbe, he asked that his last name not be used because he feared retribution.

Vazir continued: "You can give your bag of heroin to one of the guards, and he will carry it across for you."

'A CULTURE OF IMPUNITY'

The supply chain appears to reach far beyond hustlers such as Vazir. Many Western officials and Tajik observers suspect that the Rahmon government controls the drug trade.

"I don't know if the president is involved personally, but he gives the percentages to different groups for what they can do," said one Western diplomat in Dushanbe, who like others spoke only on the condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of criticizing the regime. "Just go to the airport. There are bags of heroin going through unchecked. . . . People are pretty open about it. There's more and more a culture of impunity."

After the Soviet Union fell in 1991, Russian troops continued to patrol the Tajik border. They withdrew from the area in 2005 after the Tajik government demanded that they leave — though it allowed them to stay in other parts of the country — asserting that as a sovereign nation Tajikistan was capable of securing its own frontiers.

An assortment of local conscripts replaced the relatively professional Russian contingent, which trained and financed the Tajik officer corps.

"You have conscripts earning maybe \$3 a month stretched out over 1,344 kilometers of border" — 835 miles — said another Western diplomat in Dushanbe, discussing the problem of drug dealers paying border guards to look the other way. "It's obvious that if you need to eat, corruption is an option."

Some Russian and Western officials said privately that the Tajik government wanted the Russians out of the way to ensure a larger supply of opium and heroin.

It was a move designed to gain "hold of a bigger part of the drug trade," one Western diplomat in Dushanbe said.

"Frankly speaking, there were forces in the government of Tajikistan who wanted to replace the Russian troops with Tajik troops to allow more holes in the border," said a Russian official in Moscow who travels regularly to Tajikistan and has high-level contact with the Tajik government. "It was to make the penetration of drugs easier."

The State Committee for National Security, Tajikistan's version of the KGB, took control of border enforcement in 2007 and almost immediately barred the country's Interior Ministry and drug control agency from access to the border region.

'THERE IS ALWAYS GOING TO BE A TRADEOFF'

When a McClatchy reporter drove to the border at Nizhny Panj to do interviews, troops turned him back because he didn't have official permission. A border guard supervisor in plainclothes pulled the reporter's driver aside and suggested in

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a menacing tone that the driver was a spy. The Tajik government later denied McClatchy permission to visit the southern border.

The reporter resorted to crossing the bridge into Afghanistan with a routine visa, and he saw no evidence that Afghan or Tajik officials were inspecting trucks for contraband.

Despite the public nature of the drug trade and related corruption in Tajikistan, however, the West has done relatively little to pressure President Rahmon.

Some Western officials acknowledge that it's the result of a political tradeoff: No one wants to risk alienating Rahmon on the issue of drug corruption because his authoritarian regime's cooperation is important for preventing Islamic militants from using the Tajik-Afghan border as a sanctuary.

"The Americans want to have a logistics base here, so do you think they're going to pressure the government about corruption?" said William Lawrence, a chief adviser for a U.N. Afghan border-management program based in Dushanbe. "The answer is no."

The U.S. Embassy in Dushanbe declined to comment, but a State Department official said that such balancing acts were common.

"There is always going to be a tradeoff based on different foreign-policy objectives, different security objectives, the tolerance for different types of corruption, different levels of corruption," said the official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because of diplomatic protocol. "I don't think the situation in Tajikistan, frankly, is that much different than the rest of Central Asia in terms of these types of tradeoffs."

A second Western diplomat in Dushanbe was more blunt about Western governments ignoring reports on Tajikistan's official complicity in drug corruption.

"We send reports every month to our capitals, very negative, but they don't (care)," said the diplomat, whose country has troops in Afghanistan. "Because it's a so-called stable country leading to Afghanistan, we accept it."

The diplomat said that his country had funded projects to help train and equip the Tajiks to deal with the drug problem. The United States and other Western nations have done the same.

This month, for example, the U.S. ambassador to Tajikistan broke ground on a \$2.5 million project to overhaul the border guard training academy in Dushanbe. The American Embassy said in a recent news release that it had implemented more than \$37.5 million of initiatives to help Tajik law enforcement since 1992.

However, the second Western diplomat said, there isn't much arm-twisting to make sure the Tajik government cracks down.

"We don't dare to say to the president, 'We give you money for anti-corruption but the first thing you see on the streets is these police taking bribes,' " the diplomat said. "Nobody says, 'We'll give you money for border security, but in three years we want to see a reduction in drugs.' "

PAKISTAN:

24. 13 Soldiers, 18 Taliban Killed In N Waziristan: Officials

Thirteen Pakistani Troops And 18 Taliban Militants Have Died In Clashes And Air Bombardments In The Tribal Belt As Violence Spikes In The Northwest Region, Officials Said Sunday.

(PAKISTAN DAWN 28 JUN 09)

Security forces, wrapping up a two-month campaign against Islamist militants in and around northwest Swat valley, are opening up a second front against Taliban chief Baitullah Mehsud in the lawless Afghan border region.

At least 12 soldiers were killed when their convoy came under attack Sunday in Gharlamai area near Wachabibi village, about 45 kilometres (27 miles) west of Miranshah, the main town in North Waziristan, the military said.

'Twelve soldiers embraced shahadat (martyrdom) and 10 others were seriously injured when a military convoy was attacked... in Gharlamai area,' it said in a statement.

'Ten terrorists were also killed in the exchange of fire with the security forces,' it added.

A security official in the area said there were between 100 and 150 militants involved in the ambush. Military helicopters were sent to the area to tackle the attackers and bring back the dead and injured troops, he added.

In a separate incident Saturday evening, insurgents fired rockets at Pakistani forces at a South Waziristan paramilitary Frontier Corps camp, killing an officer and injuring three soldiers, a security official said.

The army confirmed the death in its daily update, saying 'one non-commissioned officer embraced shahadat (martyrdom)' at Tanai Fort.

Security forces retaliated and shelled militant hideouts

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nearby, while air attacks also hit rebel bases elsewhere in South Waziristan, where the US alleges Al-Qaeda rebels are hiding out.

'Fighter jets bombarded militant hideouts in Samm village of Laddha town in South Waziristan on Sunday, killing eight rebels,' a security official said.

Military and government officials announced the assault against Mehsud and his network in mid-June, vowing to track down and eliminate the warlord blamed for a wave of deadly blasts in Pakistan in the past two years.

Fighter jets and helicopter gunships have been targeting militant positions in the semi-autonomous tribal zone for weeks, but it remains unclear when a full-scale offensive will begin into the hostile, rugged terrain.

Pakistan's northwestern tribal belt has become a stronghold for hundreds of extremists who fled Afghanistan after a US-led invasion toppled the hardline Taliban regime in late 2001.

Security forces launched an offensive to dislodge Taliban guerrillas from three northwest districts around Swat valley after the insurgents flouted a peace deal and thrust towards the capital Islamabad in early April.

25. Pak Army Operation Hinders Taliban Efforts In Afghanistan: US

(PAKISTAN TRIBUNE 28 JUN 09)

WASHINGTON: Pakistan's military offensive against the Taliban has slowed the flow of arms and fighters into Afghanistan, U.S. officials say, and has prompted intelligence analysts to issue cautiously upbeat new assessments of Islamabad's ability to contain the threat of violent extremists.

U.S. intelligence and military officials said the revised outlook reflected a series of developments over the last few months, including not only the Pakistani military campaign in the country's Swat Valley, but shifting political currents that have prompted many Pakistanis to turn against extremist groups and back their government's anti-insurgency efforts, reported The Los Angeles Times.

In Pakistan, the displaced yearn for... Audio slide show: Pakistan battles..."All of a sudden military operations [against militants] are being imbued with a kind of legitimacy, popular support and political support they have never had before," said a senior U.S. intelligence official who oversees analysis of the region, describing the evolving view on condition of anonymity.

Obama administration officials were warning only weeks ago that Pakistan's fragile government could succumb to a militant offensive that had drawn nearer to Islamabad, the capital, but the developments have changed the U.S. view.

The senior U.S. intelligence official described it as a "critical change" in a nation where the government has for years been reluctant to take on militants for fear of being accused of turning the Pakistani military against its own people and doing the bidding of the United States.

At the same time, U.S. military officials said this week

that Pakistan's operations in Swat and South Waziristan were already having a measurable effect on the amount of equipment and violence spilling over the border into Afghanistan.

"There's a definite impact, and I think it almost can't be overstated," said Col. John Spiszer, who is the commander of the 3rd Brigade Combat Team of the 1st Infantry Division, a unit responsible for security operations in northeastern Afghanistan along the Pakistani border.

Spiszer said Taliban elements appeared to have concluded that they could no longer afford to send as many fighters or weapons into Afghanistan because they may be needed to fight the Pakistani army in tribal regions that the militants have used as safe havens since the Sept. 11 attacks.

Among militant groups along the border in Afghanistan, "weapons are drying up. Money is drying up," Spiszer said via a satellite interview with Pentagon reporters. "There's only so many resources to go around. . . . If they're having to use them to fight against the Pakistan military and the [paramilitary] Frontier Corps, they certainly aren't of use here." The relatively optimistic assessment comes as the Obama administration is deploying an additional 21,000 U.S. troops to Afghanistan in hopes of reversing what had been an increasingly costly campaign in terms of U.S. and allied troops' lives.

Last year was the deadliest of the war for the coalition, with 294 troops killed, and 153 more deaths this year, according to the independent website icasualties.org. June has brought no relief to that trend, with 35 killed so far -- the

highest monthly toll of 2009. Pakistani forces launched their campaign in Swat two months ago, after militants had moved to within 60 miles of the capital. The operation has maintained broad support among citizens, even though about 1.7 million people were driven from their homes to refugee camps by the fighting. Analysts, however, have cautioned that enthusiasm for the campaign could wane if the displaced are not soon returned to their homes.

More recently, the Pakistani military has begun carrying out smaller military operations in South Waziristan, along the mountainous border with Afghanistan, setting the stage for a potential assault on Pakistani Taliban leader Baitullah Mahsud. Pakistani officials have blamed the Taliban leader for a string of deadly bombings as well as the 2007 assassination of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto. He has denied involvement in her killing. A senior Pakistani government official, also speaking on condition of anonymity, said that the military had begun "commando-type, special forces operations" aimed at Mahsud, and was seeking to strengthen the militant's rivals. "We're going to launch an operation," the Pakistani official said. "We would first like to consolidate our gains in Swat and then open a new front."

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26. Pakistan Offers Reward For Taliban Chief, 'Dead Or Alive'

(AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE 28 JUN 09)

PESHAWAR, Pakistan – Pakistan on Sunday offered a 615,000-dollar reward for information leading to the capture, dead or alive, of local Taliban head Baitullah Mehsud, currently holed up in the tribal belt.

Two national Urdu-language newspapers and local papers in the northwest city of Peshawar carried an advert offering the 50-million-rupee (615,300-dollar) reward for Mehsud, and other amounts for 10 other senior militants.

"The government has announced a cash reward for anybody providing authentic information leading to the capture of these (11), dead or alive," said the advertisement. It then lists the wanted men, along with their bounties.

"Innocent people are being killed because of the bloody activities of these so-called defenders of Islam," the advert says.

Fighter jets and helicopter gunships have been pounding Mehsud's hideouts for weeks, ahead of an expected ground offensive following a similar operation to root out Taliban in and around northwest Swat valley launched in late April.

Fayyaz Tooro, home secretary of the North West Frontier Province, said it was the first time Pakistan had slapped a figure on Al-Qaeda-linked Mehsud.

"This list has been issued by the interior ministry and has been published for the first time in close cooperation with security agencies, which provided invaluable information to the government," Tooro told AFP.

Mehsud already has a five-million-dollar bounty on his head offered by the United States, with the US State Department branding the warlord "a key Al-Qaeda facilitator in the tribal areas of South Waziristan."

Pakistan blames Mehsud for a wave of deadly attacks killing hundreds of people here in a two-year insurgency and has vowed to unseat him from his fiefdom in the peaks of South Waziristan.

All but two of the 10 other wanted men hail from the tribal belt, with bounties of between 10 and 15 million rupees

A CIA drone fired on a funeral service for a former Mahsud lieutenant this week, killing about 65 people. The strike was seen as an indication of expanding cooperation between the CIA and Pakistan in the hunt for the militant leader, who Pakistani officials say had been present at the funeral earlier but escaped the attack.

Pakistan's operations, combined with Predator drone strikes, have elevated pressure on Al Qaeda. The U.S. intelligence official said some members of the terrorist network may have fled to Yemen or other countries. "I'm sure they're looking at the real estate section in international newspapers," the official said. Still, U.S. officials said that Pakistan's military efforts have been focused on internal threats and that the nation has yet to show similar resolve against targets that are of primary interest to the United States. Among them is Mullah Mohammed Omar, the Afghan Taliban leader whose government in Kabul was ousted by the U.S.-led invasion in 2001. He is believed to be based in the Pakistani city of Quetta. "I don't think Pakistan wants the Taliban to defeat the United States in Afghanistan, but it's not their No. 1 concern," the U.S. intelligence official said.

each for close aides Maulvi Faqir Mohammad and Qari Hussain, and Taliban spokesman Hakimullah Mehsud.

Analysts and security sources have said that the military will likely try to fan rivalries among the Mehsud tribe to gain allies before any operation into the hostile, mountainous territory along the Afghan border.

That strategy was dealt a blow on Tuesday when Qari Zainuddin -- a rising tribal leader who had defected from Mehsud's Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) -- was assassinated in an attack claimed by the TTP.

Pakistan's northwestern tribal belt has become a stronghold for Taliban and Al-Qaeda extremists who fled Afghanistan after a US-led invasion toppled the hardline Taliban regime in late 2001.

At least 12 soldiers were killed on Sunday when their convoy came under attack about 45 kilometres (30 miles) west of Miranshah, the main town in North Waziristan, the military said in a statement.

"Ten terrorists were also killed in the exchange of fire with the security forces," it added.

In a separate militant attack on Tanai Fort in South Waziristan, one officer was killed, the army said in its daily briefing.

Fighter jets meanwhile targeted militant hideouts near Laddha town in South Waziristan, killing eight rebels, a security official said.

Mehsud, believed to be in his late 30s, set up the TTP umbrella group of tribal militants in 2007, and has steadily extended his influence into North Waziristan and Bajaur districts and nearby cities of Tank and Dera Ismail Khan.

Pakistan has already offered a 50-million-rupee reward for Swat Taliban chief Maulana Fazlullah.

Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani said Sunday the Swat operation would be over soon, but made no mention of the tribal belt campaign.

"The entire nation wants terrorism to be eliminated and

law and order restored," he told reporters in the eastern city of Lahore.

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27. Indo-Pak Talks Sans Kashmir Won't Deliver'

PM Says Nation Wants Peace By Eliminating Terrorists Forever

(PAKISTAN DAILY TIMES 29 JUN 09)

LAHORE: Pakistan has always wanted cordial relations with all neighbouring countries, but it is not possible to have peace with India until the Kashmir issue is resolved, Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani said on Sunday.

"I want to say again that Pakistan has always wanted to have cordial relations with all neighbouring countries, including Afghanistan, India and Iran, but talks between India and Pakistan without resolution of the Kashmir issue would be fruitless," he told reporters after offering condolences for the death of former Jamaat-e-Islami chief Mian Tufail Muhammad. He said a solution to the Kashmir issue was the cornerstone of Pakistan's foreign policy. Online reported.

Commenting on the drone attacks in the northern areas, the premier said they were an attack on the integrity of Pakistan and were forcing tribesmen to join extremist elements. He said the US was working towards understanding Pakistan's view on the drone attacks.

Ending the threat: Separately, after offering fateha at the grave of Dr Sarfaraz Naeemi, he said all anti-Pakistan elements were terrorists and had no religion or geographical boundaries. To questions about Maulana Fazlur Rehman's statement on dialogue with the Taliban, the premier said that

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28. Kayani And Petraeus Take Up Waziristan Action

(THE NATION PAKISTAN 29 JUN 09)

ISLAMABAD - Commander US CENTCOM General David H Petraeus who was on a daylong official visit here on Sunday exchanged information with Chief of Army Staff General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani on anti-terror operations underway along the Pak-Afghan border.

According to official sources, meeting with General Kayani was Petraeus's one-point agenda for visiting Pakistan this time. The sources said that the two discussed future options in the backdrop of Pakistan Army's operations namely Rah-e-Rast in Swat and Rah-e-Nijat in Waziristan.

The sources said that Kayani told Petraeus that the Army had so far been carrying out aerial bombardment while the troops were stepping forward on the ground in the areas of Frontier region. Discussion on the situation along the Pak-

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"There is no room for any negotiations with the militants. This is the time for a decisive action against them."

while Fazl was a coalition partner of the government, his views on the Taliban were a personal statement. However, he added, the entire nation wanted peace by eliminating the terrorists forever.

No time: He said the Pakistan Army is taking decisive action against the Taliban in FATA and other tense areas, adding this was not the time for dialogue with extremists. "Our army is fighting very efficiently against the cowards who strike through ambushes. These anti-social and anti-Pakistan elements are working on foreign agendas," he added.

To another question, Gilani said the division of a province was a constitutional matter and those aspiring for it could raise the issue before parliament or at the platform of their respective parties. He said all provinces, including Punjab, would get their water share under the Indus River System Authority in line with the 1991 water accord.

The prime minister said he had announced a civil award for Dr Sarfaraz Naeemi, APP reported. He said clerics had played a prominent role in Pakistan's formation, and should come forward to help Pakistan. agencies

Home

Afghan border was natural part of their meeting, the sources said. Moreover, they added the two generals had threadbare exchange of information on the operations both in Swat and Waziristan.

According to the sources, General Kayani informed General Petraeus about the achievements of the Pakistani Army in Swat operation. He told the visiting General that civil administration had already started taking over in most of the parts of Swat.

Meanwhile, a Press release issued by the Inter Service Public Relations (ISPR) stated that matters of mutual interest were discussed during the meeting.

MIDDLE EAST:

29. Barak Open On Israel Settlement Freeze Before U.S. Trip

(REUTERS 28 JUN 09) ... Jeffrey Heller

JERUSALEM - Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak left open the possibility on Sunday of a limited freeze on building in Jewish settlements in the occupied West Bank.

In comments to reporters, Barak stopped short of denying a report in Israel's biggest newspaper, Yedioth Ahronoth, that he would propose a three-month halt to construction starts in settlements but allow current building work to continue.

"The matter mentioned in the headlines has not been finalised," Barak told reporters ahead of talks this week with U.S. Middle East envoy George Mitchell in the United States.

"The issue of the settlements, as part of a broad range of issues, is part of our dialogue with the Americans," Barak said.

An Israeli official called the report "speculative." Other

officials said in any case, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government had not issued any tenders for new construction in West Bank settlements since taking office in March.

U.S. President Barack Obama, in a rare rift between Israel and the United States, is pushing for a building freeze in a bid to spur the resumption of Israeli-Palestinian peace talks.

But U.S. officials said Washington was considering making allowances for some structures nearing completion.

Yedioth Ahronoth reported that Barak would propose that a three-month moratorium would not cover some 2,000 buildings under construction in West Bank enclaves. Work on homes for Jews in Arab East Jerusalem also would continue.

PEACE TALKS

"I spoke with the minister of defense and he said very clearly that there was no idea to freeze all building in the settlements," cabinet minister Gilad Erdan told reporters.

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NORTH KOREA:

30. Japan, S.Korea In United Stance Against N.Korea

(AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE 28 JUN 09) ... Kyoko Hasegawa

TOKYO – South Korea and Japan "will never tolerate" a nuclear-armed North Korea, South Korean President Lee Myung-Bak said on Sunday after talks with Japanese Prime Minister Taro Aso.

Lee and Aso agreed to press North Korea to abandon its nuclear programme amid Pyongyang's continued sabre-rattling, and called for China to play a greater role in persuading its ally to disarm, they said in a news conference.

"During the talks, we confirmed that we will never tolerate a nuclear-armed North Korea," Lee told reporters.

"Through implementing UN resolution 1874, we need to show North Korea that they will gain nothing by obtaining nuclear weapons," Lee said, referring to UN sanctions against Pyongyang for its recent nuclear and missile tests.

Aso said: "We agreed to strengthen cooperation between Japan, South Korea and the United States, and agreed on the need to deepen cooperation with China."

China, North Korea's main ally, has always favoured cautious diplomacy toward Pyongyang, wary of any moves that could push the isolated regime to collapse and potentially send millions of refugees streaming over its border.

The summit came as Pyongyang has stepped up its confrontational rhetoric amid global suspicions that Kim Jong-Il's administration is preparing to fire more missiles and stage a military exercise off the North's east coast.

Regional tension spiked after North Korea on May 25 carried out its second nuclear test, followed by missile launches.

North Korea has also abandoned six-party talks on its nuclear disarmament, which involved the two Koreas, the United States, China, Russia and Japan.

Lee and Aso discussed the idea of holding five-party talks excluding Pyongyang, "with an aim of making progress in the six-party talks," Aso said.

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Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has said U.S.-backed negotiations with Israel could not resume until all settlement construction ceased.

Netanyahu has publicly rejected any restrictions on building Jewish homes within the Israeli-designated municipal boundaries of Jerusalem, which include Arab East Jerusalem and parts of the West Bank, territory Israel captured in a 1967 war.

Some 500,000 Israelis live in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Palestinians say Jewish settlement on occupied land, deemed illegal by the World Court, could prevent them from establishing a viable state.

Israel has sought to ease tensions over settlements by committing to remove more West Bank roadblocks and settler outposts built without Israeli government permission.

Tokyo and Seoul have led the push in East Asia against the North's increasingly antagonistic stance, in which Pyongyang has repeatedly warned of a military confrontation.

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

The North Sunday renewed its verbal offensive, threatening to bolster its nuclear deterrence against the United States, a close ally of South Korea and Japan.

"We will strengthen our nuclear deterrence further for our self-defence to cope with outright US nuclear threats and nuclear war attempts," Pyongyang's ruling communist party newspaper Rodong Sinmun said.

Rodong said the North's nuclear drive could be justified by the "US introduction of nuclear weapons into South Korea," despite the denial by Seoul and Washington that there are US nuclear weapons on South Korean soil.

Lee's one-day trip to Tokyo was part of regular "shuttle summit diplomacy," a system that sees the leaders visit each other twice a year for talks on issues including diplomatic and economic matters.

Lee and Aso also agreed to hold a senior-official level meeting on July 1 to resume stalled negotiations on a bilateral free trade deal.

"The bilateral free trade agreement should be completed," Lee said, adding that "South Korea will fight protectionism" amid a global recession.

The South Korean president also said that he had asked Aso "to give Korean residents in Japan the right to vote in local assembly elections."

The majority of Korean residents in Japan are descendants of forced labourers brought to Japan during its colonial rule of the Korean Peninsula in the first half of the 20th century.

31. New North Korea Sanctions Will Have Impact: US

(AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE 28 JUN 09)

WASHINGTON – New UN sanctions intended to force North Korea to abandon its nuclear program will have an "impact" when they take full force, US ambassador to the United Nations Susan Rice said Sunday.

"When this resolution is fully enforced -- not only in terms of potential vessels that may be violating the sanctions but the financial sanctions, the arms embargo, the assets freezes -- this will be a very, very tough package that will have an impact on North Korea," Rice said on US television station CBS.

Rice said the United States and other nations worldwide will implement the sanctions "fully and effectively."

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32. Uranium Gives Nkorea Second Way To Make Bombs

(ASSOCIATED PRESS 28 JUN 09) ... Kwang-Tae Kim

SEOUL, South Korea – After repudiating negotiations on dismantling its plutonium-based nuclear program, North Korea admitted this month to having an even more worrying way to make bombs.

Following nearly seven years of adamant denials, North Korea announced it can enrich uranium — a simpler method of building nuclear weapons than reprocessing plutonium. Uranium can be enriched in relatively inconspicuous factories that can better evade spy-satellite detection, and uranium bombs may work without test explosions.

The admission — made in a threatening response to a June 12 U.N. Security Council resolution punishing Pyongyang for an underground plutonium bomb test last month — poses a new challenge to the U.S., China, South Korea, Russia and Japan as they seek to stem the reclusive country's atomic ambitions.

Since 2003, they have focused on persuading the North to disable a nuclear reactor north of Pyongyang, where the communist regime had been laboriously extracting plutonium, not a naturally occurring material, from spent fuel rods.

Natural uranium, on the other hand, is readily available. North Korea has said it has an estimated 26 million tons of natural uranium deposits, of which about four million tons can be economically extracted. The Washington-based Federation of American Scientists also said an estimated 4 million tons is high-quality uranium ore.

That doesn't mean North Korea can make a uranium bomb overnight. The uranium must be highly enriched first, and making enough for a bomb requires operating 1,000 to 3,000 centrifuges for a year, said Lee Choon-geun, an expert at South Korea's state-funded Science and Technology Policy Institute.

But its recent announcement suggests the country has begun heading in that direction.

And once the weapons-grade enriched uranium is in hand, it is "significantly easier" to build a bomb from it than from plutonium, said Ivan Oelrich, vice president of the Federation of American Scientists.

Uranium also can be enriched in a facility like an ordinary factory and doesn't release much heat compared with the plutonium-producing reactor at Yongbyon, north of Pyongyang. That makes it difficult for spy satellites to detect, according to South Korea's Institute of Nuclear Nonproliferation and Control.

And testing is not as essential for bombs built from uranium as for plutonium bombs. The North has conducted

Rice refused to comment on a North Korean ship that the United States suspects of transporting prohibited freight. The ship has been tailed by a US Navy vessel for nearly two weeks.

The UN Security Council adopted resolution 1874 in response to North Korea's May 25 nuclear test.

The resolution establishes a strengthened inspection regime for all cargo coming from or destined for North Korea, whether it is being transported by air, sea or ground.

The new sanctions also include a widening of the existing arms embargo on North Korea.

two nuclear tests of plutonium-made bombs, in 2006 and in May, which drew international condemnation and garnered U.N. sanctions.

Daniel Pinkston, a Seoul-based analyst for the International Crisis Group think tank, noted that the United States' first uranium bomb wasn't tested until it was dropped on Japan in August 1945.

In contrast, "a plutonium bomb generally is more sophisticated and needs to be tested before it can be used with confidence," he said.

Little concrete information is available about North Korea's uranium program and how far they've come in developing it. Oelrich estimated it is "in its infancy."

One senior South Korean official said he suspects the North has already embarked on uranium enrichment with the ultimate purpose of building bombs. He spoke on condition of anonymity, citing the sensitivity of the issue.

"I don't believe they have a commercial-scale plant up and running, and it will take them some time," Pinkston said. "However, they could cooperate with Iran and reduce the time required to build and operate a large-scale facility since Iran has made significant progress and is already operating a large facility."

North Korea and Iran are believed to be trading information about nuclear and missile technology, making proliferation a key concern.

"The more fissionable materials they have ... the more dangerous is the situation," said James Kelly, a former assistant U.S. secretary of state who confronted North Korean officials about uranium enrichment during a 2002 visit to Pyongyang.

North Korea claimed earlier this month it was "compelled to go nuclear" because of hostility from Washington.

"It has become an absolutely impossible option for the DPRK to even think about giving up its nuclear weapons," the Foreign Ministry said in a statement carried by state media, using the initials for the country's official name, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

The statement did not make clear whether the regime has secretly built up the program over the past seven years that it has denied its existence — or started it recently.

"The process of uranium enrichment will be commenced," the June 13 statement said. "Pursuant to the decision to build its own light-water reactor, enough success has been made in developing uranium enrichment technology to provide nuclear fuel to allow the experimental procedure."

Building a light-water reactor, ostensibly for civilian energy purposes, would give the North Koreans a premise for enriching uranium. Uranium enriched to low levels is used in power reactors; left spinning, centrifuges will enrich uranium to the high levels needed for bombs.

Suspicious about a North Korean uranium enrichment program date back years.

North Korea worked with A.Q. Khan, creator of Pakistan's atomic bomb, to obtain the centrifuges needed for uranium enrichment before his operation was disrupted in 2003, former Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf said.

He wrote in his 2006 memoir that Khan transferred nearly two dozen centrifuges — the main equipment used for uranium enrichment — to North Korea, as well as nearly 18 tons of materials, including centrifuges, components and drawings, to Iran and Libya.

Khan also "provided North Korea with a flow meter, some special oils for centrifuges, and coaching on centrifuge technology, including visits to top-secret centrifuge plants," Musharraf wrote in "In the Line of Fire."

In addition, North Korea bought 150 tons of aluminum tubes from Russia, another material used to build the

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centrifuges required to enrich uranium, said Lee, of the Science and Technology Policy Institute.

In 2007, then-U.S. nuclear envoy Christopher Hill said Washington knew Pyongyang had purchased equipment only used for uranium enrichment.

The future of nuclear disarmament negotiations with North Korea — known as the six-party talks and involving the two Koreas, the U.S., Russia, China and Japan — remained unclear weeks after North Korea abandoned the process and vowed to restart its plutonium reprocessing plant.

The decision to reveal its capability to enrich uranium now is most certainly tied to the succession campaign believed under way in North Korea, said Cheong Seong-chang, a senior analyst at Sejong Institute security think tank.

The country is in the middle of a "150-day battle" to build up the country's economy; many see it as a political campaign for Kim Jong Un, the 26-year-old reportedly slated to succeed his father, 67-year-old leader Kim Jong Il.

"Uranium enrichment can be used as a propaganda campaign to show Kim Jong Un's boldness as well as the North's determination not to buckle under pressure and solve its energy shortages, Cheong said.

PACIFIC:

33. 'Cha-Cha' Plotters Tap AFP

Plot On To Cut Ibrado's Term By October

(MANILA TIMES 29 JUN 09) ... Jefferson Antiporda

A plot was allegedly being hatched to shorten the term of Chief of Staff Victor Ibrado and to replace him with a general who would support changing the Constitution to allow President Gloria Arroyo stay in power after 2010.

The replacement was said to be Delfin Bangit, the commanding general of the Philippine Army, a military source told some reporters covering the Department of Defense. The source asked not to be identified for fear of reprisals from superiors.

Members of Philippine Military Academy (PMA) Class of 1978 would allegedly carry out the plot in October, dubbed "Operation August Moon," the source said. The plan was given that name because it was to start in August and end in October.

Besides the military's top post, other key positions were to be given to members of the Class of 1978, he added.

President Gloria Arroyo, whose term ends in 2010, is an adopted member of the class.

The supposed plot involves a three-month campaign to push Bangit, codenamed "The Emperor" in the plot, as chief of staff by October this year.

Just recently, Sen. Panfilo "Ping" Lacson branded Ibrado as a lame duck chief of staff, because Bangit was already poised to take over the post once Ibrado retires next year.

Bangit, a former chief of the Presidential Security Group (PSG) from 2003 to 2006, was the military officer who sponsored the President to be an adopted member of the Philippine Military Academy's Class of 1978.

The Presidential Security Group is the unit that provides security detail to the President and her family.

Ibrado was appointed in May and was expected to lead the Armed Forces for nine months before reaching mandatory

retirement age in March 2010.

But with the recently uncovered plot, the unnamed military source said that chances were Ibrado would only serve as chief of the military for five months.

The Times tried calling Ibrado on Sunday to ask him about the alleged plot but was unsuccessful.

The military's spokesman, Public Information Office chief Romeo Brawner, said the alleged plot was "non-existent" and that the military remains loyal to the government.

Story not true

The Times also called Bangit but was only able to reach his spokesman, Army Col. Marcelo Burgos.

Burgos said the alleged plot was not true, adding that those behind the story should insulate the military from politics.

"There's no truth behind it," Burgos insisted. "First of all such kind of plot is unhealthy to the organization, and the AFP [Armed Forces of the Philippines] has a mission to accomplish which is to defeat insurgency by next year, we have no time for that."

He added that members of Class of 1978 have good relations with other Philippine Military Academy classes, and there was no friction whatsoever among them.

There was no need for the military to get involved with politics, Burgos said, and Charter change was a political matter that should be left to politicians.

Burgos said he suspected that such allegations could be a handiwork of Bangit's detractors or other groups that want to destabilize the government.

Military and 'Cha-cha'

The military source also told The Times that a number of

soldiers have joined the swelling ranks of disgruntled soldiers in the military, adding that a serious problem could arise if President Arroyo insisted on using the military, particularly members of Class of 1978, in pushing Charter change.

But Bangit denied that there was no disenchantment among some members of the military and that the institution was solid.

The military spokesman said that the information about the plot could have come from groups that aimed to sow confusion in the military.

A number of military leaders have also maintained that the Armed Forces has matured as an institution and would remain apolitical and professional in its service for legitimate leaders.

The military was key in the success of EDSA 1 and 2, which toppled the governments of the day in bloodless coups. In EDSA 1, then President Ferdinand Marcos went into exile in 1986, and in the second EDSA, then-President Joseph Estrada was forced to relinquish power amid mounting

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AFRICA:

34. Somali Leader Says Islamists Use Child Soldiers

(REUTERS 28 JUN 09) ... Ibrahim Mohamed

MOGADISHU, - Somali President Sheik Sharif Ahmed accused hardline Al Shabaab Islamist rebels on Sunday of forcing children to fight in battles to oust his government in the Horn of Africa country.

Al Shabaab is seen as a proxy for al Qaeda in Somalia and includes foreign jihadists. It has carried out executions, floggings and amputations to enforce its authority, mainly in the southern Somali port of Kismayu.

The insurgents control most of southern Somalia and parts of the Horn of Africa nation's capital. Western nations fear they could destabilise the region and provide safe havens for hardline Islamists from elsewhere.

"The terrorist groups forcibly conscript children for soldiers and al Qaeda is involved in this, even their leaders have admitted that," he told reporters.

Violence from the Islamist-led insurgency has worsened this month, with a minister, the Mogadishu police chief, and a legislator killed.

On Sunday, ten masked al Shabaab men, who follow a strict version of sharia law, hurled large stones at a young man until he died, in the Middle Shabelle region.

"The culprit raped and killed an 18-year old girl... we sentenced him to be stoned to death according to Islamic rule," said Sheikh Abdul Baasid a local judge.

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OP-ED:

35. Understanding Iran: Repression 101

(NEW YORK TIMES 27 JUN 09) ... David E. Sanger

WASHINGTON — When the rallying cry on the streets of Tehran turned from "Death to America!" to the stranger-sounding "Death to the Dictator!" there was a great temptation to conclude that the days of the mullahs were numbered.

Maybe they are and maybe not; as President Obama said

criticisms of corruption and mismanagement. He was replaced by his then vice president, Mrs. Arroyo, under whose term Estrada was convicted of plunder but pardoned shortly after.

Defense Secretary Gilbert Teodoro said earlier that he believed that the military would not meddle with the political affairs of the government again.

"The AFP [Armed Forces of the Philippines] should be insulated from partisan politics," he added. "Our responsibility is to serve the interest of the nation above our own and let us leave political exercise to the politicians."

Teodoro, also one of those aspiring to be president after Mrs. Arroyo, also called on other sectors to leave the military alone and allow it to focus on the twin threats of terrorism and rebellion.

He also downplayed military adventurism, and that it was a thing of the past. The Armed Forces was now a solid and professional organization, Teodoro said.

The Islamists cut a hand and a leg each off four teenagers as punishment for robbery on Thursday.

The government, which controls but a few parts of the capital, has declared a state of emergency.

Agencies say the spiralling violence in Mogadishu has killed more than 250 civilians, and 160,000 have been forced to flee over the past seven weeks.

Ahmed accused Eritrea of supporting hardline Islamist opposition leader Hassan Dahir Aweys, who leads one of the insurgent groups fighting the government.

"My ex-friend Hassan Dahir is on an irreversible path and he is accompanied by Eritrean officials. He is committing crimes against Somali people. I'm (urging)...him to retract from those acts," he said.

Aweys and Ahmed both led the Islamic Courts, which ruled Mogadishu and most of South Somalia for six months until opponents backed by the Ethiopian military allies expelled them in a two week war in January 2007.

Ahmed's government, though clearly weak, is seen by some as moderate and offering the chance of peace in a country that has been without central rule for 18 years. (Writing by Wangui Kanina; editing by Ralph Boulton)

on Tuesday, "we don't know yet how this thing is going to play out." But inside Mr. Obama's National Security Council, and around the world, versions of the same question were being asked: Will the resort to raw repression work? Or will it eventually backfire, only widening the huge political breach that the election laid bare?

The history of repression to save regimes — or at least their leaders — is long. And every case is different: Some regimes are brittle in the face of popular pressure while others are supple in adapting to it; some can use nationalism as their trump card, while for others, it is an Achilles' heel. And if some regimes are simple tyrannies, the structure of Iran's political system is especially complex and opaque.

Still, a common thread is clear: It is the security services on which the regime's fate ultimately hinges. If they decide their best interests lie with the powers that they have protected, and that have protected them, they will stick it out. If they decide they are more likely to prosper under new leadership, power can collapse at the speed of a show trial.

There are a lot of gradations along that scale.

Twenty years ago this month, many inside and outside of China who witnessed Tiananmen Square confidently predicted the beginning of the end for the Communist Party. They were wrong. Two decades later the party itself has changed radically enough — tossing aside its revolutionary ideology and replacing it with a social compact built on stupendous annual economic growth — that it remains secure, with its grip on power as solid as ever.

How has it done that? Over the past two decades, the Chinese Communist Party has allowed some local elections, tolerated some protests over pollution or corruption (as long as they did not cut deeply at the powers of the national leadership), and allowed greater freedom to travel abroad and surf the Internet (with some strict limits). And the educated, rising classes accepted the unwritten rules: You can enjoy your rising expectations, but don't challenge the party's authority.

Meanwhile, the military has reaped spoils; not only is it being modernized, but today its financial enterprises are a large part of China's rising economy.

It is an example that the Iranians have, presumably, watched carefully, if only in this sense: their Revolutionary Guard, too, has grown in standing and financial clout in recent years.

Reach back a bit further in history, though, to the Solidarity uprisings in Poland in the early 1980s, and the lesson is different. There, at first, repression also worked. The security forces, part of the Warsaw Pact, were called on to enforce martial law and remained loyal to a government firmly in the Soviet Union's orbit. But over a decade's time the regime's hold on power — and on the soldiers' loyalties — eroded as union workers, intellectuals, a pope and eventually even the security forces lost all confidence in a government that they viewed as illegitimate.

Part of the reason the regime proved vulnerable was that Poles themselves saw it as a foreign implant. So when the Soviet Union began to fall apart, the security forces recognized that their own patron was heading for the rocks. They made a strategic (some might say survival) decision to back whatever government the people chose.

That was the beginning of a swift end. But the model doesn't really fit Iran. The mullahs may be many things — fundamentalist, intolerant, even vote fixers — but their trump card is that they are Iranian to core, and that their own revolution 30 years ago ejected an autocrat whose chief supporter abroad was the United States.

The examples do not stop there: Burma's brutal junta, which rewards a loyal, if corrupt, military even as the general

economy withers, has resisted a democracy movement's protests for three decades; North Korea's all-powerful military has never let protests fester at all, even as it pursues nuclear weaponry while the population goes hungry. On the other hand, in Indonesia and Nicaragua, the first cracks in dictatorships quickly shattered myths of impregnable control.

Nicaragua's case, in the 1970s, was a lesson in the price of losing core supporters. The Somoza dynasty had weathered rebellions before, but made a crucial mistake when it squandered foreign aid sent to help the shattered economy rebuild after a 1972 earthquake. That, combined with its brutality, alienated important middle-class leaders, who made common cause with the leftist Sandinistas as the United States slashed military aid. By 1979, the rebels had beaten the army.

Experts say that case may offer little parallel to Iran, whose economy is insulated whenever oil prices rise and whose populist president can appeal to the masses even when the elite grumble about the cost of Western sanctions.

South Korea's experience was different still, but also limited as a parallel to Iran. Its generals, who had run an authoritarian government during the cold war, were persuaded that they would not lose all their power in a democracy; that became the key to establishing one in the late 1980s.

"It's too early to draw any conclusions about which model fits in Iran," said Zbigniew Brzezinski, who was born in Warsaw and had the thankless task, as Jimmy Carter's national security adviser, of trying to establish relations with the leaders of Iran's revolution in 1979. "But in this case, I have to say I'm pessimistic in the short term, and optimistic in the long term."

That pretty well captures the mood of Mr. Obama's advisers. In background conversations last week, several cautioned that it was not clear what the Iranians had in mind. "The students in Tiananmen wanted real democracy, the Poles wanted regime change, but the Iranians might be looking for something in between," one of Mr. Obama's top advisers said. "But the more the supreme leader cracks down, the more radicalized the opposition may become."

Robert Litwak, the author of "Regime Change," a study of how modern regimes have fallen, said last week: "The truth here is that a soft landing for Iranian society is not a soft landing for the leadership." So far, he observed last week, "the Iranians are not as sufficiently united against the regime as the Poles were in the late '80s." Moreover, the Polish regime was more fragile: Because it was considered a Soviet tool, the opposition could play to nationalist emotions.

Not so in Iran. The clerics may be repressive hardliners, but they are authentically Iranian. And so far, the Revolutionary Guard seems completely on the side of the supreme leader and President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

That will be hard to shake. Mr. Ahmadinejad's rise to power was in part because of Guard support, and he has since rewarded it handsomely. The Revolutionary Guard runs Iran's nuclear program; if the opposition gains power, the Guard has to wonder what it might negotiate away. And outside agencies estimate that Iran could become able to assemble a nuclear weapon between 2010 and 2015.

As one of Mr. Obama's aides said the other day, "for the leadership, that suggests the next five years are no time to be messing with the formula."

36. US Misunderstanding On Iran Lingers

(*ASIA TIMES* 27 JUN 09) ... Ali Gharib

WASHINGTON - After 30 years of enmity closed off most lines of communication, the recent crisis in Iran has suddenly engendered a boom of American interest in the Islamic Republic.

But much of the attention in Washington and elsewhere in the US is often misplaced, misguided, or completely detached from the realities currently embroiling Iran in its most significant crisis since the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

United States diplomatic relations with the nascent Islamic Republic were severed after a hostage crisis, when a group of Iranian students seized the US Embassy in Tehran on November 4, 1979, and held many of its occupants hostage for 444 days.

Since then, few significant steps have been taken towards repairing relations, and the remaining contacts between the US and Iran atrophied as US experts with firsthand knowledge of Iran grew older and their knowledge grew more obsolete.

"[The revolution] was 30 years ago," said ambassador Nick Burns, a former State Department under secretary for political affairs in the George W Bush administration. "We have a whole generation of foreign service officers who didn't learn Farsi."

Furthermore, while there have been some diplomatic contacts with Iran on matters such as Afghanistan - before 2003 when Bush placed Iran in the "axis of evil" - and later Iraq, those contacts were uncommon and narrow in scope.

"I was the point person on Iran from 2005 to 2008, and I never once met an Iranian official," said Burns.

The resulting knowledge deficit has haunted attempts at easing relations, as when president former president Bill Clinton's secretary of state Madeline Albright waited outside a conference room at the United Nations. As a gesture, Albright planned to catch her Iranian counterpart on the way out and shake his hand. But the Iranian foreign minister wouldn't shake a woman's hand, nor did he want pictures of him with a high-ranking US official to get back to Iran.

Many pundits and politicians in the US view the current crisis as an opportunity to instigate a regime change in Iran, projecting their own aspirations on those of the demonstrators and supporters of the ostensible loser of Iran's election, former prime minister Mir Hossein Mousavi.

"This is not about my expertise versus somebody in a think-tank," declared Senator Lindsey Graham as he announced his sponsorship for a bill that would boost funding to Radio Farda and Voice of America in Farsi to help the US-sponsored news outlets get broader reach in Iran. "This is about me doing what I need to do."

Along with Graham, neo-conservative Senator Joe Lieberman and Senator John McCain announced their support for the bill, to be written over the next Congressional break.

The Iranian government has charged that the broadcast of foreign news sources into Iran is spurring on demonstrations. This claim is cited in the oft-repeated government mantra that the protests are merely foreign meddling in Iranian affairs.

These accusations became all the more vocal this week, with Iranian President Mahmud Ahmadinejad on Thursday telling US President Barack Obama to avoid "interfering in Iran's affairs".

"Our question is why he fell into this trap and said things that previously [former US president George W] Bush used to say," Ahmadinejad was quoted by the semi-official Fars news agency as saying.

In response, the White House accused Ahmadinejad of seeking to blame the US for unrest following the disputed election which saw Ahmadinejad re-elected for a second term.

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

Early in the crisis, when tens of thousands of Iranians took to the streets objecting to the landslide victory of Ahmadinejad, Mousavi said that the ultimate objective of the protests was to get the allegedly fraudulent results annulled in favor of a new election.

When Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei announced a crackdown against the protests, rumors began to fly that a campaign was underway to unseat Khamenei as the supreme leader. While this presented a challenge to the order within the system, no credible evidence has emerged to suggest that the protest movement as whole endorses an overthrow of the system.

Indeed, Mousavi has repeatedly said the demonstrations are within the constitutional rights of Iranians granted by the Islamic Republic (article 27 permits peaceful protest). Even attempting to unseat Khamenei can be accomplished through the existing structures of the system - namely the Assembly of Experts, which appoints and can impeach the leader.

Undeterred by those realities, or perhaps unaware of the dynamics, US commentators continue to present the protesters as opposed to the system of the Islamic Republic. For example, widely read New York Times foreign affairs columnist Thomas Friedman seized on the Mousavi campaign's green color scheme and declared the movement "Iran's Green Revolution to end its theocracy".

Asieh Mir, an Iranian who formerly worked in government and civil society there and who now is a fellow at the US Institute of Peace (USIP), says that the battle being waged in Iran is between two factions within the regime. Even Mousavi's faction, she says, seeks a "workable democracy for Iran that holds to Islamic values" and does not necessarily want to install a democracy in the Western sense.

At the same USIP forum, Brookings Institution fellow Suzanne Maloney said that in the current crisis, reliable information about elite wrangling was at a minimum because those with knowledge and a stake in the process were unlikely to get on "international phone lines" or the Internet to distribute the information around the globe.

Furthermore, Maloney contends that the crisis itself is evidence of a knowledge deficit in the US, "As we've seen in the past two weeks, we had no idea what was going on in Iran," nor an ability to predict what happened, noting that there is little information from "anyone who means anything".

But the most glaring misunderstanding of Iran seems to come from US neo-conservatives and their right-wing allies, who have called on Obama to make broader efforts at

democracy promotion in Iran and stronger denunciations of the Iranian regime in light of the maltreatment of peaceful protesters.

But Maloney, mirroring Mir's comments, contends that a pro-democratic faction already exists in Iran, but the US doesn't understand or know much about it.

"This movement already exists and we don't touch it," she said. "We have no idea where it is."

Nonetheless, neo-conservatives, some of whom like Daniel Pipes admitted their preference for an Ahmadinejad victory, have urged Obama to make demands of the Iranian leadership and levy sanctions against the regime.

But Iranian-American journalist and author Hooman Majd, one of the best-connected Western journalists in Iran, rejects the neo-conservative mantras as an example of ignorance about Iran and an inability to get over the Bush goal of regime change.

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37. Do Not Forget Burma

(WASHINGTON POST 28 JUN 09) ... Laura Bush

For two weeks, the world has been transfixed by images of Iranians taking to the streets to demand the most basic human freedoms and rights. Watching these courageous men and women, I am reminded of a similar scene nearly two years ago in Burma, when tens of thousands of Buddhist monks peacefully marched through their nation's streets. They, too, sought to reclaim basic human dignity for all Burmese citizens, but they were beaten back by that nation's harsh regime.

Since those brutal days in September 2007, Burma's suffering has intensified. In the past 21 months, the number of political prisoners incarcerated by the junta has doubled. Within the past 10 days, two Burmese citizens were sentenced to 18 months in prison. Their offense: praying in a Buddhist pagoda for the release of the jailed opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi. That is only the tip of the regime's brutality. Inside Burma, more than 3,000 villages have been "forcibly displaced" -- a number exceeding the mass relocations in genocide-racked Darfur. The military junta has forced tens of thousands of child soldiers into its army and routinely uses civilians as mine-sweepers and slave laborers. It has closed churches and mosques; it has imprisoned comedians for joking about the government and bloggers for writing about it. Human trafficking, where women and children are snatched and sold, is pervasive. Summary executions pass for justice, while lawyers are arrested for the "crime" of defending the persecuted.

Rape is routinely used as a "weapon of war." In 2006, I convened a roundtable at the United Nations to address the situation in Burma and listened as Burmese activist Hseng Noun described the rape victims she had aided. The youngest victim was 8; the oldest was 80. Her words silenced the room.

Yet time and again, the women of Burma, who are often the regime's chief targets, have responded to this brutality with inspiring courage. I will never forget visiting the remote and crowded refugee camps on the mountainous border between Burma and Thailand. There, I watched the tireless efforts of Dr. Cynthia Maung to provide lifesaving medical aid for hundreds of Burmese in need, many of them ill or injured. I sat with victims of land mines who had lost legs or feet and were waiting quietly, often for hours, for basic care. Last fall,

"The neo-cons know nothing about Iran, nothing about the culture of Iran," Majd told Salon.com. "They have no interest in understanding Iran, in speaking to any Iranian other than Iranian exiles who support the idea of invasions - I'll call them Iranian Chabalis," a reference to now-disgraced neo-conservative darling Iraqi exile Ahmad Chalabi, who reportedly provided some of the bad intelligence on Iraq's weapons programs and was slated for a prominent post-invasion role in Iraq.

"It's offensive, even to an Iranian American like me," said Majd. "There are people who would have actually preferred to have Ahmadinejad as president so they could continue to demonize him and were worried, as some wrote in op-eds, that Mousavi would be a distraction and would make it easier to Iranians to build a nuclear weapon. And now all a sudden they want to be on his side? Go away."

it was my great privilege to present a Vital Voices award to Charm Tong, who testified before U.N. officials at the age of 17 and eloquently described the systematic military campaign of rape and abuse that is being waged against women in Burma's Shan state. She spoke unflinchingly even though her audience included representatives of the very regime she condemned.

More of us in America should make such courage our courage. At this moment, Aung San Suu Kyi, 64 and in fragile health, faces sentencing on trumped-up charges that could force her to endure five more years of brutal captivity. The junta leaders wish to undermine the Nobel Peace laureate's influence ahead of next year's elections. Leaders from around the world -- including the United States -- have called forcefully for the junta to release Aung San Suu Kyi and the 2,100 other political prisoners it is holding. Even Burma's closest allies in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations have called for her to receive proper medical care and have warned that Burma's "honor and credibility" are at stake. But the world must do more than express concern.

A new report from Harvard Law School asks the U.N. Security Council to establish a "commission of inquiry" into crimes against humanity and war crimes in Burma. Harvard's panel of international law experts has carefully catalogued what it deems as the junta's "widespread and systemic" human rights violations. The Security Council has already referred the crisis in Darfur to the International Criminal Court. It should do the same for Burma.

With U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon planning to visit Burma this summer, it is crucial that he press the regime to take immediate steps to end human rights abuses, particularly in ethnic minority areas. There have been 38 U.N. resolutions condemning these abuses, yet the horrors continue unabated. Under the junta's brutal rule, too many lives have been wasted, lives whose talents could have helped all of Burma prosper.

But Aung San Suu Kyi's continued example of civil courage -- like those brave protesters in Iran -- reminds all of us that no matter how callous the regime, it cannot lock up what she stands for: the fundamental desire of all people to live in freedom and with dignity. During the brief moments

that foreign diplomats were allowed to observe her show trial, Aung San Suu Kyi calmly apologized for having to greet them in a prison, saying, "I hope to meet you in better times." We should all share her hope -- and add our voices to those who

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OTHER:

38. Univ. Of Wisconsin Reaching Out To Military

(MILITARY TIMES/AP 28 JUN 09) ... Ryan J. Foley

MADISON, Wis. — The University of Wisconsin-Madison, which saw some of the fiercest Vietnam War protests in the nation, is shedding its long-standing antimilitary image by hiring a military historian and teaching a new course for military officers.

The university also has improved services for veterans after hiring an assistant dean with a military background last year.

"It really is a group effort to reach out to the military in a way we never have before, at least not in the last 20 to 30 years," UW-Madison history professor Jeremi Suri said.

"We've actually in the last few months, out of circumstance, made enormous headway. ... We're getting beyond this really silly notion people have that we're antimilitary."

The image dates to the 1960s and '70s, when the university was a hotbed of Vietnam War protests. In 1970, four student radicals used a car bomb to destroy a building housing the Army Mathematics Research Center, killing a young scientist.

Suri is teaching the online course on the history of U.S. war and 20th-century diplomatic strategy to military officers this summer. His graduate assistant, retired Capt. Scott Mobley, commanded a Navy ship in the first days of the Iraq war in 2003 and helped develop the course.

Mobley said he received lots of interest in the course and more than two dozen Army, Navy and Air Force officers signed up.

They include Joshua McAuliffe, a first lieutenant in the Army who is an intelligence officer at a military prison in Iraq. The 25-year-old from Potosi, Wis., uses free time at Camp Bucca to listen to online lectures and do course reading and homework.

"I am taking this course to better understand the historical backdrops that have led to the United States using military intervention," he wrote in an e-mail. "I hope through a better understanding. ... I will come out as a better leader, one that is informed and able to speak intelligently on the subject."

Suri said he hopes to provide a new model for educating military employees if the class offered over the Internet is successful.

"If we can be educating officers out there, I'm idealistic enough to believe we'll do a lot better job as a country," he said. "The idea is to give military officers a firmer historical grounding in the kinds of issues they are confronting every day — the problems of cultural difference, counterinsurgency, problems with nation-building."

His outreach hasn't gone unnoticed. Roger Hertog, a

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risk so much to protest tyranny and injustice in Burma and beyond.

conservative-leaning philanthropist in New York, agreed to donate \$200,000 to the university in February to help Suri's efforts. "Jeremi is someone who tries to do new things — witness this whole reaching out to the military online," Hertog said.

Suri also led the search for the university's new military history professor, which ended in the April hiring of Maj. John Hall, a historian who had worked in the Future Warfare Division of the Army's Training and Doctrine Command in Virginia.

Hall's position is supported through a donation from the late historian Stephen Ambrose, a UW-Madison alumnus best known as the author of "Band of Brothers." He created an endowment in 1996 to support the job after the school's longtime military historian retired. The school received about \$500,000 when Ambrose died in 2002.

The university had kept the position open until now, prompting accusations that liberals on the faculty were deliberately blocking the hiring of a military historian. The university denied that, saying it did not want to fill the position until the endowment was worth more and it had money to pay the professor's salary.

A search started in 2006 failed to find a suitable candidate. The second ended with the hiring of Hall, 36, an expert on the history of U.S.-Indian military and diplomatic relations in the Great Lakes region.

"I think a lot of people see me as being perhaps uniquely capable of bridging whatever divide exists between the military and the University of Wisconsin," Hall said.

James Kurtz, commander of a local Veterans of Foreign Wars post, recalled being angered by anti-war protests in Madison after he returned from the Vietnam War in 1967, an especially turbulent time on campus. But this year, he served on the committee that interviewed Hall, who he said would provide a valuable viewpoint for the faculty.

"This is a very positive step," he said.

Military groups also have praised the university for hiring retired Army Lt. Col. John Bechtol last year as an assistant dean of students to serve veterans, who are enrolling in greater numbers.

Bechtol has helped the school's 650 veterans find benefits, sped up processing of financial aid by months in some cases and resolved disputes with students called to active duty. He said he is working to change the negative perception many veterans have of the school.

"They say, 'They don't like veterans in Madison' and I tell them that's not the case at all," he said.