C U R R E N T N E W S

E A R L Y B I R D

October 10, 2012

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Item numbers indicate order of appearance only.

NATO

1. **NATO To Discuss Afghan War, Reveal New Commanders**
   (Yahoo.com)....Lolita C. Baldor, Associated Press
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4. **NATO Closer To Sharing The Wealth Via 'Smart Defense'**
   (The E-Ring (e-ring.foreignpolicy.com))....Kevin Baron
   NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen announced the approval of two more multinational security burden-sharing “projects” under the banner of “Smart Defense,” at the defense ministers meeting happening in Brussels on Tuesday.

5. **Georgian Tycoon Anticipates NATO Entry Soon**
   (Washington Post)....News services
   The billionaire who is likely to become Georgia's next prime minister said he was confident the former Soviet republic would soon join NATO. Bidzina Ivanishvili, whose opposition coalition won parliamentary elections last week, also responded to accusations that he might let Georgia be drawn back into Moscow's orbit. "We are striving towards Europe," he said after his first meeting with President Mikheil Saakashvili since the vote.

SYRIA

6. **U.S. Military Is Sent To Jordan To Help With Crisis In Syria**
   (New York Times)....Michael R. Gordon and Elisabeth Bumiller
   The United States military has secretly sent a task force of more than 150 planners and other specialists to Jordan to help the armed forces there handle a flood of Syrian refugees, prepare for the possibility that Syria will lose control of its chemical weapons and be positioned should the turmoil in Syria expand into a wider conflict.

7. **NATO Vows Support For Turkey In Border Standoff**
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NATO is ready to defend Turkey, the alliance's top official said Tuesday, in a direct warning to Syria after a week of cross-border artillery and mortar exchanges dramatically escalated tensions between the two countries.

8. **Qaeda-Linked Group Claims Responsibility For Syrian Blasts**
(New York Times)....Anne Barnard and Christine Hauser
A jihadist insurgent group that Western intelligence officials have linked to Al Qaeda claimed responsibility on Tuesday for a multiple bombing by suicide attackers who struck an intelligence compound on the outskirts of Damascus overnight. It was the second major assault that the group has claimed to have carried out against a government facility in a Syrian urban center in about a week.

9. **Iran Assisting Syrian Surveillance Of Rebels**
(Washington Post)....Ellen Nakashima
Iran is providing crucial equipment and technical help to Syria in its effort to track opposition forces through the Internet and other forms of electronic surveillance, according to U.S. officials.

10. **Iraq Sends Crucial Fuel Oil Supplies To Syria**
(Financial Times)....Lina Saigol and Michael Peel
Iraq is quietly shipping vital supplies of fuel oil to Syria in a deal that has triggered concern in Washington and exposes Damascus's difficulties in keeping its economy afloat in the face of a growing civil war and economic sanctions.

AFGHANISTAN

11. **Kabul Prepares For U.S. Talks**
(Wall Street Journal)....Yaroslav Trofimov and Nathan Hodge
Afghanistan's demands to curtail immunity for U.S. forces will be a main stumbling block in negotiations over the long-term American military presence here, Afghan National Security Adviser Rangin Dadfar Spanta said, highlighting the issue that derailed similar U.S. talks with Iraq a year ago.

12. **Top Soldiers Reassure On Insider Fears**
(Tacoma News Tribune)....Adam Ashton
Three of the Army's highest-ranking soldiers have gone to remote outposts in one of Afghanistan's most dangerous districts in the last month to connect with Joint Base Lewis-McChord soldiers and answer their tough questions about the rising number of insider attacks.

13. **U.N. Extends NATO Afghan Mission**
(Philadelphia Inquirer)....Edith M. Lederer, Associated Press
The U.N. Security Council on Tuesday extended authorization for the NATO-led force in Afghanistan for a year and welcomed the agreement to gradually transfer full responsibility for security in the country to the Afghan government by the end of 2014.

14. **Taliban Leader Who Downs NATO Helicopter Killed: Coalition**
(Xinhua News Agency)....Xinhua
A local Taliban leader, who was accused of shooting down a NATO CH-47 Chinook helicopter last year, was killed in Afghanistan's eastern province of Kunar, the NATO- led coalition forces confirmed on Wednesday.

15. **The Afghan War: Do The Numbers Add Up To Success?**
(McClatchy Newspapers (mcclatchydc.com))....Matthew Schofield, McClatchy Newspapers
...Violence is down, Panetta said, echoing a refrain heard around the Pentagon. But for all the American blood and treasure invested in the war, some experts who've studied it contend that the problem with the military's claims of success is that the numbers don't add up. Using them alone, the Taliban is overmatched, and attacks since the surge are down. Yet, they have become more brazen.

16. **Insurgent Bomb Kills Six Afghan Cops**
(Agence France-Presse)....AFP
A Taliban roadside bomb ripped through a police vehicle in a southern Afghanistan town on Wednesday, killing six officers including a commander, an official said.

MIDEAST

17. **Al Qaeda Rebuilding In Iraq**
(Philadelphia Inquirer)....Associated Press
Al Qaeda is rebuilding in Iraq and has set up training camps for insurgents in the nation's western deserts as the extremist group seizes on regional instability and government security failures to regain strength, officials say.

18. **Iraq Signs Arms Deals Worth $4.2 Billion**
(Washington Post)....Reuters
Russia announced Tuesday that it has signed $4.2 billion in deals to sell arms to Iraq, making it the largest weapons supplier to the Middle Eastern country after the United States.

PAKISTAN

19. **Taliban Gun Down Girl Who Spoke Up For Rights**
(New York Times)....Declan Walsh
At the age of 11, Malala Yousafzai took on the Taliban by giving voice to her dreams. As turbaned fighters swept through her town in northwestern Pakistan in 2009, the tiny schoolgirl spoke out about her passion for education — she wanted to become a doctor, she said — and became a symbol of defiance against Taliban subjugation.

20. **US Drone Strike Kills Five 'Militants' In Pakistan**
(Agence France-Presse)....Hasbanullah Khan, Agence France-Presse
A US drone strike targeting a militant compound killed five insurgents in a restive Pakistani tribal region near the Afghan border on Wednesday, security officials said.

ASIA/PACIFIC

21. **North Korea Says Its Missiles Can Reach U.S. Mainland**
(New York Times)....Choe Sang-Hun
North Korea claimed Tuesday to have missiles that can reach the American mainland, and it said that the recent agreement between the United States and South Korea to extend the range of the South’s ballistic missiles was increasing the risk of war on the Korean Peninsula.

MILITARY

22. **Military Families Balk At Health Fee**
(Wall Street Journal)....Louise Radnofsky
A provision in the national health-care law that lets young adults stay on their parents' insurance plan is popular with many families—but not ones in the military.

NAVY

23. **On 237th Birthday, Navy Feels Its Time Has Come; Budget Pressures Belie Campaign Rhetoric**
(AOL Defense (defense.aol.com))....Sydney J. Freedberg Jr.
"It's perfectly acceptable to say 'beat Army,'" the Chief of Naval Operations began, and the assembled sailors laughed. Adm. Jonathan Greenert was making a football joke, but there's a serious strategic point beneath the smiles. At this morning's celebration of the Navy's 237th birthday, the service's normal pride on such occasions was redoubled by a strong sense that... the administration's refocus on the Pacific means it is now the Navy's turn to shine.

24. **Of Machines And Men, And Fires And Fastballs**
(Washington Post)....Al Kamen
...The Navy is developing a version of C-3PO, the lovable “Star Wars” robot who appeared on the big screen 35 years ago, to fight shipboard fires. The Navy robot’s name is Autonomous Shipboard Humanoid (ASH). It’s hoped ASH will be able to walk in any direction, keep its balance at sea, and go through narrow passageways and up ladders.

CONGRESS

25. **Before Hearings On Libya Attack, Charges Of Playing Politics**
(New York Times)....Michael S. Schmidt and Eric Schmitt
On the eve of the first Congressional hearing on the attack last month at the American diplomatic mission in Benghazi, Libya, members of the House committee investigating the assaults spent Tuesday accusing one another of exploiting the violence to score partisan political points.

26. **Government Waste?**
(CNN)....Drew Griffin
...It's a remarkable sight parked in the California desert, more than 2,000 of them, row upon row of M1 Abrams tanks, built by General Dynamics beginning in the 1980s. Most of them are still ready to roll. So when the U.S. Army's budget folks sat down to make some tough decisions about what to cut, they saw a great opportunity. Postpone what they said would be a $3 billion expense, the refurbishing of hundreds of these tanks at this General Dynamics plant in Lima, Ohio.

27. **U.S. House Report Lists Multitude Of Weapons Programs Sequestration Would Hit**
(DefenseNews.com)....John T. Bennett
Unless lawmakers find a way to prevent a $53 billion cut to planned defense spending for 2013, the U.S. military services would be forced to buy fewer F-35 fighters, Stryker vehicles and Army helicopters, says a House panel. What’s more, the pending cut could jeopardize the Air Force’s plans for new tanker and bomber fleets.

28. **Challengers Could Topple Armed Services Members**
(Politico.com)....Leigh Munsil
With Election Day less than a month away, some members of the House and Senate Armed Services committees are fighting for their political lives in races that could well go down to the wire.

BUSINESS

29. **Defense Budget Cut 'Equals Devastation,' Bell Chief Says**
(Fort Worth Star-Telegram)....Bob Cox
Bell Helicopter Chief Executive John Garrison on Tuesday joined the chorus of defense industry executives sounding the alarm about the likely consequences if Congress doesn't act by early January to block huge defense spending cuts from automatically taking place.

30. **Boards Meet To Consider EADS Deal**
(Wall Street Journal)....Stephen Fidler and Daniel Michaels
The boards of Airbus parent European Aeronautic Defence & Space Co. and British defense giant BAE Systems PLC met late Tuesday to discuss their proposed merger before a critical deadline, as senior European officials cited progress in government talks on how the deal would be structured.

COMMENTARY

31. **Protecting Against A 'Cyber 9/11'**
(Washington Post)....Joseph I. Lieberman
Congress has recessed until after the November elections without passing cybersecurity legislation, which a bipartisan chorus of prominent defense and intelligence officials says is urgently needed to protect our country’s economic and national security.

32. **A Third Way In Syria**
(Los Angeles Times)....Robert A. Pastor
The conflict in Syria was "extremely bad and getting worse." That's what Lakhdar Brahimi, special envoy to Syria for the United Nations and the Arab League and one of the world's most skillful diplomats, told the Security Council in late September. The major powers listened but offered no new ideas on how to end the crisis. We need to change direction.

33. **The Enemy Within**
(ForeignPolicy.com)....Lawrence J. Korb
The U.S. military is confronting an epidemic of suicides, which, in the Army alone, are currently averaging more than one a day. To deal with this scourge, Defense Secretary Leon Panetta has said that he wants military leaders to "kick ass" and that he will hold them accountable for whether they succeed in helping desperate troops.

34. **Tighter Defence Ties Will Bind Academics And Stifle Innovation**
(Sydney Morning Herald)....Jill Trewhella
When our politicians line up for pictures with the US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, during her visit next month few Australians will be aware of the potential cost of that photo opportunity.

35. **BAE Needs EADS. There's No Serious Alternative**
(London Times)....Sash Tusa
In announcing that it was in talks with EADS, the European owner of Airbus, BAE Systems opened a Pandora's Box.

36. **Embargo Iran**
(Chicago Tribune)....Editorial
Iran's currency took such a breathtaking nose dive against the dollar last week that even the country's denier-in-chief, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, had to admit that economic sanctions were cutting deep.

37. **No Light At End Of Afghan Tunnel -- (Letter)**
(Wall Street Journal)....J.M. Simpson
I recently watched a Special Forces soldier honored for his bravery. During the reading of the citations for the Silver and Bronze Stars he received, it was clearly noted that the Afghan National Security Forces he was serving with had cut and run during two separate firefights. What I heard that day is contrary to what Frederick Kagan and Kimberly Kagan write in "The 'Andar Uprising' and Progress in Afghanistan" (op-ed, Oct. 4).

Yahoo.com
October 10, 2012

1. NATO To Discuss Afghan War, Reveal New Commanders

By Lolita C. Baldor, Associated Press

BRUSSELS -- NATO defense ministers are gathering in Belgium Wednesday to begin deliberating the next phase of the Afghanistan war and to hear how military commanders plan to tamp down the insider attacks that have killed or injured 130 allied forces.

Officials here are also expected to formally announce that the top U.S. commander in Afghanistan, Marine Gen. John Allen, will be the next NATO supreme allied commander. Allen is slated to take over early next year, and Marine Gen. Joseph Dunford, the assistant Marine commandant, will take the top Afghanistan job.

During the meeting, Allen and Defense Secretary Leon Panetta plan to assure the ministers that commanders have come up with a range of ways to reduce the insider attacks in which Afghans have turned their guns on allied forces.

Agence France-Presse
October 10, 2012

2. NATO Focuses On Afghan Transition

By Bryan McManus, Agence France-Presse

NATO defence ministers on Wednesday focus on planning for Afghanistan after combat forces are withdrawn in 2014, knowing that the transition to full control by Kabul is fraught with danger and problems.

They will also have to review progress in Kosovo, where a NATO-led peacekeeping effort is now in its 13th year, with little sign that the dispute over the country's self-proclaimed independence from Serbia can be resolved.

Afghanistan, however, remains the key issue, with hundreds of billions spent on a war the public has grown disenchanted with, while the problems of withdrawal and what happens afterwards press increasingly for answers.

NATO head Anders Fogh Rasmussen said Tuesday that, despite setbacks in Afghanistan, "the goal, the strategy and the timeline remain unchanged," with the alliance beginning work on a training and assistance mission from 2015.

Rasmussen insisted that the Taliban would not succeed, but one diplomatic source said 'insider attacks' -- where renegade Afghan soldiers killed their NATO comrades -- were a major concern.

NATO members have "concerns about the safety of their own soldiers but also about the potential impact on the overall effort," the source said.

More than 50 NATO soldiers have died in such attacks this year, leading to the temporary suspension of joint operations with Afghan troops, alliance officials said earlier this week.

The Taliban had jumped on the attacks "as something with strategic potential. This is not something that is yet a strategic threat, it has the potential to be that," said the diplomatic source, who asked not to be identified.

"More important right now is how we respond to it, what measures are taken."

The challenges facing NATO are daunting, with the diplomatic source highlighting the slow progress made in developing local governance in Afghanistan, a key step in winning hearts and minds.

Meanwhile, the Taliban will retreat to remote Pakistan areas, not fully controlled by the government, in the winter months to rearm and build supplies, making the insurgent problem more difficult still to control, the source added.

The other main theme of the meeting at NATO headquarters on the outskirts of Brussels is how to address the tricky problem of military spending at a time when governments are under pressure on all sides to cut budgets.

"This period of economic austerity poses a challenge to defence budgets but it also opens an opportunity for strength and cooperation and new ways to provide security," Rasmussen said Tuesday.

NATO adopted a 'Smart Defence' policy at a May summit in Chicago, aiming to promote increased cooperation and burden sharing to offset smaller budgets.

The United States accounts for the bulk of NATO defence spending and its portion has increased markedly in the last decade, a sore point for Washington in trying to get its allies to do more.

"Let me be clear: we need smart spending and, even more, we need sufficient spending," Rasmussen said.

Reuters.com
October 9, 2012

3. Ministers Try To Limit Impact Of Defence Cuts On NATO

By Adrian Croft, Reuters

BRUSSELS -- NATO ministers wrestled on Tuesday with how to prevent austerity-driven defence cuts in many member countries from undermining the power of the 63-year-old Western alliance.

Many European countries have cut defence spending in recent years as they try to rein in budget deficits, deepening the gulf in military capabilities between the United States and the other 27 alliance members.

On the first day of a two-day meeting in Brussels, NATO defence ministers were looking at how to make scarce defence dollars go further by increasing multinational cooperation and cutting wasteful duplication of effort.

NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen urged member nations to commit to increasing defence spending again once the squeeze on budgets eases.

"Once our economies recover, we must increase our investment in defence once again," Rasmussen told reporters at the start of the meeting. "Because security is the basis of prosperity. Some argue that we cannot afford it. But I say that we cannot afford to be without it."

NATO diplomats say it is unrealistic to expect any increase in defence spending soon although the pressure on alliance budgets may ease slightly once the NATO-led combat mission in Afghanistan finishes at the end of 2014.

Ministers turn to Afghanistan on Wednesday, when they are expected to give military experts the go-ahead to draw up detailed plans for a NATO-led training mission that will start work in Afghanistan in 2015 once combat operations end.

The United States has made little secret of its frustration with declining European defence spending and European deficiencies were laid bare during last year's NATO bombing campaign in Libya, when the Europeans had to rely on the United States in key areas.

One NATO answer to the cash shortage has been "smart" defence. This means more cooperation between alliance members to reduce wasteful

duplication of equipment and to enable members to access to capabilities they could not afford on their own.

NATO allies are working on 24 multinational programmes and more are in the works. One example is a "universal armaments interface" to enable fighter jets to use munitions from various sources and nations.

Experts say the proposed merger of Franco-German dominated EADS and Britain's BAE Systems could encourage governments to standardise weapons and equipment.

Rasmussen avoided expressing an opinion on the merger, whose future hung in the balance on Tuesday, but said he favoured restructuring Europe's defence industries to make them more competitive.

Another idea debated by ministers was whether NATO's own central pool of funds could be used to help develop shared multinational capabilities. NATO's central military budget, made up of contributions from member states, totals 1.45 billion euros this year, about a third of which is spent on operations.

"As the level of activity in our operations goes down, the question arises what do you do with this money?" said a senior NATO diplomat, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The diplomat suggested some of the funds could be spent on training to make sure NATO nations keep the operational edge they have acquired by working together for years in Afghanistan.

Ministers were also planning to discuss results of a study measuring the effectiveness of each country's defence spending.

Additional reporting by Sebastian Moffett, Claire Davenport, Justyna Pawlak.

The E-Ring (e-ring.foreignpolicy.com)
October 9, 2012
The E-Ring: Inside the Pentagon's Power Corridors

4. NATO Closer To Sharing The Wealth Via 'Smart Defense'

By Kevin Baron

NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen announced the approval of two more multinational security burden-sharing "projects" under the banner of "Smart Defense," at the defense ministers meeting happening in Brussels on Tuesday.

It's the latest sign that Rasmussen's pet project -- which in part helped him win a job extension through 2014 last week -- has real footing across the pond.

With European defense budgets crunching, the Continent like never before is planning to share its military forces and capabilities in an attempt to make the whole greater than the sum of its parts. The next step: sharing military budgets.

Rasmussen said the ministers in Brussels would discuss increasing the use of common funds, and he felt there is support for the idea, but no decisions were expected this week. Instead, he focused on the combined-nation projects just being inked. Past agreements included pooling maritime patrol aircraft, maintenance and medical facilities, and training.

"Over the coming months, I would expect us to agree to around 10 more. Dozens more ideas are also under consideration, and should come to fruition in the years ahead," Rasmussen said.

What's still unclear, however, is what role the United States will play in Smart Defense, or wants to play. Rasmussen didn't mention the United States when praising the plan.

"This is an effort which reaches across the Alliance. It is one in which every Ally, large and small, is involved. And it is one in which European Allies are playing a central role. European countries are involved in every one of the 24 projects we have set in motion so far. They are leading two-thirds of them. And one-third are purely European in terms of participation. This is crucial. Because it shows that European Allies are aware of their responsibilities and are actively looking for ways to improve their capabilities, even in this time of economic austerity," he said.

Bully for Europe. That speech will make former Defense Secretary Robert Gates happy. Last year, Gates blasted NATO capitals in his final speech in Brussels on his way into retirement, warning against faltering on defense spending or their troop commitments abroad right when the alliance needs greater security against the spread of violent extremism beyond its borders.

The U.S. so overwhelmingly overshadows its fellow NATO members in military spending, personnel, equipment and capabilities, that NATO has yet to lay out exactly what part of that future collective defense should remain in the Washington portfolio and what else other nations can take on their own.

Some of it is not hard to imagine: the U.S. has refueling, intelligence, joint command operations, and naval assets far out gunning Europe collectively. But what could the U.S. stand to give up, in the name of austerity? Some fiscally conservative members of Congress, like Sen. Jeff Sessions (R-Ala.), have long asked Europe (and put it to the Pentagon) for those nations to take on more burden of their borders, so that the U.S. can save billions by shrinking its European footprint -- possibly far more than the Army brigade or two on the table today.

The power divide is even starker when applied to what NATO would need to conduct additional expeditionary missions outside of NATO borders. NATO and U.S. officials call last year's Libya mission a success but one that revealed huge shortcomings -- from under supplies of ammunition to coordinating ISR flights with ground operations.

For this week, it's just talks. But Smart Defense is showing it has staying power.

"We can do things together that we couldn't do individually," Rasmussen said.

How the Pentagon responds, like NATO, remains a work in progress.

Washington Post
October 10, 2012
Pg. 10

5. Georgian Tycoon Anticipates NATO Entry Soon

The billionaire who is likely to become Georgia's next prime minister said he was confident the former Soviet republic would soon join NATO. Bidzina Ivanishvili, whose opposition coalition won parliamentary elections last week, also responded to accusations that he might let Georgia be drawn back into Moscow's orbit. "We are striving towards Europe," he said after his first meeting with President Mikheil Saakashvili since the vote.

-- *From news services*

New York Times
October 10, 2012
Pg. 1

6. U.S. Military Is Sent To Jordan To Help With Crisis In Syria

By Michael R. Gordon and Elisabeth Bumiller

WASHINGTON — The United States military has secretly sent a task force of more than 150 planners and other specialists to Jordan to help the armed forces there handle a flood of Syrian refugees, prepare for the possibility that Syria will lose control of its chemical weapons and be positioned should the turmoil in Syria expand into a wider conflict.

The task force, which has been led by a senior American officer, is based at a Jordanian military training center built into an old rock quarry north of Amman. It is now largely focused on helping Jordanians handle the estimated 180,000 Syrian refugees who have crossed the border and are severely straining the country's resources.

American officials familiar with the operation said the mission also includes drawing up plans to try to insulate Jordan, an important American ally in the region, from the upheaval in Syria and to avoid the kind of clashes now occurring along the border of Syria and Turkey.

The officials said the idea of establishing a buffer zone between Syria and Jordan — which would be enforced by Jordanian forces on the Syrian side of the border and supported politically and perhaps logistically by the United States — had been discussed. But at this point the buffer is only a contingency.

The Obama administration has declined to intervene in the Syrian conflict beyond providing communications equipment and other nonlethal assistance to the rebels opposing the government of President Bashar al-Assad. But the outpost near Amman could play a broader role should American policy change. It is less than 35 miles from the Syrian border and is the closest American military presence to the conflict.

Officials from the Pentagon and Central Command, which oversees American military operations in the Middle East, declined to comment on the task force or its mission. A spokesman for the Jordanian Embassy in Washington would also not comment on Tuesday.

As the crisis in Syria has deepened, there has been mounting concern in Washington that the violence could spread through the region. Over the past week, Syria and Turkey have exchanged artillery and mortar fire across Syria's northern border, which has been a crossing point for rebel fighters. In western Syria, intense fighting recently broke out in villages near the border crossing that leads to the Bekaa Valley in Lebanon. To the east, the Syrian government has lost control of some border crossings, including the one near Al Qaim in Iraq.

Jordan has also been touched by the fighting. Recent skirmishes have broken out between the Syrian military and Jordanians guarding the country's northern border, where many families have ties to Syria. In August, a 4-year-old girl in a Jordanian border town was injured when a Syrian shell struck her house, and there are concerns in Jordan that a sharp upsurge in the fighting in Syria might lead to an even greater influx of refugees.

Jordan, which was one of the first Arab countries to call for Mr. Assad's resignation, has become increasingly concerned that Islamic militants coming to join the fight in Syria could cross the porous border between the two countries.

The American mission in Jordan quietly began this summer. In May, the United States organized a major training exercise, which was dubbed Eager Lion. About 12,000 troops from 19 countries, including Special Forces troops, participated in the exercise.

After it ended, the small American contingent stayed on and the task force was established at a Jordanian training center north of Amman. It includes communications specialists, logistics experts, planners, trainers and headquarters staff members, American officials said. An official from the State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugee Affairs and Migration is also assigned to the task force.

"We have been working closely with our Jordanian partners on a variety of issues related to Syria for some time now," said George Little, the Pentagon press secretary, who added that a specific concern was the security of Syria's stockpiles of chemical and biological weapons. "As we've said before, we have been planning for various contingencies, both unilaterally and with our regional partners."

Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta met in Amman in August with King Abdullah II of Jordan and at that time pledged continuing American help with the flow of Syrian refugees. Mr. Panetta was followed in September by Gen. James N. Mattis, the head of Central Command, who met with senior Jordanian officials in Amman.

Members of the American task force are spending the bulk of their time working with the Jordanian military on logistics — figuring out how to deploy tons of food, water and latrines to the border, for example, and training the Jordanian military to handle the refugees. A month ago, as many as 3,000 a day were coming over the border. But as the Syrian army has consolidated its position in southern Syria, the number of refugees has declined to several hundred a day.

According to the United Nations, Jordan is currently hosting around 100,000 Syrians who have either registered or are awaiting registration. American officials say the total number may be almost twice that.

The American military is also sending medical kits to the border and has provided gravel to help keep down the dust at the Zaatari refugee camp, which the task force helped set up and is now home to 35,000 Syrians. It has also provided four large prefabricated buildings to be used at Zaatari as schools. One official estimated the cost so far at less than $1 million.

Eric Schmitt contributed reporting from Washington, and Ranya Kadri from Amman, Jordan.

Washington Post
October 10, 2012
Pg. 14

7. NATO Vows Support For Turkey In Border Standoff

By Frank Jordans and Slobodan Lekic, Associated Press

BRUSSELS -- NATO is ready to defend Turkey, the alliance's top official said Tuesday, in a direct warning to Syria after a week of cross-border artillery and mortar exchanges dramatically escalated tensions between the two countries.

Ankara has sent additional fighter jets to reinforce an air base close to the frontier

with Syria where shells killed five Turkish civilians last week, sparking fears of a wider regional crisis. Syria has defended its shelling of neighboring Turkey as an accidental outcome of its civil war.

The comments by NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen were the strongest show of support to Turkey since the firing began Wednesday - though the solidarity is largely symbolic.

NATO member Turkey has sought backing in case it is attacked, but despite publicly supporting Syria's rebels Ankara isn't seeking direct intervention. And the alliance is thought to be reluctant to get involved militarily at a time when its main priority is the war in Afghanistan.

"Obviously Turkey can rely on NATO solidarity," Rasmussen said ahead of a meeting of NATO defense ministers in Brussels. "We have all necessary plans in place to protect and defend Turkey if necessary."

When pressed on what kind of trouble on the border would trigger those plans, NATO's chief said he could not discuss contingency plans. "We hope it won't be necessary to activate such plans," he said. "We do hope to see a political solution to the conflict in Syria."

NATO officials said the plans have been around for decades and were not drawn up in response to the Syria crisis.

At least 25 additional F-16 fighter jets were deployed to Turkey's Diyarbakir air base in the southeast late Monday, Turkey's Dogan News Agency said.

Meanwhile, a Sunni extremist group called Jabhat al-Nusra claimed responsibility for an attack on Syrian air force intelligence compound in the Damascus suburb of Harasta on Monday evening. A statement on a militant website by the group's media arm, Al-Manara al-Bayda, said the bombing aimed "to avenge the killing of Muslims and those who suffered injustice."

The Syrian state-run news agency did not report the explosion, and there were conflicting reports on how badly the compound was damaged.

New York Times
October 10, 2012

8. Qaeda-Linked Group Claims Responsibility For Syrian Blasts

By Anne Barnard and Christine Hauser

BEIRUT, Lebanon — A jihadist insurgent group that Western intelligence officials have linked to Al Qaeda claimed responsibility on Tuesday for a multiple bombing by suicide attackers who struck an intelligence compound on the outskirts of Damascus overnight. It was the second major assault that the group has claimed to have carried out against a government facility in a Syrian urban center in about a week.

The group, Al Nusra Front for the People of the Levant, posted a statement on the Internet with details of what it called a three-stage attack on a compound run by a branch of the air force intelligence service in Harasta, on the edge of Damascus. It released a video showing nighttime blasts that it said were set off by vehicles packed with explosives.

The number of casualties from the attack was not known, and the Syrian state news media did not immediately report on it. On Oct. 3, the same group posted a statement on a Web site affiliated with Al Qaeda that claimed responsibility for explosions in the embattled northern city of Aleppo that killed dozens of people in areas held by the government, including an officers' club.

The attacks have highlighted a worrisome theme in the Syrian conflict, in which Sunni extremist groups like the Nusra Front, some of which are suspected of having links to Al Qaeda, are claiming responsibility for deadly attacks on government targets, including suicide bombings, with increasing frequency. While the main opposition fighting force, the Free Syrian Army, has denied any ties to such groups, their presence has strengthened President Bashar al-Assad's argument that the nearly 19-month-old uprising is being orchestrated by terrorists.

The Nusra Front gave details about the operation in the Damascus area, like the name of the man who drove the car laden with what it said was nine tons of explosives in the first stage of the operation. Twenty-five minutes later, another man drove an ambulance laden with explosives to the scene, to kill those remaining or coming to assist, the group said. Shelling followed.

Fighting was also reported on Tuesday in other areas, including Aleppo, Syria's largest city, and Deir al-Zour, in eastern Syria. The Local Coordination Committees, an opposition group, said in its daily tally of violence that at least 115 people had been killed and that in Maaret al-Nouman, in Idlib Province, the Free Syrian Army had captured more than 40 government troops and seized weapons. Casualty claims by antagonists in the Syria conflict are often difficult to confirm because of restrictions on independent news reporting there.

The latest violence came as the Syrian military continued to divert some forces and firepower to face escalating tensions on its border with Turkey, a NATO member. On Monday, Syrian Army gunners exchanged artillery blasts with their Turkish counterparts across the frontier for the sixth consecutive day.

The exchange of fire has raised concerns that the conflict will ignite a broader crisis in the region. On Tuesday, the NATO secretary general, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, emphasized that NATO, which considers an attack on one member to be an attack on all, had "all necessary plans in place to protect and defend Turkey if necessary."

But Mr. Rasmussen also made it clear that he had no desire to embroil NATO in the conflict.

While most Syrian insurgents are members of the country's Sunni majority, many of them defectors from the military, much of the Alawite minority, which Mr. Assad belongs to, remains intensely loyal to him. Nonetheless, recent signs of fracturing have surfaced in his Alawite base, including unconfirmed reports of deadly clashes last weekend in his ancestral home, Qardaha, a village in Latakia Province, which borders Turkey.

In another possible signal of Alawite ambivalence about Mr. Assad's political leadership, opposition figures in Syria and in neighboring Jordan said that as many as seven high-ranking Alawite military and intelligence officers had defected in recent days, with some saying they had entered Jordan.

Anne Barnard reported from Beirut, and Christine Hauser from New York. Hwaida Saad contributed reporting from Beirut, Ranya Kadri from

Amman, Jordan, and Rick Gladstone from New York.

Washington Post
October 10, 2012
Pg. 14

9. Iran Assisting Syrian Surveillance Of Rebels

By Ellen Nakashima

Iran is providing crucial equipment and technical help to Syria in its effort to track opposition forces through the Internet and other forms of electronic surveillance, according to U.S. officials.

The aid is the latest example of how Iran is helping Syria in its battle against rebel forces threatening the regime of President Bashar al-Assad. The technical assistance is coming mainly through Iran's Ministry of Intelligence and Security, the officials said.

Iran, which has long experience in tracking dissidents internally, has supplied surveillance and communications gear, as well as technical support in computer-network surveillance, said one intelligence official. Like others interviewed, he spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the topic's sensitivity.

Among the tactics in which Iran is advising the Syrians is how to gain access to Web forums and chat rooms, where they pose as opposition members to identify and track targets, the intelligence official said. Syrian agents are then dispatched to kill the rebels, the officials said.

An array of sophisticated techniques used to entrap Syrian opposition activists has already been unearthed by tech privacy and security groups. Pro-government hackers have covertly installed spyware on activists' computers by sending them e-mail and Skype messages purporting to be from opposition sympathizers that include attachments containing surveillance tools, said Eva Galperin of the Electronic Frontier Foundation, an Internet privacy group based in San Francisco.

The surveillance software can record keystrokes, steal passwords, turn on webcams and record audio conversations.

Iran's electronic assistance began at least a year ago as part of a broader program to sustain the Syrian regime that included military advisers and fighters from Hezbollah, a Lebanese Shiite militant group closely allied with Iran.

"We know that Iran is there in a whole range of capabilities, and they're offering what capabilities they have because they look at a loss of Syria as a huge problem," Rep. Mike Rogers (R-Mich.), chairman of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, said in an interview. "You can extrapolate from that everything they have available, from weapons systems to finance and training, and they do have a growing cyber-capability that's concerning."

Instead of weapons, the Obama administration has given the rebels communications gear, passed on intelligence on who is being targeted, and trained them in using covert channels to escape tracking by the government.

The intelligence official said advice on how to avoid being targeted includes "relatively simple techniques that anyone who's computer-savvy can use to obscure" their identity.

"It's a good way for us to help the opposition without having to send in troops and bombs," said a former U.S. defense official.

The Syrians are reasonably good at internal security, but experts say the Iranians are better trained in electronic and computer-network surveillance.

"Technologically, they're light-years ahead of Syria," said Robert B. Baer, a former CIA case officer in the Middle East and author of several books on the region. "The Syrians have got to go to the Iranians for anything advanced."

James Ball contributed to this report.

Financial Times
October 9, 2012
Pg. 1

10. Iraq Sends Crucial Fuel Oil Supplies To Syria

US concerns over Baghdad contract

By Lina Saigol and Michael Peel

Iraq is quietly shipping vital supplies of fuel oil to Syria in a deal that has triggered concern in Washington and exposes Damascus's difficulties in keeping its economy afloat in the face of a growing civil war and economic sanctions.

Nouri al-Maliki's Baghdad government agreed in June to supply 720,000 tons of fuel oil to Syria in monthly shipments as part of a one-year, renewable supply contract, according to commercial documents seen by the Financial Times.

In June and July, Baghdad's oil ministry delivered two shipments of fuel oil, which is used for power generation, worth $14m, to President Bashar al-Assad's regime. Syria paid in cash, the documents show.

While the figures to date are relatively small, the deal highlights the ad hoc efforts that Mr Assad's embattled regime is being forced to make as it attempts to keep shortages at bay during its civil war. It also underlines the active role Iraq is playing in the region.

The revelations come a month after US officials complained that Baghdad was allowing aircraft carrying Iranian arms to fly over its territory to Syria.

A US state department official said that the fuel shipment did not violate American and EU sanctions but he indicated surprise at Iraq's involvement.

Iraq abstained from an Arab League vote in 2011 to suspend Syria's membership and impose sanctions; it has also rejected attempts to bring down Syria's regime by force, fearing a wider regional crisis.

Iraq's Shia-led government is close to Iran and Tehran is the Syrian regime's chief Middle Eastern ally.

"Perceptions matter, so we encourage countries trading with Syria to be open about their legal and non-sanctionable exchanges," a US state department official said. "If this is going to continue, the Iraqis should be up front about it."

The deal showed that the Syrian regime was desperate for fuel and was depleting what is left of its hard currency cash reserves to import it, the official added.

The documents show that the state-backed Syria Trading Oil Company (Sytrol), which handles Syria's fuel imports, agreed to pay cash into an account with the Trade Bank of Iraq before each delivery, or provide an irrevocable letter of credit.

Iraq offered Syria a discount, according to the contract. Syria paid $505.909 per ton for the fuel, compared with today's market price of $800.

Alaa Kidher Kadhum, a signatory for Baghdad's state oil marketing organisation, or SOMO, sits on the board of the Trade Bank of Iraq, according

to the documents. He did not respond to questions from the FT nor did any official from the Iraqi oil ministry.

Hoshyar Zebari, Iraq's foreign minister, said he did not know of such a deal.

Syrian officials did not comment.

Wall Street Journal
October 10, 2012
Pg. 13

11. Kabul Prepares For U.S. Talks

Afghanistan Wants New Pact to Curtail American Troops' Immunity, Official Says

By Yaroslav Trofimov and Nathan Hodge

KABUL—Afghanistan's demands to curtail immunity for U.S. forces will be a main stumbling block in negotiations over the long-term American military presence here, Afghan National Security Adviser Rangin Dadfar Spanta said, highlighting the issue that derailed similar U.S. talks with Iraq a year ago.

Mr. Spanta explained Kabul's negotiating positions in an interview as the lead American negotiator arrived in the Afghan capital for meetings to prepare for the talks on a bilateral security agreement, which are slated to start in the coming days.

At stake is the future of U.S. influence in this strategic region after more than a decade of war—including whether the U.S. will be able to fight al Qaeda and other extremist groups in Afghanistan and neighboring Pakistan's tribal lands.

Both sides said the discussions won't be easy. The talks come at a time of distrust between the two governments, when U.S. officials are angry over increasingly frequent incidents of Afghan troops turning their weapons on American soldiers, and after Afghan President Hamid Karzai has criticized the conduct of the war and what he sees as U.S. violations of Afghan sovereignty.

The State Department declined to comment on the substance of the negotiations.

Several disagreements must be bridged by the talks, including an Afghan demand that the U.S. military intervene to defend the country from external attacks, such as persistent cross-border shelling from Pakistan over the last several months.

Mr. Spanta told The Wall Street Journal he hoped the new agreement will "bring more clarity" as to what the U.S. response would be if Pakistani forces bomb Afghan territory.

Kabul is also pressing the U.S. for costly modern military equipment, such as tanks and fighter jets—something that U.S. officials oppose, saying that Afghanistan doesn't need this weaponry to fight the insurgency and lacks the experience and manpower to operate it.

"Afghanistan's expectation is NATO-standard," said Mr. Spanta. "We cannot have a paramilitary army, and a paramilitary police force."

The toughest issue, however, could be the U.S. demand for immunity from Afghan justice for U.S. service members who commit crimes or accidentally kill civilians after the current U.S.-led military mission ends in 2014, Mr. Spanta said.

"As a very Muslim country, as a very proud country…the public opinion here is very sensitive in this regard," Mr. Spanta said. "This is not an easy job, but we can find a solution…in harmony with Afghan sovereignty."

"Neighboring countries," an expression Afghan officials usually reserve for Pakistan and Iran, will also try to derail the agreement by whipping up public hostility to any immunity for Americans, he added.

In Iraq, Washington's ability to influence the government in Baghdad was greatly diminished by December's pullout of American forces, ordered by President Barack Obama after Baghdad refused to accept the U.S. demand that remaining U.S. troops be immune from Iraqi jurisdiction.

The issue of immunity gained particular prominence in Afghanistan after a U.S. soldier allegedly murdered 17 people in Kandahar province in March. The U.S. quickly spirited the suspect, Staff Sgt. Robert Bales, out of the country to face trial in the U.S., despite Afghan demands that he face Afghan justice or be publicly tried on Afghan soil.

While Iraq ended legal immunity for U.S. contractors in negotiations over a status of forces agreement with the administration of George W. Bush, U.S. troops remained exempt from Iraqi law.

Afghan officials have indicated that they could compromise on the issue of immunity for on-duty personnel, but insisted that off-duty American soldiers and officials—such as Sgt. Bales, who allegedly left his base without permission during the Kandahar rampage—can't be exempted from Afghan law.

That, however, is unlikely to be accepted by the U.S., American officials said.

"Both sides know it is going to be very difficult," a Western official said. "The Afghans want us out of their hair, but they also know that they need us—and they resent the fact that they need foreigners."

Afghanistan can't afford to fund its government and security forces without billions of dollars in U.S. aid. That, analysts said, is likely to make Mr. Karzai more amenable than Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki was last year, with Baghdad counting on oil revenue to sustain the Iraqi economy.

"The current Afghan government as we know it would cease to exist without the security and the financial support provided to it by the U.S. and NATO allies," said Brian Katulis, senior fellow at the Center for American Progress think-tank, which is close to the Obama administration. "And it's not like China or Russia are rushing in to fill any potential gaps."

Stephen Biddle, a defense expert at George Washington University who advised the Pentagon, said it was important that the negotiation process not become a "zero-sum conflict" between Afghan sovereignty concerns and U.S. national-security priorities.

Confusion among senior Afghan officials about U.S. intentions—reinforced by conspiracy theories about Washington's supposed desire to use Afghanistan as a military launch pad against Iran—"makes it hard for both sides to have a consistent sense of where the real bargaining space lies," Mr. Biddle said.

Mr. Spanta said he had been closely studying the negotiations that the U.S. held with Iraq, as well as Washington's security agreements with European countries and nations such as Egypt.

Under a strategic partnership deal signed by Messrs. Obama and Karzai in May, the U.S. and Afghanistan should complete the so-called Bilateral Security Agreement,

which outlines the details of future American presence, within 12 months.

The lead Afghan negotiator is the country's ambassador in Washington, Eklil Hakimi. The American negotiating team is led by the U.S. deputy special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, Amb. James Warlick. Both men are in Kabul this week to prepare for the formal start of the talks, officials said.

The U.S. hasn't specified how quickly the current troop levels will be withdrawn before the end of 2014, and the outlines of any U.S. military presence after 2014 are still far from clear. Mr. Spanta said the U.S. hasn't told the Afghans how many bases it seeks to keep, or how many troops it would need to remain for training and advising the Afghan security forces and for carrying out counterterrorist operations.

Western officials have mentioned the residual American force as ranging from a few thousand to some 20,000. There are currently 68,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan, down from a peak of more than 100,000 last year.

U.S. Army Maj. Gen. Kenneth Dahl, who oversees logistics throughout Afghanistan, said the coalition was already creating a new staff to help with planning for the post-2014 presence. The military, he added, had "learned a lot of lessons" from the transition to a State Department-led mission in Iraq, and is already busily working on preparing that changeover here.

"The most important thing about a war," Gen. Dahl added, "is how it ends."

Tacoma News Tribune
October 9, 2012
Pg. 1

12. Top Soldiers Reassure On Insider Fears

AFGHANISTAN: They visit war's front lines

By Adam Ashton, Staff writer

Three of the Army's highest-ranking soldiers have gone to remote outposts in one of Afghanistan's most dangerous districts in the last month to connect with Joint Base Lewis-McChord soldiers and answer their tough questions about the rising number of insider attacks.

The three leaders, including Army Chief of Staff Gen. Ray Odierno, met with U.S. soldiers in the Panjwai district of Kandahar province who are concerned about attacks from within the ranks of their allies in the Afghan security forces.

The visits from Odierno and two top enlisted officers show that the Army considers Panjwai the front lines of the war this year.

More than 50 Western service members have been killed and dozens more wounded by Afghan allies this year, including three Lewis-McChord soldiers who were shot to death last month by an Afghan police officer.

Insider attacks are also called "green on blue" killings, a term coined in other conflicts when host security forces would turn on blue-helmeted United Nations peacekeepers.

Insider attacks are especially damaging to NATO's war plan because Western forces this year are focused on training their Afghan counterparts to fight insurgents once the U.S. withdraws most of its troops by 2014. In most cases, U.S. and Afghan soldiers work side by side on joint patrols.

"With all the green on blues, why are we still doing joint patrols?" one soldier asked Sgt. Maj. of the Army Raymond Chandler during his visit to Forward Operating Base Zangabad, according to an account in the Stars and Stripes newspaper.

"I would assume we are still doing it because that's what command tells you," Chandler replied. "What should we do?"

"Not patrol with the Afghanis," the soldier said.

Chandler told the soldiers the Army was adapting to the insider attacks. He asked them to focus on improving the performance of Afghan security forces.

"Overall there is a sense of a lack of trust, but you've got to rebuild that relationship, and I have a lot of confidence in these guys," Chandler said.

The Panjwai district is a mostly rural area near Kandahar City. It's considered Taliban heartland, and it's a major focus of NATO's campaign in southern Afghanistan this year.

Lewis-McChord's 3rd Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division took responsibility for the territory in April. The brigade and its roughly 3,500 soldiers are due home by Christmas.

Another Lewis-McChord infantry brigade (the 2nd Brigade) is working in southern Afghanistan, and one more brigade (the 4th Brigade) is set to deploy to that country this fall.

Last month, Odierno stopped in Panjwai to speak with American and Afghan soldiers. He told both sides the growing number of insider attacks was on his mind.

"We're working very hard to understand what are the right tactics, techniques and procedures. And also (we're) ensuring that the Afghan commanders understand their responsibility to ensure that our soldiers working with them remain safe," he said, according to an Army story about his visit.

Odierno was followed by a name familiar to Lewis-McChord soldiers and families: Command Sgt. Maj. Frank Grippe, formerly the top enlisted officer in Lewis-McChord's I Corps, also visited bases in Panjwai. He's now the top enlisted officer at U.S. Central Command in Florida.

Grippe looked back to his 10 years in and out of Afghanistan to put the threat of insider attacks in perspective.

"We can't let this issue fracture our partnership, especially during this most critical time of our campaign plan," he said, according to an Army story about his visit. "We've got to (stay) shoulder-to-shoulder even more, show more trust and keep training and building the capacity of our Afghan armed forces, especially to compliment our responsible withdrawal (from Afghanistan) with success and honor."

American officials said last week that many of the insider attacks have been plotted by the Haqqani network, an affiliation of insurgents based in Pakistan and with ties to al-Qaida. The Haqqanis support Taliban leadership, but operate independently for the most part.

Philadelphia Inquirer
October 10, 2012
Pg. 2

13. U.N. Extends NATO Afghan Mission

The Security Council also welcomed plans to transfer control of security to the government.

By Edith M. Lederer, Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS - The U.N. Security Council on Tuesday extended authorization for the NATO-led force in Afghanistan for a year and welcomed the agreement to gradually transfer full

responsibility for security in the country to the Afghan government by the end of 2014.

A resolution adopted unanimously by the council also welcomed the government's "strong commitment" to develop a national security force under civilian leadership that can contribute to the region's security by stabilizing the situation in Afghanistan.

The U.N.'s most powerful body expressed serious concern at the current security situation in Afghanistan and stressed that many challenges remain.

The Security Council had tentatively scheduled a trip to Afghanistan in late October. But diplomats said it has been delayed, partly because of security concerns.

The Afghan war began its 12th year Sunday amid fears that once international combat forces leave, the country will again fracture along ethnic lines, leading to a repeat of the bloody ethnic fighting that followed the Soviet exit from Afghanistan in the 1990s.

The Security Council singled out continuing terrorist activities by the Taliban, al-Qaeda, and other extremist groups and condemned their use of civilians as human shields. It expressed serious concern at the high number of civilian casualties, especially among women and children, noting that an increasingly large number are caused by the Taliban, al-Qaeda, and armed groups.

The council also stressed the link between terrorist activities and the illicit drug trade that still flourishes in Afghanistan.

The Security Council acknowledged that progress has been made in reforming Afghanistan's police and army, and it welcomed NATO's commitment to provide "sustained practical support aimed at improving and sustaining Afghanistan's capacity and capability to tackle continued threats to its security, stability, and integrity" after international forces leave at the end of 2014.

The resolution adopted Tuesday extends the authorization of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force until Oct. 13, 2013. The force currently includes about 68,000 Americans and about 40,000 troops from other nations.

Xinhua News Agency
October 10, 2012

14. Taliban Leader Who Downs NATO Helicopter Killed: Coalition

KABUL (Xinhua) -- A local Taliban leader, who was accused of shooting down a NATO CH-47 Chinook helicopter last year, was killed in Afghanistan's eastern province of Kunar, the NATO-led coalition forces confirmed on Wednesday.

"An Afghan and coalition force killed a Taliban leader in an operation in Kunar province, Monday. The Taliban leader, Abdullah, was accused of shooting down a CH-47 Chinook helicopter July 25, 2011 in Kunar province. During the operation, the security force positively identified Abdullah with two other militants engaging in insurgent activity in an isolated area away from civilians. The security force conducted a precision airstrike, killing Abdullah and two additional insurgents," the coalition said in a statement.

However, no death was reported in last years' crash.

Up to 10 NATO and U.S. helicopters had gone down since beginning this year, leaving three dozen coalition soldiers and eight Afghans dead.

The Taliban-led insurgency has been rampant since the militant group launched annual spring offensive on May 3 against Afghan government and about 100,000 NATO-led troops.

McClatchy Newspapers
(mcclatchydc.com)
October 9, 2012

15. The Afghan War: Do The Numbers Add Up To Success?

By Matthew Schofield,
McClatchy Newspapers

WASHINGTON — The 33,000 U.S. troops ordered to Afghanistan two years ago to stop Taliban advances are back home, with military officials claiming that the surge accomplished its objectives.

But did it?

“In mid-2009 there was a real risk that the mission in Afghanistan might very well fail,” Defense Secretary Leon Panetta said recently. “Today the situation is very much different and improved.”

Violence is down, Panetta said, echoing a refrain heard around the Pentagon.

But for all the American blood and treasure invested in the war, some experts who’ve studied it contend that the problem with the military’s claims of success is that the numbers don’t add up. Using them alone, the Taliban is overmatched, and attacks since the surge are down. Yet, they have become more brazen.

“When I was in the Pentagon, I used to see reams of metrics for Iraq and Afghanistan,” said Thomas Mahnken, a former deputy assistant defense secretary for policy planning under Presidents Barack Obama and George W. Bush. “Few had any real meaning.”

Now in its second decade, the war played a supporting role for many years while most of the military and political attention was focused on Iraq. And while the presidential campaign has occasionally veered to foreign policy concerns, like Libya and Syria, Afghanistan as an issue has been missing in action.

Obama and Republican challenger Mitt Romney largely agree on the strategy, which is to remove most American troops by the end 2014.

But after 11 years, Afghanistan remains a battlefield of mixed accomplishments and unforeseen milestones.

Last month marked the death of the 2,000th American service member in the war. It also saw a group of uniformed Afghan soldiers – our supposed allies – turned their weapons on American troops at an Afghan Army checkpoint. It was not the first time. So-called “green-on-blue” attacks have been increasing over the past year.

The end of the surge leaves the American military and NATO with a combined force of about 100,000, supplemented by an Afghan force of 350,000, according to NATO.

NATO and the Pentagon estimate that the Taliban has about 20,000 men. By any definition, the 20-to-1 odds would seem to pose an overwhelming advantage.

But a recent spate of highly organized attacks against allied forces, such as the raid last month in which 15 Taliban got inside Camp Bastion , a major air base in southern Afghanistan’s Helmand province, and killed two U.S. Marines and destroyed six fighter jets, indicate that troop numbers don’t tell the whole story.

Nor do the enemy body counts.

Coming up with numbers to reflect military progress has

never been easy, said Mahnken, who teaches national security at the U.S. Naval War College. Even as basic a measure as the number of enemy killed has little meaning against an insurgency, he said.

In fact, military officials refuse to even track exact numbers of enemy killed or captured in Afghanistan. Instead, daily reports from the International Security Assistance Force, the NATO-led coalition, use vague descriptions like “few” or “several,” “multiple” or “numerous;” even “many.”

The measurements can mean anywhere from three to “more than 20.”

Using that math, U.S. and allied forces during the first half of September captured or killed about 400 insurgents. But if the entire Taliban force consists of about 20,000 fighters, shouldn’t losing hundreds every few weeks be a sign of a looming collapse?

Indeed, Mahnken said that by U.S. and NATO counts, the Taliban has been defeated several times over.

While Defense Department officials were shocked at the Camp Bastion incident, they say that insurgent attacks are down 24 percent since their peak in 2010, at the beginning of the surge, according to international security force numbers.

In 2010, between the May and August fighting season in Afghanistan, there were about 14,000 insurgent attacks, according the group’s statistics, which are all estimates

During the same period this year, there were about 12,000.

But that’s still higher than they were in 2009 before the surge, when nearly 8,000 insurgent attacks occurred. It was that number that convinced the White House and the Pentagon that more troops were needed.

The security force statistics, however, don’t account for attacks on Afghan troops unaccompanied by NATO forces. Afghan forces operating without NATO support is another trend the Pentagon frequently cites as a primary accomplishment this year.

The numbers also don’t reflect insurgent attacks on civilians, which the international security force notes is common. And it only counts a quarter of the “green-on-blue” attacks, where uniformed Afghans turn their guns on international forces serving alongside them, like last week’s checkpoint shooting.

As in Iraq, success in Afghanistan is dependent not just on battlefield victories, but on a counterinsurgency strategy, or to borrow an expression from Vietnam, another long and unpopular war, winning the “hearts and minds” of the people.

“Victory in Afghanistan won’t come with a shipboard surrender ceremony,” but when the Afghan people take control of their own destiny, said Pentagon spokesman George Little.

That means doing things like building roads and schools, and making everyday life safe.

Still, a former U.S. ambassador to NATO, Kurt Volker, said, “This doesn’t work if the motivation is ideology, if you fight because God wants you to fight. It becomes an impossible numbers game.”

The obstacle of ideology is clear in the fight against al Qaida. Pentagon and intelligence officials estimate that al Qaida has about 100 followers in Afghanistan, but in reality, only about a quarter are active and on the ground.

The international security force numbers show that al Qaida 10 fighters were killed or captured during the first half of September, which would seem to be a serious blow. But the terror group has no shortage of volunteers, according to Bernard Finel, an associate professor of national security strategy at the National War College.

“There are more people wanting to join an organization such as al Qaida than the organization can accommodate,” he said. “Can you ever cut off the flow of potential fighters?”

Meanwhile, the pullout of most allied troops by 2014 looms over any discussion of the success of the 11-year war and the way forward.

“Afghans know that the U.S. is leaving,” Finel said. “They also know all of these other groups will remain.”

It’s a waiting game, for everyone.

Jacqueline L. Hazelton, a visiting professor at the University of Rochester, who studies state-building through counterinsurgency, said in an email that given the enemy’s access to inside military information, the murderous episode at Camp Bastion suggests that “support for the state is not increasing.”

That, and the questions surrounding the numbers behind the claims of military success, she said, tell “a dismal story.”

Agence France-Presse
October 10, 2012

16. Insurgent Bomb Kills Six Afghan Cops

By AFP

A Taliban roadside bomb ripped through a police vehicle in a southern Afghanistan town on Wednesday, killing six officers including a commander, an official said.

The officers, part of a US-sponsored community force known as the Afghan Local Police (ALP), were patrolling in Nad Ali, a restive town in the province of Helmand when hit by the blast, the official said.

"It was a roadside bombing. It hit a local police vehicle and killed six policemen. The bomb was planted by the Taliban," Mohammad Ibrahim, the Nad Ali district chief, told AFP.

He said the bombing was in retaliation for recent operations by the ALP against insurgents -- the Taliban, an Islamic militant force that has been waging an insurgency to bring down the Kabul government since 2001.

Police are coming under increasing attack from the Taliban as Afghan security forces take on a greater role in countering the insurgents ahead of a withdrawal of NATO troops in 2014.

On Monday, a suicide car bomber targeting an Afghan police station in the southern city of Lashkar Gah killed two intelligence agents and wounded 15 other people.

Philadelphia Inquirer
October 10, 2012
Pg. 2

17. Al Qaeda Rebuilding In Iraq

By Associated Press

BAGHDAD - Al Qaeda is rebuilding in Iraq and has set up training camps for insurgents in the nation's western deserts as the extremist group seizes on regional instability and government security failures to regain strength, officials say.

Iraq has seen a jump in al Qaeda attacks over the past 10 weeks, and government officials believe that most of the fighters are former prisoners who have either escaped from jail or were released by

Iraqi authorities for lack of evidence after the U.S. military withdrawal in December. Many are said to be Saudi or from Sunni-dominated Gulf states.

During the war and its aftermath, U.S. forces, joined by allied Sunni groups and later by Iraqi counterterror forces, managed to beat back al Qaeda's Iraqi branch.

But now, Iraqi and U.S. officials say, the insurgent group has more than doubled in numbers from a year ago - from about 1,000 to 2,500 fighters. And it is carrying out an average of 140 attacks each week across Iraq, up from 75 attacks each week earlier this year, according to Pentagon data.

The new growth of al Qaeda in Iraq, also known as the Islamic State of Iraq, is not entirely unexpected. Last November, the top U.S. military official in Iraq, Army Gen. Lloyd Austin, predicted "turbulence" ahead for Iraq's security forces. But he doubted that Iraq would return to the days of widespread fighting between Shiite militias and Sunni insurgents, including al Qaeda, that brought the Islamic country to the brink of civil war.

While there's no sign of Iraq headed back toward sectarian warfare - mostly because Shiite militias are not retaliating to their deadly attacks - al Qaeda's revival is terrifying to ordinary Iraqis.

Each round of bombings and shootings that the terror group unleashes across the country, sometimes killing dozens on a single day, fuels simmering public resentment toward the government, which has been unable to curb the violence. And the rise of Sunni extremists who aim to overthrow a Shiite-linked government in neighboring Syria has brought a new level of anxiety to Iraqis who fear that the same thing could happen in Baghdad.

"Nobody here believes the government's claims that al Qaeda is weak and living its last days in Iraq," said Fuad Ali, 41, a Shiite who works for the government.

"Al Qaeda is much stronger than what the Iraqi officials are imagining. [It] is able to launch big attacks and free its members from Iraqi prisons, and this indicates that al Qaeda is stronger than our security forces."

Washington Post
October 10, 2012
Pg. 10

18. Iraq Signs Arms Deals Worth $4.2 Billion

Russia announced Tuesday that it has signed $4.2 billion in deals to sell arms to Iraq, making it the largest weapons supplier to the Middle Eastern country after the United States.

The deals, disclosed in a Russian government document issued at a meeting between Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev and Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, give Russia a big boost at a time when the future of its arms sales to Libya and Syria is uncertain.

The contracts were signed during visits to Russia by Iraq's acting defense chief in April, July and August, the document showed. It gave no further details, and the state agency in charge of weapons trade could not be immediately reached.

Iraq had been all but off-limits for Russia's defense industry after the U.S.-led invasion of 2003 which ousted Saddam Hussein, one of Moscow's biggest weapons customers.

In Washington, the State Department signaled it was not overly concerned by the Russian deal.

"Iraq overall has initiated some 467 foreign military sales cases with the United States. If all of these go forward, it will be worth over $12.3 billion, so obviously our own military support relationship with Iraq is very broad and very deep," spokeswoman Victoria Nuland said.

-- *Reuters*

New York Times
October 10, 2012
Pg. 1

19. Taliban Gun Down Girl Who Spoke Up For Rights

By Declan Walsh

KARACHI, Pakistan — At the age of 11, Malala Yousafzai took on the Taliban by giving voice to her dreams. As turbaned fighters swept through her town in northwestern Pakistan in 2009, the tiny schoolgirl spoke out about her passion for education — she wanted to become a doctor, she said — and became a symbol of defiance against Taliban subjugation.

On Tuesday, masked Taliban gunmen answered Ms. Yousafzai's courage with bullets, singling out the 14-year-old on a bus filled with terrified schoolchildren, then shooting her in the head and neck. Two other girls were also wounded in the attack. All three survived, but late on Tuesday doctors said that Ms. Yousafzai was in critical condition at a hospital in Peshawar, with a bullet possibly lodged close to her brain.

A Taliban spokesman, Ehsanullah Ehsan, confirmed by phone that Ms. Yousafzai had been the target, calling her crusade for education rights an "obscenity."

"She has become a symbol of Western culture in the area; she was openly propagating it," Mr. Ehsan said, adding that if she survived, the militants would certainly try to kill her again. "Let this be a lesson."

The Taliban's ability to attack Pakistan's major cities has waned in the past year. But in rural areas along the Afghan border, the militants have intensified their campaign to silence critics and impose their will.

That Ms. Yousafzai's voice could be deemed a threat to the Taliban — that they could see a schoolgirl's death as desirable and justifiable — was seen as evidence of both the militants' brutality and her courage.

"She symbolizes the brave girls of Swat," said Samar Minallah, a documentary filmmaker who has worked among Pashtun women. "She knew her voice was important, so she spoke up for the rights of children. Even adults didn't have a vision like hers."

Ms. Yousafzai came to public attention in 2009 as the Pakistani Taliban swept through Swat, a picturesque valley once famed for its music and tolerance and as a honeymoon destination.

Her father ran one of the last schools to defy Taliban orders to end female education. As an 11-year-old, Malala — named after a mythic female figure in Pashtun culture — wrote an anonymous blog documenting her experiences for the BBC. Later, she was the focus of documentaries by The New York Times and other media outlets.

"I had a terrible dream yesterday with military helicopters and the Taliban," she wrote in one post titled "I Am Afraid."

The school was eventually forced to close, and Ms. Yousafzai was forced to flee to Abbottabad, the town where Osama bin Laden was killed last year. Months later, in summer 2009, the Pakistani

Army launched a sweeping operation against the Taliban that uprooted an estimated 1.2 million Swat residents.

The Taliban were sent packing, or so it seemed, as fighters and their commanders fled into neighboring districts or Afghanistan. An uneasy peace, enforced by a large military presence, settled over the valley.

Ms. Yousafzai grew in prominence, becoming a powerful voice for the rights of children. In 2011, she was nominated for the International Children's Peace Prize. Later, Yousaf Raza Gilani, the prime minister at the time, awarded her Pakistan's first National Youth Peace Prize.

Mature beyond her years, she recently changed her career aspiration to politics, friends said. In recent months, she led a delegation of children's rights activists, sponsored by Unicef, that made presentations to provincial politicians in Peshawar.

"We found her to be very bold, and it inspired every one of us," said another student in the group, Fatima Aziz, 15.

Ms. Minallah, the documentary maker, said, "She had this vision, big dreams, that she was going to come into politics and bring about change."

That such a figure of wide-eyed optimism and courage could be silenced by Taliban violence was a fresh blow for Pakistan's beleaguered progressives, who seethed with frustration and anger on Tuesday. "Come on, brothers, be REAL MEN. Kill a school girl," one media commentator, Nadeem F. Paracha, said in an acerbic Twitter post.

In Parliament, Prime Minister Raja Pervez Ashraf urged his countrymen to battle the mind-set behind such attacks. "She is our daughter," he said.

The attack was also a blow for the powerful military, which has long held out its Swat offensive as an example of its ability to conduct successful counterinsurgency operations. The army retains a tight grip over much of Swat. But that Tuesday's shooting could take place in the center of Mingora, the valley's largest town, offered evidence that the Taliban were creeping back.

"This is not a good sign," Kamran Khan, the most senior government official in Swat, said by phone. "It's very worrisome."

The Swat Taliban are a subgroup of the wider Pakistani Taliban movement based in South Waziristan. Their leader, Maulvi Fazlullah, rose to prominence in 2007 through an FM radio station that espoused Islamist ideology.

After 2009, Maulvi Fazlullah and his senior commanders were pushed across the border into the Afghan provinces of Kunar and Nuristan, where Pakistani officials say they are still being sheltered — a source of growing tension between the Pakistani and Afghan governments.

But over the last year or so, small groups of Taliban guerrillas have slowly filtered back into Swat, where they have mounted hit-and-run attacks on community leaders deemed to have collaborated with the government.

On Aug. 3, a Taliban gunman shot and wounded Zahid Khan, the president of the local hoteliers association and a senior community leader, in Mingora. It was the third such attack in recent months, a senior official said.

The military has asserted control in Swat through a large military presence in the valleys and support for private tribal militias tasked with keeping the Taliban at bay. But soldiers have also been accused of human rights abuses, particularly after a leaked videotape in 2010 showed uniformed men apparently massacring Taliban prisoners.

In response to criticism, the army chief, Gen. Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, announced an inquiry into the shootings. An army spokesman said it was not yet complete.

Shah Rasool, the police chief in Swat, said that all roads leading out of Mingora had been barricaded and that more than 30 militant suspects had been detained.

Reporting was contributed by Sana ul Haq from Mingora, Pakistan; Ismail Khan from Peshawar, Pakistan; Ihsanullah Tipu Mehsud from Islamabad, Pakistan; and Zia ur-Rehman from Karachi.

Agence France-Presse
October 9, 2012

20. US Drone Strike Kills Five 'Militants' In Pakistan

By Hasbanullah Khan, Agence France-Presse

A US drone strike targeting a militant compound killed five insurgents in a restive Pakistani tribal region near the Afghan border on Wednesday, security officials said.

The attack was the first since a massive anti-drone rally last weekend near the lawless region known as a stronghold of Taliban and Al-Qaeda militants, they said.

"Several US drones flew into the area before dawn and fired four missiles on a compound, killing five militants," a security official told AFP after the strike in Hurmuz area, east of Miranshah, the capital of North Waziristan tribal region.

Another security official in the northwestern city of Peshawar confirmed the attack and casualties.

The identities of those killed in the strike was not immediately clear.

The Al-Qaeda-linked Haqqani network in North Waziristan, blamed for some of the deadliest attacks in Afghanistan, is one of the thorniest issues between Islamabad and Washington.

The attacks by unmanned US aircraft remain contentious -- they are deeply unpopular in Pakistan, which says they violate its sovereignty and fan anti-US sentiment, but American officials are said to believe they are too important to give up.

Imran Khan, Pakistan's cricket hero turned politician, led thousands of supporters on a long drive from the capital Islamabad to the edge of the nearby tribal district of South Waziristan in a two-day protest against US drone strikes.

The rally was the first from a mainstream politician to the tribal belt described by US officials as one of the most dangerous place on Earth.

Khan defied official warnings and led emotional supporters and dozens of Western peace activists to Tank, the last town before the semi-autonomous area.

The march passed through Tank but turned back before reaching the border with South Waziristan.

Khan insisted the march -- a motorcade that included several thousand vehicles -- was a success.

"We have given our message -- it has gone across the world," he told supporters.

"We have succeeded in raising this issue. We came here to raise this issue, we came here to take a stand against drones."

"We had already made our point to the international media. Globally our message was conveyed, so we should not go ahead and put lives at risk."

Islamist militants have killed thousands of people in Pakistan since 2007, and US officials say the drone strikes are a key weapon in the war on terror.

But peace campaigners condemn them as a breach of international law. Pakistanis call them a violation of sovereignty that breeds extremism, and politicians including Khan say the government is complicit in killing its own people.

Casualty figures are difficult to obtain, but a report commissioned by legal lobby group Reprieve estimated last month that 474 to 881 civilians were among 2,562 to 3,325 people killed by drones in Pakistan between June 2004 and September 2012.

New York Times
October 10, 2012

21. North Korea Says Its Missiles Can Reach U.S. Mainland

By Choe Sang-Hun

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea claimed Tuesday to have missiles that can reach the American mainland, and it said that the recent agreement between the United States and South Korea to extend the range of the South's ballistic missiles was increasing the risk of war on the Korean Peninsula.

North Korea has often threatened to strike the "heart" of the United States, and a popular propaganda poster there shows a North Korean missile hitting what looks unmistakably like Capitol Hill. But the warning issued Tuesday was more detailed.

The North Koreans "do not hide" that their armed forces, "including the strategic rocket forces, are keeping within the scope of strike not only the bases of the puppet forces and the U.S. imperialist aggression forces' bases in the inviolable land of Korea but also Japan, Guam and the U.S. mainland," a spokesman at the North's National Defense Commission said in a statement. North Korea often refers to the South Korean military as "puppet forces," a reference to the South's alliance with the United States.

The North's "strategic rocket forces" are believed to be in charge of the country's missiles. The North's leader, Kim Jong-un, visited the unit's headquarters in Marchand mentioned it by name during his first public speech in April.

Estimating the missile capabilities of a country as secretive as North Korea is notoriously difficult. But military experts and South Korean government officials have said that the North has already deployed ballistic missiles capable of reaching targets as far away as Guam, the American territory in the Pacific.

In addition, North Korea has repeatedly conducted what it calls satellite launchings that American and South Korean officials, as well as the United Nations Security Council, have condemned as a cover for developing and testing intercontinental ballistic missile technology.

In 1998, the North sent up a rocket called the Taepodong-1 that flew over Japan and crashed into the Pacific. In 2006, the Taepodong-2 exploded seconds after liftoff. The North launched yet another long-range rocket, the Unha-2, in 2009, but American and South Korean officials said the third stage never separated.

In April of this year, the Unha-3 rocket disintegrated in midair shortly after liftoff, a failure that the new government in Pyongyang publicly acknowledged.

But the North claimed to have successfully placed satellites into orbit in 1998 and 2009. The country has also conducted two nuclear tests, the first in 2006 and the second in 2009, although it remains unclear whether it can make a nuclear warhead small enough to fit atop a missile. Robert M. Gates said in early 2011, while he was the American defense secretary, that North Korea was within five years of being able to strike the continental United States with an intercontinental ballistic missile.

"Even if they failed to put the satellites into orbit, these rocket tests mean that the North Koreans may have already acquired the missile range" they claimed on Tuesday, said Jeung Young-tae, a military analyst at the government-run Korea Institute for National Unification in Seoul.

In Washington, a State Department spokeswoman, Victoria Nuland, said, "Rather than bragging about its missile capability," North Korea "ought to be feeding its people."

Mr. Jeung said the North's strident statement on Tuesday was driven in part by a domestic political need to highlight the supposed threat from the United States and its allies. On Sunday, South Korea announced a deal with Washington that would allow it to nearly triple the range of its ballistic missiles to 800 kilometers, or 500 miles, to better cope with the North's growing missile and nuclear capabilities.

On Tuesday, North Korea called the agreement "a product of another conspiracy of the master and the stooge to push the situation on the Korean Peninsula to the extreme pitch of tension and ignite a war."

"We should not forget even a moment that wolf never subsists on grass as long as it breathes," it said, adding that the missile agreement disproved the United States' insistence that it had no intention to invade the North.

Wall Street Journal
October 10, 2012
Pg. 6

22. Military Families Balk At Health Fee

By Louise Radnofsky

A provision in the national health-care law that lets young adults stay on their parents' insurance plan is popular with many families—but not ones in the military.

Families covered by Tricare, the health program for active and retired members of the military, must pay as much as $200 a month to let an adult child stay on their plan until age 26. Most families in private plans now pay no fee to extend such coverage. Military families are starting to complain about the disparity, saying they can't afford those premiums and have let their children go uninsured.

The fee for young adults aside, Tricare has a significant advantage over private insurance plans: Most beneficiaries don't pay premiums to participate. By contrast, workers in private plans paid on average $4,316 in premiums for family coverage in 2012, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation, and their employers paid an additional $11,429.

Under the 2010 law, insurance plans offered by civilian employers, including plans for federal government workers, have to allow parents to keep children enrolled on family policies until their 26th

birthday. The plans aren't permitted to charge a separate fee for such coverage and, in general, family policies cost the same regardless of the number of children they cover.

An estimated 6.6 million young adults have taken advantage of the provision, according to the Commonwealth Fund, a private foundation that supports the health law. Nearly half of all 19-to-25-year-olds—some 13.7 million—use their parents' insurance, the foundation said.

Initially, Tricare wasn't affected by the health law, which meant it which was focused on traditional private insurance plans that didn't have to allow children to stay on their parents' plans past age 21, or 23 if they were full-time college students. Once the provision became popular with consumers, lawmakers passed separate legislation requiring Tricare to adopt it.

The final legislation directed the Department of Defense to charge families for the full cost of the additional coverage. Sen. Mark Udall (D., Colo.), an author of the legislation, said the fee was included because legislators wouldn't support providing the coverage free of charge. Looming defense cuts have put pressure on Tricare and overall military spending.

That fee is either $176 or $201 a month for each young-adult dependent who wants to be covered through a parent's insurance, depending on the type of plan. Tricare says the premiums are based on data for medical costs incurred by similar dependents and administrative expenses. Next year, premiums will fall to $152 or $176 a month.

Nick Papas, a White House spokesman, and Cynthia Smith, a Defense spokeswoman, both said Tricare differed from private insurance plans because it didn't charge members a premium that could absorb the additional costs of covering the young adults. They pointed to Congress's role in including the fee in the legislation.

The monthly premium has deterred most families, as have other restrictions that young-adult dependents be single and have no access to other insurance through a job. Those requirements aren't in place for most civilian employer plans. Of 230,000 young-adult dependents of service members who might have signed up, only 20,740 had signed up for the Tricare extension by August, according to the Department of Defense.

Bob Becker, an Air Force retiree in Colorado Springs, Colo., had hoped the health overhaul would help his 24-year-old son Corey, who is living at home as he finishes culinary studies at a community college. When the Beckers found out about the premium, they decided it was more cost-effective for Corey to go without insurance and use an urgent-care center when he got a bad cold or a pulled muscle. "I know he's a healthy kid, but you just worry if he gets seriously sick," Mr. Becker said.

Danny McNamara also was put off by the premiums after he lost coverage through Tricare on his 23rd birthday last year while a student at Texas Tech University. He said he ended up getting his own private plan and paying premiums of $124 a month with money left over from part-time jobs after his parents persuaded him not to go without coverage.

"I've broken a lot of bones, so I thought I had to have insurance," he said.

Tricare's charge illustrates how insuring young adults, while cheap, changes costs for health-care plans. Consulting firm Mercer said in the past two years, medical costs have averaged between $1,600 and $2,400 a year for each young-adult dependent because of very high costs incurred by a few enrollees.

Civilian employers reported in a 2011 survey that private plan costs had gone up 2% overall that year as a result.

Some benefits managers say that, over time, private plans can absorb the cost of additional young adult dependents because participants pay for family policies for longer.

AOL Defense
(defense.aol.com)
October 9, 2012

23. On 237th Birthday, Navy Feels Its Time Has Come; Budget Pressures Belie Campaign Rhetoric

By Sydney J. Freedberg Jr.

PENTAGON: "It's perfectly acceptable to say 'beat Army,'" the Chief of Naval Operations began, and the assembled sailors laughed.

Adm. Jonathan Greenert was making a football joke, but there's a serious strategic point beneath the smiles. At this morning's celebration of the Navy's 237th birthday, the service's normal pride on such occasions was redoubled by a strong sense that, after a decade supporting ground operations in Afghanistan (landlocked) and Iraq (nearly so), the administration's refocus on the Pacific means it is now the Navy's turn to shine. As Navy Secretary Ray Mabus said in his remarks just minutes after the CNO's, "if you look at the new strategy... it is a maritime-centric strategy."

One of Greenert's bosses made the Navy's case for it. "We all know we're in a moment of great strategic transition," added Deputy Secretary of Defense Ash Carter. "We have been preoccupied, focused, riveted, of necessity" on Afghanistan and Iraq, he said, but "now is the time for us all to look up, look around, and look forward" to a wider strategic vision around the world, and "we see a central role for the United States Navy in that strategy going forward."

That "central role" has definite limits. There's intense downward pressure on the budget, even if the automatic cuts known as sequestration are repealed before they take effect on Jan. 2. So it's unlikely that the Navy will actually grow, despite rhetoric in both the Pentagon and on the campaign trail.

Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney has pledged to increase Navy shipbuilding from the current nine warships a year to "about 15" -- indeed, it's the first point mentioned in the online version of his national security plan. Romney's chief defense advisor, former Navy Secretary John Lehman, recently promised a new class of frigates, a new missile defense ship, more amphibious warfare ships, and an additional air wing. (The Navy currently has 11 aircraft carriers but just 10 air wings, because one carrier is normally out of service for overhaul at any given time).

But Romney has also pledged to reverse the Obama administration's cut of about 100,000 ground troops (80,000 Army soldiers, 20,000 Marines; Romney claims he will "add" the troops but his campaign made clear he would merely reverse the current cuts). Without the savings from those personnel reductions, the only way to fulfill his promises is to find some way to increase the total defense budget. The campaign has discussed trimming the number of top

officers, cutting headquarters staffs, and fixing the chronic cost overruns in the military procurement system, but all these fixes have been tried to little avail before.

Romney advisor Dov Zakheim, former Pentagon comptroller, admitted at an event in June that "this [defense buildup] is not going to all take place in one year" and will probably depend on new revenues from the economic recovery that Romney's tax plan is supposed to stimulate. "If the economy expands," Zakheim said, "you're in a better position to increase defense spending and other spending besides."

Until the recovery restores federal revenues, however, the Navy will keep on making do. For example, Mabus touted Saturday's commissioning of the Navy's newest warship, the *Arleigh Burke*-class destroyer USS Michael Murphy, as "a flexible, powerful, incredible projection of America named after one of our great naval heroes." But the fact that the Navy has committed to building Arleigh Burkes almost indefinitely, and to keep those it has in service for an unprecedented 35 to 40 years, is all about controlling costs. New designs proved too expensive, and even sticking with the current class, the Navy can't build new Arleigh Burkes fast enough to let it retire destroyers after the normal 30-year service life.

Nevertheless, it's still likely that the Navy will "beat Army," if only by not getting its budget cut as much. The Army is the service that grew the most since 9/11, so it would be the logical candidate to be cut the most as the wars wind down, even if the administration were not also seeking to emphasize the Pacific theater, which is (to belabor the obvious) mostly water. Now the largest service is struggling to define -- and defend -- its post-Afghanistan role.

"The Army's got to be the bill-payer," said Robbin Laird, a defense analyst and member of AOL Defense's Board of Contributors, in a conversation with this reporter yesterday. "The Army, I'm sure, will be cut in half by the time we're done, at least."

In some ways, the coming years may be the fiscal equivalent of the War of 1812, whose bicentennial the Navy has been celebrating all year. A sailor from the USS *Constitution*, in reproduction 1812-era uniform, helped CNO Greenert cut the Navy's birthday cake. Secretary Mabus said the Navy's actions in that war "guaranteed our independence... by defeating the then-greatest navy in the world," Great Britain's.

But in fact the War of 1812 was mostly a debacle for the US armed forces, from the abortive invasion of Canada to the burning of the White House by British troops. Oliver Hazard Perry heroically repulsed the British on the Great Lakes, while the famed *Constitution* and other frigates won dramatic but strategically insignificant one-on-one duels with roving Royal Navy ships, but the British still ruled the seas. The US Navy did not truly defeat the British then, and it probably will not defeat the budget-cutters now. Likewise, in the budget wars of the next few years, the Navy's great victory may simply to avoid getting as badly pummeled as everybody else.

Washington Post
October 10, 2012
Pg. 19
In The Loop

24. Of Machines And Men, And Fires And Fastballs

By Al Kamen

After Tuesday night's 12-4 pummeling in St. Louis, the Washington Nationals pitching staff looks as though it may need some help if the team's going to win the World Series.

And it turns out that the U.S. Naval Research Laboratory, along with engineers and scientists at Virginia Tech and the University of Pennsylvania, is already working on something that might do the trick — though maybe not for this season.

The Navy is developing a version of C-3PO, the lovable "Star Wars" robot who appeared on the big screen 35 years ago, to fight shipboard fires.

The Navy robot's name is Autonomous Shipboard Humanoid (ASH). It's hoped ASH will be able to walk in any direction, keep its balance at sea, and go through narrow passageways and up ladders.

Naturally, it'll have all sorts of sensors and cameras and will be able to see through smoke — but maybe not through walls. And it will be able to respond to human gestures and hand signals.

What's more, ASH will be able to throw PEAT (propelled extinguishing agent technology) grenades and be able to use hoses and fire extinguishers.

The Navy robot is a follow-on version of Virginia Tech's CHARLI robot, which was developed by Virginia Tech's Robotics and Mechanisms Laboratory (RoMeLa). The lab's founder and director, professor Dennis Hong, worked on CHARLI and is now working on ASH.

Robots can play sports, too. Hong's team won the RoboCup, or robot world soccer cup, in Istanbul last year. (This is a huge deal amongst folks in that field. You can watch the robot soccer stars at wapo.st/looprobot.)

When will ASH be ready?

"It is walking now and will start testing on a Navy ship early next year," Hong said in an e-mail. "But that does not mean that it is complete — it still needs a lot of things done," such as "protection against heat and flames ... sensors, navigation, fire fighting behaviors" and so forth.

"It still has a long way to go until it can actually be deployed for fighting fires," he said, "but it will one day."

Well, in the meantime, how about a simpler robot? One that can throw a 110-mph curveball (preferably both right- and left-handed). Doesn't even have to be able to field or hit.

Put a Nats hat on him and we're good to go!

New York Times
October 10, 2012

25. Before Hearings On Libya Attack, Charges Of Playing Politics

By Michael S. Schmidt and Eric Schmitt

WASHINGTON — On the eve of the first Congressional hearing on the attack last month at the American diplomatic mission in Benghazi, Libya, members of the House committee investigating the assaults spent Tuesday accusing one another of exploiting the violence to score partisan political points.

The hearing, four weeks after the attack that killed Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens and three other Americans, is expected to focus on any potential intelligence failures in assessing a growing militant threat in Benghazi and eastern Libya; possible security lapses at the mission; and whether the Obama administration underestimated the dangers posed by Al

Qaeda's franchise in northern Africa and other extremist groups in Libya.

Summoned to testify Wednesday before the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee are two senior State Department officials responsible for embassy security worldwide, a former head of security at the United States Embassy in Tripoli and the former head of an American military team assigned to provide security at the embassy.

Underscoring the attack's increasing political and policy significance, President Obama's top counterterrorism adviser, John O. Brennan, visited Libya on Tuesday to discuss the F.B.I.'s investigation of the killings with American and Libyan officials, Reuters reported from Tripoli.

And in a sign of the administration's concerns over the House hearing, the State Department held a hastily arranged conference call with reporters on Tuesday night to offer its first extended account of what happened in Bengazi on the night of Sept. 11, after having repeatedly cited a continuing F.B.I. investigation as a reason for not releasing information on the attack.

Democrats and Republicans on the oversight committee traded similar accusations — that the other party had shown scant interest in dealing with the broader issues of intelligence warnings and security matters, and had focused instead on trying to show that their party was better equipped to address volatile and shifting national security challenges.

"Never in all of my years in Congress have I seen such a startling and damaging series of partisan abuses," said Representative Elijah E. Cummings of Maryland, the panel's ranking Democrat. "The Republicans are in full campaign mode, and it is a shame that they are resorting to such pettiness in what should be a serious and responsible investigation. We should be above that."

Representative Jason Chaffetz, Republican of Utah and chairman of the panel's subcommittee on national security issues, said the Democrats' strategy was to "blame it on politics rather than addressing the nature of the issue."

"They can blame it on politics," Mr. Chaffetz said, "but we are concerned about the more than a hundred embassies and thousands of Americans abroad."

Democrats accused the Republicans of preventing them from interviewing witnesses they plan to call at the hearing, including Lt. Col. Andrew Wood of the Utah National Guard, who led the military security team in Tripoli. Colonel Wood has appeared on several national television programs in recent days and has said that he and other embassy officials unsuccessfully sought to extend his team's tour at the embassy because of mounting security concerns.

A memorandum circulated by Democratic staff members of the panel said that Republicans concealed until last Thursday their plans to depart on the next day for an investigative trip to Libya and that "due to this inadequate notice, no Democratic members or staff were able to join." A Congressional staff member provided a copy of the memo to The New York Times.

A spokesman for the committee's chairman, Representative Darrell Issa, Republican of California, did not respond to several messages seeking comment.

Mr. Chaffetz, who said he went on the trip to Libya, said he was told about the trip only the day before it. He said that the committee had handed over a list of witnesses to the Democrats on the panel and that it was their responsibility to interview them.

Soon after the attack, Congressional Republicans began accusing the administration of trying to play down the possibility that Al Qaeda's franchise in North Africa, or extremist groups with ties to it, were more involved in the assault than administration officials first acknowledged. They said the administration did not want to acknowledge the Qaeda links because it would detract from the message that Mr. Obama's policies had significantly weakened the terrorist network, especially since the Navy SEALs raid in Pakistan last year that killed Osama bin Laden.

Representative Peter T. King, Republican of New York and chairman of the Committee on Homeland Security, said that at an intelligence briefing on Sept. 13, he was told that there had been terrorist involvement. The next day, Mr. King said, he received another briefing that was "not as conclusive."

"It was clear that there was likely terrorist involvement," he said of his impression after those two briefings.

Republicans have singled out Susan E. Rice, the United States ambassador to the United Nations, for criticism because she first attributed the attack to a spontaneous mob protest that spun out of control. Ms. Rice has fired back, saying that she relied solely on information from intelligence agencies and that the government's understanding of what happened had evolved as more information became available.

Michael R. Gordon contributed reporting.

CNN
October 9, 2012

26. Government Waste?

Erin Burnett OutFront (CNN), 7:00 PM

ERIN BURNETT, CNN HOST: So if defense spending is such a big issue this year, why are we on the hook for those tanks?

Drew Griffin from our Special Investigations Unit is OUTFRONT with the story.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

DREW GRIFFIN, CNN SPECIAL INVESTIGATIONS UNIT (voice-over): It's a remarkable sight parked in the California desert, more than 2,000 of them, row upon row of M1 Abrams tanks, built by General Dynamics beginning in the 1980s. Most of them are still ready to roll.

So when the U.S. Army's budget folks sat down to make some tough decisions about what to cut, they saw a great opportunity. Postpone what they said would be a $3 billion expense, the refurbishing of hundreds of these tanks at this General Dynamics plant in Lima, Ohio.

U.S. Army's chief of staff marched up to Capitol Hill with a great idea.

GENERAL RAYMOND T. ODIERNO, CHIEF OF STAFF, U.S. ARMY: In Lima, it would cost us $2.8 billion just to keep that open. And we -- our tank fleet is in good shape. We don't need to -- because of the great support we've gotten over the last few years --

GRIFFIN: And he had support.

Travis Sharp, who studies defense spending at Center for a New American Security says the proposed cuts of tanks were a no-brainer.

TRAVIS SHARP, CENTER FOR A NEW AMERICAN SECURITY: When you relatively conservative institution like the U.S. military, which does not like to take risks, because risks get people killed, says that it has enough tanks -- I think, generally, civilians should be inclined to believe them.

GRIFFIN: But while the defense bill isn't finished yet, you, the taxpayer, are still likely to be on the hook -- for fixing up tanks the Army doesn't want.

(on camera): So who decided the general was wrong, that he actually does need more tanks? I'll give you one word: Congress.

SHARP: I think that there are better things that they could be doing with that $3 billion. But the fact that the military is having such a hard time getting this relatively small amount of money to be saved, I think is an indication of the huge uphill fight that the military faces when it comes to Congress. Congress is going to fight tooth and nail to protect defense investments that benefit their constituents and the people that live in their states.

GRIFFIN (voice-over): Congressman Buck McKeon is chairman of the House Armed Services Committee.

(on camera): Why refurbish tanks the Army doesn't want?

REP. BUCK MCKEON (R-CA), CHAIRMAN OF THE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE: You know, the Army has a job to do and we have a job to do. And they have tough choices because they have been having their budget cut, you know, with the first cuts, the half a trillion dollars and now sequestration on top of that.

But we have to look long range. If somebody could guarantee us that we'll never need tanks in the future, that would be good. I don't see that guarantee.

GRIFFIN (voice-over): McKeon is a Republican. But in this divided Congress, Democrats and Republicans agree on one thing -- 173 congressmen signed this letter calling for the tanks to keep rolling off the refurbishing line.

REP. SILVESTER REYES (D), TEXAS: Listen, we don't want to play Russian roulette with the national security of this country.

GRIFFIN: Why such bipartisan harmony on what should be an easy spending cut? Is it national security or is it congressional job security? Like almost everything up here on Capitol Hill, what's on the surface may not be the whole story.

AARON MEHTA, THE CENTER FOR PUBLIC INTEGRITY: We're saying there's buying votes. We're saying that it's true in pretty much every aspect of politics, especially in the defense industry. It's almost impossible to separate out the money that is going into elections and the special interests, and what we found was the direct spike in the giving around certain important dates that were tied to these votes.

GRIFFIN: It turns out when the army asked Congress to cut the tanks, the company that has the tank refurbishing contract, General Dynamics, began to spend some cash.

Erin Mehta and the Center for Public Integrity began tracking the money, the votes and the lobbyists hired by General Dynamics to try to keep rebuilding the tanks the Army doesn't want.

What they found, campaign contributions given at key times. Congress did cut much of the tank refurbishing but not all, leaving $181 million in the budget for next year.

A spokesman for General Dynamics said there's nothing surprising about the dates the firm gave its money. It's when Congress was in town and fund-raisers were being held.

"Our money is bipartisan," said General Dynamics' Kendell Pease.

Congressman McKeon says he didn't even know General Dynamics had given him $56,000 since becoming chairman of the House Armed Services Committee.

(on camera): Since you've been chairman, people associated with General Dynamics have sent $56,000 into your campaign.

MCKEON: I'm taking your word for that. I don't go to my reports and see that.

GRIFFIN: Well, I'm telling you.

MCKEON: OK.

GRIFFIN: Isn't this corporate welfare year after year after year for General Dynamics?

MCKEON: This isn't about General Dynamics. It's about keeping a work force to provide for the defense of our nation.

GRIFFIN (voice-over): Congressman Reyes, who has received $64,000 from General Dynamics since 2001, says he, too, is worried about the work force.

And we contacted General Dynamics about all of this. The company told us the same thing. It's about the ability in the future to make new tanks when the Army is ready. General Dynamics argues it's cheaper to keep this plant going now than to shut it down entirely and then have to pay for it to come back up in the future. It wants to protect the industrial base -- a theme echoed by McKeon and Reyes, which brings us to one final thought.

The Army does want to upgrade the M1 tank beginning in 2017. Who do you think will get that contract? I asked Buck McKeon.

MCKEON: General Dynamics will probably get the contract for it anyway, because they're kind of the ones that are out there leading the way on this.

GRIFFIN: For General Dynamics, the future in tanks looks pretty good.

Drew Griffin, CNN, Herlong, California.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

DefenseNews.com
October 9, 2012

27. U.S. House Report Lists Multitude Of Weapons Programs Sequestration Would Hit

F-35, Stryker, Tanker and New USAF Bomber Among Systems Projected To Feel Cuts

By John T. Bennett

Unless lawmakers find a way to prevent a $53 billion cut to planned defense spending for 2013, the U.S. military services would be forced to buy fewer F-35 fighters, Stryker vehicles and Army helicopters, says a House panel. What’s more, the pending cut could jeopardize the Air Force’s plans for new tanker and bomber fleets.

The report, released Oct. 9 by House Appropriations Committee (HAC) Democrats, offers the first projections of how many big-ticket weapon systems the armed services likely would cut under the first tranche of a decade-long spending cut.

The Air Force would take a major hit under that first year of a broader 10-year, $500 billion reduction to planned Pentagon spending. The service would be forced to slash funding for its KC-145 aerial tanker program by $499.5 million next year, a move the lawmakers conclude would slow the program’s crucial

engineering and development phase. Boeing is the prime contractor on that high-profile program.

The air service also would have to slash by $33.7 million its 2013 budget for an initiative to design and field a new bomber aircraft.

The largest Pentagon weapon program ever, the F-35 fighter effort, would lose $1 billion in 2013 — and four jets. Lockheed Martin is the prime contractor.

The panel predicts the Army would be forced to buy eight fewer Sikorsky-made Black Hawk helicopters and five fewer Boeing-made CH-47 Chinook choppers. Collectively, those moves would "[slow] Army plans to modernize its utility and heavy lift helicopter fleet," the panel's Democrats write in the "dear colleague" report, sent to all members of Congress.

The Army also would have to purchase 11 fewer General Dynamics-made Stryker vehicles, the HAC Democrats say, adding that would hurt the service's "ability to keep Stryker brigades fully outfitted."

The report bears the signature of soon-to-retire Rep. Norm Dicks, D-Wash., the outgoing House Appropriations Committee ranking member. (He holds the same seat on the panel's powerful Defense subcommittee.)

The Navy would buy two fewer Boeing-made F-18G electronic warfare aircraft and three fewer F/A-18E/F Super Hornets. The latter move, the lawmakers say, would make "if more difficult to avoid a carrier-based strike fighter shortfall."

Boeing would take a further hit because the Navy likely would kill one planned P-8A aircraft, which conduct surveillance and electronic warfare, the report states.

The planned spending cuts, which would occur under a process known as sequestration, also would hit America's nuclear arms arsenal.

"The National Nuclear Safety Administration (NNSA) would also be subject to the more substantial defense reduction. Under sequestration, NNSA Weapons activities would be cut by $861 million," the report states. "With this reduced budget, NNSA would no longer be able to support modernization of the weapons complex, including required life extension programs to ensure the nation's nuclear deterrent remains safe, reliable and effective."

Also hit hard would be the Pentagon's operations and maintenance accounts, which would take a $1.6 billion cut next year.

"This reduction would limit DOD's ability to maintain and modernize key weapon systems, and overhaul weapons systems damaged in operations," the HAC Democrats state. "Sequestration would severely degrade the Defense Department's ability to maintain a trained and ready force, and would similarly ensure that the condition of combat equipment and military facilities would deteriorate."

The report surely will be used by both sides of the defense spending debate in coming weeks and months.

"It is encouraging to see Democrats actually being open about the impact of sequestration to defense," one House Republican source said. "It's interesting to see the discordant messages from Democrats, with Norm Dicks' message that sequestration would hurt defense and cause millions of job losses, and then the message from OMB that it won't. … Members need to understand how deeply this would hurt defense."

Not everyone in the defense sector agrees, however.

"After an unprecedented 13 straight years of increases in base defense budgets, the Pentagon is well positioned — even for sequestration-size cuts," Lawrence Korb, a former Pentagon official now with the Center for American Progress, wrote in a recent op-ed. "Such reductions would return the country to its fiscal year 2006 level of defense spending, when the United States was fighting two large land wars."

On the matter of how many job losses the cuts would spawn, there is ample disagreement. A study commissioned by a defense trade association that is being used by GOP nominee Mitt Romney's campaign warns of over 1.2 million lost jobs just from defense cuts. Other studies have panned that one for failing to factor in important economic elements, such as whether dollars not spent on the military might be spent in other sectors, thus creating new jobs.

But a Congressional Research Service (CRS) report that surfaced just hours before the HAC Democrats' released their study questioned the findings of each of the jobs-related estimates.

"Any projections involve considerable uncertainty and thus margins for error," the CRS report states. "State-by-state job impacts of the analyses — which appeared to garner the most attention — were based on the perhaps unlikely assumption that the distribution of program spending by industry in the past would continue in the forecast period."

The final passage of the Dicks-signed report offers a window into the policy differences that have so far prevented Democrats and Republicans from agreeing to the necessary $1.2 trillion deficit-reduction plan that would void the defense cuts and a twin $500 billion cut to planned domestic spending over the same span.

"Congress must find a way to replace sequestration with a balanced approach to long-term deficit reduction that focuses on economic growth and job creation, and does no harm to our economic recovery in the short-run," the Democrats' report states.

The operative term is "balanced approach," Democratic code for a deficit-reduction plan that includes spending cuts, entitlement program reform, defense cuts and tax hikes for the wealthiest Americans. Most congressional Republicans, however, oppose the final two legs of such a plan.

Politico.com
October 10, 2012

28. Challengers Could Topple Armed Services Members

By Leigh Munsil

With Election Day less than a month away, some members of the House and Senate Armed Services committees are fighting for their political lives in races that could well go down to the wire.

Traditionally, the committees have been stable bastions. But already the Senate panel is reeling from the announced retirements of four stalwarts: Democrats Jim Webb of Virginia, Daniel Akaka of Hawaii and Ben Nelson of Nebraska, and independent Joe Lieberman of Connecticut.

Here's an update on POLITICO's list of the most vulnerable:

Sen. Claire McCaskill (D-Mo.)

Despite the now well-known "legitimate rape" gaffe by Republican Rep. Todd Akin,

the race is on in Missouri as the chairwoman of the Senate Readiness and Management Support Subcommittee tries to fend off Akin's challenge.

Akin, who chairs the House Seapower and Projection Forces Subcommittee, ignored calls from within his own party to drop off the ballot after the gaffe and is running hard to catch up.

He's been taking aim at McCaskill on ethics issues, airing a TV ad claiming that economic stimulus funding made McCaskill rich. And she's been pushing back on his support of congressional earmarks.

The latest statewide polls have McCaskill up by about 6 percentage points.

Sen. Scott Brown (R-Mass.)

The Massachusetts freshman has been running neck and neck with Harvard Law professor Elizabeth Warren. They've traded barbs in high-profile debates, but the race is still very volatile and most likely will remain so, right up until the Nov. 6 election.

Brown, who won the 2010 special election to fill the seat held by the late Democratic Sen. Ted Kennedy, is one of the top recipients of defense industry contributions this cycle. And he's been tacking to the middle to attract more votes in the very blue state.

Rep. Allen West (R-Fla.)

A new addition to the "most endangered" list, the former Army officer is in an increasingly ugly House race in Florida, with brutal ads flying on both sides.

A West ad compares the two candidates in 2003, when West was stationed at Fort Hood, Texas, and his Democratic opponent, Patrick Murphy, was arrested after a college bar fight in South Beach.

The circumstances surrounding the end of West's U.S. Army tenure are also becoming a major campaign issue, with Murphy's ad in response pointing to the criminal charges against West that led to him being relieved of his Army command.

The polling numbers in the race have been all over the map, with both sides claiming wide leads in internal polls. But Larry Sabato's Crystal Ball, of the University of Virginia's Center for Politics, has changed the 18th District race from "leans Republican" to a tossup.

Rep. Roscoe Bartlett (R-Md.)

The 20-year House veteran has been struggling on the campaign trail, using the Holocaust as a metaphor twice in two days in September and muddling through subsequent apologies.

Democrat John Delaney has seized upon the opportunity created by a redistricting shift to the left. An attorney and businessman, he spent more than $1 million of his own money to win the primary. And Democrats think they could have a real chance to knock out the chairman of the House Tactical Air and Land Forces Subcommittee in their bid to pick up the 6th Congressional District seat.

Rep. Chris Gibson (R-N.Y.)

At first, it looked like the Army veteran would be fielding a serious challenge in New York's redrawn 19th Congressional District from Julian Schreibman, a former CIA lawyer.

But a recent Siena College Research Institute poll of likely voters found Gibson gaining substantial ground, mounting a 16-point lead.

The rivals will face off in three debates before Election Day — on Oct. 10, 18 and 24 — the Daily Freeman newspaper reported.

Rep. Bobby Schilling (R-Ill.)

The tea-party-backed freshman has been trading accusations in a tight race with Democrat Cheri Bustos, a former journalist and past member of the East Moline City Council.

"The race is rapidly moving in our direction," Bustos campaign manager Allison Jaslow told The Quad-City Times.

The Rothenberg Political Report, though, has the contest a tossup, with the district leaning Democratic.

The 17th Congressional District is home to the U.S. Army Garrison-Rock Island Arsenal, a key government-owned weapons manufacturing plant. Schilling has been touting his work on behalf of the facility.

Rep. Bill Owens (D-N.Y.)

The Air Force veteran, who's running in a redrawn 23rd Congressional District, was weighed down by a scandal over his December visit to Taiwan. Owens reimbursed the government $22,132 after ProPublica and POLITICO reported that he and his wife had stayed at luxury hotels on the four-day trip, which is believed to have been arranged by lobbyists — a possible violation of ethics laws.

Owens's challenger, Republican banking manager and former House candidate Matt Doheny, has seized on the ethics issue, accusing his opponent of being too cozy with lobbyists.

Still, Owens was leading Doheny by a dozen-plus points in a mid-September Siena College poll.

The candidates' next debate is set for Oct. 16.

Rep. Dave Loebsack (D-Iowa)

After redistricting lumped him together with Democratic Rep. Bruce Braley, Loebsack moved to another county to avoid a member-vs.-member primary. Now, he's being challenged by Republican lawyer John Archer.

Archer addressed the Republican National Convention last August in Tampa, Fla., a platform given to few congressional candidates.

The Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee has placed Loebsack on its list of the most vulnerable House members. And the Cook Political Report considers the 2nd District race competitive, though Loebsack is still favored.

Rep. Larry Kissell (D-N.C.)

Republican-backed redistricting in North Carolina has given the GOP hope of picking up as many as four seats in the state. Kissell faces Republican Richard Hudson, a former congressional chief of staff and consultant.

Due to his new Republican-friendly 8th District, Kissell has declined to endorse President Barack Obama's reelection and didn't attend the Democratic National Convention in Charlotte.

The Charlotte Observer reported that a campaign sign one of his supporters carried outside a debate said: "Another conservative for Kissell."

Rep. Mike McIntyre (D-N.C.)

Another endangered North Carolina Democrat, McIntyre has also stayed far away from Obama's record in his new Republican-leaning district.

His GOP challenger, state Sen. David Rouzer, has the support of national Republicans, who see a major opportunity to flip the balance of power in North Carolina's congressional delegation.

National Republican Congressional Committee ads in the 7th District use video of Rouzer's speech at the Republican National Convention and try to pin McIntyre to Obama.

Recent polls, however, show Obama with a slight lead in North Carolina, which could be a good sign for down-ballot Democrats.

McIntyre is the ranking Democrat on the Seapower and Projection Forces Subcommittee.

Rep. Mark Critz (D-Pa.)

After winning one of the ugliest member-vs.-member battles of the primary cycle, Critz now faces NRCC-backed "Young Gun" Keith Rothfus, whose résumé includes a stint at the Department of Homeland Security.

Former President Bill Clinton is coming to Critz's aid in the 12th Congressional District, appearing at a rally in Beaver, Pa., on the Democrat's behalf.

Austin Wright contributed to this report.

Fort Worth Star-Telegram
October 10, 2012

29. Defense Budget Cut 'Equals Devastation,' Bell Chief Says

By Bob Cox

Bell Helicopter Chief Executive John Garrison on Tuesday joined the chorus of defense industry executives sounding the alarm about the likely consequences if Congress doesn't act by early January to block huge defense spending cuts from automatically taking place.

Budget sequestration "in my opinion equals devastation," Garrison said in a presentation at the Aviation and Aerospace Industry Manufacturing Summit being held in Fort Worth.

Sequestration is the legislative term for the process mandated in the Budget Control Act of 2011 that will require the federal government to slash roughly $1 trillion -- about $100 billion a year -- from projected spending over the next decade, unless Congress reaches a new budget deal.

By law, the cuts must be distributed equally between defense and non-defense budget items, excluding entitlements such as Medicare and Social Security.

Sequestration is "a horrible way to set policy," Garrison said, and it will have far-reaching effects on defense contractors such as Bell and Lockheed Martin and ultimately their employees.

"It's going to affect engineering. It's going to affect manufacturing. And it's going to have downstream effects" on the companies that supply defense contractors.

Defense contractors and industry lobbying groups have been ringing alarms bells for months about the impact that sequestration could have on businesses, jobs and the economy.

One pro-defense spending group, the Center for Security Policy, has put together state and county data showing where defense dollars from the 2011 budget were spent and presumably, where the cuts would occur.

The data shows that about $11.1 billion was spent with contractors in Tarrant County in 2011, more than $7 billion tied to Lockheed Martin's F-35 fighter program. The total for the four-county Dallas-Fort Worth area was $15.8 billion and for the entire state was $36 billion.

The group says that under the budget law the contracts could be cut 18 percent or more across the board. But the first round of cuts, about $45 billion for the 2013 budget, was not applied equally.

The initial impact on Bell would likely be small, Garrison said, because the company has contracts and funding on V-22 aircraft and military helicopters through 2015. Bell likely would not have to send out WARN Act notices to employees advising them of possible layoffs, Garrison said, because it believed the immediate impact would be slight.

"I'd like to believe the federal government isn't going to break contracts and this will be worked out going forward," Garrison said.

Bell has been given virtually no guidance by the Department of Defense or other government agencies on how sequestration would be implemented. The law calls for across-the-board spending cuts, but President Barack Obama has said military payroll and benefits spending would be exempted.

Garrison said he believes the cuts would also not be made in the military's operations accounts that are used to buy spare parts, food and fuel.

"The [only] guidance we've been given is what Secretary [Leon] Panetta said, that sequestration is not something that's going to happen," Garrison said after his speech.

Wall Street Journal
October 10, 2012

30. Boards Meet To Consider EADS Deal

By Stephen Fidler and Daniel Michaels

The boards of Airbus parent European Aeronautic Defence & Space Co. and British defense giant BAE Systems PLC met late Tuesday to discuss their proposed merger before a critical deadline, as senior European officials cited progress in government talks on how the deal would be structured.

French Defense Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian said his government has made progress with Britain and Germany on terms for the proposed linkup. Speaking on the sideline of a summit of North Atlantic Treaty Organization defense ministers in Brussels, he said it remained unclear whether the progress achieved so far was sufficient to satisfy the two companies.

"We have advanced a lot, I think," Mr. Le Drian said. "Whether we have advanced enough for the initiators of the project is for them to say."

U.K. Defense Secretary Philip Hammond said he had met with his counterparts from France, Germany and the U.S. regarding the deal, and the companies understood each nation's views.

"I think the companies have a very clear understanding of the positions and the red lines of the governments involved," Mr. Hammond said.

BAE and EADS have until 5 p.m. London time on Wednesday to notify British regulators whether they will seek an extension of the 28-day period during which they were to set out detailed plans for their merger. If the companies feel inadequate progress is being made in their merger talks, they might say Wednesday that they are abandoning the effort.

Finalizing the plan has been held up by complex negotiations among the governments over state ownership of the combined company and concerns over job guarantees.

British, French and German government officials are trying to agree on how their governments would safeguard their national interests in the enlarged group, whose

operations would be based largely in France, the U.K., Germany and the U.S.

France now owns 15% of EADS, which would translate to 9% of the merged company. German officials have said that for the deal to proceed, Germany must hold an equal stake to France. Germany has been planning to buy part of a 15% stake in EADS held by car giant Daimler AG.

Mr. Le Drian said that France's three priorities are to guard its strategic interests in EADS, guarantee that French employment in the new company is secure and understand the future strategic direction of the merged company. British and German officials have spoken of similar priorities.

Another European official said France and Britain had made progress in their talks since the end of last week but an agreement hasn't been reached. Officials continue to discuss issues around French and German ownership of the combined company.

British officials have said they want state holdings and influence in the merged company reduced. They are in part concerned that European government influence would hurt BAE's U.S. operations. American officials could restrict BAE's extensive U.S. operations if they feel that Paris or Berlin were too involved in the company's operations.

One sticking point has been a 7.5% stake in EADS held by French media group Lagardere SCA, which before the merger announcement last month had said it wanted to sell its stake. French officials are concerned that an outside buyer could snap up the stake and want to prevent that, but British and German officials want to ensure France's stake doesn't exceed 9%, according to several people involved in the talks. France and Britain on Tuesday were near an agreement on how to address the issue, according to these people.

Other issues also need to be resolved in areas such as the company's management structure, its corporate governance and the location of its headquarters, according to these people.

—Cassell Bryan-Low and David Gauthier-Villars contributed to this article.

Washington Post
October 10, 2012
Pg. 21

31. Protecting Against A 'Cyber 9/11'

By Joseph I. Lieberman

Congress has recessed until after the November elections without passing cybersecurity legislation, which a bipartisan chorus of prominent defense and intelligence officials says is urgently needed to protect our country's economic and national security.

Director of National Intelligence James Clapper delivered an unvarnished assessment of the threat from cyberattacks when he told Congress in February: "We all recognize [cyberattacks] as a profound threat to this country, to its future, to its economy, to its very being."

And yet, our cyberdefenses are "woefully lacking," former national intelligence director Michael McConnell has said. That's why Sens. Susan Collins, Jay Rockefeller, Dianne Feinstein, Tom Carper and I introduced the Cybersecurity Act of 2012 — to require a minimum level of security for the most critical privately owned cybernetworks, which will be prime targets for attack. But even this was considered "burdensome, job-killing, government regulation" by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and its allies in the Senate.

In the interest of finding common ground, we reluctantly cut out a central feature of our bill: requiring that minimum cybersecurity standards be applied to the most critical cybernetworks upon which our security depends, such as water and transportation systems, the electric grid, communications systems and financial networks. Instead of mandating that key systems meet minimum security standards, we agreed to a voluntary program with a carrot: liability protections for companies that voluntarily adopt the standards. Still, our opponents refused to budge.

The Chamber of Commerce says that better information-sharing between the private sector and the government will keep us safe from cyberattacks. Our bill contains information-sharing provisions that have received support from industry and privacy and civil liberties advocates as well as from our nation's military and intelligence leaders.

But information-sharing alone is a half-step, helping only some networks some of the time. If critical infrastructure systems don't meet standards that give them the capabilities or motivation to act on timely information, or if they fail to gather information about threats to share with others, then sharing information with them in real time won't do much good.

Many critical systems don't even have the personnel or technological capabilities to use shared information or to gather information to share with others. A joint study by Verizon and the Secret Service found that 85 percent of all data breaches took weeks to discover and that 92 percent were discovered by third parties — usually law enforcement — not the systems' owners. The Chamber of Commerce itself was the victim of a sustained, widespread hack by the Chinese, and if the FBI had not informed the chamber, who knows how long the breach would have gone undetected? As Deputy Defense Secretary Ashton Carter pointed out: "There is a market failure at work here. . . . Companies just aren't willing to admit vulnerability to themselves, or publicly to shareholders."

Since Congress has not been able to find common ground on cybersecurity legislation, I appreciate the president's stated intention to fortify the security of critical cybersystems through his executive powers. We know our adversaries are already stealing valuable intellectual property and exploiting our critical infrastructure to prepare for attack. Under the Homeland Security Act of 2002, the Department of Homeland Security has clear authority to conduct risk assessments of critical infrastructure, identify the systems or assets that are most vulnerable to cyberattack, and issue voluntary standards for them to maintain adequate cybersecurity.

Executive action is not the best way to protect the United States from cyberattacks. Without congressional action, the president cannot offer liability protections to industry to reward compliance with voluntary security guidelines. Nor can he require industry to report major cyber-intrusions. But the president can encourage owners of critical infrastructure to improve their cybersecurity by identifying systems and assets that pose the greatest risk and recommending measures necessary to protect them.

Our nation's security interests should not be at the mercy of congressional inaction. An array of current and former homeland security secretaries, National Security Agency chiefs, CIA directors, national intelligence directors, Joint Chiefs of Staff and others who know the extent to which our most critical cybersystems have been infiltrated have called on Congress to act. We fail to listen at our peril.

In a letter to the Senate majority and minority leaders this summer, former homeland security and defense officials Michael Chertoff, Michael McConnell, Paul Wolfowitz, Michael Hayden, Gen. James Cartwright and William J. Lynnwrote: "We carry the burden of knowing that 9/11 might have been averted with the intelligence that existed at the time. We do not want to be in the same position again when 'cyber 9/11' hits — it is not a question of whether this will happen; it is a question of when."

We must act before another catastrophe occurs.

Joseph I. Lieberman, an independent, represents Connecticut in the U.S. Senate.

Los Angeles Times
October 10, 2012
Pg. 13

32. A Third Way In Syria

By Robert A. Pastor

The conflict in Syria was "extremely bad and getting worse." That's what Lakhdar Brahimi, special envoy to Syria for the United Nations and the Arab League and one of the world's most skillful diplomats, told the Security Council in late September. The major powers listened but offered no new ideas on how to end the crisis. We need to change direction.

Up to now, two strategies have been pursued. Kofi Annan, the former U.N. secretary-general and Brahimi's predecessor as special envoy, tried to negotiate a cease-fire and forge a consensus among the great and middle powers. That failed.

A second strategy has been to assist the fragmented opposition to overthrow Syrian President Bashar Assad. Saudi Arabia, the Persian Gulf states and Turkey have provided guns. Other governments, including the United States, are helping. The opposition is much stronger than when the uprising began 18 months ago, and it can now attack the regime almost everywhere. The opposition is encouraged by international support, and some seek foreign intervention to hasten Assad's fall. That is unlikely to happen.

The Syrian army remains strong enough to retake areas seized by the rebels, and it is being resupplied by Iran and supported by Russia. Assad retains some support in the country, and the security forces -- led by family and his minority Alawite clan -- have remained a potent force, despite defections. They are fighting hard because they fear that defeat will mean their annihilation. Moreover, the regime fears that compromise could be construed as weakness.

With the two sides balanced and resisting serious negotiations, the conflict won't be over soon. Indeed, Syria might very well be entering the second year of a decade-long civil war. Each year, the sectarian violence will worsen, atrocities will multiply, the most fundamentalist elements will grow stronger and neighboring countries will become more involved.

Some have urged the U.S. to increase military support for the opposition, but President Obama's caution is wise. If the U.S. goes down this road, it cannot afford to lose, but it is unlikely to "win" soon or inexpensively. Americans are weary of wars in the Middle East, and they learned in Iraq that winning can be elusive. In Syria, the winners might be jihadis, and one result could be a regional war by and against the Kurds.

This is the time for a new goal and strategy, and Brahimi is the man because it was he who defined the terms that provided Lebanon an exit from its long civil war. The goal should not be to overthrow Assad, however desirable that might be to many. The goal should be to construct a path to a political system that provides voice and vote for all Syrians, and institutional checks and balances to protect all minorities and sects.

What would the agreement look like? At the start of the uprising, the Assad government proposed reforms of election administration, political parties, the media and nongovernmental organizations, among others. That is the right agenda, but the reforms were so flawed that no one took them seriously. Last year, representing the Carter Center, Hrair Balian and I discussed with the Assad government an approach that would modify the reforms to make them credible and convincing to the democratic opposition.

Some senior government officials supported the idea, but at that time, the security forces were sure they could crush the opposition. They were mistaken.

As the government and opposition will not deal with each other, the special envoy should shuttle between them to craft credible reforms that could permit an internationally supervised election that protects all groups. A U.N. peacekeeping force would be essential to oversee and implement the agreement. With the conflict intensifying but stalemated, it is hard to imagine any serious leader denying the reforms.

Is democracy possible in Syria? It seems improbable. But the most likely alternative -- a decade-long descent into self-destruction -- is too awful to contemplate. The time might be ripe to place the weight of the international community behind a third option.

Robert A. Pastor is a professor of international relations at American University in Washington and the author of "The North American Idea." He is a senior advisor to the Carter Center on conflict resolution in the Middle East.

ForeignPolicy.com
October 9, 2012

33. The Enemy Within

Why aren't we holding the military's leaders responsible for the suicide epidemic?

By Lawrence J. Korb

The U.S. military is confronting an epidemic of suicides, which, in the Army alone, are currently averaging more than one a day. To deal with this scourge, Defense Secretary Leon Panetta has said that he wants military leaders to "kick ass" and that he will hold them accountable for whether they succeed in helping desperate troops.

But while the commissioned officers and the noncommissioned officers currently leading men and women in combat and support units should make every effort to help their troops, they are not responsible for this sad state of affairs. Rather, the people who should be accountable are the civilian and military leaders who sent these men and women

repeatedly into combat zones without sufficient time at home between combat deployments and lowered the standards for new enlistees in order to meet their recruitment goals.

The all-volunteer force (AVF) came into being -- over the opposition of the military chiefs, who were concerned that the volunteers would be mercenaries -- because so many elites, including many current and past U.S. political leaders, avoided service during the Vietnam War era. Those who had other priorities during the war in Vietnam included presidential candidate Mitt Romney, Vice Presidents Dick Cheney and Joe Biden, and Presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush. But, as the Joint Chiefs of Staff told President Ronald Reagan in 1981 -- when he was deciding whether to fulfill his campaign promise to abolish Selective Service registration -- the AVF is a peacetime force. War requires mobilization -- that is, the activation of Selective Service. Doing so would allow the military to give the troops at least two years in between one-year deployments and prevent the military from having to lower its standards to get people to "volunteer" for wars that appeared to have no end in sight. Moreover, given that over 20 million men are in the Selective Service System, the armed forces could ensure that they drafted only men who met their standards.

Unfortunately, successors in the Joint Chiefs of Staff -- including the chairmen who presided over the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, Gen. Richard Myers, Gen. Peter Pace, and Adm. Mike Mullen -- failed to speak up publicly or privately about what 12- or 15-month deployments with less than a year at home in between were doing to thousands of military people and their families. As far as can be ascertained from their testimony to Congress, nor did military leaders point out to their civilian superiors how the granting of more than 100,000 moral waivers by the Army and Marine Corps to meet recruitment quotas was affecting the quality of the force and unit cohesion.For example, Pvt. Steven Green, who was allowed to enlist in the Army even though he had not graduated from high school and had three misdemeanor convictions, persuaded two of his colleagues in 2006 to help him rape a young girl in Iraq and then kill her and her family.

The military chiefs were aided and abetted in this dereliction of duty by their civilian superiors, particularly Defense Secretaries Donald Rumsfeld and Robert Gates, and President Bush. By the time Rumsfeld left office in 2006, there were almost 200,000 troops deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan. Soon after Gates took over from Rumsfeld, he extended troops' tours in Iraq from 12 to 15 months to carry out the surge and then sent many of these troops back into Iraq and Afghanistan with less than a year at home. In addition, neither Rumsfeld nor Gates prevented the services from using moral waivers to meet recruitment quotas, which allowed people with criminal convictions, including felonies, into the Army and Marine Corps. At the height of the war, in 2007, the Army and Marine Corps together issued waivers to 861 recruits with felony convictions. Nor did Rumsfeld or Gates ensure that all the men and women in the units had all the necessary individual or unit training before being deployed to combat zones -- something we only became aware of when the families of the young soldiers informed the media. In 2007, Mark Thompson of *Time* magazine covered the story of a group of soldiers who were deployed to Iraq after a "cut-rate, 10-day course on weapon use, first aid and Iraqi culture" rather than the typical four weeks of intense combat training.

Ultimately, the responsibility for this moral outrage stops with Bush. As commander in chief, he should not have allowed his civilian and military leaders to send members of the armed forces back to combat zones without sufficient time at home, or to send unprepared people into battle. But Bush knew that if he raised the specter of activating Selective Service before invading Iraq, the American people and their elected representatives would have asked a lot more questions about whether the mindless, needless, senseless invasion and occupation would be a cakewalk, as he and his acolytes claimed, and that U.S. forces would be greeted as liberators.

The failure to activate the Selective Service System when the United States invaded Iraq also had strategic consequences that linger today. Even after stretching the force too thin, the United States still did not have enough troops to achieve its objectives in Iraq and Afghanistan simultaneously. The Bush administration, in the words of Mullen, did what it had to in Iraq and what it could in Afghanistan. Consequently, the war in Afghanistan, which should have been over years ago, continues today.

Although not every suicide can be attributed to the stress of combat, it is no accident that the Army, which has borne the overwhelming portion of combat, has the most suicides and has seen the greatest increase. In 2004, the suicide rate for the Army was 9.7 cases per 100,000 soldiers. In July 2012, that rate had more than tripled to 29.1 cases per 100,000; in that month alone, 38 soldiers, or more than one a day, killed themselves. And in the first eight months of 2012, suicide rates among active-duty troops averaged 33 per month.

Yes, Secretary Panetta should hold today's military leaders accountable for helping desperate troops avoid suicide. But we must all remember why they are desperate. It is because of the actions of previous leaders in the Pentagon and the White House. How about kicking them in the butt?

Lawrence J. Korb, a senior fellow at the Center for American Progress, served as U.S. assistant secretary of defense in Ronald Reagan's administration.

Sydney Morning Herald
October 10, 2012
Pg. 13

34. Tighter Defence Ties Will Bind Academics And Stifle Innovation

By Jill Trewhella

When our politicians line up for pictures with the US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, during her visit next month few Australians will be aware of the potential cost of that photo opportunity.

With each handshake our research enterprise - Australia's engine of innovation - will be strangled. Our researchers may have lost their ability to freely conduct public-good research and communicate research results - simply because legislation important to the US-Australia defence trade was rushed before Clinton's visit, rather than considered with enough time to find a solution to protect against its unintended consequences.

This legislation could mean a conference speech, publication of a scientific paper or sending an email to colleagues could require a Defence permit or become a serious crime.

What is scary is that because few Australians are engaged with this complex, technical legislation - let's face it, anything called the Defence Trade Control Bill will not make the six o'clock news - this was able to happen. What is maddening is that in our rush, Australia will potentially not have legislated comparable safeguards to protect public-good research that Americans have.

The purpose of the bill before the Senate is to give effect to the 2007 Australia-United States Defence Trade Co-operation Treaty which aims to reduce administrative burdens that have hampered the Australian-US defence trade.

However, while the bill reduces the burden of export controls for Defence, it introduces new and potentially stifling export controls on all other sectors, with serious potential consequences for universities.

New controls on intangible transfers mean research activities that could result in the communication of information regarding the development, use or production of a broad range of technologies used in ordinary research would require review by, and permission from, the Department of Defence. The bill could even criminalise publication of data or information relating to these technologies.

This is likely to restrict researchers from communicating critical information to scientists abroad to prevent pandemic flu outbreaks. It would impede top scientists in developing technologies for tomorrow's high-tech manufacturing industries, new vaccines and potential cures for cancer. The Australian government worries about a brain drain in advanced technology, but is poised to pass legislation that could force our best and brightest offshore.

US researchers in accredited higher education institutions enjoy broad exclusions from export control relating to intangible transfers of dual-use technology for basic or applied research.

However, Defence will impose far more restrictive controls on researchers, disadvantaging them compared with their US peers, especially given the relative importance of international collaboration to Australia.

The legislation gives unprecedented authority to one department to decide what research can be communicated and to whom and given the bill covers technologies with military and civilian applications, Defence is alarmingly unqualified for the task.

The failure of Defence to consult adequately has prompted very recent rushed meetings in which there has been pressure to agree to a trial period of the legislation, rather than amend it. During this two-year trial academics will not be prosecuted for breaches, but this still will not protect them and institutions from overwhelming administrative burdens and an expensive, lengthy permit process.

Consider a renowned University of Sydney physicist, whose quantum technology research, with applications for computing and development of green-energy sector materials, is not excluded from proposed regulations. He estimates 20 per cent of the equipment he purchases and uses in experiments will be affected and he might spend a quarter of his research time reviewing, assessing, seeking legal advice, applying for, or waiting for, permits. Stay in Australia? This burden just might force him to return to the US.

The University of Sydney has just obtained independent legal advice showing Australian researchers will be at a comparative disadvantage to US peers if this legislation passes.

We must demand it be amended to ensure Australian researchers are not subject to greater restrictions than US colleagues. If there are compelling national interest reasons to rush legislation then a simple amendment to the bill excluding open scientific research is required. Anything less will prove dangerous to Australian research and innovation.

Professor Jill Trewhella is deputy vice-chancellor (research) at the University of Sydney.

London Times
October 10, 2012

35. BAE Needs EADS. There's No Serious Alternative

If this deal collapses, the choice is between a US takeover or a break-up of the business

By Sash Tusa

In announcing that it was in talks with EADS, the European owner of Airbus, BAE Systems opened a Pandora's Box.

Much of the noise around the proposed merger — over jobs, potential loss of sovereignty and Britain's relationship with the US — has obscured the bigger picture: BAE has put itself "into play". It implicitly accepts that it is in a strategic cul-desac, with a low-growth (or possibly shrinking) defence business and insufficient access to higher-growth markets. Whatever happens now, BAE can never go back to the status quo of independence and stability.

Politicians, investors and employees therefore need to ask the question about this proposed merger: "If not this, then what?"

Or who? During this phoney war it has been easy to forget that a merger of BAE and EADS would address serious strategic weaknesses for both companies. BAE spent the last two decades getting out of civil aerospace and investing heavily in the US defence market, especially armoured vehicles. This worked like a charm when the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were at their peaks.

But the US defence budget faces cuts of up to $600 billion over the next decade. While defence markets may be attractive longer-term, with the US remaining the technology driver, and exports to the Middle East and East Asia providing a real upside, BAE now lacks the balance sheet to be able to compensate its investors for the years of patience that might be required.

Things might seem to be rosier for EADS, as Airbus rides the crest of the civil aerospace wave, with orders for tens of thousands of new airliners forecast over the coming decades. But the risks are high and write-offs of several billions in any year are depressingly frequent. EADS' defence, space and helicopter businesses are just too small to provide the diversification that the group needs.

This proposal would be unlikely to produce the instant financial results beloved of some business advisers and investors, but BAE and EADS appear to have a commendably long-term vision for a merged

group, one able to produce far more balanced results, stable cash flow, and shoulder big investment programmes and export opportunities.

And merger would have the clear benefit for EADS of diluting the strategic shareholdings of Daimler (effectively held on behalf of the German Government) and the French Government, marking an irreversible step towards being a "normal" company free of state control.

The shareholders have been woefully underinformed about the deal — a function of overzealous adherence to a UK Takeover Code that was never intended to deal with a case of such sensitivity and should have been suspended. The companies were set the absurdly short deadline of today to either complete the deal, scrap it or ask for an extension.

Whatever the commercial logic, politicians are the ones to make or break the deal. So far the debate has amounted chiefly to petty squabbling over jobs, shareholdings and status between France, Germany and the UK.

In part this reflects mutual insecurity in Europe. Germany worries that its best Airbus jobs are being stolen by France and the UK. All three countries squabble over who has which headquarters where, and the nationality of key management roles. But it is entirely reasonable for governments to require that key national defence capabilities be preserved or ring-fenced.

EADS management understands the sensitivity over BAE's highly classified US defence businesses and the value they would bring to a merged group. That the enlarged defence division should be run out of London — a non-negotiable for Britain — with the UK Government acting as the guarantor of US secrets and security should be an entirely acceptable price.

If the merger collapses, BAE's management will come under pressure to say what happens next. The Government needs to prepare now for the two most likely options.

BAE's management is reported already to have looked at a deal with the US giant Northrop Grumman; a deal with one of the other four big US defence contractors is also possible. For reasons of size and US shareholder governance, none of these could possibly be dressed up as a "merger" — it would be a takeover. There would be no chance of a London headquarters or the level of influence that the UK might get with the EADS option.

Or BAE might just break itself up, sell its US defence activities and weaken one aspect of the Special Relationship. There are some who might welcome this latter option. But unless it is addressed explicitly it could come as an unpleasant surprise all too soon. We may have worries, we may have concerns. But the BAE-EADS tie-up is the least worst option.

Sash Tusa is aerospace and defence analyst at Echelon Research in London.

Chicago Tribune
October 9, 2012
Pg. 16

36. Embargo Iran

A decisive economic blow could force Tehran to stand down on its rogue nuclear program

Iran's currency took such a breathtaking nose dive against the dollar last week that even the country's denier-in-chief, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, had to admit that economic sanctions were cutting deep.

Tens of thousands of Iranian merchants, workers, shopkeepers and activists flooded Tehran's streets in protest, chanting anti-government slogans. Some shouted, "We don't want nuclear energy," a sign that the protesters rightly blamed the regime's refusal to stop its rogue nuclear program for causing the economic pain.

Inflation is raging in Iran. So is unemployment. People are angry. To stop Iran's outlaw nuclear program -- the imperative here -- the economic pain needs to get worse. Much worse.

Encouraging news: The Wall Street Journal reports that American and European Union officials are considering dramatically expanding sanctions by imposing "a de facto trade embargo" by early 2013. Such a move would block all export and import transactions through Iran's banking system. Current sanctions cover only oil-related transactions through Iran's central bank. Such a move could be devastating. Iran wouldn't be able to pay its bills or collect its debts through the global banking system.

Republican Sen. Mark Kirk of Illinois is drafting a bill to similarly expand U.S. sanctions against Iran, to be introduced in Congress soon.

One word of advice: hurry.

Iran is already reeling from the EU's ban earlier this year on imports of Iranian oil. Overall, Iran's oil exports have been cut in half, costing Tehran billions. The ruling mullahs may have figured the country's oil wealth would make it invulnerable to sanctions. Not anymore. "There has been a perception that Iran is unmovable because of its oil resources," a European official told the Journal. "This perception is quickly shifting."

We're not certain that such a dramatic squeeze will persuade the mullahs to surrender their nuclear ambitions. Iran has spent the better part of a decade busting through red lines drawn by the West. Tehran now could produce enough weapons-grade fuel for a bomb within two to four months, although actually building a bomb would take longer, the Institute for Science and International Security said Monday.

A banking freeze could force the mullahs back to the bargaining table, this time in good faith. The outlines of a reasonable nuclear deal are clear: Iran ships all of its higher-enriched uranium out of the country and shuts its underground fortress at Fordo. The U.S. and its allies ease sanctions in stages, as Iran allows international inspectors free rein to make sure that its government is not hiding enrichment plants or nuclear weapons facilities. Iran is allowed to keep its Russian-built nuclear power plant at Bushehr.

There are hints that the mullahs may be spooked. The New York Times reported last week that Iran had proposed a nine-step deal to resolve the standoff on its rogue nuclear program ... if Western governments first lifted all sanctions. Iran later denied it had offered such a proposal, probably because it was turned down flat. Smart move by U.S. officials: Iran could easily restart its nuclear programs, while sanctions would take years to reimpose.

Earlier this year, a group of former American, Israeli and British officials wrote that Iran's nuclear program might still be halted with a "potentially decisive economic blow to the regime." That would show the mullahs "that the world is

serious and committed, willing to do whatever it takes to stop Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons."

Time for that blow. Embargo Iran.

Wall Street Journal
October 10, 2012
Pg. 18

37. No Light At End Of Afghan Tunnel

I recently watched a Special Forces soldier honored for his bravery. During the reading of the citations for the Silver and Bronze Stars he received, it was clearly noted that the Afghan National Security Forces he was serving with had cut and run during two separate firefights. What I heard that day is contrary to what Frederick Kagan and Kimberly Kagan write in "The 'Andar Uprising' and Progress in Afghanistan" (op-ed, Oct. 4).

I have embedded on several occasions with American soldiers in Kandahar province, and I have watched as Afghan forces repeatedly left the conducting of combat operations to the American-led International Security Assistance Force, or ISAF.

Soldiers told me that ISAF really means "I Saw Americans Fight." Based on my experiences, these words are true more often than not.

What is clear to many Americans is that the Taliban is waiting for the 2014 withdrawal of American forces, and that there is no clear path to America achieving its security objectives.

It is time to end the wishful thinking about the so-called efficacy of the Afghans and bring our service members home.

J.M. Simpson, Lakewood, Wash.

Editor's Note: The op-ed by Frederick Kagan and Kimberly Kagan appeared in the *Current News Early Bird*, October 4, 2012.