



United States Department of State

Washington, D.C. 20520

Case No. F-2012-38774

Ms. Kate Bailey
Judicial Watch
425 Third Street SW, Suite 800
Washington, DC 20024

OCT 8 1 2013

Dear Ms. Bailey:

In response to your request dated October 18, 2012, under the Freedom of Information Act (Title 5 USC Section 552), we have conducted a search of the files of the United States Mission to the United Nations.

Based on the results of that search, we have determined that 13 documents, totaling 1192 pages, responsive to your request may be released in full. All released material is enclosed. Review of additional records of the United States Mission to the United Nations is ongoing. We will keep you informed as your case progresses.

If you have any questions, you may contact Department of Justice attorney Robert Prince at (202) 305-3654. Please be sure to refer to the case number, F-2012-38774, and the civil action number, 13-951, in all correspondence about this case.

Sincerely,

Sheryl L. Walter / su

Sheryl L. Walter, Director
Office of Information Programs and Services

Enclosures:
As stated.

RELEASED IN FULL

DAILY PRESS CLIPS FOR
FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 28, 2012

DOMESTIC AGENDA

Veterans Wait for Benefits as Claims Pile Up

September 28, 2012

New York Times

By JAMES DAO

For Dennis Selsky, a Vietnam-era veteran with multiple sclerosis, it was lost documents. It seemed that every time he sent records to the Department of Veterans Affairs, they disappeared into the ether. ([link](#))

ECONOMIC RECOVERY

Chinese Slowdown Idles U.S. Coal Mines

September 28, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By KRIS MAHER

WHARTON, W.Va.—Slowing growth in China is taking a brutal toll on Appalachian coal mines and coal towns. Appalachia has one of the world's richest deposits of high-grade coal used to make steel. Thanks to Chinese demand, the price for premium metallurgical coal, whose low-ash and low-sulfur content makes it ideal for steelmaking, hit a record \$330 a metric ton in early 2011. ([link](#))

USUN IN THE NEWS

Kerry, Rice position themselves on Benghazi attack

September 28, 2012

Foreign Policy

By Josh Rogin

The two most discussed candidates to be America's next top diplomat now find themselves on opposite sides of the Libya issue, with U.N. Ambassador Susan Rice in the role of defending the administration's narrative and Sen. John Kerry (D-MA) promising tough congressional oversight while giving the State Department room to conduct its own investigation. ([link](#))

Obama Cabinet Flunks Disclosure Test With 19 in 20 Ignoring Law

September 27, 2012

Bloomberg

By Jim Snyder and Danielle Ivory

On his first full day in office, President Barack Obama ordered federal officials to "usher in a new era of open government" and "act promptly" to make information public. ([link](#))

Romney aide: Obama tried to 'mislead' on Libya attack

September 28, 2012

AFP

WASHINGTON — Mitt Romney's campaign accused President Barack Obama's administration on Thursday of trying to "mislead the American people" over the attack that killed the US ambassador to Libya. ([link](#))

UNITED NATIONS

World Powers Urge Syria Opposition To Unite

September 28, 2012

REVIEW

Reviewer

Associated Press

By David Stringer

UNITED NATIONS - Western nations and allies in the Middle East meet Friday to urge Syria's fractured opposition to unite, seeking a new path for ending the country's conflict amid deadlock between major powers on the U.N. Security Council. ([link](#))

Bibi and the bomb chart

September 27, 2012

Foreign Policy

By Mario Tama

For Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu it wasn't enough just to reiterate an impassioned call for the United States and other U.N. governments to impose a red line on Iran's nuclear program. ([link](#))

At U.N., Myanmar Leader Highlights Steps To Reform

September 28, 2012

New York Times

By Rick Gladstone

The president of Myanmar, a former general who has led the move away from a prolonged era of dictatorship, poverty and isolation, asserted on Thursday in his first United Nations speech that "amazing changes" were transforming his country and could never be reversed. ([link](#))

Burma's president calls for "patience" with democratic transition

September 27, 2012

Foreign Policy

By Colum Lynch

Burma's President Thein Sein paid tribute to the country's most famous democratic dissident, Aung San Suu Kyi, saying he wanted to congratulate her for the awards she has received during a 17-day tour the United States, including the Congressional Gold Medal. ([link](#))

Libya Chief Apologizes for 'Despot' Gadhafi

September 28, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By CHRISTOPHER RHOADS

UNITED NATIONS—Libya's head of state apologized to the international community on Thursday for four decades of bloodlust, terrorism and human-rights abuses perpetrated by his "lunatic despot" predecessor, Col. Moammar Gadhafi. ([link](#))

Libya apologizes to the world

September 28, 2012

Foreign Policy

By Colum Lynch

Three years ago, then Libyan leader Muammar al-Qaddafi stood at the U.N. General Assembly podium, held up a copy of the U.N. Charter, and declared he would not recognize its authority. ([link](#))

Tunisia: 'dictatorship is a disease'

September 27, 2012

Foreign Policy

By Colum Lynch

Tunisia's President Moncef Marzouki urged the United Nations to declare dictatorship a disease, much like polio and small pox, and launch a campaign to eliminate autocratic rule. ([link](#))

At U.N., Rwanda defiantly rejects claims of Congo rebel support

September 28, 2012

Reuters

By Michelle Nichols

UNITED NATIONS - Rwanda defiantly denied claims at the United Nations on Thursday that it was aiding rebels in Democratic Republic of Congo and rejected U.N. chief Ban Ki-moon's summary of a meeting on the crisis, diplomats said. ([link](#))

Italy, Jordan Push Religious Tolerance Initiative

September 28, 2012

Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS - The foreign ministers of Italy and Jordan are pushing an initiative to promote religious tolerance worldwide. ([link](#))

EXCLUSIVE: Study: UN Misconduct Goes Unpunished

September 28, 2012

Associated Press

By Peter James Spielmann

NEW YORK - When U.N. staffers on peacekeeping missions were accused of misconduct or corruption over the last couple of years, more than two-thirds of them were exonerated by the U.N.'s internal tribunal system, according to research provided to AP by a whistleblower-protection group. ([link](#))

TOP STORIES

Nod To Obama By Netanyahu In Warning To Iran On Bomb

September 28, 2012

New York Times

By Rick Gladstone And David E. Sanger

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel told the United Nations on Thursday that Iran's capability to enrich uranium must be stopped before next spring or early summer, arguing that by that time the country will be in a position to make a short, perhaps undetectable, sprint to manufacture its first nuclear weapon. ([link](#))

Netanyahu Demands 'Red Line' on Iran

September 28, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By JAY SOLOMON

UNITED NATIONS—Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Iran was on track to build an atomic bomb by summer of 2013 and exhorted the U.S. and other global powers to set a strict limit on Tehran's nuclear fuel production as the clear "red line" that would trigger military strikes. ([link](#))

Netanyahu: Iran Could Have Bomb By Next Summer If It Does Not Face A "Red Line"

September 28, 2012

Washington Post

By Anne Gearan

UNITED NATIONS - Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Thursday that a firm ultimatum to Iran is the only peaceful way to stop the regime in Tehran from getting atomic weapons, increasing pressure on President Obama weeks before the U.S. presidential election. ([link](#))

Security Fears Hobble Inquiry Of Libya Attack

September 28, 201

New York Times

By David D. Kirkpatrick, Eric Schmitt And Michael S. Schmidt

BENGHAZI, Libya - Sixteen days after the death of four Americans in an attack on a United States diplomatic mission here, fears about the near-total lack of security have kept F.B.I. agents from visiting the scene of the killings and forced them to try to piece together the complicated crime from Tripoli, more than 400 miles away. ([link](#))

Attack On US Consulate In Libya Determined To Be Terrorism Tied To Al-Qaeda

September 28, 2012

Washington Post

By Greg Miller

U.S. intelligence agencies have determined that the attack on the U.S. mission in Libya involved a small number of militants with ties to al-Qaeda in North Africa but see no indication that the terrorist group directed the assault, U.S. officials said Thursday. ([link](#))

AFRICA

Kenya

Kenya Attacks Last Stronghold Of Somali Militants

September 28, 2012

Associated Press

By Abdi Guled And Tom Odula

MOGADISHU, Somalia - Kenyan troops invaded al-Shabab's last stronghold in Somalia, coming ashore in a predawn assault Friday. Other African Union forces were traveling overland to link up with the Kenyan forces in the port city of Kismayo. ([link](#))

Sudan

Sudan And South Sudan Sign Accord, But Several Issues Are Unresolved

September 28, 2012

New York Times

By Jeffrey Gettleman

KAMPALA, Uganda - The presidents of Sudan and South Sudan signed a long-awaited cooperation agreement on Thursday, paving the way for the resumption of oil exports and casting their ailing economies a desperately needed lifeline. But several analysts said the deal came up far short. ([link](#))

ASIA

Burma

Myanmar Awaits Sanction-Lift Effect

September 28, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By SAM HOLMES and CELINE FERNANDEZ

The U.S. decision to lift a ban on exports from Myanmar could give the country its best shot at becoming the world's next low-cost manufacturing hub as well as firm up the fragile political reforms now taking

place. But business leaders say it will be a long time before T-shirts and hoodies made in the Southeast Asian country are ubiquitous in shopping malls and years before meaningful benefits reach its archaic industrial infrastructure and low-income households. ([link](#))

China

China Hits Back At Japan PM's Statement On Islands

September 27, 2012

Associated Press

BEIJING - China on Thursday assailed Japan's prime minister as obstinate and wrong for saying his nation won't compromise in their island dispute, as Japanese lawmakers and business leaders visited Beijing with hopes of mending ties. ([link](#))

Clinton Presses China On Maritime Spats

September 28, 2012

Associated Press

By Matthew Lee

NEW YORK - Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton urged China's top diplomat on Thursday to peacefully resolve increasingly tense maritime disputes with Japan and its smaller neighbors in Southeast Asia. ([link](#))

Chinese Government Scientist Raises Doubt On Evidence In A Murder Case.

September 28, 2012

New York Times

By Edward Wong

BEIJING - A senior Chinese forensic scientist who works for the government has said that the evidence presented in a prominent criminal trial last month did not prove that Neil Heywood, a British businessman, was killed last year by cyanide poisoning. ([link](#))

China's Ai Weiwei: I Won't Pay Rest Of \$2.4M Fine

September 28, 2012

Associated Press

By Alexa Olesen

BEIJING - Activist artist Ai Weiwei said he does not intend to pay \$1.1 million demanded by Beijing tax officials after he lost a final appeal in the case on Thursday, a defiant stance that threatens further confrontation with authorities. ([link](#))

Japan

Osaka Mayor's Radical Message Has Broad Appeal In A Weary Japan

28, 2012

New York Times

By Martin Fackler

OSAKA, Japan - It took more than six decades, including nearly 20 years of economic stagnation, to persuade Japan's change-averse voters to kick out the governing party long enough to move to a true two-party democracy in 2009. Now, just three years later, many voters have embraced a largely unknown new party led by a brash young leader who promises a drastic overhaul of the government. ([link](#))

NEA

Egypt

Egypt: Christians Flee Town After Militant Threats

September 28, 2012

Associated Press

By Maggie Michael

CAIRO - Coptic Christian families have fled their homes in a town in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula, fearing for their lives after receiving death threats from suspected Islamic militants, a local priest said Thursday.

([link](#))

Iran

World Powers Open To More Nuke Talks With Iran

September 28, 2012

Associated Press

By Bradley Klapper

WASHINGTON - World powers decided Thursday to lay the groundwork for another round of negotiations with Iran over its disputed nuclear program, a senior U.S. official said, but they want a significantly improved offer from the Islamic republic. ([link](#))

Iran Envoy Is Assaulted By Protesters Near The U.N.

September 28, 2012

New York Times

By Robert Mackey And Rick Gladstone

Iranian exiles and the Iranian government can make for a combustible combination, as a spokesman for the Iranian Foreign Ministry discovered after an address by the country's president to the United Nations during this week's General Assembly. ([link](#))

Israel

Israeli Foreign Ministry Calls For More Sanctions On Iran

September 28, 2012

New York Times

By Isabel Kershner

JERUSALEM - An internal report prepared by Israel's Foreign Ministry calls for an additional round of international sanctions against Iran, an Israeli official confirmed on Thursday, in what appeared to be a rare Israeli acknowledgment that there might still be time to try to stop the Iranian nuclear program by means other than military action. ([link](#))

Israeli Report Says Sanctions Hitting Iran Hard

September 28, 2012

Associated Press

By Daniel Estrin

JERUSALEM - A new Israeli government report published in local media on Thursday concludes that international sanctions are hitting Iran hard and called for another round, adding a new wrinkle to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's claim that tougher action is needed to prevent the Islamic Republic from developing nuclear weapons. ([link](#))

Libya

Panetta says undetermined terrorist group carried out attack on US Consulate in Libya

September 27, 2012

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Defense Secretary Leon Panetta said Thursday there can be no doubt that terrorists had planned and carried out the attack on the U.S. Consulate in eastern Libya two weeks ago that killed the U.S. ambassador and three other Americans. ([link](#))

Benghazi Attack Followed Deep Cuts In State Department Security Budget

September 28, 2012

Washington Times

By Shaun Waterman

Investigators looking for lessons from the fatal terrorist attack on the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi might want to start on Capitol Hill, where Congress slashed spending on diplomatic security and U.S. embassy construction over the past two years. ([link](#))

Palestinian Territories

Abbas Seeks Super Observer Status For Palestinians

September 28, 2012

AFP

President Mahmud Abbas sought a new super observer UN status for Palestinians on Thursday as he condemned Israel's "catastrophic" settlements in the occupied territories. ([link](#))

Syria

Syrian Rebels Announce Big Offensive In Aleppo

September 28, 2012

New York Times

By Hwaida Saad And Nick Cumming-Bruce

BEIRUT, Lebanon - Rebel fighters in the northern Syrian city of Aleppo said Thursday that they had launched a major offensive against government troops in the city, just as the United Nations and humanitarian agencies warned that the number of Syrians fleeing to neighboring countries could surge past 700,000, far exceeding earlier estimates. ([link](#))

Rebels Low On Ammo Debriefed At Aleppo HQ

September 28, 2012

AFP

For commanders assembled at the headquarters of Aleppo's main rebel unit, the Liwa al-Tawhid Brigade, the current stalemate in Syria's second city boils down to a lack of ammunition. ([link](#))

SCA

Afghanistan

U.S. Resumes Joint Operations With Afghans

September 28, 2012

Washington Post

By Craig Whitlock

Most U.S. and NATO combat troops have resumed joint operations with Afghan forces, the Pentagon said Thursday, although U.S. officials said they remain worried about the threat of fratricidal "insider attacks." ([link](#))

Ammonium Nitrate Fertilizer Is Being Smuggled Into Afghanistan For IEDs

September 28, 2012

Washington Post

By Greg Jaffe

Seizures in Afghanistan of ammonium nitrate fertilizer, the main explosive used in Taliban bombs, more than doubled in the first seven months of 2012 compared with the same period last year, U.S. officials said. ([link](#))

Nepal**Plane With 19 On Board Crashes In Nepalese Capital**

September 28, 2012

Associated Press

By Binaj Gurubacharya

KATMANDU, Nepal - A plane carrying trekkers into the Everest region crashed Friday morning in Nepal's capital, and all 19 people on board are believed dead, authorities said. ([link](#))

WHA/EUR**Georgia****Ahead of Georgia Vote, Prison Tapes Spark Fury**

September 28, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By ALAN CULLISON

MOSCOW—The pro-Western government of Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili is facing its toughest electoral challenge since it was swept to power by the Rose Revolution in 2004, an event hailed by the U.S. as creating a beacon of Western-style democracy in the former Soviet Union. ([link](#))

Greece**Greece Agrees On New Package Of Budget Cuts And Taxes**

September 28, 2012

New York Times

By Rachel Donadio And Niki Kitsantonis

ATHENS - After weeks of wrangling, Greece's coalition government said it had reached a basic agreement on Thursday over highly unpopular new austerity measures that could set off a new round of social unrest. ([link](#))

Russia**Russian Activists Stand Firm Against Putin**

September 28, 2012

Washington Post

By Kathy Lally

MOSCOW - She entered the room slowly Thursday, bent over her cane but still unbowed at age 85. She has stared down Soviet authorities, stood up to KGB interrogations and endured exile. ([link](#))

Not In Script For Kremlin: A Real Race For Governor

September 28, 2012

New York Times

By Ellen Barry

RYAZAN, Russia - A funny thing happened during the elections this fall for governor in the Russian region of Ryazan: for a few weeks, no one knew who would win. ([link](#))

Spain**Spain Unveils Sweeping Spending Cuts; Leaders Silent On Bailout**

September 28, 2012

Washington Post

By Michael Birnbaum

BERLIN - Amid a growing sense that Europe is slipping back into instability after months of relative calm, Spanish leaders unveiled sweeping spending cuts and new taxes Thursday in a last-ditch attempt to get their country's finances on track. But they were silent about whether they would seek a formal bailout to prop up their turmoil-wracked economy. ([link](#))

United Kingdom**British Authorities To Announce Changes In Libor Oversight**

September 28, 2012

New York Times

By Mark Scott

LONDON - British authorities are set to announce significant changes to the interest rate at the heart of a recent manipulation scandal as they aim to improve the accuracy and reliability of the benchmark. ([link](#))

FOREIGN POLICY**Man Tied To Anti-Islam Video Held On Probation Charge**

September 28, 2012

New York Times

By Brooks Barnes

LOS ANGELES - The man thought to have been behind the crude anti-Islam video that set off deadly protests across the Muslim world in recent weeks was arrested Thursday for violating terms of his probation in a 2010 bank fraud case. ([link](#))

EDITORIAL / OPINION**The Arab Spring Still Blooms**

September 28, 2012

New York Times

By Moncef Marzouki

THE violent demonstrations that have spread across the Muslim world in recent weeks have convinced many in the United States and Europe that the Arab revolutions that began in late 2010 are now over and that the democratic project has failed. Bitterness and a sense of impending catastrophe are replacing the enthusiasm that followed the toppling of dictators in Tunisia and Egypt last year. ([link](#))

Stop Playing Politics With The Benghazi Attack

September 28, 2012

Washington Post

THE OBAMA administration's descriptions of what happened Sept. 11 in the Libyan city of Benghazi have evolved in a way that some - including congressional Republicans - find suspicious. Initially, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton described an "attack" in which "heavily armed militants" assaulted a U.S. compound, leading to the death of Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens and three other Americans. Four days later, U.N. Ambassador Susan Rice said that "extremist elements" had joined a demonstration outside the U.S. Consulate against an anti-Muslim video. ([link](#))

Providing A Legal Basis To Attack Iran

September 28, 2012

Washington Post

By Jeffrey H. Smith And John B. Bellinger III

The question of whether military force should be used to prevent, or at least delay, Iran from building a nuclear weapon is again on the front pages. Both President Obama and Mitt Romney have said they would consider a military strike against Iran. According to media reports, the necessary planning has been completed, and military options are "fully available." ([link](#))

Talking At Cross Purposes

September 28, 2012

New York Times

The alternate universes of the Israeli and Palestinian leaders were on display Thursday at the United Nations General Assembly. ([link](#))

As The World Burns, Leaders Await Post-Election Decisions By The US

September 28, 2012

Washington Post

ADD MAHMOUD Ahmadinejad to the list of world leaders impatiently waiting for the U.S. election to be over. The Iranian president suggested to The Post's David Ignatius in an interview Sunday that "key issues" in the negotiations between Iran and an international coalition over its nuclear program "must be talked about again once we come out of the other end of the political election atmosphere in the United States." The implication was that it won't be possible to know the bottom-line U.S. terms for a deal - and that Iran would not reveal its own - until President Obama has either won reelection or been defeated by Mitt Romney. ([link](#))

Europe's Austerity Madness

September 28, 2012

New York Times

By Paul Krugman

So much for complacency. Just a few days ago, the conventional wisdom was that Europe finally had things under control. The European Central Bank, by promising to buy the bonds of troubled governments if necessary, had soothed markets. All that debtor nations had to do, the story went, was agree to more and deeper austerity - the condition for central bank loans - and all would be well. ([link](#))

When Growth Outpaces Happiness

September 28, 2012

New York Times

By Richard A. Easterlin

Los Angeles -- CHINA's new leaders, who will be anointed next month at the Communist Party's 18th National Congress in Beijing, might want to rethink the Faustian bargain their predecessors embraced some 20 years ago: namely, that social stability could be bought by rapid economic growth. ([link](#))

DOMESTIC AGENDA

Veterans Wait for Benefits as Claims Pile Up

September 28, 2012

New York Times

By JAMES DAO

For Dennis Selsky, a Vietnam-era veteran with multiple sclerosis, it was lost documents. It seemed that every time he sent records to the Department of Veterans Affairs, they disappeared into the ether.

For Mickel Withers, an Iraq war veteran with severe post-traumatic stress disorder, it was a bureaucratic foul-up. The department said he received National Guard pay in 2009, though he had left the Guard the previous year, and cut his disability compensation by \$3,000. He filed for bankruptcy to protect himself from creditors.

For Doris Hink, the widow of a World War II veteran, it was the waiting. The department took nearly two years to process her claim for a survivor's pension, forcing her daughter to take \$12,000 from savings to pay nursing home bills.

These are the faces of what has become known as "the backlog": the crushing inventory of claims for disability, pension and educational benefits that has overwhelmed the Department of Veterans Affairs. For hundreds of thousands of veterans, the result has been long waits for decisions, mishandled documents, confusing communications and infuriating mistakes in their claims.

Numbers tell the story. Last year, veterans filed more than 1.3 million claims, double the number in 2001. Despite having added nearly 4,000 new workers since 2008, the agency did not keep pace, completing less than 80 percent of its inventory.

This year, the agency has already completed more than one million claims for the third consecutive year. Yet it is still taking about eight months to process the average claim, two months longer than a decade ago. As of Monday, 890,000 pension and compensation claims were pending.

Skyrocketing costs have accompanied that flood of claims. By next year, the department's major benefit programs — compensation for the disabled, pensions for the low-income and educational assistance — are projected to cost about \$76 billion, triple the amount in 2001. By 2022, those costs are projected to rise nearly 70 percent to about \$130 billion.

These are the compounding wages of war, and they are not just the result of recent conflicts. The department is administering pensions for World War II veterans while handling new claims from Vietnam veterans struggling with the multiplying ailments of age. Indeed, nearly a third of all pending new claims are from Vietnam-era veterans, roughly equal to the number from Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans.

Thanks to superior battlefield medicine and armor, those Iraq and Afghanistan veterans have survived combat at a higher rate. As they return home with more wounds, and perhaps more savvy, the ones who file for disability compensation are claiming on average nearly 10 disorders or injuries each, compared with 6 for Vietnam veterans and fewer than 4 for World War II veterans. Their complex claims are often more time-consuming to process, adding to the backlog.

At the same time, a higher percentage — nearly half — of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans are filing for disability compensation, partly because of the weak economy. That is double the rate for previous wars.

"We're not gaining any ground here," Eric K. Shinseki, the secretary of veterans affairs, acknowledged in an interview over the summer. "Am I impatient? Yes, but I've got a fix."

That fix is the department's "transformation plan," which calls for a new training regimen that Mr. Shinseki says will improve speed and accuracy in processing claims; creation of special teams to handle complex claims; and new digital technology that will replace the current paper-choked system.

When all those pieces are in place by 2015, Mr. Shinseki says that every claim will be processed in fewer than 125 days, with almost no errors — a pledge that veterans' advocates view skeptically.

Current and former front-line workers, who spoke out of frustration with the widespread criticism of their agency, offer a different analysis. The dysfunction, they say, stems from inadequate training and weak management, an excessively complicated process, and assembly line-like performance standards that require them to meet production quotas under threat of demotion or firing. The solution, they say, is clear.

"They need more workers," said Mark Locken, a retired Army artillery officer who worked for the department for three years in Boston before quitting in May because, he said, of the stress.

The history of the backlog, which predates the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, suggests another source of the problem: a bureaucratic culture with conflicting missions.

On one hand, Department of Veterans Affairs employees are urged to be advocates for veterans. "I tell them: you're going to take care of these young men and women for life," Allison A. Hickey, a retired Air Force brigadier general who is under secretary for benefits, said in an interview.

Yet those workers are also required to be stewards of the public dime, called on to distinguish the truly needy from the less needy from the fraudulent.

That means they must evaluate veterans to determine whether their illnesses or injuries are real, and whether they are the result of military service, or something else. If those problems are deemed "service connected," the workers must then quantify their severity and attach dollar values.

Is that traumatic brain injury from high school football or a roadside bomb in Iraq? Is that back injury a 10 percent disability or 30 percent? Is that post-traumatic stress disorder real?

Medical questions without simple answers must be settled by harried bureaucrats and overworked doctors applying black-and-white rules to very gray ailments. Their decisions mean the difference between monthly checks of a few hundred dollars versus a few thousand.

When veterans are not happy with the results, as is often the case, they can appeal, or reapply, submitting new documents and diagnoses to bolster their claims — and adding years to the process.

About half of the current backlog is due to veterans reapplying for denied claims or seeking to increase existing benefits because of new or worsening conditions. So the backlog grows, and along with it, the pessimism of some advocates.

"They are rearranging the decks chairs on a sinking ship," said Katrina Eagle, a lawyer who represents veterans before the agency. "You can hire people and buy new software. But nothing will improve."

Bureaucratic Behemoth

Born from a system that paid pensions to Revolutionary War soldiers, the Department of Veterans Affairs has grown into a behemoth with more than 270,000 employees who maintain 131 cemeteries, operate 152 hospitals and disburse benefits to more than four million veterans. The nation has a total of about 23 million veterans.

Congress, the courts and the executive branch have contributed to the growth by creating new benefits and rights like perennial blooms. Typically, Congress has accomplished that by establishing "presumptive connections" between military service and certain diseases, allowing veterans to seek disability compensation if they received a diagnosis within a certain period.

There are now scores of diseases that are presumed to be the result of, or aggravated by, military service, from anemia to yellow fever. Each time the government adds a new one, thousands of veterans apply for benefits.

In 2010, for example, Mr. Shinseki announced that three diseases — ischemic heart disease, Parkinson's disease and b-cell leukemia — would be considered the result of Agent Orange exposure for veterans who served in Vietnam. As of this week, the department had processed more than 240,000 claims for those diseases filed in just the last two years.

Since at least the 1960s, multiple sclerosis has been on the presumptive list, and in the decades since, tens of thousands of veterans with the disease have received benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs. Dennis Selsky, 69, is one.

A Navy reservist from the Philadelphia area who was called to active duty for 10 months in 1968, Mr. Selsky worked as an ordnance specialist on domestic air bases. Two years after leaving the service in 1970, he says, doctors told him he had multiple sclerosis, which Mr. Selsky believes he contracted from working on planes contaminated with the herbicide Agent Orange.

Two years ago, he learned from the National Multiple Sclerosis Society that he was eligible for veterans compensation, applied and was granted the minimum benefit: a 30 percent rating, worth \$435 a month. That seemed low to him because, he says, he has tremors, walks with a cane and is losing his vision. So Mr. Selsky, who spent 31 years with Verizon before retiring in 1998, appealed, seeking a 100 percent rating that would pay about \$3,000 a month.

Then his problems with the Department of Veterans Affairs began in earnest.

First, the Philadelphia regional office lost part of his file, his wife, Sheila, said. Then it lost authorizations to obtain records from his cardiologist, podiatrist, neurologist and ophthalmologist — more than once. After the office finally obtained those doctors' reports, it still required him to see department doctors to confirm his diagnoses.

Each appointment and lost document has added weeks to the processing, now in its 15th month. So have skeptical department examiners, who have requested additional information on whether Mr.

Selsky's heart palpitations and vision loss are related to his multiple sclerosis. "This should be a slam dunk," Ms. Selsky said. "He keeps getting worse, and they keep fighting and fighting and fighting with us. The stress is unbelievable."

Mr. Selsky may have also been the victim of another problem common to claims processing: the chaotic handling of records. Lost or mishandled documents are perhaps the No. 1 complaint about the processing system. Indeed, a 2009 review by the department's inspector general found rampant cases of mishandled mail, including documents being improperly put in shred bins at 40 of the department's 57 regional offices.

Workers who process mail in the Philadelphia regional office, which handled Mr. Selsky's claim, say that veterans' records have for years piled up in gray file cabinets or cardboard boxes because they were thought to lack clear identifying information, like Social Security numbers.

Ryan Cease, a former mail handler at the regional office, said that earlier this year he saw workers who were cleaning up the mail room in preparation for a visit by a senior official tossing records into boxes marked "for shredding."

Suspicious, he and a fellow worker later leafed through the boxes and found numerous records that they believed could have easily been identified.

Mr. Cease, through another employee, sent an urgent e-mail to the department's central office. After an investigation, the department concluded that nothing improper had occurred.

"We have not shredded any documents up there," Ms. Hickey said.

Mr. Cease is not so sure. "I'm convinced," he said in an interview, "that mail was shredded and that the mail was identifiable."

Manpower Shortage Cited

In 2009, Kathryn Kausch learned that her mother, Doris Hink, was eligible for a pension because her husband, who died in 1987, had served honorably during World War II. Ms. Kausch sent in the paperwork, hoping the funds would help pay assisted living costs for her mother, now 89, who has dementia.

The application was rejected because her mother's assets were above the \$80,000 threshold. But in a year, those assets had shrunk and Ms. Kausch reapplied in January 2010. That September, the Philadelphia pension office asked for additional documents, and she sent off a fat packet of bank statements, medical invoices and other financial records.

In November, the office notified her that it had not received the documents and was rejecting her mother's application again. But Ms. Kausch produced a receipt showing that the documents had been delivered, and the office acknowledged it had received them. Then she hunkered down to wait. Months passed.

Ms. Kausch began dipping into her savings to pay her mother's bills at an assisted living center. Then in July 2011, Ms. Kausch was laid off from her job at Xerox. Desperate for help, she called her

congressman, Representative Michael Fitzpatrick, a Republican from the Philadelphia suburbs. A week after his office made inquiries, her mother's pension was approved.

But Ms. Kausch's problems did not end. Her mother is eligible for \$22,000 in retroactive pension payments dating to 2009. But because of her mother's dementia, the department must approve Ms. Kausch as her mother's fiduciary. Though the department has conducted the required interview, it has not filled out the final paperwork, despite calls from Mr. Fitzpatrick's office.

"No wonder our government has such problems," Ms. Kausch, 58, said. "It seems you get lost in this bureaucratic paperwork."

A routine pension claim, undisputed by the department, took nearly two years to process, and only after a congressman's intervention. An equally straightforward fiduciary application is still pending after six months. Why?

Employees and veterans advocates repeatedly point to one reason: a lack of manpower. Though the Veterans Benefits Administration, the division that oversees entitlement programs, has grown significantly in the past decade, to 20,600 employees from 12,150, it still often assigns mandatory overtime to meet workload demands. And because the processing is so complicated, it can take two years before new hires are fully productive, the department says.

With its staff stretched to the limit, the Veterans Benefits Administration supervisors set priorities for processing claims, workers say, with seriously wounded recent veterans, the homeless and terminally ill often rising to the top. Veterans or survivors who are already receiving benefits but applying for new ones may, as a consequence, be given lower priority, the workers say.

Another problem, front-line claims workers say, are production quotas that determine whether they will be promoted, given raises, demoted or fired. The pressure to meet those quotas cause some workers to skip complicated, time-consuming files and reach for simpler ones, workers and advocates say.

"Given the choice, they'll go for the thin folder every time," said Gerald T. Manar, a former manager for the Veterans Benefits Administration who now works for Veterans of Foreign Wars.

More processors would make a difference, most experts say. But at a time when both parties are talking about slashing the federal deficit, hiring more employees may be impossible. Since 2004, the department's total budget — which includes health care, administrative costs and entitlements — has doubled, to \$127 billion. "New employees hired into a broken system that awards process instead of outcomes will not get us there," Mr. Fitzpatrick said.

For Mickel Withers, a veteran of the Georgia National Guard, the system was not exactly broken. But it was blundering. After serving on a bomb-detection team in Iraq in 2005 and 2006, he left the Army in 2008 with a diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder and started receiving \$3,080 a month in disability compensation from the Department of Veterans Affairs.

But this May, a check arrived for only \$109. The department told him they were docking his compensation because they had determined he received drill pay from the Guard in 2009. Veterans are not allowed to receive both kinds of pay. In fact, Mr. Withers had left the Guard as a sergeant in 2008, but it took the department weeks to confirm that fact. With two children and a wife to support, he had

to seek emergency housing assistance from a veterans group to pay rent and filed for bankruptcy to avoid debt collectors.

It was his second bad experience with the benefits system: In 2009, the department overpaid the art school he was attending, then tried to collect the money from Mr. Withers. It took months to resolve that dispute.

"I think they are so overwhelmed over there, they just glance at things," he said. "It doesn't make me feel good about the system."

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ECONOMIC RECOVERY

Chinese Slowdown Idles U.S. Coal Mines

September 28, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By KRIS MAHER

WHARTON, W.Va.—Slowing growth in China is taking a brutal toll on Appalachian coal mines and coal towns.

Appalachia has one of the world's richest deposits of high-grade coal used to make steel. Thanks to Chinese demand, the price for premium metallurgical coal, whose low-ash and low-sulfur content makes it ideal for steelmaking, hit a record \$330 a metric ton in early 2011.

Now, the Chinese economy is slowing and so is its steel industry. That has sent the price of coal used for steelmaking down nearly 50% to \$170 a metric ton. Those coal producers who counted on Chinese sales are reeling.

"When someone had coal to move, China was your big box store," said Ernie Thrasher, chief executive of XCoal Energy & Resources, a major U.S. marketer of such coal to Asia. This year, "the switch went off."

While many have blamed the downturn in the U.S. coal industry on cheap natural gas supplanting coal and tougher environmental regulations, the slide in metallurgical coal demand has been equally devastating. Coal companies were caught flat-footed after ramping up production last year with the expectation that steep prices would cover their rising costs, despite coal's past cyclicity. Instead, demand in China began to falter just as Australian metallurgical coal production—interrupted by floods last year—surged back into the market.

In July, Patriot Coal Corp. PCXCQ -9.09% of St. Louis filed for bankruptcy protection, shortly after it lost a contract for coal bound for an Asian steelmaker. Patriot's stock slid 18% the day after it announced that news, taking other coal stocks down with it. Earlier this month, Patriot said it would temporarily idle metallurgical coal operations at three mining complexes in southern West Virginia and lay off 250 miners, in addition to 1,000 layoffs earlier this year. On top of that, Patriot has said it will need to reduce "unsustainable" pension and health benefits to 2,000 miners and some 20,000 retirees and surviving spouses.

China's metallurgical coal imports dropped to 2.6 million metric tons in August, from an average of 4.5 million metric tons per month through July. Now coal mines are closing throughout Appalachia. Earlier this month, Alpha Natural Resources Inc., ANR +2.43% of Bristol, Va., which derives a large share of its

profits from metallurgical coal, said it was cutting 1,200 jobs, or 9.2% of its workforce. Earlier this year, Alpha laid off more than 700 miners and trimmed production at more than 20 mines. Consol Energy Inc. CNX +3.32% of Pittsburgh, which sells more coal into China than any other U.S. producer, earlier this month idled the nation's biggest metallurgical coal mine, which employs 620 miners. Arch Coal Inc. ACI +0.47% trimmed its metallurgical coal production estimate by 21% this year.

Miners like Phillip Powell, 38 years old, of Wharton, have been swept up by the collapse. "A lot of guys that I worked with are scared of losing everything they own," said Mr. Powell, who was laid off in March from a section foreman job at a Patriot metallurgical coal mine. Mr. Powell said he sees no chance of finding another job that would come anywhere close to paying the \$108,000 he earned last year. After 17 years in mining, he plans to go back to college to get certified to teach physical education.

Appalachian coal industry executives had been counting on metallurgical or "met" coal—which is sold at a premium to steelmakers—to offset the dwindling market for lower-grade thermal coal used by power plants. The thermal coal market has been weakening because utilities are buying cleaner-burning natural gas instead. Natural-gas prices have plummeted as energy companies used hydraulic fracturing to extract gas from vast shale formations.

In April, natural gas and coal each fueled 32% of the nation's electricity, achieving parity for the first time in the decades that the Energy Information Administration has tracked the data. For decades, coal powered about 50% of the electricity to the nation's businesses and homes.

Metallurgical coal exports were supposed to fill the gap. Only a year ago Patriot was posting record revenue and operating earnings and embarking on a plan called the "Met Built-Out" to open new metallurgical mines and hire up to 200 new miners.

Other coal companies were buying rivals to strengthen their metallurgical coal operations and reserves. Four publicly traded U.S. coal companies made acquisitions in North America totaling \$14 billion in 2011, the largest being Alpha's \$7.1 billion purchase of troubled Massey Energy.

Alpha now has 1.5 billion tons of metallurgical coal reserves, and the ability to export up to 30 million tons a year. It is hoping to weather the weak market by being the low-cost producer of premium met coal. "While it's a bit soft now, we have a very valuable metallurgical coal franchise, and we're hitching our wagon to it," said Alpha Chief Executive Kevin Crutchfield.

The cost to pull a ton of coal out of the ground varies widely from mine to mine based on geologic conditions and the degree of automation. In Appalachia, average mining costs are about \$65 to \$75 per ton. A ton of thermal coal is currently selling for \$52 a ton on the spot market, making it impossible to operate some mines at a profit.

Before the China steel market took off, metallurgical coal was valued much like thermal coal and was often sold to power plants where it was burned like lower-grade coals. "It was like using an expensive bottle of red wine to make spaghetti sauce," said Paul Forward, an analyst with Stifel, Nicolaus & Co.

That changed with China's industrial boom. Up until 2004, the price for metallurgical coal stayed below \$40 a ton in the U.S. Prices hit an all time record of \$330 a metric ton in the second quarter of 2011 after flooding in Queensland, Australia, disrupted coal supplies headed for China.

China couldn't seem to get enough metallurgical coal to feed its steelmaking industry. In 2009, U.S. met coal exports to China grew nearly six-fold, and grew by the same rate in 2010, linking Appalachia more closely to the global steel trade.

Now the China spigot is closing. The Chinese steel industry—which consumes half of all metallurgical coal mined each year—faces the possibility it could operate at a loss in 2012 for the first time as a result of overcapacity and weak steel prices, according to the China Iron & Steel Association. That would mean tougher times in West Virginia, where rail, barge, trucking and other jobs depend on coal.

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USUN IN THE NEWS

Kerry, Rice position themselves on Benghazi attack

September 28, 2012

Foreign Policy

By Josh Rogin

The two most discussed candidates to be America's next top diplomat now find themselves on opposite sides of the Libya issue, with U.N. Ambassador Susan Rice in the role of defending the administration's narrative and Sen. John Kerry (D-MA) promising tough congressional oversight while giving the State Department room to conduct its own investigation.

As the controversy over the administration's handling of the issue grows, Rice's comments on the Sept. 11 assault on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi are coming under increasing attack. Her insistence on a number of Sunday talk shows Sept. 16 that, according to the best information available at the time, the attack was an unplanned assault and the result of an anti-Islam video is facing harsh criticism from senators. Administration officials, including most recently Defense Secretary Leon Panetta, have since called it a "terrorist attack," and even Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has indicated that al Qaeda affiliated groups were involved.

"First of all, there's an FBI investigation which is ongoing and we look to that investigation to give us the definitive word as to what transpired. But putting together the best information that we have available to us today, our current assessment is what happened in Benghazi was in fact initially a spontaneous reaction to what had just transpired hours before in Cairo, almost a copycat of the demonstrations against our facility in Cairo, prompted by the video," Rice said Sept. 16 on NBC's Meet the Press.

Sens. John McCain (R-AZ), Lindsey Graham (R-SC), Kelly Ayotte (R-NH), and Ron Johnson (R-WI) accused Rice of jumping the gun and disseminating false information about the attack in a letter Wednesday by quoting Rice's comments selectively, leaving out the context where she caveated the information as being based on initial assessments.

"In the aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attack in Benghazi that resulted in the death of four Americans, including Ambassador Chris Stevens, you made several troubling statements that are inconsistent with the facts and require explanation," they wrote, referring to Rice's Meet the Press remarks as well as several other TV appearances.

They pointed out the mounting evidence that the attack was in fact pre-planned and highlighted discrepancies between Rice's statements and statements from officials including Libyan national

assembly president Mohamed Yousef al-Magariaf, who has said the attack was "preplanned" and that the attackers began plotting it "a few months ago."

"We look forward to a timely response that explains how the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations could characterize an attack on a U.S. consulate so inaccurately five days after a terrorist attack that killed four Americans," the senators wrote.

Kerry, the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (SFRC), has taken a far more cautious position on the Benghazi attack, joining with his Senate colleagues in calling for transparency and accountability from the administration but not going so far as to criticize the Obama administration's handling of the issue outright.

Last week, Kerry objected to a bill in his committee that would have demanded the State Department report to Congress on the Benghazi attack within 30 days, put forth by Sens. Bob Corker (R-TN) and Jim DeMint (R-SC). He is deferring to the State Department's plan to set up its own Accountability Review Board, which will be led by former Deputy Secretary of State Thomas Pickering. Kerry promised his committee members that if the ARB doesn't produce good answers, he would be open to more congressional action.

"Given all of the information that should be forthcoming already, I did not think it would be productive to take up the reporting bill at this time. But I do want to thank Senators DeMint and Corker for the initiative and let them know that I share their instincts that this warrants our close attention," Kerry said at the SFRC business meeting last week.

Privately, however, Kerry has been pressing the administration for answers. He sent a letter to Deputy Secretary of State Tom Nides about Diplomatic Security on Sept. 17. The letter, which was previously undisclosed but obtained by The Cable, asks Nides to answer a host of questions on the security conditions at the Benghazi consulate and the cooperation of the governments in Egypt, Libya, and Yemen during and after the attacks.

Republicans in the Senate are not about to let up on the administration over what they perceive as serious missteps in the handling of the Libya crisis. Senate Homeland Security Committee heads Joe Lieberman (I-CT), who often joins hand with Republicans on foreign-policy issues, and Susan Collins (R-ME) have already called on Clinton to investigate the security failures at the Benghazi consulate and SFRC members Corker and Johnny Isakson (R-GA) are demanding that Clinton show Congress all the recent correspondence from the U.S. Embassy in Libya, including the cables written by Stevens.

Corker, who said last week that Clinton's briefing on the Benghazi attack was "the most useless, worthless briefing that I have attended in a long time," is set to be the ranking Republican on the SFRC, or possibly even the chairman, when the Senate returns next year. The confirmation of a new secretary of state will be high on the committee's agenda.

Already, GOP offices on Capitol Hill say they are preparing to focus on the Benghazi issue if Rice were nominated to succeed Clinton.

"Benghazi is now to Rice what Syria is to John Kerry," one senior GOP Senate aide told The Cable, alluding to Kerry's controversial past statements about Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad. "Senators feel misled and given the emotions surrounding this issue. I can't imagine a Rice nomination sailing through

without a floor fight. And if it's the beginning of a second Obama term, he will not want a battle over his nominee, which could weaken him right out of the gate."

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Obama Cabinet Flunks Disclosure Test With 19 in 20 Ignoring Law

September 27, 2012

Bloomberg

By Jim Snyder and Danielle Ivory

On his first full day in office, President Barack Obama ordered federal officials to "usher in a new era of open government" and "act promptly" to make information public.

As Obama nears the end of his term, his administration hasn't met those goals, failing to follow the requirements of the Freedom of Information Act, according to an analysis of open-government requests filed by Bloomberg News.

Nineteen of 20 cabinet-level agencies disobeyed the law requiring the disclosure of public information: The cost of travel by top officials. In all, just eight of the 57 federal agencies met Bloomberg's request for those documents within the 20-day window required by the Act.

"When it comes to implementation of Obama's wonderful transparency policy goals, especially FOIA policy in particular, there has been far more 'talk the talk' rather than 'walk the walk,'" said Daniel Metcalfe, director of the Department of Justice's office monitoring the government's compliance with FOIA requests from 1981 to 2007.

The Bloomberg survey was designed in part to gauge the timeliness of responses, which Attorney General Eric Holder called "an essential component of transparency" in a March 2009 memo. About half of the 57 agencies eventually disclosed the out-of-town travel expenses generated by their top official by Sept. 14, most of them well past the legal deadline.

Public Interest

Bloomberg reporters in June filed FOIA requests for fiscal year 2011 taxpayer-supported travel for Cabinet secretaries and top officials of major departments. Justice Department official Melanie Ann Pustay said in an interview that disclosure of those records is in the public interest.

Even agency heads who publicly announce their events -- including Holder, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius -- didn't provide the costs of their out-of-town trips more than three months after the initial request.

"It's ironic that the demands in the presidential campaign for Mitt Romney's tax returns are unrelenting, but when it comes time to release the schedules for senior appointees there's the same denial of access," said Paul Light, a New York University professor who studies the federal bureaucracy.

"Over the past four years, federal agencies have gone to great efforts to make government more transparent and more accessible than ever, to provide people with information that they can use in their daily lives," said White House spokesman Eric Schultz, who noted that Obama received an award for his commitment to open government. The March 2011 presentation of that award was closed to the press.

2013 Delivery

The travel costs generated by some other Obama officials --Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood, Energy Secretary Steven Chu, Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lisa Jackson, and Homeland Security chief Janet Napolitano -- also remain undisclosed.

A request made in June for the travel records of Susan Rice, the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, will remain unfulfilled for more than a year, according to a federal official involved in the case.

"We really appreciate your patience in this matter. The estimated completion date is July 2013," wrote Chris Barnes, a State Department FOIA official, in a Sept. 24 e-mail. Under FOIA, the department is required to offer a timetable for delayed responses.

GSA Scandal

Government travel costs have received greater scrutiny since a report by the General Services Administration's inspector general on April 2 revealed that a 2010 Las Vegas junket -- featuring a mind reader and a clown -- cost taxpayers more than \$823,000. Since then, GSA Administrator Martha Johnson has resigned and the IG has referred the matter to the Department of Justice.

Records obtained as a result of another Bloomberg FOIA request showed that the GSA almost tripled its expenditures for conferences from 2005 to 2010. Taxpayers paid \$27.8 million for more than 200 overnight gatherings attended by at least 50 GSA employees over the five-year period, according to the records.

Under Obama, federal agencies also have stepped up the use of exemptions to block the release of information.

During the first year of the administration, cabinet agencies employed exemptions 466,402 times, a 50 percent jump from the last year of the presidency of George W. Bush. While exemption citations have since been reduced by 21 percent from that high, they still are above the level seen during the Bush administration, according to Justice Department data.

DHS Exemptions

The majority of the exemptions came from the Department of Homeland Security, which gets the most requests, records show.

The greater number of documents released online helps explain the increased use of exemptions, according to Tracy Russo, a spokeswoman for the Justice Department. "The pool of requests that are made tend to be more complex," she said.

Open government advocates note that Obama's transparency pledge is undermined by a federal bureaucracy that often cites staff shortages and compliance costs to delay the release of information.

"I don't think the administration has been very good at all on open-government issues," said Katherine Meyer, a Washington attorney who has been filing open records requests since the late 1970s. "The Obama administration is as bad as any of them, and to some extent worse."

Fee Fight

In one case Meyer pursued, the Center for Auto Safety was told by Treasury FOIA officials that its request for records relating to the U.S. auto bailout would cost \$38,000. Meyer successfully argued the fees should be waived because the request was in the public interest.

The Freedom of Information Act, signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1966, is designed to open up the process of government to citizens. Individuals have the right to file requests, and the law mandates that the department answer the query within 20 working days, ask for a 10-day extension, or offer a timetable for the release of the information.

In the past, FOIA has been used to obtain a wide range of government records. Among them: Documents on the use of the defoliant Agent Orange during the Vietnam War; Department of Transportation reports detailing safety issues with the Ford Pinto's fuel tank that contributed to some 500 deaths; and details of the Bush administration's deliberations on the use of torture following the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.

'Smoking Gun'

"It's the smoking gun that often holds government accountable for its misdeeds," said Kevin Goldberg, a First Amendment attorney at Fletcher, Heald & Hildreth Plc in Arlington, Virginia, who also serves as legal counsel for the American Society of News Editors.

Miriam Nisbet, the head of the Office of Government Information Services, which acts as a FOIA ombudsman, said Obama deserves praise for highlighting government accountability.

"We see a great deal of emphasis and attention paid to transparency," she said. "That is a really important message."

Nisbet's office offered travel documents three days after acknowledging the FOIA request.

The Bloomberg FOIA filing also asked each department to identify trips, lodging and meals provided by non-federal sources. All told, 30 of the 57 agencies contacted replied with those travel records by Sept. 14.

SBA Response

Of the 20 Cabinet-level agencies contacted by Bloomberg News, only the Small Business Administration met the legal 20-day deadline by disclosing that Administrator Karen Mills took 27 trips out of Washington at a total cost to the U.S. taxpayer of \$15,856.

The records of Secretary of the Treasury Timothy Geithner, Labor Hilda Solis, former Secretary of Commerce and Acting Secretary Gary Locke and Rebecca Blank, U.S. Trade Representative Ron Kirk and Jacob Lew, the former director of the Office and Management and Budget who is now White House

Chief of Staff, were released to Bloomberg News under the request, though those agencies did not meet the 20-day deadline.

Kirk, "who travels all over the world" for his duties according to the USTR website, took 23 business trips in fiscal 2011, 17 of which involved domestic travel, for a cost of about \$45,000. Kirk "has said many times that increased outreach to the American people" is important for economic growth, USTR spokeswoman Carol Guthrie said in an e-mail.

No Excuse

Eric Newton, senior adviser at the Knight Foundation, a Miami-based group that promotes citizen engagement, said agencies have no excuse not to rapidly disclose travel costs.

"In a 24/7 world, it should take two days, it should take two hours," Newton said. "If it's public, it should be just there."

The Department of Justice, which is charged with monitoring how all federal agencies respond to FOIA requests, has yet to release the travel details of top officials at three of its affiliated agencies: The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, the Drug Enforcement Administration and the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Pustay, head of the Justice Department's Office of Information Policy, said that taxpayer-supported travel records are "certainly something that people would ask for and something that's of interest to the public." She said "the crush of work" makes swift replies difficult.

Redacted Information

None of the nine exemptions under the FOIA -- which protect national security, personal information or corporate trade secrets, for example -- allow taxpayer-supported travel expenses to remain hidden from view.

Those records may include information, such as private mobile-phone numbers or information related to security, that is exempted from disclosure, which could be causing the delays, Pustay said.

Responsive agencies were able to redact personal details within the FOIA time period. The Federal Housing Finance Agency, the chief regulator for Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, provided the travel expense records for Acting Director Edward DeMarco's six trips out of town within 15 days of the filing.

DeMarco's trips cost \$5,653.29, the documents show. Personal information such as his Social Security number and home address were blacked-out in the file.

The process for accessing information that hasn't been already released remains confusing, time-consuming and at times antagonistic, said Thomas Blanton, director of the National Security Archive, a Washington-based open-information repository.

'Obfuscation' Culture

"There is a culture of obfuscation among agency Freedom of Information officials," he said. "Bureaucrats are able to deter a lot of citizen engagement."

Travel records were largely shielded from public view until Johnson signed the Freedom of Information Act on July 4, 1966. Congress adopted post-Watergate reforms in 1974, giving agencies a deadline to comply with requests and narrowing exemptions for law enforcement and national security agencies. The FOIA law was updated another four times through 2007, when the Office of Government Information Services was established as the federal ombudsman.

The White House says it has released more than 2.5 million records since Obama took office. Recovery.gov allows citizens to track stimulus spending by state. The administration also has for the first time posted the names of White House visitors, though not a full list of who has attended meetings.

Backlogged Files

Other records now disclosed include the number of weapons in the nation's nuclear arsenal, report cards for veterans' hospitals, and employer-specific workplace safety records kept by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

The total number of FOIA requests increased, with 631,424 processed last year, compared with 600,849 in 2010.

The government's website dedicated to monitoring its response to filings, FOIA.gov, shows the number of backlogged requests grew 20 percent to 83,490 filings from 2010 to 2011.

The Justice Department reported in 2008 that there were 3,691 full-time FOIA personnel across all departments and agencies. In 2011, the figure increased by 19 percent to 4,400, according to the department. Some agencies outsource FOIA-related tasks, including the redaction process. The government has spent at least \$86.2 million on contracts described as pertaining to FOIA since 2009, according to federal procurement data compiled by Bloomberg.

The administration acknowledged systemic issues with the FOIA process when the Office of Management and Budget issued guidelines Aug. 24 to all federal agencies on how to streamline government information. The memo called for all government information to be stored in an electronic format by December 2019 -- almost three years after the end of a potential second Obama term.

Stephen Hess, a presidential historian at the Washington-based Brookings Institution, called the survey results a "grim" assessment of Obama's transparency record. He said the president -- like many of the men who have occupied the Oval Office -- has discovered how difficult it is to bend the government's bureaucracies to his will.

"The sad part is it won't be any better for the next folks either," Hess said. "The only difference perhaps is the Obama people led us to believe it would be different."

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Romney aide: Obama tried to 'mislead' on Libya attack

September 28, 2012

[AFP](#)

WASHINGTON — Mitt Romney's campaign accused President Barack Obama's administration on Thursday of trying to "mislead the American people" over the attack that killed the US ambassador to Libya.

"We were initially told that this was a spontaneous demonstration in response to a video that was on YouTube," the top political adviser to the Republican White House hopeful, Eric Fehrnstrom, told Fox News.

"Now we're learning that it was a pre-planned terrorist attack, conducted on the anniversary of 9/11 and that it involved elements of Al Qaeda."

Obama "needs to be held accountable for his administration's attempts to mislead the American people about what happened in Benghazi," the Republican aide added.

Republican opponents accuse the Obama administration of downplaying and changing its story about the attack in eastern Libya two weeks ago that claimed the lives of four Americans, in a bid to paper over possible security or intelligence lapses that may have contributed to the deaths.

Libyan officials say they believe the assault on the consulate, which included the firing of rocket-propelled grenades and several hours of small arms fire, was pre-planned in advance by foreign extremists.

Asked directly if he thought the Obama administration was lying, Fehrnstrom did not use the word but suggested it was possible.

"If in fact there were early intelligence reports indicating that this was a pre-planned terrorist attack, and instead the administration was trying to persuade the American people that it was a spontaneous demonstration in response to a YouTube video, then of course, there does appear to be an attempt to mislead," he said.

"This president would prefer not to talk about this attack on Benghazi being a terrorist attack. But I think we need to level with the American people about what's happening in that part of the world."

The White House had earlier Thursday accused Republicans of using the US deaths in Libya for political gain.

"There was an attempt by Republicans beginning with governor Romney to try to turn this event into a partisan issue," said White House spokesman Jay Carney, accusing Republicans of trying to "score political points out of a terror attack."

US ambassador to the United Nations Susan Rice initially said the attack was by extremists taking advantage of a spontaneous demonstration against an anti-Islamic film made by Christian extremists in the United States.

Carney said last week and on Wednesday that the attack was terrorism. On Tuesday, Romney accused the president of papering over the incident in which US ambassador Christopher Stevens was killed.

Obama has not yet used the word "terrorism" specifically in reference to the attack, but in his initial reaction he did say that "no acts of terror will ever shake the resolve" of Americans.

On Wednesday, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton appeared to suggest there could have been an Al-Qaeda link to the attack on the consulate.

A senior administration official later rowed back her remarks.
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UNITED NATIONS

World Powers Urge Syria Opposition To Unite

September 28, 2012

Associated Press

By David Stringer

UNITED NATIONS - Western nations and allies in the Middle East meet Friday to urge Syria's fractured opposition to unite, seeking a new path for ending the country's conflict amid deadlock between major powers on the U.N. Security Council.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was hosting talks among the Friends of Syria - a coalition which includes the United States, the European Union and the Arab League - on the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly, seeking to encourage better cooperation among groups which oppose Syrian President Bashar Assad.

The talks, which don't include Russia, China or Iran, take place with the Security Council at a stalemate on efforts to halt the 18-month long conflict, which activists say has led to more than 30,000 deaths.

Russia and China have vetoed three Western-backed resolutions aimed at pressuring Assad to end the violence and enter negotiations on a political transition, paralyzing the U.N.'s most powerful body and denting chances of any progress during the General Assembly.

Clinton has decried Assad's "murdering of his own people," while Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov - who will address the General Assembly on Friday - has accused the U.S. and other countries of encouraging terrorism in their stance on Syria.

French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius has said it is "shocking" that the Security Council had been unable to act, while British Prime Minister David Cameron denounced the deaths of Syrian children as "a stain on those who have failed to stand up to these atrocities," a reference to Russia and China.

Britain's Middle East minister Alistair Burt said Thursday that Friday's meeting would seize on tentative signs that Syria's opposition is becoming more willing to work together. "What we hear is that they do understand the need to make more progress themselves," he said.

"Our message has been consistent," Burt added. "No-one is asking them to form a unified, single party - but to have a clear set of objectives addressed towards minorities and the people of Syria as to what they would do."

Iranian leader Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said Wednesday that he was developing a 12-nation group to work on developing a solution to Syria's crisis, but declined to say which countries may be involved or what steps the body might take.

Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi has also invited Iran, Turkey and Saudi Arabia to join a contact group aimed at ending the conflict, though the Saudis have not yet participated. Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal was addressing the General Assembly on Friday.

"We don't want to close any options off that might be helpful in the process, but we struggle to understand how someone so involved in supporting the regime, and therefore perpetuating the cycle of violence, can be part of the answer," Burt said, referring to Ahmadinejad.

Libya's new Prime Minister Mustafa Abu-Shakour and foreign ministers of Germany and South Korea are also scheduled Friday to address the General Assembly.
(top)

Bibi and the bomb chart

September 27, 2012

Foreign Policy

By Mario Tama

For Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu it wasn't enough just to reiterate an impassioned call for the United States and other U.N. governments to impose a red line on Iran's nuclear program.

He literally drew it -- right before the assembled world leaders -- on a crude bomb chart that looked like it came directly out Wile E. Coyote's comic book arsenal.

In a speech that briefly glossed over the Middle East process, Netanyahu made his most detailed and impassioned case for confronting Iran, clarifying that the threshold for a military strike should be set at the point Iran produces enough highly enriched uranium to produce a nuclear weapon.

"Nothing could imperil our future more than the arming of Iran with nuclear weapons," Netanyahu told the gathering of foreign leaders. "At this late hour, the only way to peacefully prevent Iran from getting an atomic bomb is by placing a clear red line on Iran's nuclear weapons programs.

"Red lines don't lead to war; red lines prevent war," he added. "I believe faced with clear red line Iran will back down."

The Israeli prime minister has been pressing President Barack Obama for weeks to specify a precise stage in Iran's enrichment of uranium that would trigger a military reaction. Obama has repeatedly said that the United States would not permit Iran to possess nuclear weapons, but he has refused to commit to a specific red line in order to preserve response flexibility.

In his speech to the U.N. General Assembly on Tuesday, Obama said that while it remains committed to resolving the nuclear dispute with Iran "through diplomacy and we believe that there is still time and space to do so. But that time is not unlimited."

"Make no mistake: A nuclear-armed Iran is not a challenge that can be contained," Obama said. "It would threaten the elimination of Israel, the security of Gulf nations, and the stability of the global

economy. It risks triggering a nuclear arms race in the region, and the unraveling of the Non-Proliferation Treaty."

Netanyahu thanked Obama for his statement acknowledging an Iranian nuclear weapons program could not be contained, and he said he recognized that international sanctions were inflicting serious pain on the regime.

But he said that more than a decade of sanctions and diplomacy have failed to halt Iran's nuclear ambitions, and that it would be irresponsible to place one's faith in cautious estimates from Western intelligence agencies that there is sufficient time to stop the Iranians from acquiring the bomb. "Our intelligence agents are not fool-proof," he said.

Netanyahu, who spoke shortly after Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, devoted little attention to the peace process, simply saying the "libelous speeches" or "unilateral declarations of statehood" before the U.N. General Assembly would not further the cause of peace.

The Palestinian leader was the clear favorite in the General Assembly, receiving a standing ovation for a speech that denounced a wave of anti-Palestinian attacks by Jewish settlers, and claimed that Israeli policies were undermining the ability of the Palestinian National Authority to function -- threatening its ultimate collapse.

But his bid for international recognition of statehood was scaled back from a year ago.

"We will continue our efforts to obtain full membership for Palestine at the United Nations," he said. But for now, he said his government has "begun intensive consultations with various regional organizations and member states aimed at having

the General Assembly adopt a resolution considering the State of Palestine as a non-member state of the United Nations during this session."

"We do not seek to delegitimize an existing state -- that is Israel; but rather to assert the state that must be realized -- that is Palestine."

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At U.N., Myanmar Leader Highlights Steps To Reform

September 28, 2012

New York Times

By Rick Gladstone

The president of Myanmar, a former general who has led the move away from a prolonged era of dictatorship, poverty and isolation, asserted on Thursday in his first United Nations speech that "amazing changes" were transforming his country and could never be reversed.

The president, U Thein Sein, also paid homage to the country's opposition leader, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, a Nobel Peace Prize winner and former political prisoner whose liberation from nearly two decades of house arrest in 2010 signaled the beginning of Myanmar's gradual emergence from pariah status.

"As a Myanmar citizen, I would like to congratulate her for the honors she has received in this country in recognition of her efforts for democracy," said Mr. Thein Sein in his address to the United Nations General Assembly.

It was the first time that Mr. Thein Sein had praised Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi in such a public way, and appeared to reflect growing confidence that his navigation of Myanmar's political system away from decades of authoritarian rule would not be challenged at home, where many of his colleagues in the military are known to be ambivalent about the changes.

In another first, Mr. Thein Sein's speech was broadcast live in Myanmar, The Associated Press reported, so people at home could see for themselves the president's outspoken tribute to Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi, who is widely considered the country's most popular politician and has expressed the hope of becoming president one day.

Mr. Thein Sein spoke a day after Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, in a meeting with him, announced that the United States intended to ease a ban on imports from Myanmar, one of the last remaining American sanctions on the country, as a reward for his efforts. The easing could further strengthen Mr. Thein Sein's political stature in Myanmar, where the sanctions are a major impediment to the economy. Mr. Thein Sein was only removed from an American sanctions blacklist last week.

He devoted much of his General Assembly speech to enumerating the political changes in his country, including the creation of an elected legislature, an end to censorship, the granting of amnesty to hundreds of prisoners and the attempt to create a culture of political dialogue and tolerance, where citizens can disagree without fear of retribution.

"Within a short time, the people of Myanmar have been able to bring about amazing changes," he said. "They have been taking tangible, irreversible steps in the democratic reform process." Myanmar, he said, "is now ushering in a new era."

He also acknowledged the country's litany of problems, including the levels of abject poverty and stunning gaps between rich and poor, and vowed that economic development would not widen those gaps.

The president also said Myanmar was still confronting protracted ethnic insurgencies, including a dispute with the Kachin, a Christian minority near the China border, and the Rohingya Muslims along the Bangladesh border. Myanmar is predominantly Buddhist. "People inhabiting our country, regardless of religion, have a right to live in peace and security," he said.

Later in an appearance at the Asia Society in New York, the president acknowledged that the era of authoritarian rule in Myanmar had led to a significant exodus of educated people, who are desperately needed back home.

"It's true that many of our citizens - doctors, engineers and entrepreneurs - they are working out in foreign countries," he said through a translator. "That might have something to do with the previous political systems."

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Burma's president calls for "patience" with democratic transition

September 27, 2012

Foreign Policy

By Colum Lynch

Burma's President Thein Sein paid tribute to the country's most famous democratic dissident, Aung San Suu Kyi, saying he wanted to congratulate her for the awards she has received during a 17-day tour the United States, including the Congressional Gold Medal.

"As a Myanmar citizen, I would like to congratulate her for the honors she has received in this country in recognition of her efforts for democracy," he told the U.N. General Assembly gathering this morning.

The tribute underscored the dramatic shift under way in Burma and in the country's leader -- a former general from the military junta that had once annulled an election that would have made Suu Kyi the country's leader, and then held her under house arrest for nearly two decades.

Dressed in a business suit, Sein said that his government is making "progress on the democratic path" and that it would require forbearance from the international community. The remarks come one day after U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton informed Myanmar that the United States was easing a series of sanctions on the country's exports to the United States.

"I am well aware of the fact that Myanmar's democratic transformation process would be a complex and delicate one that requires patience," he said. "Myanmar is now ushering in a new era.... It is...necessary that Myanmar should be viewed from a different and new perspective."

He also addressed international concerns about a wave of violence against the country's minority groups, referring to an upswing in ethnic violence in Rakhine. "In this connection, I would like to mention in the first place that the people inhabiting in our country, regardless of race, religion, and gender, have the right to live in peace and security."

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Libya Chief Apologizes for 'Despot' Gadhafi

September 28, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By CHRISTOPHER RHOADS

UNITED NATIONS—Libya's head of state apologized to the international community on Thursday for four decades of bloodlust, terrorism and human-rights abuses perpetrated by his "lunatic despot" predecessor, Col. Moammar Gadhafi.

"I stand before you today, before the entire world, to apologize for all the harm, all the crimes committed by that despot against so many innocents, to apologize for the extortion and terrorism he meted on so many states," Mohamed Magariaf, the president of the Libyan National Congress, said in a speech at the United Nations annual meeting.

Mr. Magariaf also thanked those who came to the country's aid during the bloody revolution that overthrew and killed Gadhafi a year ago as he attempted to flee the war-torn country with his entourage in a convoy of SUVs. He singled out the U.N., the U.S., and in particular Christopher Stevens, the U.S. ambassador recently killed in an attack in Benghazi, Libya.

"We stress to the United States, its government and its people that this catastrophe will only increase our solidarity," he said. "Our future is a future that will be chartered by people like Chris Stevens, not by people like his killers."

Mr. Magariaf has said he believed the attack was pre-planned by terrorists, since it occurred on the anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001, U.S. attacks and because the attackers were heavily armed.

The matter has become a political issue. Republicans accuse the White House of not labeling the attack terrorism for the purposes of President Barack Obama's re-election campaign. Administration officials have said that the investigation continues and that they have provided details as they learn them.

Susan Rice, the U.S. ambassador to the U.N., has said the attack was spontaneous and the consequence of an amateur video produced in the U.S. insulting the Prophet Muhammad.

While the new Libya will be based on democracy and openness, speech such as that in the video won't be tolerated, Mr. Magariaf said, echoing sentiments made this week at the U.N. by other new leaders brought to power by the Arab Spring.

"I cannot fail to condemn the anti-Islam campaigns and those defaming his prophet," he said. "Such campaigns increase hatred, they aim at provocation and tension in relations among civilizations. They go beyond the concept of free expression."

He added that the U.N. General Assembly should therefore adopt what he called a covenant to criminalize the insulting of religious symbols.

While Libya has made much progress in beginning the process of building a functioning government based on the rule of law, Mr. Magariaf said, the country still faces numerous hurdles posed in part by members of the former regime.

"We face threats and challenges that are very serious and threaten national and regional security because of illegitimate acts by Gadhafi's sons and some elements of the previous regime who are wanted by the law and have found a safe harbor in some neighboring countries," he said.

Drug- and weapons-trafficking and illegal immigration are also problems in Libya, he said. The State Department has temporarily reduced its staff at its Tripoli embassy pending a review of the security situation, according to the Associated Press.

Mr. Magariaf acknowledged that the security problems and, more broadly, the recent turmoil in the region have cast doubts on the results of the Arab Spring.

"Some wonder was the Arab spring worthy of support," he said. "To them, I would say, would it have been better for the corrupt dictatorial regimes to remain in place for decades more, oppressing, meting out injustice, arbitrary treatment, corruption and the violation of the most fundamental human rights?"

He reminded the audience that democracy did not come to France immediately after its 18th-century revolution. As occurred following revolutions elsewhere through history, it was followed by war and instability, he said.

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Libya apologizes to the world

September 28, 2012

Foreign Policy

By Colum Lynch

Three years ago, then Libyan leader Muammar al-Qaddafi stood at the U.N. General Assembly podium, held up a copy of the U.N. Charter, and declared he would not recognize its authority.

This afternoon, Mohammed Magarrief, the president of Libya's national assembly, affirmed his commitment to the charter and issued an apology to the membership for the crimes committed by Libya's former ruler.

"Three years ago, a despot who ruled my country for 42 years with oppression and an iron fist stood on this very rostrum and tore a copy of the charter of the United Nations," he said. "Today, I am standing on the very same rostrum affirming my country's support of the charter of the United Nations and our respect for it."

Dressed in a crisp Western business suit, Libya's new leader sought to present a starkly different image from Qaddafi, who was known for his often outlandish robes and designer sunglasses.

In contrast to the long, rambling anti-imperial rants that characterized his predecessor's U.N. speeches, Magarrief spoke from a prepared text, and remained on the podium for about 27 minutes, longer than 15 minutes allotted, but a far cry from Qaddafi's interminable monologues.

He sought to assure other countries that his government would seek to get along with the international community and abide by the rules of the road.

Qaddafi funneled weapons to insurgent groups throughout the continent, fueling conflicts from West Africa to Sudan, and he played a role in some of the most audacious acts of international terror, including the bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, an attack that killed 243 passengers, 16 crew members, and 11 people on the ground.

"I stand before you today, before the entire world, to apologize for all the harm, all the crimes committed by that despot against so many innocents, to apologize for the extortion and terrorism he meted on so many states," Magarrief said.

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Tunisia: 'dictatorship is a disease'

September 27, 2012

Foreign Policy

By Colum Lynch

Tunisia's President Moncef Marzouki urged the United Nations to declare dictatorship a disease, much like polio and small pox, and launch a campaign to eliminate autocratic rule.

He proposed the establishment of a global constitutional court, along the lines of the International Criminal Court, to pass judgment on the integrity of governments, elections, and legal institutions.

The proposal probably stands little chance of being created, given international concerns about interference in states' sovereign affairs, but it underscored the deep emotional reservoir of anger towards autocratic regimes by a new generation of leaders brought the power by popular unrest known as the Arab Spring.

"My country proposes that we consider that dictatorship is a disease, a disease that is threatening peace and security and well as the prosperity of people," Marzouki said. "We invite the U.N. to declare that dictatorship is a social and political scourge which needs to be eliminated."

Marzouki said that Tunisia's long-ruling dictator, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, benefited from the manipulation of supposedly democratic institutions, including the judiciary and electoral machinery, to ensure he would rule forever.

An international constitutional court, he said, could denounce constitutional irregularities, fraudulent elections, and other illegal schemes. "This would be a deterrent weapon against any despot, against any tyrannical regime, and will contribute to the very disappearance of these regimes, because these courts will strengthen the role of civic resistance. Otherwise, the only choice is to live under oppression or alternatively turn to violence. And we all know how expensive that could be."

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At U.N., Rwanda defiantly rejects claims of Congo rebel support

September 28, 2012

Reuters

By Michelle Nichols

UNITED NATIONS - Rwanda defiantly denied claims at the United Nations on Thursday that it was aiding rebels in Democratic Republic of Congo and rejected U.N. chief Ban Ki-moon's summary of a meeting on the crisis, diplomats said.

According to Ban, most states attending a high-level meeting on the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly with Rwandan President Paul Kagame and Congolese President Joseph Kigali "condemned all forms of external support" to the rebels.

Kagame said after the meeting that Rwanda rejected allegations it was supporting the M23 rebels and said that "solving the crisis will be impossible if the international community continues to define the issue erroneously."

M23 rebels, who have ties to a warlord wanted by the International Criminal Court for war crimes, Bosco Ntaganda, have been fighting government soldiers in eastern Congo's North Kivu province since April. Some 320,000 civilians have been displaced.

"Most participants strongly condemned all forms of external support to the M23 and other negative forces in the DRC, and demanded the immediate and permanent cessation of such support," according to the meeting summary. "Some participants cautioned that those supporting the M23 could also be held accountable."

"They stressed ... the urgency of constructive engagement and dialogue between the DRC and Rwanda," it said.

Despite Rwanda's denials, a senior U.N. diplomat has said that privately Kigali was "a bit embarrassed, to say the least, and this could be one of the reasons behind the lull (in fighting) in the Kivu." He said if Rwanda withdrew support then the M23 group, numbering about 1,500, "could be subdued."

The DRC said last month it had asked the U.N. Security Council to place sanctions on Rwanda's defense minister and two top military officials for backing the rebellion.

A U.N. experts' report has accused Rwandan Defense Minister James Kaberebe, chief of defense staff Charles Kayonga, and General Jacques Nziza, a military adviser to President Paul Kagame, of being "in constant contact with M23.

"There can be no possible justification for such support, whether in terms of military hardware, or strategic advice. It must stop," Britain's Minister for Africa, Mark Simmonds, told the U.N. summit. "And there can be no impunity for those who violate human rights. They must be brought to justice."

INTERNATIONAL FORCE?

France said it would support sanctions against M23 and warned neighboring states against supporting the group.

"The M23 is benefiting from external support, including from neighboring DRC states," said French Minister for the Francophone countries Yamina Benguigui. "Nothing can justify the support of an armed rebellion led by war criminals. All support of M23, whatever it is, must stop."

As uneasy neighbors, Congo and Rwanda have gone to war against each other in the past. Rwanda has backed armed movements in the DRC during the past two decades, citing a need to tackle Rwandan rebels operating out of Congo's eastern hills.

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton met jointly with Kagame and Kabila on Monday in New York and pressed them to resolve the conflict.

In July the United States withdrew some \$200,000 in military aid for Rwanda, Washington's first direct punitive action against the Rwandans over the crisis. Several other western European nations also have cut or suspended aid.

The United Nations said it was working with east and central African states on their proposal for a neutral force to tackle the M23 and other armed groups in eastern Congo.

"It is something that generates interest, but we are short of a real concept of operations - who would be in, who would do what, who would pay - and this is why more work needs to be done," said U.N. peacekeeping chief Herve Ladsous after the meeting.

"We are already working (with them) to flesh out the concept because at the end of the day it will be submitted to the Security Council and the Security Council will want very precise explanations as to what it is all about," he said.

A resolution mandating military intervention in the DRC would have to be approved by the 15-member Security Council.

"Before endorsing any such support, we and the U.N. Security Council will want to understand the intended role and scope of the force," said Britain's Simmonds. Britain, the United States, France, China and Russia are veto-wielding council members.

A U.N. mission in the DRC, known as MONUSCO, has more than 17,000 troops, but the force is stretched thin across a nation the size of Western Europe and struggles to fulfill its current mandate of protecting civilians.

U.N. helicopter gunships frequently back up outgunned government forces, but even that firepower failed to prevent rebels from taking several towns in July. The U.N. force would work with any neutral force, but could not launch operations.

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Italy, Jordan Push Religious Tolerance Initiative

September 28, 2012

Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS - The foreign ministers of Italy and Jordan are pushing an initiative to promote religious tolerance worldwide.

Italy's Giulio Terzi and Jordan's Nasser Judeh announcement Thursday came on the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly and a little over two weeks after an anti-Islam video that portrays the Prophet Muhammad as a womanizer, a child molester and a fraud, sparked violent protests in Muslim countries.

Terzi said plans for the initiative were under way well before the video went public, and that the next step would be a conference in the coming months with representatives from governments, academia and international organizations.

Participants at a panel discussion on religious tolerance co-chaired by the two ministers on Thursday included U.N. human rights chief Navi Pillay and UNESCO's director general, Irina Bokova.

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EXCLUSIVE: Study: UN Misconduct Goes Unpunished

September 28, 2012

Associated Press

By Peter James Spielmann

NEW YORK - When U.N. staffers on peacekeeping missions were accused of misconduct or corruption over the last couple of years, more than two-thirds of them were exonerated by the U.N.'s internal tribunal system, according to research provided to AP by a whistleblower-protection group.

Extensive interviews conducted with current and former U.N. staffers in eight peacekeeping forces who lodged complaints against higher-ups found widespread frustration over "managers who committed misconduct and were rarely sanctioned," said the Washington-based organization, Government Accountability Project (GAP).

The U.N.'s tribunal system was reformed under Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, at the insistence of the General Assembly, in 2009 but appears to be worse at rooting out mismanagement than the old procedures, according to the GAP study, which was being released publicly Friday.

After the reforms adopted higher standards of evidence and proof, GAP found 19 cases of misconduct allegations against peacekeeping staff over two years, of which 13 were exonerated -- 68 percent.

GAP's study showed, however, that in a 2 ½-year period before the reforms, nine misconduct cases were filed against peacekeeping staffers and just four were exonerated -- a 28.6 dismissal rate.

"Too often, bad apples are getting away with misconduct that they commit in the peacekeeping missions, at the expense of citizens across the globe," GAP international program staffer Shelley Walden, co-author of the study, told The Associated Press.

The United Nations is pledged to uphold justice worldwide. But as an international institution, its 75,000 staffers worldwide are ruled by an internal U.N. tribunal system that judges complaints of mismanagement, harassment or corruption. National courts do not have jurisdiction over U.N. employment issues.

GAP's research focused on the problems of whistle-blowers in the U.N. system who spoke out against mismanagement, corruption or harassment that can go as far as death threats and assault.

The most serious crimes are dealt with by having the United Nations discharge the staffer and send them to their home country for possible prosecution. This is how the U.N. handled several notorious cases of U.N. peacekeepers accused of rape or soliciting prostitution in Congo and Haiti.

The office of the spokesman for the U.N. chief was asked Thursday about the premise of the GAP research and was sent the report's executive summary. Ban's spokesman, Martin Nesirky, did not have any immediate comment on the report.

Part of the problem with the 2009 reforms, Walden said, is that it raised the standard of proof of misconduct, making it harder for whistle-blowers to make their complaints stick.

A report by Ban to the General Assembly in July verified that, saying that many cases "failed to meet the higher evidential and procedural standards" of the new tribunal system.

These also led to long delays in investigating some cases, Ban said. Some complaints were deemed not credible. And some cases were not pursued because managerial changes had already been made.

These "factors resulted in cases that were not pursued as disciplinary matters or closed with no measure," Ban said.

Walden said that "They are not pursuing as many cases, so the pendulum has swung back the other way."

The GAP report said that U.N. tribunal judges "have been hesitant to refer cases to the Secretary-General for possible action to enforce accountability." In almost tribunal 500 cases the GAP study examined, over a range from disputes over severance pay to actual threats and assaults, judges had asked Ban for enforcement only four times, and it was unable to find out if he had actually taken action in those four cases.

"The secretary-general has not upheld the rule of law within the organization," Walden said.

The appeals process "is almost never effective when it is higher level staff, I think that's a political problem within the institution," George G. Irving, a private attorney who is a consultant to the U.N. Staff Union, told the AP. He was one of the experts interviewed by the GAP study.

"The tone at the top is really a problem -- you might get accountability at the lower levels," Walden said.

Ban's report summed up specific staff problems that had actually resulted in firing or other discipline over the past year, including:

- seeking sexual favors from a job applicant.

- making derogatory and sexual comments on fellow workers and storing pornography on a U.N. computer.

- verbal abuse including threats to kill a supervisor.

- beating a spouse, who was a U.N. volunteer, with a table, causing multiple injuries requiring hospitalization.

- theft and sale of U.N. computers, radios cameras, and rolls of copper wire.

- a "long-running and widespread" scheme to use forged U.N. airline vouchers for travel by unauthorized persons "and companies."

- submission of phony dental care claims to the U.N.'s health insurance plan.

- leaking information involving internal UN investigations "to the press and outside government agencies."

It appeared that even criminal activity may go unpunished. Ban's report said the U.N. had reported seven "credible" cases of criminal conduct by U.N. officials or experts on U.N. missions to national authorities, but he "is not aware of any action taken in respect of such cases by the Member States themselves."

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TOP STORIES

Nod To Obama By Netanyahu In Warning To Iran On Bomb

September 28, 2012

New York Times

By Rick Gladstone And David E. Sanger

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel told the United Nations on Thursday that Iran's capability to enrich uranium must be stopped before next spring or early summer, arguing that by that time the country will be in a position to make a short, perhaps undetectable, sprint to manufacture its first nuclear weapon.

In his speech at the annual General Assembly, Mr. Netanyahu dramatically illustrated his intention to shut down Iran's nuclear program by drawing a red line through a cartoonish diagram of a bomb. But the substance of his speech suggested a softening of what had been a difficult dispute with the Obama administration on how to confront Iran over its nuclear program.

Only two weeks after that dispute broke into the open, Mr. Netanyahu on Thursday praised the warning Mr. Obama gave Iran in his own General Assembly speech on Tuesday.

"I very much appreciate the president's position, as does everyone in my country," he said. The Israeli leader's speech also suggested that his deadline for a military strike was well past the American presidential election and into 2013 - perhaps as late as next summer.

Mr. Netanyahu said in an interview on "Meet the Press" on NBC that was broadcast on Sept. 16 that he believed Iran was six months from amassing most of the enriched uranium needed for a bomb. "You have to place that red line before them now," he said. But his speech on Thursday was more explicit about his time frame for a military strike.

While such a strike seemed like a receding possibility in recent weeks, it had remained a possible "October surprise" that worried the White House and military planners.

Mr. Netanyahu's softened tone may also have also reflected Israel's reading of the American presidential polls, which have shown Mr. Obama's lead widening somewhat since the prime minister's harsh words in mid-September, when he said the United States had no "moral right" to hold back Israel from taking action against Iran because the Obama administration refused to set its own red line.

"It seems that Netanyahu's Iran policy is becoming more Obama-friendly," Meir Javedanfar, an Iranian-Israeli lecturer at the Interdisciplinary Center in Herzilya, Israel, said in an e-mailed reaction to Mr. Netanyahu's speech.

"What was most impressive was that he drew a red line, without committing himself to it," Mr. Javedanfar said. "He also did it in a way which takes the pressure off Obama, illustrated by the fact that he pushed back the timelines to next year."

Michael Herzog, a former chief of staff to Israel's defense minister and an Israel-based fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, said it was implicit in Mr. Netanyahu's remarks that "there are six or seven months more to continue to pressure the Iranians. The international buzz before was that Israel had to act before the November elections."

Mr. Netanyahu's speech also came against a backdrop of revived international diplomacy with Iran, which has insisted its nuclear program is peaceful. Foreign ministers from the so-called P5-plus-1 group of countries - the five permanent members of the Security Council plus Germany - met to discuss how to advance negotiations with Iran that have been stalled since June.

"All of the ministers were unified in their belief that diplomacy is the much preferred way forward," a senior Obama administration official said after the meeting.

A new report by Israel's Foreign Ministry calls for another round of sanctions against Iran, seemingly another acknowledgement by the Israelis that there might be time to stop its rival's nuclear program by means other than military action.

The report, published on Thursday by the newspaper Haaretz, states that the international sanctions already imposed are having a deep effect on Iran's economy, and may, according to some assessments, also be affecting the stability of the Iranian government. But because the sanctions have not persuaded Tehran to suspend the program, the report concludes, "another round of sanctions is needed."

Much of Mr. Netanyahu's speech was devoted to what he described as the existential and increasingly ominous threat that would be posed by a nuclear-armed Iran, which he equated to a nuclear-armed Al Qaeda. He portrayed a Middle East increasingly in the hands of Islamic radicals, many threatening Israel's existence.

But it was his description of Iran's nuclear progress that was at the heart of his speech. Perhaps mindful of the experience of former Secretary of State Colin L. Powell, who laid out an ultimately flawed case against Iraq nine years ago, Mr. Netanyahu revealed no new intelligence - he just urged his audience to do some math based on the public findings of inspectors.

With an almost professorial air, Mr. Netanyahu held up a diagram of a bomb with a fuse to show the Israeli view of Iran's progress in achieving the ability to make a nuclear weapon. He drew a red line through the point at which Iran would have amassed enough medium-enriched uranium to make a bomb - which he said would be in the spring or summer of 2013.

His calculus turned on a stockpile of medium enriched uranium - uranium enriched to the level of 20 percent - that Iran has produced, ostensibly to fuel a research reactor, provided to the country by the United States in the days of the shah. Right now, Iran does not possess enough of that fuel to make a single weapon. In fact, its stockpile of it has declined in recent months, as it has converted some for the research reactor.

But based on current production rates, Mr. Netanyahu said it would have enough in its stockpile by the middle of next year, a conclusion shared by many nuclear experts who have examined the reports of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

The Obama administration does not dispute Mr. Netanyahu's math, but it does challenge his logic. Its officials, in background conversations, have insisted that if Iran wanted to convert its uranium to bomb-grade fuel, which is much higher purity than 20 percent, it would have to throw out the nuclear inspectors and take steps that would be easily detectable.

"We'd almost certainly see it," one of Mr. Obama's top advisers said two weeks ago.

Mr. Netanyahu challenged that assessment in his speech, asserting that the actual assembly of a bomb could be done clandestinely anywhere in Iran.

"Do we want to risk the security of the world on the assumption that we would find in time a small workshop in a country half the size of Europe?" he asked.

In response to Mr. Netanyahu's speech. Iran again denied what it called "baseless and absurd allegations" that it is seeking a nuclear weapon and insisted the goals of its nuclear program are "exclusively peaceful." But Iranian officials, including President Ahmadinejad have declined to rule out the possibility that Iran would continue producing 20 percent uranium, even though it has now made enough to keep its medical reactor running for the next 6 to 10 years. And in its statement Thursday night it reserved its "full right to retaliate with force against any attacks"

Mr. Netanyahu also used his speech as a rejoinder to the Palestinian president, Mahmoud Abbas, who earlier had harshly denounced Israel from the General Assembly podium.

Mr. Abbas said he believed that Israel intended to destroy the basis for a two-state solution to the Israel-Palestinian conflict. He also declared his intention to pursue full-member status at the United Nations as an alternative path to statehood, an effort begun last year that has faltered because of Israeli and American objections.

Rick Gladstone reported from New York, and David E. Sanger from Washington. Jodi Rudoren and Isabel Kershner contributed reporting from Jerusalem, and Steven Lee Myers from New York.

This article has been revised to reflect the following correction:

Correction: September 27, 2012

An earlier version of this article misidentified at one point that day on which Prime Minister Netanyahu addressed the United Nations.

As the article noted correctly elsewhere, it was Thursday, not Wednesday.

This article has been revised to reflect the following correction:

Correction: September 27, 2012

An earlier version of this article misspelled the Israeli city where the Interdisciplinary Center is located. It is Herzliya, not Herzilya.
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Netanyahu Demands 'Red Line' on Iran

September 28, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By JAY SOLOMON

UNITED NATIONS—Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Iran was on track to build an atomic bomb by summer of 2013 and exhorted the U.S. and other global powers to set a strict limit on Tehran's nuclear fuel production as the clear "red line" that would trigger military strikes.

The speech at the U.N. General Assembly on Thursday marked Mr. Netanyahu's latest public challenge to President Barack Obama to more aggressively confront Tehran.

But Mr. Netanyahu also implied that Israel wouldn't consider attacking Iran at least until the spring. By then, he argued, Iran will have amassed enough medium-enriched uranium to convert into fuel for a nuclear bomb in a matter of weeks or months.

Standing before world leaders, the Israeli leader held a drawing of a round bomb with a lighted fuse and, with a thick red marker, drew a line he said Iran shouldn't be permitted to cross.

"I believe that, faced with a clear red line, Iran will back down," Mr. Netanyahu said.

The Israeli leader's comments damped fears among some Western and Arab officials that Israel might strike Iran's nuclear facilities before the U.S. presidential election in November. These officials said they believed that any possible military action has been put off until at least next year.

"I don't believe any longer that we will see an attack before November," said a senior Arab official. "This wasn't the case a few weeks ago."

The comments were seen similarly by Israeli analysts. "The pressure was focused on the possibility that Israel might attack before the elections," said Shlomo Brom, a fellow at Tel Aviv University's Institute for National Security Studies and a former brigadier general in the Israeli military. "Now it seems like it's off the table."

Tehran denies it is trying to build nuclear weapons, and late Thursday called Mr. Netanyahu's accusations "entirely baseless."

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, speaking in New York this week, said he didn't take Israeli threats seriously—and said any strike on his country would be seen as a joint Israeli-U.S. operation.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran is strong enough to defend itself and reserves its full right to retaliate with full force against any attack," Tehran's mission to the U.N. said in a statement Thursday night.

Mr. Netanyahu in recent months has repeatedly threatened military strikes against Iran, while asking Mr. Obama to lay down his own red line, including during a phone conversation earlier this month, according to U.S. officials.

Mr. Obama and his aides have rebuffed the Israeli leader's demands, saying such a pronouncement could constrict Washington's ability to use diplomacy to contain Iran's nuclear threat. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton met on Thursday with representatives of the global powers seeking to contain Iran's nuclear program through talks with Tehran, which U.S. officials said they expected would resume in the coming months.

Mrs. Clinton met one-on-one with Mr. Netanyahu on Thursday evening for 75 minutes to discuss Iran. They agreed to continue "close consultation" on preventing Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon, a senior State Department official said.

White House officials on Thursday played down any differences between Messrs. Obama and Netanyahu. "As the prime minister said, the United States and Israel share the goal of preventing Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon," said U.S. National Security Council spokesman Tommy Vietor.

Israel's prime minister sought and failed to secure a meeting with Mr. Obama in New York this week. The White House cited scheduling differences, and Mr. Obama had no one-on-one meetings with world leaders at the U.N. The two men plan to speak by telephone on Friday, White House officials said.

The U.S. and Israel continue to follow different timelines for when they believe Iran might be able to develop a nuclear weapon. They also differ in their assessments of the impact of international sanctions on Tehran.

U.S. intelligence agencies believe Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei hasn't made the political decision to build an atomic weapon. Should he make such a decision, according to U.S. intelligence, it still could take a year to 18 months for Iran to develop a crude nuclear bomb, a longer timeline than that outlined by Mr. Netanyahu on Thursday.

The Obama administration also is confident that sanctions are significantly weakening Iran's economy. Treasury officials say the sanctions are costing Tehran \$15 billion a quarter in lost oil revenue and that Iran's energy sales have dropped by a million barrels a day.

Mr. Netanyahu said on Thursday that sanctions are having an impact, but stressed that he didn't believe sanctions alone would be enough to make Iran give up its nuclear program—implying the country's rulers won't make rational decisions.

Iran could produce enough of 20%-enriched uranium by next spring or early summer, Mr. Netanyahu estimated, adding it would be just "a few months, possibly a few weeks" before it could develop a crude nuclear device.

The U.N.'s nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency, estimated last month Iran had amassed 190 kilograms of uranium enriched to 20% purity. Of this, 71 kilograms have been converted into fuel rods for Iran's research reactor in Tehran, according to the IAEA.

Nuclear experts believe Iran would need 250 kilograms of uranium enriched to 20% to make one crude bomb. Iran would need to reprocess the fuel to 90% purity to have the fissile material for a nuclear bomb.

U.S. officials believe that any effort by Tehran to begin producing the most highly enriched uranium would be detected by IAEA monitors based at Iran's nuclear facilities in the cities of Natanz and Qom.

Mr. Netanyahu, however, stressed Thursday that he didn't believe Western intelligence was good enough to run the risk of allowing Iran to push forward with its enrichment efforts. Israel is also concerned that Iran is moving more fuel production to an underground facility seen as impervious to attack.

"No one appreciates our intelligence agencies more than the prime minister of Israel," Mr. Netanyahu said. "But they are not foolproof."

The debate between the U.S. and Israel over red lines has fed into the U.S. presidential election. Republican candidate Mitt Romney has repeatedly called Mr. Obama soft on Iran, though Mr. Romney hasn't specified what Iranian actions would prompt him to strike.

On Thursday, Mr. Romney said he agreed with Mr. Netanyahu, although he didn't specifically endorse the Israeli leader's recommendation for a red line.

"I join in Prime Minister Netanyahu's call for a Middle East of progress and peace. And I join his urgent call to prevent the gravest threat to that vision—a nuclear-armed Iran," Mr. Romney said.

The Israeli leader's comments about Iran overshadowed discussions at the U.N. of Mideast peace talks. Mr. Netanyahu's speech came after Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas addressed the U.N.

Mr. Abbas said he remained open to negotiations with Israel aimed at creating an independent Palestinian state. But he said that lower-level talks between the two sides in recent months have been fruitless.

Mr. Netanyahu dedicated little of his speech to the Palestinian issue, but said his government remains open to negotiations.

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Netanyahu: Iran Could Have Bomb By Next Summer If It Does Not Face A "Red Line"

September 28, 2012

Washington Post

By Anne Gearan

UNITED NATIONS - Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Thursday that a firm ultimatum to Iran is the only peaceful way to stop the regime in Tehran from getting atomic weapons, increasing pressure on President Obama weeks before the U.S. presidential election.

Netanyahu's address to the U.N. General Assembly was a highly public argument for a stronger U.S. threat to attack Iran if it does not back off from what the Israeli leader described as the final push toward a nuclear weapon. Israel and the United States say the program is intended to develop a weapon, an accusation that Iran denies.

Netanyahu made a case, laced with historical references, for telling Iran explicitly where it must stop to forestall an outside attack. He also warned that time was running out.

"At this late hour there is only one way to peacefully prevent Iran from getting atomic bombs," Netanyahu told the annual gathering. "And that is by placing a clear red line on Iran's nuclear weapons program."

Estimates have varied widely on when Iran might have a nuclear weapon, but Netanyahu offered Israel's most specific timetable yet when he said Tehran's progress would be irreversible by next spring or summer.

In a bit of theater, Netanyahu illustrated his point by holding up a placard showing a cartoon-like bomb with a lighted fuse. Lines on the chart marked what he said was Iran's progress toward a weapon. With a flourish, Netanyahu pulled a red marker from his pocket and drew a thick line across the cartoon just below the start of what he described as the third and final stage.

Some of the diplomats in the audience squinted to see the chart; others seemed perplexed. The image quickly went viral on the Internet and drew praise in some quarters and criticism from opposition politicians back in Israel.

Netanyahu never directly threatened his own attack on Iran, and his tone toward Obama was conciliatory, but his meaning was clear: If Iran won't back down and the United States won't act, Israel will be forced to do so.

The Obama administration has been irritated by what many advisers see as rising Israeli threats and pressure. Obama told the U.N. session on Tuesday that there is still time to negotiate a peaceful end to the most troublesome elements of Iran's nuclear program. But he has refused to set a deadline for Iran to back down or to publicly outline precisely what Iranian nuclear milestone would trigger a U.S. attack.

U.S. officials have said that an ultimatum now could kill chances for a peaceful deal to head off the Iranian program. The threat of war or a rupture with Israel, a close U.S. ally, is also an unwelcome topic in this election season.

Republican presidential nominee Mitt Romney has criticized Obama for being too hard on Israel and not hard enough on Iran. He responded to Netanyahu's remarks with a statement saying: "I, like the rest of the American people, applaud the bravery of the people of Israel and stand with them in these dangerous times. The designs of the Iranian regime are a threat to America, Israel, and our friends and allies around the world."

Over the past six months, Netanyahu has made an increasingly public case for a unilateral Israeli attack on Iran sometime soon. Some analysts think he is bluffing to force Obama's hand, while others think he is serious.

Israeli leaders say they cannot afford to risk a nuclear weapon in the hands of a clerical regime pledged to Israel's destruction.

The Israeli demand for a U.S. red line on Iran is the latest point of conflict in a testy personal relationship between Obama and Netanyahu. Although U.S. officials regularly profess an unshakable alliance with Israel, the two leaders have done little to hide their mutual suspicion and dislike.

But in his speech, Netanyahu thanked the president for ruling out a Cold War-style containment strategy for Iran, saying that the clerical regime in Tehran would not be as responsible as Soviet leaders. And he talked about the United States and Israel working together to stop Iran.

The Israeli leader devoted much of his speech to portraying a nuclear-armed Iran as a threat not only to Israel but also to the entire world. He equated the threat of an Iranian regime with an atomic weapon to a nuclear-armed al-Qaeda, saying, "They're both fired by the same hatred, they're both driven by the same lust for violence."

"Who would be safe in Europe? Who would be safe in America? Who would be safe anywhere?" he asked.

Iran's mission to the United Nations issued a lengthy refutation of Netanyahu's accusations, calling them baseless.

In Israel, Shelly Yachimovich, leader of the opposition Labor Party, scoffed at Netanyahu's use of a simple diagram to highlight his argument for a red line.

"The drawing is very attractive," she said on Channel 10 television, "but that is not what will influence the United States to become deeply involved and be our ally in every step we take."

A new Israeli government report leaked to local media concludes that international sanctions are hitting Iran hard, possibly undermining Netanyahu's argument for tougher action.

Shaul Mofaz, who heads the centrist Kadima party, said that plans to confront Iran should take place behind closed doors. Speaking on Israel's Channel 2 television, Mofaz noted that Obama "has said that Iran will not have a bomb . . . that he will prevent Iran from going nuclear. I think that's a clear red line."

U.S. military and intelligence officials have said that an attack by Israel would be unlikely to destroy the Iranian program, possibly leaving the United States to finish the job and igniting a new war in the Middle East.

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Security Fears Hobble Inquiry Of Libya Attack

September 28, 2011

[New York Times](#)

By David D. Kirkpatrick, Eric Schmitt And Michael S. Schmidt

BENGHAZI, Libya - Sixteen days after the death of four Americans in an attack on a United States diplomatic mission here, fears about the near-total lack of security have kept F.B.I. agents from visiting the scene of the killings and forced them to try to piece together the complicated crime from Tripoli, more than 400 miles away.

Investigators are so worried about the tenuous security, people involved in the investigation say, that they have been unwilling to risk taking some potential Libyan witnesses into the American Embassy in Tripoli. Instead, the investigators have resorted to the awkward solution of questioning some witnesses in cars outside the embassy, which is operating under emergency staffing and was evacuated of even more diplomats on Thursday because of a heightened security alert.

"It's a cavalcade of obstacles right now," said a senior American law enforcement official who is receiving regular updates on the Benghazi investigation and who described the crime scene, which has been trampled on, looted and burned, as so badly "degraded" that even once F.B.I. agents do eventually gain access "it'll be very difficult to see what evidence can be attributed to the bad guys."

Piecing together exactly how Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens and three other Americans died here would be difficult even under the best of conditions. But the volatile security situation in post-Qaddafi Libya has added to the challenge of determining whether it was purely a local group of extremists who initiated the fatal assault or whether the attackers had ties to international terrorist groups, as Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton suggested Wednesday may be the case.

The Libyan government has advised the F.B.I. that it cannot assure the safety of the American investigators in Benghazi. So agents have been conducting interviews from afar, relying on local Libyan

authorities to help identify and arrange meetings with witnesses to the attack and working closely with the Libyans to gauge the veracity of any of those accounts.

"There's a chance we never make it in there," said a senior law enforcement official.

Also hampering the investigation is fear among Libyan witnesses about revealing their identities or accounts in front of Libyan guards protecting the American investigators, because the potential witnesses fear other Libyans might leak their participation and draw retribution from the attackers.

One person with knowledge of the inquiry said the investigators had gathered some information pointing to the involvement of members of Ansar al-Shariah, the same local extremist group that other witnesses have identified as participating in the attack. Benghazi residents and the leaders of the large militias that have constituted the city's only police force insist that the attackers were purely local. They note that many of the brigades that have sprung up in the city have the ability to conduct such an attack on short notice and that a few homegrown groups - like Ansar al-Shariah - have the ideological disposition to do it as well.

American counterterrorism and intelligence officials say they have not found any evidence to indicate that the Qaeda affiliate in North Africa, Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, ordered or planned the attack.

But the investigators are casting a wide net. To determine whether there was participation by an international element, intelligence analysts are poring over cellphone conversations intercepted before and after the attacks, as well as informant reports, witness accounts and satellite imagery.

When asked which group or groups may have been behind the violence, Matthew G. Olsen, director of the National Counterterrorism Center, told senators last week, "The picture that is emerging is one where a number of different individuals were involved, so it's not necessarily an either/or proposition."

Specifically, intelligence analysts are going down the roster of known militants who operate in and around Benghazi and elsewhere in eastern Libya, and like an Islamic extremist scorecard, seeking to determine what involvement, if any, each might have.

Complicating the investigation, these officials say, is the fact that many of these individuals align themselves with more than one group and with ad hoc organizations, making accountability to a specific group more difficult than to an individual or a group of militants.

Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told reporters in Washington on Thursday that before the attack - he did not say when - "there was a thread of intelligence reporting that groups in the environment, in eastern Libya, were seeking to coalesce, but there wasn't anything specific, and certainly not a specific threat to the consulate that I am aware of."

General Dempsey said that information was shared throughout the government.

Assigning culpability also complicates the American response. For now, the administration awaits the F.B.I. investigation and updated intelligence reports. President Obama has said the United States will bring to justice those responsible for the attacks. But there is little appetite in the White House to launch drone strikes or a Special Operations raid, like the one that killed Osama bin Laden, in yet another Muslim country.

American officials would prefer that Libyan officials lead any military or paramilitary operation, or work alongside American investigators, to arrest any suspects. But the transitional Libyan government still does not command a meaningful national army or national police force.

At the Pentagon on Thursday, Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta said the government was waiting on the F.B.I. investigation to determine who was responsible for the bloodshed.

"We have made clear that as a result of that, we're going to continue to go after those that would attack our individuals," Mr. Panetta told reporters. "We are not going to let people who deliberately attack and kill our people get away with it."

Mr. Panetta also indicated that the attack on the mission involved some degree of advance planning.

"As we determined the details of what took place there, and how that attack took place," Mr. Panetta said, "it became clear that there were terrorists who had planned that attack."

Another United States official who receives daily intelligence briefings said that the planning was "a matter of a few hours, not days or weeks."

Adding to the uncertainty of the investigation is the American government's relative lack of information on the Islamist groups operating in North Africa, including the Algerian opposition group that renamed itself Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb.

One Western intelligence official expressed doubt that the Islamists in northern Mali were involved in the Benghazi attack. "If they were going to take direct action, it would be in Bamako," the official said, mentioning the Malian capital, which has a number of Western targets.

Islamist extremists are believed to have a more secure foothold than ever in Africa, receiving training and fighting across borders, officials said.

"It's not impossible that somebody who would have been trained in northern Mali would have been involved" in the deaths in Benghazi, said the Western intelligence official, who was not authorized to discuss the matter publicly.

But many Benghazi residents said the city's many heavily armed fighters needed no further training after the uprising against Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi, and they noted that Libyans were deeply hostile to the Malians, in part because of racial animosity and in part because they think Malians provided mercenaries for Colonel Qaddafi.

"It is a Libyan job," Ismail al-Sallabi, a commander with one of the largest so-called authorized militias here, said of the attack on the mission. "It is not Al Qaeda."

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Attack On US Consulate In Libya Determined To Be Terrorism Tied To Al-Qaeda

September 28, 2012

Washington Post

By Greg Miller

U.S. intelligence agencies have determined that the attack on the U.S. mission in Libya involved a small number of militants with ties to al-Qaeda in North Africa but see no indication that the terrorist group directed the assault, U.S. officials said Thursday.

The determination reflects an emerging consensus among analysts at the CIA and other agencies that has contributed to a shift among senior Obama administration officials toward describing the siege of U.S. facilities in Benghazi as a terrorist attack.

U.S. intelligence officials said the composition of the militant forces involved in the assault has become clearer over the past week and that analysts now think that two or three fighters affiliated with al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb were involved.

"There are people who at least have some association with AQIM," said a senior U.S. intelligence official who added that "it's not so direct that you would say AQIM as an organization planned and carried this out."

Instead, U.S. officials said a lesser-known Islamist group, Ansar al-Sharia, played a much larger role in sending fighters and providing weapons for the attack, which killed the U.S. ambassador and three other Americans. U.S. officials have previously cited suspicion of al-Qaeda connections to the attack.

The intelligence picture assembled so far indicates that militants had been preparing an assault on the U.S. compound in Benghazi for weeks but were so disorganized that, after the battle started, they had to send fighters to retrieve heavier weapons.

U.S. intelligence officials said they think the attack was not timed to coincide with the Sept. 11, 2001, anniversary. Instead, the officials said, the assault was set in motion after protesters scaled the walls of the U.S. Embassy in Cairo as part of a protest of an amateur anti-Islamic YouTube video.

"There's never been any intelligence, nor any I'm aware of now, that indicated this was a plot planned months in advance to get turned on on 9/11," said an Obama administration official.

The emerging scenario, the official said, "is that extremists in the region had cased out and hoped to target U.S. facilities in Benghazi for some time. When they saw what was happening in Cairo, that influenced their timing."

The officials spoke on the condition of anonymity to describe the preliminary assessments of analysts involved in an ongoing investigation of the Benghazi attack that involves the FBI, the CIA and other agencies.

The question of whether the attack was a pre-planned act of terrorism has become entangled in the politics of the ongoing presidential campaign. Republicans have accused the administration of being reluctant to attribute the Benghazi assault to terrorism, suggesting it could make Obama vulnerable on a perceived foreign policy strength - the success of the campaign against al-Qaeda - and raise questions about his handling of the rise of Islamist factions in the aftermath of the Arab Spring.

The State Department said Thursday that it was pulling more American staff from the U.S. Embassy in Tripoli out of concern for their safety. A State Department official described the reduction as temporary

and said the embassy was not being closed. The State Department would not say how many people are leaving or how many will stay.

A message on the embassy Web site Thursday told U.S. citizens in Libya to avoid areas of the city where protests are planned and warned that "even demonstrations that are meant to be peaceful can turn violent and unpredictable. You should avoid them if at all possible."

After Obama administration officials initially characterized the assault as a protest that turned violent, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton on Wednesday became the highest-ranking official to call the attack an act of terrorism. In remarks at the United Nations, Clinton said that terrorists were "working with other violent extremists to undermine the democratic transitions underway in North Africa, as we tragically saw in Benghazi."

Clinton and others had avoided that term until the director of the National Counterterrorism Center, Matthew Olsen, testified before Congress last week that the ambassador and others "died as a result of a terrorist attack."

At the time, Olsen said that analysts were examining "indications that individuals involved in the attack may have had connections to al-Qaeda or al-Qaeda's affiliates."

U.S. analysts have combed through intercepted communications, pictures and video from the scene and information from sources, including suspects taken into custody by the Libyan government.

Describing the militants involved, one U.S. official said: "Those individuals - whoever they may be - who took part in the attack all swim in the same, relatively small, extremist pond. So there could be a number of individual or ad hoc ties with AQIM or other extremist groups. These connections alone do not mean AQIM was behind or planned the attack. This is why there's an ongoing investigation, to identify the attackers and determine motives and relationships to extremist groups."

Two other U.S. officials said that intelligence indicates that the AQIM figures may have included one or more from outside Libya but declined to provide more details. AQIM, which grew out of a long-standing insurgency in Algeria, has mainly been a regional menace, but it is a source of growing concern to U.S. counterterrorism officials largely because it has acquired territory and weapons in northern Mali.

Beyond the suspicions of al-Qaeda involvement, the key questions surrounding Benghazi so far have centered on the extent to which the assault was premeditated. The staging of the attack, which targeted two separate U.S. compounds, is seen by analysts as evidence of significant pre-planning. But officials said the fighters needed to rearm and that mortars didn't appear until seven hours into the fight, indicating impromptu adjustments.

"They had to rally people to get their most lethal weapons," the administration official said.
(top)

AFRICA

Kenya Attacks Last Stronghold Of Somali Militants

September 28, 2012

Associated Press

By Abdi Guled And Tom Odula

MOGADISHU, Somalia - Kenyan troops invaded al-Shabab's last stronghold in Somalia, coming ashore in a predawn assault Friday. Other African Union forces were traveling overland to link up with the Kenyan forces in the port city of Kismayo.

Col. Cyrus Oguna, the Kenyan military's top spokesman, said the surprise attack met minimal resistance but al-Shabab denied that the city had fallen and said fighting was taking place. Oguna said that al-Shabab has incurred "heavy losses" but that Kenyan forces have not yet had any injuries or deaths.

Residents in Kismayo contacted by The Associated Press said that Kenyan troops had taken control of the port but not the whole city.

"Al-Shabab fighters are on the streets and heading toward the front line in speeding cars. Their radio is still on the air and reporting the war," resident Mohamed Haji told The Associated Press. Haji said that helicopters were hitting targets in the town in southeastern Somalia.

A U.S. military spokesman, Lt. Cdr. Dave Hecht, said the U.S. Africa Command, known as AFRICOM, is closely monitoring the situation but that "we are not participating in Kenya's military activities in the region."

"The operation began five days ago with surgical attacks and gun placement at the jetty and warehouse," Oguna said, adding that Somali national army troops participated in the assault.

An al-Shabab spokesman said on Twitter that the al-Qaida-linked militants still control Kismayo.

"The enemy forces have launched a desperate attack on Kismayo this morning and the mujahedeen forces are resisting their attacks," Sheikh Abdiaziz Abu-Musab said over the militants' radio station in Kismayo.

Oguna said the assault is part of a four-prong attack involving Kenyan forces currently in villages outside Kismayo. The amphibious assault landed between 10:30 p.m. Thursday and 2 a.m. Friday, he said. Some of the troops had night-vision goggles, he said.

African Union troops pushed al-Shabab out of Mogadishu in August 2011, ending four years of control of the capital by the fighters. The Ugandan and Burundian troops that make up the bulk of the African Union force in Mogadishu have slowly been taking control of towns outside of Mogadishu.

The expanding control by AU troops sent al-Shabab fighters fleeing south toward Kismayo, north to other regions of Somalia and across the Gulf of Aden to Yemen, according to American and African Union officials.

Al-Shabab still holds sway across many small, poor villages of southern Somalia. The loss of Kismayo would be significant. The militants taxed goods coming into its port. Al-Shabab lost its major source of financing last year when it was pushed out of Bakara market in Mogadishu, where it also charged taxes.

The march toward Kismayo by the Kenyan forces has been nearly a year in the making. Kenyan troops entered Somalia last October after a string of kidnappings inside neighboring Kenya, including of Westerners in and around the beach resort town of Lamu, which is also seeing the construction of a new port and could one day be final point of a new oil pipeline from South Sudan.

Kenyan forces were bogged down by rain and poor roads for months but have making slow and steady progress toward Kismayo in recent weeks.

More than 10,000 residents fled Kismayo in the last several weeks. Resident Faduma Abdulle said Friday that she is now leaving too. She said al-Shabab announced false propaganda on its radio station Friday to trick residents into moving toward the invading troops.

"They told residents through their radio to loot a Kenyan ship that washed up on the coast, but instead the residents who rushed there were attacked by helicopters," she said. "Some of them have died but I don't know how many. The situation is tense and many are fleeing. It's a dangerous situation."

The commander of the U.N-backed African Union troops, Lt. Gen. Andrew Gutti, said that more of the soldiers were headed to Kismayo to reinforce those that stormed ashore. He said the aim is to "liberate the people of Kismayo to enable them to lead their lives in peace, stability and security. Operations are ongoing to neutralize targets in Kismayo."

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Sudan And South Sudan Sign Accord, But Several Issues Are Unresolved

September 28, 2012

New York Times

By Jeffrey Gettleman

KAMPALA, Uganda - The presidents of Sudan and South Sudan signed a long-awaited cooperation agreement on Thursday, paving the way for the resumption of oil exports and casting their ailing economies a desperately needed lifeline. But several analysts said the deal came up far short.

The status of Abyei, a contested border area, was not settled. Nor was that of several other disputed territories, differences that have driven the countries' two leaders, historic enemies, nearly to all-out war.

"The seeds of further conflict are firmly planted in this partial deal," John Prendergast, a founder of the Enough Project, an antigencide organization that watches the two Sudans closely, said by e-mail.

Last year, amid great jubilation, South Sudan split off from Sudan after decades of guerrilla struggle. But the divorce was messy. Forces from the two countries have battled intensely over the past year amid confusion over disputed areas and contested oil fields.

South Sudan has billions of barrels of oil, but the pipeline to export it runs through the north. The south shut down production last winter, which deeply wounded the economies on both sides of the border, leading to skyrocketing inflation, protests and rising discontent.

Since then, negotiations have gone around and around, with increasing pressure by the United States, the African Union and the United Nations to come to an agreement. Since Sunday, Omar Hassan al-Bashir, the president of Sudan, and Salva Kiir, South Sudan's leader, had been holed up together in negotiating rooms in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, trying to hammer out a compromise. For years, the two men fought each other on the battlefield, and it seems that the history of bitterness has been extremely difficult to overcome.

On Thursday, Mr. Bashir and Mr. Kiir emerged to announce that they would demilitarize the border - a step that had been agreed to in principle last year but was almost instantly violated when Sudan began a brutal counterinsurgency campaign in the Nuba Mountains, near the border. The two sides also committed to resuming cross-border trade and allowing citizens from each side to move freely.

And they agreed to resume oil production - again, an issue that had been previously covered, with a deal reached in August, but had not yet taken effect because of mutual mistrust. "This basically kicks the can down the road," said EJ Hogendoorn, the Horn of Africa director for the International Crisis Group, a conflict-prevention organization.

"Oil production will give both governments some breathing room, since their economies were collapsing, but unless there is a resolution to Abyei" and other conflict-ridden parts of Sudan, he said in an e-mail, "enormous frictions remain."

One person close to the talks tried to put a positive gloss on them, saying the negotiating session was a "crunch summit" and the border deal was "serious progress."

But most analysts disagree.

"Of course, there will be a tremendous amount of overselling whatever agreement is signed," Eric Reeves, a professor at Smith College in Northampton, Mass., and a prolific blogger on the Sudans, wrote in an e-mail. "This is a survivalist regime in Khartoum," the capital of Sudan, "and the agreement signed is precisely what one would expect from survivalists. This fundamental feature won't change."
(top)

ASIA

Myanmar Awaits Sanction-Lift Effect

September 28, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By SAM HOLMES and CELINE FERNANDEZ

The U.S. decision to lift a ban on exports from Myanmar could give the country its best shot at becoming the world's next low-cost manufacturing hub as well as firm up the fragile political reforms now taking place. But business leaders say it will be a long time before T-shirts and hoodies made in the Southeast Asian country are ubiquitous in shopping malls and years before meaningful benefits reach its archaic industrial infrastructure and low-income households.

With Wednesday's action, Washington has lifted nearly all of the economic sanctions imposed against Myanmar in recognition of its reforms over the past 18 months. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said the most recent move is the next step in normalizing commercial relations between the two countries. Bans on investment and financial services were lifted earlier.

"By lifting the sanctions we can now see real changes in Burma," said Nyan Win, spokesman for the National League for Democracy, using the country's other name. "It will bring a lot of benefits to the country and we will support the government using the benefits for the people of Burma," The NLD is led by Nobel Peace laureate Aung San Suu Kyi.

Resource-rich Myanmar, a country of 60 million people, is coming to be seen by many international investors as having potential both as a source of raw materials and a large consumer market following a

series of wide-ranging reforms implemented in the past year after long isolation under military dictatorship.

However, economic stagnation following the imposition of a number of trade and investment sanctions by the U.S. and other countries since the late 1990s means the country lacks even some of the most basic economic infrastructure required to compete with other frontier, low-cost manufacturing nations such as Cambodia and Bangladesh.

Maung Maung Lay, vice president of the Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry, doesn't expect to see any tangible export volumes to the U.S. until the beginning or the middle of next year. Even then, he expects shipments to be just a trickle. Myanmar is essentially starting back where it was more than a decade ago while its competitors—from Cambodia to parts of China—have surged ahead.

"We have lost many markets," Mr. Maung Manug Lay said. "We have to compete in the new world order, so there are more challenges than opportunities."

The biggest expected beneficiary should be the country's textiles and garments industry, which had exports totaling \$558 million in 2011, according to Myanmar's Garment Manufacturers Association, representing 200 factories in Myanmar. Other industries that could gain include the timber sector.

Aung Win, vice chairman of the garment association, said it could take up to a year for garment makers to rebuild capacity, with local manufacturers needing to import equipment and machinery and source the necessary financing for such operations.

"Now, we only have mostly Japanese orders and Korean orders—they are not enough to go around for the industry in Myanmar," Mr. Aung Win said. "Most factories are struggling—we hope this obstacle will go away when American orders come in."

In Washington, senior State Department officials told reporters in a briefing that the process of easing sanctions would require congressional consultations and waivers from the administration on different products or sectors. The intent is to help Myanmar's economy grow beyond extracting minerals and timber and to be able to create manufacturing jobs, the officials said.

In one of the first reactions from the U.S. garment industry, the American Apparel & Footwear Association, which represents U.S. clothes makers, said it welcomed the easing of restrictions in light of the country's reforms. It said it would work with local stakeholders to ensure clothes were made under appropriate working conditions and workers "are treated with fairness and respect."

Myanmar President Thein Sein, speaking during a panel discussion at the Asia Society in New York on Thursday, said: "We have got developed countries to relax their restrictions on our economy. We believe there will be an increase of foreign investment and that will allow our citizens to improve their living standards."

The prospect of an effective low-cost manufacturing hub has caught the attention of some manufacturers and trade groups.

Mr. Aung Win said his garment association meets potential foreign buyers on a daily basis. Fast Retailing Co., 9983.TO +0.17% the Japanese operator of the Uniqlo clothing chain, meanwhile, has flagged Myanmar as a potential manufacturing base alongside Bangladesh as part of its capacity expansion.

Myanmar should have a competitive edge in labor costs. A Japan External Trade Organization report this year showed the average monthly wage of a factory worker in Yangon at 61% of that in Hanoi and 83% of average wages in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

While a handful of multinationals such as Coca-Cola Co., KO +1.46% PepsiCo Inc. PEP +0.31% and General Electric Co. GE +2.85% are making earnest moves into Myanmar's domestic market, caution and a degree of skepticism prevails among many companies about Myanmar.

A spokeswoman for Hennes & Mauritz AB HM-B.SK -1.55% said the Swedish fashion retail giant is watching developments but hasn't made any decision about using goods from Myanmar until the situation becomes clearer. H&M and other foreign manufacturers have been bound by the U.S. rules against exporting goods with Myanmar-originated materials to the U.S.

Adam Sitkoff, the Hanoi-based executive director of the Asia Pacific Council of American Chambers of Commerce, said many U.S. businesses are looking to see how Myanmar can fit into their future supply-chain plans.

"In the near term, however, American consumers probably won't see many 'Made in Myanmar' labels in their favorite stores as the country lacks key infrastructure, legal certainty, and skilled labor," he said.

A protracted debate in the country's legislature about how to allow foreign investment also clouds the investment outlook.

While some probusiness politicians—including Mr. Thein Sein—are calling for faster economic reforms, some lawmakers and local business leaders are concerned that an overly aggressive pace of change would give foreign companies too big a share in the local market at the expense of domestic companies. ([top](#))

China Hits Back At Japan PM's Statement On Islands

September 27, 2012

Associated Press

BEIJING - China on Thursday assailed Japan's prime minister as obstinate and wrong for saying his nation won't compromise in their island dispute, as Japanese lawmakers and business leaders visited Beijing with hopes of mending ties.

Relations between Japan and China are at their lowest in years because of their spat over the island group in the East China Sea known as Senkaku in Japan and Diaoyu in China. Japan says it bought the islands this month to thwart Japanese nationalists' more radical plans to develop them. But China saw the move as wrecking a prior arrangement with Tokyo, and it and many Chinese have responded with outrage.

Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda said in New York on Wednesday that the islands are clearly an "inherent part of our territory, in light of history and international law." He said that issues over the islands should be resolved peacefully and by the rule of law.

In response, Foreign Ministry spokesman Qin Gang said Thursday that "China is strongly disappointed and sternly opposes the Japanese leader's obstinacy regarding his wrong position." His statement repeated China's stance that Japan was ignoring historical facts and international laws.

"The country seriously challenges the postwar international order, but tries to take the rules of international law as a cover. This is self-deceiving," Qin said in a separate statement.

Senior diplomats from the two countries have met this week in New York and Beijing in an attempt to patch things over. But China still scrapped long-planned festivities scheduled this weekend to mark 40 years of diplomatic relations between the countries.

Instead, Jia Qinglin, a senior Communist Party official, met with members of the China-Japan Friendship Association on Thursday. He struck a friendly note by welcoming the Japanese elder statesmen as "old friends of the Chinese people" who had worked hard to promote exchanges and cooperation in economic, political and cultural areas.

But in remarks released by the Foreign Ministry, Jia reiterated China's position on the island dispute, and said Japan's actions had "pushed China-Japan relations to an unprecedented grim phase."

Yohei Kono, a former Japanese foreign minister, referred to the strife when he told his Chinese hosts he had come to Beijing "this time with a heavy heart."

The islands, held by Japan, are tiny and uninhabited but sit astride rich fishing waters and potentially large reserves of natural gas. They are also claimed by Taiwan.

Japan's purchase of some of the islands from their private Japanese owners two weeks ago sparked sometimes-violent protests in China that targeted Japanese-owned stores and factories.

Noda defended the purchase as an attempt to ensure their "stable management," but conceded, "It seems that China has yet to understand that."

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Clinton Presses China On Maritime Spats

September 28, 2012

[Associated Press](#)

By Matthew Lee

NEW YORK - Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton urged China's top diplomat on Thursday to peacefully resolve increasingly tense maritime disputes with Japan and its smaller neighbors in Southeast Asia.

A senior U.S. official said Clinton had pressed Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi on the importance of settling its conflicting claim with Japan over the Japanese-held Senkaku islands, called Diaoyu by China, along with numerous competing claims in the South China Sea with members of the Association of South East Asian Nations.

"We urged that cooler heads prevail, that Japan and China engage in dialogue to calm the waters," the official said. "We believe that Japan and China have the resources, have the restraint, have the ability to work on this together and take tensions down."

The official was not authorized to publicly discuss the private discussion between Clinton and Yang on the sidelines of the annual U.N. General Assembly and therefore requested anonymity. Clinton was expected to make the same case to Japanese Foreign Minister Koichiro Gemba when she meets with him in New York.

However, Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda said Wednesday that his nation was not willing to compromise in its territorial dispute with China over the Senkakus that have spawned violent anti-Japan protests in China.

"So far as the Senkaku islands are concerned, they are the inherent part of our territory, in light of history and international law. It's very clear," Noda told reporters in New York. "There are no territorial issues as such, therefore there could not be any compromise that may mean any setback from this basic position."

Senior Chinese and Japanese diplomats met both in New York and Beijing on Tuesday, seeking to mend ties frayed by the spat over the islands that has raised tensions between them to their highest level in years. The islands are uninhabited but sit astride rich fishing waters and potentially large reserves of natural gas.

In her meeting with Yang, Clinton also called on China to work cooperatively with ASEAN over the territorial disputes in the South China Sea, according to the U.S. official. Clinton has been pressing China and ASEAN to develop and implement a code of conduct for the South China Sea that could pave the way for a mechanism to resolve the disputes.

Clinton, who later met Thursday with ASEAN foreign ministers, said she was pleased that ASEAN and Chinese officials had resumed high-level meetings on the matter ahead of November's East Asia Summit in Cambodia at which the issue is expected to be a primary focus. The U.S. would like to see progress on the code of conduct by the time the summit takes place.

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Chinese Government Scientist Raises Doubt On Evidence In A Murder Case

September 28, 2012

New York Times

By Edward Wong

BEIJING - A senior Chinese forensic scientist who works for the government has said that the evidence presented in a prominent criminal trial last month did not prove that Neil Heywood, a British businessman, was killed last year by cyanide poisoning.

The scientist, Wang Xuemei, an employee with the Supreme People's Procuratorate, said in a blog post late on Wednesday that the testimonies by Gu Kailai, the woman convicted last month of killing Mr. Heywood, and her longtime aide did not indicate there were any symptoms of death by cyanide. The official account of Ms. Gu's trial said she and the aide killed Mr. Heywood, a family friend and business associate, by feeding him cyanide after getting him drunk in a hotel room last November in the southwest metropolis of Chongqing.

Ms. Gu's husband, Bo Xilai, was removed from his post as party chief of Chongqing in April and suspended from the Politburo the next month, after a former police chief of the city told American diplomats last winter of Mr. Heywood's death. The former police chief was convicted this week on four charges connected to the case. Mr. Bo's fall from power is one of the biggest political scandals in China in decades.

In her post, Ms. Wang, the forensic scientist, wrote that based on what she had seen of the testimonies from Ms. Gu and Zhang Xiaojun, the family aide, there were no signs of cyanide poisoning. "This fact can't help but make one doubt," she wrote.

Ms. Wang is a dissenter with an official position, a rarity in this drama. Attention focused on her blog post because she is an employee of the government who has been lauded in the Chinese state media and on the Internet. Ms. Wang's writing adds to doubts that have been raised about the trials of Ms. Gu and Wang Lijun, the former police chief. Some Chinese Internet users have even said they believe the stout woman who appeared at Ms. Gu's trial was not actually Ms. Gu, who has appeared slim in old photographs, but was a stand-in, though there has been no evidence to support this theory.

Wang Fengying, the younger sister of the former police chief, said in a telephone interview this week that the justice system had been unfair and that Mr. Wang should not have to serve the 15-year prison sentence that a court imposed. Mr. Wang's trial ended last week.

Ms. Wang, the forensic scientist and not a relative of Mr. Wang, appeared to be making her judgment on the poisoning based solely on a review of the official account of Ms. Gu's trial, which was published by Xinhua, the state news agency. In the blog post, Ms. Wang gave only her opinion of the court case and did not reveal anything about her political ties or leanings.

Ms. Wang did not take part in the trial or in an examination of the evidence, and did not indicate in the blog post that she had any special access to case files. The Xinhua accounts of the trials of Ms. Gu and Mr. Wang are plagued with inconsistencies and holes in the narratives, and testimonies or scientific evidence presented in court may not have been accurately documented by Xinhua. Moreover, since the trials were linked to politics and the verdicts were likely predetermined, officials may not have felt the need to thoroughly present evidence in court, even if the evidence had been gathered.

When Mr. Heywood's corpse was found last November, the police in Chongqing said he had died of excessive drinking, even though Mr. Heywood was not known to be a heavy drinker. The body was cremated days after its discovery without a full autopsy. Mr. Wang and four other police officers were later convicted of harboring Ms. Gu. Mr. Wang was known to be a friend of Ms. Gu's and her powerful husband.

But during the trials of Ms. Gu and Mr. Wang, officials said police officers working under Mr. Wang collected blood samples from Mr. Heywood's heart. A lawyer for Mr. Wang had also said in a telephone interview that Mr. Wang had turned over blood samples to Chinese investigators after his meeting with American diplomats.

During Ms. Gu's trial, her lawyers said that Mr. Heywood might not have died from the poison she fed him, and that there were indications someone might have come into the room afterward and perhaps killed him.

People have raised doubts about other parts of the official narratives. During Ms. Gu's trial, officials said Mr. Heywood met the Bo family less than a decade ago, and that he approached the son of Mr. Bo and Ms. Gu in England to try to get an introduction to the family. But friends of Mr. Heywood have said that Mr. Heywood became close to the Bo family in the Chinese city of Dalian in the 1990s.

According to people present in the courtroom, officials said Ms. Gu decided to murder Mr. Heywood because he was threatening her son and demanding that the son pay 14 million pounds, or about \$22 million, which Mr. Heywood felt was owed him in the aftermath of a failed business deal.

The fate of Mr. Bo is still unclear. The state news media announced in the spring that he was being investigated for "serious disciplinary violations." Leaders of the Communist Party have been negotiating over how to punish him. That has been complicated by the buildup to a once-a-decade leadership transition expected to take place this fall.

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China's Ai Weiwei: I Won't Pay Rest Of \$2.4M Fine

September 28, 2012

[Associated Press](#)

By Alexa Olesen

BEIJING - Activist artist Ai Weiwei said he does not intend to pay \$1.1 million demanded by Beijing tax officials after he lost a final appeal in the case on Thursday, a defiant stance that threatens further confrontation with authorities.

Beijing's No. 2 Intermediate Court rejected a second and final appeal of the \$2.4 million fine levied against Ai's design company for alleged tax evasion. The company earlier submitted a financial guarantee of \$1.3 million to officials in order to get a review of his case. That money will be automatically collected, Ai said, but he won't pay the difference.

"Our intention is that we are not going to pay," Ai said. He said he wasn't sure what will happen as a result and still had to discuss the plan with his lawyers.

The internationally known artist, who has long used his fame to highlight injustice, and his supporters have interpreted the penalty as official retaliation against his activism. The fine was levied last year, soon after he was released from detention in an overall crackdown on dissent.

Ai and his company, Fake Cultural Development Ltd., accused the tax bureau of violating laws in handling witnesses, gathering evidence and company accounts. The court rejected those claims, and the ruling cannot be appealed again.

Ai said he was disappointed but not surprised.

"What surprises me is that this society, which is developing at such a rapid rate today, still has the most barbaric and backward legal system," he said. "I think it's a bad omen."

Ai said that authorities have repeatedly denied him his legal rights and failed to follow basic procedures. He said the Beijing court should have given him written notice of its judgment three days in advance, but

instead notified him by phone Wednesday, the day before the ruling. The short notice meant his lawyers weren't able to attend because they were traveling, he said.

Ai said authorities also have yet to return his passport, effectively barring him from leaving the country. The passport was taken after Ai was detained without explanation for three months last year. Authorities had said they would give his passport back after a probationary period that ended in June.

Not having the passport has kept him from going to exhibitions of his work and other engagements in Washington, New York and Berlin, he said.

The Beijing Public Security Bureau did not immediately respond to a faxed request for comment about Ai's passport.

A sculptor, photographer and installation artist, Ai has used his art and online profile to draw attention to injustices in Chinese society and the need for greater transparency and rule of law. ([top](#))

Osaka Mayor's Radical Message Has Broad Appeal In A Weary Japan

28, 2012

New York Times

By Martin Fackler

OSAKA, Japan - It took more than six decades, including nearly 20 years of economic stagnation, to persuade Japan's change-averse voters to kick out the governing party long enough to move to a true two-party democracy in 2009. Now, just three years later, many voters have embraced a largely unknown new party led by a brash young leader who promises a drastic overhaul of the government.

That party, the Japan Restoration Association, was formally inaugurated this month by its sharp-tongued leader, the mayor of Osaka, Toru Hashimoto. The boyish-faced 43-year-old former television commentator came out of nowhere four years ago to electrify this gritty business city with his very un-Japanese, in-your-face style - and his ability to do what few national leaders have seemed able to: push through painful changes. Mr. Hashimoto battled labor unions to slash deficit-ridden budgets and impose performance requirements on schoolteachers.

Now, he is taking his antiestablishment insurgency to the national stage, naming about 350 candidates, most of them political neophytes trained at Mr. Hashimoto's own political "cram school," to run in parliamentary elections expected as soon as November. His charisma has made the group a feared force in Japanese politics, seemingly overnight.

Polls show that the party, formally begun as a national movement just two weeks ago, has become the No. 2 party, polling behind the largest opposition party, but ahead of the governing party. And it is a close enough race that some analysts give Mr. Hashimoto's group a chance of pulling ahead.

Beyond Mr. Hashimoto's personal appeal, his rise reflects the desire for bolder change in a nation anxious over its chronic economic drift and fed up with a lack of leadership by the two main political parties, according to political analysts and lawmakers. His ascent is also the most potent evidence yet that last year's nuclear disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi plant is leading to some fundamental rethinking of the country's priorities, at least among ordinary Japanese who no longer trust the closely knit political elite.

This new distrust reached a climax with Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda's unpopular decision over the summer to restart a nuclear plant, a move opposed by many Japanese as an effort to go back to the pre-Fukushima status quo. Mr. Hashimoto was a leading voice early on for overhauling the nation's insider-driven nuclear watchdog agencies.

"Mr. Hashimoto has appeared at a time when discontent at Japan's collusive politics is building" toward an eruption, said Katsuhito Yokokume, a lawmaker from Tokyo who quit the governing Democratic Party last year and wants to join Mr. Hashimoto. "The people feel betrayed by established political parties."

The changes Mr. Hashimoto proposes would be nothing short of radical: to dismantle Japan's heavily centralized government, once seen as its strength but now viewed as thwarting reform. His party aims to replace what exists with an American-style federalism in which newly created states would hold greater control over their regions. The party also wants voters to directly choose the prime minister, who is now selected by Parliament.

Analysts say that for his party to win in parliamentary elections, Mr. Hashimoto will have to overcome deep misgivings that many Japanese feel with his take-no-prisoners style, and provocatively right-wing remarks. But perhaps as important, he might have to join the race himself. So far, he has said he would not run for a parliamentary seat, precluding his ability to become prime minister. He explained that he had not yet made good on all his campaign promises in Osaka, though many analysts still expect him to change his mind.

They say, however, that the party has recently lost some momentum because of his stance.

For the moment, the opposition Liberal Democrats have a slight lead because they are much better known than Mr. Hashimoto's group and maintain a strong organization in rural areas, but many voters remain unenthusiastic about the party, which governed Japan for more than a half century and is widely blamed for leaving the country vulnerable to disaster by coddling the nuclear industry. The governing Democrats under Mr. Noda are widely criticized as having failed to fulfill their sweeping 2009 campaign promises to revitalize Japanese democracy by taking some power from the bureaucracy and making the government more transparent.

Mr. Hashimoto's followers say he has patterned himself somewhat on the last prime minister to make a popular push for fundamental change, the telegenic Junichiro Koizumi, who led the country in the early 2000s by championing economic liberalization.

Mr. Hashimoto goes a step further than Mr. Koizumi's populist style. He offers a buck-stops-here ability to make quick decisions that is rare in consensus-driven Japan, where even plans that seem pressing - like expanding capacity at the capital's main airport - can take decades. He is also unafraid to challenge others in a nonconfrontational political culture: he recently forced a half-dozen lawmakers from established parties who wanted to join his movement to try out publicly, debating before a panel of judges for the right to defect.

Part of Mr. Hashimoto's appeal lies in his outsider status. A lawyer whose father was a gangster, Mr. Hashimoto came from a neighborhood in Osaka populated by descendants of Japan's medieval class of "buraku" untouchables, who still face discrimination. (Mr. Hashimoto says he does not know if he is from that background.)

He is also one of the first national political figures from the "lost generation" that came of age after the early 1990s financial collapse, and who appeals to young urban voters with his calls for breaking up a system that blocks youthful challengers, in politics and in business.

"Japan needs a leader who can say no to interest groups, and make decisions for the whole nation," Mr. Hashimoto said during a recent news conference.

Mr. Hashimoto turned down an interview request, as he does with most such requests. He apparently prefers to take his message directly to voters on Twitter, where he is the most followed politician in Japan.

His combative style was on display during the news conference. When a reporter for a major daily newspaper asked a question, Mr. Hashimoto berated the paper for using the word "dictator" in a recent front-page story about him.

"Do you think I am a dictator?" he demanded of the sheepishly grinning reporter. "Here in Osaka, I have done what I said I would do. Ask the voters what they think about that."

Nor did Mr. Hashimoto refrain from a bit of boasting, rare in a nation that values humility. He told reporters that he had overridden dithering city officials in deciding to host a motorcycle race on the grounds of Osaka's ancient castle.

Such decisiveness has made him popular in this metropolitan area of nearly nine million residents, which has been hit hard by the closing of factories. In 2008, after winning election as governor of the region that includes Osaka, he surprised many by fulfilling campaign pledges to balance the budget with drastic but ultimately popular spending cuts on items from welfare to children's libraries. Last year, he once again stunned the establishment by beating an incumbent backed by all the major parties to become mayor.

"He has seized the public imagination by offering a drama of himself fighting vested interests and cutting waste," said Yosuke Sunahara, a professor at Osaka City University.

His standing rose further after the nuclear disaster when he demanded that the government create more independent oversight of the industry before turning plants back on.

Mr. Sunahara and others said the impulsive Mr. Hashimoto could still implode. One of his most controversial moves was to support a high school principal who had punished a teacher for not singing the national anthem, leading to accusations of "Hash-ism," a play on the word "fascism."

He has also made remarks that have helped paint him as a right-wing firebrand, even though he has not embraced such conservative causes as rewriting the pacifist Constitution to allow Japan a full-fledged military, with his party instead calling for a referendum on whether to do so. Last month, he challenged South Korea to produce evidence that the Imperial Japanese military had forced Korean women into sexual slavery during World War II, diverging from the Japanese government's official view that the army played a role.

Many Osaka voters say they generally do not mind the verbal fireworks, so long as he gets things done.

"He is a politician who can make quick decisions," said Ryoichi Hama, 62, a bus driver. "Osaka needs a decisive leader, but the whole nation needs one even more."

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NEA

Egypt: Christians Flee Town After Militant Threats

September 28, 2012

Associated Press

By Maggie Michael

CAIRO - Coptic Christian families have fled their homes in a town in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula, fearing for their lives after receiving death threats from suspected Islamic militants, a local priest said Thursday.

Father Youssef Sobhi said that Islamic militants dropped leaflets on the doorsteps of shops owned by Copts in the city of Rafah near the border with Gaza and Israel, ordering them to leave town within 48 hours and making an implicit warning of violence if they failed to do so. Two days later, masked militants on a motorcycle opened fire on one of the shops before speeding off, Sobhi said. No one was hurt in the shooting.

When Christians met Tuesday with the province's top government official, who was recently appointed by Egypt's new Islamist president, Mohammed Morsi, the governor promised to facilitate the Copts' move to the nearby city of el-Arish but did not offer to protect the community to ensure that it stayed in Rafah, according to the priest.

"I was shocked at the governor's response," Sobhi said. "This is simply displacement by the government's consent."

An Egyptian intelligence official confirmed that a number of Coptic families had fled Rafah because of a militant threat. Another security official denied the reports and said that no Christians were forced to leave. Both officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they are not authorized to brief the media.

It was not exactly clear how many Christians have left the town, but Sobhi said that the number of Copts in Rafah had dwindled from 14 families to two since the uprising that pushed longtime autocrat Hosni Mubarak from power in February 2011.

A first wave left Rafah after the only church in the town, The Holy Family Church, was looted, torched and destroyed in several militant attacks over the past year. The church is built on the site where Christians believe the Holy Family first stopped to rest after crossing into Egypt.

Sobhi was in the first group of Christians to flee, although he returns frequently to Rafah check on his parish.

Mamdouh Nasef, the Coptic shop owner who recently came under attack, said that his Muslim neighbors are urging him to stay and pledging to protect him.

"They can't guard me 24 hours a day, and I fear for my children," Nasef said by telephone. "My children were born here and Muslims here are like my brothers."

Nasef is still in Rafah, but plans to return to his hometown in southern Egypt.

There have been incidents of sectarian violence in Egypt in the past. In July, in the village of Dahshour south of Cairo a Muslim mob torched Christian homes and shops and damaged the local church, forcing many Coptic families to flee the village. The violence was sparked when a personal dispute swelled into violence and a Muslim man died.

In Sinai, the threats against the Christians, who are estimated at around 10 percent of Egypt's population of 85 million, are a symptom of the broader lawlessness that has hit the peninsula since the popular uprising ousted Mubarak. Since then, security has deteriorated across Egypt, particularly in Sinai where heavily armed Islamic groups have exploited the security vacuum to wage attacks on police stations and call for the establishment of an Islamic state.

Militants from Rafah, along with those from the neighboring Gaza Strip who cross into Sinai through an elaborate network of underground tunnels, have also waged cross border attacks into Israel. In one of their most recent strikes, masked militants killed 16 Egyptian soldiers near the border in early August.

Under Mubarak, Christians complained of discrimination from the government, which did little to prevent attacks on the community by hardline Muslims. Many Christians fled to the United States and other Western countries, and tensions have risen since Mubarak's police state has given way to a state of lawlessness.

With the election of the country's first Islamist president, Mohammed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood, many Christians have grown increasingly concerned about their place in Egypt.

Those worries only deepened after Egyptian Coptic Christians in the United States posted a 14-minute clip entitled "Innocence of Muslims," which denigrates Islam and the Prophet Muhammad, portraying him as a womanizer, a fraud and a child molester. The film has sparked angry protests across the Muslim world as well as attacks on U.S. embassies, including one in Libya that killed the U.S. ambassador and three other Americans. The wave of protests began in Cairo, where demonstrators breached the walls of the U.S. Embassy.

Also Thursday, an Egyptian court has upheld a six-year jail sentence for a Coptic Christian school teacher convicted of insulting Islam and the country's Islamist president in postings on Facebook.

Egypt's MENA state news agency says a court in the southern province of Sohag agreed with a lower court ruling that found Michelle Bishoy, also known as Bishoy el-Behiri, guilty of blasphemy after posting pictures that were deemed offensive to Islam's Prophet Muhammad. The court also upheld Bishoy's conviction on charges of insulting Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi.

Thursday's ruling can be appealed.

The case is the second this month in which a Coptic Christian has been detained for posting material considered anti-Islamic on social networking sites.

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World Powers Open To More Nuke Talks With Iran
September 28, 2012

Associated Press

By Bradley Klapper

WASHINGTON - World powers decided Thursday to lay the groundwork for another round of negotiations with Iran over its disputed nuclear program, a senior U.S. official said, but they want a significantly improved offer from the Islamic republic.

Neither the U.S. nor any of its international partners was ready to abandon diplomacy in favor of military or other actions, as Israeli President Benjamin Netanyahu has advocated.

The new hope for negotiated end to Iran's decade-long nuclear standoff came after Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton met with the foreign ministers of Britain, China, France, Germany and Russia - powers that have sought, over several rounds of talks, to persuade Iran to halt its production of material that could be used in nuclear weapons. All such efforts have failed so far.

The latest stab at a diplomatic compromise collapsed this summer after Iran proposed to stop producing higher-enriched uranium in exchange for a suspension in international sanctions, which Clinton has termed a "nonstarter." The U.S. official said Iran would have to bring a much better offer to the table this time, but stressed that nations were seeing some signs for optimism and that diplomacy remained "far and away the preferred way to deal with this issue."

Catherine Ashton, the European Union's top diplomat, who has been spearheading the international diplomacy with Iran, was instructed to reach out to Iran's top nuclear negotiator, Saeed Jalili. Still, no date was set for the possible resumption of the so-called P5+1 talks with Iran, said the U.S. official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because she wasn't authorized to comment publicly about the closed-doors meeting at the United Nations.

After looking for a diplomatic solution there, Clinton met later Thursday with Netanyahu one-on-one for 75 minutes at a New York hotel where she was expected to hear the alternative argument for possible military action. The U.S. official said they agreed that Iran must be prevented from becoming a nuclear power, without going into details.

Their meeting occurred just hours after the Israeli leader warned in an address to the U.N. General Assembly that Iran will have enough enriched uranium for a nuclear weapon by next summer.

Pulling out a red marker while holding a poster depicting a cartoon-like bomb that measured Iran's nuclear progress, Netanyahu drew a "red line" across the second-to-last stage of nuclear development, reminding everyone of his demand for President Barack Obama to declare when the U.S. might attack Iran. Obama has rejected the demand.

It is getting "late, very late" to stop the Iranian nuclear threat, Netanyahu said at the United Nations.

"Red lines don't lead to war; red lines prevent war," he said.

Iran insists its program is solely for peaceful energy and medical research purposes, while the U.S. and many Western and Sunni Arab states see that as a cover for developing nuclear arms. But there is disagreement on how to stop Iran, with Obama insisting there is more time for diplomacy and hard-hitting sanctions while Netanyahu presses for a military response.

That disagreement has spilled over into Obama's bid for re-election, with Republican challenger Mitt Romney accusing the president of being weak on Iran. Romney has promised a more credible threat of military action and closer alignment of U.S. policy with Netanyahu's positions - an argument that resonates with some Jewish and pro-Israel evangelical Christian voters.

Neither presidential candidate, however, advocates clearly for military action.

An attack on Iran's nuclear facilities would surely prompt retaliation. Iran could seek to disrupt fuel supplies from the Persian Gulf, through which about one-fifth of the world's oil flows, or it could support proxies such as Hezbollah to attack Israel or U.S. allies in the Gulf. A worst-case scenario might see the U.S. dragged into another major war in the Muslim world at a time of staggering American debt and continued economic struggles.

Obama and Netanyahu probably will speak by telephone Friday, the White House said, after Clinton's meeting are over. She is doing the bulk of America's diplomatic work at this year's gathering of global leaders in New York, with Obama ruling out any bilateral meetings with presidents or prime ministers so he can spend more time campaigning for re-election.

America's partners also prefer diplomacy.

"We discussed at length the need for Iran to take action urgently," said Ashton, who briefed officials for more than an hour on her recent discussions with the Iranians.

"We were united," said French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius, refusing to comment on Netanyahu's call for red lines.

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Iran Envoy Is Assaulted By Protesters Near The U.N.

September 28, 2012

New York Times

By Robert Mackey And Rick Gladstone

Iranian exiles and the Iranian government can make for a combustible combination, as a spokesman for the Iranian Foreign Ministry discovered after an address by the country's president to the United Nations during this week's General Assembly.

Not long after the speech by President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad on Wednesday, the spokesman, Ramin Mehmanparast, was shoved and shouted at by a small group of protesters as he tried to cross the street near Second Avenue and East 48th Street. Police officers stepped in quickly to protect him, ordering the protesters back.

Video of the incident, obtained by The Associated Press from a documentary filmmaker, showed that the protesters included a man wrapped in an old Iranian flag; another man in a yellow vest worn by supporters of the Mujahedeen Khalq, a powerful Iranian exile group known as the M.E.K. or M.K.O.; and a woman wearing a T-shirt for Ma Hastim, a rights group associated with the Iranian exile community in Los Angeles and whose name is Persian for "We Are."

Iran's state-run satellite news channel, Press TV, placed blame for the assault on supporters of the M.E.K., identifying them as "anti-Iran M.K.O. terrorists."

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton recently decided to remove the M.E.K. from the State Department's list of designated terrorist organizations after an intense lobbying campaign on behalf of the group.

Alireza Miryousefi, the press attaché for Iran's Mission to the United Nations, said the episode resulted from "aggression by M.E.K. sect members" against Mr. Mehmanparast, who, he said, was not hurt.

Mr. Miryousefi warned that removing the "terrorist sect" from the State Department's list of terrorist organizations "would be another wrong step by the U.S. administration."

Another video clip, apparently recorded by the cellphone of a man shouting threats at Mr. Mehmanparast from very close range, showed police officers escorting the spokesman from protesters screaming "terrorist." The episode occurred after Iranian exiles rallied outside the United Nations to protest Mr. Ahmadinejad's speech. Maryam Rajavi, the leader of the M.E.K., which is described as a cult by some former members, addressed the rally from France by satellite. Patrick J. Kennedy, a former congressman from Rhode Island, who said last year that he had been paid \$25,000 to voice his support for the M.E.K. at a rally in Washington, also addressed the protest on Wednesday.

An M.E.K. organizer, Homeira Hesami, an Iranian expatriate who is a medical technician in Texas, said that a group of Iranian officials being escorted by police officers had been walking west on East 47th Street from the United Nations campus toward Second Avenue around 1:30 p.m. on Wednesday when a number of protesters recognized Mr. Mehmanparast.

"I saw him walking by, and of course we started chanting 'Get lost!' in Farsi," said Ms. Hesami, who was across the street. "People were angry at him and surrounded him. The presence of Ahmadinejad at the U.N. made people very emotional."

She said the M.E.K. protesters had been with Syrians protesting the government of President Bashar al-Assad. "We suffer from the same pain," she said. "We were side by side. It wasn't like they had their own thing and we had our own thing."

A man who identified himself as Gregory Nelson boasted to The Daily News that he managed to punch Mr. Mehmanparast in the stomach during the melee.

Mr. Nelson, who identified himself as a former member of the Army National Guard, said that he flew to New York from his home in Fayetteville, Ark., to attend the anti-Ahmadinejad protest. After a rally in favor of the M.E.K. in Washington last year, Zaid Jilani and Ali Gharib of the liberal Web site ThinkProgress interviewed several non-Iranians who attended but seemed to know little about the group's involvement in terrorist attacks. All of them, including three men from Fayetteville, said they had been provided with all-expenses-paid trips to Washington for the event.

Mr. Nelson's Facebook page describes him as a "partner in small documentary production company," and says he has been working on a film about the National Council of Resistance of Iran, the political wing of the M.E.K., "and their struggles to be recognized" for the past 10 years. ([top](#))

Israeli Foreign Ministry Calls For More Sanctions On Iran
September 28, 2012

New York Times

By Isabel Kershner

JERUSALEM - An internal report prepared by Israel's Foreign Ministry calls for an additional round of international sanctions against Iran, an Israeli official confirmed on Thursday, in what appeared to be a rare Israeli acknowledgment that there might still be time to try to stop the Iranian nuclear program by means other than military action.

Details of the report were leaked to Haaretz and were published on Thursday morning as the prime minister of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu, was on his way to New York to address the United Nations General Assembly. An Israeli official who is familiar with the report, but was not authorized to speak about it to it publicly, confirmed the points that appeared in Haaretz.

The Foreign Ministry report states that the international sanctions already imposed on Iran are having a deep effect on the country's economy, according to the official, and may, according to some assessments, also be affecting the stability of the Iranian government. But the sanctions have not yet persuaded the government in Tehran to suspend its nuclear drive. Therefore, the report concludes that "another round of sanctions is needed," the official said.

The question of how to deal with Iran's nuclear drive has become an acute source of tension between Mr. Netanyahu and the Obama administration. Israel views a nuclear Iran as an existential threat. Mr. Netanyahu has argued that sanctions have not worked and that time is running out to stop Iran from achieving a nuclear military capability.

President Obama opposes military action at this point, saying that there is still "time and space" to resolve the issue through diplomacy and pledging that the United States will do what it must to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. Iran insists that its nuclear program is for purely civilian purposes.

Mr. Obama has also rejected Mr. Netanyahu's demands to set clear "red lines" for Iran.

But there appears to be an effort by Israeli officials to smooth relations with Washington and lower the tone of the public argument.

"I think that this whole matter of red lines should be made, but not publicly," Israel's deputy foreign minister, Danny Ayalon, told Israel Radio on Thursday. "And I think that at the moment, the talks between us and the Americans, which are excellent, are precisely about this."

Mr. Ayalon added: "We are constantly coming closer in our positions, and this is because, among other reasons, Iranian activity continues without a break. And the more the Iranians defy the entire world, this coming closer will ultimately reach a point that we are united in our positions."

The timing of the leak to Haaretz raised questions among Israelis. It was unclear whether the Foreign Ministry, led by Avigdor Lieberman, was sending a pointed message of its own to counter the usually belligerent tone of Mr. Netanyahu, or whether the leak was coordinated with the prime minister and intended to send a more conciliatory message from Israel to Washington.

Mr. Netanyahu called for economic sanctions against Iran to be intensified at a meeting with the Italian foreign minister earlier this month.

Citing an Israeli Foreign Ministry official, Haaretz said Iran had suffered a 50 percent decline in its oil exports as a result of sanctions by the European Union and other countries, including the United States, Canada, Australia, Japan and South Korea. As a result, the country's oil revenues have declined by \$40 billion since the beginning the year, it said.

Sanctions on the Iranian central bank have hampered the government's access to its foreign currency reserves and prices of basic necessities have risen sharply, it added. Haaretz said the internal Israeli report was based partly on assessments provided by countries that maintain embassies in Tehran.

But at the same time on Thursday, Israel's defense minister, Ehud Barak, underlined Israel's readiness to act militarily if faced with no alternative, and reiterated the Israeli doctrine of self-reliance when it comes to national security.

Speaking at a memorial ceremony for the soldiers who fell in the 1973 Yom Kippur war, Mr. Barak said the clear message to be learned on this anniversary was "not to be captivated by false hopes, aspirations or wishes."

"In the ultimate test, we can rely only on ourselves," he said.

Mr. Barak added that it was the government's responsibility to do everything possible to "break the circle of hostility" without resorting to war, but that if left with no choice, Israel was ready to fight any battle demanded of it "even at a painful price."

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Israeli Report Says Sanctions Hitting Iran Hard

September 28, 2012

Associated Press

By Daniel Estrin

JERUSALEM - A new Israeli government report published in local media on Thursday concludes that international sanctions are hitting Iran hard and called for another round, adding a new wrinkle to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's claim that tougher action is needed to prevent the Islamic Republic from developing nuclear weapons.

The Foreign Ministry report - which surfaced on the same day Netanyahu made his case before the U.N. General Assembly - adds to the cacophony of voices coming out of Israel over the showdown with Iran.

The prime minister argues that an attack on Iran's nuclear facilities may be the only answer to what he calls a fanatical and intransigent Iranian leadership. President Shimon Peres and others want to give punishing measures more time to persuade the Iranians to enter negotiations.

Four rounds of U.N. sanctions have already been placed on Iran, which insists its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes.

Netanyahu has acknowledged that sanctions against Iran are biting but says they have not deterred Tehran from abandoning its nuclear program. He has instead urged the U.S. to draw "red lines" that would make clear which conditions would provoke an American strike on Iran's nuclear facilities - a demand that Washington has rejected.

Netanyahu reiterated his position on the global stage at the U.N. on Thursday. "For over seven years the international community has tried sanctions with Iran, under the leadership of President Obama, the international community has passed some of the strongest sanctions to date," Netanyahu said. "It's had an effect on the economy, but we must face the truth, sanctions have not stopped Iran's nuclear program either."

The report, according to details published in the Haaretz newspaper, found that Iran's oil exports declined by more than 50 percent in the past year - from 2.4 million barrels a day to 1 million - and oil revenues dropped by \$40 billion since the beginning of the year.

An Israeli foreign ministry official confirmed the report and said it recommended that another round of sanctions should be imposed. The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to discuss internal government documents, refused to elaborate further.

The Foreign Ministry based the findings on data received from countries that have embassies in Iran, according to Haaretz.

The report also claims that sanctions on Iran's central bank have made it difficult for the regime to access its foreign currency reserves, and bread, meat and electricity prices have soared because of the sanctions.

It tracks other findings on the effect of sanctions.

According to the International Energy Agency, Iran's crude oil production fell from nearly 4 million barrels a day in May to 2.9 million barrels a day in July. Imports of Iranian oil by major consumers dropped to 1 million barrels a day in July from 1.74 million barrels a day in June.

Iran relies on crude oil exports for about 80 percent of its foreign revenue.

Speaking on an Iranian TV talk show earlier this month, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad admitted that the West's sanctions have curbed oil exports and limited banking - and the banking embargo has made it difficult to supply meat and other basic needs.

"There are barriers in transferring money, there are barriers in selling oil," said Ahmadinejad. "We are going ahead, and God willing we will succeed."

In Tehran, food prices have risen sharply since the summer, with a 1.5 kilogram (52-ounce) tub of yogurt doubling in price to about 24,000 rials (87 cents) since early September.

On Wednesday, the moderate Shargh newspaper used Central Bank reports to estimate the prices of meat and rice, both staples of Iranian kitchens, have risen 48 percent and 34 percent, respectively, since last year.

Parliament speaker Ali Larijani said inflation has risen to 29 percent, newspapers reported Wednesday.

According to Haaretz, Israel's Foreign Ministry believes that Iranian citizens are blaming their leaders for the sanctions, and believe another round of sanctions could tip the balance and push Iran to negotiate a

compromise on its nuclear program. The anonymous senior Israeli ministry official quoted in Haaretz did not explain how the ministry had reached those conclusions.

A poll published in Haaretz Thursday underlined jitters in Israel over the possibility it may strike Iran's nuclear program to prevent it from advancing. Fifty percent of Israelis polled said they feared the existence of their country was in danger if a war with Iran erupts, and 56 percent said they thought there was a high or medium chance that war could break out next year.

The survey, conducted by pollster Camile Fuchs, questioned 502 Israelis and had a margin of error of 4.2 percent.

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Panetta says undetermined terrorist group carried out attack on US Consulate in Libya

September 27, 2012

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Defense Secretary Leon Panetta said Thursday there can be no doubt that terrorists had planned and carried out the attack on the U.S. Consulate in eastern Libya two weeks ago that killed the U.S. ambassador and three other Americans.

Republicans have accused the Obama administration of playing down the possibility of a terrorism link to the Sept. 11 attack, which it initially said was connected to protests over an anti-Islam, Internet video that enraged Muslims worldwide.

"It was a terrorist attack," Panetta said when asked at a Pentagon news conference whether al-Qaida was involved.

He said it remains to be determined by investigators which terrorist group was involved.

Asked how long after the attack it took him to come to the conclusion that it was perpetrated by terrorists, Panetta said, "It took a while," but he was not more specific.

"I think, on the terrorist attack, I mean, as we determined the details of what took place there and how that attack took place, that it became clear that there were terrorists who had planned that attack, and that's when I came to that conclusion," he said.

Addressing the same topic, Gen. Martin Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said that before the attack there was some intelligence about security threats in Libya, but it was not specific to the U.S. Consulate.

"There was a thread of intelligence reporting that groups in the environment in western — correction - eastern Libya were seeking to coalesce, but there wasn't anything specific and certainly not a specific threat to the consulate that I'm aware of," Dempsey said.

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Benghazi Attack Followed Deep Cuts In State Department Security Budget

September 28, 2012

Washington Times

By Shaun Waterman

Investigators looking for lessons from the fatal terrorist attack on the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi might want to start on Capitol Hill, where Congress slashed spending on diplomatic security and U.S. embassy construction over the past two years.

Since 2010, Congress cut \$296 million from the State Department's spending request for embassy security and construction, with additional cuts in other State Department security accounts, according to an analysis by a former appropriations committee staffer.

Rep. Michael Rogers, chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, made clear Wednesday that congressional staff will be looking into the attack, in addition to a probe by the State Department's inspector general and another State Department investigation required by federal law.

The cuts to the embassy construction, security and maintenance budget was almost 10 percent of the entire appropriation for that account over those two years, said Scott Lilly, now a scholar at the left-leaning Center for American Progress.

"Anytime we cut that account back, we are putting people's lives at risk, people who are serving the country" in dangerous places abroad, said Mr. Lilly.

The cuts mean that "a lot of places you'd intended to secure better, you don't reach" this year, he added.

He said he did not know whether the cuts had impacted security at the Benghazi consulate that was stormed on the 11th anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks by heavily armed Islamic extremists, who burned down the building and killed U.S. Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens and three other Americans.

A State Department official told The Washington Times that there was no impact on security in Benghazi from the cuts.

Since 1999, the official said, the department has spent \$13 billion on 94 new secure diplomatic facilities "and security upgrades to existing properties that have moved more than 27,000 people into safer, more secure facilities."

The cuts were the latest in a series of squeezes on State Department spending. Congress has appropriated less money for the department than requested in every year since Fiscal 2007, according to budget figures.

"During both the latter years of the Bush presidency and throughout the Obama presidency, the administration has recommended boosting spending on foreign aid and [State Department] foreign operations, including security, and Congress has always cut it back," said Philip J. Crowley, a former State Department spokesman.

"There is simply not a constituency on the Hill to increase spending on diplomacy and development. Resources do matter," said Mr. Crowley, now a fellow at the George Washington University Institute for Public Diplomacy and Global Communication.

"Getting the budget request cut is pretty standard for the State Department," added James Dobbins, a former career diplomat who was a special envoy to a series of global troubled spots under former President Bill Clinton and former President George W. Bush.

But he noted that the State Department has gotten "billions and billions over the years" to rebuild, move and fortify missions around the world since two 1983 suicide truck bomb attacks on U.S. facilities in Beirut.

Following those attacks, a special commission was established by the secretary of state to examine security measures at U.S. embassies. The Inman commission report in 1985 recommended standards for diplomatic facilities like narrower windows, blast-proof walls and "setback" - a distance between the public street and the buildings sufficient to protect the occupants from truck bombs.

"The architecture it required was fortress-like," according to former State Department counter-terrorism coordinator Michael B. Kraft.

He said the standards imposed a "security premium" on embassy construction and refurbishment that added about 10-15 percent to the cost.

Dozens of diplomatic facilities have had security upgraded, often moving to the suburbs to acquire the large plots of land necessary to provide embassy compounds with setback, according to Mr. Dobbins.

He is skeptical that budget cuts might have affected the outcome of the deadly events in Benghazi, noting that up to 100 extremists with rocket-propelled grenade launchers, heavy machine guns and mortars had stormed the compound.

"There are some levels of attack for which no reasonable precautions can prepare," he said, adding that "any reasonable security presence" would likely have been overwhelmed by the gunmen.

Former Ambassador Charles Ray, who left the foreign service recently, said that he had "on multiple occasions dealt with [situations] ... where security upgrades were warranted by conditions on the ground but unfunded." He did not comment directly on the Benghazi attack.

The separate investigations by Congress and the State Department inspector-general will proceed along with a legally required probe by a specially convened Accountability Review Board. Last week, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton appointed career diplomat Thomas Pickering to lead the review board investigation.

On Wednesday, Mr. Rogers said he is not concerned by the possibility of three different probes.

"Another set of eyes is a good thing," he said, "It's something we're going to have to get to the bottom of. I think we'll have to do our own investigation, we being Congress."

"Seeing this confusion or lack of concern or at least lack of candor in the details [about the attack] that we had is very, very concerning," he added.

Initially, when approached by lawmakers last week, State Department Inspector General Harold W. Geisel appeared to balk at the idea of a separate inquiry by his office.

"In view of ... our desire not to interfere with investigations by other law enforcement entities or the Department of State, we will offer our support and assistance as needed," he wrote to Sen. Joseph Lieberman, Connecticut Independent, and Sen. Susan Collins, Maine Republican.

Over the weekend, the senators expressed their dissatisfaction with his position.

"We think there ought to be two investigations," Mr. Lieberman told C-SPAN.

He noted that the inspector-general at Department of Homeland Security investigated allegations of sexual misbehavior by Secret Service agents in Columbia, even as the secret service was carrying out its own probe.

"If it was justified in the case of Secret Service agents consorting with prostitutes in Cartagena, it's certainly justified in Benghazi where four Americans were killed," Mr. Lieberman said.

"I hope [the inspector general will] go forward with his own investigation."

Mr. Geisel's office is developing a "scope of work" plan for an inquiry, which would "address the senators' concerns," said spokesman Douglas Welty.

"We are trying to do the most efficient and effective investigation, but ... there might be some duplication [of the Accountability Review Board probe] to ensure independence and oversight," said Mr. Welty.

Mr. Kraft, who retired in 2004 and recently wrote the first unclassified guide to the organizational structure of the U.S. counter-terrorism effort, questioned the need for multiple investigations at this time.

"It takes time for the FBI, the intelligence community and the State Department accountability board to get the facts and determine who did it - especially in a difficult environment like Libya," he said.

"I hope that the multiple investigations focus on different aspects and do not trip over each other or divert the guys on the ground from doing their digging."

Judith Yaphe, a research fellow at the National Defense University and a former CIA counter-terrorism analyst, saying different agencies were often at "cross-purposes" when investigating terror attacks,

"We tend to fall over each other out there," she said.

"History repeats itself," she added. "Those lessons that needed to be learned [from previous attacks] - the mistakes we made, the problems we have - they haven't changed."

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Abbas Seeks Super Observer Status For Palestinians

September 28, 2012

AFP

President Mahmud Abbas sought a new super observer UN status for Palestinians on Thursday as he condemned Israel's "catastrophic" settlements in the occupied territories.

One year after making an emotional bid for full membership of the United Nations, Abbas returned to the UN General Assembly to warn that Israel's tactics were a sign that it "rejects the two-state solution."

Abbas called on the United Nations Security Council to pass a binding resolution setting out a path to end the two-year deadlock in talks between the Middle East rivals.

The Palestinians' bid for full membership of the United Nations has been blocked at the Security Council by the veto-wielding United States. This week, Abbas came back to New York with more modest ambitions.

Abbas said he would now seek to bolster the Palestinians existing observer status. He said he would seek a vote at the UN General Assembly in the coming months to approve Palestine as a "non-member state of the United Nations."

As a permanent UN Security Council member, the United States can veto any resolution backing full membership for the Palestinians.

But no country can veto a resolution in the General Assembly, where an overwhelming majority of the 193 members states would back Abbas.

"We are confident that the vast majority of the countries of the world support our endeavor, aimed at salvaging the chances for a just peace," Abbas said, speaking just ahead of Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Direct negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians have been frozen for two years, with Abbas refusing talks while Israel continues to build new Jewish settlements or expand existing ones.

The United States condemns Israeli settlement building but protects its close ally from UN criticism.

"Developments over the past year have confirmed what we have persistently drawn attention to and warned of: the catastrophic danger of the racist Israeli settlement of our country, Palestine," Abbas said, lashing out at "attacks by terrorist militias of Israeli settlers."

"We are facing relentless waves of attacks against our people, our mosques, churches and monasteries, and our homes and schools," he said.

"They are unleashing their venom against our trees, fields, crops and properties, and our people have become fixed targets for acts of killing and abuse with the complete collusion of the occupying forces and the Israeli government."

Abbas said Israel's tactics could only lead to the conclusion "that the Israeli government rejects the two-state solution."

Abbas called on the Security Council to "urgently adopt a resolution comprising the basis and foundations for a solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict that would serve as a binding reference and guide for all."

The Palestinian leader said this was crucial "if the vision of two states, Israel and Palestine, is to survive and if peace is to prevail in the land of peace."

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Syrian Rebels Announce Big Offensive In Aleppo

September 28, 2012

New York Times

By Hwaida Saad And Nick Cumming-Bruce

BEIRUT, Lebanon - Rebel fighters in the northern Syrian city of Aleppo said Thursday that they had launched a major offensive against government troops in the city, just as the United Nations and humanitarian agencies warned that the number of Syrians fleeing to neighboring countries could surge past 700,000, far exceeding earlier estimates.

Activists in Aleppo, a city ravaged by months of a brutal but inconclusive battle between insurgents and the military, said the offensive was announced around 4 p.m., with calls from the city's mosques. Members of the rebel Tawhid Brigade declared the start of a "decisive" battle in Internet videos, including one that showed fighters from the unit wearing matching white headbands, walking with weapons down a deserted street.

The offensive involved hundreds of rebel fighters attacking government positions on several fronts, members of the brigade said.

Their claims could not be *immediately verified*, but late Thursday night, activists in the city reported heavy clashes and shelling in several neighborhoods.

The reported offensive in Aleppo followed days of brazen rebel attacks on Syrian military positions.

On Wednesday, rebel groups bombed the headquarters for the army and the air force in the capital, Damascus, breaching a heavily fortified security compound with suicide bombers and fighters. On Tuesday, insurgent fighters set off explosives in a Damascus school that they claimed was used as a base for the military and for a feared government militia.

Over the past three days, Syrian activists have reported hundreds of deaths around the country, of both fighters and civilians. On Wednesday, the bodies of at least 40 people, apparently executed, were discovered in the Damascus suburb of Thiyabiya.

More than half a million people have already fled the civil war in Syria and made their way to surrounding countries, the United Nations' refugee agency estimates, but only 294,000 have registered as refugees or are waiting to do so.

Speaking in Geneva on Thursday, Panos Moumtzis, the agency's regional coordinator for Syrian refugees, said that if the present trend continued, the number of registered refugees was likely to more than double, to 710,000 by the end of the year.

"This is not business as usual," Mr. Moumtzis said. He appealed for \$488 million to finance international relief efforts that have been overwhelmed by the speed and scale of the refugee flow.

The flight of Syrian refugees has repeatedly overrun United Nations estimates. Now, with security deteriorating further in Syria, refugees are leaving the country at a rate of 2,000 to 3,000 a day.

On Thursday, the Syrian authorities seemed to hint at new violence, in text messages sent to the country's cellphones. The messages, from the Syrian Army, told rebel fighters to surrender their weapons and warned of a countdown to evict foreign fighters from the country, The Associated Press reported.

"Game over," one of the messages said.
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Rebels Low On Ammo Debriefed At Aleppo HQ

September 28, 2012

AFP

For commanders assembled at the headquarters of Aleppo's main rebel unit, the Liwa al-Tawhid Brigade, the current stalemate in Syria's second city boils down to a lack of ammunition.

Their current depleted supply, used sparingly by snipers, is just enough to defend the positions they hold but not to advance, as regime forces and rebels remain holed up either side of the front line.

Rebel commanders arrive one after the other for an evening debriefing, gathering from bases in the districts of Saif al-Dawla, Izaa, Salaheddin and Amiriya in eastern Aleppo.

Some come in fatigues, some wear only semi-military outfit and others are in civilian clothes.

Among them are a mishmash of fighters, some wearing bandanas with the Islamic profession of faith scrawled on, others sporting tattoos of arrow-pierced hearts.

Everyone has more or less the same take on the current situation: nothing is moving in Aleppo, due to a lack of rebel ammunition.

After a crucial breakthrough at the end of July in the city which was initially spared the violence of the uprising against the Syrian regime, the rebels will now only fight to hold their positions.

"The front line hasn't moved for a month," says Abu Furat, a commander of Liwa al-Tawhid. The defecting former army officer attributes the current standstill to a lack of rebel firepower.

"The countries who claim to defend human rights have to supply us," one man says, as each commander recounts the same story: "I'm out of ammo."

"I haven't received a single bullet from commanders outside the country," says another rebel fighter, referring to the top command of the Free Syrian Army, which has announced its transfer to inside Syria after a year based in Turkey.

The FSA leaders say that with 5,000 assault rifles and 2,500 rocket launchers seized in a raid on the Hanano military base, the rebels should be well-equipped.

"You young people, you know Facebook and the Internet, launch an online appeal, do something," appeals a commander in Aleppo.

He sits among other commanders leaning over two maps. One is stuck onto a wooden board and another is printed off the Internet and laminated in plastic.

They point to the maps indicating which areas they've taken in the latest action. Some streets have been captured by the armed opposition, others still escape their grasp.

"We control around 60 to 70 percent of Aleppo and 100 percent of the region's towns," claims Hajji al-Bab, a top commander.

The Syrian air force maintains control of the skies, however, carrying out regular bombardments. AFP also noted that regime forces held several roads between Aleppo and the Turkish border to the north.

"The other day we attacked the army, killing and wounding dozens of soldiers; but as usual the state media announced a 'successful operation against armed terrorist groups' and the death of 'hundreds of terrorists,'" says one rebel, amid laughter from his comrades.

The regime has attributed the violence in the country to "terrorists" since the outbreak of the revolt in March last year.

After reviewing the latest operations, it was time to plan for the next day.

"We've identified an army colonel who kills civilians. That's your sector, I'll ask you to deal with it. If you want, I can give you a sniper," Abu Furat tells a unit commander.

An army sniper recently defected to the rebels, bringing his helmet and hi-tech sights, which the insurgents say is Iranian-made.

This new recruit is invaluable to the rebels in Aleppo, where most of the battles are now played out between snipers.

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SCA

U.S. Resumes Joint Operations With Afghans

September 28, 2012

Washington Post

By Craig Whitlock

Most U.S. and NATO combat troops have resumed joint operations with Afghan forces, the Pentagon said Thursday, although U.S. officials said they remain worried about the threat of fratricidal "insider attacks."

U.S. commanders had substantially scaled back the joint operations 10 days ago in an urgent effort to reduce the vulnerability of U.S. and NATO troops.

At a news conference, Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta said "most" U.S. and NATO units had "returned to their normal partnered operations" with their Afghan allies. But he offered few details, and other Pentagon officials offered conflicting accounts of how many missions were still being conducted separately.

A spike in the number of insider attacks has undercut the U.S. strategy to end the war by training hundreds of thousands of Afghan soldiers and police to take over responsibility for fighting the Taliban and other insurgents. The Obama administration has pledged to end the current U.S. combat mission by the end of 2014.

Panetta said that the strategy remained sound but that the U.S. military would "take whatever steps are necessary to protect our forces." At least 51 NATO troops - most of them Americans - have been killed this year by insider attacks, accounting for about one in every five combat deaths for the foreign forces.

"I expect that there will be more of these high-profile attacks and that the enemy will do whatever they can to try and break our will using this kind of tactic," Panetta said. "That will not happen."

Military commanders said they have adopted new precautions to prevent and deter such attacks, including better screening of Afghan recruits. But they acknowledged an intensive effort in recent days to reassess the broader war strategy.

Army Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, made an unannounced trip to Afghanistan over the weekend to meet with Marine Gen. John R. Allen, the top U.S. and NATO commander, and other officials.

Dempsey, whose trip wasn't disclosed publicly until he returned Wednesday, said he wanted to "get a sense for whether our campaign objectives were still valid, whether our campaign plan was still on track." He said he came away reassured.

"The Taliban is clearly trying to split us apart, but it won't work," he told reporters. "They're working to weaken the coalition, and that won't work either."

Dempsey said he kept his Afghan visit under wraps because he originally intended to travel to neighboring Pakistan for a "very private" meeting with Gen. Ashfaq Kayani, that country's powerful army chief.

He said he wanted to meet with Kayani to discuss another long-standing and sensitive problem that has hamstrung the U.S. war strategy: the existence of cross-border havens in Pakistan for Afghan insurgents. U.S. leaders have criticized the Pakistani military for tolerating and supporting Taliban groups, and Dempsey said he wanted to speak with Kayani "to get his insights and his intentions in that regard."

But the meeting was postponed, Dempsey said, because of fallout over an anti-Islam video that has sparked protests in Pakistan and other Muslim countries against the United States.

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Ammonium Nitrate Fertilizer Is Being Smuggled Into Afghanistan For IEDs
September 28, 2012

Washington Post

By Greg Jaffe

Seizures in Afghanistan of ammonium nitrate fertilizer, the main explosive used in Taliban bombs, more than doubled in the first seven months of 2012 compared with the same period last year, U.S. officials said.

Despite that increase, senior U.S. officials said, the number of improvised explosive devices, or IEDs, manufactured with the chemical compound is on pace to surpass the record levels of 2011.

"We are sweeping ammonium nitrate fertilizer off the battlefield at historic rates," said a senior U.S. official who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive intelligence. "But the IEDs are going up at historic rates, too, and it is directly related. It is a supply issue."

The homemade bombs, which are most often planted along roads and footpaths, are a leading killer of U.S. and NATO troops in Afghanistan. The ammonium nitrate used as the explosive component is manufactured at two plants across the border in Pakistan, and officials said the manufacturer has resisted efforts to control the flow into Afghanistan.

Figures provided to The Washington Post show that U.S. and Afghan troops have seized about 480 tons of ammonium nitrate fertilizer this year, enough explosive material to manufacture 30,000 to 50,000 IEDs.

During the same period, U.S. and Afghan troops have either triggered or discovered 16,600 of the makeshift bombs, a slight increase over 2011. In June, U.S. and Afghan forces encountered 1,900 IEDs, a record number in a single month for the 11-year war.

"Unless we do something about the ammonium nitrate from Pakistan, we are going to continue to face these numbers and threats," the senior U.S. official said.

Sen. Robert P. Casey Jr. (D-Pa.), a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, has conducted several hearings and investigations into the smuggling of ammonium nitrate from Pakistan into Afghanistan. He has pushed for a tougher stance against Pakistan for failing to curtail the trade and is troubled by the lack of progress.

"One year ago this month, I met in Islamabad with senior officials who committed to comprehensively regulate the component materials of IEDs, including calcium ammonium nitrate," Casey said in an interview. "Since then, there has been minimal progress. The administration will soon need to certify that Pakistan is addressing the IED threat in order to release millions in security assistance and, as of now, I cannot see how Pakistan will reach this threshold."

The large number of IEDs uncovered this spring and summer, the traditional fighting season in Afghanistan, demonstrates that the Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan has remained resilient even as U.S. forces have increased in recent years and the territory controlled by insurgent forces has been reduced.

U.S. troop levels are set to shrink to about 68,000 by the end of September, from a peak of about 100,000 in 2011. But once U.S. forces have left, the massive increase in explosive material flowing in to

Afghanistan could make it difficult for Afghan troops to hold territory seized from the Taliban in recent years.

Unlike their U.S. counterparts, Afghan forces lack sophisticated technology to find and clear buried bombs. As they have taken a more prominent role this year, Afghan troops have seen a 76 percent increase in IED attacks compared with the same period in 2011, U.S. officials said.

Although U.S. casualties from the bomb blasts are down - a sign that U.S. and Afghan troops are getting better at finding them - U.S. fatalities in Afghanistan have held steady in 2012.

Almost all of the ammonium nitrate used in the Taliban's bombs comes from two big fertilizer plants in Pakistan, both owned by the Fatima Group, based in Lahore. The production and sale of ammonium nitrate is legal in Pakistan but banned in Afghanistan because of the IEDs.

Officials from the Fatima Group did not respond to a request for comment.

Most of the fertilizer produced by the Fatima plants is used by small farmers in Pakistan who depend on it for their survival, U.S. officials said.

The 110-pound bags of fertilizer are easy to spot, and they must be hidden in secret compartments to be hauled across the border in trucks. But converting the fertilizer into explosive material that is 1.4 times more powerful than TNT is fairly simple, requiring only water and a heat source.

After processing, the ammonium nitrate is white and powdery, and Taliban fighters on both sides of the border often package it as laundry detergent, making it difficult for Afghan officials to spot as it is being smuggled into and around the country.

Earlier this year, senior U.S. military officials met with Fatima Group executives to try to persuade them to add U.S.-supplied pink or yellow dyes to their fertilizer to make it easier to spot at border crossings. But Fatima Group officials rejected the American entreaties, according to U.S. officials.

"They said, 'We are not going to do it because it would single us out . . . as being the source of the material,'" said the senior U.S. official, who met with Fatima executives and recounted the conversation.

U.S. officials have photographs of tens of thousands of pounds of the Fatima Group's fertilizer that has been smuggled into Afghanistan in trucks and then confiscated by U.S. and Afghan troops. The company's two multimilliondollar plants in Pakistan's Punjab province are the only facilities authorized by the Pakistani government to manufacture the fertilizer.

After allowing U.S. officials to tour one of the plants in 2011, Fatima Group executives cut off contact, saying all future communications with the company must be conducted through Pakistan's Foreign Ministry, according to U.S. officials involved in the talks.

"There is an ISI link in this," said the senior U.S. official, referring to Pakistan's powerful Inter-Services Intelligence agency. "They put the clamps on us."

Although the Fatima Group is a multinational company, U.S. officials have limited tools to put pressure on the business to help control smuggling of ammonium nitrate. The U.S. Commerce Department can place foreign companies on the Entity List, which prohibits U.S. firms from doing business with them.

The Fatima Group works with Bank of New York Mellon and Bank of America to facilitate trading of the company's shares in the over-the-counter market, according to Fatima Group news releases posted on the company's Web site.

To place a company on the Entity List, U.S. officials must be able to prove that it is knowingly selling its product to insurgent groups or terrorists. U.S. officials acknowledged that they have not been able to meet that threshold with the Fatima Group.

"You have to have a witting link," the senior U.S. official said. "That is what is frustrating on this."

Updated Sept. 27: Fatima Group, which operates two major fertilizer plants in Pakistan, was unable to respond to an Aug. 17 request for comments from The Post before the publication of this article on Aug. 18. In a recent letter, the company made several points that would have been included in the original article.

Fatima Group disputes the assertion by U.S. officials that most of the ammonium nitrate used in Taliban bombs comes from its plants. The company said other countries bordering Afghanistan have a much larger production of ammonium nitrate fertilizer than Pakistan and produce fertilizer that is much easier to convert into explosives. They also have more porous borders.

The company also said it has cooperated with the U.S. and Pakistani governments to curtail fertilizer smuggling into Afghanistan and that it discontinued direct talks with the U.S. military after the Pakistan government suggested to company officials that it wanted a single channel of communication.

The letter said the company's anti-smuggling efforts included redesigning its ammonium nitrate fertilizer bags to make them more distinctive, adding numbers to the bags, stopping the sale of fertilizer in the tribal areas bordering Afghanistan and ensuring that the product is sold only by authorized retailers who keep formal records. The company said it declined to dye its fertilizer on the advice of the Pakistan government, which said the issue should be dealt with on a regional basis rather than by singling out Fatima Group.

"An impression is being created that there seems to be apathy on Pakistan's part," said the letter. "The fact is that ever since the issue of IEDs was raised unprecedented efforts have been underway at both the government level and in terms of our group's cooperation."

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Plane With 19 On Board Crashes In Nepalese Capital

September 28, 2012

Associated Press

By Binaj Gurubacharya

KATMANDU, Nepal - A plane carrying trekkers into the Everest region crashed Friday morning in Nepal's capital, and all 19 people on board are believed dead, authorities said.

Thirteen people on board were foreigners, while three passengers and the three crew members were from Nepal, said Katmandu airport chief Narayan Bastakoti. He said all the 19 were believed to have been killed when the plane crashed.

The twin-engine prop plane belonging to the domestic Sita Air crashed onto open ground near the Manohara River on the southwest edge of Katmandu, just minutes after takeoff. Weather conditions were clear.

Firefighters brought the fire in the wreckage under control and police rescuers were trying to pull out the bodies, Bastakoti said.

The plane was heading for Lukla, the gateway to Mount Everest. Thousands of Westerners head to the region around the world's highest peak yearly for trekking trips. Autumn is considered the best time to trek the foothills of the Himalayan peaks.

The crash follows an avalanche on another Nepal peak Sunday that killed seven foreign climbers and a Nepali guide.

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WHA/EUR

Ahead of Georgia Vote, Prison Tapes Spark Fury

September 28, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By ALAN CULLISON

MOSCOW—The pro-Western government of Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili is facing its toughest electoral challenge since it was swept to power by the Rose Revolution in 2004, an event hailed by the U.S. as creating a beacon of Western-style democracy in the former Soviet Union.

Mr. Saakashvili's ruling party had been confident of winning a majority in parliamentary elections to be held Monday. But his United National Movement's popularity was dented last week by a scandal in the country's penal system, which included the appearance of smuggled videos showing prisoners being beaten and sodomized by guards.

Mr. Saakashvili has responded by arresting penal officials and firing his ministers of prisons and the interior. The government also hit back with allegations of its own—releasing videos and tapes that it said linked the opposition with mafia figures and showed that the opposition was trying to stage more abuse in jails and the army in an attempt to frame the ruling party. Opposition figures dismissed some of the videos as fabrications.

The bitter fight over parliamentary control raises tensions over whether Mr. Saakashvili, 44, will make a graceful exit from Georgian politics after a term limit requires him to step down from the presidency next year. Constitutional changes mean that the 150-seat parliament to be elected Monday will have greater powers in coming years, as it appoints the prime minister who will inherit many of the powers of the president.

Georgia's Rose Revolution in 2004 was the first of the so-called colored revolts to sweep the former Soviet Union. The U.S. considers Georgia, despite its disastrous war with Russia in 2008, as a rare success story in a region dominated by autocrats.

Mr. Saakashvili has dominated politics since the Rose Revolution and remains broadly popular in Georgia for rooting out corruption in the country's bureaucracy and justice system. The U.S. has been urging him to make room for new politicians, and expressed hope he will shun any plan to return to government after his presidential term expires.

Mr. Saakashvili has refused to rule out a future in politics, saying he doesn't want to be a lame duck. Since the prison scandal erupted, he has lashed out at his critics for opportunism and said Russia, whom he accuses of destabilizing his government, is the ultimate beneficiary.

Speaking at the United Nations General Assembly this week, he bristled at Moscow's criticism of Georgia for the prison brutalities, saying Russia "doesn't give a damn" about prison abuse and that it wants to wipe "Georgia off the map, because if Georgia survives... then that's a bad example" for the other ex-Soviet states.

Mr. Saakashvili's own mercurial manners have been an asset as well as a liability in his political career. In 2007, his image was tarnished when police brutally suppressed street protests with rubber bullets and tear gas. It took another hit in 2008 with the debacle of the war with Russia, which was started after Mr. Saakashvili sent Georgian troops into the breakaway region of South Ossetia.

Mr. Saakashvili won his current term in a 2008 presidential vote that he won handily but not by the same margin that swept him into power after the Rose Revolution. Lately his power has been challenged by Georgian billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili, a onetime ally who has poured millions into building a broad coalition under his political party, Georgian Dream.

Mr. Saakashvili alleges that Mr. Ivanishvili, who made his fortune in Russia after the fall of the Soviet Union, remains tied to the Kremlin. Mr. Ivanishvili denies this.

Analysts say Georgian Dream's ratings were moribund coming into elections but got a boost with the prison scandal, which opened festering resentment over the government's foot-dragging at penal reform. The videos showed guards systematically beating inmates as they were admitted to one jail and showed another inmate being raped with a broomstick.

"We are all shocked, disturbed and outraged" by the videos, said Giga Bokeria, head of the government's National Security Council. The government made a "grave mistake," he added, when it failed to act on complaints from civil-society groups about problems in the prison system.

As the government began releasing its own videos and tapes, a "war of compromising videos" has erupted on television stations, with issues of policy taking a backseat, analysts say.

"The opposition is not talking about what they are going to do with the country, but they are making the leadership look bad," said Alexander Rondeli, a Georgian political expert and president of the Georgian Foundation of Strategic and International Studies. "There has been a serious blow to the ruling party."
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Greece Agrees On New Package Of Budget Cuts And Taxes

September 28, 2012

New York Times

By Rachel Donadio And Niki Kitsantonis

ATHENS - After weeks of wrangling, Greece's coalition government said it had reached a basic agreement on Thursday over highly unpopular new austerity measures that could set off a new round of social unrest.

The government of Prime Minister Antonis Samaras must now present the proposed actions - \$15 billion in cuts to pensions, salaries and state spending, and at least \$2.6 billion in new taxes - for further discussion with the foreign lenders, who have demanded them in return for releasing the next portion of aid to the stricken country. That financing, about \$40 billion, was withheld this year during a tumultuous period in which Greece had two rounds of elections in May and June.

Finance Minister Yannis Stournaras said Thursday that the accord would form the foundation for negotiations on Monday with officials of the so-called troika of lenders - the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund - who left in a huff last week after tensions rose during talks.

The government did not release specifics of the agreement, though it is said to call for a rise in the retirement age to 67 from 65. It comes ahead of another critical month for Greece, which has been asking for more time to bring its finances under control. The troika has so far rebuffed that request, questioning whether the country can actually make good on its promises.

For its part, the Greek government has been embroiled in an internal debate over the austerity measures required by the troika, which are equivalent to 6 percent of Greece's gross domestic product and politically toxic to all three parties in the coalition, especially the Socialists and the smaller Democratic Left.

Even if the troika signs off on them, the measures must also face a vote in the Greek Parliament, which is expected before a summit meeting of European Union leaders later next month. They are expected to pass, since the coalition has 178 of the 300 seats in Parliament, but public resentment is rising and new protests are planned.

"I don't think there will be any surprises," said Babis Papadimitriou, a political commentator for the daily newspaper Kathimerini and Skai television, about the parliamentary vote.

Mr. Papadimitriou said that he doubted the government would accept the troika's demand that the government lay off public-sector employees.

On Thursday, the Socialist leader Evangelos Venizelos said that the basic pact still needed to be finalized in detail and that "intensive political negotiations" would continue, an apparent reference to coming talks with the troika.

"We will struggle until the end to ensure that the measures are not horizontal and are the last," Mr. Venizelos said, referring to proposals for across-the-board cuts to salaries and pensions that his party and Democratic Left have strenuously opposed.

The head of the junior partner in the coalition, Fotis Kouvelis of the Democratic Left, emphasized that "some outstanding issues remained."

Thursday's agreement emerged a day after a general strike when demonstrators marched in downtown Athens, protesting the Greek middle class's rapid descent into poverty.

"They are not aware of the problems of social cohesion," Mr. Venizelos said, referring to the lenders.

In a heated exchange last week, Mr. Stournaras pointed to a bullet hole in a window in the Finance Ministry and told the I.M.F.'s lead negotiator, Poul M. Thomsen, that excessive cuts to pensions could destabilize the coalition government.

"You see this - this came from a bullet," Mr. Stournaras said, aides reported. "Do you want to overthrow the government?"

On Thursday, Mr. Venizelos and Mr. Kouvelis both emphasized the importance of introducing growth-boosting measures alongside the austerity package, and they said Greece should be allowed to adopt the measures over four years rather than two.

But more immediately, without the \$40 billion aid package the country will not be able to meet expenses and could potentially default. Still, fears that Greece could exit the euro zone have abated - although not entirely subsided - in recent weeks after a series of measures taken by European leaders. [\(top\)](#)

Russian Activists Stand Firm Against Putin

September 28, 2012

Washington Post

By Kathy Lally

MOSCOW - She entered the room slowly Thursday, bent over her cane but still unbowed at age 85. She has stared down Soviet authorities, stood up to KGB interrogations and endured exile.

Lyudmila Alexeyeva, chairwoman of the Moscow Helsinki Group, has no intention of giving up the struggle for human rights and freedom now, despite new obstacles and threats that seem to arrive every day - a law requiring her to register as a foreign agent; rules constraining demonstrations; last week's expulsion of the U.S. Agency for International Development, which has provided grants and moral support for 20 years.

"My friends, hard times are ahead," she said Thursday, "but we must live through them as we have many times before. Our human rights movement was born in the 1960s, when you could easily get a sentence or forced psychiatric treatment or exile."

She added, "We are still here, and where is the power that tried to kill us? Gone."

Alexeyeva and other Russian human rights leaders met with journalists at a small independent press center to explain how they plan to contend with the new limits Vladimir Putin has been imposing on activists since his return to the Russian presidency in May. Among their tools, although they did not use the word, is courage.

"Repression makes you stronger," said Alexeyeva, a tiny woman with a firm voice.

She and the others, longtime campaigners all - Lev Ponomaryov, head of the Movement for Human Rights; Valery Borshchov of Social Partnership; and Liliya Shibanova of Golos, an election-monitoring group - said the members of their groups refuse to comply with the new law requiring nongovernmental organizations that receive money from abroad to register as foreign agents.

Penalties for violating the law include up to three years in jail, seizure of bank accounts and fines equivalent to tens of thousands of dollars.

To the Russian ear, "foreign agent" sounds like "spy." "Once they called us anti-Soviet," Borshchov said, referring to a typical criminal charge in earlier days, "but even then they didn't call us foreign agents."

The law goes into effect Nov. 21. As soon as legal papers ordering compliance are received, Ponomaryov said, the organizations will challenge the law in court. But with judges usually following the government's wishes, chances of success are small. "It's premature to talk about what we would do next," he said.

USAID has been ordered to stop its operations in Russia on Oct. 1. The government accused the agency of meddling in internal Russian affairs by providing grants to civil society groups. Ponomaryov predicted that was only a first step and that other donors would soon also be ordered to leave.

Of course, the rights groups would be pleased to have Russian benefactors, he said, but that is unlikely.

"They will never give us money," he said. "You all know why. They are afraid."

Winding its way through parliament is a bill that would broadly expand the definition of treason to include the provision of consulting services to foreign governments or agencies.

"This law is the scariest one of all," Ponomaryov said. "Anyone who provides any information to a foreigner could be in prison for 10 years."

Another proposed law would impose a jail term of up to three years for religious insults. "I am Orthodox, and I go to church, but this is an awful law," Borshchov said. "It threatens your right to argue for your point of view."

Alexeyeva has said she feels as if a new Iron Curtain is being drawn around her. She and the other activists called on the United States to expand the operations of Radio Liberty. Last week, the station, which has broadcast to Russia since 1953, said it would stop medium-wave (AM) broadcasting in Moscow on Nov. 10 because of a law then-President Dmitry Medvedev signed last year keeping foreign-owned companies off the airwaves.

It was a blow to dissidents. "I have been listening to Radio Liberty since my childhood, and it helped me become a human rights activist," Ponomaryov said.

Yelena Glushkova, director of Russian operations at Radio Liberty, said the station, which receives financing from Congress, would develop a more vigorous online and multimedia presence.

The Moscow Helsinki Group was founded in 1976, Alexeyeva said, and operated without grants until 1993. Those involved in the organization all know how to survive, she added, her voice clear and confident over a battery of loudly whirring cameras.

"We lived through Soviet power," Alexeyeva said, "and we will live through this power."
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Not In Script For Kremlin: A Real Race For Governor

September 28, 2012

New York Times

By Ellen Barry

RYAZAN, Russia - A funny thing happened during the elections this fall for governor in the Russian region of Ryazan: for a few weeks, no one knew who would win.

An insurgent appeared from within the local nomenklatura, and it looked as if he might beat the bland former construction engineer whom the Kremlin appointed governor in 2008. Igor N. Morozov, a former intelligence officer, was so convincing that local officials began abandoning the incumbent, knowing that they risked their careers by doing so. Here was a case of actual political competition.

That is what Dmitri A. Medvedev promised in December when, as president, he reinstated the direct election of governors, reversing a decision in 2004 by his predecessor, Vladimir V. Putin. But the Kremlin has hollowed out that promise. Voters in five Russian regions will cast votes for governor on Oct. 14, but the contests have been micromanaged from Moscow, which imposed strict screening of candidates to avoid any uncertainty in the outcome.

Ryazan was the exception - until it proved the rule. Just as experts were beginning to point to a real horse race, Mr. Morozov was summoned for urgent consultations with Kremlin officials. The next day he appeared at an awkward news conference and said he was dropping out. His campaign, he explained, had created the "threat of a split in society." In return, it seemed, he would be named a senator.

At that moment, the excitement went out of the Ryazan elections, leaving a pallid Communist as the governor's only significant challenger. Sergei V. Salnikov, the deputy secretary of United Russia's Ryazan branch, who had crossed party lines to back Mr. Morozov, sounded bitter, like a man who had been tricked. "When that decision was made, some hope emerged in people - that they had been given the right to cast votes," said Mr. Salnikov, who runs a major agricultural holding in the region. "But when they afterward realized they did not have this right, that was tragic. I don't know how to describe it, but every person who experienced that ugly state - I don't know what to compare it with - it's as if you have simply been raped."

This summer, as Russia's political class fell into lock step around Mr. Putin, who is now the president, races for governor still promised a bit of intrigue. They had been reinstated in the deep of winter, on the heels of a dismal performance in parliamentary elections by United Russia, Mr. Putin's party, and with protests swelling in Moscow. The Kremlin rushed to assure the public that this was not a concession, deepening the sense that it was.

Mr. Putin was the first to warn that these would not be wholly free elections, and that he envisioned a "presidential filter" to exclude candidates with criminal backing. By the time that idea had been enshrined in law, it had become a "municipal filter." Any candidate wishing to run for governor had to

first win the endorsement of 10 percent of the region's municipal lawmakers, local officials who, in turn, are heavily dependent on the sitting governors.

As the Kremlin prepared for the elections, "very wise people, as always, overprotected themselves and said, 'Don't worry, we'll come up with an ideal scheme, so that there will be competition, but it will be managed,'" Aleksandr V. Kynev, a political analyst, said in an interview on Radio Svoboda. "But, actually, there is either competition or management - one or the other."

Members of minority parties have called the filtering system "idiotic" and "raving mad." Even some United Russia officials have said it should be reconsidered after the vote next month.

"It's a comfortable technology that allows them not to make changes and not worry about the real sympathies of the voters," said Mikhail Y. Vinogradov, the chairman of the St. Petersburg Politics Fund. "On the other hand, it's obvious to everyone that it is a discriminatory technology that leads to an imitation of elections."

Ryazan, about 100 miles southeast of Moscow, seemed primed for a real race. Deep in Russia's conservative "Red Belt," it is a place where people complain about bad roads, high utility prices and overbooked kindergartens. In 2010, when wildfires devoured forests here, residents gave up on state efforts in disgust and organized themselves into fire brigades.

A sour mood surfaced in the parliamentary elections in December, when the governing party won just under 40 percent of the vote. Moreover, United Russia's incumbent governor, Oleg I. Kovalyov, was unusually vulnerable. In a "survival index" of governors released by a panel of prominent analysts this spring, Mr. Kovalyov received a grade of D, because of "low popularity" and a "lack of obvious achievements."

A military officer interviewed this month, Anatoly V. Ivanov, said he had decided to vote for Mr. Morozov, of the pro-Kremlin Patriots of Russia party, in the hope that "maybe something will change."

"When there is a change in power, there is progress," Mr. Ivanov said. "In America, there are the Republican and the Democratic Parties, and they change, and there is progress. But here, it is all the same."

Heavyweights in local business and government, like Mr. Salnikov, were making a similar calculus. Realizing that they could not pass the municipal filter to take part in the race without the Kremlin's blessing, they scanned the horizon for a candidate who could. Vladimir Y. Krymsky, the leader of the minority party A Just Russia, grilled Mr. Morozov for evidence of his sincerity, and then, convinced, told members of his party to vote for him.

"Many people supported Morozov," Mr. Krymsky said. "It was not so much that they believed in Morozov, it was that they believed it was possible that there would be a transition."

Analysts said that though Mr. Morozov had good connections in the Kremlin, his run had become a problem. Perhaps he would siphon off votes from the governor but could not win the popular vote, potentially opening the door to a victory by the Communist. Aleksei V. Makarkin, of the Center for Political Technologies in Moscow, said the race had raised the specter of a political split within government and business circles, something that the Kremlin fears greatly.

"It was important to show the elites that they cannot put up their own candidate," he said.

Mr. Morozov's withdrawal from the race has left his supporters bitter and isolated, with an uncertain future in Ryazan. Mr. Salnikov, who was himself discussed as a possible candidate for governor this summer, last week wrote a letter of resignation from United Russia. He said he was leaving Russia for a vacation on the Dead Sea, where, he said, "there isn't a single living bacterium, no one to blame, no one who can do you any harm."

A recent visit to Ryazan revealed little indication that a race was occurring at all. The governor's single major challenger, a courtly 65-year-old Communist, Vladimir N. Fedotkin, complained his access to television time had been limited to midmorning, when few people are at home. Meanwhile, Mr. Putin lifted the profile of the incumbent, Mr. Kovalyov, by meeting with him on Thursday and promising new state orders for Ryazan's defense factories. Officials from United Russia said they would not comment for this article.

For his part, Mr. Krymsky, of A Just Russia, is so angry that he is now advising members of his party to vote for "the most inappropriate figure" as an act of protest. "I am ready to say to the president, 'Vladimir Vladimirovich, please return the procedure of direct appointment - it would be honest,' " Mr. Krymsky said. "But when they thrust this person on us and tell us, 'You will vote for him,' and then the day after the elections he wakes up and says, 'I am the person who has been chosen by the people' - well, that's nonsense, it's a nightmare, it's cynicism."

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Spain Unveils Sweeping Spending Cuts; Leaders Silent On Bailout

September 28, 2012

Washington Post

By Michael Birnbaum

BERLIN - Amid a growing sense that Europe is slipping back into instability after months of relative calm, Spanish leaders unveiled sweeping spending cuts and new taxes Thursday in a last-ditch attempt to get their country's finances on track. But they were silent about whether they would seek a formal bailout to prop up their turmoil-wracked economy.

Europe's financial crisis appears to be going strong nearly three years after it started, with talks in Greece about its future again at an impasse, European economic indicators pointing toward recession and even relatively strong France confronting a bleak financial outlook. Violent anti-austerity protests rocked Spain and Greece this week, while a June deal to give aid to banks seemed to partially unravel after finance ministers questioned basic assumptions about it.

In Spain, the attempt to close a \$52 billion gap in the budget follows \$84 billion in grinding cuts and taxes that were announced in July, and it underscores just how difficult the country's road to recovery may be.

With Spain's borrowing costs skyrocketing and its overall debt burden rapidly rising, the money raised by new taxes is funneling straight into interest payments. And its recession has been far deeper than anticipated in earlier forecasts, meaning that even these new measures may not be enough to stabilize the economy. In fact, analysts say, they may worsen unemployment, which at 25 percent is already the highest of the 17 nations that share the euro currency.

The measures came after two days of massive anti-austerity protests on the streets of Madrid and renewed separatist efforts in the restive Spanish province of Catalonia. Spanish citizens are increasingly questioning how much more budget pressure they can take.

Also Thursday, Greek leaders announced that they had reached preliminary agreement on \$14.8 billion in additional cuts demanded by the international debt inspectors making a do-or-die decision about whether to give Greece a fresh installment of its bailout or leave it to go bankrupt and possibly off the euro. Negotiations have been beset by conflict amid reports that Greece has wildly missed the financial targets that were set out less than a year ago.

And a key European Commission business and consumer survey released Thursday painted a gloomy picture of September, with signs pointing toward a significant recession.

In Spain, Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy has been trying to benefit from the early September promise of aid from the deep-pocketed European Central Bank without actually resorting to that help, because it would require him to seek a bailout and accept strict oversight from European watchdogs who have pushed painful cuts in Greece and other struggling countries.

Affecting a range of citizens

The measures announced Thursday could preempt at least some of the requirements that would be imposed on Spain if it did seek a bailout, thus easing the sting to Spanish sovereignty. Officials repeatedly emphasized that they were acting within European Union recommendations, perhaps an indication that was indeed their plan.

Spanish borrowing costs plunged after the Sept. 6 announcement that the ECB would use "unlimited" resources to buy government bonds from struggling countries if the euro's future were at stake. But in recent days, markets have caught on to Rajoy's caution about seeking assistance, and Spanish bond yields are again edging close to the 6 percent mark that many analysts say is a red line of danger.

Most European markets, which closed as the late-in-the-day Spanish announcement was being made, were up slightly. So was the euro, up a hair at \$1.29.

In a measure of the political unpopularity of the cuts, Rajoy avoided cameras Thursday, sending out deputies to make the difficult announcement.

"We are complying with . . . our commitments to our European partners," said Deputy Prime Minister Soraya Saenz de Santamaria in a news conference in Madrid.

The budget proposal in Spain would impose new measures to discourage early retirement and try to get more people to retire at the official age of 65. Some sectors of the economy will be liberalized, and an independent commission will be set up to monitor progress on the structural overhauls, officials said. Several taxes would be increased, and ministry spending would drop 8.9 percent.

The budget is subject to approval by the Spanish parliament, which has been under siege from protesters in recent days. More than half of Spaniards ages 18 to 25 are unemployed.

The plans brought praise from E.U. Economic and Monetary Affairs Commissioner Olli Rehn, who said in a statement Thursday that "the reforms are clearly targeted at some of the most pressing policy challenges."

But some analysts questioned whether the measures would be enough, suggesting that it is only a matter of time before Spain is forced to seek more European assistance. Rajoy told the Wall Street Journal this week that he has not made up his mind about asking for more help, but that if his country's interest rates were "too high for too long . . . I can assure you 100 percent that I would ask for this bailout."

Many analysts see a bailout as inevitable. Spain "has to ask for money, or everyone knows that things will get worse," said Sony Kapoor, managing director of Re-Define, a Brussels-based think tank. Without a bailout, he said, borrowing costs would spiral upward and deposits would keep emptying from Spanish banks. But he said that the austerity being pushed on Spain was so onerous that he was not sure a bailout would be enough to offset it.

Audit findings coming

There is also fresh uncertainty about future assistance for Spain's banking system, with the finance ministers of Germany, Finland and the Netherlands saying that governments may for the time being be liable for any European bailout money given to the country's troubled banks. That would appear to go against an agreement reached in June, which sought to disentangle the financial problems of governments and their banks, and could leave Spain with a burden of up to \$129 billion for the help for its banking sector.

On Friday, the results of an audit of Spain's banks will be released, putting a concrete figure on how much money the troubled sector will need to shore up balance sheets. Rajoy said this week that their financing needs would be significantly less than that.

Spain this year has been trying to reduce its deficit to 6.3 percent of its gross domestic product. Although Spanish officials said Thursday that they would make the target, most analysts expect the government to fall short, making it more difficult to hit a 4.5 percent mark in 2013.

Spain's problems are compacted by increasing unrest in regions that have long had simmering separatist tendencies, which have been exacerbated by the federal austerity measures. This week, the leader of Catalonia, Artur Mas, called early regional elections for November, a move that could give extra power to separatists there who are planning a referendum on the region's future. The promise of more turmoil and perhaps more budget autonomy will only add stress to Spain's tenuous position on the international bond markets, analysts say.

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British Authorities To Announce Changes In Libor Oversight

September 28, 2012

[New York Times](#)

By Mark Scott

LONDON - British authorities are set to announce significant changes to the interest rate at the heart of a recent manipulation scandal as they aim to improve the accuracy and reliability of the benchmark.

On Friday, Martin Wheatley, the managing director of Britain's Financial Services Authority, will outline plans to increase oversight of the rate-setting process, which underpins more than \$350 trillion of financial products like mortgages and student loans.

As part of that effort, regulators are stripping the British banking group that currently oversees the interest rate - the London interbank offered rate, or Libor - of its power. The British government, in turn, will take a more hands-on role, including making rate manipulation a criminal offense.

The benchmark itself will also be retooled to address some of its inherent weaknesses. The goal is to base Libor, which measures the rate at which banks lend to each other, on actual market transactions, rather than estimates.

"The disturbing events we have uncovered in the manipulation of Libor have severely damaged our confidence and our trust," Mr. Wheatley says in an advance text of the remarks he is to deliver in London. "It has torn the very fabric that our financial system is built on."

The scrutiny of Libor has intensified this year as authorities around the globe have ramped up their investigation into rate-rigging at more than a dozen big banks. Regulators are concerned that the institutions, including HSBC, Deutsche Bank and JPMorgan Chase, submitted false rates.

In June, the British bank Barclays agreed to pay \$450 million to settle charges that employees manipulated the rate to increase profits and make the institution appear healthier. Several top officials, including the chief executive, Robert E. Diamond Jr., resigned as a result of the scandal.

"Libor needs to reflect the values of the market," said David E. Kovel, a partner at the law firm Kirby McInerney who is representing clients in a potential class-action suit related to Libor. "There's no doubt the way that the rate is set up now makes it susceptible to abuse."

The changes to Libor, some of which may require changes to British law, are expected to be introduced over the next 12 months.

The Financial Conduct Authority, a new British regulator that will become part of the Bank of England, the country's central bank, will have primary responsibility for regulating Libor. Mr. Wheatley of the Financial Services Authority will lead the new agency when it is created next year.

"We can't allow the unfettered latitude that banks previously enjoyed," Mr. Wheatley's advance text says. "Much greater rigor and transparency must be introduced."

Under the proposal, regulators will pare back the number of currencies and maturities included in the Libor system. Critics have questioned the accuracy of Libor, given the lack of actual bank lending transactions, particularly in smaller currencies like the Swedish krona.

To improve the system, five of the current 10 currencies, including the Canadian dollar, will be phased out over the next year. Instead, Libor will focus mainly on major currencies like the United States dollar and the euro. In all, regulators are looking to cut the number of Libor rates to 20, from 150.

Individual banks' rate submissions will be delayed by three months, rather than released in real time. This change means Libor will not readily reflect a bank's health, potentially eliminating a motivation to submit false rates.

If a bank reports a high rate, it can be a sign of underlying troubles at the firm. During the financial crisis, Barclays submitted artificially low rates to deflect concerns about its financial position, according to regulatory documents.

Despite the changes, analysts worry that Libor may still be easy to manipulate. Since the financial crisis, banks have not been willing to take the risk of lending to other institutions. In their proposal, regulators indicate that the process will still rely on some "level of judgment" when hard data are not available.

"There are few markets where there's a significant amount of liquidity," said Darrell Duffie, a finance professor at Stanford University. "It makes sense to prune down the number of maturities."

The British government will also replace the British Bankers' Association, the London-based trade group, as Libor's overseer. The organization, which established the benchmark rate in 1986, has come under mounting criticism for failing to catch the manipulation, which dated back to at least 2007, according to regulatory filings.

Under the proposed changes, a new administrator will be selected in the next 12 months. The future role of the data provider Thomson Reuters, which currently collects the daily rate submissions on behalf of the trade association, is uncertain.

"British Bankers' Association clearly failed to properly oversee the Libor setting process and should take no further role in the administration and governance of Libor," Mr. Wheatley's advance text says.

He will also take aim at the excesses within the financial services sector that led to the manipulation of Libor, arguing that traders at many of the world's largest banks were too focused on securing large bonuses. "Libor needs to get back to doing what it is supposed to do," the text says, "rather than what unscrupulous traders and individuals in banks wanted it to do."

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FOREIGN POLICY

Man Tied To Anti-Islam Video Held On Probation Charge

September 28, 2012

New York Times

By Brooks Barnes

LOS ANGELES - The man thought to have been behind the crude anti-Islam video that set off deadly protests across the Muslim world in recent weeks was arrested Thursday for violating terms of his probation in a 2010 bank fraud case.

The man, Nakoula Basseley Nakoula, 55, was ordered held without bond during an appearance in United States District Court here Thursday evening. Suzanne H. Segal, a federal magistrate judge, called Mr. Nakoula "a flight risk and a danger to the community." He will remain in jail until a probation-revocation hearing is scheduled.

Mr. Nakoula is widely considered to be the filmmaker responsible for "Innocence of Muslims," an inflammatory, amateurish video that is supposedly a trailer for a full-length film.

The video depicts the Prophet Muhammad as a buffoon, a womanizer and a child molester. It was first uploaded to YouTube in June, and translated into Arabic and uploaded several more times leading up to the 11th anniversary of the terrorism attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

Mr. Nakoula was charged with eight probation violations, including lying to law-enforcement officers when they initially detained him for questioning, and using various aliases, which an assistant United States attorney, Robert Dugdale, said was "part of a lengthy pattern of deception."

Federal officials have been investigating whether Mr. Nakoula was the person who posted the video on YouTube using the pseudonym Sam Bacile, a name he used during the making of the movie, according to actors and crew members. If he did post the video, he would have violated the terms of his sentencing in a conviction in a 2010 check-kiting case, which restricted his use of the Internet.

Mr. Nakoula served about a year of a 21-month prison term for orchestrating a check-kiting scheme against Wells Fargo Bank, court records show.

As part of his sentence, Mr. Nakoula was ordered to pay restitution of \$794,700.

The bank fraud scheme included a twist that is probably pertinent to the current investigation: he committed the crime using a variety of aliases.

On Sept. 15, federal probation officers took Mr. Nakoula to a Los Angeles County sheriff's station in the suburb of Cerritos, where he lives, for questioning. He wore a hat and had a white shawl around his face. He was not arrested at that time.

Mr. Nakoula has not spoken publicly since the trailer, parts of which were broadcast on Egyptian television, first set off a wave of rioting and attacks that led to the death of four Americans in Libya, including the ambassador.

On Saturday, a Pakistani cabinet minister offered a \$100,000 reward for the death of the person behind the video, with the incendiary statement coming a day after violent protests paralyzed Pakistan's largest cities, leaving at least 23 people dead.

Mr. Nakoula's lawyer, Steve Seiden, had argued unsuccessfully that it was a dangerous for his client to be in jail where there are, presumably, Muslim inmates. "My client's safety has been an issue for weeks," he said.

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EDITORIAL / OPINION

The Arab Spring Still Blooms

September 28, 2012

New York Times

By Moncef Marzouki

THE violent demonstrations that have spread across the Muslim world in recent weeks have convinced many in the United States and Europe that the Arab revolutions that began in late 2010 are now over

and that the democratic project has failed. Bitterness and a sense of impending catastrophe are replacing the enthusiasm that followed the toppling of dictators in Tunisia and Egypt last year.

Now there is ominous talk of an "Islamist Fall" and "Salafi Winter" after a supposedly failed Arab Spring. To these skeptics, religion is the driving force in Arab politics, and hateful anti-Western slogans and the killing of America's ambassador to Libya, J. Christopher Stevens, are evidence of a "clash of civilizations" between Islam and the West.

While these fears are understandable, such alarmism is misplaced. The Arab revolutions have not turned anti-Western. Nor are they pro-Western. They are simply not about the West. They remain fundamentally about social justice and democracy - not about religion or establishing Shariah law.

The democratization of Tunisia, Egypt and other countries has allowed a number of extremist free riders into the political system. But it has also definitively refuted the myth that democracy and Islam are incompatible. Islamists are political actors like any others: they are no more pure, more united or more immune from criticism than anyone else.

Islamist parties are now free to take part in political debates and to win seats in legislatures and governments. However, these political changes have also rendered the divisions among Islamists more apparent than ever before.

Islamists span a wide ideological and political spectrum. Yet many observers still seem to believe that extremist Salafi groups represent a majority. They are wrong. Radical Salafis who advocate violence and Shariah constitute a very small minority in Tunisia - and even in Egypt they are vastly outnumbered by more moderate Islamists. They are a minority within a minority, and extremely unpopular among both religious and secular Tunisians. They do not speak for all Tunisians, Arabs or Muslims.

The goal of these violent extremists is not political participation; it is to create chaos. We should not forget that before attacking American symbols, these extremists had degraded Tunisian symbols, like the flag and national anthem.

Despite their small numbers, the danger they pose cannot be dismissed. Tunisia's economy depends on the millions of foreign tourists who visit each year. If Salafi extremists were to attack just two or three foreigners in Tunisia, it would destroy our tourism industry and ruin our country's peaceful reputation. As a democratic government, we support the Salafis' freedom of expression, but advocating violence is a red line. Those who cross it will be arrested.

The strength and importance of extremist groups have been unduly amplified by the news media. Images of angry Muslim mobs, like the one featured on a recent cover of Newsweek magazine, once again revived the old Orientalist trope of a backward and hysterical Muslim world, unable to engage in civilized and rational debate or undertake peaceful negotiations - in other words, incapable of conducting political affairs.

However, that image is a distorted fantasy; it does not represent any sociological or political reality. Arguing that the groups who have recently staged violent demonstrations represent the entire Arab population is as absurd as claiming that white supremacist groups represent the American people or that the Norwegian right-wing mass murderer Anders Behring Breivik is representative of Europeans.

The demonstrations that took place against the anti-Islamic video "Innocence of Muslims" involved small numbers of extremists; there were only about 3,000 in Tunisia. Counterprotests denouncing the violence also took place in Benghazi, Libya, after the killing of Ambassador Stevens; numerous Muslim leaders have implored believers not to respond to provocations; and no demonstration occurred last Friday, after a French newspaper published demeaning caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad.

The attempts by journalists and anti-Islamic filmmakers to stage a sequel to the Danish cartoon controversy of 2006 are in vain. Most Tunisians firmly condemn the violence that took place against the United States embassies, even if they were personally offended by anti-Islamic provocations emanating from the United States and Europe.

They are frustrated by how this unnecessary uproar has made the struggle for what matters most to them more arduous: building new democratic institutions, creating jobs and halting the exodus of Tunisian boat people seeking a better life in Europe.

These are difficult tasks for any country, and the challenge is even greater for new democracies in the post-revolutionary Arab world. We are in a race against poverty. At this crucial moment, the West must not abandon us. It must continue to aid Tunisia in strengthening democracy and the rule of law, securing our borders to stop arms from reaching extremists, and creating economic opportunities that give our citizens hope.

Moncef Marzouki is Tunisia's president.

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Stop Playing Politics With The Benghazi Attack

September 28, 2012

Washington Post

THE OBAMA administration's descriptions of what happened Sept. 11 in the Libyan city of Benghazi have evolved in a way that some - including congressional Republicans - find suspicious. Initially, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton described an "attack" in which "heavily armed militants" assaulted a U.S. compound, leading to the death of Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens and three other Americans. Four days later, U.N. Ambassador Susan Rice said that "extremist elements" had joined a demonstration outside the U.S. Consulate against an anti-Muslim video.

By the end of last week, White House spokesman Jay Carney was calling the incident a "terrorist attack" but adding that it was likely "the result of opportunism" and not planned. But then Wednesday, Ms. Clinton suggested that al-Qaeda's North African branch, operating from a safe haven in Mali, could have had a hand in the assault. Al-Qaeda and other terrorists, she said, "are working with other violent extremists to undermine the democratic transitions underway in North Africa, as we tragically saw in Benghazi."

Critics see in this a deliberate attempt by the administration to portray the Benghazi violence as a spontaneous response to the video, as opposed to a terrorist attack that was timed for Sept. 11 and possibly planned by al-Qaeda. Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) and three other Republicans have demanded in a letter that Ms. Rice explain how she "could characterize an attack on a U.S. consulate so inaccurately," while a group of congressmen accused the administration of adopting "a pre-9/11 mind-set - treating an act of war solely as a criminal matter."

In fact, political calculations appear to have infected the rhetoric of all sides. The White House was slow to place the modifier "terrorist" in front of the word "attack," at a time when President Obama claims credit on the campaign trail for the "decimation" of al-Qaeda. He continued to focus on the offending video - which also provoked demonstrations outside U.S. embassies in Cairo and around the Muslim world - long after it became clear that the Benghazi attack was the work of well-organized combatants who, among other things, accurately aimed mortar fire at an unmarked U.S. compound located half a mile from the consulate.

Still, it is not yet clear that Libyan government officials are correct in their own, self-interested claims that the attack was pre-planned for Sept. 11 by al-Qaeda leaders outside of Libya. Many residents of Benghazi blame members of a local militia, Ansar al-Sharia, which in turn has conceded that some of its members may have joined in a spontaneous attack on U.S. installations. Such extremist groups were known to be encamped around Benghazi and heavily armed; it's not implausible that they would have acted opportunistically.

The sensible and responsible response to this foggy situation is to refrain from further loose talk and allow the investigations by the FBI and the State Department to proceed, with the collaboration of intelligence agencies and the Libyan government and regular briefings for Congress. The probe should cover not only what occurred on Sept. 11 and who carried it out, but why U.S. facilities in such a dangerous city did not have better protection. Perhaps sensible and responsible is a lot to ask this close to an election - but given the tragic loss of U.S. life in this case, it ought to be possible.

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Providing A Legal Basis To Attack Iran

September 28, 2012

Washington Post

By Jeffrey H. Smith And John B. Bellinger III

The question of whether military force should be used to prevent, or at least delay, Iran from building a nuclear weapon is again on the front pages. Both President Obama and Mitt Romney have said they would consider a military strike against Iran. According to media reports, the necessary planning has been completed, and military options are "fully available."

But there has been almost no discussion of whether an attack by the United States would be legal under domestic and international law. This should be a priority. Law is important, especially in issues of war and peace.

The United States has long maintained the right, under international law, to take unilateral, preemptive action to prevent an attack on the nation. We have, for example, never agreed to a "no-first-use" policy for our nuclear weapons.

However, presidents who have authorized military actions have generally tried to demonstrate that they are permissible under international law. Under the U.N. Charter, member states may use force against another country only if authorized by the U.N. Security Council or in self-defense against an "armed attack" (which most international lawyers agree includes the threat of such an attack). President George W. Bush relied on the right to self-defense and a Security Council resolution to invade Afghanistan after the Sept. 11 attacks. He cited Security Council resolutions dating from 1990 as authority to use force against Iraq in 2003. President Obama has relied on a self-defense rationale (or the consent of the

country involved) to conduct drone strikes in Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen. The Security Council authorized the use of force against Libya in 2011.

Ideally, any military strike against Iran would also be authorized by the United Nations. But a Security Council resolution is likely to be vetoed by Russia and China. To act unilaterally, the United States would have to argue that an attack on Iran was justified as an act of anticipatory self-defense because the threat of a nuclear-armed Iran is so great that we cannot wait until an attack is imminent. But in the absence of U.N. authorization, many nations, including some of our allies, are likely to believe that a preemptive attack would violate international law, just as they believed the U.S. invasion of Iraq violated international law (despite the prior Security Council resolutions).

With respect to U.S. law, the president must rely on either congressional authorization or his constitutional authority as commander in chief. Although the 1973 War Powers Resolution purports to require the president to terminate the use of U.S. armed forces within 60 to 90 days in the absence of congressional approval, presidents of both parties have questioned the constitutionality of the resolution and have committed U.S. armed forces for longer periods without a congressional mandate.

Bush sought and received specific congressional authorizations to use military force against Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003. Then-President Bill Clinton relied solely on constitutional powers to conduct the Kosovo bombing campaign in 1999. Obama has relied on congressional authority to continue using force against al-Qaeda and the Taliban, but he used only his constitutional powers to conduct the Libya bombings in 2011.

The president could reasonably argue that he has constitutional authority to use force without congressional authorization because a nuclear-armed Iran is a real threat to the United States. But he would be on stronger legal and political ground if he first sought legislative approval. While many members of Congress might not object if the president were to proceed unilaterally, the Constitution gives Congress the responsibility "to declare war."

Congressional approval is important. A military strike on Iranian nuclear facilities might require multiple sorties over several days and would surely be regarded by Iran as an act of war. Like all military actions, the outcome is not certain and where it leads is not within our control. Congress should hold hearings to consider the implications of an attack - which include possibly provoking terrorist attacks against the United States, a wider regional war and damaging the U.S. economy - as well as the resulting costs and how to pay for them. An explicit congressional mandate authorizing the use of force unless Iran meets specified requirements would demonstrate to all our resolve to prevent Tehran from developing nuclear weapons.

The threat posed by Iran's aggressive pursuit of a nuclear weapon is grave. Obama and Romney are right to say that the United States is prepared to use force to defend the nation against this threat, if that is necessary after other means have been exhausted. But both men should also explain a clear legal basis for a military strike. They should publicly commit to seeking specific congressional authorization to bolster the president's constitutional authority to defend the United States. And they should explain how using force against Iran would be justified under international law and under what circumstances. ([top](#))

Talking At Cross Purposes
September 28, 2012

New York Times

The alternate universes of the Israeli and Palestinian leaders were on display Thursday at the United Nations General Assembly.

In dueling speeches, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel focused on drawing a red line for an attack on Iran's nuclear facilities while the Palestinian president, Mahmoud Abbas, cataloged his community's many grievances against Israel and tried to revive the fading dream of a two-state solution. Mr. Netanyahu even had on hand a visual aid - a primitive cartoon drawing of a bomb, which quickly went viral on the Internet.

Both issues - Iran's dangerous nuclear ambitions and the Palestinian right to a secure state - need to be dealt with seriously, but neither man acknowledged the other side's priority nor articulated a common path forward. Mostly, the speeches showed how far peace efforts have gone off track.

Mr. Netanyahu told the United Nations that he believes Iran's ability to make a nuclear weapon will be irreversible by next spring or summer, and he argued that a "clear red line" must be drawn to warn Iran to halt its nuclear fuel enrichment or face military action. While that was a far more specific time frame than he had previously noted, his reference to next year seems to back away from earlier statements that seemed to suggest an Israeli strike much sooner.

Still, Mr. Netanyahu's speech continued to push a campaign, which promotes military action when there is time for sanctions and diplomatic negotiations to produce a peaceful outcome. An Israeli Foreign Ministry report, disclosed by Haaretz, an Israeli newspaper, on Thursday, acknowledged as much, saying that sanctions imposed by the United States and Europe are having a huge impact on Iran's economy and may be affecting the government's stability. The report urged that the sanctions be tightened further.

A recent report by The Iran Project signed by nearly three dozen American experts concluded that "conservatively, it would take Iran a year or more to build a military-grade weapon, with at least two years or more required to create a nuclear warhead that would be reliably deliverable by a missile."

Mr. Netanyahu is justifiably suspicious that Iran may be using negotiations to buy time as it advances its weapons program. And President Obama made clear the other day that the time for a diplomatic solution is "not unlimited."

Mr. Abbas's complaints are no less important for both Israel, the Palestinians and the region. Using exceptionally sharp rhetoric, he accused Israeli settlers of undertaking 535 attacks against Palestinians in recent months, and he charged Israel with using settlement expansion and efforts to weaken the Palestinian Authority to destroy the prospect of a two-state solution. Mr. Netanyahu made a brief reference to wanting peace with the Palestinians, but there is no hope of meaningful negotiations anytime soon.

After failing to get a process for talks going early in his term, Mr. Obama seems to have given up. Mitt Romney has suggested that he would do even less if he's elected. On the notorious video taped when he was speaking at a private fund-raising event in May, he disparaged Palestinians as "not wanting to see peace anyway" and said his approach was to "recognize this is going to remain an unsolved problem." He seems poised to encourage Mr. Netanyahu's intemperate posture toward Iran, no matter the consequences.

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As The World Burns, Leaders Await Post-Election Decisions By The US

September 28, 2012

Washington Post

ADD MAHMOUD Ahmadinejad to the list of world leaders impatiently waiting for the U.S. election to be over. The Iranian president suggested to The Post's David Ignatius in an interview Sunday that "key issues" in the negotiations between Iran and an international coalition over its nuclear program "must be talked about again once we come out of the other end of the political election atmosphere in the United States." The implication was that it won't be possible to know the bottom-line U.S. terms for a deal - and that Iran would not reveal its own - until President Obama has either won reelection or been defeated by Mitt Romney.

Tehran's frontman joined a queue that already included Russian President Vladimir Putin, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan - among others. Mr. Erdogan bluntly told CNN's Christiane Amanpour this month that the United States had failed to meet international "expectations" and was "lacking of initiative" on the crisis in Syria, probably because of the elections. When they are over, Turkey, which has proposed that a no-fly zone be created to protect Syrian civilians and rebels, will be looking for a change in U.S. policy.

Mr. Abbas has timed his appeal to the U.N. General Assembly for recognition of Palestinian statehood so that it will move forward only after the Nov. 6 U.S. vote; he may be hoping that Mr. Obama's opposition to the resolution will soften post-election. For his part, Mr. Netanyahu, having so far failed to persuade Mr. Obama to adopt a more explicit "red line" on military action against Iran, will likely try again with the election's winner, while renewing the threat of unilateral action by Israel.

Thanks to an open mike at a summit this year, the world knows of a pledge made by Mr. Obama to Mr. Putin, via then-Russian President Dmitry Medvedev: that "after my election, I [will] have more flexibility" to make concessions on NATO plans for missile defense in Europe. That's a prime preoccupation of Mr. Putin, and it's the likely key to a new agreement reducing U.S. and Russian nuclear arms.

In short, it's not just the "fiscal cliff" of automatic spending cuts and tax increases that Mr. Obama or Mr. Romney will face in the immediate aftermath of the election but also a string of critical foreign policy choices. Notably, Mr. Romney has made it fairly clear how he would respond to several of these challenges: He has said he opposes a missile defense deal with Russia, favors arming the Syrian rebels and believes Palestinian statehood is unrealistic in the near term.

Mr. Obama is more opaque. He has offered no hint of what his "flexibility" on missile defense might mean, nor whether the current, relatively tough U.S. offer to Iran, which involves trading enriched uranium for modest economic concessions, could get better. Though he appears unlikely to change his position on a U.N. resolution on Palestinian statehood and his objection to a no-fly zone in Syria, might he have other initiatives in mind to answer Mr. Abbas and Mr. Erdogan? As with so much in this election, voters appear unlikely to learn the answers to these crucial questions before they must choose.

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Europe's Austerity Madness

September 28, 2012

New York Times

By Paul Krugman

So much for complacency. Just a few days ago, the conventional wisdom was that Europe finally had things under control. The European Central Bank, by promising to buy the bonds of troubled governments if necessary, had soothed markets. All that debtor nations had to do, the story went, was agree to more and deeper austerity - the condition for central bank loans - and all would be well.

But the purveyors of conventional wisdom forgot that people were involved. Suddenly, Spain and Greece are being racked by strikes and huge demonstrations. The public in these countries is, in effect, saying that it has reached its limit: With unemployment at Great Depression levels and with erstwhile middle-class workers reduced to picking through garbage in search of food, austerity has already gone too far. And this means that there may not be a deal after all.

Much commentary suggests that the citizens of Spain and Greece are just delaying the inevitable, protesting against sacrifices that must, in fact, be made. But the truth is that the protesters are right. More austerity serves no useful purpose; the truly irrational players here are the allegedly serious politicians and officials demanding ever more pain.

Consider Spain's woes. What is the real economic problem? Basically, Spain is suffering the hangover from a huge housing bubble, which caused both an economic boom and a period of inflation that left Spanish industry uncompetitive with the rest of Europe. When the bubble burst, Spain was left with the difficult problem of regaining competitiveness, a painful process that will take years. Unless Spain leaves the euro - a step nobody wants to take - it is condemned to years of high unemployment.

But this arguably inevitable suffering is being greatly magnified by harsh spending cuts; and these spending cuts are a case of inflicting pain for the sake of inflicting pain.

First of all, Spain didn't get into trouble because its government was profligate. On the contrary, on the eve of the crisis, Spain actually had a budget surplus and low debt. Large deficits emerged when the economy tanked, taking revenues with it, but, even so, Spain doesn't appear to have all that high a debt burden.

It's true that Spain is now having trouble borrowing to finance its deficits. That trouble is, however, mainly because of fears about the nation's broader difficulties - not least the fear of political turmoil in the face of very high unemployment. And shaving a few points off the budget deficit won't resolve those fears. In fact, research by the International Monetary Fund suggests that spending cuts in deeply depressed economies may actually reduce investor confidence because they accelerate the pace of economic decline.

In other words, the straight economics of the situation suggests that Spain doesn't need more austerity. It shouldn't throw a party, and, in fact, it probably has no alternative (short of euro exit) to a protracted period of hard times. But savage cuts to essential public services, to aid to the needy, and so on actually hurt the country's prospects for successful adjustment.

Why, then, are there demands for ever more pain?

Part of the explanation is that in Europe, as in America, far too many Very Serious People have been taken in by the cult of austerity, by the belief that budget deficits, not mass unemployment, are the

clear and present danger, and that deficit reduction will somehow solve a problem brought on by private sector excess.

Beyond that, a significant part of public opinion in Europe's core - above all, in Germany - is deeply committed to a false view of the situation. Talk to German officials and they will portray the euro crisis as a morality play, a tale of countries that lived high and now face the inevitable reckoning. Never mind the fact that this isn't at all what happened - and the equally inconvenient fact that German banks played a large role in inflating Spain's housing bubble. Sin and its consequences is their story, and they're sticking to it.

Worse yet, this is also what many German voters believe, largely because it's what politicians have told them. And fear of a backlash from voters who believe, wrongly, that they're being put on the hook for the consequences of southern European irresponsibility leaves German politicians unwilling to approve essential emergency lending to Spain and other troubled nations unless the borrowers are punished first.

Of course, that's not the way these demands are portrayed. But that's what it really comes down to. And it's long past time to put an end to this cruel nonsense.

If Germany really wants to save the euro, it should let the European Central Bank do what's necessary to rescue the debtor nations - and it should do so without demanding more pointless pain.

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When Growth Outpaces Happiness

September 28, 2012

New York Times

By Richard A. Easterlin

Los Angeles -- CHINA's new leaders, who will be anointed next month at the Communist Party's 18th National Congress in Beijing, might want to rethink the Faustian bargain their predecessors embraced some 20 years ago: namely, that social stability could be bought by rapid economic growth.

As the recent riots at a Foxconn factory in northern China demonstrate, growth alone, even at sustained, spectacular rates, has not produced the kind of life satisfaction crucial to a stable society - an experience that shows how critically important good jobs and a strong social safety net are to people's happiness.

Starting in 1990, as China moved to a free-market economy, real per-capita consumption and gross domestic product doubled, then doubled again. Most households now have at least one color TV. Refrigerators and washing machines - rare before 1990 - are common in cities.

Yet there is no evidence that the Chinese people are, on average, any happier, according to an analysis of survey data that colleagues and I conducted. If anything, they are less satisfied than in 1990, and the burden of decreasing satisfaction has fallen hardest on the bottom third of the population in wealth. Satisfaction among Chinese in even the upper third has risen only moderately.

Our data were collected by five survey organizations, one of them Chinese, between 1990 and 2011. The surveys focused on urban areas, where growth has been concentrated. Participants were asked about their satisfaction with life as a whole, and their feelings were measured on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 representing strong satisfaction.

It is startling to find that Chinese people's feelings of well-being have declined in a period of such momentous improvement in their economic lives. After all, most policy makers would confidently predict that a fourfold increase in a people's material living standard would make them considerably happier.

And yet, piecing the surveys together, we found a U-shaped pattern of happiness over time, with life satisfaction declining from 1990 to the first part of this decade, and then recovering by 2010 to a level somewhat below the 1990 value. What explains the "U" at a time of unprecedented economic growth?

Before free-market reforms kicked in, most urban Chinese workers enjoyed what was called an "iron rice bowl": permanent jobs and an extensive employer-provided safety net, which included subsidized food, housing, health care, child care, pensions and jobs for grown children. Life satisfaction during this period among urban Chinese, despite their much lower levels of income, was almost as high as in the developed world.

The transition to a more private economy in the 1990s abruptly overturned the iron rice bowl. Hundreds of thousands of Chinese who worked at inefficient and unprofitable state companies were laid off. The loss of jobs also meant the loss of the employer-provided safety net. Growing numbers of rural migrants took city jobs that provided no benefits. Among urban workers still employed, concerns about job security and the continuation of benefits mounted. Life satisfaction in urban areas declined markedly.

Although the rate of layoffs dropped considerably in the early 2000s and unemployment started falling, Chinese people's concerns about jobs and safety-net benefits persisted.

Worries about job security are reflected in feelings of financial satisfaction. In 2007, only 27 percent of Chinese in the lowest third of the income distribution expressed satisfaction with their financial situation, down from 42 percent in 1990. Evidence of a fraying social safety net is indicated by the decline in self-reported health among the bottom third: those reporting that their health was good or very good dropped to 44 percent, compared with 54 percent in 1990.

China's transition has been similar in several respects to the transitions of countries in Central and Eastern Europe, for which we have similar life-satisfaction data. In almost all countries, life satisfaction initially declined and then recovered to numbers somewhat below pre-transition levels. The U-shaped pattern in happiness was accompanied by the emergence of widespread joblessness, the dissolution of the safety net and a subsequent modest recovery.

The similarity ends there, however. In Europe, growth initially fell sharply before rebounding, tracking life-satisfaction numbers. In China, life satisfaction declined as output and consumption rapidly expanded. The difference shows that economic growth is not enough; job security and a social safety net are also critical to people's happiness.

What can we learn from China's transition? Certainly not that China should return to socialism and the gross inefficiencies of central planning. But its market transition has given birth to increasing concerns among everyday Chinese about such matters as finding and holding a job, the availability of reliable and affordable health care, and provision for children and the elderly. To its credit, the Chinese government has taken some steps in recent years to broaden and improve unemployment and pension benefits, as well as to upgrade the health care system. But the safety net remains in need of substantial repair.

It is noteworthy that at a time when the need for a strong safety net is under attack in the United States, the world's most fervent capitalist nation has inadvertently demonstrated its critical importance for people's happiness.

Richard A. Easterlin is a professor of economics at the University of Southern California and the author of "Happiness, Growth and the Life Cycle."

(top)

RELEASED IN FULL**DAILY PRESS CLIPS FOR
THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 2012****DOMESTIC AGENDA****Big Firms Overhaul Health Coverage**

September 27, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By ANNA WILDE MATHEWS

Two big employers are planning a radical change in the way they provide health benefits to their workers, giving employees a fixed sum of money and allowing them to choose their medical coverage and insurer from an online marketplace. ([link](#))

USUN IN THE NEWS**GOP Lawmakers Demand Details Of Deadly Attack On U.S. Consulate In Libya**

September 27, 2012

Washington Post

By Ernesto Londoño

Republican lawmakers demanded Wednesday that the Obama administration disclose details about the Sept. 11 attack on U.S. compounds in eastern Libya that killed an ambassador and three other government employees. ([link](#))

UNITED NATIONS**Libyan leader contradicts Obama administration account of Benghazi attack**

September 26, 2012

Foreign Policy

By Colum Lynch

Libya's president Mohammed Magarief today contradicted American claims that the deadly attack on the U.S. consulate was a spontaneous reaction to an anti-Islamic film, telling NBC's Anne Curry in an interview broadcast this morning. ([link](#))

At UN, Egypt And Yemen Urge Curbs On Free Speech

September 27, 2012

New York Times

By Neil MacFarquhar

UNITED NATIONS - The new presidents of Egypt and Yemen - both of whom were swept to power by uprisings demanding democratic rights - issued clear rebuttals on Wednesday to President Obama's ardent defense of Western values at the United Nations, arguing that cultural limits on rights like freedom of speech had to be respected. ([link](#))

Egypt's President Morsi Tells UN: Insults To Muhammad "Unacceptable"

September 27, 2012

Washington Post

By Anne Gearan

UNITED NATIONS - Insults to the Islamic prophet Muhammad are part of an organized assault on Muslim religious and cultural values and cannot be brushed aside, Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi said Wednesday, rejecting the case for free speech made by President Obama just a day earlier. ([link](#))

Blasphemy's back**REVIEW AUTHORITY: Archie Bolster, Senior Reviewer**

September 26, 2012

Foreign Policy

By Colum Lynch

President Barack Obama on Tuesday delivered an impassioned defense of the values of freedom of expression, explaining that the appearance on the Internet of a controversial film mocking the Prophet Mohammed did not justify the violent attacks on American embassies throughout the region. It was aimed at persuading the Arab Spring's new leaders that criticism against Islam, however offensive, should not be answered with violence or prohibitions on speech. It didn't work. ([link](#))

Arabs Seek Blasphemy Ban; US, Russia Spar On Syria

September 27, 2012

Associated Press

By Bradley Klapper And Matthew Lee

UNITED NATIONS - The head of the Arab League called Wednesday for the international community to criminalize blasphemy, warning that insults to religion pose a serious threat to global peace and security. The comments put him squarely at odds with the United States and many of its western allies, which are resolutely opposed to restrictions on freedom of expression. ([link](#))

Ahmadinejad Tells UN "Uncivilized Zionists" Are Threat To Iran; US Boycotts Address

September 27, 2012

Washington Post

By Colum Lynch

UNITED NATIONS - Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, addressing the U.N. General Assembly on Wednesday for what was likely to be the last time, denounced military threats against Tehran by "uncivilized Zionists" and attacked Western leaders as handmaidens of the devil. ([link](#))

Israel's Netanyahu To Push Case Against Iran At UN

September 27, 2012

Associated Press

By Aron Heller

JERUSALEM - Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu heads to the United Nations Wednesday night with a single item on his agenda: Iran. ([link](#))

U.N. members divided over response to Mali crisis

September 27, 2012

Reuters

By John Irish

UNITED NATIONS - U.N. members appeared deeply divided on Wednesday as they sought to resolve the crisis in Mali, with France and some of Mali's neighbours backing possible military intervention, while the United States said the West African nation must first have an elected government. ([link](#))

World Urged To Help Sahel, But Fears Over Mali Force

September 27, 2012

AFP

By Jo Biddle

World leaders vowed to work to stem a food crisis in west Africa's Sahel region, where millions risk starvation, but were cautious on sending troops to Mali to root out Islamist rebels. ([link](#))

UN's Focus On Middle East Eclipses Other Urgent Global Issues

September 27, 2012

McClatchy

By Hannah Allam

Casual observers of this week's United Nations General Assembly could be forgiven for thinking that the Middle East was the only region of concern for world leaders. ([link](#))

LatAm Presidents Call For Drug Debate At UN

September 27, 2012

Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS - The leaders of three Latin American nations hit hard by drug trafficking called on the membership of the United Nations on Wednesday to promote a debate on alternative ways to combat drug trafficking. ([link](#))

TOP STORIES

Clinton Suggests Link To Qaeda Offshoot In Deadly Libya Attack

September 27, 2012

New York Times

By Steven Lee Myers

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton on Wednesday suggested there was a link between the Qaeda franchise in North Africa and the attack at the American diplomatic mission in Benghazi, Libya, that killed the American ambassador and three others. She was the highest-ranking Obama administration official to publicly make the connection, and her comments intensified what is becoming a fiercely partisan fight over whether the attack could have been prevented. ([link](#))

U.S. Ties Libya Attack to 'Powder Keg' in Mali

September 27, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By CHRISTOPHER RHOADS and DREW HINSHAW

UNITED NATIONS—Mali has become an incubator for terrorist activity that demands urgent international attention, world leaders said Wednesday, as the U.S. drew its most explicit link between al Qaeda havens in such places and the recent attack on the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi, Libya. ([link](#))

Rebels Make Gains In Blunting Syrian Air Attacks

September 27, 2012

New York Times

By C. J. Chivers

ABU AD DUHUR, Syria - The rebels huddled before darkness near the edge of the Syrian Air Force base. They were about 40 men, hiding beside small buildings on the flatlands south of Aleppo. ([link](#))

Hezbollah Increases Support For Syrian Regime, US And Lebanese Officials Say

September 27, 2012

Washington Post

By Babak Dehghanpisheh

BEIRUT - Hezbollah, the Lebanese Shiite political and militant group, has ramped up its support for the Syrian government, sending in military advisers to aid in the bloody struggle against the opposition, U.S. and Lebanese government officials say. ([link](#))

China Tied Up By Transition As Its Economy Loses Force

September 27, 2012

New York Times

By Andrew Jacobs

BEIJING - When it comes to confronting economic slowdowns, the Chinese government has not been shy about making bold moves. Faced with the contagion of global recession four years ago, policy makers created a \$585 billion stimulus package that helped inoculate the nation against the economic malaise still sapping the United States and Europe. ([link](#))

AFRICA

Nigeria

Nigeria says its push on Boko Haram Islamists paying off

September 27, 2012

Reuters

By Louis Charbonneau and Michelle Nichols

UNITED NATIONS - Nigeria's "robust" approach to neutralizing a threat posed by Islamist sect Boko Haram using military force, holding indirect talks with the group and improving education in the north is paying off, the Nigerian president said on Wednesday. ([link](#))

South Africa

South African Firebrand Is Charged With Money Laundering

September 27, 2012

New York Times

By Lydia Polgreen

JOHANNESBURG - Julius Malema, the firebrand former leader of the African National Congress youth wing, appeared in a court in his home province of Limpopo on Wednesday to face a charge of money laundering in connection with state contracts with an engineering company linked to him. ([link](#))

Sudan

South Sudan-Sudan Agree On 9 Issues But Not Border

September 27, 2012

Associated Press

By Kirubel Tadesse

ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia - The leaders of Sudan and South Sudan have reached nine agreements but did work out the issues surrounding the contested Abyei region or the demarcation of their shared border. ([link](#))

Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe President: Constitution Changes On Track

September 27, 2012

Associated Press

By Angus Shaw

HARARE, Zimbabwe - Zimbabwe President Robert Mugabe has assured regional leaders that adoption of a new constitution is on track, ahead of proposed elections to end the nation's fragile coalition government, his loyalist state media reported Wednesday. ([link](#))

ASIA

Burma

In Further Opening, US To Ease Ban On Imports From Myanmar

September 27, 2012

New York Times

By Steven Lee Myers And Rick Gladstone

The United States announced Wednesday that it would begin to ease a longstanding ban on imports from Myanmar, one of the last major economic sanctions on the country, because of the advances made by its military-led government in moving toward a more democratic system. ([link](#))

Japan

Former Prime Minister In Japan Elected To Lead Opposition Party

September 27, 2012

New York Times

By Hiroko Tabuchi

TOKYO - Shinzo Abe, a nationalist former prime minister, was elected to lead Japan's main opposition party on Wednesday, giving him a chance of regaining the nation's top job - a prospect that could worsen the country's tense relations with China and its other Asian neighbors. ([link](#))

NEA

Bahrain

Daughter Of Bahrain Opposition Leader Sentenced

September 26, 2012

Associated Press

MANAMA, Bahrain - A defense lawyer in Bahrain says the daughter of a jailed rights activist has received a two-month prison sentence for ripping a picture of the Gulf nation's king during a protest. ([link](#))

Egypt

Egypt's President Calls for Action on Syria

September 27, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By MATT BRADLEY in Cairo and JOE LAURIA at the United Nations

Egypt's president sought to reclaim his country's role as a regional leader, voicing outrage over an anti-Islam video and urging a regional solution to the Syrian conflict, in the first speech to the United Nations General Assembly by a freely elected Egyptian head of state. ([link](#))

Egypt's Morsi Warns Israel Over "Law Of The Jungle" Threats

September 27, 2012

AFP

Egypt's new president on Wednesday hit out at Israel over its veiled threats to attack Iran's nuclear facilities and the deadlock in the Middle East peace process. ([link](#))

Egypt: No Need To Amend Treaty With Israel

September 27, 2012

Associated Press

CAIRO - A spokesman for Egypt's President Mohammed Morsi said Wednesday that there is currently no need to amend the peace treaty with Israel, despite calls in Cairo to revise the 1979 accord to allow the country to beef up its presence in the Sinai Peninsula to combat militants there, the state news agency reported. ([link](#))

Iran

Conflicts at Home Resonate in Iranian's U.N. Farewell

September 27, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By JAY SOLOMON

UNITED NATIONS—Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's farewell appearance at the United Nations General Assembly exposed the deepening political fissures inside Tehran, in a surprising finale to eight annual U.S. speeches better known for his insults and threats. ([link](#))

Iranian President's Press Adviser Jailed

September 27, 2012

Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran - Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's top press adviser was taken into custody to begin serving a six-month jail sentence after being convicted of publishing material deemed insulting to the country's supreme leader. ([link](#))

Iran Seeking New Contact Group On Syria

September 27, 2012

AFP

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said Wednesday that Tehran was working to set up a separate contact group on the conflict in Syria, in a move unlikely to be welcomed by many nations. ([link](#))

Libya

White House: Obama Views Libya Attack As Terrorism

September 27, 2012

Associated Press

By Steve Peoples

ABOARD AIR FORCE ONE - The White House said Wednesday that President Barack Obama considers the deadly assault on the U.S. consulate in Libya a terrorist attack. ([link](#))

Saudi Arabia

WHO Advising Saudis On Virus Ahead Of Hajj

September 27, 2012

AFP

The UN health agency said Wednesday it knew of no more cases in the Gulf of a mystery illness from the same virus family as the deadly SARS but was advising Saudi Arabia ahead of the upcoming Hajj pilgrimage. ([link](#))

Syria

Syrian Insurgents Mount Fierce Attack On Military Compound In Damascus

September 27, 2012

New York Times

By An Employee Of The New York Times In Syria And Kareem Fahim

DAMASCUS, Syria - Suicide bombers struck a military headquarters in a busy square in central Damascus on Wednesday morning, the second insurgent assault on a government military installation in two days and the largest attack in the capital since July, when explosions killed several key aides to President Bashar al-Assad. ([link](#))

West Complicit In Syria "Massacres": Rebel Leader

September 27, 2012

AFP

A Syrian rebel commander has accused the West of being complicit in the "unprecedented massacres" committed by President Bashar al-Assad's forces by refusing to arm the rebels with anti-aircraft weapons. ([link](#))

Arab Ministers Mull Syria Intervention Force

September 27, 2012

AFP

By Tim Witcher

Arab ministers on Wednesday weighed calls for an Arab intervention in the Syria conflict, while Western nations pressed Russia and China to drop opposition to international action. ([link](#))

Tunisia

Tunisia Says Would Support Arab Peacekeepers In Syria

September 27, 2012

AFP

Tunisian President Moncef Marzouki on Wednesday said his country would support an Arab peacekeeping force in Syria, as nations struggle to find a solution to the conflict. ([link](#))

Outrage As Tunisia Woman Raped By Police Is Accused

September 27, 2012

AFP

Tunisian civil society groups expressed outrage on Wednesday after a young woman was accused of indecency by two policemen jailed for raping her, amid criticism of the Islamist-led government for rolling back women's rights. ([link](#))

SCA

India

As Power Flows To Regional Bosses, Questions Rise On India's Economy

September 27, 2012

New York Times

By Jim Yardley

NEW DELHI - It seems like eons ago, but Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and his coalition government once inspired very high expectations. They were going to stoke India's economy, improve education, help the poor, build modern transportation and energy systems and, perhaps most improbably, prove that India, the most populous and messiest of democracies, could be successfully governed. ([link](#))

Two Million Flee India Floods As Aid Effort Struggles

September 27, 2012

AFP

Rains hampered a military air operation to help flood victims in northeastern India, where more than two million people have been forced from their homes, officials said Wednesday. ([link](#))

Pakistan

Pakistan Taliban: "Amnesty" For Bounty Minister

September 27, 2012

Associated Press

By Asif Shahzad

ISLAMABAD - The Pakistani Taliban announced Wednesday that they were giving a Cabinet minister an "amnesty," taking him off their hit list, because he offered a \$100,000 bounty for the killing of an anti-Islam filmmaker. ([link](#))

WHA/EUR

Markets Falter In Europe Amid Protests On Austerity

September 27, 2012

New York Times

By Liz Alderman And Niki Kitsantonis

ATHENS - After a period of relative calm, European markets shuddered once again on Wednesday as protests erupted across Greece and demonstrators surrounded the Spanish Parliament for a second day to protest the austerity program of Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy. ([link](#))

Russia

Putin Condemns Bloody Regime Change In Middle East

September 27, 2012

Associated Press

By Peter Leonard

MOSCOW - Russian President Vladimir Putin issued a strong warning Wednesday against inciting violent regime change in the Middle East - an apparent rebuke to Western calls for an end to Syrian President Bashar Assad's rule. ([link](#))

Russian Billionaire Lebedev Charged With Hooliganism

September 27, 2012

Washington Post

By Kathy Lally

MOSCOW - A billionaire former KGB agent who has been financing an independent newspaper has been charged with hooliganism for getting into a fight on a television show a year ago, Russian news agencies reported Wednesday, in yet another sign of a crackdown on dissident voices here. ([link](#))

Turkey

As Refugees Flood Turkey, Asylum System Nears Breakdown

September 27, 2012

New York Times

By Susanne Güsten

ISTANBUL - A month after arriving in Istanbul after a six-week journey across Africa and the Middle East, Moussa and Diaby are still trying to figure out what to do next. ([link](#))

Turkey To Block Access To Anti-Islam Film

September 27, 2012

Associated Press

ANKARA, Turkey - A Turkish court issued an order on Wednesday allowing authorities in the country to block Internet access to the anti-Islam movie that has sparked violent protests across the Muslim world, an official said. ([link](#))

FOREIGN POLICY

Obama, Romney Differ On US Exceptionalism

September 27, 2012

Washington Post

By Scott Wilson

President Obama and Republican presidential nominee Mitt Romney made clear this week that they share an overriding belief: American political and economic values should triumph in the world. ([link](#))

Cyberwarfare Emerges From Shadows for Public Discussion by U.S. Officials

September 26, 2012

New York Times

By SCOTT SHANE

WASHINGTON — For years, even as the United States carried out sophisticated cyberattacks on Iran's nuclear program and the Pentagon created a Cyber Command, officials have been hesitant to discuss American offensive cyberwarfare programs openly. Since June, in fact, F.B.I. agents have been investigating leaks to The New York Times about the computer attacks on Tehran. ([link](#))

EDITORIAL / OPINION**In Obama's Speech, Their Voices**

September 27, 2012

New York Times

By Nicholas D. Kristof

When President Obama made a landmark speech against modern slavery on Tuesday, many of us in the news media shrugged. It didn't fit into the political narrative. It wasn't controversial, so - yawn - it wasn't really news. ([link](#))

Fighting Over God's Image

September 27, 2012

New York Times

By Edward J. Blum And Paul Harvey

THE murders of four Americans over an amateurish online video about Muhammad, like the attempted murder of a Danish cartoonist who in 2005 had depicted the prophet with a bomb in his turban, have left many Americans confused, angry and fearful about the rage that some Muslims feel about visual representations of their sacred figures. ([link](#))

The Libya Debacle

September 27, 2012

Wall Street Journal

In his United Nations speech on Tuesday, President Obama talked about the September 11 attack on the U.S. consulate in Libya and declared that "there should be no doubt that we will be relentless in tracking down the killers and bringing them to justice." What he didn't say is how relentless he'll be in tracking down the security lapses and intelligence failures that contributed to the murders. Let's say there's some doubt about that. ([link](#))

5 Reasons To Intervene In Syria Now

September 27, 2012

New York Times

By Michael Doran And Max Boot

WHETHER you agree or disagree with President Obama, there is no doubt that he has formulated a coherent approach to the use of American power. The Obama Doctrine involves getting into a conflict zone and getting out fast without ground wars or extended military occupations. This approach proved its effectiveness in Libya last year. ([link](#))

Inside Assad's Killing Fields

September 27, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By JONATHAN SPYER

Aleppo, Syria – Dar al-Shifa hospital in the al-Sha'ar neighborhood of Aleppo is one of two large facilities serving the fighters of the Free Syrian Army here. The hospital also treats civilians in FSA-controlled areas. On Sept. 18, Dar al-Shifa came under attack by the Syrian air force. I was in the hospital at the time and witnessed the bombing. ([link](#))

A Flimsy U.S. Sanctions Policy Toward Iran

September 27, 2012

Washington Post

By Andrew K. Davenport And Ilan Berman

Recent revelations from the International Atomic Energy Agency that Iran has both continued and expanded its uranium enrichment activities have focused attention anew on U.S. policy toward the Islamic Republic - and what more can be done to stop Iran's march toward the bomb. ([link](#))

Mr. Romney Addresses Foreign Aid

September 27, 2012

New York Times

Six weeks before the election, Mitt Romney has finally made a substantive contribution to the national security debate, offering ideas about how he would handle foreign aid. For a campaign troubled by fumbles and incoherent proposals, this counts as progress. But, even here, there are details he needs to flesh out. ([link](#))

Abu Hamza Road Show

September 27, 2012

Wall Street Journal

For years, Abu Hamza made a career out of denouncing the West—and allegedly plotting terrorist attacks against it—while living in the bosom of the British welfare state. ([link](#))

DOMESTIC AGENDA

Big Firms Overhaul Health Coverage

September 27, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By ANNA WILDE MATHEWS

Two big employers are planning a radical change in the way they provide health benefits to their workers, giving employees a fixed sum of money and allowing them to choose their medical coverage and insurer from an online marketplace.

Sears Holdings Corp. SHLD -0.74% and Darden Restaurants Inc. say the change isn't designed to make workers pay a higher share of health-coverage costs. Instead they say it is supposed to put more control over health benefits in the hands of employees.

The approach will be closely watched by firms around the U.S. If it eventually takes hold widely, it might parallel the transition from company-provided pensions to 401(k) retirement-savings plans controlled by workers and funded partly by employer contributions. For employees, the concern will be that they could end up more directly exposed to the upward march of health costs.

"It's a fundamental change...the employer is saying, 'Here's a pot of money, go shop,'" said Paul Fronstin, director of health research at the Employee Benefit Research Institute, a nonprofit. The worry for employees is that "the money may not be sufficient and it may not keep up with premium inflation."

Neither Sears nor Darden would say how much money employees would receive to buy health insurance. Darden says its sum would rise as health-care costs rise. Sears declined to disclose details of its contributions strategy.

Darden did say that employees will pay the same contribution out of their own pockets that they currently do for approximately the same level of coverage. Employees who pick more expensive coverage will pay more from their paychecks to make up the gap. Those who opt for cheaper insurance, which may involve bigger deductibles or more limited networks of doctors and hospitals, will pay less.

"It puts the choice in the employee's hands to buy up or buy down," said Danielle Kirgan, a senior vice president at Darden. The owner of chains including Olive Garden and Red Lobster will let its approximately 45,000 full-time employees choose the new coverage in November, to kick in Jan. 1. Darden says that employees with families to cover will be given more money to buy insurance than employees covering just themselves.

The hope is that insurers will compete more vigorously to get workers to sign up, which will lower overall health-care costs. Darden and Sears are both currently self-insured, meaning that the cost of claims each year comes out of company coffers.

On average, U.S. employers and workers are estimated to spend \$15,475 in annual premiums for health insurance this year for a worker with family coverage, according to a survey by the Kaiser Family Foundation and Health Research and Educational Trust. The average employee pays about 28% of that amount and the employer picks up the balance.

The approach isn't directly tied to the federal health overhaul law, which largely goes into effect in 2014. That law will make it easier for employers to funnel workers toward purchasing plans in the individual insurance market, perhaps aided by an employer contribution. The exchange used by Sears and Darden still involves employer-backed group plans, not individual insurance, however, so it doesn't rely on the law's changes.

Several big benefits consultants and health insurers are betting on the employee-choice model. Major consulting firm Aon Hewitt, a unit of Aon AON, is behind the insurance exchange that Sears and Darden will use, while rival Towers Watson TW & Co. in May bought Extend Health Inc., an online marketplace used by employers to hook retirees up with Medicare coverage. It plans to expand the marketplace to include active workers buying individual plans, starting in 2014.

"Within the next two or three years, it's going to be mainstream," said Ken Goulet, executive vice president at WellPoint Inc. The insurer will roll out a product next year called Anthem Health Marketplace that lets employers offer a variety of its plans to workers, paired with a fixed contribution. Mr. Goulet said it is close to signing up more than 30 midsize and large employers for early next year, including one with more than 50,000 workers.

Other insurers say big companies will hold back until they see early successes. "There will be a lot of interest in taking a look at those results," said Yasmine Winkler, chief product and marketing officer at UnitedHealth Group Inc.'s insurance arm, the nation's largest. But, she said, "The jury's out" on whether the approach will become widespread.

Though some employers today offer workers more than one health plan design, they don't provide as many choices as the exchanges will. The Aon Hewitt version will have five different levels of health plan, and five different health insurers. Workers also don't get the "shopping" experience, where they see the full cost of the plan, and apply their own allotted money to it.

A spokesman for Sears, which will have around 90,000 full-time employees eligible for the new health-benefits program, said the approach "is about increasing associate choice and options for their health care," and should benefit both the company and its employees.

But some consultants question whether the exchange setups will achieve overall savings for big employers, particularly those who already self-insure to shave costs.

Exchange operators today say they offer employers more predictable costs, as well as potential savings gleaned from workers' voluntary choice of skinnier coverage and competition among insurers offering plans on the exchanges.

"It drives competition and drives efficiency," said Ken Sperling, Aon's national health exchange strategy leader.

Aon's marketplace is expected to have around 100,000 employees, including Aon's own, when it launches next year. Bloom Health Corp., which is working with Health Care Service Corp. and Minnesota's Medica Health Plans, in addition to WellPoint and others, said it also expects to have around 100,000 workers at the beginning of 2013. Other employer-focused exchanges, including ConnectedHealth LLC, of Chicago, also say they are seeing growth.

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USUN IN THE NEWS

GOP Lawmakers Demand Details Of Deadly Attack On U.S. Consulate In Libya

September 27, 2012

[Washington Post](#)

By Ernesto Londoño

Republican lawmakers demanded Wednesday that the Obama administration disclose details about the Sept. 11 attack on U.S. compounds in eastern Libya that killed an ambassador and three other government employees.

The requests for information about the assault, including any cables about security written by slain Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens, underscored the extent to which the incident has become a political liability for the White House during the final stretch of President Obama's reelection campaign.

Lawmakers are asking whether the administration overlooked warning signs about the threat level in Libya, and some have suggested the security at the U.S. installations in Benghazi was inadequate.

Senior administration officials, including Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and Director of National Intelligence James Clapper, have briefed Congress. But details on the events in Benghazi are still being assembled.

After initially describing the attack as a spontaneous act of mob violence in response to a video that disparaged Islam, administration officials in recent days have begun to suggest it was a well-planned terrorist attack.

Clinton mentioned the Benghazi assault Wednesday during a speech at the U.N. General Assembly about the rise of extremist militants in North Africa. Clinton did not specifically ascribe the attack to al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, the African offshoot of the terrorist organization, but she said the violent deaths of American officials underscored the importance of defeating the group.

"With a larger safe haven and increased freedom to maneuver, terrorists are seeking to extend their reach and their networks in multiple directions," Clinton said, according to an official transcript of her remarks. "And they are now working with other violent extremists to undermine the democratic transitions underway in North Africa, as we tragically saw in Benghazi."

U.S. counterterrorism chief Matthew Olsen told the the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee last week that analysts are exploring whether al-Qaeda's African branch played a role in the attack. Investigators are also looking for evidence linking the assault to leaders of Ansar al-Sharia, a loose coalition of hard-line militants with a strong presence in Libya.

Republican congressmen took the administration to task for what they called contradictory statements about the Benghazi raid and initial information portraying it as a protest that turned violent.

"This seems like a pre-9/11 mindset - treating an act of war solely as a criminal matter," a group of 10 congressmen wrote Wednesday in a letter to the president, referring to the 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States.

Sens. Johnny Isakson (Ga.) and Bob Corker (Tenn.), GOP members of the Foreign Relations Committee, sent a letter Tuesday to Clinton expressing concern about the "lack of security preparations made despite a demonstrable increase in risks to U.S. officials and facilities in Benghazi." The senators asked to see any relevant cables that Stevens wrote in the days before he was killed.

The State Department has launched a type of probe called an accountability panel. The FBI is conducting a separate criminal investigation into the incident. Citing the inquiries, administration officials have provided few new details about the Benghazi raid in recent days.

U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Susan Rice made the most extensive remarks about the attack four days after the deaths. Her early accounts have come under scrutiny because they suggested that U.S. government officials did not believe the assault had been well planned or coordinated.

"We look forward to a timely response that explains how the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations could characterize an attack on a U.S. consulate so inaccurately," Sen. John McCain (Ariz.) and three fellow Republican senators wrote Wednesday in a letter to Rice.

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UNITED NATIONS

Libyan leader contradicts Obama administration account of Benghazi attack

September 26, 2012

Foreign Policy

By Colum Lynch

Libya's president Mohammed Magarief today contradicted American claims that the deadly attack on the U.S. consulate was a spontaneous reaction to an anti-Islamic film, telling NBC's Anne Curry in an interview broadcast this morning.

"It has nothing to do with this attack," said Magarief, noting that the assailants used rocket propelled grenades and mortar fire in the attack. "It's a preplanned act of terrorism against American citizens."

The remarks came more than one week after Susan Rice, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, argued that the attack, which killed four American nationals, including U.S. ambassador J. Christopher Stevens, had been triggered by popular anger from Libyan Muslim's offended by the film.

"Our current best assessment, based on the information that we have at present, is that, in fact, what this began as, it was a spontaneous -- not a premeditated -- response to what had transpired in Cairo," Rice told ABC's "This Week." "We believe that folks in Benghazi, a small number of people came to the...consulate...to replicate that sort of challenge that was posed in Cairo. And then as that unfolded, it seems to have been hijacked, let us say, by some individual clusters of extremists who came with heavier weapons."

Rice's account has come under scrutiny in the following days as the administration's explanation for the attack evolved.

Republicans have criticized the account of the attack, suggesting that the Obama administration is seeking to mask the facts. They have seized on the fact that President Barack Obama has not characterized the attack as an act of terror, even though other senior administration officials have, including Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Matthew Olsen, the director of the National Counterterrorism Center.

"It is troubling that President Obama refuses to call the Libya attacks on the anniversary of 9/11 an act of terror," said Republican National Committee Chairman Reince Priebus. "For weeks President Obama and his administration have failed to acknowledge the facts behind the Libya attack."

Asked to explain the discrepancy, Rice's office referred Turtle Bay to White House spokesman Jay Carney's reaction to the Libyan president claim that the U.S. consulate had been targeted in a pre-planned terror attack. "Over the course of the past two weeks, this administration has provided as much information as it has been able to."

"It continues to be the case that we provided information based on what we know -- not based on speculation but based on what we know -- acknowledging that we are continuing an investigation that will undoubtedly uncover more facts, and as more facts and more details emerge we will, when appropriate, provide them to you."

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At UN, Egypt And Yemen Urge Curbs On Free Speech

September 27, 2012

New York Times

By Neil MacFarquhar

UNITED NATIONS - The new presidents of Egypt and Yemen - both of whom were swept to power by uprisings demanding democratic rights - issued clear rebuttals on Wednesday to President Obama's ardent defense of Western values at the United Nations, arguing that cultural limits on rights like freedom of speech had to be respected.

President Mohamed Morsi of Egypt, who billed his 40-minute speech to world leaders as the first by a democratically elected leader of his country, condemned the violence stemming from a short online video that insulted the Prophet Muhammad and led to numerous deaths, including that of the American ambassador to Libya and three of his staff members.

But Mr. Morsi rejected Mr. Obama's broad defense of free speech a day earlier at the United Nations, saying "Egypt respects freedom of expression, freedom of expression that is not used to incite hatred against anyone."

"We expect from others, as they expect from us, that they respect our cultural specifics and religious references, and not seek to impose concepts or cultures that are unacceptable to us," said Mr. Morsi, a former leader of the Muslim Brotherhood. "Insults against the prophet of Islam, Muhammad, are not acceptable. We will not allow anyone to do this by word or by deed."

On Tuesday, Mr. Obama laid out a lengthy defense of the right of free speech as a universal value. But Mr. Morsi and other leaders signaled that such a right could only go so far, even if the Arab world has four new leaders because of popular revolutions demanding basic human rights.

President Abed Rabbu Mansour Hadi of Yemen opened his speech on Wednesday by demanding curbs on freedom of speech that insults religion.

"These behaviors find people who defend them under the justification of the freedom of expression," he said. "These people overlook the fact that there should be limits for the freedom of expression, especially if such freedom blasphemes the beliefs of nations and defames their figures."

But Mr. Hadi also noted that expressions of opinion should be peaceful, denouncing "violence and incitement of hatred, which is contradictory to the values of the true Islamic religion."

Other leaders have spoken out on the issue at the United Nations. President Asif A. Zardari of Pakistan, a country that experienced some of the most violent riots as a result of the film, went furthest in arguing against freedom of expression on religious matters, using his address on Tuesday to demand that insults to religion be criminalized.

"Before I take up my speech, I want to express the strongest condemnation for acts of incitement of hate against the faith of billions of Muslims of the world and our beloved prophet, Muhammad," Mr. Zardari said, going on to enumerate the suffering caused in Pakistan by extremism, including the 2007 assassination of his wife, Benazir Bhutto.

"The international community must not become silent observers and should criminalize such acts that destroy the peace of the world and endanger world security by misusing freedom of expression," he said. The United Nations should take up the issue immediately, he added.

Past United Nations attempts to address the issue, summarized in a general Human Rights Council agreement, have been deemed insufficient.

Nabil Elaraby, the secretary general of the 21-member Arab League, added his voice to the issue, saying that spiritual harm should be treated as a crime, even as he condemned the recent riots. "If the international community has criminalized bodily harm, it must just as well criminalize psychological and spiritual harm," Mr. Elaraby told a special session about Syria of the Security Council, saying it was a serious enough problem to warrant Council attention.

The Arab League will pursue an international legal framework to confront insults to religion and to ensure respect for all faiths and their symbols, he said.

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran, in a speech on Monday at a high-level meeting on legal standards, indirectly attacked the United States and others for defending freedom of speech when it came to defaming religion, but there was no direct reference to this in his main address on Wednesday. He stuck largely to spiritual and moral themes, rather than presenting his usual broadside against Israel, the lack of peace in the Middle East and international efforts to dismantle Iran's nuclear program.

Mr. Ahmadinejad did say that Iran was being threatened with military action by "uncivilized Zionists" and criticized the enormous amount of money spent on American elections, without naming the United States. He aligned himself indirectly with Occupy Wall Street and similar protest movements, saying the voices of the "99 percent" were not heard in policy making decisions.

But otherwise the 35-minute appearance was a lecture about the need for a fairer world order. As an example, he said later, Iran would soon form a working group to tackle the Syria problem. He concluded by forecasting at length about the peace that will prevail with the appearance of the religious savior awaited by many faiths.

"The current abysmal situation of the world and the bitter incidents of history are due mainly to the wrong management of the world, and the self-proclaimed centers of power who have entrusted themselves to the devil," Mr. Ahmadinejad said.

But he said nothing to prompt what had become an annual walkout by European nations over Holocaust denials and other subjects.

"Ahmadinejad gave a long, rambling speech," said one European Union diplomat, speaking anonymously according to his ministry's guidelines. "Previously we've walked out because of his anti-Semitism, threats against Israel and 9/11 conspiracies. This year his only crime was incoherence."

Other critics noted that Mr. Ahmadinejad made laudatory remarks about the young people who are seeking change around the world, even though Iran crushed its own youth-fueled pro-democracy movement that contested his re-election in 2009.

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Egypt's President Morsi Tells UN: Insults To Muhammad "Unacceptable"

September 27, 2012

Washington Post

By Anne Gearan

UNITED NATIONS - Insults to the Islamic prophet Muhammad are part of an organized assault on Muslim religious and cultural values and cannot be brushed aside, Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi said Wednesday, rejecting the case for free speech made by President Obama just a day earlier.

"The obscenities that I have referred to that were recently released as part of an organized campaign against Islamic sanctities are unacceptable," Morsi said, referring to a crude YouTube video called "Innocence of Muslims" that mocks Islam.

"We reject this. We cannot accept it," Morsi said, his voice thin with anger. "We will not allow anyone to do this by word or deed."

In an address before the U.N. General Assembly that marked his debut as an international statesman, Egypt's first democratically elected president presented an unapologetically Islamic view of world events and Egypt's role in them. He said outrage over insults to Islam does not justify violence but said nothing directly about the attack two weeks ago on the U.S. Embassy in Cairo.

And his assertion that the YouTube video was part of an organized assault risked undermining U.S. attempts to disavow it, although Morsi did not explain who he thought was behind the campaign.

"Egypt respects freedom of expression," said Morsi, who was the candidate of the Muslim Brotherhood movement once banned by the U.S.-backed secular dictatorship of Hosni Mubarak. But "not a freedom of expression that targets a specific religion or a specific culture."

Morsi's stance underlined the challenges facing the Obama administration as it attempts to recalibrate the U.S. relationship not only with Egypt but also with other countries in the Middle East and North Africa roiled by the Arab Spring. The reaction to the YouTube video that denigrated Islam has proven to be a critical flash point.

With the U.S. presidential election approaching, Republican candidate Mitt Romney has tried to turn the events in the Middle East and North Africa into a referendum on what he says is Obama's weakness. This week, Romney said Morsi's election in Egypt was part of a pattern of events that called for tougher leadership from the United States.

The Obama administration was angered by Morsi's initially slow response to the Sept. 11 attack on the embassy in Cairo, which ended with protesters vandalizing the compound and tearing down the U.S. flag. Obama placed an unusual late-night phone call to Morsi to complain, but U.S. officials said the Egyptian leader has since moved quickly to protect U.S. installations in Egypt.

In his address, Morsi never mentioned the United States, Egypt's largest foreign benefactor, but much of his message appeared aimed at setting boundaries for his country's new relationship with the West.

He said Egypt would not back away from a diplomatic partnership with Iran to end the civil war in Syria - a partnership that is viewed with deep skepticism by Washington because of Iran's alleged role in funding and arming the repressive Syrian regime.

Morsi also said Egypt would argue forcefully for the rights of Palestinians and for an end to what he called illegal occupation of Arab lands, a reference to Israeli occupation of the West Bank. He said nothing about Egypt's peace treaty with Israel, the basis for about \$1.5 billion in annual U.S. aid.

The Egyptian president denounced Israel's presumed nuclear weapons, a stockpile built outside the international arms control treaty. And in a further challenge

to Israel and its U.S. ally, Morsi warned against "irresponsible policies or arbitrary threats." That was a reference to the looming possibility of a unilateral Israeli military strike on Iran's nuclear facilities.

The United States opposes such a strike now, but it would almost certainly back Israel if it went ahead.

"The acceptance by the international community of the principle of preemptiveness, or the attempt to legitimize it," Morsi said, "is itself a serious matter and must be firmly confronted to avoid the prevalence of the law of the jungle."

Morsi, who was sworn in June 30, has previously said he would like to make changes to the 30-year-old peace treaty with Israel, but he has been careful not to suggest he would abandon it.

The Obama administration is working to help Egypt secure a badly needed loan from the International Monetary Fund, but talks on the aid package were delayed by the embassy protests this month. Morsi is stepping carefully to avoid alienating his Islamist constituency at home, while seeking to reassure the United States and other potential international investors.

His lengthy visit to the United States will not include a meeting with Obama. Although Morsi's office had said a meeting was planned, the White House was cool to the idea in the middle of the presidential campaign.

Obama told an interviewer shortly after the Cairo attack that Egypt was not necessarily an ally. That remark hung over Morsi's meeting Monday with Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, but U.S. officials later said the session was cordial and productive.

Morsi and his delegation made a point of stressing that the security of diplomatic installations was "Egypt's duty," said a senior U.S. official who wasn't authorized to speak publicly about the private meeting and requested anonymity. Clinton assured Morsi of continued U.S. aid.

A senior State Department official, speaking on the condition that his name not be used because he was discussing diplomatic issues, said that the administration would not respond directly to Morsi's comments. But the official underscored the Egyptian leader's rejection of violence.

Both Egypt and the United States have a strong interest in keeping their long partnership intact. U.S. aid is vital to Egypt's decrepit economy, and Egypt is a key Arab power broker and counterterrorism partner. Mubarak was seen as a bulwark against Islamic extremism, so the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood and more conservative Islamic political parties in Egypt alarmed some of Egypt's international backers.

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Blasphemy's back

September 26, 2012

Foreign Policy

By Colum Lynch

President Barack Obama on Tuesday delivered an impassioned defense of the values of freedom of expression, explaining that the appearance on the Internet of a controversial film mocking the Prophet Mohammed did not justify the violent attacks on American embassies throughout the region. It was aimed at persuading the Arab Spring's new leaders that criticism against Islam, however offensive, should not be answered with violence or prohibitions on speech. It didn't work.

Egyptian President Mohamed Morsy, in his first speech to the U.N. General Assembly, said today that the "obscenities" contained in the film are "unacceptable" and that "we will not allow anyone to do this by word or deed." He proposed that the U.N. Security Council and the U.N. General Assembly consider steps to prevent similar religious offenses.

"There are limits to the freedom of expression especially if such freedom blasphemes the beliefs of nations and defames their figures," added Yemen's President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi.

Over the past day and a half, speaker after speaker, from Indonesia to Qatar to Pakistan to Yemen called for the need to pass international legislation limiting the freedom of expression if it insults the religious beliefs or leaders. "Today, I would like to seize this opportunity to call on the United Nations and those of wisdom and reason and those who have the power of decisions at the international level to write internationally agreed upon laws, procedures, and controls to prevent insulting religious and faiths under any pretext and at the same time keep the right of man to know and express his opinion," said Qatar's emir, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani hours after Obama spoke.

Islamic countries have sought in the past to pursue the adoption of resolutions in the U.N. General Assembly and the Human Rights Council, and are likely to revive that effort in the months ahead. "A lot of these governments feel that they have to be seen doing something, even if it's a non-binding General Assembly resolution," said Bruce Jones, director of NYU's Center on International Cooperation. "It would mean precisely nothing, it would give you something to say without your domestic constituency, but it's a pretty poisonous thing."

The press for new international legislation over insults to religion marks a serious setback for American efforts to convince Islamic governments to curtail their quest to pass international blasphemy laws. It also underscored the challenges of addressing such a potentially divisive issue with a new generation of Middle East leaders whose politics are more deeply rooted in religion.

Last year, Washington marked a watershed moment in international negotiations over the issue when they convinced the Organization of the Islamic Conferences, and organization of Islamic governments, to drop a decade-long effort to adopt resolutions banning religious defamation.

"The U.N. membership finally overcame a battle that had dragged on for nearly a decade over whether insults to religion should be dealt with through bans on offensive speech," said Suzanne Nossel, president of Amnesty International, USA, who helped broker the deal when she was a senior official in the State Department. "It would be a huge step backward to devolve into opposing camps pitting concerns over freedom of expression against those of addressing religious intolerance. Offenses to religion can and must be addressed through more speech exposing such insults for what they are, not through prohibitions on speech."

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Arabs Seek Blasphemy Ban; US, Russia Spar On Syria

September 27, 2012

Associated Press

By Bradley Klapper And Matthew Lee

UNITED NATIONS - The head of the Arab League called Wednesday for the international community to criminalize blasphemy, warning that insults to religion pose a serious threat to global peace and security. The comments put him squarely at odds with the United States and many of its western allies, which are resolutely opposed to restrictions on freedom of expression.

Also at Wednesday's U.N. Security Council session, the U.S. and Russia offered starkly differing assessments of the situation in Syria, underscoring the global body's inability to unite around a strategy to end the Arab country's civil war. Whereas Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton decried Syrian President Bashar Assad's "murdering of his own people," Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov accused the U.S. and other countries of encouraging terrorism.

But perhaps the most controversial argument came from the Arab League's Nabil Elaraby, who told the U.N. Security Council that if the west has criminalized acts that result in bodily harm, it must also criminalize acts that insult or cause offense to religions. He condemned the violence that erupted throughout the Muslim world in response to an anti-Islam film produced in the United States. But, he said that unless blasphemy laws are enacted and enforced, similar incidents could happen again.

"While we fully reject such actions that are not justifiable in any way, we would like to ring the warning bell," Elaraby said. "We are warning that offending religions, faiths and symbols is indeed a matter that threatens in international peace and security now."

"If the international community has criminalized bodily harm, it must just as well criminalize psychological and spiritual harm," he said. "The League of Arab States calls for the development of an international legal framework which is binding ... in order to confront insulting religions and ensuring that religious faith and its symbols are respected."

Elaraby maintained that the 21-member Arab League valued the freedom of speech but stressed that "we don't see any relation between freedom of expression which aims at enriching culture and building civilization of the one hand and activities that merely offend and insult the beliefs, culture and civilization of others."

Individual members of the Arab League, including Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi, have issued similar calls.

Elaraby spoke at a special session of the Security Council called to discuss developments in the Middle East, including the crisis in Syria and the stalled Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

Speaking later at the same meeting, Clinton did not address Elaraby's comments. On Tuesday, though, President Barack Obama gave a powerful defense of free speech rights as he spoke to the U.N. General Assembly. He strongly defended the U.S. Constitution's guarantee of the freedom of expression, "even views that we profoundly disagree with."

Clinton said the protests exposed "deep rifts" within the Arab Spring's new democracies that extremists were able to exploit. She said the U.S. would work closely with the region's new democracies, specifically on helping them restore security. Threats she cited included extremists trying to "hijack" Tunisia's democratic progress and al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula's dangerous presence in Yemen.

"The riots underscored the challenges of building security forces focused on protecting people, not regimes," Clinton told foreign ministers from the 14 other U.N. Security Council members. "Training, funding, and equipment will only go so far. It takes the political will to make hard choices and tough changes that will build strong institutions and lasting security."

On Syria, Clinton joined other ministers in complaining that the U.N. Security Council has been unable to unify behind a plan to end the violence in Syria and promote a political transition. Clinton said the council was "paralyzed." French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius said it was "shocking" that the council had been unable to act. Advocates say almost 30,000 people have died since March 2011, but China and Russia have blocked Security Council action on Syria.

Without mentioning any country by name, Lavrov blamed the U.S. and its European and Arab allies for the continued violence.

"A significant share of responsibility for the continuing bloodshed rests upon the states that instigate the opponents of Bashar Assad to reject the cease-fire and dialogue and at the same time to demand unconditional capitulation of the regime," he said. "Such an approach is unrealistic and in fact it encourages terrorist methods that the armed opposition is using more and more often."

Earlier Wednesday, Clinton said western and northern African nations need to tighten security on their borders to combat the increased movement of extremists, weapons and drugs. She called the Sahel region is a "powder keg" of hunger, displacement and insecurity, and said the world can't ignore the situation.

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Ahmadinejad Tells UN "Uncivilized Zionists" Are Threat To Iran; US Boycotts Address

September 27, 2012

[Washington Post](#)

By Colum Lynch

UNITED NATIONS - Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, addressing the U.N. General Assembly on Wednesday for what was likely to be the last time, denounced military threats against Tehran by "uncivilized Zionists" and attacked Western leaders as handmaidens of the devil.

But, for all the rhetoric, the Iranian leader's speech was decidedly less provocative - and less notable - than his previous seven appearances at the U.N.

The Iranian leader's U.N. visit comes at a time of heightened tension between Israel, which has warned that Tehran is close to becoming a nuclear power, and Iran, which insists that its nuclear program is peaceful. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who is scheduled to address the General Assembly on Thursday, has urged President Obama to take a more confrontational stance toward Iran and to clarify a set of "red lines" that would trigger a military response to Iran's nuclear developments.

But in a speech that drew heavily on religion and history, Ahmadinejad devoted little attention to the nuclear clash, using his speech to advance Tehran's case for a greater say in world affairs as the new leader of the Non-Aligned Movement, where it is serving a three-year term as chair.

"There is no doubt that the world is in need of a new world order and a fresh way of thinking," said Ahmadinejad, whose second and final term expires next year. "The current abysmal situation in the world and the bitter incidents of history are due mainly to the wrong management of the world and the self-proclaimed centers of power who have entrusted themselves to the devil."

Shortly before the speech, the United States said that it would boycott Ahmadinejad's address because he had selected a Jewish holy day, Yom Kippur, to deliver it. Israeli diplomats, who do not work on Yom Kippur and who walked out of an earlier U.N. meeting on the rule of law to protest Iran's presence, also did not attend.

Several European delegations, who were represented by low-ranking diplomats and who were prepared to coordinate a walkout if provoked, sat through the lengthy speech.

"Over the past couple of days, we've seen Mr. Ahmadinejad once again use his trip to the U.N. not to address the legitimate aspirations of the Iranian people but to instead spout paranoid theories and repulsive slurs against Israel," said Erin Pelton, the spokeswoman for the U.S. mission to the United Nations. "It's particularly unfortunate that Mr. Ahmadinejad will have the platform of the UNGA on Yom Kippur, which is why the United States decided not to attend."

In his address, Ahmadinejad returned to a familiar theme on the excesses of American power in the world but did not specifically name the United States, instead denouncing big-power domination of the U.N. Security Council, "unilateralism, application of double standards, and impositions of wars, instability and occupations to ensure economic interests."

Ahmadinejad made passing reference to some of his more controversial statements - recalling his proposal to conduct a fact-finding mission to investigate the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks - and criticized the United States for "killing and throwing the culprit into the sea without trial."

But he ended with a reference to Scripture, saying "the Almighty God" will deliver the world's people to a life of "peace and security."

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Israel's Netanyahu To Push Case Against Iran At UN

September 27, 2012

Associated Press

By Aron Heller

JERUSALEM - Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu heads to the United Nations Wednesday night with a single item on his agenda: Iran.

Netanyahu is convinced the Islamic Republic isn't taking American vows to block it from acquiring nuclear weapons seriously and that time is quickly running out to stop them.

Claiming international diplomatic efforts and economic sanctions have failed, Netanyahu says the threat of force must be seriously considered. His demand that President Barack Obama declare "red lines" that would trigger an American attack on Iran's nuclear facilities has been rejected and sparked a public rift between the two leaders.

Netanyahu's General Assembly address on Thursday offers the Israeli prime minister an opportunity in front of the international community to press his case once again, perhaps in a final plea before Israel takes matters into its own hands. Israeli leaders have issued a series of warnings in recent weeks suggesting that if Iran's uranium enrichment program continues it may soon stage a unilateral military strike, flouting even American wishes.

The Obama administration has urgently sought to hold off Israeli military action, which would likely result in the U.S. being pulled into a conflict and cause nationwide mayhem on the eve of American elections.

Such an attack would almost certainly lead to retaliatory Iranian missile strikes on Israeli population centers. On Sunday, Iranian leaders suggested they may strike Israeli preemptively if they feel threatened.

Israel considers a nuclear-armed Iran to be an existential threat, citing Iranian calls for Israel's destruction, Iran's development of missiles capable of striking the Jewish state and its support for hostile Arab militant groups.

A few hours before Netanyahu flew to the U.S., Iranian leader Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, known for past fiery denunciations of the United States and Israel, spoke at length about his vision for a "new world order" during his speech at the U.N. His speech Wednesday happened to fall on Yom Kippur, the most sacred day on the Jewish calendar, devoted to fasting, prayer and introspection.

Netanyahu issued a statement condemning the speech soon after the fast ended. "On the day when we pray to be inscribed in the book of life a platform was given to a dictatorial regime that strives, at every opportunity, to sentence us to death," Netanyahu said. "In my remarks to the UN General Assembly, they will hear my response. History has proven that those who have wanted to wipe us off the map have failed, as the Jewish People have overcome all obstacles," Netanyahu said.

Netanyahu has said he is going to the U.N. to draw attention to what Israel perceives as the Iranian threat. Speaking to his Cabinet on Sunday, he said at the U.N. he would "reiterate that the most dangerous country in the world must not be allowed to arm itself with the most dangerous weapon in the world." He did not elaborate.

On Tuesday, the Maariv daily reported that Netanyahu would present his own "red lines" to the world body. It said Netanyahu would spell out what limits the international community should set for Iran to

prevent it from becoming a nuclear power and how long that will take. Netanyahu has never laid out these limits precisely.

Iran insists its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes but Israel, the U.S. and other Western allies reject the claim. Four rounds of U.N. sanctions have already been placed on Iran.

A U.N. report last month only reinforced Israeli fears, finding that Iran has moved more of its uranium enrichment activities into fortified bunkers deep underground where there are impervious to air attack. Enrichment is a key activity in building a bomb, though it has other uses as well, such as producing medical isotopes.

While Israel is convinced that Iran is pursuing a nuclear weapon, American officials believe Iran has not yet made a final decision to take the plunge, even as it develops much of the infrastructure needed to do so.

Obama has repeatedly said he will not allow Iran to gain nuclear weapons and has said the U.S. would be prepared to use force as a last resort. But in an interview Sunday with "60 Minutes" he also vowed to "block out any noise that's out there" on the issue, in an apparent swipe at Netanyahu.

Israel's timeline for military action is shorter than that of the United States, which has far more powerful bunker-busting bombs at its disposal, and there is great suspicion in Israel over whether in the moment of truth Obama will follow through on his pledge.

Netanyahu has a history of fiery speeches at the U.N. General Assembly.

In 2009, he waved the blueprints for the Nazi death camp Aushwitz and invoked the memory of his own family members murdered by the Nazis while making his case against Iran's Holocaust denial and threats to destroy Israel.

To those who remained at the General Assembly while Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad spoke, he chastised: "Have you no shame? Have you no decency?"

And last year, he warned the world about the threat of militant Islam and Iran.

"The international community must stop Iran before it's too late. If Iran is not stopped, we will all face the specter of nuclear terrorism, and the Arab Spring could soon become an Iranian winter. That would be a tragedy," he said.

During his three-day visit, Netanyahu is scheduled to meet with U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton, Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper - who recently expelled the Iranian ambassador from his country - and U.S. Secretary of State Hilary Clinton. He is not scheduled to meet Obama.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas is also set to speak in New York. The Palestinian leader is expected to ask the United Nation's General Assembly to vote on recognizing Palestine as an observer state in November.

Abbas has said he wants to put off a vote until after U.S. elections to avoid entangling the Palestinian statehood bid in presidential politics.

"I'm not in the U.N. to delegitimize Israel but to present the two state solution," Abbas told U.S. Jewish community leaders last week at a meeting by the S. Daniel Abraham Center for Middle East Peace. "I want to have Palestine as a nonmember state." said.

Abbas' relatively low-key approach is in contrast to last year when he was at center stage with his attempt to win full membership in the world body. That application failed to win enough support in the Security Council.

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U.N. members divided over response to Mali crisis

September 27, 2012

Reuters

By John Irish

UNITED NATIONS - U.N. members appeared deeply divided on Wednesday as they sought to resolve the crisis in Mali, with France and some of Mali's neighbours backing possible military intervention, while the United States said the West African nation must first have an elected government.

A special U.N. session on Mali, held on the sidelines of the annual General Assembly, was intended to devise a plan for a nation that descended into chaos in March after a military coup toppled the president, leaving a power vacuum that enabled local Tuareg rebels to seize nearly two-thirds of the country.

Islamist groups have since hijacked the rebellion in the north, imposing strict Islamic law in regions under their control and spurring fears that religious extremist fighters could further destabilize the region.

Islamist groups including the al Qaeda-linked Ansar Dine have carried out public whippings of alleged adulterers and destroyed UNESCO-listed shrines of local saints in the ancient town of Timbuktu, arguing such worship was un-Islamic.

"There is an urgency to act to end the suffering of the people of Mali and to prevent a similar situation that would be even more complicated in the Sahel and the rest of the world," Malian Prime Minister Cheick Modibo Diarra told the General Assembly.

France, Mali's former colonial power, called on Wednesday for the U.N. Security Council to adopt as soon as possible a resolution enabling military intervention in northern Mali, a call that has been supported by some West African nations that fear Mali's chaos will spread beyond its borders.

French President Francois Hollande warned that Mali's territorial integrity should be restored as soon as possible and that any lost time would only complicate matters.

He said he wanted a resolution on Mali to be approved within weeks. France has ruled out intervening directly, but has promised logistical and intelligence support.

Hollande's calls were echoed by some of Mali's neighbours, including Niger, whose foreign minister, Mohammed Bazoum, told delegates that only an armed intervention supported by friendly powers could eradicate insecurity in the region.

'A POWDER KEG'

But U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton signalled caution, saying immediate efforts should concentrate on putting a legitimate government back in power in Mali before its internal divisions are addressed.

"This is not only a humanitarian crisis; it is a powder keg that the international community cannot afford to ignore," Clinton said in her remarks.

"In the end, only a democratically elected government will have the legitimacy to achieve a negotiated political settlement in northern Mali, end the rebellion and restore the rule of law," Clinton added.

The fragile interim government that now holds Mali's capital, Bamako, requested a U.N. Security Council resolution earlier this month, and the West African regional body ECOWAS has said it would be ready to send in troops.

But diplomats say the Security Council remains unlikely to provide a mandate for military intervention until ECOWAS outlines a more detailed strategy, including troop numbers and costs of the operation.

The Mali conflict has exacerbated a deteriorating humanitarian and security situation in the turbulent Sahel region - a belt of land spanning nearly a dozen of the world's poorest countries on the rim of the Sahara - where drought has pushed millions to the brink of starvation.

African Union Security Commissioner Ramtane Lamamra told Reuters on Tuesday that Mali's interim leaders were capable of managing the crisis and needed full international backing.

"How can we organize elections when northern Mali is occupied by terrorist movements that don't apply democracy?" Hollande said when asked if elections should be held first.

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon cautioned that any military action could have serious humanitarian consequences. More than 400,000 people already have been forced to flee their homes.

Ban said the United Nations was developing a strategy on the Sahel that would look as a whole at issues including security, response to large-scale crises, and the promotion of democratic governance. Ban said he would appoint an envoy to manage the process, but did not name the person.

Britain said it had also appointed an envoy to the region.

On July 5, the Security Council endorsed political efforts by the 15-nation ECOWAS - the Economic Community of West African States - to end the unrest in Mali, but stopped short of backing military intervention there.

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World Urged To Help Sahel, But Fears Over Mali Force
September 27, 2012

AFP

By Jo Biddle

World leaders vowed to work to stem a food crisis in west Africa's Sahel region, where millions risk starvation, but were cautious on sending troops to Mali to root out Islamist rebels.

Opening high-level talks on a growing humanitarian and refugee crisis, UN chief Ban Ki-moon Wednesday urged world leaders not to abandon the Sahel which has been hit by regional insecurity, drought and poor harvests.

"The region needs your attention, your focus. Do not abandon it and regret it later," Ban said of the vast desert area stretching across nine west African nations, where armed Islamic and rebel groups have moved in.

"The Sahel is at a critical juncture. Political turmoil, extreme climatic conditions and fragile economies are combining to create a perfect storm of vulnerability," Ban said.

France and west African nations led calls for the creation of an African-led force to help Mali flush out rebels from its northern territory seized in a March coup.

Mali's Prime Minister Cheick Modibo Diarra officially asked the UN Security Council to agree to "an international military force, one which would be composed of all those willing and able to help us reconquer occupied territories in the north of our country."

He described appalling daily atrocities being carried out by the rebels in a region which was "once a haven of peace and is now a source of threats to international peace and security."

Chaos erupted in Mali in March when military putschists seized power in the capital, Bamako, ousting President Amadou Toumani Toure, only to see the north and east fall to Tuareg rebels and Islamist militias linked to Al-Qaeda.

French President Francois Hollande said his country, the former colonial power, was ready to do "everything it can to support the troops that are being planned" and urged a Security Council meeting "as soon as possible."

"It has come time for the international community to take its responsibility to come to the assistance of Mali. The time has come," Hollande said. He later said he hoped the force would be set up within weeks.

Senegalese President Macky Sall echoed the same concerns.

"The Sahel region has become a subject of great preoccupation for us. It is not just a low-level crisis, nor just a local threat. We need clear military action today."

But UN Secretary General Ban, who is appointing a special UN envoy for the Sahel, urged caution.

"Any proposed military solution to the security crisis in northern Mali should be considered extremely carefully," he said.

"This could have significant humanitarian consequences, including further displacement and restrictions on humanitarian access."

The Sahel stretches across a swathe of west Africa, including Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Gambia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said work must urgently begin in the Security Council to consider the various proposals because the situation was "not only a humanitarian crisis, it is a powderkeg that the international community cannot afford to ignore."

"For some time, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and other groups have launched attacks and kidnappings from northern Mali into neighboring countries. "With a larger safe haven, and increased freedom for maneuver, terrorists were seeking to extend their reach and their networks in multiple directions," she said.

"They are working with other violent extremists to undermine the democratic transitions underway in North Africa, as we tragically saw in Benghazi," Clinton added.

This year, more than 18 million people in the region have been hit by a severe food crisis, with some 1.1 million children facing acute malnutrition, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

The instability in northern Mali has led 400,000 people to leave their homes, with more than half fleeing into neighboring countries, straining the infrastructure of already poor western African nations.

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has 3,300 regional troops on standby, but wants UN approval.

But aid organizations are wary about pouring troops into the lawless region which has also become a haven for drug-traffickers and money-launderers.

"There is a major risk that military operations in northern Mali would make an already fragile humanitarian situation much worse," said Mamadou Biteye, Oxfam's West Africa regional director, in a statement.

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UN's Focus On Middle East Eclipses Other Urgent Global Issues

September 27, 2012

McClatchy

By Hannah Allam

Casual observers of this week's United Nations General Assembly could be forgiven for thinking that the Middle East was the only region of concern for world leaders.

The civil war in Syria, Israeli-led anxiety over Iran's nuclear program and anti-American riots in Arab countries are dominating this 67th gathering of heads of state, overshadowing other pressing issues of global importance, say analysts and visiting delegates.

Even when raised by leaders as prominent as President Barack Obama, problems such as human trafficking, climate change or the global financial crisis have barely registered this week. While the General Assembly's official agenda listed more than 160 topics, delegates struggled for an audience if they dared to broach issues not rooted in the perennially troubled Middle East.

"Are there some?" James Paul, the director of the Global Policy Forum, asked with mock incredulity.

Paul, whose organization monitors policymaking at the United Nations, said he'd heard scant mention of the U.S. government's trillion-dollar deficit, the euro crisis or the sense that the world economy was "on the edge." At most, he said, non-Middle East issues arise in sideline meetings, and even then are couched in jargon about "multi-stakeholders' dialogue" and "pro-poor policies."

"The most important things are not coming up here, and that's what's disappointing," Paul said.

Seemingly every bland comment about Syria has become news, but there was little buzz when the United Kingdom pledged more than \$1.5 million to combat sexual violence in conflict zones.

Or when the Pakistanis announced that the heroin trade had increased by 3,000 percent and was fueling deadly terrorist groups.

Or when the Senegalese sounded alarms over the fact that heavily armed Islamist militant groups now occupy two-thirds of Mali, "sowing despair among the population and destroying symbols of World Cultural Heritage."

The continent of Africa, whose problems take up an estimated 70 percent of the U.N. Security Council's agenda, appears downright neglected when compared with the attention lavished on the Middle East this week. The crisis in Mali, for example, shares some common features with Syria – jihadist haven, refugee exodus – but the United Nations so far hasn't named a special envoy, which would propel that conflict to more prominence.

Syria, meanwhile, is on its second high-profile envoy in 18 months.

"Syria is so visible. It's a real civil war and you have Syrian opposition documenting it and sending it out," said Tiffany Lynch, senior Africa policy analyst at the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, a bipartisan watchdog commission that makes policy recommendations to the U.S. government. "There's really a lack of press coverage on Mali."

"What happens in Africa doesn't get much attention," she added.

African delegates were diplomatic about the U.N.'s focus on their northern neighbors but concerned that there wasn't enough action to help African countries get on track to meet their Millennium Development Goals, eight benchmarks that U.N. member countries are striving to reach by 2015. They include establishing universal primary education, eradicating hunger and empowering women.

"The concentration on the hot spots of the world – mainly the Middle East – is not without reason, and it shows that the U.N. is concerned about world peace," said Liberian delegate Abu Kamara, who's served as a diplomat in several Arab countries. "But African countries are lagging far behind the

development goals, and these are critical issues that we believe should be highlighted, too, as we talk about the Middle East."

Reports circulating at the conference seem determined to outdo one another in doom and gloom, as if to shock attendants into looking beyond Middle Eastern borders. More than 100 million people will die by 2030 if there's no action on climate change, one report warns. Some 900 million people suffer from undernourishment when the world should be able to feed twice its population, according to another.

The tiny South Pacific island of Nauru tried to marshal attention to what it called "a staggering and irrevocable loss of biodiversity and our shared natural heritage."

"This summer, we were treated to a new round of truly terrifying news: Arctic sea ice dropped to its lowest extent in recorded history, shattering the previous record by a jaw-dropping 18 percent," Nauru President Sprent Dabwido told the assembly. "Some scientists are predicting that the Arctic Ocean could be ice-free in as little as five years."

It's unclear how many leaders heard Nauru's distressing message; many had filed out after Obama's address to the assembly Tuesday morning.

The U.S. president, naturally, had focused on the Middle East, eulogizing the slain American ambassador to Libya, defending free speech after Arab riots over an anti-Islam film and reiterating his call for Syrian President Bashar Assad's ouster.

Those themes were echoed – often with Syria as the only crisis mentioned by name – in the speeches of leaders from countries big and small. Finland lamented "the tragic situation" in Syria, Cyprus condemned the "violence and massacres of innocent civilians in Syria," Indonesia called it a "human catastrophe" and Qatar ruffled feathers by calling for "all sorts of support" – presumably including weapons – to help the Syrians overthrow Assad.

"As in 2011, the Middle East and Northern Africa continue to be at the center of the attentions of the international community," Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff said in her speech to the assembly.

Syria has commanded so much attention this week that even the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, an annual topic of contention at the U.N., has been shoved to the background, leaving some delegates feeling like yesterday's news.

Ambassador Hisham Badr, assistant foreign minister of Egypt, said, "There's a lot of frustration" with the lack of discussion this week on reviving peace talks. He echoed the wistfulness of his African and Latin American counterparts in describing how Syria is detracting from important dialogue on other topics.

"Yes, of course Syria is very important and should be on the front burner," Badr said. "But Palestine should not be forgotten, as the mother of all the problems in the region, and any attempts to divert from that are misguided."

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LatAm Presidents Call For Drug Debate At UN
 September 27, 2012
[Associated Press](#)

UNITED NATIONS - The leaders of three Latin American nations hit hard by drug trafficking called on the membership of the United Nations on Wednesday to promote a debate on alternative ways to combat drug trafficking.

In an unusually energetic address to the annual opening of the U.N. General Assembly, Mexican President Felipe Calderon insisted the world body must do more if developed nations that use "tons and tons of drugs" cannot reduce consumption.

More than just analyze the problem, the United Nations should head "a profound international debate" about ways to cut down on trafficking, he said.

The presidents of Colombia and Guatemala also urged the world body to explore alternatives to the traditional "war on drugs." Guatemala's leader had been expected to repeat his call for drug legalization to be considered, but he did not explicitly mention it.

Calderon's speech was his last to the U.N. as Mexico's head of state. President-elect Enrique Pena Nieto takes office Dec. 1.

During his six years in office, Mexico's president has waged an offensive against drug cartels, and at least 47,000 people have died in drug-related violence, most of them as a result of fighting among the cartels.

Calderon's speech characterized organized crime as a principal cause of death and "one of the greatest threats to democracy in the 21st century."

He urged drug-consuming nations to "evaluate with all sincerity, and honesty, if they have the will to reduce the consumption of drugs in a substantive manner."

"If this consumption cannot be reduced, it is urgent that decisive actions be taken," Calderon said.

Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos also called for a debate looking at alternatives to the traditional "war on drugs," saying the discussion "must be frank, and without a doubt, global."

"It is our duty to determine - on objective scientific bases - if we are doing the best we can or if there are better options to combat the scourge," Santos said.

Guatemalan President Otto Perez Molina in the past has called for legalization of drugs as one possible alternative, but did not go that far in his U.N. address.

Instead, Perez Molina said his government "would like to establish an international group of countries that are well disposed to reforming global policies on drugs" and would consider "new creative and innovative alternatives."

"We must seek new avenues with responsibility and perseverance, with the cooperation of all: producing, consuming and transit countries," he said.

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TOP STORIES

Clinton Suggests Link To Qaeda Offshoot In Deadly Libya Attack

September 27, 2012

New York Times

By Steven Lee Myers

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton on Wednesday suggested there was a link between the Qaeda franchise in North Africa and the attack at the American diplomatic mission in Benghazi, Libya, that killed the American ambassador and three others. She was the highest-ranking Obama administration official to publicly make the connection, and her comments intensified what is becoming a fiercely partisan fight over whether the attack could have been prevented.

Mrs. Clinton did not offer any new evidence of a Qaeda link, and officials later said the question would be officially settled only after the F.B.I. completed a criminal inquiry, which could take months. But they said they had not ruled out the involvement of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb - an affiliate of the international terrorist group with origins in Algeria - in an attack the administration initially described as a spontaneous protest turned violent.

Her remarks added to the administration's evolving and at times muddled explanation of what happened on the evening of Sept. 11 and into the next morning. Republicans in Congress have accused President Obama of playing down possible terrorist involvement in the midst of a re-election campaign in which killing Osama bin Laden and crippling Al Qaeda are cited as major achievements.

Mrs. Clinton made her remarks at a special United Nations meeting on the political and security crisis in the parts of North Africa known as the Maghreb and the Sahel, particularly in northern Mali, which has been overrun by Islamic extremists since a military coup helped lead to the division of that country this year.

Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb has long operated in the region, she said, and was now exploiting a haven in Mali to export extremism and terrorist violence to neighbors like Libya.

"Now with a larger safe haven and increased freedom to maneuver, terrorists are seeking to extend their reach and their networks in multiple directions," Mrs. Clinton told leaders assembled at the meeting, including President François Hollande of France and the United Nations secretary general, Ban Ki-moon. "And they are working with other violent extremists to undermine the democratic transitions under way in North Africa, as we tragically saw in Benghazi."

Mr. Ban called the meeting to lay the groundwork for a possible international military intervention - to be led by African troops - to help the new military government in Mali re-establish control over a part of the country that Mr. Hollande noted was the size of France and is now under the grip of Islamist extremists imposing their vision of law and order.

"We cannot stand by and allow terrorists to take over an entire territory," Mr. Hollande said.

Top militia leaders in Benghazi have dismissed the possibility that Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb played a role in the attacks or had a foothold in eastern Libya. Benghazi residents have said they believe the brigade that conducted the attack could not have managed the assault on its own, because it included more than 100 heavily armed fighters.

Mrs. Clinton's connection of the turmoil in the Sahel with the violence in Benghazi, which killed Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens, echoed remarks made last week by Matthew G. Olsen, the director

of the National Counterterrorism Center. He said that intelligence analysts were investigating ties between local Libyan militias and Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, but had not yet come to any conclusions.

A senior administration official said that Mrs. Clinton intended to underscore the rising threat that the Qaeda affiliate and other extremist organizations pose to the emerging democratic governments in countries like Tunisia and Libya, adding that the group clearly intended to make contact with extremists in Benghazi and elsewhere. The final determination of the group's role, the official said, would await the investigation by the F.B.I.

Mrs. Clinton has also ordered a review of diplomatic security that is being led by Thomas R. Pickering, a veteran diplomat and former undersecretary of state.

It was not clear whether Mrs. Clinton's remarks foreshadowed any possible retaliation against those who carried out the attack, whether they operated in sympathy with, or on orders from, Al Qaeda leaders. But she reiterated the administration's vow to bring those responsible to justice, telling the conference that American intelligence and law-enforcement agencies were working not only with Libya but with other nations in the region to investigate the attack.

The cooperation with other nations beyond Libya in the investigations also seemed to indicate that the attack's planning and execution might have crossed international borders and not simply have been a local, spontaneous eruption of violence in response to an amateurish Internet video denigrating the Prophet Muhammad.

"The United States is stepping up our counterterrorism efforts across the Maghreb and the Sahel," Mrs. Clinton said, "and we're working with the Libyan government and other partners to find those responsible for the attack on our diplomatic post in Benghazi and bring them to justice."

Questions about the attack in Libya have become politically charged, even as the State Department has grieved over the loss of four employees - including the first American ambassador killed on duty since 1979 - and tried to contain the outrage over the video that spread to dozens of countries.

Officials initially described the attack as a protest, though one administration official acknowledged what Libyan witnesses have said in interviews: that the attack was deliberate and organized. Five days after the attack, the American representative to the United Nations, Susan E. Rice, in an appearance on the Sunday talk shows, continued to describe it as a spontaneous protest, and it was only on Sept. 19 that Mr. Olsen of National Counterterrorism Center called it a terrorist attack.

Four Republican Senators - John McCain of Arizona, Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, Kelly Ayotte of New Hampshire and Ron Johnson of Wisconsin - released a blistering letter to Ms. Rice on Wednesday, accusing her of making "several troubling statements that are inconsistent with the facts and require explanation."

"The administration's position seems to be evolving with the pass of each day," Senator Susan Collins, Republican of Maine, and a ranking member of the Homeland Security Committee, said in an interview. Ms. Collins, who has received briefings from administration, counterterrorism and defense officials, said that shortly after the attack it was evident to her that terrorists had been behind it. She said she was

convinced both because the attack took place on the anniversary of the attacks in New York and Washington in 2001 and because the gunmen were reported to be so heavily armed.

"I have been perplexed that the administration has been slow in coming to that same conclusion," she said.

The Republican criticism was bolstered by Libya's president, Mohamed Magariaf, who met with Mrs. Clinton and other American officials in New York on Monday. In an interview broadcast on Wednesday, he also attributed the attack to what he called "Al Qaeda elements who are hiding in Libya," citing its sophistication and the date of the attack.

From the start, Libyan officials have sought to blame foreigners, even as they move to crack down on extremist militias that took part in the uprising against Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi last year and clearly had a role in the attack. Mr. Magariaf said at least 40 suspects had been questioned, but there was no definitive conclusion about those involved. "It was a preplanned act of terrorism directed against American citizens," Mr. Magariaf said in remarks broadcast on NBC's "Today" show Wednesday.

The White House press secretary, Jay Carney, defended the administration's evolving version of events. "Over the course of the past two weeks, this administration has provided as much information as it has been able to," Mr. Carney told reporters traveling on Air Force One to Ohio on Wednesday. "We made clear that our initial assessment and interim reports were based on information that was available at the time."

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U.S. Ties Libya Attack to 'Powder Keg' in Mali

September 27, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By CHRISTOPHER RHOADS and DREW HINSHAW

UNITED NATIONS—Mali has become an incubator for terrorist activity that demands urgent international attention, world leaders said Wednesday, as the U.S. drew its most explicit link between al Qaeda havens in such places and the recent attack on the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi, Libya.

The political, economic and humanitarian crisis in Mali—and much of the broader North African region known as the Sahel—has turned the country into a "powder keg" for terrorist activity by al Qaeda's Saharan front, said Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

"Now, with a larger safe haven and increased freedom to maneuver, terrorists are seeking to extend their reach and their networks in multiple directions," Mrs. Clinton said at a scheduled meeting between senior government officials and heads of international groups held on the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly. "And they are working with other violent extremists to undermine the democratic transitions under way in North Africa, as we tragically saw in Benghazi."

It was the first time a top administration official publicly linked the U.S. consulate attack in Benghazi so directly to al Qaeda's Saharan affiliate, al Qaeda in the Islamic Magreb. In the two weeks since the attack, which killed four Americans including the U.S. ambassador to Libya, U.S. officials have gone from saying there was no evidence of a pre-existing plot to naming AQIM.

Despite the terror network's possible involvement, however, U.S. officials still haven't said the assault was preplanned. Republican critics have assailed the administration's handling of security arrangements and the attack aftermath.

Mali's crisis accelerated in March, when junior military officers staged a coup, ending 20 years of democracy. That junta has since stepped down in favor of a transitional civilian administration, but it wields influence in the military.

As Libya descended into civil war last year, waves of workers from Mali returned to their home villages, followed by a flood of weapons carried back into Mali by separatist rebels, many of whom had fought under late Libyan leader Col. Moammar Gadhafi. Three militias now control the north, dominated by al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb.

More than 260,000 refugees have fled the instability in northern Mali, according to the U.N, exacerbating the situation.

Those who have remained behind in northern Mali contend with drought and spikes in the cost of food, aggravated by road closures and a mass exodus into the south. Nearly five million people could be on the cusp of famine, the U.N. says. Human-rights groups have documented widespread abuse.

U.N. Secretary-general Ban Ki-moon, at the meeting Wednesday, called for urgent international support in the region to confront the confluence of crises that have created what he called "a perfect storm of vulnerability." He appointed a U.N. special envoy to the region.

French President François Hollande said his country was ready to do "everything it can to support the troops that are being planned" and urged a Security Council meeting as soon as possible.

The U.S. has increased counterterrorism efforts with 10 countries across the region, Mrs. Clinton said, including more training and support to break up networks and better protect borders. The U.S. has sent \$378 million in humanitarian aid to the area, she said, in efforts to confront a humanitarian crisis that includes 18 million people facing a shortage of food.

The Malian government and a regional bloc of countries recently agreed on the deployment of West African troops to Mali under a U.N. mandate. The U.N. hasn't yet approved the plan.

Mali's West African neighbors have pledged to dispatch 3,300 troops into the country to help it retake its north. French and American military leaders have offered varying degrees of logistical and diplomatic support for the mission. It isn't yet clear which West African nations would contribute troops, since virtually all of West Africa's armies are wrapped up elsewhere.

In recent weeks, Ansar al-Dine, another of the north's militias, has threatened to attack any country in North or West Africa that supports the government of Mali in its quest to retake its territory.

"What happened in Libya helped destabilize Mali, and the reverse could also be true," said Michael Woldemariam, professor of African security issues at Boston University.

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Rebels Make Gains In Blunting Syrian Air Attacks

September 27, 2012

New York Times

By C. J. Chivers

ABU AD DUHUR, Syria - The rebels huddled before darkness near the edge of the Syrian Air Force base. They were about 40 men, hiding beside small buildings on the flatlands south of Aleppo.

Each man carried little more than a rifle and several dozen cartridges. They had gathered for an effort that illustrated the lopsided nature of the fight for Syria: Lightly armed men trying to remove Syria's attack jets from the skies.

Roughly two months into this important yet scarcely documented battle, Syria's antigovernment fighters have succeeded in laying siege to the heavily fortified Abu ad Duhur Air Base. They have downed at least two of the base's MIG attack jets. And this month they have realized results few would have thought possible. Having seized ground near the base's western edge, from where they can fire onto two runways, they have forced the Syrian Air Force to cease flights to and from this place.

"We are facing aircraft and shooting down aircraft with captured weapons," said Jamal Marouf, a commander credited by the fighters with downing the first MIG-21 here. "With these weapons we are preventing aircraft from landing or taking off."

This is a significant setback for the government in the northern region, where rebels had already strengthened their position with homemade bombs, making roads too perilous for military vehicles to pass and restricting the military's movements.

But air power has remained a large advantage for President Bashar al-Assad, whose air force has pounded many cities and towns.

For the rebels, managing to deny the use of this airfield has undermined the government's ability to exert its full authority in some parts of the country. It has also improved the morale of fighters who remain severely outgunned.

The rebels' boldness, and their success, have not been painless. The army units inside the base have tanks, artillery and mortars. When attacked, the soldiers often respond by firing barrages of high-explosive rounds into the nearby town, in what amounts to a tactic of collective punishment against civilians. The effects are evident in the center of town, where block after block of buildings have been shattered. "This is the army, taking revenge," said another fighter, Abu Razaq.

The events at Abu ad Duhur form another telling chapter of the uprising's evolution, and for the tit-for-tat fight between the government and its adversaries.

The crackdown by the Assad government has descended in stages since it started last year. It began with arrests but quickly shifted into a bloody campaign by loyalist militias and a conventional army using mortars, artillery and tanks. This summer, as the campaign slowed in the face of swelling rebel ranks and roadside bombs, the government escalated again. It turned loose helicopters and then jets to attack rebels and their neighborhoods.

After the government moved its battle to the sky, at least hundreds of fighters from the mountains diverted some of their attention from the remaining army outposts near their homes and began

infiltrating into the lowlands. Armed with a paltry assortment of weapons, they began hunting the aircraft that were hunting them.

Mr. Marouf, 37, is from Deir Sonbul, a village in Jebel al Zawiya, an area of rolling mountains where mosques and Muslim cemeteries stand beside Roman ruins and where olive groves cloak the slopes. Before the war he had been a construction contractor in Lebanon.

Now he is one of the rebels' most prominent field commanders, his stature elevated in part by YouTube videos in which he is seen striding among the flaming wreckage of MIGs to stand over the bloodied remains of Syrian pilots still strapped to their parachutes. In one video he declared that if the world would not protect Syrians by enforcing a no-fly zone, then the rebels would create a no-fly zone themselves. That statement was fired in part by adrenaline, made moments after knocking a Russian-made jet from the sky.

In an interview after last Friday's prayers, Mr. Marouf offered a more measured view and an assessment heard throughout the rebel-held zones. The Syrian oppositions, he said, need antitank weapons and shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missiles, which would help them defeat the government's armor and ground its planes. Then he again offered a confident declaration.

"If they send us these, we will destroy this regime in not less than 30 days," he said.

The West has been reluctant to provide such arms, and rebels said Arab states had followed the West's lead and not provided them either. (Although a few old SA-7 anti-aircraft missiles have been spotted in rebel videos, these sightings have been rare, and the missiles have yet to be a significant factor in the conflict.)

Judging from what Mr. Marouf's fighters carried as they moved around the air base's western flank, the missiles have not appeared here, either. These men are woefully equipped. Most have only rifles. Ammunition supplies are lean.

The few heavier weapons visible - including a BMP armored vehicle, a Russian-made 14.5-millimeter machine gun and two mortar tubes - were all captured from government forces or purchased from corrupt army units, Mr. Marouf and two of his subcommanders said.

With the weapons they do have, the fighters have managed to overrun scores of mountain checkpoints, to sever the road linking Damascus and Aleppo, and to turn a once-secure military airfield into a forlorn and besieged outpost.

Exactly how many MIGs have been shot down around this air base is unclear. Fighters gave different tallies, ranging from three to six. But the rebels' video, checked against interviews with fighters, make clear that at least two MIG-21's had been downed, and a government transport plane taxiing on the runway about 10 days ago was turned back under fire.

The first jet was crippled in late August by Mr. Marouf using a 14.5-millimeter machine gun mounted on a truck bed, several fighters said. Until then, the rebel actions at the airport had been bold, but not necessarily effective.

As the aircraft burst into flame, the pilot ejected and the rebels opened fire on him as he slowly descended. Everything had changed. The fighters had punished the aircraft that were dropping bombs on their villages. An enemy once beyond reach had been hit. Emotions soared.

"It was indescribable," said Abu Azab, who leads the Voices of the Right Brigade, one of the fighting groups that swear allegiance to Mr. Marouf. "We were hiding from the snipers, but after the MIG was hit we were jumping up and shouting 'Allahu akbar!' and we forgot about the snipers."

Several days later, a second MIG-21 was hit, this time by a sniper rifle, the rebels said. It crashed and burned. A third aircraft, a MIG-23, crashed a few days later after being struck by heavy machine-gun fire, the rebels said.

In what seems the enduring competition among rebels seeking credit and outside financial support, various groups have said they were involved in these downings, boasting of them to journalists.

But only Mr. Marouf and his groups are seen in the videos firing on the aircraft and then wandering the flaming wreckage of the government's jets. And they have a battlefield trophy rare to this brand of war - the shattered tail section of a MIG-21, which they carted off to Deir Sonbul.

Still, the battle for Abu ad Duhur has not come without its puzzles, its limits, or its costs.

On some days aircraft arrive from other bases to bomb or strafe the rebels and try to relieve the siege. Sometimes the base's soldiers are resupplied, rebels said, by helicopters that hover high overhead and then risk a swift, spiraling descent and quick escape.

These sorties point to a larger picture: While the Syrian Air Force is under strain, and Abu ad Duhur is at risk of being overrun, other air bases are firmly in government control. The government's air-to-ground campaign goes on. And the fight for Abu ad Duhur remains fierce.

Protective cover is hard to find near the base, which sits on a bare agricultural plain. The government's soldiers know many places where rebels hide.

Moments after the fighters prayed at dusk among buildings at the base's southwestern edge, the army struck. It shelled the rebels with mortar fire, forcing many of them to scatter and seek cover beside walls. Explosions followed them, as if the pattern of this fight had been set weeks ago.

The rebels said that eventually they would claim the base, capturing more weapons, including aircraft now idled in hangars or near the runways. That possibility has presented them with a conundrum: should they seek the destruction of the grounded aircraft, or try to protect them?

Riad Darwish, 24, a college student who joined the fighters, offered one view: "We are trying not to destroy the aircraft," he said. "They are our aircraft, and we have pilots who are ready." ([top](#))

Hezbollah Increases Support For Syrian Regime, US And Lebanese Officials Say

September 27, 2012

Washington Post

By Babak Dehghanpisheh

BEIRUT - Hezbollah, the Lebanese Shiite political and militant group, has ramped up its support for the Syrian government, sending in military advisers to aid in the bloody struggle against the opposition, U.S. and Lebanese government officials say.

Hezbollah's involvement is a clear indication that the uprising, now a year and a half old, is drawing in Syria's neighbor and broadening a conflict that has the potential to destabilize the entire region. It also marks a worrying turn for the Syrian rebels, who already face one of the region's most potent armies and now must contend as well with a disciplined and sophisticated militia.

The U.S. government this month accused Hezbollah of providing aid to the Syrian government, an allegation the group has denied. Any acknowledgment that it is sending help to the regime of President Bashar al-Assad risks worsening tensions in Lebanon between Hezbollah and Lebanese Sunnis who support the mostly Sunni opposition in Syria.

But Lebanese officials say the support is becoming harder to hide and has markedly increased since a July 18 bomb attack in Damascus that killed four senior security officials, including Assef Shawkat, Assad's brother-in-law.

Lebanese officials and analysts say Hezbollah militants are now fighting - and dying - in the conflict, although U.S. officials have not confirmed the group's combat role. The Lebanese officials cite as evidence quiet burials in Hezbollah-dominated areas of Lebanon, with the families of the "martyrs" warned not to discuss the circumstances of their sons' deaths.

"Hezbollah has been active in supporting the Syrian regime with their own militia," said a Lebanese government official allied with a political bloc opposed to Hezbollah who spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the issue's sensitivity. "They've been quite involved in a combat role, quite involved in fighting."

Hezbollah has a well-armed and trained militia that is considered the strongest fighting force in Lebanon. But the group also oversees a powerful political party and runs a number of organizations that provide social services to Shiite Muslims, its main supporters, throughout the country.

Recruitment efforts

In some villages in south Lebanon and the Bekaa Valley in the eastern part of the country, young men loyal to Hezbollah are recruiting volunteers to fight in Syria, according to Lebanese officials. And a number of secret funerals for young men killed in Syria have been held in Shiite strongholds.

This month, the U.S. Treasury Department announced sanctions against Hasan Nasrallah and two other Hezbollah leaders in connection with the group's activities in Syria. The department accused Hezbollah of "providing training, advice, and extensive logistical support to the Government of Syria." Hezbollah has also helped the Syrian government push rebel forces from some areas in Syria, the Treasury Department said.

Hezbollah's heightened role in the conflict comes at the same time that Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps appears to be playing a bigger role in Syria. The Treasury Department said that the two groups are coordinating their military aid in Syria and that Hezbollah has helped the Revolutionary Guard train Syrian forces.

The conflict in Syria is dividing the region along sectarian lines, with the dominant Shiite powers, Iran and Hezbollah, backing the Alawite government of Assad. The Alawite faith is an offshoot of Shiism. Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, all countries with Sunni majorities, are backing the rebels, who are predominantly Sunni.

Asked about the role that both Hezbollah and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard are playing in the Syria conflict, a senior U.S. intelligence official said that both have expanded their presence and role in Syria in recent months. But the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the subject, said it appears that they have stopped short of carrying out operations or attacks.

Guerrilla warfare

Hezbollah's involvement could signal a tougher fight ahead for the Syrian rebels. Hezbollah fighters, expert in guerrilla warfare, fought the Israeli military to a standstill in 2006 and could provide a useful complement to the Syrian military, which has experience in conventional warfare, perhaps providing insight into the rebels' operations.

Hezbollah officials have denied any role in the conflict in recent months. A Hezbollah spokesman reached by phone in Beirut on Friday declined to comment on allegations that the group is involved in the Syria conflict.

Lebanese government officials say Hezbollah has become deeply involved and is trying to keep its activities under wraps. Dozens of Hezbollah fighters have been killed in Syria, according to a Lebanese government official who is a member of the political bloc opposed to Hezbollah.

The fighters who are killed in Syria do not receive the large public funerals that Hezbollah usually organizes for militants killed in clashes with the Israeli military. Instead, the "martyrs" are buried discreetly and families are urged not to talk about the circumstances of the death, three government officials said. All three of the officials are members of the political bloc opposed to Hezbollah.

A number of families have complained bitterly to Hezbollah about the deaths of their relatives and their secretive burial, one of these officials said. There is a debate within the Lebanese Shiite community about the Syrian conflict, even among Hezbollah supporters, and some say that the fight in Syria does not have the same prestige as the fight against the Israelis.

Obituaries for Hezbollah fighters have also started appearing in local newspapers such as al-Safir, one of these officials said, without the circumstances of the death being explained.

There has been one notable exception to these discreet burials, according to Lokman Slim, a political activist who runs Hayya Bina, a civic initiative that aims to make Lebanese politics less sectarian, and is a frequent critic of Hezbollah.

In early August, a senior Hezbollah military commander named Musa Ali Shehimi was killed in Syria, according to Slim, and a large funeral was held for him in Lebanon without specifying where or how he was killed. But the bodies of a handful of Hezbollah militants who were killed at the same time as Shehimi were returned to the families at different times, Slim says, in order to avoid unnecessary attention.

A news site that appears to be run by Hezbollah supporters, al-Intiqad, ran an item about Shehimi's funeral on Aug. 10 along with an alleged picture of the funeral. A handful of Hezbollah commandos are shown carrying a coffin draped in the Hezbollah flag in the photo with hundreds of people packed in the street behind them. The article notes that Shehimi "died while performing his jihadi duty" without giving any further details.

The funeral was attended by Hezbollah parliamentarians Ali Fayyad and Ali Ammar, the article said, and Shehimi was buried in the "Garden of Martyrs" cemetery in Beirut, the same location where the group's top military commander, Imad Mughniyah, who was assassinated mysteriously in Damascus in 2008, is reportedly buried.

"Only this Shehimi was given a measure of a public funeral," Slim said. "There's a whole machine of how they're administering these deaths."

Propaganda efforts

Hezbollah is also helping the Syrian government with its news and propaganda, Slim said. Communication specialists from Hezbollah's TV station al-Manar are helping Syria's official channel al-Ikhbariya present slick news packages with the government's viewpoint.

More worrying for some Lebanese are reports that Hezbollah is targeting Syrian opposition members near the border areas inside Lebanese territory. These reports could inflame sectarian tensions with Lebanese Sunnis.

A clash between Syrian rebels and Hezbollah fighters inside Lebanese territory at the beginning of the summer left two Hezbollah fighters dead, according to a Lebanese former senior security official.

But Hezbollah is trying to keep the peace at home, many observers say. The group has little interest in spreading sectarian strife inside Lebanon or destabilizing the government in which they play a key role.

"Hezbollah doesn't want to pick a fight inside Lebanon," said Paul Salem, the head of the Carnegie Middle East Center in Beirut.

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China Tied Up By Transition As Its Economy Loses Force

September 27, 2012

New York Times

By Andrew Jacobs

BEIJING - When it comes to confronting economic slowdowns, the Chinese government has not been shy about making bold moves. Faced with the contagion of global recession four years ago, policy makers created a \$585 billion stimulus package that helped inoculate the nation against the economic malaise still sapping the United States and Europe.

But today, even as China's vaunted export manufacturing juggernaut loses force and the Shanghai stock market remains in a slump, the Communist Party appears so distracted by its politically tangled once-a-decade leadership transition that it is unwilling or unable to pursue the more ambitious agenda that many economists say is necessary to head off a far more serious crisis in the future.

Although the departing government has tried in recent months to address decelerating growth by easing bank loan restrictions, increasing pensions and offering tax breaks to small businesses, a lack of consensus among the top stewards of the economy has stymied a more muscular response, insiders say.

Similarly, many analysts question whether the incoming leadership has the political will to overcome the resistance of the so-called princelings and other well-connected families that have prospered under the current system.

China's standard economic formula, they say, is losing its potency: overzealous government investment and lagging consumer spending are creating serious imbalances that are expected to lead to a much more painful reckoning, perhaps not long after the new raft of younger leaders assumes power in early 2013.

"There are tough choices to make, but the central government appears to be so paralyzed they are just sitting on their hands," said Ho-Fung Hung, a political economist at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. "The situation is looking increasingly dire."

The economic data is indeed glum. Direct foreign investment has fallen for 9 months out of the past 10, and industrial output is rising at the slowest rate in three years. Last week, Frederick W. Smith, the chief executive of FedEx, the global airfreight titan, warned of more trouble to come, saying that China's faltering exports pointed to a weakening global economy in the coming year.

Since the death of Deng Xiaoping, the wily leader who steamrolled his conservative opponents to introduce market reforms in the 1980s and '90s, China's political system has increasingly operated through consensus. The horse-trading, involving a dozen or so men who negotiate in secrecy, has dimmed the prospect of significant political or economic change.

"The slogans are loud and the plans are grand, but when it comes to implementation, the constraints are many," said Zhao Xijun, an economics professor at Renmin University in Beijing.

Prime Minister Wen Jiabao is a vocal advocate of what many experts see as the kind of change China needs: breaking up state-owned monopolies, encouraging more consumer spending and reducing reliance on investment in real estate and heavy industry. But he has already been rendered something of a lame duck because of his planned retirement in March. He lacks the political capital to undertake a more ambitious overhaul of the economy, particularly anything that would undercut the favored position of state monopolies, analysts say.

"Wen is a spent force," said a person with close contacts in the upper levels of the Chinese government.

To be sure, China's developing economy enjoys many advantages over those of most other major industrial nations, with growth still robust enough to prevent unemployment from rising significantly. But unrest is increasing, as riots at a big Foxconn electronics factory on Sunday demonstrated, and there is so much uncertainty surrounding economic policy and the leadership hand-over that few are willing to hazard a prediction about the future.

"The system is so opaque and the new guys are such unknown entities that no one really knows what to expect," said Alistair Thornton, senior China economist at IHS Global Insight.

Supporters of Xi Jinping, the man expected to be China's next president, and Li Keqiang, who is all but certain to replace Mr. Wen as prime minister, have been quietly putting out the word that the new team plans to introduce a more far-reaching agenda once the incoming leaders are secure in their new posts. Some even argue that the worse things get, the better the chance the new leaders will have to deal with China's biggest challenges after the successors are announced at the 18th Party Congress, expected to take place next month.

"When the bubble bursts, there will be an initial period of pain," Li Zuojun, a prominent government economist, said in a recent speech, "but it would be good news for the new leadership because it would be clear who is to blame - their predecessors. The new leadership can start over on solid ground."

But so far, Mr. Xi has offered almost no clues as to where he stands on overhauling the economy, while Mr. Li's track record during his time as a provincial governor and party secretary suggests he is more of a risk-averse technocrat than a reformer.

For the moment, the world's second-largest economy is drifting, as exports to Europe and the United States wane. Some economists even suspect that the official figure of an annual rate of growth of 7.6 percent in the second quarter is overstated; indicators like electricity generation are rising much more slowly. Moreover, part of the growth led only to producing stocks of unsold appliances, toys and coal that are piling up at warehouses and ports.

Still, Beijing has largely held back from the kind of prodigious investment in housing and public works that propped up the flagging Chinese economy during the global downturn. In an editorial published this month, People's Daily, the party's influential mouthpiece, conveyed the official view, saying the central government should resist the temptation to spend its way out of the slowdown.

In a speech this month at a World Economic Forum session in Tianjin, Mr. Wen agreed that the government was holding its fire, but said that it would step in forcefully if necessary. Beijing has a budget surplus of \$158 billion, with \$16 billion more in a reserve fund, he noted.

"We will use that money at a right moment for pre-emptive policy and fine-tuning to propel stable economic growth," Mr. Wen said.

Local governments, alarmed by a slowdown they fear could lead to mass unemployment and the kind of sluggish growth that can dent political careers, have decided to take matters into their own hands. In recent months, a number of cities have proposed extravagant infrastructure projects they hope will be financed in part by newly liberalized bank loan policies.

Tianjin claims \$236 billion will be spent in the petrochemical, aerospace and other industries. Xi'an, home of the famed terra cotta warriors, plans to invest tens of billions of dollars on nine new subway lines. In Guizhou, one of China's poorest provinces, officials said they hoped to funnel \$472 billion into tourism-related development.

In Changsha, the provincial capital of Hunan, officials brag of 12.9 percent growth as they spend billions of dollars on a new subway system, a ring road, an intercity rail line and a pair of bridges to knit together its transportation system.

"We haven't felt any impact from the crisis in Europe," said Liu Maosong, chairman of the Hunan Economics Association and an adviser to the Changsha government. "Our guiding philosophy is 'investment, investment, investment.' "

Even if many such projects turn out to be wishful thinking, economists have expressed alarm that municipalities are still chasing debt-financed growth. "It almost scares me to death," said Mao Yushi, a prominent economist. "Local governments are using the people's money for investment, but when they can't repay the banks, the financial system will snap."

And Liao Jinzhong, an economist at Hunan University, worries that much of the spending is misplaced. "What we really could use is a functioning sewage system," he said, speaking from his sixth-floor apartment in a crumbling faculty building that has no elevator.

Mr. Liao said he gave frequent lectures at the local party school about the dangerous fixation on propping up growth figures at all costs. He said officials often congratulated him on his frank views.

"But then they admit they can't change the way they do things," he said. "Given that the whole system is oriented toward bolstering the careers of officialdom, I just don't see things changing any time soon."

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AFRICA

Nigeria says its push on Boko Haram Islamists paying off

September 27, 2012

Reuters

By Louis Charbonneau and Michelle Nichols

UNITED NATIONS - Nigeria's "robust" approach to neutralizing a threat posed by Islamist sect Boko Haram using military force, holding indirect talks with the group and improving education in the north is paying off, the Nigerian president said on Wednesday.

Boko Haram, which wants to carve out an Islamic state in northern Nigeria, has been blamed for more than 1,000 deaths since its insurgency intensified in 2010. The United States has designated three of Boko Haram's senior members as terrorists.

In an interview with Reuters on the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly's annual gathering of world leaders, President Goodluck Jonathan also played down the significance of the government forces' killing of the sect's spokesman, Abu Qaqa, in a gun battle in Kano on September 16.

"If I look at it, the trend is coming down," he said about the threat posed by Boko Haram. "It's not because Abu Qaqa is dead. Abu Qaqa is just one person. If one Abu Qaqa dies, it can generate 10 Abu Qaqs."

"The issue is not the death of one person," Jonathan said. "The issue is that the robust approach that government is taking, exploiting all possible means ... is paying off, and we believe it will continue to pay off."

Nigeria's military has been accused of using heavy-handed tactics in the past and previous operations targeting Boko Haram have resulted in civilian deaths. But Jonathan made clear that the military approach could only be one part of the solution.

Much more important, he said, was a push to improve agriculture, job prospects and access to Western-style education in the predominantly Muslim north.

"The whole approach, both the security aspects, both the indirect talks, and the job opportunities that we are creating. We are giving hope to the people. The education institutions we are establishing are giving hope to the people," Jonathan said.

"One links up with the other to get to the respite we are seeing now," he said. "I cannot credit it to only one approach."

This week, Nigeria's military said it killed 35 members of Boko Haram and arrested several during an overnight gun battle in Damaturu, capital of northeastern Yobe state.

Jonathan's spokesman said last month that Nigeria's government was reaching out to Boko Haram and talking with some of its members via "backroom channels" as it seeks a peaceful way out of the north's conflict.

SOVEREIGN WEALTH FUND

Wearing his trademark wide-brimmed black hat, Jonathan also spoke about the Nigerian government's plan to put oil revenues into a sovereign wealth fund, a move state governors vowed last week to go to court to prevent.

"Yes, we can go to court. But we believe it's not the best to solve certain problems through a court," he said. "We are discussing, and I believe at the end of the day we will get to a point where both parties will win."

Africa's top crude producer has been moving closer to joining its OPEC partners in creating a sovereign wealth fund for long-term investment of its oil cash.

"They are not arguing because they know that the issue of the sovereign wealth fund is transparent, they trust the minister of finance," he said.

"They feel that some of the states have challenges and they want to decide what percentage they can put in. But we feel no, it's better we do it collectively."

Jonathan also talked about his push to abolish a much-criticized fuel subsidy. He tried to halt the subsidy in January but had to reinstate it partly in response strikes.

"Besides the issue of corruption, it was being abused," he said. "All over the world, people advised that states should no longer subsidize hydrocarbons, because when you subsidize hydrocarbons, those who gain are not the ordinary people."

"Quite a lot of Nigerians agree that subsidies must go," he said, adding that he expected to again try a gradual phase-out to soften the impact of price increases. "This time around we will properly involve the people and give a robust timeline."

Nigeria's cities are expected to add 200 million people by 2050, more than doubling the country's current population, the United Nations forecast in April. But Jonathan said he was wary of forecasts based on current trends and suggested that the country's population growth would eventually slow down.

"That (growth forecast) is based on the present statistics in terms of a pattern of reproduction, which may not continue that way," he said. "As more people become more educated and more aware, they tend to reduce the size of their population."

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South African Firebrand Is Charged With Money Laundering

September 27, 2012

[New York Times](#)

By Lydia Polgreen

JOHANNESBURG - Julius Malema, the firebrand former leader of the African National Congress youth wing, appeared in a court in his home province of Limpopo on Wednesday to face a charge of money laundering in connection with state contracts with an engineering company linked to him.

After being released on bail of around \$1,200 following a brief court appearance, he denounced the charge.

"I have nothing to hide," Mr. Malema told a throng of supporters cheering for him outside the courthouse.

"I have never been part of any criminal activity," he said. "I am not corrupt, and I do not engage in fraudulent activities. What you see is what you get."

In recent weeks, Mr. Malema has resurfaced after an attempt by South Africa's leaders to banish him from politics. Although he was expelled from the governing A.N.C., he has emerged to champion miners engaged in wildcat strikes at gold and platinum mines.

The police killed 34 striking workers in a barrage of gunfire on Aug. 16 in the bloodiest episode of labor unrest since the end of apartheid. Mr. Malema has also sharpened his attacks on President Jacob Zuma, a man he once supported but has since turned against bitterly.

The Limpopo charge arises from one of several investigations targeting Mr. Malema, a rabble-rousing politician who has proposed seizing white-owned property and nationalizing South Africa's mines.

Last week, the government billed him for nearly \$2 million in unpaid taxes. The government's anticorruption czar, Public Protector Thuli Madonsela, is also preparing a report on accusations of criminality in Mr. Malema's business dealings.

Mr. Malema and his supporters have argued that the charges against him are spurious and politically motivated. Contrary to earlier news reports, Mr. Malema was not charged with fraud or corruption.

"They are sent by Jacob Zuma," Mr. Malema said of the prosecutors, "that illiterate Jacob Zuma."

During the time when Mr. Malema fiercely supported Mr. Zuma, he played a crucial role in ousting the country's president at the time, Thabo Mbeki, as leader of the A.N.C., paving the way for Mr. Zuma to become president.

But the two fell out, and Mr. Malema has become one of Mr. Zuma's most vociferous critics at a time when the president is facing serious challenges to his position ahead of the party's leadership conference in December.

Mr. Zuma himself faced a series of corruption charges, all of which were dropped amid accusations of prosecutorial misconduct. Several other major political figures have also been investigated for corruption.

Mr. Malema's expulsion from the A.N.C. earlier this year came after a lengthy internal disciplinary process. That seemed to be the end of his *political career*, since no party has managed to challenge successfully the supermajority the A.N.C. has held since the first fully democratic elections in 1994, when apartheid ended.

Limpopo, Mr. Malema's home province and a bastion of support for him, has been facing a financial crisis for the past year, sapping social services and infrastructure projects. The provincial government overspent its budget by about \$250 million, and investigations into bloated contracts, many of which are linked to Mr. Malema and his associates, have begun. ([top](#))

South Sudan-Sudan Agree On 9 Issues But Not Border

September 27, 2012

Associated Press

By Kirubel Tadesse

ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia - The leaders of Sudan and South Sudan have reached nine agreements but did work out the issues surrounding the contested Abyei region or the demarcation of their shared border.

South Sudan President Salva Kiir said the two countries would sign a "protocol of collaboration" on Thursday.

Atif Kiir, a South Sudan spokesman, said late Wednesday that Sudan President Omar al-Bashir and Kiir agreed on economic issues and a buffer zone between their borders to allow oil exports.

Kiir said that oil exports - which South Sudan shut down earlier this year - would resume and that only "technical work" remains.

South Sudan broke free from Sudan in July, 2011 in a referendum that has put an end to one of the region's deadliest and longest conflicts.

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Zimbabwe President: Constitution Changes On Track

September 27, 2012

Associated Press

By Angus Shaw

HARARE, Zimbabwe - Zimbabwe President Robert Mugabe has assured regional leaders that adoption of a new constitution is on track, ahead of proposed elections to end the nation's fragile coalition government, his loyalist state media reported Wednesday.

Mugabe met with South African President Jacob Zuma, the chief regional mediator on Zimbabwe, on the sidelines of the United Nations general assembly in New York late Tuesday, the Herald newspaper reported.

Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai, the former opposition leader, has declared that the talks for constitutional reforms have become deadlocked.

The 15-nation regional bloc, the Southern African Development Community, set far-reaching democratic and constitutional reforms as a condition for free elections after violent and disputed polls in 2008.

Mugabe told Zuma that a stakeholders' conference on the constitution is set to go ahead in Harare next month and regional leaders "will not be let down," the Herald said.

It said Mugabe insisted two documents will be put to the conference - the 150-page draft constitution and a national statistical report on opinions on proposed changes gathered at public meetings across the country by an all-party panel of lawmakers in charge of rewriting the existing constitution.

Mugabe's ZANU-PF party says the new draft omits some of the views of its supporters who opposed the dilution of powers that the party and Mugabe have held since independence in 1980.

Tsvangirai's party officials charge the statistical report is not a true reflection of recorded opinions that were skewed by several "quantative not qualitative" factors, including groups of the same Mugabe supporters being bussed to many of the public meetings.

The lawmakers' panel on Wednesday announced it has rescheduled the constitutional conference from Oct.4 to Oct.13, citing cash shortages and delays in collecting funding for the gathering of 2,500 delegates from main interested groups.

It said it was also scaling down the number accredited to participate.

The Crisis Coalition, Zimbabwe's main alliance of independent civic groups, has threatened to boycott the conference if the widest national interests are not catered for.

A similar constitutional conference in 2009 was abandoned after it was disrupted by militants of Mugabe's party who sang revolutionary songs and shouted down successive speakers contributing to the debate.

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ASIA

In Further Opening, US To Ease Ban On Imports From Myanmar

September 27, 2012

New York Times

By Steven Lee Myers And Rick Gladstone

The United States announced Wednesday that it would begin to ease a longstanding ban on imports from Myanmar, one of the last major economic sanctions on the country, because of the advances made by its military-led government in moving toward a more democratic system.

The announcement was made by Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton during a meeting in New York with U Thein Sein, a former general who is now president of Myanmar. He has been directing the gradual transition away from the two decades of dictatorship and isolation that had driven the country to near economic collapse and dysfunction.

"We have watched as you and your government have continued the steady process of reform," Mrs. Clinton, who has been ensconced in meetings with world leaders gathered for the United Nations General Assembly, told Mr. Thein Sein at the Mark Hotel in Manhattan. "And we have been pleased to respond to specific steps that recognize the government's efforts and encourage other reforms."

Mr. Thein Sein, who was making his first visit to the United States to attend the General Assembly, responded: "The people of Myanmar are very pleased with the easing of economic sanctions by the United States. We are very grateful for the actions of the United States." He presented Mrs. Clinton with a large envelope containing a letter to President Obama.

It was Mrs. Clinton's third meeting with Mr. Thein Sein. The first was on her trip to Myanmar last December, and they met again at a meeting of the Association of South East Asian Nations in Cambodia in July.

The United States had already lifted its ban on American investment in Myanmar, and just last week it removed Mr. Thein Sein from a blacklist of individuals who faced sanctions. The pressure for further easing of sanctions also came from Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the Myanmar opposition leader and former political prisoner, who said during a visit to Washington last week that she favored moves toward normalization of commercial relations.

Political experts said the easing of the restriction on imports from Myanmar was significant for that country, which is mineral-rich but desperately impoverished. Formerly known as Burma, it was once prosperous and self-sufficient.

"The timing of this announcement is a big win for Thein Sein," said Suzanne DiMaggio, the Asia Society's vice president for global policy programs. "He will return from his first visit to the U.S. as Myanmar's president with a major boost to his reform agenda. It's a 'concrete deliverable' that will go a long way toward muffling critics and hard-liners at home."

A senior Obama administration official said the lifting of the import ban - which has been in place for more than a decade - would require a waiver that the administration would now shape, working in consultation with Congress. That could take some months, and some prohibitions could remain in place on specific areas of concern, including businesses tied to military industries. Even so it will remove the bulk of sanctions, though the provisions will remain on the books.

"What this is intended to do is help a Burmese economy that is more than resource-based in terms of exports," the official said, expressing hope that lifting American and European sanctions would create jobs and promote industries beyond natural gas, oil and timber.

A second administration official, asked about Myanmar's military ties to North Korea - one of the main concerns for American officials - said that the administration was satisfied with efforts by Myanmar's leaders to reconsider that relationship. "They understand this is a legacy of a different Burma," this official said.

The easing of the import ban was announced against a backdrop of gradually warming American relations with Myanmar, punctuated not only by Mr. Thein Sein's first visit but by a 17-day tour of the United States by Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi, a Nobel laureate who became a worldwide political heroine during nearly two decades of house arrest. She has met with President Obama, received the Congressional Gold Medal and enjoyed rapturous welcomes from expatriate communities.

In a meeting with the editorial board of The New York Times earlier Wednesday, Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi, 67, said she bore no malice toward the generals who oppressed her, and as a recently elected legislator from her party, the National League for Democracy, said she hoped to qualify as a presidential candidate one day.

"The leader of every political party must aspire to be head of state; otherwise he or she would be letting the party down," Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi said.

The daughter of the country's independence hero, Gen. Aung San, who was assassinated when she was just 2 years old, Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi rose to become Myanmar's most popular political figure and a beacon of resistance to the military dictators who have run the country for much of her adult life. She won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991.

The ruling generals first placed her under house arrest in 1989 and kept her there for most of the next 21 years, isolated from her English-born husband and two sons, finally releasing her in 2010. Her children grew up without her, and her husband died of cancer in 1999. Nonetheless, she said, she did not feel a sense of bitterness or need for retribution.

"They didn't treat me badly," she said. "If I had been put in prison and tortured, perhaps I would have feelings of vengeance and hatred."

House arrest was not unpleasant, she said, adding, "I was just simply kept in the house."

Asked why she had not been imprisoned, like many of her colleagues, she said, "I think because I'm my father's daughter."

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Former Prime Minister In Japan Elected To Lead Opposition Party

September 27, 2012

New York Times

By Hiroko Tabuchi

TOKYO - Shinzo Abe, a nationalist former prime minister, was elected to lead Japan's main opposition party on Wednesday, giving him a chance of regaining the nation's top job - a prospect that could worsen the country's tense relations with China and its other Asian neighbors.

Mr. Abe's Liberal Democratic Party is poised to make gains in nationwide elections expected soon, in part because of the unpopularity of Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda. Poll ratings for Mr. Noda and his

Democratic Party have been pulled down by the party's handling of last year's disasters and gridlock in Parliament that has crippled policy making.

"We are going to win back Japan and build a strong country, a prosperous country," Mr. Abe said after defeating four other candidates in the party ballot.

It is a striking return to the spotlight for Mr. Abe - who called for a stronger and unapologetic Japan when he took office in 2006, but stepped down just a year later, citing a health problem - after his party suffered a defeat in an interim election. At the time, Mr. Abe's nationalist agenda seemed off the mark for a public that was more interested in jobs and economic recovery.

During his brief term, he angered China and South Korea with moves to change Japan's pacifist Constitution, denials that Asian women were forced into sexual slavery for the Japanese military during World War II, and efforts to alter school textbooks to present what critics called a whitewashed version of Japan's wartime history. But in some ways, he kept tensions with China from boiling over, picking Beijing for his first official trip overseas and refraining from visiting a contentious Tokyo war shrine.

But with emotions running high between Japan and China in recent weeks over a set of disputed islands, a return to office by Mr. Abe could help fuel more tension. Mr. Abe has veered further to the right since his time as prime minister, suggesting recently that he intends to visit the Yasukuni war shrine if he becomes prime minister again and may even seek to nullify some of Japan's war apologies.

Speaking to reporters on Wednesday, Mr. Abe promised to take a strong stand in the dispute with Beijing over the islands, even as he referred to Japan's strong economic ties with China. He said he would also seek to strengthen Japan's defense cooperation with the United States by taking a more active military role.

Political analysts had all but written off Mr. Abe after his abrupt resignation, which drew much ridicule and greatly weakened the long-ruling Liberal Democrats. His party eventually lost to the Democrats in 2009, ending a half-century of almost uninterrupted rule.

But now the Democratic Party has lost much of its support, having fallen short on many of its promises to wrest power away from the country's bureaucrats. The public is disillusioned with reconstruction efforts after the tsunami and nuclear crisis last year, and the moribund economy remains a drag. Mr. Noda is under mounting pressure to call elections soon, though he need not hold them until next summer. Analysts agree that the Democrats would probably lose their majority in Parliament's lower house in an early vote, but the Liberal Democrats are seen as unlikely to win a majority either, inviting further political gridlock.

Mr. Abe had not been the front-runner in the party balloting on Wednesday; he ran second in the initial round to Shigeru Ishiba, a conservative but less ideological former defense minister. But party elders did not back Mr. Ishiba in the runoff, analysts said, because of an independent streak that led Mr. Ishiba to leave the party for a time in the 1990s. Mr. Abe ultimately won the party vote, 108-89.

Now, the Liberal Democrats and Democrats appear set to limp into an election to decide which party is the least unpopular.

"I don't think the Liberal Democrats can hope for much more support under Mr. Abe, who comes with a sense of tired déjà vu," said Atsuo Ito, an independent political analyst who has worked in the secretariats of both parties. "But there will be no change to the public's deep-rooted disillusionment with the Democrats," he said.

If the two largest parties perform as tepidly as recent polls suggest, the future political landscape may depend on whether they can work together, given that their platforms are similar on most issues.

"It would be good if the parties can somehow cooperate across party lines," Harumi Arima, a well-known political commentator and newscaster. "But if they can't, I'm afraid we're heading into more confusion."

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NEA

Daughter Of Bahrain Opposition Leader Sentenced

September 26, 2012

Associated Press

MANAMA, Bahrain - A defense lawyer in Bahrain says the daughter of a jailed rights activist has received a two-month prison sentence for ripping a picture of the Gulf nation's king during a protest.

The court's decision Wednesday was denounced by rights groups accusing authorities of limiting free expression in crackdowns on protesters from the kingdom's Shiite majority, which is seeking a greater political voice in the Sunni-ruled nation. More than 50 people have died in unrest since February 2011.

Mohamed al-Jishi says his client Zainab al-Khawaja could be released soon based on her time held awaiting trial, but there was no immediate word from officials.

Al-Khawaja's father Abdulhadi is among eight opposition figures sentenced to life in prison. He staged a 110-day hunger strike earlier this year in protest.

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Egypt's President Calls for Action on Syria

September 27, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By MATT BRADLEY in Cairo and JOE LAURIA at the United Nations

Egypt's president sought to reclaim his country's role as a regional leader, voicing outrage over an anti-Islam video and urging a regional solution to the Syrian conflict, in the first speech to the United Nations General Assembly by a freely elected Egyptian head of state.

Mohammed Morsi used his global audience in New York on Wednesday to reintroduce Egypt as a regional diplomatic hub—a position the North African country forfeited during the 30-year rule of ousted President Hosni Mubarak.

"The new Egypt is determined to regain its standing among nations and assume an effective role in global issues, stemming from the will of its people, as well as the legitimacy on which its regime is founded," he said.

The leader held forth on conflicts throughout the Middle East, and expressed particular interest in the civil war in Syria, where more than 20,000 people have been killed in the past 19 months, according to human-rights groups.

As an expression of Egypt's more prominent standing, Mr. Morsi used the podium to convey the outrage of Muslims over a video made in the U.S. that mocked Islam's Prophet Muhammad. Unrest sparked by protests over the video left over 50 people dead world-wide. "The insults heard on the Prophet Muhammad, we reject this," he said.

Responding to U.S. criticism that he didn't act quickly enough to condemn protesters from scaling the walls of the U.S. Embassy in Cairo before ripping down and burning the U.S. flag, Mr. Morsi said Egypt "also stands firmly against the use of violence in expressing objection to these obscenities."

In assuming Egypt's abandoned role as a voice for the wider Arab and Islamic communities, Mr. Morsi sought to breathe new life into the language of Arab unity that Gamal Abdel Nasser, one of Egypt's first presidents, first articulated generations ago.

Mr. Morsi stressed the centrality of the revitalized "Arab nation" to Egypt's "commitment to working with its Arab brothers and sisters to reclaim our rightful position in the world."

"He is a lawyer for the Arab Spring," said Abdullah Al Ashaal, a former Egyptian diplomat and law professor at the American University in Cairo. "He is defending the right of the Arab peoples to determine themselves."

That worldview was evident in Mr. Morsi's defense of the Syrian public, who he said are trapped in "the tragedy of our era."

Though Mr. Morsi spoke of a global, collective responsibility for the crisis, he reiterated his rejection of foreign intervention to stop the crisis. Instead, he backed the joint U.N.-Arab League initiative now led by Algerian diplomat Lakhdar Brahimi, and promoted Egypt's own regionally based contact group of four nations—Egypt, Iran, Turkey and Saudi Arabia—that convened this month.

That initiative is remarkable for its inclusion of Iran, a former enemy of Egypt and a stalwart supporter of the embattled regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. Mr. Morsi's condemnation of the violence in Syria stood in contrast to a speech moments earlier by Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who made no mention of the civil war.

Mr. Morsi's speech was short on details of domestic policy and how he would take his country to a position of pre-eminent global leadership.

"I would say that Egypt is still lacking some of the tools and the strength to do that," said Salman Shaikh, director of the Brookings Doha Center. "I think his words are more about Egypt rising and posturing than actually delivering on that."

The new leader also seemed conscious of the anxieties stemming from his affiliation to the powerful Muslim Brotherhood, the 84-year-old Islamist organization that Mr. Morsi once helped lead.

He spoke plainly to play down concerns about the future of the 1979 Egypt-Israel peace treaty. "I say it loudly to those wondering about our position vis-à-vis the international agreements and conventions that we have previously adhered to: We are committed to what we have signed on," he said.

But he sharply criticized Israel, without naming it, for its "colonization, settlement activities, and the alteration in the identity of occupied Jerusalem."

"It is shameful that the free world accepts, regardless of the justifications provided, that a member of the international community continues to deny the rights of a nation that has been longing for decades for independence," he said.

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Egypt's Morsi Warns Israel Over "Law Of The Jungle" Threats

September 27, 2012

AFP

Egypt's new president on Wednesday hit out at Israel over its veiled threats to attack Iran's nuclear facilities and the deadlock in the Middle East peace process.

President Mohamed Morsi received a rousing ovation for his first speech to the 193-member UN General Assembly since becoming Egypt's first civilian, democratically elected leader in June.

Without specifically mentioning Israel's undeclared nuclear arsenal, Morsi said the Middle East "no longer tolerates" any country's refusal to join the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty "especially if this is coupled with irresponsible policies or arbitrary threats."

"The acceptance by the international community of the principle of pre-emptiveness or the attempt to legitimize it is in itself a serious matter and must be firmly confronted to avoid the prevalence of the law of the jungle," Morsi said.

The election of the Islamist politician has unsettled ties with Israel, which has refused to rule out a military strike on Iran's nuclear facilities.

Morsi also put the Israel-Palestinian conflict ahead of the Syria war in the list of priorities he laid out before the General Assembly.

"The first issue which the world must exert all its efforts in resolving, on the basis of justice and dignity, is the Palestinian cause," Morsi said.

He said that UN resolutions on the conflict had not been implemented and that Palestinians "must also taste the fruits of freedom and dignity" that other countries in the Arab region have won in the past year.

"It is shameful that the free world accepts, regardless of the justifications provided, that a member of the international community continues to deny the rights of a nation that has been longing for decades for independence," Morsi said.

"It is also disgraceful that settlement activities continue on the territories of these people."

The Palestinians have refused to hold direct talks with Israel for the past two years because of Israel's refusal to halt settlement activities in the occupied territories.

Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian leader Mahmud Abbas are to address the General Assembly on Thursday.

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Egypt: No Need To Amend Treaty With Israel

September 27, 2012

Associated Press

CAIRO - A spokesman for Egypt's President Mohammed Morsi said Wednesday that there is currently no need to amend the peace treaty with Israel, despite calls in Cairo to revise the 1979 accord to allow the country to beef up its presence in the Sinai Peninsula to combat militants there, the state news agency reported.

For years, many Egyptians have considered the limitations on troop deployments to impinge on national sovereignty. Egyptian political groups including the Muslim Brotherhood, from which Morsi hails, have called for revising the treaty, particularly as lawlessness in the peninsula has increased since the uprising that ousted Hosni Mubarak in February 2011.

The Jewish state has allowed Egypt to temporarily strengthen its forces in the Sinai to fight Islamist militants who have attacked targets both in Egypt and across the border in Israel. But it is opposed to formalizing any changes to the treaty, Israel's first with an Arab country.

The treaty restored Sinai, which Israel captured in the 1967 Mideast war, to Egyptian control. Areas near the border were demilitarized, however. The country's hardline foreign minister Avigdor Lieberman said Sunday there was "no chance" Israel would reevaluate the terms of the peace deal.

Yasser Ali, speaking from New York where Morsi is attending the U.N. General Assembly, said Egypt now has the troops it needs in the Sinai to restore security. The military has been conducting a sweep against Islamist militants there following an August assault on an outpost that killed 16 Egyptian soldiers, the worst attack on the army in peacetime.

Ali said the operation is "unhindered" and will continue until it is successful. His comments came in response to published comments by one of Morsi's advisers, who said he will soon present the president with a proposal to amend the 1979 treaty. Mohammed Seif el-Dawla was quoted by the independent Dostor daily as saying the proposed changes, not described, were based on "popular demand and a strategic and security need."

"With all due respect to all political and intellectual luminaries on the presidential advisory panel, only the president and his spokesman speak for the presidency," Ali said, according to the state news agency MENA.

Israel had welcomed the crackdown by Egypt, which deployed armored personnel carriers and attack helicopters to root out militants in the Sinai this summer. But it balked once Egypt sent in tanks, some of which were removed after Israel complained.

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Conflicts at Home Resonate in Iranian's U.N. Farewell

September 27, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By JAY SOLOMON

UNITED NATIONS—Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's farewell appearance at the United Nations General Assembly exposed the deepening political fissures inside Tehran, in a surprising finale to eight annual U.S. speeches better known for his insults and threats.

As Mr. Ahmadinejad began his U.N. speech on Wednesday morning, Iranian security forces jailed for six months his top media adviser after convicting him of publicly insulting Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Later, Mr. Ahmadinejad voiced disapproval of his government's economic policies, an unexpected criticism that came during a meeting with reporters.

The political discord played out as Mr. Ahmadinejad wrapped up his final trip to New York as president under Iran's term limits. His second four-year term ends in June.

Visibly subdued, the Iranian president confirmed to hundreds of journalists gathered at the New York news conference that he had been notified of the imprisonment of his aide, Ali Akbar Javanfekr, and that he was still "digesting" the news. Mr. Javanfekr had questioned in print whether women's use of head-to-toe coverings was originally a national custom or had been imported from elsewhere.

Also in the news conference, Mr. Ahmadinejad said he had opposed Iranian financial authorities' decision to allow its currency, the rial, to drop by as much as 60% against the U.S. dollar over the past year.

Iranian businessmen have complained that Iran's central bank has limited their access to dollars, causing the sharp drop in the value of the rial. Many Iran analysts believe that Tehran's economic planners, facing mounting international financial sanctions, are increasingly seeking to maintain the country's foreign-exchange reserves. "I was and am against" this policy, he said.

The president also disputed claims that Iran's economy is in crisis, and said his economic policies have helped his country modernize since he took office in 2005. His account differs from the charges made by some Iranian lawmakers that his heavy spending and confrontational foreign policy have fueled inflation and left Iran economically isolated. "I don't think the situation in Iran is so dire," he said.

The comments came after a U.N. address in which he toned down his now commonplace attacks on Israel and the U.S. Taking their place were religious remarks in which he called for a system of new global governance and hailed the coming arrival of Shiite Islam's messiah.

The Iranian president's visit to New York didn't go without provocation: speaking to the media earlier in the week, he questioned the veracity of the Holocaust and openly called for the destruction of the state of Israel. On Wednesday, in his 40-minute speech, he continued to question the accepted version of what happened in the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. He also warned developing countries about the dangers posed by a capitalist system dominated by what he called Zionists and "arrogant" world powers.

American and Israeli diplomats, as they have done each year, walked out of the U.N.'s main chamber when Mr. Ahmadinejad walked up to the dais.

But he refrained from making some of the more offensive remarks that often color his speeches.

Instead, the 55-year-old focused on calling for the overthrow of the current capitalist-driven global system in favor of one more influenced by developing nations and non-Western societies.

"The current abysmal situation of the world and the bitter incidents of history are due mainly to the wrong management of the world and the self-proclaimed centers of power who have entrusted themselves to the devil," Mr. Ahmadinejad said.

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon had requested that Mr. Ahmadinejad refrain from the offensive comments that have highlighted his seven previous speeches to the world body. Iranian officials weren't immediately available to comment on the perceptibly muted speech.

Iran's leader fixated on the theme of capitalism corrupting business and the politics of leading nations. He particularly seemed to focus on the coming U.S. presidential elections in November as bound to unfairly represent the will of the American people.

"Despite what big political parties claim in the capitalistic countries, the money that goes into election campaigns is usually nothing but an investment, Mr. Ahmadinejad said. "In such countries, people have to vote for parties that only represent a small number of people."

As Mr. Ahmadinejad began his speech, thousands of Iranian opposition supporters, and some U.S. politicians, gathered in a park across the street to denounce the Iranian leader and celebrate a recent decision by the U.S. to remove the organization hosting the protest, the Mujahedin-e Khalq, or MeK, from its list of terrorist organizations.

"He wants to make Iran a nuclear power," shouted former New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani to the crowd set in a sea of signs mocking the Iranian leader. "You know what I say? No how, no way, never!"

The State Department placed the MeK on its terrorist list in 1997 because of its ties to Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein and assassination campaigns directed against Iranian leaders and Americans, dating back to the 1970s. The group has since worked to improve its image, and cooperated with the U.S., including collecting intelligence about Iran's nuclear program.

A fierce lobbying campaign in recent years, featuring enlistment of American political figures, also helped.

The delisting was "a correct decision which sets aside a serious obstacle on the path of the Iranian people," said Maryam Rajavi, the leader of the MeK, in a live broadcast from Paris.

Mr. Ahmadinejad, despite the protests, said he would fondly recall his trips to New York. As in previous visits, he conducted TV interviews, held gatherings with Iranian-Americans and lectured academics and journalists about global events.

"My visits to New York have all been good," Mr. Ahmadinejad said at the end of his news conference. "Unfortunately, I didn't have the opportunity to really interact with the good people of the city."

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Iranian President's Press Adviser Jailed

September 27, 2012

Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran - Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's top press adviser was taken into custody to begin serving a six-month jail sentence after being convicted of publishing material deemed insulting to the country's supreme leader.

Ali Akbar Javanfekr, who is also the head of the state-run IRNA news agency, is one of dozens of Ahmadinejad's allies detained since April 2011 in the fallout from a political feud between the president and the country's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Iran's hardline political establishment slapped down Ahmadinejad and his supporters after the president briefly challenged an order from the country's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei over the choice of intelligence chief.

The semiofficial Fars news agency said judicial agents detained Javanfekr late Wednesday. IRNA said Javanfekr was arrested as Ahmadinejad, who had shielded his press adviser in the past from arrest, began his speech at the U.N. General Assembly in New York.

The case against Javanfekr began after he wrote in an official publication that the practice of women wearing a head-to-toe black covering known as a chador was not originally an Iranian practice but was imported. This was considered offensive by hardline Iranian clerics.

An Iranian court convicted Javanfekr last November of "publishing materials contrary to Islamic norms," and also banned him from journalism activities for three years. The charges against him included insulting Khamenei, who has the final say on all state matters in Iran.

Javanfekr resisted an attempt by the judiciary to arrest him last November when his loyalists clashed with law enforcement forces inside the building of his office. Ahmadinejad reportedly intervened to stop the imprisonment of his close ally and confidant.

Meanwhile, authorities shut down a moderate newspaper late Wednesday after it published a caricature that hardliners have interpreted as insulting to war veterans.

The daily Shargh was ordered closed by the Press Supervisory Board over the caricature, state TV's website reported.

But the caricaturist, Hadi Heidari, posted messages on his Facebook page saying his work has been misinterpreted by extremists and that his caricature simply criticized those who blindly follow others.

Iran experienced a wave of newspaper closures during a confrontation between reformers and hardliners during the 1997-2005 tenure of former reformist President Mohammad Khatami.

The judiciary has shut down more than 120 pro-reform newspapers and jailed dozens of editors and writers on vague charges of insulting authorities since 2000.

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Iran Seeking New Contact Group On Syria

September 27, 2012

AFP

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said Wednesday that Tehran was working to set up a separate contact group on the conflict in Syria, in a move unlikely to be welcomed by many nations.

"We do believe that through a national dialogue and a national understanding and consensus, they can, the various Syrian sides, reach a more solid conclusion, a more tangible and long-lasting conclusion," the Iranian leader told a press conference in New York.

"Therefore we strive to pave the way for national dialogue and national understanding between the two sides and we are working hard to stand up and shape a contact group from various countries."

He refused to divulge which nations had been approached by Iran to join the group, saying he was hopeful the Iranian foreign ministry would make an announcement in the coming days.

Tehran is already included in another so-called "contact group," involving Iran, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Turkey, and has called for sending observers to Syria in an effort to quell the violence there.

There is a separate Friends of Syria group headed by the United States and grouping some 60 nations, which will meet Friday on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly to discuss the conflict in which an estimated 29,000 people have been killed.

Speaking through a translator to journalists, Ahmadinejad accused "outside forces" of meddling in Syria, without directly naming any countries.

The Syrian issue "has become incredibly complicated because of the meddling of outside forces," he said.

He warned that outside interference might yield "short-term results, but for decades to come it will keep Syria in complete chaos and instability."

"The social fabric of Syria does not have the capacity to allow some tribal groups to gain the reins of power through warfare. And if followed will bring with itself subsequent warfare."

He did not address charges from the United States that Iran is arming the Syrian regime of President Bashar al-Assad, which is engaged in a brutal suppression of an 18-month-old rebellion.

Instead, the Iranian leader insisted his Islamic republic was working for peace.

"I am hopeful that all of those who beat the drums of war can come to understand the sensitive conditions of Syria. The European countries and America as well," he said.

"No-one should meddle or interfere in the internal affairs of Syria. Anything that the people of Syria decide upon must be respected by all."

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White House: Obama Views Libya Attack As Terrorism

September 27, 2012

Associated Press

By Steve Peoples

ABOARD AIR FORCE ONE - The White House said Wednesday that President Barack Obama considers the deadly assault on the U.S. consulate in Libya a terrorist attack.

White House spokesman Jay Carney said it is "certainly the case that it is our view as an administration, and the president's view, that it was a terrorist attack." Four Americans were killed in the attack, including Chris Stevens, the U.S. ambassador to Libya.

Carney's comments came after Republican Mitt Romney accused Obama of failing to acknowledge what Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and other officials have said - that the attacks in Benghazi were acts of terrorism against the U.S.

Obama has declined several chances to call the incident a terrorist attack. He said last week that extremists used an anti-Islam video as an excuse to assault U.S. interests.

Carney, who speaks for Obama, had himself declared the violence a terrorist attack last week.

On Capitol Hill, eight Republicans who head House committees sent a letter to Obama saying they were disturbed by statements from administration officials suggesting that the attack was a protest gone wrong rather than a terrorist attack. They said they would be willing to return to Washington from Congress' nearly two-month recess if the administration scheduled another briefing on Libya.

Clinton and senior Pentagon and intelligence officials briefed members of the House and Senate last Thursday on Libya.

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WHO Advising Saudis On Virus Ahead Of Hajj

September 27, 2012

AFP

The UN health agency said Wednesday it knew of no more cases in the Gulf of a mystery illness from the same virus family as the deadly SARS but was advising Saudi Arabia ahead of the upcoming Hajj pilgrimage.

"WHO is working closely with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, as in previous years, to support the country's health measures for all visitors participating in the hajj pilgrimage to Mecca next month," the World Health Organization said in a statement.

The Geneva-based agency earlier confirmed that the illness was in the coronavirus family and had caused the death of a Saudi national.

It has also left a Qatari man seriously ill in a London hospital after he was transferred there from Doha earlier this month, the WHO said, adding that he had previously been in Saudi Arabia.

The two cases occurred three months apart in June and September, said the WHO, stressing that the illness is not Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome which swept out of China in 2003, killing more than 800 people worldwide.

What sets the new virus apart from SARS, the agency added, is that it causes rapid kidney failure.

Meanwhile, pilgrims have already begun to arrive in the Saudi kingdom for the ritual that represents the world's largest annual gathering.

Last year, nearly three million Muslim pilgrims performed the Hajj, which represents one of the five pillars of Islam and must be performed at least once in a lifetime by all Muslims who are able to do so.

Saudi health authorities have downplayed the chances of an outbreak of the mystery illness, adding that there were no changes on travel conditions for pilgrims.

Meanwhile a Danish hospital said Wednesday it had isolated five people with symptoms of a viral respiratory illness pending the result of tests.

Odense University hospital said those admitted were a family of four where the father had been to Saudi Arabia, and an unrelated person who had been to Qatar.

Two of the patients were children under five.

SARS swept out of China in 2003, killing more than 800 people worldwide.

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Syrian Insurgents Mount Fierce Attack On Military Compound In Damascus

September 27, 2012

New York Times

By An Employee Of The New York Times In Syria And Kareem Fahim

DAMASCUS, Syria - Suicide bombers struck a military headquarters in a busy square in central Damascus on Wednesday morning, the second insurgent assault on a government military installation in two days and the largest attack in the capital since July, when explosions killed several key aides to President Bashar al-Assad.

In gunfire after two explosions, a television correspondent - Maya Naser of Press TV, Iran's English-language satellite network - was killed during a live broadcast, the network said.

In a statement, the Syrian Army said that "armed terrorist gangs, with foreign links, carried out a new terrorist act this morning by blowing up an explosives-laden car and a bomb at the Army General Command, which damaged the building, caused a fire and wounded some of the guards."

The warren of government buildings is in one of the capital's most guarded areas, near an office used by Mr. Assad. State television broadcast images of a small white minibus slowing to a stop on a busy road near the wall of the military compound and then exploding in a fireball. Other images showed what appeared to be another blast in the compound. Witnesses said it struck the air force command headquarters.

The blasts were precursors to a fierce armed attack, two witnesses said. One said that dozens of insurgent fighters appeared almost immediately, attacking with grenades and gunfire while guards from the military complex ran around in a panic.

Reports of the toll varied. Syrian state news media said that four guards were killed at the military headquarters and that 14 people were wounded, including some civilians, while witnesses said they also saw dead guards, soldiers and insurgent fighters.

There were at least two claims of responsibility. The Free Syrian Army, the umbrella group for defected soldiers, said on its Facebook page that one of its fighters blew himself up at the compound gate, allowing four others to enter, and that a car bomb killed everyone in the courtyard. It also said informers had helped plant bombs inside the compound a day earlier.

An Islamist group, Tajamo Ansar al-Islam, also claimed responsibility. None of the claims of either group could be independently verified.

On Tuesday, insurgents bombed a school they claimed was being used as a headquarters and barracks for military officers and for the government's plainclothes security enforcers, known as shabiha. The attacks showed fighters remained able to strike close to centers of power, even after weeks of efforts by the Syrian military to drive them from the capital.

Also on Wednesday, activist groups reported the discovery of dozens of bodies in Thiyabiya, a Damascus suburb, including men who had apparently been executed. One group, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, said that at least 40 bodies had been found, including women and children.

The explosions on Wednesday occurred within a 10-minute period, beginning about 7 a.m. A 40-year-old driver who works near Umayyad Square, where the buildings are, described chaotic scenes of battle, as rebels fought their way into the army headquarters and others fired on soldiers from rooftops. Then, he said, "big numbers of soldiers and security men came from everywhere and they surrounded the building, and began fighting in a crazy way."

"I cannot believe what I saw," the driver said. "The government cannot protect its military and key security buildings, so how can it protect the country?"

Another witness described the shock of seeing fighting in the center of the capital. "I saw dozens of armed security men and soldiers killed and injured," he said, adding that, for a time, gunfire from the rebels prevented ambulances from approaching.

"To see dozens of armed rebels, with snipers, machine guns and grenades - I was not expecting this in my life."

The government responded quickly, shutting down parts of the capital, including entrances to Damascus and all roads leading to Umayyad Square. Checkpoints were set up as dozens of security officers streamed in. Shabiha searched shoppers in the Souk al-Hamidiya, the market in the heart of old Damascus.

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West Complicit In Syria "Massacres": Rebel Leader

September 27, 2012

AFP

A Syrian rebel commander has accused the West of being complicit in the "unprecedented massacres" committed by President Bashar al-Assad's forces by refusing to arm the rebels with anti-aircraft weapons.

Rebel officer Ahmad al-Fajj, a brigadier-general in the regular Syrian army before his defection "in the first days of the revolution," spoke in the rebel Free Syrian Army-held village of Atmeh on the Turkish border.

"The free peoples of the world -- Europeans, Americans -- must understand that their governments are indirectly responsible for the killings in our country," Fajj, 64, said in an interview with AFP on Tuesday.

"We asked all the arms dealers and traffickers in the region to sell us anti-aircraft missiles. They told us they needed the green light from the CIA and Mossad, and the light was red," he said.

"They won't sell us anti-tank weapons for the same reason. All we have to defeat Bashar's tanks are the RPGs we manage to retrieve from the enemy."

He claimed that with surface-to-air missiles the rebels would be able to defeat the regime forces "in a week, a month at most."

General Fajj, who bore an odd resemblance to the late Hafez al-Assad, former president and father of Bashar, said he could not fathom the West's reluctance to supply the rebels with the necessary anti-aircraft equipment.

Western nations fear that such weapons may fall into the hands of militant Islamists operating in the country.

"There aren't many Islamists, less than a thousand in the whole of Syria. They have no power," he asserted. "We control the liberated areas and I can guarantee you there is no chance they'd get hold of missiles."

"If Western countries had helped us from the beginning, they wouldn't even be here as we wouldn't need them. I assure you that after our victory they will not pose a problem. If they do we'll deal with them. The Syrian people don't support them, they're on our side."

"I can promise the free peoples of the world that if surface-to-air missiles are given to us, they will not fall into the hands of Islamist groups," he said.

As the UN General Assembly opened in New York Tuesday, Fajj complained: "Democratic countries only support us with words. This is shameful for the world. They can see what's happening, buildings being destroyed by air strikes, and they do nothing."

Fajj, commander of the rebels on the front line in western Aleppo, had been leading a four-day-old FSA assault on a crucial army post, "base 46," which lies on the main road between the northern city and Turkey.

"We are surrounding them. Yesterday a helicopter flew past to drop them bread. They can't get reinforcements because we hold all the roads.

"This base is the only obstacle on the road to Aleppo. If we take it, we can join up with our fighters in the city, which would be a key victory," he said.

"We have time anyway," he concluded. "We will defeat them by ourselves. It'll take longer and many people, civilians in particular, will die as a result. The French revolution didn't get any outside help. This is our revolution."

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Arab Ministers Mull Syria Intervention Force

September 27, 2012

[AFP](#)

By Tim Witcher

Arab ministers on Wednesday weighed calls for an Arab intervention in the Syria conflict, while Western nations pressed Russia and China to drop opposition to international action.

Arab ministers met with UN-Arab League envoy Lakhdar Brahimi on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly and Tunisia's President Moncef Marzouki said later his country could support an Arab peacekeeping force in Syria. Others have doubts though.

"A peacekeeping operation by Arab nations is something we could well imagine," Marzouki told AFP, calling President Bashar al-Assad "a bloodthirsty dictator."

"We have really pushed for a peaceful solution, but if it is necessary, it must be an Arab peacekeeping force, yes."

On Tuesday, the emir of Qatar, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, called at the UN General Assembly for an Arab intervention in Syria.

Arab League secretary general Nabil al-Arabi told reporters he did not believe the emir intended a "fighting force."

But he told a Security Council meeting on the Middle East that the council must support Brahimi by making its resolutions on Syria "binding on all parties."

Russia and China have used their powers as permanent members of the council three times to block resolutions which could have led to potential sanctions.

Western diplomats say they do not expect Russia, Syria's main ally, to weaken its defense of Assad. But they say China, which does not have the same strategic interests, may now be feeling pressure from Arab and other nations over its position.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton appealed for the "paralyzed" council to make a new attempt to reach an accord on taking measures over the conflict.

"The atrocities mount while the Security Council remains paralyzed and I would urge that we try once again to find a path forward," Clinton told the Middle East meeting.

France's Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius said it was "shocking" that the council had been unable to act in the 18 months since the uprising against Assad started.

"As the international community, we must be united to stop the violence and help initiate a process of political transition. We must find a common response. We owe it to the people," said Germany's Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle.

None of the ministers have specifically mentioned Russia or China, but diplomats said the targets are clear and that the campaign is also being waged on a wider stage.

Britain's Prime Minister David Cameron told the UN General Assembly on Wednesday that the tens of thousands of deaths in Syria conflict had become a "terrible stain" on the reputation of the United Nations.

"The future for Syria is a future without Assad," Cameron told the 193-member assembly, highlighting a report this week that outlined the horror suffered by children who have seen killings and been tortured in the conflict.

"The blood of these young children is a terrible stain on the reputation of this United Nations," Cameron said.

"And in particular, a stain on those who have failed to stand up to these atrocities and in some cases aided and abetted Assad's reign of terror."

Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov showed no sign of changing tack and said violence by the government and opposition had to be condemned.

"A significant share of the responsibility for the continuing bloodshed rests upon the states that instigate the opponents of Bashar al-Assad to reject a ceasefire and dialogue and demand an unconditional capitulation of the regime," he told the Middle East meeting.

China's Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi was more defensive.

"China has faithfully fulfilled its obligations and acted as a positive force in seeking a political solution to the issue," he said.

"China is ready to join the rest of the international community in an unrelenting effort to resolve the Syrian issue in a just, peaceful and appropriate way."

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Tunisia Says Would Support Arab Peacekeepers In Syria

September 27, 2012

[AFP](#)

Tunisian President Moncef Marzouki on Wednesday said his country would support an Arab peacekeeping force in Syria, as nations struggle to find a solution to the conflict.

"A peacekeeping operation by Arab nations is something we could well imagine," Marzouki told AFP on the sidelines of a UN General Assembly.

"We have really pushed for a peaceful solution, but if it is necessary, it must be an Arab peacekeeping force, yes."

He was speaking a day after the emir of Qatar called for an Arab intervention in Syria and a no-fly zone to protect refugees as President Bashar al-Assad's forces step up the battle for Aleppo.

Arab League ministers on Wednesday held a meeting at the United Nations to discuss the conflict in Syria.

"Tunisia has already spoken about an Arab peace corps," said Marzouki, speaking in French.

"We have to do something, because it is obvious that faced with this bloodthirsty dictator, in my opinion we are faced with a real Nero who is capable of destroying the whole country to stay in power," he told AFP.

"We have to shoulder our responsibilities as Arabs."

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Outrage As Tunisia Woman Raped By Police Is Accused

September 27, 2012

AFP

Tunisian civil society groups expressed outrage on Wednesday after a young woman was accused of indecency by two policemen jailed for raping her, amid criticism of the Islamist-led government for rolling back women's rights.

The woman and her fiance were summoned by a magistrate on Wednesday to face the two policemen, both found guilty of rape and jailed, who accuse her of "indecency," a group of Tunisian NGOs said in a statement.

The crime is punishable by six months in prison.

The hearing was eventually postponed until October 2, according to the NGOs, with social media networks calling for a demonstration outside the court in Tunis on that day.

The interior ministry said the woman and her boyfriend were apprehended by three policemen on September 3, when they were found in an "immoral position."

Two policemen then raped her, while the third held the handcuffed fiance.

The NGOs, which include the Tunisian Association of Democratic Women and the Tunisian League of Human Rights, slammed what they described as a procedure that "transforms the victim into the accused."

It "is designed to frighten, and to force her and her fiance to waive their rights," they added.

They also questioned "the seriousness of the government's commitment to applying the national plan to combat violence against women."

"Rape as a means of repression is still practised in Tunisia," a coalition of leftwing opposition parties said separately, calling for a law to protect "Tunisian men and women against all forms of physical, moral and sexual violence."

MP Karima Souid, who belongs to Ettakatol, a centre-left group that partners the Islamist party Ennahda in Tunisia's ruling coalition, condemned her party's support for the government in protest at the proceedings against the rape victim.

"I completely dissociate myself from this government. The rape case and the summoning of the victim this morning is the last straw," she wrote on Facebook.

Interior ministry spokesman Khaled Tarrouche told AFP that the ministry "had nothing to do with" the proceedings against the young women, emphasising that the decision to summon her was taken by the magistrate.

"In this case, we acted as was required of us. What had to be done was done, and the three police agents were arrested straight away," he said, insisting that cases of police assaulting women were "isolated."

The justice ministry was not immediately reachable for comment.

Since the Islamists' rise to power after the revolution last year, Tunisian feminist groups have accused the police of regularly harassing women, by challenging them over their clothing, or when they go out at night unaccompanied by family members.

Ennahda also provoked a storm of protest for proposing an article in the new constitution that referred to the "complementarity" of men to women rather than their equality.

Many saw the proposed article, which was abandoned on Monday, as a ploy by the Islamists to reverse the principle of gender equality that made Tunisia a beacon of modernity in the Arab world when it was introduced six decades ago.

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SCA

As Power Flows To Regional Bosses, Questions Rise On India's Economy

September 27, 2012

New York Times

By Jim Yardley

NEW DELHI - It seems like eons ago, but Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and his coalition government once inspired very high expectations. They were going to stoke India's economy, improve education, help the poor, build modern transportation and energy systems and, perhaps most improbably, prove that India, the most populous and messiest of democracies, could be successfully governed.

That was in 2009, when the governing coalition, led by the Indian National Congress Party, won an unexpectedly broad re-election victory. India's economy was motoring out of the global recession, and the country seemed to be moving from an era of fragmented politics to a new stage in which power resided with a stronger central government in New Delhi. To those who saw India as a rising global power, this was good news.

If only.

Today, India's political calculus is again in flux. The economy is in a tailspin, Mr. Singh and his government are desperately trying to regain credibility, and power is now radiating to regional political chieftains, who are teasingly considering a new national political alignment, a so-called third front to compete with the two national powers, the Congress Party and the opposition Bharatiya Janata Party.

Regional bosses, once in decline, are becoming kingmakers again: the squat, sleepy-eyed Mulayam Singh Yadav, who oversees the powerful Samajwadi Party, is even publicly musing about himself as a future prime minister.

"The incentive for every single party from the opposition to the allies is to send a signal that the Congress can't govern," said Pratap Bhanu Mehta, president of the Center for Policy Research in New Delhi. "That's the election plank."

Had Mr. Singh's government met initial expectations, or even come close, the political landscape would undoubtedly be different. "They just blew it," Mr. Mehta said. The rise of Mr. Yadav and several other regional bosses has many implications for Indian politics, but the trend also raises a broader question about the changing arc of the Indian economic story: If the old assumption was that India needed a strong central government to compete globally, and to avoid a competitive disadvantage with China, what will happen now that the opposite seems to be happening?

History does not provide much reassurance. In past decades, third-front governments have twice taken power and have twice collapsed because of internal bickering, a prospect of instability certain to be unappealing to those in New Delhi and Washington who are eager for India to become a stable and influential player in Asia. Most analysts are skeptical that a true third front will take power in the near future, but they agree that the clout of regional leaders is growing.

"Indian politics will have to live with bargains and negotiations with regional parties," Ashutosh Varshney, a political expert, said in an e-mail interview. "A third front may or may not emerge, but both national parties will have to negotiate and bargain. That also means that India will find it harder to make firm assertions of power on the international stage, à la China. Its power will grow, but more gradually."

Last week, Mr. Singh's coalition government nearly collapsed after he pushed through unpopular economic measures, including an increase in diesel fuel prices and a policy shift enabling global giants like Walmart to open retail stores here. Mamata Banerjee, the populist chief minister of the state of West Bengal, declared the moves "anti-poor" and withdrew her regional party from the governing coalition, potentially bringing down Mr. Singh's government. Until, that is, Mr. Yadav and another nonaligned regional leader, Mayawati, who uses only one name, stepped in to rescue the government, at least for now, by pledging "outside" support.

The machinations were hardly altruistic. For months, Mr. Yadav and other regional leaders have speculated - at times gleefully - about the possibility that the governing coalition might collapse, forcing early elections for Parliament, before the scheduled date in 2014. By allowing the government to survive, analysts say, the regional bosses made a cold calculation: keeping afloat a wounded central government was more advantageous, for now, than trying to pick up extra seats by forcing early elections.

The strategy is to pummel Mr. Singh's government like a piñata, if not yet knocking it completely to the ground, in hopes of inflicting even greater long-term damage to the Congress Party. Mr. Yadav, for example, is lending parliamentary support to the government, even as he plans to rally against Walmart and some economic measures.

India's economy has suffered in the lingering global downturn, but most analysts say India's current problems are disproportionately self-inflicted. The two-headed leadership structure of Mr. Singh and Sonia Gandhi, the Congress Party president, which worked earlier, is now seen as increasingly ineffective.

For his part, Mr. Singh is trying to reverse course and reposition the Congress Party as an agent of reform. He is expected to reshuffle his cabinet this week and announce more economic measures, like speeding up public spending on new airports and subway systems.

Mr. Singh, who turned 80 on Wednesday, now seems more determined to act decisively, perhaps with his legacy in mind. He gave a nationally televised address on Friday in which he sought to explain why the fuel price increase and other measures were necessary to stabilize the country's economy. Maligned for months, Mr. Singh has since won praise in India's news media, though many commentators have warned him not to fall back into what often seemed like an aloof governing style.

"The essence of progressive politics is communication, a skill this government must learn fast," The Indian Express, a leading English-language newspaper, said in an editorial.

In the meantime, India's regional leaders will continue to press for advantage. Ms. Banerjee is planning a huge demonstration in New Delhi on Monday against the government's new economic measures. Even as Ms. Banerjee is often criticized for being intemperate and unpredictable, her influence is undeniable: this week the American ambassador, Nancy Powell, met with her privately, just as Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton made a point of visiting her during a trip to India in May.

Other regional leaders are also increasingly powerful national figures. Nitish Kumar, the chief minister of the state of Bihar, has hinted that his regional party could join any coalition that granted his state special status. Naveen Patnaik, the chief minister of Orissa, has expressed support for a third-front coalition. Jayalalithaa, the chief minister of Tamil Nadu, has also spoken suggestively about a new political alliance.

Most of them have won political support by delivering economic growth and, to varying degrees, improved government. This is one reason that even as India's politics is again fragmenting, some analysts believe that the country's economic modernization can continue. In recent years, as policy logjams paralyzed the central government, many international and domestic business leaders shifted their focus to negotiating with individual state leaders.

Most analysts predict that both the Congress Party and the Bharatiya Janata Party will lose seats in the next election, but that one of the dominant parties will ally with some combination of the regional bosses to form a government, possibly even agreeing to elevate one of them to serve as prime minister.

No doubt several of them are interested in the job.

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Two Million Flee India Floods As Aid Effort Struggles

September 27, 2012

AFP

Rains hampered a military air operation to help flood victims in northeastern India, where more than two million people have been forced from their homes, officials said Wednesday.

Disaster management chiefs overseeing the aid effort in Assam state also said the number of people killed in flood-related incidents had reached 18 with five more casualties reported in the last 24 hours.

It is the third time this year that Assam has been hit by flooding.

Families stranded by the flood waters said they were close to starvation because the few aid packages that had been flown in were not enough to go round.

The defence ministry said heavy-lift helicopters were conducting up to 10 drops a day, each containing up to 1.5 tonnes of food, medicine and aid material.

But it admitted the relief operation was struggling because there was no let-up in the weather during what is the back-end of the monsoon season.

"Rains and strong river currents are hampering relief and rescue operations by soldiers and Indian Air Force helicopters," defence ministry spokesman S.S. Phogat said in Guwahati, Assam's largest city.

Phogat said he was unable to put a figure on the number of people rescued so far.

"Our priority right now is to rescue trapped people and reach food and medicines to those affected," he told AFP.

Mother-of-three Rupamoni Payeng said it was the third time this year she had fled to an elevated section of land on the submerged island of Majuli to escape flooding.

"We had to come here in June and August," she told AFP by phone, huddled inside a tarpaulin tent with the rest of her family.

She said the mood among other victims on the island, which is around 350 kilometres (220 miles) from Guwahati, was getting desperate.

A bulletin from Assam's disaster management department said the number forced to flee their homes had risen to two million, up by around 200,000 on the previous figure.

At least 19 of oil-rich Assam's 27 districts had been left under water, including 2,600 villages, it said. Some 400,000 hectares (988,400 acres) of crops were affected and 55 breaches of river banks had been recorded.

Assam's worst floods in recent years came in 2004 when 200 people were killed and five million people displaced.

Floodwaters have also submerged the 430-square-kilometre Kaziranga National Park, home to the world's largest concentration of one-horned rhinos. A 2012 census put the number there at 2,290, of a global population of 3,300.

Poachers took advantage of the chaos to kill one rhino, taking to 14 the number slaughtered this year. They also shot and wounded another, park wardens said.

The animals are killed for their horns, which fetch huge prices in Asian countries where they are deemed to have aphrodisiac qualities.

Flooding has also hit parts of neighbouring Bangladesh, where officials say nearly 250,000 people have been trapped by rising waters.

In Kurigram district, which borders Assam, more than 200,000 people have been trapped in their homes, district administrator Habibur Rahman told AFP.

"The flood situation is worsening, with the Brahmaputra River rising more than a foot (25 centimetres) in the last 24 hours. We've geared up relief for the flood-affected people," he said. ([top](#))

Pakistan Taliban: "Amnesty" For Bounty Minister

September 27, 2012

Associated Press

By Asif Shahzad

ISLAMABAD - The Pakistani Taliban announced Wednesday that they were giving a Cabinet minister an "amnesty," taking him off their hit list, because he offered a \$100,000 bounty for the killing of an anti-Islam filmmaker.

Separately, a breakaway faction of the Afghan Taliban announced its own bounty for those behind "Innocence of Muslims," the film that has sparked deadly protests across the Islamic world. The group is offering almost \$500,000 in gold.

Muslims have been angered by the crude, amateurish film's portrayal of the Prophet Muhammad as a fraud, a womanizer and a child molester. Dozens of people, including the U.S. ambassador to Libya, have died in violence linked to protests over the movie.

The main figure behind the video, Nakoula Basseley Nakoula, has put his home up for sale and gone into hiding since violence erupted over the 14-minute YouTube trailer for "Innocence of Muslims," which also has sparked debate over freedom of expression in the U.S. and in Europe.

Some of the most intense protests have erupted in Pakistan, where the role of Islam in society is sacrosanct and anti-American sentiment runs high. It was in that atmosphere that Railways Minister Ghulam Ahmad Bilour offered his \$100,000 reward Saturday for anyone who kills Nakoula.

Bilour also appealed to al-Qaida and Taliban militants to help eliminate the filmmaker, while Pakistan's government said the bounty reflected Bilour's personal view and was not official policy.

The minister belongs to the secular Awami National Party, an ally in the government of President Asif Ali Zardari. His comments drew criticism within his own party, which is considered anti-Taliban and has lost several leaders in the fight against the insurgency.

Pakistani Taliban spokesman Ahsanullah Ahsan told The Associated Press by telephone Wednesday that the minister's views represent the true spirit of Islam, and that, consequently, the insurgents have removed him from their hit list.

But while Bilour gets an "amnesty," others in his party are still fair game, Ahsan said. Bilour could not immediately be reached for comment.

In Afghanistan, the Taliban faction known as the Dadullah Group offered eight kilograms, or 17.6 pounds, of gold to anyone who kills the film's creators. In a telephone message to the AP, spokesman Rehbar Mal, announced the reward, which would be the equivalent of about \$487,000.

The group, named for a Taliban commander killed by NATO troops in 2007, broke away from the Afghan Taliban earlier this year to protest reconciliation talks with the United States. The Afghan Taliban and the Pakistani Taliban are separate, though linked, militant outfits.

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WHA/EUR

Markets Falter In Europe Amid Protests On Austerity

September 27, 2012

New York Times

By Liz Alderman And Niki Kitsantonis

ATHENS - After a period of relative calm, European markets shuddered once again on Wednesday as protests erupted across Greece and demonstrators surrounded the Spanish Parliament for a second day to protest the austerity program of Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy.

Earlier this month, the European Central Bank announced its intention to buy unlimited quantities of debt from European nations, including the troubled economies of southern Europe. That kept the peace in the financial markets until Wednesday, when political instability startled investors, with the Spanish stock market dropping 3.9 percent and even the German DAX falling by 2 percent. The interest rate on the 10-year Spanish bond, which had been declining, inched closer to the ominous 6 percent level.

On Tuesday in Spain, tens of thousands of demonstrators besieged Parliament to protest austerity measures planned by Mr. Rajoy. Last week, more than half a million people marched in cities across Portugal to protest an increase in social security contributions, and a million marched in Barcelona calling for Catalan independence.

In Athens, trade unions called a nationwide strike Wednesday to contest billions of dollars in new salary and pension cuts being discussed by the government and its international creditors. It was the first such walkout since a conservative coalition led by Prime Minister Antonis Samaras came to power in June.

Mr. Samaras is negotiating a \$15 billion austerity package that is needed to persuade Greece's so-called troika of lenders - the International Monetary Fund, the European Central Bank and the European Commission - to release nearly \$40.7 billion in financial aid that the country needs to stay solvent.

Mr. Rajoy has been trying for months to convince investors that Spain can handle its own problems and that it will not need a bailout that would force Madrid to cede some authority over its fiscal affairs to its lenders, and is set to introduce new cutbacks to meet budgetary goals. Those will include restrictions on early retirement and various measures to streamline regulations and fight unemployment, he said in an interview with The Wall Street Journal.

The proposed cuts in Greece have ignited new anger, with many talking openly of increased impoverishment as the nation grapples with a third round of austerity measures in three years. The protests in Athens were peaceful in the morning, as civil servants, teachers, medical personnel, bank employees and lawyers made their way to the city center. A police spokeswoman put the turnout at 35,000 to 40,000 people - modest by Greek standards.

But violence broke out shortly after 1 p.m., as a group of protesters wearing black masks hurled gasoline bombs at police officers on Vasilissis Sofias, a wide avenue abutting Parliament, sending bursts of flame and black smoke into the air. Firebombs were also thrown at the Finance Ministry and into the lush National Gardens next to Parliament.

Officers wielding batons responded with bursts of tear gas, scattering demonstrators and tourists as police helicopters circled overhead and flares exploded. Many cursed the police with cries of "traitors" and "Merkel's pigs" - a reference to Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany, the country widely blamed for insisting on strong austerity measures in exchange for aid.

Mr. Samaras is scheduled to meet on Thursday with his coalition partners - Evangelos Venizelos, the Socialist leader, and Fotis Kouvelis of the Democratic Left - to seek a common line regarding the \$15 billion austerity plan.

Representatives of the troika left Athens last week after tussling with the government over the depth of cuts planned for salaries and pensions. The two sides need to reach an agreement before the lenders can issue a report in October grading Greece's ability to mend its tattered finances. Additional aid depends on a positive assessment, and is critical to lifting confidence that Greece will remain in the euro zone.

But for many Greeks who took to the streets, that pact amounts to a bargain with the devil.

Anna Afanti, 50, a secondary school teacher, removed a surgical mask she had been wearing to ward off the tear gas to denounce Greece's foreign creditors. "They just want to impoverish us, to bring our salaries down to the level in India and swoop in and buy everything on the cheap," she said, referring to planned privatizations of state assets.

Ms. Afanti, who traveled about 40 miles to Athens from the town of Halkida with several colleagues to attend Wednesday's protest, said her salary had been cut by a third since the crisis hit. "I should have left this country a long time ago," Ms. Afanti said. "Now I'm stuck here."

Smaragda Aivalioti, 21, an economics student at Athens University, had planned to stay in Greece despite the crisis. "But now I just don't see any hope," she said. "All the odds are stacked against Greece. Even if we stay in the euro, life will be wretched. What's the point?"

Speaking to state television, Alexis Tsipras, the head of the leftist opposition party Syriza, which opposed Greece's bailout terms, said the country's only hope was in Greeks' rejecting austerity.

Numerous government services across the country were shuttered for the day, and main transportation arteries in central Athens were disrupted. Flights to and from the main Athens airport were delayed as air traffic controllers briefly took part in the strike.

This article has been revised to reflect the following correction:

Correction: September 26, 2012

An earlier version of this article misstated the day that demonstrators marched on Parliament in Spain. It was Tuesday, not Monday.

This article has been revised to reflect the following correction:

Correction: September 26, 2012

An earlier version of this article misspelled part of the name of the Athens street where protesters threw Molotov cocktails at police officers. It is Vasilissis Sofias Avenue, not Vassilis Sofias.

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Putin Condemns Bloody Regime Change In Middle East

September 27, 2012

Associated Press

By Peter Leonard

MOSCOW - Russian President Vladimir Putin issued a strong warning Wednesday against inciting violent regime change in the Middle East - an apparent rebuke to Western calls for an end to Syrian President Bashar Assad's rule.

Putin said the international community should operate as a united front to soothe the tensions in the Mideast and claimed that a bloody regime change would only fuel further unrest.

"Violence only begets violence," Putin said in a speech to foreign diplomats in Moscow.

The statement appeared to again pit Putin against President Barack Obama, who used his speech at the U.N. General Assembly this week to call for an end to the Assad regime over its violent crackdown on an uprising that began in March 2011.

Speaking about the rising violence in Syria, Obama said Tuesday that "the future must not belong to a dictator who massacres his people."

"Together, we must stand with those Syrians who believe in a different vision," Obama said.

As frustration deepens at the ongoing failure of U.N.-led measures to reach a solution on Syria, officials from a coalition including the United States, the European Union and the Arab League met in the Netherlands last week to devise new ways of isolating the Assad regime.

But Putin said Wednesday that attempts to circumvent U.N.-led diplomatic efforts would prove destructive.

"Such action is fraught with potential for destabilization and chaos," Putin said. "Life has recently given us proof that this is correct. It is time for us to draw lessons from what is happening."

Activists estimate that at least 30,000 people have been killed since the Syrian revolt began and hundreds of thousands have been displaced, many fleeing to neighboring countries such as Turkey and Jordan.

In his speech, Putin also called for joint international efforts to counter terrorist threats across a number of Middle East nations, including Libya, Iraq, Yemen, Syria, Egypt, and Afghanistan.

"There can be no room for double standards. Terrorists should be given a hard and unanimous rebuff," he said.

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Russian Billionaire Lebedev Charged With Hooliganism

September 27, 2012

[Washington Post](#)

By Kathy Lally

MOSCOW - A billionaire former KGB agent who has been financing an independent newspaper has been charged with hooliganism for getting into a fight on a television show a year ago, Russian news agencies reported Wednesday, in yet another sign of a crackdown on dissident voices here.

Alexander Lebedev, who along with Mikhail Gorbachev has been providing funds to the crusading Novaya Gazeta newspaper, faces criminal charges for taking two swings and knocking a fellow television guest off his chair, Russia's Investigative Committee told the Interfax news agency.

Until recently, former KGB agents appeared to derive some degree of protection from their membership in the secret police. But this month, Gennady Gudkov, an ex-agent, was stripped of his seat in parliament. He was accused of running a business in violation of parliamentary rules, but he asserted that he was targeted by President Vladimir Putin - also formerly of the KGB - for joining opposition marches.

The charges against Lebedev, 52, come as Putin, who returned to the presidency in May, has overseen a methodical attack against any perceived opposition. Laws governing protests have been made harsher, human rights and election-monitoring groups that receive foreign money must register as foreign

agents, and the U.S. Agency for International Development has been expelled because it offered grants to those groups.

Lebedev, whose other media interests include Britain's the Independent and London's Evening Standard, told a Reuters Russia Investment Summit on Tuesday that Putin had turned on him because he suspects him of financing the opposition - a charge that landed former oil tycoon Mikhail Khodorkovsky in prison.

"He thinks it is true that I have been funding" the opposition, Lebedev told Reuters, "so I was violating rule No. 1 - if you have money, you should not interfere [in politics]."

He denied the accusation.

Lebedev, whose wealth has been estimated at \$1.1 billion by Forbes magazine, nominated anti-corruption blogger Alexei Navalny to the board of directors of the national airline Aeroflot earlier this year. Lebedev has a stake in the company and has been trying to sell his Russian businesses, he said this year.

He got into a fight on a talk show last year with a developer named Sergei Polonsky when Polonsky said he was mad enough to punch someone. Lebedev said he took the remark as a threat. Putin described the incident as hooliganism. That is the same charge brought against three members of a feminist punk-rock group who were sentenced to two years in jail last month.

The charge carries a maximum sentence of seven years behind bars.

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As Refugees Flood Turkey, Asylum System Nears Breakdown

September 27, 2012

New York Times

By Susanne Güsten

ISTANBUL - A month after arriving in Istanbul after a six-week journey across Africa and the Middle East, Moussa and Diaby are still trying to figure out what to do next.

The two young men from the Ivory Coast have had one lucky break: A man from Senegal is letting them sleep nights on the floor of a basement he shares with 10 other Africans in the Kumkapi district under the crumbling Byzantine-era city wall, where migrants from all corners of the world wash up at the edge of Europe.

But with the basement locked in the daytime, their waking hours are spent wandering the back streets of Kumkapi in a daze of bewilderment and hunger.

"We don't know anyone and we don't speak any Turkish," Moussa, 28, a car mechanic from Abidjan, said last week. "We can't just walk up to a stranger and ask for help."

Although they are refugees from the latest spate of political violence in the Ivory Coast, it has not occurred to the men to apply for asylum here.

"We wouldn't know where or how, or whom to ask," said Diaby, 25, who worked as a vendor in Abidjan and, like his friend, declined to give his last name for fear of being deported.

Nor would applying for asylum be of much use, as earlier arrivals from Africa well know.

"The screening takes years, and then you still have to wait for a third country to take you," said Fofana, 36, a former law student from Abidjan on the run from political violence at home. Fofana has been in Istanbul for a year, choosing to keep his head down in Kumkapi on an expired tourist visa and to take odd jobs as a day laborer, rather than register as a refugee and be sent to a remote Turkish province to wait while the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees screens his application and tries to resettle him overseas. "It's a hard life, but it's better than going back and being killed," he said.

Asylum is not on offer for Africans and other non-Europeans in Turkey, which retains a "geographical limitation" to the Geneva Refugee Convention, effectively limiting asylum to refugees from Europe.

But Ivorians are only the most recent arrivals in Kumkapi. They join thousands of Iraqis, Iranians and Afghans, as well as Somalis and Congolese, who have run as far as they can and now find themselves unable to proceed further and stuck in a country that precludes asylum for refugees fleeing events occurring outside of Europe.

For many years, the U.N. agency has picked up the slack in Turkey, screening asylum applications and resettling refugees in countries like the United States, Canada and Australia. But with the number of refugees swelling drastically and resettlement quotas shrinking, the system is headed for a breakdown.

Nearly 29,000 incoming refugees registered with the United Nations in Turkey by Aug. 31 this year, according to figures provided by the agency. That figure does not include an estimated 125,000 Syrian refugees sheltering in camps and private accommodation in the southern border area. It also excludes thousands of unregistered refugees, like those in Kumkapi.

Even so, only France, Germany, Italy, Belgium and Sweden, among E.U. countries, received more asylum applications in all of last year, according to Eurostat figures.

The figure in Turkey is sharply higher than an average of 10,000 to 15,000 annually in recent years, according to Multeci-Der, a private group supporting refugee rights. "It is a record number for Turkey," the association's chairman, Taner Kilic, said last week.

At the same time, resettlement quotas are down from about 6,500 places last year to fewer than 6,000 this year, according to the U.N. agency, with the United States accepting about 4,000 refugees in 2012 and Canada offering 900 places. Australia is taking 630 refugees, with Norway and Finland offering 150 places each and Germany taking 100 refugees.

"A refugee entering Turkey today will wait for a year and a half just to register with the U.N.H.C.R. and another year for his first interview with them," Mr. Kilic said. "That's a two-and-a-half-year wait; just for your first chance to plead your case." With follow-up interviews and appeals, the average wait for a decision is four to five years, he added, with some refugees waiting seven to eight years before they even become eligible for resettlement.

Third countries then choose among the eligible refugees according to criteria like education, language skills and nation of origin. "Afghans, for example, currently have virtually zero chance of being

resettled," Mr. Kilic said, citing cases of recognized refugees who have been waiting 10 years in what are often miserable conditions.

It is the uncertainty of that wait more than anything else that leads refugees to resort to the desperate action of boarding a smugglers' boat like one that sank off Turkey's western coast last month, drowning more than 60 refugees on their way to Europe, Mr. Kilic said.

While Turkey does grant temporary protection to registered refugees while their applications are being considered by the U.N. agency, it requires them to sit out the wait in one of 53 provincial towns to which they are assigned by the Interior Ministry. "But no one tells them how to get there or what to do when they arrive, no one asks where they will sleep, what they will eat and how they will survive," Mr. Kilic said.

Asylum seekers are neither entitled to material assistance nor granted work permits, leaving them at the mercies of provincial authorities and driven to work illegally. They are frequently subject to detention and deportation by the Turkish authorities without recourse to legal appeal.

It is criticism of such conditions that led lawmakers to draft Turkey's first asylum law, submitted to Parliament just before the summer recess and due to be voted on soon after it reconvenes next week. The draft law has been greeted with praise by activists and academics, who were consulted in its preparation by the Interior Ministry to an extent that is highly unusual in Turkey.

"They invited us to the ministry and sat down with us, and we went over the law for two days, article by article, and then they did the same with the academics," Mr. Kilic said. Officials drafting the law also traveled to Strasbourg and Brussels to consult the European Court of Human Rights and the European Commission. The result is an asylum law that not only meets E.U. standards, but exceeds them, experts agree.

"The law has been deeply influenced by the rulings of the European Court of Human Rights," specifically addressing the issues raised by the court, Kemal Kirisci, a professor of political science at the Bosphorus University and one of the country's leading experts on asylum issues, said in an interview last week. The draft law, which was supported in committee by all parties represented in Parliament, "puts the accent on human rights rather than on security," he said.

There is just one problem, activists like Mr. Kilic say: The new asylum law will not extend asylum to refugees from outside Europe, because it does not lift the geographical limitation.

"Over all it is a good law, but in my view as long as the geographical limitation is maintained, it remains problematic," Mr. Kilic said. "We will continue to depend on the U.N. to resettle refugees in third countries, and if those countries will not take them - perhaps pointing out that our economy is now stronger than theirs and that the refugees have fled to our country, not theirs - then we have a deadlocked system."

But Mr. Kirisci is among those who argued for keeping the geographical limitation in place. "If Turkey were to lift the geographical limitation without being a member of the European Union, I think it would fall into a situation worse than that Greece, an E.U. member, has found itself in over the last couple of years," he said, pointing to the overwhelming numbers of refugees there and the international criticism of Greece's handling of the situation.

Turkey would have to lift the geographical limitation to accede to the European Union, Mr. Kirisci conceded. But for now, Turkey is within its rights under international law in maintaining the restriction, he said.

"Why should Turkey give away such a right without European Union membership itself?" Mr. Kirisci said. "I see this as a hard bargaining chip with the European Union."

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Turkey To Block Access To Anti-Islam Film

September 27, 2012

Associated Press

ANKARA, Turkey - A Turkish court issued an order on Wednesday allowing authorities in the country to block Internet access to the anti-Islam movie that has sparked violent protests across the Muslim world, an official said.

Binali Yildirim, the minister in charge of transportation and communications, told state-run TRT television that the injunction allows government telecommunications and information technology authorities to prevent access from Turkey to URL links to the film.

The move came a day after another government minister said Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who heads an Islam-based party, ordered officials to find ways of preventing access to videos of "Innocence of Muslims" movie.

Dozens of people, including the U.S. ambassador to Libya, have been killed in violence linked to protests over the film.

"Henceforth, it will not be shown in our country," said Yildirim, calling the film "disgusting."

"To insult what is sacred, to incite indignation is unacceptable for all religions. It is a hate crime and no crime should go unpunished," Yildirim said. His office said Tuesday that the ministry has also asked Google Inc. and YouTube to remove the videos.

Erdogan has criticized Western nations for not taking steps to prevent insults to Islamic values but also has criticized violent protests against the film saying they harm Islam.

Yildirim said the court order is limited to links to the film and that access to websites that carry the links would not be blocked. Turkey banned access to the video sharing site YouTube from 2008 and 2010 because of videos deemed insulting to the country's founder, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk.

Thousands of other websites, most of them pornographic, have also been banned in the country. The government says it is fighting child pornography, illegal gambling and other cybercrimes.

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FOREIGN POLICY

Obama, Romney Differ On US Exceptionalism

September 27, 2012

Washington Post

By Scott Wilson

President Obama and Republican presidential nominee Mitt Romney made clear this week that they share an overriding belief: American political and economic values should triumph in the world.

Where the two differ most is in how a debt-burdened United States, weary after a more than a decade of war, should engage other nations to pursue that goal.

Their differences emerged sharply during a pair of foreign policy speeches in New York, pushing the subject of U.S. international interests and power into the center of the presidential campaign with just six weeks to go.

A proponent of American exceptionalism, Romney has consistently outlined a far tougher approach to the world than Obama has practiced. He has emphasized the benefit of traditional allies such as Israel, punishing rather than cultivating difficult nations, and embracing a possible military confrontation with Iran.

Obama, whom Romney has accused of "apologizing for American values," delivered his strongest defense yet of free speech and human rights at the U.N. General Assembly on Tuesday.

But he emphasized that diplomacy and partnerships, American assistance where wanted without heavy-handed demands from the top, are still his preferred approaches to promoting those rights worldwide and in dealing with antagonists such as Iran.

"It's very clear in reading and hearing what the two candidates have to say that, at least rhetorically, there would be a significant change under President Romney," said Karl F. Inderfurth, a former assistant secretary of state in the Clinton administration and now a senior adviser at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Inderfurth, who is not consulting either campaign, said some of the "swagger" of the George W. Bush administration would return to U.S. foreign policy under Romney.

"Obama has tried to tone that down and he has faced pushback for doing so," he said.

Until now, the campaign has been concerned mostly with the economy, and foreign policy has been viewed largely as a strength for the president, who was behind the killing of Osama bin Laden.

But the recent unrest in the Muslim world - revealed in the attack in Benghazi, Libya, on Sept. 11 that killed Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens and three other Americans - has exposed Obama politically and been seized upon by Romney as the product of what he calls the president's weak engagement of the world.

The conflicting philosophies Obama and Romney outlined this week are consistent in large part with their life experiences.

Those backgrounds have given each a different vantage on the world - a former chief executive's broad-strokes view of how it should work and a former community organizer's details-matter assessment - and different opinions about the best way to promote U.S. interests at a time of fiscal constraint at home and rapid change abroad.

In addressing the Clinton Global Initiative on Tuesday, Romney, the former chief executive of Bain Capital, told the audience that "when I was in business, I traveled to many countries."

He summed up the perspective he developed by declaring that "free enterprise cannot only make us better off financially, it can make us better people."

"As the most prosperous nation in history, it is our duty to keep the engine of prosperity running - to open markets across the globe and to spread prosperity to all corners of the Earth," Romney said. "We should do this because it's the right moral course to help others."

Overall, given that he has never held federal office, Romney's record on particular foreign policy issues is thin.

He also has made several missteps during the campaign - most recently, jumping into the debate over the attacks in Libya and Egypt too soon. His overarching message, however, has been consistent.

Romney has said that as president, he would speak more loudly for American interests in the world, embrace traditional allies and punish antagonists as the need arises.

He favors Israeli interests in the Jewish state's conflict with the Palestinians, and he has spoken more martially about how he would prevent Iran from achieving a nuclear weapon.

He has pledged a firmer hand with China after years of conducting business there. He also has suggested that countries that do not share American values, including strategic nations such as Egypt, should perhaps no longer receive U.S. aid.

But Romney, beyond policy, appears most concerned with the United States' stature in the world, its market share in business terms.

His steady critique of Obama's foreign policy exposes their central difference: Romney believes the nation has a far greater ability than Obama does to get its way in the world.

"We feel that we are at the mercy of events, rather than shaping events," Romney said in a tacit criticism of Obama at the Global Initiative event.

Obama spent part of his childhood in Indonesia, the son of an itinerant anthropologist. He has discussed his ability to bring an outside-in view of the United States as a result, something many abroad have welcomed in an American president.

Obama also worked as a community organizer on Chicago's South Side and he has brought that street-level view to his practice of foreign policy.

His approach takes into account many motivations, cultural details and history in a way that sometimes exasperates those seeking a clearer statement of U.S. interests and abilities.

Obama took office with a foreign policy designed to signal a change from what he believed were the unilateral excesses of the George W. Bush administration. Topping the list for Obama was the Iraq war.

Obama has ended the United States' involvement there, a move Romney criticized as abrupt, and the president is moving to do the same in Afghanistan.

In that way, Obama has cast himself as a realist, free of the "freedom agenda" ideology embraced to varying degrees by the previous administration.

Obama's choice of force, for example, is the drone strike, which he has expanded greatly from the Bush years on similarly contested legal ground.

His use of drones has undermined work on other issues, including his outreach to the Islamic world. The outreach has upset such traditional allies as Israel, a breach Romney has sought to turn into political capital.

Obama has tried to be evenhanded in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, a diplomatic effort that will be largely dormant until after Election Day.

He chose that approach in the belief that a neutral role is the best way for the United States to mediate the long conflict and eliminate a traditional source of anti-American anger.

But his realism has often felt arid to those trying to understand it, too calculating and lacking in passion for U.S. values and power. This is the vein Romney has sought to tap.

Obama chose his annual address to the U.N. General Assembly to deliver perhaps his most emotional defense of American values and interests in the world, using the Stevens, the late ambassador, as a symbol of what he called "the best of America" - and perhaps a surrogate for Obama's foreign policy.

Stevens was attacked amid rising protest over YouTube video that disparaged the prophet Muhammad. Obama called the video "crude and disgusting" while defending its right to be made.

"He acted with humility, but he also stood up for a set of principles," the president said of Stevens. "A belief that individuals should be free to determine their own destiny, and live with liberty, dignity, justice and opportunity."

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Cyberwarfare Emerges From Shadows for Public Discussion by U.S. Officials

September 26, 2012

New York Times

By SCOTT SHANE

WASHINGTON — For years, even as the United States carried out sophisticated cyberattacks on Iran's nuclear program and the Pentagon created a Cyber Command, officials have been hesitant to discuss American offensive cyberwarfare programs openly. Since June, in fact, F.B.I. agents have been investigating leaks to The New York Times about the computer attacks on Tehran.

But the reticence is giving way. The chorus of official voices speaking publicly about American cyberattack strategy and capabilities is steadily growing, and some experts say greater openness will allow the United States to stake out legal and ethical rules in the uncharted territory of computer

combat. Others fear that talking too boldly about American plans could fuel a global computer arms race.

Next month the Pentagon's research arm will host contractors who want to propose "revolutionary technologies for understanding, planning and managing cyberwarfare." It is an ambitious program that the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, or Darpa, calls Plan X, and the public description talks about "understanding the cyber battlespace," quantifying "battle damage" and working in Darpa's "cyberwar laboratory."

James A. Lewis, who studies cybersecurity at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, says he sees the Plan X public announcement as "a turning point" in a long debate over secrecy about cyberwarfare. He said it was timely, given that public documents suggest that at least 12 of the world's 15 largest militaries are building cyberwarfare programs.

"I see Plan X as operationalizing and routinizing cyberattack capabilities," Mr. Lewis said. "If we talk openly about offensive nuclear capabilities and every other kind, why not cyber?"

Yet like drone aircraft, which similarly can be used for both spying and combat, American cyberattack tools now are passing through a zone of semisecrecy, no longer denied but not fully discussed. President Obama has spoken publicly twice about drones; he has yet to speak publicly on American cyberattacks.

Last week, at a public Cyber Command legal conference, the State Department's top lawyer, Harold H. Koh — who gave the Obama administration's first public speech on targeted killing of terrorists in 2010 — stated the administration's position that the law of war, including such principles as minimizing harm to civilians, applies to cyberattacks.

In August, the Air Force raised eyebrows with a bluntly worded solicitation for papers advising it on "cyberspace warfare attack capabilities," including weapons "to destroy, deny, degrade, disrupt, deceive, corrupt or usurp" an enemy's computer networks and other high-tech targets.

And a few weeks earlier, a top Marine commander recounted at a public conference how he had used "cyber operations against my adversary" in Afghanistan in 2010. "I was able to get inside his nets, infect his command-and-control, and in fact defend myself against his almost constant incursions to get inside my wire," said Lt. Gen. Richard P. Mills, now deputy commandant of the Marine Corps.

Cyberwarfare was discussed quite openly in the 1990s, though technological capabilities and targets were far more limited than they are today, said Jason Healey, who heads the Cyber Statecraft Initiative at the Atlantic Council in Washington.

"Our current silence dates back 8 or 10 years, and N.S.A. is a big reason," said Mr. Healey, who is working on a history of cyberwarfare.

The National Security Agency, which plays a central role in Cyber Command, traditionally breaks foreign codes and eavesdrops on foreign communications; it is among the most secretive agencies in government. Years ago it pioneered the field of cyberespionage: breaking into foreign computer systems in order to collect intelligence. The same skills and reflexive secrecy of spies carried over to cyberwarfare, Mr. Healey said. American officials have long preferred to talk cyberdefense, leaving the attack side in the shadows.

The increased candor recently about cyberoffense results not from a policy change, officials say, but from an inevitable acceptance of attacks on computer networks as a standard part of military and intelligence capabilities. The fact that dozens of Beltway contractors see cyberwarfare as one of the few parts of the defense budget that are likely to grow is also a factor.

When Darpa announced a "proposers' day workshop" for its Plan X program, the "overwhelming response from industry and academia" led the defense research agency to expand the event to an extra day, the agency said in a statement. (A Darpa spokesman declined to comment further on Plan X.)

Just as drone-fired missiles have never been a secret to those on the ground, so cyberattacks have consequences that cannot be hidden, even if their origin may be initially uncertain. The computer worm called Stuxnet, devised by the United States and Israel to destroy Iran's nuclear centrifuges, was quickly detected by computer security experts when it infected networks around the world in 2010 — but remains highly classified.

Hence the Cyber Command legal conference, which avoided specific cases while dwelling on principles. Mr. Koh, of the State Department, told the conference that the United States carries out "at least two stages of legal review" on cyberwarfare operations — considering whether the law of war prohibits the use of "new weapons" altogether and, if not, how the law governs their use in "each particular operation."

Matthew Waxman, a law professor at Columbia and former Defense Department official, said speaking openly about cyberwarfare policy was important because it allowed the United States to make clear its intentions on a novel and fast-emerging form of conflict.

Because both the Bush and Obama administrations were slow to speak publicly about their use of armed drones, Mr. Waxman said, "they ceded a lot of ground to critics to shape the narrative and portray U.S. practices as lawless." As a result, he said, "the U.S. is trying to play catch-up, giving speech after speech, saying 'We abide by the law.'"

Now, Mr. Waxman said, because the United States "occupies a position of advantage on offensive cyber capabilities, it should seize the opportunity to lay out a set of rules for itself and others."

That is a worthy goal, said Daryl G. Kimball, executive director of the Arms Control Association. But he said that came with a hazard: more talk about the United States' cyberwarfare capabilities might prompt other countries to step up their own programs at a time when the world is "on the cusp of a cyber arms race," he said.

Mr. Kimball said Darpa's sweeping public statement about the goals of its Plan X for cyberwarfare might be a case in point.

"It makes it sound like the U.S. is preparing to be able to wage a full-out cyberwar," Mr. Kimball said. "Those kinds of statements could come back to haunt the U.S. down the road."

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EDITORIAL / OPINION

In Obama's Speech, Their Voices

September 27, 2012

New York Times

By Nicholas D. Kristof

When President Obama made a landmark speech against modern slavery on Tuesday, many of us in the news media shrugged. It didn't fit into the political narrative. It wasn't controversial, so - yawn - it wasn't really news.

But women like Sina Vann noticed. She's a friend of mine who was trafficked as a young girl from Vietnam into Cambodian brothels - where she was regularly punished by being locked inside coffins with scorpions and biting ants. Now an anti-trafficking activist with the Somaly Mam Foundation, she sent me an exuberant e-mail (in fractured English, her third language) with a message for Obama: "We are survivors here so proud of you, you are the big president in U.S. and you take action of trafficking. So you give victims from around the world have hope."

Rachel Lloyd, a survivor of human trafficking who was nearly choked to death by her pimp, felt the same way. Lloyd now runs a superb program in New York City, GEMS, to help American girls escape "the life." She told me that watching the Obama speech was "one of the most gratifying moments in my 15 years of work on the issue."

If Representative Todd Akin's remarks about "legitimate rape" provoked an uproar, shouldn't it be incomparably more offensive that millions of human beings are still trafficked in the 21st century? Yet the world often scorns the victims and sees them as criminals: these girls are the lepers of the 21st century.

So bravo to the president for giving a major speech on human trafficking and, crucially, for promising greater resources to fight pimps and support those who escape the streets. Until recently, the Obama White House hasn't shown strong leadership on human trafficking, but this could be a breakthrough. The test will be whether Obama continues to press the issue.

I've been passionate about human trafficking ever since I encountered a village in Cambodia 15 years ago where young girls were locked up, terrified, as their virginity was sold to the highest bidder. It felt just like 19th-century slavery, except that these girls would likely be dead of AIDS or something else by their 20s.

Granted, not all prostitution is coerced. Reasonable people can disagree about what to do in the case of adults who sell sex voluntarily. Put aside that disagreement, for we can agree to place priority on the millions of children and adults compelled to provide sex or other labor.

Prostituted kids are among the most voiceless of the voiceless around the world, and it will make a difference if the White House speaks up for them - and fights for them.

On the India/Nepal border, I once chatted with an Indian policeman who was on the lookout for terrorists and smuggled DVDs but was uninterested in the streams of Nepali girls passing through, destined for the brothels in Bombay and Kolkata. The policeman explained that America was pressuring India on movie piracy, so let's show India and the world that we're also concerned with enslaved children.

If we tell other countries to free their slaves, we also have to clean up our own act. Contrary to public opinion, the worst of America's human trafficking arguably doesn't involve foreign women smuggled into the United States, but homegrown girls.

It's a disgrace that police officers and prosecutors routinely go after such teenage girls - often runaways fleeing abuse or other impossible situations - and treat them as criminals, while showing less interest in the pimps who exploited them.

Normally, if a man has sex with a young girl, he risks jail and she gets counseling. But, if she has a pimp who earns \$50 from the transaction, then everything changes: The man may get a slap on the wrist and the girl may go to jail. Does that make any sense?

So let's demand that police officers and prosecutors go after pimps and johns, while treating the teenagers as victims who need comprehensive social services.

Republicans have done superb work on this issue in the past, but now they're balking at straightforward reauthorization of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act - landmark legislation against human trafficking. What are they thinking?

One person on the front lines here in the United States is Alissa, who has a scar on her cheek from where her former pimp mutilated her with a potato peeler as a warning not to escape. She did get away and now works with prostituted girls in Washington whose average age, she says, is 14. Alissa is her street name; she doesn't want her real name published because pimps still harass her.

Alissa watched Obama's speech, and then replayed it four more times. She has always been treated as a "throwaway," she said, and now she was dazzled that the president was treating the issue as a priority.

Some 150 years after the Emancipation Proclamation, let's make sure that this isn't just a speech, but a turning point.

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Fighting Over God's Image

September 27, 2012

New York Times

By Edward J. Blum And Paul Harvey

THE murders of four Americans over an amateurish online video about Muhammad, like the attempted murder of a Danish cartoonist who in 2005 had depicted the prophet with a bomb in his turban, have left many Americans confused, angry and fearful about the rage that some Muslims feel about visual representations of their sacred figures.

The confusion stems, in part, from the ubiquity of sacred images in American culture. God, Jesus, Moses, Buddha and other holy figures are displayed in movies, cartoons and churches and on living room walls. We place them on T-shirts and bumper stickers - and even tattoo them on our skin.

But Americans have had their own history of conflict, some of it deadly, over displays of the sacred. The path toward civil debate over such representation is neither short nor easy.

The United States was settled, in part, by radical Protestant iconoclasts from Britain who considered the creation and use of sacred imagery to be a violation of the Second Commandment against graven images. The anti-Catholic colonists at Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay refused to put images of Jesus in their churches and meetinghouses. They scratched out crosses in books. In the early 1740s, English officials even marched on an Indian community in western Connecticut, where they cross-examined Moravian missionaries who reportedly had a book with "the picture of our Saviour in it."

The colonists feared Catholic infiltration from British-controlled Canada. Shortly after the Boston Tea Party, a Connecticut pastor warned that if the British succeeded, the colonists would have their Bibles taken from them and be compelled to "pray to the Virgin Mary, worship images, believe the doctrine of Purgatory, and the Pope's infallibility."

It was not only Protestants who opposed sacred imagery. In the Southwest, Pueblo Indians who waged war against Spanish colonizers not only burned and dismembered some crucifixes, but even defecated on them.

In the early Republic, many Americans avoided depicting Jesus or God in any form. The painter Washington Allston spoke for many artists of the 1810s when he said, "I think his character too holy and sacred to be attempted by the pencil." A visiting Russian diplomat, Pavel Svinin, was amazed at the prevalence of a different image: George Washington's. "Every American considers it his sacred duty to have a likeness of Washington in his home," he wrote, "just as we have images of God's saints."

Only in the late 19th century did images of God and Jesus become commonplace in churches, Sunday school books, Bibles and homes. There were many forces at work: steam printing presses; new canals and railroads; and, not least, the immigration of hundreds of thousands of Catholics who brought with them an array of crucifixes, Madonnas and busts of saints. Protestants began producing their own images - often, to appeal to children - and gradually became more comfortable with holy images. In the 20th century, the United States began exporting such images, most notably Warner Sallman's 1941 "Head of Christ," which is one of the most reproduced images in world history.

But there was also resistance. When Hollywood first started portraying Jesus in films, one fundamentalist Christian fumed, "The picturing of the life and sufferings of our Savior by these institutions falls nothing short of blasphemy." Vernon E. Jordan Jr., an African-American who was later president of the National Urban League and an adviser to President Bill Clinton, recalled that white audience members gasped when he played Jesus as an undergraduate at DePauw University in Indiana in the 1950s.

In fact, race has been a constant source of conflict over American depictions of Jesus. In Philadelphia in the 1930s, the black street preacher F. S. Cherry stormed into African-American churches and pointed at paintings or prints of white Christs, shouting, as one observer recounted, "Who in the hell is this? Nobody knows! They say it is Jesus. That's a damned lie!"

During the civil rights era, black-power advocates and liberation theologians excoriated white images of the sacred. A 1967 "Declaration of Black Churchmen" demanded "the removal of all images which suggest that God is white." As racial violence enveloped Detroit that year, African-American residents painted the white faces of Catholic icons black.

More recently, there have been uproars over the Nigerian-British painter Chris Ofili's "Holy Virgin Mary" and the New York artist and photographer Andres Serrano's "Piss Christ." Mr. Serrano's image of Jesus on the crucifix, submerged in the artist's own urine, roused a crusade against the National Endowment for the Arts in the late 1980s. Mr. Ofili's painting of a dark-skinned Madonna with photographs of vaginas surrounding her enraged Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani. The mayor, who mistakenly claimed that elephant dung was smeared on the image when it in fact was used at the base to hold the painting up, tried to ban it from being displayed at the Brooklyn Museum of Art, in 1999. (One upset Christian smeared white paint over it.)

Images of the sacred haven't caused mass violence in the United States, but they have generated intense conflict. Our ability to sustain a culture supersaturated with visual displays of the divine, largely without violence, came only after massive technological change, centuries of immigration and social movements that forced Americans to reckon with differences of race, ethnicity and religion.

Edward J. Blum, an associate professor of history at San Diego State University, and Paul Harvey, a professor of history at the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs, are the authors of "The Color of Christ: The Son of God and the Saga of Race in America."

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The Libya Debacle

September 27, 2012

Wall Street Journal

In his United Nations speech on Tuesday, President Obama talked about the September 11 attack on the U.S. consulate in Libya and declared that "there should be no doubt that we will be relentless in tracking down the killers and bringing them to justice." What he didn't say is how relentless he'll be in tracking down the security lapses and intelligence failures that contributed to the murders. Let's say there's some doubt about that.

None of the initial explanations offered by the White House and State Department since the assault on the Benghazi consulate has held up. First the Administration blamed protests provoked by an amateurish anti-Islam clip posted on YouTube. Cue Susan Rice, the U.N. Ambassador and leading candidate for Secretary of State in a second Obama term: "What happened initially was that it was a spontaneous reaction . . . as a consequence of the video, that people gathered outside the embassy and then it grew very violent."

Administration officials also maintained that the diplomatic missions in Libya and Egypt, the site of the first attacks this September 11, were properly defended and that the U.S. had no reason to prepare for any attack. "The office of the director of National Intelligence has said we have no actionable intelligence that an attack on our post in Benghazi was planned or imminent," Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said last week, calling the security measures in place there "robust."

Cell phone video footage and witness testimony from Benghazi soon undercut the Administration trope of an angry march "hijacked" by a few bad people. As it turned out, the assault was well-coordinated, with fighters armed with guns, RPGs and diesel canisters, which were used to set the buildings on fire. Ambassador Chris Stevens died of smoke inhalation. Briefing Congress, the Administration changed its story and said the attacks were pre-planned and linked to al Qaeda.

You'd think this admission would focus attention on why the compound was so vulnerable to begin with. But the Administration wants to avoid this conversation. The removal of all staff from Benghazi, including a large component of intelligence officers, would also seem to hinder their ability to investigate the attacks and bring the killers to justice.

Journalists have stayed on the case, however, and their reporting is filling in the Administration's holes. On Friday, our WSJ colleagues showed that starting in spring, U.S. intelligence had been worried about radical militias in eastern Libya. These armed groups helped topple Moammar Gadhafi last year but weren't demobilized as a new government has slowly found its legs. As we've noted since last winter, the waning of American and European interest in Libya could have dangerous consequences.

Deteriorating security was no secret. On April 10, for example, an explosive device was thrown at a convoy carrying U.N. envoy Ian Martin. On June 6, an improvised explosive device exploded outside the U.S. consulate. In late August, State warned American citizens who were planning to travel to Libya about the threat of assassinations and car bombings.

Despite all this, U.S. diplomatic missions had minimal security. Officials told the Journal that the Administration put too much faith in weak Libyan police and military forces. The night of the Benghazi attack, four lightly armed Libyans and five American security officers were on duty. The complex lacked smoke-protection masks and fire extinguishers. Neither the consulate in Benghazi nor the embassy in Tripoli were guarded by U.S. Marines, whose deployment to Libya wasn't a priority.

Rummaging through the Benghazi compound, a CNN reporter found a seven-page notebook belonging to Ambassador Stevens. According to the network, the diary said he was concerned about the "never-ending" security threats in Benghazi and wrote that he was on an al Qaeda hit list. In deference to the family's wishes, CNN didn't quote directly from the diary and didn't divulge any private information in it.

His worries are newsworthy, however, and can inform America's response. But Mrs. Clinton's long-time and closest media adviser chose to attack CNN. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Philippe Reines called the network's conduct "disgusting." He then deployed words not fit for a family newspaper in an exchange with a reporter for the Web site BuzzFeed. Mr. Reines may wish to protect his boss's legacy for her 2016 Presidential run, but that won't be enhanced by the appearance of a cover-up.

Imagine the uproar if, barely a month before Election Day, the Bush Administration had responded to a terrorist strike—on Sept. 11 no less—in this fashion. Obfuscating about what happened. Refusing to acknowledge that clear security warnings were apparently ignored. Then trying to shoot the messengers who bring these inconvenient truths to light in order to talk about anything but a stunning and deadly attack on U.S. sovereign territory.

Four Americans lost their lives in Benghazi in a terrorist attack that evidence suggests should have been anticipated and might have been stopped. Rather than accept responsibility, the Administration has tried to stonewall and blame others. Congress should call hearings to hold someone accountable for this debacle.

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5 Reasons To Intervene In Syria Now

September 27, 2012

New York Times

By Michael Doran And Max Boot

WHETHER you agree or disagree with President Obama, there is no doubt that he has formulated a coherent approach to the use of American power. The Obama Doctrine involves getting into a conflict zone and getting out fast without ground wars or extended military occupations. This approach proved its effectiveness in Libya last year.

But the president is not applying his own doctrine where it would benefit the United States the most - in Syria. One can certainly sympathize with his predicament. Syria is a mess, and it is tempting to stay out, especially in an election year. Yet inaction carries its own risks. There are five reasons to bring down President Bashar al-Assad sooner rather than later.

First, American intervention would diminish Iran's influence in the Arab world. Iran has showered aid on Syria and even sent advisers from its Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps to assist Mr. Assad. Iran knows that if his regime fell, it would lose its most important base in the Arab world and a supply line to pro-Iranian Hezbollah militants in Lebanon.

Second, a more muscular American policy could keep the conflict from spreading. Syria's civil war has already exacerbated sectarian strife in Lebanon and Iraq - and the Turkish government has accused Mr. Assad of supporting Kurdish militants in order to inflame tensions between the Kurds and Turkey.

Third, by training and equipping reliable partners within Syria's internal opposition, America could create a bulwark against extremist groups like Al Qaeda, which are present and are seeking safe havens in ungoverned corners of Syria.

Fourth, American leadership on Syria could improve relations with key allies like Turkey and Qatar. Both the Turkish prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and his Qatari counterpart have criticized the United States for offering only nonlethal support to the rebellion. Both favor establishing a no-fly zone and "safe zones" for civilians in Syrian territory.

Finally, American action could end a terrible human-rights disaster within Syria and stop the exodus of refugees, which is creating a burden on neighboring states. Mr. Obama pledged earlier this year to strengthen the government's ability "to foresee, prevent and respond to genocide and mass atrocities." Now he has an opportunity to do so. And by putting allies in the lead, Mr. Obama could act without sliding down the slippery slope toward a ground war.

Our closest friends in the region - including Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Jordan, Qatar and Israel - would like to see Mr. Assad toppled as soon as possible. France and Britain could also be counted on to help, as they did in Libya. Yet none of them will move until America does.

We cannot wait for the United Nations to act; that is highly unlikely. Nor can we expect the Free Syrian Army to oust Mr. Assad on its own; it is not a cohesive organization. Instead, America must identify those elements on the ground that are the most effective, easily supplied and amenable to help.

The focus should be on Aleppo, Syria's second largest city and commercial hub. The F.S.A. already controls much of the territory between the city and the Turkish border, only 40 miles away. With American support, Turkish troops could easily establish a corridor for humanitarian aid and military supplies. Defeating the government's forces in Aleppo would deal a serious blow to Mr. Assad and send a powerful signal to fence-sitters that the regime was dying.

Damascus, the capital, should be the second target. But unlike Aleppo, it can't be easily reached from a Turkish base. It could, however, be supplied from Dara'a, which is 70 miles from Damascus and less than five from the Jordanian border. It has been at the forefront of opposition to Mr. Assad. Working with Jordan, the United States could create a second corridor to Dara'a, which could serve as the southern base for the insurgency. On Wednesday, by bombing a military complex, the rebels demonstrated their ability to strike in the heart of Damascus - though they have not yet been able to do so on a sustained basis.

To prevent Mr. Assad from staging a devastating response, the American-backed alliance would have to create a countrywide no-fly zone, which would first require taking apart Syrian air defenses. Mr. Assad has been using jets and helicopters to fight the rebels; a no-fly zone would quickly ground his entire air force. The zone could then be extended to provide the kind of close air support that NATO warplanes provided to rebel fighters in Kosovo and Libya.

While our allies could take the lead in maintaining the no-fly zone, it is necessary in Syria, as in Libya, for America to take the lead in establishing it; only our Air Force and Navy have the weaponry needed to dismantle Syria's Russian-designed air defenses with little risk.

A "lead from behind" approach can work in Syria. President Obama need only apply it.

Michael Doran is a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution. Max Boot is a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations and an adviser to Mitt Romney's presidential campaign.

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Inside Assad's Killing Fields

September 27, 2012

[Wall Street Journal](#)

By JONATHAN SPYER

Aleppo, Syria – Dar al-Shifa hospital in the al-Sha'ar neighborhood of Aleppo is one of two large facilities serving the fighters of the Free Syrian Army here. The hospital also treats civilians in FSA-controlled areas. On Sept. 18, Dar al-Shifa came under attack by the Syrian air force. I was in the hospital at the time and witnessed the bombing.

Attacks like the one on Dar al-Shifa aren't unusual. Syrian rebels now control roughly 70% of Aleppo, this country's largest city, with a population of 2.3 million. The Assad regime is fighting back through indiscriminate air attacks on rebel-held districts.

President Bashar Assad succeeded this summer in crushing a rebel attempt to bring the fighting to Damascus, where his regime sits. But rebels remain largely in control of the Idlib and Aleppo governorates near Turkey. The city of Aleppo hangs in the balance, and Assad is throwing substantial resources into maintaining as much control there as possible. His tactics are proving disastrous for the city's civilian population.

The day before the attack on the hospital, I had entered Syria illegally over the Turkish border. My fixer and I met at a coffeehouse opposite the hospital with two doctors who worked there. I will call them Dr. Amin and Dr. Maher to preserve their anonymity. Dr. Amin, a native of the Syrian city Daraa, returned

from work in Saudi Arabia at the start of the uprising to volunteer in Dar al-Shifa. Dr. Maher is from Damascus.

An elderly waiter brought coffee, and we spoke for a few minutes. Then we went into the hospital, where the staff was in the closing stages of treating around 50 victims of aerial bombing. Most were civilians, with a few young men wearing the camouflage of the FSA. Orderlies were washing a pool of blood on the floor into the drains. A man whose fingers had been sheared off by a bomb fragment was receiving first-aid treatment. Another man, very old and badly wounded, was being wheeled on a trolley, hooked up to an oxygen tank.

The atmosphere was calm, somber. Then everything changed. There were sudden shouts from outside. Then a man rushed in from the street, shouting "Tiyara [airplane]! Tiyara!"

There was a rush for the narrow staircase leading to the basement. Then came the earsplitting roar of a jet engine. It felt like the aircraft was flying a few feet above the hospital's roof. An instant later, an enormous explosion sent rubble and dust pouring into the hospital reception area. We followed the others down to the basement.

It was narrow and packed, the air thin and full of dust. Everyone expected the fighter jet to make another run. We were surrounded by the hospital staff, the mostly female relatives of the wounded, and their small children. We heard other explosions, still close but not on top of us. If the plane scored a direct hit, the basement would offer entombment rather than shelter.

About a minute passed. Dr. Maher was standing on the stairs. He began to chant a prayer. Several voices joined in. The crying of a small child held in her mother's arms punctuated the prayer. Two more explosions, farther away. Then the lights in the basement went out. Dr. Maher turned on a flashlight and continued his chant. The atmosphere was eerie: the packed basement, the darkness, the sounds of Muslim prayer and the single point of the flashlight illuminating the face of the young man, in his white coat and surgical mask.

After five more tense minutes, the sense of danger ebbed. If there was going to be another bombing run, it would have happened by now. There were shouts from above and we began to climb the stairs. My fixer, Ahmed, grabbed my arm: "Let's get out of here, come on." We ran outside to the road.

The bomb had exploded about 10 yards from the hospital entrance. The road was covered with rubble, disoriented people were everywhere. We ran about 30 yards to our car. The windshield was shattered, the door punched in. We piled in and left the area.

We met up again by chance a few days later with Dr. Maher and Dr. Amin at the FSA hospital in the town of Azaz, not far from Aleppo. Dr. Maher said that the old waiter who had served us coffee before we entered the hospital was one of those killed by the bomb. Dr. Maher wasn't sure how many others died—there is such a stream of Aleppo casualties in the hospital that tallying who was injured or killed in which particular raid is difficult.

The attack had been carried out by a single jet, invulnerable because of the FSA's lack of antiaircraft weapons, much less an aerial capacity of its own. The other explosions we'd heard were of rockets fired by the plane as it made its second run over the hospital.

The attack on Dar al-Shifa was a single episode in a civil war in which a dictatorial regime is employing the full weight of its modern military capacity against its own people. The regime's aerial bombings appear designed not so much to achieve a military end as to demoralize civilians who either support the rebels or might be tempted to.

"We've no antibiotics, short of skilled staff, no capacity for surgery," Dr. Maher told me when we met in Azaz. "But we don't need medicine. We need antiaircraft weapons."

Mr. Spyer is a senior research fellow at the Global Research in International Affairs Center and a columnist at the Jerusalem Post. He is the author of "The Transforming Fire: The Rise of the Israel-Islamist Conflict" (Continuum, 2010).

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A Flimsy U.S. Sanctions Policy Toward Iran

September 27, 2012

[Washington Post](#)

By Andrew K. Davenport And Ilan Berman

Recent revelations from the International Atomic Energy Agency that Iran has both continued and expanded its uranium enrichment activities have focused attention anew on U.S. policy toward the Islamic Republic - and what more can be done to stop Iran's march toward the bomb.

This is, necessarily, a conversation about sanctions. Given the advanced state of Iran's nuclear program and the growing possibility that third parties - namely, Israel - might resort to force to stop it, it stands to reason that the full arsenal of U.S. economic and financial sanctions would be deployed against the Iranian threat. Yet it has not been.

The reality is that current sanctions policy is simultaneously extensive and flimsy. It amounts, in large part, to labeling a broad array of business activity as "sanctionable." But with the exception of a handful of cases, the actual sanctioning of violators has been markedly absent.

Reporters and pundits alike have been complicit in ignoring this important distinction. Accordingly, it may come as a surprise to many that just about every piece of sanctions legislation and every executive order adopted over the past 16 years and advertised as "tightening the screws" on Iran has offered an escape hatch that gives the president discretion over which violators are targeted and whether they are named and penalized.

The result is that very few "sanctionable" companies are ever actually penalized - or even identified. Instead, successive administrations of both parties have opted against the strict application of economic penalties on countries and companies that do business with Iran.

President Obama takes great pride in pointing out that his administration has levied the most extensive sanctions to date against the Iranian regime. Indeed it has; much more than its predecessors, the Obama administration has actively targeted Iran's energy sector. The centerpiece of the administration's sanctions effort, the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability and Divestment Act of 2010, known as CISADA, focused on one of Iran's major economic vulnerabilities: its need to import refined petroleum from foreign sources.

But enforcement has lagged far behind. In the rare instances when the White House has chosen to enforce CISADA and other measures, it has penalized only obscure violators and those with the most minimal impact on the global - and the Iranian - economy. Arguably, the most prominent entity targeted by CISADA is Venezuela's state oil company, PDVSA, and even its ties to the U.S. market remained largely untouched. The last five companies to be sanctioned by the Obama administration - FAL Oil Co., Bank of Kunlun, Kuo Oil, Zhuhai Zhenrong Co. and Elaf Islamic Bank - are all marginal entities in Iran's economic edifice.

The reason for the stunted state of U.S. sanctions policy is understandable but deeply unfortunate. Administration after administration has been reluctant to enforce sanctions against foreign companies with ties to Iran because of the diplomatic fallout that would invariably accompany such a decision. More often than not, the most egregious violators are companies headquartered in countries that are close U.S. allies or represent key strategic relationships for the United States, such as China and Russia. Fully implementing U.S. sanctions would require the political will to persist through a temporary downturn in those ties.

President Ronald Reagan demonstrated such political will when he sanctioned Western European companies that defied orders not to supply U.S.-origin oil and gas equipment and technology to the Soviet Union for the development of its Siberian gas pipeline. Had it not eventually been thwarted, that project would have nearly doubled Soviet annual hard currency revenue and created a dangerous level of dependency in Western Europe on Soviet supplies of natural gas.

Today such fortitude is strikingly absent. But at what cost? Obama's failure to fulfill his pledge to fully exhaust all non-military options regarding Iran suggests that the White House thinks the potential of sanctions to influence Iranian behavior is overblown and not worth the diplomatic consequences.

The full enforcement of sanctions is a logical intermediary step before the use of force. The administration's failures on that front suggest that it views actual warfare as more palatable than ruffled diplomatic relationships with countries such as China, the primary violator of "sanctionable" activity currently on the books. That, in turn, makes the likelihood of some sort of conflagration over Iran's nuclear program all the more probable.

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Mr. Romney Addresses Foreign Aid

September 27, 2012

New York Times

Six weeks before the election, Mitt Romney has finally made a substantive contribution to the national security debate, offering ideas about how he would handle foreign aid. For a campaign troubled by fumbles and incoherent proposals, this counts as progress. But, even here, there are details he needs to flesh out.

In a speech to the Clinton Global Initiative on Tuesday, Mr. Romney acknowledged the value of foreign aid and its purpose: providing humanitarian assistance, improving security and encouraging economic growth. He did not call for slashing aid, as many in the Republican Party have.

But we don't know whether he would really protect the current budget - \$54.9 billion in 2012 - from further cuts if he is elected. He had earlier endorsed ending foreign aid to countries that "oppose America's interests," a fuzzy term that could affect many recipients. The budget drafted by his running

mate, Representative Paul Ryan, would cut foreign affairs spending by 10 percent in 2013 and even more in 2016.

Mr. Romney focused most of his attention on overhauling aid programs. The George W. Bush and Obama administrations and the development community have worked on this for years, so Mr. Romney will find little argument when he says aid has too often been ineffective.

Mr. Romney's call for more public-private partnerships on aid projects makes sense. The Obama administration has made this a priority. The United States Agency for International Development this week announced a joint initiative with several banks and technology companies to promote the use of cellphones to get aid payments to people in poor and rural communities. Another American initiative links donors and private companies in providing clean cook stoves for impoverished women so they don't risk their lives gathering firewood in conflict zones or being asphyxiated by smoke from fires in closed spaces. It's unclear what more Mr. Romney would do.

His talk about the potentially transformative nature of American assistance and the need to invest more in small and medium-size businesses that will create jobs and lift ailing economies is also sensible and in line with administration policies. His plan to condition aid on a country's promise to make reforms, including reducing barriers to American trade and investment, seems to add a twist to initiatives put in place by the Bush and Obama administrations. Mr. Romney needs to explain more fully how this might affect countries that receive the bulk of aid: Egypt, Israel, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

There were also gaps in Mr. Romney's speech; there was no mention of foreign aid's critical role in health, agriculture, education and poverty programs. On the whole, though, Mr. Romney's remarks were encouraging. Foreign aid is badly misunderstood. Many Americans believe it consumes a large part of the federal budget when it really is less than 2 percent. It is a crucial security asset that should be increased, not reduced.

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Abu Hamza Road Show

September 27, 2012

Wall Street Journal

For years, Abu Hamza made a career out of denouncing the West—and allegedly plotting terrorist attacks against it—while living in the bosom of the British welfare state.

Since his arrest in 2004, he's had a second career of sorts: exploiting every available avenue afforded him by the criminal justice systems of the societies he so disdains to avoid incarceration and, lately, extradition to America.

The U.S. first requested his extradition in 2004. On Monday, he and four confederates finally exhausted their last appeal against extradition to stand trial on terror-related charges in America. Abu Hamza had argued before the European Court of Human Rights that the prospect of incarceration in the U.S. federal "supermax" prison in Colorado violated his right against cruel and unusual punishment.

The court rejected this argument, so he will soon take his show to the U.S. There, the man who praised Osama bin Laden in the wake of 9/11 will no doubt once again exploit every procedural nicety available to him. Abu Hamza is accused in the U.S. of trying to establish a terrorist training camp in Oregon and providing material aid to the Taliban, as well as a 1998 hostage-taking in Yemen.

Abu Hamza's case was heard alongside those of Khaled Fawwaz and Abdul Barry, charged in connection with the 1998 Embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania, which killed 269 people. Under U.S. law, all of these men enjoy the presumption of innocence and can mount a vigorous defense. We suspect that, as in Britain, they will once again take full advantage of the very legal protections they have otherwise sought to destroy.

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RELEASED IN FULL

**DAILY PRESS CLIPS FOR
MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 24, 2012**

DOMESTIC AGENDA

Liking It or Not, States Prepare for Health Law

September 23, 2012

New York Times

By ABBY GOODNOUGH

PHOENIX — Like many Republican governors, Jan Brewer of Arizona is a stinging critic of President Obama's health care law. When the Supreme Court upheld it in June, she called the ruling "an overreaching and unaffordable assault on states' rights and individual liberty." ([link](#))

ECONOMIC RECOVERY

Under Ben Bernanke, a more open and forceful Federal Reserve

September 23, 2012

Washington Post

By Zachary A. Goldfarb

In what might be his final years as chairman of the Federal Reserve, Ben S. Bernanke is transforming the U.S. central bank, seeking to shed its reclusive habits and make it a constant presence in bolstering the economy. ([link](#))

USUN IN THE NEWS

Susan Rice, US Ambassador To UN, Takes Center Stage In Debate Over Syria Violence

September 24, 2012

Washington Post

By Colum Lynch

UNITED NATIONS - Over Thanksgiving last year, Susan E. Rice, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, traveled with her husband and two children to Rwanda. It was part vacation - a chance to see the magnificent bird and gorilla population. But it was also a somber opportunity to visit the memorial honoring more than 800,000 people who died in the largest mass killing in modern times as the world looked on passively. ([link](#))

White House pressured to tell more about Benghazi attack

September 23, 2012

Christian Science Monitor

By Brad Knickerbocker

President Obama is under increasing pressure to explain and respond more fully to the Sept. 11 attack on the US consulate in Benghazi, Libya in which the American ambassador and three other embassy personnel were killed. ([link](#))

Gibbs: No one misled over Libya attacks

September 23, 2012

The Washington Times

By Paige Winfield Cunningham

"Absolutely not," Obama campaign adviser Robert Gibbs replied to "Fox News Sunday" host Chris Wallace when asked whether the administration was politically motivated when it initially mischaracterized the recent attack on the U.S. Consulate in Libya. ([link](#))

REVIEW AUTHORITY: Archie Bolster, Senior Reviewer

South Sudan, Sudan talk to finalize border, other issues

September 24, 2012

CNN

The leaders of Sudan and South Sudan met Sunday in Ethiopia, attempting to resolve -- under international pressure -- issues arising from the latter nation's independence just over a year ago. ([link](#))

UNITED NATIONS

Frustration And Turmoil As World Leaders Meet

September 24, 2012

Associated Press

By Edith M. Lederer

UNITED NATIONS - Democratic uprisings across the Arab world and the Palestinians' bid for U.N. membership sparked excitement and hope at last year's meeting of world leaders. But with war raging in Syria, the Palestinian application sidelined, and deadly protests generated by an anti-Islamic video, the mood as this year's U.N. gathering begins is one of disappointment and frustration. ([link](#))

Events In Muslim World Bear On Obama's Speech At United Nations

September 24, 2012

Washington Times

By Dave Boyer

A year after President Obama largely defused a diplomatic showdown at the United Nations over Palestinian statehood, his difficulties with the Muslim world are multiplying rapidly as he prepares to address the U.N. General Assembly on Tuesday. ([link](#))

Britain, France, Germany Call For New Iran Sanctions

September 24, 2012

AFP

Britain, France and Germany have officially called for new European Union sanctions against Iran over its nuclear program, diplomats said. ([link](#))

TOP STORIES

At United Nations, Renewed Focus On Syria, If Not New Ideas

September 24, 2012

New York Times

By Neil MacFarquhar

UNITED NATIONS - The raging conflict in Syria will take center stage starting Monday as some 120 world leaders converge on the United Nations for what is sometimes called "diplomacy's annual trade fair." ([link](#))

U.N. Stalemate on Damascus Clouds Meeting

September 24, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By JOE LAURIA

UNITED NATIONS—The United Nations' inability to resolve the Syrian crisis is highlighting how competing interests have hampered the body's ability to tackle some big global issues, as the annual General Assembly meeting gets set to open Tuesday in New York. ([link](#))

Deadly Attack In Libya Was Major Blow To C.I.A. Efforts

September 24, 2012

New York Times

By Eric Schmitt, Helene Cooper And Michael S. Schmidt

WASHINGTON - The attack in Benghazi, Libya, that killed Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens and three other Americans has dealt the Central Intelligence Agency a major setback in its intelligence-gathering efforts at a time of increasing instability in the North African nation. ([link](#))

Government Issues Order To Disband Libya Forces

September 24, 2012

New York Times

By David D. Kirkpatrick

CAIRO - Libya's interim government on Sunday ordered the breakup of all militias that do not fall under its authority, and demanded that those militias pull out of military compounds and public property within 48 hours. ([link](#))

Libyan Army Clamps Down on Militias Facing Backlash

September 24, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By CHARLES LEVINSON and MARGARET COKER

The Libyan army ejected a rogue militia from its headquarters on Sunday, the first move in a government-threatened crackdown on such groups. ([link](#))

AFRICA

Cote D'Ivoire

Ivory Coast Reopens Air Space With Ghana

September 24, 2012

Associated Press

ABIDJAN, Ivory Coast - Ivory Coast says it will allow flights to resume with Ghana, and has reopened its air space after closing its borders following last week's cross-border attack. However, the country has not yet agreed to reopen its land and maritime borders. ([link](#))

Nigeria

Suicide Bomber Kills 2, Injures 45 In Nigeria

September 24, 2012

Associated Press

By Shehu Saulawa

BAUCHI, Nigeria - A suicide car bomber attacked a Catholic church conducting Mass in northern Nigeria on Sunday, killing two people and wounding another 45 in a region under assault by a radical Islamist sect, officials said. ([link](#))

Sudan

Hope Mounts For Deal In Sudan, S.Sudan Summit

September 23, 2012

AFP

Sudan and South Sudan's leaders will meet Sunday as international pressure mounts to settle long-running bitter disputes that have brought the former civil war foes to the brink of renewed conflict. ([link](#))

ASIA

Burma

Myanmar president heads to U.S., seeks end to sanctions

September 24, 2012

Reuters

By Martin Petty

Myanmar's reformist president heads to the United States this week, keen to win an end to sanctions and open a new chapter in a once frosty relationship that could bring economic and geostrategic benefits to both sides. ([link](#))

China

Police Chief In Chinese Murder Scandal Convicted And Sentenced To 15 Years

September 24, 2012

New York Times

By Edward Wong

BEIJING - Chinese court officials have found Wang Lijun, a former police chief, guilty of four criminal charges after he fled to a United States Consulate last February and told diplomats there that the wife of a senior politician had murdered a British businessman, according to a report on Monday by Xinhua, the state news agency. ([link](#))

Top Chinese Official Makes Landmark Afghan Visit

September 23, 2012

AFP

China's top security official has made the first high-level trip to Afghanistan by a senior Chinese leader in nearly half a century, meeting President Hamid Karzai in Kabul, state media said Sunday. ([link](#))

Japan

Japan PM Warns China on Dispute

September 24, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By TOKO SEKIGUCHI and GEORGE NISHIYAMA

TOKYO—Japan's prime minister warned China that its inflammatory reaction to a territorial dispute—from violent protests to apparent informal trade sanctions—could further weaken China's economy by scaring away foreign investors. ([link](#))

Tokyo Set to Switch Focus to U.S. Pact

September 24, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By MITSURU OBE

TOKYO—As a territorial dispute begins to impinge on Japan's economic relationship with China, the government of Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda looks increasingly likely to shift its focus to a free-trade pact led by the U.S. from one involving China—at least for now. ([link](#))

North / South Korea

North Korean Assembly Might Offer Clues to New Leader's Direction

September 24, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By EVAN RAMSTAD

SEOUL—A meeting Tuesday of North Korea's rubber-stamp legislature might provide the clearest signals yet of the direction in which new dictator Kim Jong Eun is trying to take the country. ([link](#))

Exclusive: North Korea plans agriculture reforms

September 23, 2012

Reuters

By Benjamin Kang Lim

BEIJING - North Korea plans to allow farmers to keep more of their produce in an attempt to boost agricultural output, a source with close ties to Pyongyang and Beijing said, in a move that could boost supplies, help cap rising food prices and ease malnutrition. ([link](#))

NEA

Arab Spring Leaving Women Out In Cold

September 24, 2012

USA Today

By Sarah Lynch

Nawal Al Saadawi has been at the lead of the fight for rights for women for decades, and like many here was exhilarated when women and men united in Tahrir Square to lead protests against dictator Hosni Mubarak. ([link](#))

Egypt

Egypt's New Leader Spells Out Terms for U.S.-Arab Ties

September 22, 2012

New York Times

By DAVID D. KIRKPATRICK and STEVEN ERLANGER

CAIRO — On the eve of his first trip to the United States as Egypt's new Islamist president, Mohamed Morsi said the United States needed to fundamentally change its approach to the Arab world, showing greater respect for its values and helping build a Palestinian state, if it hoped to overcome decades of pent-up anger. ([link](#))

Sinai Group Claims Role In Attack On Israel

September 24, 2012

New York Times

By David D. Kirkpatrick

CAIRO - An obscure militant group based in Egypt's North Sinai region claimed responsibility over the weekend for a cross-border attack that killed an Israeli soldier last week. The claim called fresh attention to the uphill struggle the newly formed Egyptian government is facing to control the restive Sinai region. ([link](#))

Iran

Iran Threatens Attacks On US Bases In Event Of War

September 24, 2012

Associated Press

By Ali Akbar Dareini

TEHRAN, Iran - A senior commander in Iran's powerful Revolutionary Guard warned that Iran will target U.S. bases in the region in the event of war with Israel, raising the prospect of a broader conflict that would force other countries to get involved, Iranian state television reported Sunday. ([link](#))

Israel

Israel Won't Accept Egypt Treaty Changes: Lieberman

September 23, 2012

AFP

Israel will not accept alterations to its 1979 peace treaty with Egypt, Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman said on Sunday, as ties between the two countries continue to fray. ([link](#))

Obama Brushes Off Israeli Pressure Over Iran

September 24, 2012

AFP

WASHINGTON - President Barack Obama likened Israeli pressure on him to draw a line in the sand over Iran's nuclear ambitions as noise he tries to ignore, according to remarks aired Sunday. ([link](#))

Israel Says Crime Ring Targets Africa Migrants

September 24, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By JOSHUA MITNICK and JOEL MILLMAN

TEL AVIV—Israel indicted three Jewish men and an Arab resident of Israel on Sunday for allegedly working with a Hamas-linked crime ring to extort thousands of dollars in ransom from African migrants in Israel. ([link](#))

Lebanon

Hezbollah Winds Up Demos Against Anti-Islam Film

September 24, 2012

AFP

Thousands of supporters of the powerful Shiite militant group Hezbollah took part on Sunday in Hermel, eastern Lebanon in the last in a series of protests against a US-made film which mocks Islam. ([link](#))

Syria

Rebels to Use Syrian Territory for Training

September 24, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By NOUR MALAS

Syrian rebel fighters on the Turkish border are pushing ahead with a plan to turn territory in Idlib province that has been mostly under their control since early summer into a logistics and training base for fighters across the country. ([link](#))

Syrian Opposition Figures Meet In Damascus

September 24, 2012

Associated Press

By Albert Aji And Zeina Karam

DAMASCUS, Syria - Syrian opposition figures who reject foreign intervention in Syria's 18-month conflict called for the ouster of President Bashar Assad at a rare meeting Sunday in the nation's capital. The gathering was tolerated by the regime in an apparent attempt to lend credibility to its claims that it remains open to political reform despite its bloody crackdown on dissent. ([link](#))

Most Of Syria Outside Regime Control: Rebel Colonel

September 23, 2012

AFP

Syria's vast territory is increasingly outside the control of the regular military, whose aerial superiority is the last strength keeping the Damascus regime afloat, a rebel chief told AFP. ([link](#))

Survey: Syrian rebels want democracy, Islamic-style

September 24, 2012

USA Today

By Oren Dorell

Syrian opposition members generally want a democratic government that protects the rights of minorities, though many also want a constitution based on Islam, according to a recent survey. ([link](#))

Syrian President's Sister "Now In Dubai"

September 24, 2012

AFP

Embattled Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's only sister, Bushra, whose husband was killed in a July bombing, is now living in Dubai with her children, Syrian residents told AFP on Sunday. ([link](#))

SCA

Pakistan

US Slams Pakistan Minister's Bounty To Kill Filmmaker

September 24, 2012

AFP

The United States condemned a Pakistani government minister's offer of a bounty to kill the maker of an anti-Islam film that has triggered violent protests around the Muslim world. ([link](#))

WHA/EUR

Belarus

Belarus Votes As Europe Keeps A Watch For Signs That Sanctions Can End

September 24, 2012

New York Times

By Andrew E. Kramer

MINSK, Belarus - Belarus held parliamentary elections on Sunday, though the outcome was hardly in doubt: supporters of President Aleksandr G. Lukashenko have traditionally won, and now hold, all 110 seats in the chamber. ([link](#))

Greece

Prophet Film Protesters Clash With Greek Police

September 24, 2012

Associated Press

By Demetris Nellas

ATHENS, Greece - Greek riot police used tear gas and pepper spray to disperse Muslim protesters who clashed with officers Sunday during a rally against a film produced in the U.S. that denigrates Islam's Prophet Muhammad. No injuries were reported. ([link](#))

Russia

Cumbersome Gazprom losing its clout

September 23, 2012

Washington Post

By Will Englund and Kathy Lally

MOSCOW — The foundations are starting to crack at Gazprom, the giant energy company that is the central pillar in the economic and political system constructed by Russian President Vladimir Putin. ([link](#))

FOREIGN POLICY

A Manager Of Overseas Crises, As Much As The World Permits

September 24, 2012

New York Times

By Peter Baker

WASHINGTON - When President Obama flies to New York on Monday afternoon for the United Nations General Assembly, he will dispense with the usual battery of one-on-one meetings with world leaders so he can tape an appearance on "The View" and return by midweek to the battleground state of Ohio. Left to help smooth over any ruffled feathers will be Tom Donilon. ([link](#))

From Nigeria to Athens, Muslim protests rumble on

September 24, 2012

Reuters

By Robin Pomeroy

DUBAI - Muslims protested in Nigeria, Iran, Greece and Turkey on Sunday to show anti-Western anger against a film and cartoons insulting Islam had not dissipated. ([link](#))

EDITORIAL / OPINION

On The Wrong Side

September 24, 2012

New York Times

Leaders of Iraq's Shiite-led government have often advised the United States not to worry about their ties with Iran, where Shiites are also in the majority. But the assurances are getting harder to swallow. Baghdad is showing a distressing willingness to side with the region's most repressive regimes, not just Iran but also Iran's chief ally, the brutal Syrian president, Bashar al-Assad. ([link](#))

Iran's Mahmoud Ahmadinejad On Israeli Threats, Nuclear Program And Syria

September 24, 2012

Washington Post

By David Ignatius

NEW YORK -- Iran may be on the firing line, but President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was as calmly combative as ever Sunday, dismissing Israel's military threats and predicting that nothing will happen in the nuclear talks until after the U.S. presidential elections. ([link](#))

The Satanic Video

September 24, 2012

New York Times

By Bill Keller

THE alchemy of modern media works with amazing speed. Start with a cheesy anti-Muslim video that resembles a bad trailer for a Sacha Baron Cohen comedy. It becomes YouTube fuel for protest across the Islamic world and a pretext for killing American diplomats. That angry spasm begets an inflammatory Newsweek cover, "MUSLIM RAGE," which in turn inspires a Twitter hashtag that reduces the whole episode to a running joke. ([link](#))

America's Inevitable Retreat From The Middle East

September 24, 2012

New York Times

By Pankaj Mishra

THE murder of four Americans in Libya and mob assaults on the United States' embassies across the Muslim world this month have reminded many of 1979, when radical Islamists seized the American mission in Tehran. There, too, extremists running wild after the fall of a pro-American tyrant had found a cheap way of empowering themselves. ([link](#))

The White House Goes Mum on Free Speech

September 24, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By L. GORDON CROVITZ

When Rudy Giuliani was mayor of New York, he tried to cut off taxpayer funding for a museum showing a work entitled "The Holy Virgin Mary," featuring an image of the Madonna smeared with elephant dung, surrounded by cutout porn photos of female genitalia. Mr. Giuliani said the museum didn't have a "right to government subsidy for desecrating somebody else's religion." Hillary Clinton, then a Senate candidate, defended the right to show the artwork: "Our feelings of being offended should not lead to the penalizing and shutting down of an entire museum." ([link](#))

DOMESTIC AGENDA**Liking It or Not, States Prepare for Health Law**

September 23, 2012

New York Times

By ABBY GOODNOUGH

PHOENIX — Like many Republican governors, Jan Brewer of Arizona is a stinging critic of President Obama's health care law. When the Supreme Court upheld it in June, she called the ruling "an overreaching and unaffordable assault on states' rights and individual liberty."

Yet the Brewer administration is quietly designing an insurance exchange — one of the most essential and controversial requirements of the law. Officials in a handful of other Republican-led states say they are also working to have a framework ready by Nov. 16, the deadline for states to commit to running an exchange or leave it to the federal government to run it for them. That is just 10 days after Election Day, which is likely to decide the future of the law.

Given that the health care overhaul remains a lightning rod — just last week, Oklahoma revised a lawsuit against it — even the most tentative discussions about carrying it out in Republican states tend to take place behind closed doors or "underground," as the leader of a health care advocacy group in the South put it.

In Mississippi, Mike Chaney, the insurance commissioner, who is laying the groundwork for a state-based exchange there, recently learned the difficulties of moving forward in anything but the utmost secrecy. At a luncheon this summer he found himself facing down an opponent of the law in a confrontation that is now circulating on YouTube.

"I was invited to the picnic, and I was the main course," said Mr. Chaney, a Republican and an elected official.

The law requires all states to have exchanges, which are essentially online marketplaces where small businesses and individuals can shop for private health plans, in place by January 2014, when a requirement takes effect for most Americans to have health insurance or pay a penalty. If states fail to submit plans for running their own exchanges by the deadline, the law calls for the federal government to set up and run one for them, with or without their help. People with incomes between 133 percent and 400 percent of the poverty level can get federal tax subsidies through exchanges to make the price of coverage more affordable.

"If we have to have one," said Donald Hughes, Ms. Brewer's health care policy adviser, "then it would be better for Arizona to do it ourselves rather than defer to the federal government." He said, however, that Ms. Brewer would not make a final decision on a state-run exchange until after the election.

Only 13 states and the District of Columbia have formally committed to running their own exchanges. All of them but Rhode Island, whose governor, Lincoln Chafee, is an independent, are led by Democrats. The Republican governors in six states — Alaska, Florida, Louisiana, Maine, South Carolina and Texas — have said they will not create a state-run exchange, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation. So has New Hampshire, where Gov. John Lynch, a Democrat, faced opposition from the Republican-controlled legislature.

Most of the remaining states, 22 of them run by Republicans, are exploring their options. Along with Arizona, at least three of them — Mississippi, Nevada and New Mexico — have done enough planning to meet the November deadline should they decide to run their own exchanges, according to officials. Nevada has already created its exchange, appointed its board and hired its executive director. Most Republican governors, including Ms. Brewer, are waiting for the outcome of the presidential race before making a final decision; Mitt Romney has pledged to repeal the law if elected.

But states like Arizona say they want to be prepared in case the law survives. (Even if Mr. Romney wins, repealing the law will require Congressional approval, which will be difficult if Democrats retain control of the Senate.)

Peter Lee, the executive director of the insurance exchange in California, said he had attended meetings with officials from red states who were eager to keep their presence under the radar.

"It's sort of like A.A.: 'My name's Bob, and I can't tell you the state I'm from,'" Mr. Lee said.

Republicans who support state-run exchanges say they are embracing a fundamental conservative belief: that states should make their own decisions rather than cede control to the federal government. But groups that oppose the law have sent emissaries around the country to argue that deferring to the federal government is a shrewder move.

Michael Cannon, a health policy expert at the Cato Institute, a libertarian group, has visited more than a dozen Republican-led states, pressing them not to set up their own exchanges. Mr. Cannon, the opponent who confronted Mr. Chaney in Mississippi, said he tells states that exchanges will in fact be "an entirely federally controlled enterprise."

Mr. Cannon says that Republican governors who are moving toward state-run exchanges are bowing to the wishes of insurance companies and health care providers. "They happen to be the interest groups that stand to get billions of dollars in federal subsidies," he said.

Many Republicans in state legislatures, including in Arizona, do not need convincing: they are against state-run exchanges. That could make the challenge of creating them tough even if the framework is in place by November, because most states need legislative approval to establish them. Another option is a "partnership" exchange, one that is created by the federal government but that the state would have a role in operating.

Mr. Hughes said that if Ms. Brewer decided to move ahead with a state-based exchange after the election, she would ask the Legislature to sign off on creating one early next year. "Opinions can change," he said.

But Tom Jenney, the Arizona director of the conservative organization Americans for Prosperity, said his group would pressure legislators to resist. Mr. Jenney recently challenged supporters of a state-based exchange to debate Mr. Cannon at an event his group sponsored in Phoenix. When no one accepted the invitation, Mr. Jenney played the role of a supporter himself, wearing devil horns.

"Our mission is to make it as uncomfortable as possible for anyone who has not committed to opposing the exchange," he said.

Creating an exchange takes significant time and resources: states must build the Web sites and other technological infrastructure, a call center, outreach programs and other pieces. Mr. Hughes said Arizona had set standards for health plans that would compete on its exchange and was seeking a vendor to build some of the technological infrastructure and a call center.

But the state, he said, had "included language in all of our contracts with vendors and consultants that would allow us to cancel them."

In the meantime, a coalition of business leaders, including many from insurance companies and health care providers, is urging Ms. Brewer to go with the state-based exchange.

Mr. Chaney said that while he faced pressure to abandon plans for a state-run exchange in Mississippi - the Tea Party there is an especially vocal opponent - he would not back down. He said that he would, however, honor a request by Gov. Phil Bryant, a Republican, to wait until after the election to submit a blueprint.

"What we're doing here is an offensive move, and it's a defensive move," Mr. Chaney said. "I'm doing what I think is the best thing to give me some alternatives and what's in the best interest of my state."
(top)

ECONOMIC RECOVERY

Under Ben Bernanke, a more open and forceful Federal Reserve

September 23, 2012

Washington Post

By Zachary A. Goldfarb

In what might be his final years as chairman of the Federal Reserve, Ben S. Bernanke is transforming the U.S. central bank, seeking to shed its reclusive habits and make it a constant presence in bolstering the economy.

The new approach would make the Fed's policies more responsive to the needs of the economy — and likely more forceful, because what the Fed is planning to do would be much clearer. A key feature of the strategy could be producing a set of scenarios for when and how the Fed would intervene, which would mark a dramatic shift for an organization that throughout its history has been famously opaque.

Bernanke has already pushed the Fed far along this path. The central bank this month pledged to stimulate the economy until it no longer needs the help, an unprecedented promise to intervene for years. That's a big change from the Fed's usual role as a curb on inflation and buffer against financial crises.

"It's a re-imagining of Fed policy," said John E. Silvia, chief economist at Wells Fargo. "It's a much more explicit commitment than people had thought about in the past. It's a much stronger commitment to focus on unemployment."

As the Fed becomes more forceful and interventionist, it creates new risks for itself. Bernanke's actions have provoked tough criticism from conservatives in Congress, who have proposed more closely regulating what the Fed can do. The Fed takes pride in its independence, but becoming more interventionist may plunge it deeper into the political maelstrom.

With his new approach, Bernanke is searching for an elixir for a problem that has plagued the Fed's efforts to help the economy. Each time Fed officials have acted during the recent downturn, the effort has been limited in scope. When the Fed's program has ended, invariably it has not accomplished enough.

Now, the Fed is saying that it plans to continue stimulating the economy well after the recovery gets strong. The virtually unlimited nature of the pledge means that financial markets will know that the Fed will probably step in whenever growth weakens — and that may have powerful calming effects on the economy.

"Stating that we expect to keep a highly [stimulative] stance for policy for a considerable time after the recovery strengthens is an important reassurance to households and businesses," Charles Evans, president of the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, said in a speech last week.

Bernanke is also studying the idea of declaring that the Fed will boost the economy until unemployment reaches a specific target or until inflation takes off. Some Fed officials have suggested that the central bank keep on stimulating until unemployment reaches 7 percent or inflation rises to 3 percent; others have proposed Fed action until unemployment reaches 5.5 percent or inflation rises to 2.25 percent.

The Fed's legal mandate is to minimize unemployment and keep prices stable; the Fed has set a long-term inflation target of 2 percent per year.

While many top Fed officials agree with a far more detailed approach, the Fed has not reached final agreement on which new steps to take. But any measures would build on the Fed's announcement this month that it will launch a series of open-ended policies to spur job creation. The stimulus comes in the

form of a plan to hold interest rates near zero at least through mid-2015 and to buy \$143 billion in mortgage bonds through the end of the year, and then continue the purchases as long as necessary.

"They've basically signaled that this time is going to be different," said Michelle Girard, senior U.S. economist at RBS. "They're going to keep the foot on the gas until the economy responds."

The new strategy still carries a number of risks. The most significant is that the Fed's efforts heat up economic growth in a way that unleashes inflation, which would eat away at middle-class incomes.

"A commitment to provide stimulus beyond the point at which the recovery strengthens and growth increases implies too great a willingness to tolerate higher inflation," Jeffrey M. Lacker, the president of the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond, said in a speech last week.

Lacker was the only one of the 12 voting members of the Fed's governing committee to dissent from this month's decision.

Despite that dissent, Bernanke's efforts to remake the Fed dovetails with his efforts to forge a greater consensus among members of the Federal Open Markets Committee.

Bernanke believes that the consensus is especially critical now because the Fed's promises extend beyond the chairman's term, which ends in early 2014. Many economists expect Bernanke to step down then after eight grueling years.

Together, the push for the Fed to take a more aggressive stance against unemployment and make decisions by consensus fulfills two longtime goals of Bernanke, one of the preeminent Fed scholars before becoming chairman.

As a college professor, he strongly advocated that central banks not stand idly by during times of high unemployment and argued that more deliberation at central banks can increase the legitimacy and impact of their actions.

But the search for consensus may have also delayed the Fed's actions.

By late July, for instance, Bernanke thought the jobs market was weak, and he was ready to launch a major intervention. At the Fed's meeting July 31 and Aug. 1, Bernanke circulated open-ended language the Fed would later release.

But some of Bernanke's colleagues were not convinced that any new measures would be particularly effective and wondered whether it would be better to save those weapons for a crisis, such as what might happen if Greece leaves the euro zone.

Since the Fed had announced a stimulus in June, Bernanke was willing to wait to do another major stimulus. Instead, the Fed issued statements suggesting that action would be on its way if the economy did not improve.

Over six weeks of lobbying, Bernanke convinced the other committee members that the labor market was extremely weak and that additional action could help. He told them he expected new stimulus to help create 500,000 jobs.

In a bit of cunning, he argued that the open-ended nature of the commitment — which most economists view as highly stimulative — would allow the Fed to pull back if the economy takes off.

The chairman's pursuit of consensus has had costs, according to many economists. These economists, some of whom are close to Bernanke, have excoriated his record as failing to respond vigorously enough to a national crisis of 12.5 million people without jobs.

While left-leaning economists have pressed Bernanke to do more, he has also felt heat from the right to stop intervening in the markets.

Republicans have accused Bernanke of subsidizing the nation's borrowing binge by buying more than a trillion dollars in U.S. government debt since 2008 — a position he has rejected.

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USUN IN THE NEWS

Susan Rice, US Ambassador To UN, Takes Center Stage In Debate Over Syria Violence

September 24, 2012

[Washington Post](#)

By Colum Lynch

UNITED NATIONS - Over Thanksgiving last year, Susan E. Rice, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, traveled with her husband and two children to Rwanda. It was part vacation - a chance to see the magnificent bird and gorilla population. But it was also a somber opportunity to visit the memorial honoring more than 800,000 people who died in the largest mass killing in modern times as the world looked on passively.

Rwanda's 1994 genocide was a watershed for Rice. At the time, she was a 30-year-old National Security Council official in the Clinton administration, which stymied international efforts at the United Nations to respond militarily to the slaughter. Rice took the failure to heart.

But the lessons of Rwanda have offered an imperfect guidebook as Rice weighs the use of U.S. diplomatic and military power. She helped rally support for action in Libya, where the United States helped topple a regime that had threatened to commit large-scale killings. But she has gone the other direction on Syria, with President Obama resisting calls for intervention there as thousands die in the fight against the government of President Bashar al-Assad.

The prospect of international action to halt the violence in Syria will be one of the most pressing issues as the U.N. General Assembly convenes its annual debate Tuesday and Rice moves to center stage as the chief defender of U.S. policy toward Syria as well as the issue of Iran's ongoing nuclear efforts.

In a lengthy interview last week, Rice said that her image as an interventionist has been overstated and that so has the impact of Rwanda on her deliberations on national-security and foreign-policy issues. Her approach as policymaker, she said, is to "bring analysis and rigor and elbow grease" to every problem.

When Rice arrived in New York in January 2009, she had a reputation as a foreign-policy hawk, a passionate advocate for the use of American military force to halt atrocities in Darfur. While thousands

were being slaughtered in the Darfur region of Sudan, she argued for U.S. military intervention in newspaper articles and congressional testimony.

"If anybody thought that I was going to be a bomb thrower or a wild-eyed advocate of military intervention, they don't know me," she said. "There is no one-size-fits-all."

As Obama's longest-serving foreign-policy adviser, Rice, 47, is seen as a potential candidate to replace Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton if the president wins a second term.

Rice is charming, down to earth, quick with a joke, a proud mother who brags about her children. She was a Rhodes scholar and earned a doctorate in philosophy at Oxford University. As U.S. ambassador, she also has a reputation as a dominant, and sometimes domineering, force among her diplomatic peers.

She blusters, she cajoles and she curses, participating in high-octave exchanges over Iran and Syria with Russia's U.N. ambassador, Vitaly Churkin. One council ambassador described her variously as "the bulldozer" and "the headmistress."

"With Churkin they have this special relationship - they love this kind of dogfight," said the diplomat, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to avoid antagonizing Rice.

Others have bridled under what one diplomat called her "bossy" personality and frequent absences from Security Council deliberations. During a council trip to Sudan led by Rice, France's U.N. ambassador, Gerard Araud, grouched, "We are not the 14 dwarves, and she is not Snow White."

White House officials declined to speculate on who would lead the president's foreign-policy team if he is reelected, but they said Obama believes that Rice has delivered on some of his key priorities, including resolutions imposing sanctions on Iran and North Korea and securing a narrow majority in the Security Council to support the use of force against Libya. They said Russia, not Rice, is responsible for the United Nations' inability to end the violence in Syria.

"I honestly don't know who is going to be the next secretary of state," said Ben Rhodes, the deputy national security adviser for strategic communications. "But the fact is Susan is very aligned with the president and his worldview and has been able to deliver in a very practical sense as U.S. ambassador. I think she is clearly going to continue to be an important adviser to him going forward."

When the administration needed a surrogate to denounce the YouTube video that sparked violence across the Middle East on the Sunday talk shows a week ago, it turned to Rice. On almost every network, she delivered the administration's message that the U.S. government had nothing to do with the video. She has come under fire from Republicans for saying the attack in Libya that killed four Americans was not planned, an issue that remains unresolved.

But in New York, critics maintain that Rice's brash style has sometimes complicated high-wire diplomacy and that her promotion of human rights has been selective.

"She tends to be strongest when the human rights violations involved are committed by U.S. adversaries," said Kenneth Roth, the executive director of Human Rights Watch. "But she is less strong

when violations are committed by U.S. friends, like Rwanda or Israel, or by governments more in the middle, like Sri Lanka."

Roth said he believes that Rice sought this summer to block the release of a damning U.N. report accusing Rwanda of backing army mutineers in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. He said Rice's discomfort with the failure of the Clinton administration to stop the genocide in Rwanda created a blind spot in her human rights vision for Rwandan President Paul Kagame, whose military victory ended the slaughter.

Rice was a rising star on President Bill Clinton's National Security Council in 1994 as the killings were under way in Rwanda and the international community did not intervene. She later told Samantha Powers, a journalist at the time and now an Obama aide, "I swore to myself that if I ever faced such a crisis again, I would come down on the side of dramatic action, going down in flames if that was required."

Rice told The Washington Post that "it's not true" that she tried to block the recent Congo report. She said that she merely asked for its release to be delayed to provide Rwanda a fair chance to respond and that she has forcefully criticized Rwanda for its alleged interference in Congo.

A senior administration official said that during her trip to Rwanda in November she delivered the sternest American criticism of Rwandan political repression to date and that she was attacked sharply in the country for doing so.

Her remarks came a day before her family arrived in Rwanda for a vacation and a day after Rice had visited Libya, where NATO-backed rebels ousted Moammar Gaddafi. In her speech, she sought to compare the two countries' experiences. "Just yesterday, I was in Libya," she told her Rwandan audience. "I knew from my visit to Rwanda in 1994 that such atrocities were likely in Libya, if Gaddafi went unchecked. I knew we should act, as did President Obama."

Edward Luck, a U.N. special adviser for Responsibility to Protect, a fledgling U.N. doctrine that obliges states to take action to halt mass atrocities, said he worries that boasting by Washington, Paris and London about toppling Gaddafi has made it harder to strike a deal with Syria's Assad to protect civilians, setting back the international effort to promote the doctrine.

"I think they lost sight in both cases of the fundamental issue of the protection of populations over time and started getting into the regime-change thing," he said.

Rice countered that "there is no way on God's green earth that had Libya gone down differently the Russians would have been any more ready to allow the Security Council to do anything to put pressure on Assad."

But with the council unable to act, Rice has pursued a more cautious track on Syria, arguing against U.S. military involvement.

"I'm not of the view that this is a circumstance in which external military intervention is wise for the United States or others," she said. "I don't think that [the Responsibility to Protect] was ever a cookie-cutter response that was going to automatically be implemented everywhere things went badly."
(top)

White House pressured to tell more about Benghazi attack

September 23, 2012

Christian Science Monitor

By Brad Knickerbocker

President Obama is under increasing pressure to explain and respond more fully to the Sept. 11 attack on the US consulate in Benghazi, Libya in which the American ambassador and three other embassy personnel were killed.

"The president needs to go on TV and set this right. It can't be about the election. It has to be about an American ambassador who was killed," Rep. Mike Rogers, chairman of the House Intelligence Committee and a former FBI agent, said on CNN's "State of the Union" Sunday. "He needs to be out front and leading on this issue. He shouldn't wait until after November."

Over on "Fox News Sunday," Obama campaign adviser and former White House press secretary Robert Gibbs was pushing back against critics who say the administration message on the issue have been conflicted or confusing.

Blasphemy riots: 6 examples around the world

"Absolutely no one intentionally or unintentionally misled anybody involved in this," Mr. Gibbs said. "Nobody wants to get to the bottom of this more than the President and the Secretary of State so that we can protect our missions and our consulates throughout the world and remain engaged."

Nearly two weeks after the attack in Benghazi, it remains unclear what prompted it or the degree to which Al Qaeda or some other terrorist organization was involved.

Early on, the Obama administration said the protest against a crude US-made anti-Islam YouTube video "seems to have been hijacked ... by some individual clusters of extremists who came with heavier weapons," as UN Ambassador Susan Rice said last Sunday. In other words, it wasn't a coordinated, pre-planned attack but something more spontaneous for which there was no "actionable intelligence," as Ambassador Rice put it, that might have alerted officials able to protect against it.

Since then, White House officials have acknowledged that it was a sophisticated "terrorist attack." Meanwhile, news reports have suggested that there was no video-related anti-US protest before the armed attack that killed Ambassador Christopher Stevens and the three other men.

"I have seen no information that shows that there was a protest going on as you have seen around any other embassy at the time," Rep. Mike Rogers said on CNN Sunday. "It was clearly designed to be an attack."

Concern about security in Benghazi is at the heart of a controversy over CNN's reporting information it found in Stevens' journal several days after he was killed.

Based on journal entries, CNN said that Stevens was concerned about security threats in Benghazi and a "rise in Islamic extremism." The public has a right to know what CNN learned from "multiple sources" about fears and warnings of a terror threat before the Benghazi attack, the channel said, "which are now

raising questions about why the State Department didn't do more to protect Ambassador Stevens and other US personnel."

State Department officials are furious that CNN used Stevens' journal entries in its reports, apparently against the wished of the late ambassador's family.

State Department spokesman Philippe Reines called CNN's actions "indefensible."

"Whose first instinct is to remove from a crime scene the diary of a man killed along with three other Americans serving our country, read it, transcribe it, email it around your newsroom for others to read and then call the family?" Mr. Reines asked.

Whether or not Al Qaeda was behind the attack on the US consulate, the organization has cooperated with terrorist groups worldwide including "The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group." In a 2008 cable made public by WikiLeaks, Ambassador Stevens himself described the Libyan port city of Derna (in the eastern part of the country, as is Benghazi) as "a wellspring of Libyan foreign fighters" for Al Qaeda in Iraq.
(top)

Gibbs: No one misled over Libya attacks

September 23, 2012

The Washington Times

By Paige Winfield Cunningham

"Absolutely not," Obama campaign adviser Robert Gibbs replied to "Fox News Sunday" host Chris Wallace when asked whether the administration was politically motivated when it initially mischaracterized the recent attack on the U.S. Consulate in Libya.

"No one either intentionally or unintentionally misled anyone involved in this," Mr. Gibbs said. "We learned more information every single day about what happened. No one wants to get to the bottom of this more than we do."

Some House Republicans have accused the president of intentionally misleading the public about the Sept. 11 attack in Benghazi that killed four Americans, including the U.S. Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens.

Susan Rice, U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, initially said the strike was spontaneous. But top officials offered a different version late last week, with Secretary of State Hilary Rodham Clinton and White House press secretary Jay Carney calling it a terror attack.

Mr. Gibbs defended Ms. Rice, saying she was merely offering the best information the administration had at the time.

"The best information we had at the point in which she gave that answer is the answer she gave," Mr. Gibbs said. "As we have learned more and as this investigation continues, I would anticipate we will continue to learn more facts about the awful assassination murder of our ambassador."

(top)

South Sudan, Sudan talk to finalize border, other issues

September 24, 2012

CNN

The leaders of Sudan and South Sudan met Sunday in Ethiopia, attempting to resolve -- under international pressure -- issues arising from the latter nation's independence just over a year ago.

The creation of South Sudan stemmed from a referendum, agreed to by leaders in the Sudanese capital of Khartoum, in which people in the southern part of the landlocked African nation voted for independence.

South Sudan formally became a new nation in July 2011, though significant issues with Sudan remain. Chief among them are the demarcation of the border between them, the possible creation of a demilitarized zone and the transportation and processing of oil from South Sudan, which got around 70% of the formerly united country's reserves when it became independent.

On Sunday, top officials from the two countries, including South Sudan President Salva Kiir Mayardit and Sudan President Omar al-Bashir, met at the Sheraton Hotel in Addis Ababa in an attempt to bridge these differences.

Speaking from Ethiopia, Sudanese official Badreldin Abdalla said there had been "progress" in the talks, which were broken into different "clusters" reflecting the specific issues being discussed.

"They are going to have very substantive meetings to finalize the negotiations," Abdalla said.

At the United Nations headquarters in New York, Sudan's ambassador to the U.N., Dafalla Al-Haj Yousif, likewise pointed to what he described as "good progress in all the issues discussed between the two parties."

Members of the delegations plan to talk with officials in their respective capitals, then to meet again soon to ideally move even closer to a final resolution, he said.

His South Sudanese counterpart at the United Nations, Francis Nazario, said his nation is committed to reaching an agreement in accordance with a U.N. resolution "and the African Union roadmap" -- which lays out details for a possible final deal, including setting up a demilitarized zone along the two countries' border.

But Nazario said Sudan was not on board, at least yet.

"The Republic of South Sudan is concerned that the Sudan negotiating team has not accepted the African Union road map for the purpose of setting up the demilitarized zone," he said.

U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Susan Rice called Sudan's refusal to "accept ... the map" was "an issue of utmost concern." She said the international community is prepared to act to spur the countries to reach a resolution.

"Our aim is not to propose sanctions," Rice said. "Our purpose is to spur the parties to meet their obligations and to create a foundation for lasting peace."

Peter Wittig, Germany's U.N. ambassador and the current president of the U.N. Security Council, noted the governments have failed to reach a peace deal in the past but said they cannot afford to let the disagreements linger.

"Council members shared the view that the suffering of the people ... requires that both sides act with a sense of urgency, and both parties should not allow technicalities to stand in the way," said Wittig.

"There's a great awareness that there's not much time left."

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UNITED NATIONS

Frustration And Turmoil As World Leaders Meet

September 24, 2012

Associated Press

By Edith M. Lederer

UNITED NATIONS - Democratic uprisings across the Arab world and the Palestinians' bid for U.N. membership sparked excitement and hope at last year's meeting of world leaders. But with war raging in Syria, the Palestinian application sidelined, and deadly protests generated by an anti-Islamic video, the mood as this year's U.N. gathering begins is one of disappointment and frustration.

More than 120 presidents, prime ministers and monarchs meeting this week under heavy security at the U.N. General Assembly and in sideline events will also be preoccupied by rising tension over Iran's nuclear program and the possibility of an Israeli strike against Tehran's nuclear facilities, al-Qaida's inroads in the Sahel region of west Africa, especially in Mali, and the first decline in years in international aid to help developing countries combat poverty.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon predicted that the ministerial session, which starts Tuesday, will be among the busiest ever, reflecting "the tumultuous time in which we live - a time of turmoil and transition." It is also taking place "against a backdrop of widespread violence linked to intolerance," he said.

Ahead of the opening ministerial session, which President Barack Obama will address, the U.N. chief has invited leaders to the first high-level meeting on the rule of law on Monday, hoping they "will send a strong signal to the world's people that they are serious about establishing well-functioning institutions and delivering justice."

Diplomats aren't expecting any breakthroughs on the deadlock over Syria, which Ban said "will be foremost in our minds," despite a number of sideline meetings starting Monday when the new U.N.-Arab League envoy Lakhdar Brahimi briefs the U.N. Security Council behind closed doors on his recent talks with Syrian President Bashar Assad and other leaders in the region.

"To increase pressure and to increase the isolation of the regime of Assad is one of the goals of this week," Germany's Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle told reporters Sunday.

The Syrian conflict has bitterly divided the most powerful members of the Security Council, paralyzing the only U.N. body that can impose global sanctions and authorize military action. Russia, Syria's key protector, and China, have vetoed three Western-backed resolutions aimed at pressuring Assad to stop

the violence and start political talks with opponents of his family's 40-year dictatorship who began demonstrating against his regime 18 months ago.

Germany's U.N. Ambassador Peter Wittig, the current Security Council president, said "change in the Arab world" will be uppermost in the minds of the leaders - as was the case at last year's session.

Egypt's President Mohammed Morsi, an Islamist who was sworn in on June 30 after the first democratic elections in the country's modern history, will be addressing the 193-member assembly for the first time on Wednesday. So too will Yemen's President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi, who took office in February following more than a year of political turmoil and is now trying to steer the country's transition to democracy.

Last year, Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas stole the spotlight with his submission of an application for Palestine to become the 194th member state of the United Nations. The United States, Israel's closest ally, made clear that it would veto any application until the Palestinians and Israelis negotiate an end to their decades-long conflict.

So Abbas is expected to come to the General Assembly on Thursday with a more modest proposal - to upgrade Palestine's current status as a U.N. observer to a non-member observer state - but likely putting off the date for submission of a resolution to the assembly, where there are no vetoes, until after the U.S. presidential election in November.

The Palestinians expect overwhelming support from the assembly for the enhanced U.N. status, which they hope will give broad international legitimacy to the pre-1967 lines as Palestine's border and grant them access to U.N. agencies and possibly the International Criminal Court.

With no sign of an end to the Security Council's paralysis over Syria, Wittig said Germany chose to focus the council's ministerial session Wednesday on something new and positive in the Mideast - "the emergence of the Arab League as a regional actor that has proved to be essential for conflict resolution."

The 21-member Arab League has shaken off decades of near total submission to the will of the region's leaders and is seeking to transform itself following the seismic changes brought about by the Arab Spring. The league has supported the rebels who ousted Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi and suspended Syria in response to Assad's brutal crackdown against his opponents.

"This organization is promoting the values that the United Nations is standing for - human rights, rule of law, democracy, pluralism," the fight against corruption and promoting economic opportunity, Wittig said.

Another issue looming large over the ministerial session is Iran's nuclear program, with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu convinced that the Iranians are close to developing a nuclear weapon - which Tehran vehemently denies.

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who will step down next year, makes his final speech to the General Assembly on Wednesday. Netanyahu speaks on Thursday, before a closed-door meeting of senior diplomats, and possibly ministers, from the six countries trying to rein in Iran's nuclear ambitions - the U.S., Russia, China, Britain, France and Germany.

Secretary-General Ban met Ahmadinejad on Sunday and "urged Iran to take the measures necessary to build international confidence in the exclusively peaceful nature of its nuclear program," U.N. spokesman Martin Nesirky said.

The U.N. chief also raised the potentially harmful consequences of inflammatory rhetoric "from various countries in the Middle East" and "the grave regional implications of the worsening situation in Syria and underlined the devastating humanitarian impact," Nesirky said.

Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, secretary general of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, said the U.S.-produced film denigrating the Prophet Muhammad will be at the top of the agenda of a ministerial meeting of its 57 members on the sidelines of the assembly. He said the international community needs to unite behind action to implement international law which warns against any advocacy of religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, aggression or violence.

There will also be sessions to promote the achievement of U.N. anti-poverty goals by 2015, sustainable energy and an end to polio.

(top)

Events In Muslim World Bear On Obama's Speech At United Nations

September 24, 2012

Washington Times

By Dave Boyer

A year after President Obama largely defused a diplomatic showdown at the United Nations over Palestinian statehood, his difficulties with the Muslim world are multiplying rapidly as he prepares to address the U.N. General Assembly on Tuesday.

Across the Middle East and beyond, protesters have stormed U.S. diplomatic posts, killing four Americans in Libya in a terrorist attack on Sept. 11 and clashing with security forces elsewhere in a wave of anti-U.S. violence.

A Pakistani government minister Sunday issued a fatwa against the U.S. producer of an anti-Islam movie blamed by some for the worldwide outburst against America, and the leader of Egypt's largest ultraorthodox Islamist party called on Muslim leaders to demand that the United Nations criminalize contempt of religion.

In Syria, the slaughter of anti-government protesters goes on despite the Obama administration's diplomatic efforts, as if the regime of President Bashar Assad is mocking Mr. Obama's creation last spring of an "atrocities prevention board" in Washington.

In Afghanistan, the number of "insider" killings of NATO forces by Afghan troops has increased so much that NATO has suspended most mutual training missions, cooperation that the Obama administration views as the key to turning over security of the country to the Afghans.

In Iran, work on a suspected nuclear weapons program continues as Israel grows increasingly agitated at what it perceives as Mr. Obama's failure to take strong enough action against the Iranians.

The broader range of crises in the Arab world this year is especially uncomfortable to address for Mr. Obama, who has built his foreign policy approach to Muslim countries on a more moral philosophy that emphasizes encouraging pro-democracy movements and less focus on military solutions.

"The president faces a much more difficult challenge now," said Stewart Patrick, a senior fellow on national security and global governance at the Council on Foreign Relations. "It's all well and good to promote human rights, and the United States should do that, but the reality is that it's going to be a long, painful process. The president may have built up some unrealistic expectations with some of his statements."

A spokesman for the president's national security council said that as Mr. Obama prepares to deliver his speech to the U.N., "the United States is in a stronger position than we were when he took office."

"Any time the president goes to the U.N. General Assembly, he has an opportunity to set the agenda on the world stage as the leader of the world's most powerful nation," said spokesman Tommy Vietor. "He does so with the credibility of strengthening our alliances, ending the war in Iraq, devastating al Qaeda, and rallying international action on challenges like securing nuclear materials and stopping the spread of nuclear weapons."

This year, too, Mr. Obama needs to aim his message at U.S. voters in the midst of his re-election bid, with Republican rival Mitt Romney accusing him of apologizing to Islamic extremists and failing to stand strongly enough with Israel.

At the opening of last year's U.N. General Assembly, Mr. Obama was facing the delicate problem of threatening to veto Palestinian statehood in the U.N. Security Council, an outcome that likely would have inflamed anti-U.S. tensions in the Middle East. In his speech, Mr. Obama said that the Palestinians must make peace with Israel before they gain statehood and that the U.N. must be an arbiter for Israelis and Palestinians.

Although there has been virtually no progress in the so-called "peace process," analysts generally credit Mr. Obama with tamping down the furor over the Palestinians last year at the U.N. There was also the U.S.-led NATO action in Libya that helped to topple the regime of dictator Moammar Gadhafi without the loss of any U.S. troops.

"Last year, he was in a position to be able to tout the success of the basically blood-free intervention in Libya," Mr. Patrick said. "There are a number of things [this year] that make the situation much less attractive for him."

With the anti-U.S. protests roiling the Middle East, several analysts said they expect Mr. Obama will have to walk a fine line by defending a filmmaker's right to free speech while rejecting the anti-Islam message of his film.

"Islamic leaders in the Arab League, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and even Turkish leader Recep Tayyip Erdogan have all announced a push to criminalize speech that offends Muslims," said Michael Rubin, resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute. "It is essential that Obama remember his roots as a law lecturer and give an impassioned defense of the importance of free speech. Free speech- the basic right upon which centuries of progress has been based - is under unprecedented

assault. It's time for Obama to stand up and lead rather than merely react with platitudes and apologies."

Mr. Rubin also said Mr. Obama should take a more clear-eyed view of the Arab Spring revolutions.

"What we now see is the Islamist extremists making their push," he said. "We are witnessing the Middle Eastern equivalent of the Reign of Terror supplanting the French Revolution, or the Bolsheviks defeating the Mensheviks. One thing is clear: The Muslim Brotherhood has seen its shadow leading to six more decades of violence."

Mr. Obama, borrowing a line from Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, has said in the wake of the attack in Libya that "we cannot replace the tyranny of a dictator with the tyranny of a mob." Mr. Vietor said the president will "put forward a vision of U.S. leadership" in the Middle East.

"I would certainly expect the president to address the recent unrest in the Muslim world, and the broader context of the democratic transitions in the Arab World," Mr. Vietor said. "The president will make it clear that we reject the views in this video, while also underscoring that violence is never acceptable - a message that has been echoed by the leaders he has personally reached out to in places like Libya, Egypt and Yemen. He will also send a clear message that the United States will never retreat from the world, will bring justice to those who harm Americans, and will stand strongly for our democratic values abroad."

Mr. Patrick said the president also may need to explain to the Muslim world why the United States doesn't simply arrest the movie producer (although the man, Nakouly Basseley Nakoula, was taken in for questioning by authorities in Los Angeles and then released).

"There are limited things that the United States can do in the age of global information when some ass in the United States can put together a crude video attacking the prophet," Mr. Patrick said. "Then suddenly it's beamed all over the world and taken advantage of by extremist groups to mobilize major protests. It's very hard to know what any president could do in that situation to try to tamp down things."

Emad Abdel Ghaffour, head of Egypt's Salafist Nour Party, told Reuters in an interview that the U.N. should pass a resolution to criminalize contempt of Islam and the Prophet Muhammad.

"The voice of reason in the West will prevail if there is mutual respect, dialogue and efficient lobbying for this critical resolution," he said.
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Britain, France, Germany Call For New Iran Sanctions September 24, 2012

AFP

Britain, France and Germany have officially called for new European Union sanctions against Iran over its nuclear program, diplomats said.

The foreign ministers of the three countries wrote to EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton last week calling for tougher measures as the showdown with Tehran becomes more tense, a European diplomat told AFP on condition of anonymity.

The EU is working on more sanctions as President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad seeks to counter the pressure on his country at this week's UN General Assembly in New York.

Ahmadinejad met UN leader Ban Ki-moon on Sunday as the EU foreign policy chief held talks on Iran and other topics with US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in New York.

Details of the new EU measures are still being worked on but foreign ministers from the 27-nation bloc will discuss the move at a meeting in Brussels on October 15.

The United States and its European allies say that Iran is working toward a nuclear bomb. Iran says its research is for peaceful energy purposes. There has been mounting speculation in recent months that Israel is planning a military strike on Iran's bunkered nuclear facilities.

The United States, Britain and France warned at the UN Security Council last week that time is running out for a negotiated solution with Iran.

"It is necessary that we sharpen the sanctions," said a second western official, confirming the request by foreign ministers William Hague of Britain, Laurent Fabius of France and Guido Westerwelle of Germany.

"We think there is still time for a political solution, a diplomatic solution, and this is what we are working for. But we cannot accept nuclear weapons in the hands of Iran," said the official, also speaking on condition of anonymity.

Ashton is to chair a meeting in New York on Thursday of the six nations -- the EU three, plus the United States, Russia and China -- who have been seeking to negotiate a solution with Iran.

The international community has pursued a dual track of pressure through sanctions while seeking to negotiate. But the US and European nations say Iran is refusing to talk.

UN chief Ban "urged Iran to take the measures necessary to build international confidence in the exclusively peaceful nature of its nuclear program," said a UN spokeswoman, Vannina Maestracci.

Ban and Ahmadinejad also discussed the war in Syria and the protests in the Muslim world against a US-made film that mocks Islam.

The showdown with Iran is one of the key topics at the UN assembly where Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is also scheduled to speak.

Ahmadinejad, who will address world leaders on Wednesday, is probably making his last appearance at the UN assembly where he has become a controversial figure.

Western nations regularly walk out of his speeches in protest at his anti-Israeli comments.
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TOP STORIES

At United Nations, Renewed Focus On Syria, If Not New Ideas
September 24, 2012

New York Times

By Neil MacFarquhar

UNITED NATIONS - The raging conflict in Syria will take center stage starting Monday as some 120 world leaders converge on the United Nations for what is sometimes called "diplomacy's annual trade fair."

Syria will have to share the stage at the weeklong United Nations General Debate with other intractable diplomatic problems, of course. They include the spread of Al Qaeda across the Western Sahara; the snail's pace of negotiations over Iran's nuclear program; global riots prompted by religious intolerance; and sharp new tensions in Asia over competing claims to small, potentially mineral-rich islands.

"The deteriorating situation in Syria will be the foremost on our minds," Ban Ki-moon, the United Nations secretary general, said at a news conference last week outlining the priorities of the main session and some 50 side meetings. "It is really troubling that this situation is continuing without any immediate end to this crisis."

Attention is one thing, however, and progress something else entirely.

Despite at least three high-level meetings on Syria, and countless other talks, not to mention day after day of speeches from presidents, kings and other potentates, no broad new initiatives are expected.

"Everybody will think of Syria, everybody will speak of Syria, especially in the speeches to the General Assembly, but I don't see anything substantial on Syria coming out of the meetings," said one veteran Western diplomat, speaking anonymously under his ministry's rules. -

That would be consistent with the United Nations' seeming return to the way it operated during the cold war, when the divisions between East and West and rich and poor states meant it provided a venue for discussion but few solutions.

President Obama, wrestling with a difficult election, will practice something like drive-by diplomacy, hosting a reception for world leaders on Monday night and speaking at the official opening on Tuesday.

But he is expected to eschew even a single solo session with any world leader, exiting quickly from the United Nations - never a broadly popular institution among Americans - to appear on "The View," the ABC talk show, and to speak at the Clinton Global Initiative. Mitt Romney will also speak at the Clinton Global Initiative, a forum set up by former President Bill Clinton that now competes with the United Nations for high-level speakers and attention.

Instead of Mr. Obama, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton will hold the meetings with other leaders.

The Israeli prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, will most likely use his time at the United Nations to press for consensus on pushing Iran to dismantle its suspected nuclear weapons program or face an attack.

Mr. Netanyahu will address the General Debate on Wednesday just moments after the Palestinian leader, Mahmoud Abbas, who is expected to propose that the United Nations make Palestine a "nonmember state," a rather symbolic status far short of the full membership he demanded in his speech last year.

If Syria is Topic A this year, it was Palestinian membership a year ago.

The Palestinians are not expected to press for a vote on nonmember status before the Nov. 6 American election. Indeed, there will be nary a high-level meeting this week on the moribund Arab-Israeli peace process.

The desire to avoid contentious issues is seen behind Mr. Obama's decision to curb his time here. "The Americans have a talent for finding reasons not to act on the peace process," said one Western ambassador, following diplomatic protocol in not publicly criticizing an ally.

One new diplomatic star here will be Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the opposition leader in Myanmar, who will attend for the first time as an elected member of Parliament after years of detention.

When Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi appeared briefly on Friday, normally blasé ambassadors and staff members stopped in their tracks, whipping out their smartphones to take videos as she glided past. The new leaders of Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and Yemen are also likely to attract a great deal of attention for what they have to say about stabilizing their combustible nations after sweeping political change.

Every year there is some manner of grand theme, and this year "rule of law" will be the focus at a one-day meeting on Monday.

"There is a growing realization that rule of law is an important part of living up to the three objectives of the U.N.: peace, development and human rights," said Jan Eliasson, the deputy secretary general.

Of course, all 193 member states do not use the phrase with the same intent. The West largely sees the issue as ensuring that all states respect basic rights at home, like having an independent judiciary and equal access to the courts; in much of the rest of the world, the term refers to the need to respect international law.

Also, Russia and China balked at the last minute about the way the final document referred to Security Council reform, diplomats said, so it is still not clear whether the meeting will produce even an anemic agreement.

It is another example of what seasoned diplomats call a return to form at the United Nations, when the two giants of Communism were so distracted by their own internal changes that they let the world body run on a largely Western agenda.

Now Moscow and Beijing are signaling their objection to international meddling in any internal affairs. Syria has become their prime example, which is why so little progress is expected.

Both have vetoed three Security Council resolutions addressing the Syria conflict. It does not help matters that the Syrian government and the armed opposition are seemingly locked in a death match, but many governments are convinced that only united Council action can break that after some 18 months of fighting.

Aside from their opposition because of diplomatic precedent, Russia and China are also worried that the rise of Islamic extremists in Syria will inspire new religious extremism at home.

Some Arab leaders will use the meetings here to try to convince the two that the risk of fueling extremism will be even greater as the conflict rages on, one senior Arab official said.

Failing a political solution, Mr. Ban said the least the United Nations could do was to try to address the humanitarian crisis, with some 2.5 million Syrians affected and winter looming. The United Nations needs \$350 million to help, he said, with only about 40 percent of that donated so far after months of appeals.

Instead, the United Nations has raided its emergency funds to take care of ordinary Syrians. ([top](#))

U.N. Stalemate on Damascus Clouds Meeting

September 24, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By JOE LAURIA

UNITED NATIONS—The United Nations' inability to resolve the Syrian crisis is highlighting how competing interests have hampered the body's ability to tackle some big global issues, as the annual General Assembly meeting gets set to open Tuesday in New York.

The U.N. Security Council couldn't unite on Syria as Russia and China vetoed three resolutions criticizing Damascus, including one threatening sanctions in July. This led U.N. and Arab League envoy Kofi Annan to resign. His successor, veteran Algerian diplomat Lakhdar Brahimi, who briefs the Security Council on Monday, has lowered his goals.

The lack of unity on Syria has emphasized the fact that the competing interests of the 193 member nations often result in extremely compromised agreements. In the Security Council, it takes just one veto among the five permanent members to stop any accord.

"The issues that the U.N. works together on are not ones of vital interest for the major powers," a Western diplomat said. "People say on Syria the U.N. is irrelevant. But we are irrelevant on a lot of other issues, too."

For instance, for years the U.N. has had virtually no impact on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas is expected on Thursday to say he will seek a General Assembly vote to become a U.N. nonmember state after the U.S. presidential election on Nov. 6, diplomats said.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is to speak a few hours later, and is expected to focus on what he sees as the threat of a nuclear-armed Iran. Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is to address the Assembly on Wednesday and will likely again prompt a walkout of U.S., Israeli and European diplomats. Foreign ministers of the European Union negotiations on Iran's nuclear program are tentatively scheduled to meet Thursday afternoon.

Cooperation at the U.N. is found on issues such as Somalia, where terrorists have again struck in recent days; Mali, facing a rebellion fueled by loose stocks of deposed Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi's weapons; and the simmering dispute between Sudan and South Sudan. Summit meetings will be held this week on those issues as well as nuclear terrorism, HIV-AIDS, sexual violence against women, the rule of international law, a global initiative on education and a French-led meeting on the death penalty.

"But on the issues like Syria, no way," the Western diplomat said. "At the same time, you can argue that if there is a political solution in Syria, and it's a big if, frankly, I think that you need a channel for negotiation and I don't see which other channel than the U.N. could be used."

When the Security Council faltered on Syria, the issue was moved to the General Assembly by the Assembly's then-president, Nassir Abdulaziz al Nasser of Qatar, which openly supports the Syrian rebels. Vuk Jeremic, Serbia's foreign minister, is the new Assembly president.

Under Mr. Nasser, the General Assembly passed three nonbinding resolutions, with large majorities condemning Damascus and calling on President Bashar al-Assad to step down. In the Assembly, Russia and China's votes have equal weight with those of the smallest nations. Nevertheless, the bitter international divide on Syria spilled into the Assembly, as this week's speeches are expected to do, since it gave a platform to Syria's ambassador to attack Mr. Nasser's government.

"It is strange that some oligarchic states who sponsor draft resolutions on transfer of power and on human rights are those very states that do not even have a constitution, let alone elections and only practice democracy through satellite TV channels and fancy conference halls," said Syrian envoy Bashar Ja'afari, as Mr. Nasser looked on.

"He accused me personally, but as president I didn't want to come down to the same level of language," Mr. Nasser said in an interview. "I gave him three minutes, he spent 15 minutes. So at the end we switched off the microphone."

That level of bitterness over Syria may re-emerge this week as world leaders take the Assembly podium. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov is to speak on Friday and Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Moallem is to speak on Oct. 1, the meeting's last day.

Sparks could also fly Wednesday at a foreign ministers' meeting on the Arab Spring in the Security Council, chaired by Germany's foreign minister. And U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on Friday is chairing a meeting of the Friends of Syria, a 70-nation group supporting the Syrian rebels harshly criticized by Russia.

Making his debut on the world stage is Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi, who this month called for Mr. Assad to step down.

President Barack Obama may condemn the Syrian government too when he makes a foreign-policy speech on Tuesday, six weeks before the election. But Mr. Obama has been criticized as weak on Syria by his Republican challenger Mitt Romney, who is speaking in the same hour across town at the Clinton Global Initiative meetings, where he may lay out his views on how relevant he thinks the U.N. is.
(top)

Deadly Attack in Libya Was Major Blow To C.I.A. Efforts

September 24, 2012

New York Times

By Eric Schmitt, Helene Cooper And Michael S. Schmidt

WASHINGTON - The attack in Benghazi, Libya, that killed Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens and three other Americans has dealt the Central Intelligence Agency a major setback in its intelligence-gathering efforts at a time of increasing instability in the North African nation.

Among the more than two dozen American personnel evacuated from the city after the assault on the American mission and a nearby annex were about a dozen C.I.A. operatives and contractors, who played a crucial role in conducting surveillance and collecting information on an array of militant armed groups in and around the city.

"It's a catastrophic intelligence loss," said one American official who has served in Libya and who spoke on the condition of anonymity because the F.B.I. is still investigating the attack. "We got our eyes poked out."

The C.I.A.'s surveillance targets in Benghazi and eastern Libya include Ansar al-Sharia, a militia that some have blamed for the attack, as well as suspected members of Al Qaeda's affiliate in North Africa, known as Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb.

Eastern Libya is being buffeted by strong crosscurrents that intelligence operatives are trying to monitor closely. The killing of Mr. Stevens has ignited public anger against the militias, underscored on Friday when thousands of Libyans took to the streets of Benghazi to demand that the groups be disarmed. The makeup of militias varies widely; some are moderate, while others are ultraconservative Islamists known as Salafis and still others are loyalists from the government of Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi, the deposed Libyan leader.

"The region's deeply entrenched Salafi community is undergoing significant upheaval, with debate raging between a current that is amenable to political integration and a more militant strand that opposes democracy," Frederic Wehrey, a senior policy analyst with the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace who closely follows Libya and visited there recently, wrote in a paper this month, "The Struggle for Security in Eastern Libya."

American operatives at the mission also assisted State Department contractors and Libyan officials in tracking shoulder-fired missiles taken from the former arsenals of Colonel Qaddafi's forces; they aided in efforts to secure Libya's chemical weapons stockpiles; and they helped train Libya's new intelligence service, officials said.

Senior American officials acknowledged the intelligence setback, but insisted that information was still being collected using a variety of informants on the ground, systems that intercept electronic communications like cellphone conversations and satellite imagery. "The U.S. isn't close to being blind in Benghazi and eastern Libya," said an American official.

Spokesmen for the C.I.A., the State Department and the White House declined to comment on the matter on Sunday.

Within months of the start of Libyan revolution in February 2011, the C.I.A. began building a meaningful but covert presence in Benghazi, a locus of the rebel efforts to oust the government of Colonel Qaddafi.

Though the agency has been cooperating with the new post-Qaddafi Libyan intelligence service, the size of the C.I.A.'s presence in Benghazi apparently surprised some Libyan leaders. The deputy prime minister, Mustafa Abushagour, was quoted in The Wall Street Journal last week saying that he learned about some of the delicate American operations in Benghazi only after the attack on the mission, in

large part because a surprisingly large number of Americans showed up at the Benghazi airport to be evacuated.

"We have no problem with intelligence sharing or gathering, but our sovereignty is also key," said Mr. Abushagour.

The attack has raised questions about the adequacy of security preparations at the two American compounds in Benghazi: the American mission, the main diplomatic facility where Mr. Stevens and another American diplomat died of smoke inhalation after an initial attack, and an annex a half-mile away that encompassed four buildings inside a low-walled compound.

From these buildings, the C.I.A. personnel carried out their secret missions. The New York Times agreed to withhold locations and details of these operations at the request of Obama administration officials, who said that disclosing such information could jeopardize future sensitive government activities and put at risk American personnel working in similar settings around the world.

In Benghazi, both compounds were temporary homes in a volatile city teeming with militants, and they were never intended to become permanent diplomatic missions with appropriate security features built into them.

Neither was heavily guarded, and the annex was never intended to be a "safe house," as initial accounts suggested. Two of the mission's guards - Tyrone S. Woods and Glen A. Doherty, former members of the Navy SEALs - were killed just outside the villa's front gate. A mortar round struck the roof of the building where the Americans had scrambled for cover.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton announced last week the creation of a review board to examine the attacks. The board is to be led by a veteran diplomat and former undersecretary of state, Thomas R. Pickering.

The F.B.I. has sent investigators - many from its New York field office - to Benghazi, but they have been hampered by the city's tenuous security environment and the fact that they arrived more than a day after the attack occurred, according to senior American officials.

Complicating the investigation, the officials said, is that many of the Americans who were evacuated from Benghazi after the attack are now scattered across Europe and the United States. It is also unclear, one of the officials said, whether there was much forensic evidence that could be extracted from the scene of the attacks.

Investigators and intelligence officials are now focusing on the possibility that the attackers were members of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, or at least were in communication with the group during the four hours that elapsed between the initial attack at the mission and the second one at the mission's annex.

Representative Mike Rogers, a Michigan Republican who heads the House Intelligence Committee, said on CNN's "State of the Union" program on Sunday that there was "a high degree of probability that it is an Al Qaeda or Al Qaeda-affiliated group that had a very specific target in mind, and that was to attack the consulate and cause as much harm, chaos and death as possible."

Foreign diplomats say that under security circumstances like those now in Libya, it is generally standard procedure to have a "safe house" in the vicinity of a main diplomatic facility that can be easily defended and evacuated.

"Normally, you try to keep the location of such a safe house secret, but in Benghazi right now, I think this was next to impossible," Col. Wolfgang Puzstai, who until early August was Austria's defense attaché to Libya and visited the country every month, wrote in an e-mail. "There are not too many foreigners hanging around, and it is quite easy to track them."

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Government Issues Order To Disband Libya Forces

September 24, 2012

[New York Times](#)

By David D. Kirkpatrick

CAIRO - Libya's interim government on Sunday ordered the breakup of all militias that do not fall under its authority, and demanded that those militias pull out of military compounds and public property within 48 hours.

The order came in response to an upwelling of public anger at the militias after an armed group assaulted a United States diplomatic mission in Benghazi earlier this month, killing Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens. Exasperated by the interim government's failure to curb the militia brigades, thousands of civilians swarmed into the headquarters of several of them in Benghazi on Friday and forced their fighters to scatter - in effect, an angry mob demanding law and order.

Mohamed al-Magariief, the president of Libya's national Congress and the interim head of state, apparently sought to both appease public anger and capitalize on it with the order to withdraw and disband. Previous interim leaders have issued similar calls before without success, in part because the Libyan government still depends on many of the self-organized militias to act as its military, police and national guard.

Hundreds of such armed groups were formed during and after the uprising against Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi, typically armed with Kalashnikov rifles, rocket-propelled grenades and truck-mounted artillery captured or looted from the colonel's armories. Since his overthrow the groups have been both the main guardians of the social order in Libya and the chief menace to it.

As recently as Friday the Libyan Army's chief of staff, Yousef al-Mangoush, urged protesters not to molest the many militias that were now officially authorized and ostensibly operating under the army's direction, because the government still needed them to control the country.

But it can be difficult to tell which militias are authorized and which are not. The authorized militias usually still report to their original commanders, and those commanders may or may not follow orders from the Defense Ministry or act on their own. The fighters and their commanders may say sometimes that they are part of the Libyan government and other times that they are outside it.

On Friday, the mob in Benghazi first marched against the Islamist militia that is believed to have led the attack on the American mission, but that militia, known as Ansar al-Sharia and opposed to democracy, also proudly plays a role in local civic life by guarding a major hospital.

The mob's next target was the Rafallah al-Sehati Brigade, which has Islamist ties but a more moderate and democratic character. That brigade is authorized, a mainstay of security in the area, and an ally of the militia that came to the defense of the American mission. Members of Rafallah al-Sehati stood with the army chief of staff at the Benghazi airport when he spoke in defense of the authorized militia. But the protesters attacked the brigade anyway, and at least four people were reportedly killed before its members fled.

Only a minority of the militias openly flout the government's authority the way Ansar al-Sharia did, and the government's order on Sunday applied only to the unauthorized groups. The Libyan state news agency said that the army would "use force to carry out these orders." But it was unclear whether that referred to the use of a militia nominally under the Defense Ministry's control or to some other new and more professional force.

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Libyan Army Clamps Down on Militias Facing Backlash

September 24, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By CHARLES LEVINSON and MARGARET COKER

The Libyan army ejected a rogue militia from its headquarters on Sunday, the first move in a government-threatened crackdown on such groups.

Libya's new government appears intent on capitalizing on the popular backlash that erupted locally in the wake of the killing of the American ambassador this month.

Militias that have held sway in much of Libya since the revolution that toppled Moammar Gadhafi last October appear to have rapidly retreated in recent days amid mass demonstrations that appear to have emboldened the government to take action.

Libya's state news agency reported on Sunday that the army had peacefully evicted one militia from an army building near Tripoli's airport hours after issuing a 48-hour ultimatum for rogue militias to give up state and military premises and turn over weapons. The army pledged it would use force against any groups that refused to heed the ultimatum, the state news agency reported.

On Friday, thousands of demonstrators in Benghazi stormed the compound of the militant Islamist group Ansar al-Sharia and set it on fire.

Ansar has become a primary target in the search for those responsible for the Sept. 11 attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi, in which four Americans, including Ambassador Christopher Stevens, died. U.S. and Libyan officials said some of the group's members were in communication with al Qaeda ahead of the battle. The group has repeatedly denied it was responsible for organizing or directing the attack on the consulate.

But underscoring the confusion surrounding militias, protesters then lay siege to the headquarters of another militia, the Rafallah Sahati brigade, apparently unaware that it was approved by the Ministry of Defense and tasked with guarding a sizable weapons storehouse in the city. Eleven people died in the ensuing clashes.

On Saturday, the two largest Islamist militias in another eastern Libyan city, Darna, said they intended to disband and turn over their weapons to the government. Darna is significant because it has long been known as a hotbed of Islamic militancy.

Libyan officials said they are hopeful that their government has turned a corner in the struggle to rein in militias and assert control over the whole country. But many ordinary Libyans remain skeptical that powerful militias, many of which have vast weapons arsenals, will surrender so easily and may simply be beating a tactical retreat until popular anger calms.

"Some of these groups are sincerely committed to doing what's best for the country, but others—no way they'll just surrender because someone in Tripoli orders them to," said Benghazi resident Jamal el-Kour.

Since the end of the revolution last year, Libya's security establishment has been divided on how to deal with the scores of militias, composed predominantly of ex-rebels who fought to topple the Gadhafi regime.

Many local militias have been brought nominally under the government's command, providing security in places where the weak central government is unable to do so.

But other rogue militias have rebuffed invitations to work within the government umbrella. Some government officials have privately recommended that the national forces use force to disband the holdouts, citing the escalating threat of allowing these groups to remain armed and unanswerable to central authority.

However, several leading members of the transitional parliament, known as the National Transitional Council, refused to approve any armed response against the militants because of their fear of sparking an internecine war.

Mustafa Abushagour, who Congress nominated on Sept. 13 to be Libya's next prime minister and is in the process of forming a new government, told The Wall Street Journal on Thursday that he considered radical Islamist militias to be among the country's greatest national security threats, but said he would support a cautious approach to handling the issue.

He said he wasn't convinced that attacking groups like Ansar al-Sharia with force was the most effective way to stamp out their threat.

"We take [this threat] very seriously, but we have to have serious programs about how to handle it," Mr. Abushagour said. "These groups are a small segment of society. They grow in an oppressive environment....And we don't want to mimic the [oppressive Gadhafi-era environment] in which they were created."

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AFRICA

Ivory Coast Reopens Air Space With Ghana

September 24, 2012

Associated Press

ABIDJAN, Ivory Coast - Ivory Coast says it will allow flights to resume with Ghana, and has reopened its air space after closing its borders following last week's cross-border attack. However, the country has not yet agreed to reopen its land and maritime borders.

Four gunmen were killed in an attempted raid on security posts on Friday in the town of Noe, near the Ghanaian border. Military officials said late Sunday they believe the attack originated in Ghana, and the government announced Friday that all borders would be closed.

Ivory Coast accuses allies of ousted President Laurent Gbagbo, including some hiding in Ghana, of being behind a spate of attacks on military positions that began in August. Ghanaian President John Dramani Mahama has vowed not to let his country be used as a staging ground. ([top](#))

Suicide Bomber Kills 2, Injures 45 In Nigeria

September 24, 2012

Associated Press

By Shehu Saulawa

BAUCHI, Nigeria - A suicide car bomber attacked a Catholic church conducting Mass in northern Nigeria on Sunday, killing two people and wounding another 45 in a region under assault by a radical Islamist sect, officials said.

An Associated Press journalist heard the explosion after 9 a.m. Sunday in the city of Bauchi, which has seen a number of bombings and shootings blamed on the sect known as Boko Haram. The blast appeared to hit a parking lot alongside the St. John's Catholic Church in the city.

Police and military surrounded the church and did not allow journalists inside the cordon. Later at a nearby hospital, Bauchi deputy police commissioner T. Stevens told journalists that the bomber had been stopped at the church's gate, where he detonated the explosives packed inside his car.

Doctors cautioned more could die from their injuries.

"The situation has been brought under control," Stevens said. "We have our men minding all areas."

Stevens said no group or individual had claimed responsibility for the attack, though suspicion immediately fell on Boko Haram. The sect, whose name means "Western education is sacrilege" in the Hausa language of Nigeria's north, has been waging an increasingly bloody fight against nation's weak central government. More than 680 people have died in drive-by killings and bombings blamed on Boko Haram this year alone, according to an AP count. The sect has demanded the release of all its captive members and has called for strict Shariah law to be implemented across the entire country.

The sect has used suicide car bombs against churches in the past, most noticeably a 2011 Christmas Day attack on a Catholic church in Madalla near Nigeria's capital. That attack and assaults elsewhere in the country killed at least 44 people. An unclaimed car bombing on Easter in Kaduna killed at least 38 people on a busy roadway after witnesses say it was turned away from a church.

Attacks against churches by the sect have waned in recent weeks. Nigeria's military claimed it killed the sect's spokesman and a commander Sept. 17 outside the city of Kano, potentially shaking up a sect that has continued attacks despite a tighter military presence in northern cities.

The killing of members of the sect's senior leadership comes as the group recently changed some of its tactics and attacked more than 30 mobile phone towers throughout northern Nigeria, disrupting communications in a nation reliant on cellular phones.

Saturday night, the military conducted door-to-door searches in the northern cities of Damaturu and Potiskum, areas now under a 24-hour curfew that have been hard-hit by the sect.

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Hope Mounts For Deal In Sudan, S.Sudan Summit

September 23, 2012

AFP

Sudan and South Sudan's leaders will meet Sunday as international pressure mounts to settle long-running bitter disputes that have brought the former civil war foes to the brink of renewed conflict.

The rival delegations have held dragging talks that began several months before South Sudan split Africa's biggest nation in two in July 2011, when it seceded after a landslide independence vote following decades of war.

Among issues on the table Sunday are expected to be ownership of contested regions along their frontier -- especially the flashpoint Abyei region -- as well as the setting up of a demilitarised border zone after bloody clashes.

The buffer zone would also potentially cut support of rebel forces in Sudan's crisis-hit Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile regions, where Sudan accuses Juba of supplying former civil war comrades Khartoum now seeks to wipe out.

Multiple rounds of talks have failed to find solutions, but both sides have said they are now optimistic, amid the looming threat of United Nations Security Council sanctions, and the positive sign of the presidents meeting face-to-face.

"We are still facing difficulties...but we are hopeful we can reach a deal," said Atif Kiir, spokesman of South Sudan's delegation to the African Union mediated talks in the Ethiopian capital.

"The summit is to reach a comprehensive agreement between the two countries, so let us hope," his Sudanese counterpart Badr el-din Abdullah told reporters late Saturday, in a brief break from negotiations that stretched into the night.

A UN deadline passed Saturday for Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir and his Southern counterpart Salva Kiir to settle the raft of key issues unresolved when the South became the world's newest nation last year.

The deadline was set after brutal border clashes broke out in March, when Southern troops and tanks briefly wrested the valuable Heglig oil field from Khartoum's control, and Sudan launched brutal bombing raids in response.

UN leader Ban Ki-moon has called on leaders to "take responsibility for the resolution of their remaining differences, so that their summit concludes with a success that marks an end to the era of conflict."

While Kiir arrived Saturday, Bashir was expected to land Sunday morning, first meeting with Ethiopia's Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn, before meeting his counterpart for talks later in the afternoon.

In the bustling lobby of an upmarket hotel, a mix of delegates, diplomats, rebel leaders, technical advisors, journalists and wealthy tourists rubbed shoulders, as meetings continued late into Saturday night.

For once, the mood in these long running and often slow moving talks appeared positive, with both Khartoum and Juba apparently keen to end conflict and a mutually economically crippling stalemate over stalled oil production.

Chief mediator Thabo Mbeki, the former South Africa president, was seen busily shuttling between multiple delegations addressing issues of security, border demarcation, oil and finance.

"There does seem a genuine move towards finding a broad solution, even if technical issues and details will certainly need fixing in future meetings," said a Western diplomat close to the talks.

"We are not going to go back to fighting each other, we know the cost of that after 50 years of war," said the South's spokesman Kiir. "It is the time to rebuild our lives, to rebuild our nation." ([top](#))

ASIA

Myanmar president heads to U.S., seeks end to sanctions

September 24, 2012

Reuters

By Martin Petty

Myanmar's reformist president heads to the United States this week, keen to win an end to sanctions and open a new chapter in a once frosty relationship that could bring economic and geostrategic benefits to both sides.

After feting Nobel Peace Prize winner and opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi in Washington last week, the United States will welcome Thein Sein, a 67-year-old former general who emerged as the unlikely catalyst for a wave of reforms that were unthinkable a year ago.

Thein Sein's U.S. visit, the first by a Myanmar leader in 46 years, is the strongest sign yet of rapprochement between the two countries -- something that will benefit not only the cash-starved southeast Asian nation, but could help a superpower intent on boosting its political and economic muscle in a booming region.

U.S. aid to Myanmar could resume at some point and the Treasury Department on Wednesday removed individual sanctions against Thein Sein, the latest let-up in the tight restrictions that isolated his country for two decades, squeezed its tattered economy and pushed it closer into China's orbit.

Congress last week approved a bill that would allow President Barack Obama to waive a ban on U.S. participation in providing development loans from international financial institutions like the World Bank to the former British colony.

But crucial to Thein Sein, who leaves Myanmar on Monday to address the U.N. General Assembly in New York, is the removal of a U.S. ban on Burmese imports, which could pave the way for greater foreign investment and create urgently needed jobs.

The European Union set the pace last week in agreeing to grant Myanmar access to its Generalised System of Preferences, a scheme that allows poorer countries access to European markets without quotas or duties.

Presidential adviser Ko Ko Hlaing, who a diplomatic source said helped smooth the path for Thein Sein's visit, said ending the embargoes would facilitate the kind of reforms the United States has been asking for.

"(The visit) is certainly intended to have some relaxation of restrictions and sanctions," Ko Ko Hlaing told Reuters. "Because they happen now to be obstacles in our reform process."

CASE TO END SANCTIONS

Suu Kyi is also in tune on sanctions with Thein Sein, the former fourth-in-command of the junta that locked her up for 15 years. She received the highest congressional medal on Wednesday and praised the president's reforms, adding Myanmar no longer needed to "depend on U.S. sanctions to keep up the momentum".

She met Obama on Wednesday. It is not known if he would also meet his Myanmar counterpart, as recommended by Washington's Center for Strategic and International Studies, which said a decision not to risked being seen as unbalanced and "a failure to appreciate the courageous role" he has played.

Thein Sein has sought to build a strong case for Washington to slash sanctions and deepen engagement with a country the Bush administration dubbed an "outpost of tyranny" while under the rule of reclusive generals, who viewed the U.S. with suspicion.

Thein Sein gave amnesty last week to nearly 90 political prisoners, and sent charismatic president's office minister Aung Min to the United States to showcase peace efforts with ethnic minority rebel groups.

But it is not just Myanmar which stands to gain. The country also known as Burma is of strategic importance to Washington in terms of its geographical location, business potential and its decades-old alliance with China.

Sanctions on Myanmar allowed China to command huge influence there and experts say closer U.S. engagement serves Washington's unspoken goal of containing China by cosying up to poorer Southeast Asian countries with close ties to Beijing.

As one of Asia's last untapped frontier markets and with a population of 60 million, Myanmar also offers corporate America plentiful opportunities in energy, extractive industries, financial services, retail, hotels and tourism. PepsiCo Inc, Coca-Cola and GE have already set up.

"It's a win-win situation for both countries and a chance to show the damage from the past can be repaired. It's therefore crucial Presidents Obama and Thein Sein meet," said Aung Thu Nyein of the Vahu Development Institute, a Myanmar think-tank.

"Burma needs Washington's help, it fits in with the new U.S. Asia policy and there's much U.S. firms can do in Burma."

(top)

Police Chief In Chinese Murder Scandal Convicted And Sentenced To 15 Years

September 24, 2012

New York Times

By Edward Wong

BEIJING - Chinese court officials have found Wang Lijun, a former police chief, guilty of four criminal charges after he fled to a United States Consulate last February and told diplomats there that the wife of a senior politician had murdered a British businessman, according to a report on Monday by Xinhua, the state news agency.

Mr. Wang, 52, originally from Inner Mongolia, was found guilty of defection, abuse of power, taking bribes and bending the law for personal gain, the report said. The People's Intermediate Court in Chengdu, where the trial took place last week, sentenced Mr. Wang to 15 years in prison.

Verdicts in Chinese criminal cases, especially those with a political dimension, are often predetermined. Mr. Wang's sentence was relatively lenient; court officials had made the argument last week that mitigating factors should be taken into account when determining the verdict and punishment.

In February, Mr. Wang spent nearly 36 hours at the consulate in Chengdu, capital of the southwestern province of Sichuan, and set off one of the biggest political scandals here in a generation. He told diplomats that Gu Kailai, the wife of Bo Xilai, a Communist Party leader, had poisoned the Briton, Neil Heywood, in November.

After an overnight stay, Mr. Wang left the consulate in the custody of state security officers and presumably told investigators, too, about the murder. Mr. Bo was removed last March as party chief of the southwestern metropolis of Chongqing, where Mr. Wang had served as police chief, and was suspended from the Politburo a month later.

Ms. Gu was convicted last month of murder and given a death sentence with a two-year suspension, which means she will probably wind up with a long prison term and not be put to death.

With Mr. Wang's trial over, Mr. Bo is the one remaining major figure in the matter yet to be tried. Speculation abounds over whether there will be an announcement or leaked statements concerning his fate before China's once-a-decade leadership transition, which is expected this fall. There has been speculation, too, about whether Mr. Bo, who was being investigated for what the state news media called "serious disciplinary violations," will face criminal charges or suffer punitive measures within the party system.

On Wednesday, Xinhua released an official account of Mr. Wang's trial, including testimony asserting that Mr. Bo had slapped Mr. Wang on Jan. 19, a day after Mr. Wang told Mr. Bo about his suspicions over Ms. Gu's role in the Heywood murder.

The public announcement of that episode indicated that the party might try Mr. Bo on a criminal charge of attempting to cover up the murder. (Even before the Xinhua report, American officials had said that Mr. Wang told American diplomats in Chengdu that Mr. Bo had hit him.)

The Xinhua article did not name Mr. Bo as the person who slapped Mr. Wang, but the phrase used to describe him left no doubt about the slapper's identity.

The official account of the trial also emphasized arguments from both the prosecutors and defense lawyers asking the court to show leniency toward Mr. Wang. The account said Mr. Wang had cooperated with investigations into transgressions by others. This was a reference to Ms. Gu's case, but it might also have indicated that Mr. Wang helped with the inquiries concerning Mr. Bo.

Court officials also laid out Mr. Wang's role in the Heywood murder. Mr. Wang was accused of helping cover up for Ms. Gu after she told him that she had killed Mr. Heywood, and he was formally charged with bending the law for personal gain. Court officials also said that one day before the murder, Mr. Wang spoke about Mr. Heywood with Ms. Gu and agreed to keep the Briton under surveillance.

During Ms. Gu's trial, court officials said Ms. Gu had killed Mr. Heywood because she believed he was threatening her son, Bo Guagua, who graduated from a master's program at Harvard University this summer.

The court account of Mr. Wang's trial had a bizarre description of the son's trying to drive to meet Mr. Wang at a city outside Chongqing one night and almost getting into an accident. That story was included in the account to show rising tensions between Mr. Wang and Ms. Gu in the weeks after the murder.

After Bo Xilai hit Mr. Wang on Jan. 19, the account said, Mr. Wang ordered his police allies to collect evidence that would show Ms. Gu's involvement in the murder. Mr. Wang had several police officers keep separate pieces of evidence, including a blood sample from Mr. Heywood's heart and a secret recording Mr. Wang had made of Ms. Gu confessing to him. After the authorities took him to Beijing, the account said, Mr. Wang asked a police ally, Li Yang, to turn over the blood sample to investigators.

Mr. Wang's lawyer, Wang Yuncui, who is not related to Mr. Wang, has said the Xinhua account of the proceedings was mostly accurate. But she disputed the accusation that Mr. Wang had taken bribes from two associates of the Bo family.

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Top Chinese Official Makes Landmark Afghan Visit

September 23, 2012

AFP

China's top security official has made the first high-level trip to Afghanistan by a senior Chinese leader in nearly half a century, meeting President Hamid Karzai in Kabul, state media said Sunday.

Zhou Yongkang made the four-hour visit on Saturday, in a secretive trip aimed at shoring up ties between the neighbours, Xinhua news agency reported.

The visit was not previously announced due to security concerns, the report said. Late president Liu Shaoqi, the last senior Chinese official to visit Afghanistan, visited in 1966, Xinhua said.

Beijing has stepped up diplomacy with Afghanistan in recent months as the 2014 deadline for the withdrawal of US and NATO troops approaches.

China, which shares a 76-kilometre (47-mile) border with Afghanistan's far northeast, has already secured major oil and copper mining concessions in Afghanistan, which is believed to have more than \$1 trillion worth of minerals.

The scramble for influence in Afghanistan is expected to intensify in the run-up to 2014, with its central position in a volatile region having shaped its history for centuries.

Xinhua provided few details about the visit, other than quoting Zhou as saying: "It is in line with the fundamental interests of the two peoples for China and Afghanistan to strengthen a strategic and cooperative partnership... conducive to regional peace, stability and development."

Zhou, ranked ninth in China's ruling Communist Party hierarchy, is China's top security official and oversees a crackdown on religious extremism, terrorism and separatism in his nation's Muslim-populated Xinjiang region, which borders Central Asia and Afghanistan.

Zhou's appearance in Kabul comes after Karzai pledged to work with China to fight terrorism and extremism in the region during a visit to Beijing in June, where he attended the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation meeting.

The grouping, which is led by China and Russia and was set up to counterbalance US and NATO influence, granted Afghanistan observer status at the meeting.
(top)

Japan PM Warns China on Dispute

September 24, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By TOKO SEKIGUCHI and GEORGE NISHIYAMA

TOKYO—Japan's prime minister warned China that its inflammatory reaction to a territorial dispute—from violent protests to apparent informal trade sanctions—could further weaken China's economy by scaring away foreign investors.

The comments show how the diplomatic standoff could broaden into a damaging commercial tit-for-tat between the world's second- and third-largest economies.

"China should be developing through the various foreign investments it receives," Yoshihiko Noda told The Wall Street Journal following a tense week filled with news of Japanese factories torched and cars overturned, and Chinese patrol boats hovering in and around territorial waters controlled by Japan. "I hope for its levelheaded and rational understanding that anything to discourage that is a disservice to itself," the prime minister added during the interview in his residence Saturday.

"Recent delays in customs and visa issuance are of concern," Mr. Noda continued, referring to reports that Japanese companies were now facing a form of economic harassment, outlining his most detailed comments to date on the business implications of the row. "Damaging our ties over such things would be bad for not just the two countries' economies, but for the global economy."

Japan is simultaneously ensnared in an increasingly bitter tiff with another neighbor, South Korea, over a separate territorial argument as well as a debate over whether Japan has made adequate amends for its World War II aggression. Mr. Noda made clear in the interview that his government had no intention of making the concessions Seoul has demanded to repair diplomatic ties frayed in recent months, indicating an extended period of friction there as well.

Asked whether he would consider providing new compensation for the so-called comfort women who served as sex slaves for the Japanese soldiers, Mr. Noda said firmly "The matter is closed." He said South Korean criticism that Japan's previous offerings were insufficient "hurt the feelings of conscientious Japanese, and it is a pity."

Mr. Noda conducted the interview ahead of a visit to the United Nations General Assembly session starting Monday, where he plans to give a speech on the importance of "the rule of law" in international-dispute settlement. While aides said that is intended as an allusion to Japan's territorial tiffs, Mr. Noda said he wouldn't single out any country by name: "I don't think it's appropriate for a leader to go on in length and in detail about individual issues."

Indeed, at the same time that Japan appears to be taking a firm line in its regional disputes, officials also are looking for ways to dial down the heat, particularly with China. Illustrating his balancing act, Mr. Noda held out hope that the recent curbing of formal diplomatic contacts would be eased, and that the foreign ministers of the two nations would meet in New York as a step toward defusing tensions over the contested islets in the East China Sea. "If there is a chance, we should hold such a meeting," he said.

But Beijing indicated Sunday that it wasn't ready to move on, with the official Xinhua news agency saying the Chinese government had decided to cancel various ceremonies scheduled for later this week related to the 40th anniversary of normalization of postwar diplomatic ties between the two nations.

The latest flare-up with China followed the Japanese government's purchase from private Japanese owners earlier this month of the islands controlled by Japan but also claimed by China. Japan's nationalization of the islands—known as the Senkaku in Japan, Diaoyu in China—set off anti-Japanese protests in more than 100 cities in China, some violent, leaving a trail of burned-down factories, looted stores and vandalized consulates. The head of a Japanese insurers' industry body has said insurance payments to Japanese companies damaged by the protests could total up to tens of billions of yen.

Beijing also sent paramilitary patrol boats under its various agencies to waters near the islands, setting off a cat-and-mouse chase with the Japanese Coast Guard that has continued for more than a week. On Monday, the Coast Guard said two Chinese vessels entered the islands' territorial waters, an act Tokyo sees as provocative.

Japanese opposition lawmakers have called for beefing up the defenses around the islands. But Mr. Noda said he saw no need to bring in the Japanese navy, and shrugged off the possibility of a military conflict. "It's not good to talk about pessimistic scenarios," the 55-year-old leader said.

He gave Chinese officials some credit for trying to calm things down, saying "the government itself is calling for restraint, and I believe it is trying to defuse such behavior and actions," he said, referring to the protests. "However, I don't think they've been entirely successful yet."

Although he noted that the violence had died down, he cited the new trade delays as evidence that prospects remain for spreading economic fallout. In recent days, Japanese companies have reported customs-clearing delays, raising concerns that China was now retaliating economically, just as it did after a similar territorial spat in 2010 led to a curb on the export to Japan of rare-earth minerals vital for production of some of Japan's leading products.

Mr. Noda implied that other countries would conclude they are vulnerable to the same kind of harassment facing the Japanese—and possibly curb investments—making a point of citing the incident in Beijing on Tuesday where anti-Japanese protesters briefly surrounded the American ambassador's car, causing minor damage. "Even the U.S. embassy and its official car came under attack," Mr. Noda said.

Mr. Noda's remarks Saturday followed statements by Japanese business leaders that they may begin to rethink their ties to China. Tokyo has considerable economic clout: Japan has become a major contributor to China's growth, just as China has become economically vital to Japan. Japanese companies injected \$12 billion in foreign direct investment into China last year, according to Japanese government statistics. Japan is China's second largest trading partner, while China is Japan's largest.

In addition to the isles dispute with China, Japan faces another with South Korea, which has evolved into an issue over Japan's wartime compensation. The South Korean foreign minister is widely expected to raise demands for new "comfort women" compensation in his U.N. speech.

The long-simmering issue has heated up over the past year, after the South Korean constitutional court ruled that the country's leaders had violated the law by failing to negotiate a new compensation package with Japan. That put new pressure on South Korea's leaders, and Seoul has since twice asked Tokyo to hold consultations, but the requests were turned down.

While more understated than the rhetoric coming out of China, Mr. Noda's comments over the weekend echoed remarks by Chinese government officials and editorials suggesting that tensions could spill into business ties. The China Daily, for example, carried a column titled "Consider Sanctions on Japan." "Japan's economy will suffer severely if China were to impose sanctions on it. China's loss would be relatively less," said the piece written by an analyst at a think tank affiliated with China's Ministry of Commerce.

South Korean President Lee Myung-bak cited the lack of progress on the issue as a reason for the recent flare-up in their bilateral territorial rivalry over a group of tiny islets known as the Liancourt Rocks, including his surprise August visit to the area called Dokdo in Korea and Takeshima in Japan. After that, South Korea's National Assembly passed a resolution demanding more formal apologies and compensation from the Japanese government over the comfort women issue.

In contrast to his remarks about China, which appeared to leave the door open for discussions, Mr. Noda was resolute Saturday in refusing Seoul's demand for government compensation, saying that South Korea agreed to forfeit claims to wartime compensation when the two nations normalized ties in 1965.

"In the long negotiation process, we have completely and legally resolved the matter of compensation," Mr. Noda said. He said the government went out of its way to jointly set up a fund in 1995 with private donations to provide the former comfort women with compensation. South Korea has said the fund

should come directly from Japan's government. Mr. Noda said Korea should first revise its assessment of the fund that Japan has already offered before the two sides can look into alternatives.

Facing some criticism at home that Japan hasn't done enough to explain globally its side of its disputes with South Korea, Mr. Noda said: "We've been conducting backstage negotiations on the matter. We need to advertise this fact to the international community."
(top)

Tokyo Set to Switch Focus to U.S. Pact

September 24, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By MITSURU OBE

TOKYO—As a territorial dispute begins to impinge on Japan's economic relationship with China, the government of Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda looks increasingly likely to shift its focus to a free-trade pact led by the U.S. from one involving China—at least for now.

Lawmakers of the ruling Democratic Party of Japan expect Mr. Noda to announce his decision to participate in the U.S.-led Trans-Pacific Partnership free-trade initiative after an expected cabinet reshuffle as early as this month, following his re-election as party leader Friday.

"I expect Prime Minister Noda to decide to move ahead with the TPP following his mandate to lead the party," said Rintaro Ogata, a lower house member and former trade negotiator.

Shuji Kira, a lower house member who oversees the DPJ's TPP task force, also said he expects Mr. Noda to announce his decision to join the TPP after the expected reshuffle.

Japan's trade negotiators admit that trade talks with China are unlikely to move forward this year and that refocusing on the TPP is becoming an option. But they stress they haven't made any formal determination on the prospects of trade talks with China or how to go about other trade negotiations.

How China would react to Japan's TPP participation is difficult to predict, but one Japanese trade negotiator is concerned that it could further anger China and worsen the countries' relationship. Last week, Chinese commerce ministry spokesman Shen Danyang said the deepening territorial row would affect trilateral free-trade talks between Japan, China and Korea, but he stopped short of saying the talks should be canceled.

Japan, China and South Korea agreed in May to start talks on trilateral free trade by year's end. The three countries and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations also agreed last month to start talks in November for a regional free-trade bloc covering East Asia, Australia and India.

Mr. Noda has refrained from making a clear commitment to the TPP to avoid antagonizing party members who represent rural districts. They are against a TPP rule requiring members to eliminate all tariffs without exception, predicting that it will allow relatively cheaper imports from countries such as Australia and the U.S. to undermine Japan's agricultural industry.

Mr. Kira said he believes it is important to join the TPP before the next general election, in which the opposition Liberal Democratic Party, which is even more cautious about the TPP than the ruling party, is widely expected to prevail.

"Japan has to join the TPP talks while we are in power," Mr. Kira said. The general election is expected to be held as early as November.

Participation in the TPP is seen to have an additional benefit: forcing China to rethink its attitude toward Japan. Beijing is keen to create a regional economic group with China at its core, acting as a counterweight to the influence of a U.S.-led trading bloc.

China has taken comfort in so-far limited participation in TPP talks by major Asian economies, but any move by Japan could push China to work harder for economic partnerships with Japan and other Asian countries.

Japan and China are embroiled in a territorial dispute over islands in the East China Sea islands, called Senkaku in Japan and Diaoyu in China, which are controlled by Tokyo but claimed by Beijing. But the political tensions mask a thick web of economic and trading relations between Asia's two largest economies.

Amid slow growth in the U.S. and Europe, Asia has been one of the few growing markets for Japanese exports. Between 2000 and 2011, Japanese exports grew 3.4 times with China, while they declined 35% with the U.S. and 10% with Europe.

The importance of Asia is expected to increase further for Japan as its population continues to decline. The government predicts Japan's share of global gross domestic product will fall to 6% in 2030 from 15% in 1990, while that for China will rise to 25% from 2%.

Forming free-trade agreements with major markets is crucial for keeping jobs and attracting new investment.

Last year, Japanese textile maker Toray Industries Inc. decided to set up a new carbon-fiber plant in South Korea, citing the country's free-trade agreements with the U.S., European Union and proposed pact with China. Many other Japanese and European companies are now following suit by shifting their plants to Korea from Japan.

Japan is playing catch-up, and is set to launch two major free-trade talks this year: one that involves a total of 16 countries such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and India and Australia, and another involving Japan, Korea and China.

China has also signaled that it is looking closely at economic integration across the Eurasian continent. Earlier this month, Chinese President Hu Jintao proposed FTAs with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

The China Economic Daily, an official mouthpiece for the Chinese government, recently published an online story calling for China and Germany to become "the core countries in the integration process as countries located on either side of the continent."

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North Korean Assembly Might Offer Clues to New Leader's Direction

September 24, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By EVAN RAMSTAD

SEOUL—A meeting Tuesday of North Korea's rubber-stamp legislature might provide the clearest signals yet of the direction in which new dictator Kim Jong Eun is trying to take the country.

The approximately 700 members of the Supreme Peoples' Assembly will gather in Pyongyang for the second time this year, a rare development for a body that went four years in the 1990s without meeting.

Two years ago, Mr. Kim made his public debut at an assembly gathering. And when the body met this spring, it bestowed on him the last of several titles that legitimized his succession.

"You can't think of the SPA as a typical legislative body," said Stephen Haggard, an international-relations professor and North Korea specialist at the University of California, San Diego. "These meetings are more like an event followed by a policy announcement."

No agenda for Tuesday's meeting has been announced. Since Mr. Kim took control after the death of his father, Kim Jong Il, last December, he has taken a number of seemingly contradictory steps on the economy and national security. One of the most visible was agreeing to a U.S. aid deal in February, then undermining it two weeks later with the announcement of a missile launch.

Mr. Kim has also presided over a harsh crackdown on refugees along the country's border with China, resulting in sharp drop in the number of North Koreans coming to South Korea this year. And his regime has continued to heap criticism on and antagonize South Korea.

But Mr. Kim has also undertaken a kind of charm offensive, by revealing his wife and taking her on a dozen or so well-publicized outings to places ranging from amusement parks to military drills.

Meanwhile, two months ago, North Koreans in South Korea began to hear from relatives and associates in the North that Mr. Kim's government is planning to reduce the government's grip on farming and manufacturing in some parts of the country. That news came just after Mr. Kim fired his top military chief, a move widely seen as an attempt by Mr. Kim to diminish the military's influence in the economy.

Choi Kang-hyuk, a leader of a defector group called North Korea Intellectuals Solidarity, said North Koreans are anxious about the rumored changes because the last major economic change—a redenomination of the nation's currency in 2009—was disastrous for citizens as it wiped out private savings.

"They don't believe in their own government," said Mr. Choi, who left North Korea in 2002 but keeps in phone contact with people there. "They are expecting a change, but they aren't sure."

Pressure is growing on Mr. Kim to move the economy beyond its reliance on outdated agriculture practices, arms shipments to a handful of buyers and help from China.

Poor weather this summer again hurt the country's food production—although, with harvesting just starting, it is unclear precisely how much. Meanwhile, North Korea got another sign of international pressure on its arms dealing when Iraq on Friday refused to allow one of its planes—suspected of carrying weapons—pass through its airspace on the way to Syria.

And Mr. Kim's uncle, Jang Song Thaek, got a direct taste of pressure from China, the North's main political ally and economic benefactor during a visit last month. Premier Wen Jiabao publicly told Mr. Jang that a joint development zone planned for the countries' border should be run on "market mechanisms" and that North Korea need stronger laws to foster economic development.

Stephen Bosworth, the former U.S. envoy to North Korea, said in a visit to Seoul last week that the change he is watching for is a waning of the "Military First" policy developed by Kim Jong Il, which gave the military priority in all economic activities.

"That would indicate a shift in orientation and that perhaps there's a shake-up that enables the people at the center of the regime to give a little less prominence to the military," Mr. Bosworth said.

"All this stuff about agricultural reform and new emphasis on consumption—I remain very skeptical until we see actual evidence that it's happening."

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Exclusive: North Korea plans agriculture reforms

September 23, 2012

Reuters

By Benjamin Kang Lim

BEIJING - North Korea plans to allow farmers to keep more of their produce in an attempt to boost agricultural output, a source with close ties to Pyongyang and Beijing said, in a move that could boost supplies, help cap rising food prices and ease malnutrition.

The move to liberalize agriculture under new leader Kim Jong-un, who took office in December 2011 after the death of his father, would reverse a crackdown on private production that started in 2005. It comes amid talk that the youngest Kim to rule the impoverished North is considering reforms to boost the economy.

"Peasants will have incentive to grow more food. They can keep and sell in the market about 30-50 percent of their harvest depending on the region," said the source.

At present, most farm output is sold to the government at a state auction price that has diverged from the market rate.

It was impossible to verify the plan independently in North Korea, one of the world's most closed states, although the source has proved reliable in the past, predicting North Korea's first nuclear test in 2006 days before it was conducted, as well as the ascent of Kim's uncle, Jang Song-thaek.

The plans come as some websites run by North Korean defector groups have said the price of rice - a staple food - more than doubled at the end of August from the start of June.

The surge in rice prices, cited by DailyNK, a North Korean defector website (www.dailynk.com), was driven by a fear of economic reforms that could in fact be punitive, like a 2009 currency revaluation that confiscated most peoples' savings. This report also could not be independently verified.

North Korea experienced a devastating famine in the 1990s from which its economy has not recovered, and a third of its population is malnourished, according to U.N. estimates. The country needs about 5

million tons of grain and potatoes to feed its people and since the early 1990s its annual harvest has been 3.5-4.7 million tons, according to most observers.

Experts in South Korea believe the North desperately needs fertilizer to boost yields in a country where soil has been degraded by erosion due to poor farming techniques.

LOST IN TRANSLATION

A recent visit to Beijing, North Korea's sole major economic and diplomatic ally, by the youngest Kim's uncle Jang appeared to be aimed at economic reforms in North Korea, whose centrally planned economy is smaller than it was 20 years ago.

North Korea wants to attract Chinese investment to help it overcome tough sanctions imposed in retaliation for its nuclear tests. Kim also aims to deliver on a promise to make the North a "prosperous" nation by 2012 and to banish memories of his father's austere 17-year rule.

But it is unclear how far Kim Jong-un can go in liberalizing the economy without losing his family's firm grip on power, most independent analysts say.

The source said a September 25 meeting of the Supreme People's Assembly, the North's rubber-stamp parliament, was likely to discuss "economic adjustment", but was unlikely to result in any major steps forward.

The phrase "economic adjustment" has been chosen carefully, the source added, noting the North's decision not to use the old catchcry of its key ally, China - "reform and opening up" - should not be misinterpreted as a lack of reformist will.

Instead, the source said, North Korea was indeed trying to follow in the footsteps of China but was avoiding the phrase coined by Beijing because of an unfortunate quirk of the Korean language. "It won't be called 'reform and opening up' because it sounds like 'dog fart' in Korean," the source said.

This is the second time this year that the parliament, which rarely meets, has been assembled this year, triggering speculation in the North Korea-watching community that it could be a forum for announcing major reforms.

The source said North Korea also planned to make its 1.2 million-strong military - one of the largest armed forces in the world - food self-reliant by modeling its production model on China's armed forces.

"The food (shortage) problem will hopefully be resolved by learning from the Xinjiang Construction and Production Corps," the source said, referring to the sprawling quasi-military network of state farms and factories in northwestern China intended to secure stability in the restive region by developing the economy and helping control borderlands.

The Xinjiang corps was founded in 1954 by late vice president Wang Zhen. As of March 2011, more than 2.6 million people lived in the corps' 14 divisions, which cover a combined area of more than 70,000 sq km (27,000 sq miles). The corps owns 179 farms, 1,400 enterprises, 13 listed companies, universities, media outlets and medical institutions, and its output was worth 75 billion yuan (\$11.9 billion) in 2010.

North Korea's military also has significant economic interests and its armed forces are required in part to feed themselves as transport and a central distribution system have broken down, while fuel is in short supply.

The armed forces also have little to do, experts say, to occupy their time, and so farming is encouraged and praised in visits by Kim Jong-un and by his father Kim Jong-il, whose "field guidance" advice trips were a staple of North Korean state media reports.

The source said boosting the army's food self-reliance would not be a major change in North Korea's "military first" policy. "Hopefully, the military will become (food) self-reliant. It will be given land to grow its own rice and vegetables."

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NEA

Arab Spring Leaving Women Out In Cold

September 24, 2012

USA Today

By Sarah Lynch

Nawal Al Saadawi has been at the lead of the fight for rights for women for decades, and like many here was exhilarated when women and men united in Tahrir Square to lead protests against dictator Hosni Mubarak.

But more than a year after Mubarak's ouster, not much has changed for women, she laments.

"Things didn't improve for women, and we are going backward," said Nawal, 81, an author and activist.

Much of the Arab world has typically not been kind to the emancipation of women, who have little political power in most Arab states and often face legal systems weighted against them. This has been true under both secular states such as Egypt and Islamic states such as Iran.

The Arab Spring uprisings that have ousted dictators and ushered in democratic reforms such as free elections also gave some women hope that they, too, would see an end to discrimination.

New governments are forming in the Arab world to write constitutions and pass laws as the basis for new political systems and societies. Liberal activists are pushing their new lawmakers to include a view of women's rights that reflects standards of gender equality found in the West.

Even so, many activists see a possible rollback of gains for women won over the past decades as women are sidelined from power and Islamists, many elected with the votes of women, emerge politically.

"There is a trend in the region that women's rights could go backward," said Stephanie Willman Bordat, director of Global Rights in Morocco, a human rights group.

Anti-government uprisings that ushered in power shifts began in December 2010 when protesters forced out Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali in Tunisia. Long considered among the most liberal of the Arab states, the nation hit milestones for women last year when it adopted a gender-parity law that required equal participation in constituent assembly elections.

Tunisia later lifted reservations to the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women -- a sort of bill rights for women that Tunisia, like other Arab states, failed to apply in full.

Despite these reforms, women rallied last month in the streets against what they believe is a threat to their status -- a change in the draft of the nation's new constitution that would deem women "complementary to men." The leading Islamist party, Ennahda, vowed to uphold women's rights and not enforce hard-line Islamic laws, but activists are skeptical.

"We have to be vigilant and be aware of the danger of a possible backlash," said Houda Zaibi Belhassen, vice president of the League of Tunisian Women Voters.

In Egypt, women have been sidelined from power when only men were appointed to draft an interim constitution after the military council took control last year. The 64-seat quota for women's representation in parliament was abolished, and activists say no effort is made by any party -- liberal groups included -- to prioritize women's issues.

"We struggle first to have a vision for the future and second to ensure that women's rights are an essential part of human rights," said Nehad Abu El Komsan, director of the Egyptian Center for Women's Rights.

Activists say the state fails to protect women from sexual harassment. Women protesting for rights have been sexually assaulted by authorities who in March 2011 tested some women for virginity to defend the army against rape claims. Rights groups say no one has been charged in such cases.

The Association for the Development and Enhancement of Women said it is crucial to maintain existing laws that benefit women, such as opposing calls to lower the legal age of marriage to below 18.

Some say women could weather the transitions and surface stronger.

"First and foremost is economics: Tunisia, Egypt and even oil-rich Libya simply cannot afford to disempower half their population," wrote Isobel Coleman, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, in a report for consulting firm McKinsey & Company.

Another reason for optimism is that the Arab revolutions prompted women to mobilize themselves for a cause. Activists are taking to the airwaves and using social media to make themselves heard, Coleman wrote.

"Before the revolution we were silent," said Rabat Abdel Halim, 27, riding a Cairo metro car solely for women. "Now we have the right to say our opinions, and we can fight if we don't agree with things."

Even so, challenges persist.

In Morocco, the suicide of 16-year-old Amina Filali in March provoked protests against antiquated legislation that allows men who rape or have sex with minors to avoid prosecution by wedding their victims. Filali's family said she killed herself after being forced to marry her rapist, who continued to abuse her.

It doesn't seem the government will pass a long-promised "violence against women" law and the leading Islamist party indicated it is not on board with eliminating marriage of minors or polygamy, Bordat said. She added, "The positive flipside is the new constitution," which was adopted in July 2011 in response to protests. "It's going to be a back-and-forth tug-of-war struggle between the current Islamist government initiatives that could (have a conservative impact on) women and the new tools in the constitution that could push back."

Libyan women are hopeful that a new constitution there will protect women, who participated in the protests against the now-deceased dictator Moammar Gadhafi.

"There are some slight changes in the perception of women in terms of politics and public life, which could help in the long run," said Alaa Mubarit, 22, founder of the Voice Of Libyan Women, which promotes women's political participation.

Activists say that however long the fight, it is a crucial one.

"It is a matter of human rights for everyone, for equality," said Iman Bibars, chair of the Association for the Development and Enhancement of Women in Egypt. "It's a matter of: Are you being treated as an equal or not -- because we were all in Tahrir."
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Egypt's New Leader Spells Out Terms for U.S.-Arab Ties

September 22, 2012

New York Times

By DAVID D. KIRKPATRICK and STEVEN ERLANGER

CAIRO — On the eve of his first trip to the United States as Egypt's new Islamist president, Mohamed Morsi said the United States needed to fundamentally change its approach to the Arab world, showing greater respect for its values and helping build a Palestinian state, if it hoped to overcome decades of pent-up anger.

A former leader of the Muslim Brotherhood and Egypt's first democratically elected president, Mr. Morsi sought in a 90-minute interview with The New York Times to introduce himself to the American public and to revise the terms of relations between his country and the United States after the ouster of Hosni Mubarak, an autocratic but reliable ally.

He said it was up to Washington to repair relations with the Arab world and to revitalize the alliance with Egypt, long a cornerstone of regional stability.

If Washington is asking Egypt to honor its treaty with Israel, he said, Washington should also live up to its own Camp David commitment to Palestinian self-rule. He said the United States must respect the Arab world's history and culture, even when that conflicts with Western values.

And he dismissed criticism from the White House that he did not move fast enough to condemn protesters who recently climbed over the United States Embassy wall and burned the American flag in anger over a video that mocked the Prophet Muhammad.

"We took our time" in responding to avoid an explosive backlash, he said, but then dealt "decisively" with the small, violent element among the demonstrators.

"We can never condone this kind of violence, but we need to deal with the situation wisely," he said, noting that the embassy employees were never in danger.

Mr. Morsi, who will travel to New York on Sunday for a meeting of the United Nations General Assembly, arrives at a delicate moment. He faces political pressure at home to prove his independence, but demands from the West for reassurance that Egypt under Islamist rule will remain a stable partner.

Mr. Morsi, 61, whose office was still adorned with nautical paintings that Mr. Mubarak left behind, said the United States should not expect Egypt to live by its rules.

"If you want to judge the performance of the Egyptian people by the standards of German or Chinese or American culture, then there is no room for judgment," he said. "When the Egyptians decide something, probably it is not appropriate for the U.S. When the Americans decide something, this, of course, is not appropriate for Egypt."

He suggested that Egypt would not be hostile to the West, but would not be as compliant as Mr. Mubarak either.

"Successive American administrations essentially purchased with American taxpayer money the dislike, if not the hatred, of the peoples of the region," he said, by backing dictatorial governments over popular opposition and supporting Israel over the Palestinians.

He initially sought to meet with President Obama at the White House during his visit this week, but he received a cool reception, aides to both presidents said. Mindful of the complicated election-year politics of a visit with Egypt's Islamist leader, Mr. Morsi dropped his request.

His silence in the immediate aftermath of the embassy protest elicited a tense telephone call from Mr. Obama, who also told a television interviewer that at that moment he did not consider Egypt an ally, if not an enemy either. When asked if he considered the United States an ally, Mr. Morsi answered in English, "That depends on your definition of ally," smiling at his deliberate echo of Mr. Obama. But he said he envisioned the two nations as "real friends."

Mr. Morsi spoke in an ornate palace that Mr. Mubarak inaugurated three decades ago, a world away from the Nile Delta farm where the new president grew up, or the prison cells where he had been confined by Mr. Mubarak for his role in the Brotherhood. Three months after his swearing-in, the most noticeable change to the presidential office was a plaque on his desk bearing the Koranic admonition, "Be conscious of a day on which you will return to God."

A stocky figure with a trim beard and wire-rim glasses, he earned a doctorate in materials science at the University of Southern California in the early 1980s. He spoke with an easy confidence in his new authority, reveling in an approval rating he said was at 70 percent. When he grew animated, he slipped from Arabic into crisp English.

Little known at home or abroad until just a few months ago, he was the Brotherhood's second choice as a presidential nominee after the first choice was disqualified. On the night of the election, the generals who had ruled since Mr. Mubarak's ouster issued a decree keeping most presidential powers for themselves.

But last month Mr. Morsi confounded all expectations by prying full executive authority back from the generals. In the interview, when an interpreter suggested that the generals had "decided" to exit politics, Mr. Morsi quickly corrected him.

"No, no, it is not that they 'decided' to do it," he interjected in English, determined to clarify that it was he who removed them. "This is the will of the Egyptian people through the elected president, right?"

"The president of the Arab Republic of Egypt is the commander of the armed forces, full stop. Egypt now is a real civil state. It is not theocratic, it is not military. It is democratic, free, constitutional, lawful and modern."

He added, "We are behaving according to the Egyptian people's choice and will, nothing else — is it clear?"

He praised Mr. Obama for moving "decisively and quickly" to support the Arab Spring revolutions, and he said he believed that Americans supported "the right of the people of the region to enjoy the same freedoms that Americans have."

Arabs and Americans have "a shared objective, each to live free in their own land, according to their customs and values, in a fair and democratic fashion," he said, adding that he hoped for "a harmonious, peaceful coexistence."

But he also argued that Americans "have a special responsibility" for the Palestinians because the United States had signed the 1978 Camp David accord. The agreement called for the withdrawal of Israeli troops from the West Bank and Gaza to make way for full Palestinian self-rule.

"As long as peace and justice are not fulfilled for the Palestinians, then the treaty remains unfulfilled," he said.

He made no apologies for his roots in the Brotherhood, the insular religious revival group that was Mr. Mubarak's main opposition and now dominates Egyptian politics.

"I grew up with the Muslim Brotherhood," he said. "I learned my principles in the Muslim Brotherhood. I learned how to love my country with the Muslim Brotherhood. I learned politics with the Brotherhood. I was a leader of the Muslim Brotherhood."

He left the group when he took office but remains a member of its political party. But he said he sees "absolutely no conflict" between his loyalty to the Brotherhood and his vows to govern on behalf of all, including members of the Christian minority or those with more secular views.

"I prove my independence by taking the correct acts for my country," he said. "If I see something good from the Muslim Brotherhood, I will take it. If I see something better in the Wafd" — Egypt's oldest liberal party — "I will take it."

He repeatedly vowed to uphold equal citizenship rights of all Egyptians, regardless of religion, sex or class. But he stood by the religious arguments he once made as a Brotherhood leader that neither a woman nor a Christian would be a suitable president.

"We are talking about values, beliefs, cultures, history, reality," he said. He said the Islamic position on presidential eligibility was a matter for Muslim scholars to decide, not him. But regardless of his own views or the Brotherhood's, he said, civil law was another matter.

"I will not prevent a woman from being nominated as a candidate for the presidential campaign," he said. "This is not in the Constitution. This is not in the law. But if you want to ask me if I will vote for her or not, that is something else, that is different."

He was also eager to reminisce about his taste of American culture as a graduate student at the University of Southern California. "Go, Trojans!" he said, and he remembered learning about the world from Barbara Walters in the morning and Walter Cronkite at night. "And that's the way it is!" Mr. Morsi said with a smile.

But he also displayed some ambivalence. He effused about his admiration for American work habits, punctuality and time management. But when an interpreter said that Mr. Morsi had "learned a lot" in the United States, he quickly interjected a qualifier in English: "Scientifically!"

He was troubled by the gangs and street violence of Los Angeles, he said, and dismayed by the West's looser sexual mores, mentioning couples living together out of wedlock and what he called "naked restaurants," like Hooters.

"I don't admire that," he said. "But that is the society. They are living their way."
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Sinai Group Claims Role In Attack On Israel

September 24, 2012

New York Times

By David D. Kirkpatrick

CAIRO - An obscure militant group based in Egypt's North Sinai region claimed responsibility over the weekend for a cross-border attack that killed an Israeli soldier last week. The claim called fresh attention to the uphill struggle the newly formed Egyptian government is facing to control the restive Sinai region.

The group, which calls itself Supporters of the Holy Places, said in a statement posted on militant Web sites that it mounted the attack in response to a crude American-made video mocking the Prophet Muhammad, the same video cited in anti-American protests around the Muslim world. The group repeated a false claim that a number of Jews were involved in making the video, an apparent lie initially told by a Coptic Christian, an Egyptian expatriate, who did play a role in the production.

The militant group also said it was responsible for a cross-border attack near the Israeli resort of Eilat last year that killed 8 people and wounded more than 30. The Israeli response to that attack inadvertently killed five Egyptian soldiers, bringing the two nations to the brink of a crisis. The militant group said that one of its leaders, Ibrahim Aweida, helped lead the Eilat attack and that Israel killed him last month in the Sinai village of Khreiza; the attack on Friday was partly to avenge his death, the group said.

All three of the attackers were killed by Israeli security forces; their bodies were returned to Egypt over the weekend, state news media reported.

None of the militant group's statements could be confirmed.

The same group claimed responsibility for bombing a natural gas pipeline to Israel this year; the pipeline was bombed frequently over the last 18 months, until Egypt stopped shipping gas to Israel in a price dispute.

President Mohamed Morsi, a former leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, began a military campaign last month to clear Sinai of what he has called "militants" and "criminals," after an attack on an Egyptian Army checkpoint killed 16 soldiers. There are often reports of gun battles between Egyptian soldiers and militants, and the army has announced the detention of dozens of suspects and the closing of at least 31 cross-border smuggling tunnels.

But the Sinai region, dominated by Bedouin clans who consider smuggling revenue a birthright, was relatively lawless even under former President Hosni Mubarak's police state. Residents often refer to Cairo, even Egypt, as a different country or colonial power. After Mr. Mubarak's government collapsed, the police scattered and lawlessness reached a new peak.

President Morsi told a visiting business delegation that the reassertion of Egyptian "sovereignty" in Sinai was a top priority, participants said, speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss a private meeting.

But security on the Egyptian side of the border remains a challenge. Last week, Egyptian state news media reported that a government checkpoint on the road to the Rafah border crossing had been attacked by unidentified gunmen for the 36th time since Mr. Mubarak was ousted in February 2011. ([top](#))

Iran Threatens Attacks On US Bases In Event Of War

September 24, 2012

Associated Press

By Ali Akbar Dareini

TEHRAN, Iran - A senior commander in Iran's powerful Revolutionary Guard warned that Iran will target U.S. bases in the region in the event of war with Israel, raising the prospect of a broader conflict that would force other countries to get involved, Iranian state television reported Sunday.

The comments by Gen. Amir Ali Hajizadeh, who heads the Guard's aerospace division, came amid tension over Iran's nuclear program and Israel's suggestion that it might unilaterally strike Iranian nuclear facilities to scuttle what the United States and its allies believe are efforts to build a bomb. Tehran says its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes.

Hajizadeh said no Israeli attack can happen without the support of its most important ally, the United States, making all U.S. military bases a legitimate target.

"For this reason, we will enter a confrontation with both parties and will definitely be at war with American bases should a war break out," Hajizadeh said in remarks that were posted on the website of Iran's state Al-Alam TV. U.S. facilities in Bahrain, Qatar and Afghanistan would be targeted, he said.

"There will be no neutral country in the region," Hajizadeh said. "To us, these bases are equal to U.S. soil."

The U.S. Fifth fleet is based in Bahrain and the U.S. has a heavy military presence in Afghanistan.

The Iranian warning appears an attempt to reinforce the potential wider consequences of an attack by Israel. The message is not only intended for Washington, but to its Gulf Arab allies that are fearful of a regional conflict that could disrupt oil shipment and cripple business hubs in places such as Dubai and Qatar's capital Doha.

It also comes during a major show of naval power in the Gulf by U.S.-led forces taking part in military exercises, including mine-sweeping drills. The U.S. Navy claims the maneuvers are not directly aimed at Iran, but the West and its regional allies have made clear they would react against attempts by Tehran to carry out threats to try to close critical Gulf oil shipping lanes in retaliation for tighter sanctions.

Despite Israeli hints of a military strike, Iran's military commanders believe Israel is unlikely to take unilateral action against Iran. The Guard's top commander, Gen. Mohammad Ali Jafari, said last week that Iran believes the United States won't attack Iran because its military bases in the Middle East are within the range of Iran's missiles.

Iran has also warned that oil shipments through the strategic Strait of Hormuz will be in jeopardy if a war breaks out between Iran and the United States. Iranian officials had previously threatened to close the waterway, the route for a fifth of the world's oil, if there is war.

Israel believes that any attack on Iran would likely unleash retaliation in the form of Iranian missiles as well as rocket attacks by Iranian proxies Hezbollah and Hamas on its northern and southern borders.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu says international diplomatic efforts and economic sanctions against Iran have failed to deter its nuclear ambitions, and he has urged President Barack Obama to declare "red lines" that would trigger an American attack on Iran's nuclear facilities, coupling his appeals with veiled threats of an Israeli attack.

Obama has rejected these calls, saying diplomacy and U.S.-led sanctions must be given more time and that Iran will never be allowed to obtain nuclear weapons. American officials have pressed Israel not to attack Iran unilaterally, a move that could set off regional mayhem just ahead of the November election.

Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is currently in New York to attend the annual U.N. General Assembly and could seek to use his speech and meetings later this week to highlight the possible risks - including sharply higher oil prices - if military action is taken.

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Israel Won't Accept Egypt Treaty Changes: Lieberman

September 23, 2012

AFP

Israel will not accept alterations to its 1979 peace treaty with Egypt, Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman said on Sunday, as ties between the two countries continue to fray.

"There is not the slightest possibility that Israel will accept the modification of the peace treaty with Egypt," Lieberman told Israeli public radio. "We will not accept any modification of the Camp David accords."

The comments come as tensions rise between Egypt and Israel, with speculation the government of Egypt's Islamist President Mohamed Morsi could seek to alter parts of the decades-old treaty.

Ties are also strained over the issue of security in Egypt's Sinai, which borders Israel and has increasingly become a haven for militants, some of whom have used the territory as a launching ground for attacking the Jewish state.

On Friday, an Israeli soldier and three militants who infiltrated from Sinai were killed in a clash along the border, after troops opened fire on the gunmen as they crossed the frontier.

Israel has urged Egypt to tackle the growing lawlessness in Sinai, and Cairo has responded by boosting its military presence in the peninsula, but that has also raised concern in the Jewish state, because the Camp David treaty limits the number of Egyptian troops that can be present in the territory.

"Egypt must fulfill its obligations in Sinai," Lieberman said on Sunday.

Egypt launched an unprecedented military operation in the peninsula after militants killed 16 Egyptian border police in northern Sinai on August 5.

Israel has warned that it expects Cairo to withdraw the military reinforcements once the operation was over.

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Obama Brushes Off Israeli Pressure Over Iran

September 24, 2012

AFP

WASHINGTON - President Barack Obama likened Israeli pressure on him to draw a line in the sand over Iran's nuclear ambitions as noise he tries to ignore, according to remarks aired Sunday.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu recently urged the United States to establish what he called a "red line" regarding Tehran's nuclear program beyond which the United States would be compelled to act.

Iran insists its uranium-enrichment activities are for civilian energy-producing purposes, but the West fears it is for building nuclear weapons.

Israel is seen as pushing a much more hardline approach that would include military action, while Washington instead prefers to let diplomacy and sanctions dissuade Iran from building the bomb.

Obama, interviewed for Sunday's edition of "60 Minutes" on broadcaster CBS, said he understands and agrees with Netanyahu's insistence that Iran not be allowed to obtain nuclear weapons as this would threaten both countries, the world in general, and kick off an arms race.

But Obama added: "When it comes to our national security decisions -- any pressure that I feel is simply to do what's right for the American people. And I am going to block out -- any noise that's out there."

Tensions have been running high between the United States and Israeli leader, and they will not hold a face-to-face meeting this week at the UN General Assembly in New York. The White House has cited scheduling problems.

Obama's contender for the presidency, Republican Mitt Romney, said this was no way to treat an ally.

The decision not to meet with Netanyahu, he said, also in an interview with "60 minutes", "is a mistake and sends a message throughout the Middle East that somehow we distance ourselves from our friends and I think the exact opposite approach is what's necessary."

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Israel Says Crime Ring Targets Africa Migrants

September 24, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By JOSHUA MITNICK and JOEL MILLMAN

TEL AVIV—Israel indicted three Jewish men and an Arab resident of Israel on Sunday for allegedly working with a Hamas-linked crime ring to extort thousands of dollars in ransom from African migrants in Israel.

Israeli investigators said the money was intended as ransom to release relatives of the Africans held by Bedouin gangs in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula.

The indictments mark the third time since March that Israel has charged residents in the extortion trade linked mainly to Bedouin gangs in Egypt, said prosecutors and human-rights groups. It is the first time Israeli authorities have named Jewish suspects as collaborators.

With human-rights groups calling them asylum seekers and the Israeli government insisting they are economic migrants, the Africans' growing presence has become a lightning rod for racial tensions.

Israeli authorities say crime gangs hold hundreds of African immigrants against their will in the Sinai at any given time while the gangs extort cash from relatives and friends who have already reached Israel and entered the underground workforce.

Authorities say the kidnappers generally call their victims' relatives in Israel, demand ransom and then dispatch middlemen, who use code words to identify themselves and collect money. Third parties then transfer the ransom to Sinai.

In the indictment, prosecutors said Yaakov Grad, 42 years old, and Eliran Moshe, 24, collected a \$13,000 ransom from an Eritrean migrant in cooperation with Imad Abu Arar, who prosecutors called a Hamas activist in the Gaza Strip. Prosecutors say the Israelis delivered the ransom to a Hamas operative in Jerusalem.

The two Israelis are charged with aiding a kidnapping for murder or extortion, prosecutors said. Mr. Arar wasn't charged with a crime.

Prosecutors said Victor Siboni, the third Israeli, allegedly transferred ransom money, and charged him with a lesser charge of accessory to commit a crime.

The fourth man, Louis Nasr al-Din, who the indictment says is a Hamas activist from Jerusalem, was charged with transferring the ransom money.

Mr. Al-Din's attorney, Lea Tsemel, denied his involvement, the Times of Israel reported on its website.

Mr. Grad's attorney, Boaz Kenig, told reporters in Israel that his client "was involved in a very small part of this story" and that Mr. Grad was unaware of any Hamas connection.

Mr. Siboni's father, Avraham Siboni, in an interview with The Wall Street Journal, said his son was innocent.

Mr. Moshe's attorney couldn't be reached for comment, but Mr. Moshe said on Israeli television that he was innocent.

All four suspects were arrested earlier this month and are in prison awaiting trial. Prosecutors requested they remain in jail until the end of the trial. The indictments were released publicly Sunday.

Sigal Rozen, a spokeswoman for the Hotline for Migrant Workers, praised Israel's police for the crackdown on the alleged extortion ring. "We hope the more indictments there are, the less people here will be willing to cooperate," she said.

Charges of a Hamas link to the crime ring first emerged this past spring, when Israeli authorities charged a Bedouin man from the southern Israel town of Rahat and a Palestinian from East Jerusalem of functioning as middle men.

One migrant from Eritrea said in an interview he has been making such payments regularly since 2008, when he crossed the Sinai and began working in a restaurant, illegally, in Tel Aviv.

The 32 year-old man said he and three other family members, also working illegally, have paid about \$60,000 to collectors saying they represent the kidnappers-always in cash and always after being summoned to a public park to meet the collector.

The migrant said some of his relatives have been released, and others have gone missing.

"They always say, be there in one hour," the migrant said. "If you call the police we will kill your cousin."
(top)

Hezbollah Winds Up Demos Against Anti-Islam Film

September 24, 2012

AFP

Thousands of supporters of the powerful Shiite militant group Hezbollah took part on Sunday in Hermel, eastern Lebanon in the last in a series of protests against a US-made film which mocks Islam.

"Death to America! Israel, enemy of Muslims!" chanted the crowd made of men, women in all-covering black chadors and children waving the yellow flags of the Iranian-backed movement.

The Hermel protest was the fifth in a series of demonstrations called for by Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah who made a rare public appearance on September 17 and urged supporters to vent their fury over the film.

The protests against the movie and cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed in a French satirical magazine have been staged in several towns across Lebanon, without resulting in violence.

But protests by Sunni Islamists in the northern city of Tripoli on September 14 led to clashes with police in which one demonstrator was killed and 25 people were injured.

More than 30 people have been killed in violence linked to the low-budget "Innocence of Muslims", produced by US-based extremist Christians, that has sparked protests in at least 20 countries since a trailer was posted online.

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Rebels to Use Syrian Territory for Training

September 24, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By NOUR MALAS

Syrian rebel fighters on the Turkish border are pushing ahead with a plan to turn territory in Idlib province that has been mostly under their control since early summer into a logistics and training base for fighters across the country.

The move, which could draw the regime's attention back to this swath of northwestern territory, shows how Syria's rebels are trying to consolidate control over pockets of liberated land along the Turkish border even as war rages farther north in Aleppo.

But it also comes as thousands of factions in the armed insurgency against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad compete for international support and local influence on the ground.

For months, local fighting groups assumed civilian governance in areas they have wrestled from regime control. Now, rebel fighters say they are intent on proving to world powers they can train fighters and unite disparate rebel groups using this territory as a haven.

"We are organized, we are effective, and we don't need anyone's help but God's," said Abu Zeid, a lawyer-turned fighter with one of three rebel groups guarding the newly taken Bab al-Hawa border crossing with Turkey.

Rebel fighters claimed control of the crossing in mid-July after a 12-hour battle with government soldiers. They now control at least three other major crossings along the 565-mile border with Turkey, a key frontier for the passage of weapons and aid supplies to front lines in Syria through the provinces of Idlib and Aleppo.

Last Wednesday, they gained a new foothold into Syrian territory after capturing the Tal Abyad crossing at the northern Raqqqa province. From Bab al-Hawa to Tal Abyad, rebels control about a 320-mile stretch of the border on the Syrian side.

These gains have threatened the military authority of the leaders of the Free Syrian Army, a nominal umbrella for fighters that is based in Turkey. The intensity of the fighting in Syria in recent months has bestowed the highest credibility on the most battle-hardened rebel brigades—most of them unaffiliated with the FSA—while alienating rebel and political leaders outside the country.

Rival leaders of the FSA, based in the guarded camp in southern Turkey where the highest-ranking Syrian army defectors live, separately announced over the weekend that they were moving the command for the rebel army into Syria.

The announcement, first made by Col. Riad al-Assad by video from inside Syria, and later confirmed by Brig. Gen. Moustapha al-Sheikh, appeared to be a bid to assert authority and catch up with the sprawling and splintering fighting force on the ground.

The two top defectors, who have ruled the umbrella group in an uneasy alliance since early this year but competed for foreign funds, are expected to base themselves in their hometowns in Idlib province but move frequently in and out of the country.

Their influence over fighting units outside of Idlib province remains tenuous, making their move into Syria a largely symbolic effort designed to appease Arab benefactors and Western powers urging rebel units to unite.

Inside Idlib, rebels say their toehold extends some 25 miles from the border into the province, territory in which some government checkpoints on roads connecting villages break the otherwise solid control of rebel forces.

Life has returned largely to normal in a cluster of villages as far as 10 miles from the border, minus frequent power cuts and idle children. In the town of al-Dana, where markets are bustling with customers from surrounding villages, residents wake up to the sound of jackhammers as construction workers resume work on new homes.

Villagers and fighters in the area have even felt safe from aerial bombardment, the military's latest tactic in rooting out rebels in Aleppo and other parts of rural Idlib. Many say they hadn't heard a jet or helicopter fly over since Turkey reinforced its military presence at the border in late June, after Syria shot down a Turkish fighter jet in the area on June 22.

"We were under threat from the regime's forces until the downing of the Turkish jet," said Abdelkadir, a defected first lieutenant leading Battalion 309, a unit in Tahrir Brigade, or Liberation Brigade, that is one of at least a handful of groups jostling for control in this village of 6,000 people. "Then we became reassured. We gained the courage to start training in the area."

The battalion held its training session at a course dug into the rolling hills, past beige tents that are the group's new headquarters. Down the road, a checkpoint of cinder blocks painted in the colors of Syria's rebel flag and another grouping of tents mark the territory of Ahrar al-Sham, an Islamist rebel faction gaining influence in Idlib.

Ahrar al-Sham has also recently set up training camps for its fighters. An inaugural, two-week course this month gathered some 40 fighters from across Idlib province, a 19-year-old who joined the training said.

"The training included physical fitness, weaponry and religion," the fighter said. "We are going to try to focus more on guerrilla warfare, because some of us will be sent to Aleppo."

The widening of military activity here is a risky calculation for the local rebels trying to balance the demands of unifying their ranks inside Syria—mostly at the request of Arab and Western powers funding the rebel movement— with the rebuilding of civilian life in a dozen villages that dot the border with Turkey.

Rival secular and Islamist groups are competing for control in the smallest villages in Idlib. The rebels' success will depend on whether they can keep rivalries at bay, whether regime forces steer clear of the area, and—most significantly—how porous the Turkish border continues to be to shuttle in weapons and supplies.

"Even in the international media, we're beyond the illusion of the FSA and Col. Riad al-As'ad as its leader," said Khaled Ali, a spokesman for the Hama Military Council, which groups several fighting units and pledges allegiance to the FSA umbrella because, Mr. Ali said, "unfortunately most of the support still goes to the people outside."

"Some of us call ourselves FSA," he said, "but we know that we define what the FSA is on the ground."
(top)

Syrian Opposition Figures Meet In Damascus

September 24, 2012

Associated Press

By Albert Aji And Zeina Karam

DAMASCUS, Syria - Syrian opposition figures who reject foreign intervention in Syria's 18-month conflict called for the ouster of President Bashar Assad at a rare meeting Sunday in the nation's capital. The gathering was tolerated by the regime in an apparent attempt to lend credibility to its claims that it remains open to political reform despite its bloody crackdown on dissent.

A senior former Assad ally, meanwhile, said Iran is providing massive support for the embattled Syrian regime.

"Iranians are active in leading positions in the military," former Syrian Prime Minister Riad Hijab, who defected to the opposition last month, told the German daily Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung. "We're not only talking about military aid, but also logistical and economic support" by Iran.

Earlier this month, the top commander of Iran's powerful Revolutionary Guard said the elite unit has high-level advisers in Syria. Iran is also believed to be sending weapons to Syria.

In recent weeks, Assad's military has escalated airstrikes and shelling of civilian areas to put down an uprising that began in March 2011 with peaceful protests but has since devolved into a civil war. Activists say close to 30,000 people have been killed.

Sunday's opposition conference was attended by diplomats from Iran, Russia and China, Assad's main allies. It was likely to be viewed as likely to be viewed as a cosmetic gesture by Syrian rebels and their many backers in the international community.

The loose network of Syrian rebel groups and the political opposition outside Syria believe Assad cannot be trusted to negotiate reform or a peaceful transfer of power, and call for foreign military intervention to break the stalemate in the conflict.

The United States and its allies have refrained from such action, partly because of international divisions over Syria and fears of a wider conflict. The opposition figures who met in Damascus are open to the idea of a political settlement, even though the conflict so far has eluded all attempts at mediation.

Assad's government tightly restricts criticism in areas it controls, and security was tight for Sunday's one-day conference at a Damascus hotel, attended by dozens of people. Streets leading to the hotel were blocked off, plainclothes security agents patrolled the perimeter and participants passed through security checks.

A bomb hidden in a black bag exploded on a footbridge in downtown Damascus, close to the Four Seasons hotel, about a kilometer (under a mile) from where Sunday's opposition conference was held. Two people suffered slight injuries, witnesses said.

Sunday's meeting was organized by the National Coordination Body for Democratic Change in Syria, or NCB, an umbrella for 16 opposition groups with roots in the country.

On Thursday, two senior NCB leaders disappeared after landing at Damascus International Airport, along with a friend who was to pick them up, and the NCB has blamed the regime for the disappearance. The government claimed the three were kidnapped by "terrorist groups," a phrase it uses for rebels.

Despite the incident, the group said participants agreed on the idea of "overthrowing the regime with all its symbols" while emphasizing the need for "peaceful struggle to achieve the goals of the revolution."

"It's our right to meet here in the capital to express our views without being subject to dictates and pressures or to be forced to make concessions," said the NCB's head, Hassan Abdul-Azim, who spent long years in Syrian prisons for his opposition role.

The strong language may be aimed at gaining credibility among Syrians who despise the regime but are weary of civil war.

NCB leaders, most of them traditional leftists, accuse the rebels and the Syrian National Council, a political opposition group based outside Syria, of being beholden to Turkey, which shelters defected Syrian generals and opposition figures, as well as Gulf Arab countries that support the rebels.

The rebels, in turn, accuse the NCB of being cut off from grassroots opposition fighters on the ground. Many rebels look askance at any political plan short of Assad's immediate ouster, seeing it as a play for time.

Ausama Monajed, a Syrian National Council official in exile, said the NCB was letting itself be used for Syrian propaganda purposes.

"Obviously, the regime had a signal to send ... to show that they are open to political dialogue and to sitting with so-called reasonable people," Monajed said. He portrayed the NCB leaders as isolated and lacking support among Syrians.

The statement emerging from Sunday's conference called for an immediate ceasefire accompanied by the full withdrawal of the Syrian army from towns and cities and the release of all political detainees and kidnapped people. This would be followed by the start of negotiations between the opposition and representatives of the Syrian government on a peaceful transition of power, it added.

The scenario outlined by the participants is similar to a six-point peace plan proposed by the former international peace envoy to Syria, Kofi Annan. That plan ended with Annan quitting the post last month after his cease-fire failed to take hold as violence escalated across the country.

Haitham Manna, a Paris-based veteran dissident who heads the external branch of the NCB, said the Syrian uprising was launched from inside Syria and it was "only natural for us to speak on behalf of the revolution from inside Syria."

He said regime change in the country was inevitable.

"This regime is dead in the hearts and minds of all Syrians ... there must be negotiations on a peaceful transition of power," he said in a telephone interview.

The Russian ambassador in Damascus, Azmat Allah Kolmahmedov, praised the conference, calling it a "direct implementation of the process of reforms launched by the Syrian government, including the freedom of expression."

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Most Of Syria Outside Regime Control: Rebel Colonel

September 23, 2012

AFP

Syria's vast territory is increasingly outside the control of the regular military, whose aerial superiority is the last strength keeping the Damascus regime afloat, a rebel chief told AFP.

"With or without outside help, the fall of the regime is a question of months, not years," said Colonel Ahmed Abdel Wahab, who claims that he commands a brigade of 850 men in the Free Syrian Army (FSA).

"If we had anti-aircraft and anti-tank missiles, we could quickly gain the advantage," he said, speaking in the village of Atma near the Syrian border with Turkey.

"But if foreign countries don't give us these, we will still win. It will take longer, that's all.

"We control most of the country. In most regions, the soldiers are prisoners of their barracks. They go out very little and we can move freely everywhere, except Damascus."

"As long as we avoid the main roads, we can move freely," he added.

Wahab, a colonel in the regular army only nine months ago, said his defection was driven by "the magnitude of the crimes of the regime, which is killing its own people."

He said he commands four katibas (battalions) which make up the "Nasser Salaheddine" brigade in Syria's second city of Aleppo and the region.

Wahab said he attends daily meetings with FSA leaders in the northern metropolis, where orders are given to him and other battalion commanders.

But he added that he has remained in contact with officers who are still in the regular army.

"Their morale is very bad," he said.

"If the Sunni soldiers don't desert, it's only because they fear for their families, who are being held hostage. I was able to find a safe place for mine before leaving the army."

Nearly 80 percent of towns and villages along the Turkish border are outside the control of Damascus, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

The AFP has observed that in many of these areas, residents are managing their own affairs. ([top](#))

Survey: Syrian rebels want democracy, Islamic-style

September 24, 2012

USA Today

By Oren Dorell

Syrian opposition members generally want a democratic government that protects the rights of minorities, though many also want a constitution based on Islam, according to a recent survey.

Their aspirations are important because the Obama administration has said it is refraining from arming the opposition, which has been pummeled by Syrian security forces for 18 months, in part out of fear of igniting sectarian violence and of weapons reaching Islamist radicals who would threaten allies in the region.

The survey by the International Republican Institute, which trains democracy activists around the world, found high support for a government that "respectfully acknowledges religion" and treats all religions equally. The second-most popular model of choice was for a constitution "based on Islam."

"Most of the opposition is Sunni Muslims, and they are democratically minded, but they want a government based on some kind of Islamic law or that follows Islamic guidelines," says Elizabeth O'Bagy, an analyst at the Institute for the Study of War who helped the survey writers find contacts in the opposition movement.

The survey was conducted with help from Pechter Polls of Princeton, N.J., which used personal networks of opposition members to reach 1,168 participants via the Internet, including 315 opposition members in Syria, from June 1 to July 2. It was released Friday. Respondents were asked to rank their support, on a scale of 1 to 7, of various statements about a future Syrian government.

A government styled on that of France, the United States or Turkey received the highest marks. A government styled on Iran or Iraq received the lowest marks.

They tended to agree that government should protect minorities, even members of President Bashar Assad's Alawite sect, atheists and apostates.

They agreed that the government and constitution should mention religion but otherwise be secular. They also agreed, though not as much, with the statement that the constitution should be "based on Islam."

O'Bagy says the findings confirm her own research. Many Syrian opposition members she has spoken to compared what they want to the United States. "People here are religious, and, yes, we have a secular constitution and government," she says. "But a lot of decisions that are made are based on religious beliefs."

Though that view is shared by the majority, religious extremists known as Salafis, who seek to rule according to an ultra-conservative version of Islam, are a small minority in the opposition that is growing in number and influence, says O'Bagy, who published her own report titled "Jihad In Syria" last week. They're growing because of the rising desperation and violence inflicted by Assad's regime and because they're funded by Persian Gulf Arab nations, she says.

Amnesty International said this month that as Syrian security forces are forced to withdraw from villages, they have adopted a pattern of indiscriminate artillery attacks on civilian targets and that close to 200 non-combatants are dying each day.

O'Bagy estimates that Salafi Jihadis number from 800 to 1,000 among up to 60,000 armed fighters. The majority of the fighters are what she calls religious nationalists "fighting for democracy and nationalist principles but (for whom) religion plays a large role." Islamists akin to the Muslim Brotherhood, which wants a religious state through democratic means, represent 20,000 to 30,000 fighters, "a significant portion of the opposition but still not a majority," she says.

Though the United States declines to supply weapons to rebels at war with the regime, money for arms has flowed from countries such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Kuwait, which tend to support hardcore Islamists, and Turkey, which supports the Muslim Brotherhood, O'Bagy says.

"More extremist elements are beginning to gain increasing popular support," O'Bagy says. "The situation is getting so desperate. They may gain a foothold in the Syrian opposition to influence the outcome, or at the very least threaten the future stability of a post-Assad future."

The United States should deliver "a much larger engagement to compete with this extremist power that is coming about as the situation becomes more desperate," she says.

Edgar Vasquez, a spokesman for the State Department's Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, says the rebels don't need more guns. Instead, the State Department is focused on helping unarmed elements in the opposition develop a plan for how to rule once Assad is gone.

Rebels, led by the Free Syrian Army, have liberated large portions of the country's north, they've seized checkpoints on the border with Turkey and Iraq, and they have turned the tide on the Assad regime with the weapons they already have, Vasquez says.

He agrees that extremists are a concern. "That's why our principal focus has been to encourage the opposition to come up with a transition plan," Vasquez says. "That's something those elements within Syria are working on within Syria -- with a cross section of Kurds, Sunnis and Alawites -- to agree on a plan to lay the way forward. There's no question that (Assad) will be gone."
(top)

Syrian President's Sister "Now In Dubai"

September 24, 2012

AFP

Embattled Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's only sister, Bushra, whose husband was killed in a July bombing, is now living in Dubai with her children, Syrian residents told AFP on Sunday.

Bushra's husband General Assef Shawkat, an army deputy chief of staff, was killed along with three other high-ranking officials in a July 18 bombing at the National Security headquarters in Damascus.

The president's elder sister, a pharmacist in her 50s, has five children she has enrolled at a private school in Dubai, according to Syrian expatriates in the emirate.

Ayman Abdel Nour, editor-in-chief of opposition news website all4syria.com, told AFP that Bushra, who did not hold any position in the Syrian regime, left after "differences" with her brother whose troops are locked in a deadly conflict with rebels.

Bashar has "accused her of being closer to the opposition because she did not entirely agree with his policies," Abdel Nour said.

In 2008, Bushra also left Syria following what sources said were "disagreements" with her brother, staying for one year with her children in the United Arab Emirates capital Abu Dhabi.

With Bushra's departure, Assad now has only his brother Maher, who commands the notorious Fourth Brigade, in the country.

Their other two brothers, Bassel and Majd, are dead.

Bassel, who was groomed by his father -- Syria's former president Hafez al-Assad -- to succeed in power had opposed Bushra's marriage to Shawkat and put the latter behind bars on four separate occasions to ensure he would stay away from his sister.

But Bassel's death in a January 1994 car accident enabled the marriage to go ahead a year later.

Majd, of whom little is known, died of unspecified illness in 2009.

According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, at least 29,000 people have been killed since the revolt against Assad's rule erupted in March last year. The United Nations puts the toll at more than 20,000.

A large number of businessmen and wealthy Syrians fleeing the unrest have arrived in Dubai over the past few months.

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SCA

US Slams Pakistan Minister's Bounty To Kill Filmmaker

September 24, 2012

AFP

The United States condemned a Pakistani government minister's offer of a bounty to kill the maker of an anti-Islam film that has triggered violent protests around the Muslim world.

As demonstrators held more rallies against the film -- this time in Hong Kong, Turkey, Greece, Saudi Arabia, Iran and Bangladesh -- even Pakistan's government distanced itself from the comments by its Railways Minister, Ghulam Ahmed Bilour.

On Saturday, Bilour offered a \$100,000 "prize" for killing the filmmaker of "Innocence of Muslims" -- an amateurish film made in the United States -- and invited the Taliban and Al-Qaeda to take part in the "noble deed."

The State Department weighed in Sunday, with an official recalling that US President Barack Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton "have both said the video at the core of this is offensive, disgusting, and reprehensible."

The official added: "But that is no justification for violence and it is important for responsible leaders to stand up and speak out against violence."

"Therefore we find Mr. Bilour's announcement is inflammatory and inappropriate," the official said in a statement.

In Pakistan, Prime Minister Raja Pervez Ashraf rejected the bounty offer.

"This is not government policy. We completely dissociate (ourselves) from this," a spokesman for the prime minister's office told AFP.

Fresh rallies were held across Pakistan Sunday to condemn the film after violent nationwide protests Friday left 21 people dead when police used tear gas and live rounds to fight back protesters.

More than 50 people have died in protests and attacks around the world linked to the low-budget film, which mocks Islam and the Prophet Mohammed, since the first demonstrations on September 11. Four Americans, including the ambassador to Libya, were killed in the Libyan city of Benghazi.

The publication on Wednesday of cartoons mocking the Prophet Mohammed in French satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo has further stoked anger.

In France, an 18-year-old man who used Facebook to threaten the magazine's editors was charged Sunday with terrorism-related activity, a judicial source said.

Police arrested the teenager in the southern city of Toulon on Wednesday after he was reported by a person close to him who was concerned over his radicalism.

Police found several knives at his residence and said the man had threatened to go after those in charge of the weekly.

Meanwhile, an influential US lawmaker cast doubt over whether there was even an anti-American protest going on when the American ambassador to Libya was killed in an attack on the consulate in Benghazi.

The Obama administration initially said it believed extremists had not really planned the attack in Libya but rather had simply used a spontaneous protest over the anti-Islamic trailer as cover to mix in with the crowd and attack with weapons that included rocket-propelled grenades.

The White House for the first time Thursday described the assault as a "terrorist attack" and said it could have links to Al-Qaeda. But a Republican lawmaker cast doubt Sunday over whether the protests even happened.

"I have seen no information that shows that there was a protest going on as you have seen around any other embassy at the time," Mike Rogers, chairman of the House intelligence committee, told CNN's "State of the Union" program.

"The notion about the film... I think the administration was ill-advised to push down that road," he added.

Rogers said he believed it was a revenge attack timed to coincide with the 11th anniversary of 9/11 but that it wasn't clear if the militants had known Stevens was there or just got lucky.

"This had to be a pre-planned event. We know it was an act of terrorism. I think the administration has come to the conclusion it's an act of terrorism now," he said.

The State Department is under rising scrutiny about what appears to be inadequate security for Stevens and the consulate in Benghazi before the attack.

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WHA/EUR

Belarus Votes As Europe Keeps A Watch For Signs That Sanctions Can End

September 24, 2012

New York Times

By Andrew E. Kramer

MINSK, Belarus - Belarus held parliamentary elections on Sunday, though the outcome was hardly in doubt: supporters of President Aleksandr G. Lukashenko have traditionally won, and now hold, all 110 seats in the chamber.

Still, there was some uncertainty surrounding the circumstances of the balloting.

The campaign provided the first broad interaction between Belarus and international observers since the 2010 presidential election here went badly awry, ending in police beatings and mass arrests. In response, the European Union imposed a travel ban on Mr. Lukashenko and 100 or so senior members of his government, and the lifting of the ban depends in part on the observers' assessment of the election on Sunday. Results were not expected before Monday.

Opponents of Mr. Lukashenko, always a mercurial figure, say that his modest steps to ease election rules since 2010 are nothing more than window dressing, and that the country, its eccentric leader and his dictatorial form of government remain dismally backward and an embarrassment for Europe.

In a sign of these deep troubles, soon after the last national election in Belarus, Irina Khalip, the wife of the leading opposition candidate, awoke one morning to the greeting, "Behold, the first lady of Belarus is getting up!"

The fellow inmates in her prison were, of course, joking. She was peeling herself off a lower plank in a bunk bed.

"We're just falling into an abyss" politically, said Ms. Khalip, who was released from prison last year but remains under house arrest. The authorities in 2010 also threatened to put her son into foster care. In April, they released her husband, Andrei Sannikov.

Mr. Lukashenko's often absurd outbursts - in March he said it was "better to be a dictator than gay" - cast his rule in a cartoonish tinge. So has police behavior. When protesters resorted to flash mobs, clapping or eating ice cream in a group, the police began to arrest people for clapping and eating ice cream.

But for dissidents like Ms. Khalip, even small changes in election practices, which were the most that were hoped for in this vote, are pivotally important.

Two opposition parties, the Belarus Popular Front and the United Civil Party, withdrew from the election last weekend and called for a boycott. The government, perhaps in response, subsidized delicious spreads of potato pancakes, pastries and sausages at buffets set up in the foyers of many polling sites.

By midafternoon on a drizzly election day in Minsk, turnout passed the 50 percent mark needed for the vote to be declared valid. Voters even tramped into one polling station, No. 85, to dutifully check the single name on the ballot. They could vote "yes" or "no."

Mr. Lukashenko, at a news conference, embraced the idea that Belarus has boring elections. "Those who say our elections are boring, well, let them envy us," he said. "Elections in a civilized society, in a civilized country, should be exactly this way."

Mr. Lukashenko voted with one arm around his young son, Kolya, who wore a matching suit, in keeping with the practice of their public appearances together. Mr. Lukashenko calls the boy, whose mother has not been publicly identified, "my talisman."

In a preliminary assessment, the observer mission, from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, noted improvements in Belarussian election law. Officials eased the rules for forming initiative groups, which candidates need to legally gather signatures to get on the ballot. Surprisingly, many opposition figures were allowed to collect signatures.

Electoral commissions, though, eventually threw out about half of these applications on technicalities.

European Union officials have recently shifted their emphasis to election law and away from political prisoners, not wanting to encourage Mr. Lukashenko to hold dissidents as bargaining chips. By different assessments, Belarus has 11 to 14 political prisoners, including one candidate in the 2010 election.

Ms. Khalip, her green eyes blazing intensely, has objected to this stance, as have other former prisoners and relatives, saying the bloc is abandoning prisoners.

"When there are hostages, what else is there to talk about?" she said. "Every one is a personal tragedy."

The European Commission has scheduled a ministerial-level review of the visa ban a month after the election.

"It is not a negotiation: 'You give me this. I give you that,' " said Matteo Mecacci, the head of the observer mission here. "It is not something we negotiate."

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Prophet Film Protesters Clash With Greek Police

September 24, 2012

Associated Press

By Demetris Nellas

ATHENS, Greece - Greek riot police used tear gas and pepper spray to disperse Muslim protesters who clashed with officers Sunday during a rally against a film produced in the U.S. that denigrates Islam's Prophet Muhammad. No injuries were reported.

A general strike in Bangladesh shut down schools, transportation and businesses, while a few hundred people peacefully marched in Pakistan. Iranian students burned flags in Tehran to protest the recent publication of lewd caricatures of Muhammad by a French satirical weekly.

In Athens, six people were detained during the demonstration at a central square, police said. About 600 people attended the rally, which featured heated speeches, but was mostly peaceful.

The crowd then wanted to march to the U.S. Embassy, which is about three kilometers (two miles) away from Omonia Square. Some tried to break through police lines several times, but riot officers pushed them back.

The violence occurred at the end of the rally, when small groups of protesters threw objects at police. Three cars were damaged and three storefronts smashed.

Banners were displayed in English, denouncing the film and called on the U.S. to hang the filmmaker. One told President Barack Obama "we are all with Osama," referring to Osama bin Laden, the al-Qaida leader who was killed in a U.S. raid in Pakistan in May 2011.

The amateurish film, which portrays the prophet as a fraud, a womanizer and a child molester, has sparked violent protests throughout the Muslim world for nearly two weeks. The violence linked to protests over the film has resulted in the deaths of at least 49 people, including the U.S. ambassador to Libya.

About 300 Iranian students protested against the caricatures that appeared in the French weekly. They rallied in front of the French Embassy in Tehran, burning French, U.S. and Israeli flags and chanting "death to France" and "down with the U.S." They called for the expulsion of French ambassador to Iran.

In an interview to be aired Monday on CNN's "Piers Morgan Tonight," Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was asked about the protests in the Muslim world.

"Offending the Holy Prophet is quite ugly," Ahmadinejad said. "This has very little or nothing to do with freedom and freedom of speech. This is the weakness of and the abuse of freedom, and in many places it is a crime.

"But we also believe that this must also be resolved in a humane atmosphere, in a participatory environment and we do not like anyone losing their lives or being killed for any reason anywhere in the world."

In Bangladesh, schools and businesses were closed and transportation was disrupted across the south Asian country as hardline Islamic groups protesting the film enforced a general strike.

The strike was called in response to police action Saturday against supporters of the groups who rallied in the capital, Dhaka, to denounce the film. Dozens of people were arrested and scores injured Saturday as protesters clashed with police. Several vehicles were burned, including a police van. No violence was immediately reported during Sunday's strike.

About 300 Christians, Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims peacefully rallied in Pakistan's capital, Islamabad, to protest the film.

"There will be no peace in the world until we respect each other's religion," Sikh leader Deedar Singh said.

The protesters marched about a 1 kilometer (just over a half mile) on Islamabad's main avenue near the parliament building.
(top)

Cumbersome Gazprom losing its clout

September 23, 2012

Washington Post

By Will Englund and Kathy Lally

MOSCOW — The foundations are starting to crack at Gazprom, the giant energy company that is the central pillar in the economic and political system constructed by Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Gazprom's exports of natural gas to Europe, which form the mainspring of its wealth, are falling, and a potentially major fight is brewing over price fixing. Russian officials publicly criticize the company for its sloth. Subsidiaries are being lopped off and sold at fire-sale prices to more agile competitors, almost certainly on orders from the Kremlin.

Neither at home nor abroad does the company appear to have a competitive answer to the dramatic decline in gas prices worldwide — sparked by the rapid development of American shale gas. Gazprom,

the world's largest producer of natural gas, has grown somnolent, its critics say, failing to invest in research and development and ignoring the changes transforming the industry.

Under Putin's control, Gazprom has been a principal driver of the rest of the Russian economy, generously spreading rewards and high-paying contracts to Kremlin favorites. It employs nearly half a million people, working in cities and towns in every region of Russia. Even now, as the company hits significant turbulence and declining profits, it is continuing its free-spending ways — with a new \$1.9 billion office tower in St. Petersburg, planned as the tallest skyscraper in Europe, just a token expression of its opulent habits.

"It's a very important instrument," said Vladimir Pastukhov, a visiting scholar at St. Anthony's College Oxford. But after 12 years, Putin and his friends have squeezed so much from it, he said, there may not be much left to wring out.

Gazprom's troubles are likely to accelerate a long-running trend, which makes the government the loser. An extraordinary 60 percent of Russia's revenue comes from taxes and income from fossil fuels, economists believe; Gazprom alone accounts for 12 percent of all Russian exports. The state owns just over 50 percent of the company and is heavily dependent on the taxes and profits it brings in. But as officially reported income goes down while spending stays steady, the government takes in less and less. Spinning off the more lucrative parts of the business has the same effect.

"It's the nationalization of costs and the privatization of profit," said Mikhail Krutikhin, an energy analyst with a company here called Rusenergy.

But the implications for Russia's policy toward its neighbors and the rest of Europe are immense, because the Kremlin has used Gazprom as its chief club when bullying recalcitrant nations that depend on its supplies of gas. The consequences for Putin's system itself — in which Gazprom has been both the main income generator and the chief dispenser of financial rewards to those in favor — are potentially profound.

"It's going from being Russia's greatest asset to Russia's biggest problem," said Vladimir Milov, once a deputy energy minister and a longtime critic of the company.

Gazprom in its current form spreads so much cash around that, as Sam Greene, who studies state-society relations at the New Economic School here, put it, "They subsidize essentially the way politics is run in the country."

Gazprom still has plenty of money — its reported profit was \$44 billion last year. But profits are down more than 23 percent in 2012, and the deputy minister of economic development, Andrei Klepach, said the company could run into serious problems as early as 2014 because of competition stemming from cheap shale gas.

At Putin's behest, nonetheless, it is continuing to pursue hugely overpriced projects for political ends that are unlikely ever to pay for themselves. Foremost among them are two ambitious undersea pipelines to Europe, justified neither by demand nor by supply.

This is standard procedure for Gazprom, a \$119 billion company. A phenomenally profitable monopoly up to now, it has been a prime source of funds for the Kremlin's pet projects. It spreads its export

earnings throughout favored sectors of the Russian economy — propping up rail-car builders, for instance, with orders for more freight cars than the railroad can haul — and dramatically overpays for the privilege. A mile of pipeline in Russia costs about three times as much as one in Germany.

It is a company that has devised intricate means to cover its tracks and keep billions of profits off its books, to divert cash and reward Putin's favorites, but it has paid so little attention to the changing realities of the actual gas business that, some analysts say, it is spending its way into insolvency.

Big earner, big spender

Gazprom was set up in the Soviet era to export gas to Europe. After the collapse of communism in 1991, Russia broke up its oil monopoly — oil prices were very low at the time — but held on to Gazprom, its chief earner and its chief spender.

When Putin took the presidency in 2000, he told the oligarchs he would protect their businesses as long as they stayed out of politics. Clifford Gaddy of the Brookings Institution calls this "Putin's protection racket."

But Gazprom, in which the state at that time had a minority share, was in a different category. It wasn't just a business. Putin moved carefully in the beginning, because it was too valuable an asset to pick a fight over. First, he replaced the board chairman with his St. Petersburg friend Dmitry Medvedev, whom he was to anoint as Russian president in 2008. A year after installing Medvedev, he engineered the appointment of Alexei Miller, an old associate from St. Petersburg, as CEO.

The state arranged to take on a majority stake in the company. As Gazprom became the chief means of rewarding Putin's inner circle — men who were elbowing the first generation of oligarchs aside — Putin installed another longtime associate, Viktor Zubkov, as chairman. Zubkov is the keeper of meticulously collected and undoubtedly compromising information on each of the old-time oligarchs, Gaddy and Barry Ickes, an economist at Penn State, assert.

Gazprom became not just another company, but a component of the political system: a bulwark of Putin's domain.

When Putin wanted to bring the news media to heel a decade ago, Gazprom Media was organized. It bought up enough television companies, newspapers and radio stations to give it today one of the biggest media holdings in Europe.

When Putin wants money for a sports complex in Orenburg, or a chess academy in Khanty-Mansiysk, or a monument in Yaroslavl or an apartment-house development in Moscow, he calls on Gazprom.

When he needs financing for a political campaign, or a loan on favorable terms for one of his friends, he goes to the same source, Greene said.

He has wielded Gazprom as a blunt weapon against Ukraine, where corruption has provided the company with rich opportunities to assert influence and to manipulate huge amounts of cash. Ukraine's large storage facilities and its role as a transit nation through which most of Gazprom's exports flow have given rise to layers upon layers of middlemen who take their cut. The country itself is Gazprom's

biggest foreign buyer and pays a higher price than any other customer. Ukraine's debt to Gazprom is growing so large that politicians and analysts worry the country will be drawn tightly into Russia's orbit.

"Putin was very deeply into the affairs of Gazprom, always," Milov said. How much, for instance, will Russian consumers have to pay for gas, and how much will they be subsidized by the company? Every year, Putin picks the numbers, said Natalia Volchkova, a professor at the New Economic School here.

In doing the president's bidding, Gazprom officials have practically lost sight of the investment needs of the company — modernization, maintenance and expansion — and of the need to compete. They have been in the money and political power business, not the gas business.

"The individual interests of managers are not aligned with the interests of the organization," Volchkova said. "Loyalty is more important than efficiency, as in any state company." Loyalty, that is, to Putin and his system — not to the running of a good company.

Private investors share the doubts about Gazprom: Though the Russian company's reported profits in 2011 top even those of Exxon Mobil, its stock valuation is about one-quarter that of the American oil giant. Bloomberg calculated in August that Gazprom had fallen out of the top 20 of the world's largest corporations.

But neither the demands of the market nor of the shareholders can force greater efficiency on Gazprom, Greene said. "There's only one shareholder who matters."

Stagnant production

Gazprom's production has been stagnant for years. A huge new \$20 billion gas-extraction project in the Barents Sea was put in mothballs this month after Gazprom's foreign partners — who alone had the expertise to pursue it — dropped out.

Gazprom has spent a decade trying to negotiate a huge deal with China, but with no results so far. The two sides are about 1,000 miles apart on the routing of a new pipeline.

The advent of shale gas in the United States has increased supplies and driven down spot prices worldwide, and Europe can now buy liquefied natural gas from the Middle East at a relatively attractive price. It is also exploring its own shale-gas potential. Customers have been renegotiating contracts, as the Russian giant comes under more pressure. Unlike oil, natural gas until recently was difficult to ship except in pipelines; this gave Gazprom a guaranteed, if partial, monopoly as a gas supplier to Europe.

But that era is passing. Gazprom executives have been very slow to recognize the competition. Their company is large and sprawling and, with a seemingly eternal income stream, had no need to be innovative or especially adept at what it did. It opened the spigots and gas and money flowed in gushers.

"They will have real problems in export sales in the coming years, and they're not ready for it," Milov said.

Now the European Union is putting pressure on Gazprom to "decouple" its pipeline business from its gas-supply business. The Kremlin is unlikely ever to go for that idea.

The E.U. has also opened an antitrust investigation into Gazprom's business dealings in Eastern Europe, accusing it of price fixing. The Kremlin, by its defensive pronouncements, clearly takes the threat against Gazprom seriously. A new presidential decree forbids Gazprom from reaching a settlement without getting the Kremlin's approval.

At the same time, though, Putin is shaking up the gas business at home. A beneficiary has been a domestic competitor called Novatek, which recently snapped up a Gazprom subsidiary known as Sibur for way under market value. Novatek may, reportedly, get permission to start exporting gas, as well, breaking Gazprom's monopoly.

"The favoritism toward Novatek is pretty striking," Gaddy said. The company is half owned by Gennady Tymchenko — a former judo instructor who knew Putin when they belonged to the same martial arts club in St. Petersburg. He also runs a Swiss company called Gunvor that has become extremely profitable as a middleman in exports of Russian oil. His partner is Leonid Mikhelson, who rose to second-richest man in Russia on the Bloomberg billionaire index thanks to the Sibur deal — the index valuing Sibur at its actual value, not what Novatek paid for it.

The government has also announced that it is reversing its policy and once more placing its own people on the Gazprom board. That is unlikely to substantially change the way the board — already a rubber stamp — runs its business. It is probably a sign of "a fight under the rug" between Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev and Igor Sechin, a close associate of Putin and head of the Rosneft oil company, Krutikhin said.

One thing remains unchanged, no matter who wins that inside struggle, Milov said: "Putin is the central figure who makes the major decisions."

Is he preparing for Gazprom's decline? "I would hope they're thinking about that," said Greene, at the New Economic School. But it's difficult to imagine, he said, how you could remove Gazprom from the political and economic system in Russia and still have the system.

(top)

FOREIGN POLICY

A Manager Of Overseas Crises, As Much As The World Permits

September 24, 2012

New York Times

By Peter Baker

WASHINGTON - When President Obama flies to New York on Monday afternoon for the United Nations General Assembly, he will dispense with the usual battery of one-on-one meetings with world leaders so he can tape an appearance on "The View" and return by midweek to the battleground state of Ohio. Left to help smooth over any ruffled feathers will be Tom Donilon.

Gray-suited, meticulous and little known to the public, Mr. Donilon is the president's national security adviser and central figure in American foreign policy, "the most important person in the mix," according to Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr. In this critical campaign season, he has also become the president's geopolitical bodyguard, charged with keeping the world at bay for another 43 days.

Mr. Donilon is the one who wakes the president when an ambassador is killed in Libya, the one who tries to keep Israel from rupturing relations and Egypt from heading off track. Solutions to intractable problems like Iran's nuclear program are for another day. For now, it is Mr. Donilon's mission to manage problems and keep them from blowing up, so Mr. Obama can focus on Mitt Romney rather than Benjamin Netanyahu.

But the world has not been cooperative with the American political calendar, as the tumult in Muslim countries attests. Afghan troops keep killing American troops. Syria keeps massacring its people. China and Japan keep rattling sabers. Iran keeps defying the West. And the bill will come due in November when Mr. Obama will confront a daunting list of challenges that the final weeks of the presidential campaign have seemingly put on hold.

If anyone can manage it, colleagues say, it is Mr. Donilon. "Tom can keep 10 important things in his head at once while juggling others in the air, trying to avoid any falling to the ground," Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said. Jacob S. Lew, the White House chief of staff, said Mr. Donilon ensures that "we don't end up just with all the grains of sand but we see how all the issues connect."

Mr. Biden, whose wife, Jill, employs Mr. Donilon's wife, Cathy Russell, as her chief of staff, said Mr. Donilon channels Mr. Obama. "In a sense, he kind of thinks like the president," Mr. Biden said. "Tom knows where the president wants to go. Tom knows when the president wants to go left, straight, up or down."

A longtime political operative, Mr. Donilon has methodically reinvented himself as a maestro of international affairs, consolidating control of the national security apparatus in a corner West Wing office stacked with classified briefing books as thick as a fist. He oversaw support for the Libya war that toppled Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi and the operation that killed Osama bin Laden. He made sure surge troops left Afghanistan as scheduled. He is a champion of Mr. Obama's so-called pivot to Asia.

Yet Mr. Donilon has not escaped controversy. Colleagues talk of clashes with the Pentagon and the State Department and flashes of temper that should have lasted 30 seconds but extended for 10 minutes. Republicans suspect him of orchestrating national security leaks to make Mr. Obama look good, "which a spokesman calls 'completely false.' " And some foreign policy specialists consider him a pretender without a real vision.

"He is ferociously protective of the president's priorities," which is part of his job, said Kori Schake, who worked on President George W. Bush's national security staff, "but comes down squarely on the side of the president's political interests when they are at odds with our national interests." She cited the timeline imposed on the Afghanistan troop surge, a move that mollified the antiwar left but has been criticized as premature.

Mr. Donilon, 57, who has lately avoided journalists amid leak investigations and declined to be interviewed for this article, is an unlikely foreign policy maven. He grew up in Providence, R.I., studied at Catholic University, then won an internship and later a staff job in Jimmy Carter's White House. In 1980, he wrangled convention delegates to beat Edward M. Kennedy.

After Mr. Carter's defeat, Mr. Donilon studied law at the University of Virginia and worked on campaigns, including Mr. Biden's 1988 presidential bid. When Bill Clinton won in 1992, a Carter-era mentor, Warren M. Christopher, became secretary of state and made Mr. Donilon his chief of staff.

He worked for six years as an executive at Fannie Mae, the housing giant that after his departure was at the center of the 2008 economic crash. Mr. Donilon, who made millions, was not linked to Fannie Mae's problems with accounting irregularities, but he was part of a management that lobbied Congress against tighter regulation.

Mr. Donilon was drawn into Mr. Obama's orbit late in 2008 to help prepare him for his debates in the general election campaign. After the election, Rahm Emanuel, a friend from the Clinton administration who was tapped as Mr. Obama's chief of staff, made sure he became deputy to Gen. James Jones, the new national security adviser.

Mr. Jones focused on high-profile meetings with ambassadors and foreign ministers, leaving Mr. Donilon to brief the president and run the National Security Council. Mr. Emanuel often bypassed Mr. Jones to work with Mr. Donilon. "Tom and Rahm were making decisions," said a former White House official. "There were times he probably felt left out," the official said of Mr. Jones, but Mr. Donilon "never meant to make the general look bad."

Mr. Donilon made enemies at the Pentagon during the debate over sending more troops to Afghanistan. He suspected the military of trying to manipulate the new president; the military suspected Mr. Donilon, who never served in uniform or visited Afghanistan, of substituting politics for strategy.

Mr. Donilon clashed with officials like Michèle A. Flournoy, then under secretary of defense. "She really took a pounding from Donilon," one colleague said. Robert M. Gates, then the defense secretary, warned that making Mr. Donilon national security adviser would be "a disaster," according to a book by Bob Woodward.

Mr. Donilon has since visited Afghanistan, and colleagues said he forged better relations with the military.

"It's not unusual, especially with a new administration coming in, getting a sense that the military might try to box you in on a political position, and I think Tom had what I would call kind of a questioning nature - are we really getting the real scoop?" said Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta, who succeeded Mr. Gates. "Over time and with some of the changes that were made with regard to the military leadership, it became much more of a give and take process."

Mr. Emanuel tried to enlist Mr. Donilon to succeed him as chief of staff, but it was Mr. Jones whom Mr. Donilon hoped to succeed. Mr. Obama, impressed with Mr. Donilon's trains-on-time proficiency, obliged.

"It's not something he had to learn," said Senator Jack Reed of Rhode Island, who went to high school with Mr. Donilon. "He's been preparing for a role like this for several decades."

Mr. Donilon righted an operation seen as dysfunctional. He is an "evangelist for process," one aide said, calling meeting after meeting to ensure every quarter is heard. His preparations and work ethic are legendary. "The notion of 24/7 - he gives new meaning to it," said Dennis B. Ross, a former special envoy. Once he was so exacting in choosing a basketball jersey for his son, recalled Tommy Vietor, his spokesman, "it was as if it was a principals' meeting."

Mr. Obama gave him grief for never taking time off and browbeat him into losing 50 pounds. But he remains a famous worrier - "the bed-wetter," some at the State Department call him. "He has a lot to worry about," Mrs. Clinton said. "He really cares deeply about getting it right."

Mr. Donilon has a complicated relationship with Mrs. Clinton. Colleagues said he seemed to fear her and rarely takes her on, yet is insecure about her, asking before a recent trip to China whether his meetings were on par with hers.

Mrs. Clinton played down tension and lavished praise - "incredibly intelligent" and "extraordinarily efficient," she said. "I have a great relationship with him. We don't always agree, obviously. I bring my own perspective and experience to the table. But he is truly an honest broker."

For a model Mr. Donilon has James A. Baker III, another convention delegate wrangler turned foreign policy statesman, and he is known to resent the idea that he has not evolved over the course of his career. When an aide said half-jokingly that Washington still viewed Mr. Donilon as a political operative, he replied bitterly, "Fourteen years in foreign policy and I'm a political guy. O.K. I ran the State Department but O.K. Baker complained about this, too."

For Mr. Donilon, politics is largely in the past. "He has devoted an incredible amount of time and energy over two decades in making the shift from being a political person to a policy person," said Benjamin Rhodes, a deputy, "and that's reflected in everything he's been doing."

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From Nigeria to Athens, Muslim protests rumble on

September 24, 2012

Reuters

By Robin Pomeroy

DUBAI - Muslims protested in Nigeria, Iran, Greece and Turkey on Sunday to show anti-Western anger against a film and cartoons insulting Islam had not dissipated.

As delegates from around the world gathered in New York for a U.N. General Assembly where the clash between free speech and blasphemy is bound to be raised, U.S. flags were once again burning in parts of the Muslim world.

Iranian students chanted "Death to America" and "Death to Israel" outside the French embassy in Tehran in protest at the decision by satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo to publish cartoons of the Prophet Mohammad, days after widespread protests - some deadly - against a film made in the United States.

Shi'ite Muslims in the Nigerian town of Katsina burned U.S., French and Israeli flags and a religious leader called for protests to continue until the makers of the film and cartoons are punished.

In Pakistan, where fifteen people were killed in protests on Friday, a government minister has offered \$100,000 to anyone who kills the maker of the short, amateurish video "The Innocence of Muslims". Calls have increased for a U.N. measure outlawing insults to Islam and blasphemy in general.

In Athens, some protesters hurled bottles of water, stones and shoes at police who responded with teargas. Calm returned when demonstrators interrupted the protest to pray.

Hours later, dozens of Muslim inmates in Athens' main prison set mattresses and bed sheets on fire in protest. Firemen with four engines battled the flames in some cells but police and government officials said late at night the situation was under control.

ON ALERT

Protests around the world were relatively small and calm, but Western embassies remained on alert after the U.S. ambassador to Libya and three other Americans were killed in one of the first protests, on September 11.

The upsurge of Muslim anger - just weeks before U.S. elections - have confronted President Barack Obama with a setback yet in his efforts to keep the "Arab Spring" revolutions from fuelling a new wave of anti-Americanism.

In U.S. ally Turkey, a secular Muslim state often seen as a bridge between the Islamic world and the West, protesters set fire to U.S. and Israeli flags on Sunday.

"May the hands that touch Mohammad break," chanted some 200 protesters before peacefully dispersing.

"We will certainly not allow uncontrolled protests, but we will not just grin and bear it when Islam's prophet is insulted," Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan told party members at the weekend.

"The protests in the Muslim world must be measured, and the West should show a determined stance against Islamophobia."

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EDITORIAL / OPINION

On The Wrong Side

September 24, 2012

New York Times

Leaders of Iraq's Shiite-led government have often advised the United States not to worry about their ties with Iran, where Shiites are also in the majority. But the assurances are getting harder to swallow. Baghdad is showing a distressing willingness to side with the region's most repressive regimes, not just Iran but also Iran's chief ally, the brutal Syrian president, Bashar al-Assad.

In recent months, the United States has accused Iraq of allowing Iran to fly weapons through its airspace to Syria, where Mr. Bashar is pounding his people with air power in an effort to crush an 18-month rebellion in which some 25,000 people have been killed.

Last week, Reuters disclosed a Western intelligence report that said the supply operation was far bigger and more systematic than first thought, involving the transport of "tens of tons" of arms and military personnel on civilian aircraft almost daily. The report also said Iranian trucks were moving overland through Iraq to Syria.

Iraqi officials deny the charges. A United Nations Security Council resolution forbids Iran from exporting arms to Syria. And member nations, like Iraq, are obligated to prohibit procurement of these items. That

means Baghdad is required to deny overflight rights for Iranian planes headed to Syria or to inspect the cargo to verify what is being shipped.

But the Obama administration says that after a pause, Baghdad allowed the flights to resume in July. Since then, every American official to visit Iraq has made the case that the arms shipments must stop, according to Robert Beecroft, the new ambassador to Baghdad. On Friday, Vice President Joseph Biden Jr. stepped up the pressure with a telephone call to Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki. Given Iraq's recalcitrance, Senator John Kerry, chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, was right to warn last week that American aid could be reconsidered if Iraq failed to change course.

Perhaps to address the mounting criticism, Iraqi officials may be altering their stance. On Friday, Reuters reported that Iraq had denied permission for a North Korean plane bound for Syria to use its airspace. On Saturday, an Iraqi government spokesman said authorities will start searching Syrian-bound Iranian planes if they have reason for suspicion.

Iraqis have a chance to build a new democratic system based on the rule of law and respect for all citizens. It would be morally wrong and hypocritical if Iraqi leaders, who were so long oppressed by Saddam Hussein, kept working against Syrians as they struggle to overthrow their tyrant.

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Iran's Mahmoud Ahmadinejad On Israeli Threats, Nuclear Program And Syria

September 24, 2012

Washington Post

By David Ignatius

NEW YORK -- Iran may be on the firing line, but President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was as calmly combative as ever Sunday, dismissing Israel's military threats and predicting that nothing will happen in the nuclear talks until after the U.S. presidential elections.

In an interview on the eve of his visit to the United Nations, Ahmadinejad seemed unfazed by recent months of speculation about bombing strikes or by the precarious state of Tehran's allies in Damascus. Instead, he talked often about politics - including a reference to what he saw as the war-weariness of the American public.

The hour-long conversation was a case study in the bob-and-weave style, and unrelenting self-confidence, that has made Ahmadinejad a survivor in Iranian politics and a particular nemesis for critics in the U.S., Israel and the Arab world. While he expressed a willingness to negotiate on a range of subjects, he retreated into generalities when pressed about details. His tone was calm, even in discussing a potential clash with Israel.

"We, generally speaking, do not take very seriously the issue of the Zionists and the possible dangers emanating from them," he said early in the interview. "Of course, they would love to find a way for their own salvation by making a lot of noise and to raise stakes in order to save themselves. But I do not believe they will succeed."

Asked if he thought Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was bluffing in his threats to strike Iranian nuclear facilities, the Iranian president said he agreed with that view and asserted that this analysis was a "common consensus."

Ahmadinejad's bland self-assurance is partly a matter of style, for no politician ever wants to display weakness before his adversaries. But in this third interview I've had with the Iranian president, I had the sense that he genuinely believes the world is going Iran's way. He sees an America that is facing reversals across the Muslim world - in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and most recently, in dealing with the Arab uprisings. Close U.S. allies such as Egypt's Hosni Mubarak are gone, and Ahmadinejad is still standing.

In discussing Iran's negotiations with the international group known as the P5+1, Ahmadinejad said Iran was willing to make a deal to limit its stockpile of enriched uranium. But he implied that the Obama administration wants to slow the negotiations down until after the November election, to avoid bargaining concessions that might embarrass the president.

"We have always been ready and we are ready" to make a deal that will address the P5+1's concerns, he said. "But experience has shown that important and key decisions are not made in the U.S. leading up to national elections."

Ahmadinejad observed at another point in the conversation: "I do believe that some conversations and key issues must be talked about again once we come out of the other end of the political election atmosphere in the United States."

In talking about America, Ahmadinejad several times referred to a country that, in his words, is tired of "back-breaking expenses" of foreign wars overseas and where public opinion is trending against Israel. He didn't cite evidence for these views.

"Will the people of the U.S. accept meddling and intervention in the affairs of others?" he mused at one point, before answering his own question. "I don't believe so. I believe the people of the U.S. are peace-loving people."

The Iranian president said Iran is eager to help broker deals to end fighting in Syria and Afghanistan. On Syria, which has been Iran's Arab ally, he said he supported transitional elections for a new government. Asked if President Bashar al-Assad should be a candidate, he answered this was for Syrians to decide. It was hard to read whether this represented any step away from Assad.

On Afghanistan, the Iranian leader claimed he had no knowledge of a February 2011 invitation to Tehran for U.S. special representative Marc Grossman. But he in effect renewed the offer, saying that after the U.S. elections, Iran was ready for direct discussions with the United States about how to stabilize Afghanistan.

The most intractable subject in any conversation with Ahmadinejad is Israel, and Sunday's discussion was no different. Pressed why he continued to make comments that Israelis regarded as hate speech, he parried back with a series of questions about Israeli occupation of Arab territory. Asked to affirm Israel's existence, he wouldn't.

Ahmadinejad's term as president will end next year, so in theory this is probably his last visit to New York as Iran's leader. But as he spoke Sunday, it seemed unlikely that this veteran counter-puncher will disappear from Iranian politics, or the world stage, without a fight.

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The Satanic Video

September 24, 2012

New York Times

By Bill Keller

THE alchemy of modern media works with amazing speed. Start with a cheesy anti-Muslim video that resembles a bad trailer for a Sacha Baron Cohen comedy. It becomes YouTube fuel for protest across the Islamic world and a pretext for killing American diplomats. That angry spasm begets an inflammatory Newsweek cover, "MUSLIM RAGE," which in turn inspires a Twitter hashtag that reduces the whole episode to a running joke:

"There's no prayer room in this nightclub. #MuslimRage."

"You lose your nephew at the airport but you can't yell his name because it's JIHAD. #MuslimRage."

From provocation to trauma to lampoon in a few short news cycles. It's over in a week, forgotten in two. Now back to Snooki and Honey Boo Boo.

Except, of course, it's far from over. It moves temporarily off-screen, and then it is back: the Pakistani retailer accused last week of "blasphemy" because he refused to close his shops during a protest against the video; France locking down diplomatic outposts in about 20 countries because a Paris satirical newspaper has published new caricatures of the prophet.

It's not really over for Salman Rushdie, whose new memoir recounts a decade under a clerical death sentence for the publication of his novel "The Satanic Verses." That fatwa, if not precisely the starting point in our modern confrontation with Islamic extremism, was a major landmark. The fatwa was dropped in 1998 and Rushdie is out of hiding, but he is still careful. His book tour for "Joseph Anton" (entitled for the pseudonym he used in his clandestine life) won't be taking him to Islamabad or Cairo.

Rushdie grew up in a secular Muslim family, the son of an Islam scholar. His relationship to Islam was academic, then literary, before it became excruciatingly personal. His memoir is not a handbook on how America should deal with the Muslim world. But he brings to that subject a certain moral authority and the wisdom of an unusually motivated thinker. I invited him to help me draw some lessons from the stormy Arab Summer.

The first and most important thing Rushdie will tell you is, it's not about religion. Not then, not now.

When the founding zealot of revolutionary Iran, Ayatollah Khomeini, issued his Rushdie death warrant in 1989, the imam was not defending the faith; he was trying to regenerate enthusiasm for his regime, sapped by eight years of unsuccessful war with Iraq. Likewise, Muslim clerics in London saw the fatwa against a British Indian novelist as an opportunity to arouse British Muslims, who until that point were largely unstirred by sectarian politics. "This case was a way for the mosque to assert a kind of primacy over the community," the novelist said the other day. "I think something similar is going on now."

It's pretty clear that the protests against that inane video were not spontaneous. Antisecular and anti-American zealots, beginning with a Cairo TV personality whose station is financed by Saudi fundamentalists, seized on the video as a way to mobilize pressure on the start-up governments in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya. The new governments condemned the violence and called in police to protect American diplomatic outposts, but not before a good bit of nervous wobbling.

(One of the principal goals of the extremists, I was reminded by experts at Human Rights First, who follow the region vigilantly, is to pressure these transitional governments to enact and enforce strict laws against blasphemy. These laws can then be used to purge secularists and moderates.)

Like the fanatics in the Middle East and North Africa, our homegrown hatemongers have an interest in making this out to be a great clash of faiths. The Islamophobes - the fringe demagogues behind the Koran-burning parties and that tawdry video, the more numerous (mainly right-wing Republican) defenders against the imaginary encroachment of Islamic law on our domestic freedom - are easily debunked. But this is the closest thing we have to a socially acceptable form of bigotry. And their rants feed the anti-American opportunists.

Rushdie acknowledges that there are characteristics of Islamic culture that make it tinder for the inciters: an emphasis on honor and shame, and in recent decades a paranoid sense of the world conspiring against them. We can argue who is more culpable - the hostile West, the sponsors, the appeasers, the fanatics themselves - but Islam has been particularly susceptible to the rise of identity politics, Rushdie says. "You define yourself by what offends you. You define yourself by what outrages you."

But blaming Islamic culture dismisses the Muslim majorities who are not enraged, let alone violent, and it leads to a kind of surrender: Oh, it's just the Muslims, nothing to be done. I detect a whiff of this cultural fatalism in Mitt Romney's patronizing remarks about the superiority of Israeli culture and the backwardness of Palestinian culture. That would explain his assertion, on that other notorious video, that an accommodation with the Palestinians is "almost unthinkable." That's a strangely defeatist line of thought for a man who professes to be an optimist and a problem-solver.

Romney and Rushdie are a little more in tune when it comes to mollifying the tender feelings of irate Muslims.

In his new book, Rushdie recounts being urged by the British authorities who were protecting him to "lower the temperature" by issuing a statement that could be taken for an apology. He does so. It fills him almost immediately with regret, and the attacks on him are unabated. He "had taken the weak position and was therefore treated as a weakling," he writes.

Of the current confrontation, he says, "I think it's very important that we hold our ground. It's very important to say, 'We live like this.' " Rushdie made his post-fatwa life in America in part because he reveres the freedoms, including the freedom, not so protected in other Western democracies, to say hateful, racist, blasphemous things.

"Terrible ideas, reprehensible ideas, do not disappear if you ban them," he told me. "They go underground. They acquire a kind of glamour of taboo. In the harsh light of day, they are out there and, like vampires, they die in the sunlight."

And so he would have liked a more robust White House defense of the rights that made the noxious video possible.

"It's not for the American government to regret what American citizens do. They should just say, 'This is not our affair and the [violent] response is completely inappropriate.' "

I would cut the diplomats a little more slack when they are trying to defuse an explosive situation. But I agree that the administration pushed up against the line that separates prudence from weakness. And the White House request that Google consider taking down the anti-Muslim video, however gentle the nudge, was a mistake.

By far the bigger mistake, though, would be to write off the aftermath of the Arab Spring as a lost cause.

It is fairly astounding to hear conservatives who were once eager to invade Iraq - ostensibly to plant freedom in the region - now giving up so quickly on fledgling democracies that might actually be won over without 10 bloody years of occupation. Or lamenting our abandonment of that great stabilizing autocrat Hosni Mubarak. Or insisting that we bully and blackmail the new governments to conform to our expectations.

These transition governments present an opportunity. Fortifying the democratic elements in the post-Arab Spring nation-building, without discrediting them as American stooges, is a delicate business. The best argument we have is not our aid money, though that plays a part. It is the choice between two futures, between building or failing to build a rule of law, an infrastructure of rights, and an atmosphere of tolerance. One future looks something like Turkey, prospering, essentially secular and influential. The other future looks a lot like Pakistan, a land of fear and woe.

We can't shape the Islamic world to our specifications. But if we throw up our hands, if we pull back, we now have a more vivid picture of what will fill the void.

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America's Inevitable Retreat From The Middle East

September 24, 2012

New York Times

By Pankaj Mishra

THE murder of four Americans in Libya and mob assaults on the United States' embassies across the Muslim world this month have reminded many of 1979, when radical Islamists seized the American mission in Tehran. There, too, extremists running wild after the fall of a pro-American tyrant had found a cheap way of empowering themselves.

But the obsession with radical Islam misses a more meaningful analogy for the current state of siege in the Middle East and Afghanistan: the helicopters hovering above the roof of the American Embassy in Saigon in 1975 as North Vietnamese tanks rolled into the city.

That hasty departure ended America's long and costly involvement in Indochina, which, like the Middle East today, the United States had inherited from defunct European empires. Of course, Southeast Asia had no natural resources to tempt the United States and no ally like Israel to defend. But it appeared to be at the front line of the worldwide battle against Communism, and American policy makers had unsuccessfully tried both proxy despots and military firepower to make the locals advance their strategic interests.

The violent protests provoked by the film "Innocence of Muslims" will soon subside, and American embassies will return to normal business. But the symbolic import of the violence, which included a Taliban assault on one of the most highly secured American bases in Afghanistan, is unmistakable. The

drama of waning American power is being re-enacted in the Middle East and South Asia after two futile wars and the collapse or weakening of pro-American regimes.

In Afghanistan, local soldiers and policemen have killed their Western trainers, and demonstrations have erupted there and in Pakistan against American drone strikes and reported desecrations of the Koran. Amazingly, this surge in historically rooted hatred and distrust of powerful Western invaders, meddlers and remote controllers has come yet again as a shock to many American policy makers and commentators, who have promptly retreated into a lazy "they hate our freedoms" narrative.

It is as though the United States, lulled by such ideological foils as Nazism and Communism into an exalted notion of its moral power and mission, missed the central event of the 20th century: the steady, and often violent, political awakening of peoples who had been exposed for decades to the sharp edges of Western power. This strange oversight explains why American policy makers kept missing their chances for peaceful post-imperial settlements in Asia.

As early as 1919, Ho Chi Minh, dressed in a morning suit and armed with quotations from the Declaration of Independence, had tried to petition President Woodrow Wilson for an end to French rule over Indochina. Ho did not get anywhere with Wilson. Indian, Egyptian, Iranian and Turkish nationalists hoping for the liberal internationalist president to promulgate a new "morality" in global affairs were similarly disappointed.

None of these anti-imperialists would have bothered if they had known that Wilson, a Southerner fond of jokes about "darkies," believed in maintaining "white civilization and its domination over the world." Franklin D. Roosevelt was only slightly more conciliatory when, in 1940, he proposed mollifying dispossessed Palestinian Arabs with a "little baksheesh."

Roosevelt changed his mind after meeting the Saudi leader Ibn Saud and learning of oil's importance to the postwar American economy. But the cold war, and America's obsession with the chimera of monolithic Communism, again obscured the unstoppable momentum of decolonization, which was fueled by an intense desire among humiliated peoples for equality and dignity in a world controlled by a small minority of white men.

Ho Chi Minh's post-World War II appeals for assistance to another American president - Harry S. Truman - again went unanswered; and Ho, who had worked with American intelligence agents during the war, was ostracized as a dangerous Communist. But many people in Asia saw that it was only a matter of time before the Vietnamese ended foreign domination of their country.

For the world had entered a new "revolutionary age," as the American critic Irving Howe wrote in 1954, in which the intense longing for change among millions of politicized people in Asia was the dominant force. "Whoever gains control of them," Howe warned, "whether in legitimate or distorted forms, will triumph." This mass longing for political transformation was repressed longer by cold war despotism in the Arab world; it has now exploded, profoundly damaging America's ability to dictate events there.

Given its long history of complicity with dictators in the region, from the shah of Iran to Saddam Hussein and Hosni Mubarak, the United States faces a huge deficit of trust. The belief that this deep-seated suspicion can be overcome by a few soothing presidential speeches betrays only more condescending ignorance of the so-called Arab mind, which until recently was believed to be receptive only to brute force.

It is not just extremist Salafis who think Americans always have malevolent intentions: the Egyptian anti-Islamist demonstrators who pelted Hillary Rodham Clinton's motorcade in Alexandria with rotten eggs in July were convinced that America was making shady deals with the Muslim Brotherhood. And few people in the Muslim world have missed the Israeli prime minister's blatant manipulation of American politics for the sake of a pre-emptive assault on Iran.

There is little doubt that years of disorder lie ahead in the Middle East as different factions try to gain control. The murder of Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens in Libya, the one American success story of the Arab Spring, is an early sign of the chaos to come; it also points to the unpredictable consequences likely to follow any Western intervention in Syria - or Iran.

As in Southeast Asia in 1975, the limits of both American firepower and diplomacy have been exposed. Financial leverage, or baksheesh, can work only up to a point with leaders struggling to control the bewilderingly diverse and ferocious energies unleashed by the Arab Spring.

Although it's politically unpalatable to mention it during an election campaign, the case for a strategic American retreat from the Middle East and Afghanistan has rarely been more compelling. It's especially strong as growing energy independence reduces America's burden for policing the region, and its supposed ally, Israel, shows alarming signs of turning into a loose cannon.

All will not be lost if America scales back its politically volatile presence in the Muslim world. It could one day return, as it has with its former enemy, Vietnam, to a relationship of mutually assured dignity. (Although the recent military buildup in the Pacific - part of the Obama administration's "pivot to Asia" - hints at fresh overestimations of American power in that region.)

Republicans calling for President Obama to "grow" a "big stick" seem to think they live in the world of Teddy Roosevelt. Liberal internationalists arguing for even deeper American engagement with the Middle East inhabit a similar time warp; and both have an exaggerated idea of America's financial clout after the biggest economic crisis since the 1930s.

It is the world's newly ascendant nations and awakened peoples that will increasingly shape events in the post-Western era. America's retrenchment is inevitable. The only question is whether it will be as protracted and violent as Europe's mid-20th century retreat from a newly assertive Asia and Africa.

Pankaj Mishra is the author of "From the Ruins of Empire: The Intellectuals Who Remade Asia."

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The White House Goes Mum on Free Speech

September 24, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By L. GORDON CROVITZ

When Rudy Giuliani was mayor of New York, he tried to cut off taxpayer funding for a museum showing a work entitled "The Holy Virgin Mary," featuring an image of the Madonna smeared with elephant dung, surrounded by cutout porn photos of female genitalia. Mr. Giuliani said the museum didn't have a "right to government subsidy for desecrating somebody else's religion." Hillary Clinton, then a Senate candidate, defended the right to show the artwork: "Our feelings of being offended should not lead to the penalizing and shutting down of an entire museum."

Mr. Giuliani, who always acknowledged the artist's First Amendment right while questioning the public funding, was a censorship softie compared with Mrs. Clinton today. Her State Department's response to a movie trailer tied to Islamic mob violence and organized terrorism has been censorship and a global apology campaign.

The movie "Innocence of Muslims," apparently made by a Coptic Christian in the U.S., mocks Muhammad, the Islamic prophet, but it exists publicly only as a 14-minute trailer on YouTube. Digital technology can spread mischief, but it was only when an Islamist television show in Egypt aired excerpts that the video got widespread attention. The movie, if there is one, would never have gotten distribution in theaters, with its amateurish filming and clumsily dubbed voices.

The U.S. government attributed enormous power to these 14 minutes of video. The White House press spokesman insisted that the attacks in Egypt, Libya and some 20 other countries were a "response not to United States policy, and not to, obviously, the administration, not to the American people," but "to a video, a film we have judged to be reprehensible and disgusting." The White House later backtracked, blaming organized terrorists for killing the U.S. ambassador in Libya and three other Americans.

But the problem is not the video. It's that many of the post-Arab Spring governments condone or encourage Islamist groups that find any pretense to attack the U.S. The Obama administration kowtowed to pressure from Egypt and other supposed allies, asking Google to remove the YouTube footage globally. Google rightly refused to censor, citing the right to free speech, which the president is sworn to defend.

When the government in Pakistan last week cynically organized a "Love for Prophet Day," the State Department bought time on Pakistani television to run groveling advertisements. In one, Mrs. Clinton says: "Let me state very clearly . . . the United States government had absolutely nothing to do with this video. We absolutely reject its content and message."

Instead of seeking to censor the video or apologizing, the White House should be reminding the world that free speech, even when tasteless or hateful, is an American right. The U.S. should be encouraging the new governments in the Middle East to value free speech. In contrast to the U.S. abandonment of free speech, tiny Denmark refused to apologize for the satirical cartoons of Muhammad that ran in the Jyllands-Posten newspaper in 2005, which provoked rioting in many countries.

Indeed, in the aftermath of the YouTube video, France has been truer to free speech than has the U.S. A French satirical magazine, Charlie Hebdo, responded to the video controversy by running more cartoons of Muhammad. Its editor, Stephane Charbonnier, told the German magazine Der Spiegel: "We publish caricatures every week, but people only describe them as declarations of war when it's about the person of the prophet or radical Islam."

French authorities offered protection to the magazine before it went to press. "Of all publications, our magazine, which mocks the police at every opportunity, is now protected by it," Mr. Charbonnier says. "Which only goes to show that freedom of speech is protected in our country." He pledges to keep satirizing Catholics, Jews and Muslims. Meanwhile, France temporarily closed its embassies and schools in 20 countries when the magazine came out.

A silver lining to this controversy is how many people, apparently mostly Muslims themselves, used the online medium in a humorous way to make the point that Islamic fundamentalists are a minority of the religion. Under a hashtag on Twitter that Newsweek created for its cover story, #MuslimRage, they tweeted laugh lines for what leads to "Muslim Rage":

"Sale at the butchers! Oh, only on pork."

"Lost your kid 'Jihad' at the airport. Can't yell for him."

"Head & Shoulders STILL hasn't made a beard conditioner!"

"When I wear a white hijab to a TV interview with a white backdrop."

On a more serious note:

"Hezbollah offended by the movie but not by the daily murder of hundreds of Syrian civilians."

"Memo to those few violent Mideast protesters, this is how you fight Islamophobia. You make fun of it."

These tweets use free speech the way it was intended: To make political points, unapologetically. Islamists will protest and some will even kill for any reason or for no reason. On behalf of Americans and reformers around the world, the White House should stand up for free speech instead of recoiling from it.

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**DAILY PRESS CLIPS FOR
TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 2012**

UNITED NATIONS

Downbeat U.N. General Assembly opens amid Syria stalemate

September 24, 2012

Foreign Policy

By Colum Lynch

The world's annual diplomatic gab-fest -- the U.N. General Assembly debate -- opens on Manhattan's East River tomorrow against a backdrop of deepening civil war in Syria, nuclear-tipped confrontation between Israel and Iran, and nagging questions about whether a recent wave of anti-American protests was a blip or portends darker diplomatic days ahead for the United States and its Western partners. ([link](#))

Syria's Immediate Prospects For Peace Grim, New U.N. Envoy Says

September 25, 2012

Washington Post

By Colum Lynch

UNITED NATIONS - The new U.N.-Arab League envoy to Syria offered a downbeat assessment Monday on the prospects for peace in the war-torn country, saying that he would be powerless to avert worsening civil and sectarian strife as long as the United Nations' biggest powers, including the United States and Russia, remained divided. ([link](#))

UN: 1.5 Million Syrians In Need Of Food Aid

September 25, 2012

Associated Press

By Karin Laub

BEIRUT - The number of Syrians in need of food aid has jumped from 250,000 in April to 1.5 million today, the head of the U.N.'s food agency said Monday, as more civilians are driven from their homes by an escalating civil war. ([link](#))

Syria, Iran Hang Heavy As World Gathers At UN

September 25, 2012

AFP

Fears that the Syrian civil war and the Iranian nuclear standoff could provoke wider international conflict dominated the debate on Monday as world leaders gathered for the UN General Assembly. ([link](#))

In New York, defiant Ahmadinejad says Israel will be "eliminated"

September 25, 2012

Reuters

By Louis Charbonneau

NEW YORK - Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said on Monday Israel has no roots in the Middle East and would be "eliminated," ignoring a U.N. warning to avoid incendiary rhetoric ahead of the annual General Assembly session. ([link](#))

Attack By Iran's Ahmadinejad Sparks Israel Walkout

September 25, 2012

REVIEW AUTHORITY: Archie Bolster, Senior Reviewer

Associated Press

By Edith M. Lederer

UNITED NATIONS - Iran's president called Israel a nuclear-armed "fake regime" shielded by the United States, prompting Israel's U.N. ambassador to walk out of a high-level U.N. meeting Monday promoting the rule of law. ([link](#))

Before Palestinians Act At UN, Israeli Officials Urge Other Steps

September 25, 2012

New York Times

By Jodi Rudoren

JERUSALEM - With the Palestinians planning to make their case this week to upgrade from organizational status to nonmember status at the United Nations General Assembly, one senior Israeli minister condemned the move as "the easy and wrong way out" on Monday, while another said the time had come for Israel to consider its own unilateral move toward a separate state: annexing parts of the West Bank and withdrawing from others. ([link](#))

Abbas Set For Scaled-Down Bid At UN

September 25, 2012

Washington Post

By Joel Greenberg

RAMALLAH, West Bank - There is no fanfare this time, no campaign in support of Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas as he heads this week to the United Nations to ask for an upgrade of the Palestinians' status there to a non-member state. ([link](#))

At U.N., Free Speech Divides West And Muslim Nations

September 25, 2012

Los Angeles Times

By Paul Richter

UNITED NATIONS - The annual U.N. General Assembly meeting, which is intended to celebrate the world's common values, this year is exposing instead the gulf between Western and Islamic perspectives on freedom of expression, posing an unexpected challenge for President Obama when he speaks here Tuesday. ([link](#))

Obama To Address U.N. On Foreign Policy

September 25, 2012

USA Today

By Aamer S. Madhani

President Obama will deliver a wide-ranging foreign-policy address Tuesday to the 67th meeting of the United Nations General Assembly, including a renewed warning to Iran to suspend its suspected nuclear program and a reflection on the recent violence in the Middle East. ([link](#))

TOP STORIES**In Arab Spring, Obama Finds A Sharp Test**

September 25, 2012

New York Times

By Helene Cooper And Robert F. Worth

WASHINGTON - President Hosni Mubarak did not even wait for President Obama's words to be translated before he shot back. "You don't understand this part of the world," the Egyptian leader broke

in. "You're young." Mr. Obama, during a tense telephone call the evening of Feb. 1, 2011, had just told Mr. Mubarak that his speech, broadcast to hundreds of thousands of protesters in Tahrir Square in Cairo, had not gone far enough. Mr. Mubarak had to step down, the president said. ([link](#))

Syrian War's Spillover Threatens A Fragile Iraq

September 25, 2012; A1

New York Times

By Tim Arango

BAGHDAD - The civil war in Syria is testing Iraq's fragile society and fledgling democracy, worsening sectarian tensions, pushing Iraq closer to Iran and highlighting security shortcomings just nine months after American forces ended their long and costly occupation here. ([link](#))

Obama's Policy On Iran Bears Some Fruit, But Nuclear Program Still Advances

September 25, 2012

Washington Post

By Joby Warrick

Barack Obama's presidency was only hours old when a fierce debate erupted among top Iranian officials over the new U.S. leader and his offer to "extend a hand" to the Islamic republic. Hard-liners suspected a trick, convinced that Obama was no different from his predecessor, but others saw potential for a long-sought diplomatic thaw. ([link](#))

Iran's President Spreads the Outrage in New York

September 25, 2012

New York Times

By RICK GLADSTONE and NEIL MacFARQUHAR

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran stoked the anger of Israel, the United States, Syrian insurgents and gay rights advocates on Monday, using the first full day of his final visit to the United Nations as Iran's leader to assert that he has no fear of an Israeli attack on his country's nuclear facilities, regards the Israelis as fleeting aberrations in Middle East history, is neutral in the Syria conflict and considers homosexuality an ugly crime. ([link](#))

Iran President Plays Down Israeli Threat

September 25, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By JAY SOLOMON

NEW YORK—Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad on Monday played down the prospects of an Israeli military strike on his country's nuclear installations, but made clear that Tehran would hold the U.S. responsible if such an attack occurred. ([link](#))

Iran Says Israel Is "Threatening" US With Allegations Of Iranian Nuclear Weapon

September 25, 2012

Washington Post

By Anne Gearan

NEW YORK - Israel is bullying the United States over the alleged threat of an Iranian nuclear weapon, using the prospect of an Israeli military attack on Iran to force the hand of its much larger ally, Iran's president said Monday. ([link](#))

Race Focuses on Foreign Policy

September 25, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By CAROL E. LEE, PATRICK O'CONNOR and JAY SOLOMON

Foreign policy is taking on new urgency in the presidential campaign as President Barack Obama prepares to address the United Nations amid a resurgence of unrest in the Muslim world and his Republican challenger, Mitt Romney, intensifies his criticism of the White House's approach to the region. ([link](#))

AFRICA

Nigeria

Hundreds Protest Anti-Islam Film In Nigeria

September 25, 2012

Associated Press

KADUNA, Nigeria - Hundreds of Muslims march peacefully through the streets of a northern Nigerian city to protest an anti-Islam film that denigrates the Prophet Muhammad. ([link](#))

Sudan

No Deal Yet In Sudan-South Sudan Talks

September 25, 2012

Associated Press

ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia - The leaders of Sudan and South Sudan have not yet reached a deal on where their shared border lies. ([link](#))

ASIA

Burma

Mine Protests Challenge Myanmar Reforms

September 25, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By PATRICK BARTA

WETHMAY, Myanmar—Anger over plans to expand a Chinese-backed mine near here is emerging as a test case of Myanmar's recent political reforms. ([link](#))

China

In China, Sister Of Ex-Police Official Bemoans His Conviction

September 25, 2012

New York Times

By Edward Wong

BEIJING - The sister of a former police chief who played a central role in a seismic political scandal criticized his sentence of 15 years in prison in an interview on Monday, saying it was unfair and symptomatic of the lack of justice in China. ([link](#))

Bo Xilai Awaits His Fate After Sentencing Of Wife And Top Aide

September 25, 2012

Washington Post

By Keith B. Richburg

BEIJING - His wife is in jail on a murder conviction with a suspended death sentence. His former right-hand man was just sentenced to 15 years in prison for covering up the crime and then trying to defect to the United States. ([link](#))

Tibet Exiles Seek New Tactics To Shake Off Despair

September 25, 2012

AFP

Tibetan exiles will hold their biggest gathering in four years from Tuesday where delegates will try to come up with new policies to end a spate of gruesome self-immolations. ([link](#))

China's First Aircraft Carrier Enters Service

September 25, 2012

AFP

China's first aircraft carrier -- a former Soviet ship it bought from Ukraine and refurbished -- entered service on Tuesday, the defence ministry in Beijing said, naming it as the Liaoning. ([link](#))

Japan

U.S., Japan Train for Island Defense

September 25, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By YUKA HAYASHI

GUAM—Japan's military is sharpening its skills at defending remote islands with the help of U.S. troops, as Tokyo faces an increasingly contentious dispute with China. ([link](#))

Japan fires water cannon to turn away Taiwan boats

September 25, 2012

Reuters

By Kiyoshi Takenaka and Kaori Kaneko

TOKYO - Japanese Coast Guard vessels fired water cannon to turn away about 40 Taiwan fishing boats and eight Taiwan Coast Guard vessels from waters Japan considers its own on Tuesday in the latest twist to a row between Tokyo and Beijing. ([link](#))

North / South Korea

AP Exclusive: Images Show NKorea Launch Pad Halt

September 25, 2012

Associated Press

By Foster Klug

SEOUL, South Korea - North Korea has stopped construction on a launch pad where intercontinental-range rockets could be tested, an interruption possibly due to heavy rains and that could stall completion up to two years, according to an analysis of new satellite imagery. ([link](#))

Rare N.Korean Parliament Meet Blunts Reform Expectations

September 25, 2012

AFP

North Korea's parliament held a rare session Tuesday, presided over by Kim Jong-Un, which had been expected to confirm an apparent push by the new, young leader to introduce limited economic reforms. ([link](#))

Vietnam

Vietnam Convicts 3 Bloggers Over Posts

September 25, 2012

Wall Street Journal
By JAMES HOOKWAY

A Vietnamese court convicted three prominent bloggers and sentenced them to between four and 12 years in prison, the latest step in a crackdown against online dissent in the tightly policed communist state. ([link](#))

NEA

Clinton Says "Avenging Insults" Is No Path To Dignity Amid Anti-American Protests

September 25, 2012

Associated Press

By Matthew Lee

NEW YORK, N.Y. - Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton appealed Monday to Muslims to show "dignity" and not resort to violence as they protest an anti-Islam film produced in the United States. ([link](#))

Egypt

Clinton And Morsi Discuss Embassy Security

September 25, 2012

Associated Press

By Bradley Klapper

NEW YORK - Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton has met Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi in the most high-level U.S.-Egypt meeting since protesters stormed the U.S. Embassy in Cairo. ([link](#))

Egypt: 14 Get Death Sentences For Sinai Attacks

September 25, 2012

Associated Press

By Aya Batrawy

CAIRO - An Egyptian court on Monday sentenced 14 members of an extremist group to death by hanging for attacks against police in the Sinai Peninsula, ruling that they were members of an organization that considers even other Islamists to be infidels. ([link](#))

Iran

After Daughter, Iran Arrests Son Of Ex-President: Report

September 25, 2012

AFP

The son of Iran's former president Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani was arrested after he returned from abroad on Monday, two days after authorities jailed Rafsanjani's daughter, the official IRNA news agency reported. ([link](#))

Iran's President Says Backing Gays Is For "Capitalists"

September 25, 2012

AFP

Supporting homosexuality is the stuff of hardline capitalists who do not care about real human values, Iran's president said. ([link](#))

Israel

Israeli Defense Chief Proposes West Bank Pullout

September 25, 2012

Associated Press

By Josef Federman

JERUSALEM - Israel's defense minister on Monday called for a broad unilateral withdrawal from the West Bank if talks with the Palestinians remain stalled, saying in published comments that "practical steps" are needed to breathe life into the stalemated peace process. ([link](#))

Former Israeli Premier Gets Suspended Sentence

September 25, 2012

New York Times

By Isabel Kershner

JERUSALEM - Ehud Olmert, a former prime minister of Israel, was sentenced by a Jerusalem court on Monday to a one-year suspended prison term and a maximum fine of about \$19,000 for breach of trust. The relatively light sentence ended a long-running prosecution that forced Mr. Olmert from office. It also opened the way for a possible political comeback. ([link](#))

Lebanon

Lebanon Blocks Internet Access To Anti-Islam Film

September 25, 2012

AFP

A Lebanese court decided on Monday to block Internet access to an anti-Islam film that has provoked rage across the Muslim world, a judicial source told AFP. ([link](#))

Hamas Head Mashaal Says He Will Resign

September 25, 2012

Associated Press

By Ibrahim Barzak

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip - The supreme leader of the Palestinian Islamic militant group Hamas has decided to step down, clearing the way for the movement to choose a new head for the first time in more than 15 years, two senior officials said Monday. ([link](#))

Libya

Obama: Libya Assault "Wasn't Just Mob Action"

September 25, 2012

Associated Press

By Ben Feller

NEW YORK - President Barack Obama said Monday "there's no doubt" that the assault of the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi, Libya, that killed four Americans including the U.S. ambassador "wasn't just a mob action" but a sign of extremism in nations lacking stability. His words about the Libya killings were his most specific since the White House called it a "terrorist attack" last week. ([link](#))

Libya Appoints Military Officers To Head Militias

September 25, 2012

Associated Press

By Esam Mohamed

TRIPOLI, Libya - Libya's military command appointed Monday a pair of army officers to head two powerful Islamist militias in the country's east, part of the government's push to rein in armed factions. ([link](#))

Libya Militia Leader: Heat-seeking Missiles, Other Weapons Stolen During Firefight

September 25, 2012

Washington Post

By Abigail Hauslohner

BENGHAZI, Libya - The commander of a powerful Libyan militia said Monday that looters had stolen "a large number" of shoulder-fired, heat-seeking missiles from the militia's base when protesters who called for dismantling the country's militias overran the compound. ([link](#))

Libyan Leader Vows His Country Will Not Be A Burden

September 25, 2012

AFP

New Libyan leader Mohamed al-Megaryef on Monday vowed his country would not be a burden to the international community as he held his first face-to-face talks with US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. ([link](#))

Syria

Rebels Make Huge Gains In Syria's North: AFP

September 25, 2012

AFP

Syria's rebels have captured hundreds of kilometres (miles) of territory in the country's north in the past six months, an AFP correspondent who visited the area in March reported on Monday. ([link](#))

Front Line Syria Rebels Hostile To Command Move

September 25, 2012

AFP

Rebels in the war-ravaged northern city of Aleppo greeted the announcement that their central command has moved from Turkey to inside Syria with indifference bordering on hostility. ([link](#))

Tunisia

Tunisia Arrests Senior Salafist Over US Embassy Attack

September 25, 2012

AFP

A senior member of Tunisian hardline Salafist group Ansar al-Sharia has been arrested in connection with the attack on the US embassy in Tunis earlier this month, the interior ministry said on Monday. ([link](#))

SCA

Afghanistan

Top Afghan Security Official Wins Case Challenging Corruption Accusation

September 25, 2012

New York Times

By Alissa J. Rubin

KABUL, Afghanistan - A judicial panel here ruled in favor of Afghanistan's national security chief on Monday in an unusual case of a senior government official turning to the courts and the public to prove that allegations of corruption against him were untrue. ([link](#))

Taliban Release Video On Afghan Base Attackers

September 25, 2012

Associated Press

By Heidi Vogt And Rahim Faiez

KABUL, Afghanistan - The Taliban published a video Monday they say shows insurgents preparing for the brazen attack on a major NATO base earlier this month, just as NATO forces released data showing that insurgent attacks decreased in August. ([link](#))

Pakistan**No Reprimand For Bounty On Filmmaker**

September 25, 2012

USA Today

By Hani Yousuf

Karachi, Pakistan - A Cabinet minister who put a \$100,000 bounty on the head of a U.S. filmmaker has not been reprimanded, and some Pakistanis say the call for assassination is fueling a controversy they want to go away. ([link](#))

WHA/EUR**Belarus****In Belarus Election, President's Supporters Win Every Seat In Parliament**

September 25, 2012

New York Times

By Andrew E. Kramer

MINSK, Belarus - Supporters of President Aleksandr G. Lukashenko won every seat in Parliament in an election over the weekend that, as many in post-Soviet authoritarian states, was widely seen as rigged, if perhaps a little less so than before. ([link](#))

Spain**Spain Recoils As Its Hungry Seek Sustenance In Trash Bins**

September 25, 2012

New York Times

By Suzanne Daley

MADRID - On a recent evening, a hip-looking young woman was sorting through a stack of crates outside a fruit and vegetable store here in the working-class neighborhood of Vallecas as it shut down for the night. ([link](#))

FOREIGN POLICY**New SARS-like Virus Detected In Middle East**

September 25, 2012

Associated Press

By Maria Cheng

LONDON - Global health officials are closely monitoring a new respiratory virus related to SARS that is believed to have killed at least one person in Saudi Arabia and left a Qatari citizen in critical condition in London. ([link](#))

IMF Chief Lagarde Warns Of Renewed Global Downturn, Urges US, Europe To Act

September 25, 2012

Washington Post

By Howard Schneider

The United States and Europe need to speed key political decisions to help keep the weakening global economy from sinking under high debt and unemployment, International Monetary Fund Managing Director Christine Lagarde said on Monday. ([link](#))

EDITORIAL / OPINION

In The Middle East, A Pro-American Turn

September 25, 2012

Washington Post

IN THE IMMEDIATE aftermath of the attacks on U.S. diplomatic missions in Libya and Egypt, plenty of commentators lamented what they saw as intractable anti-Americanism in the Middle East - even in Libya, where the United States had helped to overthrow a hated dictator. As it turns out, the reactions were hasty. In the days since the riots, there has been a broad backlash against the violence in both countries - culminating Friday in Benghazi, where tens of thousands of people marched on the base of an Islamist militia suspected of involvement in the Sept. 11 attack on the U.S. Consulate. ([link](#))

Netanyahu's Iran Blunders

September 25, 2012

New York Times

By Roger Cohen

LONDON - Shaul Mofaz, the leader of Israel's centrist Kadima party, posed three questions this month to Benjamin Netanyahu. Speaking in the Knesset, he said: "Prime minister, tell me, who is our biggest enemy, the U.S. or Iran? Who do you want replaced, Ahmadinejad or Obama? How low are you prepared to drag relations with our closest ally?" ([link](#))

China's Nationalist Furies

September 25, 2012

Wall Street Journal

The protesters smashing and burning Japanese businesses in Chinese cities this month are hard to fathom. Even the "peaceful" marchers carried alarming banners, some calling for the annihilation of Japan. For what? ([link](#))

Dead Men Share No Secret

September 25, 2012

New York Times

By Marisa L. Porges

Cambridge, Mass. -- THOSE who naively believed that Osama bin Laden's death and America's forthcoming departure from Afghanistan would usher in a new era free of threats from Al Qaeda have been proved wrong. ([link](#))

Will Obama Free the Blind Sheik?

September 25, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By MICHAEL B. MUKASEY

Are senior Obama administration officials considering transferring to Egypt a poisonously influential Islamist cleric serving a life term in federal prison for trying to unleash a war of urban terrorism in the United States? That's the impression several officials have given over the past three months, apparently out of fear that if the cleric dies in U.S. custody, American outposts in the Middle East could be overrun by vengeful mobs. ([link](#))

Iran Impasse Threatens Obama's U.N. Legacy

September 24, 2012

World Policy Review

By Richard Gowan

President Barack Obama heads to the U.N. tomorrow to address the new session of the General Assembly. His visit will be brief -- he is not even expected to stay for lunch -- and his speech is likely to be sharply worded. In what will probably be his last major international engagement before November's elections, he has a chance to scold Russia for its behavior over Syria, warn Iran over its nuclear program and reassert America's primacy on the international stage. ([link](#))

UNITED NATIONS

Downbeat U.N. General Assembly opens amid Syria stalemate

September 24, 2012

Foreign Policy

By Colum Lynch

The world's annual diplomatic gab-fest -- the U.N. General Assembly debate -- opens on Manhattan's East River tomorrow against a backdrop of deepening civil war in Syria, nuclear-tipped confrontation between Israel and Iran, and nagging questions about whether a recent wave of anti-American protests was a blip or portends darker diplomatic days ahead for the United States and its Western partners.

The U.N. session will offer world leaders an opportunity to take stock of the health of the democratic movement, known as the Arab Spring, that has swept through North Africa and the Middle East over the past year and a half, toppling dictatorships in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, and dealing an existential challenge to the Assad dynasty's decades-long rule in Syria.

For the first time, the region's old guard, including Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas, and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, will cross paths in the U.N. corridors with the region's new leaders, including Egypt's Mohamed Morsy and Libya's Mohammed Magarief.

As world leaders from 193 countries converged on midtown, swelling the East Side's most luxurious hotels, the U.N. and Arab League representative, Lakhdar Brahimi, offered a downbeat assessment of the prospects for peace in Syria, while the Iranian leader took swipes at Israel in a series of interviews with American editors and journalists, accusing the Jewish state of trying to bully America into a war with Iran. Israel's U.N. delegations, meanwhile, staged a walk-out from a high-level U.N. meeting on the rule of law after Ahmadinejad denounced the Zionist state.

In a rare snub to visiting dignitaries, President Barack Obama will avoid conducting the customary bilateral meetings with foreign counterparts, appearing only briefly at U.N. headquarters to deliver his address to the General Assembly. From there, he'll head crosstown, where he will speak at the Clinton Global Initiative conference hosted by former President Bill Clinton. He will, however, host a dinner for visiting leaders at the Waldorf Astoria hotel on Tuesday night.

"The president just in recent weeks has had intensive consultations with leaders in the region, with the leaders of Turkey, of Egypt, of Israel, of Yemen, of Libya, of Afghanistan, and that process will continue," White House spokesman Jay Carney said. "It is a simple fact that when you're president of the United States, your responsibility as commander-in-chief never ends and you are constantly engaged in matters of foreign affairs and national security. And that's what this president is doing."

The Iranian leader sought to set the tone for this year's debate, launching his final appearance in New York as Iran's president with a series of interviews with American columnists, editors, and reporters. At a breakfast this morning, Ahmadinejad said that Israel, which he refers to only as "Zionists," was bullying the Americans into a clash with Iran. "Is it the Zionists who must tell the United States government what to do, such as form a red line on Iran's nuclear issue and the United States government must make such vital decision under the influence of the Zionists?"

Israel's U.N. ambassador, Ron Prosor, meanwhile, walked out of a high-level U.N. meeting promoting the rule of law. "Ahmadinejad heads a state that is the most systematic violator of international law and the world's greatest sponsor of terrorism," he said in a statement after the walkout. "It is shameful, disgraceful, and absurd that his voice was part of today's U.N. discussion on the rule of law."

Netanyahu, who is scheduled to speak on Thursday, is expected to deliver a combative speech denouncing Iran's nuclear activities, pressing the U.N. membership to confront the regime before it obtains a nuclear weapon.

Behind the nuclear standoff, there were competing narratives over the state of America's relations with the Middle East's new leaders.

The new Libyan leader's attendance at the U.N. underscored the prospects for improving America's standing in the region. And Magarief, the head of Libya's national congress, today struck a conciliatory note, apologizing directly to U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on Monday for his government's failure to halt the Sept. 11 attack on the U.S. consulate, which left four Americans dead, including the U.S. ambassador J. Christopher Stevens. "What happened on 11th of September towards these U.S. citizens does not express in any way the conscience of the Libyan people, their aspirations, their hopes or their sentiments towards the American people," Magarief told Clinton today, according to Reuters. "Of course we ... express our great readiness to cooperate with the U.S. government in order to cooperate in the investigation and bring those perpetrators to justice."

Morsy, meanwhile, was not interested in offering comfort to America, which he suggested bore the burden of improving its poor standing in the region. Egypt's Islamist leader defended his government's tepid first response to the protests at the U.S. embassy in Cairo, telling the New York Times that "we took our time" to avoid a violent reaction by the protesters, but later dealt "decisively" with them. "We can never condone this violence but we need to deal with the situation wisely," Morsy said.

The Egyptian leader also told the New York Times that the United States had earned its bad reputation in the Middle East by backing generations of military dictatorships and Israeli policies toward the Palestinians. "Successive American administrations essentially purchased with American taxpayer money the dislike, if not the hatred, of the peoples of the region."

But the issue weighing most heavily over the U.N. membership was Syria, where nearly a year's worth of Arab League and U.N.-based diplomacy has failed to halt a brutal government crackdown on anti-regime

protesters. The crisis in Syria, which began as a peaceful popular call for change, has deteriorated into all-out civil war, with thousands dead, mostly civilians killed by government forces, and the emergence of extremist elements seeking to take advantage of the chaos.

In advance of the General Assembly debate, U.N.-Arab League envoy Lakhdar Brahimi provided the U.N. Security Council with a downbeat assessment of peace prospects in Syria, saying that he would be powerless to avert worsening civil and sectarian strife as long as the U.N.'s biggest powers, including the United States and Russia, remained divided.

The veteran U.N. trouble-shooter also sent a strong message to Syrian president Bashar al-Assad, saying that his promise to bring government-sponsored reforms would not be enough to stem the spreading violence in Syria. "I think there is no disagreement that the situation is extremely bad and getting worse," Brahimi told reporters after the meeting. "I refuse to believe that reasonable people do not see that you cannot go backward; you cannot go back to the Syria of the past. I think I told everybody in Damascus and elsewhere that reform is not enough. What is needed is change."

Despite the grim report, Brahimi offered his first sliver of hope, saying that while there are "no prospects" for diplomatic progress in the immediate future, his travel to the region had given him cause to believe "we will find an opening in the not too distant future."

After the meeting, Brahimi told reporters that the situation in Syria "is extremely difficult. There is a stalemate; there is no prospect for today or tomorrow to move forward." But he also raised a hopeful note over the prospects for future progress, saying that a recent visit to the region, including a meeting with Assad, had convinced him that "I think we will find an opening in the not too distant future."

Brahimi's remarks, which followed the former Algerian diplomat's first briefing to the Security Council on Syria, reflected a growing consensus among U.N. officials and some Arab leaders that the only hope of easing the crisis would require some sort of agreement between Russia and the West on a process for political transition in Syria. "If I do not represent the entire council I am nothing," Brahimi told reporters. "I need to be seen to represent a united council and a united League of Arab States and I think the Security Council understands that perfectly well."

Brahimi said he would use the occasion of the General Assembly debate to consult with key regional and international leaders in New York before returning to the region. For the time being, Brahimi said he had no fixed peace plan for Syria, but that "I do have a few ideas" that he intends to discuss with key foreign powers in New York this week.

The U.N. Security Council has remained at a stalemate on Syria since July, when Russia and China cast vetoes -- their third on Syria -- on a resolution that outlined a blueprint for the establishment of a national transition government, which threatened sanctions against Damascus if it failed to halt its attacks on residential areas.

Behind closed doors, Brahimi told the 15-nation Security Council that he saw few signs that either Assad or the fragmented armed opposition are currently prepared to engage in substantive peace talks, according to council diplomat present.

"On the side of the government, the aim is still to keep, or return to, the old Syria, even if much is said about dialogue and reform," Brahimi told the council. "Popular demand for change, not reforms, is

hardly recognized by the government. The crisis is seen mainly as a foreign conspiracy engineered from abroad."

The Syrian government, Brahimi told the Security Council, continues to dismiss the role of popular unrest in fueling anti-government sentiment, arguing that Damascus is the victim of a foreign conspiracy, and that its troops are up against as many as 5,000 foreign fighters. The armed opposition, meanwhile, maintains the current rebellion is the result of four decades of state-terror against the people.

"They say there is no turning back," Brahimi told the council. "Indeed, it bears repeating that the solution to Syria's problems demands a clean break with the past."
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Syria's Immediate Prospects For Peace Grim, New U.N. Envoy Says

September 25, 2012

Washington Post

By Colum Lynch

UNITED NATIONS - The new U.N.-Arab League envoy to Syria offered a downbeat assessment Monday on the prospects for peace in the war-torn country, saying that he would be powerless to avert worsening civil and sectarian strife as long as the United Nations' biggest powers, including the United States and Russia, remained divided.

Lakhdar Brahimi, a veteran U.N. troubleshooter, also sent a strong message to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad that his promises of government-sponsored reforms would not be enough to stem the spreading violence in Syria.

"I think there is no disagreement that the situation is extremely bad and getting worse," Brahimi told reporters after the meeting. "I refuse to believe that reasonable people do not see that you cannot go backward; you cannot go back to the Syria of the past. I think I told everybody in Damascus and elsewhere that reform is not enough. What is needed is change."

Despite the grim report, Brahimi offered a sliver of hope, saying that although there are no immediate prospects for progress diplomatically, his travels to the region had given him cause to believe "we will find an opening in the not-too-distant future."

Brahimi's remarks, which followed his first briefing to the Security Council on Syria, reflected a growing consensus among U.N. officials and some Arab leaders that an easing of the crisis is all but impossible without some sort of agreement between Russia and the West on a process for political transition in Syria.

"If I do not represent the entire council, I am nothing," Brahimi told reporters. "I need to be seen to represent a united council and a united League of Arab States, and I think the Security Council understands that perfectly well."

Brahimi's visit to U.N. headquarters comes on the eve of the annual General Assembly debate of world leaders, and Brahimi said he would use the occasion to consult with key regional and international leaders in New York before returning to the region. For the time being, Brahimi said that he had no fixed

peace plan for Syria, but that "I do have a few ideas" that he intends to discuss with key foreign powers this week.

The U.N. Security Council has remained at a stalemate on Syria since July, when Russia and China cast their latest vetoes on a resolution that outlined a blueprint for the establishment of a government of national transition and that threatened sanctions against Damascus if it failed to halt its attacks on residential areas.

Behind closed doors Monday, Brahimi, a former Algerian diplomat, told the 15-nation Security Council that he saw few signs that either Assad or the fragmented armed opposition are prepared to engage in substantive peace talks, according to council diplomats present.

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The Syrian government, Brahimi told the council, continues to dismiss the role of popular unrest in fueling anti-government sentiment, arguing that Damascus is the victim of a foreign conspiracy and that its troops are up against as many as 5,000 foreign fighters. The armed opposition, meanwhile, maintains that the crisis is the result of four decades of state-backed terror against ordinary Syrians.

"They say there is no turning back," Brahimi told the council. "Indeed it bears repeating that the solution to Syria's problems demands a clean break with the past."

Brahimi said the opposition's attempts to unite behind a single platform "have been disappointing until now," but he said he saw "some signs" that its members were trying to improve coordination.
(top)

UN: 1.5 Million Syrians In Need Of Food Aid

September 25, 2012

Associated Press

By Karin Laub

BEIRUT - The number of Syrians in need of food aid has jumped from 250,000 in April to 1.5 million today, the head of the U.N.'s food agency said Monday, as more civilians are driven from their homes by an escalating civil war.

Separately, the international envoy to Syria, Lakhdar Brahimi, told reporters at the U.N. that the conflict threatens to spill across the Middle East and is "extremely bad and getting worse."

In a closed-door session of the U.N. Security Council, Brahimi had harsh words for Bashar Assad, saying the Syrian president has no intention of carrying out reforms that would end his family's four-decade grip on Syria.

Brahimi's comments were relayed by a diplomat who participated in the briefing and spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to discuss publicly what was said.

Assad insists he is ready to consider political reforms and portrays those fighting to bring him down as foreign-backed terrorists. Syria's opposition groups, both in exile and in the country, dismiss Assad's promises and say the dictator must step down ahead of any political dialogue.

Syria's 18-month conflict appears to have reached a stalemate, with neither Assad's military nor armed rebels able to deliver a knock-out blow. The death toll has reached nearly 30,000, according to activists, while hundreds of thousands of Syrians have been displaced, many seeking refuge in neighboring Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan.

In recent weeks, fighting has focused on Aleppo, Syria's largest city and a strategic prize for both sides. Rebels seized several neighborhoods of Aleppo over the summer, but have been unable to take full control of the city of 3 million, Syria's commercial capital and a former regime stronghold. The regime for its part has been unable to drive opposition fighters out of the city, despite superior firepower.

Taking Aleppo could give the rebels momentum and a stronghold in the north near the Turkish border. A rebel defeat, at the very least, would buy Assad more time.

On Monday, Syrian warplanes bombed two buildings in Aleppo's southern neighborhood of Maadi, killing five people, including three children from the same family, activists said. The apartment buildings were destroyed and more people were feared buried under the rubble, activists said. An amateur video showed people digging through the debris in search of survivors.

The aim of such strikes on residential areas is to terrify people and turn them against the Free Syrian Army rebel group, said Aleppo-based activist Mohammed Saeed. "The regime wants people to say that had the Free Syrian Army not entered the city, the regime wouldn't have bombed us," Saeed said.

In New York, the U.N.'s World Food Program warned that it is running short of funds to cover operations in Syria because of sharply growing needs. World Food Program chief Ertharin Cousin said the agency had raised \$78 million, but needs \$60 million more to cover its annual Syria budget. The crisis is likely to worsen as Syria's wet, chilly winter rolls in, she said.

In addition to aid pledges, Cousin said, donor countries need to exert diplomatic pressure to ensure the Syrian government allows agency workers access to those in need. Aid workers are struggling to reach families in conflict areas in and around the capital Damascus, and in the cities of Aleppo and Homs, adding that the agency's staff are traveling in armored vehicles.

The spike in the number of Syrians needing food, or money to buy food, has come as fighting has forced families to leave homes and jobs, with little hope of supporting themselves elsewhere.

"People are now living in schools and other public facilities like schools because they can't go back to their homes," she said. "It's an impossible situation for families, women, children, living through this crisis on a daily basis."

"Those who are food insecure are also internally displaced for the most part. If we don't provide them with the food assistance that is required, they will go hungry," Cousin said.

Across Syria, at least 48 civilians and 22 regime soldiers were killed Monday, including 16 in Aleppo, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based activist group.

The battle for Aleppo has marked the first time the regime has used helicopters and warplanes regularly to strike from the air, bringing an even heavier toll of civilian casualties. Previously, the military relied heavily on often indiscriminate artillery and tank shelling.

The Observatory and another group, the Local Coordination Committees, reported violence elsewhere in the country, including attacks by government troops backed by helicopter gunships on the southern town of Sheikh Miskeen in Daraa province.

The Observatory said rebels and troops were fighting near the military air base of Tabaqah in the northern province of Raqqah. Last week, rebels captured a major border crossing with Turkey in Raqqah.

Meanwhile, the Assad regime came under attack in a different arena. The state-run news agency SANA said its Facebook page was hacked in what it described as "another attempt targeting the Syrian national media." Efforts are underway to repair the Facebook page, the agency said.

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Syria, Iran Hang Heavy As World Gathers At UN

September 25, 2012

AFP

Fears that the Syrian civil war and the Iranian nuclear standoff could provoke wider international conflict dominated the debate on Monday as world leaders gathered for the UN General Assembly.

The annual summit of the nations of the world was to begin on Tuesday, but the preliminary exchanges in New York quickly underlined the stark dangers facing the international community as several conflicts come to a head.

UN and Arab League peace envoy Lakhdar Brahimi told the UN Security Council that Syria is sinking deeper into bloodshed, with the regime complaining of an invasion of foreign fighters and the people facing growing food shortages.

And Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad stuck a typically defiant note, accusing Western powers of misusing UN veto powers to bully Tehran over its nuclear program and of standing by while critics of Islam commit "sacrilege."

Neither intervention augured well for consensus to emerge at the upcoming week of debate at the General Assembly, where leaders and senior officials from scores of powers great and small were to take the platform.

Brahimi's briefing underlined the scale and complexity of the Syrian crisis, with veto-wielding permanent Security Council members Russia and China still blocking Western efforts to build support for robust international action.

He told the 15-nation council the Syrian government estimates there are 5,000 foreign fighters in the country and is increasingly portraying the conflict as a "foreign conspiracy," envoys at the closed meeting told AFP.

Reporting on recent talks with Syria's President Bashar al-Assad, the former Algerian foreign minister painted a grim picture of life for those caught up in an 18-month-old conflict in which activists say more than 29,000 have died.

Brahimi told the council that the torture of detainees has become "routine" and that people were now afraid to go to hospitals which were in the hands of government forces for fear of facing abuse or detention.

The envoy estimated that 1.5 million people have now fled their homes and said Syria faces growing food shortages because harvests have been slashed by the fighting between government forces and opposition rebels.

There was also little sign of a breakthrough in the Iranian stand-off, in which the United States and its allies hope sanctions will force Tehran to scale back its nuclear ambitions and open them to international scrutiny.

Absent a climb-down by Tehran, Israel has warned it might launch pre-emptive strikes against Iranian targets, plunging the Middle East into a whole new round of uncertainty with global economic and political consequences.

But Ahmadinejad arrived for his annual show-down on enemy territory in New York in a belligerent mood, declaring that the United States, Britain and France "violate the basic rights and freedoms of other nations."

He said that it was wrong for the five major powers to have a veto on the Security Council, which was why the body "has failed to establish justice and ensure sustainable peace and security in the world."

And he sought to link his charge of illegitimacy to the West's failure to prevent filmmakers and cartoonists from, in his view, committing "sacrilege against people's beliefs and sanctities."

There has been widespread outrage in the Muslim world this month following the release of a movie trailer made by a Christian extremist group in California and new French cartoons lampooning the Prophet Mohammed.

The Arab Spring revolutions in Tunisia, Libya and Egypt have brought a new generation of Islamist leaders to power and the conflict between Western respect for free speech and Muslim opposition to blasphemy has strained ties.

This week's General Assembly will be the first attended by Egypt's President Mohamed Morsi, a former leader of the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood who is now leader of the biggest country in the Arab world.
(top)

In New York, defiant Ahmadinejad says Israel will be "eliminated"

September 25, 2012

Reuters

By Louis Charbonneau

NEW YORK - Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said on Monday Israel has no roots in the Middle East and would be "eliminated," ignoring a U.N. warning to avoid incendiary rhetoric ahead of the annual General Assembly session.

Ahmadinejad also said he did not take seriously the threat that Israel could launch a military strike on Iran's nuclear facilities, denied sending arms to Syria, and alluded to Iran's threats to the life of British author Salman Rushdie.

The United States quickly dismissed the Iranian president's comments as "disgusting, offensive and outrageous."

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has hinted Israel could strike Iran's nuclear sites and criticized U.S. President Barack Obama's position that sanctions and diplomacy should be given more time to stop Tehran from acquiring nuclear weapons.

Iran denies it is seeking nuclear arms and says its atomic work is peaceful and aimed at generating electricity.

"Fundamentally we do not take seriously the threats of the Zionists," Ahmadinejad, in New York for this week's U.N. General Assembly, told reporters. "We have all the defensive means at our disposal and we are ready to defend ourselves."

Ahmadinejad is due to speak at the U.N. General Assembly on Wednesday. U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon met Ahmadinejad on Sunday and warned him of the dangers of incendiary rhetoric in the Middle East.

Ahmadinejad, who has used previous U.N. sessions to question the Holocaust and the U.S. account of the September 11, 2001, attacks, did not heed the warning and instead expanded on his previous rejection of Israel's right to exist. Western envoys typically walk out of Ahmadinejad's U.N. speeches in protest at his remarks.

"Iran has been around for the last seven, 10 thousand years. They (the Israelis) have been occupying those territories for the last 60 to 70 years, with the support and force of the Westerners. They have no roots there in history," he said, referring to the founding of the modern state of Israel in 1948.

"We do believe that they have found themselves at a dead end and they are seeking new adventures in order to escape this dead end. Iran will not be damaged with foreign bombs," Ahmadinejad said, speaking through an interpreter at his Manhattan hotel.

"We don't even count them as any part of any equation for Iran. During a historical phase, they (the Israelis) represent minimal disturbances that come into the picture and are then eliminated."

In 2005, Ahmadinejad called Israel a "tumor" and echoed the words of the former Iranian Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, by saying that Israel should be wiped off the map.

WHITE HOUSE: COMMENTS DISGUSTING

In Washington, White House spokesman Tommy Vietor reaffirmed the U.S. commitment to Israel's security.

"President Ahmadinejad's comments are characteristically disgusting, offensive and outrageous," he said. "They underscore again why America's commitment to the security of Israel must be unshakeable, and why the world must hold Iran accountable for its utter failure to meet its obligations."

The United States also officially linked Iran's state oil company to the country's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, a move that enables Washington to apply new sanctions on foreign banks dealing with the company.

Attending what will likely be his last U.N. General Assembly as he nears the end of his second term next year, Ahmadinejad also spoke at a high-level U.N. session on the rule of law, prompting a walkout by Israel's U.N. Ambassador Ron Prosor.

"Ahmadinejad showed again that he not only threatens the future of the Jewish people, he seeks to erase our past," Prosor said in a statement. "Three thousand years of Jewish history illustrate the clear danger of ignoring fanatics like Iran's president, especially as he inches closer to acquiring nuclear weapons."

Amir Ali Hajizadeh, a brigadier general in Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, was quoted on Sunday as saying that Iran could launch a pre-emptive strike on Israel if it was sure the Jewish state was preparing to attack it.

Ahmadinejad said the nuclear issue was ultimately between the United States and Iran and must be resolved in talks.

"The nuclear issue is not a problem," he said. "But the approach of the United States on Iran is important. We are ready for dialogue, for a fundamental resolution of the problems, but under conditions that are based on fairness and mutual respect."

"We are not expecting a 33-year-old problem between the United States and Iran to be resolved in a speedy fashion," Ahmadinejad said. "But there is no other way besides dialogue."

Obama will underscore his commitment to preventing Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon and address Muslim unrest related to an anti-Islamic video in his speech to the General Assembly on Tuesday, the White House said.

'BULLYING COUNTRIES'

At the meeting on the rule of law, Ahmadinejad said states should not yield to rules imposed "by bullying countries."

Ahmadinejad said on Monday that conditions in Iran, which is under U.N., U.S. and European Union sanctions over its nuclear program, were not as bad as portrayed by some and the country could survive without oil revenues.

Britain, France and Germany called for fresh economic sanctions on Iran in a letter to European Union foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton, a top French official told reporters.

"If we want to reach a diplomatic and peaceful solution to Iran's nuclear program, then we must increase the pressure," French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius said.

Western sanctions on Iran tightened markedly this year with an EU ban on crude oil purchases from Iran and U.S. sanctions targeting banks that deal with Iran's central bank. Those sanctions have not yielded tangible progress toward a diplomatic solution.

There will be high-level side meetings on Iran's nuclear program and the Syrian conflict during the General Assembly but U.N. diplomats do not expect either issue to be resolved soon.

Ahmadinejad's annual visits to New York, a city with a sizable Jewish population, are routinely met with protests against his anti-Israel rhetoric. United Against Nuclear Iran, a U.S. group that opposes Iran acquiring an atomic bomb, protested at the Iranian official's hotel with a banner reading "Out of the Warwick, out of New York, out of the U.N.!"

'WE SEEK PEACE IN SYRIA'

Ahmadinejad rejected charges by the United Nations and Western officials that Iran is sending arms to pro-government forces in Syria fighting rebels trying to topple President Bashar al-Assad. "The so-called news that you alluded to has been denied vehemently, officially," he said to a question.

"We see both sides as equally our brothers," he said. "The intervention and meddling from outside have made conditions that much tougher. We must help to quell the violence and help ... (facilitate) a national dialogue."

Ahmadinejad also was asked about a move by an Iranian religious foundation to increase its reward for the killing of Rushdie in response to a California-made anti-Islam video called "The Innocence of Muslims" that has sparked anti-American protests around the Muslim world.

"Where is he now?" Ahmadinejad asked of Rushdie. "Is he in the United States? If he is, you shouldn't broadcast that for his own safety."

Rushdie, an Indian-born British novelist who has nothing to do with the video, was condemned to death in 1989 by Khomeini, Iran's late leader, because of his novel "The Satanic Verses," saying its depiction of the Prophet Mohammad was blasphemous.

Ahmadinejad appeared to reject Washington's position that while it condemns the video's content, freedom of expression must be upheld. "Freedoms must not interfere with the freedoms of others," Ahmadinejad said. "If someone insults, what would you do? ... Is insulting other people not a form of crime?"

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Attack By Iran's Ahmadinejad Sparks Israel Walkout

September 25, 2012

Associated Press

By Edith M. Lederer

UNITED NATIONS - Iran's president called Israel a nuclear-armed "fake regime" shielded by the United States, prompting Israel's U.N. ambassador to walk out of a high-level U.N. meeting Monday promoting the rule of law.

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad also accused the U.S. and others of misusing freedom of speech and failing to speak out against the defamation of people's beliefs and "divine prophets," an apparent reference to the recently circulated amateur video made in the U.S. which attacks Islam and denigrates the Prophet Muhammad.

The Iranian leader, who has called for Israel's destruction, used his speech to denounce Israel's occupation of Palestinian territory and U.S. vetoes in the U.N. Security Council to back its ally. He urged all nations to "hold occupiers accountable and make efforts to return the occupied territories to their rightful owners."

Ahmadinejad blamed the "discriminatory" veto power of the U.S., China, Russia, Britain and France for the Security Council's failure to ensure peace in the world, and he called for a change in the rules "in favor of nations with due regard to justice."

As Ahmadinejad addressed leaders and ministers from more than 100 countries, Israel's U.N. Ambassador Ron Prosor walked out of the General Assembly hall.

"Ahmadinejad showed again that he not only threatens the future of the Jewish people, he seeks to erase our past," Prosor said in a statement.

"Three thousand years of Jewish history illustrate the clear danger of ignoring fanatics like Iran's President, especially as he inches closer to acquiring nuclear weapons," he said. "Those who ignore his hateful words today, will bear responsibility for his deeds tomorrow."

Israel views a nuclear-armed Iran as an existential threat, but Iran insists its nuclear program is purely peaceful and aimed solely at producing nuclear energy. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu believes Tehran is moving closer to producing a nuclear weapon and has been pushing the United States to set "red lines" which, if crossed, might lead to American military action. President Barack Obama has refused to set any "red lines."

The U.S. delegation did not walk out of Monday's meeting, as it has in the past when Iran attacked Israel directly.

Ahmadinejad did not name either Israel or the U.S. in his speech but his targets were clear when he said: "We have witnessed that some members of the Security Council with veto right have chosen silence with regard to the nuclear warheads of a fake regime while at the same time they impede scientific progress of other nations."

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon organized the first-ever high-level U.N. meeting on the rule of law hoping to send a strong signal to people everywhere that world leaders "are serious about establishing well-functioning institutions and delivering justice."

He told delegates he is proud that the United Nations is promoting the rule of law in more than 150 countries.

Ban called on all states to apply the law equally, both nationally and internationally, and not allow political self-interest to undermine justice. He also called on world leaders "to uphold the highest standards of the rule of law in their decision-making at all times."

At the start of the day-long meeting, diplomats from more than 100 countries adopted a declaration reaffirming "that states shall abide by all their obligations under international law." It stresses the importance of the rule of law in preventing and resolving conflicts and building peace in countries emerging from war and urges the U.N. and the international community to support such efforts.

U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder called the meeting "historic" and said the United States will continue "to support U.N.-led efforts to improve access to legal aid, to more effectively combat drug trafficking and organized crime" and to promote the rule of law in conflict and post-conflict situations.

He said the meeting underscored a key conclusion in a recent World Bank report "that in today's world, the greatest threat to development and recovery is a weak rule of law."

Many speakers cited the impact of corruption and stressed that no one can be above the law, from high government officials to ordinary citizens.

"In developing nations, corruption is the mortal enemy of democracy," Mongolia's President Tsakhia Elbegdorj said. "It is like an infectious disease - it must be attacked head on."

He said high-level corruption also hurts development, so the fight for the rule of law "is also a fight for more transparent and successful economic development."

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Before Palestinians Act At UN, Israeli Officials Urge Other Steps

September 25, 2012

New York Times

By Jodi Rudoren

JERUSALEM - With the Palestinians planning to make their case this week to upgrade from organizational status to nonmember status at the United Nations General Assembly, one senior Israeli minister condemned the move as "the easy and wrong way out" on Monday, while another said the time had come for Israel to consider its own unilateral move toward a separate state: annexing parts of the West Bank and withdrawing from others.

The first, Deputy Prime Minister Dan Meridor, said at a briefing for journalists here, "The goal is not a statement but a state; the way is not condemnation of Israel, but negotiations." Of the Palestinian bid, he said: "It's easier, but it won't bear fruit. A statement in the U.N. will give him some advantage in the public opinion, but this is it. Nothing will change on the ground."

But even as Mr. Meridor, a veteran politician whose voice is one of the most moderate in Israel's inner cabinet, emphasized the need to return to the negotiating table after a four-year stalemate, Defense Minister Ehud Barak said the time might have come "to take action to start the separation process" without waiting for a deal with the Palestinians.

In an interview with the right-wing daily Israel Today, parts of which were published on Monday, Mr. Barak called for the annexation of three large settlement blocs - Gush Etzion, Maale Adumim and Ariel - where a vast majority of the 350,000 Jews in the West Bank live, and the removal of up to dozens of smaller settlements scattered across the area. He proposed that those in the farther-flung areas be offered money to move - as individual families or whole communities - either to the annexed blocs or to what is now Israel, and that those unwilling to leave remain under the rule of the Palestinian Authority for a five-year trial period.

"This will not only help us with the Palestinians, but also with other countries in the region, with the American administration, and of course ourselves," said Mr. Barak, who mentioned his interest in unilateral action at a conference in May but did not provide details.

"This isn't an easy decision," he added. "The time has come to make decisions that are not only based on ideology and gut feelings, but also a cold, realistic reading of reality."

The call for unilateralism is out of sync with the public diplomacy of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, particularly at a time when his office is criticizing the Palestinians' unilateral attempt to upgrade their status at the United Nations.

Mr. Barak's proposal is anathema to settlers and their supporters, who see uprooting so many people as unimaginable. They point out that a similar, though smaller, disengagement from the Gaza Strip in 2005 was traumatic for Israeli society and created an opening for the militant Hamas wing that now rules the area. The plan is equally derided by Palestinian leaders, who loathe the notion of having their future borders determined by Israeli's decisions on annexations and withdrawals and complain that the large settlement blocs compromise the viability of a new state.

"What he's talking about, if we're going to think in terms of geography, is disastrous," said Nour Odeh, a Palestinian Authority spokeswoman. "It represents an agenda that has nothing to do with a two-state solution."

She noted that the Ariel bloc stretches more than 10 miles into the West Bank and sits on an important water source. "Ultimately all these settlements - their presence, their expansion, their expanded borders and so on - they're all illegal, and we don't recognize their legitimacy," she said.

Many in Israel saw Mr. Barak's statements less as a serious new policy initiative and more as an attempt to distinguish himself politically from the rest of the cabinet amid increasing talk of elections being called for early next year rather than as scheduled in October 2013. Mr. Barak, who is not a member of Mr. Netanyahu's right-leaning Likud Party but leads his own small Independence Party, in recent weeks has spoken out against the elevation of an educational institution in Ariel to university status and has harshly criticized the prime minister's budget proposal.

"As Henry Kissinger once aptly said, 'Israel has no foreign policy, only a domestic political system,' " Dani Dayan, the head of the settler movement, said in an interview. "Barak's plan is a nonstarter with the Israeli public that totally opposes unilateral withdrawals. It caters to a small portion of the electorate on which Barak bases his political calculations for his future."

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Abbas Set For Scaled-Down Bid At UN

September 25, 2012

Washington Post

By Joel Greenberg

RAMALLAH, West Bank - There is no fanfare this time, no campaign in support of Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas as he heads this week to the United Nations to ask for an upgrade of the Palestinians' status there to a non-member state.

Abbas is scheduled to speak at the General Assembly on Thursday, a year after he addressed that body in a high-profile bid to win U.N. membership for a state of Palestine in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem. That effort fizzled in the Security Council when the Palestinians were unable to muster enough votes in the face of strong opposition from Washington.

So the scaled-down bid this year has the feeling of an anti-climax.

Facing stalled peace efforts with the Israelis, an impasse in attempts to heal the rift between his Fatah movement and the Islamist group Hamas, and economic unrest in the West Bank, Abbas returns to the U.N. after a year in which the Palestinian issue has been sidelined by concerns about the Iranian nuclear program and the unfolding Arab Spring.

While Abbas will try to use his speech to refocus world attention on the Palestinian quest for statehood, it is far from clear that his words will be followed anytime soon with a draft resolution to change the Palestinians' status at the U.N. from an "observer entity" to a non-member "observer state."

Though Security Council approval is needed for full membership in the United Nations, an upgrade in status need only be approved by the General Assembly, where resolutions cannot be vetoed. As an observer state, Palestine could join U.N. agencies such as the International Criminal Court, where Palestinian officials have suggested they could bring cases against Israel.

A majority at the 193-member General Assembly likely would favor granting the Palestinians observer-state status, but Israel and the United States oppose the move, calling it a unilateral step to decide an issue that should be resolved through negotiations.

If the resolution is submitted, Abbas could risk losing promised financial aid from Washington as well as tax and customs transfers from the Israelis. Those are funds the Palestinian Authority desperately needs.

Caught between those external pressures and public discontent over the lack of movement toward ending the Israeli occupation, Abbas appears to be walking a tightrope: He is going to the United Nations in a show of diplomatic resolve, while remaining unclear about when a draft statehood resolution would actually be submitted to the body.

At a news conference at his Ramallah headquarters this month, he was deliberately vague about the timing of the step, saying the Palestinians would consult with allies about a draft that would be submitted for a vote "at the appropriate time."

Palestinian officials acknowledge that any such resolution is unlikely to be presented in the weeks leading up to the U.S. election, so as not to antagonize President Obama at a politically sensitive moment.

Still, the officials assert, the renewed approach to the United Nations is meant to mobilize international support for Palestinian statehood at a time when efforts to renew negotiations with Israel have foundered. "This step aims to preserve the two-state solution," Saeb Erekat, the chief Palestinian negotiator, told reporters last week. "After the U.N. vote . . . Palestine will become a country under occupation."

Nabil Shaath, a senior aide to Abbas, said that after a year of failed efforts to restart talks, "we just reached a dead end."

"We really lost a lot of support from our people," Shaath said in an interview. "The U.S. has done absolutely nothing to somehow make up for what has been lost through this futile effort. . . . So we're going back to seek more international support and more international legitimacy."

Attempts to restart negotiations have faltered over a Palestinian demand that Israel halt settlement building in the West Bank and East Jerusalem and agree to negotiate a peace deal based on Israel's 1967 boundaries, with land swaps. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has called for a resumption of talks without preconditions.

In an interview published Monday in the newspaper Israel Hayom, Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak said that if peace efforts remain stalled, Israel should take "practical steps" of its own. He suggested withdrawing from outlying settlements in the West Bank and retaining control of the larger Israeli settlement blocs where most of the settlers live. Commentators called the remarks an attempt by Barak to distinguish himself from Netanyahu and appeal to mainstream Israeli voters, with an eye to possible early elections.

Mark Regev, a spokesman for Netanyahu, said that the latest Palestinian initiative at the United Nations was a violation of Israeli-Palestinian agreements to resolve their conflict through negotiations, and that Israel "reserves the right" to respond, though he declined to elaborate.

"On the one hand, the Palestinians refuse to negotiate and condemn the process to a period of stagnation, and the same Palestinian leadership says that because of the stagnation, they are forced to take radical steps," Regev said. "It's simply not logical."

Nathan Thrall, a Jerusalem-based Middle East analyst for the International Crisis Group, said that the Palestinian leadership's U.N. bid had become "a problem for them, because they want to preserve their relations with the United States, which has communicated to them very clearly that it doesn't want them to do it."

"I think that it's a convenient solution for them for Abbas to give a speech, not do anything in practice, and to promise as they have all along that they are still intending to go ahead with a General Assembly resolution," Thrall said.

On the streets of Ramallah on Monday, where there were demonstrations this month against the high cost of living, there seemed to be little enthusiasm for the scaled-down U.N. statehood bid, in sharp contrast to the flag-waving last year.

"It's all empty words, and nothing has changed," said Muhammad Abdullah, sitting in his plumbing supplies store. "People are more worried now about just making a living."

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At U.N., Free Speech Divides West And Muslim Nations

September 25, 2012

Los Angeles Times

By Paul Richter

UNITED NATIONS - The annual U.N. General Assembly meeting, which is intended to celebrate the world's common values, this year is exposing instead the gulf between Western and Islamic perspectives on freedom of expression, posing an unexpected challenge for President Obama when he speaks here Tuesday.

Prompted by the anti-Islam video produced in California that has stirred deadly riots around the world, delegations from major Muslim nations have arrived at the U.N. prepared to demand international curbs on speech or media that they believe defame their religion or the prophet Muhammad.

Western leaders say they won't give ground on free speech, but the clash is souring the mood at a gathering that diplomats had hoped would yield new collaboration on Syria, the dispute over Iran's nuclear development and the challenges newly elected governments face a year after the "Arab Spring" toppled authoritarian rulers in the Middle East and North Africa.

The demand for limits on anti-Muslim expression is coming from leading Islamic groups such as the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and leaders as diverse as Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi and Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Erdogan, whom President Obama views as a key ally, has declared that all 57 Islamic nations "should speak forcefully with one voice," and has called for "international legal regulations against attacks on what people deem sacred."

These leaders consider anti-Islamic material a kind of hate speech that should be banned around the world. They are expected to demand those regulations when debate begins Tuesday in the General Assembly.

"This has exposed a huge fault line in political philosophies," said Stewart Patrick of the nonpartisan Council on Foreign Relations. "It may be irreconcilable."

The dispute puts Obama in a difficult position in the closing weeks of the presidential race. Although the president will stand firmly for 1st Amendment values, he needs to be careful in condemning the anti-Muslim video so as not to sound an apologetic note that would draw political fire from his adversaries.

The White House was hoping Obama could use his U.N. address to show how his administration's support for democratic movements in the Arab Spring and greater engagement with the Muslim world overall have improved America's international standing after a decade of war in Muslim nations.

Instead he faces a jarring reminder of the anti-American riots in about 20 nations and the storming of the U.S. Consulate in eastern Libya that killed Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens and three other Americans on Sept. 11. The White House last week described the heavily armed assault in Benghazi as a terrorist attack.

The controversy is expected to breathe new life into efforts by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, which pushed unsuccessfully for a dozen years for the U.N. Human Rights Council to pass a resolution making anti-blasphemy laws a matter of global human rights.

A battle at the U.N. for such a standard, even if it doesn't pass, is a setback for U.S. policy on several levels.

Experts say it helps legitimize efforts in parts of the Islamic world to enforce tough anti-blasphemy laws that may be used to target moderate politicians and permit harsh treatment of minority groups and religions. It also could make it harder for missionaries seeking converts and Western nongovernmental groups pushing for democratic governance.

"This could justify tough crackdowns on religious minorities," Patrick said. "This does touch on American values.... U.S. officials have been very worried in the past that this effort would catch on."

In Pakistan, it is a crime to insult Muhammad, the Koran or Islam, a law that critics say can be used to settle scores against adversaries or persecute minorities.

In Egypt, Coptic Christians have said they worry that the anti-Islam video, called "Innocence of Muslims," could unleash a wave of violence against them. Two men reportedly involved with the video are Egyptian immigrants tied to conservative Christian causes.

The demand for limits on supposed hate speech reflects, in part, new political realities since the Arab Spring.

In countries such as Egypt and Tunisia, previously outlawed Islamist parties are competing openly for votes and power. Their leaders are seeking to outflank more moderate political rivals, who feel increasing pressure to back down on free speech amid the broader public outrage.

Morsi, the Egyptian president, was slow to respond when protests broke out over the video. The Muslim Brotherhood, now a dominant force in Egyptian politics, wants to maintain its legitimacy on the streets, and it took two days after crowds stormed the U.S. Embassy in Cairo for the new Egyptian leader to publicly condemn the attack.

Rachid Ghannouchi, leader of the moderate Islamist Nahda party in Tunisia, is widely respected in the West, for example. But he has joined the calls for international criminalization of anti-Muslim speech, and his party has introduced a draft law in Tunisia's legislature that would make such behavior illegal.

On the far end of the spectrum, Sheik Hassan Nasrallah, head of the Shiite Muslim militant group Hezbollah in Lebanon, has also called for international rules to ban insults against Islam, as well as insults against Christianity and Judaism. His comments are viewed as a sign of the popular appeal of the issue because Nasrallah rarely concerns himself with international diplomacy.

Ahmadinejad, the Iranian president, told reporters in New York on Monday that Israel is only a short-lived presence among the ancient civilizations of the Middle East and would eventually be "eliminated."

Meanwhile, the situation in battle-ravaged Syria "is extremely bad and getting worse," Lakhdar Brahimi, special envoy for the United Nations and the Arab League, told reporters in New York. The violence there "is a threat to the region and a threat to peace and security in the world."

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Obama To Address U.N. On Foreign Policy

September 25, 2012

USA Today

By Aamer S. Madhani

President Obama will deliver a wide-ranging foreign-policy address Tuesday to the 67th meeting of the United Nations General Assembly, including a renewed warning to Iran to suspend its suspected nuclear program and a reflection on the recent violence in the Middle East.

But as Obama prepares to tout his foreign-policy vision, GOP nominee Mitt Romney and his surrogates are charging that the president is downplaying the tumult in the Middle East and downgrading the U.S. relationship with Israel.

The meeting at the United Nations comes in the aftermath of the killings of four Americans -- including Ambassador Chris Stevens -- in Benghazi, Libya, earlier this month and as Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has pressed Obama to clearly articulate the circumstances under which he would back military action to prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons.

Romney took aim at Obama for referring to the recent violence in the Middle East as "bumps in the road" on the path to a more stable and peaceful region. The president's comments came in an interview that aired on CBS's 60 Minutes on Sunday.

"Look, the world looks at the events going on," Romney said at a campaign event Monday in Pueblo, Colo. "They don't see these events as bumps in the road. These are lives. This is humanity. This is freedom."

The Obama campaign shot back that Romney was "misinterpreting" Obama's statement.

Romney "is making reckless statements about the death of four Americans in Libya, apparently for the sole purpose of his own political gain. Using this incident to launch political attacks should be beneath someone seeking to be our nation's Commander-in-Chief," said Obama campaign spokeswoman Lis Smith.

Romney supporters also seized on comments the president made in the same interview to argue that the U.S.-Israel relationship has diminished under Obama's watch.

In the interview, Obama called Israel "one of our closest allies in the region," but Romney allies said that understates the primacy of the relationship.

"Most Americans would say undoubtedly that Israel is our best ally in the region -- the one that stands for the same things we do," said House Majority Leader Eric Cantor. "For President Obama to say that Israel is on par with other allies in the region struck me as very, very concerning."

White House spokesman Jay Carney said on Monday that Israel remains the U.S.' "closest ally" in the region and the U.S. is committed to preventing Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon.

"The president was making clear that his commitment and this country's commitment to Israel and Israel's security is as strong as ever and unbreakable in nature," Carney said of Obama's 60 Minutes interview. "There's obviously a lot of noise around this issue at times. His point was clearly that his objective is to take every step possible to enhance Israel's security as part of our strong relationship with Israel."

Unlike last year's U.N. General Assembly gathering, when Obama packed in 13 meetings with other heads-of-state, the president has no one-on-one conversations with world leaders scheduled for this visit.

On Monday afternoon, Obama and first lady Michelle Obama sat down for an interview with ABC's The View, a daytime-talk show, before hosting a reception for foreign leaders in New York. Prior to the U.N. gathering today, the president and Romney will each deliver remarks to the Clinton Global Initiative before returning to the campaign trail.

Cantor questioned Obama's decision not to meet with Netanyahu and other world leaders for one-on-one meetings, while in New York.

"It speaks volumes to the lack of seriousness that the president is taking the current situation," Cantor said.

The White House had previously said that Obama and Netanyahu will not be in New York at the same time and the prime minister did not request a meeting. Carney noted on Monday that Obama remains deeply engaged in foreign-policy matters and has spoken by phone with the leaders of Egypt, Israel, Libya, Turkey and Yemen in recent days.

Obama and Netanyahu need to sit down to talk through Iran, said Aaron David Miller, a senior fellow at the Woodrow Wilson Center. But substantively there is little they can accomplish in a meeting on the sidelines of the U.N., particularly so soon after Netanyahu publicly criticized Obama for not setting clear lines that Iran must not cross.

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TOP STORIES

In Arab Spring, Obama Finds A Sharp Test

September 25, 2012

[New York Times](#)

By Helene Cooper And Robert F. Worth

WASHINGTON - President Hosni Mubarak did not even wait for President Obama's words to be translated before he shot back.

"You don't understand this part of the world," the Egyptian leader broke in. "You're young."

Mr. Obama, during a tense telephone call the evening of Feb. 1, 2011, had just told Mr. Mubarak that his speech, broadcast to hundreds of thousands of protesters in Tahrir Square in Cairo, had not gone far enough. Mr. Mubarak had to step down, the president said.

Minutes later, a grim Mr. Obama appeared before hastily summoned cameras in the Grand Foyer of the White House. The end of Mr. Mubarak's 30-year rule, Mr. Obama said, "must begin now." With those words, Mr. Obama upended three decades of American relations with its most stalwart ally in the Arab world, putting the weight of the United States squarely on the side of the Arab street.

It was a risky move by the American president, flying in the face of advice from elders on his staff at the State Department and at the Pentagon, who had spent decades nursing the autocratic - but staunchly pro-American - Egyptian government.

Nineteen months later, Mr. Obama was at the State Department consoling some of the very officials he had overruled. Anti-American protests broke out in Egypt and Libya. In Libya, they led to the deaths of four Americans, including the United States ambassador to Libya, J. Christopher Stevens. A new Egyptian government run by the Muslim Brotherhood was dragging its feet about condemning attacks on the American Embassy in Cairo.

Television sets in the United States were filled with images of Arabs, angry over an American-made video that ridiculed the Prophet Muhammad, burning American flags and even effigies of Mr. Obama.

Speaking privately to grieving State Department workers, the president tried to make sense of the unfolding events. He talked about how he had been a child abroad, taught to appreciate American diplomats who risked their lives for their country. That work, and the outreach to the Arab world, he said, must continue, even in the face of mob violence that called into question what the United States can accomplish in a turbulent region.

In many ways, Mr. Obama's remarks at the State Department two weeks ago - and the ones he will make before the General Assembly on Tuesday morning, when he addresses the anti-American protests - reflected hard lessons the president had learned over almost two years of political turmoil in the Arab world: bold words and support for democratic aspirations are not enough to engender good will in this region, especially not when hampered by America's own national security interests.

In fact, Mr. Obama's staunch defense of democracy protesters in Egypt last year soon drew him into an upheaval that would test his judgment, his nerve and his diplomatic skill. Even as the uprisings spread to Libya, Yemen, Bahrain and Syria, the president's sympathy for the protesters infuriated America's allies in the conservative and oil-rich Gulf states. In mid-March, the Saudis moved decisively to crush the democracy protests in Bahrain, sending a convoy of tanks and heavy artillery across the 16-mile King Fahd Causeway between the two countries.

That blunt show of force confronted Mr. Obama with the limits of his ability, or his willingness, to midwife democratic change. Despite a global outcry over the shooting and tear-gassing of peaceful protesters in Bahrain, the president largely turned a blind eye. His realism and reluctance to be drawn into foreign quagmires has held sway ever since, notably in Syria, where many critics continue to call for a more aggressive American response to the brutality of Bashar al-Assad's rule.

Mr. Obama's journey from Cairo to the Causeway took just 44 days. In part, it reflected the different circumstances in the countries where protests broke out, despite their common origins and slogans. But his handling of the uprisings also demonstrates the gap between the two poles of his political persona:

his sense of himself as a historic bridge-builder who could redeem America's image abroad, and his more cautious adherence to long-term American interests in security and cheap oil.

To some, the stark difference between the outcomes in Cairo and Bahrain illustrates something else, too: his impatience with old-fashioned back-room diplomacy, and his corresponding failure to build close personal relationships with foreign leaders that can, especially in the Middle East, help the White House to influence decisions made abroad.

A Focus on Respect

In many ways, Mr. Obama's decision to throw American support behind change in the Arab world was made well before a Tunisian street vendor set himself on fire and ignited the broadest political challenge to the region in decades.

Mr. Obama, whose campaign for the presidency was in part set in motion by his early opposition to the Iraq war, came into office in January 2009 determined that he would not repeat what he viewed as the mistakes of his predecessor in pushing a "freedom agenda" in Iraq and other parts of the Arab world, according to senior administration officials.

Instead, he focused on mutual respect and understanding. During a speech to the Arab world in 2009 from Cairo, the president did talk about the importance of governments "that reflect the will of the people." But, he added pointedly, "there is no straight line to realize this promise."

Two weeks later, as large street protests broke out in Iran after disputed presidential elections, Mr. Obama followed a low-key script, criticizing violence but saying he did not want to be seen as meddling in Iranian domestic politics.

Months later, administration officials said, Mr. Obama expressed regret about his muted stance on Iran. "There was a feeling of 'we ain't gonna be behind the curve on this again,'" one senior administration official said. He, like almost two dozen administration officials and Arab and American diplomats interviewed for this article, spoke on the condition of anonymity.

By the time the Tunisian protests broke out in January 2011 - an angry Mr. Obama accused his staff of being caught "flat-footed," officials said - the president publicly backed the protesters. But the real test of the new muscular posture came 11 days later, when thousands of Egyptians converged on Tahrir Square in Cairo for a "day of rage."

Mr. Obama felt keenly, one aide said, the need for the United States, and for he himself, to stand as a moral example. "He knows that the protesters want to hear from the American president, but not just any American president," a senior aide to Mr. Obama said. "They want to hear from this American president." In other words, they wanted to hear from the first black president of the United States, a symbol of the possibility of change.

If the president felt a kinship with the youthful protesters, he seems to have had little rapport with Egypt's aging president, or, for that matter, any other Arab leaders. In part, this was a function of time: he was still relatively new to the presidency, and had not built the kind of cozy relationship that the Bush family, for instance, had with the Saudis.

But Mr. Obama has struggled with little success to build better relations with key foreign leaders like Hamid Karzai, the Afghan president, and King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia.

In any case, after an awkward phone call between the American and Egyptian presidents on Jan. 28, Mr. Obama sent a senior diplomat with long experience in Egypt, Frank G. Wisner, to make a personal appeal to the Egyptian leader. But Mr. Mubarak balked. Meanwhile, the rising anger in Cairo's streets led to a new moment of reckoning for Mr. Obama: Feb. 1.

That afternoon at the White House, top national security officials were meeting in the Situation Room to decide what to do about the deteriorating situation in Egypt. Thirty minutes into it, the door opened and the president walked in, crashing what was supposed to be a principals' meeting.

Attending were Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr.; Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton; Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates; the Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman, Adm. Mike Mullen; and the national security adviser, Tom Donilon. Margaret Scobey, the ambassador in Cairo, appeared on the video conference screen.

The question on the table would have been unthinkable just a week before. Should Mr. Obama call for Mr. Mubarak to step down?

Midway through the meeting, an aide walked in and handed a note to Mr. Donilon. "Mubarak is on," he read aloud.

Every screen in the Situation Room was turned to Al Jazeera, and the Egyptian leader appeared, making a much-anticipated address. He said he would not run again, but did not offer to step down. "This is my country," he said. "I will die on its soil."

In the Situation Room, there was silence. Then the president spoke. "That's not going to cut it," he said.

Seeing the Inevitable

If this were Hollywood, the story of Barack Obama and the Arab Spring would end there, with the young American president standing with the protesters against the counsel of his own advisers, and hastening the end of the entrenched old guard in Egypt. In the Situation Room, Mr. Gates, Admiral Mullen, Jeffrey D. Feltman, then an assistant secretary of state, and others balked at the inclusion in Mr. Obama's planned remarks that Mr. Mubarak's "transition must begin now," arguing that it was too aggressive.

Mr. Mubarak had steadfastly stood by the United States in the face of opposition from his own public, they said. The president, officials said, countered swiftly: "If 'now' is not in my remarks, there's no point in me going out there and talking."

John O. Brennan, chief counterterrorism adviser to Mr. Obama, said the president saw early on what others did not: that the Arab Spring movement had legs. "A lot of people were in a state of denial that this had an inevitability to it," Mr. Brennan said in an interview. "And I think that's what the president clearly saw, that there was an inevitability to it that would clearly not be turned back, and it would only be delayed by suppression and bloodshed."

So "now" stayed in Mr. Obama's statement. Ten days later, Mr. Mubarak was out. Even after the president's remarks, Mrs. Clinton was still publicly cautioning that removing Mr. Mubarak too hastily could threaten the country's transition to democracy.

In the end, many of the advisers who initially opposed Mr. Obama's stance now give him credit for prescience. But there were consequences, and they were soon making themselves felt.

Angry Reactions

On Feb. 14, in the tiny island monarchy of Bahrain, Internet calls for a "day of rage" led to street rallies and bloody clashes with the police. The next day at a news conference in Washington, Mr. Obama seemed to suggest that this revolt was much like the others. His message to Arab allies, he said, was "if you are governing these countries, you've got to get out ahead of change."

But in the following weeks, Mr. Obama fell silent. Away from the public eye, he was coming under assault from leaders in Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, even Israel. Angry at the treatment of Mr. Mubarak, which officials from the Gulf states feared could forecast their own abandonment, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates drew a line in the sand. Some American and Arab diplomats say that response could have been avoided if Mr. Obama had worked quietly to ease Mr. Mubarak out, rather than going public.

On March 14, White House officials awoke to a nasty surprise: the Saudis had led a military incursion into Bahrain, followed by a crackdown in which the security forces cleared Pearl Square in the capital, Manama, by force. The moves were widely condemned, but Mr. Obama and Mrs. Clinton offered only veiled criticisms, calling for "calm and restraint on all sides" and "political dialogue."

The reasons for Mr. Obama's reticence were clear: Bahrain sits just off the Saudi coast, and the Saudis were never going to allow a sudden flowering of democracy next door, especially in light of the island's sectarian makeup. Bahrain's people are mostly Shiite, and they have long been seen as a cat's paw for Iranian influence by the Sunni rulers of Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. In addition, the United States maintains a naval base in Bahrain that is seen as a bulwark against Iran, crucial for maintaining the flow of oil from the region.

"We realized that the possibility of anything happening in Saudi Arabia was one that couldn't become a reality," said William M. Daley, President Obama's chief of staff at the time. "For the global economy, this couldn't happen. Yes, it was treated differently from Egypt. It was a different situation."

Some analysts credit Mr. Obama for recognizing early on that strategic priorities trumped whatever sympathy he had for the protesters. Others say the administration could have more effectively mediated between the Bahraini government and the largely Shiite protesters, and thereby avoided what has become a sectarian standoff in one of the world's most volatile places.

If Mr. Obama had cultivated closer ties to the Saudis, he might have bought time for negotiations between the Bahraini authorities and the chief Shiite opposition party, Al Wefaq, according to one American diplomat who was there at the time. Instead, the Saudis gave virtually no warning when their forces rolled across the causeway linking Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, and the ensuing crackdown destroyed all hopes for a peaceful resolution.

The lingering resentment over Mr. Mubarak's ouster had another apparent consequence. Mrs. Clinton's criticism of the military intervention in a Paris television interview angered officials of the United Arab Emirates, whose military was also involved in the Bahrain operation and who shared the Saudis' concern about the Mubarak episode.

The Emiratis promptly threatened to withdraw from the coalition then being assembled to support a NATO-led strike against Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi, the Libyan leader. The Emiratis knew they were needed to give the coalition legitimacy. They quickly named their price for staying on board, according to Arab and Western diplomats familiar with the episode: Mrs. Clinton must issue a statement that would pull back from any criticism of the Bahrain operation.

The statement, hastily drafted and vetted by Emirati and American officials, appeared soon afterward, in the guise of a communiqué on Libya.

The tensions between Mr. Obama and the Gulf states; both American and Arab diplomats say, derive from an Obama character trait: he has not built many personal relationships with foreign leaders. "He's not good with personal relationships; that's not what interests him," said one United States diplomat. "But in the Middle East, those relationships are essential. The lack of them deprives D.C. of the ability to influence leadership decisions."

A Lack of Chemistry

Arab officials echo that sentiment, describing Mr. Obama as a cool, cerebral man who discounts the importance of personal chemistry in politics. "You can't fix these problems by remote control," said one Arab diplomat with long experience in Washington. "He doesn't have friends who are world leaders. He doesn't believe in patting anybody on the back, nicknames.

"You can't accomplish what you want to accomplish" with such an impersonal style, the diplomat said.

Mr. Obama's advisers argue that when he does reach out, he is more effective - as in a phone call last week to Mohamed Morsi, the new president of Egypt. After Mr. Morsi's initial tepid response to the attacks on the embassy in Cairo, a fed-up Mr. Obama demanded a show of support. Within an hour, he had it.

"Were he to be calling all the time, it would run counter to our assertion that we won't dictate the outcome of every decision in every country," said Benjamin J. Rhodes, a top national security aide. Limiting his outreach, Mr. Rhodes said, "heightens the impact of presidential engagement" when Mr. Obama does get on the phone.

Still, there remains concern in the administration that at any moment, events could spiral out of control, leaving the president and his advisers questioning their belief that their early support for the Arab Spring would deflect longstanding public anger toward the United States.

For instance, Mr. Feltman, the former assistant secretary of state, said, "the event I find politically most disturbing is the attack on Embassy Tunis." Angry protesters breached the grounds of the American diplomatic compound there last week - in a country previously known for its moderation and secularism - despite Mr. Obama's early support for the democracy movement there. "That really shakes me out of complacency about what I thought I knew." ([top](#))

Syrian War's Spillover Threatens A Fragile Iraq

September 25, 2012; A1

New York Times

By Tim Arango

BAGHDAD - The civil war in Syria is testing Iraq's fragile society and fledgling democracy, worsening sectarian tensions, pushing Iraq closer to Iran and highlighting security shortcomings just nine months after American forces ended their long and costly occupation here.

Fearing that Iraq's insurgents will unite with extremists in Syria to wage a two-front battle for Sunni dominance, Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki recently ordered guards at the western border to block adult men, even husbands and fathers with families in tow, from crossing into Iraq along with thousands of refugees seeking to escape the grinding war next door.

Farther north, Iraqi officials have another concern, also related to the fighting across the border. Turkish warplanes have stepped up attacks on the mountain hide-outs of Kurdish insurgents galvanized by the war in Syria, underscoring Iraq's inability to control its own airspace.

The hardening of the antagonists' positions in Syria - reverberating across Iraq - was made clear Monday at the United Nations when the new special envoy for Syria, Lakhdar Brahimi, gave a bleak appraisal of the conflict to the Security Council and said he saw no prospect for a breakthrough anytime soon.

The Syrian war's spillover has called attention to uncomfortable realities for American officials: despite nearly nine years of military engagement, an effort that continues today with a \$19 billion weapons sales program, Iraq's security is uncertain and its alliance with the theocratic government in Tehran is growing. Iraq's Shiite-dominated leadership is so worried about a victory by Sunni radicals in Syria that it has moved closer to Iran, which shares a similar interest in supporting the Syrian president, Bashar al-Assad.

There is already some indication that Sunni insurgents in Iraq have tried to coordinate with Syrian fighters to set off a regional sectarian war, Iraqi tribal leaders said.

"Fighters from Anbar went there to support their sect, the Sunnis," said Sheik Hamid al-Hayes, a tribal leader in Anbar Province, in western Iraq, who once led a group of former insurgents who switched sides and joined the Americans in fighting Al Qaeda in Iraq.

In response, the United States has tried to secure its interests in Iraq. It has unsuccessfully pressed Iraq to halt flights from Iran that traverse Iraqi airspace to ferry weapons and fighters to the Assad government, although The Associated Press reported that over the weekend a government spokesman said Iraq would begin random searches of Iranian aircraft.

While some Congressional leaders have threatened to cut off aid to Iraq if the flights do not stop, the United States is trying to speed up weapons sales to Iraq to secure it as an ally, said Lt. Gen. Robert L. Caslen Jr., the American commander in charge of that effort. As regional security deteriorates, the United States is finding it hard to deliver the weapons - especially antiaircraft systems - quickly enough to satisfy the Iraqis, who in some cases are looking elsewhere, including Russia.

"Although they want a strategic partnership with the United States, they recognize the vulnerability, and they are interested in going with the nation that will be able to provide them, and meet their need, their capabilities gap, as quickly as possible," said General Caslen, who oversees a Pentagon office here, under the authority of the American Embassy, that brokers weapons sales to Iraq.

The United States is providing Iraq with refurbished anti-aircraft guns, free of charge, but they will not arrive until June. In the meantime, the Iraqis have collected cold war-era missiles found in a junkyard on an air base north of Baghdad, and they are trying to get them in working order. Iraq is negotiating with Russia to buy air defense systems that could be delivered much more quickly than those bought from the United States.

"Iraq recognizes they don't control their airspace, and they are very sensitive to that," General Caslen said. Each time Turkish fighter jets enter Iraq's airspace to bomb Kurdish targets, he said, Iraqi officials "see it, they know it and they resent it."

Iskander Witwit, a former Iraqi Air Force officer and member of Parliament's security committee, said, "God willing, we will be arming Iraq with weapons to be able to shoot down those planes."

The American military withdrew at the end of last year after negotiations for an extended troop presence collapsed because the Iraqis would not agree to extend legal immunities to any remaining force. Once the Americans left, Iraq celebrated its sovereignty, even as military officials in both countries fretted about the deficiencies of Iraq's military and sought ways to work together that would not require a public debate about immunities.

Iraq and the United States are negotiating an agreement that could result in the return of small units of American soldiers to Iraq on training missions. At the request of the Iraqi government, according to General Caslen, a unit of Army Special Operations soldiers was recently deployed to Iraq to advise on counterterrorism and help with intelligence.

So even as the country leans closer to Iran and contemplates buying weapons from Russia, it still seeks the military support of the United States. This is because Iraq is still facing a potent insurgency whose frequent recent attacks have raised questions about the ability of Iraq's counterterrorism forces to face the threat.

In Anbar, said Mr. Hayes, the tribal leader, insurgents have created Al Qaeda-affiliated units under the name the Free Iraqi Army, to mimic the banner under which Syrian Sunnis are fighting. "They are having meetings and are recruiting," he said. The group also has a Twitter account and a Facebook page.

Similar units have sprouted in Diyala Province, and they have used a call to arms in Syria as a recruitment tool, according to local officials. When fighters die in Syria, local families hold funerals in secret so as not to alert the Shiite-dominated security forces that they have sent their sons to Syria. One such recent funeral was held on the pretext that the fallen fighter had died in a car crash in Jordan, and not, as had actually happened, in fighting in Aleppo, according to a local intelligence officer.

As Western policy makers consider intervention in Syria, they worry that country's war could turn into a full-blown sectarian conflict like the one that engulfed Iraq from 2005 to 2007. For Iraqis who fled to Syria and are now returning, not by choice but to save their own lives, Syria already is Iraq.

"It's exactly like it was in Iraq," said Zina Ritha, 29, who returned to Baghdad after several years in Damascus. Referring to the Free Syrian Army, Ms. Ritha said: "The F.S.A. is destroying Shia houses. They are kidnapping people, especially the Iraqis and the Shia."

On a recent morning, Ms. Ritha and her mother-in-law visited a center for returnees here, where families collect a payment of four million Iraqi dinars, or about \$3,400, from the government. For Iraqis in Syria, people at the center said, there is no security. Shiites are attacked by rebels, Sunnis by government forces. And at any time they can be targeted just for being foreigners.

Abdul Jabbar Sattar, a single man in his 40s, is Sunni. After a bombing in Damascus that killed several top security officials in July, his neighborhood endured round-the-clock shelling. He returned to Iraq with one set of clothes, and little money, having been robbed as he fled.

"It's the same situation as it used to be in Iraq," he said. "Everyone is afraid of one another."
(top)

Obama's Policy On Iran Bears Some Fruit, But Nuclear Program Still Advances

September 25, 2012

Washington Post

By Joby Warrick

Barack Obama's presidency was only hours old when a fierce debate erupted among top Iranian officials over the new U.S. leader and his offer to "extend a hand" to the Islamic republic. Hard-liners suspected a trick, convinced that Obama was no different from his predecessor, but others saw potential for a long-sought diplomatic thaw.

"It created real hope inside Iran," recalled Seyed Hossein Mousavian, a former senior Iranian Foreign Ministry official and witness to the internal rift over Obama's 2009 inaugural speech. "The question was whether he could deliver."

Both sides misjudged Obama, who has proceeded to chart a course with Iran that is neither fully conciliatory nor bellicose. Over the previous few years, the president has used his office to repeatedly extend offers of rapprochement to Iranian leaders. And when those attempts have been rejected - firmly - he has used diplomacy to build an unprecedented wall of international opposition to Iran's nuclear program and preside over the imposition of the harshest economic sanctions in the country's history.

At the same time, the Obama White House has proven to be no more successful than its predecessors at halting Iran's nuclear advance, the singular goal that has driven U.S. policy on Iran since the George H.W. Bush administration. Indeed, Iran's rate of production of enriched uranium has nearly tripled since Obama took office, while hopes that the president can deliver a solution to the crisis have faded, even among the president's former admirers in Iran.

"This hand that was stretched out to us turned out to be covered in iron," said Mousavian, the Iranian diplomat.

As Obama nears the end of his first term, the mixed results of his Iran policy have provided ammunition for supporters - who point to the president's unparalleled success in uniting the world against a nuclear Iran - but also for his chief political rival, Republican Mitt Romney, who has pounded the White House

for failing to halt Iran's march to a nuclear- weapons capability and accused the president of abandoning Israel, the United States' top ally in the region.

The Iran record offers unique insights into Obama's use of power in dealing with an intractable foreign policy challenge that threatens to dominate the agenda of whoever occupies the White House in 2013. On Monday, at the U.N. General Assembly, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad remained defiant in the face of calls for his country to curb its nuclear program and suggested the United States was being bullied by Israel. President Obama is expected to address the issue in remarks before the United Nations on Tuesday.

For now, the Obama administration is seeking to further increase the pain for Iran, responding in part to pressure from Israel and from Congress, which has consistently urged harsher measures, including some that U.S. officials fear could hurt allies as well as Iranians. Although sanctions rarely work, independent analysts say a groundswell of economic unrest could force the regime to make concessions if it sees its own survival at risk.

"Two clocks are now running: a nuclear clock and regime-change clock," said Clifford Kupchan, a former State Department official who now serves as a private consultant on the Middle East. "Sanctions have put a big hole in the revenue side of Iran's budget, but the leadership doesn't yet know that it's on a cliff."

"So are sanctions changing the nuclear program? No," Kupchan said. "Are they buying time so the regime-change clock can run down? I'd say yes."

Aiming to shift the dynamic

Ironically, as the Obama White House winds down its first term, it finds itself in a similar place on Iran as the George W. Bush administration did in its final months: grappling with a belligerent regime locked on a course of nuclear expansion, impervious to U.S. threats, coercion or diplomacy. It is hardly the outcome that Obama's policy advisers envisioned when the Democrat took office promising to overturn three decades of hostile relations with the Islamic republic.

As a presidential candidate, Obama determined early that Iran would be a top priority, former and current administration officials say. Then a senator, Obama had made nuclear nonproliferation one of his signature issues, and he came to regard Iran's nuclear program as deeply destabilizing, not only to Middle East security but also to the international nonproliferation standards that had contained the spread of nuclear weapons throughout the second half of the 20th century, according to several of his top advisers.

"He felt he had to change the dynamic on Iran quickly," said Dennis Ross, a top Iran official in the Obama White House until late last year. "If he didn't succeed, there was a high chance that the issue would impose itself."

At the time, relations with Iran were at their lowest level since the late 1970s. President George W. Bush had labeled Iran part of an "axis of evil" and launched wars against two of Iran's neighbors during his first term. In his second term, the State Department had sought to engage Tehran diplomatically, but its efforts drew skepticism, even among European allies.

Obama took steps to change the dynamic. He appealed to Iran implicitly in his inaugural address, and two months later, he spoke directly to Iranians in a televised speech marking Iran's Nowruz holiday and in a personal letter sent through diplomatic channels to the country's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

"To the Muslim world, we seek a new way forward, based on mutual interest and mutual respect," Obama had said in his Jan. 20, 2009, speech. "We will extend a hand if you are willing to unclench your fist."

Khamenei publicly rejected Obama's appeals, and U.S. conservatives derided his overtures as both naive and a reflexive rejection of Bush administration policies. "It was informed by 'Bush derangement syndrome' - a belief that if President Bush touched it, it must be wrong," said Danielle Pletka, vice president for foreign and defense policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute, a conservative Washington think tank.

But Ross, a veteran diplomat who met repeatedly with Obama as he devised his Iran strategy, said Obama was realistic about the chances for a diplomatic breakthrough.

"He was never starry-eyed. We never expected that the Iranians would just agree to talk and sing 'Kumbaya,'" Ross said. "But there was a sense that we had to see what was possible. And if engagement was not possible, we needed a way to demonstrate to the world, unmistakably, that the problem was not with the United States, but with Iran's behavior."

Support for sanctions

History would quickly intervene to put Iran's actions in an even harsher light. In June 2009, Iranian authorities launched a brutal crackdown against hundreds of thousands of young Iranians who took to the streets to protest alleged vote-rigging in the reelection of Ahmadinejad. Muslims around the world recoiled at YouTube videos showing Iranian police beating and even killing unarmed demonstrators.

Then, that September, the Obama administration revealed the existence of a hidden uranium-enrichment plant near the Iranian city of Qom. The discovery of the plant - concealed inside a fortified mountain bunker - all but demolished Iran's claim that it was interested only in developing peaceful nuclear energy under U.N. oversight.

In the months that followed, Obama saw a chance to unite the U.N. Security Council behind tough new economic sanctions that would isolate Iran diplomatically and pressure its leaders to accept a deal, former and current administration officials said.

"There was high-level, personal involvement" by Obama in lobbying Russian and Chinese leaders to support sanctions, recalled a senior administration official who participated in meetings and phone calls in which the sanctions were discussed. "We wanted to achieve the maximum, and Russian and Chinese help was crucial," said the official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to describe diplomatic deliberations.

The U.N. sanctions, approved in June 2010, were only the opening salvo in a pressure campaign that would continue to gather steam over the following two years. Goaded at times by Congress, the White House enacted unprecedented restrictions on international commerce with Iran's petroleum, shipping

and banking sectors. The European Union adopted nearly identical measures and then went even further, imposing an unprecedented embargo on Iranian oil, effective July 1, 2012.

Although Iran has weathered sanctions in the past, independent analysts say the impact this time has been staggering. Oil exports have plummeted by a third, forcing Iran to shut down oil wells and close petrochemical plants, depriving the country's economy of billions of dollars each month. Iran's currency, meanwhile, is in free fall, driving up food prices and jobless rates throughout the country.

While remaining defiant, Iranian officials have been forced to acknowledge the sanctions' severe impact.

"There are some problems in selling oil, and we are trying to manage it," Ahmadinejad said in a rare admission on state television. He then accused the Obama administration and its allies of waging an "all-out, hidden, heavy war" against Iran.

Elusive diplomatic solution

Without question, the administration's pressure campaign has sharpened Iran's choices and dramatically raised the cost of its nuclear program. In addition to new sanctions, Obama has sold billions of dollars in military hardware to Iran's rivals in the Persian Gulf, while also authorizing the expansion of a secret campaign to disrupt Iran's uranium production through cyberattacks and other covert means. Both strategies built on policies begun under President George W. Bush.

At times, a diplomatic end to the nuclear crisis has appeared tantalizingly close. On at least three occasions, various sides have floated a possible "grand bargain" that would result in Iran eliminating a substantial portion of its uranium stockpile in exchange for Western technology and eventual sanctions relief. The latest proposal, discussed during three rounds of international nuclear talks over the spring and summer, was rejected by Iranian officials.

But the Obama administration's performance in the talks also drew criticism, not only from Israelis and conservatives but also from liberals who accused the White House of refusing to bargain seriously with Iran because of political risks in an election season.

"After being burned initially, Obama went into election mode," said Trita Parsi, an Iranian national and author of "A Single Roll of the Dice," a book critiquing Obama's Iran policy. "When it comes to Iran, the maneuvering space is always minimal because of politics. But you have to break eggs to make an omelet."

No firm dates for new negotiations have been set, and Middle East analysts say no breakthrough is likely until after the November election. Meanwhile, Iran's success in adding thousands of centrifuge machines to its underground facility - and the inexorable growth of its uranium stockpile - continues to stoke fears of an Israeli airstrike. It has also left the White House vulnerable to Republican charges that administration policies, while well-intentioned, have ultimately been fruitless.

"The administration says, 'Judge us by how effective our sanctions are,' but that's the wrong measure," said Elliott Abrams, a former senior adviser on the Middle East to the George W. Bush administration and a frequent Obama critic. "The question is, how many more centrifuges does Iran have now, compared to where they were in 2009?"

White House officials insist that any proper assessment of Obama's performance on Iran must also include a consideration of what has not happened in the Persian Gulf under his watch. Despite setbacks and disappointments, advisers note, the president has hewed to a course of steadily increasing pressure while seeking to discourage what he once derided as "loose talk" of another U.S. military campaign in the Middle East.

"The president has made an assurance that he will prevent Iran from making a nuclear weapon, and his record bears out that he will do what he says," said Ben Rhodes, a deputy national security adviser to the White House. For now, at least, "the best way to do that is through diplomacy."
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Iran's President Spreads the Outrage in New York

September 25, 2012

New York Times

By RICK GLADSTONE and NEIL MacFARQUHAR

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran stoked the anger of Israel, the United States, Syrian insurgents and gay rights advocates on Monday, using the first full day of his final visit to the United Nations as Iran's leader to assert that he has no fear of an Israeli attack on his country's nuclear facilities, regards the Israelis as fleeting aberrations in Middle East history, is neutral in the Syria conflict and considers homosexuality an ugly crime.

In a series of public appearances that included a breakfast meeting with selected members of the news media, a speech on the rule of law at a United Nations conference and a CNN interview broadcast on Monday evening, Mr. Ahmadinejad sought to portray Iran as a principled and upstanding member of the global community.

But the Iranian leader, known for his denials of the Holocaust and other inflammatory statements, ignored a warning by the secretary general of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, against making provocative declarations. Instead, he offended a wide range of parties and prompted the Israeli delegation to walk out of the United Nations conference in protest.

Mr. Ahmadinejad, 55, is in the final nine months of his last term as president of Iran, and his annual visits to the United Nations for its General Assembly meetings have become something of a media event. Iran attached particular importance to his appearance this year because Iran is the rotating president of the Nonaligned Movement, which represents the largest bloc of members in the 193-nation General Assembly. Mr. Ahmadinejad will deliver his General Assembly address on Wednesday.

In what may have been his most incendiary remarks on Monday, Mr. Ahmadinejad belittled what he characterized as the insignificant history of Israel, compared with the long history of Iran. He told reporters and editors at the breakfast meeting that the Israelis had been around the region for only 60 or 70 years, in contrast to the Iranians, whose civilization has existed for thousands of years.

"They have no roots there in history," Mr. Ahmadinejad said of the Israelis. "They do not even enter the equation for Iran."

He also rejected any suggestion that Iran fears an Israeli military assault on its uranium enrichment facilities, which the Israeli government has called part of a clandestine effort to develop nuclear weapons, despite Iran's repeated assertions that its atomic energy program is peaceful.

"We believe the Zionists see themselves at a dead end and they want to find an adventure to get out of this dead end," he said, according to The Associated Press. "We are fully ready to defend ourselves. We do not take these threats seriously."

Later at his speech on the rule of law, without mentioning any country by name, he denounced the United States for ignoring Israel's nuclear arsenal while trying to shut down Iran's nuclear program.

"Some members of the Security Council with veto rights have chosen silence with regard to the nuclear warheads of a fake regime, while at the same time they impede the scientific progress of other nations," he said.

Israel's ambassador, Ron Prosor, left the conference, saying in a statement that "Ahmadinejad showed again that he not only threatens the future of the Jewish people, he seeks to erase our past. Three thousand years of Jewish history illustrate the clear danger of ignoring fanatics like Iran's president, especially as he inches closer to acquiring nuclear weapons."

In Israel, Dan Meridor, the deputy prime minister, said that recent assertions from Iran, including threats of a pre-emptive strike on Israel, might be a sign that economic sanctions and diplomatic pressure on Iran were having an effect. "Maybe we need to continue the pressure," he told reporters at a briefing.

The Obama administration, which has vowed that Iran will not become a nuclear-weapons state but has urged Israel to give diplomacy and sanctions more time, was quick to denounce Mr. Ahmadinejad. Tommy Vietor, a White House spokesman, called his comments "characteristically disgusting, offensive and outrageous." He said they "underscore again why America's commitment to the security of Israel must be unshakable, and why the world must hold Iran accountable for its utter failure to meet its obligations."

Regarding Syria, Iran's most important Middle East ally, Mr. Ahmadinejad denied accusations that his country is helping the military of President Bashar al-Assad, which is seeking to crush a nearly 19-month-old uprising that has turned into a civil war. Syrian insurgents and their backers, including the United States, have said the Iranians are arming and training Syria's military.

In his CNN interview with Piers Morgan, Mr. Ahmadinejad rejected the suggestion that some people are born homosexuals and said the West's permissive attitude toward gay rights was insensitive to other cultures. "Let me ask you this," he said. "Do you believe that anyone is giving birth through homosexuality? Homosexuality ceases procreation."

Mr. Ahmadinejad also said, "If a group recognizes an ugly behavior or ugly deed as legitimate, you must not expect other countries or other groups to give it the same recognition."

Homosexuality is forbidden in Iran. Last year a United Nations report on human rights in Iran expressed concern that gays "face harassment, persecution, cruel punishment and even the death penalty."

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Iran President Plays Down Israeli Threat

September 25, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By JAY SOLOMON

NEW YORK—Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad on Monday played down the prospects of an Israeli military strike on his country's nuclear installations, but made clear that Tehran would hold the U.S. responsible if such an attack occurred.

"Fundamentally, we don't take seriously the threats of the Zionists," Iran's leader said at a breakfast with journalists, referring to Israel. "If such an attack were to happen, all equations in the region would see a deep change."

Mr. Ahmadinejad is attending this week's annual meeting of the United Nations General Assembly for the last time as Iran's leader. His second four-year presidential term ends in June.

His appearances in New York, including his public bromides on Israel and questioning of both the Holocaust and Sept. 11 attacks, have become an annual event, often to the chagrin of Western governments.

Mr. Ahmadinejad on Monday charged that Israeli was at a "dead end" and claiming that the Iranian economy, despite international sanctions, is even doing better than those in Europe.

A spokesman for the White House National Security Council, Tommy Vietor, called Mr. Ahmadinejad's comments "disgusting, offensive, and outrageous," adding, "They underscore again why America's commitment to the security of Israel must be unshakable, and why the world must hold Iran accountable for its utter failure to meet its obligations."

Despite his trademark bluster, the 55-year-old Iranian president is visiting New York with Tehran in a weaker position than in previous years.

His country faces Israeli threats and intensified Western sanctions. It also is at risk of losing its closest ally in the Arab world—embattled Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. Damascus has provided Tehran with a channel for sending arms and funds to Iranian allies fighting Israel—Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in the Palestinian territories.

Arab leaders have roundly criticized Iran for allegedly supporting Mr. Assad's crackdown on his political opponents over the past 18 months, which human-rights groups say have claimed as many as 20,000 Syrians.

Mr. Ahmadinejad on Monday disputed comments made recently by senior Iranian military officials that acknowledged Iran's military support for Mr. Assad. "We seek peace in Syria," Iran's leader said. "We like and love both sides."

U.S. officials have grown increasingly confident that the West's financial war on Tehran is having a growing impact.

Treasury officials estimate that sanctions are costing Iran \$15 billion in lost revenue each quarter. And the value of the Iranian currency, the rial, has lost at least half of its value against the U.S. dollar from a year ago.

The U.S. Treasury Department on Monday reported to Congress that the National Iranian Oil Co., Tehran's main energy exporter, has direct links to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, Iran's elite

military unit. The designation significantly strengthens U.S. sanctions on the oil company, potentially barring any foreign firm doing business with it from the American financial system.

Mr. Ahmadinejad said Western countries were deluded if they believed financial pressure would force Tehran to end its nuclear program.

"The situation in Iran is not as bad as some suggest," the Iranian president said, while declining to confirm reports that Tehran's oil exports have dropped by one million barrels a day.

Meanwhile, Mr. Ahmadinejad chastised the State Department's decision last week to delist an Iranian opposition group from a U.S. terrorism list. The Mujahedin-e Khalq, or MEK, was charged by the U.S. with allying with the former Iraqi strongman Saddam Hussein and conducting a campaign of assassinations against Iranian and American officials in the 1970s and 1980s. The MEK's supporters, despite this U.S. ban, launched an extensive lobbying campaign inside Washington over the past 18 months to get off the list, including paying former U.S. officials to give speeches.

"If we wanted to show the double standards of the American government, we couldn't have done it better ourselves," Mr. Ahmadinejad said, in reference to the MEK's delisting. "The U.S. government gave us a gift for free."

Iran's leader refused to condemn the rioting that broke out across the Islamic world in recent weeks following the posting of a video that criticized the Muslim faith's prophet, Muhammad.

Mr. Ahmadinejad was asked at the breakfast whether the Islamic Republic had formally lifted a 1980s religious decree that called for the death of the British writer Salman Rushdie, who wrote a novel that Muslim leaders considered anti-Islamic.

"Where is he now?" Mr. Ahmadinejad said of Mr. Rushdie, without addressing the question. "Is he in the U.S.? You shouldn't broadcast this for his own safety."

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Iran Says Israel Is "Threatening" US With Allegations Of Iranian Nuclear Weapon

September 25, 2012

[Washington Post](#)

By Anne Gearan

NEW YORK - Israel is bullying the United States over the alleged threat of an Iranian nuclear weapon, using the prospect of an Israeli military attack on Iran to force the hand of its much larger ally, Iran's president said Monday.

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad dismissed the idea that Israel might attack on its own, over the objections of the United States, and said Israel is an inconsequential interloper with no rightful place in the Middle East.

"I look at it from the outside, and I see that a few occupying Zionists are threatening the government of the United States," Ahmadinejad said during an interview with American editors and reporters.

"Is it the Zionists who must tell the United States government what to do, such as form a red line on Iran's nuclear issues, and the United States government must make such vital decisions under the

influence of the Zionists?" Ahmadinejad said, using the Iranian regime's term for Israel. He spoke through an interpreter.

Americans should be insulted if their government takes marching orders from Israel, Ahmadinejad added.

The two-term Iranian leader spoke on the sidelines of the annual meeting of the U.N. General Assembly. The gathering this year is colored by the politics of the U.S. presidential election and by the possibility of an Israeli military strike on Iran.

The Obama administration is chafing under increasingly direct pressure from Israel to declare "red lines" in Iran's nuclear development that would trigger a U.S. attack. President Obama, who is scheduled to address the United Nations on Tuesday, has said he would not tolerate an Iranian nuclear bomb. He has threatened a military strike if there is no other option to prevent Iran from getting a bomb, but he has not publicly set a deadline for diplomacy to run its course.

The Obama administration opposes a unilateral Israeli strike because it would be unlikely to finish off Iran's program and could pull the United States into a wider Middle East war.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is expected to tell the United Nations in an address Thursday that Israel must decide for itself what risk is unacceptable. In a clear challenge to Obama, Netanyahu said this month that outsiders who refuse to set a "clear red line" for Iran do not have the authority to tell Israel what to do.

Iran's clerical leaders have previously vowed to eradicate Israel, although Ahmadinejad did not repeat that threat Monday.

He said he is not worried that Israel would go it alone; he made it clear that a U.S. strike is the only one Iran would take seriously.

"The people do not even count them as any part of an equation," he said of Israel. "When you have prepared yourself for a much vaster, bigger threat, then of course the small disturbances hardly represent anything more than a blip on the radar screen."

Ahmadinejad said Iran remains open to negotiation over the bounds of what he insisted is a peaceful nuclear development program, but he said several U.S. administrations have "managed to miss" opportunities to improve relations with Iran.

Although Netanyahu is presumed to favor Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney, Ahmadinejad declined an offer to endorse Obama. Netanyahu is featured in a pro-Romney television ad airing in Florida.

"The U.S. elections are a domestic issue," Ahmadinejad said. "We will not meddle in that at all."

Obama and Romney traded accusations about Israel and Iran in high-profile television interviews that aired over the weekend. Romney said in a "60 Minutes" interview that aired Sunday on CBS that Obama was making a "mistake" by not meeting with Netanyahu on the sidelines of the U.N. meeting.

Obama's choice "sends a message throughout the Middle East that somehow we distance ourselves from our friends," Romney said. "I think the exact opposite approach is what's necessary."

Speaking on the same program, Obama defended his handling of foreign policy.

"If Governor Romney is suggesting that we start another war, he should say so," he said.

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Race Focuses on Foreign Policy

September 25, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By CAROL E. LEE, PATRICK O'CONNOR and JAY SOLOMON

Foreign policy is taking on new urgency in the presidential campaign as President Barack Obama prepares to address the United Nations amid a resurgence of unrest in the Muslim world and his Republican challenger, Mitt Romney, intensifies his criticism of the White House's approach to the region.

In his speech Tuesday to the annual gathering of the U.N. General Assembly, the president will condemn the anti-Muslim video that sparked protests, his aides said. Violence in Libya led to the deaths of four Americans, including U.S. Ambassador Christopher Stevens, after a storming of a U.S. consulate in Libya. But Mr. Obama also will stress the importance of those in the region condemning slander against Christians and Jews, people familiar with his speech said.

Mr. Obama is expected to reaffirm his commitment to keeping Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon, including his willingness to use military force, and he will also address the conflict in Syria and the stalled Middle East peace process.

Mr. Romney accused the president Monday of playing down tumult in the Middle East, saying the U.S. needs to exert stronger leadership and that the president needs to do more to shape events abroad.

Mr. Romney zeroed in on Mr. Obama's remark in an interview that aired Sunday in which he said the U.S. had been right to align with democratic movements during the Arab Spring but that "there are going to be bumps in the road."

"His indication that developments in the Middle East represent 'bumps in the road' is a very different view than I have," Mr. Romney told ABC News.

The Republican candidate criticized Mr. Obama over the unrest in the Muslim world, Iran's continued efforts on its nuclear program and the continuing violence in Syria, saying: "We're at the mercy of events rather than shaping the events in the Middle East."

He also suggested the president, in his "bumps in the road" remark, was referring specifically to the violence that caused the deaths of four Americans. "These are not bumps in the road; these are human lives," Mr. Romney said at a campaign stop in Pueblo, Colo.

Mr. Obama's aides said he meant there are going to be challenges as the region transforms, including the unrest in recent weeks that has included protests at U.S. embassies. White House press secretary Jay

Carney called the charge that Mr. Obama was referring to the deaths of four Americans "desperate and offensive."

The sniping between the two candidates comes as polls suggest that Mr. Obama's leadership on foreign policy is coming under challenge. In the latest Wall Street Journal/NBC News survey, conducted on Sept. 12-16, at the height of the violent protests in the Middle East and North Africa, more voters approved of the president's handling of foreign policy than those who disapproved, 49% to 46%.

But those numbers marked a sharp drop from August, when 54% of voters gave the president high marks on foreign policy, compared with the 40% who disapproved.

The drop was severe among independent voters. In the August poll, far more independent voters approved of Mr. Obama's handling of foreign policy than disapproved—53% to 38%. One month later, those disapproving outnumbered those approving by 10 percentage points, 51% to 41%.

In same September poll, Mr. Obama retained his lead over Mr. Romney on who voters see as better able to serve as commander in chief, with the president leading, 45% to 38%, on that trait.

Mr. Obama's aides see the U.N. gathering as an opportunity for him to appear in a forum that makes him look presidential, and to put into context some foreign policy issues that have recently spilled into the political arena.

Mr. Obama will use the U.N. platform to say that violence hasn't been an acceptable response to the anti-Muslim video that has been blamed in for triggering protests, and that the U.S. won't shrink its presence or its goals of promoting democratic values in the region. Mr. Romney had accused the president of abandoning the principle of free speech in the administration's initial response to the recent protests.

"It's a real moment for the United States to assert its values and its leadership role, to make clear where we stand in the midst of this remarkable period of transformation in the Arab world," Mr. Carney said.

The president's main goal during his 24-hour stay in New York is to do no harm. Unlike his past trips to the U.N. General Assembly, Mr. Obama hasn't scheduled any meetings with world leaders. Last year, he held more than a dozen.

Instead Mr. Obama stopped by the set of the ABC TV show "The View" on Monday with first lady Michelle Obama, where he fielded a question on Libya amid conversation about lavishing his wife with attention on their 20th wedding anniversary and taking a postelection vacation.

"The overwhelming majority of Muslims, they want the same things that families here want," Mr. Obama said in a taped appearance on the talk show. "They want opportunity, kids want an education, they want jobs, they want peace. But there are extremist strains that are there."

The president has come under particular GOP criticism for not scheduling a meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in New York this week. Mr. Netanyahu had criticized Mr. Obama for failing to set clear red lines that Tehran can't cross in its nuclear work or risk facing U.S. and Israeli military action.

Senior U.S. officials say Mr. Obama has repeatedly rebuffed Mr. Netanyahu's calls for such action, including in a direct phone call earlier this month. But Israeli leaders are hoping that the American leader will at least press the world body to prepare for more coercive actions against Iran, including a fifth round of U.N. Security Council economic sanctions, if Tehran doesn't take concrete steps to slow its nuclear program. Mr. Obama is expected to say he believes there is still time to pursue diplomacy to keep Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon.

"We hope this will be an opportunity for the president to highlight for world leaders the severity of the Iranian threat," said an Israeli official attending the General Assembly.

Messrs. Obama and Netanyahu won't be in New York at the same time. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton will meet Mr. Netanyahu later this week.

House Majority Leader Eric Cantor (R., Va.) questioned Mr. Obama's decision to make a daytime talk show appearance but not sit for meetings with foreign leaders at a time of unrest in a critical part of the world. "To me, it indicates a lack of willingness to lead in times of trouble," Mr. Cantor said on a conference call with reporters.

While Mr. Romney has devoted the bulk of his stump speeches and campaign attacks to the economy, the Republican nominee and his allies have become increasingly critical of the Obama administration on foreign policy in recent weeks.

The shift of focus initially put Mr. Romney on the defensive, after he issued a controversial statement condemning the administration's response to protests in Egypt while events were still in flux.

Afterward, some of Mr. Romney's aides began to second guess whether they had made the right move as the Republican candidate faced intense blowback from Democrats and some conservatives who felt the campaign had moved too quickly to politicize the crisis.

Senior campaign staffers, including members of the foreign policy team and communications department, embarked on a series of internal discussions about whether they moved too fast or not, according to someone familiar with the conversation. Their primary take-away: The statement was a bold moment to contrast with the president, and they had been right to seize the opportunity.

Mr. Romney has since strengthened his attacks, although the foreign policy focus has expanded beyond the unrest in the Middle East to include China policy. Both campaigns began the week by intensifying their battle over China trade issues in an attempt to woo voters in the industrial Midwest, which includes critical battleground states like Ohio.

The Romney campaign unveiled a new ad Monday accusing the president of not standing up to China on trade issues. In the latest spot, the Republican charges Mr. Obama with failing to protect American intellectual property rights and says the alleged failure resulted in two million American lost jobs.

The Obama campaign responded by releasing a memo citing nine trade-enforcement complaints the administration has filed against China with the World Trade Organization, including one the president announced last week in Ohio.

Both candidates are also set to address Tuesday the annual meeting of former President Bill Clinton's foundation, the Clinton Global Initiative, where Mr. Obama may announce a new human trafficking initiative, according to people familiar with his speech.

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AFRICA

Hundreds Protest Anti-Islam Film In Nigeria

September 25, 2012

Associated Press

KADUNA, Nigeria - Hundreds of Muslims march peacefully through the streets of a northern Nigerian city to protest an anti-Islam film that denigrates the Prophet Muhammad.

The march Monday was in the city of Kaduna, where hundreds were killed in religious violence following Nigeria's 2011 presidential election. Those protesting burned French, British and U.S. flags.

The protest comes after a series of protests in Nigeria, a nation largely split between a Christian south and a Muslim north. All the demonstrations have been peaceful, though one protest was broken up by soldiers firing into the air.

The film, "Innocence of Muslims," has sparked protests around the world. American leaders have denounced the film, which is protected under U.S. free speech laws.

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No Deal Yet In Sudan-South Sudan Talks

September 25, 2012

Associated Press

ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia - The leaders of Sudan and South Sudan have not yet reached a deal on where their shared border lies.

Talks between Sudan President Omar al-Bashir and South Sudan President Salva Kiir were expected to continue for a third day Tuesday. No breakthrough was reached Monday.

El-Obeid Morawah, a spokesman for Sudan's foreign ministry, said Tuesday would be the last day of talks. The two sides reached an oil-sharing agreement in August but need to agree on their border and control of the Abyei region.

The U.N. Security Council has threatened sanctions if the sides don't resolve their differences.

South Sudan split from Sudan last year after an independence vote, the culmination of a 2005 deal ending decades of war. The two came to the brink of war earlier this year.

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ASIA

Mine Protests Challenge Myanmar Reforms

September 25, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By PATRICK BARTA

WETHMAY, Myanmar—Anger over plans to expand a Chinese-backed mine near here is emerging as a test case of Myanmar's recent political reforms.

Villagers have staged raucous protests in recent weeks over the giant copper mine near Monywa in northwestern Myanmar, owned jointly by Myanmar's military and a subsidiary of China North Industries Corp., an arms manufacturer. The subsidiary, Wanbao Mining Ltd., and its Myanmar partners are hoping to expand the mine, but that would require taking over huge tracts of land and moving as many as 26 villages, locals say.

In one flare-up this month, police arrested a dozen of the protesters, holding some of them for several days, the villagers say. Groups of villagers—sometimes more than a thousand—have gathered in tense rallies in recent weeks and challenged police who held weapons in firing positions, according to residents and local media reports.

The standoff echoes an earlier fight over an unpopular Chinese-backed dam and is the latest flash point in an increasingly tense relationship between Myanmar and Chinese companies, which have aggressively expanded their presence in the country in recent years.

The Monywa disputes, which come as Myanmar President Thein Sein travels to New York to attend the United Nations General Assembly, raise questions as to what extent the country's recent reforms will disrupt commercial deals involving Chinese companies, many of which have benefited Myanmar's former military regime but have brought limited trickle-down benefits to regular citizens.

Mr. Thein Sein's trip, the first U.S. visit by a leader of Myanmar since 1966, follows a visit to China in recent days in which he met with Xi Jinping, vice president and presumed future China leader, who said China will continue to encourage its companies to invest in Myanmar, according to the state-run Xinhua news agency.

Public protests are becoming increasingly common and bolder in Myanmar, whose reformist government has allowed more freedoms and courted foreign investors since the country's former military dictator retired last year.

Hundreds of people marched through central Yangon on Friday to celebrate the International Day of Peace, one of the largest public rallies in Myanmar in years, despite not having a required permit to do so. Other demonstrations have criticized the government for not providing enough electricity, while factory workers have held a series of strikes over the past year.

So far such demonstrations, which have been largely peaceful, appear to be a tolerable cost of reform for the government.

But unlike those protests, the latest episodes near Monywa have repeatedly threatened to spin out of control, with locals blaming police for using intimidation and other tactics common in Myanmar before the new government took power.

President Thein Sein's government has released political prisoners, eased restrictions on public assembly, and encouraged the media to become more assertive. But power brokers in more remote areas have at times ignored the directives from Naypyitaw, the capital. That has raised fears that for all

the excitement over Myanmar's reforms, large parts of the country, also known as Burma, may not be changing much, especially some of the areas which are loaded with natural resources.

One protester says she was dragged into a police station and strip-searched after participating in protests against the mine expansion. She was held for several days before being released.

"I'll never forget what happened," said the protester, 29-year-old Thwae Thwae Win, as she recounted her experience in her muddy village of thatched-roof huts with scattered broken pottery and cows tied to trees. No matter what the authorities do, "I'm not leaving," she said.

A police official located in a Monywa teashop said he was unable to comment without permission from authorities in Naypyitaw. Officials in Naypyitaw didn't respond to request to comments.

Geng Yi, vice president of Wanbao Mining, said in an email that no village had been forced to relocate, and that some "small groups" of villagers had tried to disturb work at the project site through illegal demonstrations, in some cases encouraged by people from outside the region. He said the company was following "all legal procedures" in accordance with Myanmar law and that further questions over demonstrations should be directed to local Myanmar authorities, saying "it is the government's responsibility to ensure...smooth implementation of the project."

President Thein Sein last year suspended construction of the \$3.6 billion Myitsone hydroelectric dam project in northern Myanmar led in part by China Power Investment Corp., which would have flooded an area the size of Singapore if completed. Activists hailed the move as a breakthrough for popular democracy at a time when Chinese investment in the country was stirring increasing resentment.

Activists are less optimistic about the current dispute. The Myitsone dam involved a river system vital to Myanmar's history and culture, whereas the Monywa mine project would affect a smaller number of people.

"The government is showing its magic for the international community, but it hasn't really changed," says Kyaw Ko Ko, an activist with the All Burma Federation of Student Unions, whose group has tried to drum up support for the villagers. In the end, "the government will cover the company."

The mine was originally a joint venture between Canada-based Ivanhoe Mines Ltd. TRQ.T -2.56% and a Myanmar state-owned company. Ivanhoe exited the venture in 2007 as it focused on other projects, transferring its stake to an independent third-party trust charged with finding a new investor. China's investors later acquired the stake from the trust in a transaction activists said lacked transparency under Myanmar's previous military government. The mine is jointly operated by Wanbao and the military-owned Union of Myanmar Economic Holdings Ltd.

To expand the mine, which is one of Myanmar's main mineral producers, Wanbao offered to relocate families to better houses and pay \$600 per acre in compensation, locals said. Many villagers agreed to the company's terms, but others resisted, saying the \$600 offer was too low since many of their farms yielded that much or more in revenue every year. Others argued they had no future without their corn and bean farms, even if they were moving to better housing.

Several villages banded together to launch protests in June last year after bulldozers and mine waste began appearing on their land. After a series of protests such activities stopped, locals said, but

restarted again in August. Officials also closed down Wethmay's monastery in an apparent attempt to force that village's residents to leave.

Tensions boiled over this month, when angry villagers tried to organize a march to a pagoda near Monywa, which is about 15 miles, or 25 kilometers, away. Locals say authorities blocked them from crossing a river along the way, so some hopped on motorbikes to the city, where several protesters were arrested.

Area residents say protests continued over the past week, with hundreds of people gathering this past Thursday before being ordered home by armed authorities.

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In China, Sister Of Ex-Police Official Bemoans His Conviction

September 25, 2012

New York Times

By Edward Wong

BEIJING - The sister of a former police chief who played a central role in a seismic political scandal criticized his sentence of 15 years in prison in an interview on Monday, saying it was unfair and symptomatic of the lack of justice in China.

The former police chief, Wang Lijun, was sentenced by the Intermediate People's Court in the southwest provincial capital of Chengdu on four charges: defection, abuse of power, taking bribes and bending the law for one's personal gain.

"I feel desperate," his younger sister, Wang Fengying, said in a telephone interview. "It's too unfair."

She added: "This is an unacceptable reality that has to be accepted. That is what China is."

Ms. Wang also said her biggest concern now is the safety her brother and his family.

She made her criticisms even though Mr. Wang's sentence was relatively light, given the gravity of the charges. He was sentenced to two years for defection; someone found guilty of that crime in the era of Mao Zedong could have faced execution. An official account of Mr. Wang's trial in Chengdu last week said that Mr. Wang had helped investigators, and so court officials had advocated leniency.

Mr. Wang's lawyer, Wang Yuncai, who is not related to him, said in a telephone interview that the 15-year sentence was about what she expected. She said that Mr. Wang's wife, though, was stunned. "She was utterly shocked and unwilling to accept such a result," she said.

The lawyer also said that she had met with Mr. Wang after the verdict, as part of a legal procedure, and that he had thanked her. "He said he wouldn't appeal," she added.

Mr. Wang, 52, was for several years the police chief of Chongqing, a western metropolis governed until March by Bo Xilai, a powerful Chinese politician and Communist Party aristocrat. On Feb. 6, after a falling out with Mr. Bo during which he was removed from his job, Mr. Wang drove to the United States Consulate in Chengdu and told diplomats there that Mr. Bo's wife, Gu Kailai, had murdered a British businessman, Neil Heywood, by poisoning him.

Mr. Wang presumably told the same tale to Chinese investigators after he left the consulate, setting off one of China's biggest political scandals in decades. Mr. Bo was removed from his Chongqing post in March and suspended from the 25-member Politburo in April.

The state media said Mr. Bo was being investigated for "serious disciplinary violations." Many Chinese and foreigners are awaiting word from the party on whether he will be tried on criminal charges. That announcement could take place before the once-a-decade leadership transition that the party has scheduled for this fall.

Before he was toppled, Mr. Bo was considered a possible candidate for one of the seats on the Politburo Standing Committee, the group of more than a half-dozen men who make the most important policy decisions in China and rule the nation by consensus.

After Mr. Bo was made party chief of Chongqing in December 2007, he brought the flamboyant Mr. Wang to Chongqing from northeast China to help with what was billed at the time as a crackdown on organized crime and police corruption, but that later was revealed to also be a purge of the enemies of Mr. Bo and his allies.

Ms. Gu, Mr. Bo's wife, was convicted last month of Mr. Heywood's murder and given a death sentence with a two-year suspension, which means she will likely serve a long prison term, possibly life, and not be executed.

It was unclear on Monday whether Mr. Wang had a chance of having his sentence commuted in the future.

"There is nothing we can do," said Ms. Wang, his younger sister. "You can't change this. Such is the country."

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Bo Xilai Awaits His Fate After Sentencing Of Wife And Top Aide

September 25, 2012

Washington Post

By Keith B. Richburg

BEIJING - His wife is in jail on a murder conviction with a suspended death sentence. His former right-hand man was just sentenced to 15 years in prison for covering up the crime and then trying to defect to the United States.

Somewhere, Bo Xilai awaits his fate.

A popular and charismatic Communist Party "princeling" - considered a contender for a top spot in a revamped Politburo until the murder scandal erupted last year - Bo has not been seen publicly since he was fired in March as party chief for the sprawling southwestern city of Chongqing.

How to handle Bo, without upsetting his hard-core supporters, seems to be the dilemma facing China's leaders as they try to resolve the case before a planned leadership transition later this year.

The Communist Party's 18th Party Congress is set to inaugurate a new generation of leaders, led by Xi Jinping and an almost entirely new Politburo Standing Committee. But so far, no date has been set for

the conclave, leading many here to speculate that the top leaders have not resolved some thorny issues, including the question of what punishment, if any, will be handed to Bo.

"If they don't handle this problem well, it might threaten the stability of the party," said Tie Liu, a journalist who spent 23 years in a labor camp during Mao Zedong's "anti-rightist" campaign launched against intellectuals in 1957.

He said he believed the party would opt for a mild administrative punishment, perhaps penalizing Bo for failing to properly supervise his family members and subordinates, and would announce it after the leadership transition. Others agreed with that analysis.

"They just don't want him to return. . . . He'll no longer be able to hold any official position," said the editor of a Communist Party newspaper in Beijing, who asked not to be quoted by name to speak more freely. " . . . If he's expelled, the party would split, because many leftists in the party still support him."

Bo, the son of Mao-era revolutionary hero Bo Yibo, was the antithesis of the typical Chinese politician: charismatic where most are bland, outspoken when others are reticent, open to the media when most eschew publicity; and bold in a system that prizes uniformity and consensus.

Bo is also something else highly unusual in China's staid communist bureaucracy. He is popular.

In Chongqing, the isolated city where he served as party chief from late 2007 until his ouster, Bo is well-regarded for clearing out the organized gangsters who held sway, attracting foreign investment and providing low-income housing and school lunches to the poor.

Among China's "new left" intellectuals, disgruntled over China's growing income disparity and nostalgic for Mao-era class warfare, Bo was revered as something of a hero. His "Chongqing model," as it was called, was held up as an alternative to China's modern, get-rich-quick brand of capitalism, in which a very few have become very, very wealthy. His advocacy of "red culture" - singing revolutionary songs, playing patriotic broadcasts on the local television station - also endeared him to the new leftists.

"Chinese leftists find that many of Bo's policies are similar to their ideas," said Sima Nan, a blogger and one of the best known of the new left thinkers. "So they regard Bo Xilai as their spirit leader."

Bo's only known communication with his family since his ouster was an emotional letter sent in April to his mother-in-law, Fan Chengxiu, wrote with a traditional Chinese brush. Bo said he hoped to quietly read books while waiting for his case to be resolved, according to a family associate who saw the letter.

Bo called his wife, Gu Kailai, the most important person in his life, followed by Fan, who became like a mother to him because his mother died during the Cultural Revolution, the associate said.

Gu was convicted in August of poisoning a British businessman, Neil Heywood, whom she thought threatened their son after a business dispute. Bo's onetime top aide and police chief, Wang Lijun, was tried for helping Gu cover up the crime and then taking the evidence to the U.S. Consulate in Chengdu in February when he feared for his life. Wang on Monday was sentenced to 15 years in prison, a relatively light sentence because Wang cooperated in implicating Gu. Wang's attorney said he would not appeal.

But the separate trials of Gu, Wang and four other police officers charged in the coverup left unanswered the crucial question of whether Bo knew about the murder and when he knew it. Bo in April was stripped of his positions in the Politburo and the Party Central Committee, but he has not been charged with any crime.

He is believed to have been moved several times among government residences in Hebei province, Inner Mongolia and the outer suburbs of Beijing. Those reports could not be independently confirmed.

The family associate, who saw the letter Bo wrote to his mother-in-law but refused to be identified by name in discussing it, said Bo reiterated his commitment to Communist Party ideals.

"Bo Xilai really believes in Chairman Mao," the family intimate said. "He was rooted in Mao Zedong's thoughts, which can be found everywhere in his values, life goals and his pursuits." ([top](#))

Tibet Exiles Seek New Tactics To Shake Off Despair

September 25, 2012

AFP

Tibetan exiles will hold their biggest gathering in four years from Tuesday where delegates will try to come up with new policies to end a spate of gruesome self-immolations.

About 400 Tibetans from around the world have come together in the northern Indian hill town of Dharamshala for the four-day meeting, also set to consider the upcoming power handover in China.

The rise in suicides by fire has sparked alarm among the leadership and prime-minister-in-exile Lobsang Sangay will push delegates to come up with a response that can address the growing sense of desperation among Tibetans.

According to Tibet's government-in-exile, based in Dharamshala, 51 people have set themselves on fire in the past three years. Forty-one died from their burns.

"We are calling this meeting due to the self-immolations," Sangay told AFP.

"After four days we will come up with some activities that need to be done among Tibetan people."

"Tibetans everywhere understand why such drastic actions are taken, given the repression by the Chinese government," he said. "We must formulate ways to ensure that the cries and suffering in Tibet do not go in vain."

The special general meeting is the first since the Dalai Lama, the revered spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhism, decided to retire from political duties -- putting far greater responsibility on the role of prime minister.

"Filling the Dalai Lama's shoes is an impossible task, but I have enjoyed tremendous solidarity around me," Sangay said.

Many Tibetans have been deeply shocked by the self-immolations, which contradict Buddhist teachings that all life is sacred, and are frustrated that years of efforts to negotiate with China have made no progress.

But, five decades after the Dalai Lama fled Tibet for India following a failed uprising in 1959, the options available to the exiles appear limited.

"The urgency is very high due to the situation getting worse and worse," Dorjee Tseten, a Students for a Free Tibet leader who is attending the meeting, told AFP.

"We want to find good new tactics, but I do not expect any major political change of course."

Beijing insists that Tibet is an integral part of China and that the Dalai Lama is determined to split the Himalayan region from the rest of the country -- though he says he only seeks greater autonomy.

One topic of discussion at the meeting is likely to be the upcoming change of leadership in China, with some observers suggesting president-in-waiting Xi Jinping may be more flexible on Tibet.

"China could offer to re-start talks, as there have been some statements from Beijing suggesting this," Robert Barnett, a professor of Tibetan studies at Columbia University, told AFP.

"But the Tibetan leaders are under pressure to withdraw from future talks because there is no confidence in anything coming from the Chinese side.

"This problem has been exacerbated by the self-immolations, which have made the community very emotional and anxious that nothing is being done."

The Dalai Lama will hold a prayer session on Friday when the meeting ends.

"I am here because we are obliged to try to do anything we can due to the gravity of the situation in Tibet," said Norbu Dhargay, a 62-year-old former member of the exile parliament from Boston in the United States.

"We will stay non-violent, but need to be more assertive. We must use our strong network and contacts around the world to exert pressure (on China) and mobilise support."
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China's First Aircraft Carrier Enters Service

September 25, 2012

AFP

China's first aircraft carrier -- a former Soviet ship it bought from Ukraine and refurbished -- entered service on Tuesday, the defence ministry in Beijing said, naming it as the Liaoning.

"Having the aircraft carrier enter the ranks will be of important significance in raising the overall fighting capacity of our nation's navy to a modern level," the ministry said in a statement.

The commissioning makes China the last permanent member of the United Nations Security Council to have an aircraft carrier, and comes at a time of increased maritime tensions in the region.

The 300-metre (990-foot) ship was named after the northeastern province that is home to China's main naval port city of Dalian, where its refit was carried out.

The defence ministry said the vessel will "increase (China's) capacity to defend, develop its capacity to cooperate on the high seas in dealing with non-traditional security threats and will be effective in defending the interests of state sovereignty, security and development".

Domestic press said on Sunday that the vessel had been handed over to the navy of the People's Liberation Army by its refitters.

There had been swirling speculation on what the vessel was to be called, with retired Major General Luo Yuan suggesting naming it Diaoyu, after islands in the East China Sea claimed by China, which are also claimed by Japan and called Senkaku by Tokyo.

The announcement comes at a time of heightened maritime disputes over the islands and elsewhere in the Asia-Pacific region, where China's growing assertiveness has put it on a collision course with Japan, Vietnam and the Philippines.

Beijing on Sunday postponed a ceremony marking the 40th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties with Tokyo.

Tensions have also risen this year with Vietnam and the Philippines over disputed islands in the South China Sea.

Beijing confirmed last year it was revamping the former Soviet ship, and has repeatedly insisted the carrier poses no threat to its neighbours and will be used mainly for training and research purposes.

But numerous sea trials of the aircraft carrier -- which was previously only known as "Number 16" -- since August 2011 were met with concern from regional powers including Japan and the United States, which called on Beijing to explain why it needed such a ship.

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U.S., Japan Train for Island Defense

September 25, 2012

[Wall Street Journal](#)

By YUKA HAYASHI

GUAM—Japan's military is sharpening its skills at defending remote islands with the help of U.S. troops, as Tokyo faces an increasingly contentious dispute with China.

In a move that signals how the two allies are adjusting their defense cooperation to counter Beijing's growing territorial ambitions in the Western Pacific, troops from Japan's Ground Self Defense Force since mid-August have been receiving training on amphibious military tactics from the U.S. Marine Corps.

During the final session, which runs through Tuesday on Guam and other U.S.-controlled islands, roughly 40 troops from the Japanese army have trained with their Marine counterparts to make landing by boat or helicopter, and expel imaginary enemy forces that have taken over key facilities, such as a port and an airport on jungle-covered islands.

As the key U.S. military partner in Asia, Japan's Self Defense Forces regularly conduct joint exercises with U.S. troops. But U.S. and Japanese officials say the current session is the first drill devoted to island defense by the American and Japanese units defending the southern island chain of Okinawa. Japan considers the islands that are at the heart of the current Japan-China dispute—known as Senkaku in Japan and Diaoyu in Chinese—to be part of Okinawa.

Japanese and U.S. officials stress they don't envision any specific country as an enemy as they conduct these drills. But the occasion is a provocative show of unity between the two allies, coming at a time when a dispute over a group of small uninhabited islands in the East China Sea brings tensions between Japan and China to levels not seen in many years. The exercise—while scheduled weeks ago—coincided with a period when anti-Japan protests turned violent in some Chinese cities; pro- and anti-Japanese activists have landed on the islands, and a small fleet of Chinese boats have hovered for days near the territorial waters of the disputed islands.

"We are out here to train together—so we can operate and work together better in the future for any contingency, whether that be humanitarian or disaster-relief issues, or contingency response," said Col. John Merna, commanding officer of the 31st Marine Expedition Unit, the host of the Japanese troops. "Our ability to operate together will only help stabilize the region and move all of our desires forward."

Col. Merna spoke to reporters aboard the USS Bonhomme Richard, an amphibious assault ship off the coast of Guam. Training of the Japanese team was conducted as part of a broader Marine Corps certification exercise, to train the Marines for combat.

A spokesman for China's foreign ministry said Beijing had taken note of the exercise. Spokesman Hong Lei said at a daily briefing Japan should draw lessons from history and "adhere to pursuing the road of peaceful development."

On Saturday, the Japanese troops participated in a landing exercise on a beach on Guam's northeastern shore. Along with scores of Marines, they boarded rubber boats dispatched from a U.S. vessel. Once securing the beach, the Japanese soldiers advanced on land to retake the area from hypothetical enemy forces, carrying rifles, and some crawling on their stomachs. They wore fatigues in green a shade darker than their U.S. counterparts.

Capt. Tobin Walker, commander of the Marine boating company that conducted Saturday's landing drill, described the Japanese soldiers, who are on average a couple of years older than the Marines in his team, as "very mature and very excited about learning."

"They've learned very quickly," he said, adding that "lots and lots of practice" is still needed until they master the skills of amphibious fighting.

The session on Guam showed the difficulty and unpredictability of such tactics. A nighttime boat raid on Thursday, for example, was cut short because of the surf conditions, just as the troops were about to launch their boats from the main ship that had come within several hundred yards of the shore. It would have been a strenuous 12-hour drill featuring a long hike from a secluded beach through steep jungle hills to free a building captured by guerrilla forces.

Japan's Self Defense Forces have identified strengthening island defense capability as a key new strategy since 2010—the last time tensions flared up over the islands, when a Chinese fishing vessel rammed a

Japanese Coast Guard boat. With an eye toward expanding Chinese naval activities in the East China Sea, Japan is upgrading air-surveillance functions and preparing to build a military base on a remote island near the disputed territory. To add to its water-to-land capability, the defense ministry has requested the funds to purchase next year the nation's first amphibious armored vehicles. Japan's military doesn't have a Marine division.

"Until now, we haven't paid much attention to island defense," Eiji Kimizuka, JGSDF's chief of staff told reporters Sunday after surveying the exercise. "Our capability for amphibious landing—the area of expertise for the Marines—is severely limited. I hope these drills will help us make strides."

The U.S. is beefing up cooperation with its regional allies, as it rebalances its military forces to Asia to respond to the changing landscape. Increased participation in regional security from Japan is seen as essential, given the huge size of Japan's military. While the nation's pacifist constitution severely limits its activities, Japan's Self Defense Forces are among the world's largest armed forces, with annual military spending ranking No. 6 in the world—or No. 2 in Asia after China—last year, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.

"The deterrence posture of the alliance can be strengthened by enhanced defense cooperation, in particular by expanding joint training and exercises in Japan's southwest, by information sharing, patrolling and surveillance activities," said James Przystup, senior research fellow at the Institute for National Strategic Studies.

The current exercise was implemented in response to a new U.S.-Japan bilateral defense-cooperation agreement signed in April. The agreement calls for strengthening "interoperability" between U.S. and Japanese forces, and building permanent training facilities on Guam and in the nearby Northern Mariana Islands. Such facilities will mark the first permanent post for the Japanese military within U.S. territory since World War II.

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Japan fires water cannon to turn away Taiwan boats

September 25, 2012

Reuters

By Kiyoshi Takenaka and Kaori Kaneko

TOKYO - Japanese Coast Guard vessels fired water cannon to turn away about 40 Taiwan fishing boats and eight Taiwan Coast Guard vessels from waters Japan considers its own on Tuesday in the latest twist to a row between Tokyo and Beijing.

Japan protested to Taiwan, a day after it lodged a complaint with China over what it said was a similar intrusion by Chinese boats.

Sino-Japanese relations deteriorated sharply this month after Japan bought disputed East China Sea islands, called Senkaku in Japan and Diaoyu in China, from their private owner, sparking anti-Japan protests across China.

Taiwan has friendly ties with Japan, but the two sides have long squabbled over fishing rights in the area. China and Taiwan both argue they have inherited China's historic sovereignty over the islands.

Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Osamu Fujimura said the coast guard used water cannon and other measures to get the Taiwan ships to change course.

All the Taiwan fishing boats and coast guard ships had since left territorial waters, the Japanese Coast Guard said. -

Japanese public broadcaster NHK showed footage of a Japanese Coast Guard ship shooting water at a Taiwan fishing boat, while a Taiwan patrol vessel blasted water at the Coast Guard ship in reply.

While few experts expect a military confrontation, an unintended clash at sea would increase tension, although all sides are expected to try to manage the row before it spirals out of control. Japan's top diplomat, Vice Foreign Minister Chikao Kawai, was in Beijing for a meeting with Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Zhang Zhijun in a bid to ease tensions between Asia's two biggest economies.

An official at the Japan-China Economic Association said that Toyota Motor Corp Chairman Fujio Cho and Hiromasa Yonekura, chairman of Japanese business lobby Keidanren, and other representatives of Japan-China friendship groups would attend an event on Thursday in Beijing.

This comes despite the cancellation of a bigger event to mark the 40th anniversary of the normalization of diplomatic ties, called off because of the chill in relations.

"We've just lodged a protest with the Taiwan side," Fujimura told a news conference. "...Our stance is that this is something that needs to be solved in the context of good bilateral ties between Japan and Taiwan. We would like to address the issue calmly."

China's Ministry of Agriculture for its part said close to 200 Chinese boats have been fishing in seas around a group of rocky islands, near rich fishing grounds and potentially huge gas reserves, disputed with Japan.

The Chinese statement did not specify whether the boats were all there at once or say how close they were to the islands. Beijing, which regards self-ruled Taiwan as a renegade province, may have included Taiwan fishing boats in its estimate.

The flare-up in tension comes at a time when both China and Japan confront domestic political pressures. Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda's government faces an election in months, adding pressure on him not to look weak on China.

China's Communist Party is preoccupied with a leadership turnover, with President Hu Jintao due to step down as party leader at a congress that could open as soon as next month.

A group of Taiwan fishing boats left for the islands in heavy rain on Monday. The group said the boats would sail around the islands and assert their right to fish there - and did not rule out attempting to land. As many as 100 Taiwan fishing boats may be in the area, Japanese media said.

Japan said that four Chinese surveillance vessels and two Chinese fishery patrol ships were in nearby waters but outside its territory.
(top)

AP Exclusive: Images Show NKorea Launch Pad Halt

September 25, 2012

Associated Press

By Foster Klug

SEOUL, South Korea - North Korea has stopped construction on a launch pad where intercontinental-range rockets could be tested, an interruption possibly due to heavy rains and that could stall completion up to two years, according to an analysis of new satellite imagery.

Despite the setback, however, Pyongyang is also refurbishing for possible future use another existing pad at the same complex that has been used for past rocket launches, according to the analysis of Aug. 29 images provided to The Associated Press by 38 North, the website of the U.S.-Korea Institute at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies.

While the renovations don't mean a launch is imminent, they indicate North Korea is preparing the site for possible future rocket tests, according to the 38 North special report written by Nick Hansen.

North Korea conducted nuclear tests in 2006 and 2009, but experts don't believe Pyongyang has yet mastered the technology needed to shrink a nuclear weapon so it can be mounted onto the tip of a long-range missile.

There are worries, however, about North Korea's rocket and missile programs. The United States, South Korea and others have said North Korea uses rocket launches, including a failed effort in mid-April, as covers to test banned missile systems that could target parts of the United States. North Korea says recent rocket launches were meant to put peaceful satellites into orbit.

North Korea has repeatedly vowed to push ahead with its nuclear program in the face of what it calls U.S. hostility that makes a "nuclear deterrence" necessary.

Both the new launch pad where work has been suspended and the existing launch pad being refurbished are at the Tonghae launch complex, which houses nine facilities around the villages of Musudan, No-dong and Taepo-dong on the northeast coast, according to the report.

"Despite the temporary halt in construction at the new Tonghae launch pad and the failed test last April, the North Koreans appear determined to eventually build bigger and better rockets," Joel Wit, a former U.S. State Department official and editor of 38 North, told AP.

The failed April launch of Pyongyang's new Unha-3 rocket occurred at the Sohae Satellite Launching Station in Tongchang-ri, a sophisticated, newer site on the country's northwestern coast.

The new commercial satellite photos of Tonghae, taken by DigitalGlobe, also show halted construction at fuel and oxidizer buildings near the new pad, the analysis said. Those buildings are described as crucial to any future tests.

The exact reason for the halt isn't clear, but the analysis says the rains this summer that killed dozens of people and submerged large amounts of farmland are one explanation. North Korea is particularly vulnerable to natural disasters because of its poor drainage, widespread deforestation and poor infrastructure.

There are no workers or heavy construction equipment at the new pad site. No flooding can be seen in the new photos, but the analysis speculates that the construction equipment may have been moved to help with rebuilding efforts elsewhere. It says that heavy equipment can only get to the site by a rutted dirt trail that crosses a stream.

"Whatever the reason, the slowdown, barring concerted North Korean efforts to make up for lost time, could result in a 1-2 year slip in the planned completion date of the new complex, which was probably the middle of this decade," the report said.

It said Pyongyang can still launch longer-range rockets from its Sohae facility.

The analysis also notes as an "important new development" the start of what could be a new launch control center meant for the entire complex. It's the only site "where work is proceeding at a rapid pace," the report said.

The images are also said to show "further, although very slow, progress" at a structure meant to build future long-range rocket stages. North Korea has also apparently improved its ability to destroy launched missiles, "an important development since rockets from Tonghae can come close to or overfly Japan." ([top](#))

Rare N.Korean Parliament Meet Blunts Reform Expectations

September 25, 2012

AFP

North Korea's parliament held a rare session Tuesday, presided over by Kim Jong-Un, which had been expected to confirm an apparent push by the new, young leader to introduce limited economic reforms.

The country has one of the world's most rigidly-controlled economies and is desperately poor following decades of mismanagement and isolation, as well as the imposition of international sanctions over its nuclear programme.

The rubber-stamp parliament last convened in April and it is unusual to hold two sessions in the same year.

North Korea watchers and media reports in South Korea had speculated it would adopt market reforms that Kim has shown signs of experimenting with since taking power following the death of his father Kim Jong-Il last December.

However, the state Korean Central News Agency's (KCNA) description of the day's proceedings mentioned only a report on education and a minor reshuffle in the parliament's standing committee.

Since assuming the leadership, Kim Jong-Un has made several public statements on the need to improve living standards, and there have been signs of introducing incentives for workers and farmers to boost productivity.

"Reforms are always risky in a closed totalitarian country, but Jong-Un appears to be confident that his leadership is now stable enough to enforce a new system," Yang Moo-Jin at the University of North Korean Studies in Seoul told AFP.

Newspaper reports in Seoul had suggested one change may see the North's regime taking only 70 percent of the harvest from collective farms, allowing farmers to keep or sell the remainder.

The fact that the KCNA report on the session contained no mention of economic reform might suggest Pyongyang is still wary of moving beyond the trial stage towards institutionalised change, analysts said.

"As a whole, today's announcement means the North's economic reform still remains at an experimental level and has not reached the point where it can be enshrined in laws to be approved by the assembly," Soongsil University professor Lee Jung-Chul told AFP.

The caution is understandable given the results of Pyongyang's past attempts at freeing up the economy.

Limited market reforms were introduced in 2002 to revive an economy which had begun to collapse in the 1990s, as subsidised imports of fuel and food from the former Soviet Union and its European satellite nations dried up.

The resulting boom in street markets and general trading activity across the nation was seen as a threat to government control and most of the reforms were rolled back three years later.

Then there was a disastrous currency "revaluation" in 2009 which resulted in an inflationary surge that wiped out people's savings and triggered rare public protests.

Andrei Lankov, a Russian professor at Seoul's Kookmin University, said it seemed clear that Kim Jong-Un was looking to move the economy in a new direction.

The obvious model, Lankov said, would be a Chinese-style "development dictatorship" combining an authoritarian political structure with a market economy.

However, this would inevitably require an initial period of uncertainty as any market changes took root.

"A reforming North Korea will likely be very unstable and might collapse," Lankov said.
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Vietnam Convicts 3 Bloggers Over Posts

September 25, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By JAMES HOOKWAY

A Vietnamese court convicted three prominent bloggers and sentenced them to between four and 12 years in prison, the latest step in a crackdown against online dissent in the tightly policed communist state.

One of the defendants' lawyers, Ha Huy Son, said the three bloggers were found guilty of writing articles that opposed the government, diplomats said. Monday's verdict came after a one-day trial in Ho Chi Minh City.

Vietnam's government has stepped up its campaign against cyber-dissidents recently, ordering police to take action against three websites this month in what analysts and diplomats say is a bid to inculcate a

sense of fear among the growing numbers of Vietnamese who are going online to obtain news and exchange opinions on events in the country.

"This is designed to create a chilling effect," said a Western diplomat. "The government doesn't want criticism to snowball." The U.S. Embassy issued a statement saying it was "deeply concerned" and urged the government to free all three dissidents.

The Vietnamese government said it had no comment.

Internet penetration rates are growing faster in Vietnam than in many other emerging nations. Around 34% of the country's 90 million people are online, a larger proportion than in neighbors such as Thailand and Indonesia.

But as Vietnam's booming economy slows and its debt problems worsen, the government is increasingly eager to rein in criticism and prevent online dissidents from attracting a larger following.

The crackdown is attracting world-wide attention, with the plight of the three prisoners convicted Monday gaining particular traction. U.S. President Barack Obama cited one of the bloggers, Nguyen Van Hai, this year in a speech urging more Internet freedoms around the world. The mother of one of the other detainees, meanwhile, burned herself to death in July in a protest against the charges filed against her daughter, Ta Phong Tan.

All three bloggers, including Phan Thanh Hai, belonged to the "Free Journalists Club," which writes prolifically about political, economic and social issues in Vietnam.

Mr. Nguyen Van Hai, alias Dieu Cay, was sentenced to 12 years in prison, while Ms. Tan was handed a 10-year sentence. Mr. Phan Thanh Hai, the only one of the trio who pleaded guilty, was given a four-year sentence. The heavy sentences could herald more arrests and convictions.

Vietnam's leaders are particularly wary of any accusations of corruption and malpractice as the country's economy continues to struggle, said Carlyle Thayer, a Vietnam expert at the Australian Defence Force Academy in Canberra. In addition, Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung is also anxious to suppress reports about infighting in the ruling politburo that have circulated online in recent months.

Human-rights groups sharply criticized the lengthy prison sentences. Phil Robertson, deputy director of the Asian division at New York-based Human Rights Watch, said "these harsh sentences against bloggers are absolutely outrageous, and show the depth of the Vietnam government's intolerance of views that oppose its own."

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NEA

Clinton Says "Avenging Insults" Is No Path To Dignity Amid Anti-American Protests

September 25, 2012

Associated Press

By Matthew Lee

NEW YORK, N.Y. - Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton appealed Monday to Muslims to show "dignity" and not resort to violence as they protest an anti-Islam film produced in the United States.

Speaking at her husband's Clinton Global Initiative before meeting the presidents of Afghanistan, Egypt, Libya and Pakistan on the sidelines of the annual U.N. General Assembly,

Clinton said the United States would always champion the rights to peaceful protest and free expression even if it deplored the content of the speech. But, she said, "dignity does not come from avenging insults."

Her comments came as demonstrators angry over the vulgar depiction of the Prophet Mohammed in the video continue to protest around the Muslim world.

"Dignity does not come from avenging insults, especially with violence that can never be justified," she said. "It comes from taking responsibility and advancing our common humanity."

Fomenting grievance, Clinton said, produces violent protests that accomplish nothing in the way of improving living standards, creating jobs or developing societies.

"Building schools instead of burning them, investing in their people's creativity, not inciting their rage, opening their economies and societies to have more connections with the wider world, not shutting off the internet or attacking embassies" is the way to better life, she said.

"Extremists around the world are working hard to drive us apart," Clinton warned. "All of us need to stand together to resist these forces and to support democratic transitions under way in North Africa and the Middle East."

The Obama administration has been grasping for ways to try to tamp down the fury over the video, especially in Pakistan, where some of the most intense and sustained protests have been held. The embassy in Islamabad released public-service advertisements showing

President Barack Obama and Clinton denouncing the film.

Compounding the difficulty, a Pakistani Cabinet minister offered \$100,000 to anyone who kills the maker of the film. The Pakistani government disavowed the bounty on Monday, just hours before Clinton was to meet with

President Asif Ali Zardari.

"We very much appreciate the strong response of your government," Clinton told Zardari as they began their meeting in a New York hotel.

Zardari replied: "It's been a difficult time for all of us."

Later, Clinton met with President Mohamed Magariaf of Libya, where the U.S. ambassador and three other Americans were killed in a Sept. 11 attack on the consulate in Benghazi. She thanked him for the support offered by his government in the aftermath of the attack and praised the Libyan people for overthrowing Moammar Gadhafi last year.

"Courage has been the defining characteristic of the Libyan people over these last two years," she said. "Courage to rise up and overthrow a dictator, courage to choose the hard path of democracy, courage to stand against violence and division in the country and the world."

Magariaf called the consulate attack "a very painful, huge tragedy, not only for the American people and the families of the victims, but also for the Libyan people." He noted that thousands of Libyans had marched in the streets to protest the attack and said those demonstrations "embodied the conscience of the Libyan people."

"What happened on (the) 11th of September toward these US citizens does not express in any way the conscience of the Libyan people, their aspirations, their hopes or their sentiments toward the American people," he said.

Later Monday, Clinton will also meet with Afghan President Hamid Karzai and Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi.

Obama is speaking to the UN General Assembly on Tuesday, but on Monday left the bilateral meetings with heads of state to Clinton while he taped an appearance on the daytime talk show "The View." He attends a reception Monday evening.

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Clinton And Morsi Discuss Embassy Security

September 25, 2012

Associated Press

By Bradley Klapper

NEW YORK - Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton has met Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi in the most high-level U.S.-Egypt meeting since protesters stormed the U.S. Embassy in Cairo.

A U.S. official says they spoke Monday night at a New York hotel about the importance of ensuring the security of U.S. diplomatic offices. Morsi stressed that embassy security was Egypt's duty.

The Cairo demonstrations came on Sept. 11 in response to an American-made video ridiculing Islam. Hours later, a U.S. ambassador and three other Americans were killed in Libya.

The official wasn't authorized to speak publicly about the private meeting and requested anonymity.

Clinton and Morsi also spoke about improving security in the Sinai Peninsula near Israel's border and helping the Egyptian economy. They were in New York for the U.N. General Assembly.

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Egypt: 14 Get Death Sentences For Sinai Attacks

September 25, 2012

Associated Press

By Aya Batrawy

CAIRO - An Egyptian court on Monday sentenced 14 members of an extremist group to death by hanging for attacks against police in the Sinai Peninsula, ruling that they were members of an organization that considers even other Islamists to be infidels.

Six of the men were present to be sentenced by the court in the Suez Canal governorate of Ismailia that borders Sinai, while another eight are still fugitives and convicted in absentia.

The death sentences highlight the conflict between the government of President Mohammed Morsi, who hails from the more moderate Muslim Brotherhood, and extremist networks like el-Tawhid wi el-Jihad, blamed for the deadly attack last year in northern Sinai's el-Arish city.

The June 2011 attack against el-Arish's main police station and a nearby bank killed a civilian and a number of police and military officers. The group was also found guilty of storming el-Arish's police station and of smashing statues of former President Anwar Sadat who was assassinated in 1981 after signing Egypt's peace treaty with Israel.

El-Tawhid wi el-Jihad is part of a larger fringe trend in northern Sinai known as Takfir wil-Hijra. The movement's members, dubbed "Takfiris", lead secretive, isolated lives where anything and anyone that does not adhere to their rigid interpretation of Islam is deemed heretical - including the government and its security forces. Takfir wil-Hijra's leader was executed under Sadat in 1978.

The court issued its final verdict Monday after Egypt's top religious cleric approved the executions, as is customary for death sentences under the nation's legal system.

Another six men involved in the case were sentenced to life in prison. Four others were found not guilty.

Extremist militants operate in disparate groups in the Sinai Peninsula and are believed to have grown in numbers since last year's political upheaval following the ouster of Hosni Mubarak, largely due to a negligible police presence in the area. The volatile region, which links Egypt's borders with the Gaza Strip and Israel, has become increasingly lawless over the past year.

In a brazen attack, unidentified militants killed 16 Egyptian soldiers near the border in August. More recently on Friday, heavily armed militants wearing explosive belts opened fire on Israeli soldiers near the border, killing one.

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After Daughter, Iran Arrests Son Of Ex-President: Report

September 25, 2012

AFP

The son of Iran's former president Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani was arrested after he returned from abroad on Monday, two days after authorities jailed Rafsanjani's daughter, the official IRNA news agency reported.

Mehdi Hashemi was apprehended after an hours-long interrogation by prosecutors after his arrival in Tehran from Dubai after a flight from Britain, where he had lived for the past three years.

Iran had issued an arrest warrant for him in 2010.

On Saturday, Hashemi's sister Faezeh Hashemi was arrested and imprisoned to serve a six-month jail term for "propaganda against the regime." The sentence had been delivered early this year but not imposed until now.

Both Mehdi and Faezeh Hashemi were accused by authorities of involvement in 2009 street protests that erupted after President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was given a second term in elections that the opposition said were marked by vote fraud.

Faezeh Hashemi was briefly arrested with thousands of others after those demonstrations, while Mehdi Hashemi fled the country.

Their father is an influential cleric who served as president from 1989 to 1997 and who is seen as a moderate voice isolated by hardliners in Iran's regime.

Rafsanjani, who still heads the country's top political arbitration body, has faced demands from conservatives that he publicly condemn opposition leaders Mir Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karroubi, both of whom languish under house arrest.

Ahmadinejad, who beat Rafsanjani to secure the presidency in 2005, is to step down next year, having served his maximum two terms. Iran's presidential election to choose a successor is due to be held on June 14, 2013.

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Iran's President Says Backing Gays Is For "Capitalists"

September 25, 2012

AFP

Supporting homosexuality is the stuff of hardline capitalists who do not care about real human values, Iran's president said.

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said in an interview on CNN that homosexuality is a "very ugly behavior" that he said was banned by "all prophets and all religions and all faiths."

In New York to attend the UN General Assembly, Ahmadinejad said that just because some countries support homosexuality that does mean his criticism of it means he is denying people's freedom.

He ridiculed politicians and parties who, he said, approve of gays and lesbians just to win "four or five additional votes."

More broadly he said supporting homosexuality had nothing to do with supporting human development.

"This kind of support of homosexuality is only engrained in the thoughts of hard-core capitalists and those who support the growth of capital only, rather than human values," the president said through an interpreter.

He insisted that people become homosexual, rather than being born that way, and dodged a question as to what he would do if one of his three children were homosexual.

The president said the world has myriad woes such as grinding poverty, repression and dictatorships, and he supports resolving them and championing human dignity.

Asked if such support for freedom should not extend to homosexuals, he said: "Homosexuality ceases procreation. Who has said that if you like or believe in doing something ugly and others do not accept your behavior, they're denying your freedom. Who says that?"
(top)

Israeli Defense Chief Proposes West Bank Pullout

September 25, 2012

Associated Press

By Josef Federman

JERUSALEM - Israel's defense minister on Monday called for a broad unilateral withdrawal from the West Bank if talks with the Palestinians remain stalled, saying in published comments that "practical steps" are needed to breathe life into the stalemated peace process.

The proposal drew attention to the dire state of affairs with the Palestinians, which has been overshadowed by Israel's focus on the Iranian nuclear program. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, convinced that Tehran is pursuing nuclear weapons, says the Islamic Republic must be stopped and has devoted his 3 1/2 year term to rallying international support against the Iranians. At the same time, he has largely ignored the Palestinian issue.

In an interview with the Israel Hayom daily, Defense Minister Ehud Barak implied that the deadlock with the Palestinians cannot be sustained indefinitely.

"It's better to reach an agreement with the Palestinians, but if that doesn't happen, we must take practical steps to start a separation," he said. "It will help us not only in dealing with the Palestinians, but also with other countries in the region, with the Europeans, and with the American administration - and of course (will help) us."

Barak's proposal is unlikely to be implemented, at least in the short term. Netanyahu has shown no interest in one-sided concessions, and his governing coalition is dominated by hard-liners who would be reluctant to embrace the plan. Netanyahu's office declined comment.

The 12 million people who live in Israel and the Palestinian territories are divided roughly equally between Jews and Arabs. Most experts believe the Arab birthrate is higher, and that if Israel does not give up control of the West Bank, Jews will no longer be a majority in areas under Israeli control. That would threaten Israel's twin goals of being a democracy and a Jewish state.

Dovish Israelis have cited this demographic argument for years as a key reason to pull out of the West Bank, which is home to 2.5 million Palestinians. Even Netanyahu, head of the nationalist Likud Party, has raised concerns about the demographic issue.

But on the ground, Netanyahu has continued to build up the settlements. More than 300,000 Israelis now live in Jewish settlements in the West Bank, in addition to 200,000 Israelis in east Jerusalem. The Palestinians claim both areas and the Gaza Strip, captured by Israel in the 1967 Mideast war, for their future state.

The Palestinians believe the continued construction on occupied lands is a sign of bad faith and say they will not return to negotiations without a settlement freeze. Netanyahu has rejected this demand, and says peace talks should resume without any conditions.

Barak has previously floated the idea of unilateral action, most recently in May. But in Monday's interview, he was far more detailed.

"We have not been a year or two in Judea and Samaria, but 45 years," Barak said, using the biblical terms for the West Bank. "The time has come to make decisions based not only on ideology and gut feelings, but from a cold reading of reality."

He said Israel would keep heavily concentrated settlement "blocs." These blocs, home to most of the settler population, are mostly located near the frontiers with Israel proper, though one of them, Ariel, is located deep inside the West Bank. Barak also said Israel would need to maintain a military presence along the West Bank's border with Jordan.

The remaining settlers would be given financial incentives to leave, or be allowed to remain in their homes under Palestinian control for a five-year "trial period," Barak said.

"It's time to look at Israeli society honestly and say: 'We succeeded in keeping 80 to 90 percent of settlements,'" he said. "It would be a great accomplishment if we succeed in bringing them into Israel's permanent borders."

Barak, who was out of the country on Monday, did not explain why he decided to unveil his proposal now. A full version of the interview was to be published on Tuesday.

Barak, a former prime minister who led failed peace talks with the Palestinians a decade ago, may have been motivated by domestic politics to float his proposal now. Netanyahu is widely expected to call early elections in the coming weeks, roughly a year ahead of schedule. Barak, who leads the small centrist Independence Party, could be positioning himself for centrist voters ahead of the campaign season.

But the strategy is risky. The idea of a unilateral pullout is widely scorned in Israel following the experience of an Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip in 2005.

The pullout cleared the way for Hamas militants to overrun the territory two years later, leaving Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in control of only the West Bank.

Gaza quickly became a launching pad for rocket attacks on southern Israel, prompting a three-week Israeli military offensive in 2008-2009. Many Israelis fear a repeat in the West Bank, which could place Islamic militants just miles away from Israel's largest cities.

The Palestinians also rejected Barak's proposal, since it falls short of their demand for a full withdrawal from the entire West Bank and east Jerusalem. They also say a continued Israeli military presence in the West Bank is unacceptable.

Sabri Sedam, an aide to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, said continued Israeli control of the settlement blocs and east Jerusalem would make the establishment of a Palestinian state impossible.

"These settlement blocs are not isolated populations. They are connected communities, passing through the Palestinian land, which kills any geographical contiguity for a Palestinian state," he said.

Barak's plan would also face resistance from settler groups, who wield significant political power. Extremist settlers might also violently resist any attempts to uproot them.

Settler leader Dani Dayan called the plan a "nonstarter" motivated by Barak's "electioneering." He said the experience of unilateral pullouts had been discredited by the experience in Gaza, as well as an earlier withdrawal in southern Lebanon that strengthened Hezbollah.

"It is regrettable that the minister of defense engages in petty politics on the most crucial issues," he said.

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Former Israeli Premier Gets Suspended Sentence

September 25, 2012

New York Times

By Isabel Kershner

JERUSALEM - Ehud Olmert, a former prime minister of Israel, was sentenced by a Jerusalem court on Monday to a one-year suspended prison term and a maximum fine of about \$19,000 for breach of trust. The relatively light sentence ended a long-running prosecution that forced Mr. Olmert from office. It also opened the way for a possible political comeback.

Mr. Olmert, the first Israeli prime minister to be convicted of a criminal offense, was found guilty in July of making decisions when he was minister of trade and industry that benefited clients of a close associate.

Commentators here considered the suspended sentence, which carried no determination by the court of moral turpitude, as a victory for Mr. Olmert. The prosecution had requested six months of community service, and the judges said in their ruling that in other circumstances, a public figure convicted of conflict of interest could have expected a stiffer sentence.

But the judges said that this was a "special case" because of Mr. Olmert's former position and the circumstances of his resignation, and that they had taken the political and personal price already paid by Mr. Olmert into account.

"Today, I leave the court with my head held high," Mr. Olmert told reporters waiting outside the court, adding that he respected the court's decisions and would learn the lessons.

Still, the prospect of a speedy return to politics is clouded by the fact that Mr. Olmert is fighting another corruption case, in which he is charged with taking bribes in connection with the construction of a huge residential complex while he was the mayor of Jerusalem.

Eli Abarbanel, a lawyer for the prosecution, said after Monday's decision, "We thought the principle of equality before the law required a sentence no less than community service."

"This episode is not over," Mr. Abarbanel added, saying that prosecutors would study the sentence before deciding how to proceed, and that they were also studying the original verdict, with a view to a possible appeal.

Mr. Olmert has acknowledged making mistakes in the years before he became prime minister, but he has always denied criminal wrongdoing. He insisted that the matter on which he was convicted, known as the Investment Center affair, amounted to procedural irregularity rather than corruption. In their ruling on Monday, the judges described the conflict of interest as "acute."

Mr. Olmert was acquitted in July of two more serious matters, the most sensational one involving accusations of the transfer of large sums of money from Morris Talansky, an American businessman whose early testimony was instrumental in Mr. Olmert's downfall. The prosecution failed to prove that the money was used for private purposes.

The second involved accusations that, while he was mayor of Jerusalem and later in the cabinet, he billed multiple state and charitable agencies for the same travel expenses and used the extra money for private family trips.

The acquittals caused an uproar in Israel and led to questions about zealous state prosecutors who appeared to have staked their prestige on convicting the former prime minister.

The judges on Monday noted that Mr. Olmert's resignation from office was connected with these matters and not the Investment Center affair.

Mr. Olmert came of age politically in the Likud Party but by the time he became prime minister, he was the leader of Kadima, a centrist party established in 2005.

Israeli elections have to be held within the next 14 months. Mr. Olmert's sentencing comes amid speculation about a reordering of the centrist forces in Israeli politics. Newcomers like Yair Lapid, a former journalist, have entered politics, and there is talk of a comeback by Tzipi Livni, a former foreign minister who succeeded Mr. Olmert as the leader of Kadima but was unable to form a government of her own. Soon after losing the party leadership in March, she resigned from Parliament.
(top)

Lebanon Blocks Internet Access To Anti-Islam Film

September 25, 2012

AFP

A Lebanese court decided on Monday to block Internet access to an anti-Islam film that has provoked rage across the Muslim world, a judicial source told AFP.

Judge Nadim Zoueiri decided "to stop the Internet distribution of the film 'Innocence of Muslims' in Lebanon," following a complaint filed by a lawyer, the source said.

"Innocence of Muslims" mocks Islam and the Prophet Mohammed, and has led to violent protests across the Muslim world. Some 50 people have been killed in violence linked to protests over the film.

Protests against the movie and cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed in a French satirical magazine have been staged in several towns across Lebanon, without resulting in violence.

But protests by Sunni Islamists in the northern city of Tripoli on September 14 led to clashes with police in which one demonstrator was killed and 25 people were injured.

Last week the powerful Shiite militant group Hezbollah called for a series of protests.
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Obama: Libya Assault "Wasn't Just Mob Action"

September 25, 2012

Associated Press

By Ben Feller

NEW YORK - President Barack Obama said Monday "there's no doubt" that the assault of the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi, Libya, that killed four Americans including the U.S. ambassador "wasn't just a mob action" but a sign of extremism in nations lacking stability. His words about the Libya killings were his most specific since the White House called it a "terrorist attack" last week.

"What's been interesting, just this past week, there were these massive protests against these extremists militias that are suspected, maybe, of having been involved in this attack," Obama said during the taping of an interview on ABC's talk show program "The View."

The White House initially said the storming of the consulate attack was a spontaneous assault tied to ongoing protests over a video that ridiculed the Prophet Muhammad, but has since broadened its answer to say an investigation will show what ultimately happened.

Obama and first lady Michelle Obama taped the show - a clear pitch to women voters - in New York the day before the president addresses the U.N. General Assembly. The interview, a mix of policy, politics and personal tidbits, will air Tuesday. Obama made a solo appearance on "The View" in July 2010, drawing an estimated 6.5 million viewers, according to Nielsen. The first lady appeared on the show in late May, where she discussed family life and the re-election campaign.

Asked if a Mitt Romney presidency would be a disaster, Obama hardly disagreed with the sentiment, replying that the nation can "survive a lot." He added: "The American people don't want to just survive, we want to thrive."

Obama pointed to Romney's assertion that it is fair for a person with a \$50,000-a-year income to pay a higher percentage of their earnings in taxes than someone who makes millions from investments. Romney said a low capital gains tax rate encourages economic growth and encourages people to invest.

"I've just got a different vision about how we grow our economy," Obama said, adding that such growth is faster when the middle class is doing well.

Discussing the stresses of the presidency, the first lady described her husband as having an even temperament. "He doesn't have emotional shifts; he's very steady," she said. "I'm one of the few people who can really make him mad."

Asked how, Obama joked: "By being thoroughly unreasonable."

In recalling his hardest day of the last four years, Obama cited the August 2011 downing of a Chinook helicopter by a rocket-propelled grenade in Afghanistan that killed 30 American troops. Obama later flew to Dover, Del., to pay tribute to the troops.

"It's very raw in those moments and it reminds you that freedom's not free and these families are taking enormous strain and ours troops are making enormous sacrifices," Obama said.

Asked what they will be doing in about five years, Michelle Obama said, "go on a long vacation," adding that she wants to retrace the couple's honeymoon route along California's scenic Route 1.

The president at first objected, saying there is still an election ahead, with a whole set of goals he wants to accomplish in a second term. After the presidency, Obama said, he expects to spend time working with kids.

"I love teaching. I miss teaching," he said. Still, the former law school professor said he is not sure he will return to the classroom.

Instead, he may explore the idea of going around to cities, creating mentorships and "giving young people" a sense of opportunity and possibility, Obama said.

An avid basketball player and occasional coach to his two daughters, Obama was asked what was harder, coaching girls or getting Congress to work.

"No contest," he replied. "The girls? They play like a team."
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Libya Appoints Military Officers To Head Militias

September 25, 2012

Associated Press

By Esam Mohamed

TRIPOLI, Libya - Libya's military command appointed Monday a pair of army officers to head two powerful Islamist militias in the country's east, part of the government's push to rein in armed factions.

The move reflects the pressure on the government to control or disband the country's militias, many of which it had relied upon for securing Libya in the turmoil following last year's ouster and killing of longtime leader Moammar Gadhafi.

Col. Ali al-Sheikhi, the spokesman for Libya's joint chiefs of staff, told the news agency LANA that the chiefs of the Rafallah Sahati Brigade and the Feb. 17 Brigade, two groups that authorities had allowed to manage security in the eastern city of Benghazi, would be replaced with army commanders.

Anger at the militias boiled over following the killing of the top American diplomat in Libya and three U.S. mission staffers in an assault on the consulate in Benghazi on Sept. 11. The attack followed an angry protest against an anti-Islam film produced in the U.S. which has riled many in the Muslim world.

Members of the radical Islamist Ansar al-Shariah militia are suspected of being behind the attack.

Many of Libya's militias were formed in the eight-month war against Gadhafi, but more groups sprang up after the end of fighting in October. With the country trying to rebuild after 42 years of Gadhafi, the groups paid little attention to successive interim leaders. They were accused of bullying citizens, operating independent prisons and holding summary trials for Gadhafi loyalists. Recently, Islamist-led

militias have also attacked shrines, such as tombs associated with religious figures, that they considered to be counter to their strict view of Islam.

This Friday, thousands of protesters marched against the militias in Benghazi, the cradle of the uprising against Gadhafi, and stormed two of their compounds. Militiamen at the Sahati Brigade's compound fired at the protesters, killing nearly a dozen.

In an attempt to deflect the anger, Libya's president ordered all militias to dissolve or to come under a joint operations command to coordinate between the militia brigades and the army. The military had already asked all armed groups using captured Gadhafi-era barracks to evacuate them and hand them over. Security forces have already raided a number of sites in the capital Tripoli used by militias.

The moves surprised some critics who doubted that the government was strong enough to deal with the militias, particularly the powerful Islamist ones.

But many Libyans still feel the government has not done enough.

In Benghazi, around 200 people rallied against the militias on Monday, decrying the government decision to retain some of the armed groups even if they were under military command. The protest demanded that all militias be disbanded and its members integrated in the security agencies as individuals.

The protesters also demanded an independent investigation into the killing of protesters on Saturday, saying that the government bears responsibility for the actions of a militia upon which it had relied for security.

"The blood of the martyrs will not be shed in vain," the protesters chanted. They called for the chief of staff, defense and interior ministers to be sacked.

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Libya Militia Leader: Heat-seeking Missiles, Other Weapons Stolen During Firefight

September 25, 2012

[Washington Post](#)

By Abigail Hauslohner

BENGHAZI, Libya - The commander of a powerful Libyan militia said Monday that looters had stolen "a large number" of shoulder-fired, heat-seeking missiles from the militia's base when protesters who called for dismantling the country's militias overran the compound.

Ismail Salabi, the commander of Rafallah al-Sahati, a powerful Islamist militia in Benghazi, said in an interview that the missiles, used by fighters to "hit airplanes" and known to the U.S. intelligence community as MANPADs, were stolen along with 2,000 semi-automatic rifles and ammunition, as the militia withdrew from its base amid a firefight early Saturday morning.

Saleh Jouda, a member of Libya's elected General National Congress and the deputy head of national security, said that the government did yet not have any information about stolen weapons aside from "between 1,000 and 2,000 guns." He said the government had set up new security checkpoints to track down the weapons. But there was no evidence of new checkpoints in Benghazi on Monday.

The militias were carrying out arrests Monday of people believed to have been involved in the weekend incidents.

The clashes at Rafallah al-Sahati's base followed a mass protest on Friday, during which thousands of Libyans marched through Benghazi demanding the establishment of a strong national army, and the dissolution of the hundreds of militias that have run Libya's streets in the security vacuum since Moammar Gaddafi's fall last year.

By early Saturday morning, protesters, aided by other government-allied militias, had overrun four militia bases, including Rafallah al-Sahati's, and a base belonging to the extremist group Ansar al-Sharia, which many here have accused of involvement in the Sept. 11 attack on the U.S. Consulate that killed the U.S. ambassador and three other Americans.

Libya's militias consist largely of former rebels who in some cases have amassed large quantities of heavy weapons, stolen from Gaddafi's arsenals over the course of Libya's eight-month revolution. The country's weak central government has yet to develop a clear plan to collect those weapons.

The president of Libya's elected General National Congress told reporters on Saturday that all of the militias would be absorbed into a unified national force, or required to disband. However, there is a fine line between the militias that already fall under the loose central command in Tripoli, and those that don't.

During the interview, Salabi referred to his militia at times as "the nucleus of the new Libyan army," and at other times as an organization separate from and victimized by the national army. He also said that his group and two other government-affiliated militias are the only groups in Benghazi capable of reclaiming the stolen weapons.

"There is no organized militia that can get these weapons back, other than Rafallah al-Sahati, the February 17th [brigade], and Libya Shield. We can attack the places where the weapons are," he said.

It was unclear whose hands the weapons had fallen into. But Salabi suggested that the clashes had broken out between rival militias over the looting of Rafallah al-Sahati's weapons. "Most of the clashes were over who was going to get control of the weapons," he said.

A senior Obama administration official said earlier this month that U.S. intelligence estimates that between 100 and 1,000 MANPADs are still unaccounted for in Libya, despite U.S. efforts to destroy them. Intelligence officials believe that some of the MANPADs have already been smuggled across Libya's borders.

Glen Doherty, a former Navy SEAL and one of the Americans killed in the consulate attack, told ABC News last month that he had gone into Libya to track down MANPADs as a contractor for the State Department.

The United States and the Soviet Union stockpiled MANPADS during the Cold War. Although military aircraft now have countermeasures that have rendered the weapon largely ineffective in conventional battle, MANPADS continue to pose a serious threat to passenger planes.

Under Gaddafi's rule, Libya is believed to have collected more MANPADS than any other nation that did not produce them, according to the State Department. During the country's 2011 civil war, rebels seized troves of weapons from government depots. Many were later sold on the black market. Fearing that terrorist groups could acquire Libyan MANPADS, U.S. officials in November launched a \$40 million effort to recover the missiles.

"In the wrong hands, shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missiles pose a major threat to passenger air travel, the commercial aviation industry and possibly military aircraft around the world," Andrew J. Shapiro, an assistant secretary of state who oversees the effort said in a speech earlier this year. "Not only could a successful attack against an aircraft cause a devastating loss of life, but it could also cause significant economic damage."

Meeting with Libya's president on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly on Monday, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton gave a strong endorsement of Libya's democratic transition. She did not mention the Benghazi attack during brief opening remarks heard by reporters.

Libyan President Mohamed Magariaf thanked Clinton for U.S. support and said Libya bears "a grave responsibility for this tragedy." He pledged to "expedite the investigation in the incident and to bring to justice the perpetrators."

Magariaf noted that thousands of Libyans had marched in the streets to protest the attack. Those demonstrations "embodied the conscience of the Libyan people," he said.

"What happened on [the] 11th of September toward these U.S. citizens does not express in any way the conscience of the Libyan people, their aspirations, their hopes or their sentiments toward the American people," he said.

Earlier Monday, Clinton addressed the wave of often violent anti-American protests related to an American-made video that mocks Islam.

"Dignity does not come from avenging insults, especially with violence that can never be justified," she said in remarks to her husband's Clinton Global Initiative development forum. "It comes from taking responsibility and advancing our common humanity."

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Libyan Leader Vows His Country Will Not Be A Burden

September 25, 2012

AFP

New Libyan leader Mohamed al-Megaryef on Monday vowed his country would not be a burden to the international community as he held his first face-to-face talks with US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

After voicing his condolences again for a militant attack on the US mission in the eastern city of Benghazi in which four Americans were killed, Megaryef said in English: "We will not be a burden."

The two were meeting in New York on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly, in the wake of more than a week of violent protests triggered by an anti-Islam film which saw tens of thousands of demonstrators take to the streets.

US ambassador to Libya Chris Stevens was killed in the September 11 assault on the Benghazi mission, along with three other diplomatic staffers, when the compound came under sustained heavy arms fire for several hours.

"I also seize this opportunity to reaffirm that what happened on 11th of September towards these US citizens does not express in any way the conscience of the Libyan people, their aspirations, their hopes or their sentiments towards the American people," he added, in a softly-spoken speech, mostly through a translator.

He said the attack in Benghazi "was a very painful, huge tragedy, not only for the American people and the families of the victims, but also for the Libyan people."

"The Libyan people lost a friend, lost someone who was very supportive of them, someone who was very supportive of our revolution and someone who was always there for them."

Clinton told the Libyan leader that she wanted to thank him for his government's efforts "to help find and bring to justice all those responsible for the attack.

"I'd also like to thank the Libyan people for the outpouring of support they have shown to not only Ambassador Stevens, but on behalf of the United States," she said at the start of their talks in an upscale New York hotel.

"Courage has been the defining characteristic of the Libyan people over these last two years," Clinton added.

"Courage to rise up and overthrow a dictator, courage to choose the hard path of democracy, courage to stand against violence and division in the country and the world. Mr President, that kind of courage deserves our support."

After the talks, a senior State Department official said the two sides had reviewed the efforts made to rein in the militias, to deal with shoulder-launched missiles and other excess weapons left over from the era of toppled tyrant Moamer Kadhafi.

Clinton "offered to intensify our support and help for the Libyan government in all of those areas," the official.

Megaryef, who is the head of the national assembly, said there were two main threats to Libyan security -- the threat from extremists, and also from remnants of the Kadhafi era.

"Security is their government's absolute highest priority," the US official said, adding they also talked about economic challenges facing Libya as it seeks to diversify away from being dependant on petrochemicals.

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Hamas Head Mashaal Says He Will Resign

September 25, 2012

Associated Press

By Ibrahim Barzak

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip - The supreme leader of the Palestinian Islamic militant group Hamas has decided to step down, clearing the way for the movement to choose a new head for the first time in more than 15 years, two senior officials said Monday.

Khaled Mashaal told a recent meeting in Cairo of Hamas' leadership that he would not run in upcoming elections for the top position, said Izzat Risheq, a confidant of Mashaal who attended the gathering. Moussa Abu Marzouk, Mashaal's deputy, also confirmed the decision.

Mashaal will remain in his post until a new leader is chosen, most likely by the end of the year.

Hamas officials said the leadership change would not affect its confrontational approach to Israel. The group's founding charter calls for the destruction of the Jewish state, and its leaders have staunchly rejected Palestinian peace efforts with Israel.

It may however impact the balance between exiles like Mashaal, who tended to favor reconciliation with other Palestinian groups, and influential members from the group's Gaza Strip stronghold who are more reluctant to give up their grip on power.

Mashaal's announcement comes at a turbulent time for Hamas. Officials said Mashaal was motivated by a number of factors, including the Arab Spring protests jolting the region and the simmering struggle between Gaza and the exiles.

Mashaal has led Hamas since 1996, helping to build the movement into a potent force. Under his leadership, Hamas carried out numerous suicide bombings and other attacks that killed hundreds of Israelis during a Palestinian uprising a decade ago. He also survived an Israeli assassination attack in 1997. The group has been branded a terrorist organization by Israel, the U.S. and the EU.

Forging an alliance with Iran and Syria, where the group has maintained its headquarters, it also has become an important regional political player. The group swept Palestinian legislative elections in 2006.

After a short-lived attempt at sharing power with President Mahmoud Abbas' Fatah movement, Hamas overran the Gaza Strip in 2007. Hamas continues to rule Gaza, while Abbas governs in the West Bank. The two factions have been unable to reconcile.

Risheq said Mashaal told the recent leadership meeting that given the changes sweeping the region, it is time for him to step down and make way for "new blood."

But other Hamas officials say there have been differences between Mashaal and the influential Gaza leadership over key policy issues, particularly in the area of Palestinian reconciliation. Gaza leaders believe Mashaal was too willing to make concessions in attempts to reconcile with Abbas.

Mashaal also may have some personal motives. He is expected to take on a position with Hamas' parent, the pan-Arab Muslim Brotherhood, whose offshoots have grown in power thanks to the toppling of autocrats in the Arab Spring. Egypt's new president, Mohammed Morsi, hails from the group.

He may potentially seek a leadership role in the Palestine Liberation Organization. Hamas has long sought a place in the PLO, which is dominated by Fatah.

The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were discussing the internal workings of the group.

Although a successor has not been named, the two leading candidates are Abu Marzouk, who led Hamas in the 1990s until he was imprisoned in the U.S. for two years, and Gaza Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh.

Both men are from Gaza, a reflection of the rising influence of Hamas' Gaza wing.
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Rebels Make Huge Gains In Syria's North: AFP

September 25, 2012

AFP

Syria's rebels have captured hundreds of kilometres (miles) of territory in the country's north in the past six months, an AFP correspondent who visited the area in March reported on Monday.

The journalist, who was in the northwestern province of Idlib in March, verified that the rebel Free Syrian Army had gained significant ground in the period since.

It is now possible to travel hundreds of kilometres in areas controlled by the FSA, only making infrequent detours to avoid nearby garrisons still in the hands of the regular army.

The rebels refer to these as "liberated" areas.

According to the reporter, the rebels have captured many villages in Idlib and the northern province of Aleppo, and forced troops loyal to Damascus to retreat on many fronts.

Most crossroads are controlled by small contingents of rebels, sleeping in a tent, calmly observing the traffic and intercepting cars with unknown passengers.

Al-Atarib, a small town west of Aleppo whose buildings bear the scars of fierce battles, was taken by the FSA three months ago. In the town centre, several charred carcasses of tanks remain.

Rebel leaders said their forces have encircled an important military base en route to Aleppo, which according to them is the last obstacle to Syria's second city, where battles have raged for the past two months.

They claim to control all of the axes around the northern metropolis, and say that their only fear is aerial attacks.

On Sunday, a rebel commander told AFP that much of Syria's territory is increasingly outside the control of the regular military, whose aerial superiority is keeping the Damascus regime afloat.

In some large towns, like Harim, the army does not budge from the centre, because the rebels have laid mines on the surrounding roads.

Last week, the insurgents took control of a fourth border crossing with Turkey, Tal al-Abyad, in northern Syria. Their goal is to connect the regions they control to create what could become a "liberated zone" backed by Ankara.

Northwest and northeast Syria is predominantly Kurdish territory, where Kurdish militias took control after the regular army withdrew, with the two parties avoiding hostilities.

The FSA too has established a modus vivendi with the Kurdish forces, who display their neutrality by keeping out of the fight, with rare exceptions joining the fight against the government army.

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Front Line Syria Rebels Hostile To Command Move

September 25, 2012

AFP

Rebels in the war-ravaged northern city of Aleppo greeted the announcement that their central command has moved from Turkey to inside Syria with indifference bordering on hostility.

"The arrival of one single new fighter would be more useful than the Free Syrian Army chiefs," said Abdullah, spokesman for the Al-Tawhid Brigade, the most important rebel unit in Aleppo, of Saturday's announcement.

"Combatants on the ground are worth more than guys who've been sitting behind a table for a year and a half outside Syria," he said.

While the FSA leadership has presented its transfer to inside Syria as "good news," it barely registered with front line fighters in Aleppo who have developed their own tactics.

Abu Somer, head of the Ahfad al-Rasul Brigade (Grandchildren of the Prophet) had learned three days previously that the FSA's command, holed up thus far in neighbouring Turkey, was moving across the border.

But he and his men, positioned on three fronts in the Salaheddin and Saif al-Dawla districts of the city, continued operations as if nothing had changed.

"At this very moment I have men on the front," he told AFP, stressing that "strategy is decided by those on the ground."

The rebels in the city, beset by violent clashes and bombardments since July 20, already have their own local command centre and meet up regularly.

"We don't follow any religious or political ideology. Not the Muslim Brotherhood, Al-Qaeda, or any other foreign movement. We are the FSA on the ground," he said.

Abu Somer takes his orders at meetings with other brigades in the city, in consultation with the recently set up Aleppo military revolutionary council.

The commanders on the ground share one goal: "That (President) Bashar al-Assad falls as soon as possible."

For this to happen, Abu Somer calls for all insurgent commanders still in refugee camps abroad, especially in Turkey, "to get onto the ground."

Abu Riad, an army officer who defected and now heads a brigade in Aleppo's old town, first learned of the central command move when he saw the FSA chief Colonel Riyadh al-Asaad's YouTube video announcement broadcast on television.

The armed opposition leader, under pressure from the international community to keep a leash on extremist splinter groups operating under the auspices of the FSA, declared in the video: "We announce good news to our free, brave Syrian people. The FSA command has moved into liberated areas of Syria."

He did not specify what those areas were.

Abu Riad deplored the absence of a "true military structure" for the rebels at the national level, but also said the leadership from abroad did not have the same "expertise" that the insurgents, even civilians who had taken up arms, had gained through fighting.

Various rebel commanders have privately accused the top FSA leadership of monopolising power.

They have also questioned the distribution of funds within the FSA, and complain that because of a lack of funds to buy ammunition the rebels have been unable to make advances in Aleppo for several days now.

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Tunisia Arrests Senior Salafist Over US Embassy Attack

September 25, 2012

AFP

A senior member of Tunisian hardline Salafist group Ansar al-Sharia has been arrested in connection with the attack on the US embassy in Tunis earlier this month, the interior ministry said on Monday.

"Hassen Brik, who is the subject of a police inquiry, was arrested on Sunday in the connection with the investigation," ministry spokesman Khaled Tarrouche told AFP.

Supporters of the extremist group's leader Seif Allah Ibn Hussein, who is also wanted by the police, said on their Facebook page that the preacher "Hassen Brik was arrested in the El-Khadra district of Tunis on the pretext of checking his identity."

His arrest adds to the 96 protesters held following the attack on the American embassy in Tunis on September 14, which left four people dead and dozens wounded.

Since then, the police have been searching for Salafist leaders, including Ibn Hussein who is also known as Abu lyadh and who has managed to escape arrest several times since the deadly violence in which he has been implicated.

The ruling Islamist party Ennahda has been strongly criticised for failing to clamp down on Tunisia's Muslim extremists, who have carried out numerous acts of violence since last year's revolution that ousted former strongman Zine El Abidine Ben Ali.

The party's veteran leader Rached Ghannouchi vowed, in an interview with AFP on Friday, that Ibn Hussein would be hunted down and arrested.

(top)

SCA

Top Afghan Security Official Wins Case Challenging Corruption Accusation

September 25, 2012

New York Times

By Alissa J. Rubin

KABUL, Afghanistan - A judicial panel here ruled in favor of Afghanistan's national security chief on Monday in an unusual case of a senior government official turning to the courts and the public to prove that allegations of corruption against him were untrue.

The three-judge panel found that a former deputy attorney general, Fazel Ahmed Faqiryar, had falsely accused Rangin Dadfar Spanta, the national security adviser, of corruption and had falsely alleged that he had been forced into early retirement. Mr. Faqiryar was ordered to pay a modest fine, about \$300.

The small fine was in keeping with Mr. Spanta's stated intent, which was to clear his name rather than to get revenge, said his lawyer, Ahmad Farid Arabzai.

"Our goal is not to avenge," Mr. Arabzai said. "What we want is to prove that we are not corrupt, we are not involved in embezzlement."

Mr. Spanta has been in a two-year dispute with Mr. Faqiryar, who named him in Parliament hearings and interviews with both Afghan and international news organizations, including The New York Times.

The hearing was heavily covered by news outlets, many of which had previously broadcast news about the corruption allegations. In the course of the hearing, Mr. Faqiryar, who represented himself in court, repeated some of the allegations and said there were documents to prove them in the attorney general's office where he used to work, but several of his arguments seemed inconclusive. Although he was holding a sheaf of papers throughout the proceedings, he did not appear to have given any of them to the court.

Mr. Faqiryar also said he was glad he no longer worked for the government. At one point during his presentation, he indicated that he believed the case was being brought for political reasons and at another time for personal reasons, but above all he argued that an example was being made of him.

"If this is punishable at my 74 years of age and with my record of performance as a lawyer and with all of the documents I have mentioned, then I request that you punish me so that it can be a lesson for everyone," Mr. Faqiryar said. "But if this is a case where the law is only enforced when it comes to one person, then this is not justice."

He said he would appeal the verdict.

The case stems from a period in 2009-2010, when the international community was seized by the idea that the aggressive prosecution of high-profile corruption cases in Afghanistan, backed by international financing and mentoring, would help to restore faith in the Afghan government and begin to inculcate the rule of law. The attorney general's office began investigations of scores of public officials on suspicion of corruption, kickbacks and bribery.

Corruption is rife in Afghanistan, which ranks third from last in Transparency International's list of countries. At the time, there was finger pointing and complaints of corruption against scores of public officials.

In the summer of 2010, shortly before the incident involving Mr. Faqiryar and Mr. Spanta, the prosecution of a close aide to President Hamid Karzai was halted after the president intervened, saying that Western-backed investigators had violated the aide's civil rights. Around the same time, the two main fraud investigative units - the major crimes task force and the sensitive crimes unit - while continuing to work, saw none of their cases brought to trial.

The only truly high-profile case that appears to have moved forward in the past two years is one involving the chief executives of Kabul Bank. In that case, Mr. Karzai has appointed a special tribunal to bring charges.

With no high profile cases going to prosecution, many officials whose names were reported in the news media as accused of corruption never saw the allegations proved or dismissed, including Mr. Spanta.

The incident began when Mr. Faqiryar was sent by the attorney general's office to testify before Parliament about corruption and read out a long list of officials on whom the office was said to have files.

When Mr. Spanta's name came up, it surprised many people, in part because he had a reputation for honesty and not least because the national security office generally handled few contracts.

Mr. Spanta, an economist by training whose family lives in Germany, is a rare member of Mr. Karzai's inner circle who does not even own a house in Kabul, but stays in the national security guesthouse, occasionally returning to Germany to visit his family.

Because prosecutions were never brought, it was unclear whether there was a file at all and, if there was, what was in it.

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Taliban Release Video On Afghan Base Attackers

September 25, 2012

Associated Press

By Heidi Vogt And Rahim Faiez

KABUL, Afghanistan - The Taliban published a video Monday they say shows insurgents preparing for the brazen attack on a major NATO base earlier this month, just as NATO forces released data showing that insurgent attacks decreased in August.

The twin releases are a reminder of the escalating battle for public opinion between the insurgency and the international military as U.S. and allied troops draw down. The Taliban continue to contend that they are fighting at full force while the international alliance says that they have been weakened.

In the Sept. 14 attack on Camp Bastion in Helmand province, 15 insurgents dressed in U.S. Army uniforms breached the base's perimeter fence then used automatic rifles and rocket-propelled grenade launchers to fire on planes and people around the base's airstrip. They managed to kill two Marines and

destroy six fighter jets costing tens of millions each before they were stopped. All but one of the assailants were killed in the fighting.

The Taliban video shows men wearing U.S. Army uniforms as they practice cutting through a chain-link fence and charging through the opening. One man indicates targets with a pointer and a whiteboard showing drawings of planes and fortifications. He speaks Pashtun, a major language in southern Afghanistan and parts of Pakistan. Words on the whiteboard are written in Urdu, a language more common in Pakistan.

A Taliban spokesman emailed the link to the video to the media but it was not possible to verify the authenticity of the footage. Nothing in the video indicates when or where it was filmed.

The NATO statistics showed that insurgent attacks decreased 9 percent in August, compared with the same month last year - continuing a falloff that started in July after a spike in attacks in May and June.

NATO said the shortened poppy harvest in the spring meant that the usual summer fighting season started earlier. Regionally, attacks decreased in the east and south, but increased in the west and north, according to the data.

Overall, NATO's figures show insurgent attacks are down 5 percent for the year so far, compared with the same period of 2011.

Australian Army Brig. Gen. Roger Noble, deputy to the deputy chief of staff for operations of the U.S.-led military coalition in Afghanistan, told reporters in Kabul earlier this month that fighting in the south - the Taliban strongholds of Kandahar and Helmand provinces - has moved away from the bigger towns and cities.

"If you think back to 2010, people were talking about central Helmand being the center of fighting, but it's been pushed out and away from most of the major population centers," he said. "But there is still plenty of fighting and it is dangerous and having a direct effect in casualties on the coalition and also, increasingly, on the Afghan security forces."

Nearly two years after President Barack Obama announced that he was sending another 33,000 troops to take on the Taliban, those reinforcements have just completed their return to the United States. That leaves about 68,000 American troops, along with their NATO allies and Afghan partners, to carry out an ambitious plan to put the Afghans fully in the combat lead as early as next year.

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No Reprimand For Bounty On Filmmaker

September 25, 2012

[USA Today](#)

By Hani Yousuf

Karachi, Pakistan - A Cabinet minister who put a \$100,000 bounty on the head of a U.S. filmmaker has not been reprimanded, and some Pakistanis say the call for assassination is fueling a controversy they want to go away.

Pakistan's Foreign Office said Monday that the call for the murder of Nakoula Basseley Nakoula for his film mocking Islam's prophet Mohammed reflected the personal view of Railways Minister Ghulam Ahmad Bilour and had nothing to do with the Pakistani government.

"We are a secular party," said Haji Adeel, spokesman for the Awami National Party, to which Bilour belongs and is a coalition partner of President Asif Ali Zardari's government.

Six days of violent protests killed 21 people last week after the release of a 14-minute trailer for The Innocence of Muslims. Protesters torched theaters and shops in major cities, goaded by anti-American clerics.

The filmmaker, a Coptic Christian, is in hiding amid death threats.

"We should have ignored the video," said Abdul Majeed, who works at a small food shop in Karachi. "We're making an issue out of this. We gave it too much importance and caused a lot of destruction in our own country."

Some of the most violent protests have been in Pakistan, which has a number of militant groups in the northwest and where clerics are pushing for greater use of Islamic law.

Bilour offered his bounty to anyone who would rid the world of the "blasphemer," as he referred to the filmmaker, and appealed to the Taliban and al-Qaeda for help.

Adeel, the party spokesman, said of Bilour's offer: "We consider al-Qaeda and Taliban our enemy."

Several provinces in Pakistan enforce blasphemy laws that carry the death sentence for people who insult Mohammed. Shahbaz Bhatti, the federal minister for minorities, was assassinated in March 2011 for his opposition to the blasphemy laws.

The U.S. State Department tried to diffuse the outrage by broadcasting a \$70,000 advertisement on Pakistani television featuring President Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton condemning the video and the man who made it.

The ad has had little effect, Pakistan analysts say, because extremists detest the U.S. for allowing such free speech. "TV is a good way to reach the masses, but the effect in such a situation is marginal because they (the protesters) have already made up the minds," said Omar Quraishi, an editor at The Express Tribune, an English-language news daily.

Pakistani commentators criticized the State Department's 45-second ad as ineffective because it was broadcast in English with Urdu subtitles in a country where 56% of the population is illiterate, according to the World Bank. And many people only speak their regional languages, not Urdu, the country's official language, much less the English of the elites.

Abdul Maalik, 25, who works as an office clerk in Karachi, demonstrated Friday. He said he watched the State Department's video but didn't understand it. "The Urdu subtitles were hard for me to read because they sped by too fast," he said, adding that he only has five years of primary school education and does not know English.

He says he hasn't seen the video, but he believed he needed to protest. "The man who made the video should be on trial in court," he said. "Nobody has the right to insult someone's religion. Because of that one filmmaker, so many lives were lost."

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WHA/EUR

In Belarus Election, President's Supporters Win Every Seat In Parliament

September 25, 2012

New York Times

By Andrew E. Kramer

MINSK, Belarus - Supporters of President Aleksandr G. Lukashenko won every seat in Parliament in an election over the weekend that, as many in post-Soviet authoritarian states, was widely seen as rigged, if perhaps a little less so than before.

The chairman of the Central Election Commission said the turnout was 74 percent, despite calls for a boycott by two opposition parties. Other opposition figures were allowed to run in the election with fewer bureaucratic hindrances, which was viewed as an improvement over past parliamentary elections, but none of them won a seat.

"This election was not competitive," said Matteo Mecacci, an Italian lawmaker and the head of an international observer mission in Belarus, in a statement released by the mission. "A free election depends on people being free to speak, organize and run for office, and we didn't see that."

The group's report noted the easing of rules for registering candidates, something Belarussian officials are believed to have enacted last year in the hope that the European Union would ease a visa ban on Mr. Lukashenko and 100 or so other senior officials. Foreign ministers of the union's members will meet next month to weigh whether the changes merit a loosening of the visa ban and other sanctions.

Belarus's political system closely resembles those in other former Soviet states with authoritarian governments that stage rigged elections. In February, for example, the president of Turkmenistan won election with 97 percent support against seven candidates, all of them members of his own political party.

In Belarus, the last three opposition figures lost their seats in Parliament in 2004.

Alaksiej Janukievic, chairman of the Belarussian Popular Front, one of the two parties that boycotted the latest election, said that if Mr. Lukashenko wanted to win an easing of the European sanctions, the logical path would be to allow one or two opposition figures into the 110-seat Parliament. But letting even one critic in "would challenge the whole ideological line of the government," Mr. Janukievic said. "There is a president, and the people who support him, and there is a fifth column. If even one opposition member entered Parliament, it would show the opposition is not a public enemy, as the public supported at least one of them."

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Spain Recoils As Its Hungry Seek Sustenance In Trash Bins

September 25, 2012

New York Times

By Suzanne Daley

MADRID - On a recent evening, a hip-looking young woman was sorting through a stack of crates outside a fruit and vegetable store here in the working-class neighborhood of Vallecas as it shut down for the night.

At first glance, she looked like she might be a store employee. But no. The young woman was looking through the day's trash for her next meal. Already, she had found a dozen aging potatoes she deemed edible and had loaded them onto the luggage cart parked nearby.

"When you don't have enough money," she said, declining to give her name, "this is what there is."

The woman, 33, said that she had once worked at the post office but that her unemployment benefits had run out and she was living now on 400 euros a month, about \$520. She was squatting with some friends in a building that still had water and electricity, while collecting "a little of everything" from the garbage after stores closed and the streets were dark and quiet.

Such survival tactics are becoming increasingly commonplace here, with an unemployment rate over 50 percent among young people and more and more households having adults without jobs. So pervasive is the problem of scavenging that one Spanish city has resorted to installing locks on supermarket trash bins as a public health precaution.

A report by a Catholic charity, Caritas, this year said that it had fed nearly one million hungry Spaniards in 2010, more than twice as many as in 2007. That number rose again in 2011 by 65,000.

As Spain tries desperately to meet its budget targets, it has been forced to embark on the same path as Greece, introducing one austerity measure after another, cutting jobs, salaries, pensions and benefits, even as the economy continues to shrink.

Most recently, the government raised the value-added tax three percentage points, to 21 percent, on most goods, and two percentage points on many food items, making life just that much harder for those on the edge. Little relief is in sight as the country's regional governments, facing their own budget crisis, are chipping away at a range of previously free services, including school lunches for low-income families.

For a growing number, the food in garbage bins helps make ends meet.

At the huge wholesale fruit and vegetable market on the outskirts of this city recently, workers bustled, loading crates onto trucks. But in virtually every bay, there were men and women furtively collecting items that had rolled into the gutter.

"It's against the dignity of these people to have to look for food in this manner," said Eduardo Berloso, an official in Girona, the city that padlocked its supermarket trash bins.

Mr. Berloso proposed the measure last month after hearing from social workers and seeing for himself one evening "the humiliating gesture of a mother with children looking around before digging into the bins."

The Caritas report also found that 22 percent of Spanish households were living in poverty and that about 600,000 had no income whatsoever. All these numbers are expected to continue to get worse in the coming months.

About a third of those seeking help, the Caritas report said, had never used a food pantry or a soup kitchen before the economic crisis hit. For many of them, the need to ask for help is deeply embarrassing. In some cases, families go to food pantries in neighboring towns so their friends and acquaintances will not see them.

In Madrid recently, as a supermarket prepared to close for the day in the Entrevias district of Vallecas, a small crowd gathered, ready to pounce on the garbage bins that would shortly be brought out to the curb. Most reacted angrily to the presence of journalists. In the end, few managed to get anything as the trucks whisked the garbage away within minutes.

But in the morning at the bus stop in the wholesale market, men and women of all ages waited, loaded down with the morning's collection. Some insisted that they had bought the groceries, though food is not generally for sale to individuals there.

Others admitted to foraging through the trash. Victor Victorio, 67, an immigrant from Peru, said he came here regularly to find fruits and vegetables tossed in the garbage. Mr. Victorio, who lost his job in construction in 2008, said he lived with his daughter and contributed whatever he found - on this day, peppers, tomatoes and carrots - to the household. "This is my pension," he said.

For the wholesalers who have businesses here, the sight of people going through the scraps is hard.

"It is not nice to see what is happening to these people," said Manu Gallego, the manager of Canniad Fruit. "It shouldn't be like this."

In Girona, Mr. Berloso said his aim in locking down the bins was to keep people healthy and push them to get food at licensed pantries and soup kitchens. As the locks are installed on the bins, the town is posting civilian agents nearby with vouchers instructing people to register for social services and food aid.

He said 80 to 100 people had been regularly sorting through the bins before he took action, with a strong likelihood that many more were relying on thrown-away food to get by.

But Mr. Berloso's locks created something of an uproar across Spain, where the economic crisis is fueling more and more protests highlighting hunger. A group of mayors and unionists in southern Spain, where unemployment rates are far above the average, recently staged Robin Hood raids on two supermarkets, loading carts with basic foods and pressing them to donate more food to the needy.

More than a dozen are facing prosecution for theft over the stunt. But they are unrepentant and appear to have huge local support. "Taking some food and giving it to families who are having a really hard time, if this is stealing, I am guilty," one of the men, Francisco Molero of the farmworkers' SAT union, told the local news media afterward.

Some politicians say Girona's locks are really all about protecting Girona's image. Dominated by medieval buildings and the picturesque cobblestone streets of a beautifully preserved former Jewish quarter, the city of about 100,000 derives most of its income from tourism.

"The social workers or civil agents could refer people to the food distribution center without having to lock bins," said Pia Bosch, a Socialist councilor in Girona. "It's like killing a fly with a cannonball."

The unemployment rate is still relatively low in Girona - 14 percent over all, compared with 25 percent for the country as a whole. But more and more families have no income. Of the 7,700 unemployed in Girona, Mr. Berloso said, 40 percent have now run out of benefits.

Many, he said, were "people who never expected find themselves in this position."

Ramon Barnera, who runs the Caritas programs in Girona, said the organization realized early on that shame was a factor preventing people from coming forward to ask for food. So three years ago, it helped create food distribution sites that looked more like supermarkets, and removed the charity's name from the outside of the building.

"We looked for a system that would give dignity," Mr. Barnera said. "This is not easy for people."

On a recent morning, Juan Javier, 29, who had come to collect milk, pasta, vegetables and eggs from one of the distribution centers, was one of the few clients who would discuss his circumstances. A former printer, he has been out of work for two years. "I would like to have a job," he said, "and not be here."

In a nearby soup kitchen, Toni Lopez, 36, waited quietly for a free lunch with his girlfriend, Monica Vargas, 46, a beautician. The couple recently became homeless when they fell two months behind on their rent.

"All our lives we have been working people," Mr. Lopez said. "We are only here because we are decent people. The landlord was knocking on the door demanding the rent, so we said, 'Here, here are the keys.' "

Mr. Lopez, who gets occasional work these days in restaurant kitchens, said he had a sister but had not gone to her for help. "I can't bear to tell her," he said. "I have always pulled through. I've always managed to get by. This is new."

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FOREIGN POLICY

New SARS-like Virus Detected In Middle East

September 25, 2012

Associated Press

By Maria Cheng

LONDON - Global health officials are closely monitoring a new respiratory virus related to SARS that is believed to have killed at least one person in Saudi Arabia and left a Qatari citizen in critical condition in London.

The germ is a coronavirus, from a family of viruses that cause the common cold as well as SARS, the severe acute respiratory syndrome that killed some 800 people, mostly in Asia, in a 2003 epidemic.

In the latest case, British officials alerted the World Health Organization on Saturday of the new virus in a man who transferred from Qatar to be treated in London. He had recently traveled to Saudi Arabia and is now being treated in an intensive care unit after suffering kidney failure.

WHO said virus samples from the patient are almost identical to those of a 60-year-old Saudi national who died earlier this year. The agency isn't currently recommending travel restrictions and said the source of infection remains unknown. Still, the situation has raised concerns ahead of next month's annual Hajj pilgrimage, which brings millions of people to Saudi Arabia from around the world.

Health officials don't know yet whether the virus could spread as rapidly as SARS did or if it might kill as many people. SARS, which first jumped to humans from civet cats in China, hit more than 30 countries worldwide after spreading from Hong Kong.

"It's still (in the) very early days," said Gregory Hartl, a WHO spokesman. "At the moment, we have two sporadic cases and there are still a lot of holes to be filled in."

He added it was unclear how the virus spreads. Coronaviruses are typically spread in the air but Hartl said scientists were considering the possibility that the patients were infected directly by animals. He said there was no evidence yet of any human-to-human transmission.

"All possible avenues of infection are being explored right now," he said.

No other countries have so far reported any similar cases to WHO, he said, and so far there is no connection between the cases except for a history of travel in Saudi Arabia.

Hartl said the first patient may have had an underlying condition but it probably didn't make him more susceptible to catching the virus.

Other experts said it was unclear how dangerous the virus is.

"We don't know if this is going to turn into another SARS or if it will disappear into nothing," said Michael Osterholm, a flu expert at the University of Minnesota. He said it was crucial to determine the ratio of severe to mild cases.

Osterholm said it was worrying that at least one person with the disease had died. "You don't die from the common cold," he said. "This gives us reason to think it might be more like SARS," which killed about 10 percent of the people it infected.

Britain's Health Protection Agency and WHO said in statements that the 49-year-old Qatari national became ill on Sept. 3, having previously traveled to Saudi Arabia. He was transferred from Qatar to Britain on Sept. 11 and is being treated in an intensive care unit at a London hospital for problems including kidney failure. Respiratory viruses aren't usually known to cause serious kidney problems.

In Qatar, Mohammed bin Hamid Al Thani of the Public Health Department said the patient was in Saudi Arabia for Ramadan during the summer and fell ill after returning to Qatar. Doctors could not immediately identify the virus and decided he should be treated in London.

A public health official, Abdullakef al-Khal, said there is no indication that the patient's family or others were infected.

"There is no special alert for now," he said. "We are being vigilant."

David Heymann, chairman of the Health Protection Agency, said the new virus didn't appear that similar to SARS.

"It isn't as lethal as SARS and we don't know too much about its transmissibility yet," he said. "If people are getting infected, they aren't getting serious disease."

Heymann said none of the health workers involved in treating the Qatari patient had fallen ill.

Saudi officials said they were concerned that the upcoming Hajj pilgrimage next month could provide more opportunities for the virus to spread. They advised pilgrims to keep their hands clean and wear masks in crowded places.

The Hajj has previously sparked outbreaks of diseases including the flu, meningitis and polio. ([top](#))

IMF Chief Lagarde Warns Of Renewed Global Downturn, Urges US, Europe To Act

September 25, 2012

Washington Post

By Howard Schneider

The United States and Europe need to speed key political decisions to help keep the weakening global economy from sinking under high debt and unemployment, International Monetary Fund Managing Director Christine Lagarde said on Monday.

The ongoing crisis in Europe, U.S. fiscal problems and a developing slowdown in Asia are threatening even deeper problems, Lagarde said, and have triggered new worries about waning momentum for action still needed to address some of the issues behind the 2008 financial crisis.

"We need a sustained rebound, not a bounce," in global growth, Lagarde said in an address at the Peterson Institute for International Economics in advance of IMF meetings in Japan next month.

Recent actions by major central banks have helped buoy growth and provided "an opportunity to make a decisive turn in the crisis," she said. "But we should not get ahead of ourselves. The global economy is still fraught with uncertainty, still far from where it needs to be."

Data released Monday added to the sense of slowdown. A closely watched index of German business optimism slid for the fifth straight month - a poor showing among entrepreneurs and investors in the euro region's largest economy.

Lagarde's remarks focused on the political risks for the economic recovery - the seemingly stalled debate over fiscal policy in the United States and the protracted efforts by European policymakers to prove they can keep the euro currency union intact. Weak growth in the developed world is adding to the slump in important developing countries, and the problems in Europe are widely regarded as the major threat to the world economy. In each case, Lagarde said, political bickering and delays in decision making have made matters worse.

Over the summer, the IMF cut its world growth forecast to 3.5 percent for 2012, and it is likely to trim it again during the Tokyo meetings. Lagarde said the downward trend has been evident for a year.

The problems around the world threaten to reinforce each other: The crisis in Europe, for example, means fewer exports for China; slowing growth in that country, the world's second-largest economy, means fewer import orders from the United States. The approaching U.S. "fiscal cliff," and its threat of dramatic government spending cuts, could have global ripple effects, too.

Central-bank policy has been a main prop for developed countries, with the U.S. Federal Reserve and the Bank of Japan announcing rounds of "quantitative easing" to pump money into those economies and the European Central Bank approving plans to ensure that governments can finance their operations.

But that may prove only a temporary salve, Lagarde suggested, without more steps to reignite growth in Europe and address fiscal problems in the United States.

Policy changes in Europe are proceeding fitfully, with plans for broader banking oversight incomplete and financing plans for Greece, Spain and some other countries still in doubt.

In the United States, the automatic budget cuts slated for next year if Congress and the Obama administration do not agree on an alternative could put the country back in recession, the IMF has warned. Though no agreement is expected before the November presidential election, "we all hope that political clarity emerges soon, and with it actions to avoid the fiscal cliff," Lagarde said.

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EDITORIAL / OPINION

In The Middle East, A Pro-American Turn

September 25, 2012

Washington Post

IN THE IMMEDIATE aftermath of the attacks on U.S. diplomatic missions in Libya and Egypt, plenty of commentators lamented what they saw as intractable anti-Americanism in the Middle East - even in Libya, where the United States had helped to overthrow a hated dictator. As it turns out, the reactions were hasty. In the days since the riots, there has been a broad backlash against the violence in both countries - culminating Friday in Benghazi, where tens of thousands of people marched on the base of an Islamist militia suspected of involvement in the Sept. 11 attack on the U.S. Consulate.

People carrying pro-American signs pushed their way into the encampment of Ansar al-Sharia, which in spite of its denials is suspected of complicity in the death of Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens and three other Americans. The militants were forced out of the base, and the demonstrators burned part of it before turning it over to the Libyan army. On Sunday, the interim government, which had been wavering on how to react to the assault on the consulate, ordered the dismantlement of all militias not under its authority and said they must withdraw from government property within 48 hours.

In Egypt, where the government's slow reaction to protests outside the U.S. Embassy in Cairo prompted a phone call from President Obama to the newly elected Islamist President Mohamed Morsi, there has been a chorus of condemnation of the violence, with the country's most prestigious sheiks and other Islamic leaders calling it shameful and contrary to Islam; some even issued fatwas against it. The Middle

East Media Research Institute has documented numerous commentaries by newspaper columnists warning against incitement by radical groups.

Anti-Americanism is a potent force in the Arab Middle East; polls show that in several countries - though not in Libya - U.S. prestige has fallen during the Obama administration. But in a region where power is up for grabs, it is only one of many competing agendas, and much evidence suggests that its champions are in the minority. That means the appropriate U.S. response is not to write off the region, or to cancel aid programs - as some in Congress propose - but to help moderate forces defeat and marginalize the extremists.

Libya's biggest problem is that its new democratic government is too weak to take on the scores of militias around the country that do not accept its authority, including some that may be allied with al-Qaeda. Though last week's popular demonstrations gave it a political boost, the government could use greater security assistance from the United States and other NATO governments - including training and help with intelligence.

In Egypt, the Obama administration has been working on a \$1 billion debt-forgiveness deal that could help revive the Egyptian economy, but the oft-postponed pact was put on hold again after the Sept. 11 demonstration. Mr. Obama may wish to deflect election-eve Republican claims that he is showing weakness in the face of attacks on Americans. But such demagoguery ought not to derail the effort to help stabilize Egypt's economy and reinforce free-market policies.

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Netanyahu's Iran Blunders

September 25, 2012

New York Times

By Roger Cohen

LONDON - Shaul Mofaz, the leader of Israel's centrist Kadima party, posed three questions this month to Benjamin Netanyahu. Speaking in the Knesset, he said: "Prime minister, tell me, who is our biggest enemy, the U.S. or Iran? Who do you want replaced, Ahmadinejad or Obama? How low are you prepared to drag relations with our closest ally?"

Ouch.

Netanyahu has talked himself into a corner on Iran. He has set so many "red lines" on the Iranian nuclear program nobody can remember them. He has taken to fuming publicly over President Obama's refusal to do the same. Of late he has juggled metaphors: Iran is now "20 yards" from "touchdown." His cry-wolf dilemma comes right out of a children's book. It was in 1992 that he said Iran was three to five years from nuclear capacity.

(One achievement of Netanyahu's Iran obsession has been to relegate the critical question before Israel - the millions of Palestinian people on its doorstep - to somewhere between the back burner and oblivion. The best primer for Netanyahu's thinking is these words from his coached buddy Mitt Romney: "I look at the Palestinians not wanting to see peace anyway, for political purposes, committed to the destruction and elimination of Israel, and these thorny issues, and I say, 'There's just no way.'")

The mistake Netanyahu has made is to believe he can go over the head of President Obama. He has tried through Congress, where his speech last year earned 29 standing ovations. He has greeted Romney

in Israel as if he were on a state visit. He has said those "who refuse to put red lines before Iran don't have a moral right to place a red light before Israel." He has given critical interviews on U.S. TV networks in the midst of a presidential campaign. And he hath protested far too much that he has no intention - none - of swaying the outcome.

Some adjectives that come to mind are: brazen, reckless and irrational. Another is disingenuous: Obama has set a clear red line on Iran - he will not permit Iran to become a nuclear-armed state.

The president is angry. Not surprising that he has no time to meet with Netanyahu during his post-Yom Kippur visit to the United States this week for the United Nations General Assembly.

No Israeli prime minister should seek to circumvent the president, bet on his losing an election, and attack him publicly when the most strategically damaging course for a state as powerful as Israel is to alienate its unwavering ally, generous funder and military supplier - the United States.

Barbara Boxer, a senator and California Democrat, was outraged. In a recent letter to the Israeli leader, she said she was "stunned" and disappointed by his questioning of American support for Israel.

"Are you suggesting that the United States is not Israel's closest ally and does not stand by Israel?" Boxer wrote. "Are you saying that Israel, under President Obama, has not received more in annual security assistance from the United States than at any time in its history?"

When Congressional support for Israel shows cracks, that is a seismic event.

The best reading ahead of Netanyahu's U.S. visit is "Weighing Benefits and Costs of Military Action against Iran," an excellent bipartisan paper [pdf] (and lesson in sobriety) from The Iran Project signed by two former national security advisers, Zbigniew Brzezinski and Brent Scowcroft, former Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage and former Senator Chuck Hagel, retired military leaders including Gen. Anthony Zinni and Adm. William Fallon, and a host of other experts.

Among its findings: "It would take Iran a year or more to build a military grade weapon, once the decision was made to do so. At least two years or more would be required to create a nuclear warhead that is reliably deliverable by a missile." The United States does not believe that decision has been made by Iran's supreme leader.

And this: Any Israeli military strike is "unlikely to succeed in destroying or even seriously damaging" the underground Fordow enrichment facility with its stockpile of 20 percent enriched uranium. It could set back Iran's ability to make a bomb "for up to two years." Only an extended U.S. military campaign "carried out to near perfection" could delay it "by up to four years."

And this: Iran is likely to retaliate and "we believe there are at least the preconditions for a major escalation and a bloody conflict in the Levant." In addition, "We believe that a U.S. attack on Iran would significantly increase Iran's motivation to build a bomb." It might "end all cooperation" with the International Atomic Energy Agency, whose inspectors are in Iran. An attack would also "enhance the recruiting ability of radical Islamist groups, including Al Qaeda, to recruit" and give Muslims "even more reason to believe that the U.S. and Israel are at war with Islam."

In short, the facts are against Netanyahu. After Iraq, Americans, if they are to go to war in a third Muslim country, want that war to be fact-based. His headstrong behavior has been ungrateful to Obama and undermining of Israel's true strategic interests.

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China's Nationalist Furies

September 25, 2012

[Wall Street Journal](#)

The protesters smashing and burning Japanese businesses in Chinese cities this month are hard to fathom. Even the "peaceful" marchers carried alarming banners, some calling for the annihilation of Japan. For what?

The current fuss is over a few uninhabited outcrops in the East China Sea known as the Diaoyus in China and the Senkakus in Japan, which the U.S. restored to Japanese sovereignty (along with Okinawa) in 1972. Even U.S. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta was greeted this month by a small protest outside the Beijing Embassy. This was for the sin of military support for Japan, an American ally, including the announcement that the U.S. would deploy a second X-band radar to Japan for missile defense.

The last widespread outbreak of anti-Japanese violence in China was in 2005. Then as now the question was: To what extent did Beijing orchestrate the protests? The answer isn't entirely clear. Chinese state media initially fanned the flames of hatred but then tried to tamp them down. The police gave the demonstrators free rein but also directed them to go home once they vented their anger.

This dual approach typifies Beijing's attitude. The Communist Party benefits from keeping anti-Japanese feeling simmering, since it derives its historic legitimacy from (supposedly) driving out the Japanese invaders and restoring China to its proper place in the world. But anger against Japan must also be kept within bounds, lest protesters blame China's leaders for not being more assertive with Tokyo.

Japan's own nationalists make the legacy of past wars harder to handle. In 2005, the fight was mostly about Japanese school textbooks that glossed over Japan's atrocities during the Second World War. This time Tokyo Governor Shintaro Ishihara proposed that the city buy the Senkakus from their private owners. Knowing that Mr. Ishihara, an extreme nationalist, would stir up trouble, the central government stepped in to purchase the islands.

In doing so, Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda acted responsibly to minimize friction with Beijing. Yet China jumped on the move as a provocation. Perhaps some form of diplomatic protest was necessary for Beijing to preserve its claim to the islands. Yet Beijing has now taken steps that increase the risk of an armed skirmish. Several coast guard and fisheries vessels have confronted Japanese forces, and neither side seems prepared to back down.

All this suggests that Beijing is seeking a way to distract the population from bad economic news and a succession of political embarrassments. Still, it would be a mistake to underestimate the depth of Chinese nationalism or view the Communist Party's actions as purely cynical.

As scholar Guo Yingjie has written, modern China harbors two strains of nationalism. The cultural variety emphasizes the preservation of traditions and values that are seen as the essence of being Chinese. The political variety focuses on a strong state capable of defending its sovereignty, and sees traditional culture as a drag on development.

In recent years the Communist Party has tried to bring these nationalist strains together by touting a "China model" that incorporates Confucian values. But a return to nativism could hamper the adoption of foreign ideas and reforms that China needs to take the next steps toward an innovation-based economy.

So far China has not sought to overturn the international status quo as the Soviet Union did, but a rising, undemocratic power has often destabilized the world order, especially when nationalism is in the saddle. The U.S. needs to take a firm line against Chinese aggression toward its neighbors, lest Beijing's rulers think they can indulge their nationalist furies without cost.

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Dead Men Share No Secret

September 25, 2012

New York Times

By Marisa L. Porges

Cambridge, Mass. -- THOSE who naïvely believed that Osama bin Laden's death and America's forthcoming departure from Afghanistan would usher in a new era free of threats from Al Qaeda have been proved wrong.

After Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens was killed on Sept. 11 in Benghazi, Libya, Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb issued a statement praising the murder and calling for further attacks against American diplomats in the region. Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula made similar calls for violence.

Then, last week, new evidence emerged suggesting that the attack had been planned by Al Qaeda - and was linked to Sufian bin Qumu, a Libyan who had been detained at the American prison camp at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. In 2007, Mr. Qumu was transferred to Libyan custody and held in a Libyan prison; he was later freed by the Qaddafi government and rejoined terrorist groups.

The ongoing fight against Al Qaeda is not limited to Afghanistan and Pakistan; Qaeda affiliates and supporters operate actively in North Africa, Yemen, and beyond. And if Mr. Qumu was indeed involved with the mission attack, it raises serious questions about what other countries do with captured terrorists who remain a threat. It also reminds us that America's ability to effectively hold and interrogate those it captures in this fight is crucial.

At the moment, the United States has nowhere to hold and interrogate newly captured terrorists. America just handed over control of its detention facility at Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan, a significant step toward transferring security operations to Afghans. And while Guantánamo Bay remains home to nearly 170 men that the United States believes are still a threat, no captured terrorist has been transferred there since August 2008. Yet in the past four years, drone strikes and airstrikes targeting Al Qaeda affiliates in Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia have increased dramatically.

Since 2010, there have been about 2,000 such strikes in Pakistan alone, with hundreds more in Yemen and North Africa. Meanwhile, only one alleged terrorist outside of Afghanistan - a Somali named Ahmed Abdulkadir Warsame - was captured, held and interrogated. He was later flown to New York to stand trial.

It's true that drone strikes and other tactics that aim to kill, rather than capture, terrorists are an effective tool for combating serious threats. They increase America's ability to quickly attack targets in remote regions where American troops cannot easily operate. Such strikes allow the United States to respond quickly to time-sensitive intelligence about a known terrorist's location or plans. They avoid the political risks and the costs, in money and lives, of supporting a large-scale military operation on foreign soil. And they help the White House avoid controversial issues of long-term detention and interrogation, which remain a political liability at home and abroad.

But this one-sided approach - always opting to kill instead of capture - is a major weakness of America's current approach to counterterrorism. It deprives us of significant amounts of intelligence about what Al Qaeda is thinking and planning, and information that could help find other senior terrorists. After all, it was intelligence from a detainee that helped American forces track down Bin Laden.

America's heavy reliance on drones also creates more sympathy for Al Qaeda in some countries and, ultimately, may radicalize more people and encourage them to join forces with terrorists - creating more enemies for America, not fewer. One young Yemeni told me this summer that he and his friends "are like mobiles with two SIM cards," his way of saying that American drone attacks make them shift allegiances, just as they easily switch their cellphone service providers and they become sympathetic with local Al Qaeda groups.

The fact that the United States now has nowhere to hold a terrorist - and no policy to deal with him once captured - means that a dangerous suspect might very well be let go. At present, there is no standard course of action approved by the president and relevant government agencies for what to do in the days and months following capture.

This situation creates disturbing incentives for troops on the battlefield. It encourages soldiers and policy makers in Washington to opt for the "five-cent solution" - a bullet. Rather than shooting people, we should be exercising due process, and bringing transnational terrorists to justice. That's an approach that would help America maintain the moral high ground in the ongoing fight against Al Qaeda.

The United States has had numerous counterterrorism successes in the past few years, but this month's events prove that we are still fighting a serious battle against terrorists in North Africa, Yemen, Pakistan and elsewhere. It is a battle that requires multiple weapons - not just airstrikes and drone attacks - and one that requires detention facilities where transnational terrorists can be safely held after they are captured.

As the election approaches, we need to start asking both candidates how they would handle high-profile terrorists. "Kill them" should not be the only answer.

Marisa L. Porges, a former counterterrorism adviser in the Departments of Defense and Treasury, is a fellow at the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs at the Harvard Kennedy School.
([top](#))

Will Obama Free the Blind Sheik?

September 25, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By MICHAEL B. MUKASEY

Are senior Obama administration officials considering transferring to Egypt a poisonously influential Islamist cleric serving a life term in federal prison for trying to unleash a war of urban terrorism in the United States? That's the impression several officials have given over the past three months, apparently out of fear that if the cleric dies in U.S. custody, American outposts in the Middle East could be overrun by vengeful mobs.

Omar Abdel Rahman, the so-called Blind Sheikh, is one of the world's leading theologians of terrorism. Abdel Rahman, who has diabetes and is in his mid-70s, is confined at the U.S. Bureau of Prisons medical facility in Butner, N.C. He served as spiritual adviser to El Sayid Nosair (in connection with the 1990 assassination in Manhattan of Meir Kahane, a right-wing Israeli politician) and to the band of terrorists who carried out the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center that killed six and wounded numerous others (an operation undertaken in part to free Nosair from jail).

Abdel Rahman was convicted in 1995 of participating in a seditious conspiracy that included the Kahane murder, the 1993 WTC bombing, and a plot to blow up other landmarks in New York and to assassinate Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak when he visited the United Nations. I presided over the trial as a U.S. district judge; upon his conviction, I sentenced Abdel Rahman to life in prison.

In 1997, members of Abdel Rahman's organization (Gama al Islamiyah, or the Islamic Group, which is designated by the U.S. government as a terrorist organization) murdered more than 60 tourists at Luxor, Egypt, and inserted notes in the body cavities of several victims demanding the Blind Sheikh's release. Also in the mid-1990s, Abdel Rahman contrived from jail to issue the fatwa that Osama bin Laden cited as authorization to carry out the 9/11 attacks. The sheik's confinement was on bin Laden's list of grievances meant to justify that atrocity.

Blind since youth, Abdel Rahman reputedly memorized the Quran in his teens. He later lectured at the prestigious Al Azhar University (where President Obama would deliver his speech of outreach to the Muslim world in 2009). Abdel Rahman has been a totemic figure to Islamists since 1981, when his pronouncements gave a group of Egyptian army officers the spiritual justification for assassinating President Anwar Sadat. The officers were hanged, but Abdel Rahman successfully defended himself at trial by arguing that he had simply been opining on issues of Islamic law and should not face censure for that in a Muslim country.

The evidence that the U.S. government is seriously considering transferring him to Egypt is circumstantial. However, as Henry David Thoreau pointed out when dairy customers were suspicious that local farmers had diluted the milk they were selling, "some circumstantial evidence can be very convincing, as when you find a trout in the milk."

The first hint of something fishy came in June, when Hani Nour Eldin, a member of the terrorist group that carried out the Luxor slaughter and who had himself spent 11 years in Egyptian jail on terrorism charges, was granted a visa to come to the United States, where he visited the White House and urged that Abdel Rahman be transferred to Egypt. Members of Congress immediately raised questions about how such allowances were made for a member of a designated terrorist organization.

The assistant secretary of homeland security for legislative affairs, Nelson Peacock, responded in a July letter. It suggested that no warning flags had been raised during the processing of the Eldin visa, but the letter acknowledged that, as a member of a designated terrorist organization, Hani Nour Eldin would have needed a waiver from someone in authority to get a visa.

Rep. Peter King (R., N.Y.) then demanded that the Homeland Security Department's inspector general investigate how that waiver was secured and explain what role the department would play in any transfer of Abdel Rahman. Acting Inspector General Charles K. Edwards answered on Sept. 10 with a letter promising that the department would conduct the requested review "and add it to our FY 2013 workplan" (for which no deadline is announced).

Meanwhile, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton traveled to Egypt in July to meet with President Mohammed Morsi, an avowed Islamist and leading member of the Muslim Brotherhood, and invite him to the U.S. He will be in New York this week for the opening session of the U.N. General Assembly. Mrs. Clinton's visit came two weeks after Mr. Morsi's inaugural speech in Cairo's Tahrir Square, in which he promised to seek the release of the Blind Sheikh. This month, when Mr. Morsi dispersed protesters outside the U.S. Embassy in Cairo (following a telephone scolding from President Obama), he left in place those protesting the Blind Sheikh's continued confinement.

Transferring Abdel Rahman to an Egypt already under the control of the Muslim Brotherhood and presided over by Mohammed Morsi would be pouring gasoline on a bonfire.

A congressional staffer I spoke with last week recently called the Egyptian Embassy in Washington and asked to speak with the official in charge of the request to release Abdel Rahman. This call elicited not a denial but rather the disclosure that the matter was within the portfolio of the deputy chief of mission, for whom the caller was invited to leave a message.

Then there are the statements of U.S. officials on the subject, which all have sounded excruciatingly lawyered. Asked before Congress in July whether there is an intention "at any time to release the Blind Sheikh," Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano responded: "Well, let me just say this. I know of no such intention."

The State Department's spokesperson last week, after the ceremonial "let me be clear," said that there had been no approach on this topic "recently" from any "senior" official of the Egyptian government—an elucidation laden with ambiguity and certain to send chills up the spine of anyone familiar with Abdel Rahman's record and President Morsi's inclinations.

All of this plays out in the context of an Obama administration that hasn't hesitated to employ executive orders to get around Congress, led by a president who was caught on a "hot mike" assuring Russia's leaders that if he wins re-election he will have more "flexibility" to accommodate Russian demands that the U.S. curtail missile defense in Europe.

It appears that the only course open now is for Congress to demand an unequivocal statement from the State Department and the White House that the U.S. will not transfer or release Abdel Rahman under any circumstances. Absent such assurance, it may be time for Congress to make clear that such a transfer or release could be considered the kind of gross betrayal of public trust that would justify removal from high office.

Mr. Mukasey served as U.S. attorney general from 2007-09, and as a U.S. district judge from 1988 to 2006.

(top)

Iran Impasse Threatens Obama's U.N. Legacy

September 24, 2012

World Policy Review

By Richard Gowan

President Barack Obama heads to the U.N. tomorrow to address the new session of the General Assembly. His visit will be brief -- he is not even expected to stay for lunch -- and his speech is likely to be sharply worded. In what will probably be his last major international engagement before November's elections, he has a chance to scold Russia for its behavior over Syria, warn Iran over its nuclear program and reassert America's primacy on the international stage.

This won't be an entirely easy exercise for the president in terms of his domestic audience. Whatever he ends up saying, the sizable percentage of the American electorate that instinctively distrusts the U.N. will doubtless find something to dislike. At the same time, those liberals who believe that the president should be boosting international cooperation on issues such as climate change will be disappointed too, as he is not going to make grand promises about his second term that could cause him trouble with voters.

The president will nonetheless be able to point to some notable successes in his administration's interactions with the U.N. since 2009. Last week, Esther Brimmer, the senior official in the State Department dealing with international organizations, gave a speech in Washington citing examples of how U.S. multilateral leadership has "helped assemble broad coalitions to address crises and avert or stem violent conflict." They include U.S. collaboration with U.N. peacekeepers in cases such as Haiti and South Sudan.

Yet however compellingly Obama describes these accomplishments, his record at the U.N., and the future of U.S. policy toward it, will be defined by events in the Middle East in the coming months. There will be a lot of talk about Syria in New York this week, but the decisive issue is Iran.

When historians review U.S. policy at the U.N. from 2009 to 2012, they are likely to highlight three components. The first and foremost of these has been to hold together an international coalition, including China and Russia, committed to keeping Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. Indeed, the administration's single biggest success at the U.N. was probably to persuade Beijing and Moscow to sign on to a new U.N. sanctions resolution in mid-2010.

The second element of American policy has been to normalize U.S. relations with the U.N., in part to avoid letting secondary issues distract from first-order challenges like Iran. The Bush administration adopted obstructionist positions on many aspects of U.N. diplomacy, such as pro forma votes on human rights issues, something that Obama's team has dropped.

The third dimension of U.S. policy toward the U.N. has involved the crises in the Arab world since the beginning of 2011. Though the Obama administration has never seen the U.N. as a useful forum for sorting out the Israeli-Palestinian conflict -- instead trying, and failing, to find a solution on its own -- it did seek to use the U.N. to manage the conflicts arising from the Arab Spring, turning to the Security Council to respond to events in Libya, Syria and to a lesser extent Yemen. Its initial efforts resulted in a resounding diplomatic success, when the council approved U.S. proposals to first sanction and then use force in Libya.

But over the past year, China and Russia's refusal to cooperate in the council over Syria has been a headache for the administration. The Syrian case has very clearly demonstrated both the limits of U.S. leverage at the U.N. -- despite a large majority of member states supporting the U.S. position -- and the fragility of Washington's relations with Moscow. Many American officials wanted to avoid dragging out the Syrian debate at the U.N., but the lack of feasible alternatives has left them little choice.

The arguments over Syria have set the stage for a potentially greater confrontation over the pivotal problem in the administration's U.N. policy: the containment of Iran's nuclear ambitions. In spite of their differences with the U.S. and Europe over Syria, China and Russia have continued to work with the West on Iran, but there have been growing differences over sanctions. Meanwhile, Israel has made it entirely clear that it has lost any shred of faith it ever had in U.N. diplomacy to resolve the impasse over Iran's nuclear program.

While talk of an Israeli strike on Iran has ebbed recently, the possibility of military action before the U.S. elections will still loom large in private discussions at the General Assembly. If Israel does attack, it will face a massive wave of criticism at the U.N., forcing the U.S. -- possibly supported by the U.K. and France -- to defend it.

Such a scenario would undermine the Obama administration's long-standing efforts to put U.S.-U.N. relations on a more normal footing. This in itself might not be a major disaster for the president. The U.S. has recovered relatively quickly from previous setbacks at the U.N., including after the Iraq War. And a lot of powers would be glad to see Israel take a potshot at Iran anyway, however loudly they might vent their anger in public afterward.

The consequences of the U.N. failing to play a meaningful role in resolving the Iran nuclear standoff, however, would be deeper and long-lasting, for it would severely damage U.S. perceptions of the U.N. as a crisis-management mechanism. If the U.N. fails to contain Iran's nuclear program, no American president will be able to turn to the organization to manage major threats for many years to come, whoever wins in November's elections.

When Obama addresses the General Assembly, he, much more than most other leaders, will be privy to Israel's plans regarding Iran. But even if there is no military action this year, the Iranian question will continue to define America's position at the U.N. for the foreseeable future. So despite his administration's commitment to multilateral engagement, a subtext of Obama's speech -- for both him and his audience -- will be the knowledge that U.S. relations with the U.N. hang in the balance.

Richard Gowan is an associate director at New York University's Center on International Cooperation and a senior policy fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations.

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RELEASED IN FULL

**DAILY PRESS CLIPS FOR
WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 26, 2012****USUN IN THE NEWS****Qatar emir calls for armed intervention in Syria**

September 25, 2012

Foreign Policy

By Colum Lynch

Qatar's emir Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al-Thani urged Arab nations in a General Assembly speech to form a political and military coalition to intervene in Syria to stop the bloodshed, as a first step towards guaranteeing a peaceful political transition. ([link](#))

UNITED NATIONS**U.N. Leader Opens General Assembly On Somber Note**

September 26, 2012

New York Times

By Neil MacFarquhar

The leader of the United Nations formally opened its annual General Assembly on Tuesday with a speech conveying a broad sense of crisis because of pressing problems including armed conflict in the Middle East, disruptive climate change and religious intolerance. ([link](#))

Ban kicks off General Assembly with Syria warning

September 25, 2012

Foreign Policy

By Colum Lynch

U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon opened today's U.N. General Assembly debate by urging the Arab Spring's new leaders -- from Egypt to Libya -- to "make decisive breaks with the past" and appealing to the U.N. membership to prevent Syria's worsening civil war from engulfing the region in sectarian strife. ([link](#))

UN Chief Demands Global Action To End War In Syria

September 26, 2012

Associated Press

By Edith M. Lederer

UNITED NATIONS - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon demanded international action to stop the war in Syria, telling a somber gathering of world leaders Tuesday that the 18-month conflict had become "a regional calamity with global ramifications." ([link](#))

US, UN Grapple For Workable Peace Plan In Syria

September 26, 2012

Associated Press

By Bradley Klapper

NEW YORK - The United States and the U.N.'s new Syria mediator grappled for a new strategy Tuesday toward stopping 18 months of brutal government crackdowns and civil war in the Arab country as President Barack Obama again called for the end of Syrian President Bashar Assad's regime. ([link](#))

REVIEW AUTHORITY: Archie Bolster, Senior Reviewer

At U.N., Qatar Emir Calls On Arab Nations To Intervene In Syria

September 26, 2012

Washington Post

By Colum Lynch And Anne Gearan

UNITED NATIONS - The emir of Qatar called on Arab nations Tuesday to form a political and military coalition to intervene in Syria to stop the bloodshed there, posing a direct challenge to U.N. efforts to resolve the conflict through negotiations. ([link](#))

Obama surprises with powerful U.N. speech on Middle East

September 26, 2012

Foreign Policy

By Colum Lynch

Expectations for President Barack Obama's U.N. speech this morning could not have been lower. Entering the last leg of his presidential reelection campaign, pundits predicted a speech aimed directly at the American electorate: He would denounce Iran, denounce Syria, uphold American commitments to Israel's security, and head straight for the door. ([link](#))

Middle East Officials Praise Obama Speech

September 26, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By JAY SOLOMON and CHRISTOPHER RHOADS

UNITED NATIONS—Some Middle Eastern leaders praised President Barack Obama's address to the United Nations as welcome advice for a turbulent region, while Syrian opposition leaders expressed disappointment saying his demand that the country's ruler step down did not go far enough. ([link](#))

Africa Leaders Trade Jabs Over Conflict in Eastern Congo

September 26, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By CHRISTOPHER RHOADS

UNITED NATIONS—The presidents of Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo traded barbs on the international stage Tuesday over the deepening conflict on their shared border that in recent months has left hundreds dead and created hundreds of thousands of refugees. ([link](#))

Afghan President Karzai Blasts Anti-Islam Film

September 26, 2012

Washington Times

By Ashish Kumar Sen

UNITED NATIONS - Afghan President Hamid Karzai on Tuesday said the production of an anti-Islam film and publication of cartoons perceived as insulting to Muslims cannot be justified as freedom of speech or expression, but that they also must not be used as an excuse for violence. ([link](#))

Pakistani President Fires Back At Critics Over Terror Fight

September 26, 2012

Washington Times

By Ashish Kumar Sen

UNITED NATIONS - Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari on Tuesday slammed critics who say his country has not done enough in the fight against terrorists and blamed U.S. drone attacks against suspected terrorists for complicating efforts to win hearts and minds. ([link](#))

Humanitarian Crisis Looming In Yemen: UN

September 26, 2012

AFP

Yemen is on the verge of a major humanitarian crisis, the UN's World Food Programme warned Tuesday, calling for more funds to help the country where nearly half the population is going hungry. ([link](#))

WikiLeaks' Assange To Address UN On Asylum Bid

September 25, 2012

Associated Press

By David Stringer

UNITED NATIONS - WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange plans to address a meeting on the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly via a videolink from his hideout at Ecuador's London embassy, seeking to draw new attention to his efforts to avoid extradition to Sweden over sex crimes allegations. ([link](#))

TOP STORIES

Obama Tells U.N. New Democracies Need Free Speech

September 26, 2012

New York Times

By Helene Cooper

UNITED NATIONS - President Obama on Tuesday used his last major address on a global stage before the November election to deliver a strong defense of America's belief in freedom of speech, challenging fledgling Arab and North African democracies to ensure that right even in the face of violence. ([link](#))

Obama Tells UN: Attacks On US Missions And Diplomats Violated Ideals

September 26, 2012

Washington Post

By Scott Wilson And Anne Gearan

UNITED NATIONS - President Obama challenged world leaders Tuesday to condemn the violent attacks that have occurred against U.S. diplomats and missions in Libya and Egypt, suggesting that now is a key moment in the struggle for democratic freedom throughout the Middle East and North Africa. ([link](#))

Obama Seeks Arab Spring 'Reform'

September 26, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By JAY SOLOMON and CAROL E. LEE

UNITED NATIONS—President Barack Obama, his policies facing tests abroad and political pressures at home, defended his handling of the uprisings that have swept the Middle East as he took a turn on the world stage ahead of the November election. ([link](#))

Training Afghan Allies, With Guard Firmly Up

September 26, 2012

New York Times

By MATTHEW ROSENBERG

BAD PAKH, Afghanistan — When American military advisers fly into Afghan Army outposts like the one nestled on the floor of this forested valley, they keep their body armor on and their weapons loaded. ([link](#))

U.S. Unease Over Drone Strikes

September 26, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By ADAM ENTOUS, SIOBHAN GORMAN and EVAN PEREZ

About once a month, the Central Intelligence Agency sends a fax to a general at Pakistan's intelligence service outlining broad areas where the U.S. intends to conduct strikes with drone aircraft, according to U.S. officials. The Pakistanis, who in public oppose the program, don't respond. ([link](#))

AFRICA**Kenya****Kenya Bombs Somali Airport Held By Militants**

September 26, 2012

Associated Press

NAIROBI, Kenya - The Kenyan military says its jets have bombed an airport in Somalia - the last major city in the country held by extremist insurgents who are fighting African Union troops. ([link](#))

South Africa**South Africa Strikes Spread To Transport Sector**

September 26, 2012

Associated Press

By Carley Petesch

JOHANNESBURG - South Africa's labor unrest spread Tuesday from its mines to the transport sector, and the country's transport union said more than 20,000 road freight employees are on strike demanding a pay increase. ([link](#))

ASIA**Cambodia****Land Disputes In Cambodia Focus Ire On Chinese Investors**

September 26, 2012

Washington Post

By Andrew Higgins

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia - When China's President Hu Jintao visited Cambodia this year, Tep Vanny, a 32-year-old housewife fighting eviction from her family home in central Phnom Penh, set off down Mao Tse-Tung Boulevard to try to deliver a plea for help to the Chinese Embassy. ([link](#))

China**China Launches Carrier, But Experts Doubt Its Worth**

September 26, 2012

New York Times

By Jane Perlez

BEIJING - In a ceremony attended by the country's top leaders, China put its first aircraft carrier into service on Tuesday, a move intended to signal its growing military might as tensions escalate between Beijing and its neighbors over islands in nearby seas. ([link](#))

Foxconn Riot In China Seen As Likely To Recur

September 26, 2012

Washington Post

By William Wan

BEIJING - The factory riot that hit one of world's largest electronics manufacturers this week in northern China was rooted in growing economic pressure and impatience with poor work conditions among the country's vast pool of migrant workers, analysts say, adding that if grievances remain unaddressed, such incidents are likely to increase. ([link](#))

Chinese Dissident Artist Says The Authorities Still Have His Passport

September 26, 2012

New York Times

By Edward Wong

BEIJING - Ai Weiwei, the rebel artist and acid critic of the Chinese Communist Party who was detained by the government last year, said Tuesday that the authorities were still holding his passport, which means he cannot travel to the United States for long-planned artistic events there next month or start a job as a visiting professor in Germany. ([link](#))

Japan

Japan, China Move To Dampen Down Island Dispute

September 26, 2012

Associated Press

By Peter Enav

TAIPEI, Taiwan - Japan and China are taking small steps to dampen down a bitter dispute over a group of small islands in the East China Sea following an intense but seemingly controlled confrontation between Japan and Taiwan over the islands' sovereignty. ([link](#))

Near Disputed Islands, Japan Confronts Boats From Taiwan

September 26, 2012

New York Times

By Hiroko Tabuchi

TOKYO - The Japanese Coast Guard used water cannons on Tuesday to disperse fishing boats from Taiwan in waters claimed by Japan in the East China Sea, widening a territorial dispute that has already pitted Japan against China and threatened vital trade relations in the region. ([link](#))

Senkaku Dispute Reinforces Military Shifts

September 26, 2012

Washington Post

By Mure Dickie

TOKYO - Tuesday's confrontation between Japanese and Taiwanese coast guard vessels hardly ranks among the great naval battles - the only weapons deployed were water cannon, and the Taiwanese beat a dignified retreat after a few hours. ([link](#))

North / South Korea

North Korea's Leaders Promise Improvements To Educational System

September 26, 2012

New York Times

By Choe Sang-hun

SEOUL, South Korea - North Korea's leadership ended a rare second session of Parliament in a single year on Tuesday without making the announcements on economic reforms that many analysts had expected. ([link](#))

North Korea's Parliamentary Session Ends With No Announced Reforms

September 26, 2012

Washington Post

By Chico Harlan

TOKYO - A rare North Korean parliamentary session ended Tuesday without the announcement of economic policy changes that many outside experts had predicted. The silence immediately tempered expectations about the impoverished state's pace of reform. ([link](#))

NEA

Egypt

Alarm Raised Over Egypt Constitution

September 26, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By MATT BRADLEY

CAIRO—The troubled process of drafting Egypt's postrevolutionary constitution has turned rancorous, as secular-minded politicians and intellectuals forcefully object to what they call hard-line Islamists' efforts to use the document to impose Islamic law. ([link](#))

Morsi Wants Free Speech Linked To Responsibility

September 26, 2012

Associated Press

By Diaa Hadid

NEW YORK - Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi said freedom of expression must be used responsibly in a speech Tuesday to the Clinton Global Initiative in New York that hinted at looming tensions in the newly-democratic nation. ([link](#))

Egypt Will Embrace Non-Muslims, Women: Morsi

September 26, 2012

AFP

The rights of non-Muslims and women are safe in Egypt, Prime Minister Mohamed Morsi said Tuesday, repeatedly telling a US audience that the newly democratic country will remain a secular state. ([link](#))

Iran

Iran Reveals More About What It Calls Foreign Sabotage

September 26, 2012

New York Times

By Rick Gladstone

Iran said Tuesday that it had amassed new evidence of attempts by saboteurs to attack Iranian nuclear, defense, industrial and telecommunications installations, including the use of computer virus-infected American, French and German equipment. ([link](#))

AP Interview: Ahmadinejad Pushes New World Order

September 26, 2012

Associated Press

By Edith M. Lederer And Wendy Benjaminson

NEW YORK - Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said Tuesday that a new world order needs to emerge, away from years of what he called American bullying and domination. ([link](#))

EU Mulls "Full" Financial Freeze, Shipping Ban On Iran

September 26, 2012

AFP

EU nations are discussing a British sanctions proposal against Iran that notably calls for a ban on shipping and "full" freeze on financial transactions with Iran's central bank, European diplomats said Tuesday. ([link](#))

Iran's Economy Sags Under Sanctions

September 26, 2012

AFP

Iran's oil-dependent economy was showing the strain of punishing Western sanctions on Tuesday, on the eve of a speech by President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to the UN General Assembly in New York. ([link](#))

Iran Unveils New Long-range Drone

September 26, 2012

Associated Press

By Ali Akbar Dareini And Nasser Karimi

TEHRAN, Iran - Iranian military leaders gave details of a new long-range drone and test fired four anti-ship missiles Tuesday in a prelude to upcoming naval war games planned in an apparent response to U.S.-led warship drills in the Persian Gulf. ([link](#))

Israel**Israel: Syrian Mortars Accidentally Land In Golan**

September 26, 2012

Associated Press

By Bassem Mroue

BEIRUT - Syrian soldiers fought rebels Tuesday in a firefight that killed nine people and sent several mortars sailing across the border into the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights. ([link](#))

Jordan**Syrian Refugees Clash With Jordanian Police**

September 26, 2012

Associated Press

By Jamal Halaby

AMMAN, Jordan - Angry over harsh living conditions in their desert tent camp in Jordan, dozens of Syrian refugees clashed with Jordanian police, hurled stones and smashed charity offices and a hospital, officials and refugees said Tuesday. ([link](#))

Libya**As Libya Presses Some Militias To Disband, Fighters Attack A Hotel In Tripoli**

September 26, 2012

New York Times

By David D. Kirkpatrick

BENGHAZI, Libya - Libyan militia fighters assaulted a hotel in Tripoli housing members of the newly elected General National Congress on Tuesday, dramatizing the challenge the government faces in enforcing its ultimatum that all unauthorized brigades must submit to its authority or disband by the start of the day. ([link](#))

Death Of Libyan Rebel Raises Calls For Vengeance

September 26, 2012

Associated Press

By Aya Batrawy And Esam Mohamed

MISRATA, Libya - One of the young Libyan rebels credited with capturing Moammar Gadhafi in a drainage ditch nearly a year ago died Tuesday of injuries after being kidnapped, beaten and slashed by the late dictator's supporters - the latest victim of persistent violence and instability in the North African country. ([link](#))

CIA's Exit From Benghazi, Libya, Draws Criticism From Ex-officers

September 26, 2012

Los Angeles Times

By Ken Dilanian

WASHINGTON -- About a dozen CIA personnel were evacuated from eastern Libya after heavily armed men stormed the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi and killed four Americans, setting back an important intelligence operation and prompting a debate about how much risk CIA officers should assume in dangerous overseas posts. ([link](#))

Senators to Clinton: Show us the ambassador's cables

September 25, 2012

Foreign Policy

By Josh Rogin

Two top senators on the Foreign Relations Committee don't want to wait for the State Department to do its own investigation into the Sept. 11 attack in Benghazi that killed four Americans including Ambassador Chris Stevens; they want Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to show them Stevens's diplomatic cables and other correspondence now. ([link](#))

Saudi Arabia**S. Arabia Downplays Impact Of Mystery Virus On Hajj**

September 26, 2012

AFP

Saudi health authorities downplayed Tuesday the impact of a possible outbreak of a virus from the family of deadly SARS on its forthcoming Hajj pilgrimage, stressing that the cases remain rare. ([link](#))

Syria**Blasts Hit Syrian School As War Is Focus At The U.N.**

September 26, 2012

New York Times

By An Employee Of The New York Times In Syria And Steven Lee Myers

DAMASCUS, Syria - Insurgent bombs exploded at a Damascus school building on Tuesday, and Syrian government shells landed in the disputed Golan Heights region held by Israel, underscoring the Syrian conflict's growing scope as it dominated much of the discussion on the first formal day of the United Nations General Assembly. ([link](#))

2 Explosions Hit Near Army HQ In Syrian Capital

September 26, 2012

Associated Press

By Albert Aji And Zeina Karam

DAMASCUS, Syria - Two massive explosions targeting the army command headquarters rocked the heart of the Syrian capital on Wednesday, setting off clashes and a huge fire inside the building in the heavily guarded area, state-run media and residents said. ([link](#))

Syria Rebels Prepare To Blow Up Base 46

September 26, 2012

AFP

The roar of the approaching fighter-bomber gets louder, so the rebels preparing to assault a major military base hide themselves indoors as others move cars and motorcycles under cover among the olive trees. ([link](#))

Yemen

Yemen Leader Says Would Talk To Disarmed Al-Qaida

September 26, 2012

Associated Press

SANAA, Yemen - Yemen's president said Tuesday he would talk to his country's branch of the al-Qaida militant network if it were to give up its weapons, abandon its extremist ideas and stop sheltering foreign fighters. ([link](#))

SCA

Afghanistan

Afghanistan Bans Pakistani Newspapers In Border Area

September 26, 2012

New York Times

By Rod Nordland And Declan Walsh

KABUL, Afghanistan - In the often ill-tempered war of words between Afghanistan and Pakistan, the Afghans have just taken a new tack: outlawing Pakistani words. ([link](#))

Pakistan

Qaeda Operatives Killed In Drone Strike, Official Says

September 26, 2012

New York Times

By Ismail Khan And Scott Shane

PESHAWAR, Pakistan - An Al Qaeda operative of Turkish origin and an Iraqi reported to be a liaison between Al Qaeda and the Taliban were among five people killed on Monday in a United States drone strike in Pakistan's lawless North Waziristan region, a Pakistani security official confirmed Tuesday. ([link](#))

WHA/EUR

European Bank Chief Defends Bond Buys

September 25, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By TOM FAIRLESS and BRIAN BLACKSTONE

BERLIN—European Central Bank President Mario Draghi launched a robust defense of the bank's new bond-buying program in Berlin on Tuesday, saying the ECB's anticrisis measures are key to preserving Germany's industrial might. ([link](#))

Spain

Protesters Take to Street in Madrid

September 26, 2012

New York Times

By RAPHAEL MINDER

MADRID — The pressures facing the government of Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy mounted on several fronts on Tuesday, as thousands of demonstrators besieged Parliament and Spain's two largest regions took steps that underscored their deepening economic troubles and displeasure with his austerity plans.

([link](#))

FOREIGN POLICY

Romney pledges to privatize foreign aid

September 25, 2012

Foreign Policy

By Josh Rogin

Mitt Romney pledged Tuesday to shift foreign aid toward the private sector and deprioritize humanitarian aid in favor of promoting free enterprise and business development around the world.

([link](#))

EDITORIAL / OPINION

President Obama At The U.N.

September 26, 2012

New York Times

The anti-American violence in the Muslim world demanded a firm push back from President Obama, who finally delivered it on Tuesday in the last United Nations General Assembly speech of his term. ([link](#))

Mr. Obama's Refreshing Defense Of Free Speech

September 26, 2012

Washington Post

WHEN ANTI-AMERICAN demonstrations spread around the world this month, the Obama administration focused much of its public response on denouncing the anti-Muslim video that had provoked outrage and provided a pretext for extremists. President Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton rightly distanced the U.S. government from the video and stressed the American system of religious tolerance; more disturbingly, the White House asked Google to consider removing the offending video from its YouTube Web site. ([link](#))

Alan Dershowitz: The Message Obama Should Have Sent

September 26, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By ALAN M. DERSHOWITZ

On Monday in New York, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad promised that Israel will be "eliminated," a variation on his previous threats to the nation's existence. He was in town for the opening of the United Nations General Assembly, a gathering that reliably sees leaders issuing pronouncements that, even if not new, at least are given a bigger stage. On Tuesday, the first day of the gathering, President Obama delivered a speech that also struck familiar notes, including the statement that "a nuclear-armed Iran is not a challenge that can be contained." He moved no closer to giving a signal of what he might consider an intolerable development in Iran's advance toward a nuclear weapon. ([link](#))

Backlash To The Backlash

September 26, 2012

New York Times

By Thomas L. Friedman

One of the iron laws of Middle East politics for the last half-century has been that extremists go all the way and moderates tend to just go away. That is what made the march in Benghazi, Libya, so unusual last Friday. This time, the moderates did not just go away. They got together and stormed the headquarters of the Islamist militia Ansar al-Sharia, whose members are suspected of carrying out the attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi that resulted in the death of four Americans, including Ambassador Chris Stevens. ([link](#))

Israel Must Be 'Eliminated'

September 26, 2012

Wall Street Journal

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad speaks at the United Nations today, which also happens to be Yom Kippur, the holiest day on the Jewish calendar. The timing is apt because when it comes to Iran and Israel, the hardest thing for some people to see or hear is what Iranian leaders say in front of the world's nose. ([link](#))

Tolerance, Up In Flames

September 26, 2012

New York Times

By Steve Inskeep

Washington -- FOR 65 years, the Nishat cinema stood in Karachi, Pakistan. A giant screen showed blockbuster films from around the world, reflecting Pakistan's relative openness compared with neighboring Muslim nations. Vast billboards over the door featured handsome movie stars flanked by young women with revealing clothes and long, luxurious hair. ([link](#))

A "Hit Man" For Hillary Clinton

September 26, 2012

Washington Post

By Dana Milbank

For one hour on Sunday afternoon, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Philippe Reines was behaving most undiplomatically. ([link](#))

Matthew Kaminski: The Accidental Architect of a New Europe

September 26, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By MATTHEW KAMINSKI

Berlin -- Of all the national leaders convening in New York this week for the 67th United Nations General Assembly, their number doesn't include the one with the most potential to affect the world's fortunes in the next few years. German Chancellor Angela Merkel is staying home, in part to deal with a euro crisis that has cost untold billions and toppled rulers from Dublin to Athens. Amid the turmoil, she has stood out. This "Iron Chancellor," in power since 2005, is cruising to a third term in office, even as she midwives expensive EU rescues that are opposed by most Germans. She has cemented a pre-eminence in Europe that was forced on her by circumstances and, by all appearances, accepted only reluctantly. ([link](#))

US Gas Exports Could Limit Putin's Influence

September 26, 2012

Washington Post

ONE THING THAT this year's presidential candidates both get right is that the United States' plentiful reserve of unconventional natural gas is an exceptional national asset, not only revolutionizing the energy business at home but also benefiting America and its allies abroad. ([link](#))

USUN IN THE NEWS

Qatar emir calls for armed intervention in Syria

September 25, 2012

Foreign Policy

By Colum Lynch

Qatar's emir Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al-Thani urged Arab nations in a General Assembly speech to form a political and military coalition to intervene in Syria to stop the bloodshed, as a first step towards guaranteeing a peaceful political transition.

"The situation in Syria has reached an unacceptable phase," he told the gathering. "Hundreds of innocent Syrians are killed everyday by the fire of a regime that does not hesitate to use all sort of weapons against its people."

The Qatari leader said the intervention force could be modeled on a Syrian-led Arab Deterrence Force that was established by the Arab League in Lebanon in 1976, and which provided regional backing to Syria's military occupation of Lebanon.

We "have used all available means to get Syria out of the cycle of killing but that was in vain," Al Thani said. "In view of this, I think it is better for the Arab countries themselves to interfere out of their national, humanitarian, political and military duties and do what is necessary to stop the bloodshed in Syria and the killing of innocent people and their displacement in order to guarantee a peaceful transition of power in Syria."

He urged countries "that believe in the cause of the Syrian people to contribute to the provision of all sorts of support to this people until it gains its legitimate rights."

It was hard to measure how serious the Qatari proposal was and doubtful that an Arab coalition could be mustered to go to war with one of the region's most powerful armies, particularly one with strong backing of Iran and Russia. The announcement came hours after the U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon appealed to governments to stay out of the conflict and support the efforts of his special representative, Lakhdar Brahimi, to resolve the crisis through diplomatic means.

"We must stop the violence and flows of arms to both sides, and set in motion a Syrian-led transition as soon as possible," Ban said. Those remarks appeared targeted at the warring parties -- but also foreign backers, including Qatar and Saudi Arabia, who have reportedly armed the insurgents, and Russia and Iran, who are backing the government.

However, Qatar's Prime Minister Sheikh Hamad Bin Jassim al-Thani told Christiane Amanpour this week that Qatar is not arming the rebels, but that it support a new approach -- which he called Plan B -- that would impose save havens in Syria and that "I believe there are a lot of Arab countries who will participate. And there are also European countries who will participate."

It remained unclear how much support the Arabs can expect from the West, but Bin Jassim expressed hope that Washington might support the plan if Obama wins the election. American officials have been chilly to the idea. Susan Rice, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, told me last week: "I'm not of the view that this is a circumstance in which external military intervention is wise for the United States or others."

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UNITED NATIONS

U.N. Leader Opens General Assembly On Somber Note

September 26, 2012

New York Times

By Neil MacFarquhar

The leader of the United Nations formally opened its annual General Assembly on Tuesday with a speech conveying a broad sense of crisis because of pressing problems including armed conflict in the Middle East, disruptive climate change and religious intolerance.

"I am here to sound the alarm about our direction as a human family," said Ban Ki-moon, the United Nations secretary general, beginning six days of speeches by world leaders.

He warned about the implications of the unbridled war in Syria, the unresolved Palestinian statehood issue, Israel-Iran war rhetoric and unchecked Islamic fury over an anti-Muslim video.

In his wide-ranging speech, Mr. Ban also said global action on climate change remains unfinished business and food prices are too volatile. The economic and political crisis across Africa's Sahel region is not getting sufficient attention, Mr. Ban said, and North Korea had to do more to denuclearize the Korean Peninsula.

He pointed to some positive developments, including a halving in extreme poverty in the past decade; the democratic transition in the Arab world; and Africa's booming economic growth.

He said one of the most pressing immediate issues confronting the United Nations is the Syria conflict, which began in March 2011 and is now causing regional instability. "This is a serious and growing threat to international peace and security which requires Security Council action," Mr. Ban said.

The Council remains sharply divided on Syria, with Russia and China arguing that the opposition needs to be curbed while the West wants President Bashar al-Assad to step aside.

"We must stop the violence and flows of arms to both sides, and set in motion a Syrian-led transition as soon as possible," said Mr. Ban. He noted that "brutal" human rights abuses continue, "mainly by the government, but also by opposition groups." Criminal prosecution should be pursued, he said.

On the Israeli-Palestinian dispute, being given scant high-level attention this week, Mr. Ban said that when it comes to the two-state solution, "the door may be closing, for good." The growth of settlements in occupied Palestinian territory as "seriously undermines," efforts toward peace, he said.

Mr. Ban also made an oblique critical reference to the threats traded between Israel and Iran about a possible war over Iran's disputed nuclear program, describing the shrill war talk as "alarming."

"I also reject both the language of delegitimization and threats of potential military action by one state against another," he said. "Any such attacks would be devastating."

Speaking about the outbreak of global rioting in the past few weeks over an anti-Muslim video, Mr. Ban said, "a disgraceful act of great insensitivity has led to justifiable offense and unjustifiable violence."

While endorsing freedom of speech as a fundamental right, he said it should not be used as a license to incite nor commit violence. Divisions around the world are too often "exploited for short-term political gain," Mr. Ban told 120 assembled world leaders.

"Too many people are read to take small flames of difference and turn them into a bonfire," he said.

"Too many people are tolerant of intolerance."

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Ban kicks off General Assembly with Syria warning

September 25, 2012

Foreign Policy

By Colum Lynch

U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon opened today's U.N. General Assembly debate by urging the Arab Spring's new leaders -- from Egypt to Libya -- to "make decisive breaks with the past" and appealing to the U.N. membership to prevent Syria's worsening civil war from engulfing the region in sectarian strife.

"We need to look no further than this room to see expression of the thirst for progress," Ban said. "A large number of you are here for the first time -- new leaders, installed by new voices, and expected to make decisive breaks with the past. Your people want to see results in real time; now, not the distant future."

Ban appealed to the gathering to "put an end to impunity for international crimes in Syria and elsewhere" and warned that conditions in Syria were worsening each day, saying that steps need to be taken to "stop the violence and flows of arms to both sides" in order to "set in motion a Syrian led transition as soon as possible."

"The crisis is no longer limited to Syria; it is a regional calamity with global ramifications," he said. "It is the duty of our generation to put an end to impunity for international crimes, in Syria and elsewhere."

Ban also touched on a set of other global concerns, including poverty, climate change, and the scarcity of essential resources to sustain a growing world population that surpassed 7 billion people, saying the United Nations and world leaders need "to bolster safety nets."

"Action on climate change remains a major piece of unfinished business," he said. "Our use of resources threatens the planet's limits. Ecosystems are reaching the breaking point. The world's best science tells us we must change course before it is too late."

The U.N. chief also touched on a series of other security challenges, expressing concern about ongoing violence in Afghanistan and the stalled Middle East peace process. "After decades of harsh occupation and humiliating restriction in almost every aspect of their lives, the Palestinians must be able to realize their right to a viable state of their own," he said, while also making clear that "Israel must be able to live in peace and security from threats and rockets."

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UN Chief Demands Global Action To End War In Syria

September 26, 2012

Associated Press

By Edith M. Lederer

UNITED NATIONS - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon demanded international action to stop the war in Syria, telling a somber gathering of world leaders Tuesday that the 18-month conflict had become "a regional calamity with global ramifications."

In sharp contrast to the U.N. chief, President Barack Obama pledged U.S. support for Syrians trying to oust President Bashar Assad - "a dictator who massacres his own people."

Opening the U.N. General Assembly's annual ministerial meeting, Ban said in his state of the world speech that he was sounding the alarm about widespread insecurity, inequality and intolerance in many countries.

Putting the spotlight on Syria, the U.N. chief said "the international community should not look the other way as violence spirals out of control."

"We must stop the violence and flows of arms to both sides, and set in motion a Syrian-led transition as soon as possible," he said.

While Obama didn't call for an end to the violence, he made no mention of arming the opposition and stressed the importance of ensuring "that what began with citizens demanding their rights does not end in a cycle of sectarian violence."

"Together, we must stand with those Syrians who believe in a different vision - a Syria that is united and inclusive, where children don't need to fear their own government, and all Syrians have a say in how they are governed, Sunnis and Alawites, Kurds and Christians," said Obama, who arrived at the U.N. after Ban spoke.

"That is what America stands for; that is the outcome that we will work for - with sanctions and consequences for those who persecute; and assistance and support for those who work for this common good," the U.S. president said.

Ban, declaring that the situation in Syria is getting worse every day, called the conflict a serious and growing threat to international peace and security that requires attention from the deeply divided U.N. Security Council.

That appears highly unlikely, however, at least in the near future.

Russia and China have vetoed three Western-backed resolutions aimed at pressuring Syrian President Bashar Assad to end the violence and enter negotiations on a political transition, leaving the U.N.'s most powerful body paralyzed in what some diplomats say is the worst crisis since the U.S.-Soviet standoff during the Cold War.

Brazil's President Dilma Rousseff, whose country by tradition is the first to speak, supported the secretary-general, saying: "There is no military solution to the Syrian crisis. Diplomacy and dialogue are not just our best option: they are the only option."

With the Security Council unable to act, the Emir of Qatar, Sheik Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, said Arab countries should intervene "out of their national, humanitarian, political and military duties and do what is necessary to stop the bloodshed ... in order to guarantee a peaceful transition of power in Syria."

He cited a similar precedent when Arab forces intervened in Lebanon in the mid-1970s to stop the civil war "in a step that proved to be effective and useful."

French President Francois Hollande said almost 30,000 people have died and asked: "How many more deaths will we wait for before we act? How can we let the paralysis of the United Nations to continue?"

"I know one thing is certain, the Syrian regime will never again take its place in the council of nations. It has no future among us," he said.

He called on the United Nations to protect "liberated zones" within Syria and to ensure humanitarian aid to refugees.

Ban also expressed profound concern at continuing violence in Afghanistan and Congo, increasing unrest across west Africa's Sahel region where al-Qaida has made inroads, and the "dangerous impasse" between Israelis and Palestinians that may close the door on the two-state solution.

The "shrill war talk" by Israel in recent weeks, in response to its belief that Iran is pursuing nuclear weapons, "has been alarming," Ban said, and Tehran's rhetoric threatening Israel's existence is unacceptable.

"Any such attacks would be devastating," he said, reminding the presidents, prime ministers, monarchs and diplomats from the 193 U.N. member states of the need for peaceful solutions and respect for international law.

"Leaders have a responsibility to use their voices to lower tensions instead of raising the temperature and volatility of the moment," he said.

Alluding to the recently circulated amateur video made in the U.S. which attacks Islam and denigrates the Prophet Muhammad, Ban said that "in recent days we have seen hate speech and violent responses that perpetuate a cycle of blind violence."

He lamented that in the world today "too often, divisions are exploited for short-term political gain" and "too many people are ready to take small flames of difference and turn them into a bonfire."

The secretary-general said it's time for responsible political and community leaders and ordinary citizens to speak out.

"The moderate majority should not be a silent majority," Ban said. "It must empower itself, and say to bigots and extremists alike: 'you do not speak for us.'"

Obama urged all leaders "to speak out forcefully against violence and extremism" and join the U.S. in confronting the root causes of the rage across the Muslim world.

He condemned the anti-Muslim video that helped spark the recent attacks, calling it "cruel and disgusting." But he strongly defended the U.S. Constitution's protection of the freedom of expression, "even views that we profoundly disagree with."

Obama was not expected to cross paths with Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who addresses the assembly on Wednesday morning, but he did have a message about the country's nuclear program: There is still "time and space" to resolve the dispute over Iran's nuclear ambitions "but that time is not unlimited."

Ahmadinejad insists his country's nuclear program is only for electricity generation and medical research, but the U.S. and Western allies are demanding that Iran open all its facilities to inspectors from the U.N. nuclear agency to prove the intent of its enrichment of uranium.

Obama said a nuclear-armed Iran "would threaten the elimination of Israel, the security of Gulf nations, and the stability of the global economy" and would also risk triggering a nuclear arms race in the region.

"And that is why the United States will do what we must to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon," he said.

Hollande said France is ready to discuss new sanctions against Iran, "not to punish the great Iranian people, but to say to its leaders that enough is enough now, and that it must restart negotiations before it's too late."

Tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan were downplayed by Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari, who said his country has begun to deepen relations with its troubled neighbor.

"A sovereign, secure, stable Afghanistan is good for the Afghan people and it is good for Pakistan," he said, adding that peace will only come to Afghanistan if it is "Afghan-owned, Afghan-driven and Afghan-led."

Afghan President Hamid Karzai said incidents like Pakistan's recent shelling of a border province in eastern Afghanistan threaten relations, but said his country remains "deeply committed to our brotherly relations with Pakistan."

Karzai called on the West to help "fight the forces of division and hatred" stoked by provocations like the anti-Islam video.

"The menace of Islamophobia is a worrying phenomenon that threatens peace and coexistence among cultures and civilizations," he said. "I call upon leaders in the West, both politicians and the media, to confront Islamophobia in all its many forms."

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US, UN Grapple For Workable Peace Plan In Syria

September 26, 2012

[Associated Press](#)

By Bradley Klapper

NEW YORK - The United States and the U.N.'s new Syria mediator grappled for a new strategy Tuesday toward stopping 18 months of brutal government crackdowns and civil war in the Arab country as President Barack Obama again called for the end of Syrian President Bashar Assad's regime.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and Lakhdar Brahimi spoke for an hour on the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly, according to a senior U.S. official, charting paths that might help unite Syria's opposition and engineer a peaceful transition away from the four-decade Assad regime. Their talks came just hours after Obama told world leaders that Assad must leave "so that the suffering of the Syrian people can stop and a new dawn can begin."

"In Syria, the future must not belong to a dictator who massacres his people," Obama said. "If there is a cause that cries out for protest in the world today, it is a regime that tortures children and shoots rockets at apartment buildings."

It has been more than a year since Obama first called for Assad to step down, but the violence has only swelled since. That has put his administration somewhat on the defensive as it seeks ways short of military intervention or arming Syria's still little-known rebel forces to pressure the Syrian government into a peaceful political transition. U.S. officials say both those options would only worsen the crisis.

But all diplomatic efforts so far have failed, and Brahimi's discussions with Clinton confirmed that neither the U.S. nor the global body has a clear plan at the moment for how to bring change to Syria.

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon also demanded international action to stop Syria's war, including stopping "flows of arms to both sides."

Brahimi, a veteran Algerian diplomat who previously mediated in Afghanistan and Iraq, entered Syria's complicated diplomatic landscape earlier this month when he replaced Kofi Annan.

Until recently, the United Nations and the Obama administration had stuck to a strategy outlined by Annan in June that would have seen Assad's government and Syria's opposition pick members of a to-be-established interim government, with each side able to veto candidates they oppose.

The plan was endorsed by the U.S. and Russia, U.N. Security Council rivals who've clashed repeatedly on how best to end the conflict. But it never got off the ground as violence only picked up through the summer and Moscow blocked a U.S.-backed resolution that would have created global consequences for inaction by the Syrian government. A frustrated Annan then announced he'd resign.

With diplomacy still at a standstill, the U.S. official described Brahimi outlining how he has inherited Annan's job but not his plan. He may maintain some elements of it, but at the moment the United Nations has no clear road map for ending the war. Brahimi told Clinton he would take his time in developing a workable strategy, expressing little hope that diplomatic efforts could yield a quick end to fighting, according the official, who wasn't authorized to speak publicly about the private meeting and requested anonymity.

Advocates say almost 30,000 Syrians have died in the conflict - but the international community still appears paralyzed on a course of action beyond sanctions and isolation that might pressure Assad into a peace arrangement. Assad is being shielded diplomatically by Russia and China, and the West accuses Iran of providing his regime with military support.

Najib Ghadban, a senior member of the opposition Syrian National Council credited Obama with saying the right things but said more action was needed. He compared the tepid support of the West with the weapons and political aid Assad's side is receiving, and said rebels should be provided military assistance and international protection of safe zones in Syria where they can operate freely.

"People feel like they are left on their own," said Ghadban, a political science professor at the University of Arkansas.

Obama's "support for the right of the Syrian people to achieve freedom remains abstract and academic," added Louay Safi, another U.S.-based council member.

The U.S. president stressed, however, that more sectarian violence must not follow Assad.

"Together, we must stand with those Syrians who believe in a different vision," said Obama, "a Syria that is united and inclusive, where children don't need to fear their own government and all Syrians have a say in how they are governed - Sunnis and Alawites, Kurds and Christians."

"That is what America stands for," he said.
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At U.N., Qatar Emir Calls On Arab Nations To Intervene In Syria

September 26, 2012

Washington Post

By Colum Lynch And Anne Gearan

UNITED NATIONS - The emir of Qatar called on Arab nations Tuesday to form a political and military coalition to intervene in Syria to stop the bloodshed there, posing a direct challenge to U.N. efforts to resolve the conflict through negotiations.

"We have used all available means to get Syria out of the cycle of killing, but that was in vain," the emir, Sheik Hamad Bin Khalifa al-Thani, said in an address to the U.N. General Assembly. "In view of this, I think it is better for the Arab countries themselves to interfere out of their national, humanitarian, political and military duties and do what is necessary to stop the bloodshed in Syria."

The appeal, which received a cool reception from the Obama administration, was part of a broader effort by the Persian Gulf nation to press for an intervention in Syria in the hope of ultimately

persuading the United States, as well as European powers, to participate in a military overthrow of President Bashar al-Assad, possibly after the U.S. election in November.

Violence between Syrian forces and rebels has continued to rage, with activists estimating that as many as 30,000 people have been killed since the revolt began in March 2011. On Tuesday, several bombs went off inside a school in the Syrian capital, Damascus, and Syrian soldiers battled rebels in a firefight that sent several mortars sailing across the border into the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights, according to the Associated Press.

U.S. officials have made clear that they do not support a military solution to the crisis in Syria and that they are unlikely to provide military backing for an Arab force. U.S. officials still assess the Syrian opposition as scattered and Assad's government as strong enough to hold onto power for some time.

"We've made clear what our view is at the moment on the question of military intervention and no-fly zones," a senior U.S. official said. The official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to describe closed-door diplomacy, said the Qatari proposal may be part of an emerging "Plan B" for international involvement.

"This is something they have discussed in the past, and have raised as a prospect or a possibility at the right time and under the right circumstances. We have obviously never taken anything off the table, but we've been clear that in our view military intervention from the outside right now would do more harm than good," the official said.

The Qatari emir, dressed in traditional robes, said an Arab force in Syria could be modeled on the Syrian-led Arab Deterrence Force, which was established by the Arab League during Lebanon's civil war in 1976 and provided regional backing to Syria's military occupation of Lebanon.

He urged countries "that believe in the cause of the Syrian people to contribute to the provision of all sorts of support to this people until it gains its legitimate rights."

Without U.S. support, the Qatari plan stands little chance of being implemented, and it is unlikely that an Arab force could be mustered to go to war with one of the region's most powerful armies, particularly one with the strong backing of Iran and Russia.

The emir's remarks came hours after U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon appealed to governments to stay out of the conflict and support the efforts of his special representative, Lakhdar Brahimi, to resolve the crisis through diplomatic means.

"We must stop the violence and flows of arms to both sides, and set in motion a Syrian-led transition," he said.

Ban's comments appeared targeted at the warring parties' foreign backers, including Qatar and Saudi Arabia, which have reportedly armed the insurgents, and Russia and Iran, which are backing the government.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton is likely to pledge additional U.S. aid for Syrian opposition groups during a meeting Friday with activists and diplomats from several other countries that support a

move to democracy in Syria, the U.S. official said. The "Friends of Syria" session will focus on unifying the political opposition inside and outside the country.

Clinton met Tuesday with Brahimi, and the senior U.S. official said she endorsed his approach to move slowly in proposing any new international peace plan. One put forward by Brahimi's predecessor, Kofi Annan, failed.

"We believe there is still room, as Brahimi does, for a negotiated transition" leading to an interim government and eventually to a "new Syria," the official said. "He doesn't think that's going to happen tomorrow or next week."

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Obama surprises with powerful U.N. speech on Middle East

September 26, 2012

Foreign Policy

By Colum Lynch

Expectations for President Barack Obama's U.N. speech this morning could not have been lower.

Entering the last leg of his presidential reelection campaign, pundits predicted a speech aimed directly at the American electorate: He would denounce Iran, denounce Syria, uphold American commitments to Israel's security, and head straight for the door.

The president did indeed high-tail it after the speech. But he left behind one of his most affecting speeches on America's relations with the Arab world since Cairo -- and it was targeted directly at the world leaders sitting in the U.N. General Assembly audience. "Understand that America will never retreat from the world," he said, noting that the flurry of anti-American protests that followed the circulation of a video mocking the Prophet Mohammed would not drive the United States from the Middle East.

Obama opened his speech by drawing a contrast between the fallen Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens -- who was killed in an attack on the American consulate in Benghazi, Libya, "the city he helped to save" -- and the forces of extremism who murdered him, three other American nationals, and an even larger number of Libyan security guards which offer nothing to the millions of Muslims seeking a better life and better leaders. "Chris Stevens embodied the best of America. Like his fellow Foreign Service officers, he built bridges across oceans and cultures," Obama said. "Burning an American flag will do nothing to educate a child.... Attacking an embassy won't create a single job."

The broader point of Obama's speech was to drive home the message that the region's new Islamic leaders, including Egyptian President Mohamed Morsy, must move more assertively to stem the tide of extremism or see it swallow up their achievements. In a remark that appeared directed at Morsy, Obama said the United States "has not, and will not, seek to dictate the outcome of democratic transitions abroad, and we do not expect other nations to agree with us on every issue."

In an interview with the New York Times on the eve of the U.N. General Assembly, Morsy had sharply criticized America's role in the Middle East, saying that U.S. support for generations of military dictatorships, and its backing of Israel, had fueled anti-American sentiment in the region.

Obama responded today that all leaders have "an obligation" to "speak out forcefully against violence and extremism" and marginalize those who "use hatred of America or the West, or Israel as a central principle of politics."

"A politics based only on anger -- one based on dividing the world between us and them -- not only sets back international cooperation, it ultimately undermines those who tolerate it," he added. "The impulse towards intolerance and violence may initially be focused on the West, but over time it cannot be contained."

Obama also took aim at the history of violent reactions across the Muslim world to offensive portrayals of Islam in the West, saying that while "we understand people take offense to this video ... there is no speech that justifies mindless violence."

"There is no video that justifies an attack on an embassy," said Obama. "There is no slander that provides an excuse for people to burn a restaurant in Lebanon, or destroy a school in Tunis, or cause death and destruction in Pakistan," he added. "Like me, the majority of Americans are Christian, and yet we do not ban blasphemy against our most sacred beliefs."

"I expect that people are going to call me awful things every day, and I will defend their right to do so," he said. "We do so not because we support hateful speech, but because our founders understood that without such protections, the capacity of each individual to express their own views, and practice their own faith may be threatened."

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Middle East Officials Praise Obama Speech

September 26, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By JAY SOLOMON and CHRISTOPHER RHOADS

UNITED NATIONS—Some Middle Eastern leaders praised President Barack Obama's address to the United Nations as welcome advice for a turbulent region, while Syrian opposition leaders expressed disappointment saying his demand that the country's ruler step down did not go far enough.

Mr. Obama mentioned Syria several times in a 30 minute speech in which he surveyed the uneven progress of the Arab Spring, saying "We again declare that the regime of Bashar al-Assad must come to an end."

But he outlined no new steps to help rebels topple Mr. Assad or form a new government, leaving opposition leaders unsatisfied.

"While statements of support are welcome, the slaughter of tens of thousands of Syrian civilians continues unchecked, and we need action more than words," said Radwan Ziadeh, a spokesman for the opposition Coalition for a Democratic Syria.

Other Middle Eastern officials said they valued Mr. Obama's call for tolerance.

"It was a very good opening speech," said Lebanon's Prime Minister Najib Mikati. "I agreed with it 99%, particularly his point that we need to expect and have openness, before it is too late."

Mr. Obama in his address called on new rulers around the world to govern fairly and openly, to permit dissent but discourage violence.

One Arab diplomat who was not authorized to speak publicly to the press, said: "The key message was that we need to fight for tolerance and accept people as they are. This was very important. We cannot be dragged down into violence by what is after all a very small minority." ([top](#))

Africa Leaders Trade Jabs Over Conflict in Eastern Congo

September 26, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By CHRISTOPHER RHOADS

UNITED NATIONS—The presidents of Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo traded barbs on the international stage Tuesday over the deepening conflict on their shared border that in recent months has left hundreds dead and created hundreds of thousands of refugees.

Though neither pointed fingers directly, their comments underscored the increasing fragility of the peace between the neighbors amid the nearly six-month-long crisis in the provinces of North Kivu and South Kivu, a mineral-rich section of eastern Congo.

In a sharply worded speech at the U.N.'s annual meeting, Congolese President Joseph Kabila called for international sanctions against those providing "external support" to rebels fighting in eastern Congo.

"This situation is unacceptable and deserves to be condemned and should give rise to sanctions," Mr. Kabila said, without naming Rwanda. "We expect the community of nations will shoulder its responsibility, and the Security Council will ensure compliance."

An independent U.N. report in June accused Rwanda of supporting the M23, a rebel army that triggered the conflict in the volatile region. Rwanda has vehemently denied the accusations.

On Tuesday, the European Union said it would delay additional budget support to Rwanda until it receives clarification on the country's role in the conflict, said a spokesman for EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton. The U.S., U.K. and several other countries have already suspended or delayed aid totaling more than \$90 million to Rwanda over the matter in recent months.

Earlier Tuesday, Rwandan President Paul Kagame rebuked the international community for what he called a superficial response to international conflicts.

"Too often, the inclination is to parachute into a situation with ready-made answers based on superficial examination of the conflict's dynamics, doing considerably more harm than good," President Kagame said in his speech to the U.N., without naming eastern Congo. "There is no one-size-fits-all remedy."

The conflict began in early April when some 600 soldiers in Congo's national army mutinied, purportedly over poor treatment. In the fighting that followed, human-rights groups allege, the group engaged in murder, rape and use of child soldiers. Its leader, former Congolese national army general Bosco Ntaganda, is wanted by the International Criminal Court in The Hague on charges of war crimes committed during the past decade.

The independent U.N. report accused the Rwandan government of supporting M23 with arms, food and other supplies, assistance that allowed the rebel army to avoid immediate defeat. Congo also accused Rwanda of propping up the rebels, raising the prospect that the fragile peace forged in 2009 between the two countries would crumble.

Calling the actions in eastern Congo "profound evil," Mr. Kabila on Tuesday vowed to "dedicate all our human, material and financial resources" to defending the country.

Since the late-1990s, the area has been hotly contested by various armed groups, many backed by neighboring governments, leading to bloodshed, disease and starvation that conflict-research groups say has claimed millions of lives.

M23 leader Mr. Ntaganda fought under Mr. Kagame in the Rwandan army in the 1990s and later joined a Tutsi-led armed group backed by Rwanda fighting in eastern Congo. That group was folded into Congo's national army as part of the 2009 peace.

"Congo is unable to overcome a militia of a few hundred men," Rwandan Foreign Minister Louise Mushikiwabo said Friday in a speech to the Rwandan diaspora gathered in Boston. "So cynically, they say they're really fighting a much bigger army next door—that is what this is really about."

The EU said Tuesday that Rwanda must condemn M23 and cease any support of it before the grouping would reconsider its decision, the EU spokesman said.

The EU "takes seriously the allegations...about Rwandan support of the M23, provoking a new crisis in the eastern Congo," the EU spokesman said. The EU official said the decision wouldn't affect existing projects and support.

The worsening situation on the ground has affected business activity. On Tuesday, U.K.-based oil exploration company Soco International SIA.LN -3.44% PLC said the violence had forced it to cease operations and evacuate its workers from its camp in eastern Congo.

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Afghan President Karzai Blasts Anti-Islam Film

September 26, 2012

Washington Times

By Ashish Kumar Sen

UNITED NATIONS - Afghan President Hamid Karzai on Tuesday said the production of an anti-Islam film and publication of cartoons perceived as insulting to Muslims cannot be justified as freedom of speech or expression, but that they also must not be used as an excuse for violence.

"The world is shaken by the depravity of fanatics who have committed acts of insult against the faith of over 1.5 billion Muslims," Mr. Karzai told the U.N. General Assembly.

"We strongly condemn these offensive acts, whether it involves the production of a film, the publication of cartoons, or indeed any other acts of insult and provocation," he added.

The low-budget film that mocks Islam's prophet Muhammad was produced in the U.S. President Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton have condemned it, as did several world leaders who

addressed the U.N. session on Tuesday. Mr. Obama, too, focused a large part of his address earlier in the day on the film and the deadly protests that followed in the Muslim world. Four Americans, including Chris Stevens, the U.S. ambassador to Libya, have been killed in the violence.

Mr. Karzai said the production of the film and publication of cartoons lampooning the prophet can "never be justified as freedom of speech or expression."

"Equally, they cannot give reason for the genuine protests to be used to incite violence and chaos with terrible losses of innocent lives," he added.

The Afghan leader expressed concern over "the menace of Islamophobia," which he described as a "worrying phenomenon that threatens peace and coexistence among cultures and civilizations."

Mr. Karzai called on Western leaders, politicians and the media, to confront Islamophobia. "We must work to defeat the protagonists of the conflict of civilizations, and support the voices of tolerance and understanding," he said.

On the issue of terrorism, Mr. Karzai reprised his often-repeated assertion that its roots lay beyond Afghanistan's borders - a thinly veiled reference to Pakistan.

"It is in deference to the immense sacrifices of the Afghan people, and the precious lives lost from the international community, that the campaign against terrorism must be taken to the sources of terrorism and must be result-oriented," he said.

Mr. Karzai urged the U.N. to remove sanctions on Taliban leaders so as to facilitate direct negotiations with the militants.

He said he was hopeful Pakistan would play a critical role in the reconciliation process, but that incidents such as the recent shelling of Afghan villages risked undermining efforts by both governments to work together.

Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari, who addressed the session earlier in the evening, said his country supports the Afghan government's efforts make peace with terrorists.

Mr. Zardari said a search for peace must be "Afghan-owned, Afghan-driven and Afghan-led" and that Pakistan would support any process that "reflects Afghan national consensus."

The Taliban considers Mr. Karzai a Western puppet and has refused to hold peace talks with his government.

The Taliban broke off peace talks with the U.S. in March. It cited, as one of its reasons for its decision was that the Obama administration had not released five high-value Taliban operatives from the U.S. military detention facility at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. This was a key demand of the Taliban when it signaled its willingness to start official peace talks with the U.S. in January.

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Pakistani President Fires Back At Critics Over Terror Fight
September 26, 2012

Washington Times

By Ashish Kumar Sen

UNITED NATIONS - Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari on Tuesday slammed critics who say his country has not done enough in the fight against terrorists and blamed U.S. drone attacks against suspected terrorists for complicating efforts to win hearts and minds.

"To those who say we have not done enough, I say in all humility: Please do not insult the memory of our dead, and the pain of our living," Mr. Zardari told the U.N. General Assembly. "No country and no people have suffered more in the epic struggle against terrorism, than Pakistan."

The Obama administration has pressed Pakistan, with limited success, to take a tougher stand against terrorists who operate from safe havens in the tribal border region near Afghanistan.

Earlier this month, the State Department added al Qaeda-affiliated Haqqani Network to its list of foreign terrorist organizations. Pakistan's army has been reluctant to go after these terrorists who operate from the border province of North Waziristan.

"Do not ask of my people what no one has ever asked of any other peoples. Do not demonize the innocent women, and children of Pakistan. And please, stop this refrain to do more," Mr. Zardari said. "The simplest question of all is: How much more suffering can Pakistan endure?"

Mr. Zardari said Pakistanis have paid a high price in the war on terrorists. More than 7,000 soldiers and policemen and over 37,000 civilians, including Pakistan's Minister for Minority Affairs, Shahbaz Bhatti and Salmaan Taseer, the governor of Pakistan's most populous province of Punjab, have been killed in this war, he added.

Mr. Zardari's own family has paid a price, a point which he made in his address. His late wife, former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, was assassinated in a terrorist attack in Pakistan on Dec. 27, 2007. Bhutto's portrait sat atop the lectern during Mr. Zardari's address.

The Pakistani leader slammed the controversial U.S. strategy of strikes by unmanned Predator drones on terrorist suspects. "Drone strikes and civilian casualties on our territory add to the complexity of our battle for hearts and minds through this epic struggle," he said.

The Pakistani leader opened his remarks with condemnation of an anti-Islam film, produced in the U.S., that has roiled the Muslim world and led to the deaths of dozens of people. Four Americans, including Chris Stevens, the U.S. ambassador to Libya, have been killed in the violence.

"I want to express the strongest condemnation for the acts of incitement of hate against the faith of billions of Muslims of the world and our beloved prophet, Muhammad," Mr. Zardari said.

Mr. Zardari did not directly condemn the violence, which has erupted in deadly protests across Pakistan.

"Although we can never condone violence, the international community must not become silent observers and should criminalize such acts that destroy the peace of the world and endanger world security by misusing freedom of expression," he said.

Last week, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said "responsible leaders" must condemn the violence.

Pakistan's government on declared Friday a national holiday - "Love for the Prophet Day" - and encouraged peaceful protests against the film that was made in the U.S. and insults Islam's prophet Muhammad.

Pakistan's Railway Minister, Ghulam Ahmad Bilour, has offered a \$100,000 bounty on the head of the producer of the controversial film.

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Humanitarian Crisis Looming In Yemen: UN

September 26, 2012

[AFP](#)

Yemen is on the verge of a major humanitarian crisis, the UN's World Food Programme warned Tuesday, calling for more funds to help the country where nearly half the population is going hungry.

"Yemen is sliding ever further into a humanitarian crisis," WFP spokeswoman Elisabeth Byrs told reporters in Geneva, adding that "more than 10 million people, or about half the population, is hungry and needs food".

The country, one of the poorest on the planet, now also has the highest level in the world of malnutrition among children, with two million stunted and one million acutely malnourished, Byrs said.

The WFP has scaled up its food assistance programmes in Yemen, and aims now to help a total of 5.5 million people by the end of the year, she said, compared with 3.4 million people at the end of July.

The aid increase meant the WFP was in desperate need of funds, Byrs said, adding that \$223 million is needed to fund its programmes in Yemen through the end of the year, and it is still lacking \$69 million, or 31 percent.

The shortfall meant among other things that a programme aimed at helping girls remain in school by providing them with take-home food rations for their families had been slashed.

Instead of helping 111,000 school girls, and thus reaching 777,000 people, the programme could now only reach just 53,000 school girls, or a total of 371,000 people, Byrs said.

Yemen is undergoing a difficult political transition after a year-long uprising unseated veteran leader Ali Abdullah Saleh in February and left the economy of the Arabian peninsula's poorest country in shambles.

Earlier this month, global donors made aid pledges worth \$6.4 billion to Yemen, amounting to only half of what Sanaa says it needs to revive its economy and rebuild infrastructure badly damaged during the 2011 uprising.

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WikiLeaks' Assange To Address UN On Asylum Bid

September 25, 2012

Associated Press

By David Stringer

UNITED NATIONS - WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange plans to address a meeting on the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly via a videolink from his hideout at Ecuador's London embassy, seeking to draw new attention to his efforts to avoid extradition to Sweden over sex crimes allegations.

Ecuador's mission to the United Nations said Tuesday that Assange was scheduled to speak Wednesday alongside foreign minister Ricardo Patino at a specially convened event to discuss his asylum case.

The Australian activist is seeking to avoid extradition to Sweden for questioning over sex crimes allegations and has been sheltered inside Ecuador's embassy in London - beyond the reach of British police - since he fled there on June 19.

Since then President Rafael Correa has granted Assange asylum, but he is unable to leave the country's tiny mission. If he steps outside the apartment-sized embassy, he will be arrested by police who surround the building.

Assange and his supporters claim that the Swedish sex case is part of a Washington-orchestrated plot to make him stand trial in the United States over his work with WikiLeaks, which has published thousands of secret U.S. diplomatic cables and other documents. Both Sweden and the U.S. reject that claim.

In his last public appearance, a speech in August from the balcony of Ecuador's embassy, Assange cast himself as the victim of an American "witch hunt" over his secret-spilling website.

British Foreign Secretary William Hague said that the U.N. was dealing with "much bigger issues" than Assange's fate, but acknowledged there was no current prospect of a resolution to the case in discussions with Ecuador.

"We agreed that we would continue to talk, and we will continue to talk about this issue with the government of Ecuador. But I see no sign of any break through," Hague told reporters at the U.N.

He said the U.K. had an obligation to uphold British and European law by sending Assange to Sweden. "This may go on for some time," Hague said.

Quito and London had clashed over the case, after the U.K. suggested that one potential option would be to invoke a little-known law to strip Ecuador's embassy of diplomatic privileges - meaning police would be free to move in and detain Assange.

Hague has insisted that diplomats have no intention of carrying out that action, and had simply been briefing Ecuador on all possible legal options.

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TOP STORIES**Obama Tells U.N. New Democracies Need Free Speech**

September 26, 2012

[New York Times](#)

By Helene Cooper

UNITED NATIONS - President Obama on Tuesday used his last major address on a global stage before the November election to deliver a strong defense of America's belief in freedom of speech, challenging fledgling Arab and North African democracies to ensure that right even in the face of violence.

The speech was in many ways a balancing act for Mr. Obama, who has had to contend with angry anti-American demonstrations throughout the Middle East during the past several weeks, and a Republican opponent, Mitt Romney, who says the president has projected weakness in his foreign policy. Mr. Romney has criticized the administration for issuing what he called "an apology for American values" in its initial response to the demonstrations.

Mr. Obama's message seemed intended to appeal to a domestic audience as much as to the world leaders at the General Assembly.

In a 30-minute address, he affirmed what he said "are not simply American values or Western values - they are universal values." He vowed to protect the enduring ability of Americans to say what they think. He promised that the United States "will do what we must to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon." And he asserted that the flare-up of violence over a video that ridicules the Prophet Muhammad would not set off a retreat from his support of the Arab democracy movement.

Mr. Romney was also in New York on Tuesday, talking about foreign aid at a forum sponsored by the Clinton Global Initiative, where Mr. Obama also spoke after his United Nations address. But Mr. Romney was left to make his own case on a much smaller stage, where the host was former President Bill Clinton, an Obama surrogate.

Mr. Romney called for a rethinking of how American foreign aid is disbursed, suggesting that it could be tied directly to how governments and organizations work to open up their markets and encourage employment. "The aim of a much larger share of our aid must be the promotion of work and the fostering of free enterprise," he said.

That idea is bound to set off debate, since many labor rights organizations - and in fact, many American labor unions - argue that free trade pacts like the ones advocated by Mr. Romney serve only to ship jobs overseas.

Mr. Romney managed a smile when Mr. Clinton, who has been slamming him in swing states on behalf of Mr. Obama, introduced him, and he even joked about the help Mr. Clinton has been giving his rival on the campaign trail. "If there's one thing we've learned this election season, it's that a few words from Bill Clinton can do a man a lot of good," Mr. Romney said.

Mr. Obama appeared to relish the larger canvas of the United Nations and his subject, freedom of speech and why in the United States, even making "a crude and disgusting video" is a right of all citizens.

"As president of our country, and commander in chief of our military, I accept that people are going to call me awful things every day," Mr. Obama said. "And I will defend their right to do so." For that, he received cheers in the cavernous hall.

The president worked to explain - before a sometimes skeptical audience that has never completely bought into the American idea that even hateful speech is protected - why the United States values its First Amendment so highly.

"We do so because in a diverse society, efforts to restrict speech can become a tool to silence critics, or oppress minorities," Mr. Obama said. "We do so because given the power of faith in our lives, and the passion that religious differences can inflame, the strongest weapon against hateful speech is not repression, it is more speech - the voices of tolerance that rally against bigotry and blasphemy, and lift up the values of understanding and mutual respect." He said Americans "have fought and died around the globe to protect the right of all people to express their view."

Just two weeks after the beginning of violent anti-American protests that led to the deadly attacks on American diplomatic compounds in Benghazi, Libya, Mr. Obama vowed that even as the United States worked to bring the killers to justice, he would not back down from his support of democratic freedoms in the Muslim world.

"It is time to marginalize those who, even when not resorting to violence, use hatred of America, or the West, or Israel as the central principle of politics," Mr. Obama said. "For that only gives cover, and sometimes makes excuses, for those who do resort to violence."

On Iran, Mr. Obama warned that time to diplomatically resolve the Iranian nuclear issue "is not unlimited." But he refused to go further than what he has said in the past, that "a nuclear-armed Iran is not a challenge that can be contained," despite pleas from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel to establish a new "red line" that Iran cannot cross without provoking military intervention.

"America wants to resolve this issue through diplomacy, and we believe there is still time and space to do so," Mr. Obama said. "We respect the right of nations to access peaceful nuclear power, but one of the purposes of the United Nations is to see that we harness that power for peace."

He devoted most of his remarks to the Arab democracy movement and its fallout. Benjamin J. Rhodes, one of Mr. Obama's deputy national security advisers, worked on the speech, but as a starting point he had the president's own thoughts after he learned of the attacks in Benghazi that claimed the lives of the four Americans, including Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens.

Mr. Obama had accompanied Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton to the State Department to console grieving employees there, and spoke off the cuff, a senior administration official said, about the devotion of diplomats like Mr. Stevens and the American ideals that they put themselves in the line of fire to uphold.

He returned to that subject at the United Nations on Tuesday. "There are no words that excuse the killing of innocents," Mr. Obama told the General Assembly. "There is no video that justifies an attack on an embassy. There is no slander that provides an excuse for people to burn a restaurant in Lebanon, or destroy a school in Tunis, or cause death and destruction in Pakistan."

It was the president's first truly expansive response to the unrest that erupted over the video made in the United States, and it came just as his campaign was battling attacks from Republicans over his foreign policy. Mr. Romney, at the Clinton conference, did not repeat those accusations. Nor did the president, in either his remarks at the General Assembly or at his appearance at the Clinton forum, make his own partisan attack.

But the presidential election seemed to be a subtext, and while Mr. Romney was the first up at bat in the dueling speeches on Tuesday, Mr. Obama had the more presidential forum in the high-ceilinged General Assembly chamber. After the ritual of waiting for 10 seconds in a chair just below the stage while he was introduced, Mr. Obama walked to the lectern.

"I would like to begin today by telling you about an American named Chris Stevens," he said. He spoke of Mr. Stevens's "love and respect" for the people of North Africa and the Middle East, of his penchant for "walking the streets of the cities where he worked, tasting the local food, meeting as many people as he could, speaking Arabic and listening with a broad smile."

At the close of his remarks, he returned to the slain American envoy. "Today," he said, "I promise you this: Long after these killers are brought to justice, Chris Stevens's legacy will live on in the lives he touched."

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Obama Tells UN: Attacks On US Missions And Diplomats Violated Ideals

September 26, 2012

Washington Post

By Scott Wilson And Anne Gearan

UNITED NATIONS - President Obama challenged world leaders Tuesday to condemn the violent attacks that have occurred against U.S. diplomats and missions in Libya and Egypt, suggesting that now is a key moment in the struggle for democratic freedom throughout the Middle East and North Africa.

Speaking to world leaders and diplomats gathered for the U.N. General Assembly, Obama told his audience that "it is the obligation of all leaders, in all countries, to speak out forcefully against violence and extremism."

"It is time to marginalize those who - even when not resorting to violence - use hatred of America, or the West, or Israel as the central principle of politics," Obama said in the fourth address of his presidency to the assembly. "For that only gives cover, and sometimes makes excuses, for those who do resort to violence."

Obama used his appearance to defend the U.S. role in the Middle East and North Africa to an extent that he had not done before, calling on those gathered to help ensure that the unpredictable political transition underway in the region ends in democratic rule and economic opportunity. He cited the violent conflict in Syria, the Palestinian national movement and other regional struggles as opportunities to reaffirm American support for those seeking freedom.

But the president also acknowledged what he described as "the tensions between the West and an Arab world moving to democracy" - tensions he said have surfaced again in the recent attacks on Americans in Libya and Egypt.

He said they must be "honestly addressed," then presented a strong defense of democratic values such as free speech, that he said should not be sacrificed despite the new challenges presented to governments and beliefs in the information age.

"Just as we cannot solve every problem in the world, the United States has not, and will not, seek to dictate the outcome of democratic transitions abroad, and we do not expect other nations to agree with us on every issue," he said.

Turning to the dispute over Iran's nuclear program, Obama adopted a sterner tone. He said time is running out for a diplomatic solution and echoed his previous position that the United States is committed to stopping Tehran from developing a nuclear weapon.

"A nuclear-armed Iran is not a challenge that can be contained," he said. "It would threaten the elimination of Israel, the security of gulf nations and the stability of the global economy. It risks triggering a nuclear arms race in the region and the unraveling of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. That's why a coalition of countries is holding the Iranian government accountable. And that's why the United States will do what we must to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon."

The bulk of the 30-minute speech, however, was devoted to appealing for calm and tolerance in the aftermath of the protests and violence that swept many mainly Muslim countries this month in response to a YouTube video that disparaged the prophet Muhammad.

Invoking the death of the American ambassador to Libya, J. Christopher Stevens, and three others in an assault on a U.S. diplomatic post there on Sept. 11, Obama said: "There is no speech that justifies mindless violence. There are no words that excuse the killing of innocents. There is no video that justifies an attack on an embassy."

Obama called the video "crude and disgusting," but he did not apologize for it as protesters in Pakistan and elsewhere have demanded.

"I have made it clear that the United States government had nothing to do with this video, and I believe its message must be rejected by all who respect our common humanity," the president said. "It is an insult not only to Muslims but to America as well."

Obama warned repeatedly that democratic change - from Burma to Yemen - is threatened by the extremism occurring in the Middle East

"If we are serious about those ideals, we must speak honestly about the deeper causes of the crisis. Because we face a choice between the forces that would drive us apart and the hopes we hold in common," Obama said.

"Today, we must affirm that our future will be determined by people like Chris Stevens, and not by his killers. Today, we must declare that this violence and intolerance has no place among our United Nations."

Obama argued that banning the video would violate the constitutional principle of free speech and wouldn't work anyway in the age of the smartphone.

"Like me, the majority of Americans are Christian, and yet we do not ban blasphemy against our most sacred beliefs," he said. "As president of our country and commander in chief of our military, I accept that people are going to call me awful things every day, and I will always defend their right to do so."

That line drew laughter and applause from an audience that included leaders of U.S. adversaries such as Iran and North Korea.

Obama said the United States protects offending views "not because we support hateful speech," but "because in a diverse society, efforts to restrict speech can quickly become a tool to silence critics and oppress minorities."

The administration has struggled particularly hard to address the wave of violence sparked by the video in Pakistan, where anti-American sentiment is high and the billions in U.S. aid is often viewed with suspicion.

U.S. officials said Pakistan's security services have done an able job of defending American diplomatic installations, but U.S. officials were dumbfounded last week when Pakistan's railway minister offered \$100,000 to anyone who kills the maker of the video.

The Pakistani government disavowed the bounty Monday, just hours before Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton met President Asif Ali Zardari on the sidelines of the U.N. meeting. U.S. officials said afterward that she did not directly call on the Pakistani leader to fire the minister.

Senior U.S. officials later said that the entire Pakistani delegation had condemned the bounty, and one official who belongs to the same political party as the railway minister told Clinton that the party would soon consider the minister's future role. The U.S. officials said they took that statement as an implicit promise to punish the minister, and one said the Americans were "comfortable with that response."

The U.S. officials described the session on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the closed-door session on the record.

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Obama Seeks Arab Spring 'Reform'

September 26, 2012

[Wall Street Journal](#)

By JAY SOLOMON and CAROL E. LEE

UNITED NATIONS—President Barack Obama, his policies facing tests abroad and political pressures at home, defended his handling of the uprisings that have swept the Middle East as he took a turn on the world stage ahead of the November election.

The president's address on Tuesday to the United Nations General Assembly was his first detailed response to the violence and protests that erupted in the Middle East and North Africa after circulation this month of a video made in the U.S. mocking the Muslim faith's Prophet Muhammad.

President Barack Obama's speech before the United Nations General Assembly comes as Republican challenger Mitt Romney says the president needs to do more to shape events abroad. Neil King has details on The News Hub.

The speech also was an opportunity for world leaders to hear the U.S. leader's current assessment of democracy in Egypt, Yemen, Tunisia, Libya and other countries once under autocratic rule, but now run by new leaders grappling to control long-repressed and often rebellious populations.

"True democracy—real freedom—is hard work," Mr. Obama said. "Those in power have to resist the temptation to crack down on dissidents. In hard economic times, countries must be tempted— may be tempted—to rally the people around perceived enemies, at home and abroad, rather than focusing on the painstaking work of reform."

Mr. Obama addressed an array of issues, warning Iran and Syria that the U.S. and its allies are united in their efforts to deny Tehran a nuclear bomb and to deprive Damascus the arms and funding for its military crackdown. However, he didn't outline any specific new steps Washington might take, as some allies had hoped and adversaries have urged.

"While statements of support are welcome, the slaughter of tens of thousands of Syrian civilians continues unchecked, and we need action more than words," said Radwan Ziadeh, a spokesman for the opposition Coalition for a Democratic Syria.

On Iran, Mr. Obama reiterated his view that diplomacy still can work and that the U.S. "will do what we must" to ensure Iran doesn't obtain a nuclear weapon. However, failing to meet Israeli hopes, he offered no new red lines short of the actual development of an atomic bomb that might trigger a U.S. military response.

An Israeli diplomat said his government was still gauging what Mr. Obama meant in his speech's phrasing. Israeli President Benjamin Netanyahu sought, but was denied, a meeting with Mr. Obama on the sidelines of the U.N. event, though they weren't in New York at the same time. Iran denies charges that it is trying to develop nuclear weapons.

The eruption of anti-American violence on Sept. 11 galvanized GOP views that Mr. Obama had ceded U.S. influence in the Mideast and failed to anticipate security needs at U.S. diplomatic missions.

The administration condemned the anti-Islamic video that was the initial rallying point of protests, but has also said that the attack on the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi, Libya, that killed Ambassador Christopher Stevens was terrorism that may have involved al Qaeda.

Republican candidate Mitt Romney, in a speech Tuesday at the annual meeting of a foundation started by former President Bill Clinton, argued Mr. Obama's policies have made Americans "feel that we are at the mercy of events, rather than shaping events." He told an audience at the Clinton Global Initiative meeting in New York that in the weeks ahead he would detail a new approach to U.S. foreign aid that would foster stability in the Middle East.

Mr. Obama also spoke at the Clinton foundation session, announcing new steps by the U.S. government to fight human trafficking, which he called "debasement" to humanity.

In his 30-minute speech to the General Assembly, Mr. Obama defended his record on the Arab Spring and said that the U.S. must stand by emerging democracies, even as political transitions create instability or bring to power leaders from groups, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, not traditionally aligned with Washington.

"Even as there will be huge challenges that come with a transition to democracy, I am convinced that ultimately government of the people, by the people and for the people is more likely to bring about the

stability, prosperity, and individual opportunity that serve as a basis for peace in our world," Mr. Obama said.

Mr. Obama's approach, as outlined in the address, is to walk a fine line on the issue of free speech in the Muslim world and the respect for different cultures and religions. He repeated that the U.S. government had no role in making the anti-Muslim video and that he personally found it "repugnant."

"As president of our country and commander-in-chief of our military, I accept that people are going to call me awful things every day, and I will always defend their right to do so," Mr. Obama said, drawing laughter from his audience.

But he also stressed that emerging democracies need to aggressively guard against the use of religion and violence for political purposes, adding that it would be increasingly difficult for the U.S. and American companies to engage with governments that aren't committed to security.

Mr. Obama held no formal meetings with world leaders during his 24-hour visit to New York. However, he stopped by a meeting that one of his advisers was holding with Yemeni President Abdu Rabu Mansour Hadi "to thank him for the steps he's taken to secure our embassy and our diplomats in that country," said Ben Rhodes, a deputy national-security adviser.

He also met briefly with U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the current president of the U.N. General Assembly, Vuk Jeremic of Serbia.

Mr. Obama's call for free-speech guarantees in the emerging democracies were cautiously lauded by some Middle Eastern leaders at the U.N.

"It was a very good opening speech," said Lebanon's prime minister, Najib Mikati. "I agreed with it 99%, particularly his point that we need to expect and have openness, before it is too late."

One Arab diplomat said: "The key message was that we need to fight for tolerance and accept people as they are. This was very important. We cannot be dragged down into violence by what is after all a very small minority."

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Training Afghan Allies, With Guard Firmly Up

September 26, 2012

New York Times

By MATTHEW ROSENBERG

BAD PAKH, Afghanistan — When American military advisers fly into Afghan Army outposts like the one nestled on the floor of this forested valley, they keep their body armor on and their weapons loaded.

Their guard was up even though they were there for a day of training Afghan soldiers without once leaving the confines of a fortified base — even when chatting with the Afghan officers over a lunch of goat meat and yogurt.

Afghan soldiers and police officers have gunned down 51 American and allied troops so far this year, and now no one is taking chances. The advisers' extreme caution lays bare the steep challenge ahead after

the official end of the American troop "surge" on Friday and as the mission shifts toward the next chapter of the war: preparing the Afghans to fight on their own.

"They come here and they look like they are going to fight us," said Sgt. Abdul Karim Haq, 25, an Afghan soldier at the outpost. "They are always talking down to us like we are little children."

American military leaders say they have little choice as insider killings have become a prevalent cause of death. Attacks by Afghan forces against Western soldiers and Marines this month led to new precautions over where and when joint operations and training sessions happen. At the same time, a video and cartoons mocking the Prophet Muhammad are stoking outrage and violence against Americans across the Muslim world.

In the field, where small teams of American advisers are now working with Afghan units, even minor misunderstandings are treated as potentially violent confrontations.

When a pair of Afghan soldiers decided to take a nap in a guard tower in which the Americans had taken up a position at this outpost, the coalition advisory team commander, Capt. John Chung, 28, sent his interpreter to hustle out the Afghans with an admonishment to "be gentle. No trouble, you know what I mean."

Aside from a fear of being gunned down, the advisers said they were more vigilant because they also doubted the ability of Afghan soldiers to secure the base from an insurgent attack.

"Exhibit A," one adviser noted about the Afghans' nap in the guard tower.

"I think we need to be ready for everything. Maybe it's coming from inside, or maybe it gets in here from the outside," said the adviser, a young soldier who did not want to be identified for fear of damaging his career. "I mean, sleeping in a tower? There are a lot of reasons to be careful out here."

By here, he meant behind high walls that American soldiers had built near Bad Pakh, in eastern Afghanistan, just a few years ago and guarded until handing the outpost over to the Afghan Army in March. Once home to Americans, it is now treated by them as another dangerous place in a hostile country.

And for good reason, judging by comments from Afghan soldiers here and elsewhere in the country.

Abdul Hanan, 20, a soldier also based in the east, was blunt. "We would have killed many of them already," he said, "but our commanders are cowards and don't let us."

He said the Americans treat the Afghans roughly, cursing at and bullying them. "We like the Americans' heavy weapons, but we don't like their soldiers," he said.

He and other soldiers nonetheless acknowledged what the Pentagon's own public reporting makes clear: the Afghans are not ready to fight without American help, and the United States is eager to see that they still get it.

American forces may be dwindling, but "there's still going to be an insurgency here," said Brig. Gen. David G. Fox, the top adviser north of Kabul. The advisers' brief is to "make sure the Afghans can take it on themselves."

Despite a decade-long, \$33 billion allied effort to build the military and the police, Afghanistan's security forces "continue to confront challenges, including attrition, leadership deficits and limited capabilities in staff planning, management, logistics and procurement," according to an April review of Afghan security by the Pentagon.

The army was improving, the report said, pointing to the fact that 13 of the Afghan Army's 156 battalions were now rated by the coalition as "independent with advisers," up from one in 2011. The ranking is the highest given by the coalition.

Yet the report readily acknowledged that its own figures were suspect. This year the coalition stopped using officers independent of its training command to validate ratings, and the change "has resulted in the recent increase in 'independent with advisers' units," it said.

Persistent corruption and organized crime networks within the security forces also risk undermining rising public esteem for the army and the police, and could "pose a threat to the transition process," it said.

The police, in particular, have a reputation for brutality and corruption. In Bagh-e-Pol, a village near the southern city of Kandahar, the police chief, Abdul Wali, boasted that he and his men often beat people suspected of being members of the Taliban so badly that "sometimes he loses an arm, sometimes he loses a leg."

Mr. Wali's American advisers smiled uncomfortably as he explained in an interview that he did not need a trial to know who deserved a beating.

Senior American and European officials say privately that problems within the Afghan forces have reinforced internal doubts about Afghanistan's long-term stability.

As one Western official put it, American and European talk of the transition in Afghanistan being "conditions based" is really about the conditions in America and Europe, where majorities no longer support the war.

The immediate result is that coalition resources are diminishing fast, though senior American officers said scarcity could have its advantages. With less to give to the Afghans, who for years looked to coalition forces for everything from clean drinking water to air cover, they will have to learn to fend for themselves.

But that does not include Western assets like surveillance drones, attack helicopters and medical evacuation helicopters, which will remain in Afghanistan for some time, officials say.

Advisers flew into Bad Pakh last month to teach the Afghans how to load wounded soldiers into an American medevac helicopter. Time permitting, they also planned mortar practice.

But when the Americans flew out 10 hours later, the training day had gone much like three previous ones held here in the past two months: the helicopter never showed. It was either down for maintenance or called away for a more pressing mission. The advisers never got a clear answer why.

Mortar practice also had to be scratched when it turned out the Afghans were missing the sight for their sole mortar tube.

With plenty of time to talk, the Afghans told stories about life without the Americans. Their first big test came in June when a patrol ran out of ammunition after being ambushed by the Taliban, who killed one soldier and captured another, said Sgt. Maj. Ghulam Jilani, 45, the senior Afghan enlisted soldier at the base.

The Americans had pulled out three months earlier, and the Afghans quickly determined that a rescue mission was too risky without the air cover and surveillance once readily provided by their now-departed allies.

So, Sergeant Major Jilani said, they got their man back the "Afghan way." They rounded up fighting-age men from a nearby village and took them back to the base. The villagers basically became hostages.

"We made sure everyone knew: 'Give us the soldier back and we'll free the men,' " Sergeant Major Jilani said.

By dusk, the district governor had brokered a trade.

Without American backup, "we could only do what these village people would understand," Sergeant Major Jilani said. "Why should there be any objections to this method? We did not shoot the men."
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U.S. Unease Over Drone Strikes

September 26, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By ADAM ENTOUS, SIOBHAN GORMAN and EVAN PEREZ

About once a month, the Central Intelligence Agency sends a fax to a general at Pakistan's intelligence service outlining broad areas where the U.S. intends to conduct strikes with drone aircraft, according to U.S. officials. The Pakistanis, who in public oppose the program, don't respond.

On this basis, plus the fact that Pakistan continues to clear airspace in the targeted areas, the U.S. government concludes it has tacit consent to conduct strikes within the borders of a sovereign nation, according to officials familiar with the program.

Representatives of the White House's National Security Council and CIA declined to discuss Pakistani consent, saying such information is classified. In public speeches, Obama administration officials have portrayed the U.S.'s use of drones to kill wanted militants around the world as being on firm legal ground. In those speeches, officials stopped short of directly discussing the CIA's drone program in Pakistan because the operations are covert.

Now, the rationale used by the administration, interpreting Pakistan's acquiescence as a green light, has set off alarms among some administration legal officials. In particular, lawyers at the State Department,

including top legal adviser Harold Koh, believe this rationale veers near the edge of what can be considered permission, though they still think the program is legal, officials say.

Two senior administration officials described the approach as interpreting Pakistan's silence as a "yes." One dubbed the U.S. approach "cowboy behavior."

In a reflection of the program's long-term legal uncertainty and precedent-setting nature, a group of lawyers in the administration known as "the council of counsels" is trying to develop a more sustainable framework for how governments should use such weapons.

The effort is designed to fend off legal challenges at home as well as to ease allies' concerns about increasing legal scrutiny from civil-liberties groups and others. The White House also is worried about setting precedents for other countries, including Russia or China, that might conduct targeted killings as such weapons proliferate in the future, officials say.

Because there is little precedent for the classified U.S. drone program, international law doesn't speak directly to how it might operate. That makes the question of securing consent all the more critical, legal specialists say.

In public, Pakistan has repeatedly expressed opposition to the drone program, and about 10 months ago closed the CIA's only drone base in the country. In private, some Pakistani officials say they don't consider their actions equivalent to providing consent. They say Pakistan has considered shooting down a drone to reassert control over the country's airspace but shelved the idea as needlessly provocative.

Pakistan also has considered challenging the legality of the program at the United Nations.

"No country and no people have suffered more in the epic struggle against terrorism than Pakistan," Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari told the U.N. General Assembly Tuesday. "Drone strikes and civilian casualties on our territory add to the complexity of our battle for hearts and minds through this epic struggle."

A former Pakistani official who remains close to the program said Pakistan believes the CIA continues to send notifications for the sole purpose of giving it legal cover.

It is possible Pakistan is playing both sides. Ashley Deeks, a former State Department assistant legal adviser under Mr. Koh who is now at the University of Virginia, said a lack of a Pakistani response to U.S. notifications might be a way for Pakistan to meet seemingly contradictory goals—letting the CIA continue using its airspace but also distancing the government of Pakistan from the program, which is deeply unpopular among Pakistanis.

Legal experts say U.S. law gives the government broad latitude to pursue al Qaeda and its affiliates wherever they may be. A joint resolution of Congress after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks authorized the president to use force against the planners of the attacks and those who harbor them. Then-President George W. Bush that month signed a classified order known as a "finding" authorizing covert action against al Qaeda.

Government consent provides the firmest legal footing, legal experts say. The U.S. has that in Yemen, whose government assists with U.S. strikes against an al Qaeda affiliate. In Somalia, the nominal government, which controls little territory, has welcomed U.S. military strikes against militants.

In an April speech, White House counterterrorism adviser John Brennan said the administration has concluded there is nothing in international law barring the U.S. from using lethal force against a threat to the U.S., despite the absence of a declared war, provided the country involved consents or is unable or unwilling to take action against the threat.

On the international stage, matters are less clear-cut. The unwilling-or-unable doctrine, which was first publicly stated by the George W. Bush administration and has been affirmed by the Obama administration, remains open to challenge abroad, legal experts say. Conducting drone strikes in a country against its will could be seen as an act of war.

Benjamin Wittes, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, said the U.S. drone approach in Pakistan is getting closer to the edge. "It doesn't mean it is illegal, but you are at the margins of what can reasonably be construed as consent," he said.

Kenneth Anderson, a law professor at American University, defended the right to conduct drone operations without consent if a country refuses to address the threat. He added, however, that such a program can't be sustained by secret winks and nods.

"Strategic ambiguity is a real bad long-term policy because it eventually blows up in your face," Mr. Anderson said. "It's not stable."

Senior U.S. officials worry about maintaining the support of an important ally—the U.K.—where officials have begun to express concerns privately about the extent of Pakistan's consent.

Britain began a review to see whether under British law it could continue to cooperate with the program, say U.S. and British officials, after Pakistan closed the CIA's drone base in December. Pakistan took that action after a strike by a manned U.S. aircraft killed two dozen Pakistani troops mistaken for militants. Britain eventually decided to maintain its cooperation.

John Bellinger, the top State Department legal adviser in the George W. Bush administration, said that for the U.S., it is "not unreasonable to assume consent" from Pakistan for the use of drones, "particularly when the U.S. conducts repeated attacks and it's open and obvious."

But some in the U.K., Mr. Bellinger added, might "need to have greater clarity that there actually is consent," given increasing domestic legal scrutiny for Britain's supporting role in the program.

Until the raid that killed Osama bin Laden, there was a more open channel of communication.

In the early days of the Afghan war, lists of specific individuals to be targeted on Pakistani soil by U.S. drones were approved by both the U.S. and Pakistan, in what was called a "dual-key" system. Starting about four years ago, the U.S. began increasingly to go it alone.

By last year, according to U.S. officials, the system in place was that the CIA would send a regular monthly fax to Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence agency. The fax would outline the boundaries of the

airspace the drones would use—large areas along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border referred to as flight "boxes" because they are shaped like three-dimensional rectangles in the sky. There was no mention of specific targets.

The ISI would send back a fax acknowledging receipt. The return messages stopped short of endorsing drone strikes. But in U.S. eyes the fax response combined with the continued clearing of airspace to avoid midair collisions—a process known as "de-confliction"—represented Pakistan's tacit consent to the program.

After the May 2011 bin Laden raid, which the U.S. did without Pakistani permission or knowledge, the ISI stopped acknowledging receipt of U.S. drone notifications, according to U.S. and Pakistani officials. Replies were stopped on the order of the ISI chief at that time, said an official briefed on the matter.

"Not responding was their way of saying 'we're upset with you,'" this official said. The official said the ISI chief chose that option knowing an outright denial of drone permission would spark a confrontation, and also believing that withdrawing consent wouldn't end the strikes.

Administration lawyers, including those with qualms such as Mr. Koh, believe the CIA's campaign is legal. They believe they have consent, however tacit, primarily because the Pakistani military continues to clear airspace for drones and doesn't interfere physically with the unpiloted aircraft in flight, according to officials involved with the administration's legal thinking.

Still, for some U.S. officials, including Mr. Koh, the lack of an ISI response to faxes was unnerving, leaving already-vague communications even more open to interpretation.

Spurred by concerns about the future of the drone program in Pakistan, administration lawyers have been considering the feasibility of making changes. One idea calls for putting some of the drones under control of the U.S. military, which would allow officials to talk more openly about how the program works and open the door to closer cooperation with the Pakistanis, according to U.S. and Pakistani officials.

The U.S. has also considered a coordinated campaign that could involve both U.S. drones and Pakistani F-16 fighter planes, these officials said.

In meetings in Washington last month with the new chief of Pakistan's ISI, Lt. Gen. Zahir ul-Islam, American officials raised the prospect of a "drone drawdown," according to Pakistani officials. American officials said the idea of ramping down the program gradually as security conditions permit has been hotly debated for months. Pakistani officials considered the proposal to be "amorphous" and "without detail," an adviser to Pakistan's government said.

Americans also raised the prospect of creating "joint ownership" of the drone program, the Pakistani adviser said, but no changes were agreed to.

Since retired Gen. David Petraeus became CIA director about a year ago, the agency has taken some steps to ease concerns about the drone program, according to officials. The frequency of drone strikes in Pakistan has fallen to an average of four a month, versus 10 monthly in the prior 12 months, based on a tally from the New America Foundation, a nonpartisan think tank.

Officials said Gen. Petraeus has occasionally overruled recommendations of the CIA's Counterterrorism Center and declined to authorize some strikes that could create friction with Pakistan. One U.S. official said the pace of counterterrorism operations mirrors the thinner ranks of al Qaeda after years of strikes.

The effort to put the program on a firmer legal footing is running into some hurdles. The council of counsels wants to make details of counterterrorism programs public in some ways to address court challenges and reassure anxious allies, as well as to avoid spurring future use of these kinds of technologies by other countries.

But the agency general counsels have drawn the line at revealing detailed criteria for picking targets or disclosing who makes the decisions. Officials say leaving these things ambiguous could help shield officials involved against possible court challenges and avoid providing information that militants could use to evade targeting. Courts in Europe have sought to put on trial some of the CIA officers and foreign partners alleged to be involved in detaining suspected militants in secret sites during the Bush administration.

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AFRICA

Kenya Bombs Somali Airport Held By Militants

September 26, 2012

Associated Press

NAIROBI, Kenya - The Kenyan military says its jets have bombed an airport in Somalia - the last major city in the country held by extremist insurgents who are fighting African Union troops.

Kenya's military said Tuesday that its bombing of the Somali port city of Kismayo destroyed a warehouse and armory belonging to the Islamist militant group al-Shabab, which controls the city. Al-Shabab said on Twitter, however, that the three bombs which hit the airport didn't cause any casualties or losses.

Claims about fighting in Somalia are difficult to verify.

Kismayo is the main remaining stronghold of the al-Qaida-linked al-Shabab. The group, considered terrorists by the United States and others, is waging an insurgency against the U.N.-backed Somali government, which is being bolstered by African troops including forces from Kenya.

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South Africa Strikes Spread To Transport Sector

September 26, 2012

Associated Press

By Carley Petesch

JOHANNESBURG - South Africa's labor unrest spread Tuesday from its mines to the transport sector, and the country's transport union said more than 20,000 road freight employees are on strike demanding a pay increase.

An extended transport strike will affect the delivery of goods including gasoline and food items in South Africa.

South African Transport and Allied Workers' Union said road freight employees are demanding a 12 percent pay increase. Employers had offered an 8.5 percent increase, an offer that was rejected in the

Gauteng province earlier Tuesday, SATAWU spokesman Vincent Masoga said. The workers also want an equal increase for workers classified under the council's extended bargaining unit, he said.

"Talks are finished for today, but no resolution was reached," Masoga said, adding that the strike will continue Wednesday.

Striking truck drivers gathered in Johannesburg on Tuesday and threw stones at passing trucks. The union said workers decided to strike since there has been a deadlock in wage negotiations since June.

Also Tuesday, mine workers for the Anglo American Platinum mines near Rustenburg met with management and arbitrators to discuss demands submitted last week for greater pay. Gaddafi Mdoda, a representative for the miners said that through talks with the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration, workers have now dropped their demand for a monthly gross pay of about 16,000 rand (\$2,000) and have asked for a take home monthly pay of 12,500 rand (\$1,560).

Mdoda said that Amplats has been given seven days to respond.

"We will be waiting for these seven days with our tools down until they respond," he said.

Striking miners at Lonmin PLC, a platinum mine in South Africa's north west, had demanded a take-home pay of 12,500 rand, but eventually they accepted a 22 percent pay raise that gave them a monthly pay of 11,000 rand (\$1,375). The deal was reached after nearly six weeks of sometimes violent protests that saw 46 people killed. The Lonmin deal has led to other miners in the area to demand the same, and to sidestep their unions to deal directly with management.

Amplats spokeswoman Mpumi Sithole told The Associated Press that she did not have updates on the talks Tuesday, or the number of miners striking.

Anglo American Platinum is the world's largest producer of the metal used in jewelry and to reduce carbon emissions of high-end vehicles. Police broke up several gatherings last week at the Amplats mine settlements using tear gas.

Mdoda said that five worker representatives are meeting directly with Amplats management and representatives from the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration, the same body that helped in Lonmin negotiations.

Amplats miners will gather Wednesday, despite the outcome of talks Tuesday. Mdoda said he expected 9,000 to 10,000 workers at the Bleskop stadium near Rustenburg.

"We are going to meet no matter what," Mdoda said. "If it is negative, the strike will continue in a hard way because it's been a long time we've been waiting for the management to discuss our demands."

Strikes at the Amplats mines have been ongoing for weeks despite calls from management that workers return to the mines or face legal action.

Labor unrest is also ongoing in the gold mining sector. Nearly 25,000 workers are on strike at Gold Field's KDC West and Beatrix mines, spokesman Willie Jacobsz said Tuesday. Strikes at the KDC West mines started more than two weeks ago.

"The cause of the strikes at KDC West was originally a leadership issues, though other issues have surfaced, gone away and returned," said Jacobz. "The financial question has raised its head, but our position is that we currently have an existing wage agreement in place until the middle of next year. "

Jacobz said the KDC West mine, when operating, produces about 14,000 ounces of gold per day, while the Beatrix mine produces 900 ounces daily.

South Africa produces 75 percent of the world's platinum and is the No. 4 chrome producer and the fifth-biggest gold producer. South Africa produces 7 percent of the world's production of gold.

Miners at AngloGold Ashanti's Kopanang mine, which employs 5,000 people and produced about 4 percent of AngloGold Ashanti's total production in the first half of this year, continued strikes started last week into Tuesday, company spokesman Alan Fine said.

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ASIA

Land Disputes In Cambodia Focus Ire On Chinese Investors

September 26, 2012

Washington Post

By Andrew Higgins

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia - When China's President Hu Jintao visited Cambodia this year, Tep Vanny, a 32-year-old housewife fighting eviction from her family home in central Phnom Penh, set off down Mao Tse-Tung Boulevard to try to deliver a plea for help to the Chinese Embassy.

Among thousands of residents in the Boeung Kak Lake district of the capital whose land has been targeted for redevelopment by a Chinese-financed real estate company, Tep Vanny carried a letter explaining the "sadness and suffering" caused by the project - which has turned Phnom Penh's biggest lake into a barren, arid expanse of sand - and begging the Chinese leader to "intervene for a fair resolution of our land dispute problems."

The letter never got delivered. Tep Vanny was driven from the embassy gate by a phalanx of security guards. Other would-be petitioners with land gripes were chased away by police on motorbikes.

China professes a policy of never interfering in the internal affairs of foreign lands. But in Cambodia, growing public fury over land grabs to make way for development projects involving Chinese investors has pushed Beijing to the center of one of this Southeast Asian nation's most sensitive social and political issues.

"I had hoped that Chinese companies would help bring prosperity and development, but instead they brought only problems," said Tep Vanny, who has helped spearhead a long campaign against forced evictions in the capital. The campaign has been surprisingly effective, mobilizing a wide array of people against the Boeung Kak Lake project, which is now at a standstill. It is unclear why construction has been halted and when it will resume.

On an official level, relations between Beijing and Phnom Penh are now at their warmest since the 1970s, when China pumped aid, arms and advisers into Cambodia to help the Khmer Rouge, which ruled

here from 1975 to 1979 and abolished all land rights in a murderous communist revolution that dotted the country with "killing fields" and left up to a third of the population dead.

That shared revolutionary ardor faded long ago, replaced in recent years by the bonds of profit between Cambodia's corrupt governing elite and Chinese companies looking for land to build on, rivers to dam, highways to pave and forests to cut down. Parts of this burgeoning economic alliance have brought undoubted benefits to ordinary Cambodians, most notably hundreds of miles of new roads and tens of thousands of jobs in Chinese-owned factories.

But the partnership has also stirred widespread public anger as Chinese investment has helped push hundreds of thousands from their homes. In the southwest of the country, a real estate company from Tianjin is building a casino and resort complex on what was supposed to be protected forestland. At the other end of Cambodia, Chinese investors have been given rights to mine for gold and develop plantations. In all, according to data collected by human rights activists in a survey of just half the country, about 420,000 Cambodians have been affected by evictions since 2003, many of them in relation to China-funded ventures.

A vital partner

Chinese companies, said Pung Chhiv Kek, president of Licadho, a group of human rights and social activists, "should be more cautious" and examine the consequences of their investments. Instead, she said, they often take the view that "they don't have to care about people's rights in China, so why should they care here?"

Government spokesman Phay Siphon blamed the public outcry over evictions on opposition politicians and said Cambodia, a small, poor nation with about 15 million people, has to develop its land in order to boost living standards.

China, he added, has done far more than the United States - which bombed the country mercilessly during the Vietnam War and is still pressing it to repay loans granted in the early 1970s - to help Cambodia recover from decades of conflict.

China has written off many old debts and provided hundreds of millions of dollars in new low-

interest credits to fund the construction, mostly by Chinese companies, of government buildings, dams, roads, bridges and ports. "The building where we sit is Chinese," said Phay Siphon, referring to a shiny new complex that houses the offices of hundreds of officials. Chinese companies, meanwhile, have invested nearly \$9 billion in Cambodia since 1994, according to official Chinese reports - compared with just \$77.8 million in American investment registered over the same period.

China, by far Cambodia's biggest foreign investor, has become such a vital partner for Cambodia, particularly for politicians and officials who have business ties with Chinese companies, that authorities here have sometimes taken extraordinary steps to protect Chinese interests. When workers at three garment factories operated by companies from China and Taiwan in the city of Bavet staged a protest in February to press for higher pay, the local governor, furious at the disruption, turned up with a gun and shot into the crowd, according to witnesses. Three female workers were wounded. The governor lost his job but has not been jailed. Garment-making is Cambodia's biggest industry, employing about 300,000 people.

Two months later, an environmental activist, Chut Wutty, was shot to death, apparently by military police, during a visit to the Cardamom mountain region to collect evidence that a Chinese dam project - one of six new hydropower projects undertaken here by China - had opened the way to a rash of illegal logging.

Cambodia has also worked hard within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations to protect China's diplomatic interests, particularly in relation to territorial disputes in the South China Sea.

Outrage over a lake

Of all the Cambodian controversies involving China, however, none has stirred as much public outrage as the development of Boeung Kak Lake, which had been one of Phnom Penh's most cherished urban landmarks. Though badly polluted after decades of neglect, it still attracted throngs of people to its waterfront pathways, cafes and guesthouses.

Today, the area is an eyesore - and an emblem of the damage wrought by Cambodia's China-

assisted dash for development. "The policy of the government is to cut poverty, but all these evictions only make people homeless and poor," said Pung Chhiv Kek of Licadho.

Under the terms of a 99-year lease granted in Feb 2007 by Phnom Penh Municipality, a Cambodian company called Shukaku gained the right to turn the lake and a swath of surrounding land into a new residential and business district. Shukaku agreed to pay \$79 million for 328 acres of prime real estate, far less than the market value of such a large piece of land in the center of the capital.

The company is controlled by Lao Meng Khin, a wealthy senator for the ruling Cambodian People's Party and a close ally of Cambodia's long-serving leader, Prime Minister Hun Sen. Shukaku executives declined to be interviewed. Government spokesman Phay Siphon said Boeung Kak Lake had been a smelly health hazard and needed to be turned into "a developed place."

After two false starts with Chinese companies, Shukaku's effort now has the backing of Inner Mongolia Ordos Hong Jun Investment Corp., a joint venture between two Chinese entities.

While workers moved in to drain the lake and pump in sand in 2008, armed police stood guard as most of the area's more than 4,000 families - who were offered either land outside the city or modest cash payments - were ordered to leave. But hundreds of other residents, including Tep Vanny, refused to budge and began organizing protests. They also started writing letters to the Chinese Embassy. All went unanswered. But, in an interview with a state-owned Chinese newspaper, the embassy's commercial attache, Jin Yuan, defended Chinese investors, saying they had played no role in evictions, which he said were solely the work of local authorities.

After repeated clashes between residents and police, the World Bank announced in August 2011 that it would suspend lending to Cambodia until authorities halted the evictions and agreed to fair compensation. Stung by the mounting criticism, Prime Minister Hun Sen ordered that part of the area leased to Shukaku be registered as the property of more than 700 families still living in the area. But protests continued, and authorities cracked down hard. In May of this year, Tep Vanny and a dozen

other women were arrested during a rally near a cluster of demolished homes and sentenced to 21 / 2 years in prison for "illegally occupying public land."

The stiff sentences drew widespread condemnation and a plea for the women's release from Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton. Cambodia's Appeal Court overturned the jail sentences. The crackdown, however, has since resumed, with two anti-eviction activists arrested early this month.

The future of the project, meanwhile, is mired in uncertainty. A high concrete wall has been erected around the sand-filled lake, but there is no sign of construction work. The sand is too soft to build on and could take up to a decade to settle sufficiently. Residents complain that draining of the lake has caused flooding during the rainy season and led to sewage leaking. Liu Xueming, an official with Ordos Hong Jun Investment in Phnom Penh, said he couldn't discuss plans for the vanished lake. "This project is a little bit sensitive," he said.

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China Launches Carrier, But Experts Doubt Its Worth

September 26, 2012

New York Times

By Jane Perlez

BEIJING - In a ceremony attended by the country's top leaders, China put its first aircraft carrier into service on Tuesday, a move intended to signal its growing military might as tensions escalate between Beijing and its neighbors over islands in nearby seas.

Officials said the carrier, a discarded vessel bought from Ukraine in 1998 and refurbished by China, would protect national sovereignty, an issue that has become a touchstone of the government's dispute with Japan over ownership of islands in the East China Sea.

But despite the triumphant tone of the launching, which was watched by President Hu Jintao and Prime Minister Wen Jiabao, and despite rousing assessments by Chinese military experts about the importance of the carrier, the vessel will be used only for training and testing for the foreseeable future.

The mark "16" on the carrier's side indicates that it is limited to training, Chinese and other military experts said. China does not have planes capable of landing on the carrier and so far training for such landings has been carried out on land, they said.

Even so, the public appearance of the carrier at the northeastern port of Dalian was used as an occasion to stir patriotic feelings, which have run at fever pitch in the last 10 days over the dispute between China and Japan over the East China Sea islands, called Senkaku in Japan and Diaoyu in China.

The carrier will "raise the overall operational strength of the Chinese Navy" and help China "to effectively protect national sovereignty, security and development interests," the Ministry of Defense said.

The Communist Party congress that will begin the country's once-in-a-decade leadership transition is expected to be held next month, and the public unveiling of the carrier appeared to be part of an effort to forge national unity ahead of the event.

For international purposes, the public unveiling of the carrier seemed intended to signal to smaller nations in the South China Sea, including the Philippines, an American ally, that China has an increasing number of impressive assets to deploy.

American military planners have played down the significance of the commissioning of the carrier. Some Navy officials have even said they would encourage China to move ahead with building its own aircraft carrier and the ships to accompany it, because it would be a waste of money.

Other military experts outside China have agreed with that assessment.

"The fact is the aircraft carrier is useless for the Chinese Navy," You Ji, a visiting senior research fellow at the National University of Singapore, said in an interview. "If it is used against America, it has no survivability. If it is used against China's neighbors, it's a sign of bullying."

Vietnam, a neighbor with whom China has fought wars, operates land-based Russian Su-30 aircraft that could pose a threat to the aircraft carrier, Mr. You said. "In the South China Sea, if the carrier is damaged by the Vietnamese, it's a huge loss of face," he said. "It's not worth it."

Up to now, Chinese pilots have been limited to practicing simulated carrier landings on concrete strips on land in Chinese J-8 aircraft based on Soviet-made MIG-23s produced about 25 years ago, Mr. You said. The pilots could not undertake the difficult maneuver of landing on a moving carrier because China does not yet have suitable aircraft, Mr. You said.

The question of whether China will move ahead and build its own carrier depends in large part, he said, on whether China can develop aircraft to land on one. "It's a long, long process for constructing such aircraft," he said.

In contrast to some of the skepticism expressed by military experts outside China, Li Jie, a researcher at the Chinese Naval Research Institute, said in an interview in the state-run People's Daily that the carrier would change the Chinese Navy's traditional mind-set and bring qualitative changes to its operational style and structure, he said.

Although the Chinese military does not publish a breakdown of its military spending, foreign military experts say the navy is less well financed than the army and air force.

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Foxconn Riot In China Seen As Likely To Recur

September 26, 2012

Washington Post

By William Wan

BEIJING - The factory riot that hit one of world's largest electronics manufacturers this week in northern China was rooted in growing economic pressure and impatience with poor work conditions among the country's vast pool of migrant workers, analysts say, adding that if grievances remain unaddressed, such incidents are likely to increase.

The riot, which began late Sunday, involved nearly 2,000 workers at a facility of Foxconn, a Taiwan-based manufacturing giant, which temporarily shut down the factory in response. The latest unrest

coincides with signs of a slowdown in the Chinese economy, as well as the launch of a new iPhone by Apple, which depends on Foxconn as its main Chinese supplier.

"Such riots have become in some ways inevitable," said Liu Kaiming, a labor expert in Shenzhen, the hub of China's manufacturing plants. "It's no longer simply a matter of raising the wages."

Foxconn and police said the cause of the latest riot was being investigated, the Associated Press reported. The company did not respond to labor groups' claims about working conditions.

The young migrant workers whose labor has fueled much of the growth of China's economy and the global manufacturing sector have begun to change in demographics and desires. That labor pool is shrinking, according to experts, as workers from China's provinces have become better educated and hold higher expectations for their lives.

"They aren't just thinking about saving money to bring back to their villages anymore," said Mary Gallagher, a China labor expert at the University of Michigan.

But the heavy demands of the factory jobs have not changed with the demographics, leaving many frustrated. Most of the jobs require little education or, in many cases, skill - only intensity.

"The companies haven't figured out how to manage that intensity," Gallagher said. "It's intense because of the precision required. It's intense because of how quickly technology changes and newer models are demanded. And while the number of workers is shrinking, you have the pressures on them mounting."

Foxconn, in particular, has drawn attention in recent years because of its connection to Apple and the increasingly visible signs of unhappiness among its workers. A string of employee suicides in 2010 pushed the company to install netting to catch jumpers and take other steps. Pressure from its clients - especially Apple, which found itself under fire - also led it to raise wages and take other minor steps.

The Washington-based Fair Labor Association, which audited Foxconn's Apple facilities in China after the criticism by rights groups, initially found serious violations of labor standards but reported in August that the manufacturer is improving working conditions ahead of schedule.

But the improvements are not enough, many Foxconn workers say. "It's not about the money. . . . It's a problem of management. It's a mess. The guards often abuse their power over the workers," said Wang Zhiqian, who used to work on Foxconn's production line and now recruits workers for the company. "We attract many fewer workers now than in 2010. People would rather work at a hotel or other places. It's not a lack of workers in these areas - it's a problem of spiritual emptiness."

Wang and others describe workdays that routinely extend three hours into overtime, leaving little opportunity to do anything after hours but sleep. And they say there is little talk among the workers, who stew in their frustrations.

"It's definitely not a happy place," he said. Details slowly emerging about the riot this week seem to support those descriptions. According to witnesses and a report from the state-run China News Service - the most detailed official account of the riot - the incident was sparked by a clash between guards and workers at the factory, in the central northern city of Taiyuan.

A large number of workers had been brought from other areas of China about a month ago to work on a large electronics order. (Early claims that the work was related to Apple's new iPhones have not been confirmed by either company.) When guards beat up workers from Shandong province, others from the same region fought back, igniting a full-fledged riot, according to the news agency's account.

"This sort of circumstance is bound to lead to the eruption of certain issues in other factories of Foxconn sooner or later," said Li Qiang, an activist with China Labor Watch.

In an earlier account, the state-run Xinhua News Agency reported that the riot was sparked by fighting between workers from Shandong province and others from Henan province.

An online account posted on China's microblogs Wednesday morning by an alleged worker at the factory said a fight between workers from different provinces grew into a riot only after guards responded to the fight with force, severely injuring a worker from Shandong.
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Chinese Dissident Artist Says The Authorities Still Have His Passport

September 26, 2012

New York Times

By Edward Wong

BEIJING - Ai Weiwei, the rebel artist and acid critic of the Chinese Communist Party who was detained by the government last year, said Tuesday that the authorities were still holding his passport, which means he cannot travel to the United States for long-planned artistic events there next month or start a job as a visiting professor in Germany.

Mr. Ai said in a telephone interview that he would be unable to attend the opening on Oct. 7 of the first survey of his work in North America. The exhibition is being prepared at the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington, one of the Smithsonian museums supported by the United States government. Mr. Ai said that he also expected to be forced to cancel an appearance at a literary festival in New York that promotes freedom of speech and that he would be unable to give talks at Harvard, Princeton and New York University.

"They're still holding my passport," Mr. Ai said. "They said they want to give it to me but have no clear time schedule for that."

Mr. Ai was detained for 81 days last year and put on probation for one year after his release. That probation ended June 21. Mr. Ai said at the time that police officers in Beijing had told him that he could not leave China, but that he would soon have his passport returned.

"I think it's that the person who's responsible for my case didn't get a clear order from above," he said. "And maybe the people from above are busy with much more important issues."

With a once-a-decade leadership transition expected to take place this fall, Chinese officials are watchful for any potential trouble here. Written requests for comments made to both the headquarters of the Beijing police and the Foreign Ministry went unanswered on Tuesday.

It was unclear whether American officials are negotiating with the Chinese government to allow Mr. Ai to travel to the United States. An embassy spokesperson did not return a request for comment. The

Smithsonian Institution has written the Chinese culture minister reaffirming the invitation for Mr. Ai from the Hirshhorn.

While in detention, Mr. Ai was interrogated on, among other things, the value of his artwork, and tax officials later said he owed \$2.4 million in back taxes and penalties. Mr. Ai sued the tax authorities in a Beijing court, but the court ruled against him. Mr. Ai appealed the ruling at a higher court; he said court officials were expected to announce a decision on Thursday.

Mr. Ai, the son of one of the most respected modern Chinese poets, has for years been an outspoken critic of China's authoritarian system. When he was released from detention in June 2011, he was ordered not to talk to foreign journalists or use Twitter. He habitually violated those directives and has continued to make his presence felt both in the streets of Beijing and on the Internet.

Mr. Ai said his inability to travel abroad had prevented him from starting a job as a visiting professor at the Berlin University of the Arts. Mr. Ai said the school asked for a three-year commitment, and he expects to spend several months each year in Berlin if he can travel.

For his scheduled appearances in the United States, Mr. Ai said he had planned to leave at the end of September and spend four to six weeks in the country.

A team from Mr. Ai's studio is already at the Hirshhorn, where it is preparing the opening of his exhibition, "Ai Weiwei: According to What?"

"The exhibition will be ready by the opening and it already looks very powerful," the exhibition curator, Mami Kataoka, of the Mori Art Museum in Tokyo, said in an e-mail. "The only thing I can say is that we would miss him very much."

Organizers of The New Yorker Festival, to be held in New York in early October, had also planned for Mr. Ai to be there. And on Oct. 11, Mr. Ai was scheduled to take part in a talk at the Public Theater in New York as part of the PEN World Voices Festival, an annual literary gathering whose aim is to help defend freedom of expression around the world.

The festival director, Laszlo Jakab Orsos, said if Mr. Ai managed to get his passport, the Oct. 11 event would still take place. "The question is: What can we do when artistic freedom is so blatantly denied at this point?" Mr. Orsos said. "It's very sobering and sad, the whole situation."

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Japan, China Move To Dampen Down Island Dispute

September 26, 2012

Associated Press

By Peter Enav

TAIPEI, Taiwan - Japan and China are taking small steps to dampen down a bitter dispute over a group of small islands in the East China Sea following an intense but seemingly controlled confrontation between Japan and Taiwan over the islands' sovereignty.

Foreign ministers from Tokyo and Beijing met late Tuesday on the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly in New York to discuss the issue, two weeks after the Japanese government's purchase of

some of the islands from private owners sparked bitter anti-Japanese protests in China and raised tensions between the two Asian giants to their highest level in years.

Vice foreign ministers from the two countries met the same day in Beijing.

Despite the promise of the meetings, it is still too early to conclude that the crisis has passed. China is almost certain to send its own vessels to challenge Japanese control of the islands, raising the possibility of armed conflict arising from mistake or miscalculation.

Tuesday's Japan-China meetings came just hours after Japanese and Taiwanese coast guard cutters exchanged water cannon blasts just off the islands, known as the Senkakus in Japan and the Diaoyu or Diaoyutai in China and Taiwan. Taiwan also claims the islands, which sit astride rich fishing waters and potentially large reserves of natural gas.

Neither Tokyo nor Beijing has released a full account of the New York meeting, though the mere fact it occurred raises hopes of a peaceful solution to the crisis between an ascendant China, flush with tens of billions of dollars of foreign exchange reserves and a rapidly expanding military, and a Japan that seems eager to prove that despite long years of economic drift it still remains a power to be reckoned with.

China's official Xinhua News Agency reported that Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi told Japanese counterpart Koichiro Gemba that the Japanese government's island purchase constituted "a serious challenge to the post-war international order."

"China will not tolerate the Japanese side taking any unilateral action on the Diaoyu Islands," the Xinhua report said. "China will continue to take firm measures to safeguard its territorial integrity and sovereignty."

Earlier, senior Japanese Foreign Ministry official Naoko Saiki repeated Japan's claims to the islands, and said that while compromise with Beijing would likely be difficult, the two sides should keep talking.

"We don't want to have any wars or battles or use of force," she told reporters. "We have to stabilize the situation through dialogue in a peaceful manner, in accordance with international law."

The Chinese government and state media portrayed Japan as the supplicant in Tuesday's meeting in Beijing between Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Zhang Zhijun and Japanese Vice Foreign Minister Chikao Kawai. A Foreign Ministry statement said Zhang told Kawai that the islands have been "China's sacred territory since ancient times" and repeated familiar uncompromising language related to the dispute.

Taiwan, which split from China amid civil war in 1949 but has been drawing ever closer to Beijing in the 4 ½ years since Ma Ying-jeou became president, has become a wild card in the Japan-China dispute, staking out what it claims is an independent stance to assert its sovereignty over the islands.

But reflecting its claim that Taiwan is part of its territory, China has gone out of its way to suggest that Taipei's interest in the islands is identical with its own. Following Tuesday's confrontation between the Taiwanese and Japanese coast guards, China's state-controlled media offered clear validation of the Taiwanese actions, presenting detailed coverage of the presence of some 50 Taiwanese fishing boats and 12 coast guard vessels in the disputed island area.

During the confrontation, the two coast guards used water cannon for the first time, an apparent escalation in their previously low-key tactics. But the almost ritualistic nature of the exchange - the sides separated after only a few minutes, and the Taiwanese flotilla returned to Taiwan - suggested that Tokyo and Taipei were operating within carefully prescribed parameters and they had no interest in letting things get out of hand.

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Near Disputed Islands, Japan Confronts Boats From Taiwan

September 26, 2012

New York Times

By Hiroko Tabuchi

TOKYO - The Japanese Coast Guard used water cannons on Tuesday to disperse fishing boats from Taiwan in waters claimed by Japan in the East China Sea, widening a territorial dispute that has already pitted Japan against China and threatened vital trade relations in the region.

Japan's top government spokesman, Osamu Fujimura, said Tokyo had lodged a protest with Taiwan's government over the fishing boats' intrusion into waters around a chain of small, rocky islands controlled by Japan, but also claimed by China and Taiwan. Japanese ships have also confronted fishing boats from mainland China in the area in recent days.

The islands, called the Senkaku Islands in Japan and the Diaoyu Islands in China, are uninhabited, but the waters around them are coveted fishing grounds and may have large gas reserves. The status of the islands touches on historical grievances in East Asia dating from World War II and before.

Taiwan's government generally maintains friendly relations with Japan, and has not been very vocal about its claim to the islands. Even so, activists in Taiwan have raised their voices about the issue as mainland Chinese activists have done.

Scenes of a Japanese Coast Guard vessel blasting water at a Taiwanese fishing boat were televised by NHK, the Japanese public broadcaster. Another Taiwanese boat was seen trying to spray water back. The Coast Guard said that more than 40 Taiwanese fishing boats and 8 Taiwanese patrol craft briefly approached the disputed islands, but had since departed.

The dispute erupted earlier this year when the governor of Tokyo, a well-known nationalist, announced that he wanted to buy three of the islands from their owner, a Japanese citizen. He said he believed that Japan's central government was not doing enough to defend them.

The uproar that followed prompted the Japanese central government to step in and buy the islands itself. Officials said that was done to keep them from falling into more provocative hands, but the move was seen in China as an effort to solidify Japanese control. Angry demonstrations broke out, and some Chinese protesters attacked Japanese businesses.

The foreign ministers of Japan and China met in Beijing on Tuesday to talk about ways to settle the dispute, but the Chinese Foreign Ministry said no substantive progress was made.

The meeting came as the Japanese military was winding down joint military exercises with the United States that the Japanese government said were aimed at improving its ability to defend far-flung islands, Reuters reported.

On Tuesday, Pentagon officials said the joint exercises should not be interpreted as a signal to China that the United States was abetting Japan in its dispute over the islands; the two militaries frequently practice together. "It's natural for us to help the Japanese and to exercise with them," George Little, the Pentagon press secretary, said during a news conference on Tuesday. "I wouldn't construe this particular event as in any way tied to the island dispute."

Pentagon officials said the exercises had been planned before the flare of public concern over the sovereignty issue.

China has been sensitive to any moves to support Japan, however, and last week some officials complained that an agreement to deploy a second advanced missile-defense radar on Japanese territory helped embolden the country in the territorial dispute.

Also on Tuesday, China put its first aircraft carrier into service, a move intended to signal its growing military capabilities as tensions run high over various island disputes with other nations.
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Senkaku Dispute Reinforces Military Shifts

September 26, 2012

Washington Post

By Mure Dickie

TOKYO - Tuesday's confrontation between Japanese and Taiwanese coast guard vessels hardly ranks among the great naval battles - the only weapons deployed were water cannon, and the Taiwanese beat a dignified retreat after a few hours.

But the televised maritime contest certainly highlighted the rising passions surrounding the Senkaku islands, a tiny Japanese-controlled archipelago that is also claimed by Taiwan and, more dangerously, by its giant neighbor, China.

Worrying cracks have appeared along a diplomatic fault line that lay mostly quiet for decades, sparking heated talk among international commentators of a possible Sino-Japanese war.

The stakes are certainly high. Japan's pacifistic constitution may outlaw aggressive war, but in Tokyo there is a firm political consensus that the Senkaku are an integral part of the nation's territory, to be defended by force if necessary.

But China, which calls the islands the Diaoyu, appears increasingly willing to test Japan's control by sending state fisheries vessels through their territorial waters.

And the tone and martial language of protests in China this month against Japan's purchase of three of the islands made clear that some Chinese at least are spoiling for a fight.

Moves by Chinese and Taiwanese state vessels and fishing boats to challenge Japan's de facto control of the islands could lead to a potentially fatal accident that some analysts say could further escalate hostility from China.

Kunihiko Miyake, research director at the Canon Global Institute in Tokyo, says such an escalation remains unlikely in the near term, given the strength of Japan's navy - officially known as the Maritime Self-Defense Force - and its alliance with the United States.

While Washington does not take a formal position on who owns the Senkaku, it has repeatedly made clear that it would stand with Japan in the island's defense.

"China will not use force, because it would lose," Miyake said.

Instead, he says, Beijing plans to continue using nonmilitary forces to challenge Japan's control of the group - a strategy in line with the teachings of classical Chinese strategist Sun Zi. "They want to win without fighting," he said. "This is Sun Zi theory."

Still, Japanese policymakers are acutely aware that China's rapid economic growth and the development of its People's Liberation Army is likely to narrow any current military superiority. On Tuesday, the Chinese navy put its first aircraft carrier into formal service. Development of other Chinese weapons systems such as sophisticated anti-ship missiles poses a potentially even bigger challenge.

Senkaku tensions are likely to strengthen Japan's determination to refocus its military forces toward stronger defense of southern islands and away from the emphasis on northern ground troops once seen as a bulwark against the Soviet Union.

Under a new defense policy unveiled in 2010, Japan will increase the number of its submarines from 16 to 22, while tank forces - many based on the northern island of Hokkaido - will be cut from 830 tanks to just 400.

The island dispute is also likely to prove a funding windfall for Japan's already impressively equipped and well-armed coast guard, which has the frontline role in the absence of an overtly military threat.

Candidates in Wednesday's leadership election of Japan's Liberal Democratic party, which polls suggest will topple the ruling Democratic party at a general election that must be held by next summer at the latest, have already called for action to beef up the coast guard.

In a set of policy proposals released on Monday, the Japan Institute of International Affairs, a think tank, called for "significant improvements" to the service's "capacity and equipment" as well as the deployment of more large patrol vessels to the Senkaku area "as a matter of priority."

The institute also suggested that the tensions might create an opportunity to push the United States to formally endorse Japan's territorial claim as part of efforts to ensure a "rock-solid" alliance.

Washington is likely to be reluctant to get involved in the sovereignty debate, but the Senkaku tensions have certainly distracted attention from alliance frictions, such as public worries in Japan about the safety of the newly deployed U.S. Osprey tilt-rotor aircraft.

They have also given a boost to those like Miyake who think postwar Japan moved too far to the left and who favor a closer alliance with the United States and more robust defense policy.

"I'm sure China is making a big mistake. The harsher they are and the more assertive, the more they push us to America's side," Miyake said. "I personally thank them."

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North Korea's Leaders Promise Improvements To Educational System

September 26, 2012

New York Times

By Choe Sang-hun

SEOUL, South Korea - North Korea's leadership ended a rare second session of Parliament in a single year on Tuesday without making the announcements on economic reforms that many analysts had expected.

The one-day session ended instead with an announcement of changes to the isolated country's educational system, including adding a year of free education that analysts saw as potentially popular with the North Korean people.

It is unclear what the silence on economic reforms means. Recent reports by the South Korean press and Seoul-based Web sites that rely on sources in North Korea have said that the country's new leader, Kim Jong-un, was considering a series of important changes to try to jump-start the moribund economy, including giving more incentives to farms and factories to increase productivity.

The country has begun economic reforms in the past, but then backtracked.

Analysts in South Korea said that in putting education at the center of the first policy changes made public under his leadership, Mr. Kim was trying to reinforce the public's faith in the country's dynastic regime.

"Perhaps North Korea believed that its economic programs were still in too early a stage of development, and too experimental, to be made public," said Chang Yong-seok of the Institute for Peace and Unification Studies at Seoul National University. "Instead, Kim Jong-un presented what could be a more ambitious, longer-term plan of normalizing his country's educational system."

The move would seem to fit with Mr. Kim's attempts in recent months to at least appear to be open to change and attuned to his people's needs. The North Korean education system has been in ruins since a famine in the 1990s deprived most schools of heating fuel, adequate food rations and school supplies, deprivations that some analysts believe continue today.

The rubber-stamp legislature extended compulsory education to 12 years from 11, promised more classrooms and said that teachers would be given priority in the distribution of food and fuel rations, according to the North's official Korean Central News Agency.

The Supreme People's Assembly also pledged to end the "unruly mobilization of students" for activities outside school. The official report did not elaborate on this; however, since famine struck North Korea in the mid-1990s, mobilizing students to gather firewood and human and animal waste for fertilizer has become a common practice in the country's schools, and a major parental grievance, according to defectors.

The report did not say how the North would finance the first major overhaul of its educational system in four decades, and it is unclear how far the government will be willing to go in changing an education system that defectors say focuses much of its time on state propaganda. (According to defectors, students have been taught how to add and subtract by counting the number of "American imperialist enemies" they want to kill, and the North Korean report on Tuesday indicated that ideological education would continue.)

Although the report emphasized the importance of education in computer technology, so far the country does not appear to have loosened its tight grip on information. Except for its elite, the country is cut off from the Internet, although the government has recently stressed that its companies are increasingly using computers.

Since taking over after the death of his father, Kim Jong-il, in December, Kim Jong-un has sought to project an image as a youthful leader who is accessible to his people, and particularly as one who cares for the country's children. He dedicated one of his first public speeches to North Korean children, has ordered improvements to amusement parks and was pictured in the state news media holding kindergartners on his lap.

The legislature said that stretching the number of years children are in school was intended to meet the requirements of "the age of knowledge-based economy and the trend of the world," a term that has been favored under Mr. Kim.

The report, which emphasized the need for proficiency in foreign languages, said the legislature promised to build more classrooms and dormitories and to ensure that school buses run on time.

"Kim Jong-un is trying to rebuild a loyalty in his socialist system by emphasizing free compulsory education," said Yang Moo-jin, a professor at the University of North Korean Studies in Seoul. "One more year of education also means producing a better work force for the regime."

Meanwhile, the construction of a new North Korean launching pad designed to support the tests of rockets bigger than the one tested in April is slowing down, said 38 North, a Web site affiliated with Johns Hopkins University. It cited commercial satellite imagery taken of the Musudan-ri site on the country's northeast coast on Aug. 29.

North Korea has halted construction of fuel and oxidizer buildings at the site, possibly because of recent heavy rains, 38 North said. The slowdown could push back the completion of the new complex, originally estimated to be around the middle of this decade, by one to two years, it said.

But it said that the same imagery indicated that North Korea was refurbishing the existing launching pad, last used in 2009 to test fire the Unha-2 rocket. The Unha-3 rocket that was launched in April blasted off from a separate site near the country's northwestern tip.

All of those rockets failed to complete their designed flights, indicating that North Korea still has a long way to go before mastering the technology needed to deliver a warhead on intercontinental ballistic missiles.

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North Korea's Parliamentary Session Ends With No Announced Reforms

September 26, 2012

Washington Post

By Chico Harlan

TOKYO - A rare North Korean parliamentary session ended Tuesday without the announcement of economic policy changes that many outside experts had predicted. The silence immediately tempered expectations about the impoverished state's pace of reform.

Analysts, as well as government officials in Washington and in Seoul, had been watching for concrete evidence of a policy shift under leader Kim Jong Eun that would allow farmers to keep more of their crops and sell surpluses in capitalist-style markets.

Such a policy change, which would echo Chinese reforms of the late 1970s, had been widely reported by media outside North Korea over the past month, but it was never confirmed by Pyongyang.

The North had fanned expectations of a major announcement by holding a meeting of its rubber-stamp parliament, the Supreme People's Assembly, which convenes only infrequently. But a state news agency report released after the meeting Tuesday said merely that the assembly had authorized a few low-level personnel changes and extended the period of compulsory education from 11 years to 12.

Outside experts who study the opaque totalitarian nation said the North might simply be reluctant to publicly state its new economic policies because a formal announcement would make it harder to later back away from any changes or crack down in some other way. In 2002, the last time the North experimented briefly with economic reforms, the country mentioned the news only in a pro-North Korean Japanese publication, according to South Korea's Yonhap news agency.

"Just because there's no official announcement does not mean reforms are not taking place," said Andrei Lankov, a North Korea expert at Seoul's Kookmin University.

"Such reforms are bound to be introduced by low-key, semi-confidential methods," such as in Workers' Party speeches delivered at local meetings, he added. "The idea of keeping it low key is basically just to say, 'Look, our system has always been perfect, we are making just minor adjustments.'"

Despite decades of food shortages, the North Korean government still channels much of its money toward weapons and its 1.2 million-member military. Its state-run rationing system hasn't functioned in years, and citizens, particularly in rural areas, depend on illicit market trading for goods and food.

Since taking power after his father, Kim Jong Il, died in December, Kim Jung Eun has given hints that he wants to improve the North's economy. The elder Kim long resisted such changes, apparently fearing that any economic opening would erode the tight state controls that helped keep his family in power.

This week's meeting marked just the third time in nearly two decades that the assembly gathered more than once in a year. It also met in April to appoint Kim first chairman of the powerful National Defense Commission.

According to a report this week from the Associated Press, which operates a bureau in Pyongyang, the North is rolling out changes that will allow farmers to keep surpluses after they have fulfilled state quotas. That marks a change from the current system, which requires farmers to relinquish almost everything they produce.

Other reports, from various news organizations that employ North Korean defectors and maintain contacts in the North, go a step further and suggest that the North will buy produce at market prices, as opposed to a state-fixed rate.

The North's nascent reforms resemble those of China or Vietnam, said Koh Yoo-hwan, a professor of North Korean studies at Dongguk University in Seoul.

"The North is taking very cautious steps," Koh said. "For North Korea, economic reform is not a choice but a matter of speed or scale."

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NEA

Alarm Raised Over Egypt Constitution

September 26, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By MATT BRADLEY

CAIRO—The troubled process of drafting Egypt's postrevolutionary constitution has turned rancorous, as secular-minded politicians and intellectuals forcefully object to what they call hard-line Islamists' efforts to use the document to impose Islamic law.

Several liberal politicians called this week for their counterparts on the 100-seat constituent assembly, the body tasked with framing Egypt's new constitution, to resign from their posts. Conservatives on the body are attempting to impose Shariah law and limit freedoms of expression in media and art, to the liberal framers' objections, these politicians allege. An outspoken liberal member of the assembly quit Monday.

The conflict threatens to drag out the final leg of Egypt's fraught transition to a stable democracy, and erode the assembly's already shaky authority to design the blueprint of Egypt's political future.

Assembly leaders have said they plan to finish the document within the next few weeks, after which it will be put to a national referendum. Egypt's new Muslim Brotherhood-backed president, Mohammed Morsi, has pledged to call new parliamentary elections within 60 days of the document's approval.

But discourse within the assembly sessions has grown hostile within the past two weeks, members say. Draft articles have endowed the government with broad powers to police freedom of speech, including the powers to shut down newspapers on political grounds, according to local media reports of participants' accounts from the closed assembly sessions, which were confirmed by people involved in the process.

Unlike in earlier sessions, in which the more pragmatic Muslim Brotherhood played a mediating role between liberals and Salafi Islamists, the Brotherhood members have become abruptly neutral, some members say.

"The situation is uncomfortable," said Ahmed Maher, the leader of the 6th of April Youth Movement, an activist group that was central to the uprising that ousted former President Hosni Mubarak in February 2011. Mr. Maher said he and several other secular-leaning members are considering quitting the assembly over the disagreements with the Salafi members.

A different resolution to the impasse may loom. An administrative court will decide Oct. 2 whether to dissolve the assembly on the grounds that it was nominated by a Parliament that itself was later dissolved as unconstitutional.

The Islamists' increasing confidence may be a vestige of outrage over an American-made film clip that many Muslims say insults the Prophet Muhammad, said Noah Feldman, a professor of law at Harvard University and an expert on Islamic jurisprudence.

Protesters angered by the clips stormed the U.S. Embassy grounds in Cairo two weeks ago, forcing the Brotherhood-backed presidency to accommodate public outrage while demonstrating a strong defense of Islam. That same dynamic may now be playing out in Egypt's constituent assembly, Mr. Feldman said. "It's not a good time to press for a freedom of speech clause," he said.

Brotherhood members of the assembly couldn't be reached to comment on Tuesday.

None of the committee members cited the Internet film clips as a reason for the shift in tone. Emad Abdel Ghaffour, the head of the Salafi Nour Party and a member of the assembly, said the differences between liberals and Islamists were "personal" rather than political. He declined to elaborate.

The original assembly was dissolved in May after a court deemed its makeup unconstitutional. Lawmakers then fought for weeks to divide seats in a new assembly evenly among liberals and Islamists.

Six secular-leaning political parties quit the assembly in June, saying the committee lacked representation from women and Christians. The Islamists' greater ideological unity also appears to have given them a stronger hand.

Critics of the assembly say Islamist members have reversed their previous commitments to hew to a set of guidelines drafted last year by religious scholars at the Cairo-based Al Azhar University, the seat of Sunni Islam and one of the oldest religious institutions in the world.

Many also object to the Salafis' insistence that Shariah law take a more prominent role in drafting legislation. The constitution drafted by Egypt's former regime contained vague language that only alluded to "principles" of Shariah law as the "source" of legislation.

The draft articles cited in the local press have already violated Al Azhar's proposed safeguards over freedoms of religion, expression, artistic creation and scientific research, said Mohammed Salmawy, a leader in the National Committee for the Defense of Freedom of Expression, a group of prominent liberal intellectuals and politicians that called Monday for a united stand against Islamist proposals to limit free speech.

Mr. Salmawy's group complained that Islamist committee members struck language from a draft constitution that said "literary and artistic creativity are the cultural right of every citizen."

The proposals "are really shocking in many ways," Mr. Salmawy said. "They are even more backward than what was there during Mubarak's time."

Three secular-minded former presidential candidates were scheduled to meet Tuesday night to discuss organizing protests against the assembly.

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Morsi Wants Free Speech Linked To Responsibility

September 26, 2012

Associated Press

By Diaa Hadid

NEW YORK - Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi said freedom of expression must be used responsibly in a speech Tuesday to the Clinton Global Initiative in New York that hinted at looming tensions in the newly-democratic nation.

Morsi, a key figure of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, repeated several times that he was the "first, democratically elected, civilian president of Egypt" and earned applause by asking his audience to "see a new Egypt."

"I never imagined this moment," Morsi said. "We really have a new state in Egypt."

That state has faced a chaotic political climate since last year's mass protests brought down Egypt's aging dictator Hosni Mubarak.

Egypt, now governed by the conservative Muslim Brotherhood, has tussled with military officials and democracy activists over the future of the Arab world's most populous country.

Morsi called for limits on free speech, without providing details, saying the violent protests over an anti-Islam video required "some reflection." The protests have killed dozens of people, including the U.S. ambassador to Libya, since they began last week.

"We must acknowledge the importance of freedom of expression," he said. "We must also recognize that such freedom comes with responsibilities, especially when it comes with serious implications for international peace and stability."

His speech at the annual gala of former President Bill Clinton's foundation followed a Monday-night meeting with U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton that sought to repair ties that were strained severely after Egyptian demonstrators overran the U.S. Embassy in Cairo.

Morsi insisted that all Egyptians enjoyed equal rights after the lecture's moderator - Bill Clinton - asked about the rights of women and the country's large Christian minority.

In the past, Morsi has said he does not believe Christians or women can serve as the country's leaders, based on his conservative interpretation of Islam.

Morsi called for a shakeup of global organizations like the U.N., saying they had to be more democratic - a frequent cry of regional powers who resent the Security Council's permanent five members: the U.S., Russia, China, France and the United Kingdom.

Morsi appeared to single out Syria's backers - Russia and China - and Israel for criticism.

"I can't simply watch the blood that is being shed in Syria, or the children starving in Gaza, and claim that our model of global governance works," Morsi said.

Israel maintains a blockade on the impoverished Gaza Strip, which is ruled by the militant Hamas organization.

Morsi acknowledged the vast challenges his country faces - high unemployment, a crippled infrastructure, sputtering economy and unchecked violence - but said he remains patriotic and faithful.

"As an Egyptian, I know there is no limit to what humans can accomplish when people come together for a peaceful purpose," he said. "As a Muslim, I know God helps."

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Egypt Will Embrace Non-Muslims, Women: Morsi

September 26, 2012

AFP

The rights of non-Muslims and women are safe in Egypt, Prime Minister Mohamed Morsi said Tuesday, repeatedly telling a US audience that the newly democratic country will remain a secular state.

"All Egyptians represent the majority, all Egyptians -- men, women, Muslims, and Christians... regardless of their beliefs, their gender, their color," Morsi said at the Clinton Global Initiative forum in New York.

Morsi, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood movement who was elected following Egypt's revolution against US-backed strongman Hosni Mubarak, told the forum led by former president Bill Clinton that Egypt will remain pluralistic and secular.

"We have really a new democratic state and a new real civilian state in Egypt: non-theocratic, not military," he said.

Morsi dismissed worries by some outside Egypt that civil and religious rights, including for the Coptic Christian minority, are likely to decline with the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood. He said the real problem in Egypt was Mubarak-era corruption.

"We don't have a real problem in terms of the rights of women," he said. "However, the corruption is something everybody suffered from."

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Iran Reveals More About What It Calls Foreign Sabotage

September 26, 2012

New York Times

By Rick Gladstone

Iran said Tuesday that it had amassed new evidence of attempts by saboteurs to attack Iranian nuclear, defense, industrial and telecommunications installations, including the use of computer virus-infected American, French and German equipment.

An Intelligence Ministry announcement, carried by the semiofficial Fars News Agency, did not further specify the intended targets or the type of sabotage equipment it said had been found. But the

announcement represented a new level of detail from Iran about the scope of sabotage attacks, and it appeared to reflect growing Iranian concern about security threats carried out clandestinely.

Some equipment in question was even put on display, Fars said, calling it the first such exhibition "to show American, French and German equipment used for sabotage acts against Iran's vital and important facilities."

Fars said the exhibition was meant to showcase the Intelligence Ministry's achievements in "discovering and defusing the plots hatched by the enemies." It did not provide photographs or explain where the exhibition was held.

The announcement came against a backdrop of growing international tensions over Iran's disputed nuclear program, with American-led naval war games conducted in the Persian Gulf and a successive array of announcements by Iran of new achievements in rockets and other weaponry meant to show that Iran is prepared for an armed conflict.

In words intended partly to reassure Israel, which considers Iran's nuclear program a major threat, President Obama told the United Nations General Assembly on Tuesday that he would not tolerate a nuclear-armed Iran and that time was running out to resolve the matter peacefully.

Iranian leaders, who have repeatedly asserted that their nuclear program is peaceful, have also been warning that Israel would face military obliteration if it pre-emptively attacked Iranian nuclear sites. President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran, who is also visiting the General Assembly this week, said Monday, "We are fully prepared to defend ourselves."

The accounts of sabotage came three days after the top Iranian lawmaker for national security and foreign policy, Aladdin Boroujerdi, said Iranian security experts had discovered explosives planted inside equipment bought from Siemens, the German technology company. Mr. Boroujerdi was quoted in Iran's state-run news media as saying the explosives, which were defused, had been intended to detonate after installation and derail Iran's enrichment of uranium.

Siemens said its nuclear division had done no business with Iran since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, suggesting that the Iranians, who are prohibited from buying nuclear equipment under United Nations sanctions, bought the booby-trapped equipment from third parties.

Last week, the top Iranian atomic energy official, Fereydoon Abbasi, said the power supply for Iran's two main uranium enrichment sites had been sabotaged with explosives. He also complained that the International Atomic Energy Agency, the nuclear monitor of the United Nations, had been infiltrated by "terrorists and saboteurs," suggesting that the agency had fed information to Iran's adversaries.

Iran has rejected repeated agency requests for unfettered access to all sites where inspectors suspect that experimentation with using uranium for weapons has taken place.

Mr. Abbasi, a nuclear scientist, narrowly escaped assassination in Tehran two years ago. Five other Iranian nuclear scientists and researchers have been killed in the past few years, and the Intelligence Ministry has blamed operatives from Israel, the United States and Britain.

Iran has also been the target of cyberattacks, most notably a computer worm known as Stuxnet, which disrupted the centrifuges that enrich uranium in 2010. In May, Iran said its computer experts had stopped an Israeli virus known as Flame.

Iranian news media have lately seized on evidence of nuclear sabotage regardless of its source. On Sunday, Iran's state-run Press TV Web site, quoting The Sunday Times of London quoting unidentified Western intelligence sources, said that the Revolutionary Guards had discovered a self-destructing electronic eavesdropping device disguised as a rock outside Fordo, its subterranean enrichment plant near Qum.

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AP Interview: Ahmadinejad Pushes New World Order

September 26, 2012

Associated Press

By Edith M. Lederer And Wendy Benjaminson

NEW YORK - Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said Tuesday that a new world order needs to emerge, away from years of what he called American bullying and domination.

Ahmadinejad spoke to The Associated Press in a wide-ranging interview on the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly - his last as president of Iran. He was to address the Assembly Wednesday morning.

He also discussed solutions for the Syrian civil war, dismissed the question of Iran's nuclear ambition and claimed that despite Western sanctions his country is better off than it was when he took office in 2005.

"God willing, a new order will come together and we'll do away with everything that distances us," Ahmadinejad said, speaking through a translator. "I do believe the system of empires has reached the end of the road. The world can no longer see an emperor commanding it."

"Now even elementary school kids throughout the world have understood that the United States government is following an international policy of bullying," he said.

President Barack Obama warned Iran earlier Tuesday that time is running out to resolve the dispute over its nuclear program. In a speech to the General Assembly, Obama said the United States could not tolerate an Iran with atomic weapons.

Ahmadinejad would not respond directly to the president's remarks, saying he did not want to influence the U.S. presidential election in November.

But he argued that the international outcry over Iran's nuclear enrichment program was just an excuse by the West to dominate his country. He claimed that the United States has never accepted Iran's choice of government after the 1979 Islamic revolution.

"Everyone is aware the nuclear issue is the imposition of the will of the United States," he said. "I see the nuclear issue as a non-issue. It has become a form of one-upmanship."

Ahmadinejad said he favored more dialogue, even though negotiations with world powers remain stalled after three rounds of high-level meetings since April.

He said some world leaders have suggested to him that Iran would be better off holding nuclear talks only with the United States.

"Of course I am not dismissing such talks," he said, asked if he were open to discussions with the winner of the American presidential election.

Israeli leaders, however, are still openly contemplating military action against Iranian nuclear facilities, dismissing diplomacy as a dead end. Israel and many in the West suspect that Iran is seeking to acquire nuclear weapons, and cite its failure to cooperate fully with nuclear inspectors. Iran says its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes only.

Ahmadinejad also proposed forming a new group of 10 or 11 countries to work to end the 18-month Syrian civil war. Representatives of the nations in the Middle East and elsewhere would meet in New York "very soon," he said.

Critics have accused Tehran of giving support to Syrian President Bashar Assad in carrying out massacres and other human rights violations in an attempt to crush the uprising against his rule. Activists say nearly 30,000 people have died.

He said the so-called contact group hopes to get the Syrian government and opposition to sit across from each other.

"I will do everything in my power to create stability, peace and understanding in Syria," Ahmadinejad said.

Earlier this month, Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi announced the formation of a four-member contact group with Iran, Turkey and Saudi Arabia. But Saudi Arabia so far has not participated.

He denied Iranian involvement in plotting attacks on Israelis abroad, despite arrests and accusations by police in various countries. He also vehemently disputed the U.S. claim that Iranian agents played a role in a foiled plot to assassinate the Saudi ambassador to the United States last year.

Ahmadinejad will leave office next June after serving two four-year terms. He threw out numbers and statistics during the interview to show that Iran's economy and the lives of average Iranians have improved under his watch. Since his 2005 election, he claimed, Iran went from being the world's 22nd-largest economy to the 17th-largest; non-petroleum related exports increased sevenfold; and the basic production of goods has doubled. Median income increased by \$4,000, he said.

"Today's conditions in Iran are completely different to where they were seven years ago in the economy, in technical achievement, in scientific know-how," Ahmadinejad said. "All of these achievements, though, have been reached under conditions in which we were brought under heavy sanctions."

Iran has called for the U.S. and its European allies to ease the sanctions that have hit its critical oil exports and left it blackballed from key international banking networks.

Ahmadinejad said he had no knowledge of the whereabouts of Robert Levinson, a private investigator and former FBI agent who vanished in Iran five years ago. He said he directed Iranian intelligence services two years ago to work with their counterparts in the U.S. to locate him.

"And if any help there is that I can bring to bear, I would be happy to do so," he said.

He also claimed never to have heard of Amir Hekmati, a former U.S. Marine who is imprisoned on espionage charges in Iran. Hekmati was arrested while visiting his grandmother in Iran in August 2011, and his family has been using Ahmadinejad's visit to New York to plead for his release.

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EU Mulls "Full" Financial Freeze, Shipping Ban On Iran

September 26, 2012

AFP

EU nations are discussing a British sanctions proposal against Iran that notably calls for a ban on shipping and "full" freeze on financial transactions with Iran's central bank, European diplomats said Tuesday.

"Most member states are largely supportive" of the proposals, an EU diplomat said on condition of anonymity.

"The discussions are ongoing, there is still a long way to go," cautioned another source who also asked not to be named.

Britain, France and Germany jointly urged their European Union partners last week to step up pressure on Iran over its contested nuclear drive by agreeing new sanctions to be adopted at EU foreign ministers' talks in Luxembourg on October 15.

Currently under discussion is a London proposal to strengthen existing punitive measures in four areas -- finance, trade, energy and transport. The Netherlands has tabled similar ideas.

The hardest-hitting British suggestions, according to an EU diplomat, are a "full freeze on Iran's central bank, on all its financial transactions" as well as "a wide sectorial ban on shipping".

Some EU nations, however, including Spain and Sweden, were concerned that the freeze would be tantamount to a ban on trade, "but it is not," a diplomat said.

France and Germany too "needed reassuring", the diplomat added.

Current EU sanctions against Iran's central bank were drafted to ensure that an assets freeze did not affect trade between the 27-nation bloc and Iran.

Shipping nations Denmark and Greece for their part were worried by the proposed ban on shipping.

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Iran's Economy Sags Under Sanctions

September 26, 2012

AFP

Iran's oil-dependent economy was showing the strain of punishing Western sanctions on Tuesday, on the eve of a speech by President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to the UN General Assembly in New York.

The Iranian currency dived around four percent close to an all-time low against the dollar, while thousands of workers publicly complained of unpaid wages, importers struggled to pay for goods, inflation climbed and travel agencies bemoaned a rapidly shrinking pool of travellers able to afford to go abroad.

Government initiatives to maintain the value of the rial and the volume of oil exports have failed, with both halved from their levels of a year ago.

Iran's leaders, though, are defiant in the face of the Western pressure, vowing to never roll back its nuclear programme as demanded by the five permanent UN Security Council members plus Germany.

Ahmadinejad was expected to stress that defiance in a speech to the annual General Assembly on Wednesday.

Supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has already ordered Iran to adopt an "economy of resistance," while officials have told national media to avoid reporting on the "bleak" domestic situation and instead emphasise positive economic stories.

Evidence of the difficulties still surfaced, though, driven by an EU embargo on Iranian oil and US sanctions on financial transactions involving Iran's central bank.

A prominent MP, Mohammad Reza Bahonar, was quoted at the weekend by the ISNA news agency as saying oil exports in June-July had dropped to "around 800,000 barrels per day" -- a low not seen in more than two decades, and less than half the 2.3 million barrels per day of a year ago.

Bahonar's oil export figures roughly tallied with those given by OPEC and the International Energy Agency.

But Oil Minister Rostam Qasemi was quoted by ISNA saying that overall oil production this year "will be the same as last year."

While crude exports were expected to rebound a little in September as South Korea resumed buying some Iranian oil, they were expected to continue well below recent historic levels.

Ahmadinejad early this month also admitted Iran faced "problems" selling its oil, which accounts for nearly half of budget revenues. But he insisted his country would manage. Both he and Khamenei have urged lesser economic dependence on oil sales.

Iran's government and ordinary citizens alike were struggling with the sanctions, with food costs notably soaring.

The ILNA news agency reported that a letter on behalf of 20,000 workers from across the country was sent to Labour Minister Abdolreza Sheikholeslami complaining they had not been paid and demanding an increase to their salaries of \$120 to \$285 a month that they said were "way below the poverty line."

Better-off Iranians were cutting back on travel because of the sharply weakened rial.

"Iranians who would have travelled abroad are more likely to go to domestic destinations like Kish or Mashhad," an employee in a small independent Tehran travel agency who gave her first name as Pantea said.

"Many Iranians who used to go on domestic trips simply can't afford it now."

Tour companies trying to fill half-empty flights in the middle of the week to Turkey have taken to trying to sell last-minute flights for as little as \$60 return via mass text messages.

A lighting equipment seller in Tehran who gave his first name as Saeed said he was used to importing six shipping containers of goods from China per year, but this year he imported just one.

"I am waiting to what happens to the market and dollar situation," he said. "If these circumstances persist, I may have to close down."

Iranian officials are increasingly focusing on the problems.

"According to the statistics, there is a strong rise in unemployment, and we need to find a solution. Official statistics also show inflation is at 22 percent, which is very high, and in some areas it's even higher," parliamentary speaker Ali Larijani was quoted as saying by ISNA.

The US Treasury official tasked with deploying US sanctions, Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence David Cohen, two weeks ago gave a speech to a law school at New York University in which he said: "Put simply, Iran's economy is struggling."

He said that was because of the sanctions -- and also "the Iranian government's continued gross mismanagement of its domestic economy."

He said the slump in oil exports was costing Iran "up to \$5 billion a month, forcing the Iranian government to cut its budget because of a lack of revenue."

Cohen said that, as long as Iran refused to negotiate curbs on its nuclear activities, "we will continue to devise new and enhanced sanctions."

Britain, France and Germany are also urging their European Union partners "to further step up the pressure" on Iran. Further sanctions targeting the Islamic republic's energy, finance, trade and transportation sectors are expected to be formally adopted on October 15.

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Iran Unveils New Long-range Drone

September 26, 2012

Associated Press

By Ali Akbar Dareini And Nasser Karimi

TEHRAN, Iran - Iranian military leaders gave details of a new long-range drone and test fired four anti-ship missiles Tuesday in a prelude to upcoming naval war games planned in an apparent response to U.S.-led warship drills in the Persian Gulf.

The show of Iranian military readiness and its latest tool - a domestically made drone capable of reaching Israel and most of the Middle East - also came as President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad prepared to address the U.N. General Assembly on Wednesday amid a deepening impasse with the West over Tehran's disputed nuclear program.

Ahmadinejad on Monday held open hope for renewed dialogue with the United States, but told reporters in New York that Iran was "fully ready" to defend itself from attacks. In Tehran, a senior Revolutionary Guard commander, Gen. Amir Ali Hajizadeh, also warned that U.S. bases in the Gulf could face retaliatory strikes if Israel attacks Iran's nuclear sites.

The West and its allies fear Iran's uranium enrichment program could lead to atomic weapons, but the U.S. and others favor a mix of sanctions and diplomacy to try to force Tehran to curb its nuclear program. Iran claims it only seeks nuclear power for energy and medical applications.

On Tuesday, Hajizadeh described the new drone as a key strategic addition to Iran's military capabilities with the ability to carry out reconnaissance missions or be armed with "bombs and missiles."

Hajizadeh, who heads the Guard's aerospace division, said the Shahed-129, or Witness-129, has a range of 2,000 kilometers (1,250 miles). That covers much of the Middle East including Israel and nearly doubles the range of previous drones produced by Iranian technicians, who have often relied on reverse engineering military hardware with the country under Western embargoes.

But it's unclear whether the new drone contains any elements of an unmanned CIA aircraft that went down in eastern Iran in December. Iran said it has recovered data from the RQ-170 Sentinel and claimed it was building its own replica.

Iran frequently makes announcements about its strides in military technology, but it is virtually impossible to independently determine the actual capabilities or combat worthiness of the weapons Iran is producing.

Near the strategic Strait of Hormuz at the mouth of the Gulf, Iran test fired four missiles it claimed could sink a "big target" such as a warship in 50 seconds, Gen. Ali Fadavi of the powerful Revolutionary Guard was quoted as saying by the semi-official Fars news agency.

The Fars report late Monday was the first indication of an Iranian military exercise taking place at the same time as the U.S.-led naval maneuvers in the Persian Gulf, including mine-sweeping drills, which got under way last week.

The U.S. Navy claims the maneuvers are not directly aimed at Iran, but the West and its regional allies have made clear they would react against attempts by Tehran to carry out threats to try to close critical Gulf oil shipping lanes in retaliation for tighter sanctions over its disputed nuclear program.

Fadavi did not elaborate on the ongoing Iranian exercise or the type of missiles fired, but said the Guard is planning a "massive naval maneuver in the near future" in the strait, which is the route for one-fifth of the world's crude oil.

Iran regularly holds maneuvers to upgrade its military readiness as well as test its equipment. ([top](#))

Israel: Syrian Mortars Accidentally Land In Golan

September 26, 2012

Associated Press

By Bassem Mroue

BEIRUT - Syrian soldiers fought rebels Tuesday in a firefight that killed nine people and sent several mortars sailing across the border into the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights.

The Israeli military said nobody was hurt in the shelling and that the spillover was believed to be accidental. But Israel filed a complaint to the United Nations peacekeeping force that patrols the tense region between Israel and Syria.

Over the course of the 18-month-old uprising against Syrian President Bashar Assad, violence has spilled into neighboring Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey. In July, mortar shells fell about one kilometer (half a mile) from the Golan boundary.

The spillover is among the most worrying developments from the Syria crisis, which has the potential to enflame the entire region.

Activists said Tuesday that the clashes between troops and rebels inside Syria killed at least nine people.

On Tuesday, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon demanded international action to stop the war in Syria, telling a somber gathering of world leaders that the 18-month conflict had become "a regional calamity with global ramifications."

"The international community should not look the other way as violence spirals out of control," Ban said.

Also at the United Nations, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and the U.N.'s new Syria mediator Lakhdar Brahimi discussed ways to unite Syria's opposition and advance a political transition.

A senior U.S. official said the two discussed new strategies for dealing with the Assad regime. The official demanded anonymity because he was not authorized to speak publicly on the matter.

An Israeli defense official said the military believes Tuesday's incident in the Golan Heights was a mistake and the mortars were not aimed at the Jewish state. It was not the first time shells from Syria exploded in Israel since the uprising began, the official said on condition of anonymity because he is not allowed to brief the media.

There have been concerns in Israel that the long-quiet Israel-Syria frontier area could become a new Islamist front against the Jewish state. Israel captured the Golan Heights from Syria in the 1967 Mideast war and annexed the plateau 14 years later.

Syria and Israel are bitter enemies and have fought several wars, including the 1973 war. Despite the animosity, the border with Syria has been Israel's quietest since then.

The defense official said Israel is concerned that the border region could become as lawless and deadly as Israel's frontier with Egypt's Sinai Peninsula has become since the fall of longtime Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak last year.

The Israeli news site YNet quoted a resident near the border as saying the mortars struck an area filled with apple trees.

"All in all there has been a lot shooting and mortars really close to the border," Dudi Mored, resident of Kibbutz Elrom, an Israeli settlement in the Golan, told Ynet.

Although the uprising against Assad has been an unprecedented challenge to his family's four-decade ruling dynasty, the regime has managed to keep its grip on power. Neither side of the conflict has been able to deal a decisive blow, leading to a grinding and deadly stalemate. Activists estimate that the conflict has killed some 30,000 people since the revolt began in March 2011.

On Tuesday, several bombs went off inside a school in the Syrian capital that activists say was being used by regime forces as a security headquarters. Ambulances rushed to the area and an initial report on state media said seven people were wounded.

An amateur video posted online showed smoke billowing from several spots in an area near a major road. The narrator said: "A series of explosions shake the capital Damascus." The authenticity of the video could not be independently confirmed.

Over the past few months, rebels have increasingly targeted security sites and symbols of regime power, particularly in the main cities of Damascus and Aleppo, in a bid to turn the tide.

In July, a bombing in the heart of Damascus killed four senior security officials including the defense minister and Assad's brother-in-law. Other large blasts have targeted the headquarters of security agencies in the capital, killing scores of people this year.

Abu Hisham al-Shami, an activist based in Damascus, told The Associated Press via Skype that the "Sons of Martyrs School" had recently been turned into a regime security center. He said government forces use the school as a base to fire mortars at rebellious neighborhoods.

State-run television quoted the director of the school, Mohammed Amin Othman, as saying that two bombs exploded inside the school, wounding seven people and causing minor damage. State TV said the bombs were planted by "terrorists," the term the government uses for rebels.

Othman said in a statement carried by the official SANA news agency that no students were at the school at the time of the blast because it does not open until next week. Although the school year started last week in Syria, Othman said the boarding school opens later.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said 20 people were wounded, some of them seriously, in several blasts at the school. It said most of the wounded were members of the military.

A worker outside the school, who refused to be identified, said two diesel tankers exploded inside the school compound, wounding at least four people, one of them seriously. He added that the wounded were rushed to nearby hospitals.

He said a thick plume of smoke billowed over the area and fire reached the fifth story of the building. A nearby theater for the school's students was partially damaged and the blast caused its ceiling to collapse.

Also Tuesday, Syrian rebels released Lebanese citizen Awad Ibrahim, who was one of 11 Shiite Muslim pilgrims abducted in May shortly after entering Syria from Turkey on their way to Lebanon, the Lebanese state-run National News Agency reported.

Ibrahim, who crossed into Turkey Tuesday afternoon and expected to fly home later, is the second to be released. The nine others are still being held in northern Syria.

His release came after two Turkish citizens and several Syrians were set free in Beirut after being abducted by Lebanese tribesmen to press for the release of Lebanese. Turkey hosts leading Syrian opposition figures and rebel commanders.

In Jordan, dozens of Syrian refugees angry over harsh living conditions in their desert tent camp clashed with Jordanian police, hurling stones and smashing charity offices and a hospital, officials and refugees said Tuesday.

The rioting late Monday in the Zaatari camp was the worst violence since the facility opened in July near the Jordan-Syria border. More than 25 policemen were injured by stones thrown by the refugees, a police official said.

A Syrian refugee in the camp, Abu Nawras, said police fired tear gas to disperse the protesters who were demanding improved conditions, better food and education for their children.

The camp, which hosts about 32,000 Syrians who fled the civil war at home, has seen smaller protests in the past weeks as refugees mostly complained about snakes and scorpions, and demanded their tents be replaced with trailers so they can better protect themselves from the scorching sun, cold nights and ubiquitous dust.

Hundreds of thousands have fled the chaos in Syria as the uprising against President Bashar Assad turned increasingly violent. Jordan alone has taken in some 200,000 Syrians - the largest number in the region - while Turkey, Lebanon and Iraq have taken in the rest.
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Syrian Refugees Clash With Jordanian Police

September 26, 2012

Associated Press's

By Jamal Halaby

AMMAN, Jordan - Angry over harsh living conditions in their desert tent camp in Jordan, dozens of Syrian refugees clashed with Jordanian police, hurled stones and smashed charity offices and a hospital, officials and refugees said Tuesday.

The rioting late Monday in the Zaatari camp was the worst violence since the facility opened in July near the Jordan-Syria border. About 26 policemen were injured by stones thrown by the refugees, a police official said.

A Syrian refugee in the camp, Abu Nawras, said police fired tear gas to disperse the protesters who were demanding improved conditions, better food and education for their children.

The camp, which hosts about 32,000 Syrians who fled the civil war at home, has seen smaller protests in the past weeks as refugees mostly complained about snakes and scorpions, and demanded their tents be replaced with trailers so they can better protect themselves from the scorching sun, cold nights and ubiquitous dust.

Hundreds of thousands have fled the chaos in Syria as the uprising against President Bashar Assad turned increasingly violent, with activists saying nearly 30,000 people have died since the conflict began in March 2011. Jordan alone has taken in some 200,000 Syrians - the largest number in the region - while Turkey, Lebanon and Iraq have taken in the rest.

Jordan opened Zaatari only after long delaying a decision on whether to set up refugee camps, possibly to avoid angering Assad's autocratic regime by showing images at his doorstep of civilians fleeing his military onslaught.

The Jordanian police official said Monday's violence erupted when about 150 refugees started hurling stones at security officers, torched a tent and attacked the offices of a Jordanian charity responsible for the camp and a Moroccan field hospital. The official, speaking on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the issue, declined to say if any arrests were made.

Abu Nawras, the Syrian refugee, said many of the Zaatari residents, disillusioned with the conditions there, are now demanding to go back to Syria.

But a representative for the U.N. refugee agency in Jordan, Andrew Harper, said it would not be safe for them to return home now.

"People vented their frustration in a way that is unacceptable in any environment, by throwing stones at buildings, damaging buildings, injuring a number of staff," Harper said. "It was a particularly ugly situation, which is now under control."

In response to the refugee riot, scores of Jordanians took to the streets in the nearby town of Mafraq, demanding the Syrians be sent home, Information Minister Sameeh Maaytah said. The Jordanian protesters denounced what they described as "ingratitude" by the refugees to their host country.

The police official said the protesters in Mafraq burned tires and blocked a road leading to the camp before they too were dispersed by Jordanian police.

In Geneva, UNHCR spokeswoman Melissa Fleming said the agency was looking into the "complaints that have spurred this riot."

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As Libya Presses Some Militias To Disband, Fighters Attack A Hotel In Tripoli

September 26, 2012

New York Times

By David D. Kirkpatrick

BENGHAZI, Libya - Libyan militia fighters assaulted a hotel in Tripoli housing members of the newly elected General National Congress on Tuesday, dramatizing the challenge the government faces in enforcing its ultimatum that all unauthorized brigades must submit to its authority or disband by the start of the day.

The attack came as an American team arrived in Tripoli to investigate the death of Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens in an assault this month on the American Mission in Benghazi. Libyans who had spoken with the team said the investigators had reached Tripoli, but it was unclear when they might proceed to Benghazi, where security for American government officials is precarious. Representatives of the State and Justice Departments would not comment on the investigators' whereabouts.

Although behind locked gates, the mission in Benghazi was all but unguarded on Tuesday. For two days after the attack, it had been completely open to looters and the curious, raising questions about the state of any evidence the investigators might find.

The ambassador's death has brought on a new sense of crisis about the autonomous militias that have controlled Libya's streets since the collapse of Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi's police state. Shocked by the death and exasperated at the lawlessness, tens of thousands of civilians marched through the streets of Benghazi last Friday to demand more control of the militias, eventually storming at least four barracks and forcing the fighters to scatter.

Some militia leaders in Benghazi said Tuesday that the new government led by President Mohamed al-Magariaf was trying to appoint its own officers over, or at least along with, the commanders of the three biggest brigades in the country's eastern region. Since Colonel Qaddafi's ouster, the brigades have acted as the government's main military and police force in the region, and two of them battled the fighters who attacked the United States Mission.

The government considers all three brigades as "authorized" and, in fact, essential. But they remain independent, and last Friday one of the three came under attack by anti-militia demonstrators.

If successful, the appointment of army officers to lead the militias could be the first tangible step toward government control of the brigades. Until now the transitional government has in effect handed army or internal security uniforms to brigade fighters and left their commanders in place.

But brigade leaders gave conflicting reports of the new officers' authority. The commander of the Rafallah al-Sehati Brigade, Mohamed al-Gharabi, said in an interview on Tuesday that he had stepped aside to make room for the appointment by the army chief of Col. Salah bin Omran to lead his militia. Asked what his position was, Mr. Gharabi said, "Nothing."

A spokesman for a coalition of brigades that includes Rafallah al-Sehati and others reported to be under a newly appointed commander said that their former leaders remained in place but that a new administrative officer had been added. "The commander of the brigade is still the same," said the spokesman, Ramiz Daghaman, disputing Mr. Gharabi's account.

A senior officer in Rafallah al-Sehati, Ismail al-Sallabi, also indicated that he expected his militia to resume its role without any such changes. "We feel hurt, we feel underappreciated," he said, describing his brigade's role in guarding ballot boxes and otherwise keeping the peace during the election in July.

Security officials at the Tripoli hotel attacked by militiamen said that two people had been injured in an exchange of gunfire but that the hotel guards had repelled the attack.

Two security officials at the hotel, the Rixos, said the attack grew out of a protest by three different groups of Libyan fighters, each with its own complaints. One group, based in the Souk al-Juma district, was angry over what it called a lack of government support when it fought suspected Qaddafi loyalists in the western town of Birak.

Another group, based in Misurata, was angry over the death in Paris of a rebel fighter from that coastal city, Omran Shaaban, who was famous for a leading role in the capture and killing of Colonel Qaddafi. They believe Mr. Shaaban had died of injuries sustained at the hands of Qaddafi loyalists in the town of Bani Walid, a last bastion of Qaddafi support that remains outside the new government's control. Misurata and Bani Walid have a history of animosity dating to the Italian occupation decades ago.

The third group may have been pushing back at the government's drive to rein in the militia, or perhaps just defending the Islamist militias that have come under increased pressure recently after a hard-line brigade was seen at the forefront of the attack on the United States Mission in Benghazi. This group chanted, "There is no god but God, and Abu Shagour is the enemy of God," against the new prime minister, Mustafa Abu Shagour, according to two hotel security officials.
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Death Of Libyan Rebel Raises Calls For Vengeance

September 26, 2012

Associated Press

By Aya Batrawy And Esam Mohamed

MISRATA, Libya - One of the young Libyan rebels credited with capturing Moammar Gadhafi in a drainage ditch nearly a year ago died Tuesday of injuries after being kidnapped, beaten and slashed by the late dictator's supporters - the latest victim of persistent violence and instability in the North African country.

The death of Omran Shaaban, who had been hospitalized in France, raised the prospect of even more violence and score-settling, with the newly elected National Congress authorizing police and the army to use force if necessary to apprehend those who abducted the 22-year-old and three companions in July near the town of Bani Walid.

Libya is battling lingering pockets of support for the old regime, and its government has been unable to rein in armed militias in a country rife with weapons. Earlier this month, a demonstration at the U.S. Consulate in the eastern city of Benghazi turned violent, killing four Americans, including the U.S. ambassador.

Shaaban was praised as a "dutiful martyr" by the National Congress, although his family says he never received a promised reward of 1 million Libyan dinars (\$800,000) for capturing Gadhafi on Oct. 20, 2011, in the former leader's hometown of Sirte. The eccentric dictator was killed later that day by revolutionary fighters.

The Libyan government said it would honor Shaaban with a funeral befitting a hero. His body was greeted at the airport in his hometown of Misrata by more than 10,000 people for a procession to a soccer stadium for funeral prayers.

Photos on social media websites showed a wooden coffin with a glass window that revealed Shaaban's face, with white gauze covering his head.

In the capital of Tripoli, several hundred protesters gathered outside the headquarters of the National Congress to demand that the government avenge Shaaban's death.

Shaaban's family said that he and three friends had been en route home to the western city of Misrata from a vacation in July when they were attacked by gunmen in an area called el-Shimekh near Bani Walid.

Shaaban and his friends, who like many Libyans were armed, fired back, the family said.

Two bullets hit Shaaban, and he was paralyzed from the waist down, his relatives said. The men were captured by militiamen from Bani Walid, a town of about 100,000 people that remains a stronghold of Gadhafi loyalists and is isolated from the rest of Libya.

President Mohammed el-Megarif visited Bani Walid this month and secured the release of Shaaban and two of his companions. A fourth is still being held.

When Shaaban was finally brought home, he was "skin and bones" - still paralyzed, frail and slipping in and out of consciousness, according to his brother, Abdullah Shaaban.

"It was clear he was beaten a lot," Abdullah Shaaban said. "His entire chest was sliced with razors. His face had changed. It wasn't my brother that I knew."

Omran Shaaban later was flown to France for medical treatment.

Shaaban, the second youngest in a family of nine children, was a member of Libya Shield, a loose coalition of the country's largest militias relied on by the Defense Ministry.

Khalifa al-Zawawi, the former head of Misrata's local council, said the government reneged on paying the reward to Shaaban.

Abdullah Shaaban said his brother did not mind, saying he considered capturing Gadhafi to be his national duty.

Libya's president released a statement Tuesday vowing that those responsible for the violence against Omran Shaaban would be punished.

But apprehending and disarming the militants in Bani Walid are among the most daunting tasks facing the government. The town is heavily armed with rocket-propelled grenades, automatic weapons and artillery left over from last year's civil war.

Residents of Bani Walid say that pictures of Gadhafi are displayed during weddings and youths play his speeches on their cars' stereos. Students refrain from singing Libya's new national anthem and teachers refuse to follow the revised curriculum.

Bani Walid fighters were blamed for many of the sniper attacks, shelling, rapes and other violence against the city of Misrata during the civil war, and there were new calls Tuesday from residents of Misrata for vengeance against Bani Walid.

Shaaban's eldest brother, Walid, insists there will be justice for the family, regardless of whether the government is the one to administer it.

"I plan to pursue his rights legally and join if there is a military incursion. We are going to death, God willing," Walid Shaaban said.

Family friend Abu-Shaala echoed that sentiment.

"If the government does not go in, we are going in," he said. "We are all patient. But our patience has limits."

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CIA's Exit From Benghazi, Libya, Draws Criticism From Ex-officers

September 26, 2012

Los Angeles Times

By Ken Dilanian

WASHINGTON -- About a dozen CIA personnel were evacuated from eastern Libya after heavily armed men stormed the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi and killed four Americans, setting back an important intelligence operation and prompting a debate about how much risk CIA officers should assume in dangerous overseas posts.

The decision to withdraw the team from Benghazi drew criticism from former CIA officers, who called it an overly cautious response to the Sept. 11 attack, which killed two security officers, an information technology officer and the U.S. ambassador, J. Christopher Stevens.

The critics drew analogies to Syria, where the U.S. closed its diplomatic mission. The CIA has sent few if any operatives there despite policymakers wanting clarity on the conflict. The agency has relied on local informants, other foreign intelligence services and technical systems to collect intelligence in Syria.

In Benghazi, CIA operatives were working from a diplomatic compound. Their mission included identifying and tracking extremist militants and searching for surface-to-air missiles missing since Libyan ruler Moammar Kadafi was toppled and killed last year.

For now, those efforts have been curtailed.

"This is really disgraceful," said a former CIA station chief with three decades of Middle East experience. "Why spend billions of dollars a year on the intelligence service and then run away right at the moment when you most need intelligence?"

The CIA declined to comment. A U.S. official, speaking about Intelligence matters on condition of anonymity, described spying since the attack as "challenging" but said U.S. agencies have "not lost the bead on key targets that might threaten U.S. and Libyan security interests."

Others said the CIA is already planning to reestablish an operation in Benghazi.

"Benghazi has played a key role in the emergence of the new Libya, and it will continue to do so," a U.S. intelligence official said. "It makes complete sense that U.S. officials would return to continue to build relationships and help the Libyans secure their future."

Former officials said the evacuation was justified given the dangers in Benghazi, traditionally home to Islamist militants, including some affiliated with Al Qaeda. The former officials said the CIA may have left operatives behind under deep cover or, more likely, Libyan agents who can operate more easily without detection.

"If you've got 10 or 12 guys living in a house in eastern Libya somewhere, that's a target, and there's no way 10 or 12 guys are going to hold off a militia," a former CIA manager said. "Our tendency has been, if there is a problem, we pull out. Yes, we have stay-behind plans, but we rarely execute those kinds of plans because of the risks" that an American could be captured.

Ambassador Stevens and State Department information management officer Sean Smith died apparently from smoke inhalation during the attack, U.S. officials have said. Glen A. Doherty and Tyrone S. Woods, two former Navy SEALs who were working as security contractors for the U.S. mission, were killed later when mortar rounds were fired at a consulate annex.

FBI agents are in Libya investigating the attack, and the U.S. intelligence community can listen to phone calls, hack into email traffic, conduct overhead surveillance and otherwise spy in Libya. But face-to-face meetings usually provide the best information, former CIA officers say.

A former CIA officer who served in Iraq and Afghanistan said it should be possible for agents to operate relatively safely in Libya by traveling in small teams with Arabic-speaking officers.

"Look, the risks are somebody could get killed. Somebody could get grabbed. There could be terrible videos on the Internet," he said.

"This is the job. This is what we do. If we are going to be relevant in a place like Libya, we're going to have to take the risk," he said.

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Senators to Clinton: Show us the ambassador's cables

September 25, 2012

Foreign Policy

By Josh Rogin

Two top senators on the Foreign Relations Committee don't want to wait for the State Department to do its own investigation into the Sept. 11 attack in Benghazi that killed four Americans including Ambassador Chris Stevens; they want Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to show them Stevens's diplomatic cables and other correspondence now.

"While we appreciate the sensitivities associated with this ongoing investigation, we must insist on more timely information regarding the attacks and the events leading up to the attacks," wrote Sens. Bob Corker (R-TN) and Johnny Isakson (R-GA) in a letter to Clinton Tuesday.

They acknowledged that Clinton is in the process of setting up an Accountability Review Board, although its chairman former Deputy Secretary of State Thomas Pickering said Monday that the panel hasn't started its work yet. But the senators don't want to wait for the board to finish its report, which might not be transmitted to Congress until next spring.

"To that end, we request that you transmit to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee all communications between the U.S. Mission to Libya and the State Department relevant to the security situation in Benghazi in the period leading up to the attacks, including, but not limited to, cables sent from Ambassador Stevens," they wrote.

The senators noted that Libya officials have said they warned the U.S. government about rising threats in Benghazi just before the attacks and they referenced the CNN reports, culled at least partially from Stevens's personal diary, stating that the ambassador believed his life was in danger.

"Despite these warnings, the State Department sought and received a waiver from the standard security requirements for the consulate," the senators wrote.

"We are extremely concerned about conflicting reports over the events leading up to the attacks. Specifically, we are concerned over the apparent lack of security preparations made despite a demonstrable increase in risks to U.S. officials and facilities in Benghazi in the period leading up to the attacks."

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S. Arabia Downplays Impact Of Mystery Virus On Hajj

September 26, 2012

AFP

Saudi health authorities downplayed Tuesday the impact of a possible outbreak of a virus from the family of deadly SARS on its forthcoming Hajj pilgrimage, stressing that the cases remain rare.

Pilgrims have begun to arrive in Saudi Arabia for the ritual that represents the world's largest annual gathering as some two million faithful are expected to descend on the Muslim holy city of Mecca for the hajj which peaks in late October.

"There have been two cases of flu over a period of time. This is normal," said health ministry spokesman Khaled al-Mirghalani.

"There are no changes to the conditions put by the health ministry to pilgrims," he said, adding that authorities remain vigilant.

The undersecretary for preventive medicine at the Saudi health ministry, Ziyad Memish, said the "virus has been in the kingdom for three months."

He, however, insisted the situation was "stable and no new cases have been recorded." Memish said the kingdom is not planning to impose new preventive measures on pilgrims.

The virus has caused the death of a Saudi national and has left a Qatari man in serious conditions at a London hospital, said the World Health Organization (WHO).

The 49-year-old Qatari was admitted to an intensive care unit in Doha on September 7 suffering from acute respiratory infection and kidney failure before being transferred to Britain by air ambulance on September 11, the WHO said.

The WHO confirmed the illness was in the coronavirus family but was not SARS, or Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome, which swept out of China in 2003, killing more than 800 people worldwide.

"This is not SARS, it will not become SARS, and it is not SARS-like," said Gregory Haertl, a WHO spokesman in Geneva, pointing out that what sets the new virus apart was that it caused rapid kidney failure.

Qatar's top health authority announced on Monday that no other cases have been reported in the Gulf state, apart from the citizen who fell ill in Saudi Arabia.

The head of the country's public health authority, Mohammed bin Hamad Al-Thani, said the infected Qatari had "been treated in Qatar for two months before being transferred to London."

Last year, nearly three million Muslim pilgrims performed the hajj, which represents one of the five pillars of Islam and must be performed at least once in a lifetime by all those Muslims who are able to do so.

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Blasts Hit Syrian School As War Is Focus At The U.N.

September 26, 2012

[New York Times](#)

By An Employee Of The New York Times In Syria And Steven Lee Myers

DAMASCUS, Syria - Insurgent bombs exploded at a Damascus school building on Tuesday, and Syrian government shells landed in the disputed Golan Heights region held by Israel, underscoring the Syrian conflict's growing scope as it dominated much of the discussion on the first formal day of the United Nations General Assembly.

President François Hollande of France called for outside military intervention to protect areas in Syria held by the rebels and told the General Assembly in his first speech there that the government of President Bashar al-Assad, which has been widely accused by Western and Arab countries of brutality in its campaign to crush the insurgency, "has no future among us."

President Obama, in his remarks to the General Assembly, said Syria's future "must not belong to a dictator who massacres his people." But neither he nor Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton detailed new initiatives to address the spiraling violence in Syria, where an estimated 20,000 people have been killed and millions have been displaced since the anti-Assad uprising began with peaceful protests in March 2011.

"If there is a cause that cries out for protest in the world today, it is a regime that tortures children and shoots rockets at apartment buildings," Mr. Obama said, "and we must remain engaged to assure that what began with citizens demanding their rights does not end in a cycle of sectarian violence."

In Damascus, the Syrian capital, accounts from both the insurgent and government sides said multiple bombs exploded at the school. Ambulances raced to the scene as smoke plumes rose above the city, but accounts of the use of that school and the extent of the casualties diverged sharply.

The Syrian state news agency said two bombs had exploded, wounding seven people and lightly damaging the school. The rebel group that claimed responsibility for the attack, which called itself the Grandchildren of the Prophet, said it planted nine bombs and killed senior officers and scores of other security agents who had commandeered the school and were using it as a military headquarters.

However, the group provided no immediate proof for that assertion, and another activist group, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, based in Britain, said that 24 people had been wounded in the attack, most of them soldiers.

The explosions nonetheless seemed to demonstrate the continued ability of antigovernment fighters to strike close to centers of power, despite the Syrian military's assault on rebel fighters around Damascus, which has lasted for weeks.

A shopkeeper in the area said he saw smoke rising from the school and from other locations nearby. The school, he said, had been used as a military base and a barracks for soldiers fighting the rebels in the southern suburbs of Damascus.

He said he saw about 10 ambulances in the area after the explosions. "Damascus has become a nightmare to live in," he said. "Checkpoints are everywhere."

Elsewhere, heavy clashes were reported between the Syrian government and rebel fighters near the border with Israel. Military officers said mortar shells landed near a kibbutz in the Golan Heights, which Israel seized from Syria during the 1967 war. No injuries or damage was reported, but Israeli officials expressed concern about the conflict's widening reach.

"The shells were aimed at villages inside Syria and are actually part of the internal, ongoing conflict inside Syria," the Israel Defense Forces said in a statement. "Fire from Syria leaking into Israel will not be accepted."

A Syrian resident who lives near the site of the fighting said it started around 7 a.m., with clashes and explosions near large military checkpoints, as rebel fighters tried to drive government troops from two villages, Jubata al-Khashab and Khan Arnabah, in Quneitra Province.

Despite the demands at the United Nations for an end to the Syria conflict, the prospects for a diplomatic solution appear remote.

Mrs. Clinton met with the new special envoy for Syria, Lakhdar Brahimi, who represents both the United Nations and the Arab League, a day after he delivered a gloomy assessment of the conflict to the Security Council.

A senior State Department official said the two compared notes but did not detail any new plans for reviving the diplomatic process. "Brahimi is very focused on how you create the conditions for some kind of diplomatic process to unfold," the official said, speaking on the condition of anonymity as part of

the department's protocol, "but he is also realistic that right at the moment we are not around the corner from a diplomatic process being launched."

The United States continues to oppose military intervention, and the administration sees little hope that Mr. Assad's strongest backers, Russia and China, are willing to ease their opposition to any coercive resolutions by the Security Council, which both have vetoed three times.

"It's basically been our view since the third veto by the Russians and the Chinese that the most profitable investment of our time and energy is not at the moment in the Security Council," the official said. "It's in supporting the opposition on the ground."

To that end, the official said, Mrs. Clinton will participate in several meetings later in the week intended to strengthen and unify opposition forces that remain deeply divided.

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2 Explosions Hit Near Army HQ In Syrian Capital

September 26, 2012

Associated Press

By Albert Aji And Zeina Karam

DAMASCUS, Syria - Two massive explosions targeting the army command headquarters rocked the heart of the Syrian capital on Wednesday, setting off clashes and a huge fire inside the building in the heavily guarded area, state-run media and residents said.

Information Minister Omran Zoubi said there were no casualties from the blasts, the latest to hit the city as the uprising against President Bashar Assad's regime intensifies. But the explosions appear to show the deep reach of the rebels determined to topple the regime.

Witnesses said the explosions were followed by heavy gunfire, suggesting security forces clashed with gunmen in the area.

Syria's state-run news agency, SANA, said the explosions struck just before 7 a.m. (0400 GMT) near the landmark Omayyad square. The explosions were heard several miles (kilometers) away and shattered the windows of the Dama Rose hotel and other nearby buildings.

The army command building was in flames, sending huge columns of thick black smoke that hung over Damascus for several hours following the blasts.

"The explosions shook the entire apartment and the windows shattered," said a resident of the nearby Abu Rummaneh district who spoke on condition of anonymity out of security concerns. "It was like a quake."

Zoubi, the information minister, said the blasts were caused by two "large, highly explosive" improvised devices, one of which may have been placed "on the inner side of the fence" around the grounds of the army command building. He said the damage inflicted was material and there were no casualties.

"I can confirm that all our comrades in the military command and defense ministry are fine," he told Syrian TV, which is located near the site of the explosion, in a telephone call.

"Everything is normal," he said. "There was a terrorist act, perhaps near a significant location, yes, this is true, but they failed as usual to achieve their goals."

Ambulances were rushed to the site as police sealed off the area to traffic and journalists. Traffic in other areas snarled as checkpoints were set up, blocking access to the capital from the suburbs.

Syria's unrest began in March 2011 when protests calling for political change met a violent government crackdown. Many in the opposition have since taken up arms as the conflict morphed into a civil war that activists say has killed nearly 30,000 people. Over the past few months, the rebels have increasingly targeted security sites and symbols of regime power in a bid to turn the tide in the fighting.

On July 18, rebels penetrated the heart of Syria's power elite, detonating a bomb inside a high-level crisis meeting in Damascus that killed three top regime officials, including Assad's brother-in-law and the defense minister. Other large blasts have targeted the headquarters of security agencies in the capital, killing scores of people this year.

On Tuesday, several bombs went off inside a Damascus school that activists said was being used by regime forces as a security headquarters. Several people were wounded.

Syria's conflict was the focus of attention as world leaders gathered at the U.N. General Assembly's annual meeting in New York this week.

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon demanded international action to stop the war in Syria, telling a somber gathering of world leaders Tuesday that the 18-month conflict had become "a regional calamity with global ramifications."

Ban, declaring that the situation in Syria is getting worse every day, called the conflict a serious and growing threat to international peace and security that requires attention from the deeply divided U.N. Security Council.

That appears highly unlikely, however, at least in the near future.

Russia and China have vetoed three Western-backed resolutions aimed at pressuring Assad to end the violence and enter negotiations on a political transition, leaving the U.N.'s most powerful body paralyzed in what some diplomats say is the worst crisis since the U.S.-Soviet standoff during the Cold War.

In sharp contrast to the U.N. chief, President Barack Obama pledged U.S. support for Syrians trying to oust Assad - "a dictator who massacres his own people."

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Syria Rebels Prepare To Blow Up Base 46

September 26, 2012

AFP

The roar of the approaching fighter-bomber gets louder, so the rebels preparing to assault a major military base hide themselves indoors as others move cars and motorcycles under cover among the olive trees.

Fighters of the rebel Free Syrian Army (FAS) took the rocky heights above the large town of Al-Atarib, west of Syria's second city Aleppo in the north, three months ago from the forces of President Bashar al-Assad.

Now they have their sights set on "Base 46."

They say they have the vital regime base two kilometres (more than a mile) away surrounded and have been attacking Assad's forces holed up there for the past three days.

They also say Base 46, inside which 1,000 regime soldiers are trapped, is a major military objective, the last link on the road to Aleppo, and that they will blow it up within several days.

Abu Sadeq, with his bushy black beard, green battledress and black desert boots, introduces himself as a rebel officer.

He waits until the sound of the warplane fades before declaring: "They're done for."

"They're well-armed in there -- they've got 13 tanks and multiple rocket launchers. But we are too many for them, and we've cut all the roads they could use to bring in reinforcements.

"Even if they try to send more armour in from Aleppo, we have booby traps everywhere. All the roads are mined. And we also have rocket-propelled grenades. If they come, we'll destroy them," Abu Sadeq says.

The rebels claim to have brought in at least 1,500 fighters from all across the region for this one crucial attack on Base 46. They are under the command of "general" Ahmad al-Fajj, himself a native of Al-Atarib.

There are around 300 rebels constantly on the front line, under fire from sharpshooters and artillery inside the base, and they rotate to the rear every eight hours for rest and recuperation.

Another officer who gives only his first name -- Hussein -- and says he commands the Ansar al-Haq ("Partisans of Justice") brigade, says: "The only thing they can do is use air power. So they do it, but that still won't save the base."

"They fire but hardly ever hit us," he adds, pointing to a crater five metres (yards) across between two olive trees at the foot of the hill near the road.

"They're firing at random on Al-Atarib, hitting houses and killing only civilians. Because they don't know where we are, and we keep on the move all the time. When we hear a MiG coming we hide, when it's a chopper we give it all we've got. But often they're flying too high."

His men drive an AFP correspondent to a place they say was destroyed in an air raid the night before, a two-storey house now flattened, reduced to a pile of rubble three metres high.

"There was a whole family in there -- four kids. They're all dead," sighs Abu Sadeq. "They fire at night if they see even a glimmer of light. We've even unscrewed the bulbs from the brake lights of our cars and bikes."

Just a few hundred people, maybe 1,000 at the most, remain of the 35,000 who lived in Al-Atarib before the war. Those who remain hide in corners, startled at the mere hint of the sound of a plane.

The poorest of the poor do not even have the money to pay for the truck ride that could take them to the border with Turkey to join the rest of the refugees.

Abu Sadeq's brother, another uniformed rebel, sits by the front of a small grocery shop, its metal shutters half pulled down. He nods with his head towards an old man at the end of the street.

The man is in a wheelchair, his legs horribly deformed.

"And him?" he asks. "What do you think'll happen to him?"
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Yemen Leader Says Would Talk To Disarmed Al-Qaida

September 26, 2012

Associated Press

SANAA, Yemen - Yemen's president said Tuesday he would talk to his country's branch of the al-Qaida militant network if it were to give up its weapons, abandon its extremist ideas and stop sheltering foreign fighters.

The televised statement by President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi appeared aimed at showing his readiness to use any means to reduce the political violence in his country, home to the world's most active branch of the terror network. Al-Qaida however has shown little indication that it would want to pursue a dialogue, especially under Hadi's conditions.

The militants had taken advantage of Yemen's popular uprising last year to seize much of the country's south. This summer, backed by U.S. advisers and drones, Hadi's military launched an offensive to reclaim this territory, going after al-Qaida's strongholds and hideouts. The groups' No.2 was killed earlier this month in an airstrike.

The militants in turn have struck back, targeted security officials for assassinations and staging deadly bombings.

Hadi's remarks were in line with the image he tries to project, of a leader serious about bringing stability to his country either by force or by negotiation.

He said he was pressured by unidentified local "mediators" to accept the idea of dialogue with the militants. The group has often found shelter among tribal leaders.

"I say, despite the heavy blood that was shed and the homes which were destroyed, and people who lost their homes, a dialogue can be started on condition that the al-Qaida agrees publicly to hand over its weapons, declares its repentance from its extremist ideas that have nothing to do with Islam and gives up sheltering armed groups from outside Yemen," he said. "Then this would be opening the door for dialogue."

He added, however, that "mediators go and never come back," indicating skepticism that al-Qaida would ever take up the offer.

Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula has planned attacks against targets in both Yemen and the United States., including the failed attempt by an al-Qaida operative to detonate a bomb in his underwear aboard a flight bound for Detroit on Christmas Day, 2009.

In May, nearly 100 Yemeni soldiers were killed when a suicide bomber blew himself up at a parade rehearsal. Al-Qaida said at the time it was targeting the defense minister, who was the target of at least six assassination attempts. At least 13 people were killed in the latest attempt against the minister two weeks ago in Sanaa.

Hadi's predecessor Ali Abdullah Saleh was long accused by critics of not fighting al-Qaida wholeheartedly. Saleh stepped down in February in a power transfer deal backed by the U.S., but Hadi and his supporters complain the former leader undermines security using relatives and loyalists still in key positions.

On Tuesday, Hadi vowed to continue to free the country from "burden of the past," an apparent reference to his predecessor's alleged meddling. "All I promise is that I will not be silent or objective before whatever curtails the path to change," he said.

The impoverished Arabian Peninsula nation's economy has been hard hit by the upheaval.

On Tuesday, an explosion struck a gas pipeline in southern Yemen, temporarily halting the flow of gas although exports were not affected, a government official said. The pipeline has repeatedly been targeted by groups suspected to be affiliated with al-Qaida.

An oil ministry official said repair work has begun in the Liquefied Natural Gas Co. pipeline. He spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to reporters.

The bombing in Shabwa province comes on the heels of a Monday attack against an oil pipeline nearby.

A statement by the gas company said nobody was hurt in Tuesday's explosion. Yemen LNG Co. was created in 1995 - the country's first natural gas liquefaction consortium. Its major shareholders include French oil company Total SA and Dallas-based Hunt Oil Co. It also is backed with Asian, U.S. and Yemeni government funding.

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SCA

Afghanistan Bans Pakistani Newspapers In Border Area

September 26, 2012

New York Times

By Rod Nordland And Declan Walsh

KABUL, Afghanistan - In the often ill-tempered war of words between Afghanistan and Pakistan, the Afghans have just taken a new tack: outlawing Pakistani words.

The Afghan government has banned Pakistani newspapers from eastern Afghanistan. Granted, that is an area where only 29 percent of the population can read, but it was at least a symbolic smack in the mouth.

Afghan police at the two countries' notoriously porous border crossings this week began seizing copies of a dozen Pakistani daily newspapers, in English, Pashto and Urdu, after the Afghan Interior Ministry issued an order Friday saying the publications were "functioning as mouthpieces and propaganda tools for the Taliban."

Some Pakistani news outlets are clearly not shy about reporting on Afghanistan in terms that would please the insurgents. A headline last year in the English-language newspaper Nation read "18 Puppets Killed in Spin Boldak Martyrdom Attack," reporting about a Taliban suicide bombing of a government border post.

That article bore the byline of Qari Yousuf Ahmadi, described as "our staff reporter." Mr. Ahmadi is the Taliban's official spokesman for southern Afghanistan. His counterpart in the east and north, Zabiullah Mujahid, is also frequently listed as a Nation "staff reporter."

Still, The Nation is a fringe publication, owned by the right-wing Pakistani nationalist Majid Nizami, that sells only 10,000 copies daily, by the most generous industry estimates. Few copies ever reach Afghanistan. (The most respected paper in Pakistan, Dawn, sells at least 10 times as many copies).

Editors of less lurid English-language publications say that such brazenly pro-Taliban coverage is the exception, though the Pakistani press features plenty of criticism of President Hamid Karzai's government and of the United States. "The Afghans have gone overboard," said Rashed Rahman, editor of The Daily Times, based in Lahore. "I understand their sensitivities, but to say the Pakistani press is pro-Taliban is difficult to justify."

Intermedia Pakistan, an aid group that specializes in media development, recently conducted an analysis of how Afghanistan is portrayed in the Pakistani news media. Its executive director, Adnan Rehmat, said there was a strong pro-Taliban bias after the 2001 invasion by the United States, but the bias shifted after homegrown Pakistani Taliban militants took up arms.

Even so, the deep suspicions between the two countries are reflected in the press.

Ahmad Ahmadani, a staff correspondent employed by The Nation, rather than the Taliban, called the Afghan government's action "a form of intimidation." While he agreed that The Nation was somewhat pro-Taliban in its tone, he said it reflected how Muslims in general feel, "so how can they talk against them?" The more mainstream English-language papers in Pakistan offer plenty of considered analysis - some of it sharply critical of the powerful military. But publications in Urdu, the main language of Pakistan and a widely spoken tongue in eastern Afghanistan, are another matter. Some carry extreme views that at times make The Nation seem a model of restraint.

Ansar Abbasi, an influential journalist writing in the leading Urdu daily Jang in July accused the Pakistani and American governments of handing Afghanistan over to Jews and Christians, and killing "hundreds of thousands of people in 11 years." A writer in the Urdu daily Nawai Waqt - also owned by Mr. Nizami, the Punjabi nationalist - declared last week that America had already lost the war in Afghanistan, and that a majority of its troops had become drug users.

Mr. Rehmat, of Intermedia Pakistan, said there was strong antipathy in the Urdu press toward President Karzai, who is often presented as an American puppet, as well as skepticism about the broader American project in Afghanistan.

"They are unabashedly anti-Karzai, and in general view the American partnership in Afghan governance as being not in Pakistan's interest," he said.

For their part, the Afghan news media make criticism of Pakistan a mainstay of their coverage as well, particularly for providing sanctuaries for the Taliban. Many Afghan critics assert that there would be no insurgency in Afghanistan had Pakistan not created it.

There are other factors at play in the Pakistani coverage. The civilian government wields indirect influence over newspapers through its large advertising budget, while the powerful military prevails on major news media companies to stick to the official line on national security issues, especially on Afghanistan and India.

Even mainstream Pakistani papers give prominence to conspiratorial, and occasionally extremist, views. The News International newspaper, for instance, offers regular columns by Abdul Qadeer Khan, the international nuclear proliferator, and by Ahmed Quraishi, a right-wing populist with close military ties.

In one article last May, Mr. Quraishi claimed that the Central Intelligence Agency had been "grooming and supporting terrorism and insurgency inside Pakistan" for the past decade.

The All Pakistan Newspapers Society, whose members include the largest English and Urdu papers, expressed "serious concern" about the Afghan ban, calling it an infringement of the "people's right to know."

For the most part, though, the move was little noticed east of the border, partly because it did not create much financial hardship. A newspaper distributor in Jalalabad, the largest city in eastern Afghanistan, said that total sales there amounted to just 500 to 800 copies a day.
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Qaeda Operatives Killed In Drone Strike, Official Says

September 26, 2012

New York Times

By Ismail Khan And Scott Shane

PESHAWAR, Pakistan - An Al Qaeda operative of Turkish origin and an Iraqi reported to be a liaison between Al Qaeda and the Taliban were among five people killed on Monday in a United States drone strike in Pakistan's lawless North Waziristan region, a Pakistani security official confirmed Tuesday.

The official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, identified the Turk as Seleh al-Turki and the Iraqi as Abu Akash al-Iraqi, both aliases. The drone strike took place in the Mir Ali area of North Waziristan.

The official said Seleh al-Turki was a field operative associated with Al Qaeda. "He was not on the F.B.I.'s bounty list, but was a midlevel A.Q. guy," the official said.

Abu Akash al-Iraqi, long a target of Western counterterrorism agencies, had been living in Pakistan's border regions for 15 years and had married the daughter of a local tribal cleric. The Long War Journal, a Web site that covers the war on terror, described Abu Akash al-Iraqi as an important link between Al Qaeda and the Taliban.

The government official said all five killed in the drone strike were foreign militants. Abu Akash al-Iraqi was reported to have been killed in an October 2008 drone strike, but reports emerged later that he was still alive.

Drone strikes remain a sore point between Pakistan and the United States. Islamabad insists that drones are counterproductive and are a violation of its sovereignty. And a new joint report by the Stanford and New York University law schools concluded that the strikes have killed more civilians than American officials have acknowledged and that they have undermined international law.
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WHA/EUR

European Bank Chief Defends Bond Buys

September 25, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By TOM FAIRLESS and BRIAN BLACKSTONE

BERLIN—European Central Bank President Mario Draghi launched a robust defense of the bank's new bond-buying program in Berlin on Tuesday, saying the ECB's anticrisis measures are key to preserving Germany's industrial might.

It was Mr. Draghi's latest attempt to quell deep suspicion in Germany over the central bank's planned anticrisis measures. Many Germans view government bond purchases by central banks as a dangerous mingling of monetary and fiscal policy that fuels inflation.

The country's respected central bank, the Bundesbank, vigorously opposes the ECB's plan, announced on Sept. 6, to purchase unlimited amounts of government bonds of Spain and other vulnerable euro members provided the countries first seek assistance from Europe's bailout funds.

Hours after the decision was announced, the Bundesbank said its president, Jens Weidmann, regarded ECB bond buying as "being tantamount to financing governments by printing bank notes." Germany's chancellor and finance minister have voiced support for Mr. Draghi's plan, limiting the public backlash.

Addressing the Federation of German Industries in the country's capital, Mr. Draghi said the ECB's action has helped remove "unfounded fears about the future of the euro area" that had "compromised" the bank's ability to ensure price stability.

"The [ECB's] Governing Council faced a choice: to accept this situation and allow the singleness of its monetary policy to be undermined; or to take actions within its mandate to restore the normal transmission of monetary policy across all parts of the euro area," Mr. Draghi said. "In the current circumstances, the greatest risk to stability is not action, but inaction," he said.

The bond-buying plan—known as Outright Monetary Transactions—is "directly in Germany's interests" because it helps create a level playing field for German companies, he said. In a nod to Germany's

export-intensive manufacturing sector, which drives growth in Europe's largest economy, Mr. Draghi said the euro "supports the strong industrial sector on which Germany depends."

The ECB has yet to purchase any bonds under the new plan. But it is already having positive effects, according to Mr. Draghi. "We are seeing signs of improved sentiment in financial markets and we expect the economy to return to growth next year."

Still, the ECB president was at pains to express his "enormous respect" for the Bundesbank, which was the only central bank to oppose the latest bond-buying plan. "Many of [the Bundesbank's] concerns are shared by me and many of the members" of the ECB's rate-setting board, Mr. Draghi said.

In addition to Tuesday's speech, Mr. Draghi has taken other steps to shore up support in Germany. In an interview days after this month's bond decision, he told German daily *Süddeutsche Zeitung* that the ECB needed "to explain what we do better in Germany."

Mr. Draghi has also offered to speak to Germany's parliament to explain the ECB's policies.

Corrections & Amplifications

Addressing the annual gathering of the Federation of German Industry in Berlin, Mr. Draghi said the ECB's plans for so-called "Outright Monetary Transactions" have helped remove "unfounded fears about the future of the euro area." An earlier version of this story incorrectly named the ECB's plan "Outright Monetary Operations."

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Protesters Take to Street in Madrid

September 26, 2012

[New York Times](#)

By RAPHAEL MINDER

MADRID — The pressures facing the government of Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy mounted on several fronts on Tuesday, as thousands of demonstrators besieged Parliament and Spain's two largest regions took steps that underscored their deepening economic troubles and displeasure with his austerity plans.

Presenting the biggest domestic political challenge, the leader of Catalonia, Spain's most powerful economic region, called an early election for Nov. 25 that could turn into an unofficial referendum on whether to split from the rest of the country.

Catalonia's demands for more autonomy have been fueled by its own financial problems, which forced the Catalan government last month to request \$6.5 billion from an emergency fund of \$23.3 billion set up by Mr. Rajoy's government to help regions meet their debt financing obligations.

Underlining its deepening financial difficulties, another region, Andalusia, said Tuesday that it was preparing to request \$6.3 billion from the fund.

The developments unfolded as police officers and protesters clashed before the Parliament building and as Mr. Rajoy comes under intense pressure from investors and his European counterparts to clean up Spain's banks and public finances, particularly at the regional level.

The problems in the regions, both political and economic, appear to be intensifying, as Catalonia's move showed Tuesday, two weeks after a huge pro-independence rally in Barcelona.

"The voice of the street needs to be moved to the ballot boxes," the president of Catalonia, Artur Mas, told lawmakers at the regional Parliament. "We want to have the same instruments that other nations have in order to develop their own collective identity."

Following the Sept. 11 rally in Barcelona, Mr. Rajoy called on regions and their politicians to avoid raising tensions and instead to close ranks and help Spain emerge from its economic quagmire. Last week, in an unusual political foray, King Juan Carlos I also published a letter urging national unity.

"Mas has been under intense pressure to calm things down, even from the king, but what we now see is that far from taking any step back, Mas is in fact seeking a fresh mandate from voters to move things forward," said Josep Ramoneda, a Catalan political commentator and philosopher. The result of the vote, Mr. Ramoneda added, "will determine exactly how far and fast Catalonia moves toward independence."

Economists warned that the call for a Catalonia election added yet another element of uncertainty for Spain.

"Once comforted in power after elections, the government could then work more constructively towards a redefinition of the relationship between the central government and the regions," said Gilles Moëc, an economist at Deutsche Bank in London. "Still, in the meantime, political turmoil in Spain's richest region could generate the kind of market reaction which would precipitate a request for European support by Madrid."

Mr. Rajoy has been debating whether to tap into a new bond-buying program proposed by the European Central Bank. While such additional help would considerably alleviate Spain's debt problems, Mr. Rajoy finds himself in an increasingly tight bind between Spanish voters who oppose further cuts and investors and European finance officials demanding reassurance that Spain can meet budget deficit targets.

On Tuesday, Parliament took on the appearance of a fortress as about 1,400 police officers ringed the building to keep back demonstrators. The organizers of the latest protest said in a statement that they had no plans to try to occupy Parliament, but instead wanted to surround the building to show that "democracy has been kidnapped" by inept Spanish politicians.

Using their truncheons, the police scattered protesters in an effort to keep some approaches to the Parliament building open. By the evening, the police said that 10 people had been arrested and six had been injured.

Catalonia is the third region to call an early election, with the Basque region and Mr. Rajoy's home region of Galicia set to hold separate votes next month.

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FOREIGN POLICY

Romney pledges to privatize foreign aid

September 25, 2012

Foreign Policy

By Josh Rogin

Mitt Romney pledged Tuesday to shift foreign aid toward the private sector and deprioritize humanitarian aid in favor of promoting free enterprise and business development around the world.

In remarks at the Clinton Global Initiative, Romney laid out his most detailed proposals on foreign aid thus far, beginning with his plan to move foreign aid to rely more on public-private partnerships that enlist American corporations to the cause of helping the developing world.

"Free enterprise has done more to bless humanity than any other economic system not only because it is the only system that creates a prosperous middle class, but also because it is the only system where the individual enjoys the freedom to guide and build his or her own life. Free enterprise cannot only make us better off financially, it can make us better people," Romney said.

He said that America was a compassionate nation but that Americans wonder why foreign aid often falls victim to corruption and doesn't seem to solve the problems of the developing world. Romney believes that is because the private sector is now playing a much larger role in the developing world than foreign governments.

"If foreign aid can leverage this massive investment by private enterprise, it may exponentially expand the ability to not only care for those who suffer, but also to change lives," Romney said. "For American foreign aid to become more effective, it must embrace the power of partnerships, access the transformative nature of free enterprise, and leverage the abundant resources that can come from the private sector."

Romney then said he would lower the priority of foreign aid as a means to address humanitarian needs, such as health, as well as foreign aid as a means to promote U.S. strategic interests. He said the foreign aid goal that will receive "more attention and a much higher priority" if he is elected would be "aid that elevates people and brings about lasting change in communities and in nations."

Romney invoked the name of Muhammed Bouazizi of Tunisia, "the street vendor whose self-immolation sparked the Arab Spring," and said his protest was based on his desire to work to provide for his family.

"Work. That must be at the heart of our effort to help people build economies that can create jobs for people, young and old alike," Romney said. "Work builds self-esteem. It transforms minds from fantasy and fanaticism to reality and grounding. Work will not long tolerate corruption nor quietly endure the brazen theft by government of the product of hard-working men and women."

A Romney administration would initiate "Prosperity Pacts" through which the U.S. government would work with the private sector to eliminate trade and investment barriers in developing nations in exchange for U.S. aid packages that focus on "developing the institutions of liberty, the rule of law, and property rights," he said.

"The aim of a much larger share of our aid must be the promotion of work and the fostering of free enterprise," said Romney. "Nothing we can do as a nation will change lives and nations more effectively and permanently than sharing the insight that lies at the foundation of America's own economy--free people pursuing happiness in their own ways build a strong and prosperous nation."

"I've laid out a new approach for a new era," he said. "We'll couple aid with trade and private investment to empower individuals, encourage innovators, and reward entrepreneurs."

Romney started his speech with a joke about Clinton's speech endorsing President Barack Obama during the Democratic National Convention in Charlotte.

"If there's one thing we've learned this election season, it's that a few words from Bill Clinton can do any man a lot of good," Romney said. "After that introduction, I guess all I have to do is wait a day or two for the bounce."

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EDITORIAL / OPINION

President Obama At The U.N.

September 26, 2012

New York Times

The anti-American violence in the Muslim world demanded a firm push back from President Obama, who finally delivered it on Tuesday in the last United Nations General Assembly speech of his term.

Since the protests, attacks and flag burnings erupted two weeks ago over an anti-Islam video made in California, administration officials have condemned its crude depiction of the Prophet Muhammad and explained that the government had nothing to do with it. Mr. Obama made a similar point at the United Nations.

But he also gave a full-throated defense of the First Amendment right that, in this country, protects even hateful writings, films and speech. "We do so because in a diverse society, efforts to restrict speech can quickly become a tool to silence critics and oppress minorities," Mr. Obama said. He added that "the strongest weapon against hateful speech is not repression; it is more speech - the voices of tolerance that rally against bigotry and blasphemy, and lift up the values of understanding and mutual respect."

Mr. Obama was right to deliver that message, however foreign it is in much of the Muslim world. The assembled leaders applauded when Mr. Obama said he accepts that, as president, people will call him "awful things every day" and that he will defend their right to do it. But a number of Islamic leaders have recently revived a push for an international ban on blasphemy, which would move in exactly the wrong direction.

Mr. Obama's more pragmatic challenges to Arab Spring countries trying to build new democratic societies may have more impact. He said all leaders must speak against violence and extremism out of obligation to United Nations norms as well as self-interest. "Burning an American flag does nothing to provide a child an education," he said, and popular outrage can be turned as easily against Muslim leaders, ethnic groups and tribes as America.

Mr. Obama also bluntly warned that the politics of anger could damage international cooperation. The United States intends to stay engaged with the struggling Muslim democracies, even after the killing of the ambassador to Libya and three other Americans on Sept. 11. But efforts to deepen trade, economic and other ties "depend on a spirit of mutual interest and mutual respect," he said.

Six weeks before the election, the speech to an audience of world leaders in the United Nations General Assembly hall was as much a domestic political appeal as anything else. President Obama used the

commanding venue of the General Assembly to offer a reasonable defense against Mitt Romney's incoherent critique of his response to the revolutions in Libya, Egypt, Tunisia and Yemen and to Iran's nuclear program.

There were two fairly big omissions in Mr. Obama's visit to the General Assembly. He spoke only briefly on areas that need more debate in this campaign - the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Syrian civil war, Afghanistan and Iraq. And while it's reasonable for Mr. Obama to be in campaign mode, just like Mr. Romney, he is the president. He could have used some of his time in New York to meet privately with world leaders, as presidents usually do.

It's not like he doesn't have a lot to talk to them about.
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Mr. Obama's Refreshing Defense Of Free Speech

September 26, 2012

Washington Post

WHEN ANTI-AMERICAN demonstrations spread around the world this month, the Obama administration focused much of its public response on denouncing the anti-Muslim video that had provoked outrage and provided a pretext for extremists. President Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton rightly distanced the U.S. government from the video and stressed the American system of religious tolerance; more disturbingly, the White House asked Google to consider removing the offending video from its YouTube Web site.

So it was heartening Tuesday to hear Mr. Obama, in his address to the U.N. General Assembly, deliver a vigorous defense of freedom of speech, including the right of individuals to "blasphemy against our most sacred beliefs."

"Americans have fought and died around the globe to protect the right of all people to express their views - even views that we disagree with," the president said. Without such freedom, he said, individuals might be stopped from practicing their own faith; "efforts to restrict speech can become a tool to silence critics or oppress minorities." He concluded: "Given the power of faith in our lives and the passion that religious differences can inflame, the strongest weapon against hateful speech is not repression, it is more speech."

Mr. Obama went on to denounce violence as a response to speech, and to insist that other leaders speak out against extremism - including "those who - even when not resorting to violence - use hatred of America, or the West, or Israel as a central principle of politics." The rhetoric was well-targeted: Anti-Americanism has become a tool of extremist and reactionary forces in the power struggles underway in post-revolutionary Arab states. The anti-Muslim video - a vile but obscure piece of Internet flotsam - was seized on by militants in Egypt and Libya as a means for rallying support in Cairo and as a cover for staging an armed assault on U.S. personnel in Benghazi.

It is important for the president and his administration to try to make clear to the majority of Muslims - who do not participate in demonstrations but follow the controversy - that the United States does not sponsor or endorse religious slander. That fact, while obvious to Americans, is not widely understood in the Middle East. But it is just as important to send the message that American free speech will not be curbed to suit religious sensibilities and that violence will not be tolerated. "We will bring justice to

those who harm our citizens and our friends," Mr. Obama said. Delivering on those words will be another important piece of the administration's response. ([top](#))

Alan Dershowitz: The Message Obama Should Have Sent

September 26, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By ALAN M. DERSHOWITZ

On Monday in New York, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad promised that Israel will be "eliminated," a variation on his previous threats to the nation's existence. He was in town for the opening of the United Nations General Assembly, a gathering that reliably sees leaders issuing pronouncements that, even if not new, at least are given a bigger stage. On Tuesday, the first day of the gathering, President Obama delivered a speech that also struck familiar notes, including the statement that "a nuclear-armed Iran is not a challenge that can be contained." He moved no closer to giving a signal of what he might consider an intolerable development in Iran's advance toward a nuclear weapon.

For months, U.S. and Israeli officials have debated whether Mr. Obama should publicly announce a "red line" that, if crossed by Iran, would prompt an American military response. Announcing such a threshold publicly or privately might be helpful, but it may not be necessary for the president to specify what would constitute such a red line (a certain degree of uranium enrichment, for example, or other evidence of weaponization).

Instead, Mr. Obama has another good option: Tell the Iranian leadership that under no circumstances will it ever be permitted to develop or acquire nuclear weapons, and that the U.S. is prepared to take decisive military action to make sure of this.

Such a statement wouldn't tip the president's hand regarding a precise red line, but it would send a clear message that Iran's efforts to develop nuclear weapons are futile and ultimately will lead to disaster for Iran's rulers.

Mr. Obama's prior statements—that containing a nuclear Iran is not an option; that a country committed to wiping Israel off the map, promoting terrorism and arming Hezbollah and Syria can't be allowed to have nukes—have been strong. But Iran's leadership still doesn't seem to believe that an American military option really is on the table.

Iran's skepticism is understandable in light of some Obama administration rhetoric. This week the president himself characterized Israeli concern over Iran and threats of military action as mere "noise." Defense Secretary Leon Panetta has repeatedly and emphatically outlined the dangers of military action against Iran, and this month Vice President Joe Biden criticized Mitt Romney for being "ready to go to war" with Iran.

Being ready for war with Iran, after all, might be the only way to deter that country from going nuclear.

Were Mr. Obama to affirm America's dedication to blocking Iran's nuclear ambitions through military force if necessary, he would maintain his flexibility to act while putting pressure on Iran's mullahs. He would not be acknowledging, as some fear, that the combination of sanctions and diplomacy is failing. Rather, he would make this combination more effective by convincing Iran's leaders that there is no good reason for them to continue bringing the economic pain of international sanctions onto their

country. The message is that their sanctions-provoking projects are pointless because the U.S. will never allow Iran to become a nuclear power.

A policy of sanctions, diplomacy and an absolute dedication to the use of force if necessary has a far better chance of working than sanctions and diplomacy alone. Sanctions have certainly made life difficult in Iran, at least for the general population, but they haven't slowed the regime's nuclear march. Meanwhile, Israeli leaders have been forced to consider unilateral action in the absence of America's clear commitment to stopping Iran before it's too late.

There are many ways to communicate American preparedness, including by increased military planning and exercises. But there is no substitute for a firm commitment, unambiguously stated by a president whose subordinates do nothing to blur the message and, if anything, signal a steely resolve.

There are those who argue that an American president should never make a threat that he may not want to carry out. But President Obama has already committed his administration to preventing Iran from developing nuclear weapons, which necessarily means employing the military option if all else fails. He has also told the world that he does not bluff. If that is true, then there is no downside to his stating U.S. policy and intentions explicitly.

Mr. Dershowitz is a law professor at Harvard. His latest book is "Trials of Zion" (Grand Central Publishing, 2010).

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Backlash To The Backlash

September 26, 2012

New York Times

By Thomas L. Friedman

One of the iron laws of Middle East politics for the last half-century has been that extremists go all the way and moderates tend to just go away. That is what made the march in Benghazi, Libya, so unusual last Friday. This time, the moderates did not just go away. They got together and stormed the headquarters of the Islamist militia Ansar al-Sharia, whose members are suspected of carrying out the attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi that resulted in the death of four Americans, including Ambassador Chris Stevens.

It is not clear whether this trend can spread or be sustained. But having decried the voices of intolerance that so often intimidate everyone in that region, I find it heartening to see Libyans carrying signs like "We want justice for Chris" and "No more Al Qaeda" - and demanding that armed militias disband. This coincides with some brutally honest articles in the Arab/Muslim press - in response to rioting triggered by the idiotic YouTube video insulting the Prophet Muhammad - that are not the usual "What is wrong with America?" but, rather, "What is wrong with us, and how do we fix it?"

On Monday, the Middle East Media Research Institute, or Memri, which tracks the Arab/Muslim press, translated a searing critique written by Imad al-Din Hussein, a columnist for Al Shorouk, Cairo's best daily newspaper: "We curse the West day and night, and criticize its [moral] disintegration and shamelessness, while relying on it for everything. ... We import, mostly from the West, cars, trains, planes ... refrigerators, and washing machines. ... We are a nation that contributes nothing to human civilization in the current era. ... We have become a burden on [other] nations. ... Had we truly implemented the essence of the directives of Islam and all [other] religions, we would have been at the

forefront of the nations. The world will respect us when we return to being people who take part in human civilization, instead of [being] parasites who are spread out over the map of the advanced world, feeding off its production and later attacking it from morning until night. ... The West is not an oasis of idealism. It also contains exploitation in many areas. But at least it is not sunk in delusions, trivialities and external appearances, as we are. ... Therefore, supporting Islam and the prophet of the Muslims should be done through work, production, values, and culture, not by storming embassies and murdering diplomats."

Mohammad Taqi, a liberal Pakistani columnist, writing in the Lahore-based Daily Times on Sept. 20, argued that "there is absolutely no excuse for violence and indeed murder most foul, as committed in Benghazi. Fighting hate with hate is sure to beget more hate. The way out is drowning the odious voices with voices of sanity, not curbing free speech and calls for murder."

Khaled al-Hroub, a professor at Cambridge University, writing in Jordan's Al Dustour newspaper on Sept. 17, translated by Memri, argued that the most "frightening aspect of what we see today in the streets of Arab and Islamic cities is the disaster of extremism that is flooding our societies and cultures, as well as our behavior. ... This [represents] a total atrophy of thought among wide sectors [of society], as a result of the culture of religious zealotry that was imposed on people for over 50 years, and which brought forth what we witness" today.

The Egyptian comedian, Bassem Youssef, wrote in Al Shorouk, translated by Memri, on Sept. 23: "We demand that the world respect our feelings, yet we do not respect the feelings of others. We scream blue murder when they outlaw the niqab in some European country or prevent [Muslims] from building minarets in another [European] country - even though these countries continue to allow freedom of religion, as manifest in the building of mosques and in the preaching [activity] that takes place in their courtyards. Yet, in our countries, we do not allow others to publicly preach their beliefs. Maybe we should examine ourselves before [criticizing] others."

Whenever I was asked during the Iraq war, "How will you know when we've won?" I gave the same answer: When Salman Rushdie can give a lecture in Baghdad; when there is real freedom of speech in the heart of the Arab-Muslim world. There is no question that we need a respectful dialogue between Islam and the West, but, even more, we need a respectful dialogue between Muslims and Muslims. What matters is not what Arab/Muslim political parties and groupings tell us they stand for. What matters is what they tell themselves, in their own languages, about what they stand for and what excesses they will not tolerate.

This internal debate had long been stifled by Arab autocrats whose regimes traditionally suppressed extremist Islamist parties, but never really permitted their ideas to be countered with free speech - with independent, modernist, progressive interpretations of Islam or by truly legitimate, secular political parties and institutions. Are we seeing the start of that now with the emergence of free spaces and legitimate parties in the Arab world? Again, too early to say, but this moderate backlash to the extremist backlash is worth hailing - and watching.

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Israel Must Be 'Eliminated'

September 26, 2012

Wall Street Journal

"To see what is in front of one's nose needs a constant struggle."

—George Orwell

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad speaks at the United Nations today, which also happens to be Yom Kippur, the holiest day on the Jewish calendar. The timing is apt because when it comes to Iran and Israel, the hardest thing for some people to see or hear is what Iranian leaders say in front of the world's nose.

"Iran has been around for the last seven, 10 thousand years. They [the Israelis] have been occupying those territories for the last 60 to 70 years, with the support and force of the Westerners. They have no roots there in history," Mr. Ahmadinejad told reporters and editors in New York on Monday.

"We do believe that they have found themselves at a dead end and they are seeking new adventures in order to escape this dead end. Iran will not be damaged with foreign bombs. We don't even count them as any part of any equation for Iran. During a historical phase, they [the Israelis] represent minimal disturbances that come into the picture and are then eliminated."

Note that word—"eliminated." When Iranians talk about Israel, this intention of a final solution keeps coming up. In October 2005, Mr. Ahmadinejad, quoting the Ayatollah Khomeini, said Israel "must be wiped off the map." Lest anyone miss the point, the Iranian President said in June 2008 that Israel "has reached the end of its function and will soon disappear off the geographical domain."

He has company among Iranian leaders. In a televised speech in February, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei called Israel a "cancerous tumor that should be cut and will be cut," adding that "from now on, in any place, if any nation or any group that confronts the Zionist regime, we will endorse and we will help. We have no fear of expressing this."

Major General Hassan Firouzabadi, chief of staff of the armed forces, added in May that "the Iranian nation is standing for its cause that is the full annihilation of Israel."

This pledge of erasing an entire state goes back to the earliest days of the Iranian revolution. "One of our major points is that Israel must be destroyed," Ayatollah Khomeini said in the 1980s.

Former Iranian President Akbar Rafsanjani—often described as a moderate in Western media accounts—had this to say in 2001: "If one day, the Islamic world is also equipped with weapons like those that Israel possesses now, then the imperialists' strategy will reach a standstill because the use of even one nuclear bomb inside Israel will destroy everything. However, it will only harm the Islamic world. It is not irrational to contemplate such an eventuality."

So for Iran it is "not irrational" to contemplate the deaths of millions of Muslims in exchange for the end of Israel because millions of other Muslims will survive, but the Jewish state will not.

The world's civilized nations typically denounce such statements, as the U.S. State Department denounced Mr. Ahmadinejad's on Monday. But denouncing them is not the same as taking them seriously. Sometimes the greatest challenge for a civilized society is comprehending that not everyone behaves in civilized or rational fashion, that barbarians can still appear at the gate.

Thus we hear in U.S. and European policy circles that Israel is overreacting to such publicly stated intentions because Iran would never act on them and, in any case, Israel has its own nuclear deterrent.

But no one believes Israel would launch a nuclear first-strike to wipe out Tehran, and an Israeli counterstrike would be too late to protect Israel from being "eliminated."

The tragic lesson of history is that sometimes barbarians mean what they say. Sometimes regimes do want to eliminate entire nations or races, and they will do so if they have the means and opportunity and face a timorous or disbelieving world.

No one knows that more acutely than Israeli leaders, whose state was founded in the wake of such a genocide. The question faced by Benjamin Netanyahu, Ehud Barak and other Israelis is whether they can afford to allow another regime pledged to Jewish "annihilation" to acquire the means to accomplish it. The answer, in our view, is as obvious as Mr. Ahmadinejad's stated intentions.

In his U.N. speech Tuesday, President Obama took a tougher-than-usual election-season line against Iran, stating that "the United States will do what we must to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon." But the cold reality is that after nearly four years of failed diplomacy and half-hearted sanctions that he opposed until Congress forced his hand, neither Iran nor Israel believe him.

Someone should put Orwell on the President's reading list before it's too late.
([top](#))

Tolerance, Up In Flames

September 26, 2012

New York Times

By Steve Inskeep

Washington -- FOR 65 years, the Nishat cinema stood in Karachi, Pakistan. A giant screen showed blockbuster films from around the world, reflecting Pakistan's relative openness compared with neighboring Muslim nations. Vast billboards over the door featured handsome movie stars flanked by young women with revealing clothes and long, luxurious hair.

The cinema also symbolized the country's resilience. Opened in 1947, the year of Pakistan's independence, the Nishat became a landmark in a lively district of theaters, nightclubs and cafes. An Islamist dictator closed the bars and many theaters after 1977, but the Nishat survived. Crowds attended movies even though boys and girls who sat together risked harassment by religious conservatives.

The show went on until last Friday, when a mob set the Nishat on fire. Although it happened on "Love of the Prophet Day," a state-sanctioned holiday devoted to protesting an anti-Muslim video made in the United States, the attack was the latest episode in a long-running pattern of self-destruction.

The Nishat fire shows just how much mob violence and misgovernment have damaged Pakistan. The attack wasn't about American influence or anti-Muslim videos. Small numbers of Pakistanis are wrecking their country's values and traditions. At the theater in 2010 I met Masih ul Hasan, who had been working there for 46 years. He led me from the ticket booth to a tiny office, where he pored over handwritten ledger books as he told of the theater's constant adaptation.

The Nishat drew thousands to see films made in India, Pakistan and Hollywood - "Terminator 2," Mr. Hasan's favorite, played for 16 weeks. Pakistan's Urdu-language movies were popular for a time; Bollywood movies were banned because of conflict with India, but later returned. The cinema stayed

closed for days in December 2009 after a bomb exploded down the street but reopened in the new year for "Avatar," which drew huge crowds for five weeks before the theater closed because of more violence. By the time of my visit the Nishat was busy again, with moviegoers' motorcycles parked on the sidewalk, and street vendors waiting for the movie to end.

The theater was temporarily closed again last week when the mob broke through its gates. Neighborhood residents told me that rioters, including teenagers, stole soft drinks from the snack bar before starting the fire. The roof and a wall collapsed, leaving only the blackened Art Deco facade. As several Karachi theaters burned, The Express Tribune of Pakistan quoted a teenager declaring, "The United States doesn't know who they have messed with."

He was right, in a way. Until recently, virtually no Americans knew of the offending video, and American life will be completely unaffected by this supposed act of revenge. Nor will such acts wipe out supposedly decadent outside influences. As the number of cinemas has declined, people have been watching movies at home; and a law against Muslims' drinking alcohol has not stopped alcohol from being consumed.

What the protesters really oppose, though they may not realize it, is the nature of their own country. Pakistan is a cultural crossroads with many languages and religious sects, and the Nishat's eclectic screenings mirrored the nation. Cultural diversity, like alcohol, quietly persists, but it is being driven underground by intolerant brands of Islam. And the recent protests have severely damaged the freedom of expression for which earlier generations fought.

Pakistan's history is one long struggle to speak out. Both India and Pakistan won independence thanks to decades of speech and expression that were offensive to the men in power. British viceroys and soldiers tried in vain to stop their nonviolent protests. Since 1947, Pakistanis have been ruled by military dictators four times. Except for one who died in office, those strongmen never surrendered until Pakistanis spoke out so fiercely that the army stepped aside.

Given this history, it's no surprise that many Pakistanis are admirably frank about their country's problems and speak with scorn about their government's failings. This is as true of Islamists as it is of liberals. Members of every political group, including Islamists, recall times when their leaders were unjustly imprisoned for what they said.

Their imprisonment was part of another, more oppressive, strand of Pakistani history. Dictators threatened their critics with death. The government branded an entire Muslim sect, Ahmadis, heretical and decreed the death penalty for blasphemy. Today, real or imagined blasphemy is punished by the state, by mobs or by a government that plays to the mob, as happened last Friday.

Criticism opens the way for improvement - but it requires the freedom to speak. The protesters had every reason to be angry about the portrayal of the Prophet Muhammad in a cheap American video. But when they burned the Nishat cinema, they were burning a part of themselves.

Steve Inskeep is a host of NPR's "Morning Edition" and the author of "Instant City: Life and Death in Karachi."

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A "Hit Man" For Hillary Clinton

September 26, 2012

Washington Post

By Dana Milbank

For one hour on Sunday afternoon, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Philippe Reines was behaving most undiplomatically.

He had been engaged in a testy e-mail exchange with a journalist who was asking tough but fair questions related to the State Department's handling of the attack in Libya in which the American ambassador was killed - and then Reines escalated.

"Why do you bother to ask questions you've already decided you know the answers to?" he asked.

"Why don't you give answers that aren't bull[expletive] for a change?" replied the writer, BuzzFeed's Michael Hastings.

"I now understand," Reines parried, why the Defense Department "concluded beyond a doubt that you're an unmitigated [expletive]. How's that for a non-bull[expletive] response? Now that we've gotten that out of our systems, have a good day. And by good day, I mean [Expletive] Off."

Reading the full exchange when BuzzFeed published it Monday, I recognized it as vintage Philippe: savage, sardonic and over-the-top in the service of the cause that is his life's work and his reason for being: the reputation of Hillary Clinton. Such traits have caused many to revile Philippe (like Madonna, who performed in Washington this week, he is known here by one name only). Journalists in particular have found him to be ruthless and sometimes dishonest in his unwavering loyalty to Clinton, his patron of the past dozen years.

Yet these traits also say something admirable about Philippe. He is a throwback - an unapologetic loyalist in a town that no longer values loyalty. He could have cashed in on his ties to Clinton and become wealthy in the private sector. He could have turned against her as other top aides in her fractious presidential campaign did in 2008. Instead, he stuck with her, from her Senate office to her presidential run to the State Department - becoming what is essentially the deputy assistant secretary for Doing Hillary's Bidding.

When he was pushed aside by Howard Wolfson during a power struggle within the campaign, he didn't complain: He took on a minor role, essentially an aide de camp to Chelsea Clinton, until he returned to favor. In his role as Chelsea defender, he led the effort that got MSNBC's David Shuster suspended for asking whether Chelsea had been "pimped out" by her mother's advisers.

Part Clinton henchman, part Clinton hit man, he's described by a friend in the administration as the secretary of state's "roving linebacker" who sometimes "gets called for unnecessary roughness." Chris Lehane, who brought Philippe to Al Gore's presidential campaign, describes his tribal sense of loyalty as "old school."

I first met Philippe when, as a young prankster on the Gore campaign, he persuaded staffers to send him their Zip codes so their home towns could be protected by Gore's missile-defense proposal. Later, as Clinton's Senate spokesman, he once responded to criticism of her by asking: "Is it possible to be quoted yawning?"

But his humor gave way to anger, as Reines, now 42, became a caricature whose loyalty to his boss overshadowed everything - even his limited private life. Theirs is often likened to a mother-son relationship, and that closeness gives Philippe power well above his title. The closeness also explains why he wasn't rebuked for his obscene exchange with Hastings; nobody doubted that Philippe was channeling Clinton's own anger.

CNN had infuriated Clinton by reporting that slain Ambassador J. Chris Stevens had worried about his security because he thought he was on an al-Qaeda "hit list" - information that came from his diary, which a CNN reporter had found at the site of the attack. But State officials had a weak case against CNN, because they had failed to secure the site; if CNN hadn't found the diary, it may have wound up in the hands of the militants who killed Stevens.

Instead, Philippe attacked CNN over a peripheral issue, accusing the network of violating a promise it had made to Stevens's family not to broadcast the diary's contents without permission. In a raw and lengthy criticism of CNN, Philippe called the network's actions "disgusting" and accused it of essentially stealing from a "crime scene." It was Hastings's challenge to that statement (he thought CNN had done "good journalism") that provoked Philippe's e-mail outburst.

On Tuesday, Philippe admitted to me that he had erred - not in substance but because "it was a mistake to let this become about me." In Philippe's world, everything is always about Hillary.
(top)

Matthew Kaminski: The Accidental Architect of a New Europe

September 26, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By MATTHEW KAMINSKI

Berlin — Of all the national leaders convening in New York this week for the 67th United Nations General Assembly, their number doesn't include the one with the most potential to affect the world's fortunes in the next few years. German Chancellor Angela Merkel is staying home, in part to deal with a euro crisis that has cost untold billions and toppled rulers from Dublin to Athens. Amid the turmoil, she has stood out. This "Iron Chancellor," in power since 2005, is cruising to a third term in office, even as she midwives expensive EU rescues that are opposed by most Germans. She has cemented a pre-eminence in Europe that was forced on her by circumstances and, by all appearances, accepted only reluctantly.

Ms. Merkel isn't an easy pol to peg. She holds her cards close and projects a bland seriousness. Financier George Soros and the Obama crowd view her as the grim reaper of austerity for those poor Greeks. But it was the chancellor who signed off on the EU bailouts and on the European Central Bank's new "whatever it takes" strategy to save the euro.

Public unease in Germany over the price tag for the rescues grew this month after the ECB unveiled a plan to purchase the debts of troubled governments and the German constitutional court blessed the bailouts. Ms. Merkel's approval rating promptly rose to 61%, which suggests formidable political savvy, some say a Machiavellian genius.

Economists around her grumble that endless bailouts are planting the seeds of future trouble, and the political advisers worry about a popular backlash in Germany one day. Yet no consensus exists in the EU for any other approach—either for fatter German checks for the bankrupt "Club Med" countries or for a cold cutoff of aid, starting with the dilatory Greeks. And no alternative exists to Ms. Merkel's leadership.

Britain stays out of the euro mess by choice; the French are preoccupied by their economic troubles. Ms. Merkel's ability to navigate the crisis and handle her domestic public pressures makes her indispensable.

There was no hint of such a future during her first 35 years. She was an academic physicist in Communist East Germany, married to Joachim Sauer, a respected chemist. She still vacations at her modest holiday dacha from those days. With her dry wit, Ms. Merkel likes to perform impersonations for friends in private, according to biographer Margaret Heckel. To the public, the chancellor—befitting the daughter of a Protestant pastor raised in northern Germany—is all business, which is how Germans prefer their leaders.

After the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, Ms. Merkel got involved with a start-up democratic party. Her management skills stood out in those chaotic days, and she caught the eye of the chancellor at the time, Helmut Kohl. Ms. Merkel's early years in his center-right Christian Democratic Union were "horrible," says Ms. Heckel. Being known as "the girl" in the Kohl cabinet "kindled her fighting spirit . . . She wanted to show that someone from the East, a woman, an outsider could do it."

Ms. Merkel is said to have learned from Mr. Kohl most of what she knows about getting and keeping power. A decade ago, when her mentor was embroiled in a party-financing scandal, the men in the CDU kept quiet. Ms. Merkel called for Mr. Kohl to step aside, in a front-page letter to Germany's main conservative paper. The audacity of this patricide, never forgiven by Mr. Kohl, secured her leadership of the CDU.

Yet no one should mistake Ms. Merkel for a Konrad Adenauer or even Mr. Kohl, postwar predecessors who put forward a grand plan for Germany's future. She bends to the needs of the moment, living by the credo of another former chancellor, Helmut Schmidt, who once said: "People who have a vision should go see a doctor."

Seven years ago, Ms. Merkel was elected to tackle Germany's domestic problems. She raised the retirement age to 67 yet dropped other ambitious reform plans, such as a flat tax, which polled badly. When Greece's debts exploded three years ago, she was thrust to the forefront only because Germany has the Continent's largest and healthiest economy. With no firmly set policy ideas and little understanding of finance, she called on a wide circle of bankers and economists to chart the EU's response.

People who know the chancellor invariably note her work ethic, intelligence and open mind, as well as her caution, slow decision-making and aversion to grand oratory. Here's a German economic adviser on the Merkel method: "Utterly unpretentious. Listens. Ruthless. She has no broader mission—like Thatcher did—except to be chancellor."

Parliamentarian Philipp Missfelder, the CDU foreign-policy spokesman, doesn't dispute the absence of a guiding ideology. Ms. Merkel ignored the Obama administration's pleas to "print our problems away" and open the ECB monetary spigots, he says. But she has since broken with German monetary orthodoxy to let the ECB purchase unlimited quantities of sovereign bonds, as long as those countries promise to overhaul their states and economies. The markets and the public calmed down, which certainly helps her re-election efforts at the start of Germany's political season.

While Ms. Merkel's coalition partners, the Catholic Bavarians and the economically liberal Free Democrats, oppose her euro policies, her position as head of the conservatives has never looked so

secure. Her personal popularity exceeds that of the CDU party's by over 20 percentage points. No challenger is visible or likely.

If current trends continue, next year's election will produce a left-right coalition between the Social Democrats and CDU, with Ms. Merkel at the helm. A so-called grand coalition would ease the way for constitutional amendments to gradually move ahead with an EU banking and fiscal union—"more Europe" in her words.

Hints of a broader vision do exist. Ms. Heckel says the chancellor became "obsessed" with China after her first trip there, in 2006, which made her see that "Europe could survive in this new world only being united." By this view, Germany, too small to compete on its own with China and America, needs to be at the heart of a bloc that will revive the EU by enforcing the sort of economic discipline that Germany adopted a decade ago. That is a pragmatic and politically sound case for Europe in tune with Ms. Merkel's character and instincts.

This accidental architect of a new EU won't give any stirring speeches, move rashly or overlook the electoral implications of her decisions. The results may not be known for a few years. Underestimated throughout her improbable career, though, Angela Merkel has so far tended to come out on top.

Mr. Kaminski is a member of the Journal's editorial board.
(top)

US Gas Exports Could Limit Putin's Influence

September 26, 2012

Washington Post

ONE THING THAT this year's presidential candidates both get right is that the United States' plentiful reserve of unconventional natural gas is an exceptional national asset, not only revolutionizing the energy business at home but also benefiting America and its allies abroad.

Over the past decade, new drilling methods have made oceans of fuel once trapped in subterranean rock formations easily accessible. The result is that the United States, which used to worry about importing huge quantities of natural gas, is now producing loads of its own, so much that domestic prices have tumbled and energy companies are asking for permission to liquefy and export some of the country's output.

That's good for a variety of reasons, including, as The Post's Will Englund and Kathy Lally reported Monday, accelerating the decline of Gazprom, Russia's natural-gas monopoly.

Gazprom finances Russian President Vladimir Putin's corrupt political system. Under Mr. Putin's direction, it has also been a notorious international villain, tying delivery of its precious fuel, a matter of life and death during European winters, to the Kremlin's political agenda.

But with the United States no longer demanding massive quantities of liquefied natural gas from Russia or anywhere else - thus freeing up fuel for others - and gas production ramping up elsewhere, the economics that enable Gazprom's abuse are changing.

The company, to be sure, is still a monster. It claimed \$44 billion in profit last year - and that's just what it reported. It provides most or all of the natural gas for many Eastern European nations, and it still has

lucrative long-term supply contracts with European customers that link Gazprom's prices to the price of oil.

However, a recent Brookings Institution analysis reported that a looser natural gas market has already empowered German utilities to renegotiate those contracts; some European customers are even ignoring them altogether and buying cheaper liquefied natural gas on spot markets.

If the United States begins exporting natural gas, it would only encourage positive long-term structural changes in this international trade - away from Kremlin domination and toward a larger and more nimble world market. European countries would not be the only ones to feel this effect. Gazprom intends to enter the gas-hungry Asian market, and it might find that it has less leverage over its potential customers than it had expected to wield.

If the economic case for allowing U.S. natural-gas exports, which we have made in other editorials, doesn't persuade those fighting to limit them, the possible geopolitical benefits should. With new supply from America and others sloshing around the world market later this decade, Mr. Putin might have to make a choice - between propping up a dysfunctional and decreasingly profitable monopoly or finally liberalizing the Russian energy sector, to the benefit of customers, shareholders, Russia's neighbors and, ultimately, Russia, too.

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RELEASED IN FULL**DAILY PRESS CLIPS FOR
THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 20, 2012****ECONOMIC RECOVERY****Central Banks Flex Muscles**

September 20, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By TOM LAURICELLA, SUDEEP REDDY and ERIN MCCARTHY

Massive injections of stimulus into financial markets by the world's largest central banks are creating a domino effect around the globe, prompting governments from Brazil to Turkey to take steps to keep easy money from flooding in and driving up their currencies. ([link](#))

UNITED NATIONS**Ban: Syria Will Top UN General Assembly Agenda**

September 20, 2012

Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS -- UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon says the Syrian crisis will top the agenda of the General Assembly gathering of world leaders next week. ([link](#))

UN Backs Shaming Of Those Who Use Child Soldiers

September 20, 2012

Associated Press

By Edith M. Lederer

UNITED NATIONS -- The UN Security Council on Wednesday backed the naming and shaming of governments and armed groups that recruit, kill or sexually attack children in armed conflicts over protests from Russia, China, Pakistan and Azerbaijan. ([link](#))

TOP STORIES**U.S. Names al Qaeda in Libya Attack**

September 20, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By SIOBHAN GORMAN and DOUG CAMERON

WASHINGTON—U.S. intelligence officials are investigating indications that al Qaeda's North African affiliate is connected with militants involved in the attack on a U.S. consulate in Libya, the top U.S. counterterrorism official said, providing the first public acknowledgment of the extremist movement's possible involvement in the deadly assault. ([link](#))

Benghazi Attack Called "Terrorist"

September 20, 2012

Washington Post

By Karen DeYoung

The US ambassador and three other Americans killed last week in Libya died "in the course of a terrorist attack," a senior US intelligence official told lawmakers Wednesday. ([link](#))

Libya's Central Government Exercises Little Authority Outside Capital

September 20, 2012

Washington Post**REVIEW AUTHORITY: Archie Bolster, Senior Reviewer**

By Abigail Hauslohner

BENGHAZI, Libya -- Hussein Abu Hameida, the head of security in Libya's second-largest city, was sacked this week over the attack on the US consulate here that killed the ambassador and three other Americans. But he says he's not going anywhere. ([link](#))

In China, Panetta Says American Focus on Asia Is No Threat

September 20, 2012

[New York Times](#)

By THOM SHANKER and IAN JOHNSON

BEIJING — Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta declared Wednesday that the United States was not trying to contain a rising China, and he emphasized that with patience and effort current tensions between the giant rivals on opposite sides of the Pacific could be resolved. ([link](#))

Panetta Urges Beijing to Resolve Island Spat

September 20, 2012

[Wall Street Journal](#)

By JULIAN E. BARNES

BEIJING—U.S. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta met Wednesday with China's presumed next leader and urged a peaceful solution to a territorial dispute with Japan, an issue that a Chinese official said could damage coming trade talks and economic ties between the two Asian powers. ([link](#))

Myanmar's Suu Kyi receives Congress' highest honor, meets Obama on landmark US visit

September 19, 2012

[Associated Press](#)

WASHINGTON — Lawmakers united by their respect of Myanmar democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi on Wednesday presented her with Congress' highest civilian honor in a ceremony in the Capitol Rotunda, ahead of a meeting with President Barack Obama. ([link](#))

AFRICA

South Africa

SAfrican Police Kill 2 More In Crackdown On Strike

September 20, 2012

[Associated Press](#)

By Carley Petesch

RUSTENBURG, South Africa -- South African police have killed two more people in a crackdown on striking miners, the Congress of South African Trade Unions and a strike leader said Thursday. ([link](#))

Sudan

Sudan Refugees Flee Intensified Bombing Runs

September 20, 2012

[Associated Press](#)

By Michael Onyiego

YIDA, South Sudan -- Refugees fleeing fighting in Sudan's southern reaches say civilians are among the casualties from aerial bombings. ([link](#))

ASIA

Burma

U.S. Treasury Lifts Sanctions On Top Myanmar Officials

September 20, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By SAMUEL RUBENFELD

The U.S. Treasury Department said Wednesday it removed sanctions on two top Myanmar officials as the country continues being welcomed back into the international community. ([link](#))

China

China Report Suggests Harsh Bo Penalty

September 20, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By BRIAN SPEGELE and JEREMY PAGE

BEIJING—China for the first time suggested that fallen Communist Party official Bo Xilai rebuked his police chief in late January for telling him that his wife was suspected of murdering British businessman Neil Heywood. ([link](#))

China Probes Protest Around US Ambassador's Car

September 20, 2012

Associated Press

By Alexa Ole'sen

BEIJING -- China said Wednesday it was investigating an incident where about 50 protesters surrounded the car of the US ambassador, tried to block him from entering the embassy compound and ripped the car's flag. ([link](#))

Trade And Syria Top Agenda At EU-China Talks

September 20, 2012

New York Times

By James Kanter

BRUSSELS -- China's prime minister, Wen Jiabao, is expected to meet with top officials of the European Union on Thursday amid rising trade tensions and diverging views on how to quell the conflict in Syria. ([link](#))

Japan

Rejecting Japan's Remorse, Nationalists Feed Asia Strife

September 20, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By YUKA HAYASHI

TOKYO—One factor behind Japan's mounting tensions with China and South Korea is an increasingly vocal movement arguing that Tokyo has for too long apologized for World War II and needs to move past the events of seven decades ago. ([link](#))

Japan, Under Pressure, Backs Off Goal To Phase Out Nuclear Power By 2040

September 20, 2012

New York Times

By Hiroko Tabuchi

TOKYO -- In an abrupt turnabout, the Japanese government on Wednesday stopped short of formally adopting the momentous goal it announced just last week -- to phase out nuclear power by 2040 -- after the plan drew intense opposition from business groups and communities whose economies depend on local nuclear power plants. ([link](#))

NEA**Iran****Iran: Top Nuclear Negotiator Calls Talks With Big Powers "Constructive"**

September 20, 2012

New York Times

By Rick Gladstone

Saeed Jalili, Iran's top negotiator in talks with the big powers over his country's disputed uranium enrichment program, called negotiations with Catherine Ashton, his counterpart, "constructive and helpful," the official Islamic Republic News Agency reported on Wednesday. The talks on Tuesday in Istanbul, their first face-to-face meeting in three months, produced no breakthroughs, and it remained unclear when they would meet again. ([link](#))

Iran underlines 'right' to nuclear energy

September 20, 2012

Financial Times

By Najmeh Bozorgmehr in Tehran

Military action against Iran would be "highly costly" for the US and threats issued by Mitt Romney as he tries to become the next American president are campaign rhetoric only and can be largely ignored, Ali Larijani, Speaker of the Iranian parliament, has told the FT. ([link](#))

Iran Preparing Internal Version Of Internet

September 20, 2012

Washington Post

By James Ball, Benjamin Gottlieb

The Iranian government, determined to limit Western influence and defend itself against cyberattacks, appears to have laid the technical foundations for a national online network that would be detached from the Internet and permit tighter control over the flow of information. ([link](#))

Iraq**Kerry Says Iraq Aid Could Be Tied To Halting Flights To Syria**

September 20, 2012

New York Times

By John H. Cushman

WASHINGTON -- The Obama administration's leading foreign policy ally in Congress said on Wednesday that aid to Iraq might be made contingent on cutting off flights shuttling military supplies from Iran to the repressive regime in Syria. ([link](#))

Jordan**Jordan Limits Protests, And Internet, As Tensions Simmer**

September 20, 2012

New York Times

By Rana F. Sweis

AMMAN -- Jordan has been rocked by the shock waves running across the Middle East, and tensions are still simmering. ([link](#))

Lebanon**A Void For Sunnis In Lebanon**

September 20, 2012

New York Times

By Josh Wood

BEIRUT -- As spillover from the civil war in Syria continues to unsettle Lebanon, the prolonged absence of Saad Hariri, the country's former prime minister and leader of its Sunni community, has created a political vacuum of sorts, as his influence has declined and new voices have emerged. ([link](#))

Palestinian Territories

World Bank, IMF Warn On Palestinian Budget Shortfall

September 20, 2012

AFP

The Palestinian Authority in the West Bank faces a \$400 million budget shortfall and risks "social upheaval," the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund warned on Wednesday. ([link](#))

Syria

New Sanctions Target Syria's Arms Suppliers

September 20, 2012

Washington Post

By Joby Warrick

The Obama administration moved Wednesday to punish companies from Belarus and Iran for allegedly providing Syria with weapons and communications gear used to battle rebels in the country's 18-month-old civil war. ([link](#))

Extremists Showing Up On Front Lines In Syria

September 20, 2012

Associated Press

By Paul Schemm

TEL RIFAAT, Syria -- The bearded gunmen who surrounded the car full of foreign journalists in a northern Syrian village were clearly not Syrians. A heavysset man in a brown gown stepped forward, announced he was Iraqi and fingered through the American passport he had confiscated. ([link](#))

SCA

Afghanistan

Afghan president urges peace, despite attacks

September 20, 2012

Associated Press

By AMIR SHAH and HEIDI VOGT

KABUL, Afghanistan — The Afghan president on Wednesday urged his nation to rally behind the push for peace negotiations with insurgents despite persistent violence, evoking the memory of a former leader who was assassinated while trying to broker talks with the Taliban. ([link](#))

Obama, Karzai discuss 'insider' attacks in Afghanistan

September 20, 2012

Reuters

WASHINGTON - President Barack Obama and Afghan President Hamid Karzai agreed on Wednesday to press forward with a U.S.-Afghan security pact, the White House said, despite the curtailment of NATO operations in response to a surge in "insider" attacks on foreign servicemen. ([link](#))

Pakistan**Blast Near Pakistani Air Base Kills 10**

September 20, 2012

New York Times

By Ismail Khan, Declan Walsh

PESHAWAR, Pakistan -- A car bomb apparently aimed at a military vehicle killed 10 people and wounded 27 at a busy intersection here in Peshawar on Wednesday, as rowdy anti-American protests continued across the country. ([link](#))

Pakistani accused by film protesters of blasphemy

September 20, 2012

Associated Press

By ASIF SHAHZAD

ISLAMABAD — Demonstrators angry over an anti-Islam film accused a local businessman in southern Pakistan of blasphemy, forcing the police to open a case and driving him and his family into hiding, following an argument that broke out when he refused to join their protest, officials said Wednesday. ([link](#))

WHA/EUR**Anti-Islam Film Controversy Hits Europe, Asia**

September 20, 2012

USA Today

By Charles McPhedran

BERLIN -- Europeans are worried over becoming the next battleground over an anti-Islam video. German officials are considering a ban on a screening in Berlin, while a French weekly magazine published cartoons of the prophet Mohammed, including some of him naked. Government officials and Muslim community leaders are calling for calm. ([link](#))

France**French Magazine Runs Cartoons That Mock Muhammad**

September 20, 2012

New York Times

By SCOTT SAYARE and NICOLA CLARK

PARIS — Calling itself a defender of free speech and a denouncer of religious backwardness, a French satirical newspaper on Wednesday published several crude caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad, images viewed as a provocation by many Muslims and condemned by the French government as irresponsible at a time of violence and unrest across the Islamic world. ([link](#))

Cartoons Prompt French Closures

September 20, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By INTI LANDAURO

PARIS—France will close embassies and French schools in 20 countries on Friday, its Foreign Ministry said, amid fears of a backlash after a French magazine published a series of caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad. ([link](#))

Russia**Russia Slams U.S. Agency for 'Political' Aid Agenda**

September 20, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By ALAN CULLISON

MOSCOW—Russia accused the U.S. on Wednesday of trying to influence elections inside the country under the guise of aid to pro-democracy groups, confirming it is kicking the U.S. Agency for International Development out of the country and warning that Russia's civic groups no longer need U.S. funding. ([link](#))

EDITORIAL / OPINION

The United States And The Muslim World

September 20, 2012

New York Times

The anti-Islam video that set off attacks against American embassies and violent protests in the Muslim world was a convenient fuse for rage. Deeper forces are at work in those societies, rived by pent-up anger over a lack of jobs, economic stagnation and decades of repression by previous Arab governments. ([link](#))

There's No Place For Censorship-By-Riot

September 20, 2012

Washington Post

By Charles Lane

Charlie Hebdo, a French satire magazine, published Wednesday cartoons that nastily mock the prophet Muhammad, and European governments immediately feared more violence like the murder and arson at US diplomatic installations that followed the appearance of a crude video about Muhammad. France closed 20 embassies as a precaution; the French foreign minister chided the magazine for pouring "oil on the fire." Germany's foreign minister used the same phrase. ([link](#))

Obama Vs. Islamic Extremists

September 20, 2012

USA Today

By Bob Beckel, Cal Thomas

Cal Thomas is a conservative columnist. Bob Beckel is a liberal Democratic strategist. But as longtime friends, they can often find common ground on issues that lawmakers in Washington cannot. ([link](#))

Demanding Justice From Libya, Egypt And Pakistan

September 20, 2012

Washington Times

By Sen. Rand Paul

By now my colleagues in the Senate are familiar with the tragic story of Pakistani doctor Shakil Afridi. Since Dr. Afridi was taken into custody by Pakistani officials in May 2012, I have been fighting for his release. I have also been working for a vote on a bill that would cut foreign aid to Pakistan until they free this ally of America. ([link](#))

Ambassador Chris Stevens's Libyan Legacy

September 20, 2012

Washington Post

By Mustafa A.G. Abushagur

Libya lost one of its most ardent international supporters and a true friend last week with the death of US Ambassador Chris Stevens. The terrorist attack on the American compound in Benghazi is still being investigated, but it is clear that the perpetrators sought to derail Libya's democratically elected government and to injure its vital relationship with the United States. ([link](#))

Georgia's Rowdy Election Campaign

September 20, 2012

[Washington Post](#)

By David Ignatius

The Georgian government of President Mikheil Saakashvili, long a favorite of US conservatives for championing pro-democratic "color revolutions," is under fire for its own alleged suppression of a domestic opposition movement headed by a billionaire tycoon. ([link](#))

US Should Redouble Effort To Boost Russian Democracy

September 20, 2012

[Washington Post](#)

IN WHAT HAS been a steadily escalating campaign to shore up his power after a bumpy return to Russia's presidency, Vladimir Putin has delivered an audacious double blow. By ending cooperation with the US Agency for International Development (USAID), he has deprived a host of Russian pro-democracy organizations of critical funding -- and administered a sharp rebuff to the United States, which he portrays as an adversary. This coup, delivered in a diplomatic note on Sept. 11, was, as Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) aptly put it, "a finger in the eye of the Obama administration." ([link](#))

Putin Does His Own 'Reset'

September 20, 2012

[Wall Street Journal](#)

Democrats and the media who love them have ridiculed Mitt Romney for saying Russia is America's "number one geopolitical foe," and Vladimir Putin recently all but endorsed President Obama for re-election. But the Russian President keeps behaving in ways that prove the Republican had a point. ([link](#))

Burma's Champion Comes To Washington

September 20, 2012

[Washington Post](#)

By Fred Hiatt

During all her years under house arrest, Aung San Suu Kyi resisted getting a dog for company. "I did not think it would be fair to the dog," she told Post editors and reporters Wednesday during a visit to the newspaper. Now she is free, on her first visit to the United States in four decades -- she was awarded Congress's highest honor Wednesday afternoon, the Congressional Gold Medal -- and she has a dog. Fairness is still very much on her mind, as she tries to help engineer an improbable peaceful transition from dictatorship to democracy in her Southeast Asian nation of 50 million people. ([link](#))

ECONOMIC RECOVERY

Central Banks Flex Muscles

September 20, 2012

[Wall Street Journal](#)

By TOM LAURICELLA, SUDEEP REDDY and ERIN MCCARTHY

Massive injections of stimulus into financial markets by the world's largest central banks are creating a domino effect around the globe, prompting governments from Brazil to Turkey to take steps to keep easy money from flooding in and driving up their currencies.

The Bank of Japan Wednesday became the latest central bank to ease monetary policy. That follows bold pledges by the world's two biggest central banks to launch open-ended programs to bolster their economies.

The BOJ's efforts were largely designed to stimulate Japan's moribund economy, in part by adding money to financial markets as well as driving down the value of the yen to help the nation's exporters. The bank increased the size of its asset-purchase program to 80 trillion yen (\$1 trillion) from 70 trillion yen, and extended the program by six months until the end of 2013.

The European Central Bank said earlier this month that it is prepared to buy debt from euro-zone countries that need help in controlling their borrowing costs. The Federal Reserve last week announced a program to buy \$40 billion a month in mortgage-backed securities until the economy recovers. Many investors expect the Bank of England to announce its own additional measures to stimulate growth.

Amid the flurry of news from central banks, financial markets have been buoyant but calm. Investors note that stocks and other riskier investments staged big rallies over the summer in part on expectations for easier monetary policy, muting the response to the news. The Standard & Poor's 500 stock index is up 1.7% since last Wednesday, the day before the Fed announced its latest easing.

Given the apparent slowing in the global economy, worries about inflation or asset-price bubbles from central bank efforts to pump money into the financial system have for the most part been pushed to the back burner. But should economic activity pick up, those concerns could quickly revive, especially when it comes to commodities or higher-yielding investments.

And, given that the Fed and other major central banks appear committed to long periods of easy money, investors expect the effects of their actions to play out for months or years.

The efforts of the world's major central banks to stimulate growth in their own economies are already rippling across financial markets.

Investors are flocking to countries and assets that offer higher interest rates than the rock-bottom rates offered in Japan, the U.S. and parts of Europe. That is driving other central banks to employ their own measures, in part to keep their interest rates low or to make their currencies less attractive.

A weaker currency makes a country's exports more affordable overseas. At the same time, that makes other nations' exports more expensive. The dynamic raises the incentive for policy makers to devalue their own currencies to remain competitive in global markets.

As with past episodes of aggressive easing by the world's major, developed-market central banks, many investors are homing in on emerging markets offering higher yields and generally healthier economies. The Brazilian real initially jumped 0.7% after the Fed's move, but finished Wednesday's session up 0.3% from a week earlier. The Mexican peso, meanwhile, has gained 2.7% over the past week, the Polish zloty is up 4.3% and the Korean won is up 1.6%.

"All of this cash generated by the Federal Reserve is going to be entering foreign shores," said Komal Sri-Kumar, chief global strategist at TCW. "Emerging markets are going to be tempted to cut interest rates...to offset their currencies appreciating too much."

Brazil took steps Monday to prevent potential waves from the Fed's easing from lifting the value of its currency, conducting so-called "reverse dollar swaps" to prevent its currency, the real, from appreciating. Also Monday, Peru adjusted its intervention strategy toward weakening the Peruvian sol, and on Tuesday Turkey cut interest rates by more than expected.

Unlike past easing episodes that created fears of a "currency war" over tidal waves of money heading toward emerging markets, some in the markets expect a muted response this time.

Officials in South Korea, Thailand, Singapore and the Philippines took a cautious view of the uptick in their currencies following the Fed's announcement, though they all asserted a readiness to smooth out market movement if capital inflows become excessive.

Investors like Alessio de Longis, a portfolio manager at Oppenheimer Funds, which has \$182 billion under management, have been buying currencies of countries such as Poland, Norway, Mexico and Canada, whose central banks are seen as less likely to act to push down their currencies against the U.S. dollar.

In the previous round of Fed quantitative easing, the dollar weakened significantly against most currencies. The Wall Street Journal Dollar Index, a measure of the dollar's value against a basket of major currencies, fell 18% in the 13 months from June 2010, when expectations of more Fed stimulus first began to rise, until the \$600 billion bond-buying program ended the following summer. The index dropped 20% against the Brazilian real over the same period and 18% versus the Korean won.

The dollar's decline was less pronounced ahead of the announcement last week. The WSJ Dollar Index is down 6% from its 2012 high reached in July.

The current environment is far different from late 2010, when the Fed launched its second major bond-buying program, known as QE2. At the time, the stronger growth in emerging-market nations helped attract investors from advanced economies. The Fed's move spurred loud complaints from Brazil, China and other emerging powers that a surge in "hot money" would destabilize their economies and spur unwanted inflation.

By contrast, U.S. job creation has slowed sharply since the start of the year. The euro zone is already in recession, driven by worsening downturns in southern European nations such as Spain and Italy spreading to their northern neighbors. Most emerging-market economies, in turn, have seen their export sectors struggle as a result of Europe's woes. Almost every major economy in the world is seeing its manufacturing sector contract, according to recent surveys of purchasing managers.

Recent reviews by the International Monetary Fund of the effects of QE2 dismissed many of the concerns that were originally raised about the Fed's bond-buying program.

"The Brazilians and the Chinese, who were among the biggest critics of QE2, I think have changed their view of it in hindsight," said Joseph Gagnon, a senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics and former Fed economist. "They're just less inclined to worry about it."

Emerging-market nations are less likely to complain this time, after taking their own measures to boost exports.

China may limit the appreciation of its currency, despite appeals from the U.S. to let the yuan rise, but the country "won't risk outright confrontation with Washington in the run-up to the election," said Simon Evenett, an economist at the University of St. Gallen in Switzerland. And Brazil "lost a lot of credibility" already by devaluing its currency, the real, he said.

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UNITED NATIONS

Ban: Syria Will Top UN General Assembly Agenda

September 20, 2012

[Associated Press](#)

UNITED NATIONS -- UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon says the Syrian crisis will top the agenda of the General Assembly gathering of world leaders next week.

Ban lamented that both sides seem determined to end the conflict by force and said diplomatic efforts must continue.

At a news conference Tuesday, he said both President Bashar Assad's regime and the rebels trying to topple him must support UN-Arab League envoy Lakhdar Brahimi's efforts to find a political solution. He also called on any nations sending arms into Syria to stop.

Ban also addressed the ongoing protests against an anti-Islamic video made in the US He said, "I once again condemn those who deliberately provoke others with hatred and bigotry. I also join with others in speaking out against those who, in response to such provocations, fan those flames further still."

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UN Backs Shaming Of Those Who Use Child Soldiers

September 20, 2012

[Associated Press](#)

By Edith M. Lederer

UNITED NATIONS -- The UN Security Council on Wednesday backed the naming and shaming of governments and armed groups that recruit, kill or sexually attack children in armed conflicts over protests from Russia, China, Pakistan and Azerbaijan.

A resolution supporting the UN special representative for children and armed conflict and continuing annual reports by the secretary-general identifying those countries and groups victimizing youngsters was approved by a vote of 11-0 with abstentions by the four countries.

The dissenters accused the report's supporters of trying to expand the naming and shaming list to all countries and not sticking to conflicts that the Security Council is dealing with, which is its mandate. Pakistan also protested that the report includes situations that are not conflicts but acts by terrorists and criminals.

The secretary-general's latest report in June included Pakistani armed groups as well as Syrian government forces and their allied "shabiha" militias on a list of 52 governments and armed groups that recruit, kill or sexually attack children in armed conflicts. The list includes 32 "persistent perpetrators" that have been on the list for at least five years, including the security forces of seven countries.

The resolution calls on member states to bring those responsible for such violations to justice, either through national or international judicial systems.

The Security Council also reiterated its readiness to adopt "targeted and graduated measures" -- a code phrase for sanctions -- against persistent perpetrators.

Pakistan's deputy UN ambassador Raza Bashir Tarar said his government supports reporting on violations in conflicts addressed by the council.

Pakistan is not on the council's agenda and Tarar called allegations against armed groups associated with the Taliban and al-Qaida in the report, "unwarranted and completely misleading."

"This not only misrepresents Pakistan's law enforcement and counterterrorism measures but also serves to accord undeserved respectability to terrorists and criminals," he said.

China's UN Ambassador Li Baodong called for more international support for Pakistan to fight terrorism "rather than creating difficulties and obstacles." He insisted that the resolution cannot be interpreted "to equalize the incidents of terrorist attacks in Pakistan to armed conflict," a view echoed by Russia and Azerbaijan.

The Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, an international network of organizations established in 2001 to end violations against children in armed conflict, said Wednesday's vote marked the first time a country has ever abstained from a resolution protecting children. It quoted members as calling the abstentions "shocking" and "disappointing."

Philippe Bolopion, UN director for Human Rights Watch, accused Russia, China, Azerbaijan and Pakistan of playing politics, saying their absentions "are a huge disservice to children caught up in conflicts around the world."

"Children victimized by war do not care whether the country in which they live is on the Security Council's agenda or not, but instead deserve all the UN attention they can get," he said.

Leila Zerrougui, the new UN special representative for children and armed conflict, pointed to the resolution's success in getting 20 governments and groups to adopt plans to stop recruiting and using children in conflicts. She also pointed to the International Criminal Court's convictions of Congolese warlord Thomas Lubanga and former Liberian president Charles Taylor for using child soldiers.

But Zerrougui said thousands of children are still being victimized, and she urged the council to take action against persistent perpetrators, saying "the cost of inaction has become too high."

"The situation for children in Syria is dire," she said, citing attacks on schools, the killing of children in bombings, and youngsters being tortured and subjected to sexual violence, sometimes for weeks.

Syria's UN Ambassador Bashar Ja'afari criticized the secretary-general's report for implicating the Syrian armed forces for violence against children -- and not the leaders of "terrorist groups" which he accused of using armed groups of children to take part in terrorist acts.

Zerrougui said that since the report was published her office has gathered evidence of violations committed by armed groups including the Free Syrian Army, "who may have children associated with their forces."

A resolution adopted by the UN Security Council in 2005 took the first major step to prevent the victimization of young people in war zones by addressing the exploitation of children as combatants and identifying governments and armed groups that recruit child soldiers. In 2009, the council voted to also name and shame countries and insurgent groups engaged in conflicts that lead to children being killed, maimed and raped.

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TOP STORIES

U.S. Names al Qaeda in Libya Attack

September 20, 2012

[Wall Street Journal](#)

By SIOBHAN GORMAN and DOUG CAMERON

WASHINGTON—U.S. intelligence officials are investigating indications that al Qaeda's North African affiliate is connected with militants involved in the attack on a U.S. consulate in Libya, the top U.S. counterterrorism official said, providing the first public acknowledgment of the extremist movement's possible involvement in the deadly assault.

The Sept. 11 attack in Benghazi, Libya, came as protests erupted there and in Egypt, before spreading throughout the Middle East and to Europe and Southeast Asia after word circulated of an Internet video considered offensive to Islam. Protests continued Wednesday in Pakistan, and angry crowds forced a U.S. consulate in Indonesia to close. Western officials braced for more trouble after a French satirical magazine published caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad.

In the wake of last week's attacks, the Obama administration has begun to bolster security at other hot spots in Africa, including Tunisia and Sudan, where the State Department is airlifting armored vehicles and other security equipment.

The acknowledgment of a possible al Qaeda role came at a congressional hearing in which government officials were peppered with questions about the adequacy of security at the U.S. Consulate in Libya, where the Sept. 11 attacks killed Ambassador Christopher Stevens and three other State Department officials.

The Wall Street Journal reported last week that U.S. intelligence officials were examining evidence that operatives for al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb had a series of conversations with members of Ansar al-Sharia, a local militant group sympathetic with al Qaeda, on the day violent protests broke out in Cairo.

Testifying before a Senate committee on Wednesday, Matthew Olsen, director of the National Counterterrorism Center, said intelligence officials are examining the possibility of such links. "We are looking at indications that individuals involved in the attack may have had connections to al Qaeda or al

Qaeda's affiliates, in particular, al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb," he said, calling the assault on the consulate a "terrorist attack."

It may be the case that both local militants and an overseas al Qaeda affiliate were involved in the attacks, he added. "The picture that is emerging is one where a number of different individuals were involved," he said.

Mr. Olsen also faced persistent questioning at the hearing, before the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, over the adequacy of diplomatic security in Libya. "The attack in Benghazi was not a black swan, but rather an attack that should have been anticipated," said Sen. Susan Collins (R., Maine), the top Republican on the panel.

She said Marines should have been dispatched to Benghazi to provide security as dangers grew in the area in recent months. Last week's assault was the sixth that militants have mounted in Benghazi since April.

Intelligence agencies had issued reports about the growing unrest in the area in recent months, Mr. Olsen said, but added there were no specific indications of an attack on Sept. 11. "We do rely on host countries to help protect our diplomatic personnel in those countries," Mr. Olsen said.

Officials at the State Department and White House also defended administration policies on diplomatic security. But they said much remains unknown about the Benghazi assault and that officials are awaiting results of a probe by the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

After the attacks, the administration moved Marine units to Libya and Egypt. On Wednesday, the U.S. State Department began airlifting armored vehicles and other equipment to its missions in Tunisia and Sudan. The shipment was revealed through regulatory filings after a U.S. cargo airline objected to the State Department's use of a Russian carrier, Volga-Dnepr Airlines LLC, which has to secure special permission to fly its huge Antonov An-124 cargo planes on special missions for the U.S. government and private American clients.

The Volga-Dnepr plane took off from Washington, D.C., with the equipment early Wednesday en route to Tunis, the company said, and was due to continue to Khartoum.

The U.S. carrier—Kalitta Air LLC of Ypsilanti, Mich.—sought to block the use of Volga-Dnepr, arguing in regulatory filings that its own Boeing Co. 747-200 planes could carry the equipment and unload them in the two African capitals.

Volga-Dnepr, backed by the State Department, argued in its request for clearance from the Department of Transportation that only its planes were suitable for a 52-ton shipment that the filings said would include seven armored vehicles and other "physical security equipment."

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Benghazi Attack Called "Terrorist"

September 20, 2012

[Washington Post](#)

By Karen DeYoung

The US ambassador and three other Americans killed last week in Libya died "in the course of a terrorist attack," a senior US intelligence official told lawmakers Wednesday.

Matthew Olsen, director of the National Counterterrorism Center, repeated earlier statements by the Obama administration that initial conclusions do not point to a planned assault. Instead, he said, "the facts that we have now indicate that this was an opportunistic attack," in which heavily armed militants took advantage of an ongoing demonstration at the US Consulate in Benghazi.

But Olsen went beyond those conclusions to say that the people involved in the violent assault appeared to have come from several militant groups, including localized extremists in eastern Libya as well as affiliates of al-Qaeda.

"The picture that is emerging is one where a number of different individuals were involved, so it's not necessarily an either/or proposition," Olsen told a hearing of the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee.

The hearing came amid mounting questions about security at the consulate and whether the State Department was insufficiently responsive to previous attacks in Benghazi and the anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001, al-Qaeda attacks on the United States.

"I'm just stunned and appalled that there wasn't better security for all of the American personnel at that consulate, given the high-threat environment," Sen. Susan Collins (R-Maine) told Olsen, Associate Deputy FBI Director Kevin Perkins and Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano at the hearing.

Collins also sharply disagreed with Olsen's statement that the attack did not appear to be planned. "Based on the briefings I have had, I've come to the opposite conclusion," she said. "I just don't think that people come to protests equipped with RPGs [rocket-propelled grenades] and other heavy weapons. And the reports of complicity -- and they are many -- with Libyan guards who were assigned to guard the consulate also suggest to me that this was premeditated."

In the wake of the Sept. 11 Benghazi attack and violent demonstrations at US missions across the Muslim world over the past 10 days, a number of diplomatic posts remain closed "as we continue to evaluate security," State Department spokeswoman Victoria J. Nuland said Wednesday. She listed embassies in Tunisia, Libya and Yemen among those shuttered, as well as consulates in Alexandria, Egypt, and Lahore, Karachi and Peshawar in Pakistan.

The demonstrations purportedly began as a protest against a YouTube video, produced privately in the United States, that ridiculed the Muslim prophet Muhammad. The State Department this week was girding for possible additional protests related to the planned publication of cartoons dealing with Muhammad in a French magazine. France has said it would temporarily close 20 of its diplomatic missions this weekend.

Many lawmakers have expressed surprise at learning that US Marine guards are not present at all US embassies and consulates around the world.

The State Department has emphasized that perimeter security for the missions is the responsibility of host governments, with "inside the wall" protection often provided by contractors. The first

responsibility of the Marines, administration officials have said, is the protection of classified information rather than personnel.

Olsen repeated that US intelligence had no specific warning of a threat to the consulate. But he said that many of the questions raised at the hearing would be more specifically addressed Thursday at a closed-door administration briefing for lawmakers.

Collins and committee Chairman Joseph I. Lieberman (I-Conn.) have called on the State Department's inspector general to investigate US security in Benghazi prior to the attacks.

In remarks Tuesday, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said that consulate security was "robust," and that a full evaluation of threats was made there and at other diplomatic posts before the Sept. 11 anniversary.

"But let me state the obvious again," Clinton said. "Our diplomats engage in dangerous work, and it's the nature of diplomacy in fragile societies and conflict zones to be aware of the necessity for security but to also continue the important diplomatic work that has to go on." ([top](#))

Libya's Central Government Exercises Little Authority Outside Capital

September 20, 2012

Washington Post

By Abigail Hauslohner

BENGHAZI, Libya -- Hussein Abu Hameida, the head of security in Libya's second-largest city, was sacked this week over the attack on the US consulate here that killed the ambassador and three other Americans. But he says he's not going anywhere.

On the night of Sept. 11, he says, his police were outnumbered and outgunned by the attackers. The blame, he says, belongs not on his own shoulders, but with the central government for its failure to rein in Libya's powerful postwar militias.

"There has been no strategy in place to remove the weapons from the streets," Abu Hameida said Wednesday in the sprawling, high-ceilinged chamber that serves as his office in Benghazi's national security headquarters. "There has been no strategy to contain these [militias] and to move them into either the police or the army."

Nearly a year after Libyan rebels killed Moammar Gaddafi, ushering in a new democratic era, Libya's central government still exercises so little authority here in the eastern part of the country that Abu Hameida sees little peril in refusing an order from the Interior Ministry in Tripoli that he step down from his post.

Libyan officials have blamed foreign fighters for the Benghazi assault. On Wednesday, Matthew G. Olsen, director of the National Counterterrorism Center, called it a "terrorist attack" and said there is evidence that those involved came from extremist groups in eastern Libya and from affiliates of al-Qaeda.

For many here, last week's violence underscored the security vacuum left by Libya's anemic central authority. With a far weaker police force than existed before the revolution, people in Benghazi have become "self-disciplining," said Fatima Aguila, a local English teacher. "We govern ourselves." Residents

go about their daily business, help each other to resolve tribal disputes and continue to stop at stoplights, she said.

But in lawless Libya, weapons also carry clout. Well-armed bands of former rebel fighters make up more than 200 militias nationwide, according to an Atlantic Council study released last week. Some militias claim to have been absorbed, at least symbolically, into the ranks of Libya's Tripoli-based Interior Ministry and military, but ground-level security is often uncoordinated, decentralized and lacks a hierarchy.

In many cases, including in Benghazi and in the western mountain town of Zintan where Libya's highest-profile prisoner, Saif al-Islam Gaddafi, is being held, the militias hold considerably more sway -- and arms -- than the Interior Ministry's police force.

Even the US consulate was partially dependent on militias for its security in the hours ahead of last week's assault, fighters and officials said. According to the accounts provided by several witnesses and officials, consulate personnel called militia commanders for help in securing a safe house and locating Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens after the initial attack left parts of the compound consumed by flames and consular staff ill-equipped to confront the intruders.

A week after the consulate attack, security commanders in Benghazi said they had yet to receive new directives from Tripoli.

"The only thing they've done so far is fire me, the head of general security, and Wanis Sharif," the head of regional security in the eastern part of Libya, Abu Hameida said as dozens of the city's blue-uniformed police, who Abu Hameida said support him, meandered the hallways and cruised through the headquarters compound in red-and-white police vehicles. "As if the Americans will be convinced that it's as easy as firing the two most important people, and that will calm everything down."

Discontent with Tripoli

Libya's revolution was born in Benghazi, and, after four decades of marginalization and neglect under Moammar Gaddafi, many of the city's residents had hoped the revolution would bring them recognition and development. But today they are frustrated and bitter, complaining that the new government has done little more for them than to appoint a few top officials who hail from the east. The real benefits -- such as wages to workers across the public sector, including hospital staff, teachers, and garbage collectors -- have been too slow in coming, they say.

Libya's interim leadership and its newly elected national Congress have taken stabs at both pacifying and absorbing the militias. Authorities have issued paychecks, offered training, and urged the submission of official paperwork to become part of a national force. For the more troublesome fighters, Benghazi residents say the authorities have organized tribal meetings, urging the cooperation of families in reining in their restless, gun-toting sons.

But Tripoli's critics, including militia commanders here, say the lack of a coherent strategy has kept national security weak and left militia members directionless, divided in their loyalties, and waiting for wages that never seem to come.

"Now, the big question is: What is the next step? And it's not clear," said Fawzi Wanis al-Gaddafi, the head of Benghazi's Supreme Security Committee, a loose coalition of militias under ostensible Interior Ministry control, who, according to Gaddafi, number more than 16,000 fighters.

"People don't like this temporary situation," he said. "It's their future, and they want to know where they're going. They want it to be sorted out."

The militias under the security committee's umbrella haven't received paychecks since June, he added. At the US consulate on Tuesday, the militia fighters tasked with guarding the now-empty compound said they haven't been paid since March. "We don't tell them there are no wages, we say it'll come after a week or two weeks," Gaddafi said.

Decentralized security

So decentralized is Benghazi's security setup that in the days following the attack, the prime minister's office was still trying to get a grip on just what forces are operating within the city, said Youssef Arish, whose family owns property adjacent to the consulate and who knew Stevens personally. Arish said the investigators asked him about a mysterious militia that had recently moved into an abandoned compound down the street. "The Ministry of Defense knew nothing about it," he said.

"People are angry," he added. "They want the government to do something about this [militia problem]."

Any strategy will be tricky to implement, said Gaddafi. If Tripoli demanded the dissolution of his own force today, he said that he -- like Abu Hameida, the city's security chief -- might have trouble following the orders. "The government is not strong enough" to tell the militias to lay down their arms, he said. "Plus, they don't want to set off a civil war."

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In China, Panetta Says American Focus on Asia Is No Threat

September 20, 2012

New York Times

By THOM SHANKER and IAN JOHNSON

BEIJING - Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta declared Wednesday that the United States was not trying to contain a rising China, and he emphasized that with patience and effort current tensions between the giant rivals on opposite sides of the Pacific could be resolved.

Mr. Panetta concluded a three-day visit in Beijing with a high-profile session with China's presumptive next leader, Vice President Xi Jinping, an encounter that required Mr. Panetta to stay an extra day. He also participated in a discussion with future commanders at a People's Liberation Army academy.

The meeting with Mr. Xi in the Great Hall of the People was viewed as additional proof that Mr. Xi was clear of whatever physical or political ailments had pushed him from public view for two weeks and had prompted speculation about whether he would ascend to China's top post. Mr. Xi greeted Mr. Panetta with a vigorous handshake and a broad smile, and he said the meeting "would be very helpful in further advancing" ties between the United States and China.

Mr. Panetta echoed that sentiment. "We are two great Pacific nations with common concerns," he told Mr. Xi. "We want to begin what you have called a 'new model' relationship, and we can begin with better military-to-military relations. I am convinced that we will be able to improve our dialogue."

According to Xinhua, China's official news agency, Mr. Xi addressed the heated sovereignty conflict with Japan over several tiny islands, strongly condemning Japan's purchase of them as "a farce." Mr. Xi was also quoted as saying to Mr. Panetta, "Japan should rein in its behavior and stop any words and acts that undermine China's sovereignty and territorial integrity."

But it appeared that the Chinese and American delegations were more intent on avoiding conflict over their often-competing policies, not arguing about them. For instance, after Mr. Panetta's meeting Tuesday with the Chinese defense minister, Gen. Liang Guanglie, the general made public comments about the dispute with Japan, threatening Japan with unspecified "further actions," but made no mention of the fact that the defense secretary of Japan's closest military ally was standing next to him.

Mr. Panetta reiterated American policy that Washington would take no sides in territorial disputes across the region and was urging all parties to seek a peaceful, negotiated settlement.

Mr. Panetta's weeklong mission to Japan, China and New Zealand was intended to show allies that the United States' planned strategic rebalancing toward Asia is a reality, not just talk. But he also was seeking to reassure Beijing that the new American focus on the region, which includes shifting some military resources from others regions to Asia and the Pacific, is not a threat to China.

"Our rebalance to the Asia-Pacific region is not an attempt to contain China," Mr. Panetta said Wednesday in a speech to People's Liberation Army officers and cadets. "It is an attempt to engage China and expand its role in the Pacific."

Mr. Panetta said at the Armored Forces Engineering Academy that a Chinese warship would be invited to join a major Pacific exercise hosted by the United States in waters off Hawaii, and he lauded Chinese cooperation in antipiracy missions off the Horn of Africa.

Mr. Xi's meeting with Mr. Panetta coincided with remarks by a former chief executive of Hong Kong, Tung Chee-hwa, that Mr. Xi's earlier absence from public view had been tied to a back injury sustained while swimming.

Mr. Xi was not seen in public during the first two weeks of September, giving rise to a variety of rumors: that he had hurt his back, or had a heart attack or was in political trouble. Although Mr. Tung's comments in a television interview in New York were not official, they were the first on-the-record remarks on the matter by a person close to the Chinese leadership. During Mr. Xi's absence, Chinese officials refused to comment.

Mr. Panetta was asked to assess Mr. Xi and the intrigue surrounding his absence from public view. "Frankly, my impression was that he was very healthy and very engaged," Mr. Panetta said during a session with reporters. "I guess you'll have to ask them what issues were involved here."

He said Chinese leaders had urged that the American rebalancing in Asia not be solely military, but should include enhanced diplomatic and economic engagement as well.

"These interactions made it clear to me that the leaders of both of our countries are sincerely working toward the same goal: to build a sustained and substantive United States-China defense relationship that supports the broader United States-China cooperative partnership," Mr. Panetta said. "That is why an essential element of our rebalancing effort is the constructive bilateral relationship with China." Mr. Panetta said he and his Chinese counterparts had discussed the expanding realm of computer network warfare. The United States has blamed people from China and Russia for many of the recent cyberattacks on American government computer networks.

Despite the friendly official meetings this week, signs of underlying tensions lingered. On Tuesday, the American ambassador's car was surrounded by protesters, apparently concerned about the island-sovereignty dispute with Japan, as it tried to enter the compound. The car, in which the ambassador, Gary Locke, was riding, was quickly freed by Chinese police officers and entered the embassy.

"It was all over in a matter of minutes," Mr. Locke told reporters traveling with Mr. Panetta. "I never felt in any danger."

While in Beijing, Pentagon officials also announced an accord on an issue that has vexed Washington's relations with Tokyo, where Mr. Panetta visited earlier this week.

Residents on the Japanese island of Okinawa had protested the deployment of the Marine Corps tilt-rotor troop transport called the Osprey, which has had a series of crashes. It had arrived in Okinawa but had been ordered not to fly. That ban has now been lifted and the Ospreys can fly, the officials said. But it was not clear how the deal would affect tensions on Okinawa.

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Panetta Urges Beijing to Resolve Island Spat

September 20, 2012

[Wall Street Journal](#)

By JULIAN E. BARNES

BEIJING—U.S. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta met Wednesday with China's presumed next leader and urged a peaceful solution to a territorial dispute with Japan, an issue that a Chinese official said could damage coming trade talks and economic ties between the two Asian powers.

It also was the first public international meeting for Chinese Vice President Xi Jinping, who is widely expected to become president in a Chinese leadership transition, after he had canceled several others in recent weeks. His appearance, following rumors of illness, suggests the once-a-decade process is on track and could move forward in coming weeks.

Mr. Panetta described Mr. Xi as "very healthy and very engaged." A senior Chinese adviser told CNN that Mr. Xi had hurt his back while practicing sports.

But Mr. Xi also offered a pointed denunciation of Japan. China's state-run Xinhua news agency reported that Mr. Xi told Mr. Panetta that the Japanese purchase of disputed islands was a "farce" and that Tokyo should "rein in its behavior."

A U.S. defense official said it was clear from the meeting with Mr. Xi that the Chinese "feel very strongly" about the Islands. The islands are controlled by Japan but claimed by China and Taiwan. They are called Senkaku in Japanese and Diaoyu in Chinese.

Separately, a spokesman for China's Ministry of Commerce said the dispute will have an impact on economic and trade relations between China and Japan, particularly talks over a potential free-trade agreement among the two nations and South Korea.

"We don't want to see it happen, but Japan must take full responsibility for it," said Shen Danyang, ministry spokesman.

At a news conference in Tokyo, Japanese Finance Minister Jun Azumi vowed to continue efforts to boost financial cooperation with China. He said that acts committed by some Chinese protesters were "very disappointing," but added that "from the long-term perspective we should maintain our policy of trying to enable companies from our country to sell or make products in China in a stable manner and with a sense of ease."

Mr. Panetta is on a three-day visit to China aimed at improving military-to-military ties, addressing Chinese concerns about the U.S. reinvestment in Asian security, and tamping down territorial disputes between Beijing and U.S. regional allies.

The visit takes place after days of sometimes violent protests in China against the Japanese government's plans to buy the Senkaku islands. The protests died down Wednesday amid increasingly tight security and the heavy presence of law-enforcement personnel.

The trip also occurs amid the sensitivities of China's leadership change, expected to begin in the weeks ahead. Mr. Xi's disappearance from public view sparked rumors of illness. After last appearing in public Sept. 1, he canceled meetings with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton as well as with the prime ministers of Singapore and Denmark.

Former Hong Kong chief executive Tung Chee-hwa told CNN in an interview broadcast on Wednesday that Mr. Xi, 59 years old, had hurt his back "in sport," which he said he believed to be swimming. "He has now recovered, and he is now back at work," Mr. Tung said. Mr. Tung is a vice chairman of an advisory body to China's rubber-stamp legislature.

On the islands issue, Mr. Panetta told reporters there were "a lot of emotions" on both sides but suggested the importance that both China and Japan place on good relations with the U.S. could help end the flare-up of tensions.

"By virtue of both countries understanding how important that relationship is with the United States, if we can encourage both of them to move forward and not have this dispute get out of hand, we can play a positive role," he said.

Mr. Panetta also painted a positive portrait of Mr. Xi, who appeared energetic in his joint appearance with the U.S. defense secretary at Beijing's Great Hall of the People. "He is someone who speaks frankly, speaks candidly," Mr. Panetta said. "You don't get the sense that he is pulling his punches or reading talking points, but he is someone who is talking from the heart."

The U.S. defense official said that in the meeting with Mr. Xi, Mr. Panetta echoed his public comments that both China and Japan have a responsibility to settle the dispute peacefully.

Mr. Panetta's visit comes as the U.S. has moved to add new missile defenses and to build up forces in the Asian-Pacific region. In a speech at the Armored Engineering Academy in Beijing on Wednesday, he said his message was that the U.S. was placing a renewed focus on Asia because the region was critical to its economic, diplomatic and security interests, not because Washington sees Beijing as a threat.

"Our rebalance to the Asia-Pacific region is not an attempt to contain China," Mr. Panetta said. "It is an attempt to engage China and expand its role in the Pacific."

Mr. Panetta said the U.S. wanted to create a new model for the relationship with China. Like his predecessors, Mr. Panetta emphasized that the U.S. requires a stable military-to-military relationship with China.

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Myanmar's Suu Kyi receives Congress' highest honor, meets Obama on landmark US visit

September 19, 2012

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Lawmakers united by their respect of Myanmar democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi on Wednesday presented her with Congress' highest civilian honor in a ceremony in the Capitol Rotunda, ahead of a meeting with President Barack Obama.

Suu Kyi described it as "one of the most moving days of my life."

She was awarded the Congressional Gold Medal in 2008 while under a 15-year house arrest for her peaceful struggle against military rule.

Her long-awaited visit to America finally provided an opportunity for her to receive the honor in person in Congress' most majestic setting, beneath the dome of the Capitol and ringed by marble statues of former presidents.

The 67-year-old Nobel laureate said it was worth the years of waiting, being honored "in a house undivided, a house joined together to welcome a stranger from a distant land."

Previous recipients of the medal include George Washington, Tibetan Buddhist leader the Dalai Lama and Pope John Paul II.

She then met privately at the White House with Obama, another winner of the Nobel Peace Prize. They appeared relaxed and were smiling as they talked in the Oval Office. Neither made formal comments to the photographers gathered to briefly witness the meeting.

The low-key nature of the meeting appeared to reflect concerns that Suu Kyi's Washington visit could overshadow Myanmar's reformist president Thein Sein, who attends the U.N. General Assembly in New York next week, and still faces opposition within Myanmar's military to political reform.

At the medal ceremony, House and Senate leaders joined Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton in paying tribute to Suu Kyi. Speaker after speaker at the medal ceremony marveled that this was moment they thought they would never see: Suu Kyi before them, not only free but herself now a lawmaker.

"It's almost too delicious to believe, my friend," said Clinton, "that you are in the Rotunda of our Capitol, the centerpiece of our democracy as an elected member of parliament."

Buddhist monks in saffron robes and women in traditional Burmese dresses crammed into the venue alongside members of Congress, who set aside the intense rivalries ahead of the Nov. 6 election.

Lawmakers talked about years of working together across party lines on the behalf of Suu Kyi's democracy movement. When sanctions against the Myanmar junta were imposed, and over the past year when they have been suspended, Democrats and Republicans alike have set aside their increasingly bitter differences to pass and renew legislation annually.

That's due in large part to their respect for Suu Kyi. Lawmakers who have spoken or met with her, and even those who haven't, speak of her in reverential terms. Her photo adorns some office walls in Congress and her views have been critical in shaping U.S. policy toward the country also known as Burma.

At Wednesday's emotional ceremony, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., lavished praise on a man who is usually his adversary, Republican leader Mitch McConnell, for long being at the forefront of efforts to help Suu Kyi for two decades.

McConnell compared Suu Kyi's path of peaceful resistance to Martin Luther King and Indian independence leader Mohandas Gandhi. "It was impossible not to be moved by her quiet resolve, her hidden yet luminous heroism," the Kentucky senator said.

Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., often called a hero for the years he endured as a prisoner of war in Vietnam, said Suu Kyi was his hero.

Former first lady Laura Bush said the hope that now grows in Myanmar was a tribute to Suu Kyi. She said the former military regime had encountered an "immoveable object" in the opposition leader and its legitimacy broke against her character.

While speakers paid tribute to Suu Kyi's resolve in the face of oppression, a spirit of reconciliation in Myanmar also pervaded the ceremony — recognition of its recent dramatic political changes after five ruinous and bloody decades of authoritarian rule.

A key aide to Thein Sein attended the ceremony, which Suu Kyi welcomed. The Treasury also announced it was taking Thein Sein off its list of individuals sanctioned from doing business or owning property in America.

Since Suu Kyi won a parliamentary seat in April, the U.S. has normalized diplomatic relations with Myanmar and allowed U.S. companies to start investing there again. The administration is now considering easing the main plank of its remaining sanctions, a ban on imports.

Suu Kyi voiced support for that step Tuesday, saying Myanmar should not depend on the U.S. to keep up its momentum for democracy. Some of her supporters, however, oppose it, saying reforms have not taken root and Washington will lose leverage with Myanmar, which still faces serious human rights issues. Clinton also expressed concern Tuesday that Myanmar retains some military contacts with North Korea.

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AFRICA

SAfrican Police Kill 2 More In Crackdown On Strike

September 20, 2012

Associated Press

By Carley Petesch

RUSTENBURG, South Africa -- South African police have killed two more people in a crackdown on striking miners, the Congress of South African Trade Unions and a strike leader said Thursday.

COSATU condemned the brutality of police who have been harshly criticized for the Aug. 16 shootings of 112 striking miners that left 34 dead at London-registered Lonmin PLC platinum mine. The deaths have traumatized the nation that had not seen such state violence since the white minority apartheid regime was brought down in 1994.

COSATU said African National Congress councilor Paulina Masuhlo was shopping Saturday near the Never Die Tavern at the Wonderkop shantytown where Lonmin miners live when police firing from a speeding armored car hit several women. Masuhlo was hit in the abdomen and leg and rushed to the hospital, where she died Wednesday, COSATU said.

Police spokesman Dennis Adriaio said he was investigating the report of a death. He said police had reported to the Independent Police Investigative Directorate that several people were hit by rubber bullets in a raid to disarm strikers on Saturday, the day after the government ordered a crackdown.

The directorate already has opened 34 murder and 78 attempted murder charges against police in the Aug. 16 shootings.

But no action has been taken against any of the officers involved. The government has said it is awaiting the outcome of a judicial commission of inquiry that is supposed to report to the president in January.

COSATU called for "the immediate identification and suspension of the police officers involved in her (Masuhlo's) murder. "

"We are also extremely unhappy that, to date, none of the police officers involved in the massacre on 16 August 2012 has been identified or suspended - this is totally unacceptable and unlawful," said the unions body that is part of a governing tripartite alliance with the African National Congress party and the South African Communist Party.

Also on Wednesday, police said they fired rubber bullets, tear gas and stun grenades to break up a march by thousands of strikers at Amplats mines near Rustenburg belonging to Anglo American Platinum, the world's largest platinum producer.

Amplats strike leader Evans Ramokga told The Associated Press that a miner was run over by a police armored car and dragged several meters (feet) before it stopped. He said the man died overnight in the hospital.

Adriaio said he was unaware of the incident but added the armored cars weigh several tons.

The deaths at the two miners, both northwest of Johannesburg, bring the toll to 47 dead in violent strikes rooted in union rivalry.

Lonmin on Tuesday resolved its five-week strike by agreeing to pay raises of up to 22 percent.

Union leaders warned that sets a precedent for other miners to join demands for better wages. The strike already has spread to several gold, platinum and chrome mines, damaging investor confidence in the country that produces 75 percent of world platinum and is the No. 4 chrome producer and in the top 10 of gold producers.

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Sudan Refugees Flee Intensified Bombing Runs

September 20, 2012

[Associated Press](#)

By Michael Onyiego

YIDA, South Sudan -- Refugees fleeing fighting in Sudan's southern reaches say civilians are among the casualties from aerial bombings.

Ryan Boyette, a former American aid worker who now lives in the Nuba Mountains of South Kordofan, said Wednesday that Sudanese war planes have dropped 81 bombs on 11 villages since early August. He believes Sudan is increasing its attacks to discourage the implementation of a humanitarian agreement signed Aug. 4 that would see aid deliveries to the region.

Abdul Karim Mustafa, a newly arrived refugee at the Yida refugee camp in South Sudan, said he was nearly hit by a bomb while walking to Yida. He said one person in his group was killed.

The Yida refugee camp has seen its ranks swell from 17,000 earlier this year to around 65,000 today.

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ASIA

U.S. Treasury Lifts Sanctions On Top Myanmar Officials

September 20, 2012

[Wall Street Journal](#)

By SAMUEL RUBENFELD

The U.S. Treasury Department said Wednesday it removed sanctions on two top Myanmar officials as the country continues being welcomed back into the international community.

The removal gives Myanmar President Thein Sein and lower house of Parliament Speaker Thura Shwe Mann access to once-blocked property and assets, and allows Americans to do business with them.

Treasury said the removals acknowledge the efforts of the pair on behalf of reform.

"Thein Sein and Thura Shwe Mann have taken concrete steps to promote political reforms and human rights, and to move Burma away from repression and dictatorship toward democracy and freedom, warranting today's delisting action," said David Cohen, undersecretary of Treasury for terrorism and financial intelligence, in a statement. Washington continues to maintain an import ban on Myanmar products, which Myanmar officials are pressing hard to get removed. Lifting the ban would help jumpstart Myanmar's economy, its leaders say, but Washington has held back in the hopes of seeing

more reforms in the former militarized state. Washington also has kept a number of other top Myanmar businessmen on its list of targeted sanctions, meaning U.S. companies still can't work with many of the country's most-established business leaders.

The U.S. Treasury move Wednesday came as opposition leaders and some activists criticized Myanmar's government for not including more political prisoners in a general amnesty announced earlier this week. Opposition leaders and activists said the release of more than 500 prisoners only included about 90 political detainees. Although estimates of the total number of political prisoners behind bars vary, activists say several hundred are likely still detained after a series of prisoner releases over the past year.

Treasury said Mr. Thein Sein has supported far-reaching reforms in Myanmar, which is also known as Burma, since taking office in 2011 after the country's former strongman leader, Than Shwe, retired. Among them is his dialogue with Aung San Suu Kyi, who met with U.S. President Barack Obama at the White House. Earlier, U.S. lawmakers awarded her the Congressional Gold Medal, Congress's highest civilian honor.

"Going forward, additional listings or delistings will be pursued as appropriate to meet changing conditions in Burma," Treasury said in the statement.

Mr. Thein Sein also granted amnesty to hundreds of political prisoners over the past year and oversaw elections that saw Ms. Suu Kyi and other members of her opposition party win seats in parliament, Treasury said.

Mr. Shwe Mann has supported Mr. Thein Sein's reforms, and the Myanmar Parliament under his leadership has passed bills that granted the release of political prisoners and a law that allowed for the formation of unions, Treasury said.

U.S. sanctions against certain senior Myanmar government officials for repressive policies were imposed, Treasury said, to motivate them to abandon policies of repression and move them to support human rights and political reform.

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China Report Suggests Harsh Bo Penalty

September 20, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By BRIAN SPEGELE and JEREMY PAGE

BEIJING—China for the first time suggested that fallen Communist Party official Bo Xilai rebuked his police chief in late January for telling him that his wife was suspected of murdering British businessman Neil Heywood.

An account of the confrontation from the state-run Xinhua news agency Wednesday indicated that Mr. Bo could be facing harsh sanctions—and possibly criminal charges—as party chieftains try to wind up the scandal surrounding him ahead of a once-a-decade leadership change this fall.

Xinhua published a lengthy report giving the first official explanation of how and why Wang Lijun, the former police chief of Chongqing city, fled to a U.S. consulate on Feb. 6, triggering China's worst political crisis in decades.

Xinhua said that Mr. Wang initially covered up the Heywood murder, but on Jan. 28 informed "the then-leading official of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Chongqing Committee" that a chief suspect was Gu Kailai—Mr. Bo's wife.

"On the morning of Jan. 29, Wang Lijun was angrily rebuked and slapped in the face by the official," Xinhua said, quoting "relevant testimonies from witnesses." Xinhua didn't mention Mr. Bo by name, but he was the head of the Chongqing Party Committee—the city's most powerful job—at the time.

The news agency's account of the confrontation also jibes with what diplomats say Mr. Wang alleged in the U.S. consulate, although it goes on to say Mr. Wang filled in an application form for political asylum—which U.S. officials have denied. The State Department didn't return a call for comment Wednesday.

Xinhua's account is the closest Chinese authorities have come to suggesting that Mr. Bo tried to interfere with a police investigation of his wife—something that lawyers say would leave him open to criminal charges.

It is the latest sign that the party leadership may be leaning toward a harsher penalty for Mr. Bo, who was once considered a front-runner for promotion to the Politburo Standing Committee—the top decision-making body—at this year's leadership change.

Another indication is that during Mr. Wang's trial, which finished Tuesday, prosecutors said he should be treated leniently because of the key role he played in helping to convict Ms. Gu last month. She was given a suspended death sentence, which is typically commuted to life in prison.

Mr. Wang didn't contest charges of defection, bribe-taking, abuse of power and "bending the law for selfish ends," according to a statement from the court that tried him in the southwestern city of Chengdu—site of the consulate where he sought refuge.

Mr. Bo was fired from his party posts and placed under investigation for unspecified "serious disciplinary violations" in April, but Chinese officials have yet to announce whether he, too, will face criminal charges.

Continuing debate on that issue is thought to be one reason why the party has yet to announce the dates for the 18th Party Congress, at which President Hu Jintao and other top leaders are due to retire from their party posts.

The Xinhua report also sheds new light on the status of Xu Ming, a confidant of the Bo family who is among China's richest entrepreneurs, as chairman of a conglomerate called Dalian Shide Group.

Mr. Xu has been missing since late March when he was detained shortly after Mr. Bo was fired as Chongqing party chief.

Xinhua said Mr. Xu in April 2009 purchased two apartments in Beijing for a relative of Mr. Wang for 2.85 million yuan (\$450,000). In July of that year, Mr. Wang's police department released three people in Chongqing at Mr. Xu's request, Xinhua said. It didn't say whether Mr. Xu could face bribery charges.

Dalian Shide has declined to respond to repeated requests to comment; Mr. Xu has been unreachable to comment.

Xinhua described how Mr. Wang's relationship with Ms. Gu grew increasingly strained over the months leading up to and after Mr. Heywood's murder.

On Aug. 12 last year, it said, Ms. Gu's son attempted to meet with Mr. Wang, but Mr. Wang didn't want to meet him. Ms. Gu and Mr. Bo have one son, named Bo Guagua, who graduated this year from Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government.

Bo Guagua couldn't be reached to comment; in the past he has declined to comment on his parents' situation and Mr. Heywood's murder.

Mr. Wang had his driver tell Bo Guagua that he had traveled to the distant Chongqing district of Wanzhou, according to Xinhua. Bo Guagua then drove during the night to try to find Mr. Wang and nearly crashed his car in the process, Xinhua said. Ms. Gu grew angry at Mr. Wang over the incident, it added.

In the months before his death, Mr. Heywood became involved in a business dispute with Ms. Gu and Bo Guagua, according to earlier official accounts of Ms. Gu's trial that said she plotted to kill the Briton after he threatened her son in an email exchange.

On Nov. 12, after discussions with Ms. Gu, Mr. Wang arranged "surveillance and control efforts" targeting Mr. Heywood on the pretext that he had committed drug-related crimes, Xinhua said.

Ms. Gu spoke with Mr. Wang by telephone around midnight on Nov. 13—the night Mr. Heywood was murdered—and confessed to the crime in a meeting with Mr. Wang at her residence the following day, which Mr. Wang secretly recorded, Xinhua said.

"I told him I was a bit worried, he told me it would be fine within a week or two," Ms. Gu was quoted as saying at Mr. Wang's trial. Mr. Wang said he feared antagonizing Ms. Gu.

"After coming to Chongqing, I visited Bogu Kailai's home often, and I thought she treated me quite well. I knew if the case was treated as a homicide, it would be huge. However, to avoid antagonism with Bogu Kailai, I shunned the case," Xinhua quoted Mr. Wang as saying. Chinese authorities and the statement refer to Ms. Gu as "Bogu Kailai" without explaining why.

Xinhua said that after Mr. Heywood's murder, Ms. Gu became increasingly worried about her crime being exposed, and destroyed some evidence, while Mr. Wang became concerned that she was allowing an increasing number of people to know about the incident, Xinhua said.

"Since Dec. 14 of last year, Bogu Kailai turned hostile toward me, taking a different attitude from before when contacting me," Xinhua quoted Mr. Wang as saying. "She was not so warm as before and began to guard herself against me."

Tension between Mr. Wang and Ms. Gu was exacerbated in late December after four people working closely with Mr. Wang were "illegally investigated," according to Xinhua.

After Mr. Wang was rebuked by the Chongqing Party leader, he told colleagues on the same day to re-examine the Heywood murder, take fresh witness statements, and properly protect evidence including blood extracted from Mr. Heywood's heart, Xinhua said.

Mr. Wang also became concerned for his own safety after he was dismissed as police chief on Feb. 2 and three more of his colleagues were placed under "illegal investigation" in early February, Xinhua said.

Mr. "Wang felt he was in danger, giving rise to his idea to defect," Xinhua said.

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China Probes Protest Around US Ambassador's Car

September 20, 2012

Associated Press

By Alexa Olesen

BEIJING -- China said Wednesday it was investigating an incident where about 50 protesters surrounded the car of the US ambassador, tried to block him from entering the embassy compound and ripped the car's flag.

Chinese police cleared roadblocks and some Japanese businesses reopened after days of large, sometimes violent protests in many cities over Japan's recent purchase of islands also claimed by Beijing.

In Beijing, the bitterness spilled over from the Japanese Embassy to the nearby US Embassy.

US Ambassador Gary Locke told reporters Wednesday that Chinese authorities were "very quick" to move the demonstrators away. Video posted on YouTube showed a small number of protesters throwing small objects at the car before Chinese security forces moved in to break up the crowd.

"It was all over in a matter of minutes, and I never felt in any danger," Locke said.

The US, a close ally of Japan, has said it is staying out of the dispute over the islands.

The incident came amid heightened vigilance for American diplomats following violent attacks on US embassies in Libya, Yemen and Egypt. The embassy said it has asked China's government to do everything possible to protect American facilities and personnel.

State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland said the US has registered its concern with China both in Washington and Beijing, and Chinese authorities have expressed regret over the incident.

Nuland said the preliminary US assessment was that the car was "a target of opportunity" for protesters who had gathered outside the nearby Japanese Embassy.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Hong Lei told a regular news briefing Wednesday that the incident was "an individual case," but that China was investigating it.

The protests over the weekend were triggered by the Japanese government's decision last week to purchase some disputed East China Sea islands from their private Japanese owners. More

demonstrations followed Tuesday, the 81st anniversary of Japan's invasion of China, an emotional remembrance that further stoked the outrage.

Though the anti-Japan demonstrations have wound down, at least temporarily, there has been no progress in resolving the territorial dispute bedeviling relations between the two Asian economic powerhouses.

The rhetoric on both sides has remained uncompromising.

China's future leader, Xi Jinping, told visiting US Defense Secretary Leon Panetta on Wednesday that Japan's purchase of the islands was a farce, according to the official Xinhua News Agency.

"Japan should rein in its behavior and stop any words and acts that undermine China's sovereignty and territorial integrity," Xinhua quoted Xi as saying.

In Tokyo, former Japanese Defense Minister Shigeru Ishiba said losing a piece of Japan would mean "losing the whole country."

The islands -- called Senkaku in Japan and Diaoyu in China -- are tiny rock outcroppings that have been a sore point between China and Japan for decades. Japan has claimed the islands since 1895. The US took jurisdiction after World War II and turned them over to Japan in 1972.

Japan's government sees its purchase of some of the islands as a way to thwart a potentially more inflammatory move by the governor of Tokyo, who had wanted not only to buy the islands but also develop them. But Beijing sees Japan's purchase as an affront to its claims and its past calls for negotiations.

Beijing has sent patrol ships inside Japanese-claimed waters around the islands, and some state media have urged Chinese to show their patriotism by boycotting Japanese goods and canceling travel to Japan.

The islands are important mainly because of their location near key sea lanes in the East China Sea. They are surrounded by rich fishing grounds and as-yet untapped underwater natural resources.

Chinese state media have also reported that boats were headed to the waters around the disputed islands for seasonal fishing.

Hong, the foreign ministry spokesman, said such activities were within China's rights.

"The Diaoyu Islands have belonged to China since ancient times," he said. "It is totally legitimate and reasonable for Chinese fishing vessels to fish in relevant waters."

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Trade And Syria Top Agenda At EU-China Talks

September 20, 2012

New York Times

By James Kanter

BRUSSELS -- China's prime minister, Wen Jiabao, is expected to meet with top officials of the European Union on Thursday amid rising trade tensions and diverging views on how to quell the conflict in Syria.

The meeting comes before a change of leadership in Beijing, making it the last meeting of its kind between Mr. Wen and Herman Van Rompuy, the president of the European Council, and José Manuel Barroso, the president of the European Commission.

But with no major agreements planned, the meeting risked being overshadowed by a dispute over censorship after the EU authorities said they would not hold a customary closing news conference because of a disagreement over the format and after journalists based in Brussels expressed concerns that the Chinese authorities were planning to exclude those they disliked.

The European Union is the biggest destination for Chinese exports, which were worth €292.5 billion, or about \$382 billion, last year, while exports from the Union to China were worth €136.2 billion, making China the Union's second-largest trading partner after the United States and a major source of wealth and jobs.

The importance of the trade relationship makes the slowing Chinese economy and the crisis in the euro zone major concerns for both parties. The meeting "allows us to discuss the state of both our economies and how to join forces to drive our economies out of their current difficulties," Mr. Van Rompuy said in a statement issued Wednesday.

As in the United States, the EU relationship with China has come under strain in recent years amid concerns about unfair competition and other issues.

This month, the European Commission began a broad investigation into whether Chinese companies had exported solar power equipment for less than the cost of making it. The EU trade commissioner, Karel De Gucht, is expected to discuss the solar dispute with his Chinese counterpart, Commerce Minister Chen Deming, on Thursday.

Another source of friction is a European law requiring airlines using airports inside the Union to account for their carbon dioxide emissions. China has stated that its airlines should not pay any associated charges without permission from the government. The first charges fall due in April 2013.

The two sides are also expected to discuss mounting tensions between China and Japan over the disputed islands in the East China Sea known as the Diaoyu in China and the Senkakus in Japan, which could also have ramifications for trade.

China halted exports of rare earth metals to Japan for nearly two months in 2010 after the Japanese Coast Guard detained a Chinese fishing vessel that had slammed into a coast guard ship when it was intercepted near one of the islands. The halt drew international attention to Chinese restrictions on exports of rare earths and helped lead to the filing in March this year of a World Trade Organization case, in which the European Union, the United States and Japan challenged China's right to limit exports of such important minerals.

The situation in Syria is also expected to feature prominently in discussions.

China, along with Russia, has vetoed proposed UN Security Council resolutions intended to put pressure on President Bashar al-Assad to end a crackdown on the Syrian opposition. The Europeans "will emphasize the inability of the international community to mobilize" in the case of Syria, an EU official said, speaking on the condition of anonymity before the meeting.

The customary closing news conference was shelved after journalists expressed concerns that the Chinese authorities planned exclusions.

Ann Cahill, the president of the International Press Association, said the group had rejected a suggestion from the European Council to allow access by 50 journalists, photographers and camera crews. Ms. Cahill said the EU authorities would have selected 25 non-Chinese journalists and the Chinese authorities would have selected 25 Chinese journalists, including some from the EU press corps, and questions would be limited to just two from each side.

The press association "could not approve of any arrangement that would tacitly permit any group to discriminate against journalists representing views of which they disapprove," Ms. Cahill wrote in a letter to the Brussels press corps this week.

Dirk De Backer, a spokesman for Mr. Van Rompuy, said a number of meetings had been held with the Chinese and the press association but it had been impossible to reach a compromise.

"Regrettably, it has not been possible to reach a satisfactory agreement on the conditions for a press conference," Mr. De Backer said. "Therefore, the EU decided not to call a press conference."

Ms. Cahill said the EU and Chinese authorities appeared to be trying to avoid a repetition of events at a similar meeting in Brussels two years ago, when Chinese authorities tried to bar some Chinese journalists from attending, leading the European Council to cancel the final news conference.

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Rejecting Japan's Remorse, Nationalists Feed Asia Strife

September 20, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By YUKA HAYASHI

TOKYO—One factor behind Japan's mounting tensions with China and South Korea is an increasingly vocal movement arguing that Tokyo has for too long apologized for World War II and needs to move past the events of seven decades ago.

Some Japanese politicians and opinion leaders are asserting that the nation's long-standing efforts to use economic cooperation and what they derisively refer to as "peace-at-any-price diplomacy" have only made Japan look weak. The results, they say, are increasing territorial frictions that have flared up in the past several weeks, and more demands for more apologies and compensation for wartime sins.

Their assertiveness itself also has added to animosities, and highlighted the gap in sentiment between Japan and its neighbors.

The dispute that has raged over the past week over a chain of uninhabited East China Sea islands was fueled by Tokyo's nationalist governor, Shintaro Ishihara, who pushed to buy the islands after criticizing leaders for failing to stand up to China.

"Japanese people buying islands to protect Japanese territory, no matter how much other countries complain. Does anyone have a problem with that?" he asked, when launching his campaign this year to take control of the territory from private owners.

In August, two cabinet members visited a controversial shrine that commemorates war criminals, the first time such high-level leaders have done so since 2009. And now, nearly two decades after Tokyo apologized for the forced prostitution of South Korean women during World War II, some politicians are pushing for the withdrawal of the official contrition.

Shinzo Abe, a hawkish former prime minister vying for a comeback as head of the former ruling Liberal Democratic Party, has called for reconsideration of apologies Japanese leaders issued in the 1990s to soften lingering wartime tensions. He told the Sankei newspaper in an interview published Aug. 28: "Being excessively considerate to neighboring nations...has not brought us real friendship."

The push for a review of a 1993 apology—known as the Kono statement after Yohei Kono, a moderate politician who unveiled it as chief cabinet secretary at the time— reflects the broader rise of nationalism. "Many politicians are now thinking that taking hawkish positions toward China and South Korea will earn them votes," said Yoshiaki Yoshimi, a professor of history at Chuo University and an expert on comfort-women issues. "I am very concerned."

The campaign to nullify the contrition comes during heightened tensions between Japan and South Korea over Seoul's insistence that Tokyo take further steps to make amends to the female victims, including more apologies and compensation, and over a long-standing territorial dispute.

The government of Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda has rebuffed South Korea's demands. Several opposition politicians—and one member of Mr. Noda's own cabinet—have gone further, saying Japan has done too much already, erring with the 1993 cabinet statement declaring that Japan's military was involved in the coercive recruitment of women from South Korea and other nations, such as China and the Philippines, and offering a formal apology to the victims.

"It's baseless and most egregious," Toru Hashimoto, the popular Osaka mayor, said in August. "There is no proof the Japanese military used violence and threats to gather up the comfort women. If South Korea insists as such, they should show us the proof."

At an Aug. 24 news conference, Mr. Ishihara, the popular four-term governor, said the destitute women "helplessly, but not unwillingly, chose the occupation" as prostitutes catering to Japanese soldiers. He then criticized the 1993 Kono declaration, calling Mr. Kono a "fool."

Mr. Kono, now retired, declined a request for an interview through an aide. "My understanding is Mr. Kono's position on the statement remains the same," said the aide, who asked not to be identified

The comfort-women debate highlights how unresolved differences over Japan's wartime aggression continue to strain relations seven decades later, threatening to undermine efforts to deepen economic ties and regional cooperation.

In Japan, a recent editorial in the Asahi Shimbun, a liberal-leaning major daily, criticized the lawmakers opposing the 1993 statement, saying Japan's politics "can't confront its own past mistakes." "It is an

undeniable fact that many women had their mental and physical freedom taken away and endured damage to their honor and dignity," it stated.

Nationalist movements in Japanese politics have come in waves over the past few decades, intertwined with periods of overtures for more contrition and peacemaking.

Starting in the 1960s, Japan repeatedly offered apologies to South Korea and China for the nation's wartime actions, delivered by generations of emperors and prime ministers.

In 2005, thousands in China protested in the streets against what they saw as Japan's failure to address its wartime sins, including school textbooks that they said glossed over its cruelties. Also spurring China's wrath, Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi repeatedly visited the controversial Yasukuni Shrine. In 2008, the chief of Japan's air force was removed from his post after writing an essay for a national magazine saying Japan wasn't an aggressor in World War II. Seoul has twice asked Tokyo to hold consultations on the comfort-women issue, but was turned down.

South Korean President Lee Myung-bak cited the lack of progress on the issue as a reason for the recent flare-up in their territorial rivalry over a group of tiny islets. South Korea controls these islets, known as Liancourt Rocks in the U.S. and other countries not party to the dispute. South Korea calls them the Dokdo Islands; Japan calls them the Takeshima Islands.

Many in Japan blame Mr. Lee for using the two disputes to buttress his popularity before his term ends in February. "Both parties are very angry, emotional and frustrated," said Cheol Hee Park, professor at the Graduate School of International Studies at Seoul National University. "We have to wait for this politically turbulent period to end, then look for new momentum to solve the issue."

Mr. Park said 60 comfort women survive of a total 50,000 to 200,000, estimated 2007 U.S. congressional research. They are seeking three things: an official apology from the Japanese prime minister, symbolic action such as visits by Japanese ambassador to individual victims, and, especially, direct government compensation.

Tokyo's stance on that largely hinges on the outcome of coming general elections, likely to take place by early next year. Mr. Noda's ruling party has affirmed its commitment to the 1993 statement, in which Tokyo offered "sincere apologies and remorse," but polls suggest Mr. Noda's ruling party could suffer a defeat.

The comfort women issue first surfaced on the bilateral diplomatic agenda in the early 1990s, as some victims began pressing for compensation. Until then, most of the women remained silent. Japan has maintained that all the wartime claims were settled in a 1965 bilateral agreement.

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Japan, Under Pressure, Backs Off Goal To Phase Out Nuclear Power By 2040

September 20, 2012

New York Times

By Hiroko Tabuchi

TOKYO -- In an abrupt turnabout, the Japanese government on Wednesday stopped short of formally adopting the momentous goal it announced just last week -- to phase out nuclear power by 2040 -- after

the plan drew intense opposition from business groups and communities whose economies depend on local nuclear power plants.

The cabinet of Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda said it would "take into consideration" the 2040 goal, but formally endorsed only a vague promise to "engage in debate with local governments and international society and to gain public understanding" in deciding Japan's economic future in the wake of the 2011 nuclear disaster at Fukushima. Energy policy will be developed "with flexibility, based on tireless verification and re-examination," the cabinet's resolution read.

A day earlier, the chairmen of Japan's most prominent business associations, including the influential Keidanren group, called a rare joint news conference to demand that Mr. Noda abandon the 2040 goal. On Wednesday, they praised the cabinet's decision.

The deadline "was not a viable option in the first place," Tadashi Okamura, chairman of the Japan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said at a news conference.

Nuclear critics had been suspicious of the government's promise last week, saying the announced plans were vague and drawn out, and included troubling loopholes. On Wednesday, after the cabinet's rollback, they called the government indecisive and weak-kneed.

"We've only seen the government strike compromise after compromise with the business community," said Hideyuki Ban, secretary general of a nuclear watchdog, the Citizens' Nuclear Information Center.

Motohisa Furukawa, the national strategy minister, announced the original plan last week, releasing a document titled the "Revolutionary Energy and Environment Strategy" that said Japan would seek to eliminate nuclear power within 28 years through greater reliance on renewable energy, conservation and the use of fossil fuels. On Wednesday, he defended the cabinet's omission of the 2040 deadline, saying the government had intended to use it as a reference point.

"It is just a matter of decision-making, and there is no real change to content," he said.

But to critics, the cabinet's move cast into further doubt Japan's commitment to ending its nuclear power program, first made in July 2011 by Naoto Kan, who was then prime minister. Since September, his successor, Mr. Noda, has pushed to restart the energy-poor country's shuttered reactors while making vague promises to "reduce Japan's nuclear dependence."

Japan got about 30 percent of its electricity from 54 reactors across the country -- and planned to increase its reliance to 50 percent -- before damage from a powerful tsunami in March 2011 led to multiple meltdowns at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant and vast radiation leaks. All but two of the plants remain closed.

Mr. Noda was forced to consider alternative energy sources after a series of public hearings held by the government after the Fukushima disaster showed overwhelming support for phasing out nuclear power. The unmistakable theme of the hearings was mistrust of the government's ability to oversee nuclear safety.

But business groups criticized any move away from nuclear power as impractical and a death knell for Japanese manufacturers, which have already lost much of their competitive edge to cheaper rivals

elsewhere in Asia. And communities across Japan that host nuclear facilities feared losing government subsidies, tax revenues and jobs, and they worried that they would become the final dumping ground for spent nuclear fuel stored at their plants.

The government's reversal came as it officially opened a new agency on Wednesday to oversee the nuclear industry, a bid to regain the public's trust. Japan got rid of its previous nuclear regulator after criticism that it had been drawn into a cozy, collusive relationship with plant operators and had failed to take the necessary steps to prevent a disaster like Fukushima.

But the new body has already come under fire, with criticism focusing on Shunichi Tanaka, the head of a five-person committee that would set nuclear policy and retain oversight over the new agency.

Mr. Tanaka is considered suspect by those who favor tighter regulation because he helped lead a former government commission tasked with building a strong nuclear industry, raising fears that the new regulator will be as lax as the previous one.

Yukio Edano, the minister of economy, trade and industry, said that the new regulatory framework ensured that there was "a strict separation between those who regulate nuclear power and those who use it."

The government will help create "the highest-level regulations and disaster-preparedness plans in the world," Mr. Edano said.

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NEA

Iran: Top Nuclear Negotiator Calls Talks With Big Powers "Constructive"

September 20, 2012

New York Times

By Rick Gladstone

Saeed Jalili, Iran's top negotiator in talks with the big powers over his country's disputed uranium enrichment program, called negotiations with Catherine Ashton, his counterpart, "constructive and helpful," the official Islamic Republic News Agency reported on Wednesday. The talks on Tuesday in Istanbul, their first face-to-face meeting in three months, produced no breakthroughs, and it remained unclear when they would meet again.

Iran coupled its favorable official comment with a warning that any aggressive action by adversaries would be met with a "crushing response." In an announcement, the armed forces said they were "monitoring all the internal and external moves of the enemies with maximum strength," the Fars News Agency reported. The United States has been leading a multinational naval exercise in the Persian Gulf this week, and an Iranian atomic energy official disclosed Monday that bomb sabotage had hit its two main uranium enrichment plants. Iran has repeatedly asserted that its nuclear program is peaceful.

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Iran underlines 'right' to nuclear energy

September 20, 2012

Financial Times

By Najmeh Bozorgmehr in Tehran

Military action against Iran would be "highly costly" for the US and threats issued by Mitt Romney as he tries to become the next American president are campaign rhetoric only and can be largely ignored, Ali Larijani, Speaker of the Iranian parliament, has told the FT.

Mr Romney has sought to portray himself as much tougher on Iran than President Barack Obama and more sympathetic to Israel's concerns. But Mr Larijani is unimpressed, saying the Republican candidate has the "little bit of wisdom" needed to understand the consequences of waging war on the Islamic Republic.

Speaking in his office building in Tehran, the Speaker of the Iranian parliament lambasted US policy in the Middle East as a catalogue of failures and said it made little difference who was in the White House. "It is political systems in the US which make decisions, not individuals," he said. "Mr [Barack] Obama swept to power and made promises which were not followed by actions. So, I do not think significant changes can happen."

"What did he do for Palestine? Did not he go to Turkey and Egypt and promise to protect the rights of Muslims? [But] we have not seen any action to back up his promise of change. The Americans supported Hosni Mubarak [of Egypt] until his final moments [in power]. The same with Tunisia's Ben Ali and in Yemen [with Ali Abdullah Saleh]."

Mr Larijani, 54, was Iran's top nuclear negotiator in 2005-07, leaving his post after a row with Mahmoud Ahmadi-Nejad, the fundamentalist president. He is seen as espousing a more pragmatic view of foreign policy than the president and he is part of the group that has sought to undermine Mr Ahmadi-Nejad in his internal power struggle with the supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

In a sign of the vast potential for misunderstanding between the US and Iran, estranged for more than three decades, Iran has brushed off Washington's attempts to persuade Israel not to attack Iran's nuclear facilities, even though disagreement over Iran have led to growing and increasingly public tensions between the two allies.

Iran insists Israel would not dare to attack Iran's nuclear sites without co-ordinating with the US government. Iranian retaliation would, therefore, target both countries.

He said the success of nuclear talks with the six major powers – US, UK, France, Russia, China and Germany – which faltered after three rounds, depended on Washington's willingness to hold sincere discussions.

Iran returned to the negotiating table following an escalation in American and European sanctions, which have badly hit its economy and reduced its oil exports. But the parties were unable to agree even a limited deal that would curb its production of 20 per cent uranium, which is now at the centre of international concerns.

Mr Larijani blamed the lack of progress in the talks on western adversaries. He said the negotiations would be helped if Washington put its public statements on recognition of Iran's right to peaceful nuclear energy into writing.

"I assure you that these talks can be successful and help create more security in the region. But if they try to dissuade Iran from its rights to have peaceful nuclear technology, then they will not go anywhere – before or after the US elections," he said.

"Many times the US president or secretary of state have said they recognise Iran's right to nuclear energy. So, if [they] accept this, write it down and then we use it as a basis to push forward the talks. What they say during the talks is different from what they say outside the talks. This is a problem."

Some western officials fear that Iran will now step up its nuclear activities, raising the level of enrichment above the current 20 per cent and closer to weapons grade. Mr Larijani repeated Iran's position that it was interested only in "peaceful technologies", adding: "We do not need [20 per cent enriched uranium] now. But if we need [it], we may [produce it]. Or if we can buy it from other places, then we will not produce it."

He also said Iranian leaders had not discussed withdrawing from the non-proliferation treaty, even though "there is this serious question" among Iranian "intellectuals" about the benefits of remaining a signatory to the treaty at a time when international pressure to scale back its nuclear programme continues to mount on Tehran.

"The Israelis did not join the NPT and they do not recognise the IAEA," he said. "They are doing what they want – producing nuclear bombs, and no one questions it."

As for his own political ambitions, Mr Larijani refused to be drawn on whether he would run for president once Mr Ahmedi-Nejad's second term was up. "[I have] no plans yet," he said. "There are various politicians who are preparing [for the elections] and I am watching to see who is more successful."

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Iran Preparing Internal Version Of Internet

September 20, 2012

Washington Post

By James Ball, Benjamin Gottlieb

The Iranian government, determined to limit Western influence and defend itself against cyberattacks, appears to have laid the technical foundations for a national online network that would be detached from the Internet and permit tighter control over the flow of information.

The concept of a self-contained network has been reverberating within Iran for almost a decade and has often been treated with skepticism, given the significant investment in infrastructure and security that would be required. But Iranian officials and outside experts say that development of the network has accelerated following cyberattacks aimed at the country's nuclear program.

Last month, Iran's communications and information technology minister unveiled a plan to take key government agencies and military outfits offline and onto the new network by the end of September. US security researchers say they are for the first time seeing evidence of an operational network that is consistent with Iran's publicly stated plans.

The researchers, working under the auspices of the University of Pennsylvania's Center for Global Communications Studies, say in a report to be released this week that they have found functional versions of the sites of government ministries, universities and businesses on the network. They also found evidence of an already operational filtering capability.

At the core of the network was high-end equipment manufactured by the Chinese firm Huawei that is capable of sophisticated online surveillance of traffic. The network is already "internally consistent and widely reachable," concluded the report, a copy of which was provided to The Washington Post.

The findings are likely to worry Internet freedom activists and the Obama administration, which has spent tens of millions of dollars on initiatives designed to ease access to the Internet in Iran and other countries with repressive governments. Officials had expressed concerns even before the release of the latest research.

"We have concerns from not only a human rights perspective, but about the integrity of the Internet," David Baer, deputy assistant secretary for the State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, said in an interview. "When countries section off parts of the Web, not only do their citizens suffer, everyone does."

Experts say the Iranian government has a handful of reasons to establish a state-run alternative to the Internet. A protected Iran-only network could help officials counter US-funded programs that allow Iranian activists to evade online surveillance. It could also help insulate Iranian computers from a covert campaign of cyberattacks that Iranian officials assert the United States and Israel continue to wage.

The Iranian network is not expected to entirely replace the Internet. But for ordinary Iranians it could be a well-run alternative to the Internet, which in Iran is often still accessed through dial-up connections.

Internet speeds in the country are intentionally suppressed to make certain Web activities, including the streaming of video, virtually impossible. Many Web sites, such as Facebook and YouTube, are blocked by the Iranian government.

Having the infrastructure for a skeleton Iran-only internet in place would give the Iranian government greater power to shut off access to the Internet at times of civil unrest, such as the anti-government protests that swept Iran in 2009.

During the Arab Spring uprising in Egypt, President Hosni Mubarak's regime tried to stall its spread by shutting off access to the Internet -- a move that largely backfired when it caused panic. Having a national network operational could help prevent a similar outcome in Iran.

"The main reason for this project is security," said Moussavi Khoeini, a former Iranian reformer and parliament member now living in exile. "They may say it's to increase Internet speeds or protect against harmful content, but it's always been security."

Not all experts are convinced that an Iranian network would be viable, especially given the need for access to the Internet for commercial purposes and international communication.

"Any attempt by a country to make an intranet is doomed to failure," Cedric Leighton, a retired deputy director at the National Security Agency, said in an interview.

But Leighton, who spent more than 25 years as an intelligence officer specializing in cybersecurity, said that Iran's "cyber army," a network of government-supported hackers that has attacked Western targets in recent years, does stand to gain from the attempted creation of a national network.

By "laying down the fiber" and connecting thousands of servers inside Iran, the government would "build on their knowledge of networks and how they operate," he said, increasing their capabilities to both launch and repel cyberattacks.

"But no matter what you do, there will always be vulnerabilities in a network," Leighton said.

Both the Obama administration and Internet freedom experts have expressed concern that the launch of the Iranian network could set a precedent for repressive governments across the globe. Reza Taghipour, Iran's communications and information technology minister, has lauded Iran as a "pioneer" of the idea, hinting that other nations could follow his country's lead.

"We don't want governments to believe that it is now legitimate to take a country offline," explained Brett Solomon, executive director of AccessNow.org, a global digital freedom initiative. "If we look back to the Egyptian revolution, where the regime shut down the free flow of information, you can see how this act could give rise to the creation of a new international norm."

The researchers who uncovered the foundations of the new Iranian network said they found that it already hosted a number of Web sites -- typically government or academic sites -- meaning that the beginning of an Iranian internet is already in operation. Email and other providers are in place, and a scan of the network's infrastructure by the researchers uncovered more than 10,000 devices connected to the system.

Collin Anderson, a D.C.-based security researcher and the report's lead author, said the study should prompt further work on the scope of the Iranian network, its filtering ability, its growth, and how many Web sites were available only there.

"Internet freedom is a cat-and-mouse game -- bad actors will always think of new ways to thwart the aspirations of the public," Anderson said. "People and organizations have to remain vigilant to the ever-changing environment in order to support those who want to fight back against isolation."

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Kerry Says Iraq Aid Could Be Tied To Halting Flights To Syria

September 20, 2012

New York Times

By John H. Cushman

WASHINGTON -- The Obama administration's leading foreign policy ally in Congress said on Wednesday that aid to Iraq might be made contingent on cutting off flights shuttling military supplies from Iran to the repressive regime in Syria.

Senator John Kerry, a Massachusetts Democrat who is chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, warned at a confirmation hearing for the new ambassador to Baghdad that the mood in Congress was not generous toward recipients of foreign aid that "seem to be trying to have it both ways."

The administration has been protesting for at least a month the resumption in July of flights that Iraq's government has allowed to cross uninspected over Iraqi territory from Iran to Syria, in violation of international sanctions.

"If so many people have entreated the government to stop and that doesn't seem to be having an impact," Mr. Kerry said, "that sort of alarms me a little bit and seems to send a signal to me maybe we should make some of our assistance or some of our support contingent on some kind of appropriate response."

"It just seems completely inappropriate that we're trying to help build their democracy, support them, put American lives on the line, money into the country, and they're working against our interest so overtly -- against their interests, too, I might add," he said

The nominee, Robert S. Beecroft, a career Foreign Service officer who is already running the enormous Baghdad embassy as chargé d'affaires, said that the United States was adamant that Iran not be permitted to airlift arms to Syria.

He and other officials have "made very clear that we find this unacceptable and we find it unhelpful and detrimental to the region and to Iraq and, of course, first and foremost, to the Syrian people," Mr. Beecroft said.

"It's something that needs to stop and that we are pressing and will continue to press until it does stop," he said.

"I share your concerns 100 percent," Mr. Beecroft told Mr. Kerry, promising to pass on the message to the Iraqis that "you find it alarming and that it may put our assistance and our cooperation on issues at stake."

Mr. Kerry said that "around here I think right now there is a lot of anxiety about places that seem to be trying to have it both ways."

Mr. Kerry is involved in a showdown with Senator Rand Paul, Republican of Kentucky, who has been holding up ambassadorial nominations and other Senate business in an attempt to get a Senate vote on withholding aid from Pakistan, Egypt and Libya unless they are more cooperative with the United States.

Under questioning, Mr. Beecroft said that Iraq had been accepting Iran's declarations that its planes were not carrying military equipment and had not been requiring that the planes land and be inspected.

"They're taking the manifests at face value," he said. "We're pressing them to have the aircraft -- either disapprove the flights or have them land and be inspected, which is their right to do."
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Jordan Limits Protests, And Internet, As Tensions Simmer

September 20, 2012

New York Times

By Rana F. Sweis

AMMAN - Jordan has been rocked by the shock waves running across the Middle East, and tensions are still simmering.

Last week, about 200 protesters gathered at a traffic circle in the heart of Amman. Watched by police forces, they demanded the release of dozens of activists who were arrested a few days earlier and charged with opposing the regime, slandering the royal family and violating security.

"I think we will see more detentions of activists, because the government will not tolerate what is being said at these protests," said Rana Sabbagh, a leading political columnist at Al Ghad, an independent daily. "Jordan is going against the tide of the Arab Spring."

King Abdullah II and his top aides appear to have decided that the best course, unpopular as it may be, is to keep a relatively tight lid on protests, free speech and online media.

At the same time, demonstrations, while continuing, remain relatively small. The opposition is divided and mostly behaving with restraint, because dissidents worry about ushering in something worse than the monarchy.

"People I talk to are holding back," Ms. Sabbagh said. "They are saying, 'Let's keep whatever peace and stability we have now. We don't want to turn into another Syria.'"

King Abdullah continues to try to ease tensions through symbolic political concessions. This week, a royal decree suspended Parliament, which has been broadly criticized as unrepresentative. A new prime minister and government, the fifth since the Arab Spring, may be announced soon, according to local news reports.

The king, who succeeded his father, King Hussein, in 1999, has promised elections for a new Parliament early next year.

"We call on all groups to take part in this reform process and participate in the legislative elections to reach parliamentary governments," the king said in an interview with Jordan Television in July.

Still, promises of political change are no longer doing much to quell discontent. A government decision this month to raise the price of gasoline 10 percent led to larger demonstrations demanding the dismissal of the government, with hundreds of taxi drivers parking on a busy street, causing serious traffic jams.

The government quickly rescinded the tax increase, but it warned that further tax and price increases were inevitable to curb a budget deficit that is projected to reach a record two billion Jordanian dinars, or about \$3 billion, this year.

"The bottom line is that Jordanians no longer want to hear about reform -- they want to see it implemented on the ground," Bassam Haddadin, a member of the suspended Parliament, said in an interview.

Some influential Jordanians are calling for far more sweeping changes than the king is offering.

"It is time to admit the country is going through a deep political and economic crisis," Marwan Muasher, a former foreign minister, wrote in an article published this week in Al Ghad. "The dilemma cannot be

solved through elections in accordance to a law that lacks national consensus. It will only deepen the crisis."

Mr. Muasher, now an official at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington, outlined a new national agenda and called for a long-term political and economic strategy.

He wrote that a political system of checks and balances was needed to ensure that no one branch in government became too powerful, and he called for a clear law that would penalize security agencies for interfering in daily political life. He also called for political parties, including the Muslim Brotherhood, to respect political, cultural and religious diversity.

Meanwhile, with criticism mounting, the government is threatening journalists and bloggers with widespread censorship of online speech. The House of Representatives, the Senate and the king recently approved legislation that would impose the same sort of tough restrictions faced by domestic print media on online news Web sites and give the government new powers to block domestic and international Web sites.

Under the new legislation, editors would be held responsible for anything published on their Web sites, and local online media would be required to register and obtain licenses from the Press and Publications Department, at a cost of nearly 1,000 dinars in registration fees.

Jordanian journalists showed their disapproval by blacking out many Internet media sites one day last month. Cartoonists, bloggers, and Twitter users have raged against the proposed rules.

"It seems that times have, indeed, changed, and even the voice of reason has departed the political theater," wrote Naseem Tarawneh, a popular blogger. Mr. Tarawneh suggested that the main goal of the authorities was to scare the online media world into self-censorship.

This week, the Jordanian news media association held a protest near the offices of the main newspapers. "There can be no reform without press freedom," read a large sign.

Because Jordan previously refrained from censoring Internet content, the new rules have come as a shock to many.

"I lived in Saudi Arabia for 12 years where there was Internet censorship and you have no idea how much you hate it," said Dareen Alhiyari, 28, a senior software engineer. "This means new obstacles, and I feel sad -- as if I am not respected as an individual anymore. There needs to be freedom."

Nidal Mansour, head of the Center for Defending Freedom of Journalists, said: "News Web sites have a long way to go in terms of professionalism, but it's very important that freedom of expression is protected and if the information published is incorrect, to rectify it. The person affected by this wrong information should be able to take legal procedures like in any democratic country, but to punish and detain journalists is not acceptable."

Sawsan Zaideh, a journalist and talk-show host at AmmanNet, a community radio station, said there was no doubt the government was using fear tactics to try to stem mounting criticism of its policies.

"By blocking Web sites now and security agencies' having the legal right to access I.P. addresses," she said, "you can't help but wonder if what the government is doing is trying to create a chilling effect and instill fear."

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A Void For Sunnis In Lebanon

September 20, 2012

New York Times

By Josh Wood

BEIRUT -- As spillover from the civil war in Syria continues to unsettle Lebanon, the prolonged absence of Saad Hariri, the country's former prime minister and leader of its Sunni community, has created a political vacuum of sorts, as his influence has declined and new voices have emerged.

Mr. Hariri, whose father, former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, was assassinated in February 2005, has been outside of Lebanon for nearly a year and a half. Ousted from his position as prime minister at the start of last year by the March 8 coalition, led by Hezbollah, he now splits his time between Saudi Arabia and France. Security concerns, most say, are responsible for his self-imposed exile, though there have also been rumors in Beirut about financial difficulties.

The absence of Mr. Hariri, the head of the Future Movement, has left the Sunni population of Lebanon without its zaim, its leader. Traditionally from wealthy, powerful families, a zaim presides over large patronage networks, is seen as the protector of his sectarian community and commands high levels of loyalty. It is a position that stretches back centuries, but survives today in a political system still governed by sectarian identity.

Mr. Hariri remains the zaim of the Sunni community to most, but his continuing absence and the political moves that led to what was seen by many as a stumbling exit and the muting of his voice in Lebanese affairs of late have reduced his influence.

"It would be a mistake to suggest that Saad Hariri has lost his position entirely among Lebanon's Sunnis, but it's clear that his leadership has been called into question," said Elias Muhanna, the author of *Qifa Nabki*, an influential blog on Lebanese politics and a professor at Brown University in Rhode Island.

At the same time, many Sunnis in Lebanon have become more supportive of rebels in Syria, who are mostly Sunni, and more hostile and aggressive toward allies of Damascus in Lebanon, notably the Shiite Islamist party Hezbollah.

"I think there is a regionwide kind of Sunni awakening," said Imad Salamey, an associate professor of political science at the Lebanese American University in Beirut. "It is being reflected in Lebanon, where the Sunnis are taking a more and more militant role, and they are becoming more aware of their sectarian identity and linking their sectarian identity to their political demands."

The Sunnis are one of the three major sectarian communities in Lebanon, along with the Shiites and the Maronites, and dominate in cities that include Sidon and Tripoli. By an unwritten rule going back to 1943, a Sunni serves as prime minister in each electoral cycle.

The perceived lack of leadership among the Sunnis has led some to criticize Mr. Hariri.

"I don't know of a March 14 supporter who is not incredibly disappointed and frustrated -- and even borderline insulted -- by the political performance, the political strategy, even the political mind-set that Hariri has displayed over the past five years," said Saleh el-Machnoug, a rising young Sunni political activist, referring to supporters of the March 14 alliance, a broad political coalition to which Mr. Hariri's party, the Future Movement, belongs.

"These people feel humiliated, they feel frustrated, they feel like they have been let down, and worst of all they feel like there is no hope for a better future," Mr. Machnoug added.

Mr. Machnoug, the 28-year-old son of a Future Movement member of the Lebanese Parliament, first gained attention for enthusiastically supporting Syria's rebels at a time when most mainstream Sunni politicians hesitated to do so. Along with his confrontational calls for Hezbollah to disarm, this platform has lifted Mr. Machnoug from relative obscurity to popularity.

While perhaps more indicative of affinity with some of Lebanon's disgruntled March 14 youth than political power, Mr. Machnoug's Facebook page has garnered more than twice as many fans as Mr. Hariri's.

Mr. Machnoug says he is trying to set up a political organization that will be secular in outlook and draw support from a religiously diverse base. But he concedes that is no easy task and that it will take time. "The mind-set of people is geared toward assuming that if you are a politician and you are Sunni, then you are a Sunni politician," he said.

While he does not view himself as a Sunni politician, he champions causes that are on the minds of many in the Sunni community, to which most of his supporters belong. To a certain degree, Mr. Machnoug recognizes that by default, his message will be attractive to Sunnis. He said that he was looking to offer them an alternative political option, different from both the Future Movement and the puritanical Sunni radicalism of the Salafi sect.

One Salafi, Sheik Ahmed Assir, has gained notoriety in Lebanon this year by holding a monthlong sit-in in July along a stretch of highway in Sidon, south of Beirut, to protest the arsenal of weapons held by Hezbollah outside of government control. Like Mr. Machnoug, Mr. Assir has found that his political platform, based on supporting Syrian rebels and opposing Hezbollah, has quickly raised his profile.

"If most of the Sunni community is acting like I'm their zaim, in reality they are dealing with me because I'm vocalizing their pain," Mr. Assir said.

"The person who oppressed people in Syria is the same person who oppressed us, so therefore we are directly related to the revolution," he added.

When speaking of Hezbollah, Mr. Assir refuses even to use the name of the organization, which translates as the Party of God, considering it blasphemous.

"In the Koran, there are two parties, the Party of God and the Party of Satan -- if you are not with the Party of God, you are with the Party of Satan," he said.

Secular-minded Sunnis dismiss Mr. Assir as an attention-seeking rabble-rouser: Still, his political message, focused on restoring Sunni dignity and ending Syrian and Iranian influence in Lebanon, resonates with the Sunni community.

Despite his bold political actions -- and a threat to take to the streets again soon -- Mr. Assir denies that he is looking to become a political leader.

Analysts argue that while new voices in the Sunni community may wield new influence, they have little chance of challenging the traditional centers of Sunni political power.

"The outspoken figures we've seen emerge do not present a real alternative to the Future Movement, but they have played a role in fragmenting the Sunni electorate and channeling people's frustrations with the status quo," said Mr. Muhanna, the blogger.

Mr. Salamey, the political science professor at Lebanese American University, said that Mr. Hariri would remain "a very relevant political force in the country, regardless of and in spite of what happened, because the alternative is not out there."

For many in Lebanon, a zaim remains a zaim, even after death. Posters plastered across Beirut attest to undimmed loyalties: to Bashir Gemayel, the Christian warlord assassinated in 1982, to Musa Sadr, the Shiite cleric who disappeared in Libya in 1978 -- and to Rafik Hariri.
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World Bank, IMF Warn On Palestinian Budget Shortfall

September 20, 2012

AFP

The Palestinian Authority in the West Bank faces a \$400 million budget shortfall and risks "social upheaval," the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund warned on Wednesday.

The two financial institutions, in reports published ahead of a meeting of international donors in New York next Monday, urged new funding for the Ramallah-based government, which is struggling with a deep financial crisis.

In recent weeks, demonstrators have brought West Bank cities to a standstill over the spiralling cost of living, and particularly steep petrol costs.

The demonstrations forced prime minister Salam Fayyad to slash VAT and fuel prices.

The World Bank report warns of "a time of deepening fiscal crisis for the Palestinian Authority," noting that the situation is likely to "worsen by the end of 2012."

Both institutions said the government faces a current budget gap of \$400 million "if donor pledges are met," noting that promised funds, particularly from regional neighbours, have often not been forthcoming.

"If no additional donor funding is identified," the World Bank says, "the PA may be forced to finance the gap through accumulating additional arrears to the pension system and cutting some of its basic spending such as wages, which could have severe social impacts."

The IMF noted that growth has slowed and unemployment risen in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

In the West Bank, growth fell to five percent from nine percent in 2011 and the first quarter of 2012, while unemployment jumped to 19 percent in the first half of 2012, up from 16 percent in the same period a year earlier.

In Gaza, the IMF report said, growth slowed to six percent in the first quarter of 2012 even as unemployment climbed to 30 percent from 28 percent over the same period last year.

"Looking ahead, with persisting restrictions, financing difficulties with aid shortfalls, and stalemate in the peace process, there is a high risk of a continued economic slowdown, a rise in unemployment, and social upheaval," the report said.

Both institutions pointed to continued Israeli restrictions on Palestinian activity in Area C of the West Bank, which covers some 60 percent of the West Bank where Israel maintains full administrative and military control.

To "reverse the downward trend in economic growth," the private Palestinian sector "needs access to land in Area C," the World Bank report says.

"However, restrictions put in place by the government of Israel continue to stand in the way of potential private investment and remain the major impediment to sustainable economic growth."

Both institutions urged donors to pledge additional support, which the World Bank said would be "critical in the medium term to sustain... achievements and support the PA through its current crisis."

The Palestinian government has warned for months of a major budget shortfall, created in part by the failure of donors to deliver on pledged funds.

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New Sanctions Target Syria's Arms Suppliers

September 20, 2012

Washington Post

By Joby Warrick

The Obama administration moved Wednesday to punish companies from Belarus and Iran for allegedly providing Syria with weapons and communications gear used to battle rebels in the country's 18-month-old civil war.

Treasury Department officials also announced sanctions against a Syrian army supply group and a Syrian scientist who is suspected of overseeing the production of some of the country's chemical weapons.

The sanctions and other measures are the latest in a series of steps intended to squeeze Syria's economy and discourage foreign governments from aiding Syria's armed forces and its beleaguered president, Bashar al-Assad.

The actions "seek to disrupt the flow of weapons and communications equipment to the Syrian regime and help prevent their use against the Syrian people," said David S. Cohen, Treasury's undersecretary for terrorism and financial intelligence.

Documents released by the Treasury Department identified a state-owned Belarusian company, Belvneshpromservice, as having attempted to supply fuses for aerial bombs to the Syrian army. Aerial bombs were used by Syrian loyalists as recently as July in attacks against rebel strongholds in Aleppo, the country's largest city.

The Syrian agency that negotiated the purchase of bomb fuses, the Syrian Army Supply Bureau, was also targeted for sanctions in connection with efforts to procure a wide range of weapons and communications equipment for use against anti-government rebels, including electronic jamming devices, department officials said.

Much of the equipment was flown into the country by Iranian planes owned by the air carriers Iran Air, Mahan Air and Yas Air, administration officials said. Treasury documents identified 117 specific aircraft used by the three companies in carrying out routine smuggling operations, often posing as humanitarian-relief flights.

Under a law passed by Congress in April, the Treasury Department is authorized to blacklist US or foreign firms that conduct business with any of the sanctioned companies, department officials noted.

The Syrian scientist named in the documents was Amr Armanazi, director of a civilian research agency known as the Scientific Studies Research Center. The center has been previously linked to Syria's WMD programs, including biological and chemical weapons research, Treasury officials said in a statement.

During his tenure, Armanazi "oversaw a facility that was involved in the production of sarin nerve agent," the statement said.

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Extremists Showing Up On Front Lines In Syria

September 20; 2012

[Associated Press](#)

By Paul Schemm

TEL RIFAAT, Syria -- The bearded gunmen who surrounded the car full of foreign journalists in a northern Syrian village were clearly not Syrians. A heavyset man in a brown gown stepped forward, announced he was Iraqi and fingered through the American passport he had confiscated.

"We know all American journalists are spies. Now tell us what you are doing here and who you are spying for," he said in English before going on to accuse the US of the destruction of Iraq and Afghanistan.

"I really want to cut your head off right now," he added, telling his men, many of whom appeared to have North African accents, that this American kills Muslims.

With the intervention of nearby villagers, the confrontation eventually was defused. But it underscored the unpredictable element that foreign fighters bring to the Syrian conflict.

Most of those fighting the regime of President Bashar Assad are ordinary Syrians and soldiers who have defected, having become fed up with the authoritarian government, analysts say. But increasingly, foreign fighters and those adhering to an extremist Islamist ideology are turning up on the front lines. The rebels are trying to play down their influence for fear of alienating Western support, but as the 18-month-old fight grinds on, the influence of these extremists is set to grow.

On Monday, a UN panel reported a rise in the number of foreign fighters in the conflict and warned that it could radicalize the rebellion.

The Syrian government has always blamed the uprising on foreign terrorists, despite months of peaceful protests by ordinary citizens that only turned violent after repeated attacks by security forces. The transformation of the conflict into an open war has given an opening to the foreign fighters and extremists.

Talk about the role of foreign jihadists in the Syrian civil war began in earnest, however, with the rise in suicide bombings. US National Director of Intelligence James Clapper said in February that those attacks "bore the earmarks" of the jihadists in neighboring Iraq.

Rebel commanders are quick to dismiss the role of the foreign fighters and religious extremists, describing their numbers as few and their contribution as paltry.

Col. Abdel-Jabbar Aqidi, a top rebel commander for the Aleppo area, told The Associated Press there were maybe 500 jihadis involved in the battle for Aleppo, while a report from the Quilliam Foundation, a London-based think tank studying extremism, estimated a total of 1,200-1,500 foreign fighters in all of Syria.

Other commanders estimated that at most, jihadis, whether local or foreign, made up no more than 10 percent of the fighters.

While this is a small amount compared with the thousands of rebels estimated to be battling the regime, Peter Harling of the International Crisis Group warns that the religious extremists will have an influence on the rebellion.

"I think numbers are irrelevant," he said, adding that the extremists are a "very important phenomenon in many ways. Their presence is very divisive, whether there are many or not."

"They are certainly visible, and this increasingly shapes the complexion of the opposition in ways that are not negligible," Harling said.

Reflecting their extreme sensitivity to the topic, the media center on the Syrian-Turkish border investigated and questioned any journalists they discovered who had written about foreign fighters in Syria.

"My brother died in this revolution. This revolution means everything to me, and if the world thinks that al-Qaida is involved, it is finished," said Nader, a young rebel with the media center who declined to give his last name.

The media center investigated and questioned any journalists they discovered who had written about foreign fighters being involved in the rebellion.

Most of the rebels fighting in the north come from the countryside and have always been more traditional and religious than the more cosmopolitan urbanites of Aleppo.

Rebels often wear the beards associated with religious Muslims and pepper their conversations with references to their faith, but that does not necessarily mean they subscribe to ultraconservative views.

"Having a beard is not a symbol of extremists. It just means we're religious, like a woman wearing a headscarf or a Christian wearing a cross," said Abdel Malik Atassi, a young rebel in the town of Marea, as he gestured to his bearded comrades.

Atassi also noted that the fighters tend to be more religious.

"As a fighter, I am constantly close to death, so yes, I am more religious and I want to follow the prophet's traditions more closely in case I die," he added.

Rebel leaders like Abdel Aziz Salameh, one of the top commanders in the countryside, said that while he hopes for a future government system based on Islamic law, it will ultimately be the people's choice.

"We don't let the foreign fighters spread their way of thinking in our home," he told AP. "We don't need foreign fighters. We have 100,000 men who want to fight, but we don't have weapons for them."

While Salameh and other rebel commanders have pledged to respect Syria's pluralistic society, which includes many ethnic and religious minorities, the jihadis are increasingly framing this war as part of a regional struggle between the Sunni and Shiite sects of Islam.

Assad and many of the top people in the regime belong to the Alawite minority, an offshoot of Shiite Islam, and the jihadis are framing the struggle in Syria as another front in the battle against what they perceive as heretical Shiites.

In the numerous online statements celebrating their nearly daily operations in Syria, Jebhat al-Nusra, or Victory Front, the largest jihadist group, often states that the attacks are to "avenge the Sunnis killed by the apostate regime."

Despite their smaller numbers, the jihadis bring experience in fighting guerrilla wars as well as their own supply lines for much needed weapons and ammunition, making them attractive to local Syrians to join.

"The infiltration of weapons and funding to these groups, as well as the ethno-religious component of the Syrian uprising, is likely to continue to serve as a source of attraction for many fighters, some of whom are ex-Free Syrian Army soldiers and many of whom are from foreign countries," noted the September report by the Quilliam Foundation about the role of jihadis in the rebellion.

The jihadis also have a reputation for heading straight to the front lines. Few were in evidence in the countryside, where many rebel units are involved in managing the civilian areas.

A French physician with Doctors Without Borders working near the front lines in Aleppo said in an interview last week that based on style of dress and what their companions said, half of the rebels he treated were jihadis, both foreign and Syrian.

In the end, the 12 bearded men who threatened the car full of journalists may have backed down because of wanting to maintain a good relationship with the civilians from the nearby village.

The more a rebel group is entrenched in the population, the more self-discipline it will exercise and the less likely it will engage in atrocities, Harling said. The problem with the jihadis and foreign fighters is that they often have few links with civilians.

"There is no jihadi precedent in the Islamic world that hasn't ended in one way or another in total failure, which makes it difficult to understand how it carries so much appeal," he said.

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SCA

Afghan president urges peace, despite attacks

September 20, 2012

Associated Press

By AMIR SHAH and HEIDI VOGT

KABUL, Afghanistan — The Afghan president on Wednesday urged his nation to rally behind the push for peace negotiations with insurgents despite persistent violence, evoking the memory of a former leader who was assassinated while trying to broker talks with the Taliban.

"We should all strive for peace," said Hamid Karzai, adding that doing so continues the mission of slain former President Burhanuddin Rabbani, killed by a suicide bomber posing as an emissary from the insurgents.

Karzai spoke at a memorial marking the one-year anniversary of Rabbani's death, which badly shook confidence in the chance that a peaceful resolution could be achieved.

The ceremony came a day after a suicide bomber rammed a car packed with explosives into a minibus carrying foreign aviation workers to the airport in Kabul, killing at least 12 people, including nine foreigners.

A militant group said the attack aimed to avenge an anti-Islam film that ridicules the Prophet Muhammad. The film has sparked angry protests across the Muslim world, including in Afghanistan, after a video clip of it was posted on the Internet last week.

On Wednesday, attacks in three different provinces killed four police, two security guards and two civilians.

The attacks come at a time when the Afghan-U.S. alliance appears increasingly shaky and many Afghans predict civil war after the majority of international forces depart at the end of 2014.

And the Afghans may have to stand on their own more quickly than previously envisioned. A rash of attacks by Afghan police and soldiers against their international counterparts has prompted the NATO military coalition to restrict joint operations with Afghan forces.

So far this year, 51 international service members have died at the hands of Afghan forces or militants who have infiltrated them. That is more than 18 percent of the 279 international troops who have been killed in Afghanistan since the beginning of the year, according to figures compiled by The Associated Press.

Under the new NATO rules issued on Sunday, operations that mix small-sized Afghan and coalition units are no longer considered routine and require the approval of the regional commander. Previously, coalition troops routinely conducted operations such as patrolling or manning outposts with small units of their Afghan counterparts.

It's unclear whether the coalition's exit strategy can succeed with less partnering between foreign troops and Afghan policemen and soldiers, who are slated to take over for foreign combat troops by the end of 2014. NATO considers joint missions key to training Afghan forces.

Simon Gass, NATO's outgoing senior civilian envoy for Afghanistan, told reporters in Brussels on Wednesday that the new directive will not undermine the long-term international military mission.

"I don't think it's a strategic setback. It's not ideal and it's not what we wanted to happen (but) it is a sensible arrangement and it is temporary," Gass said, having just completed his 18-month tour.

"It was a setback but it is one that we will recover from," he added.

A year ago, before Rabbani's slaying, Afghans and their international partners seemed more optimistic about the future. Rabbani was the head of a group tasked with bringing the Taliban to the negotiating table and NATO was in the process of handing over cities and provinces to Afghan control, while saying they would still be close at hand as advisers and mentors.

Then on Sept. 20, 2011, a man posing as a high-level insurgent emissary seeking peace went into a meeting with Rabbani with a bomb hidden in his turban. He detonated the explosive as he shook Rabbani's hand, killing the former president on the spot. Rabbani's son later took on the leadership of the peace council, but talks are widely considered stalled, if they ever truly started.

And Taliban attacks and assassinations of government allies only increased this summer.

Karzai recalled how Rabbani consoled him when the president lost a brother who was gunned down by insurgents in July 2011. Many Afghans criticized Karzai for continuing to pursue reconciliation with the Taliban but Rabbani stood by his side, telling him that, "You did not lose the voice of peace. The Afghan nation needs peace," the president recounted.

However, the tone at the memorial was not all conciliatory. Speaking after Karzai, Rabbani's son lashed out at the Afghan government, accusing it of not doing enough to bring his father's murderers and those of other politicians to justice.

"People have the right to know who the people are behind these series of killings and why," Salahuddin Rabbani said. "Unfortunately, the government has failed in its investigations."

In the first of three attacks Wednesday, a bomb hidden in a parked motorcycle exploded outside a police training center in western Afghanistan, killing two security guards, said Herat provincial police spokesman, Noor Khan Nikzad. He said six guards were also wounded in the explosion.

No one immediately claimed responsibility for the attack, but it matched the pattern of Taliban strikes that typically target Afghan forces or government workers.

Then in the early evening, bombs went off in the two main southern cities of Kandahar and Lashkar Gah. The bomb in Kandahar went off near a police checkpoint, killing two police officers and one civilian, said provincial government spokesman Jawed Faisel. Then a gunman in Lashkar Gah to the west fired on police on motorcycles, killing another two officers and one civilian, said Helmand provincial spokesman Daoud Ahmadi.
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Obama, Karzai discuss 'insider' attacks in Afghanistan

September 20, 2012

Reuters

WASHINGTON - President Barack Obama and Afghan President Hamid Karzai agreed on Wednesday to press forward with a U.S.-Afghan security pact, the White House said, despite the curtailment of NATO operations in response to a surge in "insider" attacks on foreign servicemen.

"The two presidents discussed a range of issues, including efforts to stem insider attacks on U.S., coalition, and Afghan forces," the White House said in a statement summarizing a video conference call between the two leaders.

They also agreed to continue implementation of a Strategic Partnership agreement signed in May during Obama's visit to Afghanistan, the White House said.

The White House said on Tuesday there would be no change in Obama's timeline for gradually handing over security responsibility to Afghans and eventually withdrawing U.S. troops. NATO has agreed to remove most of its forces in 2014.

At least 51 foreign troops have been killed in "insider" attacks this year in which Afghan security personnel have turned their weapons on their Western mentors.

NATO ordered a cutback on Tuesday in operations with Afghan forces in response to a surge of insider attacks, but said the restriction was temporary and would not derail the security handover.

The two leaders also discussed the need to encourage "restraint and non-violence" in reaction to inflammatory materials, the White House said. U.S. diplomatic compounds in some Muslim countries have been hit by violent protests by demonstrators incensed by a film insulting to Islam.
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Blast Near Pakistani Air Base Kills 10

September 20, 2012

New York Times

By Ismail Khan, Declan Walsh

PESHAWAR, Pakistan -- A car bomb apparently aimed at a military vehicle killed 10 people and wounded 27 at a busy intersection here in Peshawar on Wednesday, as rowdy anti-American protests continued across the country.

Javed Marwat, a senior government official in Peshawar, said the blast occurred close to Badaber Air Base, which was used by the American military for espionage flights over the Soviet Union in the 1960s, and which is now controlled by the Pakistani military.

The blast appeared to come from a remote-control device planted at the intersection, Mr. Marwat said; other officials said it appeared to be targeting a passing Pakistan Air Force vehicle.

"The accuracy and timing of the bombing suggests that it was targeted," said Shafqat Malik, head of the Peshawar bomb squad.

High-intensity explosives, including artillery shells, had been placed inside a vehicle parked at the junction, and several shops were destroyed by the blast, Mr. Malik said.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility but a senior police official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said that Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, or the Pakistani Taliban, was the principal suspect. "It looks more the handiwork of the T.T.P. than any other group," he said.

In early September a suicide bomber struck an American diplomatic vehicle in Peshawar, killing at least two people and wounding 19, most of them passers-by.

Meanwhile, protests continued across Pakistan against an American film deemed to be insulting to Islam. In Peshawar, traders and students rallied in the streets; in the capital Islamabad, protesting lawyers broke into the heavily guarded diplomatic enclave, shouting anti-American slogans.

In the eastern city of Lahore, an Islamist student group led a march on the American Consulate, at one point climbing over containers designed to stop their advance toward the building. The police stepped up security outside the consulate after protesters managed to scale the perimeter walls during a demonstration earlier in the week.

In Hyderabad, a businessman is being investigated for blasphemy after he refused to close his shops in unity with protests against the video, prompting accusations that he supported the film, The Associated Press reported.

In an apparent bid to control the momentum of the protests, the government declared next Friday a national holiday in honor of the prophet Mohammed and encouraged people to protest peacefully.

"The holiday is not for leisure but for peaceful protests," said the information minister, Qamar Zaman Kaira.

The government has already banned YouTube; on Friday the prime minister, Raja Pervez Ashraf, will address an Islamic convention in Islamabad.

"We respect freedom of speech and expression, but we cannot allow anyone to issue hate speeches or hate material," said Mr. Kaira.

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Pakistani accused by film protesters of blasphemy

September 20, 2012

Associated Press

By ASIF SHAHZAD

ISLAMABAD — Demonstrators angry over an anti-Islam film accused a local businessman in southern Pakistan of blasphemy, forcing the police to open a case and driving him and his family into hiding, following an argument that broke out when he refused to join their protest, officials said Wednesday.

The incident demonstrates the potential for abuse of the country's strict blasphemy laws as well as the intense feelings the film, which denigrates Islam's Prophet Muhammed, has unleashed in Pakistan.

At least two people have died in protests against the film, which has generated widespread animosity across the Muslim world.

The incident in the city of Hyderabad began when hundreds of protesters rallied Saturday. Some protesters demanded that businessman Haji Nasrullah Khan shut his roughly 120 shops in solidarity, said police officer Munir Abbasi.

When Khan refused, one of his tenants said his decision supported the film, the officer said.

The protesters claimed Khan insulted the Prophet while arguing with them, said city police chief Fareed Jan. But he said there was no evidence to suggest the insults really occurred and that police only opened a blasphemy case because they were pressured by the mob. Opening such a case doesn't mean the person is necessarily charged with the crime but that police are investigating him or her.

Protesters ransacked Khan's house, and surrounded a police station, refusing to go away until officials opened a blasphemy case, Abbasi said.

The situation became even more inflamed when religious leaders from one of the biggest mosques in the city issued an edict calling for Khan's death and announced from the mosque's loudspeakers that he should be killed, Abbasi said.

The police officer said Khan and his family members had gone into hiding in fear for their lives.

Under Pakistan's blasphemy laws, anyone found guilty of defiling the holy book, or Quran, or insulting Islam's Prophet Muhammad can face life in prison or death.

Critics say the laws are often abused to harass non-Muslims or to settle personal rivalries. Radical Islamist groups have also been behind some of the blasphemy accusations.

In this case, Abbasi said, police suspect some of the complaints against Khan by other shopkeepers may have been sparked more by his desire to evict some of them for late payment as opposed to any actual insults.

Abbasi said a prominent pro-Taliban religious party, Jamiat-e-Ulema Pakistan, and an al-Qaida linked militant group, Sipah-e-Sahaba, had been advocating against the shopkeeper.

Despite the potential for abuse, efforts to amend or repeal the blasphemy laws have failed in the past.

Last year, a minister and a governor were assassinated when they spoke out about misuse of the laws and suggested changing them. The governor was shot and killed by his own guard.

Rights activists and critics of the laws had hoped that the recent case of a 14-year-old girl charged with insulting the Quran would help bring about changes in the laws, or at least help curb abuse.

The case gained widespread attention and sympathy both in Pakistan and internationally due to her young age and questions about her mental capacity.

She was granted bail after a religious cleric was accused of planting evidence to incriminate her, and her lawyers have said they will move to throw the case out entirely.

But a blasphemy accusation, even an unproven one, can be a death sentence in Pakistan.

A report by the Islamabad-based Center for Research and Security Studies said that since 1990, 52 people have been killed by vigilantes after being implicated in blasphemy cases.

Earlier this summer a mob in one Pakistani city dragged an accused blasphemer from a police building, beat him to death and burned the body.

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WHA/EUR

Anti-Islam Film Controversy Hits Europe, Asia

September 20, 2012

USA Today

By Charles McPhedran

BERLIN -- Europeans are worried over becoming the next battleground over an anti-Islam video. German officials are considering a ban on a screening in Berlin, while a French weekly magazine published cartoons of the prophet Mohammed, including some of him naked. Government officials and Muslim community leaders are calling for calm.

Controversy over The Innocence of Muslims, a film produced by an Egyptian Christian living in California, has spread to Europe, where German officials are exploring legal options to ban the video and France has banned a protest.

"There's no reason to let this conflict enter one that doesn't involve France enter our country," French Prime Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault said.

The video, which depicts the prophet Mohammed in a disparaging way, has sparked violent Muslim protests in the Middle East and North Africa, leaving Europeans worried over the reaction of their own Muslim populations, which number about 6 million in France and 4 million in Germany.

In Russia, home to 20 million Muslims, the government planned to ban the film, and possibly block access to it on YouTube.

In the past decade, European officials have been increasingly concerned over the rise of extremism, both among its Muslim populations and from far-right factions that oppose Muslim immigration.

Now a debate over freedom of speech is brewing in Europe, as protests are prohibited and publications are scrutinized.

The French government defended the right of satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo, whose offices were firebombed last year by unknown assailants, to publish cartoons depicting Mohammed, a practice Muslims consider blasphemous. It's not the first time the weekly is at the center of such a storm: In 2008, it was acquitted by a Paris appeals court of "publicly abusing a group of people because of their religion" after a complaint by Muslim associations.

The German fringe party Pro Deutschland, which has clashed with Muslims in the past, wants to screen The Innocence of Muslims in November at a theater in Berlin. The party has contacts with Terry Jones, a Florida pastor who has threatened to burn the Quran as a way to express his opposition to the faith.

"The public has a right to see this film and to make up its mind or express an opinion after having seen the film in full," Pro Deutschland leader Manfred Rouhs said.

The German Interior Ministry said it is looking into whether it can prevent the screening. Some German officials called the film an abuse of free-speech laws and called for "anti-blasphemy laws," which would prohibit insulting religions.

"I want more respect for people's religious beliefs," said German Interior Minister Hans-Peter Friedrich.

Free-speech advocates criticized the proposal.

German Social Democrat lawmaker Dieter Wiefelspuetz told German daily newspaper taz that a ban should be a last resort. "A purely foreign-policy-related consideration is not enough to warrant limiting basic civil rights," he said.

Meanwhile, government officials and Muslim leaders called for cool heads.

"This is a disgraceful and hateful, useless and stupid provocation," Dalil Boubakeur, rector of France's Grand Paris Mosque, told the Associated Press. "We are not like animals of Pavlov to react at each insult."

Germany's Muslim population includes thousands of Salafists who believe in Islamic states. It is largely Salafist clerics who have organized protests in the Middle East against US embassies and other targets.

In May, Germany saw clashes erupt between the Salafist Muslims and far-right activists in the former German capital Bonn. Scores of police officers were injured in violence that started after a group affiliated with Pro Deutschland displayed Danish cartoons of Mohammed — the same depictions that led to protests in 2005 in which dozens of people died and embassies were attacked.

"In the past, we've seen police officers attacked and severely injured by Salafists," said Reiner Wendt from the German Trade Union of the Police.

Muslim leaders warned that not all Germans would react to any screening of the film with moderation.

"There is reason to fear that extremists on both sides won't refrain from violence," said Secretary of the German Central Council of Muslims Nurhan Soykan.

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French Magazine Runs Cartoons That Mock Muhammad

September 20, 2012

[New York Times](#)

By SCOTT SAYARE and NICOLA CLARK

PARIS — Calling itself a defender of free speech and a denouncer of religious backwardness, a French satirical newspaper on Wednesday published several crude caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad, images viewed as a provocation by many Muslims and condemned by the French government as irresponsible at a time of violence and unrest across the Islamic world.

In South Asia and the Middle East, protests continued Wednesday over an amateur video, titled "The Innocence of Muslims" and produced in the United States, which also disparages the prophet. Given that context, the French government had urged the weekly newspaper, Charlie Hebdo, to reconsider printing the illustrations, some of which depict Muhammad naked and in pornographic poses.

The newspaper refused; after Charlie Hebdo arrived at newsstands on Wednesday, the government announced that French embassies, consulates, cultural centers and schools in about 20 countries would be closed Friday as a precautionary measure. Security will be raised at embassies and consulates, a Foreign Ministry spokesman said, though no specific threats against French targets have been identified.

Accustomed to denunciations by the government, Muslims and almost every other religious or political group in France, Charlie Hebdo stood by its editorial choice. "We're a newspaper that respects French law," said Gérard Biard, the editor in chief. "Now, if there's a law that is different in Kabul or Riyadh, we're not going to bother ourselves with respecting it."

The caricatures are meant to satirize the video and the violence it has stirred, he said, and to denounce that violence as absurd.

"What are we supposed to do when there's news like this?" Mr. Biard asked. "Are we supposed to not do that news?"

French officials acknowledged the newspaper's right to publish as it pleased, within the limits of the law, but deplored its choice to print images that might be reasonably expected to cause violence.

"In the present context, given this absurd video that has been aired, strong emotions have been awakened in many Muslim countries," Laurent Fabius, the foreign minister, told France Info radio. "Is it really sensible or intelligent to pour oil on the fire?"

In a statement, the French Council of the Muslim Faith warned that the cartoons risked "exacerbating tensions," but urged French Muslims "not to cede to provocation" and to express their grievances via the courts. An appeal for calm will be read during Friday Prayer in several hundred mosques across the country, the rector of Paris's Grand Mosque announced.

The Arab League denounced the illustrations, as did the White House. "We don't question the right of something like this to be published," Jay Carney, the White House press secretary, told reporters. "We just question the judgment behind the decision to publish it."

In Egypt, where protesters last week attacked the American Embassy, the Muslim Brotherhood said the cartoons were blasphemous and hurtful, and called upon the French judiciary to condemn the newspaper. Mahmoud Ghozlan, a spokesman, noted that French law prohibited Holocaust denial. Similar provisions might be made for comments deemed blasphemous under Islam, he suggested.

"If anyone doubts the Holocaust happened, they are imprisoned," Mr. Ghozlan told Reuters. "It is not fair or logical" that the same not be the case for those who insult Islam, he said.

There were no reports of protests over the caricatures on Wednesday, but demonstrations against "The Innocence of Muslims" continued across the globe. In the Pakistani capital, Islamabad, protesting lawyers broke into the heavily guarded diplomatic enclave, shouting anti-American slogans. Protesters rallied in Peshawar and Lahore as well.

In an apparent bid to control the momentum of the protests, the Pakistani government declared next Friday a national holiday in honor of Muhammad, and encouraged peaceful protest. The government has already banned YouTube, where the video first surfaced.

Hundreds reportedly protested in Sri Lanka, where effigies of President Obama were burned, and in Afghanistan, where a suicide bomber killed 14 people on Tuesday, apparently in retaliation for the film. In Lebanon, where the Shiite group Hezbollah has called for protests against the film, thousands marched in the city of Tyre on Wednesday, chanting anti-American slogans.

In France, Prime Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault said the government would block a series of protests planned in several cities for Saturday in response to the video. "There is no reason for us to let a conflict that doesn't concern France come into our country," Mr. Ayrault told RTL radio.

Stéphane Charbonnier, the editorial director of Charlie Hebdo, challenged that decision.

"Why should they prohibit these people from expressing themselves?" Mr. Charbonnier asked. "We have the right to express ourselves, they have the right to express themselves, too."

Police officers were sent Wednesday to guard the offices of Charlie Hebdo, in eastern Paris. The newspaper's former headquarters were gutted by a firebomb last year after the publication of another issue featuring images of Muhammad. Mr. Biard, the editor in chief, described the newspaper as "atheist" and "democratic," but also a defender of France's fervent secularism, known as "laïcité."

"We're a newspaper against religions as soon as they enter into the political and public realm," Mr. Biard said. Religious leaders, and Muslim religious leaders in particular, have manipulated their French followers for political reasons, he asserted.

"You're not meant to identify yourself through a religion, in any case not in a secular state," Mr. Biard said.

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Cartoons Prompt French Closures

September 20, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By INTI LANDAURO

PARIS—France will close embassies and French schools in 20 countries on Friday, its Foreign Ministry said, amid fears of a backlash after a French magazine published a series of caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad.

French authorities said they feared the cartoons published Wednesday in satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo could cause more outrage in the Muslim world, days after a video denigrating the Prophet Muhammad helped to fuel violent protests at U.S. and other Western embassies in several Muslim countries.

Paris's move to pre-emptively close its embassies highlights how Western governments are grappling to respond to a wave of protests whose flash points lie largely out of their control.

The French government said that although freedom of speech rules applied in France, the magazine's publication of the cartoons was ill-timed. "It is dangerous, even irresponsible, when we know the general climate, to pour oil on fire," Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius told reporters in Paris on Wednesday.

French authorities didn't disclose the list of embassies subject to closure. But government officials said they had decided to close buildings on Friday because it is the main day of prayer for Muslims, suggesting the order would apply mainly to Muslim countries. Ambassadors could choose to keep their embassies closed beyond Friday for security reasons, a spokesman at the Foreign Ministry said.

French interests overseas have so far been spared by recent protests in Muslim countries that began in Egypt and Libya and have since erupted elsewhere in the Middle East and South Asia.

In Paris, about 150 protesters were arrested Saturday during what police described as an unauthorized rally near the U.S. Embassy.

Charlie Hebdo defended its decision to publish the prophet cartoons. "If we start to wonder whether we have the right to draw Muhammad or not, or if it is dangerous to do it, we will have to start to wonder whether we can draw Muslims or human beings in the paper," the weekly magazine's editor in chief, known only as Charb, told French radio RTL. "Eventually, we won't be drawing anything, and a bunch of extremists in the world and in France will have won."

The magazine's headquarters in Paris were put under heightened police protection, police said.

Charlie Hebdo's offices were struck by arson last year after the paper published a special issue with Muslim cartoons called "Sharia Hebdo."

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Russia Slams U.S. Agency for 'Political' Aid Agenda

September 20, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By ALAN CULLISON

MOSCOW—Russia accused the U.S. on Wednesday of trying to influence elections inside the country under the guise of aid to pro-democracy groups, confirming it is kicking the U.S. Agency for International Development out of the country and warning that Russia's civic groups no longer need U.S. funding.

The demarcation is the most serious blow yet to the "reset" in relations with Russia that had been an avowed accomplishment of the Obama administration. It signals that President Vladimir Putin is planning a harder tack toward Russian civic groups, the fostering of which had been a key component the White House's strategy of engaging both the Kremlin and its critics.

That "dual track" has turned into a balancing act for the Obama administration—which is now coping with a leadership in Moscow that is increasingly hostile and suspicious of U.S. intentions, as well as critics in the U.S. who accuse the White House of going soft on Mr. Putin's authoritarianism.

The White House has argued that it can collaborate with the Kremlin on pressing issues like Iran and Afghanistan, even as it pushes for democracy and human rights in Russia. That approach appeared to work with Russia's former president, Dmitry Medvedev, who voiced support for Western ideals and an open political system in Russia. Mr. Putin, by contrast, has shown little patience since returning to power this year for what he has characterized as Western meddling.

The Obama administration's architect of the reset, U.S. Ambassador Michael McFaul, arrived in Moscow in January. He has since been harassed by pro-Kremlin youth groups and maligned in the state-controlled media as a plotter of post-Soviet revolts. U.S. officials had hoped the anti-American campaign was a passing tactic to buttress Mr. Putin's appeal before March presidential elections, but the rhetoric has continued.

In its tersely worded statement, Russia's foreign ministry said Wednesday that Moscow was expelling USAID because the agency wasn't always meeting its stated goals of promoting "bilateral humanitarian cooperation," and that its workers were trying to "influence the political process through the distribution of grants" to groups of its choosing.

The ministry said USAID's activities raised "serious question" in Russia's regions, but especially in the North Caucasus, where the Kremlin is facing a simmering Islamist insurgency. The statement confirmed that USAID had until Oct. 1 to cease activities in Russia, a pressing deadline that U.S. officials had declined to mention previously in an apparent hope it would be delayed.

The U.S. stands by the work of USAID in Russia, an administration official said, adding that the agency's departure doesn't signal a change in U.S. policy. In the coming weeks, the official said, the White House "will be looking at ways to advance our old foreign-policy objectives using different new means."

Russia's foreign ministry statement warned, however, that Russia would take a dim view of USAID trying to fund Russian civic groups from abroad. The ministry said Moscow was prepared to cooperate with USAID outside Russia, but only if the cooperation was in the spirit of "equality and respect for each other's interests and non-interference in internal affairs."

The U.S. wouldn't speak to Russia's motivations for the ouster, said State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland, who cited several successes from the reset, including U.S.-Russian cooperation over Iran and North Korea. "We've also always said that the reset allows us to speak frankly when we

disagree, and we've always been very up-front about our concerns—about human rights in Russia, rule of law, free, fair, transparent elections, and we'll continue to do so," Ms. Nuland said.

USAID's annual aid to Russian groups totals only about \$50 million. But the agency's abrupt pullout is likely to upend the work of some prominent recipients that have come to rely almost entirely on the funding.

Among these is the vote monitoring group Golos, a central player in alleging election fraud during parliamentary and presidential elections in the past year that formally returned Mr. Putin to the presidency.

Golos had trained a network of observers for Oct. 14 municipal and regional elections in Russia, but the withdrawal of USAID funding "may call that work into question," said its leader, Liliya Shibanova.

Another loser will be the human-rights watchdog Memorial, which was founded by Soviet dissidents to collect files on victims of the Soviet purges. More recently, the group has been documenting abuse and disappearances in Russia's North Caucasus, especially in Chechnya. The foreign ministry statement clearly referred to Memorial's work in Chechnya as a threat to the government, said Memorial chairman Oleg Orlov.

"We believe that the fight against terrorism, by state terrorism, is foolish, harmful and irrational," said Mr. Orlov, who said USAID funding made up a "meaningful part" of the group's budget.

Transparency International Russia, which monitors perceptions of corruption in the country, said the cutoff will represent a blow to a small operation in the country that relies on USAID for covering office costs.

In its statement, the foreign ministry said Russia, whose economy has been fired by an oil and metals boom that has largely coincided with Mr. Putin's rule, is now "quite mature and does not need 'external leadership' " from the likes of USAID.

Officials of the Kremlin-controlled United Russia party praised USAID's expulsion, saying it would bring new vitality to homegrown Russian NGOs.

Under Mr. Putin, who has compared U.S.-funded civic groups to Judas Iscariot, the Kremlin has promoted parallel groups of civic organizations that don't receive foreign funding and invited many of them into a Kremlin advisory group called The Public Chamber. Kremlin critics have derided the group as a puppet organization.

On Wednesday, Mr. Putin's top anti-corruption official, Sergei Ivanov, held a meeting with anti-corruption civic groups without inviting Transparency International. Mr. Ivanov urged listeners to ignore various ratings that had given Russia abysmal scores for corruption.

"Don't worry over it and don't let it become a tragedy," he said, according to the Russian government-run RIA-Novosti news agency. "All ratings are subjective."

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EDITORIAL / OPINION

The United States And The Muslim World

September 20, 2012

New York Times

The anti-Islam video that set off attacks against American embassies and violent protests in the Muslim world was a convenient fuse for rage. Deeper forces are at work in those societies, rived by pent-up anger over a lack of jobs, economic stagnation and decades of repression by previous Arab governments.

In the wake of the Arab Spring, these newly liberated nations have become battlegrounds for Islamic extremists, moderates and secularists, all contending for power and influence over the direction of democratic change. These forces and the attacks may be beyond the control of American foreign policy, no matter how some might want to think otherwise.

Plenty of Islamist leaders, and Al Qaeda affiliates, are eager to exploit unrest for their own purposes. One particularly destructive force is Hassan Nasrallah, the Hezbollah chief who rallied a huge anti-American demonstration in Lebanon. He is undoubtedly trying to revive his own popularity, badly damaged by his alliance with the brutal Syrian president, Bashar al-Assad.

The anti-American extremists who murdered Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens and three of his colleagues in Benghazi, Libya, or went on rampages in other cities have reinforced the worst fears of those who see Muslims mainly through a prism of intolerance and hate. The extremists have also done serious damage to their economies; tourism and businesses cannot grow in chaos and insecurity.

Instead of demanding that their governments deliver needed jobs and housing, the protesters focused on a crude video promoted by hatemongering fanatics in the United States. With the news media mostly state-controlled in the Arab world, the idea of the United States government refusing to censor offensive anti-Islam material on free speech grounds remains inexplicable to many Muslims. On Wednesday, a French magazine published vulgar caricatures of Prophet Muhammad, provoking a new wave of outrage.

In 2009, President Obama wisely sought rapprochement with Muslims. Speaking in Cairo, he endorsed an approach of mutual respect and promised that while he would never hesitate to confront extremism, America never would be at war with Islam. He also challenged Muslims to establish elected, peaceful governments that respect all their people. Few would have predicted then how many Arab nations would now be struggling to meet that standard. As troubling as they are, the protests should be seen in context. Most of the crowds were a few thousand people or less. And many leaders -- the Libyans and Tunisians, especially, but also the Turkish prime minister, the grand mufti in Saudi Arabia and, belatedly, Egyptian leaders -- condemned the violence and promised to beef up security at American embassies and consulates. They need to keep speaking out and also publicly explain to their people why a relationship with the United States even matters. The Libyans who tried to save Ambassador Stevens certainly saw value in those ties.

Mitt Romney and the Republicans have leveled preposterous charges that Mr. Obama has been weak and apologetic. They have offered only confusing and often contradictory assertions in place of a coherent alternative. They haven't gotten the message that Washington cannot, and should not, try to impose its will on the fragile Arab democracies.

But it would be wrong to retreat from supporting people in Libya, Tunisia and Egypt who are committed to building democratic governments and pluralistic societies based on the rule of law as some in Congress urge. The United States has to stay engaged in whatever ways it can.
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There's No Place For Censorship-By-Riot

September 20, 2012

Washington Post

By Charles Lane

Charlie Hebdo, a French satire magazine, published Wednesday cartoons that nastily mock the prophet Muhammad, and European governments immediately feared more violence like the murder and arson at US diplomatic installations that followed the appearance of a crude video about Muhammad. France closed 20 embassies as a precaution; the French foreign minister chided the magazine for pouring "oil on the fire." Germany's foreign minister used the same phrase.

I say: One cheer for Charlie Hebdo. I doubt that its cartoons are either laudable or responsible. In fact, I'm sure that they are neither. But if free speech means anything, it's the right to say and publish things that other people find objectionable and irresponsible, even blasphemous. Censorship is an affront to freedom, whether imposed by official decree or through a rioters' veto -- as the Middle Eastern mobs and those who set them in motion seem to want.

That is the legitimate political point that Charlie Hebdo's editors are making, at no small risk to their safety. The publication's offices were fire-bombed last year and have been under police protection since. As the magazine's director told Reuters: "It shows the climate -- everyone is driven by fear, and that is exactly what this small handful of extremists who do not represent anyone want -- to make everyone afraid, to shut us all in a cave."

There's been too much equivocation about such matters lately.

I can understand why the Obama administration, trying to quench a crisis last week, would denounce the trashy and deliberately insulting video "Innocence of Muslims." To their credit, administration officials, the most forthright of whom was Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, said that nothing can justify violence -- and tried to defend free speech.

But they couldn't really square the circle. The more official opprobrium they heaped on the video, the more they implied that the rioters had a valid point -- and the more they seemed to reward violence.

I suppose that the US government could try to denounce all potentially Islamophobic expression consistently, regardless of whether it triggers violence, just as the French government has preemptively distanced itself from Charlie Hebdo's cartoons.

But that would be an impossible task -- even if the government could explain why it condemns mockeries of Muhammad and not, say, Mel Gibson's "The Passion of the Christ."

Meanwhile, Obama administration actions undermined its words about free expression. The White House contacted Google, which does millions of dollars in business with the federal government, and asked it to reconsider whether "Innocence of Muslims" might have violated YouTube's terms of use.

Exercising highly selective prosecutorial discretion, the government rounded up the video's alleged producer for an "entirely voluntary" session with his federal probation officer.

Gen. Martin Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, took it upon himself to call the Rev. Terry Jones, the Islamophobic preacher in Florida, to warn him that US troops would be in danger if he didn't cease his support for the offensive video.

Think about that: The commander of the world's most powerful military machine contacted an American civilian and suggested that his exercise of a constitutional right -- and not enemy forces -- was putting US lives at risk. But it's not surprising, given that Dempsey's former staff lawyer argued in a recent op-ed that "Innocence of Muslims" is not constitutionally protected speech.

Among the many threats that Islamic extremism poses to the West, censorship-by-riot may be the most insidious. We have been facing it at least since Iran's Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini issued a kill-the-apostate decree against British novelist Salman Rushdie in 1989. It arose again in 2006, when Muhammad-mocking cartoons in Denmark prompted the sacking of Danish embassies and death threats against the artist.

Think I exaggerate? No less a pillar of intellectual freedom than Yale University Press decided three years ago not to publish the Danish cartoons in an academic book on the controversy, even though they were clearly relevant. Yale declined to print any images of Muhammad in the book, including a sketch by the 19th-century artist Gustave Doré. Yale said "experts" advised that depicting the prophet might offend some Muslims and trigger violence.

We can't slide one more inch down this slippery slope. Voltaire famously remarked: "I do not agree with a word that you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it." That must be the West's unequivocal, united answer to those who would exploit the ugly words of a few to justify the violent deeds of a mob.

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Obama Vs. Islamic Extremists

September 20, 2012

[USA Today](#)

By Bob Beckel, Cal Thomas

Cal Thomas is a conservative columnist. Bob Beckel is a liberal Democratic strategist. But as longtime friends, they can often find common ground on issues that lawmakers in Washington cannot.

Cal: If you know history, Bob, you'll recall that the US has had strained relations with Muslims since at least the early 1800s. That was when Thomas Jefferson ordered warships to the Mediterranean to free US merchant vessels and their crews from Barbary pirates who were holding them for ransom. Now that was decisive action! It was the opposite of the kowtowing policy of President Obama, which has encouraged Islamic extremists to kill our diplomats and attack our embassies.

Bob: President Obama's policy has done nothing to encourage Islamic extremists, and it's shameful for conservatives to blame the president for the deaths of our diplomats. It's appropriate for you conservatives to cite Jefferson's foreign policy since conservative policies haven't advanced much beyond 1800. Libya is free of a dictator thanks to President Obama and NATO. By the way, it is increasingly clear that terrorists killed our diplomats.

Cal: I doubt most of the rioters ever saw the anti-Muslim video that sparked all the outrage. Groups with ties to al-Qaeda had been planning the attack on our consulate in Benghazi for some time. The small number of guards were overpowered. What is our response? Secretary Hillary Clinton focused on denouncing the video and again assuring Muslims we respect their "great religion." That attitude is seen as weakness and will encourage more violence.

Bob: For such a smart guy, Cal, your facts are simply wrong. The terrorists who killed our diplomats used the demonstrations as cover to carry out a completely separate operation. The protest was a response to a despicable film that was a disgusting portrayal of the Muslim faith. If the protests and the killings were coordinated, why didn't we see acts of terror in Egypt or Tunisia or other Muslim countries where protesters gathered? What do you conservatives want to do, bomb the Muslim world back to the Stone Age?

Cal: They're already in the Stone Age. The video has been on the Internet since July, but went unnoticed until a rabble-rousing Egyptian TV channel, Al Nas, broadcast a version dubbed in Arabic. Intelligence reports reveal that al-Qaeda was planning an event in conjunction with the Sept. 11 anniversary. If it hadn't been the video, it would have been some other pretext.

Bob: I agree any anti-Muslim material could have touched off riots, but this film was particularly vile.

Cal: Many of these nations have great oil wealth. They have not used it to build better lives for their people. Instead, they have used that wealth to finance corruption and terrorism aimed at Israel and America. Israel and America aren't their problem. Muslim nations are their own problem. It's time for a different and more pragmatic approach. Strength and consistency are what they respect.

Bob: You're back to your gunboat diplomacy. The problem is we don't have enough gunboats, and the American public lacks patience with more military actions in the Middle East. I was amazed when Mitt Romney attacked Obama's Mideast policy. I was joined in my outrage against Romney's statement by several prominent Republicans. What ever happened to the idea that in a crisis, politics stops at the water's edge?

Cal: I'm not talking "gunboat diplomacy." There are other options, including a consistent and realistic policy, which escapes this administration. But I'm glad you brought up that "water's edge" business. Recall the criticism of Presidents Johnson and Nixon by leading Democrats about their prosecution of the Vietnam War. Many believed at the time that Sens. George McGovern and J. William Fulbright encouraged the Vietnamese to keep fighting because they saw division in America.

Bob: Fulbright and McGovern were right about that war.

Cal: In retrospect, I agree with you, but that's a different issue. We're discussing when a president's foreign policy can be criticized. There were Democrats, including yourself, who criticized the second President Bush's invasion of Iraq to topple Saddam Hussein.

Bob: Again, I am looking better all the time, given the violence there.

Cal: Sen. Harry Reid openly opposed George W. Bush on the Iraq War, even declaring the war "lost" before it was over. Talk about giving aid and comfort to the enemy.

Bob: This raises a bigger issue. The US has not had a consensus foreign policy since the end of the Cold War.

Cal: Agreed! I hope that during the upcoming presidential debates, the questioners will ask President Obama and Mitt Romney about America's role in the world. I think you and I agree that while John F. Kennedy's statement in his 1961 inaugural address that the US would "pay any price, bear any burden" in the defense of liberty was noble then, it is unrealistic now.

Bob: I couldn't agree more. Ever since the US became the world's sole superpower, it seems we are expected to project American military strength whenever conflict appears anywhere in the world. In the Middle East, we supported the Arab Spring. But in cases like Egypt, where the pro-Islamist Muslim Brotherhood won power in free and fair elections, we might wish for a different result, but that is democracy. We can't now project American power in a democracy just because we don't like election outcomes.

Cal: You and I have watched many elections that replaced old dictators with new ones. It should be clear we aren't going to "convert" nations with no experience in democracy and constitutional government overnight. Only Turkey among Muslim nations has a constitutional democracy, and that country has been flirting with fundamentalism. We are fooling ourselves at great cost in lives and treasure if we continue down this road seeking to impose our way of life on people who mostly don't want it.

Bob: It will take some time for the advantages of democracy to develop in these countries. I agree it is not our business to convert these countries to our way of thinking, but we should not walk away. If we leave a vacuum, China or Russia will fill it.

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Demanding Justice From Libya, Egypt And Pakistan

September 20, 2012

Washington Times

By Sen. Rand Paul

By now my colleagues in the Senate are familiar with the tragic story of Pakistani doctor Shakil Afridi. Since Dr. Afridi was taken into custody by Pakistani officials in May 2012, I have been fighting for his release. I have also been working for a vote on a bill that would cut foreign aid to Pakistan until they free this ally of America.

In the weeks leading up to that attack on the compound by SEAL Team 6, there was a doctor in Pakistan who helped us determine Osama bin Laden's exact location. Dr. Afridi risked his own life to provide the American military with intelligence that confirmed the particular location of the bin Laden compound. The information provided by Dr. Afridi directly led to bin Laden's death.

Dr. Afridi remains under arrest and has been subject to torture. If Pakistan wants to be our ally -- and receive foreign aid -- then they should act like it, and they must start by releasing Dr. Afridi.

As I was fighting this battle, tragedy struck again in the Middle East with the attack that killed four Americans in Benghazi, Libya, at the US consulate, and the attack on the US embassy in Egypt. I, like many Americans, was outraged. I believe that the perpetrators of these senseless acts of violence must be brought to justice, but I also believe that Libya and Egypt must be held accountable in the same way.

Therefore, I have proposed a bill to demand that until the Libyan police hand over suspects to US officials, and until the Egyptian government vows to protect our embassy, any US foreign aid will be suspended.

Last week, I requested that Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, Nevada Democrat, provide a brief amount of time for debate and a vote on my amendment to end US aid to Pakistan, Egypt and Libya. Yet, Senate Democrat leadership blocked it. I will continue my effort this week and have announced my intentions to stop all Senate business with a filibuster.

You and I have been reminded that our enemies are relentless, but we were also reminded that our so-called allies are often not acting like allies at all. We send billions of taxpayer dollars abroad and what do we get in return? Disrespect, disdain and, ultimately, violence.

American taxpayer dollars should not go to Libya until the murderers are delivered to justice. Nor should they go to Egypt until the Egyptians prove that they are willing and able to protect our embassy. Finally, not one more penny of American taxpayer dollars should go to Pakistan until the doctor who helped us get bin Laden is freed.

We should not reward bad behavior, yet that is what we've done with foreign aid for so many years. The total US foreign aid given to Pakistan, Libya and Egypt equals roughly \$4 billion per year. But enough is enough. So I have announced that I will block any and all legislation until Mr. Reid allows for a debate and vote on these foreign aid bills.

As this is expected to be the final week of legislative session for both the House and Senate before an extended recess, the elected officials must take immediate action to pass a much-needed bill demanding cooperation and accountability from the countries involved in the recent violence directed at our embassies, consulates and allies.

The timing of this action by Congress is vitally important. I have insisted on floor consideration and votes on these issues in the Senate, and will be engaged in a filibuster of the Continuing Resolution (CR) and any recess for adjournment until the Senate allows action on these vital matters.

The CR is not due until Sept. 30, but because my colleagues in the Senate seem to value their campaigning time, the Senate is trying to vote on the CR this week and leave until the election. I vow to filibuster any legislation until the Senate addresses our vital need for foreign aid reform. I regretfully apologize to all of my colleagues, as I am told my filibuster will put a kink in their campaign plans and flights home this week.

This can all be avoided with one simple action by Mr. Reid: Allow a vote on my bill to end foreign aid to Pakistan, Egypt and Libya.

It is time for Congress to do the right thing. It is time for the Senate to prioritize their responsibilities to the American people.

Sen. Rand Paul is a Kentucky Republican.

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Ambassador Chris Stevens's Libyan Legacy

September 20, 2012

Washington Post

By Mustafa A.G. Abushagur

Libya lost one of its most ardent international supporters and a true friend last week with the death of US Ambassador Chris Stevens. The terrorist attack on the American compound in Benghazi is still being investigated, but it is clear that the perpetrators sought to derail Libya's democratically elected government and to injure its vital relationship with the United States.

What's also clear from counter-demonstrations that have taken place across Libya is that the Libyan people stand with the United States in support of democracy and in opposition to such horrific acts of terror.

Ambassador Stevens was a dear friend of mine, and he played a key role in helping to liberate Libya from the oppressive regime of Moammar Gaddafi. After arriving in Benghazi on a freighter in the midst of war in April 2011, Stevens risked his life to coordinate invaluable US support, when even the truest believers in our revolution harbored doubts as to whether it would be successful.

Libya's new General National Congress had scheduled the election for prime minister for Sept. 12. Despite the tragic events of the previous day, this milestone in our democratic transition went forward as planned. I take solace in knowing that was what Stevens would have wanted.

I was honored to be elected prime minister by that Congress -- the first time a prime minister has been elected in Libya's history.

A day that began under the worst circumstances ended with hope and optimism. As we grieve the loss of our friend, we honor the legacy he left us.

Stevens remained a loyal friend to Libya because he knew that our revolution could succeed and that the Libyan people desired a stronger relationship with the United States. Libyans will always remember that, in our greatest hour of need, America came to our assistance, helping the freedom fighters push back Gaddafi's forces.

Our appreciation for steadfast US support is reflected in a Gallup finding last month that a majority of Libyans approve of America's leadership. This is among the highest approval ratings Gallup has ever recorded on the question in the Middle East and North Africa.

Libya is a moderate, tolerant country that does not condone violence as a form of expression. While others protested and rallied over alleged insults, Libyans gathered in the public squares of our cities to mourn the loss of our American friends, to honor the American contribution to our freedom and to reject the violence a small group of criminals perpetrated against the US Consulate.

Let me be clear: The Libyan people will never trade one form of authoritarianism or extremism for another. We didn't free ourselves from a tyrant's iron grip just to be shackled by ideological dogmatism or any other form of tyranny.

There is never a justification for terrorism. It runs counter to the foundations and values of a free Libya, of democracy and of Islam. The Libyan people are determined to bring to justice those who were involved in the attack against the US Consulate in Benghazi last week.

These are difficult times in my country. Our revolution will be complete only when our state institutions are strong, when heavy arms are controlled only by the government and when our streets are safe to all Libyans and our revered guests. Our shared security is the bedrock of our freedom.

What I ask of America is do not lose faith in Libya. Stand with us as we build a democratic society, and help us transform our country into a beacon of hope for a region once plagued by despotism.

If we move forward as a nation with the same courage and optimism that sparked our revolution, the same optimism and courage that Chris Stevens embodied throughout his service in Libya, there are no obstacles we cannot overcome.

Inspired by the memory of our friend and our hopes for future generations, we remain committed to the cause of freedom, democracy and opportunity.

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Georgia's Rowdy Election Campaign

September 20, 2012

Washington Post

By David Ignatius

The Georgian government of President Mikheil Saakashvili, long a favorite of US conservatives for championing pro-democratic "color revolutions," is under fire for its own alleged suppression of a domestic opposition movement headed by a billionaire tycoon.

Saakashvili was lauded as a reformer after he became president in 2004, following the Rose Revolution, and he has bravely challenged Russian hegemony in the region. But he has also shown a tendency to overreach, as in the imprudent military moves that offered Russia a pretext for invading Georgia in 2008. Now, critics charge, his government has been overly zealous in combating political challengers at home.

Saakashvili's rival is a wealthy businessman named Bidzina Ivanishvili, who made a fortune in Russia before returning home to form a political party called Georgian Dream. Ivanishvili's supporters allege a series of repressive moves by the government, including a cyberattack that has ensnared not just Georgian activists but US lawyers, lobbyists and security advisers for Georgian Dream.

Allegations about the cyberattack were made to State Department officials in a Sept. 7 briefing by Tedo Japaridze, a former Georgian ambassador to Washington, and other members of a team representing the opposition group. Japaridze charged, "The government has turned the campaign into a war between the 'state' and the 'enemies of the state.'"

The Georgian political battle has seen allegations of dirty tricks by both sides, but the cyberattack appears to be an escalation. According to Ivanishvili's supporters, investigators found 66 malware infections on five computers operated by Ivanishvili, his family and close advisers. The viruses had spread to about 50 other machines.

The malware was cleverly designed: It could turn on the computers' cameras and microphones, capture screen shots every 10 seconds, and record keystrokes and passwords, the State Department was told. One "screen grab" I saw was a June 7 bill to Ivanishvili from National Strategies LLC, a Washington-based security advisory firm. Another was a June 4 message to Ivanishvili from an attorney with the Washington firm Patton Boggs, which is heading his lobbying effort.

The cybercampaign evidently went beyond infecting individual computers: Japaridze's team said that investigators discovered devices that could intercept data and insert malware into Internet traffic had been installed at several Georgian Internet service providers. The Georgian opposition group alleged that the use of these sophisticated tools "is clear proof of state security and intelligence activity in surveillance of the political opposition," according to notes from the meeting.

This run-up to next month's parliamentary elections has been thick with allegations of abuses on both sides. An August statement by the Council of Europe criticized the government's seizing campaign funds as "a weapon to destroy the democratic opposition and target Georgian Dream supporters." And Thomas Melia, the deputy assistant secretary of state for human rights, noted last week "a variety of shortcomings in recent months" but said that the United States still believes that "there is a competitive campaign under way."

The Georgian Embassy said in a statement that Ivanishvili had not made any formal complaint about the cyberissue. "Had the government been informed about the alleged cyber attack, it would have acted vigorously to determine who had undertaken it," the statement said, adding: "Should Bidzina Ivanishvili formally request that the government investigate this case, it will do so immediately. The country of Georgia itself was a victim of a vicious cyber attack in 2008, directed out of Russia, and so is exceedingly sensitive to this issue."

Jeremy Rosner, a prominent US pollster hired by Saakashvili's party, cautioned that Georgian Dream has committed its own abuses, including inaccurate polling data that had led him to file a complaint with the group that oversees international polling. "Ivanishvili and his party are engaged in a systematic attempt to discredit the integrity of Georgia's election system," Rosner charged.

Saakashvili has claimed that his billionaire rival represents "Russian money" and that Ivanishvili's election will undermine Georgia's independence. The United States, which appreciates Georgia's decision to send troops to Iraq and Afghanistan, has stayed neutral, urging that the parliamentary elections next month and presidential election in October 2013 be "free and fair."

What's happening in Georgia is partly a proxy war, as a jittery and sometimes overzealous Saakashvili government tries to cope with a Russia that increasingly wants to assert its influence. The political tension spiked Wednesday, with graphic reports from Georgia of police abuse of prisoners.

The Georgian battle, to me, illustrates the modern folk wisdom, "What goes around, comes around." The Rose Revolution made Saakashvili a role model for democratic challenges to autocratic rulers in Ukraine, Iran and elsewhere. But in this year's murky campaign, Saakashvili's regime risks becoming a symbol of what he once so eloquently opposed: the resistance of an entrenched elite to political change. [\(top\)](#)

US Should Redouble Effort To Boost Russian Democracy
September 20, 2012

Washington Post

IN WHAT HAS been a steadily escalating campaign to shore up his power after a bumpy return to Russia's presidency, Vladimir Putin has delivered an audacious double blow. By ending cooperation with the US Agency for International Development (USAID), he has deprived a host of Russian pro-democracy organizations of critical funding -- and administered a sharp rebuff to the United States, which he portrays as an adversary. This coup, delivered in a diplomatic note on Sept. 11, was, as Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) aptly put it, "a finger in the eye of the Obama administration."

You wouldn't have known that, however, from listening Tuesday to the State Department. In announcing the Russian decision, State carefully avoided criticizing USAID's eviction from Moscow. Asked whether the administration was disappointed, spokeswoman Victoria Nuland repeatedly described the cutoff of \$29 million in funding for democracy and civil society programs as "a sovereign decision." When asked if it affected the administration's much-promoted "reset" of relations with Russia, she said: "When we talk about the reset, we talk primarily about global and regional foreign policy issues on which we work together." (On Wednesday, after the Russian foreign ministry claimed that USAID had been shut down for meddling in elections, Ms. Nuland called the decision "regrettable.")

Perhaps this laconic response can be attributed to the administration's election-eve unwillingness to acknowledge a setback in one of its signature foreign policies; challenger Mitt Romney has been a trenchant critic of the "reset." Still, it's disheartening to hear officials describe support for democracy as marginal to US relations with Russia, at the very moment when pressure for political change there is greater than it has been in more than a decade.

Since announcing his return to the presidency last year, Mr. Putin has faced a swelling opposition movement. In its attempt to squelch it, the Kremlin has concocted legal charges against leaders, ramped up penalties for participation in "illegal" protests and rammed through a law requiring non-governmental organizations that receive foreign funds to register as "foreign agents." Its booting of USAID will strip funding to groups such as Golos, an independent election monitoring group that publicized fraud in Mr. Putin's reelection as president last March.

This is a time for the United States to redouble its support for Russian democracy, rather than quietly accepting the shutdown of its programs. Officials say they will try to provide funding by other means; one way of doing so would be to create a new \$50 million fund to support Russian civil society organizations. The Obama administration proposed this initiative to Congress last year but met resistance from Republicans.

Similar shortsightedness by House Republicans recently prevented the passage of the Sergei Magnitsky bill, which would punish Russian officials guilty of human rights abuses by freezing their US assets and banning them from receiving visas. The Obama administration long resisted the bill but now is prepared to accept it if it is linked to legislation that would remove restrictions on trade. Passage of the Magnitsky bill and the new democracy fund would be an appropriate response to Mr. Putin; Congress should make those a priority.

(top)

Putin Does His Own 'Reset'

September 20, 2012

Wall Street Journal

Democrats and the media who love them have ridiculed Mitt Romney for saying Russia is America's "number one geopolitical foe," and Vladimir Putin recently all but endorsed President Obama for re-election. But the Russian President keeps behaving in ways that prove the Republican had a point.

In the latest slap to America, the Kremlin announced this week it is expelling the U.S. Agency for International Development. The aid arm of the State Department has spent almost \$3 billion in the last two decades to feed and modernize Russia and, in recent years, promote human rights and free elections. The relatively small \$50 million annual program will close October 1. Justifying the move, the Russian foreign ministry on Wednesday accused the U.S. of trying "to influence political processes, including elections of various types."

Among the groups that get American assistance is Golos, which has exposed the Kremlin's electoral fraud. Golos and other NGOs will be hard-pressed to find new funding. Russians are reluctant to support democratic groups, lest they end up like oil tycoon Mikhail Khodorkovsky in a Siberian prison.

Stunned by large pro-democracy protests in Moscow and other cities last winter and spring, the Kremlin has cracked down. Anyone who takes a penny from an outside source is now branded a "foreign agent." Penalties for public protests are stiffer. Prosecutors are dredging up criminal cases against activists, and more show trials are coming.

The Obama Administration responded to the expulsion with what has become a familiar nonchalance. "It's their sovereign decision to make," said State's spokeswoman. Team Obama won't admit that its ballyhooed "reset" in relations with Russia has been a failure.

Russia's beleaguered democrats deserve better, and Congress can help by passing a human-rights bill named after slain lawyer Sergei Magnitsky. The bill has bipartisan support but has been held up by legislative bickering. The Magnitsky Act punishes Russian rights abusers by blocking their ability to travel and bank in the U.S. Prompt passage would be an ideal riposte to Mr. Putin's reset of the reset.

([top](#))

Burma's Champion Comes To Washington

September 20, 2012

[Washington Post](#)

By Fred Hiatt

During all her years under house arrest, Aung San Suu Kyi resisted getting a dog for company.

"I did not think it would be fair to the dog," she told Post editors and reporters Wednesday during a visit to the newspaper.

Now she is free, on her first visit to the United States in four decades -- she was awarded Congress's highest honor Wednesday afternoon, the Congressional Gold Medal -- and she has a dog. Fairness is still very much on her mind, as she tries to help engineer an improbable peaceful transition from dictatorship to democracy in her Southeast Asian nation of 50 million people.

I have been writing about Aung San Suu Kyi for many years, but we had never met. In person she is as advertised, only more so: serene but sharply intelligent, confident but with self-deprecating humor, spiritual but intensely pragmatic.

"The greatest human quality is kindness," she said, sharing one of the lessons learned during nearly two decades in isolation. "It costs people nothing, and I don't know why people are so miserly about being kind."

This is her principle for living a good life but also, as it happens, her considered strategy for promoting political and economic change in Burma, which has been ruled by military dictators for half a century, most of its post-colonial existence.

The generals and former generals have opened some space. They have released some but not all political prisoners, allowed Aung San Suu Kyi and some of her party colleagues to contest a minority of seats in the legislature and relaxed censorship without undoing censorship laws. But they remain in control, and the hardest test may not come until possible elections in 2015.

Aung San Suu Kyi has made herself a partner of the reformers in the regime, notably President Thein Sein, to the point that some longtime supporters are discomfited. They wonder how she can call for lifting sanctions while the shoots of democracy are so fragile, why she does not speak out more strongly against abuses of ethnic minorities.

"It is not condemnation that is my forte," Aung San Suu Kyi responded. "If condemnation is going to remove us further from reconciliation, I do not see the point in it."

In our meeting, she was resolutely positive. Businessmen disparaged by many as regime cronies deserve a chance in the new economy, she said. House arrest wasn't necessarily meant as punishment: "They just wanted to keep me from what they would see as making trouble." The regime sought an opening to the West not to resist Chinese domination but out of concern for the nation's poverty after years of economic sanctions.

The nearest she came to a disparaging comment was when I asked about working in Burma's monumental and largely uninhabited new capital. "My dog loves it," she said. "I have rather more reservations than he does."

She agreed, in response to another question, that many Burmese suffered under the regime more grievously than she, but even for them she defended her call for "restorative justice," not retribution.

"I don't think just because one person is hurt, you can remove that hurt by hurting another person," she said.

No one can doubt the sincerity of her insistence on forgoing bitterness, all the more remarkable given how close regime thugs came to killing her in 2003 and how many of her comrades were tortured in the notorious Insein Prison.

Nor could anyone doubt that her insistent positivity fits with a political strategy focused very much on the long view. She believes that the regime cracked open the political system partly because it had come to trust its own propaganda -- to think that the regime was more popular than it proved to be, and her National League for Democracy (NLD) less. When the NLD won 43 out of 44 seats contested in an April by-election, "it seemed to come as a shock to some of them," she said.

Now that the generals understand that the NLD remains as popular as it was in 1990, when it won a landslide victory promptly annulled by the regime, why would they permit an election for the full parliament that could lead to a change of power?

"I hope they will not look at my popularity but my desire to cooperate with them," she answers. "I want reconciliation."

She has studied other nations that have made or attempted the transition: South Africa, Indonesia, Cambodia, Chile. She knows how hard it is, and how Burma has only begun. To help move down the path, she is remaking herself from icon of freedom to something arguably more difficult: politician.

"I am in favor of steps that will bring about harmony in the long run," she told us.
([top](#))

RELEASED IN FULL**DAILY PRESS CLIPS FOR
FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 21, 2012****DOMESTIC AGENDA****Reversing Trend, Life Span Shrinks for Some Whites**

September 21, 2012

New York Times

By SABRINA TAVERNISE

For generations of Americans, it was a given that children would live longer than their parents. But there is now mounting evidence that this enduring trend has reversed itself for the country's least-educated whites, an increasingly troubled group whose life expectancy has fallen by four years since 1990. ([link](#))

ECONOMIC RECOVERY**Rising Home Values Repair Balance Sheets**

September 21, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By NEIL SHAH

A strengthened housing market is lifting property values and helping Americans repair their balance sheets, a trend that could spur the economy by making households more willing to spend. ([link](#))

USUN IN THE NEWS**West Accuses Iran Of Shipping Arms To Syria**

September 21, 2012

Associated Press

By Edith M. Lederer

UNITED NATIONS - The four Western powers trying to rein in Iran's nuclear program accused Tehran on Thursday of shipping arms to Syria in violation of U.N. sanctions and ignoring demands to open key nuclear facilities to U.N. inspectors. ([link](#))

Iran attacked at U.N. Security Council over Syria aid

September 21, 2012

Reuters

By Louis Charbonneau

UNITED NATIONS - Western members of the U.N. Security Council blasted Iran on Thursday for providing Syrian President Bashar al-Assad with weapons to help him crush an 18-month-long uprising by rebels determined to topple his government. ([link](#))

West warns Iran time running out for nuclear accord

September 21, 2012

AFP

UNITED NATIONS — The United States, Britain and France warned Iran on Thursday that time is running out for a negotiated settlement to the showdown on its nuclear program. ([link](#))

UNITED NATIONS**U.N. Presses Pakistan Over The Fate Of Hundreds Of Missing People**

September 21, 2012

New York Times**REVIEW****Reviewer**

By Declan Walsh

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan - The United Nations on Thursday stepped up pressure on Pakistan over the fate of hundreds of people who have disappeared into the illegal custody of the country's powerful intelligence and law enforcement agencies over the last decade. ([link](#))

Year After Effort At UN, New Aim For Palestinians

September 21, 2012

[New York Times](#)

By Jodi Rudoren

JERICO, West Bank - One year after the Palestinians' high-profile failure to win United Nations membership through the Security Council, they are returning to the General Assembly next week seeking largely symbolic "nonmember state" status, with a subdued campaign that many analysts see as a long-shot effort to win back the waning attention of the world. ([link](#))

Outrage Over Anti-Islam Video Threatens To Reignite Blasphemy Debate At U.N.

September 21, 2012

[McClatchy](#)

By Hannah Allam

The divide in world opinion over what constitutes free speech will be on display again next week at the United Nations, where heated arguments over a proposed blasphemy law were an annual feature for the past decade. This time it's the global reaction to a YouTube video that disparages Islam's Prophet Muhammad that's sure to roil the meeting of the U.N. General Assembly. ([link](#))

TOP STORIES

After Libya Attack, a Fleeting Sense of Survival

September 21, 2012

[New York Times](#)

By STEVEN LEE MYERS, MICHAEL S. SCHMIDT and SULIMAN ALI ZWAY

WASHINGTON — The survivors of the assault on the American Mission in Benghazi, Libya, thought they were safe. They had retreated to a villa not far from the main building where the surprise attack had occurred, and a State Department team had arrived to evacuate them. The eruption of violence had ended, and now they were surrounded by friendly Libyan brigades in what seemed to be a dark, uneasy calm. ([link](#))

Miscues Before Libya Assault

September 21, 2012

[Wall Street Journal](#)

By MARGARET COKER in Benghazi, Libya, and ADAM ENTOUS, JAY SOLOMON and SIOBHAN GORMAN in Washington

The deadly assault on a U.S. diplomatic mission in Libya on Sept. 11 was preceded by a succession of security lapses and misjudgments, compounded by fog-of-battle decisions, that raise questions about whether the scope of the tragedy could have been contained. ([link](#))

Libya Envoy's Killing Was A Terrorist Attack, The White House Says

September 21, 2012

[New York Times](#)

By Helene Cooper

WASHINGTON - The White House is now calling the assault on the American diplomatic facility in Benghazi, Libya, a "terrorist attack." ([link](#))

Protesters in Pakistan Clash With Police

September 21, 2012

[Wall Street Journal](#)

Protesters tried to break into a guarded enclave that houses the U.S. Embassy in Pakistan's capital, in the largest show of anger against an anti-Islam video during a day that saw smaller demonstrations in Indonesia, Iran and Afghanistan. ([link](#))

Obama's Journey To Tougher Tack On A Rising China

September 21, 2012

[New York Times](#)

By Mark Landler

WASHINGTON - President Obama's patience with China had been fraying for months, and by November 2010 he was fed up. Meeting with President Hu Jintao in Seoul, South Korea, Mr. Obama warned that if China did not do more to curb North Korea's bellicose behavior, he would have to take steps to shield the United States from the threat of a nuclear missile attack from the North. ([link](#))

With China's Rise, Japan Shifts To The Right

September 21, 2012

[Washington Post](#)

By Chico Harlan

TOKYO - Japan is in the midst of a gradual but significant shift to the right, acting more confrontational in the region than at any time since World War II. ([link](#))

AFRICA

Ethiopia

Ethiopia Swears In New Prime Minister

September 21, 2012

[Associated Press](#)

By Kirubel Tadesse

ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia - Ethiopia's parliament has sworn in the country's new leader. Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn, who was sworn in on Friday, succeeds former Prime Minister Meles Zenawi. Meles died Aug. 20 after ruling Ethiopia for more than two decades. ([link](#))

Guinea

Police Fire Tear Gas As 1000s March In Guinea

September 21, 2012

[Associated Press](#)

CONAKRY, Guinea - Thousands of protesters marched in Guinea's capital to call for the departure of South African company Waymark, which was hired by the Guinean government to re-do the country's electoral list. ([link](#))

South Africa

SAfrica Military Forces To Assist In Mine Strikes

September 21, 2012

[Associated Press](#)

By Carley Petesch And Michelle Faul

RUSTENBURG, South Africa - Days after soldiers were deployed, South African President Jacob Zuma announced Thursday that he has ordered the military to assist police trying to control labor unrest in the nation's crucial mining sector. ([link](#))

South Sudan

Water Shortage Sparks "Crisis" In S. Sudan: Red Cross

September 21, 2012

AFP

The lack of clean water in refugee camps in South Sudan has become a "major humanitarian crisis" with people exposed to diseases due to contamination, the Red Cross said Thursday. ([link](#))

ASIA

China

Trade Talks Aim To Expand United States' Asia Presence, With China On The Horizon

September 21, 2012

Washington Post

By Howard Schneider

As the U.S. hammers on China's front door with demands to further open up its economy, Obama administration officials are negotiating a potential back alley to the same end - a trade agreement with other Asian nations they hope will challenge China to change some of its core economic policies. ([link](#))

Wen Chides Europe On Arms Sale Embargo

September 21, 2012

New York Times

By James Kanter

BRUSSELS - Prime Minister Wen Jiabao said on Thursday that China would continue to help the European Union recover from its economic crisis even as he sternly criticized the bloc for maintaining an embargo on weapons sales to his country. ([link](#))

Indonesia

U.S. to sell Indonesia 8 Apache helicopters

September 21, 2012

Reuters

WASHINGTON - The United States said on Thursday it will sell Indonesia eight AH-64/D Apache helicopters to strengthen security ties with the largest country in Southeast Asia and the world's most populous Muslim-majority nation. ([link](#))

Japan

Sleepy Islands And A Smoldering Dispute

September 21, 2012

New York Times

By Martin Fackler And Ian Johnson

ISHIGAKI, Japan - In the fishing harbor here, Japan has increased the number of sleek, white Coast Guard cutters to fend off the Chinese patrol boats that have stepped up their challenge of Japan's control of disputed nearby islands, one sign of a smoldering conflict that has threatened relations between Asia's two giants. ([link](#))

North / South Korea**South Korea Fires On North Korean Fishing Boats**

September 21, 2012

Associated Press

By Sam Kim

SEOUL, South Korea - South Korea's navy fired warning shots Friday toward North Korean fishing boats that crossed a disputed maritime boundary, but the shots didn't hit the fishing boats and the vessels retreated, a South Korean official said. ([link](#))

New Zealand**Panetta Announces Warmer Military Ties On New Zealand Trip**

September 21, 2012

New York Times

By Thom Shanker

AUCKLAND, New Zealand - Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta arrived in this South Pacific island nation Friday, becoming the first Pentagon chief to visit here in three decades, an absence prompted by a breakdown in ties after New Zealand prohibited American nuclear warships from its territorial waters. ([link](#))

NEA**Egypt****In Egypt, new power brings new challenges for Muslim Brotherhood**

September 21, 2012

Washington Post

By Michael Birnbaum

CAIRO — For decades, the Muslim Brotherhood was forced to operate in Egypt's shadows. Now its leaders, closely allied with President Mohamed Morsi, are quickly finding that opposition tactics don't always work when they are in charge. ([link](#))

Iran**Iran's Top Atomic Official Says Nation Issued False Nuclear Data To Fool Spies**

September 21, 2012

New York Times

By Rick Gladstone And Christine Hauser

Iran's top atomic energy official said in an article published Thursday that because of foreign espionage, his government had sometimes provided false information to protect its nuclear program, which Western powers and Israel have called a cloak to develop a nuclear weapons capacity. ([link](#))

Libya**U.S. Plans New Inquiry On Libya Attack**

September 21, 2012

Washington Post

By Anne Gearan And Abigail Hauslohner

The State Department is opening a new inquiry into the attack on a diplomatic post in Libya that killed four Americans, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said Thursday. ([link](#))

Obama: Extremists Used Anti-Islam Video As 'excuse' For Attack Against US Interests

September 21, 2012

Associated Press

MIAMI - President Barack Obama said Thursday that extremists used an anti-Islam video as an excuse to assault U.S. interests overseas, including an attack on the U.S. Consulate in Libya that killed the U.S. ambassador and three other Americans. ([link](#))

Ansar Al Shariah, Linked To Diplomat's Death, Sets Benghazi Rally To Counter Calls For Moderation

September 21, 2012

McClatchy

By Mel Frykberg

Libya's second-largest city, Benghazi, was reported tense Thursday ahead of two major rallies called for Friday, one to show support for the United States and its slain ambassador, who died last week when gunmen stormed the U.S. consulate compound, and the other by the Ansar al Shariah militia suspected of involvement in the attack. ([link](#))

Libya offers further apology for U.S. envoy's death

September 21, 2012

Reuters

By Marie-Louise Gumuchian and Ali Shuaib

TRIPOLI - Libya apologized on Thursday to visiting U.S. Deputy Secretary of State William Burns for an attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi in which U.S. ambassador Christopher Stevens and three other Americans died. ([link](#))

Syria

Syrian Planes Said To Strike Gas Station

September 21, 2012

New York Times

By Kareem Fahim

BEIRUT, Lebanon - At least 30 people, and possibly dozens more, were killed in Syria on Thursday in northern Raqqqa Province when government warplanes bombed a gas station crowded with cars and people, according to a witness at the scene and activist groups. ([link](#))

Rebels Unite In Fight For Syria's Largest City

September 21, 2012

Associated Press

By Paul Schemm

ALEPPO, Syria - Rebels have taken a major stride in uniting their ranks in the battle for Syria's largest city, giving them hope they could tip the balance after three months of bloody, stalemated combat in Aleppo, one of the biggest prizes of the civil war. ([link](#))

Turkey Border Gate Marks Key Gain For Syria Rebels: Experts

September 21, 2012

AFP

Rebels are consolidating potentially strategic territorial gains in northern Syria, having seized yet another border crossing into Turkey from already stretched regime forces, experts say. ([link](#))

Tunisia

In Tunisia, Embassy Attack Tests Fledgling Democracy

September 21, 2012

Washington Post

By Karin Brulliard

TUNIS - Onlookers milled and nervous merchants shut shops as security forces surrounded a colonnaded mosque on a leafy downtown street here on Monday, preparing to arrest a man giving a speech inside. ([link](#))

Tunisia Bans Protest Over French Muhammad Cartoons

September 21, 2012

Associated Press

By Bouazza Ben Bouazza

TUNIS, Tunisia - Tunisia's government has banned any protests Friday against a French satirical weekly's publication of lewd, crude caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad. ([link](#))

SCA

Afghanistan

U.S. Ally Is Fired in Afghan Shake-Up

September 21, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By NATHAN HODGE and ZIAULHAQ SULTANI

KABUL—Afghan President Hamid Karzai removed the governor of a key southern province, depriving the U.S.-led coalition of a stalwart ally at a tense moment in U.S.-Afghan relations. ([link](#))

Progress Seen in Resolving U.S.-Afghan Dispute Over Detainees

September 21, 2012

New York Times

By ALISSA J. RUBIN and DOUGLAS SCHORZMAN

KABUL, Afghanistan — President Obama and the Afghan leader, Hamid Karzai, had what an American official called a "serious and positive" discussion on Wednesday night that the Afghans confirmed had made progress toward resolving an increasingly acrimonious dispute over detaining terrorism suspects, which had their two governments and their militaries at loggerheads for weeks. ([link](#))

Taliban Targeted by Local Uprisings

September 21, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By HABIB KHAN TOTAKHIL

ANDAR, Afghanistan—The paved road to this district is controlled by government troops. The alternate route, a dirt track, is under Taliban sway. Both ways are perilous for the local villagers who have taken up arms in the first of several anti-Taliban uprisings spreading in Afghanistan. ([link](#))

Final "Surge" Troops Leave Afghanistan

September 21, 2012

Washington Post

By Craig Whitlock

AUCKLAND, New Zealand - The last of the 33,000 "surge" troops President Obama ordered to Afghanistan in December 2009 have left the country, the Pentagon announced Friday, just ahead of a Sept. 30 deadline. ([link](#))

India

Refugees Seek Refuge From Squalid India Camps

September 21, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By MEGHA BAHREE

BALAJAN, India—Nearly 200,000 refugees, mostly Muslim, have been crowded since July into a couple of hundred makeshift camps in a pocket of the Indian state of Assam, waiting in deteriorating conditions to return home while the government verifies their citizenship status. ([link](#))

Pakistan

U.S. Disavows Anti-Muslim Video

September 21, 2012

Washington Post

By Anne G

Trying to blunt street protests surrounding a YouTube video that mocks the prophet Muhammad, the Obama administration paid \$70,000 to buy ads on Pakistani television disavowing the video, the State Department said Thursday. ([link](#))

Pakistani Minister Vows Better Counterterrorism Work With US, But Won't Talk Of Tackling Haqqanis

September 21, 2012

Associated Press

WASHINGTON - Pakistan's foreign minister revealed Thursday that her country would soon hold confidential talks with the United States and Afghanistan to improve a three-way counterterrorism relationship beset by misunderstandings, including one over the Pakistan-based Haqqani network that Washington considers the greatest threat to Afghan stability. But she refused to say whether her government was ready to take any action against the militants. ([link](#))

WHA/EUR

Greece

Fight Looms on Greek Bailout

September 21, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By MARCUS WALKER and MATINA STEVIS

A confrontation is brewing among Greece's international creditors over who will provide the financing needed to keep the country afloat. ([link](#))

Russia

Aung San Suu Kyi Finds Common Cause With Russian Dissident Punk Rockers

September 21, 2012

Washington Post

By Lisa Rein And Emily Wax

The elder stateswoman of the human rights struggle sat on stage in pearls and a floor-length traditional skirt, pink roses pinned in her chignon. The shaggy-haired performance artist whose punk-rocker wife sits in a Moscow jail rose from the front row with the couple's four-year-old daughter, who placed a bouquet of flowers in Aung San Suu Kyi's lap. ([link](#))

FOREIGN POLICY

Restrictions On Religion Are Tightening, Study Finds

September 21, 2012

New York Times

By Adam Nossiter

DAKAR, Senegal - Government restrictions on religion around the world were highest in the Middle East and North Africa, particularly in the period before the Arab Spring uprisings, a new study has found, underscoring a factor that fueled hostilities in the region and led to the rise of political Islam after the revolts. ([link](#))

EDITORIAL / OPINION**The Post-American Middle East**

September 21, 2012

Wall Street Journal

Another day, another installment in what President Obama likes to call the "receding" tide of war. On Wednesday, John Kerry threatened to cut U.S. aid to Baghdad unless the Iraqi government blocks overflights of Iranian planes suspected of ferrying military supplies to Damascus. But Baghdad isn't budging. Welcome to the post-American Middle East, Senator. ([link](#))

Collapse Of The Cairo Doctrine

September 21, 2012

Washington Post

By Charles Krauthammer

In the week following 9/11/12 something big happened: the collapse of the Cairo Doctrine, the centerpiece of President Obama's foreign policy. It was to reset the very course of post-9/11 America, creating, after the (allegedly) brutal depredations of the Bush years, a profound rapprochement with the Islamic world. ([link](#))

Fouad Ajami: Muslim Rage and the Obama Retreat

September 21, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By FOUAD AJAMI

This is not a Jimmy Carter moment—a U.S. Embassy and its staff seized and held hostage for 444 days, America's enemies taking stock of its weakness, its allies running for cover. But the anti-American protests that broke upon 20 nations this past week must be reckoned a grand personal failure for Barack Obama, and a case of hubris undone. ([link](#))

Iran Shows No Hesitation About Intervening In Syria

September 21, 2012

Washington Post

IT'S BEEN MORE than a year since the Obama administration began describing the downfall of Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad as a matter of time. He's defied White House predictions in part because of his ruthlessness - more than 20,000 Syrians, most of them civilians, have died during the uprising - and in part because of political and military weakness of his opposition. ([link](#))

Lessons From An Iranian War Game

September 21, 2012

Washington Post

By David Ignatius

Perhaps it was the "fog of simulation." But the scariest aspect of a U.S.-Iran war game staged this week was the way each side miscalculated the other's responses - and moved toward war even as the players thought they were choosing restrained options. ([link](#))

DOMESTIC AGENDA

Reversing Trend, Life Span Shrinks for Some Whites

September 21, 2012

New York Times

By SABRINA TAVERNISE

For generations of Americans, it was a given that children would live longer than their parents. But there is now mounting evidence that this enduring trend has reversed itself for the country's least-educated whites, an increasingly troubled group whose life expectancy has fallen by four years since 1990.

Researchers have long documented that the most educated Americans were making the biggest gains in life expectancy, but now they say mortality data show that life spans for some of the least educated Americans are actually contracting. Four studies in recent years identified modest declines, but a new one that looks separately at Americans lacking a high school diploma found disturbingly sharp drops in life expectancy for whites in this group. Experts not involved in the new research said its findings were persuasive.

The reasons for the decline remain unclear, but researchers offered possible explanations, including a spike in prescription drug overdoses among young whites, higher rates of smoking among less educated white women, rising obesity, and a steady increase in the number of the least educated Americans who lack health insurance.

The steepest declines were for white women without a high school diploma, who lost five years of life between 1990 and 2008, said S. Jay Olshansky, a public health professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago and the lead investigator on the study, published last month in Health Affairs. By 2008, life expectancy for black women without a high school diploma had surpassed that of white women of the same education level, the study found.

White men lacking a high school diploma lost three years of life. Life expectancy for both blacks and Hispanics of the same education level rose, the data showed. But blacks over all do not live as long as whites, while Hispanics live longer than both whites and blacks.

"We're used to looking at groups and complaining that their mortality rates haven't improved fast enough, but to actually go backward is deeply troubling," said John G. Haaga, head of the Population and Social Processes Branch of the National Institute on Aging, who was not involved in the new study.

The five-year decline for white women rivals the catastrophic seven-year drop for Russian men in the years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, said Michael Marmot, director of the Institute of Health Equity in London.

The decline among the least educated non-Hispanic whites, who make up a shrinking share of the population, widened an already troubling gap. The latest estimate shows life expectancy for white

women without a high school diploma was 73.5 years, compared with 83.9 years for white women with a college degree or more. For white men, the gap was even bigger: 67.5 years for the least educated white men compared with 80.4 for those with a college degree or better.

The dropping life expectancies have helped weigh down the United States in international life expectancy rankings, particularly for women. In 2010, American women fell to 41st place, down from 14th place in 1985, in the United Nations rankings. Among developed countries, American women sank from the middle of the pack in 1970 to last place in 2010, according to the Human Mortality Database.

The slump is so vexing that it became the subject of an inquiry by the National Academy of Sciences, which published a report on it last year.

"There's this enormous issue of why," said David Cutler, an economics professor at Harvard who was an author of a 2008 paper that found modest declines in life expectancy for less educated white women from 1981 to 2000. "It's very puzzling and we don't have a great explanation."

And it is yet another sign of distress in one of the country's most vulnerable groups during a period when major social changes are transforming life for less educated whites. Childbirth outside marriage has soared, increasing pressures on women who are more likely to be single parents. Those who do marry tend to choose mates with similar education levels, concentrating the disadvantage.

Inklings of this decline have been accumulating since 2008. Professor Cutler's paper, published in Health Affairs, found a decline in life expectancy of about a year for less educated white women from 1990 to 2000. Three other studies, by Ahmedin Jemal, a researcher at the American Cancer Society; Jennifer Karas Montez, a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Health and Society Scholar at Harvard; and Richard Miech, a professor at the University of Colorado Denver, found increases in mortality rates (the ratio of deaths to a population) for the least educated Americans.

Professor Olshansky's study, financed by the MacArthur Foundation Research Network on an Aging Society, found by far the biggest decline in life expectancy for the least educated non-Hispanic whites, in large part because he isolated those without a high school diploma, a group usually combined with high school graduates. Non-Hispanic whites currently make up 63 percent of the population of the United States.

Researchers said they were baffled by the magnitude of the drop. Some cautioned that the results could be overstated because Americans without a high school diploma — about 12 percent of the population, down from about 22 percent in 1990, according to the Census Bureau — were a shrinking group that was now more likely to be disadvantaged in ways besides education, compared with past generations.

Professor Olshansky agreed that the group was now smaller, but said the magnitude of the drop in life expectancy was still a measure of deterioration. "The good news is that there are fewer people in this group," he said. "The bad news is that those who are in it are dying more quickly."

Researchers, including some involved in the earlier studies that found more modest declines in life expectancy, said that Professor Olshansky's methodology was sound and that the findings reinforced evidence of a troubling pattern that has emerged for those at the bottom of the education ladder, particularly white women.

"Something is going on in the lives of disadvantaged white women that is leading to some really alarming trends in life expectancy," said Ms. Montez of Harvard.

Researchers offered theories for the drop in life expectancy, but cautioned that none could fully explain it.

James Jackson, director of the Institute of Social Research at the University of Michigan and an author of the new study, said white women with low levels of education may exhibit more risky behavior than that of previous generations.

Overdoses from prescription drugs have spiked since 1990, disproportionately affecting whites, particularly women. Professor Miech, of the University of Colorado, noted the rise in a 2011 paper in the American Sociological Review, arguing that it was among the biggest changes for whites in recent decades and that it appeared to have offset gains for less educated people in the rate of heart attacks.

Ms. Montez, who studies women's health, said that smoking was a big part of declines in life expectancy for less educated women. Smoking rates have increased among women without a high school diploma, both white and black, she said. But for men of the same education level, they have declined.

This group also has less access to health care than before. The share of working-age adults with less than a high school diploma who did not have health insurance rose to 43 percent in 2006, up from 35 percent in 1993, according to Mr. Jemal at the American Cancer Society. Just 10 percent of those with a college degree were uninsured last year, the Census Bureau reported.

The shift should be seen against the backdrop of sweeping changes in the American economy and in women's lives, said Lisa Berkman, director of the Harvard Center for Population and Development Studies. The overwhelming majority of women now work, while fertility has remained higher than in European countries. For women in low-wage jobs, which are often less flexible, this could take a toll on health, a topic that Professor Berkman has a grant from the National Institute on Aging to study.
(top)

ECONOMIC RECOVERY

Rising Home Values Repair Balance Sheets

September 21, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By NEIL SHAH

A strengthened housing market is lifting property values and helping Americans repair their balance sheets, a trend that could spur the economy by making households more willing to spend.

The value of Americans' real-estate holdings jumped about \$400 billion, or 2.1%, to \$19.1 trillion, in the second quarter, the Federal Reserve said Thursday, the highest level since the final three months of 2008. The increase follows a similar leap in the first quarter and raises the amount of equity that owners have in their homes to a high since the third quarter of 2008.

Since the recession, sliding property prices have made Americans feel less wealthy and less willing to spend on everything from home renovations and appliances to restaurant meals. That weighs on the recovery, because consumer spending fuels two-thirds of the nation's economic activity. With real-estate values now rising—and housing chalking up more gains recently in sales and construction—

Americans are seeing their critical assets rise in value as their disposable incomes also climb. That helps in rebuilding wealth and makes even heavier debts more manageable.

Rising home values are "very helpful," said Harm Bandholz, chief U.S. economist at UniCredit Bank, who estimates that stabilizing home prices could boost America's gross domestic product in 2012 by more than half a percentage point. "I think the fundamentals for a stronger pickup in consumer spending are in place."

U.S. households' net worth—the value of homes, stocks and other investments minus debts and other liabilities—dropped about \$300 billion, or 0.5%, to \$62.67 trillion from April through June, the first decline in three quarters. But the drop was driven by financial assets like stocks, which lost around \$600 billion in value as the Dow Jones Industrial Average sank 2.5% in the second quarter. During the third quarter, such investments have rebounded.

The Fed report also showed that borrowing inched up, with household liabilities, mostly debt, rising 0.1% to \$13.46 trillion.

The salutary effect of housing-market gains on Americans' balance sheets could reduce the risk of recession, some economists said. Home prices rose 6.9% in the second quarter from three months earlier, according to CoreLogic Inc. Last week, the data firm said that in the first half of 2012, rising prices lifted more than 1.3 million homeowners who owed more on their homes than they were worth above the water line. The Federal Reserve's program of buying \$40 billion in mortgage-backed securities a month, announced last week, could further boost housing by keeping interest rates on mortgages low.

"The ongoing climb by home prices can only enhance the economic outlook," Moody's Analytics economist John Lonski wrote. This "will help household expenditures grow by enough to contain recession risks."

Onno Koelman, a 32-year-old engineer, is among those feeling better about his personal finances and spending more. Mr. Koelman and his wife bought a \$525,000 home in Northern California's Marin County in the spring of 2010 and are refinancing their mortgage for the second time. Recent appraisals put their house between \$550,000 and \$560,000.

"It's definitely relaxing," said Mr. Koelman, who works for a firm that serves the drinking-water industry. With their residence gaining value, the couple is spending money on home improvements rather than paying off hefty student debts. "Things are going to get better," Mr. Koelman said.
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USUN IN THE NEWS

West Accuses Iran Of Shipping Arms To Syria

September 21, 2012

Associated Press

By Edith M. Lederer

UNITED NATIONS - The four Western powers trying to rein in Iran's nuclear program accused Tehran on Thursday of shipping arms to Syria in violation of U.N. sanctions and ignoring demands to open key nuclear facilities to U.N. inspectors.

The United States, Britain, France and Germany expressed growing concern that Iran's goal is building a nuclear arsenal - not nuclear power plants for peaceful civilian use, as Tehran insists.

U.S. Ambassador Susan Rice told a Security Council meeting on the implementation of U.N. sanctions that members can't be complacent about Iran's "latest leaps forward in its prohibited nuclear activities."

"We must recognize that we are facing a situation that continues to worsen," she said.

A spokesman for Iran's mission to the U.N. did not immediately respond to an email seeking comment.

Rice and ambassadors from the other Western powers expressed serious concern at Iran's arms exports to President Bashar Assad's regime in violation of a U.N. ban against all weapons exports.

She reiterated the conclusion of the panel of experts monitoring implementation of sanctions that Syria is now the "central party to illicit Iranian arms transfers."

Britain's U.N. Ambassador Mark Lyall Grant said Iran's supply of weaponry to Syria is unacceptable and it must stop.

"It is in stark contrast to the will of the Syrian people and a reminder of Iran's hypocrisy in claiming to support freedom in the Arab world," he said.

France's U.N. Ambassador Gerard Araud accused Assad of massacring his own people and urged rigorous implementation of sanctions to keep Iran from providing his forces with the arms to accomplish his "sinister work."

Rice called on states in the region to "work together and redouble their efforts to deny, inspect and seize illicit Iranian shipments."

The 18-month Syrian conflict has escalated to a civil war which has killed more than 23,000 people, according to activists.

Germany's U.N. Ambassador Peter Wittig said reports indicate Iran is shipping arms to Syria "under a humanitarian pretext," which makes it crucial that all countries enforce the sanctions to keep pressure on Iran.

Russia and China, who have vetoed three Western-backed resolutions aimed at pressuring the Assad regime to end the violence and start talks with the opposition, made no mention of Iranian arms shipments to Syria in their speeches to the council but did address the nuclear issue.

On Iran's nuclear program, the Western powers expressed alarm at the latest report from the International Atomic Energy Agency. It said Iran has effectively shut down a probe of a site suspected of being used for work on nuclear weapons development while doubling the number of machines it could use to make the core of nuclear warheads at an underground bunker safe from airborne attack.

The nuclear concerns will be at the top of the agenda at a ministerial meeting of the four Western powers, Russia and China on Sept. 27 on the sidelines of the annual General Assembly gathering of world leaders that begins Tuesday.

"The Iranian regime is at a crossroads," Britain's Lyall Grant told the council. "It can continue to ignore the international community's concerns over its nuclear program, or it can negotiate a settlement that will help to realize the benefits of a civil nuclear program. It can support the oppressive regime in Syria in suppressing freedom, or it can play a constructive role in the region. It can be an exporter of terrorism or a responsible member of the international community." ([top](#))

Iran attacked at U.N. Security Council over Syria [aid](#)

September 21, 2012

[Reuters](#)

By Louis Charbonneau

UNITED NATIONS - Western members of the U.N. Security Council blasted Iran on Thursday for providing Syrian President Bashar al-Assad with weapons to help him crush an 18-month-long uprising by rebels determined to topple his government.

"Iran's arms exports to the murderous Assad regime in Syria are of particular concern," U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Susan Rice told the 15-nation council during a meeting on the world body's Iran sanctions regime.

She cited a May 2012 report by the U.N. panel of experts that monitors compliance with four rounds of Security Council sanctions against Tehran. That report concluded Syria was now the "central party to illicit Iranian arms transfers."

Tehran is forbidden from selling weapons under a U.N. arms embargo, which is part of broader sanctions against Iran over its nuclear program. Tehran rejects allegations from Western powers and their allies that it is seeking atomic weapons and has defied council demands that it halt nuclear enrichment.

Although she did not mention Iraq by name, Rice appeared to have Baghdad in mind when she emphasized the obligation of Iran's neighbors to prevent illegal arms shipments across their territory.

"States in the region must therefore work together and redouble their efforts to deny, inspect and seize illicit Iranian shipments, including transfers via air corridors," she said.

Iraq on Thursday denied a Western intelligence report that said Iranian aircraft had flown weapons and military personnel over Iraqi airspace to Syria to help Assad.

The allegation, reported by Reuters on Wednesday, said arms transfers were organized by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

Although charges that Iraq has allowed Iran to send arms to Syria are not new, the intelligence report said the extent of such shipments is far greater and more systematic than has been publicly acknowledged, thanks to a deal between senior Iraqi and Iranian officials.

UAE REQUESTS HELP IN IRAN INVESTIGATION

British Ambassador Mark Lyall Grant echoed Rice's condemnation of arms transfers to Syria.

"This is unacceptable and it must stop," he said. "It is in stark contrast to the will of the Syrian people and a reminder of Iran's hypocrisy in claiming to support freedom in the Arab world."

German Ambassador Peter Wittig said worries about Iranian support for Assad "are aggravated by unsettling recent reports indicating that Iran is shipping arms to Syria under a humanitarian pretext."

Neither Russia nor China, which have joined forces in vetoing three resolutions that would have condemned Assad's assault on the opposition, mentioned the allegations about arms shipments to Syria.

Western council members also complained that Iran is pressing ahead with its nuclear program and has shown no interest in taking steps that would reduce concerns that it is amassing the capability to produce atomic weapons.

French Ambassador Gerard Araud said the five permanent Security Council members and Germany had spent "hundreds of hours" negotiating with Iran to resolve the stand-off with Tehran, but without success.

The chairman of the Security Council's Iran sanctions committee, Colombian Ambassador Nestor Osorio, said he continued to receive reports about how countries were working to implement the four rounds of U.N. sanctions against Iran.

He said the United Arab Emirates had asked for the U.N. panel of experts to help it investigate items it confiscated en route to Iran which it reported to the sanctions committee on May 21.

Earlier this week diplomats told Reuters that UAE and Bahrain were among the countries that had notified the sanctions committee of confiscations and were investigating possible sanctions violations.

The emirate Dubai has long been one of Iran's main export-import hubs because of its busy port and position as a financial center. UAE remains one of its main trading partners.

There were no details available on the items confiscated by UAE authorities, but the three items Bahrain intercepted included carbon fiber, a dual-use material that the U.N. panel of experts identified in May as key for further development of Iran's uranium enrichment centrifuge program.

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West warns Iran time running out for nuclear accord

September 21, 2012

AFP

UNITED NATIONS — The United States, Britain and France warned Iran on Thursday that time is running out for a negotiated settlement to the showdown on its nuclear program.

"Time is wasting," US ambassador Susan Rice told a UN Security Council meeting on nuclear sanctions against Iran.

Iran is "at a crossroads," Britain's UN envoy Mark Lyall Grant told the meeting at which western nations also slammed Iran for its arms deliveries to Syria and alleged links to terrorism.

The meeting was held amid mounting speculation that Israel is planning a military strike on Iran's nuclear facilities. Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is to speak at the UN General Assembly of world leaders next week.

A series of reports by the International Atomic Energy Agency, the UN nuclear watchdog, have said Iran is stepping up uranium enrichment and not providing proof that its nuclear activities are peaceful.

The western powers say Iran is seeking a nuclear bomb but the Tehran government says its drive is peaceful.

No Iranian diplomat spoke at the meeting where Rice said the international powers -- Britain, China, France, Germany, Russia and United States -- cannot pursue their nuclear talks with Iran "indefinitely".

"We will not engage in an endless process of negotiations that fail to produce any results. We must therefore remain clear and united in seeking resolution of the international community's concerns regarding Iran's nuclear program. Time is wasting," the US envoy said.

Top officials from the six international powers are to meet in New York next week to discuss Iran. But Russia and China have spoken against tightening the four rounds of UN sanctions already imposed.

Rice said "Iran's approach remains to deny, to deceive and distract."

She called on UN members, particularly neighbors of Iran, to step up action to halt Syria's arms shipments to President Bashar al-Assad's forces in Syria. UN sanctions experts have uncovered evidence of shipments and diplomats said that Iran is sending some weapons by air across Iraqi territory.

States in the region must "redouble their efforts to deny, inspect and seize illicit Iranian shipments, including transfers by air corridors," Rice said.

The US government has asked Iraq to ensure that Iranian planes flying over its territory land and face cargo inspections, amid concerns that arms are being shipped to the Assad government.

Britain's UN ambassador called the arms exports to Syria "a reminder of Iran's hypocrisy in claiming to support freedom in the Arab world."

"The Iranian regime is at a crossroads," said Lyall Grant.

"It can continue to ignore the international community's concerns over its nuclear program, or it can negotiate a settlement that will help to realize the benefits of a civil nuclear program.

"It can support the oppressive regime in Syria in suppressing freedom, or it can play a constructive role in its region. It can be an exporter of terrorism or a responsible member of the international community. But it must make these choices soon," Lyall Grant said.

France's UN ambassador Gerard Araud said: "We are asking Iran to negotiate, but Iran is not negotiating."

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UNITED NATIONS

U.N. Presses Pakistan Over The Fate Of Hundreds Of Missing People

September 21, 2012

New York Times

By Declan Walsh

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan - The United Nations on Thursday stepped up pressure on Pakistan over the fate of hundreds of people who have disappeared into the illegal custody of the country's powerful intelligence and law enforcement agencies over the last decade.

A two-person delegation, led by a French law professor, Olivier de Frouville, spent 10 days meeting with government officials and about 100 people who said their relatives had been illegally abducted and, in some cases, tortured and killed.

But in a sign of the delicacy of the subject, the leadership of the powerful Inter-Services Intelligence agency and the paramilitary Frontier Corps, which have been blamed for many of the disappearances, refused to meet the United Nations team.

The current spate of disappearances started after 2001, when American officials pushed their Pakistani counterparts to abduct people suspected of being militants with Al Qaeda. But in recent years the phenomenon has been concentrated in the sprawling western province of Baluchistan, where a national insurgency has been under way since about 2006.

Estimates of the scale of the problem vary enormously, from fewer than 100 missing people acknowledged by the provincial government of Baluchistan, to more than 14,000 claimed by some campaigning groups.

The fact that the Pakistani government had invited the team to visit constituted a tacit admission that there is a problem, Mr. de Frouville said. "There is acknowledgment that enforced disappearances have occurred and still occur in the country," he said.

The 10-day visit was marked by controversy from the start. Even though the United Nations team enjoys little more than moral authority - Mr. de Frouville was reluctant to even describe it as a "fact finding" mission - it came in for withering criticism in Pakistan's Parliament and some news media outlets, where right-wing politicians slammed it as a threat to national sovereignty.

Some of the witnesses who met with the delegation, including in the Baluch capital, Quetta, told its members that they had been "threatened or intimidated," Mr. de Frouville said.

Speaking to local and international reporters, he appealed to the government "to guarantee the safety of those who have met us and protect them from any form of reprisals, threat or intimidation."

Despite its modest powers, the United Nations mission did bring new attention to a phenomenon that has eluded the efforts of the Pakistani government to solve.

At the same time, Mr. Abbas's approval ratings have plummeted, to 46 percent this month from 67 percent in September 2011, according to the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, while the revolutions across the Arab world and the Iranian nuclear program have distracted the international community from the Palestinian struggle.

"A lost year" is how Nabil Shaath, the Palestinian commissioner of international relations, put it in an interview this week. "We have wasted a whole year, and that waste cost us a lot in the circumstances of our people, in the support of our people. The frustration is unequaled. This stalemate, this closed door, this impasse cannot stay."

While there is broad support for the United Nations bid among Palestinian leaders and on the street, there are also growing calls for a far more drastic move: abandoning the Oslo agreements that have governed Palestinian-Israeli relations for nearly two decades, or dissolving the Palestinian Authority. After two evenings of sometimes-heated meetings this week, according to participants, Mr. Abbas told the leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organization that within 10 days of his return from New York he wanted a decision either to walk away from Oslo or to hold national elections and replace him.

"Twenty years of Oslo and 20 years of a Palestinian Authority and 20 years of all the promises ended in fiasco," said Zakaria al-Qaq, a professor of national security at Al Quds University. "They are trying to scare the Israelis, because the Israelis consider Oslo as a genius political achievement. They want to scare the Americans and the Europeans."

But experts on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict see this more as posturing than serious policy making, and they warn that a vacuum could provide opportunity for extremists. "Supposing now you scrap Oslo - then what?" Tony Blair, the representative of the so-called quartet - the Middle East peacemaking group made up of the United States, the United Nations, the European Union and Russia - asked in an interview on Wednesday. "If you burn the house down on the basis that somebody's going to have to build you something new, you might just be left with a burned house."

The Oslo Accords, signed in 1993 and 1995, were intended as a five-year interim arrangement establishing the Palestinian Authority to begin state-building while negotiations continued toward a final-status solution. They outline protocols for security and economic cooperation between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, and divide the West Bank into distinct areas with varying levels of Israeli control and Palestinian responsibility.

There have been occasional calls for abandoning Oslo for a decade, said Diana Buttu, a former legal adviser to the Palestinian negotiations unit. Lately, the chorus has grown, with Palestinian officials complaining that Israel routinely violates provisions of the agreements. In April, Yossi Beilin, one of the Israeli architects of the accords, wrote an open letter to Mr. Abbas in the magazine *Foreign Policy* headlined, "End This Farce."

"It's like keeping someone in kindergarten for 19 years and then blaming the kindergarten for them not being successful," Mr. Beilin said this week. "They need something dramatic. If they say by the 1st of December, if nothing good happens to us, if there are no serious negotiations, you don't freeze settlements, whatever, we are going to give up on it - this will put the world in a different situation, everyone will rush to prevent it."

Mr. de Frouville noted that a judicial inquiry into the disappearances, started by the Supreme Court in March 2011, had been hampered by the presence of intelligence operatives at hearings, which prevented some witnesses from speaking out.

"Some said they had no fear to confront them, whereas others felt intimidated," he said. He called on the government to hear future testimony in private.

The United Nations officials also touched on the delicate issue of prosecutions of perpetrators, urging the government to amend the law so that illegal abductions by agents of the state will become a criminal offense.

They called on the government to provide financial aid to the relatives of people who have disappeared, in particular women and children.

More contentiously, they recommended that military personnel facing charges connected with the disappearances be suspended from official duty so they can be tried by ordinary courts. Currently, officers are subject only to secretive military courts; the military has staunchly resisted efforts to prosecute them elsewhere.

A spokesman for the government could not be reached for comment on Thursday evening.

Impunity in Pakistan is a concern "for the whole society," Mr. de Frouville said, before quoting the mother of a disappeared person who had asked the United Nations officials to convey a message to "all persons in public life" in Pakistan.

"If your child disappeared, what would you do?" he said, citing her words.

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Year After Effort At UN, New Aim For Palestinians

September 21, 2012

New York Times

By Jodi Rudoren

JERICHO, West Bank - One year after the Palestinians' high-profile failure to win United Nations membership through the Security Council, they are returning to the General Assembly next week seeking largely symbolic "nonmember state" status, with a subdued campaign that many analysts see as a long-shot effort to win back the waning attention of the world.

The delegation heading to New York this weekend is half the size of last year's. And there are no concerts or street parties planned this time around President Mahmoud Abbas's Sept. 27 speech to the General Assembly; instead, it comes after days of unrest across the West Bank focused more on the Palestinian Authority than its Israeli occupier.

It has been a year without peace talks. And it has been a year in which economic conditions for Palestinians have deteriorated, Israeli settlements in the West Bank have expanded, and promised reconciliation between Mr. Abbas's Fatah faction and the more militant Hamas that rules the Gaza Strip has failed to materialize.

At the same time, Mr. Abbas's approval ratings have plummeted, to 46 percent this month from 67 percent in September 2011, according to the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, while the revolutions across the Arab world and the Iranian nuclear program have distracted the international community from the Palestinian struggle.

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But he and others said they doubted the Palestinian leadership would actually take such a step. "The threat of canceling Oslo is always a reactionary threat, just the same way that Abbas is always threatening to quit," Ms. Buttu said.

For now, there is the General Assembly. While some in Jerusalem and Washington have condemned the effort as thwarting the peace process, Saeb Erekat, the Palestinians' chief negotiator, described it Thursday as a last-ditch effort to "preserve the two-state solution."

"We have never said that our rights of self-determination are subject to negotiation," Mr. Erekat told journalists at his headquarters here in Jericho before leaving for Turkey en route to New York. "We are declaring a state on the 1967 lines with East Jerusalem as its capital, to live side by side with Israel in peace and security. I don't see why people who stand for the two-state solution would not join us."

Appeasing the Americans, the Palestinians do not plan to press for a vote before the Nov. 6 presidential election. Instead, they will only begin drafting the resolution. Mr. Erekat said they expected to win the votes of between 150 and 170 of the General Assembly's 193 members.

Nonmember state status would give the Palestinians access to United Nations' institutions like the International Criminal Court, and, Mr. Erekat said, make clear that they are living under occupation, not in what Israelis sometimes call "disputed territory."

"The day after, life will not be the same," he said. "Yes, occupation will continue, settlements will continue, the crimes of settlers may continue. But there will be consequences."

Mark Regev, a spokesman for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel, denounced the General Assembly strategy as "a violation of their fundamental commitment," and placed blame for the stagnated peace process on Mr. Abbas's refusal to return to the table while the settlement enterprise marches on.

"We are willing for Palestinian statehood in the framework of peace and reconciliation," Mr. Regev said. "If Palestinians want a state merely as a superior vehicle to continue a political, military, economic and psychological struggle with Israel, that's not what we have in mind." ([top](#))

Outrage Over Anti-Islam Video Threatens To Reignite Blasphemy Debate At U.N.

September 21, 2012

McClatchy

By Hannah Allam

The divide in world opinion over what constitutes free speech will be on display again next week at the United Nations, where heated arguments over a proposed blasphemy law were an annual feature for the past decade. This time it's the global reaction to a YouTube video that disparages Islam's Prophet Muhammad that's sure to roil the meeting of the U.N. General Assembly.

Muslim leaders have vowed to discuss the offensive video from their U.N. platforms, sowing concern among free-speech activists of a fresh push toward an international law criminalizing blasphemy. Human rights groups and Western democracies resisted such an initiative for years and thought they'd finally quashed the matter after convincing enough nations that repressive regimes use blasphemy laws to imprison or execute dissidents.

"I expect that we'll regress to where we were a couple of years ago," said Courtney C. Radsch, program manager for the Global Freedom of Expression Campaign at Freedom House, the Washington-based nonprofit group that promotes democratic values.

"Human rights are not about protecting religions; human rights are to protect humans," added Radsch, who's followed the issue closely at the U.N. "Who is going to be the decision-maker on deciding what blasphemy is?"

At one end of the spectrum lies France, where a magazine on Wednesday published cartoons of the prophet as a naked, cowering man to underscore a point that even the most offensive expression should be protected. France plans to close its embassies and schools in 20 countries Friday as a precaution against retaliatory attacks.

At the other end of the spectrum is U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who surprised – and disappointed – many free-speech activists by suggesting limitations to freedom of speech when it's "used to provoke or humiliate."

"We are living through a period of unease. We are also seeing incidents of intolerance and hatred that are then exploited by others," Ban told the 193-member assembly at the gathering's opening this week. "Voices of moderation and calm need to make themselves heard at this time. We all need to speak up in favor of mutual respect and understanding of the values and beliefs of others."

The head of the Arab League, Nabil Elaraby, decried the depictions of the prophet but added that only "peaceful means" should be used to protest them, according to news reports.

Elaraby's native Egypt, however, took legal action, with the Islamist-led government filing a lawsuit against the Egyptian-American filmmakers of "Innocence of Muslims;" authorities also detained without charge an Egyptian atheist who's accused of posting the video online.

The ultraconservative Islamists of the Nour Party went even farther, filing a formal request with the public prosecutor to revoke citizenship for any Egyptian who insults the prophet.

The Obama administration, meanwhile, quickly shushed a rogue public relations employee at the U.S. Embassy in Cairo who'd reportedly gone off-message to condemn the video at the onset of the crisis. This week, after Republicans assailed the administration's confusing response, State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland sounded forceful in her defense of free speech.

"Whereas this may be repugnant, it may be insulting, we may all be offended by it, and we separate ourselves definitively from it – as a government we're not involved – we believe in free speech," Nuland said. "We believe that free speech should be protected, and there's never an excuse for violence as a result of an insult."

Protests over the crudely made "Innocence of Muslims" video have taken place in dozens of countries over the past week. On Thursday in Pakistan, mobs burned American flags and tried to storm the U.S. Embassy but were forced back by police firing clouds of tear gas. U.S. officials braced for even more widespread anti-U.S. demonstrations after prayers Friday, the Muslim holy day.

For years, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, or OIC, a 57-member bloc of countries that seeks to guard Muslim interests around the world, has proposed a resolution criminalizing the defamation of religion.

By last year, free-speech proponents had convinced so many countries to ditch the cause that no new defamation of religion resolution was proposed. Instead, Pakistan won U.S. support for an alternative resolution on "combating intolerance;" the only speech it seeks to ban is "incitement to imminent violence."

Now, Turkey heads the OIC and, while the group hasn't formally announced whether it will resurrect its old initiative to criminalize defamation of religion, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan has said he'd bring up the topic during his allotted speaking time in New York next week.

Erdogan had no qualms laying out to journalists his view that free speech comes with boundaries. "Freedom of thought and belief ends where the freedom of thought and belief of others starts," he said.

The issue is much broader than the Muslim world. Greece has used its blasphemy laws to bar certain displays of art, according to Freedom House, while Ireland adopted a blasphemy law in 2008. And in a headline-grabbing case, Russia last month convicted three members of the feminist punk collective Pussy Riot of "hooliganism motivated by religious hatred."

"There are Muslim, there are Christians, there are nondenominational countries that have blasphemy laws," said Radsch of Freedom House. "It's not about the religion of the country – it's about the broader institutions of democracy and rule of law."

Even in the United States, free speech is undergoing a test through lawsuits over an ad that a notoriously Islamophobic group seeks to place in the Washington and New York City subway systems. The ad reads: "In any war between the civilized man and the savage, support the civilized man. Support Israel. Defeat Jihad."

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority, which runs New York's subway and train systems, initially rejected the ads because they violated a prohibition on "demeaning" language. A federal judge ruled that those standards are unconstitutional; the ads should be up soon.

Meanwhile, the transit authority in Washington has resisted putting up the ads out of "a concern for public safety, given current world events," according to news reports. A judge has given the agency two weeks to revisit its decision.

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TOP STORIES

After Libya Attack, a Fleeting Sense of Survival

September 21, 2012

New York Times

By STEVEN LEE MYERS, MICHAEL S. SCHMIDT and SULIMAN ALI ZWAY

WASHINGTON — The survivors of the assault on the American Mission in Benghazi, Libya, thought they were safe. They had retreated to a villa not far from the main building where the surprise attack had occurred, and a State Department team had arrived to evacuate them. The eruption of violence had

ended, and now they were surrounded by friendly Libyan brigades in what seemed to be a dark, uneasy calm.

A colleague's body lay on the ground. They had no idea where their boss, Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens, was, nor how in the confusion he had become separated from his bodyguard and left behind.

Then, shortly after 2 a.m. on Sept. 12, just as they were assembling to be taken to the airport, gunfire erupted, followed by the thunderous blasts of falling mortar rounds. Two of the mission's guards - Tyrone S. Woods and Glen A. Doherty, former members of the Navy SEALs — were killed just outside the villa's front gate. A mortar round struck the roof of the building where the Americans had scrambled for cover.

The attackers had lain in wait, silently observing as the rescuers, including eight State Department civilians who had just landed at the airport in Benghazi, arrived in large convoys. This second attack was shorter in duration than the first, but more complex and sophisticated. It was an ambush.

"It was really accurate," Fathi al-Obeidi, commander of special operations for a militia called Libyan Shield, who was there that night, said of the mortar fire. "The people who were shooting at us knew what they were doing."

They also escaped, apparently uninjured.

Interviews with Libyan witnesses and American officials provide new details on the assault on American diplomatic facilities and the initial moblike attack, set off by a video denigrating the Prophet Muhammad, that transformed into what the Obama administration now, after initial hesitation, describes as a terrorist attack.

The accounts, which remain incomplete and contradictory, are broadly consistent with what is known about the attack, but they still leave many questions unanswered, including the identity of the attackers and how prepared they might have been to strike at an American target.

The attack has raised questions about the adequacy of security preparations at the two American compounds in Benghazi. Both were temporary homes in a dangerous, insecure city, and they were never intended to become permanent diplomatic missions with appropriate security features built into them.

Neither was heavily guarded, and the second house was never intended to be a "safe house," as initial accounts suggested. At no point were the Marines or other American military personnel involved, contrary to news reports early on.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton announced on Thursday the creation of a review board led by a veteran diplomat and former under secretary of state, Thomas R. Pickering. She also briefed lawmakers behind closed doors on Capitol Hill. But the State Department now faces Congressional demands for an independent investigation of the attacks and any security failures that might have added to the death toll.

"In my judgment, which is informed by numerous briefings and discussions with experts, the attack in Benghazi was not a black swan," Senator Susan Collins, Republican of Maine, said at a hearing on Wednesday, "but rather an attack that should have been anticipated, based on the previous attacks

against Western targets, the proliferation of dangerous weapons in Libya, the presence of Al Qaeda in that country and the overall threat environment."

Investigators and intelligence officials are now focusing on the possibility that the attackers were affiliated with, or possibly members of, Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb — a branch that originated in Algeria — or at least in communication with it before or during the initial attack at the mission and the second one at the mission's annex, a half-mile away.

One extremist now under scrutiny is a former detainee at the prison at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, Abu Sufian Ibrahim Ahmed Hamouda, a Libyan who is a prominent member of an extremist group called Ansar al-Sharia, which some have blamed for the attack. "It is safe to assume that any significant extremist in eastern Libya is going to be under a lot of scrutiny right now," an American intelligence official said, adding that it was premature to draw any conclusions.

The most significant inconsistency between Libyan and American accounts is whether the attack that night began with a small protest over the trailer of "The Innocence of Muslims," parts of which were broadcast on Egyptian television. American officials insist there was a protest that began peacefully, only to be hijacked by armed militants. But Libyan witnesses, including two guards at the building, say the area around the compound was quiet until the attackers arrived, firing their weapons and storming the compound from three sides, beginning at 9:30 p.m. on Sept. 11. A witness said that some of those attacking referred to the film's insults to Islam.

Matthew G. Olsen, director of the National Counterterrorism Center, said at a Senate hearing on Wednesday that the authorities believe "this was an opportunistic attack" that "evolved and escalated over several hours."

What is clear, however, is that those who arrived at the mission — not officially a consulate, though Libyans call it that informally — came intending to inflict maximum damage on the building. They quickly overwhelmed a small security detail that included three guards from a force called the 17th of February Brigade and five Libyans employed by a British security company called Blue Mountain.

In a detail not previously disclosed, after storming the compound, the attackers poured diesel fuel around the exterior of the building where Mr. Stevens; a computer technician, Sean Smith; and a security officer had settled in for the night and ignited it. It is not clear if they knew anyone was inside.

By that time, according to officials, the three had moved into a part of the building designated as a "safe haven," with fortified doors and no external exposure. The dense, billowing smoke from the fire, however, forced them to leave the haven and head for an exit. It was at that time that they became separated. The security guard, who has not been identified, made it out of the house, but Mr. Smith and Mr. Stevens did not. Both died of asphyxiation from the smoke.

The guard, now joined by others, found Mr. Smith's body, but not the ambassador's. By 11:20 p.m., nearly two hours after the shooting started, they retreated to the mission's second compound, or annex, which had been rented after the fall of Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi's government last year to provide additional space for a diplomatic team that now included roughly two dozen Americans in all.

It was only after they left that the fighting subsided and a crowd wandering through the compound discovered Mr. Stevens's body and removed it through an exterior window, suggesting that he had left

the designated haven inside but failed to find an exit. His body was taken to the hospital in Benghazi, where a doctor tried but failed to resuscitate him. The area around the hospital was under the control of a militia suspected of having extremist sympathies, and a video of Mr. Stevens's corpse in the hospital's morgue ultimately circulated to an extremist Web site, according to the SITE Intelligence Group, a monitoring agency that tracks militants' Internet postings.

By then, the State Department's operations center, now aware of the attack in progress, set in motion a contingency plan drafted for emergencies. A civilian airliner contracted by the department and on standby at Tripoli's airport flew to Benghazi, arriving at 1:30 a.m. with the eight additional security officers.

Mr. Obeidi, the commander with the Libya Shield brigade, was ordered to meet them at the airport, take them to the mission's annex and escort them back to the airport to be evacuated. Mr. Obeidi expected to find only a few people inside and was surprised to find the entire staff from Benghazi, more than two dozen people. "They told me that there would only be a few, but I saw a big number," he said.

When the second attack began, it lasted only five minutes, "but when you are in that situation, it feels like an hour," he added.

The evacuation to the airport did not begin until dawn, but the plane could not carry everyone. It left behind 11 security officers and three bodies. Mr. Obeidi said that the commander of the local operations center, Mustapha Boshala, then ordered a unit to the hospital to retrieve Mr. Stevens's body. Two hours later the State Department's plane returned to carry the last Americans out of Benghazi.

In Tripoli on Thursday, Libya's new government held a memorial service for the four Americans who died. Deputy Secretary of State William J. Burns attended. "If Chris were here this evening," he said, referring to the ambassador, "I know he would be the first to say that for all the pride and jubilation of the revolution, for all the pain we feel tonight, it is the days ahead which matter most."

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Miscues Before Libya Assault

September 21, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By MARGARET COKER in Benghazi, Libya, and ADAM ENTOUS, JAY SOLOMON and SIOBHAN GORMAN in Washington

The deadly assault on a U.S. diplomatic mission in Libya on Sept. 11 was preceded by a succession of security lapses and misjudgments, compounded by fog-of-battle decisions, that raise questions about whether the scope of the tragedy could have been contained.

U.S. officials issued alerts and ordered security precautions in neighboring Egypt ahead of protests and violence on Sept. 11, but largely overlooked the possibility of trouble at other diplomatic postings in the region.

The State Department chose to maintain only limited security in Benghazi, Libya, despite months of sporadic attacks there on U.S. and other Western missions. And while the U.S. said it would ask Libya to boost security there, it did so just once, for a one-week period in June, according to Libyan officials.

The U.S. didn't seriously consider sending in the military during the attack. It summoned rapid-response teams of Marines only after the U.S. ambassador was dead. State Department officials said they doubted the Pentagon could have mobilized a rescue force quickly enough to make a difference during the fighting. The Pentagon waited for guidance from State, which is responsible for diplomatic security, a senior military official said.

Adding a new dimension to the chain of events, the siege also engulfed what officials now describe as a secret safe house used by American officials and security personnel involved in sensitive government programs after last year's Libyan revolution.

Even when that building, also known as the "annex," came under attack, U.S. officials were reluctant to divulge its existence, and the secrecy complicated the Libyan response and the eventual American evacuation, according to Libyan security officials.

The Obama administration has defended levels of security in place. Though intelligence officials are investigating indications al Qaeda's North African affiliate had connections with militants who mounted the attack, U.S. officials say the evidence still indicates it was a spontaneous response to protests in Cairo against an anti-Islamic video. But a detailed review based on interviews with more than a dozen U.S. and Libyan officials shows months of ominous signals suggesting the need for better security, along with missed chances for delivering it.

President Barack Obama, in his re-election campaign, gets high marks from voters on national security, but has drawn Republican criticism over his handling of the anti-American protests.

After a classified briefing to lawmakers by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton Thursday, Sen. Susan Collins (R., Maine) called the security "woefully inadequate, given the security-threat environment." The State Department has convened an Accountability Review Board to investigate the attack, something it is required to do after such an incident.

U.S. officials still are struggling to piece together details of the attack. For more than a week after U.S. Ambassador Christopher Stevens was killed, the State Department couldn't say why he was in Benghazi. On Thursday, officials said they believed he was there to attend the launch of a joint U.S.-Libyan cultural and educational program.

Mr. Stevens and Sean Smith, an information officer, were killed at the consulate, in the first wave of the attack. Former Navy SEALs Glen Doherty and Tyrone Woods died later, at the sensitive safe house or annex a kilometer away. It remains unclear to U.S. and Libyan officials whether the militants knew of that facility or just followed a U.S. convoy to it after the consulate attack.

The apparent lapses extended to firefighting equipment. Rescue attempts at the main building were thwarted in part by the absence of smoke-protection masks and fire extinguishers, said Libyan guards. Senior State Department officials said these wouldn't have provided sufficient protection against the diesel-fueled inferno.

State Department officials said security for the consulate was frequently reviewed and was deemed sufficient to counter what U.S. officials considered to be the most likely threat at the time: a limited hit-and-run attack with rocket-propelled grenades or improvised explosive devices, or IEDs.

There was a string of attacks in Benghazi in the months before Sept. 11, including a June 6 IED explosion outside the consulate compound. "These types of incidents were the ones that were our principal concerns," a senior State Department official said. Based on the outcome of the June 6 attack, in which a perimeter wall was damaged but no Americans hurt, a second State Department official added: "Our security plan worked."

Current and former officials said the security choices in Benghazi reflected efforts by Mr. Stevens to maintain a low-profile security posture and show faith in Libya's new leaders, despite questions about their ability to rein in heavily armed bands of militants. Officials say Mr. Stevens personally advised against having Marines posted at the embassy in Tripoli, apparently to avoid a militarized U.S. presence.

The security plan for the consulate also reflected confidence Mr. Stevens felt in a city where he worked for months with rebels battling Moammar Gadhafi's rule. State Department officials said he didn't consult with Washington before traveling to Benghazi, located in an area that has become notorious for its volatile mix of Islamist militancy and heavy weaponry.

"This is what happens when you're relying on a government that's not in control of the whole country," said Randa Fahmy Hudome, a former U.S. official. Benghazi "was awash with weapons in the hands of various brigades who were all in combat with one another. It wasn't a secret."

A State Department official said Washington doesn't control the travels of ambassadors within countries where they are posted. But some current and former U.S. officials say it was a mistake for the administration to put so much faith in the Libyans to provide adequate security so soon after the revolution, and questioned why more robust contingency plans weren't in place.

One senior State Department official described the Benghazi consulate as a "temporary office" that security officers treated as a "subsidiary" of the embassy in Tripoli, where more strenuous procedures and precautions were in place. "So Tripoli had the plan and the idea was that these people would just fall back on Tripoli, which they did in this situation, so it worked," the official said.

Alarm bells about security in Benghazi started sounding this spring.

On April 10, someone threw an explosive device at a convoy carrying United Nations envoy Ian Martin. On May 22, a rocket-propelled grenade hit offices of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

After the June 6 IED attack on the U.S. consulate, the U.S. asked Libya to step up security around American installations, said a State Department spokesman. Libyan officials say the request was only for one week. A State Department official said the temporary security buildup was needed to repair damage to the wall.

The Libyan who received the request said the added security was two extra cars of men plus some heavy machine guns. After the repairs, Libyan security returned to normal levels: a four-man team of armed guards protecting the perimeter and four unarmed Libyan guards inside to screen visitors.

Tensions remained high, however. On June 11, a rocket-propelled grenade hit a convoy in Benghazi carrying Britain's ambassador to Libya, injuring two bodyguards. Britain closed its consulate in Benghazi.

The U.S. deemed the security level sufficient and decided to stay, "given the very important mission that we have in eastern Libya to support U.S. national security interests," said a senior State Department official. He said "robust" security improvements had been made to the compound since the Americans moved into it in May 2011, including cement barriers and barbed wire.

As the attacks mounted in Benghazi, intelligence agencies warned of the growing security risks, but didn't have specific intelligence about particular threats or planned attacks. On Aug. 27, the State Department issued a travel warning for Libya, citing a threat of assassinations and car bombings in both Benghazi and Tripoli. The warning said the embassy's ability to intervene was limited because armed groups behind the attacks were "neither sanctioned nor controlled by the Libyan government."

In the days before Sept. 11, intelligence agencies issued their annual warning of heightened security risks around the anniversary of the 2001 attacks. Many counterterrorism officials saw a lessened risk this year than last year, which was the 10th anniversary and the first one after the killing of Osama bin Laden.

In Libya, embassy personnel conducted a security review right before the anniversary. It determined there was no reason to think an attack was planned or the consulate in Benghazi was "insufficiently postured," said a senior administration official.

Across the border in Egypt, red flags appeared on Sept. 8, after a radical Egyptian cleric aired on television portions of an anti-Islam video believed made in the U.S. Officials at the U.S. embassy in Cairo that night sent the first of several messages alerting Washington and other embassies in the region to the video and seeking guidance about responding and the potential for a backlash.

The embassy in Cairo knew the film was beginning to get attention because it was monitoring social media, according to State Department officials. "That was well ahead of any intelligence that they got from Washington," one official said.

On Monday, Sept. 10, intelligence agencies sent a warning directly to the U.S. embassy in Cairo saying the protests could turn violent. Diplomatic security officers in Cairo sent most embassy personnel home.

Intelligence analysts at the time had no reason to believe the unrest would spill over to neighboring Libya or beyond, officials said. State Department officials likewise found no reason to put other embassies in the region on heightened alert and decided not to call in Marine teams to help in Cairo.

"We have to put this in context: We've had protest after protest in Cairo. We know where the military is. We know where to find them when we need them," a senior State Department official said.

Ethan Chorin, an American development economist working with U.S. and Libyan officials on a hospital in Benghazi, said he spoke by phone to Mr. Stevens about an hour before the assault, and the ambassador told him there was "no indication of trouble" following the protests in Egypt. Mr. Chorin said a subsequent conversation he had with the ambassador's security officer was cut short by what the officer said was a serious problem. Several minutes later, he could hear explosions from his hotel room across town as the assault began.

During a final call by Mr. Chorin to a security officer at the consulate, the attack began, and his call was cut off.

The attack on the consulate compound started shortly after 9:30 p.m. Benghazi time, which was 3:30 p.m. Eastern time, according to Libyan security guards.

Besides the four armed Libyans outside, five armed State Department diplomatic security officers were at the consulate.

Diplomatic security agent David Ubben was inside the main building with Mr. Stevens and Mr. Smith, the information-management officer, when the attackers set it on fire around 15 minutes after the shooting started.

The three took refuge in a safe room, but found themselves overcome by smoke and agreed they would make a break for it through a window, according to a State Department official familiar with Mr. Ubben's role.

Mr. Ubben, a 30-year-old Iraq war veteran, managed to escape, but lost contact with Messrs. Stevens and Smith in the dense smoke, the official said.

In Washington, officials said, National Security Adviser Tom Donilon informed Mr. Obama of the attack in progress ahead of a 5 p.m. Eastern time Oval Office meeting with Defense Secretary Leon Panetta and Gen. Martin Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. By then, the main villa in the consulate compound was on fire.

There was no serious consideration at that hour of intervening with military force, officials said. Doing so without Libya's permission could represent a violation of sovereignty and inflame the situation, they said. Instead, the State Department reached out to the Libyan government to get reinforcements to the scene.

The Libyans sent about two dozen security men, according to members of the reinforcement team, who arrived at the consulate 30 minutes after the fighting had started.

In addition to the shooting, thick black smoke and flames hindered a proper search inside the consulate, an effort further hampered by the absence of fire extinguishers and masks.

Mr. Ubben and the other security agents made several trips into the building to try to find the diplomats but could spend only brief periods inside, and suffered varying degrees of lung damage, said the official familiar with Mr. Ubben's role.

On one trip in, they found Mr. Smith's body and pulled it out. There was no sign of the ambassador.

The American security personnel evacuated the consulate and made their way to the secret site called the annex.

A plane with an American security team from Tripoli arrived in Benghazi about 1:30 a.m., according to the Libyan account. The team found its way to the annex using global positioning devices. Libyans who accompanied the Americans to the scene weren't told of the annex's location because of its connection to sensitive programs, and the Americans didn't give them the GPS coordinates or address. Libyans at an emergency operation center in Benghazi were also kept in the dark to the exact location.

As the U.S. and Libyan reinforcement team arrived from the airport, fighting broke out at the annex.

That assault, using rocket-propelled grenades and mortars, was described in U.S. and Libyan accounts as more sophisticated than the earlier attack on the consulate, and it appeared to involve militants with possible links to al Qaeda.

The Libyans led a convoy of roughly 30 Americans from the safe house to the airport, where a plane had been waiting. But they quickly realized the plane was too small to evacuate everyone at once.

"We were surprised at the numbers of Americans who were at the airport," said Libyan Deputy Prime Minister Mustafa Abushagour. "We figured three or four people. No one told us the numbers ahead of time."

The deputy prime minister said that he learned about the extent of U.S. intelligence operations only after the incident. "We have no problem with intelligence sharing or gathering, but our sovereignty is also key," said Mr. Abushagour.

The first to be flown to Tripoli were American diplomats and civilians. The U.S. security team waited for a second flight. During the wait, Libyan troops went, without any Americans, to the Benghazi Medical Center to retrieve the ambassador's body. Around 8 a.m., according to Libyan officials, the security detail flew back to Tripoli, carrying the body.

Some officials say the U.S. could have sent military forces to Benghazi from U.S. Naval Air Station Sigonella, which is some 450 miles away in Sicily, or mobilized a Marine team in Rota, Spain. Some officials said the U.S. could also have sent aircraft to the scene in a "show of force" to scare off the attackers.

State Department officials dismissed the suggestions as unrealistic. "They would not have gotten there in two hours, four hours or six hours. They don't have troops sitting in a room next to an airplane with a pilot just sitting in the next room drinking coffee," one senior State Department official said.

Some defense officials agreed with that assessment, given limited communications to Americans on the ground during the assault. "It was the fog of war," one said.

At the annex, Mr. Ubben suffered head and leg injuries from a mortar explosion. He was released this week from intensive care but remains at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, in Bethesda, Md., the State Department official familiar with his role said.

Mr. Ubben, a Marylander, is married and has a stepdaughter and an infant son. He is conscious and able to communicate, according to his father, Rex Ubben.

"He's in good spirits," the senior Mr. Ubben said. "They're pretty confident that he'll be able to walk again."

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Libya Envoy's Killing Was A Terrorist Attack, The White House Says
September 21, 2012

New York Times

By Helene Cooper

WASHINGTON - The White House is now calling the assault on the American diplomatic facility in Benghazi, Libya, a "terrorist attack."

"It is self-evident that what happened in Benghazi was a terrorist attack," the White House press secretary, Jay Carney, told reporters aboard Air Force One on Thursday. "Our embassy was attacked violently and the result was four deaths of American officials."

Until now, White House officials have not used that language in describing the assault. But with the election less than two months away and President Obama's record on national security a campaign issue, they have come under criticism from Republican lawmakers who say the administration is playing down a threat for which it was unprepared.

Mr. Carney offered the new assessment in response to a question about remarks by Matthew G. Olsen, director of the National Counterterrorism Center, who told a Congressional committee Wednesday that J. Christopher Stevens, the United States ambassador to Libya, and three other Americans had died "in the course of a terrorist attack."

Asked if the president drew a connection between the Libyan attack, which occurred on Sept. 11, and the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon 11 years before, Mr. Carney said, "The attack occurred on Sept 11, 2012, so we use the same calendar at the White House as you do."

In a highly charged political atmosphere, the mere use of the term "terrorist" is loaded, not least, as one administration official acknowledged privately, because the phrase conjures up an image of America under attack, something the White House wants to avoid.

Beyond that, different government agencies have different definitions for what defines terrorism, said Brian Fishman, a counterterrorism expert at the New America Foundation, a nonpartisan research group.

The classic definition, Mr. Fishman said, "is an attack by a nonstate group on noncombatants with the intent to intimidate people." He said that another reason the administration was shying from using that term is because "they really didn't know who did it."

And the president, campaigning in Florida on Thursday, did not use the word terrorism when asked about the attacks.

Mr. Carney maintained on Thursday that Obama administration officials still were not calling the attack preplanned.

"According to the best information we have now, we believe it was an opportunistic attack on our mission in Benghazi," he said. "It appears that some well-armed militants seized on that attack as the events unfolded that evening. We do not have any specific intelligence that there was significant advance planning or coordination for this attack." Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said earlier in the week that there had been no intelligence warnings that an attack was imminent.

Mrs. Clinton said that F.B.I. investigators had arrived in Tripoli and that the United States, with the Libyan authorities, would find those responsible. She did not discuss any potential ties to Al Qaeda, but blamed extremists opposed to the democratic changes in places like Libya, Tunisia and Egypt for the violence and protests around the region generally.

On Thursday, Mrs. Clinton announced the creation of a panel to investigate the attack. The panel, called an Accountability Review Board, will be led by Thomas R. Pickering, a veteran diplomat and former under secretary of state. The board is authorized by a 1986 law intended to strengthen security at United States diplomatic missions.

"We are concerned first and foremost with our own people and facilities," Mrs. Clinton said in an appearance at the State Department with the Indonesian foreign minister. "But we are concerned about the internal security in these countries, because ultimately, that puts at risk the men, women and children of these societies on a daily ongoing basis if actions are not taken to try to restore security and civil order."

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Protesters in Pakistan Clash With Police

September 21, 2012

Wall Street Journal

Protesters tried to break into a guarded enclave that houses the U.S. Embassy in Pakistan's capital, in the largest show of anger against an anti-Islam video during a day that saw smaller demonstrations in Indonesia, Iran and Afghanistan.

More than a thousand people, including students affiliated with the Islamist hard-line Jamaat-e-Islami party, clashed with riot police outside the enclave in Islamabad, which was cordoned off with hundreds of shipping containers.

The State Department issued an alert Thursday, warning Americans to avoid nonessential travel to Pakistan as protests are likely to continue and turn violent.

The Pakistani government has called a national holiday for Friday so that people could come out and demonstrate peacefully against the video. The decision drew rare words of praise from the Pakistani Taliban, which is usually at odds with the government. A spokesman for the militant group said it welcomed the decision but also thought the government should expel all American diplomats.

Violence linked to the video has left at least 30 people in seven countries dead, including the American ambassador to Libya. Two people have died in protests in Pakistan. In recent days, the decision by French satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo to release cartoons crudely depicting the prophet has added to the tension, as may the coming issue of the German satirical magazine Titanic.

In an effort to address some of the damage to America's image in the Muslim world since the release of the video, advertisements condemning an anti-Islam video appeared on Pakistani television on Thursday with the U.S. Embassy seal.

The television ads in Pakistan feature clips of President Barack Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton during press appearances in Washington in which they condemned the video. Their words were subtitled in Urdu.

"We absolutely reject its content and message," said Mrs. Clinton in the advertisement. A caption on the ad reads: "Paid Content."

State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland said the U.S. purchased airtime on Pakistani TV stations to deliver the message, and that the ads include a notice saying they were paid.

"So in order to ensure we reached the largest number of Pakistanis—some 90 million, as I understand it in this case with these spots—it was the judgment that this was the best way to do it," Ms. Nuland said Thursday in Washington

An embassy spokeswoman in Islamabad declined to comment. In an email later Thursday, the embassy sent out a link to video of ordinary Americans condemning the anti-Islam video.

U.S. diplomatic missions across Indonesia will close Friday as the American Embassy warned of the "potential for significant demonstrations." The closure will affect U.S. diplomatic missions in Jakarta, Surabaya, Bali and Medan, which had already been closed Thursday after three straight days of protest.

In Malaysia, the U.S. Embassy in Kuala Lumpur will close at 11 a.m. ahead of a planned demonstration, but the embassies in Bangkok and Manila will remain open, officials at the embassies said. France closed its diplomatic missions in Indonesia, Malaysia and in several other countries as a precaution.

"I urge Muslims to remain peaceful and not resort to violence as a means of showing dissatisfaction," said Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak.

Protests have grown throughout the region against the video trailer of a purported film, which portrays the Prophet Muhammad as a fraud, womanizer and child molester.

In Iran, hundreds of students and clerics gathered outside the French Embassy in Tehran to protest the publication of the caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad in the French weekly. Protesters chanted "Death to France" and "Down with the U.S." and burned the flags of the U.S. and Israel. The demonstration ended after two hours.

In Kabul, a few hundred people demonstrated in the downtown area against the video, chanting slogans before dispersing peacefully.

The first protest in Germany against the video is due to take place Friday in Freiburg after Muslim groups obtained a permit to march through the center of the town in southern Germany. Authorities expect about 800 people to attend. A similar demonstration is also scheduled to take place on Saturday in Karlsruhe, in southwest Germany.

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Obama's Journey To Tougher Tack On A Rising China

September 21, 2012

New York Times

By Mark Landler

WASHINGTON - President Obama's patience with China had been fraying for months, and by November 2010 he was fed up. Meeting with President Hu Jintao in Seoul, South Korea, Mr. Obama warned that if

China did not do more to curb North Korea's bellicose behavior, he would have to take steps to shield the United States from the threat of a nuclear missile attack from the North.

For the first time in a half dozen stilted encounters, Mr. Obama seemed to get through to the bland, tightly scripted Chinese leader. Mr. Hu dropped his talking points and asked Mr. Obama to clarify what he meant, according to two people who were in the room. The president's answer included a clear hint that the United States would move warships to the seas off China, a step sure to antagonize the increasingly nationalistic Chinese.

"Obama pulled back the veil," said Jeffrey A. Bader, the president's chief adviser on China at the time, who was one of those in the room. He added that Mr. Obama's warning prodded the Chinese president to send a senior diplomat to lean on North Korea's leader, Kim Jong-il.

The tense exchange, Mr. Bader and other officials said, was a turning point in the president's complex relationship with China, a journey that began with hope and accommodation but fell into disillusionment after Beijing started flexing its muscles on trade and military questions and proved to be a truculent partner on a variety of global issues.

As Mr. Obama runs for re-election, his tougher line toward Beijing is showing itself on several fronts. The White House has filed two major cases in the past three months against China at the World Trade Organization, both of which Mr. Obama promoted to autoworkers in the Rust Belt. On the same day as the latest trade action, Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta announced plans in Tokyo to help Japan deploy a new missile-defense system, which has aroused suspicion in Beijing.

With Mitt Romney charging that Mr. Obama has not stood up enough to Chinese leaders, China has suddenly become a focal point in the presidential campaign, one that encompasses both security and economic concerns and puts to the test the president's management of a crucial, and occasionally combustible, relationship.

Mr. Obama's blunt warning in Seoul presaged what may end up as the most consequential foreign policy initiative of his presidency: the shift of American focus from the battlefields of Iraq and Afghanistan to the Pacific Rim, where the United States has shored up alliances with Japan and South Korea, opened the door to Myanmar, and sent Marines to Australia. While the new focus has rattled allies in Europe, the emergence of a counterweight to a rising China has been greeted with enthusiasm in Asia.

"Time and time again, I had leaders - I mean, I'm talking about the highest leaders - essentially say: 'Thank goodness. Thank you. I'm so pleased you're here. We were worried about America,' " Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, who played a significant role in shaping the president's approach to China, said in an interview.

Mr. Obama's turn to Asia was not precisely what he had in mind when he entered office. The shift emerged in fits and starts, after a first year in which critics, including the president's aides, concluded that the United States had been too soft on China. In interviews, a dozen current and former administration officials described a White House that struggled to find the right tone with Beijing.

From his decision not to meet with the Dalai Lama in 2009 to his tightly constrained first trip to China, the president accommodated Chinese leaders in the hopes that the moves would translate into good will on issues like climate change or Iran's nuclear program.

They did not. China spurned the United States on climate change standards, dragged its feet on efforts to pressure Iran and began bullying its neighbors over territorial claims in the South China Sea. That last development, in particular, persuaded the administration that the time for accommodation had come to an end.

"I certainly think we tested the limit of how far you can get with China through positive engagement," said Benjamin J. Rhodes, a deputy national security adviser. "We needed to toughen our line in Year 2, and we did that."

At the center of the internal debate on China was a president, who despite being born in Hawaii and spending childhood years in Indonesia, is less beguiled by China's history and culture than many of his predecessors were, aides said. Once in office, they said, Mr. Obama came to view China primarily through an economic prism. He is angry at what he sees as Beijing's refusal to play by the rules in trade, and frustrated by the United States' lack of leverage to do anything about it.

In meetings, Mr. Obama liked to tease two of his advisers, Mr. Bader and Lawrence H. Summers, who had helped negotiate China's entry into the World Trade Organization during the administration of Bill Clinton. "Did you guys give away too much?" he asked them, according to a senior aide, who described it as "a running joke."

To some extent, Mr. Obama's learning curve on China parallels his early outreach to Iran: an initial hope that old adversaries could put aside their differences, followed by a jolting recognition of reality and the ultimate adoption of a realpolitik approach. The difference, officials argue, is that in this case the tougher line has led not to stalemate but to a constructive give-and-take with a country bound to rub up against the United States.

"Despite it all, China has been an increasingly responsible actor on Iran," said James B. Steinberg, a former deputy secretary of state who made a number of trips to Beijing to air American concerns. "Despite some wobbles, they've played a positive role in constraining North Korea at times of crisis."

The president's Asia agenda, however, raises many questions. With deep cuts in the military budget looming, critics question whether the United States has the money to back up its words. A Pentagon preoccupied by Afghanistan and Iraq has done little planning to shift troops or ships - so little, in fact, that a Navy commander was called to the White House for his first meeting after Mr. Obama had already laid out the broader strategy.

America's eastward shift has left the Chinese deeply suspicious of American motives, with some analysts in China arguing that the United States is trying to encircle the country. For all the talk of give-and-take, the Chinese rebuffed Mrs. Clinton during her recent visit to Beijing when she raised the disputes over the South China Sea.

"The Chinese feel a bit whiplashed," said Michael J. Green, an Asia policy maker in the administration of George W. Bush who is now at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. "The hope and change of the first year, followed by the sharp-edged push-back of the second year, all of this, to the Chinese, looks like gross inconsistency and unpredictability."

The President's Asia

It is little surprise that Mr. Obama would look east. The president's Asia, however, lies not on the wind-swept ramparts of the Great Wall of China but in the tropical swelter of Singapore and Indonesia. He identifies more with the languid rhythms of Jakarta, aides say, than with the crackling energy of Shanghai.

An adviser recalled a breakfast at a summit meeting in Toronto in 2010 that Mr. Obama shared with President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono of Indonesia, which was so relaxed and serene that afterward the president's hyperactive chief of staff, Rahm Emanuel, told him, "Now I see what your Asianness is about."

Despite his preferences, Mr. Obama was determined not to antagonize China when he ran for president in 2008. Unlike Mr. Clinton, who referred to China's leaders as the "butchers of Beijing" in 1992, Mr. Obama said little about China, and his thin record on foreign policy left few clues for the Chinese to size him up.

"We tried to introduce him as the first Asia-Pacific president," said Jon M. Huntsman Jr., who was ambassador to China from 2009 to 2011, before resigning to run for the Republican presidential nomination. Mr. Huntsman said that in exchanges with Chinese officials, Mr. Obama was highly effective. "But the Chinese were perplexed by President Obama," he said. "Where does he come from? What does he think? He remained a bit of a cipher."

With the president focused on priorities like Afghanistan and Iran in the early days of his administration, other officials rushed to stake their claim to China. Thomas E. Donilon, who later became national security adviser, spoke of a "rebalancing" to Asia from the Middle East. Mrs. Clinton, eager to reassert the State Department's role on China, made her first trip there.

Before landing in Beijing, however, Mrs. Clinton appeared to sideline the issue of human rights, saying she did not see the value of lodging pro forma protests with the Chinese in return for predictable responses. (She quickly changed course.)

Then, a few months later, Mr. Obama declined to meet with the Dalai Lama when he visited the United States. The sticking point was not the meeting but the timing - in October 2009, a month before Mr. Obama was to make his first trip as president to Beijing. Officials involved in the decision now express regret for not going ahead with the meeting.

"We hadn't reckoned with the way people in Washington set up litmus tests," Mr. Bader said. "Maybe we should have."

The optics did not improve on Mr. Obama's trip, which the Chinese stage-managed, allowing no questions after a joint news conference with Mr. Hu. White House officials said the trip was more successful than the news coverage suggested, but they do not dispute that the lasting impression was of a fast-rising power - the holder of \$1 trillion in American debt - pushing back on a beleaguered United States.

Not all of Mr. Obama's first year was conciliatory. In September 2009, he imposed a tariff on China for dumping tires into the American market. The administration also kept pressure on Beijing to revalue its

currency, though it did not label China a currency manipulator. This showed what former aides described as the "Chicago pol" side of Mr. Obama, who views China as a threat to American jobs.

An aide recalled briefing the president in early 2011 before a state visit by Mr. Hu on an array of diplomatic and human rights issues. Impatiently, Mr. Obama said, "The only thing people care about is the economic issues."

Drawing a Line

For a president with Southeast Asian sympathies, however, the tensions over the South China Sea were hard to ignore. At a meeting in May 2010, China's top foreign affairs official, Dai Bingguo, told a stunned Mrs. Clinton that Beijing regarded vast swaths of the sea, which it shares with Vietnam, the Philippines and other neighbors, as its territory. The economic stakes are great, given the resources beneath the sea's surface.

"China had been on a charm offensive and had really been making inroads with their neighbors in kind of soothing fears and showing restraint," Mrs. Clinton said. "And then I think that the Chinese began to flex their muscles."

The White House decided to draw a line. Two months later, Mrs. Clinton, working with Mr. Bader and Kurt M. Campbell, the hard-charging assistant secretary for East Asia in the State Department, sprang a surprise. At a summit meeting in Hanoi, Vietnam, she declared that the United States would take an interest in resolving disputes over the sea. China was livid, while Vietnam and the Philippines felt that they had a potent new backer.

China also underlies Mr. Obama's opening to Myanmar. During the long estrangement between the United States and its military dictators, China set out to turn the isolated country, also known as Burma, into a colonial outpost. On Wednesday, Mr. Obama welcomed Myanmar's opposition leader, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, to the White House.

Mr. Campbell rejected the suggestion that the United States was pursuing a cold-war-style containment of China, saying that the notion was "simplistic and wrong." At the same time, he said, "the Chinese respect strength, determination and strategy."

Exhibit A in that approach, he and others said, is the tortuous but ultimately successful negotiation over the dissident Chen Guangcheng, who sought refuge in the American Embassy in Beijing and was allowed to fly to New York.

With China embroiled in a leadership transition, Beijing now sometimes sounds like the beleaguered party. Over lunch with Mr. Donilon in Beijing recently, China's foreign minister, Yang Jiechi, complained about being pressured over the South China Sea. "Big countries can get bullied by little countries," Mr. Yang said, according to a senior aide who was in the room.

But China shows few signs of backing down. It filed its own case at the World Trade Organization against the United States on the same day as Mr. Obama's latest action. And when Mr. Panetta met in Beijing with China's presumed next leader, Xi Jinping, he got an earful on a territorial dispute involving tiny islands claimed by Japan and China.

Looking back, some former officials argue that it was not Mr. Obama who changed, but the Chinese. "People say we got mugged by reality," Mr. Bader said. "No, the Chinese behaved differently in 2010, and what we did reflected their behavior."

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With China's Rise, Japan Shifts To The Right

September 21, 2012

Washington Post

By Chico Harlan

TOKYO - Japan is in the midst of a gradual but significant shift to the right, acting more confrontational in the region than at any time since World War II.

The shift applies strictly to Japan's foreign policy and military strategy, not social issues, and has been driven both by China's rapid maritime expansion - particularly its emphatic claims on contested territory - and by a growing sense here that Japan should recover the clout squandered amid two lost decades of economic stagnation.

Japan's shift can be seen in an increasingly muscular role for the nation's Self-Defense Forces (SDF), in a push among mainstream politicians to revise key portions of the pacifist constitution and in a new willingness to clash with China, particularly in the East China Sea, where U.S. Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta said this week he was "concerned about conflict."

But analysts stress that Japan, even with its rightward shift, still remains ambivalent about its military; Japan is merely moving toward the center, they say, after decades of being perhaps the world's most pacifist advanced nation.

"The post-World War II Japan policy was to be low-key and cooperation-oriented," said Narushige Michishita, a self-described moderate and a security expert at the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies in Tokyo. "We tried to avoid any confrontation or friction with surrounding countries. . . . But there's a widespread feeling in the minds of Japanese people that being nice didn't work out."

Polls suggest Japanese are increasingly concerned about security and feel their country faces an outside threat. According to government data collected earlier this year, 25 percent think Japan should increase its military strength, compared with 14 percent three years ago and 8 percent in 1991.

That shift in thinking is reflected in Japan's leaders, including hawkish Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda, son of an SDF member, who has restored the U.S.-Japan security alliance as the "foundation" of Tokyo's foreign policy. That's a stark shift from three years ago, when then-leader Yukio Hatoyama frayed ties with Washington and dreamed of a harmonious "East Asian community" that included China.

But Noda, unpopular and likely facing an election in the upcoming months, is a relative moderate compared with those lining up to take his place. Front-runner Shigeru Ishiba, of the Liberal Democratic Party, said in a recent interview with the Wall Street Journal that the SDF should be able to fire warning shots against maritime intruders; currently, the SDF yields to the Coast Guard to handle incursions. Another top candidate, Nobuteru Ishihara, son of China-baiting Tokyo Gov. Shintaro Ishihara, said recently that part of the country "will be snatched" if Japan is off guard.

Some of the get-tough-on-China talk, surging this summer amid a recent territorial dispute, merely caters to Japan's small and vocal group of nationalists. But such security issues have also "become more important to common people as well," said Yuichi Hosoya, a professor of international politics at Keio University, and no politician can ignore that.

No matter who follows Noda as prime minister, Hosoya said, Japan will move further to the right.

Tensions escalate

The most obvious sign of Japan's new security concerns came two years ago, under then-Prime Minister Naoto Kan, when the country overhauled its defense strategy, turning its attention to China's expanding naval threat and promising greater surveillance of the southwestern island chain that marks a tense maritime border between the neighbors.

The strategy pinpointed Beijing as a chief security concern and tensions have only escalated this summer as the countries have sparred over a collection of remote, uninhabitable islands and the waters around them.

Although the disputes over these islands go back centuries, experts say that Japan is now taking previously unseen steps to boldly state its claims and monitor its waters, with heavy investments in helicopters and airplanes that can transport SDF members to a maritime crisis.

Additionally, Japan by 2015 plans to deploy troops on southwestern Yonaguni Island, in the East China Sea. A defense ministry spokesman said that this will be the first time Japan will station ground troops anywhere in the "first island chain" that runs from Okinawa to Taiwan and that also includes the Senkaku Islands, owned by Japan but claimed also by China and Taiwan.

"It has now become the highest priority . . . to figure out how to reinforce the defense of Japan's southwestern region along this first island chain," Defense Minister Satoshi Morimoto said in a recent interview.

Morimoto, however, said that he does not think Japanese support flagrant use of force, and he rejected the idea that Japan is moving toward the right. Conducting "military activities that pose an unnecessary threat to surrounding countries," Morimoto said, "would only damage the stability of the region."

China says Japan has already caused damage a different way - with its move last week to nationalized the Senkaku Islands, which the central government bought from a private owner. China blasted the "illegal" move and sent six ships into Japanese waters, all while Chinese staged anti-Japanese protests in more than 50 cities. The purchase, a commentary in the China's state-run Xinhua news agency said, indicates that "Japan has not shown any sincere regret for past invasions, but is, instead, attempting to recover its pre-defeat prestige."

Overhauling Article 9?

A legacy of its retreat from militancy after World War II, Japan's constitution, with the two-paragraph Article 9, renounces war and promises to never maintain land, sea and air forces. Article 9 has never been changed, but its interpretation has been loosened, most clearly in 1954, when Japan established the SDF for the purpose of protecting its own land.

Still, the SDF, as a defense-only unit, faces profound restrictions. It has no long-range missiles or aircraft carriers. Though it takes part in peacekeeping missions overseas, it can't join in combat to defend an ally.

But there's a growing push to change this restriction on "collective self-defense," as it's known. Noda favors a change, as does Toru Hashimoto, the country's most popular politician, who recently launched a new national party. Meantime, the Liberal Democratic Party, likely to assume power after Noda, has taken an even bolder step, laying out a re-drafted constitution that overhauls Article 9, provides the right to collective self-defense and "make[s] Japan a truly sovereign state."

Japan's constitution has never been changed, and any revision would require a two-thirds majority in both houses of parliament, as well as a national referendum. Some Japanese politicians, experts note, have pushed for decades for changes in the pacifist clauses of the constitution, but opposition now has become less vocal.

"I don't see the tipping point yet for constitutional change" because any change requires profound consensus, said Masashi Nishihara, president of the Research Institute for Peace and Security in Tokyo. "But we are moving in that direction."

Nishihara pointed to several smaller steps that indicate Japan's willingness to push the boundaries of its constitution.

Japan last year relaxed a long-standing ban on weapons exports. In June, it passed a law permitting military space satellites and other surveillance, which had previously been prohibited. Japan's SDF this month is also taking part in U.S.-led minesweeping exercises in the Strait of Hormuz.

"The pacifist sentiment is still strong enough to impact Japanese government policy," Nishihara said. "So the government has to be careful. It has to move very slowly."

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AFRICA

Ethiopia Swears In New Prime Minister

September 21, 2012

Associated Press

By Kirubel Tadesse

ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia - Ethiopia's parliament has sworn in the country's new leader.

Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn, who was sworn in on Friday, succeeds former Prime Minister Meles Zenawi. Meles died Aug. 20 after ruling Ethiopia for more than two decades.

Last weekend Ethiopia's ruling political party, the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front, named Hailemariam as chair of the party, which controls parliament.

Ethiopia is a strong U.S. ally in East Africa, particularly on security issues. David Shinn, the U.S. ambassador to Ethiopia from 1996 to 1999, said it's unlikely U.S.-Ethiopia relations will change significantly with Hailemariam as prime minister. Shinn said Washington, though, will be interested in seeing a renewed focus on human rights policies, for which Ethiopia is frequently criticized.

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Police Fire Tear Gas As 1000s March In Guinea

September 21, 2012

Associated Press

CONAKRY, Guinea - Thousands of protesters marched in Guinea's capital to call for the departure of South African company Waymark, which was hired by the Guinean government to re-do the country's electoral list.

Police fired tear gas to disperse the marchers but there were no immediate reports of injuries.

Guinea held its first democratic election in 2010, after delaying the vote multiple times, as candidates demanded changes in the voters' register. Since then, the country has failed to hold parliamentary elections, as the ruling party demands another revision. Because Waymark was hired by the ruling party, the opposition says that they fear it is conniving with President Alpha Conde's administration.

Opposition leader Lansana Kouyate told the marchers, "We are calling for the departure of Waymark, a company that was recruited by Alpha Conde."

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SAfrica Military Forces To Assist In Mine Strikes

September 21, 2012

Associated Press

By Carley Petesch And Michelle Faul

RUSTENBURG, South Africa - Days after soldiers were deployed, South African President Jacob Zuma announced Thursday that he has ordered the military to assist police trying to control labor unrest in the nation's crucial mining sector.

Despite resolution of the longest and bloodiest strike, at least one more death was reported.

Even as miners whistled as they returned to work Thursday at the Lonmin PLC platinum mine in Marikana, where police killed 34 miners on Aug. 16, labor advocates said police killed a ruling party municipal councilor who died of injuries from a rubber bullet.

Zuma's office issued a statement saying he was invoking the constitution to order the military to support police "in the prevention and combating of crime as well as the maintenance of law and order in the Marikana Area ... and other areas around the country where needed" until Jan. 31. The notice from the presidency referred to section 201 (2) of the constitution, which states that "only the President, as head of the national executive, may authorize the employment of the defense force."

Last weekend some 1,000 soldiers were trucked into the "platinum belt" northwest of Johannesburg.

Thursday morning, police in two water cannon trucks and several armored cars confronted striking Anglo American Platinum miners at a shantytown where residents set up barricades of rocks and burning tires and logs. Before long, the fires died down and most of the police pulled back. The people dispersed, leaving a herd of goats milling around the water cannons.

Police spokesman Dennis Adriaio confirmed that earlier Thursday police fired tear gas and a stun grenade on a gathering of about 300 people near the Sondela settlement. There were no arrests, he said.

Strike leader Evans Ramokga said that one miner died Wednesday after he was run over by a police armored car as police fired rubber bullets, tear gas and stun grenades to break up a gathering of up to 500 worker, but he could not provide further details.

Police spokesman Adriaio said he was unaware of the incident, and it could not be confirmed by another independent source. The mines near Rustenburg belong to Anglo American Platinum, the world's largest platinum producer.

"The only thing we want is to sit down and have them hear our demands," Ramokga said. He said authorities have refused to give permission for the thousands of strikers among Anglo's 15,000 workers there to hold a protest march to back their demands for a gross monthly salary of 16,070 rand (\$2,000).

Anglo issued an ultimatum for workers to report for duty by Thursday night or threatened to act on a court order declaring the strike illegal. That gives Anglo the power to fire strikers.

"Anglo American Platinum's Rustenburg mining operations are already under considerable economic pressure, any further delays in returning to work will only increase the risk to the long-term viability of these mines," it said in a statement late Wednesday.

Gaddafi Mdoda is among the 40 leaders elected by miners to represent them during the strike and through negotiations.

"Until we get the money, the cycle continues," he said.

Strikes also still continue for miners who work at Gold Fields.

Sven Lunsche, spokesman for Gold Fields, said that 85 percent of the companies 15,000 workers at its biggest mine, KDC west near Carletonville, are on strike and none of them have returned to work. The mine is still open, but not in production.

"We have explained that there isn't much we can do," Lunsche said, adding that the gold mine industry deals through collective bargaining.

"The strike is about pay, but it's also mostly about branch leadership at the mine," he said. The mine is a part of the National Union of Mineworkers, and strikers met with the union Thursday.

Bandile Memela, a representative for the miners at the KDC west mine near Carletonville, said the meeting with the NUM did not yield enough reason to end the strike, according to South Africa Press Association.

"Yes, we will continue the strike," Memela told thousands of workers, it said.

The NUM reported Thursday that as many as 10,000 jobs could be lost because mining companies say some of their shafts have become unprofitable.

The Marikana Solidarity Campaign reported that African National Congress councilor Paulina Masutlhe was shopping Saturday at the Wonderkop shantytown where Lonmin platinum miners live when police firing from a speeding armored car hit several women. Masutlhe was hit in the abdomen and leg and rushed to the hospital, where she died Wednesday, a statement said.

The councilor's death northwest of Johannesburg, brings the confirmed strike-related death toll to 46.

Adriao said he is investigating the report of the death. He said police had reported to the Independent Police Investigative Directorate that several people were hit by rubber bullets in a raid to disarm strikers on Saturday, the day after the government ordered a crackdown.

The directorate already has opened 34 murder and 78 attempted murder charges against police in the Aug. 16 shootings, the worst state violence since the white minority apartheid regime was brought down in 1994. The government has said it is awaiting the outcome of a judicial commission of inquiry that is to report to the president in January.

Lonmin on Tuesday resolved its five-week strike by agreeing to pay raises of 11 to 22 percent.

The strike already has spread to several gold, platinum and chrome mines, damaging investor confidence in the country that produces 75 percent of world platinum and is the No. 4 chrome producer and in the top 10 of gold producers.

A declaration ending a three-day conference of the Congress of South African Trade Unions demanded an end to "starvation wages" and "radical change in socio-economic conditions." It said its 2.2 million members "have had enough of the unfulfilled promise to implement the Freedom Charter."

The Freedom Charter calls, among other things, for the nationalization of natural resources, including mines.

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Water Shortage Sparks "Crisis" In S. Sudan: Red Cross

September 21, 2012

AFP

The lack of clean water in refugee camps in South Sudan has become a "major humanitarian crisis" with people exposed to diseases due to contamination, the Red Cross said Thursday.

"Severe water shortages in refugee camps close to the Sudanese border have contributed to a rise in mortality and malnutrition rates to alarming levels," the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said in a statement.

In response to the crisis, the organisation said it had launched a project to improve water access for some 37,000 people in the worst-hit camp, Yusuf Batil.

"The humanitarian situation in Yusuf Batil camp in particular is extremely worrying. Conditions are dire and survival remains a struggle," Melker Mabeck, who heads the ICRC delegation in South Sudan, said in the statement.

"Owing to the lack of clean water, people are drinking contaminated surface water. Children are especially vulnerable to death from water-borne diseases such as diarrhoea," he said, pointing out that the ICRC was expanding the camp's water infrastructure and distributing buckets for water storage.

The organisation said it was also drawing a 15-kilometre (nine-mile) pipeline to provide better access to water for the 30,000 refugees living in the nearby Jamam camp.

The ICRC first launched operations in southern Sudan in 1986, and it set up a delegation in the capital of Juba when South Sudan became an independent country in July last year.

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ASIA

Trade Talks Aim To Expand United States' Asia Presence, With China On The Horizon

September 21, 2012

[Washington Post](#)

By Howard Schneider

As the U.S. hammers on China's front door with demands to further open up its economy, Obama administration officials are negotiating a potential back alley to the same end - a trade agreement with other Asian nations they hope will challenge China to change some of its core economic policies.

China is not party to the Trans-Pacific Partnership talks that the United States is pursuing with 10 other nations. But the proposed treaty has become a central part of the administration's "pivot" toward Asia and is meant to address issues, such as the role of state-owned enterprises, that figure in the central disputes between the United States and China.

The ongoing talks include countries like Vietnam and Malaysia that are direct competitors with China for international investment, and they could give these countries freer access to U.S. markets and make them more attractive to multinational businesses as foreign investment in China has ebbed.

If U.S. ambitions are met, the pact will unite large portions of Asia, North America and South America in a trading bloc of lowered tariffs and common rules - a tidal pull that the Chinese could find hard to resist.

"This really embeds us in the fastest-growing region of the world and gives us a leadership role in shaping the rules of the game for that region," said Mike Froman, deputy national security adviser for international economics. "It is creating a platform for the Asia-Pacific that more and more countries will want to be part of."

After 14 rounds of talks, most recently at Virginia's Lansdowne Resort, negotiators are aiming to complete the agreement next year among the 11 countries currently involved. Most of them - including Australia, Singapore, Chile and Peru, with Mexico and Canada about to join - already have trade agreements with the United States, which could limit the short-term impact of an additional regional pact.

But the breadth of the agreement, and the potential for its membership to expand, makes it perhaps the central trade discussion underway in the world as global trade talks have ground to a halt. By delving into issues that World Trade Organization rules don't cover - the proper place of state-owned

enterprises, for instance, or questions of electronic commerce - U.S. officials and others hope it will frame a new stage in trade relations for those who join.

After China joined the WTO, Beijing viewed its commitments "as a ceiling" that did not have to be exceeded, said Ted Dean, chairman of the American Chamber of Commerce in China. "We want them to treat it as a floor. If at the margin Vietnam looks better, Malaysia looks better [because of the Trans-Pacific Partnership] . . . that has an impact."

China already faces increasing impatience among its major trading partners to loosen control over the state-dominated economy, allow more competition, give freer rein to foreign investors and rely less on exports. Top Communist Party figures have often said that is their intent, and Obama administration officials in recent months have said the country is making strides on important issues, such as state control of the financial system.

But progress on many fronts has been slow, and American public opinion is ambivalent about whether freer trade is a good idea. A March Pew Research Center poll found that 48 percent of those questioned supported free-trade agreements, with 41 percent opposed. But other surveys found large majorities who felt China's economic rise had damaged U.S. prospects.

The issue has figured in the U.S. presidential campaign, with President Obama saying that Republican challenger Mitt Romney's business deals sent American jobs overseas, and Romney saying that Obama has not been tough enough with China. Romney has also endorsed the treaty, calling it a "dramatic geopolitical and economic bulwark against China."

Finishing the treaty - not to mention winning congressional approval - will be no easy task.

The trade talks have touched off vigorous opposition from a broad range of interest groups and companies and have drawn protests from members of Congress. negotiators have been criticized for not revealing more of the proposed treaty to the public.

There are disputes brewing over regulation of Internet commerce - groups such as the Electronic Frontier Foundation argue that the treaty may go beyond what's been settled under U.S. law - and pharmaceutical patents and pricing. As the Lansdowne talks proceeded, Maine state representative Sharon Treat monitored them from the resort's lobby, concerned that the Trans-Pacific Partnership might prevent state governments from negotiating better rates from drug and biotech companies.

There are still deep divisions among the countries involved, and U.S. domestic interests may clash as well. The Sweetener Users Association, a coalition of major food and beverage companies, hopes the trade negotiations lead to the elimination of import restrictions that protect U.S. sugar producers. The country's small footwear industry opposes lowering tariffs on imported shoes, a levy that shoe importers want lifted.

The issue prompted U.S. Trade Representative Ron Kirk to visit the New Balance shoe plant in Norridgewock, Maine, last week, where executives said the tariffs protect the company's 1,350 shoe-making jobs.

"A TPP with Vietnam imperils our ability to keep making footwear in this country," said company spokesman Matt LeBretton. "People are tripping over themselves to get to Vietnam. There is no need to give them an additional advantage."

But given the stakes - with administration officials calling it a "gold standard" agreement integral to their Asia policy - domestic trade-offs may well be required.

Why expect Vietnam to start dismantling stated-owned enterprises or ask New Zealand to change its drug pricing if the United States restricts its sugar imports or keeps a tax on imported sneakers? U.S. officials say they are determined to bring the trade deal to completion and say that the disputes emerging now are a sign that the talks have reached bedrock.

"We are going to have to solve a lot of issues to bring this over the finish line, but there is unanimous consensus to keep the momentum," said Demetrios Marantis, deputy U.S. trade representative. "We are that advanced, we are getting to the hard stuff."

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Wen Chides Europe On Arms Sale Embargo

September 21, 2012

New York Times

By James Kanter

BRUSSELS - Prime Minister Wen Jiabao said on Thursday that China would continue to help the European Union recover from its economic crisis even as he sternly criticized the bloc for maintaining an embargo on weapons sales to his country.

The Union is the biggest buyer of Chinese exports and China is the second most important trading partner for the Union, after the United States, making the relationship crucial to growth and jobs for both.

Yet there are serious irritants for Beijing, including the E.U. ban on arms exports to China, in place since the 1989 crackdown on protesters around Tiananmen Square, and the reluctance of Europe to classify China as a modern, open economy, which would clear the way for advantages on tariffs.

"I have to be very frank in saying this," Mr. Wen told Herman Van Rompuy, the president of the European Council, and José Manuel Barroso, the president of the European Commission. On "the two issues of lifting the arms embargo against China and recognizing China's full market economy status, we have been working hard for 10 years. But the solution has been elusive."

"I deeply regret this," Mr. Wen said, shortly before a live television transmission from the meeting was cut off. "I hope, and I do believe that the E.U. side will seize the opportunity and take greater initiative at an early stage."

The Union considered easing the arms ban in 2005, but the United States steadfastly objected and some of Union's member states raised objections because of concerns about violations of human rights in China.

Without market economy status, a nation usually faces higher tariffs in trade disputes with the Union, but China has fulfilled only one of the five requirements required to win such status, the European Commission said.

China still needs to show less government influence over its businesses, including those in the financial sector, and to adopt transparent laws on corporate governance, property and bankruptcy to be eligible for market economy status, the commission said. Europe and China are also embroiled in trade disputes over solar panels and rare earth metals.

Striking a softer tone, Mr. Wen said China would continue to support the E.U. economy.

"In recent months, China has been continuing to invest in the euro zone government bonds and bonds issued by the European Financial Stability Facility," said Mr. Wen, referring to a temporary fund for euro countries that has already been used to assist Greece, Ireland and Portugal.

"Europe is one of the main markets for China to invest its foreign exchange reserves and China will continue to participate in efforts to tackle Europe's debt crisis through appropriate channels," Mr. Wen said.

The European Council, the body headed by Mr. Van Rompuy, did not hold a customary news conference after the meeting because the European authorities and their Chinese counterparts were unable to agree on a format after journalists expressed concerns that the Chinese authorities planned to exclude members of the media they dislike.

In a statement, Mr. Van Rompuy and Mr. Barroso sought to underline the growing interdependence of the Chinese and European economies. The European leaders also urged China to use its influence to end "a terrible humanitarian tragedy" in Syria.

"We have asked China, as a permanent member of the Security Council, to redouble its efforts to ensure the United Nations Security Council can contribute effectively to the solution of the Syrian crisis," they said.

China, along with Russia, has vetoed proposed U.N. resolutions intended to put pressure on President Bashar al-Assad to end a crackdown on the Syrian opposition.
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U.S. to sell Indonesia 8 Apache helicopters

September 21, 2012

Reuters

WASHINGTON - The United States said on Thursday it will sell Indonesia eight AH-64/D Apache helicopters to strengthen security ties with the largest country in Southeast Asia and the world's most populous Muslim-majority nation.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, speaking during a meeting with Indonesian Foreign Minister Marty Natalegawa in Washington, said Congress had been notified of the intent to sell the aircraft.

"This agreement will strengthen our comprehensive partnership and help enhance security across the region," Clinton said.

President Barack Obama's administration has sought to buttress defense ties with Indonesia as it refocuses its attention toward the Asia-Pacific following long years of war in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The United States has stepped up military cooperation with traditional allies such as the Philippines and Australia, and joined regional efforts to press China to accept a multilateral framework for solving flaring territorial disputes in the South China Sea.

Clinton did not reveal an estimated cost for the Apache deal, which Indonesian media have reported has been in the works for months. The attack helicopters, used by militaries around the world, are made by Boeing.

The United States last year announced it was giving Indonesia two dozen second-hand F-16 fighter planes, with Jakarta covering the estimated \$750 million needed to refurbish the late-model fighters and overhaul their engines.

U.S. officials say the delivery of U.S. hardware will improve cooperation and information-sharing between the U.S. and Indonesian militaries as they face common security threats.

The announcement of the helicopter sale came as Clinton and Natalegawa wound up the third regular U.S.-Indonesia joint commission meeting, with both saying that ties between the two countries had grown stronger.

Clinton, who visited Indonesia this month as part of an Asia-Pacific tour, said trade topped \$26 billion last year and that the United States would invest \$600 million over the next five years in Indonesian clean energy development, child health and nutrition programs and government transparency initiatives under its Millennium Challenge aid program.

Indonesia has been among the nations hit by violent anti-American protests over the past week to protest against a U.S.-made video seen as critical of Islam.

Clinton said that the United States had decided to temporarily close its diplomatic facilities in the country on Friday in case further protests erupt. But she praised Jakarta for its response to the crisis.

"We are very grateful for not only the cooperation and the protection that has been provided to our facilities, but also for the strong statements condemning violence," Clinton said.
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Sleepy Islands And A Smoldering Dispute

September 21, 2012

New York Times

By Martin Fackler And Ian Johnson

ISHIGAKI, Japan - In the fishing harbor here, Japan has increased the number of sleek, white Coast Guard cutters to fend off the Chinese patrol boats that have stepped up their challenge of Japan's control of disputed nearby islands, one sign of a smoldering conflict that has threatened relations between Asia's two giants.

But even here in Ishigaki, at the southern edge of Japan closest to the contested territory, many fear that the heated showdown may scare off other, more welcome Chinese visitors: tourists who sustain the town's resort-based economy.

The conflicted feelings are emblematic of the quandary both nations face as they once again clash over sovereignty of the uninhabited islands in the East China Sea known as Senkaku in Japan and Diaoyu in China. Neither nation can afford to appear to back down over territorial claims that speak volumes about the countries' often tortured history since Japan's brutal invasion of China. But they also cannot ignore their more modern history, in which businesses have brushed past political wariness to build a web of ties in trade and investment that are critical to both economies' well-being.

"The huge contradiction at the center of Japanese-Chinese relations is the fact that politics and the economics are moving in completely opposite directions," said Kazuko Mori, a China specialist at Waseda University in Tokyo.

Those economic ties may help explain why the Japanese government has remained so reticent, even as demonstrators in China vandalized Japanese-owned businesses this week. They may also explain why China - after at least tolerating, if not encouraging, protests in recent weeks - has taken steps to end the protests and prosecute rioters.

According to Japan's Finance Ministry, China was Japan's largest trading partner last year, and Japan is China's second-biggest trading partner after the United States. Japan is also China's largest outside investor, with Japanese companies directly or indirectly employing about 10 million Chinese, according to a Japanese lobby group.

Perhaps as important as the volume of the trade and investment, though, is how complementary the two countries' industries are.

Japan's still formidable lead in technology allows it to provide much of the production machinery in Chinese factories and many of the core components in Chinese-made products that have helped make China's rise possible. Japan's struggling electronics companies, in turn, have become dependent on sales to China's lower-cost manufacturers, which use Japanese memory chips, display panels and other parts in many of their high-tech products.

The iPhone is just one example. Although the phones are assembled in China, many of their most sophisticated parts are supplied by Japanese companies like Toshiba and TDK. Japanese content is so high that there were even calls during the recent anti-Japan protests to boycott the iPhone, according to Japanese news reports.

Beyond that, low-priced Chinese goods have become an important part of coping in economically stagnant Japan, embraced by consumers weary of declining wages and living standards.

"We disagree on the islands," said Sachie Misawa, who shopped this week at a store in Tokyo that sells affordable Chinese-made clothing. "But shopping for clothes is another matter entirely. Chinese-made products are cheap and good, so I am a loyal customer."

In the short term, such sentiments may help cool the dispute. But the problem, according to Victoria Hui, a scholar of Chinese government and protests at the University of Notre Dame, is that China's

government does not seem to have an easy exit strategy from the tensions. Unless Japan surrenders control of the islands, a virtual impossibility, the Chinese government will have no successes to show, which could make it seem weak.

"Japan is unlikely to do anything that will make the Chinese happy," she said. "How do you put the genie back in the bottle?"

The islands at the heart of the dispute are a seven-hour voyage from this tropical port town. They are controlled by Japan, but claimed by both China and Taiwan and have been a festering problem for years.

The hard feelings are partly over history: Japan staked its claims in the late 1800s, in what the Chinese see as one of the aspiring imperial power's earliest attempts to impose its will on the region. The territorial contest is also over resources; studies in recent decades have suggested a possible wealth of oil beneath the waters surrounding the islands.

The issue has been compounded in recent years by Japan's increasing feelings not only of threat from its more assertive neighbor, but also of loss as China has surged past it, displacing Japan as the world's second-largest economy.

Politics has also added to the combustible mixture. China is on the brink of a once-in-a-decade shift in leadership that has not been going well, with a top party official vanquished by a scandal over his wife's murder of an English businessman, and his own grab for power.

Japan, for its part, has had a series of weak governments that some analysts, including Professor Mori, say have allowed a small but vocal group of nationalists to drive the agenda on the islands instead of doing more to convince the public that confrontation is against the country's best interests. Japanese leaders have also been constrained by public opinion, which has slowly turned against China.

"The leadership often cannot control these emotions, because they cannot afford politically to look weak," Professor Mori said.

The conflict flared this time as Japan announced plans to buy the privately owned islands, a move that the government said was meant to stop a nationalistic governor from doing so and possibly worsening the conflict. But Chinese officials and protesters scoffed at that explanation, saying the nationalization was meant to solidify Japan's claim.

The raging emotions at the protests in dozens of Chinese cities, which caused some business giants like Toyota to close temporarily, were enough of a shock that business leaders in Japan have begun to urge the government to try to quash the conflict.

"We must get the economic relations back on track," Hiromasa Yonekura, the chairman of Japan's largest business lobby group, the Keidanren, told reporters on Wednesday after a trip to Beijing was canceled because of the protests.

And just-released data in the Chinese news media show that trade may already be slowing. During the first eight months of the year, trade fell 1.4 percent to \$218.7 billion, according to data from the General Administration of Customs, after increasing 14.3 percent last year. Officials said the slowing world economy was partly responsible, but also blamed concerns over political issues. The government said

the growth of investment from Japan in China also slowed, growing 16 percent in the first eight months of the year compared with a 50 percent rise in the same period last year as Japanese companies seek out countries with even cheaper work forces and less-touchy diplomatic relations.

While the two countries are mutually dependent economically, some analysts in both places warn that Japan is overly dependent on China. Automakers, electronics companies and even supermarkets and convenience stores have begun investing heavily in China in part to escape shrinking demand at home.

"China and Japan need each other, but honestly speaking, Japan needs China more," said Kazuo Yukawa, a professor at Asia University in Tokyo. "So Japanese feel torn. They want to defend their territory, but few would say to do so at the expense of business."

Still, even some of those who have been hurt by the tensions understand the geopolitics driving the problem. Lin Shu Ying - a Chinese travel agent in Tokyo who has been overwhelmed by cancellations by Japanese bound for China - suspects that the protests will drive Japan to reconsider its reliance on China.

Indeed, the trade ministry has been working to reduce Japan's near-total reliance on China for so-called rare earths, metals used to make modern electronics, since China cut off shipments in a diplomatic showdown two years ago over the same islands.

"China will remain an important source," said Satoshi Hashimoto, a deputy director at the trade ministry, "but we learned that it is dangerous to be overdependent on it."

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South Korea Fires On North Korean Fishing Boats

September 21, 2012

[Associated Press](#)

By Sam Kim

SEOUL, South Korea - South Korea's navy fired warning shots Friday toward North Korean fishing boats that crossed a disputed maritime boundary, but the shots didn't hit the fishing boats and the vessels retreated, a South Korean official said.

Fishing boats routinely jostle for position in the seafood-rich Yellow Sea waters claimed by both countries during crab-catching season, which is now in high gear. Three deadly naval clashes since 1999 have taken a few dozen lives. The disputed sea boundary is not clearly marked, and incursions by North Korean military and fishing boats are not unusual.

No North Korean navy ships were involved in Friday's incident along a tense western sea boundary that the North has long refused to recognize, an official with South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said, speaking anonymously because of office policy.

Six North Korean fishing boats crossed the boundary and refused to return until the South Korean Navy fired the warning shots, the official said.

North Korean fishing boats already crossed the boundary four times earlier this month but retreated each time after being warned by the South, the official said. Seoul says North Korean fishing boats also crossed the boundary in April.

The Korean War ended nearly 60 years ago with a truce, not with a peace treaty, so the U.S.-led U.N. Command divided the Yellow Sea without Pyongyang's consent. The boundary favored South Korea, cutting North Korea off from rich fishing waters and boxing in one of its crucial deep-water ports. North Korea has bitterly contested the line ever since.

Pyongyang argues the line should run farther south. But for Seoul, accepting such a line would endanger fishing around five South Korean islands and hamper access to its port at Incheon.

In 2010, a North Korean artillery barrage on Yeonpyeong Island, which is near the boundary, killed four South Koreans, including two civilians. Also in 2010, an explosion ripped apart a South Korean warship in the area, killing 46 sailors. Seoul says Pyongyang torpedoed the vessel. North Korea denies responsibility.

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Panetta Announces Warmer Military Ties On New Zealand Trip

September 21, 2012

New York Times

By Thom Shanker

AUCKLAND, New Zealand - Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta arrived in this South Pacific island nation Friday, becoming the first Pentagon chief to visit here in three decades, an absence prompted by a breakdown in ties after New Zealand prohibited American nuclear warships from its territorial waters.

In a sign of Washington's efforts to increase military-to-military cooperation, Mr. Panetta announced that the Obama administration had modified United States policy so that, in the future, the defense secretary can authorize individual visits by New Zealand naval vessels to Defense Department or Coast Guard facilities.

Although New Zealand now participates in American-led naval exercises, its ships must dock at commercial ports in the United States, and not at military bases - a reciprocal ban in response to that imposed by New Zealand on American warships.

New Zealand has pulled its Special Operations forces from Afghanistan and will focus on training local security troops, but it still has about 180 troops on the ground there operating a provincial reconstruction team. The dangers remain: New Zealand has lost 10 troops in combat, including 5 in August alone. One of those killed was the first female combat death in the nation's history, officials said.

"The deep respect the United States military has for the New Zealand defense forces has only grown over this decade of war," Mr. Panetta said.

The closer relations have resulted in the United States and New Zealand signing new documents to re-establish avenues for dialogue and pledging cooperation on Asia-Pacific security issues.

Even so, Mr. Panetta said he did not push for a renewed, formal mutual-defense treaty with New Zealand. This final stop on a weeklong mission that included visits to Japan and China was intended more broadly to nurture closer military-to-military ties with an important South Pacific security partner.

That sentiment was echoed by New Zealand's defense minister, Jonathon Coleman, who said there was no need to recreate the treaty alliance canceled in 1986. Both nations "are enjoying the benefits" of a growing security partnership, he said, without "reverting back to the way things were."

He said that New Zealand's continued prohibition on nuclear warships would remain in place but was no longer a hindrance to security cooperation with the United States.

Both defense officials said areas of increased military cooperation between the countries could include efforts to counter piracy and halt nuclear proliferation, as well as joining forces for humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations.

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NEA

In Egypt, new power brings new challenges for Muslim Brotherhood

September 21, 2012

Washington Post

By Michael Birnbaum

CAIRO — For decades, the Muslim Brotherhood was forced to operate in Egypt's shadows. Now its leaders, closely allied with President Mohamed Morsi, are quickly finding that opposition tactics don't always work when they are in charge.

In the latest example of that, the Brotherhood's calls last week for demonstrations against an anti-Islam YouTube video drew an unhappy phone call from President Obama and led to a halt in aid negotiations crucial to the Egyptian economy.

Top Brotherhood officials say they are maturing as they grow into their new role as Egypt's dominant political power under Morsi, a former head of the group's political wing. But they say they also find themselves caught between the moderating force of office and a sharp tug toward religious and social conservatism from Islamist groups that sparked the protests at the U.S. Embassy here.

A top Morsi adviser, Essam el-Erian, said this week that the newness of democracy in Egypt has compounded the challenges the group faces in a country ruled by autocratic military leaders since the toppling of the monarchy in 1952.

"In any democratic country, you have a rotation of power," said Erian, the interim chairman of the Brotherhood's political wing. But in Egypt, he said, those who are now politicians have spent 60 years in the opposition.

Failure to find the right balance could lead to a split between moderate and conservative forces in a nation of 83 million whose long-term success is critical to the Arab world, officials and analysts say.

"It's going to be very difficult to find a way forward and keep it all together," said Elijah Zarwan, a Cairo-based expert on Egyptian politics at the European Council on Foreign Relations. Morsi "is really walking a very delicate tightrope."

The Muslim Brotherhood, a moderate Islamist group, has said that it wants an expanded role for religion in Egyptian life but has tried to be inclusive in the 19 months since massive protests forced Hosni Mubarak to step down after decades in power. The movement was founded in 1928 and was banned

and repressed almost continuously until Mubarak's departure, drawing popular support by providing social services to some of Egyptian society's most vulnerable in a country with sharp divides between rich and poor.

The revolution transformed the Brotherhood's status overnight. Leaders, some of whom had been imprisoned for years, suddenly became the heads of the biggest, best-organized civil group in the country. They have slowly ramped up their engagement in political life, first capturing nearly half the seats in parliament and then winning the presidency after first saying they would limit their parliamentary presence and skip the presidency altogether.

Now leaders say they will contest every single parliamentary seat if elections are held again after the legislature was dissolved over the summer.

"The people are in a hurry for democracy," Erian said.

Morsi further cemented his power in mid-August when he dismissed some of the military's top leaders, enshrining civilian control over an army that has long dominated Egyptian political life. In a move toward inclusiveness, he appointed a cabinet made up mainly of technocrats, with a few Muslim Brotherhood affiliates in key positions.

But with leadership come new responsibilities, and the Brotherhood has been evolving quickly, sometimes by the day.

Last week, it was the ultraconservative Salafist Nour party, a rival to the Brotherhood, that took the lead in calling for protests against the anti-Islam video. The demonstrations at the fortress-like U.S. Embassy helped spark a week of anger toward U.S. targets across the region — and it also put pressure on Morsi and his circle.

"They were basically forced to choose between the Islamists and the United States," said Michele Dunne, a former Middle East specialist at the National Security Council who is now at the Atlantic Council. "Their initial response was to try to outflank the Salafis to show that they, the Brotherhood, were the real defenders of Islam."

After protesters stormed the embassy on Sept. 11, breaching the compound and pulling down and destroying an American flag, Morsi waited 24 hours, then posted a mild condemnation on Facebook. The political wing of the Muslim Brotherhood, meanwhile, called for more demonstrations against the YouTube video.

Protesting is "both the right and the duty of all Egyptian people," it said in a statement on Thursday of last week.

Only after Obama's stern phone call did Morsi get tough on the protests, tempering the calls for a massive nationwide turnout and, on Saturday, cracking down on the hundreds of people who remained in Tahrir Square, 350 yards from the embassy. Tahrir has been swept clean, and government workers are putting in plants in place of permanent encampments.

Brotherhood officials say they are learning.

Gehad el-Haddad, a senior adviser to the Brotherhood, said the Freedom and Justice Party, the Brotherhood's political wing, "is a new party, less than two years old, and the Muslim Brotherhood has a very new role that they have not been accustomed to after many years of being underground."

Whether the new moderation will work in the long term is another question. Before parliament was dissolved, ultraconservative Islamists held about a quarter of the seats, making them the second-largest bloc in the legislature. The more compromises the Brotherhood has to make, some analysts say, the harder it will be to retain its current level of support.

And if leaders don't succeed in addressing Egypt's crippling poverty and unemployment, they also risk losing broad-based support. For now, aid and investment will have to come from outside Egypt — the country's \$10 billion funding gap and dwindling foreign currency reserves are too hard to handle alone. Many Brotherhood officials sound above all like hard-nosed business people.

"We're working with the American community," Hassan Malek, a top Muslim Brotherhood businessman who advises Morsi on international investment, said in an interview shortly before the protests last week. "We've decided to be exposed to the whole world because we really need investment."

For now, the Brotherhood has quieted the protests. Even the Nour party has issued conciliatory statements condemning the violence outside the embassy. But leaders say they will need to remain vigilant to hold their disparate wings together.

Across the Arab world, Erian said, newly democratic countries are facing "enormous and difficult challenges" and need to work to ensure that "society does not split up into sects or factions."
(top)

Iran's Top Atomic Official Says Nation Issued False Nuclear Data To Fool Spies

September 21, 2012

New York Times

By Rick Gladstone And Christine Hauser

Iran's top atomic energy official said in an article published Thursday that because of foreign espionage, his government had sometimes provided false information to protect its nuclear program, which Western powers and Israel have called a cloak to develop a nuclear weapons capacity.

The official, Fereydoon Abbasi, a nuclear scientist who is the head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization, did not specify the nature of the false information. Nor did he specify when it had been presented or to whom.

Mr. Abbasi's remarks were quoted in an article on the Web site of Al Hayat, a pan-Arab newspaper in Britain that is considered the leading daily of the Arab diaspora. He talked this week with a correspondent for Al Hayat on the sidelines of a meeting in Vienna of the International Atomic Energy Agency, the nuclear monitor of the United Nations, which has repeatedly demanded that Iran provide unfettered access to its inspectors to resolve unanswered questions about the nature of the country's nuclear work.

Iran has defied the I.A.E.A.'s inspection demands as well as resolutions by the United Nations Security Council calling on Iran to halt all uranium enrichment until the agency's unanswered questions are resolved.

Accusing MI6, the British intelligence service, of spying on Iran's nuclear program, Mr. Abbasi was quoted as saying, "We presented false information sometimes in order to protect our nuclear position and our achievements, as there is no other choice but to mislead foreign intelligence." He was also quoted as saying that "sometimes we present a weakness that we do not in fact really have, and sometimes we appear to have power without having it."

The I.A.E.A., Mr. Abbasi was further quoted as saying, deals with Iran as if it is guilty and must "establish its innocence. And this is rejected.

"Others accuse us, and the agency seeks to establish these accusations, like what happened with the regime of Saddam Hussein, wanting a legal framework by which to isolate Iran and toughen sanctions on it."

Gill Tudor, a spokeswoman for the agency, declined to comment on Mr. Abbasi's quoted remarks, which were part of a news report on the Iranian nuclear issue, including a meeting on Tuesday in Istanbul between the top nuclear negotiators for Iran and the big powers. Both sides have said the meeting was constructive, but it was unclear when more talks would be held.

Iran has consistently asserted that its uranium enrichment is for peaceful purposes and that, as a signatory to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, it has been transparent about all of its nuclear activities. But critics have long contended that Iran is untrustworthy on the nuclear issue.

Iran hid the construction of its Natanz nuclear enrichment plant - until it was revealed by a dissident group - as well as its construction of centrifuges to enrich uranium, until inspectors acting on a tip found them behind a false wall in a Tehran clock factory.

Iran revealed a deep underground site in 2009 only when it became clear that the West had discovered it and was about to announce its existence.

Iranian officials have refused to answer questions about documents and computer files that suggest Iran has explored how to build a weapon and has researched explosive yields of different nuclear fuels.

While Mr. Abbasi's comments seemed to confirm that some of the answers Iran had provided were false, it remained unclear what kind of abilities it was hiding or overstating.

Mr. Abbasi, who was the target of an assassination attempt two years ago in Tehran by what Iranian officials said were Israeli agents, said in a blunt speech at the I.A.E.A. meeting on Monday that the agency had been infiltrated by "terrorists and saboteurs." He also disclosed two previously unreported bombings at Iran's top uranium enrichment sites, suggesting that at least one may have been carried out based on information gained through compromised security within the I.A.E.A.

The news media in Israel, where the government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said it considered Iran its top threat and only months away from achieving atomic bombmaking capability,

seized on Mr. Abbasi's quoted remarks in Al Hayat and his speech, interpreting them as part of an Iranian strategy to further justify its rejection of I.A.E.A. inspection requests.

But one Israeli analyst, Uzi Eilam, former director of the Israel Atomic Energy Commission, said it was unclear why Iran would admit to having issued false information. It is particularly perplexing at this stage in what has been a long-running dispute that has escalated in recent months, as new Western sanctions have been imposed on Iran and as Israel has threatened a pre-emptive military strike on Iranian nuclear sites.

"It could be that the lies and deceptions have become so transparent that they no longer have any choice and they are now forced to admit to that," Mr. Eilam said on Israel Radio.

Mr. Netanyahu's publicly expressed concern about Iran's nuclear work has caused new frictions with the Obama administration, which has refused his request to specify "red lines" of Iranian behavior that would justify a military attack on Iran. President Obama and his aides have said there is still time for the sanctions and negotiations to help resolve the dispute.

The Israeli leader has frequently cited public threats by Iran's government to eradicate Israel as an underlying justification for his militant position toward Iran on the nuclear issue.

For Iran's part, its supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, has banned nuclear weapons as un-Islamic.

Iranian officials also note that Israel is not a signatory to the nonproliferation treaty and possesses an unacknowledged stockpile of nuclear weapons.

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U.S. Plans New Inquiry On Libya Attack

September 21, 2012

Washington Post

By Anne Gearan And Abigail Hauslohner

The State Department is opening a new inquiry into the attack on a diplomatic post in Libya that killed four Americans, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said Thursday.

Clinton announced the inquiry the same day she and senior defense, intelligence and law enforcement officials briefed Congress about what the Obama administration has learned about the attack in Benghazi during the past week.

The classified presentations to both houses of Congress included a look at U.S. intelligence assessments ahead of the Sept. 11 attack in Libya and the FBI's efforts to identify suspects.

The administration presentation was a careful examination of what is known about the perpetrators of the attack, intelligence about possible threats related to the attack and the State Department's security inquiry, a person familiar with the briefing said. The session didn't offer a firm conclusion about what group or groups were responsible, the person said.

"They are really doing a very thorough forensic analysis. They are being very judicious and cautious," the person said.

The person requested anonymity to describe the broad outlines of the classified session.

The investigation has not filled in all the gaps in the confusing timeline of the hours-long attack, the person said. It still is not clear exactly when Stevens died, and other details are hazy. No cause of death was given for the four Americans.

Speaking earlier with reporters, Clinton said the briefing would cover "our security posture before and during the event and the steps we have taken since to do everything we can with host governments to protect our people and our embassies and consulates."

A senior U.S. official said earlier in the day that Director of National Intelligence James R. Clapper was expected to tell members of Congress that he does not consider the attack in Benghazi an indication of a long-planned operation, a senior U.S. official said.

Clapper was also expected to tell Congress that there could be multiple extremist elements involved or linked to the attack but that reports claiming involvement by particular people probably are inaccurate, the official said. The official spoke on the condition of anonymity to describe the agenda for the closed-door sessions.

The White House has labeled the Benghazi incident a terrorist attack. Asked if the attack was carried out by al-Qaeda, President Obama said, "We don't know yet."

Speaking at a candidate forum on Spanish-language network Univision, Obama said groups affiliated with al-Qaeda "have not gone away" and remain dangerous.

More than a week after the lethal attack, conflicting accounts continue to emerge both in Washington and Benghazi about whether the assault was spontaneous or premeditated. The Obama administration insists that so far evidence indicates local extremists hijacked a peaceful demonstration, as has been suggested in Benghazi.

A spokesman for Ansar al-Sharia, one of the militant groups blamed for the assault, acknowledged that members of the group were among many militia members who attended the protest over an anti-Muslim video, but said the attack was carried out by others who arrived at the consulate and began to disperse the crowd.

"It's like a culture here," said the spokesman, Hany Mansouri. "You carry your weapons. Everyone has Kalashnikovs, RPGs [rocket-propelled grenades] and small guns, at least."

But a former member of Libya's Transitional National Council with close knowledge of the investigation there said that there are signs the assault was planned, the same position taken by the Libyan government.

The former TNC member, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because he is not authorized to speak to the press, pointed to a successful mortar strike on a safe house outside the consulate as evidence of advance planning. He said the attackers needed experience using mortars and knowledge of the location of the building.

Sen. Susan Collins (R-Maine) said at a Senate hearing on Wednesday that, after briefings, she has concluded that the attack was planned. "I just don't think that people come to protests equipped with RPGs and other heavy weapons," she said.

The inquiry announced by Clinton will be carried out by an independent four-member panel chaired by retired diplomat Thomas Pickering. The panel, required by law, will look at whether security procedures were adequate at the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi and make recommendations to the secretary of state. Pickering was once the boss of U.S. Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens, who was killed in the Benghazi attack last week, along with another diplomat and two security personnel.

Speaking at a news conference with Indonesian Foreign Minister Marty Natalegawa, Clinton also said she would argue to Congress that the United States must remain engaged in Muslim-majority nations that have seen more than a week of anti-American protests.

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Obama: Extremists Used Anti-Islam Video As 'excuse' For Attack Against US Interests

September 21, 2012

Associated Press

MIAMI - President Barack Obama said Thursday that extremists used an anti-Islam video as an excuse to assault U.S. interests overseas, including an attack on the U.S. Consulate in Libya that killed the U.S. ambassador and three other Americans.

The president's comments came as Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton faced questions from members of the House and Senate about the Sept. 11 attack on the consulate in Benghazi in a series of closed-door classified briefings on Capitol Hill.

Republicans have accused the Obama administration of misreading the assault as the outgrowth of widespread demonstrations in the Middle East over the video. They insisted it was a terrorist attack, a term White House spokesman Jay Carney used on Thursday. Obama did not use the phrase.

"What we do know is that the natural protests that arose because of the outrage over the video were used as an excuse by extremists to see if they can also directly harm U.S. interests," the president said at a candidate forum on the Spanish-language network Univision.

Asked if that meant al-Qaida, Obama said, "We don't know yet."

"We will focus narrowly and forcefully on groups like al-Qaida, the ones that carried out the 9/11 attacks. Those forces have not gone away," the president said.

Clinton also announced that, in line with federal law, she will appoint an independent panel to look at circumstances of the attack in Benghazi that killed Ambassador Chris Stevens and three other employees. The so-called Accountability Review Board will be chaired by retired diplomat Thomas Pickering, she said.

Democrats and Republicans emerging from the briefings provided some details about what the administration is still piecing together - who was responsible, how much of it was planned and what was the security.

Joining Clinton at the back-to-back briefings were Director of National Intelligence James Clapper and Deputy Defense Secretary Ashton Carter.

Rep. Adam Smith of Washington state, the top Democrat on the House Armed Services Committee, said it was "clearly a terrorist attack," but mortars weren't used until six, seven hours into the fight.

"So it seemed like an armed gang that seized an opportunity," Smith said.

Both Smith and Rep. C.A. Dutch Ruppersburger of Maryland, the top Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee, said there was no evidence to suggest that the local Libyans at the consulate colluded with the attackers.

Published reports suggested that Sufyan bin Qumu, a former detainee at the U.S. military prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, who was transferred to Libya in 2007, was involved. Lawmakers asked about Qumu at the briefing.

"But not directly related to the attack, but as someone who's in that region," Smith said. "They're attempting to establish whether or not he was connected to the people who made the attack. He's certainly a person of interest."

Investigators have found no evidence or intelligence to suggest Qumu was at the conflict, leading it or organizing it, according to a U.S. official, speaking anonymously because he was not authorized to discuss the investigation publicly.

Senate Republicans expressed frustration with the information provided at the sessions and disputed the administration's assessment.

"There's increasing amount of evidence that this was a coordinated attack by terrorists," said Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla., a member of the Foreign Relations Committee. "The movie wasn't the catalyst for this, the catalyst was radical Islamic extremists that wanted to attack the United States and saw an opportunity to do it in Benghazi."

One of the harshest critics of the administration, Sen. John McCain of Arizona, scoffed at the administration's argument that the video set off the assault.

"I'm stunned that they thought this was some kind of spontaneous demonstration," McCain told reporters.

In testimony Wednesday, Matthew Olsen, director of the National Counterterrorism Center, called the incident a "terrorist attack."

Carney echoed that point on Thursday.

"It is, I think, self-evident that what happened in Benghazi was a terrorist attack. Our embassy was attacked violently, and the result was four deaths of American officials," he said.
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Ansar Al Shariah, Linked To Diplomat's Death, Sets Benghazi Rally To Counter Calls For Moderation

September 21, 2012

McClatchy

By Mel Frykberg

Libya's second-largest city, Benghazi, was reported tense Thursday ahead of two major rallies called for Friday, one to show support for the United States and its slain ambassador, who died last week when gunmen stormed the U.S. consulate compound, and the other by the Ansar al Shariah militia suspected of involvement in the attack.

Ansar al Shariah called its rally for the same time and the same place as a group of moderate Libyans who call themselves "Save Benghazi."

"Ansar al Shariah has done this deliberately," said Bilal Bettamir, one of the organizers of the Save Benghazi rally, which in addition to marking the passing of U.S. Ambassador Christopher Stevens is intended to call for freedom of expression and religious moderation. "We have been planning our march for the past week, and they made their decision yesterday. They knew all about it."

The stark differences between the two sides were evident in an interview with the head of Ansar al Shariah aired Thursday by the United States' National Public Radio network. Mohammed Zahawi showed nothing but contempt for Western ideals.

"As for those bankrupt calls for Western democracy, liberalism and secularism, what did democracy give to the West?" he said, according to an account of the interview posted on the NPR website. "Social collapse, moral collapse, economic collapse?"

Ansar al Shariah is by far the dominant armed group in eastern Libya, where the national government in Tripoli has so far been unable to establish a security presence. The group has denied that it is responsible for the assault on the consulate, but witnesses have told McClatchy that the 100 to 125 gunmen who stormed the consulate compound with grenades, rockets and automatic weapons fire were carrying the Ansar al Shariah flag.

"The liberals and secularists were all raised in the West," Zahawi told NPR. "They were raised in openness, nakedness and decay. They know that in an Islamic state, they can't get to their vices. That's why they are waging a war against Islam."

In Washington, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced the formation of a panel to investigate the deaths of Stevens and the three other Americans: computer expert Sean Smith and two former Navy SEALs, Greg Doherty and Tyrone Woods, who were working as security contractors at the consulate.

The panel – the formation of which is usually pro forma in such cases – is to be chaired by Thomas Pickering, a retired diplomat who served in the third highest post at the State Department and as a U.S. ambassador to Russia, India, Israel and the United Nations.

Clinton made the announcement before going to Capitol Hill to provide closed-door briefings to the Senate and the House of Representatives on the consulate attack. She was joined by Director of National Intelligence James Clapper and other senior officials.

A House subcommittee chairman, meanwhile, informed Clinton that his panel would conduct its own investigation, and he cited the differences in the U.S. and Libyan versions of what happened.

"The universe of known facts . . . remains small and confusion has overshadowed certainty in this matter," Rep. Jason Chaffetz, R-Utah, chairman of the House Subcommittee on National Security, Homeland Defense and Foreign Operations, wrote to Clinton in a letter. "The American people have a right to know precisely what happened."

Chaffetz asked Clinton to provide the committee by 5 p.m. on Oct. 4 all classified and unclassified analyses and other assessments of the security situation in Benghazi, the preliminary findings of an FBI team that is due to inspect the consulate compound, and other materials, including documents on which the administration based its public assertions that the attack appeared to be a spontaneous action and not a long-planned operation.

There is little doubt that the security situation has been deteriorating for months in Benghazi. The U.S. consulate was the target of a bomb June 6, and there were subsequent attacks on British and Tunisian diplomats that same month. In August, the offices of the Red Cross were hit with a rocket-propelled grenade. Benghazi has been the scene as well of a wave of kidnappings, bombings and assassinations.

Save Benghazi has called on Libya's central government to withdraw the authority it's given to militias in police matters and has called on the General National Congress to pass a law criminalizing armed militias.

That, however, is unlikely in a country where militias exercise broad powers and the central government is unable to assert authority.

In Benghazi, for example, the city's police force went on strike over the appointment of a new security head, Col. Salah Daghman, who was to replace former deputy interior minister Wanis Al Sharif and former police head Hussein Ahmedia, who'd been fired by Interior Minister Fawzi Abdel Al for incompetence in the handling of the consulate assault.

The last straw for the central government was Sharif's assertion that there was no organized assault on the consulate, an explanation that was derided as "ridiculous" by influential Congressman Salah Ajouda Jawdah and contradicted by the country's top elected official, National Congress President Mohammed Magarief.

Police serving under Sharif, however, said his dismissal was intended to mask Abdel Al's own incompetence.

"We see the decision taken by the minister of the interior as an attempt to find a scapegoat for the minister's own failure to address the security issue and to cover up the ineptitude of his administration," said the spokesman for a union of senior police officers, Izzedin al-Sazzani.

Both Sharif and Ahmedia refused to step down, and Daghman responded by calling for the army to remove them by force.

Meanwhile, it was reported Thursday that a number of the leaders of the attack on the U.S. consulate had escaped from Libya across the border into neighboring Egypt before they could be arrested.

Nevertheless, other chief suspects who haven't escaped don't appear to be fazed about being arrested, further underlining the government's unwillingness or inability to take strong action against well-armed militias.

Ahmed Boukhatala heads the Abu Ubaidah Brigades in Benghazi, a sub-group of the larger Ansar al Shariah militia. He was interviewed by CNN in a Benghazi restaurant where he appeared relaxed. When told he was one of the main suspects in the Benghazi attack, he replied that if the Libyan authorities wanted to arrest him they could try, but it would be a losing battle for them.

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Libya offers further apology for U.S. envoy's death

September 21, 2012

Reuters

By Marie-Louise Gumuchian and Ali Shuaib

TRIPOLI - Libya apologized on Thursday to visiting U.S. Deputy Secretary of State William Burns for an attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi in which U.S. ambassador Christopher Stevens and three other Americans died.

Burns held talks in Tripoli with Libyan leaders including new Prime Minister Mustafa Abu Shagour and Mohammed Magarief, head of the national congress. He later attended a memorial ceremony for Stevens and his colleagues.

Foreign Minister Ashour Bin Khayyal apologized to Burns for the violence on Tripoli's behalf, praising Stevens as a "friend of Libya", a foreign ministry official said after their meeting.

The four Americans died when gunmen attacked the consulate and a safe house in the eastern city of Benghazi. The attackers were among a crowd protesting against a video made in California that mocks Islam and the Prophet Mohammad.

"We do agree, Libyans and Americans that it is absolutely essential and urgent to bring those responsible for this horrible tragedy to justice just as quickly as possible and we're determined to work together to ensure that that happens," Burns told reporters.

"This is a shared loss, a terrible tragedy," he added. "But it is also a reminder of the importance of renewing the determination of the U.S. to do what Chris Stevens tried so hard to do. And that is to help Libyans realize the premise of the revolution, not allow it to be hijacked by extremists."

Burns later paid tribute to Stevens as "a wonderful ambassador (who) believed in Libya".

VALUES

After meeting Burns, outgoing Prime Minister Abdurrahim El-Keib said the killing of Stevens was "definitely not representative of the moral values that we have here in Libya".

He also said the video was "distasteful" and "does not reflect the feeling of the American people".

At the early evening memorial for Stevens and his colleagues, Keib said the attackers were "a group of outlaws (who) must be brought to justice".

In Washington, a State Department spokeswoman said Burns urged Libyan officials to "build the kind of security institutions that are going to ensure the safety of the Libyan people, diplomats serving there, and foster a democratic environment, economic progress that protects the freedoms and the rights of all Libyans.

"We will not allow our partnership with Libya to be weakened by extremists," she said.

Matthew Olsen, director of the U.S. government's National Counterterrorism Center, called the Benghazi assault a terrorist attack and said officials were looking at whether those involved had links to al Qaeda, particularly its North African affiliate, al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb.

The Libyan foreign ministry official said Burns and Bin Khayyal had discussed U.S. involvement in the investigation, as well as broader security and economic cooperation.

Magarief, who apologized last week "to the United States, the people and the whole world" for the Benghazi attack, agreed in a telephone call with U.S. President Barack Obama that their countries would work together to investigate it.

"These events strengthen the determination of the authorities to arrest and bring to justice those responsible and reinforce the security of diplomatic missions," Magarief said at the memorial ceremony.

Libya sacked its security chiefs for Benghazi after the attack. Another official, tasked with employing militia fighters in the police in the east of the country, said he had resigned because recruits were not being paid or supplied adequately.

Libya's interim government has struggled to impose its authority on a myriad armed groups that have refused to lay down their weapons since last year's overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi. The fighters often take the law into their own hands.

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Syrian Planes Said To Strike Gas Station

September 21, 2012

New York Times

By Kareem Fahim

BEIRUT, Lebanon - At least 30 people, and possibly dozens more, were killed in Syria on Thursday in northern Raqqqa Province when government warplanes bombed a gas station crowded with cars and people, according to a witness at the scene and activist groups.

The witness said the gas station was on the outskirts of Ayn Issa, a town near a border post with Turkey that Syrian opposition fighters had stormed two days ago.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a group based in Britain with a network of contacts in Syria, said 110 people were killed or wounded.

If verified, the bombing would be one of the worst casualty tolls from the Syrian military's use of aircraft in its effort to crush the armed insurgency. Stretched thin by a persistent, far-flung rebellion, and facing

greater challenges from improvised bombs on Syria's roads, the military has increasingly relied on warplanes and helicopters to extend its reach.

On Thursday, one of those helicopters crashed near a suburb of Damascus that has been the site of persistent fighting between insurgents and government forces, according to Syrian officials.

The official Syrian news agency said the helicopter's rotors had clipped the tail of a Syrian Air passenger jet with 200 people aboard. It said that the jet then landed safely at the Damascus airport and no one was injured. But an activist in Damascus said a rebel battalion had shot down the helicopter, which crashed near a salt factory near the town of Douma.

It was unclear whether anyone aboard the helicopter was killed or injured.

While rebels claim to have brought down planes in the past, the authorities routinely attribute such crashes to mechanical failure.

At the Hisham gas station near the Turkish border, an activist who went to the scene said that the station was crowded with cars when the bombs fell.

He said the warplanes had dropped so-called barrel bombs, an improvised government weapon filled with TNT that opposition fighters have claimed the military is deploying with greater frequency.

The activist's claim was impossible to verify. The weapons are something of a mystery, though there have been attempts to document their use over the last few weeks, including by Brown Moses Blog, which collects and analyzes video evidence from the war, and has collected possible instances of the barrel bomb's use.

Videos that were said to be of the gas station after the bombing showed at least two shallow craters in the ground, encircled by a ring of destruction, including smoldering trucks with their doors flung open and a burned-out tractor.

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Rebels Unite In Fight For Syria's Largest City

September 21, 2012

Associated Press

By Paul Schemm

ALEPPO, Syria - Rebels have taken a major stride in uniting their ranks in the battle for Syria's largest city, giving them hope they could tip the balance after three months of bloody, stalemated combat in Aleppo, one of the biggest prizes of the civil war.

The question is how much more destruction the city can bear.

Government troops are retaliating against more effective rebel attacks with increasingly devastating bombardment, and civilians are bearing the brunt, with their neighborhoods left in ruins.

The new military council was announced Sept. 9. It brings together two of the biggest rebel players in Aleppo and the countryside, and should allow for better coordinated attacks against the 30 percent of the city still in regime hands.

The rebels have long been hampered by their division into dozens of competing groups, some with better links to funding and weapons, while others have more manpower. There has been little coherent strategy, and organizing a major assault can often involve negotiations among dozens of independent outfits.

"Before we made this council, the military aid used to come to just one man, and the people on the ground would get nothing. By forming this council, now aid comes to everyone, and everyone gets part of it," said Abdel Aziz Salameh, a former honey trader, based in the town of Tel Rifaat. He runs the biggest network of fighters in the province and is part of the Tawhid Division.

He described how assaults often had to be called off when his men ran out of ammunition after days of hard fighting and had to regroup and scrounge for more.

No rebel group admits to getting weapons or ammunition from abroad. They say instead that they get funds from Syrians abroad and use it to buy weapons from smugglers.

The uprising against President Bashar Assad began in March 2011, when protests calling for political change were met by a violent government crackdown by government troops. Many in the opposition took up arms, and activists say more than 23,000 people have been killed.

Salameh's one-time rival is Col. Abdel Jabbar Aqidi, a recently defected officer from Assad's military and the official representative of the Free Syrian Army. He received the lion's share of the funding from Syrians abroad, but did not have the manpower to take advantage of it.

"There were differences among the organizations and now we are united in our structure to improve our fighting," the blue-eyed officer in smartly ironed fatigues told The Associated Press from the basement of his villa set among olive groves in a village north of Aleppo. "Unity and coordination make us more effective in the revolution."

The rebel assault on Aleppo, a city of about 3 million, began in July after the government crushed a similar attack on the capital of Damascus. In this case, however, the forces were more evenly matched and to the surprise of many, the outgunned rebels not only held on but expanded their hold on the city in fierce urban combat.

While the rebels are poorly equipped and lacking much organization, their successes have as much to do with their tenacity as the state of the Syrian army in Aleppo.

"Significant weaknesses among the Syrian armed forces have been the primary factor behind the deadlock in Aleppo," said Torbjorn Soltvedt, a senior analyst with the Britain-based Maplecroft risk analysis group, explaining that the bulk of the regime's trusted troops were based around Damascus. Other units are constantly in danger of hemorrhaging men through defections to the rebel cause.

"The regime has been unable to use the main highway between Damascus in the south and Aleppo in the north to reinforce and supply its forces," he said, because of rebel control of the city of Rastan, on the highway, and parts of the Idlib province countryside around it.

The Syrian army, whose *raison d'être* until recently was a full scale tank war with Israel, is also not accustomed to counterinsurgency tactics in urban environments - something the rebels, for all their flaws, appear to have adapted to quite quickly.

Already there have been some successes, including the overrunning of a military barracks in the northern Aleppo neighborhood of Thakanet Hanano on Sept. 10 that involved several battalions working together.

The barracks was a key government bastion and part of a string of regime strong points being targeted by the rebels, including the military intelligence headquarters as well as the medieval citadel in the center of the city.

The response, however, was swift. For three days, government artillery and planes unleashed a withering bombardment of rebel-controlled areas nearby.

Human rights groups have reported a spike in civilian casualties as the regime staves off rebel advances with heavy weapons.

"A pattern has emerged in recent weeks in areas where government forces, pushed into retreat by opposition forces, are now indiscriminately bombing and shelling lost territory - with disastrous consequences for the civilian population," said the London-based Amnesty International in a briefing paper Wednesday.

Just two days after taking over the barracks, nearby neighborhoods were constantly buzzed by helicopters and regime fighter jets that lazily circled the city, confident in their invulnerability before diving to bombard a target.

Residents report the use of "barrel bombs" that appear to be large drums packed with explosives that can take down whole buildings.

Despite occasionally shooting down helicopters, most recently over Damascus on Thursday, the rebels are still struggling to confront this airborne menace for civilians both inside the city and in the country.

Peter Harling, a Syria expert for the International Crisis Group, said the regime is conserving its manpower in Aleppo and meting out collective punishments through airstrikes on any neighborhoods under rebel control.

The lack of progress on the ground and civilian frustration has been part of the impetus for the rebels to put aside their differences and work together, he noted.

"They are increasingly faced with anger and frustration in places coming from people who don't see them making progress that is tangible," he said. "That's a driver behind these unification attempts - I think the opposition needs to show some results and break out of this impasse one way or another."

Yet the new council includes just 80 percent of the estimated 8,000-10,000 rebels fighting the regime in and around Aleppo. The commanders say that Jebha al-Nusra, or the Victory Front, which follows an extreme Islamist ideology and includes foreign fighters, remains outside the council.

The powerful smuggler-turned-rebel-leader Abu Ibrahim, who controls the border crossing with Turkey through his Northern Storm brigade, also declined to join with his 700 fighters.

He told AP he was invited to join but was withholding his support because the new outfit lacked organization.

"The rebels should be organized like an ordinary military, with the men totally under control of the leadership and each man knowing his role," he said, dismissing Aqidi and Salameh as weak leaders with little operational control of their men.

The problems over unity are also replicated on a broader level across the country. There have been talks under way to unite and reorganize the Free Syrian Army under the leadership of defected Gen. Mohammed al-Haj Ali, but it is not clear if any progress has been made.

When asked if he would be part of the effort to unite the rebels, Aqidi only smiled and declined to comment.

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Turkey Border Gate Marks Key Gain For Syria Rebels: Experts

September 21, 2012

AFP

Rebels are consolidating potentially strategic territorial gains in northern Syria, having seized yet another border crossing into Turkey from already stretched regime forces, experts say.

But as they do so, they are heightening tensions with local Syrian Kurdish militia, who are suspected of collaborating with the embattled regime of President Bashar al-Assad and with whom they have already clashed.

On Wednesday, after two days of fighting, rebels from the Free Syrian Army (FSA) seized the Tal al-Abyad border crossing. That would give them control of as many as four of the seven posts in the north.

Turkish media footage showed the rebel flag hanging from one of the customs buildings on the Syrian side of the border, but an activist said fighting continued through Wednesday night as troops tried to retake the post.

Turkey once had close relations with the Assad regime, but now backs the opposition, providing safe haven to rebel forces and allowing men and supplies through the border.

"For a rebellion, it is essential to be able to rely on a border with an allied country to secure the flow of men, arms and materiel and infiltration and exfiltration," a former chief of France's intelligence services told AFP.

"This was the case with the Algerian National Liberation Front and the Tunisian border," he said about the Algerian war for independence from France.

The more territory accessible to a friendly country, the better he said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Also, in terms of political strategy, this serves to show the world that they "control a large area, which could pave the way for creation of what the international community could consider to be a liberated zone."

For Fabrice Balanche, a Syria specialist who heads the French research centre GREMMO, the Tal al-Abyad border crossing "illustrates the rebels' strategy to conquer the north of Syria."

The facts that Damascus did not send massive reinforcements and that hundreds of kilometres (miles) along the Turkish border have fallen from the regime's grip, "show that the Syrian government has decided to abandon these small isolated posts, which prove too difficult to defend and supply," said Balanche.

Tal al-Abyad is about 100 kilometres (63 miles) north of the city of Raqa and was relatively little used until recently.

Since late July, rebels fighting Assad's regime have seized control of at least three key border crossings with Turkey -- Bab al-Hawa, Al-Salama and Jarabulus.

They have also captured crossings on Syria's eastern border with Iraq.

Both experts agree that the army must now literally "pick its battles."

The reasons for that are two-fold: the large number of hot spots proliferating across the country and the army's inability to trust all its men, particularly the Sunni Muslims among them.

"The Syrian army must now make choices," says the former intelligence chief. "The border with Turkey is long, and defending it requires a large number of soldiers, who are probably more needed elsewhere."

One of the goals of the FSA would be to multiply their fronts in order to force the regime to stretch the numbers of troops deployed or to abandon entire regions.

"Since the beginning of the uprising, the army abandoned the Kurdish-majority northeast of Syria to Syrian Kurdish militias," said Balanche.

"A few men have remained in the bases across several big cities, but in very little numbers and they do not leave their barracks."

Some of those militias are close to Turkey's separatist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which has further estranged Ankara.

"By capturing Tal al-Abyad, the FSA is dangerously approaching the Kurdish-majority regions," he said.

"Even if the Kurds are so far... content with controlling their areas, the advance of the FSA will increase tensions. There have already been armed confrontations in which the FSA has lost men."
(top)

In Tunisia, Embassy Attack Tests Fledgling Democracy
September 21, 2012

Washington Post

By Karin Brulliard

TUNIS - Onlookers milled and nervous merchants shut shops as security forces surrounded a colonnaded mosque on a leafy downtown street here on Monday, preparing to arrest a man giving a speech inside.

Hours later, the officers had retreated, and the speaker, a hard-line Islamist whom Tunisian authorities say instigated a violent rampage at the U.S. Embassy last Friday, had slipped away.

And so the hunt for one of Tunisia's most-wanted men continued, raising questions about the will of the government to rein in ultra-conservative Muslims who vociferously - and sometimes violently - oppose plans to build democracy in this nation whose revolution sparked the Arab Spring.

Those questions have become a defining battle of the democratic transition in tiny Tunisia, and the embassy attack dramatically raised the stakes. Handling the fallout of the deadly demonstration, one of several connected to anger over an American-made YouTube video insulting Islam, is now posing a major test for a country that has been lauded for its smooth post-revolution shift.

Tunisia's new government, led by the moderate Islamist party Ennahda, has pledged to demonstrate that the country's traditionally tolerant brand of Islam is compatible with Western-style democracy. But it has also struggled to balance the interests of pious Muslims relishing newfound religious freedoms, secular Tunisians who are spooked by Islamists and the United States, which provides crucial economic assistance.

Many here agree that the equation failed last Friday, when mobs set fire to the embassy and a nearby American school, prompting the United States to withdraw most diplomats and warn travelers away from tourism-dependent Tunisia.

As in Libya and Egypt, where demonstrations against the video at U.S. missions also turned violent, officials and participants said the protest here was hijacked by extremists and exploited by hooligans. But it was also viewed domestically as only the most violent in an escalating series of thuggish acts by ultraconservative Islamists, known here as Salafists, against uncovered women, art, bars and other things they deem un-Islamic.

The governing coalition, which includes two secular parties, has sought to avoid ideological confrontations during the transition to democracy. Analysts say that is particularly true of Ennahda, whose leaders have championed the return of Islamic values to Tunisia but are viewed by some secularists as closeted radicals and by Salafists as religious poseurs.

The embassy attack, which left four Tunisians dead, and the U.S. reaction have clearly rattled the government. Officials have condemned what they say were the actions of a tiny minority and vowed that the failure to protect the embassy and school - which some attributed to poor planning, others to divisions within security forces - will not happen again.

"There was an obsession with the right to demonstrate and the right to be within a republic that protects the rights of the citizen, whoever they are and whatever they believe," said Hedi Ben Abbas, a Tunisian undersecretary of state for foreign affairs who blamed the violence on Salafists. The embassy attack, he said, "was, for us, the end of the game."

This week, Tunisian military vehicles and soldiers guarded the charred American buildings, and the United States deployed additional security to embassy premises. Khaled Tarouch, an Interior Ministry spokesman, said Tuesday that 96 people had been arrested in connection with the attack.

Police for days said they were pursuing prominent Salafist leader Saif Allah bin Hussein, known as Abu Ayyad. He is the leader of the Tunisia wing of Ansar al-Sharia, a radical Islamist group that is loosely tied to the group of the same name in Libya whose members have been implicated by Libyan authorities in the attack there that killed U.S. Ambassador to Libya J. Christopher Stevens. Abu Ayyad was imprisoned under the former Tunisian dictatorship and released under an amnesty deal after the 2011 revolution.

Despite being a wanted man, on Monday he felt emboldened enough to deliver a sermon at the central al-Fatah mosque. He commanded supporters to protest peacefully and railed against what he called a "new dictatorship" that discriminates against Islamists. Tarouch said police eventually retreated to avert a violent confrontation in a crowded location.

"How long will the government play cat and mouse with the Salafists?" La Presse, a Tunisian daily newspaper, editorialized the next day.

"No one has been able to convince the government that there is a danger behind this and Tunisian society would never accept such an atmosphere," said Ahmed Ounaies, a retired diplomat who briefly served as foreign minister after the revolution.

Lofti Zeitoun, an adviser to the Ennahda prime minister, said security forces are stepping up surveillance and "dismemberment" of extremist groups. But he said a harsh crackdown early in Tunisia's transition could drive radicals underground, alienating those who could still be convinced by democracy.

"American support for the Arab spring is one of the most important guarantees for the success of this democratic transition," Zeitoun said. "If we are left alone, maybe we will go to a new kind of dictatorship, a dictatorship of chaos and mobs."

The video offended many Tunisians, said Yassine Brahim, one leader of a liberal opposition party that also called for a demonstration against it. But so did the violent reaction, said Brahim, who, like many here, said it was "not Tunisian."

Among those who protested the video was Walid, a 32-year-old trader who sat in the pink twilight outside a mosque in southwest Tunis on Monday. Hours before, he was in al-Fatah mosque listening to Abu Ayyad; three days before, he was outside the U.S. Embassy, condemning the offensive video and what he called an American mission to destroy Islam.

Walid, who declined to give his last name, blamed secular and former regime forces - wearing "fake beards," he said - for stirring the violence to frame Salafists. But he said he did not regret the death of Stevens. Arresting Abu Ayyad, he said, would spark a "human catastrophe." As for Ennahda, Walid said he doesn't consider the party to be truly Islamist, and he opposes democracy in Tunisia because only Sharia, or Islamic law, pleases God.

Even if the government curbs law-breaking by extremists, no one here thinks it will settle broader questions about the role of Islam in Tunisian democracy.

The government says it is dedicated to freedom of expression, but it is facing growing criticism from civil society groups and international human rights organizations about restrictions.

Rachid Ghannouchi, Ennadha's spiritual leader, said the violence at the embassy was un-Islamic, and he said his party is trying to convince extremists that "their ideas are wrong." But he said that in an increasingly globalized world, there should be international laws against speech that incites on the basis of religion, something Ennadha is advocating in Tunisia, to the dismay of many secular groups.

"For us to live in a civilized, peaceful world, we need to put some limits on freedom," Ghannouchi said. "What happened may give support to our cause."

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Tunisia Bans Protest Over French Muhammad Cartoons

September 21, 2012

Associated Press

By Bouazza Ben Bouazza

TUNIS, Tunisia - Tunisia's government has banned any protests Friday against a French satirical weekly's publication of lewd, crude caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad.

Interior Minister Ali Larayedh told Tunisian radio that authorities sensed that some groups were planning to pillage and carry out violence after weekly communal prayers at mosques Friday.

"To repel any risk and in the interest of preserving the security of people, property and our foreign guests, we have decided to forbid any demonstration in the country," the minister told Shems FM.

Wednesday's publication of the cartoons by Charlie Hebdo weekly has raised concerns that French interests could face violent protests like the ones targeting the U.S. over an amateur video produced in California that mocked Muhammad.

The government of France - a former colonial ruler in Tunisia - has ordered its embassies and other official sites in about 20 countries across the Muslim world closed Friday as a precaution. Paris has already shut its embassy and a French school in Tunis, the site of a deadly protest last week at the U.S. Embassy over the amateurish video entitled "Innocence of Muslims."

Calls to protest in Tunisia against the caricatures have turned up in social media.

The governing, moderate Islamist party Ennahda expressed support for the right to peaceful protest, while the office of President Moncef Marzouki has appealed to Tunisians "not to fall into the trap of provocation by those who want to cause trouble in Muslim countries."

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U.S. Ally Is Fired in Afghan Shake-Up

September 21, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By NATHAN HODGE and ZIAULHAQ SULTANI

KABUL—Afghan President Hamid Karzai removed the governor of a key southern province, depriving the U.S.-led coalition of a stalwart ally at a tense moment in U.S.-Afghan relations.

Mr. Karzai fired or reassigned 10 of Afghanistan's 34 provincial governors on Thursday. The move came weeks after he replaced the top officials overseeing Afghan security forces, and further strengthened his oversight of state machinery and key ministries.

In the shake-up, Mr. Karzai fired Gov. Mohammad Gulab Mangal of Helmand province, Afghanistan's main opium growing area, a Taliban stronghold, and the focus of President Barack Obama's troop surge. U.S. officials said that surge ended Thursday, with the last of 33,000 troops that began arriving in late 2009 now outside Afghanistan.

Gov. Mangal's removal was "bad news" for the coalition, said retired U.S. Army Lt. Gen. David Barno, former coalition commander in Afghanistan, who serves as senior fellow at the Center for a New American Security in Washington. He "was one of the most—if not the single most—effective governors in Afghanistan," Gen. Barno said.

As the coalition has sought to build up local leaders from provincial governors to village militias, Mr. Karzai has tried to centralize authority in Kabul, often reassigning local officials as he attempted to prevent the emergence of other power centers.

The shake-up Thursday followed a decree by the president to review the performance of regional governors in combating corruption and improving governance, Mr. Karzai's administrative affairs department said, without giving the specific reason for Gov. Mangal's dismissal.

The lack of a stable local leadership in many parts of Afghanistan has undermined governance, deepening the divide that many Afghans feel from the Kabul authorities. Coalition commanders relied on Gov. Mangal to extend the presence of the central government in Helmand.

Mr. Karzai named Mohammad Naim Baloch as Helmand governor. Coalition officials said Gov. Mangal had informed them of his replacement. "We have not met him yet," said a coalition official in the province. Pentagon spokesman George Little declined to comment on internal Afghan political matters.

Coalition military officials said Gov. Mangal's removal would mean the loss of a powerful and effective local leader.

"We feel that he has done a tremendous amount for the coalition here," said Marine Corps Lt. Col. Stewart Upton, spokesman for the Helmand-based Regional Command South-West. "He saved lives through his actions, and he also helped contribute to accomplish our mission."

Gov. Mangal was a "very adept politician" who helped reach out to communities traditionally excluded by the government, said an official with the Helmand Provincial Reconstruction Team, a combined military-civilian unit that oversees reconstruction and governance projects.

Under the governor's leadership, the official added, Helmand saw the creation of local representative bodies and the appointment of district governors.

The U.K., which focuses its Afghan efforts on Helmand province, and the U.S. had been able to stop Mr. Karzai's previous plans to remove Gov. Mangal, in office since 2008.

U.S. and coalition officials said rumors had surfaced in recent months about Gov. Mangal's imminent removal, particularly as he grew in stature. The governor's staff first learned about the dismissal through a Facebook posting, his spokesman said.

The president's reshuffle also led to the appointment of new governors in southwestern Nimroz province, Kabul, and eastern provinces including Logar. There was no change of provincial leadership in the main regional centers of Herat, Kandahar, Jalalabad and Mazar-e-Sharif.

The reshuffle comes amid friction between Kabul and Washington over a range of issues, from the U.S. detention of Afghan nationals to a wave of attacks by Afghan troops on U.S. and coalition forces. Those attacks—so-called "green-on-blue" incidents—forced a halt this week to some joint operations between Afghan and U.S. forces. Mr. Obama held a video conference with Mr. Karzai on Wednesday in which the two leaders discussed efforts to halt insider attacks on coalition troops, as well as the growing tide of anger over the anti-Muslim video that has sparked protests around the globe, according to the White House.

Helmand is home to Camp Bastion, the large coalition base that was the scene of a dramatic raid on Friday by a small group of Taliban fighters. Most of the fighters were killed, but the attackers killed two U.S. Marines and destroyed half a squadron of fighter jets.

Ambassador Marc Grossman, the U.S. special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, had been slated to meet with a group of Afghan governors, including Gov. Mangal, during a visit to Kabul this weekend. Mr. Karzai canceled the meeting amid the furor over the video.

"It had to do with the issues around the world and the need to stay at home more than any political intrigue," said a U.S. official.

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Progress Seen in Resolving U.S.-Afghan Dispute Over Detainees

September 21, 2012

New York Times

By ALISSA J. RUBIN and DOUGLAS SCHORZMAN

KABUL, Afghanistan — President Obama and the Afghan leader, Hamid Karzai, had what an American official called a "serious and positive" discussion on Wednesday night that the Afghans confirmed had made progress toward resolving an increasingly acrimonious dispute over detaining terrorism suspects, which had their two governments and their militaries at loggerheads for weeks.

In a video teleconference, Mr. Karzai and Mr. Obama had a wide-ranging conversation touching almost every hot-button issue that has complicated the plans of the United States to draw down its forces here, senior American and Afghan officials said. Most important, they began to resolve the two countries' differences on rules for indefinitely detaining terrorism suspects without trial, known as administrative detention, officials from the two countries said. American military commanders insist on assurances that terrorism suspects they detain in the field will not be summarily released.

The Afghan Constitution and laws do not provide explicitly for indefinite detention, but Mr. Karzai has ordered his judiciary "to come up with a legal framework that allows us to keep those people who pose a serious security threat," said Aimal Faizi, the president's spokesman.

While other problems are also urgent, the conflict over the Americans' insistence that some detainees should continue to be held without charge had begun to spill out in public and undermine diplomatic relations, said people involved in the discussions. Until the issue is resolved, the Americans have refused to turn over the last prisoners that they are holding at Parwan, the American-built detention center adjacent to the Bagram Air Base.

"President Karzai had a good conversation with President Obama last night," Mr. Faizi said. "There were clear and frank talks — they started in general terms, then got very specific on the details regarding the 650-plus Afghan prisoners.

"After last night's conference, this should be solved," Mr. Faizi said. "We're working to frame this legal issue. The judiciary will look at our laws and soon come up with a legal framework that allows us to keep those people who pose a serious security threat."

A senior American official who characterized the conversation as "serious and positive" said that the call went on longer than planned.

"It was very matter-of-fact," the official said. "They talked about resolving it, they didn't talk about setting a legal framework to do it," he said. But he added that if the Afghan spokesman had alluded to such a framework, then "that's good."

While there was no timetable set either for the Afghans to introduce a new law or regulation or for the Americans to hand over the prisoners, the friendly tone was a turnaround. Over the last three weeks, the Afghans have been increasingly confrontational in press statements and have suggested that the Americans are flouting the country's sovereignty. The Americans, while keeping much of the argument behind the scenes, "were dug in," a Western diplomat said.

There have been many ups and downs in the countries' relationship, but the dispute over detainees has come at a particularly delicate time between Afghanistan and the United States because of deepening worries over killings of American and other coalition troops by infiltrators and disgruntled Afghan security force members and because of the provocative anti-Muslim video produced in the United States that last week set off protests across the Muslim world.

(American officials announced Thursday that the last of the 33,000 "surge" troops had left Afghanistan, leaving a force of 68,000 Americans in the country.)

The debate between the governments over administrative detention touches on a larger disagreement between international human rights advocates and security experts. That is whether countries with weak justice systems should have laws allowing detention without trial — and if they do, what limits should be put on the length of detention without legal review.

"The Afghan government's justice system, as it is, is very shaky," said Heather Barr, the Afghanistan researcher for Human Rights Watch. "So we are very concerned about setting up a parallel system in which even the protections which are supposed to exist, but are rarely followed, are completely absent." She noted that many countries put administrative detention regimes in place for a short-term emergency, but never repeal them.

The dispute over detention has centered on the terms of a memorandum of understanding signed in March in which the Americans agreed to hand over all the Afghan detainees held in Parwan, as part of the transfer of security to the Afghans. The memorandum states that "Afghanistan has established an administrative detention regime."

But there were disagreements among senior Afghan officials about whether the Constitution allowed for indefinitely holding dangerous prisoners who could not be tried because of a lack of admissible evidence. On Tuesday, Mr. Karzai's legal advisers told him that Afghan law had no provision for detention without trial. On Thursday, Mr. Faizi said that Mr. Karzai had resolved to have his judiciary draft such a provision.

The NATO commander, Gen. John R. Allen, has privately expressed concerns that in the absence of an administrative detention process, dangerous insurgents captured on the basis of intelligence that could not be shared in court might be released and return to the battlefield, as has happened in the past.

The Afghans are signatories to the Second Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions, which recognizes the right to detain people as inherent in any armed conflict and provides for it to be done in a humane way. The Americans had assumed that their accession to that convention would allow them to put such a system in place, but some senior Afghan legal experts disagreed.

As the Afghans began to air doubts about continued detention, the Americans halted the transfer of the remaining 650 detainees they had captured since the memorandum was signed. That infuriated the Afghans, who viewed it as a violation of the memorandum and an infringement of their sovereignty.

The Afghan government would like to end the practice of having foreign troops detain Afghans, Mr. Faizi said. When they have to, they should not hold them for more than 72 hours, he said.

That could prove far too restrictive to the American military, which wants to hold suspected terrorists for weeks, if not months, for detailed interrogations. People close to the discussions over the detentions say they hope to come to a compromise between 72 hours and the weeks, or even months, requested by military interrogators.

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Taliban Targeted by Local Uprisings

September 21, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By HABIB KHAN TOTAKHIL

ANDAR, Afghanistan—The paved road to this district is controlled by government troops. The alternate route, a dirt track, is under Taliban sway. Both ways are perilous for the local villagers who have taken up arms in the first of several anti-Taliban uprisings spreading in Afghanistan.

Two of these Andar rebels, escorting a reporter to their stronghold on a recent day, were stopped by jumpy Afghan soldiers, who cocked their American-furnished M-16s and briefly seized the villagers' weapons. The fighters were allowed to proceed only after long negotiations.

The Afghan soldiers' fears are easy to understand: Andar's band of fighters, who wear traditional dress and carry Kalashnikov rifles and rocket-propelled grenades, are hard to distinguish from the Taliban. Until a few months ago, many were Taliban.

But now, they may be America's best hope for a decisive blow to the Taliban, especially as relations with President Hamid Karzai's administration deteriorate and a spate of insider killings led to an end, this week, to most joint operations between U.S. and Afghan forces.

U.S. Marine Gen. John Allen, the top coalition commander, has publicly compared the Andar revolt—which to a great degree pits local Pashtuns against the largely Pashtun Taliban—to the so-called Anbar Awakening, a rebellion of Iraq's Sunni tribes against al Qaeda-linked Sunni insurgents that became a turning point in the Iraq war.

Whether Andar will go the way of Anbar is far from certain. Outgunned by the Taliban, Andar's local fighters urgently need weapons and ammunition—something the U.S.-backed Afghan government would be eager to provide. Yet the Afghan rebels also know that any open backing by Mr. Karzai's unpopular administration is likely to backfire, denting their movement's credibility.

"We want support for the uprising. But we want the people to maintain ownership of this uprising," said Faizanullah Faizan, the leader of the Andar rebels, sitting among fighters in a house in Payendai village, where the first fighting between the rebels and Taliban took place. Neighboring lands are still controlled by the Taliban.

For the villagers here, the stakes are even higher. "If this uprising fails, the people's only hope dies," said Sarwar Khan, a resident of Andar, one of the most dangerous districts in the volatile province of Ghazni, in Afghanistan's southeast. "If the Taliban return, we think they will even execute our women and children."

As in Iraq's Sunni belt, there is little love here for either the central government or the Americans. Village men—mostly former local Taliban, or members of the Hezb-i-Islami group of warlord Gulbuddin Hekmatyar—say they rose up against harsh new edicts by Taliban commanders who moved here this year from Pakistani madrassas, banning government education and imposing a more austere brand of Islam that defied local customs.

"Schools, clinics and the bazaar were closed. People were deprived of their basic rights. The Taliban would blindfold and execute anybody they wanted," said Ubaidullah Patsoon, one of the Andar uprising's leaders and a former Taliban fighter himself. "We asked the Taliban to let the people live their lives, let the schools, clinics and bazaar reopen but they responded with more killings."

The Andar uprising began shortly after the Taliban closed down government schools in March. The Taliban made the move to retaliate against a government order banning the use of unregistered motorcycles, the insurgents' favorite mode of transportation. A group of about a half-dozen villagers demanded that the schools be reopened.

In response, insurgents kidnapped the brother of one of the movement's leaders. He remains in their custody, confirmed Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid.

"We tried to negotiate with the Taliban," said Mr. Patsoon, one of the movement's founders. "But they sent a message saying surrender, abandon Andar and join the infidels—or get ready to fight."

In May, Taliban fighters surrounded the movement's members as they met in a house in Payendai village. One of the rebels, Abdul Samad, the son of a tribal elder, went outside holding a Quran as a symbol of peace and asking the insurgents to negotiate. He was shot dead instead, villagers say, fueling local anger with the Taliban.

In the fighting that ensued, Andar's rebels prevailed. The Taliban fled, empowering other villagers to join the movement, its followers say. The anti-Taliban rebels say their 250 fighters control some 50 of Andar's 400 or so villages and are in active pursuit of 50 more. Similar uprisings have taken place in eastern Kunar, Laghman and Nangarhar provinces, as well in southeastern Paktia and central Logar provinces, say local and provincial officials.

The Andar rebels benefit from their inside knowledge of the enemy. One of them, Abdullah Andar, said he used to be a Taliban explosives expert. "I defused a bomb the day before here," Mr. Andar said, pointing to an unpaved road. "Their tactics are not working on us. We know how they fight—once I was one of them."

Mr. Andar, who hails from the area, said he defected from the insurgency after he witnessed what he said was the Taliban's collusion with Pakistani forces. He said he initially took refuge in Iran, then returned home after the uprising began.

The Taliban are trying to crush this challenge, ramping up executions of the movement's supporters and planting more homemade bombs on roads and in bazaars, Mr. Faizan said, the movement's leader. Mr. Faizan was recently wounded in an assassination attempt, according to the rebels.

In villages the Taliban still control, they have banned groups of more than three men from gathering and barred travel to neighboring villages, villagers say. A series of battles with the Taliban in the district claimed scores of lives on both sides and among local civilians.

Mr. Mujahid, the Taliban spokesman, confirmed the Taliban had restricted villagers' movements in Andar. He also dismissed the rebels, characterizing them as a U.S.-backed militia. "They are directly under Americans' supervision," said Mr. Mujahid. "We have been telling them since the beginning to put an end to the turbulence. The schools are reopened... The bazaar was banned because people would use it for spying."

Top U.S. military officials in Kabul say they aren't providing any support to the Andar movement but are watching whether they can help without damaging its organic development.

Mr. Faizan, the Andar uprising's leader, flatly denies having received any official Afghan government or coalition military help. His men carry old weapons, he says—rusty Kalashnikovs of the kind found in most Afghan homes—as well as some guns captured from the Taliban.

However, Asadullah Khalid, the former governor of Ghazni who became chief of the country's National Directorate of Security intelligence agency this month, said in an interview that he is supporting the rebels with what he said are his own personal funds.

When Mr. Faizan, the uprising's commander, gave a wad of some 50,000 afghanis—about \$1,000—to the father of the slain Mr. Samad on a recent day, he said the money had been provided by Mr. Khalid.

Such aid notwithstanding, Mr. Khalid said: "This isn't a government-planned uprising, but a popular uprising initiated by the oppressed people of Ghazni against the Taliban."

The local wish for self-determination could make the Andar movement a longer-term challenge for the central government's authority. Afghan and coalition officials have yet to determine what role such unregulated local militias would play in the future.

Juma Gul, the tribal elder whose son was killed in the uprising's first day, says his three other sons and two grandsons have now taken up arms against the Taliban—to fight not for Mr. Karzai, but for the right to live without outside interference.

"The Taliban don't let us live our lives and we fight to regain that right," Mr. Gul said. "We're fighting for freedom."

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Final "Surge" Troops Leave Afghanistan

September 21, 2012

Washington Post

By Craig Whitlock

AUCKLAND, New Zealand - The last of the 33,000 "surge" troops President Obama ordered to Afghanistan in December 2009 have left the country, the Pentagon announced Friday, just ahead of a Sept. 30 deadline.

The number of U.S. troops in the war zone now stands at 68,000, Secretary of State Leon E. Panetta told reporters traveling with him during a week-long visit to the Asia-Pacific region. The troop count is down from a peak of 101,000 U.S. forces last year and marks the end of a critical phase in Obama's war strategy.

"There's no question there will continue to be difficult days ahead in this campaign," Panetta said at a news conference in Auckland, where he was making a visit, in part, to thank New Zealand for its contribution of about 180 troops to the NATO-led coalition in Afghanistan. "But this is an opportunity to recognize that the surge did accomplish its objectives."

Obama's strategy has been tested in recent months by the resilience of the Taliban-led insurgency. The U.S. military has also struggled to contain a rash of insider attacks in which uniformed Afghan soldiers and police officers have fired upon their U.S. trainers, disrupting joint operations and undermining the U.S. plan to hand over security responsibilities to the Afghans.

U.S. and NATO commanders announced this week that they would sharply scale back joint patrols and training operations because of their inability to stanch the insider attacks, calling into question a core part of the military strategy.

The drawdown of U.S. forces is in keeping with Obama's timetable to pull out all conventional combat forces by the end of 2014. U.S. commanders have said that some special operations forces and trainers could remain in Afghanistan after that, but they have not specified how many.

Panetta said the current troop levels are sufficient. He said U.S. forces would continue to focus on training the Afghan army and police, and prevent the Taliban from regaining territory.

"I think we are on track," he told reporters. He said that Marine Gen. John Allen, the commander of U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan, had assured him that the military strategy remained sound.

"Right now, he is saying that he has the force in place to accomplish that mission," Panetta said. ([top](#))

Refugees Seek Refuge From Squalid India Camps

September 21, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By MEGHA BAHREE

BALAJAN, India—Nearly 200,000 refugees, mostly Muslim, have been crowded since July into a couple of hundred makeshift camps in a pocket of the Indian state of Assam, waiting in deteriorating conditions to return home while the government verifies their citizenship status.

They have been stuck here, often in squalid conditions, after ethnic violence drove them from their homes in this northeastern corner of India, tucked between Myanmar and Bangladesh. Many say they want to go home but are too frightened to go back because of violence like the riot this month in the town of Dhubri, in which a mob took to the streets after an alleged theft at a Hindu temple. One Muslim was killed; a curfew has since been imposed.

The process of verification "has delayed their rehabilitation, but at least it will be a firm thing and no one will be able to use it again for another round of violence," said Gyanendra Tripathi, Assam's top internal-security official.

The clashes started in July between Muslims, including migrants from Bangladesh, and a local indigenous group called Bodos—many of whom are animists who believe souls inhabit all living things—along with some Christians and Hindus.

The violence has claimed 97 lives and caused hundreds of thousands to flee their homes, filling at the peak of the crisis more than 300 relief camps across four districts, including Kokrajhar and Dhubri, a largely Muslim district. The camps are basically local schools that were opened to the villagers. School has been halted and can resume only when the buildings empty out.

The current wave of violence was sparked in July by the killing, in separate incidents, of two Muslim and four Bodo youths in Kokrajhar, the capital of Bodoland.

Takimari, one of the few Bodo villages in Dhubri district, is now an abandoned shell. The houses have been burned, leaving charred piles of clothes, books and a few half-burned pieces of furniture. Members of both communities, nearly 500,000 at the peak of the conflict in August, fled amid fears of reprisals.

There will be more clashes, predicts Rajeev Bhattacharyya, managing editor of the Seven Sisters Post, a local daily in the Assamese capital of Guwahati, because, he says, the government hasn't figured out how to "stem the menace" of migrants.

The roots of the ethnic tensions date back several decades. The Bodo community has an autonomous territory within the state known as the Bodoland Territorial Autonomous Districts. Bodos complain they have been displaced from ancestral lands by a growing wave of immigrants, whom they allege are largely illegal immigrants from Bangladesh.

Mamna Bibi, a slim 29-year-old mother of six, was staying in the classroom at a camp in Balajan village in Dhubri district. Nearly two dozen women and children sat around her in the dark room. The electricity was out. Their belongings, tied up in pieces of cloth, replaced books on the shelves next to the blackboard. Black plastic sheets were tacked along the walls to guard against the drenching rain. Outside, refuse and sewage floated in puddles of water.

Ms. Mamna, a Muslim from near the camp, used to clean houses for a living while her husband worked as a laborer. She says the family's two-room tin shack was destroyed by Bodo attackers. "We are poor people, but our tin home was better than this place," she said. "We have nothing to eat here, nothing to wear. Are we going to spend the rest of our lives like this?"

The conditions in the camps are grim. Each family gets one sari and one piece of cloth that the men wear like a sarong. No clothes have been given for the children. Food is supposed to be rice, lentils, cooking oil and salt. In interviews across several camps, however, residents said they weren't getting daily rations. At one camp last month, residents said they hadn't received any rations from the government for 12 days.

Mr. Tripathi, Assam's internal-security official, said no relief camp had complained of inadequacy of food, but said he would look into the question. Of the camp where resident said they had received no rations, he said: "It may be that this was an illegal camp. But 12 days of no ration is a very sensitive matter and I will check it out."

Mr. Tripathi also acknowledged problems with sanitation. The camps began with one toilet for 200 people, a ratio that has been halved since to one toilet per 100. The government is now building additional toilets to push the ratio to one per 30.

The government says it is verifying the credentials of the nearly 200,000 Muslim refugees still in the camps to end such concerns.

Speaking at a conference of police officers earlier this month, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said "the increase in the communal incidents in the country in the past few months and the revival of ethnic tensions in the North East in recent weeks have been particular causes of concern to all of us."

Muslims make up 8.2 million of the Assam's 26.6 million population. They have been arriving in phases ever since Assam was made a part of India's eastern Bengal province in 1905 with Dhaka as the capital. There was another influx in the 1940s when the British brought in Muslims to farm the lands as part of a policy to grow more food, followed by another wave in 1947 when India was partitioned to create Pakistan, and another at around the time that Bangladesh was carved out of Pakistan in 1971.

Assam has a history of protest against these immigrants, starting in 1979. In 1983, more than 2,000 Bangladeshi Muslims were killed in a matter of six hours. In 1985, the national and state governments signed an accord with the leaders of the protest that declared all foreigners who migrated to Assam after March 25, 1971, as illegal.

Under the 1985 accord, the federal government was supposed to build a fence along the border with Bangladesh. Nearly three decades later, it is up along most of the 167-mile, or shared border.

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U.S. Disavows Anti-Muslim Video

September 21, 2012

Washington Post

By Anne G

Trying to blunt street protests surrounding a YouTube video that mocks the prophet Muhammad, the Obama administration paid \$70,000 to buy ads on Pakistani television disavowing the video, the State Department said Thursday.

The ads, featuring President Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, were airing on seven networks even as angry crowds tried to rush the diplomatic enclave in Islamabad housing the U.S. Embassy and other embassies on Thursday. Pakistani police kept about 2,000 protesters at bay.

The ads and a broader effort to solicit and promote pro-U.S. testimonials on YouTube are an effort by the State Department and White House to counter the pervasive view in Pakistan and other Muslim-majority nations that the crude video is either the work of the U.S. government or is condoned by it.

Anti-American sentiment runs high in Pakistan, and suspicion of U.S. motives runs deep.

"The sense was that this particular aspect of the president and the secretary's message needed to be heard by more Pakistanis than had heard it, and that this was an effective way to get that message out," State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland said.

The television messages resemble political ads. It is unusual but not unprecedented to air such messages overseas. The seven Pakistani networks have a potential audience of 90 million people, Nuland said.

Pakistan abruptly declared a holiday Friday that senior Pakistani officials said was an attempt to defuse protests that often follow Friday prayer services. U.S. diplomatic offices will be closed for the day.

The U.S. ad includes footage of Obama and Clinton making statements in the wake of last week's attack on a U.S. diplomatic post in Libya that killed four Americans. Neither Obama nor Clinton mentions the attack in the brief ad.

"Since our founding, the United States has been a nation of respect, that respects all faiths. We reject all efforts to denigrate the religious beliefs of others," Obama says in the ad, which is stamped "paid content."

Clinton then adds a categorical denial of any official U.S. involvement in producing the "Innocence of Muslims" video.

"We absolutely reject its contents," she says.

The ad concludes with an image of the seal of the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad.

The U.S. Embassy in Pakistan also distributed a link to YouTube video of ordinary Americans and religious leaders condemning the anti-Islam clip.

Nuland said that the U.S. government had solicited some of the recorded comments to illustrate U.S. tolerance.

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Pakistani Minister Vows Better Counterterrorism Work With US, But Won't Talk Of Tackling Haqqanis
September 21, 2012
[Associated Press](#)

WASHINGTON - Pakistan's foreign minister revealed Thursday that her country would soon hold confidential talks with the United States and Afghanistan to improve a three-way counterterrorism relationship beset by misunderstandings, including one over the Pakistan-based Haqqani network that Washington considers the greatest threat to Afghan stability. But she refused to say whether her government was ready to take any action against the militants.

In an interview with The Associated Press, Hina Rabbani Khar said senior officials from the three countries have been instructed to come up with a strategy for repairing cooperation that has suffered since U.S.-Pakistani relations collapsed a year and half ago. That chill in relations was brought on by a CIA contractor's killing of two Pakistanis, the unilateral U.S. raid on Osama bin Laden's compound inside Pakistan and the accidental killing of 24 Pakistani troops in November by NATO forces.

A key element of the talks will be to determine which militant groups can be persuaded to lay down their arms as part of an Afghan peace treaty - a crucial if so far lagging part of the U.S. strategy to stabilize the country as it withdraws forces over the next two years.

"This has to be a joint effort to determine who is a threat ... to determine how do we deal with those who are a threat, and how do we bring in those which are not," said Khar, who was in Washington on her first official visit since being appointed Pakistan's top diplomat last year. "We are willing to work with anyone against any forces which are a threat to peace and stability."

Khar also addressed other contentious points in the U.S.-Pakistani relationship, heaping scorn on the doctor who allegedly helped the U.S. track down bin Laden in Pakistan last year and defending her government's decision to declare a national holiday on Friday so people can demonstrate against an American-made Internet video that ridicules Islam.

Lawmakers have been demanding tough Pakistani action on the Haqqani network, which the Obama administration formally designated as a terrorist body on Wednesday. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta told The Associated Press in August that he believed a Pakistani attack on the network would occur soon.

A subsidiary of the Taliban and based in the remote North Waziristan region of Pakistan, the Haqqani network is responsible for several attacks in Kabul, Afghanistan, including last September's rocket-propelled grenade assault on the U.S. Embassy and NATO headquarters. American officials estimate it has 2,000 to 4,000 fighters and that it maintains close relationships with al-Qaida.

Khar dismissed the notion that Pakistan had any special responsibility to deal with the Haqqanis, lumping them in with the 5 million Afghan refugees in Pakistan.

"We would be happy to send each one of them back and live in peace in Afghanistan," she said. But she refused to say whether her government would be willing in its three-way talks with the U.S. and Afghanistan to commit to taking on the Haqqanis militarily.

The White House declined to comment on the counterterrorism talks, but U.S. officials familiar with the developments saw cause for optimism in the upcoming negotiations, which were worked out by President Barack Obama's chief Afghanistan and Pakistan advisers, Marc Grossman and Doug Lute, as well as Pentagon envoy Peter Lavoy, in a meeting last week with Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari and Army chief Gen. Ashfaq Parvez Kayani.

The "working group" on the militant issue will include top U.S. officials from the White House, State Department and Pentagon along with their Pakistani and Afghan counterparts, one current and one former U.S. official said. They spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the talks publicly.

The U.S. and Pakistan also have been holding direct talks on other counterterrorism issues, including CIA drone strikes targeting militants in Pakistan's lawless tribal areas. Pakistan wants the drone strikes stopped - or it wants to control the drones directly - something the U.S. refuses.

Those bilateral talks so far have produced no breakthroughs, U.S. and Pakistani officials say.

The tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan, meanwhile, were highlighted Thursday by Afghan Foreign Minister Zalmai Rassoul at a U.N. Security Council meeting. Rassoul called on Pakistan to end the shelling of the border province of Kunar in eastern Afghanistan, which he said has killed dozens of civilians.

"Failure to end such attacks risks jeopardizing Afghanistan-Pakistan bilateral relations, with potential negative consequences for necessary bilateral cooperation for peace, security and economic development in our two countries and the wider region," he said.

Many Pakistani Taliban fighters have fled to Kunar and surrounding areas after Pakistan's army pushed them out of its tribal region, taking advantage of the U.S. military's withdrawal of most of its forces from these Afghan border provinces in recent years.

Jan Kubia, the U.N. secretary-general's special representative for Afghanistan, told the council that the transition of handing off security for the entire country to Afghan forces by 2014 is "on time and on track."

Khar called the formation of the new working group a "turning point" that could produce progress on the other issues.

But she made it clear that Islamabad wasn't simply going to do Washington's bidding, sharply criticizing Panetta for his comments about supposed Pakistani military operations.

Khar said Panetta was speaking "beyond his scope."

"He is obviously welcome to talk about what military action will take place by American troops," Khar said, but not Pakistan's. And she pointed a finger back at the United States for the "hundreds" of

milantants crossing the border from Afghanistan and "slaughtering our soldiers," including 17 troops who were beheaded recently.

Khar also sought to explain the Pakistani decision to declare Friday a national holiday, saying the "day of loving the prophet" would motivate the peaceful majority to demonstrate their love for the Prophet Muhammad and not allow extremists to turn it into a show of anger against the United States.

On Thursday, more than 2,000 people tried to reach the guarded enclave housing the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad to protest the anti-Islam video. Riot police used tear gas and batons against stone-throwing demonstrators, some of whom carried flags from hardline Islamist and al-Qaida-linked groups.

"We are very confident this will lessen the violence," Khar said, but acknowledged: "There will always be elements that will try to take advantage of these things."

And she hit back at criticism from the Obama administration and Congress over the treatment of Shakil Afridi, the doctor who is said to have run a fake vaccination program for the CIA to collect DNA that might verify bin Laden's presence at the compound in Abbottabad where U.S. commandos found and killed him. Afridi was later convicted and sentenced to 33 years for high treason.

"He did not know who he was working for or what he was trying to achieve, so this 'great man' who was helping the world by assisting us to capture Osama bin Laden is a myth," Khar said. "He was up for hire by anyone who was paying him," she said, accusing him of links to an Islamist militant group and significantly setting back Pakistani efforts against polio.

"For us, he's no hero, believe me," she said. "He is somebody whose activity has endangered our children."

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WHA/EUR

Fight Looms on Greek Bailout

September 21, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By MARCUS WALKER and MATINA STEVIS

A confrontation is brewing among Greece's international creditors over who will provide the financing needed to keep the country afloat.

A report by international inspectors, due in October, will state how big the funding shortfall is in Greece's bailout program, but European officials say the deficit is far too big for Greece to close on its own.

That means the International Monetary Fund, the European Central Bank, and euro-zone governments such as Germany will have to negotiate over which of them will make painful concessions to ease Greece's debt-service burden. That is intended to avoid a Greek bankruptcy that could force the country out of the euro and reignite financial panic across the currency bloc.

The trio must agree to a plan by November at the latest, when the government in Athens—already in financial arrears—could run out of money altogether.

The €173 billion (\$226 billion) bailout plan agreed with Athens in March this year—Greece's second bailout since 2010—is already badly off track, euro-zone officials admit. Greece has been waiting since June for its next aid slice of that package—a €31 billion payment from the euro-zone bailout fund and the IMF, as the country's recession cuts deeper and longer than forecast.

The aid has been held, as months of political turmoil in Athens delay economic overhauls, including privatizations that were penciled into the bailout plan but haven't happened.

In addition, Greece's new government under Prime Minister Antonis Samaras is pressing for two extra years to implement pledged austerity measures. The implicitly higher government spending would contribute to a shortfall in Athens of up to €30 billion through 2014, a person familiar with the numbers said.

Greece has in recent weeks tried to persuade Europe that the two-year extension can be achieved without extra lending. Its creditors aren't buying that. "Everyone knows more time means more money," said a senior European Union official. "You can't fool people."

Northern creditor countries, led by Germany, the Netherlands and Finland are adamant that Greece won't get more loans from them. Such loans would require the approval of Germany's parliament, where Chancellor Angela Merkel fears many of her center-right allies would revolt, causing a government crisis.

Some euro-zone officials would like the ECB to extend the duration of Greek government bonds that it holds, or to promise to buy new bonds when existing ones mature, reducing Greece's need for money. But many ECB officials strongly oppose such concessions, equating them with illegal central-bank financing of government debt.

The ECB is already facing accusations from the German Bundesbank that its offer this month to buy more bonds of struggling euro members such as Spain and Italy amounts to "monetary financing" of governments. That makes it less likely the ECB will show further flexibility toward Greece.

Athens could cover part of the gap by selling more treasury bills to private investors such as Greek banks, since it still has access to the short-term debt market. But investor demand is limited, and comes at a steep price: Greece had to offer a yield of 4.31% to sell 12-week bills this week.

Whoever blinks first among the creditors, extra lending will add to Greece's overall debt and worsen the country's solvency problem. The March bailout was meant to put Greece on track to cut its government debt from at least 160% of gross domestic product this year to 120% by 2020—a level Europe and the IMF see as "sustainable."

The report by the "troika" of inspectors from the IMF, ECB and European Commission is expected to say Greece's debt ratio won't reach that goal on current trends. Unless Greece's economy bounces back unexpectedly, that would leave no way around a restructuring of euro-zone loans to Greece at a later date that could cost taxpayers in Germany and elsewhere tens of billions of euros.

One option being discussed is for euro-zone governments to write off some or all of the €53 billion in bilateral loans that they lent Greece under its first aid program in May 2010. However, Germany and France aren't keen on taking such a large hit.

In any case, such painful decisions are likely to be pushed into the future, as Europe looks for a way to keep the Greek crisis quiet while it strives to shore up investor confidence in the larger economies of Spain and Italy.

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Aung San Suu Kyi Finds Common Cause With Russian Dissident Punk Rockers

September 21, 2012

Washington Post

By Lisa Rein And Emily Wax

The elder stateswoman of the human rights struggle sat on stage in pearls and a floor-length traditional skirt, pink roses pinned in her chignon. The shaggy-haired performance artist whose punk-rocker wife sits in a Moscow jail rose from the front row with the couple's four-year-old daughter, who placed a bouquet of flowers in Aung San Suu Kyi's lap.

Four hundred young activists gathered Thursday at the steel-and-glass monument to the First Amendment known as the Newseum and applauded. A generation and a continent apart, the understated Suu Kyi, one of the world's most famous political prisoners until her release in Burma in 2010, briefly shared the spotlight with friends and family of the feminist culture warriors known as Pussy Riot, three of whose members are serving two years in prison for an anti-Kremlin stunt in Moscow's main Orthodox cathedral.

This paying of respect to the Nobel laureate by the upstart dissidents was a symbolic footnote to a Thursday morning town-hall gathering at the Newseum. It was a reminder that the struggle endures, as Burma - called Myanmar by its ruling party - emerges slowly from 50 years of military rule and Russia cracks down on a wave of dissent under recently reinstalled President Vladimir V. Putin.

The 67-year-old Suu Kyi, who was in Washington to pick up the Congressional Gold Medal, and the three jailed 20-something Pussy Rioters - poster women for Amnesty International, which sponsored the event - also are Exhibit A in how to navigate Washington's corridors of power. The nation's capital is a crossroads for anyone with a cause. Everyone - from quasi-living saints such as Nelson Mandela, the Dalai Lama, and Suu Kyi, to subversives like Occupy D.C. or the tobacco farmer who drove a tractor into a pond on the Mall - stakes their claims here.

At the Newseum, the Oxford-educated democracy leader gave the Russian renegades her stamp of approval.

"I don't see why people shouldn't sing whatever it is they want to sing!" Suu Kyi said when asked to opine on Pussy Riot - unless they sang terribly or said something "nasty to other people." Told the punk rockers' target was the government, she quipped, "I think governments don't count as people." It was manna to the crowd.

Washington is accustomed to such strange pairings.

Justice for Janitors may beat drums on K Street as a limo carrying a head of state zooms by. On the lawn of the U.S. Capitol during the July 2011 World Peace event, the Dalai Lama yukked it up with actress Whoopi Goldberg. That's just the kind of city Washington is.

Suu Kyi, who was elected to the Burmese parliament in April, is now on the Washington A-list. On a 17-day stop in the United States, she met privately with President Obama, was welcomed by Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and met with the Washington Post editorial board.

Pussy Riot has not quite arrived in official Washington.

While Suu Kyi was shuttled to the Newseum by a fleet of black Chevy suburbans and stepped onto the sidewalk with an entourage of Secret Service agents, Pussy Riot's team was driven by an Amnesty staffer. On Wednesday, the group's lawyers and Pyotr Verizlov, husband of jailed rocker Nadezhda Tolokonnikova, lunched on chicken sandwiches wrapped in tin foil in a conference room at Amnesty headquarters, checking their iPads and iPhones as they ate. Daughter Gera played beside them. The Free Pussy Riot Tour - two days in Washington, then three in New York, where Yoko Ono will award them the Lennon Ono Grant for Peace - tends to run late (this can happen with a 4-year-old in tow).

Compared to those who filled Suu Kyi's dance card, Pussy Riot could only book Senate staff and lesser-known House members. But their case became an international sensation when they were convicted in August of hooliganism for storming Moscow's Christ the Savior Cathedral altar and performing a "punk prayer" for divine intervention in the ousting of Putin.

"What a mash-up. I'm just in awe," said David Meyer, a professor of sociology and political science at the University of California who blogs about protest movements. "This shows that Aung San Suu Kyi is a heroic figure who's willing to share the spotlight with people who are somehow like she used to be."

Suu Kyi, now a political insider, is fighting to lift her country out of poverty. Days after she called for opening more doors to investment in Burma, the U.S. Treasury Department announced Wednesday that the House has backed legislation that eases a longstanding restriction on U.S. financial aid to the country.

The Pussy Riot contingent is here in advance of an Oct. 1 appeal of the women's sentence. They don't expect the appeal to succeed. But they hope their tour of Washington will put pressure on the Kremlin to allow the three imprisoned band members - Tolokonnikova, Maria Alekhina and Ekaterina Samutseva - to serve their time in Moscow instead of the remote penal colony where they are scheduled to be moved. The legal team held some meetings they can't discuss. "It's D.C. - you know how these things work," Verizlov said.

While Burmese Americans adore their long-imprisoned leader, her support of the Pussy Riot team took a few of them aback.

"She's our rock star. And she's not far away from all the current trends so I can see her meeting the young people," said Than Lwin Htun, Voice of America's Burmese Washington bureau chief, after Suu Kyi's visit to their headquarters.

"But I'm a little surprised, um, by the, well, I'll try and say it: the name - 'Pussy Riot,' " he said, his voice shaking a little. "Burmese are a little bit conservative."

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FOREIGN POLICY

Restrictions On Religion Are Tightening, Study Finds

September 21, 2012

New York Times

By Adam Nossiter

DAKAR, Senegal - Government restrictions on religion around the world were highest in the Middle East and North Africa, particularly in the period before the Arab Spring uprisings, a new study has found, underscoring a factor that fueled hostilities in the region and led to the rise of political Islam after the revolts.

The study, by the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion and Public Life, said that government restrictions on religion were "high or very high" in most of the Arab Spring countries in 2010 - where, in fact, suppression of Islamist movements contributed to the uprisings and spurred subsequent incursions of Islamists into political power.

Restrictions in Tunisia went from "high" in mid-2009 to "very high" a year later, the study found. The uprising there began at the end of 2011.

In Egypt, restrictions were already high and edged up further between 2009 and 2010, the year before the country exploded. And in Yemen, where there also was an uprising, restrictions increased sharply over the same period.

Over all, the study found a worldwide rise in religious restrictions. It measured two basic yardsticks: a government restrictions index, and a social hostilities index. Government restrictions includes moves by authorities to ban faiths and conversions, and to limit preaching. Social hostilities encompasses mob violence and "religion-related intimidation or abuse," such as harassment over attire.

The study found 15 countries with very high levels of social hostilities in 2010, up from 10 in 2007, with the new additions being Egypt, Nigeria, the Palestinian territories, Russia and Yemen. It noted that "in Nigeria, violence between Christian and Muslim communities, including a series of deadly attacks, escalated throughout the period."

However, in Nigeria at least, the religious dimension is often superseded by, or a mask for, more complex underlying factors - elements not noted by the broad-brush, numbers-based Pew study. In the central region of Nigeria, for instance, where much of the ostensibly Christian-Muslim violence takes place, the mutually hostile groups are often motivated as much by disputes over land and longstanding ethnic friction as they are by religion.

The study found that increases in religious restrictions outnumbered decreases in all five major regions of the world, with sub-Saharan Africa scoring the largest share of countries with significant increases.

Over all, countries with "high or very high restrictions" rose from 31 percent of the total in 2009 to 37 percent in 2010. The Pew study found that 63 percent of countries had "increases in government restrictions" from 2009 to 2010.

Separately on Thursday, United Nations human rights investigators in Geneva said that over 300 Christians had been arrested in Iran since mid-2010, where they said churches operate in a "climate of fear." Iran is given a score of "very high" on Pew's Government Restrictions Index.

The Pew study found that restrictions also increased in Europe, like the Swiss ban on construction of minarets, and in the United States, noting a rising number of incidents in which people were prevented from wearing clothing or beards, and problems in building places of worship.

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EDITORIAL / OPINION

The Post-American Middle East

September 21, 2012

Wall Street Journal

Another day, another installment in what President Obama likes to call the "receding" tide of war. On Wednesday, John Kerry threatened to cut U.S. aid to Baghdad unless the Iraqi government blocks overflights of Iranian planes suspected of ferrying military supplies to Damascus. But Baghdad isn't budging. Welcome to the post-American Middle East, Senator.

"If so many people have entreated the [Iraqi] government to stop and that doesn't seem to be having an impact," said the Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee at a confirmation hearing for the new U.S. Ambassador to Iraq, then it "seems to send a signal to me maybe we should make some of our assistance or some of our support contingent on some kind of appropriate response."

The nominee, current Baghdad chargé d'affaires Robert Beecroft, agreed, saying he has "made it very clear that we find this unacceptable."

"Unacceptable" is a word the Administration often uses about behavior it doesn't like but isn't prepared to do much to stop: Think massacres in Syria, warfare in Sudan, mob violence against our embassies—or a nuclear Iran. Now add to the list the nonfeasance of an Iraqi government that calculates it has more to lose from confronting the mullahs than it does from rejecting entreaties from erstwhile friends in Washington.

That's not to say that Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki is right to let Iran use its airspace to help Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad remain in power—as Tehran now openly boasts it is doing. It's no secret that Mr. Maliki detests the regime in Tehran, which did so much to foment the insurgency in Iraq in his first years in office. Nor does Mr. Maliki love the Assad regime, which funneled so many jihadists to Iraq and gave safe haven to so many of Saddam's exiled lieutenants.

But Iraq will always have Iran and Syria as its neighbors, and it needs to choose its squabbles carefully. Nor could Iraq do much to stop the Iranian overflights even if it chose to. Iraqi airspace has been essentially undefended since the U.S. withdrew its remaining forces last year. In December the Iraqi government made initial payments for two squadrons of F-16s, but delivery isn't expected until 2014. What passes for an Iraqi air force today consists of a hodgepodge of Cessnas, Hueys, plus a few transport planes and helicopters.

The Iraqi Prime Minister must also wonder why Mr. Kerry—who until last year was Assad's best friend in Washington, or second best after Nancy Pelosi—should now strike such an indignant pose about the overflights. This is from an ally of an Administration that has consistently refused to intercede in Syria in any serious way beyond symbolic and fruitless diplomacy at the U.N. An America that prefers to lead from behind can't ask other countries to take risks we aren't prepared to run ourselves.

All the more so following America's complete pullout from Iraq, when the Administration could have negotiated to maintain a meaningful residual U.S. force. Gratitude is not a powerful operating force in the foreign policy of most states, including Iraq. Joe Biden, the President's point man for Iraq, now gets only the back of Mr. Maliki's hand without U.S. troops as his influence-multiplier.

The larger lesson is that withdrawal from Iraq was not the no-cost triumph the President keeps telling American voters it is. The Iranian overflights—of which there have been more than 100 so far—would not happen if the U.S. still had an airbase in Iraq to secure the country's airspace. And Mr. Maliki would likely be more confident in his dealing with Iran if he had a division's worth of American troops to serve as a deterrent to Iranian incursion. As for U.S. aid, the \$1 billion is not all that meaningful for a government flush with oil revenues.

What goes in Iraq goes as well in the broader Middle East, from Tunisia to Afghanistan. The Administration has repeatedly made it clear that it wants to downsize its commitments to the region, as part of its "pivot" to Asia. But now it wonders why our entreaties in Baghdad (and Cairo) keep falling on deaf ears.

Or why jihadists would plan to murder a U.S. Ambassador on the anniversary of 9/11 in Libya, a country we helped to liberate but have since ignored. Having first blamed the attack on the "spontaneous" reaction to a YouTube film, even the Administration has now had to admit it was a terrorist attack. One question Congress should ask is why the White House didn't act to protect or rescue the Ambassador when news reports now say it was warned that an attack could happen.

President Obama keeps using his campaign catchphrase that the "tide of war is receding," but the real receding tide is in U.S. power and influence. Our growing irrelevance to the region comes with costs that are growing and that are likely to draw us back in later at a much higher price.

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Collapse Of The Cairo Doctrine

September 21, 2012

Washington Post

By Charles Krauthammer

In the week following 9/11/12 something big happened: the collapse of the Cairo Doctrine, the centerpiece of President Obama's foreign policy. It was to reset the very course of post-9/11 America, creating, after the (allegedly) brutal depredations of the Bush years, a profound rapprochement with the Islamic world.

Never lacking ambition or self-regard, Obama promised in Cairo, June 4, 2009, "a new beginning" offering Muslims "mutual respect," unsuitedly implying previous disrespect. Curious, as over the previous 20 years, America had six times committed its military forces on behalf of oppressed Muslims, three times for reasons of pure humanitarianism (Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo), where no U.S. interests were at stake.

But no matter. Obama had come to remonstrate and restrain the hyperpower that, by his telling, had lost its way after 9/11, creating Guantanamo, practicing torture, imposing its will with arrogance and presumption.

First, he would cleanse by confession. Then he would heal. Why, given the unique sensitivities of his background - "my sister is half-Indonesian," he proudly told an interviewer in 2007, amplifying on his exquisite appreciation of Islam - his very election would revolutionize relations.

And his policies of accommodation and concession would consolidate the gains: an outstretched hand to Iran's mullahs, a first-time presidential admission of the U.S. role in a 1953 coup, a studied and stunning turning away from the Green Revolution; withdrawal from Iraq with no residual presence or influence; a fixed timetable for leaving Afghanistan; returning our ambassador to Damascus (with kind words for Bashar al-Assad - "a reformer," suggested the secretary of state); deliberately creating distance between the United States and Israel.

These measures would raise our standing in the region, restore affection and respect for the United States and elicit new cooperation from Muslim lands.

It's now three years since the Cairo speech. Look around. The Islamic world is convulsed with an explosion of anti-Americanism. From Tunisia to Lebanon, American schools, businesses and diplomatic facilities set ablaze. A U.S. ambassador and three others murdered in Benghazi. The black flag of Salafism, of which al-Qaeda is a prominent element, raised over our embassies in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen and Sudan.

The administration, staggered and confused, blames it all on a 14-minute trailer for a film no one has seen and may not even exist.

What else can it say? Admit that its doctrinal premises were supremely naive and its policies deeply corrosive to American influence?

Religious provocations are endless. (Ask Salman Rushdie.) Resentment about the five-century decline of the Islamic world is a constant. What's new - the crucial variable - is the unmistakable sound of a superpower in retreat. Ever since Henry Kissinger flipped Egypt from the Soviet to the American camp in the early 1970s, the United States had dominated the region. No longer.

"It's time," declared Obama to wild applause of his convention, "to do some nation-building right here at home." He'd already announced a strategic pivot from the Middle East to the Pacific. Made possible because "the tide of war is receding."

Nonsense. From the massacres in Nigeria to the charnel house that is Syria, violence has, if anything, increased. What is receding is Obama's America.

It's as axiomatic in statecraft as in physics: Nature abhors a vacuum. Islamists rush in to fill the space and declare their ascendancy. America's friends are bereft, confused, paralyzed.

Islamists rise across North Africa from Mali to Egypt. Iran repeatedly defies U.S. demands on nuclear enrichment, then, as a measure of its contempt for what America thinks, openly admits that its Revolutionary Guards are deployed in Syria. Russia, after arming Assad, warns America to stay out, while the secretary of state delivers vapid lectures about Assad "meeting" his international "obligations." The Gulf states beg America to act on Iran; Obama strains mightily to restrain . . . Israel.

Sovereign U.S. territory is breached and U.S. interests are burned. And what is the official response? One administration denunciation after another - of a movie trailer! A request to Google to "review" the trailer's presence on YouTube. And a sheriff's deputies' midnight "voluntary interview" with the suspected filmmaker. This in the land of the First Amendment.

What else can Obama do? At their convention, Democrats endlessly congratulated themselves on their one foreign policy success: killing Osama bin Laden. A week later, the Salafist flag flies over four American embassies, even as the mob chants, "Obama, Obama, there are still a billion Osamas."

A foreign policy in epic collapse. And, by the way, Vladimir Putin just expelled the U.S. Agency for International Development from Russia. Another thank you from another recipient of another grand Obama "reset."

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Fouad Ajami: Muslim Rage and the Obama Retreat

September 21, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By FOUAD AJAMI

This is not a Jimmy Carter moment—a U.S. Embassy and its staff seized and held hostage for 444 days, America's enemies taking stock of its weakness, its allies running for cover. But the anti-American protests that broke upon 20 nations this past week must be reckoned a grand personal failure for Barack Obama, and a case of hubris undone.

No American president before this one had proclaimed such intimacy with a world that stretches from Morocco to Indonesia. From the start of his administration, Mr. Obama put forth his own biography as a bridge to those aggrieved nations. He would be a "different president," he promised, and the years he lived among Muslims would acquit him—and thus America itself. He was the un-Bush.

And so, in June 2009, Mr. Obama descended on Cairo. He had opposed the Iraq war, he had Muslim relatives, and he would offer Egyptians, and by extension other Arabs, the promise of a "new beginning." They told their history as a tale of victimization at the hands of outsiders, and he empathized with that narrative.

He spoke of "colonialism that denied rights and opportunities to many Muslims, and a Cold War in which *Muslim-majority countries* were too often treated as proxies without regard to their own aspirations."

Without knowing it, he had broken a time-honored maxim of that world: Never speak ill of your own people when in the company of strangers. There was too little recognition of the malignant trilogy—anti-Americanism, anti-Semitism and anti-modernism—that had poisoned the life of Egypt and much of the region.

The crowd took in what this stranger had to say, and some were flattered by his embrace of their culture. But ever since its traumatic encounter with the guns and ideas of the West in the opening years of the 19th century, the region had seen conquerors come and go. Its people have an unfailing eye for the promises and predilections of outsiders.

It didn't take long for this new American leader to come down to earth. In the summer of 2009, Iran erupted in rebellion against its theocratic rulers. That upheaval exposed the contradictions at the heart

of the Obama approach. At his core, he was a hyper-realist: The call of freedom did not tug at him. He was certain that the theocracy would respond to his outreach, resulting in a diplomatic breakthrough. But Iran's clerical rulers had no interest in a breakthrough. We are the Great Satan, and they need their foreign demons to maintain their grip on power.

The embattled "liberals" in the region were awakened to the truth of Mr. Obama. He was a man of the status quo, with a superficial knowledge of lands beyond. In Cairo, he had described himself as a "student of history." But in his first foreign television interview, he declared his intention to restore U.S. relations with the Islamic world to "the same respect and partnership that America had with the Muslim world as recently as 20 or 30 years ago."

This coincided, almost to the day, with the 30th anniversary of the Ayatollah Khomeini's rise to power in Iran. That "golden age" he sought to restore covered the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the fall of Beirut to the forces of terror, deadly attacks on our embassies, the downing of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, and more. A trail of terror had shadowed the American presence.

Yet here was a president who would end this history, who would withdraw from both the "good war" in Afghanistan and the bad one in Iraq. Here was a president who would target America's real enemy—al Qaeda. "Osama bin Laden is dead," we've been told time and again, and good riddance to him. But those attacking our embassies last week had a disturbing rebuttal: "Obama, we are Osama!" they chanted, some brandishing al Qaeda flags.

Until last Tuesday's deadly attack on our consulate in Benghazi, it was the fashion of Mr. Obama and his lieutenants to proclaim that the tide of war is receding. But we can't declare a unilateral end to our troubles, nor can we avert our gaze from the disorder that afflicts the societies of the Greater Middle East.

A Muslim world that can take to the streets, as far away as Jakarta, in protest against a vulgar film depiction of the Prophet Muhammad—yet barely call up a crowd on behalf of a Syrian population that has endured unspeakable hell at the hands of the dictator Bashar al-Assad—is in need of self-criticism and repair. We do these societies no favor if we leave them to the illusion that they can pass through the gates of the modern world carrying those ruinous ideas.

Yet the word in Washington is that we must pull back from those troubled Arab and Muslim lands. The grand expectations that Mr. Obama had for Afghanistan have largely been forgotten. The Taliban are content to wait us out, secure in the knowledge that, come 2014, we and our allies will have quit the place. And neighboring Pakistan, a nuclear-armed country with 170 million people, is written off as a hotbed of extremism.

Meanwhile, Syria burns and calls for help, but the call goes unanswered. The civil war there has become a great Sunni-Shiite schism. Lebanon teeters on the edge. More important, trouble has spilled into Turkey. The Turks have come to resent the American abdication and the heavy burden the Syrian struggle has imposed on them. In contrast, the mullahs in Iran have read the landscape well and are determined to sustain the Assad dictatorship.

Our foreign policy has been altered, as never before, to fit one man's electoral needs. We hear from the presidential handlers only what they want us to believe about the temper of distant lands. It was only yesterday that our leader, we are told, had solved the riddle of our position in the world.

Give him your warrant, the palace guard intone, at least until the next election. In tales of charismatic, chosen leaders, it is always, and only, about the man at the helm.

Mr. Ajami is a senior fellow at Stanford's Hoover Institution and the author most recently of "The Syrian Rebellion" (Hoover Press, 2012).

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Iran Shows No Hesitation About Intervening In Syria

September 21, 2012

Washington Post

IT'S BEEN MORE than a year since the Obama administration began describing the downfall of Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad as a matter of time. He's defied White House predictions in part because of his ruthlessness - more than 20,000 Syrians, most of them civilians, have died during the uprising - and in part because of political and military weakness of his opposition.

But the Assad regime also has been bolstered by the imbalance of foreign intervention. While the United States and other Western powers hang back, and Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar offer weak and poorly coordinated aid, Iran has mounted a concerted and escalating campaign to prop up the government. Iran has sent men as well as arms, cash and technical support.

White House aides are frequently described as worrying that direct U.S. aid to the rebels would intensify the war - which is now bloodier than Iraq at the height of its sectarian fighting - or prompt other countries to jump in. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's regime has no such scruples. The commander in chief of the Revolutionary Guard, Mohamad Ali Jafari, acknowledged at a news conference last weekend that members of the elite Quds force have been training a 50,000-member civilian militia modeled on Iran's own Basij force. Those fighters, known to Syrians as shabiha, have been guilty of some of the war's worst atrocities, including the mass murder of civilians in several villages.

The Wall Street Journal reported that the Revolutionary Guard general leading the training effort, Hossein Hamedani, commanded the assault on Iranians who revolted against the regime in 2009. Hundreds of rank-and-file members of the Guard and Basij are in Syria to bolster government forces, the Journal said. A busload of 48 was captured by the Free Syrian Army last month.

Even as the Obama administration was rejecting appeals from Turkey, France and other allies for more robust action against the Assad regime, Tehran was escalating. In July it resumed direct cargo flights to Damascus across Iraqi airspace. U.S. officials, who believe that the planes carry military equipment, appealed to the Iraqi government to stop them or at least inspect them. But the flights have continued. U.S. officials told the New York Times that Iran has even provided the regime with a cargo plane for transporting fighters and supplies around the country. Meanwhile, the Lebanese militia Hezbollah, an Iranian client, has been sending its own trainers into Syria.

Some administration officials dismiss the Iranian effort as futile support for a lost cause. But Iranian backing for the regime, matched against Western passivity, could keep Mr. Assad in power indefinitely. Even if the government in Damascus collapses, Iranian commanders and the militias they've trained will likely stay on to compete in what could be a chaotic struggle for power that could spread from Syria to Lebanon and Iraq. Al-Qaeda and other Sunni extremist groups will be part of that fight; so will the rebel

groups backed by the fundamentalist Saudis and Qataris. If it continues its present policy, the United States will go on watching from the sidelines as the future of the Levant is decided.
(top)

Lessons From An Iranian War Game

September 21, 2012

Washington Post

By David Ignatius

Perhaps it was the "fog of simulation." But the scariest aspect of a U.S.-Iran war game staged this week was the way each side miscalculated the other's responses - and moved toward war even as the players thought they were choosing restrained options.

The Iran exercise was organized by Kenneth Pollack, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution's Saban Center for Middle East Policy. It included former top U.S. officials as Washington policymakers, and prominent Iranian American experts playing Tehran's hand. I was allowed to observe, on the condition that I wouldn't name the participants.

The bottom line: The game showed how easy it was for each side to misread the other's signals. And these players were separated by a mere corridor in a Washington think tank, rather than half a world away.

Misjudgment was the essence of this game: Each side thought it was choosing limited options, but their moves were interpreted as crossing red lines. Attacks proved more deadly than expected; signals were not understood; attempts to open channels of communication were ignored; the desire to look tough compelled actions that produced results neither side wanted.

Let's walk through the simulation to see how the teams stumbled up the ladder of escalation. The game was set in July 2013, with some broad assumptions: It was assumed that President Obama had been reelected, the PS+1 negotiations remained deadlocked and Israel hadn't launched a unilateral attack.

The game controllers added some spicy details: Assassinations of Iranian scientists were continuing; and the United States, Israel and Britain were developing a new cyberweapon (imaginary code name: National Pastime) to disrupt power to Iran's nuclear and military facilities. Even so, the Iranian supreme leader thought that America was a paper tiger, telling aides: "The Americans are tired of the fight, and they are led by a weak man with no stomach for the struggle."

Meanwhile, Iran was pushing ahead with its nuclear program; it had a rough design for a weapon and, in three to four months, would have enough highly enriched uranium to make two bombs.

The action started on July 6 with an Iranian terror operation: A bomb destroyed a tourist hotel in Aruba, killing 137 people, many of them Americans, including a vacationing U.S. nuclear scientist. The damage at the hotel was far greater than the Iranians had expected.

The U.S. team recommended strong retaliatory moves to signal Iran that it had crossed an "unacceptable threshold." The United States bombed a Revolutionary Guards camp in eastern Iran; launched a cyberattack that disrupted power at 40 Iranian security facilities; and warned Iranian operatives in 38 countries that they were known and vulnerable. U.S. military leaders in the game complained that these calibrated moves were half-measures.

Bombing the Iranians' homeland rocked their team. It crossed a red line, in a way the U.S. side hadn't anticipated. The Tehran players spurned a secret message from Obama, delivered through Russia, warning of "dire consequences" if the nuclear program wasn't stopped; the imaginary Iranian defense minister called it a "bluff." The Iranians wanted to respond forcefully but not so much so that they would trigger an attack on their nuclear facilities.

Then the Iranian team made what proved a devastating mistake. After rejecting the most aggressive options (such as attacking Fifth Fleet headquarters in Bahrain), they chose limited actions, described as the "random mining" of the Strait of Hormuz and "harassment" of U.S. ships in the Persian Gulf. The Iranians also dispersed their stockpile of uranium, but only half, to signal they were still willing to negotiate. But the United States missed the message.

"They've crossed our red line," responded the imaginary U.S. national security adviser - expressing the group's mistaken view that the Iranians had decided to close the strait and attack U.S. vessels. As tensions increased, oil prices headed toward \$200 a barrel.

U.S. military options were between harsh and harsher: (a) reopen the strait by force and deliver an ultimatum that Iran stop its nuclear program within 24 hours; or (b) hit Iran's nuclear facilities simultaneously with reopening the strait. Military logic seemed to require the strongest move. The U.S. team ultimately voted, 5 to 3, for an attack across Iran to disable the nuclear program and destroy coastal defenses.

The unsolved puzzle for the U.S. side was how to stop the conflict, once it started. The Iranians, for their part, had decided to bleed the United States in a protracted struggle. The lesson of the exercise, concluded Pollack, is that "small miscalculations are magnified very quickly."

(top)

RELEASED IN FULL**DAILY PRESS CLIPS FOR
WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 19, 2012****DOMESTIC AGENDA****Union Vote Ends Strike by Teachers in Chicago**

September 19, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By STEPHANIE BANCHERO

CHICAGO—Chicago teachers union officials voted Tuesday to end a strike that halted classes for 350,000 students and illustrated the intensifying national debate over how teachers are evaluated, hired and fired. ([link](#))

ECONOMIC RECOVERY**Mortgage Loans Hit 16-Year Low as Standards Tighten**

September 19, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By NICK TIMIRAOS and SARAH PORTLOCK

Mortgage lending declined to its lowest level in 16 years in 2011 amid weak demand for mortgages and tighter lending standards, according to a report released by federal regulators Tuesday. ([link](#))

USUN IN THE NEWS**A tale of two narratives**

September 19, 2012

Foreign Policy

By Tom Mahnken

Recent days have witnessed the emergence of two divergent narratives regarding the wave of anti-American protests that have spread throughout the Islamic world and beyond. ([link](#))

Syrian War Looms Over UN Meeting Of World Leaders

September 19, 2012

Associated Press

By Edith M. Lederer

UNITED NATIONS - Hovering over this month's annual gathering of world leaders at the United Nations is the international community's failure to end the escalating war in Syria that is starting to spill over into a fragile and divided region. ([link](#))

UNITED NATIONS**UN Council Worries About Yemen**

September 19, 2012

AFP

The UN Security Council expressed concern Tuesday over a campaign to "undermine" Yemen's interim government and a widening humanitarian crisis in the country. ([link](#))

TOP STORIES**Russia Demands U.S. End Support Of Democracy Groups**

September 19, 2012

New York Times

By David M. Herszenhorn And Ellen Barry

REVIEW AUTHORITY: Archie Bolster, Senior Reviewer

MOSCOW - Russia has ordered the United States to end its financial support for a wide range of pro-democracy, public health and other civil society programs here, in an aggressive step by the Kremlin to halt what it views as American meddling in its internal affairs. ([link](#))

Russia Boots Out USAID

September 19, 2012

[Washington Post](#)

By Natasha Abbakumova And Kathy Lally

MOSCOW - President Vladimir Putin is expelling the U.S. Agency for International Development, the State Department said Tuesday, another in a series of ever-more-aggressive measures meant to limit the work of Russian activists who support democracy, protect human rights and promote fair elections. ([link](#))

Taliban's New Strategy Focuses More On High-profile Assaults, Less On Territory

September 19, 2012

[Washington Post](#)

By Rajiv Chandrasekaran

As U.S. and NATO forces have evicted insurgents from a broad swath of southern Afghanistan, senior Taliban commanders have shifted toward a new battlefield strategy, one less focused on reclaiming lost territory and more on winning the next phase of the 11-year-old war. ([link](#))

Coalition Sharply Reduces Joint Operations With Afghan Troops

September 19, 2012

[New York Times](#)

By MATTHEW ROSENBERG

KABUL, Afghanistan — In a significant blow to a core element of the Western exit strategy from Afghanistan, the American-led military coalition said Tuesday it has temporarily curtailed joint operations with the Afghan Army and police forces. ([link](#))

More Protests In China Over Japan And Islands

September 19, 2012

[New York Times](#)

By Ian Johnson And Thom Shanker

BEIJING - China drove home its opposition to Japanese control of a contested group of islands on Tuesday, with angry protests in dozens of cities and a warning from its defense minister that "further actions" were possible. ([link](#))

China Reins In Anti-Japan Protests On Sensitive Anniversary

September 19, 2012

[Washington Post](#)

By William Wan

BEIJING - Anti-Japan protests continued across China on Tuesday, with thousands of people marching on the Japanese Embassy to mark the anniversary of Japan's brutal invasion 81 years ago. ([link](#))

AFRICA

African Union Forces Start Hunt For Joseph Kony

September 19, 2012

[Associated Press](#)

KAMPALA, Uganda - A military official says Ugandan troops tracking infamous rebel leader Joseph Kony have handed over command of the operation to African Union troops from Uganda, South Sudan and the Central African Republic. ([link](#))

Somalia

Somalia: Militants Said To Leave Last Stronghold

September 19, 2012

Associated Press

By Abdi Guled And Tom Odula

GALKAYO, Somalia - Fighters from Somalia's Islamist extremist rebels have started to leave their remaining coastal stronghold in the face of advancing allied African troops, residents and a military official said Tuesday. ([link](#))

South Africa

Striking SA Miners Sign Deal To End 5-Week Strike

September 19, 2012

Associated Press

By Carley Petesch And Michelle Faul

MOOINOOI, South Africa - Striking platinum miners in South Africa have signed a wage deal ending a bloody 5-week strike at the Lonmin PLC mine that had spread to the gold and chrome sectors of the industry which anchors the economy of Africa's richest economy. ([link](#))

ASIA

Burma

Suu Kyi Calls on U.S. to Lift Export Ban

September 19, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By JAY SOLOMON

WASHINGTON — Myanmar's opposition leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, began her first trip to the U.S. since she was released from house arrest amid hints the Obama administration was preparing to lift a decades-old ban on her country's lucrative exports, which include gems, textiles and oil and gas. ([link](#))

China

Panetta Meets With China's Elusive Leader-in-waiting

September 19, 2012

Washington Post

By Craig Whitlock

BEIJING — China's anointed leader, Xi Jinping, re-emerged from the shadows Wednesday as he met with Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta and smiled for the cameras, quelling speculation about his health and political status. ([link](#))

China reserves right to act on disputed islands

September 19, 2012

Associated Press

By LOLITA C. BALDOR

BEIJING — China's national defense minister warned Tuesday that Beijing reserves the right to take further action against Japan in the ongoing dispute over uninhabited islands in the East China Sea. ([link](#))

Beijing Demonstrators Damage US Ambassador's Car

September 19, 2012

Associated Press

By Didi Tang

BEIJING - A car carrying the U.S. ambassador to China was mildly damaged after becoming the target of boisterous anti-Japan demonstrators who were expressing outrage over a territorial dispute and marking the 81st anniversary of Japan's invasion of China. ([link](#))

Hints of Leniency for Chinese Police Chief

September 19, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By JEREMY PAGE

CHENGDU—The trial of the former police chief whose flight to a U.S. consulate triggered a political crisis in China concluded after two days and legal experts said it appeared Wang Lijun stood a good chance of a comparatively light sentence. ([link](#))

Indonesia**US Temporarily Closes Consulate In Indonesia's 3rd-Largest City As Film Protests Continue**

September 19, 2012

Associated Press

MEDAN, Indonesia - The U.S. has temporarily closed its consulate in Indonesia's third-largest city due to ongoing protests over an anti-Islam film produced in the United States. ([link](#))

Japan**US And Japan Reach Agreement On Osprey Deployment**

September 19, 2012

Associated Press

By Lolita C. Baldor

BEIJING - The United States and Japan have reached an agreement allowing the MV-22 Osprey military aircraft to begin flight operations in Japan, officials said Wednesday. The deal had been in question because of protests by Japanese citizens who feared the hybrid aircraft was not safe. ([link](#))

NEA**After Libya, Renewed Questions About The Potency Of Al Qaeda**

September 19, 2012

New York Times

By Eric Schmitt And David D. Kirkpatrick

WASHINGTON - The attack on the United States mission in Benghazi, Libya, that killed Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens has set off a new debate here and across the Middle East about whether Al Qaeda has been reinvigorated amid the chaos of the Arab Spring or instead merely lives on as a kind of useful boogeyman, scapegoat or foil. ([link](#))

Al-Qaida Threatens Attacks On US Diplomats

September 19, 2012

Associated Press

By Maamoun Youssef

CAIRO - Al-Qaida's branch in North Africa on Tuesday called for attacks on U.S. diplomats and an escalation of protests against an anti-Islam video that was produced in the United States and triggered a wave of demonstrations and riots in the Middle East and beyond. ([link](#))

Egypt

Temporary Spending Bill Permits Egypt Aid To Flow

September 19, 2012

[Associated Press](#)

By Andrew Taylor

WASHINGTON - As anti-American sentiment boils in Islamic countries like Egypt, lawmakers are moving to permit billions of dollars in U.S. foreign aid under a government-wide funding bill set to clear Congress this week. ([link](#))

Egypt To Try 7 Copts, US Pastor Over Prophet Film

September 19, 2012

[Associated Press](#)

By Sarah El Deeb

CAIRO - Egypt's general prosecutor issued arrest warrants Tuesday for seven Egyptian Coptic Christians and a Florida-based American pastor and referred them to trial on charges linked to an anti-Islam film that has sparked riots across the Muslim world. ([link](#))

Iran

Negotiators Meet In Bid To Revive Iran Talks

September 19, 2012

[New York Times](#)

By Rick Gladstone

The top nuclear negotiators for Iran and the big powers met face to face for the first time in nearly three months on Tuesday, part of an effort to revive the stalled talks over Iran's disputed uranium enrichment activities as new military tensions roil the Middle East. ([link](#))

Bahrain, UAE probe suspicious shipments headed to Iran

September 19, 2012

[Reuters](#)

By Louis Charbonneau

UNITED NATIONS - Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates have confiscated a number of items Iran may have sought for its nuclear program, a development that diplomats said showed how enforcement of U.N. sanctions against Tehran is steadily improving. ([link](#))

Iraq

Iraq Reopens Border Crossing To Syrian Refugees

September 19, 2012

[Associated Press](#)

By Zeina Karam

BEIRUT - Iraqi officials say a western border crossing with Syria has been reopened in order to receive refugees fleeing an escalating civil war in their country. ([link](#))

Libya

FBI Arrives In Libya To Probe Deaths Of Four Americans

September 19, 2012

Washington Post

By Anne Gearan

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said Tuesday that a team of FBI agents has arrived in Libya to investigate the deaths of four Americans who were killed when the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi was overrun last week. ([link](#))

Islamist Denies Group's Role In Benghazi Attack, Warns He'll Target Americans If U.S. Retaliates

September 19, 2012

McClatchy

By Mel Frykberg

The leader of an Islamist militia whose members are suspected of involvement in the attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi last week, killing the U.S. ambassador and three other Americans, has warned that his group will consider American citizens fair game in a holy war if the United States takes action inside Libya against his group. ([link](#))

Attack On Americans Jolts Libya To Act On Militias

September 18, 2012

AFP

By Dominique Soguel

BENGHAZI, Libya - Islamist militias have been able to flourish in Libya since its 2011 uprising, but a deadly attack on Americans in Benghazi has jolted the newly democratic country to finally act against them. ([link](#))

Syria

Syria Orders Schools To Open, But Classes Give Way To War

September 19, 2012

New York Times

By An Employee Of The New York Times In Syria And Kareem Fahim.

DAMASCUS, Syria - At one Syrian school, in the Damascus suburbs, students were so scarce this week that teachers spent most of the last few days sitting around and drinking tea. ([link](#))

Rebels Are Said to Defeat Syrian Forces in Battle for Border Post

September 19, 2012

New York Times

By SEBNEM ARSU and ALAN COWELL

ISTANBUL — For the second time in a week, the bloody civil war in Syria spilled across border areas on Wednesday as rebel forces reportedly expelled government troops from a northern frontier crossing in an apparent expansion of their effort to control infiltration and resupply routes in the campaign to overthrow President Bashar al-Assad. ([link](#))

SCA

Afghanistan

Suicide Bomber In Afghanistan Strikes Minibus, Killing Mostly Foreign Workers

September 19, 2012

New York Times

By Rod Nordland And Sangar Rahimi

KABUL, Afghanistan - A suicide bomber killed 14 people on Tuesday, including 10 foreigners, most of whom worked as flight crew members under contract with the United States government, officials said.

The attack brought to at least 28 the number of deaths attributed to unrest sweeping the Muslim world as a result of a video parodying the Prophet Muhammad. ([link](#))

WHA/EUR

Belarus

AP Photographer Beaten, Detained In Belarus

September 19, 2012

Associated Press

MINSK, Belarus - An Associated Press photographer was beaten and briefly detained Tuesday by plainclothes security officers in the Belarusian capital. ([link](#))

France

French Prime Minister Says Won't Be Intimidated, Won't Allow New Protest Against Prophet Film

September 19, 2012

Associated Press

PARIS - France's prime minister says a planned demonstration by people angry over a film produced in the United States that insults the Prophet Muhammad won't be allowed to go ahead. ([link](#))

Turkey

Turkish Public Sours On Syrian Uprising

September 19, 2012

New York Times

By Tim Arango

ISTANBUL - As the war in Syria rages next door, Turks have grown increasingly weary of nearly daily reports of troubles at home: Iranian spies working with Kurdish insurgents, soldiers ambushed and killed, millions spent caring for a flood of refugees, lost trade and havoc in border villages. ([link](#))

New Strike Shows Fray Worsening Between Turks, Kurds

September 19, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By JOE PARKINSON and AYLA ALBAYRAK

ISTANBUL—At least 10 Turkish soldiers were killed and more than 70 were wounded in a rocket attack by Kurdish militants in Turkey's eastern province of Bingol, government officials said, in the latest of a series of brazen attacks on Turkey's security forces that underline how the region's three-decade-old conflict is deepening. ([link](#))

FOREIGN POLICY

Race Is On As Ice Melt Reveals Arctic Treasures

September 19, 2012

New York Times

By Elisabeth Rosenthal

NUUK, Greenland - With Arctic ice melting at record pace, the world's superpowers are increasingly jockeying for political influence and economic position in outposts like this one, previously regarded as barren wastelands. ([link](#))

U.S. Official Says Cyberattacks Can Trigger Self-Defense Rule

September 19, 2012

Washington Post

By Ellen Nakashima

Cyberattacks can amount to armed attacks triggering the right of self defense and are subject to international laws of war, the State Department's top lawyer said Tuesday. ([link](#))

EDITORIAL / OPINION

Bush: Suu Kyi's Long Journey to Freedom

September 19, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By LAURA W. BUSH

On Wednesday, Burmese opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi will enter the U.S. Capitol. She will pass by statues honoring many of our nation's defenders of freedom and liberty and make her way to the soaring rotunda, where she will receive the Congressional Gold Medal, one of the two highest civilian awards given by the United States. It is a journey that many never expected her to make. Ms. Suu Kyi's life and story are powerful reminders of why we must not give up on the causes of freedom and liberty. ([link](#))

Look In Your Mirror

September 19, 2012

New York Times

By Thomas L. Friedman

On Monday, David D. Kirkpatrick, the Cairo bureau chief for The Times, quoted one of the Egyptian demonstrators outside the American Embassy, Khaled Ali, as justifying last week's violent protests by declaring: "We never insult any prophet - not Moses, not Jesus - so why can't we demand that Muhammad be respected?" Mr. Ali, a 39-year-old textile worker, was holding up a handwritten sign in English that read: "Shut Up America." "Obama is the president, so he should have to apologize!" ([link](#))

America's Gift to Jihadi Publicists

September 19, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By ANNE JOLIS

The U.S. government has spent the past week declaring that while violence in response to speech is officially condemnable, so too is certain speech. Specifically, a 14-minute Internet video mocking Islam is, according to various Obama administration officials, "reprehensible," "disgusting" and "very hateful, very offensive." So bad, it apparently led to the deaths of four Americans in Benghazi last week and to the mobbing, storming and torching of U.S. facilities in several Muslim countries since then. ([link](#))

An Election-Year Ploy: Get Tough On China

September 19, 2012

Washington Post

IT'S AN IRON LAW of U.S. politics: You can't go wrong bashing China. Polls show the public believes that this country is losing jobs due to unfair economic competition from abroad, especially from China. And so, every four years, presidential candidates fall all over themselves promising to get tough on imports. ([link](#))

Will Obama Stand Up Against Putin's Abuses?

September 19, 2012

Washington Post

By David J. Kramer

The decision to halt USAID work in Russia is just the latest in what has been an especially bad year for human rights in that country, though you wouldn't know it from the virtual silence of Western leaders. Since Vladimir Putin's formal return to the Russian presidency in May, there has been an across-the-board crackdown on civil society and the opposition. Beyond the show trial of members of the punk rock band Pussy Riot, authorities have raided the homes of government critics and their family members, conducted criminal investigations and prosecutions of opposition figures and their spouses, and used brutal force against protesters. ([link](#))

DOMESTIC AGENDA

Union Vote Ends Strike by Teachers in Chicago

September 19, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By STEPHANIE BANCHERO

CHICAGO—Chicago teachers union officials voted Tuesday to end a strike that halted classes for 350,000 students and illustrated the intensifying national debate over how teachers are evaluated, hired and fired.

Classes are expected to resume Wednesday, city officials said, bringing a close to the seven-day strike in the nation's third-largest school district. Tuesday's vote by the union's governing body came days after the city and the teachers union reached a tentative deal on a three-year contract. The union's full membership must now ratify that deal in a vote that union leaders said would come within the next couple of weeks.

The draft agreement for the first time links teacher evaluations to student test scores, giving city officials what they say is a more rigorous system to identify the worst-performing teachers—and fire them if they don't improve. And the deal would let the city lay off teachers based on performance, rather than simply based on how long they have served.

But it still would give preference to tenured teachers in that process, and Mayor Rahm Emanuel had to agree to conditions that make it hard to fire some teachers who receive weak evaluations, and to limit some of the power of school principals to choose their staff. The union failed to gain new concessions they sought on issues like reducing class sizes.

Mr. Emanuel called the outcome "an honest compromise" and trumpeted its incorporation of a longer school day—although that took effect at the start of this school year under a recent state law. "This contract is a break with past practices and brings a fundamental change that benefits our children," he said.

Union officials didn't predict certain passage of the contract by members, but union President Karen Lewis defended the deal. "There is no such thing as a contract that would make all of us happy," she said. "But the other issue is, do we stay on strike forever until every little thing that we want is capable of being gotten?"

An "overwhelming" majority of the union governing body's approximately 800 members, known as delegates, approved an end to the strike in Tuesday's voice vote, Ms. Lewis said. The decision came after

the delegates had voted Sunday to continue the strike into its second week to give teachers time to study the tentative deal.

Chicago's teachers strike—the first in a major urban center since Detroit's in 2006—has focused on issues at the heart of debates over education policy, including the use of test scores to evaluate teachers and fire poor performers, and job guarantees for laid-off educators in urban districts hemorrhaging students. The battle over those issues has grown increasingly intense in recent years, thanks in part to the embrace of such initiatives by a group of Democratic mayors, such as Mr. Emanuel, seeking new ways to address long-standing urban-education problems while also grappling with budgetary woes.

Both advocates of school overhauls and labor leaders nationwide have been watching the Chicago fight, and perceptions of its outcome could strengthen the hand of like-minded politicians or embolden unions to take a more defiant stand.

The U.S. Conference of Mayors, headed by Philadelphia Mayor Michael Nutter, a Democrat, praised Mr. Emanuel in a statement, saying he negotiated a "historic" agreement that "mayors across the nation will be following."

Some aspects of the tentative Chicago deal don't go as far as recent deals done in other big cities. It gives the city less room than a deal in Washington, D.C., in 2009 to move out struggling teachers, and it doesn't match a Denver contract signed in 2004 when it comes to awarding raises, in part, based on performance.

"This is what happens in a negotiation—you sometimes have to split the baby," said Kate Walsh, president of the National Council on Teacher Quality, an advocacy group that pushes for better teacher evaluations. "There are some clear wins for kids, but there are also some notable setbacks."

Shay Porter, a teacher at Hendricks Academy and a union delegate, said he was happy to be going back to the classroom—but also gratified with the outcome of the strike. "We reunited the labor movement," he said, and "we got most of what we wanted."

Mr. Emanuel, former chief of staff to President Barack Obama, has earned a reputation for driving hard bargains, and several factors seemed to favor him going into the contract fight. He won election last year without the support of the teachers union so wasn't beholden to it for political support. The state legislature last year pushed through measures that helped his agenda by making it tougher for Chicago teachers to strike and giving the mayor the power to lengthen the school day. And he boasted solid public support: a Chicago Tribune/WGN-TV poll in May showed 52% of Chicago voters saying they approved of Mr. Emanuel's job performance, while 29% disapproved and 20% had no opinion.

But Mr. Emanuel also faced a teachers union whose resolve he appears to have underestimated. Ms. Lewis rallied union members around resentment over what they said was unfair blame for education ills they believed are caused by poverty and poor policies. Teachers are also frustrated by the increasing reliance on student test scores to evaluate them and schools.

The draft contract, a copy of which was viewed by The Wall Street Journal, calls for a 3% raise the first year and 2% raises the next two years. The two sides can agree to extend the contract to a fourth year with a 3% raise. Mr. Emanuel had wanted to replace the "step and lane" raises that teachers get for years of service and extra credentials with merit pay. But the union blocked that. District officials say the

total pay increases in the deal would average 4.4% annually over four years, and cost an additional \$295 million for a district that faces an estimated \$1 billion deficit in 2015-16.

The tentative deal calls for student performance on tests to make up 25% of teachers evaluations—which previously have been based on principals' observations—this year and next, and to make up 30% in year three—in line with state law. That figure would rise to 35% in the fourth year—marking a victory for Mr. Emanuel.

Under the deal, teachers would be ranked into four categories. Those in the lowest tier, "unsatisfactory," could be fired in 90 working days if they don't improve—although they can appeal their evaluations. Teachers in the second-to-lowest category, "developing," would be moved to the "unsatisfactory" ranking after two years unless they gain at least one point annually on the evaluations, which have a 100-to-400-point scale.

A pilot study conducted last year in about 100 schools showed that about 2% of teachers fell into the lowest rating, and 28% into "developing." Ms. Lewis said as many as 6,000 teachers could face dismissal under the city's initial contract offer.

Tim Daly, president of the New Teacher Project, which supports tougher evaluations to improve teacher effectiveness, called the provision "twisted" and said it allows a teacher to "stagnate at a mediocre" level forever. "This policy makes no sense if you are trying to reassure parents that the district can consistently hold a high standard on teacher quality," he said.

The proposal also institutes a new policy that, for the first time, would base layoffs partly on performance. If layoffs occur, teachers rated "unsatisfactory" would be the first to go. Nontenured teachers would be laid off next, even if they had a better rating than a tenured teacher.

The union also would win a provision that gives teachers displaced from closed schools first dibs on jobs at the schools where their students move—provided those teachers are ranked in the top two categories. The union has said as many as 100 of the city's 681 campuses could be shut for low-performance and under-enrollment, though the city won't confirm that figure. Since at least the mid-1990s, Chicago principals have not had to choose from a pool of laid-off teachers—a prerogative Mr. Emanuel vowed to protect.

Raul Galvan, who has a 10-year-old son in Chicago public schools, said it was "about time" the strike ended. While many parents have been solidly behind striking teachers, he is frustrated teachers asked for raises in tough budget times and unhappy the city "gave up so much."

"My son has been out of school for seven days—not much to be happy about," he said.

([top](#))

ECONOMIC RECOVERY

Mortgage Loans Hit 16-Year Low as Standards Tighten

September 19, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By NICK TIMIRAOS and SARAH PORTLOCK

Mortgage lending declined to its lowest level in 16 years in 2011 amid weak demand for mortgages and tighter lending standards, according to a report released by federal regulators Tuesday.

Banks funded about 7.1 million mortgages in 2011, down 10% from the year before, and the lowest tally since banks issued 6.2 million mortgages in 1995. The Federal Reserve analyzed data submitted by more than 7,600 lenders under the Home Mortgage Disclosure Act.

Loans funding home purchases fell by 5% last year and stood 64% below the level of 2006, when the housing market reached its peak. Refinances, which are more sensitive to modest swings in interest rates, fell by 13% in 2011 from 2010 but rebounded at the end of the year, after the average 30-year fixed-rate mortgage dropped below 4%.

The report showed that home-purchase lending activity fell more substantially in areas that have borne the brunt of foreclosures and home-price declines, a sign of how difficult it will be for some markets to heal.

Overall, purchase loans for owner-occupied homes dropped by 7.2%. But neighborhoods considered hardest hit by the housing bust saw purchase loans fall 13.8%. Areas considered less affected by the bust saw loans drop by just 3.3%.

The report covers only loans made in 2011. Housing demand has improved this year, largely because investors and other buyers who have been paying in cash have scooped up quantities of foreclosed and other distressed properties. While lending to non-owner-occupants is down sharply from five years ago, it rebounded last year, rising 10% from 2010.

Banks have become much more cautious about making loans since the housing bust. The median credit score for approved loans has increased by about 40 points since 2006. Median credit scores "now exceed by a considerable margin" those for any time in the past 12 years, the report said. The bottom tenth of all home-purchase borrowers had seen an even larger increase of around 50 points.

Tighter credit standards could impede the latest push by the Federal Reserve to stimulate the economy. The Fed last week announced it would begin buying \$40 billion in mortgage-backed securities partly in a bid to reduce yields, which could be passed onto borrowers in the form of lower mortgage rates.

Due to more conservative credit standards, "the impact of lower mortgage rates on housing is probably less powerful than normal," said William Dudley, president of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, in a speech on Tuesday in Florham Park, N.J. While rising home prices could ease that constraint over time, he said, "the difficulties of households with lower credit scores in obtaining mortgage credit warrants ongoing attention."

The top 10 largest lenders in 2011, which accounted for around one-third of all mortgage originations, saw their home-purchase lending fall by 17%, compared with declines of just 2.6% for all other financial institutions. Credit unions saw an 8% increase in home-purchase lending, while thrifts saw lending fall by nearly one-fourth.

Loan denial rates were flat last year, with around 23% of all borrowers who applied for a mortgage being turned down. The Fed said in the report that issues related to home appraisals and the applicant's debt-to-income ratio were two reasons for denials that had seen the largest increase since 2006.

As in prior years, denial rates were higher for minority borrower applicants. The denial rates for conventional home-purchase loans were 15% for Asians and 12% for non-Hispanic whites, while the denial rates for African-Americans and Hispanics stood at 31% and 22%, respectively.

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USUN IN THE NEWS

A tale of two narratives

September 19, 2012

Foreign Policy

By Tom Mahnken

Recent days have witnessed the emergence of two divergent narratives regarding the wave of anti-American protests that have spread throughout the Islamic world and beyond.

The first, which originated from the U.S. Embassy in Cairo at the very beginning of the unrest, is centered on the spontaneous and righteous indignation of the Muslim street in the face of an amateurish film defaming their religion. Although the administration subsequently distanced itself from the embassy's statement laying blame for the violence at the feet of the filmmaker, the assertion that the ongoing unrest was the result of a trailer posted on YouTube, rather than a more fundamental outpouring of rage, remains at the core of the administration's narrative.

The second narrative, which the administration appears keen to play down, involves a deliberate attack by an Al Qaeda affiliate on the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi on the eleventh anniversary of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. **Although senior administration officials, most recently United Nations Ambassador Susan Rice, have termed the attack a spontaneous event, such a view is increasingly at odds with the facts.** In an interview with National Public Radio (hardly at the forefront of the vast right-wing media conspiracy) Libya's interim president, Mohammed el-Megarif, described the attack on the U.S. consulate as pre-planned and multi-phased.

Each narrative is problematic for the Obama administration. Perhaps, just perhaps, it is a coincidence that this wave of protests began on the eleventh anniversary of 9/11. But perhaps not. Regardless of its origins, the ongoing violence is stark testimony to the failure of the outreach to the Muslim world that lay at the heart of Obama's Middle East policy.

Obama, a Christian originally of Muslim heritage who lived in Indonesia and attended a predominantly Muslim school as a child, has seen himself as uniquely qualified to use the force of his personality to transform America's relationship with the Islamic world. Speaking in Cairo in June 2009, Obama pledged to repair relations with Muslims. The logic undergirding Obama's policy was that a conciliatory approach would increase America's standing and improve its security.

Such logic appears increasingly open to question. First, data from the Pew Global Attitudes Project shows that the United States is more unpopular now in key Muslim states than it was when Obama first took office. In 2009, for example, 74 percent of Jordanians held an unfavorable view of the United States; today it is 86 percent. In 2009, 68 percent of Pakistanis held an unfavorable view; today it is 80 percent. And in 2009, 70 percent of Egyptians held an unfavorable view of the United States; today, after Obama's Cairo speech and the overthrow of Mubarak, the number stands at 79 percent. In other words, the roots of Muslim rage lie not in who occupies the White House, but in more fundamental and less tractable causes.

Second, the logic of Obama's policy was that if Muslims liked the United States more, then Americans would be more secure. Despite Obama's admonition that U.S. leaders not "spike the football" in the wake of the killing of Osama bin Laden, the Obama administration has initiated repeated bouts of chest thumping. In recent months, administration officials have repeatedly portrayed Al Qaeda and its affiliates as organizations in decline.

The situation on the ground would appear to be somewhat different. Aside from the death of Ambassador Chris Stevens in Benghazi, the U.S. position in Afghanistan has suffered setbacks at the hands of Al Qaeda's friends, the Taliban. On Friday, U.S. forces at Camp Leatherneck in southern Afghanistan suffered an attack that killed two Marines and destroyed seven percent of the AV-8B Harrier attack aircraft in the U.S. combat inventory. Yesterday the U.S. military suspended combat patrols with Afghan forces because of a mounting wave of attacks by Afghan security forces on their American partners, undermining the thrust of the U.S. strategy in Afghanistan.

It remains to be seen how the past week's events will affect the presidential election. At the very least, these emerging narratives call into question Barack Obama's stewardship of American foreign policy. More seriously, they could prefigure a more serious weakening of our position in the Middle East. ([top](#))

Syrian War Looms Over UN Meeting Of World Leaders

September 19, 2012

Associated Press

By Edith M. Lederer

UNITED NATIONS - Hovering over this month's annual gathering of world leaders at the United Nations is the international community's failure to end the escalating war in Syria that is starting to spill over into a fragile and divided region.

The Syrian conflict has bitterly divided the most powerful members of the Security Council, paralyzing the only U.N. body that can impose global sanctions and authorize military action.

It frustrated former U.N. secretary-general Kofi Annan, who quit his high-profile role as special envoy to the country last month, giving reasons that amounted to scathing criticism of world powers for failing to unite to stop the chaos in the Arab state.

There will be a flurry of meetings on the sidelines of the VIP gathering at the General Assembly that begins Sept. 25, including a ministerial meeting of the Security Council's five veto-wielding members and lots of behind-the-scenes discussions among the more than 130 heads of state and government coming to New York. But frustrated diplomats don't expect any breakthrough on Syria, and outside observers agree.

This "means we're heading into a very dark time in Syria - more violence and a slow grinding conflict that's going to test everyone's limits on non-intervention," Andrew Tabler, a senior fellow and Syria expert at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, told The Associated Press in an interview Monday.

"I think it's the elephant in the room in the sense that it's a lightning rod issue," Tabler said. "It's a crisis the U.N. is unable to deal with. And so, basically what happens is that you're going to have a lot of speeches ... but unless you get the Security Council agreeing I don't see anything happening."

Since the Syrian conflict began in March 2011, the division among the five powerful permanent council nations has deepened.

The United States, Britain and France have tried unsuccessfully to get the council to put pressure on President Bashar Assad's government to halt the fighting and pull back its heavy weapons.

Russia, Syria's key protector, and China, which is supporting Moscow, are demanding equal pressure on the opposition and say the West's real goal is regime change, which could lead to a takeover of Syria by Islamist radicals. Russia is the major arms supplier to Syria and has a base in Tartus. It is Russia's only naval base outside the former Soviet Union that serves Russian navy ships on missions to the Mediterranean.

Russia and China have vetoed three Western-backed resolutions, the latest in July which included the threat of non-military sanctions.

France's U.N. Ambassador Gerard Araud said Monday that the Security Council "has never been as paralyzed as it is today since the end of the Cold War."

France is now working with the U.S., Britain, Turkey, Arab friends and the Syrian opposition in its fight against the Assad regime, he said.

"It is essential that we support the democratic opposition in Syria," Araud said. "Some believe it is possible to choose between Assad and the Islamists. We tell them, 'If you keep blocking, you'll get Assad and then the Islamists.'"

U.S. Ambassador Susan Rice said the council's failure to support efforts by U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and Annan to end the violence is "reprehensible and has only intensified the suffering of the Syrian people. "

"I am not optimistic in the short term that the dynamic in the council is going to change," she said. "However, the United States is not allowing that to block our efforts to speed the day when Assad departs, through sanctions and political and nonlethal support for the opposition."

President Barack Obama has called for Assad to step down, but the United States wants to ensure that whatever government replaces his regime is a democracy that respects the rights of all Syrians, particularly religious minorities and women.

Annan has been replaced with former Algerian foreign minister Lakhdar Brahimi, a highly regarded diplomat and mediator who met Assad in Damascus on Saturday, but gave no indication of a breakthrough.

Many countries are hopeful that Brahimi can get the government and opposition to peace talks, but he has called his mission "nearly impossible."

He has said he is still holding talks with key players and does not have a plan yet.

"I will go to New York for the occasion of the General Assembly, to meet the Security Council and foreign ministers and representatives of countries that have interest, influence or both concerning Syria," Brahimi said.

The Security Council has given its support to Brahimi, but its division is so deep now that members couldn't even agree on a statement last month on the humanitarian crisis. The conflict has left some 3 million Syrians inside and outside the country in need of food and other assistance.

Michael Weiss, research director at the London-based Henry Jackson Society think tank, said no breakthrough is likely at the General Assembly because Russian President Vladimir Putin has done nothing "to repudiate Assad." Also, he added, Obama is reluctant to intervene in the Middle East as he fights for reelection on a record of ending the U.S. military role in Iraq and setting a 2014 deadline to withdraw from Afghanistan.

"All you are going to see for the next six months or longer is this continuing state of civil war," Weiss said. "The rebels may assassinate members of the Assad regime, but until they have parity of weaponry and forces, Damascus will not fall."

The West has hesitated to arm the rebels for fear that costly and lethal equipment could fall into the hands of extremists like al-Qaida, or get lost. The rebels have received weapons delivered via Turkey, Iraq and elsewhere, according to activists and diplomats. Some of the arms, activists say, are purchased with Saudi and Qatari funds.

At the opening of the 67th session of the General Assembly on Tuesday, Ban said "the deteriorating situation in Syria will ... be foremost in our minds" when world leaders gather next week.

The Syrian conflict, which began as a protest against four decades of dictatorship by the Assad family, was spawned by the Arab Spring, the pro-democracy wave of uprisings across the Middle East that began when Tunisians rose up in January 2011 against their longtime dictator.

The changes in the Arab world since then are the theme of a ministerial-level meeting of the Security Council on Sept. 26 on the sidelines of the General Assembly speeches.

Germany U.N. Ambassador Peter Wittig, the current Security Council president whose foreign minister will be presiding at that meeting, said "there will be council members who will speak out on Syria." But he said the focus of the meeting will be the emergence of the Arab League as a key player in the Middle East with "a lot more clout."

Supporters of a democratic government in Syria - the "Friends of Syria" - are also scheduled to meet on Sept. 28 at a session chaired by Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton. Their last meeting in Paris in July brought together some 100 nations including the U.S., its European and Arab partners, as well as the fractious Syrian opposition, all looking to turn up the heat to force Assad from power.

Britain's U.N. Ambassador Mark Lyall Grant said "Syria will be at or near the top of the agenda at most of the key bilateral meetings."

There will also be a meeting of foreign ministers and development ministers "to galvanize support for refugees and those displaced within Syria," he said.

Earlier this month, the United Nations nearly doubled its humanitarian appeal for Syria to \$347 million, even though the original appeal for \$180 million is only half-funded. The secretary-general has urged donors to increase their contributions.

Another issue certain to make headlines during the General Assembly is the dispute over Iran's nuclear intentions.

Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who insists his country's nuclear program is peaceful, will address the assembly on Sept. 26. Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who has accused Iran of trying to build a nuclear arsenal, takes the podium on Sept. 27.

And on that day political directors from the six countries trying to get Iran to suspend its nuclear enrichment program - the U.S., Russia, China, Britain, France and Germany - will meet behind closed doors, possibly followed by a ministerial session.

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UNITED NATIONS

UN Council Worries About Yemen

September 19, 2012

AFP

The UN Security Council expressed concern Tuesday over a campaign to "undermine" Yemen's interim government and a widening humanitarian crisis in the country.

The 15-nation council discussed Yemen as tens of thousands of people staged protests in Sanaa to demand an end to immunity for ex-president Ali Abdullah Saleh. The country has also been rocked by attacks from Al-Qaeda and other militant groups against government officials.

The Security Council and UN envoy to Yemen, Jamal Benomar, expressed support for President Abdrabuh Mansur Hadi and concern at "ongoing attempts to undermine the transition process," said Peter Wittig, Germany's UN ambassador and council president for September.

The council wants a "comprehensive and inclusive national dialogue should begin without delay, in order to lay the foundations for a stable and unified Yemen," Wittig told reporters after the meeting.

Yemen is now stricken by a "dire humanitarian situation" which now needs urgent attention, Wittig added.

On top of the political turmoil in the country since Saleh's 33-year rule was ended, at least seven million people in the 24 million population need food aid, according to UN agencies.

A summit on Yemen is to be held on September 27 on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York and Wittig should be taken as a chance to "reaffirm the international community's strong support for the transition process."

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TOP STORIES

Russia Demands U.S. End Support Of Democracy Groups

September 19, 2012

New York Times

By David M. Herszenhorn And Ellen Barry

MOSCOW - Russia has ordered the United States to end its financial support for a wide range of pro-democracy, public health and other civil society programs here, in an aggressive step by the Kremlin to halt what it views as American meddling in its internal affairs.

The Kremlin's provocative decision to end two decades of work in post-Soviet Russia by the United States Agency for International Development - with little warning ahead of an Oct. 1 deadline - was announced on Tuesday by the State Department in Washington. The move stands to cut off aid that currently totals about \$50 million a year, a relatively small sum but a potentially devastating blow for groups that came to rely on foreign money as domestic controls over politics tightened.

American officials, who were informed of the decision earlier this month, quickly pledged to maneuver around the Kremlin. The Obama administration last October proposed the creation of a new \$50 million fund - essentially an endowment for a private foundation established under Russian law - for Russian civil society groups, and one senior administration official said work on that project would speed up.

The Kremlin has taken a number of actions in recent months to bring pressure on nongovernmental groups and clamp down on political dissent, including a new law requiring any organization receiving aid from abroad to register with the justice manager as "acting as a foreign agent." Russia also increased the penalties for libel and slander - a step that seemed intended to intimidate critics of government officials.

Russia is not alone in its resentment of United States-led democracy building efforts. Those have become a sore point for a number of countries in recent years, including allies like Egypt and Pakistan, which have objected to outside groups telling them how to run their affairs. The aid agency's cold war history of providing a front for American intelligence agencies is still fresh in the memories of foreign officials, many of whom have never fully dropped their suspicions.

The abruptness of Russia's announcements represents a sour new turn in relations between the countries, which have been touch-and-go since Mr. Putin returned to the presidency in May. While Mr. Putin has rebuffed overtures from President Obama for international action on Syria, he has also praised him as "a very honest man" who could possibly conclude a missile defense deal in coming years.

Mr. Putin also undoubtedly would prefer to deal with the devil he knows rather than the one he does not - the Republican presidential nominee, Mitt Romney, whom Mr. Putin has criticized for characterizing Russia as America's greatest geopolitical foe.

Reaction was swift in Washington to what was widely perceived as an affront, with Senator John McCain, the Arizona Republican, urging the White House to condemn the Kremlin. "The Russian government's decision to end all U.S.A.I.D. activities in the country is an insult to the United States and a finger in the eye of the Obama administration, which has consistently trumpeted the alleged success of its so-called reset policy toward Moscow," Mr. McCain said in a statement.

But the State Department spokeswoman, Victoria Nuland, suggested that if Russia did not want American assistance, the money could be better spent elsewhere. "It's their sovereign decision to make," she said. "There are many countries around the world who would like to have more AID funding and help."

Mr. Putin, facing large-scale dissent at home for the first time, has said unrest is being stoked by the State Department, working covertly through nonprofit organizations.

Among the groups supported by the money from Washington is Golos, Russia's only independent election monitoring group, which last winter enlisted thousands of young Russians as poll-station monitors and posted reports of vote-rigging on its Web site.

Grigory A. Melkonyants, the deputy director of Golos, said it would take at least a year to find alternate financing to replace the American grants, if it was even possible.

"They see us as the source of criticism, and they are trying to halt that source," Mr. Melkonyants said. "Many people are already scared to talk about the problems that exist today. The press is already frightened. Now they are trying to shut up civil organizations."

The news filtered through Moscow's human rights circles, already battered by new sanctions on political activities.

"What is the list of other countries that have expelled U.S.A.I.D.?" said Yelena A. Panfilova, the head of the Moscow branch of Transparency International. "It's not about money - we can cope somehow - the problem is about this whole feeling that we have been brought together with Venezuela, Somalia and Belarus."

As a practical matter it was unclear how many of the programs could continue without financing or support staff on the ground. The American aid agency employs 13 Americans in its Moscow headquarters, as well as a Russian staff of 60.

Officials said that the Russian foreign minister, Sergey V. Lavrov, informed Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton of the decision on Sept. 8, when they met in Vladivostok in Russia's Far East during the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit meeting.

Formal notice was then sent to Washington, through the American ambassador, Michael A. McFaul, in a memorandum dated Sept. 11, officials said.

The American-financed programs played a crucial role in helping Russia recover from the collapse of the Soviet Union, and included efforts to build the country's capital markets and financial system and its mortgage-lending industry. The United States also supported an array of health programs, including efforts to combat tuberculosis and the spread of H.I.V.

But as Russia's economy was buoyed by oil and gas revenues, the agency swung more than half of its portfolio to democracy and human rights programs, among them prominent critics of government policy. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, the programs have cost American taxpayers \$2.7 billion, with about one-third of the yearly funding now going to health programs.

In recent years, however, Russia has bridled at the foreign aid flowing across its borders, in part because it views itself as a world power, a member of the Group of 8, and therefore more appropriately positioned to dole out assistance than to receive it.

Underscoring this view, Russia said on Tuesday that it was forgiving nearly all of North Korea's accumulated foreign debt, which Russian officials have valued at roughly \$11 billion, dating back to the closer relationship between them during the Soviet era.

The forgiveness step, which has been in the works for many months, would help clear the way for Russia to make new investments in North Korea - a development that runs counter to American-led efforts to economically ostracize the North over its expanding arsenal of nuclear weapons.

Mr. Melkonyants of Golos said he could not understand why American aid agency's work rankled the Kremlin so. "Free elections are not an American goal - that is absurd," he said. "They are a Russian goal." [\(top\)](#)

Russia Boots Out USAID

September 19, 2012

Washington Post

By Natasha Abbakumova And Kathy Lally

MOSCOW - President Vladimir Putin is expelling the U.S. Agency for International Development, the State Department said Tuesday, another in a series of ever-more-aggressive measures meant to limit the work of Russian activists who support democracy, protect human rights and promote fair elections.

The move closes a two-decade window, open since the end of the Cold War, that has allowed the American aid agency to operate fairly freely in Russia while providing \$2.6 billion in assistance.

Putin, who has always disliked what he considers U.S. attempts to influence events in his country, has mounted a steadily escalating attack on organizations that accept foreign money - an attack that began during the Russian election campaign earlier this year and that hasn't let up.

The amount of money that USAID provides to Russian organizations is not large - about \$50 million this year, down considerably from the heights of the 1990s. But the expulsion is a very public slap at the United States that will give ammunition to those who view Russia as a major U.S. adversary.

The move will almost certainly further demoralize and isolate embattled Russian activists, with the heaviest weight falling on Russian organizations that have received U.S. support - groups that monitor elections, organize to deal with tuberculosis, advocate for human rights, defend the environment and work to improve education.

Victoria Nuland, a State Department spokeswoman, said the order was delivered in a letter to Washington last week.

No matter who wins the presidential election in November, the expulsion is likely to make relations with Russia even less of a priority for Washington than it has been in recent years, which might or might not suit Putin's needs. The Obama administration has already come close to the end of its so-far-futile efforts to win Russian support for a joint policy on Syria.

'A very bad signal'

A senior administration official said the USAID ouster did not necessarily mean the end of U.S. assistance. It was not immediately clear, for example, whether American money could be conveyed in

other ways, without the oversight of USAID staff. "We are going to look for other ways to establish the general policy objectives we established at the beginning of the Obama administration," the official said.

Some U.S.-government supported organizations will continue to work in Russia, including the National Democratic Institute, the International Republican Institute and the National Endowment for Democracy.

But Lilia Shibanova, the head of the election monitoring agency Golos, said the loss of USAID's help suggested difficult days ahead. Golos was thrown out of its office and publicly vilified after Putin criticized the organization.

"This is a very bad signal," she told the Ria-Novosti news agency Tuesday. "USAID has been our partner since 2002. I believe they have done a lot for Russian people, for the support of the human rights organizations and development of free journalism in Russia."

The White House's reset of relations with Russia nearly four years ago was based on finding areas of agreement where U.S. and Russian interests intersected, including Iran, Afghanistan and arms control. Human rights and civil society development have always been outside that framework.

Over the summer, the Russian parliament approved a law that requires nonprofit groups to register as foreign agents if they receive money from outside Russia to promote political ends. The definition of political ends was left vague. Several organizations that have been recipients of American money, including Golos, objected strongly to the law as a crude clampdown on them. Advocates pointed out that no conceivable Russian source of replacement funding exists.

A long-brewing decision?

USAID, which has been working in Russia since shortly after the fall of the Soviet Union, had budgeted \$49.47 million for Russian programs for fiscal 2012, with 59 percent of that directed for programs supporting democracy and civil society, 37 percent designated for health projects and 4 percent for environmental programs. It had 13 American employees, supported by Russian staffers.

In commenting on the decision Tuesday, Nuland, the State Department spokeswoman, was careful not to directly criticize Russia. "This is a sovereign decision that any country makes, whether they want to have U.S. assistance through AID," she said.

Matthew Rojansky, an expert on Russia at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, said in an e-mail that he thought this decision had been brewing for a while.

"Russian authorities have made clear for the better part of a decade that they see Russia as a great power, and a provider of assistance, not a recipient," he wrote. "Add to that tension over the pre- and post-election protests, which the Kremlin alleges were orchestrated by U.S.-funded NGOs, plus the deep disagreement over U.S. democracy promotion activities in the Middle East, and you can see why this decision may have come now."

The expulsion was announced just more than a week after Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton had seen Putin at an Asian security conference in Vladivostok.

Nuland said the State Department was informed of Russia's decision on Sept. 12, just a few days after Clinton left. She said U.S. officials had indications that the move was coming during Clinton's visit but did not get final word until later. She did not fully explain the nearly one-week delay in making the decision public; nor did she say why Russia had not announced its own decision first.

Interest within the U.S. government in Russian assistance programs has been waning for several years. Nuland alluded to that in describing the different approach USAID began to take after the financial recovery fed by high oil prices lifted Russia out of poverty. USAID typically no longer paid in bulk for programs but sought to work in a consulting role with local partners. The \$50 million in this year's budget is about half the average spent in Russia over the past 20 years - with most of the spending coming in the 1990s.

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Taliban's New Strategy Focuses More On High-profile Assaults, Less On Territory

September 19, 2012

Washington Post

By Rajiv Chandrasekaran

As U.S. and NATO forces have evicted insurgents from a broad swath of southern Afghanistan, senior Taliban commanders have shifted toward a new battlefield strategy, one less focused on reclaiming lost territory and more on winning the next phase of the 11-year-old war.

U.S. military and intelligence officials believe that Taliban commanders, driven by a combination of desperation and savvy, have started assigning more of their suicide fighters to conduct audacious attacks against prominent targets across the country, including the U.S. Embassy and well-fortified NATO bases.

Insurgent leaders, they say, have redoubled a campaign to assassinate key Afghan government and security officials who are likely to play leadership roles in the country once foreign troops depart. And by happenstance or meticulous planning - U.S. military officials are not sure which - the Taliban has managed to kill numerous Western troops by joining the ranks of the Afghan army.

"The Taliban are fighting a political war while the United States and its allies are still fighting a tactical military war," said Joshua Foust, a former U.S. intelligence analyst who has worked in Afghanistan and is now a fellow with the American Security Project. "We remain focused on terrain. They are focused on attacking the transition process and seizing the narrative of victory."

The impact of the strategic shift, which has occurred gradually over the past year, has been profound. The high-profile assaults and assassinations have prompted new doubts among Afghans about the ability of their government and security forces to keep the insurgents at bay once NATO's combat mission ends in 2014. The infiltration of the security forces led the top allied operational commander in Kabul on Monday to order extraordinary new restrictions on joint patrols and other missions, a move that strikes at the heart of the U.S. and NATO strategy to operate in closer partnership with Afghan soldiers.

U.S. officials said the new rules, which require high-level approval for partnered operations, also resulted from concern about possible attacks on American and NATO forces by Afghan troops enraged by reports of a controversial anti-Islam video produced in the United States. The officials said the

operational commander will probably ease the restrictions in coming days if tensions over the video subside.

"Protecting the force for the moment protects the mission and the campaign later," said a senior U.S. official in Kabul, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss internal military decision-making.

The official said the pause in joint operations also will enable allied forces to implement new protection measures intended to defend against insider attacks resulting from Taliban infiltration, which account for about a quarter of all "green on blue" killings. Fifty-one foreign troops have been killed in insider attacks this year.

U.S. commanders have urged the Afghan Defense Ministry to take more aggressive actions to vet its troops for possible links to the Taliban. Until recently, the ministry resisted placing officers from the country's intelligence service in army battalions to ferret out insurgents in the ranks.

It is not clear to U.S. military and intelligence officials whether the Taliban had long-standing plans to place sleeper agents within the Afghan security forces. If it did, some have wondered why the Taliban did not activate them sooner.

Regardless of how long the plans may have been in the works, U.S. officials think that Taliban leaders quickly sought to seize an opportunity to undermine confidence in the NATO mission. The infiltration was relatively easy, the officials said, because the Defense Ministry did little vetting, in part because of pressure from the American military to grow the Afghan army as quickly as possible.

The Taliban "made a decision at a senior level" to sneak into the security forces, said Alex Strick van Linschoten, an Afghanistan-based researcher who has co-written two books about the Taliban. "There wouldn't be so many of them if this wasn't officially sanctioned policy."

Senior military officers said new force-protection measures will probably reduce the number of deaths from such attacks, but they acknowledged that insider assaults will remain a danger on the battlefield, just as roadside bombs are. "It's not going to stop," one U.S. general said. "But we're not going to let these attacks get in the way of what we need to do."

American commanders are fond of citing data that they think show major progress against the Taliban: From Jan. 1 to Aug. 31, enemy-initiated attacks dropped 5 percent compared with the same period last year; makeshift-bomb detonations have fallen 15 percent. Large parts of the south that once were teeming with insurgents now are relatively stable, although small bands of Taliban fighters continue to attack U.S. forces and reassert themselves, but with less vigor than a few years ago.

Even the southern city of Kandahar, once a key Taliban battleground, has been free of major attacks over the past few months, save for an audacious attempt to assassinate the provincial police chief with a 400-pound bomb packed into a fuel truck.

On Tuesday, Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta called the insider attacks a "last-gasp effort" by the Taliban. Speaking during a visit to Beijing, he said the insurgents are trying "to create chaos because they have been unable to regain any of the territory that they have lost."

U.S. commanders have offered a similar reaction to the Taliban's other attempts to assert itself. Although the assassination campaign has claimed several key figures, including former president Burhanuddin Rabbani and police commander Daoud Daoud, Afghan government officials are still coming to work and performing their jobs. And, the commanders note, the high-profile assaults have usually been tactical failures that have resulted in most of the attackers being killed.

Even suicide bombings, horrific as they are, do not bring life to a halt in Kabul or other cities. On Tuesday morning, the Hezb-i-

Islami militant group, which has not been a major player in much of the recent violence, asserted responsibility for a suicide car bombing near the Kabul airport that killed 12 people, nine of them foreigners working for an air-charter company serving the U.S. Agency for International Development. A few hours later, traffic clogged nearby roads.

"The attacks give the perception that all of Afghanistan is like this, when that couldn't be further from the truth," the senior U.S. official in Kabul said.

One of the most significant Taliban attacks occurred Friday, when 15 well-trained insurgents clad in U.S. Army uniforms breached the perimeter of a large NATO air base in southwestern Afghanistan. They made it all the way to the flight line, where they killed two U.S. Marines, including a lieutenant colonel who commanded an aviation squadron, and destroyed six AV-8B Harrier jets and other equipment worth an estimated \$200 million. The attack, which constituted the greatest single loss of allied materiel in the war, took out 7 percent of the Marine Corps' overall fleet of combat Harriers.

"It's a wake-up call," the U.S. general said. "They're saying, 'Hey, we're still here.'"

By demonstrating "the ability to strike at will against heavily guarded fortifications," Foust said, "it shakes confidence, and it obscures the coalition's metrics. Overall Taliban attacks may be down, but it doesn't look that way to the Afghans - or the American people."

To some military officials and independent analysts, the Taliban's strategic shift suggests not just an adaptable adversary but greater involvement in the planning of attacks by elements of Pakistan's intelligence service, which have long aided the Taliban.

Most of the recent high-profile attacks in Kabul, and many of the assassinations of senior Afghan leaders, have been conducted by fighters from the Pakistan-based Haqqani network. The officials and analysts see signs that the Haqqanis may be working more closely with the principal Taliban faction, led by the movement's reclusive leader, Mohammad Omar.

The attack on the NATO base over the weekend "outstrips the ability of Mullah Omar to coordinate all of it," said Jeffrey Dressler, an analyst at the Institute for the Study of War who tracks the Haqqani network. "Clearly there's someone in the background pulling the puppet strings."

So far, shifts in the Taliban's strategy have not led the White House to halt troop reductions - all of the surge forces are scheduled to depart by the end of this month, leaving about 68,000 U.S. military personnel in Afghanistan - but the pattern of violence could affect how the winner of the presidential election chooses to adjust troop levels next year.

Regardless of how that decision plays out, the Taliban does not appear headed for defeat anytime soon. Large stretches of southern and eastern Afghanistan still remain in the grip of Omar's faction or the Haqqanis, and incipient peace talks with the Afghan government do not appear to have gained traction.

"They know they're not in a terrible place," Dressler said. "They can lose every tactical battle, but they're trumping it by winning the strategic narrative and the waiting game."

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Coalition Sharply Reduces Joint Operations With Afghan Troops

September 19, 2012

New York Times

By MATTHEW ROSENBERG

KABUL, Afghanistan — In a significant blow to a core element of the Western exit strategy from Afghanistan, the American-led military coalition said Tuesday it has temporarily curtailed joint operations with the Afghan Army and police forces.

The new limits were a sign of how American priorities were being drastically reordered amid a wave of anti-American sentiment brought on by an anti-Islam movie, which has sparked riots across the Muslim world and on Tuesday was the motive behind a suicide bombing here that killed 14 people, 10 of them foreigners.

Coalition officials said they feared that anger over the American-made film, which mocks the Prophet Muhammad, could worsen an already deadly spike in attacks on foreign troops by Afghan soldiers and police forces over the past six weeks. Under the rules issued on Sunday, a general's approval will be required for foreign forces to work with Afghans on a tactical level — a broad category that covers everything from joint patrols into Taliban territory to hands-on training behind the fortified walls of a shared outpost.

Until now, junior officers from both sides were able to organize patrols or small operations on their own. An American captain, for instance, could send men from his company to reinforce Afghans in a firefight without seeking higher approval.

But now those officers would need approval from a two-star general who commands thousands of service members.

The shift away from a top-to-bottom partnership with Afghans, even on a temporary basis, represented a sharp departure from efforts to pull Afghan forces closer to the coalition's own so they could battle the Taliban together and, at the same time, let Afghanistan's nascent army and police lean on and learn from foreign troops.

Coalition officials had an oft-repeated catchphrase to describe the relationship: the two sides, they say, were fighting "shoulder-to-shoulder."

Among higher-level units, that cooperation will remain unchanged, coalition officials said on Tuesday, stressing that the basic concept of forging a partnership with the Afghans to get them ready to fight on their own was still the guiding strategic principle for NATO forces.

"We are not stepping away from this," said Lt. Col. Richard W. Spiegel of the Army, a coalition spokesman. "Things might look a little different, but we're not walking away."

Yet such talk did little to reassure Afghan soldiers and police forces, a number of whom said most of their units were not yet ready to fight on their own — an assessment shared by the Pentagon's own public reporting.

"It's better to announce a cease-fire so we can also step back and take a nap," said Abdul Qayom Baqizoi, the police chief of Wardak Province in central Afghanistan.

An Afghan soldier said the new orders were already harming his forces, citing an episode on Monday in which an Afghan Army vehicle struck a hidden bomb. Two soldiers were killed, and the Americans did not respond to a request to evacuate four wounded soldiers, said Major Salam, an officer based in western Afghanistan who asked that his first name not be used.

Instead, he said they had to wait for help from their own forces, which do not have medical evacuation helicopters. "It took them six hours to bring the soldiers to the hospital. One of them has lost a lot of blood, and he might die," Major Salam said.

Amid the growth in popular anti-American sentiment, President Hamid Karzai and top officials in his government have also begun this week to publicly push back on Washington's demands that they hold thousands of prisoners indefinitely at a prison recently turned over by the Americans.

The Afghan government made clear on Sunday that it wants the Americans to immediately turn over another 600 prisoners they are still holding.

The government followed up on Tuesday by saying that Afghan law does not provide for the indefinite detention of prisoners.

American officials have countered that the Afghan government agreed to the indefinite detentions in the deal under which they won control of the prison, a detention facility in Parwan adjacent to the Bagram Air Base.

"We need to give everybody a chance to solve this at the high levels; once you trade barbs publicly, people's positions harden," said one Western official.

The coalition move to curtail direct cooperation with Afghan forces covers all work done by American military companies of roughly 120 men, and the platoons and squads of which they are composed. That includes many of the day-to-day interactions between the tens of thousands of coalition and Afghan troops that live on shared outposts and often work in small groups to more effectively combat insurgents who blend easily into villages.

"Clearly, we're going to be seeing less" of the joint patrols, meetings with village elders and other work field units from the two sides often do together, said Colonel Spiegel, adding that such interaction will not cease completely.

The orders, which were first reported by The Associated Press, would remain in place until commanders felt the insider threat to their soldiers and Marines had dropped, said Col. Thomas Collins, another coalition spokesman.

There had been pullbacks from certain areas during other periods of upheaval, such as widespread rioting earlier this year after American soldiers burned Korans.

But the new orders covered the entire country, and given the current threat level, "commanders will be very discerning in the operations they approve or disapprove," Colonel Collins said.

While the change would not alter the basic American strategy, "we are concerned with regards to these insider attacks and the impact they are having on our forces," Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta told reporters in China, where he was traveling. Gen. John R. Allen, the top NATO commander in Afghanistan, "has reflected that in the steps that he has taken," Mr. Panetta said.

Some officials, though, acknowledged the new order would sharply limit cooperation between junior American and Afghan officers and their troops in the field, and thus inevitably affect how the war was fought — and brought to a conclusion.

The logistical implications of the new orders — how smaller units would continue to share outposts with Afghan forces — were still being worked out, officials said. Sometimes, Afghan and coalition units are separated by mere yards, and they often man posts together and split duty in guard towers.

Other support the Americans and their NATO allies provide the Afghans would remain in place, like air cover, artillery support and, in select cases, the airlifting of wounded Afghans on American medical evacuation helicopters, officials said. Nor would life change significantly at battalion and brigade headquarters, which are not covered by the new limits and are, in any case, housed on sprawling bases where there is often physical distance and high walls between the NATO troops and the Afghans.

Afghanistan's Defense Ministry played down the impact of the coalition move, saying in a statement that its army companies already conducted many operations on their own and would continue to do so.

But as word of the changes spread beyond Kabul, the potential blow to the morale of Afghan forces that for nearly a decade have looked to Americans for everything from bullets to drinking water quickly became apparent.

"We rely on the Americans for everything," said Major Salam, the officer in western Afghanistan. "We still need their support."

If the Americans "abandon us," he added, "they should know that it would be the end of everything for all of us."

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More Protests In China Over Japan And Islands

September 19, 2012

New York Times

By Ian Johnson And Thom Shanker

BEIJING - China drove home its opposition to Japanese control of a contested group of islands on Tuesday, with angry protests in dozens of cities and a warning from its defense minister that "further actions" were possible.

The protests were large and sometimes angry, but appeared much better controlled than those over the weekend, which included extensive rioting and vandalism. Many Japanese businesses closed for the day, and a strong police presence seemed to prevent damage.

The Japanese companies that closed included the 7-Eleven convenience store chain, which is Japanese-owned in China. The company said it would reopen Wednesday. Several other large companies, including Mitsubishi and Canon, gave their employees the day off.

Despite the calls for peaceful protests, scattered violence was reported. The Italian consul's car in Guangzhou was attacked, according to diplomatic sources who asked to remain anonymous.

The protests occurred as Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta was visiting the country, and early Wednesday Mr. Panetta met with the Chinese vice president, Xi Jinping, who is expected to become the nation's next leader. The meeting with Mr. Xi in the Great Hall of the People was taken as evidence that Mr. Xi had recovered from whatever ailment, physical or political, had kept him from making public appearances for two weeks.

In the streets on Tuesday, the protesters were objecting to Japan's control of a group of islands in the East China Sea called Senkaku in Japanese and Diaoyu or Diaoyutai in Chinese. Japan has held the islands for more than a century, but many Chinese believe they should have been given to China after World War II.

In Beijing, several thousand people brought one of the city's diplomatic districts to a standstill as they swelled out from a crucial artery, the Third Ring Road, to beyond the Japanese Embassy. The police kept protesters separated into groups of 100 to 200 each; at the peak of the demonstration, in the early afternoon, streets were lined with at least 20 such groups.

As the day progressed, crowds threw rocks and water bottles at the well-guarded embassy compound. Some of the banners were crude, with sexual undertones that might have reflected the Japanese military's brutal wartime treatment of Chinese, including the systematic rape of Chinese women during its 14-year invasion and occupation of parts of the country. One banner showed a Chinese soldier castrating a Japanese soldier, while a popular image depicted Japan's national flag as a white sanitary napkin with a spot of blood in the middle.

Some foreigners were queried about their nationality, with Americans lectured for their country's military alliance with Japan. Foreign men were asked if they had Chinese girlfriends.

Although the protests clearly had government support - large-scale public demonstrations are extremely rare in China - many people came on their own and appeared to be genuinely angered at what they saw as Japan's failure to address its past behavior.

Tuesday was the 81st anniversary of the Mukden Incident, which signaled the start of Japan's incursion into China and is sometimes referred to as the "day of national humiliation."

Zhang Dongxiao, a student at the University of International Business and Economics in Beijing, said he and a few classmates took the subway to the protest site to express their anger.

"Japan must fear China," he said, predicting demonstrations each year on the anniversary unless Japan gives up its claim to the islands.

Other protesters came from farther afield. Members of one group of about 40, from Badong County in Hebei Province, said that the county government had organized bus transportation but that the demonstrators had paid for it.

Some demonstrators were supported by patriotic businesspeople who helped defray costs. A man from the city of Tangshan who gave only his surname, Guo, said he found a group through an online bulletin board and took a bus that a local businessman had chartered.

More official pressure was also applied. A well-connected government research institute, the Council for National Security Policy Studies, led by a retired general of the government's paramilitary force, said Japan should also give up the Ryukyu island chain. That chain stretches from southern Japan to Taiwan, and many Chinese see it as encircling China.

The defense minister, Gen. Liang Guanglie, used the visit by Mr. Panetta to issue a stern warning. While holding open the possibility of a peaceful resolution to the dispute, he warned that China reserved the right to undertake unspecified "further actions."

General Liang said the islands "have all along been China's inherent territory since ancient times, for which China has sufficient historical and jurisprudential evidence."

He characterized Japanese actions toward the islands as illegal. In recent weeks, the Japanese central government bought some of the islands from private Japanese owners, arguing that nationalists would otherwise have bought them. China also reacted strongly Tuesday to news that two Japanese swam to one of the islands from a boat.

"The current escalation of tension over this dispute was totally caused by the Japanese side," General Liang said. "The Chinese people have every reason to feel more concerned, because it regards it as China's territory."

During his visits this week to Tokyo and Beijing, Mr. Panetta has reiterated American policy, which is not to take sides in the region's territorial disputes and to urge a negotiated settlement. He said the United States was advocating "open channels of communication in order to resolve these disputes diplomatically and peacefully."

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China Reins In Anti-Japan Protests On Sensitive Anniversary

September 19, 2012

Washington Post

By William Wan

BEIJING - Anti-Japan protests continued across China on Tuesday, with thousands of people marching on the Japanese Embassy to mark the anniversary of Japan's brutal invasion 81 years ago.

The numbers equaled or surpassed those seen in riots over the weekend, but almost no violence was reported as Chinese security forces turned out en masse to contain demonstrations that authorities had allowed, and even encouraged, a week ago. Even so, several of Japan's biggest brand-name companies shut down factories in China, and Japanese shops and restaurants closed.

The recent tensions over a disputed chain of islands have threatened to strain the \$340 billion trade relationship between China, the world's second-largest economy, and Japan, the third-biggest. While the Chinese government had seemed willing at first to use the protests to increase its bargaining power in the territorial dispute, Tuesday's overwhelming show of force signaled that it intends to rein in the demonstrations before they spiral out of control and affect the already slowing Chinese economy.

Outside the Japanese Embassy in Beijing, paramilitary police with riot gear, as well as uniformed and plainclothes officers, flooded the area, setting up a tightly controlled, prescribed protest routine. Protesters were divided into manageable groups of a few hundred, separated by disciplined lines of officers and led in marching and chants by leaders in the front.

A helicopter hovered above for much of the day, while authorities instructed the crowds via loudspeakers to protest "in an orderly manner" and to avoid "impulsive behavior."

Meanwhile, the diplomatic spat over the islands - called Senkaku by the Japanese and

Diaoyu by China - continued as two Japanese activists landed on one of the islands, provoking angry responses in Beijing.

"The unlawful landing of the Japanese right-wingers on the Chinese territory of the Diaoyu islands was a gravely provocative action violating Chinese territorial sovereignty," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Hong Lei said in a statement.

At an event with U.S. Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta, Chinese Defense Minister Liang Guanglie also blamed Japan for triggering the crisis during a politically sensitive time for China, as party officials prepare for a once-

in-a-decade leadership transition.

One unexpected image to surface in Tuesday's demonstration was that of late party chairman Mao Zedong, in portraits carried by protesters and in Maoist references in chants and on banners. The spectacle of hundreds of Mao portraits held aloft recalled the days of traumatic upheaval during China's Cultural Revolution and appeared to shock some.

"I don't know why they are holding up Mao's picture, to be honest," said Yang Qingyang, 24, a protester marching in front of the embassy. "I think they are just feeling nostalgic about the past. I'm not into that myself."

Many protesters said the invocations of Mao were meant to shame current leaders into standing up to foreign powers as Mao once did. However, the presence of those protesters, who seemed to have arrived in a group, also suggested an attempt by the leftist, Maoist wing of the party, among others, to use the anti-Japan rallies as an excuse to advocate for their fallen leader Bo Xilai.

Also Tuesday, the government was conducting the trial of Bo's chief lieutenant on a range of charges, including defection and abuse of power. And in coming days, the party is expected to announce whether Bo will face expulsion from the party, criminal charges or worse in the wake of China's worst political scandal in two decades. The confluence of events reflected the competing forces at play in every arena of Chinese politics as its leaders jockey for power in the coming transition.

Cao Zhaojin, a retired worker who acknowledged having brought dozens of cardboard printouts of Mao's portrait to the protest, cited his admiration of Mao's tough stance against "U.S. aggressors and all their running dogs."

"How can we forget Mao's thoughts that we should despise all our enemies, but that tactically we should take them all seriously?" said Cao, 58.

In the next breath, however, he veered seamlessly into a defense of Bo. "In the history of the party, lots of cadres, including Chairman Mao, they all made mistakes, but everyone deserves a chance to correct the mistake," he said. "A comrade who has corrected his mistake is still a good comrade."

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AFRICA

African Union Forces Start Hunt For Joseph Kony

September 19, 2012

[Associated Press](#)

KAMPALA, Uganda - A military official says Ugandan troops tracking infamous rebel leader Joseph Kony have handed over command of the operation to African Union troops from Uganda, South Sudan and the Central African Republic.

The ceremony took place Tuesday in the South Sudanese town of Nzara, said Ugandan Maj. Alex Ahabyona, an intelligence officer for the Kony operation.

The AU force, which was announced early this year, had failed to start earlier because of lack of equipment and troops. It remains unclear how many of the proposed 5,000 troops have been amassed, although the handover ceremony suggests they have enough to start with. The force will be led by Ugandan Col. Dick Olum.

Some 100 U.S. troops are helping regional governments to eliminate Kony and his murderous Lord's Resistance Army.

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Somalia: Militants Said To Leave Last Stronghold

September 19, 2012

[Associated Press](#)

By Abdi Guled And Tom Odula

GALKAYO, Somalia - Fighters from Somalia's Islamist extremist rebels have started to leave their remaining coastal stronghold in the face of advancing allied African troops, residents and a military official said Tuesday.

Armed militants from al-Shabab, which is allied to al-Qaida, left the coastal town of Kismayo in pickup trucks after freeing prisoners in the town's jail, Muse Hassan, a Kismayo resident said by phone.

The spokesman for the Kenyan army, which is part of the African Union forces fighting al-Shabab militants, said the fighters were fleeing because they sensed defeat. Col. Cyrus Oguna said the al-Shabab militants are moving toward the town of Jilib about 80 miles (130 kilometers) northeast of Kismayo. Oguna said Kenyan forces are about 20 miles (30 kilometers) from Kismayo in a town called Jana Cabdalla.

Kismayo resident Hassan also said the militants are moving toward the town of Jilib but that it was not clear if they had abandoned all their positions in Kismayo.

However an al-Shabab spokesman said on Twitter that the reports of militants fleeing Kismayo are "blatant lies."

"The Islamic administration in (hash)Kismayo is going about its business as usual, & the city remains calm & firmly under the control of HSM," one posting said.

Claims and counter-claims made during fighting in Somalia are difficult to verify.

But Yusuf Hashi, another Kismayo resident, said that a few fighters in military dress could be seen along Kismayo's streets. He said government buildings were empty.

"It feels like the town is under no one's control now. We hope there'll be no fighting but a peaceful change," he said.

Oguna said the militants had dismantled the transmitters for Radio al-Andalus which the group used to broadcast propaganda.

Abdirashid Hashi, a horn of Africa analyst with the International Crisis Group, says he is not surprised that the militants are moving. The militants have not put up cohesive resistance in the southern Somali towns they once controlled, he said, noting that al-Shabab doesn't have the firepower to match the tanks, warships and military planes the Kenyan military is using in southern Somalia.

Hashi said the capture of Kismayo by the allied force is imminent and would be a significant victory against the militants who until August 2011 controlled large parts of the capital city, Mogadishu, and much of southern Somalia. However he said al-Shabab would remain a threat as an insurgent force using hit-and-run attacks for a long while.

Oguna said when faced with overwhelming force al-Shabab fighters often hide their guns and melt into the population so it is difficult to say how many al-Shabab fighters remain in Kismayo.

The U.N.'s refugee agency said Tuesday that at least 5,200 residents have fled Kismayo since Sept 1.

Kismayo residents have said that al-Shabab barred them from leaving the town with threats of brutal punishment. Al-Shabab is known for carrying out lashings, amputations and stonings.

Somalia elected a new president last week and he is expected to set up the country's first functioning government since warlords overthrew a longtime dictator in 1991 and turned against one another. Two

days after being elected, President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud survived an attack by suicide bombers who detonated explosives at his temporary residence.

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Striking SA Miners Sign Deal To End 5-Week Strike

September 19, 2012

Associated Press

By Carley Petesch And Michelle Faul

MOOINOOI, South Africa - Striking platinum miners in South Africa have signed a wage deal ending a bloody 5-week strike at the Lonmin PLC mine that had spread to the gold and chrome sectors of the industry which anchors the economy of Africa's richest economy.

The agreement for the company's 28,000 miners ends a strike with political and economic repercussions, but does not resolve rage engendered by the country's huge inequality and the government's failure to address massive unemployment and poverty.

Reporters watched as representatives of three unions, of strikers not represented by any union, and the London-registered company signed the deal late Tuesday night.

Lonmin agreed to pay a gross monthly wage of 11,078 rand (\$1,385) to rock drill operators who had been demanding a take-home monthly wage of 12,500 rand (\$1,560). They also agreed to pay all miners a once-off payment of 2,000 rand (\$250). A statement from the company said the agreement includes a previously agreed upon 9-10 percent raise for certain employees in October, and addressed the issue of promotions for some categories of workers.

The strike had spread to gold and chrome mines, scaring foreign investors in Africa's largest economy and, according to President Jacob Zuma, costing the country at least \$500 million.

Media coverage of miners living in tin shacks without electricity or running water has highlighted government failures to improve the lives of the majority of poor South Africans suffering high unemployment and poor education and health services.

Abey Kgotle, executive manager for human capital at Lonmin, said that the workers agreed to return to work Thursday and production will likely resume in a matter of weeks.

"This is a groundbreaking agreement," he said. "We are very pleased to reach the conclusion of this agreement."

The trouble began Aug. 10 at Lonmin and ended up killing 45 people. On Aug. 16 police opened fire on demonstrating strikers, killing 34 of them and wounding 78 in the worst state violence since apartheid ended in 1994. It traumatized the nation of 48 million and raised questions about how much the poorest of the poor have benefited since white rule ended.

"Mission accomplished!" was the message inscribed in black ink on the hand of one striker in a crowd some 5,000 addressed by Bishop Seoka on Tuesday.

Joseph Mathunjwa, of the Association of Mining and Construction Workers Union, said the deal opens "a new chapter as to what work we still have ahead of us."

"And as much as we regret about those lives we have lost in this journey, surely we have learned something about how to engage in the future," he said.

The violence was rooted in rivalry between the dominant Union of Mineworkers, which is allied with the governing African National Congress and is accused by workers of being too preoccupied by business and politics to take care of the basic shop-floor needs of its 300,000 members.

"You have won as workers!" Seoka told the crowd, who cheered, sang and danced.

Seoka was among mediators at government-sponsored negotiations.

The end of the strike - which has cost Lonmin more than 20 percent of its share value and forced it into negotiations with debtors wanting payments due at the end of September - has not resolved far bigger issues in South Africa.

The strike has highlighted the country's widening gap between the majority poor and a small black elite enriched, often corruptly, through shares in mines.

Despite promises by the ruling African National Congress to redress the concerns of its major constituents, South Africa has become the most unequal nation on Earth, and raised questions about Zuma's leadership just as he prepares for a crucial governing party congress in December that will decide whether he gets another term as leader of Africa's richest economy.

Government plans in the aftermath of the brutal apartheid regime to share the wealth of a country that provides 75 percent of the world's platinum, a fourth of its chrome and is in the top 10 of gold producers have made a small handful of blacks billionaires, joining a small white elite that continues to control an economy dominated by mineral resources and agriculture.

South Africans have become increasingly enraged by the disparity, which has weakened trade unions and a government alliance that includes the ruling party and its partners the Congress of South African Trade Unions and the South African Communist Party. The alliance was fractured over Zuma's continued leadership even before the strikes, which have jeopardized his future as South Africa's president.

On Monday, the head of the trade unions suggested that government failures could bring down the ruling party. COSATU President Sidumo Dlamini said that 30 million of South Africa's 48 million people survive on less than 10 rand (\$1.25) a day.

"What we see happening (in Lonmin's mine) at Marikana and elsewhere is that workers are essentially demanding a living wage. Workers are simply saying we produce wealth and we want our reasonable share, and they expect to be given a fair share ... This is a reflection of the demands being harbored by millions of our people," he said.

The Lonmin workers were the first to strike, and in recent weeks seven other mines had work stoppages, including six platinum mines, a gold one and a chrome one.

Anglo American Platinum is the world's largest producer of the metal used in jewelry and to reduce carbon emissions of high-end vehicles. The company said it was using police protection Tuesday to resume operations at four of its mines in the Rustenburg area, where Lonmin also is located.

Anglo American Platinum had claimed its workers were not striking, but that it had shut down operations to ensure their safety against violent threats. But it did not say Tuesday how many workers had reported for duty.

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ASIA

Suu Kyi Calls on U.S. to Lift Export Ban

September 19, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By JAY SOLOMON

WASHINGTON — Myanmar's opposition leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, began her first trip to the U.S. since she was released from house arrest amid hints the Obama administration was preparing to lift a decades-old ban on her country's lucrative exports, which include gems, textiles and oil and gas.

The ban could be eased in coming weeks, said officials briefed on government policy deliberations. Underscoring U.S. efforts to coax Myanmar's reform drive, the administration also planned to remove individuals and companies in Myanmar from a U.S. blacklist.

Ms. Suu Kyi called on the administration to dissolve the import ban Tuesday in her first U.S. appearance. Myanmar's president, Thein Sein, a retired military officer who initiated the Southeast Asian nation's dramatic political reforms last year, plans to attend the United Nations General Assembly meeting next week in New York.

Ms. Suu Kyi's position on the import ban was criticized by some democracy activists, who said the dissolution of U.S. sanctions would deprive Washington of a key diplomatic tool for pressing Myanmar's military leaders to promote political reforms and end its military campaigns against the country's ethnic minorities.

But she said it was time to let the country's internal reforms progress without outside pressure.

"We should not depend on U.S. sanctions to keep up the momentum for democracy. We have got to work at it ourselves," Ms. Suu Kyi said in response to a question about her position on the U.S. export ban. The Nobel Peace Prize laureate appeared with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton at the U.S. Institute of Peace, a congressionally funded think tank in Washington.

Neither Mrs. Clinton nor other U.S. officials on Tuesday confirmed that a move was imminent to lift the U.S. ban on Myanmar's exports. A State Department official said the ban was renewed by Congress in August, but allows the administration to waive its provisions. Officials are consulting with lawmakers and others about the import ban, the official said.

Mrs. Clinton stressed that Washington wanted to work with the leaders of Myanmar, also known as Burma, to continue opening up its economy and political system.

"We've taken steps to exchange ambassadors, ease economic sanctions, and pave the way for American companies to invest in the country in a way that advances rather than undermines continued reforms," Mrs. Clinton said. "And we are in close contact with government and opposition leaders."

Ms. Suu Kyi's 17-day trip to the U.S. is being used to spotlight the historic changes in Myanmar in the past two years, as well as the need for continued reforms. She will be awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor in the Capitol's rotunda Wednesday, due to her decades of work to promote democracy, often while under house arrest.

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Panetta Meets With China's Elusive Leader-in-waiting

September 19, 2012

Washington Post

By Craig Whitlock

BEIJING – China's anointed leader, Xi Jinping, re-emerged from the shadows Wednesday as he met with Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta and smiled for the cameras, quelling speculation about his health and political status.

Xi is widely expected to be declared as China's new president next month as part of a once-in-a-decade revamping of the senior Communist Party leadership. But his unexplained cancellation of meetings with foreign dignitaries and disappearance from public view in recent weeks had triggered a frenzy of rumor and gossip.

The 59-year-old Xi offered a firm, prolonged handshake to Panetta in front of a pack of Western and Chinese journalists assembled inside an ornate reception room in the Great Hall of the People. The two leaders exchanged pleasantries for about five minutes before the media was ushered away.

"It is a great pleasure for me to meet you again, Secretary Panetta, and to welcome you to China," Xi said in Chinese, appearing comfortable and at ease as he paced across the room in a dark suit and a placid light-blue tie.

"It's an honor to have the opportunity to visit with you here," Panetta, 74, replied with a broad smile. "I appreciate all of your support in encouraging better military-to-military relations between our two countries."

Xi was supposed to meet with Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton earlier this month but was a no-show; he also canceled meetings with three other foreign leaders. The Chinese government offered no official explanation for his withdrawal from the limelight. U.S. diplomats said they were told privately by Chinese officials that Xi was hampered by a bad back.

Other theories spawned by the rumor mill included speculation that Xi had suffered a heart attack, hurt himself playing sports or been the target of an assassination attempt.

On Saturday, Xi suddenly reappeared in public when he toured a Chinese university campus, looking very much alive, upright and light on his feet. The campus visit was brief, however, and the Chinese state-run media only distributed two still photographs of the event.

Xi's meeting with Panetta was the first time in nearly three weeks that he showed up for a scheduled, public event with journalists present.

Panetta is in the midst of a three-day visit to China, the first since he became defense secretary in July 2011. In February, Panetta hosted Xi on a visit to the Pentagon, replete with an honor guard. So failing to return the favor with a meeting in Beijing would have only fueled more questions about Xi's condition.

The son of a revolutionary leader, Xi is being groomed to take over as China's president from the current occupant, Hu Jintao, as part of a broader reorganization of the Politburo Standing Committee that runs the country.

Although China has sought to project an image of stability and order during the leadership transition, that script has been undermined by intra-party feuding, including a murder-and-corruption scandal involving another Politburo member, Bo Xilai.
(top)

China reserves right to act on disputed islands

September 19, 2012

Associated Press

By LOLITA C. BALDOR

BEIJING — China's national defense minister warned Tuesday that Beijing reserves the right to take further action against Japan in the ongoing dispute over uninhabited islands in the East China Sea.

Standing next to U.S. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta, Gen. Liang Guanglie said Japan should bear full responsibility for the dispute, which has triggered violent protests in China against the Japanese. Panetta has been pressing both Liang and defense leaders in Japan to find ways to resolve the problem peacefully and diplomatically.

Liang, however, made it clear during a press conference that while China still would like to see a negotiated solution, he hopes the Japanese government "will undo its mistakes and come back to the right track of negotiations." Tensions over the string of islands, called the Senkakus in Japan and Diaoyu in China, spiked last week when the Japanese government said it was purchasing some of the islands from their private owner.

China's official Xinhua News Agency reported that during their private talks, Liang told Panetta that China was "resolutely opposed" to the islands' inclusion within the terms of the U.S.-Japan mutual defense treaty, the agreement signed in 1951 as the U.S. helped the island nation rebuild after World War II.

Liang said China hopes the U.S. will honor its commitment to maintain a neutral stance, Xinhua reported.

The island dispute has been a hot topic during Panetta's weeklong tour of the Asia-Pacific region. But his session with Liang also touched on a wide expanse of issues as the U.S. and China try to find a way to improve their military relationship.

U.S. relations with China have been rocky, especially over America's support of and arms sales to Taiwan, the self-governing island that Beijing claims as its own. The U.S. also has been critical of China for its lack of transparency regarding its massive military buildup.

"I've long believed that the United States-China relationship requires a long-term perspective," Panetta said during the press conference after a lengthy meeting Tuesday morning with Liang. "It is measured less by major breakthroughs than by slow, steady progress over time to build a relationship and to work on activities in areas of mutual interest."

In a move to enhance the relationship, Panetta announced that the U.S. will invite China to send a ship to participate in a major military maritime exercise in 2014. Both Panetta and Liang said they talked about how their two nations can improve communications and work toward developing a greater mutual trust.

Speaking through an interpreter, Liang said the U.S. and China must work to gain a better understanding of each other so they can gradually reduce the ongoing suspicions that have plagued the relationship.

Their meeting came just days after the U.S. forged an agreement to put a second missile-defense radar system in Japan, a move China is likely to view as another effort by the U.S. to broaden its military power in the Asia-Pacific region.

This is Panetta's first trip to China as defense chief, and it is expected to include several historic visits, including a meeting Wednesday with the country's leader-in-waiting, Xi Jinping, just days after the ruler reappeared in public after a two-week absence.

Panetta's stay in China was extended in recent days so he could visit Qingdao, a key naval base where he will see a Chinese submarine and frigate.

China and the U.S. also faced off over trade issues this week. China filed a World Trade Organization case Monday challenging U.S. anti-dumping measures on billions of dollars of kitchen appliances, paper and other goods, adding to worsening trade strains as global demand weakens.

Beijing's move came shortly before the Obama administration filed its own WTO case accusing China of improperly subsidizing exports of automobiles and auto parts.

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Beijing Demonstrators Damage US Ambassador's Car

September 19, 2012

Associated Press

By Didi Tang

BEIJING - A car carrying the U.S. ambassador to China was mildly damaged after becoming the target of boisterous anti-Japan demonstrators who were expressing outrage over a territorial dispute and marking the 81st anniversary of Japan's invasion of China.

The State Department said in a statement Wednesday that Ambassador Gary Locke was unhurt in Tuesday's incident, and that diplomats have expressed concerns to the Chinese Foreign Ministry.

The statement said around 50 protesters surrounded Locke's car as he tried to enter the embassy and were eventually removed by Chinese security personnel.

The incident comes amid heightened vigilance for American diplomats following violent attacks on U.S. embassies in Libya, Yemen and Egypt. The statement said embassy officials have asked the Chinese government to do everything possible to protect American facilities and personnel.

People across China have engaged in days of furious protests over some East China Sea islands, claimed by Beijing and Tokyo, that Japan purchased last week from a private owner. The U.S., a close ally of Japan, has said it is staying out of the dispute, but it also been the target of Chinese anger.

On Tuesday the dispute mixed with remembrances of a 1931 incident that Japan used as a pretext to invade Manchuria, setting off a brutal occupation of China that ended only at the close of World War II. China marks every Sept. 18 by blowing sirens, but demonstrations such as those seen Tuesday are not routine.

Thousands of protesters marched in front of the Japanese Embassy, with some burning Japanese flags and throwing apples, water bottles and eggs. The daylong demonstration periodically spilled over to the nearby U.S. Embassy.

The islands are tiny rock outcroppings that have been a sore point between China and Japan for decades. Japan has claimed the islands since 1895. The U.S. took jurisdiction after World War II and turned them over to Japan in 1972.

The disagreement escalated last week when the Japanese government said it was purchasing some of the islands from their private owner. Japan considers it an attempt to thwart a potentially more inflammatory move by the governor of Tokyo, who had wanted not only to buy the islands but develop them. But Beijing sees Japan's purchase as an affront to its claims and its past calls for negotiations.

Beijing has sent patrol ships inside Japanese-claimed waters around the islands, and some state media have urged Chinese to show their patriotism by boycotting Japanese goods and canceling travel to Japan.

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Hints of Leniency for Chinese Police Chief

September 19, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By JEREMY PAGE

CHENGDU—The trial of the former police chief whose flight to a U.S. consulate triggered a political crisis in China concluded after two days and legal experts said it appeared Wang Lijun stood a good chance of a comparatively light sentence.

What appeared to be a lenient approach to Mr. Wang's case by prosecutors—who said he helped solve the murder of British businessman Neil Heywood—suggested to some analysts that the Communist Party leadership would take a harder line with his former boss, Bo Xilai, whose political downfall has thrown the party elite into turmoil.

The Intermediate People's Court in the southwestern city of Chengdu—site of the consulate where Mr. Wang sought refuge in February—said in a statement Tuesday that he didn't contest the charges including defection and bribe-taking, and that it would announce a verdict and sentence at a later date. Mr. Wang's lawyer expects a sentence within two weeks.

Lawyers and analysts say a guilty verdict is almost certain, but the fact that prosecutors noted several mitigating factors in his case indicated that his sentence could be relatively light.

Mr. Wang plunged Chinese politics into disarray when he fled to the consulate and told U.S. diplomats there he had evidence that Mr. Bo's wife, Gu Kailai, was involved in Mr. Heywood's murder. Ms. Gu was convicted of the crime last month and given a suspended death sentence, which is typically commuted to a jail term. Party insiders and political analysts had suggested that if Mr. Wang was given the death penalty, or a suspended death sentence, it might indicate that the Chinese leadership would be more lenient on Mr. Bo, who was once a political highflier but was stripped of his party posts and placed under investigation in April.

Anxious to wrap up the scandal ahead of a once-a-decade leadership change due to start in the next few weeks, the party leadership is expected to announce soon whether Mr. Bo will also face criminal charges, those party insiders and political analysts say.

Mr. Wang's lawyer, Wang Yuncai, said she expected the court to deliver its verdict before China's National Day on Oct. 1, but she declined to speculate about the severity of his sentence.

"He's doing pretty well. Yes, I think he's mentally prepared for any forthcoming penalty," his lawyer, Wang Yuncai, told The Wall Street Journal after the trial ended.

"It's not time yet to talk about leniency or reducing the sentence," she said. "It's not convenient for me to talk about that."

Mr. Wang's trial began Monday, according to the court, with a closed session that it said involved state secrets. It otherwise followed a similar pattern to that of Ms. Gu and was conducted amid equally tight security, with hundreds of uniformed and plainclothes police officers surrounding the courthouse.

Footage of the trial by the state broadcaster, CCTV, showed Mr. Wang, who is 52 years old, looking solemn but to all appearances healthy as he sat in the courtroom in a white shirt and dark trousers.

"The defendant Wang Lijun did not raise objections to the basic facts and charges of bending the law for selfish ends, defection, abuse of power, and bribery," said the statement read out by a spokesman for the Chengdu court, Yang Yuquan, after the end of the trial.

Prosecutors accused Mr. Wang of "bending the law for selfish ends" by shielding Ms. Gu from criminal investigation for the Heywood murder, but they also noted that he later asked Chongqing police to "rebuild the file" and preserve evidence, according to the statement.

"Reporting to relevant national authorities the question of Bogu Kailai being suspected of intentional homicide, providing relevant evidence, and actively assisting the re-investigation played an important role in the solving of the case by public security organs," the statement said. Chinese authorities and state media have consistently referred to Ms. Gu as "Bogu Kailai."

"This can be taken into account, and can make the punishment more lenient for the charge of bending the law for selfish ends."

The prosecution also noted that the penalty for defection could be reduced according to Chinese law because Mr. Wang had ultimately surrendered himself and reported details of his defection attempt to Chinese authorities, the court statement said.

In addition, Mr. Wang had provided clues about other people's crimes that had played a large role in the investigation of those cases, the statement said, without giving details. "This can be considered as performing major meritorious services," the statement said.

It quoted prosecutors saying he had taken bribes for the benefit of others worth 3.05 million yuan (around \$482,000)—a relatively small sum by the standard of recent Chinese corruption cases. It didn't say who the bribes were for.

The prosecution also accused Mr. Wang of abusing his power by illegally using surveillance technology against several people.

The statement made no mention of Mr. Bo, who as party chief of Chongqing appointed Mr. Wang as police chief there in 2008 and put him in charge of a high-profile crackdown on organized crime. But some lawyers and political analysts said the prosecution appeared to be laying the ground for Mr. Wang to be given a lighter penalty in exchange for information he provided that helped Mr. Bo's opponents to ensure his political downfall.

"I think leaders have taken the view that if Wang Lijun had not gone to the consulate, China's problems would have been even worse," said He Weifang, a law professor at Peking University. "His actions did not just expose the Bo affair, they changed the whole direction of China."

The court said Mr. Wang's lawyer argued that he should be treated leniently because he had helped solve the Heywood murder, because he had "good reason" to flee to the consulate, and had left of his own accord, and because his other crimes were relatively small.

The court said Monday's session was closed because it was examining the defection and power-abuse charges that both involved state secrets. Tuesday's hearing was technically open, according to the court, and Ms. Wang said her client's wife and younger brother were inside the court, while his two sisters waited outside.

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US Temporarily Closes Consulate In Indonesia's 3rd-Largest City As Film Protests Continue

September 19, 2012

Associated Press

MEDAN, Indonesia - The U.S. has temporarily closed its consulate in Indonesia's third-largest city due to ongoing protests over an anti-Islam film produced in the United States.

About 300 members of the pan-Islamic movement Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia rallied Wednesday morning in front of the consulate in Medan, the capital of North Sumatra province. Later, about 50 Muslim

students also protested there. Both groups called on Washington to punish the makers of the film, "Innocence of Muslims."

It was the third consecutive day of protests in Medan.

The U.S. Embassy in the Indonesian capital of Jakarta sent a text message to U.S. citizens saying the consulate has been closed temporarily because of the demonstrations.

Wednesday's protests at the consulate were peaceful. On Monday, protesters hurled rocks and Molotov cocktails outside the embassy in Jakarta.

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US And Japan Reach Agreement On Osprey Deployment

September 19, 2012

Associated Press

By Lolita C. Baldor

BEIJING - The United States and Japan have reached an agreement allowing the MV-22 Osprey military aircraft to begin flight operations in Japan, officials said Wednesday. The deal had been in question because of protests by Japanese citizens who feared the hybrid aircraft was not safe.

The Pentagon said in a statement that U.S. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta was pleased with the agreement, which calls for the deployment of 12 of the aircraft to the southwestern island of Okinawa. Japan's defense minister, Satoshi Morimoto, said Tokyo was satisfied the aircraft - which takes off and lands like a helicopter but can fly like a plane - was safe, but Okinawa's Gov. Hirokazu Nakaima said he remained concerned and called the government's handling of the matter "insincere."

The Pentagon called the agreement the result of "a deep partnership" and a thorough process that has reconfirmed the safety of the aircraft, which U.S. officials say will help strengthen their ability to defend Japan and provide humanitarian assistance.

Japanese media reports said test flights could begin this week at the base in southern Japan where the Ospreys are temporarily stationed before they fly to Okinawa.

The plan has created an outpouring of anger on Okinawa after crashes in Morocco and Florida earlier this year. A recent incident in North Carolina that officials called a "precautionary landing" further aggravated the sentiment.

The tilt-rotor planes have been used extensively in Iraq and Afghanistan. The United States says they have a solid record and can fly faster and carry bigger loads than the CH-46, which it is replacing worldwide.

But Okinawa officials say crowding on their islands means a crash could cause significant civilian casualties or damage. The deployment plan has also reignited longstanding anger over the heavy presence of American troops on Okinawa, where more than half of the roughly 50,000 U.S. troops stationed throughout Japan are based.

Okinawans are also angry because the Ospreys will be deployed to Marine Corps Air Station Futenma, which the two countries decided to close more than a decade ago. The base has remained in operation because a replacement site hasn't been readied.

Tens of thousands of Okinawans rallied against the plan in a peaceful protest earlier this month.
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NEA

After Libya, Renewed Questions About The Potency Of Al Qaeda

September 19, 2012

New York Times

By Eric Schmitt And David D. Kirkpatrick

WASHINGTON - The attack on the United States mission in Benghazi, Libya, that killed Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens has set off a new debate here and across the Middle East about whether Al Qaeda has been reinvigorated amid the chaos of the Arab Spring or instead merely lives on as a kind of useful boogeyman, scapegoat or foil.

In the week since the attack, the president of Libya's newly elected national Congress blamed foreign fighters from Algeria or Mali with links to Al Qaeda who he said entered the country months earlier to plan the assault. The Al Qaeda affiliate in North Africa praised the attack on Tuesday and urged more like it across the region. And in Washington, some Republicans have embraced that narrative, implicitly faulting the administration for prematurely declaring the demise of Al Qaeda with the killing of Osama bin Laden last year.

But the Libyan militia leader whose fighters ultimately beat back the attack on behalf of the government insisted that the brigade of Islamist militants involved in the violence was entirely homegrown and well-known in their city. The leader of that brigade, Ansar al-Sharia, on Tuesday denied any ties to Al Qaeda or responsibility for the attacks, although he praised Al Qaeda's leader, Ayman al-Zawahri, and lauded the group's goals.

This may be the one narrow wedge of common ground between Ansar al-Sharia and senior Obama administration officials who say they have not seen signs of advance planning or Al Qaeda involvement, although intelligence analysts are trying to determine whether Ansar fighters and Qaeda operatives communicated before the assault.

At the heart of the debate is the reality that whatever the continued ability of Al Qaeda or regional groups bearing its name to inflict damage on local or American interests, the terrifying power of its name has also given it a spectral second life as a kind of catchall for Islamist militants. Far-flung militants with little connection to the original group find the use of its name an easy way to exaggerate their threat, and politicians eager to campaign against them - whether in the United States Congress or Arab capitals - share that incentive.

"It is a ghost," said Fahmy Howeidy, an Egyptian commentator. "People here don't believe that Al Qaeda is this huge scary thing that is moving everywhere and behind everything in the whole world. They think that is American propaganda."

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said Tuesday that there were no intelligence warnings that an attack was imminent. She said that F.B.I. investigators had arrived in Tripoli and that the United States,

with the Libyan authorities, would find those responsible. She did not discuss any potential ties to Al Qaeda, but blamed extremists opposed to the democratic changes in places like Libya, Tunisia and Egypt for the violence and protests around the region generally.

For political leaders in the United States or the Arab world, both addressing audiences that may have little familiarity with the various schools of ultraconservative or militant Islam, "the big name - Al Qaeda - can mobilize people," said Diaa Rashwan, an expert on Islamist movements at the state-funded Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies in Cairo. "It is very difficult to use another name that people don't know when you already have this brand."

"Al Qaeda as an organization, as a command, it doesn't exist," Mr. Rashwan said. "There are no orders from Ayman Zawahri coming to jihadists in Libya or Sinai to make something," though he added, "Since the death of Osama bin Laden, Al Qaeda has been in a sense reborn because some of its ideas and the model have inspired new militants."

Many news reports in Egypt, and some in the Western media, have said that Al Qaeda was operating in the relatively lawless and Bedouin-dominated Sinai area along the Israeli border. But officials at the Egyptian Interior Ministry, who have been collaborating with the military in a campaign to combat a militant presence, said Tuesday that they have never believed or reported that any of those militants had links to Al Qaeda, or even outside Egypt.

In Syria, the government of President Bashar al-Assad has often asserted that Al Qaeda is active among the rebels there in order to discredit them. But rebel fighters and opposition groups in Syria say they have found mainly homegrown militants or, more recently, independent foreign fighters enlisting in rebel brigades.

In Tunisia, where a mob angry over a video denigrating Islam attacked the United States Embassy and stormed an American school, some critics of the moderate Islamist governing party have sought to suggest that Al Qaeda may have played a role in inflaming the attacks. But on Tuesday, Rafik Abdesslem, Tunisia's foreign minister, said at a news conference that Al Qaeda had no foothold at all in the country.

In Washington, the question of whether Al Qaeda was involved in the Benghazi attack has injected itself into a presidential campaign in which Republicans have tried to chip away at President Obama's top counterterrorism achievement: the death of Bin Laden and the weakening of the terrorist group's reach and effectiveness.

A United States intelligence official said Tuesday that the attack "was hatched opportunistically that day" - something more than spontaneous but well short of a premeditated plot.

But some Republicans who have reviewed the same information scoffed at the idea. "We can't say for certain it was an Al Qaeda event; it just has all of the hallmarks of an Al Qaeda-style event," said Representative Mike Rogers, a Michigan Republican who heads the House Intelligence Committee.

In Libya before the fall of Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi, he and his government propagandists constantly maintained that their opposition was dominated and led by Al Qaeda, although journalists moving among the rebels saw no sign of it.

On Tuesday the commander of Ansar al-Sharia, Mohammed Ali al-Zahawi, made his first public statement since the attack. He asserted that the group needed to hold on to its weapons because of the continuing uncertainty about Libya's future, but that it was not responsible for the violence and that it was not aligned with Al Qaeda. "We are in a battle with the liberals, the secularists and the remnants of Qaddafi," he said, relaxing in a Western-style shirt and jeans in the brigade's fortified compound. "Our brave youths will continue their struggle until they impose Shariah."
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Al-Qaida Threatens Attacks On US Diplomats

September 19, 2012

[Associated Press](#)

By Maamoun Youssef

CAIRO - Al-Qaida's branch in North Africa on Tuesday called for attacks on U.S. diplomats and an escalation of protests against an anti-Islam video that was produced in the United States and triggered a wave of demonstrations and riots in the Middle East and beyond.

While demonstrations have tapered off in nations including Egypt and Tunisia, protests against the film turned violent in Pakistan and Indian-controlled Kashmir and hundreds of people rallied in Indonesia and Thailand.

In Kabul, the Afghan capital, a suicide bomber rammed a car packed with explosives into a mini-bus carrying South African aviation workers to the airport, killing at least 12 people in an attack that a militant group said was revenge for the film "Innocence of Muslims," which was made by an Egyptian-born American citizen.

Afghan President Hamid Karzai said the attack killed eight South Africans, three Afghans and a Kyrgyzstani.

Twelve protesters have died in riots in several countries, bringing the total number of deaths linked to unrest over the film to at least 28. That figure includes Christopher Stevens, the U.S. ambassador to Libya, and three other Americans killed in an attack there.

The White House said the violent protest in Libya appeared to have been sparked by the film, but that the matter was still under investigation and the assessment could change.

U.S. officials describe the video as offensive, but the American government's protection of free speech rights has clashed with the anger of Muslims abroad who are furious over the depiction of the Prophet Muhammad as a fraud, womanizer and pedophile.

In a statement, Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb praised the killing of Stevens in the attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi on Sept. 11. The group threatened attacks in Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco and Mauritania, and condemned the United States for "lying to Muslims for more than 10 years, saying its war was against terrorism and not Islam."

The group urged Muslims to pull down and burn American flags at embassies, and kill or expel American diplomats to "purge our land of their filth in revenge for the honor of the Prophet."

Yemen-based al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula recently issued a similar call for attacks on U.S. diplomatic facilities. It is al-Qaida's most active branch in the Middle East.

An Islamist militant group, Hizb-i-Islami, claimed responsibility for the attack in Kabul. The group is headed by 65-year-old former warlord Gubuddin Hekmatyar, a former Afghan prime minister and one-time U.S. ally who is now listed as a terrorist by Washington. The militia has thousands of fighters and followers across the country's north and east.

In Pakistan, hundreds of angry protesters broke through a barricade outside the U.S. Consulate in the northwest city of Peshawar, sparking clashes with police that left several wounded on both sides, said police officer Arif Khan. The demonstrators threw bricks and flaming wads of cloth at the police, who pushed them back by firing tear gas and rubber bullets and charging with batons. The protest was organized by the youth wing of the hardline Jamaat-e-Islami party.

In Kashmir's main city of Srinagar, a strike shut down businesses and public transportation as marchers burned U.S. flags and an effigy of President Barack Obama. When the protesters tried to march into the main business district, police fired tear gas and used batons to disperse them, a police officer said on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to reporters. Protesters hurled rocks at the troops, he said. There were no immediate reports of injuries.

An alliance of Kashmiri religious groups called the strike in response to the anti-Islam film. The shutdown was supported by the bar association, trade unions and separatist groups in the volatile region, where strikes are a common tactic to protest against Indian rule.

In Indonesia, about 200 people from various Islamic groups torched an American flag and tires outside the U.S. Consulate in the third largest city of Medan. Some unfurled banners saying, "Go to hell America," while others trampled on dozens of paper flags. Also Tuesday, about 100 Muslim students in Makassar, a city in central Indonesia, called for the death penalty against the filmmaker, Nakoula Basseley Nakoula.

Some 400 people protested peacefully outside the U.S. Embassy in Bangkok, Thailand's capital. Protesters carried signs and banners saying, "We love Prophet Muhammad" and "Stop insulting our religion," and chanted, "Down with America" and "Down with Israel."

The government in Bangladesh blocked YouTube on Monday to prevent people from seeing the video. Mir Mohammad Morshed, a spokesman for the state-run Bangladesh Telecommunications Company Ltd., said the decision will remain effective until further notice.

Google has blocked access to the video in Libya and Egypt following violence there, and in Indonesia and India because it says the video broke laws in those countries.

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Temporary Spending Bill Permits Egypt Aid To Flow

September 19, 2012

Associated Press

By Andrew Taylor

WASHINGTON - As anti-American sentiment boils in Islamic countries like Egypt, lawmakers are moving to permit billions of dollars in U.S. foreign aid under a government-wide funding bill set to clear Congress this week.

In the case of Egypt, turmoil since the overthrow of U.S. ally President Hosni Mubarak early last year has delayed the release of hundreds of millions of dollars in economic aid that has been approved over several years.

A violent mob assault at the U.S. Embassy in Cairo certainly hasn't helped efforts to release already approved funds, but White House Press Secretary Jay Carney on Tuesday denied a media report that U.S. talks with Egypt to release the aid are on hold until after the election.

"We're continuing to work with (Congress) on ways to support a stable, democratic transition in Egypt that is important for defeating extremism of the very kind that we just recently saw," Carney said. "We provide assistance to Egypt because it's in our interests to help them advance regional security and uphold their treaty with Israel and transition to democracy."

Some in Congress have called for cutting off aid to Egypt.

Instead, new money will continue to be available under the terms of a six-month government funding bill that passed the House last week and faces a Senate procedural vote on Wednesday. The measure allows for almost \$130 million a month in military and economic aid to Egypt since it permits aid to flow at the same rate as current funding.

Conservative GOP Rep. Dan Burton of Indiana mounted a futile protest during House debate on the stopgap spending bill last week.

"I want to know if any of it is going to Libya or Egypt," Burton said. "Our embassies have been attacked. An ambassador has been killed. The Muslim Brotherhood runs Egypt - and we're going to give them money? I would like to have an answer."

Burton didn't get an answer. But it's clear that no money from the temporary spending bill would go to the government of Libya, which unlike Egypt has ample oil resources. Some humanitarian aid could end up flowing into Libya but it's not mandated.

As for aid to Egypt, it would be permitted at an annualized rate of \$1.55 billion - \$250 million in economic aid and \$1.3 billion in military aid, though the actual flow of money is supposed to be contingent on the administration's willingness to certify that Egypt has met stringent conditions demanded by Congress, including demonstrating that it is taking specific steps toward democracy.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, however, has the authority to waive such congressional conditions placed on aid if it would be in the United States' national security interest. She issued such a waiver in March.

"The incidents of the past week highlight how important our work is. The United States must and will remain strongly engaged in the world. ... The United States must be a force for peace and progress," Clinton said Tuesday. "That is worth striving and sacrificing for and nothing that happened last week changes that fundamental fact."

New, somewhat more stringent rules demanded this summer by Capitol Hill's appropriations panels will have to wait, however, for passage of the full-year foreign aid bill. One rule suggested by the Senate panel would require the administration to certify that Egypt is being ruled by a democratically-elected civilian government that protects a variety of civil liberties.

The tougher certification requirements still could be waived by Clinton, though approval from key congressional committees is required before the money can actually be disbursed.

Egypt's military aid is used to buy weapons from U.S. manufacturers and has traditionally flowed pretty quickly. But economic aid has advanced much more slowly.

"They're now only beginning to look at spending fiscal '10 and '11 money in Egypt which has been in the pipeline," said a Senate Appropriations Committee staff aide. The aide required anonymity because he or she is only authorized to speak to the media under such conditions. ([top](#))

Egypt To Try 7 Copts, US Pastor Over Prophet Film

September 19, 2012

Associated Press

By Sarah El Deeb

CAIRO - Egypt's general prosecutor issued arrest warrants Tuesday for seven Egyptian Coptic Christians and a Florida-based American pastor and referred them to trial on charges linked to an anti-Islam film that has sparked riots across the Muslim world.

The case is largely symbolic since the seven men and one woman are believed to be outside of Egypt and unlikely to travel to the country to face the charges. Instead, the prosecutor's decision to take legal appears aimed at absorbing at least some of the public anger over the amateur film, which portrays the Prophet Muhammad as a fraud, womanizer and buffoon.

But some Christians and human rights groups expressed concern that trying people on charges of insulting religion, which also occurred to a degree under the secular-leaning regime of Hosni Mubarak, could only increase now that various strains of Islamists are gaining power. The arrest warrants were issued the same day that a Coptic teacher in southern Egypt received a prison sentence for Facebook postings deemed anti-Islamic, charges that predated the amateur film.

The prosecutor's office said in a statement that the eight accused, who include the film's alleged maker, face charges of harming national unity, insulting and publicly attacking Islam and spreading false information. The office said they could face the death penalty, if convicted.

Their case has been transferred to a criminal court, but no date for the trial has been set.

Among those charged is Nakoula Basseley Nakoula, an Egyptian Copt living in southern California and believed to be behind the film. Florida-based Pastor Terry Jones, who has said he was contacted by the filmmaker to promote the video, as well as Morris Sadek, a conservative Coptic Christian in the U.S. who pushed the video on his website, are also among those charged.

The connection of the other five accused in the case to the film was not immediately clear. Most of them live in the United States. They include two who work with Sadek in a radical institute for Coptic

Christians in the U.S. that has called for an independent Coptic state; a priest who hosts TV programs from the U.S., a lawyer who lives in Canada and who has previously sued the government for clashes in 2000 that left 21 Christians dead.

They also include a woman who had converted to Christianity from Islam years back and is a staunch critic of the religion.

"We are not going to respond to Egypt. We do not take that particular threat very seriously," Jones said.

He added he hoped the U.S. government "would take a radical stand" on the case "that carries a possible death penalty for a U.S. citizen for exercising his First Amendment rights."

Sadek's phone was switched off. The others could not be immediately reached for comment.

Ultraconservative Salafi lawyer Mamdouh Ismail praised the prosecutor's decision. While recognizing that the eight will be tried in absentia, Ismail said referring them to a court will help curb public anger.

"Now these are legal measures instead of angry reactions, whose consequences are undetermined," he said. "This would also set a deterrent for them and anyone else who may fall into this" offense.

The prosecutor's statement, a copy of which was obtained by The Associated Press, said that after studying the film investigators have determined that it contains scenes offensive to Islam and state institutions. It also says they questioned 10 plaintiffs before issuing the charges.

Nakoula, 55, told the AP in an interview last week outside Los Angeles that he was the manager of the company that produced "Innocence of Muslims." Jones also told AP that he was contacted by Nakoula to promote the movie.

Violence surrounding the film, clips of which appeared on YouTube, has included angry protests outside U.S. embassies worldwide and an attack on the American Consulate in Libya that killed the U.S. ambassador.

Both the Christians and rights groups say charges of insulting religion, vague in what constitutes an insult, are only pressed against offenses to Islam, and never to Christianity.

A Muslim preacher who tore the Bible in protest over the offensive film remains free without any charges. Another Coptic Christian who posted the film on his Facebook page and has posted other videos discussing the merits of atheism is currently under 15 days detention on accusations of insulting religion.

A Coptic teacher was sentenced Tuesday to six years for posting on his Facebook page drawings that were deemed to be insulting the Prophet, as well as comments considered an affront to the country's current president. The charges predate the amateur film, but anger was heightened outside the courtroom in southern Egypt, and many Islamists protested the sentence as too meager.

Medhat Klada, a Coptic Christian living in Switzerland, said the accused are referred to criminal trials without even interrogation.

"This is only to absorb public anger but there is no justice in Egypt," he said. "These charges are now used with force because of the rise of political Islam and the fierce fight" between the different strands among these groups.

Amr Gharbeia, a program director with the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, argued against the constitutionality of the charges.

"This is not a call for prosecuting those who insult Christians or Shiites, but if we are going to use this charge only in one direction (against insulting Islam), then we should just call it off," he said.
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Negotiators Meet In Bid To Revive Iran Talks

September 19, 2012

New York Times

By Rick Gladstone

The top nuclear negotiators for Iran and the big powers met face to face for the first time in nearly three months on Tuesday, part of an effort to revive the stalled talks over Iran's disputed uranium enrichment activities as new military tensions roil the Middle East.

The meeting between the negotiators, Catherine Ashton, the European Union's top foreign policy official, and Saeed Jalili, the secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, was held privately in Istanbul and was not considered a formal negotiation. Michael Mann, Ms. Ashton's spokesman, said in an e-mailed statement that it was "a useful and constructive meeting and an important opportunity to stress once again to Iran the urgent need to make progress."

The last time Ms. Ashton and Mr. Jalili met was June 18-20 in Moscow, where teams for Iran and the P5-plus-1 countries - the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council plus Germany - walked away in frustration.

A series of lower-level contacts since then led to the Istanbul meeting, which came against a backdrop of tightening Western economic sanctions on Iran, new disclosures of sabotage at Iran's uranium enrichment sites and shrill exchanges between Iran and Israel over the possibility that Israel may attack Iran.

Iran has insisted that it is enriching uranium for peaceful uses and has rejected Security Council demands that it halt the activity until questions about the possible weaponization of its nuclear fuel stockpile are answered. Last week the International Atomic Energy Agency, the monitoring arm of the United Nations, rebuked Iran for refusing to grant inspectors unlimited access to sites where they believe suspicious activity may have occurred.

Iran's most senior atomic energy official responded on Monday by asserting that the I.A.E.A. had been compromised by "terrorists and saboteurs," and he disclosed that power lines to its two main uranium enrichment sites had been hit by explosions. The official, Fereydoon Abbasi, did not say whether the sites had been damaged, but his assertions raised the possibility that Israel, the United States or some other groups had carried out another attack in a clandestine effort to subvert the enrichment program short of a military attack.

The I.A.E.A. did not comment on Mr. Abbasi's assertions, but in a statement on Tuesday it said that the agency's director general, Yukiya Amano, had met with Mr. Abbasi and told him "it is essential for Iran to extend its full cooperation to the agency."

In a rising show of military force meant as a signal to Iran, the United States is leading a 30-nation naval mine-clearing exercise in the Persian Gulf in 12 days of maneuvers that began on Monday. Iran responded on Tuesday by deploying what the state-run news media called a homemade missile destroyer, a newly refurbished submarine and a new underground missile launchpad in the northern city of Noshahr.

Western powers have said negotiations are the preferred solution to the nuclear issue. Britain added pressure on Tuesday, with its foreign secretary, William Hague, telling lawmakers in London that although the sanctions were having a major impact, "we will be intensifying those sanctions in the coming weeks and months in the absence of successful negotiations."

In the United States, United Against Nuclear Iran, an advocacy group that helped pressure a global banking communications network to expel sanctioned Iranian banks, said it had undertaken a new effort to force the authorities who assign international Internet addresses to block sanctioned Iranian entities and persons from access to the Web.

In letters sent to the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers, known as ICANN, based in Los Angeles, and the Réseaux IP Européens Network Coordination Centre, known as RIPE NCC, based in Amsterdam, the advocacy group's president, Mark D. Wallace, said they may be in violation of Iran sanctions and that by disconnecting Internet access, "the dictatorial regime of Iran would be severely impeded in pursuing its illegal and amoral activities."

ICANN officials did not respond to requests for comment. RIPE NCC, in a statement posted on its Web site, said that it did not believe it had violated sanctions "but we will investigate in cases where new information is provided to us and we will ensure that changing circumstances do not place the RIPE NCC in violation of sanctions."

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Bahrain, UAE probe suspicious shipments headed to Iran

September 19, 2012

Reuters

By Louis Charbonneau

UNITED NATIONS - Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates have confiscated a number of items Iran may have sought for its nuclear program, a development that diplomats said showed how enforcement of U.N. sanctions against Tehran is steadily improving.

One of the items heading to Iran but confiscated by Bahrain was carbon fiber, the diplomats told Reuters, a dual-use material U.N. experts have said would be crucial if Iran was to develop more advanced nuclear enrichment centrifuge technology.

Bahrain's and UAE's confidential reports to the U.N. Security Council's Iran sanctions committee are politically significant, envoys said on condition of anonymity, since they highlight how more and more states are enforcing the sanctions and making it increasingly difficult for Tehran to flout them.

"The fact that these two countries are now taking steps to enforce the sanctions and reporting those steps to the U.N. is remarkable by itself," a senior Security Council diplomat told Reuters. "It shows that the U.N. sanctions regime can work. UAE has been one of Iran's enablers. Iran's becoming more isolated."

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Sunday that Tehran was close to being able to build a nuclear bomb, and U.S. President Barack Obama is under pressure ahead of November's election from political opponents who argue that sanctions are not doing enough to stop Iran building a bomb.

The emirate Dubai has long been one of Iran's main transit hubs because of its busy port and position as a key financial center. The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace think-tank wrote in July 2011 that Dubai was "a top source of Iranian imports and a key transshipment point for goods - legal and illegal - destined for the Islamic Republic."

But pressure from the United States and other Western powers to crack down on Iranian sanctions violations has borne some fruit in the form of redoubled efforts to enforce the sanctions and report to the sanctions committee, Western envoys say.

The Security Council imposed four rounds of U.N. sanctions on Tehran between 2006 and 2010 to punish it for defying Security Council demands that it suspend uranium enrichment and other sensitive nuclear activities.

Tehran rejects charges it is developing the capability to produce atomic weapons. Iran says its nuclear program is intended solely for the peaceful production of electricity.

UAE officials insist that the country's policy has always been to fully abide by U.N. regulations and cooperate with the sanctions committee. A UAE official who declined to be identified played down the reports to the Iran committee.

"All incidents were reported at the time when they happened, and there has been no incident in more than a year," the official told Reuters. He did not comment further.

Bahrain's mission to the United Nations in New York did not reply to a request for comment, and officials in Bahrain were not immediately available to comment.

CARBON FIBER

Bahrain has become increasingly annoyed with what it says are attempts by Iran to undermine its government. The Sunni-led island, along with fellow Gulf Arab countries, have accused Shi'ite-led Iran of being behind the unrest in the region. Tehran denies fomenting problems in Bahrain.

U.N. diplomats say that some countries could also do more to enforce the sanctions. They say it is important for China, Russia, India, Turkey and others to counter Iranian attempts to use their territory to circumvent international sanctions.

The UAE reported to the council's Iran sanctions committee that it had made some 15 interceptions of suspicious items bound for Iran over the last three years, diplomats said.

"Some of those items have been cleared as OK but some remain under investigation," a U.N. diplomatic source told Reuters.

Diplomats said that reports from the UAE, Bahrain and other countries would likely be mentioned in a briefing later this week for the 15-nation council by Colombia's U.N. envoy Nestor Osorio, who chairs the Iran sanctions committee.

Osorio's report was expected to leave out the names of the countries that submitted reports to the committee in keeping with council tradition on such delicate matters, envoys said.

In some cases, the UAE returned seized items to the original shipping countries, diplomats said. Among the firms involved in the procurement efforts the UAE uncovered was Kalaye Electric Co. in Tehran, the former center of Iran's enrichment centrifuge research and development program, envoys said.

There were no details available on the items confiscated by UAE authorities, but the three items Bahrain intercepted included carbon fiber, a dual-use material that the U.N. expert panel identified in a May 2012 report as key for the further development of Iran's uranium enrichment centrifuge program.

It remains unclear if Iran wanted the carbon fiber for its nuclear program, diplomats said.

The last round of U.N. sanctions adopted in June 2010 established the panel of experts to monitor compliance with the U.N. measures and gave countries the authority to inspect all cargo going to and from Iran and seize any banned items.

The United States and European Union have also imposed their own much more draconian sanctions. ([top](#))

Iraq Reopens Border Crossing To Syrian Refugees

September 19, 2012

Associated Press

By Zeina Karam

BEIRUT - Iraqi officials say a western border crossing with Syria has been reopened in order to receive refugees fleeing an escalating civil war in their country.

The mayor of Qaim, Farhan Fitkhan Farhan, says 100 Syrian refugees entered Iraq Tuesday and more would be let in on daily basis. But he says only women and children will be accepted while young men will be denied entry for security reasons.

He put the total number of the Syrian refugees who settled in camps in Qaim to about 4,348 people so far.

The Qaim border crossing was closed last month after the eruption of fierce fighting between Syrian government forces and rebels on the Syrian side of the borders.

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FBI Arrives In Libya To Probe Deaths Of Four Americans

September 19, 2012

Washington Post

By Anne Gearan

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said Tuesday that a team of FBI agents has arrived in Libya to investigate the deaths of four Americans who were killed when the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi was overrun last week.

The FBI's arrival had been delayed by concerns about continued violence in the eastern Libyan city. Clinton did not provide any details of how many agents were involved or whether the team has arrived in Benghazi yet.

"The FBI has joined the investigation on the ground in Libya and we will not rest until the people who orchestrated this attack are found and punished," Clinton told reporters after a meeting with Mexican Foreign Minister Patricia Espinosa at the State Department.

U.S. Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens and three other State Department employees were killed when a protest linked to an anti-Muslim video turned violent and an armed mob stormed the consulate and set it ablaze.

Libyan officials said that as many as 50 people have been brought in for questioning in connection with the attack. Most of them are regarded as witnesses who were outside the consulate at the time of the protest, the officials said.

Clinton defended the security in place before the attack, repeating the administration's position that the combination of Libyan guards and U.S. personnel was sufficient. She also said there had been no intelligence or other warnings of an impending attack on the consulate.

In Cairo, Egypt's general prosecutor issued arrest warrants Tuesday for seven Egyptian Coptic Christians and a Florida-based American pastor, referring them to trial on charges linked to the video.

The case is largely symbolic, because the seven men and one woman are believed to be outside Egypt. Among those charged is Nakoula Basseley Nakoula, an Egyptian Copt living in Southern California and believed to be behind the video. Also among those charged are Florida-based pastor Terry Jones, who has said he was contacted by the filmmaker to promote the video, as well as Morris Sadek, a conservative Coptic Christian in the United States who pushed the video on his Web site.

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Islamist Denies Group's Role In Benghazi Attack, Warns He'll Target Americans If U.S. Retaliates

September 19, 2012

McClatchy

By Mel Frykberg

The leader of an Islamist militia whose members are suspected of involvement in the attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi last week, killing the U.S. ambassador and three other Americans, has warned that his group will consider American citizens fair game in a holy war if the United States takes action inside Libya against his group.

The statements by Ansar al Shariah leader Yousef Jehani underscore the delicate position both the United States and Libya's central government find themselves in as they confront a crisis brought on by

a group that has become a key part of the country's security apparatus in a nation that has been unable to establish a national military or disarm the militias that helped topple Moammar Gadhafi last year.

"Libya will turn into an inferno for American troops and Americans will be legitimate targets if Washington sends troops to target any of our groups, thereby forcing Libyans to wage a holy war or jihad," Jehani said in remarks first reported by the Reuters news agency. "If one U.S. soldier arrives, not for the purpose of defending the embassy but to repeat what happened in Iraq or Afghanistan, be sure that all battalions in Libya and all Libyans will put aside all their differences and rally behind one goal of hitting America and Americans."

Ansar al Shariah has a strong presence in Benghazi, which is also a base for many other Islamist militants. Its members forced the closing of the city's airport in the days after the consulate raid as they fired at U.S. reconnaissance drones flying over the city, possibly monitoring suspected locations of militant groups. Ansar al Shariah controls a large security compound and a hospital in the city.

The militant group's fears that the U.S. was planning a retaliatory attack follow the deployment of the drones and two warships off the Libyan coast, as well as the sending of U.S. special forces to the country.

Jehani said that he was against the killing of U.S. Ambassador Christopher Stevens because the envoy "hadn't committed any crimes in Libya." He said that he didn't want a confrontation with the U.S. but that his men were ready if provoked.

The Ansar al Shariah leader further denied that his group was responsible for the killings and said none of the 50 men arrested by the Libyan authorities in the wake of the attack were from his organization.

Mohammad al Bishari, the landlord of the leased consulate property, told McClatchy last week that he was present when the assault on the compound took place and that the assailants carried the flag of Ansar al Shariah. The group has also been tied to other attacks on diplomatic facilities in the Benghazi region.

The role of such groups in Libya's security forces has become a key point of internal tension in recent weeks as the government in Tripoli attempts to assert authority over the better armed militias.

Last month, Libya's interior minister, Fawzi Abdel Al, resigned, then rescinded his resignation, after the country's top elected official, Mohammed Magarief, the president of the country's new congress, questioned his ministry's involvement in the destruction of several shrines and mosques affiliated with the moderate Sufi strain of Islam.

Magarief accused Abdel Al's ministry, and the Supreme Security Committee, an amalgamation of militias that are supposed to fall under his control, of failing to protect several of the shrines from groups such as Ansar al Shariah, whose members follow conservative Salafi Islam. Members of the police and the Supreme Security Committee stood guard and watched as Tripoli's Sidi Shaab Mosque and Zlitan's Abdel Salam al Asmar shrine, 100 miles east of Tripoli, were razed by armed Salafists. Some of the attackers were reported to be serving members of the Supreme Security Committee.

In recent days, Magarief has championed the view among Libyan officials that the attack on the U.S. consulate was pre-planned by foreigners, and he has rejected the notion that it began as a

demonstration against a crude video that insults the Prophet Muhammad. Protests against the video, "Innocence of Muslims," turned violent last week in Egypt, Sudan and Tunisia.

Importantly, it was a deputy interior minister with responsibility for Benghazi security, Wanis al Sharif, who first said there had been a demonstration outside the consulate. Sharif also at first said that no one was in the mission at the time of the attack and then, after the news of the deaths of Stevens and the other Americans were announced, tried to put the blame equally on the Americans and pro-Gadhafi sympathizers. He said the alleged demonstration outside the mission over the video had been peaceful until U.S. security guards started firing – a version that has been refuted by eyewitnesses and was branded "ridiculous" by influential parliamentarian Salah Ajouda Jawdah.

Sharif, who was responsible for investigating the attack, was fired on Monday.

Meanwhile, the Obama administration appeared to be retreating from its insistence that the Benghazi attack was spurred by the video, with White House spokesman Jay Carney noting that there's an ongoing investigation and that "the investigation will follow the facts wherever they lead."

Carney said the investigation would examine whether there had been enough security at the consulate in Benghazi, in light of warnings of possible violence related to the anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States. The Benghazi attack occurred on the 11th anniversary of 9/11.

"All I can tell you is that steps are taken, both seen and unseen, in advance of and in preparation for times like the anniversary of 9/11 when it is judged that there might be greater threats, and those steps are based on the threat assessments that we have at the time," Carney said.

According to a security guard on duty at the consulate on the night of the attack, the consulate's outer perimeter was protected by five private security contractors and three members of a local Libyan militia when the assailants appeared and began lobbing grenades into the compound. In addition, there were an unknown number of American security contractors inside the compound. Two of those, former Navy SEALs Glen Doherty and Tyrone Woods, were killed in the attack. Sean Smith, an information technology specialist, was also killed.

Carney also said he was unaware of any advance notice that violence was increasing specifically in Libya before the attack, though news stories published by McClatchy and others over the month prior to the Benghazi assault had detailed the growing number of assaults in Benghazi and Tripoli.
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Attack On Americans Jolts Libya To Act On Militias

September 18, 2012

AFP

By Dominique Soguel

BENGHAZI, Libya - Islamist militias have been able to flourish in Libya since its 2011 uprising, but a deadly attack on Americans in Benghazi has jolted the newly democratic country to finally act against them.

Ansar al-Sharia is among the most prominent of the hardline Islamist groups to have emerged from the power vacuum in Libya since the revolution that toppled and killed dictator Moamer Kadhafi.

It is widely suspected of being behind the assault on the US consulate in the eastern city that killed ambassador Chris Stevens and three other Americans during a protest against an anti-Muslim film last week.

As analyst Jaber al-Obeidi puts it: "All the readings point to them as a primary suspect -- their name itself links them to Abu Yahya al-Libi and Al-Qaeda."

Al-Qaeda welcomed the assault -- which erupted on the anniversary of the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States -- as revenge for a drone strike that killed Libi, a Libyan who was the jihadist network's deputy leader.

And although Ansar al-Sharia's flag was sighted at the consulate, Fawzi Wanis al-Kadhafi, head of the Benghazi supreme security committee, stressed there is not enough evidence to accuse any specific group.

"Many people angered by the film came, including Ansar al-Sharia," he said.

There is no shortage of well-armed Islamist brigades in Benghazi, cradle of the 2011 revolt against the Kadhafi regime.

Shield Libya and February 17, both viewed as close to the Muslim Brotherhood, and the jihadist brigade Raf Allah Al-Sehati are the best armed and most well known. All nominally operate under the defence ministry.

Ansar al-Sharia, which has two solid bases in the eastern city, is not.

Yussef al-Gehani, in charge of external relations for Ansar al-Sharia, told AFP that it "did not take part in any act against the embassy."

But Ansar al-Sharia, which translates as Partisans of Islamic Law, is the name mentioned most often when locals are asked to identify which groups in Benghazi mirror Al-Qaeda's ideology and tactics.

"We fought against Kadhafi not only because he is Kadhafi but to apply Sharia (Islamic law) in Libya," said Gehani, 33, an accountant by training.

Bringing together about 100 armed men, Ansar al-Sharia categorically rejects western (secular) democracy and demands the application of Islamic law.

Gehani insists the group, which formed just a few months ago, has no links to Al-Qaeda and that it turned up at the consulate to help restore order.

Formed in response to insecurity, it is the military arm of Al-Dawa wa Al-Islah, a like-minded charitable organisation with roughly 400 members, Gehani said.

And it has won a degree of legitimacy and popular support by securing two hospitals, Al-Jalaa and Al-Hiwari, at the request of the local council, he added.

They represent the Salafist jihadist strand in Libya which by most accounts is a small minority but best captures the threat of arms meeting ideological zeal.

Gehani says good relations between Tripoli and Washington depend on the "United States not spilling Muslim blood through its actions, as in Afghanistan, or inaction, as in Syria."

He also cautions against insulting the Prophet Mohammed.

Last week's deadly assault on the US consulate is the worst in a series of attacks this year in Benghazi focused on diplomatic missions and humanitarian agencies like the United Nations and the Red Cross.

The authorities in the city have proved powerless and brought no one to justice.

They are reticent to acknowledge the threat posed by small but radical groups, preferring to blame remnants of the previous regime instead.

In the case of the consulate attack, Mohammed Taib, security chief at Benghazi council, blames "mistakes" and the toxic marriage of arms and emotions running wild over the American-produced film deemed insulting to Islam.

"It was a peaceful demonstration... that turned into a frontline," he said.

Mohammed al-Megaryef, the president of the national assembly, has accused Al-Qaeda and foreign actors of being responsible for the deaths of the Americans.

Leaders in Benghazi worry, however, that blaming Al-Qaeda may trigger reprisal US drone attacks against Islamist militants in Libya.

Kadhafi stressed that dealing with extremist groups, which have historically concentrated in the east, requires the use of "personal ties" and influence to avoid plunging the city into conflict.

Mohammed Abu Sedra, a former political prisoner and prominent Islamist negotiator, said he was "contacting different Islamic sects and groups to try to deal with the situation because it is a very serious and dangerous one."

His concern is the White House might find the arrests of suspects as simply not enough and order strikes against Libya to boost President Barack Obama ahead of the US presidential election.

"If it is Al-Qaeda (behind the attack), that is the beginning," he said.

"Then American and Western intelligence will have reason to come to Libya. We will always be threatened and maybe we'll be another Waziristan with drones. Now we can see surveillance drones but maybe next time they'll be armed."

Islamists, well represented in the ranks of local brigades, are said to have training camps west of the nearby city of Darna, known as Libya's "Islamic emirate."

Most, Abu Sedra maintains, are willing to give the transitional government a chance to produce a constitution based on Islamic law, but there are jihadists like Ansar al-Sharia willing to fight for an Islamic state.

"When the constitution includes Sharia (Islamic law) as a frame of reference, straight and clear, at that time they will be ready to... come under control of the army," he predicted.

A less optimistic Obeidi urged the government to uproot them.

"If the government doesn't use power now and show that it is a competent state, then it is condemning itself to failure," he said.

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Syria Orders Schools To Open, But Classes Give Way To War

September 19, 2012

New York Times

By An Employee Of The New York Times In Syria And Kareem Fahim.

DAMASCUS, Syria - At one Syrian school, in the Damascus suburbs, students were so scarce this week that teachers spent most of the last few days sitting around and drinking tea.

On the outskirts of the northern city of Aleppo, the teachers just stayed home. The schools had been transformed into shelters for residents displaced by fighting, and in any case, one teacher said, there were more "more pressing concerns" than school.

Other schools had been taken over by rebel fighters, and throughout Syria, more than 2,000 school buildings had been destroyed or damaged in the war.

In an attempt to project calm in the midst of relentless violence, Syria's Education Ministry ordered schools to open this week. Instead of calm, however, the schools reflected what had happened in the rest of the country during the summer: the fighting had grown worse, the routines of daily life more dangerous and education had become one more casualty of the unrest.

On Sunday, the education minister said that more than five million Syrian students had returned so far. But certainly tens of thousands, if not more, stayed away. Teachers and parents said that educators and students were too scared to return, or unable to, since the schools themselves were occupied, destroyed or inaccessible.

"The Syrian government promised that everything would be O.K., that they will finish the 'criminal gangs' before the beginning of the educational year," said a teacher at a school in a Damascus refugee camp, using a term the government uses to describe its opponents.

"What happened is the opposite," she said. The fighting grew worse and rolled through the neighborhood and surrounding areas, sending more and more families to shelter in the schools.

Last week, Unicef, citing government estimates, said that of the country's 22,000 schools, at least 10 percent were damaged, destroyed or occupied by displaced families. In Homs, parents said that classes had started in only a few schools; in one private school, the families living there simply moved to an

upper floor. In the Damascus suburb of Barza, one or two schools took students in shifts, to make up for all the schools that were closed.

Different challenges faced Syrians who had fled the country, including to Lebanon, where officials are struggling with a vexing issue: how to teach Syrian students, accustomed to classes in Arabic, in Lebanese schools where science and math classes are taught in English or French.

"When you ask young people about school, they say they're afraid of the language," said Soha Boustani, a spokeswoman for Unicef. Last year, she said, the dropout rate for seventh-, eighth- and ninth-grade Syrian students in Lebanese schools was 70 percent, with the language barriers being a major cause.

Syrian students also face discrimination, from Lebanese teachers and students, and resentment from local residents in impoverished parts of the country where the school system is already overburdened.

The United Nations envoy to Syria, Lakhdar Brahimi, visited Syrian refugee camps in Turkey and Jordan on Tuesday, and was quickly given a taste of the anger brewing among the exiles. In the Zaatari camp, near Jordan's border with Syria, refugees angered that Mr. Brahimi had met with President Bashar al-Assad of Syria chanted, "By seeing Bashar, you've extended his life," according to The Associated Press. As Mr. Brahimi's entourage left the camp, teenagers pelted its cars with rocks.

The problems for many of the children start even before they register for school. "Some of them have seen dead bodies," said Miled Abou Jaoude, the emergency coordinator for Save the Children in Beirut. "There is a fear of warplanes. Some families are living in one room, with the father unemployed, which can create domestic violence."

At a registration center for the refugees in the Lebanese city of Baalbek on Tuesday, Thaer al-Ghawi, a teacher who fled the Damascus suburbs 10 days ago, fretted about the transition for his four children, who had been top students back home. "Everything is good in Syria, except language instruction," he said.

Aid officials said that the Lebanese government recently directed the schools to accept the Syrian students. The United Nations Refugee Agency and nongovernmental groups are trying to rehabilitate schools to prepare them for more students, especially in low-income areas where repairs were badly needed.

Schools in Syria face a much steeper challenge. In Qaboun, an opposition stronghold outside Damascus that has had fierce fighting, a teacher said his school opened under orders from the Education Ministry: teachers were told to show up, whether the students came or not.

"They wanted to show the situation is as normal as any year," said the teacher, who, like others, requested anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to the news media.

About 100 students returned Sunday, when classes began, to a school where there were once 50 students in each classroom. "Most of the families left Qaboun," the teacher said, adding that many of his colleagues had not shown up for work because they lived in other areas besieged by violence.

At a school in the Yarmouk Palestinian refugee camp, a 13-year-old boy scolded administrators for planning to remove displaced families to comply with the order to open schools, a teacher there said on Tuesday. "To be honest, I cried when I heard those words," the teacher said.

The crisis has not spared the country's elites, including government officials who used to send their children to private and international schools outside of Damascus.

"I decided to send my son to the state-run school instead," one father said. "I think that this year, Syrian students will not get a good education."

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Rebels Are Said to Defeat Syrian Forces in Battle for Border Post

September 19, 2012

New York Times

By SEBNEM ARSU and ALAN COWELL

ISTANBUL — For the second time in a week, the bloody civil war in Syria spilled across border areas on Wednesday as rebel forces reportedly expelled government troops from a northern frontier crossing in an apparent expansion of their effort to control infiltration and resupply routes in the campaign to overthrow President Bashar al-Assad.

Turkish schools in the region were closed for the day after intense overnight clashes as the rebels attacked the Syrian frontier post at Tal Abyad, south of the Turkish town of Sanliurfa, according to the semiofficial Anatolian News Agency.

Television footage on Wednesday appeared to show members of the insurgent Free Syrian Army standing on the rooftop and hauling down the Syrian flag at the Tal Abyad customs post, which is less than a mile from Turkey's Akcakale crossing.

The rebels were also reported to have fired into the air and torn down posters of Mr. Assad to celebrate what news reports described as their first capture of a frontier post in the northern Raqqqa province.

The Associated Press said Turkish video showed smoke rising from a small explosion atop of four-floor customs house, and added that three people in Turkey had been hit by stray bullets from the fighting.

The rebel action enabled Syrian citizens, trapped by earlier fighting and fleeing other towns further from the border, to pour into Turkey, The A.P. said, joining tens of thousands of others who have already fled into this country.

The United Nations refugee agency in Geneva said this week that the number of people fleeing Syria had increased from 18,500 in June to 35,000 in July to 102,000 in August.

The exodus has pushed the number of Syrian refugees to more than a quarter of a million, the agency said. Of the total, Turkey has more than 78,000, including those who have registered or are awaiting registration. Many more refugees have not registered with the authorities.

Two days of fighting for the Tal Abyad crossing came two days after the rebels attacked soldiers near Syria's border with Lebanon and then fled into Lebanese territory, followed by helicopters and warplanes firing missiles. A Lebanese Army colonel, speaking on the condition of anonymity, said at the

time that missiles had landed in an area where the border is not clearly marked, but not inside Lebanon. He said warplanes and helicopters attacked rebel soldiers who had raided a checkpoint in the border area and killed four government soldiers.

The reported closure of schools in Turkey on Wednesday offered a counterpoint to official efforts in Syria to project an air of normalcy by ordering pupils back to class this week. But, with more than 2,000 school buildings destroyed or damaged in the fighting since March, 2011, and others taken over by rebels, teachers and pupils had "more pressing concerns" than turning up for class, a Syrian teacher said.

The latest fighting has inspired several recent accounts by human rights groups saying that civilians are increasingly caught in the fray. Amnesty International said on Wednesday that Syrian government forces had carried out indiscriminate air attacks and artillery strikes apparently intended to punish civilians perceived as sympathetic to the rebels.

A report by the organization, based on visits to areas of central Syria between Aug. 31 and Sept. 11, said that, while much international attention was focused on fighting for Damascus, the capital, and Aleppo, Syria's largest city and biggest commercial center, "indiscriminate air bombardments and artillery strikes by the Syrian Army are killing, maiming and terrorizing the residents of Jabal al-Zawiya and other parts of the Idlib and north Hama regions."

"Every day civilians are killed or injured in their homes, in the street, while running for cover or trying to shelter from the bombings. Hundreds have been killed or injured in recent weeks, many of them children, in indiscriminate attacks," amnesty International said.

In recent days, moreover, United Nations investigators and Human Rights Watch, based in New York, have also accused the rebels of misdoing.

In a report this week, Humans Rights Watch said armed opposition groups "have subjected detainees to ill-treatment and torture and committed extrajudicial or summary executions in Aleppo, Latakia, and Idlib."

But Sergio Pinheiro, the chairman of a United Nations human rights investigative panel, said the "crimes and abuses committed by antigovernment groups, though serious, did not reach the gravity, frequency and scale of those committed by the government forces and shabiha" pro-government militia.
(top)

SCA

Suicide Bomber In Afghanistan Strikes Minibus, Killing Mostly Foreign Workers

September 19, 2012

New York Times

By Rod Nordland And Sangar Rahimi

KABUL, Afghanistan - A suicide bomber killed 14 people on Tuesday, including 10 foreigners, most of whom worked as flight crew members under contract with the United States government, officials said. The attack brought to at least 28 the number of deaths attributed to unrest sweeping the Muslim world as a result of a video parodying the Prophet Muhammad.

A spokesman for an Afghan insurgent group, Hezb-i-Islami, claimed responsibility for the bombing and said it was carried out by an 18-year-old woman "in response to the film insulting the Prophet Muhammad and Islam."

The attack took place as word emerged that the American-led military coalition fighting the insurgents had sharply curtailed ground-level operations with the Afghan Army and police forces. The new limits were prompted by a spike in attacks on international troops by Afghan soldiers and police officers over the past six weeks. There was also fear that anger over the anti-Islam video could prompt such attacks, American officials said.

The deaths in Kabul on Tuesday were the first here so far connected to the video, and came as the authorities cracked down on attempted street demonstrations and asked Internet providers to block sites hosting a clip of the film, posted under the name "Innocence of Muslims," shutting down access to Google, YouTube and Gmail in the process.

Access to Google and Gmail in Afghanistan appeared to have been restored by Monday afternoon, though officials said YouTube remained blocked for most Internet users. Google, which owns YouTube, declined a White House request to remove the video, saying it did not violate Google's rules on hate speech. In Egypt, a radical cleric issued a fatwa calling for the killing of everyone involved in the video, according to a report posted on militants' Web sites.

In the attack on Tuesday, the suicide bomber drove a car full of explosives at high speed head-on into a minibus carrying foreign workers on Airport Road, killing all 12 people aboard and two people on the road, according to the police.

The United States Embassy said in a statement that many of the foreign victims were employees of a private company that provides services to the United States Agency for International Development and other organizations in Afghanistan. American officials said they had been employed by a South African aviation charter company, ACS/Balmoral, working under contract for USAID as pilots and crew flying planes in what is colloquially known as "Embassy Air" to provincial capitals in Afghanistan.

A spokeswoman for ACS/Balmoral, Candice Teubes, said the 10 foreign victims were all believed to be South African citizens.

The authorities in Afghanistan provided conflicting accounts. An aide to Gen. Mohammad Ayoub Salangi, the Kabul police chief, said at least six of the 10 dead foreigners were South Africans, five men and a woman; one was a Filipino; and the nationalities of the others were uncertain.

At least 28 people have been killed in six countries as a consequence of protests over the video since it was posted on YouTube in the days before Sept. 11. A Florida pastor, Terry Jones, whose small church had publicly staged burnings of the Koran last year, called attention to it in the United States, but it drew much wider scrutiny in the Muslim world after an Arabic language version began to circulate on the Web.

The film was produced in the United States, though its origins are still shrouded. American federal authorities identified the man behind the film as Nakoula Basseley Nakoula, 55. Though the film does not appear to violate any American laws, the authorities took Mr. Nakoula in for questioning on

Saturday over possible federal parole violations connected to an unrelated criminal conviction. That action has done little to tamp down the unrest.

The violence began on Sept. 11 when a mob attacked the American embassy in Cairo. The unrest quickly spread to Libya, where an attack on an American diplomatic mission in Benghazi claimed the lives of the American ambassador, J. Christopher Stevens, and three staff members. Protests at Western diplomatic posts in the ensuing days took one life in Egypt, three in Tunisia, one in Lebanon and five in Yemen. The United States sent Marines to Yemen and Sudan to protect embassies there.

SITE Intelligence Group, a monitoring agency that tracks militants' Internet postings, reported late Monday that a prominent Egyptian Salafist preacher, Ahmad Ashoush, had issued a fatwa, or religious edict, saying that "the killing of the director, producer, actors and everyone else involved in the film is mandatory."

The fatwa was posted on militant online forums on Sunday, SITE said.

The branch of Hezb-i-Islami that claimed responsibility for the Kabul bombing is an extremist faction headed by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, which fights against both the Taliban and the Afghan government. A moderate branch of the group has prominent members in the government, and Hezb-i-Islami has been seen as the insurgent group most likely to enter peace talks with the government.

The explosion took place on a road leading from the civilian entrance to the airport toward northern Kabul, near three adjacent wedding halls. The victims' vehicle appeared to have been heading toward the airport.

A street vendor, Abdul Rahim, 40, who was 150 yards from the scene, said he saw the suicide bomber drive into the minibus on a narrow access lane that was part of Airport Road, a broad boulevard where the lanes are separated by concrete barriers. As the vehicles collided, the bomb went off with such force that both were flung into the air, ending up 100 yards away from each other, he said.

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WHA/EUR

AP Photographer Beaten, Detained In Belarus

September 19, 2012

Associated Press

MINSK, Belarus - An Associated Press photographer was beaten and briefly detained Tuesday by plainclothes security officers in the Belarusian capital.

Sergei Grits was among eight journalists covering a protest by four opposition activists calling for a boycott of this weekend's parliamentary election when plainclothes security officers attacked them in downtown Minsk.

Grits said one of the men grabbed him by the neck from behind while another punched him in the eye, breaking his glasses and leaving a gash. They then pushed the journalists into a van without license plates and drove them to a police station, where they were held for two hours before being released without charges or explanation, Grits said. Police tried to delete images from their cameras, but some managed to save them.

"Such violence by police against a journalist peacefully going about his work is unacceptable and must be protested in the strongest possible terms," said John Daniszewski, AP's senior managing editor for international news. "We demand that the Belarus authorities look into the matter and take appropriate actions against the individuals involved."

Minsk police spokesman Alexander Lastovsky said he could not comment on the incident.

Belarusian authorities have shown little tolerance for dissent and media freedom under President Alexander Lukashenko, who has ruled the ex-Soviet nation of 10 million people since 1994. The United States and the European Union have imposed economic and travel sanctions on Lukashenko's government over its crackdown on opposition groups and independent news media.

The opposition activists who participated in Tuesday's picket have remained in custody, according to Valentin Stefanovich of Vyasna rights group.

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French Prime Minister Says Won't Be Intimidated, Won't Allow New Protest Against Prophet Film
September 19, 2012

[Associated Press](#)

PARIS - France's prime minister says a planned demonstration by people angry over a film produced in the United States that insults the Prophet Muhammad won't be allowed to go ahead.

Jean-Marc Ayrault says organizers of the planned demonstration Saturday against the film "Innocence of Muslims" won't receive police authorization for the protest.

Ayrault told French radio RTL on Wednesday that "there's no reason for us to let a conflict that doesn't concern France come into our country. We are a republic that has no intention of being intimidated by anyone."

A wave of protest has swept some Muslim countries over the amateurish video posted online. The total number of deaths linked to unrest over the film is at least 28.

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Turkish Public Sours On Syrian Uprising

September 19, 2012

[New York Times](#)

By Tim Arango

ISTANBUL - As the war in Syria rages next door, Turks have grown increasingly weary of nearly daily reports of troubles at home: Iranian spies working with Kurdish insurgents, soldiers ambushed and killed, millions spent caring for a flood of refugees, lost trade and havoc in border villages.

"This is how we start our morning," Mehmet Krasuleymanoglu, a bookseller in a narrow alley in central Istanbul, said recently as he laid out several newspapers, each with a blaring headline about an explosion at a munitions depot that killed more than two dozen soldiers. The government called it an accident, but in the current environment, many Turks, including Mr. Krasuleymanoglu, are not so sure.

"What do we have to do with Syria?" he said. "The prime minister and his wife used to go there for tea and coffee."

The Turkish government is facing a spasm of reproach from its own people over its policy of supporting Syria's uprising; hosting fighters in the south, opposition figures in Istanbul and refugees on the border; and helping to ferry arms to the opposition. While many Turks at first supported the policy as a stand for democracy and change, many now believe that it is leading to instability at home, undermining Turkey's own economy and security.

Turkey's call for military intervention, which much of the international community opposes, has only added to the domestic frustration. Now, in the wake of the anti-American protests that have convulsed the Muslim world in reaction to a film that denigrated Islam, it seems less likely that Turkey will find partners in the West to join its call for military action in Syria.

The souring mood presents the first obvious setback for the foreign policy of Turkey's prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who has ridden the turmoil of the Arab Spring to promote Turkey's influence abroad and his standing at home.

Suddenly, Turkey appears vulnerable on multiple fronts.

"A lot of Turks are seeing this as a direct result of Turkey's aggressive posture against Assad," said Soner Cagaptay, the director of the Turkish Research Program at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, referring to the Syrian president, Bashar al-Assad.

In the face of criticism from columnists and opposition politicians, and signs of rising public opposition to its Syria policy, the country is being compelled to reassess its overall strategy for spreading its influence and interests across the Middle East, including Egypt, Iraq and Iran. Increasingly frustrated with its efforts to join the European Union, Turkey turned noticeably toward regaining and elevating its standing in the Muslim world, especially amid the chaos and reordering of alliances caused by the Arab Spring.

"Turkey's Syria policy has failed," wrote Dogan Heper, a columnist for the newspaper Milliyet. "It has turned our neighbors into enemies. We have been left alone in the world."

Selcuk Unal, the spokesman for Turkey's Foreign Ministry, acknowledged that the Syria policy had become a domestic policy issue. Even though it may not be popular, he said, "that doesn't mean it is wrong."

"I don't think we are wrong so far," Mr. Unal said. "Turkey is on the right side of history on this."

Before the Arab uprisings, economic and political engagement with Syria was a centerpiece of Turkey's regional strategy, which some described as an effort to integrate the Middle East along the lines of the European Union. Visa restrictions were lifted and trade increased. Mr. Erdogan and Mr. Assad even vacationed together. Initially, Turkey urged dialogue and reform in Syria, but as the killing increased, Turkey turned against the government.

That shift was part of its broader regional strategy. Last year Prime Minister Erdogan toured Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, offering Turkey's support for the democratic aspirations of the Arab world's revolutionaries, and holding up Turkey's mix of Islam, democracy and economic prosperity as an inspiration for those countries in turmoil.

Turkey, it seemed, was ascendant, and the public was largely supportive.

"We loved it," said Soli Ozel, an academic and columnist. "It was like, we're back. The empire is back."

Perhaps causing the greatest unease for Turks these days is an increase in violence by Turkey's separatist Kurdistan Workers Party, or P.K.K., which seems emboldened by the success of Syria's Kurds in gaining territory. The P.K.K. has waged an insurgency against Turkey since the 1980s in a conflict that has claimed an estimated 40,000 lives.

More than 700 people have died in the past 14 months, the deadliest level in 13 years, according to a report published last week by the International Crisis Group. The P.K.K. has now set up daylight checkpoints in villages in the southeast, carried out deadly ambushes against Turkish forces and kidnapped lawmakers. Recently, the Turkish military carried out an offensive involving F-16 fighter jets and 2,000 soldiers, Reuters reported.

The Assad government has effectively ceded some territory near the Turkish border to Syria's Kurds, who have not joined the opposition in large numbers. These gains have fanned the flames of Kurds' historical ambitions for an independent state that would include Kurdish areas in Syria, Iraq, Turkey and Iran, analysts say.

"There has been a thunderbolt in the minds of people there," said Sezgin Tanrikulu, a Kurdish member of Turkey's Parliament, referring to Kurdish areas in southeast Turkey. P.K.K. fighters have become more visible, he said. "They are trying to create the idea among Kurds there that the authority in the area is the P.K.K."

An influx of refugees - more than 100,000 Syrians have sought safety in Turkey - has tested government resources and raised tensions in border areas, prompting the Turkish government to try to relocate refugees further inland. The government has said it has spent \$300 million providing for refugees and has complained of a lack of support from the international community.

According to Mr. Cagaptay of the Turkish Research Program, Turkey remains "the only country that is economically and politically stable in the region." Turkey's ambitious Middle East policy has been centered on Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu's much-heralded vision of "no problems" with neighbors. But that approach has stalled amid the hard realities of the region and the limits of Turkish power, most evident in its policy in Syria, where nearly 23,000 people have been killed and the Assad government clings to power. Now the joke is that there are "no neighbors without problems."

Last year Mr. Davutoglu spoke expansively about a political, economic and military alliance with Egypt that could serve as a linchpin of a new regional order. Almost nothing has come of that, although a spokesman for Mr. Davutoglu said Turkey would soon begin a high-level dialogue with the government of Mohamed Morsi, Egypt's new president, who was a member of the Sunni Islamist Muslim Brotherhood.

Now, the talk is more about a rivalry between Egypt and Turkey over which will become the region's power broker.

"Egypt will try to restore its central role in Arab affairs, and it will be interesting to see Morsi and Erdogan compete for influence in the region," Mr. Cagaptay said.

Mr. Ozel, the columnist, was more emphatic. "The fact of the matter is that when all is said and done, Turks are Turks and Arabs are Arabs," he said. "Egypt believes it is the crown jewel of the Arab world, and it will not share the spotlight with anyone, including Turks."

Analysts say Turkey has hardened sectarian divisions in the region by working with Saudi Arabia and Qatar in backing Syria's Sunni rebels against Mr. Assad's Alawite sect, an offshoot of Shiite Islam, and by supporting Sunnis in Iraq against the government of Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki, a Shiite. And tensions with Iran, the region's largest Shiite power, have been heightened since Turkey agreed to allow NATO to place a radar station on its territory as part of a missile defense system.

To its credit, analysts say, Turkey will quickly shift from policies it deems mistaken. For example, it opposed NATO intervention in Libya and then swiftly changed tack.

But it may be too late to change course on Syria. "They are stuck in this conflict so deeply, there is no way out," said Mr. Tanrikulu, the Kurdish lawmaker.

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New Strike Shows Fray Worsening Between Turks, Kurds

September 19, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By JOE PARKINSON and AYLALBAYRAK

ISTANBUL—At least 10 Turkish soldiers were killed and more than 70 were wounded in a rocket attack by Kurdish militants in Turkey's eastern province of Bingol, government officials said, in the latest of a series of brazen attacks on Turkey's security forces that underline how the region's three-decade-old conflict is deepening.

A Turkish military convoy of some 200 soldiers, riding in three buses and accompanied by armored vehicles, was hit by rockets fired by members of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, at around noon local time Tuesday, according to officials in Bingol governorate.

Ten soldiers were killed in the resulting explosion. Scores of wounded were ferried to nearby hospitals for treatment, some in critical condition, the officials said. Turkish television showed the smoldering carcass of a bus that had been mangled and charred by the strike.

"The rocket was launched far from the convoy by the militants. According to our information, this was an attack by the PKK," a governorate spokesman said. Kurdish news sources considered close to the PKK also reported that the group was responsible for the attack.

Turkish forces had already launched a "major operation" in response to the ambush, including deploying attack helicopters, to root out militants in the area, the Bingol governorate spokesman added.

Underlining Ankara's growing concern over the frequency and severity of PKK attacks, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan called an extraordinary meeting with Chief of the General Staff Necdet Ozel in Ankara on Tuesday evening.

The past few months have seen some of the heaviest fighting since the PKK—considered a terrorist organization by Turkey, the U.S. and the European Union—took up arms in 1984 with the aim of carving

out a Kurdish state. The conflict has cost some 40,000 lives. The PKK subsequently scaled back its demands, saying it is fighting for Kurdish autonomy rather than secession from Turkey.

More than 700 people have been killed since a parliamentary election in June 2011, according to a report from the International Crisis Group this month, making this the deadliest period since the capture of PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan in 1999.

Mr. Erdogan appeared to suggest on Monday that the number could be higher, announcing that some 500 PKK militants had been "rendered ineffective"—meaning killed, wounded or captured—in the past month alone.

Intensifying violence across Turkey's predominantly Kurdish southeast could lead to a replay of the 1990s, analysts have cautioned. Then, a primarily military response from Ankara failed to quell the insurgency and aggravated poverty and grievances among Turkey's estimated 12 million to 15 million Kurds.

Turkish ministers have repeatedly linked this year's dramatic upswing in PKK attacks to Turkey's efforts to topple Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, alleging that Damascus is providing arms and logistical support to boost the rebels' capabilities, a charge Syria's government has denied.

In recent weeks, Ankara has reinforced its southern border with Syria's predominantly Kurdish northeast and staged military exercises after Damascus appeared to cede control of swaths of that region to the Democratic Union Party of Syria, which Ankara alleges is closely linked to the PKK.

"It seems clear that the number of casualties has spiked in tandem with Turkey's Syria policy. Up until August [2011], Turkey was with Assad but then they turned against him and violence began rising. There's a direct correlation between Turkey's Syria policy and these attacks," said Soner Cagaptay, director of the Turkish Research Program at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

Turkey's political backdrop is also increasingly polarized. Kurdish activists have bitterly protested against the detention of some 8,000 Kurds—including journalists, lawyers and politicians—as part of a case into a shadowy umbrella Kurdish organization.

On Tuesday, Sebahat Tuncel, a deputy from Turkey's Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party, or BDP, was sentenced to eight years in prison for being a member of the PKK, although parliamentary immunity means she won't immediately face jail.

Last month, Turks were outraged when members of the BDP were filmed hugging armed PKK rebels at a remote roadblock in Turkey's mountainous southeast, leading Prime Minister Erdogan to float the prospect of withdrawing lawmakers' immunity.

The atmosphere of deepening political animosity has dovetailed with increasingly brazen attacks from PKK militants in recent weeks.

The group appeared to shift tactics from their hallmark hit-and-run attacks last month, when more than 100 militants poured into the town of Semdinli, close to Turkey's border with Iran, fighting Turkish forces for almost three weeks in an effort to set up a stronghold. They were cleared out by heavy

Turkish reinforcements, who killed a "large number" of them, according to local government officials. The group has also set up roadblocks and kidnapped Turkish officials.

On Sunday, eight police officers were killed by a roadside bomb in a different region of Bingol province. On Saturday, suspected PKK fighters killed four Turkish soldiers in an attack on a convoy near Turkey's far eastern border with Iran and Iraq.

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FOREIGN POLICY

Race Is On As Ice Melt Reveals Arctic Treasures

September 19, 2012

[New York Times](#)

By Elisabeth Rosenthal

NUUK, Greenland - With Arctic ice melting at record pace, the world's superpowers are increasingly jockeying for political influence and economic position in outposts like this one, previously regarded as barren wastelands.

At stake are the Arctic's abundant supplies of oil, gas and minerals that are, thanks to climate change, becoming newly accessible along with increasingly navigable polar shipping shortcuts. This year, China has become a far more aggressive player in this frigid field, experts say, provoking alarm among Western powers.

While the United States, Russia and several nations of the European Union have Arctic territory, China has none, and as a result, has been deploying its wealth and diplomatic clout to secure toeholds in the region.

"The Arctic has risen rapidly on China's foreign policy agenda in the past two years," said Linda Jakobson, East Asia program director at the Lowy Institute for International Policy in Sydney, Australia. So, she said, the Chinese are exploring "how they could get involved."

In August, China sent its first ship across the Arctic to Europe and it is lobbying intensely for permanent observer status on the Arctic Council, the loose international body of eight Arctic nations that develops policy for the region, arguing that it is a "near Arctic state" and proclaiming that the Arctic is "the inherited wealth of all humankind," in the words of China's State Oceanic Administration.

To promote the council bid and improve relations with Arctic nations, its ministers visited Denmark, Sweden and Iceland this summer, offering lucrative trade deals. High-level diplomats have also visited Greenland, where Chinese companies are investing in a developing mining industry, with proposals to import Chinese work crews for construction.

Western nations have been particularly anxious about Chinese overtures to this poor and sparsely populated island, a self-governing state within the Kingdom of Denmark, because the retreat of its ice cap has unveiled coveted mineral deposits, including rare earth metals that are crucial for new technologies like cellphones and military guidance systems. A European Union vice president, Antonio Tajani, rushed here to Greenland's capital in June, offering hundreds of millions in development aid in exchange for guarantees that Greenland would not give China exclusive access to its rare earth metals, calling his trip "raw mineral diplomacy."

Greenland is close to North America, and home to the United States Air Force's northernmost base in Thule. At a conference last month, Thomas R. Nides, deputy secretary of state for management and resources, said the Arctic was becoming "a new frontier in our foreign policy."

In the past 18 months, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and President Lee Myung-bak of South Korea have made debut visits here, and Greenland's prime minister, Kuupik Kleist, was welcomed by President José Manuel Barroso of the European Commission in Brussels.

"We are treated so differently than just a few years ago," said Jens B. Frederiksen, Greenland's vice premier, in his simple office here. "We are aware that is because we now have something to offer, not because they've suddenly discovered that Inuit are nice people."

Chinese activity in the Arctic to some extent mirrors that of other non-Arctic countries, as the region warms.

The European Union, Japan and South Korea have also applied in the last three years for permanent observer status at the Arctic Council, which would allow them to present their perspective, but not vote.

This once-obscure body, previously focused on issues like monitoring Arctic animal populations, now has more substantive tasks, like defining future port fees and negotiating agreements on oil spill remediation. "We've changed from a forum to a decision-making body," said Gustaf Lind, Arctic ambassador from Sweden and the council's current chairman.

But China sees its inclusion "as imperative so that it won't be shut out from decisions on minerals and shipping," said Dr. Jakobson, who is also an Arctic researcher at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. China's economy is heavily dependent on exports, and the polar route saves time, distance and money to and from elsewhere in Asia and Europe, compared with traversing the Suez Canal.

So far there has been little actual exploitation of Arctic resources. Greenland has only one working mine, though more than 100 new sites are being mapped out. Here, as well as in Alaska, Canada and Norway, oil and gas companies are still largely exploring, although experts estimate that more than 20 percent of the world's oil and gas reserves are in the Arctic. Warmer weather has already extended the work season by a month in many locations, making access easier.

At one point this summer, 97 percent of the surface of Greenland's massive ice sheet was melting. At current rates, Arctic waters could be ice-free in summer by the end of the decade, scientists say.

"Things are happening much faster than what any scientific model predicted," said Dr. Morten Rasch, who runs the Greenland Ecosystem Monitoring program at Aarhus University in Denmark.

Ownership of the Arctic is governed by the United Nations Convention of the Law of the Sea, which gives Arctic nations an exclusive economic zone that extends 200 nautical miles from land, and to undersea resources farther away so long as they are on a continental shelf. The far northern Arctic Ocean belongs to no country, and conditions there are severe. In a place where exact boundaries were never much of a concern, haggling over borders has begun among the primary nations - between Canada and Denmark, and the United States and Canada, for example.

The United States has been hampered in the current jockeying because the Senate has refused to ratify the Convention of the Law of the Sea, even though both the Bush and Obama administrations have strongly supported doing so. This means the United States has not been able to formally stake out its underwater boundaries. "We are being left behind," Deputy Secretary Nides said.

But experts say boundary disputes are likely to be rapidly resolved through negotiation, so that everyone can get on with the business of making money. There is "very little room for a race to grab territory, since most of the resources are in an area that is clearly carved up already," said Kristofer Bergh, a researcher at the Stockholm Institute.

Even so, Arctic nations and NATO are building up military capabilities in the region, as a precaution. That has left China with little choice but to garner influence through a strategy that has worked well in Africa and Latin America: investing and joining with local companies and financing good works to earn good will. Its scientists have become pillars of multinational Arctic research, and their icebreaker has been used in joint expeditions.

And Chinese companies, some with close government ties, are investing heavily across the Arctic. In Canada, Chinese firms have acquired interests in two oil companies that could afford them access to Arctic drilling. During a June visit to Iceland, Premier Wen Jiabao of China signed a number of economic agreements, covering areas like geothermal energy and free trade.

In Greenland, large Chinese companies are financing the development of mines that are being developed around discoveries of gems or minerals by small prospecting companies, said Soren Meisling, head of the China desk at the Bech Bruun law firm in Copenhagen, which represents many of them. A huge iron ore mine under development near Nuuk, for example, is owned by a British company but financed in part by a Chinese steel maker.

Chinese mining companies have proved adept at working in challenging locales and have even proposed building runways for jumbo jets on the ice in Greenland's far north to fly out minerals until the ice melts enough for shipping.

"There is already a sense of competition in the Arctic, and they think they can have first advantage," said Jingjing Su, a lawyer in Bech Bruun's China practice.

The efforts have clear political backing. Greenland's minister for industry and mineral resources was greeted by Vice Premier Li Keqiang in China last November. A few months later, China's minister of land and resources, Xu Shaoshi, traveled to Greenland to sign cooperation agreements.

Western analysts have worried that China could leverage its wealth, particularly in some of the cash-poor corners of the Arctic like Greenland and Iceland.

But Chinese officials have cast their motives in more generous terms. "China's activities are for the purposes of regular environmental investigation and investment and have nothing to do with resource plundering and strategic control," the state-controlled Xinhua news agency wrote this year.

Michael Byers, a professor of politics and law at the University of British Columbia, said the Chinese were unlikely to overstep their rights in a region populated by NATO members. "Despite the concerns I

have about Chinese foreign policy in other parts of the world, in the Arctic it is behaving responsibly," he said. "They just want to make money."

Next February, the Arctic Council is scheduled to choose the countries that will be granted permanent observer status, which requires unanimity vote. Though Iceland, Denmark and Sweden now openly support China's bid, the United States State Department, contacted for comment, declined to say how it would vote.

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U.S. Official Says Cyberattacks Can Trigger Self-Defense Rule

September 19, 2012

[Washington Post](#)

By Ellen Nakashima

Cyberattacks can amount to armed attacks triggering the right of self defense and are subject to international laws of war, the State Department's top lawyer said Tuesday.

Spelling out the U.S. government's position on the rules governing cyberwarfare, Harold Koh, the department's legal adviser, said that cyber operations that result in death, injury or significant destruction would likely be viewed as a use of force in violation of international law.

In the United States' view, any illegal use of force potentially triggers the right of national self-defense, Koh said.

Cyberattacks that cause a nuclear plant meltdown, open a dam above a populated area or disable an air traffic control system resulting in airplane crashes are examples of activity that likely would constitute an illegal use of force, he said.

Koh, speaking at a conference hosted by U.S. Cyber Command at Fort Meade, laid out 10 principles that he said the United States adopted and has shared with other countries through the United Nations. The points include the position that international law applies in cyberspace, a view that not all countries accept. At least one country, he noted in an apparent reference to China, has questioned this principle.

"Cyberspace is not a 'law-free' zone where anyone can conduct hostile activities without rules or restraint," said Koh, a former dean of Yale Law School and respected voice in the international law community.

Though the White House and Defense Department have issued cyber-strategies that made clear the United States abides by international law in the cyber-realm, Koh's speech marked the first time a senior legal official publicly addressed the topic in such explicit terms.

He said the right of self-defense potentially applies against any illegal use of force. "In our view, there is no threshold for a use of deadly force to qualify as a 'armed attack' that may warrant a forcible response," he said. He noted that some nations view an "armed attack" as having a higher threshold to cross before the right of self-defense is triggered.

Koh also said that in responding to an attack, the action need not be taken in cyberspace, but it must still be a necessary action and one that is proportionate - avoiding harm to civilians.

He said that compliance with international law in cyberspace is part of a broader "smart power" approach to international law as part of U.S. foreign policy. "We see law not as a straitjacket, but as ... a body of 'wise restraints' that make us free."

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EDITORIAL / OPINION

Bush: Suu Kyi's Long Journey to Freedom

September 19, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By LAURA W. BUSH

On Wednesday, Burmese opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi will enter the U.S. Capitol. She will pass by statues honoring many of our nation's defenders of freedom and liberty and make her way to the soaring rotunda, where she will receive the Congressional Gold Medal, one of the two highest civilian awards given by the United States. It is a journey that many never expected her to make. Ms. Suu Kyi's life and story are powerful reminders of why we must not give up on the causes of freedom and liberty.

In May of 2008, when my husband, President Bush, signed the legislation awarding her medal, Ms. Suu Kyi was living under house arrest inside Burma. Her crime? She had led a democratic opposition party against the ruling military junta and had the courage to stand for parliamentary elections in 1990, when her National League for Democracy won in a landslide.

She spent much of the next two decades under various forms of house arrest or restricted movement. Repeatedly denied the most basic rights of free speech and free assembly, she also was forcibly separated from her children and her husband. The ruling Burmese junta even blocked her cancer-stricken husband from seeing her before he died. She missed valuable years of her sons' lives.

Yet through it all, Ms. Suu Kyi never wavered in her belief that Burma deserved a democratic process, where all voices might be heard. For more than two decades, she has remained a valiant and steadfast voice for freedom and for the Burmese people.

Ms. Suu Kyi has long had many international supporters who both publicly and quietly pressed Burma's ruling junta for her release. She was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991. Over the past decade, I and others took our support public, hoping that greater public pressure might convince the country's rulers to relent.

They did not, and some observers began to question whether the cause of freedom in Burma was lost. After tens of thousands of Buddhist monks peacefully protested during the 2007 Saffron Revolution, the ruling junta unleashed harsh beatings on the protesters and doubled the number of political prisoners to 2,100, according to Human Rights Watch. Later Ms. Suu Kyi was subjected to a show trial on the pretext that a Westerner had illegally visited her. But she never faltered. To the foreign diplomats allowed brief glimpses of her trial, her words were, "I hope to meet you in better times."

The light of hope was never fully extinguished inside Burma. In 2007 and 2008, President Bush expanded economic and financial sanctions against the Burmese regime, curtailing imports and exports and restricting the ruling junta's access to wealth, including blocking imports of Burmese rubies and jade in which they trafficked. These sanctions were continued by President Obama.

Thanks to the U.S.-funded Radio Free Asia and the BBC, the people of Burma knew that they were not forgotten. Like the Cold War dissidents in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, they could draw strength from every mention of their plight and every expression of faith in their cause and in their future. By August 2011, the political dam had burst, and Burma began to reform.

Today, Ms. Suu Kyi is a member of Burma's parliament and a leading voice for democratic values and reform in her country. The reforms in Burma are still fragile, but with each day they are harder to turn back. The cause that so many once thought hopeless is now full of promise.

Ms. Suu Kyi's story is one of the great stories of our time. She spoke via Skype last May at the launch of the George W. Bush Institute's Freedom Collection. In the audience was Rev. Bob Fu, a leader of the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests, who now lives in exile in Midland, Texas, and labors on behalf of dissidents and religious prisoners in China. As Ms. Suu Kyi talked of never giving up, tears ran down Bob's face. He and other Chinese human-rights defenders have long looked upon Ms. Suu Kyi as an inspiration. And now their inspiration is free.

The next generation of Aung San Suu Kyis is out there, working and sacrificing for freedom. As she receives the Congressional Gold Medal Wednesday afternoon, they will be watching and listening. They will hear of freedom's enduring support—and they, too, will have hope.

Mrs. Bush is former first lady of the United States.
(top)

Look In Your Mirror

September 19, 2012

New York Times

By Thomas L. Friedman

On Monday, David D. Kirkpatrick, the Cairo bureau chief for The Times, quoted one of the Egyptian demonstrators outside the American Embassy, Khaled Ali, as justifying last week's violent protests by declaring: "We never insult any prophet - not Moses, not Jesus - so why can't we demand that Muhammad be respected?" Mr. Ali, a 39-year-old textile worker, was holding up a handwritten sign in English that read: "Shut Up America." "Obama is the president, so he should have to apologize!"

I read several such comments from the rioters in the press last week, and I have big problem with them. I don't like to see anyone's faith insulted, but we need to make two things very clear - more clear than President Obama's team has made them. One is that an insult - even one as stupid and ugly as the anti-Islam video on YouTube that started all of this - does not entitle people to go out and attack embassies and kill innocent diplomats. That is not how a proper self-governing people behave. There is no excuse for it. It is shameful. And, second, before demanding an apology from our president, Mr. Ali and the young Egyptians, Tunisians, Libyans, Yemenis, Pakistanis, Afghans and Sudanese who have been taking to the streets might want to look in the mirror - or just turn on their own televisions. They might want to look at the chauvinistic bile that is pumped out by some of their own media - on satellite television stations and Web sites or sold in sidewalk bookstores outside of mosques - insulting Shiites, Jews, Christians, Sufis and anyone else who is not a Sunni, or fundamentalist, Muslim. There are people in their countries for whom hating "the other" has become a source of identity and a collective excuse for failing to realize their own potential.

The Middle East Media Research Institute, or Memri, was founded in 1998 in Washington, by Yigal Carmon, a former Israeli government adviser on counterterrorism, "to bridge the language gap between the Middle East and the West by monitoring, translating and studying Arab, Iranian, Urdu and Pashtu media, schoolbooks, and religious sermons." What I respect about Memri is that it translates not only the ugly stuff but the courageous liberal, reformist Arab commentators as well. I asked Memri for a sampler of the hate-filled videos that appear regularly on Arab/Muslim mass media. Here are some:

ON CHRISTIANS Hasan Rahimpur Azghadi of the Iranian Supreme Council for Cultural Revolution: Christianity is "a reeking corpse, on which you have to constantly pour eau de cologne and perfume, and wash it in order to keep it clean." <http://www.memritv.org/clip/en/1528.htm> - July 20, 2007.

Sheik Al-Khatib al-Baghdadi: It is permissible to spill the blood of the Iraqi Christians - and a duty to wage jihad against them. <http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/5200.htm> - April 14, 2011.

Abd al-Aziz Fawzan al-Fawzan, a Saudi professor of Islamic law, calls for "positive hatred" of Christians. Al-Majd TV (Saudi Arabia) <http://www.memritv.org/clip/en/992.htm> - Dec. 16, 2005.

ON SHIITES The Egyptian Cleric Muhammad Hussein Yaaqub: "Muslim Brotherhood Presidential Candidate Mohamed Morsi told me that the Shiites are more dangerous to Islam than the Jews." www.memritv.org/clip/en/3466.htm - June 13, 2012.

The Egyptian Cleric Mazen al-Sirsawi: "If Allah had not created the Shiites as human beings, they would have been donkeys" <http://www.memritv.org/clip/en/3101.htm> - Aug. 7, 2011.

The Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan video series: "The Shiite is a Nasl [Race/Offspring] of Jews." <http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/51/6208.htm> - March 21, 2012.

ON JEWS Article on the Muslim Brotherhood's Web site praises jihad against America and the Jews: "The Descendants of Apes and Pigs." <http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/51/6656.htm> - Sept. 7, 2012.

The Pakistani cleric Muhammad Raza Saqib Mustafai: "When the Jews are wiped out, the world would be purified and the sun of peace would rise on the entire world." <http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/51/6557.htm> - Aug. 1, 2012.

Dr. Ismail Ali Muhammad, a senior Al-Azhar scholar: The Jews, "a source of evil and harm in all human societies." <http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/51/6086.htm> - Feb. 14, 2012.

ON SUFIS A shrine venerating a Sufi Muslim saint in Libya has been partly destroyed, the latest in a series of attacks blamed on ultraconservative Salafi Islamists. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-19380083> - Aug. 26, 2012.

As a Jew who has lived and worked in the Muslim world, I know that these expressions of intolerance are only one side of the story and that there are deeply tolerant views and strains of Islam espoused and practiced there as well. Theirs are complex societies.

That's the point. America is a complex society, too. But let's cut the nonsense that this is just our problem and the only issue is how we clean up our act. That Cairo protester is right: We should respect

the faiths and prophets of others. But that runs both ways. Our president and major newspapers consistently condemn hate speech against other religions. How about yours?
([top](#))

America's Gift to Jihadi Publicists

September 19, 2012

[Wall Street Journal](#)

By ANNE JOLIS

The U.S. government has spent the past week declaring that while violence in response to speech is officially condemnable, so too is certain speech. Specifically, a 14-minute Internet video mocking Islam is, according to various Obama administration officials, "reprehensible," "disgusting" and "very hateful, very offensive." So bad, it apparently led to the deaths of four Americans in Benghazi last week and to the mobbing, storming and torching of U.S. facilities in several Muslim countries since then.

The idea that rocket-propelled grenades are to be expected when Muslims are insulted is, to quote Libyan President Mohamed Al-Magariief on NPR this weekend, "completely unfounded and preposterous." But at least terrorist spinmeisters are flattering the White House's version of reality. This morning a suicide bomber drove a car loaded with explosives into an American aviation firm's minivan in Kabul. The blast killed several Afghan civilians and eight South African contractors. As of June 30 this year, 1,173 contractors had been killed in Afghanistan since September 2001, according to the U.S. Department of Labor.

Hezb-e-Islami, an old anti-Soviet Islamist militia that has intermittently rivalled and allied itself with Taliban insurgents, claimed responsibility for the Kabul bombing. The group is led by warlord and former Prime Minister Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, who the U.S. designates a "global terrorist" (not a movie critic) and who, per his own past press statements, supported Osama bin Laden.

For this spin cycle though, it all comes down to the movie. "The anti-Islam film hurt our religious sentiments and we cannot tolerate it," Haroon Zarghoon, a spokesman for Hezb-e-Islami, told the Associated Press on Tuesday. He said the attack was carried out by a 22-year-old woman and added that "we wanted to give a chance to a girl for the attack to tell the world we cannot ignore any anti-Islam attack."

The Taliban is also on board with the new line. In an English statement on Wednesday, it denounced the video as an "insult towards the great Prophet of Islam," and instructed that "the Mujahideen in Afghanistan should avenge these actions of the American government by dealing a heavy blow to its invading troops on the battlefield."

It's unclear how that would deviate from their pre-video efforts. But why shouldn't terrorists join in the media blitz? American foreign affairs haven't gotten much press lately, beyond the death of bin Laden and the timeliness of Mitt Romney's commentaries. The 14-minute video clip, on the other hand, is a world-famous, hateful assault on Muslims, per the U.S. government, and a grave threat to American security. That's more attention than workaday jihadis have gotten in months.

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An Election-Year Ploy: Get Tough On China

September 19, 2012

[Washington Post](#)

IT'S AN IRON LAW of U.S. politics: You can't go wrong bashing China. Polls show the public believes that this country is losing jobs due to unfair economic competition from abroad, especially from China. And so, every four years, presidential candidates fall all over themselves promising to get tough on imports.

Still, there are more and less blatant ways to go about it. President Obama's announcement Monday of a new international trade case against China in swing-state Ohio strikes many as a transparently political use of his incumbency. The crassness is mitigated only somewhat by the fact that the president was responding to Republican challenger Mitt Romney's ads promising to do more than Mr. Obama has done to punish China for manipulating the value of its currency on international markets - or "cheating," as the ads describe it.

As to the merits of the president's case against China, if Beijing is violating trade law, then a complaint to the World Trade Organization (WTO) may be called for. Mr. Obama alleges that the Chinese have provided \$1 billion in illegal subsidies over the past three years. Is that responsible for the growth in Chinese auto-parts imports to the United States, which now total \$10 billion? Hard to say. But remember: To the extent that imports from China - or Mexico, which sells almost three times as much to the United States - reduce the cost of auto manufacturing, and hence the price of cars, they may help create more American jobs than they cost. Is the Mr. Obama who charges China with subsidizing its industry the same president who takes credit for bailing out General Motors and Chrysler? China imposed import duties on U.S. cars in July, partly in response to U.S. aid to the carmakers; it has filed a case at the WTO in response to Mr. Obama's latest move.

Litigation at the WTO will take months. Would Mr. Romney's idea, to brand China a currency manipulator, with sanctions to follow, get faster results? No doubt China's effort to hold down the value of the yuan artificially boosts the competitiveness of its products overseas, to the detriment of U.S. industry. But it also imposes costs and distortions on the domestic Chinese economy, which the Obama administration has repeatedly invoked while jawboning Beijing to change its policy. The Obama strategy has yielded some modest success over the past three years, arguably more than would have been achieved by the open confrontation Mr. Romney advocates.

The fact is that China has plenty of ways to retaliate when this country protects specific industries; on balance, that retaliation may cost more American jobs. Even if China does not retaliate, the higher production costs and higher consumer prices that trade protection imposes are not evenly distributed. Protectionist measures may "save" jobs for higher-paid workers at the expense of those who make less. These are the sorts of nuances and trade-offs to which we hope the winner of this election will pay more attention. Though the United States and China are competing for global market share, avoiding an actual trade war is very much in both nations' interest.

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Will Obama Stand Up Against Putin's Abuses?

September 19, 2012

[Washington Post](#)

By David J. Kramer

The decision to halt USAID work in Russia is just the latest in what has been an especially bad year for human rights in that country, though you wouldn't know it from the virtual silence of Western leaders. Since Vladimir Putin's formal return to the Russian presidency in May, there has been an across-the-board crackdown on civil society and the opposition. Beyond the show trial of members of the punk rock band Pussy Riot, authorities have raided the homes of government critics and their family members,

conducted criminal investigations and prosecutions of opposition figures and their spouses, and used brutal force against protesters.

Meanwhile, aside from spokesmen's statements of concern, President Obama and most of his European colleagues have said next to nothing. A clear condemnation of Putin's actions is necessary out of principle and to show support to those brave Russians who are fed up with authorities' rampant corruption, abuses and heavy-handed tactics. Tens of thousands of Russians turned out at anti-Putin demonstrations last December, this spring and again on Saturday, despite the threat of arrest and beatings. Western governments should show unwavering solidarity with them.

More specifically, the U.S. government should make clear that support remains unchanged for Russian nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Russian legislation due to take effect Nov. 9 would require NGOs that receive foreign funding to declare themselves "foreign agents," a pejorative Soviet-era phrase rejected by many NGO leaders. Several Russian NGOs plan to challenge the legislation and want to continue receiving foreign funding, without which many would go out of business. But they are uncertain whether the U.S. government will continue supporting their activities.

This uncertainty is turning into despair with the Obama administration's announcement Tuesday that it will comply with Putin's request - detailed in a diplomatic note last week - that the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) end operations in Russia effective Oct. 1. The administration is trying to put the best spin on this, but it simply isn't credible. Instead of pushing back and forcing Putin to publicly kick out USAID - a scenario from which he might have backed down - the Obama administration has capitulated peremptorily, without even an expression of regret, betraying and demoralizing Russian civil society and setting a dangerous precedent under which repressive regimes elsewhere that don't like our support for civil society and human rights can ask us to leave.

The United States should be pressing publicly and at the highest levels for Putin to reverse his campaign against NGOs, which is wholly inconsistent with internationally accepted norms. We should also join Russians in challenging other problematic legislation passed this summer, including the re-criminalization of libel and slander - which had been decriminalized last year - and massively increased penalties for participation in "illegal" protests.

U.S. officials say they are figuring out ways to quietly convey messages to Putin. But private missives simply won't work. Putin is not going to be persuaded that his path is wrong; his interest is in staying in power at any cost. An August report detailing Putin's luxurious lifestyle - 20 residences, 50 planes and helicopters, four yachts - underscores what is at stake if he were to relinquish power and lose his immunity. Only pressure from within and outside Russia is likely to force a change in his regime's behavior. Accordingly, Western leaders, not spokesmen, need to speak out in a clear voice against Putin's crackdown.

Congress, too, has a critical role to play. Passing the Sergei Magnitsky Rule of Law Accountability Act would send a strong message that there is a price for past and continued human rights abuses. The legislation, which the Obama administration has opposed, is named for a 37-year-old lawyer who was jailed unjustly in 2008 after exposing a massive tax fraud by Russian officials and then, after being brutally beaten and denied medical treatment, was left to die in prison. It would impose a visa ban and asset freeze against the Russian officials responsible for Magnitsky's murder and other gross human rights abuses. It has strong bipartisan support in both chambers, and key House and Senate committees approved it in July as part of a package that would grant Russia permanent normal trade relation status.

Unfortunately, Congress appears poised to again fail to act on the package, which Putin is certain to interpret as U.S. weakness and lack of resolve.

Depriving abusive Russian officials the privilege of traveling to or living in the West or banking here is a neatly targeted penalty. It is not anti-Russian, for it goes after only those who engage in abuses. Nor is it a partisan attack against the Obama administration's Russia policy, for its chief congressional sponsors - Rep. James McGovern (Mass.) and Sen. Ben Cardin (Md.) - are Democrats. Passing the Magnitsky legislation would tell those Russians protesting Putin's depredations that the West is on their side. It is an urgently needed signal, especially in light of the Obama administration's cave to Putin's pressure on USAID.

(top)

RELEASED IN FULL

**DAILY PRESS CLIPS FOR
TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 18, 2012**

USUN IN THE NEWS

Protests erupt in Afghanistan as Muslim anger over film simmers

September 17, 2012

Reuters

By Mirwais Harooni

KABUL - Thousands of protesters took to the streets of the Afghan capital on Monday, setting fire to cars and shouting "death to America", the latest in demonstrations that have swept the Muslim world against a film mocking the Prophet Mohammad. ([link](#))

Was the attack on the U.S. Consulate in Libya planned?

September 17, 2012

Washington Post

By Glenn Kessler

"Based on the best information we have to date ... it began spontaneously in Benghazi as a reaction to what had transpired some hours earlier in Cairo, where, of course, as you know, there was a violent protest outside of our embassy sparked by this hateful video. But soon after that spontaneous protest began outside of our consulate in Benghazi, we believe that it looks like extremist elements, individuals, joined in that effort with heavy weapons of the sort that are, unfortunately, readily now available in Libya post-revolution. And that it spun from there into something much, much more violent.... We do not have information at present that leads us to conclude that this was premeditated or preplanned." ([link](#))

Terrorists, White House Agree: It's the Video

September 17, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By ANNE JOLIS

On Sunday Susan Rice, the U.S. ambassador to the U.N., doubled down on the Obama administration's line that "what happened this week in Cairo, in Benghazi and many other parts of the region was a result, a direct result, of a heinous and offensive video." It's definitely no reason to question the administration's broader handling of American interests overseas. ([link](#))

UNITED NATIONS

Civilian Attacks Rise in Syria, U.N. Says

September 17, 2012

New York Times

By HWAIDA SAAD and NICK CUMMING-BRUCE

BEIRUT, Lebanon — With the Syrian conflict spilling into the Lebanese border area on Monday, United Nations investigators said civilians were bearing the brunt of indiscriminate air and ground assaults in the fighting over the future of President Bashar al-Assad. ([link](#))

TOP STORIES

Libyans Struggle to Rein In Militants

September 18, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By MARGARET COKER

REVIEW AUTHORITY: Archie Bolster, Senior Reviewer

BENGHAZI, Libya—The investigation into last week's killing of four American diplomats in eastern Libya is raising pressure on a shaky new Libyan government to quash pockets of violent Islamists emerging after the country's revolution and now threatening its struggle for stability. ([link](#))

Anti-U.S. Protests Flare Again

September 18, 2012

[Wall Street Journal](#)

By I MADE SENTANA and JAMES HOOKWAY

JAKARTA—Demonstrations related to an anti-Islam video showed no signs of ebbing, with a reported suicide bomber in Afghanistan and protesters battling police there and in Indonesia nearly a week after angry crowds swarmed the U.S. Embassy in Cairo and killed the U.S. ambassador to Libya. ([link](#))

U.S. Aid To Egypt Stalled

September 18, 2012

[Washington Post](#)

By Anne Gearan And Michael Birnbaum

Anti-American protests that started in Cairo and spread across the Muslim world have stalled negotiations to provide crucial U.S. economic assistance to Egypt, U.S. officials said Monday. ([link](#))

China Tensions on the Rise

September 18, 2012

[Wall Street Journal](#)

By KEITH JOHNSON and CAROL E. LEE

Political pressures in both the U.S. and China are straining ties between the two superpowers. President Barack Obama, under attack by Republican nominee Mitt Romney for being soft on China, said Monday he is asking the World Trade Organization to rule that Beijing is illegally subsidizing autos and auto parts. Mr. Romney, who has been running ads in Ohio criticizing the president on trade policies toward China, called the move "too little, too late." ([link](#))

U.S. Files Trade Complaint Against China Over Auto Subsidies

September 18, 2012

[Washington Post](#)

By Howard Schneider And Amy Gardner

The United States and China filed dueling complaints at the World Trade Organization on Monday, sharpening what has become a steady trade skirmish even as the nations' leaders pledge to expand economic cooperation between the world's two largest economies. ([link](#))

Israeli Diplomat Is Man In Middle

September 18, 2012

[New York Times](#)

By Elisabeth Bumiller

WASHINGTON - With Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel engaged in an unusually public dispute with the Obama administration over Iran, Mr. Netanyahu's man in Washington, Michael B. Oren, has been working rooms all over town. ([link](#))

AFRICA

Mali

ECOWAS Talks Focus On Mali Troops Deployment

September 18, 2012

AFP

West African defence and foreign ministers held talks Monday on the possible deployment of regional troops to Mali amid reports that Islamists destroyed the tomb of a Muslim saint in a region under their control. ([link](#))

Islamists Destroy Tomb Of Muslim Saint In Mali

September 18, 2012

AFP

Islamists have destroyed the tomb of a Muslim saint in a northern Mali region under their control, two months after similar incidents in the region brought widespread condemnation, sources said Monday. ([link](#))

Togo

Togo Militia Stops Protest Against President

September 18, 2012

Associated Press

LOME, Togo - A militia of some 500 men loyal to President Faure Gnassingbe prevented a march by opposition groups over the weekend. ([link](#))

ASIA

Burma

Myanmar Releases Hundreds Of Prisoners

September 17, 2012

New York Times

By THOMAS FULLER

YANGON, Myanmar — Myanmar's government said Monday that it was releasing more than 500 prisoners, the latest in a series of amnesties by President Thein Sein's administration. ([link](#))

Nobel Activist To Warn U.S. Of Too Much Faith In Myanmar

September 18, 2012

Washington Times

By Ashish Kumar Sen

One of Asia's most prominent democracy advocates will warn the Obama administration and members of Congress on a visit to Washington this week against "reckless optimism" over the chance for real political reform in her native Myanmar. ([link](#))

China

U.S. Accord With Japan Over Missile Defense Draws Criticism In China

September 18, 2012

New York Times

By Thom Shanker And Ian Johnson

BEIJING - Tensions between China and the United States and its Asian allies escalated on Monday as several well-connected Chinese experts immediately criticized an announcement earlier in the day that the United States and Japan had reached a major agreement to deploy a second advanced missile-defense radar on Japanese territory. ([link](#))

Chinese Government Both Encourages And Reins In Anti-Japan Protests, Analysts Say

September 18, 2012

Washington Post

By William Wan

BEIJING -- As anger increases over a territorial dispute between China and Japan, Chinese authorities have been playing both sides of the issue by quietly encouraging recent anti-Japanese protests, then publicly reining them in. ([link](#))

Chinese Vice President Xi Jinping To Meet With Panetta Amid Health Rumors

September 18, 2012

Washington Post

By Craig Whitlock

BEIJING - Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta has been promised an audience with Chinese Vice President Xi Jinping, U.S. defense officials said Monday, in what would be the Chinese leader's first meeting with a foreign leader since he mysteriously vanished from view this month. ([link](#))

Trial Ends for Ex-Police Chief Key to Bo Scandal in China

September 18, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By JEREMY PAGE

CHENGDU, China—The trial for the former Chongqing police chief whose flight to a U.S. consulate triggered China's worst political scandal in a generation ended Tuesday after two half-day sessions, according to the Associated Press. ([link](#))

Japan

Panetta Warns Of War Over Isle Claims

September 18, 2012

Washington Times

By Kristina Wong

TOKYO - Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta on Monday warned that territorial disputes between China and its neighbors could easily spiral into war, as the start of the fishing season in the East China Sea increased the likelihood of confrontations between Beijing and Tokyo over a string of islands there. ([link](#))

Panetta: US-Japan agree on new defense system

September 17, 2012

Associated Press

By LOLITA C. BALDOR

TOKYO - U.S. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta said Monday that U.S. and Japanese officials have agreed to put a second defense system in Japan aimed at protecting the country from the threat of a missile attack from North Korea. ([link](#))

Thailand

US Embassy Closes, Thai Police Send Heavy Security Ahead Of Prophet Film Protest In Bangkok

September 18, 2012

Associated Press

BANGKOK - More than 700 police will be on guard at the U.S. Embassy in Bangkok as protests against an anti-Islam film produced in the United States spread to Thailand. ([link](#))

NEA

Egypt**Amid unrest, Clinton to lobby lawmakers on Mideast aid**

September 18, 2012

Reuters

By Andrew Quinn and Susan Cornwell

WASHINGTON - Secretary of State Hillary Clinton will lobby lawmakers this week on the need to keep billions of dollars in aid flowing to Egypt and other countries caught up in a spasm of violent anti-American protests across the Muslim world. ([link](#))

Iran**Iranian Official Says Blasts Targeted Nuclear Sites**

September 18, 2012

New York Times

By David E. Sanger And Rick Gladstone

WASHINGTON - Iran's most senior atomic energy official revealed on Monday that separate explosions, which he attributed to sabotage, had targeted power supplies to the country's two main uranium enrichment facilities, including the deep underground site that American and Israeli officials say is the most invulnerable to bombing. ([link](#))

Iran Nuke Chief Harshly Criticizes Atomic Agency

September 18, 2012

Associated Press

By George Jahn

VIENNA - Iran's nuclear chief said Monday that "terrorists and saboteurs" might have infiltrated the International Atomic Energy Agency in an effort to derail his nation's atomic program, in an unprecedentedly harsh attack on the integrity of the U.N. organization and its probe of allegations that Tehran is striving to make nuclear arms. ([link](#))

Iran urges West to take action on anti-Islam film

September 17, 2012

Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran — Iran's top leader urged the West on Monday to show it respects Muslims by blocking a film that mocks the Prophet Muhammad and has touched off rage across the Islamic world. ([link](#))

Lebanon**Thousands In Beirut Protest Anti-Islam Video In Hezbollah Show Of Strength**

September 18, 2012

Washington Post

By Babak Dehghanpisheh

BEIRUT - Tens of thousands of people hit the streets of Beirut to protest the controversial video mocking the prophet Muhammad on Monday, a massive rally organized by the Shiite Muslim militant group Hezbollah that was also an attempt to show the party's strength. ([link](#))

Libya**Libya Sacks Benghazi Security Chiefs After US Attack**

September 18, 2012

AFP

Libya's interior minister has sacked Benghazi security chiefs after last week's deadly attack on the US consulate in the eastern city, according to official statements seen Monday by AFP. ([link](#))

US, Libyan Officials Offer Vastly Different Version Of Benghazi Consulate Attack That Killed 4
September 18, 2012

McClatchy

By Jonathan S. Landay

U.S. and Libyan officials are giving significantly different accounts of the gunfire and rocket-propelled grenade attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi that killed the U.S. ambassador to Libya and three other Americans. ([link](#))

Video Shows Libyans Trying To Rescue US Ambassador

September 18, 2012

Associated Press

By Maggie Michael

CAIRO - Libyans tried to rescue Ambassador Chris Stevens, cheering "God is great" and rushing him to a hospital after they discovered him still clinging to life inside the U.S. Consulate, according to witnesses and a new video that emerged Monday from last week's attack in the city of Benghazi. ([link](#))

Palestinian Territories

Financial Strains Said To Threaten Stability Of Palestinian Authority

September 18, 2012

New York Times

By Isabel Kershner

JERUSALEM - As the Palestinian Authority marks the 19th anniversary this month of the signing of the Oslo Accords, the agreement with Israel that brought it into existence, the authority is facing a financial crisis that experts say could threaten its future operations and stability. ([link](#))

Palestinians Protest Anti-Islam Film

September 18, 2012

AFP

Hundreds of Palestinians on Monday staged a peaceful protest in Ramallah against an anti-Islam film that has sparked violent demonstrations in the Muslim world. ([link](#))

Syria

Syrian Jets Fire Into Lebanese Territory

September 18, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By CHARLES LEVINSON

BEIRUT—Syrian warplanes fired missiles into Lebanese territory on Monday, heightening the potential for Syria's neighbors to be pulled into its 18-month-old conflict. ([link](#))

Mideast Powers Meet, Seek Syria Peace In Cairo

September 18, 2012

Associated Press

By Aya Batrawy

CAIRO - Mideast heavyweights had a first high-level meeting in Cairo on Monday as part of newly-formed quartet tasked to end Syria's civil war, cautioning that a solution would not come easy but that common ground exists between Damascus' staunchest regional ally and its opponents. ([link](#))

Tehran Denies Revolutionary Guards In Syria

September 18, 2012

AFP

Iran's foreign ministry on Monday denied the Islamic republic had any Revolutionary Guards in Syria, affirming that media reports quoting the head of the Guards saying that had been published out of context. ([link](#))

SCA

Afghanistan

Suicide Bomber Strikes Vehicle Carrying Foreigners In Kabul

September 18, 2012

New York Times

By ROD NORDLAND and SANGAR RAHIMI

KABUL, Afghanistan — Fourteen people, 10 of them foreigners, were killed by a suicide bomber on Tuesday, bringing to at least 28 the number of deaths attributed to unrest sweeping the Muslim world as the result of an amateurish video parodying the Prophet Muhammad. ([link](#))

Police Contain Afghan Rage Over Film, As Protests Spread Elsewhere

September 18, 2012

New York Times

By Matthew Rosenberg And Sangar Rahimi

KABUL, Afghanistan - Facing Afghanistan's first significant outbreak of violence over an anti-Islam film that has inflamed mobs elsewhere, the police moved swiftly on Monday to contain rampaging groups of young men who were burning tires and throwing stones along a thoroughfare leading east out of Kabul, keeping the protesters from advancing toward the city and dispersing them within hours. ([link](#))

Coalition Sharply Reduces Joint Operations With Afghan Troops

September 18, 2012

New York Times

By MATTHEW ROSENBERG

KABUL, Afghanistan — After years of tightly intertwining its forces with Afghan troops, the American-led military coalition has sharply curtailed ground-level operations with the Afghan Army and police forces, potentially undercutting the training mission that is the heart of the Western exit strategy. ([link](#))

India

Strike Over Anti-Islam Film Shuttters Businesses, Halts Public Transportation In Indian Kashmir

September 18, 2012

Associated Press

By Aijaz Hussain

SRINAGAR, India - Shops and businesses are on strike across Indian-controlled Kashmir and marchers are burning U.S. flags and an effigy of President Barack Obama in protest against an anti-Islam video. ([link](#))

WHA/EUR

Germany

Germany Weighs Banning Video

September 17, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By LAURA STEVENS

FRANKFURT—Germany is weighing a ban on public showings of the controversial anti-Islam video that sparked violent protests in the Middle East, pitting advocates for free speech against those worried about unrest. ([link](#))

Mexico

U.S. Shifts Mexico Drug Fight

September 18, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By NICHOLAS CASEY

MEXICO CITY—Secretary of State Hillary Clinton meets her Mexican counterparts at a security summit in Washington Tuesday to discuss the next phase in the drug war: how to train the judges and prosecutors that will be trying suspected drug lords. ([link](#))

Russia

Russian Prosecutors Will Ask Court To Ban Anti-Islam Film

September 18, 2012

Associated Press

MOSCOW - Russian prosecutors say they will seek to ban an anti-Islam film that has sparked violence around the world. ([link](#))

EDITORIAL / OPINION

America Foreign Policy, Adrift On The Middle East

September 18, 2012

Washington Post

By Michael Gerson

During his campaign and the early part of his administration, Barack Obama offered a theory about the disorders of the greater Middle East. One explanation, he argued, was the intervention in Iraq, which "fans anti-American sentiment among Muslims, increases the pool of potential terrorist recruits." Another was the failed Arab-Israeli peace process, which his administration would finally give some emphasis (as though other presidents had not really tried). Obama would refocus the war on terrorism more narrowly on Afghanistan and al-Qaeda and dispense with the Bush Doctrine, which sought to "impose democracy with the barrel of a gun." ([link](#))

The Myth Of Barack The Liberator

September 18, 2012

Washington Post

By Marc A. Thiessen

The anti-American violence spreading across the Middle East is not, as some suggest, blowback for President Obama supporting the overthrow of friendly dictators - irresponsibly pushing out autocrats who kept a lid on the forces of Islamic radicalism. The current unrest is indeed a result of Obama's feckless policies in the Middle East - but overthrowing dictators is not one of them. ([link](#))

The Price Of Obama's Leading From Behind

September 18, 2012

Washington Post

By Richard Cohen

What lessons can be learned from events in Libya? That nothing good will come out of the Arab Spring? That Arabs are volatile, easily excitable and prone to acting out? That the United States, Mitt Romney notwithstanding, cannot control everything or that the United States, Mitt Romney more to the point, has tried to control nothing? In other words, is this what happens when the United States is "leading from behind"? ([link](#))

How Should U.S. Deal With the Islamic World?

September 18, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By GERALD F. SEIB

Here is a fact not so well known. After remaining lofty for years, the birthrate in the Islamic world actually has begun to decline dramatically. Research by Nicholas Eberstadt at the American Enterprise Institute finds the fertility rate has dropped in recent years in all 48 Muslim-majority nations for which data are available. ([link](#))

Mr. Obama's 'War' Game

September 18, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By WILLIAM MCGURN

The grave for Maj. Thomas Kennedy is so fresh that it lacks a headstone. In its place are flowers, flags and mementos left by people who knew this Army officer as a classmate, as an instructor, as a neighbor. Such is the terrible beauty of West Point, where even on a sun-kissed football Saturday it is impossible to forget America is at war. ([link](#))

Mahmoud Abbas's U.N. Gambit

September 18, 2012

Washington Post

ONE OF THE winners in last week's protests outside U.S. embassies in the Middle East was Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. Before the eruption of outrage over an anti-Muslim film, Mr. Abbas and Prime Minister Salam Fayyad had faced a week of demonstrations and strikes in the West Bank that some were starting to compare to the revolts against other autocratic Arab rulers. Thanks to the eruption of anti-Americanism and Mr. Fayyad's timely repeal of several recent price and tax increases, the opposition movement appears to have subsided for now. But one way or another, Mr. Abbas's Palestinian Authority appears headed for trouble. ([link](#))

DOMESTIC AGENDA

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ECONOMIC RECOVERY

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USUN IN THE NEWS

Protests erupt in Afghanistan as Muslim anger over film [simmers](#)

September 17, 2012

Reuters

By Mirwais Harooni

KABUL - Thousands of protesters took to the streets of the Afghan capital on Monday, setting fire to cars and shouting "death to America", the latest in demonstrations that have swept the Muslim world against a film mocking the Prophet Mohammad.

Western embassies across the Muslim world are on high alert and the United States has urged vigilance after days of anti-American violence provoked by the film.

"There were between 3,000 and 4,000 demonstrators. They burned some police cars, but we could split them up and prevent the insecurity widening," Lieutenant-General Fahem Qayem, police quick reaction force commander, told Reuters in Kabul.

Embassies in Kabul's heavily guarded central zone were placed on lockdown, including the U.S and British missions, after violence flared near fortified housing compounds for foreign workers in the city's volatile eastern suburbs.

"We will defend our prophet until we have blood across our bodies. We will not let anyone insult him," said protester Jan Agha Pashtun, giving what was apparently a false name to avoid police retaliation. "Americans will pay for their dishonour."

It was the latest in a week of violent protests fanned by anger over a video, posted on the Internet under several titles including "Innocence of Muslims", that mocked the Prophet Mohammad and portrayed him as a womaniser and a fool.

The head of Libya's national assembly said an attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi that killed Ambassador Christopher Stevens and three other Americans last Tuesday looked like a planned assault by a "group with an agenda" rather than a spontaneous reaction to the video posted online.

With protests against the film continuing from London to Lahore on Sunday, Western diplomatic missions were on edge. Germany followed the U.S. lead and withdrew some staff from its embassy in Sudan, which was stormed on Friday.

The United States ordered non-essential staff and family members to leave its embassy on Saturday after the Khartoum government turned down a U.S. request to send Marines to bolster security.

Non-essential U.S. personnel have also been withdrawn from Tunisia, and Washington urged U.S. citizens to leave the capital Tunis after the embassy there was targeted on Friday.

About 350 people chanted slogans at a rally outside the U.S. embassy in London on Sunday. A small group of protesters burned a U.S. flag outside the embassy in the Turkish capital, and in Pakistan there were protests in more than a dozen cities.

The head of Shi'ite militant group Hezbollah called for protests in Beirut this week.

"Those responsible for the film, starting with the U.S., must be held accountable," Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah said. "All these developments are being orchestrated by U.S. intelligence."

"AGENDA FOR REVENGE"

The violence is the most serious wave of anti-American protests in the Muslim world since the start of the Arab Spring revolts last year. At least nine people were killed in protests in several countries on Friday.

The crisis presents U.S. President Barack Obama with a foreign policy headache as November elections approach.

Some U.S. officials have suggested the Benghazi attack was planned by Islamist militants using the video as a pretext, a hypothesis endorsed by Mohammed Magarief, the president of Libya's national assembly.

"Call it whatever you want, al Qaeda or not, what happened was an act by a group with an agenda for revenge. They chose a specific time, technique and certain victims. This is what it was all about," Magarief told Reuters in an interview.

However, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, Susan Rice, said on Sunday talk shows that preliminary information indicated that the attack was not pre-meditated.

"There's no question, as we've seen in the past with things like 'The Satanic Verses', with the cartoon of the Prophet Mohammad, there have been such things that have sparked outrage and anger and this has been the proximate cause of what we've seen," she said.

U.S. FORCES DEPLOYED

U.S. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta said at the weekend he hoped the worst of the violence was over but U.S. missions must remain on guard.

"It would appear that there is some levelling off on the violence that we thought might take place," he told reporters on his plane en route to Asia on Saturday.

"Having said that, these demonstrations are likely to continue over the next few days, if not longer."

The United States has deployed a significant force in the Middle East to deal with any contingencies and rapid deployment teams were ready to respond to incidents, he said.

The foreign minister of Egypt, where hundreds of people were arrested in four days of clashes, assured Secretary of State Hillary Clinton that U.S. diplomatic grounds would be protected.

Mohamed Kamel Amr told Clinton in a telephone call that the film was designed to incite racial hatred and was therefore "contradictory with laws aimed at developing relationships of peace and mutual understanding between nations and states".

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Was the attack on the U.S. Consulate in Libya planned?

September 17, 2012

[Washington Post](#)

By Glenn Kessler

"Based on the best information we have to date ... it began spontaneously in Benghazi as a reaction to what had transpired some hours earlier in Cairo, where, of course, as you know, there was a violent protest outside of our embassy sparked by this hateful video. But soon after that spontaneous protest began outside of our consulate in Benghazi, we believe that it looks like extremist elements, individuals, joined in that effort with heavy weapons of the sort that are, unfortunately, readily now available in Libya post-revolution. And that it spun from there into something much, much more violent.... We do not have information at present that leads us to conclude that this was premeditated or preplanned."

— Susan E. Rice, U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, Sunday on CBS's "Face the Nation."

"The way these perpetrators acted and moved, and their choosing the specific date for this so-called demonstration, this leaves us with no doubt that this was preplanned, predetermined."

— Mohamed Yusuf al-Magariaf, president of Libya's General National Congress, on the same program.

This is a strange one.

Just minutes after Libya's de facto head of state says that the deadly attack on an American Consulate was "preplanned, predetermined," the top administration spokeswoman on the same show disagrees with him, saying there is no "information at present" that suggests the attack was planned.

Yet in the same breath, Susan E. Rice, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, says that "extremist elements" joined in what she calls a demonstration that began "spontaneously" in response to another demonstration in Cairo. That certainly suggests that someone may have been planning to take advantage of any opportunity.

The investigation is in its earliest stages, but let's explore what we know and why the administration would be eager to play down any suggestion that this tragedy was planned.

The Facts

The attack that killed Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens and three other Americans took place on the 11th anniversary of the Sept. 11 attacks. That may simply be a coincidence, but if so, it would be a pretty big one.

In his interview, Mohamed Yusuf al-Magariaf, the president of Libya's National Congress, said Libya had arrested 50 people, many connected to al-Qaeda. That would certainly bolster the notion that the date — Sept. 11 — was not a coincidence. He also said a few of those arrested were from other countries.

It is in Magariaf's interest to emphasize that this tragedy does not reflect anti-American feelings by the Libyan people, especially because Stevens was a well-liked diplomat in the country. But he was also emphatic that "the way these perpetrators acted and moved" and the "specific date for this so-called demonstration" make it clear that the attack was planned.

"It was planned by foreigners, by people who entered the country a few months ago, and they were planning this criminal act since their arrival," he said.

To some extent, Rice and Magariaf may be speaking past each other. Magariaf is emphasizing a plan in motion for a period of time; Rice appears to be focused on a plan for that particular day, or even an attack specifically on the ambassador. The two positions do not necessarily contradict each other.

For instance, Stevens was known to travel with a relatively small security detail, so the attackers may have planned to take advantage of that. But that does not mean they had a specific plan for that day - until the opportunity presented itself.

Stevens, who died of smoke inhalation, may not have been the target of the attacks in any case. One media report claims that key documents, including one with the names of Libyans working with Americans, were taken from the consulate.

That same report, in the Independent, quotes a Libyan military official as saying that a separate safe house also came under attack:

The building then came under fire from heavy weapons. "I don't know how they found the place to carry out the attack. It was planned, the accuracy with which the mortars hit us was too good for any ordinary revolutionaries," said Captain Obeidi. "It began to rain down on us, about six mortars fell directly on the path to the villa."

Indeed, news services reported last week that Undersecretary of State Patrick Kennedy, briefing lawmakers last week, said the attack appeared to be planned because it was so extensive and because of the "proliferation" of small and medium weapons at the scene. That also would seem to contradict Rice's stance.

Finally, ABC News reported that Glen Doherty, one of the former Navy SEALs who was killed, was not there to provide security but was on a mission to track down shoulder-fired surface-to-air missiles and destroy them. "Doherty said that he traveled throughout Libya chasing reports of the weapons, and once they were found, his team would destroy them on the spot by bashing them with hammers or repeatedly running them over with their vehicles," ABC said.

While Rice pointed to anger at an anti-Muslim film that appeared on YouTube as the spark for the demonstration, Doherty's mission suggests that there were aspects of U.S. policy that may have directly affected militants in the country — and angered them. That also would strengthen the case that this was a planned attack.

The Pinocchio Test

The administration obviously wants to play down the possibility of a planned attack because that would raise broader questions about whether U.S. intelligence and embassy security in Libya were adequate. But Rice's comments strain credulity, especially after Libya's president declared without a doubt that the attack was planned.

We also acknowledge being suspicious when an official begins by citing "the best information we have to date" because that suggests other information, such as that gathered by the Libyans, is not being given the same weight. (Rice said FBI agents were not even in Libya yet.) Elsewhere in the interview, Rice used carefully hedged language — "We do not have information at present that leads us to conclude that this was premeditated" — that suggests the administration is straining to avoid an obvious conclusion.

Given that this is a fast-moving story with confusion about basic facts, we are going to start out relatively light on the Pinocchios. We may adjust depending on the information that emerges in the coming weeks, but at the moment the publicly available evidence stands in stark contrast to Rice's talking points.

UPDATE: Administration officials sharply disputed these conclusions, especially the awarding of any Pinocchios so early in the process. They argued we had really jumped the gun. We had considered a "verdict pending," but had believed the gap between Rice's statement and other information publicly available made a Pinocchio rating appropriate.

For instance, Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Carl Levin (D-Mich.) said after receiving a briefing from Defense Secretary Leon Panetta said that "it was a planned, premeditated attack."

But officials also pointed to a statement by Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.), chair of the Intelligence Committee. "I can say I've seen no evidence or no assessment that indicates" this was a planned attack, she said after receiving a briefing from CIA Director David Petraeus.

Part of the issue surrounds the definition of "planning." Was this something in the works for months, which intelligence had missed, or was this an opportunistic event, planned just 24 or 48 hours earlier, that could not have been prevented? U.S. officials do not discount the possibility of the later, but insist there is thus far no evidence of the former.

"We have no indication that there was actionable intelligence that would have allowed us to predict there would be an attack on the U.S. post in Benghazi," said Shawn Turner, director of communications for national intelligence.

It is of course in the Libyan government's interest to point the finger at foreigners, just as it is in the intelligence community's interest to suggest this tragedy sprung up suddenly, with little or no prior planning. We still think Rice's statement is bit too categorical, given the the timing of the attack and the statements of the Libyan government. But we also can see an argument for considering this worthy of a Pinocchio, or a Verdict Pending--options we had considered on Sunday.

As mentioned above, we are prepared to revisit this issue in the future, adjusting the ruling as new information emerges. We would welcome reader input as well, since this is a difficult issue to judge. Were we too hasty or on the mark?

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Terrorists, White House Agree: It's the Video

September 17, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By ANNE JOLIS

On Sunday Susan Rice, the U.S. ambassador to the U.N., doubled down on the Obama administration's line that "what happened this week in Cairo, in Benghazi and many other parts of the region was a result, a direct result, of a heinous and offensive video." It's definitely no reason to question the administration's broader handling of American interests overseas.

Citing "the information that we have at present," Ms. Rice told ABC that last Tuesday's consular attack in Libya, which killed four Americans, "was a spontaneous—not a premeditated" follow-up to the earlier breach of the U.S. embassy in Egypt.

Libyan officials are now openly contradicting that narrative. "It's clear from the timing on Sept. 11" and the "weapons used, like RPGs and other heavy weapons," that "experienced masterminds" were responsible, Libyan President Mohamed Al-Magariief told al-Jazeera on Friday. He added that the carnage in Benghazi "was not a spontaneous act in protest of the movie . . . they took advantage of the movie as justification." Mr. Al-Magariief said he suspects a foreign al Qaeda-linked militia, while other officials have suggested Gadhafi loyalists.

These are just a couple of the factions that Libyans have been warning about for months. On Oct. 26 last year, Mustafa Jilil—then-chair of Libya's National Transitional Council—told a conference in Doha that "we hope [NATO] will continue its campaign until at least the end of this year." Instead, Washington let the military mandate run out when the U.N. said it should. NATO forces were gone by Nov. 1.

That same week in October, President Obama was on the "Tonight Show" talking foreign policy. "This whole thing only cost us a billion dollars, as opposed to a trillion dollars," he told Jay Leno of the Libyan operation. "Not a single U.S. troop was on the ground, not a single U.S. troop was killed or injured, and that, I think is a recipe for success in the future."

Then in June this year, a bomb hurled from a passing car hit the gate of the U.S. mission in Benghazi. No one was hurt in that blast.

Still, there was apparently no information before Tuesday that "led us to believe that this facility [in Benghazi] would be attacked," per White House press secretary Jay Carney. As the U.S. embassy compound burned in Tunis on Friday, Mr. Carney stressed that "the violence is reprehensible and unjustified" but the "unrest we've seen around the region has been in reaction to a video."

Since Tuesday, seven U.S. service-members have died in separate attacks in Afghanistan. That brings the American death toll there to 425 since the NATO drawdown began in July 2011, out of 2,031 total since October 2001, according to figures from iCasualty.org.

Either that video's been online longer than we know or—just maybe—America has bigger problems in the world.

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UNITED NATIONS

Civilian Attacks Rise in Syria, U.N. Says

September 17, 2012

New York Times

By HWAIDA SAAD and NICK CUMMING-BRUCE

BEIRUT, Lebanon — With the Syrian conflict spilling into the Lebanese border area on Monday, United Nations investigators said civilians were bearing the brunt of indiscriminate air and ground assaults in the fighting over the future of President Bashar al-Assad.

The report was presented to the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva by Paulo Pinheiro, the Brazilian investigator leading a commission of inquiry. Mr. Pinheiro said that there had been a sharp

escalation in indiscriminate attacks by government forces against civilians, and that the commission had collected "a formidable and extraordinary body of evidence" against those responsible.

The report, completed last month, said that both anti- and pro-government forces had committed war crimes and crimes against humanity. Mr. Pinheiro said that the evidence, including names of people and units, could support action by national or international courts.

A report released on Monday by Human Rights Watch, based in New York, raised further concerns about rights abuses by antigovernment fighters. The group documented 12 cases of extrajudicial or summary executions by groups linked to the opposition, including four killings in the town of Haffa by members of the Ansar Mohammed battalion.

Battalion members told the rights group that after storming a police station there in June, they killed two snipers on the roof. The fighters, referring to an opposition group of army defectors known as the Free Syrian Army, explained that "everyone saw that they had been shooting at us and killing F.S.A. fighters, so there was no need for a trial."

Underscoring the reach of the conflict and its regional perils, Lebanese officials said Monday that the Syrian Air Force had fired on an area near the Syrian-Lebanese border about noon on Monday. There were no reports of casualties. The attack, near the Lebanese town of Ersal, lasted about three minutes, the Ministry of Information said.

"I saw lots of smoke," said a resident of Ersal, a carpenter who identified himself as Zaher. He said fighting started late Sunday, inside Syria, when rebels attacked soldiers near the border. The rebels fled into Lebanese territory, followed by helicopters and warplanes firing missiles.

A Lebanese Army colonel, speaking on the condition of anonymity, said missiles had landed in an area where the border is not clearly marked, but not inside Lebanon. He said warplanes and helicopters attacked rebel soldiers who had raided a checkpoint in the border area and killed four government soldiers.

The rebels withdrew immediately, the Lebanese officer said, and the warplanes bombed the road on which they retreated.

In another indication of the regional impact of the Syrian revolt, President Michel Suleiman of Lebanon asked Iran to explain remarks attributed to a senior Iranian commander that Tehran's powerful Revolutionary Guard has military advisers in Lebanon and Syria.

In Geneva, Mr. Pinheiro said the escalating conflict was marked by an increasing presence of "foreign elements," including jihadist militants. Some of them joined antigovernment forces and some operated independently, he said, observing that "such elements tend to push antigovernment fighters toward more radical positions."

Little is known about the origins or character of those groups, Mr. Pinheiro told reporters, but the panel referred to them in its report to draw international attention to what he described as "one of the most alarming and scariest aspects" of the conflict. "They have their own agenda, they are sort of loose cannons," he said.

The militants appeared to be involved in attacks and explosions similar to the activities of militants in neighboring countries, Mr. Pinheiro added. The longer the Syrian conflict lasted, he said, "the more of these kind of people will be present opportunistically taking advantage of the conflict."

Drawing attention to events that have occurred since the report was compiled, Mr. Pinheiro called for further investigation of operations in the town of Daraya in late August, where hundreds of people were killed as government forces and allied civilian militiamen known as shabiha assaulted the town.

The antigovernment militias loosely organized under the banner of the Free Syrian Army appeared to have adopted a code of ethics, Mr. Pinheiro noted, but he said that groups affiliated with it were reported to have summarily executed 21 government soldiers in Aleppo earlier this month. Some groups used prisoners to detonate vehicle-borne explosives, killing them, and used other indiscriminate improvised explosive devices that threatened civilians.

"It is apparent that the crimes and abuses committed by antigovernment groups, though serious, did not reach the gravity, frequency and scale of those committed by the government forces and shabiha," Mr. Pinheiro said.

He also reported an increase in sectarian tensions, with abductions and killings committed by Sunni Muslims on one side and Shiites and minority Alawites on the other, prompting other minority groups to organize their own self-defense groups.

After 18 months of escalating violence, the conflict in Syria seems likely to continue until one side or the other is too exhausted to go on, Mr. Pinheiro said, but "this is a war neither side can win."

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TOP STORIES

Libyans Struggle to Rein In Militants

September 18, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By MARGARET COKER

BENGHAZI, Libya—The investigation into last week's killing of four American diplomats in eastern Libya is raising pressure on a shaky new Libyan government to quash pockets of violent Islamists emerging after the country's revolution and now threatening its struggle for stability.

Late Monday, one of the country's top security officials met with two leaders of the militant Islamist group Ansar al Sharia. Ansar has become a primary target in the search for those responsible for last Tuesday's deadly attack on the U.S. Consulate here—especially after U.S. and Libyan officials said some of the group's members were in communication with al Qaeda ahead of the battle.

Libyan military Chief of Staff Yousef al-Mangush met with two Benghazi-based leaders of the group at a Defense Ministry office in this eastern city, according to group representatives and an aide to the chief of staff. It wasn't immediately clear what was discussed during the meeting, which broke up around midnight after about three hours.

Libyan officials investigating the deaths of U.S. Ambassador Christopher Stevens and three embassy colleagues haven't disclosed whether any of the 50 people arrested so far are from Ansar al Sharia. The

group itself has repeatedly denied it was responsible for organizing or directing the attack on the consulate.

Ansar spokesman Hani Mansouri told a Benghazi radio station on Sunday that Ansar was forming its own committee to investigate the attack, saying it would sue organizations, including "foreign media," that had defamed the organization by associating it with the incident.

The spotlight on Ansar highlights what has been a slow but significant splintering over the past year of Libya's shrinking Islamist ranks—a process in which most onetime jihadist and ultraconservative groups renounced violence and threw in their lot with the government, while a few, such as Ansar, appeared to have moved further into the fringe and turned more violent.

Mr. Mansouri, the Ansar spokesman, canceled two scheduled interviews with The Wall Street Journal and didn't respond to questions about the organization sent by text message.

Libyan authorities now face a test over how to effectively stamp out such groups without further destabilizing society. Libya is suffering from a weak central government, and its wobbly new security forces are filled with untrained personnel. Few people are interested in creating a new crisis.

"There are people with their own strange vision," said Fawzi Wanis, head of the Supreme Security Committee for eastern Libya. "They have no respect for the Libyan people or Libyan authority. But if we tackle them with guns, we expect bombs in return. Who wants to make Libya into Iraq?"

For decades, Libya's conservative eastern region has been known as an incubator for Islamic militants. The town of Darna—which, along with Benghazi, is Ansar's base—gained notoriety in the mid-2000s as 52 of its men traveled to Iraq to become suicide bombers, the most from any foreign city, according to a study by the Combating Terrorism Center at the United States Military Academy in West Point, New York.

Ansar al Sharia formed last year as a brigade from Benghazi, one of the many independent militias fighting in the battle to topple leader Moammar Gadhafi. Many of Ansar's fighters battled alongside men who would later become some of Benghazi's top security officials.

Libya's revolt didn't take on the same religious flavor that now exists in Syria. Libyans are homogeneously Sunni Muslims, and much more moderate than the small segment of society that identifies with hard-line Saudi-style Salafi teachings. While there were rebel units that identified themselves as Islamic fighters, the rebel leadership and most fighters said their goal was self-determination, not to replace Gadhafi with a purely Islamic society.

After the strongman's fall last year, the majority of the country's ultraconservative Salafis—including former fighters from Iraq and Afghanistan and ex-Guantanamo Bay detainees—renounced violence. Many followed the route of nonreligious militias and merged their armed units into the nascent national army and police forces. Salafis also formed political parties and pledged allegiance to the new congress, even after their parties were roundly defeated in the polls.

Most Salafis felt the theological reason for fighting ended when Gadhafi fell, said Emohamed al-Ghula, a founder of one such party, al Watan. "Salafis believe their duty is to follow a just ruler. Libya has that now," he said.

That is a major reason why many Libyans, including many Salafis, have expressed outrage at both the U.S. diplomats' killings last week and the temerity of fringe groups like Ansar al Sharia, who have boycotted elections and attempted to press their religious agendas by force.

Unlike most fellow militants, Ansar refused the invitation to merge its armed wing into the government forces. It retained control of the Gadhafi-era security service compound it seized in the center of Benghazi, a walled, football-field-size compound where its members train and spend their days. The heavily guarded front entrance is emblazoned with the group's logo: two facing Kalashnikov rifles surrounding a clenched fist and raised forefinger.

Ansar has no more than 300 members between two branches in Benghazi and nearby Darna, said Mr. Wanis, whose security agency polices Benghazi.

Ansar describes itself as an Islamic organization but has never given a detailed public explanation of its ideology and hasn't published a manifesto. With no top leader, it is organized around a leadership council, whose members include a Benghazi-based commander named Mohammed al-Zahawi and Omar al-Hasadi, a former Guantanamo Bay detainee who lives in Darna, security officials here say. It was Mr. al-Zahawi, along with Benghazi-based religious leader Sheik Nasser al-Tarshani, who met with the chief of staff Monday.

Most Ansar followers have pulled away from mainstream society, say Benghazi religious leaders say. Ansar followers don't pray in the main city mosques and don't work in government institutions, according to people familiar with the group.

The first time many people in Benghazi heard of Ansar was in early June, when the group organized an afternoon march down the city's seaside promenade. Cruising in pickup trucks mounted with anti-aircraft guns, members shouted at passing cars and pedestrians to boycott elections and make Libya a more pure Islamic state.

A string of attacks on diplomatic targets swiftly followed. On the day of the rally, a bomb exploded at the U.S. consulate. Over the following weeks, the Tunisian and Egyptian consulates in Benghazi were also bombed. There were no injuries in the attacks. On June 11, militants fired a rocket-propelled grenade at the British ambassador's convoy, injuring two security guards.

Ansar publicly denied having a role in these attacks. Responsibility was claimed by a previously unknown group named after the sheik convicted of the 1993 World Trade Center attack. Ansar's leaders, including Mr. al-Zahawi, praised the actions in interviews with local media.

Because the group hadn't been involved in street violence and hadn't overtly called for the violent overthrow of the government, tackling Ansar's "problematic" religious agenda hadn't been one of the security committee's priorities, said Mr. Wanis of the SSC.

Many members of Benghazi's religious community, however, say they have fearfully watched Ansar's increasingly aggressive behavior over the past several months.

Sheik Akram Abu Drissi, a 33-year-old Salafi prayer leader in Benghazi who says he has had a long and contentious relationship with Ansar's leaders, derides the group as takfiiri—a reference to the hard-line

Islamic teachings adopted by al Qaeda that approves of killing people deemed infidels, including Muslims, who disagree with the narrow, literal interpretation of the Quran.

Ansar's boycott of the elections was one of several signs to him that the group was "metastasizing," Sheik Akram said. "They respect no authority. They warp Islam. They even call me an infidel," he said. ([top](#))

Anti-U.S. Protests Flare Again

September 18, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By I MADE SENTANA and JAMES HOOKWAY

JAKARTA—Demonstrations related to an anti-Islam video showed no signs of ebbing, with a reported suicide bomber in Afghanistan and protesters battling police there and in Indonesia nearly a week after angry crowds swarmed the U.S. Embassy in Cairo and killed the U.S. ambassador to Libya.

In Afghanistan on Tuesday morning, a suicide bomber rammed a car into a minivan, killing at least nine people, including foreigners, reports said. Hezb-e-Islami, the Islamist party founded by an anti-U.S. warlord, claimed responsibility and said it was in response to the video, Reuters reported.

Indonesian police fired water cannons Monday to disperse a crowd of more than 500 protesters outside the U.S. Embassy in Jakarta, in the most violent protests to hit Indonesia since the emergence of the video, made in the U.S., which mocks the Prophet Muhammad.

The video sparked violent demonstrations that targeted the U.S. and its allies across the Islamic world from the Middle East to Africa and Asia, prompting the U.S. to step up security at its embassies around the world.

U.S. Embassy officials in Jakarta issued an emergency warning to U.S. citizens when word of the planned demonstration broke early in the day.

The protesters in Jakarta, led by members of the hard-line Islamic Defenders Front, gathered Monday outside the U.S. mission, where they burned tires and threw rocks and Molotov cocktails. Demonstrators tried to commandeer a firetruck before breaking off their protests for prayers in the street.

In Kabul, a crowd blocked traffic, burned tires and pelted police with stones on a highway that links the city to eastern Afghanistan. The demonstration took place in the vicinity of Camp Phoenix, a major North Atlantic Treaty Organization military base, raising fears that protesters might march on U.S. diplomatic facilities in the center of town. The protest ended without escalating into serious violence. The Afghan police's response drew praise from Gen. John Allen, commander of the International Security Assistance Force.

The demonstrations came amid heightened tensions in Afghanistan, following a well-orchestrated Taliban raid on a major base in southern Helmand province this weekend and a coalition airstrike Sunday that claimed the lives of several civilians in eastern Laghman Province. Fearful of widespread violence, U.S. and Afghan officials have urged restraint over the video. "This video goes against values of tolerance and mutual respect, which are the foundation of our alliance and our societies," said Brig.

Gen. Günter Katz, spokesman for the ISAF. "NATO has been very clear that there can be no justification for violence."

The coalition on Monday also disclosed another so-called insider attack, in which an Afghan soldier opened fire on a vehicle he believed to be driven by coalition troops. Gen. Katz said the soldier was detained by Afghan forces.

New details emerged Monday about this weekend's Taliban assault on Camp Bastion in southern Afghanistan. The Defense Department identified one of the two Marines killed in the attack as Lt. Col. Christopher Raible, the commanding officer of Marine Attack Squadron 211.

A military news release in July said Lt. Col. Raible, a Pennsylvania native and graduate of Carnegie Mellon University, had led the fighter squadron as it relocated from a previous base at Kandahar Airfield to Camp Bastion.

Also killed in the attack was Sgt. Bradley Atwell of Kokomo, Ind.

The Harrier jet unit lost around half of its aircraft in the assault after insurgents disguised in U.S. Army uniforms managed to breach the perimeter of the heavily fortified base. Six of the jump-jets were destroyed, and two were seriously damaged.

Protesters in Pakistan also demonstrated, with teachers joining students in the streets of Baluchistan province. The day before, protesters broke through a barrier near the U.S. Consulate in Karachi. At least one protester died, the Associated Press reported.

In Lebanon, thousands of protesters massed in Hezbollah strongholds south of Beirut. The leader of the militant group, Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of the Lebanese Shiite political party and militant group Hezbollah, made a rare public appearance before tens of thousands of protesters in Beirut's southern suburbs.

It was Mr. Nasrallah's first public appearance since December 2011. He called on the U.S. to close down any websites that continue broadcasting the video, and called on international organizations to make denigration of monotheistic religions a violation of international law.

"This is the start of a serious movement that must continue all over the Muslim world in defense of the prophet of God," Mr. Nasrallah said.

Google Inc.'s GOOG +0.04% YouTube has suspended access to the film in Libya and Egypt and restricted access in India and Indonesia, where local governments have declared its content illegal. The telecommunication regulator in the United Arab Emirates said it has blocked access to the video and urged users to report any existing links to the country's Internet providers, the AP said. It was still possible to view the video by clicking recently posted links found within the site. Afghanistan attempted to block local Internet users' access to YouTube.

Indonesia has the world's largest population of Muslims, around 210 million, most of whom practice a moderate form of the faith, but there is a vocal community of hard-liners.

Outside Jakarta, local media reported dozens of protesters throwing eggs and trampling on American flags at the U.S. Consulate in Medan earlier in the day. Protests over the weekend led several branches of Yum! Brands Inc's KFC restaurant chain to close.

The Jakarta demonstration was the first to turn violent, however. Among other things, demonstrators burned a picture of U.S. President Barack Obama, a popular figure in Indonesia, where he spent some of his childhood.

City Police Chief Maj. Gen. Untung Rajab said several police officers were taken to the hospital after being hit with rocks and rattan sticks. Four demonstrators were arrested, and at least one taken to hospital for treatment.

"Today's demonstration was anarchy, resulting in 11 policemen who needed to be hospitalized," Maj. Gen. Rajab said. "Demonstrations are allowed, but as long as they're not anarchic."
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U.S. Aid To Egypt Stalled

September 18, 2012

Washington Post

By Anne Gearan And Michael Birnbaum

Anti-American protests that started in Cairo and spread across the Muslim world have stalled negotiations to provide crucial U.S. economic assistance to Egypt, U.S. officials said Monday.

The violent demonstrations sparked by an anti-Islam video, and Egypt's initially clumsy response, have temporarily halted talks about a proposed \$1 billion in debt relief and how to speed millions in other aid to Egypt, according to several U.S. officials who spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak to the news media.

No new aid is likely to be approved for Egypt until after the U.S. presidential election, and talks aimed at breaking a logjam on spending funds already approved are on hold, the officials said. Several U.S. officials said that the delays are expected to be temporary and that there is no major reevaluation of U.S. aid to Egypt.

"Folks are going to wait and see how things materialize both with the protests and on Capitol Hill," a congressional aide said.

The roughly \$1.5 billion in annual U.S. aid to Egypt represents crucial economic assistance to a nation the United States has long considered an essential Arab partner - despite recent concerns about the new government dominated by the Muslim Brotherhood. In addition to that assistance, President Obama has proposed \$1 billion in debt relief for Egypt, which owes Washington about \$3 billion.

In the aftermath of the overthrow of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak last year, Congress attached conditions to U.S. aid, including a requirement that the State Department certify that Egypt is abiding by its peace treaty with Israel. Now some lawmakers are talking about adding more conditions.

The House Foreign Affairs Committee called a hearing this week to examine U.S. relations with Egypt, but it was canceled Monday after the State Department declined to provide witnesses, committee spokesman Steve Sutton said.

A senior congressional staffer suggested that the course of events in the next couple of weeks will determine the long-term fate of U.S. assistance to Egypt. Other U.S. officials cast the delay as a natural reaction to the violence and a test of Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi's resolve, but they stressed that the United States is unlikely to set stringent conditions on aid or debt relief.

"We are continuing to work with the Hill on the support that we think is important to support those very forces of moderation, change, democracy, openness in Egypt that are very important for defeating extremism of the kind that we saw," State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland said Monday.

Nuland said Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton would talk to Congress soon about U.S. aid and other issues affected by the protests.

Anti-American protests outside U.S. government buildings in Egypt stretched into a seventh day Monday, with many demonstrators calling for the U.S. ambassador to be tossed out of the country.

Just days before protests erupted outside the fortress-like embassy compound, American and Egyptian officials had been in the final stages of negotiating the details of assistance that could be worth hundreds of millions of dollars.

A delegation of 120 U.S. business leaders was in Cairo at the time of the protest as part of a related State Department effort to drum up foreign investment, which Egypt needs badly to help its economy recover.

U.S. and Egyptian officials had hoped to resolve much of the debt relief plan by the end of this month, but U.S. and other officials said those discussions are now likely to drag on through the fall. Any new congressional action on Egypt will have to wait, too, since Congress adjourns next week until after the Nov. 6 election.

American assistance to Egypt had already been in some jeopardy as a result of the country's crackdown on U.S.-funded pro-democracy groups in February. The prosecutions of some individuals are still being pursued, although the anti-American cabinet minister who pushed the issue left the government.

The concerns are heard on both sides. Near Tahrir Square - where protesters clashed violently with Egyptian security forces last week as they tried to fight their way to the nearby U.S. Embassy - few people seemed to regard American aid with enthusiasm.

"U.S. aid came to the old regime, and there were a lot of suspicions," said Ahmed Imam, 38, who runs a shop that sells satellite dishes. "Nothing is for free. This has to be repaid somehow."

Top advisers to Morsi say they are seeking money wherever they can get it. They promise economic liberalizations of the type often advocated by the International Monetary Fund - from whom they are seeking a \$4.8 billion loan to help close a roughly \$10 billion funding gap - but they say they want to overhaul Egypt's economy because it needs it, not because international partners are telling them to do so.

"Having a democratic election is something great," Egyptian Prime Minister Hesham Kandil told the U.S. business delegation two days before the protests started. "But that needs to be accompanied by economic growth and development."

Before the protests, a steady stream of American officials had been in and out of Cairo, including Sen. Bob Corker (R-Tenn.), a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee; Undersecretary of State Robert Hormats; Deputy Secretary of State Thomas R. Nides and Obama adviser Michael Froman.

When Corker visited in August, he praised the Egyptian government and spoke in favor of extending aid. Now, he says, he is newly concerned.

"While I believe engagement is our best policy in Egypt and understand the fine line President Morsi is walking in his new position, the initial reaction by him and a very seasoned military with years of involvement with our country is unacceptable," Corker said in an e-mail Monday. "The timing of this will and should affect our negotiations as we go forward in our relationship with this new government."

And when Nides was in Cairo before the protests, he said in an interview that the Egyptian government clearly wanted U.S. help and was willing to cooperate to get it. But he included caveats that seem newly relevant.

"We don't hand people money if they don't either want it or if they want it for different reasons" from the United States, Nides said.

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China Tensions on the Rise

September 18, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By KEITH JOHNSON and CAROL E. LEE

Political pressures in both the U.S. and China are straining ties between the two superpowers.

President Barack Obama, under attack by Republican nominee Mitt Romney for being soft on China, said Monday he is asking the World Trade Organization to rule that Beijing is illegally subsidizing autos and auto parts. Mr. Romney, who has been running ads in Ohio criticizing the president on trade policies toward China, called the move "too little, too late."

Chinese leaders, meanwhile, are under internal pressure to appear tough and please the military during China's own leadership transition, which gets under way this fall. They are facing off with Japan and other regional powers over ownership of several Pacific islands.

Some major Japanese companies on Monday shut factories in China following an outbreak of anti-Japan demonstrations over the weekend.

Anti-Japanese protests spread from Beijing to Guangzhou, as the territorial dispute between China and Japan escalates. The WSJ's Brian Spegele tells us why the Chinese government is allowing protesters to take to the streets.

Anti-Japanese protests in China have led some of Japan's biggest companies to shut their Chinese operations temporarily. The WSJ's Juro Osawa tells us why Japanese companies are cautious and what it means for broader Japan-China economic ties.

Defense Secretary Leon Panetta walked into the dispute when he arrived in China Monday in search of a way to lower tensions. Mr. Panetta is supposed to meet Wednesday with Chinese Vice President Xi Jinping, who is expected to become the country's top leader in a few weeks.

There is every reason to believe that tensions will continue to simmer.

"Particularly at a time of leadership transition, nobody wants to appear soft on any external actor—not Japan, not the U.S.," said Bonnie Glaser, an expert on Chinese security issues at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

The WTO complaint by the Obama administration is its third this year and eighth against China, and the president traveled to the election-battleground state of Ohio to address the issue. "American workers build better products than anybody," Mr. Obama said to cheers. "Made in America means something."

Mr. Romney wasted no time calling Mr. Obama's WTO complaint inadequate. "Campaign-season trade cases may sound good on the stump, but it is too little, too late for American businesses and middle-class families," said Mr. Romney, whose ads promise he will "stand up to China."

Polls show little downside in the U.S. to beating up on Beijing. An NBC/Wall Street Journal poll in June found that 62% saw China as an adversary; just 25% saw it as an ally. And the advantages are clear for Republicans: A Bloomberg poll in June showed 40% of voters were dissatisfied with the Obama administration's China trade policies while only 32% were satisfied.

Similarly for the Chinese, feelings of national pride among the masses provide leaders with a grass-roots stamp of approval for their worldly ambitions. China's leaders can point to restlessness among its people or its military in pressing their claims abroad—with the Americans, Japanese or others.

"It's a version of the good-cop, bad-cop routine," said James Holmes, a China expert at the U.S. Naval Warfare College.

Unlike the U.S., where voters can throw a weak leader out of office, China's system is more diffuse. Leaders rise by the approval they receive from powerful patrons and interest groups within the Chinese Communist Party, or elsewhere in the system. State-owned corporations represent a powerful domestic voice.

"It's very hard to work against the interests of some major players," said Kenneth Lieberthal, who was a White House national security adviser specializing in China during the Clinton administration and is now at the Brookings Institution.

"The druthers of the Xi Jinping leadership would be to tamp things down internationally a lot so that they can focus on their domestic agenda," he said.

But if the U.S. holds to an aggressive stance, or implements Mr. Romney's pledge to begin battering China over its currency policies on Day 1 of his administration, Mr. Xi will have to respond forcefully.

Said Mr. Lieberthal: "If the U.S. challenges China, and he does not react strongly, he doesn't have a prayer."

U.S. officials hope to head off a crisis through Mr. Panetta's visit. Within the South China Sea and East China Sea, tensions have been rising as China and its neighbors parry competing claims to islands, waters and the resources beneath them. China is competing with the Philippines over claims to an area in the South China Sea known as Scarborough Shoal, and is vying with the Philippines and others for control of the Spratly Islands.

A more troubling dispute is brewing in the East China Sea as Japan and China face off over an uninhabited archipelago known as the Senkaku Islands in Japan and as the Diaoyu Islands to the Chinese.

Mr. Panetta left Japan for Beijing on Monday, calling the situation risky and warning of the possibility of a "blowup."

The defense secretary's message to the Chinese: Take part in talks to resolve the territorial disputes. The protests in China are expected to continue through the week, fueled by Tuesday's anniversary of Japan's 1931 incursion into northeast China.

Chinese security officials stepped up their presence on the anniversary. Thousands gathered in front of the Japanese embassy in Beijing on Tuesday morning under the watch of what might have been as many security personnel. The crowd's numbers were growing rapidly as the morning went on. Many carried portraits of Mao Zedong. But the scene was still considerably quieter than over the weekend, when protesters engaged in shoving matches with police.

Chinese radio has issued reports that as many as 1,000 Chinese fishing boats are heading toward the islands, under protection from six Chinese maritime surveillance boats.

A key question will be whether the U.S. is considered an honest broker in the dispute. Mr. Panetta represents an administration that has engaged in a military buildup in the region that Washington views as a response to pleas from allies, but that China considers to be aimed squarely at Beijing.

In his trip to Japan, Mr. Panetta announced a deal to beef up U.S. radar in the country to protect against North Korea, but the step is seen in Beijing as a military challenge to Chinese missile program.

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U.S. Files Trade Complaint Against China Over Auto Subsidies

September 18, 2012

[Washington Post](#)

By Howard Schneider And Amy Gardner

The United States and China filed dueling complaints at the World Trade Organization on Monday, sharpening what has become a steady trade skirmish even as the nations' leaders pledge to expand economic cooperation between the world's two largest economies.

U.S. officials accuse China of giving hundreds of millions of dollars a year in subsidies to its auto parts makers in order to boost its own exports.

"Export subsidies are prohibited under WTO rules because they are unfair and severely distort international trade," U.S. Trade Representative Ron Kirk said in a statement on Monday. The subsidies to

auto parts makers were provided through "dozens of Chinese legal instruments," including cash grants and preferential terms on loans.

The Obama administration has steadily amped up enforcement actions against China at the WTO and through tariffs and other duties. The government has also added a new China unit in the trade representative's office and pulled in expertise from the State Department and other agencies to bolster Mandarin language and other research.

In its own filing, the Chinese government challenged U.S. tariffs on Chinese goods that the Department of Commerce has determined are being "dumped," or sold at unfair prices on U.S. markets.

The administration's action comes as several states with prominent auto-manufacturing industries have emerged as top battlegrounds in the presidential election. President Obama made campaign stops Monday in Ohio and will travel to Wisconsin, another auto-industry center, later in the week.

After a tumultuous week of headlines focused intensely on unrest in the Middle East, posing problems for Obama and GOP challenger Mitt Romney, both campaigns have pledged to turn to the state of the economy. In addition to talking up the trade case, Obama is expected to keep hammering Romney's record of investing in companies that outsourced jobs to China during his tenure as head of the private equity firm Bain Capital.

Obama has heavily promoted the auto industry bailout that he stewarded in 2009 and that is widely credited with spurring a comeback among struggling U.S. car manufacturers and reviving economic fortunes in Ohio, where unemployment trails the national average. Today, the industry directly employs 54,200 in Ohio and supports more than 800,000 total jobs in associated industries in that state, according to the White House.

On Monday Romney quickly pounced on the WTO filing, accusing the administration of waging a "campaign-season trade case" that "may sound good on the stump but is too little too late for American businesses and middle-class families."

Obama hit back during his speech in Cincinnati, reminding his audience of about 4,500 supporters that in the private sector, Romney invested in businesses that shipped jobs overseas: "You can't stand up to China when all you've done is send them our jobs," the president said.

He added: "When the playing field is level, America will always win.... We don't need folks who, during election time, suddenly are worrying about trade practices, but before the election are taking advantage of unfair trade practices."

Major unions lauded the latest trade action and emphasized the U.S. auto industry bailout at a critical moment in the financial crisis. "This isn't just some political moment; this is part of a pattern of action," said United Auto Workers president Bob King. The United Steel Workers also released a statement praising the latest trade enforcement effort. Union support could help sway voters in key industrial states.

The United States runs a large and steady trade deficit with China - typically from \$25 billion to \$30 billion monthly. While the Obama administration has focused on the country's potential as a large and growing market for U.S. exports, there has been concern, as well, that the deficit has siphoned off some

middle-income manufacturing jobs. China has tried to push its manufacturing expertise into increasingly sophisticated areas, seeking to challenge top nations such as the United States, Japan, Korea and Germany as a manufacturer of high-tech equipment and industrial goods.

Although China has been a member of the WTO for more than a decade, it still is not considered a "market economy." Many of its policies have been challenged by the United States, Europe and others who argue that China has unfairly limited raw material exports needed around the world, improperly subsidized cutting-edge solar and other technologies to stunt the growth of foreign competition, and generally tried to tilt the playing field in favor of its exporters.

Monday's trade complaint filings show the tit-for-tat use of the WTO by China and the United States to press their economic claims. While regular political and diplomatic talks between the countries routinely cite the importance of trade and fair play in one of the world's central economic relationships, there's a long list of disputes - including questions about China's close control of its financial sector and the large role of state-owned companies in that economy.

The United States has also pressed China to stop controlling the value of its currency, pegged closely to the value of the dollar at a level that supports the country's exports. Romney has argued that he would be more aggressive on the currency issue, citing a semi-annual Treasury report to label the Chinese government a "currency manipulator." The Obama administration has avoided an open confrontation on Chinese currency, instead using public statements and private diplomacy to urge the country to relax its rules.

The value of China's currency has been rising, and there are signs the country is progressing toward a more open financial system - considered a critical step in building a more open economy and allowing Chinese households to control more of the nation's wealth. But there is concern now that slowing growth may also put a damper on reform as Chinese officials eye state-directed investment and other traditional tools to try to meet annual growth targets.

The complaint filed by the United States is technically a request to open talks with China about their auto industry policies. If those talks do not resolve the issue, the administration would ask the WTO to set up a dispute panel to review the evidence and decide if China is violating the agreements it signed when it joined the trade body.

The United States has typically fared well at the WTO, winning most of the cases it has brought against China. But the process can drag, and the benefits to industry are sometimes disappointing. In some cases, dispute panels have spawned settlements that allowed better market access. In others, the lag between the start of a particular Chinese policy and a WTO ruling against it has given China more time to protect and build its national champions. The United States recently won a case against the limits China places on electronic payment companies, but years of protection have allowed China's UnionPay to become a strong global competitor.

Auto parts have been at the center of trade troubles between the two nations before. The United States won an earlier case against import tariffs China had imposed on American-made auto parts. But auto industry officials say the victory did little to stop the dispersion of auto parts manufacturing around the world, accelerated by the North American Free Trade Agreement between the United States, Canada and Mexico, and by the building of auto plants in China by General Motors and many other auto companies with an incentive to buy parts locally.

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Israeli Diplomat Is Man In Middle

September 18, 2012

New York Times

By Elisabeth Bumiller

WASHINGTON - With Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel engaged in an unusually public dispute with the Obama administration over Iran, Mr. Netanyahu's man in Washington, Michael B. Oren, has been working rooms all over town.

He has run up to Capitol Hill for damage control. He has spent hours with reporters making Israel's case against Tehran. He went to a Rosh Hashana party celebrating the Jewish New Year at Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr.'s house. He had the White House chief of staff and hundreds of others over for Rosh Hashana at his own house. He went to a ribbon-cutting ceremony in Maryland to open the North American headquarters of an Israeli military contractor. He even made a quiet trip to press his arguments about Iran at J Street, the dovish Jewish lobbying group.

Much of it was the crisis management and daily business conducted by any Israeli ambassador to the United States, who always finds an open door in Washington. But with the New Jersey-born-and-bred Mr. Oren, there is a difference: He is representing a prime minister who has infuriated the White House.

"He's in a very tough spot because his job is to maintain open communications between two administrations that have staked out positions that are adversarial and yet they can't admit that they're adversarial," said David J. Rothkopf, the chief executive of the Foreign Policy Group and a roommate of Mr. Oren in graduate school who remains a good friend.

"This is not the easiest time in history to be the Israeli ambassador to the United States," said another friend, Jeffrey Goldberg, who closely follows relations between Jerusalem and Washington as a national correspondent for The Atlantic magazine.

Friends say that the polished and telegenic Mr. Oren is frustrated, although he keeps up a diplomatic front. Asked last week if he was having a tough day after Mr. Netanyahu harshly criticized the Obama administration for refusing to set "red lines" on Iran's nuclear progress that would trigger an American military strike, Mr. Oren replied, zombie-like, "Oh, no."

He was sitting still for five minutes at his desk at the heavily guarded Israeli Embassy, his face a mask. "You want to know a tough day?" Mr. Oren said. "There are days when rockets are falling on a southern Israeli city. There are days when you're worried about unconventional weaponry getting into the wrong hands, when hundreds of lives are at stake."

Friends say that although Mr. Oren may wish that Mr. Netanyahu used more tact, he is in sync with the prime minister's alarms about Iran.

"We've waited while they've declared their intention to destroy us, pretty much every day," Mr. Oren said during an interview in a sitting room at his official residence, a modern home tucked away in an expensive, verdant section of Northwest Washington. "That's waiting a very long time."

He pointed to pictures of his three children, including a years-old photograph of his wife, Sally, with their youngest, now on active duty in the Israeli Defense Forces. "That little boy with his mother - there is my infantry officer now," Mr. Oren said. "I've got these kids - their lives are on the line. The last thing we want is war. Part of our responsibility is seeking to avoid war. And if we can avoid war by raising international consciousness about the nature of the Iranian threat, then we're fulfilling our responsibility."

The nub of the tension between the United States and Israel is time: Mr. Netanyahu believes that the Iranians are so close to making a nuclear bomb that Israel soon will not be able to stop it, but the United States, with superior military capabilities, argues that it will be able to detect, and prevent, Iran from passing that point. Israel in turn says it cannot outsource its national security, even to an ally like the United States. Iran says its nuclear program is peaceful.

Like most Israeli ambassadors before him, Mr. Oren does not make policy, negotiate or carry vital messages between the two sides - the last a superfluous job when the traffic between the two administrations remains so intense. If Ehud Barak, the Israeli defense minister, needs to speak to the Obama administration, he picks up the phone and calls Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and Thomas E. Donilon, the national security adviser. Or President Obama simply phones Mr. Netanyahu, as he did last week to try to calm the situation after the prime minister's comments about red lines.

And Mr. Netanyahu has no problem communicating directly to the American public, as he demonstrated over the weekend by appearing on the NBC News program "Meet the Press" and CNN's "State of the Union" to reiterate his warning that Iran is close to being able to produce a bomb.

Mr. Oren's role is to shape and push Mr. Netanyahu's point of view in Washington. As difficult as that is, he has the résumé to try. Raised in a conservative Jewish family in West Orange, N.J., Mr. Oren worked on a kibbutz at 15, was educated at Princeton and Columbia, immigrated to Israel and spent multiple tours in the Israeli Army, including a job as spokesman during an infamous low point for the military, its poor performance in the 2006 war in Lebanon. Along the way he wrote two highly regarded histories, one on the 1967 war, another on America's turbulent 230-year relationship with the Middle East. He was appointed ambassador three years ago, giving up his American citizenship to do it.

Mr. Oren is unique among previous Israeli envoys in that he speaks American English, appears with fluency and frequency on television and writes dozens of op-ed articles for The New York Times and other newspapers. At the same time, Mr. Oren courts a wide network of reporters and columnists and speaks regularly to universities and Jewish groups, including now J Street, after he initially turned down an invitation to speak to them.

"I give him credit for coming to engage," said J Street's president, Jeremy Ben-Ami, whose group agrees with Mr. Oren that Iran is a threat but not that it is time to set a deadline.

People in Israel say Mr. Oren is in regular contact with Mr. Netanyahu, but generally on the subject of what to say and not to say in Washington. "He's a very good analyst, but I don't think he's a player on telling Bibi not to bomb Iran," said Aluf Benn, the editor of the left-leaning Israeli newspaper Haaretz.

Asked the \$100,000 question in Washington - whether Mr. Netanyahu is bluffing or will order an Israeli strike on Iran this fall - Mr. Oren replied, "I'm out of the loop on that."

But he is enough in the loop to say that an article earlier this month in Haaretz - which characterized Mr. Barak as now against an Israeli strike on Iran - was all wrong. "I read the interview that supposedly he was backtracking, I didn't see backtracking at all, and he has denied it to me," Mr. Oren said, referring to a recent conversation with Mr. Barak.

Mr. Oren, 57, was also in the room in Israel last month when Mr. Netanyahu, according to Representative Mike Rogers, Republican of Michigan, dressed down the American ambassador, Daniel B. Shapiro. Mr. Rogers, the chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, was in the meeting and told WJR, a Michigan radio station, that there was a "very sharp exchange" between Mr. Netanyahu and Mr. Shapiro.

It was, he said, "very, very clear the Israelis had lost their patience with the administration" over Iran.

Not so, Mr. Oren said.

"Dan did not shout anything," Mr. Oren said. "He presented the Obama administration's position - compellingly, O.K.? The prime minister conveyed Israel's position - compellingly. I found it refreshing, the whole thing. It didn't shock me at all. But that's me. Listen, I'm a veteran of a lot of this stuff."

He smiled, and joked about how his time as Israel's ambassador to Washington at this fraught moment in history may have aged him.

"I'm only like 32 years old," he said, "and look like this after three years."
(top)

AFRICA

ECOWAS Talks Focus On Mali Troops Deployment

September 18, 2012

AFP

West African defence and foreign ministers held talks Monday on the possible deployment of regional troops to Mali amid reports that Islamists destroyed the tomb of a Muslim saint in a region under their control.

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is trying to broker an end to the political crisis in Mali -- which has been effectively sliced in two after a putsch.

"We have affirmed our willingness to support and encourage Mali in its efforts towards the legitimate regaining of its territorial integrity," Ivory Coast's Foreign Minister Daniel Kablan Duncan said after the meeting.

He described the task involved as "huge but not impossible."

The latest meeting came in the wake of a formal request earlier this month by Mali's interim President Dioncounda Traore for ECOWAS military assistance to recover the occupied territory in the north and combat Islamist extremists there.

Traore's request for assistance made it clear that "the deployment of active military forces" would not be needed in the capital Bamako.

Mali insists that the West African troops must only provide logistics and air support and would be involved in law and order operations after the north of the country has been retaken by Bamako.

"This is no longer the time for indecision but for concerted action," ECOWAS Commission chief Kadre Desire Ouedraogo said, adding that action must be taken against "criminals of all sorts who occupy northern Mali".

Youssoufou Bamba, Ivory Coast's ambassador to the UN, speaking for ECOWAS, told the Security Council in New York on Monday that the West African nations need fighter jets and other international military support to beat the Islamists who seized northern Mali.

But the UN Council gave no immediate sign it would give the backing for an intervention force.

"The green light from the UN is an absolute condition," a Western diplomat in West Africa said recently, adding that not many African countries had so far volunteered to join the ECOWAS force.

Senegal and Ghana have no plans to take part, while Burkina Faso President Blaise Compaore, the top mediator in Mali's crisis, has signalled support.

An international Sahel conference presided by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon is to meet on the crisis in New York on September 26.

ECOWAS has had 3,300 regional troops on standby for months but was awaiting a formal request from the Malian authorities to seek UN Security Council approval for a military deployment.

The country was considered one of the region's stable democracies until a March coup plunged it into turmoil.

Taking advantage of the chaos, extremists allied to Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb seized key towns in the huge arid north, an area larger than France or Texas.

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay on Monday condemned the ongoing human rights violations in northern Mali, decrying "serious human rights violations and possibly war crimes."

Sources in the north said Islamists had destroyed the tomb of a Muslim saint in the region under their control.

"The Islamists on Saturday destroyed the mausoleum of Cheik El-Kebir, 330 kilometres from Gao," a local politician told AFP on condition of anonymity. "Twelve of them arrived at the site. They demolished the mausoleum with hammers, picks."

The sources said the Islamist militant Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) was responsible for the destruction.

Oumar Ould Gaddy, a Gao resident who is believed to be close to MUJAO, confirmed the reports, adding that "there is another mausoleum which they will also destroy soon."

Kebir's tomb is venerated by the Kunta tribe whose members live in Mali, Algeria, Mauritania and Niger.

The latest attack came two months after Islamists destroyed two tombs at the ancient Djingareyber mud mosque in Timbuktu, an intellectual and spiritual capital which was crucial in the spread of Islam throughout Africa, soon after taking over northern Mali.

Senegal and Mauritania's leaders voiced concern about "serious threats" from the Islamist takeover of northern Mali, warning against terrorism and the partition of the west African nation.

"We think that if the Malian factions want to engage in dialogue, we encourage them," said Senegalese President Macky Sall, on his first official visit to Nouakchott.

"But for those who choose the path of terrorism and the partition of Mali, they will face the consequences of their choice."

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Islamists Destroy Tomb Of Muslim Saint In Mali

September 18, 2012

AFP

Islamists have destroyed the tomb of a Muslim saint in a northern Mali region under their control, two months after similar incidents in the region brought widespread condemnation, sources said Monday.

"The Islamists on Saturday destroyed the mausoleum of Cheik El-Kebir, 330 kilometres from Gao," a local politician told AFP on condition of anonymity. "Twelve of them arrived at the site. They demolished the mausoleum with hammers, picks."

The sources said the Islamist militant Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) was responsible for the destruction.

"Today in Gao, the Islamists boasted about the destruction of the mausoleum of Cheikh El-Kebir. They said they had smashed the mausoleum on Saturday, a town leader who would not give his name told AFP. "This is a crime," he added.

Oumar Ould Gaddy, a Gao resident who is believed to be close to MUJAO, confirmed the reports.

"Cheik El-Kebir's mausoleum north of Gao was destroyed. That's true," he said. "The Islamists have confirmed this. There is another mausoleum which they will also destroy soon."

Kebir's tomb is venerated by the Kunta tribe whose members live in Mali, Algeria, Mauritania and Niger.

The latest attack came two months after Islamists destroyed two tombs at the ancient Djingareyber mud mosque in Timbuktu soon after taking over northern Mali amid chaos in the wake of a coup attempt in the capital Bamako.

The fighters from the Islamist group Ansar Dine (Defenders of Faith) began their destruction of the city's cultural treasures on July 1, shortly after UNESCO placed them on a list of endangered World Heritage sites.

Declaring the ancient Muslim shrines "haram", or forbidden in Islam, Ansar Dine set about destroying seven of Timbuktu's 16 mausolea of ancient Muslim saints.

They also destroyed the sacred door of the 15th-century Sidi Yahya mosque.

Along with Sidi Yahya, Djingareyber and the Sankore mosque bear witness to Timbuktu's golden age as an intellectual and spiritual capital which was crucial in the spread of Islam throughout Africa.

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Togo Militia Stops Protest Against President

September 18, 2012

Associated Press

LOME, Togo - A militia of some 500 men loyal to President Faure Gnassingbe prevented a march by opposition groups over the weekend.

Bare-chested militia men armed with batons, clubs, cutlasses and hoes blocked the path of civil rights groups and opposition political parties allies known as 'Let's Save Togo,' preventing them from demonstrating against recent electoral reforms announced by the government.

Tension was rife when the militia men blocked the streets of Lome's Adewui neighborhood where thousands of opposition marchers had planned to start their demonstration.

Zeus Atta-Messan Ajavon, leader of 'Let's Save Togo,' accused Togo's security forces of not protecting the rights of the opposition.

But Togo's Interior Minister Gilbert Bawara denied the allegations saying that "the opposition demos were authorized by the government."

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ASIA

Myanmar Releases Hundreds Of Prisoners

September 17, 2012

New York Times

By THOMAS FULLER

YANGON, Myanmar — Myanmar's government said Monday that it was releasing more than 500 prisoners, the latest in a series of amnesties by President Thein Sein's administration.

An announcement on the president's Web site said 514 prisoners had been released as a show of "the love and sympathy of the state."

The announcement did not include the names of the prisoners, but Reuters quoted a source from the largest opposition party as saying that many of those released were political prisoners.

The announcement may have been timed to coincide with Mr. Thein Sein's visit later this month to the United States, where he plans to address the United Nations General Assembly. The president's Web site and state television said the prisoner release was being conducted in part to "obtain good relations with neighboring and foreign countries." Some of those released are foreign citizens, state television said.

Washington has rescinded travel restrictions on Mr. Thein Sein but his administration is also seeking the lifting of a ban on imports from Myanmar, one of the last major punitive measures that the United States has in place.

Also visiting the United States is Myanmar's opposition leader, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, who is scheduled to receive a Congressional medal on Wednesday. She will also travel to New York, Kentucky, Indiana and California.

Since taking over from a military government in March last year, Mr. Thein Sein's civilian administration has released more than 600 political prisoners.

Before news of the prisoner release on Monday, the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, an organization based in Thailand that tracks political prisoners, estimated that 400 political prisoners remained under detention. U Bo Kyi, one of the founders of the organization, said by telephone that he could not confirm how many of those released on Monday were political prisoners.

But in a measure of the continued difficulties for dissidents in Myanmar, some of those released in previous amnesties have been denied passports. Human Rights Watch said Monday that at least 19 former student activists' applications for passports had been turned down.

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Nobel Activist To Warn U.S. Of Too Much Faith In Myanmar

September 18, 2012

Washington Times

By Ashish Kumar Sen

One of Asia's most prominent democracy advocates will warn the Obama administration and members of Congress on a visit to Washington this week against "reckless optimism" over the chance for real political reform in her native Myanmar.

Aung San Suu Kyi, a Nobel Peace Prize winner and former political prisoner in the nation formerly known as Myanmar, arrived in Washington Monday on her first visit to the United States in more than two decades.

Her packed schedule includes meetings with Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, members of Congress and university students. President Obama is expected to take time off from his re-election campaign to meet Mrs. Suu Kyi. The White House, however, did not confirm a meeting. She will receive Congress' highest honor, the Congressional Gold Medal, on Wednesday.

The visit takes place amid a thaw in Myanmar's relationship with the West. The Southeast Asian nation's military-backed government has released hundreds of political prisoners, including Mrs. Suu Kyi; allowed her to participate in elections; and struck peace deals with ethnic rebel groups.

Mrs. Suu Kyi's cousin Sein Win - who led Myanmar's government-in-exile until it was dissolved last week to promote national reconciliation - said she will warn her U.S. interlocutors about "reckless optimism" over developments in Myanmar, where the government's commitment to democratic reform is far from certain.

"There are many changes, but there need to be many more changes, and that is not happening now," Sein Win said.

The commitment of Myanmar's government to democratic reform and the plight of ethnic minorities will top the agenda of Mrs. Suu Kyi's meetings in Washington.

The Obama administration is also worried about the plight of Rohingyas, stateless Muslims who have been raped, arrested and killed by Myanmar's security forces following deadly clashes with majority Buddhists in the western part of the country in June. Human rights activists say Mrs. Suu Kyi has not spoken out strongly enough on this issue.

The Obama administration in July sent diplomat Derek Mitchell to Myanmar as the first U.S. ambassador in two decades. The White House has mostly waived financial restrictions, paving the way for U.S. businesses to invest in Myanmar. Washington is considering easing a ban on imports from Myanmar.

In August, Congress approved legislation to extend some sanctions on Myanmar by another year but gave the administration the authority to waive the import sanctions if it determined that the government had taken steps to earn it.

Despite those breakthroughs, the Obama administration remains concerned about the protection of human rights, government corruption, and the role of the military in Myanmar's economy.

In Myanmar, the opposition wants to amend the constitution, which guarantees the military a quarter of the seats in the lower house of parliament and one-third in the upper house.

"When you look at the present constitution, how can you say we have democracy or we are going toward democracy?" Sein Win asked. "Our struggle is not over."

Myanmar's efforts to normalize ties with the West have been dogged by an ongoing civil war with ethnic rebels in the northernmost Kachin state.

The government of President Thein Sein, a retired general, announced Monday that it had released 514 prisoners, some of them political prisoners.

Jennifer Quigley, advocacy director at the U.S. Campaign for Myanmar, was unimpressed by the amnesty.

"One of the easiest things to do is to release political prisoners because that is also one of the easiest things to undo," she said.

Rep. Joseph Crowley, New York Democrat and co-sponsor of a bill to award Mrs. Suu Kyi the Gold Medal, said, "We need to see the release of all remaining political prisoners, and we need to see the permanent end of violence against ethnic minorities like the Kachin and the Shan." ([top](#))

U.S. Accord With Japan Over Missile Defense Draws Criticism In China

September 18, 2012

New York Times

By Thom Shanker And Ian Johnson

BEIJING - Tensions between China and the United States and its Asian allies escalated on Monday as several well-connected Chinese experts immediately criticized an announcement earlier in the day that the United States and Japan had reached a major agreement to deploy a second advanced missile-defense radar on Japanese territory.

The new conflict, coming as China and Japan have been sparring over claims to disputed islands in the sea between them, emerged as Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta arrived in Beijing from Tokyo to meet this week with China's leadership, including Xi Jinping, who is expected to become the nation's next president.

The scheduling of Mr. Panetta's meeting with Mr. Xi was made public only as the defense secretary flew to Beijing. It suggests that Mr. Xi, currently serving as China's vice president, has made a recovery from whatever ailment - physical or political - had kept him from making public appearances for two weeks. The absence prompted widespread speculation about whether Mr. Xi would ascend to the top post, as long planned.

Even as the latest controversy erupted, the Chinese government began to reassert control over chaotic anti-Japanese riots that spread over the weekend to dozens of cities. But the anniversary of a 1931 incursion by Japanese troops, generally considered the opening shot in Japan's occupation of major parts of China from 1931 to 1945, revitalized the protesters angered by a territorial dispute involving islands claimed by Japan and China.

The Chinese government warned Japanese businesses to close on Tuesday, the day of the anniversary, and a number of Japanese companies, including Honda, Nissan, Canon, Panasonic and others, said they would shut their operations in China not just on Tuesday but for at least another day as well, with some saying they expected to remain closed through the end of the week. In recent days Japanese businesses have been attacked, burned and looted by protesters, companies say.

The Japanese government's response so far has been muted, with officials calling on the Chinese government to protect Japanese citizens and property.

Economically, the impact was hard to assess, but many Japanese businesses in Beijing were closed on Tuesday. The popular clothing chain Uniqlo covered its name entirely with red paper; over the weekend it had tried to protect itself by putting a sign in its windows saying it supported China's territorial claims.

On Tuesday morning, the crowds at protests in front of the Japanese Embassy in Beijing swelled into the hundreds after ebbing Monday. But they were carefully controlled by the police, who blocked off streets around the embassy.

Many Chinese people said they did not support the attacks on Japanese businesses. China's most influential blogger, Han Han, posted an essay on Monday urging Chinese not to boycott Japanese cars. He said the protests served those in power, who could use the violence to reinforce their claims that stability is paramount.

Some Chinese pleaded online with foreigners to be more nuanced in their views of China. "Don't say 'residents of Beijing,' " one wrote, referring to the size of the protests in a city with nearly 20 million inhabitants. "Write 'some numbskulls in Beijing' did this or that."

But Mr. Panetta's visit raised tensions on another front. During a stopover in Tokyo before flying to China, he praised the antimissile radar system as essential to enhancing the American-Japanese alliance and improving its ability to defend Japan from surprise attack by North Korea, while stressing that it was not aimed at China.

"The purpose of this is to enhance our ability to defend Japan," Mr. Panetta said at a news conference in Tokyo. "It's also designed to help forward-deployed U.S. forces, and it also will be effective in protecting the U.S. homeland from the North Korean ballistic missile threat."

But several leading Chinese reacted strongly, saying the system was also aimed at China, where officials fear that their relatively small nuclear deterrent could be greatly diminished by even a modest missile defense program. Two senior figures in Chinese international relations said the American missile shield was also emboldening Japan to resist China's territorial claims on the Diaoyu Islands, known as the Senkaku Islands in Japan.

"The joint missile defense system objectively encourages Japan to keep an aggressive position in the Diaoyu Islands dispute, which sends China a very negative message," said Shi Yinhong, a professor of international studies at Renmin University in Beijing. "Japan would not have been so aggressive without the support and actions of the U.S."

Although he has been in Asia for only two days, Mr. Panetta has been asked repeatedly about the sovereignty dispute - and each time he responded that the United States was not taking sides in any of the region's territorial disagreements. Washington, he said, was advocating a diplomatic process to resolve the tensions peacefully, echoing points made by Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton on a visit to Asia this month.

Mr. Panetta's weeklong mission to Asia is intended to prove to allies and partners that the United States is refocusing its national security attention and resources on the region. At the same time, though, he has to try to convince the leadership in Beijing that the "rebalancing" does not have as a shadow agenda the containment of China.

Japan is already the site of one American X-band radar, officially known as the AN/TPY-2, which is a central element in a complex technical architecture for identifying ballistic missiles and coordinating a defense by interceptors. That first radar is at Shariki; the location for the second has not been decided.

The Japanese government has so far offered only a muted reaction to the Chinese protests, which were the top news over the weekend in Japan. Officials have issued appeals for restraint and called on the Chinese government to ensure the safety of Japanese individuals and businesses.

"We need to take a coolheaded approach to avoid negative impacts on overall relations," Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda of Japan told the broadcaster NHK. "Japan will do so, too, but we need to strongly call on China to show restraint."

Officials in the Noda government have said that they are considering increasing the number of coast guard ships patrolling the disputed islands, after unconfirmed reports on Chinese Web sites that as many as 1,000 Chinese fishing vessels may stage a mass protest by sailing into waters around the islands. On Monday, the coast guard said it had so far not seen any increase in the normal fishing activity around the islands.

The array of issues - the radar, the island dispute and the American shift to Asia - should come into clearer focus on Wednesday, when Mr. Panetta is scheduled to meet with Mr. Xi, who serves on China's Central Military Commission.

The meeting with Mr. Panetta, however, could prove tricky for Mr. Xi, 59, who is due to take over from Hu Jintao as Communist Party leader at a congress in the coming weeks. Mr. Xi, who is widely seen as more pro-American than the current leaders, has visited the United States several times, including a stay with a farming family in Iowa and an official visit to the Pentagon.

The recent protests here against Japan over the island dispute have been interpreted by some observers in Beijing as a challenge to Mr. Xi and an effort to allow Mr. Hu to stay in control of the military longer than he might have.

Mr. Hu's predecessor, Jiang Zemin, stayed on as chairman of the Central Military Commission for an extra two years when he stepped down as leader of the party and the government a decade ago. One reason given was China's unsettled external circumstances, which some hard-liners may be using now in a bid to prevent Mr. Xi from taking fuller control of the military.

"This could force Xi to take a strong line with Panetta," said a Chinese academic who asked not to be identified because of the issue's sensitivity. "He will have to say very forcefully that what the U.S. is doing is wrong."

Although the United States has said it is neutral in the dispute over the islands, its actions show it is taking sides, said Tao Wenzhao, deputy director of United States studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

"This move shows that the U.S. has picked a side between China and Japan in the Diaoyu dispute," Mr. Tao said. "It is highly inappropriate and counter-constructive for the U.S. to make such a move at this highly sensitive time."

As if to underscore its displeasure, China held a large naval exercise over the weekend, with 40 missiles launched.

In addition, China unveiled another stealth fighter, just as it disclosed another model two years ago, when Mr. Panetta's predecessor, Robert M. Gates, visited Beijing. The new model is made by a different company, and it indicates that China is pushing ahead with the project, although it is not certain if the planes will ever be produced and deployed in large numbers.

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Chinese Government Both Encourages And Reins In Anti-Japan Protests, Analysts Say

September 18, 2012

[Washington Post](#)

By William Wan

BEIJING -- As anger increases over a territorial dispute between China and Japan, Chinese authorities have been playing both sides of the issue by quietly encouraging recent anti-Japanese protests, then publicly reining them in.

Experts point to clear signs that the Chinese authorities have cleared the way and, in some cases, even fueled some of the anti-Japanese protests that have erupted in recent days. At the same time, officials have been careful to keep control over the masses -- leery that such gatherings of malcontents could easily turn against China's government.

China analysts say the two-pronged approach is carefully calibrated to increase pressure on Japan, but it is also driven by domestic politics, as officials jockey for position ahead of the fast approaching, once-in-a-decade leadership transition.

"The party is skilled at manipulating such public opinion....and the signs that these demonstrations were organized by the government is very high," said Liu Junning, a former researcher at government-related think tank and now an independent political analyst. "The protests come when the leaders need one to come, and the protests will stop when they want them to stop."

On Monday, Chinese officials sent clear signals they were looking to taper off the protests over the disputed islands -- called Senkaku by Japan and Diaoyu by China -- especially in the face of economic impact to China-Japan trade.

Some Japanese companies temporarily shut down their factories in China on Monday, with reports of temporary work stoppages for brand names such as Nissan, Mazda and Canon. Air tickets from China to Japan have been reported cancelled en masse. Many Japanese-brand stores closed and posted Chinese flags on from their doors to ward off vandals and posters swearing their love and allegiance for China.

The precautions following violent action by protesters over the weekend, including eggs and bottles thrown at the Japanese embassy in Beijing, smashed window businesses and Japanese brand cars bashed in on streets across the country. And in southern parts of the country, protesters clashed at times violently with riot police.

Editorials in most major state-run media in China on Monday called for restraint, "sensible patriotism," and "levelheadedness." Authorities also significantly bulked up police presence in Beijing and threatened arrest of "unlawful" protesters in certain regions in preparation of Tuesday's anniversary of the invasion of China by the Japanese in the 1930s.

The current anger is rooted in widespread bitterness that has lingered in China for decades. Chinese leaders are using those feelings in part for reasons that have little to do with Japan, experts say.

Even as early as last Tuesday, as small groups began demonstrating in front of the Japanese embassy, there were signs of government encouragement. Mistaken for protesters, two journalists passing by the scene were met by plainclothes police officers and instructed where to go to more effectively protest.

Interviews with protesters were also monitored by plainclothes police, who allowed some to express their anger at Japan but swiftly intervened in several cases when questions turned personal, asking about how the protesters had heard of the demonstration and where they worked.

In past cases, such as anti-U.S. protests, local officials have been known to organize students and others, busing them in to increase numbers and even giving out flags for them to wave.

In recent days, Chinese journalists say they have been given instructions by propaganda officials to report on the nationalistic, patriotic nature of the demonstrations but not to emphasize any violence that occurred. Many blog posts criticizing the protests and violence were also wiped off China's microblogs.

One blog post that quickly went viral compared a protest leader in Xi'an to the ID photo of a local police official, as proof the police were organizing some aspects of the protests – an allegation local police later denied.

But the biggest proof of government encouragement of the protests is that they happened at all.

Communist party officials, anxious about retaining their grip on power, allow virtually no protests critical their own government. Demonstrations, in fact, banned without legal registration.

But there are competing theories about who within the government is encouraging recent anti-Japan protests and why.

Some analysts argue rival factions, such as the security ministry or the military, are using them to gain political power ahead of the leadership change in coming weeks that will appoint China's top leaders for the next decade. Others point to specific banners and well-organized groups of protesters in outdated Maoist garb in certain areas as proof that supporters of recently fallen leader Bo Xilai are using the anti-Japanese demonstrations as an excuse to push their leftist ideology and rally support for Bo.

Most experts believe the party is using the demonstrations to release built-up pressure and frustration among Chinese citizens and to redirect their attention to foreign issues rather than dwelling on all the mounting internal problems of China.

"Foreign threats are certainly a useful diversion during a period when people would otherwise be paying attention to the domestic issues and leadership," said Susan Shirk, a former U.S. deputy assistant secretary of state for Asia.

"This is also happening at a moment of succession, when everyone is competing with everyone else for a seat in the system. You can't go wrong by talking tough on Japan."

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Chinese Vice President Xi Jinping To Meet With Panetta Amid Health Rumors

September 18, 2012

Washington Post

By Craig Whitlock

BEIJING - Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta has been promised an audience with Chinese Vice President Xi Jinping, U.S. defense officials said Monday, in what would be the Chinese leader's first meeting with a foreign leader since he mysteriously vanished from view this month.

U.S. defense officials said the Chinese government confirmed that Xi would meet Wednesday with Panetta in Beijing's Great Hall of the People, apparently in an emphatic bid to dispel doubts about the Chinese leader's health and political future.

Xi canceled meetings with Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and other foreign dignitaries without official explanation this month, fueling rumors about his status as China's putative leader-in-waiting. He reappeared in public briefly Saturday during a visit to a Chinese university.

Speculation arose that he had been sidelined by a bad back or a bad heart at a time when China is preparing for a major once-in-a-decade leadership transition. Xi is expected to be named as China's new president in coming weeks. Chinese authorities said Sunday that Xi would also appear at an expo attended by Southeast Asian leaders later this week.

Panetta arrived in Beijing on Monday for his first visit to China since taking over as Pentagon chief in July 2011. He was originally scheduled to spend two days in the country, but U.S. defense officials announced that he would extend his visit to a third day.

In addition to meeting Xi, Panetta is scheduled to visit a People's Liberation Army naval base, give a speech to Chinese cadets and tour a submarine and frigate.

His arrival in China comes at a time of heightened security tensions in the region, as well as an ongoing effort by the Obama administration to reassert its strategic interests in Asia.

Earlier Monday, for example, the United States and Japan announced they will expand a shared missile defense system in East Asia by installing a new, high-powered radar in southern Japan.

During a joint news conference in Tokyo, Panetta and Japanese Defense Minister Satoshi Morimoto said a joint U.S.-Japanese team would begin searching immediately for a site for the new radar, which would bolster one already in place in northern Japan, on the island of Honshu.

U.S. and Japanese leaders say the missile shield is intended to defend against the threat of an attack by North Korea, which has developed a small arsenal of nuclear weapons and is seeking to extend the range of its long-range missiles so they could reach U.S. territory.

Although Washington and Tokyo have repeatedly denied that the missile defenses are designed to counter China, the developments have heightened suspicions in Beijing that a secondary aim of the program is to contain China's growing military power in the region.

Panetta told reporters that there was no reason for the Chinese to think the radar would target them.

"It's no secret that one of our concerns in this area is the ballistic missile threat from North Korea," he said. "We have made these concerns very clear to the Chinese. We've also made clear that we'll take steps to protect the United States and our allies from that threat."

U.S. officials said the second land-based radar in Japan would enhance their ability to detect a North Korean missile launch. The U.S. and Japanese navies operate similar radars from aboard cruisers and destroyers that patrol east Asian waters on a regular basis.

"The purpose of this is to enhance our ability to defend Japan," Panetta added, referring to the land-based radar. "It will also be effective in protecting the U.S. homeland from the North Korean ballistic missile threat."

In addition to detecting ballistic missiles, however, the radars also provide the U.S. military and its allies a highly detailed view of ship traffic in the region. That capability is particularly desired by U.S. allies in the region that are engaged in territorial disputes with China over contested islands and fishing grounds.

For instance, officials in the Philippines have asked the Obama administration to consider placing a similar land-based radar on their territory to gather intelligence on maritime traffic in the South China Sea. The Philippines and several other countries in the region have been butting heads with China over control of the mineral-rich seabed and local shipping lanes, which are some of the busiest in the world.

In addition to radars, the U.S. military has been expanding its use of surveillance drones in Asia across the wide expanses of the Pacific Ocean, relying primarily on unarmed, high-altitude Global Hawk aircraft.

Japan has expressed interest in obtaining Global Hawks or other surveillance drones. Morimoto alluded to this in a joint news conference with Panetta in Tokyo, saying the two countries are "deepening cooperation on surveillance and reconnaissance activities."

The agreement to deploy a second land-based radar in Japan was announced hours before Panetta was scheduled to arrive in Beijing.

The radar deal also comes amid a worsening dispute between Japan and China over the disputed rights to a collection of uninhabited islands in the East China Sea. Massive anti-Japanese demonstrations have erupted across China in recent days to protest the Japanese government's recent decision to purchase the islands from a private Japanese landowner. The islands are known as the Senkaku in Japan and Diaoyu in China.

The Pentagon has been seeking to improve military relations with the People's Liberation Army. Beijing, however, has been leery of the overtures, and many PLA commanders have accused Washington of seeking to contain its growing military and economic influence in Asia and the Pacific.
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Trial Ends for Ex-Police Chief Key to Bo Scandal in China

September 18, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By JEREMY PAGE

CHENGDU, China—The trial for the former Chongqing police chief whose flight to a U.S. consulate triggered China's worst political scandal in a generation ended Tuesday after two half-day sessions, according to the Associated Press.

Wang Lijun stood trial for defection, abuse of power, bribe-taking and "bending the law for selfish ends," court officials said.

A day earlier, Mr. Wang attended a closed hearing at the Intermediate People's Court in the southwestern city of Chengdu to examine the defection and abuse of power charges—both of which involved state secrets—the AP quoted his lawyer, Wang Yuncai, as saying.

The court did not issue a verdict.

The fall of Bo Xilai, once a rising star in Chinese politics, has plunged the country into its biggest crisis since Tiananmen Square. In this documentary, The Wall Street Journal examines how his downfall has altered the debate about China's future.

Ms. Wang, who isn't related to her client, didn't respond to repeated telephone calls.

An indictment accuses Mr. Wang of shielding the wife of his boss, Bo Xilai, from a criminal investigation, taking "massive" bribes and illegally using surveillance technology, according to state media.

Local government and court officials declined to confirm whether the trial had started a day early, or the reason for an early start. They said the proceedings on Tuesday would be technically open, but all the seats for members of the public were already full.

Mr. Wang's trial is expected to produce the first official account of how and why Mr. Wang sought refuge in the U.S. Consulate in Chengdu in February and told U.S. diplomats he had evidence that Mr. Bo's wife, Gu Kailai, was involved in the murder of a British businessman, Neil Heywood.

The trial is the latest step in the Communist Party leadership's efforts to wind up the scandal in time for a once-a-decade leadership change that is expected to begin this fall, according to party insiders, political analysts and diplomats.

But party insiders and political analysts say the official narrative is unlikely to convince an increasingly skeptical Chinese domestic audience, especially if key parts of the trial are closed, as Monday's hearing was.

Prominent Chinese figures, especially popular microbloggers, have already cast doubts on the official account presented at Ms. Gu's trial for the murder of Mr. Heywood, saying it contains inconsistencies and omits key details.

Ms. Gu was convicted of the murder last month and given a death sentence with a two-year reprieve—which lawyers and political analysts say is likely to be commuted to a life sentence in prison after two years.

Mr. Bo, once a candidate for promotion in the fall, was dismissed from his party posts and placed under investigation for unspecified "serious disciplinary violations" in April. Chinese authorities are expected to announce soon whether he, too, will face criminal charges.

Mr. Wang is certain to be found guilty given a conviction rate of about 98% in China, where the party controls the police, prosecutors and judges, and is likely to be given a stiff penalty, according to lawyers and political analysts. But like Ms. Gu, he may escape execution if he has provided evidence in other criminal cases, these people said.

Mr. Wang is in a unique position to provide information about Mr. Bo's tenure as party chief in Chongqing, as the two men oversaw a crackdown on organized crime that critics said violated legal norms and was used to seize assets from private entrepreneurs.

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Panetta Warns Of War Over Isle Claims

September 18, 2012

Washington Times

By Kristina Wong

TOKYO - Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta on Monday warned that territorial disputes between China and its neighbors could easily spiral into war, as the start of the fishing season in the East China Sea increased the likelihood of confrontations between Beijing and Tokyo over a string of islands there.

Mr. Panetta told reporters traveling with him in Asia that he will encourage Japanese and Chinese leaders to find a peaceful resolution to their competing claims to the islands, which are called Diaoyu in Chinese and Senkaku in Japanese.

Tensions between China and Japan spiked last week, when Beijing briefly sent six patrol ships off the islands' coast after Tokyo had purchased the islands from a private Japanese business owner. Chinese citizens have protested against Japan in cities across China, in some incidents overturning Japanese-made cars and targeting Japanese businesses.

On Monday, the Kyodo news service cited a report on the state-run China National Radio that 1,000 Chinese fishing boats are expected to arrive in waters off the islands.

"We're concerned by the demonstrations, and we're concerned by the conflict that's taking place over the Senkaku Islands," Mr. Panetta said Monday.

In Asia to advance the Pentagon's "pivot" to the Pacific region, Mr. Panetta met with Japanese Defense Minister Satoshi Morimoto and Foreign Minister Koichiro Gamba in Tokyo before traveling to nearby Yokota Air Base. There, he met with and addressed about 350 U.S. troops.

The defense secretary arrived Tuesday in Beijing, where he will meet with his counterpart, Gen. Liang Guanglie, and Vice President Xi Jinping, who is expected to be named president in the coming weeks.

Mr. Panetta used the China-Japan dispute to underscore the need to establish a process to resolve these disputes peacefully.

"The United States does not take a position with regards to territorial disputes. But the one thing that I am urging is that countries develop a process to resolve these disputes peacefully. That's what they have to do," the defense secretary said before departing to China.

At the same time, the U.S. would stand by its treaty to defend Japan against attack, he added.

"Obviously, we stand by our treaty obligations. They're long-standing, and that has not changed," Mr. Panetta said. "Having said that, we expect that these issues will be resolved peacefully and, although we understand the differences here with regards to jurisdiction, it is extremely important that diplomatic means on both sides be used to try to constructively resolve these issues."

Mr. Panetta warned there would be more territorial disputes like this, and urged both sides to abide by codes of conduct established by regional bodies, such as the Association of South East Asian Nation's code of conduct for navigation rights.

"The reason this is happening is because a lot of these countries look to these islands, look to the resources that are out there, look to offshore drilling, look to energy resources. And so it's going to become more competitive between countries as they face this issue," he said.

The start of the fishing season Sunday in the East China Sea, where the Senkaku island chain lies between Japan and Taiwan, raises the chance of a confrontation leading to a flare-up, according to local media reports.

In previous years, Chinese authorities prohibited Chinese fishing ships from approaching waters near the islands to avoid the possibility of a confrontation between fishermen and Japanese coast guard vessels deployed there.

But this year, officials in Beijing have promised to protect fishermen by deploying paramilitary patrol vessels, "including in waters around the Diaoyu" as the Chinese call the island, according to Japan's respected Asahi Shimbun newspaper.

Also Sunday, the People's Liberation Army's East China Sea Fleet staged its first live-fire military exercise in the area, according to state-run China Central Television.

The Pentagon announced Monday that the U.S. and Japan have agreed to begin coordinating the deployment of a surveillance radar designed specifically for ballistic missile defense.

It will be Japan's second deployment of the Army Navy/Transportable Radar Surveillance and Control, or AN/TPY-2, which can track all classes of ballistic missiles and identify small objects at long distances, according to a Missile Defense Agency fact sheet. An AN/TPY radar already is deployed at Shariki, Japan.

A defense official said the radar deployment is not an act against China: "The radar would be focused on addressing the growing North Korean missile threat to the U.S. homeland, as well as U.S. citizens, our deployed forces, allies and partners in the region."

There was no immediate response from Chinese officials about the radar.

Mr. Panetta also announced that the U.S. and Japan are cooperating in deploying two dozen Marine V-22 Osprey aircraft to a U.S. base in Okinawa.

"We have made great progress on this issue, important progress, and I believe we can expect a positive announcement soon," Mr. Panetta said at a joint news conference with Mr. Morimoto, his Japanese counterpart.

The deployment of the tilt-rotor Ospreys is a sensitive issue for Okinawans. Before Mr. Panetta arrived in Tokyo, tens of thousands of Japanese had protested against the aircraft, which residents say is prone to crashes and risks the safety of people in densely populated Okinawa.

"We will do everything possible to respond to the concerns with regard to the Osprey," Mr. Panetta said. "We will take whatever steps necessary to try to assure that the people involved are, and that the operations are safe, that we do whatever we can to provide noise abatement, that we will do whatever we can to assure the operations are in keeping with the neighbors that we have and that we respect at the base at Okinawa." ([top](#))

Panetta: US-Japan agree on new defense system

September 17, 2012

Associated Press

By LOLITA C. BALDOR

TOKYO — U.S. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta said Monday that U.S. and Japanese officials have agreed to put a second defense system in Japan aimed at protecting the country from the threat of a missile attack from North Korea.

The exact location of the radar installation has not yet been determined. It will be in the south, U.S. officials said, but not in Okinawa.

Officials stressed that the system would be aimed at protecting the region against the threat from North Korea and is not directed at China.

The U.S. already has similar early warning radar systems on ships in the Asia-Pacific.

This second Japan-based system will allow the U.S. vessels to spread out and cover other parts of the Asia-Pacific region.

Panetta said the new installation would also be effective in protecting the U.S. homeland from a North Korea threat. He spoke during a press conference in Tokyo with the Japanese defense minister, Satoshi Morimoto.

Morimoto said it would not be appropriate at this time to specify a location for the new radar, and said a date for its deployment has not yet been set.

While officials insisted the radar system would not be aimed at China, the decision was sure to raise the ire of Beijing.

The radar will "enhance our ability to defend Japan," Panetta said, adding that he would talk to Chinese leaders about the system to assure them that this about protecting the U.S. and the region from North Korea's missile threat.

"We have made these concerns clear to the Chinese," he said. "For that reason ... we believe it is very important to move ahead" with the radar system.

Japan has worked closely with the U.S. for several years on missile defense, and has both land- and sea-based missile launchers.

North Korea's ballistic missiles are considered a threat to security in the Asia-Pacific region because of the risk of conflict erupting on the divided and heavily militarized Korean peninsula, and because of the secretive North's nuclear weapons program.

The long-range rockets it is developing have been test-fired over Japan and could potentially reach the U.S.

The North conducted its latest long-range rocket launch in April, defying a U.N. ban. Pyongyang said the launch was intended to send an observation satellite into space but it drew international condemnation as the rocket technology is similar to that used for ballistic missiles.

The launch was a failure and the rocket disintegrated shortly after takeoff.

Panetta is on his third trip to Asia in 11 months, reflecting the Pentagon's ongoing shift to put more military focus on the Asia-Pacific.

The defense chief is urging countries involved in territorial disputes in the region to find a way to peacefully resolve those problems before they spark provocations and violence.

Panetta's visit to Japan also included discussions with Morimoto about the deployment of V-22 Ospreys to the southwestern island of Okinawa. Tens of thousands of people have protested the hybrid aircraft's planned use, saying they are unsafe.

The U.S. had hoped to have the aircraft in place as early as next month, but Morimoto said no specific date has been set on that matter, either.

The Pentagon plans to deploy 12 of the aircraft, which take off and land like a helicopter, but fly like a plane. U.S. officials have assured Japanese leaders the Ospreys are safe.

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US Embassy Closes, Thai Police Send Heavy Security Ahead Of Prophet Film Protest In Bangkok

September 18, 2012

Associated Press

BANGKOK - More than 700 police will be on guard at the U.S. Embassy in Bangkok as protests against an anti-Islam film produced in the United States spread to Thailand.

The U.S. Embassy says it plans to close at midday Tuesday ahead of the protests planned to start shortly afterward.

Embassy spokesman Walter Braunohler says Thai police have told the embassy to expect "a large number of demonstrators." He says the embassy is unaware of any threat to Americans but U.S. citizens should exercise caution.

Bangkok's police commissioner says security will include hundreds of anti-riot police and plainclothes officers.

The Muslim group organizing the protest, the International Al Quds Federation of Thailand, called for a peaceful protest on its Facebook page.

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NEA

Amid unrest, Clinton to lobby lawmakers on Mideast aid

September 18, 2012

Reuters

By Andrew Quinn and Susan Cornwell

WASHINGTON - Secretary of State Hillary Clinton will lobby lawmakers this week on the need to keep billions of dollars in aid flowing to Egypt and other countries caught up in a spasm of violent anti-American protests across the Muslim world.

The State Department said Clinton intended to meet with Congress later this week to discuss the protests, which saw U.S. diplomatic missions attacked and the U.S. ambassador to Libya killed amid fury over a film produced in the United States that many saw as an insult to Islam.

Republican lawmakers are calling for an investigation into the attacks amid suspicions in Republican circles that the Democratic administration is trying to tamp down inquiries about the events as the November 6 presidential election looms.

Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, who chairs the House Foreign Affairs Committee, had hoped to hold a public hearing on Egypt this week. She reluctantly called it off after the Obama administration refused to send any witnesses and instead offered a private briefing for lawmakers, a congressional aide said.

Officials said Clinton's meetings on Capitol Hill have not yet been scheduled and they gave no details about the format.

But State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland said Clinton would be ready to answer lawmakers' questions, both about the attacks and about the future of U.S. policy in a region tipping further into crisis.

"They will want to have a full assessment of what happened, what we know, what measures we took at the time, what measures we're taking going forward to continue to protect our personnel and our facilities," Nuland said of Clinton's meetings, which are tentatively expected to take place on Thursday.

Nuland said Clinton also planned to stress the importance of continued U.S. support, which includes \$1.3 billion for Egypt's military; proposals for up to \$1 billion in debt relief for Cairo; and a further \$800 million in economic assistance for other countries in the region.

SECURITY LAPSE?

Republican lawmakers are calling for an investigation into last week's attacks, the most violent of which saw the U.S. consulate in Benghazi stormed by gun-wielding militants in an assault that killed Ambassador Chris Stevens and three other U.S. personnel.

A bill introduced by Republican senators Jim DeMint and Bob Corker would require the Obama administration to report to Congress within 30 days on the attacks on U.S. missions in Egypt and Yemen, and to submit proposals for beefing up security within 90 days.

U.S. and Libyan officials are investigating the incident, with help from the FBI.

Libyan officials have suggested the consulate assault was planned in advance rather than a spontaneous reaction to the U.S.-made video. U.S. officials have said that preliminary information did not indicate the incident was planned.

Republican Senator Lindsey Graham on Monday rejected this, saying he believed the assault was a coordinated attack mounted by al Qaeda or its affiliates.

"It points to severe lapses of security in a region where likely attacks can be anticipated," Graham said in a statement. "The bottom line is statements by the Obama administration must be properly scrutinized, and that is the proper role of Congress."

The explosion of anti-American anger, which saw embassies attacked in Yemen, Tunisia, Sudan, Egypt and elsewhere, has presented U.S. President Barack Obama with an unexpected foreign policy crisis as he heads into the final months before the November presidential election.

It also looks likely to fuel debate in Congress about the future of U.S. aid to the region, which already was being questioned as lawmakers ponder widespread cuts to deal with the ballooning federal budget deficit.

Even before last week's attacks on U.S. diplomatic missions, Ros-Lehtinen had blocked nearly \$26 million in U.S. economic aid from being spent in Egypt and Representative Kay Granger had placed a "hold" on \$18.3 million of the same funds, congressional aides said.

MAINTAINING U.S. LEVERAGE

U.S. aid to Egypt, where the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood rose to power in elections following the ouster of strongman Hosni Mubarak, has been repeatedly caught up in politics as the United States seeks to maintain its leverage with Cairo.

The Obama administration in March allowed \$1.3 billion in military aid to continue despite misgivings among prominent lawmakers over the role of the country's military in the democratic transition, and it is now finalizing a debt relief package of up to \$1 billion to help the country's new Islamist leaders stabilize their badly wounded economy.

The Obama administration also has proposed an \$800 million fund for fiscal 2013, which starts in October, to help other countries swept by "Arab Spring" revolutions, many of which in recent days have seen crowds of protesters take to the streets to denounce the United States.

But the House appropriations committee last spring refused to provide a separate fund for supporting Arab spring reforms. Final decisions for spending in fiscal 2013 have not been made.
(top)

Iranian Official Says Blasts Targeted Nuclear Sites

September 18, 2012

New York Times

By David E. Sanger And Rick Gladstone

WASHINGTON - Iran's most senior atomic energy official revealed on Monday that separate explosions, which he attributed to sabotage, had targeted power supplies to the country's two main uranium

enrichment facilities, including the deep underground site that American and Israeli officials say is the most invulnerable to bombing.

The official, Fereydoon Abbasi, a nuclear scientist who narrowly escaped an assassination in his car nearly two years ago, just before he was appointed to lead the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, said one of the attacks occurred on Aug. 17, a day before international inspectors arrived at the underground site.

The most recent report by the International Atomic Energy Agency, the United Nations arm that conducts the inspections, said nothing about power cutoffs. On Monday, a spokesman for the agency would not comment on whether power to the site had been disrupted.

There was no way to verify Mr. Abbasi's assertions; he also contended that the I.A.E.A. had been infiltrated by "terrorists and saboteurs," suggesting they were responsible for the attacks. But if they were acts of sabotage, as he claimed, they would raise the question of whether Israel, the United States or some groups within Iran had moved beyond cyberattacks to take other steps, short of a military attack, to disable Iran's nuclear fuel plants.

Mr. Abbasi's accusations, in a speech at an I.A.E.A. conference in Vienna, come as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel has been pressing the Obama administration to establish "red lines" of intolerance for Iran's nuclear activities. Mr. Netanyahu said on Sunday that Iran was only six or seven months away from having the fuel to make a quick dash for a nuclear weapon, a clear reference to the activity at Fordow, the underground site near the holy city of Qum.

That site was one of the two that Mr. Abbasi said had been struck.

Mr. Abbasi said that on Aug. 17, power lines from Qum to the Fordow site "were cut using explosives." He also said a "power outage is a way of damaging centrifuge machines." He said I.A.E.A. officials had requested "a snap inspection of the facility" early the next day.

He did not say what damage the attack might have done. Asked by reporters at the conference to elaborate, he was quoted by The Associated Press as saying backup batteries and diesel generators had prevented disruptions to the centrifuges, which are vulnerable to damage from abrupt changes in the power supply.

Fordow is the newest known plant in Iran's uranium enrichment program, which Western countries suspect is a cloak for developing the capacity to make atomic bombs despite Iran's repeated denials.

Mr. Abbasi said a similar attack had hit Natanz, an older plant where most of Iran's enrichment has taken place. But he gave no date.

A number of years ago, power supplies installed under centrifuges at Natanz blew up, and Iran claimed American sabotage was the cause. Other components for the program have been tampered with, in at least one case at an American nuclear laboratory, before they were delivered.

In January 2009, The New York Times reported that President George W. Bush, at the end of his second term, authorized a program to undermine electrical and computer systems and other networks on which Iran relies. In June of this year it reported that program had turned into "Olympic Games," a

covert effort, focused on cyberattacks on the Natanz plant, that was expanded by President Obama. That effort became apparent in the summer of 2010, when one of the computer worms, later called Stuxnet, was replicated around the world because of a programming error. But the Fordow plant was apparently not a target of that effort.

Mr. Abbasi's criticism of the I.A.E.A. came a few days after the agency chastised Iran for rejecting repeated demands to halt its centrifuges, as the United Nations Security Council has demanded, and to allay the agency's concerns about evidence that Iran had done nuclear weapons research.
(top)

Iran Nuke Chief Harshly Criticizes Atomic Agency

September 18, 2012

Associated Press

By George Jahn

VIENNA - Iran's nuclear chief said Monday that "terrorists and saboteurs" might have infiltrated the International Atomic Energy Agency in an effort to derail his nation's atomic program, in an unprecedentedly harsh attack on the integrity of the U.N. organization and its probe of allegations that Tehran is striving to make nuclear arms.

Fereydoun Abbasi also rebuked the United States in comments to the IAEA's 155-nation general conference, reflecting Iran's determination to continue defying international pressure aimed at curbing its nuclear program and nudging it toward cooperation with the IAEA inspection.

As such, the speech was bound to give a greater voice to hardline Israeli leaders who say that both diplomatic efforts and economic penalties have failed to move Iran, leaving military strikes as the only alternative to stopping it from developing nuclear weapons.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu made a direct appeal to American voters on Sunday to elect a president willing to draw a "red line" with Iran.

In the past week, Netanyahu has urged President Barack Obama and other world leaders to state clearly at what point Iran would face a military attack. But Obama and his top aides, who repeatedly say all options remain on the table, have pointed to shared U.S.-Israeli intelligence that suggests Iran hasn't decided yet whether to build a bomb, despite pursuing the technology and that there would be time for action beyond toughened sanctions already in place.

In Berlin, German Chancellor Angela Merkel described Iran as "a threat, not only for Israel but for the whole world." But she said she wants to see a "political solution" and that the international community should work together to try and find one, including the possibility of new sanctions. "The room for political maneuver is not yet exhausted," she told reporters on Monday.

Iran has often warned that any Israeli attack would trigger a devastating response, and on Monday Abbasi suggested that such strikes would not succeed in slowing down his country's nuclear program. He said without elaboration that experts have "devised certain ways through which nuclear facilities remain intact under missile attacks and raids."

Tehran denies seeking nuclear arms, and Abbasi, an Iranian vice president whom the agency suspects may have been involved in nuclear weapons research, again insisted on Monday that his country's nuclear program is aimed only at making reactor fuel and doing medical research.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran ... has always opposed and will always denounce the manufacture and use of weapons of mass destruction," he said.

Tehran has long dismissed suspicions that it may re-engineer its uranium enrichment program from making reactor fuel to produce nuclear warheads and says accusations that it has worked secretly on nuclear arms are based on fabricated U.S. and Israeli intelligence. It also frequently accuses the IAEA of anti-Iran bias in its push to ensure that all of Tehran's nuclear activities are peaceful. But Abbasi's comments Monday were the harshest to date on the agency itself.

"Terrorists and saboteurs might have intruded the agency and might be making decisions covertly," he said. Citing what he said was an example of sabotage last month at an underground enrichment plant, he said IAEA inspectors arrived to inspect it shortly after power lines were blown up.

"Does this visit have any connection to that detonation?" he asked.

It appeared to be the first mention of the alleged sabotage attack. The plant at Fordo, about 70 kilometers (40 miles) south of Tehran, is of particular concern to Israel because it is buried deep into a mountainside to protect it from attack. It also is being used to enrich uranium closer to the level needed for a nuclear warhead than what is used to power reactors.

Abbasi said that anti-Iran elements are helped by the agency, even when it reports what it sees "truthfully and with absolute honesty," because "this information is easily accessible to saboteurs and terrorists through IAEA reports."

However, Iran now can "ward off threats by targeting ... cyber-attacks, industrial sabotage and use of explosives," he said, without elaborating.

Abbasi said U.S. pressure on Iran is the equivalent of an attack on all developing nations' nuclear rights. He called U.S.-led sanctions on Iran's oil exports and financial transactions "the ugly face of colonization and modern slavery."

"A state which has used nuclear weapons is not eligible to be present at the Board of Governors," he said, questioning the right of the United States to sit on the 35-nation IAEA board that makes agency policy.

Meanwhile, statements critical of Iran on Monday were voiced in more traditional terms similar to that heard at previous IAEA meetings.

U.S. Energy Secretary Stephen Chu accused Tehran of continuing "a decade-long pattern of evasion regarding questions over the nature of its nuclear program, including those related to possible military dimensions of its nuclear activities."

A European Union statement warned of "deep concerns about possible military dimensions" to Iran's nuclear program.

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Iran urges West to take action on anti-Islam film

September 17, 2012

Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran — Iran's top leader urged the West on Monday to show it respects Muslims by blocking a film that mocks the Prophet Muhammad and has touched off rage across the Islamic world.

State TV quoted Ayatollah Ali Khamenei as saying Western leaders must prove they are not "accomplices" in a "big crime."

Such an appeal falls into the major cultural divide over the film. U.S. officials say they cannot limit free speech and Google Inc. refuses to do a blanket ban on the YouTube video clip. This leaves individual countries putting up their own blocks.

Khamenei noted that some nations place restrictions on expression deemed hate speech, such as banning Nazi-related sites, or legislating protections for gays or lesbians.

"How there is no room for freedom of expression in these cases, but insulting Islam and its sanctities is free?" Khamenei was quoted as saying.

Separately, Iran's Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi said Iran will send a protest letter on the film to the U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

Iranians have staged several demonstrations against the film, but none have been violent. Crowds gathered last week in front of the Swiss Embassy, which looks after American diplomatic interests in Iran.

A semi-official religious foundation also increased a reward it had offered for the killing of British author Salman Rushdie to \$3.3 million from \$2.8 million over his book "The Satanic Verses," which was considered blasphemous by Iranian leaders.

A 1989 fatwa, or religious edict, was issued against Rushdie by Iran's late leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, but Iranian authorities have since distanced themselves from the order. ([top](#))

Thousands In Beirut Protest Anti-Islam Video In Hezbollah Show Of Strength

September 18, 2012

Washington Post

By Babak Dehghanpisheh

BEIRUT - Tens of thousands of people hit the streets of Beirut to protest the controversial video mocking the prophet Muhammad on Monday, a massive rally organized by the Shiite Muslim militant group Hezbollah that was also an attempt to show the party's strength.

Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of Hezbollah, made a rare public appearance around 6 p.m. local time and led the crowds in chants pledging martyrdom to the prophet Muhammad.

"The world should know our anger will not be a passing outburst but that this is the start of a serious movement that will continue all over the Muslim world to defend the Prophet of God," he told the

crowd, who roared their approval as he spoke. Nasrallah also warned the U.S. that if the full anti-Islam movie is released, rather than the short clip that has been posted on YouTube, there will be "dangerous consequences." The video supposedly promotes a full-length film.

The U.S. Embassy, which is a roughly 30-minute drive away from central Beirut, has begun destroying classified documents as a security precaution, the Associated Press reported. The U.S. Embassy in Beirut was the target of a car bomb in 1983 that killed 63 people; the U.S. Marine barracks was also attacked by a car bomb the same year, an incident with 242 fatalities.

Hezbollah's militia has long been the strongest military force in Lebanon and fought a short but bloody war with Israel in 2006 that left at least 1,100 Lebanese dead. Many of the group's supporters still consider that conflict to be a victory against the Israelis.

But the group also runs a strong political party and has members in parliament. The faction allied with Hezbollah - known as the March 8th Movement - is the governing coalition, and nominated the current prime minister, Najib Miqati, last year.

The demonstration Monday wound through streets in Beirut's predominantly Shiite southern suburbs, a Hezbollah stronghold. Platforms and speakers had been set up and organizers stoked up the crowd with chants of "Death to America" and "Israel is the enemy of Muslims."

"If we keep silent about this movie, then this will happen again," said Zeinab, a 40-year old housewife whose 7-year-old son was carrying a Hezbollah flag. "America is responsible. Whether it's the people or the government. They are responsible."

Protests against the controversial video flared up last Friday in Tripoli, the second-largest city in the Lebanon and one which is predominantly Sunni Muslim. The situation there veered out of control as demonstrators torched a Kentucky Fried Chicken restaurant and attempted to overrun a government building. One man was killed and more than a dozen were injured after protesters clashed with police.

But Hezbollah supporters were noticeably absent from the streets of Beirut and the group's leaders did not call for public demonstrations last Friday, which was the day Pope Benedict XVI arrived in the country for a three-day visit. Hezbollah appears to have shown restraint in keeping its supporters off the streets until Monday in order not to disrupt the pope's visit, which ended on Sunday.

It was also a savvy political move, analysts say, since Hezbollah is allied with the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM), a largely Christian party led by Michel Aoun. Hezbollah's alliance with the FPM is a point the group's leaders highlight to show that they have support beyond their mostly Shiite base. If Hezbollah had called for demonstrations during the pope's visit, it would have probably irked their Christian political allies.

Thousands of supporters of the Shiite Amal party, who are allies of Hezbollah, also joined the demonstrations on Monday.

Hezbollah's al-Manar television reported that a number of Christians had joined the crowds to condemn the controversial video. And some protesters also made an effort to show that the demonstration is not an attempt to antagonize Christians or start civil strife. One young woman carried a sign that read "Jesus and Mohammed are prophets. We do not target Christ."

But the rally wasn't about the controversial video alone. In recent months, Hezbollah's carefully cultivated image as a supporter of the downtrodden and symbol of resistance to Israel and the United States has been damaged as the group's leaders have stood steadfastly by Syrian president Bashar al-Assad amid an increasingly bloody crackdown against opposition forces.

The rally Monday was also an attempt to show that the political alliance that many observers refer to as the "axis of resistance" - Hezbollah, Syria and Iran - is still holding strong. Demonstrators carried pictures of Assad and Syrian flags in the crowd on Monday, and some carried Iranian flags, too.

Hezbollah has called for demonstrations to continue and take place in other cities across Lebanon in coming days. Sunni leaders, not to be outdone by their Shiite counterparts, also announced more protests on Monday. The controversial Sunni sheikh Ahmad Assir, who is based in the city of Sidon, announced a demonstration for his followers later this week.

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Libya Sacks Benghazi Security Chiefs After US Attack

September 18, 2012

AFP

Libya's interior minister has sacked Benghazi security chiefs after last week's deadly attack on the US consulate in the eastern city, according to official statements seen Monday by AFP.

Deputy interior minister for the eastern region, Wanis al-Sharif, and the head of national security for Benghazi, Hussein Bou Hmida, were both replaced, said two separate statements dated September 12, a day after the attack.

Ambassador Chris Stevens and three other Americans were killed as the Benghazi consulate came under fire from rocket-propelled grenades during a protest against an anti-Islam film made in America.

General Bou Hmida would be replaced by Colonel Salaheddin Doghman who would also temporarily fill in for Sharif until his successor is found, according to the texts signed by Interior Minister Fawzi Abdelali.

Libya announced on Sunday the arrest of 50 suspects over the killing of the Americans, and has blamed the Benghazi attack on foreign extremists.

A low-budget trailer for the film entitled "Innocence of Muslims," believed to have been produced by a small group of extremist Christians in the United States, has sparked furious anti-American protests across the Islamic world.

The first protests erupted in Cairo, where demonstrators stormed the US embassy on Tuesday night, replacing the Stars and Stripes with an Islamic banner.

Hours later, the US consulate in Benghazi was attacked.

Announcing the 50 arrests, Libya's parliament chief on Sunday blamed the attack on a few foreign extremists who he said entered the country from Mali and Algeria and pre-planned it with local "affiliates and sympathisers."

"It was planned, definitely, it was planned by foreigners, by people who entered the country a few months ago," Mohammed al-Megaryef, president of the Libyan National Congress, told US broadcaster CBS.

Ambassador Stevens is believed to have died from smoke inhalation after becoming trapped in the blazing diplomatic compound as it came under fire from RPGs, mortars and small arms for several hours.

Since the consulate attack, the United States has deployed counterterrorism Marine units to Libya to protect the Tripoli embassy and stationed two destroyers off the North African coast.

Anti-US protests have shaken a large swathe of Muslim countries in Africa, Asia and the Middle East, and many of the protests have been deadly.

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US, Libyan Officials Offer Vastly Different Version Of Benghazi Consulate Attack That Killed 4
September 18, 2012

McClatchy

By Jonathan S. Landay

U.S. and Libyan officials are giving significantly different accounts of the gunfire and rocket-propelled grenade attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi that killed the U.S. ambassador to Libya and three other Americans.

The Obama administration says the assault was a spontaneous local reaction inspired by a demonstration that was taking place at the U.S. Embassy in Cairo against a video made in the United States slurring the Prophet Muhammad, the founder of the Islamic faith. It also contends that the attack grew out of a small protest.

A senior Libyan official says the attack was organized and planned by foreigners – some with links to al Qaeda – involved a local Islamic militia, and was timed for the anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States. Moreover, the Libyan official appeared to question whether there was a protest beforehand.

"The way these perpetrators acted and moved, and their choosing a specific date for this so-called demonstration, I think that this leaves us with no doubt that this was pre-planned, pre-determined," Mohammad Magarief, the head of the Libyan National Congress, the recently elected interim government, said Sunday.

The drastically different versions come as the investigation into the assault still is in its preliminary stages. FBI agents who are to assist their Libyan counterparts have yet to arrive in the North African country, and the Libyan Interior Ministry official who was in charge of the investigation was fired Monday.

Both governments would have good reason to promote their version of the incident.

Libya's factionalized and weak interim government is confronting growing violence by militias and Islamic extremist groups that refused to disarm after overthrowing the late dictator Moammar Gadhafi

last year. The interim government would appear less ineffectual and feckless if the attack were a deep-rooted conspiracy by the world's most feared terrorist network.

President Barack Obama's claims that he has kept Americans safe from terrorism and dealt debilitating blows to the remnants of al Qaida have been centerpieces of his appeal for re-election in November. Those claims could be questioned by GOP candidate Mitt Romney and other Republicans if al Qaida is found to have planned a well-coordinated attack on such a significant date without being detected by U.S. intelligence.

The attack claimed the lives of U.S. Ambassador to Libya Christopher Stevens, who was visiting Benghazi from the capital of Tripoli, Sean Smith, an information technology specialist, and two security men, Tyrone Woods and Glen Doherty, both former Navy SEALs.

Scores of attackers firing assault rifles and rocket-propelled grenades charged the walled compound from two directions, swarmed inside and attacked the main building, setting it afire, witnesses have told McClatchy. Stevens and Smith apparently died from smoke inhalation. Woods and Doherty were shot dead protecting up to 30 U.S. staffers who had taken refuge in a nearby annex.

The consulate compound's landlord, Mohammed al Bishari, and a 27-year-old guard, who was wounded and asked to remain anonymous, told McClatchy last week that no protest was taking place when the attack was launched at 9:35 p.m. local time. They described the assault as sudden and well-coordinated.

The assailants were carrying the black flag of a local Islamic extremist group, Ansar al Shariah, Bishari said.

Al Qaida is suspected of playing a role because a video posted on the Internet the evening before featured Ayman al Zawahiri, Osama bin Laden's successor, calling for revenge for the death of his second in command, Abu Yahya al Libi, a Libyan cleric, who was killed in a June 4 CIA drone strike in Pakistan's tribal region.

Two senior Republican lawmakers questioned the administration's version of the attack, with Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., saying it "defies common sense." He called for a congressional investigation.

"It is imperative that Congress conduct an investigation into this matter as the two scenarios are vastly different in terms of scope and depth," Graham said in a statement on Monday. "A planned and coordinated assault points loudly to a security lapse, and the problems associated with such a scenario are much deeper than a violent riot over a film."

"It is my belief, as stated by the Libyan president, that this was a coordinated attack by al Qaida or like-minded groups," said Graham, a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee.

Rep. Mike Rogers, R-Mich., the chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, said he was told by Pentagon and CIA officials that they were "only moderately confident that it was a spontaneous event because there are huge gaps in what we know."

"I think it's just too early to make that conclusion," he told Fox News on Sunday.

Rogers, a former FBI agent, said that the attack "seemed to be military style, coordinated," featured "indirect fire coordinated with direct-fire rocket attacks," and took place on the 11th anniversary of al Qaida's strikes on the United States. The assailants also "repelled a fairly significant Libyan force that came to rescue" the consulate.

"It just has all the markings of an al Qaida-style event," he said.

Aaron Zelin, an expert on Islamic extremist groups at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, said he agreed that the attack was most likely planned in advance because the assailants launched a second attack on the consulate's safe house, which U.S. officials have been referring to as the annex.

"Not only was there the attack on the consulate, but they knew where that safe house was," he said. "They had to have some kind of reconnaissance ahead of time."

"I think that has more to do with the anniversary of 9/11 than anything else," he said.

He noted that Ansar al Shariah leaders have denied ordering the attack. But they didn't condemn it, either, he said, adding that it appeared that group members were present "in their individual capacities."

At the same time, he said there are "no known operational links" between Ansar al Shariah and any al Qaida-affiliated groups operating in the region.

Tommy Vietor, a White House spokesman, said in an email that the administration's version is "our assessment based on the information available."

"I can't speak to the factual basis for statements made by Libyan officials," he said. He declined to comment on the statements by Rogers and Graham.

Susan Rice, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, laid out the administration's version on Sunday talk shows.

"Our current best assessment, based on the information we have at present, is that, in fact, what this began as, it was spontaneous – not a pre-meditated – response to what had transpired in Cairo," she said on ABC News' "This Week." "We believe . . . that a small number of people came to the . . . consulate . . . to replicate the sort of challenge that was posed in Cairo. And then as that unfolded, it seems to have been hijacked, let us say, by some individual clusters of extremists who came with heavier weapons."

A senior intelligence official who asked not to be further identified because he was not authorized to speak publicly on the subject offered a similar assessment. "Simply put, while everything is still under investigation, the available information suggests the protests in Cairo inspired what the attackers decided to do later that night in Benghazi," the official said. "Right now, this points to a plan that was hatched opportunistically that day. Of course, if credible new information suggests otherwise, the investigation will pursue those leads."

In contrast, Magarief, the Libyan official, told CBS News' "Face the Nation" that the attack was "planned by foreigners, by people who entered the country a few months ago, and they were planning this criminal act since their arrival."

The foreigners included people from Algeria and Mali, the North African country whose northern half has been overrun by Islamic militants linked to al Qaeda and whose arms are thought to have come from looted Gadhafi storehouses.

In a related development, Wanif al Sharif, the deputy interior minister who was in charge of eastern Libya and headed the investigation, was fired, according to the Libya Herald, because of the attack. Sharif was the only Libyan official to publicly say that there had been a protest before the attack. He didn't respond to calls Monday seeking comment.

Even before the assault, many Libyans had complained about deteriorating security in Benghazi, where the uprising against Gadhafi first erupted. Scores of rogue militias have been drafted by the government to provide security in the absence of a regular force, and the role of extremists, including members of Ansar al Shariah, has been controversial.

The city is divided block by block among the groups, which have kept the weapons they procured during the uprising. Many of the militias occupy bases lined with tanks and machine-gun mounted trucks and are led by self-styled colonels.

Every time there was a bombing or other attack, Sharif blamed remnants of Gadhafi's regime, despite evidence that groups empowered by the state were behind the violence, said Michel Cousins, the editor of the Libya Herald. The attack on the compound was the last straw for Libya's first elected government, he said.

Magarief has been a critic of the Interior Ministry before, blaming it last month for involvement in the destruction of mosques and shrines associated with the moderate Sufi strain of Islam. Interior Minister Fawzi Abdel Al handed in his resignation after Magarief's criticism, but he rescinded it two days later, saying the threat from Islamist militants was too great for him to step down.
(top)

Video Shows Libyans Trying To Rescue US Ambassador

September 18, 2012

Associated Press

By Maggie Michael

CAIRO - Libyans tried to rescue Ambassador Chris Stevens, cheering "God is great" and rushing him to a hospital after they discovered him still clinging to life inside the U.S. Consulate, according to witnesses and a new video that emerged Monday from last week's attack in the city of Benghazi.

The group of Libyans had stumbled across Stevens' seemingly lifeless form inside a dark room and didn't know who he was, only that he was a foreigner, the man who shot the video and two other witnesses told The Associated Press.

The account underlines the confusion that reigned during the assault by protesters and heavily armed gunmen that overwhelmed the consulate in Benghazi last Tuesday night, killing four Americans, including Stevens, who died from smoke inhalation soon after he was found. U.S. officials are still trying

to piece together how the top American diplomat in Libya got separated from others as staffers were evacuated, suffocating in what is believed to be a consulate safe-room.

The Libyans who found him expressed frustration that there was no ambulance and no first aid on hand, leaving him to be slung over a man's shoulder to be carried to a car.

"There was not a single ambulance to carry him. Maybe he was handled the wrong way," said Fahd al-Bakoush, a freelance videographer who shot the footage. "They took him to a private car."

U.S. and Libyan officials are also trying to determine who was behind the attack. Still unclear was whether it had been planned beforehand or was sparked by an anti-Islam film made in the United States that, hours before the Benghazi assault, had sparked protests at the American Embassy in Cairo.

On Sunday, Libyan President Mohammed el-Megarif contended foreign militants had been plotting the attack for months and timed it for Tuesday's 9/11 anniversary.

However, U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Susan Rice said it appeared spontaneous and unplanned, that extremists with heavier weapons "hijacked" the protest and turned it into an outright attack. She noted Libya is awash with weapons.

A CIA memo sent to U.S. lawmakers this weekend, and obtained by The Associated Press, says current intelligence still suggests the demonstrations in Benghazi "were spontaneously inspired by the protests at the U.S. Embassy in Cairo" and "evolved into a direct assault" on the diplomatic posts by "extremists."

Soon after the attack, Libyan civilians roamed freely around the trashed consulate, its walls blacked and furniture burned. Among them were the videographer al-Bakoush, and a photographer and art student he often works with.

They heard a panicked shout, "I stepped over a dead man," and rushed to see what was going on, al-Bakoush said. The body had been found inside a dark room with a locked door accessible only by a window. A group of men pulled him out and realized he was a foreigner and still alive.

He was breathing and his eyelids flickered, al-Bakoush said. "He was alive," he said. "No doubt. His face was blackened and he was like a paralyzed person."

Video taken by al-Bakoush and posted on YouTube shows Stevens being carried out of the room through a window with a raised shutter. "Bring him out, man," someone shouts. "Out of the way, out of the way!"

"Alive, Alive!" come other shouts, then a cheer of "God is great."

The next scene shows Stevens lying on a tile floor, with one man touching his neck to check his pulse. Al-Bakoush said that after that scene, they put Stevens in a private car to rush to the hospital.

The video has been authenticated since Stevens' face is clearly visible and he is wearing the same white t-shirt seen in authenticated photos of him being carried away on another man's shoulders, presumably moments later. The photographer and student who were with al-Bakoush at the scene gave the same account as he did.

"We were happy to see him alive. The youths tried to rescue him. But there was no security, no ambulances, nothing to help," said Ahmed Shams, the 22-year-old arts student.

When they entered the consulate, "there was no one around. There was no fire fighters, no ambulances, no relief," said the photographer, Abdel-Qader Fadl.

The accounts of all three witnesses mesh with that of the doctor who treated Stevens that night.

Dr. Ziad Abu Zeid told The Associated Press last week that Stevens was nearly lifeless when he was brought by Libyans, with no other Americans around, to the Benghazi hospital where he worked. He said Stevens had severe asphyxia from the smoke and that he tried for 90 minutes to resuscitate him with no success. Only later did security officials confirm it was Stevens.

Fadl said he drove to the hospital behind the car carrying Stevens.

During the assault, more than 30 U.S. staffers were evacuated from the consulate. So far, U.S. officials have not announced the results of an investigation into the circumstances of the four Americans' deaths.

They have said preliminary reports said that amid the evacuation, Stevens and foreign service officer Sean Smith were inside the consulate with a regional security officer. They got separated in the smoke. The security officer and others went back in to try to find the two of them and found Smith dead. They pulled him out but flames and gunfire forced them to flee before they could find Stevens.

Al-Bakoush and his colleagues said that once they learned his identity, they were stunned Stevens had been alone.

"I've never seen incompetence and negligence like this, from the two sides, the Americans and the Libyans," he said. "You can sacrifice everyone but rescue the ambassador. He is the ambassador for God's sake."

(top)

Financial Strains Said To Threaten Stability Of Palestinian Authority

September 18, 2012

New York Times

By Isabel Kershner

JERUSALEM - As the Palestinian Authority marks the 19th anniversary this month of the signing of the Oslo Accords, the agreement with Israel that brought it into existence, the authority is facing a financial crisis that experts say could threaten its future operations and stability.

The International Monetary Fund said last year that the Western-backed authority had built the institutions and sound fiscal policies for running the economy of a future state. Oussama Kanaan, the fund's mission chief for the West Bank and Gaza, said in an interview that on that count, nothing had changed.

But there is no state in sight and the Oslo Accords, which were meant as interim arrangements giving the Palestinians limited self-rule, have stretched on for nearly two decades, perpetuating what critics

say are conditions that are now limiting economic development. The authority needs \$400 million in immediate assistance to cover a gap in its 2012 budget and it has been confronted with growing public outrage over austerity measures and steep price increases driven largely by outside forces.

Beyond that, though, to build a sustained economic recovery, reduce unemployment and support the authority's reforms, Mr. Kanaan said, it is essential that the restrictions that Israel places on Palestinian trade and movement be eased and that donors provide adequate aid. Otherwise, he warned, "The gains made in recent years in institution-building and reforms would unravel, and ultimately, the Palestinian Authority would not be able to operate."

Mr. Kanaan, who was speaking by telephone from Washington, based his assessment on the results of a recent fact-finding trip he led to the Palestinian territories. A report on those findings will be presented on Sept. 23 at a donors' conference at the United Nations.

The report will state that the West Bank-based Palestinian Authority faces "serious risks," including an inability to make essential payments, like salaries, with all the implications that has for stability. The authority employs about 180,000 Palestinians, among them the security forces. Those employees, in turn, support relatives estimated to include about a quarter of the population of the Palestinian territories, including the Gaza Strip which is run by Hamas. In June, July and August, the authority was unable to pay its employees their full salaries on time.

Over the last two years the West Bank has experienced an economic slowdown, with real G.D.P. growth declining to about 5 percent from an annual average rate of 9 percent in 2008-2010, the study found. Unemployment has reached 19 percent in the West Bank and as much as 30 percent in Gaza. The authority's severe financing difficulties over the past 20 months have led to a substantial rise in domestic payment arrears and debt to commercial banks.

Although the authority has reduced its reliance on international aid after economic reforms - to \$1.1 billion in 2010 from \$1.8 billion in 2008 - the amount received since then has not been sufficient to fulfill requirements. Much of the shortfall is due to a drop in aid from Arab countries, Mr. Kanaan said. In both 2008 and 2009, Arab donors disbursed \$500 million, but in 2011 and so far in 2012, the amount dropped to more like \$200 million.

The Palestinian Authority is already reeling under the pressure. Shaken by days of popular protests over fuel price increases and the rising cost of living, the government hastily backtracked this week on some of the austerity measures it had taken, like a raise in taxes.

Much of the anger has been directed against Salam Fayyad, the prime minister of the authority.

"We are doing the best we can, and we have been all along," Mr. Fayyad said after announcing the steps aimed at calming the protests.

Some Palestinians in the West Bank have called for a review of the Oslo Accords and changes to its economic annex. Critics argue that the accords allow Israel to continue its occupation of areas captured in the 1967 Middle East war while divesting itself of responsibility for the welfare of the population.

There is always concern in Israel that discontent with the Palestinian Authority can easily be channeled against Israel. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu instructed the Israeli treasury last week to advance

to the Palestinians 250 million shekels, or more than \$60 million, in the monthly tax clearance that Israel collects on behalf of the Palestinian Authority.

An Israeli official said that some of the road blocks and other restrictions cited by the I.M.F. as undermining the economy were essential to address Israel's security concerns. The official said Israel had removed many of the roadblocks and other obstacles in the West Bank that were introduced after the violent Palestinian uprising broke out in 2000, and under international pressure, it significantly eased import restrictions on consumer goods from Israel to Gaza. The Israeli official also hinted at bad Palestinian management.

But Mr. Kanaan argued that more could be done, and that what was needed was to restart peace negotiations between the parties that would lead to a fundamental change in the Israeli-Palestinian economic relationship. For example, he said, allowing the operation of an airport in the West Bank or a seaport in Gaza would give Palestinians easier access to outside markets.

Crucially, he added, Palestinian economic activity and investment should be allowed in Area C, the portion of the West Bank where Israel retains full civil and military control under the Oslo Accords and which covers 60 percent of the West Bank territory.

Any Palestinian economic initiatives there have to be coordinated with Israel; the Palestinians say that permission is rarely given.

One area of particular contention is the Jordan Valley, the fertile strip of West Bank land along the border with Jordan, where Israel says it must retain a presence for strategic reasons under any future statehood agreement with the Palestinians.

The Palestinians say the valley holds great potential for agriculture and agro-industry projects, but large swathes of land there have been declared Israeli military zones off-limits to the Palestinians and other parts are designated for use by the Jewish settlements in the area. Palestinian access to the area's water resources is also severely limited.

The Palestinian government complained in late August that the Israeli authorities had issued orders to a number of Palestinian farmers in the Jordan Valley to uproot some 900 acres of date palms that they had planted east of Jericho. The Palestinians said the date palms were planted on lands they had rented from the Waqf, or Islamic trust.

The office of the Israeli authority that liaises with the Palestinians on such issues said that there had been a "phenomenon of illegal palm plantings" in the area on lands where ownership discussions had not yet been finalized, and that this date palm plantation had relied mostly on water from pirate drilling or unauthorized connections to Israeli-controlled water sources.

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Palestinians Protest Anti-Islam Film

September 18, 2012

AFP

Hundreds of Palestinians on Monday staged a peaceful protest in Ramallah against an anti-Islam film that has sparked violent demonstrations in the Muslim world.

Participants of the sit-in, organised by the Palestinian Authority's Waqf (religious endowment) and held outside its offices, held signs saying "We are against those who oppose you Mohammed" and "Do not touch our Prophet."

Speaking at the event, Waqf minister Mahmoud Habbash called on the United States to remove the film and apologise for it.

The low-budget, US-produced "Innocence of Muslims" movie has incited a wave of bloody anti-American violence in Libya, Egypt, Sudan, Tunisia, Yemen and in several other countries across the Muslim world.

The film, in which actors have strong American accents, portrays Muslims as immoral and gratuitously violent. It also pokes fun at the Prophet Mohammed and touches on themes of paedophilia and homosexuality.

On Saturday, hundreds of Israeli Arabs protested against the film, and on Friday thousands of Palestinians protested in the Gaza Strip and hundreds in Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem, where there were clashes with Israeli police.

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Syrian Jets Fire Into Lebanese Territory

September 18, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By CHARLES LEVINSON

BEIRUT—Syrian warplanes fired missiles into Lebanese territory on Monday, heightening the potential for Syria's neighbors to be pulled into its 18-month-old conflict.

Such spillover has rocked the delicate political balance in Lebanon, where rival sectarian political forces have thrown their support behind opposing sides in Syria's civil war.

"As conditions deteriorate, we see dangerous implications for Syria's neighbors," Robert Serry, the United Nations special coordinator for the Middle East peace process, told the U.N. Security Council on Monday.

Hours after the strike, Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of the Lebanese Shiite political party and militant group Hezbollah, made a rare public appearance before tens of thousands of protesters in Beirut's southern suburbs.

Hezbollah had called for demonstrations to protest a video mocking the Prophet Muhammad, but the gathering also served as a show of political force by the movement, which remains a supporter of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. Hezbollah's Sunni and Christian rivals in Lebanon have largely backed Syria's rebel fighters.

The Lebanese government's quiet response to the Syrian missile strikes underscored just how deep and fraught those divisions remain.

Lebanon's state-run National News Agency and other local television stations reported that three missiles hit on the outskirts of the border village of Aarsal on Monday morning after warplanes flew low

over the village in pursuit of fleeing Syrian rebels. A spokesman for the Lebanese Army played down the incident, saying the missiles had actually struck Syrian territory. The Lebanese Army includes all sects of Lebanese society and has found itself caught between the country's rival forces.

The turnout in support of Hezbollah dwarfed the crowds that came out on Sunday for Mass in downtown Beirut with Pope Benedict XVI, who wrapped up his three-day trip to Lebanon with a public plea for peace, reconciliation and interreligious harmony.

It was widely assumed that Hezbollah held off on joining the outpouring of anger across the region in response to the video until after the pope left, so as not to jeopardize the historic trip. The Shiite group has a powerful presence within the Lebanese government and walks a delicate road between hard-line militancy and the more pragmatic demands of governance and coexistence in the fractured country.

At Monday's rally, protesters marched through the streets chanting "Death to America" and "America is the great Satan."

The protest was peaceful and orderly and held far from the U.S. Embassy, which is in the hills outside of Beirut.

Sprinkled throughout the crowd among Hezbollah's yellow and green banners were Syrian flags with Mr. Assad's portrait.

It was Mr. Nasrallah's first public appearance since December 2011. He called on the U.S. to close down any websites that continue broadcasting the video, and called on international organizations to make denigration of monotheistic religions a violation of international law.

Tens of thousands of Hezbollah supporters surged through the streets when Mr. Nasrallah appeared on stage in Beirut's Shiite-dominated suburbs, rushing for a rare glimpse of the charismatic leader who makes most of his public appearances via satellite link for fear of assassination.

Mr. Nasrallah began his speech with a Quranic verse warning that those who oppose the Prophet will be cursed and destroyed. "Destroyed were the hands of Abu Lahab and he lay utterly doomed...," the verse begins.

"This is the start of a serious movement that must continue all over the Muslim world in defense of the prophet of God," Mr. Nasrallah said.

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Mideast Powers Meet, Seek Syria Peace In Cairo

September 18, 2012

Associated Press

By Aya Batrawy

CAIRO - Mideast heavyweights had a first high-level meeting in Cairo on Monday as part of newly-formed quartet tasked to end Syria's civil war, cautioning that a solution would not come easy but that common ground exists between Damascus' staunchest regional ally and its opponents.

The gathering was the first time foreign ministers from the "Islamic Quartet" met for the dialogue as part of an initiative launched by Egypt's new Islamist president Mohammed Morsi.

"Nobody should expect from one meeting an immediate action plan which we agree upon and could be presented to others," said Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, adding that what counted was "regional ownership" of the crisis.

Davutoglu was speaking to reporters in a press conference alongside his Egyptian and Iranian counterparts after the meeting in Cairo's Foreign Ministry.

The four-nation group brings together three supporters of the Syrian rebellion - Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Egypt - with the Syrian regime's top regional ally, Iran.

The U.N.'s special envoy for Syria, Lakhdar Brahimi, and Arab League chief Nabil Elaraby had discussed Brahimi's three-day trip to Syria over the weekend, where he met Syrian President Bashar Assad, before meeting the ministers for dinner.

Egyptian Foreign Minister Mohamed Kamel Amr also acknowledged that a plan had not emerged from Monday night's meeting, "but there is discussion about this."

Speaking in Arabic, the Iranian foreign minister praised Egypt for its own successful uprising, which ousted the country's longtime authoritarian leader last year and helped spark Syria's own revolt.

"The common ground between us is more than our differences," Ali Akbar Salehi said. "Finding a peaceful solution is important."

While the Turkish foreign minister stressed that the ultimate goal should be "a strong Syria" based on the "legitimate rights and demands of the Syrian people," Salehi said "the solution in Syria should be a Syrian solution," not "imposed from the outside."

Asked whether the Shiite Muslim country had sent military forces to Lebanon and Syria, Salehi did not reply. Earlier in the week a top commander of Iran's powerful Revolutionary Guard said Tehran had sent advisers, the clearest indication to date of Iran's direct assistance to the Syrian regime.

Notably absent was Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal, who earlier this month was recovering from abdominal surgery in the United States. Last week, Saudi Arabia said that the 72-year-old foreign minister would spend several weeks in Los Angeles to recover.

It was initially suggested that Saudi Arabia would send its deputy foreign minister to the meeting in Cairo, but the kingdom did not. No explanation was given. Saudi Arabia, though, did send the deputy to Cairo last week to attend a preparatory session for Monday's meeting, and the kingdom remains part of the talks.

Earlier in the day, the Turkish foreign minister met with Egypt's Morsi to discuss the Syrian crisis.

Morsi's Sunni Muslim Brotherhood backers, Egypt's most powerful political group since the revolt, are opposed to Shiite Iran's staunch backing of the Syrian regime and its lethal crackdown on largely Sunni protesters. Assad is a follower of the Alawite sect, an offshoot of Shiite Islam.

Turkey, which hosts some 80,000 Syrian refugees, has accused its southern neighbor Syria of "state terrorism" and allowed rebels to use its territory as a base. Saudi Arabia has taken a leading role in supporting the opposition seeking to topple the regime, while Egypt's president has urged Assad to take a lesson from the Arab Spring uprisings that deposed other leaders and step down.

Syria has responded by saying Morsi's comments were "blatant interference in Syrian internal affairs" and accused Turkey of "practicing terrorism against the Syrian people by harboring, supporting and training armed terrorist groups."

Cairo is trying to convince Iran to drop its unquestioned support of Assad in exchange for help in easing Tehran's regional isolation, officials close to the Egyptian presidency said last week.

Morsi was said to have offered a package of incentives for Tehran, including the restoration of full diplomatic ties and efforts toward reconciliation with wealthy Gulf nations - a significant diplomatic prize for the Islamic Republic, especially as it comes under mounting pressure over its disputed nuclear program.

Meanwhile, the carnage shows no sign of abating. Syrian activists say nearly 5,000 people were killed in August, the highest monthly total since the crisis began in March 2011 - bringing the overall death toll from the conflict to some 23,000.

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Tehran Denies Revolutionary Guards In Syria

September 18, 2012

AFP

Iran's foreign ministry on Monday denied the Islamic republic had any Revolutionary Guards in Syria, affirming that media reports quoting the head of the Guards saying that had been published out of context.

"The comments citing General (Mohammed Ali) Jafari on the presence of Guards in Syria were selective and incorrect... and they are not in any way valid," ministry spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast told Iran's Arabic-language Al-Alam television.

"Iran does not have any military presence in the region, especially in Syria," he said.

General Jafari, in a very rare news conference in Tehran on Sunday, had said that members of the Guards' elite Quds Force were in Syria and Lebanon as advisors -- and asserting that they did not constitute a "military presence."

"A number of Quds Force members are present in Syria and Lebanon. But it does not mean that we have a military presence there. We provide them with counsel and advice, and transfer experience to them," Jafari told the press and television reporters for Iranian and a few foreign news outlets.

"We provide them with our experience, while other countries are not shy of supporting terrorist groups," he said, using the epithet Tehran and Damascus employ to designate Syria's rebels they say are armed by Western and Gulf Arab nations.

"It is our pride, as the supreme leader has said, to defend Syria which is part of (anti-Israel) resistance," Jafari said.

Jafari's comments were reported by Iranian news agencies, including the official outlet IRNA, ISNA and the news website of the Revolutionary Guards (Sepah News). They corresponded to an audio recording of the entire news conference made by AFP.

Lebanon on Monday said it had officially demanded that Iran explain Jafari's reported comments.
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SCA

Suicide Bomber Strikes Vehicle Carrying Foreigners in Kabul

September 18, 2012

New York Times

By ROD NORDLAND and SANGAR RAHIMI

KABUL, Afghanistan — Fourteen people, 10 of them foreigners, were killed by a suicide bomber on Tuesday, bringing to at least 28 the number of deaths attributed to unrest sweeping the Muslim world as the result of an amateurish video parodying the Prophet Muhammad.

In Egypt, a radical cleric issued a fatwa calling for the killing of everyone involved in the video, according to a report posted on militants' Web sites.

The deaths in Kabul were the first here so far connected to the video, as authorities cracked down on attempted street demonstrations, and blocked Internet access to all Google products, including YouTube, where the video was posted under the name "Innocence of Muslims."

A suicide bomber, said by insurgents to be a woman, drove a car full of explosives head-on into a minibus apparently carrying foreign workers on the Airport Road early Tuesday morning, killing all 12 people aboard and two people on the road, according to police.

A district police official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the foreign victims included French citizens, South Africans and Russians who worked for a foreign company in Kabul and were apparently headed for the airport. Literature seen in the wreckage of the minibus suggested they had been part of a flight crew.

An Afghan insurgent group, Hezb-e-Islami, claimed responsibility for the attack, saying it was vengeance for the Muhammad video.

That brought to at least 28 the number of people killed in six countries as a consequence of protests over the video since it came to public attention and was posted on YouTube in the days before Sept. 11. A Florida pastor, Terry Jones, whose small church had publicly staged burnings of the Koran last year, called attention to it.

The violent backlash began on Sept. 11 with an organized attack on the American consulate in Benghazi that claimed the lives of the American ambassador to Libya, J. Christopher Stevens, and three staff members. Protests at Western embassies in the ensuing days took one life in Egypt, three in Tunisia, one in Lebanon and five in Yemen. United States Marines were sent to Yemen and Sudan to protect the embassies in those countries.

Although federal authorities identified the man behind the film as a convicted criminal named Nakoula Bassely Nakoula, 55, and took him in for questioning on Sept. 15 over possible federal parole violations, that has so far done little to tamp down the rising unrest.

SITE Intelligence Group, a monitoring agency that tracks militants' Internet postings, reported late Monday that a prominent Egyptian Salafist preacher named Ahmad Ashoush had issued a fatwa, or religious edict, saying that "the killing of the director, producer, actors and everyone else involved in the film is mandatory."

The fatwa by Mr. Ashoush, who has been reported as having ties to Al Qaeda, was posted on militant online forums on Sept. 16, SITE said.

Afghanistan had remained relatively calm while unrest swept Muslim communities from Australia to Britain, and the suicide bombing were the first deaths in Afghanistan linked to the video, which most people here have not been able to see.

Authorities in Pakistan similarly blocked access to YouTube, officials said, as did some other Muslim countries. Google, which owns YouTube, refused a White House request to remove the video, saying it did not violate Google's rules on hate speech.

French soldiers could be seen at the site of the blast afterward. At least nine bodies, some with severed limbs, were seen lying on the road. It appeared that the dead were Westerners, judging from their clothes — T-shirts and jeans — and their remains. One victim's blond hair was somehow untouched by the blast, which left a crater almost four feet across and a foot deep.

"A Toyota Corolla rigged as a car bomb was detonated by one of its occupants near a minibus that was carrying passengers," said the Kabul police chief, Mohammed Ayub Salangi.

A spokesman for Hezb-i-Islami claimed responsibility for the bombing and said it was carried out by an 18-year-old woman.

"We claim credit for the attack by a martyrdom-seeking mujahid, an 18-year-old girl named Fatima, from Kabul, and the attack has been conducted in response to the film insulting the Prophet Muhammad and Islam," said Zubir Siddiqi, a spokesman for the group, who was reached by telephone.

Suicide bombings carried out by women are highly unusual in Afghanistan.

Mr. Siddiqi spoke for the extremist branch of Hezb-i-Islami, headed by Gulbuddin Hekmatyr, which fights against both the Taliban and the Afghan government. A moderate branch of the group has prominent members in the government, and Hezb-i-Islami has been seen as the insurgent group most likely to enter peace talks with the government.

The explosion Tuesday took place on a road leading from the civilian entrance to the airport toward northern Kabul, near three adjacent wedding halls. The victims' vehicle appeared to have been heading toward the airport. Kabul police officers, Afghan intelligence special forces and some Westerners in plain clothes rushed to the scene, but no one arrived in the first hour and a half after the blast to claim the bodies or identify them.

A witness, a street vendor named Abdul Rahim, 40, who was 150 yards from the scene, said he saw the car with the bomb drive head on into the minibus on a narrow access lane that was part of the Airport Road, a broad boulevard where the lanes are separated by concrete barriers. As the vehicles collided, the bomb went off with such force that both were flung into the air, ending up 100 yards away from one another, he said.

The minibus was thrown into the forecourt of a gasoline station, and all 12 occupants were killed, police said. Gen. Mohammad Zahir, the head of the Afghan Police Criminal Investigation Division, said it was unclear who the victims worked for. One of the dead was a woman, he said, adding that 10 other people were wounded.

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Police Contain Afghan Rage Over Film, As Protests Spread Elsewhere

September 18, 2012

New York Times

By Matthew Rosenberg And Sangar Rahimi

KABUL, Afghanistan - Facing Afghanistan's first significant outbreak of violence over an anti-Islam film that has inflamed mobs elsewhere, the police moved swiftly on Monday to contain rampaging groups of young men who were burning tires and throwing stones along a thoroughfare leading east out of Kabul, keeping the protesters from advancing toward the city and dispersing them within hours.

A large American base along the route taken by the protesters remained untouched throughout Monday morning's unrest, and there were no reports of deaths or serious injuries among the police or protesters.

The work by the police earned the praise of Gen. John R. Allen, the commander of the American-led military forces in Afghanistan, and capped nearly a week in which the Afghan government has quietly worked behind the scenes to keep anger over the American-made film, which mocks the Prophet Muhammad, from turning violent. As news of the protests spread around the world last week, Afghan officials across the country gathered elders and religious leaders and told them that it was fine to speak out against the film, "The Innocence of Muslims," but that they should urge people to stay calm and avoid violence.

Those efforts have continued - many sermons delivered during last week's Friday Prayer, for instance, were vehemently anti-American and sharply critical of the movie yet concluded with urgings to keep the peace.

Afghan and Western officials on Monday said having those kinds of messages delivered by religious and tribal leaders had gone a long way toward averting a repeat of the violence that gripped wide areas of Afghanistan earlier this year after American soldiers burned Korans at a base north of Kabul.

The government also asked Internet providers to block sites hosting a clip of the film, shutting down access to Google, YouTube and Gmail in the process. Access to Google and Gmail appeared to have been restored on Monday afternoon, though officials said YouTube remained blocked for most Internet users.

The relative calm in Afghanistan, despite Monday's outburst, has stood in stark contrast to events elsewhere in the Muslim world since last Tuesday when the American ambassador to Libya, J.

Christopher Stevens, was killed in an attack on the United States diplomatic mission in Benghazi as protests spread from neighboring Egypt. New outbreaks were reported Monday in Indonesia, Pakistan, Lebanon and Iran.

In Jakarta, the Indonesian capital, police firing tear gas and water cannons moved against hundreds of demonstrators who had gathered outside the American Embassy to express opposition to the film. Some protesters set fire to an American flag, while others hurled rocks and gasoline bombs and burned tires, news reports said.

Demonstrations spread across Pakistan, where the government restricted Internet access to YouTube and other sites containing what the Telecommunication Authority called anti-Islamic material. The police clashed with protesters outside the United States Consulates in Lahore and Karachi, and dozens were reported hurt. In the Upper Dir district of northwest Pakistan, police officers opened fire on 600 student protesters, leaving at least one dead. In Islamabad, the United States Embassy suspended public services.

In Beirut, Lebanon, Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of the Lebanese Shiite Muslim group Hezbollah, condemned the video during a rare public appearance at a peaceful protest of thousands far from the United States Embassy. He said countries around the world should block Web sites carrying the video, and that its producers should be "punished."

"America, which uses the pretext of freedom of expression, should understand that airing the entire movie will have repercussions in the world that are dangerous, dangerous, very dangerous!" he said.

Student protesters were also mobilized to denounce the film in Iran, where the supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, blamed what he called the West's "Islamophobic policies of arrogance and Zionism" and dismissed American government criticism of the film as meaningless. In a speech to police cadets, reported by Iran's official news media, the ayatollah said Western countries "should acquit themselves of such a heavy crime not in words but in deed."

There were also unconfirmed reports, apparently originating in an account on Sunday by the Iranian Students' News Agency, that a religious foundation had enriched its death bounty on Salman Rushdie, the British author whose novel "The Satanic Verses" was deemed a blasphemy punishable by death 23 years ago by Iran's revolutionary icon, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. The news agency said the bounty was increased to \$3.3 million from \$2.8 million for Mr. Rushdie, considered by Iran's clerics to be the inspiration for insults to Islam.

In Afghanistan on Monday, as in other parts of the world, most of the protesters were young men, who chanted for the death of America, Israel, Britain and President Hamid Karzai's government.

The police here responded in force to quell the rioting. Scores of regular officers and riot police officers wearing helmets and protected by shields battled groups of young men throughout the morning.

The NATO-led coalition said the base that lies along Jalalabad Road, Camp Phoenix, had not been targeted by the protesters and was unaffected by the violence.

But outside its well-fortified walls, the charred remains of shipping containers could be seen, though it was impossible to tell from the blackened steel shells whether they had been carrying supplies for the base or were being used by others not connected to the military.

Ayub Salangi, Kabul's police chief, said about 50 policemen had sustained light wounds trying to keep the protesters in check. He, too, was left with some bruises and cuts from stones hurled by protesters.

At least two police cars were set ablaze, he said. By late morning, other smoldering vehicles could be seen along the road, as well as the burning shipping containers and piles of flaming tires. Plumes of black smoke were visible from the center of the city.

For many of the people who live near Jalalabad Road or work at the shops and construction depots that line it the protest was an unwelcome disruption that had accomplished little apart from destroying property. A man in his mid-30s, who declined to be identified by name, cursed the protesters for burning tires and shouted at them: "Will your dad pay for the road's damages?" None of the protesters seemed to hear him.

"They can express their pure Islamic emotions, but this is not the way to do it," he said. "The government built this road with money we beg from foreigners and now they are destroying it."

The protests abated by noon, and a few hours later the road was clogged with its usual workday traffic.

Most officials gave only vague estimates of the size of the protest, saying hundreds of men took part. But one senior police officer, Gen. Ahmad Fahim Qayam, who commands the quick-reaction force of the Kabul police, told reporters that the crowd had numbered 3,000 to 4,000.

Mr. Salangi, the police chief, described the protesters as "emotional" young men.

In an unusual step, the American command released a statement praising the police, who did not appear to use deadly force in containing the unrest.

General Allen singled out the police chief, saying in the statement that "we watched his great efforts at peacefully containing the demonstrations. We all admire his courage and his leadership, and that of his brave police."

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Coalition Sharply Reduces Joint Operations With Afghan Troops

September 18, 2012

New York Times

By MATTHEW ROSENBERG

KABUL, Afghanistan — After years of tightly intertwining its forces with Afghan troops, the American-led military coalition has sharply curtailed ground-level operations with the Afghan Army and police forces, potentially undercutting the training mission that is the heart of the Western exit strategy.

The new limits, which were issued Sunday and require a general's approval for any joint work at the small-unit level, was prompted by a spike in attacks on international troops by Afghan soldiers and police over the past six weeks. There was also fear that anger over an anti-Islam movie could prompt more of what the coalition calls insider attacks, American officials said.

Coalition officials stressed that their officers would still be paired with higher-level Afghan units, and that the basic concept of training, advising and fighting alongside Afghan units in the field to ready them to fight on their own remained at the core of war strategy.

The advisory mission is "the way ahead. It is still valid," said Army Lt. Col. Richard W. Spiegel, a coalition spokesman.

"We are not stepping away from this," he added. "Things might look a little different, but we're not walking away."

Coalition officers said the order to curtail direct cooperation covers all work done with Afghan forces below the level of a battalion. An American battalion has about 700 to 800 troops, though some are larger or smaller, and is designed to be the smallest unit that can fight independent of a higher command.

But in Afghanistan, where the Taliban blend easily and often strike in small groups, most of the combat goes on far below the battalion level, with small squads of about 10 men or platoons of about 15 to 40 soldiers or Marines.

Many of the day-to-day interactions between coalition and Afghan forces, such as joint patrols and meetings with village elders, also take place in small groups. Sometimes, even recreation is shared, with Afghans and foreign troops playing volleyball or working out together at one of the scores of small, shared combat outposts spread across the country.

"Clearly, we're going to be seeing less of that," Colonel Spiegel said.

But, he stressed, work at those levels with the Afghans would not cease completely. Rather, any operations below the battalion level now must be approved by one of the five coalition regional commands in Afghanistan.

Most officials insisted the change would not have a huge impact or alter the basic American strategy. "No one should interpret this as anything more than a prudent response to recent events. We remain committed to our goals and strategy in Afghanistan," said George Little, the Pentagon spokesman, speaking to reporters during a trip to China.

At a news conference on that trip, Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta said: "We are concerned with regards to these insider attacks and the impact they are having on our forces." Gen. John R. Allen, the top NATO commander in Afghanistan, "has reflected that in the steps that he has taken," Mr. Panetta said.

Some officials, though, acknowledged the new order would sharply limit organic cooperation between junior American and Afghan officers and their troops in the field, and thus could undercut the effectiveness of the advisory mission.

Until now, they had been empowered to organize patrols or small operations. An American captain could send men from his company to reinforce Afghans in a firefight without seeking higher approval.

But now, if a young lieutenant who commands a platoon wants to take a few dozen soldiers on a routine patrol with Afghan forces, he now needs approval from a two-star general who commands a division, which usually has about 10,000 service members.

How adding layers of bureaucracy will play out remains to be seen, coalition officials said, saying the new order was only issued two days ago. The order was first reported on Tuesday by NBC News, although its report said that all partnering of forces had been cut off, not just the work done by smaller units.

But officials insisted the strategy of partnering with the Afghans to get them ready to fight on their own remained in place. "The advisory piece has not stopped," Colonel Spiegel said. "All that's really happening is that we've changed the level at which risk assessments are approved."

It was also unclear how the logistics of the new plan would work. The higher-level commands — the battalions and brigades — that will remain fully partnered with their Afghan counterparts are housed on sprawling bases where there is often physical distance and high walls between them and the Afghan commands.

But the smaller units those commands are composed of — companies and platoons — are in many places based at small outposts shared with Afghan forces. Sometimes, the two are separated by mere yards, and they often share guard duty at the outpost's gate and in its guard towers, among other duties.

How work at those outposts is supposed to continue is unclear. Colonel Spiegel said there was no "cookie-cutter solution" and each case would be considered on an individual basis.

Other support the Americans and their NATO allies provide the Afghans would remain in place, such as air cover, artillery support and the airlifting of wounded Afghans on American medical evacuation helicopters.

Afghan soldiers were not reassured by such talk. Three interviewed as word spread Tuesday said their many of their units were not yet ready to fight alone — an assessment shared by the Pentagon — and could be in deep trouble without close coalition assistance.

The curtailment of partnered operations is "a big problem for the Afghan Army," said Maj. Salam, an officer based in western Afghanistan who asked that he only be identified by his rank and last name.

"We rely on the Americans for everything," he continued. "The army is not in a level to carry out military operations independently, we still need their support. I do not buy the lies that the MOD officials are trying to sell us and the public — we are in the field and we know how difficult it would be for the army without Americans."

He cited an incident on Monday in which an Afghan Army vehicle struck a hidden bomb. Two soldiers were killed, and the Americans did not respond to a request to evacuate the four wounded troopers.

Instead, they had to wait for help from their own forces, which do not have medical evacuation helicopters. "It took them six hours to bring the soldiers to the hospital. One of them has lost a lot of blood and he might die," Major Salam said.

If the Americans "abandon us, they should know that it would be the end of everything for all of us."
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Strike Over Anti-Islam Film Shuttters Businesses, Halts Public Transportation In Indian Kashmir
September 18, 2012

Associated Press

By Aijaz Hussain

SRINAGAR, India - Shops and businesses are on strike across Indian-controlled Kashmir and marchers are burning U.S. flags and an effigy of President Barack Obama in protest against an anti-Islam video.

Protests took place in the region's main city of Srinagar and at least seven other towns Tuesday. Troops patrolled the largely deserted streets of Srinagar as public transport stayed off the roads.

An alliance of Kashmiri religious groups called the strike in response to a film produced in the U.S. ridiculing the Prophet Muhammad. The strike was supported by the bar association, trade unions and separatist groups. Authorities placed key separatist leaders under house arrest, a common tactic aimed at stopping them from leading public rallies.

Muslim cleric Qazi Yasir called for a boycott of U.S. goods.
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WHA/EUR

Germany Weighs Banning Video

September 17, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By LAURA STEVENS

FRANKFURT—Germany is weighing a ban on public showings of the controversial anti-Islam video that sparked violent protests in the Middle East, pitting advocates for free speech against those worried about unrest.

Russian authorities, meanwhile, said they are moving to ban online distribution of the video for extremism. "The Russian Prosecutor General's Office will appeal to court for the acknowledgement of this film as extremist in order to prevent its online distribution in Russia," spokeswoman Marina Gridneva told Interfax.

The debates, for now, appear to cover a 14-minute online clip that has been billed as a trailer for a longer film. It isn't clear, however, whether the full film exists.

In Germany, Pro Deutschland, a far-right German political party, announced plans last week to show the film in movie theaters in Berlin as an expression of free speech, opening the debate over what exactly is protected under the German constitution. Pro Deutschland representatives couldn't be reached for comment.

On Monday, Chancellor Angela Merkel and Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle expressed support for a ban on showings of the material in public.

"We've seen signals that this could cause a significant disruption to public safety, so it's being reviewed to see if the showing of this video will be banned," Ms. Merkel told reporters Monday. "I can well

imagine that there are good reasons to do so, but the necessary institutions, the appropriate institutions, must conduct an examination."

Germany's interior ministry is examining the video and will present a legal paper Tuesday with its recommendations to local and federal law enforcement officials, who will decide on the merits of banning public showings, an interior ministry spokesman said.

Centrist opposition politicians described the video as a crude provocation, but argued that preventing it from being shown would infringe on Germans' right to free expression. A ban would play into the hands of right-wing elements, representatives from both the Social Democratic party and the Green party argued.

Germany has a population of about 4 million Muslims. The country's leaders are concerned that any public showing of the film could trigger domestic violence. The German embassy in Sudan was attacked last week amid the wave of anti-Western protests that erupted across the Muslim world.

The German government over the weekend banned Rev. Terry Jones, the Florida pastor who previously sparked deadly protests by burning a copy of the Quran, from entering the country.

Germany issued the ban on Rev. Jones after German far-right groups extended invitations to him, something seen as endangering the public order, the spokesman for the interior ministry said.

Initial reviews of the video in Germany have led the ministry to determine it could provoke public unrest and lead to violence between anti- and pro-Islamic factions, the spokesman said, but it is still being determined if the video is protected under the German constitution's rights to free speech and freedom of art. Any such decision would apply to public showings of the material and would extend to a full-length film, should one emerge, the interior ministry spokesman added.

In Russia, authorities have filed paperwork with the Ministry of Communications and Mass Media, which said it was already contacting Internet service providers to warn them that the video may violate the law. Russia's 19 million Muslims make up about 13% of the country's population, and its authorities are usually quick to clamp down on material that could be deemed extremist.
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U.S. Shifts Mexico Drug Fight

September 18, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By NICHOLAS CASEY

MEXICO CITY—Secretary of State Hillary Clinton meets her Mexican counterparts at a security summit in Washington Tuesday to discuss the next phase in the drug war: how to train the judges and prosecutors that will be trying suspected drug lords.

The Merida Initiative, the U.S.'s \$1.9 billion assistance program to Mexico, began mostly as a means to buy military hardware like Black Hawk helicopters for Mexico. But over the past two years, it has entered a new phase, in which purchases for the Mexican military are taking a back seat to measures to mend the branches of Mexico's civilian government.

The former director of Colorado's penitentiary system has trained more than 5,000 Mexican prison officials in recent years. Mexican jurists are running mock trials with visiting American judges to prepare for a transition to oral hearings that will replace Mexico's enigmatic closed-door meetings where sentences are handed down.

"Different things have come to the fore at different times, but strengthening the rule of law in Mexico is the area that's crucial right now," says Roberta Jacobson, the Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs.

Officials in both countries increasingly believe the root of Mexico's problem lies in creating an honest police force, professional judges and a prison system comparable with that in the U.S.

The challenges are harder to measure but will take center stage at the so-called High-Level Consultative Group on Tuesday, where Mrs. Clinton will be joined by Deputy Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter, Attorney General Eric Holder and top officials from Mexican President Felipe Calderón's cabinet. The two sides will also discuss topics ranging from border security to seizing assets of drug cartel members in the U.S.

"Our efforts to confront transnational crime on both sides of the border benefited from a clear understanding that we had to multitask," says Mexican Ambassador to the U.S. Arturo Sarukhán.

While Mexico has had success at catching criminals, it's had less luck in putting them behind bars—the country has a meager 2% conviction rate for most crimes. A new test came just last week with the capture of Jorge "El Coss" Costilla, the alleged boss of Mexico's powerful Gulf Cartel. He is the 23rd in Mexico's "37 Most Wanted" list to have either been killed or captured under Mr. Calderón; after six years of fighting, the original heads of Mexico's drug gangs are mostly gone.

That reality is being reflected in how U.S. aid is being spent in Mexico. Assistance to the Mexican military has nearly collapsed, with counternarcotics and security aid falling from a height of around \$529 million in 2010 to \$67.5 million planned for next year.

Meanwhile money meant for strengthening institutions from law schools to prisons doubled in the last year, to \$201.8 this year from \$105 million in 2011.

Training Mexico to handle its own struggle could be more cost-effective for the U.S.—total aid this year to Mexico is at \$330 million, less than half its number 2010—in large part because training police and prosecutors is less expensive than financing a military with big purchases like helicopters.

One example both sides are touting has to do with Mexico's courts, which are undergoing a radical overhaul. Unlike the U.S., most trials in Mexico take place in closed proceedings where judges aren't present nor even meet the defendant. Attorneys and witnesses gather in a cubicle where a clerk takes notes and prepares a file, later sent to the judge for a decision. There are no juries.

In 2008, Mexico's congress approved a change to have trials be conducted orally—with attorneys arguing in an open courtroom before a judge—with a complete rollout by 2016. The overhaul is hoped to boost conviction rates and guarantee fair trials.

Since the new system will be similar to the way trials are conducted in the U.S., the government has sent legal experts to train their Mexican counterparts in everything from witness protection to plea bargaining. So far more than 7,500 Mexican judicial personnel have received U.S. training at the federal level, and more than 19,000 at the state level.

A delegation from the U.S. Supreme Court met with Mexican judges in taking oral testimony, a first in Mexico. Members of the U.S. Bar Association are training lawyers.

"There was a skepticism that Mexican judges had coming into this, for this new role, but now they have enthusiasm," says John Feeley, principal deputy assistant secretary of state for the Western Hemisphere. "Judges are going to be the linchpin in this."

Another key area is the Mexican police. Experts believe most drug-related crime in Mexico is never reported because the populace mistrusts the police. Such problems were on full view last month when members of the Federal Police wounded two U.S. government employees after opening fire on their car in the hills outside of Mexico City. The police say they mistook the car for that of fugitive kidnappers they were looking for.

The U.S. is trying to avoid incidents like that in the future by taking a hand in training the police themselves.

A Mexican police academy in the central state of San Luis Potosi is now partially staffed by American law enforcement agents who have trained more than 4,500 federal police. Mr. Feeley says the program is being expanded to develop similar academies that will work with state and local police in other Mexican states. Spanish-speaking U.S. agents from border states now work with the Mexicans and the U.S. even hired the former director of Colorado's state penitentiary system to give classes to Mexican corrections officers.

Still, both the U.S. and Mexico agree that no amount of training will solve crime problems if corruption remains in institutions such as the police and judiciary.

Despite the collaboration, one reality can't be avoided when the leaders meet Tuesday: Mexico still has a long way to go in this second phase of the drug war.

Eric L. Olson, a Mexico expert at Washington think-tank the Wilson Center went to an oral trial in Morelos, one of the first adopters of the new system, and says the hearings reached an awkward moment where a judge was scolding the attorneys for wanting to read from sheets rather than argue properly.

Mr. Olson says the proceedings were a step in the right direction, even if there are missteps. Still, he says: "Both sides have always had difficulty defining what the criteria for success are," he says. "That has not happened yet."

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Russian Prosecutors Will Ask Court To Ban Anti-Islam Film

September 18, 2012

[Associated Press](#)

MOSCOW - Russian prosecutors say they will seek to ban an anti-Islam film that has sparked violence around the world.

The Prosecutor General's office said Monday it will ask the courts to outlaw the "Innocence of Muslims" film as "extremist and offending believers." The office said it already has urged leading Internet providers to prevent its spread across the web.

The privately produced American-made movie ridiculing Islam has triggered violent protests against U.S. embassies and other targets in several countries in the Middle East and beyond.

The Russian prosecutors' move reflects the Kremlin's fears that the film could foment unrest among Russia's Muslims, who make up the majority of the population in many provinces.
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EDITORIAL / OPINION

America Foreign Policy, Adrift On The Middle East

September 18, 2012

Washington Post

By Michael Gerson

During his campaign and the early part of his administration, Barack Obama offered a theory about the disorders of the greater Middle East. One explanation, he argued, was the intervention in Iraq, which "fans anti-American sentiment among Muslims, increases the pool of potential terrorist recruits." Another was the failed Arab-Israeli peace process, which his administration would finally give some emphasis (as though other presidents had not really tried). Obama would refocus the war on terrorism more narrowly on Afghanistan and al-Qaeda and dispense with the Bush Doctrine, which sought to "impose democracy with the barrel of a gun."

The president's June 4, 2009, speech in Cairo summarized this critique, while adding an element of soaring ambition. With American combat troops still on the ground, Obama dismissed Iraq as a "war of choice." He catalogued various criticisms of U.S. policy during the Cold War and the Bush administration - if not an apology, then certainly an aggressive distancing. And he offered an antidote to anti-Americanism: himself. He had, after all, "known Islam on three continents" and had "heard the call of the azaan at the break of dawn and at the fall of dusk."

It was to be a "new beginning between the United States and Muslims around the world, one based on mutual interest and mutual respect" - implying that insufficient American respect had been part of the problem. Obama's persona would be the bridge between civilizations.

After pumping up expectations to the size of a Thanksgiving Day parade balloon, the deflation has not been dignified. Large historical challenges do not yield to changes in tone and personality. And the matters that obsess liberal foreign-policy experts - Iraq, the Arab-Israeli peace process, various policies in the war on terror - have little relation to the current chaos in North Africa and the Middle East.

This is a region of dysfunctional societies, run into the ground by corrupt and oppressive autocrats. Leaders such as Hosni Mubarak undermined legitimate opposition, forced dissent into the radical mosque, produced economic misery and vast unemployment, and drew attention away from their failures by blaming outsiders and feeding conspiracy theories. It is hard to imagine a political system better designed to produce resentment, radicalism and riots with minimal provocation.

The collapse of the old order has released dangerous forces, exploited by sophisticated and unappeasable Islamist groups. But preserving the status quo ante was not an option - as though Mubarak or his unimpressive son could have survived indefinitely if only provided with a few more truncheons. The autocrats fell because they failed. For many years to come, the United States will deal with the resulting disorder - attempting to preempt threats and promote more reasonable political actors. The stakes are high and the levers are limited.

Obama's grand ambitions were naive. But how has he reacted to realities that resisted resetting?

On security matters, Obama is hard to fault, and hard to distinguish from his predecessor. Threats to the U.S. homeland are magnified by terrorist safe havens - places to gather, plot and train. Terrorists in Pakistan, Yemen and elsewhere have been given every reason to feel unsafe by American drones and Special Operations forces. For the most part, Obama has continued to treat the global war on terror as an actual war, not primarily a law enforcement operation.

On aid to democratic transitions, Obama's record is mixed. In a May 19, 2011, policy address, the sworn opponent of the Bush Doctrine proclaimed "tyrants will fail" and declared the promotion of democratic reform a "core" American interest. Efforts in Tunisia and Libya have been relatively strong. Reaction to the Egyptian government's persecution of pro-democracy organizations has been limp. The promotion of reform in the Gulf States - where political transition won't be delayed forever - is weak.

The largest failure of Obama's approach to the Middle East is its apparent geopolitical randomness. Support for Iran's Green Revolution was late and grudging - as though courageous reformers were intruding on Obama's engagement of the regime. The president dramatically escalated the Afghan war before conveying an impression of heading for the exits. After wringing its hands, the administration took needed action in Libya. After wringing its hands, it has remained on the sidelines in Syria. The main consistency has been the wringing part.

In the absence of an organizing principle, flexibility becomes ambiguity. Other nations know exactly what Iran is after, what Russia is after, what Israel is after. They are left to guess at American intentions. The risk is that they will cease to care.

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The Myth Of Barack The Liberator

September 18, 2012

[Washington Post](#)

By Marc A. Thiessen

The anti-American violence spreading across the Middle East is not, as some suggest, blowback for President Obama supporting the overthrow of friendly dictators - irresponsibly pushing out autocrats who kept a lid on the forces of Islamic radicalism. The current unrest is indeed a result of Obama's feckless policies in the Middle East - but overthrowing dictators is not one of them.

When tens of thousands of Egyptians poured into Tahrir Square last year to demand an end to dictatorship, the Obama administration stood with the Egyptian regime. Obama's handpicked envoy, Frank Wisner, declared that Hosni Mubarak "must stay in office" to implement reforms. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton the United States announced, "Our assessment is that the Egyptian government is stable and is looking for ways to respond to the legitimate needs and interests of the Egyptian people."

The hopes of ordinary Egyptians that Obama might stand with them soon gave way to disappointment and anger. Demonstrators began carrying signs that declared "Shame on you Obama!" and showed Mubarak depicted as Obama in his iconic "hope" image - with a caption that read "No You Can't."

Egyptians did not forget how in 2009 - the same year Obama gave his Cairo speech promising to "a new beginning between the United States and Muslims around the world" - Obama cut pro-democracy funding for Egypt in half. Or how Clinton declared, "I really consider President and Mrs. Mubarak to be friends of my family." Egyptians saw that Obama only began to shift his position after the momentum had shifted to the protesters. As one opposition leader put it before Mubarak's fall, Obama and his advisers "are just waiting to see which side wins and then they will claim to have backed them all along." That is exactly what Obama did. His failure to stand up against Mubarak alienated the Egyptian people, and cost us our ability to influence the post-Mubarak transition.

Obama also didn't support the overthrow of Moammar Gaddafi. Indeed, he explicitly rejected making his removal a military objective, declaring, "We are not going to use force to go beyond a well-defined goal - specifically, the protection of civilians in Libya." Obama's top military adviser, then-chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Adm. Mike Mullen, went further declaring that "the goals of this campaign right now again are limited, and it isn't about seeing him go. It's about supporting the United Nations resolution, which talked to limiting or eliminating his ability to kill his own people, as well as support the humanitarian effort." David Gregory pressed Mullen, asking: "So the mission can be accomplished, and Gaddafi can remain in power?" Mullen replied: "That's certainly, potentially, one outcome."

A State Department spokesman said that arming the rebels would be "illegal." It was the British and French who insisted on making Gaddafi's removal the goal of our intervention, and arming and training the rebels to accomplish it. They had to drag Obama into it. Thank goodness they did. Today, unlike the Egyptian people, the Libyan people don't think we stood with their dictator. When Gaddafi did finally fall, the administration tried to claim that Obama was for his removal all along but was simply "leading from behind." The truth is he wasn't leading at all.

We see that lack of presidential leadership today in Syria, where Iran's closest ally slaughters innocent men, women and children by the tens of thousands while Obama stands by and does nothing. The Syrian people can be excused for wondering: Where is Barack the Liberator? Obama's failure to lift a finger to protect the population is alienating Syrians who will remember our reticence when Assad is gone. His failure to back responsible elements of the Syrian opposition is creating opportunity for Islamic radicals to seize control of a post-Assad Syria. And his failure to act is seen across the Middle East as a sign of American weakness and vacillation.

That is what is causing the unrest in the Middle East today - a perception of American weakness. Across the region, people see the United States in retreat. They see Obama pulling all U.S. forces out of Iraq and preparing to do the same in Afghanistan. They see an American ambassador killed in Libya, the flag of al-Qaeda raised over our embassy in Egypt, and our diplomats fleeing from Khartoum and Tunis. Instead of looking to the United States and asking, "Where are you, Obama?", the crowds in Cairo today are chanting, "Obama, we are all Osama."

The failure of Obama's policies in the Middle East is not the fall of dictators in Cairo and Tripoli; it is the failure of leadership in Washington. On taking office, Obama promised to usher in a new era of popularity in the region. Well, ask yourself this: Are we more popular now than we were four years ago?

Marc A. Thiessen, a fellow with the American Enterprise Institute, writes a weekly online column for The Post.

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The Price Of Obama's Leading From Behind

September 18, 2012

Washington Post

By Richard Cohen

What lessons can be learned from events in Libya? That nothing good will come out of the Arab Spring? That Arabs are volatile, easily excitable and prone to acting out? That the United States, Mitt Romney notwithstanding, cannot control everything or that the United States, Mitt Romney more to the point, has tried to control nothing? In other words, is this what happens when the United States is "leading from behind"?

This phrase, you might remember, was coined in reference to Barack Obama's reluctance to take the lead in the NATO air campaign that toppled the dictatorship of Moammar Gaddafi. And that operation, in which the French seized the initiative, was mounted to save Benghazi, the city where the insurrection started and the one where U.S. Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens and three other Americans were killed last week. Benghazi was saved from Gaddafi's bloody reprisals, but not from mayhem.

The notion that the United States can lead from behind is pitiful, the sorry concoction of an Obama administration that mistakes dulcet passivity for a foreign policy. The view from behind now has to be awfully depressing. Where once Obama could see the gallant tails of the French, the British, the Italians and some others, there is now no one. The predictably indignant Nicolas Sarkozy has been replaced by the soullessly pragmatic Francois Hollande, who has other fish to saute. NATO's warplanes have returned to base and Libya, a tribal society, was left to fend for itself. It has not fended all that well.

Until recent events offered a rebuke, the Obama administration treated its toe-in-the-water response to the threats uttered by Gaddafi as an unalloyed success. The dictator had been ousted (and subsequently killed), no Americans had died in the effort and the wisdom of doing as little as possible was proclaimed a sterling triumph. Had the United States taken the lead, however, someone might have been paying more attention to events there and trying to forge a government out of heavily armed militias. After all, it's not as if all of Libya was sacking the U.S. legation; it was a well-armed few. Much of the rest of the country was appalled by what happened and the president of the national congress, Mohamed Yusuf al-Magariaf, offered an apology and vowed to find the terrorists and, as always, bring them to justice.

Some things are true even though Obama is president. The Arab world is culturally a very distant shore. It will not embrace American values such as free speech and religious toleration because certain speech and certain religious practices are truly repugnant to it. The intellectual godfather of the Muslim Brotherhood, Sayyid Qutb, spent many months in the United States and returned to Egypt loathing America and fulminating about its obscenely provocative women. The 9/11 terrorists lived among us as well - and not one of them was deterred from their mission by the sweet treats of U.S. life. I love us to pieces, but we are, for some people, awfully revolting.

Another thing. Without U.S. leadership, nothing happens. Our allies are incapable of leading because (1) they do not have the military wherewithal, and (2) they have forgotten how. The French determination to bring Gaddafi to heel and avoid a massacre was a short-lived affair. We see what has happened in Syria. The French and British are outraged; the Turks are appalled. The Jordanians are anxious and the

Saudis are indignant. Still, Bashar al-Assad remains in power because the United States will not impose a no-fly zone - and really no one else can do so. This cautious policy has resulted in many civilian deaths, a huge refugee crisis and the comfy feeling in the White House that we have ducked another quagmire. The situation may now be beyond remedy, and the chirpy forecasts that Assad is a goner are way past their pull date. Every president gets his foreign policy regret. Syria will be Obama's.

Romney was wrong and ham-fisted and alarmingly premature to criticize Obama for a statement put out by the U.S. Embassy in Cairo. He is both wrong and dishonest to keep repeating the canard about Obama being a serial apologizer. But he is right in sensing that beyond the very Obamaness of Obama himself - the quality that made him a Nobel Peace Prize winner in the pupal stage of his presidency - lurks a foreign policy that has been more sentiment and aspiration than hard reasoning. Leading from behind is not a nifty phrase. In Libya, it's an indictment.

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How Should U.S. Deal With the Islamic World?

September 18, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By GERALD F. SEIB

Here is a fact not so well known. After remaining lofty for years, the birthrate in the Islamic world actually has begun to decline dramatically. Research by Nicholas Eberstadt at the American Enterprise Institute finds the fertility rate has dropped in recent years in all 48 Muslim-majority nations for which data are available.

In other words, Islamic societies are changing rapidly, and not just because of the Arab Spring that brought the rise of both democracy and the Islamist movements seeking to take advantage of it. Giant social and demographic shifts are under way, and nobody knows where they are leading.

All of which means we should welcome the belated arrival of a debate over how to deal with the Islamic world. The subject is simply too important not to be part of the national dialogue of a presidential campaign. The economy is the topic of the year, but relations with the Islamic world are the topic of the decade, maybe the century.

The circumstances that have sparked this conversation are, of course, tragic. The mobs that have attacked American diplomatic missions and killed an American ambassador, allegedly over the existence of a crude and previously unnoticed anti-Islamic video, are signs of both deep anti-American sentiment and vast ignorance about how this country works. But the question of whether to get "tougher" with Islamic countries in response is way too simplistic.

Successive administrations of both parties have used military action against hostile Islamic foes while simultaneously supporting nascent democratic movements that have, for better or worse, empowered Islamist leaders. In other words, there actually is rough bipartisan consensus on the general course.

The debate is over how assertive the U.S. should be in trying to shape the governments now forming. Current political debate would seem to suggest there are but three simplistic options:

- Withdraw from the Islamic world. Hatred of us is too high, and we don't need Middle East oil as much anymore anyway.
- Try to advance and even impose American values.

- Put up with unappetizing and even hostile new leaders because they are the best we can hope for.

Political stereotypes further suggest tea-party isolationists back option one, Mitt Romney and his Republicans option two, and President Barack Obama and his Democrats option three. Reality is far more complex. Both parties reject option one, and are searching for more nuanced versions of options two and three.

The question ripe for debate is how best to support Islamic governments willing to resist extremism in this time of transition, even if they aren't entirely pleasing.

Does public pressure or private persuasion work better in getting Egypt's new president and Muslim Brotherhood leader, Mohammed Morsi, to keep extremists at bay?

Should we expect aid to Egypt, Pakistan, Libya and Afghanistan to produce love for the U.S., or is it sufficient to hope that it merely produces more stable democracies over the long run? And is it wise to use the threat of a cutoff of aid as a lever to produce more pro-American behavior from governments in the region?

Perhaps most sobering of all, what should the unrest of the past week tell us about what to expect if U.S. or Israeli planes strike at the Islamic Republic of Iran?

These are the questions worth debating in the campaign. Meantime, Americans certainly can and should make the unapologetic case for their values and how they can benefit new and evolving governments in the Islamic world. They also should realize, though, that the precise models for sane modern Islamic governments are more likely to emerge from within the region (think Turkey).

In the process, the U.S. can rest more easily knowing that many Islamic nations, suffocated by years of repressive rulers and backward economic models, are just starting to find their way to new systems.

The transition will be rough, but the demographic changes are important because they hint at just how broad the changes are in Islamic societies. Mr. Eberstadt and his partner, Apoorva Shah, say in their study that fertility rates in Muslim-majority areas declined by 41% over the last three decades; 22 Muslim-majority countries and territories were estimated to have experienced fertility declines of 50% or more during that period. For Iran, the decline was estimated at more than 70%

The scholars say the precise causes are uncertain. But the findings at least suggest Islamic countries may be undergoing some of the same changes Western nations experienced as they matured.

Islamic nations may not want to be just like the U.S.—but ultimately they also may not be as different as today's headlines suggest.

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Mr. Obama's 'War' Game

September 18, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By WILLIAM MCGURN

The grave for Maj. Thomas Kennedy is so fresh that it lacks a headstone. In its place are flowers, flags and mementos left by people who knew this Army officer as a classmate, as an instructor, as a neighbor. Such is the terrible beauty of West Point, where even on a sun-kissed football Saturday it is impossible to forget America is at war.

That sounds like a platitude, it is so obvious. Then again, maybe it's not so obvious—at least to this White House. In the week since our ambassador to Libya was murdered along with three others from our consulate in Benghazi, the president has studiously avoided using the "w" word to describe what was plainly an attack on the United States.

That approach was on full display at Andrews Air Force Base Friday, when Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton welcomed home the bodies of the four slain Americans. The president and his secretary of state spoke well and warmly about these men, about their families, about the good work they were doing. Still, someone who had only their remarks to go by could be forgiven for coming away with the impression that these were people killed in some senseless shooting—not Americans targeted and murdered by enemies who are at war with us and act accordingly.

In his Rose Garden remarks delivered the morning after the killings became news, the president's lone reference to war was to Libya as a country "striving to emerge from the recent experience of war." In Saturday's radio address, war went completely unmentioned. The president had also left it unmentioned during the solemn ceremony at Andrews Air Force Base the day before.

What does it say about a president's foreign policy when Americans who represent him are killed overseas—and the only reference to the glaring fact of war comes from the Army chaplain, who asked the Almighty to help us defeat these agents of terror?

Perhaps it bespeaks a man who finds casual talk about war undignified. The difficulty here is that when it comes to politics, the president shows no hesitation. At the campaign fundraiser in Las Vegas to which he jetted off after his Rose Garden remarks, for example, the word "war" was reduced to a political punch line—as when he criticized Republicans for "tax cuts when we are at war," or declared his policy is to "turn a page on a decade of war."

This is no accident. Mr. Obama delivered the same lines the next day at another campaign rally in Colorado. Then again on Monday in Ohio.

The idea seems to be that war exists only during Republican administrations. Call it the Carney Doctrine, named for White House Press Secretary Jay Carney, who informed America that the attacks that began in Egypt and Libya and have now spread to U.S. Embassies from Iran to Indonesia "are not directed against the United States." We heard a similar denial a year ago, when Harold Koh, the antiwar Yale Law School dean turned State Department adviser, asked us to believe the War Powers Resolution didn't apply to Libya because, well, the fighting there isn't really war.

We may laugh at these explanations, but it is the logical consequence of the Obama political logic. The alternative is to acknowledge two points the White House can never concede: First, that radical Islam's anti-Americanism did not begin with George W. Bush; second, that this anti-Americanism has not abated despite Mr. Obama's promise of love and understanding, the stunningly naïve foundation of his 2009 Cairo speech.

In his remarks before those four flag-draped caskets at Andrews, Mr. Obama vowed that "the United States of America will never retreat from the world." In fact, the central promise of his administration has been retreat. If our enemies now attack our embassies and our friends are reluctant to stand up, it's because both rightly see us as disengaging.

There's an opening here for Mitt Romney. With all due respect to the wisdom of the NPR water cooler, the Republican presidential contender was right to attack the apologetic tweet that came from a U.S. Embassy under siege. The media storm he provoked comes for a simple reason: The images now coming out of the Islamic world bring home the weakness of a foreign policy based on pretending that people who are at war with us aren't.

When a suicide bomber in Afghanistan took the life of Maj. Kennedy a month ago, he became the 90th West Pointer to give his life for his country since 9/11. Here at his alma mater, young men and women barely out of high school have come, willing to take his place. Is it too much to ask that they—and we—be led by a commander in chief who calls war by its rightful name?

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Mahmoud Abbas's U.N. Gambit

September 18, 2012

Washington Post

ONE OF THE winners in last week's protests outside U.S. embassies in the Middle East was Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. Before the eruption of outrage over an anti-Muslim film, Mr. Abbas and Prime Minister Salam Fayyad had faced a week of demonstrations and strikes in the West Bank that some were starting to compare to the revolts against other autocratic Arab rulers. Thanks to the eruption of anti-Americanism and Mr. Fayyad's timely repeal of several recent price and tax increases, the opposition movement appears to have subsided for now. But one way or another, Mr. Abbas's Palestinian Authority appears headed for trouble.

The 76-year-old president has been digging himself into a political hole since early last year, when he announced a new strategy of seeking recognition of Palestinian statehood by the United Nations and a reconciliation deal with the rival Hamas movement. The recognition bid flopped last fall in the U.N. Security Council, where the Palestinians failed to obtain even the eight votes needed for a simple majority. Meanwhile, talks with Hamas stalled, and long-overdue elections, promised for last May, were once again put off.

During this time Mr. Abbas has mostly refused negotiations with Israel, citing as a pretext the continued construction in Israel's West Bank settlements. Israel has offered the Palestinian Authority a number of concessions in exchange for renewing the peace process, including prisoner releases and a potentially lucrative natural gas concession. But Mr. Abbas has not agreed.

Instead, as the West Bank demonstrations were reaching a crescendo, Mr. Abbas held a news conference in Ramallah on Sept. 8 and confirmed that he will renew the U.N. initiative, this time by seeking a vote in the General Assembly upgrading the Palestinians' status to that of a non-member observer state. Palestinian officials say the new status might allow them to join more U.N. bodies and to bring actions against Israel in the International Criminal Court.

However, the vote would not create a state - and it might put an end to Mr. Abbas's Palestinian Authority. Israel would probably stop providing the tax funds that pay for two-thirds of the authority's

budget; Congress, which has already held up \$200 million in funding because of last year's U.N. initiative, could block all American aid. That would worsen the economic crunch, caused by a loss of foreign funding, that has prompted the strikes and demonstrations Mr. Abbas is seeking to defuse. Not just the Obama administration but also friendly Arab governments, such as that of Jordan, have counseled Mr. Abbas that the push for recognition would be self-defeating.

The Palestinian leader seems to have left himself some wiggle room: He says the push for recognition will begin with "consultations" with other U.N. members after his Sept. 27 speech to the assembly. Other Palestinian officials have hinted that the "consultations" may be prolonged; Mr. Abbas might hope that he can extract concessions from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and, after the Nov. 6 election, from President Obama, were he to win, in exchange for dropping the initiative. But to what end? As Jordan's foreign minister recently pointed out, negotiations with Israel are the only realistic path to Palestinian statehood. Mr. Abbas's refusal to accept that fact might prove to be his undoing.

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RELEASED IN FULL

**DAILY PRESS CLIPS FOR
MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 2012**

DOMESTIC AGENDA

Teachers Union in Chicago to Extend Strike Into 2nd Week

September 17, 2012

New York Times

By MONICA DAVEY and STEVEN YACCINO

CHICAGO — The Chicago Teachers Union extended its strike into a second week on Sunday, after significant divisions emerged among union delegates over a deal that only a day before had been described by the union's leader as "a good contract." ([link](#))

USUN IN THE NEWS

Middle East 'Extremists' Protests May Continue, Rice Says

September 17, 2012

Bloomberg Businessweek

By Angela Greiling Keane and David Lerman

The protest in Libya that killed U.S. ambassador Chris Stevens and three other Americans appears to have begun spontaneously and was "hijacked" by extremists, United Nations Ambassador Susan Rice said. ([link](#))

Internal Rifts Color Anti-U.S. Protests

September 17, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER

Fierce anti-American protests waned around the Middle East on Sunday, but the delicate, often tense politics that helped fuel them will be the defining dynamic in the region for some time, politicians and analysts warned. ([link](#))

Obama 'measured' on Mideast crisis: top US official

September 17, 2012

AFP

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama has been "incredibly calm, incredibly steady, and incredibly measured" in his handling of the anti-US protests in the Muslim world, a top official said Sunday. ([link](#))

Israel

Israeli Leader Makes Case Against Iran on U.S. TV

September 17, 2012

New York Times

By STEVEN LEE MYERS

WASHINGTON — Having been rebuffed privately by President Obama last week, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel took to the airwaves in the United States on Sunday to warn that Iran was only six or seven months from having "90 percent" of what it needed to make an atomic bomb. ([link](#))

Israeli PM makes case on Iran to US voters

September 17, 2012

Associated Press

By ANNE FLAHERTY

REVIEW AUTHORITY: Archie Bolster, Senior Reviewer

WASHINGTON — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu took his case on Iran directly to U.S. voters Sunday, telling the American public in televised interviews that the White House must be willing to draw a "red line" on Tehran's nuclear program, comparing Tehran's nuclear program to Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh and reminding Americans of the devastating repercussions of failed intelligence. ([link](#))

Netanyahu: Iran on brink of nuclear bomb in 6-7 months

September 17, 2012

Reuters

By Matt Spetalnick and Dan Williams

WASHINGTON/JERUSALEM - Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu warned on Sunday that Iran would reach the brink of being able to build a nuclear bomb in just six or seven months, adding urgency to his demand that President Barack Obama set a "red line" for Tehran amid the worst U.S.-Israeli rift in decades. ([link](#))

US-Israeli Gap On Iran Nukes Widens

September 17, 2012

AFP

By Arthur Macmillan

WASHINGTON - The gap between Israel and the United States on Iran widened Sunday as Benjamin Netanyahu insisted on a "red line" from Washington, claiming Tehran is "90 percent" toward having a nuclear bomb. ([link](#))

Lebanon

Clashes over prophet film; Hezbollah urges demos

September 17, 2012

Associated Press

By ADIL JAWAD

KARACHI, Pakistan — Hundreds of Pakistanis protesting an anti-Islam film broke through a barricade near the U.S. Consulate in the southern city of Karachi on Sunday, sparking clashes with police in which one demonstrator was killed and more than a dozen injured. ([link](#))

Libya

Susan Rice: Libya Protests 'Hijacked' by Extremists

September 17, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By JOHN D. MCKINNON And COREY BOLES

An Obama administration official said Sunday that the deadly attack on a U.S. consulate in Libya last week was the work of "individual clusters of extremists" but began as a spontaneous protest. ([link](#))

U.S. downplays terror role in Libya riot

September 17, 2012

UPI

WASHINGTON -- A top U.S. diplomat said Sunday there was no evidence to suggest the protest that led to the sacking of a U.S. consulate in Libya was part of a terrorist plot. ([link](#))

Libyan president says U.S. consulate attack was premeditated; U.S. Ambassador Rice says it began spontaneously

September 17, 2012

Washington Post

By Sean Sullivan

Libyan President Mohamed Yousef El-Magariaf said he is convinced a Tuesday attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi that left four Americans dead was premeditated, but the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations said Sunday that the protests near the consulate began spontaneously, but were later hijacked by armed extremists. ([link](#))

US, Libya Differ On Accounts Of Benghazi Attack

September 17, 2012

AFP

By Andrew Gully

WASHINGTON - Top US and Libyan officials offered starkly different accounts Sunday about the attack on the US consulate in Benghazi that left the ambassador and three other Americans dead. ([link](#))

UN ambassador says Libya attack was spontaneous

September 17, 2012

Associated Press

By JOSH LEDERMAN

WASHINGTON — A deadly assault on a U.S. consulate in Libya was a spontaneous reaction to an anti-Muslim video, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations said Sunday, even as Libya's president insisted the attackers spent months preparing and carefully choosing their date — the anniversary of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. ([link](#))

Video Shows Libyans Retrieving Envoy's Body

September 17, 2012

New York Times

By David D. Kirkpatrick

CAIRO - An amateur video that surfaced Sunday appears to show a crowd removing the motionless body of Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens from a window of the American mission in Benghazi, Libya, after it was attacked last week by Islamist militants, adding new details to reports that Mr. Stevens had died of smoke inhalation while locked in a safe room. ([link](#))

Libya Arrests 50 Over US Envoy Killing

September 17, 2012

AFP

By Imed Lamloum

TRIPOLI - Libya announced the arrest of 50 suspects over the killing of the US envoy and three other Americans, blaming the Benghazi attack on foreign extremists and claiming it was pre-planned. ([link](#))

TOP STORIES

Audacious Raid on NATO Base Shows Taliban's Reach

September 17, 2012

New York Times

By ALISSA J. RUBIN

KABUL, Afghanistan — An audacious Taliban attack on a heavily fortified base in southern Afghanistan did far more damage than initially reported, destroying or severely damaging eight attack jets in the

most destructive single strike on Western matériel in the 11-year war, military officials said Sunday.
([link](#))

Cultural Clash Fuels Muslims Raging at Film

September 17, 2012

New York Times

By DAVID D. KIRKPATRICK

CAIRO — Stepping from the cloud of tear gas in front of the American Embassy here, Khaled Ali repeated the urgent question that he said justified last week's violent protests at United States outposts around the Muslim world. ([link](#))

As Scandal Shook China, Quiet Spy Game Unraveled

September 17, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By JEREMY PAGE

BEIJING—In spy-speak it is known as a "walk-in"—an unsolicited approach to a diplomatic mission by a foreigner claiming to have sensitive information. And when an agitated former police chief, Wang Lijun, entered a U.S. consulate in early February with an eye-popping tale about the death of a British citizen, the stakes could hardly have been higher. ([link](#))

AFRICA

Mali

ECOWAS Defence Ministers Meet On Mali, G.Bissau: Official

September 17, 2012

AFP

LAGOS - West African defence and foreign ministers will hold an emergency meeting Monday in the Ivorian capital Abidjan on the political and security crises in Mali and Guinea Bissau, an official statement said. ([link](#))

Niger

Niger Islamic Council Urges Muslims Not To Use Violence To Protest Film

September 17, 2012

Associated Press

NIAMEY, Niger - The Islamic Council of Niger asks Muslims not to attack Christian churches to protest the recent film on the Prophet Muhammad. ([link](#))

South Africa

South Africa Police Step Up Efforts Against Protesters

September 17, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By DEVON MAYLIE and PETER WONACOTT

JOHANNESBURG—One month after South African police killed protesters near a platinum mine in a clash that inflamed national tensions, police have stepped in again to try to end the turmoil in the country's mining sector. ([link](#))

ASIA

China

Beijing Mixes Messages Over Anti-Japan Protests

September 17, 2012

New York Times

By Ian Johnson And Thom Shanker

BEIJING - Anti-Japanese demonstrators took to the streets again on Sunday in cities across China, with the government offering mixed signals on whether it would continue to tolerate the sometimes violent outbursts. ([link](#))

Anti-Japan Protests Mount in China

September 17, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By BRIAN SPEGELE in Beijing and TAKASHI NAKAMICHI in Tokyo

Angry crowds across China ransacked Japanese businesses, smashed Japanese cars and pelted Tokyo's embassy in Beijing with eggs and plastic bottles in weekend protests over disputed islands in the East China Sea. ([link](#))

Reappearance of Xi Eases Transition Concerns

September 17, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By JEREMY PAGE

BEIJING—China said that Vice President Xi Jinping, the man expected to take over as the country's top leader in the next few weeks, will attend an international trade fair this week, another apparent move to quash speculation about his health following an unexplained two-week absence from public engagements. ([link](#))

Panetta seeks closer Sino-U.S. ties as China military expands

September 17, 2012

Reuters

By David Alexander

TOKYO - U.S. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta will look for ways to deepen military relations with China during a visit to Asia this week, even as he works to bolster U.S. alliances in the region as part of a strategic shift that Beijing views with concern. ([link](#))

Indonesia

Google Blocks Anti-Islam Film In Indonesia: Govt

September 17, 2012

AFP

YouTube has begun restricting access to videos of an anti-Islamic film in the world's most populous Muslim nation, a government official said Sunday. ([link](#))

Japan

Panetta Targets Two Pacific Disputes

September 17, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By JULIAN E. BARNES

YOKOTA, Japan—On U.S. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta's agenda as he arrived in Japan on Sunday was the goal of helping to defuse a pair of growing disputes, one between Japan and China, and the other between Japan and the U.S. ([link](#))

NEA

U.S. Outposts Still Face Threat In Muslim World

September 17, 2012

Washington Post

By Michael Birnbaum And Karin Brulliard

CAIRO - After days of anti-American turmoil in the Muslim world, governments on Sunday looked ahead to a week of trying to make an uneasy accommodation between the anger of their citizens and their desire to convince the United States of their goodwill. ([link](#))

Panetta: Violence Leveling Off; Protests To Go On

September 17, 2012

Associated Press

By Lolita C. Baldor

ABOARD A US MILITARY AIRCRAFT - U.S. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta says the turmoil raging across the Muslim world is likely to continue into the days ahead, but he says the violence expected by the U.S. appears to be leveling off. ([link](#))

Muslim Rage Over Film Echoes Back To Islam's Internal Struggles

September 17, 2012

Associated Press

By Brian Murphy

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates - At the height of the latest Islamic rage, one of the Muslim world's first media-celebrity imams told worshippers they were indeed witnessing a clash of civilizations. Just not the kind you think. ([link](#))

Egypt

Egypt Denounces Breaching Of US Embassy Compound

September 17, 2012

Associated Press

CAIRO - Egypt's presidential spokesman says the breaching of the U.S. embassy in Cairo during protests over an anti-Islam film was "unjustified," denouncing it in the strongest words to date to come from the nation's highest office. ([link](#))

Iran

Iran Commander Warns Israel, US Against Attack

September 17, 2012

Associated Press

By Ali Akbar Dareini

TEHRAN - The top commander in Iran's powerful Revolutionary Guard warned Sunday that his country's missiles will ensure "nothing will remain" of Israel if it takes military action against Tehran over its controversial nuclear program. ([link](#))

Israel

Iran Guided By 'Unbelievable Fanaticism:' Netanyahu

September 16, 2012

AFP

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu made a fresh push to turn the screws on Iran's nuclear program, saying the Islamic Republic's leaders are guided by "unbelievable fanaticism." ([link](#))

Lebanon**Pope Urges Peace at Mass in Beirut**

September 17, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By FARNAZ FASSIHI

BEIRUT—Pope Benedict XVI delivered an open-air Sunday Mass in Beirut to a crowd of more than 300,000 people that touched on the central theme of his trip: peace in the Middle East, namely Syria, and endurance for the region's Christian minorities. ([link](#))

Hezbollah Calls For Week Of Lebanon Demos Over Film

September 17, 2012

AFP

BEIRUT - Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah on Sunday called for a week of angry protests across Lebanon over a US-produced film mocking Islam that triggered uproar in the Muslim world. ([link](#))

Syria**Mideast Unrest Intensifies Debate On U.S. Intervention In Syria**

September 17, 2012

New York Times

By Robert F. Worth And Helene Cooper

DOHA, Qatar - In recent weeks, the growing death toll in Syria pushed that country's civil war to the top of the Obama administration's agenda, with some Arab leaders pressing harder for a greater American role in toppling Syria's leader, Bashar al-Assad. ([link](#))

Elite Iranian Unit's Commander Says His Forces Are In Syria

September 17, 2012

Washington Post

By Babak Dehghanpisheh

BEIRUT - The commander of Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps said Sunday that members of its elite Quds Force are inside Syria but are not involved directly in military work, the first time a senior official has publicly admitted the involvement of Iranian military personnel in the Syrian conflict. ([link](#))

State Media Says Syrian Troops Have Captured Rebel-held Neighbourhood In Aleppo

September 17, 2012

Associated Press

BEIRUT - Syria's state-run news agency says troops have captured and cleared the neighbourhood of Midan in the embattled northern city of Aleppo. ([link](#))

Syria accuses Turkey of allowing al-Qaida transit

September 17, 2012

Associated Press

By ALBERT AJI and BASSEM MROUE

DAMASCUS, Syria — Syria accused neighboring Turkey Sunday of allowing thousands of Muslim extremists to cross into its territory, as the government and opposition said an explosion killed at least seven and cut off a main road leading south from the capital. ([link](#))

SCA

Afghanistan**Karzai Denounces Coalition Over Airstrikes**

September 17, 2012

New York Times

By Matthew Rosenberg

KABUL, Afghanistan - Two of the most contentious issues dividing the United States and President Hamid Karzai's administration re-emerged as the Afghan leader condemned American-led forces for killing eight women in airstrikes on Sunday and denounced his American allies for continuing to hold hundreds of Afghan prisoners. ([link](#))

4 Troops Killed In Southern Afghanistan Insider Attack

September 17, 2012

Washington Post

By Richard Leiby And Greg Jaffe

KABUL, Afghanistan - Four U.S. troops were killed Sunday at a remote checkpoint in southern Afghanistan when a member of the Afghan security forces opened fire on them, military officials said. The attack brought to 51 the number of international troops shot dead by their Afghan partners this year. ([link](#))

India**India Labels Anti-Islam Film "Offensive Material"**

September 17, 2012

AFP

India on Sunday said that Google had blocked access in the country to an anti-Islam film which has triggered protests across the Muslim world as it condemned the "offensive" movie. ([link](#))

Pakistan**Pakistanis Try To Storm U.S. Outpost; One Is Killed**

September 17, 2012

New York Times

By Salman Masood

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan - One person was killed and dozens of people were injured when anti-American protesters tried to storm the American Consulate in the southern port city of Karachi and clashed for several hours with the police and paramilitary troops on Sunday evening, rescue workers and police officials said. ([link](#))

WHA/EUR**France****Paris Prosecutor To Probe Protest At US Embassy**

September 17, 2012

Associated Press

PARIS - The Paris prosecutor's office opened an investigation Sunday regarding a protest around the American Embassy that drew hundreds of people angry over a film produced in the United States that insults the Prophet Muhammad. ([link](#))

United Kingdom**Muslims Protest Outside US Embassy In London**

September 17, 2012

AFP

LONDON - Hundreds of demonstrators gathered outside the United States embassy in London on Sunday to protest an anti-Islam film that has caused outrage throughout the Muslim world. ([link](#))

FOREIGN POLICY

On Web, A Fine Line On Free Speech Across The Globe

September 17, 2012

New York Times

By Somini Sengupta

SAN FRANCISCO - For Google last week, the decision was clear. An anti-Islamic video that provoked violence worldwide was not hate speech under its rules because it did not specifically incite violence against Muslims, even if it mocked their faith. ([link](#))

EDITORIAL / OPINION

The Video Did It

September 17, 2012

Wall Street Journal

The Obama Administration dispatched Ambassador to the U.N. Susan Rice to the talk shows Sunday to explain the outbreak of anti-American protests in the Arab world. Her message: It's all the fault of that 13-minute anti-Islamic video on YouTube. U.S. policies or foreign terrorists have little or nothing to do with it. ([link](#))

Amid Chants of 'Free Libya, Terrorists Out,' a Nation at a Crossroads

September 17, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By JASON PACK And ANDREA KHALIL

Benghazi, Libya — Sept. 11 is now a date that signifies a national tragedy for Libya as well as the United States. The attack on the U.S. diplomatic mission in Benghazi that killed four Americans, including Ambassador Christopher Stevens, has upset the delicate political transition from dictatorship to democracy that was unfolding here. It also has obscured parliament's prudent selection Wednesday of Mustafa Abushagour—a moderate Islamist and respected technocrat—as prime minister. Yet spontaneous street demonstrations throughout the week denouncing the attack and seeking to pressure the government to act against its perpetrators suggest that Libyans are determined to build an inclusive society, free from fear. ([link](#))

Bigotry, Both Fringe And State-sanctioned

September 16, 2012

Boston Globe

By Joanna Weiss

IF YOU HAVEN'T seen the 13-minute YouTube trailer of "Innocence of Muslims," it's worth a look, if only to witness the ultimate collision of bigotry and bad production values. Posted to YouTube last summer, dubbed recently into Arabic, the video features an Ashton Kutcher type as a murderous and lecherous Mohammed. It's filmed on a green screen so crude that, at times, the characters seem to be floating above the desert sands. ([link](#))

A Preventable Massacre

September 17, 2012

New York Times

By Seth Anziska

ON the night of Sept. 16, 1982, the Israeli military allowed a right-wing Lebanese militia to enter two Palestinian refugee camps in Beirut. In the ensuing three-day rampage, the militia, linked to the Maronite Christian Phalange Party, raped, killed and dismembered at least 800 civilians, while Israeli flares illuminated the camps' narrow and darkened alleyways. Nearly all of the dead were women, children and elderly men. ([link](#))

Syria: The Assad Family Business

September 16, 2012

[Boston Globe](#)

By Farah Stockman

IF YOU'VE BEEN watching Syria's descent into chaos over the past 16 months, you might have been plagued by a single question: Why doesn't Bashar Assad just get on a plane and leave? ([link](#))

In An Islamist Egypt, Can Diversity Survive?

September 16, 2012

[Los Angeles Times](#)

By Michael Wahid Hanna And Elijah Zarwan

Egypt is now set to enter arguably its first period of Islamist rule. How long that period lasts and what form it takes is far from determined, a situation highlighted by the protests and violence in Cairo last week. If all goes according to plan - a big "if" in Egypt - Egyptians who believe in a democratic, civil state theoretically have the remainder of President Mohamed Morsi's term of office to get their collective act together. ([link](#))

Colombia Gambles on Talks With the FARC

September 17, 2012

[Wall Street Journal](#)

By MARYANASTASIA O'GRADY

No one I know of has ever calculated the net present value of future cash flows from the drug-trafficking activities of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). It would be a good number to have as Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos embarks on the fourth attempt in 30-some years to reach a peace accord with the legendary terrorists. ([link](#))

Japan's Zero-Nuclear Dream

September 17, 2012

[Washington Post](#)

IT'S EASY to understand the Japanese dream of a nuclear-free future. During last year's meltdown at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear complex, tens of millions of residents on Japan's densely populated islands feared emergency evacuation and contamination of scarce land. Yet the government's new goal to phase out nuclear power over the next few decades would have serious costs, financial and to the climate. ([link](#))

DOMESTIC AGENDA

Teachers Union in Chicago to Extend Strike Into 2nd Week

September 17, 2012

New York Times

By MONICA DAVEY and STEVEN YACCINO

CHICAGO — The Chicago Teachers Union extended its strike into a second week on Sunday, after significant divisions emerged among union delegates over a deal that only a day before had been described by the union's leader as "a good contract."

The announcement came after nearly 800 union representatives, the House of Delegates, convened for several hours to decide whether to end a strike that has drawn national attention in the debate over teacher evaluations, job security and the length of a school day.

The decision forced 350,000 students in the nation's third-largest school system to begin another week without classes and with no strong indication of when they might resume.

Many Chicagoans had assumed school would start again on Monday, after union leaders and city officials reached the outlines of a deal on Friday, ending what had been days of long and sometimes contentious talks.

But inside the closed-door meeting of the union's House of Delegates on Sunday, opinion was split. Some delegates wanted to accept the deal and return to school immediately, while others said they needed time to digest its details, which they had not known until Sunday's meeting. Still others objected to the new terms of the contract entirely, suggesting that a resolution of this entire chapter may yet be far from reach.

"I think everybody wants to be back in the classroom, but I think everyone is nervous about a bad contract," Kevin Hough, one of the delegates, said as he left the meeting on this city's South Side, where delegates had decided in a "standing vote" to continue their strike. A clear majority, those present said, wanted to wait. "In the end I think it's wise for members to have a day to review the contract," Mr. Hough said.

The decision infuriated school system officials, who had advised parents on Friday to be ready to return their children to school on Monday, and Mayor Rahm Emanuel, who has suggested since the teachers began striking a week ago that they ought to return to the classroom even as negotiators finished the contract. Mr. Emanuel said he was now instructing city lawyers to seek a legal injunction to end the strike. He deemed the strike "illegal on two grounds," saying that it was called over issues that teachers are not legally permitted to strike about and that it endangers the health and safety of children.

"I will not stand by while the children of Chicago are played as pawns in an internal dispute within a union," Mr. Emanuel said in a statement. "This was a strike of choice and is now a delay of choice that is wrong for our children. Every day our kids are kept out of school is one more day we fail in our mission: to ensure that every child in every community has an education that matches their potential."

Beyond Chicago, the notion that the strike would not, as expected, end immediately could also prove troublesome for President Obama, who has so far stayed neutral in the fight between his former chief of staff and labor, though both are expected to play a crucial role in fund-raising and voter turnout efforts nationwide.

For some parents, the continuing crisis — and the news late Sunday that it would go on — created a crushing problem: How to juggle a second week with alternative child care. "We're spending half of our

life trying to figure out what to do with the kids this week," Roger Wilen, a lawyer and parent of three, said on Sunday evening. "This is ridiculous."

Last week Mr. Wilen and his wife had tested nearly every option for their children — finding a baby sitter, working from home, using an alternative school program, even taking the children to work — and were, by this weekend, feeling tested themselves. "We need them in school," he said.

As they had a week ago when the strike began, schools officials said Sunday that they would open 147 schools with nonunion workers as a contingency plan for children with nowhere else to go. Attendance at those alternative programs had been low in recent days, as parents said they felt uncertain about sending their children to schools they did not know and supervisors they had not met.

Sunday's developments came as a setback to the union's bargaining team, which felt it had secured an agreement its delegates might accept, even if it did not quell every concern voiced at protests across the city over the last week.

"There's all kinds of stuff that they're concerned about," Karen Lewis, the president of the Chicago Teachers Union, who played a pivotal role in negotiating the tentative deal, said as she emerged from the meeting with delegates. "This is the deal we got."

The delegates agreed to meet again on Tuesday, Ms. Lewis said, adding that the earliest that schools could open would be Wednesday. Eventually, some 26,000 union members will need to vote on whether to ratify the new contract, but the delegates had been expected to end the strike well before a vote could be completed.

It is unclear whether the tentative agreement merely needs study by union delegates and members, or whether its terms are in more serious jeopardy. All along, the contract fight here has focused on an wide array of issues, including teacher evaluations, job security, pay, benefits and more.

Earlier, negotiators for the schools and for the union had seemed satisfied with the tentative deal they had hashed out. Both sides were claiming victory about its contents.

Leaders from the school system said the most important provisions for changes — shifts pressed most notably by Mayor Emanuel — lived on in the latest proposal: students here would attend school for more hours and more days a year than before; principals would decide which teachers were hired; and teachers would be evaluated, in part, based on student test scores.

But Ms. Lewis and the union negotiators said their strongest wishes were intact in the proposal they brought to delegates on Sunday. Among their claimed victories: Teacher raises were to be maintained for those who seek additional education and for those with a certain experience level; the schools would agree to hire additional teachers to handle longer school days; and most experienced teachers could not be fired for the first year of the new evaluation system, which would be something of a test run.

"We believe this is a good contract; however, no contract will solve all of the inequities in our district," Ms. Lewis said, in a release issued on Saturday night.

The proposed contract — a three-year arrangement with an option for a fourth — would have given an average teacher a more than 17 percent raise if it ran all four years, more than had been offered a week

ago, the school system said. It was uncertain how the schools were going to pay for raises, which were predicted to cost in the "high \$300 million" range at a time when the system has a significant budget deficit, estimated at \$1 billion next year. Chicago Public Schools officials say an average teacher here makes \$76,000 a year, though union officials have said the figure is lower.

On Sunday, as David Stieber, a delegate, left the meeting, he said he wanted more time to examine the contract in all its detail. He said he also wanted other teachers at his school on the city's South Side to have a chance to look, and see what they thought.

Of the decision to continue the strike, he said, "We're showing you an example of true democracy, and that means talking to everybody — even if that takes a little extra time."

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USUN IN THE NEWS

Middle East 'Extremists' Protests May Continue, Rice Says

September 17, 2012

Bloomberg Businessweek

By Angela Greiling Keane and David Lerman

The protest in Libya that killed U.S. ambassador Chris Stevens and three other Americans appears to have begun spontaneously and was "hijacked" by extremists, United Nations Ambassador Susan Rice said.

Intelligence so far shows the protest began as "a spontaneous, not a premeditated, response" to demonstrations in Cairo over a "very offensive video" criticizing Islam, Rice said today on ABC's "This Week" program. "As that unfolded, it seems to have been hijacked, let us say, by some individual clusters of extremists who came with heavier weapons."

Speaking on CBS's "Face the Nation," she said, "We do not have information at present that leads us to conclude that this was premediated or preplanned."

Even so, Mohammed Yussef Magariaf, president of Libya's General National Congress, said on the CBS program he believes the attack was "planned by foreigners, by people who entered the country a few months ago" from countries including Mali and Algeria.

The Sept. 11 date of the attack "leaves us in no doubt that this was preplanned," Magariaf said, according to a transcript of the interview.

FBI Investigation

Arizona Senator John McCain, the senior Republican on the Senate Armed Services Committee, disputed Rice's contention that the attack on the Benghazi consulate was largely spontaneous.

"How spontaneous is a demonstration when people bring rocket-propelled grenades and heavy weapons?" McCain asked on CBS. He said there was "no doubt" the attack was waged by "extremists," though he didn't know how long it had been planned.

Rice said on ABC that a Federal Bureau of Investigation probe aims to determine what happened in the Sept. 11 attack at the U.S. consulate in Benghazi, Libya.

Rice, speaking on CNN's "State of the Union," said protests "could percolate into the future."

"This is a turbulent time" and a "time of dramatic change" in the Mideast, she said. Those causing the violence are a "small minority" and are "the ones who lost" in the move toward democracy, the ambassador said on CNN.

The U.S. is reinforcing embassy and consulate security throughout the Middle East following protests in countries including Sudan and Tunisia, Rice said, noting that the U.S. has had a diplomatic presence in Libya for "only a matter of months" following the overthrow of dictator Muammar Qaddafi.

Visiting Tripoli

"I've visited there myself, both to Tripoli and Benghazi," she said. "I was very grateful to have a strong security presence with me."

Asked whether the violence in the region means Obama's overtures to Muslims haven't worked, she said "there have been substantial improvements." She described the U.S. as "extremely popular in Libya."

Rice said she is confident in the majority of Libyans, citing a public outcry over the killings of the Americans.

When democracy is taking root in a country, there may be "short-term turbulence," she said. People in Libya are "not going to allow an extremist mob to hijack their future and their freedom."
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Internal Rifts Color Anti-U.S. Protests

September 17, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER

Fierce anti-American protests waned around the Middle East on Sunday, but the delicate, often tense politics that helped fuel them will be the defining dynamic in the region for some time, politicians and analysts warned.

In Egypt, a presidency that is headed by an Islamist has struggled to connect with an old-regime Interior Ministry that is controlled and staffed by longtime opponents of political Islam.

Along with the Egyptian presidency's own slowness to curb a protest initially called by Islamists in the wake of last week's release of a vulgar video depicting the Muslim prophet that fueled anger at U.S. foreign policy, the friction between Egyptian leadership and security forces appears to have undermined defense of the U.S. Embassy in Cairo as demonstrators stormed the compound.

In Yemen, where four protesters died in riots Thursday outside the U.S. Embassy, an interior minister selected by that country's Islamist party faces allegations now that his ministry failed to give any order to hold back the hundreds of young men who answered that party's call to demonstrate last week. Protesters there burned vehicles and a guard post outside the final compound defense wall.

On Sunday, one person in Pakistan died in a new protest over the crude video, filmed in the U.S., that depicts Prophet Muhammad as a carouser and dullard. In Tunisia, the postrevolution government of moderate Islamists said Sunday it had arrested 75 people in connection with Friday's protests led by fundamentalist Salafi Muslims that burned some buildings in the U.S. Embassy complex and an American school.

In Washington, Obama administration officials said they hoped the deadliest violence had ended, but were planning for the likelihood of continuing turmoil, setting up contingencies for military, diplomatic and political responses.

Over the weekend, increased numbers of unmanned U.S. drones were visible in the skies over Libya and Yemen. Defense officials already have dispatched 50-member teams of U.S. Marines to protect embassies in Libya and Yemen, and moved warships toward Libya.

Although not announcing additional deployments, Defense Secretary Leon Panetta said the U.S. had "enhanced" its military forces in the wider Middle East. He and aides wouldn't elaborate on the comments, made during a flight to Japan, where he arrived Sunday.

Susan Rice, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, appeared on several television networks Sunday to defend President Barack Obama's handling of the situation. She said a battery of phone calls by the president to Mideast leaders helped ease the crisis and showed U.S. influence in the tumultuous region.

"We're not impotent," she said in an interview on ABC's "This Week." "We're not even less popular."

Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney and his supporters charge the embassy attacks resulted from Mr. Obama's foreign policies, which they contend have made the U.S. appear weakened. But Ms. Rice praised what she called Mr. Obama's "strong, steady, steadfast leadership" during the crisis and said his calls to foreign leaders helped ease tension levels.

"It was Osama bin Laden that said, 'When people see the strong horse and the weak horse, people like the strong horse,'" said Sen. John McCain (R., Ariz.) on CBS's "Face the Nation." "Right now the United States is the weak horse."

As investigators probed the background of the embassy attack in Benghazi, differences emerged in the initial U.S. and Libyan versions of the events. **While Ms. Rice agreed with other U.S. officials who said the attack grew out of a protest at the embassy, fueled by extremism, Libya's leader, Mohamed Magariaf, president of the National Congress, said it had been planned in advance.**

Several U.S. officials told The Wall Street Journal last week that al Qaeda extremists were in communication with local militants on the day of the attack. **Ms. Rice didn't address the possible involvement of al Qaeda, but Mr. Magariaf said in a CBS interview over the weekend that he believes the terrorist organization was central to the attack.**

In Cairo, meanwhile, the Salafi cleric whose television show on pan-Arab al Nas channel first brought the video to widespread attention accused Egypt's new government of favoring Americans and falsely blaming Muslim fundamentalists.

"Did you forget all the nasty things America has done?" demanded Sheik Khalid Abdullah, whose channel is owned by a Saudi businessman. "You punish us when you're not able to control people burning things?"

Forces of revolution and counterrevolution traded blame Sunday for inciting the protests and for failing to act swiftly enough to quell them.

In Egypt, "the fact is that the loyalty of the police is not that good to the new administration," said Gehad el Haddad, a foreign-policy adviser to Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi's longtime former party, the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood.

Meanwhile, "the religious groups of Yemen...all were racing to send their public calls for protest," including Yemen's Islah religious party, said Tareq Saleh, who lost his job as commander of some of Yemen's most elite forces when political protests and factional fighting this year overthrew his uncle, Ali Abdullah Saleh, Yemen's authoritarian leader of three decades.

An activist video from the first moments of Yemen's protests shows the country's U.S.-trained Central Security Forces—which still have as deputy commander another nephew of the ousted president—stepping aside to let protesters stream on to the road leading to the U.S. Embassy in Yemen's capital.

In Yemen, increasing U.S. strikes targeting suspected members of the country's branch of al Qaeda have increased criticism of the U.S. The crude video insulting Muhammad offended many Muslims worldwide.

In Yemen, however, "I think the whole incident was about Yemeni politics," said Fernando Carvajal, a University of Exeter doctoral candidate in San'a who is closely familiar with Yemen's many factions. That includes opposition blocs whipping up anger among the teenage and young-adult rioters, Mr. Carvajal said. "This narrative, this spin, about blaming the movie, in this country at least, is completely wrong."

In Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Tunisia, and Sudan, protests last week surged quickly into violent attacks on U.S. embassies, with little initial efforts by authorities in any of the countries to stop it, witnesses said.

With the exception of Sudan, which is led by an entrenched regime long hostile to the U.S., all the Arab countries hit by the most violent riots are headed by fragile, post-Arab Spring governments. Those governments variously include Islamist political blocs or are facing extreme Islamist groups as strengthening opposition forces.

In Libya, where a secularist government is dealing with a violent Islamist movement and many other armed groups, attackers overran a U.S. consulate on Tuesday and killed the U.S. ambassador and three American staffers, in one of the deadliest attacks ever on a U.S. Embassy staff.

Across the region, "we're now talking about [extreme Islamist forces] feeling compelled to take on governments and leaders who have the legitimacy of the popular mandates, and yet [the extreme Islamist forces] feel that they must," said Salman Shaikh, director of the Doha, Qatar, center of the Brookings Institution think tank.

For the former opposition parties now leading governments in countries changed by Arab Spring revolutions, "they have to realize they do have a popular mandate, they are the leaders, and these

protests are doing immense harm to the reputation and the economy of these countries," said Mr. Shaikh.

In Saudi Arabia, security forces on Friday, the peak day of violence in some countries, demonstrated how a nearly-century-old monarchy deals with Islamist protests. At a Riyadh McDonalds picked by Salafists as the site for a protest, security forces skidded up to each small group of white-robed Saudi men who tried to rally, the lights on their cars flashing. In a country where such defiance can bring interrogation or detention, the would-be Saudi demonstrators stuck their hands in their robes, and strolled away.

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Obama 'measured' on Mideast crisis: top US official

September 17, 2012

AFP

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama has been "incredibly calm, incredibly steady, and incredibly measured" in his handling of the anti-US protests in the Muslim world, a top official said Sunday.

The robust defense of the president from US ambassador to the United Nations Susan Rice follows criticism from Republican opponents that Obama's leadership is weak and has encouraged extremists to exploit the Arab Spring.

"What we've seen is that the president has been incredibly calm, incredibly steady, and incredibly measured in his approach to this set of developments," Rice told ABC's "This Week" program.

"His interventions, his leadership, has ensured that in Egypt, in Yemen, in Tunisia, in Libya, and many other parts of the world, that leaders have come out and made very plain that there's no excuse for this violence."

Republican presidential nominee Mitt Romney urged a tough line Saturday on Egypt amid deadly anti-US violence in the region, as his election running mate Paul Ryan called for greater "moral clarity" in Obama's foreign policy.

Romney toned down his rhetoric Thursday after several negative headlines and complaints from within his own party that he had made an ill-timed mischaracterization of Obama's handling of rapidly escalating events.

But on Friday Romney's pick for vice president, Ryan, led a withering attack on Obama's foreign policy, accusing it of diminishing America's global standing and of emboldening extremists.

"Peace, freedom, and civilized values have enemies in this world, as we have been reminded by events in Egypt, Libya, and Yemen," Ryan told the conservative Values Voter Summit in Washington.

Rice hit back at claims the administration was "Impotent" and insisted that the demonstrations involved only a small number of people and that the United States was still broadly popular in the Muslim world.

"President Obama picked up the phone and talked to President (Mohammed) Morsi in Egypt. And as soon as he did that, the security provided to our personnel in our embassies dramatically increased," she said.

"We're not impotent, were not even less popular."

Obama leads Romney by a significant margin in surveys of who voters trust more to conduct US foreign policy. On November 6, the American people will decide whether to re-elect Obama or insert Romney into the White House.

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Israeli Leader Makes Case Against Iran on U.S. TV

September 17, 2012

New York Times

By STEVEN LEE MYERS

WASHINGTON — Having been rebuffed privately by President Obama last week, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel took to the airwaves in the United States on Sunday to warn that Iran was only six or seven months from having "90 percent" of what it needed to make an atomic bomb.

Mr. Netanyahu received sharp criticism at home and abroad for similar remarks last week, which were widely seen as an effort to put pressure on Mr. Obama to act more forcefully against Iran. And yet, less than two months before Election Day, he turned to the weekly platform for American politics — the Sunday morning political talk shows — to make his case more urgently and specifically than ever to a wider American audience.

He repeated his warning that the only way to stop Iran was for the United States to draw a distinct "red line" on that country's nuclear activity and declare that crossing it would trigger military intervention. But he also offered his most explicit description to date of the level of nuclear development that he would regard as particularly dangerous: one bomb's worth of medium-enriched uranium, a level that would take Iran close to a bomb but would still require additional work to make a weapon.

He implied that Iran would cross that line soon. "You know, they're in the last 20 yards, and you can't let them cross that goal line," Mr. Netanyahu said on the NBC News program "Meet the Press," displaying his familiarity with American football, another Sunday ritual here. "You can't let them score a touchdown, because that would have unbelievable consequences, grievous consequences for the peace and security of us all, of the world really."

Iran, which denies that it is pursuing nuclear weapons, warned on Sunday that it would retaliate across the region if it came under attack.

The warnings and threats came after a tumultuous and violent week in the Middle East, which left the Obama administration reeling at times and straining to sustain relations with two allies that have long been viewed as pillars of stability in the region, Israel and Egypt.

On several Sunday shows, Susan E. Rice, the American representative at the United Nations, sought to defend the administration's handling of each relationship. She said that the United States cooperated closely with Israel but believed there was time for diplomacy and sanctions in the case of Iran.

In the case of Egypt, she argued against cutting the annual \$1.5 billion in American assistance, an action that some have urged in the wake of the storming of the American Embassy in Cairo last week.

"We think that despite this very bumpy path we're on and the very disturbing images we've seen, it's in the United States' fundamental interest that people have the ability to choose their own governments — that these governments be democratic and free," Ms. Rice said on "Meet the Press." "That's in our long-term best interest. We need to reinforce that with our assistance."

The protests, which were inspired by an American-made video denigrating the Prophet Muhammad, spread from Cairo to Libya, where the American ambassador, J. Christopher Stevens, and three other Americans were killed. Since then, the protests have spread to nearly two dozen countries and forced the State Department to evacuate all but emergency staff members from its embassies in Sudan and Tripoli, Libya, on Saturday, though the intensity of the demonstrations appeared to be subsiding.

Mr. Netanyahu, who also appeared on the CNN program "State of the Union" on Sunday, sought to link the violence with Iran's nuclear ambitions, arguing that Iran's leaders were driven by the same fanaticism that enraged the protesters. Israel has its own nuclear weapons arsenal, though it has never publicly acknowledged it.

"All the things that you see now in these mobs storming the American Embassies is what you will see with a regime that would have atomic bombs," he said on CNN. "You can't have such people have atomic bombs."

In Iran, the commander of the powerful Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, Gen. Mohammad Ali Jafari, took the unusual step of holding a news conference on Sunday to warn that "nothing will remain" in Israel if it or any other nation launches attacks against his country.

He said that Iran and its allies — presumably Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza — would retaliate at Israel's borders, as would Iran itself in Israel and beyond, targeting American military bases in the Persian Gulf and shutting down the Strait of Hormuz. Iran has often threatened to counter any attack, but the general's threats were unusually specific and signaled Iran's intent to turn any possible attack into a regional conflict.

"Our response to Israel is clear: I think nothing will remain of Israel," General Jafari said, according to an account by The Associated Press. "Given Israel's small land area and its vulnerability to a massive volume of Iran's missiles, I don't think any spot in Israel will remain safe."

General Jafari also confirmed, in what appeared to be the clearest terms so far, that some high-level advisers from his elite unit were working in Syria and Lebanon, underscoring how deeply intertwined the many conflicts in the region have become.

The United States and Israel have cooperated closely over most security matters for years, including Iran's nuclear efforts, but Mr. Netanyahu's remarks over the last week underscored his desire that the administration act more forcefully with Iran. It also highlighted his evident personal estrangement with Mr. Obama.

The two spoke by telephone on Tuesday after Mr. Netanyahu's first remarks.

While the United States and the International Atomic Energy Agency have cited Iranian efforts to accelerate work on enriching uranium, American officials say there is not hard and clear evidence that Iran has resumed work on the military components necessary to build a bomb.

Iran possesses enough low-enriched uranium to make five or six weapons, but that process would be lengthy. Mr. Netanyahu is particularly concerned about a new line of production of uranium largely being conducted in a deep underground site invulnerable to Israeli attack. Iran is expected to have roughly a bomb's worth of that medium-enriched uranium within half a year.

Despite Mr. Netanyahu's contention that Iran is close to developing a nuclear weapons capacity, administration officials have said there would still be time for the United States and others to detect and, if necessary, respond to an effort to move from merely enriching to constructing a bomb.

The differences between Mr. Netanyahu and Mr. Obama were fully on display on Sunday. **Ms. Rice argued that international diplomacy and economic sanctions were having an impact on Iran and should be given time to work.**

"They are not there yet," she said, referring to the American assessment of where Iran's nuclear weapons ambitions stand. "They are not there yet, and our assessment is — and we share this regularly with our Israeli counterparts in the intelligence and defense community — that there is time and space for the pressure we are mounting, which is unprecedented in terms of sanctions, to still yield results."

Mr. Netanyahu insisted that he was not trying to influence American politics. He expressed respect for Mr. Obama's vow not to allow Iran to acquire an atomic bomb.

Asked specifically if he felt that Mr. Obama's Republican opponent, Mitt Romney, would take a firmer stand toward Iran, Mr. Netanyahu demurred.

Mr. Romney and Mr. Netanyahu, who are friends, worked together briefly in the 1970s at Boston Consulting Group.

"What's guiding my statements is not the American political calendar but the Iranian nuclear calendar," he said.

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Israeli PM makes case on Iran to US voters

September 17, 2012

Associated Press

By ANNE FLAHERTY

WASHINGTON — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu took his case on Iran directly to U.S. voters Sunday, telling the American public in televised interviews that the White House must be willing to draw a "red line" on Tehran's nuclear program, comparing Tehran's nuclear program to Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh and reminding Americans of the devastating repercussions of failed intelligence.

His remarks were an impassioned election-season plea from a world leader who insists he doesn't want to insert himself into U.S. politics and hasn't endorsed either candidate. But visibly frustrated by U.S. policy under President Barack Obama, the hawkish Israeli leader took advantage of the week's focus on unrest across the Muslim world and America's time-honored tradition of the Sunday television talk shows to appeal to Americans headed to the polls in less than two months.

Tehran claims its nuclear program is peaceful. Netanyahu said the U.S. would be foolish to believe that, using football metaphors and citing example of past terrorist attacks on U.S. soil to appeal to his American audience.

"It's like Timothy McVeigh walking into a shop in Oklahoma City and saying, 'I'd like to tend my garden. I'd like to buy some fertilizer.' ... Come on. We know that they're working on a weapon," Netanyahu said.

The past week, Netanyahu has called on Obama and other world leaders to state clearly at what point Iran would face a military attack. But Obama and his top aides, who repeatedly say all options remain on the table, have pointed to shared U.S.-Israeli intelligence that suggests Iran hasn't decided yet whether to build a bomb despite pursuing the technology and that there would be time for action beyond toughened sanctions already in place.

Netanyahu disagrees, estimating that Iran is about six months away from having most of the enriched uranium it needs and warning that letting them reach the "goal line" would have disastrous consequences.

Obama's Republican opponent, Mitt Romney, has said he is willing to take a tougher stance than Obama against Iran, although his campaign has declined to provide specifics. He has also aligned himself personally with Netanyahu, casting the Israeli leader as a longtime friend.

Meanwhile, Obama is reported to have a strained relationship with Netanyahu, chastising Israel for continuing to build housing settlements in areas disputed with the Palestinians.

America's ambassador to the United Nations, Susan Rice, responded Sunday by saying there is "no daylight" between the U.S. and Israel and saying Obama "will do what it takes" to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon. But, she said, "we are not at that stage yet."

"Our bottom line — if you want to call it a red line — the president's bottom line has been that Iran will not acquire a nuclear weapon, and we will take no option off the table to ensure that it does not acquire a nuclear weapon, including military," Rice later said.

But Netanyahu has said that's not enough and employed historical examples known to most Americans to make his case: President John F. Kennedy's demand that the Soviets remove its missiles sites in Cuba "maybe purchased decades of peace," Netanyahu said. And absent a similar "red line," then-Iraqi President Saddam Hussein faced a U.S. attack in 1991 after invading Kuwait.

"Maybe that war could have been avoided," Netanyahu said.

Netanyahu also pointed to America's inability to prevent the 9/11 hijackings as proof that intelligence can fail.

He insisted that his motivations were not political but reflected a key sense of urgency. Israeli officials point to Iranian enrichment of uranium, a key ingredient in building a bomb, the movement of Iranian nuclear research facilities to fortified underground bunkers impervious to attack and Iran's refusal to open its facilities to U.N. inspectors.

"I think that there's a common interest of all Americans, of all political persuasions, to stop Iran," he said. "This is a regime that is giving vent to the worst impulses that you see right now in the Middle East."

Rice said the window to act "is not infinite" but that the sanctions "reached their high point in July." Rice says that for the first time the Iranian economy is shrinking at a rate of negative 1 percent, Iranian oil production has dropped 40 percent over the last several months and their currency has plummeted 40 percent in that time as well.

"This pressure, even to use the Iranians own words, is crippling," Rice said, adding, "What is clear is that Iran does not have a nuclear weapon."

Netanyahu and Rice spoke on CNN's "State of the Union" and NBC's "Meet the Press." Rice also spoke on "Fox News Sunday" and appeared on CBS' "Face the Nation."

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Netanyahu: Iran on brink of nuclear bomb in 6-7 months

September 17, 2012

Reuters

By Matt Spetalnick and Dan Williams

WASHINGTON/JERUSALEM - Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu warned on Sunday that Iran would reach the brink of being able to build a nuclear bomb in just six or seven months, adding urgency to his demand that President Barack Obama set a "red line" for Tehran amid the worst U.S.-Israeli rift in decades.

Taking to the airwaves to make his case directly to the American public, Netanyahu said that by mid-2013 Iran would have 90 percent of the material it needed for an atomic weapon. He again pressed the United States to spell out limits that Tehran must not cross if it is to avoid military action - something Obama has refused to do.

"You have to place that red line before them now, before it's too late," Netanyahu told NBC's "Meet the Press" program, saying that such a move could reduce the chances of having to attack Iran's nuclear sites.

The unusually public dispute between close allies - coupled with Obama's decision not to meet with Netanyahu later this month - has exposed a gaping U.S.-Israeli divide and stepped up pressure on the U.S. leader in the final stretch of a tight presidential election campaign.

It was Netanyahu's most specific explanation yet on why he has become so strident in his push for Washington to confront Tehran with a more forceful ultimatum. At the same time, his approach could stoke further tensions with Obama, with whom he has had a notoriously testy relationship.

U.S. officials say Iran has yet to decide on a nuclear "breakout" - a final rush to assemble components for a bomb - and they express high confidence that it is still at least a year away from the capacity to build one and would then need more time to fit a warhead onto a missile. This contrasts with Netanyahu's timetable, although he stopped short of saying Iran had decided to manufacture a weapon.

Netanyahu showed no signs of backing off from his pressure campaign and equated the danger of a nuclear-armed Iran with the Islamist fury that fueled attacks on U.S. embassies across the Muslim world last week.

"It's the same fanaticism that you see storming your embassies today. You want these fanatics to have nuclear weapons?" Netanyahu asked in the NBC interview, in a clear emotional appeal to Americans still reeling from the angry protests sparked by a film that mocked the Prophet Mohammad.

There have been no accusations, however, of any Iranian role stoking violence that hit Middle Eastern and African capitals.

'IN THE RED ZONE'

Speaking via satellite from Jerusalem, Netanyahu argued that a credible U.S. ultimatum was needed to curb Iran, which denies it is seeking a nuclear bomb.

"They're in the 'red zone,'" Netanyahu said, using an American football metaphor for when a team is close to scoring a touchdown. "You can't let them cross that goal line."

Mohammad Al Jafari, commander-in-chief of Iran's Revolutionary Guards, threatened retaliation for any Israeli attack, saying U.S. bases in the region would be hit and trade via the Strait of Hormuz, a vital oil link, would be disrupted.

"Nothing of Israel would remain," he said.

Susan Rice, Obama's U.N. envoy, offered no sign that Obama - who has asked Netanyahu to hold off on any strike on Iran's nuclear sites to give sanctions and diplomacy time to work - intended to soften his resistance to red lines.

"We will take no option off the table to ensure that (Iran) does not acquire a nuclear weapon, including a military option," Rice told "Meet the Press," reiterating Obama's longstanding position but insisting "they are not there yet."

Israeli leaders, who see Iran's nuclear advances as a looming existential threat, have made clear they are operating on a far tighter window than the United States, which has a superpower's mighty conventional arsenal at its disposal.

Asked whether Israel was closer to acting on its own, Netanyahu said: "We always reserve the right to act. But I think that if we are able to coordinate together a common position, we increase the chances that neither one of us will have to act."

Obama, who is seeking re-election in November, has faced criticism from Republican rival Mitt Romney that the president is being too tough with Israel and not tough enough with Iran.

But Netanyahu took a more neutral posture on the election, denied he was meddling in U.S. politics in support of fellow conservative Romney and distanced himself from the Republican's accusation that Obama was "throwing Israeli under the bus."

Netanyahu's sharpened rhetoric in recent days had fueled speculation that Israel might attack Iran before the U.S. election, believing that Obama would give it military help and not risk alienating pro-Israeli voters.

Netanyahu has drawn criticism at home for overplaying his hand. He faces divisions within the Israeli public and his cabinet that will make it hard to launch a strike any time soon.

He said he appreciated Obama's assurances Iran would not be allowed to obtain a nuclear weapon. But Netanyahu, whose "red line" demands have infuriated U.S. officials, made clear that was not enough. "I think a red line, in this case, works to reduce the chances of the need for military action," he said.

MOVING RAPIDLY

In his most specific comments on Iran's nuclear work, Netanyahu told CNN: "They're moving very rapidly to completing the enrichment of the uranium that they need to produce a nuclear bomb. In six months or so they'll be 90 percent of the way there."

He appeared to be referring to Iran's enrichment of uranium to 20 percent purity, a level it says is required for medical isotopes but which also is close to bomb-fuel grade. According to an August report by U.N. inspectors, Iran has stockpiled 91.4 kg of the 20 percent material.

Experts say about 200-250 kg (440-550 pounds) would be the minimum required to enrich further into enough material for a bomb. Iran could potentially reach that threshold soon by producing roughly 15 kg (33 pounds) a month, a rate that could be speeded up if it activates new uranium centrifuges.

Israel's concern is that Iran be prevented from reaching nuclear weapons capability, not just from developing an actual device, and they worry time is running out. Israel is widely believed to possess the Middle East's only nuclear arsenal.

Netanyahu did not repeat his harshest comments of last week that Washington had lost any "moral right" to restrain Israel because it had refused to put strict U.S. limits on Tehran.

That was followed by word that Obama would not meet Netanyahu during the Israeli leader's U.S. visit later this month to address the United Nations - widely viewed as a snub.

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US-Israeli Gap On Iran Nukes Widens

September 17, 2012

AFP

By Arthur Macmillan

WASHINGTON - The gap between Israel and the United States on Iran widened Sunday as Benjamin Netanyahu insisted on a "red line" from Washington, claiming Tehran is "90 percent" toward having a nuclear bomb.

The Israeli leader, speaking on two US political television talkshows, pressed the need for a categorical bar on Iran, saying such a safeguard had averted nuclear calamity with Russia during the Cold War and could ensure peace again.

The United States says all options against Iran, including military action, remain on the table, but top officials reject so-called "red lines" as political grandstanding that might leave them at a strategic disadvantage.

On CNN and on NBC's "Meet the Press," Netanyahu maintained that telling Iran there is a definite line it must step back from would serve as a preemptive and effective deterrent.

"If they know there's a point, a stage in the enrichment or other nuclear activities that they cannot cross because they'll face consequences, I think they'll actually not cross it," he told CNN's "State of the Union."

"It's important to put a red line before them, and that's something we should discuss with the United States."

The Israeli prime minister said Iran was moving rapidly to complete enrichment of the uranium needed to produce a nuclear bomb. "In six months or so, they'll be 90 percent of the way there," he said.

But his call for a change of tack and stiffer warnings from Washington was rejected by Susan Rice, the US ambassador to the United Nations.

Rice, who spoke on five separate television talkshows, maintained there was "no daylight" between the US and Israel on preventing Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon, but her comments on the timescale of Tehran's ambitions jarred with Netanyahu's judgment.

"We think that there's still considerable time for this pressure to work," Rice said, refusing to acknowledge the red lines argument and insisting that US sanctions were effectively hobbling Iran's currency and oil production.

But she added: "This is not an infinite window, and we've made very clear that the president's bottom line is Iran will not have a nuclear weapon."

Israel has consistently said a nuclear-armed Iran would pose an existential threat to the Jewish state and has wielded the threat of military action, but the United States favors sanctions and diplomatic arm-twisting.

Iran has steadfastly denied that it is seeking the bomb.

Relations between Netanyahu and President Barack Obama are viewed as frosty, and US Defense Secretary Leon Panetta further highlighted policy differences in an interview published Friday.

"The fact is, look, presidents of the United States, prime ministers of Israel or any other country -- leaders of these countries don't have, you know, a bunch of little red lines that determine their decisions," Panetta said.

"What they have are facts that are presented to them about what a country is up to, and then they weigh what kind of action is needed to be taken in order to deal with that situation," he told Foreign Policy magazine.

"That's the real world. Red lines are kind of political arguments that are used to try to put people in a corner."

The White House was forced in recent days to deny a report that Obama had refused to meet Netanyahu in New York later this month, and said the two spoke by telephone on Tuesday and were united in their stance toward Tehran.

With Republican presidential nominee Mitt Romney accusing Obama of being a poor friend to Israel, Netanyahu has denied that he is meddling in US politics ahead of elections on November 6.

Rice said that US-Israeli relations were "stronger than ever," and insisted the only reason Netanyahu and Obama would not meet at the upcoming UN General Assembly in New York was because their schedules did not match.

But Senator John McCain, the Republican presidential nominee who lost to Obama in 2008, said there was a clear gap between Israel and the White House on where the red line lies.

"In the administration's view, it's when (Iran) has a nuclear weapon," and in Israel's view, it's when Tehran has reached the level where they can quickly assemble a nuclear weapon," McCain told CBS's "Face the Nation."

"That's a big difference," he said.

The threat of war, however, remains severe, according to Martin Indyk, a former US ambassador to Israel.

"I'm afraid that 2013 is going to be a year in which we're going to have a military confrontation with Iran," he said on "Face the Nation."
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Clashes over prophet film; Hezbollah urges demos

September 17, 2012

Associated Press

By ADIL JAWAD

KARACHI, Pakistan — Hundreds of Pakistanis protesting an anti-Islam film broke through a barricade near the U.S. Consulate in the southern city of Karachi on Sunday, sparking clashes with police in which one demonstrator was killed and more than a dozen injured.

In a move that could escalate tensions around the Arab world, the leader of the Hezbollah militant group called for protests against the movie, saying protesters should not only 'express our anger' at U.S. embassies but urge leaders to act.

The film, which denigrates Islam's Prophet Muhammad, has sparked violent protests in many Muslim countries in recent days, including one in Libya in which the U.S. ambassador was killed. The U.S. has responded by deploying additional military forces to increase security in certain hotspots.

In a televised speech, Hezbollah leader Sheik Hassan Nasrallah said the U.S. must be held accountable for the film, which was produced in the United States. The U.S. government has condemned the film.

"The ones who should be held accountable and boycotted are those who support and protect the producers, namely the U.S. administration," Nasrallah said. He called for protests on Monday, Wednesday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

He urged protesters to call on their leaders to express their anger too.

"We should not only express our anger at an American embassy here or there. We should tell our rulers in the Arab and Muslim world that it is 'your responsibility in the first place' and since you officially represent the governments and states of the Muslim world you should impose on the United States, Europe and the whole world that our prophet, our Quran and our holy places and honor of our Prophet be respected," he told his followers in a televised speech.

Nasrallah said he waited to speak out about the film until Sunday, when Pope Benedict XVI ended his three-day trip to Lebanon.

In Pakistan, police fired tear gas and water cannons at the protesters in Karachi after they broke through the barricade and reached the outer wall of the U.S. Consulate, police officer Mohammad Ranjha said. The protesters threw stones and bricks, prompting the police to beat back the crowd with their batons. The police and private security guards outside the consulate also fired in the air to disperse the crowd.

One protester was killed during the clash, said Ali Ahmar, spokesman for the Shiite Muslim group that organized the rally.

An official with the main ambulance service in the city, Khurram Ahmad, confirmed they carried away one dead protester and 18 others who were injured.

All Americans who work at the consulate, which is located in the heart of Karachi, were safe, Rian Harris, a spokeswoman for the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad, said. Thousands more held peaceful demonstrations against the film in other parts of the country, including the eastern city of Lahore and the northwest city of Dera Ismail Khan.

The demonstration in Lahore was organized by Jamaat-ud-Dawa, believed to be a front organization for a powerful militant group blamed for attacks in the Indian city of Mumbai in 2008 that killed over 160 people. The protesters shouted anti-U.S. slogans and burned an American flag.

"Our war will continue until America is destroyed!" shouted some of the protesters. "Dog, dog, America is a dog!" chanted others.

The head of Jamaat-ud-Dawa, Hafiz Mohammad Saeed, who has a \$10 million U.S. bounty on his head, addressed the crowd and demanded the Pakistani government shut down the U.S. Embassy and all consulates in the country until the filmmakers are punished.

The protests were set off by a low-budget, crudely produced film called "Innocence of Muslims," which portrays Muhammad as a fraud, a womanizer and a child molester. A 14-minute excerpt of the film, which is both in English and dubbed into Arabic, has been available on YouTube, although some countries have cut access to the site.

The violence began Tuesday when mainly Islamist protesters climbed the U.S. Embassy walls in the Egyptian capital of Cairo and tore down the American flag from a pole in the courtyard.

Chris Stevens, the U.S. ambassador to Libya, also was killed Tuesday along with three other Americans, as violent protesters stormed the consulate in Benghazi. President Barack Obama has vowed that the attackers would be brought to justice but also stressed that the U.S. respects religious freedom.

In a security shake-up following the attack on the consulate, the Libyan interior minister has fired three security officials in the eastern city, including the head of the Benghazi security sector, and the deputy interior minister in Benghazi, said senior security official Adel Rajouba.

The decisions came following a government meeting and the three were fired because of "the lawlessness," Rajouba said.

The intensity of the anti-American fervor initially caught U.S. leaders by surprise, but in the last several days the Obama administration has called for calm and urged foreign governments to protect American interests in their countries.

"I think that we have to continue to be very vigilant because I suspect that ... these demonstrations are likely to continue over the next few days, if not longer," U.S. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta told reporters Sunday.

It has been unclear how much of the violence was spontaneously triggered by the film and how much of it was spurred on by anti-American militants using it as a tool to grow and enrage the crowds.

Libya's Interim President Mohammed el-Megarif said Sunday that the attackers who killed the U.S. ambassador in the country appeared to have spent months preparing and carefully choosing their date — the anniversary of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. He pointed to a second raid on a safe house. "All this indicates clearly that the attackers are well trained and well prepared and have planned this in advance," he said in an interview.

But the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, Susan Rice, brushed aside his assessment, saying evidence gathered so far indicated it was a spontaneous reaction to the anti-Islam video and not a premeditated or coordinated strike.

"It seems to have been hijacked, let us say, by some individual clusters of extremists who came with heavier weapons," said Rice, referring to the mortars and rocket-propelled grenades used in the attack.

Whether the attackers had ties to al-Qaida or other terrorist groups has yet to be determined, Rice said, noting that the FBI has yet to complete its investigation.

It wouldn't be the first time that Western works critical of Islam have triggered spontaneous unrest throughout the Middle East, she said, pointing to the novel "Satanic Verses" by British author Salman Rushdie and the cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad published by a Danish newspaper in 2006.

A semiofficial religious foundation in Iran increased a reward it had offered for killing Rushdie to \$3.3 million from \$2.8 million, a hard-line Iranian newspaper reported Sunday, a move that appeared to be linked to the protests against the video.

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Susan Rice: Libya Protests 'Hijacked' by Extremists

September 17, 2012

[Wall Street Journal](#)

By JOHN D. MCKINNON And COREY BOLES

An Obama administration official said Sunday that the deadly attack on a U.S. consulate in Libya last week was the work of "individual clusters of extremists" but began as a spontaneous protest.

United Nations' Ambassador Susan Rice's comments on ABC's "This Week" contradict those of the head of the new Libyan congress, Mohamed al-Magariaf, who said the attack was planned by al Qaeda-linked militants before the protests began.

Libya's interim president, Mohammed Al-Megarif, suggested on Sunday that al-Qaeda was behind the deadly assault on the US consulate in Benghazi, which claimed the life of the US ambassador.

Ms. Rice said on ABC that the assault on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi Tuesday started with a "small number of people" seeking to replicate a violent protest that had broken out in Cairo. "And then as that unfolded, it seems to have been hijacked, let us say, by some individual clusters of extremists who came with heavier weapons, weapons that ... in the wake of the revolution in Libya ... are quite common and accessible," she said. "And it then evolved from there."

Mr. Magrief said, in contrast, "if you take into account the weapons used, like RPGs [rocket-propelled grenades] and other heavy weapons, it proves that it was preplanned. It's a dirty act of revenge that has nothing to do with religion."

The consulate attack in Benghazi killed four Americans, including the U.S. ambassador to Libya, Christopher Stevens. A question that has lingered since is whether it started as a spontaneous protest or had been planned by extremists.

Several U.S. officials said last week that local militants, communicating with al Qaeda extremists about the protest, were responsible for the deadly turn. Ms. Rice didn't address the possible involvement of al Qaeda; Libya's Mr. Magariaf insists that al Qaeda was involved.

A senior Republican lawmaker said Sunday that the attack was clearly an act of terrorism. "Most people don't bring rocket-propelled grenades and heavy weapons to a demonstration," said Sen. John McCain (R., Ariz.), the top Republican on the Senate Armed Services Committee, on CBS's "Face the Nation." "That was an act of terror. For anyone to disagree with that fundamental fact is really ignorant of the facts."

Rep. Mike Rogers (R., Mich.), chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, said on "Fox News Sunday" it was too early to tell whether the attack on Benghazi was an organized or spontaneous incident.

The U.S. and Libyan officials are continuing to probe the exact nature of the attack, including possible connections with a regional al Qaeda group.

The protests against the video in Cairo were followed by violence against U.S. facilities last week in several countries in North Africa, the Middle East and beyond, posing a foreign-relations challenge for the Obama administration in a sensitive region.

Ms. Rice told "Fox News Sunday" that the protests weren't an "expression of hostility in the broadest sense to the U.S. or its policies," but rather were a reaction to the video negatively depicting the Muslim faith. She said that it was difficult to "project the trajectory" of how the reaction of protesters around the region would develop.

Mr. Rogers, the GOP lawmaker, said on Fox he thought the protests were a reaction to U.S. policy in the region. He said there are many people living in the Mideast who are unclear what the overall American policy toward the region is.

President Barack Obama's handling of the turmoil could affect his political standing in the U.S. as he seeks re-election in November.

In appearances on several Sunday talk shows, Ms. Rice described Mr. Obama as "incredibly calm, incredibly steady, and incredibly measured" through the crisis. She said his leadership has "ensured that in Egypt, in Yemen, in Tunisia, in Libya, and many other parts of the world, that leaders have come out and made very plain that there's no excuse for this violence."

She dismissed suggestions that the U.S. has become less effective or popular in the region. "We're not impotent," she said in response to a question on "This Week." "We're not even less popular."

She acknowledged on "This Week" that U.S. security at the Benghazi facility "obviously didn't prove sufficient" to withstand the attack.
(top)

U.S. downplays terror role in Libya riot

September 17, 2012

UPI

WASHINGTON -- A top U.S. diplomat said Sunday there was no evidence to suggest the protest that led to the sacking of a U.S. consulate in Libya was part of a terrorist plot.

Susan Rice, U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, said the preliminary investigation into the deadly demonstration in Benghazi found that armed extremists took advantage of the uproar in the streets.

"It seems to have been hijacked, let us say, by some individual clusters of extremists who came with heavier weapons, weapons that as you know in -- in the wake of the revolution in Libya ... are quite common and accessible," Rice said on ABC's "This Week." "And it then evolved from there."

What evolved was a breaching of the consulate perimeter and the death of U.S. Ambassador Chris Stevens and three other Americans. The incident appeared to spawn additional anti-American protests around the Arab world and election-year sparring between Republican and Democratic leaders of the Obama administration's actions in the region.

Rice said on CNN's "State of the Union" the attack should not be viewed from the United States as typical of Libya. "I have been to Libya and walked the streets of Benghazi myself," she said. "Despite what we saw in that horrific incident where some mob was hijacked ultimately by a handful of extremists, the United States is extremely popular. The outpouring of sympathy and support for Ambassador Stevens and his colleagues from the government, from people is evidence of that."

Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., said CBS' "Face the Nation" the administration was naïve to think the Benghazi violence was not the work of al-Qaida or other violent extremists. "Most people don't bring rocket-propelled grenades and heavy weapons to a demonstration," McCain said. "That was an act of terror. For anyone to disagree with that fundamental fact I think is really ignoring the facts."

McCain said he did not dispute the assumption the United States was popular among most Libyans, but he said those that did not share that sentiment were being emboldened by a seeming weakness from the United States. "It was Osama bin Laden who said when people see the strong horse and the weak horse, people like the strong horse," McCain said. "Right now, the United States is the weak horse."

Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu said a seeming U.S. disengagement was also emboldening Iran into pressing forward with developing nuclear weapons. He said the United States needed to stop being preoccupied with the election year and step up to the plate to head off a potential crisis.

"I think you should have a red line communicated to Iran," Netanyahu said. "I know that people value flexibility. I think that's important. But I think at this late stage of the game, I think Iran needs to see clarity."

Rice responded the United States had indeed drawn a red line in the sand on Iran and that President Obama had not discounted bringing the U.S. military into the equation. "All options remain on the table," she said on "Fox News Sunday. "The president has been very clear about that and that includes the military option. This is not a policy of containment, it's a policy to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon."

Rep. Peter King, R-N.Y., said on NBC's "Meet the Press" the Obama administration was contributing to the problem with its rush to pull U.S. troops out of Iraq and Afghanistan and the wide berth it was giving the "Arab Spring" movement. "What he is doing by that is telling our allies they can't trust us and he's also telling unaligned that the U.S. is not a reliable ally," said King.

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Libyan president says U.S. consulate attack was premeditated; U.S. Ambassador Rice says it began spontaneously

September 17, 2012

Washington Post

By Sean Sullivan

Libyan President Mohamed Yousef El-Magariaf said he is convinced a Tuesday attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi that left four Americans dead was premeditated, but the U.S. ambassador to the

United Nations said Sunday that the protests near the consulate began spontaneously, but were later hijacked by armed extremists.

"The way these perpetrators acted, and moved ... and they're choosing the specific date for this so-called demonstration, I think we have no, this leaves us with no doubt that this was preplanned, determined...predetermined," Magariaf said in an interview on CBS's "Face The Nation" set to air later Sunday morning.

The attack claimed the life of U.S. Ambassador to Libya J. Christopher Stevens and three other Americans: The FBI has is conducting an investigation into the events surrounding the incident.

"What this began as was a spontaneous, not a premeditated response to what happened in Cairo," Susan Rice, the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, said in an interview on ABC's "This Week With George Stephanopoulos."

Hours before the attack in Benghazi, protesters moved against the U.S. Embassy in Cairo, Egypt, scaling the embassy walls and entering its outer grounds. The protests were an apparent reaction to an anti-Islam film linked to a California man.

"We believe that folks in Benghazi, a small number of people came to the embassy to — or to the consulate, rather, to replicate the sort of challenge that was posed in Cairo," Rice said. "And then as that unfolded, it seems to have been hijacked, let us say, by some individual clusters of extremists who came with heavier weapons."

"We do not have information at present that leads us to conclude that this was premeditated or preplanned," Rice said on CBS.

Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.), also speaking on CBS, appeared to disagree with the suggestion that the attack was spontaneous. "Most people don't bring rocket propelled grenades and heavy weapons to a demonstration. That was an act of terror, and for anyone to disagree with that fundamental fact, I think is really ignoring of the facts," said McCain, the ranking Republican on the Senate Armed Services Committee.

House Intelligence Committee Mike Rogers (Mich.) echoed a similar sentiment on "Fox News Sunday." He said: "I'm just suspect that they could come to that conclusion so assuredly — that it was a spontaneous effort, given the coordination of it."

When asked whether it is safe for FBI investigators from the United States to come into the country, or if he is advising them to stay away for a while, Magariaf responded: "Maybe it is better for them to stay for a little while, for a little while. But until we ... we do what we have to do ourselves. But again when we need for their presence to help in further investigation ... and any hasty action I think is not welcome," Magariaf said.

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US, Libya Differ On Accounts Of Benghazi Attack

September 17, 2012

AFP

By Andrew Gully

WASHINGTON - Top US and Libyan officials offered starkly different accounts Sunday about the attack on the US consulate in Benghazi that left the ambassador and three other Americans dead.

The US ambassador to the United Nations, Susan Rice, said it began with a spontaneous protest over the anti-Islamic video that had already set off similar protests in Egypt, leading to the storming of the US embassy there.

"People gathered outside the embassy (consulate) and then it grew very violent and those with extremist ties joined the fray and came with heavy weapons... and that then spun out of control," Rice told "Fox News Sunday."

"But we don't see at this point signs this was a coordinated plan, premeditated attack. Obviously, we will wait for the results of the (FBI) investigation and we don't want to jump to conclusions before then."

Announcing the arrest of 50 suspects, Libya's parliament chief, however, blamed the attack on a few foreign extremists who he said entered Libya from Mali and Algeria and pre-planned it with local "affiliates and sympathizers."

"The way these perpetrators acted, and moved... leaves us with no doubt that this was pre-planned, determined, predetermined," Mohammed al-Megaryef, president of the Libyan National Congress, told CBS News.

"It was planned, definitely, it was planned by foreigners, by people who entered the country a few months ago. And they were planning this criminal act since their arrival."

Ambassador Chris Stevens is believed to have died from smoke inhalation after becoming trapped in the blazing diplomatic compound, which came under fire from rocket-propelled grenades, mortars and small arms for several hours.

Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula said the attack was revenge for the killing of the terror network's deputy leader Sheikh Abu Yahya al-Libi in a drone strike in June, but there is no evidence to support the claim.

US officials initially leaned toward the premeditated, well-planned assault angle and pointed to the fact the attack came on the anniversary of 9/11.

Now they are more reticent, insisting journalists wait for the results of the FBI investigation before leaping to conclusions.

Rice's comments are the strongest indication yet that -- even if the United States does believe the assault was the work of a small band of extremists -- it has no evidence to suggest planning prior to the protests.

Leading Republican senator and top Obama administration critic John McCain said it was ridiculous to believe it was anything other than a planned assault by Islamic extremists.

"Most people don't bring rocket-propelled grenades and heavy weapons to a demonstration," McCain told CBS. "That was an act of terror. And for anyone to disagree with that fundamental fact I think is really ignoring the facts."

The reluctance of US officials to give details about the Libya probe betrays their determination to track down those who killed Stevens, the ~~first~~ American envoy killed in the line of duty since 1979.

US spies, Marines and drones are aiding the Libyan authorities in their effort, hampered by the chaotic blend of competing militia and tribal alliances in the wake of the revolution that ousted Moamer Kadhafi last year.

In Paris, French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius told French TV that the American ambassador died under "absolutely atrocious conditions," suggesting new details could soon emerge.

Speaking to ABC, Rice denied the United States was powerless to stop the anger spreading through the Muslim world at symbols of US influence, such as diplomatic missions, businesses and fast food restaurants.

Countering accusations from opposition Republicans that weak US leadership was emboldening the extremists, Rice said President Barack Obama had been extremely effective in getting Muslim leaders to protect US facilities and condemn the violence.

"What we've seen is that the president has been incredibly calm, incredibly steady, and incredibly measured in his approach to this set of developments," Rice said.

"His interventions, his leadership, has ensured that in Egypt, in Yemen, in Tunisia, in Libya, and many other parts of the world, that leaders have come out and made very plain that there's no excuse for this violence."

The flare-up was not a sign of anti-US sentiment but triggered solely by a "reprehensible and disgusting" movie denigrating the Prophet Mohammed, Rice said, stressing: "We're not impotent, we're not even less popular."

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UN ambassador says Libya attack was spontaneous

September 17, 2012

Associated Press

By JOSH LEDERMAN

WASHINGTON — A deadly assault on a U.S. consulate in Libya was a spontaneous reaction to an anti-Muslim video, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations said Sunday, even as Libya's president insisted the attackers spent months preparing and carefully choosing their date — the anniversary of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

Unnerved by the rapidly escalating raid on Tuesday that claimed the life of the U.S. ambassador to Libya and three other Americans, the Obama administration last week launched an investigation into whether terrorist groups had exploited outrage over an anti-Muslim video to trigger an attack long in the works.

But Ambassador Susan Rice said evidence gathered so far shows no indication of a premeditated or coordinated strike. She said the attack in Benghazi, powered by mortars and rocket-propelled grenades, appeared to be a copycat of demonstrations that had erupted hours earlier outside the U.S. Embassy in Cairo, spurred by a YouTube film attributed to a California man mocking the Prophet Muhammad.

"It seems to have been hijacked, let us say, by some individual clusters of extremists who came with heavier weapons," Rice said, adding that such weaponry is easy to come by in post-revolutionary Libya.

Whether those extremists had ties to al-Qaida or other terrorist groups has yet to be determined, Rice said, noting that the FBI has yet to complete its investigation.

Rice's depiction of the chain of events contrasted with one offered by Libya's Interim President Mohammed el-Megarif, who said Sunday there was no doubt the perpetrators had predetermined the date of the attack.

"It was planned, definitely. It was planned by foreigners, by people who entered the country a few months ago," el-Megarif said. "And they were planning this criminal act since their arrival." Brushing aside el-Megarif's assessment, Rice said it wouldn't be the first time that Western works critical of Islam have triggered spontaneous unrest throughout the Middle East. She pointed to Salman Rushdie's novel "Satanic Verses" and cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad published by a Danish newspaper in 2006.

But Rep. Mike Rogers, the House Intelligence Committee chair, said it was premature to rule out a premeditated attack. A former FBI agent, Rogers, R-Mich., said there were too many coincidences to conclude the Benghazi attack hadn't been planned in advance.

"There's other information, classified information we have that just makes you stop for a minute and pause," Rogers said, without elaborating.

Added Arizona's Sen. John McCain, the top Republican on the Senate Armed Services Committee: "Most people don't bring rocket-propelled grenades and heavy weapons to a demonstration."

What started with protesters scaling the embassy wall in Cairo on Tuesday over an amateurish video deriding Islam's holiest figure has mushroomed into a maelstrom of disquiet throughout the Muslim world. In Libya, U.S. Ambassador Chris Stevens and three other Americans were killed when protesters stormed the consulate in Benghazi. Anti-U.S. protests in 20 countries led the Pentagon to dispatch elite Marine anti-terrorism teams to Libya and Yemen and to position two Navy warships off Libya's coast.

Meanwhile, the State Department ordered all nonessential U.S. government workers and their families out of Sudan and Tunisia. In Lebanon, protesters torched an American fast-food restaurant. Even as tensions appeared to be easing Saturday, al-Qaida's most active Mideast branch was calling for further attacks on U.S. embassies.

"It's approximately a reaction to this video, and it's a hateful video that had nothing to do with the United States and which we find disgusting and reprehensible," Rice said.

Rice's comments appeared to mark a departure from an earlier State Department position. Citing the ongoing FBI probe, State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland said Friday that until the Justice Department was ready to talk, no details would be released. "Not who they were, not how they happened, not what happened to Ambassador Stevens — not any of it."

But the uncertainty of an anxious nation questioning what was gained by U.S. support for democratic, pro-Islamic uprisings in Muslim countries has created a sense of urgency that has been difficult for the Obama administration to ignore. The turbulence has also become a major issue in President Barack Obama's re-election campaign, with the Republican rival for the White House, Mitt Romney, laying blame on the president and accusing him of apologizing for the U.S. Doubts also persist about whether security measures in place to protect U.S. diplomatic missions, which were overwhelmed in Benghazi, were sufficient.

Rice said the U.S. had "no actionable intelligence" about any imminent attack in Benghazi, and that security was beefed up in Cairo following signs that the YouTube video might spark protests. She said foreign governments are stepping up to condemn the violence and to fulfill their obligations to protect U.S. embassies.

Rice said it's too early to judge whether security should have been stronger in Libya. U.S. Marines, who commonly protect embassies abroad, were not assigned to the Benghazi consulate, the State Department has said. At the embassy in Cairo, Rice said, protections initially afforded by the Egyptian government fell short.

"When President Obama picked up the phone and spoke to the President (Mohammed) Morsi, right away things changed," Rice said. "And that's an evidence of our influence and our impact."

Rice and Rogers spoke on "Fox News Sunday," while el-Megarif and McCain spoke on CBS' "Face the Nation." Rice also appeared on NBC's "Meet the Press" and on "Face the Nation."
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Video Shows Libyans Retrieving Envoy's Body

September 17, 2012

New York Times

By David D. Kirkpatrick

CAIRO - An amateur video that surfaced Sunday appears to show a crowd removing the motionless body of Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens from a window of the American mission in Benghazi, Libya, after it was attacked last week by Islamist militants, adding new details to reports that Mr. Stevens had died of smoke inhalation while locked in a safe room.

The video emerged as a new disagreement broke out between the recently named president of the Libyan Parliament and American officials over whether the attack was planned and whether Al Qaeda had a role.

Labeled the work of Fahd al-Bakkosh, the video centers on what appears to be the same tall, narrow window that witnesses have described as Mr. Stevens's last exit. The witnesses said residents drawn to the scene had forced open the window and found Mr. Stevens behind a locked iron gate, pulled him out and taken him to the hospital. In the video, none say anything that shows ill will.

"I swear, he's dead," one Libyan says, peering in.

"Bring him out, man! Bring him out," another says.

"The man is alive. Move out of the way," others shout. "Just bring him out, man."

"Move, move, he is still alive!"

"Alive, Alive! God is great," the crowd erupts, while someone calls to bring Mr. Stevens to a car.

Mr. Stevens was taken to a hospital, where a doctor tried to revive him, but said he was all but dead on arrival.

The full identity and motivation of the attackers remains a matter of dispute. Considerable suspicion has fallen on a local Benghazi militia, Ansar al-Sharia, known for its intensely conservative and anti-democratic Islamist politics. Witnesses saw the group's insignia on trucks at the scene, and attackers acknowledged they were members. Fighters and others present at the attack said the motive was anger at a video produced in the United States that denigrates the Prophet Muhammad.

On Sunday, Mohamed Yusef Magariaf, president of Libya's newly elected national congress, said in interviews with American news media that he believed people affiliated with or sympathetic to Al Qaeda played a role in the assault, although he did not seem to rule out that the attackers might have been ideological allies of Al Qaeda without specific collaboration. The regional Qaeda affiliate, Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, is active near Libya but has focused primarily on attacking local governments.

Mr. Magariaf said that Libya has arrested as many as 50 people over the assault. At least a few, he said, had come from outside Libya, possibly Algeria or Mali. And he also said that he believed the non-Libyans had been involved in planning the attack in the months since they entered the country, and that it was meant to coincide with the anniversary of the Sept. 11 attacks.

Referring to "ugly deeds, criminal deeds," Mr. Magariaf insisted that the attacks "do not resemble any way, in any sense, the aspirations, the feelings of Libyans towards the United States and its citizens," emphasizing the role of "foreigners."

Appearing on the same program, Susan Rice, the United States ambassador to the United Nations, said the attacks began "spontaneously in Benghazi as a reaction to what had transpired some hours earlier in Cairo."

"But soon after that spontaneous protest began outside of our consulate in Benghazi, we believe that it looks like extremist elements, individuals, joined in that effort with heavy weapons of the sort that are, unfortunately, readily now available in Libya post-revolution," Ms. Rice said. "And that it spun from there into something much, much more violent."

The United States did not believe the attack was preplanned or premeditated, Ms. Rice said, adding that whether the extremists "were Al Qaeda affiliates, whether they were Libyan-based extremists or Al Qaeda itself I think is one of the things we'll have to determine."

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Libya Arrests 50 Over US Envoy Killing

September 17, 2012

AFP

By Imed Lamloum

TRIPOLI - Libya announced the arrest of 50 suspects over the killing of the US envoy and three other Americans, blaming the Benghazi attack on foreign extremists and claiming it was pre-planned.

Defence Secretary Leon Panetta said the US military did not plan to bolster its forces in the Middle East and North Africa, despite the threat of more violent protests targeting diplomatic outposts across the region.

The specter of renewed unrest after a relatively peaceful weekend grew with Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah calling for a week of protests across Lebanon over the anti-Islamic Internet video stirring up anger in the Muslim world.

"The whole world needs to see your anger on your faces, in your fists and your shouts," Nasrallah, the head of Lebanon's powerful Shiite Muslim organisation, said in a televised speech.

He spoke hours after Pope Benedict XVI left Lebanon following a historic three-day visit in which he prayed that Middle East leaders would work towards peace and reconciliation.

A low-budget trailer for a movie entitled "Innocence of Muslims," believed to have been produced by a small group of extremist Christians in the United States, has sparked furious anti-American protests across the Islamic world.

The first unrest was in Cairo, where protesters -- reportedly stirred up by clips of the film presented on satellite TV channels and seen on YouTube -- stormed the US embassy on Tuesday night, replacing the Stars and Stripes with an Islamic banner.

Hours later, the US consulate in Libya's eastern city of Benghazi came under sustained attack during more protests against the film -- four Americans, including ambassador Chris Stevens, were killed in the assault.

Announcing the arrest of 50 suspects, Libya's parliament chief blamed the attack on a few foreign extremists who he said entered Libya from Mali and Algeria and pre-planned it with local "affiliates and sympathizers."

"It was planned, definitely, it was planned by foreigners, by people who entered the country a few months ago," Mohammed al-Megaryef, president of the Libyan National Congress, told US broadcaster CBS television's "Face the Nation."

Stevens is believed to have died from smoke inhalation after becoming trapped in the blazing diplomatic compound, which came under fire from rocket-propelled grenades, mortars and small arms for several hours.

US Ambassador to the United Nations Susan Rice offered a different account of the Benghazi assault, saying it began with a "spontaneous" protest over the film and that there was no evidence of pre-planning.

Countering accusations of US impotence over the crisis, Rice said President Barack Obama had been extremely effective in getting Muslim leaders to protect US diplomatic facilities and condemn the violence.

"What we've seen is that the president has been incredibly calm, incredibly steady and incredibly measured in his approach to this set of developments," Rice said.

"His interventions, his leadership, has ensured that in Egypt, in Yemen, in Tunisia, in Libya and many other parts of the world, that leaders have come out and made very plain that there's no excuse for this violence."

Since the Benghazi consulate attack, the United States has deployed counterterrorism Marine units to Libya to protect the Tripoli embassy and stationed two destroyers off the North African coast.

It has also sent a Marine unit to protect the US embassy in the Yemeni capital Sanaa, where police shot dead four protesters and wounded 34 others on Thursday as a mob stormed the facility and breached its perimeter.

The United States has evacuated all non-essential staff and family members from Sudan and Tunisia and warned US citizens against travel to the two countries.

With a substantial force already deployed in the region and now boosted by extra Marine units, Panetta said the US military had the ability to respond as necessary to protect American diplomats.

"We do have a major presence in the region," he told reporters.

"Having said that, we've enhanced that with FAST (Fleet Anti-Terrorism Security Team) teams and others so that if they are requested, they can respond more quickly."

Protests targeting symbols of US influence, ranging from embassies and schools to fast food outlets erupted again on Sunday, with thousands rallying across Pakistan, burning American flags and effigies of Obama. At least eight people were injured when protesters clashed with police outside the US consulate in the port of Karachi.

Hundreds of students poured onto the streets of Kabul shouting anti-American slogans, while the Bangladesh government condemned the film as "reprehensible" and New Delhi called it "offensive."

Belgian police said they detained 230 people in the northern city of Antwerp after clashes at a demonstration against the film.

In Afghanistan, heavily armed Taliban fighters on Friday stormed a strongly fortified air base in Helmand province where Britain's Prince Harry is deployed, killing two US Marines in an assault the militia said was to avenge the anti-Islam video.

A NATO spokesman revealed that six US fighter jets and three refuelling stations were destroyed and six aircraft hangars damaged in the attack, the scale of which he said was unprecedented.

A total of 17 people have died in violence linked to the film, including the four Americans killed in Benghazi, 11 protesters who died as police battled to defend US missions from mobs in Egypt, Lebanon, Sudan, Tunisia and Yemen, and the two US soldiers in Afghanistan.

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TOP STORIES

Audacious Raid on NATO Base Shows Taliban's Reach

September 17, 2012

New York Times

By ALISSA J. RUBIN

KABUL, Afghanistan — An audacious Taliban attack on a heavily fortified base in southern Afghanistan did far more damage than initially reported, destroying or severely damaging eight attack jets in the most destructive single strike on Western matériel in the 11-year war, military officials said Sunday.

While other attacks have caused greater loss of life, the assault late Friday at Camp Bastion in Helmand Province, one of the largest and best-defended posts in Afghanistan, was troubling to NATO because the attackers were able to penetrate the base, killing two Marines and causing more than \$200 million in damage. "We're saying it's a very sophisticated attack," said a military official here. "We've lost aircraft in battle, but nothing like this."

The complex attack, which NATO officials said was conducted by three tightly choreographed teams of militants wearing American Army uniforms, was a reminder that the Taliban remain capable of serious assaults despite the "surge" offensive against them. Now the offensive is over, and nearly 10,000 American Marines have left Helmand Province, a critical stronghold for the Taliban, over the past several months.

Together with a rash of attacks by Afghan security forces against NATO troops — including two over the weekend that left at least six coalition service members dead — the Taliban have put new pressure on the American withdrawal plan, which calls for accelerated troop pullouts through 2014 while training Afghan forces to take over.

At the same time, tensions with the government flared Sunday as President Hamid Karzai condemned the deaths of Afghan women in airstrikes and criticized the continued American custody of hundreds of Afghan prisoners.

The military investigation into the attack at Bastion is now trying to uncover whether the insurgents had help from inside the camp and whether they were trained or aided by neighboring countries, such as Pakistan or Iran, which have allowed the Taliban to take refuge on their territory. But military officials and Afghan analysts said that the insurgents may well have prepared for their mission in significant measure by studying easily available satellite images on the Internet. "We don't underestimate the enemy," the military official said, speaking on the condition of anonymity because of the continuing investigation. "We know the enemy has limited capability to do these, but they are not a whole bunch of yokels running around the country."

The 15 insurgents conducting the attack lost no time from the moment they blew a hole in the perimeter at one of the closest points to the airfield, military officials said. They then raced toward their targets, shooting and setting fire to parked Navy AV-8B Harrier jets and destroying three refueling stations, even as a quick reaction force was mustering to fight them off, a military official said. "It was a

running gun battle for a while, two and a half hours, nonetheless they were able to get to the aircraft before we could intercept them," a military official said, noting that because it happened at night it was difficult until daylight to be sure that all the insurgents had been killed or captured. All but one was killed; the remaining insurgent is in custody, the military said.

Two American Marines were killed in the attack, and nine coalition personnel, including a civilian contractor, were wounded, the military said in a statement. Prince Harry, the third in line to the British throne, is doing a tour of duty as a helicopter pilot and was stationed at Camp Bastion at the time of the attack, but was not hurt. Camp Bastion is home mostly to British soldiers, while the neighboring camp, known as Leatherneck, has American Marines and other service members.

Six of the jets, which each cost between \$23 million and \$30 million when they were first acquired by the United States Navy, according to a General Accounting Office report, were completely destroyed and two more were so severely damaged it was unlikely they could be repaired. Also badly damaged were three refueling stations and three soft-skinned aircraft hangars, the military said in a news release.

Determining how it was possible for the insurgents to penetrate and severely damage such a well-defended base, particularly one with clear lines of sight across miles of mostly flat plain, will be important in determining whether this was a unique attack or one that could be replicated either in targeting Western bases or Afghan ones, military experts said.

"The Taliban retain the command and military planning infrastructure to put together complex and sophisticated attacks," said Stephen Biddle, a professor at George Washington University with expertise in defense studies.

"If this is a clever surprise, it can't work twice; it tells you the people are clever and can do elaborate planning, using subterfuge and possibly captured uniforms," Mr. Biddle said. "It would be a different matter if they managed to blow a hole in a heavily defended perimeter — then the Afghan National Security Forces are looking at a big, big problem."

Wahid Mujda, an Afghan analyst who tracks the Taliban, said that despite the Taliban's statement that the attack was retaliation for an anti-Muslim video, the video almost certainly had nothing to do with it.

"I do not think that the Camp Bastion attack had anything to do with the anti-Prophet movie," Mr. Mujda said. "Given the sophistication of the attack one can say with a lot of confidence that the Taliban had been training, rehearsing and preparing for weeks and even months. Everything was not planned and decided overnight."

He predicted that the Afghan government and the international military forces here would see similar attacks in the future.

"They have experts, strategists, planners and designers, they have a great knowledge of the modern technology," Mr. Mujda said.

"My sources in the Taliban tell me that every time they want to attack an important target they use Google Maps and other available means for studying and understanding their targets."

This year's toll from what are known as insider or green-on-blue attacks — green being American military parlance for indigenous forces, blue for its own — has become one of the most visible signs of the challenges faced by the NATO-led coalition as it nears the end of its role in Afghanistan's war.

The second attack of the weekend, which was Sunday in Zabul Province, was the deadliest of the two latest incidents, with four coalition service members killed. The coalition said in a terse statement that the attack was "suspected to involve members of the Afghan police" and was under investigation.

Michael Cole, a coalition spokesman, said officials suspected the Afghan police in the attack because a police officer was killed in the firefight that ensued. But Mr. Cole said investigators were not yet certain whether the dead officer was one of the attackers or was caught in the cross-fire.

Afghan officials said they, too, were investigating.

The six deaths brought to 51 the number of coalition service members killed this year in insider attacks. The toll has already well exceeded last year's total of 35 killed in such violence.

The increase in attacks has prompted coalition and Afghan officials to step up their vetting of Afghan recruits, and coalition officials say the attacks are mostly driven by personal animosity. Still, at least a quarter are believed to be the result of Taliban infiltration or influence over soldiers and the police.
(top)

Cultural Clash Fuels Muslims Raging at Film

September 17, 2012

New York Times

By DAVID D. KIRKPATRICK

CAIRO — Stepping from the cloud of tear gas in front of the American Embassy here, Khaled Ali repeated the urgent question that he said justified last week's violent protests at United States outposts around the Muslim world.

"We never insult any prophet — not Moses, not Jesus — so why can't we demand that Muhammad be respected?" Mr. Ali, a 39-year-old textile worker said, holding up a handwritten sign in English that read "Shut Up America." "Obama is the president, so he should have to apologize!"

When the protests against an American-made online video mocking the Prophet Muhammad exploded in about 20 countries, the source of the rage was more than just religious sensitivity, political demagoguery or resentment of Washington, protesters and their sympathizers here said. It was also a demand that many of them described with the word "freedom," although in a context very different from the term's use in the individualistic West: the right of a community, whether Muslim, Christian or Jewish, to be free from grave insult to its identity and values.

That demand, in turn, was swept up in the colliding crosscurrents of regional politics. From one side came the gale of anger at America's decade-old war against terrorism, which in the eyes of many Muslims in the region often looks like a war against them. And from the other, the new winds blowing through the region in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, which to many here means most of all a right to demand respect for the popular will.

"We want these countries to understand that they need to take into consideration the people, and not just the governments," said Ismail Mohamed, 42, a religious scholar who once was an imam in Germany. "We don't think that depictions of the prophets are freedom of expression. We think it is an offense against our rights," he said, adding, "The West has to understand the ideology of the people."

Even during the protests, some stone throwers stressed that the clash was not Muslim against Christian. Instead, they suggested that the traditionalism of people of both faiths in the region conflicted with Western individualism and secularism.

Youssef Sidhom, the editor of the Coptic Christian newspaper Watani, said he objected only to the violence of the protests.

Mr. Sidhom approvingly recalled the uproar among Egyptian Christians that greeted the 2006 film "The Da Vinci Code," which was seen as an affront to aspects of traditional Christianity and the persona of Jesus. Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and other Arab countries banned both the film and the book on which it was based. And in Egypt, where insulting any of the three Abrahamic religions is a crime, the police even arrested the head of a local film company for importing 2,000 copies of the DVD, according to news reports.

"This reaction is expected," Mr. Sidhom said of last week's protests, "and if it had stayed peaceful I would have said I supported it and understood."

In a context where insults to religion are crimes and the state has tightly controlled almost all media, many in Egypt, like other Arab countries, sometimes find it hard to understand that the American government feels limited by its free speech rules from silencing even the most noxious religious bigot.

In his statement after protesters breached the walls of the United States Embassy last Tuesday, the spiritual leader of the Egypt's mainstream Islamist group, the Muslim Brotherhood, declared that "the West" had imposed laws against "those who deny or express dissident views on the Holocaust or question the number of Jews killed by Hitler, a topic which is purely historical, not a sacred doctrine."

In fact, denying the Holocaust is also protected as free speech in the United States, although it is prohibited in Germany and a few other European countries. But the belief that it is illegal in the United States is widespread in Egypt, and the Brotherhood's spiritual leader, Mohamed Badie, called for the "criminalizing of assaults on the sanctities of all heavenly religions."

"Otherwise, such acts will continue to cause devout Muslims across the world to suspect and even loathe the West, especially the U.S.A., for allowing their citizens to violate the sanctity of what they hold dear and holy," he said. "Certainly, such attacks against sanctities do not fall under the freedom of opinion or thought."

Several protesters said during the heat of last week's battles here that they were astonished that the United States had not punished the filmmakers. "Everyone across all these countries has the same anger, they are rising up for the same reason and with the same demands, and still no action is taken against the people who made that film," said Zakaria Magdy, 23, a printer.

In the West, many may express astonishment that the murder of Muslims in hate crimes does not provoke the same level of global outrage as the video did. But even a day after the clashes in Cairo had

subsided, many Egyptians argued that a slur against their faith was a greater offense than any attack on a living person.

"When you hurt someone, you are just hurting one person," said Ahmed Shobaky, 42, a jeweler. "But when you insult a faith like that, you are insulting a whole nation that feels the pain."

Mr. Mohamed, the religious scholar, justified it this way: "Our prophet is more dear to us than our family and our nation."

Others said that the outpouring of outrage against the video had built up over a long period of perceived denigrations of Muslims and their faith by the United States or its military, which are detailed extensively in the Arab news media: the invasion of Iraq on a discredited pretext; the images of abuse from the Abu Ghraib prison; the burning or desecrations of the Koran by troops in Afghanistan and a pastor in Florida; detentions without trial at Guantánamo Bay; the denials of visas to prominent Muslim intellectuals; the deaths of Muslim civilians as collateral damage in drone strikes; even political campaigns against the specter of Islamic law inside the United States.

"This is not the first time that Muslim beliefs are being insulted or Muslims humiliated," said Emad Shahin, a political scientist at the American University in Cairo.

While he stressed that no one should ever condone violence against diplomats or embassies because of even the most offensive film, Mr. Shahin said it was easy to see why the protesters focused on the United States government's outposts. "There is a war going on here," he said. "This was a straw, if you will, that broke the camel's back."

"The message here is we don't care about your beliefs — that because of our freedom of expression we can demean them and degrade them any time, and we do not care about your feelings."

There are also purely local dynamics that can fan the flames. In Tunis, an American school was set on fire by protesters angry over the video — but then looted of computers and musical instruments by people in the neighborhood.

Here in Cairo, ultraconservative Islamists known as Salafis initially helped drum up outrage against the video and rally their supporters to protest outside the embassy. But by the time darkness fell and a handful of young men climbed the embassy wall, the Salafis were nowhere to be found, and they stayed away the rest of the week.

Egyptian officials said that some non-Salafis involved in the embassy attacks confessed to receiving payments, although no payer had been identified. But after the first afternoon, the next three days of protests were dominated by a relatively small number of teenagers and young men — including die-hard soccer fans known as ultras. They appeared to have been motivated mainly by the opportunity to attack the police, whom they revile.

Some commentators said they regretted that the violence here and around the region had overshadowed the underlying argument against the offensive video. "Our performance came out like that of a failed lawyer in a no-lose case," Wael Kandil, an editor of the newspaper Sharouq, wrote in a column on Sunday. "We served our opponents something that made them drop the main issue and take us to the margins — this is what we accomplished with our bad performance."

Mohamed Sabry, 29, a sculptor and art teacher at a downtown cafe, said he saw a darker picture. "To see the Islamic world in this condition of underdevelopment," he said, "this is a bigger insult to the prophet."

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As Scandal Shook China, Quiet Spy Game Unraveled

September 17, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By JEREMY PAGE

BEIJING—In spy-speak it is known as a "walk-in"—an unsolicited approach to a diplomatic mission by a foreigner claiming to have sensitive information. And when an agitated former police chief, Wang Lijun, entered a U.S. consulate in early February with an eye-popping tale about the death of a British citizen, the stakes could hardly have been higher.

As Chinese police cars surrounded the building, Mr. Wang slipped U.S. diplomats the cellphone number of an accomplice, according to several people familiar with what happened. It would lead to evidence, he said, implicating the wife of Bo Xilai, one of the most senior leaders in the Chinese Communist Party, in the murder of British businessman Neil Heywood.

During a 30-hour standoff, U.S. officials weighed the information he claimed to have against the damage that granting him asylum could do to U.S.-Chinese relations. In the end, diplomats said Mr. Wang didn't formally seek asylum, and he left the consulate and was taken into Chinese custody.

But the drama didn't end there. In a previously undisclosed development, the U.S. handed the cellphone number over to British diplomats and gave them instructions on how to track down the information from Mr. Wang's mysterious accomplice. The instructions included setting up an email account under a designated name with a popular Chinese email and messaging service. The British set up the account and texted the cellphone number. People involved gave conflicting accounts of the timing and whether the accomplice responded. For reasons that are unclear, the British never received the promised documents.

On Tuesday, Mr. Wang will stand trial in the city of Chengdu on charges of defection, abuse of power, bribery and "bending the law for selfish ends," according to an official at the trial court. An indictment accuses Mr. Wang, the former police chief of Chongqing, of shielding Mr. Bo's wife from a criminal investigation, taking "massive" bribes and illegally using surveillance technology, according to state media.

The revelation that he claimed to have an accomplice who may still be prepared to spill secrets could complicate China's efforts to dictate the narrative about Messrs. Wang and Bo. The new details about Mr. Wang's stay in the consulate and its aftermath also shed light on how U.S. and British authorities responded to the unusual episode that triggered China's worst political crisis in more than two decades. Mr. Wang was a potentially valuable intelligence source with inside knowledge about senior Chinese leaders, but also was someone accused by human-rights activists and legal experts of widespread abuse of police powers.

The accounts of Britain's actions raise questions about whether it could have acted faster to procure the documents from Mr. Wang's associate. In the U.S., some politicians initially questioned the Obama administration's decision not to treat Mr. Wang as a valuable intelligence source and candidate for asylum.

Lawyers and Communist Party insiders say Mr. Wang almost certainly will be found guilty and given a stiff sentence, potentially the death penalty. Mr. Bo's wife, Gu Kailai, was given a suspended death sentence after her Aug. 20 conviction for Mr. Heywood's murder, which means she could spend life in prison.

Mr. Wang's trial is expected to produce the first official account of his flight to the consulate, which triggered a series of events that have thrown Chinese politics into disarray in advance of a once-a-decade leadership change expected this fall. Communist Party leaders see the trial as a next step in their efforts to limit the scandal. Soon after it ends, China likely will announce whether Mr. Bo—a former political highflier who was sacked from his party posts and placed under investigation in April—will face criminal charges, according to party insiders, political analysts and diplomats.

But the story prosecutors present is unlikely to address many of the unanswered questions about the episode, such as what other secrets Mr. Wang knew about Mr. Bo and what prompted his flight to the consulate.

That means it is unlikely to convince domestic skeptics, especially China's microbloggers, many of whom were deeply suspicious of the official story presented at Ms. Gu's trial. Many appear unsure about whether to view Mr. Wang as a hero or a villain.

"Wang Lijun did a lot of bad things, but he also saved China inadvertently," said Hu Xingdou, a popular microblogger and political economist at the Beijing Institute of Technology. "I don't think the authorities will fully explain what he did. But if they don't, that will only increase people's suspicions and lack of trust in the government."

The first sign of the brewing crisis in Chongqing came on Feb. 2 when a notice on the local government website announced that Mr. Wang had been replaced as police chief the previous day and given new responsibilities as vice mayor.

Soon afterward, he requested a meeting with the British consulate in Chongqing, but he failed to appear, according to people familiar with the episode.

Around the same time, he arranged a meeting at the U.S. consulate in Chengdu on the pretext that he wanted to discuss issues relating to his new post, people with knowledge of the meeting said. He drove the 200 miles from Chongqing to Chengdu and, on Feb. 6, approached the consulate, located in a leafy area of the city center surrounded by high walls:

U.S. diplomats, not realizing the political storm about to erupt, took him to the consulate's library rather than a safe room designed to block Chinese surveillance, according to people familiar with the events. Mr. Wang appeared agitated and fearful for his safety, but he didn't seem to have a preconceived plan, these people said. He told U.S. diplomats that he had fallen out with Mr. Bo, his boss in Chongqing, and gave them an account of the evidence against Ms. Gu, they said.

Among other evidence, Mr. Wang said he could provide a toxicology report proving that Mr. Heywood had ingested cyanide, although he said there were also traces of another poison that local authorities had been unable to identify. He also said that Ms. Gu had confessed to him that she murdered Mr. Heywood.

Early accounts from people briefed on the incident had suggested that Mr. Wang brought the evidence with him. But two people with more direct knowledge of the episode said more recently that he didn't have the documents with him.

At one point, Mr. Wang offered to bring in an associate who had documentary evidence, according to someone with direct knowledge of the incident, but that wasn't possible because the consulate was surrounded by Chinese police.

There are various theories about what motivated Mr. Wang to approach U.S. authorities.

One explanation from several people with close links to the party leadership is that well before Mr. Heywood's death, Mr. Wang was under investigation for alleged abuses of power in China's northeast and in Chongqing.

Some party insiders have said Mr. Wang was implicated in a corruption investigation into his successor as police chief of Tieling city in China's northeast, which was reported by state media in February. These people said Mr. Wang had been relying on political protection from Mr. Bo but became convinced his boss no longer was willing to shield him.

On or around Jan. 28, in an attempt to put pressure on Mr. Bo, Mr. Wang had confronted him over his wife's involvement in Mr. Heywood's murder, according to several people familiar with that incident. But Mr. Bo refused to give Mr. Wang what he wanted and replaced him as Chongqing's police chief three days later, they said.

Inside the U.S. consulate, Mr. Wang asked for shelter from Mr. Bo. Peter Haymond, the U.S. consul general in *Chengdu*, was out of town but hurried back. Stunned diplomats also informed the embassy in Beijing, which contacted the State Department in Washington. Members of the National Security Staff were informed, but President Barack Obama wasn't briefed while Mr. Wang was at the consulate, according to administration officials.

It was a tricky situation for U.S. diplomats. Although Mr. Wang was a potential fount of confidential information, he didn't necessarily qualify for asylum given the allegations of power and rights abuses that surrounded him. Moreover, offering him protection would have outraged the Chinese on the eve of a planned U.S. visit by Xi Jinping, the man expected to take over as China's top leader in the fall. U.S. government officials appear to have decided early on that he wasn't a sufficiently valuable intelligence asset to risk the political fallout, according to people familiar with the matter.

The U.S. officials explained to Mr. Wang that it wasn't possible to apply formally for asylum in the consulate, and that it would be extremely difficult to arrange his departure from China, according to people with knowledge of the events. After some discussion, Mr. Wang agreed that his best option was to hand himself to central-government authorities, who could protect him from Mr. Bo's security forces. Using three or more mobile phones he brought with him, Mr. Wang spent several hours negotiating with central authorities.

Mr. Wang agreed to be taken away by officials from the Ministry of State Security, who flew with him back to Beijing, where he has been kept at an undisclosed location for the past few months.

Before Mr. Wang left the consulate on Feb. 7, some 30 hours after he entered, U.S. officials briefed British diplomats on his allegations, according to people familiar with those discussions. The next day, the Americans gave the British the cellphone number and told them of the plan for obtaining documents from his associate via the email account.

British diplomats set up the email account and texted the mobile phone number with confirmation that the account was ready, according to two people familiar with the efforts, who gave differing accounts of the timing and whether there was a response.

One of the people said British diplomats texted and called several times starting Feb. 9, but never got an answer. Another said the British didn't set up the email account until later and did receive two text messages from the accomplice, which outlined Mr. Wang's allegations but contained no evidence.

A spokesman for the British Embassy said: "We made every effort to establish whether additional information existed."

William Hague, Britain's foreign secretary, has said he was informed about the matter on Feb. 7 and the British embassy first asked the Chinese government to investigate Mr. Heywood's death on Feb. 15.

Also on Feb. 15, a text message outlining Mr. Wang's allegations and using a Chinese approximation of Mr. Heywood's name was sent to Chinese journalist Chu Chaoxin, according to a message Mr. Chu posted on his microblog in March. Mr. Chu, who works for the Southern Weekend newspaper, said in his microblog posting that the message came from one of Wang Lijun's "one way communication" cellphone numbers. He didn't explain what that meant, and the posting was quickly deleted. He recently declined to comment.

Some party insiders, diplomats and political analysts believe Mr. Wang had laid plans for what would happen if Chinese authorities took him into custody. "I think it's clear that Wang was not working alone," said one Western official following the case.

On March 26, The Wall Street Journal was the first to report that the British government had asked Chinese authorities to investigate Mr. Heywood's death, and to describe his links to the Bo family as well as Mr. Wang's allegations.

During Ms. Gu's murder trial on Aug. 9, prosecutors alleged that she told Mr. Wang about her plan to kill Mr. Heywood, and she originally had schemed with Mr. Wang to have the Briton framed as a drug smuggler and shot dead resisting arrest, according to observers of the trial. Prosecutors said Mr. Wang backed out of that plan and Ms. Gu went ahead with her own scheme to poison Mr. Heywood, the observers said. Mr. Wang met Ms. Gu the day after the murder and secretly recorded her confessing, the observers quoted prosecutors as saying.

Ms. Gu didn't contest the charges against her, but her defense team sought to discredit Mr. Wang's testimony, according to the observers. "They really seemed to be trying very hard to undermine Wang Lijun," noted one.

Lawyers and political analysts say that doesn't bode well for Mr. Wang. But they say he should escape execution if he has provided evidence against others, possibly in relation to the crackdown on organized crime he oversaw, which critics say was used to seize assets from local entrepreneurs.

Wang Yuncai, a lawyer and old friend of Mr. Wang, said she was allowed to meet him in Chengdu last month but had no sense of what penalty he might face.

"It's hard to say if the situation is optimistic or not. There is simply no way to judge it," she said. As for his physical and emotional condition, she said, "it's very difficult to say whether it's good or not."
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AFRICA

ECOWAS Defence Ministers Meet On Mali, G.Bissau: Official

September 17, 2012

AFP

LAGOS - West African defence and foreign ministers will hold an emergency meeting Monday in the Ivorian capital Abidjan on the political and security crises in Mali and Guinea Bissau, an official statement said.

The extraordinary meeting will consider reports presented by the president of the ECOWAS Commission, Desire Kadre Ouedraogo, on the political and security situations in the two countries, the ECOWAS statement said.

The foreign ministers of Burkina Faso and Nigeria will also brief the ECOWAS Mediation and Security Council meeting on the mediation efforts in Mali and Guinea Bissau, respectively, it said.

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is trying to broker an end to the political crises in Mali -- which has been effectively sliced in two after a putsch -- and in impoverished Guinea-Bissau, which suffered a coup in April.

Ivory Coast's Chief of Defence Staff, who is also the chairman of the Committee of the ECOWAS Chiefs of Defence Staff, will also brief the Council on the outcome of the two-day committee meeting which ended on Saturday in Abidjan.

The defence chiefs have held several meetings as part of ECOWAS efforts towards the resolution of the crises in Mali and Guinea Bissau following the coups d'état which interrupted constitutional rule in both countries, and the separatist rebellion in northern Mali.

The Council's meeting comes in the wake of the formal request by the government of Mali for ECOWAS military assistance to recover the occupied territory in the north of the country and combat terrorism, the statement said.

ECOWAS has had 3,300 regional troops on standby for months but was awaiting a formal request from the Malian authorities to seek UN Security Council approval for a military deployment.

The country was considered one of the region's stable democracies until a March coup plunged it into turmoil.

Taking advantage of the chaos, Islamic extremists allied to Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb seized key towns in the vast desert north, an area larger than France or Texas.

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Niger Islamic Council Urges Muslims Not To Use Violence To Protest Film

September 17, 2012

Associated Press

NIAMEY, Niger - The Islamic Council of Niger asks Muslims not to attack Christian churches to protest the recent film on the Prophet Muhammad.

In a speech on national television Sunday, condemned the film but urged Muslims to respond with "appeasement and tolerance, the cardinal virtues of Islam."

Niger's religious leader proposed the creation of a confederation that would include representatives of all religions to foster "dialogue ... and peaceful coexistence between religions."

In a separate development, Niger President Issoufou Mahamadou sent a condolence message to U.S. President Barack Obama in which he called "cowardly" the attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi, Libya, which resulted in the deaths of U.S. citizens including Ambassador Chris Stevens.

Issoufou said that "terrorism must be combated with the utmost vigour."

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South Africa Police Step Up Efforts Against Protesters

September 17, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By DEVON MAYLIE and PETER WONACOTT

JOHANNESBURG—One month after South African police killed protesters near a platinum mine in a clash that inflamed national tensions, police have stepped in again to try to end the turmoil in the country's mining sector.

On Sunday, police stopped hundreds of demonstrators employed at the world's largest platinum producer, Anglo American Platinum Ltd., [AMS.JO](#) +1.32% from marching to a police station in nearby Rustenburg to protest a security clampdown that began Friday. Meanwhile, at the third-biggest platinum miner, Lonmin LMI.LN +0.73% PLC, protesters used rocks and dirt mounds to block roads and prevent police from entering an informal settlement where strike leaders were hiding. At one point, nine police trucks attempted to dislodge the barriers before turning back.

The day before, police fired rubber bullets at protesters, raided homes of miners for weapons and arrested more than 38 people, according to a local police officer who was part of the operations. Those arrested were scheduled to appear Monday at a local Rustenburg court, he said.

The moves follow weeks of illegal strikes that have paralyzed platinum production in South Africa, which accounts for 80% of the metal's global output, and hit the country's major goldmines. The wildcat strikes erupted after police on Aug. 16 gunned down 34 people who refused to disperse during a wage protest at Lonmin's Marikana mine. In all, 45 people have died in the strike violence.

President Jacob Zuma has resisted calls to take disciplinary action against those involved in the police shootings before a judicial committee that he set up releases its findings. State prosecutors fueled a public outcry after they used an apartheid-era law to formally charge protesters with the murder of the 34 people that police shot, on the basis that they had incited the violence. Prosecutors later dropped the murder charges following the public uproar.

South Africa's police chief, Riah Phiyega, has defended her force, saying officers used appropriate measures to protect themselves against an armed assault.

But the Marikana incident has put a fresh spotlight on a chronic problem with policing and public order, says Gareth Newham, head of the Crime and Justice Program at the Institute of Security Studies, a Pretoria-based think tank. Either the police don't act quickly enough before situations go out of control, as in the case of the 2008 riots that targeted African migrants, or overzealous actions deepen conflicts, he says.

"Police are supposed to de-escalate violence," Mr. Newham says. "In the past few years, they've escalated conflicts."

The number of police-related deaths last year reached 797, more than double a decade earlier, according to figures from the Independent Police Investigative Directorate, a government arm that investigates potential criminal offenses by police. Between 1997 and 2010, 5,820 people died as a result of police action or during police custody, according to the IPID figures.

After the shootings at Marikana, police had played a largely passive role in trying to protect company property during protests, and allowed miners to march with makeshift weapons such as spears and machetes.

On Friday, the South African government signaled a shift. The country's justice minister, Jeff Radebe, told reporters that law-enforcement agencies won't tolerate individuals inciting violence and would arrest those engaged in illegal gatherings or carrying weapons. Mr. Radebe said the government is intervening now because the strikes have put South Africa's economy at risk.

But the stepped-up police action also carries political risks. One of President Zuma's chief critics, Julius Malema, a youth leader expelled from the ruling African National Congress, has sought to stir opposition to the government in the wake of Marikana shootings. He has called for a nationwide mining strike and for Mr. Zuma's resignation.

On Sunday, a spokesman for a special investigative police unit called the Hawks said Mr. Malema is being investigated for his alleged role in instigating violence at Lonmin. The investigation follows a complaint lodged by labor union Solidarity after Mr. Malema visited the mines and called for a national mine strike, according to the Hawks spokesman, MacIntosh Polela.

A spokesman for Mr. Malema described the charges as "intimidation" and said they wouldn't stop him from meeting with Marikana miners and their families on Monday.

As part of the government's renewed efforts to stop the protests, police barged into a hostel early Saturday morning where Lonmin workers stay, breaking windows and pointing guns at those asleep, the

workers said. Miners in a nearby informal settlement said police also started firing rubber bullets around women and children who weren't part of the protest.

A defense department spokesman said around 150 soldiers have been deployed in the area and are assisting police in their raids to contain those they believe to be leading the protests.

Behind the strikes are demands for higher wages by workers frustrated at the slow pace of change since the end of apartheid 18 years ago. Many workers have rejected representation of the National Union of Mineworkers, the country's biggest union and an ally of the ruling African National Congress. The upstart Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union has been actively recruiting, spurring intra-union clashes as the two unions battle for membership. Some miners also say they are striking on their own initiative, outside of all union leadership.

Anglo American said Sunday that it plans to reopen the mines Tuesday following the police efforts. "We ... commend the government and our key local stakeholders in helping to restore calm to the Rustenburg area," said Chris Griffith, the company's chief executive.

Lonmin has offered an increase far below the 12,500 rand (US\$1,522) a month that the miners are demanding. On Sunday, they said they cannot afford the miner's demands.

In an opinion piece in the local Sunday Times, Simon Scott, Lonmin's acting chief executive officer, called the deadly clash at Lonmin "a defining moment for South Africa," and said the miner was struggling with its responsibility to the community and the country as well as its shareholders who have invested in the shuttered mine. "After all the horrific violence at Marikana, it is essential that we move as quickly as possible into meaningful negotiations," he wrote.

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ASIA

Beijing Mixes Messages Over Anti-Japan Protests

September 17, 2012

New York Times

By Ian Johnson And Thom Shanker

BEIJING - Anti-Japanese demonstrators took to the streets again on Sunday in cities across China, with the government offering mixed signals on whether it would continue to tolerate the sometimes violent outbursts.

The protests were orderly in Beijing, with several hundred people circling in front of the Japanese Embassy demanding Chinese control over a small island group known as Senkaku in Japan and as Diaoyu in China. Protests were also reported in other cities, including Shanghai, Guangzhou and Qingdao.

On Saturday, protests occurred in more than 50 cities, with some violence reported. A factory for the Panasonic Corporation was set on fire in Qingdao, and a Toyota dealership was looted, according to photographs posted on social media sites and local residents reached by telephone.

"Across China, calls have grown for boycotts of Japanese products. Many Japanese retailers and restaurants have been forced to place signs in their windows supporting China, and on Sunday, Japan's prime minister, Yoshihiko Noda, asked China to protect Japanese and their property.

A signed editorial on the Web site of People's Daily, the authoritative Communist Party newspaper, said the protests should be viewed sympathetically. While it did not defend the violence, the editorial said the protests were a symbol of the Chinese people's patriotism.

"No one would doubt the pulses of patriotic fervor when the motherland is bullied," the editorial said. "No one would fail to understand the compatriots' hatred and fights when the country is provoked; because a people that has no guts and courage is doomed to be bullied, and a country that always hides low and bides its time will always come under attack."

Some articles in the Chinese news media, however, said the protests should be "rational" and peaceful.

Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta is scheduled to visit Beijing on Monday, and some observers said the government might try to limit the protests.

Just before landing in Tokyo on Sunday, Mr. Panetta told correspondents aboard his jet that he was worried that territorial disputes in the Pacific raise "the possibility that a misjudgment on one side or the other could result in violence."

Mr. Panetta said the United States was not taking sides in any of the region's territorial disagreements, but advocated diplomacy to peacefully resolve them. One option, he said, would be for the feuding nations to follow a code of conduct advocated by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

Both China and Japan claim the disputed islands, although Japan has controlled them for over a century. China increased its pressure on Japan after the Japanese government purchased the islands from private owners. Japan says the move was to prevent nationalists from using the islands, but China has seen it as a step to solidify Japanese control. In response, China dispatched surveillance ships to the waters near the islands.

Complicating the diplomatic dispute, Japan's newly appointed ambassador to China, Shinichi Nishimiya, died Sunday after falling ill last week in Tokyo, according to Japanese and Chinese news reports. He was appointed ambassador last week and was to assume his duties next month.

China's state-run news media has made repeated calls for the islands to be given to China, which claims that it controlled them before Japan's colonial expansion in the late 19th century. Both China and Japan are also involved in territorial disputes with other countries over separate island chains, some of which are thought to be surrounded by rich deposits of natural resources in the surrounding waters.

There was evidence on Sunday that some Chinese government officials were involved in the protests. In the western city of Xi'an, activists on the Internet identified one of the officials as the police chief.

The political analyst Li Weidong said the official tolerance fit a longstanding pattern of behavior in which the Chinese government uses mass protests to further its foreign policy goals. In a text message sent to friends and associates, Mr. Li compared the current protesters to the Boxers, a quasi-religious group that was used by the Qing dynasty to oppose foreign incursions in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

"Beijing dares not to fight, but it's unable to talk it over either," Mr. Li wrote. "So it has to employ Boxers, using product boycott to press Japan."

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Anti-Japan Protests Mount in China

September 17, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By BRIAN SPEGELE in Beijing and TAKASHI NAKAMICHI in Tokyo

Angry crowds across China ransacked Japanese businesses, smashed Japanese cars and pelted Tokyo's embassy in Beijing with eggs and plastic bottles in weekend protests over disputed islands in the East China Sea.

Japan's prime minister, Yoshihiko Noda, deplored the violence as Japanese companies and residents braced for further demonstrations ahead of the anniversary on Tuesday of an event that precipitated Japan's conquest of parts of northeast China in 1931—an emotionally charged date that represents for many Chinese one of the blackest periods in their modern history.

Still, there were signs that neither Japan nor China wants an escalation of tensions that could damage wider economic relations. Mr. Noda, while insisting on Japan's sovereignty over the disputed islets, also called for "levelheadedness." The state-run Xinhua news agency said in a commentary Sunday that "wisdom is needed in the expression of patriotism."

The protests were sparked by a recent move by the Japanese government to buy the islands—known as the Senkaku in Japan and the Diaoyu in China—from their private owners, who are Japanese.

An official at the Japanese Embassy in Beijing said they were the largest anti-Japanese demonstrations since 1972, when the two countries restored diplomatic ties. Attacks on Japanese factories and restaurants on Saturday were "more radical than anything seen" in the past, said the official, who declined to be identified.

Meanwhile, the Chinese foreign ministry said Sunday that China had submitted information to the United Nations arguing that its continental shelf in the East China Sea extends beyond the standard 200 miles (320 kilometers) granted under the U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea. The submission is part of efforts by Beijing to establish a legal basis for its claims over the islands.

On Saturday, thousands of demonstrators swarmed in front of the Japanese Embassy in central Beijing. "Smash Japanese imperialism," they chanted. Some sang the Chinese national anthem and held aloft portraits of Mao Zedong. As a police helicopter hovered overhead, young protesters climbed into trees outside the embassy's gates where they burned a Japanese flag to loud cheers.

Protests continued outside the embassy on Sunday, but riot police stood shoulder to shoulder outside the embassy's gates to stop demonstrators from approaching.

Elsewhere in China, protesters in the southern city of Guangzhou invaded the luxury Garden Hotel, which is attached to a building that houses a Japanese consulate. They smashed glass windows and desks and unfurled banners reading "Kill Japanese Robbers" and "Boycott Japanese Goods" before being chased away by hundreds of police, according to a hotel employee, who declined to give her name. The hotel's Japanese restaurant was forced to close all day, she said.

In Shenzhen, a boom city adjacent to Hong Kong, Lily Qin, a 24-year-old student, described fleeing tear gas police fired at demonstrators. Transport in one area of the bustling Futian district of the city was "totally paralyzed," she said.

In the central city of Nanchang, one resident contacted by telephone said the window of a store selling Sony goods was smashed. "I saw a female car owner crying beside her Nissan sedan that was turned over," he said.

The embassy official said that around 10 Japanese companies in the coastal city of Qingdao, a magnet for Japanese investment, had reported damage. Protesters set on fire a sales outlet of Toyota Motor Corp. 7203.TO +1.42% in the city on Saturday, a public-relations officer from Japan's largest automobile maker said.

Violent clashes between protesters and riot police continued on Sunday afternoon in southern China, sparked by a dispute between China and Japan over a series of tiny islands between the two countries. Courtesy AP.

Demonstrators also are suspected to have set ablaze Saturday a Panasonic Corp. 6752.TO +1.44% factory in Shandong that produces electronic parts such as those for television sets, a public-relations officer from the electronic maker said.

The last time demonstrations erupted on this scale was in 2005 over former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's visits to a controversial Japanese shrine that honors the country's war dead. Back then, tens of thousands of protesters marched through Shanghai, smashing Japanese businesses along the way.

This time, Shanghai was relatively quiet. Several hundred mostly peaceful demonstrators were outnumbered by uniformed and paramilitary police who carefully controlled access to the front of Japan's consulate. Police permitted demonstrators to group into bunches of 80 to 100, then offered them instructions through megaphones before allowing teams to pass near the consulate entrance for a few minutes at a time.

Mr. Noda is under pressure to minimize his party's potential losses in elections for the lower house of parliament, which could be held as early as November, and in which the Chinese issues may feature prominently. Speaking Sunday in a televised debate with other members of the ruling Democratic Party of Japan, he said that the protests threaten "the safety of the Japanese nationals and companies."

"I will strongly demand to the Chinese government that it ensure their safety, and at the same time I will protest" over the violence, he said.

However, Mr. Noda also signaled his desire to retain healthy economic ties with China, which is Japan's largest trading partner, amid his country's sharpening economic slowdown.

He said one of his two policy pillars over the territorial spat is a "firm response." But the other pillar is "levelheadedness."

"It is important to remember that we are the world's second- and third-largest economies, and growth in China means opportunities for Japan," he said. "It is important for both sides to respond while thinking calmly of [the importance of] deepening such mutually beneficial, strategic relationships."

Chinese state media also sought to limit the damage. In some cases during the weekend protests, "patriotic acts exceeded the boundary of reason and legitimacy and conversely turned into the destruction of other people's property and violated compatriots' reasonable interests," read a commentary in the Changjiang Daily, a state-backed newspaper in the central city of Wuhan. The commentary also was posted to the website of the People's Daily, the Communist Party's flagship mouthpiece.

More protests are expected on Tuesday, the anniversary of an incident in 1931 in which the Japanese army blew up a railway in China and, by insisting that it was done by the Chinese military, used it as an excuse for invading.

The Japanese embassy official in Beijing said that ahead of the anniversary the embassy will keep urging Japanese citizens in China to avoid speaking their language loudly. He said he expected many Japanese companies will suspend operations on Tuesday, and that most Japanese schools will close.

Possibly complicating Tokyo's handling of the territorial spat, the man chosen to succeed Japan's current ambassador to China, Shinichi Nishimiya, died Sunday morning. The 60-year-old career diplomat was rushed to the hospital in Tokyo late last week—two days after his appointment to the post—because of an illness.

Mr. Nishimiya had been scheduled to leave for Beijing in mid-October to replace Japan's current top envoy to China, Uichiro Niwa, who has been under fire for making what many Japanese have perceived as pro-China remarks over the islets issue.

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Reappearance of Xi Eases Transition Concerns

September 17, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By JEREMY PAGE

BEIJING—China said that Vice President Xi Jinping, the man expected to take over as the country's top leader in the next few weeks, will attend an international trade fair this week, another apparent move to quash speculation about his health following an unexplained two-week absence from public engagements.

Mr. Xi made his first public appearance since Sept. 1 on Saturday, when state media and witnesses reported that he met students and staff at the China Agricultural University in Beijing in the company of three other senior Communist Party officials.

International concern and speculation about Mr. Xi's health was triggered when he canceled several scheduled meetings at short notice this month, including one with visiting U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. U.S. officials said they were told Mr. Xi had a bad back.

As the Chinese government repeatedly declined to comment on the matter last week, rumors of a more-serious health problem circulated among party members and foreign diplomats, raising fears that a once-a-decade leadership in the fall could be disrupted.

But Mr. Xi, who is 59 years old, appeared healthy and relaxed during his university visit, according to witnesses.

One male student at the university said he had been standing about three or four steps away from the Chinese vice president, and he saw no signs of any health issue as Mr. Xi was shown round the campus by university officials.

"He sounded perfectly normal," said the student. "You definitely couldn't see any sign of him suffering from serious illness or back injury recently."

Another student said Mr. Xi was "very talkative" and showed no signs of having suffered a stroke—one of the rumors that circulated last week.

State media reports on the university visit made no mention of Mr. Xi's health or his fortnight away from the public eye.

On Sunday, Hong Lei, a foreign ministry spokesman, said Mr. Xi would attend the opening ceremony and "other important activities" of the 9th China-ASEAN Expo, according to the Xinhua news agency, the main government mouthpiece.

The trade fair is due to run from Sept. 21-25 in the southwestern city of Nanning, and will be attended by several Southeast Asian leaders, including Thein Sein, president of Myanmar, and Nguyen Tan Dung, who is prime minister of Vietnam, Xinhua said.

With Mr. Xi's apparent return to public duty, the party leadership is expected to announce soon the dates for the 18th Party Congress at which he is expected to take over President Hu Jintao's most powerful post as Party General Secretary, according to diplomats and analysts.

They also say they expect the party leadership to announce whether Bo Xilai, the ousted party official, will face criminal charges following the conviction of his wife last month for the murder of a British businessman.

Mr. Bo, once seen as a candidate for the top leadership, was stripped of his party posts and placed under investigation for unspecified "serious disciplinary violations" in April.

Mr. Hong from the foreign ministry said last week that preparations for the Congress were "well under way" and that Chinese authorities would announce the dates of the meeting "in due course."

Party insiders say it is most likely to occur in mid or late October. Several hotels that are being used to accommodate delegates to the Congress said that Chinese authorities had block-booked rooms for most of October.

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Panetta seeks closer Sino-U.S. ties as China military expands

September 17, 2012

Reuters

By David Alexander

TOKYO - U.S. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta will look for ways to deepen military relations with China during a visit to Asia this week, even as he works to bolster U.S. alliances in the region as part of a strategic shift that Beijing views with concern.

Panetta, who arrived in Tokyo on Sunday, is making his third trip to Asia as defense secretary at a time when China is embroiled in testy territorial disputes with Japan and the Philippines, two key U.S. allies in the region.

Scores of cities across China erupted in anti-Japan protests at the weekend in which demonstrators looted shops and attacked Japanese cars and restaurants. They were angered by Japan's decision on Tuesday to buy a tiny group of disputed islands which Tokyo calls the Senkaku and Beijing calls the Diaoyu from a private Japanese owner.

Panetta will discuss with Japanese officials the realignment of U.S. military basing in Japan and expanding ballistic missile defense cooperation before heading to Beijing to try to deepen and broaden military-to-military ties.

He will wrap up his tour with defense cooperation talks in New Zealand.

Senior U.S. and Chinese defense officials have made an effort to push their military relationship forward since it resumed a year and a half ago after a bitter break over U.S. arms sales to self-ruled Taiwan, which Beijing views as a breakaway province.

However, despite high-level visits by top officials, relations between the Pentagon and the People's Liberation Army are marked by wariness and mistrust.

"This is a relationship that has in the past been characterized by a lot of ups and downs and an on-again, off-again cycle that reflected the lack of a solid foundation ... sufficient to weather the type of turbulence that's natural in a relationship that's as broad and complex as the one that we have with China," a senior U.S. defense official said on condition of anonymity.

"We're not there yet in terms of where we'd like to be in our military-to-military relationship, but visits like the one that Secretary Panetta is going to have ... sustain the forward progress that we've been able to make over the past several months."

U.S. defense officials pressed for a restoration of military-to-military ties with China due to concerns about the direction of Beijing's military modernization efforts, including development of anti-ship missiles, stealth aircraft and its first aircraft carrier.

Many of the weapons worry U.S. military leaders because they appear to be aimed at countering U.S. strengths and denying U.S. access to waterways in the region.

U.S. defense officials believe that by engaging in cooperative efforts with the Chinese military, the two sides will gain greater familiarity with each other's operations and develop transparency and communications channels that can help avoid misunderstandings that could lead to conflict.

But Dean Cheng, a China analyst at the conservative Heritage Foundation think tank in Washington, said it was not clear exactly what the upside to renewed ties had been.

"The relationship is not in the deep freeze, but there is, at best, limited evidence of any kind of progress," he said. "The Chinese military remains averse to transparency as the West understands it and remains hostile to things like U.S. military ships transiting China's EEZ (exclusive economic zone) without prior permission."

The U.S. push for deeper ties could be especially tough-going at a time when China is not only squaring off with its neighbors over potentially resource-rich islands in the East and South China Seas, but also hunkered down for a once in a decade leadership transition.

The United States is officially neutral on the territorial disputes and has urged the parties involved to settle their disputes peacefully, a point Panetta said he would raise in Beijing.

'WE DON'T WANT PROVOCATIVE BEHAVIOR'

"The United States does not take a position with regards to territorial disputes, but we do urge not just China but the other countries that are involved to engage in a process in which they can peacefully resolve these issues," Panetta told reporters on his plane en route to Tokyo.

He said he would encourage China to engage in the dispute-resolution process promoted by ASEAN, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, in an effort to try to resolve the disagreements peacefully.

"What we don't want is to have any kind of provocative behavior on the part of China or anybody else result in conflict," Panetta said. "And my purpose will be to urge that they engage in the effort by the ASEAN nations to try to work out a format for resolving these issues."

China's claims over much of the South China Sea, including the Spratly and Paracel islands, have put it at loggerheads with Vietnam, the Philippines and other Southeast Asian nations. A similar dispute has set China against Japan in the East China Sea.

China has been irked by the U.S.-backed proposals for a multilateral approach to resolving such disputes, preferring to negotiate separately with each of the far less powerful Asian claimants.

Panetta said he hoped to talk to Chinese defense officials about cooperating on a range of additional issues where the two countries have common interests, including nuclear proliferation, freedom of navigation, piracy, trade and humanitarian assistance.

"These are all areas where we can work together to try to provide security support for the Asia-Pacific region that will enhance the ability of that region to be able to prosper in the future," Panetta said. "Those are some of the areas that I'd like to work on."

Even if Panetta is successful in moving U.S.-China cooperation to a new level, it is still not clear that the relationship will deliver the kind of communications U.S. officials hope is possible.

"Part of the question is what we want out of the mil-mil (military-to-military) relationship," Cheng said. "If it is simply to have a channel available, then it is succeeding. If, however, it is to have a channel of communications that can avert a crisis or tamp down escalation at critical moments, that is unlikely to happen under any circumstances."

"The PLA's procedures and organization, including the important role of political officers, does not match against how the US tends to operate."

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Google Blocks Anti-Islam Film In Indonesia: Govt

September 17, 2012

AFP

YouTube has begun restricting access to videos of an anti-Islamic film in the world's most populous Muslim nation, a government official said Sunday.

"Google, which is YouTube's parent company, emailed us on Thursday evening to say it had blocked Indonesia's access to 16 URLs related to the "Innocence of Muslims" videos on the site," Communications and Information Ministry spokesman Gatot Dewa Broto told AFP.

Extracts of the film were still available on the video-sharing website on Sunday, but Broto said Google was "making special effort" to prevent the film from being watched in Indonesia.

"We understand that it takes time for Google to block everything as people continue to upload those sensitive videos. We appreciate Google's cooperation," he said.

Broto said the government also wrote to Blackberry maker Research In Motion on Friday to filter the videos on its smartphones.

Indonesia is the Canada-based company's biggest market outside North America, with subscriptions expected to almost double to 9.7 million by 2015.

"We could access the videos on Blackberry too so we wrote to RIM to ask that it filter them, and RIM has been very co-operative," he added.

Besides Indonesia, Google has denied access to the video in Libya, Egypt and India.

In cities across the Muslim world protesters have vented their fury at the "Innocence of Muslims" -- an amateur film produced in the United States -- by targeting symbols of US influence ranging from embassies and schools to fast food chains.

Hundreds of Indonesians staged rallies against the United States on Friday and Saturday over the film, which portrays the Prophet Mohammed as an immoral sexual deviant.

In the worst violence triggered by the film, the US ambassador to Libya, Chris Stevens, and three other Americans were killed late Tuesday when suspected Islamic militants fired rocket-propelled grenades at the US consulate in Benghazi.

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Panetta Targets Two Pacific Disputes

September 17, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By JULIAN E. BARNES

YOKOTA, Japan—On U.S. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta's agenda as he arrived in Japan on Sunday was the goal of helping to defuse a pair of growing disputes, one between Japan and China, and the other between Japan and the U.S.

The U.S. is increasingly worried that territorial disputes in the Pacific could inadvertently erupt into a conflict and is also hoping to disentangle snares in its own relationship with Japan that could threaten to derail the deployment of a new Marine troop-transport aircraft.

With tensions already high between Japan and China over disputed islands in the East China Sea, protests by Chinese citizens surged Saturday over Tokyo's decision last week to buy three islands it doesn't own from their private owner.

Mr. Panetta, who heads to Beijing after his Tokyo visit, said the U.S. hopes territorial disputes in both the East China and South China seas can be settled peacefully. Tensions have flared in the South China Sea in recent months between China and the Philippines over control of the Scarborough Shoals.

"What we don't want is any kind of provocative behavior on the part of China or anybody else, resulting in conflict," Mr. Panetta said at a news conference aboard his plane en route to Japan. Provocations, he said, could lead to the possibility of misjudgments and eventually violence. "And that conflict would have the potential of expanding," he warned.

Mr. Panetta is to meet with Japanese Defense Minister Satoshi Morimoto on Monday, and the two men are scheduled to hold a news conference.

Mr. Panetta will also have to navigate the shoals of a conflict in which the U.S. is more directly involved. Protests have grown in recent weeks in Okinawa over deployment of the Marine Corps tilt-rotor V-22 Osprey. Japanese officials have raised concerns about its safety and flight record and have succeeded in blocking deployment of as many as 24 of the aircraft on Okinawa. The first 12 V-22 are grounded at the U.S. base in Iwakuni, and haven't been allowed on to Okinawa. Mr. Panetta didn't address the disagreement over the Ospreys directly over the weekend. But he emphasized the importance the U.S. places on its alliance with Japan, and Japan's role in hosting U.S. forces in the region.

Japanese officials have focused on recent accidents with the aircraft, which can take off and land like a helicopter but flies like a plane. Okinawans are hoping to restrict the altitudes at which the Ospreys can fly, but Marines object to the restrictions.

In a briefing in Washington on Friday, a senior U.S. defense official said that the U.S. "looked forward" to making progress on the Osprey issue and that Tokyo and Washington were in a good dialogue over the deployment. "This entire process has been about reconfirming the safety," of the Osprey, the official said. "We have had a lengthy, robust, collaborative, constructive process that has basically led to a great deal of understanding, transparency and helped us make progress on this issue."

Despite the collaboration and transparency, there is little doubt that concerns remain in Okinawa over the continued presence of the Marines and their plans to deploy the tilt-rotor Osprey.

"That alliance provides us with a great deal of support with the deployment we make to the Pacific," he said. He also noted that the U.S. has made progress in the past year in reaching agreements over the

future of the Marine force in Okinawa. Despite the new agreement, some of the stickiest issues—such as moving the main military base to a more rural part of the island—remain unresolved.

Indonesia will try to rally Southeast Asian nations meeting at the United Nations this week behind a new attempt at talks with China to manage territorial disputes in the South China Sea. "We see this as a very serious problem and one that is demanding a solution by all of us," Foreign Minister Marty Natalegawa said Friday.

Indonesia's effort appears aimed primarily at restoring a semblance of unity among members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations at a time when the Philippines, in particular, is seeking stronger backing from its partners. Indonesia has sought to revive long-stalled negotiations over a code of conduct to act as a framework for disputes pending a negotiated resolution.
(top)

NEA

U.S. Outposts Still Face Threat In Muslim World

September 17, 2012

Washington Post

By Michael Birnbaum And Karin Brulliard

CAIRO - After days of anti-American turmoil in the Muslim world, governments on Sunday looked ahead to a week of trying to make an uneasy accommodation between the anger of their citizens and their desire to convince the United States of their goodwill.

But U.S. diplomatic outposts remained under threat. In Pakistan, at least one protester was killed and 18 were injured Sunday as hundreds of people broke through a barricade in a march to the U.S. consulate in Karachi, and thousands more rallied in Lahore, where American flags were burned, the Associated Press reported.

In Cairo, the U.S. Embassy returned to full staffing Sunday, a spokesman said, for the first time since Tuesday protests against an anti-Islam movie made in the United States sparked turmoil across the Muslim world. But the American diplomatic presence remained reduced elsewhere in the region, meaning that there were fewer routes to repair relations even as they came under the most strain since the wave of democratic change caused last year by the Arab Spring.

In Tunisia, where additional security has been deployed to protect the embassy, the Saturday decision to withdraw non-essential U.S. embassy staff from the mission there appeared to jar Tunisian officials, who have marketed the country as a model of democratic transformation after the peaceful toppling last year of longtime president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. Tunisia's 2011 protests set the rest of the Arab world afire - and led, in the end, to newfound freedoms for many citizens to express their distaste for their own governments and for the United States.

Leaders have struggled ever since to accommodate those anti-American sentiments.

In an address to the nation Friday night, Tunisian President Moncef Marzouki condemned that day's violent attack on the U.S. Embassy and an American school, in which four protesters were killed. He said those who organized the protest - widely described here as religious hardliners known as Salafists - had "crossed a red line." Yet he also sought to appease the sentiments of those reportedly angered by the film, "The Innocence of Muslims," saying Tunisia would work with Egypt to sue its producers.

Hedi Ben Abbas, a foreign affairs minister of state whose portfolio includes the Americas, said in an interview Sunday that the Tunisian government "deeply regrets" the American decision to pull its diplomats following the attack, which he insisted was triggered by religious fervor, not anti-American anger.

Security officials, Ben Abbas said, were overhauling their procedures and could now "guarantee" the safety of all diplomatic facilities and foreigners. He said the government, which is headed by a moderate Islamist party that has faced criticism for tolerating religious zealotry, is determined to respond more firmly than it has to previous violent protests staged by Salafists. Dozens of people suspected of involvement in the riot have been arrested, according to local news reports.

Friday's demonstration, Ben Abbas said, "was for us the end of the game."

"We understand that there was a failure," he said of security measures at the embassy and school. "Let's be clear, the plan we put in place was not enough. It was weak."

"The government of America cannot be responsible for the movie," he said. Similarly, he said, "The Americans cannot blame the Tunisian government for the behavior" of protesters.

"The United States should trust us again," Ben Abbas said. "We need them more than ever to support democracy."

American support comes in many forms in the region, ranging from diplomatic relations to aid to investment. Its future is being newly evaluated.

In Egypt, the government of President Mohamed Morsi and the Obama administration had been hammering out the final points of an aid deal that could forgive a sizeable chunk of the more than \$3 billion that the Egyptian government owes to the United States. But with embassy activity largely reduced last week and the United States initially disappointed at the Egyptian government's response to the protests, the final outcome of the aid talks remains uncertain, as does congressional support for a deal.

Morsi has pursued a diplomatic path far different from former president Hosni Mubarak, who hewed closely to the U.S. line, or even from the interim military-dominated government that ran the country from February 2011 until Morsi took power at the end of June. On Sunday, Morsi met in Cairo with Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir, despite an International Criminal Court warrant for the Sudanese leader's arrest - and despite a sharp decline in relations between Sudan and the United States since Friday, when the U.S. Embassy was attacked by protesters in Khartoum.

The Sudanese government refused Saturday to allow U.S. Marines to secure U.S. diplomats there, and the State Department pulled out nonessential personnel in response.

Separately, in Libya, where U.S. Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens was killed Tuesday along with three other U.S. embassy staffers in an attack on the consulate in Benghazi, President Mohammed el-Megarif on Sunday announced the arrests of about 50 people in connection with the attack. In an interview with CBS News, el-Megarif said that "foreigners," some from Mali and Algeria, had participated in the attack

and that he had "no doubt" that it was pre-planned. But on the same program, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Susan Rice said that officials had seen no evidence to support such a conclusion.

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Panetta: Violence Leveling Off; Protests To Go On

September 17, 2012

[Associated Press](#)

By Lolita C. Baldor

ABOARD A US MILITARY AIRCRAFT - U.S. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta says the turmoil raging across the Muslim world is likely to continue into the days ahead, but he says the violence expected by the U.S. appears to be leveling off.

He said the Pentagon has "deployed our forces to a number of areas in the region to be prepared to respond to any requests that we receive to be able to protect our personnel and our American property."

He declined to provide more details on reports that the military may be moving additional military forces so they can respond to unrest in any of a number of regions of concern.

"I think our approach right now is to not do anything until we've been requested to do it by the State Department," Panetta told reporters traveling with him to Asia. But he noted that, "I think that we have to continue to be very vigilant because I suspect that ... these demonstrations are likely to continue over the next few days, if not longer."

Protests by furious Muslims erupted in countries around the world in recent days, with some spawning violence and even deaths over an anti-Islam video shot in California that denigrates the Prophet Muhammad. In places like Libya, Sudan and Tunisia, protesters stormed U.S. embassies, and an American fast food restaurant was burned in Lebanon.

In response, the Pentagon dispatched elite Marine rapid response teams to Libya and Yemen, but a team deployed to Khartoum on Friday was turned back when the Sudanese government objected.

Asked about Sudan's decision, Panetta said host countries have the right to reject such military deployments.

"My understanding is that they felt that they could provide sufficient security to be able to protect our embassy and our personnel there," said Panetta. "And you know, in many ways, as all of you know the primary responsibility for protecting embassies rests with the host country."

Known as a fleet antiterrorism security teams, the units were sent in response to violent protests in Khartoum where protesters tried to climb the walls of the U.S. Embassy, setting off a battle with police.

The Navy also moved two warships to positions off the coast of Libya. The two destroyers are largely meant as a show of force, but they carry Tomahawk missiles and can also be available for evacuations or other missions as needed.

The intensity of the anti-American fervor initially caught U.S. leaders by surprise, but in the last several days the Obama administration has deployed military units to shore up security in hotspots, and used

diplomacy to call for calm and urge foreign governments to protect American interests in their countries.

It also has been unclear how much of the violence was spontaneously triggered by the film and how much of it was spurred on by anti-American militants using it as a tool to grow and enrage the crowds.

The al-Qaida affiliate in Yemen praised the killing of the U.S. ambassador in Libya in an online statement Saturday and called for more attacks to expel American embassies from Muslim nations.

Chris Stevens, the U.S. ambassador to Libya, was killed Tuesday along with three other Americans, as violent protesters stormed the consulate in Benghazi. President Barack Obama has vowed that the attackers would be brought to justice, but has also stressed that the U.S. respects religious freedom.

The protests were set off by a low-budget, crudely produced film called "Innocence of Muslims," which portrays Muhammad as a fraud, a womanizer and a child molester. A 14-minute excerpt of the film, which is both in English and dubbed into Arabic, has been available on YouTube, although some countries have cut access to the site.

Panetta was traveling to Asia, where he will visit Japan, China and New Zealand.

His visit comes amid escalating tensions in the region including tussles over several disputed islands in the East China Sea. It is Panetta's third trip to the region in the last 11 months, reflecting the Pentagon's ongoing effort to put a greater military focus on the Pacific region.

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Muslim Rage Over Film Echoes Back To Islam's Internal Struggles

September 17, 2012

Associated Press

By Brian Murphy

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates - At the height of the latest Islamic rage, one of the Muslim world's first media-celebrity imams told worshippers they were indeed witnessing a clash of civilizations. Just not the kind you think.

This one also is within Islam, and it helps explain the multiple personalities of the fury.

It's political: The uncompromising ethos of extremism clawing for any gains against more moderate voices. It's social: Fed by an explosive blend of economic stagnation, anger over U.S.-led wars and - in some places since last week - frustration as the soaring hopes of the Arab Spring hit the grinding realities of rebuilding.

And it cuts deeply into questions that have added resonance in a hyper-connected world that moves at the quicksilver pace of the Web: How to coexist with the free-speech openness of the West and whether violence is ever a valid response.

"Our manner of protesting should reflect sense and reason," urged Egyptian-born cleric Youssef al-Qaradawi in his Friday sermon in Qatar's capital, Doha, where he has found a worldwide audience through the Internet and a show on the pan-Arab network Al-Jazeera.

Yet such appeals - while frequent from many Islamic leaders and scholars in the past week - have competed against opposing calls that can tap deeper passions that have been funneled into violence. Political factions and hard-line clerics across the Muslim world have been quick to try to capitalize as after other perceived offences against the faith.

"There's no doubt that every Muslim feels in some ways deeply troubled by any insults to the Prophet Muhammad, but how many have seen the video of this movie to make up their own minds? Very few," said Sami al-Faraj, director of the Kuwait Center for Strategic Studies. "You need someone to organize the protests and, in effect, throw the switch."

It's come in many forms.

Ultraconservative Islamists apparently have taken the lead in protests in Arab Spring countries such as Tunisia and Egypt in a show of force against the new leadership and their Western allies. In a curious battle of perceptions, Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood-led government called out riot troops to protect the U.S. Embassy against protesters also claiming to "defend" Islam.

In Libya, U.S. investigators are examining whether armed militants used the uproar over the film as cover to launch a pre-planned attack on the U.S. Consulate in the eastern city of Benghazi, killing the ambassador and three other Americans. The U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, Susan Rice, said Sunday the attack was not co-ordinated and premeditated, but others have challenged that view.

Crowds in Yemen condemned the film but also chanted against the continued U.S. military presence such as drone strikes that have targeted suspected al-Qaida leaders.

"Obviously there's a latent anti-Americanism that is coming out," said Salman Shaikh, director of The Brookings Doha Center in Qatar. "But that is only part of this," he said. "This is primarily about a struggle for the soul of these states."

Elsewhere - from Nigeria to Australia - hard-line clerics and parties have mobilized demonstrations in both expressions of anger and messages to rivals. In Iran, protesters were given pre-made placards denouncing the U.S. in a clear sign of a state-organized demonstration.

On Sunday, Iranian newspapers reported that a religious foundation has increased the reward for killing British author Salman Rushdie to \$3.3 million from \$2.8 million in response to alleged insults to the Prophet Muhammad in his novel "The Satanic Verses." Iran's late Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini issued a death fatwa against Rushdie in 1989, but Iran officials later distanced themselves from the edict.

Bahrain protest groups, meanwhile, have used Twitter to organize demonstrations that included burning American flags in the nation that hosts the U.S. Navy's 5th Fleet. Pakistan's conservative Islamist parties sent out text messages, mosque announcements and made phone calls to bring out protest crowds, including about 1,000 people in the northwestern city of Peshawar on Sunday and hundreds who rushed the U.S. consulate in Karachi, sparking clashes with police in which one demonstrator was killed.

"What kind of freedom of expression is that which hurts the religious sentiments of others?" said Haider Gul, a grocery store owner who joined the anti-American rally in Peshawar.

This question is not new - tumbling back over centuries and different faiths. It flared anew in 2005 when a Danish newspaper published cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad that were deemed offensive by many Muslims. And it was a centerpiece of the debates after the 2004 slaying of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh, whose film "Submission" criticized the treatment of Muslim women.

But the current film, "Innocence of Muslims," brings a new element: What if the sole intent was to provoke backlash and violence? It's unlikely to bring any clear-cut answers in the short term. America's free speech protections give a wide berth for filmmakers.

There are cases, however, where boundaries have been set. Last year, two Florida pastors were blocked from demonstrating outside a mosque in Dearborn, Michigan, after a jury ruled it would have breached the peace. One of the pastors, Terry Jones, touched off a series of violent protests in Afghanistan that killed more than a dozen people after he burned a Qur'an in March 2011.

If anything, the cultural gaps may have been pried farther apart by the scope of the latest violence and bloodshed.

Google has refused a White House request to take down the video clip from its YouTube site, but is restricting access in certain countries including Egypt, Libya and Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim nation. A YouTube statement said the video was within its content guidelines. "This can be a challenge because what's OK in one country can be offensive elsewhere," it said.

At the same time, it's also opened fault lines within the Muslim world over what's an acceptable response. In many ways, it's simply an extension of the same internal struggles over Islam's moral compass that has gripped the faith for decades.

An Indonesian Muslim scholar, Komaruddin Hidayat, said Muslims have the duty to oppose to anything they deem offensive to their faith, but must "avoid using violence in expressing their objections." At the other end of the Muslim world in Nigeria, a top Islamic leader, Sheik Sani Yahaya Jingir, said violence never brings "any benefit to Islam."

For Jumaa al-Qurishi, a 38-year-old Iraq librarian: "This is not freedom. This is an act of aggression."

"Yes, we understand the First Amendment and all of this stuff," wrote Khalid Amayreh, a prominent Islamist commentator and blogger in Hebron on the West Bank. "But you must also understand that the Prophet (for us) is a million times more sacred than the American Constitution."

He adds: "As Americans have their own idiots and fanatics, we, too, have our idiots and fanatics. And as Americans are utterly unable - probably unwilling as well - to stop their idiots, we, too, are less able to rein in ours."

There's no wonder why the loudest voices still tend to rule the day, said Issandr El Amrani, a Moroccan-born journalist and visiting fellow at the European Center for Foreign Relations, a pan-European think-tank.

"The resulting cascade of outrage is now predictable," he wrote in Abu Dhabi's The National newspaper. "Islamophobes in the West will say, 'We told you they're fanatics,' and the crowd-riling demagogues

here will say, 'We told you they disrespect us.' And politicians everywhere will use the language of outrage in their petty calculations."

In Gaza, 23-year-old Rawhi Alwan described a cycle of mutual blame: "Some crazy Muslims will commit devilish acts to respond to the devilish sin."

Before he left for a peaceful Friday demonstration against the film, he changed his Facebook profile picture. It became an image pledging loyalty to Prophet Muhammad.

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Egypt Denounces Breaching Of US Embassy Compound

September 17, 2012

Associated Press

CAIRO - Egypt's presidential spokesman says the breaching of the U.S. embassy in Cairo during protests over an anti-Islam film was "unjustified," denouncing it in the strongest words to date to come from the nation's highest office.

Spokesman Yasser Ali's comments Sunday seem aimed to defuse criticism of President Mohammed Morsi, who condemned the breaching of the mission's perimeter only two days afterward, leading to tension with Washington.

Scores of Egyptian protesters scaled the embassy walls on Tuesday and entered its courtyard, tearing down the U.S. flag. Hours later, attackers in Libya killed four diplomats, including the ambassador, in an assault on the Benghazi consulate.

After three days of clashes in Cairo, authorities blocked off the embassy's street with a concrete wall. The visa section remained closed Sunday despite earlier plans to reopen.

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Iran Commander Warns Israel, US Against Attack

September 17, 2012

Associated Press

By Ali Akbar Dareini

TEHRAN - The top commander in Iran's powerful Revolutionary Guard warned Sunday that his country's missiles will ensure "nothing will remain" of Israel if it takes military action against Tehran over its controversial nuclear program.

Gen. Mohammad Ali Jafari also warned that Iran might close the Straits of Hormuz if it is attacked, withdraw from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and hit U.S. bases in the Middle East.

Such warnings and references to Israel's destruction have been made before by Iranian officials. But Gen. Jafari's comments to a Tehran news conference were an unusually detailed, strongly worded and comprehensive listing of the means that Iran says it has to retaliate against a strike on its nuclear facilities.

The U.S. and Israel have left open the possibility of such a strike if Iran does not back down from what they say are a push to develop nuclear weapons. Iran says its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes.

"Our response to Israel is clear: I think nothing will remain of Israel (should it attack Iran). Given Israel's small land area and its vulnerability to a massive volume of Iran's missiles, I don't think any spot in Israel will remain safe," he said.

He said Iran's response to any attack will begin near the Israeli border. The Islamic Republic has close ties with militants in Gaza and Lebanon, both of whom have rocket arsenals that could be used for cross-border strikes.

He said he did not believe however that Israel would attack on its own. Should the U.S. launch a strike, Jafari suggested that Iran could respond with missile salvos at U.S. bases in the Gulf.

"The US military bases sprawled around Iran are considered a big vulnerability. Even the missile shields that they have set up, based on information we have, could only work for a few missiles but when exposed to a massive volume of missiles, the shields will lose their efficiency and will not work," he said.

He also said that Iran warned that oil shipments through the strategic Strait of Hormuz will be in jeopardy if a war breaks out between Iran and the United States. Iranian officials have previously threatened to close the waterway, the route for a fifth of the world's oil, but less frequently in recent months.

"If a war breaks out where one side is Iran and the other side is the West and U.S., it's natural that a problem should occur in the Strait of Hormuz. Export of energy will be harmed. It's natural that this will happen," he said.

Gen. Jafari said that, if attacked, Iran will no longer be committed to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, under whose terms U.N. inspectors visit Iranian nuclear sites. He said however that this does not mean that Iran would build a nuclear weapon.

"If the world and international organizations fail to prevent such an attack, it's natural that Iran's commitments (to the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty) would naturally change and the situation would be different from the past. These are the risks and consequences that such an attack will bring about, and these matters would be a deterrent."

Jafari's comments come as U.S.-led naval forces from the West and Arab allies gather for naval maneuvers in the Persian Gulf that include mine-sweeping exercises.

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Iran Guided By 'Unbelievable Fanaticism:' Netanyahu

September 16, 2012

AFP

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu made a fresh push to turn the screws on Iran's nuclear program, saying the Islamic Republic's leaders are guided by "unbelievable fanaticism."

Netanyahu's comments, part of an interview to be aired on NBC television's "Meet the Press" on Sunday, came after the hawkish leader of the Jewish state made repeated demands that US President Barack Obama set unambiguous "red lines" on the program.

"I think Iran is very different. They put their zealotry above their survival. They have situation bombers all over the place. I wouldn't rely on their rationality," Netanyahu said, suggesting Iran cannot be contained in the same way as the Soviet Union during the Cold War.

"Since the advent of nuclear weapons, you have countries that had access to nuclear weapons who always made a careful calculation of cost and benefit. But Iran is guided by a leadership with an unbelievable fanaticism."

Netanyahu even made a link between Iran's hardline leadership and the wave of violent protests against US and other Western diplomatic posts around the world triggered by an amateur Internet film made in the United States that denigrates Islam and its Prophet Mohammed.

"It's the same fanaticism that you see storming your embassies today. You want these fanatics to have nuclear weapons?" he asked.

The Israeli leader said critics who argue that taking action against Iran's nuclear program was "a lot worse" than a nuclear-armed Tehran, or that an Iran with nuclear weapons would stabilize the Middle East, "have set a new standard for human stupidity."

Israel, the Middle East's sole, if undeclared, nuclear power, has said a nuclear-armed Iran would pose an existential threat to the Jewish state and has threatened unilateral military action against Tehran.

But Washington backs continued diplomatic pressure and says it is not the time for a strike against the nuclear program, which Israel and much of the West worry masks a weapons drive. ([top](#))

Pope Urges Peace at Mass in Beirut

September 17, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By FARNAZ FASSIHI

BEIRUT—Pope Benedict XVI delivered an open-air Sunday Mass in Beirut to a crowd of more than 300,000 people that touched on the central theme of his trip: peace in the Middle East, namely Syria, and endurance for the region's Christian minorities.

The pope spoke of human suffering in wartime, highlighting women and children as first victims, and the necessity of all leaders in the region to come together as "brothers" and for Christians to play a constructive role as peacemakers.

"May God grant to your country, to Syria and to the Middle East the gift of peaceful hearts, the silencing of weapons and the cessation of all violence," the pope said at the end of a mass before a huge crowd of worshippers waving small flags of Lebanon and Vatican.

The pope arrived in Lebanon Friday on a three-day visit, which ended Sunday night. It was his first trip to Lebanon and coincided with widespread unrest across the Muslim world. Since last week, protesters have attacked a number of Western targets, from U.S. embassies to NATO bases and fast-food chains, many citing an inflammatory online movie made in the U.S. that ridiculed Prophet Muhammad.

While the pope didn't directly address the video, called "Innocence of Muslims," or the violence, he repeatedly called for tolerance among religious sects and an end for the "grim trail of death and destruction" in the region.

The Christian community in the Middle East, despite its ancient origins, is dwindling in many countries due to fears of unrest, rise of Islamism and economic hardship. The Arab Spring has exacerbated these sentiments, with Islamist parties rising to power and a still-unclear picture of the future.

In Lebanon, Christians account for about a third of the population and enjoy equal power sharing in the government. The president of Lebanon, for example, always comes from the Maronite Christian sect.

Many Christians attending the Sunday service said the pope's visit restored their confidence in the community and strengthened their standing. They said they continue to worry about Syria's unraveling next door and its ramifications on Lebanon's sectarian-driven politics.

"We are always asking ourselves what's our future here, what will happen to our children," said Rania Yammen, a 39-year-old interior designer, who attended mass with her husband and two small children from a mountain town several hours away. "This encourages me to stay and not migrate."

Many attendees of the Sunday Mass had traveled from all corners of Lebanon from early morning hours and walked several miles to reach the area. The event had a festive air, with colorful balloons being handed out, as well as free traditional Lebanese breakfast and bottles of water. Parents carried their children on their shoulders for a blessing, and many elderly couples walked slowly with their canes.

Rev. Federico Lombardi, a spokesman for the Vatican, said the crowd was estimated at 350,000 people. Syrian Christian refugees taking shelter in villages in the Bekaa Valley were bused to the event through church organizers.

During the pope's meeting Saturday with thousands of Christian youth, the pontiff addressed the Syrians in the crowd and said he admired their courage and asked them to pass a message to Christians inside Syria that the pope hasn't forgotten them.

"It's very important for the world to see that we are here, we exist and live together with the Muslims in the Arab world," said Najib Khoury, an 85-year-old retired oil worker, who sat on a curb in a side street to avoid the packed crowd but hear the pontiff in person.

The mass took place on Beirut's new waterfront area, a vast piece of land reclaimed after the civil war that has become a showcase of Lebanon's resilience and recovery after multiple wars with Israel and its own dark chapter of civil war.

The pope, wearing green vestments, sat on an altar with a backdrop of a giant stylized white Cedar tree, the symbol of Lebanon, which also appears on the nation's flag.

Officials and politicians from Lebanon's various sects, including the Shiite political and militant group Hezbollah, attended the mass to signal unity and support for the Vatican.
(top)

Hezbollah Calls For Week Of Lebanon Demos Over Film

September 17, 2012

AFP

BEIRUT - Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah on Sunday called for a week of angry protests across Lebanon over a US-produced film mocking Islam that triggered uproar in the Muslim world.

"The whole world needs to see your anger on your faces, in your fists and your shouts," Nasrallah said in a televised speech.

The head of the powerful Shiite Muslim organisation spoke just hours after Pope Benedict XVI left Lebanon following a historic three-day visit in which he prayed that Middle East leaders would work towards peace and reconciliation.

Nasrallah noted that he purposely postponed his call for protests until after the pope's departure.

"The whole world should know that the Prophet has followers who will not be silent in the face of humiliation," said Nasrallah.

A low-budget movie, entitled "Innocence of Muslims", has sparked fury across the Islamic world for mocking the Prophet Mohammed, and for portraying Muslims as immoral and gratuitously violent.

Nasrallah called for protests in southern Beirut on Monday, in the southern city of Tyre on Wednesday, in the eastern city of Baalbek on Friday, in Bint Jbeil in south Lebanon on Saturday, and in Hermel in the eastern Bekaa valley region on Sunday. All are majority Shiite areas.

He also called for people across the Islamic world to demonstrate against the film, which he described as "the worst attack ever on Islam, worse than the Satanic Verses by Salman Rushdie, the burning of the Koran in Afghanistan and the cartoons in the European media."

"There should be resolutions adopted in top international institutions, that are binding on all states and governments in the world, to forbid the defamation of religions," said Nasrallah, adding attacks on Muslims were "frequent".

"Those who write or draw or make such a film would know that they would be punished wherever they are, and they would not feel protected," said the Hezbollah chief.

He also blamed the United States for the film. "The film was made and spread from the US," said Nasrallah. "Muslims should say to the US: 'This happened in your state.'"

The United States on Thursday imposed new sanctions on Nasrallah and two other figures in the Shiite militia over their support of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

The US Treasury move adds to measures already levied on Hezbollah, which was first designated by Washington as a terrorist group in 2001.

In his speech, Nasrallah said Lebanon should call for an emergency meeting of the Arab League to discuss the anti-Islam film.

And shortly after his address ended, Lebanon's foreign ministry said in a statement that Foreign Minister Adnan Mansour had requested such a meeting of the 22-member bloc.
(top)

Mideast Unrest Intensifies Debate On U.S. Intervention In Syria

September 17, 2012

New York Times

By Robert F. Worth And Helene Cooper

DOHA, Qatar - In recent weeks, the growing death toll in Syria pushed that country's civil war to the top of the Obama administration's agenda, with some Arab leaders pressing harder for a greater American role in toppling Syria's leader, Bashar al-Assad.

Then came the protests of the past week in the Middle East - a vivid illustration that the United States' support for greater democracy in the Arab world during the past two years is no guarantee against the incendiary power of Islamist sentiment and anti-American rage.

The turmoil has only sharpened a painful quandary that had been largely overshadowed by the presidential campaign. Should the United States and its allies remain wary of toppling Mr. Assad, one of the region's last secular dictators, whose rule, however repressive, has kept the forces of populist Islam in check? Or do the protests underscore the risks of inaction, with a rapidly growing jihadi presence in Syria that is likely to further destabilize the entire region?

Already, the attacks on American and European diplomatic posts, and especially the deaths of an ambassador and three other Americans in Libya, have roused calls in the United States for disengagement from the Arab world and its seemingly endless mayhem. That a shoddy 14-minute video lampooning the Prophet Muhammad can provoke such anger, some say, bodes poorly for any future investment in Arab democracy.

Yet those calls to disengage, some analysts say, threaten to eclipse the larger context in Syria, where rising sectarian bloodshed and a growing Al Qaeda presence on Israel's doorstep could, if left unchecked, prove far more damaging to American interests than the latest turmoil.

"You can see why the U.S. would want to disengage after what just happened in Cairo and Benghazi," said Salman Shaikh, the director of the Brookings Doha Center. "But, in fact, the chaos and the Islamists we saw in Libya should be a warning to us about this policy of standing back. Syria could become far, far more dangerous than Libya for the United States and the region, and it's still not too late to make a difference."

The death toll in Syria has sharply increased in recent weeks, with some estimates putting it at more than 23,000. Regional powers like Turkey and Saudi Arabia, which now provide a trickle of light weapons to the rebels, have made it clear that they will not play a more decisive role without American support.

At the same time, the increasingly sectarian nature of the conflict and the danger of becoming involved in a proxy war with Iran and Russia, which continue to provide military support to the Syrian government, have kept the Obama administration and its European allies cautious. Looming over any potential intervention is the specter of Iraq, where a sectarian civil war devastated the country in 2006 and 2007 despite a major American military presence.

One senior administration official, speaking on the condition of anonymity, said the attacks on American Embassies last week demonstrated the soundness of President Obama's approach, which involves providing humanitarian and logistical aid but not weapons to the rebels. Mr. Obama has been criticized by Republicans, including Senator John McCain of Arizona, who has advocated a military approach, and Mitt Romney, the party's presidential nominee, who proposes arming the opposition via intermediaries but not directly.

Any effort to intervene militarily in Syria would probably take place without the imprimatur of the United Nations Security Council, where Russia has consistently opposed it.

"These incidents will further give people pause because already our intelligence agencies have been telling us that amongst the Syrian opposition - the people who we're supposed to support - some of them are Al Qaeda affiliates," said Brian Katulis, a national security expert at the Center for American Progress, a research and advocacy organization with close ties to the Obama White House.

Adding to the complexity of the Syria issue is the connection with Iran and the debate in the United States and Israel over whether to use airstrikes to stop Iran's nuclear program. One argument for toppling Mr. Assad has been to weaken Tehran, which has depended on Syria as its lone Arab ally and conduit to Hezbollah and other anti-Israel groups. Iran's economy is already buckling under sanctions, and if Iran lost Syria's support, it might be more amenable to a compromise over its nuclear program, or so the theory goes.

But it is far from clear that Western intervention in Syria would succeed in ousting Iran, which has deep networks in the country and might prove more adept than any Western or Arab power at operating in a chaotic, post-Assad Syria.

Some proponents of intervention argue that it is likely to take place at some point, and that by then the United States and its allies will have fewer options. Mr. Obama has already said he would step in if Syria appeared ready to use chemical weapons, and a vastly increased death toll - or the threat of genocidal attacks on one of Syria's religious or ethnic minorities - would create much greater pressure to intervene. If the rebels succeed in toppling Mr. Assad on their own, the resulting chaos and power struggle would also create a strong incentive for intervention.

"The risk of not intervening is not just that you create greater operating room for jihadis," said Emile Hokayem, a senior fellow at the International Institute for Strategic Studies. "You also risk not having any allies on the ground the day after Assad falls," and no power to shore up moderates in the new Syria.

Apart from the question of intervention, the latest anti-American protests could influence the way the United States allocates the limited support it has been providing to the rebels fighting Mr. Assad's government.

"The focus so far has been on identifying rebel groups to support" and weeding out the more Islamist elements, Mr. Hokayem said. "You can be sure those categories are going to harden."

Officials with the Free Syrian Army, the main rebel opposition group in Syria, have been in Washington calling for the United States and other nations to establish a partial no-fly zone over Syria.

Administration officials close to Mr. Obama say that while he remains opposed to military intervention in Syria, the events of the past week have not turned him away from any kind of engagement with the Syrian opposition.

Friends and associates of J. Christopher Stevens, the American ambassador killed during the attack in Benghazi, say the last thing that he would have wanted to see was the United States retreat from the Arab world, including Syria. Mr. Stevens was considered for a top post at the embassy in Damascus, the Syrian capital, before he decided to go to Libya.

"Chris believes, and would say, 'This takes a robust form of diplomacy that we're not good at because we're used to dealing with dictatorships,' " said Andrew J. Tabler, a Syria expert for the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. "He knew there were risks. What I'm worried about is if Libya is used as an excuse for the United States to pull back from the region. The reality there has just changed, and the people now are a factor in these countries."

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Elite Iranian Unit's Commander Says His Forces Are In Syria

September 17, 2012

Washington Post

By Babak Dehghanpisheh

BEIRUT - The commander of Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps said Sunday that members of its elite Quds Force are inside Syria but are not involved directly in military work, the first time a senior official has publicly admitted the involvement of Iranian military personnel in the Syrian conflict.

The Iranian's comments are one of the clearest signs yet that the conflict in Syria has evolved into a broader regional showdown with Iran and Lebanon's Hezbollah supporting the government of President Bashar al-

Assad and Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar supporting the rebels. Both sides have been accused of funneling arms into the country.

"In comparison with the scale of support the Arab countries have given to opposition groups in Syria and their military presence, we haven't taken any action there," Maj. Gen. Mohammad Ali Jafari, the commander of the Revolutionary Guard, said during a news conference in Tehran, according to the semi-official Fars News agency. "We have only given intellectual and advisory help and transferred experience."

The involvement of the Quds Force in Syria could be particularly worrying to Assad's foes. The unit is tasked with carrying out overseas operations for the Revolutionary Guards, and the U.S. military frequently accused it of training and arming Shiite militias in Iraq during the peak of the sectarian conflict there. In particular, the Quds Force was accused of supplying militia groups in Iraq with explosively formed penetrators, or EFPs. The deadly bombs, which can cut through thick armor, killed many American and Iraqi soldiers.

The Syrian government, for its part, has tried to focus the attention of the international community on the regional countries helping the rebels. Syrian officials on Sunday lashed out at the role Turkey is playing in the conflict by claiming that the Turkish government had opened its airports and borders to "al-Qaeda terrorists" who have killed many Syrians and damaged public and private property in the

country. The Syrian foreign ministry sent a letter of protest to the chairman of the U.N. Security Council and the U.N. secretary-general, the official Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA) reported.

On Friday, Pope Benedict XVI, while en route to Lebanon for a three-day visit, also criticized the regional dimensions of the conflict by saying that importing arms into Syria is a "grave sin." He again addressed the bloody conflict in Syria, which has left more than 25,000 dead according to opposition groups, during a Sunday Mass that drew tens of thousands of people in Beirut. "Why so much horror? Why so many dead?" he asked.

The rebel fighters have said they are receiving arms from Qatar and Saudi Arabia, although officials from those countries have said little about their role. Iran, Hezbollah and Turkey have all strongly denied accusations of sending arms.

Iran's action

In the news conference Sunday, Jafari said that defending Syria is a "point of pride" for Iran but he stopped short of promising military intervention if Syria is attacked. If that happened, Jafari said, Iran wouldn't necessarily invoke the bilateral security agreement between the two countries and respond immediately with military force. Iran's actions would depend on "conditions," he said, according to Fars News, without giving further details.

In late August, Gen. Salar Abnough, the commander of the Revolutionary Guard's Saheb al Amr unit, said that Iran was involved in the Syria conflict without explicitly mentioning the presence of Iranian military personnel, according to Iran's Daneshjoo news agency.

But there have been hints of Iran's increased involvement in recent weeks. In early August, 48 Iranians were kidnapped from a bus in Damascus. The Iranian government claimed they were pilgrims but members of the Free Syrian Army, who carried out the kidnapping, claimed they were Revolutionary Guards and posted a video online in which some of the kidnapped Iranians showed what appeared to be Guard IDs.

Not long after, Iran's foreign minister Ali Akbar Salehi said there were some retired Guards and other retired military personnel among the group of kidnapped men but they had all traveled to Syria as pilgrims.

Forces also in Lebanon

Iran's Revolutionary Guards are not only present in Syria. Jafari said Sunday that members of Iran's Quds Force are also in Lebanon in a non-military capacity without giving further details, according to Fars News.

Hezbollah, the Syrian government's strongest regional ally after Iran, has also been accused of sending fighters and weapons into the country. Asked about the role of Hezbollah in the Syrian conflict, Jafari did not rule it out.

"Syrian forces have come to the aid of Lebanon in the past, and it's natural that if Syria needs help that the people of Lebanon will go to help them," Jafari said, according to Fars News. "This will not be related to Iran and, with attention to their close ties in the past, it's not unlikely that this would happen."

In the news conference Sunday, Jafari also commented on the militia groups, often referred to as "shabiha" by the opposition, which have been fighting alongside the Syrian military. Opposition activists accuse the shabiha of carrying out some of the worst atrocities in the 19-month conflict.

Jafari compared these fighters to the Basij, a plainclothes militia under the command of the Revolutionary Guard in Iran, and claimed they are a potent force that aids the Syrian military.

"There are more than 50,000 Syrian people who have organized as a people's army, or a force of Syrian Basij, who are standing beside the army in the face of the unfair attacks from the countries of the region and outside the region," Jafari said.

The Syrian government carried out attacks in more than half a dozen cities across the country on Sunday, killing at least 113 people, according to the Local Coordination Committees, an activist network. More than 40 people were killed in Aleppo alone, many of them from heavy shelling, the group claimed. ([top](#))

State Media Says Syrian Troops Have Captured Rebel-held Neighbourhood In Aleppo

September 17, 2012

Associated Press

BEIRUT - Syria's state-run news agency says troops have captured and cleared the neighbourhood of Midan in the embattled northern city of Aleppo.

SANA's announcement came as activists reported heavy bombardment Sunday of rebel-held areas throughout the country.

SANA says troops also killed dozens of rebels in other parts of Aleppo, the country's largest city and commercial centre.

The fight for Aleppo, a city of 3 million that was once a bastion of support for President Bashar Assad, is critical for both the regime and the opposition.

Its fall would give the opposition a major strategic victory with a stronghold in the north near the Turkish border. A rebel defeat, at the very least, would buy Assad more time.

The latest violence comes as millions of Syrian students began their school year.

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Syria accuses Turkey of allowing al-Qaida transit

September 17, 2012

Associated Press

By ALBERT AJI and BASSEM MROUE

DAMASCUS, Syria — Syria accused neighboring Turkey Sunday of allowing thousands of Muslim extremists to cross into its territory, as the government and opposition said an explosion killed at least seven and cut off a main road leading south from the capital.

In letters to the U.N. Security Council and Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, Syria's Foreign Ministry said Turkey allowed "thousands of al-Qaida, Takfiri and Wahhabi terrorists" access to the country in order to "kill innocent Syrians, blow up their properties and spread chaos and destruction."

Syrian authorities blame the anti-government uprising that began in March last year on a foreign conspiracy and accuse Gulf countries Saudi Arabia and Qatar, along with the U.S, other Western countries and Turkey, of offering funding and training to the rebels, whom they describe as "terrorists."

Turkey serves as headquarters for the leaders of the Free Syrian Army rebels and hosts many meetings of the Syrian National Council opposition group. Relations between Turkey and Syria, once strong allies, have been deteriorating since after the crisis began last year and Ankara became one of President Bashar Assad's harshest critics.

Although the conflict has left Syria internationally isolated, Iran has stood by Assad.

On Sunday, the top commander of Iran's powerful Revolutionary Guard says the elite unit has high-level advisers in Lebanon and Syria but remains undecided on whether to send military reinforcements to help save Assad's regime.

Sunday's comments by Gen. Mohammad Ali Jafari were the clearest indication to date of Iran's direct assistance to its main Arab allies, Assad and Lebanon's Hezbollah. It also suggests Tehran is wary about being drawn into a Middle East conflict if outside forces attack Assad, who is locked in a civil war with rebel forces.

Jafari told reporters that Quds force members have been in Syria and Lebanon as advisers for a long time, but was not more specific.

He said decisions about whether to boost military aid to Syria if attacked would "depend on the circumstances."

Also Sunday, state-run news agency SANA said rebels detonated a 600 kilogram (1,320 pound) bomb under the highway near the southern town of Khirbet Ghazaleh. It said the bomb was detonated by remote control and cut the highway that links Damascus with the southern city of Daraa and the Jordanian capital of Amman.

The opposition Local Coordination Committees said seven people were killed and others wounded, although SANA put the toll at eight. SANA added that nine cars and two buses carrying state employees were damaged in the blast.

Residents in the province of Daraa reported Sunday that government troops have been surrounding hamlets in the region. They said the "troops are not allowing people to leave their area, not even to go to school." One, who identified himself as Abu Wassim, said his elementary-aged sons could not attend classes on the first day of school in the country.

Other residents said the Syrian military was inspecting houses and randomly arresting people in the province. They alleged the troops were insulting and beating, particularly young men, during the inspections. Also, they reported receiving threatening text messages on their mobile phones warning: "Armed people, hand yourselves in because our intrepid army is coming to get you."

Earlier in the day, government troops captured and cleared the neighborhood of Midan in the embattled northern city of Aleppo, SANA said, while activists reported that bombardment of rebel-held areas throughout the country claimed the lives of dozens of people.

SANA said troops also killed dozens of rebels in other parts of Aleppo, the country's largest city and commercial center. The LCC and the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said many of the dead in Aleppo were killed in air raids on the rebel-held neighborhood of Shaar.

The fight for Aleppo, a city of 3 million that was once a bastion of support for Assad, is critical for both the regime and the opposition. Its fall would give the opposition a major strategic victory with a stronghold in the north near the Turkish border. A rebel defeat, at the very least, would buy Assad more time.

The Observatory also said troops shelled the Damascus neighborhood of Hajar Aswad, an area that has witnessed anti-government activities since the early weeks of the uprising. Sunday's countrywide death toll reached over 50 people, the Observatory added. It was the same day that the school year began for some five million students.

The Syrian uprising began with mostly peaceful protests in a number of the country's impoverished provinces. As security forces violently suppressed them, the protest grew and escalated into an increasingly armed insurrection. Activists say at least 23,000 people have been killed in the past 18 months.

On Sunday, the new international envoy tasked with ending the civil war, Lakhdar Brahimi, left Syria, ending a four-day visit during which he met with Assad and other officials, his office said in a statement. Brahimi summed up his first foray to Damascus Saturday with a startling and frank admission that he still has no plan for stopping the bloodshed which he warned could threaten world peace.

In Damascus, some 24 political parties and groups who describe themselves as opposition organizations gathered in an effort to seek national reconciliation and end violence in the country.

The participants, who included Deputy Prime Minister Qadri Jamil — head the opposition party Front of Change and Liberation, said in a statement that they aim to launch a pure Syrian dialogue and call for a national conference to be attended by all opposition groups from inside and outside the country.
(top)

SCA

Karzai Denounces Coalition Over Airstrikes

September 17, 2012

New York Times

By Matthew Rosenberg

KABUL, Afghanistan - Two of the most contentious issues dividing the United States and President Hamid Karzai's administration re-emerged as the Afghan leader condemned American-led forces for killing eight women in airstrikes on Sunday and denounced his American allies for continuing to hold hundreds of Afghan prisoners.

After the coalition initially said that it needed time to investigate Afghan reports of the deaths, by evening it confirmed that the civilians had died in airstrikes launched early Sunday in the mountains of eastern Afghanistan. It said the strikes were carried out "solely with the intent of countering known insurgents," and offered its sympathies to the families of those slain. It did not give a number of dead; Afghan officials said eight women who were out collecting firewood had died.

While Mr. Karzai's condemnation was likely to rankle some Western officials, it was in keeping with how he has responded to the killing of Afghan bystanders by both coalition forces and the Taliban, which is responsible for the vast majority of civilian deaths in Afghanistan. Instead, the presidential palace reserved its strongest language for the continued detention of some 600 Afghans at what was once the main American prison here. Mr. Karzai's office said in a statement that keeping the prisoners was a "serious breach" and a "serious violation" of a deal struck this year, under which the United States agreed to transfer control of the prison to Afghan authorities on Sept. 9.

"The continued holding of Afghans in American custody runs in contradiction with the spirit of mutual friendship," it said. "The people of Afghanistan consider the issue of prisons and detention of their fellow citizens a matter of their national sovereignty."

After a summer in which American and Afghan officials were more often than not on the same page, the confrontational tone of the statement was a sharp reminder of the acrimony that has often characterized relations between Mr. Karzai and his American benefactors. As recently as March, Mr. Karzai referred to Americans as "demons."

The statement came after Mr. Karzai met with Ambassador Marc Grossman, the United States special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, who was in Kabul on a previously unannounced visit. The men discussed the prison issue and stalled efforts to strike a peace deal with the Taliban, the palace said.

The Americans were holding roughly 3,000 people at the prison, which is next to Bagram Air Base north of Kabul, when the United States and Afghanistan signed a memorandum of understanding in March that laid out a six-month timetable for the transfer. But Afghan officials say 600 people detained since March remain in American custody, along with about 30 of the original prisoners considered too dangerous to release but too difficult to prosecute because of a lack of admissible evidence.

American officials have not said anything about the 600 figure, but they have acknowledged holding the men detained before the deal was struck. They also have said they want the Afghans to agree to detain those men indefinitely under stipulations in the Geneva Convention that permit wartime detentions without trial.

Sunday's statement from Mr. Karzai's office said Afghan judicial authorities would soon "express their views" on how or whether a system of indefinite detention would comply with Afghanistan's laws.

Rangin Dadfar Spanta, Afghanistan's national security adviser, said in an interview last week that the Afghan government would eventually implement such a system but wanted control of the prisoners immediately. The Americans want a guarantee that the Afghans will leave intact the American detention system that allows the indefinite holding of prisoners deemed dangerous if there is insufficient evidence to try them.

"It is like the egg and the chicken," said Mr. Spanta, who is viewed as one of Mr. Karzai's more pro-Western advisers. Mr. Spanta said in the interview that he needed "a little space, two or three days, to find a diplomatic solution." But with no solution at hand, the Karzai administration appeared to be taking the negotiations public with Sunday's statement.

In response, the American Embassy stressed that "there is no question of our commitment to fully implement" the prison transfer accord. "Ambassador Grossman made clear in his discussion with the president that the United States fully respects Afghan sovereignty," it said in a statement.

Sunday's civilian deaths were the latest case of innocents being caught up in an operation by the coalition, which has reduced civilian casualties in part by limiting the use of air power.

The airstrikes took place in the Alingar district of Laghman Province. The coalition said the strikes were called in around 2 a.m. during a firefight with insurgents that had been spotted moving through the area.

According to Maj. Lori Hodge of the Air Force, coalition forces "engaged with precision munitions and direct fire" - airstrikes and gunfire - with about 45 insurgents. She could not say how many insurgents were killed.

Coalition forces were apparently unaware that village women sometimes go into the woods in the early hours of the morning to fetch wood for cooking fires they need to have going by breakfast time.
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4 Troops Killed In Southern Afghanistan Insider Attack

September 17, 2012

Washington Post

By Richard Leiby And Greg Jaffe

KABUL, Afghanistan - Four U.S. troops were killed Sunday at a remote checkpoint in southern Afghanistan when a member of the Afghan security forces opened fire on them, military officials said. The attack brought to 51 the number of international troops shot dead by their Afghan partners this year.

The so-called insider attack came on the same day that NATO warplanes killed nine women gathering firewood in the mountains outside their village in an eastern province, local officials said, adding to long-festering outrage here over civilian casualties. Although the coalition said it regretted any civilian deaths, the incident was likely to further strain relations between Afghans and the international forces.

The weekend's events touched the core of the U.S.-led war's problems. The escalating insider attacks and continuing civilian casualties both deepen mistrust and alienate NATO forces from the people they're supposed to be protecting, undermining an already fragile partnership.

The Americans and their coalition partners are training Afghan forces to take over responsibility for the nation's security and enable the United States to pull out its combat troops by the end of 2014.

The American troops were killed Sunday near a NATO installation in Zabul province, at a checkpoint staffed by both foreign and Afghan forces. (The U.S. did not immediately release information on which service branch the troops belonged to.)

On Saturday, an Afghan gunman thought to belong to the local police killed two British soldiers in southern Helmand province.

The weekend killings marked an escalation of insider attacks on international troops here that coincided with Muslim rage worldwide that was sparked by a film that defames the Islamic prophet Muhammad. It was unclear, however, whether the shootings were connected to the unreleased "Innocence of Muslims" movie, snippets of which can be seen on the Internet.

Even so, the inflammatory movie, along with insider killings, have had a significant impact on U.S. military and Afghan Army operations in some areas over the past three days. Top NATO officers ordered their field commanders to conduct risk assessments and determine whether to postpone or scale back some missions in response to the recent Afghan anger.

In Wardak Province, a restive area south of Kabul, some commanders appeared to misinterpret the guidance and postponed several major operations for three days. Because Afghan Army commanders in Wardak Province were reluctant to patrol without support from U.S. troops, they also chose to cancel the planned missions.

The pause in Wardak Province had initially been planned for only two days, but U.S. commanders extended it in the immediate aftermath of a Friday night attack by the Taliban on Camp Bastion - a large British base in Helmand Province - so that U.S. troops could focus on internal-base security in case similar insider attacks were launched.

The Taliban said the attack on Camp Bastion, which is hundreds of miles from Wardak Province, was initiated to avenge the Islam-insulting movie and also meant to target Britain's Prince Harry, a helicopter gunner on the base. Two U.S. Marines died in the attack, and upwards of \$200 million in aircraft and base structures were destroyed.

Col. Thomas Collins, a spokesman for the NATO-backed International Security Assistance Force, confirmed the pause in some operations but said such readjustments are not unusual.

"Recent events outside of and inside Afghanistan related to the 'Innocence of Muslims' video plus the conduct of recent insider attacks have given cause for ISAF troops to exercise increased vigilance and carefully review all activities and interactions with the local population," Collins said in a statement.

Shooter is killed

The latest fatal insider attacks on U.S. troops involved a group of Afghans wearing the uniforms of the Afghan National Police - a component of the country's 352,000-member security forces. Jailani Khan Farahi, a senior police officer for Zabul province, said the assassin was a member of that force and worked closely with foreign troops in the area.

The shooter was killed in reciprocal firing and five of his colleagues fled, Farahi said. It was unclear whether the five were also involved in the killings.

In a statement on its Web site Sunday, the Taliban said four Americans died, crediting "one Afghan Mujahid," or holy warrior, for carrying out the attack.

NATO and Afghan officials have undertaken intense efforts recently to prevent the insider attacks. The Afghans say they have been weeding out potential turncoats and Taliban infiltrators through better screening; they also have increased counter-intelligence operations in the ranks and introduced cultural sensitivity training so that Afghan forces can better understand Western behaviors.

Taliban infiltrators are estimated to account for 25 percent of the insider attacks, with the rest attributed to Afghans' who are settling personal scores, avenging perceived humiliations or making larger statements against the international troop presence - including civilian casualties.

Airstrikes in mountains

Sunday's NATO airstrikes in the mountains of eastern Laghman province fueled further anger among Afghans - including President Hamid Karzai, who condemned the killings. The U.S.-led international coalition said the precision strikes killed about "a large number of insurgents" but also acknowledged that that up to eight civilians had been hit.

Chanting "Death to America," protesters deposited what local authorities said were the bodies of nine victims at the residence of the provincial governor, about 30 miles from where the strikes occurred. Seven other women and girls were reported to be injured.

"We strongly condemn it - killing innocent women is not justifiable at all," said Alif Shah, district governor of the province's Alingar District. "The operation was not coordinated with the Afghan authorities."

Doug Ollivant, a fellow at the New American Foundation and former National Security Council official, said such incidents contribute to insider attacks, but "I think the root cause is the perceived disrespect the Afghans get from their NATO allies and trainers."

As for the film, he said, "It probably isn't going to set you off if your honor isn't already being bruised."

Lt. Col. Hagen Messer, a coalition spokesman, said there was no evidence so far to suggest that the two insider attacks in two days had a connection to the controversial anti-Muslim film that has provoked protests and violence in some 20 countries.

"Every one of these insider attacks is handled as its own individual incident," Messer said. "We can't draw the conclusion that there is a single reason or point."

Since 2007, when the insider-attack phenomenon began, about 109 international troops have been killed by rogue Afghan security forces.

Last week, the Taliban called for increased attacks in Afghanistan, specifically on U.S. forces, to avenge the anti-Muslim film, as well as "all the violations against our heavenly book [the Koran]" and the Prophet Muhammad.

"The Mujahideen in Afghanistan should avenge these actions of the American government by dealing a heavy blow to its invading troops on the battlefield," an official Taliban Web site said.

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India Labels Anti-Islam Film "Offensive Material"

September 17, 2012

AFP

India on Sunday said that Google had blocked access in the country to an anti-Islam film which has triggered protests across the Muslim world as it condemned the "offensive" movie.

"Google India has, in compliance with Indian law, blocked access to the offensive material," foreign ministry spokesman Syed Akbaruddin said.

"India has always strongly condemned all acts that disparage religious beliefs and hurt religious sentiments," he said in a statement, adding that authorities were also "in touch with US officials who share our concerns on the matter".

A Google executive, speaking on condition of anonymity, said on Friday that it had blocked access to Internet users trying to watch the movie via YouTube which it owns.

More than 80 people were arrested in the southern city of Chennai on Friday after an attack by Islamists on the US consulate during a protest against the film.

India has reinforced security at the US embassy in New Delhi and consulates and diplomatic interests in other Indian cities as a precaution against possible protests.

India is home to world's third largest Muslim population after Indonesia and Pakistan.

(top)

Pakistanis Try To Storm U.S. Outpost; One Is Killed

September 17, 2012

New York Times

By Salman Masood

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan - One person was killed and dozens of people were injured when anti-American protesters tried to storm the American Consulate in the southern port city of Karachi and clashed for several hours with the police and paramilitary troops on Sunday evening, rescue workers and police officials said.

The outbreak of violence came after days of peaceful demonstrations in Pakistan against the release of an American-made video mocking the Prophet Muhammad. Pakistani officials had increased security in all major cities before Friday Prayer services, which have in the past served as flash points for protests, and until Sunday, calm had prevailed. The American Embassy here said in a message posted Sunday evening on Twitter that "all American personnel are safe and accounted for at U.S. Consulate, Karachi."

"The United States government has absolutely nothing to do with this video," another Twitter message by the American Embassy said. "We reject its content and its message."

Karachi is Pakistan's commercial capital, and the sprawling city is frequently torn by ethnic and sectarian violence. "Things usually get out of hand in Karachi," Mehreen Zahra-Malik, an assistant editor at The News International, said in an interview.

The demonstration on Sunday was spearheaded by two groups of Shiites, a minority in Pakistan, which had urged demonstrators to march "toward" the American Consulate.

The police responded by blocking the road that leads to the American Consulate with concrete barriers and shipping containers on Sunday afternoon. Then, as the march neared, the police fired tear gas canisters into the crowd. That failed to contain waves of angry demonstrators, who grew increasingly agitated, witnesses said.

The police and Rangers, a force controlled by the Interior Ministry, then fired shots into the air as demonstrators rushed through the clouds of tear gas, trying to reach the outer boundary wall of the heavily fortified consulate building. Water cannons were also used on the protesters, who began hurling stones.

Local television broadcast images of young men falling on the roadside after being struck by water jets. One young man ran toward a police officer, who was firing warning shots in the air, and flung his arms open, daring the officer to shoot at his chest.

After battling for a few hours without entering the consulate property, the protesters dispersed. They later assembled in the Numaish Chowrangi neighborhood and staged a sit-in. Local news media reported that the demonstrators had set at least four police vehicles on fire.

Mirza Yousuf Hussain, the leader of one of the two Shiite groups that organized the protest, claimed that violence had broken out in Karachi after police opened fire on "peaceful protesters." He said in a statement that police fire had killed the brother of the deputy secretary general of his party's Karachi chapter. He also said two wounded workers were in critical condition. He accused high-ranking police officers of "working to protect American interests."

In the eastern city of Lahore, thousands of protesters took part in a demonstration led by Hafiz Muhammad Saeed, the leader of the militant group Lashkar-e-Taiba, which is accused of orchestrating the 2008 Mumbai terrorist attacks. While the protest remained peaceful, the fiery speeches were filled with anger as protesters gathered at the Mall, about half a mile from the American Consulate in Lahore.

Mr. Saeed said in his speech that the production crew of the video "must be hanged to set an example."

Protesters held placards and shouted slogans against the United States government. One placard read, "O Obama, we are all Osama." Another placard read, "Blasphemy is not freedom of expression, and its sentence is death."

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WHA/EUR

Paris Prosecutor To Probe Protest At US Embassy

September 17, 2012

Associated Press

PARIS - The Paris prosecutor's office opened an investigation Sunday regarding a protest around the American Embassy that drew hundreds of people angry over a film produced in the United States that insults the Prophet Muhammad.

In the wake of Saturday's unauthorized protest, uniformed and plain clothes police were added to the streets surrounding the embassy, police officer Pierre Coric said. Police detained 150 people as they broke up the demonstration; one was still in custody Sunday for roughing up an officer.

Between 200 and 250 people converged Saturday afternoon on the streets around the embassy, which is not far from the famed Champs-Elysees Avenue and France's presidential Elysee Palace. They were apparently responding to calls put out via text message and social media.

The prosecutor's office will look into how such a large demonstration was organized without the proper permits, according to spokeswoman Agnes Thibault Lecuivre.

Interior Minister Manuel Valls has called the protest, which at one point saw dozens of men praying on the sidewalks, "unacceptable."

The demonstration was part of a wave of protests outside U.S. diplomatic posts around the world, some of which have turned violent. The U.S. Ambassador to Libya was killed during an attack on the consulate in Benghazi; protesters have also stormed the U.S. Embassy in Tunis and held violent demonstrations outside posts in Egypt and Sudan.

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Muslims Protest Outside US Embassy In London

September 17, 2012

AFP

LONDON - Hundreds of demonstrators gathered outside the United States embassy in London on Sunday to protest an anti-Islam film that has caused outrage throughout the Muslim world.

Around 300 men and women joined in the protest, waving placards and chanting slogans outside the embassy building in central London, an AFP photographer reported.

Demonstrators chanted "Allahu Akbar" (God is greatest) and waved placards reading "USA dead" at the demonstration against the film, which has sparked sometimes violent protests in Muslim countries.

Furious protests targeting symbols of US influence have flared in cities such as Cairo in retaliation for the crude film made in the United States by a right-wing Christian group that ridicules the Prophet Mohammed.

In the worst incident of violence, the US ambassador to Libya, Chris Stevens, and three other Americans died when suspected Islamic militants fired rocket-propelled grenades at the US consulate in the eastern city of Benghazi.

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FOREIGN POLICY

On Web, A Fine Line On Free Speech Across The Globe

September 17, 2012

New York Times

By Somini Sengupta

SAN FRANCISCO - For Google last week, the decision was clear. An anti-Islamic video that provoked violence worldwide was not hate speech under its rules because it did not specifically incite violence against Muslims, even if it mocked their faith.

The White House was not so sure, and it asked Google to reconsider the determination, a request the company rebuffed.

Although the administration's request was unusual, for Google, it represented the kind of delicate balancing act that Internet companies confront every day.

These companies, which include communications media like Facebook and Twitter, write their own edicts about what kind of expression is allowed, things as diverse as pointed political criticism, nudity and notions as murky as hate speech. And their employees work around the clock to check when users run afoul of their rules.

Google is not the only Internet company to grapple in recent days with questions involving the anti-Islamic video, which appeared on YouTube, which Google owns. Facebook on Friday confirmed that it had blocked links to the video in Pakistan, where it violates the country's blasphemy law. A spokeswoman said Facebook had also removed a post that contained a threat to a United States ambassador, after receiving a report from the State Department; Facebook has declined to say in which country the ambassador worked.

"Because these speech platforms are so important, the decisions they take become jurisprudence," said Andrew McLaughlin, who has worked for both Google and the White House. Most vexing among those decisions are ones that involve whether a form of expression is hate speech. Hate speech has no universally accepted definition, legal experts say. And countries, including democratic ones, have widely divergent legal approaches to regulating speech they consider to be offensive or inflammatory.

Europe bans neo-Nazi speech, for instance, but courts there have also banned material that offends the religious sensibilities of one group or another. Indian law frowns on speech that could threaten public order. Turkey can shut down a Web site that insults its founding president, Kemal Ataturk. Like the countries, the Internet companies have their own positions, which give them wide latitude on how to interpret expression in different countries.

Although Google says the anti-Islamic video, "Innocence of Muslims," was not hate speech, it restricted access to the video in Libya and Egypt because of the extraordinarily delicate situation on the ground and out of respect for cultural norms.

Google has not yet explained why its cultural norms edict applied to only two countries and not others, where Muslim sensitivities have been demonstrably offended.

Free speech absolutists say all expression, no matter how despicable, should be allowed online. Others say Internet companies, like governments, should be flexible enough to exercise restraint under exceptional circumstances, especially when lives are at stake.

At any rate, as Mark L. Movsesian, a law professor at St. John's University, pointed out, any effort to ban hateful or offensive speech worldwide would be virtually impossible, if not counterproductive.

"The regimes are so different, it's very, very difficult to come up with one answer - unless you ban everything," he said.

Google's fine parsing led to a debate in the blogosphere about whether the video constituted hateful or offensive speech.

Peter J. Spiro, a law professor at Temple University, said Google was justified in restricting access to the video in certain places, if for no other reason than to stanch the violence.

"Maybe the hate speech/offensive speech distinction can be elided by the smart folks in Google's foreign ministry," Mr. Spiro wrote on the blog *Opinio Juris*. "If material is literally setting off global firestorms through its dissemination online, Google will strategically pull the plug."

Every company, in order to do business globally, makes a point of obeying the laws of every country in which it operates. Google has already said that it took down links to the incendiary video in India and Indonesia, because it violates local statutes.

But even as a company sets its own rules, capriciously sometimes and without the due process that binds most countries, legal experts say they must be flexible to strike the right balance between democratic values and law.

"Companies are benevolent rulers trying to approximate the kinds of decisions they think would be respectful of free speech as a value and also human safety," said Jonathan Zittrain, a law professor at Harvard.

Unlike Google, Twitter does not explicitly address hate speech, but it says in its rule book that "users are allowed to post content, including potentially inflammatory content, provided they do not violate the Twitter Terms of Service and Rules." Those include a prohibition against "direct, specific threats of violence against others."

That wide margin for speech sometimes lands Twitter in feuds with governments and lobbyists. Twitter was pressed this summer to take down several accounts the Indian government considered offensive. Company officials agreed to remove only those that blatantly impersonated others; impersonation violates company rules, unless the user makes it clear that it is satirical.

Facebook has some of the industry's strictest rules. Terrorist organizations are not permitted on the social network, according to the company's terms of service. In recent years, the company has repeatedly shut down fan pages set up by Hezbollah.

In a statement after the killings of United States Embassy employees in Libya, the company said, "Facebook's policy prohibits content that threatens or organizes violence, or praises violent organizations."

Facebook also explicitly prohibits what it calls "hate speech," which it defines as attacking a person. In addition, it allows users to report content they find objectionable, which Facebook employees then vet. Facebook's algorithms also pick up certain words that are then sent to human inspectors to review; the company declined to provide details on what kinds of words set off that kind of review.

Nudity is forbidden on Facebook, too. This year, that policy enmeshed the social network in a controversy over photographs of breast-feeding women. Facebook pages were set up by groups that objected to the company's ban on pictures of exposed breasts, and "nurse-ins" were organized, calling on women to breast-feed outside Facebook offices worldwide.

The company said sharing breast-feeding photos was fine, but "photos that show a fully exposed breast where the child is not actively engaged in nursing do violate Facebook's Statement of Rights and Responsibilities."

Just this month, a New Yorker cartoon tripped over Facebook's rules on exposed breasts. On its Facebook page, the magazine displayed a cartoon that contained the topless figures of a man and women. The illustration was removed for violating Facebook's naked breast decree.

Facebook soon corrected itself. With "hundreds of thousands" of reported complaints each week, the company said, sometimes it makes a mistake.

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EDITORIAL / OPINION

The Video Did It

September 17, 2012

Wall Street Journal

The Obama Administration dispatched Ambassador to the U.N. Susan Rice to the talk shows Sunday to explain the outbreak of anti-American protests in the Arab world. Her message: It's all the fault of that 13-minute anti-Islamic video on YouTube. U.S. policies or foreign terrorists have little or nothing to do with it.

"What sparked the recent violence was the airing on the Internet of a very hateful, very offensive video that has offended many people around the world," said Ms. Rice, a leading candidate to be Secretary of State in a second Obama term, on "Fox News Sunday."

While there is no excuse for violence, she added, "as we've seen in the past with things like 'Satanic Verses,' with the cartoon of the Prophet Muhammad, there have been such things that have sparked outrage and anger, and this has been the proximate cause of what we've seen last week."

This followed White House spokesman Jay Carney's remarks last week that the violent protests were a "response not to United States policy, not to, obviously, the administration, not to the American people" but were "in response to a video, a film, that we have judged to be reprehensible and disgusting."

Mr. Carney all but asked Google to pull the video from its YouTube subsidiary website as inconsistent with its "terms of use," as if an anti-American attack should result in American self-censorship. Google appropriately refused.

Ms. Rice did concede on ABC's "This Week" that the deadly attack on the U.S. consulate in Libya might have been the work of "Individual clusters of extremists," but she added that it had begun merely as a spontaneous protest against the video.

That doesn't square with the view of Libyan officials, who say they believe the attack was the work of Islamists linked to al Qaeda. Peaceful protesters don't typically carry rocket-propelled grenades and

other heavy weapons to a demonstration. The fact that the attack happened on the anniversary of September 11 also suggests terrorist planning.

Ms. Rice's the-video-did-it explanation is no doubt intended to shield Obama Administration policies from any domestic political blame for the attacks. But far worse is the message it sends to adversaries and even friendly governments abroad: Overrun sovereign U.S. territory, even kill U.S. diplomats, and the first reaction of the American government will be to blame Americans for somehow provoking the violence.

Ms. Rice's reference to the 1988 novel "The Satanic Verses" is especially unfortunate since Iran issued a fatwa urging the murder of author Salman Rushdie. Ms. Rice is suggesting that what matters is whether Muslims take offense against some Western statement or work, regardless of its value as art or free-expression. We wonder how Mr. Rushdie feels about having his work linked to the trashy and insulting video "Innocence of Muslims" as a provocation for violence.

It's one thing for the U.S. government to say it isn't responsible for and disapproves of an anti-Islamic video. But it's another to say the video is the reason for anti-American violence. Eleven years after 9/11 and 33 years after the Iranian revolution, it should be obvious that there is no end to the insults that Islamic radicals can imagine or cite as an excuse to foment anti-American, anti-Western protests and violence.

The far greater provocation to violence is the appearance of U.S. weakness. What should really concern the White House is how slow and parsimonious were the denunciations of anti-American violence in Egypt, Tunisia, Sudan, Yemen and most of the rest of the Middle East. The Administration's feeble response in the last week only invites radicals to use more such excuses to kill more Americans.
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Amid Chants of 'Free Libya, Terrorists Out,' a Nation at a Crossroads

September 17, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By JASON PACK And ANDREA KHALIL

Benghazi, Libya – Sept. 11 is now a date that signifies a national tragedy for Libya as well as the United States. The attack on the U.S. diplomatic mission in Benghazi that killed four Americans, including Ambassador Christopher Stevens, has upset the delicate political transition from dictatorship to democracy that was unfolding here. It also has obscured parliament's prudent selection Wednesday of Mustafa Abushagour—a moderate Islamist and respected technocrat—as prime minister. Yet spontaneous street demonstrations throughout the week denouncing the attack and seeking to pressure the government to act against its perpetrators suggest that Libyans are determined to build an inclusive society, free from fear.

We knew Ambassador Stevens personally and he was the best kind of American diplomat—charismatic, not bureaucratic, and fluent in Arab culture. He was in Benghazi from the beginning of last year's uprising against Moammar Gadhafi and forged irreplaceable personal ties with top rebel leaders.

On Wednesday night in Tree Square in Benghazi, we witnessed crowds expressing heartfelt disappointment, shouting slogans like, "Free Libya, terrorists out!" On Saturday, Libyan President Mohamed Magariaf told "NBC Nightly News" that non-Libyans were among those involved. The assertion dovetails with educated opinion here that the attack on the mission must have been planned

by an al Qaeda affiliate in revenge for the U.S. drone killing of the Libyan-born al Qaeda leader Abu Yahya al-Libi in Pakistan in June. Few demonstrators we talked to knew about the alleged justification for storming the consulate—the hateful 13-minute YouTube video "The Innocence of Muslims." Among those who did, a minority incorrectly assumed that if the video was produced in the U.S., it must represent American public opinion or tacit government policy.

Most Libyan popular opinion is more nuanced. Based on our dozens of interviews in Benghazi, most Libyans are appalled by the consulate attack. One female medical student at a Benghazi demonstration captured the mood: "The Americans are guests in our country and Islam requires us to treat them well."

According to a recent Gallup poll, Libyans hold a more favorable attitude toward Americans than they do even toward Canadians. As days have passed since the attack, Libyan popular condemnation has increased. A meeting took place on Thursday evening at the Shbelia Hotel to coordinate citizen action against the militants. The people who attended also wanted to goad the government into reining in the myriad militias that fought Gadhafi and have deepened their hold on local politics since his ouster. According to one activist, "There is no government response—because there is no government."

There is a small anti-American minority who support using the YouTube video to advance their militant agenda. On Wednesday night, they staged a small counterdemonstration in front of the Tibisti Hotel, where most foreigners stay. It consisted of about 50 men with Salafist black banners advocating more anti-Western violence.

On Friday, there were competing demonstrations around Benghazi. Women staged a peaceful antimilitant, pro-American demonstration in front of the Tibisti Hotel. Partisans of the militant group Ansar al-Sharia confronted them, dispersing the women. The demonstrations have dissolved without further violence.

Although some Libyan police died heroically resisting the consulate attackers, it still isn't clear if the ill-trained Libyan security forces did all they could to halt the attack. Symptomatic of the good and bad in the new Libya, there was no police or governmental presence at any of the protests we attended.

Last week Prime Minister Abushagour condemned the attack, expressing solidarity with the U.S. and promising to bring the criminals to justice. On Friday Benghazi's airport was closed to try to prevent suspects from escaping. About 50 arrests have already been made, but experts doubt that Libyan authorities have the firepower or know-how to tackle all the nonstate actors involved. The attack on the U.S. diplomatic post has also added to the perception that the Libyan government doesn't control its territory. Such popular doubt fuels decreasing public willingness to cooperate with authorities.

The U.S. can respond in three ways to the attack and its aftermath. It can cut and run, as in Lebanon in 1984. It can conduct a punitive counterterror expedition in coordination with Libyan authorities—although this would have to rely on Predator drones and risks prompting revenge attacks.

Or the U.S. can help Libya build institutions to strengthen its new foundations. Although the U.S. already has a small footprint—training Libyan security personnel, engineers and English-language students—such efforts could be increased. Such an effort would help create jobs and get potential extremists and militia off the streets.

In the words of Sen. John McCain, "Libya is wealthy. It does not need our money. . . . It needs our technical expertise." Based on our observation, popular sentiment in Libya longs for increased international cooperation.

If America abandons the country or lashes out in revenge, security and stability will deteriorate, foreign investment will dry up, and the Libyan economy will stagnate.

America wisely played a supporting role in ending the Gadhafi dictatorship. In the struggle for post-Gadhafi Libya, the U.S. cannot be silent. Only intense engagement can help restore momentum to the political transition already under way.

Mr. Pack is a researcher of Middle Eastern History at the University of Cambridge. He is president of Libya-Analysis.com. Mrs. Khalil is an associate professor at CUNY. She is currently traveling in Libya while on a Fulbright Scholarship to Tunisia.

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Bigotry, Both Fringe And State-sanctioned

September 16, 2012

Boston Globe

By Joanna Weiss

IF YOU HAVEN'T seen the 13-minute YouTube trailer of "Innocence of Muslims," it's worth a look, if only to witness the ultimate collision of bigotry and bad production values. Posted to YouTube last summer, dubbed recently into Arabic, the video features an Ashton Kutcher type as a murderous and lecherous Mohammed. It's filmed on a green screen so crude that, at times, the characters seem to be floating above the desert sands.

Andrew Goldberg, a filmmaker, watched the clip in his New York office with his production staff last week and thought, at first, that it was a joke. "I've seen an awful lot of Middle Eastern filmmaking, and at its absolute worst, it's not this bad. This is singular," he told me. One of the editors of Goldberg's 2007 film "Anti-Semitism in the 21st Century" had a similar reaction on Facebook: " 'Horseman Without a Horse' blows this one out of the water."

He was referring to a 41-part miniseries that first aired on Egyptian state television - a kind of anti-Semitic flip side to "Innocence of Muslims," albeit with better acting and lighting. According to the Anti-Defamation League, the series was based on a hoax known as the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, which describes a Jewish conspiracy to rule the world. It includes such timeworn falsehoods as the notion that Jews kill Christian children and use their blood to make matzoh.

And it's one key to understanding how an obscure YouTube video could launch international riots.

At the time this column went to press, it still wasn't clear precisely who made or financed "Innocence of Muslims"; some of the actors have declared that they didn't even know the film was going to be about Islam. It also wasn't clear what role the trailer played in the deadly attacks on the US Consulate in Benghazi.

But as protests spread across the Middle East, it was clear that many were viewing the clip not as a laughable production by a fringe group of extremists, but as something sanctioned by the US

government. That's why the US Embassy in Egypt issued a statement - before anyone was killed - attempting to distance the US government from the actions of a few bigoted people in America.

How such a statement amounts to an "apology for America" is one of those enduring mysteries of Mitt Romney. Still, even Mitt seems to accept as self-evident, as most Americans do, that anyone can post a clip on YouTube, without government involvement or approval.

But free speech may be harder to understand on the Middle Eastern street, when some of the most virulent prejudice does, in fact, come sanctioned by the state. That's the context of "Horseman Without a Horse," which also aired on other networks throughout the Middle East - and was described, in the Egyptian press, as true.

As Goldberg points out, this is standard practice among oppressive regimes: diverting attention from the government's misdeeds by focusing on a scapegoat. One certain impediment to Middle Eastern peace is the official dissemination of anti-Semitic hatred. Children grow up with state-approved propaganda and little access to counterexamples. Bigotry becomes ingrained. This spring "Horseman" was scheduled to be rebroadcast on Egypt's privately owned Al-Tahrir TV.

Yes, there are some bigots in America, too. And, yes, there's a huge difference between producing an offensive movie and taking part in a violent mob. But if enough Middle Easterners equate the American fringe with the US government, we have a problem. Especially if people are already inclined to see our government as all-powerful.

As a reporter years ago, I covered the recovery of an EgyptAir jet that plummeted into Nantucket Sound. Many relatives of the victims, reared in Egypt, didn't understand why the mighty United States couldn't retrieve intact bodies from the bottom of the sea. "It's so easy for them - 270 feet? It's nothing for them," one victim's cousin said at the time. "All this technology? They can't find anything from the plane?"

The flip side of American strength is the notion that our government is in total control - that it can make anything happen, even a movie that's embarrassingly bad. Explaining our messy, complex culture of free speech will be an increasingly critical task. As Romney ought to know, that's what diplomacy is for. [\(top\)](#)

A Preventable Massacre

September 17, 2012

New York Times

By Seth Anziska

ON the night of Sept. 16, 1982, the Israeli military allowed a right-wing Lebanese militia to enter two Palestinian refugee camps in Beirut. In the ensuing three-day rampage, the militia, linked to the Maronite Christian Phalange Party, raped, killed and dismembered at least 800 civilians, while Israeli flares illuminated the camps' narrow and darkened alleyways. Nearly all of the dead were women, children and elderly men.

Thirty years later, the massacre at the Sabra and Shatila camps is remembered as a notorious chapter in modern Middle Eastern history, clouding the tortured relationships among Israel, the United States, Lebanon and the Palestinians. In 1983, an Israeli investigative commission concluded that Israeli leaders

were "indirectly responsible" for the killings and that Ariel Sharon, then the defense minister and later prime minister, bore "personal responsibility" for failing to prevent them.

While Israel's role in the massacre has been closely examined, America's actions have never been fully understood. This summer, at the Israel State Archives, I found recently declassified documents that chronicle key conversations between American and Israeli officials before and during the 1982 massacre. The verbatim transcripts reveal that the Israelis misled American diplomats about events in Beirut and bullied them into accepting the spurious claim that thousands of "terrorists" were in the camps. Most troubling, when the United States was in a position to exert strong diplomatic pressure on Israel that could have ended the atrocities, it failed to do so. As a result, Phalange militiamen were able to murder Palestinian civilians, whom America had pledged to protect just weeks earlier.

Israel's involvement in the Lebanese civil war began in June 1982, when it invaded its northern neighbor. Its goal was to root out the Palestine Liberation Organization, which had set up a state within a state, and to transform Lebanon into a Christian-ruled ally. The Israel Defense Forces soon besieged P.L.O.-controlled areas in the western part of Beirut. Intense Israeli bombardments led to heavy civilian casualties and tested even President Ronald Reagan, who initially backed Israel. In mid-August, as America was negotiating the P.L.O.'s withdrawal from Lebanon, Reagan told Prime Minister Menachem Begin that the bombings "had to stop or our entire future relationship was endangered," Reagan wrote in his diaries.

The United States agreed to deploy Marines to Lebanon as part of a multinational force to supervise the P.L.O.'s departure, and by Sept. 1, thousands of its fighters - including Yasir Arafat - had left Beirut for various Arab countries. After America negotiated a cease-fire that included written guarantees to protect the Palestinian civilians remaining in the camps from vengeful Lebanese Christians, the Marines departed Beirut, on Sept. 10.

Israel hoped that Lebanon's newly elected president, Bashir Gemayel, a Maronite, would support an Israeli-Christian alliance. But on Sept. 14, Gemayel was assassinated. Israel reacted by violating the cease-fire agreement. It quickly occupied West Beirut - ostensibly to prevent militia attacks against the Palestinian civilians. "The main order of the day is to keep the peace," Begin told the American envoy to the Middle East, Morris Draper, on Sept. 15. "Otherwise, there could be pogroms."

By Sept. 16, the I.D.F. was fully in control of West Beirut, including Sabra and Shatila. In Washington that same day, Under Secretary of State Lawrence S. Eagleburger told the Israeli ambassador, Moshe Arens, that "Israel's credibility has been severely damaged" and that "we appear to some to be the victim of deliberate deception by Israel." He demanded that Israel withdraw from West Beirut immediately.

In Tel Aviv, Mr. Draper and the American ambassador, Samuel W. Lewis, met with top Israeli officials. Contrary to Prime Minister Begin's earlier assurances, Defense Minister Sharon said the occupation of West Beirut was justified because there were "2,000 to 3,000 terrorists who remained there." Mr. Draper disputed this claim; having coordinated the August evacuation, he knew the number was minuscule. Mr. Draper said he was horrified to hear that Mr. Sharon was considering allowing the Phalange militia into West Beirut. Even the I.D.F. chief of staff, Rafael Eitan, acknowledged to the Americans that he feared "a relentless slaughter."

On the evening of Sept. 16, the Israeli cabinet met and was informed that Phalange fighters were entering the Palestinian camps. Deputy Prime Minister David Levy worried aloud: "I know what the

meaning of revenge is for them, what kind of slaughter. Then no one will believe we went in to create order there, and we will bear the blame." That evening, word of civilian deaths began to filter out to Israeli military officials, politicians and journalists.

At 12:30 p.m. on Sept. 17, Foreign Minister Yitzhak Shamir hosted a meeting with Mr. Draper, Mr. Sharon and several Israeli intelligence chiefs. Mr. Shamir, having reportedly heard of a "slaughter" in the camps that morning, did not mention it.

The transcript of the Sept. 17 meeting reveals that the Americans were browbeaten by Mr. Sharon's false insistence that "terrorists" needed "mopping up." It also shows how Israel's refusal to relinquish areas under its control, and its delays in coordinating with the Lebanese National Army, which the Americans wanted to step in, prolonged the slaughter.

Mr. Draper opened the meeting by demanding that the I.D.F. pull back right away. Mr. Sharon exploded, "I just don't understand, what are you looking for? Do you want the terrorists to stay? Are you afraid that somebody will think that you were in collusion with us? Deny it. We denied it." Mr. Draper, unmoved, kept pushing for definitive signs of a withdrawal. Mr. Sharon, who knew Phalange forces had already entered the camps, cynically told him, "Nothing will happen. Maybe some more terrorists will be killed. That will be to the benefit of all of us." Mr. Shamir and Mr. Sharon finally agreed to gradually withdraw once the Lebanese Army started entering the city - but they insisted on waiting 48 hours (until the end of Rosh Hashana, which started that evening).

Continuing his plea for some sign of an Israeli withdrawal, Mr. Draper warned that critics would say, "Sure, the I.D.F. is going to stay in West Beirut and they will let the Lebanese go and kill the Palestinians in the camps."

Mr. Sharon replied: "So, we'll kill them. They will not be left there. You are not going to save them. You are not going to save these groups of the international terrorism."

Mr. Draper responded: "We are not interested in saving any of these people." Mr. Sharon declared: "If you don't want the Lebanese to kill them, we will kill them."

Mr. Draper then caught himself, and backtracked. He reminded the Israelis that the United States had painstakingly facilitated the P.L.O. exit from Beirut "so it wouldn't be necessary for you to come in." He added, "You should have stayed out."

Mr. Sharon exploded again: "When it comes to our security, we have never asked. We will never ask. When it comes to existence and security, it is our own responsibility and we will never give it to anybody to decide for us." The meeting ended with an agreement to coordinate withdrawal plans after Rosh Hashana.

By allowing the argument to proceed on Mr. Sharon's terms, Mr. Draper effectively gave Israel cover to let the Phalange fighters remain in the camps. Fuller details of the massacre began to emerge on Sept. 18, when a young American diplomat, Ryan C. Crocker, visited the gruesome scene and reported back to Washington.

Years later, Mr. Draper called the massacre "obscene." And in an oral history recorded a few years before his death in 2005, he remembered telling Mr. Sharon: "You should be ashamed. The situation is

absolutely appalling. They're killing children! You have the field completely under your control and are therefore responsible for that area."

On Sept. 18, Reagan pronounced his "outrage and revulsion over the murders." He said the United States had opposed Israel's invasion of Beirut, both because "we believed it wrong in principle and for fear that it would provoke further fighting." Secretary of State George P. Shultz later admitted that "we are partially responsible" because "we took the Israelis and the Lebanese at their word." He summoned Ambassador Arens. "When you take military control over a city, you're responsible for what happens," he told him. "Now we have a massacre."

But the belated expression of shock and dismay belies the Americans' failed diplomatic effort during the massacre. The transcript of Mr. Draper's meeting with the Israelis demonstrates how the United States was unwittingly complicit in the tragedy of Sabra and Shatila.

Ambassador Lewis, now retired, told me that the massacre would have been hard to prevent "unless Reagan had picked up the phone and called Begin and read him the riot act even more clearly than he already did in August - that might have stopped it temporarily." But "Sharon would have found some other way" for the militiamen to take action, Mr. Lewis added.

Nicholas A. Veliotis, then the assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs, agreed. "Vintage Sharon," he said, after I read the transcript to him. "It is his way or the highway."

The Sabra and Shatila massacre severely undercut America's influence in the Middle East, and its moral authority plummeted. In the aftermath of the massacre, the United States felt compelled by "guilt" to redeploy the Marines, who ended up without a clear mission, in the midst of a brutal civil war.

On Oct. 23, 1983, the Marine barracks in Beirut were bombed and 241 Marines were killed. The attack led to open warfare with Syrian-backed forces and, soon after, the rapid withdrawal of the Marines to their ships. As Mr. Lewis told me, America left Lebanon "with our tail between our legs."

The archival record reveals the magnitude of a deception that undermined American efforts to avoid bloodshed. Working with only partial knowledge of the reality on the ground, the United States feebly yielded to false arguments and stalling tactics that allowed a massacre in progress to proceed.

The lesson of the Sabra and Shatila tragedy is clear. Sometimes close allies act contrary to American interests and values. Failing to exert American power to uphold those interests and values can have disastrous consequences: for our allies, for our moral standing and most important, for the innocent people who pay the highest price of all.

Seth Anziska is a doctoral candidate in international history at Columbia University.
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Syria: The Assad Family Business

September 16, 2012

Boston Globe

By Farah Stockman

IF YOU'VE BEEN watching Syria's descent into chaos over the past 16 months, you might have been plagued by a single question: Why doesn't Bashar Assad just get on a plane and leave?

Generals have defected. Diplomats have quit. Even Bashar's childhood best friend snuck out of the country. But Bashar himself shows no sign of giving up. In fact, no one in his extensive family tree appears to have jumped ship.

Look closely at Syria's economy and the reason becomes clear: From telecoms to banks to the oil industry, the Assad family owns Syria - and they intend to hang onto their investment. To Bashar, Syria is a family business. He doesn't just have himself to think about. He has his brother, his sister, his cousins, his uncles and aunts.

The story about how the Assads came to acquire a majority stake in every major private enterprise in the country is the story behind the Syrian uprising itself. Bashar Assad came to power promising economic reforms. But the reforms he enacted produced a rebellion.

Hafez Assad, Bashar's father, ran Syria the old Soviet way. Back in the 1970s, '80s, and '90s, there was only one bank - the Central Bank of Syria. There were only two television channels, both owned by the state. People weren't allowed to own a fax machine or buy a car on the open market. Luxury goods were taxed 200 percent.

Getting ahead in the old Syria meant working your way up the Ba'ath Party. As a kid, you went to holiday camps run by the Ba'athist youth organization. Then you joined the local branch of the party. If you were loyal enough, or had made the right friends within the security services, you might land a job at a state-run factory. Being a Ba'athist in the old Syria meant getting little perks: the breadmaker would deliver your bread faster than your neighbor's. Or you could slip in a luxury good at the airport, tax free.

The system was built so that the lowest-level government employee could get a little piece of the corruption, "in order to make him believe he is part of the game," Kamal al-Labwani, a Syria doctor once imprisoned by the regime, wrote me in an e-mail.

When Hafez died in 2000, his son Bashar - a British-educated eye doctor - promised change. The Soviet Union had already crumbled. Even Mother Russia was treating its oligarchs to Mercedes and perfume.

So Bashar began to allow some private companies and schools. The Internet came. So did duty-free stores.

"There was an explosion of high-end restaurants and cafes," said Steven Heydemann, a Syria specialist at the US Institute of Peace. "People could live quite well if they had money."

The problem was that nobody did have money, except for Bashar's relatives and friends. They were the only ones who got licenses to buy into the burgeoning empire of private enterprise. Like his father, Bashar saw Syria as a personal possession. But instead of contenting himself with dreary, Soviet parastatals, Bashar wanted shiny, new private enterprises.

It started with cellphones. In 1998, the regime approached Farid Ghadry, a Syrian-American businessman in Maryland, to ask him to bid on the first private telecom license.

"Knowing the system, I knew I had zero chance of getting it," recalled Ghadry, who has since started an opposition party.

Sure enough, in 2000, the Ba'ath party granted a cell monopoly to Bashar's mother, Anisa Makhoulf. Over time, it went to his cousin, Rami Makhoulf, who became the owner of Syriatel, the country's largest telecom.

The monopoly sparked outrage. Riad Seif, a businessman and member of parliament, called it a "big scandal." (The regime fined him \$2 million and forced his factory into bankruptcy.)

But cellphones were just the beginning. Private newspapers, banks, and universities followed. Whatever the venture, Rami Makhoulf seemed to have a stake in it.

"There is saying in Syria: If you are a businessman, you have to be from the Makhoulf family, or you are against the law," said Radwan Ziadeh, director of the Syrian Center for Political and Strategic Studies in Washington.

A US Treasury official said that Rami Makhoulf is widely considered a "front man" for Bashar Assad - the caretaker for the family fortune.

"Rami Makhoulf is one of the most hated people in Syria," the Treasury official said, speaking on the condition of anonymity. "He would take over businesses as he saw fit, or force owners to give him the majority share."

The corruption was so flagrant that President George W. Bush issued an executive order sanctioning Rami Makhoulf in 2008 as part of a widely successful broader policy of going after corrupt regimes.

But the Assads continued to grow their wealth by pulling merchant families in Aleppo and Damascus into their ventures. In 2007, two holding companies were set up - al-Cham and Al-Sourya - comprised of more than 70 favored businessmen.

Al-Cham got a 40-year license to build a mall, an airport, and railway service, as well as a stake in the country's first private power plant. Al-Sourya scored a Ministry of Tourism contract to operate a bus station in downtown Damascus.

These holding companies were vital tools for the regime, according to Caroline Donati, a Syria specialist who details their activities in a chapter of a forthcoming book, "Middle East Authoritarianism," by Heydemann and Reinoud Leenders.

The new companies procured much-needed foreign investment and political support, she wrote. Bashar also tied the new business class to the fortunes of the regime so they could never become dissenters. Some families didn't want to invest with the regime, but were forced to do so anyway.

Disentangling the regime from its business partners is now a key goal of US sanctions. If Syria's tight clique of entrepreneurs could be separated from the Assad family fortune, US officials reason, then maybe support for Bashar will evaporate.

US officials have slapped sanctions on many of the regime's business partners.

"The idea of targeting them was to tell them, 'You have a choice. You are either in bed with the Assad regime, isolated from the rest of the world, or you save yourself,' " said a US Treasury official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity. She said it is working: "We have definitely seen some business elite shy away from the regime. Some of the clique moved their assets abroad, and prepared exit plans."

But Bashar's crony capitalism started to backfire even before US sanctions, collapsing under the sheer weight and ostentatiousness of the wealth itself.

Low-level Ba'ath party hacks - who used to have the good life because they got bread quicker than everybody else - started to realize the new system left them out.

The uprising began last year in the city of Deraa, a former Ba'ath party stronghold.

Some say the popular anger started when Rami Makhlouf tried to force people there to sell him a factory that makes Turkish Delight sweets. Others say the problem started when his company, Syriatel, tried to take over part of a school.

However it started, we do know this: Teens wrote anti-government graffiti and were arrested and tortured. The city rose up in protest. As protests mounted, Rami Makhlouf announced that he was offering shares of Syriatel to the poor, and focusing on charity work.

But it was too late. Demonstrations spread. Rioters burned Syriatel stores.

"The [low-level Ba'ath party] guy who was breaking the bread line never got anything out of privatization," Ghadry said. "He saw the riches, the wealth, the cars. Worse than that, he saw pictures on Facebook of Assad and his wife sporting \$4,000 shoes and handbags that cost as much as his apartment. That put the whole thing into perspective."

Bashar brought an new era of money and glamour to Syria, but also the impossibility for an ordinary person to achieve it. Is it any wonder that the ordinary people rose up?

And is it any wonder that the Assads can't break free from the financial web they created? Bashar's whole family is implicated in the regime's crimes now, Heydemann said: "There is no exit strategy for them."

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In An Islamist Egypt, Can Diversity Survive?

September 16, 2012

[Los Angeles Times](#)

By Michael Wahid Hanna And Elijah Zarwan

Egypt is now set to enter arguably its first period of Islamist rule. How long that period lasts and what form it takes is far from determined, a situation highlighted by the protests and violence in Cairo last week. If all goes according to plan - a big "if" in Egypt - Egyptians who believe in a democratic, civil state theoretically have the remainder of President Mohamed Morsi's term of office to get their collective act together.

But practically speaking, the short-term political calendar will not allow them such a lengthy reprieve, with the likelihood of new parliamentary elections in the coming months and the current debate over a new constitution. Although broad-based national political action requires patient grass-roots organizational efforts that will take years, the current phase of the country's transition will go a long way toward fashioning a new legal and political order.

If non-Islamists and liberals hope to preserve any chance of having a role in shaping the nation's future, a constructive, engaged and coordinated opposition will have to emerge. Those who truly believe in a civil, democratic state must overcome two bad habits: sniping from the sidelines, as they did under Hosni Mubarak, and splitting into factions, as they have since time immemorial.

Following the heady days of Egypt's uprising, the story of the country's transition has largely been dictated by the struggle for power between the Muslim Brotherhood and its military interlocutors. To the extent these two traditional antagonists have been able to reach stable accommodations and pacts, they have largely held sway.

We may never know what happened in the corridors of power in the days leading up to Morsi's surprise military shake-up in August. However, whether through acquiescence or outright collaboration, Morsi appears to have made his peace with enough of the remaining senior leadership now that the obstinate, old military brass has been swept aside. The exact parameters of that accommodation between civilian and military leaders will evolve over time, and the armed forces will undoubtedly remain an important center of authority.

But now that Morsi has apparently settled the question of whether he or the generals run domestic affairs, Egypt's non-Islamists and liberals can no longer hide behind the military. Their strategy of making Faustian bargains with the generals, of sacrificing "some" democracy in exchange for a "civil" (non-religious) state, has been shown to be as ineffective as it was morally bankrupt.

Preaching to Muslim Brotherhood politicians that they should be less Islamist or less politically self-serving has proved to be naïve and ineffectual. The conduct of these politicians since the fall of Mubarak makes it clear that they seek to consolidate power and to implement their agenda - an Islamist agenda.

Furthermore, with significant pressure from more rigid Salafist elements to his right, as was vividly on display in aspects of last week's demonstrations at the U.S. Embassy in Cairo, Morsi will face stiff challenges if he does shift course and seek a more inclusive approach to governance.

In the meantime, Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood are carving out control of as much of the state as they can. No doubt they see these steps as necessary for implementing their plans for reform and delivering on their promises of a better life for Egyptians. Be that as it may, there is currently no credible institutional check on their power to make domestic policy.

It would be foolhardy for Egyptian opposition leaders, however, to again place their faith in the ability of the military to serve as a check on the ambitions of the Muslim Brotherhood. Such authority, to the extent that it might exist, is inherently undemocratic and lacks transparency. Similarly, the opposition should take no great comfort in the ability of bottom-up pressure generated by mass mobilization and public protest to serve as a barrier to the monopolization of power and the abuse of authority. In a weary society craving a modicum of stability, such public shows of force may never again be re-created.

But despite its dominant position in Egyptian politics today, the electoral strength of the Muslim Brotherhood should not be taken as a given. The demands of leadership, the magnitude of Egypt's challenges and the high expectations of the populace have already begun to erode its widespread popularity. The fluidity of political dynamics and the shallowness of party allegiances were clearly on display in the first round of the presidential elections, when Morsi won only a quarter of the vote.

While not losing sight of longer-term efforts to expand their popular appeal and to establish nationwide political organizations, the Egyptian opposition must take immediate steps to counteract the president's de facto monopoly on formal political power. Liberals must cohere around a core set of constitutional demands: equal rights for all citizens, religious freedom, separation of powers, rule of law and issues of due process.

At this sensitive moment in Egypt's history, consensus-driven decisions taken by a broadly inclusive coalition stand the best chance of enduring and ensuring the political stability Egypt needs to recover economically.

Toward that end, Morsi would do well to remember his promises to be "a president for all Egyptians," mindful of the fact that a majority of those who voted for him in the runoffs preferred someone else in the first round. His political rivals would do well to cooperate with him and the Brotherhood to meet the serious practical challenges Egypt faces, to present themselves as credible alternatives rather than only as armchair critics, and to keep the agenda focused on solving the country's problems. To the extent opportunities arise, Morsi's opponents should meet him halfway, cooperating on those issues on which they can agree while articulating a positive alternative on those issues where they do not.

Michael Wahid Hanna is a fellow at the Century Foundation. Elijah Zarwan is a fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations.
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Colombia Gambles on Talks With the FARC

September 17, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By MARY ANASTASIA O'GRADY

No one I know of has ever calculated the net present value of future cash flows from the drug-trafficking activities of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). It would be a good number to have as Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos embarks on the fourth attempt in 30-some years to reach a peace accord with the legendary terrorists.

Getting the FARC to renounce organized crime will be crucial to a successful outcome. That implies a buyout.

The news that the Santos administration has been engaged for more than a year in secret talks with the FARC was leaked to the press on Aug. 27. That prompted the release of a three-page document, signed Aug. 26 in Havana, spelling out the issues the two sides have agreed will be on the table when they meet in Oslo in October. These include political participation, an end to conflict and solving the problem of drug trafficking. Cuba and Norway are to provide the venues for the talks, with Venezuela and Chile as observers.

The national reaction to Mr. Santos's efforts to reach a settlement with the FARC has run the gamut from hope and enthusiasm to suspicion and downright rejection. A recent poll by Ipsos Napoleón Franco found that 77% of Colombians approve of the president's decision to open talks.

But key opinion makers, including former President Alvaro Uribe, are not so eager to proceed. Many ask why the government should negotiate with Marxist criminals who have not put down their weapons, still hold kidnap victims and continue to murder civilians. To further illustrate its lack of good faith, the FARC recently released a rap video that appears to taunt Mr. Santos. It asserts that he was forced to ask for the negotiation because he could not prevail militarily.

All of this demonstrates the magnitude of risk that the Colombian president is taking. FARC land mines are everywhere.

That a majority of Colombians are open to the outreach for peace isn't surprising. The nation is weary of more than five decades of guerrilla violence, and Mr. Santos earned its trust as Mr. Uribe's defense minister from 2006 to 2009. During his tenure he proved to be a brilliant military strategist capable of hitting the enemy decisively. His government says that it has eliminated the FARC's top two leaders and killed or captured 18 other commanders.

It is therefore hard to buy into charges that the president has gone soft on terror. Mr. Santos knows better than anyone that if he does not secure a full FARC capitulation, it will use "peace" to ratchet up war. When Mr. Uribe's predecessor negotiated with the rebels, they used a government-sanctioned safe haven to stockpile weapons, hold kidnap victims and plot attacks.

In a telephone interview last week from Bogotá, the president told me that the rebels approached him about talking, and he felt a responsibility to pursue the possibility of peace because even in its weakened state the FARC will menace the population for years to come.

Mr. Santos said he made clear from the start that there would be no safe haven and no bilateral cease-fire. He also said that any negotiation would last months, not years and that private property, military operations and state policies, like taxes, are nonnegotiable. His negotiating team of five includes a former police chief, a former armed-forces commander, and the president of a chamber of commerce, all pillars of the democratic community.

Considering all this, the process sounds safe enough. Yet there are also many reasons to be wary, especially with the involvement, however passive, of the Cuban military dictatorship.

One legitimate concern for those who know the FARC is the Santos-sponsored "law for restitution of land" passed earlier this year. It opens the door to lawsuits by individuals who claim that they lost property in the conflict at gunpoint and puts the burden of proof of how land was acquired on the current owner. There is also a new promise to compensate victims of human-rights violations perpetrated by parties other than the state. State crimes were already covered.

Both appear to have been done to smooth the negotiations by ensuring the FARC and its operatives, who are sworn enemies of many large landholders and have long coveted their property, that they can make their way into the courts.

But Colombia's justice system is unreliable, and left-wing nongovernmental organizations have repeatedly demonstrated their skill in dredging up bribed or intimidated witnesses to win cases. What good are military victories on the battlefield if the terrorists are able to use the legal system to seize property, force huge government payouts, and destroy the lives and livelihoods of the armed forces?

Talking to the FARC may well turn out to be a triumph of hope over experience. But given the long history of bloodshed, the FARC offer was one Mr. Santos could hardly refuse, even if it only proves that, short of a FARC surrender, there is not much a modern liberal democracy has to talk about with the drug-running Marxists.

(top)

Japan's Zero-Nuclear Dream

September 17, 2012

Washington Post

IT'S EASY to understand the Japanese dream of a nuclear-free future. During last year's meltdown at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear complex, tens of millions of residents on Japan's densely populated islands feared emergency evacuation and contamination of scarce land. Yet the government's new goal to phase out nuclear power over the next few decades would have serious costs, financial and to the climate.

Before the accident, Japan derived a third of its electricity from nuclear power. Now, most of the country's 50 nuclear reactors sit idle. The results have been power shortages and skyrocketing imports of oil and natural gas. Not only have these taken a toll on Japanese business, harmed the nation's quality of life and turned the country's trade surplus into a deficit, they portend ominously for Japan's carbon dioxide emissions. Nuclear power plants produce almost none.

Taking up an argument from anti-nuclear activists, the Japanese government claims that it will address these issues by investing heavily in renewable sources of electricity, such as solar, geothermal and wind power. But it admits that it has no details about the feasibility and cost of its goal to triple the amount of electricity the country gets from renewables, nor does it have a plan to limit the impact on emissions of burning lots more fossil fuels as renewables ramp up.

Fighting climate change is hard enough without wasting resources, and Japan's nuclear infrastructure and know-how can be valuable assets in that battle, as long as the country continues to retrofit its safety regime. A government report this year calculated that Japan might still be able to cut its carbon emissions by 25 percent of 1990 levels by 2030 without nuclear - though the government is now committing only to 20 percent. But that same report found that the country could cut those emissions by 33 percent if it got a fifth of its electricity from nuclear, and 39 percent if it derived a third of its load from nuclear. And then there is the importance of ensuring access to reliable, always-on power, of the sort nuclear used to provide the country.

The government has built some - though not enough - wiggle room into its zero-nuclear plan. It will restart reactors that its new nuclear watchdog certifies as safe; otherwise, it will seek to shut only those plants that are more than 40 years old. Even then, old reactors could obtain 20-year extensions to their service lives. The government also said that its plan could be revised, which could leave more room for building reactors in the future, particularly if its big bet on renewables doesn't work out as well as some environmentalists predict.

Some observers say that the government's new tack is merely political; the ruling Democratic Party of Japan is attempting to forestall large losses in elections to be held sometime in the next few months, so it is talking tough on nuclear. This suggests that the government might not move away from reactors with the energy its zero-nuclear rhetoric implies. If that's so, the Japanese public would have reason to feel manipulated - but it would also benefit from a more flexible approach to powering the world's third-largest economy.

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RELEASED IN FULL**DAILY PRESS CLIPS FOR
THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 2012****USUN IN THE NEWS****UN Ambassador Susan Rice: U.S. Has Lost 'Four Brave Individuals'**

September 12, 2012

TPM

DAVID TAINTOR 10:36 AM EDT

Susan Rice, the United States' permanent representative to the United Nations, released the following statement on the attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi; ([link](#))

U.N. Condemns Embassy Attacks in Libya, Egypt

September 13, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By JOE LAURIA

UNITED NATIONS—The Security Council on Wednesday unanimously condemned the attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi that killed four diplomats and killed or wounded 10 Libyans as "unjustifiable regardless of motivation" and called for the perpetrators to be brought to justice. ([link](#))

Another bad UN egg

September 13, 2012

New York Daily News

BY HILLEL C. NEUER / NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

GENEVA - Promoters of the UN's hypocrisy-ridden Human Rights Council say it's been reformed. Yet the 47-nation body stooped to a new low today by installing a top official whose life's work — authoring books on World War II — make Germans the victims and the Allies the war criminals. ([link](#))

UNITED NATIONS**At U.N., death of Amb. Stevens gets personal**

September 12, 2012

Foreign Policy

By Colum Lynch

The United Nations marked the death of U.S. Ambassador John Stevens, Sean Smith, and two other American nationals in Benghazi, Libya, with the customary expressions of condolence invoked when a U.N. member state endures a national tragedy. ([link](#))

United Nations condemns attack on U.S. diplomats in Libya

September 12, 2012

Reuters

By Michelle Nichols

UNITED NATIONS - The United Nations strongly condemned on Wednesday an assault that killed the U.S. ambassador to Libya and three embassy staff and said the "horrific and tragic attack" further spotlighted the security challenges facing Libyan authorities. ([link](#))

U.N. Steps Up Pressure on Iran Nuclear Program

September 12, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By DAVID CRAWFORD

REVIEW AUTHORITY: Archie Bolster, Senior Reviewer

The U.S. and several of its allies aim to step up pressure on Iran with a proposal that would empower the United Nations nuclear watchdog to order snap inspections of Iranian nuclear facilities. ([link](#))

TOP STORIES

Turmoil Spreads to U.S. Embassy in Yemen

September 13, 2012

New York Times

By NASSER ARRABYEE and ALAN COWELL

SANA, Yemen — Turmoil in the Arab world linked to a contentious video denigrating the Prophet Muhammad spread on Thursday to Yemen, where hundreds of protesters stormed the United States Embassy, two days after assailants killed the American ambassador in Libya and crowds tried to overrun the embassy compound in Cairo. ([link](#))

Libya Attack Brings Challenges for U.S.

September 13, 2012

New York Times

By DAVID D. KIRKPATRICK and STEVEN LEE MYERS

CAIRO — Islamist militants armed with anti-aircraft weapons and rocket-propelled grenades stormed a lightly defended United States diplomatic mission in Benghazi, Libya, late Tuesday, killing the American ambassador and three members of his staff and raising questions about the radicalization of countries swept up in the Arab Spring. ([link](#))

Libya Attack Sparks Crisis

September 13, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By MARGARET COKER, ADAM ENTOUS and JULIAN E. BARNES

The killing of the U.S. ambassador to Libya and three other Americans, in one of the most brazen attacks on a U.S. diplomatic compound in a generation, sparked a security crisis in the North African country, elevated tensions across the Middle East and raised concerns about how well the U.S. can protect its diplomats abroad. ([link](#))

Libya Consulate Attack Came After Militants Joined Protesters, Say Witnesses, Officials

September 13, 2012

Washington Post

By Greg Miller and Michael Birnbaum

At least an hour before the assault began, a stream of cars was seen moving toward the U.S. Consulate in the eastern Libyan city of Benghazi. By late Tuesday evening, as many as 50 heavily armed militants had gathered outside its high walls. ([link](#))

Libya Attack Provokes Washington Crisis

September 12, 2012

New York Times

By Peter Baker, David D. Kirkpatrick and Alan Cowell

WASHINGTON - The violent deaths of four American diplomats in Libya during a heavily armed and possibly planned assault on a flimsily protected consulate facility on the Sept. 11 anniversary provoked a crisis in Washington on Wednesday, confronting the Obama administration with new challenges in the volatile Middle East less than two months before the presidential election. ([link](#))

Libya Consulate Attack Represents Challenge For Obama

September 13, 2012

Washington Post

By Karen Deyoung And Scott Wilson

What President Obama on Wednesday called the "outrageous and shocking" attack that killed the U.S. ambassador to Libya left his administration with a diplomatic crisis that threatened to undermine its long-term strategy in the Arab world. ([link](#))

Origins Of Provocative Video Are Shrouded

September 12, 2012

New York Times

By David D. Kirkpatrick

The amateurish video at the center of the violence in Libya and in Egypt opens with scenes of Egyptian security forces standing idle as Muslims pillage and burn the homes of Egyptian Christians. Then it cuts to cartoonish scenes depicting the Prophet Muhammad as a child of uncertain parentage, a buffoon, a womanizer, a homosexual, a child molester and a greedy, bloodthirsty thug. ([link](#))

U.S. Policy in Mideast Challenged by Assaults

September 13, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By JAY SOLOMON

WASHINGTON—President Barack Obama has supported the democratically elected governments that have emerged in the Mideast over the past 18 months, despite concerns about the influence of Islamists that historically opposed the U.S. ([link](#))

AFRICA

Somalia

Somalia's New President Survives Suicide Bombings

September 13, 2012

New York Times

By Mohammed Ibrahim

MOGADISHU, Somalia - Three suicide bombers attacked the temporary residence of the new president of Somalia as he was giving a news conference on Wednesday, killing an African Union soldier but failing to assassinate any political leaders, witnesses and officials said. ([link](#))

South Africa

South African Mining Strikes Spread

September 13, 2012

Associated Press

By Andrew Meldrum And Michelle Faul

MARIKANA, South Africa (AP) - Hundreds of striking miners forced the closure Wednesday of four mines of Anglo American Platinum, the world's largest producer, as labor unrest spread in South Africa's biggest industry. ([link](#))

ASIA

China

Xi Jinping Mystery Echoes Back To China's History

September 12, 2012

Washington Post

By Kathrin Hille And Jamil Anderlini

When Lin Biao, China's then heir apparent, died in an air crash more than 40 years ago, it took the Communist Party two months to inform the public. ([link](#))

North / South Korea**North Korea Rejects Offer Of Aid From South Korea**

September 13, 2012

New York Times

By Choe Sang-hun

SEOUL - North Korea on Wednesday rejected a South Korean offer to send it humanitarian aid, scuttling earlier hopes of easing tensions between the two Koreas. ([link](#))

NEA**Struggle for Ideological Upper Hand in Muslim World Seen as Factor in Attacks**

September 12, 2012

New York Times

By ROBERT F. WORTH

DOHA, Qatar — The Arab uprisings have appeared to offer a new bridge in the anguished relationship between the United States and the Muslim world, perhaps most of all in Libya, where American firepower helped oust Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi and earned the United States deep popular gratitude. ([link](#))

Security Forces Wary of Hard-Line Islamists

September 13, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By MATT BRADLEY IN CAIRO and MARGARET COKER

The attacks on U.S. diplomatic missions in Libya and Egypt exposed how rising hard-line Islamist movements have cowed and frustrated security forces in the nascent democracies of the so-called Arab Spring. ([link](#))

Algeria**US embassies in Algeria, Tunisia warn of protests**

September 12, 2012

Associated Press

ALGIERS, Algeria — The American embassies in Algeria and Tunisia warned of more protests Wednesday, following attacks by protesters in neighboring Libya in which the U.S. ambassador and three embassy staff were killed. ([link](#))

Egypt**Spotlight Is on Libya, but Bigger Challenge for White House May Lie in Egypt**

September 12, 2012

New York Times

By HELENE COOPER and MARK LANDLER

WASHINGTON — For all the harrowing images of the deadly attack on the American mission in Benghazi, the Obama administration is grappling with the possibility that its far bigger long-term problem lies in Egypt, not Libya. ([link](#))

Inside The Public Relations Disaster At The Cairo Embassy

September 13, 2012

Foreign Policy Magazine

By Josh Rogin

One staffer at the U.S. Embassy in Cairo was responsible for the statement and tweets Tuesday that have become grist for the presidential campaign, and that staffer ignored explicit State Department instructions not to issue the statement, one U.S. official close to the issue told The Cable. ([link](#))

Iran

U.S. Group Issues Warning on Iran Attack

September 13, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By JULIAN E. BARNES

WASHINGTON—A bipartisan group of ambassadors, retired generals and foreign policy experts is warning against a U.S. or Israeli attack on Iran's nuclear facilities without a more thorough public discussion to weigh the costs and benefits. ([link](#))

U.S. lawmakers urge White House to seek more Iran oil cuts

September 12, 2012

Reuters

WASHINGTON - Two senators asked the Obama administration on Wednesday to push countries to make more cuts in Iranian oil purchases before they receive exemptions from U.S. penalties for doing business with the OPEC nation. ([link](#))

Insight: Iran parks oil off Malaysia to dodge Western sanctions

September 13, 2012

Reuters

By Luke Pachymuthu and Randy Fabi

LABUAN, Malaysia/SINGAPORE - Iran is using a little-known port off the East Malaysia coast to hide millions of barrels of oil from Western sanctions, according to shipping data, industry sources and officials. ([link](#))

Russia, China agree to resolution criticizing Iran

September 13, 2012

Washington Times

VIENNA, Austria — The U.S. and its Western allies have persuaded Russia and China to support a resolution critical of Iran's nuclear defiance in the intention of showing Israel that diplomacy is an alternative to military force in pressuring Tehran, diplomats said Wednesday. ([link](#))

Israel

Netanyahu's Comments Cause Stir In Israel

September 12, 2012

New York Times

By Isabel Kershner

JERUSALEM - In Israel, where arguments are rife, there are at least two issues of national consensus: that the special relationship with the United States must be preserved at all costs, and that the looming threat of a nuclear Iran must be dealt with. ([link](#))

Libya

U.S. Officials: Attack On Consulate In Libya May Have Been Planned

September 12, 2012

Washington Post

By Karen Deyoung, Michael Birnbaum And William Branigin

U.S. officials and Middle East analysts said Wednesday that an attack that killed four Americans at a U.S. Consulate in eastern Libya may have been planned by extremists and inspired by al-Qaeda. ([link](#))

Islamists Targeted U.S. Diplomats With Gunfire, RPGs In Planned Assault, Witness Says

September 13, 2012

McClatchy

By Nancy A. Youssef, Suliman Ali Zway And Jonathan S. Landay

The U.S. ambassador to Libya and three other American officials died in a coordinated assault on the U.S. consulate by gunmen firing assault rifles and rocket-propelled grenades and carrying the black flag of an Islamic extremist group, the property's landlord said Wednesday. ([link](#))

Libyan Deputy Ambassador Blames 'extremist Group' For Deadly Attack On US Consulate

September 13, 2012

Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS - Libya's deputy U.N. ambassador on Wednesday blamed "an extremist group" for the attack on the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi that killed U.S. Ambassador Chris Stevens, whom he called "one of the greatest friends of Libya." ([link](#))

U.S., Libya to probe violence after slaying of ambassador

September 12, 2012

Washington Times

By Guy Taylor

U.S. and Libyan officials launched investigations Wednesday into a deadly nighttime attack on the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi, trying to determine whether it was a premeditated assault by Muslim militants or a mob enraged by a U.S.-produced film that derides Islam's Prophet Muhammad. ([link](#))

US Officials Say 2 Warships Moving Toward Libya

September 13, 2012

Associated Press

By Lolita C. Baldor

WASHINGTON - The Pentagon ordered two warships to the Libyan coast in the aftermath of the attack in Benghazi that killed the U.S. ambassador and three others, U.S. officials said Wednesday. ([link](#))

Libya's Parliament Elects New Prime Minister

September 13, 2012

Associated Press

By Esam Mohamed

TRIPOLI, Libya - Libya's parliament elected Wednesday a leading member in the country's oldest opposition movement to be its new prime minister. ([link](#))

Palestinian Territories

Gazans protest anti-Islam movie

September 12, 2012

Associated Press

By ESAM MOHAMED and MAGGIE MICHAEL

TRIPOLI, Libya — Dozens of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip have burned American flags and chanted "Death to America," protesting an American film that mocks the Muslim Prophet Muhammad. ([link](#))

Syria**Activists: Syrian Hospitals Targeted**

September 13, 2012

USA Today

By Tom A. Peter

ALEPPO, Syria - The Syrian military is bombing hospitals in its weeks-long campaign to crush a rebellion in this commercial center, forcing doctors to treat patients in unsuitable facilities in what human rights groups say is a war crime. ([link](#))

Syrians Join Relief Efforts For Countrymen In Jordan

September 13, 2012

New York Times

By Aida Alami

AMMAN, Jordan - During one of her visits to the Zaatari refugee camp in northern Jordan, a young pharmacist from the Syrian city of Homs tried to inspire distraught and disenchanted refugees. ([link](#))

SCA**Afghanistan****Karzai, Muslim Brotherhood Condemn Anti-Islam Movie**

September 13, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By NATHAN HODGE and HABIB KHAN TOTAKHIL in Kabul and MATT BRADLEY in Cairo

Afghan President Hamid Karzai and Egypt's ruling Muslim Brotherhood Wednesday angrily denounced a U.S.-produced film harshly critical of the Prophet Muhammad, raising fears that a new wave of violent protests will follow Tuesday's attacks on U.S. diplomatic installations in Cairo and Benghazi, Libya. ([link](#))

Pakistan**71-year-old American Aid Worker Kidnapped In Pakistan Appeals To Israel In New Al-Qaida Video**

September 13, 2012

Associated Press

ISLAMABAD - A 71-year-old American aid worker kidnapped over a year ago in Pakistan asked Israel's prime minister for help in meeting al-Qaida's demands so that he could be freed, in a new video released by the group Wednesday. ([link](#))

WHA/EUR**Cuba****Cuba Says Its Ready To Negotiate Gross Fate**

September 12, 2012

Associated Press

By Paul Haven

HAVANA - A senior Cuban diplomat said Wednesday her country is prepared to negotiate a solution in the case of a jailed American contractor, but is awaiting a U.S. response. ([link](#))

Germany

German Court Rules In Favor Of Bailout Fund, With Conditions

September 12, 2012

Washington Post

By Anthony Faiola

BERLIN – The European Union breathed a huge sigh of relief Wednesday after a German court ruled Berlin's approval of taxpayers' cash to aid its deeply indebted neighbors was not unconstitutional, paving the way for a rescue fund considered vital to containing the region's debt crisis to come into existence. ([link](#))

EDITORIAL / OPINION

Murder In Benghazi

September 13, 2012

New York Times

Libya and its pro-democracy revolution had no better friend than J. Christopher Stevens, the United States ambassador who was killed along with three other Americans in Tuesday's attack on the consulate in Benghazi. It was an outrageous act that deserved the strongest condemnation. ([link](#))

The New World Disorder

September 13, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By their nature, foreign policy problems often have a long fuse. The successes of one Administration (Truman, Reagan) sometimes don't pay off for years (Bush 41), while dangers can simmer until they suddenly explode (al Qaeda). The Obama Presidency has been an era of slowly building tension and disorder that seems likely to flare into larger troubles and perhaps even military conflict no matter who wins in November. ([link](#))

EDITORIAL: The World Obama Created

September 13, 2012

Washington Times

The tragic events that took place in Libya and Egypt this week were the inevitable consequences of weak U.S. leadership. America and the world cannot afford four more such years. ([link](#))

Beyond Religion In The Middle East

September 13, 2012

Los Angeles Times

By Mimi Hanaoka

The chaotic violence that killed U.S. Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens and three American staffers in Libya, and that resulted in a mob storming the U.S. Embassy in Cairo, has been garbed in religious language and references. However, the religious rhetoric from all corners distracts from the real issues: serious domestic political fragmentation in Libya and Egypt in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, and America's place in the region. ([link](#))

Treacherous Currents In The Mideast

September 13, 2012

Miami Herald

The outrageous and indefensible attack against the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi, Libya, that killed U.S. Ambassador Chris Stevens and three other American diplomats on Wednesday sends a powerful message about the treacherous currents blocking peaceful change in the Middle East. ([link](#))

From Prussia With Love

September 13, 2012

New York Times

By Jacob Heilbrunn

WITH its decision yesterday to allow Germany to contribute to European bailout efforts, the country's Federal Constitutional Court not only handed Chancellor Angela Merkel a big political victory - it also provided further confirmation that this economic powerhouse, a cautious and self-effacing country during the cold war, is assuming a dominant role in a new Europe. And it is doing so in the 300th anniversary year of the birth of Frederick the Great, the Prussian ruler who almost single-handedly forged a powerful new European kingdom. ([link](#))

USUN IN THE NEWS

UN Ambassador Susan Rice: U.S. Has Lost 'Four Brave Individuals'

September 12, 2012

TPM

DAVID TAINTOR 10:36 AM EDT

Susan Rice, the United States' permanent representative to the United Nations, released the following statement on the attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi;

I am profoundly saddened by the tragic and senseless deaths of four Americans in Benghazi, Libya, including Ambassador Chris Stevens and Foreign Service Information Management Officer Sean Smith. In their tireless service and courage, they represented the very best of America. My thoughts and prayers are with their families and friends and all whose lives were enriched and touched by these exceptional individuals.

The United States has lost four brave individuals who, in President Obama's words, exemplified America's commitment to freedom, justice and international partnership. In Ambassador Stevens, the Libyan people also lost a close friend—one who stood by them in their revolution and its aftermath, one who understood and shared in their aspirations, their culture and their traditions. I had the privilege of working closely with Ambassador Stevens. He was passionate about his work to bring about a better future in Libya, and he cared deeply for the Libyan people. He and the rest of his team risked their lives daily to support the Libyan people's democratic aspirations, including during the height of the revolution, when he represented the United States in Benghazi. Our hearts are heavy today.

I join President Obama and Secretary Clinton in condemning in the strongest terms this vicious and violent attack. On this day of profound grief, we honor, as ever, the service and sacrifice of our American diplomatic personnel around the world.

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U.N. Condemns Embassy Attacks in Libya, Egypt

September 13, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By JOE LAURIA

UNITED NATIONS—The Security Council on Wednesday unanimously condemned the attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi that killed four diplomats and killed or wounded 10 Libyans as "unjustifiable regardless of motivation" and called for the perpetrators to be brought to justice.

The council also condemned "in the strongest terms" the attack on the U.S. embassy in Cairo on Tuesday in which an angry mob entered the compound to pull down a U.S. flag.

German ambassador Peter Wittig, this month's council president, told reporters the 15-member body didn't discuss details of the Libya incident, in response to a question on whether the assaults were a planned attack linked to the Sept. 11 anniversary.

Chinese Ambassador Li Baodong told reporters that the circumstances surrounding the Libya attack are "complicated."

Mr. Wittig said it wasn't clear whether the video at the center of the Cairo attack played a role in the Benghazi killings.

But U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said in a statement condemning the attack that the U.N. "rejects defamation of religion in all forms. At the same time, nothing justifies the brutal violence which occurred in Benghazi yesterday."

The council statement called on Libyan authorities to protect diplomatic premises "against any intrusion or damage, and to prevent any disturbance of the peace of these missions or...impairment of their dignity" and "to prevent any attack on diplomatic agents and consular officers."

Ibrahim Dabashi, Libya's deputy U.N. ambassador, said, "We have to state the reality that the authority of the government is still not covering the whole territory of Libya." He said, "There are some groups...that are outlaw and the government cannot at this moment contain all of them."

He said the government was investigating and he vowed to bring the attackers to justice.

"We cannot understand how this group...could have eliminated" Mr. Stevens who "was with us during our fight against the dictator Moammar Gadhafi," Mr. Dabashi added. "He was very brave to stay on the ground to see what was happening to the Libyan people."

Mr. Stevens's death is a "big loss for the Libyan people," Mr. Dabashi said. He also said 10 Libyan security forces were either killed or wounded in the attack.

"I had the privilege of working closely with Ambassador Stevens," said U.S. Ambassador Susan Rice in condemning the killings. "He was passionate about his work to bring about a better future in Libya, and he cared deeply for the Libyan people."

In Paris, President François Hollande said he "utterly condemns" the attack. "France calls on the Libyan authorities to shed full light on these heinous and intolerable crimes, identify the perpetrators and bring them to justice."

British Foreign Secretary William Hague condemned "the brutal and senseless attack," adding, "It is the sort of attack that won't achieve anything. These diplomats are serving not only their own country, the United States, but the people of Libya."

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Another bad UN egg

September 13, 2012

New York Daily News

BY HILLEL C. NEUER / NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

GENEVA - Promoters of the UN's hypocrisy-ridden Human Rights Council say it's been reformed. Yet the 47-nation body stooped to a new low today by installing a top official whose life's work — authoring books on World War II — make Germans the victims and the Allies the war criminals.

Alfred de Zayas made his first appearance this afternoon as the council's "Independent Expert on the promotion of a democratic and equitable international order." I participated in the debate and took the floor to call him out. Now it is U.S. Ambassador Susan Rice who must act.

The post was initiated by Cuba — the same country that interrupted my remarks today — in order to criticize Western countries that "wish to dominate the world with their economic and military models."

At first glance, De Zayas seems highly qualified. He was born in Havana, grew up in America and graduated from Harvard Law School. He spent 22 years with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, for whom he continues to freelance in his Geneva retirement.

But a closer glance at De Zayas' writings — his website has everything, including the minutiae of his daily activities — raises troubling questions.

De Zayas is not a Holocaust denier. But he is a hero to them. His publications and lectures are promoted on websites such as "Committee for Open Debate on the Holocaust." It's easy to see why.

One of his key themes is that hardly any Germans knew what was happening to their Jewish compatriots.

In 1996, when historian Daniel Jonah Goldhagen published "Hitler's Willing Executioners," documenting the complicity of the broader German population, De Zayas responded that Germans could not have been anti-Semites because there were "many German Jews in Bismarck's circle," and "many mixed marriages."

Rather, he said, it was Goldhagen who was "racist."

And, he argued, just as Americans never assumed their government would kill the Japanese-Americans sent to internment camps, Germans had no reason to imagine the Nazis would do such things to Jews.

De Zayas pressed Germans in Canada to prosecute Goldhagen's book distributors on charges of "hate literature," and advised them how to win at a UN human rights tribunal for which he then worked. Referring to a Canadian revisionist, De Zayas boasted in an email to supporters that "Jim Bacque and I even visited a lawyer in Toronto to suggest this procedure."

He urged Germans in the U.S. to do like the Jewish community, which he said contributes millions of dollars to "the Lobby."

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UNITED NATIONS

At U.N., death of Amb. Stevens gets personal

September 12, 2012

Foreign Policy

By Colum Lynch

The United Nations marked the death of U.S. Ambassador John Stevens, Sean Smith, and two other American nationals in Benghazi, Libya, with the customary expressions of condolence invoked when a U.N. member state endures a national tragedy.

The U.N. Security Council duly condemned the "heinous" murder of the American diplomatic delegation. A "saddened" U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon offered his condolences to the United States government and the "bereaved Libyan and American families." And other council diplomats expressed their somber regrets at the untimely murder of colleagues.

But this time, the killing struck closer to home. U.N. Undersecretary General for Political Affairs Jeffrey Feltman, who served until recently as the U.S. assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern Affairs, was a close personal friend and colleague of Stevens at the U.S. State Department.

The U.N. Security Council had played a vital role in shielding Benghazi's residents from certain slaughter at the hands of Muammar al-Qaddafi's forces. In a rare, brief show of unity, the Security Council authorized NATO to use air power against Libyan forces, a move that until led to Qaddafi's overthrow.

The U.S. consulate in Benghazi and the U.S. embassy in Cairo both came under attack from mobs that had allegedly become enraged over the circulation on the Internet of an inflammatory film produced by a man in California who claimed in an interview with the Associated Press that he was an Israeli filmmaker. (The AP has raised questions about his true nationality) But U.S. officials said that the attack in Benghazi may have been planned by extremists inspired by al Qaeda, according to a report in the Washington Post.

After the attack, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton asked the question that was on the minds of many of the U.N.'s Western diplomats. "How could this happen in a country we helped liberate, in a city we helped save from destruction?" she said. "This question reflects just how complicated and, at times, how confounding the world can be."

Speaking outside the U.N. Security Council, Libya's U.N. ambassador Ibrahim Dabbashi conveyed his own government's condolences to the United States and the families of the dead, saying that Stevens had "been a real friend for the Libyan people."

Stevens, he added, "was with us during our fighting against the dictator Qaddafi and his forces. He was very brave in staying in Benghazi."

Dabbashi was at a loss to explain how the ambassador of a government that had supported Libya's liberation could become a target. "As you know, we have to state the reality: the authority of the government is still not covering the whole territory of Libya."

Dabbashi said his government would take "the necessary measures to contain those people ... and bring them to justice." He said that as many as 10 Libyan security forces were either injured or killed during the attack.

Inside the council, the mood was somber as Rosemary di Carlo, the U.S. deputy permanent representative, read out an account of the attack and requested support for a U.S.-drafted Security Council statement condemning the attack. Russia and other delegations that have frequently criticized U.S. backed initiatives on Libya were silent, according to a council diplomat. "Even the hardliners were subdued," the diplomat said. "I think nobody wanted to be in Rosemary's shoes, talking about the death of a colleague."

"The senselessness of it was striking," the official said. "This was not a war; these were people who had committed themselves to the well being of the Libyan people."

But the attack also raised concern among other diplomats about the future of their efforts in Libya, and the persistent diplomatic risks. In April, unidentified attackers targeted a convoy transporting the U.N.'s special representative, Ian Martin, with a roadside bomb. In June, armed groups attacked a British convoy carrying Britain's ambassador to Libya, Dominic Asquith. The British envoy was not armed, but two British bodyguards were injured.

For now, it remains unclear what impact, if any, Stevens' death will have on the future of the U.N. mission in Libya. "It is too soon to assess the implications for our future posture -- our policy has been to keep a low profile," said one senior U.N. official. Restoring stability in Libya, the official said, will depend on the effectiveness of the country's new prime minister, Mustafa Abu Shagour, who won by a slim margin in a vote today. "The events in Benghazi showed everybody that there are still a lot of challenges out there," said the council diplomat.

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United Nations condemns attack on U.S. diplomats in Libya

September 12, 2012

Reuters

By Michelle Nichols

UNITED NATIONS - The United Nations strongly condemned on Wednesday an assault that killed the U.S. ambassador to Libya and three embassy staff and said the "horrific and tragic attack" further spotlighted the security challenges facing Libyan authorities.

The Tuesday attack on the consulate in Benghazi and a safe house refuge was carried out by Islamist gunmen blaming America for a film they said insulted Prophet Mohammad.

"The United Nations rejects defamation of religion in all forms. At the same time, nothing justifies the brutal violence which occurred in Benghazi," U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said in a statement.

Ban said Libyan employees of the U.S. consulate also had been killed but he did not specify how many. Libya's Deputy U.N. Ambassador Ibrahim Dabbashi said "less than 10 victims" were Libyan security force members.

"We condemn in the strongest terms this attack on a diplomatic facility," U.N. Undersecretary-General for Political Affairs Jeffrey Feltman told the U.N. Security Council during a regularly scheduled briefing on Libya on Wednesday.

The U.N. Security Council described the violence in Benghazi as a "heinous act" and in a statement strongly condemned the attack on the U.S. consulate in Libya and also another assault on Tuesday on the U.S. embassy in Cairo.

"Such acts are unjustifiable regardless of their motivations whenever and by whomever committed," German U.N. Ambassador Peter Wittig, president of the Security Council for September, told reporters on behalf of the 15-nation body.

The statement was unanimously agreed on by the council, including Russia, which was the harshest critic of last year's NATO operation that led to the end of Muammar Gaddafi's 42-year rule when his forces fled Tripoli in August 2011.

Moscow has repeatedly cited the Western and Arab-backed "regime change" in Libya as a key reason for its opposition to stronger Security Council action on the Syria's civil war.

Dabbashi told the Security Council that an investigation of the Benghazi attack was under way and that Libyan authorities would bring those responsible to justice.

"This attack gravely damages the image of Islam," he said.

SECURITY CHALLENGES

While Libya held a largely peaceful election in early July, its first national and free vote in 60 years, Dabbashi said the reality was "the government is still not governing the whole territory of Libya and there are some groups and persons who are outlawed and the government could not ... contain all of them."

A bomb was thrown at a convoy carrying the head of the U.N. mission to Libya, Ian Martin, in April, but no one was hurt. In June a rocket-propelled grenade hit a convoy carrying Britain's ambassador to Libya, injuring two of his bodyguards.

Ban announced on Wednesday that former Lebanese minister Tarek Mitri would replace Martin as head of the U.N. political mission in Libya on October 14.

Feltman said the attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi was "one example, but not the only one, demonstrating that foremost among the challenges and expectations facing the Libyan people and authorities is security."

"These challenges are manifested by the presence of arms outside state control, lack of clarity and competition over security responsibilities between and within relevant ministries and institutions and the continued prevalence of armed brigades," said Feltman, the former top U.S. diplomat for the Middle East who described Stevens as a friend.

Nine months of fighting in Libya ended last October when Gaddafi was captured and killed by rebels. But Libyan authorities have struggled to control armed groups who are now competing for power in the north African country.

Libyan revolutionary brigades still have thousands of people in custody and the U.N. human rights agency has accused them of torturing detainees, many of whom are sub-Saharan Africans suspected of fighting for the toppled government of Gaddafi.

Ban said in his latest report to the Security Council on Libya that he was "deeply concerned about the length of detention and treatment of detainees."

Feltman said the urgency with which the security vacuum in Libya needed to be addressed had also been highlighted by a spate of recent attacks on Sufi shrines.

Ultra-conservative Muslims bulldozed shrines sacred to Sufi Muslims in Tripoli and the western city of Zlitan in late August, stoking fears of the spread of factional violence.

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U.N. Steps Up Pressure on Iran Nuclear Program

September 12, 2012

Wal Street Journal

By DAVID CRAWFORD

The U.S. and several of its allies aim to step up pressure on Iran with a proposal that would empower the United Nations nuclear watchdog to order snap inspections of Iranian nuclear facilities.

In a draft resolution presented Wednesday, the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council—the U.S., Russia, China, France, the United Kingdom—plus Germany called it "essential and urgent" that Iran give international inspectors unfettered access to its nuclear sites. The International Atomic Energy Agency's board of governors is expected to approve the resolution at its meeting in Vienna this week, diplomats said.

Legally, the language of the resolution, particularly the use of the words "essential and urgent," would give the U.N. agency some more leverage in its long-standing and often-stalled probe of Iran's nuclear program, which the U.S. and its allies suspect is being used to develop weapons, a charge Tehran denies.

Although the atomic agency doesn't have power to enforce resolutions, not obeying an order for a snap inspection would put Iran in violation of the U.N. nuclear safeguards treaty it signed on to in 1974 and could further isolate it diplomatically.

The strongly worded resolution indicated a new sense of urgency to pressure Iran, particularly as Syria's civil war and growing calls within Israel's government to attack Iran stir tensions in the Middle East.

It also suggested a diplomatic victory for the U.S. and its European allies, which during the drafting urged Russia and China to agree to the resolution's wording. Russia, whose ties with Iran have made it more sympathetic to Tehran's position in the past, initially had called for less-specific language, diplomats from two of the countries said.

As senior atomic agency diplomats left the board meeting Wednesday, diplomats from the six nations were already lobbying their colleagues on the agency's 35-member-state board for support for the resolution. The lobbying is expected to continue until the atomic agency's board of governors votes on the resolution, most likely Thursday.

"We are looking for a very strong signal of support from the board for the work that the [atomic agency] is doing and an expression of deep concern about Iran's nuclear activities," U.S. State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland said this week.

The proposed special powers for the atomic agency underscore a growing impatience with Iran's efforts to stall the investigation of its nuclear program. Since January, atomic agency officials have hit roadblocks with Iran in the agency's request for immediate access to a key military site at Parchin.

On Monday, the atomic agency's director general, Yukiya Amano, said Iran's apparent effort to clean up Parchin while stalling inspectors has had an adverse impact on the agency's ability to evaluate the site. Western diplomats say the atomic agency wants to visit Parchin to determine whether Iran has tested explosive arrays that could be used to ignite a nuclear explosion.

Iran has offered to grant access to Parchin, but only under conditions that the agency officials can't accept, Vienna-based diplomats say.
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TOP STORIES

Turmoil Spreads to U.S. Embassy in Yemen

September 13, 2012

New York Times

By NASSER ARRABYEE and ALAN COWELL

SANA, Yemen — Turmoil in the Arab world linked to a contentious video denigrating the Prophet Muhammad spread on Thursday to Yemen, where hundreds of protesters stormed the United States Embassy, two days after assailants killed the American ambassador in Libya and crowds tried to overrun the embassy compound in Cairo.

News reports also spoke of a separate protest in Tehran, where around 500 Iranians chanting "Death to America" tried to converge on the Swiss Embassy, which handles United States interests in the absence of formal diplomatic relations with Washington. Hundreds of police officers held the crowds back from the diplomatic compound, which Swiss officials had evacuated as a precaution, Agence France-Presse said.

For a third straight day, protesters scuffled with police in Cairo, news reports said, while in Iraq, a militant Shiite group, Asaib Ahl al-Haq, once known for its violent attacks on Americans and other Westerners, said the video "will put all American interests in danger."

In Sana, witnesses said Yemeni security forces had tried to disperse a crowd at the fortified embassy compound in the east of Sana, the capital. But protesters broke through an outer perimeter protecting the embassy, clambering over a high wall and setting fire to a building.

They were forced to retreat after trying to plunder furniture and computers, the witnesses said.

Security forces guarding the embassy fired into the air as protesters set fire to two vehicles and burned tires. Protesters tore down and burned an American flag, replacing it with their own banner proclaiming the Islamic faith, witnesses said.

There were no immediate reports of American casualties or that the protesters had managed to breach the main diplomatic buildings within the compound. Yemeni officials said an unspecified number of protesters were wounded and some were arrested. Hours after the attack started, smoke still rose from the area.

By early afternoon, one witness, Yahya Yousef, who lives opposite the embassy, said: "Now almost everyone is out, and firing has ceased. We saw protesters getting out with some stuff from inside."

The protests came hours after a Muslim cleric, Abdul Majid al-Zandani, urged followers to emulate the protests in Libya and Egypt, Sana residents said. Mr. Zandani, a onetime mentor to Osama bin Laden, was named a "specially designated global terrorist" by the United States Treasury Department in 2004.

The crowd gathered a day after the embassy warned Americans in a posting on its Web site that "in the wake of recent events in Libya and Egypt, there is the possibility of protests in Yemen, and specifically in the vicinity of the U.S. Embassy, in the coming days."

"The U.S. Embassy continues to recommend that U.S. citizens avoid large gatherings. Even demonstrations or events intended to be peaceful can turn confrontational and possibly escalate into violence. U.S. citizens in Yemen are urged to monitor local news reports and to plan their activities accordingly," the Web posting said.

Mohammed Albasha, a spokesman for Yemen's embassy in Washington, D.C., said the government strongly condemned the attack on the United States embassy in Sana, and he said that there were no reported casualties.

"Given recent regional events, earlier this morning, angry protestors have unfortunately flooded the security perimeter of the U.S. embassy" there, breaching the wall, he said in a statement. "The government of Yemen will honor international obligations to ensure the safety of diplomats and will step up security presence around all foreign missions."

With American Marines and naval vessels heading for Libya, where the American ambassador, J. Christopher Stevens, and three of his staff were killed on Tuesday in an attack on the United States consulate, and new crowds reported gathering in Tunis and Cairo overnight, the reports from Yemen added to the already volatile mix of passions that have commingled with the initial exuberance of the so-called Arab Spring.

In an attempt to defuse the passions in his own country, President Mohamed Morsi of Egypt, was quoted on Thursday as saying the attacks on American personnel were unacceptable. Speaking in a television address while visiting Brussels, the Egyptian leader said he supported peaceful demonstrations but rejected attacks on personnel and diplomatic missions.

"What happened is unacceptable, rejected. The Prophet Muhammad taught us to respect human life," Bloomberg News quoted Mr. Morsi as saying. But he also warned against maligning Islam's founding prophet. "The Prophet Muhammad and Islamic sanctities are red lines for all of us."

Little is known about the origin of the video that provoked the protests. It was made in obscurity somewhere in Southern California, and promoted by a network of right-wing Christians with a history of animosity directed toward Muslims. When a 14-minute trailer of it was posted on YouTube in June, it was barely noticed.

But when the amateurish video was translated into Arabic and reposted twice on YouTube in the days before Sept. 11, and promoted by leaders of the Coptic diaspora in the United States, it drew nearly one million views and set off bloody demonstrations.

The initial eruption of protests in Egypt and Libya came on the anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks in the United States.

Referring to the killings in Benghazi, American and European officials said on Wednesday that while many details about the attack remained unclear, the assailants seemed organized, well trained and heavily armed and they appeared to have at least some level of advance planning. But the officials cautioned that it was too soon to tell whether the attack was related to the Sept. 11 commemoration.

On that same day in Yemen this week, a car bomb exploded on Tuesday alongside a convoy of vehicles used by Yemen's defense minister, killing seven bodyguards and five civilians in the heart of the capital, while the minister escaped unharmed, government and hospital officials said. The attack came one day after a top operative of Al Qaeda in Yemen was killed in what Yemeni officials called an American drone strike.

Those episodes and the violence on Thursday spoke to the continued volatility in poverty-stricken Yemen, where the United States is seeking to eradicate militant cells held responsible for a number of conspiracies, including an attempt by an operative of Al Qaeda to detonate a bomb hidden in his clothes on a flight bound for Detroit in December 2009.

The blast on Tuesday in downtown Sana tore through a thoroughfare between the cabinet office and the state radio building, shattering buildings and wrecking a vehicle carrying the seven bodyguards, seconds after the minister himself, Maj. Gen. Mohammed Nasser Ahmed, had passed by in another vehicle after a weekly cabinet meeting.

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Libya Attack Brings Challenges for U.S.

September 13, 2012

New York Times

By DAVID D. KIRKPATRICK and STEVEN LEE MYERS

CAIRO — Islamist militants armed with antiaircraft weapons and rocket-propelled grenades stormed a lightly defended United States diplomatic mission in Benghazi, Libya, late Tuesday, killing the American ambassador and three members of his staff and raising questions about the radicalization of countries swept up in the Arab Spring.

The ambassador, J. Christopher Stevens, was missing almost immediately after the start of an intense, four-hour firefight for control of the mission, and his body was not located until Wednesday morning at dawn, when he was found dead at a Benghazi hospital, American and Libyan officials said. It was the first time since 1979 that an American ambassador had died in a violent assault.

American and European officials said that while many details about the attack remained unclear, the assailants seemed organized, well trained and heavily armed, and they appeared to have at least some level of advance planning. But the officials cautioned that it was too soon to tell whether the attack was related to the anniversary of the Sept. 11 attacks.

Fighters involved in the assault, which was spearheaded by a Islamist brigade formed during last year's uprising against Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi, said in interviews during the battle that they were moved to attack the mission by anger over a 14-minute, American-made video that depicted the Prophet Muhammad, Islam's founder, as a villainous, homosexual and child-molesting buffoon. Their attack followed by just a few hours the storming of the compound surrounding the United States Embassy in Cairo by an unarmed mob protesting the same video. On Wednesday, new crowds of protesters gathered outside the United States Embassies in Tunis and Cairo.

The wave of unrest set off by the video, posted online in the United States two months ago and dubbed into Arabic for the first time eight days ago, has further underscored the instability of the countries that cast off their longtime dictators in the Arab Spring revolts. It also cast doubt on the adequacy of security preparations at American diplomatic outposts in the volatile region.

Benghazi, awash in guns, has recently witnessed a string of assassinations as well as attacks on international missions, including a bomb said to be planted by another Islamist group that exploded near the United States mission there as recently as June. But a Libyan politician who had breakfast with Mr. Stevens at the mission the morning before he was killed described security, mainly four video cameras and as few as four Libyan guards, as sorely inadequate for an American ambassador in such a tumultuous environment. "This country is still in transition, and everybody knows the extremists are out there," said Fathi Baja, the Libyan politician.

Obama Vows Justice

President Obama condemned the killings, promised to bring the assailants to justice and ordered tighter security at all American diplomatic installations. The administration also sent 50 Marines to the Libyan capital, Tripoli, to help with security at the American Embassy there, ordered all nonemergency personnel to leave Libya and warned Americans not to travel there. A senior defense official said that the Pentagon sent two warships toward the Libyan coast as a precaution.

"These four Americans stood up for freedom and human dignity," Mr. Obama said in a televised statement from the White House Rose Garden with Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton. "Make no mistake, we will work with the Libyan government to bring to justice the killers who attacked our people."

In Tripoli, Libyan leaders also vowed to track down the attackers and stressed their unity with Washington.

Yussef Magariaf, president of the newly elected Libyan National Congress, offered "an apology to the United States and the Arab people, if not the whole world, for what happened." He pledged new measures to ensure the security of foreign diplomats and companies. "We together with the United States government are on the same side, standing in a united front in the face of these murderous outlaws."

Obama administration officials and regional officials scrambled to sort out conflicting reports about the attack and the motivation of the attackers. A senior Obama administration official told reporters during a conference call that "it was clearly a complex attack," but offered no details.

Col. Wolfgang Pustai, who until early August was Austria's defense attaché to Libya and visited the country every month, said in an e-mail that he believed the attack was "deliberately planned and executed" by about a core group of 30 to 40 assailants who were "well trained and organized." But he said the reports from some terrorism experts that the attack may be linked to the recent death in drone strikes of senior Qaeda leaders, including Abu Yahya al-Libi, were unsupported.

A translated version of the video that set off the uprising arrived first in Egypt before reaching the rest of the Islamic world. Its author, whose identity is now a mystery, devoted the video's prologue to caricatured depictions of Egyptian Muslims abusing Egyptian Coptic Christians while Egyptian police officers stood by. It was publicized last week by an American Coptic Christian activist, Morris Sadek, well known here for his scathing attacks on Islam.

Mr. Sadek promoted the video in tandem with a declaration by Terry Jones — a Florida pastor best known for burning the Koran and promoting what he called "International Judge Muhammad Day" on Sept. 11.

The video began attracting attention in the Egyptian news media, including the broadcast of offensive scenes on Egyptian television last week. At that point, American diplomats in Cairo informed the State Department of the festering outrage in the days before the Sept. 11 anniversary, said a person briefed on their concerns. But officials in Washington declined to address or disavow the video, this person said.

By late afternoon Tuesday, hundreds had gathered in mostly peaceful protest outside the United States Embassy here, overseen by a large contingent of Egyptian security forces. But around 6 p.m., after the end of the workday and television news coverage of the event, the crowd began to swell, including a group of rowdy young soccer fans.

Gaining Entrance

Then, around 6:30 p.m., a small group of protesters — one official briefed on the events put it around 20 — brought a ladder to the wall of the compound and quickly scaled it, gaining entrance to the ground. Embassy officials asked the Egyptian government to remove the infiltrators without using weapons or force, to avoid inflaming the situation, this official said. (An embassy official said that contrary to reports on Tuesday, no one fired weapons in the air.) But it took the Egyptian security officers five hours to remove the intruders, leaving them ample time to run around the grounds, deface American flags, and hoist the black flag favored by Islamic ultraconservatives and labeled with Islam's most basic expression of faith, "There is no god but God, and Muhammad is his prophet."

It is unclear if television images of Islamist protesters may have inspired the attack in Benghazi, which had been a hotbed of opposition to Colonel Qaddafi and remains unruly since the Libyan uprising resulted in his death. But Tuesday night, a group of armed assailants mixed with unarmed demonstrators gathered at the small compound that housed a temporary American diplomatic mission there.

The ambassador, Mr. Stevens, was visiting the city Tuesday from the United States Embassy compound in Tripoli to attend the planned opening of an American cultural center, and was staying at the mission. It is not clear if the assailants knew that the ambassador was at the mission.

Interviewed at the scene on Tuesday night, many attackers and those who backed them said they were determined to defend their faith from the video's insults. Some recalled an earlier episode when protesters in Benghazi had burned down the Italian consulate after an Italian minister had worn a T-shirt emblazoned with cartoons mocking the Prophet Muhammad. Ten people were reportedly killed in clashes with Colonel Qaddafi's police force.

That assault was led by a brigade of Islamist fighters known as Ansar al-Sharia, or the Supporters of Islamic Law. Brigade members emphasized at the time that they were not acting alone. On Wednesday, perhaps apprehensive over Mr. Stevens's death, the brigade said in a statement that its supporters "were not officially involved or were not ordered to be involved" in the attack.

At the same time, the brigade praised those who protested as "the best of the best" of the Libyan people and supported their response to the video "in the strongest possible terms."

Conflicting Accounts

There were conflicting accounts of how Mr. Stevens had died. One witness to the mayhem around the compound on Tuesday said militants chased him to a safe house and lobbed grenades at the location, where he was later found unconscious, apparently from smoke inhalation, and could not be revived by rescuers who took him to a hospital.

An unidentified Libyan official in Benghazi told Reuters that Mr. Stevens and three staff members were killed in Benghazi "when gunmen fired rockets at them." The Libyan official said the ambassador was being driven from the mission building to a safer location when gunmen opened fire, Reuters said.

Five American ambassadors had been killed by terrorists before Tuesday's attack, according to the State Department. The most recent was Adolph Dubs, killed after being kidnapped in Afghanistan in 1979. The others were John Gordon Mein, in Guatemala in 1968; Cleo A. Noel Jr., in Sudan in 1973; Rodger P. Davies, in Cyprus in 1974; and Francis E. Meloy Jr., in Lebanon in 1976.

Witnesses and State Department officials said that the attack began almost immediately after the protesters and the brigade arrived around 10 p.m. Witnesses said the brigade started the attack by firing a rocket-propelled grenade at the gate of the mission's main building. American officials said that by 10:15 the attackers had gained entrance to the main building.

A second wave of assailants arrived soon after and swarmed into the compound, witnesses said.

"They expected that there would be more American commandos in there. They went in with guns blazing, with R.P.G.'s," said Mohamed Ali, a relative of the landlord who rents the building to the American mission and who watched the battle.

Libya's deputy interior minister, Wanis al-Sharif, made somewhat contradictory and defensive-sounding statements about the attack.

He acknowledged that he had ordered the withdrawal of security forces from the scene in the early stages of the protest on Wednesday night. He said his initial instinct was to avoid inflaming the situation by risking a confrontation with people angry about the video.

He also said he had underestimated the aggression of the protesters. But he criticized the small number of guards inside the mission for shooting back in self-defense, saying their response probably further provoked the attackers.

The small number of Libyans guarding the facility, estimated at only six, did not hold out long against the attackers, who had substantial firepower, the interior minister and State Department officials said. Defending the facility would have been a "suicide mission," Mr. Sharif said.

Mr. Sharif also faulted the Americans at the mission for failing to heed what he said was the Libyan government's advice to pull its personnel or beef up its security, especially in light of the recent violence in the city and the likelihood that the video would provoke protests. "What is weird is that they refrained from this procedure, depending instead on the simple protection that they had," he said. "What happened later is beyond our control, and they are responsible for part of what happened."

When the attack began, only Mr. Stevens, an aide named Sean Smith and a State Department security officer were inside the main building. As the building filled with smoke, security officers recovered Mr. Smith's body but were driven out again by the firefight, senior administration officials said. Mr. Stevens, however, could not be found and was lost for the rest of the night.

It took another hour — until 11:20 — before American and Libyan forces recaptured the main building and evacuated the entire staff to an annex nearly a mile away. The militants followed and the fighting continued there until 2:30 a.m. Wednesday, when Libyan security reinforcements arrived and managed to gain control of both compounds.

A freelance photographer took pictures of Libyans apparently carrying Mr. Stevens's ash-covered body out of the scene that were distributed worldwide by Agence France-Presse. A doctor who treated him at the Benghazi hospital told The Associated Press that Libyans had brought him in but were unaware of his identity. The doctor said that he tried for 90 minutes to revive Mr. Stevens but that he died of asphyxiation, The A.P. reported.

A senior administration official said it was not clear how or when Mr. Stevens was taken to the hospital — or by whom. "We frankly don't know how he got from where Americans last saw him," the official said.

On Wednesday night, residents of both Tripoli and Benghazi staged demonstrations to condemn the attack and express their sorrow at the loss of Mr. Stevens. Stationed in Benghazi during the uprising against Colonel Qaddafi, Mr. Stevens, who was fluent in Arabic and French, had become a local hero for his support to the Libyan rebels during their time of greatest need. Benghazi residents circulated photographs online of Mr. Stevens frequenting local restaurants, relishing local dishes, and strolling city streets, apparently without a security detail.

On Wednesday, some friends of Mr. Stevens suggested that his faith in his bond with the people of Benghazi may have blinded him to the dangers there. "Everybody liked him," said Mr. Baja, who ate

breakfast with Mr. Stevens on Tuesday. "He is a good man, a friendly man, he knows lots of the sheiks in town and a lot of the intellectuals have spent some good times with him."

"The people in Benghazi, I think, are very sad right now."

(top)

Libya Attack Sparks Crisis

September 13, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By MARGARET COKER, ADAM ENTOUS and JULIAN E. BARNES

The killing of the U.S. ambassador to Libya and three other Americans, in one of the most brazen attacks on a U.S. diplomatic compound in a generation, sparked a security crisis in the North African country, elevated tensions across the Middle East and raised concerns about how well the U.S. can protect its diplomats abroad.

The U.S. responded to the assault by dispatching two Navy destroyers, dozens of Marines, federal investigators and intelligence assets to Libya to protect Americans and help hunt the suspected religious extremists who carried out the attack late Tuesday. U.S. officials described the attack that killed Ambassador Christopher Stevens as complex and possibly premeditated.

The assault in the Libyan city of Benghazi, along with a protest at the American embassy in Cairo, fueled a harsh exchange between President Barack Obama and Republican Mitt Romney.

Mr. Obama said the U.S. will work with Libya to bring the attackers to justice. He and other officials didn't rule out a U.S. strike. "Make no mistake, justice will be done," the president said.

The assault took place on the anniversary of the Sept. 11 attacks, a day when security officials are typically on heightened alert. American officials, who debriefed survivors, described a horrifying scene in the consulate where, amid thick smoke and gunfire, Mr. Stevens became separated from his security officer.

When the armed men arrived in the consulate neighborhood, "we couldn't stop them," said Saleheddine al-Argoubi, a nearby resident. "They were multiplying, minute by minute. There were hundreds of them."

As attacks increased and flames in the consulate grew, personnel were forced to abandon the consulate building without the ambassador. American officials retrieved his body when it was brought to the airport the next day by Libyans.

An Obama administration official declined to detail the ambassador's security measures but said a review conducted ahead of the 9/11 anniversary found "no information and there were no threat streams to indicate that we were insufficiently postured."

U.S. officials were still piecing together the day's events, which followed protests at the U.S. embassy in Cairo over an anti-Islamic video. In contrast to the Cairo protest, which appeared to be spontaneous, U.S. officials said the attack in Benghazi late Tuesday might have been planned by militants who used the protests as cover.

American intelligence agencies were poring over information that could help indicate what groups may have taken part. Officials said the agencies are looking specifically at the pro-al Qaeda group Ansar al Sharia but cautioned they didn't have solid evidence.

Nearly 24 hours after the start of the shooting, officials struggled to explain what transpired through hours of chaos and terror inside the darkened consulate and a nearby annex. They warned that their preliminary version of events could change as more information became available.

The gang first arrived in the neighborhood around 8 p.m. local time carrying weapons including rocket-propelled grenade launchers and automatic rifles, said Ali Ben Saud, owner of the villa leased to the U.S. for the consulate.

A Libyan doctor said he and several neighbors tried to get the gang, which he estimated at 200, to leave as they marched toward the U.S. compound. "We told them to leave our homes alone and one [of the militants] replied, 'The Americans are infidels and we are going to finish them,'" the doctor said. "Many of us then fled because the shooting started."

Said Mr. al-Arghoubi, the neighborhood resident: "They didn't come to talk. They came to fight." The first shots were fired at around 10 p.m. local time, or 4 p.m. Eastern time, according to a preliminary U.S. account.

The attackers quickly gained access to the compound and began firing into the main building, setting it afire. A senior administration official said three people were inside the compound at the time: Mr. Stevens; Sean Smith, a foreign service information-management officer; and a U.S. regional security officer.

As the three tried to leave the burning building, they became separated from each other in heavy smoke. The regional security officer, whose name hadn't been disclosed by late Wednesday, made it outside, and then he and other security personnel rushed back into the burning building to try to rescue Mr. Stevens and Mr. Smith. They found Mr. Smith, already dead.

They were unable to find the ambassador before being forced to flee the building because of the heavy flames and continuing small-arms fire.

Mr. Obama was told Tuesday night that Mr. Stevens was unaccounted for.

At around midnight, the mission annex came under fire. Two U.S. diplomats were killed during that attack and two others were wounded.

According to Mr. Ben Saud, the landowner, Libyan security guards jumped into the compound and pulled Mr. Stevens from the burning and smoke-filled building at around 1 a.m. local time. Libyans then drove him to Benghazi Central Hospital, where the staff tried unsuccessfully to revive him.

At about 2:30 a.m. local time, Libyan security forces regained control of the situation, according to the preliminary U.S. account.

Obama administration officials said they didn't know what condition the ambassador was in when he left the compound. "His body was later returned to U.S. personnel at the Benghazi airport," an

administration official said. A chartered aircraft evacuated U.S. personnel back to Tripoli, including the remains of those killed.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said the attack should "shock the conscience" of people of all faiths, but wouldn't alter U.S. policy in Libya. The "mission in Libya is noble and necessary...and will continue," she said from Washington. The U.S. also announced increased security measures for all U.S. diplomatic facilities.

Libyan officials, many of whom led the rebel government based in Benghazi and worked with Mr. Stevens during that time, condemned the killings. The head of the new congress, Mohammed Magarief, apologized to the American public for the tragedy.

By late Wednesday, no one had been arrested. Officials in Tripoli were scrambling to implement a response to what they admitted was a monumental security breach.

The U.S. sent the destroyers U.S.S. Laboon and U.S.S. McFaul to the Libyan coast to aid in any evacuations or humanitarian missions, said a U.S. official.

A U.S. Marine team was sent to supplement security at the U.S. embassy in Tripoli, arriving there Wednesday. The unit is known as a Fleet Antiterrorism Security Team, or FAST team. These typically number 50 Marines.

Mr. Stevens is the first ambassador killed by hostile forces since 1979, when the U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan was murdered in Kabul.

Members of Ansar al Sharia gave an interview to the local television station from the hospital early Wednesday morning, praising the men who attacked the consulate and calling them "the top layer of Libyan society." However, the members told Benghazi TV that their organization, a group of religious fighters who fought to help oust Moammar Gadhafi from power, didn't plan the attack against the Americans.

Mr. Stevens, who was 52 years old, was usually based in Tripoli. He apparently was visiting Benghazi ahead of the planned opening of a U.S. cultural center there, said a Libyan official.

The attack on the U.S. consulate was the second this year. In June, suspected Islamic militants detonated an improvised explosive device at the same compound. A Libyan guard was injured, but no Americans were harmed. In the spring, the International Committee for the Red Cross offices in Benghazi were also targeted.

Washington has long been leery of the radical Islamic fringe in Libya. The largest numbers of foreign fighters in Iraq waging battles against U.S. soldiers were from two towns in eastern Libya, and U.S. drones have monitored those locations since the Libyan uprising last year.

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Libya Consulate Attack Came After Militants Joined Protesters, Say Witnesses, Officials

September 13, 2012

Washington Post

By Greg Miller And Michael Birnbaum

At least an hour before the assault began, a stream of cars was seen moving toward the U.S. Consulate in the eastern Libyan city of Benghazi. By late Tuesday evening, as many as 50 heavily armed militants had gathered outside its high walls.

They joined protesters outside the consulate who were demonstrating against an American movie that they believed denigrated the prophet Muhammad. But according to one witness, the new arrivals neither chanted slogans nor carried banners.

"They said, 'We are Muslims defending the prophet. We are defending Islam,' " Libyan television journalist Firas Abdelhakim said in an interview.

The gunmen soon opened fire, entered the compound and set the consulate's buildings aflame. Hours later, the compound was overrun and four Americans were dead. Among them were Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens, 52, and Sean Smith, a State Department employee.

The chaotic scene was described by senior Obama administration officials, Libyan government officials and witnesses. Details about the attack were still emerging late Wednesday. Key facts remain unclear, particularly how Stevens died and how his body wound up at a Benghazi hospital.

Even as evidence was being assembled, the early indications were that the assault had been planned and the attackers had cannily taken advantage of the protest at the consulate.

"Was this a spontaneous act of violence, was this capitalizing on the opportunity posed by [a protest], or was this separate and apart from al-Qaeda?" asked Rep. Adam B. Schiff (D-Calif.), a member of the House intelligence committee. "Any of those are possible," Schiff said, but accounts of the attack and the firepower employed "indicate something more than a spontaneous protest."

Others seemed more certain. Rep. Mike Rogers (R-Mich.), chairman of the intelligence committee, said the assault appeared to be well planned and well organized, with attackers executing military-like maneuvers.

A senior U.S. intelligence official said, "We haven't seen any significant indication of al-Qaeda involvement in this attack," adding that there are conflicting indications of the extent to which it was planned. "We've seen some indications that point us in that direction and others that do not," said the official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the situation. He declined to elaborate, except to say that U.S. spy agencies had seen no intelligence indicating such an attack was coming.

U.S. officials said the CIA, the FBI and other agencies were mobilizing to identify and pursue the attackers, an effort that could be aided by U.S. drones that have continued to conduct surveillance flights over the country since Tripoli fell 13 months ago.

Officials said the assault may have been carried out by an affiliate of al-Qaeda, perhaps seeking to avenge the death of a Libyan who had served as the terrorist group's No. 2 operative until he was killed in Pakistan in June by a U.S. drone strike.

In a somber appearance in the White House Rose Garden, President Obama issued an unusually emotional warning, saying, "Make no mistake, justice will be done."

But beyond the statements of resolve, there were also expressions of incredulity: How could an American facility that had been attacked just three months ago have remained so vulnerable? How could a city that the United States helped protect during the Libyan uprising have become the setting for such a grisly strike against the United States?

"How could this happen in a country we helped liberate, in a city we helped save from destruction?" asked Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton. "This question reflects just how complicated and, at times, how confounding the world can be."

The consulate is a walled-off villa with a swimming pool and palm trees on an unpaved side street in the Fwayhat district of Benghazi. It fit in with the other residences in the upscale neighborhood, where walled compounds surround green gardens and dusty streets are lined with shops and cafes.

Benghazi residents said the consulate never had a major security presence, and lawmakers in Washington described it as a "temporary" facility that did not meet the latest State Department security requirements and was scheduled to be replaced. U.S. military officials said it was not guarded by U.S. Marines, as are most embassies and many consulates.

The anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks prompted extra precautions at many U.S. facilities overseas, as well as apparent gallows humor from one of the Americans in Benghazi who was later killed.

Smith reportedly sent an electronic message to an online video-game counterpart earlier in the evening: "assuming we don't die tonight," said the message, according to the counterpart, who posted it online. "We saw one of our 'police' that guard the compound taking pictures."

Stevens, who had spent many years in Libya, had arrived Monday from the embassy in Tripoli for a week of routine meetings. A friend who spent Monday and Tuesday with him said Stevens held meetings with nongovernmental organizations and militia leaders on both days. When the friend dropped Stevens off at the consulate Tuesday afternoon, he said, nothing appeared to be amiss - beyond the protesters.

The first protesters had showed up around noon. Wanis al-Sharif, the deputy Libyan interior minister, said in an interview that the demonstrators were angered by a low-budget American film that portrayed the prophet Muhammad in a blasphemous manner. As the day wore on, Sharif said, the anger escalated and people with weapons infiltrated the crowd.

Preliminary reports speculated that the violence grew spontaneously out of anger over the film. But U.S. and Libyan officials cast doubt on that theory, with some suggesting that the attackers took advantage of the diversion created by protesters.

Sharif said the Libyan government suspected the gunmen were loyal to former leader Moammar Gaddafi, who was overthrown with American help last year and was later killed.

An attack on Sept. 11

Other fingers pointed to possible al-Qaeda affiliates. The suspicion of al-Qaeda involvement was supported by the Sept. 11 timing as well as the release of a recording this week by al-Qaeda leader

Ayman al-Zawahiri urging Libyans to avenge the death by CIA drone strike of his deputy, Abu Yahya al-Libi.

There had been signs of a threat earlier. On June 5, a bomb exploded outside the gates of the consulate in the first attack on an American facility since the fall of Gaddafi. No one was injured.

A jihadist group calling itself "Brigades of Imprisoned Sheik Omar Abdel-Rahman" claimed responsibility, according to the Site monitoring service. The group posted a message on jihadist forums saying the attack was a response to the drone strike that killed Libi in Pakistan on June 4. The group is named after the blind Egyptian sheik who is serving a life sentence for his role in the 1993 World Trade Center bombing.

On June 10, two British bodyguards were injured in an attack in Benghazi on a convoy carrying the British ambassador. The assailants used rocket-propelled grenades to attack the convoy as it was pulling out of the British Consulate.

Militants also have been blamed for attacks on the Tunisian Consulate in Benghazi and on the International Committee of the Red Cross in Libya.

A senior Obama administration official, speaking on the condition of anonymity in a conference call with reporters Wednesday afternoon, said there was a "robust American security presence" at the consulate. When asked whether security had been strengthened after the recent attacks, the official said, "We don't ever talk about the details of those kinds of things."

The most detail about the events that unfolded Tuesday night at the consulate came from the conference call and from interviews with U.S. intelligence officials along with witnesses, most of whom spoke on the condition of anonymity.

According to these officials, the protest turned into a gun battle around 10 p.m., roughly half an hour after the convoy of militants arrived at the consulate. They said men in the crowd began firing at the consulate. Within 15 minutes, the assailants had broken through the gates, scaled the walls and set fire to the main building. Images captured at the scene showed structures and vehicles engulfed in flames.

Stevens's friend said in an interview that he returned to the compound when he heard about the fighting and found a chaotic scene. "People were panicking and crying because they were shooting, and with the shooting and explosions, it was really chaos," said the friend, who insisted on anonymity for fear of jeopardizing his safety.

Another witness, Ben Eissa el-Mahjoub, a member of a media team that was at the scene, said the incident was not a protest.

"Armed groups broke into the American consulate," he said, with the consulate resisting from inside. He said the security teams had tried to protect the ambassador and the consulate. At one point, he said, someone fired a rocket-propelled grenade from the back of the crowd toward the compound.

A two-hour gun battle

While U.S. security personnel and Libyan guards returned fire, the embassy's top security officer, who had accompanied the ambassador from Tripoli, tried to get Stevens and Smith to safety inside the consulate. In the smoke and chaos, they became separated. When the security officer made it outside, he could not find Stevens and Smith.

He summoned help and went back inside the burning building. The rescuers discovered Smith's body, but the ambassador was nowhere to be found.

Under continuing fire, U.S. personnel and other consulate employees fled to an annex next door to the compound. That building, which has its own perimeter walls, came under fire that lasted two hours. Two more Americans were killed in the gun battle; they have not been identified, pending notification of their families.

Around 2 a.m. Wednesday, Libyan security forces and their U.S. counterparts were finally able to secure the compound and resume the search for the ambassador.

But at some point, Stevens had been taken from the consulate to Benghazi Medical Center. U.S. officials said it is unclear who took him or whether he was alive at the time. Photographs posted by Getty Images showed a figure identified as Stevens, his skin smudged with smoke residue, being dragged out by Libyans attempting a desperate rescue.

A senior official at the hospital said Stevens was dead when he arrived. The official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to discuss the situation publicly, said that "there were no signs of external injuries," leading doctors to believe that he had died of asphyxiation. The hospital also received 15 Libyans with injuries that included gunshot wounds and fractures, the official said, but it did not treat any other Americans.

"It was rockets that came in that created the fire and smoke," said Rep. C.A. Dutch Ruppersberger (Md.), the ranking Democrat on the House intelligence committee. Casting doubt on the possibility that the attack was carried out by a disorganized mob, Ruppersberger said: "This rogue group had weapons. And they were able to shoot."

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Libya Attack Provokes Washington Crisis

September 12, 2012

New York Times

By Peter Baker, David D. Kirkpatrick And Alan Cowell

WASHINGTON - The violent deaths of four American diplomats in Libya during a heavily armed and possibly planned assault on a flimsily protected consulate facility on the Sept. 11 anniversary provoked a crisis in Washington on Wednesday, confronting the Obama administration with new challenges in the volatile Middle East less than two months before the presidential election.

The killings of the four Americans, including the American ambassador to Libya, J. Christopher Stevens, also raised basic questions about security and intelligence in the eastern Libyan city of Benghazi, where the assault took place, as well as other American diplomatic facilities elsewhere in the region, where deep-seated anti-American sentiment remains a potent force despite United States support for the Arab Spring uprisings that have transfixed the region for nearly two years.

President Obama denounced the attack, promised to avenge the killings and ordered tighter security at all American diplomatic installations. The administration also dispatched 50 Marines to Libya for greater diplomatic protection, ordered all nonemergency personnel to leave Libya and warned Americans not to travel there, suggesting further attacks were possible.

But the killings also led to heated exchanges between the Obama administration and the Republican presidential challenger, Mitt Romney, who criticized Mr. Obama's handling of the killings in what Mr. Romney's critics, including a few Republicans, called an unwarranted politicization of an American foreign policy tragedy.

There were unconfirmed reports that Ambassador Stevens, a highly regarded diplomat who was well liked by officials in the new Libyan government, was pursued by Islamic militants to his death in a safe house, where he may have died of asphyxiation from smoke in a grenade explosion. He was the first American ambassador killed abroad in more than three decades.

Initial accounts of the assault in Benghazi were attributed to popular anger over what was described as an American-made video that lampooned the Prophet Muhammad, which had been publicized by Egyptian media and led to a mob protest at the United States Embassy protest in Cairo on Tuesday. But administration officials in Washington said the attack in Libya may have been plotted in advance.

While the protesters in Cairo appeared to be genuinely outraged over the anti-Islam video, the attackers in Benghazi were armed with mortars and rocket-propelled grenades. Officials said it was possible that an organized group had either been waiting for an opportunity to exploit like the protests over the video or perhaps even generated the protests as a cover for their attack.

"These four Americans stood up for freedom and human dignity," Mr. Obama said in a televised statement from the White House Rose Garden, where he stood with Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton. "Make no mistake: we will work with the Libyan government to bring to justice the killers who attacked our people."

Mr. Obama also offered praise for the Libyan government, noting that Libyan security forces fought back against the mob, helped protect American diplomats and took Mr. Stevens's body to the hospital. "This attack will not break the bonds between the United States and Libya," he said. Top Libyan officials, including the interim leader, quickly apologized and vowed to help find the killers.

But the Benghazi attack also put an enormous new strain on Washington's relations with the new Libyan government that took over after the ouster of Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi last year and has struggled to gain control over a litany of armed groups that still roam the country with impunity. The attack threatened to sour American public opinion about the prospects of the democratic opening of the Arab Spring. It seemed clear that the events in Benghazi far outpaced the ability of the Americans or Libyan officials to fully grasp them. The attack at the compound turned out to be much deadlier than administration officials first announced on Tuesday night, when Mrs. Clinton said one American had been killed and one injured.

Another of those killed was Sean Smith, an information management officer who joined the Foreign Service 10 years ago, Mrs. Clinton said in a statement. The State Department did not identify the other two, pending notification of relatives. Mr. Smith, a husband and father of two, previously served in Iraq, Canada and the Netherlands.

In a dispatch from Benghazi, Reuters quoted witnesses as saying the attackers included tribesmen, militia and other gunmen, and that Libyan security officers guarding the facility were overrun and some retreated. It quoted one witness as saying he saw one of the Americans die in front of him and the body had been covered in ash.

Officials in Washington said no warning had been distributed inside the United States government in the days before the assault on the consulate, either on the possibility of an attack to coincide with the 9/11 anniversary or more specifically that a plot might be afoot in Libya. That suggests that American intelligence was not picking up unusual communications or other evidence pointing to a planned attack.

About 24 hours before the consulate attack, however, Al Qaeda posted to militant forums on the Web a video in which its leader, Ayman al-Zawahri, acknowledged the death in an American drone strike in June of his Libyan deputy, Abu Yahya al-Libi, and called on Libyans to avenge the death.

If it were established that the deaths of the American diplomats resulted not from the spontaneous anger of a crowd about an insult to Islam but from a long-planned Qaeda plot, that might sharply shift perceptions of the events. But officials cautioned that the issue was still under urgent study.

The White House would not comment. "At this stage, it would be premature to ascribe any motive to this reprehensible act," said Tommy Vietor, a White House spokesman.

Mr. Stevens assumed his ambassador post in May after having served as an envoy to the Libyan rebels who overthrew Colonel Qaddafi. He was widely admired by the Libyan rebels for his support of their struggle, and others who knew Mr. Stevens described him as an extraordinarily talented and insightful diplomat.

Mr. Obama called Mr. Stevens "a courageous and exemplary representative of the United States" who had "selflessly served our country and the Libyan people at our mission in Benghazi" and, as ambassador, "supported Libya's transition to democracy."

The news of the deaths emerged on Wednesday after violence spilled over the American Consulate in Benghazi and demonstrators stormed the fortified walls of the American Embassy in Cairo. Anti-American protests also were reported in Tunisia, the birthplace of the Arab Spring revolution, and in Gaza. The Taliban called on Afghans to "take revenge" on American targets in Afghanistan.

There were conflicting accounts of how Mr. Stevens had died. One witness to the mayhem around the compound on Tuesday said militants chased him to a safe house and lobbed grenades at the location, where he was later found unconscious, apparently from smoke inhalation, and could not be revived by rescuers who took him to a hospital.

An unidentified Libyan official in Benghazi told Reuters that Mr. Stevens and three staff members were killed in Benghazi "when gunmen fired rockets at them." The Libyan official said the ambassador was being driven from the consulate building to a safer location when gunmen opened fire, Reuters said.

In Italy, the Web site of the newspaper Corriere della Sera showed images of what it said was the American Consulate in Benghazi ablaze with men carrying automatic rifles and waving V-for-victory

signs, silhouetted against the burning buildings. One photograph showed a man closely resembling Mr. Stevens apparently unconscious, his face seeming to be smudged with smoke and his eyes closed.

Mr. Stevens, conversant in Arabic and French, had worked at the State Department since 1991 after a spell as an international trade lawyer in Washington. He taught English as a Peace Corps volunteer in Morocco from 1983 to 1985, the State Department Web site said.

According to the State Department, five American ambassadors had been killed by terrorists before the attack on the American consulate in Benghazi. The most recent was Adolph Dubs, killed after being kidnapped in Afghanistan in 1979. The others were John Gordon Mein, in Guatemala in 1968; Cleo A. Noel Jr., in Sudan in 1973; Rodger P. Davies, in Cyprus in 1974; and Francis E. Meloy Jr., in Lebanon in 1976.

Peter Baker reported from Washington, David D. Kirkpatrick from Cairo and Alan Cowell from London. Reporting was contributed by Suliman Ali Zway from Tripoli, Libya; Steven Lee Myers, John H. Cushman Jr. and Elisabeth Bumiller from Washington; Rachel Donadio from Rome; Isabel Kershner from Jerusalem; and Christine Hauser and Rick Gladstone from New York.

(top)

Libya Consulate Attack Represents Challenge For Obama

September 13, 2012

Washington Post

By Karen Deyoung And Scott Wilson

What President Obama on Wednesday called the "outrageous and shocking" attack that killed the U.S. ambassador to Libya left his administration with a diplomatic crisis that threatened to undermine its long-term strategy in the Arab world.

The assault Tuesday evening on the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi and an earlier attack on the U.S. Embassy in Cairo represent the most serious challenge yet to Obama's attempt to transform a traditionally anti-American region into one that is more trusting of U.S. intentions and can serve as a counterweight, with Israel, to Iran's ambitions.

Although U.S. officials said they were still trying to determine who had carried out the assaults, signs pointed to radical Islamists as the likely perpetrators. The attacks offered a vivid reminder that despite more than a year of turbulence that has produced a more democratic Middle East and North Africa, violent extremists remain a potent force. And it is still unclear whether the new governments in Libya and Egypt are able, or willing, to confront those bent on attacking U.S. interests.

In a statement delivered in the White House Rose Garden, Obama said the deaths of Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens and three other U.S. officials in Benghazi would be investigated and the perpetrators brought to justice.

Whatever the outcome, Obama said, the United States "will not waver" in working with the Arab people and their new governments. He emphasized the continuation of an outreach policy that began even before the uprisings that last year drove longtime U.S. allies in Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen from power, overthrew Libyan dictator Moammar Gaddafi, spurred protests against entrenched autocrats throughout the region and sparked an ongoing civil war in Syria.

In his June 2009 "new beginning" speech in Cairo, Obama pledged to treat Muslims with respect and to recalibrate the U.S. role in the region. He promised to be a more honest broker in the Arab conflict with Israel than he believed his predecessor had been.

But since the heady days of spring 2011, when the U.S.-backed resignation of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak was followed by the U.S. killing of al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden, the course of reform in the Arab world has been uneven. And al-Qaeda, repeatedly designated a spent force by U.S. intelligence, has reemerged in allied or sympathetic organizations across the region.

In remarks Wednesday, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton emphasized that only a "small, savage group" was responsible for the Benghazi attack, not the Libyan government or people. But as al-Qaeda and its allies have repeatedly shown, even small groups can wield major influence.

If nothing else, the new crisis appeared likely to cement Obama's determination not to intervene militarily in Syria. "It will certainly give pause, or should give pause, to people who are pressing for a kind of involvement that you've got to back up" with significant force "to be successful," Sen. John F. Kerry (D-Mass.), chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, said in a telephone interview.

Obama's Republican rival for the presidency, Mitt Romney, wasted no time in condemning the president and his policies as fostering a sense of American weakness and lack of leadership, turning the Libya and Egypt attacks into a prominent issue in an election campaign that has included foreign policy only on the margins.

Kerry and others backing the overall policy insisted that it is the right one. "There will be moments of danger and moments of setback and confrontation. But we have to continue to press our interests, and you can't retreat," the senator said. The United States, he said, is "working very effectively with Turkey, Jordan, Qatar, the Saudis, the [Persian] Gulf states."

As for Libya, "we are as committed today as we have ever been to a free and stable Libya. That is still in America's interest," a senior administration official said.

Although the U.S. Embassy in Tripoli is being evacuated under emergency status, there was no discussion Wednesday of cutting back American aid to Libya or anywhere else - including Egypt, where a high-level U.S. trade delegation paid a visit this past weekend.

But Obama's policies in the Arab world are almost certain to come under renewed scrutiny. His efforts to change the U.S. image in the region have yielded little positive movement in public opinion polls there, and critics have charged that the Arab world has become less friendly to U.S. interests under his watch, with the election of Islamist governments in Egypt and Tunisia.

In part, Obama's lack of progress in changing the U.S. image in the region stems from his inability to make headway on resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, despite promises to make it a priority.

Early on in his term, Obama's rhetoric on the illegitimacy of Israeli settlement construction on land that Palestinians view as their future state raised Arab hopes that a president who spent years of his childhood in a Muslim-majority country would be different from his predecessors.

That posture has failed to achieve results or assuage Arab ire on the Palestinian issue, while also making Israel uncomfortable and angering its powerful supporters in the United States. Most recently, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu sharply criticized Obama for what he sees as the president's failure to stand up more firmly to Iran's uranium enrichment program.

Dennis Ross, a former senior Middle East adviser to Obama who is now at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, said the attacks in Egypt, one of only two Arab nations to have signed a peace treaty with Israel, should remind Obama and Netanyahu of their nations' close relationship. "No country is affected more by this than Israel, and there is no difference between Netanyahu and Obama over their strategic goals, only over tactics," Ross said.

With Israel pondering an attack on Iran, Obama already faced tough choices in how he manages the U.S. relationship with its closest Middle Eastern ally in the two months before Election Day. Tuesday's attacks will also bring into sharp relief his handling of the relationship with Egypt and Libya, two countries that the United States nurtured through their revolutions but whose post-revolutionary nature remain very much in question.

A senior administration official, speaking on the condition of anonymity to voice a personal opinion, said consideration should probably be given to reducing the large number of American civilians who are deployed in dangerous places abroad in support of the Obama administration's outreach efforts.

"We've got to stay out there, but we probably have way too many people," the official said.

U.S. officials said the Defense Department has deployed a Europe-based Marine anti-terrorism unit to Libya to secure the embassy in Tripoli and assist in the evacuation of personnel and casualties from Benghazi. They declined to discuss any further deployments made or under consideration.

The embassy has been reduced to "emergency staffing levels," one official said, without specifying the number. The evacuated staff members, including the three wounded, and the bodies of the four dead were being moved Wednesday to Ramstein-Landstuhl, a U.S. air base in Germany, where the wounded would be treated and the dead would be transferred home.

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Origins Of Provocative Video Are Shrouded

September 12, 2012

New York Times

By David D. Kirkpatrick

The amateurish video at the center of the violence in Libya and in Egypt opens with scenes of Egyptian security forces standing idle as Muslims pillage and burn the homes of Egyptian Christians. Then it cuts to cartoonish scenes depicting the Prophet Muhammad as a child of uncertain parentage, a buffoon, a womanizer, a homosexual, a child molester and a greedy, bloodthirsty thug.

The trailer was uploaded to YouTube by an individual whose identity was in question. Some news organizations carried interviews with someone who said he was the filmmaker and identified himself as Sam Bacile, an Israeli-American real estate developer in California, but there was no immediate confirmation in official records of such a person. In one report, he identified himself as 52 and in another, 56.

Yigal Palmor, the spokesman for the Israeli Foreign Ministry, said in a telephoned statement: "Nobody knows who he is. He is totally unknown in filmmaking circles in Israel. And anything he did - he is not doing it for Israel, or with Israel, or through Israel in any way." Mr. Palmor also called the filmmaker "a complete loose cannon and an unspeakable idiot."

It is unclear whether a full movie even exists. Executives at Hollywood agencies, including William Morris Endeavor, Creative Artists Agency and United Talent Agency, said they had never heard of "Innocence of Muslims," either from a cast, crew or financing standpoint. Hollywood unions said they had no involvement or did not respond to queries. Casting directors did not recognize actors in the 14-minute YouTube video that purports to be a trailer for a longer film.

FilmLA, which coordinates permits for location shoots in Los Angeles County, said it had no records for the movie, as did the Orange County Film Commission and the California Film Commission. They cautioned, however, that they could not say definitively that no related production entity applied for a permit.

Still, a film of this sort - with rudimentary props and costumes, cartoonish visual effects, poor lighting — would be relatively easy for amateurs to make. Digital video cameras can be purchased for \$3,000 or less, and relatively sophisticated video editing software is widely available. Casting can be as simple as posting an ad on Craigslist or tacking a flier to a Starbucks bulletin board.

In an interview with The Wall Street Journal, the man who said he was the filmmaker called Islam "a cancer," and said he had raised \$5 million from about 100 Jewish donors and had shot a two-hour movie in California last year. The Associated Press said he said it took three months in 2011 and used 59 actors and 45 crew members.

The A.P. reported reaching a consultant on the film, Steve Klein, who said he had warned the filmmaker "you're going to be the next Theo van Gogh," referring to the Dutch filmmaker killed by an Islamic militant in 2004 after making a film about abuses in Islam.

By Internet video standards, few people had watched it until the violent protests. A trailer posted on YouTube had 6,000 views on Tuesday and more than 116,000 on Wednesday. An Arabic translation, which has since been taken down by YouTube after a copyright claim by an entity called K Music Sound Productions, had garnered more than 40,000 views, according to the Hollywood film news Web site TheWrap.com. A copy of the Arabic version uploaded by the Islamic Observatory Centre in Britain registered 90,000 views before it was removed on Wednesday.

The video gained international attention after a version dubbed in Arabic was publicized in the Egyptian media and when a Florida pastor, Terry Jones, began promoting the video along with his own proclamation of Sept. 11 as "International Judge Muhammad Day."

On Wednesday, Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, called Mr. Jones and asked him to consider withdrawing his support for the video, a senior administration official told reporters in a conference call. Mr. Jones' response was "non-committal," the administration official said.

The Guardian reported Wednesday that the film clip was also promoted last week by Morris Sadek, an Egyptian-American Copt based in California who has an anti-Islamic blog. One posted photograph features Mr. Sadek and Mr. Jones at a small anti-Islam protest outside the White House in June. Mr.

Sadek, reached by Reuters, said he thought the film highlighted discrimination against Egypt's Christians and said he was sorry that American diplomats had been killed. He said he was interested only in the first part of the film, "about persecution of Copts," Reuters reported. Mr. Sadek has told The Associated Press that he plans to show the film.

In a statement, Mr. Jones, of Gainesville, Fla., called the film "an American production, not designed to attack Muslims but to show the destructive ideology of Islam" and said it "further reveals in a satirical fashion the life of Muhammad."

He said the embassy and consulate attacks illustrated that Muslims "have no tolerance for anything outside of Muhammad" and called Islam "a total deception."

Mr. Jones inspired deadly riots in Afghanistan in 2010 and 2011 by first threatening to burn copies of the Koran and then burning one in his church. He also once reportedly hanged President Obama in effigy. ([top](#))

U.S. Policy in Mideast Challenged by Assaults

September 13, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By JAY SOLOMON

WASHINGTON—President Barack Obama has supported the democratically elected governments that have emerged in the Mideast over the past 18 months, despite concerns about the influence of Islamists that historically opposed the U.S.

Tuesday's attacks put that policy at a crossroads. On Wednesday, some American lawmakers and policy makers called for the U.S. to suspend financial aid, and possibly security cooperation, to Egypt and Libya, countries that were transformed by the revolutions of the Arab Spring.

As a result, Mr. Obama faces tough decisions about whether to pull back from cooperation with new governments in the region—as well as whether to get more directly involved in the antiregime movement in Syria in an attempt to ensure that Islamist groups don't assume as much power if the regime changes there.

Some U.S. lawmakers were particularly angered by the failure of Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi, who hails from the Muslim Brotherhood, to condemn the attack on the U.S. mission.

The Egyptian leader limited his comments to affirming Egypt's commitment to protecting foreign diplomatic missions—and criticizing the production of the video on Islam that spurred Tuesday's protests.

The secretary-general of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, Mahmoud Hussein, called on Egyptians to hold peaceful vigils to denounce the controversial video after Friday prayers.

The call appeared to be part of an effort by Mr. Morsi to strengthen his domestic support. "I think Morsi is trying to send a domestic message," said Omar Ashour, an expert on Islamist movements and a professor at Exeter University in the U.K. "The Brothers are trying to capitalize and enhance their own popularity within Islamism."

Late Wednesday, police fired tear gas to disperse protesters near the U.S. Embassy in Cairo, according to local media and wire reports.

Meanwhile, Islamist activists held demonstrations outside U.S. embassies in Tunisia and Sudan, and burned U.S. flags in the Gaza Strip.

"The United States needs to send a clear signal to other countries that this barbaric behavior will not be tolerated," Rep. Michael McCaul (R., Tex.) said of Tuesday's attacks, calling for the freezing of aid for Egypt and Libya. "To attack our homeland and kill our citizens is outrageous, deplorable and it must have severe consequences."

The Obama administration is in the final stages of organizing a \$1 billion package to ease the rising debt burden of Mr. Morsi's government. The U.S. also gives Egypt \$1.3 billion a year in military aid.

While the Obama administration was critical of Egypt's response to the unrest, senior officials said Washington should continue providing assistance to the emerging governments in the Middle East, particularly Libya, because it was in Washington's long-term interest.

"We are as committed today as we have ever been to a free and stable Libya," said a senior U.S. official. "We are going to continue to help them get the future that they deserve."

President Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan, another big recipient of U.S. aid, issued a statement that condemned the video but didn't condemn the killings in Libya or call for restraint. Mr. Obama then called Mr. Karzai, the White House said.

Advisers to Republican presidential nominee Mitt Romney didn't comment on whether he would reduce aid to Islamist governments if he was elected. But they did say that Washington should more aggressively stand up for American allies in the Middle East, and ethnic minorities, which could place the U.S. in conflict with some of the region's new powers.

An immediate issue facing the Obama administration is whether to use force in Libya to seek the leaders of the mob that killed U.S. Ambassador to Tripoli Christopher Stevens and three other U.S. officials.

U.S. officials said the White House is currently determining the "rules of engagement" for tracking Mr. Stevens's assailants, while a manhunt is already under way led by Libyan security forces for the attackers. The debate in the administration, these officials said, concerns how involved the U.S. will get: from simply providing intelligence to Libyan forces, to attacking militants.

A direct U.S. attack on Libyan soil could further inflame tensions in the region, American officials acknowledge. And in the longer term, they said, if the resulting anti-American unrest spreads, it could prompt lawmakers to reconsider foreign assistance to the Egyptian and Libyan governments and potentially others.

The events in Libya and Egypt could have a particularly profound impact on U.S. policy toward Syria. The administration is seeking the removal of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, following 18 months of violence in the Arab country that has left at least 20,000 people dead, according to Syrian activists. The U.S. views Mr. Assad's fall as crucial to weakening Iran, Mr. Assad's closest ally, which uses Syrian territory to ship arms to Lebanese and Palestinian militants fighting Israel.

But the administration so far has resisted sending weapons to the Syrian rebels seeking to topple Mr. Assad, particularly because of concerns that some of them have ties to al Qaeda and other extremist groups. U.S. officials have acknowledged that there is growing pressure for Washington to play a more direct role in supporting Syria's opposition, in part, to guard against extremist forces hijacking the movement.

Mr. Romney's campaign seized on the attacks in Cairo and Benghazi to criticize Mr. Obama's Syria policy. "We don't control who gets the arms inside Syria, which gives us less leverage to dictate the future after Assad," said Richard Williamson, Mr. Romney's top foreign-affairs adviser.

(top)

AFRICA

Somalia's New President Survives Suicide Bombings

September 13, 2012

New York Times

By Mohammed Ibrahim

MOGADISHU, Somalia - Three suicide bombers attacked the temporary residence of the new president of Somalia as he was giving a news conference on Wednesday, killing an African Union soldier but failing to assassinate any political leaders, witnesses and officials said.

The Somali president, Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, had only just been elected to his post by the newly created Parliament on Monday, taking the helm of a fledgling government that is supposed to represent a tangible step toward permanent governance in a country that has been without it for more than 20 years.

Two of the suicide bombers struck, one near the gate and one at the back of the Jazeera Hotel near the airport as the president was giving a briefing for the news media with the visiting Kenyan foreign minister, Samson K. Ogeri.

Another attacker was shot as he tried to scale the walls of the compound, according to a statement from the African Union peacekeeping mission in Somalia.

The attack did not interrupt the news conference and the president continued his speech. "This is the Mogadishu we are trying to change," he said.

Mr. Mohamud was moved to the presidential palace. A statement from his office said that he called the attacks an unsuccessful attempt to demoralize the Somali people. "What happened today, and any other similar attempt, will not divert our focus and our promise," the statement said.

The attack stood in sharp contrast to the welcoming cheers Somalis have offered the new president.

"I was covered with dust as I was walking on the street near the hotel, and I saw several people lying on the ground," said Mohamed Farah, who was passing by. "This is a shocking incident reminding us of our long-gone days, but we are expecting brighter future now."

There were conflicting death tolls after the attack, but the spokesman of the African Union mission, Col. Ali Hamud, confirmed at least four deaths and noted that investigations were still under way.

"Four people have been killed in the attack, among them an African Union soldier," Colonel Hamud said, "We have secured the hotel."

The Shabab, an Islamist insurgent group linked to Al Qaeda, claimed responsibility for the attack. The government and African Union forces have driven the Shabab out of Mogadishu, but it has been waging relentless attacks against the government and the African forces through suicide and roadside bombs and assassinations. Kenya has also joined in the fight, crossing the border to invade parts of Somalia to fight the Shabab, which it considers a major security threat.

Somalia has been without an effective central government since 1991, and the election of the new president on Monday officially marked the end of the internally backed transitional government and the start of a permanent one.

Many Somalis hope the change is a significant step forward that will help end of the country's cycle of violence, famine and dire poverty.

"The enemies of peace will not be tolerated to spoil this historic moment for the people of Somalia, who on Monday successfully completed the transition to representative government," Lt. Gen. Andrew Gutti, the commander of the African Union force, said in a statement.

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South African Mining Strikes Spread

September 13, 2012

Associated Press

By Andrew Meldrum And Michelle Faul

MARIKANA, South Africa (AP) - Hundreds of striking miners forced the closure Wednesday of four mines of Anglo American Platinum, the world's largest producer, as labor unrest spread in South Africa's biggest industry.

More than 60,000 miners were not working Wednesday though it is unclear how many support the strike to demand a monthly take-home pay of R12,500 (1,560) - and how many are frightened by intimidation and death threats if they report for duty.

The plight of miners living in tin shacks while they produce the raw materials for luxury goods under dangerous conditions has put a spotlight on the South African government's failure to meet basic needs like clean water and decent health care. It also has drawn attention to the widening gap between a small black elite that lives sumptuously while many South Africans worry where their next meal will come from.

Police said some 1,500 strikers blocked roads to the Amplats mine near Rustenburg, northwest of Johannesburg. Anglo American Platinum said it had taken the rest of its 19,000 staff to a safe place. It said it had shut four mines out of concern for its workers' safety.

Mine security guards fired tear gas Wednesday at striking gold miners who prevented the National Union of Mineworkers from holding a meeting and tried to block a goods train from leaving the west section of KDC mine, Gold Fields International spokesman Sven Lunsche said. Some of Gold Fields 15,000

workers want the politically connected NUM out of the mine, near Carletonville. Some 85 percent stayed away from work Wednesday, Lunsche said.

The trouble started Aug. 10 with a strike at London-registered Lonmin PLC gold mine, neighboring Amplats, where 45 people have been killed including 34 shot by police on Aug. 16. The most recent death is a body found Tuesday with machete wounds to the head, police said.

Miners feeling the pinch from a no-work, no-pay strike marched and danced around the mine as their protest entered its fifth week.

Lonmin said just 1.8 percent of its employees reported for work Wednesday.

Trade unions and government ministers on Wednesday accused firebrand politician Julius Malema of inciting the unrest.

Malema on Tuesday called for a nationwide mine strike, addressing thousands of striking Gold Fields miners.

"All the miners in South Africa are demanding 12,500 rand," said Malema. "You must now benefit from this gold you are mining. You want a piece of gold. You get 12,500 rand."

On Wednesday, Malema addressed about 100 suspended soldiers in Johannesburg, despite opposition from the defense minister.

Malema, who was thrown out of the ruling African National Congress for "sowing disunity" in April, strongly criticized President Jacob Zuma's government for not taking more action following the police shootings at the Lonmin mine that were the worst instance of state violence since apartheid ended in 1994.

"We only have ourselves, we only have our voices, we only have our minds to fight this barbaric regime under President Zuma, to fight this murderous regime under President Zuma," said Malema. "Our people cannot be killed. Thirty-four of them in less than 15 minutes and nothing happens in South Africa."

He railed at South Africa's polygamous president, suggesting he was too busy collecting wives to take care of the country's citizens.

Malema has played to the anger growing among poor South Africans amid a leadership vacuum in the aftermath of the police killings and used it to promote his agenda to get Zuma toppled at an ANC congress to elect leaders in December. If Zuma is re-elected, he is practically guaranteed another four years at the helm of Africa's richest nation.

The violent strikes are rooted in rivalry between a breakaway union and the dominant, ANC-allied National Union of Mineworkers, whom many miners accuse of cozying up to management and being too interested in business and politics to take care of shop-floor needs.

Malema also has attacked government leaders for owning shares in mines, including the Jacob Zuma Foundation that is dedicated to uplifting the poor, arguing it is a conflict of interest for those trying to resolve the problems of poorly paid miners.

A small black elite tied to the ANC has become millionaires off mines since apartheid ended in 1994. But the ANC has failed to keep its promise of a better life for the majority of the country's 48 million people who remain mired in poverty.

Millions live, as do many of the miners, in tin-shack shantytowns with no running water and no electricity.

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ASIA

Xi Jinping Mystery Echoes Back To China's History

September 12, 2012

Washington Post

By Kathrin Hille And Jamil Anderlini

When Lin Biao, China's then heir apparent, died in an air crash more than 40 years ago, it took the Communist Party two months to inform the public.

This week's unexplained disappearance of Xi Jinping, China's leader-in-waiting, who has not been seen in public for 11 days, shows that, despite the country's economic transformation, when it comes to its leaders, Beijing is as secretive now as it was in 1971, when Lin Biao died and Mao Zedong was still in power.

According to Beijing's official version, Lin had been plotting a coup against Mao and decided to flee to the Soviet Union with his family after learning that he had been found out. His flight crashed in Mongolia, killing everyone on board. While Russian forensic evidence confirmed that he died in the crash, foreign historians continue to doubt Beijing's explanation of a coup.

More recent cases involving senior party leaders have been handled in a similar fashion. It was not until July this year that the People's Daily, the party's mouthpiece, confirmed that Li Peng, at the time China's prime minister, had been in a hospital in 1993.

Li disappeared from public view for several months that year, cancelling trips abroad and meetings with visitors. The foreign ministry had said he had a cold and was recovering. It is by now widely believed that Li had suffered a heart attack.

Keeping things secret today is much more difficult as the spread of social media has robbed the party of the power to control information.

Xi cancelled meetings with Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and a Russian delegation last week. He also appeared to cancel a meeting with Helle Thorning-Schmidt, the Danish prime minister, on Monday, although she herself later said no meeting had been planned.

An official account did not list Xi among the participants of a meeting held last Friday by the central military commission, of which he is vice chairman.

There have been no public appearances, news pictures or new mentions of Xi in the state media since Sept. 1, when he gave a speech at the central party school.

Although Xi's absence from the public eye so far has not lasted as long as those of some past Chinese leaders, politicians who have disappeared previously still sent signals by publishing articles in official media or sending congratulatory messages on major occasions.

The mystery surrounding Xi has triggered a flurry of rumors on Sina Weibo, the country's leading Twitter-like microblog, especially as it comes amid preparations for the complex once-in-a-decade leadership transition in which Xi is supposed to star.

Internet users passed round suggestions that Xi and He Guoqiang, another senior leader who was also missing from public view, had both been involved in car crashes. Another rumor was that they had both been victims of assassination attempts.

On Wednesday night, He resurfaced, appearing on state television during a visit to state publishers to promote officially-approved books. His last appearance before Wednesday had been an anti-corruption speech on Aug. 29.

"In my recent meetings with senior government officials and advisers in Beijing, many of them said they felt that the party is losing control over the discourse and just isn't able manage the message like it could before Weibo came along," said one well-connected Chinese economist.

Posts referring to Xi and He have been quickly deleted on Chinese microblogs, while searches for their names have been censored. And yet Internet users quickly found other ways of discussing the issue. One Weibo user posted a picture showing Yuan Shikai, the early 20th century Chinese ruler who had himself elevated to emperor but was toppled after 83 days, next to Xi Jinping.

The post joked that while one had been on the throne for just a matter of days, the other might never make it there because he has gone missing.

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North Korea Rejects Offer Of Aid From South Korea

September 13, 2012

New York Times

By Choe Sang-hun

SEOUL - North Korea on Wednesday rejected a South Korean offer to send it humanitarian aid, scuttling earlier hopes of easing tensions between the two Koreas.

South Korea made the offer Sept. 3. On Monday, North Korea told South Korea that it was ready to discuss it and asked what the South planned to provide and how much. That raised hopes that the two governments might resume dialogue after years of tension.

The North has repeatedly refused contact with the government of President Lee Myung-bak.

In a letter to the North on Tuesday, South Korea said it could deliver 10,000 tons of flour, three million packets of instant noodles and medicine. It added that it was willing to discuss additional aid once the two sides met.

On Wednesday, the South Korean Ministry of Unification said that the North had turned this down. "In its response today, the North expressed dissatisfaction and said, 'We don't need such aid,'" it said. "It's deeply regrettable that the North Korean government is rejecting our offer to help the North Korean people."

North Korea also rejected a similar offer from the South last year, calling it too small. South Korea used to send as much as 500,000 tons of rice and 300,000 tons of fertilizer a year, until Mr. Lee took office in 2008 and said such largess would halt until the North took concrete steps toward dismantling its nuclear weapons program. Relations were further strained after North Korea shelled a South Korean island in 2010.

North Korea recently asked for assistance from the United Nations after its state news media reported extensive damage caused by flooding and typhoons since June. More than 200 people have been killed and large tracts of farmland destroyed, according to North Korean state media. ([top](#))

NEA

Struggle for Ideological Upper Hand in Muslim World Seen as Factor in Attacks

September 12, 2012

New York Times

By ROBERT F. WORTH

DOHA, Qatar — The Arab uprisings have appeared to offer a new bridge in the anguished relationship between the United States and the Muslim world, perhaps most of all in Libya, where American firepower helped oust Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi and earned the United States deep popular gratitude.

A history of mutual suspicion seemed to be giving way to a shared language of civic rights and freedoms; American visitors are often still greeted with smiles and hugs.

But on Wednesday, in the wake of angry anti-American protests and the killing of the American ambassador and three other diplomatic workers in Benghazi, Libya, there was a return to sadly familiar ground. The cause, as in earlier riots that followed the burning of Korans in Afghanistan and the publication of anti-Islamic cartoons in Denmark, was a perceived blasphemy — in this case a video clip that denigrated the Prophet Muhammad.

Once again, Muslims were furious, and many in the West found themselves asking why Islam seems to routinely answer such desecrations with violence.

But the attacks, analysts say, might have less to do with any intrinsic Muslim intolerance than with the ideological chaos that reigns in the Arab world, where extremists routinely exploit popular anger and invoke Islam to draw attention to fundamentally political and even internecine goals. Those radicals might even include jihadis loyal to Al Qaeda, which has made clear that it hopes to win new followers in Libya and other Arab Spring countries. American officials said Wednesday they suspected the attack that killed the ambassador, J. Christopher Stevens, was planned, though many details still remain uncertain, including the identity of the killers.

Bernard Haykel, a professor of Middle East studies at Princeton University, said, "It's true that there are sanctions against insulting the Prophet, but this is really about political or symbolic opportunists, who use religious symbols to advance their own power or prestige against other groups."

Libya and Egypt are especially vulnerable to this kind of contest over symbols and power; their new national governments are still insecure about the exercise of authority, and newly empowered ultraconservative religious groups — mostly known as Salafis — are keen to assert their visibility and influence against other factions. Libya, in particular, remains a checkerboard of militias, some of them composed of Salafis, who have proved themselves capable of intimidating the newly elected government.

"Who's going to control these people?" said Tarik Yousef, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution who is also the son of Libya's interim president, Mohammed Yousef Magarief. "Some of these Salafi groups claim to operate under the banner of the Interior Ministry."

At the same time, there were outpourings of rage across Libya on Wednesday against the killers and against the Salafis more generally. In addition to demonstrations in Tripoli and Benghazi, Twitter was inundated with pro-American messages by young Libyans; several of them pleaded for the United States Marines to come and crush the Salafis.

In Egypt, too, Salafis have become powerful in the newly elected Parliament, and anti-Americanism remains a resonant way to gain attention. But the attack on the American Embassy in Cairo — unlike the one that killed Mr. Stevens — appears to have been spontaneous, led by Egyptians genuinely angered by news of the film clip, distributed on YouTube, which portrays the Prophet Muhammad as a confused, bloodthirsty pedophile of uncertain parentage.

Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood reacted to the Cairo protests with statements that illustrated its need to rein in the popular anger while maintaining its role as the mainstream voice of Islam: it implicitly criticized the violence of the embassy attack while calling for peaceful nationwide protests against the video on Friday.

As in earlier violence after the accusations that Islamic symbols had been desecrated, the nature of modern communications bears a heavy share of blame: a single match lit by an anti-Islamic zealot in Florida can — again via YouTube — ignite deadly riots a world away. Terry Jones, the Florida pastor who provoked riots in 2010 and 2011 by threatening to burn (and later burning) a Koran at his church, has promoted the new film clip, amplifying the controversy.

But the fury also has roots in the slow breakdown of religious authority in the Islamic world over the past century or more, an erosion that has allowed self-appointed interpreters to render instant judgment on issues that might once have been left to established, respected figures. In the past, even an insult to the Prophet would have to be investigated in accord with Islamic jurisprudence before anyone was licensed to take action.

"People used to look to their local imams on matters of faith and interpretation," said Michael A. Reynolds, also a professor of Middle East studies at Princeton. "But in a more mobile and transnational world, with more people living in cities and much higher rates of literacy, it's easier for ideologues and extremists to assert their own views."

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Security Forces Wary of Hard-Line Islamists

September 13, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By MATT BRADLEY IN CAIRO and MARGARET COKER

The attacks on U.S. diplomatic missions in Libya and Egypt exposed how rising hard-line Islamist movements have cowed and frustrated security forces in the nascent democracies of the so-called Arab Spring.

An ultraconservative Salafi Islamist group is a target of U.S. and Libyan inquiries into the deadly strike on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi. Salafis, once hidden, have stormed onto the political scenes in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya—three North African countries that sparked the wave of pro-democracy protests that have upended the Arab world.

While many have run for office and joined the political mainstream, ragtag groups of unaffiliated Salafis have taken to the streets to intimidate, and in some cases attack, people they regard as sinful.

Most worrying for liberals in all three countries is that the Salafis appear to them to be acting with impunity. Secular-minded activists complain that when it comes to policing religious extremists, police consistently arrive late, hold few perpetrators to account and avoid direct confrontation. Police reluctance comes as Islamist forces are gaining political power, the activists say

At the U.S. Embassy in Cairo on Tuesday night, hundreds of police in riot gear were unable to block a handful of protesters from breaching the embassy walls. After Salafi leaders convinced the demonstrators to leave the compound, security forces sat by as protesters waved Islamist banners from atop the embassy's security wall. Prosecutors on Wednesday released the four people who were detained during the demonstration, saying investigations would continue.

In Libya, a mob of hundreds of men, some of whom identified themselves as members of a Salafi fighting group called Ansar al Sharia, overwhelmed the handful of Libyan security guards outside the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi on Tuesday night.

Libyan and U.S. security officials exchanged fire with the armed mob, but none of the attackers were detained, though Libyan forces helped evacuate civilians in the area and, later, the U.S. Consulate personnel.

"This shows the erosion of state authority," said Amna Guellali, a researcher on Tunisia for the New York-based advocacy group Human Rights Watch. "It's quite systematic in all these incidents: The state reaction is either late or doesn't come at all."

Ms. Guellali and other analysts blame the inaction on a toxic mix of weakness, fear and complicity.

The chaotic aftermaths of the pro-democracy revolutions nearly broke the security forces in all three countries. But police officers' tendency to give way to Islamist groups may point to a lingering fear of blowback.

"This is an apparatus, both here and Libya, that were at war with the Islamists," said Omar Ashour, an expert on political Islam and the director of the Middle East program at Exeter University in the U.K.

"Now the ones who were victimized by the police are either in power or about to be in power. Therefore the police are quite hesitant to do brutal crackdowns."

In Egypt and Tunisia, police have used tear gas, truncheons and bullets to subdue demonstrations by left-wing protesters and secular activists. Five people were injured last week when police deployed tear gas to keep activists from invading the Syrian Embassy to hoist the Free Syrian Army flag.

"This follows a pattern formed under [Hosni] Mubarak, that force can be used on stigmatize-able groups: Youth, Coptic Christians—the cast of characters we've seen clamped down on," said Michael Hanna, an Egypt expert at the New York-based Century Foundation. "But demonstrating Islamists have free rein."

Though Egypt's security personnel were historically vetted and purged to exclude Islamists, some security chiefs and rank-and-file personnel may be siding with Islamist protesters, said Mohamed Ali Bilal, a former Egyptian general and a security expert. "Undoubtedly, there was sympathy," Mr. Bilal said. The police "knew these protesters were right."

Egypt's new Islamist president, Mohammed Morsi, has yet to condemn the invasion of the U.S. Embassy in Cairo. Gehad al-Haddad, an adviser to the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party, said he was in touch with the president's office throughout Tuesday, and that every care was taken to protect U.S. Embassy staff. The executive office ordered police reinforcements and later, a small military deployment, Mr. Haddad said.

Whereas the Brotherhood is seen as a more practical, moderate group whose members adhere to an institutional hierarchy, Salafis conform to conservative styles of dress, believing that mimicking the life of the Prophet Muhammad and his contemporaries will lead them to salvation. Aiming to achieve the earthly moral paradise promised in the Quran, Salafis take an uncompromising view toward enforcing their view of good behavior in others.

Tunisia and Libya in particular have seen an abrupt increase in the Salafis' sanctimonious torment, though it has rarely reached the level of violence seen Tuesday night in Cairo and Benghazi, where four U.S. diplomats were killed.

Over the past month, Salafi groups have smashed, burned and destroyed several of Libya's historic shrines that they believed to be blasphemous, and demolished the graves of revered Islamic holy men whose beliefs contravened Salafi strictures. Libyan officials denounced the destruction, but no one has been arrested for the vandalism.

In Tunisia, police have done little to stop groups of Salafi youth armed with truncheons from policing beaches, art galleries and theaters to stop what they consider philanderers and inappropriate media.

In Egypt, many observers blame Salafis for an uptick in tension between Muslims and Christians. Salafi leaders and television preachers have stoked violence by accusing Egypt's Coptic Christians of kidnapping Christian women to prevent them from converting to Islam.

In Syria, too, Salafi groups are among the wide-ranging elements of rebel fighters and have sometimes have had tensions with other groups.

In several incidents over the past year, local Salafi leaders and well-known television preachers have stoked violence by accusing members of Egypt's Coptic Christian minority of kidnapping Christian women to prevent them from converting to Islam.

Though dozens of people have died in attacks on Christian homes and churches, Christians note that almost no perpetrators have been held to account. Police normally try to resolve the tensions through a kind of extrajudicial community mediation that rarely leads to punishment. ([top](#))

US embassies in Algeria, Tunisia warn of protests

September 12, 2012

Associated Press

ALGIERS, Algeria — The American embassies in Algeria and Tunisia warned of more protests Wednesday, following attacks by protesters in neighboring Libya in which the U.S. ambassador and three embassy staff were killed.

Ambassador Chris Stevens and the three other Americans died in an attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi by armed protesters angry over a film by a California filmmaker that ridiculed Islam's Prophet Muhammad.

In an emergency message, the embassy in Tunis warned Americans to avoid crowded places, saying that even gatherings "intended to be peaceful can turn confrontational and possibly escalate into violence." The embassy in Algiers had similar advice.

The Algiers embassy said unspecified groups were using online social networks to organize demonstrations "to protest a range of issues" there Wednesday. The statement out of Tunis cited "media reports" indicating protests were planned, but said the embassy remained open.

The attack in Libya — which borders Algeria and Tunisia — came hours after Egyptian protesters climbed the walls of the U.S. Embassy in Cairo, pulling down the American flag and temporarily replacing it with a black Islamic banner

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Spotlight Is on Libya, but Bigger Challenge for White House May Lie in Egypt

September 12, 2012

New York Times

By HELENE COOPER and MARK LANDLER

WASHINGTON — For all the harrowing images of the deadly attack on the American mission in Benghazi, the Obama administration is grappling with the possibility that its far bigger long-term problem lies in Egypt, not Libya.

Hours before the attacks in Benghazi on Tuesday, the American Embassy in Cairo came under siege from protesters. While the violence there did not result in any American deaths, the tepid response from the Egyptian government to the assault gave officials in Washington — already troubled by the direction of President Mohamed Morsi's new Islamist government — further cause for concern.

President Obama telephoned Mr. Morsi and the president of Libya's National Assembly, the White House said early on Thursday, in calls that seemed different in tone, suggesting dissatisfaction with Cairo's response as opposed to Tripoli's.

To Mohammed Magarief, the leader of Libya's National Assembly, Mr. Obama "expressed appreciation for the cooperation we have received from the Libyan government and people in responding to this outrageous attack," the White House said in a statement.

To Mr. Morsi, there was no mention of appreciation. Instead, the White House said in a separate but parallel statement that Mr. Obama "underscored the importance of Egypt following through on its commitment to cooperate with the United States in securing U.S. diplomatic facilities and personnel."

President Obama, speaking in the Rose Garden on Wednesday, pointedly noted that Libyan authorities had tried to help the American effort to protect diplomats in Benghazi. "This attack will not break the bonds between the United States and Libya," Mr. Obama said. The Libyans "helped some of our diplomats find safety, and they carried Ambassador Stevens's body to the hospital, where we tragically learned he had died," he added, referring to the envoy J. Christopher Stevens.

The president found less reason to be pleased with Egypt, the second-largest recipient of American foreign aid after Israel, at \$2 billion a year. Mr. Morsi issued only a mild rebuke of the rioters — and on Facebook — while his movement, the Muslim Brotherhood, has called for a second day of protests against the lurid anti-Muslim video that set off the riots. And though the Egyptian police coordinated with American officials, Mr. Morsi waited 24 hours before issuing his statement against the militants who stormed the embassy; Libyan authorities issued immediate, unequivocal statements of regret for the bloodshed in Benghazi.

Mr. Obama seemed to indicate that the American relationship with Egypt is evolving. "I don't think that we would consider them an ally, but we don't consider them an enemy," he said in an interview with Telemundo that was broadcast Wednesday night on The Rachel Maddow Show on MSNBC. "I think it's still a work in progress, but certainly in this situation, what we're going to expect is that they are responsive to our insistence that *our embassy is protected, our personnel is protected.*"

For the United States, "politically the bigger issue is Egypt," said Martin S. Indyk, a former United States ambassador to Israel. "On the one hand, you didn't have Americans getting killed, but this was the fourth time an embassy was assaulted in Cairo with the Egyptian police doing precious little," Mr. Indyk said. "And where was President Morsi's condemnation of this?"

Several foreign policy experts said they worried that Mr. Morsi was putting appeasement of his country's Islamist population ahead of national security. That comes on top of other moves by his government, including restrictions on press freedom and squabbling with Israel over how to crack down on terrorists taking root in the Sinai Peninsula.

While the killing of Mr. Stevens is a "tragedy," said Robert Malley, Middle East and North Africa program director at the International Crisis Group, "in the longer term, Libya mainly is a problem for Libyans." What happens in Egypt, by contrast, from "popular attitudes toward the U.S., to its domestic economy, to relations between the Muslim Brotherhood and the army, to relations between Cairo and Jerusalem, to the situation in Sinai, will profoundly affect the region, and so will profoundly affect America's posture in the region," he said.

What makes Egypt's uncertain course so vexing for the White House is that Mr. Obama, more than any other foreign leader, has sided again and again with the Arab street in Cairo, even when it meant going

expressly against the wishes of traditional allies, including the Egyptian military, the Persian Gulf states and Israel.

As recently as June, Mr. Obama was calling on the Egyptian military to quickly hand over power to the democratically elected civilian government — a move that helped Mr. Morsi, whose movement has called for greater use of Islamic law, assume power. At the same time, the administration was chastising the military, which has for 30 years served as the bulwark of a crucial American strategic interest in the Middle East: the 1979 Camp David peace treaty between Egypt and Israel.

For anti-American unrest to erupt in Egypt after all that could reflect a deeper divergence of a once-staunch ally from the United States. Mr. Morsi's belated reaction came after other actions that have troubled American officials, from his decision to attend a meeting of nonaligned countries in Tehran to his choice of China for his first overseas trip. Mr. Obama has pledged to forgive \$1 billion in Egyptian debt.

"How does the president go to the Hill and say, 'We need to forgive \$1 billion in Egyptian debt?'" said Steven A. Cook, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations. "The complication is that this is happening six weeks before the election. The things that the administration wants to do in Egypt have become a heavier lift."

David Makovsky, a senior fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, said: "There are some real serious questions about the direction of the Egyptian government. Some of this will be submerged because of the election, but it is likely to come back later."

The violence in Libya and Egypt reinforces what has been true from the start of the Arab uprisings last year: These are homegrown popular movements over which the United States has at best limited influence.

The odds of success may be greater in Libya, some analysts said, since that country's problems are rooted in a lack of effective governance and security problems with a heavily armed populace, rather than in a newly empowered movement with a long history of suspicion of the United States.

The killing of Mr. Stevens sets back American efforts to help Libya with its transition, officials said, but only because he was such a tireless figure in this work.

"Libya's public is quite pro-American, so it might produce a backlash against those responsible," said Dennis B. Ross, a former senior adviser on the Middle East in the White House.

In Egypt, by contrast, Mr. Ross said: "Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood continue to live according to their own reality. If they want to attract any amount of economic support and investment from the outside, they're going to have to create an environment of security."

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Inside The Public Relations Disaster At The Cairo Embassy

September 13, 2012

Foreign Policy Magazine

By Josh Rogin

One staffer at the U.S. Embassy in Cairo was responsible for the statement and tweets Tuesday that have become grist for the presidential campaign, and that staffer ignored explicit State Department instructions not to issue the statement, one U.S. official close to the issue told The Cable.

Two additional administration officials confirmed the details of this account when contacted late Wednesday by The Cable.

The statement, issued as a press release on the U.S. Embassy website, has been attacked by Republican challenger Mitt Romney, lawmakers, and conservatives around the country as an inappropriate "apology" and a failure to stand up for American principles such as freedom of speech.

The White House distanced itself from the statement Tuesday, and Romney criticized it directly in his initial reaction to the attacks in Egypt and Libya shortly thereafter, accusing President Barack Obama of evincing sympathy for the attackers.

On Wednesday, Romney doubled down on that criticism, saying, "I think it's a terrible course for America to apologize for our values."

President Obama commented on the controversy in an interview to be aired Wednesday evening on 60 Minutes.

"In an effort to cool the situation down, it didn't come from me, it didn't come from Secretary Clinton. It came from people on the ground who are potentially in danger," Obama said. "And my tendency is to cut folks a little bit of slack when they're in that circumstance, rather than try to question their judgment from the comfort of a campaign office."

But Obama's remarks belie the enormous frustration of top officials at the State Department and White House with the actions of the man behind the statement, Cairo senior public affairs officer Larry Schwartz, who wrote the release and oversees the embassy's Twitter feed, according to a detailed account of the Tuesday's events.

The official noted that the statement was posted at exactly 12:18 p.m. Cairo time -- 6:18 a.m. Washington time -- well before the protests began. Romney has said, wrongly, that the statement was the administration's first response to the protests, but the official said that the demonstrations did not begin until 4 p.m. Cairo time and protesters breached the wall about 2 hours later.

After the breach, as public criticism of the statement grew, the Cairo Embassy Twitter account continued to send out tweets defending it, some of which were later deleted. One deleted tweet, originally posted at 12:30 a.m. Cairo time, said, "This morning's condemnation (issued before protests began) still stands. As does condemnation of unjustified breach of the Embassy."

Before issuing the press release, Schwartz cleared it with just one person senior to himself, Deputy Chief of Mission Marc Sievers, who was the acting charge d'affaires at the embassy on Tuesday because Ambassador Anne Patterson was in Washington at the time, the official said.

Schwartz sent the statement to the State Department in Washington before publishing and the State Department directed him not to post it without changes, but Schwartz posted it anyway.

"The statement was not cleared with anyone in Washington. It was sent as 'This is what we are putting out,'" the official said. "We replied and said this was not a good statement and that it needed major revisions. The next email we received from Embassy Cairo was 'We just put this out.'"

A heated discussion ensued among State Department and White House officials over e-mail as the controversy over the statement grew Tuesday evening, even grabbing the attention of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. Meanwhile, those same officials were dealing with a more serious attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi that resulted in the death of four American officials, including Ambassador Chris Stevens.

"People at the highest levels both at the State Department and at the White House were not happy with the way the statement went down. There was a lot of anger both about the process and the content," the official said. "Frankly, people here did not understand it. The statement was just tone deaf. It didn't provide adequate balance. We thought the references to the 9/11 attacks were inappropriate, and we strongly advised against the kind of language that talked about 'continuing efforts by misguided individuals to hurt the religious feelings of Muslims.'"

Despite being aware of Washington's objections, the embassy continued to defend the statement for several hours, fueling the controversy over it, a decision the official again attributed to Schwartz.

"Not only did they push out the statement but they continued to engage on Twitter and retweet it," the official said. "[Schwartz] would have been the one directing folks to engage on Twitter on this."

At approximately 10:30 p.m. Washington time, Clinton issued a statement on both the Libya and Egypt attacks that included a reference to religious tolerance as well as an emphasis on the administration's condemnation of the embassy attack.

"The United States deplores any intentional effort to denigrate the religious beliefs of others," she said. "Our commitment to religious tolerance goes back to the very beginning of our nation. But let me be clear: There is never any justification for violent acts of this kind."

Despite his disregard of Washington's instructions and his actions throughout the day Tuesday, Schwartz has not yet been disciplined in any way and is still the lead public affairs officer at the embassy.

"He remains at post at the same capacity as he was," the official said.

The State Department declined to comment and a request sent to the U.S. Embassy in Cairo for comment was not immediately returned.

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U.S. Group Issues Warning on Iran Attack

September 13, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By JULIAN E. BARNES

WASHINGTON—A bipartisan group of ambassadors, retired generals and foreign policy experts is warning against a U.S. or Israeli attack on Iran's nuclear facilities without a more thorough public discussion to weigh the costs and benefits.

In a paper and letter to be released Thursday, the group argues that an attack could delay Iran's development of a nuclear weapon for up to four years, but would have other consequences, such as rallying the Iranian people behind the current regime and solidifying the government's hold on power.

The group, which includes retired Marine Gen. Anthony Zinni, former National Security advisor Brent Scowcroft and former deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage, who served in Republican administrations, doesn't oppose military action across the board. But members argue that the country needs a more thorough debate about the consequences of an attack on Iran.

"Big national security decisions are not easy to make," said veteran diplomat Thomas Pickering, a former ambassador to the United Nations, who helped organize the group. "As you go ahead we think the national debate of the issue should be well informed... people should understand it is not a slam dunk, these are very hard issues."

In an interview, Mr. Pickering said if it turns out that the U.S. or Israel struck Iran's nuclear facilities before Tehran had decided to build a nuclear weapon, any Iranian opposition to building a nuclear weapon in Iran could evaporate.

But the paper doesn't rule out the need for any military involvement, and Mr. Pickering said it argues that a strike may be required if Tehran moves to build a weapon.

An attack could deter nuclear proliferation by other countries and demonstrate American commitment to protecting its allies in the Middle East, the group believes. The paper also argues that any strike is likely to damage Iran's military capabilities. But it concludes that a strike wouldn't destabilize the regime.

Among the Democrats endorsing the paper are former Georgia Sen. Sam Nunn, former Indiana Congressman Lee Hamilton, former State Department official Anne-Marie Slaughter, former National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski and former Federal Reserve chairman Paul Volcker.

The former officials and experts are wading into a sometimes emotional political and foreign policy issue. Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney has attacked President Barack Obama's handling of Iran during the election campaign.

Foreign policy issues have been a strength for Mr. Obama, but some Republicans believe he is vulnerable to criticism for his handling of Iran and Israel. Nonetheless, the cautious approach to military force advocated by the group could benefit Mr. Obama.

Some signatories said they worried about the impact of the fall campaign on the debate over Iran.

"I am deeply concerned an issue of grave consequence to our national security might fall victim to a campaign season in which the various sides will amplify their rhetoric to gain political advantage making this issue subject more to politics than to the gravity of discussion it deserves," said retired Lt. Gen. Greg Newbold.

Lt. Gen. Newbold said that, despite the success of limited military operations in Libya or Kosovo, there is more to a military campaign than an initial strike. "I think there isn't a full appreciation of all of the consequences of a military strike," he said.

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U.S. lawmakers urge White House to seek more Iran oil cuts

September 12, 2012

Reuters

WASHINGTON - Two senators asked the Obama administration on Wednesday to push countries to make more cuts in Iranian oil purchases before they receive exemptions from U.S. penalties for doing business with the OPEC nation.

In a letter to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Senators Mark Kirk and Robert Menendez said they believed the administration should ensure oil-consuming countries have cut Iranian crude purchases by about 18 percent before the United States renews 180-day exemptions to sanctions. Kirk and Menendez were two architects of the sanctions laws.

The sanctions are designed to make it harder for Iran to fund its nuclear program, which Washington suspects is developing nuclear weapons, a charge Iran denies. Under the laws, banks in countries that buy oil from Iran cannot do business with the U.S. financial system unless they reduce the amount of Iranian oil they purchase.

This year the Obama administration granted exemptions to all of Iran's major oil buyers because they have "significantly" reduced purchases of the oil. The meaning of the word "significantly" has been subject to interpretation.

Exemptions for Japan and 10 European Union nations are up for renewal this month.

"We believe the term 'significant reduction' to mean a minimum of 18 percent in purchase reduction, whether achieved through price discounts or volume reductions, and oriented toward a complete cessation of such purchases," the senators wrote.

The roughly 18 percent level surfaced in March when the State Department exempted Japan from sanctions. The State Department's special envoy for international energy affairs estimated that Japan had cut oil purchases from Iran by about 15 to 22 percent.

The official, Carlos Pascual, indicated that decisions on exemptions were made on a country-by-country basis, and he would not say if minimum cuts were required.

A State Department spokeswoman said the agency had no comment on the letter.

Kirk and Menendez said reductions should continue to be made because the Energy Information Administration, an independent branch of the Energy Department, has found that increased production from Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Libya has partly made up for production lost in Iran due to the sanctions.

Iran's oil exports are estimated to have fallen to about 1 million barrels per day from about 2.3 million bpd a year ago as the sanctions choke the industry.

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Insight: Iran parks oil off Malaysia to dodge Western sanctions

September 13, 2012

Reuters

By Luke Pachymuthu and Randy Fabi

LABUAN, Malaysia/SINGAPORE - Iran is using a little-known port off the East Malaysia coast to hide millions of barrels of oil from Western sanctions, according to shipping data, industry sources and officials.

A Reuters examination of shipping movements and interviews shows how Iranian crude is shipped to the area and loaded on to empty vessels at night to await potential Asian buyers.

Storing the oil on hired tankers operating under the Panamanian flag in the calm waters off the tax-haven port of Labuan - an offshore financial centre about the size of Manhattan - means Iran can keep its own fleet active and ensure the flow of oil money into its struggling economy.

At least two large oil tankers have been unloaded this way in recent weeks and several more Iranian vessels were steaming towards Asia, according to Reuters Freight Fundamentals, which tracks the movement of the global tanker fleet. One was destined for a Chinese port, while three others, carrying as much as 6 million barrels of crude or fuel oil, were sailing to unknown destinations.

Iran would like to shift more oil to what is effectively a mobile storage depot off Malaysia's coast over the next few months, said an industry source familiar with Iran's planning who didn't want to be identified due to the sensitivity of the matter. But it is struggling to find shipowners willing to offer vessels for storage.

While not illegal, the dead-of-night transfer of oil in the South China Sea illustrates the lengths to which Iran will go to keep exporting its oil to skirt Western sanctions aimed at pressuring Tehran's suspected pursuit of nuclear weapons. A European Union oil embargo has virtually halted access around the world to insurance for Iranian crude and oil products.

Doing business with Iran's oil industry carries reputational and financial risk and the threat of losing insurance coverage.

NO-MAN'S LAND

Less than 10 km (6.2 miles) from the coast of Borneo, Labuan is sheltered from typhoons and is typically used to park unwanted ships rather than store expensive oil. People in the industry say this makes it an ideal place to blend or rebrand oil as non-Iranian and resell it under the radar of sanctions enforcers in Washington or Brussels.

"Labuan is like a no-man's land. There's no reason to be paying attention to Labuan," said a Singapore-based source familiar with floating storage operations in Southeast Asia.

The insurer of one of the storage ships that took oil from an Iranian tanker said it had been informed of the transfer by the British government on August 16, and was looking into the matter.

With fewer customers, Iran has cut its oil output and almost halved exports from around 2 million barrels per day last year. The Labuan scheme means Iran can use its own tankers to move, rather than store, its oil. In April, shipping sources said more than half of Iran's tanker fleet was anchored in the Gulf just holding some 33 million barrels of oil - worth around \$3 billion at today's prices.

Malaysian and Iranian officials did not respond to requests for comment for this article.

China, India, Japan and South Korea, which together buy over half of OPEC member Iran's crude exports, have all imported less this year, winning waivers from U.S. sanctions. Those waivers are up for renewal later this year, so buyers are careful not to be seen to be increasing imports from Iran again.

DEAD OF NIGHT

Last month, the Lantana, a tanker operated by the National Iranian Tanker Co (NITC), transferred its cargo of around 1 million barrels of crude oil to the Titan Ruchira, a floating storage vessel, off the tiny tropical island of Pulau Kuraman near Labuan, port and shipping industry officials said. Around August 10, another Iranian tanker, the Motion, discharged as much as 2 million barrels of fuel oil on to the Titan Tulshyan in the same area, said the officials.

The two ships are among 58 Iranian-owned vessels blacklisted by Washington in July for assisting in Iran's oil trade. Those measures bar U.S. companies and Americans from doing business with the ships.

"Our vessels are there and, as we understand it, there are no issues," a source familiar with NITC tanker chartering told Reuters.

A third NITC tanker, the Justice, had been heading for Labuan, but shipping data shows it changed course and should arrive at the Chinese port of Dalian on September 17. Another tanker, the Pioneer, had been expected in Labuan early this month, but has anchored off the southwest Malaysian coast.

"That (Lantana) operation took place literally in the dark of night. They didn't even use a proper operator with experience to carry out the STS (ship-to-ship transfer)," said an East Malaysian-based shipping source. "The authorities were aware only after the fact."

Iran declined to sell the stored crude to a Chinese trader who offered \$54 a barrel - only around half the price of Iran's cheapest heavy crudes - said a source familiar with those discussions.

COMPLEX WEB

The two Titan vessels are owned by offshore companies linked to Singapore-based Tulshyan Group, which hired them out in 2010 to Hong Kong-based Titan Petrochemicals under a 5-year bare boat charter - an arrangement where Tulshyan has no staff managing or operating the vessel. Tulshyan, which shares a Singapore office with Titan, said it was not aware that the cargo on its ships was Iranian.

Titan, battling a shipping industry downturn caused by a glut of tankers, high bunker fuel prices and a shaky global economy, has struggled to meet charter payments to Tulshyan, according to a person familiar with the matter. Heavy with debt and with five straight years of losses, Titan is being sold to Chinese oil trader Guangdong Zhenrong Energy Co Ltd, whose parent, Zhuhai Zhenrong, is blacklisted by the United States as the biggest supplier of refined petroleum products to Iran.

Titan hired out the two tankers to Glammarine, a little-known shipping company that only recently registered in Labuan. Glammarine took the two ships under a 6-month charter, with Titan's crews running the vessels' day-to-day operations and Glammarine taking responsibility for finding the cargo and paying for use of the ships.

"This was the first business we've done with Glammarine ... there were no red flags raised (about them)," Titan director Augustine Cheong told Reuters in Singapore. "The due diligence we took was to

check if they are legally incorporated. And it's on a time charter, so we have our own crew on board and can see if they're doing something wrong." Cheong said Titan would drop the charter to Glammarine if the oil was found to be Iranian.

Glammarine officials declined to comment. A visit to a listed Labuan address for Glammarine given in business registry documents found a rundown building in a neighborhood once used to house workers at a now defunct milk factory. The premises were closed.

PAPER TRAIL

Glammarine agreed to let a company called Account International Safe Oil use the Titan Ruchira and Titan Tulshyan to store 4 million barrels of Iranian oil, shipping sources said. Account International is not registered in Malaysia or Hong Kong, and Reuters was unable to find an address for the company or contact staff for comment. Buyers of Iranian oil in China, India and Japan said they had not heard of the company.

A Middle East industry source familiar with the company said Account International was an affiliate of the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC). A second source based in East Malaysia said the firm had business links to HK Intertrade, a Hong Kong-based firm sanctioned by the United States in July for operating as a front company for Iran.

"HK Intertrade purchases oil from NIOC and resells it to companies like Account," another southeast Asia-based shipping industry source said.

The ships' managers from Titan were not aware that the crude and fuel oil transferred from the Lantana and Motion were from Iran, Cheong said. "We requested BL (bill of lading) documents. We were told the cargo was from India ... and we believed they were ex-NITC tankers," he added. "We only operate the ships as the ship manager. We don't own the cargo."

A source familiar with the operations of the Titan Ruchira said the cargo was declared as Iranian to port officials in nearby Sabah. Customs officials in Sabah did not respond to Reuters emails. But in signed shipping documents seen by Reuters, Account International listed the 1 million barrels of crude oil unloaded by the Lantana as Indian.

India, though, doesn't allow the export of domestically produced crude. Nor did the Lantana call in at India on its journey to Malaysia that began at Iran's crude export hub at Kharg Island, according to Reuters Freight Fundamentals and industry sources in both India and the Middle East.

Account International also indicated on shipping documents seen by Reuters that the fuel oil on the Motion was from Fujairah, a major transshipment and storage hub in the United Arab Emirates. Shipping data shows the Motion did stop in Fujairah, but began its trip in Iran.

INSURANCE RISK

The Titan Ruchira is insured by the North of England P&I Association, which said it was looking into the matter after being informed of the transfer off Labuan by London last month. Western insurers underwrite around 90 percent of the world's tanker fleet, and are currently barred from covering ships carrying Iranian oil.

"There is a risk ... a vessel providing storage services for Iranian oil would breach European sanctions laws," said Mike Salthouse, director with North Insurance Management, which acts as manager for the North of England P&I Association. "I say a risk because sanctions as currently drafted appear to target the insurance of the transportation of Iranian oil and not the provision of insurance to facilities storing such products."

The insurer declined further comment on its investigations.

The Titan Tulshyan is among some 7,000 vessels covered by Gard, the world's second-largest marine insurer.

"Gard takes very seriously any suggestion that it is in breach of any international sanctions and is conducting an investigation," it said in a response to Reuters queries. "Gard can, and will, withdraw any insurance cover if it believes sanctions are being breached."

Rakesh Tulshyan, head of the Tulshyan Group that owns the two Titan vessels, said that if there is "concrete evidence that it's Iranian oil", he will seek to have it removed from his vessels. "Because of my reputation, I would rather not do any business with links to sanctioned countries," he told Reuters.

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Russia, China agree to resolution criticizing Iran

September 13, 2012

Washington Times

VIENNA, Austria — The U.S. and its Western allies have persuaded Russia and China to support a resolution critical of Iran's nuclear defiance in the intention of showing Israel that diplomacy is an alternative to military force in pressuring Tehran, diplomats said Wednesday.

The resolution, which demands that Iran stop activities that could be used to make nuclear arms, cannot be enforced by the 35-nation board of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), even if approved by vote or consensus as expected Thursday.

But with Israel increasingly floating force as an alternative to failed international efforts to curtail suspected Iranian nuclear activities, the document is significant in seeking to show world-power resolve in pursuing a diplomatic solution to the standoff.

Israel views a nuclear-armed Iran as a mortal threat, citing Iran's persistent calls for the destruction of the Jewish state, its development of missiles capable of striking Israel, and Iranian support for Arab militant groups.

Tehran insists its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes only. But it refuses foreign offers of reactor fuel if it stops making its own through uranium enrichment -- a process that worries the international community because it could be used to arm nuclear warheads, too.

Concerns also focus on IAEA suspicions that Iran has worked secretly on nuclear arms -- allegations Iran dismisses as based on fabricated U.S. and Israeli intelligence.

With fears increasing about the possibility of an Israeli military attack and other diplomatic efforts on Iran deadlocked, diplomats told the Associated Press that a resolution supported by the six powers seeking to engage Tehran about its nuclear program had become a priority discussed at the highest level.

The text was agreed on only after consultations involving Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and her counterparts in Russia, China, Britain, France and Germany, said the diplomats, who demanded anonymity because the negotiating process was confidential.

While the four Western powers had no differences, it was unclear until Wednesday whether Russia and China -- which Iran has relied on to blunt harsh U.N. and other sanctions -- would agree to join in backing the resolution.

The diplomats said they were persuaded largely with the argument that a signal of big-power unity had to be sent to Israel.

A Russian diplomat refused Wednesday to discuss how the accord on the resolution came about.

Russia and China have been inconsistent in backing such Western efforts in the past. While joining in a critical resolution at an IAEA meeting in November, they refused to do so in June.

The current unity came at a price for the West, which had to settle for compromise language in the text of the resolution, made available to the AP outside the closed meeting.

While expressing "serious concern" over continued Iranian uranium enrichment in defiance of the U.N. Security Council, the six nations say they back the "inalienable right" of countries that have signed the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty to develop nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. That is a bow to arguments by Iran, an NPT signatory, that it has a right to enrich uranium.

The resolution "stresses" that the IAEA has not reported any nuclear material missing from Iran sites it is monitoring. Missing material could mean that Tehran is using it elsewhere for weapons purposes.

It only "notes" that the agency cannot conclude there is no hidden nuclear activity going on because of "lack of cooperation" by Iran on agency requests that it be given greater powers to monitor the country.
(top)

Netanyahu's Comments Cause Stir In Israel

September 12, 2012

New York Times

By Isabel Kershner

JERUSALEM - In Israel, where arguments are rife, there are at least two issues of national consensus: that the special relationship with the United States must be preserved at all costs, and that the looming threat of a nuclear Iran must be dealt with.

So on Wednesday, a day after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu publicly lashed out at the Obama administration for what he called its refusal to set clear "red lines" that would prompt the United States to undertake a military strike on Iran's nuclear program, Israelis were generally sympathetic to Mr. Netanyahu even as they mulled the possible damage to ties with the White House.

Mr. Netanyahu struck a more moderate tone after an overnight phone call from President Obama.

"As prime minister of Israel, it is my duty to uphold the vital interests of the State of Israel, to ensure its security and its future," he said in remarks relayed by his office. "I uphold these interests, not that it's easy, because leadership is tested in upholding them even if there are disagreements with friends, even the best of friends," he added.

There is broad support in Israel for Mr. Netanyahu's demand for firm assurances. Many Israelis oppose the idea of a go-it-alone strike on Iran's nuclear facilities, as Mr. Netanyahu has threatened, and see American red lines as a possible way out of the conundrum.

But supporters and opponents of Mr. Netanyahu alike are disturbed by the blunt and public way in which the dialogue has been conducted, particularly at a delicate political moment ahead of the American elections in November.

Shaul Mofaz, the opposition leader in the Israeli Parliament, attacked Mr. Netanyahu, accusing him of breaking a cardinal rule by meddling in American politics.

"Prime Minister, who do you think is Israel's greatest enemy? The United States or Iran?" he asked from the podium in Parliament. "Who do you fear more, Mr. Netanyahu - Ahmadinejad or President Obama?" he said, referring to the Iranian president.

"Which administration is it more important for you to replace - the administration in Washington or that in Tehran?" he added. "Explain to us, Mr. Prime Minister, what are your red lines in managing the current crisis with the Americans over Iran?"

In an unusually pointed exchange between allies, Mr. Netanyahu had said on Tuesday that "those in the international community who refuse to put red lines before Iran don't have a moral right to place a red light before Israel." He was apparently responding to a weekend statement by Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton that the United States was "not setting deadlines" beyond which it would turn to a military solution. The verbal tit-for-tat capped months of public sparring by senior Israeli and American officials.

"Both sides have said things that, in my humble opinion, should not have been said," said Sallai Meridor, who was Israel's ambassador to the United States from 2006 to 2009.

With the Iranians listening to every word, he said, the open discussions and the casting of aspersions on each other's will or capability to act are "a very unfortunate, if not dangerous, development." He added, "If there's a difference of opinion in the family, so to speak, you don't go public."

Mr. Netanyahu is perceived as trying to leverage the pre-election period to win more explicit American commitments on Iran, and some have interpreted his harsh criticism of Mr. Obama as open support for Mitt Romney.

But many here, including some longstanding critics of Mr. Netanyahu, said they did not believe his remarks were motivated by politics.

"I think he really believes a threat is looming," said Isaac Herzog, a former cabinet minister and chairman of Parliament's Labor Party faction, "and he wants to stop it."

Several analysts and experts here attributed Mr. Netanyahu's outburst to deep frustration with the United States for telling Israel to hold off on a military strike against Iran, and to a feeling in Israel that time is running out for any unilateral action.

"Netanyahu believes he needs some understanding with the United States, because he does not have enough support in Israel" to go it alone, said Eytan Gilboa, a professor at the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies at Bar-Ilan University and an expert in Israel-American relations.

Though the Iranians insist that their nuclear program is for peaceful purposes, Israel views a nuclear Iran as an existential threat and Mr. Netanyahu has frequently equated Iran with Nazi Germany and raised the specter of a second Holocaust.

"I think Netanyahu found himself in a place where he felt he had not much to lose," said Avinoam Bar-Yosef, the president of the Jewish People Policy Planning Institute in Jerusalem. "He tried to see Obama but Obama did not want to see him," Mr. Bar-Yosef said, referring to Mr. Netanyahu's failed attempt to secure a meeting with the American president when he visits the United Nations this month.

Mr. Netanyahu's relations with Mr. Obama may have been tense over the years, but given the close ties between Israel and the United States and their joint strategic interests, few here think that the relationship will be seriously damaged by one harsh statement.

But many cautioned against intervening in American politics. Israel sees the bipartisan support it has long enjoyed in the United States as one of its greatest assets. Associates of Mr. Netanyahu say that he understands the importance of that as much as anyone.

"Netanyahu is smart enough to know that Obama may well be the president after the elections as well," said Moshe Arens, a former Israeli ambassador to Washington and a onetime mentor to Mr. Netanyahu. "He's no dumbbo."

(top)

U.S. Officials: Attack On Consulate In Libya May Have Been Planned

September 12, 2012

Washington Post

By Karen Deyoung, Michael Birnbaum And William Branigin

U.S. officials and Middle East analysts said Wednesday that an attack that killed four Americans at a U.S. Consulate in eastern Libya may have been planned by extremists and inspired by al-Qaeda.

The U.S. Ambassador to Libya, J. Christopher Stevens, and three other Americans were killed Tuesday in an assault on the consulate in the city of Benghazi. President Obama strongly condemned the attack and pledged to bring the perpetrators to justice, vowing that "justice will be done."

The attack followed a violent protest at the U.S. Embassy in Cairo over a low-budget anti-Muslim film made in the United States, and it initially appeared that the assault on the Benghazi consulate was another spontaneous response. But senior U.S. officials and Middle East analysts raised questions Wednesday about the motivation for the Benghazi attack, noting that it involved the use of a rocket-

propelled grenade and followed an al-Qaeda call to avenge the death of a senior Libyan member of the terrorist network.

Libyan officials and a witness said the attackers took advantage of a protest over the film to launch their assault.

Stevens, 52, and the others appear to have been killed inside the temporary consulate, possibly by a rocket-propelled grenade, according to officials briefed on the assault.

The chain of events remains unclear, but Rep. Mike Rogers (R-Mich.), chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, said there is strong evidence that the attack was planned.

"This was a well-armed, well-coordinated event," Rogers said in an interview on MSNBC. "It had both indirect and direct fire, and it had military maneuvers that were all part of this very organized attack." Rogers referred to weapons that aimed directly at a target and those, such as rockets and mortars, that are fired without a direct line of sight.

According to Firas Abdelhakim, a Libyan television journalist who said he witnessed part of the attack, a group of several dozen armed men mounted the assault.

Abdelhakim said he was about three miles from consulate when he saw 20 to 30 cars driving toward the consulate shortly before 9:30 p.m. Tuesday.

When he reached the consulate, he said, he saw about 50 armed men gathering who were not carrying banners or chanting slogans. When asked who they were, they described themselves variously as "Muslims defending the Prophet" and "a group of Muslim youth" who were "defending Islam," Abdelhakim said.

He said he saw Libyan security forces - the February 17 Battalion - guarding the consulate, a walled-off villa compound with several buildings, a swimming pool and one security watchtower on an unpaved side street in a prosperous residential district of Benghazi.

The assault on the consulate started sometime between 10:30 and 11 p.m., and the two groups traded fire, Abdelhakim said.

Benghazi residents said the compound had never previously had a major security presence around it.

The Defense Department has dispatched two Marine antiterrorism security teams to Libya to reinforce security there, a senior Marine official said. In a statement issued by the White House early Wednesday, Obama said he had directed an increase in security at U.S. diplomatic posts around the world.

(Find the latest updates on The Post's live blog.)

The FBI said in a statement that it has opened an investigation into the deaths of the four Americans and the attack on the consulate. It said investigators would work closely with the State Department and "the appropriate government partners" in Libya.

"The FBI will not speculate on the facts and circumstances surrounding the attacks," the statement said.

Stevens and the others were initially reported to have been killed when a rocket-propelled grenade struck their vehicle as they were fleeing the consulate. But Sen. John F. Kerry (D-Mass.), who received a preliminary briefing from U.S. officials on the attack, said all four of the dead were inside a room in the consulate compound, where they had been trying to organize an evacuation. He said their bodies were pulled out by Libyan rescuers.

A senior U.S. military official gave the same account, adding that the bodies of the four were transported to the Libyan capital, Tripoli, then out of Libya.

Kerry said there may have been a plan to attack the consulate but that it was unlikely to have been aimed at Stevens, who was there by "happenstance" after stopping by the consulate during a "side trip" in eastern Libya.

"I think they were planning to take the place, no matter who was there," said Kerry, who chairs the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

The U.S. military official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said all four of the dead were State Department civilians. About a half dozen Americans were wounded in the attack, and it was not immediately clear if any of them were military. No U.S. Marines were posted at the consulate as part of its security detail, the official said.

The attack was the latest in a series of violent assaults in Benghazi over the last several months - many, but not all, directed against U.S. interests there.

Tuesday's assault was the second on the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi. On June 5, a bomb exploded outside the gates of the compound in the first targeting of an American facility since the fall of longtime strongman Moammar Gaddafi last year.

The following day in Benghazi, two British bodyguards were injured in an attack on a convoy carrying the British ambassador to Libya. Last month, unknown assailants attacked a compound of the International Committee of the Red Cross in the Libyan port city of Misurata. No one was injured in that attack.

A group allied with al-Qaeda has claimed responsibility for several recent assaults in Benghazi. But there was no immediate claim of responsibility for Tuesday's attack.

Wanis al-Sharif, Libya's deputy interior minister, told reporters Wednesday that "among the protesters, there were some who infiltrated the march to start chaos."

Obama said Wednesday morning that the United States "condemns in the strongest possible terms this outrageous and shocking attack" and is working with the Libyan government to secure U.S. diplomats and bring the attackers to justice.

Appearing with Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton in the White House Rose Garden, Obama said: "We reject all efforts to denigrate the religious beliefs of others, but there is absolutely no justification to this type of senseless violence. None. The world must stand together to unequivocally reject these brutal acts."

He said many Libyans have already joined that stand, and he vowed, "This attack will not break the bonds between the United States and Libya." He stressed that Libyan security personnel had "fought back against the attackers alongside Americans" and that other Libyans carried Stevens's body to the hospital and helped U.S. diplomats find safety.

Obama added: "We will not waver in our commitment to see that justice is done for this terrible act. And make no mistake, justice will be done."

Obama spoke as some Middle East analysts suggested that the attack in Benghazi might have been launched as revenge for the death of a top al-Qaeda militant who was killed by an American drone strike in Pakistan in June.

Mathieu Guidere, a professor of Islamic studies at the University of Toulouse in France and an expert on Islamist radicals, said information from militant Web sites suggested that Libyan extremists seized on the film to rally people around an attack on the consulate. He said the attack appeared to be motivated by a recent call by Ayman al-Zawahiri, the al-Qaeda leader, to avenge the killing of Hassan Mohammed Qaed, better known as Abu Yahya al-Libi, a Libyan-born cleric who was a key aide to Osama bin Laden.

Quillam, a respected British think-tank that monitors extremist groups, said its sources in Libya and elsewhere in the region described the attack as a well-planned assault that occurred in two waves and was organized by a group of about 20 militants. The first wave involved driving the Americans from the consulate, and the second was a coordinated attack using a rocket-propelled grenade after they were taken to another location.

"These are acts committed by uncontrollable jihadist groups," said Noman Benotam, the president of Quillam.

Zawahiri, an Egyptian who took over as al-Qaeda leader after bin Laden was killed in a U.S. raid on his Pakistani hideout in May, issued a 42-minute video Monday acknowledging Libi's death and calling on Muslims, particularly fellow Libyans, to seek vengeance for the killing.

"With the martyrdom of Sheikh Hassan Mohammed Qaed, may God have mercy on him, people will flock even more to his writings and his call, God willing," Zawahiri said in the video. "His blood urges you and incites you to fight and kill the crusaders."

Stevens, a longtime Middle East hand in the State Department, was named ambassador to Libya in May. He had worked in Libya for a number of years, both before and after the fall of Libyan leader Moammar Gaddafi.

In an interview with The Washington Post in June, Stevens said Libya's emerging democracy faces a threat from small, violent Islamist groups that reject elections.

"These are, for the most part, new groups that are emerging after the revolution, and the Libyans themselves don't know who they are," Stevens said. "Some of these groups are probably forming out of the militias that grew out of the revolution, and they have access to arms, so that is troubling."

On the recent series of violent incidents in Libya, Stevens said, "When people cross the line, it's also a function of a lack of strong state and police to enforce the law."

Obama called Stevens a "courageous and exemplary representative" of the U.S. government, who "selflessly served our country and the Libyan people."

"His legacy will endure wherever human beings reach for liberty and justice," Obama said.

Clinton said she had called Libyan President Mohamed Yusuf al-Magariaf "to coordinate additional support to protect Americans in Libya."

The attack in Benghazi followed protests in neighboring Egypt, where a group of protesters scaled the wall of the U.S. Embassy in Cairo on Tuesday evening and entered its outer grounds, pulled down an American flag, then tried to burn it outside the embassy walls, according to witnesses. On Wednesday morning, a sit-in by several dozen protesters continued outside the Cairo embassy.

The attack on the embassy in Cairo was apparently prompted by outrage over an independent, anti-Muslim film made in the United States. It illustrated a deep vein of anti-American sentiment, even though the United States supported Arab Spring revolutions and was instrumental in providing financial and diplomatic support for their newly-democratic governments.

After his Rose Garden remarks, Obama headed to the State Department with Clinton to address a closed session of the diplomatic workforce. A White House official said Obama held the meeting "to express his solidarity with our diplomats stationed around the world." The official said Obama wanted to "give thanks for the service and sacrifices that our civilians make, and pay tribute to those who were lost."

Clinton identified one of the dead as Sean Smith, a Foreign Service information management officer for 10 years who was on a temporary assignment in Libya. She said Smith, an Air Force veteran, left a wife and two children. The names of the other two people killed were being withheld pending notification of their families, Clinton said.

Before appearing at the White House with Obama, Clinton called those who attacked the Benghazi consulate a "small and savage group," praised the response by the Libyan government and people to the violence and said the assault would not deter the United States from helping Libya become free and stable.

"This is an attack that should shock the conscience of people of all faiths around the world," Clinton said in a solemn speech at the State Department. "We condemn in the strongest possible terms this senseless act of violence."

"Today many Americans are asking - indeed I asked myself - how could this happen," she said. "How could this happen in a country we helped liberate, in a city we helped save from destruction? This question reflects just how complicated and, at times, how confounding, the world can be. But we must be clear-eyed even in our grief. This was an attack by a small and savage group, not by the people or government of Libya."

Clinton said Libyans had helped to repel the attackers and lead other Americans to safety, and she said Libya's president has pledged to pursue those responsible.

Stressing that "a free and stable Libya" is in the U.S. interest, Clinton said, "We will not turn our back on that. Nor will we rest until those responsible for these attacks are found and brought to justice."

She said some people have sought to justify the violence as "a response to inflammatory material posted on the Internet." She added: "There is no justification for this.... Violence like this is no way to honor religion or faith, and as long as there are those who would take innocent life in the name of God, the world will never know a true and lasting peace."

Both the Egyptian and Libyan governments condemned the violence outside the American diplomatic compounds. But local security officials in both countries appeared slow to provide protection for the American diplomatic installations and have issued no firm statements explaining the violence.

In a news conference in Tripoli Wednesday, Libya's prime minister and parliamentary speaker apologized for the assault and extended sympathy for the deaths to the United States and families of the victims.

While they provided no details, they offered two alternative theories regarding the perpetrators, saying at one point that Gaddafi loyalists were responsible but later saying that it involved "extremists" and was related to Tuesday's anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the United States.

Earlier, however, Sharif, the deputy interior minister, implied to reporters that the attack resulted from a failure of U.S. security at the consulate. "They are to blame simply for not withdrawing their personnel from the premises" despite earlier incidents, Sharif said, according to wire services. "It was necessary that they take precautions."

The film that appeared to have sparked the protest in Cairo is called "The Innocence of Muslims." It calls the prophet Muhammad a fraud and shows him having sex. A controversial Cairo television host, Sheikh Khaled Abdallah, aired clips from the video on an Islamic-focused television station on Saturday, and the same video clips were posted online on Monday.

A California real estate developer, Sam Bacile, who described himself as an Israeli Jew, said he made the film. Bacile had gone into hiding on Tuesday, but remained defiant in his condemnations of Islam, the Associated Press reported.

The crisis quickly spilled over into the U.S. presidential campaign, as Mitt Romney issued a brief statement saying he was "outraged" by the assaults. Romney then said, "It's disgraceful that the Obama administration's first response was not to condemn the attacks on our diplomatic missions, but to sympathize with those who waged the attacks."

Obama's reelection campaign quickly responded in kind, saying, "We are shocked that, at a time when the United States of America is confronting the tragic death of one of our diplomatic officers in Libya, Governor Romney would choose the launch of a political attack."

Romney, speaking to reporters on the campaign trail Wednesday, stood by his criticism.

Stevens was the first U.S. ambassador to be killed in the line of duty since 1988, when Arnold Raphel was killed in a mysterious airplane crash in Pakistan along with Pakistani president Zia ul-Haq.

The security breach at the embassy in Cairo comes at an awkward time for broader relations between the United States and Egypt, as the new Egyptian government strives to convince the world that it is running a stable and safe country. A 120-person U.S. business delegation was just wrapping up a visit on Tuesday that had been intended to inspire more investment in Egypt. Many of their events were held inside the fortress-like embassy compound in central Cairo that was stormed on Tuesday night.

Relatively few embassy employees were inside when the protesters hopped the wall because many had gone home early, according to a U.S. official speaking on the condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to comment publicly about the developing incident.

Later in the evening, the Egyptian military sealed the entrances to the embassy to secure it from the ongoing protest, witnesses reported. Protesters were still outside the Cairo embassy early Wednesday, but Nuland later said that police had cleared the remainder.

A spokesman for the embassy said that Ambassador Anne Patterson was out of Egypt on unrelated business and that all embassy employees were "safe and accounted for."

The security breach in Cairo appeared to catch both the United States and Egyptian security forces by surprise, even though the protest was announced in advance. Shortly before the protesters went over the wall, witnesses said, few Egyptian police or military officers were nearby.

"We are, obviously, working with Egyptian security to try to restore order at the embassy," State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland said Tuesday. "We all want to see peaceful protests, which is not what happened outside the U.S. mission, so we're trying to restore calm now."

Local media estimated that about 2,000 people participated in the protest, though in video footage of the incident only about a dozen appeared to have scaled the embassy wall. The protesters on the wall replaced the U.S. flag with a black flag with an inscription that read, "There is no god but God and Muhammad is his prophet."

A spokesman for Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi did not respond to telephone calls requesting comment. "The security of embassies and providing protection for diplomatic delegates is a responsibility of the utmost priority for official authorities in any country," the Egyptian Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

Protests at the U.S. Embassy are a regular feature of life in Cairo, where many people are suspicious of the United States and resent it for its support for Israel. But no previous protests have actually breached the embassy compound.

The embassy is in central Cairo, just a few blocks from Tahrir Square, and is a complex of several buildings surrounded by high white walls. Usually, police check vehicles in the streets surrounding the embassy, and cars must pass through moveable barriers.

Many protesters at the U.S. Embassy on Tuesday said they were associated with the Salafist political parties al-Nour and al-Asala.

Organizers at the embassy protest told the Associated Press that they'd begun planning the protest last week when a controversial Egyptian Christian activist who lives in the United States, Morris Sadek, started promoting Bacile's film. Depicting the prophet at all is considered deeply offensive by Muslims.

"We are speaking out and will never be tolerant toward any curses for our prophet," said Moaz Abdel Kareem, 37, who had a long beard typical of followers of the Salafist movement and was carrying a black flag.

Earlier Tuesday, the U.S. Embassy in Egypt had condemned insults to religion, saying in a statement that "we firmly reject the actions by those who abuse the universal right of free speech to hurt the religious beliefs of others."

A spokesman for the Muslim Brotherhood, of which Morsi is a member, said that the United States should do a better job of protecting Islam.

"It isn't a matter of freedom of speech," Muslim Brotherhood spokesman Mahmoud Gozlan said. "It's a matter of a holy Islamic symbol."

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Islamists Targeted U.S. Diplomats With Gunfire, RPGs In Planned Assault, Witness [Says](#)
September 13, 2012

[McClatchy](#)

By Nancy A. Youssef, Suliman Ali Zway And Jonathan S. Landay

The U.S. ambassador to Libya and three other American officials died in a coordinated assault on the U.S. consulate by gunmen firing assault rifles and rocket-propelled grenades and carrying the black flag of an Islamic extremist group, the property's landlord said Wednesday.

Standing outside the fire-gutted compound, Mohammad al Bishari denied the attack began as a protest against an amateurish U.S.-made video mocking the Prophet Muhammad, the founder of the Islamic faith.

"They attacked right away," Bishari said.

Bishari said he believed that U.S. Ambassador Christopher Stevens and State Department computer specialist Sean Smith died from inhaling smoke spewed from a fire set by the assailants. U.S. officials corroborated much of Bishari's account and said that two other American officials were killed by gunfire at a consulate annex.

In the wake of the deaths of Stevens – the first U.S. ambassador killed in more than 30 years – and the other Americans, U.S. diplomatic and military facilities around the world tightened security and urged U.S. citizens to take precautions to avoid being caught up in further violence.

The U.S. Embassy in Sudan's capital, Khartoum, evacuated its staff; the consulate in Casablanca, Morocco, closed; and U.S.-led forces in war-ravaged Afghanistan were placed on alert.

All but a skeleton crew of U.S. personnel were flown to Europe from Libya, protected by SO Marines who will remain in the country while the security situation is assessed. American non-governmental organizations also began evacuating their staff from Tripoli.

At the U.S. Embassy in Cairo, where demonstrators ripped and burned the American flag on Tuesday, crowds gathered once again outside the embassy building, though there was no repeat of Tuesday's mayhem.

In Washington, President Barack Obama vowed to hunt down the gunmen who staged the "outrageous and shocking attack" on the Benghazi consulate.

"Make no mistake, we will work with the Libyan government to bring to justice the killers who attacked our people," Obama said in a brief remarks at the White House. He condemned the attack as "outrageous and shocking."

Bishari said the attack began with assailants carrying assault rifles, rocket-propelled grenades and the black flag of Ansar al Sharia – The Partisans of Sharia – moving from two directions against the compound, which is made up of a main building and a number of smaller ones.

"Whatever they didn't loot, they burned," he said.

Stevens, who was visiting from the capital, Tripoli, three other Americans and six Libyan security guards were inside the main building, Bishari said. The Libyan security guards managed to carry Stevens, apparently overcome by smoke, out of the building, place him in a car and drive out of compound's back gate to a hospital, where he died, Bishari said.

Stevens was the first U.S. ambassador killed since Feb. 14, 1979, when the U.S. envoy to Afghanistan, Adolph Dubs, was kidnapped and shot dead by armed militants.

In Washington, two administration officials, briefing reporters on the condition of anonymity, corroborated much of Bishari's description of what happened.

They said the assault began around 10 p.m. local time when gunmen began firing into the compound. Fifteen minutes later, the attackers gained access to the compound and set the main building aflame. Stevens, Smith and an unidentified U.S. security officer were inside. As dense smoke filled the building, the security officer was separated from Stevens and Smith and managed to get outside, the administration officials said.

The security officer then went back inside and located Smith's body in what one U.S. official described as "a heroic effort." He was unable to find Stevens because the diplomat had been taken to the hospital by "unknown personnel," the U.S. official continued.

Meanwhile, State Department and Libyan security personnel counterattacked, drove the assailants from the compound, rounded up other American personnel and moved them into a walled annex, the U.S. officials said. The annex came under fire around midnight, and two unidentified Americans were killed. Three others were injured.

The Americans eventually were evacuated from Benghazi, and all but emergency staff left the U.S. Embassy in Tripoli under the protection of the 50-strong unit from the Marines' Fleet Anti-Terrorist Security Team, an elite contingent dispersed around the world to rapidly respond to terrorist incidents, the U.S. officials said.

Initial reports said the assault began as a protest timed to coincide with the anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks and linked to anger over clips posted on the Internet of a U.S.-made film parodying the Prophet Muhammad. But Bishari's statements and those of the senior administration officials suggested that there was no such protest in Benghazi.

Obama condemned the film, saying that Americans "reject all efforts to denigrate the religious beliefs of others."

"But there is absolutely no justification to this kind of senseless violence. None," he said.

Which organization precisely was behind the attack in Benghazi was unclear amid suggestions that al Qaeda may have played a role. Ansar al Sharia, the group whose flag the Benghazi attackers displayed, is one of the largest armed extremist groups operating in Libya. But the attack came just hours after al Qaeda leader Ayman al Zawahiri in a video appeal urged Libyans to attack U.S. targets to avenge the killing by a U.S. drone in June of his Libyan second in command, Abu Yahya al-Libi.

Flanked by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in the White House Rose Garden, Obama hailed the Libyan security personnel who joined their U.S. counterparts in fighting to protect the consulate.

He stressed that the United States would continue working with the Libyan government to stabilize the country, which has been plagued by a stream of violent incidents by rebel militias and Islamic extremist groups that refused to disband after Gadhafi's October 2011 ouster.

"This attack will not break the bonds between the United States and Libya," said Obama.

As of August 2012, the U.S. government had provided more than \$200 million in assistance to Libya since the start of the uprising in 2011. The aid includes \$89 million in humanitarian assistance, \$40 million for rounding up weapons, and \$25 million in nonlethal U.S. military supplies.

Obama praised Stevens for the "characteristic skill, courage and resolve" with which he worked "to build a new Libya" as the U.S. envoy to the anti-Gadhafi rebels and then the U.S. ambassador.

"It is especially tragic that Chris Stevens died in Benghazi, because it is a city that he helped to save," Obama said.

Stevens was among the U.S. officials who advocated the U.S.-backed NATO intervention in the Libyan civil war as Gadhafi's forces were moving to overrun Benghazi, the headquarters of the rebellion.

Speaking at the State Department before going to the White House, Clinton said, "I ask myself, how could this happen? How could this happen in a country we helped liberate, in a city we helped save from destruction? This question reflects just how complicated and, at times, how confounding the world can be."

Some experts said that the Libyan government, which has integrated some of the rebel militias into its security forces, has been reluctant to tackle the growing lawlessness. The consulate attack, however, could bring pressure on Tripoli from the United States and other countries to get tough, they said.

"I think, of course, there is going to be some anger, some soul searching," said Salman Shaikh, director of the Brookings Institution's Doha Center. "But it should make the Americans that much more determined to push the Libyans to take on the serious issues in the country: the security apparatus and the establishment of a proper state."

Benghazi is home to perhaps the widest array of armed groups, some of which help protect the city.

Some Libyan officials suggested that remnants of the Gadhafi regime were responsible for the attack. Deputy Interior Minister Wanis al-Sharif told a press conference on Tuesday that the United States should have protected its personnel better in the wake of threats and the film that mocks the Prophet Muhammed, which Muslims consider blasphemous.

"They are to blame simply for not withdrawing their personnel from the premises, despite the fact that there was a similar incident when al-Libi was killed. It was necessary that they take precautions. It was their fault that they did not take the necessary precautions," Sharif said.

Stevens' death marked the loss of one of the State Department's best Libyan experts.

A former Peace Corps volunteer in Morocco, Stevens focused most of his diplomatic career on the Middle East, spending time in Cairo, Riyadh and Jerusalem. He first served in Libya in 2007 and returned in the spring of 2011 in the early days of the uprising.

At the time, he met with officials who would become key members of the National Transitional Council and eventually Libya's first democratically elected government, which was seated last month. He became ambassador in May.

An Arabic speaker, Stevens told McClatchy during a spring 2011 interview that he particularly loved Libya, even as he served as a diplomat there during Gadhafi's time. Other diplomats remembered him as deeply engaged in all the Middle East, however.

"He knew our issues really well," said Abi Khair, a diplomat at the Jordanian embassy in Washington who had met Stevens in the days after Gadhafi's fall when Khair served with the United Nations. "He was passionate about them."

Stevens moved easily in Libya. He ordered local food, sat with ordinary Libyans and with his unassuming nature, slowly cajoled rival factions to rebuild their country.

Stevens' cables on Libya, which were among the trove released by WikiLeaks, offered colorful insights on Gadhafi and al Qaida's push to expand in Libya.

In an August 2008 cable he wrote to prepare then Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice for a visit with Gadhafi, he described the Libyan leader as "a self-styled intellectual and philosopher, he has been eagerly anticipating for several years the opportunity to share with you his views on global affairs." During the fall of his regime, Libyans recovered a photo album Gadhafi had made containing photos of Rice.

When asked by McClatchy about the blunt nature of his cables, Stevens simply smiled and shrugged.
(top)

Libyan Deputy Ambassador Blames 'extremist Group' For Deadly Attack On US Consulate
September 13, 2012

Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS - Libya's deputy U.N. ambassador on Wednesday blamed "an extremist group" for the attack on the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi that killed U.S. Ambassador Chris Stevens, whom he called "one of the greatest friends of Libya."

Three other American diplomats and several Libyan security officers were also killed in the attack Tuesday night.

Speaking to the U.N. Security Council, Ibrahim Dabbashi reiterated his government's vow that the perpetrators will be brought to justice.

According to Libyan officials, the assault was carried out by protesters angry over a film that ridiculed Islam's Prophet Muhammad.

"This attack in no way serves the interests of the people or the Libyan authorities, and cannot be considered a defense of Islam," Dabbashi told the hushed chamber. "Moreover, this attack gravely damages the image of Islam."

The Obama administration, however, said later Wednesday it was investigating whether the assault was a planned terrorist strike to mark the anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks and not a spontaneous mob enraged over the film.

The Security Council and U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon condemned the attack "in the strongest terms."

Stevens, 52, was killed after he became separated from other American officials during the consulate attack. It's unclear when he died: He was taken by Libyans to a hospital, and his remains were delivered hours later to U.S. officials at the Benghazi airport.

The Security Council said that in addition to those killed, "diplomatic personnel and civilians" were injured but gave no numbers. Dabbashi said a number of Libyan security officials were wounded. Three Americans also were wounded, U.S. officials said.

Dabbashi said the attack was "carried out by an extremist group acting outside the law" and the government is trying to gather the facts, and determine how it was prepared and who was behind it. He said he didn't have details about whether any of the attackers were captured, "but certainly I presume some of them are already in prison and they are trying to bring all the others to justice."

Dabbashi was visibly moved talking about Stevens, saying the ambassador stood by the Libyan opposition in its fight to oust longtime dictator Moammar Gadhafi last year.

"He was very brave in staying in Benghazi to see on the ground what was happening," Dabbashi said.

"He tried very sincerely to promote relations between the two countries and to help Libyans move from revolution to their new state, and for this reason we will always remember ambassador Stevens as being one of the greatest friends of Libya," he said.

The deputy ambassador was asked to respond to U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, who asked earlier Wednesday how Stevens could be killed in a country that the United States helped to liberate.

"We have the same question," Dabbashi replied. "We have to say the reality - that the authority of the government is still not covering the whole territory of Libya and there are some groups and persons who are outlaws, and the government could not at this moment contain all of them."

"However, this is a provisional period, and the Libyan people are determined to extend the authority of the state throughout the country and to form a strong government that will be able to manage the country and bring it from revolution to a state," he said.

By coincidence, the Security Council had scheduled a meeting Wednesday to discuss Ban's latest report on the U.N. political mission in Libya.

The report said Libya is facing a resurgence of several local conflicts and increased instability in the east, whose capital is Benghazi. It also said the country faces "huge challenges" in trying to secure its borders and control a proliferation of weapons.

U.N. Undersecretary-General for Political Affairs Jeffrey Feltman, a former American diplomat and close friend of Stevens, told the council that in Benghazi on Tuesday "the world witnessed a sobering reminder of the challenges faced not only by the Libyans but by the international community who are committed to support Libya's ongoing transformation."

In addition to the latest attack, he noted a spate of previous assassinations of Libyan security personnel in Benghazi, a series of explosive devices in Tripoli and attacks on Sufi shrines.

In a statement, the U.N. Security Council also condemned an attack on the U.S. Embassy in Cairo. The U.N.'s most powerful body urged Libyan and Egyptian authorities to bring the perpetrators to justice and ensure that diplomatic premises and personnel are protected as required by the Vienna conventions.

Ban made a similar appeal.

"The United Nations rejects defamation of religion in all forms," the secretary-general in a statement released by his spokesman. "At the same time, nothing justifies the brutal violence which occurred in Benghazi yesterday."

Coinciding with Wednesday's Security Council meeting, the secretary-general announced the appointment of former Lebanese minister Tarek Mitri as his new special representative in Libya, succeeding Ian Martin of Britain who will complete his assignment on Oct. 14. Mitri, who worked for the World Council of Churches in Geneva from 1991-2005, most recently held academic posts at Saint Joseph University in Beirut and the American University in Beirut.

(top)

U.S., Libya to probe violence after slaying of ambassador

September 12, 2012

Washington Times

By Guy Taylor

U.S. and Libyan officials launched investigations Wednesday into a deadly nighttime attack on the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi, trying to determine whether it was a premeditated assault by Muslim militants or a mob enraged by a U.S.-produced film that derides Islam's Prophet Muhammad.

The attack killed the U.S. ambassador to Libya, J. Christopher Stevens, and three other Americans on Tuesday.

The Obama administration put the entire U.S. diplomatic corps on alert, with increased security at embassies across the globe, in response to the attack, which occurred on the same day that Islamist protesters stormed the U.S. Embassy in Cairo. It was also the 11th anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

U.S. officials said the Pentagon was moving two warships to Libya's coast and 50 Marines were being deployed to protect the embassy.

Libyan officials vowed to bring justice to the militants who carried out the assault in Benghazi and denounced the attack as "barbaric." In Washington, President Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton issued a statement condemning "in the strongest terms this outrageous and shocking attack."

But the assaults also became a political issue Wednesday, with Republican presidential nominee Mitt Romney criticizing the administration for not having an aggressive posture in its response to the violence in Libya and Egypt. Mr. Obama retaliated, telling CBS News that Mr. Romney "seems to have a tendency to shoot first and aim later."

Top Obama administration officials said they were still struggling late Wednesday to ascertain a clear timeline of how the events unfolded in Cairo and Benghazi.

"We are still here today operating within the confusion of first reports," said one senior administration official in reference to the Libya attack.

The official said that Mr. Stevens, 52, had remained holed up in the consulate in the eastern Libyan city of Benghazi for several hours while it was stormed by armed militants, who set fire to the facility shortly after 10 p.m. there.

U.S. and Libyan security forces eventually regained control of the building about 2 a.m. Wednesday, but only after a lengthy firefight with militants, at least 10 of whom were reported killed.

Senior administration officials said that Mr. Stevens and three other Americans were killed and four wounded in the chaos. The officials were still not clear about how Mr. Stevens died.

Sometime before or after U.S. and Libyan forces had regained control of the building, said one of the officials, "We believe Ambassador Stephens was taken out of the building and to a hospital in Benghazi."

His body later was returned to U.S. personnel at the Benghazi airport, officials said.

"This was clearly a complex attack," a senior administration official said. "It's too early to say who they were."

A plot by al Qaeda?

Speculation surged Wednesday through Washington's foreign policy and diplomatic communities about whether the attack in Benghazi was the result of a long-planned attack by a terrorist group, perhaps with al Qaeda ties.

Officials at the White House and the State Department offered few details of their investigation.

But in telephone interviews with The Washington Times, several residents in Benghazi said there had been two distinctly different groups involved in the assault on the U.S. diplomatic post.

The residents described a scene that began as a relatively peaceful demonstration against a film produced in the United States that had been deemed insulting to the Prophet Muhammad.

The situation did not turn violent until a group of heavily armed militants showed up and "hijacked" the protest, the residents said. The original group of protesters was joined by a separate group of men armed with rocket-propelled-grenade launchers.

U.S. officials would not confirm or deny those reports.

"We frankly don't have a full picture of what may have been going on outside the compound walls before the firing began," said one senior Obama administration official.

Tuesday's incidents in Libya and in Egypt — where protesters stormed the U.S. Embassy, ripped down the American flag and replaced it with one commonly flown by al Qaeda — are thought to have been provoked by "Innocence of Muslims," a two-hour, U.S.-produced film that many deemed derogatory of Muhammad. Arabic-dubbed portions of the English-language film recently appeared on the social-media website YouTube.

But the assaults coincided with the 11th anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, and a member of the Senate Intelligence Committee raised the possibility that the developments in Libya and Egypt were connected to al Qaeda.

Sen. Bill Nelson, Florida Democrat, said the attacks "have the markings of revenge by al Qaeda." He said they could be connected to the killing in June of Abu Yahya al-Libi, a top leader of the terrorist network.

In a 42-minute video Tuesday, al Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahri, who succeeded Osama bin Laden, called on followers to exact revenge for the U.S. drone attack in Pakistan that killed al-Libi.

In the Cairo attack, Islamist demonstrators scaled the U.S. Embassy compound's walls, tore down the American flag and replaced it with a black flag bearing the Islamic inscription: "There is no God but Allah."

While no one was killed in the storming, critics asserted that the Obama administration botched its response to the situation by moving too slowly in denouncing the actions of the protesters.

Political firestorm

Specifically, Mr. Romney homed in on an initial statement that had appeared Tuesday on the U.S. Embassy's website, in which U.S. officials appeared to apologize for the Muhammad film.

While the statement did not specifically mention the film, it said, "The United States in Cairo condemns the continuing efforts by misguided individuals to hurt the religious feelings of Muslims — as we condemn efforts to offend believers of all religions."

The statement was stripped from the website by late Tuesday, and the Obama administration has since disavowed it. A senior administration official Wednesday said that it had been posted by embassy officials long before the protests in Cairo began and that it had not been cleared through Washington first.

Such explanations did little to dampen Mr. Romney's criticism that it was a sign of the Obama administration's weak posture in the Middle East.

"The administration was wrong to stand by a statement that sympathized with those who breached our embassy in Egypt, instead of condemning their actions," Mr. Romney told reporters during a campaign stop in Jacksonville, Fla. "It's never too late to condemn attacks on Americans and to defend our values."

Mr. Obama responded in his CBS interview that there is a "broader lesson to be learned" from the incident.

"As president, one of the things I've learned is, you can't do that," he said. "That, you know, it's important for you to make sure that the statements that you make are backed up by the facts. And that you've thought through the ramifications before you make them."

'Cannot happen again'

Meanwhile, the government of Libya apologized Wednesday, calling the attack on the U.S. post in its country "cowardly" and vowing to bring the attackers to justice.

Libya's ambassador to Washington, Ali Aujali, on Wednesday said the killing of Mr. Stevens was a great loss for Libya. He called Mr. Stevens a friend and a great diplomat, and said two had played tennis together.

"He was the right man for the right position at the right time," Mr. Aujali said.

Libyan Deputy Prime Minister Mustafa Abushagur also condemned the "barbaric acts."

"This is an attack on America, Libya and free people everywhere," he said.

"There is never any justification for this type of action," he added. "There must and will be consequences. Those who were involved at all levels must be found and punished."

Mr. Abushagur said the Libyan revolution was not complete just because longtime strongman Moammar Gadhafi's regime had been toppled.

"Our revolution will be complete when our state institutions are strong, when heavy arms are in the hands of only the government and when our streets are safe to all — both to Libyans and to our honored guests," he said.

"The government cannot do this alone. I call on all true Libyans to hand in their weapons, and to work together to make a better Libya for all," he added. "This kind of shameful behavior — mobs using force on their own accord — cannot happen again, no matter the target or motivation."

The Egyptian government — headed by President Mohammed Morsi, a key figure in the Muslim Brotherhood — has been less willing to embrace an apologetic tone toward the storming of the U.S. Embassy in Cairo.

Egyptian Prime Minister Hesham Kandil called the incident unacceptable and urged for "self-restraint" among Egyptians angered by the film.

In a separate statement, however, Mr. Morsi condemned the film and ordered the Egyptian Embassy in Washington to take appropriate legal measures against those who produced it.
Amateur film, filmmaker:

The film was written, directed and produced by Sam Bacile, a real estate developer from Southern California.

The producer has told the Associated Press that he is an Israeli Jew and a U.S. citizen.

But Israeli officials, who sought to distance Israel from the film Wednesday, said they had not heard of Mr. Bacile, and there was no record of him being a citizen, the news agency reported.

Separately, the film was being promoted by an extreme anti-Muslim Egyptian Christian campaigner in the U.S.

Mr. Bacile, who had evidently gone into hiding Wednesday somewhere in the U.S., told the AP that he had not anticipated such a furious reaction but remained defiant. He said he thinks the movie will expose what he calls Islam's flaws to the world.

In Washington, Mr. Obama and Mrs. Clinton met with a crowd of several hundred State Department employees gathered solemnly in the courtyard of the department's Foggy Bottom headquarters in a scene of mourning for Mr. Stevens.

He is the first U.S. ambassador to be killed in the line of duty since 1979, when armed militants kidnapped and killed Adolph "Spike" Dubs, then-ambassador to Afghanistan. Previous ambassadors were killed in Guatemala, Sudan, Cyprus and Lebanon — all between 1968 and 1976.

Mrs. Clinton identified one of the three Americans killed with Mr. Stevens as Foreign Service Information Management Officer Sean Smith, a father of two who joined the department a decade ago.

"Like Chris, Sean was one of our best," she said.

The identities of the two others killed, along with those who were injured, were being withheld because their families had not yet been informed of their deaths.

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US Officials Say 2 Warships Moving Toward Libya

September 13, 2012

Associated Press

By Lolita C. Baldor

WASHINGTON - The Pentagon ordered two warships to the Libyan coast in the aftermath of the attack in Benghazi that killed the U.S. ambassador and three others, U.S. officials said Wednesday.

One destroyer, the USS Laboon, moved to a position off the coast Wednesday, and the USS McFaul is en route and should be stationed off the coast within days. The officials said the ships, which carry Tomahawk cruise missiles, do not have a specific mission. But they give commanders flexibility to respond to any mission ordered by the president.

Pentagon spokesman George Little said: "Without commenting on specific ship movements, the United States military regularly takes precautionary steps when potential contingencies might arise in a given situation. That's not only logical in certain circumstances, it's the prudent thing to do."

There have been four destroyers in the Mediterranean for some time. These moves will increase that to five.

The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to publicly discuss troop movements.

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Libya's Parliament Elects New Prime Minister

September 13, 2012

Associated Press

By Esam Mohamed

TRIPOLI, Libya - Libya's parliament elected Wednesday a leading member in the country's oldest opposition movement to be its new prime minister.

Mustafa Abu-Shakour is tasked with stabilizing a country where armed groups proliferate. Washington's ambassador to Libya and three other Americans were killed during a late Tuesday attack on the U.S. consulate in the eastern Libyan city of Benghazi.

Abu-Shakour, deputy to Libya's outgoing interim prime minister, is considered a compromise figure acceptable to both Islamists and liberals.

He is the first elected head of government since the ouster and slaying of dictator Moammar Gadhafi in last year's civil war.

He hails from the National Front Party, an offshoot of a longstanding anti-Gadhafi movement that includes both Islamist and secular figures. He narrowly beat liberal Mahmoud Jibril by 96 votes out of 190.

Previous interim governments have faced persistent criticism that they have been ineffective in tackling the multiple troubles facing the deeply divided nation, foremost among them the strength of armed militias that dominate towns and challenge the authority of the central government.

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Gazans protest anti-Islam movie

September 12, 2012

Associated Press

By ESAM MOHAMED and MAGGIE MICHAEL

TRIPOLI, Libya — Dozens of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip have burned American flags and chanted "Death to America," protesting an American film that mocks the Muslim Prophet Muhammad.

The protest Wednesday in Gaza City was sponsored by supporters of the Popular Resistance Committees, a militant group aligned with the ruling Hamas movement.

Some protesters carried swords, axes and black flags. They also used knives to cut posters of Morris Sadek, the Egyptian-born Christian who has promoted the film.

They chanted, "Shame on everyone who insults the prophet."

Hamas, the larger militant group that governs Gaza, also condemned the film.

Its religious affairs minister, Ismail Radwan, called it an "insult to the millions of Muslims all over the world."

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Activists: Syrian Hospitals Targeted

September 13, 2012

USA Today

By Tom A. Peter

ALEPPO, Syria - The Syrian military is bombing hospitals in its weeks-long campaign to crush a rebellion in this commercial center, forcing doctors to treat patients in unsuitable facilities in what human rights groups say is a war crime.

"We're clearly looking at violations of the laws of war," said Anna Neistat, associate director for emergencies at Human Rights Watch. "The bigger question is whether we're looking at war crimes. ... I think what we're looking at right now definitely qualifies as war crimes."

The army is firing artillery shells indiscriminately and warplanes are bombing whole neighborhoods daily, killing hundreds of people in Aleppo, activists allege. In several interviews, residents and medical workers say some attacks are directly targeting hospitals.

Since fighting began here in Syria's largest city in late July, the staff at one hospital says the building has been bombed at least four times. In one attack, seven rockets struck the hospital.

"Patients cannot stay here at the hospital anymore. It is too dangerous. We treat them and then they must immediately go somewhere else," says Ahmad al-Rashid, a medical student who is now a volunteer nurse at a hospital in Aleppo. He asked that the hospital's name not be identified to prevent a retaliatory strike.

On the hospital's upper floors, ceilings are collapsed and floors covered with debris and broken glass. Bombs and rockets have ripped holes through the outer walls, leaving much of the hospital unusable.

Other hospitals in the area surrounding Aleppo have experienced the same attacks.

"They bombed our hospital so many times we had to move it to a secret location in a new building," says Abu Adeb, a doctor in the town of Al-Bab, about 25 miles northeast of Aleppo.

He says the hospital is constantly looking for new locations to treat patients to avoid being targeted by government planes or artillery fire. To deal with the mass casualties resulting from fighting between government and rebel forces, the hospital in Aleppo stopped treating patients with routine medical problems and now helps only non-combatants, al-Rashid and other hospital workers say.

Two weeks ago, the hospital where al-Rashid works received its highest number of patients from the fighting when government forces bombed a crowd of people waiting to buy bread. The staff here said 86 patients came in, and about 50 of them were dead or dying.

Regardless of whom a hospital treats, targeting medical facilities remains a war crime under international law. Hospitals only become legitimate targets when used to commit hostile acts, such as soldiers turning a hospital into a fighting position.

Syrian President Bashar Assad defends the campaign, saying the military is combating an uprising backed by terrorist and foreign governments. The state-run media have never alleged that the government opponents are using hospitals as bases.

Taylor Strickling, legal studies director and a law of war expert at the American University of Afghanistan, says hospital buildings can be a legal target if a military leader who is not a patient could be killed in the strike without causing unreasonable collateral damage.

Such incidents in warfare are rare, he says, explaining that even if two militants were near a hospital, it would "almost certainly" be a violation of the laws of war if they were targeted with unguided bombs, "because the civilian destruction you should expect from dropping unguided bombs near a hospital so greatly outweighs and is disproportionate to the expected military advantage you would gain from possibly hitting those two militants."

Syrian doctors and medical workers also allege that they face reprisals from the Assad regime for providing care to wounded government opponents. As a result, many leave the country.

Abdul Ismail, an anesthesiologist, says his hospital is staffed with people with no medical experience who are giving injections and IVs to patients. He says he is doing treatments traditionally done by a regular doctor.

"Doctors are afraid to help because the Assad government will threaten them and kill their families if they help the opposition," Ismail says.

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Syrians Join Relief Efforts For Countrymen In Jordan

September 13, 2012

New York Times

By Aida Alami

AMMAN, Jordan - During one of her visits to the Zaatari refugee camp in northern Jordan, a young pharmacist from the Syrian city of Homs tried to inspire distraught and disenchanted refugees.

"Don't feel humiliated, and keep your head up," she told a woman, bemoaning the squalid living conditions at the camp. "You have to stay positive or else how are we going to rebuild our country?"

Like many Syrians from Homs, Houla and Dera'a who have fled the shelling and the brutal killings of the bloody conflict, Alma has thrown herself into the relief efforts for Syrian refugees in Jordan. "There are poor people suffering here that I need to help," said Alma, who, like other people mentioned in this article, asked that her last name be withheld out of fear of reprisals against family members who remain in Syria.

There are more than 200,000 Syrians in Jordan, about 30,000 of them taking refuge in the Zaatari camp, which was set up this summer to accommodate the growing number of refugees coming into the country daily. Those who entered illegally cannot leave the camp unless a Jordanian takes financial responsibility for them.

In a country with limited water and energy resources, taking in the Syrians is creating strains and makes help from Jordanian citizens crucial.

"A refugee can only leave the camp if adopted by a Jordanian," said Ali Bibi, a field officer for the U.N. refugee agency. "There are host communities that are bringing these Syrians into their homes, and it's an amazing challenge for them as well."

Alma recently arrived in Amman and quickly connected with many other Syrians working to help their countrymen. They invest their energy in obtaining medication and clothing to take to the camps and in organizing events like puppet shows to make the refugees' daily lives more bearable.

Dressed in jeans and sneakers and armed with an iPhone to document what she sees, Alma spends her days visiting refugees or wounded rebels who are getting medical treatment in Amman.

She says she strongly believes that President Bashar al-Assad of Syria will fall and is optimistic about the aftermath of the fighting in Syria.

"When I first saw people protesting in front of my pharmacy, it was like adrenaline - I realized I needed dignity, too," she recalled. "When I saw soldiers hitting kids, I realized we needed a revolution."

While wounded defectors from the Syrian Army are getting treatment in a facility by the Syrian border, other members of the Free Syrian Army, who were civilians when they joined the rebellion, are being

treated at the Specialty Hospital in Amman. Some are badly wounded and have lost limbs, and others are waiting to heal before returning to the combat zone. Many have not yet turned 18.

"I might go back in a week. I want to join the guys there," said a youth named Ghassem, who is 18. "If we are going to stay here, looking at each other, it won't work.

"You apply to return, then the Jordanian Army facilitates handing you over to the Free Syrian Army."

Fadel, a Syrian merchant from Homs in his 40s, has been active in the Syrian opposition for years. When the uprising began in March 2011, he helped provide food to families of people involved in the revolution in poor areas and helped protesters get supplies, banners and speakers. Then he smuggled wounded people into Jordan but had to stop a few months ago after his cover was blown. One of his brothers was killed and another is still fighting with the Free Syrian Army.

"I would get a small van, remove the back seat and place a mattress on the floor, get them an oxygen tube and drive them to Jordan pretending it was a car accident, or a cancer case, or something of the sort," he said. "A person who stood courageously in front of the tank and in the face of this failed regime and shouted 'freedom' deserves to get the best treatment."

When his father was diagnosed with cancer in 1994, Fadel drove him to Amman for treatment. Since then, he has built strong links with doctors and now he also helps raise money for the treatments, while also assisting wounded soldiers smuggled into Jordan.

"I have many connections with merchants in the region, in Saudi Arabia and the Emirates, and I use these contacts to fund-raise for the treatment of the injured," he said.

Another Syrian-refugee helper, Sohaib, fled Damascus in August 2011 after being involved in the uprising and after two of his friends went missing. He visited refugee camps in Turkey and in Beirut and now volunteers in Amman. He is working on a project to encourage Syrian refugees to volunteer.

"One of the sad things about Syria is that there is no volunteer work, it was forbidden - they didn't want people to form independent groups," he said. "So my ambition here is to install the culture of volunteer work to help kids in the refugee camps."

He is part of a network of Syrians operating outside the country to help those who remain in the country, for example, by raising money with the help of rich Syrian merchants for bereaved families.

"We are doing a lot of strong work inside Syria," he said. "Some young men started a group for relief work inside Damascus. For example, every family whose son was killed or arrested is provided for with a monthly salary. This is what we can do. We can't help everyone, and we don't receive foreign support."

Many refugees had little idea that life in a camp would be so hard. The Zaatari camp, run by the United Nations, is in a dusty desert near the Syrian border. Living conditions are harsh and the facilities are rudimentary. Each family shares a tent under a blazing sun and struggles to survive the heat. The lines for food are long.

"Clothes for babies is what they need most, as many women are giving birth here," said Mahmoud Sadaqa, 47, a Jordanian who has assisted refugees in Jordan for years - from Iraq, the Palestinian

territories and now Syria - and who is part of an organization that helps Syrian refugees. He organizes clothing and food drives to distribute them to both official and unofficial camps.

"I have no idea where this stuff comes from," he added, but "even if President Assad is the one donating clothes for the refugees, I will take them. This is not about politics, it is about helping people."

(top)

SCA

Karzai, Muslim Brotherhood Condemn Anti-Islam Movie

September 13, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By NATHAN HODGE and HABIB KHAN TOTAKHIL in Kabul and MATT BRADLEY in Cairo

Afghan President Hamid Karzai and Egypt's ruling Muslim Brotherhood Wednesday angrily denounced a U.S.-produced film harshly critical of the Prophet Muhammad, raising fears that a new wave of violent protests will follow Tuesday's attacks on U.S. diplomatic installations in Cairo and Benghazi, Libya.

Shortly after news emerged that the U.S. ambassador to Libya and three other American diplomats were killed in Benghazi, the Afghan presidential palace released a statement condemning the "desecrating act" by the makers of the film, saying that its release "stoked interfaith enmity and confrontation, and badly impacted the peaceful coexistence between human beings."

Mr. Karzai's statement didn't condemn the killings in Libya, and didn't contain any language calling for restraint or for conducting protests in a peaceful manner. The U.S. Embassy in Kabul and the American-led military coalition responded by issuing their own appeal for restraint.

"We ask for the assistance of Afghan leaders and the people of Afghanistan in maintaining calm and continuing our work to build a better, secure future," they said.

A Western diplomat in Kabul said he hoped that Mr. Karzai's government would ultimately act to discourage bloodshed. "We understand the insult, but we trust that Afghans will recognize that [the film] does not represent the views of America and the rest of the international community," the diplomat said.

In Cairo, meanwhile, the secretary-general of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, Mahmoud Hussein, called on Egyptians to hold "peaceful vigils to denounce the abuse of religious beliefs" in the controversial movie after Friday prayers, according to a statement by the organization.

Statements released on Wednesday morning by the Brotherhood and its political party stopped short of condemning the attack on the U.S. Embassy compound in Cairo, where the Stars and Stripes were briefly replaced with a black flag usually flown by al Qaeda's affiliates and Osama bin Laden's name was daubed on the entrance gate the evening of Sept. 11.

Egypt's President Mohammed Morsi, a Brotherhood leader, also made no public remarks about his government's failure to protect the U.S. Embassy. Instead, according to his spokesman, he urged the Egyptian Embassy in Washington to launch legal action against the film's makers.

The Brotherhood's call for protests is a risky move: It comes less than two weeks before Mr. Morsi travels to New York for the United Nations General Assembly. The State Department hasn't yet disclosed whether Mr. Morsi will meet President Obama on his U.S. trip.

The Brotherhood's stance may indicate the group's renewed focus on shoring up its base. Mr. Morsi's presidential campaign pitched him against a staunch secularist, and he needed the votes of more liberal Egyptians. His inauguration in late June was followed by weeks of glad-handing with Western diplomats, foreign businessmen and even Egyptian celebrities.

After this outreach, Mr. Morsi—who has since consolidated his power by purging the Egyptian army's top brass—now hopes to strengthen his Islamist bona fides, said Omar Ashour, an expert on Islamist movements and a professor at Exeter University in the United Kingdom. "I think Morsi is trying to send a domestic message," said Mr. Ashour. "The Brothers are trying to capitalize and enhance their own popularity within Islamism."

A similar domestic dynamic seemed in play in Afghanistan. Lawmaker Maulvi Shehzada Shahid, who is a member of the Ulema Council, the country's highest government-sponsored religious body, said that Mr. Karzai made a swift denunciation of the movie because he wanted to outflank the Taliban, and to deny the insurgents a chance to claim that he supported such a desecration of Islam. Mr. Karzai's statement was issued a couple of hours before a condemnation of the film was made by the Taliban, who promised revenge attacks on American troops.

The amateur movie, virtually unheard of until Tuesday, depicts Islam as a hateful and hypocritical religion. Mr. Shahid called it "a crime" that would inspire angry sermons in Afghan mosques on Friday. "Protests will likely be bloody," he said, "but it will hurt the Afghans, and the Afghans will get killed."

Last year, the Afghan president's statement drawing attention to plans by a Florida pastor to burn the Quran preceded violent demonstrations, including the storming of the United Nations compound in the northern city of Mazar-e-Sharif. Seven international U.N. staffers and several Afghans were killed when the mob overran the compound.

Earlier this year, another strongly worded statement by Mr. Karzai condemning the burning of Qurans at a U.S. military base was followed by several days of deadly rioting across Afghanistan, including the attempted storming of the U.S. Consulate in the western city of Herat. Western diplomats at the time harshly criticized Mr. Karzai for fanning the protests instead of trying to defuse the tensions.

Joshua Foust, a fellow at the American Security Project, said Mr. Karzai's condemnation of a Quran-burning last year "gave several opportunistic mullahs the space to whip up a violent frenzy" that led to the deaths of Afghans and U.N. employees. "Now he's doing it again: condemning a film but not urging restraint or condemning the people reacting violently to it," Mr. Foust said.

The situation remained quiet in Kabul and Cairo on Wednesday. Elsewhere in the Muslim world, Islamist activists held demonstrations outside U.S. embassies in Tunisia and Sudan, and burned U.S. flags in the Gaza Strip. There were no reported casualties.

Meanwhile, Pakistan, currently on the U.N. Security Council, joined other council members in a unanimous condemnation of the attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi and in a statement said, "Our thoughts and prayers are with the families of victims." It issued a separate statement also condemning

the U.S.-produced video, saying it "has deeply hurt the feelings of the people of Pakistan and the Muslims all over the world."

In his statement, Mr. Karzai called for "efforts to prevent the release of this insulting film, along with the video clip currently promoting it" because it would inflame Muslims. His spokesman, Aimal Faizi, said on Twitter that the Afghan government ordered Afghan Internet providers to block access to the film.
(top)

71-year-old American Aid Worker Kidnapped In Pakistan Appeals To Israel In New Al-Qaida Video
September 13, 2012
Associated Press

ISLAMABAD - A 71-year-old American aid worker kidnapped over a year ago in Pakistan asked Israel's prime minister for help in meeting al-Qaida's demands so that he could be freed, in a new video released by the group Wednesday.

Warren Weinstein did not specify what those demands were, although previous al-Qaida conditions for his release have included the freeing of militant suspects and a halt to U.S. airstrikes.

The aid worker said President Barack Obama and the American government "have shown no interest in my case." He appealed to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for help "as one Jew to another," asking him to accept the militant group's demands so he could return to his family.

He did not specify in his statement how the Israeli leader could end U.S. airstrikes or have militant suspects around the world released.

Weinstein spoke while sitting down in front of a camouflage background. He wore a white T-shirt. His captors were not visible.

The video was posted on the Internet by al-Qaida's media arm, Al-Sahab, according to IntelCenter, a U.S.-based group that monitors media websites. It contained the Al-Sahab logo.

Weinstein was abducted last August in the eastern Pakistani city of Lahore after gunmen tricked his guards and broke into his home. He was the country director in Pakistan for J.E. Austin Associates, a U.S.-based firm that advises a range of Pakistani business and government sectors.

Al-Qaida issued a video last December in which the group's leader, Ayman al-Zawahri, said the American would be released if the U.S. stopped airstrikes in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen. Al-Zawahri also demanded the release of all al-Qaida and Taliban suspects around the world.

In May, Weinstein appeared in another video in which he said he would be killed unless President Barack Obama agreed to al-Qaida's demands.
(top)

WHA/EUR
Cuba Says Its Ready To Negotiate Gross Fate
September 12, 2012
Associated Press
By Paul Haven

HAVANA - A senior Cuban diplomat said Wednesday her country is prepared to negotiate a solution in the case of a jailed American contractor, but is awaiting a U.S. response.

Foreign Ministry official Josefina Vidal also rejected allegations by the wife of 63-year-old Maryland native Alan Gross that her husband's health is failing after more than 2 1/2 years in custody.

"Cuba reiterates its willingness to talk with the United States government to find a solution in the case of Mr. Gross and continues to await an answer," Vidal, who heads the ministry's Office of North American Affairs, said in a statement sent to The Associated Press.

She gave no details. It was the first time a Cuban official has hinted that a specific proposal has been made and indicated that the ball was in Washington's court.

Previously, senior officials in President Raul Castro's government have raised the case of five Cuban agents sentenced to long jail terms in the United States, though they have not spelled out publicly that they are seeking an exchange.

U.S. officials say privately, however, that Havana has made it increasingly clear they want a quid pro quo, something Washington has repeatedly rejected.

Jared Genser, a Washington-based attorney for the Gross family, said in a telephone interview he knows of no active proposal that the Cuban government has put forward for his client's release.

He said American officials had long made clear to the Cubans that trading Gross for the Cuban agents is a nonstarter.

"My definition of a proposal is something that is specific and actionable," he said.

Genser challenged Vidal to publicly name a date, time and location where the Cuban government would willing to meet with U.S. officials to negotiate a release.

Gross's wife, Judy, traveled to Cuba and visited her husband in custody several times last week. She said upon her return to the United States that she feared he would not survive his ordeal.

Gross, who was obese when he was arrested in December 2009, has lost more than 100 pounds in custody. His wife and lawyer say he also suffers from arthritis and has developed a mass behind his right shoulder blade that is not believed to be cancerous.

Vidal said the American's physical condition is fine.

"Mr. Gross's health continues to be normal and he exercises regularly," she said in the brief statement.

Genser, the Gross family lawyer, called on the Cuban government to allow a doctor of Gross's choosing to come in and perform a physical, something he said the Cubans have rejected.

"She says he's in great health, so they've got nothing to hide," Genser said.

Gross was working on a USAID-funded democracy building program when he was arrested at Havana's Jose Marti airport. He says he was only trying to provide internet service to the island's small Jewish community.

Cuba says the multimillion dollar programs are an effort by Washington to undermine the government, and has noted that Gross was carrying sophisticated communications equipment.

Gross was sentenced to 15 years, and has lost his final appeal, leaving him out of legal options.

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German Court Rules In Favor Of Bailout Fund, With Conditions

September 12, 2012

Washington Post

By Anthony Faiola

BERLIN ~ The European Union breathed a huge sigh of relief Wednesday after a German court ruled Berlin's approval of taxpayers' cash to aid its deeply indebted neighbors was not unconstitutional, paving the way for a rescue fund considered vital to containing the region's debt crisis to come into existence.

But the notoriously activist judges of the Constitutional Court also set certain conditions, including one insisting that German liability to the \$640 billion fund - to which Berlin is contributing about \$240 billion - could not increase without parliamentary approval.

Nevertheless, the decision marked a victory for Europe's financial rescue plan in a region desperately trying to contain a debt crisis that has rocked global markets for nearly three years. The much-anticipated ruling had loomed large over the continent, reminding observers of the legal and political challenges to rapid crisis management in a currency union made of 17 distinct nations, each requiring ratification of action plans through their own peculiar and often arcane rules.

A judgment against German aid for its neighbors could have thrust Europe into a far more dangerous stage, upending years of diplomatic teeth pulling to establish the fund. It could additionally have thrown a wrench into plans announced last week by the European Central Bank to buy up the debt of troubled nations in a quest to bring down their hazardously high borrowing costs - a plan that explicitly counts on the establishment of the bailout fund, known in the bureaucratic parlance of Brussels as the European Stability Mechanism.

As it was, the ruling - though not without its caveats - boosted European markets, which had been worried about the immediate threat of the region's biggest benefactor having its hands tied by the court. The decision was being hailed by Germany's ruling coalition led by Chancellor Angela Merkel, for whom a rejection of the ESM would have presented a massive new obstacle.

"This is a good day for Germany, and this is a good day for Europe," Merkel told German lawmakers on Wednesday. "Germany is sending once again a strong signal out to Europe and beyond it."

The ruling came on the same day as voters in neighboring Holland were going to the polls, with pro-euro parties looking set to win, albeit after a race that highlighted just how distrustful many Europeans are to ceding national authority to the region's administrative capital in Brussels. Punctuating how regional integration is accelerating as result of the crisis, EU officials on Wednesday outlined plans for a

previously announced banking union that would see national regulators forfeit ultimate authority over the region's 6,000 financial institutions to the European Central Bank.

That kind of integration is troubling many in Europe, leading to the rise of nationalist parties and attempts by opponents to throw up obstacles. Indeed, the German ruling on Wednesday came as the result of a legal challenge seeking to block lawmakers from allowing frugal German taxpayers to foot the lion's share of the bill to aid their troubled neighbors.

The decision on Wednesday, made in an atmosphere of theatrical drama by the court's eight red-robed judges, amounted to a ruling on requests for an injunction to the ESM, which were denied. The decision, though, cleared the way for German President Joachim Gauck to technically ratify the ESM treaty, which was approved by the German parliament in June. However, experts were divided about how he must comply with the court's decision, which could potentially mean adding a new clause to the German ratification documents that would then need to be passed on to officials in Brussels.

Jean-Claude Juncker, head of the euro zone's group of finance ministers, issued a statement Wednesday saying that, given the court's decision, the first official board meeting of the ESM fund would be called for Oct. 8.

In addition, the court also gave a green light to Germany's participation in a fiscal treaty enshrining enforceable budgetary discipline on the 25 European Union nations that signed it in January.

Though a defeat to those seeking to hinder German aid to its neighbors, the court's message from that politicians here must act carefully not to breach the constitution in committing aid also appeared to offer a dim light for euroskeptics who want a historic referendum on the euro in a country where polls show a good portions of Germans pining for the days of the Deutsche Mark.

One poll released last week indicated 54 percent of those asked were hoping the court would block the establishment of the rescue fund, with only 25 percent hoping it would rule in favor.

"Even if I am a little disappointed, we have really done something for democracy today," Gregor Gysi, head of Germany's Linke Party which filed one of the suits seeking to block the ESM, told Germany's ARD Public Television.

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EDITORIAL / OPINION

Murder In Benghazi

September 13, 2012

New York Times

Libya and its pro-democracy revolution had no better friend than J. Christopher Stevens, the United States ambassador who was killed along with three other Americans in Tuesday's attack on the consulate in Benghazi. It was an outrageous act that deserved the strongest condemnation.

President Obama's statement of outrage and his vow to bring the killers to justice received bipartisan support, including from politicians otherwise committed to partisan warfare, like the House speaker, John Boehner, and the Senate minority leader, Mitch McConnell, who rarely misses a chance to attack Mr. Obama.

But not from Mitt Romney, who wants Americans to believe he can be president but showed an extraordinary lack of presidential character by using the murders of the Americans in Libya as an excuse not just to attack Mr. Obama, but to do so in a way that suggested either a dangerous ignorance of the facts or an equally dangerous willingness to twist them to his narrow partisan aims.

Mr. Romney could easily have held his fire during this crisis, if he could not summon the decency to support the United States government. Instead, he misrepresented the administration as "sympathizing" with the attackers. There was no truth in what he said. In fact, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton made the first official comment on the killings, a strong condemnation, before Mr. Romney released his statement. Even after having a night to reconsider his response, Mr. Romney merely doubled down on his false charges, as he is prone to do.

Mr. Stevens, 52, was Washington's envoy to the rebels in Libya when they were overthrowing Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi. He became ambassador and, undaunted by the dangers, worked to build partnerships among the country's disparate groups and guide the fragile new democracy during a difficult transition. A fluent Arabic speaker, he had a deep understanding of Libya's culture and people.

On Wednesday, the Obama administration said it appeared that an organized group armed with mortars and rocket-propelled grenades had exploited a protest over an anti-Muslim video to unleash the attack. Some news reports suggested Al Qaeda may have been responsible. American officials noted the contrast with Egypt, where unarmed protesters, decrying the same video, spontaneously stormed the Embassy perimeter and tore down a flag but did little other damage.

Libya's shaky new government will need American support to bring the killers to justice. The origins of the video, which mocks the Prophet Muhammad, are not clear. There is considerable speculation about who even produced the film, which largely went unnoticed until it was promoted on the Internet by Morris Sadek, an Egyptian-born Coptic Christian ally of Terry Jones, a Florida pastor and hatemonger whose threats to burn a copy of the Koran inspired deadly riots in Afghanistan in 2010 and 2011.

However offensive the video is, it could never justify the violence in Benghazi and Cairo. But Mr. Jones, Mr. Sadek and whoever made the film did true damage to the interests of the United States and its core principle of respecting all faiths.

Religious fundamentalists, moderates and liberal secularists are all jockeying for power in Middle East nations after the Arab Spring. The violence done on Tuesday was apparently the work of a relatively small group of radicals not associated with any legitimate protest.

The worst thing now would be for the United States to turn away from its commitments to work with Libya and Egypt as they try to build stable new societies. A number of Libyan security guards died trying to save the Americans, and Libyan leaders have condemned the killings and promised to work to apprehend those responsible. Egyptian leaders, inexplicably, have not followed that lead.

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The New World Disorder

September 13, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By their nature, foreign policy problems often have a long fuse. The successes of one Administration (Truman, Reagan) sometimes don't pay off for years (Bush 41), while dangers can simmer until they

suddenly explode (al Qaeda). The Obama Presidency has been an era of slowly building tension and disorder that seems likely to flare into larger troubles and perhaps even military conflict no matter who wins in November.

This is the bigger picture behind this week's public fight between the U.S. and Israel, as well as the anti-American violence in Cairo and Benghazi. In the Persian Gulf, across the Arab Spring and into the Western Pacific, the U.S. is perceived as a declining power. As that perception spreads, the world's bad actors are asserting themselves to fill the vacuum, and American interests and assets will increasingly become targets unless the trend is reversed.

The Administration can't be blamed for the 9/11 anniversary attack in Benghazi, which was an act of terrorism by anti-American Islamists that wasn't stopped by a weak new government. Chris Stevens, the first U.S. Ambassador killed abroad in 33 years, was one of America's most capable diplomats who was deeply engaged in the post-Gadhafi transition. Libya's government has condemned the attack, and one test of its desire for close U.S. ties will be whether it punishes the perpetrators.

Though less violent, the mob that was able to scale the U.S. Embassy wall in Cairo is in other ways more troubling. Egypt and the U.S. have worked closely since Anwar Sadat, and Cairo is one of the largest recipients of U.S. aid. Only last week the U.S. announced it will forgive about \$1 billion in Egyptian debt. Yet the new Muslim Brotherhood government of Mohamed Morsi has failed to stop an assault on the Cairo Embassy, and it hadn't condemned the latest attack by late Wednesday.

Almost as disconcerting was President Obama's failure to mention the Cairo assault in his Rose Garden remarks on Wednesday morning. He condemned the Libyan attacks, praised the fallen U.S. diplomats, and pledged that "justice will be done." But he didn't offer any larger warning that such attacks will have consequences if they continue elsewhere around the world.

This is no idle worry. The 1979 seizure of U.S. diplomats in Tehran was followed that year by attacks on American Embassies in Tripoli and Islamabad. The U.S. Ambassador to Kabul was also killed. It isn't enough for a President to say, as Mr. Obama did Wednesday, that he will work with other countries to secure the safety of U.S. diplomats. These governments have to know they will be held accountable if they don't do so.

The larger concern is that these attacks fit a pattern of declining respect for U.S. power and influence. The Obama Administration has been saying for four years that the U.S. needs to defer to the U.N. and other nations, and the world has taken notice and is more willing to ignore U.S. desires and interests.

Across the Arab Spring, the U.S. has done little to shape events and is increasingly irrelevant. The U.S. angered Saudi Arabia by calling for the ouster of Egypt's Hosni Mubarak and now has little sway in Bahrain. Mr. Obama has washed his hands of Syria, allowing Russia and Iran to keep their proxy in power and stir up trouble for Turkey and Lebanon. The Chinese have brazenly occupied disputed territories in the South China Sea, hinting at war if the U.S. intercedes on behalf of its Asian allies.

The U.S. withdrew in toto from Iraq, and now its Prime Minister ignores Vice President Joe Biden's request to stop Iranian arms flights to Damascus. Even America's dependent in Kabul, Hamid Karzai, is refusing to honor his commitments on holding Taliban detainees. Perhaps he has heard Mr. Obama describe Afghanistan in his re-election campaign as if the U.S. is already halfway out the door.

Most of all, Iran continues its march toward a nuclear weapon despite the President's vow that it is "unacceptable." The U.S. says it has isolated Iran, but only last month the U.N. Secretary-General defied a U.S. plea and attended a non-aligned summit in Tehran. The Administration has issued wholesale exemptions to Congressional sanctions, and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton declared on the weekend that the U.S. is "not setting deadlines" for Iran as it sprints to a bomb.

Meanwhile, the U.S. has engaged in repeated public arguments with Israel, supposedly its best ally in the region. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Martin Dempsey, recently declared that he doesn't want to be "complicit" in any Israeli attack on Iran's nuclear sites. The White House failed to contradict him. A nation that appears so reluctant to stand by its friends won't be respected or feared by its enemies.

President Obama has had successes against terrorism, notably Osama bin Laden and a stepped-up pace of drone strikes. But both the hunt for al Qaeda and the drone program were part of the larger antiterror policy architecture established by his predecessor. He campaigned against much of that policy only to adopt it while in office.

Mr. Obama also came to office saying, and apparently believing, that a more deferential America would be better respected around the world. He will finish his term having disproved his own argument. The real lesson of the last four years—a lesson as much for Republican isolationists as for Democrats who want to lead from behind—is the ancient one that weakness is provocative.

(top)

EDITORIAL: The World Obama Created

September 13, 2012

Washington Times

The tragic events that took place in Libya and Egypt this week were the inevitable consequences of weak U.S. leadership. America and the world cannot afford four more such years.

In Benghazi, four Americans including U.S. Ambassador Christopher Stevens were murdered in a coordinated attack on the U.S. consulate by Islamic militants. On the same day, al Qaeda released a video in which leader Ayman al-Zawahri eulogized Abu Yahya al-Libi, a Libyan al Qaeda commander believed killed in June by a U.S. drone strike. This was no coincidence.

In Cairo, demonstrators - upset over an allegedly anti-Islamic film trailer being circulated on YouTube - spray-painted the outside of the U.S. embassy with anti-American slogans, then scaled the walls, hauled down the American flag and ripped it to pieces. Old Glory was replaced by a black jihadist banner as the crowd chanted, "Obama, Obama there are still a billion Osamas."

American inadequacy was compounded in the communications crisis surrounding the incident. Our Cairo embassy put out a statement even before the flag was torn down denouncing the "misguided" film and voicing U.S. support for Islam. This semi-apology clearly had no effect, unless it was to embolden the crowd. After the flag was torn to shreds, there followed a bizarre Twitter debate between an embassy employee and an Egyptian activist in which the staffer seemed to be more concerned with denouncing the purported pretext for the mob's riot than condemning the violence itself. "We consistently stand up for Muslims around the world and talk abt [sic] how Islam is a wonderful religion," the tweeter explained.

These messages were later deleted and serve as a good illustration why Twitter and diplomacy don't mix. If the Obama administration wanted to send a brief missive to the demonstrators, it should have opted for the one suggested by columnist Charles Krauthammer: "Go to Hell."

Both of these crises could have been avoided. They were obviously timed for the anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on America. In the past, U.S. facilities at home and abroad were placed on high alert on Sept. 11 to be prepared for such situations. There is no evidence of any such warnings going out this year. More disturbingly, according to White House records, President Obama skipped every daily intelligence briefing from Sept. 6-11. The question now is: Did the United States have any prior warning about the impending attacks that might have been acted on had Mr. Obama been paying closer attention?

The brewing crisis in North Africa is a symptom of a foreign policy adrift. It was with respect to Libya that an Obama administration official admiringly coined the expression "leading from behind," a lame attempt to portray Mr. Obama as a deft manager of international crises. However, the term quickly caught on as a more pointed critique of a president who was frequently behind, but never leading. In general, he has been disengaged. A government employee who attended the Pentagon's Sept. 11 anniversary ceremony said Mr. Obama "looked bored," and that while his speech said the right things, "the words never rose up into his eyes."

Mr. Obama points with pride to his foreign-policy record, but there is little to respect. America's global reputation has declined since January 2009. There is no region in the world where U.S. interests are advancing.

The United States no longer has a strong leadership position in Europe. The trans-Atlantic relationship has withered. America is playing no important part in trying to resolve the European debt crisis which threatens to plunge the world into a new recession, if it is not already there. Germany, which has assumed the lead role in addressing the problem, is now voicing concerns that the record amounts of debt being accumulated by the Obama administration will be the catalyst for a new economic collapse.

Mr. Obama has tried to remain flexible for Russia, an adversary state whose leader Vladimir Putin isn't short on ambition. Moscow agreed to the 2010 New START nuclear-arms reduction treaty because it was a bad deal for America. Now the Obama administration is talking about further nuclear cuts, which will weaken our strategic deterrent at a time when Russia and China are modernizing their nuclear arsenals, and proliferator states like North Korea and Pakistan ponder how best to expand their nuclear programs. Washington has no evident influence on Chinese behavior and relies on Beijing to continue to assume responsibility for buying up our mounting debt. U.S. influence in Central and South America is in decline.

There is no evident progress being made in the world's hotspots. The war in Afghanistan grinds on, producing higher casualties and greater volatility. The only thing Mr. Obama can say for certain about that unfortunate country is American troops are departing, and soon. Pakistan remains a haven for terrorists, while Iraq is seeing a spike in sectarian violence. There is no steady hand anywhere across the arc of instability.

Tehran continues its march to nuclear-weapons capability, and the Obama administration seems more concerned with setting red lines for Israel than for Iran. Relations between Mr. Obama and the Israeli

prime minister are so frosty that the president has refused to meet with Benjamin Netanyahu when both will be at the United Nations this month. Mr. Obama petulantly cutting off communications will virtually guarantee a major crisis in the region; it's only a matter of time.

The fallout from the much-heralded Arab Spring continues. In Syria, a full-scale civil war is under way which the United States has chosen not to decisively influence. In Egypt, the world is beginning to witness the results of what the State Department described as "legitimate Islamism." Present in the mob outside the U.S. embassy in Cairo on Tuesday was the family of blind Sheik Omar Abdel-Rahman, who is serving a life sentence for masterminding the 1993 World Trade Center bombing. Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi, leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, has promised to seek Rahman's release. Anti-American sentiment is growing, non-Muslim religious minorities are facing increased persecution, and Egypt's peace treaty with Israel that has maintained regional stability for three decades is under assault.

The analogy to the failed Carter presidency is striking. Both Democrats came to power offering a moral critique of U.S. foreign and national-security policy. Both exploited war weariness and a desire for U.S. retrenchment. Both were greeted with enthusiasm from a global community skeptical of American activism. And both were taken advantage of by adversary states who understood that these liberals were weak leaders. Jimmy Carter also saw a diplomat killed on his watch: Adolph "Spike" Dubs, the U.S. representative to Afghanistan who was murdered in Kabul in 1979.

The one positive decision Mr. Obama can point to - taking out Osama bin Laden - is his weakest argument for a second term. After all, bin Laden is dead, and that operation cannot be repeated.

It's easier to allow global chaos to emerge than to do the hard work of maintaining stability. It's simpler to make speeches and curry favor than take tough positions needed to advance U.S. interests. Over his term in office, Mr. Obama hasn't shown the necessary qualities for a global leader, and the considerable damage caused by his policies speak for themselves. The world is teetering on the brink of disaster because Mr. Obama has failed to lead. The United States cannot afford another four years of empty-chair diplomacy.

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Beyond Religion In The Middle East

September 13, 2012

Los Angeles Times

By Mimi Hanaoka

The chaotic violence that killed U.S. Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens and three American staffers in Libya, and that resulted in a mob storming the U.S. Embassy in Cairo, has been garbed in religious language and references. However, the religious rhetoric from all corners distracts from the real issues: serious domestic political fragmentation in Libya and Egypt in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, and America's place in the region.

Media attention has focused on a polemic 14-minute movie trailer for "Innocence of Muslims" posted on YouTube, which prompted protests in Benghazi and Cairo. The film was allegedly produced by Sam Bacile, who has identified himself as an Israeli Jew. In the Wall Street Journal, Bacile called Islam a "cancer" and claimed he raised \$5 million from about 100 Jewish donors to fund the film, details that only intensify the film's polemic power.

The trailer, translated into Arabic and viewed thousands of times in the Middle East, portrays the prophet Muhammad as, among other things, a child abuser. Florida pastor and provocateur Terry Jones, who burned the Koran in 2011, claims to have screened the film; a self-described Christian militant in California claims to have consulted on it.

As news reports, punditry and Internet reactions fly, the violent response to the trailer in Libya and Egypt will undoubtedly be portrayed as generic Muslim rage rooted in a theology that inspires a special rage and hatred against the West. If more demonstrations erupt in Muslim countries after Friday prayers, there will be further temptation to understand any protests as primarily religious in nature.

But there are other ways to understand what's going on. The deadly attack in Libya may have been separate from the video protests, preplanned by extremists. In any case, the anti-American demonstrations are not necessarily exhibitions of generic Muslim theological rage as much as they are outbursts occurring for specific reasons in the particular and destabilized local contexts of the post-Arab Spring Middle East and North Africa. And more protests following Friday prayers in these countries are likely to be as much a sign of newfound political engagement as religious zeal.

The Arab Spring produced a complex matrix of political instability in Libya and Egypt, with enormous economic and social reverberations in those nations and their geopolitical relationships and strategies. The anti-American violence in Benghazi and Cairo is mostly a reflection of weakened central governments in the wake of the toppling of long-standing dictators and amid the jockeying for power of a host of actors and organizations.

If the reaction was generically Muslim in nature, Saudi Arabia, the most notable bastion of Sunni orthodoxy vehemently opposed to any depictions of Muhammad, would be the place where the trailer and the film would be expected to first spark controversy. Yet it wasn't a flash point. Nor have we heard a peep of protest from Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Oman or Kuwait, Persian Gulf countries with relatively strong central governments that retained a firm grip on power during the Arab Spring.

As the exuberant democracy movements and revolutions in Libya and Egypt transition to the painstaking reality of establishing law and order, the new regimes have to find their feet and their place in the world. The recently elected governments in Libya and Egypt and other countries will work for many years to reestablish law and order, a task complicated in Libya by the deluge of arms floating around the country after the brutal civil war. In Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood, the entrenched military power holders, and secular organizations and individuals will compete to speak for the new state.

At such a time, using religion alone to explain what's happening is counter-factual and counterproductive. Individuals, mobs and militants on all sides, in the United States as well as in Egypt and Libya, will try to dwell on Islam. Easily inflamed mobs in the Middle East may set back democratization efforts and strip the remade nations of foreign economic investment, tourism and the geopolitical support they need. In America, provocateurs will try to influence public opinion in divisive political times. It is important that policymakers and the news media remain clear-headed that the real issues are instead mostly local and always political.

Mimi Hanaoka is an assistant professor of religious studies and Islam at the University of Richmond in Virginia. She is at work on a book about early Islamic identity in Persia.

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Treacherous Currents In The Mideast

September 13, 2012

Miami Herald

The outrageous and indefensible attack against the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi, Libya, that killed U.S. Ambassador Chris Stevens and three other American diplomats on Wednesday sends a powerful message about the treacherous currents blocking peaceful change in the Middle East.

Extremist-led attempts to prevent the emergence of modern societies in Islamic countries will continue to imperil U.S. efforts to improve conditions in that part of the world and the safety of diplomats like Ambassador Stevens, who risk their lives daily on the front lines of American foreign policy. But the events in Libya and Egypt should not deter U.S. efforts to promote the U.S. national interest in the region peacefully but forcefully. The last thing the United States can afford to do - what its enemies would love for it to do - is to abandon the strategy of creating stronger bonds with the emerging governments of the region in the wake of the Arab Spring.

This is not Tehran, 1979, when government-backed thugs sacked the embassy and took American diplomats hostage. The Libyan government was quick to issue an apology and to condemn the attacks, and its deputy ambassador to the United Nations called Ambassador Stevens "one of the greatest friends of Libya."

Amid the violent protest, Libyan troops fought back against the mob, helped protect U.S. diplomats and took Mr. Stevens' body to the hospital, where he later died of smoke inhalation. Libya's government vowed to bring the perpetrators to justice, and President Obama pledged to offer U.S. assistance to make that happen.

It will take time to sort out the events in Benghazi, but U.S. intelligence officials said the attack was too well-coordinated, well-planned and well-armed to have been the work of a spontaneous mob enraged over an amateurish film allegedly made in the United States that disparaged the prophet Mohammed. It is surely no coincidence that the attack, along with an attempt to breach the U.S. Embassy compound in Cairo by another mob, occurred on the 11th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks.

This underlines the continuing dangers that United States and pro-democracy movements confront as determined adversaries resort to violence to turn back the clock and impose ruthless tyrannies in various countries.

It also emphasizes the need for U.S. resolve in the face of the challenge. The United States is under attack precisely because it is seen as an ally of the forces of peaceful change. It must not allow incidents like these to drive a wedge between U.S. policy and governments like the one in Egypt, caught between the conflicting currents of democracy and extremism.

Mr. Obama was right to reject "all efforts to denigrate the religious beliefs of others," an implicit condemnation of provocations that inspire religious hatred, but he *forcefully* noted that there can be no justification for "brutal acts" like the incidents in Libya and Egypt.

Predictably, the attacks were quickly mired in political controversy at home. Candidate Mitt Romney jumped the gun in attacking Mr. Obama as an "apologist" because of a statement issued by the U.S.

Embassy in Cairo before the assaults took place. Reacting to the death of U.S. diplomats by seeking to take political advantage is profoundly inappropriate.

This is a time for unity, as much as it was when Americans rallied behind President Bush 11 years ago. Wednesday's events are reminders that the war that began on 9/11 is far from over.

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From Prussia With Love

September 13, 2012

New York Times

By Jacob Heilbrunn

WITH its decision yesterday to allow Germany to contribute to European bailout efforts, the country's Federal Constitutional Court not only handed Chancellor Angela Merkel a big political victory - it also provided further confirmation that this economic powerhouse, a cautious and self-effacing country during the cold war, is assuming a dominant role in a new Europe. And it is doing so in the 300th anniversary year of the birth of Frederick the Great, the Prussian ruler who almost single-handedly forged a powerful new European kingdom.

Indeed, Ms. Merkel is presiding over a transformation every bit as dramatic as that of her royal predecessor, a cultural and political shift in Germany that exemplifies a rebirth of the Prussian values of thrift, independence and incorruptibility that she hopes to export to her neighbors.

The idea of a Prussian revival, with its implications of German militarism, may strike some as a cause for worry. Even in Germany, it conjures up embarrassing images from the past: monocle-wearing officers barking orders that are slavishly followed by their subordinates.

This past summer Heiner Geissler, the former secretary general of the conservative Christian Democratic Party, said on TV that the golden victory column in Berlin that celebrates Prussia's 1871 defeat of France is Germany's "dumbest memorial" and should be demolished. Not surprisingly, in denouncing Ms. Merkel for demanding fiscal austerity and rectitude, demonstrators in Greece and politicians in France have often depicted her as a Prussian dictator.

But such overheated charges may no longer carry the sting they once did. Germans are taking a second look at Prussia, particularly its transformation into the most enlightened European state in the late 18th century under Frederick the Great, a friend of Voltaire and a musician.

The German Historical Museum - housed in the former Prussian armory - recently marked Frederick's birthday with an exhibition devoted to his shifting image over the centuries. Subtitled "Respected, Revered, Reviled ..." it shows, among other things, how the Nazis misused his memory for their own genocidal ends.

Frederick is undergoing more than just a historical revision, though. Some fiscal conservatives hail him as a contemporary model for prudence in the face of demands for bailouts.

And it isn't only Prussia's greatest ruler getting a new gloss, but Prussia itself. Berlin's Baroque Hohenzollern palace, demolished by the East Germans, is being rebuilt, with a few design changes, as an academic and cultural center. In a sensible compromise between the past and present, its courtyard and three facades of the new building will emulate the original palace, while the interior will be modern.

Perhaps the most controversial episode associated with Prussia, however, is its destruction by the Soviet Red Army in 1945 and the expulsion of millions of Germans from Eastern Europe, including Czechoslovakia, where ethnic Germans, the so-called Sudetendeutschen, had lived for generations. After decades of ignoring that history, in 2008 the German Parliament passed a law calling for the establishment of a documentation center focusing on such ethnic cleansing.

Poland and the Czech Republic, which include former Prussian and German territories, tend to see the demands of the expellees as an attempt to claim victimhood status for Germans who were, of course, the aggressors during World War II. But a dispassionate exhibition chronicling the brutal exodus from the East - and addressing forced displacements of populations throughout history - is not something to recoil from. Doing so can offer a more honest and full depiction of the horrors precipitated by Nazism. Germans aren't trying to valorize Prussia and the German past but, after years of willful silence, to understand them.

There is no reason to fear what such re-examination of the past implies for the future. Quite the contrary. Before World War II, what was good for Germany was bad for its neighbors. During the cold war a divided Germany - and the carving up of the Prussian state by the wartime allies - reassured them of Germany's peaceful intentions. Now Germany is drawing on its past to create a stronger, more unified Europe. If its neighbors can profit from a revitalized and pacific Germany, they may someday find themselves celebrating Frederick the Great's birthday as well.

Jacob Heilbrunn is a senior editor at The National Interest.

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**DAILY PRESS CLIPS FOR
FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 14, 2012**

DOMESTIC AGENDA

Fresh Hopes for End to Chicago Teacher Strike by Weekend

September 14, 2012

New York Times

By MONICA DAVEY and STEVEN YACCINO

CHICAGO — Meeting behind closed doors into the evening, leaders on both sides of this city's teacher strike voiced optimism on Thursday that a deal could soon be reached, bringing an end to a walkout that has halted classes for 350,000 students in the nation's third-largest school system. ([link](#))

ECONOMIC RECOVERY

Fed Ties New Aid to Jobs Recovery in Forceful Move

September 14, 2012

New York Times

By BINYAMIN APPELBAUM

WASHINGTON — The Federal Reserve opened a new chapter Thursday in its efforts to stimulate the economy, saying that it intends to buy large quantities of mortgage bonds, and potentially other assets, until the job market improves substantially. ([link](#))

UNITED NATIONS

UN chief appeals for calm as 'hateful' film sparks violent protests

September 13, 2012

Reuters

UNITED NATIONS - U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on Thursday appealed for calm in North Africa and the Middle East after a film deemed insulting to Islam sparked riots across the Arab world and an attack that killed the U.S. envoy to Libya. ([link](#))

Ban: Somali attacks won't derail progress

September 13, 2012

UPI

UNITED NATIONS -- U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon condemned an attack on a Mogadishu hotel housing the newly elected president but said recent gains wouldn't be reversed. ([link](#))

UN Meeting Rebukes Iran's Nuclear Defiance

September 14, 2012

Associated Press

By George Jahn

VIENNA - The 35-nation board of the U.N. nuclear agency overwhelmingly rebuked Iran on Thursday for refusing to heed demands that it take actions to diminish fears that it might be seeking atomic arms, a move hailed by the United States as demonstrating international pressure on Tehran to compromise. ([link](#))

TOP STORIES

Egypt, Hearing From Obama, Moves To Heal Rift From Protests

September 14, 2012

New York Times

Reviewer

By David D. Kirkpatrick, Helene Cooper And Mark Landler

CAIRO - Following a blunt phone call from President Obama, Egyptian leaders scrambled Thursday to try to repair the country's alliance with Washington, tacitly acknowledging that they erred in their response to the attack on the United States Embassy by seeking to first appease anti-American domestic opinion without offering a robust condemnation of the violence. ([link](#))

Mideast Turmoil Spreads

September 14, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By MARGARET COKER and ADAM ENTOUS

BENGHAZI, Libya—The Libyan government arrested four people Thursday in connection with the deadly attack on the American consulate Tuesday night as Libyan and U.S. officials mounted a manhunt for others believed to be involved. ([link](#))

More protests break out in Muslim world as U.S. appeals for calm

September 14, 2012

Washington Post

By Karen DeYoung and Michael Birnbaum

Protests inspired by an anti-Islam film targeted more U.S. facilities in the Muslim world Thursday, testing the will and capacity of foreign governments to protect Americans and the ability of the Obama administration to cool the growing anger. ([link](#))

Anti-American Protests Over Film Enter 4th Day

September 14, 2012

New York Times

By DAVID D. KIRKPATRICK and ALAN COWELL

CAIRO — Anti-American protests inspired by a video denigrating the Prophet Muhammad entered a fourth straight day in the Egyptian capital as authorities in much of the Muslim world braced for possible demonstrations after Friday noon prayers — an occasion often associated with public displays of dissent. ([link](#))

Off-Script Scramble for Power in a Chinese Leader's Absence

September 14, 2012

New York Times

By IAN JOHNSON and JONATHAN ANSFIELD

BEIJING — With still no sign of China's designated new leader, Xi Jinping, who has not been seen in public since Sept. 1, many insiders and well-connected analysts say the Chinese political ship is adrift, with factions jockeying to shape an impending Communist Party conclave. ([link](#))

AFRICA

Ethiopia

Ethiopia Ruling Party Set To Choose Meles Successor

September 14, 2012

AFP

Ethiopia's ruling coalition will hold a meeting of its governing council Friday and Saturday to choose a successor to former Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, who died last month, the coalition said in a statement. ([link](#))

South Africa

Platinum Miners Call for Strikes in Africa

September 14, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By DEVON MAYLIE and PATRICK MCGROARTY

RUSTENBURG, South Africa—Platinum-mine workers on Thursday called for a nationwide strike, threatening to escalate unrest that has rocked Africa's largest economy and left the South African government and its allied unions struggling to stem the turmoil. ([link](#))

Uganda

Brit Producer Of Gay Play In Uganda Held In Jail

September 14, 2012

Associated Press

By Rodney Muhumuza^a

KAMPALA, Uganda - The British producer of a play about being gay in Uganda is in jail pending his trial on charges that he had the work performed without official authorization. ([link](#))

Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe Launches Media Complaints Watchdog

September 14, 2012

Associated Press

HARARE, Zimbabwe - The head of Zimbabwe's state media council says he wants a "cease-fire" on hostilities between the state-controlled media and privately owned news organizations. ([link](#))

ASIA

Panetta Set to Discuss U.S. Shift in Asia Trip

September 13, 2012

New York Times

By THOM SHANKER

WASHINGTON — When Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta travels across Asia next week, on an arc from Japan and China to New Zealand, he will face two almost contradictory challenges. ([link](#))

China

Chinese Ships Enter Japanese-Controlled Waters To Protest Sale Of Islands

September 14, 2012

New York Times

By Martin Fackler

TOKYO - Six Chinese maritime patrol vessels entered Japanese-controlled waters around a group of disputed islands on Friday, the Japanese Coast Guard said, in the first such move by China since the Japanese government announced that it had bought the islands this week. ([link](#))

Ex-Chongqing Police Chief to Stand Trial Tuesday

September 14, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By JEREMY PAGE

BEIJING—The former police chief of Chongqing city whose flight to a U.S. consulate triggered the scandal surrounding his former boss, Bo Xilai, will stand trial Tuesday on charges including defection, bribery and abuse of power, according to a court official. ([link](#))

Vietnam

Hanoi Web Crackdown Hits Blogs; Foreign Firms Fret

September 14, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By JAMES HOOKWAY

HANOI—Vietnam's leaders are stepping up their campaign against critical blogs, ordering government investigators to arrest the operators of three websites at a time when global Internet companies are growing more worried about doing business in the tightly policed country. ([link](#))

NEA

Egypt

Protests Put Egypt Relations on Edge

September 14, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By MATT BRADLEY in Cairo, MATTHEW DALTON in Brussels and CHARLES LEVINSON in Beirut
Egypt and the U.S. sought to avoid a further fraying of their relationship a day after Cairo's new Islamist president, Mohammed Morsi, failed to publicly condemn the siege of the American Embassy. ([link](#))

As Violence Spreads In Arab World, Google Blocks Access To Inflammatory Video

September 14, 2012

New York Times

By Claire Cain Miller

SAN FRANCISCO - As violence spread in the Arab world over a video on YouTube ridiculing the Prophet Muhammad, Google, the owner of YouTube, blocked access to it in two of the countries in turmoil, Egypt and Libya, but did not remove the video from its Web site. ([link](#))

Iran

Iran Tells US To "Punish" Makers Of Anti-Islam Film

September 14, 2012

AFP

Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, on Thursday demanded the United States punish those behind an anti-Islam film blamed for sparking violent protests in the Middle East and North Africa. ([link](#))

EU Harshly Criticizes Iran's Nuclear Defiance, Says Diplomacy Way To Resolve Concerns

September 13, 2012

Associated Press

VIENNA - The European Union has harshly criticized Iran for what it says is Tehran's refusal to engage the international community on concerns about its nuclear agenda. ([link](#))

Iraq

Leader Of Shiite Militia Threatens American Interests In Iraq Due To "Heinous" Prophet Film

September 13, 2012

Associated Press

BAGHDAD - A Shiite militant group is threatening U.S. interests in Iraq as part of the backlash over an anti-Islam film it has described as "heinous." ([link](#))

Israel

Obama Rebuffs Netanyahu on Setting Limits on Iran's Nuclear Program

September 13, 2012

New York Times

By MARK LANDLER and HELENE COOPER

WASHINGTON — President Obama on Tuesday rejected an appeal by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel to spell out a specific "red line" that Iran could not cross in its nuclear program, a senior administration official said, deepening the divide between the allies over how to deal with Iran's nuclear ambitions. ([link](#))

Israel Hints It Will Keep Pressing US On Iran

September 13, 2012

Associated Press

By Amy Teibel

JERUSALEM - Israel's leader suggested in an interview Thursday that he'll keep publicly pressing the United States to get tougher on Iran, despite the strains his remarks have caused with the Obama administration. ([link](#))

Kuwait

Kuwaitis Stage Anti-US Demo, Wave Qaeda Flag

September 14, 2012

AFP

About 500 demonstrators gathered Thursday near the US embassy in Kuwait waving a black Al-Qaeda flag in protest at a film mocking Islam. ([link](#))

Lebanon

U.S. Sanctions Hezbollah Leader for Aid to Syria

September 14, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By JAY SOLOMON

WASHINGTON—U.S. Treasury officials imposed sanctions on the leader of the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah, and two other members of the organization for their alleged role in aiding the Syrian government in its crackdown on opposition forces. ([link](#))

Pope to Start 'Peace Pilgrimage' to Lebanon

September 14, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By FARNAZ FASSIHI

BEIRUT—Pope Benedict XVI will arrive in Lebanon on Friday for a three-day visit that he labeled a "peace pilgrimage," at a time when the region and its people are facing anguish and heightened religious tensions, from war in Syria to violence in Libya. ([link](#))

Libya

In Libya, Chaos Was Followed By Organized Ambush, Official Says

September 14, 2012

New York Times

By Suliman Ali Zway And Rick Gladstone

BENGHAZI, Libya - The mayhem here that killed four United States diplomatic personnel, including the ambassador, was actually two attacks - the first one spontaneous and the second highly organized and

possibly aided by anti-American infiltrators of Libya's young government, a top Libyan security official said Thursday. ([link](#))

In Libya, Militias Pose Security Threat

September 14, 2012

Washington Post

By Abigail Hauslohner And Craig Whitlock

In the last week of his life, Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens was focused on a problem that has bedeviled Libya since the overthrow of Moammar Gaddafi last year: the countless militias that operate above the law. ([link](#))

US Consulate Attack In Libya Said Twin Operation

September 14, 2012

Associated Press

By Hamza Hendawi And Osama Alfatory

BENGHAZI, Libya - Heavily armed militants used a protest of an anti-Islam film as a cover and may have had help from inside Libyan security in their deadly attack on the U.S. Consulate, a senior Libyan official said Thursday. ([link](#))

Syria

New envoy to Syria says crisis getting worse

September 14, 2012

Associated Press

By ELIZABETH A. KENNEDY

BEIRUT — The diplomat tasked with ending Syria's civil war said that the conflict is worsening on Thursday, the same day he travelled to the country for the first time since taking up a job he himself has called "nearly impossible". ([link](#))

Yemen

Yemen Leader Apologizes To US For Embassy Attack

September 14, 2012

Associated Press

By Ahmed Al-haj

SANAA, Yemen - Yemen's president has apologized to President Barack Obama for the attack on the U.S. Embassy in Sanaa, the Yemeni capital, by a mob angry over an anti-Islam film. ([link](#))

SCA

Afghanistan

Afghanistan Tries To Block Video And Head Off Rioting

September 14, 2012

New York Times

By Alissa J. Rubin

KABUL, Afghanistan - Racing to head off potentially violent demonstrations over an anti-Islamic video, the Afghan government on Thursday pushed Internet providers to shut down access to Web sites hosting the clip, and asked political and religious leaders to urge calm, senior Afghan officials said. ([link](#))

Afghan President Postpones Trip Over Prophet Film

September 14, 2012

Associated Press

By Amir Shah And Patrick Quinn

KABUL, Afghanistan - The Afghan president canceled his official visit to Norway amid concerns following Mideast riots over a film that ridicules Islam's Prophet Muhammad, officials said Thursday. Hamid Karzai also talked to President Barack Obama and expressed condolences over the killing of the U.S. ambassador and three other Americans in Libya. ([link](#))

Pakistan

Anger Rolls Across Pakistani City in Aftermath of Factory Fire

September 13, 2012

New York Times

By DECLAN WALSH

KARACHI, Pakistan — The towering metal door at the back of the burned-out garment factory could have been an escape for many of the low-paid textile workers caught in the fire here on Tuesday. Instead, it stands as a testament to greed and corruption at a factory where 289 trapped employees died. ([link](#))

WHA/EUR

Mexico

Mexico Announces Capture Of Gulf Cartel Leader

September 14, 2012

New York Times

By Randal C. Archibold

MEXICO CITY - In a major strike against one of the largest drug-trafficking organizations, the Mexican Navy said on Thursday that it had detained one of the most sought-after drug kingpins in Mexico and the United States, the top leader of the Gulf Cartel. ([link](#))

FOREIGN POLICY

U.S. Diplomatic Security Again Under Review

September 14, 2012

Washington Post

By Colum Lynch

The volatile demonstrations at U.S. diplomatic missions this week have shattered any illusions about the inviolability of America's envoys and highlighted the perils of diplomatic life in a region undergoing sweeping political upheaval. ([link](#))

U.S. Probes Alleged Video Producer

September 14, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By DEVLIN BARRETT, TAMARA AUDI and ERICA ORDEN

Federal authorities are investigating whether the man allegedly behind a video insulting to Muslims violated the terms of his probation by using computers and the Internet, according to two U.S. officials. ([link](#))

EDITORIAL / OPINION

Our Diplomats Deserve Better

September 14, 2012

New York Times

By Prudence Bushnell

Falls Church, Va. -- THERE is a black wall in a State Department lobby inscribed with the names of those who died while serving overseas. Every time I passed that wall after Al Qaeda blew up two American Embassies in East Africa in 1998, I thought of the 12 American and 32 Kenyan friends and colleagues who died on my watch as ambassador. I thought of my own journey that day down flights of stairs in the building next door to the embassy, after having been knocked out by the blast, of the people who risked their lives to save others, and of how we carried on under horrendous circumstances. ([link](#))

What Libya Lost

September 14, 2012

New York Times

By Ethan Chorin

ON Wednesday morning, my colleagues and I were to meet in Benghazi with J. Christopher Stevens, the American ambassador to Libya, to discuss a plan for a new division of emergency medicine at Benghazi Medical Center, the largest and most modern hospital in eastern Libya. The meeting never took place. The night before, militants laid siege to the American Consulate in Benghazi, killing the ambassador and three other Americans. The ambassador was taken, without a pulse, to the hospital we hoped to upgrade. ([link](#))

Our Man In Benghazi

September 14, 2012

New York Times

By Roger Cohen

LONDON - Chris Stevens, the American ambassador to Libya killed in an attack on the consulate in Benghazi, represented the best of the U.S. Foreign Service. He was smart, dedicated and adroit. He loved his work and believed in its capacity for good. He knew history's hold on Middle Eastern minds yet dismissed the notion that ancient conflict was insurmountable. Other cultures fascinated him even as his own inspired him. No American did more to end the tyranny of Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi. Like most brave people he had a great sense of humor. ([link](#))

Belated Response From Egypt

September 14, 2012

New York Times

The response by President Mohamed Morsi of Egypt to the murder of the American ambassador in Libya and the attacks on the United States Embassy in Cairo should have been swift and unequivocal. Condemn the violence, express condolences for the killings and pledge to strengthen security at foreign missions. ([link](#))

Husain Haqqani: Manipulated Outrage and Misplaced Fury

September 14, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By HUSAIN HAQQANI

The attacks on U.S. diplomatic missions this week—beginning in Egypt and Libya, and moving to Yemen and other Muslim countries—came under cover of riots against an obscure online video insulting Islam and the Prophet Muhammad. But the mob violence and assaults should be seen for what they really are: an effort by Islamists to garner support and mobilize their base by exacerbating anti-Western sentiments. ([link](#))

The Proper US Response To Cairo Attack

September 14, 2012

Washington Post

By Robert Kagan

A handful of Republicans pushed Wednesday to cut off aid to Libya and Egypt. Fortunately, most Republicans and Democrats in Congress reject the idea. In Libya, the government is largely secular and pro-American. It is also weak and unable to preserve order against the many forces - from remnants of the Gaddafi era to radical Islamic militants - that challenge its authority. Cutting off support isn't the answer. If anything, we should be increasing assistance, especially security assistance, to help Libyans make their country safer, for themselves and us. ([link](#))

The Abandonment

September 14, 2012

Washington Post

By Charles Krauthammer

There are two positions one can take regarding the Iranian nuclear program: (a) it doesn't matter, we can deter them; or (b) it does matter, we must stop them. ([link](#))

DOMESTIC AGENDA**Fresh Hopes for End to Chicago Teacher Strike by Weekend**

September 14, 2012

New York Times

By MONICA DAVEY and STEVEN YACCINO

CHICAGO — Meeting behind closed doors into the evening, leaders on both sides of this city's teacher strike voiced optimism on Thursday that a deal could soon be reached, bringing an end to a walkout that has halted classes for 350,000 students in the nation's third-largest school system.

The upbeat tone marked a major shift from contentious days past, when Chicago Public Schools officials had deemed talks close to resolution while union officials declared the sides "miles apart." As recently as Wednesday evening, the sides had sparred publicly over whether formal talks were really taking place at all.

Any deal would require a vote by the union's roughly 700-member House of Delegates, which could come as early as Friday afternoon, possibly permitting hundreds of schools across the city to reopen on Monday, one week after the city's first strike in a quarter-century began.

"I'm praying, praying, praying," Karen Lewis, president of the Chicago Teachers Union, told reporters outside a hotel where talks are taking place, when asked whether schools would reopen by then. "I'm on my knees for that. Please, yes, I'm hoping for Monday."

Still, even as talks were seen as progressing over compromises on how a teacher evaluation plan might be put in place and on health care premiums for teachers with families, thousands of teachers and supporters — many dressed in red rain ponchos — marched and chanted through main thoroughfares downtown, stopping at one point at a Hyatt hotel in protest of Penny Pritzker, a member of the Chicago Board of Education whose family founded the hotel chain.

Given four days of picketing outside largely empty schools, months of negotiations and a roller coaster of sharp and sometimes shifting talk from those involved in the negotiations, few here seemed quick to predict what will really come next.

It was unclear precisely what had turned the mood of talks inside a Michigan Avenue hotel from sour on Wednesday afternoon to hopeful by Thursday morning, but school officials said they presented a new offer that included several changes in areas the union had been concerned about.

Among the proposed changes, according to school officials: teachers' raises would average 16 percent over four years at a cost of \$320 million, as had already been offered, but would be distributed differently; health insurance rates would not rise for teachers with families, as had been planned, if the union agreed to take part in a wellness program; and an appeals process would be created for teacher evaluations, which have been a significant area of disagreement.

Since last November, this city's 26,000 public school teachers have been negotiating over the terms of the four-year contract, but the battle has played out more broadly, over the direction and philosophy of the school system, even as it struggled to solve gaping budget deficits.

Mayor Rahm Emanuel has called for a longer school day, more control for principals in picking teachers, thorough evaluations for teachers, and expansion of the city's charter schools. The teachers have said they felt under siege, and pitted against a larger national education trend that they say fails to consider Chicago's realities, like the fact that 87 percent of public school students here come from low-income homes.

In many ways, teachers here have said they see their fight here as a larger one, taking place not only over education but also over the role of labor at a time when states like Indiana, Ohio and Wisconsin have fought battles with Republican leaders over collective bargaining rights and the power of unions. In fact, the Chicago Teachers Union announced on Thursday that it would hold a "Wisconsin-style" rally over the weekend, and that it expected wide attendance by supporters from other states.

"The teachers' union here saw this as a local struggle within a larger national battle of what a lot of teachers call the privatization of schools," said Robert Bruno, a professor of labor relations at the University of Illinois. "They didn't see this as just localized. The issues that are being pushed here are being pushed in many urban and suburban school districts."

Around the city, families said they were hopeful that the strike was nearly over. Many had expressed tolerance for the circumstances and the child care juggling act they found themselves in, in some cases, only a week into a new academic year, but patience seemed likely to run thin in the coming weeks. In 1987, the last time teachers here went on strike, an agreement took 19 days.

A relatively quick end to the fight here would also quiet an awkward issue for President Obama in his hometown in the heart of a presidential campaign season. Mr. Obama's aides said he had not chosen a side in the strike, which pitted his former chief of staff, Mr. Emanuel, against a crucial bloc of his political support, the unions.

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ECONOMIC RECOVERY

Fed Ties New Aid to Jobs Recovery in Forceful Move

September 14, 2012

New York Times

By BINYAMIN APPELBAUM

WASHINGTON — The Federal Reserve opened a new chapter Thursday in its efforts to stimulate the economy, saying that it intends to buy large quantities of mortgage bonds, and potentially other assets, until the job market improves substantially.

This is the first time that the Fed has tied the duration of an aid program to its economic objectives. And, in announcing the change, the central bank made clear that its primary reason was not a deterioration in its economic outlook, but a determination to respond more forcefully — in effect, an acknowledgment that its incremental approach until now had been flawed.

The concern about unemployment also reflects a significant shift in the priorities of the nation's central bank, which has long focused on inflation. Inflation is now running below the Fed's 2 percent annual target. But with the unemployment rate above 8 percent, the Fed's policy-making committee suggested Thursday that it might tolerate a period of somewhat higher inflation, promising to maintain stimulus efforts "for a considerable time after the economic recovery strengthens."

"The weak job market should concern every American," the Fed's chairman, Ben S. Bernanke, said at a news conference. The goal of the new policies, he added, "is to quicken the recovery, to help the economy begin to grow quickly enough to generate new jobs."

The need for new stimulus reflects the disappointing condition of the American economy, which continues to struggle between crisis and prosperity three years after the official end of the recession. More than 20 million Americans cannot find full-time jobs. Median household income has declined. The housing market remains depressed.

The Republican presidential nominee, Mitt Romney, issued a statement describing the Fed's announcement as "further confirmation that President Obama's policies have not worked."

Mr. Romney added that he did not think the Fed's efforts would work, either.

Democrats, in turn, laid the blame on Republicans in Congress. "The Fed is fulfilling its obligation to take action to address unemployment. Now Congressional Republicans need to fulfill theirs," Senator Charles E. Schumer, Democrat of New York, said in a statement.

Delighted investors responded by piling into the stock market, instantly gratifying one of the Fed's primary objectives for its program — to push money into riskier investments. The Standard & Poor's 500-stock index closed up 1.63 percent; shares in home builders rose on the news.

"There weren't many more accommodative options the Fed could have gone with," said Dan Greenhaus, the chief global strategist at BTIG, an institutional brokerage firm.

The Fed said it would add \$23 billion of mortgage bonds to its portfolio by the end of September, a pace of \$40 billion in purchases a month. It will then announce a new target at the end of this month, and every subsequent month, until the labor market outlook improves "substantially," as long as inflation remains in check. It did not further explain either standard.

Mr. Bernanke said the committee had decided to announce a "qualitative" standard because no single number sufficiently represented the health of the labor market.

"We will be looking for the sort of broad-based growth in jobs and economic activity that generally signal sustained improvement in labor market conditions and declining unemployment," he said.

Some analysts cautioned, however, that the lack of a specific standard could limit the impact.

"These moves indicate the accommodation switch has been turned on," Michael Gapen, senior United States economist at Barclays Capital, wrote in a note to clients after the announcement on Thursday.

"On the other hand, boldness has been traded for more uncertainty, as the overall amount and duration of Fed purchases will be dependent on evolving economic conditions."

The committee's statement provided a measure of guidance, in the form of an outer limit on the Fed's intentions. It said that the Fed now intended to hold short-term interest rates near zero at least through the middle of 2015, roughly half-a-year longer than its previous statement. And the projections of senior Fed officials showed that all but one committee member expected to start raising rates by the end of 2015.

Perhaps more important than that timeline was the committee's insistence, echoed by Mr. Bernanke, that the 2015 horizon was not an estimate of when the recovery would begin, but rather an indication of the Fed's determination to keep its foot on the gas well past that point.

"We're not going to rush to begin to tighten policy," Mr. Bernanke said. "We're going to give it some time to make sure that the recovery is well established."

Eleven members of the committee voted in favor of the statement. The only dissent came from Jeffrey M. Lacker, president of the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond, Va.

The scale of the new effort is smaller than the Fed's previous asset purchases. The first round, starting in 2008, averaged more than \$100 billion a month. The second, beginning in 2010, averaged \$75 billion a month. The current round will begin at a pace of \$40 billion a month, although the volume remains subject to adjustment.

The Fed said it would also continue to purchase Treasury securities under an existing program that runs through the end of the year, taking the total volume to roughly \$85 billion a month through the rest of the year.

There is broad disagreement among economists about the effects of the Fed's actions. The Fed's own research shows it may have raised economic output by 3 percent and created more than two million jobs. Most independent analyses have reached more modest conclusions, and some experts argue that there is little evidence of any meaningful economic impact.

The first round of purchases, known as QE1, aimed to arrest the financial crisis, in part by clearing room on bank balance sheets. The second round, called QE2, was started amid concerns that prices were

increasing too slowly, raising the specter of deflation. This round, by contrast, is aimed squarely at the huge and persistent unemployment crisis.

The decision to focus on mortgage bonds reflects the Fed's conviction that the housing market still needs help, and that lower rates on mortgage loans will produce broad economic benefits. Buying bonds drives down rates by increasing competition for the remaining bonds, forcing investors to accept a lower rate of return or move their money into other, riskier assets.

Joel Naroff, principal of Naroff Economic Advisors, described the decision as "housing or nothing."

"The Fed is admitting that its best bet to improve growth is by continuing to help this sector," he wrote. "By keeping mortgage rates down, the members are betting that housing starts will accelerate, creating more jobs and income. Otherwise, there is little reason to ease further."

Fed officials expressed confidence that the effort would help.

The Fed's senior officials — the 17 members of its policy-making committee — expect the economy to expand from 1.7 to 2 percent this year, down from their June estimate of growth of 1.9 to 2.4 percent, according to projections also released Thursday. They continued to predict the unemployment rate would not fall below 8 percent.

However, they predicted growth would be somewhat faster in coming years, and unemployment would decline somewhat more quickly, presumably reflecting the steps announced Thursday.

And some outside economists agreed. "The Fed's actions may not on their own result in a sudden change in the economy," wrote Jim O'Sullivan, chief United States economist at High Frequency Economics. "However, more accommodative financial conditions can only add to growth over time."

Other economists, however, said the benefits would be small at best. They argue that interest rates already are near record lows, and that the primary constraints to new borrowing are that many borrowers cannot qualify for new loans and many homeowners cannot sell or refinance because they owe more than the current value of their homes.

No one predicted that the Fed's new program would return unemployment to normal levels in the foreseeable future, or increase growth enough to eliminate the huge and growing shortfall in economic output since the onset of the financial crisis.

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UNITED NATIONS

UN chief appeals for calm as 'hateful' film sparks violent protests

September 13, 2012

Reuters

UNITED NATIONS - U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on Thursday appealed for calm in North Africa and the Middle East after a film deemed insulting to Islam sparked riots across the Arab world and an attack that killed the U.S. envoy to Libya.

In a statement issued by the U.N. press office ahead of Friday prayers and further planned demonstrations in some Muslim nations, Ban reiterated his condemnation of the attack that killed U.S. Ambassador to Libya Christopher Stevens and three other Americans in Benghazi on Tuesday.

"The Secretary-General is deeply disturbed by the recent violence in Libya and elsewhere in the Middle East," Ban's press office said. "Nothing justifies such killings and attacks. He condemns the hateful film that appears to have been deliberately designed to sow bigotry and bloodshed."

"At this time of rising tensions, the Secretary-General calls for calm and restraint, and stresses the need for dialogue, mutual respect and understanding," it added.

The film, "Innocence of Muslims," that has outraged Muslims around the world is an amateurish production. It portrays the Prophet Mohammad as a womanizer, a homosexual and a child abuser.
(top)

Ban: Somali attacks won't derail progress

September 13, 2012

UPI

UNITED NATIONS -- U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon condemned an attack on a Mogadishu hotel housing the newly elected president but said recent gains wouldn't be reversed.

Three suicide bombers dressed in Somali forces' uniforms attacked the Jazeera Hotel in Mogadishu, which serves as the temporary residence of Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud. The Somali president was meeting with Kenyan Foreign Minister Samuel Ogeri at the time of the attack.

A statement attributed to Ban condemned the attacks while extending condolences for Somali and African soldiers killed during the incident.

"The secretary-general is convinced that such acts will not reverse the recent achievements or weaken the determination of the Somali people to achieve peace and security in their country," the statement read.

Somalia leaders last month appointed some members of Parliament and drafted a constitution in a move that ended a political transition period. There hasn't been a functioning central government in Mogadishu since 1991.

The government struggles to extend its influence beyond Mogadishu as al-Qaida ally al-Shabaab controls parts of the country.

(top)

UN Meeting Rebukes Iran's Nuclear Defiance

September 14, 2012

Associated Press

By George Jahn

VIENNA - The 35-nation board of the U.N. nuclear agency overwhelmingly rebuked Iran on Thursday for refusing to heed demands that it take actions to diminish fears that it might be seeking atomic arms, a move hailed by the United States as demonstrating international pressure on Tehran to compromise.

Only one country - Cuba - voted against a resolution brought before the International Atomic Energy Agency board and drawn up by the United States, Russia, China, Britain, France and Germany. Ecuador, Tunisia and Egypt abstained, while the 31 other nations supported the resolution.

Iran denies any interest in nuclear arms. But it has refused to comply with U.N. and IAEA demands to stop activities that could be used to make such weapons and to allow a probe of suspicions it worked on an arms program.

Robert Wood, the chief U.S. delegate to the IAEA, said he hoped the board's near-solid backing for the resolution would serve as a wake-up call for the Islamic Republic to heed international demands to replace its words with actions that prove it has no interest in nuclear weapons.

"What we are hoping is that this resolution will keep ... diplomatic pressure up and convince Iran that it has really no other option than to comply with its international obligations," he told reporters.

But the resolution has its limitations, despite the broad support it received.

As 11 others before it, the document cannot be enforced by the IAEA board, and as such, may be shrugged off by Tehran, which already is ignoring U.N. Security Council sanctions and other increasingly harsh international penalties meant to force it to compromise.

Iran appeared unimpressed Thursday. The country's chief IAEA delegate, Ali Asghar Soltanieh, said pressure on his country came from "a few Western countries, especially the United States (which) are trying to change the IAEA into a mere U.N. watchdog" trying to penetrate countries' national security.

Because it is largely symbolic, the document is also unlikely to persuade Israel that diplomacy is working. Israel views a nuclear-armed Iran as a mortal threat, citing Iran's persistent calls for the destruction of the Jewish state, its development of missiles capable of striking Israel, and Iranian support for Arab militant groups.

Israeli government leaders have become increasingly strident in suggesting that only military action will stop Iran from getting nuclear arms. For the six powers sponsoring the resolution, the onus at the Vienna meeting was thus to prove that unified international diplomatic pressure could still be exerted on the Islamic Republic - even if it was largely symbolic.

Israeli chief delegate Ehud Azoulay questioned whether the resolution would have its intended effect, telling the board that "Iran's race towards the nuclear bomb has not been slowed down by well-meaning resolutions."

Tehran insists its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes only. But it refuses foreign offers of reactor fuel if it stops making its own through uranium enrichment. Enriching uranium is a process that worries the international community because it could be used to arm nuclear warheads too.

The IAEA also suspects that Iran has worked secretly on nuclear arms - allegations Iran dismisses as based on fabricated U.S. and Israeli intelligence.

The six powers behind the resolution included Russia and China - which often speak out against harsh punishment for Iran - as well as the United States, Britain, France and Germany, and Western diplomats described the backing of Moscow and Beijing for the resolution as an example of unity.

In exchange, however, the four Western powers had to settle for compromise language in the text of the resolution, which was weaker overall than the last one in November.

While expressing "serious concern" over continued Iranian uranium enrichment in defiance of the U.N. Security Council, the six nations say they back the "inalienable right" of countries that have signed the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty to develop nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. That is a bow to arguments by Iran, an NPT signatory, that it has a right to enrich uranium.

The resolution "stresses" that the IAEA has not reported any nuclear material missing from Iran sites it is monitoring. Missing material could mean that Tehran is using it elsewhere for weapons purposes.

The language is also weaker than it could be because it only "notes" that the agency cannot conclude there is no hidden nuclear activity going on because of "lack of cooperation" by Iran on agency requests that it be given greater powers to monitor.

Western nations have for years chastised the Islamic Republic over fears about its nuclear intentions. But the tone of their statements Thursday was unusually harsh. That appeared to reflect concerns that continued lack of diplomatic progress in persuading Iran to compromise could give a greater platform for Israeli hawks.

Ahead of the vote on the resolution, Wood, the chief U.S. envoy, urged board members to send the message "that Iran's continued behavior is dangerous and unacceptable."

"This board must not allow Iran to continue its pattern of deception, deceit, and flagrant flouting of its international nuclear obligations while continuing its delaying tactics," he told the closed meeting in remarks made available to reporters.

The European Union asserted that the Islamic Republic was stalling the IAEA in its attempts to probe Tehran's nuclear activities. It also said Iran was failing to comply with U.N. Security Council demands that it stop activities that could lead to the manufacture of nuclear arms. An EU statement called such conduct "unacceptable."

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TOP STORIES

Egypt, Hearing From Obama, Moves To Heal Rift From Protests

September 14, 2012

New York Times

By David D. Kirkpatrick, Helene Cooper And Mark Landler

CAIRO - Following a blunt phone call from President Obama, Egyptian leaders scrambled Thursday to try to repair the country's alliance with Washington, tacitly acknowledging that they erred in their response to the attack on the United States Embassy by seeking to first appease anti-American domestic opinion without offering a robust condemnation of the violence.

Set off by anger at an American-made video ridiculing the Prophet Muhammad, the attacks on the embassy put President Mohamed Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood in a squeeze between the need to stand with Washington against the attackers and the demands of many Egyptians to defy Washington and defend Islam, a senior Brotherhood official acknowledged.

During a late-night, 20-minute phone call, Mr. Obama warned Mr. Morsi that relations would be jeopardized if Egyptian authorities failed to protect American diplomats and stand more firmly against anti-American attacks.

The rising breach between the United States and Egypt comes at a critical time for the longtime allies. For the Obama administration, it is a test of whether it has succeeded in efforts to shore up influence after the uprising that toppled Hosni Mubarak and to find common ground with the new Islamist leaders of a country that is a linchpin of American policy in the Middle East.

For Egypt's new president, the dilemma quickly became an early test of the Brotherhood's ability to balance domestic political pressures, international commitments and its conservative religious mandate now that it is also effectively governing in a new democracy.

"We are taking the heat from both sides," Gehad el-Haddad, a spokesman for the Brotherhood, acknowledged Thursday as the group responded belatedly with a televised presidential address, a letter to the editor in The New York Times by its top strategist, and a series of sympathetic online messages aimed at mollifying American officials.

After decades focused on disciplining its own cadre to survive underground, the Brotherhood's leadership is still adjusting to the competing constituencies and high visibility of democratic life.

"They realized a little after the fact the degree of fallout in the U.S. and that is why you are seeing all these conciliatory statements from Brotherhood leaders today," said Shadi Hamid, director of research at the Brookings Doha Center, who follows the group closely. "Morsi is doing a difficult dance."

Evidently paralyzed by the conflicting pressure, Mr. Morsi had remained conspicuously silent as protesters breached the walls of the American Embassy in Cairo - a stark contrast to the help, contrition and condemnation coming from the new government of Libya, where gunmen set fire to an American diplomatic mission in Benghazi, killing Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens and three other Americans.

On Wednesday, Mr. Obama, who is campaigning, called staff members at the White House from Air Force One to arrange a telephone call to Mr. Morsi, a senior administration official said.

The president was not happy; Egypt, unlike Libya, is crucial to American security interests, given its peace treaty with Israel. At 11 p.m., from his hotel suite in Stapleton, Colo., Mr. Obama got on the phone with Mr. Morsi, who began by offering condolences on the American deaths in Libya.

But that was not what Mr. Obama was calling about.

"The president made his point that we've been committed to the process of change in Egypt, and we want to continue to build a relationship with the Egyptian government," said a senior administration official. "But he made it clear how important it is that the Egyptian government work with us to lower the tension both in terms of the practical cooperation they give us and the statements they make."

Mr. Morsi brought up the American-made video attacking the Prophet Muhammad, which had set off the violent protests, and Mr. Obama said he understood the ire felt by Muslims, but added that it did not justify attacks on the embassy.

Mr. Obama urged Mr. Morsi to publicly and strongly condemn the attacks. He had already signaled his displeasure earlier, saying in an interview on Telemundo that Egypt was not necessarily an "ally," although White House officials were playing down the remark on Thursday.

"'Ally' is a legal term of art," said Tommy Vietor, a spokesman with the National Security Council. "We don't have a mutual defense treaty with Egypt like we do with our NATO allies."

The pressure from Mr. Obama put Mr. Morsi in a vise grip of competing values and world views. Scholars say the furor here reflects different traditions when it comes to religious rights and freedoms. Where Americans prize individual choice, Egyptians put a greater emphasis on the rights of communities, families and religious groups. On the third day of increasingly violent protests outside the American Embassy, many demonstrators said their main demands were directed at Mr. Morsi, insisting that he needed to be firmer with the United States if it failed to punish the filmmakers.

"Morsi needs to take firm action," said Hesham Nawar, 25, clutching two spent canisters of tear gas and blaming the president for the clashes. Islamist politicians, he said, "rise up and mobilize millions for politics, but they do not come out for the prophet now."

But the war of words was continuing in Cairo on Thursday.

The United States Embassy publicly mocked the Brotherhood for sending out conflicting messages in its English and Arabic Twitter accounts. "Egyptians rise up to support Muhammad in front of the American Embassy. Sept. 11," read an Arabic language post the Brotherhood sent out on the day of the attacks - one of several over the last few days emphasizing outrage at the video or calls for its censorship.

So on Thursday, when the group sent out a message of sympathy and support from its top strategist, Khairat el-Shater, from its English-language Twitter account, the Embassy responded tartly via Twitter. "Thanks," its message read, "By the way, have you checked out your own Arabic feeds? I hope you know we read those too."

By midday, searching for a middle ground, Mr. Morsi appeared on national television, telling Egyptians it was their "religious duty to protect our guests and those who come to us from outside our nation," including their embassies, and businesses. "I know that the people attacking the embassies do not represent any of us. We all have to cooperate to express opinions while maintaining our principles, our correct peaceful ways that the whole world accepts," he said.

Mr. Morsi offered condolences for the American ambassador killed in Libya, in a parallel protest over the same video, and he vowed to bring charges against those who had scaled the embassy walls in Cairo. At the same time, however, he was also careful to stress the legitimacy of the protesters' grievances. "We all reject any trespassing or offense to our Prophet Muhammad," Mr. Morsi said, adding, "We oppose anyone who offends our prophet with words, actions, expression. This is rejected by all Muslims and all Egyptians."

Mr. Haddad, the Brotherhood spokesman, defended the Brotherhood's attempt to modulate its messages to the Egyptian streets and the Western world.

"Speaking to the angry Muslims of Egypt, we told them we understand your anger, you are right to be angry and we share it - but let's all express our anger in the right way and control it. And on the other side we tell the international world that we condemn these attacks and we urge restraint," he said. Both messages were consistent, he said, and sought to preserve enough trust to resolve the tension.

In the letter to The Times, Mr. Shater, the Brotherhood strategist, said: "Despite our resentment of the continued appearance of productions like the anti-Muslim film that led to the current violence, we do not hold the American government or its citizens responsible for acts of the few that abuse the laws protecting freedom of expression."

For Mr. Obama, the fear is that Egypt's initially tepid reaction to the attacks could set a dangerous precedent, as the administration tries to find its footing with the populist governments that emerged from the Arab uprisings. Any estrangement with Egypt could bleed into Cairo's relationship with Israel - a cold peace since the two countries signed a treaty at Camp David more than 30 years ago.

Mr. Obama's impatience with Mr. Morsi stems in part from the administration's belief that the United States eventually threw its weight behind the democracy movement in Tahrir Square last year, and has continued to back the Arab street, at least in Egypt.

But it is perhaps the 30-year-long alliance with the Egyptian military, and Mr. Mubarak, that is still on the minds of many joining anti-American protests, foreign policy experts suggest.

"Part of what we're seeing is the residue of support for 30 years of the Mubarak dictatorship, and that has never been decisively confronted by American officials," said Tom Malinowski, of Human Rights Watch. "There's also all the old anger of the Israeli-Palestinian issue, and the sense among some that U.S. support for the Tahrir Square movement came a few days, or even a few hours, too late for their taste."

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Mideast Turmoil Spreads

September 14, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By MARGARET COKER and ADAM ENTOUS

BENGHAZI, Libya—The Libyan government arrested four people Thursday in connection with the deadly attack on the American consulate Tuesday night as Libyan and U.S. officials mounted a manhunt for others believed to be involved.

Protests spread across the region, breaking out in Yemen and Iran and once again in Cairo, where Egyptian police in riot gear beat back crowds of young men in a street filled with tear gas outside the U.S. Embassy.

In Yemen's capital, San'a, hundreds of young men breached the outer security rings of the fortified U.S. Embassy. Evidently inflamed by a video mocking the Prophet Muhammad, one young man in Yemen shouted, "Troops will not stand in our way in defending the honor of our Prophet." Still, there were

indications some demonstrators were using the protests to put pressure on their countries' governments as much as to assail the video.

In the U.S., Secretary of State Hillary Clinton denounced both the anti-Islam video and the violence in Libya that took the life of U.S. Ambassador Christopher Stevens and three other Americans earlier this week. Emphasizing that the U.S. government had no role in the video, she called it "reprehensible" and said "we absolutely reject its content and message." At the same time, she said, there was "no justification—none at all—for responding to this video with violence."

As U.S. officials struggled to gain a clear picture of who was behind the mob attack in Benghazi late Tuesday, U.S. intelligence agencies were increasingly skeptical it was planned in advance, a shift from an initial assessment by some. U.S. officials also were increasingly doubtful the militants had direct ties to al Qaeda.

The information pointing to the possibility of a more spontaneous assault could deflect criticism of both the U.S. and Libyan governments for missing clues to an impending attack. An impromptu attack without clear ties to a major terrorist organization also could ease pressure on U.S. officials to respond aggressively.

The third and fourth Americans killed in the attack on the U.S. consulate were identified by the State Department late Thursday as security personnel Tyrone S. Woods and Glen A. Doherty, both former Navy SEALs. Previously identified, in addition to Mr. Stevens, was State Department information officer Sean Smith.

The events continued to reverberate in the U.S. presidential campaign, in a more muted form than on Wednesday. Republican Mitt Romney didn't repeat his criticism that the Obama administration was "effectively apologizing for the right of free speech" but said in Fairfax, Va., that the Libyan attack showed that "a strong America is essential to shape events."

President Barack Obama, campaigning in Colorado, promised that "no act of terror will go unpunished." Mr. Obama also has led a U.S. effort to moderate the reaction to the film in Muslim countries and stem protests in advance of Friday prayers, which often lead to new demonstrations in Muslim lands.

A Libyan official in charge of a task force tracking a militant group whose members led the first wave of attacks said his country was throwing all available resources into the hunt. Wanis al-Sharif, a deputy interior minister, said his team was using telephone taps, among other tools, to follow the group, hoping for a better understanding of its strength and structure.

"There is a group now that is under our custody, but there is a group we're following to know who's connected to them, and [we] are monitoring their phone calls," Mr. Sharif said, declining to provide more details.

The U.S. role in the manhunt has remained low key, in part out of concerns that a heavy overt American role would inflame tensions. But the U.S. has ramped up intelligence collection in the region, using unmanned aerial drones and other sophisticated eavesdropping equipment, officials said.

The distinctive humming motors of drones could be heard in the skies above Benghazi Thursday. The U.S. has used drones and other intelligence-collection efforts since the fall of Col. Moammar Gadhafi to track militant camps and weapons caches in areas east of Benghazi known to be Islamist hotbeds.

The focus of the Libyan probe appears up to this point has been an Islamist rebel brigade called Ansar al Sharia, a group of fundamentalist religious men who banded together in a militia last year in the fight to oust Gadhafi. Members of the group were at the consulate attack and cars belonging to members were found abandoned in the area, according to Mr. Sharif. It isn't known whether the four men arrested are members of the group.

A spokesman for Ansar al Sharia, Hani Mansouri, said at a news conference Thursday that his organization didn't organize or participate in the attack.

U.S. officials said preliminary information suggests the militants saw protests sparked by an anti-Islamic video as an opportunity to wreak havoc on a prominent symbol of the U.S. to make an anti-American statement. "There is no intelligence indicating this was premeditated," a U.S. official said. "It looks like it was an opportunistic attack by a group in the region."

There also are no indications at this point that the attackers knew the ambassador was in the building.

Around Benghazi, Libyan forces made no discernible ramp-up of security. A unit of six lightly armed Libyan defense soldiers stood outside the burned-out consulate complex Thursday afternoon.

The siege began late Tuesday night. New descriptions by Libyan security officials detailed hours of terror in which outgunned consulate security forces tried in vain to battle well-armed assailants.

Mohammed Farraj, a soldier who was part of a four-member Libyan military unit permanently stationed at the facility, said he heard commotion on the dirt road outside the compound about 8:30 p.m. and was told by walkie-talkie of a group of armed, bearded protesters gathering.

There also were four private security guards, all Libyans, who weren't armed and worked inside the compound. Interviews with the Libyans indicated there also were four to eight American security guards around the compound when the attack started.

As trouble began, two Libyans posted on the outside moved inside and alerted the Libyan security forces, said Mr. Farraj, but backup didn't arrive immediately. Mr. Sharif said that he advised the armed security unit not to open fire so as to not inflame the situation.

Fighting erupted at about 9:30 p.m., said Abdulaziz Mezhburi, who works for a Libyan-British security firm called Blue Mountain and was responsible for security around the main villa. Mr. Mezhburi faced a storm of grenades and small-arms fire from militants who had breached the 12-foot wall around the compound. He was shot three times in the leg and suffered shrapnel wounds from grenades.

As the compound was being overrun, the Americans started returning fire, said Mr. Farraj. "But we were totally outgunned. I called more of the brigade to come reinforce us." He said a lull developed around 11 p.m. and the Americans and Libyan military appeared to be back in control. At this point, Mr. Farraj said, he believed that the bulk of the American consulate staff were evacuated. But the ambassador was missing and the villa was on fire.

The security guards made a decision to brave the flames to find the missing ambassador but were beaten back by the fire and couldn't find Mr. Stevens.
(top)

More protests break out in Muslim world as U.S. appeals for calm

September 14, 2012

Washington Post

By Karen DeYoung and Michael Birnbaum

Protests inspired by an anti-Islam film targeted more U.S. facilities in the Muslim world Thursday, testing the will and capacity of foreign governments to protect Americans and the ability of the Obama administration to cool the growing anger.

As the anti-U.S. demonstrations spread, the administration acted on a variety of fronts to convey two messages: that it had nothing to do with the offending video and that violence was not an acceptable response to the material.

The impact of the administration's message remained in question. In Sanaa, Yemen, the U.S. Embassy was overrun Thursday by protesters who stormed a wall, set fire to a building inside the compound, broke windows and carried away office supplies and other souvenirs before being dispersed by local security forces.

"We want to expel the American ambassador," Abdelwadood al-Mutawa said as he and other protesters left the compound. He said he was motivated by reports of the movie mocking the prophet Muhammad. "We cannot accept any insult to our prophet," Mutawa said. "It's a red line."

In Cairo, clouds of tear gas floated through the fortified area around the U.S. Embassy as security forces clashed with protesters for the third straight day. Smaller demonstrations were reported throughout the region, as well as in Iran and Bangladesh.

In Pakistan, where anti-American demonstrations are frequent, the government said it had "banned" the American-made video and blocked access to it online. Although Afghanistan reportedly did the same, "Innocence of Muslims" was easily available there on the Internet on Thursday night.

Two days after the deaths of J. Christopher Stevens, the U.S. ambassador to Libya, and three other Americans in an outbreak of violence in the Libyan city of Benghazi, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton took the lead in trying to distance the U.S. government from the movie, calling the film "disgusting and reprehensible" and condemning the violent response to it.

"The U.S. government had absolutely nothing to do with this video," Clinton said at a meeting in Washington with a delegation from Morocco. "We absolutely reject its content and messages. But there is no justification — none at all — for responding to this video with violence."

The message went out from Washington throughout the day, in White House briefings, in speeches in Arab capitals and through official Web sites, e-mails and Twitter feeds from the State Department and its embassies around the globe.

Some governments responded to U.S. calls for strong statements against violence. After days of relative silence, Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi, speaking during a visit to Brussels, condemned the attacks on the embassy in Cairo and vowed to defend the security of U.S. diplomatic buildings.

But Morsi also denounced the film and called on "the American people" to "declare their rejection" of such provocations.

A protest called for by Morsi's Muslim Brotherhood movement on Friday unfolded peacefully, with demonstrators gathering in Tahrir Square without incident. Reflecting worry from influential Egyptian political and clerical leaders that the tone of demonstrations had gotten too heated, the ultraconservative Nour political party said Thursday that the demonstrations should take place away from embassies and condemned both violence and the video.

"We appreciate and value the statement from the American embassy that condemned the insult to Islam and its prophets," the party said in a statement.

Yemeni President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi, meanwhile, quickly apologized to the United States for the damage to the embassy in Sanaa and ordered an investigation into the incident.

In a telephone call with Hadi on Thursday, the White House said, President Obama "reiterated his rejection of any efforts to denigrate Islam and emphasized that there is never any justification for the violence we are seeing."

Clinton spoke alongside Moroccan Foreign Minister Saad-Eddine el-Othmani, who offered condolences for the death of Stevens and the three other State Department employees. He echoed his government's "clear position against violence and against any confrontation as a way to solve problems and settle conflicts."

Othmani also thanked Clinton for speaking out against the "insult" of the video.

President Obama spoke by phone with Libyan President Mohamed Yusuf al-Magariaf late Wednesday, accepting condolences for the deaths and expressing appreciation for the cooperation between the United States and Libya in the wake of the attack, the White House said.

Administration officials added little Thursday to accounts of how Stevens died. He became separated from others in the smoke and gunfire of the attack on the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi and was not seen by colleagues until hours later, when Libyans delivered his body to the airport during diplomatic evacuation efforts. State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland repeated earlier information that officials were told that Stevens had first been taken from the consulate to the local hospital, but she said they could not confirm that.

"We don't have any definitive information of our own as to exactly when he passed or what the precise causes of death were," Nuland said. "I would guess that this is among the things that'll become clearer as the Libyans work on their investigation with our support."

The body of one of the other Americans, Sean Smith, was found inside the consulate when U.S. personnel regained control of it early Wednesday. On Thursday night, Clinton issued a statement identifying the two others as Glen A. Doherty and Tyrone S. Woods, both former Navy SEALs who had

served in Afghanistan and Iraq and were working as security personnel for the State Department. Clinton said both had "died protecting their colleagues."

On Capitol Hill, CIA Director David H. Petraeus briefed lawmakers about the Benghazi attack, but according to one person who attended the closed-door session, Petraeus said it remained unclear who was behind the attack, whether it was planned or whether there was evidence pointing to al-Qaeda involvement. The person spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the session.

At the State Department, Nuland said Clinton "wanted to speak so strongly and so directly" because the government was concerned "that people in the region don't understand our culture and society, that [the video] was, in fact, a private effort, that it has nothing to do with the U.S. government, that we don't do these kinds of videos, and that, in fact, as a government, we found it disgusting and reprehensible."

"I hope all of you will disseminate and broadcast [her message] as broadly as you can," Nuland told reporters at the daily briefing. Clinton's remarks were "extremely intentional," Nuland said, "because we are concerned that this is not understood well."

In a State Department reception Thursday night to celebrate the Eid holiday marking the end of Ramadan, Clinton told gathered Muslim diplomats and others, "When all of us who are people of faith — and I am one — feel the pain of insults, of misunderstanding, of denigration to what we cherish, we must expect ourselves and others not to resort to violence."

They and the United States, she said, must "recommit ourselves to working toward a future marked by understanding and acceptance rather than distrust, hatred and fear. We can pledge that whenever one person speaks out in ignorance and bigotry, 10 voices will answer."

In emotional remarks, Libya's ambassador to the United States, Ali Aujali, told Clinton and the others of his friendship with Stevens, whom he called "a real hero." Aujali said it was "our responsibility, and the responsibility of the Libyan people . . . to protect the Americans" and other diplomats in his country. He said that without continued U.S. and international help, "we will not be able to do it."

Earlier in the day, Clinton acknowledged during her appearance with the Moroccan foreign minister that "it is hard for some people to understand why the United States cannot or does not just prevent" such videos "from ever seeing the light of day." But she said stopping such expressions was not only "impossible" but also against U.S. values of free expression.

Google, which owns YouTube, said it had acted on its own to stop access to the video in Egypt and Libya. A Google official said the company was "watching carefully" events in other countries.

The administration has criticized other governments for trying to shut down the Internet, bar certain content or jam cellphone and other communications it finds displeasing. It also has assisted dissidents in countries such as Syria in making their voices heard electronically. And it has struggled to develop its own ability to promote U.S. messages through social media. In separate programs, the State Department and the Pentagon have spent tens of millions of dollars to monitor the public communications of others and send out their own.

In a measure of the tension between American diplomats in Cairo and the Egyptian government, a minor tempest broke out Thursday on Twitter between representatives of the Muslim Brotherhood and U.S. Embassy public affairs officials.

The Brotherhood posted a message of support for the embassy staff, saying it was "relieved" that no diplomatic worker had been harmed in the Cairo demonstrations and expressing hope that relations between the countries would be maintained through the "turbulence of Tuesday's events."

In response, the U.S. Embassy feed said, "Thanks. By the way, have you checked out your own Arabic feeds? I hope you know we read those too," an apparent reference to the calls for more protests.

"We understand you're under a lot of stress," the Brotherhood replied. "But it will be more helpful if you point out exactly the Arabic feed of concern."
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Anti-American Protests Over Film Enter 4th Day

September 14, 2012

New York Times

By DAVID D. KIRKPATRICK and ALAN COWELL

CAIRO — Anti-American protests inspired by a video denigrating the Prophet Muhammad entered a fourth straight day in the Egyptian capital as authorities in much of the Muslim world braced for possible demonstrations after Friday noon prayers — an occasion often associated with public displays of dissent.

Witnesses in Cairo said protests that first flared on Tuesday — the day J. Christopher Stevens, the American ambassador in Libya, was killed in an attack in neighboring Libya — continued sporadically early Friday, with protesters throwing rocks and gasoline bombs near the American Embassy and police firing tear gas. State media in Egypt say that more than 220 people have been injured in the clashes since Tuesday.

The widening unrest, which stretched on Thursday to several countries including Yemen, where protesters breached the outer security perimeter of the American Embassy, has challenged the Obama administration's policy in the tinderbox region where the revolts of the so-called Arab Spring have removed many of the pro-American strongmen who once kept public displays of Islamic passion in check.

In Yemen on Friday, baton-wielding security forces backed by water cannons blocked streets near the American Embassy a day after violence in which officials said two people were killed in clashes with police. A group of several dozen protesters gathered near the diplomatic post, carrying placards and shouting slogans.

News reports from Bangladesh said thousands of protesters burned American and Israeli flags as they attempted to march on the American Embassy, but hundreds of police and other security forces blocked the demonstrators several miles from the building.

In Egypt, in particular, leaders scrambled to repair deep strains with Washington provoked by their initial response to attacks on the American Embassy on Tuesday, tacitly acknowledging that they erred

in their response by focusing far more on anti-American domestic opinion than on condemning the violence.

The attacks squeezed President Mohamed Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood between conflicting pressures from Washington and their Islamic constituency at home, a senior Brotherhood official acknowledged. During a 20-minute phone call Wednesday night, Mr. Obama warned Mr. Morsi that relations would be jeopardized if the authorities in Cairo failed to protect American diplomats and stand more firmly against anti-American attacks.

In a letter published in The New York Times, Khairat el-Shater, the deputy president of the Muslim Brotherhood said: "Despite our resentment of the continued appearance of productions like the anti-Muslim film that led to the current violence, we do not hold the American government or its citizens responsible for acts of the few that abuse the laws protecting freedom of expression."

"In a new democratic Egypt, Egyptians earned the right to voice their anger over such issues, and they expect their government to uphold and protect their right to do so. However, they should do so peacefully and within the bounds of the law."

"The breach of the United States Embassy premises by Egyptian protesters is illegal under international law. The failure of the protecting police force has to be investigated," the letter said. It was displayed prominently on the English-language Web page of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt.

In broad swathes of the Islamic world, news reports on Friday said, authorities faced similar dilemmas in their response to the amateurish American-video, which portrays the Prophet Muhammad as a perverted buffoon and which Muslims have called deeply offensive to their beliefs. In Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood reiterated its call for demonstrations against the offensive video after Friday prayers, which are an inevitability in any event. But in an apparent effort to avoid escalating the clashes, the group urged demonstrators to protest outside their individual mosques rather than march to central Tahrir Square — the epicenter of Egypt's turmoil that led to the overthrow of Hosni Mubarak last year.

In the last two days, the group has stepped up its denunciations of the attacks on the American Embassy, calling them a violation of Islamic teachings urging the protection of strangers and guests.

There were unconfirmed reports late on Thursday that police had begun using shotguns as well as tear gas in their efforts to disperse the crowd. This week was the first time police have cracked down on protesters with such violence since Mr. Morsi took office on June 30.

The authorities in Afghanistan, where deadly violence has repeatedly flared over perceived insults to Islam, tried to keep the video from being seen. Afghanistan officials said they pressed to indefinitely suspend access to YouTube, where the video, promoted by a shadowy assortment of right-wing Christians in the United States, had been viewed more than 1.6 million times by Thursday.
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Off-Script Scramble for Power in a Chinese Leader's Absence

September 14, 2012

New York Times

By IAN JOHNSON and JONATHAN ANSFIELD

BEIJING — With still no sign of China's designated new leader, Xi Jinping, who has not been seen in public since Sept. 1, many insiders and well-connected analysts say the Chinese political ship is adrift, with factions jockeying to shape an impending Communist Party conclave.

The government has maintained its official silence about Mr. Xi's absence. After an initial burst of chatter, blog posts alluding to Mr. Xi have been effectively smothered on China's social media platforms, and China's beleaguered Foreign Ministry spokesman says on a daily basis that he has no information, despite a barrage of questions from the foreign news media.

By Thursday, a number of ranking party members with years of experience following Chinese politics were generally in agreement that Mr. Xi, 59, had suffered either a mild heart attack or a stroke, forcing him to cancel his appointments.

"The most reliable information we can find is that it's his heart," said a senior Chinese newspaper editor who spoke only on the condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the issue among the party hierarchy. Li Weidong, a former editor of a government-sponsored reformist journal, agreed.

On Thursday, Mr. Xi's name appeared in the Chinese press for the first time in days, as he offered condolences over the recent death of a veteran party member. But that terse report only mentioned him among several leaders and did not imply anything more than a formal expression of sorrow.

"I think it's hard to say this proves anything," said Jin Zhong, the editor of Open, a magazine in Hong Kong. "He didn't appear, but just sent condolences."

Even if Mr. Xi does soon show up in public, he will be re-entering an unexpectedly contentious political arena.

Planned years in advance, the 18th Party Congress is slated to be the most sweeping government reorganization in a decade, with scores of leaders scheduled to retire. It was still expected to take place next month or soon after in Beijing, where Mr. Xi was to take over as leader from Hu Jintao. The Communist Party has numerous factions, but the overall framework of the transfer was thought to have been mostly ironed out over the past year.

But recent developments, including Mr. Xi's mysterious cancellation of several public appearances, suggest that may not be the case.

The most obvious sign of discord is that the dates for the congress have not been set. Most political experts here expected it to be held in mid-October, but without an official announcement, some are predicting it will be delayed.

"We hear that the congress will be held in late October or early November," a security official from southern China said. "Currently we're planning for that."

One reason for the delay, the experts say, is what now appears to have been a contentious meeting in early August at the seaside resort of Beidaihe, China. According to the official script, this was to have been the final big meeting before the congress of leaders from the party's various factions: the military, big state enterprises, descendants of revolutionary families, leaders of critical Communist Party

organizations and others. The details of the congress were to be finalized at Beidaihe and the dates announced later in August.

Instead, according to information that is slowly leaking out, the Beidaihe meeting and other sessions beforehand in Beijing were especially tense. "The atmosphere was very bad, and the struggles were very intense," said a political analyst with connections to the party's nerve center, the General Office.

Mr. Hu, who has been criticized as having been an overly cautious and ineffective leader during his decade in power, was also seen as defensive and gloomy.

A veteran party scholar who attended the Beidaihe meetings said the leaders only met over a couple of days and finalized a list of more than 2,000 delegates to the congress whose names were already public. A proposed list of new leaders was not circulated, however, and there was no deliberation of critical issues, like drafts of the political blueprints to be unveiled at the congress, he said.

"We thought that these issues would be settled there," he said, "but they weren't."

Given the absence of hard information from the government, it is possible that Mr. Xi's absence has been caused by something other than illness. The veteran party scholar, who dined late last week with a close family member of Mr. Xi's, said the relative told him he did not know Mr. Xi to be sick. The scholar maintained that Mr. Xi's absence was more likely because of the unsettled political situation.

"There is still a struggle; it is not finished," he said.

Most insiders say that they still expect Mr. Xi to re-emerge soon and take over the top positions in the party and the government roughly on schedule. Two party academics who advise the government said Mr. Xi could make a speech this weekend. Almost all the insiders said he should be healthy in time to participate fully in the Congress.

But if Mr. Xi's sudden absence has been caused by a serious illness, it raises the question of whether he will be strong enough to serve the two five-year terms expected of him when he emerged in 2007 as a compromise candidate to lead the party.

"This would be the worst-case scenario," said a senior official in a government research group with close ties to the central government. "It would require a complete rebalancing of all the competing interests."

This is not to say that the transition has ground to a halt. Most of those who closely follow China's party politics are predicting that the powerful Standing Committee of the Politburo will be reduced to seven from nine members in an effort to streamline decision-making, resolve factional fighting over seats and rein in the power of China's well-financed law enforcement apparatus. In addition, most seem to agree on all but one or two members of the probable leadership lineup.

Not all, however, believe that this plan is set in stone. The party scholar who attended the Beidaihe retreat said he had not seen any evidence confirming whether the Standing Committee would have seven or nine members.

Some see the uncertainty as reflecting Mr. Hu's desire to retain influence for as long as possible. It is unclear, for example, how long Mr. Hu will stay on as leader of the Central Military Commission, a job

that effectively makes him commander in chief. His predecessor, Jiang Zemin, retained that post for two years after stepping down as party secretary, but it appeared for a while that Mr. Hu might bow to pressure to give that position to Mr. Xi to help the new leader consolidate power.

"He wants to continue in office," a party historian said, "but a lot of people are not willing to see this."
(top)

AFRICA

Ethiopia Ruling Party Set To Choose Meles Successor

September 14, 2012

AFP

Ethiopia's ruling coalition will hold a meeting of its governing council Friday and Saturday to choose a successor to former Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, who died last month, the coalition said in a statement.

"The council assigns the chairperson of the organisation that replaces our great leader, who departed from us suddenly," said a statement Thursday on the website of the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) coalition. During his 21 years in power, Meles was both EPRDF chairman and prime minister.

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Platinum Miners Call for Strikes in Africa

September 14, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By DEVON MAYLIE and PATRICK MCGROARTY

RUSTENBURG, South Africa—Platinum-mine workers on Thursday called for a nationwide strike, threatening to escalate unrest that has rocked Africa's largest economy and left the South African government and its allied unions struggling to stem the turmoil.

Thousands of workers gathered at a soccer stadium near some of the country's main platinum mines to hear plans for a general strike set to begin Sunday.

The workers said they planned to march and stay away from work until wage demands are met. In the crowd, many accused the country's liberation party, the African National Congress, of forsaking its political core: the working-class poor.

The ANC "isn't representing the interests of working class South Africans," said Mametlwe Sebei, a leader of the platinum workers. "We are organizing for a mass strike Sunday to make sure profits don't come before people."

Some of the world's biggest mining companies are struggling to respond to the rising worker anger. On Wednesday, protesters blocked mine entrances at Anglo American Platinum, the world's top producer of the metal.

On Thursday, they gathered at a stadium next to the mine and then presented a memorandum demanding a sharp wage increase to 16,070 rand (\$1,950) a month, among other issues. Anglo Platinum, which closed five of its mines, said it received the demands and would discuss them at a Sept. 25 meeting. The workers vowed to strike until then.

Work stoppages continue at Lonmin PLC's and Gold Fields Ltd.'s mines. The wave of strikes began Aug. 10 at Lonmin's mine, the world's third-largest platinum producer. Since then, violence has claimed 45 lives, including 34 protesters who were shot and killed in August by police. Lonmin said late Thursday that it had put a wage offer on the table and worker groups would report back Friday.

Lonmin said fewer than 2% of workers turned up as wage negotiations resumed Thursday. The worker groups are calling for a near tripling in salary and say they won't return until they get that figure.

Speaking to members of South Africa's parliament in Cape Town on Thursday, President Jacob Zuma urged workers to end their strikes and work through their unions to resolve grievances.

"The illegal strikes, the incitement and intimidation will not assist workers. Instead it will make them and the country worse off," Mr. Zuma said. He also urged mine owners to improve their workers living conditions, which he said "have been terrible, all the time."

Yet the workers' rejection of government-backed unions has left Mr. Zuma and other officials with little leverage.

It has also put an uncomfortable spotlight on his government's failure to narrow inequality and reduce unemployment.

"Our economy must grow and create more jobs to absorb the unemployed and improve standards of living," Mr. Zuma said.

South Africa's economy is forecast to grow just 2.7% this year, far below the 7% annual rate government officials have said would be needed to cut into an official unemployment rate of nearly 25%.

Investors have turned skittish at prospects that mine turmoil might spread to other areas of South Africa's economy. The rand traded as high as 8.45 against the dollar on Thursday, more than 3% weaker than early on Wednesday, before gold and platinum strikes intensified and the military put its bases on high alert ahead of a speech by ousted youth league leader Julius Malema. Officials had feared he might incite suspended soldiers to join up with disgruntled miners.

Asked in parliament whether Mr. Malema presented a security threat to the nation, Mr. Zuma said only that he wasn't responsible for the youth leader's rise to prominence.

"People want to know that the situation is being addressed and that there is some kind of certainty," said Mike Keenan, a currency analyst at Absa Capital. "Until we get some kind of compact between miners and their respective companies the rand is going to be dogged by domestic sentiment."

Mr. Sebei, the worker leader helping to mobilize Sunday's planned general strike, said his group had been visiting mines across the platinum heartland and encouraging workers from other firms, including Xstrata PLC, to join their peers in withholding their labor. They also have advocated nationalization of the country's mines.

"We're here and demanding better wages. And will join Monday," said Phillip Mntombi, a miner at Samancor Chrome, who was wearing a green T-shirt for an upstart union called Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union.

At the heart of the unrest is a battle for new members between AMCU and the National Union of Mineworkers, an ally of the ruling ANC. Some South African politicians have accused AMCU of being behind attacks on rival union members. Police confirmed Thursday that the body found at Lonmin on Tuesday was that of a 51-year old NUM mine leader. AMCU President Joseph Mathunjwa said his union doesn't support illegal strikes or violence.

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Brit Producer Of Gay Play In Uganda Held In Jail

September 14, 2012

Associated Press

By Rodney Muhumuza

KAMPALA, Uganda - The British producer of a play about being gay in Uganda is in jail pending his trial on charges that he had the work performed without official authorization.

David Cecil appeared in court Thursday charged with "disobeying lawful orders" from the Uganda Media Council, which says he staged "The River and the Mountain" in Uganda's capital last month despite orders to the contrary.

Cecil's lawyer, Francis Onyango, said his client was not released on bail because his passport, wanted by the magistrate, had been confiscated by the police.

Cecil told The Associated Press that the play, whose main character is a gay businessman who finally gets killed by his own employees, was performed eight times at little-known theaters in Kampala last month. The play, a first for Uganda, was praised by gay rights activists who said it was "revolutionary" in the way it provoked an examination of common thinking about gays. But the play failed to make it to Uganda's national theater, where producers rejected the script.

Homosexuals are highly stigmatized in Uganda, where in 2010 a lawmaker with the ruling party introduced a bill proposing the death penalty for what he called "aggravated homosexuality." The bill, which is now in committee, has been condemned by some world leaders. The bill's author says he still believes it will be passed one day.

Cecil, who faces two years in jail if convicted, said he was singled out for legal action because he had become the play's "public face," the man who printed posters and sent out invitations. The play was written by a British student of poetry named Beau Hopkins, who has not been targeted by the police.

The play took a tragicomic view of the condition of gays in Uganda, and its playwright and producers said that was the best way to look at things. The play's main character is a young businessman who loses friends and then gets murdered after revealing he's gay, the victim of machete-wielding colleagues stunned that "a good man" can be gay. The gay character's mother stages an epic but losing battle to "cure" him of his homosexuality, taking him to everyone from a Christian pastor to a private dancer.

Cecil said at the play's premiere in Kampala that he did not believe the drama was "a magic pill" against raging homophobia in the East African country.

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Zimbabwe Launches Media Complaints Watchdog

September 14, 2012

[Associated Press](#)

HARARE, Zimbabwe - The head of Zimbabwe's state media council says he wants a "cease-fire" on hostilities between the state-controlled media and privately owned news organizations.

Newly appointed chairman of Zimbabwe Media Council Henry Muradzikwa said at the launch of the media complaints watchdog Thursday that he doesn't want to "perpetuate divisions" between the two sectors but to find "common ground."

The state media largely acts as a mouthpiece for President Robert Mugabe's ZANU-PF party. Its criticism of Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai amounts to hate speech, according to some media analysts.

The independent Media Monitoring Council of Zimbabwe Thursday criticized the establishment of the watchdog saying it represents further repression of press freedom by a state-controlled watchdog.

The complaints watchdog can either arrest or ban journalists for misconduct.

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ASIA

Panetta Set to Discuss U.S. Shift in Asia Trip

September 13, 2012

[New York Times](#)

By THOM SHANKER

WASHINGTON — When Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta travels across Asia next week, on an arc from Japan and China to New Zealand, he will face two almost contradictory challenges.

He will be working to dispel skepticism that the administration's new Asia-Pacific strategy is an emperor with no clothes, and so is certain to offer rebuttals to those who say the regional "rebalancing" remains more rhetoric than reality.

At the same time, he will have to convince a specific audience — in Beijing — that relocating resources to the region after a decade of combat in the Middle East and Southwest Asia is not meant to confront China.

At each stop, Mr. Panetta will describe an American vision "that we continue to be what we have been now for seven decades: the pivotal military power in the Asia-Pacific region, which has provided peace and stability," said Ashton B. Carter, the deputy defense secretary, who in late summer spent 10 days in Asia pushing the administration's strategy.

Part of that strategy, Mr. Carter said, is to ensure that not just longtime allies like Japan and South Korea thrive, but that American policy helps other economic and political powers — he cited China and India — "to rise and prosper."

But official studies have criticized the Pentagon's efforts. A review conducted for Congress by the Center for Strategic and International Studies said that the Pentagon had not yet explained in sufficient detail

how it would shift military forces to the region, or where the money would be found in an era of tightening budgets.

Mr. Carter, in an interview, spoke of deployments, planned deployments and anticipated spending to put the meat on the bones of the Asia-Pacific pivot.

The United States' new way of war is defined by high-technology airborne systems for intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, and a fleet of advanced Global Hawk drones is being transferred to Asia from the Middle East, he said. A significant number of older Navy surveillance systems — the P-3 aircraft, designed for antisubmarine warfare but converted for counterinsurgency — are also being shifted.

"We are releasing so much capacity as a consequence of not having to have that capacity tied up in Iraq and Afghanistan," Mr. Carter said.

A number of the Air Force's long-range B-1 and B-52 bombers will be withdrawn from the Middle East and Southwest Asia and moved to the Pacific. At the same time, the United States is discussing the placement of missile defense radar installations on the territory of Pacific Rim allies.

"People in the region want to see us walk the walk," Mr. Carter said. "These are the steps that we will take to do that."

In a speech to an international security conference in Singapore this year, Mr. Panetta announced that deployment of Navy ships, which have been spread evenly between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, would be divided 60-40 favoring the Pacific.

Likewise, the Pentagon said that ground combat units that were sent from the Pacific region to Iraq or Afghanistan for the wars there would return to their bases in Asia. Some Marine Corps units would begin conducting training exercises in Australia. And the Army is drawing up plans to place combat equipment in storage in the region, to be used in multinational training exercises and be available on short notice in crises.

Budgets, however, have a way of restricting strategic goals. Still, Mr. Carter said, the Pentagon's spending plans will safeguard money for personnel and hardware destined for the Asia-Pacific region.

"We have protected the newest stuff," Mr. Carter said, noting that money to buy aerial refueling tankers and a new bomber has not been cut. "And in terms of posture, we are sending all of the newest stuff to that part of the world," he added, citing the deployment order for F-22's, the Air Force's stealthy warplane.

In announcing Mr. Panetta's trip to Asia on Thursday, George Little, the Pentagon press secretary, underscored opportunities for increasing military cooperation with China — part of the effort to show that the rebalancing is not about containment.

"The visit provides an opportunity to deepen the military-to-military engagements between China and the United States," Mr. Little said.

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Chinese Ships Enter Japanese-Controlled Waters To Protest Sale Of Islands

September 14, 2012

New York Times

By Martin Fackler

TOKYO - Six Chinese maritime patrol vessels entered Japanese-controlled waters around a group of disputed islands on Friday, the Japanese Coast Guard said, in the first such move by China since the Japanese government announced that it had bought the islands this week.

The Coast Guard said one of its patrol ships tried to warn off the Chinese vessels, two of which soon left the area. In Tokyo, Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda huddled with advisers at his office's crisis management center, while the Foreign Ministry summoned the Chinese ambassador to protest.

On Tuesday, the Chinese government announced that it was dispatching vessels to protest Japan's purchase of three islands in the uninhabited chain, called the Senkaku by Japan and Diaoyu by China. The islands, in the East China Sea between Okinawa and China, are administered by Japan but also claimed by China and Taiwan.

That dispute has flared anew in recent months, after the nationalist governor of Tokyo declared that he wanted to buy the islands, which were owned by a Japanese family. The national government stepped in to buy them instead, a move that drew an angry response from Beijing.

On Friday, the Coast Guard identified two of the Chinese vessels as the Haijian 51 and Haijian 66, unarmed ships used for law enforcement in Chinese waters. It said the two ships entered Japanese-controlled waters near one of the islands early Friday morning, and left two hours later.

When a Japanese vessel warned the ships against entering Japanese waters, the Chinese replied that they were in Chinese territorial waters, and ignored requests to turn back, Japan's Coast Guard said.

The Coast Guard did not identify the four other vessels, which Japanese news reports described as similar maritime patrol ships. China frequently uses such vessels in the East China Sea to patrol near the disputed islands, and around offshore gas drilling platforms that it operates in waters also claimed by Japan.

The Haijian-class ships are run by the China Marine Surveillance agency, which has functions similar to coast guards of other nations. Both Japan and China use such law enforcement vessels to assert their claims to disputed waters without using military vessels, as a way of avoiding a dangerous escalation.

Japan annexed the disputed islands in 1895, saying that they were unclaimed territory. It says China only started showing interest in them in the early 1970s, after possible oil reserves were discovered nearby. China says that the islands were Chinese for centuries, and that Imperial Japan took them as a first step toward its later invasion of the Chinese mainland.

Beijing also blames the United States, which seized the islands during World War II, for handing them over to Japan along with Okinawa in 1972 without consulting China.

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Ex-Chongqing Police Chief to Stand Trial Tuesday

September 14, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By JEREMY PAGE

BEIJING—The former police chief of Chongqing city whose flight to a U.S. consulate triggered the scandal surrounding his former boss, Bo Xilai, will stand trial Tuesday on charges including defection, bribery and abuse of power, according to a court official.

Wang Lijun's trial will start Tuesday morning at the Intermediate People's Court in the southwestern city of Chengdu, the official from that court, who gave only his surname, He, told The Wall Street Journal by telephone. He declined to give any further details.

State media said this month that Mr. Wang had been indicted for defection, taking bribes, illegally using surveillance technology, and shielding Mr. Bo's wife, Gu Kailai, from criminal investigation for the murder of a British businessman, Neil Heywood.

Ms. Gu was convicted last month of the murder and given a death sentence with a two-year reprieve, a penalty lawyers say is usually commuted to a life sentence in prison. They say Mr. Wang could face a similarly severe penalty.

Mr. Wang's trial is the next step in the Party leadership's efforts to wrap up the scandal surrounding Mr. Bo, who was stripped of his Party posts and placed under investigation for "serious disciplinary violations" in April. Chinese authorities have yet to say if he will also face criminal charges.

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Hanoi Web Crackdown Hits Blogs; Foreign Firms Fret

September 14, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By JAMES HOOKWAY

HANOI—Vietnam's leaders are stepping up their campaign against critical blogs, ordering government investigators to arrest the operators of three websites at a time when global Internet companies are growing more worried about doing business in the tightly policed country.

A government statement issued late Wednesday named three blogs that allegedly posted articles accusing the government of corruption and human-rights abuses, describing the blogs as being part of a "wicked plot of the hostile forces"—a term often used to describe advocates of democratic reforms.

Two of the three sites vowed to continue. One, Danlambao, or "The People's Journalism Blog," said in a fresh posting Thursday that its anonymous operators are "prepared to be repressed and imprisoned rather than leading the life of a dumb dog that dares not to bark," paving the way for a deepening confrontation between Vietnam's authoritarian leaders and its increasingly vibrant online community as the country's once-booming economy slumps.

The Web has taken off here faster than in many other up-and-coming nations. Around 34% of Vietnam's 90 million people are online, a larger proportion than in more established neighbors such as Thailand and Indonesia, driven in part by the rapid spread of high-speed cellphone networks and a desire among younger Vietnamese to connect with the rest of the world separately from the nation's state-run media.

Growing numbers of Vietnamese have launched their own blogs in recent months, where they discuss everything from traditional folk songs and where to buy secondhand iPhones to the corruption that has

accompanied a decades-long economic expansion here. One prominent blogger, 60-year-old retired soldier Ng Thuong Thuy, writes forcefully under his own name about injustices in Vietnam's legal systems, especially the explosive issue of land rights which government-controlled media rarely cover.

"State newspapers," said Mr. Thuy at his home in the southern suburbs of Hanoi recently, "are only good for wrapping sticky rice."

But as Vietnam's boom turns to bust amid a mounting pile of bad debts, its leaders are following other countries such as China, Iran, Thailand and Malaysia by trying to rein in the disruptive influence of the Internet. Vietnam's primary goal: to pressure bloggers to stop pulling back the curtain on the country's excesses.

Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung's government is considering new laws that will force people to use their real names online, potentially chilling free speech and criticism of the government in addition to the latest arrest orders.

Internet giants such as Google Inc. and Yahoo Inc. are worried, too, people close to the situation say. Vietnam's draft laws may require foreign Internet companies to abide by the same rules as their Vietnamese counterparts. That means setting up expensive cross-border data centers and censoring content—something that could force many Internet companies to scrap plans to do business in Vietnam.

People familiar with the drafting process say that the Asia Internet Coalition, a lobby group founded by Google, eBay Inc., Yahoo, Nokia Corp. and Microsoft Corp.'s Skype unit, has asked Vietnamese authorities to tone down the content of the law in case it stifles the growth of Internet-driven businesses here. U.S. diplomats also have warned authorities about the side effects of blocking sites such as Facebook Inc.'s social media page, saying that it prevents Vietnamese entrepreneurs building connections with potential partners both in Vietnam and around the world.

The Asia Internet Coalition didn't respond to requests for comment. The Vietnamese government said the laws haven't been finalized yet but are expected to be put into action by the end of the year.

Some lower-ranking Vietnamese officials privately say they are aware of these concerns, especially now that the country is trying to accelerate the growth of its own local service sector instead of relying too heavily on fragile export markets in Europe and the U.S.

In a report released earlier this year, consultancy McKinsey & Co. estimated that Internet-related businesses in Vietnam so far contribute around 1% to its \$125 billion a year gross domestic product—around the same proportion as in Turkey or Russia. That figure is set to grow quickly as networks and electronic-payment systems expand, and ordinary Vietnamese become more confident in using the Web, analysts say.

The government, too, has gotten into the Internet business, financing a social-media site called go.vn to rival Facebook but which requires users to register their government-issued identification numbers. Software engineers at Google and computer security company McAfee Inc. meanwhile have reported detecting malicious software from Vietnam which was apparently used to monitor dissidents and disable critical websites.

But with the Communist Party's top cadres facing a deluge of criticism as the economy continues to slow, analysts say the authorities are likely to maintain their war against the Internet.

Mr. Thuy, the blogger in Hanoi's suburbs, says he expects the conflict to widen as more people begin using the Internet—and fears that many of them may inadvertently cross the invisible boundary between legitimate criticism and the crime of spreading propaganda against the state.

The authorities "can't really contain the Internet," says another blogger, Nguyen Xuan Dien, who has been detained for questioning in the past. "But the boundaries of what we can and cannot write are growing vaguer, and it is easy to stray into difficult territory," he says.

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NEA

Protests Put Egypt Relations on Edge

September 14, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By MATT BRADLEY in Cairo, MATTHEW DALTON in Brussels and CHARLES LEVINSON in Beirut
Egypt and the U.S. sought to avoid a further fraying of their relationship a day after Cairo's new Islamist president, Mohammed Morsi, failed to publicly condemn the siege of the American Embassy.

Mr. Morsi, on a trip to Brussels, pledged on Thursday to protect foreign missions in his country and criticized the use of violence to protest an American-made video that he said was insulting to Muslims world-wide.

The politician, who rose to office as a leader of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, also pressed the Obama administration to "put an end to such behavior," in reference to the video clip.

The video continued to fuel protests across the Arab world on Thursday in an outbreak of unrest amplified by an attack on Tuesday on the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi, Libya, that killed four Americans, including the ambassador.

The White House, meanwhile, sought to play down comments President Barack Obama made in an interview Wednesday with Spanish-language Telemundo, in which he declined to describe Egypt as an American ally and called Mr. Morsi's government a "work in progress."

Mr. Obama's comments stoked speculation that the U.S. may move to downgrade its relationship with Cairo, historically the linchpin in the U.S.'s counterterrorism, diplomatic and security efforts in the Arab world.

Some American lawmakers have called for the freezing of financial aid to Egypt because of Mr. Morsi's lax response to the storming of the American mission.

White House officials said the Obama administration expected aid to Cairo to flow and that the U.S. remained committed to helping Mr. Morsi orchestrate a democratic transition.

"Egypt is a long-standing and close partner of the United States, and we have built on that foundation by supporting Egypt's transition to democracy and working with the new government," said Tommy Vietor, the National Security Council's spokesman. "Last night, the president spoke with President Morsi to

review the strategic partnership between the United States and Egypt, while making clear our mutual obligations."

Mr. Morsi, in Brussels, also sought to contain diplomatic tensions with Washington. "We will not permit any such event, any such occurrence against the embassies present in our territories," he said between meetings with EU officials on Thursday. "The Egyptian people reject any such unlawful act."

The Muslim Brotherhood has called for further demonstrations on Friday, however, threatening further unrest.

This week's protests and U.S. relations with Cairo are playing into what many Mideast analysts say is a defining moment for the nascent governments formed by the political rebellions, known as the Arab Spring, that broke out across the region since last year.

The new unrest presents a test for these new governments on the international stage, and a challenge how to navigate the often contradictory demands of global statesmanship and domestic politics, said these analysts.

At the same time, the crisis offers a chance for this first crop of democratic Arab leaders to help shape their own countries during a historic transition.

The decisions these leaders make—to appease Islamist hard-liners or stand with more moderate forces—could begin to flesh out answers to questions about the region's democratic trajectory, its national identities and its relationship with the U.S.

"This is not just about a video," said Rebecca Abou Chedid, a member of the Arab American Institute's National Policy Council. "Tectonic plates are shifting and we have no idea what these new governments are building.... There is a vacuum of what does it mean to be Libyan, what does it mean to be a progressive Arab or a moderate Islamist."

Although the deadly embassy attack took place in Libya, the country is widely seen as moving in a fairly positive direction as far as the West is concerned. Libya's new government was quick to apologize and denounce the attack.

Protesters took to the streets of Benghazi waving signs reading "Sorry America."

It appeared that a lone group plotted to carry out the attack in Libya, a less-troubling scenario for Washington than if it had been the spontaneous outbursts of a violent mob, which would suggest a broader popular anger with the U.S.

Mr. Morsi, meanwhile, was in Brussels partly to secure financial support from the European Union for his government, which took office at the end of June after Egypt's first elections since the uprising that drove out President Hosni Mubarak in February 2011.

Mr. Morsi has traveled abroad over the past two months to solicit aid and seek to assure the international community that he can be a stabilizing force in a volatile region.

The EU is providing €449 million (\$580 million) to Egypt from 2011 through 2013. The EU also is willing to lend an additional €500 million if Cairo reaches a deal in negotiations on a loan package with the International Monetary Fund, said European Commission President José Manuel Barroso.

How governments adjust their attitudes toward the region could have an effect on the Islamist-tinged rebel insurgency in Syria, which remains in need of outside assistance for its efforts to overthrow the regime of Bashar al-Assad.

"Any chance for intervention in our fight has been severely reduced," said Shakeeb Jabri, a Syrian opposition activist based in Beirut. "We're angry at the Egyptians and the Libyans who saw fit to kill people and storm embassies over a stupid movie but do nothing while Syrian troops are destroying real mosques every day."

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As Violence Spreads In Arab World, Google Blocks Access To Inflammatory Video

September 14, 2012

New York Times

By Claire Cain Miller

SAN FRANCISCO - As violence spread in the Arab world over a video on YouTube ridiculing the Prophet Muhammad, Google, the owner of YouTube, blocked access to it in two of the countries in turmoil, Egypt and Libya, but did not remove the video from its Web site.

Google said it decided to block the video in response to violence that killed four American diplomatic personnel in Libya. The company said its decision was unusual, made because of the exceptional circumstances. Its policy is to remove content only if it is hate speech, violating its terms of service, or if it is responding to valid court orders or government requests. And it said it had determined that under its own guidelines, the video was not hate speech.

Millions of people across the Muslim world, though, viewed the video as one of the most inflammatory pieces of content to circulate on the Internet. From Afghanistan to Libya, the authorities have been scrambling to contain an outpouring of popular outrage over the video and calling on the United States to take measures against its producers.

Google's action raises fundamental questions about the control that Internet companies have over online expression. Should the companies themselves decide what standards govern what is seen on the Internet? How consistently should these policies be applied?

"Google is the world's gatekeeper for information so if Google wants to define the First Amendment to exclude this sort of material then there's not a lot the rest of the world can do about it," said Peter Spiro, a constitutional and international law professor at Temple University in Philadelphia. "It makes this episode an even more significant one if Google broadens the block."

He added, though, that "provisionally," he thought Google made the right call. "Anything that helps calm the situation, I think is for the better."

Under YouTube's terms of service, hate speech is speech against individuals, not against groups. Because the video mocks Islam but not Muslim people, it has been allowed to stay on the site in most of the world, the company said Thursday.

"This video - which is widely available on the Web - is clearly within our guidelines and so will stay on YouTube," it said. "However, given the very difficult situation in Libya and Egypt we have temporarily restricted access in both countries."

Though the video is still visible in other Arab countries where violence has flared, YouTube is closely monitoring the situation, according to a person briefed on YouTube's decision-making who was not authorized to speak publicly. The Afghan government has asked YouTube to remove the video, and some Google services were blocked there Thursday.

Google is walking a precarious line, said Kevin Bankston, director of the free expression project at the Center for Democracy and Technology, a nonprofit in Washington that advocates for digital civil liberties.

On the one hand, he said, blocking the video "sends the message that if you violently object to speech you disagree with, you can get it censored." At the same time, he said, "the decision to block in those two countries specifically is kind of hard to second-guess, considering the severity of the violence in those two areas."

"It seems they're trying to balance the concern about censorship with the threat of actual violence in Egypt and Libya," he added. "It's a difficult calculation to make and highlights the difficult positions that content platforms are sometimes put in."

All Web companies that allow people to post content online - Facebook and Twitter as well as Google - have grappled with issues involving content. The questions are complicated by the fact that the Internet has no geographical boundaries, so companies must navigate a morass of laws and cultural mores. Web companies receive dozens of requests a month to remove content. Google alone received more than 1,965 requests from government agencies last year to remove at least 20,311 pieces of content, it said.

These included a request from a Canadian government office to remove a video of a Canadian citizen urinating on his passport and flushing it down the toilet, and a request from a Pakistan government office to remove six videos satirizing Pakistani officials. In both cases, Google refused to remove the videos.

But it did block access in Turkey to videos that exposed private details about public officials because, in response to Turkish government and court requests, it determined that they violated local laws.

Similarly, in India it blocked local access to some videos of protests and those that used offensive language against religious leaders because it determined that they violated local laws prohibiting speech that could incite enmity between communities.

Requests for content removal from United States governments and courts doubled over the course of last year to 279 requests to remove 6,949 items, according to Google. Members of Congress have publicly requested that YouTube take down jihadist videos they say incite terrorism, and in some cases YouTube has agreed.

Google has continually fallen back on its guidelines to remove only content that breaks laws or its terms of service, at the request of users, governments or courts, which is why blocking the anti-Islam video was exceptional.

Some wonder what precedent this might set, especially for government authorities keen to stanch expression they think will inflame their populace.

"It depends on whether this is the beginning of a trend or an extremely exceptional response to an extremely exceptional situation," said Rebecca MacKinnon, co-founder of Global Voices, a network of bloggers worldwide, and author of "Consent of the Networked," a book that addresses free speech in the digital age.

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Iran Tells US To "Punish" Makers Of Anti-Islam Film

September 14, 2012

AFP

Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, on Thursday demanded the United States punish those behind an anti-Islam film blamed for sparking violent protests in the Middle East and North Africa.

"If the American politicians are honest that they had no role, then they must punish those who committed this heinous crime and their financial backers in proportion to this great crime," Khamenei said, according to a statement on his official website.

Earlier on Thursday, hundreds of Iranians staged a protest in Tehran over the amateur, American-made film which ridicules Islam's Prophet Mohammed.

The crowd chanted "Death to America!" and death to the movie's director, and an American flag was burnt.

But the rally, held near the Swiss embassy that handles US interests in the absence of US-Iran diplomatic ties, ended peacefully after two hours.

Security forces prevented the crowd from approaching the diplomatic compound.

Iranian news agencies said the demonstration was called by the Student Islamic Society, a hardline university group loyal to Khamenei that has held anti-Western rallies in the past.

It was one of several protests in Middle East countries that happened on Thursday, following attacks on Tuesday on US diplomatic mission in Libya and Egypt by crowds whipped into a fury by the movie.

In the Libya attack, the US ambassador and three other US officials were killed.

A spokesman for Iran's foreign ministry, Ramin Mehmanparast, was quoted by the official IRNA news agency saying: "The killing of the American ambassador in Libya in protest over insults against the prophet of Islam is an example of Muslim hatred against the repulsive policies (of the United States), which are aligned with Islamophobia."

Khamenei was quoted on his site putting the blame on Israel and the United States.

"The number one accused in this crime is Zionism and the American government," he said.

The film at the centre of the outrage was made in the United States by a man initially reported by US media to be an American-Israeli who relied on funding from 100 Jews.

But subsequent reporting found that figure to be fictitious, likely invented by a Coptic Christian living in California and identified as Nakoula Basseley Nakoula. The film was being promoted by a Florida pastor, Terry Jones, known for previous Koran-burning stunts that angered Muslims in various countries.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on Thursday condemned both the film -- saying "to me personally, this video is disgusting and reprehensible" -- and the violence seen in the protests.

She added: "The United States government had absolutely nothing to do with this video. We absolutely reject its content and message."

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EU Harshly Criticizes Iran's Nuclear Defiance, Says Diplomacy Way To Resolve Concerns

September 13, 2012

Associated Press

VIENNA - The European Union has harshly criticized Iran for what it says is Tehran's refusal to engage the international community on concerns about its nuclear agenda.

An EU statement to the International Atomic Energy Agency's 35-nation board says Iran has "not engaged seriously and without preconditions in talks aimed at restoring international confidence" that Tehran is not seeking to develop nuclear arms.

Iran denies any interest in such weapons.

The resolution says the European Union "shares the continuing serious concerns" of the IAEA about activities that include the suspected "development of a nuclear payload for a missile."

The statement, delivered Wednesday, also says the 27-nation bloc shares a commitment with world powers to seek a diplomatic solution to concerns about "the exclusively peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear program."

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Leader Of Shiite Militia Threatens American Interests In Iraq Due To "Heinous" Prophet Film

September 13, 2012

Associated Press

BAGHDAD - A Shiite militant group is threatening U.S. interests in Iraq as part of the backlash over an anti-Islam film it has described as "heinous."

The leader of the Iranian-backed Asaib Ahl al-Haq said in an interview Thursday that the amateurish video that ridicules Prophet Muhammad was unforgivable, and called on all Muslims to "face our joint enemy."

The militia leader, Qais al-Khazali, told The Associated Press that the video "will put all the American interests Iraq in danger."

The U.S. Embassy in Baghdad remains the world's largest American diplomatic mission, with an estimated 15,000 employees.

Asaib Ahl al-Haq led deadly attacks against U.S. troops before the American military withdrew from the country last year. It is funded and armed mainly by Iran.

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Obama Rebuffs Netanyahu on Setting Limits on Iran's Nuclear Program

September 13, 2012

[New York Times](#)

By MARK LANDLER and HELENE COOPER

WASHINGTON — President Obama on Tuesday rejected an appeal by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel to spell out a specific "red line" that Iran could not cross in its nuclear program, a senior administration official said, deepening the divide between the allies over how to deal with Iran's nuclear ambitions.

In an hourlong telephone conversation, this official said, Mr. Obama deflected Mr. Netanyahu's proposal to make the size of Iran's stockpile of close-to-bomb-grade uranium the threshold for a military strike by the United States against its nuclear facilities.

Mr. Obama, the official said, repeated the assurances he gave to Mr. Netanyahu in March that the United States would not allow Iran to manufacture a nuclear weapon. But the president was unwilling to agree on any specific action by Iran — like reaching a defined threshold on nuclear material, or failing to adhere to a deadline on negotiations — that would lead to American military action.

"We need some ability for the president to have decision-making room," said the official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the delicacy of the talks. "We have a red line, which is a nuclear weapon. We're committed to that red line."

Israeli officials, however, say this guarantee may not be enough for Israel, which Iranian leaders have repeatedly threatened with annihilation. Diplomatic talks, the Israelis say, have done nothing to slow Iran's nuclear program — nor have economic sanctions, though they have inflicted significant damage on the Iranian economy.

The telephone conversation came after a day that seemed to epitomize the frequently crossed wires between Mr. Obama and Mr. Netanyahu. It began with angry comments by the prime minister that the Obama administration had no "moral right" to restrain Israel from taking military action on its own if it refused to put limits on Iran. It continued with reports in the Israeli news media that the White House had rebuffed a request by Mr. Netanyahu's office for a meeting with Mr. Obama during the meeting of the United Nations General Assembly in New York this month. The White House denied those reports, citing more mundane scheduling problems. Finally, on Tuesday evening, Mr. Obama called Mr. Netanyahu.

The source of the conflict is the belief by Mr. Netanyahu that Iran, having continued to stockpile uranium enriched to 20 percent, is nearing the point at which Israel will no longer be able to prevent it from making a bomb.

Administration officials contend that the United States will still be able to detect, and prevent, Iran from passing that point. Nor does the administration have evidence that Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, has even made a decision to build a bomb. Iran, for its part, insists that its nuclear program is for peaceful energy purposes.

Israel's latest burst of anxiety about Iran comes in the midst of the American presidential election, leading some analysts to argue that Mr. Netanyahu is trying to use political leverage on Mr. Obama to stiffen his position. His Republican challenger, Mitt Romney, has accused Mr. Obama of not doing enough to protect a close ally.

Israeli officials flatly deny that Mr. Netanyahu is playing election-year politics. They said the prime minister was deeply frustrated by a recent interview with Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, in which she said the United States was "not setting deadlines."

People with close ties to Israel say Mr. Netanyahu and other Israeli officials are also frustrated because the Americans do not appear sufficiently concerned about Iran's growing stockpile of medium-enriched uranium. In its latest report, the International Atomic Energy Agency says the Iranians have amassed enough low- and medium-enriched uranium that, with further enrichment, could fuel as many as six nuclear weapons.

Basing a military judgment on Iran's stockpile of medium-enriched uranium could be tricky, however, because while the overall amount of this material has increased, the amount that can be readily used to fuel a bomb has declined since Iran converted some of it into plates to be used in a research reactor in Tehran.

"The Israelis are worried that once Iran accumulates a bomb's worth of 20 percent-enriched uranium, it's an easy dash to get weapons-grade nuclear fuel," said David Makovsky, a senior fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, who met recently with Israeli officials. "Before they decide they're on their own, I think they want to know that they and Washington see eye-to-eye that this is a red line that cannot be passed."

Indeed, Israeli officials appear reluctant to act without the backing of the United States. Mr. Netanyahu faces deep divisions within his own country about the wisdom of a military strike. On Thursday, Israel's deputy prime minister for intelligence and atomic affairs, Dan Meridor, appeared to undercut Mr. Netanyahu, saying in an interview with Israeli Army radio, "I don't want to set red lines or deadlines for myself."

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Israel Hints It Will Keep Pressing US On Iran

September 13, 2012

Associated Press

By Amy Teibel

JERUSALEM - Israel's leader suggested in an interview Thursday that he'll keep publicly pressing the United States to get tougher on Iran, despite the strains his remarks have caused with the Obama administration.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's remarks appear to have been aimed at rattling the U.S. into action for fear Israel might otherwise soon attack Iran on its own. But his heightened rhetoric has raised tensions with the White House, and even prompted a leading Jewish U.S. senator to take the extraordinary step of publicly rebuking him.

Netanyahu has repeatedly warned that Iran is getting dangerously close to acquiring a nuclear bomb and has been lobbying Washington for weeks to spell out what conditions would touch off a U.S.-led attack on Iranian nuclear facilities.

In a thinly veiled swipe at the U.S., he said earlier this week that "those in the international community who refuse to put red lines before Iran don't have a moral right to place a red light before Israel."

But Washington, which insists it won't let Iran become a nuclear power, has refused to be specific, despite Israel's implicit threat to act unilaterally if the U.S. doesn't take a tough public position.

The spat has become unusually public, prompting President Barack Obama to phone Netanyahu earlier this week and to follow up the call with a rare late-night White House statement denying reports of a rift. Netanyahu's office has also said the two men had a "good conversation."

In a newspaper interview Thursday, Netanyahu suggested he won't abandon his calls for the U.S. to set "red lines," telling The Jerusalem Post that he was "not exactly shy" about expressing his views on Israel's security interests.

"When I feel I need to speak out, I do," he said.

Iran says its nuclear program is solely for peaceful purposes but Netanyahu is convinced it's a cover to build a nuclear bomb.

The U.S. also suspects Tehran seeks to become a nuclear power, and has been leading international efforts to try to persuade Iran to abandon suspect elements of its nuclear program.

But Washington wants to give diplomacy and tough sanctions more time to try to pressure Tehran. And in a message aimed at Israel, it said several times this week that deadlines or "red lines" are counterproductive.

While Washington has tried to downplay reports of a rift, a leading Jewish U.S. senator who solidly supports Israel took the rare step of publicly criticizing Netanyahu in a letter to the Israeli leader posted on her website.

"I write to you as one of Israel's staunchest supporters in Congress to express my deep disappointment over your remarks that call into question our country's support for Israel and commitment to preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons," wrote Sen. Barbara Boxer, a Democrat from California. "Your remarks are utterly contrary to the extraordinary United States-Israel alliance, evidenced by President Obama's record and the record of Congress."

Israel enjoys strong backing in Congress and it is extremely unusual for its supporters there to question the Israeli government in such an open fashion. Boxer's decision to do so appears to suggest that at least some of his Congressional supporters feel he has gone too far.

Netanyahu spokesman Mark Regev had no immediate comment on the letter.

The possibility of Israel acting alone is a source of concern in Washington because of its potential to set off retaliatory attacks by Iran and its proxies in the region. U.S. officials have made it clear they oppose a unilateral Israeli attack, with the U.S. military chief, Gen. Martin Dempsey, recently saying he would "not want to be complicit" in such an assault.

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Kuwaitis Stage Anti-US Demo, Wave Qaeda Flag

September 14, 2012

[AFP](#)

About 500 demonstrators gathered Thursday near the US embassy in Kuwait waving a black Al-Qaeda flag in protest at a film mocking Islam.

President Barack "Obama, we are all Osama," they chanted referring to Al-Qaeda's former leader Osama bin Laden who was killed by US forces last year, an AFP photographer at the site of the demonstration reported.

The protesters gathered around 500 metres (yards) away from the US embassy after police forces, heavily deployed in the area, stopped them from reaching the mission.

The demonstrators were joined by five Islamist lawmakers as they called for expelling the US ambassador in the Gulf country.

"The people want to expel the ambassador," they chanted, as one of their banners read: "USA... respect us."

Protests have erupted since Tuesday outside US diplomatic missions in several Arab and Muslim states against a low-budget movie "Innocence of Muslims" made in the United States and deemed offensive to Islam.

The US ambassador to Libya, Chris Stevens, and three other Americans were killed when heavily-armed extremists launched a sustained four-hour attack on the US consulate in Benghazi late Tuesday.

In the Yemeni capital, police on Thursday shot dead four protesters and wounded 34 others when they opened fire on a crowd attempting to storm the US embassy.

In the Egyptian capital Cairo, police fired tear gas to disperse the latest protest outside the embassy by stone- and bottle-throwing demonstrators. More than 200 people were injured, the health ministry said.

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U.S. Sanctions Hezbollah Leader for Aid to Syria

September 14, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By JAY SOLOMON

WASHINGTON—U.S. Treasury officials imposed sanctions on the leader of the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah, and two other members of the organization for their alleged role in aiding the Syrian government in its crackdown on opposition forces.

The Treasury on Thursday formally charged that Hezbollah has been supporting Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's forces by providing training and logistical support.

The Treasury also said Hezbollah has helped Damascus monitor and control the movements of opposition fighters from the Free Syrian Army.

"By aiding Assad's violent campaign against the Syrian people and working to support a regime that will inevitably fall, Hezbollah's ongoing activity undermines regional stability and poses a direct threat to Lebanon's security," said Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence David Cohen.

"Hezbollah's actions, overseen by Hassan Nasrallah and executed by Mustafa Badr Al-Din and Talal Hamiyah, clearly reveal its true nature as a terrorist and criminal organization," Mr. Cohen said.

The sanctions bar Americans from doing business with these three Hezbollah members and freezes any assets they might have in the U.S.

Hezbollah has long been on the U.S. terrorism list, so Thursday's actions weren't expected to have much material impact on the organization.

Still, the Obama administration has been intensifying its scrutiny of the Lebanese financial sector in recent months, concerned that Hezbollah may be using Beirut's banks to launder proceeds from narcotics smuggling. Hezbollah has denied any role in narcotics trafficking.

U.S. officials also have raised their concerns with Lebanese officials in recent months that their banking system may be being used by Iran and Syria to evade sanctions.

This week, Treasury Deputy Secretary Neal Wolin met with Lebanese President Michel Suleiman, Prime Minister Najib Mikati and Central Bank Governor Riad Salameh in Beirut, according to U.S. officials.

"They discussed how Lebanon and Lebanese private financial institutions can work to prevent abuse of the Lebanese financial sector by illicit actors, including narcotics traffickers with links to Hezbollah," said a Treasury official.

Lebanese officials have said they are cooperating closely with the U.S. in combating money laundering.
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Pope to Start 'Peace Pilgrimage' to Lebanon

September 14, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By FARNAZ FASSIHI

BEIRUT—Pope Benedict XVI will arrive in Lebanon on Friday for a three-day visit that he labeled a "peace pilgrimage," at a time when the region and its people are facing anguish and heightened religious tensions, from war in Syria to violence in Libya.

A senior Vatican official said Thursday he didn't expect the pope to make specific remarks about the violence against U.S. embassies in the area, or the online video clip insulting Muslims that many protesters said had sparked it, during his visit so as not to risk angering the Muslim street and inflaming the crisis.

On the same day as the Pope's first public appearances, protests around the region are expected over the video, which appeared to have its roots in a group of Coptic Christians in the U.S. The trip "was already a minefield. Now a few more mines have been tossed in," the official said.

The Vatican issued a statement Wednesday in response to the mob attacks that led to the deaths of U.S. Ambassador Christopher Stevens and three other State Department employees in Benghazi, Libya.

It called the violence unacceptable and tragic, and called the video "unjustified offense and provocations against the sensibilities of Muslim believers." In Lebanon, religious leaders, both Muslim and Christian, have condemned the video and some have called for restraint from violence.

Patriarch Bechara Butros Rai, head of the Eastern Catholic Maronite Church in Lebanon, said at a news conference Thursday that the pope decided to go to Lebanon "because he considers this country a joining point between Christians and Muslims."

The Pope is expected to meet with Lebanese officials and religious leaders Friday and Saturday, and to hold a meeting with Christian youths. On Sunday, he will celebrate Mass at the Beirut waterfront, where up to 80,000 people are expected to attend.

Beirut has put up giant billboards advertising the pope's visit. Many Lebanese Christians say his trip shows the Vatican supports and protects Christians in the region. But the events aren't expected to draw Christians from around the region.

The visit comes as the Arab Christian communities in countries such as Syria, Iraq and Lebanon often find themselves caught between rivaling sectarian tensions of Sunni and Shiite Muslims:

In Egypt, Christians are anxious over the rise of Islamic political parties and fear the secular society they have enjoyed as a minority could fade. In the Palestinian territories, Christians have migrated in large number over the past decade as peace with Israel remains elusive.

The Pope is expected to address the situation of Christians in the region, and to ask governments to be more pluralistic and allow more religious freedoms, senior Vatican officials said. He also is likely to address the Syrian uprising and call for an end to the violence and respect for the will of Syrian people.

When the pope's predecessor, John Paul II, visited Lebanon 15 years ago, it was a time of hope for the country, as it started to rebuild after years of civil war.

The visit predated events of Sept. 11 that changed the region's landscape, with wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, a second intifada in Palestinian territories, the assassination of Lebanese Premier Rafiq Hariri and Lebanon's second war with Israel in 2006.

"We ask God to give this region of the world peace it so desires, based on respect for legitimate differences," the pope said at the end of his weekly audience Wednesday in the Vatican.

The Vatican had hoped the Arab Spring would usher a new era for the Middle East, with democratic governments and greater religious pluralism.

But some Vatican officials worried political disarray would lead to sectarianism and religious violence. "Let us not forget the danger...that democracy potentially could be used to legitimize extremist and fundamentalist ideologies," said Rev. Miguel Angel Ayuso Guixot, a senior Vatican official for interreligious dialogue, addressing a peace conference in Istanbul last week.

Many Muslims said they hope the visit would calm sectarian tensions between supporters and opponents of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. While most Sunnis in Lebanon are against the Syrian regime and most Shiites support Mr. Assad, Christians are divided. Those aligned with Sunni political parties advocate democracy and the fall of the regime, while those siding with Shiite parties say they fear Sunni fundamentalists coming to power if Mr. Assad falls.

Theresa Madi, a 45-year-old Christian and owner of an electronics shop in the Christian enclave of Beit Mery, said she and her family are attending the Sunday service. "Christians are not strong like they used to be in the past. The presence of Christians in the region is decreasing and our rights are more and more violated," she said.

Security has been tightened around Lebanon, where spillover tensions from Syria have erupted in the past few weeks in kidnappings and gunfire clashes. Beirut's international airport will limit flights on Friday and Sunday during the time that the Pope arrives and departs.

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In Libya, Chaos Was Followed By Organized Ambush, Official Says

September 14, 2012

New York Times

By Suliman Ali Zway And Rick Gladstone

BENGHAZI, Libya - The mayhem here that killed four United States diplomatic personnel, including the ambassador, was actually two attacks - the first one spontaneous and the second highly organized and possibly aided by anti-American infiltrators of Libya's young government, a top Libyan security official said Thursday.

The account by the official, Wanis el-Sharif, given to a few reporters here, was the most detailed yet of the chaotic events on Tuesday in this eastern Libyan city that killed J. Christopher Stevens, the first United States ambassador to be killed on duty in more than 30 years.

The deaths occurred amid a wave of anti-American protests convulsing the Middle East, inspired by an inflammatory anti-Islamic video, "The Innocence of Muslims," that has spread on the Internet in recent days since it was publicized in Egypt. Protests expanded on Thursday to at least a half-dozen other countries, including Iran.

Mr. Sharif, a deputy interior minister, said Mr. Stevens and a second American diplomat, Sean Smith, were killed in the initial attack, which began as a disorganized but angry demonstration by civilians and militants outside the American Consulate on Tuesday, the anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks. The protest escalated into an assault by as many as 200 people, some armed with grenades, who set the building on fire.

The second wave, Mr. Sharif said, was hours later, when the consulate staff was being spirited to a safe house a mile away. At that point, a team of Libyan security officials was evacuating them in a convoy guarded by Marines and Libyan security officials who had been flown from Tripoli to retrieve them.

Mr. Sharif said the second attack was a premeditated ambush on the convoy by assailants who were armed with rocket-propelled grenades and apparently knew the route the vehicles were taking. The other two Americans - identified on Thursday as Tyrone S. Woods and Glen A. Doherty, both former members of the Navy SEALs - were killed in that assault. At least 12 Americans and 18 Libyan security officials were wounded, Mr. Sharif said.

"The first part was chaotic and disorganized. The second part was organized and planned," he said. The ambushers in the second assault, he said, apparently "had infiltrators who were feeding them the information."

Parts of Mr. Sharif's account were not consistent with what other Libyan witnesses have said, and his version has not been corroborated by American officials, who have said it remains unclear how and where Mr. Stevens was killed. Many Libyans considered Mr. Stevens a hero for his support of their uprising against Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi.

Two Libyans who were wounded while guarding the consulate said that, contrary to Mr. Sharif's account, there was no indication within the consulate grounds that a mass protest, including members of armed groups, had been brewing outside. The guards spoke on condition of anonymity for their personal safety, and one of them said he realized the dangers only about 9:30 p.m., when protesters crashed through the gate and "started shooting and throwing grenades." The other guard said that he had been drinking coffee inside the compound just before the attack, and that it was so quiet "there was not even a single ant."

Mr. Sharif spoke as Libyan officials said at least four people were in custody. The Obama administration, which has vowed to bring the killers to justice, has sent 50 Marines and two warships to Libya, and the F.B.I. has joined the investigation. But it remains unclear precisely what American military firepower can do. If the attackers were not part of a larger international plot, there are no obvious targets for American retaliation.

"These are not the kind of guys with training camps and caravans to hit," said Michael W. S. Ryan, an expert on Islamic militants at the Jamestown Foundation, a research group in Washington.

The worst of the video-inspired violence on Thursday was in Yemen, where at least five Yemenis were killed as hundreds of protesters stormed the American Embassy in Sana and were repulsed by Yemeni security forces. The embassy's staff, sensitive to the danger, had been safely evacuated hours before, and Yemeni leaders apologized to President Obama for the mayhem.

The attackers set cars on fire and plundered offices of their equipment, including computers. They also burned an American flag and hoisted their own standard proclaiming fealty to Islam. By nightfall, witnesses said, smoke was still rising from the embassy compound in the eastern part of the capital as a protest raged 400 yards away.

In Egypt, where the anti-American anger began on Tuesday, protesters scuffled with police officers who were firing tear gas, and news agencies reported that as many as 200 people might have been hurt. Demonstrations were also reported outside United States diplomatic missions in Morocco, Sudan and Tunisia - where the police fired tear gas to disperse the crowds - and an anti-American protest was held in Gaza.

In Iran, where nearly all large protests must get government approval, witnesses and news reports said 500 people screaming "Death to America!" converged at the Swiss Embassy, which handles American diplomatic interests, and were restrained by hundreds of police officers.

The authorities in Afghanistan, where deadly violence has repeatedly flared over perceived insults to Islam, scrambled to keep the video, which portrays the Prophet Muhammad as a perverted buffoon, from being seen. Afghanistan officials said they pressed to indefinitely suspend access to YouTube, where the video, promoted by a shadowy assortment of right-wing Christians in the United States, had been viewed more than 1.6 million times by Thursday.

In Washington, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said Mr. Woods and Mr. Doherty - the two victims identified on Thursday - had served multiple tours in Iraq and Afghanistan before going to work as contract security officers for the American diplomatic mission in Libya. Mr. Woods, she said in a statement on Thursday night, was married and had three sons and was a registered nurse and a certified paramedic.

He and Mr. Doherty died "helping protect their colleagues," she said.

Mrs. Clinton also delivered a strongly worded denunciation of the video in what her spokeswoman later said was an effort to quash the belief in some parts of the Arab world that the United States government had somehow sponsored or condoned it.

"To us, to me personally, this video is disgusting and reprehensible," Mrs. Clinton said at a briefing with Morocco's foreign minister. "It appears to have a deeply cynical purpose: to denigrate a great religion and to provoke rage."

The killings in Libya led to a major political flare-up in the United States on Wednesday, when Mr. Obama's Republican challenger, Mitt Romney, issued a harsh critique of the president's handling of the protests and accused him of apologizing for the United States. The administration rejected the accusation, and even some Republicans distanced themselves from Mr. Romney's criticism as inappropriate under the circumstances.

The Yemen protests came hours after a Muslim cleric, Abdul Majid al-Zindani, urged followers to emulate the protests in Libya and Egypt, residents in Sana said. Mr. Zindani, a onetime mentor to Osama bin Laden, was named a "specially designated global terrorist" by the Treasury Department in 2004.

The crowd in Sana gathered a day after the embassy warned Americans in a posting on its Web site that "in the wake of recent events in Libya and Egypt, there is the possibility of protests in Yemen, and specifically in the vicinity of the U.S. Embassy, in the coming days."

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In Libya, Militias Pose Security Threat

September 14, 2012

[Washington Post](#)

By Abigail Hauslohner And Craig Whitlock

In the last week of his life, Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens was focused on a problem that has bedeviled Libya since the overthrow of Moammar Gaddafi last year: the countless militias that operate above the law.

Despite the formation of a new government and successful elections this summer, many of Libya's streets are still run by former rebel fighters who have not fallen under the command of a central authority.

It remains unclear who was behind the attack on the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi on Tuesday that killed Stevens and three other Americans. But the extent of the lawlessness that pervades Libya was certainly a factor.

Stevens, who became ambassador in May, had been talking with friends and colleagues about solutions. According to a friend who attended meetings in Benghazi with Stevens on Monday and Tuesday, the diplomat had proposed sending militia leaders to the United States in an exchange program that would allow them to meet American Muslims and learn about U.S. democracy. The friend, who dropped Stevens off at the diplomatic compound just hours before he died, spoke on the condition of anonymity out of concerns about personal safety.

Libyan authorities said Thursday that they had made four arrests in connection with the attack, but they provided no other details.

In acknowledging Libya's security shortcomings, the country's deputy U.N. ambassador, Ibrahim Dabbashi, said Wednesday: "We have to say the reality - that the authority of the government is still not covering the whole territory of Libya, and there are some groups and persons who are outlaws, and the government could not at this moment contain all of them."

More than 200 private militias are still active in the sprawling North African country, despite efforts by the country's nascent democratic leadership to draw them into more centralized units, according to a study released this week by the Atlantic Council.

Many of the militias control swaths of territory and huge weapons arsenals looted from Gaddafi's military bases, according to the study. The stockpile includes tanks, anti-aircraft guns and rocket launchers of the type that hit the U.S. Consulate, and about a dozen of the militias are able to project significant military power.

Particularly worrying to U.S. intelligence officials is the possibility that the groups have acquired the far more lethal man-operated portable air defense systems, or MANPADs, which are capable of taking down an airplane. A senior Obama administration official, speaking on the condition of anonymity

because the project is sensitive, said U.S. intelligence estimates that 100 to 1,000 MANPADs are still unaccounted for, despite U.S. efforts to buy up and destroy the weapons. Intelligence officials have speculated that the missiles were also smuggled across Libya's borders.

Glen Doherty, a former Navy SEAL and one of the Americans killed in Tuesday's attack, told ABC News last month that he had gone into Libya to track down MANPADs as a contractor for the State Department.

Intelligence officials said they have not yet found evidence of the Gaddafi regime's MANPADs falling into the hands of terrorist organizations.

A Gallup poll conducted in the spring and released Thursday found that 95 percent of Libyans surveyed wanted the militias to hand over their weapons to the authorities right away. But some analysts say the government has appeared nervous about pressing the militias to surrender their arms. "I think the state wants to avoid a confrontation, which could be potentially destabilizing," said Geoff D. Porter, founder and managing director of the North Africa Risk Consulting firm.

A weak central government has also allowed for the proliferation of radical Islamist cells, Karim Mezran, co-author of the Atlantic Council study, said Thursday.

Some observers have accused Ansar al-Sharia, a shadowy Islamist extremist group in Libya, of being behind Tuesday's attack.

But according to the SITE monitoring service, the brigade denied any role in the attack, saying in a posting on its Facebook page Wednesday that the accusations against it had been made to damage its image.

Some Libyan analysts and officials tried to play down the strength of armed Islamist radicals in the country.

"These groups are completely isolated, but they are powerful by their influence, not their numbers," said Noman Benotman, a former member of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group who is president of Quilliam, a London-based think tank. "The question is, to what extent they are capable of changing agendas."

In August 2011, four months after his arrival in Benghazi as the U.S. envoy to the rebel administration in Libya, Stevens was already talking about militias. In an address to the State Department, he said that despite progress in the fight against Gaddafi, there was a security "vacuum" and a situation in eastern Libya that involved "a lot of militias and a few police."

In an interview with The Washington Post in June, Stevens remained concerned and said Libyan authorities were handling the militants in their own way. "The Libyans are well aware of the problem, and they are devising Libyan ways to deal with it."

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US Consulate Attack In Libya Said Twin Operation
September 14, 2012
[Associated Press](#)

By Hamza Hendawi And Osama Alfitory

BENGHAZI, Libya - Heavily armed militants used a protest of an anti-Islam film as a cover and may have had help from inside Libyan security in their deadly attack on the U.S. Consulate, a senior Libyan official said Thursday.

As Libya announced the first four arrests, the clearest picture yet emerged of a two-pronged assault with militants screaming "God is great!" as they scaled the consulate's outer walls and descended on the compound's main building.

The rampage killed the U.S. ambassador and three other Americans.

Eastern Libya's deputy interior minister, Wanis el-Sharef, said a mob first stormed the consulate Tuesday night and then, hours later, raided a safe house in the compound just as U.S. and Libyan security arrived to evacuate the staff. That suggested, el-Sharef said, that infiltrators within the security forces may have tipped off the militants to the safe house's location.

The attacks were suspected to have been timed to coincide with the 11th anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist strike in the United States, el-Sharef added, with the militants using the film protest by Libyan civilians to mask their action.

Killed in the attack were U.S. Ambassador Chris Stevens, information management officer Sean Smith, private security guard Glen Doherty and one other American who has yet to be identified.

El-Sharef said four people were arrested at their homes Thursday, but he refused to give any further details. He said it was too early to say if the suspects belonged to a particular group or what their motive was. Libya's new prime minister, Mustafa Abu-Shakour, said authorities were looking for more suspects.

One of five private security guards at the consulate said the surprise attack began around 9:30 p.m. when several grenades that were lobbed over the outer wall exploded in the compound and bullets rained down.

The guard was wounded in the left leg from shrapnel. He said he was lying on the ground, bleeding and in excruciating pain when a bearded gunman came down the wall and shot him twice in the right leg, screaming: "You infidel, you are defending infidels!"

"Later, someone asked me who I was. I said I was the gardener and then I passed out. I woke up in hospital," said the guard, who spoke to The Associated Press from his bed at a Benghazi hospital. He spoke on condition of anonymity because he feared reprisals and reprimands from his employers.

The witness account came as protests of the obscure film, "Innocence of Muslims," continued in the Middle East.

An angry throng broke into the U.S. Embassy in Yemen, and clashes between security forces and demonstrators near the fortress-like embassy compound in the heart of Cairo left nearly 200 people injured and two police trucks burned.

Speaking at his Benghazi office, el-Sharef, who was running the Interior Ministry's operations room commanding security forces in the city during the attack, gave the most detailed account to date to

come out of Libya of what happened the night of the attack. His version, however, leaves some questions unanswered and does not provide a definitive explanation on the motives behind the attack and the identity of the perpetrators.

Killed in the attack were U.S. Ambassador Chris Stevens, information management officer Sean Smith, private security guard Glen Doherty and one other American who has yet to be identified.

No one has claimed responsibility for the attack. Some Libyan officials have pointed the finger at a hardline Islamist militia, the Ansar al-Shariah Brigades, one of multiple Libyan militias operating in the city. A spokesman for the group lavishly praised the assault for "protecting the faith and fighting for the victory of God Almighty." But he said the Brigades "did not participate as an organization. This was a popular uprising."

Adding to the confusion surrounding the attack is that it targeted the United States, a nation that played a key role in ridding the oil-rich, mostly desert nation of dictator Moammar Gadhafi. Washington also took the lead in launching the months-long NATO air campaign that crippled the late leader's forces.

Stevens was credited by most Libyans with organizing a political front made up of opposition groups to unite the uprising against Gadhafi's 41-year rule, mediating tribal and regional disputes.

The Benghazi attack also underlined the precarious conditions in Libya nearly a year after Gadhafi's fall, with a weak central government, militias operating as local governments, a destabilizing proliferation of weapons, and militant groups - some inspired by al-Qaida - that are active under the government's radar.

Stevens and another American were killed in the consulate during the initial violence, as plainclothes Libyan security were evacuating the consulate's staff to the safe house about a mile away, el-Sharef said. The second assault took place several hours later and targeted the safe house - a villa inside the grounds of the city's equestrian club - killing two Americans and wounding a number of Libyans and Americans.

The crowd built at the consulate - a one-story villa surrounded by a large garden in an upscale Benghazi neighborhood - in several stages, El-Sharef said. First, a small group of gunmen arrived, then civilians angry over the film. Later, heavily armed men with armored vehicles, some with rocket-propelled grenades, joined and the numbers swelled to more than 200.

The gunmen fired into the air outside the consulate. Libyan security guarding the site pulled out because they were so outmanned. "We thought there was no way for the protesters to storm the compound, which had fortified walls," he said.

Libyan security advised the Americans to evacuate at that point, but the advice was ignored, he said. There was shooting in the air from inside the consulate compound, he said.

At this point, el-Sharef continued, the crowd stormed the compound. The consulate was looted and burned, while plainclothes security men were sent to evacuate the personnel.

Stevens probably died of asphyxiation following a grenade explosion that started a fire, el-Sharef said, echoing what the Libyan doctor to whom Stevens' body was taken told the AP on Wednesday.

His account was corroborated by local journalist Ibrahim Hadya, who was at the scene. He told the AP that the consulate was stormed just as the evacuation was under way, with staff members smuggled out a side door that opens to a street other than the one where the militants and protesters gathered.

U.S. officials have said attackers broke into the main consulate building around 10:15 p.m. and set the compound on fire. Amid the evacuation, Stevens became separated from others, and staffers and security who tried to find him were forced to flee by flames, smoke and gunfire. After an hour, according to U.S. officials, U.S. and Libyan officials drove the attackers from the consulate.

The next attack came hours later. Around 30 American staffers along with Libyans had been evacuated to the safe house while a plane arrived from Tripoli with a joint U.S.-Libyan security group that was to fly them back to the capital, el-Sharef said.

El-Sharef said the original plan was for a separate Libyan security unit to escort the evacuees to the airport. Instead, the joint unit went from the airport to the safe house, possibly because they were under the impression they were dealing with a hostage situation, he said. The militant attack coincided with the joint team's arrival at the safe house, he said.

That the attackers knew the safe house's location suggests a "spy" inside the security forces tipped off the militants, el Sharef said.

U.S. officials have not confirmed the account. They have spoken of an attack on the consulate's annex that killed two Americans, but said their report on the incident was still preliminary.

In Yemen's capital of Sanaa, hundreds of protesters chanting "death to America" and "death to Israel" stormed the U.S. Embassy compound and burned the American flag on Thursday.

Yemen's president, Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi, quickly apologized to the U.S. and vowed to track down the culprits, just as Libya's president did. Egypt's Islamist President Mohammad Morsi, who had been slow to speak out on Tuesday's assault on the embassy in Cairo, promised Thursday that his government would not allow attacks on diplomatic missions.

The crowd in Sanaa swarmed over embassy's entrance gate. Men with iron bars smashed the thick, bullet-proof glass windows of the entrance building while others clambered up the wall. Some ripped the embassy's sign off the outer wall.

Inside the compound grounds, they brought down the American flag in the courtyard and replaced it with a black banner bearing Islam's declaration of faith - "There is no God but Allah." They did not enter the main building housing the embassy's offices, some distance away from the entry reception. Demonstrators set tires ablaze and pelted the compound with rocks.

A thick column of black smoke rose out from inside the embassy compound. Witnesses said the protesters set ablaze a room housing security guards and torched several parked cars.

Yemeni security forces who rushed to the scene fired in the air and used tear gas to disperse the demonstrators, driving them out of the compound after about 45 minutes and sealing off the surrounding streets.

The embassy said nobody was harmed. "All embassy personnel are safe and accounted for," spokesman Lou Fintor said.

Yemen is home to al-Qaida's most active branch and the United States is the main foreign supporter of the Yemeni government's counterterrorism campaign. The government on Tuesday announced that al-Qaida's No. 2 leader in Yemen was killed in an apparent U.S. airstrike, a major blow to the terror network.

In Cairo, protesters clashed Thursday with police near the U.S. Embassy. Police used tear gas to disperse the protesters and the two sides pelted each other with rocks. But unlike Tuesday, when protesters climbed the embassy's walls and several of them breached its grounds, police kept the protesters away from the compound.

The Health Ministry said 224 people, including policemen, were wounded, but they mostly suffered light injuries. Twelve protesters have been arrested.

The clashes continued well into the night.

The spreading violence comes as outrage grows over a movie called "Innocence of Muslims" produced by anti-Islam campaigners in the U.S. that mocked Islam's Prophet Muhammad. The amateurish video was produced in the U.S. and excerpted on YouTube. It depicts Muhammad as a fraud, a womanizer and a madman in an overtly ridiculing way, showing him having sex and calling for massacres.
(top)

New envoy to Syria says crisis getting worse

September 14, 2012

Associated Press

By ELIZABETH A. KENNEDY

BEIRUT — The diplomat tasked with ending Syria's civil war said that the conflict is worsening on Thursday, the same day he travelled to the country for the first time since taking up a job he himself has called "nearly impossible".

Lakhdar Brahimi, the U.N.-Arab League envoy, was expected to meet Syrian President Bashar Assad on Friday. He also was to meet members of the Syrian opposition.

"We came to Syria to consult with our Syrian brothers," Brahimi said on arrival at the airport in Damascus. "There is a crisis in Syria and I believe it is getting worse."

Brahimi replaces Kofi Annan, who left the job in frustration in August after his efforts failed to stem a conflict that started in March 2011. Activists estimate some 23,000 people have been killed in the bloodshed.

The visit comes as violence convulses the country's largest city, Aleppo, and the outskirts of the capital, Damascus. Activists said regime forces shelled Aleppo and clashes with rebels were reported outside Damascus.

The two cities were once seen as largely immune to the violence in other parts of Syria, but have been hit by fighting as rebels try to bring the fight to symbols of Assad's power.

Although the regime is better armed than the rebels, the government has not been able to crush the rebellion. The rebels also have failed to overthrow the regime, leading to a bloody stalemate that many fear will drag on indefinitely.

The violence has left the Assad government isolated internationally, although Iran, China and Russia support it. Brahimi met Mohammad Riza Shibani, the Iranian ambassador to Syria, on Thursday — a meeting the ambassador described as "good and fruitful."

He also met Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Moallem, who stressed that any initiative should "focus on the Syrian people's interest," said the state-run news agency, SANA.

In Baghdad, U.K. Foreign Secretary William Hague said Assad's regime is "doomed" and should not be allowed to survive after committing crimes against its people. He said a transition of power is the only way forward.

"That is the only way to avoid protracted civil war, or the collapse of the Syrian state, or an even greater flow of refugees and loss of life," Hague said at a joint news conference in Baghdad with his Iraqi counterpart, Hoshiyar Zebari.

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Yemen Leader Apologizes To US For Embassy Attack

September 14, 2012

Associated Press

By Ahmed Al-haj

SANAA, Yemen - Yemen's president has apologized to President Barack Obama for the attack on the U.S. Embassy in Sanaa, the Yemeni capital, by a mob angry over an anti-Islam film.

The U.S. Embassy in Yemen says nobody was harmed in Thursday's assault. "All embassy personnel are safe and accounted for," spokesman Lou Fintor said.

President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi also ordered an investigation into the attack. Several hundred protesters stormed the embassy's compound, brought down the U.S. flag in the courtyard, burned it and replaced it with a black, Islamist banner.

Hadi avowed to bring the culprits to justice, saying the attack by a "rowdy crowd" was part of a conspiracy to derail Yemen's close relations with Washington.

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Afghanistan Tries To Block Video And Head Off Rioting

September 14, 2012

New York Times

By Alissa J. Rubin

KABUL, Afghanistan - Racing to head off potentially violent demonstrations over an anti-Islamic video, the Afghan government on Thursday pushed Internet providers to shut down access to Web sites hosting the clip, and asked political and religious leaders to urge calm, senior Afghan officials said.

The quick action stood in contrast to a slow government response in February after deadly rioting broke out at the news that American soldiers had burned Korans. In that case, Afghan officials were slow to try to head off violence, and American officials later said they were concerned and angered by the delay. At least 29 Afghans and six American service members were killed by members of the Afghan security forces in days of violence after the Koran burning.

The decision Thursday to ask Internet companies to block access to YouTube and related Google-owned Web sites through which people could have gained access to the video was a first for the country, where the Internet is still a rarity outside the capital. By early evening, YouTube, Google News and Gmail could not be reached in the capital, and Google's browser, Google Chrome, was also blocked.

The blockage was not uniform and the sites were still accessible on some smartphone devices, but only a small percentage of Afghans own those.

The Afghan government also sent an official letter of complaint to YouTube for providing access to a video that insulted and abused Islam's founder and asked that the company remove it from the Web site. In a statement, Google, which owns YouTube, said that the video would not be taken down, but that the company was working with the governments of Libya and Egypt, at their request, to block access to it in those countries. It was unclear late Thursday whether that cooperation was occurring in Afghanistan as well.

President Hamid Karzai condemned the video as soon as news of it spread on Wednesday afternoon, and repeated that condemnation Thursday in a sober statement that described his conversation late Wednesday with President Obama in which it said the two leaders "denounced the film and termed it as insulting to Islamic beliefs and values."

While Mr. Karzai did not personally call for calm in his statement, he and his government turned to influential people in communities across the country to tamp down emotions and urged clerics to avoid provocation at the weekly Friday Prayer.

In the past, it has often been radical religious leaders here who have incensed the faithful to violence. In March 2011, it was clerics who inflamed their congregations over a Florida pastor's burning of the Koran, contributing to angry men pouring into the streets of the northern city of Mazar-e-Sharif and killing seven international United Nations staff members in a United Nations guesthouse.

"We must keep people quiet about this," said Rangin Spanta, the national security adviser, describing Mr. Karzai's behind-the-scenes call for calm. "We instructed all security forces of Afghanistan, all governors, all decision makers to work with the elders, to work with the clergy, to work with the imams to not talk, to not provoke people."

The NATO-led international military command in Afghanistan immediately issued instructions to Western troops across the country to minimize their exposure to places and situations where there could be violence, said Brig. Gen. Roger Noble, the deputy commander for NATO Operations in Afghanistan. The military told troops to "minimize the chance of being at the wrong time or inadvertently being in a place that might inflame a protest in the next few days," he said and underscored that the international forces have "strong" respect for the Afghans' Muslim faith.

Although senior Afghan government officials said they understood that the video was the product of a fringe element in the United States, Mr. Spanta said, "We are very, very sad about it."

The overwhelming majority of Afghans are deeply pious and conservative Muslims, and the worry is that the film's trailer, which coarsely portrayed the Prophet Muhammad as a womanizer and murderous thug, would bring Afghans into the streets, willing to do violence both to the government's forces, who work closely with the West, and to foreigners, especially Americans, many of whom live in Kabul.

In Kandahar, where the governor and local leaders followed Mr. Karzai's orders and held a lengthy closed meeting to discuss the film and the appropriate reaction, there was an overwhelming sense of pain over the video.

"This is deeply and extremely unacceptable for all Muslims all over the world, and this actually generates loathing for the Americans," said Mohammed Omar Satti, a tribal elder in Kandahar and a member of the provincial Peace and Reconciliation Commission.

Several Kandahar clerics emphasized that people of all religions were appalled by the video and asked the American government to arrest the man who made it. A Kandahar imam, Mullah Azhar, asked people to be tolerant and condemn it, but to refrain from damaging Muslim property.

Like many others, he was genuinely puzzled by free speech laws in the United States that allow such work to be made public. "I ask the government of America, why did they allow a person to insult a man, Muhammad, when by insulting him they sadden the whole Muslim world and create hatred toward Americans?"

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Afghan President Postpones Trip Over Prophet Film

September 14, 2012

Associated Press

By Amir Shah And Patrick Quinn

KABUL, Afghanistan - The Afghan president canceled his official visit to Norway amid concerns following Mideast riots over a film that ridicules Islam's Prophet Muhammad, officials said Thursday. Hamid Karzai also talked to President Barack Obama and expressed condolences over the killing of the U.S. ambassador and three other Americans in Libya.

President Karzai's trip to Norway is to take place at a later date, said his spokesman, Aimal Faizi. The Norwegian Foreign Ministry said the Afghan leader postponed the trip because he felt he needed to stay at home.

"The reason is that the president, in light of the serious events in some Arab countries in the past day, sees a need to be in Afghanistan," said the Norwegian statement. Foreign Minister Jonas Gahr Støre said he looks forward to receiving Karzai in Norway "at a later date."

Karzai was to have traveled to Oslo late Wednesday to sign an agreement of strategic partnership.

According to Karzai's office, the Afghan leader spoke by phone late Wednesday with Obama and conveyed his condolences for the violent killings of U.S. diplomats in Libya. He also discussed the "film and the insulting of holy Islamic values," but the statement provided no other details.

Karzai has condemned the anti-Islam film as "inhuman and insulting" and made by "extremists." On Wednesday, the government temporarily blocked access to YouTube to prevent people from watching the video until the website later took it down.

The Taliban have called on their fighters to avenge the film by increasing their attacks on foreign troops in Afghanistan.

So far, there have been no protests in Afghanistan against the movie that depicts Muhammad and portrays him as a womanizer and a madman.

An Afghan cleric mentioned it in a speech Thursday during a commemoration of the death of a revered Shiite imam. The cleric, Sayyed Eisa Hossaini Mazari, told about 200 worshippers in a mosque west of Kabul that a "dirty American made a movie and it was put on YouTube" to spread anti-Islamic propaganda.

Mazari named the countries where protests against the film had occurred, but did not directly call for demonstrations in Afghanistan.

He told The Associated Press there will be protests if there is no "U.S. action against the movie."

At the headquarters of the U.S.-led military coalition in Kabul, Australian Army Brig. Gen. Roger Noble said Thursday that NATO had warned the international forces about the film. The alliance has also sought to deflect the potential for violence in Afghanistan over the film.

"What we're trying to do is minimize the chance of being in the wrong place at the wrong time, or inadvertently putting ourselves in a position which might inflame a protest or people who gather together in the next few days," said Noble, deputy to the deputy chief of staff for operations for the coalition.

He said the coalition respected the Afghan people and their culture and religion. "So we ask your understanding on that and remember that we are here, a long way from home, trying to help Afghanistan."

In February, U.S. soldiers at Bagram Air Field in Afghanistan burned 315 copies of the Quran and other religious materials that had been taken from a prison library for disposal. Word of the burning, which the U.S. said was unintentional, triggered scores of anti-American protests across the country which left more than 30 Afghans and six U.S. soldiers dead.

The victims included two U.S. troops who were shot by an Afghan soldier and two U.S. military advisers who were gunned down at their desks at the Afghan Interior Ministry. Six U.S. Army soldiers received unspecified administrative punishment for the Quran burning incident, the Pentagon announced last month.

(top)

Anger Rolls Across Pakistani City in Aftermath of Factory Fire
September 13, 2012
New York Times

By DECLAN WALSH

KARACHI, Pakistan — The towering metal door at the back of the burned-out garment factory could have been an escape for many of the low-paid textile workers caught in the fire here on Tuesday. Instead, it stands as a testament to greed and corruption at a factory where 289 trapped employees died.

As hundreds of workers scrambled to escape the flaming factory after a boiler explosion, they found the main sliding door — 30 feet high, big enough for a truckload of cotton — firmly locked. Instead of letting the workers escape, several survivors said Thursday, plant managers forced them to stay in order to save the company's stock: piles of stonewashed jeans, destined for Europe.

"They prevented people from leaving, so they could save the clothes," said Shahzad, a stone-faced man in sweat-drenched clothes, standing in the blacked corridors of the factory.

His voice trembling, Shahzad, who goes by just one name, said he had already recovered the body of a 15-year-old cousin; now he was looking for his 23-year-old brother, Ayaz. He figured he was buried under the mounds of ash and twisted metal.

"He's gone," he said quietly.

Karachi buried its dead on Thursday amid grief and recrimination over the deadliest industrial accident in Pakistan's 65-year history.

Sounds of mourning filled working-class neighborhoods as emotionally charged funeral processions wound through the narrow streets. Amid such a high death toll, the stories of misfortune competed for pathos — one street lost eight residents; a mother said she lost three daughters to the inferno, then a son who tried to rescue them.

At the factory, known as Ali Enterprises, rescue workers quenched the last flames 48 hours after they started. Volunteers cast bundles of smoldering jeans from a first-floor window.

Meanwhile, the police spent a second day hunting for the factory's three owners, who now face possible charges of conspiracy to commit murder.

Mirza Ikhtiar Baig, the prime minister's adviser on textiles, noted in a statement that after the first fire engine reached the scene on Tuesday, firefighters found that the manager had ordered the gates to be closed, "not allowing anyone to leave the premises without checking."

Instead, up to 600 factory workers were left with just one open exit, or forced to take their chances plunging from windows considered too high to require bars.

Inside the factory, warmth still glowed from the pitch-black basement where many workers perished from smoke inhalation.

Muhammad Raheel, a rescuer, said he helped recover 30 bodies before fainting and having to be carried out on a stretcher. "I still have visions in my head," he said. "It is impossible to forget."

The disaster was a blow to an already struggling city: Karachi, a bustling megalopolis of an estimated 18 million people that has come to represent both the immense promise of Pakistan and its tragic failings.

For decades, Karachi and its growing factory sector have been a magnet for migrants, both from outside Pakistan's borders and within them.

Afghans and Iranians arrived in huge numbers in the 1980s, fleeing war in their homelands. Recent years have seen a strong flow of ethnic Pashtuns from the Taliban-affected areas of northwestern Pakistan, as well as refugees from surrounding areas of Sindh Province displaced by the floods of 2010 and 2011.

The Ali Enterprise factory was a microcosm of Karachi. "We had Biharis, Gujratis, Baloch, Sindhi, Pashtuns, Urdu-speakers, Punjabis," one survivor said. "Everyone worked here in peace."

But that harmony has often been missing from the city's streets, plagued by increasing violence in recent years: sectarian blood baths, criminal score-settling, militant atrocities and the bloody rivalry among the city's ethnically divided political parties.

Activists from the Muttahida Qaumi Movement, the city's most powerful and muscular political party, led cleanup efforts at the stricken factory on Thursday.

Karachi's ambitions have also been thwarted by the faltering authority of the local or federal governments, which have failed to enforce the most basic workplace standards.

In theory, Pakistan's laws offer strong protections to workers, but application is notoriously weak. In textiles, which account for 53 percent of exports, employers routinely sidestep health and safety regulations through bribery and corruption.

"The state inspectors can make a lot of extra money," said Sharafat Ali, an activist with the Pakistan Institute of Labor Education and Research, which has documented abuses in the textile industry. "They have lifestyles that go beyond their wages."

The lack of regulation was apparent inside the factory, which contained space for fire extinguishers that had failed and directions to emergency exits that were locked.

"There was no safety in there, no fire equipment," said Khwaja Sohail Mansoor, a local lawmaker, who stood near a fire truck outside the factory.

Survivors of the blaze said rule-breaking was the norm at the plant, where many worked 12-hour shifts and were paid as little as \$58 per month — one-third less than the statutory minimum.

German-language labels on bundles of denim that survived the blaze carried a brand named "Okay Men." And workers at the factory said they had been forced to lie about their working conditions to auditors representing foreign buyers.

Hafeeza Bano, a 35-year-old with burn wounds on her leg and arm, said she had to misrepresent her working hours and pay or face the threat of dismissal. "The owners were very cruel, and very greedy," she said.

Those men — identified as Abdul Aziz, Mohammad Arshad and Shahid Bhaila, and sought for arrest - have yet to be found.

A thread of outrage ran through news coverage. "Hundreds saw hell on Earth" read the banner headline in Dawn, the leading English-language paper.

On Thursday, the Sindh Province labor minister resigned. Hours later, the government announced that a retired judge would lead an investigation tasked with delivering initial findings next week. But few here believed it would amount to much.

"We need to do more than change the faces — we need to change the policies," said Farida Bibi, who lost her 26-year-old son. "Then we need to hang the men who owned this factory."

Alarmed at the wave of public anger, other textile manufacturers sought to distance themselves from their actions.

"We are shellshocked by what happened, and these people need to be held accountable," said Shehzad Saleem, chairman of the Pakistan Garment Exporters and Manufacturers Association. "But everyone needs to calm down and let the investigation take place."

The Muttahida Qaumi Movement called for three days of mourning, but the city is expected to be back on its feet soon. Karachi's resilience is a point of pride, and normal life, of a sort, has tended to quickly resume after floods and bombings.

But Parween Rahman, the head of a major aid project in Orangi, the city's largest slum, said that resilience may be a product of circumstance as much as a triumph of the human spirit. "Where do they go? They have to live their lives. They have to survive," she said. "They have little other option."
(top)

WHA/EUR

Mexico Announces Capture Of Gulf Cartel Leader

September 14, 2012

New York Times

By Randal C. Archibold

MEXICO CITY - In a major strike against one of the largest drug-trafficking organizations, the Mexican Navy said on Thursday that it had detained one of the most sought-after drug kingpins in Mexico and the United States, the top leader of the Gulf Cartel.

In an early morning news conference in Mexico City, the man, Jorge Eduardo Costilla Sánchez, who faces an array of charges in both countries, was marched before reporters by masked marine guards. A stocky man handcuffed in front and dressed in a checkered shirt and jeans and wearing a bulletproof vest, he looked sternly at the gathering, standing before a table covered with rifle parts, fancy jewelry, a couple of gold-plated handguns and other goods seized during his arrest Wednesday evening.

Jose Luis Vergara, a marine spokesman reading a statement, said Mr. Costilla, 41, known as El Coss, was detained without any resistance by about 30 marines around 6 p.m. in Tampico in northeastern Tamaulipas State. Several other people detained with him were also shown to reporters, some of them with facial cuts and bruises.

The arrest gives Mexican forces a notable victory in their battle against drug-trafficking leaders, days ahead of Mexican Independence Day celebrations, and presents another blow to the Gulf Cartel, one of the three principal groups feeding rampant violence in the country.

Mr. Costilla has been wanted by the United States since 2002 on charges including drug trafficking, money laundering and threatening to assault and murder federal law enforcement agents, and his arrest sets up the possibility of an extradition. The agents, with the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Drug Enforcement Administration, were surrounded and threatened by gunmen, including Mr. Costilla, in the border city of Matamoros in 1999 but were eventually let go, American officials have said.

Just last week, a man identified as another top leader of the gang, Mario Cárdenas Guillén, was detained, also in Tamaulipas, one of the nation's most violent states. He had assumed a leadership role after his brother was killed by Mexican forces in 2010, but Mr. Costilla was believed to be running the organization.

George W. Grayson, a professor at the College of William and Mary in Virginia and longtime researcher of the criminal groups, said the arrest demonstrated both the prowess of the Mexican marines - "they have first-rate intelligence, work closely with U.S. security agencies, and go out of their way to prevent leaks" - and the infighting in the Gulf Cartel.

Mr. Costilla, he said, was in the middle of a battle with other leaders to seize and solidify control of important cities in Tamaulipas.

This arrest, he said, is the most important takedown since Mexican marines killed Arturo Beltrán Leyva, chief of the Beltrán organization, in December 2009. That operation is also remembered for the killing of family members of a marine involved in the operation after his funeral.

Analysts have described the Gulf Cartel as somewhat weakened by a spinoff group, the Zetas, and the largest group, the Sinaloa Cartel, which have battled over turf and trafficking routes. The Zetas, too, are said to be split by factionalism.

Mexican and American drug agents believe that cutting off the heads of the organizations ultimately weakens them, but in many cases splinter groups have emerged. Violence as the new gangs and old ones fight it out, coupled with pressure from Mexican security forces, has led to more than 50,000 deaths, with some estimates far higher, in the last six years.

Mr. Costilla's capture may help burnish the marines' reputation after an embarrassment earlier this summer.

In June, it said it had captured the "presumed son" of the most wanted drug lord, Joaquin Guzmán Loera, known as El Chapo, or Shorty, but in one of the government's bigger public embarrassments, the authorities eventually conceded that it was not him.

As President Felipe Calderón's six-year term draws to a close in December, there is heightened speculation that security forces will deliver him the capture of Mr. Guzmán as well. The military and the police have nearly caught him at least a few times, Mexican and American officials have said.

Tamaulipas also has been the focus of a political scandal, with a former governor and other officials under investigation over accusations of receiving money from drug traffickers. It became an issue in the July presidential election because the politicians under investigation belonged to the Institutional Revolutionary Party, the same as the victor, Enrique Peña Nieto, who had sought to portray the party as beyond its previous corruption and drug scandals.

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FOREIGN POLICY

U.S. Diplomatic Security Again Under Review

September 14, 2012

Washington Post

By Colum Lynch

The volatile demonstrations at U.S. diplomatic missions this week have shattered any illusions about the inviolability of America's envoys and highlighted the perils of diplomatic life in a region undergoing sweeping political upheaval.

The protests - and the ferocious attack that killed U.S. Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens and three other Americans in Libya - have prompted officials to order a review of security measures in every overseas diplomatic mission. The unrest is also likely to reinvigorate an ongoing debate over whether the State Department has enough resources to protect its personnel at its 400 embassies, consulates and other diplomatic outposts.

The State Department said Thursday that the security at the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi, where the four Americans were killed, was consistent with the security at similar missions, with a local guard force on the perimeter and an American security presence inside. A spokeswoman noted that the department had recently assessed security at missions around the world in advance of the anniversary of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

"We determined that the security at Benghazi was appropriate for what we knew," said the spokeswoman, Victoria Nuland.

But the attack underlined concerns that the State Department has not adequately prepared for the security threats in some countries in which it has expanded operations.

The challenge has been best exemplified by the U.S. military's withdrawal from Iraq, which has left the State Department with a shortage of officials experienced in dealing with explosive ordnance, and rocket and mortar countermeasures.

Last year, a report by the Government Accountability Office concluded that the State Department's Bureau of Diplomatic Security has struggled to keep "up with the changing high threat environment" in foreign capitals in Iraq, Pakistan and Sudan.

"State is maintaining a presence in an increasing number of dangerous posts, is facing staff shortages and other operational challenges that tax Diplomatic Security's ability to implement all of its missions and has not provided Diplomatic Security with adequate strategic guidance," the GAO's Jess T. Ford told a House subcommittee.

In Libya, where Moammar Gaddafi has been replaced with a pro-Western government, foreign diplomats have been the target of extremist violence on a handful of occasions, including in April when armed groups exploded a roadside bomb directed at a U.N. convoy carrying the organization's top representative, Ian Martin. In June, armed groups attacked a British convoy carrying Britain's ambassador to Libya, Dominic Asquith. The ambassador was unharmed, but two British guards were injured.

"It is a real shock which should remind everyone of the dangers of diplomacy," France's U.N. ambassador, Gerard Araud, said this week after the attack in Libya.

His government has lost two ambassadors in the past three decades, Philippe Bernard in Congo in 1993, and Louis Delamare, who was gunned down in Lebanon in September 1981.

"It takes a great deal of courage to accept these risks," Araud said. "This attack is even more despicable in that our job is about dialogue, about building bridges to preserve peace."

The attack in Benghazi was the most significant assault on a U.S. diplomatic outpost since the 1998 bombing of embassies in Tanzania and Kenya. Those bombings killed 224 people, including 12 Americans, and led to a movement to reinforce U.S. missions.

The security measures in missions worldwide vary. The U.S. Consulate in Benghazi, officials said Thursday, was not staffed by Marines. But Nuland said that it was not unusual for a consulate of its type.

"We make a decision based on the local conditions as to whether that makes sense. But this posture that we had, which was external security by the Libyans, and then a strong U.S. security presence, but it didn't include that particular contingent of Americans inside," she said.

Some in the diplomatic community said Thursday that while they were reminded of the dangers of service, they were also concerned that the attack in Libya could prompt an overreaction, leading to even tighter security that could impair their work.

"We have to take the long view on finding a balance between security and getting the job of diplomacy done," said Edward Djerejian, a former U.S. ambassador to Syria and Israel and founding director of the James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy at Rice University. "You cannot conduct American diplomacy from a fortress. No American can do his job without taking a certain risk. Those risks should be managed, but without the illusion that there is something called absolute security."

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U.S. Probes Alleged Video Producer

September 14, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By DEVLIN BARRETT, TAMARA AUDI and ERICA ORDEN

Federal authorities are investigating whether the man allegedly behind a video insulting to Muslims violated the terms of his probation by using computers and the Internet, according to two U.S. officials.

The man in question, Nakoula Basseley Nakoula, was arrested in 2009 and was convicted of bank fraud a year later for a scheme in which he defrauded banks of thousands of dollars, according to documents from Los Angeles federal court.

The law-enforcement officials say they believe Mr. Nakoula is the same man who in recent days has been identifying himself as Sam Bacile, declining to say how they have drawn the connection.

A man calling himself Sam Bacile said in interviews, including a telephone conversation Tuesday with The Wall Street Journal, that he directed a film called "Innocence of Muslims." A clip posted to Google Inc.'s YouTube by one Sam Bacile in July, which purported to be a trailer for a film about the Prophet Muhammad, has sparked angry protests in the Middle East.

The movie has its roots with a Southern California group of Egyptian Christians associated with extremist critics of Islam. The film's assistant director, Jeffrey Robinson, said its production budget was just \$250,000.

Media for Christ, a nonprofit religious organization in the city of Duarte, about 20 miles northeast of Los Angeles, took out a permit to film the movie that came to be called "Innocence of Muslims" according to Film LA Inc., which coordinates permits.

Media for Christ produces Christian television programming and broadcasts it abroad in Arabic and English, some of it highly critical of Islam.

Duarte officials said the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department is providing extra patrols of the group's facilities, which include a television production house called "The Way TV."

Hussam Ayloush, executive director of the Council on American-Islamic Relations in Southern California, said the Christian group in Duarte was "well known for being Coptic," the term for Egyptian Christians. Mr. Ayloush said some local Muslims have complained to him that some of its shows are spreading anti-Muslim propaganda.

Several women who answered the phone at Media for Christ and The Way TV, who declined to identify themselves, said they didn't know anything about the movie.

The Way TV aims to "use Christian satellite television to transform the Middle East, North Africa, Europe, America and Canada," says its website.

The views espoused by The Way TV and Media for Christ appear to be far from the norm among Egyptian Christians, known as Copts—a mainstream group of Christians with moderate views similar to those of other major Christian religions. The Coptic Church, like the Greek Orthodox Church, has its own hierarchy and leadership.

There are small communities of Copts in the U.S., including in Southern California. They have denounced the film, and in recent days some have expressed fears it would spur retaliations against Coptic communities overseas. Mr. Nakoula told the Associated Press in an interview Wednesday that he, too, was a Christian Copt.

There were close to 1 million Coptic parishioners in the U.S. in about 200 parishes as of two or three years ago, according to Bishop David Anba, the General Bishop and Patriarchal Exarch for the Archdiocese of North America. He added that the number may have grown thanks to recent immigration from Egypt.

In recent years, well-known extreme anti-Islamists like Steve Klein, an insurance salesman from Southern California, have linked with a few Coptic Christians, said Muslim civil-rights groups monitoring the situation. These loosely formed alliances have produced protests at Islamic centers and events in the last few years. Mr. Klein, who didn't return calls seeking comment, has said in media reports that he served as a consultant on the film.

"There are built-in tensions between Muslims and Copts," said Mr. Ayloush, whose group put out a statement before the deadly embassy assault in Libya urging Muslims to ignore the film. "It just takes a few extremists to throw fuel on the fire and then other extremists to take the bait, and suddenly the entire world is dealing with a crisis."

Southern California's small Coptic community is responding to the film with "extreme concern," said Father Gregory Bishay, of the Three Holy Youth Church, a Coptic congregation in Orange, Calif.

"Christians never retaliate with force," he said. "We respond, we do not initiate."

Father Bishay estimated the Coptic church has 30,000 members in Southern California.

As troubling as the film itself is to Father Bishay, he said he is not worried that it will engender violent attacks on Coptic congregations in the U.S. In Egypt, he said anti-Coptic sentiment is so normal that he doubts the movie could make things much worse.

In Egypt, tensions between Christians and Muslims burst out after the collapse of President Hosni Mubarak's regime in February 2011. Leaders of the Coptic community sided with Mr. Mubarak, who was seen as a bulwark against the country's radical Muslims.

Sectarian violence swept through the Arab world's biggest country after Mr. Mubarak fell. Dozens of people have died in bloody clashes between Muslims and Christians, including an October 2011 incident that left 24 people dead.

Christians make up roughly a tenth of Egypt's population of 82 million people.

In the AP interview, a person identifying himself as Mr. Nakoula said he had managed the film's production but denied he was Mr. Bacile. Attempts by Journal to identify a Nakoula B. Nakoula at the address were unsuccessful. Several actors and the assistant director, Mr. Robinson, said they were paid via personal check from the producer. All said the checks cleared. Mr. Robinson said the producer signed the checks with the name "Sam Bassiel."

One actor said he originally auditioned for the film, which went by the name "Desert Warrior," in 2009, when he met in Los Angeles with the producer and director. This person said he was told he had landed a role, but didn't hear anything further from the filmmakers. Two years later, he noticed the same casting notice and went in for another audition, at which point the director told him that the project had been on hold because the producer had been ill, this person said.

The duration of the purported illness coincides with Mr. Nakoula's bank-fraud trial and 21-month prison term.

Mr. Robinson said they did, in fact, make a full-length feature film, for around \$250,000.

The production was extremely haphazard, he said, and while the movie included more than 70 actors, only five were cast by the first day of shooting.

According to the federal court documents, Nakoula Basseley Nakoula lives in Cerritos, Calif. The telephone number used by the man calling himself Sam Bacile was registered to a user living at the same suburban Los Angeles address.

Mr. Nakoula was convicted of using fake names and real social security numbers to get bank and credit accounts to the tune of thousands of dollars.

The creation of the film itself is unlikely to have violated any laws. The First Amendment and subsequent Supreme Court decisions specifically protect speech even if it is offensive. The court has made exceptions only in narrow circumstances, such as upholding a ban on cross burning, which the court deemed to be the equivalent of a physical threat.

However, a violation of the terms of his supervised release—the federal court term for probation—for a past crime could, if proven, lead to a new jail or prison sentence. Court documents show that under Mr. Nakoula's terms of probation, he can't access online services without the approval of a probation officer. Another condition of his probation was that he "shall use only those computers, computer related devices, screen/user names, passwords, e-mail accounts, and ISPs approved by the Probation Officer."

According to court documents from the 2009 fraud case, law enforcement officials alleged Mr. Nakoula used credit cards in the names of other people, and opened a bank account using yet another name. He then deposited fraudulent checks into the account and withdrew money from the account, federal authorities alleged in the documents.

Mr. Nakoula was initially charged with three counts of fraud. He agreed to plead guilty to one bank-fraud charge, according to court records and prosecutors.

Mr. Nakoula served 21 months in prison and was released on June 22, 2011, prison records show. He was ordered to pay over \$794,000 restitution in the case. It was unclear if he made those payments.

Probation officials are also authorized to inspect and monitor Mr. Nakoula's use of computers or the Internet during the course of his supervised release, according to the court documents.

Of particular interest to officials now is that someone claiming to be Sam Bacile has repeatedly used the Internet in recent weeks, including to post the 14-minute trailer to YouTube. The U.S. Probation Office in Los Angeles declined to comment.

Much behind the movie appears to be a mixture of half-truths and misrepresentations. The most incendiary anti-Islamic language in the clip that is online appears to be voiced not by the actors, but as poorly synchronized voiceovers. People identifying themselves as cast and crew members said in interviews they had been duped.

The spark that elevated the video from the Internet's backwater appears to have been provided by Morris Sadek, an Egyptian-American Coptic activist living in the Washington, D.C., area. Mr. Sadek has

been an outspoken anti-Islamic activist in the U.S., where he runs a small group called the National American Coptic Assembly.

(top)

EDITORIAL / OPINION

Our Diplomats Deserve Better

September 14, 2012

New York Times

By Prudence Bushnell

Falls Church, Va. -- THERE is a black wall in a State Department lobby inscribed with the names of those who died while serving overseas. Every time I passed that wall after Al Qaeda blew up two American Embassies in East Africa in 1998, I thought of the 12 American and 32 Kenyan friends and colleagues who died on my watch as ambassador. I thought of my own journey that day down flights of stairs in the building next door to the embassy, after having been knocked out by the blast, of the people who risked their lives to save others, and of how we carried on under horrendous circumstances.

Now every time I pass the black marble wall, I will think of Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens and his colleagues who died after an attack on our consulate in Benghazi, Libya, this week.

Diplomats don't often make headlines until something horrible happens. Even then, it is policy and politics that get the attention. We had barely learned of the attack before talking heads began to expound on Middle East policies and the words administration officials used, or should have used, to uphold our national dignity. Where were the conversations about the diplomats who were actually carrying out those policies in faraway, often dangerous places, the people who take care of us despite the hardship and risk? Imagine what it must have been like trying to escape the raging fire in the Benghazi consulate or enduring hours of assault in the nearby annex waiting for relief from the Libyan government.

Diplomacy is a dangerous profession. You cannot exert influence by whispering in diplomatic code to your government counterparts behind closed doors. You do not spread American values - especially in places where passions are high, governments fragile and guns plentiful - by remote control from Washington. You have to get out from behind the walls and engage with people. We know this can put us in harm's way; our people in the Benghazi consulate knew it. And they did their jobs anyway.

That is because, hokey as it sounds, the people who represent us overseas really do believe they can make a difference. They confront violent behavior and strong passions with American leadership, smart power and peaceful means.

We must make that work safer. The reasons for violence change with time and place but the human effects are the same. For two years before we were blown up in Nairobi, Kenya, my team and I fought ("nagged" was the word State Department colleagues used) to have security threats and vulnerabilities addressed. We were too close to the street, an easy target. Washington's assessment was that things were O.K. Anyway, I was told, there was no money for a more secure embassy. What was Washington's assessment of our consulate in Benghazi? We may not like the image of American diplomats working out of fortified boxes, but we cannot let them work in buildings that can be overrun by attackers. This is a lesson our government still hasn't learned since 1979 in Tehran.

If the Benghazi tragedy traces the same journey we made from the rubble in Nairobi, heartfelt pronouncements will be made; the dead will be given due homage and then they will be buried. The press will alight on other stories. A Congressionally mandated accountability review board will determine what happened and what needs to be done to avoid such tragedies in the future. Easy fixes - changes to emergency action plans, minor security upgrades - will be made; expensive and hard ones will not.

The Foreign Service is short on people, and those people are rushed into the field short on training. We build concrete fortresses when we have to, but we don't invest in the mobile communications and security technology that would protect diplomats when they leave the embassy, as they must. What kinds of technology, systems, training and deployment do we need to get results through diplomacy in the 21st century? These are the difficult questions that will remain unanswered, while diplomats disappear from public view once again. Until the next time someone dies - then we see the same sorry response all over again.

But we can give meaning to this tragedy. What if President Obama and Mitt Romney exercised true leadership by explaining to Americans, including the families and friends of those who died in Benghazi, what diplomacy is all about? Why using words and deeds for peace is as important as using weapons. Why we value our diplomats and what we will do to make their jobs easier, if we cannot guarantee their absolute security.

It is a stretch, I know. Far easier to add some more concrete, declare our responsibilities to diplomats complete and move back to the fun stuff of making and debating policy, most of it domestic. The black wall will continue to accumulate names, diplomats will continue to represent our country on the cheap and nothing much will change. Like that scenario? If not, start demanding leadership. That is what Chris Stevens and his team were providing. Let's think about them and reciprocate.

Prudence Bushnell is a former United States ambassador to Kenya and Guatemala.
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What Libya Lost

September 14, 2012

New York Times

By Ethan Chorin

ON Wednesday morning, my colleagues and I were to meet in Benghazi with J. Christopher Stevens, the American ambassador to Libya, to discuss a plan for a new division of emergency medicine at Benghazi Medical Center, the largest and most modern hospital in eastern Libya. The meeting never took place. The night before, militants laid siege to the American Consulate in Benghazi, killing the ambassador and three other Americans. The ambassador was taken, without a pulse, to the hospital we hoped to upgrade.

The draft agreement we were working on was the kind of visionary effort to improve life in Libya that Ambassador Stevens liked - in this case, a collaboration between doctors in Boston and Benghazi, brokered by a nongovernmental organization that a Libyan-American and I had organized after the recent revolution. Our goal was a center that could also serve as a training facility for all of eastern Libya. It was the kind of public-private and Libyan-American partnership that Ambassador Stevens believed could help Libya move beyond decades of stagnation and despotism.

On Tuesday night, even as the men who would kill him were closing in, Ambassador Stevens told us by phone how happy he was that the project was nearing fruition. He told us it was important to show our government's support for such initiatives, and we made plans to meet with the medical center's director general, Dr. Fathi al-Jehani, at the hospital the next morning. Dr. Jehani himself had been a target of violence for his forward-thinking views.

About half an hour later, I called the ambassador's security detail to discuss the visit, only to hear the words "we've got a problem here" - with an alarming expletive inserted. The line went dead. And we were left to listen helplessly as the sounds of distant violence carried across the city to our hotel room - a long rocket-propelled grenade volley, and machine-gun fire that continued for the better part of an hour.

Ambassador Stevens arrived after midnight at Benghazi Medical Center, where we were to have met. Its emergency room staff, which included Libyan expatriates who had returned from well-paid jobs abroad, worked for 45 minutes to try to resuscitate him. It was no use.

The tragedies of this situation simply compound one another. For a forthcoming book about the Libyan revolution, I have interviewed scores of current and former Western officials, many of whom were either pessimistic about or indifferent to Libya's growing pains. In their eyes, Libya continues to be a sideshow of the broader Arab Spring.

Ambassador Stevens did not agree. I discussed Libya's future with him last spring in a Washington cafe, as he awaited confirmation as ambassador. He had already been the deputy chief of mission in Libya, and he had been the United States envoy to Benghazi during the dangerous early days of the revolution. So he knew Libya, and he believed that it could become one of the first full success stories of the Arab Spring - that Islamic radicalism there could be nipped in the bud if Western governments acted decisively to put the country on a path to stability and social progress.

Now, his death may derail the very processes he championed.

Mr. Stevens understood that Libyans had suffered under Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi, and that conflict and post-revolutionary instability were to be expected. He also understood that some, if not all, of the hatred that had pushed some of Libya's youths to join radical factions in Afghanistan and Iraq had sprung from years of neglect and oppression. Now, he felt, new opportunities needed to be created to wean these people away from ideologies rooted in hate.

No doubt that was one reason he made a point, as ambassador, of continuing to visit Benghazi, the East's largest city, despite the clear risks; there had been attacks on other high-level diplomats there in the previous months. It is a mystery at this point why the consulate compound was so lightly fortified, but I would not be surprised if Mr. Stevens had decided to stay overnight in Benghazi simply because his list of planned meetings with Libyans there was too long to be accomplished in one afternoon.

The morning after the attack on the consulate, my colleagues and I returned to the medical center, where we witnessed an outpouring of sadness and, as one physician put it, shame. The emergency room staff members who worked to save Mr. Stevens broke down in tears, as did the physician in charge. Some knew or had met Mr. Stevens; some had not. But all were aware that he had been a champion of Libya, and of Benghazi in particular, and that his death may have rolled back Benghazi's stupendous revolutionary accomplishments by months - even if it does not set off a period of heightened instability.

in eastern Libya. Many Libyans outside the hospital also offered condolences and expressed profound regret for America's loss.

In the West, we can now expect a strong temptation among governments and private enterprise to declare the Libyan experiment a failure, and to respond by disengaging, retreating or focusing only on the extirpation of radical elements. That would be a terrible mistake. The attack has already entered into the American presidential debate in a base fashion, with Mitt Romney's first instinct being to criticize President Obama over the timing of his denunciation of the attack. But Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton got it right when she spoke of the Libyan people as allies in the fight against extremism.

The gravest mistake would be for the United States to write off Libya as an irredeemable terrorist haven, or for politicians in Washington to regret having intervened in support of Libya's rebels. Libya is still far better off today than it was under Qaddafi. The grip of fear has been broken. Election posters festoon the country. Election schedules have been met. And there is a rich expression of individual opinions.

Nevertheless, the Libyan people need support to consolidate gains, and to continue a fight against largely foreign-financed radicals who wish to hijack the revolution in the name of intolerance. And the United States must help the Libyans do that. The loss of Ambassador Stevens will, I hope, goad the Libyan government into matching its discipline about election schedules with far bolder steps to crack down on extremists and disarm the country's militias. And Libya should press the American government for even more support in that effort, even as it encourages American organizations to find common cause with their Libyan counterparts to improve the lives of Libya's citizens.

This week the United States lost one of its most admirable public servants, and I can report that at least some Libyans are profoundly aware that the loss is theirs as well. As we arrived at the airport under armed escort, a member of the airport ground crew said: "Today I will go home, I will take off these clothes, and I will put on only black. As a Libyan, I am so sorry this has happened."

Ethan Chorin is the author of "Exit the Colonel: The Hidden History of the Libyan Revolution," and a co-founder of the Avicenna Group, a nonprofit organization working on Libya's medical facilities.
(top)

Our Man In Benghazi

September 14, 2012

New York Times

By Roger Cohen

LONDON - Chris Stevens, the American ambassador to Libya killed in an attack on the consulate in Benghazi, represented the best of the U.S. Foreign Service. He was smart, dedicated and adroit. He loved his work and believed in its capacity for good. He knew history's hold on Middle Eastern minds yet dismissed the notion that ancient conflict was insurmountable. Other cultures fascinated him even as his own inspired him. No American did more to end the tyranny of Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi. Like most brave people he had a great sense of humor.

The fanatics who killed him represented the worst of Islam. They attacked the consulate in the midst of Muslim outrage over an amateurish American video portraying the Prophet Muhammad as a buffoon of indiscriminate and consuming sexual appetites. But no religious affront, however vile, can justify killing of a kind that jihadists have made only too familiar over the past two decades.

The makers, funders and promoters of the video, called "Innocence of Muslims," represent the worst of an American bigotry whose central tenet is that Islam is evil, a religion bent on the takeover of the world and followed by people who are all violent extremists, Jew-haters and sexual predators.

The movie, a procession of insults to Muslims against a background of comically flimsy sets, is of a piece with the ideology, praised at times by Republicans including Newt Gingrich, that has sought to portray Shariah law as a mortal threat to America, perceived stealth jihadists knocking at every door from Phoenix to Peoria, and worked hard to persuade the world that Barack Obama is a Muslim.

Whoever made the film - it was uploaded to YouTube in July by somebody calling himself Sam Bacile and identifying himself as an Israeli-American real estate developer - was driven by the visceral loathing of Islam that forms a significant current in post-9/11 right-wing thinking in the United States.

So perhaps it is no surprise that Mitt Romney, the Republican presidential candidate, would attempt to pander to that thinking in his response to the killing of Mr. Stevens and three of his staff. He claimed the Obama administration's first response was "to sympathize with those who waged the attacks," called it "disgraceful," and said "apology for America's values is never the right course."

Huh?

Even coming from a man who on a brief trip abroad in late July lost no opportunity to put his foot in his mouth, blundering into squabbles with the British and the Palestinians, this was heavy-handed. In fact, to use Romney's word, it was disgraceful.

The Obama administration never expressed sympathy for the assailants. It never apologized for American values. What the Cairo embassy did, as violence brewed in the Egyptian capital and well before the Benghazi attack, was to condemn "actions by those who abuse the universal right of free speech to hurt the religious beliefs of others" - specifically Muslims.

Since when was extreme bigotry that portrays the followers of one of the world's great religions as child molesters an American value? Religious tolerance is as fundamental an American value as free speech. For Romney to offer implicit defense of a scurrilous movie in the name of free speech, while misrepresenting the Obama administration's actions and offering not a word about hatred toward the world's more than 1.5 billion Muslims, suggests he is deluded or desperate or both.

As a free-speech absolutist I defend the right of Bacile - or whoever - to make the video. It is equally important that the United States says what it thinks of such bile. President Obama got it right saying the United States "rejects efforts to denigrate" others' religious beliefs, while expressing unequivocal opposition to the "senseless violence" that killed Stevens.

This September surprise has given the world cause to appreciate the cool head in the White House and worry about the hothead who aspires to replace him. Romney, in Jacques Chirac's immortal phrase, "lost a good opportunity to keep quiet."

His words reflected a shoot-from-the-hip, America-first approach to the world that will not fly in a time of deep interdependency. Two scarring wars have demonstrated that.

Stevens understood the interdependency. He loved his country but did not seek to impose it. Last year, on July 4, shortly after I saw him in Benghazi, he sent a note to family and friends as the war to unseat Qaddafi raged:

"Greetings, all," Stevens wrote. "I hope you are enjoying a great 4th with plenty of beer, ice cream, hamburgers and Chinese fireworks. I remember well the 'sparklers' we used to have in Grass Valley as little tots, and running around the lawn with abandon, catching our hair and eyebrows on fire." He had celebrated Independence Day by hosting a party with "an entire lamb, grilled chicken, Arab salads and pastries," ending with remarks expressing "our hope that Libyans would celebrate their freedom soon, too."

Stevens died for American values. The least Romney might have done was avoid misrepresenting them. His terrible death was a rebuke to the quest for squalid political capital and a demand for reflection on the best of America.

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Belated Response From Egypt

September 14, 2012

New York Times

The response by President Mohamed Morsi of Egypt to the murder of the American ambassador in Libya and the attacks on the United States Embassy in Cairo should have been swift and unequivocal.

Condemn the violence, express condolences for the killings and pledge to strengthen security at foreign missions.

That's what Libyan leaders did.

Instead, Mr. Morsi initially issued only a mild rebuke of the rioters - on Facebook. His primary concern was railing against a hatemongering anti-Muslim video that provided an excuse for the protests. It took until Thursday - after a telephone call from President Obama - before Mr. Morsi personally condemned the killing of Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens and three other Americans in Libya and vowed to protect foreign embassies in Cairo. As the new president of an aspiring democracy, Mr. Morsi is still trying to balance competing forces, including his own party, the Muslim Brotherhood, and the harder line Salafis, both of which have a history of antipathy toward the United States. The Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafis suggested on Thursday that they would work to calm tensions. They will have a chance to prove that on Friday when more protests are planned. Mr. Morsi should leave no doubt that violence will not be tolerated.

Otherwise, there is little chance of rescuing Egypt from its deep economic hole. The United States has provided Cairo as much as \$2 billion a year, though some members of Congress are calling for an end to such aid. If Americans and other Westerners cannot trust that Egypt is reasonably safe, there is little reason to back a \$4.8 billion International Monetary Fund loan or follow through on promised debt relief and investment. Khairat el-Shater, a top Muslim Brotherhood leader, in a letter to the editor of The Times, expressed the hope that the relationship the Americans and Egyptians have worked to build in the last few months can survive the week's events. We hope so, too. Both countries will pay a price if they let extremists push them apart.

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Husain Haqqani: Manipulated Outrage and Misplaced Fury

September 14, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By HUSAIN HAQQANI

The attacks on U.S. diplomatic missions this week—beginning in Egypt and Libya, and moving to Yemen and other Muslim countries—came under cover of riots against an obscure online video insulting Islam and the Prophet Muhammad. But the mob violence and assaults should be seen for what they really are: an effort by Islamists to garner support and mobilize their base by exacerbating anti-Western sentiments.

When Secretary of State Hillary Clinton tried to calm Muslims Thursday by denouncing the video, she was unwittingly playing along with the ruse the radicals set up. The United States would have been better off focusing on the only outrage that was of legitimate interest to the American government: the lack of respect—shown by a complaisant Egyptian government and other Islamists—for U.S. diplomatic missions.

Protests orchestrated on the pretext of slights and offenses against Islam have been part of Islamist strategy for decades. Iran's ayatollahs built an entire revolution around anti-Americanism. While the Iranian revolution was underway in 1979, Pakistan's Islamists whipped up crowds by spreading rumors that the Americans had forcibly occupied Islam's most sacred site, the Ka'aba or the Grand Mosque in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. Pakistani protesters burned the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad.

Violent demonstrations in many parts of the Muslim world after the 1989 fatwa—or religious condemnation—of a novel by Salman Rushdie, or after the Danish daily Jyllands-Posten published cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad in 2005, also did not represent spontaneous outrage. In each case, the insult to Islam or its prophet was first publicized by Islamists themselves so they could use it as justification for planned violence.

Once mourning over the death of the U.S. ambassador to Libya and others subsides, we will hear familiar arguments in the West. Some will rightly say that Islamist sensibilities cannot and should not lead to self-censorship here. Others will point out that freedom of expression should not be equated with a freedom to offend. They will say: Just as a non-Jew, out of respect for other religious beliefs, does not exercise his freedom to desecrate a Torah scroll, similar respect should be extended to Muslims and what they deem sacred.

But this debate, as thoughtful as it may be, is a distraction from what is really going on. It ignores the political intent of Islamists for whom every perceived affront to Islam is an opportunity to exploit a wedge issue for their own empowerment.

As for affronts, the Western mainstream is, by and large, quite respectful toward Muslims, millions of whom have adopted Europe and North America as their home and enjoy all the freedoms the West has to offer, including the freedom to worship. Insignificant or unnoticed videos and publications would have no impact on anyone, anywhere, if the Islamists did not choose to publicize them for radical effect.

And insults, real or hyped, are not the problem. At the heart of Muslim street violence is the frustration of the world's Muslims over their steady decline for three centuries, a decline that has coincided with the rise and spread of the West's military, economic and intellectual prowess.

During the 800 years of Muslim ascendancy beginning in the eighth century—in Southern Europe, North Africa and much of Western Asia—Muslims did not riot to protest non-Muslim insults against Islam or its prophet. There is no historic record of random attacks against non-Muslim targets in retaliation for a non-Muslim insulting Prophet Muhammad, though there are many books derogatory toward Islam's prophet that were written in the era of Islam's great empires. Muslims under Turkey's Ottomans, for example, did not attack non-Muslim envoys (the medieval equivalent of today's embassies) or churches upon hearing of real or rumored European sacrilege against their religion.

Clearly, then, violent responses to perceived injury are not integral to Islam. A religion is what its followers make it, and Muslims opting for violence have chosen to paint their faith as one that is prone to anger. Frustration with their inability to succeed in the competition between nations also has led some Muslims to seek symbolic victories.

Yet the momentary triumph of burning another country's flag or setting on fire a Western business or embassy building is a poor but widespread substitute for global success that eludes the modern world's 1.5 billion Muslims. Violent protest represents the lower rung of the ladder of rage; terrorism is its higher form.

Islamists almost by definition have a vested interest in continuously fanning the flames of Muslim victimhood. For Islamists, wrath against the West is the basis for their claim to the support of Muslim masses, taking attention away from societal political and economic failures. For example, the 57 member states of the Organization of Islamic Conference account for one-fifth of the world's population but their combined gross domestic product is less than 7% of global output—a harsh reality for which Islamists offer no solution.

Even after recent developments that were labeled the Arab Spring, few Muslim-majority countries either fulfill—or look likely to—the criteria for freedom set by the independent group Freedom House. Mainstream discourse among Muslims blames everyone but themselves for this situation. The image of an ascendant West belittling Islam with the view to eliminate it serves as a convenient explanation for Muslim weakness.

Once the Muslim world embraces freedom of expression, it will be able to recognize the value of that freedom even for those who offend Muslim sensibilities. More important: Only in a free democratic environment will the world's Muslims be able to debate the causes of their powerlessness, which stirs in them greater anger than any specific action on the part of Islam's Western detractors.

Until then, the U.S. would do well to remember Osama bin Laden's comment not long after the Sept. 11 attacks: "When people see a strong horse and a weak horse, by nature they will like the strong horse." America should do nothing that enables Islamists to portray the nation as the weak horse.

Mr. Haqqani is professor of international relations at Boston University and senior fellow at the Hudson Institute. He served as Pakistan's ambassador to the U.S. in 2008-11.

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The Proper US Response To Cairo Attack

September 14, 2012

Washington Post

By Robert Kagan

A handful of Republicans pushed Wednesday to cut off aid to Libya and Egypt. Fortunately, most Republicans and Democrats in Congress reject the idea. In Libya, the government is largely secular and pro-American. It is also weak and unable to preserve order against the many forces - from remnants of the Gaddafi era to radical Islamic militants - that challenge its authority. Cutting off support isn't the answer. If anything, we should be increasing assistance, especially security assistance, to help Libyans make their country safer, for themselves and us.

The bigger and more important challenge is Egypt. The attacks on the U.S. Embassy in Cairo were not carried out by or at the instigation of the elected Egyptian government. As The Post's David Ignatius rightly points out, many of the protesters who stormed the compound Tuesday oppose the current government. But that government's failure to protect the embassy, a core international obligation, and President Mohamed Morsi's failure to condemn the attacks are worrisome.

There is also reason to be concerned about the Morsi government's policies more generally. The record is mixed.

- Egypt is certainly more democratic than it was under the Mubarak regime, which the United States supported for 30 years. The month-old Morsi government has respected Egypt's long-standing peace treaty with Israel. When Morsi traveled to Iran recently, he infuriated his hosts by denouncing tyranny and calling for action against Tehran's ally in Syria. The Egyptian government's primary interest has been to seek assistance for its faltering economy, and it has been negotiating responsibly with the International Monetary Fund. This is all to the good.

Some conservatives are starting to make a glib comparison between the evolution of Egypt today and the Iranian revolution of 1979. This is a faulty analysis. Egypt is not declaring jihad on the West, and Morsi is not Ayatollah Khomeini. We need to avoid an indiscriminating Islamophobia and distinguish between those who want to kill Americans and those who may dislike the West but are primarily interested in rebuilding their societies after decades of dictatorship.

As with many nascent democracies around the world, Islamic and non-Islamic, the transition in Egypt is incomplete. Some signs give reason for hope, but there are also signs of undemocratic tendencies. The Morsi government has been censoring media and hounding political opponents. Coptic Christians are justifiably scared. Women have reason to worry about whether their rights will be respected.

The United States needs to strike an intelligent balance. If Egypt's economy crumbles, is the nation going to become less radical? Is it more likely to uphold the peace treaty with Israel? Is it more likely to be a force for moderation in the greater Middle East?

The United States and its friends in the region have a vital stake in the success of Egypt's transition. U.S. policies should aim to support the forces in Egypt - and there are many - that want a democratic system and a healthy economy. That means providing aid, ideally even more aid than is planned. But it also means making clear to Egyptians what that aid is for. U.S. support should be conditioned on the Egyptian government's behavior, both internationally and domestically. The Morsi government needs to understand that it will not get U.S. assistance, or much help from the rest of the international community, if it clamps down on freedoms at home, persecutes religious minorities such as the Copts or fails to meet its basic international obligations.

The Obama administration has not been wrong to reach out to the popularly elected government in Egypt. The Muslim Brotherhood won that election, and no one doubts that it did so fairly. We either support democracy or we don't. But the administration has not been forthright enough in making clear, publicly as well as privately, what it expects of that government.

Out of fear of making the United States the issue in Egyptian politics, the Obama administration, like past administrations, has been too reticent about stating clearly the expectations that we and the democratic world have for Egyptian democracy: a sound constitution that protects the rights of all individuals, an open press, a free and vital opposition, an independent judiciary and a thriving civil society. President Obama owes it to the Egyptian people to stand up for these principles. Congress needs to support democracy in Egypt by providing aid that ensures it advances those principles and, therefore, U.S. interests.

Meanwhile, politicians and commentators would be wise to tone down the apocalyptic rhetoric. This is an election year, and there is much to criticize in the way the administration has handled events in the Middle East. But a toxic mix is brewing between the natural impulses of political warfare and a tendency, perhaps still on the fringes, to tar all Islamic governments with the same brush and tell them all to go to hell. Sorry, we can't afford to.

This is not the time for a "who lost Egypt?" debate. Egypt, Libya, Tunisia and Yemen are far from lost. The only smart course is to redouble our efforts and use the considerable influence the United States still has to try to shape a region that remains of vital concern to Americans and the health and stability of the international order that the United States upholds.

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The Abandonment

September 14, 2012

[Washington Post](#)

By Charles Krauthammer

There are two positions one can take regarding the Iranian nuclear program: (a) it doesn't matter, we can deter them; or (b) it does matter, we must stop them.

In my view, the first position - that we can contain Iran as we did the Soviet Union - is totally wrong, a product of wishful thinking and misread history. But at least it's internally coherent.

What is incoherent is President Obama's position. He declares the Iranian program intolerable - "I do not have a policy of containment; I have a policy to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon" - yet stands by as Iran rapidly approaches nuclearization.

A policy so incoherent, so knowingly and obviously contradictory, is a declaration of weakness and passivity. And this, as Anthony Cordesman, James Phillips and others have argued, can increase the chance of war. It creates, writes Cordesman, "the same conditions that helped trigger World War II - years of negotiations and threats, where the threats failed to be taken seriously until war became all too real."

This has precipitated the current U.S.-Israeli crisis, sharpened by the president's rebuff of the Israeli prime minister's request for a meeting during his upcoming U.S. visit. Ominous new developments; no Obama response. Alarm bells going off everywhere; Obama plays deaf.

The old arguments, old excuses, old pretensions have become ridiculous:

(1) Sanctions. The director of national intelligence testified to Congress at the beginning of the year that they had zero effect in slowing the nuclear program. Now the International Atomic Energy Agency reports (Aug. 30) that the Iranian nuclear program, far from slowing, is actually accelerating. Iran has doubled the number of high-speed centrifuges at Fordow, the facility outside Qom built into a mountain to make it impregnable to air attack.

This week, the agency reported Iranian advances in calculating the explosive power of an atomic warhead. It noted once again Iran's refusal to allow inspection of its weapons testing facility at Parchin and cited satellite evidence of Iranian attempts to clean up and hide what's gone on there.

The administration's ritual response is that it has imposed the toughest sanctions ever. So what? They're a means, not an end. And they've had no effect on the nuclear program.

(2) Negotiations. The latest, supposedly last-ditch round of talks in Istanbul, Baghdad, then Moscow has completely collapsed. The West even conceded to Iran the right to enrich - shattering a decade-long consensus and six Security Council resolutions demanding its cessation.

Iran's response? Contemptuous rejection.

Why not? The mullahs have strung Obama along for more than three years and still see no credible threat emanating from the one country that could disarm them.

(3) Diplomatic isolation. The administration boasts that Iran is becoming increasingly isolated. Really? Just two weeks ago, 120 nations showed up in Tehran for a meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement - against U.S. entreaties not to attend. Even the U.N. secretary-general attended - after the administration implored him not to.

Which shows you what American entreaties are worth today. And the farcical nature of Iran's alleged isolation.

The Obama policy is in shambles. Which is why Cordesman argues that the only way to prevent a nuclear Iran without war is to establish a credible military threat to make Iran recalculate and reconsider. That means U.S. red lines: deadlines beyond which Washington will not allow itself to be strung, as well as benchmark actions that would trigger a response, such as the further hardening of Iran's nuclear facilities to the point of invulnerability and, therefore, irreversibility.

Which made all the more shocking Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's dismissal last Sunday of the very notion of any U.S. red lines. No deadlines. No bright-line action beyond which Iran must not go. The sleeping giant continues to slumber. And to wait - as the administration likes to put it, "for Iran to live up to its international obligations."

This is beyond feckless. The Obama policy is a double game: a rhetorical commitment to stopping Iran, yet real-life actions that everyone understands will allow Iran to go nuclear.

Yet at the same time that it does nothing, the administration warns Israel sternly, repeatedly, publicly, even threateningly not to strike the Iranian nuclear program. With zero prospect of his policy succeeding, Obama insists on Israeli inaction, even as Iran races to close the window of opportunity for any successful attack.

Not since its birth six decades ago has Israel been so cast adrift by its closest ally.
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RELEASED IN FULL**DAILY PRESS CLIPS FOR
WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 2012****DOMESTIC AGENDA****National Schools Debate Is on Display in Chicago**

September 11, 2012

New York Times

By MOTOKO RICH

CHICAGO — What started here as a traditional labor fight over pay, benefits and working conditions has exploded into a dramatic illustration of the national debate over how public school districts should rate teachers. ([link](#))

ECONOMIC RECOVERY**Moody's Warns That U.S. May Face Debt Downgrade**

September 11, 2012

New York Times

By JONATHAN WEISMAN

WASHINGTON — Congressional leaders dug in their heels on Tuesday against any quick deal to resolve a looming fiscal disaster before the election, even as a major ratings agency warned that it would downgrade the government's debt if no solution was found by year's end. ([link](#))

USUN IN THE NEWS**Volunteers Honor Sept. 11 Anniversary By Helping Veterans**

September 11, 2012

NY1 News

Volunteers marked the 11th anniversary of the Sept. 11 terror attacks by helping some of the city's veterans. ([link](#))

UNITED NATIONS**Envoy Brahimi To Meet Assad In Syria: UN Chief**

September 12, 2012

AFP

UN chief Ban Ki-moon said Tuesday that the new UN-Arab League envoy Lakhdar Brahimi will meet Syrian President Bashar al-Assad when he travels to the conflict-ravaged country. ([link](#))

U.N. Details Flows Of Syrian Refugees

September 12, 2012

New York Times

By Nick Cumming-Bruce

GENEVA - As fighting continues in Syria, an "extraordinary acceleration" in movements of refugees is compounding the difficulties for humanitarian relief efforts, the United Nations refugee agency said on Tuesday. ([link](#))

Syrian Refugees Seeking Aid From UN Top 250,000 In 4 Countries

September 12, 2012

Associated Press

GENEVA - The U.N. refugee agency says the number of Syrian refugees seeking its help now tops a quarter-million. ([link](#))

REVIEW AUTHORITY: Archie Bolster, Senior Reviewer

U.N. says Liberia lacks resolve to stamp out blood-diamond trade

September 11, 2012

Reuters

By Michelle Nichols

UNITED NATIONS - Liberia is showing only limited commitment to efforts to stop the trade in blood diamonds that has fueled conflicts in Africa, U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said in a report on Tuesday. ([link](#))

TOP STORIES**Israeli Sharpens Call for United States to Set Iran Trigger**

September 12, 2012

New York Times

By DAVID E. SANGER and ISABEL KERSHNER

WASHINGTON — Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel inserted himself into the most contentious foreign policy issue of the American presidential campaign on Tuesday, criticizing the Obama administration for refusing to set clear "red lines" on Iran's nuclear progress that would prompt the United States to undertake a military strike. As a result, he said, the administration has no "moral right" to restrain Israel from taking military action of its own. ([link](#))

Israel Blasts U.S. Over Iran

September 12, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By JOSHUA MITNICK And JAY SOLOMON

TEL AVIV—The rift between top U.S. and Israeli leaders appeared to deepen Tuesday as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu leveled the sharpest attacks in years by an Israeli leader against Washington, over differences on how to address Iran's nuclear program. ([link](#))

Netanyahu: Without Ultimatum, US Has No "Moral Right" To Stop Israel From Attacking Iran

September 12, 2012

Washington Post

By Karen DeYoung And Joel Greenberg

The deepening dispute between the United States and Israel over how to stop Iran's nuclear program broke into public view Tuesday, with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu suggesting that the Obama administration did not have the "moral right" to forestall military action. ([link](#))

U.S. ambassador to Libya killed in Benghazi attack

September 12, 2012

Reuters

By Tamim Elyan and Omar al-Mosmari

BENGHAZI, Libya - The U.S. ambassador to Libya and three other embassy staff were killed in a rocket attack on their car, a Libyan official said, as they were rushed from a consular building stormed by militants denouncing a U.S.-made film insulting the Prophet Mohammad. ([link](#))

Anger Over A Film Fuels Anti-American Attacks In Libya And Egypt

September 12, 2012

New York Times

By David D. Kirkpatrick

CAIRO - Protesters angry over an amateurish American-made video denouncing Islam attacked the United States Consulate in Benghazi, Libya, on Tuesday, killing a State Department officer, while Egyptian demonstrators stormed over the fortified walls of the United States Embassy here. ([link](#))

Protesters Kill One In Attacks At US Consulate In Libya, Embassy In Egypt

September 12, 2012

[Washington Post](#)

By Michael Birnbaum And Haitham Tabei

EL-ARISH, Egypt - U.S. diplomatic compounds came under attack in two Muslim countries on Tuesday, with a State Department employee killed in the assault on a consulate in Libya. ([link](#))

AFRICA

Congo

HRW: Rebels In Congo Commit Widespread War Crimes

September 12, 2012

[Associated Press](#)

By Melanie Gouby

GOMA, Congo - The 25-year-old lay on a hospital bed in the Congolese city of Goma, his leg wrapped in a bandage tinted by the blood still seeping from his bullet wound. ([link](#))

Kenya

Kenya Curfew Fails to Stem Clashes

September 12, 2012

[Wall Street Journal](#)

By IDIL ABSHIR

NAIROBI—Clashes between two tribal communities in Kenya's restive Tana River area erupted again on Tuesday despite a dusk-to-dawn curfew, leaving four people dead, in violence that has driven out residents and brought renewed scrutiny of the country's security situation. ([link](#))

Somalia

Fresh Hope For Somalia After New President Elected

September 12, 2012

[AFP](#)

The election of a new president raised hope Tuesday that Somalia could emerge from two decades of civil war, but Islamist rebels and observers reminded Hassan Sheikh Mohamud of the tough road ahead. ([link](#))

ASIA

Burma

Myanmar Students Swell Ranks Of Land Grab Protest

September 12, 2012

[Associated Press](#)

YANGON, Myanmar - Students have joined farmers and other protesters against a land grab for a copper mining project in northwestern Myanmar. ([link](#))

China

China Accuses Japan Of Stealing After Purchase Of Group Of Disputed Islands

September 12, 2012

New York Times

By Jane Perlez

TIANJIN, China - The Chinese government accused Japan on Tuesday of stealing a group of disputed islands in the East China Sea, hours after the Japanese government announced that it had bought them from their private Japanese owners for nearly \$30 million. ([link](#))

China Sends Patrol Ships To Contested Islands After Japan Buys Them

September 12, 2012

Washington Post

By Chico Harlan And Jia Lynn Yang

TOKYO - China on Tuesday sent two patrol ships to waters near a remote and disputed island chain in a show of its "undisputable sovereignty," Chinese state media said, escalating a territorial showdown between Asia's two largest economies. ([link](#))

Xi's Absence Complicates Planning for Party Meeting

September 11, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By JEREMY PAGE

BEIJING—Vice President Xi Jinping's continuing absence from public life is throwing another wrench into preparations for China's leadership change this fall when Mr. Xi is due to take over the nation's top job, according to party insiders, analysts and diplomats. ([link](#))

NEA

Iran

Exclusive: New Intelligence On Iran Nuke Work

September 12, 2012

Associated Press

By George Jahn

VIENNA - The U.N. atomic agency has received new and significant intelligence over the past month that Iran has moved further toward the ability to build a nuclear weapon, diplomats tell The Associated Press. ([link](#))

Nations Try to Increase Pressure on Iran

September 12, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By DAVID CRAWFORD

The U.S. and other countries are pushing the United Nations nuclear watchdog to step up pressure on Tehran amid what they said were new indications that it has continued to work on developing capabilities to build a nuclear weapon. ([link](#))

Iraq**Syria's War Animates Zealots in Iraq**

September 12, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By ALIA. NABHAN And SAM DAGHER

AL-QAIM, Iraq—The Syrian war is fanning a sectarian backlash in neighboring Iraq, as rising violence attributed to al Qaeda on both sides of the border pushes the government in Baghdad closer to its counterpart in Damascus. ([link](#))

Iraq Opens Controversial Refugee Camp To Diplomats

September 12, 2012

Associated Press

By Lara Jakes

BAGHDAD - Iraq offered foreign diplomats on Tuesday a rare glimpse at a camp that is the new temporary home of an Iranian exile opposition group that has a long-running feud with Baghdad, winning from the envoys cautious praise of the conditions there. ([link](#))

Israel

Obama Denies Refusal To Meet Netanyahu

September 12, 2012

Washington Times

By Dave Boyer

Seeking to calm a growing rift over Iran's nuclearization, President Obama spoke by phone to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for an hour Tuesday night and later denied reports that he was refusing to meet Mr. Netanyahu in the U.S. this month. ([link](#))

Israeli Official Cites Syrian Raid To Justify Attack On Iranian Nuke Sites

September 12, 2012

Washington Times

By Abraham Rabinovich

JERUSALEM - An Israeli official has cited a 2007 airstrike on a Syrian nuclear reactor - which Israel has never publicly acknowledged - to justify the Jewish state's right to launch a unilateral attack on Iran's nuclear facilities if the U.S. refrains from action. ([link](#))

Egypt

Egypt Trying To Persuade Iran To Drop Assad

September 12, 2012

Associated Press

By Hamza Hendawi

CAIRO - Newly activist Egypt is trying to convince Iran to drop its unquestioned support of Syria's embattled President Bashar Assad in order to end that country's bloody civil war in exchange for help in easing Tehran's regional isolation at a time of mounting pressure on it over its disputed nuclear program. ([link](#))

Egypt denies in talks to buy Iranian oil

September 12, 2012

Reuters

CAIRO - Egypt denied on Tuesday comments attributed to Iranian Oil Minister Rostam Qasemi that it was in talks to buy Iranian crude oil. ([link](#))

Lebanon

U.S. urges Lebanon to prevent Iran, Syria sanctions evasion

September 12, 2012

Reuters

BEIRUT - U.S. Deputy Treasury Secretary Neal Wolin urged Lebanese leaders and bankers in Beirut on Tuesday to ensure their country was not used by Iran and Syria to evade financial sanctions. ([link](#))

Palestinian Territories**Salam Fayyad Unveils Price, Tax Cuts To Stem Growing West Bank Protests**

September 12, 2012

Washington Post

By Joel Greenberg

RAMALLAH, West Bank - Scrambling to head off intensifying protests against the high cost of living in the West Bank, the prime minister of the Palestinian Authority, Salam Fayyad, announced price and tax cuts Tuesday and said his government was doing its best to alleviate economic hardship. ([link](#))

Syria**Wounded Flood Hospitals In Syria's Largest City**

September 12, 2012

Associated Press

By Paul Schemm

ALEPPO, Syria - It had been a calm day in Aleppo's Shifa Hospital, said Dr. Osman al-Haj Osman, his face etched with exhaustion from just three hours of sleep. Then, a man burst in bearing the shrieking bundle of a 6-year-old girl who'd had a machine-gun bullet rip through both her knees.

Two months into the battle for Syria's largest city, civilians are still bearing the brunt of the daily assaults of helicopter gunships, roaring jets and troops fighting in the streets. ([link](#))

Yemen**Car Bomb Kills 12 In Yemen, But Targeted Minister Escapes Harm**

September 12, 2012

New York Times

By Nasser Arrabyee And Alan Cowell

SANA, Yemen - A car bomb exploded Tuesday alongside a convoy of vehicles used by Yemen's defense minister, killing seven bodyguards and five civilians in the heart of the capital, Sana, while the minister escaped unharmed, government and hospital officials said. The attack came one day after a top operative of Al Qaeda in Yemen was killed in what Yemeni officials called an American drone strike.

([link](#))**Yemen's president replaces security chiefs after Sanaa attack**

September 12, 2012

Reuters

SANAA - Yemen's president replaced security officials and some ministers late on Tuesday, state media reported, in an apparent move to reduce the influence of former leader Ali Abdullah Saleh following an attempt on the defense minister's life. ([link](#))

SCA**Afghanistan****Western And Afghan Officials Split Over Karzai Nomination For Spy Chief**

September 12, 2012

New York Times

By Richard A. Oppel Jr.

KABUL, Afghanistan - President Hamid Karzai's determination to make a close aide, Asadullah Khalid, his next intelligence chief has divided Western officials here, some of whom say they are troubled by -

allegations of torture and drug trafficking against Mr. Khalid and worry that in such a powerful role he would be a step back for the country. ([link](#))

Pakistan

Almost 200 Die in 2 Pakistan Fires

September 12, 2012

[New York Times](#)

By SALMAN MASOOD

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan — At least 191 people were killed when fires engulfed two factories in two major cities, renewing concerns about lax building safety measures and dismal working conditions for factory workers in Pakistan. ([link](#))

WHA/EUR

Cuba

American Held In Cuba Is In Poor Health, Wife Says

September 12, 2012

[Washington Post](#)

By Anne Gearan

An American imprisoned in Cuba for nearly three years is in poor health and may not survive to serve out the remainder of his 15-year sentence, his wife said Tuesday after visiting him last week. ([link](#))

Russia

Russia Labels Kosovo 'Quasi-state' Without Legal Existence

September 12, 2012

[AFP](#)

Russia said Tuesday it still considers Kosovo to be a quasi-state without legal existence after the end of supervision by an international body, backing Serbia's refusal to recognise the territory. ([link](#))

EDITORIAL / OPINION

A Pointless Blacklisting

September 12, 2012

[New York Times](#)

By Alex Strick Van Linschoten And Felix Kuehn

LAST week, the United States designated the Taliban-affiliated Haqqani network a "foreign terrorist organization," placing it alongside Hamas and Al Qaeda. But to what end? ([link](#))

Obama to Israel: You're On Your Own

September 12, 2012

[Wall Street Journal](#)

Does President Obama want Israel to bomb Iran before the election? If we had more faith in this Administration's competence, we'd be tempted to think so. ([link](#))

Seven Lean Years Of Peacemaking

September 12, 2012

[New York Times](#)

By Daniel Levy

SEVEN years ago today, the Israeli flag was lowered over the Gaza Strip after approximately 7,500 Israeli settlers left or were forcibly removed. ([link](#))

The Leader Vanishes

September 12, 2012

Wall Street Journal

The 11-day disappearance of Chinese Vice President Xi Jinping brings to mind the 1938 Alfred Hitchcock classic "The Lady Vanishes." We're not suggesting that the man who will soon become China's paramount leader was abducted aboard a train, but that's a more plausible explanation than many of the rumors circulating in Beijing. ([link](#))

Where Is China's Heir Apparent Xi Jinping?

September 12, 2012

Washington Post

The heir apparent to China's leadership as of Tuesday had not been seen in public since Sept. 1. He went missing at a sensitive moment. The 18th Congress of the Communist Party, which is expected to elevate him to the top position of general secretary, is due to be held within weeks - though, curiously, no date has been announced. Scandals involving party leaders - including the alleged murder of a British businessman by the spouse of one boss and a fatal Ferrari crash by the son of another - have raised questions about whether the carefully orchestrated transition is off-track. Mr. Xi canceled meetings with four foreign leaders in a week, including Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and the Danish prime minister, with no explanation. ([link](#))

In China We (Don't) Trust

September 12, 2012

New York Times

By Thomas L. Friedman

Hangzhou, China -- One of the standard lines about China's economy is that the Chinese are good at copying, but they could never invent a Hula-Hoop. It's not in their DNA, we are told, and their rote education system reinforces that tendency. I'm wondering about that: How is it that a people who invented papermaking, gunpowder, fireworks and the magnetic compass suddenly only became capable of assembling iPods? I'm wondering if what's missing in China today is not a culture of innovation but something more basic: trust. ([link](#))

DOMESTIC AGENDA**National Schools Debate Is on Display in Chicago**

September 11, 2012

New York Times

By MOTOKO RICH

CHICAGO — What started here as a traditional labor fight over pay, benefits and working conditions has exploded into a dramatic illustration of the national debate over how public school districts should rate teachers.

At stake are profound policy questions about how teachers should be granted tenure, promoted or fired, as well as the place standardized tests will have in the lives of elementary and high school students.

One of the main sticking points in the negotiations here between the teachers union and Mayor Rahm Emanuel is a new teacher evaluation system that gives significant and increasing weight to student performance on standardized tests. Personnel decisions would be based on those evaluations.

Over the last few years, a majority of states have adopted similar systems, spurred by the desire to qualify for the Obama administration's Race to the Top education grants. The Education Commission of the States says that 30 states require that evaluations include evidence of student achievement on tests, and at least 13, and the District of Columbia, use achievement measured by test scores for half or more of a teacher's rating.

Proponents say these measures are needed to improve teaching in a country where 33 percent of fourth graders are not reading at grade level and about one-quarter of public high school students do not graduate on time, if at all. They say the new rating systems will help districts identify the best and worst teachers.

These efforts are stirring skepticism and anger among teachers, some of whom express a sense that those behind the new evaluations know little about what it is like to be in a classroom. Others fear that heavy reliance on scores will turn schools into test-taking factories.

That sentiment certainly permeated the picket lines and rallies in Chicago this week.

"Children are so much more than data points on a grid," said Elizabeth Coughlan, a third-grade teacher of gifted bilingual students, who was marching in a rally where teachers clogged downtown streets on Monday. Another teacher held a sign that read, "Let's teach kids to think outside the box not fill in circles."

Advocates of the new evaluation systems say test scores should not be the only measure of a teacher's quality. Even those who believe that such systems can work in theory say that it is important to get teacher buy-in.

"It's tough work because it's hard to get it to be fair," said Kathy Christie, a vice president at the Education Commission. "We've only recently started getting student data that could be traced back to the classroom. It's all very intertwined and complex, and it could fail very easily if people don't get it right. Teachers have very valid concerns."

Still, she said, efforts to reach a consensus could cause the rating systems to collapse in practice. "It's like trying to put a man on the moon by committee," Ms. Christie said. "At some point, decisions have to be made."

In Chicago, the teachers union has bristled at what it sees as a unilateral effort to install a system that will start by basing 25 percent of a teacher's rating on student achievement, going to 40 percent in five years.

The Illinois legislature passed a law in 2010 that requires all districts to develop teacher evaluations based in part on student performance, with Chicago being the first district to begin its system this year. The law, which passed unanimously in the Senate and received only one opposing vote in the House, requires that various test results be used for at least 25 percent of a teacher's rating in the first two

years, growing to 30 percent. Classroom observations also figure prominently in the evaluations. A separate law passed in 2011 allows teacher evaluations to be used in tenure and layoff decisions.

Chicago's teachers say they would accept a rating where 25 percent was based on student achievement on tests, but balk at the increase to 40 percent, higher than the state standard.

Across the country, critics have seized on the Chicago fight to blast the use of a teacher's ability to raise scores as an unreliable measure. The National Center for Fair and Open Testing put out a statement from its public education director, Robert Schaeffer, saying, " 'Enough is enough' to so-called reforms based on standardized exam misuse."

Several studies have shown that teachers who receive high value-added scores — the term for the effect that teachers have on student test performance — in one year can score poorly a year later. "There are big swings from year to year," said Jesse Rothstein, associate professor of public policy and economics at the University of California, Berkeley. But other studies have shown that students taught by teachers who achieve high value-added scores go on to have lower teenage pregnancy rates, are more likely to go to college and earn higher incomes as adults.

Some studies, including one that looked at a pilot of teacher evaluations here, have shown correlations between teachers whose students' test scores improve and those who receive high marks in classroom observations and on student surveys.

Sara Ray Stoelinga, senior director at the Urban Institute at the University of Chicago who conducted the study, said that using student test scores protects teachers from arbitrary decisions by principals. "The theory," she said, "is that if you have multiple pieces of information, it gives the most fair and accurate measure."

But with research at an early stage, other districts and states have stepped carefully. In Colorado, where a sweeping education law passed three years ago stipulating that half of a teacher's evaluation should be tied to student performance, the state is slowly introducing the programs, with training. "We want to make sure to do it right rather than do it fast," said Michael Johnston, a Democratic state senator who sponsored the bill.

And in New Haven, Conn., the district and the union spent more than six months discussing a new evaluation system, and union members felt their feedback was valued. "We knew we were being treated as equal partners," said David Cicarella, president of the New Haven Federation of Teachers. "It can't just be one test that the kids take one week in March."

Even those who say there is value in using test scores to measure a teacher's performance say there are plenty of other factors. "There are other things that teachers do that aren't captured by test scores," said Douglas Staiger, an economist at Dartmouth College who has studied the effects of teachers on student achievement. The debate over whether test scores accurately reflect a teacher's ability, he said, should ultimately be about "how much importance we want to place on academic achievement defined by the test."

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ECONOMIC RECOVERY

Moody's Warns That U.S. May Face Debt Downgrade

September 11, 2012

New York Times

By JONATHAN WEISMAN

WASHINGTON — Congressional leaders dug in their heels on Tuesday against any quick deal to resolve a looming fiscal disaster before the election, even as a major ratings agency warned that it would downgrade the government's debt if no solution was found by year's end.

Democratic leaders have warned their own members to tone down any discussion of a short-term resolution to the "fiscal cliff," betting that Republican fears over the January deadline will drive them to the negotiating table shortly after the November election.

Speaker John A. Boehner, reacting to the downgrade notice from Moody's Investor Service, said it underscored the Republican position that the nation's precarious fiscal condition could be addressed only by cutting government spending.

"The threat to American jobs comes not from action on our debt, but from inaction on our debt," he said. "The president and his economic advisers have consistently perpetuated the myth that downgrades are caused by efforts to force the government to stop spending money we don't have."

The Moody's warning comes a year after its rival, Standard & Poor's, downgraded the United States' credit worthiness after the protracted stalemate over raising the nation's statutory borrowing limit.

Like S&P, Moody's emphasized political dysfunction more than soaring government debt. The agency said Washington must come to agreement to head off billions of dollars in simultaneous tax increases and spending cuts scheduled to begin in January — and to put the government on a sustainable fiscal trajectory. Only then would the United States keep its AAA rating.

"If those negotiations lead to specific policies that produce a stabilization and then downward trend in the ratio of federal debt to G.D.P. over the medium term, the rating will likely be affirmed and the outlook returned to stable," Moody's said in a statement. "If those negotiations fail to produce such policies, however, Moody's would expect to lower the rating."

If no agreement is reached, all of the Bush-era tax cuts will expire in January, just as more than \$1 trillion in automatic military and domestic cuts begin slicing spending. Numerous economists have warned that the hit to the economy will almost surely send the nation back into recession.

At the Democratic National Convention in Charlotte, N.C., Senator Richard J. Durbin of Illinois, the Senate's No. 2 Democrat, suggested that Congress move now on a long-term framework that sets a target for deficit reduction and establishes the proportion of spending cuts, entitlement changes and revenue increases to get there. If an agreement on a broad outline could be reached, Congress should then push back the automatic tax hikes and spending cuts for six months, provided that revenue increases and spending cuts be enacted to pay for the delay.

The idea landed with a thud. "It isn't as if people are lining up to sign up for it," Mr. Durbin said Tuesday.

Republicans have been pummeling Democrats on the presidential and Congressional campaign trails about the fiscal cliff.

"We continue to want to provide solutions and resolve the differences here in Washington," Representative Eric Cantor of Virginia, the House majority leader, said Tuesday on CNBC. "All there's been over the last couple years is a one-way street."

Mitt Romney and his running mate, Paul D. Ryan, have suggested that the bipartisan deal last summer that set up the automatic cuts was President Obama's idea. Mr. Boehner has accused the president of failing to lead on the issue.

Democrats deny that, pointing to statements from Mr. Boehner and Mr. Ryan praising the deal when it was struck. Both men voted for it.

So far, Democrats do not appear troubled by the attacks. As Republican warnings over military cuts and tax increases grow louder, Democrats see their leverage growing stronger.

"Republicans talk a big game on defense — they just don't want to pay for it," said Representative Chris Van Hollen of Maryland, the ranking Democrat on the House Budget Committee. "They want to increase defense spending, but they don't want to ask people like Mitt Romney to pay one more dime in taxes."

If no deal is struck by Jan. 1, Mr. Obama can present Congress a retroactive extension of only the middle-class tax cuts, take it or leave it, Mr. Van Hollen said.

Representative Peter Welch, Democrat of Vermont, said, "Revenues should be part of any plan, and Democrats should not cave on that."

With just 11 legislative days remaining before the election, once-uncompromising Republicans in Congress do appear to be reassessing their positions.

Earlier this year, House conservatives demanded a cap on domestic spending for the coming fiscal year that would be \$19 billion below the level set by last summer's budget deal. Even Senate Republicans balked. On Thursday, the House is expected to pass a measure keeping the government functioning well into next year at the spending level House Republicans found unacceptable in March, \$1.047 trillion.

"My conservative friends in the Senate have taken a position that says that a clean \$1.047 number is digestible, so for us to not take that position seriously would be for us not to recognize the reality of Washington today," said Representative Tim Scott of South Carolina, who leads the Tea Party-infused Republican freshmen.

But some Democrats are getting nervous about the game of chicken in Washington. Senator Dianne Feinstein, Democrat of California, said the \$109 billion in initial automatic spending cuts should be postponed for six months, then cut at least in half.

"I'm of the opinion that cutting haphazardly at a critical time in the economic progress of the nation is absolutely the wrong thing to do," she said Tuesday.

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USUN IN THE NEWS

Volunteers Honor Sept. 11 Anniversary By Helping Veterans

September 11, 2012

NY1 News

Volunteers marked the 11th anniversary of the Sept. 11 terror attacks by helping some of the city's veterans.

200 people put together hygiene kits and painted the walls at Department of Homeless Services' Veterans Residence in East Harlem.

More than 100 formerly homeless veterans live in the residence.

Volunteers and UN Ambassador Susan Rice said Tuesday's day of service is a small but important way of saying thanks.

"I'm very lucky to be up here in New York and come to this wonderful facility that's doing such good with and for our veterans," Rice said.

"Seeing this and being a part of it, it makes me know that life was worth living and it's precious," said veteran Thomas Jones Jr.

In 2009, Congress passed a bill to formally recognize Sept. 11 as a National Day of Service and Remembrance.

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UNITED NATIONS**Envoy Brahimi To Meet Assad In Syria: UN Chief**

September 12, 2012

AFP

UN chief Ban Ki-moon said Tuesday that the new UN-Arab League envoy Lakhdar Brahimi will meet Syrian President Bashar al-Assad when he travels to the conflict-ravaged country.

"Special representative Brahimi is soon going to have a meeting with Syrian authorities including president Assad, and he has already been engaged with the key stakeholders," Ban told a news conference in Bern, without providing more details about the highly anticipated visit.

Brahimi, replacing former UN chief Kofi Annan who quit in August over divisions in the UN Security Council on the deadly violence that has gripped Syria for nearly 18 months, arrived in Cairo on Sunday.

The envoy, who has acknowledged he is on a "very difficult mission", said Monday he would travel to Damascus in a few days to meet Syrian officials, but had been unclear on whether he would be able to meet Assad himself.

Expectations that Brahimi will have any more success than Annan are low, however, and he himself warned Monday: "We cannot expect miracles."

His pessimism appears warranted, since his mission begins with key Security Council members the United States and Russia split on how to tackle the conflict and as fighting only escalates.

More than 27,000 people have been killed since the conflict erupted in March last year, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. The United Nations puts the death toll at 20,000.

The UN refugee agency meanwhile said the number of refugees fleeing the violence has reached more than 250,000, while more than 1.2 million Syrians, over half of them children, have become internally displaced.

Ban insisted that these "intolerable circumstances" must come to an end and that "the violence must stop by both sides".

He said he understood the frustration felt by many in the face of the Security Council's apparent paralysis in dealing with the spiralling crisis.

But "while we may be frustrated and troubled by not being able to address the situation in Syria, which has reached intolerable circumstances," he said, "we should not be overly pessimistic about the strength and the commitment of the international community, especially the international organisations."

He called on "all member states (to show) a common sense of common responsibility where human rights, human dignity are abused".

"Those countries who might have influence over two parties should exercise" that influence and should work towards "a political resolution reflecting the genuine aspirations of the Syrian people".

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U.N. Details Flows Of Syrian Refugees

September 12, 2012

[New York Times](#)

By Nick Cumming-Bruce

GENEVA - As fighting continues in Syria, an "extraordinary acceleration" in movements of refugees is compounding the difficulties for humanitarian relief efforts, the United Nations refugee agency said on Tuesday.

The agency said the number of people fleeing the country jumped from 18,500 in June to 35,000 in July to 102,000 in August.

Around 2,000 Syrians are crossing daily into Jordan amid continuing air and artillery attacks on towns near the southern border, Adrian Edwards, a spokesman for the agency, said.

Thousands more Syrians are reported to be moving south from village to village seeking safety from the fighting before crossing into Jordan, he said.

The exodus has pushed the number of Syrian refugees to more than a quarter of a million, Mr. Edwards said. Of the total, Jordan now has more than 85,000 refugees and Turkey more than 78,000, the refugee agency said, counting those who have registered or are awaiting registration with the agency. But many more refugees have not registered, and both countries count far greater numbers.

The agency said more than 10,000 were waiting to cross into Turkey.

The latest estimates came as António Guterres, the United Nations high commissioner for refugees, and the actress Angelina Jolie, a special envoy for the agency, toured the Za'atri camp in northern Jordan to draw attention to the needs of the swelling refugee population.

The camp, which opened on a windswept patch of desert close to the Syrian border at the end of July, already has 28,000 refugees, Mr. Edwards said.

Faced with a relentless flood of people fleeing the fighting, United Nations officials are talking to Jordanian authorities about finding new locations in less harsh surroundings for facilities to receive them.

Providing another snapshot of deteriorating living conditions inside Syria, the World Health Organization said that a United Nations mission to Homs last week found that more than half a million people needed aid, including health care, food and water. The mission found that the biggest hospital in Homs had been destroyed and only 6 of the 12 public hospitals and 8 of the 32 private hospitals were still functional, although with severely reduced capacity.

At least half the doctors had left Homs and only three surgeons now remained for an area with a population of more than two million. Many health facilities are staffed by volunteers without medical or health training and faced critical shortages of medicines, a spokesman for the World Health Organization, Tarik Jasarevic, said.

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Syrian Refugees Seeking Aid From UN Top 250,000 in 4 Countries

September 12, 2012

Associated Press

GENEVA - The U.N. refugee agency says the number of Syrian refugees seeking its help now tops a quarter-million.

Agency spokesman Adrian Edwards says 253,106 people have registered or are awaiting registration as Syrian refugees.

Edwards told reporters Tuesday in Geneva there are 85,197 in Jordan, 78,431 in Turkey, 66,915 in Lebanon and 22,563 in Iraq as of this week.

Officials acknowledge, however, the real number of Syrian refugees is likely far higher since tens of thousands are believed to have not yet registered with authorities.

Edwards says the refugees say artillery and air attacks are continuing in villages and towns close to the Jordanian border.

Activists say up to 23,000 people have been killed in Syria since an uprising began in March 2011 against President Bashar Assad's regime.

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U.N. says Liberia lacks resolve to stamp out blood-diamond trade

September 11, 2012

[Reuters](#)

By Michelle Nichols

UNITED NATIONS - Liberia is showing only limited commitment to efforts to stop the trade in blood diamonds that has fueled conflicts in Africa, U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said in a report on Tuesday.

The report to the U.N. Security Council said Liberia's capacity to control diamond mining and trade - a vital part of the global Kimberly Process agreed in 2003 to regulate the \$30 billion rough-diamond industry - remained weak.

"Limited commitment to comply with the minimum standards of the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme for Rough Diamonds remains apparent," the report said.

It said the U.S. Agency for International Development had signaled it would stop funding a program to help the Liberian government improve compliance with the Kimberley Process, partly due to Liberia's lack of commitment to the scheme.

The Kimberley Process is a government-led scheme aimed at cutting off trade in diamonds that has fueled various conflicts, including Liberia's 1989-2003 bloody civil war.

However diamond-producing countries have been accused of showing little interest in reform and campaign group Global Witness withdrew as an official observer of the process in December after it deemed the scheme an outdated failure.

Former Liberian President Charles Taylor was jailed for 50 years in May for helping Sierra Leone's rebels murder, rape and mutilate their way across Liberia's West African neighbor while he profited from a trade in blood diamonds.

Logging has also been a controversial issue in Liberia since the civil war, when rebels used proceeds from timber to purchase weapons, triggering a U.N. ban. The ban was lifted after Liberia's foreign partners, particularly the United States and the World Bank, helped it reform its forestry laws.

The United Nations said Liberia's forestry sector was still facing big challenges. "Commercial operators have to date paid only an estimated \$1.9 million of the estimated \$25.6 million owed to the government," the report said.

"The government continues to issue large tracts of forest area to commercial operators through private use permits, which have weak enforcement mechanisms and place limited financial and social obligations on companies," it said.

Global Witness said earlier this month that Liberia's forestry department had given over a quarter of the country's land area to logging firms over the past two years in a flurry of shady deals.

President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, fending off accusations of graft and nepotism within her government, has suspended the head of the Forestry Development Authority and launched a probe into the deals amid concerns of widespread fraud and mismanagement.

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TOP STORIES

Israeli Sharpens Call for United States to Set Iran Trigger

September 12, 2012

New York Times

By DAVID E. SANGER and ISABEL KERSHNER

WASHINGTON — Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel inserted himself into the most contentious foreign policy issue of the American presidential campaign on Tuesday, criticizing the Obama administration for refusing to set clear "red lines" on Iran's nuclear progress that would prompt the United States to undertake a military strike. As a result, he said, the administration has no "moral right" to restrain Israel from taking military action of its own.

Mr. Netanyahu's unusually harsh public comments about Israel's most important ally, which closely track what he has reportedly said in vivid terms to American officials visiting Jerusalem, laid bare the tension between him and President Obama over how to handle Iran. They also suggested that he is willing to use the pressure of the presidential election to try to force Mr. Obama to commit to attack Iran under certain conditions.

He appeared to be responding to a weekend statement by Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton that the United States was "not setting deadlines" beyond which it would turn to a military solution.

Mr. Netanyahu, speaking at a news conference in Jerusalem, said, "Those in the international community who refuse to put red lines before Iran don't have a moral right to place a red light before Israel."

In another sign of tensions, the Israeli Embassy in Washington said late Tuesday that the Obama administration had declined a request from Mr. Netanyahu's office for a meeting with Mr. Obama when the Israeli leader attends the United Nations General Assembly this month. The Obama administration said the decision was due to a scheduling problem and had been conveyed to Israel long ago.

On Tuesday night, Mr. Obama called Mr. Netanyahu to try to calm the situation. The two talked for a full hour, hashing through the Iran confrontation and their misunderstandings.

"President Obama and Prime Minister Netanyahu reaffirmed that they are united in their determination to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon, and agreed to continue their close consultations going forward," the White House said in a statement after the phone call.

The White House also tried to tamp down controversy over the request for a meeting, saying that after a possible New York encounter was ruled out, Mr. Netanyahu did not request a meeting in Washington. "Contrary to reports in the press, there was never a request for Prime Minister Netanyahu to meet with President Obama in Washington, nor was a request for a meeting ever denied," the statement said.

The United States says it has no evidence that Iranian leaders have made a final decision to build a bomb. However, the International Atomic Energy Agency's latest report says the country has amassed a stockpile of low- and medium-enriched uranium that, with further enrichment, could fuel as many as six nuclear weapons.

The United States concluded several years ago that Iran had suspended its nuclear weapons development program at the end of 2003, though there has been evidence of sporadic work since. The Israelis say Iran is quietly reconstituting a much larger effort.

In demanding that Mr. Obama effectively issue an ultimatum to Iran, Mr. Netanyahu appeared to be making maximum use of his political leverage at a time when Mr. Obama's Republican opponent, Mitt Romney, has sought to make an issue of what Mr. Romney says is the administration's lack of support for Israel.

It is not clear what level of development in Iran's nuclear program would constitute a "red line" in Israeli eyes. Dore Gold, president of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, a research institute, and a former Israeli ambassador to the United Nations, said in an interview last week, "It is very important to draw a line about the quantities of enriched uranium and the levels of enrichment."

One option that has been widely discussed among experts advising the United States government is capping Iran's uranium enrichment at a reactor-grade level. Also, Iran would be permitted to stockpile no more than 1,764 pounds of that uranium, less than is required, if further enriched, to make a single bomb.

Mr. Netanyahu, who is highly attuned to American politics, seemed to be using his comments to pressure Mr. Obama to specify at which point the United States would be prepared to take military action against Iran, perhaps at the United Nations General Assembly opening this month.

The Israeli ambassador to the United States, Michael B. Oren, echoed Mr. Netanyahu in an interview in Washington on Monday night and said the Israeli leadership wanted Mr. Obama and the leaders of other nations to agree on clear limits for Iran.

"We know that the Iranians see red," Mr. Oren said. "We know they can discern the color red. We know that the redder the line, the lesser the chance that they will pass it."

Mrs. Clinton publicly rejected that approach over the weekend. In an interview with Bloomberg Radio, she avoided discussion of Iran's stockpile and said, "We're not setting deadlines" for military action. It was that statement that appeared to have set off Mr. Netanyahu.

Mr. Obama has repeatedly argued — with the support of some leading Israeli officials — that the United States and Israel have closer security cooperation now than at any other point in history. The United States provided much of the Iron Dome missile defense system for Israel, and for the past five years the two countries worked closely on a major covert operation against Iran called "Olympic Games," an effort to sabotage Iran's enrichment capability with cyberattacks.

But Mr. Obama has stopped well short of saying he would prevent Iran from developing the capability to produce a bomb. He has said only that he would not allow Iran to obtain a weapon; Mr. Netanyahu has said that is not enough.

Depending on how one defines the term, Mr. Obama's aides and former aides acknowledge that Iran may already have that capability. It possesses the fuel and the knowledge to make a weapon, but that would take months or years, and Mr. Obama has argued that allows "time and space" for a negotiated solution.

Mr. Romney had no immediate comment about Mr. Netanyahu's challenge to Mr. Obama, and one of his informal advisers on the Middle East said, "It's probably better at this point to let Netanyahu make

the point because it's more powerful that way." The adviser said he was not authorized to speak on the record.

But the Netanyahu comments play right to the Republican nominee's critique of Mr. Obama. On "Meet the Press" on Sunday, Mr. Romney declared that the progress of Iran's nuclear program was Mr. Obama's "greatest failure" in foreign policy.

"The president hasn't drawn us any further away from a nuclear Iran," he said.

There is little doubt that the Iranian effort has progressed. When Mr. Obama took office, Iran had produced enough fuel to make, if enriched further, about one bomb, compared with five or six in the International Atomic Energy Agency's current calculation.

But Mr. Romney's proposals have also steered clear of describing with any precision how far Iran could go before he would use force to stop its program. Like Mr. Obama, he has not said how much progress he would allow Iran to make toward a weapons capability before he authorized a strike.

Instead, he has insisted that Mr. Obama was late to the task of placing "crippling sanctions" on Iran. Yet those sanctions have begun to strike at the heart of Iran's greatest source of national revenue — oil sales — something that the Bush administration shied away from.

Mr. Netanyahu has been dismissive of sanctions. They are an indirect form of pressure, he has argued, and have not forced Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, to scale back the country's nuclear program.

In recent days, the Israelis had appeared to be dialing down the pressure on Washington, with the Israeli news media reporting that Ehud Barak, the defense minister, was rethinking the wisdom of an attack in the coming months. There was speculation that Israeli officials feared that the long-term jeopardy to Israel's relationship with Washington was not worth the short-term gain of setting back, but probably not destroying, Iran's capability.

A number of American officials, in trips to Israel, have argued that an Israeli attack would only drive the nuclear program underground and most likely result in the expulsion of international inspectors, who are the best gauge of the program's progress.

But Mr. Netanyahu revived the tough talk of the past few months and the message that time is running out for Israel.

"So far, we can say with certainty that diplomacy and sanctions haven't worked. The sanctions have hurt the Iranian economy, but they haven't stopped the Iranian nuclear program," Mr. Netanyahu said, adding, "The fact is that every day that passes, Iran gets closer and closer to nuclear bombs."

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Israel Blasts U.S. Over Iran

September 12, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By JOSHUA MITNICK And JAY SOLOMON

TEL AVIV—The rift between top U.S. and Israeli leaders appeared to deepen Tuesday as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu leveled the sharpest attacks in years by an Israeli leader against Washington, over differences on how to address Iran's nuclear program.

Tensions had so escalated that President Barack Obama spent an hour on the phone with the Israeli leader in a hastily arranged call hours after both governments said the White House wouldn't agree to an Israeli request for a meeting between the two leaders at the United Nations General Assembly meeting in New York this month.

The Israelis said their request was refused; the White House said there was a scheduling conflict and there could be a meeting elsewhere at another time.

"Prime Minister Netanyahu reaffirmed that they are united in their determination to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon, and agreed to continue their close consultations going forward," the White House said in a statement Tuesday evening.

The rupture was the result of months of growing Israeli frustration with Mr. Obama's approach to Iran, in which he has stressed diplomacy and punitive sanctions. Mr. Netanyahu has exhorted the Obama administration in vain to set "red lines" that, if crossed, would trigger a U.S. military response.

The falling-out comes at a fragile moment for Mr. Obama, both in his re-election bid and in the international furor over Iran's nuclear program.

The comments by Mr. Netanyahu stoked concerns in Washington that the attacks on the White House's Iran policy were specifically designed to affect the coming U.S. presidential election.

Some of Mr. Netanyahu's advisers have said in recent months that they believe a Mitt Romney administration would be more in step with the Israeli government on Iran's nuclear program and other issues. Mr. Romney has attacked Mr. Obama during the campaign as being too soft on Tehran and diminishing American support for the Jewish state.

The ties between Messrs. Romney and Netanyahu also go beyond politics. Mr. Romney, who has referred to Mr. Netanyahu as "my friend," has had a cordial relationship with the Israeli leader for years. After business school, both began their careers at a Boston consulting firm and have kept in touch since.

In the election campaign, Jewish-American voters could be crucial in deciding the election in swing states like Florida and historically have voted for the Democrats.

Still, Mr. Netanyahu's unusually blunt attack on the White House isn't necessarily helpful to Mr. Romney. By endorsing the Israeli leader's views, Mr. Romney could be forced to advocate a potential military confrontation with Iran before it has been proved Tehran is developing a nuclear weapon.

Mr. Romney was silent on the issue Tuesday. He spoke to the National Guard Association in Reno, Nev., but declined to sharply criticize the president on the anniversary of the Sept. 11 attacks. In recent remarks, Mr. Romney has assailed Mr. Obama both for pursuing diplomacy on Iran and for what Republicans say is inadequate support for Israel.

Mr. Netanyahu's comments came in the third straight day of unusual and harsh public exchanges between the two governments. At a news conference in Jerusalem, Mr. Netanyahu said Tuesday the Obama administration and other Western allies, by failing to set strict limits on Tehran, lack the moral authority to press Israel not to attack Iran.

"If Iran knows that there's no deadline, what will it do? Exactly what it's doing: It's continuing without any interference toward obtaining nuclear weapons capability and from there nuclear bombs," he said.

"The world tells Israel: Wait. There's still time. And I say: Wait for what? Wait until when? Those in the international community who refuse to put red lines before Iran don't have a moral right to place a red light before Israel."

He didn't specifically point to Mr. Obama in those comments, but observers took them to be aimed at the U.S. and its European allies, who want Israel to refrain from a military strike on Iran to slow or halt its nuclear program.

Administration officials strained to say there was no rift, but were barely able to conceal their anger over Mr. Netanyahu's latest comments. "We should ignore it," said a senior U.S. official concerning Mr. Netanyahu's comments. "It's ridiculous."

The administration's rejection of Mr. Netanyahu's request for a meeting with the president during the U.N. meeting was a potent sign of the fraying ties. White House officials said Tuesday afternoon Mr. Obama wouldn't meet Mr. Netanyahu during the U.N. meeting, saying it was a matter of scheduling: The president will be in New York Sept. 24 and 25, while Mr. Netanyahu will arrive later that week, they said. Later in the day, they said a meeting outside New York that week is still a possibility.

For Mr. Obama, any political distance from the Israeli leader is a potential problem at home. Sen. Lindsay Graham (R., S.C.) urged Mr. Obama Tuesday to find time to meet Mr. Netanyahu.

"I know we're in the middle of a contested election but the consequences of Iran acquiring nuclear capability are earth shattering," Mr. Graham said. He said he was gathering signatures from a bipartisan group of senators for a letter to the president urging him to articulate clear red lines on Iran and clarify what he means when he says the U.S. will "always have Israel's back."

Jewish and Israeli sensitivities have proved important to Mr. Obama. The Democratic Party was forced to alter its policy platform last week after it initially omitted a line from its 2008 document calling Jerusalem the capital of the Jewish state.

The rift poses risks for Mr. Netanyahu as well, as top Israeli politicians criticized Mr. Netanyahu for his comments Tuesday.

Defense Minister Ehud Barak said subjects like Iran should be discussed frankly, but behind closed doors. Opposition leader Shaul Mofaz accused Mr. Netanyahu of sticking his hand "too deep into the U.S. ballot box" and expressed concern that the prime minister was "sacrificing relations with Israel's closest strategic allies in the U.S. and Europe on the altar of stopping the Iranian nuclear program."

Iranian officials deny Western charges that they are trying to develop the capacity to build nuclear bombs and say they are trying to develop civilian nuclear energy. Iran has moved in recent months to

move more of its nuclear fuel production underground, raising alarms in the U.S. and Israel. Tehran has also begun enriching uranium closer to weapons grade, and U.N. investigators say they have found evidence that Iran has conducted experiments useful in developing nuclear bombs.

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Netanyahu: Without Ultimatum, US Has No "Moral Right" To Stop Israel From Attacking Iran

September 12, 2012

Washington Post

By Karen DeYoung And Joel Greenberg

The deepening dispute between the United States and Israel over how to stop Iran's nuclear program broke into public view Tuesday, with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu suggesting that the Obama administration did not have the "moral right" to forestall military action.

Netanyahu's remarks - and a White House decision that President Obama will not meet with the Israeli leader later this month - threatened to further exacerbate tensions between the two allies and possibly push the disagreement over Iran into the U.S. presidential campaign.

In a blistering response to a Sunday statement by Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton that the United States is "not setting deadlines" for Iran to abandon its alleged weapons program, Netanyahu said that if no "red line" is established, Iran will continue to pursue an atomic bomb.

"The world tells Israel: 'Wait. There's still time.' And I say, 'Wait for what? Wait until when?' Those in the international community who refuse to put red lines before Iran don't have a moral right to place a red light before Israel," Netanyahu told reporters in Jerusalem.

The administration has pressed Israel to hold off on threatened military action against Iran and has refrained from directly issuing its own military threat, arguing that there is still time to achieve results through diplomacy backed by tightening economic sanctions.

Although international inspectors have cited continuing advances in Iran's nuclear program and diplomatic negotiations have stalled, U.S. intelligence analysts believe that Iranian leaders have not yet made a political decision to produce a nuclear bomb. Iran has said its nuclear program is solely for peaceful energy purposes.

Disagreement over meeting

Just hours after Netanyahu's remarks Tuesday, U.S. and Israeli officials acknowledged that Netanyahu had sought a meeting with Obama when they both attend the annual United Nations General Assembly in New York later this month.

"The White House informed Jerusalem that the meeting . . . won't be possible due to the president's agenda," the Israeli Embassy in Washington said of a possible New York meeting.

The White House issued a statement saying that a meeting was impossible because "they're simply not in the city at the same time." Obama plans to depart New York immediately after his Sept. 25 address to the General Assembly, while Netanyahu will not arrive to deliver his speech until Sept. 27. Obama and Netanyahu, the statement said, were in "frequent contact," and Netanyahu will meet with Clinton "and other officials."

Obama, who will spend only one night in New York, does not plan to meet with any foreign leaders at the U.N. session, according to an administration official who spoke about the president's schedule on the condition of anonymity.

In a further statement late Tuesday that indicated growing concern over the tensions, the White House said Obama and Netanyahu had spoken by telephone "for an hour tonight as part of their ongoing consultations." It said they discussed "the threat posed by Iran's nuclear program, and our close cooperation on Iran and other security issues" and "reaffirmed that they are united in their determination to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon, and agreed to continue their close consultations going forward."

A campaign issue?

Administration officials struggled Tuesday not to respond in kind to what they viewed as another in a series of Netanyahu provocations that could affect the U.S. presidential race.

Obama's foreign policy performance has polled significantly higher than assessments of Mitt Romney, the Republican nominee. Romney's campaign, seeking gains on national security issues and inroads into a Jewish vote that has traditionally gone heavily Democratic, has portrayed Obama as insufficiently attuned to Israel's concerns.

"In his first TV interview as president," Romney said in his Republican convention speech last month, Obama "said we should talk to Iran. We're still talking, and Iran's centrifuges are still spinning.

"President Obama has thrown allies like Israel under the bus," Romney said.

The latest U.S.-Israel back-and-forth began Sunday when Netanyahu said in an interview with Canadian television that Iran would not stop its nuclear program "unless it sees a clear determination by the democratic countries in the world, and a clear red line."

Although Israel has called before for a "red line" for military action against Iran, it has not spelled out the criteria for it. In the interview Sunday, Netanyahu said he was discussing the issue "right now with the United States."

U.S. resistant on deadline

Clinton, in an interview released Monday, said "we're not setting deadlines." The Israelis, she told Bloomberg News radio, are "more anxious about a quick response because they feel that they're right in the bull's-eye, so to speak. But we're convinced that we have more time to focus on these sanctions, to do everything we can to bring Iran to a good-faith negotiation."

Other administration officials waved off any suggestion that the United States was prepared to draw a red line for a military strike against Iran, even as it emphasizes that "all options" remain on the table and that the window for a negotiated solution will not stay open forever.

Consultations with Israel have been "incredibly intense and high level," State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland said Tuesday. "The president's commitment on this is absolutely firm."

Netanyahu's latest remarks came at a news conference with visiting Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borisov. "If Iran knows that there is no red line, if Iran knows that there's no deadline, what will it do? Exactly what it's doing. It's continuing, without any interference, toward obtaining nuclear weapons capability. And, from there, nuclear bombs."

Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak has warned that time is running out as Iran's nuclear facilities approach a "zone of immunity," protected in underground bunkers invulnerable to Israeli attack.

But in a reflection of what U.S. officials see as political disagreements within Israel itself, Barak issued a statement Tuesday evening that appeared designed to temper Netanyahu's remarks.

Despite "certain differences between the stances of Israel and America . . . and the importance of maintaining Israel's independence of action," he said, "we must also remember the significance of our partnership with America and do everything possible not to harm this."

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U.S. ambassador to Libya killed in Benghazi attack

September 12, 2012

Reuters

By Tamim Elyan and Omar al-Mosmari

BENGHAZI, Libya - The U.S. ambassador to Libya and three other embassy staff were killed in a rocket attack on their car, a Libyan official said, as they were rushed from a consular building stormed by militants denouncing a U.S.-made film insulting the Prophet Mohammad.

Gunmen had attacked and burned the U.S. consulate in the eastern city of Benghazi, a center of last year's uprising against Muammar Gaddafi, late on Tuesday evening, killing one U.S. consular official. The building was evacuated.

The Libyan official said the ambassador, Christopher Stevens, was being driven from the consulate building to a safer location when gunmen opened fire.

"The American ambassador and three staff members were killed when gunmen fired rockets at them," the official in Benghazi told Reuters.

There was no immediate comment from the State Department in Washington. U.S. ambassadors in such volatile countries are accompanied by tight security, usually travelling in well-protected convoys. Security officials will be considering whether the two attacks were coordinated.

Libyan deputy prime minister Mustafa Abu Shagour condemned the killing of the U.S. diplomats as a cowardly act.

The consular official had died after clashes between Libyan security forces and Islamist militants around the consulate building. Looters raided the empty compound and some onlookers took pictures after calm returned.

In neighboring Egypt, demonstrators had torn down an American flag and burned it during the protest. Some tried to raise a black flag with the words "There is no God but God, and Mohammad is his messenger", a Reuters witness said.

PORTRAYAL OF PROPHET

U.S. pastor Terry Jones, who had inflamed anger in the Muslim world in 2010 with plans to burn the Koran, said he had promoted "Innocence of Muslims", which U.S. media said was produced by an Israeli-American property developer; but clips of another film called "Mohammad, Prophet of Muslims", had been circulating for weeks before the protest.

That film portrayed Mohammad as a fool, a philanderer and a religious fake. In one clip posted on YouTube Mohammad was shown in a sexual act with a woman.

Jones, a pastor in Florida whose latest stunt fell on the anniversary of the September 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, triggered riots in Afghanistan in 2010 with his threat to burn the Koran.

Many Muslims consider any depiction of the Prophet offensive and any depiction of him can cause outbursts of anger in the Islamic world and among Muslims in Europe.

Libya's interim government has struggled to impose its authority on a myriad of armed groups that have refused to lay down their weapons and often take the law into their own hands.

It was clearly overwhelmed by Tuesday night's attack on the consulate that preceded the assault on the ambassador.

"The Libyan security forces came under heavy fire and we were not prepared for the intensity of the attack," said Abdel-Monem Al-Hurr, spokesman for Libya's Supreme Security Committee.

In Benghazi, unidentified men had shot at the consulate buildings, while others threw handmade bombs into the compound, setting off small explosions.

LOOTED

On Wednesday morning, the compound stood empty, with passers-by freely walking in to take a look at the damage.

Walls were charred and a small fire burned inside one of the buildings. A small group of men was trying to extinguish the flames and three security men briefly surveyed the scene.

A Reuters reporter saw chairs, table and food lying alongside empty shells. Some blood stains could also be seen in front of one of the buildings. Three cars were torched.

The crowd of around 2,000 protesters in Cairo was a mixture of Islamists and teenage soccer fans known for fighting police and who played a part in the revolt that toppled Egypt's leader Hosni Mubarak last year.

The fortress-like U.S. mission is near Tahrir Square, where Egypt's uprising began and the scene of many protests since. Youths danced and chanted football songs. A Reuters reporter said they appeared to climb into the embassy compound almost as an afterthought.

"We sacrificed dozens and hundreds during the uprising for our dignity. The Prophet's dignity is more important to us and we are ready to sacrifice millions," said mosque preacher Mohamed Abu Gabal who joined the protest.

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, in a statement late on Tuesday, confirmed the death of the U.S. consular diplomat in Libya, who was not identified, and condemned the attack there; but she made no mention of an attack on the Ambassador's car.

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Anger Over A Film Fuels Anti-American Attacks In Libya And Egypt

September 12, 2012

New York Times

By David D. Kirkpatrick

CAIRO - Protesters angry over an amateurish American-made video denouncing Islam attacked the United States Consulate in Benghazi, Libya, on Tuesday, killing a State Department officer, while Egyptian demonstrators stormed over the fortified walls of the United States Embassy here.

On the 11th anniversary of the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, the assaults were a violent reminder that the changes sweeping the region have hardly dispelled the rage against the United States that still smolders in pockets around the Arab world.

The mobs were set off by Egyptian media reports about a 14-minute trailer for the video, called the "Innocence of Muslims," that was released on the Web. The trailer opens with scenes of Egyptian security forces standing idle as Muslims pillage and burn the homes of Egyptian Christians. Then it cuts to cartoonish scenes depicting the prophet Muhammad as a child of uncertain parentage, a buffoon, a womanizer, a homosexual, a child molester and a greedy, blood-thirsty thug.

The trailer was uploaded to YouTube by Sam Bacile, whom The Wall Street Journal Web site identified as a 52-year old Israeli-American real estate developer in California. He told the Web site he had raised \$5 million from 100 Jewish donors to make the film. "Islam is a cancer," Mr. Bacile was quoted as saying.

The video gained international attention when a Florida pastor began promoting it along with his own proclamation of Sept. 11 as "International Judge Muhammad Day."

In a statement on Tuesday, the pastor, Terry Jones of Gainesville, Fla., called the film "an American production, not designed to attack Muslims but to show the destructive ideology of Islam" and said it "further reveals in a satirical fashion the life of Muhammad."

He said the embassy attacks illustrated that Muslims "have no tolerance for anything outside of Muhammad" and called Islam "a total deception."

Mr. Jones inspired deadly riots in Afghanistan in 2010 and 2011 by threatening to burn copies of the Koran and then burning one in his church. He also once reportedly hanged President Obama in effigy.

In Benghazi on Tuesday, protesters armed with *automatic rifles* and rocket-propelled grenades attacked the United States Consulate and set it on fire, Libyan officials said. Some news reports said American guards inside the consulate had fired their weapons, and a brigade of Libyan security forces arriving on the scene had battled the attackers in the streets as well.

Officials of Libya's Interior Ministry told reporters that an American employee of the consulate was fatally shot and that at least one other American staff member had been hurt.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton confirmed late Tuesday that a State Department officer had been killed in the Benghazi attack, and she condemned the violence. "Some have sought to justify this vicious behavior as a response to inflammatory material posted on the Internet," she said. "But let me be clear: There is never any justification for violent acts of this kind." The death in Benghazi appears to be the first such fatality in a string of attacks and vandalism against foreign diplomatic missions in Libya in recent months. Since the fall of Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi, Libya's transitional government has struggled to rebuild an effective police force and restore public security.

Local Islamist militant groups capitalizing on the security vacuum have claimed responsibility for some attacks, and some reports on Tuesday suggested that one such group, Ansar al-Sharia, had claimed responsibility for that day's assault.

In Cairo, thousands of unarmed protesters had gathered outside the embassy during the day. By nightfall, some had climbed over the wall around the embassy compound and destroyed a flag hanging inside. The vandals replaced it with a black flag with an Islamic profession of faith - "There is no god but God, and Muhammad is his prophet" - favored by ultraconservatives and militants.

Embassy guards fired guns into the air, but a large contingent of Egyptian riot police officers on hand to protect the embassy evidently did not use their weapons against the crowd, and the protest continued, largely without violence, into the night.

A spokesman for the Muslim Brotherhood, the mainstream Islamist group and the sponsors of Egypt's first elected president, Mohamed Morsi, urged the United States government on Tuesday to prosecute the "madmen" behind the video, according to the English-language Web site of the state newspaper, Al Ahram.

The spokesman asked for a formal apology from the United States government and warned that events like the video were damaging Washington's relations with the Muslim world. There should be "civilized demonstrations of the Egyptian people's displeasure with this film," the Brotherhood spokesman said, according to the Web site. "Any nonpeaceful activity will be exploited by those who hate Islam to defame the image of Egypt and Muslims."

The American Embassy had released a statement shortly after noon that appeared to refer to Mr. Jones: "The United States Embassy in Cairo condemns the continuing efforts by misguided individuals to hurt the religious feelings of Muslims - as we condemn efforts to offend believers of all religions."
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Protesters Kill One In Attacks At US Consulate In Libya, Embassy In Egypt
September 12, 2012
[Washington Post](#)

By Michael Birnbaum And Haitham Tabei

EL-ARISH, Egypt - U.S. diplomatic compounds came under attack in two Muslim countries on Tuesday, with a State Department employee killed in the assault on a consulate in Libya.

"I condemn in the strongest terms the attack on our mission in Benghazi today," Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said in a statement. "As we work to secure our personnel and facilities, we have confirmed that one of our State Department officers was killed. We are heartbroken by this terrible loss. Our thoughts and prayers are with his family and those who have suffered in this attack."

The violence in Benghazi followed protests in neighboring Egypt, where a group of protesters scaled the wall of the U.S. Embassy in Cairo on Tuesday evening and entered its outer grounds, pulled down an American flag, then tried to burn it outside the embassy walls, according to witnesses.

In both Cairo and Benghazi, protesters said they were demonstrating against a U.S.-released film that insulted the prophet Muhammad.

Clinton said late Tuesday night that she had called Libyan President Mohamed Yusuf al-Magariaf "to coordinate additional support to protect Americans in Libya. President Magariaf expressed his condemnation and condolences and pledged his government's full cooperation."

She added that although the United States "deplores" any intentional effort to denigrate the religious beliefs of others, "there is never any justification for violent acts of this kind."

The name of the State Department employee was not available.

"We are, obviously, working with Egyptian security to try to restore order at the embassy," said State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland. "We all want to see peaceful protests, which is not what happened outside the U.S. mission, so we're trying to restore calm now."

Nuland played down any significance to U.S.-Egyptian relations. "I think the bigger picture is one of the United States supporting Egypt's democratic transition and the Egyptian government very much welcoming and working with us on the support that we have to offer," she said.

Referring to the Benghazi incident, Nuland said, "We condemn in strongest terms this attack."

A Libyan security officer said that in addition to the American killed, at least one other had been wounded. The report by Wanis al-Sharif, an interior minister, could not be immediately confirmed.

In Cairo, relatively few embassy employees were inside when the protesters hopped the wall because many had gone home early, according to a U.S. official speaking on the condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to comment publicly about the developing incident. Later in the evening, the Egyptian military sealed the entrances to the embassy to secure it from the ongoing protest, witnesses reported. Protesters were still outside the Cairo embassy early Wednesday, but Nuland later said that police had cleared the remainder.

A spokesman for the embassy said that Ambassador Anne Patterson was out of Egypt on unrelated business and that all embassy employees were "safe and accounted for."

The security breach in Cairo appeared to catch both the United States and Egyptian security forces by surprise, even though the protest was announced in advance. Shortly before the protesters went over the wall, witnesses said, few Egyptian police or military officers were nearby.

Local media estimated that about 2,000 people participated in the protest, though in video footage of the incident only about a dozen appeared to have scaled the embassy wall. The protesters on the wall replaced the U.S. flag with a black flag with an inscription that read, "There is no god but God and Muhammad is his prophet."

A spokesman for Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi did not respond to telephone calls requesting comment. "The security of embassies and providing protection for diplomatic delegates is a responsibility of the utmost priority for official authorities in any country," the Egyptian foreign ministry said in a statement.

Protests at the U.S. Embassy are a regular feature of life in Cairo, where many people are suspicious of the United States and resent it for its support for Israel. But no previous protests have actually breached the embassy compound.

The embassy is in central Cairo, just a few blocks from Tahrir Square, and is a complex of several buildings surrounded by high white walls. Usually, police check vehicles in the streets surrounding the embassy, and cars must pass through moveable barriers.

Many protesters at the U.S. Embassy on Tuesday said they were associated with the Salafist political parties al-Nour and al-Asala.

Protesters condemned a video clip that depicted the Prophet Muhammad in a series of humiliating scenes. A controversial Cairo television host, Sheikh Khaled Abdallah, aired clips from the video on an Islamic-focused television station on Saturday, and the same video clips were posted to YouTube on Monday.

Organizers at the embassy protest told the Associated Press that they'd begun planning the protest last week when a controversial Egyptian Christian activist who lives in the United States, Morris Sadek, released a trailer for a movie called "Muhammad." Depicting the prophet at all is considered deeply offensive by Muslims.

"We are speaking out and will never be tolerant toward any curses for our prophet," said Moaz Abdel Kareem, 37, who had a long beard typical of followers of the Salafist movement and was carrying a black flag.

Earlier Tuesday, the U.S. Embassy in Egypt had condemned insults to religion, saying in a statement that "we firmly reject the actions by those who abuse the universal right of free speech to hurt the religious beliefs of others."

A spokesman for the Muslim Brotherhood, of which Morsi is a member, said that the United States should do a better job of protecting Islam.

"It isn't a matter of freedom of speech," Muslim Brotherhood spokesman Mahmoud Gozlan said. "It's a matter of a holy Islamic symbol."

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AFRICA

HRW: Rebels In Congo Commit Widespread War Crimes

September 12, 2012

Associated Press

By Melanie Gouby

GOMA, Congo - The 25-year-old lay on a hospital bed in the Congolese city of Goma, his leg wrapped in a bandage tinted by the blood still seeping from his bullet wound.

He was shot during a fight between soldiers from the Congolese army and M23, the African nation's newest rebel group. Like 21 others from his village, M23 rebels had kidnapped him and forced him to carry ammunitions in the battlefield.

"I was at home and I saw the rebels coming down the hill. They took us, we were 22 boys. When we pleaded to be let free they refused," the young man told The Associated Press on condition of anonymity, fearing reprisals.

According to a report published Tuesday by Human Rights Watch, the newly-formed M23 rebel group is responsible for widespread war crimes in eastern Congo, including summary executions and rape. The report says the group has forcibly conscripted at least 137 youths and killed at least 33 young men and boys who tried to escape.

"The M23 rebels are committing a horrific trail of new atrocities in eastern Congo," says Anneke Van Woudenberg, senior Africa researcher at the rights group.

"I was lucky," said the 25-year-old, a schoolteacher who was left for dead by M23 after being shot but managed to reach a hospital with the help of villagers.

The new M23 rebellion began in April and May when the group's senior commanders defected from the regular army. Their leaders include Gen. Bosco Ntaganda, who is wanted by the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity committed during an earlier rebellion.

Ntaganda and other rebels claimed that Congo had not met its obligations under a 2009 peace deal, an agreement that allowed former fighters to join the regular army. Before that peace deal, the fighters were in the bush of eastern Congo fighting under the banner of the National Congress for the Defense of the People, a rebel group backed by neighboring Rwanda.

The current rebellion is only five months old, but already a U.N. report provides evidence of Rwanda's military and logistical support. And Human Rights Watch, in a separate report published in June, documented that Rwanda had recruited up to 300 Rwandans who were made to travel across the border to fight on behalf of M23.

Rwanda has denied allegations that it supports M23 - and the leaders of M23 also reject the Human Rights Watch findings.

Reached by telephone on Tuesday, Col. Vianney Kazarama, the M23 spokesman, strongly denied the allegations.

"We invite everyone to come investigate on the ground and see the truth. These are false accusations and we regret that Human Rights Watch publishes false reports. Go to the health centers in Rutshuru, you'll see there are no women raped by our men," he said.

Besides the forced recruitment and the executions, Human Rights Watch found that M23 soldiers raped at least 46 women and girls, including one who was only eight years old.

Congo has been called "the rape capital of the world" because of the gruesome sexual torture that has been committed in eastern Congo, but the recent rapes documented by HRW stand out for their brutality.

The report quotes a 32-year-old woman who said that that M23 fighters attacked her family in the village of Chengerero on July 7.

"Before leaving, the M23 fighters gang-raped her, poured fuel between her legs and set the fuel on fire," the report said.

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Kenya Curfew Falls to Stem Clashes

September 12, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By IDIL ABSHIR

NAIROBI—Clashes between two tribal communities in Kenya's restive Tana River area erupted again on Tuesday despite a dusk-to-dawn curfew, leaving four people dead, in violence that has driven out residents and brought renewed scrutiny of the country's security situation.

The bloodshed came as Prime Minister Raila Odinga promised "decisive action" to return calm to the region. He criticized local law enforcement for failing to stop the clashes in Tana, the worst ethnic conflict in the country since the postelection violence in 2008.

"Give us one or two days because it is clear that those in the area are unable to deal with the situation and we will take it to another level," Mr. Odinga said, according to the Capital FM radio station in Nairobi.

Weeks of revenge attacks between the Pokomo farming community and the Orma pastoralist community have left 116 people dead, more than 12,000 displaced and over 160 homes burned. The curfew was imposed late Monday by President Mwai Kibaki after a clash that killed 38 people, including children and police.

Much of the fighting has taken place around the towns and villages of the Tana Delta area, about 500 miles southeast of Nairobi. The broader coastal region is also on edge after the recent killing of a radical Muslim cleric sparked riots in the nearby port city of Mombasa, the country's second-largest city after the capital.

The government curfew marked the biggest step so far to tackle the violence in Tana, amid growing public criticism of the government's perceived inaction over mounting casualties. Kenyan lawmakers called on Mr. Kibaki to send troops to the region.

The Kenyan Red Cross, which has been leading the crisis-response efforts, said Tuesday's attacks resulted in fewer casualties than previous clashes because so many villagers had already fled the area. "The situation is tense," said Red Cross spokesman Peter Outa.

Long-standing tensions over access to land and water have pitted the seminomadic Orma against the Pokomo. Said Ali, a Mombasa-based teacher, and a native of Kau, the first village in the Tana River region to be attacked and burned down, said the use of guns has made the clashes much more deadly than in the past.

"There are usually tribal clashes between the farmers and the pastoralists—it's normal," Mr. Ali said. "But it is the way it has escalated, with firearms and the deployment of security forces, that has made us suspect it is political."

A secessionist movement active in Kenya's coastal region, the Mombasa Republican Council, has been accused of stirring up simmering regional conflict in a bid to further its agenda of greater autonomy.

With national elections set for March, fears are growing that the movement is seeking to capitalize on pre-election tensions in a country that struggles with deep ethnic and religious divisions.

The potential political dimensions of Tana's crisis increase the prospect of more violence, said Dahir Ismail, a field officer for Tana county and chairman of the Kenya Muslim Youth Alliance based in Hola town.

"When it started it was farmers and pastoralists, but that is no longer just the case—now there's political influences," Mr. Ismail said. "Things are out of hand."
(top)

Fresh Hope For Somalia After New President Elected

September 12, 2012

AFP

The election of a new president raised hope Tuesday that Somalia could emerge from two decades of civil war, but Islamist rebels and observers reminded Hassan Sheikh Mohamud of the tough road ahead.

The 56-year-old academic promised to bring Somalia, best known as a byword for failed state, back into the international fold, but he inherits an ongoing war, a humanitarian crisis, feeble institutions and deeply entrenched warlordism.

The embattled government's Western backers praised the vote as a milestone in the restoration of peace, but the Al-Qaeda-linked Shebab rebels who still control vast swathes of the country promptly dismissed it as illegitimate.

"I promise that Somalia reclaims its place in the world community as of today -- and to do that, we must ensure that we move forward," Hassan was quoted as saying in a statement Tuesday.

The respected lecturer and peace activist faces the daunting task of putting together a credible government after more than a decade of transitional administrations seen as corrupt and toothless.

EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton called Hassan and told him he had "a strong mandate to establish a new government that can rebuild the country and that he should take advantage of the impetus that comes with the end of the transition process."

British Prime Minister David Cameron, who has sought to take a leading role in Somalia's peace efforts in recent months, described the election as "a significant moment" for the Horn of Africa nation.

"Somalia's leaders must now work together to build a more representative and transparent system, tackle corruption and strengthen security and stability," he said in a statement.

The outgoing president, Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, had been confident of reelection before Monday's vote and few had predicted Hassan would even be among the main contenders.

As a former top leader in the Islamic Courts Union that overran the country in 2006 and gave birth to the Shebab group, Sharif's election in January 2009 was seen then as Somalia's best chance in years to end the conflict.

Hardline Islamists always considered him a traitor however and Western powers were reluctant to negotiate with a terror-listed group, but analysts suggested the new president might be in a better position to broker truly inclusive talks.

"For there to be lasting peace... Shebab needs to be incorporated into future dialogue," Ahmed Soliman, Horn of Africa researcher at the London-based think tank Chatham House, told AFP.

"If Hassan Sheikh Mohamud is able to maintain good links with the Shebab and bring them to the table for dialogue that would be a positive step," he said.

Hassan, a member of the dominant Hawiye clan, has links to the Somali branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, a movement which has been achieving huge political gains on the back of the Arab Spring and has generous backing from Gulf states.

The Shebab, which has proclaimed its allegiance to Al-Qaeda and waged a deadly campaign against the government and foreign troops in Somalia, dismissed the election process but appeared to spare Hassan himself.

"Nothing personal, but the whole process is like an enemy project," spokesman Sheikh Ali Mohamud Rage told AFP Tuesday.

Around 20,000 troops from Ethiopia, Uganda, Burundi, Djibouti and Kenya are currently battling the Shebab in Somalia.

An African Union-led military drive has reclaimed control of most of Mogadishu, but the country's second city and key port of Kismayo remains under insurgent control.

J. Peter Pham of the Washington-based Atlantic Council warned Hassan had no real power base and would be presiding over "an entity more known for stealing foreign aid than using it for the good of the Somali people."

Among some of the most pressing issues the new president will have to address is a humanitarian situation which the United Nations has often described as the worst in the world.

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said Tuesday that the number of people needing food aid in Somalia had dropped 16 percent in half a year but still stood at a staggering 2.1 million.

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ASIA

Myanmar Students Swell Ranks Of Land Grab Protest

September 12, 2012

Associated Press

YANGON, Myanmar - Students have joined farmers and other protesters against a land grab for a copper mining project in northwestern Myanmar.

The student activists from the city of Mandalay joined Tuesday's protest in Monywa in northwestern Sagaing region after police arrested 12 demonstrators on Monday. Land rights activist Win Cho in Yangon said Wednesday that nine were released but three female protest leaders remain in custody.

An activist in Monywa who spoke anonymously said as many as 1,500 protesters marched Tuesday. Most were farmers and local residents.

They began protesting in August that they consider the seizure of nearly 8,000 acres (3,250 hectares) of land unfair. The Monywa mine project is a joint venture of a military-controlled holding company and a Chinese company.

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China Accuses Japan Of Stealing After Purchase Of Group Of Disputed Islands

September 12, 2012

New York Times

By Jane Perlez

TIANJIN, China - The Chinese government accused Japan on Tuesday of stealing a group of disputed islands in the East China Sea, hours after the Japanese government announced that it had bought them from their private Japanese owners for nearly \$30 million.

In a show of strength, China sent two maritime law enforcement ships to the islands, which are known as the Diaoyu in China and the Senkaku in Japan.

The ships, belonging to the China Marine Surveillance, are commonly deployed in the South China Sea, where China and its neighbors have other territorial disputes over islands.

Xinhua, the Chinese state news agency, said Tuesday that the marine agency had drafted an "action plan" for asserting China's claim to the disputed islands.

The Japanese government's purchase of the islands from a Japanese family was intended to prevent the conservative governor of Tokyo from buying them, a step that would have heightened the clash with China, Japanese officials said. The Tokyo governor, Shintaro Ishihara, had said he would develop the islands, something the national government does not plan to do.

But in an unusual array of strong statements by top leaders in recent days, China has asserted that the islands have belonged to China since ancient times.

Over the weekend, the Chinese president, Hu Jintao, warned the Japanese prime minister, Yoshihiko Noda, at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit meeting in Russia that nationalizing the islands would be illegal, Xinhua reported.

In a statement on Tuesday, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs said the purchase of the islands by the Japanese government "cannot alter the fact the Japanese side stole the islands from China."

The confrontation between China and Japan comes as the Chinese government nears the start of a once-in-a-decade leadership transition at a Communist Party Congress expected to be held within weeks.

Some Western analysts say they believe that the strong public defense of China's territorial claims may be a way to deflect attention from an unusually rocky succession process by shaking up the strong Chinese nationalist feelings against Japan.

The Chinese state news media have not reported that the country's presumptive new leader, Vice President Xi Jinping, has canceled meetings with foreign leaders since last Wednesday. His absence has provoked widespread speculation about his condition on the Internet. In contrast, the state media have been full of reports in the last several weeks about the disputed islands and what are presented as the transgressions of the Japanese.

China and Japan have a long history of conflict, and the brutal Japanese occupation of China during World War II left bitter memories among many Chinese. Japanese nationalists, for their part, view China with suspicion.

Nationalist sentiment against Japan has surged in China in recent weeks over the disputed islands even as both countries observed the 40th anniversary of the normalization of diplomatic relations this month.

Two weeks ago, Chinese protesters ripped the Japanese flag off the car of Japan's ambassador to China, Uichiro Niwa, as he traveled through Beijing.

On Tuesday, Japan announced that it was sending a new envoy, Shinichi Nishimiya, to replace Mr. Niwa, who was considered too sympathetic to China by some Japanese members of Parliament.

The intensity of the feelings in China against the Japanese purchase of the islands was expressed in academic circles.

Hu Lingyuan, deputy director of the Center for Japanese Studies at Fudan University in Shanghai, said the Japanese notion of reducing tensions by buying the islands before the Tokyo government could do so would not mollify Beijing.

"Justifying the so-called nationalization as a means to keep the Diaoyu Islands situation stable is self-deception," he said of the purchase. "The Chinese people won't fall for the Noda government's lie."

In contrast, a prominent Chinese journalist, Wang Shuo, the managing editor of Caixin Media, said Tuesday on his microblog, "China is protesting because it cannot accept any transfer of property rights that is not under Chinese sovereignty and actual rule." He added: "The Japanese government bought the island to prevent its being bought by a right-wing Japanese politician. It could help contain the situation."

The situation would be worse if the Tokyo governor had bought the islands. By intervening with its own purchase, the Japanese government can block efforts by Japanese nationalists, who have sailed to the islands in the past few weeks to try to occupy them, to land there.

A storekeeper in Beijing who gave only his surname, Li, said: "When other countries insult the United States, America strikes back with force, defending its honor. But when China is actually attacked, when its people are dying, all we do is insult the attacker. I'm ashamed to be Chinese." ([top](#))

China Sends Patrol Ships To Contested Islands After Japan Buys Them

September 12, 2012

Washington Post

By Chico Harlan And Jia Lynn Yang

TOKYO - China on Tuesday sent two patrol ships to waters near a remote and disputed island chain in a show of its "undisputable sovereignty," Chinese state media said, escalating a territorial showdown between Asia's two largest economies.

The move came as a direct response to Japan's nationalization of the uninhabited islands, finalized Tuesday when the central government's cabinet approved a \$26.2 million purchase of the land from a private Japanese owner.

"We are watching closely the evolution of the situation and reserve the right to take reciprocal measures," said Geng Yansheng, a Chinese Defense Ministry spokesman, according to Beijing's state-run Xinhua News Agency.

Japanese government officials have made the case that the purchase should do little to fray ties with Beijing; Japan's government previously rented the land and tightly controlled it, allowing landing permission to almost nobody.

The purchase, one government spokesman said Tuesday, will ensure "stable peace and maintenance" of the land, which is also claimed by Taiwan. The uninhabited islands are significant because they occupy precious shipping lanes and may contain oil deposits.

"It's important to avoid any misunderstanding by the Chinese government," said the spokesman, Chief Cabinet Secretary Osamu Fujimura.

But China has reacted with fury, and the two countries, which both view the islands as a symbol of nationalist pride, have pushed each other to a tense standoff - one that raises the potential for small-scale armed conflict, some security experts say.

To counter the Chinese ships, Japan sent a coast guard patrol vessel to the area, Japan's Asahi Shimbun newspaper reported.

U.S. State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland on Tuesday said the United States' position on the dispute remains "that we want to see China and Japan work this through."

A Xinhua editorial called Japan's decision to nationalize the islands "ridiculous and absurd" and an "open provocation against China." Sending the patrol ships from China Marine Surveillance - one of 11 loosely regulated agencies or paramilitary groups China has used in its increasingly aggressive push for control of the East China and South China seas, according to a recent report from the Brussels-based International Crisis Group - "is timely and necessary," the editorial continued. "The action dealt a big blow to the inflated swagger of Japan."

The report from Brussels said the marine surveillance unit "enjoys considerable independence outside the government's power structure" and has been involved in clashes with Philippine and Vietnamese ships.

Japan and China have conflicting narratives about the history of the islands, known in Japanese as Senkaku and Chinese as Diaoyu. Japan, which has controlled the rocky outcroppings for four decades, says China showed interest in the territory only after studies suggested a bounty of natural resources in the nearby waters. Beijing, meanwhile, says the land has been China's since "ancient times," discovered and named by Chinese people and appearing on Chinese maps drafted centuries ago.

"China will take any necessary measures to uphold its national territorial sovereignty," Hong Lei, China's Foreign Ministry spokesman, said during a regular news briefing Tuesday. "We demand that the Japanese let go of its wrong actions and come back to the negotiating table to resolve the Diaoyu islands issue."

The low-simmering territorial dispute began to boil in April, when Tokyo's nationalist governor, Shintaro Ishihara, told a think tank in Washington of his city's plan to nationalize the islands. Japan's central government, fearing that Ishihara would directly confront China if he bought the land, decided to launch its own bid - a move designed to decrease tensions, not raise them.

But China's Foreign Ministry on Monday denounced the purchase as a "gross violation" of Chinese sovereignty. Premier Wen Jiabao told university students in Beijing that China "will never budge, even half an inch, over the sovereignty and territorial issue."

Many Chinese citizens view Japan's claim to Diaoyu as a land grab akin to the country's brutal invasion of China before and during World War II. The wounds from that war are still raw for some. Just this week, five Chinese citizens sued the Japanese government for bombing Chongqing between 1930 and 1944, demanding a worldwide apology from Japan.

On Tuesday afternoon, about 50 young protesters gathered in front of the Japanese Embassy in Beijing, pumping their fists at the front door and chanting that Japan was illegally claiming the contested islands.

"Diaoyu has always been China's," said Li Jie, one of the protesters. "If the [Chinese] government wants to go to war, I'll join the military."

There have been other land-based flare-ups in the past several years but perhaps none as tense as this one. It comes as China's profile in the world is rising steadily and Japan's diminishes. Nationalists in Japan have seized on this sense of insecurity to wage their claims on the islands.

Both China and Japan have signed the U.N. Convention on the Law of Sea, which says that countries control territory within 12 nautical miles from their coastline and have exclusive economic rights within 200 nautical miles of their coastline. The islands Japan has purchased are 200 nautical miles from both China and Japan. China on Monday released a detailed list of latitudes and longitudes marking its definition of its boundaries - a sign to some observers that the dispute is escalating.

Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda has said Japan's remote islands are essential for marking the country's "exclusive economic zone." Japan is the 61st-largest country in the world according to land mass, Noda said, but the sixth-largest based on the size of the ocean it manages.

"What makes Japan such an expansive maritime nation is our over 6,800 remote islands, including Takeshima and the Senkaku Islands," Noda said.

South Korea also claims Takeshima.

"We'd never see a total war" between China and Japan, said Yuichi Hosoya, a professor of international politics at Keio University in Tokyo. "But we could see a small-scale conflict. We saw a clash in 2010" - when Japanese and Chinese boats collided and Japan detained a Chinese fishing captain - "and we will possibly see a harsher clash soon."

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Xi's Absence Complicates Planning for Party Meeting

September 11, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By JEREMY PAGE

BEIJING—Vice President Xi Jinping's continuing absence from public life is throwing another wrench into preparations for China's leadership change this fall when Mr. Xi is due to take over the nation's top job, according to party insiders, analysts and diplomats.

The announcement of when the meeting to start the transition will take place is already considered late, after a highly unusual year in Chinese politics, and Mr. Xi's disappearance, apparently because of a health problem, has created another complication that could cause further delays, those people said.

If he reappears within the next week or so, it is unlikely to affect the personnel changes at the 18th Communist Party Congress, when Mr. Xi is expected to take over President Hu Jintao's most powerful post as general secretary of the party, they said.

But if Mr. Xi is out of the public eye for much longer than that, his absence could influence the succession plans, possibly including negotiations over whether Mr. Hu should also step down this year as chairman of the Central Military Commission, which commands the armed forces, those people say.

Speculation about the health of Mr. Xi, who hasn't appeared in public since Sept. 1 and who canceled several meetings with foreign visitors over the past week, continued Tuesday as China's Foreign Ministry again declined to comment on the well-being of the country's heir apparent.

Asked at a regular news briefing if Mr. Xi was still alive, Foreign Ministry spokesman Hong Lei said: "I hope you will ask a serious question." He declined to respond to several other questions about the vice president, including whether he would attend a conference beginning Sept. 21 in southwestern China.

The mystery surrounding Mr. Xi's disappearance illustrates how China's secretive political culture has failed to evolve in step with the economic and social changes of the last three decades, and the recent explosion of alternative online sources of information, especially microblogs that work like Twitter.

Party insiders, diplomats and political analysts said 59-year-old Mr. Xi was most likely recovering from a back injury or a bout of illness that—while not life-threatening—was serious enough to have prevented him from attending public engagements, or even having his photograph published in state media, for the last nine days.

In one clear indication that Mr. Xi wasn't dangerously ill or embroiled in a power struggle, most other Chinese leaders appeared to be sticking to their schedules, including President Hu Jintao, who attended an Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in Russia as planned over the weekend.

"It's normal to get sick or suffer some injuries, so this shouldn't affect the 18th Party Congress," said Hu Xingdou, a political economist at the Beijing Institute of Technology. "The key point is that they should deal with this using modern political methods, rather than the traditional ones of suppressing everything. They should tell people what is going on."

Whatever Mr. Xi's situation, his absence could delay the party's announcement of the dates for the party congress, and of its decision on whether ousted party official Bo Xilai should face criminal charges, analysts said.

Mr. Xi had been expected to attend a meeting of the Politburo, the party's top 25 leaders, some time in early September to decide issues including how to handle Mr. Bo, whose wife, Gu Kailai, was convicted last month of murdering a British businessman.

The Politburo is also expected to use that meeting to set dates for a gathering of the broader 300-strong Central Committee and for the party congress, which occurs once every five years and has been held between September and November for the last 15 years.

The dates for the last three Congresses, in 1997, 2002 and 2007, were announced following Politburo meetings around the end of August in those years.

However, the Politburo is now unlikely to meet until Mr. Xi has recovered because he is directly involved in preparations for the congress and is expected to brief the other members on the matter, according to several analysts.

They said that Mr. Xi was likely playing an integral role in drafting a report, to be presented by Mr. Hu at the party congress, which would chart the course for China's future development.

If Mr. Xi doesn't reappear within the next week or so, those people said, his absence could play into back-room negotiations over whether Mr. Hu should stay on as head of the Central Military Commission for a couple of years as his predecessor, Jiang Zemin, did.

Mr. Hu had originally planned to give up his military post, but had leaned toward retaining it in recent months because of fears that Mr. Bo had been actively courting political support from senior military officials, including the sons of former party leaders, the analysts and diplomats said.

More recently, they said, Mr. Hu is thought to have discussed a compromise whereby he steps down from the post, but a protégé of his, Vice Premier Li Keqiang, becomes a civilian vice chairman of the Military Commission. Mr. Li is expected to take over as premier as part of the leadership change.

But Mr. Hu would be less likely to give up his military post if his successor wasn't in good health, they said.

"It all depends on whether Xi recovers soon," said Bo Zhiyue, an expert on Chinese politics at the National University of Singapore. "If he comes back, but is weak physically, then they might say: 'You're not ready, why don't you take it one step at a time.'"

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NEA

Exclusive: New Intelligence On Iran Nuke Work

September 12, 2012

Associated Press

By George Jahn

VIENNA - The U.N. atomic agency has received new and significant intelligence over the past month that Iran has moved further toward the ability to build a nuclear weapon, diplomats tell The Associated Press.

They say the intelligence shows that Iran has advanced its work on calculating the destructive power of an atomic warhead through a series of computer models that it ran sometime within the past three years.

The diplomats say the information comes from Israel, the United States and at least two other Western countries and concludes that the work was done sometime within the past three years. The time-frame is significant because if the International Atomic Energy Agency decides that the intelligence is credible, it would strengthen its concerns that Iran has continued weapons work into the recent past - and may be continuing to do so.

Because computer modeling work is normally accompanied by physical tests of the components that go into a nuclear weapons, it would also buttress IAEA fears outlined in detail in November that Tehran is advancing its weapons research on multiple fronts.

"You want to have a theoretical understanding of the working of a nuclear weapon that is then related to the experiments you do on the various components," said David Albright, whose Washington-based Institute for Science and International Security is a frequent go-to source on Iran for Congress and other U.S. government branches. "The two go hand-in-hand."

Such computer mock-ups typically assess how high explosives compress fissile warhead material, setting off the chain reaction that results in a nuclear explosion. The yield is normally calculated in kilotons.

Any new evidence of Iranian research into nuclear weapons is likely to strengthen the hand of hawks in Israel who advocate a military strike on Iran. They argue that Tehran is deliberately stalemating international efforts at engagement while continuing its clandestine weapons work.

Iran denies any interest in nuclear weapons and says suspicions that it ever tried to develop them are based on fabricated U.S., Israeli and other intelligence. At the same time, it has blunted IAEA efforts to investigate such claims for more than five years.

It also has scoffed at Western allegations that it is enriching uranium to make the core of nuclear warheads, saying it seeks only to create reactor fuel. But it refuses to accept offers of such fuel from abroad and is now producing material that is easier to turn into weapons-grade uranium than its main, lower-enriched stockpile.

The revelations come as Israeli officials are expressing growing alarm over what they see as continuing Iranian progress toward nuclear arms.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu engaged this week in a strident public exchange with the U.S. administration, calling on Sunday for "red lines" to be set for Iran. The calls were rebuffed, and on Tuesday, Netanyahu declared that "those in the international community who refuse to draw a red line on Iran don't have a moral right to place a red light before Israel."

Netanyahu said that sanctions were hurting Iran's economy but not nearly enough to compel it to stop the nuclear program, and said negotiations by the international community with Iran on the issue had failed.

Israel's position is that airtight sanctions are needed against Iran's central bank and oil exports. Because Asian nations in particular keep buying Iranian oil the country remains a top OPEC oil exporter, even though there are signs that its revenues are down and, with the currency plummeting, standards of living in Iran have fallen.

The comments from Netanyahu were the latest suggestion that Israel is considering taking military action on its own to at least slow down Iran's program. That prospect could badly rattle world markets and spark wider war, and is opposed not only in most Western capitals but also among many in Israel's security and political establishment. But Israeli officials have said that with Iran moving facilities underground its window of opportunity is closing while the world dithers with an inadequate sanctions regime.

Although some of the new information was said to have been supplied by the United States, it appears to run counter to the stated U.S. position that Iran shut down wide-ranging secret research and development of the components of a nuclear weapons program in 2003. At the same time the U.S. fears that Iran continues to move toward the threshold of making such arms by enriching uranium.

Ali Asghar Soltanieh, Iran's chief IAEA delegate, cut short a telephone request for comment, saying he could not talk because he was in a meeting. In Tehran, meanwhile, Foreign Ministry spokesman Rahmin Mehmanparast told reporters that Iran will start answering the agency's "questions and concerns" only when "our rights and security issues" are recognized.

IAEA spokeswoman Gill Tudor said the agency would not comment. But four of six diplomats who spoke to the AP on the issue said an oblique passage in the IAEA's August Iran report saying "the agency has obtained more information which further corroborates" its suspicions alludes to the new intelligence.

All six demanded anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss classified information member countries make available to the IAEA.

Two of them said the new information builds on what the agency previously knew, not only because the research was apparently performed past 2009 but also because it reflects that Iran has allegedly moved closer to the overall ability to develop a nuclear weapon.

The IAEA first outlined suspicions in November that Iran was working on calculating the yield of a nuclear weapon, as part of a 13-page summary of Iran's suspected nuclear weapons work that it said was based on more than 1,000 pages of research and intelligence from more than 10 member nations.

It said then that "the modeling studies alleged to have been conducted in 2008 and 2009 by Iran ... (are) of particular concern," adding that the purpose of such studies for calculating anything other than nuclear explosion yields is "unclear to the agency."

Albright, of the Institute for Science and International Security, said such computer-run modeling is "critical to the development of a nuclear weapon."

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Nations Try to Increase Pressure on Iran

September 12, 2012

[Wall Street Journal](#)

By DAVID CRAWFORD

The U.S. and other countries are pushing the United Nations nuclear watchdog to step up pressure on Tehran amid what they said were new indications that it has continued to work on developing capabilities to build a nuclear weapon.

Diplomats from the U.S., Russia, China, France, the U.K. and Germany are negotiating a joint statement or resolution aimed at pushing Iran to answer questions about its nuclear program. The statement would be issued by the International Atomic Energy Agency, which is meeting this week in Vienna and is expected to turn its attention to Iran on Wednesday.

While the six countries differ on how to press Iran to comply with the agency's investigation into its nuclear program, diplomats from two of the nations said they were eager to present a united front amid growing tensions in the Middle East.

The civil war in Syria, a close ally of Iran, and Israel's threats to attack Iran's nuclear program have increased the urgency, the countries said.

Further spurring the efforts, according to Western diplomats, is new intelligence that suggests Iran's nuclear research is tied to attempts to develop weapons. IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano alluded to the intelligence in a report presented last month, saying the agency "has become increasingly concerned about the possible existence in Iran of undisclosed nuclear-related activities involving military-related organizations, including activities related to the development of a nuclear payload for a

missile." Mr. Amano said new information corroborated agency suspicions the activity might be continuing.

Diplomats said the intelligence was supplied to the agency by several member states. An IAEA spokesman declined to comment on the evidence.

The six countries—the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council plus Germany, or P5+1, which represents the international community in nuclear negotiations with Iran—have supported a series of resolutions over the past five years calling on Tehran to cooperate with IAEA investigators. But the investigation has been stalled since February, when the talks with Iran faltered.

Mr. Amano told the IAEA Board of Governors on Monday that Iran's failure to cooperate with his agency's investigation "is frustrating because, without Iran's full engagement, we will not be able to start the process to resolve all outstanding issues, including those concerning possible military dimensions to its nuclear program."

U.S. officials have long argued that Iran is secretly developing technology needed to build a nuclear weapon. Iran says its nuclear program is solely for peaceful purposes and has argued that claims to the contrary are based on fabricated U.S. and Israeli intelligence.

Diplomats from the U.K., France and Germany are pressing for language that would mention the need for Iran to give the IAEA access to its Parchin military installation, Western diplomats said. Russia opposes mention of any specific nuclear sites and instead is pushing for a broader statement that Iran should cooperate with the IAEA, a Western diplomat said. The U.S., meanwhile, has been lobbying for an agreement that would receive broad support in an IAEA Board of Governors resolution, while others have advocated simply for a joint statement.

"The important message is that the P5+1 is unified," said a diplomat, who played down the importance of a resolution. The IAEA Board of Governors could vote on a resolution on Wednesday or Thursday, diplomats said.

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Syria's War Animates Zealots in Iraq

September 12, 2012

Wall Street Journal

By ALI A. NABHAN And SAM DAGHER

AL-QAIM, Iraq—The Syrian war is fanning a sectarian backlash in neighboring Iraq, as rising violence attributed to al Qaeda on both sides of the border pushes the government in Baghdad closer to its counterpart in Damascus.

The tensions can be seen in and around Al-Qaim, a desert border town in Iraq's Anbar province, where U.S. forces led a campaign six years ago that mostly halted al Qaeda's sway.

Hundreds of Syrians, some wounded, who have escaped the Syrian regime's aerial bombardments of the nearby Syrian town of Al-Bukamal are stuck at the border after being refused entry by Iraqi authorities, said Al-Qaim's mayor, Farhan Ftaikhan.

The Iraqi army, which is concerned al Qaeda fighters might use the refugee influx to cross into Iraq and turn places like Al-Qaim into havens, kept them out, a government spokesman said.

Among all of Syria's neighbors, Iraq has accepted the least number of Syrian refugees, taking in an estimated 16,000 out of a total of more than 234,000 as of Sept. 4, according to the United Nations. Most have gone to Iraq's northern self-ruled Kurdish region, where Baghdad has no control.

Last month, the Iraqi military sent reinforcements to the town of Al-Qaim and closed the border crossing after Baghdad briefly allowed a few thousand refugees in. The move created resentment among many of Anbar's Sunni Muslim residents, who accused the roughly 5,000-strong army unit, drawn mostly of Iraq's majority Shiite Muslim population, of religious bias and of trying to stop their Syrian relatives from seeking shelter from the violence of Syria's conflict.

"The Iraqi government wants to prop up the Syrian regime, and the motive is Iran and sectarian," said Amer al-Ani, a Sunni cleric in Al-Qaim. Shiites rule Iraq and Iran, and Syria's leadership draws heavily from the Shiite-linked Alawite sect.

The Iraqi military says it needs to fight extremists trying to gain influence in both Syria and in adjacent Sunni provinces in Iraq like Anbar. People who accuse Iraqi troops of sectarian bias want to "turn Anbar into a playground for terrorists," said Gen. Ali Ghaidan, commander of Iraq's ground troops. in an interview

Gen. Ghaidan, like many Iraqi officials, says the 18-month conflict in neighboring Syria has revitalized al Qaeda militants, who see the battle as part of a bigger struggle to unite Middle Eastern nations under a Sunni caliphate. An Iraqi border official said militants on both sides of the border are sharing resources, fighters and arms.

In a statement posted on a jihadist website Monday, the al Qaeda-linked group known as the Islamic State of Iraq claimed responsibility for bombings and assassinations the day before that killed nearly 100 people. The Iraqi government said Sunday the group was exploiting the sectarian divide in Iraq and Syria.

Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki has called his government neutral in the Syrian conflict, tiptoeing around both the Sunni states backing the Syrian uprising—Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates—and on the other side Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and his allies, Iran and Russia.

Iraqi officials have maintained support for a peaceful resolution but have accused Gulf countries of stoking the conflict. As the threat from al Qaeda appears to have grown recently, Mr. Maliki has closed ranks with Syria's regime, sharing intelligence and maintaining trade, financial and political ties, said Iraqi officials close to Mr. Maliki.

"If al Qaeda succeeds in toppling the regime in Syria, then the Shiite government in Iraq will be next," said Baqer Jabr al-Zubaidi, a former finance and interior minister, who is now a parliament member from Mr. Maliki's Shiite coalition, reflecting the thinking of most Iraqi Shiite leaders.

Mr. Zubaidi accuses Saudi Arabia and Qatar, which espouse a fundamentalist form of Sunni Islam and are currently leading the push against the Assad regime, of supporting al Qaeda militants. "Saudi Arabia

is thinking seriously of forming a corridor that connects with Anbar, Mosul and Turkey to the north," he said. Both Gulf countries have dismissed the accusations.

The Islamic State of Iraq's new self-proclaimed leader announced in July a new offensive to topple Iraq's government. He urged a Sunni jihad against Shiites and their allies in Iraq and Syria and appealed to the Sunni tribes to contribute funds and fighters.

Since then, the size, complexity and frequency of attacks against Shiite civilians and the Shiite-led government's pillars of power—including the army, police and judiciary—have risen sharply, Iraqi officials say. The strikes also target Sunni tribal figures in Anbar Province who al Qaeda views as collaborating with the Iraqi government and previously the U.S. military.

To be sure, al Qaeda is nowhere near its former strength in Anbar province when foreign fighters flocked in and allied themselves to Iraq's Sunni tribes and insurgents to fight U.S.-led troops after the 2003 invasion that toppled Saddam Hussein and empowered the country's Shiite majority.

The militant group's bloody methods soon galvanized many in the tribe to join a U.S.-funded and backed anti-Qaeda campaign starting in 2006 that came to be known as the Sahwa, or the Awakening.

Baghdad has since then exploited tribal rivalries and used economic and political patronage to maintain a fragile control in Anbar and other mainly Sunni tribal areas.

But there are signs these arrangements are being tested, partly due to the escalating conflict in Syria.

"What's happening [in Syria] now is providing a phenomenal environment for al Qaeda to exploit in order to regain control," said Brig. Gen. Tariq al-Asal, who heads Iraq's border security at the Ministry of Interior, and who previously served as Anbar's police chief. Gen. al-Asal hails from one of the province's main Sunni tribes.

Last month, Mahdi al-Sumaidaie, a Sunni cleric and Anbar native, was gravely wounded and four of his bodyguards were killed when a bomb struck his convoy in Baghdad. Mr. Sumaidaie became a prominent advocate of Sunni-Shiite reconciliation after spending time in a U.S. military jail in Iraq after the 2003 invasion for ties to the Sunni insurgency at the time.

The rising violence "means networks are being re-established," said Lt. Gen. James M. Dubik, a retired U.S. military commander who oversaw the expansion and training of Iraq's security forces in 2007-08 before joining the Washington-based military think tank the Institute for the Study of War.

Gen. Dubik said al Qaeda's support networks in places like Anbar were eroded by the Sahwa campaign but never died out because the Shiite-led central government failed to accommodate Sunnis in power structures and government positions to the extent needed to fully delegitimize the insurgency.

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Iraq Opens Controversial Refugee Camp To Diplomats

September 12, 2012

Associated Press

By Lara Jakes

BAGHDAD - Iraq offered foreign diplomats on Tuesday a rare glimpse at a camp that is the new temporary home of an Iranian exile opposition group that has a long-running feud with Baghdad, winning from the envoys cautious praise of the conditions there.

The Mujahedeen-e-Khalq opposed the move to Camp Liberty, a former U.S. base on the outskirts of Baghdad, from another camp in Iraq. They say it is an intolerable prison. Iraq says that it is up to international standards.

The back-and-forth bickering feeds into a wider, decade-long dispute between the MEK and Iraq over the fate of the former guerrilla movement. Iraq considers the MEK to be terrorists and wants them to leave the country. The MEK, also called the People's Mujahedeen of Iran, wants to move back to their old home at Camp Ashraf northeast of the capital.

Foreign diplomats who visited the dusty complex of former U.S. housing containers described the conditions as acceptable. Some said the conditions there looked good compared to other refugee camps.

"I wouldn't choose to live here, but when we talk about refugees ... and what their living conditions are all over the world, this should be considered exceptional," said Ramon Molina, the Spanish Embassy's deputy chief of mission.

"It is not very good, but it is not bad also, said Pakistani diplomat Saif Khwaja. "The people who are living here are not from Iraq, and the Iraqi government is bearing the burden of these people."

The MEK complains they are not allowed to leave and they live without reliable electricity, air condition or water supplies.

"This is not a place to live in. This is not a camp. This is only a prison," said Liberty resident Homa Roboby, 28. "They are trying to make a life here that is intolerable."

The MEK is an opposition group to Tehran's clerical regime. Several thousand of its members were given sanctuary in Iraq by dictator Saddam Hussein. But the Shiite-led government in Baghdad, which is bolstering its ties with Iran, says its members are living in Iraq illegally.

The group is also designated as a terrorist organization by the United States but Washington is currently weighing whether to take them off the list - a decision that will be made in upcoming weeks.

Camp Liberty was designed as a compromise way-station for the U.N. to speed the exiles out of Iraq peacefully. Iraqi security forces have launched two deadly raids since 2009 on the MEK's longtime home at Camp Ashraf, an inclusive mini-city that the exiles never wanted to leave.

At Liberty, the exiles live in cramped portable housing units left behind by the U.S. military, which occupied the base until it withdrew its troops from Iraq last December. They receive medical attention in a former first aid station. And they eat in a former U.S. dining hall complete with flat-screen TVs that looks very much like how the military left it - with the addition of fresh flowers on tables.

A small patch of yellow sunflowers was planted outside the dining hall, and twinkly lights were strung around posts and from the ceilings in an attempt to brighten up an area that has been dingy if sufficient for inhabitants long before the MEK arrived.

Most of the exiles wore loose clothes in khaki and other muted solid colors, and swarmed the visitors with their grievances. "Message fully understood," one British diplomat said repeatedly.

The Associated Press and Iraq's state-run TV were also on the tour in the first time the government has allowed journalists inside Liberty since the MEK began moving there earlier this year.

The exiles' local leader, Abbas Davari, called the camp "dilapidated" and complained that the Iraqi government has delayed the MEK from moving generators to Liberty from Ashraf, and stymied construction of a new water treatment system.

Gorges Bakoos, who is overseeing the issue for the government, said officials are trying to solve both problems. In the meantime, he said, each exile receives at least 200 liters of water every day, above the U.N. standard of 120 daily liters per refugee. And he said residents already get electricity around the clock - unlike most Iraqis who only get a few hours each day.

The exiles denied that. "In front of you, they say one thing, but once you go - no way," said Youssef Mahoozi, 51, who lived at Ashraf for 25 years before moving to Liberty six months ago.

The next group of exiles will move within days from Ashraf to Liberty, where U.N. will process their refugee applications and try to find countries to accept them. After that, an estimated 200 will remain at Ashraf for a few more weeks as they try to sell property left behind to traders.

The U.N. has interviewed about 90 Liberty residents but has yet to find any countries that will take them. "We are in dire need of countries coming forward to offer their help," Gyorgy Busztin, deputy U.N. envoy to Iraq, told the diplomats.

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Obama Denies Refusal To Meet Netanyahu

September 12, 2012

Washington Times

By Dave Boyer

Seeking to calm a growing rift over Iran's nuclearization, President Obama spoke by phone to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for an hour Tuesday night and later denied reports that he was refusing to meet Mr. Netanyahu in the U.S. this month.

"President Obama and Prime Minister Netanyahu reaffirmed that they are united in their determination to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon, and agreed to continue their close consultations going forward," the White House said in a hastily arranged statement.

Mr. Netanyahu blasted the Obama administration earlier Tuesday, venting his frustration at the U.S. for its refusal to draw a "red line" on Iran's nuclear program -- a line that, if crossed by Iran, would prompt a U.S. military response. He said such a line must be drawn for Israel to pull back from contemplating a unilateral attack on Iran.

"The world tells Israel: 'Wait. There's still time.' And I say: 'Wait for what? Wait until when?'" Mr. Netanyahu said. "Those in the international community who refuse to put red lines before Iran don't have a moral right to place a red light before Israel."

He was responding to comments by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who said the U.S. would not set deadlines for negotiations with the Iranian government.

Mr. Obama has been saying for months that there is still time for negotiations to prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapon.

In addition to heightening international tensions, the increasingly public rift between Israel and the U.S. has implications for the presidential election, with Republican nominee Mitt Romney seeking to draw away some of Mr. Obama's Jewish supporters. Mr. Romney has been promoting his acquaintance with Mr. Netanyahu and arguing the he would be a more staunch defender of Israel than Mr. Obama.

The White House said Mr. Obama spoke with Mr. Netanyahu for an hour "as a part of their ongoing consultations."

"The two leaders discussed the threat posed by Iran's nuclear program, and our close cooperation on Iran and other security issues," the White House said.

Earlier in the day, the White House said Mr. Obama would not meet with Mr. Netanyahu when he travels to the U.S. later this month for the United Nations General Assembly session because the two men would not be in New York on the same day. Israeli media reported that Mr. Netanyahu had offered to travel to Washington to meet with Mr. Obama.

The White House tried to knock down those reports.

"Contrary to reports in the press, there was never a request for Prime Minister Netanyahu to meet with President Obama in Washington, nor was a request for a meeting ever denied," the White House said. [\(top\)](#)

Israeli Official Cites Syrian Raid To Justify Attack On Iranian Nuke Sites

September 12, 2012

Washington Times

By Abraham Rabinovich

JERUSALEM - An Israeli official has cited a 2007 airstrike on a Syrian nuclear reactor - which Israel has never publicly acknowledged - to justify the Jewish state's right to launch a unilateral attack on Iran's nuclear facilities if the U.S. refrains from action.

"President [George W.] Bush did not agree to the United States taking part [in the 2007 raid], but in any event the right step was taken," Environment Minister Gilad Erdan said Monday on Israel Radio.

Mr. Erdan's unprecedented comments come amid reports of discord between U.S. and Israeli officials over how to deal with Iran's atomic program. Israeli leaders have called for a military strike, but U.S. leaders have been ambiguous supporting about such action, saying that international sanctions against Iran's oil industry need more time to work.

The comments also have come amid new reports that the International Atomic Energy Agency, the U.N. nuclear watchdog, has received more evidence of Iran's work in developing the capability to produce nuclear weapons.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has continued his debate with Obama administration over its refusal to draw a "red line" on Iran's nuclear program - a line that, if crossed by Tehran, would draw U.S. military response. Only if such a line is drawn, the Israeli leader has said, would Israel take a unilateral attack off the table.

"The world tells Israel, 'Wait, there's still time,' " Mr. Netanyahu said Tuesday. "Those in the international community who refuse to put red lines before Iran don't have a moral right to place a red light before Israel."

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Egypt Trying To Persuade Iran To Drop Assad

September 12, 2012

Associated Press

By Hamza Hendawi

CAIRO - Newly activist Egypt is trying to convince Iran to drop its unquestioned support of Syria's embattled President Bashar Assad in order to end that country's bloody civil war in exchange for help in easing Tehran's regional isolation at a time of mounting pressure on it over its disputed nuclear program.

The offer is the centerpiece of a diplomatic push by Egypt's new Islamist president, who is hoping his "Islamic Quartet" - grouping Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Egypt, all supporters of the Syrian rebellion, with Syria's top regional ally Iran - can succeed where other initiatives have failed.

The grouping is the first major effort to involve Iran in resolving the crisis. But it may be a tough sell. Tehran's influence in the Middle East is strongly tied to its alliance with Assad and his fall would be a major blow. Moreover, the quartet members themselves have their own divisions. Sunni powerhouse Saudi Arabia, along with other Gulf Arab nations, has been staunchly opposed to any Iranian expansion and may resist ending Tehran's isolation.

Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi made the offer when he met last month with Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in Tehran, officials close to the Egyptian presidency said. Morsi's visit to Iran, to attend a summit of the 120-nation Nonaligned Movement, was the first by an Egyptian president since the 1979 Islamic Revolution there, when diplomatic ties between the countries were cut.

Morsi offered a package of incentives for Tehran to end its support of Assad, the officials said.

Cairo would agree to restore full diplomatic ties, a significant diplomatic prize for Iran given that Egypt is the most populous Arab nation and a regional powerhouse. Morsi would also mediate to improve relations between Iran and conservative Gulf Arab nations that have long viewed Shiite Iran with suspicion and whose fears of the Persian nation have deepened because of Iran's disputed nuclear program.

Also, Morsi offered a "safe exit" for Assad, his family and members of his inner circle.

The officials spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the terms of the offer. They did not give a timeframe for the offer or say what Ahmadinejad's response was.

Morsi's argument is that neither Assad nor the rebels fighting his regime appear to be capable of winning the civil war, creating a stalemate that could eventually break up the Arab nation with serious repercussions for the entire region, the officials said.

"Egypt is convinced that what is ahead in Syria under Assad will be much worse than anything the world has seen there so far," said one of the officials. "In view of this, Egypt believes that preventing more bloodshed will be a huge achievement."

Morsi, who took office less than three months ago as Egypt's first elected and civilian president, voiced his support for the rebels against Assad's "oppressive" regime in a speech at the summit in Tehran. The move angered the Iranians, but won accolades across much of the Arab world and in Washington. It also drove the point home to the Iranians that continuing to support Assad was untenable.

The Syrian conflict has defied diplomatic solutions. Cease-fires called for by the U.N. and Arab League have been still-born as Assad's regime pushed ahead with its military campaign to stamp out the rebels, who drove ahead with their effort to bring him down.

The Syrian conflict started in March last year with a wave of mostly peaceful protests calling on Assad to step down. The uprising has morphed into a ruinous civil war. Activists say at least 23,000 people have been killed so far and the U.N. refugee agency says more than a quarter of a million people have fled the country. The conflict also has a dangerous sectarian tone: Syria's Sunni majority make up the backbone of the rebellion, while the regime is dominated by minority Alawites, the Shiite offshoot to which Assad belongs.

Diplomats from the Quartet met in Cairo for the first time Monday, and Egypt said foreign ministers from the four nations would meet in the coming days.

One prominent Syrian anti-regime activist said Iran's participation in the group suggests it realizes that supporting Assad may not be workable in the long run.

"There is a consensus among the four that the Syrian conflict must end before the country disintegrates. If this happens, the fallout will touch everyone in the region," said Rami Abdul-Rahman, director of the British-based Observatory for Human Rights in Syria, an activist group that monitors violence and abuses in Syria.

"If left to its own devices, the war will continue for four or five more years," he said.

But abandoning Assad would be difficult. Iran provides Syria with substantial financial aid and weapons, both key for Assad to continue in his crackdown on rebels.

Syria is Iran's gateway to Lebanon, where the Shiite Hezbollah group is a longtime ally. Syria has been a firm friend of Iran for decades - the only Arab nation to side with it against Saddam Hussein's Iraq during their ruinous war in the 1980s.

Still, Iran needs allies now more than at any time in recent years as its fears grow of a possible strike against its nuclear facilities by Israel or the United States while a host of U.N. sanctions begin to hurt its vital oil industry. The U.S. and its allies believe Iran's nuclear program is aimed at producing weapons, a claim Tehran denies.

Ties with Egypt could bring other benefits. Iranian Oil Minister Rostam Ghasemi said Monday that talks were taking place with Egypt for Iran to sell it oil. There was no official confirmation from Egypt that such talks were taking place, but Cairo has in recent months suffered from acute fuel shortages, blamed in part on its dwindling foreign currency reserves and lower credit ratings.

The new head of Egypt's diplomatic mission in Tehran, Khaled Emarah, may have been referring to those talks when he told a seminar in Cairo on Tuesday that Iran enjoyed a "surplus" in the oil sector and that it cooperated with many foreign nations in that field. In Washington, the U.S. State Department said it was aware of the media reports on the talks, but "will not speculate on hypothetical scenarios."

It said the U.S. will continue to implement sanctions "and increase pressure on the regime" while helping other countries to find energy alternatives, the State Department said.

But while Morsi can deliver on restoring Cairo's diplomatic relations with Iran, he may have a difficult time persuading Gulf leaders to improve their relations.

Iran has for decades occupied three Gulf islands that the United Arab Emirates claims as its own. Bahrain accuses Iran of inciting its Shiite majority against the ruling Sunni family. Saudi Arabia also sees an Iranian hand in the intermittent unrest in its mostly Shiite, oil-rich eastern region. Gulf states have been alarmed by Iran's growing influence in Shiite-majority Iraq.

"This will be a difficult goal for Morsi to achieve success," said Jamie Chandler, a political science professor at Hunter College in New York City. "The countries involved (in the quartet) have historically strained relations. But, if the conversation focuses on exile (for Assad), then Iran will be the most likely sanctuary."

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Egypt denies in talks to buy Iranian oil

September 12, 2012

Reuters

CAIRO - Egypt denied on Tuesday comments attributed to Iranian Oil Minister Rostam Qasemi that it was in talks to buy Iranian crude oil.

The Iranian Students' News Agency (ISNA) reported the comments on Monday.

"All that has been published on negotiations being held for Egypt to buy Iranian oil is completely devoid of truth," Egyptian Oil Minister Osama Kamal told Reuters.

"I can confirm that the Egyptian Petroleum Ministry has not entered into this type of negotiation before, and all that has been said on the matter is totally untrue," he added.

Iran has been looking for new buyers for its oil as western sanctions over its disputed nuclear program squeeze sales to long-time customers.

Iranian officials have said on several occasions over the last few months they are in talks to sell oil to new customers, but rarely name them and there is little evidence of significant volumes of oil being shipped to new customers.

Diplomatic relations between Tehran and Cairo broke down after Iran's 1979 Islamic revolution over Egypt's support for the overthrown Shah and its peace agreement with Iran's arch-enemy Israel.

Since the fall of President Hosni Mubarak, there have been signs of warming relations, including Egyptian President Mohamed Mursi last month making the first visit to Tehran by an Egyptian leader in more than 30 years.

Kamal told state owned Al-Ahram newspaper earlier this month that Cairo had "no objection" to importing Iranian crude and processing it in Egyptian refineries.

The European Union imposed a total ban on purchases of Iranian crude from July, making it difficult for Tehran to sell all its oil, the lifeblood of its economy.

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U.S. urges Lebanon to prevent Iran, Syria sanctions evasion

September 12, 2012

Reuters

BEIRUT - U.S. Deputy Treasury Secretary Neal Wolin urged Lebanese leaders and bankers in Beirut on Tuesday to ensure their country was not used by Iran and Syria to evade financial sanctions.

A U.S. embassy statement said Wolin "underscored the need for Lebanon to prevent abuse of the Lebanese financial sector by illicit actors and for Lebanese banks and regulatory authorities to remain vigilant against the evasion of sanctions by Iran and Syria".

Wolin met Prime Minister Najib Mikati, Economy Minister Nicolas Nahhas and Central Bank Governor Riad Salameh on the first day of a regional trip which will also take him to Saudi Arabia and Tunisia.

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Salam Fayyad Unveils Price, Tax Cuts To Stem Growing West Bank Protests

September 12, 2012

[Washington Post](#)

By Joel Greenberg

RAMALLAH, West Bank - Scrambling to head off intensifying protests against the high cost of living in the West Bank, the prime minister of the Palestinian Authority, Salam Fayyad, announced price and tax cuts Tuesday and said his government was doing its best to alleviate economic hardship.

Fayyad has been the target of several days of demonstrations in West Bank cities. The protests turned violent Monday when rioters attacked police stations and government buildings in Hebron and Nablus. Protesters have called for Fayyad's dismissal, venting their anger over recent price hikes that have driven up costs of food and fuel.

The demonstrations have posed a serious challenge to the cash-strapped Palestinian Authority, which faces a shortfall in promised donations from Arab countries and the United States.

After a meeting of his cabinet, Fayyad announced a decision to cancel increases this month in the prices of diesel fuel, kerosene and cooking gas, which are purchased from Israel, and to reduce the recently raised value-added tax, which is pegged to Israeli rates under an economic agreement with Israel.

Fayyad said government employees, hundreds of whom staged a two-hour work stoppage and demonstrated outside his office Tuesday, would be paid half their August salaries by Wednesday, and he pledged efforts to complete the wage payments in a week.

He said the government would make up for revenue losses from the price and tax reductions by cutting the salaries of ministers and other high-level officials and by reducing some government expenditures.

"We're doing the best we can, and we have been all along," he told a news conference. "I hope that the Palestinian citizen could look at this situation, in light of the unique hardships we face, and will find it sufficient. It represents the maximum, most intensive effort to get to a solution."

It was not immediately clear whether the announced measures would halt the wave of protests, which subsided Tuesday after the previous day's violence. Piles of rocks and the charred remains of burned tires still littered some streets, but protests were suspended in Hebron after crowds of youths Monday smashed traffic lights and stoned city hall, an Education Ministry building, a police post and a fire station.

The festering discontent was on display outside the cabinet building, where demonstrators chanted calls for Fayyad to "hear the voice of the masses."

Among the protesters was Baker Armoush, a father of five who works as a courier in a government ministry. His voice trembling with emotion, he said his salary of about \$400 a month was not enough to cover the costs of food, rent and utilities. To supplement his meager income, he said, he was forced to accept handouts from friends and work nights selling ice cream on the street.

Aside from its urgent need for donor contributions, Fayyad told reporters, the Palestinian Authority is constrained by Israeli-imposed restrictions on movement and access to resources in the West Bank, more than half of which remains under direct Israeli control.

"There are clear limits to what the Palestinian Authority can achieve economically, given the context of Israeli restrictions it experiences," Fayyad said.

In Israel, where the developments in the West Bank have raised concerns for the stability of the Palestinian Authority, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu ordered an advance transfer of about \$63 million in taxes and customs duties collected by Israel for the authority at its entry ports, his office said. Netanyahu said earlier that he hoped the Palestinian Authority would "weather this crisis."

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Wounded Flood Hospitals In Syria's Largest City

September 12, 2012

Associated Press

By Paul Schemm

ALEPPO, Syria - It had been a calm day in Aleppo's Shifa Hospital, said Dr. Osman al-Haj Osman, his face etched with exhaustion from just three hours of sleep. Then, a man burst in bearing the shrieking bundle of a 6-year-old girl who'd had a machine-gun bullet rip through both her knees.

Two months into the battle for Syria's largest city, civilians are still bearing the brunt of the daily assaults of helicopter gunships, roaring jets and troops fighting in the streets.

Shoving aside the orderlies and armed rebels milling around the cramped lobby Tuesday afternoon, the man deposited Fatima Qassem onto a gurney as a nurse swooped in and began cutting away the blood-soaked bandages on her knees.

A doctor reached in and pulled out an inch-long fragment of metal. There was a gush of blood. Large sections of bone and muscle were missing from the back of her knee.

She cried out plaintively for "Baba," because the man who brought her was not her father - just someone who had rushed her across town to the hospital. The family was hopefully on its way.

There was a piercing scream as the nurse picked her up again, jostling her awkwardly dangling legs and carrying her around a narrow corner into a small operating theater. Her cries subsided into a steady moan.

Her father, Abdu Qassem, came in 15 minutes later, his shirt covered with blood, probably from carrying his daughter out of the car, and frantically asked the orderly behind the desk how she was doing.

Qassem said they had been driving through a neighborhood when their car was raked by machine-gun fire from government troops.

In the operating room, Fatima's crying grew muffled as an anesthetic was administered and her mouth went slack. Osman cleaned the blood away from the wound and tried to find a way to repair the damage.

Just a few feet away from the commotion, on the next bed, a nurse calmly bandaged the hand of a stone-faced rebel who was oblivious to the stricken child nearby.

A tiny boy walked in and stared with curiosity at the blood and ruin of Fatima's legs before a nurse suddenly saw him and ushered him out. It was Osman's 4-year-old son, Omar.

When Osman started pulling all-day and all-night shifts during Syria's civil war, his wife and two children moved into the hospital so that he would actually get to see them.

"He plays between the wounded. It's a great upbringing," Osman joked in the few calm moments before another patient was carried in. He spoke in English - a language he said he learned from watching the Fox Movie Channel on satellite TV. Perhaps another joke.

The 30-year-old doctor estimated that 80 percent of the patients are civilians, wounded by falling buildings and exploding shells from the constant bombardment that government forces mete out to the parts of the city outside their control.

On Tuesday, the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported shelling in several areas across Aleppo that killed more than a dozen and collapsed a three-story building in the nearby neighborhood of Haideriya.

Forces loyal to President Bashar Assad have been increasingly relying on the government's artillery and air power to fight the tenacious rebels who so far refuse to be dislodged from Aleppo.

The city is Syria's commercial hub, and its middle and upper classes were bastions of support for Assad. If the rebels took such a key city, it would give them a quasi-capital to complement the large swaths of territory they control in the north, up to the Turkish border.

Osman said the rebels he treats mostly have gunshot wounds from the ubiquitous snipers scattered over the many front lines.

The hospital itself has been hit directly twice by shells, demolishing two of the upper floors. Bombs fell nearby several times, spraying the entrance with shrapnel and debris.

The hospital has a staff of only five doctors and no surgeons, so difficult cases are often farmed out to other facilities, including a hospital in the town of al-Bab, about 40 kilometers (25 miles) to the northeast.

While there are enough drugs in the hospital so far to deal with the daily violence - which on Monday killed 25 and wounded dozens in shelling believed to be in retaliation for the rebel capture of an army barracks - the staff is overstretched.

"What day is it? I don't know. What time is it? I don't know," Osman said, adding that he goes to sleep at 4 a.m. and wakes up at 8 a.m. - unless he's roused earlier for an emergency.

"My life is just the wounded and the dead," he said.

Outside the hospital, in the surprisingly bustling neighborhood of Tareeq al-Bab, there is the sound of gunfire. A helicopter gunship is lazily circling the neighborhood and rebels on the roofs of the apartment buildings are futilely emptying the clips of their inadequate Kalashnikovs into the sky.

Abu Hassan, who was once a carpenter, sells vegetables on the street facing the hospital because there is no other work. He navigates the tortuous jigsaw of rebel- and government-controlled neighborhoods every day.

"When we are under bombardment, the water and electricity can be cut for days," he said, explaining that if he had the money, he would try to follow the hundreds of thousands of other Syrians who have fled for the border. Since the uprising against Assad began 18 months ago, activists estimate that at least 23,000 people have been killed.

The streets between the shattered apartment buildings are choked with garbage that can no longer be collected.

Although meat is scarce, residents of Aleppo are eating adequately, said Alaa Mursi, gesturing at the eggs, chickpeas, tomatoes and other produce being sold. Many, however, are surviving on handouts.

"People give us food to eat," he said. "There are rich people who distribute food for us."

Just a few blocks away is the neighborhood of Hanano, on the city's edge, where the rebels began their assault two months ago. The streets are largely deserted because most residents were recent immigrants who could flee to relatives in the comparative safety of the countryside.

A few men lounge in the shade of a scraggly tree in the otherwise grim vista of cheaply built concrete five-story buildings.

Overhead is the whirring noise of a jet's engines - a mundane sound in the West that can mean sudden, inexplicable and random death in Aleppo.

"We are afraid to stay in the houses, so we hang out on the street," said Abu Alaa, a jovial 30-year-old who hasn't worked in months. "We sent our families to the countryside and we stay here to look after the place, in case of thieves."

The sound of the jet suddenly builds to a crescendo and there is a muffled crump, mercifully in the distance. Another airstrike. The men gesture in the direction of the explosion and say that just this morning, a bomb fell a block away, killing a woman.

"We can't sleep here during the night or day," said Abu Abed, who looks much older than his 40 years. "In the morning, it's the jets. In the afternoon, it's the helicopters. And at night, it's the shelling."
(top)

Car Bomb Kills 12 in Yemen, But Targeted Minister Escapes Harm

September 12, 2012

New York Times

By Nasser Arrabyee And Alan Cowell

SANA, Yemen - A car bomb exploded Tuesday alongside a convoy of vehicles used by Yemen's defense minister, killing seven bodyguards and five civilians in the heart of the capital, Sana, while the minister escaped unharmed, government and hospital officials said. The attack came one day after a top operative of Al Qaeda in Yemen was killed in what Yemeni officials called an American drone strike.

The episodes spoke to the continued turmoil in poverty-stricken Yemen, where the United States is seeking to eradicate militant cells held responsible for a number of conspiracies, including an attempt by an operative of Al Qaeda to detonate an underwear bomb on a flight bound for Detroit in December 2009.

The blast on Tuesday in downtown Sana tore through a thoroughfare between the cabinet office and the state radio building, shattering buildings and wrecking a vehicle carrying the seven bodyguards, seconds after the minister himself, Maj. Gen. Mohammed Nasser Ahmed, had passed by in another vehicle after a weekly cabinet meeting.

The Interior Ministry said other explosives were found nearby and defused. The blast wounded 15 people. State television reported that Ali al-Ansi, head of the National Security Agency, Yemen's intelligence agency, was fired after the attack.

No group claimed responsibility in the hours immediately after the attack, which seemed similar to earlier bombings ascribed to Al Qaeda. Militants have struck at government targets in Yemen in retaliation for the government's campaign against Qaeda cells.

The bombing on Tuesday was not the first attempt on General Ahmed's life. Last year, he was the target of two assassination attempts in southern Yemen in less than a month, one in Abyan Province and the second in the port city of Aden. And in May, a man disguised as a soldier blew himself up amid a military parade rehearsal near the presidential palace in Sana, killing hundreds, just before General Ahmed had been expected to greet the troops.

The attack came a day after state news media in Yemen said that Saeed Ali al-Shihri, the second in command for Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula - the Yemen-based regional affiliate of Al Qaeda - was killed along with six other militants by an airstrike in the eastern Hadramawt region.

Mr. Shihri, a Saudi citizen released from the American detention facility at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, in 2007 after six years of incarceration, escaped an initial drone attack and made off into the desert, witnesses in the region said, but the remotely piloted aircraft tracked him down.

Yemeni military officials said the missile was probably fired by an American-operated drone. The Associated Press reported that two senior United States officials confirmed Mr. Shihri's death but not any American involvement. Strikes by remotely piloted aircraft against militants in Yemen have been reported in the past, including some against American citizens.

Less than two weeks ago, an airstrike hit a vehicle carrying suspected militants in eastern Yemen, killing eight. At the time, The A.P. quoted a Yemeni official as saying that the attack, the third in a week, had been carried out by a United States drone.

In July, relatives of three American citizens killed in drone strikes in Yemen last year filed a wrongful-death lawsuit against four senior national security officials. The suit, in Federal District Court in Washington, was a new development in the legal debate over the Obama administration's use of drones in pursuit of terrorism suspects.

The first strike, on Sept. 30, killed a group of people including Anwar al-Awlaki, a radical Muslim cleric who was born in New Mexico, and Samir Khan, a naturalized American citizen who has lived in Queens, Long Island and North Carolina. The second, on Oct. 14, killed a group of people including Mr. Awlaki's 16-year-old son, Abdulrahman al-Awlaki, who was born in Colorado.

The Yemeni authorities have fought a long campaign against encroachment by Qaeda militants.

In June, an important military commander was assassinated in Aden shortly after the Yemeni government announced a major military victory. The commander, Maj. Gen. Salim Ali Qatn, died when a suicide bomber blew himself up in front of his vehicle, the authorities said.

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Yemen's president replaces security chiefs after Sanaa attack

September 12, 2012

[Reuters](#)

SANAA - Yemen's president replaced security officials and some ministers late on Tuesday, state media reported, in an apparent move to reduce the influence of former leader Ali Abdullah Saleh following an attempt on the defense minister's life.

A car bomb targeting the motorcade of Defense Minister Major General Muhammad Nasir Ahmad in Sanaa on Tuesday killed 12 people and wounded dozens but left him largely unscathed.

Yemen has been in turmoil since an uprising against Saleh last year that forced the former president to step down in November under a Gulf power transfer deal in favor of his deputy, Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi.

Hadi appointed a new oil and minerals minister, Ahmed Dares, and higher education minister, Hesham Sharaf, state news agency Saba said.

He also replaced the heads of military intelligence and national security, both seen as close to Saleh, and appointed two officials to key posts in the president's office.

The new military intelligence chief, Ahmed al-Yafie, was formerly a senior defense ministry official. Incoming national security chief Ali Hassan al-Ahmadi was previously governor of Shabwa province in southern Yemen.

Hadi's new presidential office manager Nasr Taha Mustafa was formerly the chief of the state news agency who turned against Saleh during last year's uprising.

Saba also said the position of secretary general of the president's office was now held by Ali Mansour bin Safaa, former ambassador to Bahrain who hails from Hadi's region of Abyan in southern Yemen.

"This was expected. They are the demands of youth and political circles to complete the process of transferring authority and distancing some power centers who have a strong connection to the tension and current events," Ali al-Sarari, a government advisor, told al-Jazeera television.

Thousands of Yemenis marched through Sanaa on Tuesday to demand Saleh be tried over corruption and the deaths of protesters. They denounced the U.S.- and Saudi-backed power transfer deal that gave him immunity from prosecution for standing down.

Hadi has been trying to assert his authority over the military, locked in a war against al Qaeda militants who took advantage of the unrest to seize territory in the south.

He has already sacked the air force chief, a brother of Saleh. He has also set up a new force under his command composed of units from the Republican Guards, a force led by Saleh's son Ahmed, and units of a dissident general, Ali Mohsen, who broke with Saleh last year.

While the army ousted al Qaeda and its allies from areas of the south this year, militants have staged a series of suicide attacks against military facilities and officials.

The lawlessness has alarmed the United States and Yemen's neighbor Saudi Arabia, the world's top oil exporter, which view the impoverished state as a front line in their war on al Qaeda and its affiliates.
(top)

SCA

Western And Afghan Officials Split Over Karzai Nomination For Spy Chief

September 12, 2012

New York Times

By Richard A. Oppel Jr.

KABUL, Afghanistan - President Hamid Karzai's determination to make a close aide, Asadullah Khalid, his next intelligence chief has divided Western officials here, some of whom say they are troubled by allegations of torture and drug trafficking against Mr. Khalid and worry that in such a powerful role he would be a step back for the country.

With a charismatic style and a record of fighting the Taliban, as well as close ties to the C.I.A. and differing Afghan factions, Mr. Khalid could become a powerful political proxy and security enforcer for Mr. Karzai, Western officials say. If he is confirmed this week as chief of the Afghan spy agency, the National Directorate of Security, he would be in a unique position to help Mr. Karzai stay in influence after term limits require him to step down in 2014.

Since the assassination of the president's half brother, Ahmed Wali Karzai, last year, Mr. Khalid has become almost a surrogate family member - an ethnic Pashtun with deft political skills who has proved himself fiercely loyal, and a bridge to some former Northern Alliance leaders who remain important to Mr. Karzai's support but are wary of presidential aides too sympathetic to Pakistan.

By contrast, Mr. Khalid is seen as a foe of Pakistan. Amrullah Saleh, a former Northern Alliance official and former Afghan intelligence director now in opposition to the Karzai government, called Mr. Khalid "a good man" known for his courage and unusually strong ties to different factions. "He knows leaders in the North and leaders in the South, so he can connect the two."

But his nomination was troubling for human rights officials and some other Western and Afghan officials who have focused on persistent allegations that Mr. Khalid oversaw a torture prison while governor of Kandahar Province several years ago. Those officials, among more than 20 interviewed who spoke on the condition of anonymity, said that if he wields the security agency as a weapon of repression, he could undermine a decade spent moving the country toward Western-style human rights.

"If Afghan security organizations are able to use the most egregious methods to combat the insurgency in the name of greater security, then we are sacrificing elements of the rule of law and accountability that are at the heart of the success of the transition," one Western diplomat said.

Mr. Khalid did not respond to an interview request. But he has denied human rights and corruption allegations. His allies have said that in many cases the accusations were politically motivated, or that he never did anything worse than other senior officials.

As Mr. Karzai's legal span in office - and, with it, the NATO mission in Afghanistan - expires in two years, speculation about the president's next moves has been a favorite parlor game: He could engineer a Russian-style Putin-Medvedev arrangement with a trusted successor. He could try to repeal term limits. Or he could throw support behind his brother Qayum. (Mr. Karzai has told some diplomats he intends to step down and do nothing to taint the process, one official said.)

What is sure is that Mr. Khalid, if confirmed, would be a crucial help in any of those situations. In the 2009 election, when he was minister of border and tribal affairs, Mr. Khalid "helped Karzai significantly," and there were some allegations that he used "most of his ministry's budget to do so," according to an American diplomatic cable published by WikiLeaks.

And it is hard to overstate how much power and trust Mr. Karzai has assigned to Mr. Khalid in the past year, officials say.

After Ahmed Wali Karzai's death, the president gave Mr. Khalid his late brother's security portfolio in southern Afghanistan and charged him with securing the family's prosperous enterprises in Kandahar.

"He is absolutely on the cusp of family," said another Western diplomat, noting that Mr. Khalid was trusted enough that after Ahmed Wali Karzai's death, he was sent to Kandahar "to ensure that Karzai's interests were protected."

Mr. Karzai's paternal view of Mr. Khalid was made clear to one former Western diplomat during a conversation with the president. "He was like a father with a son who he was really hoping would do well," the former diplomat said. Assessing Mr. Khalid's appointment, the diplomat added: "If 80 percent of the job is getting a grip on security, you want this guy. But if 80 percent is about making institutions more accountable and improving rule of law, he's probably not the best choice."

Mr. Khalid worked for Abdul Rab Rasul Sayyaf, a religiously conservative Sunni close to Saudi Arabia and one of the warlords who tore Kabul apart in the 1992-96 civil war. Mr. Sayyaf remains a patron and pressured Mr. Karzai to award him crucial jobs. He also helped secure Mr. Khalid's first governorship, in Ghazni Province in spring 2002.

Then, "he was an inexperienced boy," one Ghazni official said. But he matured quickly and led raids on Taliban hide-outs, said the official, who described him as Ghazni's best post-Taliban governor.

In 2005 Mr. Khalid was transferred to Kandahar, the heart of Karzai family intrigue and home turf for Ahmed Wali Karzai. The president told his brother not to interfere with Mr. Khalid, people close to the brother said.

As his stature rose, Mr. Khalid's tightest family relationship was with Qayum Karzai, according to some officials, who took Mr. Khalid to Saudi Arabia four years ago to meet with officials about Taliban negotiations.

But in Kandahar he proved controversial. He won support from NATO Special Operations troops for his tactics, but he angered some diplomats by alienating much of the populace with highhanded measures, two former Western officials said.

And while he can charm Westerners, his style sometimes offended traditional Pashtuns. A high-ranking Afghan said that Mr. Khalid would rudely throw his feet on the table during meetings with elders. In 2006 a senior Afghan official complained to diplomats that he angered tribal leaders because he "does not have respect for the local conservative traditions."

Mr. Khalid was dismissed from Kandahar in 2008. According to one leaked diplomatic cable, President Karzai was "unimpressed by Khalid's stewardship of his home province." In another cable a year later,

American diplomats were scathing when assessing him as a cabinet choice, calling him "exceptionally corrupt and incompetent."

Then, at a 2009 Canadian parliamentary hearing, some of the most serious charges imaginable were leveled against Mr. Khalid by Richard Colvin, a former high-ranking Canadian diplomat in Afghanistan. He described Mr. Khalid as a narcotics trafficker who, while governor, tortured people in a Kandahar dungeon. At that time, Canadian forces were responsible for the region's security. "He had people killed who got in his way," Mr. Colvin said.

Returning to Kandahar last year, Mr. Khalid may have moved too fast to replace officials with his allies. The governor, Tooryalai Wesa, complained to Mr. Karzai, who told Mr. Khalid to back off, a Kandahar official said.

But in short order he also had every National Directorate of Security office in the South reporting to him, another diplomat said. He is also now serving as Mr. Karzai's eyes, ears and dispenser of money for anti-Taliban uprising movements in Ghazni. That has bolstered relations with some members of Hezb-i-Islami, a party that, unlike Mr. Khalid, has strong ties to Pakistan.

Whatever his past, Mr. Khalid is astute enough to heed warnings from officials worried about the implications of his actions, one American official said. "We're going to encourage him to go in the right direction," the official said. "Asadullah Khalid is someone we have been able to work with."

"This is sovereignty," the official added. "It can be messy."

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Almost 200 Die in 2 Pakistan Fires

September 12, 2012

New York Times

By SALMAN MASOOD

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan — At least 191 people were killed when fires engulfed two factories in two major cities, renewing concerns about lax building safety measures and dismal working conditions for factory workers in Pakistan.

The fires broke out Tuesday evening and swept through a shoe factory in the eastern city of Lahore and a garment factory in the southern port city of Karachi.

The fire in Karachi killed at least 166 people, according to government officials and rescue workers, who were still trying to retrieve bodies from the charred building on Wednesday.

"The death toll is expected to rise," said Roshan Ali Sheikh, the commissioner of Karachi. "The building has developed cracks and can collapse any time." Dozens of bodies were still believed to be trapped in the building, local media reported.

About 1,500 people worked in the factory on the outskirts of Karachi, the commercial and economic hub of the country.

Officials said panicked workers, including men and women, were trapped inside the multistory building which had just one exit. All the other doors had been locked, a common practice to ensure that workers do not leave the premises before their shift ends.

The windows of the building were also blocked by metal grills. Many survivors suffered third-degree burns, rescue workers said.

"Workers, who were in the basement, died due to suffocation. All exit ways were closed," Ehtisham-uddin, the chief fire officer of Karachi, told reporters.

Officials said that the Tuesday evening fire at a Lahore shoe factory killed 25 people and that forensic examination showed that the fire was caused by a generator that caught fire and ignited chemicals stored nearby.

Muhammad Amjad, a witness who works at a nearby factory, said the fire suddenly erupted from the generator which was at the entrance of the building. "The door caught fire and there was no way to come out," he said. "It was just like an inferno all of sudden," Mr. Amjad said. "Many people from the neighborhood tried to break the back wall of the building to help those trapped inside to get out."

Most of the dead were believed to be young workers, between 18 and 25 years old.

Officials said the shoe factory was set up illegally and made to look like a residential house from the outside.

Omar R. Quraishi, the opinion page editor of the Karachi-based English daily The Express Tribune, said he expected more accidents because governments and civic bodies have repeatedly failed to enforce building laws and maintenance checks.

"The startling lack of safety is quite a norm," Mr. Quraishi said. "Builder mafias have taken over and government officials have proved lacking in keeping a vigilant eye on illegalities and violations of all sorts."

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WHA/EUR

American Held In Cuba Is In Poor Health, Wife Says

September 12, 2012

Washington Post

By Anne Gearan

An American imprisoned in Cuba for nearly three years is in poor health and may not survive to serve out the remainder of his 15-year sentence, his wife said Tuesday after visiting him last week.

Alan Gross has lost 105 pounds and has a growth on his back that no American doctor has been allowed to inspect, according to his wife, Judy Gross, and an attorney for the family.

"He looks like a concentration camp victim," Judy Gross said in a brief interview, adding in a statement that she fears he won't survive.

Gross said in the interview that her husband, a former U.S. government contractor, is angry with the Cuban and American governments.

"He feels like he's been dropped and ignored" by the United States, she said. "The government sent him there, and he feels like they left him there."

Gross saw her husband daily during a five-day trip to Cuba that ended Sunday. This was her first visit in more than six months, and his health deteriorated sharply in that time, said Jared Genser, the family's attorney.

Alan Gross, 63, was overweight at the time of his arrest, but he is now dangerously thin and his health is failing, Genser said. Cuban doctors have said the mass on his back is not life-threatening, but the lawyer said Gross wants an independent diagnosis.

Gross, of Potomac, has been behind bars since December 2009, when he was arrested in Cuba for distributing computer equipment that could be used for Internet access. At the time, he was working under a contract with the U.S. Agency for International Development.

The Cuban government says Gross was part of a multimillion-dollar U.S. effort to undermine it. He says he was trying to improve communication services for Cuba's small Jewish community.

Gross initially identified himself as a representative of a Jewish humanitarian organization but later acknowledged his U.S. government connection.

He was sentenced to 15 years in prison and has run out of appeals. Although he maintains his innocence, his lawyer is appealing to the Cuban government to release him on humanitarian grounds.

Judy Gross begged Cuban President Raul Castro to "put an end to our anguish and let Alan come home."

There was no immediate reaction from the Cuban government.

The State Department has regularly called on Cuba to release Gross. "We share Judy Gross's frustration with her husband's unjust detention by Cuban authorities," said Roberta Jacobson, the assistant secretary for Western Hemisphere affairs. "The administration has and will continue to work through all appropriate diplomatic means to urge Alan Gross's immediate release."

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Russia Labels Kosovo 'Quasi-state' Without Legal Existence

September 12, 2012

AFP

Russia said Tuesday it still considers Kosovo to be a quasi-state without legal existence after the end of supervision by an international body, backing Serbia's refusal to recognise the territory.

"Because the International Steering Group has no official recognised status, we act on the premise that, regardless of its decision, Kosovo continues to be a quasi-state with no international legal personality," ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova told Interfax.

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EDITORIAL / OPINION

A Pointless Blacklisting

September 12, 2012

New York Times

By Alex Strick Van Linschoten And Felix Kuehn

LAST week, the United States designated the Taliban-affiliated Haqqani network a "foreign terrorist organization," placing it alongside Hamas and Al Qaeda. But to what end?

America and its allies have learned a lot over the past decade in Afghanistan. But some fundamentals have remained elusive and shrouded in stereotypes.

To brand a group a foreign terrorist organization is not only a firm declaration that it is an enemy; it also limits America's future political options. Although it's possible to be delisted, groups on such lists find it difficult to get off them. Moreover, labeling the Haqqanis terrorists dislodges them from the wider Taliban insurgency, making a comprehensive settlement harder to achieve.

The decisions we make today will shape and constrain our future policies. Between 2002 and 2004, for example, some senior Taliban leaders sought reconciliation and cooperation with the Afghan government and the international community. The negative responses they received left little room but to pursue the path of resistance. Likewise, listing the Haqqanis as an F.T.O. now will deter them from coming to the negotiating table. It will also be seen as a sign of American insincerity by the Taliban and thus play into the hands of those opposed to a conciliatory approach.

The Haqqanis are cast as calculating players in the continuing business of "global jihad" and have gained notoriety for their spectacularly violent attacks in Afghanistan, many targeting American troops. Being enmeshed in a universe of groups and individuals along the Afghan-Pakistani border, some of whom have sought to carry out attacks in and against foreign countries, doesn't help their image. But the view that they are an irreconcilable, rigidly ideological enemy should be questioned.

The head of the Defense Intelligence Agency, Michael T. Flynn, said in 2010 that the group's leader, Jalaluddin Haqqani, was "absolutely salvageable" and open to reconciliation. Graeme Lamb, a former commander of Britain's Special Air Service, has characterized Mr. Haqqani as being a pragmatist "tied to the probability of outcomes" and called Afghanistan "the land of the deal."

In recent years, the Haqqanis and people close to them have made contact with Afghan, American and other Western officials. Ibrahim Omari (sometimes called Ibrahim Haqqani), a younger brother of Mr. Haqqani, met with American officials in 2011 in Dubai. Another more recent meeting seems to have taken place (without Americans) in Saudi Arabia.

To suggest that they are implacable foes also ignores the long history of pragmatism and political calculations that have informed the Haqqani leaders' actions for 40 years. Mr. Omari worked together with the Afghan government in 2002, although his efforts to broker discussions eventually led to his being arrested and allegedly tortured. Since the Taliban were ousted in 2001, American policy has often rested on an overestimation of the West's ability to understand the situation in Afghanistan, leading to poor decisions and ineffective initiatives that have frequently been self-defeating.

The current war effort relies heavily on drones and night raids in Afghanistan and Pakistan, but these tactics often increase radicalization and enmity. And the industrial-scale targeting of midlevel Taliban

commanders in Afghanistan has led to the rise of a younger, more uncompromising generation of leaders. The designation of the Haqqanis as an F.T.O. will only erode America's relationship with Pakistan and decrease the likelihood of Pakistan's playing a constructive role in facilitating (or not spoiling) any reconciliation process.

And the F.T.O. listing doesn't matter much for the Haqqanis' operations. After all, there can be no winner in the current stalemate. The military argument that the Taliban have lost momentum is a nonstarter. This is as true for the Haqqanis as it is for the whole insurgency. Many Afghans living in places like Kandahar don't believe the relative calm of the past two years will last. Even in heavily secured cities like Kabul, attacks continue to be carried out.

Most of the senior Haqqani commanders and family members are already on international blacklists. They are involved in the Afghan conflict to secure for themselves a future political role. Only a political process that engages them, rather than systematically sidelining them, will help end the war. One possible starting point for such a process would be some form of cease-fire. Indeed, Britain's Royal United Services Institute recently outlined the potential for such a general cease-fire agreement.

President Obama claims he has refocused America's effort in Afghanistan on those who attacked us: Al Qaeda. But the misguided ideology of the war on terror is still dictating passions and policies in the United States. And Washington's move to blacklist and marginalize the Haqqanis gravely threatens the prospects for a political settlement, which is the only way out of the Afghan conflict.

Alex Strick van Linschoten and Felix Kuehn are the authors of "An Enemy We Created: The Myth of the Taliban-Al Qaeda Merger in Afghanistan."

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Obama to Israel: You're On Your Own

September 12, 2012

[Wall Street Journal](#)

Does President Obama want Israel to bomb Iran before the election? If we had more faith in this Administration's competence, we'd be tempted to think so.

Both publicly and behind the scenes, Administration officials have insisted they oppose a unilateral Israeli strike for many reasons: Diplomacy and sanctions still need time to work; an Israeli attack could destabilize the region; Israel doesn't have the military means to do the job thoroughly; and so on.

It's no secret the Israelis don't want to strike Iran either, provided the U.S. is serious about keeping a bomb out of the mullahs' hands. But Israel's confidence in Mr. Obama's seriousness is fading fast. This week, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton told Bloomberg Radio that "we're not setting deadlines" for Iran to halt its program.

That prompted Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to note that "those in the international community who refuse to put red lines before Iran don't have a moral right to place a red light before Israel."

That's the kind of tough diplomatic exchange that an Administration should want to smooth over, at least if it's truly intent on forestalling an Israeli attack. But now comes word that Mr. Obama will not

even meet with Mr. Netanyahu during the latter's visit later this month to the U.S. Scheduling conflicts, you know.

Late Tuesday the White House issued a statement saying the two leaders had talked and denying any snub. But the message that's reaching Jerusalem these days is closer to "you're on your own, pal" than to "we've got your back." Israel will have to factor that into its security calculations as it contemplates whether to act against Iran, and when.

It's possible this is how President Obama wants it, in order to leave the job of stopping Iran to Israel while avoiding American entanglements. But it's hard to imagine an Israeli attack that didn't ultimately entangle that country's most important ally.

The Administration's diplomatic rebukes to Israel are also telling Iran that it is that much freer to move ahead with its nuclear plans. If Israel does strike Iran, Mr. Obama's mishandling of our ally will be a major reason.

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Seven Lean Years Of Peacemaking

September 12, 2012

New York Times

By Daniel Levy

SEVEN years ago today, the Israeli flag was lowered over the Gaza Strip after approximately 7,500 Israeli settlers left or were forcibly removed.

We cannot know with certainty what Ariel Sharon, Israel's prime minister at the time and the architect of the Gaza disengagement, had in mind: A dramatic step toward peace? The first of several removals of Israeli settlements from Palestinian land? Or a tactical and minimalist retreat - giving a little (Gaza) to keep a lot (the West Bank)?

One thing is clear: The years from 2005 to 2012 have been seven decidedly lean ones for peacemaking and withdrawal and seven gluttonously fat ones for entrenching Israel's occupation and settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. In these areas, almost 94,000 new settlers have been added since 2005, some settler outposts have been legalized and thousands of Palestinians have been displaced.

In the Book of Genesis, Joseph is called on to interpret Pharaoh's dream of seven fat cattle followed by seven emaciated cattle emerging from the river. He tells Pharaoh that seven years of plenty will be followed by seven years of famine - and to gather the necessary grain to see Egypt through the lean years.

But in interpreting the seven lean years of peacemaking, we can forget dreams and dream-readers. One need only look at how the Gaza withdrawal has reshaped debate within Israel's dominant political bloc, the right-nationalist-religious camp - call it the rise of Israel's 1.5 percent doctrine.

In terms of land mass, the Gaza Strip encompasses just under 1.5 percent of the total area of British Mandate-era Palestine, (or "Greater Israel" as the settlers like to call it). However, that same tiny area is today home to approximately 1.7 million Palestinians, or over a quarter of the total Palestinian population between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. So, in divesting itself of just 1.5

percent of the land, Israel significantly recalibrated the so-called "demographic equation" (the ratio of Jews to Arabs in the area under its control).

The 1.5 percent doctrine paves the way to permanent Israeli control of 98.5 percent of the land. West Bank Palestinians can either join their left-behind-in-1948 confreres as second-class citizens in an enlarged Jewish state or continue their stateless existence in insecure and disconnected enclaves of limited autonomy, a kind of Bantustan status.

Meanwhile the inhabitants of the forgotten 1.5 percent, Gazans, remain isolated in an area that a recent United Nations report concluded might not be "a liveable place" by 2020.

Maybe this is all just a bad dream and there is no such thing as a 1.5 percent doctrine. Perhaps leadership changes, security escalations and recent upheavals in the Arab world are to blame. The post-withdrawal rocket fire from Gaza onto civilian areas in southern Israel is a frequent explanation for the lack of progress. And it's true that these occasional attacks are inexcusable and a violation of international law (as are many of Israel's responses and its own military provocations).

But the bigger picture is characterized by a cease-fire between Israel and Hamas-run Gaza and by strong security cooperation between Israel and the Palestinian Authority-run areas of the West Bank. Even accounting for the continuing rivalry between the Palestinian factions Fatah and Hamas, Israel could have handed the West Bank over to the Palestinian Authority's unthreatening current leaders.

The debate within Israel today is in a very different place from where most outside observers think it is. Despite vehemently opposing the Gaza withdrawal, elements on Israel's right belatedly came to see a dramatic opportunity arising from it. A constant problem with their Greater Israel ideology was that the area simply contained too many Arabs - losing on demography has always been a far scarier prospect for many Israelis than sacrificing democracy. Dropping Gaza - the 1.5 percent doctrine - went a long way toward fixing that problem. Indeed, some Israeli demographers also claim that there are one million fewer West Bank Palestinians than appear in official American and United Nations statistics.

New dividing lines have emerged within Israel's ruling elites, and the disagreements do not revolve around the details or timing of cutting a peace deal with Mahmoud Abbas. There are three competing tendencies within Israel's ruling coalition: annexationists (who want to formally take over the West Bank), status quo merchants (who wink at the notion of two states while expanding settlements), and Bantustan two-staters (who want the Palestinians to accept 50 percent of the West Bank as constituting a state).

A growing number of rightist leaders - parliamentarians, rabbis, prominent settlers - are openly advocating "Greater Israel," their version of a one-state solution. Openly discussing such full annexation of the West Bank is a relatively new phenomenon in Israeli politics - and sans Gaza, it resonates.

That Israel will never live in peace and security with the Palestinians or the wider Arab and Muslim world under such terms doesn't seem to matter. Forty-five years of Israeli impunity as settlements metastasized in defiance of international law has bred an understandable sense of invincibility. Add to that mix the emaciated state of liberal Israeli politics, the messianic orientation that infuses religious nationalism and the catastrophism endemic to much Zionist thinking - and the seven lean years look set to continue. But don't be under any illusions; such injustice will not be sustainable.

The famine predicted in Pharaoh's dream was averted by Joseph's cunning plans. But no plan yet exists to avert more lean years ahead for Palestinians and Israelis who value universal rights, democracy and freedom.

The choices are stark. Either Israel takes bold and urgent action to reverse the 1.5 percent doctrine by getting out of the West Bank and East Jerusalem, or it acknowledges that the doctrine has triumphed and embraces a democratic solution that moves beyond the classic two-state paradigm and guarantees full and equal rights for all residents in some form of confederation or unitary state.

Daniel Levy directs the Middle East and North Africa program at the European Council on Foreign Relations and is a fellow at the New America Foundation.

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The Leader Vanishes

September 12, 2012

[Wall Street Journal](#)

The 11-day disappearance of Chinese Vice President Xi Jinping brings to mind the 1938 Alfred Hitchcock classic "The Lady Vanishes." We're not suggesting that the man who will soon become China's paramount leader was abducted aboard a train, but that's a more plausible explanation than many of the rumors circulating in Beijing.

In the movie, the heroine Iris discovers that an old lady has disappeared from her train compartment. The more the other passengers insist that they never saw the mysterious Miss Froy, the more determined Iris is to solve the mystery. Chinese government spokesmen refuse to say where Mr. Xi is and insist nobody should worry, but as they object to media requests for confirmation that Mr. Xi is alive, the Internet speculation about a leadership struggle mushrooms.

The lesson is that withholding information is counterproductive when there is an Iris around, and these days they are everywhere, especially in China. Instead of maintaining the facade of stability, Beijing looks like a tin-pot dictatorship. The Bo Xilai affair has drawn back the curtain on the Chinese Communist Party's elite infighting, so that no rumor can be entirely discounted. It doesn't help that another Politburo Standing Committee member, He Guoqiang, has also dropped out of sight for the last week.

Some observers may question how significant Mr. Xi's downfall would be, given that he is a political cipher, much like present "core leader" Hu Jintao. The direction of policy may not hinge on the succession plan confirmed at the last Party Congress five years ago. But the resilience of one-party rule in China is due in part to the creation of guidelines to manage internal competition for the top posts.

That system held through the transition from Jiang Zemin to Hu Jintao in 2002, but then both men were selected by the late Deng Xiaoping. Mr. Xi will be the first leader not picked by an undisputed supremo. As such it is a crucial test of the collective leadership that has ruled since Deng's death in 1997.

China's elite politics is governed not by institutions that enforce checks and balances, but by a consensus that can be revised at any time behind the scenes. The public is under no illusion that this is a stable arrangement, so the tendency to read political meaning into Mr. Xi's disappearance is inevitable.

Contrast this with the norm in Western democracies, where conspiracy theories seldom get traction because the public is entitled to know what their leaders are up to.

Here's hoping that Mr. Xi recovers quickly from whatever is ailing him. When he presumably takes office as the Party's General Secretary next month, he might consider revising the government's information policy. But then Beijing will never fully win the trust of the Chinese people and the world until transparent and democratic institutions choose its leaders, and a President-elect vanishing for political reasons is unthinkable.

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Where Is China's Heir Apparent Xi Jinping?

September 12, 2012

Washington Post

The heir apparent to China's leadership as of Tuesday had not been seen in public since Sept. 1. He went missing at a sensitive moment. The 18th Congress of the Communist Party, which is expected to elevate him to the top position of general secretary, is due to be held within weeks - though, curiously, no date has been announced. Scandals involving party leaders - including the alleged murder of a British businessman by the spouse of one boss and a fatal Ferrari crash by the son of another - have raised questions about whether the carefully orchestrated transition is off-track. Mr. Xi canceled meetings with four foreign leaders in a week, including Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and the Danish prime minister, with no explanation.

Maybe Mr. Xi merely strained his back, as one rumor has it, or had a mild heart attack, as another contends. The fact that China's citizens and the world were left to wonder is yet more evidence that the country's creaky Stalinist political system is entirely unprepared to meet the challenges it faces - from a slowing economy to a booming social Internet.

Neither Mr. Xi, expected to replace Hu Jintao, nor Li Keqiang, who is to step in for Wen Jiabao as prime minister, would likely stand up well to uncensored scrutiny. According to reporting by Bloomberg News, Mr. Xi's extended family has amassed stakes in companies worth hundreds of millions of dollars as well as seven properties in Hong Kong valued at \$55 million. Mr. Li, according to a report in the Financial Times, has had an administrative career "short on achievements and long on disastrous events," including the coverup of an AIDS epidemic caused by infected blood.

All the same, Beijing's policy of trying to keep secret even the most basic information about Communist Party leaders, a practice pioneered a century ago in the Soviet Union, is unsustainable. More than 300 million Chinese now have social media accounts, and an army of government censors is unable to stem rumors about Mr. Xi's disappearance or complaints about the lack of official information. In the vacuum, sensational stories are circulating, including a claim that Mr. Xi was targeted in a car crash by an associate of recently deposed Politburo member Bo Xilai.

Assuming that Mr. Xi returns and takes office as planned, the pressure he faces for transparency and accountability will only grow. China appears headed for a significant economic slowdown, which means more dissatisfied citizens and less tolerance for governmental incompetence and corruption. If they are wise, Mr. Xi and Mr. Li will open the political system rather than allowing it to crumble around them. A good first step would be to tell the truth about their own activities. [\(top\)](#)

In China We (Don't) Trust

September 12, 2012

New York Times

By Thomas L. Friedman

Hangzhou, China -- One of the standard lines about China's economy is that the Chinese are good at copying, but they could never invent a Hula-Hoop. It's not in their DNA, we are told, and their rote education system reinforces that tendency. I'm wondering about that: How is it that a people who invented papermaking, gunpowder, fireworks and the magnetic compass suddenly only became capable of assembling iPods? I'm wondering if what's missing in China today is not a culture of innovation but something more basic: trust.

When there is trust in society, sustainable innovation happens because people feel safe and enabled to take risks and make the long-term commitments needed to innovate. When there is trust, people are willing to share their ideas and collaborate on each other's inventions without fear of having their creations stolen. The biggest thing preventing modern China from becoming an innovation society, which is imperative if it hopes to keep raising incomes, is that it remains a very low-trust society.

I've been struck at how many Chinese businesspeople and investors have volunteered that point to me this week. China is caught in a gap between its old social structure of villages and families, which created its own form of trust, and a new system based on the rule of law and an independent judiciary. The Communist Party destroyed the first but has yet to build the second because it would mean ceding the party's arbitrary powers. So China has a huge trust deficit.

To see what happens when you introduce just a little more trust in this society, spend a day, as I just did, participating in the "AliFest" - the annual gathering of thousands of Chinese entrepreneurs who are linked together in the giant Chinese e-commerce Web site Alibaba.com. Founded in 1999, Alibaba says its sales this year could top eBay and Amazon.com combined. This happened, in part, because it has built trusted, credible markets of buyers and sellers inside China, connecting consumers, inventors and manufacturers who would have found it hard to do transactions before.

Alibaba has three major businesses: Taobao.com and Tmall.com, which together constitute a giant online marketplace where anyone in the world can go to buy or sell anything - from Procter & Gamble selling toothpaste to Chinese companies offering their engineering prowess. The Tao companies this year are expected to move some \$150 billion in merchandise between buyers and sellers, mostly in China.

The second is Alibaba.com, where, if you want to make rubber sandals that play "The Star Spangled Banner," you click on Alibaba and it will link you with dozens of Chinese shoemakers that will compete for your business.

And, lastly, there is Alipay, a Chinese version of PayPal that can enable, for example, a small Chinese manufacturer in the hinterland to sell its goods to a Chinese consumer in Shanghai. The buyer puts his money in escrow with Alibaba and it is released to the seller only when the buyer says he got the goods he ordered. Presto: trust. What has been the impact? There are more than 500 million Chinese Taobao users and 600 million Alipay accounts.

While here in Hangzhou, I visited the workshop of Robert Luo, the president of Classic-Maxim, a firm he started to make kitschy wall art for hotels, using foreign designs. Luo used to drum up sales by flying to trade shows, but, in 2006, he got a huge American order through the Alibaba platform, enabling him to

greatly expand his business. He has since shifted from doing outsourced artwork for others to hiring Chinese and foreign artists to produce his own original designs. "We design so much now" - outdoor art, solar art - and "we've applied for so many U.S. patents," he said.

There are two trends to watch from all this: One, argued Ming Zeng, Alibaba's chief strategist, is that Alibaba - which now serves more than 100 million consumers daily, through 6.5 million retail shops connected to 20 million manufacturers - is, in effect, creating "a virtual combination industrial park and online marketplace," where anyone in China or abroad can come to invent, collaborate or buy and sell goods or services.

Alibaba, Zeng predicted, will eventually connect in some way with Facebook, Amazon, eBay, Apple, Baidu, LinkedIn and others to create a giant trusted virtual "global commercial grid," where individuals and companies will offer their talents and buy and sell products, designs and inventions.

Eventually, Zeng argued, "every individual will have to find a way to succeed" on this global grid. "National boundaries will offer you no protection."

The other trend is that the Chinese will be big players on this grid. The creation of global trusted business frameworks like Alibaba is starting to enable a new generation of Chinese innovators - who are low cost, but high skilled - to extend their reach. We've seen cheap labor out of China; now we're going to see more cheap genius.

Which is why Phillip Brown and Hugh Lauder, in a recent essay on Eurozine.com, argued that a big shift of the global labor market is under way, in which "many of the things we thought could only be done in the West can now be done anywhere in the world, not only more cheaply but sometimes better."
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