

U.S. Joint Forces Command
Global Current Operations Media Summary
Operations Iraqi Freedom/Enduring Freedom/Noble Eagle
Current as of July 26, 2010

➤ **New Developments**

- **Taliban Claims It Captured U.S. Sailor.** U.S. and Afghan troops swept through a treacherous corner of eastern Afghanistan in search of a pair of missing Navy sailors as the Taliban said its fighters had killed one of the men in a shootout and its leaders would soon decide the fate of the other. If at least one of the sailors is indeed being held by the Taliban, he would become only the second U.S. service member known to be a captive of the militants. While the capture would have little battlefield impact, it would offer the Taliban a powerful propaganda tool with which to rally its faithful and reinforce its claim to be wearing down North Atlantic Treaty Organization forces fighting there. ([Wall Street Journal](#) – see attached)
- **Leaked Files Lay Bare War In Afghanistan.** Tens of thousands of classified documents related to the Afghan war released without authorization by the group Wikileaks.org reveal in often excruciating detail the struggles U.S. troops have faced in battling an increasingly potent Taliban force and in working with Pakistani allies who also appear to be helping the Afghan insurgency. The more than 91,000 classified documents – most of which consist of low-level field reports – represent one of the largest single disclosures of such information in U.S. history. Wikileaks gave the material to the *New York Times*, the British newspaper the *Guardian* and the German magazine *Der Spiegel* several weeks ago on the condition that they not be published before Sunday night, when the group released them publicly. ([Washington Post](#) – see attached)
- **Yemeni Rebels And Clans Clash.** Hours after tribal leaders reached a truce in northern Yemen, clashes erupted Sunday in fighting between government-backed clans and Houthi rebels that has killed more than 60 people in recent days, according to tribal sources and media reports. The latest round of bloodshed broke out last week in the tribally dominated provinces of Amran and Saada after the government accused the Houthi tribal alliance of assassinating a pro-government sheik and his son. Four people were killed in Sunday's clashes, which came after President Ali Abdullah Saleh said he did not want renewed fighting between government troops and Houthi rebels. The volatile region on the border with Saudi Arabia has undergone six outbursts of fighting since 2004 as government troops and their supporters have sought to defeat the Houthis, a Zaidi offshoot of Shiite Islam that claims ill treatment by the government and controls vast swaths of territory. ([Los Angeles Times](#) – see attached)
- **U.S. Drones Kill 12 Militants In Northwest Pakistan.** Unmanned U.S. aircraft fired missiles at houses in two different parts of northwestern Pakistan on Sunday, killing at least 12 militants in attacks that occurred hours apart, intelligence officials said. The first strike Sunday took place around midday when aircraft fired four missiles at a house in Shaktoi, a village along the border of North and South Waziristan, killing five suspected militants, intelligence officials said. The attack, which actually occurred in South Waziristan, also wounded four suspected militants, said the officials, speaking on condition of anonymity. Later Sunday, two missiles hit a house in Taipi village near Miran Shah, the main town in North Waziristan, killing seven suspected militants, said the officials. ([Charlotte Observer/AP](#))

➤ **Military Coverage**

- **U.S., South Korea Enter Second Day Of Joint Drills.** A powerful four-day show of joint U.S. and South Korean sea and air power entered its second day without incident Monday, despite North Korea's pledge to start a "sacred war" over the maneuvers. Dubbed "Invincible Spirit," the participants in the joint military exercises – featuring about 20 vessels, including the Nimitz-class aircraft carrier *George Washington* – left port just after dawn Sunday, shadowed by hundreds of U.S. and South Korean fighter jets. The drills provided a potent reminder for the government in Pyongyang of the consequences of escalating tensions on the Korean peninsula. The exercises have been in the works since the March 26 sinking of a South Korean naval ship that killed 46 crewmen. ([Los Angeles Times](#) – see attached)

➤ **World Developments**

- **Al Qaeda's North African Affiliate Says It Killed French Hostage.** A North-African group affiliated to Al Qaeda said it killed a Frenchman it held hostage in Mali to retaliate against France's failed attempt at freeing its national, according to an audio message sent by the group to Qatar-based news television Al-Jazira. French authorities said late Sunday that they were trying to check the information. France said last week that it participated in an operation aimed at freeing Michel Germaneau, a 78-year-old retired engineer, who was kidnapped by the Al-Qaeda affiliate in Niger in April. France's Defense Ministry said the military operation was led by Mauritania's army and conducted in neighboring Mali on Wednesday. Participants in the operation failed to find Mr. Germaneau, a Defense Ministry official said Friday. ([Wall Street Journal](#) – see attached)
- **Hearing On Lockerbie Sets Off More Finger-Pointing.** A coming Senate hearing in Washington has set off a new round of political disavowals by British and Scottish officials who laid the groundwork for last year's release of the former Libyan intelligence agent convicted in the 1988 Lockerbie bombing. Officials most closely involved in the release have denied suggestions that Britain's eagerness for oil deals with Libya was a factor – an issue given new momentum by accusations that the beleaguered oil giant BP also played a major role. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee is to hold a hearing on Thursday focusing on BP's role, although no official involved in freeing the Libyan, Abdel Basset Ali al-Megrahi, has agreed to travel to Washington to testify. ([New York Times](#) – see attached)
- **Israeli Defense Chief Offers Warnings On Iran And Lebanon.** Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak is due to arrive in Washington on Monday bearing two warnings for American policymakers: Sanctions won't thwart Iran's push for nuclear weapons, and Israel will strike directly at Lebanese government institutions if Hezbollah launches rockets at Israeli towns. In a wide-ranging interview, Barak – who has become one of Israel's most frequent official guests in Washington – outlined his vision for arresting Iran's nuclear drive, coping with the Hezbollah threat and forging a deal with the Palestinians. ([Washington Post](#) – see attached)
- **Khmer Rouge's Chief Jailer Guilty Of War Crimes.** A U.N.-backed war crimes tribunal sentenced the former Khmer Rouge chief jailer Monday to 35 years in prison – the first verdict involving a leader of the genocidal regime that destroyed a generation of Cambodia's people. Kaing Guek Eav, also known as Duch, listened impassively as the chief judge read out the verdict, convicting him of crimes against humanity and war crimes. He will serve only 19 years of the sentence, because Judge Nil Nonn said the court shaved off the 11 years he's already spent in detention and five more for being illegally detained in a military court. He had faced a maximum sentence of death, and many victims and their relatives watching the verdict were angry that his sentence was not more severe. ([NPR/AP](#))
- **Bomb In central Bangkok Kills 1 And Wounds 10.** A bomb at a Bangkok bus stop killed one person and wounded at least 10 on Sunday after polls closed in a parliamentary by-election seen as a referendum on recent political unrest. The bomb had been hidden near a trash bin at a bus stop on Ratchadumri Road in the heart of Bangkok's commercial district, an area occupied by thousands of "red shirt" anti-government protesters for several weeks until an army crackdown on May 19. There was no indication of who had planted the device or whether it was linked to a Bangkok by-election in which a ruling party candidate narrowly beat an anti-government protest leader who has been jailed since May on terrorism charges. ([Reuters](#))

➤ **Public Opinion**

- **Americans Split On Whether Or Not Fighting In Afghanistan Is The Right Thing To Do.** A new national poll released by Quinnipiac University last week asked 2,181 registered voters nationwide, "Do you think the U.S. is doing the right thing by fighting the war in Afghanistan now, or should the U.S. not be involved in Afghanistan now?" 48% of respondents said the U.S. is doing the right thing while 43% felt the U.S. should not be involved. When asked, "Do you think eliminating the threat from terrorists operating from Afghanistan is a worthwhile goal for American troops to fight and possibly die for or not?" 59% said that it is worthwhile. 34% said it is not worthwhile. ([Quinnipiac University](#))

Taliban Claims It Captured U.S. Sailor
Wall Street Journal
July 26, 2010

U.S. and Afghan troops swept through a treacherous corner of eastern Afghanistan in search of a pair of missing Navy sailors as the Taliban said its fighters had killed one of the men in a shootout and its leaders would soon decide the fate of the other. If at least one of the sailors is indeed being held by the Taliban, he would become only the second U.S. service member known to be a captive of the militants. While the capture would have little battlefield impact, it would offer the Taliban a powerful propaganda tool with which to rally its faithful and reinforce its claim to be wearing down North Atlantic Treaty Organization forces fighting there.

"We will do all we can, everything we can" to find the missing sailors, said U.S. Adm. Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. "We have a large number of forces focused on the return of these two individuals." Adm. Mullen was meeting with top U.S., NATO and Afghan officials in Kabul on Sunday as coalition forces widened their manhunt for the missing sailors, sending out helicopters and troops in vehicles and on foot. Coalition forces set up a perimeter around the area in Logar province, south of Kabul, where the two are believed to have disappeared, officials said. At least two radio stations in Logar were broadcasting a U.S. offer of \$20,000 – a life-changing sum for many in Afghanistan – for information leading to the return of the men.

The sailors' disappearance in an area only a few hours' drive from Kabul served as a stark reminder of just how powerful the Taliban remain in many parts of Afghanistan, despite the massive influx of U.S. troops in recent months. The Taliban's spokesman, Zabiullah Mujahid, said the militants ambushed the sailors Friday after they drove their armored Toyota Land Cruiser into a militant-controlled area of Logar. One was killed in the gun battle, the other captured, he said in a telephone interview. He said the Taliban had the body of the slain sailor, and "a meeting of top Taliban leaders will be called soon to discuss the fate of the captured soldier."

Since news of the men's disappearance first broke Saturday, there have been conflicting reports of what happened. Much remained unclear, even to top NATO military officers in Afghanistan, who refused to confirm Taliban accounts. One senior NATO officer said officials didn't want to add to the "noise" of conflicting accounts until they had worked out the details. "All we know is that our guys are missing and we're doing everything we can to get them back," the official said. In a reflection of that official uncertainty, NATO's Afghanistan task force has so far offered only limited public statements about the incident. A NATO statement released Saturday evening said the men had left their compound in Kabul the day before and had not been seen since. It did not identify the men or provide further details.

One of the main unanswered questions is just what two U.S. service members were doing on their own driving a lightly armored vehicle in a part of Afghanistan known for its illegal Taliban checkpoints and roadside ambushes. Adm. Mullen called it an "unusual circumstance" for the sailors to be driving so far from their base in Kabul without security backup. The senior NATO officer refused to say whether the men were traveling on official business. A senior U.S. military official in Washington said the sailors weren't Special Operations Forces, such as Navy Seals, who often conduct missions in small groups, although rarely in groups as small as two people.

Afghan officials and witnesses say the two men were last seen Friday in a market in the district of Charkh, about 60 miles south of Kabul. They appeared to be lost, said the provincial government spokesman, Din Muhammad Darwish, citing witness accounts. He said police tried to warn them to head back toward safer areas. Instead, they pressed on into a part of Logar known to be thick with Taliban fighters. The Taliban, too, spotted the men at the market and set up an ambush further down the road, at the foothills of a nearby mountain range, Mr. Darwish said. By Sunday, NATO and Afghan forces had set up checkpoints around Logar and were searching cars. Posters of the missing sailors could be seen at the checkpoints.

The posters featured photographs of the sailors and stated: "This American troop is missing. He was last seen in a white Land Cruiser vehicle. If you have any information about this soldier, kindly contact the Logar Joint Coordination Center," run by coalition and Afghan forces, the Associated Press reported. A

phone number is listed along with information about the \$20,000 reward. The photographs show one clean-shaven sailor wearing a soft cap and another with short-cropped hair, wearing a blue civilian shirt and a white undershirt, according to the AP.

The only other coalition service member known to be a captive of the Taliban is Spc. Bowe Bergdahl. He disappeared from his base in the eastern province of Paktika last June, and militants have since posted videos of the soldier on websites. Rescuing Spc. Bergdahl became the top priority of the military last summer, and it enlisted both the CIA and Pakistan's intelligence service for help. The U.S. came close to finding him, officials said, but militants thwarted any rescue by constantly moving him.

The apparent capture of the sailors is an early warning of the tough period to come, as additional forces flow first into the area around the southern city of Kandahar, the Taliban's heartland, and then in to eastern Afghanistan in August and September. Military officials warn that more fighting will come with the forces, and the casualties will rise. But Pentagon officials caution that rising casualties shouldn't be seen as a sign the U.S. is losing.

American casualties rose in Iraq in 2007 as the troop surge there built momentum, then began to ebb as the additional forces brought security under control, the officials say. While few officials think the Afghan surge will show results as quickly, they do say the situation is slowly improving. "No one is declaring victory but there is progress," Adm. Mullen said. "I believe that goal is still achievable and certainly the proof of that will be what happens over these next many months in what is a very challenging period."

Leaked Files Lay Bare War In Afghanistan

Washington Post

July 26, 2010

Tens of thousands of classified documents related to the Afghan war released without authorization by the group Wikileaks.org reveal in often excruciating detail the struggles U.S. troops have faced in battling an increasingly potent Taliban force and in working with Pakistani allies who also appear to be helping the Afghan insurgency. The more than 91,000 classified documents – most of which consist of low-level field reports – represent one of the largest single disclosures of such information in U.S. history. Wikileaks gave the material to the *New York Times*, the British newspaper the *Guardian* and the German magazine *Der Spiegel* several weeks ago on the condition that they not be published before Sunday night, when the group released them publicly.

Covering the period from January 2004 through December 2009, when the Obama administration began to deploy more than 30,000 additional troops into Afghanistan and announced a new strategy, the documents provide new insights into a period in which the Taliban was gaining strength, Afghan civilians were growing increasingly disillusioned with their government, and U.S. troops in the field often expressed frustration at having to fight a war without sufficient resources. The documents disclose for the first time that Taliban insurgents appear to have used portable, heat-seeking surface-to-air missiles to shoot down U.S. helicopters. Heat-seeking missiles, which the United States provided to the anti-Soviet Afghan fighters known as mujaheddin in the 1980s, helped inflict heavy losses on the Soviet Union until it withdrew its forces from Afghanistan in 1989.

One report from the spring of 2007 refers to witnesses who saw what appeared to be a heat-seeking missile destroy a CH-47 transport helicopter. *The Times* first unearthed the document in its review of the files. The Chinook crash killed five Americans, a British citizen and a Canadian. Even though the initial U.S. report stated that the helicopter was "engaged and struck with a missile," a NATO spokesman suggested that small-arms fire was responsible for bringing down the helicopter. Although the use of such weapons by the Taliban appears to be very limited, the disclosure that relatively low-tech insurgents had acquired such arms would have fostered the impression that the Afghan war effort was faltering at a time when U.S. fatalities in Iraq were at record levels and the Bush administration was struggling to maintain support for the Iraq war even among its Republican base.

The Obama administration criticized Wikileaks for disclosing the classified documents. "Wikileaks made no effort to contact us about these documents," national security adviser James Jones said in a statement. "The United States government learned from news organizations that these documents would be posted." Senior administration officials acknowledged they had been anxiously awaiting the documents' release but sought to diminish their significance. "There is not a lot new here for those who have been following developments closely," one U.S. official said. Many of the documents posted by Wikileaks suggest that Pakistan's spy service might be helping Afghan insurgents plan and carry out attacks on U.S. forces in Afghanistan and their Afghan government allies. A few reports also describe cooperation between Pakistani intelligence and fighters aligned with al-Qaeda.

U.S. intelligence concluded a number of years ago that Pakistan retained its ties with Taliban groups, intelligence officials said. Late last year, President Obama warned in a letter to Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari that the United States would no longer put up with the contacts. But the documents appear to suggest that Pakistan's spy agency, known as the Inter-Services Intelligence directorate or ISI, might have assisted insurgents in planning some attacks, at least in the past. The Pakistani government denied the allegations in the classified intelligence documents. "These reports reflect nothing more than single-source comments and rumors, which abound on both sides of the Pakistan-Afghanistan border and are often proved wrong after deeper examination," said Husain Haqqani, Pakistan's ambassador to the United States.

The documents detail multiple reports of cooperation between retired Lt. Gen. Hamid Gul, who ran ISI in the late 1980s, and Afghan insurgents battling U.S. forces in the mountainous eastern region of the country. In the latter years of the anti-Soviet insurgency, Gul worked closely with several major mujaheddin fighters who currently are battling U.S. troops and trying to topple the Afghan government. The documents also include reports that Gul was trying to reestablish contacts with insurgent leaders such as Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and Jalaluddin Haqqani, whose fighters have been responsible for some of the bloodiest attacks on U.S. forces. Over the past decade, U.S. intelligence has collected evidence of direct contacts between ISI and Jalaluddin Haqqani, Hekmatyar and Taliban leader Mohammed Omar. That evidence includes both human intelligence and intercepted communications, officials said.

As the new Afghan war strategy was being formulated late last year, Obama stepped up private pressure on the Pakistanis to sever ties with the Taliban, suggesting that if there wasn't improvement, the United States would begin to take matters into its own hands. "The key thing to bear in mind is that the administration is not naive about Pakistan," an Obama administration official said. "The problem with the Pakistanis is that the more you threaten them, the more they become entrenched and don't see a path forward with you." Most of the voluminous store of classified reports reflects the daily grind of life in Afghanistan as covered in news reports for the past several years. In them, junior officers complain about poorly equipped Afghan forces, corrupt Afghan government officials and a U.S. war effort that at times seemed to be seriously wanting for resources.

In one document, a team of civil affairs soldiers reports donating money for an orphanage that is supposed to help about 100 fatherless children and finding later that only about 30 boys and girls were being helped. Also missing were the stores of rice, grain and cooking oil that the troops had provided. "We found very few orphans living there and could not find most of the HA [humanitarian assistance] we had given them," the report states. Other reports give accounts of police chiefs skimming the pay of their patrol officers or placing nonexistent "ghost" troops on their rolls so that they could pocket the additional salaries.

Another report that chronicles a massive Taliban attack on Combat Outpost Keating in eastern Afghanistan quotes frantic radio calls from an overwhelmed U.S. lieutenant seeking air support to hold off the much larger Taliban force. The attack on the base was chronicled in a *Washington Post* report this year, based on interviews with the officer and his troops. At times the U.S. troops show a lack of knowledge about Afghanistan, botching the names of cities and the relationships between senior Afghan officials. The reports highlight how civilian casualties resulting from mistakes on the battlefield have alienated Afghans. Over the past year, civilian casualties in Afghanistan have dropped significantly. But many of the problems referred to in the memo – a resilient Taliban, porous borders with Pakistani safe havens and largely ineffectual Afghan government – remain.

Yemeni Rebels And Clans Clash

Los Angeles Times

July 26, 2010

Hours after tribal leaders reached a truce in northern Yemen, clashes erupted Sunday in fighting between government-backed clans and Houthi rebels that has killed more than 60 people in recent days, according to tribal sources and media reports. The latest round of bloodshed broke out last week in the tribally dominated provinces of Amran and Saada after the government accused the Houthi tribal alliance of assassinating a pro-government sheik and his son. Four people were killed in Sunday's clashes, which came after President Ali Abdullah Saleh said he did not want renewed fighting between government troops and Houthi rebels.

The volatile region on the border with Saudi Arabia has undergone six outbursts of fighting since 2004 as government troops and their supporters have sought to defeat the Houthis, a Zaidi offshoot of Shiite Islam that claims ill treatment by the government and controls vast swaths of territory. Saudi Arabia was drawn into the fighting last year when the rebels crossed the border and attacked Saudi guards. The kingdom claimed victory over the Houthis after months of airstrikes that left villages in rubble and scattered unexploded ordnance across the rugged terrain. More than 300,000 people have been displaced, and now live in camps or with host families in deteriorating conditions. The World Food Program, strained by the increased demand for food and water aid, has cut rations to the needy by half. Lack of funding threatens to stop aid entirely.

"What's worrying about the clashes is the intensity, and this could trigger a seventh round of war.... It is very likely we would have a new round of displacement," said WFP country director Giancarlo Cirri, speaking from Saada. The broken truce comes after the emir of Qatar, Sheik Hamad ibn Khalifa al Thani, flew to Yemen last week offering to resurrect a peace deal brokered in Doha in 2008. The agreement, which includes an end to hostilities and amnesty to rebels, was welcomed by some groups but greeted with skepticism by Hassan Zaid, a politician with ties to the Houthis.

U.S., South Korea Enter Second Day Of Joint Drills

Los Angeles Times

July 26, 2010

A powerful four-day show of joint U.S. and South Korean sea and air power entered its second day without incident Monday, despite North Korea's pledge to start a "sacred war" over the maneuvers. Dubbed "Invincible Spirit," the participants in the joint military exercises – featuring about 20 vessels, including the Nimitz-class aircraft carrier George Washington – left port just after dawn Sunday, shadowed by hundreds of U.S. and South Korean fighter jets. The drills provided a potent reminder for the government in Pyongyang of the consequences of escalating tensions on the Korean peninsula. The exercises have been in the works since the March 26 sinking of a South Korean naval ship that killed 46 crewmen. An inquiry led by South Korea concluded that the ship was struck by a North Korean torpedo; North Korea has denied involvement.

Pyongyang has criticized the military maneuvers – the largest launched by the U.S. and South Korea since 1976 and the first to include the F-22 Raptor stealth fighter jet in South Korean airspace – and threatened to start a "retaliatory sacred war." North Korea also has put its military and residents on high alert, according to local media. The maneuvers, involving more than 8,000 service members from the U.S. and South Korea, were witnessed by four officers from Japan's Maritime Self-Defense Forces, officials here said. In the coming days, the war games will include "a drill for infiltration by submarines," according to an official for the South Korean Joint Chiefs of Staff who requested anonymity.

The March sinking of the naval patrol ship Cheonan, which Seoul called the worst military attack since the end of the Korean War, prompted the investigation by an international team of experts that ended up implicating the North. Although condemning the incident, the United Nations Security Council stopped short of naming North Korea as the perpetrator. Still, international pressure has been building to punish strongman Kim Jong Il's regime for the incident. After a visit last week to the heavily armed demilitarized zone, which divides the two Koreas, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton announced that the U.S. would impose new sanctions on the North in retaliation for the Cheonan attack. Days later, the European Union suggested that it too would consider new sanctions against Pyongyang.

The military drills, initially scheduled to take place in the Yellow Sea, were moved to the Sea of Japan after China complained about the presence of the 97,000-ton George Washington, a symbol of U.S. military might with about 5,000 crewmen and a capacity to carry dozens of aircraft, including F-18 fighter jets. On Saturday, the North Korean military denounced the games in a statement read on Korean Central Television in Pyongyang, saying the drills by "the U.S. imperialists and the South Korean puppet forces deliberately push the situation to the brink of war."

Although termed defensive in nature, the exercises were expected to include firing artillery, dropping anti-submarine bombs and air-to-air refueling, South Korean officials said. Capt. Ross Myers, commander of the George Washington's air wing unit, called the maneuvers an effort to maintain "peace and stability" on the Korean peninsula but told the Yonhap news agency in Seoul on Sunday that such a powerful military presence was seen as a threat by Pyongyang, which considered such drills a rehearsal of invasion. Said Myers: "North Korea doesn't want these exercises."

Al Qaeda's North African Affiliate Says It Killed French Hostage

Wall Street Journal

July 26, 2010

A North-African group affiliated to Al Qaeda said it killed a Frenchman it held hostage in Mali to retaliate against France's failed attempt at freeing its national, according to an audio message sent by the group to Qatar-based news television Al-Jazira. French authorities said late Sunday that they were trying to check the information. France said last week that it participated in an operation aimed at freeing Michel Germaneau, a 78-year-old retired engineer, who was kidnapped by the Al-Qaeda affiliate in Niger in April. France's Defense Ministry said the military operation was led by Mauritania's army and conducted in neighboring Mali on Wednesday. Participants in the operation failed to find Mr. Germaneau, a Defense Ministry official said Friday.

Members of al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, a group of Islamic militants who pledged allegiance to al Qaeda in 2007, have threatened to kill Mr. Germaneau. In a message posted on a Web site in May, the group said it would execute Mr. Germaneau by July 26 unless some of its members were released from prisons in several North African countries. The group, known by its French acronym, AQMI, comprises a few hundred militants who hopscotch borders between Algeria, Mauritania, Mali and Niger, according to Western government sources. Before allying with al Qaeda, the AQMI militants were mainly active in Algeria, where their goal was to set up a radical Islamic government. Their new objectives are less clear. In recent months, AQMI has claimed responsibility for the killing of soldiers in several North African countries as well as numerous kidnappings. Two Spaniards were kidnapped in Mauritania last year and are being held hostage by AQMI, according to Spanish authorities.

On Friday, France's Defense Ministry said that the AQMI members holding Mr. Germaneau had refused to engage in talks about his release and hadn't provided evidence that the Frenchman was still alive. The ministry said the AQMI members in question also kidnapped and killed British tourist Edwin Dyer in 2009. The broader objective of Wednesday's military operation was to prevent AQMI members from entering Mauritania through Mali, the ministry said. In Mauritania, acting Interior Minister Mohamed Ould Boilil said Friday that the country's army killed six AQMI militants during Wednesday's operation, while four others escaped. In February, France obtained the release of a French national who was held hostage by AQMI. Pierre Camatte, who was kidnapped in Mali in November, was freed a few months later after Mali met an AQMI request and released four Islamic militants from prison.

Hearing On Lockerbie Sets Off More Finger-Pointing

New York Times

July 26, 2010

A coming Senate hearing in Washington has set off a new round of political disavowals by British and Scottish officials who laid the groundwork for last year's release of the former Libyan intelligence agent convicted in the 1988 Lockerbie bombing. Officials most closely involved in the release have denied

suggestions that Britain's eagerness for oil deals with Libya was a factor – an issue given new momentum by accusations that the beleaguered oil giant BP also played a major role. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee is to hold a hearing on Thursday focusing on BP's role, although no official involved in freeing the Libyan, Abdel Basset Ali al-Megrahi, has agreed to travel to Washington to testify.

From the moment last August that the Scottish government released Mr. Megrahi, citing his advanced prostate cancer and medical advice that he was likely to die within three months, the case has generated more controversy in the United States than in Britain. The bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over the Scottish border town of Lockerbie on Dec. 21, 1988, killed 270 people, 189 of them Americans. Some bereaved families in Britain supported Mr. Megrahi's release; most American families angrily opposed it. A new edge has been lent by BP's involvement in the Gulf of Mexico oil spill, and the fact that Mr. Megrahi, 58, the only person convicted in the bombing, remains alive in Tripoli, nearly a year after his release on Aug. 20, 2009. He had served eight years of a life sentence in a prison outside Glasgow.

The prospect of new scrutiny in the affair has prompted a fresh round of finger-pointing between the Scottish and British officials involved, and a suggestion that the Obama administration has engaged in what a headline in *The Sunday Times* of London described as "double-talk" over the case. The newspaper based its article on a letter written eight days before Mr. Megrahi's release to the Scottish government by Richard LeBaron, deputy chief of the United States Embassy in London. The letter set out the United States' position, including what *The Sunday Times* described as a preference for Mr. Megrahi to be freed on compassionate grounds rather than released under a December 2007 prisoner-transfer agreement between Libya and Britain.

British officials confirmed the letter's authenticity on Sunday in telephone interviews with *The New York Times*. But the British newspaper appeared to have misrepresented the American position by suggesting that the United States was ready to accept Mr. Megrahi's return to Libya on compassionate grounds. In fact, the sections of the letter quoted by the paper showed that Mr. LeBaron was arguing that the least harmful option being considered by Britain was to free Mr. Megrahi on compassionate grounds, but subject him to some looser form of confinement in Scotland, possibly in a hospice, not send him back to Libya under the prisoner-transfer pact.

The point was pressed home on Sunday by the American ambassador, Louis Susman, who told the BBC that the United States was considering releasing its correspondence with Britain and Scotland about the case. The United States Embassy here later released a statement saying that "the United States strongly and consistently opposed in all its exchanges with Scottish and British officials" any release or transfer of Mr. Megrahi. The LeBaron letter, the statement said, "reiterated that unchanged position and underscored in particular our deep opposition to any outcome which permitted Megrahi's return to Libya."

Israeli Defense Chief Offers Warnings On Iran And Lebanon

Washington Post

July 26, 2010

Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak is due to arrive in Washington on Monday bearing two warnings for American policymakers: Sanctions won't thwart Iran's push for nuclear weapons, and Israel will strike directly at Lebanese government institutions if Hezbollah launches rockets at Israeli towns. In a wide-ranging interview, Barak – who has become one of Israel's most frequent official guests in Washington – outlined his vision for arresting Iran's nuclear drive, coping with the Hezbollah threat and forging a deal with the Palestinians.

A decade ago, Barak's failed attempt to reach an agreement with then-Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat led to an outbreak of violence that shattered hopes for Middle East peace. Today, at 68, the Labor Party leader finds himself an outlier in a predominantly right-wing coalition that generally opposes concessions to the Palestinians. But Barak is also, oddly, perhaps the closest confidant of his former political rival, Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, making what he says on matters of peace and war particularly relevant for the Obama administration. While in Washington, Barak is due to meet with Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates and various intelligence officials.

On Iran, Barak said Israel and the United States share the same "diagnosis" that Iran is "determined to reach nuclear military capability." But he acknowledged "there are differences about what could be done about it, how it should be done, and what [is] the timeframe within which certain steps could be taken." Among the timing issues are questions of how long to give sanctions the chance to work and the cutoff point after which it would no longer be feasible to neutralize Iran's uranium enrichment program with a military strike. Iranian officials insist that their efforts are geared purely toward peaceful energy development and that they have no intention of building a weapon.

"It's still time for sanctions," Barak said in the interview Friday in his office at Israel's Defense Ministry in Tel Aviv, but "probably, at a certain point, we should realize that sanctions cannot work." The United States and the United Nations have enacted recent rounds of sanctions, with the European Union expected to follow suit as early as Monday. Israeli officials have carefully parsed President Obama's words, hoping to find evidence that he would be willing to use military force. For Barak, that evidence came in Obama's December speech accepting the Nobel Peace Prize, when Obama said there will be times when "the use of force" is "not only necessary but morally justified."

Another area where Israel believes force may be necessary is Lebanon. Since a summer war with Hezbollah ended four years ago with the deployment of a beefed-up U.N. contingent, Israel says the Iranian-backed militia has built an arsenal of 40,000 missiles and rockets. Barak warned that the next time violence breaks out, Israel would strike directly at the Lebanese government, which he said is allowing Hezbollah to rearm. If Hezbollah fires a rocket into Tel Aviv, "we will not run after each Hezbollah terrorist or launcher. . . . We will see it as legitimate to hit any target that belongs to the Lebanese state, not just to Hezbollah." Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri has said Israel is "trying to justify a war against Lebanon that it could launch when it wishes" and has complained of Israeli surveillance flights over Lebanese territory.

Tensions between Israel and Lebanon have escalated in recent days amid reports that Lebanese activists plan to dispatch aid ships to the Gaza Strip in violation of an Israeli blockade. Barak called the aid ships an "unnecessary provocation." Hariri has said Israel's actions with regard to the ships are "rejected by all human rights treaties." The Lebanese effort follows a May 31 melee on a Turkish aid ship that left nine activists dead after Israeli commandos boarded the vessel. Barak said Israel must put forward a peace plan that delineates the borders of a Palestinian state, ensures a Jewish majority inside Israel, solves the Palestinian refugee problem and offers a "reasonable solution" for the future of Jerusalem.

U.S. Middle East envoy George J. Mitchell has been trying for months to broker a resumption of direct negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians. Netanyahu has said he is willing to meet Palestinian Authority leader Mahmoud Abbas directly; Abbas, skeptical of Netanyahu's sincerity, reportedly told his party's leadership last week that he wants more specific U.S. assurances before agreeing to direct talks. Asked whether Netanyahu shared Barak's belief in the need for an Israeli peace initiative that addresses the core conflict, Barak said Netanyahu had convinced Obama at their July 6 meeting that he "is there. But, of course, the proof of the pudding is in the eating. We have to prove it in actions, in the negotiations."