

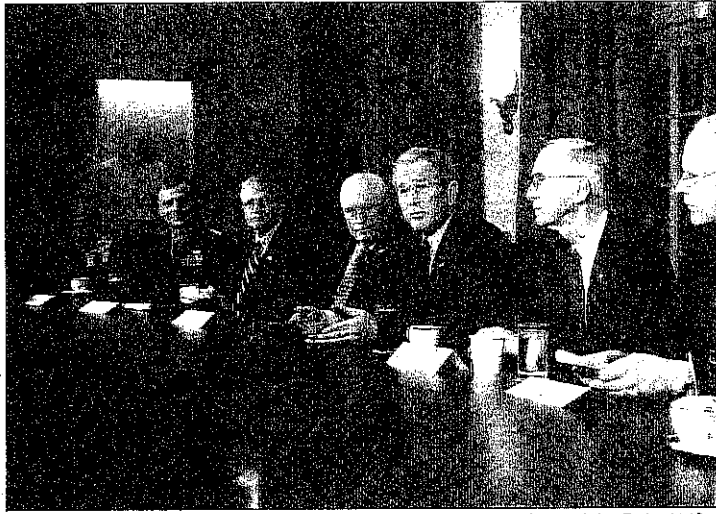
Troop cuts night pause

IAQ: Bush hints
awdown could put
curity gains at risk.

Robert Burns
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The first hint President Bush might hit the use button on troop cuts in Iraq is his offer to Gen. David Hainault: "If you want to slow her up, fine."

That was a little over two weeks ago. Then Bush invoked the commander's name again, in his State of the Union speech, saying general worries about troop levels leading to "disintegration" of Iraq's defenses.



President Bush meets with Joint Chiefs and combatant commanders in the Cabinet Room of the White House.

TROOP LEVELS

2003: U.S. forces were at 143,000 when Baghdad fell in April and ranged from a high of 148,900 in June to a low of 121,100 in

2007:

January	137,000
February	138,000
March	145,000
April	144,600
May	148,000
June	155,300

TROOP WITHDRAWAL

TROOP REDUCTIONS UNCERTAIN: The Bush administration is sending strong signals that U.S. troop reductions in Iraq will slow or stop

Fed mulls cut in key interest rate again

Jeanine Aversa
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Individuals and businesses are likely to see their borrowing costs drop further as the Federal Reserve weighs other interest-rate reduction to auster a sagging economy.

Fed Chairman Ben Bernanke and his colleagues opened a 10-day meeting Tuesday afternoon to plot their next move on interest rates. The closed-door

gathering comes amid growing fears the country is either on the brink of a recession or has already started slipping into one given the strains from a housing market collapse, a global credit crunch and turbulence on Wall Street. The country's most recent recession was in 2001.

Many economists believe the Fed will lower its key rate, now at 3.5 percent, by as much as one-half percentage point, to

3 percent, when policymakers wrap up their meeting today.

If that scenario plays out, commercial banks would be expected to lower their prime lending rate by a corresponding amount — from 6.5 percent to 6 percent. The prime rate applies to certain credit cards, home equity lines of credit and other loans. Should all of this happen, then both the Fed's key rate and the prime rate would be at nearly three-year lows.

In an emergency gathering con-

vened by Bernanke last week, the Fed ordered a rare, three-quarter-point reduction to its key rate. That came after stocks worldwide plummeted, intensifying recession fears. The Fed's action has helped to restore some confidence among skittish investors, but financial markets remain fragile.

On Wall Street, the expectation of another rate cut gave stocks a lift. The Dow Jones industrials gained 96.41 points to close at 12,480.30.

Afghanistan risks failure

OUTLOOK: Study warns that progress achieved after six years is under threat.

By Anne Flaherty
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Afghanistan risks sliding into a failed state and becoming the "forgotten war" because of deteriorating international support and a growing violent insurgency, according to an independent study.

The assessment, co-chaired by retired Marine Corps Gen. James Jones and former U.N. Ambassador Thomas Pickering, serves as a warning to the Bush administration at a time military and congressional officials are debating how best to juggle stretched warfighting resources.

The administration wants to re-energize anti-terrorism efforts in Afghanistan and Pakistan, where al-Qaida is regenerating. But the U.S. still remains heavily invested in Iraq, and officials are sending strong signals that troop reductions there will slow or stop

situation is good," Gates told The Associated Press. "We want to make sure it gets better, and I think there's still a need to coordinate civil reconstruction, the economic development side of it."

Gates said more troops are needed in Afghanistan, but "certainly not ours." When asked how many more NATO troops might be needed, he said that number should be determined by ground commanders.

Sen. John Kerry said it was "past time for wakeup calls" and that a "comprehensive, thoughtful approach" in Afghanistan was urgently needed.

"The same extremist group which plotted the attacks of 9-11 are reconstituting themselves on the Afghan border and grow more organized by the day, making the stakes higher, and higher," said Kerry, D-Mass., a senior member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

The Jones-Pickering assessment, slated for public release today, says the U.S. should rethink its military and economic strategy in Afghanistan in large part because of deteriorating support among voters in

U.S. Navy Announces Alternative Arrangements for Implementing the National Environmental Policy Act and Requests Public Input



On January 15, 2008, the Department of the Navy accepted alternative arrangements, approved by the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), for implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). These alternative arrangements specifically address the use of mid-frequency active (MFA) sonar and its effects on marine mammals during Navy exercises in the Southern California (SOCAL) Operating Area. These exercises include Composite Training Unit Exercises (COMPTUEX) and Joint Task Force Exercises (JTJFEX) scheduled to occur between January 15, 2008 and January 23, 2009. A Decision Memorandum documenting the Navy's acceptance of these alternative arrangements was published in the Federal Register on January 24, 2008.

Information on the Navy's proposals for the SOCAL Operating Area including the full text of the Decision Memorandum is available at www.SOCALRangeComplexEIS.com.

The Navy will prepare a post-exercise assessment after each exercise. By this Notice, the Navy requests input from the public on the process for reviewing the post-exercise assessments. The Navy is also offering the public the opportunity to discuss the implementation of these alternative arrangements. Input on reviewing the post-exercise assessments and any requests to meet with Navy and CEQ representatives about the alternative arrangements may be submitted by contacting Mr. Alex Stone at (619) 545-9128 or in writing to:

Naval Air Station North Island
Attn: Alex Stone, OPF Environmental
McCain Boulevard, Building 678, Room 218
San Diego, CA 92135

For more information about the Navy's Decision Memorandum, visit www.SOCALRangeComplexEIS.com.

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