

NEWS IN BRIEF

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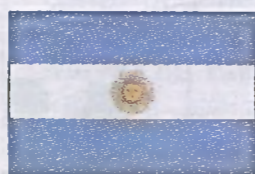
AFGHANISTAN

IN AN ALARMING BREACH OF SECURITY, A STOLEN TRUCK SPED ONTO THE RUNWAY AND BURST INTO FLAMES AS U.S. DEFENSE SECRETARY LEON PANETTA LANDED IN CAMP BASTION, AFGHANISTAN. Panetta's visit comes after a disturbing military shooting of 16 Afghan civilians, and he will seek to respond to the incident and smooth over relations. Following the tumultuous week of Afghan and U.S. relations, the strange event is being carefully investigated; however, military sources refuse to confirm a connection between the two incidents. "We cannot confirm in any way, shape or form at this time that this stolen vehicle was in any way tied to the secretary's arrival or his visit," said Pentagon Press Secretary George Little to the New York Times.



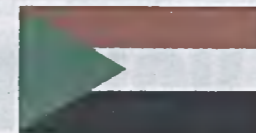
UNITED STATES

A DIET HIGH IN RED MEAT SIGNIFICANTLY INCREASES YOUR RISK OF CANCER, HEART PROBLEMS, AND DEATH according to a recent study at Harvard Medical School. Analyzing both men and women over the past 30 years, the study revealed that eating large portions of unprocessed red meat increased your risk of death by 13 percent, of fatal cardiovascular disease by 18% and of cancer mortality by 10 percent, according to BBC. The figures for processed meat were even higher. Red meat can still be eaten as part of a balanced diet, according to The British Heart Foundation, but adding more fish, chicken and nuts was highly recommended to reduce the risks.



ARGENTINA

ON MARCH 13, THE SUPREME COURT IN ARGENTINA EXPANDED THE LEGALIZATION OF ABORTION TO EXPLICITLY APPLY TO WOMEN WHO HAVE BEEN RAPED, allowing a 15-year-old rape victim to terminate her pregnancy. Being a predominantly Christian country, many Argentines were outraged by the ruling, particularly because the girl was 20 weeks into her pregnancy by the time the decision was made. Despite Argentina's initial efforts to criminalize abortion, Human Rights Watch reports that between 400 and 600 thousand women have illegal abortions every year, many of which result in the deaths of young mothers.



SUDAN



SOUTH SUDAN

AFTER MONTHS OF UNREST AND DISPUTES OVER LAND AND OIL, SUDAN AND SOUTH SUDAN HAVE DRAFTED A FRAMEWORK AGREEMENT THAT WILL GIVE CITIZENS OF BOTH NATIONS BASIC FREEDOMS AND RIGHTS. According to BBC, the accord asserts that nationals from either state would be given "freedom of residence, freedom of movement, freedom to undertake economic activity and freedom to acquire and dispose property." While this agreement appears to be moving the countries in a positive direction, their track records of broken agreements and disputes over property leave many apprehensive.

Amid divisions, Al-Qaeda exploits Syrian uprising

By Bryan Dooley
STAFF WRITER

On Feb. 11, al-Qaeda leader Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri posted an eight-minute video urging a jihad to overthrow Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

"Al-Qaeda is a terrorist organization," Zane F. Kuseybi, a second-generation Syrian, said in an email interview. "They have no central focus or goals beyond creating havoc by indiscriminate killing."

Kuseybi continued, "They have no place and are not welcome in Syria. Their call for support of the democracy movement in Syria diverts attention to the terrorist al-Qaeda message, which only reinforces their true purpose, (creating havoc). There is no true desire to help the Syrian people."

The video is the most obvious sign to date of al-Qaeda's attempts to support the opposition in Syria, according to the BBC's Jim Muir. In

the video, al-Zawahiri encourages all Muslims everywhere to support the Syrian uprising.

"If we want freedom, we must be liberated from this regime. If we want justice, we must retaliate against this regime," said al-Zawahiri.

Whereas al-Zawahiri urges retaliation, the civil uprising in Syria is more rooted in democracy and human rights.

"What drives the Syrian movement is counter to what al-Qaeda wants," said Max Carter, campus ministry coordinator and director of the Friends Center.

"I would rather see more non-violent resistance," said Carter. "I am not in favor of supplying weapons or going in with troops ourselves. In terms of being 'risky,' non-violence is risky, but violence is risky too. People are killed either way. But non-violence is more positive in the long term."

According to the BBC's Security Correspondent Frank Gardner, al-Qaeda is exploiting Syria's sectarian tensions to promote violence, by using many Sunnis' pre-existing hatred for the ruling minority.

"They have no place and are not welcome in Syria ... There is no true desire to help the Syrian people."

Zane F. Kuseybi, Syrian & Greensboro-native

One group that is trying to counter the sectarian divisions within Syria is the Syrian National Council. The SNC consists of seven opposition groups that could offer a viable alternative to al-Assad. The Syrian National Council serves

as a single contact point for the international community, according to the BBC.

Another group competing for the governance of Syria is the National Coordination Committee for Democratic Change, which is made up of 13 left-leaning political parties, three Kurdish political parties, and several independent political and youth activists.

In addition to these two groups, the Free Syrian Army consists of army deserters based in Turkey.

"Seven months into the uprisings, the Syrian opposition has yet to develop a united voice and platform," Randa Slim, a scholar at the Middle East Institute said in "Meet Syria's Opposition," published by the Middle East Channel. "Unless these disparate groups unite and present a credible and viable alternative to the Assad regime, both Syria's fearful majority

and the international community will find it difficult to effectively push for meaningful change."

Both sides are strong and will continue to pursue their goals. The presence of competing groups could leave Syria vulnerable to al-Qaeda's negative influence. However, Kuseybi believes that is unlikely.

"Both the regime and the opposition are resilient and won't be defeated easily," said Helena Cobban, internationally known reporter and author, in her blog. "Trying to find a democratic way out of this impasse still seems like the best — indeed only — way forward."

Even though the opposition groups are vastly different, they most likely will agree that al-Qaeda should not be involved, Cobban explained.

"We (I) fully expect that the free-Syria resistance groups within Syria will distance themselves completely from the al-Qaeda 'call to arms,'" said Kuseybi.