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THIS WEEK AT WAR

This Week at War

Aired September 2, 2006 - 19:00 ET

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CAROL LIN, CNN ANCHOR: "THIS WEEK AT WAR" is coming up in just a moment. But first, a look at what's happening right now in the news.

Al Qaeda on a recruitment trail -- today, the terror group's second in command released a video message seeking American converts to Islam.

The Israeli military says its troops came under fire from militants in Gaza. A gun-battle broke out and two of the militants were killed. The third Palestinian was shot dead by troops near a border crossing.

Fourteen British troops died today when their plane crashed in Kandahar, Afghanistan. Officials say it appears to be a technical problem causing the crash, no hostile fire.

Coming up next on CNN, "THE POVERTY TRAP," a provocative conversation with former President Bill Clinton. Catch it tonight and Sunday night at 8:00 p.m. Eastern.

I'm Carol Lin.

I'll see you at the bottom of the hour or for breaking news as it happens.

But right now, "THIS WEEK AT WAR."

JOHN ROBERTS, SENIOR NATIONAL CORRESPONDENT: Iran's defiance over its nuclear program -- can the crisis be resolved diplomatically or are we headed for another military conflict?

Can President Bush reenergize support for the war in Iraq by tying it to terrorism?

And will the shaky truce in the Mideast hold?

I'm John Roberts with THIS WEEK AT WAR.

Let's take a look at what our correspondents reported day by day this week.

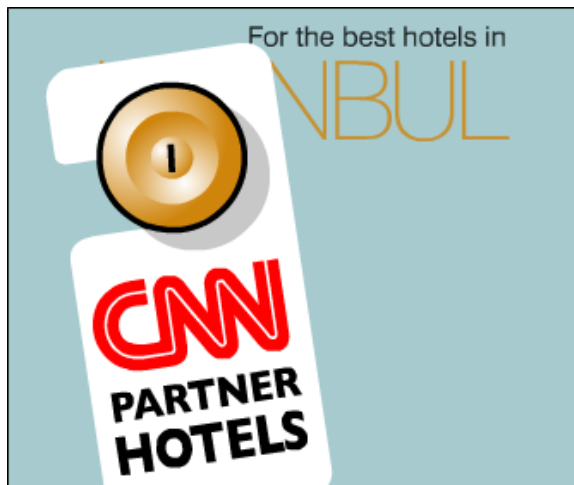
Monday, United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan begins his Mideast tour in Lebanon, calling for the release of Israeli soldiers and an end to the blockade of Lebanon.

Tuesday, Defense Secretary Rumsfeld calls terrorism a new type of fascism, warning that some seem not to have learned history's lessons.

Wednesday, President Bush previewed a series of speeches on Iraq, saying retreat before the job is done will place the U.S. in more jeopardy.

Thursday, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad defied the United Nations nuclear deadline, saying Iran will not succumb.

Friday, a new Pentagon report said an increase in violence in Iraq this summer was a setback, affecting all other



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measures of stability, reconstruction and transition.

And we'll look at the political war of words as the U.S. elections approach, all in THIS WEEK AT WAR.

First, what will be the consequences of Iran's refusal to halt nuclear development?

Joining me now via broadband, CNN's Aneesh Raman in the Iranian capital of Tehran; our senior U.N. correspondent, Richard Roth, in New York; and with me here in Washington, Ray Takeyh, who is a senior fellow for Middle Eastern Studies at the Council of Foreign Relations. He is also the author of "Hidden Iran: Paradox and Power In the Islamic Republic."

The president of Iran had been sending clear signals for weeks. And on Thursday he made it official -- he and his country are hanging tough, refusing what he called bullying by the United States and others to abandon nuclear enrichment.

President Ahmadinejad spoke to a cheering crowd in northwest Iran, adding, his nation will not let its rights be trampled on.

From President Bush came a warning.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

GEORGE W. BUSH, PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES: we want to continue to work closely with our allies to find a diplomatic solution. But there must be consequences for Iran's defiance and we must not allow Iran to develop a nuclear weapon.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

ROBERTS: Aneesh Raman in Tehran, tough words of defiance from Iran's leaders.

But is there worry there about potential consequences for that defiance?

ANEESH RAMAN, CNN CORRESPONDENT: Well, when you talk to people on the street, officials, as well, about sanctions, they really shrug their shoulders. Iran has endured and is enduring sanctions. We saw at the end of the week a plane crash that Iranian officials say was the result of old aircraft because of sanctions they already have. They can't get Western aircraft. They can't get Western parts. They have to rely on Russian aircraft.

So when you talk to them about sanctions, it really means nothing to them. They're not afraid of them. Some of the people on the street quietly say they do fear harsh economic sanctions, perhaps commodities like gas getting cut, the prices going up, unemployment going up, inflation is already high here.

But the graduated scale that Iran sees ahead with asset freezes for its leaders, travel restrictions, that is not something they are at all worried about. That's the sense you get on the ground -- John.

ROBERTS: Ray Takeyh, what's Iran's strategy here? And does the regime feel emboldened after Hezbollah stood up to Israel, with the United States backing Israel, and when they see all the trouble that the United States is in Iraq?

RAY TAKEYH, COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS, AUTHOR, "HIDDEN IRAN": Certainly. I think everything that has happened in the past few years has emboldened the Iranian government, because, as you said, America is entangled in a quagmire and Hezbollah has, at least at this particular point, managed to defiance with success.

So what Iranians are looking forward to is an international community that, at the end of the day, is unlikely to come together and impose the type of strenuous sanctions that Aneesh was talking about.

They're prepared to live with these modest, symbolic sanctions that are being talked about because they know that's not going to essentially affect their economy and therefore the basis of their power.

ROBERTS: Right. I mean it looks like the United States is going to go before the United Nations next week to talk about those sanctions.

Here's what the United States ambassador to the United Nations, John Bolton, said about sanctions on Friday in an interview with CNN.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

JOHN BOLTON, UNITED STATES AMBASSADOR TO UNITED NATIONS: we are looking at sanctions that would target the Iranian leadership, target their nuclear and ballistic missile programs and target their weapons programs generally.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

ROBERTS: So, Richard Roth at the United Nations, you heard Ray Takeyh just say a moment ago that it may be difficult to get a package of sanctions that would actually have some teeth.

Why do you think, from your position there at the United Nations? Can the United States get the Security Council on the sanctions bandwagon in a way that would actually put some pain on the Iranian regime? RICHARD ROTH, SENIOR UNITED NATIONS CORRESPONDENT: They are going to try, though it doesn't look good right now. The

U.S. says they may have to go it alone, if necessary, with some type of coalition of willing countries that will slap sanctions on Tehran.

But here at the Security Council, Russian diplomats, Chinese diplomats say sanctions are not the way to go.

On Friday, the Russian foreign minister, Lavrov, said sanctions overall are a dead end, certainly looking at a past history of Iraq and other issues.

ROBERTS: So, Richard, as both Aneesh and Ray Takeyh just said, would the Iranian regime be able to withstand some of these almost symbolic sanctions? I mean anything that the United Nations Security Council could come up with, would it have any kind of an effect at trying to bring the Iranian regime to heel?

ROTH: I don't think it will have an effect on their policy on the nuclear program, which is full steam ahead for what they say is peaceful purposes. I think you're seeing the U.S. being challenged on each side of the globe regarding its get tough approach, on whether it's North Korea or Iran or even in the Middle East.

ROBERTS: Aneesh, you said that people pretty much shrug their shoulders at the idea of sanctions there in Iran.

But what about the broader, the one, perhaps, way down the road, and that is military action?

President Bush keeps on saying all options are on the table. The military option is one that, perhaps, might be on the table at some point.

Is there concern there in Iran about possible military action?

RAMAN: There is. There's a broader issue here, which is that Iran is eager to paint this struggle as the U.S. versus Iran. The U.S. seems eager to make it about a world community against Iran. And in the picture that is painted for Iranians, they feel that U.S. air strikes, preemptive strikes on their nuclear facilities could happen, especially if sanctions aren't achieved, consensus for them, within the Security Council.

All of them say that is their worst fear. Iran endured a vicious eight year battle with Iraq that left thousands upon thousands dead. They do not want war here.

But keep in mind, the Iranian people -- and I've gotten a sense more of it this time than last time -- have a sense of resignation about them. They know they're observers in this process as much as we are. They aren't active participants helping to determine how their government goes about its business.

They want economic reform at home. Their government wants international clout. And on this nuclear issue, both combine, because the government has convinced the people that nuclear energy is a need. Despite the fact that Iran sits on large oil reserves, it imports a lot of gas. And so the people are convinced that for their economic future, they need this peaceful civilian nuclear program.

But Iranian officials are seeing this as a platform, really, to rise up against the U.S. at every step they can. They pinpoint President Bush and the U.S. administration in their comments, not really the world at large, because they want to be the balancing power to the U.S. and really capitalize on anger that exists on Muslim streets worldwide.

ROBERTS: Ray Takeyh, how would a U.S. attack against Iran go over in the Muslim world? What kind of effect would that have?

TAKEYH: Well, I think in light of the fact that there is conflict in Lebanon, there's conflict in Iraq, I don't think the region is prepared for a third conflict in the Middle East. I think everybody in the Middle East is tired of people blowing things up, particularly Americans and the Israelis.

So it will have a dramatically negative impact in terms of America's image in the Middle East. And, moreover, it may not actually succeed in the same way (UNINTELLIGIBLE).

ROBERTS: Would Ahmadinejad, in effect, become a hero?

TAKEYH: He's already tried to make an appeal to the pan-Islamic community, to the Muslim world at large. I think this would give him another avenue in order to appeal to the imagination of the public in the region.

ROBERTS: All right.

And Richard Roth, how long is this discussion over possible sanctions going to take and how long will the United States continue down this road of sanctions before it, perhaps, starts to discuss the military operation?

ROTH: Oh, I think they're going to go as long as they can hoping that diplomacy can somehow achieve success. On Friday, the European Union's chief foreign minister, their coordinator for Finland, said for us, diplomacy is number one. And as long as Iran thinks it can get China and Russia to be split apart from the U.S. and Britain, it will continue its hold fast policy on the nuke issue.

ROBERTS: Quite a diplomatic square dance going to go on there.

Richard Roth at the United Nations, Aneesh Raman in Tehran, thanks very much.

Ray Takeyh, stay with us, because we want to come back to you a little bit later on.

From Iran, we're staying in the neighborhood. A new surge of violence in Iraq. Scores of people killed in Baghdad even amidst a major security crack down in the capital. That's coming up. But first, a happy homecoming this week for members of the 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing in San Diego.

Sergeant Michael Salinas was one of 200 Marines and sailors who were reunited with their loved ones after several months in Iraq.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

SGT. MICHAEL SALINAS, U.S. MARINE CORPS: This is my daughter Clarissa (ph). She hasn't seen her daddy in seven months.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Wow!

That's a long time.

SALINAS: She don't want to let go of her daddy, either.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: I don't blame you.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

ROBERTS: A lot of families glad to have their relatives reporting for duty back at home.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

ROBERTS: Violence raging in the Iraqi capital this week, defying the security crack down by both the United States and Iraqi forces.

Can Iraq pull back from the brink?

Joining us now, CNN correspondent Michael Holmes, who is in Baghdad; Jamie McIntyre, our senior political correspondent, at the Pentagon; and with me here in Washington, Brigadier General James "Spider" Marks, U.S. Army, retired, and a CNN military analyst.

Let's take a quick look at how Michael Holmes reported on this story back on Wednesday.

(BEGIN VIDEO TAPE)

MICHAEL HOLMES, CNN INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENT (voice-over): U.S. and Iraqi officials had been pleased with the sharp drop in violence this month -- that is, until this week. Since Sunday, 200 Iraqis have been killed in a bloody string of attacks around the country, more than 200 wounded.

Shurjah (ph) sells everything from food to electronics, and Iraqis travel from miles around to visit, making it a popular target for acts like this.

(END VIDEO TAPE)

ROBERTS: Another 60 killed on Thursday. More killed on Friday.

Michael Holmes, this plan was supposed to reduce the amount of violence in Baghdad.

What happened?

HOLMES: Yes, that's right.

John, that number is now 300 dead this week, over 600 wounded. It's a staggering figure.

Now, Operation Together Forward or the battle for Baghdad, I went out with these guys. And we went into an area called Ghazaliya. We went into another area called Amariyah with two different units. And what we found was what the U.S. military is saying, that is, where Operation Together Forward has gone into these areas, it has dropped the rate of violence by 50 percent or more.

But let's just bring it back to reality. The insurgents knew that this operation was underway. They got out of dodge. They took their main weapons with them.

And so it's not surprising that rates have dropped down. They dropped -- they went up in other parts of the capital. And the locals there told me, well, this is great. This is fantastic.

But what happens when these guys go?

And what we saw around Baghdad this week was really, in many ways, the insurgents -- and the U.S. military expected this -- the insurgents saying you haven't got us, we can still do what we do -- John.

ROBERTS: Right.

And, Jamie McIntyre over at the Pentagon, just released on Friday was the Pentagon's latest quarterly report on

progress in Iraq. It found that in the period between June and August of this year, attacks were up 15 percent. Iraqi casualties up 51 percent.

Has the military got the right plan, Jamie? Is there anything they can do to stop this sectarian violence?

JAMIE MCINTYRE, CNN SENIOR PENTAGON CORRESPONDENT: What we saw in these months of June, July and August, the summer, is a staggering innocent in the number of Iraqi civilians being killed at the time when the U.S. is trying to get control.

We are seeing, in that report, some positive indications in the increasing number of Iraqi forces and some political developments.

But the bottom line is the trend line isn't good. And after a while, I think people are going to have to take a look at the strategy of just building up the Iraqi forces, cracking down on -- in that operation like we're seeing in Baghdad. And, as Michael Holmes points out, the real question is not so much whether they can reduce the violence in the short-term, but whether it'll hold.

And right now there are real questions about that. ROBERTS: General Marks, on the issue of Iraqi-on-Iraqi violence, the Pentagon report also said: "Sectarian tensions increased over the past quarter, manifested in an increasing number of execution style killings, kidnappings and attacks on civilians. Conditions that could lead to civil war exist in Iraq. Nevertheless, the current violence is not a civil war and movement toward civil war can be prevented."

Given what we're seeing on the ground, is that just so much wishful thinking?

BRIG. GEN. JAMES MARKS, U.S. ARMY (RET.), CNN MILITARY ANALYST: Well, it's more than just simply semantics. I mean, there's a government, it's in being, it's trying to get its arms around growing Iraq forward. If the government was not there and was not functioning, you'd have every aspect of a civil war.

So what you have is most of these operations have been planned, in many cases, weeks in advance. So the buildup of forces that you see in Iraq right now and what might be an episodic decrease in violence, but then it'll come back again, has been actions -- these are actions that have been planned for quite some time.

And so the forces that are on the ground will continue to work and try to get at the local intelligence that will allow them to put an arm around it.

ROBERTS: Of course, the big question in all of this is when will U.S. troops be able to come home?

The president keeps on saying as Iraqi troops stand up, U.S. troops will stand down.

When will Iraqi troops be able to stand up?

Here's what General George Casey, the commander of all American forces on the ground in Iraq, had to say about that on Wednesday.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

GEN. GEORGE CASEY, COMMANDER, MULTI-NATIONAL FORCE-IRAQ: I can see, over the next 12 to 18 months, I can see the Iraqi security forces progressing to a point where they can take on the security responsibilities for the country with very little coalition support.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

ROBERTS: The White House and Pentagon have studiously avoided any talk of a timetable. But that sounds remarkably like a timetable.

MARKS: Yes, you know, but, you know, when General Casey was asked the second part of that question, well, OK, the Iraqis can stand up.

Does that mean the U.S. troops can stand down?

He said well, I don't really know. And, of course, the reason for that is he made that what turned out to be overly optimistic prediction last July where he said he thought there would be significant troop reductions if the level of violence got better. Of course, it got worse instead.

So he's, again, being very cagey about saying anything about when U.S. troops are coming home because he knows full well that if this trend continues, he might even ask -- have to ask for more troops to come in...

ROBERTS: Right.

MARKS: ... at least in the short-term.

ROBERTS: Michael Holmes, a year to 18 months for Iraq to stand up all its forces.

Is that realistic?

HOLMES: Yes, it depends who you ask, John.

I think on the ground -- and I've been coming here since the war began and this is my seventh trip here -- and I've got to tell you, every time I come back to Baghdad, things are worse.

The -- as Jamie pointed out there, the troop numbers have gone up in the last few weeks -- 127,000 to 140,000. And that includes the numbers that have come into Baghdad to try to knock things on their head.

You know, when it comes to this whole surge, if you like, in sectarian violence and killings, Iraqis that I talk to, they don't care what you call it. Call it civil war. I mean somebody said to me the other day well, they didn't call it genocide in Rwanda either.

What they are facing is a daily battle to survive. And it's the killings. It's also the electricity is still only on a few hours a day. Life here is unbearably hard for a lot of people.

And one more thing, John. When we're talking about these killings, out -- when I was on patrol with the 10th Cav in Amariyah, we drove around the corner. This is an area where Operation Together Forward is in full swing. Drive around the corner, there's a young man about 22 years of age lying on the ground, his hands bound, two shots in the head. That's in an area meant to be under control.

ROBERTS: It's really incredible, the level of violence going on there.

Michael Holmes in Baghdad, thanks very much, as well as Jamie McIntyre at the Pentagon.

Spider Marks, stay with us, because we want to come back to you in another segment.

Now to one of this week's fallen in Iraq. U.S. Army Private Dan Dolan of Utah was killed when the truck he was riding in was hit by a roadside bomb. Dolan's father said his son, who loved to play hockey, enlisted in the military after graduating from high school last year.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

TIM DOLAN, PVT. DOLAN'S FATHER: He loved serving his country and we are proud of him, extremely proud of him.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

ROBERTS: Dolan was a member of the 2nd Infantry Division at Fort Lewis, Washington. He was 19 years old.

Just ahead, a war of words between President Bush and Democrats over the conflict in Iraq and the war on terror.

Is it playing politics or fair game?

But first, a look at some of the others who fell in this week at war.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

BUSH: The war we fight today is more than a military conflict. It is the decisive ideological struggle of the 21st century.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

ROBERTS: President Bush on Thursday speaking to veterans at an American Legion convention in Salt Lake City, Utah.

With the mid-term elections just two months away, is President Bush politicizing the war or are Democrats appeasing the terrorists?

Joining us to talk more about this, CNN's senior political correspondent, Candy Crowley, and White House correspondent, Ed Henry -- Ed Henry, like we try to do every week on this program, the president was connecting all the dots between all of these countries -- what's going on in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan.

To what end? What's his goal?

ED HENRY, CNN CONGRESSIONAL CORRESPONDENT: Well, this is almost like Bush 3.0. I mean, the first two versions he -- this is the third series of these same speeches, where he's trying to broaden it out and get beyond just Iraq and say this is about the broader war on terror.

There's one simple reason for that. His poll numbers are much higher when he talks about the broader war. When he focuses on Iraq -- and if this November election is a referendum on Iraq -- Republicans are probably in for a long night. So he's trying to broaden it out. What was interesting was the president himself said he was hoping that politics wouldn't be injected into this debate. Iraq is not only the central front in the war on terror, as he says, it's the central front in this mid-term election.

ROBERTS: You mentioned those poll numbers. Let's take a look at them.

For example, a recent "Newsweek" poll, his disapproval on handling of the war in Iraq was 63 percent versus 31 percent approval, whereas his handling of terrorism and homeland security, 49 percent of people approved; 45 percent disapproved.

Candy Crowley, this idea of linking Iraq with the war on terror, Iraq is the central front in the war on terror, we heard it time and time and time and time again.

But people don't seem to be buying it this time around.

CANDY CROWLEY, CNN CORRESPONDENT: Well, they don't, and there's a couple of things happening out on the campaign trail when I go out there that I hear. And one is, if you look at the commercials and you listen to the rhetoric of Democrats, they're no longer afraid to take on this subject of the war on terror. Before, in 2002 and in 2004, when this approach worked for Republicans, Democrats kind of skirted around it. Now they are sort of head on taking them on. They're encouraged by these poll numbers on Iraq.

And in some ways, the president has sort of made this bed, and that is he has spent so long linking the war on terror with the war in Iraq that those numbers are sinking along with Iraq.

ROBERTS: Yes, and people -- recent polls have shown -- don't believe that Iraq is part of the broader war on terror either.

CROWLEY: Right.

ROBERTS: So, can he make that reconnection if people don't believe him?

CROWLEY: Well, every time the president goes out, he sees a little bump. But, you know, you saw those poll numbers. Even on terrorism, he's below 50 percent. It is hard to see how, between now and election time, people are going to jump up and go oh, he's right.

But what they're aiming for here are the so-called soft Republicans. They're trying to get people -- their people, their votes -- out to the polls. They worry the discouraged Republicans will sit home. So this is sort of a get out the vote tour, if you will. I mean I don't question the president's sincerity and what he thinks, but it comes in an election year and in an election year, everything is political. They're trying to get the vote out.

ROBERTS: And, of course, in that, it's a time honored tradition, too, for the attack dogs, the surrogates, to come out. Take a look at this what Donald Rumsfeld had to say about Iraq and the war on terror when he addressed the convention on Tuesday.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

DONALD RUMSFELD, SECRETARY OF DEFENSE: Once again, we face similar challenges in efforts to confront the rising threat of a new type of fascism. Today, another enemy, a different kind of enemy, has made clear its intentions. But some seem not to have learned history's lessons.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

ROBERTS: Of course, the secretary of defense went on to say that people who are opposed to the war in Iraq are appeasing the terrorists in much the same way that Hitler was appeased by giving him Czechoslovakia prior to World War II.

Ed Henry, as I said, it's a time honored tradition to have the president sort of soar above the fray while the attack dogs go out there and do the dirty work.

HENRY: Absolutely. And Rumsfeld is a good lightning rod, sometimes, for the president. Let him take the heat. Democrats pounced on Rumsfeld a bit more this week, maybe, than the president himself.

But what I thought was interesting was the reaction of some Republicans to Rumsfeld going out there. There's one, a rank and file House Republican, Pat Tiberi. The morning after the president's big speech, he said not only did he still have concerns about why the president went to war in Iraq in the first place, but he thought Rumsfeld should go.

And I think that's another thing the White House is concerned about. This comes on the heels of Chris Shays, a moderate Republican, coming out the week before and saying maybe we should start pulling troops out of Iraq.

ROBERTS: Right.

HENRY: The White House is very nervous that as Republicans and their numbers in general look bad heading into the midterms, maybe more and more Republicans start jumping ship. And the White House is very nervous about that.

ROBERTS: But what this does with rhetoric like this, and also rhetoric that Dick Cheney had earlier this week, is it puts Democrats back on the defensive again, Candy. And that is always a bad place for them to be.

CROWLEY: That's not -- it's not where they want to be. And so you saw them come out and try to sort of seize the offensive. I mean, you know, my e-mail practically went into overload with the number of people saying yes, but this, he still doesn't have a plan, he doesn't have a plan. So that's their push back always is, you know, this is just the same old stuff and he doesn't have a plan.

ROBERTS: Right. But where is the Democrats' plan?

CROWLEY: Well, exactly. They think they don't need a plan. You know, you can talk to any number of Democrats and they'll say well, we have a plan, but you know what? We don't need a plan. This election is about George Bush and the

war in Iraq.

ROBERTS: Right.

This is the third time in less than year, Ed, that the president has come out with a series of speeches on Iraq. Some Republican consultants I talked to thought that he left it too late when he did it at the end of the spring of this year.

Is anyone listening anymore?

HENRY: That's a question. I mean what Republicans are hoping is that the real meat of the campaign season really doesn't kick in, obviously, until after Labor Day. And they're hoping that's when voters will finally tune in.

They saw a slight bump in the president's poll numbers after round two of these speeches. They think maybe after round three, there'll be another slight bump.

But is that enough to pull Republicans back? That's the big question.

ROBERTS: Boy, as Yogi said, it's like deja vu all over again. It's like 2004, a rerun.

Candy Crowley, Ed Henry, thanks very much.

Next up on THIS WEEK AT WAR, a quick check of the headlines.

Plus, if diplomacy fails, is there a military operation to keep Iran from building a nuclear bomb?

Right now, a special delivery for an Army sergeant wounded in Iraq. Jose Pequeno, the police chief of Sugar Hill, New Hampshire, was seriously injured in a bomb attack back in March. While he has been recovering in Florida, the town bought and built a new wheelchair accessible home for Pequeno, his wife and three children.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

CHIEF ALLAN CLARK, SUGAR HILL FIRE DEPARTMENT: We're looking forward to when Jose actually comes home. But this will -- this will allow it to happen.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

ROBERTS: The Pequeno family hopes to move in, hopes to be back home by September the 10th.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

LIN: More of "THIS WEEK AT WAR" in just a moment.

But first, a look at what's happening right now in the news.

Al Qaeda's number two releases a new video on the Internet. And on the tape, Ayman el-Zawahiri urges Americans and non-believers to convert to Islam.

Well, the remnants of Ernesto are bringing rain to western New York. Ernesto struck North Carolina as a tropical storm and dumped heavy rains there, and in Virginia and Maryland, as well.

Now, in the West, what was Hurricane John spent its energy over Mexico's Baja Peninsula. It's been downgraded to a tropical storm.

Nellie Connally, wife of late Texas Governor John Connally, died overnight in Austin. She had been the last survivor of the group riding with President John F. Kennedy when he was assassinated. Family members say Nellie Connally died in her sleep. She was 87.

At the top of the hour, "CNN PRESENTS: THE POVERTY TRAP." Former President Bill Clinton tells our Dr. Sanjay Gupta what should be done to end the cycle of poverty gripping billions of people around the world. That's at 8:00 p.m. Eastern, only on CNN.

And that's what's happening now in the news.

I'm Carol Lin.

Now back to "THIS WEEK AT WAR."

ROBERTS: So far, diplomacy has failed to end the standoff between Iran and much of the rest of the world over nuclear development.

But is there a military operation and what may planners at the Pentagon be considering?

CNN analyst and Brigadier General U.S. Army Retired James Spider Marks joins me here in Washington.

General Marks, give us a lay of the land, first off.

What would military planners be looking at in terms of geography?

MARKS: John, the number one consideration is the size of Iran. When you think military planning, when you think trying to put forces on the ground or doing anything in Iran, it is a massive piece of space and there is a lot of compartmented terrain.

The key cities, obviously, are located here. And Tehran is that much farther north from the Gulf of Hormuz in terms of strike distance. You expose yourself if you're over Iran. ROBERTS: Where are these nuclear facilities that the world is so worried about?

MARKS: The nuclear facilities are very dispersed, not concentrated in any one location, as you can see here. Now these are not delivery means. Now, I'm going to take you in with a piece of imagery into this one right here in the center of the map, which is Esfahan.

Let me walk down into a piece of imagery that is within about the last couple of months.

Now, the facility, as you can see, is located here. Now what's significant and what I'd like to address is that last year, we identified that there were some underground facilities that were being constructed.

ROBERTS: Not all out in the open like this?

MARKS: Absolutely not. And here are the openings. These are called addets (ph), which lead into facilities that are buried underneath this piece of terrain. You can see the road that leads up to that entry point and there's another little one right there.

ROBERTS: So how deep would these tunnels go in the mountain?

MARKS: This is what's most significant. These are very, very deep, protruding into the mountain. It gives you the capability to conduct a lot of operations under there. It's more than just a storage location.

Let me take you to another nuclear facility that's in Iran called Natanz. Now, I'm going to show you a piece of imagery from two weeks ago, August of '06. This is the facility of Natanz, located here.

What I want to bring...

ROBERTS: So we see a lot of buildings and a big open space.

MARKS: Absolutely.

ROBERTS: Or what looks like a big open space.

MARKS: Now, let me show you the big open space right here, John.

Let me get back a couple of years and show you what is underneath that. A piece of imagery from about three years ago portrays storage facilities, obviously some capability to do some research, potentially some assembly. This has now been buried, over the course of the last three years.

ROBERTS: So it's all covered and now it just looks like a piece of desert now?

MARKS: You've got it. And Iran denied that until the imagery was presented to them. And they said what have you got? (ph). ROBERTS: So given how much is underground, how much is buried in mountains, in terms of military operations, what sort of challenge does that present to go in there with air strikes, which I assume would be the preferred method?

MARKS: The military option is to hope that diplomacy works. This is a hardened target. These are very exposed sites. A lot of time being spent in a cockpit over Iran. It takes a lot of precise targeting and you've got to go deep and buried -- and bury -- buried, very deeply buried targets. You've got to go after those targets.

ROBERTS: Does, I mean, the U.S. military has got bunker busters, laser-guided bombs, the standoff land attack munitions.

Does it have the capability to attack these facilities?

MARKS: Oh, sure. The capability exists to attack. But what you have to evaluate are the effects you want to achieve. You can drop one of those onto one of these facilities. How do you measure the destruction? How do you measure the capability that exists after the strike?

ROBERTS: It doesn't sound like a lot of good options, though.

Thanks for that. Not just your average military Power Point presentation.

MARKS: Thank you.

ROBERTS: General Marks, appreciate it.

MARKS: Thanks.

ROBERTS: From Iran and Iraq to the tense standoff in the Mideast, we'll go Jerusalem and Beirut.

THIS WEEK AT WAR.

Stay with us.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

BUSH: Together, we're going to make it clear to the world that foreign forces and terrorists have no place in a free and democratic Lebanon.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

ROBERTS: President Bush on Thursday praising France and Italy and other countries for sending peacekeepers into Lebanon.

Can peace in the Middle East be assembled on the foundation of shaky cease-fire, really not even a cease-fire, just an end to hostilities? CNN correspondent Paula Hancocks joins us from Jerusalem.

In Beirut, Mayssam Zaaroura.

She is the editor of Lebanon's "Daily Star."

And once again Ray Takeyh, the senior fellow for Middle East Studies at the Council On Foreign Relations.

On Wednesday, CNN's Chris Lawrence covered the United Nations Secretary-General's stop in Israel.

(BEGIN VIDEO TAPE)

CHRIS LAWRENCE, CNN CORRESPONDENT (voice-over): Despite a friendly greeting between the heads of Israel and the U.N. the tense relationship is being tested.

KOFI ANNAN, U.N. SECRETARY-GENERAL: I've been urging for the immediate lifting of the blockade on Lebanon.

LAWRENCE: Kofi Annan is pushing Israel to reopen Lebanon's ports of entry. Prime Minister Ehud Olmert won't do it until the U.N. enforces an arms embargo against Hezbollah.

EHUD OLMERT, ISRAELI PRIME MINISTER: It has to be effective, it has to be strong.

(END VIDEO TAPE)

ROBERTS: Mayssam Zaaroura in Beirut, let's go to you first.

A little piece of news on Friday, Kofi Annan visiting Bashar Al- Assad in Syria got assurances from the Syrian government that they were going to institute tighter border controls between Syria and Lebanon to cut down on those transport of arms shipments to Hezbollah.

Do you have any reasonable belief that that is going to happen?

MAYSSAM ZAAROURA, EDITOR, "LEBANON DAILY STAR": The fact that the Secretary-General got that promise from the Syrian president is a huge deal for us here in Lebanon. This is the first time that the Syrians have outright discussed the subject and said, other than completely denying that there is any smuggling of weapons to Hezbollah from Syria or from Iran, this is the great thing that Kofi Annan has managed to achieve.

Now, the rest is actually waiting to see whether the Syrian president will go through on his promise and whether Israel will actually lift the embargo after this pledge.

ROBERTS: Paula Hancocks, when will Israeli troops begin to leave Southern Lebanon?

Kofi Annan has said that they would leave when some 5,000 U.N. troops got in there. That could be within a week to 10 days. Is that a realistic schedule that Israel might stick to?

PAULA HANCOCKS, CNN CORRESPONDENT: Well, John, Israel hasn't exactly said when it's going to pull its troops out. It's only said, according to Perez, the defense minister, when a reasonable number of troops are in Southern Lebanon from the United Nations -- of course, he doesn't actually say what a reasonable number of troops is. So he's given no indication when that's going to be.

And this is what we saw from the United Nations, Kofi Annan's visit just a couple of days ago, the fact that whatever Kofi Annan was asking for, Olmert really didn't promise anything. He didn't even promise to lift the blockade on Lebanon itself.

And it really reflects the Israeli sentiment toward the United Nations. Many Israelis see it as anti-Semitic. And it was almost a formality that Kofi Annan was here. It really wasn't covered that much at all.

ROBERTS: Right. Everybody's got a different interpretation of what's going on in diplomacy and on the ground.

Ray Takeyh, what are the chances that the cessation of hostilities is going to turn into some sort of cease-fire or lasting

peace between these two countries?

TAKEYH: Well, the so-called cease-fire has already been disrupted. I think the Israelis have done so 70 times and Hezbollah four times. So there is no peace at this point to be kept. A cessation of fire, but there is no cease-fire.

In the long run, I think the solution to the Hezbollah problem and the Israeli-Lebanese problem is a stronger Lebanese government. If the Lebanese government manages to take over the reconstruction effort, manages to actually bolster its armed forces and manages to deal with the international community, then it's possible for these borders and this conflict to be resolved and at least contained.

But at this particular point, there is no indication that that is happening.

ROBERTS: On the reconstruction effort, it's a massive undertaking. Fouad Siniora, the Lebanese prime minister, said on Thursday that 15 years of post-civil war progress had been set back in just a number of days by the Israeli attacks.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

FOUAD SINIORA, LEBANESE PRIME MINISTER: We now have a deep recession, with all the consequences that entails. Where we had a future full of promise, we must now pick up the pieces of our devastated economy.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

ROBERTS: Mayssam Zaaroura, what is the current situation there in Lebanon, particularly in Beirut?

It's fallen a little bit away from the headlines, though on Friday there was a striking picture on the front page of one of our newspapers of a huge convoy of dump trucks carrying debris away from the city.

What's it like there now?

ZAAROURA: A lot of people are saying that it's gone back to normal. But life here really isn't back to normal as it was before the war. The blockade is really affecting the country and the government and the people. People here are just starting to pick up their lives once again. It's very -- the economy is shattered and a lot of people have lost their jobs. They have no future.

So it is just starting from scratch, as the premier said.

ROBERTS: And how long do you expect the reconstruction will take there?

ZAAROURA: I think it's going to take quite a long time. I have no idea. I mean the aid that's come in from the Stockholm Conference is a great help. But we really need to wait and see whether that is going to be real and immediate help that is going to come through for the reconstruction. And we can start then.

ROBERTS: Paula Hancock...

ZAAROURA: They have already started quite quickly.

ROBERTS: Right.

Paula Hancock, what's the last thing, fallout from this, on the Israeli side, the idea that these Reservists were complaining about the way that the war was prosecuted? This investigation that's being launched, albeit under the auspices of the government?

HANCOCKS: Well, the political elite, at the moment, is being torn to pieces every single day in the editorials. And at this point, we're seeing them fighting amongst themselves, as well. We have the prime minister asking for a certain type of investigation into the war. The defense minister asking for a higher level, which could actually end up with some of the top dogs that are losing their jobs.

And, also, as soon as president -- Prime Minister Olmert looks out of his window every single morning, he sees Reserve soldiers sitting outside. They're protesting. They've built a mock graveyard. And also he had about 60,000 people earlier this week in Tel Aviv protesting, asking for these soldiers, these two kidnapped soldiers to be returned to Israel.

This is the key. The Israeli soldiers who were kidnapped are still in Lebanon. And that's, as far as the Israeli public are concerned, the most important thing at the moment.

ROBERTS: And Ray Takeyh, what do you see as being the lasting impact of this?

There was a quote that I read in an article in the "New York Times" on Friday which I thought was chilling. It was from a schoolteacher in Ita Al-Shaab (ph), which was one of the towns in Southern Lebanon that was hit the hardest. She said, in the future: "We will teach our children to hate the Israelis and love the resistance," meaning Hezbollah.

What does that mean for the future?

TAKEYH: The reconstruction effort potentially offers the Lebanese government an opportunity to reclaim political power, because the infrastructure of Lebanon has been destroyed and Hezbollah simply doesn't have the financial means to essentially reconstruct that.

So if the Lebanese government and the international community do reconstruct Lebanon, then perhaps in the long run, Hezbollah's influence will diminish and its regional aspirations will simply diminish.

ROBERTS: But there just seems to be so much more hatred there now.

TAKEYH: There seems to be, at this particular point. That's why it's important to reconstitute the Lebanese government and reconstruct the Lebanese infrastructure by the central government of Lebanon, as opposed to by Hezbollah, that is being done so today. So long as Hezbollah is the lead party in reconstructing Lebanon and representing Lebanese aspirations, then those feelings of hate, I think, will persist.

ROBERTS: A difficult time ahead.

Ray Takeyh from the Council On Foreign Relations, thanks.

Paula Hancocks in Jerusalem and Mayssam Zaaroura in Beirut.

Appreciate you being with us.

Coming up, we're going to meet an Army doctor who risked his life to treat others in Iraq, including former President Saddam Hussein. His unique perspective is straight ahead.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

ROBERTS: Stethoscope in one hand, M16 in the other, Dr. Sudip Bose is a unique military hero.

CNN correspondent Alex Quade met the infantry doc in Baghdad's combat hospital and follows his heroic story to the busiest civilian trauma center in Chicago.

(BEGIN VIDEO TAPE)

DR. SUDIP BOSE, EMERGENCY PHYSICIAN: Hello. Nice to meet you. I'm Dr. Bose. ALEX QUADE, CNN CORRESPONDENT (voice-over): Patients in this Chicago E.R. don't know their doctor is an Iraq war hero.

BOSE: A deep breath.

QUADE: -- who also treated Saddam Hussein not long after his capture.

BOSE: I was face to face with him and I just didn't have time to think of anything. I was just treating him like I would and, you know, maybe only after the fact you realize the weight of the moment.

QUADE: In Baghdad, at the combat support hospital where I first met him two years ago...

BOSE: Where'd you get shot?

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: In the leg.

BOSE: In the leg?

QUADE: ...Sudip Bose had many moments as an Army doctor.

BOSE: You know, the blood and the guts, you're kind of trained for that as a doctor and you're ready for it. But what's different here is there's another level of attachment to your patients, which are the soldiers, because you know, they're like all of us.

QUADE: Bose tells me about treating would-be suicide bombers, Iraqi detainees with grenades inside their bodies, and as an infantry doctor on the battlefield, about treating Iraqi civilians.

BOSE: Yes, there was three suicide bombers who detonated in a large crowd and hundreds of casualties lying on the road. And we tried to provide care, but the crowds, you know, thought we were responsible for the bombing and they just began attacking us. We had to try to provide the care, but at the same time, you know, you're having stones thrown at you. You're getting attacked by mobs. You know, courage isn't that sense of fear, it's just realizing there's something greater than that and going forward and doing your job.

QUADE: For his courage as physician under fire, the Army awarded Sudip Bose the Bronze Star.

BOSE: It's always nice to be honored for what you do, but I think whether I'm there or whether I'm here, my main focus is trying taking to care of patients.

QUADE (on camera): Do you think you're a hero?

BOSE: No, no, I don't. Those soldiers lost their lives out there. They're the true heroes and, you know, we'll miss them and their sacrifice.

QUADE (voice-over): Alex Quade, CNN, Chicago.

(END VIDEO TAPE)

ROBERTS: But to the many soldiers and Marines whose lives he saved, he certainly is a hero.

Besides working in the E.R. now, Dr. Bose also trains residents. He's teaching young doctors how to apply some of the wartime field medicine he practiced in Iraq to some of their daily medical situations in the E.R. He is also still a major in the inactive ready Reserves.

Back in Iraq, reaching out to hearts and minds through medicine. In an effort dubbed Operation Ghazaliya Aid, Iraqi security forces, in conjunction with the U.S. Army, provided medical treatment in Baghdad's Ghazaliya neighborhood. Iraqi Army medical personnel treated nearly 200 residents who sought care. U.S. Army officials said the operation showed what could be accomplished for Iraqi civilians when everyone works together.

Straight ahead, a quarter century after the United States and Iran severed former relations, a senior Iranian official will be arriving in Washington amidst new tensions.

What will he be talking about?

Stay with us on THIS WEEK AT WAR.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

ROBERTS: This being the final weekend of the summer holiday season, we can expect to hear a lot more about Iraq, Iran, the war on terror and other difficult challenges facing the United States in the weeks to come. Labor Day is the traditional kickoff of the fall election campaign and all those issues, Iraq especially, will play a prominent role in deciding some of those close races this year.

With control of Congress in the balance, we can expect a war of words that may be hotter than anything that we've heard up until now.

What's not clear at this point, will voters gravitate to the party best at pointing fingers or the one that offers real solutions to the problems?

Looking ahead to our next WEEK AT WAR, Monday, fighting in Iraq and the rebuilding of Lebanon will be on the agenda when President Bush welcomes to the White House the emir of Kuwait.

Also on Monday, eight suspects charges in the Atlantic airliner bomb plot are expected in court in London.

Thursday, former Iranian President Mohammad Khatami will speak at Washington's National Cathedral about Islam, Christianity and Judaism, and the role of religion in shaping peace.


Thanks for joining us on THIS WEEK AT WAR.

I'm John Roberts. Straight ahead, a check of the headlines.

Then, "CNN PRESENTS: THE POVERTY TRAP," a conversation with President Clinton.

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