



AS OF 0530 HOURS, JANUARY 22

## OVERVIEW

Houthi rebels in Yemen reportedly agreed to release President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi and withdraw their forces from his residence in exchange for greater influence in running the country's affairs, but heavily armed fighters remain stationed outside his home on Thursday, according to multiple outlets. Separately, the *Associated Press* reported that a U.S. prohibition on transferring Guantánamo Bay detainees to Yemen has effectively been put back in place due to security concerns, but President Obama will not officially reinstate the ban in order to maintain flexibility in case conditions improve. Also of note, Lt. Gen. Ben Hodges, commander of U.S. Army Europe, said an undetermined number of American troops will deploy to Ukraine this spring to begin training four companies of the Ukrainian National Guard near the city of Lviv.

## NEWS HEADLINES AT 0500

- U.S. not expected to charge officer in Ferguson case
- New York Assembly leader facing arrest over corruption
- Hundreds displaced in massive New Jersey apartment complex fire
- House GOP abruptly drops abortion bill
- Ukraine soldiers pull out of main part of Donetsk airport
- Leader of German anti-Islam group quits over Hitler photo

## OVERSEAS HEADLINES OF NOTE

- *Bangkok Post*: U.S. reaffirms participation in and support for Cobra Gold exercise
- *Press Trust of India*: Top Pentagon official arrives in New Delhi
- *Xinhua*: U.S. lifts cap on military aid to Philippines

## THIS DAY IN MILITARY HISTORY

- 1905 – Czarist troops massacre 500 workers marching to the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg to petition their grievances to Czar Nicholas II, sparking the first Russian Revolution

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*Washington Post Online, Jan. 22 | Ali al-Mujahed, Hugh Naylor and Daniela Deane*

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#### **2. U.S. not sending Gitmo detainees to Yemen**

*Associated Press, Jan. 22 | Nedra Pickler*

In another challenge to President Barack Obama's efforts to close the Guantanamo Bay prison, a ban on transferring detainees to Yemen has been effectively pushed back into place because of security concerns in the volatile Middle Eastern nation, administration officials say.

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*DefenseNews.com, Jan. 21 | Paul McLeary*

American soldiers will deploy to Ukraine this spring to begin training four companies of the Ukrainian National Guard, the head of US Army Europe Lt. Gen. Ben Hodges said during his first visit to Kiev on Wednesday.

## **MIDEAST**

### **4. At Risk of Fragmenting, Yemen Poses Dangers to U.S.**

*New York Times (News Analysis), Jan. 22, Pg. A1 | Robert F. Worth*

Only months ago, American officials were still referring to Yemen's negotiated transition from autocracy to an elected president as a model for post-revolutionary Arab states. Now, days of factional gun battles in the Yemeni capital have left the president a puppet figure confined to his residence. The country appears to be at risk of fragmenting in ways that could provide greater opportunities both for Iran and for Al Qaeda, whose Yemeni branch claimed responsibility for the first Paris terrorist attack this month.

### **5. We can't stop jihadists going to Syria, admits Turkish PM**

*The Times (UK), Jan. 22, Pg. 36 | Roger Boyes*

Controlling Turkey's border with Syria to stop the flow of foreign fighters joining the ranks of Islamic State is impossible, the Turkish prime minister has told The Times. In an interview shortly after holding talks with David Cameron, Ahmet Davutoglu said that sealing off the long frontier was not practicable, for technical and ethical reasons.

## **IRAQ/SYRIA**

### **6. Kurds cite success in battle with militants**

*Washington Post, Jan. 22, Pg. A8 | Loveday Morris*

Kurdish forces claimed to have pushed back Islamic State militants from a 300-square-mile area of northern Iraq on Wednesday and said they cut one of the extremist group's key supply lines to the occupied city of Mosul.

### **7. Iraq premier says ground troops need more aid**

*Associated Press, Jan. 21 | Vivian Salama and Qassim Abdul-Zahra*

Iraq's prime minister on Wednesday appealed for more aid for the country's beleaguered ground forces, which have yet to score a decisive victory against the Islamic State group despite five months of U.S.-led coalition air raids.

### **8. Japan Says Efforts to Contact Islamic State About Hostages Have Failed**

*New York Times Online, Jan. 22 | Martin Fackler*

Officials in Tokyo said Thursday that they were trying every possible avenue to reach the Islamic State militants who have threatened to kill two Japanese hostages but had so far failed to make contact, with time running out on a deadline to pay for the men's lives.

## AFGHANISTAN/PAKISTAN

### **9. Taliban Fissures in Afghanistan Are Seen as an Opening for ISIS**

*New York Times, Jan. 22, Pg. A4 | Taimoor Shah and Joseph Goldstein*

Across a violent swath of southern Afghanistan, rumors are swirling about a band of former Taliban fighters who have claimed allegiance to the Islamic State and are said to be fighting their former comrades for dominance. But interviews with Western and Afghan officials, along with accounts from local residents, the Taliban and a militant who described himself as a subcommander in the new ISIS band, pointed less to a major expansion of the Islamic State than to another example of internal divisions within the Taliban.

## UKRAINE/RUSSIA

### **10. Battle Rages With Rebels at Border Post in Ukraine**

*New York Times, Jan. 22, Pg. A4 | Rick Lyman and Andrew E. Kramer*

Shelling from both Ukrainian military and rebel separatist positions continued Wednesday over a remote border checkpoint northwest of Luhansk that Ukraine said was seized Monday by Russian troops, a chief spokesman for the Ukrainian military said.

### **11. Russia, Ukraine agree pullback line for heavy arms**

*Associated Press, Jan. 21 | Frank Jordans, Vladimir Isachenkov and Mstyslav Chernov*

Diplomats from Russia and Ukraine agreed Wednesday on a dividing line from where both sides should pull back their heavy weapons, just hours after separatist forces deployed more arms and manpower to an emerging flashpoint in eastern Ukraine.

## AFRICA

### **12. Cameroon raid frees German hostage held by Boko Haram**

*Agence France-Presse, Jan. 21 | Reinnier Kaze*

Cameroon said Wednesday its forces have freed a German hostage kidnapped six months ago in Nigeria by Boko Haram, as African leaders appealed to the United Nations for support in fighting the Islamist militants.

### **13. God ordered massacre, extremist says**

*Los Angeles Times, Jan. 22, Pg. A4 | Robyn Dixon*

Six years ago, Nigerian forces captured the leader of the extremist group Boko Haram and killed him in custody, a move that was to have far-reaching consequences. Nigeria had exchanged a charismatic preacher named Mohammed Yusuf for the more radical and violent leader, Abubakar Shekau, who steered the movement down a murderous path. In his latest video, released Tuesday, Shekau says God commanded that his fighters massacre hundreds of people in the town of Baga in northeastern Nigeria this month in an attack described by human rights groups as the worst so far by the militants.

## EUROPE

### **14. Belgium Offers Partial IDs of Two Killed in Police Raid**

*New York Times, Jan. 22, Pg. A6 | James Kanter and Andrew Higgins*

The Belgian authorities on Wednesday partly identified two men believed to be Islamic militants who died last week in a police raid, releasing the first names and nationalities -- one Belgian, one Belgian-Moroccan -- of the pair, who were suspected of belonging to a terrorist network and plotting an imminent attack.

**15. France to add 2,600 counterterror agents**

*Washington Post, Jan. 22, Pg. A7 | Michael Birnbaum*

Two weeks after the worst attacks on French soil in decades, leaders here announced sweeping measures Wednesday to add more than 2,600 counterterrorism agents and boost funding for intelligence gathering.

**16. France Has Emerged as a Hawk in Muslim World**

*Wall Street Journal (Analysis), Jan. 22, Pg. A6 | Yaroslav Trofimov*

When the French president dispatched an aircraft carrier to the Persian Gulf last week, he used his speech to the troops to criticize the U.S. -- for failing to launch timely military action in the Middle East. How the tables have turned since the "freedom fries" days, when France was taunted by some in the U.S. for its supposed cowardice and appeasement because it opposed the 2003 invasion of Iraq. In the Muslim world today, Paris is definitely a hawk.

**ASIA/PACIFIC**

**17. South Korea, U.S. defense chiefs agree to boost cybersecurity cooperation**

*Kyodo News (Japan), Jan. 22 | Not Attributed*

Defense chiefs of South Korea and the United States agreed on Thursday to further strengthen cooperation in the field of cybersecurity, according to the South Korean Defense Ministry.

**18. With Eye on China, U.S., Philippines to Boost Ties**

*Wall Street Journal Asia, Jan. 22, Pg. 18 | Trefor Moss*

The U.S. and the Philippines vowed to deepen their military alliance despite tension over a stalled defense pact and allegations that a U.S. Marine murdered a Filipino transgender woman last year. At the end of an annual two-day strategic dialogue in Manila on Wednesday, the high-level U.S. and Philippine panels also criticized China for what they characterized as its provocative actions in the South China Sea.

**POLITICS**

**19. GOP invites Israeli leader**

*Washington Post, Jan. 22, Pg. A1 | Greg Jaffe and Paul Kane*

Republicans on Wednesday delivered a swift and bold response to President Obama's exuberant State of the Union address by taking direct aim at the administration's foreign policy authority. House Speaker John A. Boehner (R-Ohio) invited Israel's prime minister to address Congress next month on the danger posed by Iran's nuclear ambitions.

**DEFENSE DEPARTMENT**

**20. Carter, Not Hagel, to Brief the Defense Budget on Capitol Hill**

*ForeignPolicy.com (The Cable), Jan. 21 | Kate Brannen and Gopal Ratnam*

One of Ashton Carter's first jobs as defense secretary? Head to Capitol Hill to present and defend the Pentagon's 2016 budget, a planning document he's had little opportunity to shape. Chuck Hagel, who is planning to stay on as SecDef until his successor is sworn in, was expected to handle the annual round of congressional budget hearings. But, according to defense and Hill sources, that task is now going to fall to Carter, who only stepped down as deputy defense secretary a year ago.

**21. Blast Force: The Invisible War on the Brain**

*National Geographic Magazine, February 2015, Cover Story | Caroline Alexander*

According to the U.S. Department of Defense, between 2001 and 2014 some 230,000 soldiers and veterans were identified as suffering from so-called mild traumatic brain injury (TBI), mostly as a result of exposure to blast events. Despite the prevalence of the condition, the most fundamental questions about it remain unanswered.

**MARINE CORPS**

**22. Marine general defends Afghan pullout while violence boils**

*San Diego Union-Tribune Online, Jan. 21 | Gretel C. Kovach*

The U.S. military commander who oversaw the withdrawal of coalition forces in Afghanistan's deadliest province last fall said he still believes it was the right time to leave Helmand, despite unrelenting insurgent attacks and heavy casualties in the region.

**NAVY**

**23. Commander reassigned amid death probe**

*Miami Herald, Jan. 22, Pg. A1 | Carol Rosenberg*

The commander of the U.S. Navy base at Guantánamo Bay has been removed from the remote outpost and reassigned to headquarters, a Navy announcement said Wednesday, declining to elaborate because of an ongoing Naval Criminal Investigative Services probe.

**24. Navy seeks enlisted women for sub duty in 2016**

*NavyTimes.com, Jan. 21 | Mark D. Faram*

Enlisted women will join the submarine force in 2016 and recruiting for the first integrated crews is now underway. Navy personnel officials outlined the plans and rules for female enlisted sailors, E-1 through E-8, to volunteer for the Silent Service, in three naval messages released Wednesday that make formal the next phase of the integration effort begun five years ago.

**CYBER**

**25. General: Cyber bill needed to give the U.S. military an edge**

*TheHill.com, Jan. 21 | Cory Bennett*

For the U.S. military to gain a competitive advantage in cyberspace, Congress must pass cybersecurity information-sharing legislation, said Gen. Martin Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

**INTELLIGENCE**

**26. Vickers: U.S. Intel Advantage ‘Threatened by Multiple Challenges’**

*SEAPOWER Magazine Online, Jan. 21 | Otto Kreisher*

Calling the last decade “a golden age for U.S. intelligence,” the top defense intelligence official on Wednesday still warned that because of a growing array of international challenges, “our intelligence advantage is something that we can’t take for granted.”

**NOTABLE COMMENTARY**

**27. War returns to Ukraine**

*Washington Post, Jan. 22, Pg. A14 | Editorial*

European foreign ministers met Monday to consider proposals for resuming diplomatic contacts and cooperation with Russia in a range of areas - a strategy pressed by several governments that wish to paper over the breach opened by Moscow's invasion of Ukraine. Unfortunately for the doves, the discussion came just as Russian forces, after several weeks of relative calm, launched a new offensive in eastern Ukraine.

**28. Give diplomacy a chance**

*Washington Post, Jan. 22, Pg. A15 | Laurent Fabius, Philip Hammond, Frank-Walter Steinmeier and Federica Mogherini*

In November 2013, after many months of negotiations, the E3+3 (France, Germany and Britain, together with the United States, Russia and China, a partnership also referred to sometimes as the P5+1) and Iran reached an interim agreement on Iran's nuclear program. This agreement has had three main benefits.

**29. When Women Become Terrorists**

*New York Times, Jan. 22, Pg. A27 | Jayne Huckerby*

Since the terror attacks in Paris two weeks ago, the French police have been on the hunt for Hayat Boumeddiene, the partner of Amedy Coulibaly, one of the slain gunmen. She is now suspected to be in Syria. Some news reports speculate that Ms. Boumeddiene, 26, may have been "the more radical of the two." Yet one of the first questions that French authorities intend to ask her is, they say, "if she did this under influence, if she did it by ideology, if she did it to aid and abet."

**30. Obama’s American Sniper**

*Wall Street Journal (Wonder Land), Jan. 22, Pg. A9 | Daniel Henninger*

Barack Obama was 15 minutes into his State of the Union speech when I arrived home to watch it, having just walked back from seeing "American Sniper." Watching a movie about a Navy SEAL who served four tours fighting in Iraq was not the best way to enhance the experience of a Barack Obama speech. As a matter of fact, it was pretty unbearable.

**TOP STORIES**

**1. Aden ports reopened but rebels still outside presidential palace and residence**

Washington Post Online, Jan. 22 | Ali al-Mujahed, Hugh Naylor and Daniela Deane



SANAA, Yemen — Authorities in southern Yemen re-opened Aden's air and sea ports on Thursday in a sign tensions have eased, but heavily armed rebels remained stationed outside the Yemeni president's house and palace in the capital despite a deal reached yesterday calling for their immediate withdrawal.

News agencies reported seeing Shiite rebel gunmen outside the house of embattled Yemeni President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi, just west of the capital, Sanaa, midday Thursday, and outside the presidential palace in the capital.

Rebels stormed the palace after intense clashes between government forces and Houthi rebels demanding better representation in government. In a deal reached late Wednesday to end the rebel siege, the government promised to respond to demands from the dominant Houthi group.

There was also no word on another part of the deal struck Wednesday — whether the president's chief of staff, kidnapped Saturday, had been released.

Aden's air and sea ports were re-opened Thursday, however, after being closed Wednesday after heavy fighting in the capital.

Authorities in Aden said they were opening the ports in response to the agreement struck Wednesday, which also called for all state institutions to return to work today, news agencies reported.

The agreement between the two sides called for an end to a siege of the president's residence and the end of the rebel offensive that both the Yemeni government and regional Arab states have decried as a coup attempt.

Hadi agreed to the deal after Houthi rebels seized his presidential palace and surrounded his residence about three miles away, according to aides.

The accord, announced by the state-run SABA news agency, included deep concessions to the Houthi rebels. It was confirmed by Information Minister Nadia Sakkaf in a Twitter message.

The Houthi offensive badly undermined the authority of a leader who is considered an important ally of Washington in the fight against Yemen's powerful al-Qaeda affiliate.

There was no immediate response to the reported deal in Washington. Earlier Wednesday, State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki told reporters that Hadi remains the head of "the legitimate Yemeni government" and that "we remain in touch with him." She said U.S. counter-terrorism cooperation with his government is continuing "at this point in time."

White House spokesman Josh Earnest said the Obama administration was monitoring the situation "minute by minute."

"We'll take whatever steps are necessary to protect American citizens up to and including evacuating the embassy if we determine that's necessary," he told reporters.

The fighting has been the most intense since the Houthis stormed into the capital in September and began taking control of Yemen's institutions, as well as at least nine provincial capitals. The latest offensive raised fears that

Yemen could plunge into a power vacuum, if not a full-scale civil war, that could be exploited by militants linked to al-Qaeda.

The terrorist network's Yemeni affiliate, known as al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), claimed responsibility for a Jan. 7 attack in Paris on the satirical newspaper Charlie Hebdo that triggered three days of violence that left 20 people dead, including the three perpetrators.

A Yemeni presidential aide, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because he feared for his safety, said Hadi has been stripped of significant authority by the deal with the Houthis. In a televised speech Tuesday evening, the Houthi leader, Abdulmalik al-Houthi, threatened Hadi with more attacks if he did not give in. The rebels' demands included a bigger role in drafting a new constitution acceptable to the Houthis, who have waged an intermittent war against the government since 2004. The majority of Yemen's population is Sunni Muslim.

Under the deal, according to the SABA report, the president agreed to increase the Houthis' representation in parliament and heed their constitutional demands. Yemen would also become a federal state, although it was not immediately clear whether that would mean retaining a proposal in an existing draft constitution to create six federalized provinces. The Houthis have rejected that idea.

The document also calls for more participation in the government by people in southern Yemen, where a separatist movement has gained momentum in recent years.

The Houthi assault alarmed Yemen's neighbors, especially Sunni Arab states such as Saudi Arabia, which see the Shiite insurgents as proxies for Iran. Earlier Wednesday, foreign ministers from the six-member Gulf Cooperation Council, or GCC, harshly condemned the assault, calling it a "coup d'etat."

The council, which consists of Yemen's Arab neighbors in the Persian Gulf — Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and Oman — demanded that the government be allowed to reassert control.

Hadi, who came to power in 2012 after a popular uprising led to the ouster of President Ali Abdullah Saleh, fostered unprecedented cooperation between Yemeni forces and the U.S. military in using drone strikes to target al-Qaeda militants.

However, civilian casualties as a result of the attacks angered many Yemenis.

Ali al-Bukhayti, an official in the Houthis' political affairs office, said by telephone that the insurgent group has "no communication" with the United States. "We are not convinced of the usefulness of the so-called U.S. war on al-Qaeda," he said. He called the drone attacks "a flagrant violation of national sovereignty." The Houthis themselves have battled al-Qaeda-linked militants before.

The Houthis have long demanded more political rights and an end to what they charge is official discrimination. They have portrayed their assault on the capital as part of a campaign to end corruption and initiate reforms that many Yemenis see as having stalled under Hadi's leadership.

The Houthis, who follow the Zaydi sect of Shiite Islam, reject accusations that they are acting as a proxy for Iran, which is led by Shiite clerics. Zaydis form about a third or more of Yemen's population.



## **2. U.S. not sending Gitmo detainees to Yemen**

Associated Press, Jan. 22 | Nedra Pickler

WASHINGTON — In another challenge to President Barack Obama's efforts to close the Guantanamo Bay prison, a ban on transferring detainees to Yemen has been effectively pushed back into place because of security concerns in the volatile Middle Eastern nation, administration officials say.

While Obama approved sending detainees back to Yemen nearly two years ago, his administration has yet to use that authority. And officials say deep concerns about the threat posed by a Yemeni-based al-Qaida offshoot have removed that option for the foreseeable future, although that could change if conditions improve. The officials described the stance on condition of anonymity without authority to speak on the record.

Obama insisted in his State of the Union address Tuesday that he will not relent in his determination to close Guantanamo before he leaves office, and the administration is working on agreements with third countries willing to take Yemenis who are clear to leave the U.S. prison in Cuba. Nearly two-thirds of the remaining 122 detainees are from Yemen, including 47 of the 54 who have been approved for transfer.

Yemen has been gripped by a violent power struggle, with Shiite rebels taking President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi prisoner in his own home this week. Yemen's state news agency reported late Wednesday that rebels reached a deal with the U.S.-backed Hadi to end the standoff, but questions remain about who really controls the country.

Meanwhile, al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula, which Washington considers to be the group's most dangerous branch, has been thriving in Yemen amid the chaos. The group has claimed responsibility for the recent attack on the French satirical newspaper Charlie Hebdo and failed assaults on the U.S. homeland. While U.S. officials have questioned how much control the group had of the Paris operation, the United States has long been waging drone strikes in Yemen to target the terrorist threat.

Republican senators introduced legislation last week, citing the Paris and other terrorist attacks, as a reason to legally reinstate a ban on Yemeni transfers among other restrictions on Guantanamo transfers during Obama's remaining two years in office.

"The last thing we should be doing is transferring detainees from Guantanamo to a country like Yemen," New Hampshire Republican Sen. Kelly Ayotte said in a news conference to announce the bill. "We have not received assurances from the administration that they will not seek to transfer anyone to Yemen, despite the wild, wild West nature of what we're facing when it comes to terrorism in Yemen."

Administration officials say even if they will not send detainees to Yemen now, Obama will not officially reinstate the ban to maintain flexibility in case conditions improve. The officials say he does not want any further restrictions on his ability to close Guantanamo with so little time left to meet his goal of shuttering it.

Obama suspended transfers to Yemen in January 2010 after a Nigerian man attempted to blow up a U.S.-bound flight on Christmas Day 2009 with explosives hidden in his underwear on instructions from al-Qaida operatives in

Yemen. But in May 2013, the president announced a renewed effort to close the prison after being blocked by Congress in his first term.

"I am lifting the moratorium on detainee transfers to Yemen so we can review them on a case-by-case basis," Obama said in a speech at National Defense University.

At the time administration officials cited Hadi's cooperation in the terrorist fight as reason for hope that the country would be an acceptable place to send detainees. Yemen agreed to open a rehabilitation center for former detainees, but it hasn't been established. Still, in August, the U.S. returned to Yemen two prisoners who had been held at the Bagram prison in Afghanistan.

The strategy for Guantanamo detainees is to find other nations where administration officials have confidence they can be reintegrated into society without posing a new threat. A dozen Yemenis have been sent to third countries since November, including last week's transfer of five to Oman and Estonia.

"While our policy preference is to repatriate detainees where we can do so consistent with our national security and humane treatment policies, we recognize that under certain circumstances the most viable transfer option is resettlement in a third country," said Ian Moss, who works on detainee transfers at the State Department. "We are actively working to identify appropriate transfer locations for every single detainee approved for transfer and it may be the case that resettlement in a third country is the best option."

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### **3. US Trainers to Deploy to Ukraine**

*Also will begin shipment of US-funded armored vehicles*

DefenseNews.com, Jan. 21 | Paul McLeary

WASHINGTON — American soldiers will deploy to Ukraine this spring to begin training four companies of the Ukrainian National Guard, the head of US Army Europe Lt. Gen. Ben Hodges said during his first visit to Kiev on Wednesday.

The number of troops heading to the Yavoriv Training Area near the city of Lviv — which is about 40 miles from the Polish border — is still being determined, however.

The American training effort comes as part of a US State Department initiative "to assist Ukraine in strengthening its law enforcement capabilities, conduct internal defense, and maintain rule of law," Pentagon spokeswoman Lt. Col. Vanessa Hillman told Defense News.

After meeting with commander of the Ukrainian Armed Forces Lt. Gen. Anatoliy Pushnyakov and acting commander of the National Guard Lt. Gen. Oleksandr Kryvyenko during his visit, Hodges said he was "impressed by the readiness of both military and civil leadership to change and reform."

The training was requested by the Ukrainian government "as they work to reform their police forces and establish their newly formed National Guard," Hillman added. Funding for the initiative is coming from the congressionally-authorized Global Security Contingency Fund (GSCF), which was requested by the Obama administration in the fiscal 2015 budget to help train and equip the armed forces of allies around the globe.

The training mission has been the subject of plenty of discussion among US policy makers for months, and the United States has already earmarked \$19 million to help build the Ukrainian National Guard.

"We're very open to the idea that this becomes a first step in further training for the Ukrainian military," Derek Chollet, former assistant secretary of defense for international security affairs, told Defense News just before he left the Pentagon on Jan. 17.

He was quick to add that he doesn't anticipate that this training mission "will require significant US presence."

The mission comes at a time of increasing concern among Eastern European countries that Russian aggression in the region will increase, and as fighting around the eastern Ukrainian city of Donetsk between government forces and Russian-backed separatist rebels rages on.

Speaking at the Davos conference on Wednesday, Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko accused Russia of sending 9,000 troops into the eastern part of his country to back the rebels, a contention that NATO officials have backed up, but without providing their own estimates for the number of Russian forces in country.

Chollet said Russian military incursions into the Crimea and eastern Ukraine have refocused American attention on the region after a decade of fighting two wars in the Middle East.

"A year ago we were worried about the future of the trans-Atlantic relationship, how would it be relevant to people," he said. "And of course, the events of the last year with Russia and Ukraine has focused people again on threats to European security and the unfinished business, really, still coming out of the end of the Cold War."

One of the biggest challenges for US policy makers is trying to discern "where could this lead and how does this make us think anew about European security issues and force posture issues or defense spending issues?" he added.

In addition to US trainers, Washington is beginning to provide heavier military equipment to the government in Kiev. On Monday, the United States delivered the first prototype of an armored "Kozak" vehicle for use with the Ukrainian border guard, according to the US Embassy there.

A posting on a US government contracting site put the cost of the vehicle at \$189,000.

The vehicle is built on a chassis manufactured by Italian company Iveco and features a V-shaped armored hull to help protect against mines and roadside bombs. The embassy said that to date, "the United States has delivered dozens of armored pickup trucks and vans to the Ukrainian Border Guard Service. The Kozak is larger and offers a higher level of protection."

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## **MIDEAST**

### **4. At Risk of Fragmenting, Yemen Poses Dangers to U.S.**

New York Times (News Analysis), Jan. 22, Pg. A1 | Robert F. Worth

WASHINGTON -- Only months ago, American officials were still referring to Yemen's negotiated transition from autocracy to an elected president as a model for post-revolutionary Arab states.

Now, days of factional gun battles in the Yemeni capital have left the president a puppet figure confined to his residence. The country appears to be at risk of fragmenting in ways that could provide greater opportunities both for Iran and for Al Qaeda, whose Yemeni branch claimed responsibility for the first Paris terrorist attack this month.

The latest Yemeni crisis raises the prospect of yet another Arab country where the United States faces rising dangers but has no strong partners amid a landscape of sectarian violence. Although the Houthi rebels who now effectively control the state are at war with Al Qaeda, they are also allied with Iran and with Yemen's meddling former president, Ali Abdullah Saleh.

The Houthis' rise to a dominant position may set off local conflicts in ways that would give more breathing room to Al Qaeda's local branch, which has repeatedly struck at the United States. Yemen's elected president, Abdu Rabbu Mansour Hadi, is a stalwart American ally but has almost no domestic support.

"The Yemeni state has always been weak, but now there's a real danger of economic meltdown, and of the kind of fragmentation that could ultimately make Yemen almost ungovernable," said April Alley, an analyst with the International Crisis Group, a nonprofit organization that works to resolve conflicts.

The Houthi takeover -- which began in September and was reinforced in recent days -- has deepened sectarian and regional divisions in a desperately poor country that has long been a sanctuary for jihadists. And though the latest round of fighting appeared to end Wednesday when Mr. Hadi conceded to the Houthis' political demands, the underlying crisis will continue to fester, analysts say.

The deal announced Wednesday addressed a number of the Houthis' grievances, including a lack of representation in government bodies and complaints about provisions in a draft constitution. In return, the Houthis agreed to withdraw fighters from the presidential palace and other parts of Sana and to release an aide to Mr. Hadi who was kidnapped by Houthi gunmen on Saturday. But there was little doubt that the Houthis, who have repeatedly threatened in recent months to use force to win political concessions, remain in control.

The Houthis' public humiliation of Mr. Hadi -- a southerner -- prompted southern rebels to close the country's chief port in Aden and shut the border between the north and south earlier this week, raising the specter of actual secession. Armed tribesmen have cut off oil exports in three southern provinces. And Saudi Arabia, which sees the Houthis as a proxy of its regional rival, Iran, has shut off almost all aid to the Yemeni government, leaving it virtually penniless and unable to pay salaries.

The Saudis, who have long been Yemen's economic lifeline, pumping in more than \$4 billion since 2012, say they would rather allow the Houthis to take the blame for the approaching economic collapse than provide aid to an Iranian client, according to a Yemeni official who spoke on the condition of anonymity, citing diplomatic protocol. Other Persian Gulf countries are likely to follow the Saudi lead.

In another ominous sign, the Houthis appear to be gearing up for a major battle with their Sunni Islamist rivals in Marib Province, to the east of the capital, where much of Yemen's oil infrastructure is. That could prove devastating to Yemen's government and economy, which is deeply dependent on oil.

It could also exacerbate sectarian tensions in a country that was almost entirely free of them until recently. The Houthis belong to the Zaydi branch of Shiite Islam, and Saudi Arabia -- whose leaders see all Shiites as heretics --

has been providing aid to Sunni tribes in Marib, diplomats say, fueling another proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Some of the tribes refer to the Houthis as an occupying force, undermining their claim to represent a broad-based national movement.

In Washington, military and intelligence officials expressed grave concerns on Wednesday about the violence in Sana and the impact any further deterioration could have on one of the Obama administration's staunchest counterterrorism partners. Michael G. Vickers, the Pentagon's top intelligence policy official, said analysts were still trying to determine the Houthis' ultimate goal.

The meteoric rise of the Houthis has drawn global attention to an insurgent group that was almost unknown outside Yemen a decade ago, and whose agenda is still opaque to many people both inside and outside the country. Their leader, a charismatic guerrilla fighter in his early 30s named Abdel Malik al-Houthi, inherited his mantle from his father and his older brother Hussein, who founded the movement in the 1990s and was killed in the first of a series of wars against the Yemeni state that ended in 2010. Mr. Houthi's speeches focus on fighting corruption and fulfilling the agreements reached in a series of "national dialogue" sessions that ended last year. Those demands have helped bolster public support for the Houthis -- which remains strong -- in a country where corruption has gutted the state and appears to have worsened since Mr. Hadi became president after the uprising of 2011.

But the Houthis are often seen through the lens of their identity as revivalist Zaydis, a group that was dominant in Yemen's government for centuries and was then marginalized in recent decades. They modeled themselves in important ways on Hezbollah, the Lebanese Shiite militia, and though their ideology and leadership are distinct and unmistakably Yemeni, they are allied with Iran, which has provided them with weapons, training, and money, especially since 2011.

The Houthis' continuing and bloody battle with Al Qaeda has led some in the West to see them as potential partners, despite the trademark Houthi slogan, "God is great; death to America; death to Israel."

Under Yemen's former president, Mr. Saleh, "the formula was to milk the U.S.A. for support in the fight against Al Qaeda, which was a recipe for more drones and more radicalization," said Bernard Haykel, a professor at Princeton who has written extensively on Yemen. "The Houthis actually want to fight Al Qaeda, which could be more effective."

But the Houthis are also allied with Mr. Saleh, who remains a powerful figure in Yemen and is bent on revenge on those who engineered his ouster during the turmoil of 2011. If the Houthis succeed in consolidating power, many in Yemen expect a bloody power struggle between them and Mr. Saleh's loyalists in the military and the tribes.

The Houthis long benefited from a reputation for honesty and discipline, much like their mentor group, Hezbollah. But the arrogant behavior of the Houthi gunmen who descended on Sana in September, bullying government ministers and their ideological opponents, has spent some of that good will. The conflict between the Houthis and their mostly Sunni rivals has led some Yemenis to give up on the state.

In Taiz, Yemen's third-largest city, the local governor has taken over the military and intelligence quarters and is effectively governing a city-state. In southern Yemen, which was a separate country from 1970 until 1990 and fought a brief civil war against the north in 1994, many have similarly seized on the Houthi ascendancy as an opportunity to break away. Those aspirations have fueled fears of a wider breakdown that could benefit Al Qaeda,

which ejected government officials across a wide stretch of the south in mid-2011 and declared an Islamic emirate that lasted about a year.

*--Shuaib al Mosawa reported from Sana, Yemen, and Kareem Fahim from Baghdad. Eric Schmitt contributed reporting from Washington*

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## **5. We can't stop jihadists going to Syria, admits Turkish PM**

The Times (UK), Jan. 22, Pg. 36 | Roger Boyes

Controlling Turkey's border with Syria to stop the flow of foreign fighters joining the ranks of Islamic State is impossible, the Turkish prime minister has told The Times.

In an interview shortly after holding talks with David Cameron, Ahmet Davutoglu said that sealing off the long frontier was not practicable, for technical and ethical reasons.

The refusal will dismay European states who are seeking to use today's meeting of the anti-Isis coalition in London, summoned in response to the terrorist attacks in Paris, to tighten the two-way traffic in jihadists between the EU and the Middle East. Turkey is regarded as a primary route.

"We can close the border, but who will save the refugees, who will give them a safe haven?" said Mr Davutoglu, who has met Mr Cameron four times in the past two months to discuss Syria, Iraq and Isis. "All those people who are escaping by walking, should we close the border to them? Is that ethically acceptable?" He added: "It's a 937-kilometre border, it's impossible to do. We can't put a soldier on every inch."

The porous border — through which Hayat Boumeddiene, a suspected conspirator in the Paris murders, reportedly slipped into Syria — is at the heart of the problems facing the 20 foreign ministers meeting at Lancaster House today. The meeting will be chaired by John Kerry, the US secretary of state, and Philip Hammond, the foreign secretary. Many of the participants believe that their specific security concerns are being overlooked in the single-minded campaign to destroy Isis.

"We can, of course, declare the border a military zone and say that nobody will enter, but then the same people who are criticising us now will say that barbaric Turkey closed the border and people are being killed as a result," Mr Davutoglu said. "We will never do it." He said that Turkey had come under pressure to control all suspicious foreigners flying into the country. "Over the past year we have banned 7,000 people from entry and expelled 1,300," he said, but insisted that western expectations were unrealistic. Turkey attracts 35 million tourists a year.

The foreign ministers will try to work out ways in which the sharing of intelligence between EU police authorities and Arab states can be improved. However, there are legal limits on how much information can be exchanged purely on the basis of suspicion.

Mr Davutoglu's particular mission is to persuade the west that Turkey has not become an ambiguous Nato ally. The country has been criticised for not allowing its Nato bases to be used in the bombing campaign against Isis fighters. Turkey is willing to budge on this, Mr Davutoglu said, only if Nato takes into account all the threats to his country.



"If we develop an integrated strategy, then we will fully participate," Mr Davutoglu said, "but not if other partners fail to understand the security concerns of Turkey and just refer to one [overriding] concern." Turkey, in other words, wants a unified line on the ousting of President Assad of Syria before it is ready to take military action.

It was all very well to tackle the jihadists moving into Syria, Mr Davutoglu said, but simultaneously the foreign fighters supporting the Assad regime also had to be stopped. That included Hezbollah units and other Shia militias.

Mr Davutoglu said a third force had to be created so that the toppling of the Assad government would not trigger an Isis takeover. An army of moderate Syrians should be trained and equipped, and refugees offered a haven shielded preferably by the United Nations and protected by a no-fly zone.

It is a formula that Turkey has been promoting for two years but which has got nowhere because of international reluctance to engage Isis or the Assad regime's troops on the ground.

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## **IRAQ/SYRIA**

### **6. Kurds cite success in battle with militants**

*Forces say they pushed Islamic State fighters out of big part of Iraq*

Washington Post, Jan. 22, Pg. A8 | Loveday Morris

BAGHDAD - Kurdish forces claimed to have pushed back Islamic State militants from a 300-square-mile area of northern Iraq on Wednesday and said they cut one of the extremist group's key supply lines to the occupied city of Mosul.

The multi-pronged operation, which began in the early morning, involved about 5,000 Kurdish soldiers, known as peshmerga and was backed by U.S.-led airstrikes, according to a statement from the government of Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdish region.

The offensive came amid speculation that Iraqi forces are preparing for an assault on Mosul, one of Iraq's biggest cities, which was seized by Islamic State extremists in June as they swept across the north.

Under pressure from airstrikes and paranoid about informants, the militants have cut phone lines and Internet connections to the city in recent months.

The Kurdish troops advanced through a string of villages and a key highway intersection, encircling Mosul on three sides and cutting supply lines between the city and nearby Tal Afar.

Kurdish authorities claimed that at least 200 Islamic State fighters were killed, with the militants using 14 suicide car bombs in an attempt to fend off the assault.

Three of the militants' explosive-packed vehicles were struck by coalition airstrikes, the officials said.

It was not possible to confirm details of the Kurdish officials' account independently. Islamic State forces swept into western Iraq a year ago and now control large swaths of the country.

The Kurdistan region's security chief, Masrour Barzani, told a news conference that the extremists were feeling "much more heat."

"This is a very important and strategic area that has come under the control of the peshmerga, which significantly reduces the movement of ISIS in that area," he added.

The Iraqi national security forces were not involved in coordinating the assault, officials said.

They added that Kurdish forces do not intend to move beyond areas with largely Kurdish populations, with the operation to secure Mosul the responsibility of the central government is Baghdad.

"Mosul is more isolated, and I hope that the Iraqi government can play its role and participate in liberating other parts of the country, especially Mosul," Barzani said.

Fighting continued into the night on Wednesday, while security forces began clearing secured villages of explosives planted by the militants, officials said.

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## **7. Iraq premier says ground troops need more aid**

Associated Press, Jan. 21 | Vivian Salama and Qassim Abdul-Zahra

BAGHDAD — Iraq's prime minister on Wednesday appealed for more aid for the country's beleaguered ground forces, which have yet to score a decisive victory against the Islamic State group despite five months of U.S.-led coalition air raids.

In an interview with The Associated Press, Haider al-Abadi praised the coalition's air campaign but said the international community has stalled on commitments to train and equip the ground forces needed to retake major cities.

"We are in this almost on our own," he said. "There is a lot being said and spoken, but very little on the ground."

He spoke as he was leaving for London to take part in a meeting Thursday on the war effort with foreign ministers from about 20 countries, including Arab states. U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry is expected to attend.

The United States spent billions of dollars training and equipping Iraq's army during its eight-year intervention, only to see security forces crumble last summer when the Islamic State group swept across northern Iraq, capturing the country's second largest city Mosul.

The failure of the security forces was largely attributed to the sectarian policies of al-Abadi's predecessor, Nouri al-Maliki. Since assuming office in September, al-Abadi has reached out to the Kurdish and Sunni minorities and sought to revamp the armed forces, but the army has yet to retake much ground.

President Barack Obama, in his annual State of the Union address Tuesday, pledged to work with Congress on a new authorization for military action against the Islamic State group in Iraq and Syria.

In November, Obama authorized the deployment of up to 1,500 more American troops to bolster Iraqi forces, which could more than double the total number of U.S. forces to 3,100. None have a combat role.

The Pentagon has made a spending request to Congress of \$1.6 billion, focusing on training and arming Iraqi and Kurdish forces. According to a Pentagon document prepared in November, the U.S. is looking to provide an estimated \$89.3 million worth of weapons and other equipment to each of the nine Iraqi army brigades.

"We want to see an acceleration of the training, acceleration of the delivery of arms," al-Abadi said. He reiterated that Iraq does not want any foreign boots on the ground, but said it needs "support and logistics."

"We are fighting very hard to find resources to purchase arms," al-Abadi said. "We are left almost alone to get these arms and munitions for the army, for our fighters, and we expect much more."

On a visit to Baghdad last week, Gen. John Allen, the U.S. envoy to the coalition, said that advise-and-assist teams are working to train and equip 12 Iraqi brigades to prepare them for retaking Mosul and the western town of Fallujah. But he said there is no timeline for an assault on those cities.

The U.S. and its coalition allies have carried out more than 1,000 airstrikes in Iraq since the campaign began in August — as well as hundreds more in neighboring Syria. U.S. officials say the campaign has been somewhat successful, though it is likely to stretch on for years.

France, Britain, Australia, the Netherlands, Belgium, Canada and Denmark have also launched airstrikes in Iraq but are not involved in the air campaign in Syria.

Iran has meanwhile provided aid to Iraqi forces, particularly the Shiite militias allied with the government, and has sent front-line trainers of its own. But it is not coordinating its efforts with the U.S.-led coalition.

Backed by airstrikes and aided by allies, Iraqi troops and pro-government militiamen have made limited gains.

Iraqi and Kurdish forces have pushed Islamic State extremists out of parts of Diyala province on Baghdad's northeast fringe and Iraqi forces recently retook the oil refinery town of Beiji.

Further north, Iraqi and Kurdish ground forces retook the Mosul Dam in August with the help of U.S. airstrikes — an achievement that is now under threat. The Kurdish Regional Security Council said Wednesday that Kurdish peshmerga fighters launched a new offensive to secure areas southeast and southwest of the dam.

"Bombing from the air has been very, very effective," al-Abadi said. "We are very thankful for the air campaign to support our military, but I think you cannot achieve big things without a real fight on the ground."

From London, al-Abadi is to travel to Davos to attend the World Economic Forum.

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## **8. Japan Says Efforts to Contact Islamic State About Hostages Have Failed**

New York Times Online, Jan. 22 | Martin Fackler

TOKYO — Officials here said Thursday that they were trying every possible avenue to reach the Islamic State militants who have threatened to kill two Japanese hostages but had so far failed to make contact, with time running out on a deadline to pay for the men's lives.

The Japanese government has confirmed that the two men seen in a video released Tuesday, kneeling in orange jumpsuits as a masked, knife-wielding militant stands between them, were Kenji Goto, a journalist, and Haruna Yukawa, who has called himself a military contractor. In the video, the militant threatened to kill the men unless the Islamic State received \$200 million within 72 hours, a deadline that would arrive Friday if the countdown began when the video was made public.

The crisis has tested the resolve of Japan's hard-charging prime minister, Shinzo Abe, who has vowed to give long-passive Japan a more active role in global affairs. When the video surfaced, Mr. Abe was in the Middle East, where he had pledged \$200 million in nonlethal aid to countries battling the Islamic State, which controls territory in Iraq and Syria.

In the video, the militant demanded a ransom equivalent to the aid package, accusing Japan of offering the money "to kill our women and children, to destroy the homes of Muslims." Mr. Abe, who called an emergency cabinet meeting on Wednesday night after rushing back to Tokyo, ordered his ministers to use whatever diplomatic channels they could to win the captives' release.

"This is a race against time, but the government will do everything it can," Mr. Abe told reporters. At the same time, he said Japan would not back down on its pledge of nonlethal aid.

On Thursday, the top government spokesman, Yoshihide Suga, said that Japan had yet to confirm whether the two men were still alive. He said Japan was trying to tell the militants that their demands were based on a "misunderstanding," since the promised aid money would be used to help refugees and for other humanitarian purposes, not to support military action.

Japan is trying to convey this "to the nations involved as well as leaders of tribal and religious groups, using every means that we can," Mr. Suga told reporters. "We are sending the message that, contrary to what the criminals are saying, we are absolutely not trying to kill people in the Muslim world."

He also said Japan had dispatched Yasuhide Nakayama, the No. 2 official at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to Jordan's capital, Amman, to lead its regional response to the crisis.

"We are in a tough spot, but we are doing our very utmost to win the quick release of the hostages," he said.

In news conferences since the video was released, Mr. Suga has dodged questions about ransom, leaving open the question of whether Japan is willing to pay for the two men's safe return. Japan is known to have given in to such a demand at least once, when it paid \$3 million in 1999 for the release of four mining experts held in Kyrgyzstan.

But Mr. Suga did insist that Japan "will not give in to terror, and will contribute to the international community's efforts to deal with terror." Mr. Abe has also vowed not to be intimidated.

New details in Japanese news reports suggested that the government may have known a hostage situation was developing even before the video's release. According to several major news outlets, Mr. Goto's wife was first contacted by the Islamic State in November with an email saying the militants were holding her husband.

According to the reports, the emails did not demand a ransom until January, when she was asked to pay the equivalent of about \$20 million. The reports said Mr. Goto's wife had consulted with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs when her husband disappeared in October, and again after receiving the first ransom demand.

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## **AFGHANISTAN/PAKISTAN**

### **9. Taliban Fissures in Afghanistan Are Seen as an Opening for ISIS**

New York Times, Jan. 22, Pg. A4 | Taimoor Shah and Joseph Goldstein

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan -- Across a violent swath of southern Afghanistan, rumors are swirling about a band of former Taliban fighters who have claimed allegiance to the Islamic State and are said to be fighting their former comrades for dominance.

Reports of a firefight this month between the competing bands of jihadists in the remote district of Kajaki, in Helmand Province, quickly created a stir. Some Afghan officials described a growing threat from the Islamic State, also known as ISIS or ISIL, more than a thousand miles from its home territory.

But interviews with Western and Afghan officials, along with accounts from local residents, the Taliban and a militant who described himself as a subcommander in the new ISIS band, pointed less to a major expansion of the Islamic State than to another example of internal divisions within the Taliban.

After the Taliban's years of war against the American-led military coalition and the new Afghan security forces, the movement's cohesiveness has increasingly come into question. In particular, the long absence of the Taliban's reclusive leader, Mullah Muhammad Omar, is said to be driving discontent within the Afghan Taliban ranks.

In that environment, the Islamic State's rush of success on the battlefields of Syria and Iraq has created a new banner for disgruntled Taliban to adopt.

The militant commander at the center of the concerns in Helmand Province is a prominent former Taliban leader, Mullah Abdul Rauf Khadim. He was detained at the Guantánamo Bay military prison for several years, then returned to the Taliban ranks after his release, serving as a provincial-level military commander. He has since fallen out with his fellow insurgents, and he is said by some to be calling for recruits to support him in his new role as the local leader of the Islamic State. But descriptions of the extent of that schism vary.

Local Taliban figures and their neighbors dismiss claims that Mullah Khadim has established a significant new Islamic State cell in Helmand Province.

"He has nothing to do with the Islamic State," Hajji Durani, a farmer with relatives in the Taliban, said. He lives near Mullah Khadim's village in Kajaki and says he sees the former Talib daily, usually accompanied by a dozen or so longtime supporters.

The local Taliban commander, Mullah Mohammad Shah, also dismissed claims that the Islamic State was active in Kajaki, or elsewhere in Helmand.

"We have not seen any Islamic State militants on the move in Kajaki," he said by telephone. "We know Mullah Abdul Rauf Khadim. He was a member of the Taliban, but now he is sitting at home."

Others disagree. Hajji Mullah Sahib, a tribal elder in Kajaki, says Mullah Khadim is actively recruiting under the Islamic State banner and has had success. Two pickup trucks full of fighters and their families moved nearby recently. "They are trying to find people, sending out letters to people to support them," the elder said.

Another tribal elder, Hajji Sharin, said Mullah Khadim was pressing his old Taliban comrades to join. "He has asked them to renege from the Taliban, and he is working to bring Islamic State to Kajaki," Mr. Sharin said.

In interviews, a man who called himself Hajji Mirwais said he had joined the Islamic State as a deputy under Mullah Khadim and claimed that their cell numbered 300 fighters. He said Mullah Khadim had been alienated by Mullah Omar's long silence and had doubts about the Taliban's exiled leadership.

"Before, field commanders received direction and guidance from Mullah Omar, but we haven't heard from Mullah Omar for several years," Mr. Mirwais said. "This is our big concern. We respect Mullah Omar. But if he is alive, why does he not appear and guide us?"

Local Taliban members later said that a man named Hajji Mirwais used to be a Taliban fighter under Mullah Khadim and had been seen with him recently.

Western officials say they are closely following reports about the Islamic State in Afghanistan and trying to discern whether the Islamic State is attracting a new generation of militants or mostly providing a rebranding opportunity for veteran Taliban fighters.

Gen. John F. Campbell, commander of the American-led coalition in Afghanistan, said in an interview that his staff was investigating reports of Islamic State recruiting, including night letter drops at a university in Jalalabad and Mullah Khadim's effort in Helmand.

So far, General Campbell said, the results seem to be limited. But he added: "I don't want to discount this. ISIS in Syria and Iraq went so quickly, and people don't want that to happen here."

General Campbell also said that the Islamic State's message might prove attractive to disaffected Taliban members.

"They may be disgruntled and turn to Daesh, thinking they'll get resources and a bigger name," he said, using the Arabic acronym for the Islamic State. "I think there will be people trying to get on the bandwagon."

General Campbell included Mullah Khadim in that group, saying, "He's looking for another way to be relevant."

This is not the first time that reports about the Islamic State have surfaced in Afghanistan.



Last year, local Afghan officials in Ghazni claimed that the Islamic State was beheading people in Ajristan District. Later, one Afghan official admitted that he had made up the rumors to persuade Kabul to deploy more troops to his area, according to two Western officials who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss intelligence matters.

But the Islamic State's quick march through Syria and Iraq has clearly captured the attention of militants in Afghanistan, who despite significant gains in some areas this year have been unable to seize and hold any major district centers. One United Nations report noted that some Taliban splinter groups would "glorify" the Islamic State over the Internet.

A jihadist video online shows a group of militant commanders announcing that 10 insurgent leaders from Pakistan and eastern Afghanistan had sworn fealty to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the leader of the Islamic State. In the video, which ends in a prisoner's beheading, one insurgent leader claimed that Afghan adherents to the Islamic State included militant groups in Kunar, Logar and Nangarhar provinces.

But it is unclear whether the Islamic State would make much headway in Afghanistan, where a range of Sunni militants has long organized around the Taliban, whose ideology and goals are mostly locally focused and quite distinct from jihadist groups with international aims.

For other reasons, the Islamic State may find recruitment in Afghanistan harder than in Iraq and Syria, where much of the Sunni population welcomed the jihadists after years of marginalization and abuse by Shiite leaders. But in Afghanistan, the Sunnis have long been dominant.

General Campbell alluded to those differences when discussing the Islamic State's prospects in Afghanistan. "We think it's going to be a hard message to sell to the Afghans," he said.

But he said he was curious about the political effects of Islamic State recruiting in Taliban territory, as appeared to be happening with Mullah Khadim's group in Helmand. "It will be interesting to see if the Taliban takes action against them," General Campbell said.

Both Mullah Khadim's camp and the Taliban said there had been one clash so far. Mr. Mirwais, the professed Islamic State deputy, spoke of a clash "one month ago, in which one of my men was killed by the Taliban." The local Taliban commander, Mullah Shah, confirmed that a firefight had occurred in Kajaki, saying it had been over control of a checkpoint, not an emerging Islamic State.

Residents of Kajaki say they are seeing signs of doctrinal differences between the militant camps. One of the first issues involved the decoration of graves, of which Mullah Khadim reportedly disapproves. Residents say he removed the flags and sticks that marked where his relatives were buried.

Mullah Shah said he was not yet certain how his group of Taliban, or the wider organization, would respond to fighters who claimed allegiance to the Islamic State.

"If the Islamic State shows their faces in Kajaki, or in Helmand," he said, "we will listen to the supreme leadership of the Taliban for how to respond or what to do against them."

The overall spokesman for the Afghan Taliban, Zabiullah Mujahid, seemed to suggest that some discussion of policy toward Islamic State upstarts had begun.

"After watching the recent Islamic State video, in which some people take an oath to follow them, we accordingly began an investigation to reach the bottom of the issue," Mr. Mujahid said in an interview. "Our investigation is underway."

*--Taimoor Shah reported from Kandahar, Afghanistan, and Joseph Goldstein from Kabul. Azam Ahmed and Ahmad Shakib contributed reporting from Kabul*

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## **UKRAINE/RUSSIA**

### **10. Battle Rages With Rebels at Border Post in Ukraine**

New York Times, Jan. 22, Pg. A4 | Rick Lyman and Andrew E. Kramer

KRAMATORSK, Ukraine -- Shelling from both Ukrainian military and rebel separatist positions continued Wednesday over a remote border checkpoint northwest of Luhansk that Ukraine said was seized Monday by Russian troops, a chief spokesman for the Ukrainian military said.

With President Petro O. Poroshenko of Ukraine claiming that thousands of additional Russian troops had crossed into Ukraine and engaged directly with Ukrainian forces, attention has shifted from the battle over the battered airport at Donetsk to this new front on the main road to the city of Luhansk, 90 miles northeast of Donetsk.

Lt. Col. Roman Turovets, a Ukrainian spokesman at the base here, the main one in the conflict area, said that Ukraine believed the soldiers it was engaging near the town of Krymske, northwest of Luhansk, were highly trained Russian regulars, based on their tactics and weaponry and on intelligence.

Checkpoint 31, on an access road into Luhansk, was bombarded by shelling for most of Tuesday, Colonel Turovets said. Then late in the afternoon darkness, and under cover of heavy fog, the suspected Russian forces were able to drive away the Ukrainians, who suffered no casualties.

In response, Ukraine shelled the position, and there was an exchange of fire that continued through Wednesday.

Russia, as it has since the conflict started last year, denied any involvement in the Ukraine fighting others than the possible participation of Russian "volunteers" wishing to aid the separatists. The foreign minister, Sergey V. Lavrov, challenged Ukraine to "present the proof" if Russian troops were really in Ukraine.

"The people who attacked, they were very professional," said Colonel Turovets, the Ukrainian spokesman. "Our troops could tell they were well trained, from how they moved."

In Berlin on Wednesday, Mr. Lavrov and the foreign ministers of Ukraine, France and Germany met for about three hours to try to shore up the crumbling cease-fire in the east. After the meeting, a joint statement urged the combatants to "cease hostilities and withdraw heavy weapons." Russia has proposed that both the separatists and the Ukrainian Army withdraw heavy weaponry from a buffer zone along the front line, to defuse the tension. Ukrainian officials have rejected this proposal, saying it is Russia that has been sending artillery and other arms to the area.

The United States ambassador to the United Nations, Samantha Power, accused Russia of training and equipping the separatist rebels and participating with them in the fighting, even as the Kremlin proposed a peace plan. "Let us pull the veil away from Putin's peace plan and call it for what it is -- a Russian occupation plan," she said at a Security Council meeting on Ukraine.

The Russian ambassador, Vitaly I. Churkin, accused Ukraine of repeatedly violating the cease-fire agreement, reached in Minsk, Belarus, last year. In eastern Ukraine, an Associated Press reporter on Wednesday saw pro-Russian rebels driving six self-propelled howitzers, four Grad rocket launchers and 15 tanks toward the front and the battle for Checkpoint 31. The tanks were described as in pristine condition.

Also on Wednesday, separatists blew up a bridge near the battle for Checkpoint 31, adding to the dozens of bridges already destroyed by both sides in the swirl of retreats and feints over nine months of fighting.

On Tuesday, a strategic railroad bridge was blown up in the Zaporozhye region, far from the front lines, halting at least temporarily shipments of iron ore to steel mills in the port of Mariupol.

At the World Economic Forum in the Swiss ski resort of Davos, Mr. Poroshenko said he would cut short his visit to help oversee the combat in the east. In a speech, Mr. Poroshenko held up a dented, shrapnel-pocked panel of a public bus in which 13 people died from a rebel rocket strike, trying to drive home to European businessmen, who have grumbled about Western sanctions, the human cost of the war.

Mr. Poroshenko said 9,000 Russian troops were fighting on Ukrainian soil.

"If this is not aggression, what is?" he said.

Ukraine also on Wednesday began enforcing a new set of strict rules for crossing between territory controlled by the government in Kiev and territory controlled by the separatists in eastern Ukraine. Only people holding new passes issued by the Ukrainian government would be allowed to pass through any of the seven main crossing points, and those trying to get across on secondary roads would be regarded as in violation of Ukrainian military rules, Colonel Turovets said.

Only a handful of police stations just outside the conflict zone would handle applications, and the passes would require a 10-day wait. Only civilians with a clear reason for crossing the border would be given the passes.

The effect would be to seal up the border in the coming days, if the new rules are enforced, but would do nothing to shore up the porous border with Russia.

"What people don't always realize is that there are several hundred kilometers of border with Russia that is not controlled," Colonel Turovets said, allowing Russian drug smugglers and potential terrorists to come into Ukraine. "So that is why we put tougher conditions on this line."

If that caused more hardship for civilians inside the conflict zone, that was the fault of the Russians, he said.

"Everybody understands if there were no Russian mercenaries in Ukraine then this war would have been over long ago," he said.

*--Reporting was contributed by Melissa Eddy from Berlin; Andrew Roth from Moscow; Alison Smale from Davos, Switzerland; and Somini Sengupta from the United Nations*

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## **11. Russia, Ukraine agree pullback line for heavy arms**

Associated Press, Jan. 21 | Frank Jordans, Vladimir Isachenkov and Mstyslav Chernov

BERLIN — Diplomats from Russia and Ukraine agreed Wednesday on a dividing line from where both sides should pull back their heavy weapons, just hours after separatist forces deployed more arms and manpower to an emerging flashpoint in eastern Ukraine.

Germany's Foreign Minister, who hosted a meeting of his counterparts from Russia, Ukraine and France, said the four parties had agreed that the demarcation line defined in the Minsk agreement of last year should form the basis for the withdrawal. Under the plan, Ukraine and the pro-Russian separatists would pull back their heavy arms 15 kilometers (9 miles) on either side of the line, though there was no agreement on a withdrawal of all troops.

"Today we have finally agreed that the demarcation line mentioned in the Minsk agreement is the line from where the withdrawal of heavy weapons needs to take place now," German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier told reporters after the meeting in Berlin.

Steinmeier said the agreement had been "difficult work" and the talks, which follow a fruitless round of negotiations last week, were "testing the patience of all involved." The parties also agreed that the contact group of Ukraine, Russia, and the OSCE should meet as soon as possible with the aim of laying further groundwork for a high-level meeting in Kazakhstan's capital Astana aimed at reaching a long-lasting settlement.

Separately, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said the "strong support" for the pullback was the meeting's most important result. He said the foreign ministers did not discuss the sanctions that the West has imposed on Russia over the Ukraine crisis, saying: "The sanctions are not our problem, it is the problem of those who introduced them and now do not know how to extricate themselves ..."

Earlier Wednesday, Lavrov had urged measures to contain the unfolding unrest, but said nothing about the rebels surrendering territory they acquired in violation of a peace deal concluded in September in Minsk, Belarus. Ukraine says separatist forces that are backed by Russia have overstepped agreed-upon front-line boundaries between the warring sides by 500 square kilometers (190 square miles).

A fresh separatist advance is under way in an area northwest of Luhansk, the second-largest rebel-held city. The fighting is centered on two checkpoints along a strategic highway.

Ukraine's Defense Ministry said one of those positions, Checkpoint 31, had been abandoned but that operations were underway to retake it.

The separatist forces appear well-poised to take the upper hand, however.

An Associated Press reporter saw nine Gvozdika self-propelled howitzers and six anti-tank cannons moving near the town of Perevalsk around midday. A rebel militiaman with the convoy who declined to give his name said the armament was heading in the direction of Checkpoint 31.

Along the same road, the AP saw four Grad multiple rocket launchers accompanied by four trucks carrying ammunition and 15 pristine-looking tanks, also heading toward the checkpoint.

Ukraine and the West accuse Russia of providing material support to the separatists, which Moscow denies. The sheer amount of sophisticated heavy weaponry in the hands of the insurgents, however, is widely seen as overwhelming evidence of direct involvement by Russia.

Speaking during a visit to Kiev, U.S. Army Europe commander Lt. Gen. Ben Hodges said the quantity of Russian equipment being provided to separatists had doubled between the September cease-fire deal and December.

"It is very clear from the capabilities that the proxies (rebels) have used against Ukrainian security forces, the type of artillery, modern equipment, the amount of ammunition that has been used," Hodges said. "It is irrefutable that they are getting direct support from Russia."

Addressing the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko held up a piece of a bullet-riddled bus as evidence of shelling last week by Russian heavy artillery in his country. He says 9,000 Russian troops are occupying 7 percent of Ukrainian territory.

He said the metal came from a bus in the town of Volnovakha, where 13 people were killed by what he described as Russian shelling.

"For me this is a symbol, a symbol of the terroristic attack against my country," he said, comparing it to the downing of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 over rebel-held eastern Ukraine last summer. He called it a "global problem," extending far beyond just Ukraine's borders, cutting short his visit to Davos to deal with the crisis in his country.

The fighting in the Luhansk region follows intense clashes over the weekend for control of the airport on the fringes of the main rebel city, Donetsk. The terminal — once the pride of the city but now reduced to a burned-out shell — is of limited strategic value. Now, however, it has acquired symbolic value because of the Ukrainian forces' stand against waves of separatist attacks.

The fierce airport battle shattered the relative tranquility that had been in place since a new truce was reached in early December.

Shelling in and around Donetsk has abated since the weekend, although artillery strikes have continued to claim civilian casualties. A shell that fell in Donetsk's Kirov district Wednesday left two dead.

U.S. State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki said there has been an increase in separatist violence, including rocket attacks on the Donetsk airport in recent days, and separatist seizures of more territory.

"We've also seen reports that Russia has moved two tactical battalions into Ukraine," she said in Washington. "We can confirm that Russia continues to move tanks, armored vehicles, trucks artillery pieces and other military equipment to deployment sites near the Russia-Ukraine border, which serve as staging points before transporting military equipment to pro-Russia separatists. That is something we're seeing."

Secretary of State John Kerry said the U.S. was concerned that the separatists were attacking the town of Debaltseve, about 70 kilometers (45 miles) east of Donetsk.

"This is a very blatant land grab and it is in direct contravention to the Minsk Agreement that they signed up to," Kerry said.

Lavrov said the continuing truce violations were rooted in the failure to abide by the line of contact between the two sides. He said Russian President Vladimir Putin had written to Poroshenko with a proposal to use the original boundary for the withdrawal of heavy weapons.

Under the September agreement, Ukrainian and separatist forces agreed to pull back their artillery by 30 kilometers (19 miles).

Poroshenko said a political dialogue must follow to help stabilize the situation and called for holding local elections in eastern Ukraine. Lavrov said Russia would welcome municipal elections there.

Ukraine is trying to cope with a resource-draining conflict while simultaneously fending off the prospect of total economic collapse.

International Monetary Fund head Christine Lagarde said Poroshenko asked the organization to replace Ukraine's current \$17 billion bailout package with a new one.

"We will consult with the IMF executive board on the (Ukrainian) authorities' request," Lagarde said.

*--Isachenov reported from Moscow; Chernov reported from Perevalsk, Ukraine; Peter Leonard in Kiev, Ukraine; John Heilprin in Davos, Switzerland; Jim Heintz in Moscow and Matthew Lee in Washington contributed to this report*

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## **AFRICA**

### **12. Cameroon raid frees German hostage held by Boko Haram**

Agence France-Presse, Jan. 21 | Reinnier Kaze

Cameroon said Wednesday its forces have freed a German hostage kidnapped six months ago in Nigeria by Boko Haram, as African leaders appealed to the United Nations for support in fighting the Islamist militants.

"A special operation led by Cameroonian armed forces along with security services of friendly nations succeeded this night (Tuesday) in freeing Nitsch Eberhard Robert, a German citizen abducted in Nigeria in July 2014 by the Boko Haram sect," the Cameroon presidency said in a statement.

A spokesman for the German foreign ministry confirmed the man's release, adding that he was now in Cameroon's capital Yaounde.

Boko Haram claimed in an October 2014 video it had captured a German man, who local residents said was a teacher at a government-run technical training centre.



Analysts say the Islamists have increasingly sought to fund their brutal six-year insurgency through ransom kidnappings, targeting primarily wealthy Nigerians, but also foreigners.

No further details were immediately available about the Cameroon raid, including where it took place.

The hostage release was announced a day after Boko Haram's leader Abubakar Shekau mocked African leaders meeting in Niger to try to forge a united front against the Islamists.

"African kings... I challenge you to attack me now. I am ready."

Boko Haram previously abducted foreigners in Nigeria and Cameroon, but all have since been released. A French family was believed to have been freed in exchange for a multi-million dollar ransom in 2013.

However, more than 200 schoolgirls abducted by the militants in April last year in one of the most shocking acts of their insurgency are still missing.

As news of the German's rescue emerged, the African Union announced it has asked the Security Council to approve a mandate for a regional force and a fund to help finance it.

"Boko Haram is a threat not only to Nigeria and the region, but also to the continent as a whole," AU head Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma said in a statement.

Nigeria's army has come under fire repeatedly for failing to crush the militants, whose insurgency has left 13,000 people dead and forced 1.5 million from their homes.

Boko Haram has also been stepping up attacks in Nigeria and neighbouring Cameroon, where it abducted dozens of people Sunday.

Niger said Wednesday the headquarters of the regional African force set up to fight Boko Haram will now be transferred to Chad after its base in the Nigerian border town of Baga was overrun earlier this month by the Islamist militants.

Chad is seen as having the most capable military in the region and at the weekend sent a convoy of troops and 400 military vehicles into neighbouring Cameroon to battle Boko Haram.

Two Cameroonian soldiers were wounded in heavy clashes Tuesday with Boko Haram in the far north of Cameroon, which borders Nigeria.

"We managed to repel the enemy," a Cameroonian military commander told AFP on condition of anonymity. "We saw signs that made us think Boko Haram lost men."

Regional efforts to fight Boko Haram have been hampered by Nigeria's reticence, with Abuja looking suspiciously on any foreign military intervention on its soil.

"Nigeria feels it can take care of the problem itself, but (Boko Haram) is no longer just impacting Nigeria, it's an issue for the whole region," said an African diplomat based in Ethiopia's capital.

Nigeria and its neighbours held talks this week in Niger's capital Niamey on speeding up the creation of the force to fight the militants.

Anger against the militants is growing in Cameroon, with protesters hitting the capital's streets Wednesday with signs saying "Beat it Boko Haram," and "I am Kolofata," in reference to town that has suffered repeated attacks from Boko Haram.

The group's leader Shekau claimed responsibility for the assault on Baga in a video posted Tuesday which is thought to have killed hundreds and is considered the militants' deadliest attack.

In his 35-minute message Shekau said: "We will not stop. This is not much. You'll see."

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### **13. God ordered massacre, extremist says**

*Boko Haram leader says hundreds of slayings in Nigeria are just the beginning*

Los Angeles Times, Jan. 22, Pg. A4 | Robyn Dixon

Six years ago, Nigerian forces captured the leader of the extremist group Boko Haram and killed him in custody, a move that was to have far-reaching consequences.

Nigeria had exchanged a charismatic preacher named Mohammed Yusuf for the more radical and violent leader, Abubakar Shekau, who steered the movement down a murderous path. His fighters cut the throats of schoolboys, abducted schoolgirls, seized a slice of northeastern Nigeria and finally threatened to spill war across borders to other West African nations.

In his latest video, released Tuesday, Shekau says God commanded that his fighters massacre hundreds of people in the town of Baga in northeastern Nigeria this month in an attack described by human rights groups as the worst so far by the militants.

In a few short years, Shekau has ruthlessly transformed Boko Haram from a militia that mainly attacked army posts and police stations to one that has launched suicide bombings across the country, targeting civilians in markets, bus stations and clubs. Its fighters have swept into dozens of northeastern villages this past year, massacring civilians and burning houses and shops.

He gained global notoriety last year with his menacing grin, as he boasted about abducting 276 schoolgirls whom he vowed to sell as slaves. And along the way his group gained significant resources and arms, often able to outgun Nigeria's military.

Claiming responsibility for this month's massacre, Shekau said in the video on YouTube that the devastation in Baga was nothing compared with future attacks he was planning.

"We are the ones who fought the people of Baga, and we have killed them with such a killing as he [God] commanded us in his book," said Shekau, as Nigeria and its neighbors struggled to deploy a regional force to confront the violent Islamist group.

"This is just the beginning of the killings," he said. "What you've just witnessed is a tip of the iceberg. More deaths are coming."

Satellite images released last week show thousands of houses in Baga and neighboring Doron Baga burned down in the attack. An accurate count of how many were killed has not been reached, but estimates range from several hundred to 2,000 people.

More than 7,500 people fled the assault that began Jan. 3, according to the United Nations. Survivors described Boko Haram gunmen shooting people on sight, or dragging them from their homes and killing them.

Shekau, once a headache for Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan, now has the presidents of several neighboring countries alarmed -- and angry that Nigeria failed to curb the terrorist group earlier. Boko Haram has attacked villages in Cameroon, recruited fighters from several countries and raised the threat of a devastating regional conflict.

Shekau's birthplace is variously reported as a remote Nigerian village in Yobe state or the neighboring nation of Niger. His parents were peasants. He studied under an Islamic cleric and later attended the Borno State College of Legal and Islamic Studies, where he took Islamic studies and Arabic.

As a student, Shekau was radicalized, became interested in Boko Haram and "began to be abrasive and radical, shunning other students and keeping company of his fellow sect members," a fellow student, Kayam Bulama, said in an interview last year.

Under his leadership, Boko Haram has wreaked mayhem and chaos in northeastern Nigeria, destroying the economy and agriculture as farmers flee their land, choking off trade between Niger, Nigeria and Cameroon and attacking secular schools. The group, which opposes democracy, is poised to undermine Nigerian elections due next month, with dozens of towns and villages under its control.

The group's ultimate goal is to impose an Islamic state in Nigeria based on a fundamentalist interpretation of Islam.

In this week's video, Shekau taunted West African leaders who are working to deploy the regional force, and mocked Niger's president, Mahamadou Issoufou, who took part in a rally of world leaders in Paris showing solidarity after the terrorist attack on the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo.

Baga was to be the headquarters of the 2,800-strong regional force, which was supposed to be launched in November after an agreement involving Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroon. But before the Jan. 3 attack on Baga, Niger's soldiers had departed and the Chadian forces had not yet been deployed, leaving Nigerian forces to confront the militants alone and further undermining trust among the neighbors.

Chad sent a force to Cameroon last weekend to help prevent the Boko Haram insurgency from spreading across the region, and the African Union is due to discuss a proposed regional force next week.

Ghanian President John Dramani Mahama, chairman of the Economic Community of West African States, told Reuters news service that the African Union might take over the planned multinational force.

"I do believe that dealing with it collectively is a much better way to go about it, because the threat of Boko Haram goes beyond Nigeria. As you can see currently there are attacks taking place in Cameroon, there have been incidents in Niger and so it is not a Nigerian problem only," Mahama told local journalists during a visit Wednesday to Germany.

"Terrorism is like a cancer and if we don't deal with it, it will keep going. It threatens everybody in the sub-region. When it comes to terrorism nobody is too far or too near," he told Reuters last week.

"The increase in strength of Boko Haram reflects our slowness and our inability to put up a robust response," Niger's foreign minister, Mohamed Bazoum, told journalists last week.

When Boko Haram seized Baga, it took over the military base. Shekau flaunted an arsenal of sophisticated weaponry in the YouTube video and said he was ready for any attack.

"Kings of Africa, you are late," he said. "I challenge you to attack me even now. I'm ready."

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## **EUROPE**

### **14. Belgium Offers Partial IDs of Two Killed in Police Raid**

New York Times, Jan. 22, Pg. A6 | James Kanter and Andrew Higgins

BRUSSELS -- The Belgian authorities on Wednesday partly identified two men believed to be Islamic militants who died last week in a police raid, releasing the first names and nationalities -- one Belgian, one Belgian-Moroccan -- of the pair, who were suspected of belonging to a terrorist network and plotting an imminent attack.

The partial lifting of the secrecy that has surrounded the men's identities came after a court in Brussels prolonged the detention of other suspects arrested in connection with what prosecutors called a foiled plot, which put the country on high alert. On Saturday, the government deployed troops to possible targets in Brussels and Antwerp.

The identities of the pair, who died in a shootout last Thursday in Verviers, an eastern town about 75 miles from Brussels, have been a source of intense speculation and contradictory reports in the Belgian media.

The confusion raised questions about whether the police might have killed people they had not expected to find in the raided house and whether the suspected plot had strictly local roots or international influences.

In a statement, the Belgian federal prosecutor described the dead suspects as Sofiane A., a Belgian and Moroccan citizen born in 1988, and Khalid B., a Belgian citizen born in 1991.

"The federal prosecution office would like to stress the fact that we could not confirm the identities of the suspects earlier in the absolute interest of the ongoing investigation," an English version of the statement said.

Earlier on Wednesday, a court in Brussels ordered that three men arrested last week be held for one month because of possible links to the two suspects killed in Verviers. The three, including a man who was in the house raided in Verviers, were charged with participation in the activities of a terrorist group and violation of a law on weapons, according to the statement.

That decision was handed down behind closed doors at the Palais de Justice in a hearing protected by two sets of police checkpoints. Heavily armed paratroopers patrolled outside. The courthouse, along with embassies, Jewish sites and other potential targets, has been under military guard since Saturday.

Those security measures followed a decision last week to raise Belgium's terrorism alert to 3 from 2 on a scale of 1-4 because of concerns raised by the suspected plot based in Verviers and the 17 deaths in attacks in Paris this month.

Belgian officials say they have found no link between a three-day rampage in Paris by three Frenchmen connected to jihadist groups and the attack they say was being planned in Verviers.

Michael G. Vickers, the Pentagon's top intelligence policy official, said the attacks in Paris and the suspected plots in Belgium reflected a growing aim of the followers of disparate jihadist groups to carry out strikes in Europe and the United States.

"Attacks on the West, in particular, are high on their list and increasing in priority," said Mr. Vickers, the under secretary of defense for intelligence.

A senior American intelligence official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because the investigation was continuing, said the Belgian suspects might have already identified targets when the authorities intervened.

The official said that intelligence and police officials in Europe and the United States were struggling to piece together details of the terrorist cells and their plans, but that attacks might have been only days away.

Marouane El Bali, 25, one of the three men in court on Wednesday, was in Verviers at the time of the police raid but jumped out a window of the house. He has denied any involvement with terrorism, and he wept in court on Wednesday, according to one of his lawyers, Abdelhadi Amrani.

"He cried throughout the hearing," Mr. Amrani said. "He has no understanding of what happened to him." Mr. Amrani added that his client had no knowledge that others in the house were planning an attack.

In addition to the weapons and terrorism-related accusations, Mr. El Bali was charged "with armed rebellion, in group, with premeditation," the statement by the prosecutor's office said.

Mr. Amrani said Mr. El Bali, who is from the Molenbeek district of Brussels, was in Verviers to visit a friend but might also have been there to deliver drugs, and perhaps shoes, to the house where the two suspects were killed by the police.

One of the other men in court also lived in Molenbeek, a heavily immigrant district of the capital that is separated from a comparatively upmarket area by a narrow canal.

The apparent concentration of suspects from Molenbeek has raised questions about whether the men became radicalized by influences in their neighborhood or had come under the sway of broader international terrorist networks.

Belgian prosecutors have said that the suspects killed in Verviers opened fire with automatic weapons before the police entered the building and that a lengthy gunfight ensued.

Officials presented the raid as the culmination of a meticulously planned operation that followed weeks of surveillance on suspected militants. But Mr. Amrani, the lawyer, said the authorities might have known the identities of the suspects only after their deaths.

Didier De Quévy, another lawyer for Mr. El Bali, said the raids and the deadly showdown in Verviers had been necessary, but might have taken place sooner than the authorities had planned because of heightened fear after the carnage in France.

"This was a long-running investigation into a cell, a terrorist nucleus," Mr. De Quévy said. "To avoid the things that happened in Paris, they intervened more quickly."

That was probably "a good thing," he said.

*--Eric Schmitt contributed reporting from Washington*

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#### **15. France to add 2,600 counterterror agents**

Washington Post, Jan. 22, Pg. A7 | Michael Birnbaum

PARIS - Two weeks after the worst attacks on French soil in decades, leaders here announced sweeping measures Wednesday to add more than 2,600 counterterrorism agents and boost funding for intelligence gathering.

The proposals would bolster the capabilities of authorities who already have some of the most extensive counterterrorism powers in Europe and came as the continent has struggled with a sense of a sharply growing threat from returnees from Islamist conflicts in Syria, Iraq and Yemen. In recent weeks, countries across Europe have detained people they suspect are connected to several alleged attack plots.

Other countries, such as neighboring Belgium, have also said that they would strengthen anti-terrorism forces. There is a rising debate within Europe about whether to build new crimefighting databases that privacy advocates have long derided as needlessly invasive.

The plan outlined by French Prime Minister Manuel Valls came the same day that French authorities acknowledged that they had intercepted one of the three killers, Amedy Coulibaly, at a routine traffic stop days before the attacks started but had let him go immediately after. The revelation, first reported by weekly satirical and investigative newspaper *Le Canard Enchaîné*, was sure to raise additional questions about intelligence failures ahead of the attacks. Counterterrorism authorities had extensive contact with all three men, it reported, but determined that they did not pose an immediate threat.

France's plans do not signal a fundamental change in the country's counterterrorism strategy. But they do reflect a growing belief in the West and among allies that security forces need to keep pace with evolving terrorist networks that could increasingly include native-born radicals.

The three gunmen suspected of leading the terror campaign were born and raised in France. A total of 17 people were killed in the attacks, which began at satirical newspaper Charlie Hebdo. The gunmen were later killed in simultaneous raids.

"The number of dangerous individuals who might actually launch attacks has been relentlessly increasing in France," Valls said in a nationally televised address. "This change of scale is a formidable challenge for our country and for our partners, particularly our European partners."

He said a French counterterrorism registry would be expanded to include about 3,000 people who had been involved in Islamist fighting in Syria and Iraq or were otherwise deemed at risk of radicalization. They will be required to check in closely with security forces about their movements and activities.

Valls said 2,680 new security posts would be created as part of the \$493 million effort, which includes providing more tools and technology for monitoring, such as phone-tapping and Internet surveillance.

"This effort is absolutely massive, but it is a prerequisite if we are to ensure the safety of the French," he said.

Lawmakers involved in drafting the law said Wednesday that they are proposing to give French authorities the ability to track the cars of suspects, force foreign social networks to hand over data directly to them and raise the number of warrantless wiretaps permitted under French law.

The announcement came as French prosecutors said they had charged four men in relation to Coulibaly's portion of the attacks that paralyzed the country.

The men are accused of helping him with logistics and weaponry in the shooting of a police officer and a later hostage-taking at a Paris kosher supermarket, which left four people dead.

It was not clear whether the men - three of whom have long criminal records - were connected to the militant ideology behind the attacks or whether they had simply assisted, said Paris Prosecutor Francois Molins.

"We will probably have months of investigation, if not years," he said.

He outlined a web of connections between the men and Coulibaly, in whose bathroom was found a suitcase stuffed with jihadist materials and a photocopy of a jihadist flag. In line with French law, the men, ages 22 to 28, were identified only as Willy P., Christophe R., Tonino G. and Mickael A. Molins acknowledged that police had stopped Coulibaly and his common-law wife, Hayat Boumeddiene, in a routine traffic stop Dec. 30 near the Buttes-Chaumont park in Paris where, more than a decade earlier, a jihadist group that included the other attackers did its exercises before some of them went off to fight in Iraq.

When they checked Coulibaly's name in their database, the police saw that he had been flagged by intelligence officials as "considered dangerous and taking part in the Islamist movement," *Le Canard Enchaîné* reported. Coulibaly was driving a rental car, and he showed police a driver's permit dated Dec. 10. Police were to obtain "a

maximum of information without drawing the attention of the subject." The police notified counterterrorism authorities, who did nothing, the newspaper reported.

France repeatedly has strengthened its counterterrorism laws in recent years, including measures seeking to block French citizens from joining fighters abroad.

Other nations have taken similar steps.

Last week, Belgium's Prime Minister, Charles Michel, said an additional \$348 million would be earmarked for strengthening security. He also proposed a range of policies that include making it easier to strip citizenship from Belgians who fight in Syria and elsewhere.

The tougher measures followed a series of raids in Belgium and other countries against suspected terrorist cells plotting attacks against police and other targets. Authorities do not believe there were direct links to the Paris attacks.

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## **16. France Has Emerged as a Hawk in Muslim World**

Wall Street Journal (Analysis), Jan. 22, Pg. A6 | Yaroslav Trofimov

PARIS -- When the French president dispatched an aircraft carrier to the Persian Gulf last week, he used his speech to the troops to criticize the U.S. -- for failing to launch timely military action in the Middle East.

How the tables have turned since the "freedom fries" days, when France was taunted by some in the U.S. for its supposed cowardice and appeasement because it opposed the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

In the Muslim world today, Paris is definitely a hawk.

As President Barack Obama tried to extricate the U.S. from overseas wars in recent years, France pushed for Western intervention in Libya, launched a massive military operation against Islamist militants in Mali and neighboring lands, and stepped into a conflict between Muslim and Christian militias in the Central African Republic.

It is also now flying bombing raids in Iraq as a key member of the U.S.-led coalition against Islamic State.

All of this means that, alongside the U.S., France now looms atop the jihadists' target list. In September, when Islamic State's spokesman Abu Mohammad al-Adnani urged the militant group's followers to kill troops and civilians in "infidel" domains, he singled out the "spiteful and filthy French" in particular.

But, if jihadists calculated that this month's Paris attacks, carried out by followers of al Qaeda and Islamic State, would frighten the French into withdrawing from the region, they appear to have miscalculated.

French leaders have reacted by arguing that going after the terrorists in their own strongholds provides the best defense for the homeland.



"Some might be tempted to say: 'Let's close in on ourselves, let's not deal with any of this, and this way we will be protected.' That is a total error," Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius told France's Europe 1 radio after the Paris attacks, which killed 17 people.

"The terrorists are not far from us, and it's not as if they will stop coming to us if we close in on ourselves."

In fact, the porous borders of Islamic State are only a few hours' flight away from France, and the French government views the militant group as a major threat to national security.

Yet, the French military is already strained by multiple deployments of its three overseas wars.

There isn't much more it can do to fill what many French officials see as a security vacuum left by the U.S. pullback from the region, even with the launch of the recent air campaign against Islamic State and the return of a limited American force to Iraq.

"What has happened in Paris certainly won't slow down our engagements, but we are already very committed," says Camille Grand, director of the Fondation pour la Recherche Strategique, a think tank that advises the French defense and foreign ministries. "It would be difficult for the French army to add thousands of men to Iraq."

It remains an article of faith in the French foreign-policy establishment that the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 was a major blunder that set off a disastrous chain reaction of Islamist radicalism across the region.

But, in analyzing the causes of Islamic State's rise and the peril of European terrorism it has spawned, French officials now place as much, if not more, blame on Mr. Obama's decision in August 2013 not to launch military action in retaliation for suspected use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad.

Since then, Islamic State and al Qaeda-affiliated rebels have gained the upper hand in the Syrian conflict, marginalizing the more moderate rebel factions backed by the West.

President Francois Hollande, who had been left blindsided by Mr. Obama's last-minute decision to abort the planned airstrikes, returned to this sore point in his speech aboard the Charles de Gaulle aircraft carrier last week.

"I continue to regret, and I say it in front of you, that the international community did not act at a desired time to end the massacres in Syria and to prevent the extremists from gaining even more ground," Mr. Hollande told his troops.

"France was ready. Orders had been given, the means were in place. Another path was chosen. We now see its results."

Obama administration officials dispute the notion that they have pulled back from world trouble spots, arguing instead that they are using power in a smarter way.

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## **ASIA/PACIFIC**

### **17. South Korea, U.S. defense chiefs agree to boost cybersecurity cooperation**

Kyodo News (Japan), Jan. 22 | Not Attributed

SEOUL -- Defense chiefs of South Korea and the United States agreed on Thursday to further strengthen cooperation in the field of cybersecurity, according to the South Korean Defense Ministry.

The agreement was reached at a 20-minute telephone conversation between South Korean Defense Minister Han Min Koo and U.S. Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel, the ministry's spokesman Kim Kin Seok said during a press briefing.

At the talks, initiated by Hagel, Han expressed South Korea's support for the U.S. response to the alleged hacking attack on California-based Sony Pictures Entertainment Inc. by North Korea, in which U.S. President Barack Obama endorsed economic sanctions against entities and individuals in North Korea.

North Korea has denied the U.S. accusations.

Meanwhile, Hagel expressed thanks to Han for Seoul's support in signing a memorandum of understanding with the United States and Japan on sharing and safeguarding sensitive information on defense matters such as North Korea's nuclear and missile programs.

The memorandum, which took effect on Dec. 29, enables the defense ministries of Japan and South Korea to share information through the U.S. Department of Defense in the absence of a General Security of Military Information Agreement between the two Asian nations. A GSOMIA facilitates exchanges of sensitive information on military affairs and prevents it from falling into the hands of a third country.

Japan is hoping to be able to swiftly obtain information on North Korean missile launches that South Korea has gathered.

The memorandum, which would help bolster trilateral cooperation in countering threats posed by Pyongyang, comes after Tokyo and Seoul put off signing a bilateral agreement on sharing sensitive information in 2012 due to opposition in South Korea.

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### **18. With Eye on China, U.S., Philippines to Boost Ties**

Wall Street Journal Asia, Jan. 22, Pg. 18 | Trefor Moss

MANILA -- The U.S. and the Philippines vowed to deepen their military alliance despite tension over a stalled defense pact and allegations that a U.S. Marine murdered a Filipino transgender woman last year.

At the end of an annual two-day strategic dialogue in Manila on Wednesday, the high-level U.S. and Philippine panels also criticized China for what they characterized as its provocative actions in the South China Sea.

But they didn't identify any new measures they could take to prevent China from tightening its grip on the disputed region, as some fear will happen this year.

The U.S. and the Philippines signed a new defense pact in April 2014 that would allow U.S. forces to deploy to Philippine military bases. However, the deal remains on ice because of a legal challenge currently before the Philippine Supreme Court.

The alliance was placed under further strain in October when a U.S. Marine was named as the suspect in the killing of Jennifer Laude in Subic Bay -- a regular port of call for U.S. Navy ships -- west of Manila.

Pfc. Joseph Scott Pemberton was charged with murder in December and is awaiting trial.

Critics of the new defense pact said the American decision to retain custody of Mr. Pemberton rather than surrender him to Philippine authorities demonstrated the inequality of the U.S.-Philippine alliance.

Mr. Pemberton has been held by the U.S. in a trailer inside the compound of the Philippine military's headquarters in Manila.

On Wednesday, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Daniel R. Russel called the alliance "a true partnership of equals," and reaffirmed Washington's "rock-solid commitment to the Philippines." Philippine Foreign Affairs Undersecretary for Policy Evan Garcia said the alliance remained deep and flexible.

In a joint statement, the two nations said they would continue "efforts to reinforce" and strengthen their militaries in areas such as maritime domain awareness.

However, on China's moves in the South China Sea, there was no sign of new measures. Mr. Russel noted that "the Chinese have a number of projects under way in the South China Sea in which they are reclaiming land in shoals and rocks in sensitive areas where sovereignty has been contested," and reiterated calls for Beijing to desist from such activities.

Mr. Garcia said the "massive reclamation by China in the South China Sea is a clear violation" of an agreement between China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, in which all parties pledged to avoid provocative actions. This month, Manila said a new artificial Chinese island with a potential military base at Fiery Cross Reef, in the Spratly Islands, was 50% complete.

However, the officials said they would continue trying to persuade China to moderate its actions, chiefly through high-level dialogue and by modernizing the Philippine military, although such efforts have been unsuccessful so far.

Chinese officials have confirmed their land-reclamation efforts, but said these are legitimate projects being undertaken in sovereign Chinese territory.

Zachary Abuza, a U.S.-based consultant on Southeast Asian affairs, said China would complete several artificial islands over the next few months, after which "the Philippines will be the focus of their actions." He suggested that "China really does want to probe the U.S. response" to see how far Washington would go to protect Filipino interests.

A Philippine case at an international court in The Hague, Netherlands, challenging China's claim to most of the South China Sea "continues to cast a dark shadow over Philippines-China relations," said Richard Javad Heydarian, a political-science professor at De La Salle University in Manila.

He said a genuine strengthening of the U.S.-Philippine alliance would be "crucial to deterring China from further adventurism."

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## **POLITICS**

### **19. GOP invites Israeli leader**

*A snub to Obama on foreign policy; Boehner says he won't 'stand idly by' on Iran*

Washington Post, Jan. 22, Pg. A1 | Greg Jaffe and Paul Kane

Republicans on Wednesday delivered a swift and bold response to President Obama's exuberant State of the Union address by taking direct aim at the administration's foreign policy authority.

House Speaker John A. Boehner (R-Ohio) invited Israel's prime minister to address Congress next month on the danger posed by Iran's nuclear ambitions.

The invitation was a strong signal by Boehner that he intends to challenge Obama on his handling of Iran and other foreign policy matters, such as the spread of Islamist extremism, where support for the president's policies has sometimes been tenuous.

In a meeting with his House GOP colleagues, Boehner said that if the president "expects us to stand idly by and do nothing while he cuts a bad deal with Iran," he will be disappointed. "Two words: 'Hell no!'" Boehner said. "We're going to do no such thing."

According to Republican aides, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who has a famously strained relationship with Obama, has accepted the offer. He is expected to make the address in February.

The invitation follows Obama's threat to veto any new congressional sanctions on Iran while his team is negotiating an agreement that would prevent Tehran from acquiring a nuclear weapon. Such a move by lawmakers, Obama warned Tuesday, would "all but guarantee that diplomacy fails" and increase the potential for military action.

The administration's position seems to have some support in Israel as well. A senior Israeli intelligence official told a visiting U.S. congressional delegation that new sanctions would be akin to "throwing a grenade into the process," Secretary of State John F. Kerry told reporters in Washington on Wednesday. Such a view is believed to be at odds with that of the Israeli prime minister.

Obama has been battling with lawmakers, including some members of his own party, to forestall congressional action imposing sanctions before the negotiations are completed.

Sen. Robert Menendez (R-N.J.), the top Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and Sen. Mark Kirk (R-Ill.) have proposed a bill that would impose sanctions if the talks were to fail.

Netanyahu's visit comes at a delicate time for Obama, who has put the chances of a deal with Iran at only 50 percent. The trip also underscores the high emotions surrounding the Iranian nuclear negotiations, which have caused splits even among some of the president's traditional allies.

At a meeting of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Menendez slammed Obama, saying he is not being tough enough on Iran. "I have to be honest with you, the more I hear from the administration and its quotes, the more it sounds like talking points that come straight out of Tehran," he said.

Netanyahu, who is in the midst of a competitive election, is expected to state the case for taking a harder line on Iran in an effort to wrest concessions from the country's leaders.

"There is a serious threat that exists in the world, and the president, last night, kind of papered over it," Boehner said, meeting with reporters Wednesday. "The fact is, is that there needs to be a more serious conversation in America about how serious the threat is from radical Islamic jihadists and the threat posed by Iran."

The invitation to Netanyahu seemed to be a deviation from normal diplomatic practice, in which the executive branch - and not a legislative leader - would coordinate the visit of a head of state. The White House said Netanyahu's failure to inform the White House of the trip was a departure from protocol.

Boehner disagreed. "I did not consult with the White House. The Congress can make this decision on its own," he said. "I don't believe I'm poking anyone in the eye."

White House press secretary Josh Earnest said the administration would reserve judgment on Netanyahu's visit "until we have an opportunity to speak to the Israelis about their plans for the trip and about what he plans to say."

The Israeli prime minister's unusual visit may offer a model of how Republicans plan to use their majorities in the House and Senate to pressure the president to take stronger action, not just in Iran but also in places such as Iraq and Syria, where Islamic State militants have taken control over several major cities. On Ukraine, Republicans are pressing the president to provide defensive weaponry to Ukrainian military forces battling Russian-backed rebels, a move the White House has been reluctant to take.

"There is disappointment with the way the world is headed, and that's providing an opportunity for folks on Capitol Hill to push a different approach," said Richard Fontaine, a former foreign policy adviser to Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) and president of the Center for a New American Security.

Obama's foreign policy struggles could also provide an opening for Republicans, who have had their traditional advantage in national security matters eaten away in recent years by the long and unpopular war in Iraq.

The country's economic struggles, meanwhile, led some Republicans to back libertarian candidates who advocate a less aggressive American foreign policy.

"The mainstream of the Republican Party has begun to re-coalesce around a more robust view of America's role in the world," said Danielle Pletka, the vice president for foreign and defense policy studies at the conservative American Enterprise Institute. "The fact that we are hearing from Boehner on national security sends a huge signal."

Republicans, meanwhile, said they were eager to hear from the Israeli prime minister. Sen. Lindsey O. Graham (R-S.C.) criticized Obama for "underestimating the threats" to the United States and said Netanyahu could provide an important perspective that is not being heard.

"We're about to debate a big deal here, regarding the Iranian nuclear threat and the Mideast in general, and I think it's smart to hear from our best ally in the region," Graham said.

Another leading Republican, Sen. Rand Paul (R-Ky.), has begun work with Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.), a leading liberal, on a milder set of sanctions than those advanced by another bipartisan group of senators. On Wednesday, Paul said the legislation remains a work in progress, far behind the tougher sanctions already drafted by lawmakers.

"We'll see; we're just getting started," said Paul, a likely 2016 presidential candidate.

Hailing from the more libertarian wing of the GOP's foreign policy plank, Paul has sometimes angered conservatives by supporting a less stringent approach than traditional hawks such as Graham. But he was supportive of Netanyahu's visit.

"He's always welcome," Paul said.

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## **DEFENSE DEPARTMENT**

### **20. Carter, Not Hagel, to Brief the Defense Budget on Capitol Hill**

ForeignPolicy.com (The Cable), Jan. 21 | Kate Brannen and Gopal Ratnam

One of Ashton Carter's first jobs as defense secretary? Head to Capitol Hill to present and defend the Pentagon's 2016 budget, a planning document he's had little opportunity to shape.

Chuck Hagel, who is planning to stay on as SecDef until his successor is sworn in, was expected to handle the annual round of congressional budget hearings. But, according to defense and Hill sources, that task is now going to fall to Carter, who only stepped down as deputy defense secretary a year ago.

Because work on the defense budget begins at least a year out, it's likely Carter was involved in the early stages of the 2016 budget. But even with a Pentagon pro like Carter, who knows the department inside and out, the budget schedule will throw him into some of the thorniest acquisition and personnel issues right off the bat.

Carter is not losing any time when it comes to cultivating good relations on Capitol Hill, and has begun meeting with senators in preparation for his confirmation hearing. On Tuesday, he met with Sen. John McCain, the new Republican chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee.

"Great meeting today with the future Secretary of Defense, Ash Carter — I'm confident he'll do a fine job," McCain tweeted.

Hagel is being spared the congressional budget briefings partly because Rep. Mac Thornberry, the new Republican chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, is looking to delay testimony from the defense secretary to give the panel time to delve more deeply into the Defense Department's budget request, a Capitol Hill staffer told FP.

That means the defense secretary and chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff will serve as wrap-up witnesses — rather than kicking off the congressional budget season, as is typically done.

Under the new timeline, Hagel will most likely have left the Pentagon by the time the House Armed Services Committee holds its briefing. It looks like the other three congressional defense committees are following suit — waiting until Carter takes over the job.

Pentagon Press Secretary Rear Adm. John Kirby said he had no new information to share about precisely when Hagel might leave.

Hagel “remains firmly focused on his duties and on making sure our troops and their families continue to get the support they need to conduct missions around the world,” Kirby said. “For him, a big part of that commitment means overseeing the final preparations of the fiscal year 2016 budget submission.”

Hagel's last day on the job is dependent on when Carter is confirmed by Congress, but his formal farewell ceremony is planned for Jan. 28 at Joint Base Myer-Henderson in Arlington, Va.

Carter's confirmation hearing is scheduled for the first week of February. The Obama administration will release its 2016 budget request that same week, on Feb. 2.

At the Pentagon, budget day usually involves back-to-back briefings on each of the military services' spending plans. Typically, the defense secretary and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs hold the first briefing of the day, but last year was a little different: Hagel and Gen. Martin Dempsey gave a preview of the budget a few weeks before it was rolled out.

Hagel will still be in the job Feb. 2, but it hasn't been decided yet whether he'll brief the public that day. If he doesn't, Deputy Defense Secretary Bob Work could stand in.

Later that week, Hagel is planning to head to Brussels for a NATO meeting of defense ministers on Feb. 5. This will likely be his last trip abroad as defense secretary.

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## **21. Blast Force: The Invisible War on the Brain**

*Brain trauma from blast force is the signature injury of the Iraq and Afghanistan campaigns, afflicting hundreds of thousands of U.S. combat personnel. Although unseen, the damage strikes deeply into a soldier's mind and psyche*

National Geographic Magazine, February 2015, Cover Story | Caroline Alexander

Inside the protective bunker I waited with the explosives team, fingers wedged firmly in my ears. Outside, shot number 52, trailing a 20-foot length of yellow-and-green-striped detonating cord, was securely taped to the wall of a one-room plywood building with a steel fire door. There was a countdown from five, a low “pow,” and a dull thump in the center of my chest. The thump is the hallmark of blast. “You feel the thump,” one team member told

me. “I’ve been in blast events where we’re actually hundreds or even thousands of feet away, and I still feel that thump.”

The mystery of what that thump does had brought me to a World War II bombing range some 40 miles southeast of Denver. Back then it was used to test half-ton ordnance; now it serves to study controlled explosives used by soldiers to blast holes through walls and doors in combat areas—standard practice in modern warfare. The eventual objective of these tests is to discover what that blast thump does to the human brain.

According to the U.S. Department of Defense, between 2001 and 2014 some 230,000 soldiers and veterans were identified as suffering from so-called mild traumatic brain injury (TBI), mostly as a result of exposure to blast events. The variety of symptoms associated with the condition—headache, seizures, motor disorders, sleep disorders, dizziness, visual disturbances, ringing in the ears, mood changes, and cognitive, memory, and speech difficulties—the fact that they resemble symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and the fact that exposure to blast events often was not logged in the early years of the campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq make it impossible to pin down casualty figures.

Despite the prevalence of the condition, the most fundamental questions about it remain unanswered. Not only is there no secure means of diagnosis, but there are also no known ways to prevent it and no cure. Above all, there is no consensus within the medical community about the nature of blast-induced injury or by what mechanism blast force damages the brain.

**BOOM:** In the field a single blast event represents a virtually simultaneous amalgam of distinct components, each uniquely damaging. Ignition sparks a chemical reaction, an instantaneous expansion of gases that pushes out a spherical wall of gas and air faster than the speed of sound. This shock wave envelops any object it encounters in a balloon of static pressure. During this fleeting stage—the primary blast effect—the individual does not move. An abrupt fall in pressure follows, creating a vacuum. Then comes the secondary blast effect, a rush of supersonic wind that floods the vacuum, hurling and fragmenting objects it encounters, weaponizing debris as high-speed, penetrating projectiles.

The wind itself causes the tertiary blast effects, lifting human beings or even 15-ton armored vehicles in the air, slamming them against walls, rocks, dusty roadsides. The quaternary blast effects are everything else—fire that burns, chemicals that sear, dust that asphyxiates.

The mystery lies in the effects of the primary blast. Theories range wildly: Is it the shock wave’s entry to the brain through cranial orifices—eyes, nose, ears, mouth—that causes injury, and if so, how? Or is external shock pressure on the chest channeled inside vasculature up through the neck and into the brain? Does the transmission of complex wave activity by the skull into the semiliquid brain cause an embolism? Does pressure deform the skull, causing it to squeeze the brain? Is the explosive noise damaging? The flash of light? The majority of soldiers diagnosed with blast-induced neurotrauma have also been hurled or rattled by blast wind. Is military neurotrauma, then, simply an exotic form of concussion?

The tests in Colorado arose from a landmark 2008 study by the military of breachers, those soldiers whose job is to set explosives and who for years had been reported to suffer a high incidence of neurological symptoms. The study, conducted by the U.S. Marine Corps Weapons Training Battalion Dynamic Entry School, followed instructors and students over a two-week explosives training course. It turned out that for days after the larger explosions, breachers reported dull aches in the chest and back “like someone had punched them,” as well as headaches that



“started with shooting pains in the forehead, progressed down the temples, behind the ears, and up through the jaw line.”

More significantly, neurobehavioral tests administered before and after the course showed a “slight indication of declining performance among the instructors,” who typically are exposed to more blast events than students are. This suggested that repetitive exposure even to low-level blasts—even over just a two-week period—could be damaging.

The breacher study went some way toward bringing blast-induced neurotrauma into focus. As Lee Ann Young, one of the study’s leaders, noted, it motivated six follow-on research initiatives that continue today. Previously, many in the military and medical communities had found it difficult to believe that a low-energy blast could inflict significant injury. “Our most recent experience was with Gulf War syndrome, where despite many efforts to find consistent threads, we came up mostly dry on specific causes,” Col. Christian Macedonia (Ret.), the former medical sciences adviser to the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told me. “So there were insane shouting matches in the Pentagon, strange as it may sound now, as to whether blast-related TBI actually existed.” In a paper published as recently as 2008, researchers at the Center for Military Psychiatry and Neuroscience Research, Walter Reed Army Institute of Research, concluded that the troubling symptoms were strongly associated with PTSD and that “theoretical concern” about the neurological effects of blast exposure was essentially unfounded.

But today some researchers are floating a different theory: that mild TBI may increase vulnerability to certain psychological disorders, possibly accounting for the high rate of such disorders and even suicide among veterans. Many neurologists now advocate more precise terminology for this signature injury of the recent wars, such as “blast-induced traumatic brain injury” or “blast-induced neurotrauma”—and all I spoke with objected to the qualifier “mild.”

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In the bunker we waited for the smoke to clear, then ventured into still-singed air. The building’s door had been blown off, the opposite wall was in splinters, the struts were broken, and much of the frame was askew. Pressure gauges at head and chest level had recorded the back-blast as it bounced off corners and walls. The explosion itself had been preserved on video, which replayed events, at two to three frames a second, that had flashed by at a speed of 14,000 frames a second—the ignited fuse glowing red-gold in a long, snaking, elegant stem of light, then the gold-black bloom of the explosion: BOOM.

Shot 52 was one of a series intended to cast light on the phenomenon of back-blast, the reflection of blast pressure off a surface. Other studies are examining the length of blast exposure and the frequency and type of blast. On site to lead the analysis was Charles Needham, a world authority on blast physics. Studying a computer-generated graph, he traced the spikes and dips of pressure that oscillated through five cycles before flattening out. The entire sequence lasted some 65 milliseconds. One hundred milliseconds is the minimum time it takes for a human to react to any stimulus—it had taken less than five milliseconds for the shock wave to hit the gauges on the walls. As Needham pointed out, “Anywhere in that room—it’s on you.”

Fatherly in manner, with white hair and a full white beard, Needham had been described to me by a colleague as a “cross between Santa Claus and Eeyore,” an impression that belied his stature as a high wizard in the black art of explosives. With degrees in physics and astrophysics, he is an authority on modeling all variety of blast events and the dynamics of blast reflection, and he spoke with wistful nostalgia of the big “rumble booms” of high-ordnance

tests of years past. A glance at his résumé calls attention to the diversity and sheer spookiness of blast-related issues: “modifications to fireball behavior,” “high explosive simulation of nuclear effects,” and “Shock and Vibration symposia.”

Needham’s objective was to provide breachers with maps that would show which areas of a given type of structure are safest from reflected pressure. How a blast is reflected is determined not only by whether a space is square or rectangular, and the ceiling high or low, but also by where the wall studs lie, the number and placement of doors and windows, whether there are gaps or holes in the enclosure, whether there is furniture in the room. A shock wave bouncing off a rigid surface, whether of thin plaster or of steel, can be more powerful than the original wave. (Notoriously, the back-blast reflected off the ground at Hiroshima was more powerful than the actual explosion.) The corners of a room, where one might instinctively seek shelter, are particularly dangerous—as is being the third man in a line of breachers carrying protective shields, which, as it turns out, also reflect shock waves. A blast even reflects from within a soldier’s helmet to his head. Every feature in a landscape, every gesture a person makes, shapes a blast event.

A terse conclusion of the original 2008 breacher injury study cited “clear evidence” that recommended safe standoff distances required revision. “We ... found errors of more than a factor of two in some of those training manuals,” Needham said, referring to breacher instructions: As a result, the manuals were modified in 2012. Encompassing a multitude of variables, calculations about blast events are elaborately difficult, and only in recent years has it been possible to make the kind of models Needham is now devising. “These are large calculations and take a lot of computer time,” he said. Or, as another blast authority put it, “Until very recently, the dominant force that caused all this damage was basically magic.”

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Keen interest in blast effects began in World War I, when the signature mechanism of injury was—as in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan—blast force, mostly in the form of exploding artillery shells. The term “shell shock” first appeared in February 1915 in an article in the *Lancet* that examined the case studies of three British soldiers exposed to blast events who complained of sleeplessness, reduced visual field, and loss of taste, hearing, and memory. Initially their affliction was believed to be a “commotional disorder,” referring to agitation of the brain caused by a blast shock wave. A leading theory was that the shock wave traveled to the brain through spinal fluid.

But as the war continued, the condition was attributed to weakness of nerves, given the fact that many men appeared to be otherwise uninjured. The term “shell shock,” implying that the shell burst itself was the cause of the damage, fell out of favor. The revision of diagnosis had profound consequences. In the following decades the shell-shocked soldier came to symbolize the emotional damage that is the cost of war, and medical research ceased to investigate the possibility that blast-force injury might be physical. “When I was in medical school, we were told about shell shock in World War I, that people then believed the brain could be damaged by blast waves from exploding shells,” Colonel Macedonia said. “It was told as a story about how ignorant the medical profession was a hundred years ago.”

The shell-shocked soldiers of that war can be tracked through British Ministry of Pension files into the 1920s, ’30s, ’40s, and beyond. Case reports give details of veterans sunk in lethargy or melancholy, “muddled” in thought, shaking convulsively on street corners, or going “around the bend” and exploding in paranoid acts of anger. Growing up in England, my parents knew of men whom they were told had “been ‘funny’ since the war.” These reports represent the best data available on the long-term fate of the shell-shocked veteran.

After World War II, in 1951, the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission created the Blast Biology Program to test on various animals very large explosions that simulated the effects of nuclear events. Oxen, sheep, pigs, goats, dogs, cats, monkeys, rats, hamsters, rabbits, mice, and guinea pigs were subjected to live blasts or placed in shock tubes. (A shock tube is a long tube fitted with an internal membrane through which pressurized air bursts. This lab simulation, stripped of heat, debris, chemical fallout, and back-blast variables, creates a “pure” blast shock wave.) In the early 1980s the focus of research shifted from nuclear blasts to the low-level explosives characteristic of today’s war theaters.

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“Most of our medical research on blast injuries was either on fragmentation wounds or what happens in gas-filled organs—everyone was always concerned in a thermonuclear explosion what happened to your lungs and your gastrointestinal tract,” Lt. Col. Kevin “Kit” Parker, the Tarr Family Professor of Bioengineering and Applied Physics at Harvard, told me. “We completely overlooked the brain. Today the enemy has developed a weapon system that is targeted toward our scientific weak spot.”

Parker, a towering figure with a shaved head and booming voice, is also a former U.S. Army infantry officer who served two tours in Afghanistan, where he saw and felt the effects of blast force. “There was a flash in the sky, and I turned back toward the mountains where the fighting was,” Parker said, recalling the day in January 2003 when, in the hills of Kandahar, the shock wave from a distant explosion passed through his body. “It just felt like it lifted my innards and put them back down.”

Mostly he was made aware of the range of damage blast inflicted. “When bombs are going off, it’s easier to forget about the guy who’s been a little out of sorts than the guy who’s sitting near him and got both his legs blown off,” Parker said. “But the guy who’s going to have the more serious long-term issues probably is going to be the guy who had the brain injury.”

In 2005 Parker, who was then involved in cardiac tissue engineering, turned his attention to blast-induced neurotrauma. He began by reviewing the science for a class of proteins—integrins—that transmit mechanical forces into cells. Using specially designed magnetic tweezers and a device resembling a miniature jackhammer to simulate the abrupt stretching and high-velocity compression of blast effects, Parker and a small team of students subjected engineered tissues of rat neurons, or nerve cells, to blastlike assault. The integrins on the cell surface initiated a cascade of effects culminating in a dramatic retraction of axons, the long tendrils that serve as a neuron’s signaling mechanism.

By working at the cellular level, Parker’s team sidestepped two central difficulties of any blast research—namely, that one cannot expose humans to blast events and that animals are poor substitutes for humans. On the other hand, results from cells in a petri dish cannot be extrapolated to a human being.

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The array of theories neurologists are actively pursuing stands as eloquent testimony to how wide open blast-induced neurotrauma research is. Lee Goldstein, of Boston University School of Medicine, has taken a very different approach. “People focus on the pressure wave,” Goldstein told me. “What’s behind it is the wind.” Goldstein’s range of expertise can be read in his full title: associate professor of psychiatry, neurology,

ophthalmology, pathology and laboratory medicine, and biomedical, computer, and electrical engineering. At 52, he has the lean build, long dark hair and beard, and intensity of purpose of a desert prophet.

In May 2012 he published the results of studies that examined a possible association between blast-induced neurotrauma and chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE), a neurodegenerative disease that he and his team discovered in the autopsied brains of four military veterans with blast exposure. Goldstein's co-author, Ann McKee, of VA Boston, had been studying CTE in the autopsied brains of football players and other athletes. First reported as a "punch drunk" syndrome in boxers in 1928, CTE is associated with athletes who sustain repetitive head trauma. An incurable and ultimately fatal neurodegenerative disease, CTE leads to cognitive disability and dementia. The disease can be detected only at autopsy and is revealed by abnormal tangles of a protein called tau.

To test the theory that blast exposure may have triggered CTE pathology, Goldstein's team exposed mice to a single shock-tube blast that simulated the effects of a moderate-size explosive. High-speed cameras captured the results—a rapid bobble-head effect, as the heads of the mice shook back and forth in reaction to the force. In 30 milliseconds, far less than the blink of an eye, the oscillating wind had spiked and dipped nine times. "In one blast you're really getting multiple hits," Goldstein said. "So it's like you're packing a whole bunch of hits into a very short time."

Two weeks after exposure to the blast, the mice brains showed an accumulation of chemically modified tau protein and other damage. Critics of the study, however, point out that three of the four human cases that inspired the shock-tube experiments had experienced additional trauma unrelated to blast and that tests on mannequin models indicated that the bobble-head effect was not usual in the field.

Some researchers believe that it's a mistake to focus only on the head. "The whole body is exposed to huge kinetic energy," said Ibolja Cernak, describing the impact of a blast event. "Athletes do not have this kind of whole body exposure." The chair of Canadian military and veterans' clinical rehabilitation research at the University of Alberta, Cernak began her research on the battlefields of Kosovo, when she noticed that some soldiers and civilians exposed to blast exhibited symptoms reminiscent of certain neurodegenerative diseases. The blast pressure wave hits the chest and abdomen "like a huge fist," Cernak says, transferring its kinetic energy to the body. "That kinetic energy generates oscillating pressure waves in the blood, which serves as a perfect medium to further transfer that kinetic energy to all organs, including the brain."

Experiments she conducted on mice revealed that inflammation occurred in the brain whether the head had been protected from blast or not—inflammation, she argues, that starts a process of damage comparable to that seen in Alzheimer's disease. By contrast, protection of the thorax significantly reduced inflammation in the brain, suggesting that the blast-body interaction has a crucial role in blast-induced brain injury.

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As of now, the only wholly reliable method of directly examining the biological effects of blast force on the human brain is autopsy. In 2013 the Department of Defense established a brain tissue repository to advance the study of blast-induced neurotrauma in service members. Overseen by Daniel Perl, professor of pathology at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences, in Bethesda, Maryland, the repository has been receiving brains donated by service members' families. This has allowed researchers, Perl says, to get "to the tissue level to really see what's going on." As he points out, magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) of the living brain has a resolution a thousand times less than what can be seen when the brain is examined under a microscope.

Perl's expertise extends from work on CTE, Alzheimer's, and other age-related neurodegenerative diseases to research on a unique complex of neurological disorders in a small population in Guam (a mystery described in Oliver Sacks's popular book *The Island of the Colorblind*). Perl has also written of shell shock and its relationship to modern blast-induced brain injuries, noting that despite a hundred years' use of explosive force in warfare, there have been "no detailed neuropathology studies ... in the human brain after blast exposure."

Now, 18 months into the brain tissue study, Perl said he's seeing revelatory results. "We believe we're getting close to identifying unique changes in the brains of blast-exposed soldiers that are not seen in brain injuries of civilians," he said, referring to common blunt-force trauma such as athletes sustain. "What we're seeing appears to be unique to blast. This is an injury that appears to be unique to military experience."

If he's correct, the findings will have major implications not only for treatment but also for diagnosis and prevention. "I think we'll have to sit down with the helmet-design people and the body-armor people," he predicted. "A lot of designs were based on very different assumptions."

For living soldiers, meanwhile, reliable methods of diagnosis remain tragically elusive. In June 2011 the *New England Journal of Medicine* published the results of a study that for the first time succeeded in detecting structural abnormalities in the brains of blast-exposed soldiers by using an advanced form of MRI. Although hailed as a landmark in an accompanying editorial, the paper was weakened by the fact that every participant had also experienced other traumas, such as being struck by a blunt object or being in a motor vehicle crash.

A number of studies investigating possible biomarkers may have findings that will aid future diagnosis: A blood test for unique protein markers indicative of brain cell damage has proved promising, for example, and is now being tested by the military. (It is effective only if administered within a few days of the injury.) And in 2014 a small study of 52 veterans successfully used an MRI technique called macromolecular proton fraction (MPF) mapping, which examines levels of myelin, a major component of brain white matter; MPF mapping has been used to study patients with multiple sclerosis, who have reduced levels of myelin, the fatty sheathing that protects and insulates neurons. Evidence of brain white-matter damage was detected in 34 veterans with exposure to one or more blast events, compared with 18 veterans without blast exposure.

"We'd told the veterans to give us their best estimates of how many blast-related mild traumatic brain injuries they had sustained during their military careers," said Eric Petrie, a professor of psychiatry at the University of Washington and the lead author of the study. "But how accurately can veterans recall these events? Some in the study were five to six years out from the time of their last blast exposure," he said, summing up one of the fundamental problems of all diagnostic studies that depend on self-reporting. In the future, photonic crystalline materials that change color when exposed to blast waves, worn as stickers on uniforms and helmets, may provide an objective measurement of blast exposure.

Despite the array of promising strategies, for the time being diagnosis still depends, as it did in WWI, on clinical assessment, which may now involve computer-administered examinations such as the Automated Neuropsychological Assessment Metrics: "Did you experience any of the following: Dazed, confused, saw stars? How much does this word describe how you feel? 'Shaky.' "

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Complex as it may be, a blast event can be created for very little money and with minimal expertise. Explosively formed penetrators, a type of IED used to pierce armored vehicles, can be assembled for a few dollars. Disks that become bullet-shaped and molten hot as they fly through the air, these explosive projectiles can, in the words of one ordnance expert, cut through an armored car “like a hot butter knife.” In this way 25 dollars’ worth of technology can take out a million-dollar armored vehicle and kill or inflict grievous injury on the soldiers in it. The cost of their medical care—possibly over decades—will add significantly to the economic disparity. Given this cost-effectiveness, explosive force is likely to remain a signature weapon of modern warfare.

Today, while researchers strive to figure out what goes on when blast force encounters the human brain, untold numbers of soldiers are struggling with the aftermath of their own encounters.

BOOM. On patrol in Iraq in 2009, Robert Anetz felt the immense pressure against his body. Then everything went numb. “Everybody started shouting, ‘Are you good? Are you good?’ You check for blood,” Anetz said. There was no blood, so he thought he was good. But seven months after returning from Iraq, he had a seizure while driving, and a grand mal seizure six months after that. Now rebuilding his life as a student and volunteer firefighter, his daunting regimen of 15 different medications is down to three, but the headaches and migraines have not gone away.

Enrique Trevino, who at the age of 21 survived a massive IED ambush in Afghanistan one night two weeks before he was to return home, remembers only the bright flash and his buddies screaming his name. “I’ll never forget that flash,” he said. “It almost looked like a lightning strike.” When he finally awoke in Fort Hood, Texas, he learned the explosion that had knocked out his night optics had also knocked out his power of speech and his peripheral vision. He now works to rebuild his mind with mental tasks like counting backward from 50, but he suffers daily from migraines and nightly from his dreams.

About a year after his return home, Trevino said, “it all came crashing down on me.” He survived a suicide attempt. A friend of his who had also served in Afghanistan did not. “They found him in his home,” Trevino said. “He, he—nobody would have ever thought—nobody would have ever been—nobody ever, nobody, no one, nobody saw that. Nobody saw.”

And nobody saw it for my brother-in-law, Ron Haskins, from whom I first learned about breachers. After retiring from the Army Special Forces, he worked with a private security force in Iraq. He sustained two IED attacks that left him with headaches and ringing in his ears so loud he was unable to sleep. On his return to the United States, he worked for the Department of Homeland Security and conducted breacher training courses for a security company of his own. One night in the summer of 2011, for reasons no one could fathom, he picked up a gun and ended his life.

“We should get you guys to come out to New Mexico so you can see the devices, have explosions go off,” Ron had told me about a training course he led. “You’ll be half a mile away, and you’ll be amazed at how a couple of pounds will rattle the earth around you.”

*--Caroline Alexander’s new translation of Homer’s Iliad will be published this year by Ecco Press. Longtime contributor Lynn Johnson was named one of five 2014-16 National Geographic photography fellows*

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## MARINE CORPS

**22. Marine general defends Afghan pullout while violence boils**  
*Camp Pendleton-based brigade shuttered southwestern command in October*  
San Diego Union-Tribune Online, Jan. 21 | Gretel C. Kovach

The U.S. military commander who oversaw the withdrawal of coalition forces in Afghanistan's deadliest province last fall said he still believes it was the right time to leave Helmand, despite unrelenting insurgent attacks and heavy casualties in the region.

Brig. Gen. Daniel Yoo, the Camp Pendleton Marine who led international forces in southwestern Afghanistan for the last year of the campaign, turned his Camp Bastion-Leatherneck headquarters over to Afghan troops on Oct. 26.

All foreign forces serving with the regional NATO command withdrew from Helmand soon after, leaving the Afghan National Army's 215th Corps and the police in charge of security.

"I am convinced the military did what we were asked to do," Yoo said Wednesday in remarks to the San Diego Military Advisory Council, a group of defense industry and military supporters.

"Transition is a sign of progress, and there has been a lot of progress ... although there are some that believe we could be further along in the campaign."

Since 2009 when the first Marine brigade deployed to Helmand to backstop beleaguered British forces, an Afghan army corps was built virtually from scratch, much of the region was pacified, and socioeconomic factors such as life expectancy and literacy boomed.

Then, as coalition forces dwindled the last two years, insurgents moved into the vacuum. Opium poppy cultivation, suicide bombings and other enemy attacks, and casualties by Afghan national troops as well as civilians surged.

In late November, one month after coalition forces departed, more than a dozen insurgents and suicide bombers breached Camp Bastion. Accounts vary, but it took at least two days to stop the siege of the 6,500-acre regional headquarters. At least seven Afghan soldiers died before the infiltrators were killed.

Among other high-profile attacks, 10 people died at a bank in the provincial capital of Lashkar Gah in December during a Taliban suicide bombing.

Helmand province is a largely rural area and historic stronghold of the Taliban as well as drug lords and criminal syndicates.

"It's a very violent area," and long has been, Yoo said, with usually four or five of the 10 most violent districts in all of Afghanistan. In the last year, insurgents stepped up attacks in an attempt to disrupt presidential elections and gain propaganda value as coalition forces departed.

The sink or swim phase of the long campaign to build a professional Afghan army and police force continued amid the violence. During the recent Bastion attack, for instance, coalition forces stationed in nearby Kandahar declined to ride to the rescue. "They did ask for coalition help but we didn't give it to them. So they ended up clearing it themselves, in an Afghan way," Yoo said.

Maj. Gen. Sayed Malouk, former commanding general of the Afghan army corps assigned to Helmand, said during a Dec. 10 interview at Camp Pendleton that his soldiers suffered a higher number of casualties last year, but they would prevail against the insurgency.

“Many of our soldiers have been martyred and wounded because we have this hope that peace and stability will come to Helmand Province. If we don’t have confidence in this there is no need for fighting. We have confidence. We trust that there will be stability,” he said.

More than 5,000 Afghan police and soldiers were killed nationwide in 2014, more than any previous year, the New York Times reported, citing official Afghan data not formally released. Over 1,300 of them died in Helmand province between June and November.

The casualties are high but “proportional to where they are in the responsibility of securing their own nation,” Yoo said.

Most operations in the last year were run unilaterally by Afghan national troops. After the presidential election in April, international forces withdrew from the violent northern arc of the province, from places like Sangin, Musa Qalah and Now Zad.

Afterward, “there was a lot of fighting going on up there... but they were able to sustain the fight this whole summer fighting season on their own,” Yoo said. “Could we have gone up there and helped? Sure we could have. But that wasn’t necessary.”

Asked about the timing of the pull-out given the ongoing violence, Yoo said: “No, I don’t think it was a mistake. It was appropriate based on where we were. Our national leadership has given dates that provided predictability to what we needed to accomplish.

“Therefore we could prioritize and find out what was achievable, what was not achievable, and what was a responsibility of others from the international community and the whole of government perspective, not just from the military.”

The NATO combat mission in Afghanistan was scheduled to sunset in December, bringing the 13-year war to an end for U.S. and foreign troops. President Barack Obama announced last May that the last American military forces remaining to train and advise Afghan army and police would withdraw by the end of 2016.

To meet the deadline in an orderly fashion, Gen. Joseph Dunford, then the top commander in Afghanistan, asked the Marines to withdraw from Helmand two months earlier than planned.

“The limitation of forces that the president and the NATO leadership decided was going to be appropriate to continue the campaign — that caused a little friction as far as what we needed to get out of there and the timelines,” Yoo said.

Sending military personnel and equipment home, “you had to balance between the insurgency, not knowing what their capabilities and intentions were; the Afghan national security forces, what their capability was and their confidence to take additional responsibilities from us, and then the redeployment and retrograde factors.



“We always said it was going to be conditions-based, that we would keep enough capability and capacity in case something changed in the campaign. But it really came down to timing — the laws of physics in order to get all that stuff (out).”

Looking ahead in Helmand, a 2015 military assessment Yoo shared on a briefing slide concludes that Afghan troops can be successful in Helmand with no physical coalition presence, provided there are strong links to Kabul and effective leadership.

“The Afghan example is a good one to learn from, as far as commitment and professionalizing a force. There are many metrics out there that show how much progress has been made. Thirteen years is a long time, there is no doubt about it. And if you talk about the billions of dollars that have been invested, it’s pretty expensive. But ... things are moving in the right direction,” Yoo said.

Some Marines who served there remain cynical about long-term prospects.

After listening to the talk, a Marine combat veteran of Afghanistan and Iraq who served on the command staff in Helmand predicted that the U.S. will have to redeploy combat forces in coming years to bail out Afghan troops.

“There is no doubt,” the retired senior non-commissioned officer said. “Look at Iraq.”

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## NAVY

### **23. Commander reassigned amid death probe**

*After a worker was found dead in the waters of Guantánamo Bay in early January, the Navy reassigned the base commander to Jacksonville*

Miami Herald, Jan. 22, Pg. A1 | Carol Rosenberg

The commander of the U.S. Navy base at Guantánamo Bay has been removed from the remote outpost and reassigned to headquarters, a Navy announcement said Wednesday, declining to elaborate because of an ongoing Naval Criminal Investigative Services probe.

According to the brief statement, Navy Capt. John “J.R.” Nettleton had lost the confidence of his boss, Navy Rear Adm. Mary M. Jackson, commander of Navy Region Southeast, who reassigned Nettleton to her office in Jacksonville.

The announcement follows a mysterious death on the base that is being investigated by NCIS. A commissary worker named Christopher Tur, 42, was found dead in the waters of Guantánamo Bay on Jan. 10 at about 11:30 a.m., Mike Andrews, a Navy Region Southeast spokesman, told the Miami Herald on Jan. 15. He had been reported missing a day earlier.

At the base, spokeswoman Kelly Wirfel said on Jan. 16 — in response to questions about the NCIS investigation — that Tur had been working at the base commissary since he moved there with his family in June 2011. Wirfel confirmed that Tur’s widow, Lara, is director of the Fleet and Family Services Center at the base but would not say whether she worked for Nettleton.

“NCIS is investigating this matter per their normal procedure,” Wirfel said in a brief email. “As such, I’m not able to comment any further.”

The base commander has no role in the running of the war-on-terror prison camps at Guantánamo. That is the responsibility of a rear admiral who commands a separate Detention Center Zone within the 45-square-mile base in southeast Cuba — and answers to Marine Gen. John F. Kelly, the commander of the U.S. Southern Command in Miami.

The prison functions much like a tenant on the base, with its 2,000 or so staff members granted wide access to base facilities as well as the separate prison zone. Jackson sent her chief of staff, Navy Capt. Scott Gray, to run the base itself until Nettleton’s replacement is chosen.

As commander, Gray will be responsible for the functioning of the airport, seaport and other base facilities. As acting base commander, Gray will also succeed Nettleton at a monthly meeting with a Cuban counterpart along the fence line that separates the U.S.-controlled base from Cuba proper. The two sides discuss topics of common interest at those monthly meetings.

Nettleton, a pilot and native of Haines City in Central Florida, started his military career as a Marine enlistee in 1984. He joined the Navy through the Naval Aviation Cadet program in 1987 and at least once a month piloted a base C-12 airplane to Miami on base business and to keep up his flying hours.

Nettleton, known as “the skipper” for his role as base commander, successfully navigated a Nativity scene controversy in 2013 that was kicked off by troops protesting a decision by kitchen workers to set up crèches in the Navy base and detention center cafeterias. He resolved the flap in a single day by ordering the religious displays moved to the base chapel.

This is the second time in a decade that a Guantánamo base commander has been recalled to Jacksonville. In July 2005, Navy Capt. Leslie McCoy was relieved following a three-month inspector-general investigation of his leadership. He was never returned to the post.

Successive Navy commanders have likened the job to that of a small-town mayor, in part, because Guantánamo feels like small-town America.

Beyond the prison camp on a bluff overlooking the Caribbean, the base has a school for sailors’ children, facilities to provide power and desalinated water for about 6,000 inhabitants, a golf course, a chapel and a McDonald’s — all serving a mixed military and civilian contractor workforce.

It is governed by military law, meaning the captain can discipline residents, impose curfews and supervise contents of the base newspaper. A police unit of Navy Masters at Arms also answers to him.

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#### **24. Navy seeks enlisted women for sub duty in 2016**

NavyTimes.com, Jan. 21 | Mark D. Faram

Enlisted women will join the submarine force in 2016 and recruiting for the first integrated crews is now underway.

Navy personnel officials outlined the plans and rules for female enlisted sailors, E-1 through E-8, to volunteer for the Silent Service, in three naval messages released Wednesday that make formal the next phase of the integration effort begun five years ago.

The move begins the next step in full integration of women into the previously all male sub force, with the integration taking cues from the surface fleet's integration decades before.

Among the lessons is the important of having female leaders in place before junior enlisted women arrive to provide them with a strong support network.

The first enlisted women to hit the sub force will be seasoned chief and senior chiefs recruited from five ratings — information systems technician, yeoman, culinary specialist, logistics specialist and independent duty corpsman.

As with female officers, enlisted women will start their integration on guided- and ballistic-missile submarines. Two crews will be integrated in 2016, with another two to four crews added each year through 2021. The move is dependent on getting enough volunteers from all eligible enlisted pay grades to make each crew viable.

Officers began serving this month aboard Virginia-class attack boats. But the arrival of female enlisted on those subs is slated for 2020, when new Virginia-class subs are delivered that will be built to accommodate enlisted women in berthing.

"CPOs with these ratings will be chosen to bring their current expertise and leadership skills aboard submarines quickly, which will be essential in the follow-on integration of junior female sailors," Vice Adm. Bill Moran, the chief of naval personnel, said in the initial message. "CPOs will be selected from these ratings for conversion and assignment in submarines until their important leadership role can be filled by the normal advancement process inside the submarine force."

As with all sub sailors, these chiefs will first attend basic enlisted submarine school and any needed rate-specific training prior to reporting to their first boat.

The first female petty officers eligible for submarine duty come from 11 ratings: sonar technician, fire control technician, machinist's mate (weapons) and (auxiliary), missile technician, information systems technician, electronics technician (navigation) and (communications), logistics specialist, yeoman and culinary specialist.

Non-designated enlisted women in the fleet can apply for these ratings, too, the message says.

As with the chiefs, enlisted females picked to convert into submarines will attend basic enlisted submarine school as well as any "A" and "C" needed to bring them up to speed.

The message also said that female sailors already in the nuclear power training pipeline — or those serving as junior instructors today — can also apply for submarine duty, but referred them to their career counselors for details.

Officials will also be recruiting women into the Navy for submarine duty.

Female officers began reporting to the sub force in late 2011. The first of the six female officers to join attack boat crews reported in January, with the rest expected to arrive within the next few months.

Officials insist the integration is going well, even as the effort has hit its first scandal with the disclosure that female officers aboard the ballistic-missile submarine Wyoming were secretly filmed undressing over a year-long period and the videos were shared among as many as a dozen shipmates.

Navy officials told Navy Times last year that surveys show significant interest among enlisted women in serving aboard submarines, but said they were unsure if that interest would translate into applications.

The Navy's plan has been to integrate women into submarines from the top down and the messages show that's still the plan. That decision was based on lessons learned from the integration of women onto ships, which started in the 1980s with auxiliary ships and continued aboard combatant ships in the 1990s.

NAVADMIN messages released Wednesday outline eligibility rules and application guidelines for chiefs and petty officers interested in submarine duty.

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## **CYBER**

### **25. General: Cyber bill needed to give the U.S. military an edge**

TheHill.com, Jan. 21 | Cory Bennett

For the U.S. military to gain a competitive advantage in cyberspace, Congress must pass cybersecurity information-sharing legislation, said Gen. Martin Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

The U.S. is facing a "level playing field" when it comes to cyber threats, Dempsey said in an interview with the Defense Department's official media outlet.

While the military has robust cyber defenses, it also relies on commercial networks with weaker cybersecurity, he said.

The imbalance presents "a significant vulnerability to our nation," and allows hackers to potentially compete with the U.S. military, Dempsey explained.

"We have authorities and capabilities that allow us to do a pretty good job of defending ourselves," he said. "But the vulnerability of the rest of America is a vulnerability of ours, and that's what we have to reconcile."

To bolster private sector cybersecurity, Congress must enable the exchange of cyber threat indicators between the public and private sectors, Dempsey said.

"We haven't done enough — that's just not internal to the military," Dempsey said. "We haven't done enough as a nation."

The issue has been at the forefront of policy makers' minds this past week.

The White House dropped its own cyber info-sharing legislative proposal on Jan. 13 and President Obama called on Congress to pass the measure during his State of the Union Address Tuesday night.

“I urge this Congress to finally pass the legislation we need to better meet the evolving threat of cyberattacks,” Obama said.

Privacy concerns will present a big hurdle to passage, though. Some worry the information exchange could give the government another venue for collecting Americans’ personal information.

Combining the multiple legislative proposals on the issue will also be time consuming.

But Dempsey believes the military can only gain the cyberspace upper hand after such legislation is passed.

“As the senior military officer of the most powerful military on the planet, I like to have the playing field tilted to my advantage,” he said. “I’d like the enemy to play uphill and us to play downhill.”

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## **INTELLIGENCE**

### **26. Vickers: U.S. Intel Advantage ‘Threatened by Multiple Challenges’**

SEAPOW Magazine Online, Jan. 21 | Otto Kreisher

WASHINGTON — Calling the last decade “a golden age for U.S. intelligence,” the top defense intelligence official on Wednesday still warned that because of a growing array of international challenges, “our intelligence advantage is something that we can’t take for granted.”

Michael Vickers, the undersecretary of defense for Intelligence, said the U.S. advantages in undersea warfare, space and air, including the expanding force of unmanned aerial systems, and improving human intelligence capabilities are the “first line of defense for warnings,” inform national security policy, provide the president with additional options and “help prevent some strategic surprises.”

But, he added in a speech to the Atlantic Council, “that advantage is threatened by multiple challenges,” including “unprecedented instability in the international system,” multiple security threats and technological changes.

Unlike during the Cold War, when the nation faced a single “enduring threat” from the Soviet Union and multiple “episodic” threats, now several of the threats “are likely to be enduring,” Vickers said.

Among the threats he cited were the expansion of the “global jihadist” movement, aided by instability across the broader Middle East and Northern Africa; the rise of China; the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and cyber capabilities; “Russia’s challenge to the international order,” and the spread of new encryption methods that “make intelligence gathering more challenging.”

Vickers also expressed concern about significant challenges to the U.S. military’s ability to “project power into what we call denied areas,” which is a growing problem for the Navy and Marine Corps, particularly in the Western Pacific.

Asked about Russia's threat to Ukraine and the possibility that the economic pain inflicted on Russia by the international sanctions and plunging oil prices could trigger a violent response from Moscow, Vickers was cautious.

While acknowledging that international powers "can always do unpredictable things" and that Russian President Vladimir Putin "has had a vision of strengthening Russia's power" over its neighbors, he said Putin "also is a pragmatist."

Vickers also downplayed the threat of a conflict with China and any international threat from the Houthi rebellion in Yemen.

But he expressed concern about the "expansion of the global jihadists" and extremist groups such as al Qaeda and the Islamic State, or ISIL, that benefit from safe havens in ungoverned areas, which he said were "greater than any time in our history."

Asked about the historic complaints over competition and duplicate efforts among the many different intelligence entities, Vickers said he thought the reforms of the past decade, which included creation of the director of national intelligence (DNI) and his office, "have done a lot to strengthen intelligence management across the department and inter-agency."

He said James Clapper, the current DNI, "has made it the signature effort to foster much greater intelligence integration, not just in his office, but across the agencies." And he attributed the successful mission to kill Osama bin Laden to cooperation among the CIA, Defense Intelligence and the Special Operations Command. "That's the norm now," he said.

"Director Clapper and I have integrated processes in terms of the national intelligence programs and various forms of military intelligence ... to make sure that we are rationalizing our efforts across the intelligence enterprise," Vickers said.

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## NOTABLE COMMENTARY

### 27. War returns to Ukraine

*Mr. Putin's aggression is more than a hiccup in relations with the West*

Washington Post, Jan. 22, Pg. A14 | Editorial

European foreign ministers met Monday to consider proposals for resuming diplomatic contacts and cooperation with Russia in a range of areas - a strategy pressed by several governments that wish to paper over the breach opened by Moscow's invasion of Ukraine. Unfortunately for the doves, the discussion came just as Russian forces, after several weeks of relative calm, launched a new offensive in eastern Ukraine.

By Tuesday, the Ukrainian government and the U.S. ambassador to Ukraine were reporting that fresh Russian army units were crossing the border and attacking Ukrainian positions north of the city of Luhansk and at the Donetsk airport. "The situation," European Union foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini told us shortly after arriving in Washington, "is not going in the right direction." Appropriately, the European ministers concluded there were no grounds for altering the existing sanctions on Russia, some of which will come up for renewal at a summit meeting in March - and the plan for detente came under heavy criticism.

The episode illustrates a pervasive disconnect in Western thinking about the regime of Vladimir Putin. As Kadri Liik of the European Council on Foreign Relations pointed out recently, many Western leaders persist in seeing the Ukraine invasion as a hiccup in relations with Russia that can be smoothed over, rather than as a demonstration that Mr. Putin's agenda is fundamentally at odds with Europe's security interests and its values. Because of their attachment to the hiccup theory, governments - including the Obama administration - have refused to take steps, such as providing the Ukrainian government with defensive weapons, that could help stop Mr. Putin's aggression. Instead, they concoct futile schemes for "reengaging" the Russian ruler.

Ms. Mogherini, a former Italian foreign minister often described as a leading advocate of this soft line, told us that she did not foresee "a return to business as usual" with Moscow. She stressed that European ministers were committed to the principle that any alteration of sanctions must be linked to Russia's full implementation of the Minsk agreement, an accord signed in September that requires the removal of Russian forces from Ukraine and international monitoring of the border. Meeting those terms would require an unprecedented reversal from Mr. Putin, who has never allowed a Russian retreat from occupied territories in Eurasia.

Nevertheless, the renewed fighting in eastern Ukraine underlines the reality that the European Union and the Obama administration need a more coherent strategy for answering Mr. Putin's actual - as opposed to wished-for - behavior. While sanctions have had an impact on the Russian economy, they clearly have not deterred Mr. Putin from continuing the war. As a start, there must be a stronger commitment to the government in Kiev, which is in worse shape than the Russian regime. Struggling to hold the military line, it may soon be forced to default on its foreign debts because of a lack of Western support. So far, U.S. and E.U. pledges for this year amount to \$4 billion against a \$15 billion funding gap.

Rather than debating when they can resume trade discussions with Moscow, Western leaders should be deciding whether they are willing to do what will be necessary to preserve Ukraine's independence.

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## **28. Give diplomacy a chance**

Washington Post, Jan. 22, Pg. A15 | Laurent Fabius, Philip Hammond, Frank-Walter Steinmeier and Federica Mogherini

In November 2013, after many months of negotiations, the E3+3 (France, Germany and Britain, together with the United States, Russia and China, a partnership also referred to sometimes as the P5+1) and Iran reached an interim agreement on Iran's nuclear program. This agreement has had three main benefits.

First, it has stopped the progress of the most sensitive elements of Iran's nuclear program. Under the Joint Plan of Action agreed to by Iran and the six partners in the talks, which are being coordinated by the European Union, Iran has ceased production of its most highly enriched uranium, limited its production of new centrifuges for enriching uranium and refrained from installing additional centrifuges. Iran has also agreed to cease progress toward bringing on line the nuclear reactor at Arak. As a result, Iran today is further away from obtaining enough fissile material for a nuclear weapon than before the negotiations.

At the same time, the international community has gained improved access to Iran's nuclear facilities, allowing the world to verify whether Iran is living up to its commitments. Whereas previous inspections only occurred once

every few weeks, the International Atomic Energy Agency is now able to conduct daily inspections of the Natanz and Fordow facilities, and the Arak reactor is now subject to monthly inspections.

And last but not least, the interim agreement has given us time and space to try to negotiate a long-term settlement to the Iranian nuclear issue, which is critical for the future of international and regional security.

This progress would have been impossible without the international consensus on the threat posed by Iran's nuclear program and the unity with which we have acted. Together, the international community built a sanctions regime that brought Iran to the negotiating table.

Today, the IAEA continues to verify that Iran is meeting its commitments. In exchange, we are fulfilling our commitment to provide Iran with limited sanctions relief, even as we continue to enforce our core sanctions regime and keep the pressure on Iran. And, during the past year, the six partners have worked in close consultation with each other and with our close allies to keep negotiating - to see if we can achieve a comprehensive and lasting solution to the threat of a nuclear Iran.

Our objective remains clear. We want a comprehensive solution that both recognizes the Iranian people's right to access peaceful nuclear energy and allows the international community to verify that Iran cannot obtain a nuclear weapon. Any agreement must provide concrete, verifiable and long-lasting assurances that Iran's nuclear program is and will remain exclusively peaceful. Nothing less will do. It is now up to Iran to make a strategic choice between open-ended cooperation and further isolation.

To be sure, difficult challenges lie ahead, and critical differences between Iran and the international community must be addressed. That is why we extended the negotiating window until later this year.

In this context, our responsibility is to make sure diplomacy is given the best possible chance to succeed. Maintaining pressure on Iran through our existing sanctions is essential. But introducing new hurdles at this critical stage of the negotiations, including through additional nuclear-related sanctions legislation on Iran, would jeopardize our efforts at a critical juncture. While many Iranians know how much they stand to gain by overcoming isolation and engaging with the world, there are also those in Tehran who oppose any nuclear deal. We should not give them new arguments. New sanctions at this moment might also fracture the international coalition that has made sanctions so effective so far. Rather than strengthening our negotiating position, new sanctions legislation at this point would set us back.

Let us be clear: If Iran violates its commitments or proves unwilling to agree to a comprehensive, verifiable understanding that meets the international community's bottom line, we will have no choice but to further increase pressure on it. For the first time, however, we may have a real chance to resolve one of the world's long-standing security threats - and the chance to do it peacefully. We can't let that chance pass us by or do anything to derail our progress. We have a historic opportunity that might not come again. With the eyes of the world upon us, we must demonstrate our commitment to diplomacy to try to resolve the Iranian nuclear issue within the deadline we have set. That is the surest path to reaching a comprehensive, lasting solution that will make the world and the region safer.

*--Laurent Fabius is France's minister of foreign affairs and international development. Philip Hammond is Britain's foreign secretary. Frank-Walter Steinmeier is Germany's federal minister for foreign affairs. Federica Mogherini is high representative of the European Union for foreign affairs and security policy*



## **29. When Women Become Terrorists**

New York Times, Jan. 22, Pg. A27 | Jayne Huckerby

DURHAM, N.C. -- Since the terror attacks in Paris two weeks ago, the French police have been on the hunt for Hayat Boumeddiene, the partner of Amedy Coulibaly, one of the slain gunmen. She is now suspected to be in Syria. Some news reports speculate that Ms. Boumeddiene, 26, may have been "the more radical of the two." Yet one of the first questions that French authorities intend to ask her is, they say, "if she did this under influence, if she did it by ideology, if she did it to aid and abet."

While much will be made in the coming months of France's intelligence failures, the West's inability to appreciate the role that women play in terror should come under the highest scrutiny. Take the role of women in the Islamic State group, also known as ISIS or ISIL. While the group oppresses many women, many also flock to its ranks. Roughly 10 percent of its Western recruits are female, often lured by their peers through social media and instant messaging. The percentage is much higher in France: An estimated 63 of the 350 French nationals believed to be with the group are women, or just under 20 percent.

This story is both a new one and an old one. Women have long been involved in terror of all stripes, from female neo-Nazis in Europe to Chechen "black widow" suicide bombers.

Indeed, despite stereotypes about their domesticity and passivity -- the idea that they must always be under men's influence or tricked into joining -- women are drawn to groups like the Islamic State by many of the same forces as men: adventure, inequality, alienation and the pull of the cause.

Once there, they commit violence against other women, including as part of all-female brigades enforcing female morality codes requiring modest dress and sex segregation. They operate checkpoints and go on home raids; they are also reportedly recruiters, trainers of female suicide bombers, wives and homemakers, fund-raisers and propagandists. They also help sanitize the group's image by posting photos of themselves drinking milkshakes on Instagram and writing chatty, lighthearted tweets.

But the news media and policy makers are playing catch-up when it comes to understanding the full extent of women's roles in jihadist groups. A large part of the problem is the tendency to fixate on terrorist violence against women, whether it be Boko Haram's mass kidnapping of schoolgirls in Nigeria or the Islamic State's sexual violence, slavery, kidnappings and forced marriage. We prefer to see terror through the lens of gender, positing radical Muslim men against women, with the West as their only defender.

Myths and misinformation abound. Islamic State fighters are afraid of Kurdish all-women brigades (they aren't). Women join groups like the Islamic State only to become "jihadi brides" (they don't). The Islamic State mandated female genital mutilation in Mosul, Iraq (it didn't).

Aphorisms about the motivations of terrorists are appealing; if only it were true that, as the saying goes, "what terrorists fear most is educated girls." But building schools and investing in girls' education should be long-term investments that are ends in themselves, not knee-jerk reactions to extremist violence. Merely defining the West in contrast to "barbarism" and talking of "rescuing" women fall short at best; at worst, doing so sets women up as symbolic targets for terrorist violence, squeezing them between terror and counterterror.

Instead, more attention must be paid to the specific factors that attract women to terrorist groups and the roles they play once there. For example, European women in the Islamic State have spoken of how alienation and restrictions on their religious practices back home, like France's ban on wearing burqas in public, helped push them into the group (Ms. Boumeddiene's reported loss of her job as a cashier for wearing the niqab should be examined in this light).

Efforts to prevent women from leaving for Iraq and Syria need to address such grievances, just as programs for those who return must be tailored to their specific experiences in the group. The strong influence of social media and peer networks also points to including more young women in these efforts, as well as female community leaders and family members.

This may not sound like much, but for some governments, such targeted approaches are a long way off. Many still deny women's involvement in terror at all, particularly in jihadist groups, or focus only on women's role in preventing men from radicalizing. Meanwhile, those same groups are deploying more female suicide bombers who can easily evade detection because of such blind spots. Earlier this month Boko Haram detonated bombs strapped to three girls -- possibly some of the abducted schoolchildren -- who were able to make it past security guards because of their age and gender.

Terrorists are strategic about using women, in increasingly chilling ways. To fight them, we have to move past simplistic assumptions about gender and terror and get serious about helping women and girls who are on this deadly path, as well as their would-be victims.

*--Jayne Huckerby, an associate clinical professor of law and the director of the International Human Rights Clinic at the Duke University School of Law, is a co-editor of "Gender, National Security and Counter-Terrorism: Human Rights Perspectives"*

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### **30. Obama's American Sniper**

Wall Street Journal (Wonder Land), Jan. 22, Pg. A9 | Daniel Henninger

Barack Obama was 15 minutes into his State of the Union speech when I arrived home to watch it, having just walked back from seeing "American Sniper."

Watching a movie about a Navy SEAL who served four tours fighting in Iraq was not the best way to enhance the experience of a Barack Obama speech. As a matter of fact, it was pretty unbearable.

Because Clint Eastwood directed "American Sniper" the movie is about more than the story of Chris Kyle, the highly skilled rifle marksman from Texas. In 2006, Mr. Eastwood presented two movies about the famous World War II battle of Iwo Jima. "Letters from Iwo Jima" told the story from the perspective of Japanese soldiers, and "Flags of Our Fathers" from the Americans' side.

So "American Sniper" is not a crude paean to "our boys" in the Iraq war. What it does is convey the extraordinary personal, psychological and physical sacrifice of the U.S. Marines who fought al Qaeda in Fallujah, Ramadi and the other towns of Iraq's Anbar province beginning in 2003 and through the period of the Anbar Awakening, which ended with the Marines pacifying the province.

It's just a movie, so even "American Sniper's" small slice only hints at the price America paid -- some 3,500 combat deaths and another 32,000 wounded -- to bring Iraq to a point of relative, if fragile, stability in 2011.

Opinions will differ, often bitterly, on the war in Iraq and the reasons for it. In the movie, a painful funeral scene captures that ambivalence. But what is just not possible to choke down is President Obama's decision in 2011 to reduce the U.S.'s residual military presence to virtually zero. It was a decision to waste what the Marines and Army had done.

Announcing the decision at the White House on Oct. 21, Mr. Obama said, "After taking office, I announced a new strategy that would end our combat mission in Iraq and remove all of our troops by the end of 2011." (Emphasis added.)

Military analysts at the time, in government and on the outside, warned Mr. Obama that a zero U.S. presence could put the war's gains and achievements at risk. He did it anyway and ever since Mr. Obama has repeatedly bragged about this decision in public speeches, notably to the graduating cadets of West Point last May.

In January, months before that West Point speech, the terrorist army of Islamic State, or ISIS, seized back control of both Fallujah and Ramadi in Anbar province. The month after the West Point speech, the city of Mosul and its population of one million fell to Islamic State, and here we are with the barbarians on the loose there, in Yemen, in Nigeria and in France.

Watching "American Sniper," it is impossible to separate these catastrophes from seeing what the Marines did and endured to secure northern Iraq. Again, anyone is entitled to hate the Iraq war. But no serious person would want a president to make a decision that would allow so much personal sacrifice to simply evaporate. Which, in his serene self-confidence, is what Barack Obama did. That absolute drawdown was a decision of fantastic foolishness.

In the one spontaneous moment of Tuesday evening's speech, Mr. Obama cracked back at some chiding Republicans that he'd won two elections. And he's right. The first election was a remarkable, historic event for the United States. His second election was a historic electoral mistake, leaving the country and the world to be led by a president who is living on his own fantasy island.

He said in the State of the Union that we are leading "a broad coalition" against ISIS. We are? What coalition? Mainly it's the Iraqi army and Kurds battling for survival alongside U.S. air support.

The president said we are "supporting a moderate opposition in Syria." But twice in 2014 Mr. Obama derided the Syrian moderates as dentists, pharmacists and teachers. U.S. support for the moderates is de minimis.

On Ukraine, Mr. Obama said, "We're upholding the principle that bigger nations can't bully the small." But bullying is exactly what Russia's Vladimir Putin is doing to Ukraine because Mr. Obama refuses to give its army even basic defensive weapons.

Then there's the grandest foreign-policy self-delusion of the Obama presidency -- the never-ending nuclear arms deal with Iran. Mr. Obama said we've "halted the progress of its nuclear program." Slowed perhaps but no one thinks we've "halted" Iran's multifacility nuclear-weapon and ballistic-missile project. Only in the Obama fantasy is it halted.

Sen. Robert Menendez, the New Jersey foreign-policy Democrat, who sat bolted to his seat during the speech, said the next day that the administration's talking points on Iran now sound "straight out of Tehran."

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There is a lot of American flag in "American Sniper." When Chris Kyle's 2013 funeral procession drives down I-35 in Waco, people with American flags line the streets and overpasses. Until the American people vote for a new president in 2016, what all of that represents will remain a world away from Washington.

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