



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

AS OF 0530 HOURS, JANUARY 23

OVERVIEW

Army Gen. Lloyd Austin, commander of CENTCOM, told the *Wall Street Journal* that a coalition of Iraq's most experienced military forces, including American-trained Sunni fighters and Kurdish Peshmerga, would be ready by as early as spring to begin an offensive to retake Mosul from ISIL militants. Separately, Secretary Chuck Hagel said he disagreed with Iraqi Prime Minister's Haider al-Abadi's assertion that the U.S. has been too slow to provide weapons and training, saying his remarks were not helpful or correct. In Saudi Arabia, Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz died at age 90 and was succeeded by his brother, Crown Prince Salman, according to state television. Also of note, Yemeni President Abdu Rabbu Mansour Hadi and his cabinet resigned amid a standoff with Houthi rebels, signaling deep uncertainty for U.S. counterterrorism strategy in the country.

NEWS HEADLINES AT 0500

- Islamic State deadline on Japanese captives passes with no word on fate
- In a reversal, Argentine president says prosecutor's death was not a suicide
- Trial begins for alleged al-Qaeda member charged in 1998 embassy bombings
- U.S., Cuba open talks on re-establishing ties
- FBI arrests top New York Democrat lawmaker

OVERSEAS HEADLINES OF NOTE

- *Arutz Sheva*: Pentagon estimates 6,000 jihadists have been killed
- *France24*: France to dispatch 40 more troops to advise Iraqi army
- *Sputnik*: Pentagon to cooperate with Japan over IS holding Japanese hostages

THIS DAY IN MILITARY HISTORY

- 1973 – President Nixon announces that Henry Kissinger and Le Duc Tho, the chief North Vietnamese negotiator, have initialed a peace agreement in Paris "to end the war and bring peace with honor in Vietnam and Southeast Asia"

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Wall Street Journal, Jan. 23, Pg. A1 | Julian E. Barnes

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2. Shrewd Force Who Reshaped Saudi Arabia

New York Times, Jan. 23, Pg. A1 | Douglas Martin and Ben Hubbard

King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, who came to the throne in old age and earned a reputation as a cautious reformer even as the Arab Spring revolts toppled heads of state and Islamic State militants threatened the

Muslim establishment that he represented, died on Friday, according to a statement on state television. He was 90.

3. Yemeni leader, cabinet resign

Washington Post, Jan. 23, Pg. A1 | Ali al-Mujahed and Hugh Naylor

Yemen's Western-backed president and his cabinet resigned Thursday amid deepening turmoil that left Shiite rebels in effective control and threw into question this nation's continued participation in the U.S. fight against terrorism.

IRAQ/SYRIA

4. Citing Plunge in Oil Prices, Iraq Seeks Arms on Credit to Fight ISIS

New York Times, Jan. 23, Pg. A10 | Michael R. Gordon

Battered by a sharp decline in oil prices, Iraq is asking Western allies to provide weapons on credit for its fight against the Islamic State until Baghdad is in a better position to pay.

5. In Mosul, Islamic State turns captured city into fortress

Reuters, Jan. 22 | Ahmed Rasheed and Ned Parker

In a government building in Mosul, a handful of Iraqi contractors gathered to compete for a tender last month. It was the kind of routine session that happens in cities everywhere -- except here the contract was for fortifications ordered by the new rulers in town, Islamic State. Interviews with 11 Mosul residents, several of whom fled this month, reveal how Islamic State has created a police state strong enough to weather severe popular discontent and military setbacks, including the deaths of senior leaders.

6. 'We're going to kill' Iraq militants who attack Canadian troops – PM

Reuters, Jan. 22 | David Ljunggren

Prime Minister Stephen Harper denied on Thursday that Canadian military advisers in Iraq would be dragged into combat against Islamic State militants despite a recent clash but said Canada's forces would kill anyone who attacked them.

MIDEAST

7. Salman Ascends Throne to Become Saudi King

New York Times, Jan. 23, Pg. A9 | Ben Hubbard

The new king of Saudi Arabia, Salman bin Abdul-Aziz Al Saud, has spent more than a half-century among the top echelons one of the world's most powerful families and is known to serve as mediator and peacekeeper between its often competing factions.

8. U.S. Sees New Period of Uncertainty

Wall Street Journal (Analysis), Jan 23, Pg. A10 | Gerald F. Seib and Jay Solomon

U.S. officials worry that the death of Saudi King Abdullah ushers in a period of new uncertainty in a key relationship that already was tense.

9. Yemen upheaval leaves U.S. drone strikes, other anti-terror efforts in limbo

Washington Post, Jan. 23, Pg. A12 | Craig Whitlock

The White House's strategy for fighting al-Qaeda in Yemen - repeatedly presented as a model by President Obama - was left in tatters Thursday by the resignation of the man who personally approved U.S. drone strikes in the country, and the collapse of its central government.

UKRAINE/RUSSIA

10. Chaotic Retreat Follows Ukrainians' Withdrawal From Donetsk Airport

New York Times, Jan. 23, Pg. A8 | Andrew E. Kramer and Rick Lyman

The ruins of the once gleaming and modern Donetsk airport, site of near relentless fighting in recent days, finally fell on Thursday to pro-Russian rebel forces who then paraded captured Ukrainian soldiers through the streets of the embattled city.

11. NATO says detects signs of increased Russian involvement in eastern Ukraine

Reuters, Jan. 22 | Adrian Croft

NATO has detected signs of heightened Russian involvement in fighting in parts of eastern Ukraine, the alliance's top military commander said on Thursday.

EUROPE

12. US military bolsters security at European bases

Agence France-Presse, Jan. 22 | Dan De Luce

The US military has stepped up security at its bases across Europe in the aftermath of deadly attacks by Islamists in Paris, officials said Thursday.

AFRICA

13. Wider Chaos Threatens as Fighters Seize Branch of Libya's Central Bank

New York Times, Jan. 23, Pg. A9 | David D. Kirkpatrick

The battle for control of Libya threatened to break open its central bank on Thursday as fighters with one of the country's two warring factions seized control of its Benghazi branch, risking an armed scramble for its gold reserves that could cripple the last functioning institution in the country.

14. Nigeria's campaign against Boko Haram hampered by 'cowards' – aide

Reuters, Jan. 22 | Estelle Shirbon and David Clarke

Nigeria's campaign against Islamist Boko Haram insurgents is being hampered by "cowards" in its armed forces, its presidential security adviser said in a rare public sign of high-level unhappiness with the effort.

POLITICS

15. Obama Not Planning to Meet With Israeli Premier

New York Times, Jan. 23, Pg. A3 | David E. Sanger, Michael D. Shear and Jodi Rudoren

The White House said on Thursday that President Obama would not meet Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel when he comes here in March to speak to a joint session of Congress and to lobby for new sanctions on Iran that Mr. Obama opposes, the latest twist in a dispute that has marked a new low in relations between the two leaders and which now threatens the chances of a nuclear deal with Tehran.

DEFENSE DEPARTMENT

16. Hagel: Vietnam War's lessons still echo today

MilitaryTimes.com, Jan. 23 | Andrew Tilghman

It's been 47 years since Chuck Hagel patrolled the thick jungles of Vietnam as an Army squad leader. But even now, in his pristine office at the Pentagon overlooking the Potomac River, the defense secretary still can vividly recall the night in 1968 when his armored personnel carrier hit a 500-pound mine.

17. Fast Track on Drug for Ebola Has Faltered

New York Times, Jan. 23, Pg. B1 | Andrew Pollack

As Ebola raged through West Africa last summer, an experimental drug was tried for the first time on two American aid workers in Liberia who were gravely ill with the virus. Both recovered, one of them rapidly. Though it could not be said for sure that the drug, ZMapp, was responsible, patients and doctors began clamoring for it. But there was enough to treat only a handful of patients. Federal officials vowed to produce more. Six months later, very little has been produced, diminishing the chances that the drug can be used to treat large numbers of patients in the current outbreak, which appears to be ebbing.

GUANTÁNAMO

18. Hagel: Yemen unrest could affect transfers from Guantánamo

TheHill.com, Jan. 22 | Kristina Wong

Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel said Thursday that recent unrest in Yemen "has to be factored in" when deciding whether to release Yemeni detainees from the prison at Guantánamo Bay.

19. Guantanamo Navy base commander relieved of duties amid probe

Reuters, Jan. 22 | David Alexander

The commander of the U.S. Navy base at Guantanamo Bay has been relieved of his duties after an investigation uncovered evidence of an inappropriate relationship between him and a civilian woman whose husband was found dead earlier this month, a U.S. official said on Thursday.

20. Egyptian held at Guantánamo goes before parole board

Miami Herald Online, Jan. 22 | Carol Rosenberg

A chronically ill Egyptian prisoner who was brought to Guantánamo a decade ago as a suspected al-Qaida explosives expert went before an inter-agency parole board Thursday and, in the small slice the public was permitted to see, didn't say a word — and neither did his attorney.

21. Lawyer for former Australian Guantanamo detainee says U.S. agrees he is innocent

Reuters, Jan. 22 | Jane Wardell

The United States has agreed that Australian David Hicks, jailed on terrorism charges for five years at Guantanamo, is innocent, his lawyer said on Friday.

ARMY

22. Army leaders now hope to slow the drawdown

ArmyTimes.com, Jan. 22 | Michelle Tan

The Army is considering taking measures to slow the drawdown, though the service still plans to eventually reach an end-strength of 450,000 active-duty troops. Army Secretary John McHugh, in a Wednesday interview with Army Times, said he hopes to "retain some faces in our structure to fill out units that are undermanned."

23. Full Speed Ahead On Wargames – Gen. Odierno

BreakingDefense.com, Jan. 22 | Sydney J. Freedberg Jr.

The US Army is trying to reinvent itself, much as it did during the Great Depression. Even if the steep cuts called sequestration return in 2016 — as is current law — the Army would rather get smaller than shortchange innovation, Chief of Staff Ray Odierno said Thursday. The service will hold annual wargames on new ways of fighting, Gen. Odierno said, the first of them this August on the concept formerly known as Air-Sea Battle.

AIR FORCE

24. 2 star's 'treason' comments spark call for an investigation

AirForceTimes.com, Jan. 22 | Brian Everstine

A prominent lawmaker is calling for an investigation of a major general's reported comments blasting officers as treasonous if they work with Congress against Air Force plans to retire the A-10.

25. Officer is found guilty of drug abuse

Great Falls Tribune (MT), Jan. 22, Pg. A1 | Jenn Rowell

Second Lt. Nicole Dalmazzi was found guilty Wednesday of illegal drug use and was dismissed from the Air Force and will serve one month in confinement at Chouteau County Detention Center. Dalmazzi, who was assigned to Malmstrom Air Force Base, had also been charged with obstruction of justice, but in a pre-trial agreement, that charge was withdrawn since she pleaded guilty to illegal drug use.

‘AMERICAN SNIPER’

26. Real Snipers Face Real Choices

USA Today (Weekend Extra), Jan. 23, Pg. A1 | Jim Michaels

For all the debate surrounding the movie American Sniper, few people know the moral choices involved in the job better than those trained to pull the trigger.

NOTABLE COMMENTARY

27. The Fight For Mosul

Washington Post, Jan. 23, Pg. A20 | Atheel al-Nujaifi

The Jan. 16 news article “ ‘Liberation camp’ doesn’t live up to its name” accurately highlighted the challenges facing those of us in Iraq who want to move swiftly to liberate Mosul, Iraq’s second-largest city, where more than a million Iraqis are living under the terrorist Islamic State. The group’s idea of governance includes beheadings, crucifixions and incompetence at delivering basic services, including clean water. But missing from the article was the new spirit of working together that unites the new Baghdad government of Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, a Shiite, and those of us from Mosul and Nineveh province, who are mainly Sunnis, Kurds, Yazidis and Christians, a multiethnic, multi-religious society that has lived harmoniously for centuries.

28. The Yemen mess

Washington Post, Jan. 23, Pg. A20 | Editorial

In devoting 250 of the 6,800 words of his State of the Union address to the fight against "violent extremism," President Obama offered a boilerplate description of his policy. "Instead of sending large ground forces overseas," he said, "we're partnering with nations from South Asia to North Africa to deny safe haven to terrorists who threaten America." As he spoke, his strategy was crumbling in a nation he failed to mention: Yemen, home to the branch of al-Qaeda that claimed credit for the recent attacks in France and has repeatedly attempted to strike the U.S. homeland.

29. No Confidence Votes on Iran

Wall Street Journal, Jan. 23, Pg. A13 | Editorial

President Obama is unhappy with House Speaker John Boehner for inviting Israel's Prime Minister to address Congress without consulting the White House, with spokesman Josh Earnest calling it a “departure” from protocol. What Mr. Obama should really worry about is that Members of Congress in both parties are showing a stunning lack of confidence in his Iran diplomacy.

30. Iran’s emerging empire

Washington Post, Jan. 23, Pg. A21 | Charles Krauthammer

While Iran's march toward a nuclear bomb has provoked a major clash between the White House and Congress, Iran's march toward conventional domination of the Arab world has been largely overlooked. In Washington, that is. The Arabs have noticed. And the pro-American ones, the Gulf Arabs in particular, are deeply worried.

TOP STORIES

1. U.S., Iraq Set Sights On Mosul Offensive

Wall Street Journal, Jan. 23, Pg. A1 | Julian E. Barnes

TAMPA, Fla. -- The U.S. and Iraq have begun preparations for an assault by summer to retake Mosul, selecting and training military units and cutting supply lines to Islamic State militants who control Iraq's second-largest city, the top American commander in the Middle East said.

Gen. Lloyd Austin, the head of the military's Central Command, told The Wall Street Journal that the international campaign against Islamic State has inflicted significant damage. Opposing forces have reclaimed about 300 square

miles of territory in Iraq and killed some 6,000 members of the Sunni radical group, eliminating about half its leadership.

U.S. defense officials have bristled under criticism from Iraqi officials and others that the campaign against Islamic State is stalled or moving too slowly. U.S. Central Command is eager to show that airstrikes are having an effect on the ground and that the American and Iraqi militaries have a plan to continue to drive fighters out of their key strongholds in Iraq.

U.S. officials said they don't have a good estimate of the current size of Islamic State forces, although they were once estimated at up to 14,000. They concede that Islamic State fighters still control large parts of northern and western Iraq, but say much of the Kurdish-controlled areas have been reclaimed. Islamic State captured Mosul, a city of 600,000, in June at the start of its blitz across parts of Iraq.

On Wednesday and Thursday, U.S. airstrikes focused on cutting supply lines between militants who control Mosul and Islamic State's stronghold in Syria. The planes conducted 18 strikes near Mosul and Sinjar, hitting Islamic State fighters, staging positions and armored vehicles, according to the U.S. military.

A coalition of Iraq's most experienced military forces, including Kurdish fighters known as Peshmerga and U.S.-trained Sunni fighters, would be ready by the spring or early summer to begin the offensive to retake Mosul, said Gen. Austin, the chief architect of the international military campaign against Islamic State fighters in Iraq and Syria.

Gen. Austin, speaking at his headquarters in Tampa, addressed questions about the pace of the campaign by saying the U.S. must wait for Iraq's forces to be ready before moving.

"If we did things alone or with some of the other allies on the ground, it could move faster," he said. "But the Iraqis have to do this themselves."

Gen. Austin said he had not decided whether to recommend that U.S. ground troops accompany local units pushing into Mosul, but emphasized the military would "do what it takes."

He said there are signs that Islamic State is having trouble finding new fighters -- noting their efforts to recruit child soldiers and to forcibly conscript fighters in Mosul. Defense officials said the estimates of the number of militants killed comes from the battle-damage assessments done by the U.S. after airstrikes. A defense official said the U.S. has a high degree of confidence in their count and that, if anything, it is a conservative estimate. Still highlighting enemy casualties is controversial, and even Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel said body counts haven't been an accurate measure of progress in the past.

In talks with British Prime Minister David Cameron in London earlier Thursday, Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi said his forces needed more ammunition, equipment and training, a spokeswoman for Mr. Cameron said. In public comments, Mr. Abadi said the sharp drop in oil prices had devastated Iraq's economy.

Mr. Abadi was in London for an international conference to discuss strategy in the fight against Islamic State. Secretary of State John Kerry told the conference the support for Iraqi efforts against Islamic State wouldn't fail for want of weapons or ammunition. Mr. Kerry said a "very significant" number of M16 rifles were on the way.

In Washington, Mr. Hagel criticized earlier comments from Mr. Abadi criticizing the amount and pace of the American weapons supplies, saying the prime minister should be mindful of the efforts the U.S. and the coalition are making on behalf of Iraq.

U.S. officials say they believe the population in Mosul will support the Iraqi forces. But they expect a tough fight, with the possibility of booby-trapped houses and roadside bombs.

The U.S. has begun training new Iraqi security forces at four sites, according to military officials. There are about 1,000 Iraqis at the al-Asad base in Anbar province, 1,800 at the Bismaya base to the south of Baghdad, 1,300 at Taji base to the north of the capital, and 300 Kurds in Erbil -- the capital of the semiautonomous Kurdistan region.

Those forces won't be directly involved in the attack on Mosul. Instead U.S. commanders are urging Iraqi leaders to use those newly trained units to take over defensive positions around Baghdad and elsewhere and send more battle-experienced units to Mosul.

Under that plan, Gen. Austin said two Iraqi divisions are expected to lead the force that retakes Mosul this spring, forces that will go to U.S.-run training centers in the coming weeks to prepare for the offensive. Those forces will receive four to six weeks training by the U.S. to prepare for the fight in Mosul, according to military officials.

Military officials say they face a challenge in convincing Iraqi leaders to release their best and most experienced units from the defense of Baghdad and commit them to the offensive. Senior U.S. officials have told Iraqi counterparts that the only way to ultimately ensure the safety of the capital is to push Islamic State forces out of Mosul and other key areas they continue to control.

"Most of the best Iraqi units are in Baghdad, and that is the thing we have to shake them free of," said a senior military officer.

Last year, Gen. Martin Dempsey, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, raised the possibility in testimony before Congress that U.S. troops might need to accompany Iraqi forces during the Mosul fight to help call in airstrikes. Gen. Austin said he had made no decision but said he may request that the White House send in U.S. advisers alongside the Iraqi divisions.

"I am going to do what it takes to be successful, and it may very well turn out . . . that we may need to ask to have our advisers accompany the troops that are moving on Mosul," he said.

He predicted Islamic State's leadership wouldn't be able to reestablish their supply lines, opening a possibility that Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the group's leader, could be forced to abandon Mosul.

"He could make a decision to fight and retake those lines of communications, which I expect him to do. I expect him to ultimately lose that fight," Gen. Austin said. "He could make a decision to leave Mosul altogether and go back into Syria."

--Nour Malas, Nicholas Winning and Jay Solomon contributed to this article

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2. Shrewd Force Who Reshaped Saudi Arabia

New Uncertainty for a Region in Turmoil

New York Times, Jan. 23, Pg. A1 | Douglas Martin and Ben Hubbard

King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, who came to the throne in old age and earned a reputation as a cautious reformer even as the Arab Spring revolts toppled heads of state and Islamic State militants threatened the Muslim establishment that he represented, died on Friday, according to a statement on state television. He was 90.

The Royal Court said in a statement broadcast across the kingdom that the king had died early Friday. The royal court did not disclose the exact cause of death. An announcement quoted by the official Saudi Press Agency said the king had a lung infection when he was admitted on Dec. 31 to a Riyadh hospital.

The king's death adds yet another element of uncertainty in a region already overwhelmed by crises and as Saudi Arabia is itself in a struggle with Iran for regional dominance.

The royal family moved quickly to assure a smooth transition of power in a nation that is a close ally of the United States, the world's largest exporter of oil and the religious center of the Islamic faith. In a televised statement, Abdullah's brother, Crown Prince Salman, announced that the king had died and that he had assumed the throne.

Salman's ascension appears to signal that the kingdom will preserve its current policies, but he faces exceptional new challenges. Though Saudi Arabia has traditionally preferred to push its agenda through checkbook diplomacy, it has taken a far more muscular approach since the Arab Spring, offering generous support to its allies, like Egypt, while working to oppose adversaries like President Bashar al-Assad of Syria and the Muslim Brotherhood.

Even as the drop in the price of oil has depleted its own treasury, it has steadfastly refused to cut the supply, hoping to increase market share at the expense of adversaries that are less able to pump oil at low prices.

"As our countries worked together to confront many challenges, I always valued King Abdullah's perspective and appreciated our genuine and warm friendship," President Obama said in a statement issued by the White House. "As a leader, he was always candid and had the courage of his convictions."

Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr. announced that he was to lead the American delegation "to pay our respects and offer condolences."

Accidents of birth and geology made Abdullah one of the world's wealthiest and most powerful men. In control of a fifth of the world's known petroleum reserves, he traveled to medical appointments abroad in a fleet of jumbo jets, and the changes he wrought in Saudi society were fueled by gushers of oil money.

As king he also bore the title of custodian of Islam's holiest sites, Mecca and Medina, making him one of the faith's most important figures.

Abdullah had grown accustomed to the levers of power long before his ascension to the throne in August 2005. After his predecessor, King Fahd, a half brother, had a stroke in November 1995, Abdullah, then the crown prince, ruled in the king's name.

Yet Abdullah spoke as plainly as the Bedouin tribesmen with whom he had been sent to live in his youth. He refused to be called "your majesty" and discouraged commoners from kissing his hand. He shocked the 7,000 or so

Saudi princes and princesses by cutting their allowances. He was described as ascetic, or as ascetic as someone in the habit of renting out entire hotels could be.

Abdullah's reign was a constant effort to balance desert traditions with the demands of the modern world, making him appear at times to be shifting from one to the other.

When popular movements and insurgencies overthrew or threatened long-established Arab rulers from Tunisia to Yemen in 2011, he reacted swiftly.

On his return from three months of treatment for a herniated disk and a blood clot in New York and Morocco, his government spent \$130 billion to build 500,000 units of low-income housing, to bolster the salaries of government employees and to ensure the loyalty of religious organizations.

He also created a Facebook page, where citizens were invited to present their grievances directly to him, although it was not known how many entries actually reached him.

But in at least two telephone calls he castigated President Obama for encouraging democracy in the Middle East, saying it was dangerous. And he showed no tolerance for the sort of dissent unfolding elsewhere.

The grand mufti, the kingdom's highest religious official, proclaimed that Islam forbade street protests. Scores of protesters who failed to heed that message were arrested in the chiefly Shiite eastern provinces. A new law imposed crippling fines for offenses, like threatening national security, that could be broadly interpreted. Reaching beyond his borders, Abdullah sent tanks to help quell an uprising in neighboring Bahrain.

Moves of Moderation

Still, Abdullah became, in some ways, a force of moderation. He contested Al Qaeda's militant interpretations of the faith as justifying, even compelling, terrorist acts. He ordered that textbooks be purged of their most extreme language and sent 900 imams to re-education sessions. He had hundreds of militants arrested and some beheaded.

But he was also mindful that his family had, since the 18th century, derived its authority from an alliance with the strict Wahhabi sect of Sunni Islam. He accordingly made only modest changes to the kingdom's conservative clerical establishment. When Islamic State forces conquered vast stretches of Syria and Iraq, imposing a creed linked to Saudi Arabia's own, the kingdom was slow to respond.

However, Abdullah chastised senior clerics for not speaking out more forcibly against the jihadists, and he eventually sent Saudi pilots to participate in an American-led campaign against the Islamic State.

Abdullah's Saudi Arabia had hurtled from tribal pastoralism to advanced capitalism in little more than a generation. The fundamentalist clerics who gave the family legitimacy remained a powerful force. Women who appeared in public without the required covering risked arrest or a beating from the religious police.

Abdullah did make changes that were seen as important in the Saudi context. He allowed women to work as supermarket cashiers and appointed a woman as a deputy minister. At the \$12.5 billion research university he built and named for himself, women study beside men.

However, he did not fulfill a promise made to Barbara Walters of ABC News in his first televised interview as king in October 2005: that he would allow women to drive, a hugely contentious issue in Saudi Arabia.

Although he ordered the kingdom's first elections for municipal councils in 2005, a promised second election, in October 2009, in which women would vote, was postponed until September 2011. Then in March of that year, the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs announced that the question of women voting would be put off indefinitely "because of the kingdom's social customs."

Abdullah's greatest legacy, however, may prove to be a scholarship program that sent tens of thousands of young Saudi men and women abroad to study at Western universities and colleges. It has been suggested that the changes long resisted by conservative forces -- resistance that even a king could not overcome -- would one day come about as those men and women rose in the government, industry and academia.

Perhaps Abdullah's most daunting challenge arrived in the wake of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, with the revelation that 15 of the 19 hijackers were Saudis. The royal family at first railed at what it called a vicious smear campaign against the kingdom, then ruthlessly suppressed known militants -- not least because the monarchy itself was a main target of Al Qaeda.

Striking a balance was almost always Abdullah's preference. He strove to keep oil prices high, but not so high that they prompted consumers to abandon petroleum, then hedged his bets by investing billions in solar energy research. In 2008, he convened a meeting of world religious leaders to promote tolerance, but held it in Madrid rather than Saudi Arabia, where the public practice of religions other than Islam is outlawed.

Yet Abdullah could, and did, take strong positions. He denounced the American-led invasion of Iraq as "an illegal occupation"; proposed a comprehensive peace plan for the Middle East that included recognition of Israel by Arab nations; and urged in a secret cable that the United States attack Iran, Saudi Arabia's great rival. "Cut off the head off the snake," he said.

His kingdom's interests always came first. Although American companies discovered and developed the Saudi oil fields, he cut deals with Russian, Chinese and European petroleum companies. He made it clear that the world's energy appetites mattered less than Saudi Arabia's future.

A Rigorous Upbringing

Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz al-Saud was born in Riyadh in 1924 into a vast, complicated family. His father, Abdul Aziz, had as many as 22 wives.

Abdul Aziz, whose ancestors founded a precursor to the present Saudi state in 1744, chose his wives partly to secure alliances with other Arabian tribes. Abdullah's mother, Fahda bint Asi al-Shuraim, was a daughter of the chief of the Shammar, whose influence extended into Syria, Iraq and Jordan.

Abdullah was Fahda's only son. She also had two daughters.

King Abdul Aziz was not an indulgent father to his dozens of sons. He was quoted as saying, "I train my own children to walk barefoot, to rise two hours before dawn, to eat but little, to ride horses bareback."

When the young Abdullah once neglected to offer his seat to a guest, Abdul Aziz sentenced him to three days in prison.

Abdullah, who overcame a stutter, was educated in religion, Arab literature and science by Islamic scholars at the royal court. From the Bedouin nomads, he learned traditional ways, including horsemanship and desert warfare. In 1962, he was appointed commander of the National Guard, which draws recruits from the Bedouin tribes, protects the king and acts as a counterweight to the army.

Four of Abdullah's half brothers preceded him to the throne.

King Khalid appointed Abdullah as second deputy prime minister in 1975. In 1982, Fahd, Khalid's successor, named him deputy prime minister and crown prince.

After Fahd's stroke, Abdullah ran the government at first as regent. Political pressures later forced the removal of the regent title, but Abdullah remained the effective decision maker. He refused to sign any official papers with his own name as long as his stricken brother lived. Fahd died on Aug. 1, 2005.

One of King Abdullah's first official acts was to pardon two Libyans accused of plotting to kill him, a result of Egypt's engineering a reconciliation between the two nations. He also pardoned three Saudi academics who were in prison for advocating a constitutional monarchy.

He went on to establish job-training programs to help ease severe unemployment among educated young Saudis, to develop long-wasted natural gas as a commodity that could be exported, and to bring Saudi Arabia into the World Trade Organization. He became the first Saudi head of state to meet a pope, Benedict XVI, in 2007.

Although he reaffirmed his kingdom's longstanding alliance with the United States, tensions arose with events. Abdullah refused, for instance, to permit American bases on Saudi territory for the Iraq invasion in 2003, something he had allowed in the first Gulf War.

'For the Greater Good'

The king also grappled with domestic crises. The deaths of 15 girls in a dormitory fire in Mecca in 2002 caused an international uproar when it was learned that the religious police had not let them escape because they were not properly dressed. Furious, the king dismissed the head of women's education.

In 2007, he pardoned a teenage girl who had been sentenced to six months in jail and 100 lashes after being raped. She was convicted of being found in a car alone with a man who was not her relative, a crime in Saudi law.

Though Abdullah made it clear that he thought the girl was guilty, pleasing the religious authorities, he pardoned her, he said, "for the greater good."

In line with Islamic law, Abdullah kept no more than four wives at once, and was married at least 13 times, said Joseph Kechichian, who studies the royal family as a senior fellow at the King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies in Riyadh.

Abdullah fathered at least seven sons, nearly all of whom have occupied powerful positions as provincial governors and officers in the national guard, Dr. Kechichian said. Of his 15 known daughters, one is a prominent physician, and another has appeared on television to advocate women's rights.

Abdullah may have resembled his warrior father, but he had a modern sensibility. A diplomatic cable revealed by WikiLeaks in 2010 said that he had suggested to an American counterterrorism official that electronic chips be implanted in detainees at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba.

He said it had worked with horses and falcons, to which the American replied, "Horses don't have good lawyers."

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3. Yemeni leader, cabinet resign

Deal with rebels falls apart; Government was a key U.S. ally in terror fight

Washington Post, Jan. 23, Pg. A1 | Ali al-Mujahed and Hugh Naylor

SANAA, Yemen - Yemen's Western-backed president and his cabinet resigned Thursday amid deepening turmoil that left Shiite rebels in effective control and threw into question this nation's continued participation in the U.S. fight against terrorism.

As President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi succumbed to an apparent coup attempt by the rebels, a government official confirmed that Hadi had lost control over the military and intelligence agencies that coordinate with the United States in operations against al-Qaeda's most dangerous affiliate.

The crisis threatens to weaken Washington's campaign against al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), which is based in Yemen and has actively targeted the United States and Europe. The government's collapse could also plunge Yemen into full-scale civil war. The Houthi rebels are widely considered to be backed by Shiite-majority Iran, although they deny it. Yemen's population is majority Sunni, and there is a strong separatist movement in the Sunni-dominated south.

The resignations in Yemen are likely to set off alarms not just in Washington but in Sunni Arab capitals, especially in neighboring Saudi Arabia, which has backed Hadi's government with billions of dollars and views Iran as its foremost regional rival.

Hadi and his government resigned just a day after agreeing to a power-sharing deal that extended the Houthis' control over Yemen. The 69-year-old president, a former major general, initially appeared ready to ride out the chaos under the arrangement with the rebels.

But government officials accused the insurgents, led by Abdulmalik al-Houthi, of failing to uphold their side of the agreement, refusing to pull back from positions they had taken around the presidential palace and residence, and continuing to hold a Hadi aide who was kidnapped by the group Saturday.

"They have been applying too much pressure on him," presidential adviser Yaseen Makawi said by telephone. Hadi "had no choice but to resign."

In a letter to the chairman of parliament, the president alluded to the Houthi offensive, which began in September, as the reason for his resignation, although he did not mention the insurgent group by name.

"I would like to apologize personally to you and to the parliament and to the Yemeni people now that we have reached a dead end," he said in the statement, which was reported widely in Yemeni media.

Prime Minister Khaled Bahah, who was besieged by the Houthis at his palace this week, said in a Facebook posting that he stepped down to avoid being drawn "into an abyss" in which the country had policies "based on no law."

"We don't want to be a party to what is happening or will happen," he added.

One of Hadi's advisers, Sultan al-Atwani, said the mass resignations resulted from frustration over the Houthis' stripping the president of all powers - including over the military and intelligence agencies - even though they had signed the power-sharing deal. The president was stripped of his authority to coordinate on U.S. drone strikes aimed at al-Qaeda targets, he said. Atwani added that he no longer had the authority to coordinate with a U.S. drone program that attacks AQAP militants.

Hadi took power in 2012 after an Arab Spring uprising led to the ouster of President Ali Abdullah Saleh. Many Yemenis suspect Saleh aided the Houthi advance and plotted against the president. The U.N. Security Council imposed sanctions on Saleh and two Houthi leaders in November for threatening Yemen's stability.

"Hadi has lost control of the military. He doesn't have the power to give orders to the military," Atwani said by telephone.

There was no immediate response from officials in Washington.

The Yemeni government was formed in November as part of a peace deal brokered after the Houthis overran the capital in September and captured large swaths of territory, including nine provincial capitals.

It was not immediately clear whether the rebels now have full control over the intelligence branches, but analysts said the developments spelled trouble for continued Yemeni counterterrorism coordination with the United States - notably on the drone program.

"It's expected that the Houthis are going to change the composition and focus of the intelligence services to gear them toward maintaining Houthi influence, primarily," said Lina Khatib, director of the Carnegie Middle East Center. "This would divert attention away from counterterrorism operations."

Houthi officials have said they oppose the U.S. drone program, calling it a violation of Yemen's sovereignty. Houthis are Zaydis, a branch of Shiite Islam whose followers form roughly a third of Yemen's population of 24 million. Although natural enemies of Sunni al-Qaeda, the Houthis would probably suspend their country's participation in the drone program because it is highly unpopular among Yemenis because of civilian casualties from the airstrikes, said Ali Shantoor, a retired Yemeni brigadier general.

"Abdulmalik al-Houthi and the Houthis will refuse to cooperate with the United States in carrying out drone attacks," he said. "They've always said that they reject the United States' control and its violation of the sovereignty of the country."

Houthis have been battling AQAP during their assaults. The al-Qaeda group claimed responsibility for a Jan. 7 attack in Paris on the satirical newspaper Charlie Hebdo that left 12 people dead and set off three days of violence.

The Houthi rebels, meanwhile, appeared to be preparing an advance on central Marib province, the country's main oil and gas region. Yemen's exports are tiny compared with those of its energy-rich neighbors, but the revenue is critical in the Arab world's most impoverished nation.

The Houthis tried to seize an army base about 90 miles from Marib in preparation for a likely assault on the province, said Ali al-Ghulaisi, a spokesman for Marib's governor. He said military officials, tribal leaders and party chiefs gathered in the province's main city Wednesday to discuss preparations in the event of a Houthi assault.

The Houthi attack on the military base "is an attempt to increase the areas they control, in addition to securing supply lines for them, so that they can attack Marib," Ghulaisi said by telephone.

For Saudi Arabia, in particular, the ascendance of a Shiite-dominated state on its doorstep represents a strategic threat. It sees Iranian proxies consolidating power on its southern border with Yemen and on the northern one with Iraq, which is led by a Shiite government that has growing political, military and economic ties with Tehran, said Mustafa Alani, director of security and terrorism at the Geneva-based Gulf Research Center.

"This is becoming a strategic nightmare" for Saudi Arabia, he said. The collapse of Yemen's government came as Saudi Arabia's leadership was in flux, with official media reporting early Friday that King Abdullah had died.

The Houthis reject accusations that they are Iranian proxies. They have defended their offensive as an attempt to root out corruption.

--Naylor reported from Beirut. Brian Murphy and William Branigin in Washington contributed to this report

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IRAQ/SYRIA

4. Citing Plunge in Oil Prices, Iraq Seeks Arms on Credit to Fight ISIS

New York Times, Jan. 23, Pg. A10 | Michael R. Gordon

LONDON — Battered by a sharp decline in oil prices, Iraq is asking Western allies to provide weapons on credit for its fight against the Islamic State until Baghdad is in a better position to pay.

Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi of Iraq said on Thursday that oil exports accounted for 85 percent of his government's budget and that the precipitous drop in prices was posing a fresh challenge to the Iraqi government as it was trying to push back Islamic State militants.

"This has been disastrous for us," Mr. Abadi said. "One thing we are asking for is deferred payment. That's one solution. And I think our coalition partner has been very receptive of this."

Mr. Abadi spoke at a news conference here with Secretary of State John Kerry and Philip Hammond, the British foreign secretary, after a meeting of 21 countries that are trying to weaken, and ultimately defeat, militants from the Islamic State who have proclaimed a caliphate that stretches from eastern Syria to northern and western Iraq.

Mr. Abadi's request was notable in that it came the same day that he drew a sharp rebuke from the American secretary of defense, Chuck Hagel, for his assertion this week that the United States has been too slow to provide weapons and training for his country.

On Wednesday, Mr. Abadi told The Associated Press that "we are in this almost on our own."

Asked about Mr. Abadi's comments during a news conference, Mr. Hagel responded sharply. "I do disagree with the prime minister's comments," he said. "I would say even further that I don't think they're helpful."

Mr. Hagel listed weapons and military hardware that the United States has provided to Iraq to fight the Islamic State, including 250 mine-resistant armored vehicles, and added that three of four planned training camps are operating.

In addition, President Obama has committed 3,000 American troops to Iraq to advise and train the Iraqi security forces, and other countries in the international coalition against the Islamic State have committed an additional 1,500 troops.

American officials insist that they have broken the Islamic State's momentum in Iraq, a claim President Obama echoed in his State of the Union address. Mr. Kerry sought to reinforce that claim by asserting that 50 percent of the Islamic State's "top command" had been killed and that much of the oil and gas infrastructure that the Islamic State uses to fund its operations had been destroyed.

In Baghdad, Stuart Jones, the United States ambassador to Iraq, told the news channel Al Arabiya that more than 6,000 Islamic State fighters had been killed in Syria and Iraq.

But the task of expelling the Islamic State militants from Mosul, Falluja and other urban areas they have seized in Iraq remains challenging for Iraq's armed forces even though they are supported by American and allied airstrikes.

The Iraqi plan to establish national guard units in northern and western Iraq made up of Sunni tribal fighters is tied up in knots in Baghdad. A stopgap effort to train and equip Sunnis in western Iraq has so far yielded only about 1,000 fighters, who will be used to replenish losses in Iraqi police and Army units.

The United States and its partners still need to train 12 more Iraqi brigades — more than 20,000 troops — so that Iraq can conduct a major counteroffensive against the Islamic State later this year.

The military challenge that Iraq faces was dramatized this week when the Ramadi compound that belongs to Abu Risha, a Sunni tribal leader, was destroyed by Islamic State militants while he was on a visit to Washington.

American officials said in November that the Iraq government's goal was to wrest control of Mosul, Falluja and other cities and major roads by the end of 2015. Iraqi forces, the officials added, would move to re-establish control of Iraq's border with Syria by the end of the year.

But on Thursday, Mr. Hammond indicated that the military campaign could take twice as long.

“This isn’t going to be done in three months or six months. It’s going to take a year, two years to push ISIL back out of Iraq but we are doing the things that need to be done in order to turn the tide,” Mr. Hammond told Sky News, using an alternative name for the Islamic State, which is also known as ISIS.

Mr. Abadi had appealed to Western governments to expand and accelerate their efforts to train and equip Iraqi forces before the London meeting. “There is a lot being said and spoken, but very little on the ground,” he told The Associated Press on Wednesday.

But Mr. Abadi said on Thursday that his appeal for more help “did not go unnoticed.” Flanked by Mr. Kerry and Mr. Hammond, the Iraqi leader said that European nations had recently provided weapons, which the United States Air Force had flown to Iraq, at no charge.

“We have decided there are things we can do more of,” Mr. Kerry said. “We can do better on cutting off financing. We can do better on the messaging. We can do better with respect to the supplies and other things.”

--Helene Cooper contributed reporting from Washington, and Falih Hassan from Baghdad

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5. In Mosul, Islamic State turns captured city into fortress

Reuters, Jan. 22 | Ahmed Rasheed and Ned Parker

BAGHDAD - In a government building in Mosul, a handful of Iraqi contractors gathered to compete for a tender last month.

It was the kind of routine session that happens in cities everywhere -- except here the contract was for fortifications ordered by the new rulers in town, Islamic State.

One member of the radical Islamist group grabbed a map and explained to those present what was required.

"Under Islamic State's tender document, a trench two meters in depth and two meters in width needs to be dug around Mosul," said a source in the city close to the tendering process.

The winning contractor will be paid the equivalent of \$4,000 for each kilometre of trench, the source said.

The tender demonstrates Islamic State's determination to defend the city that it conquered in June, as the extremists grabbed a large area of territory from Baghdad. Rich in Muslim history, Mosul stands at the centre of the group's aim to carve out a modern caliphate from large parts of Syria and Iraq.

Interviews with 11 Mosul residents, several of whom fled this month, reveal how Islamic State has created a police state strong enough to weather severe popular discontent and military setbacks, including the deaths of senior leaders.

Along with the planned trench, the militants have sealed Mosul's western entrance with giant cement walls.

They also blew up a bridge that Kurdish fighters could use to attack Mosul.

"They will fight to the last drop of blood defending Mosul, and for them this battle could define their existence. Losing Mosul means a final defeat for Islamic State in Iraq," said a retired army general living in Mosul.

LIFE UNDER SHARIA

In Mosul's city centre, in the old provincial council building, sits Islamic State's religious court. Verdicts can be ruthless.

Last week, Islamic State in Mosul posted on the Internet its version of justice: the stoning of a woman accused of adultery; two men crucified, accused of armed robbery; and two men thrown from a building for allegedly being homosexual.

Reuters interviewed Raheel, a 71-year-old Christian woman, who was brought before the court this fall and forced to convert to Islam.

Taken from a senior citizens home in Mosul, Raheel and nine others appeared before a bearded judge. Armed guards stood in the room.

"The judge began his speech, in a soft and elegant manner, and he was citing verses of the Koran and sayings of the Prophet Mohammad," Raheel told Reuters.

"He said that Islam is the true religion and that we must embrace it or we would die as infidels," she said after her freedom was obtained this month in an arrangement between Islamic State and Chaldean church representatives.

POLICE AND THIEVES

Islamic State runs at least four security organizations in Mosul, including traffic police and a tax force that collects revenues from businesses and individuals.

The most feared groups are an elite security committee that makes special arrests and gathers intelligence; and the Islamic moral police, or Hisba, that enforces the jihadists' brand of religious law.

Hisba and the intelligence units have also rounded up dozens of former officers, holding them to forestall any revolt and seeking to tap their military knowledge.

"We investigate them to figure out why they are not joining Islamic State," an Islamic State leader told Reuters by phone.

The religious code enforced by Hisba includes bans on smoking and on t-shirts with English writing.

Businesses must close at prayer times; women and girls must veil their faces; and schools are segregated.

A Mosul father stopped sending his 13-year-old daughter to school because she was forced to cover her face.

"She was saying to me 'Dad, I feel I can't breathe,'" the father told Reuters. "It is better she is free inside our house than a prisoner in school here."

WORKING FOR A LIVING

The jihadists have forced Mosul's remaining civil servants to work in Islamic State's new government offices, which cover municipal services, energy, education, religion and health.

Baghdad earmarks at least \$130 million monthly to pay Mosul government employees, whether they have stayed in the city or left, said Anwar Matti Hadaya, the exiled head of the Nineveh provincial council's finance committee.

The money is picked up in Kurdish-held Kirkuk by a department representative and taken to Mosul.

Baghdad says the salaries will remind people the national government has not forgotten them. It is unclear how much money reaches employees still in Mosul, but the cash has helped keep the city afloat.

Food is readily available. Meat, vegetables, bread and fruit cost the same as before, and some prices are lower than Baghdad.

Only fuel prices are high and electricity, supplied by generators, has been cut to six hours a day. Tankers provide drinking water.

Islamic State extracts payments from residents on a daily basis. Butchers must pay a tax of around \$4 a day to enter slaughterhouses to buy cattle and sheep.

Shop tenants in buildings confiscated by Islamic State must now pay rent to the militants.

As air strikes make smuggling oil from Syria more difficult, dozens of homemade refineries belching black smoke have sprung up around Mosul.

The group's wealth extends beyond oil smuggling and extortion.

Iraqi Finance Minister Hoshiyar Zebari estimates Islamic State has looted \$456 million from banks in Mosul, Tikrit and Baiji since its June land grab.

Most of the cash has come from Mosul.

"Islamic State is rich," Zebari told Reuters.

Citing intelligence reports, he predicted IS would create its own currency in the coming months, an idea the jihadists have advertised since June.

Most Mosul residents see a grim future.

A lawyer, who fled this month, decided to leave with his two infant daughters rather than risk a looming military confrontation.

He said goodbye to seven brothers and his parents. The night before he escaped, he told his father he was leaving, knowing he might never see him again.

"I can't handle it anymore," he said. "I am to afraid."

--Additional reporting by Saif Hameed, Isabel Coles and correspondents in Anbar province and Arbil

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6. 'We're going to kill' Iraq militants who attack Canadian troops – PM

Reuters, Jan. 22 | David Ljunggren

OTTAWA - Prime Minister Stephen Harper denied on Thursday that Canadian military advisers in Iraq would be dragged into combat against Islamic State militants despite a recent clash but said Canada's forces would kill anyone who attacked them.

Asked whether he anticipated Canadian troops taking on more of a combat role, Harper replied: "No, I do not."

He insisted the about 70 Canadian special forces personnel on the ground in Iraq are there to help local forces in their fight against the militants.

"This is a robust mission ... if those guys fire at us we're going to fire back and we're going to kill them, just like our guys did, and we're very proud of the job they're doing in Iraq," he told reporters in St. Catharines, Ontario.

Canada pledged in October to join the U.S.-led bombing campaign in Iraq for six months. It also put the special forces on the ground in Iraq in a role that Ottawa said would be to advise and assist Iraqi troops but not engage in combat.

Military officials on Monday revealed for the first time that the forces were helping target Islamic State fighters. They also said Canadian soldiers had recently shot militants who had fired on them with machine guns and mortars.

The topic is sensitive for the Conservative government, which is trailing in the polls ahead of an October election. Canadians' appetite for foreign military missions has dropped after 10 years of involvement in Afghanistan that ended in 2011, and during which 158 soldiers were killed.

Justin Trudeau, whose opposition Liberals are leading in the polls, said on Tuesday that Harper had not been telling the truth last year when he assured legislators Canadian forces would not be involved in combat.

Separately, the chief of the Canadian defense staff said the situation on the ground in Iraq has changed since last October.

"We have increased our assistance with respect to targeting air strikes in direct correlation with an increased threat encountered by the Iraqi Security Forces," General Tom Lawson said in a statement.

"Our special operations forces personnel are not seeking to directly engage the enemy, but we are providing assistance to forces that are in combat."

MIDEAST

7. **Salman Ascends Throne to Become Saudi King**

New York Times, Jan. 23, Pg. A9 | Ben Hubbard

BEIRUT, Lebanon — The new king of Saudi Arabia, Salman bin Abdul-Aziz Al Saud, has spent more than a half-century among the top echelons one of the world's most powerful families and is known to serve as mediator and peacekeeper between its often competing factions.

Best known for overseeing the development of the Saudi capital, Riyadh, during his nearly 50 years as its governor, he became the country's defense minister in 2011 as a series of uprisings were shaking Arab leaders who had long been Saudi allies.

While Salman is popular inside the kingdom and in the ruling family, he ascended the throne after the death of his brother Abdullah on Friday amid increasing strains on the kingdom.

The drop of world oil prices has hurt the country's economic base; the jihadists of the Islamic State have questioned its status as the global lodestar of Islam; and new civil strife is shredding Yemen, its southern neighbor.

Analysts said that those challenges would most likely keep the new monarch from making any sudden changes to policy.

"There will be a strong emphasis on continuity," said Bernard Haykel, a professor of Near Eastern studies at Princeton University. "Especially at a time when the price of oil is low and there is lots of turmoil in the region, the last thing they need is to get their people riled up."

It remained unclear how capable King Salman would be of putting in place Saudi responses to these difficulties. As crown prince, he was said to have taken over many of the duties of the head of state as Abdullah grew ill, but Salman's health itself is in question. He is 79, has had at least one stroke and lost some movement in one of his arms.

Robert Jordan, a former United States ambassador to Saudi Arabia, said that Salman had strong record as a good administrator, best demonstrated by his governorship of Riyadh.

"He is considered to be a straight-shooter, not corrupt, well educated," Mr. Jordan said.

His stances on social issues are less clear, but few think he will roll back the modest reforms put in place by his brother, which included encouraging women to enter the work force, a move criticized by some parts of the conservative clerical establishment.

"He is very conservative, of course, like the rest of the kingdom, but I don't think he is likely to undo the reforms that King Abdullah initiated," Mr. Jordan said.

In a statement attributed to the new king read on Saudi state television, he promoted Prince Muqrin bin Abdul-Aziz, who had been deputy crown prince, to crown prince, putting him next in line to the throne.

Prince Muqrin, relatively young for a Saudi leader at 69, is a former air force pilot who also served as governor of Madina Province before being named the head of Saudi intelligence, a post he held until 2012. Like Salman, Abdullah and the kingdom's previous four monarchs, Muqrin is a son of King Abdul Aziz, the founder of the modern Saudi state.

Jean-Francois Seznec, who teaches political economy of the Gulf at Georgetown University, said that the transition would probably not effect Saudi oil policy and the kingdom's strategy of keeping production up despite falling prices in order to hang on to market share.

"I think for the time being that they will be careful not to change very much and to go for stability," he said.

But dealing with the crisis in Yemen, which shares a long border with Saudi Arabia and harbors Qaeda militants that are hostile to the monarchy, will likely be Salman's first task.

"I think it scares the hell out of the Saudis," Mr. Seznec said. "It is a dangerous place for them, and their Yemeni policy has been a huge failure."

Salman's sons, too, hold a number of powerful positions: Prince Abdulaziz is the deputy oil minister; Prince Faisal is the governor of Madina Province; and Prince Sultan heads the tourism authority and was also an astronaut.

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8. U.S. Sees New Period of Uncertainty

Wall Street Journal (Analysis), Jan 23, Pg. A10 | Gerald F. Seib and Jay Solomon

U.S. officials worry that the death of Saudi King Abdullah ushers in a period of new uncertainty in a key relationship that already was tense.

In the short term, the king's death might ease strains in the relationship. The Saudi kingdom, as it enters a period of transition, may feel more vulnerable to external threats and eager to show the world that it still has the solid of backing of the U.S. -- which the kingdom always has seen as its ultimate protector.

But in the longer term, the transition raises questions about how the new Saudi leadership will see its relations with the region and the wider world. Most likely, it will be a period of what longtime Middle East diplomat Dennis Ross calls "collective leadership."

That in turn may reduce the Saudis' ability to move decisively on the difficult and contentious issues -- toward Iran, Iraq and the Islamic State insurgency, as well as oil policy -- that the U.S. and Saudi Arabia have been trying to address together.

"I think you get more cautious decision-making," Mr. Ross said.

King Abdullah was seen as a reformer and relatively pro-American when he took office, though he became more repressive internally and less fond of the U.S. over time. The recent sentence of 1,000 lashes given to a writer

convicted of insulting Islam sparked widespread condemnation in the West, including from the U.S. State Department.

The late Saudi monarch was incensed by President Barack Obama's failure to follow through on his threats in 2013 to launch military strikes on the Syrian regime for its alleged use of chemical weapons. And Riyadh didn't believe the White House showed strong enough support for Mideast allies, particularly in Egypt, following the eruption of Arab Spring revolts in 2010.

Secret talks between the U.S. and Iran -- the country the Saudis most fear -- over Tehran's nuclear program also were viewed in Riyadh as a sign of a weakening American-Saudi alliance and proof that the White House was willing to work behind King Abdullah's back, according to Saudi officials.

The new king, the late ruler's half-brother, Salman bin Abdul Aziz, is less well known and not considered a strong or healthy leader in his own right. That raises questions among U.S. officials about if or how quickly he will be able to consolidate power. As a result, American officials are likely to be guessing to some extent about who is in charge.

U.S. officials said they would seek to quickly work with Saudi Arabia's new rulers to address the myriad crises in the region, including Yemen's civil war and the Islamic State insurgency in Iraq and Syria. Mr. Obama promptly offered condolences on the king's death and praised the "closeness and strength of our partnership" with Saudi Arabia.

"As a leader, he was always candid and had the courage of his convictions," Mr. Obama said. "One of those convictions was his steadfast and passionate belief in the importance of the U.S.-Saudi relationship as a force for stability and security in the Middle East and beyond."

One large question American officials will be asking is whether the Saudis will continue the kingdom's recent risky oil strategy of pumping oil at high levels even as prices are dropping, in an effort to protect market share and drive other producers off the field.

A second question is whether the kingdom will continue its confrontational strategy toward Iran's Shiite Islamic regime, or try to defuse tensions during its transition period.

In addition, the U.S. will be watching closely for changes in the Saudi strategy in neighboring Yemen, where Shiite Houthi rebels are gathering strength.

The Saudis are deeply worried that extremism and disarray there could spread to the kingdom, Mr. Ross said. But it is possible the Saudis may try to quell the Houthi surge not by confronting the rebels but rather by seeking to buy peace, at least for the time being.

Mr. Ross suspects that on most of these issues the Saudis ultimately are likely to stay largely on their current course.

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9. Yemen upheaval leaves U.S. drone strikes, other anti-terror efforts in limbo

Washington Post, Jan. 23, Pg. A12 | Craig Whitlock

The White House's strategy for fighting al-Qaeda in Yemen - repeatedly presented as a model by President Obama - was left in tatters Thursday by the resignation of the man who personally approved U.S. drone strikes in the country, and the collapse of its central government.

U.S. officials struggled to sort out a melange of reports about who, if anyone, is in charge in Yemen. The prospect of continued chaos cast doubt on the viability of the Obama administration's counterterrorism policy for Yemen and whether it can still count on local help against al-Qaeda.

"A dangerous situation just went from bad to worse with grave implications for our counterterrorism efforts," said Rep. Adam B. Schiff (D-Calif.), a member of the House Intelligence Committee. "Our relationship with the Yemen government has been vital in confronting [al-Qaeda] and keeping the pressure on its leadership, and every effort must be made to continue that partnership."

As recently as September, Obama had cited his Yemen strategy as a template for confronting jihadist threats in other places, including Iraq and Syria. Instead of sending large numbers of troops to fight al-Qaeda's affiliate in the country directly, the Pentagon has limited its presence to a small number of trainers to teach and equip Yemen's security forces.

The other foundation of the U.S. strategy has been to rely on drones to provide surveillance over Yemen and launch scores of airstrikes against suspected al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) targets. Flown by the CIA and the military's Joint Special Operations Command, the drones are based outside Yemen, but U.S. officials have relied until now on the Yemeni government's authorization to conduct the airstrikes.

If order and a friendly regime are not restored soon in Yemen, the White House may be confronted with a difficult choice: keep flying the drones even if they violate Yemeni sovereignty, or halt the operations and ease up on al-Qaeda. The dilemma is exacerbated by the fact that the CIA and U.S. military's targeting decisions are largely dependent on Yemeni government intelligence collected from sources on the ground.

"I have a lot of sympathy for anybody trying to make a policy on Yemen at the moment," said Stephen A. Seche, who served as U.S. ambassador there from 2007 until 2010. If a power vacuum persists or no reliable partner emerges to take charge of the government, he added, "I don't think we'll just want to continue running operations like we have done the last several years."

Despite widespread anger among Yemenis about the drones, the Obama administration had received a green light for the airstrikes from Yemeni President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi, who took power in 2012 with Washington's backing and quickly became a firm ally against AQAP.

In an interview with The Washington Post several months after taking office, Hadi said he personally approved every drone strike and praised their effectiveness. "Every operation, before taking place, they take permission from the president," he said at the time.

On Thursday, Hadi submitted his resignation, along with the rest of his cabinet, under pressure from Houthi rebel forces who have taken increasing control of the capital, Sanaa. One of Hadi's advisers, Sultan al-Atwani, said the president quit after the Houthis tried to strip him of virtually all of his powers, including his authority to coordinate drone strikes with U.S. officials.

Although the Houthis are hostile toward AQAP, they have been just as hostile toward the United States. "The Houthis will refuse to cooperate with the United States in carrying out drone attacks," said Ali Shantoor, a retired Yemeni brigadier general. "They've always said that they reject the United States' control and its violation of the sovereignty of the country."

In Washington, U.S. officials dodged questions about whether they had been in contact with Hadi or how his departure will affect counterterrorism operations. "Obviously, we're not in a position - and I don't think any of you are, either - to assess what it means at this point in time," State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki told reporters.

The Pentagon has never fully disclosed how many military operatives have been deployed to Yemen as trainers or liaison officers. On Thursday, Maj. Curt Kellogg, a military spokesman, declined to say how many U.S. service members remained in Yemen or whether their numbers had decreased recently because of the upheaval there.

Rep. Mac Thornberry (R-Tex.), the chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, said Thursday that U.S. surveillance over Yemen has decreased in recent months because of increased demand for drones and other aircraft to fight another jihadist group, the Islamic State, in Iraq and Syria.

"Yemen's a pretty big mess," Thornberry said. "You have this big, very difficult crisis with [the Islamic State], so that necessarily means there is less attention that can be paid to Yemen and other places. And yet Yemen is the place from which the most serious threats against our homeland have emanated."

On Thursday, a senior State Department official said the U.S. Embassy in Sanaa would further reduce its American staffing "in response to the changing security situation in Yemen." The official said the embassy would remain open.

--Hugh Naylor in Beirut and Ali al-Mujahed in Sanaa contributed to this report

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UKRAINE/RUSSIA

10. Chaotic Retreat Follows Ukrainians' Withdrawal From Donetsk Airport

New York Times, Jan. 23, Pg. A8 | Andrew E. Kramer and Rick Lyman

DONETSK, Ukraine — The ruins of the once gleaming and modern Donetsk airport, site of near relentless fighting in recent days, finally fell on Thursday to pro-Russian rebel forces who then paraded captured Ukrainian soldiers through the streets of the embattled city.

The airport, which had been claimed by both sides, is nonfunctional, the terminal and runways having been destroyed months ago. Nonetheless, it has retained high symbolic value in the continuing hostilities as the government's last toehold in the city, the largest in the contested territory of southeastern Ukraine.

By dawn on Thursday, it was clear the Ukrainian Army was in a chaotic and bloody retreat, leaving behind their dead in the ruins of the main terminal, a Russian news video showed. Later in the day, in an official statement, Ukrainian military officials acknowledged that they had lost the battle.

In Donetsk, rebels forced a dozen captured Ukrainian soldiers to kneel on the streets near where artillery fire had gutted a trolley bus, killing at least eight people, encouraging passers-by to beat and spit on them.

“Fascists!” one old woman yelled at them. “Who are the terrorists now?”

The renewed violence, in Donetsk and at a remote checkpoint north of Luhansk, another major separatist-held city, threatened to plunge the region into ever-deepening chaos.

Deepening the sense that the region might be descending into a fresh period of bloodshed, Gen. Philip Breedlove, NATO’s top commander in Europe, said that the alliance’s analysts had noted the presence of sophisticated Russian military systems, electronic warfare and air defense systems, in the conflict zone. Previously, he said, the presence of these systems has been associated with an incursion of Russian troops and presaged a fresh round of fighting.

Speaking at a meeting of security officials in Kiev after the capture of the airport and public humiliation of its last, captured defenders, Ukraine’s president, Petro O. Poroshenko, vented frustration with a broken peace process.

“If the enemy does not want to abide by the cease-fire, if the enemy doesn’t want to stop the suffering of innocent people in Ukrainian villages and towns, we will give it to them in the teeth,” Mr. Poroshenko said in a statement on his website.

The Ukrainian Army and volunteer soldiers had held the airport through months of close combat. At times, Russian-backed rebels and Ukrainian soldiers occupied different floors in the same building. Holes in the floor and stairwells became front lines.

The turning point came when rebels exploded one of the floors, raining concrete and debris onto the heads of Ukrainian forces on the level below.

The airport fell as months of continual rebel shelling had destroyed all of its defensible positions, wrote Yuri Butusov, the editor of a Ukrainian military news portal, *sensor.net*.

“The new and old terminals, the control tower and everything that could serve as a point of defense was destroyed,” he wrote. “And the airport is under direct fire, and the last surviving defenders left the new terminal only today.”

For Ukraine, the airport was laden with symbolic value as the site of the first in a string of military victories last summer that ended in August with a Russian intervention and cease-fire.

“Ukrainian soldiers defending the Donetsk airport were compelled to surrender what just a year ago was a wonderful, modern airport,” one volunteer unit, the Azov Battalion, posted on its website.

Andriy Lysenko, a spokesman for Ukraine’s military, said Ukrainian soldiers still defended some airport territory, without clarifying what. “The airport is still a battlefield,” he said.

In the city, an angry crowd of Donetsk residents pounced upon a Ukrainian soldier marched by rebel troops to the site of the bus-trolley explosion. People screamed angrily at the soldier as he was held by rebels, some reaching out to slap him across the face, or punch the back of his head. At one point, the crowd surged in so close that the soldier

bent over to escape their pokes and punches and was pummeled on his back until the rebels holding him managed to squeeze him through the crowd and into the front seat of a waiting SUV.

Pro-Russian separatist leaders and senior Ukrainian government officials were quick to trade accusations over who was responsible for the assault on the bus, with the foreign ministries of Ukraine and Russia issuing nearly identical statements calling for an objective investigation.

A video taken in the aftermath of the early morning explosion showed the bus, which ran from an electrical connection to overhead lines, with its tires flattened, its sides punched in, filled with shards of concrete and stone and all of its windows either shattered or pocked with holes. A burned out car sat in the street nearby, and the building opposite had its front gate smashed and most of its windows blown out. There were conflicting reports of between eight and 13 people killed.

In Moscow, the Russian foreign minister, Sergey V. Lavrov, issued a statement putting blame on the Ukrainian government and calling the bus attack “a crime against humanity, a rude provocation aimed at undermining the efforts on a peace settlement.”

Mr. Lavrov added: “It is becoming obvious that the party of war in Kiev, and its foreign patrons, are not stopped by fatalities. Everything must be done to stop the shelling by Kiev of towns in southeastern Ukraine and to prevent the further pointless casualties among the civilians.”

With both sides equipped with heavy weapons, artillery duels all too often miss by hundreds of yards or more, killing bystanders.

The strike in Donetsk came the day after President Poroshenko, addressing the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, held up a piece of wreckage from another public bus, destroyed in an artillery attack on Jan. 13 near the town of Volnovakha, in which 13 people were killed. In his speech, Mr. Poroshenko said that thousands of regular-duty Russian troops had been moved across the border into eastern Ukraine, escalating the conflict.

Fighting also intensified early Thursday in an area of remote Ukrainian checkpoints and small villages along the northern approach to the rebel stronghold of Luhansk. Ukraine military officials had said they were convinced they were facing regular Russian troops when the engagement began on Tuesday.

Late Wednesday night and into Thursday morning, both Checkpoints 29 and 31, north of Luhansk, and the nearby villages of Krymske and Nizhneye were subjected to persistent shelling. This was followed, Thursday afternoon, by what Ukrainian military officials described as a tank assault, which they said their forces were able to repel.

The three days of fighting, though, resulted in widespread damage to the two villages, said Yaroslav Galas, head of the department of communications for the regional administration. Only about 150 residents were left in Krymske, he said, about 10 percent of the usual population, and a huge fire at the local power station, visible for miles around, made it unlikely the village would ever be reinhabited, he said.

“You can say the situation there is an emergency,” Mr. Galas said.

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11. NATO says detects signs of increased Russian involvement in eastern Ukraine

BRUSSELS - NATO has detected signs of heightened Russian involvement in fighting in parts of eastern Ukraine, the alliance's top military commander said on Thursday.

U.S. Air Force General Philip Breedlove, NATO's supreme allied commander Europe, said fighting in the pro-Russian separatist uprising was now more intense in some places than it was before September's Minsk ceasefire agreement.

Breedlove told a news conference after a meeting of NATO defense chiefs that military leaders would try to re-establish contact with their Russian counterparts, broken off amid tensions over Ukraine.

Russia denies deploying troops in eastern Ukraine, where more than 4,800 people have been killed since a pro-Russian rebellion broke out soon after Moscow annexed Crimea in March. It also rejects accusations it is supplying arms.

"The situation along the line of contact in Ukraine is not good. The fighting has intensified to essentially pre-agreement or pre-standdown levels and in some cases beyond," Breedlove said.

Following that accord, NATO said Russia had pulled back some of the troops it had inside Ukraine supporting pro-Russian separatists; but in recent days, Ukraine has said there has again been an increase of Russian forces in the country.

Breedlove said he could not confirm Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko's estimate of 9,000 Russian troops in eastern Ukraine.

"What we do see is that the Russian-backed forces have renewed capability now to bring pressure on the Ukrainian forces and have in several places moved the line of contact to the west and this is concerning," he said.

"We are beginning to see the (heat) signatures of air defense systems and electronic warfare systems that have accompanied past Russian troop movements into Ukraine," he said.

High-level military contact between Russia and NATO used to take place regularly until Russia's intervention in Ukraine.

The last contact took place last May between Gen. Knud Bartels, head of NATO's military committee, and General Valery Gerasimov, chief of the general staff of Russia's armed forces.

"We are going to re-establish that (communication), we have talked among several of us senior military leaders how we will do that ... but yes, we are going to re-establish communication with Valery (Gerasimov)," Breedlove said.

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EUROPE

12. US military bolsters security at European bases

The US military has stepped up security at its bases across Europe in the aftermath of deadly attacks by Islamists in Paris, officials said Thursday.

Spokesman Captain Greg Hicks said US European Command had ordered "additional force protection measures" including reinforced random security checks at installations throughout the region.

"We continually assess threats to our forces with and alongside our host nation counterparts and take appropriate measures based on those assessments," he said, without disclosing specific measures.

Pentagon chief Chuck Hagel said he supported the move but added that there was currently no intelligence indicating an imminent threat against American forces or their families in Europe.

He said the danger posed by extremists and foreign fighters returning to the West represented a "long-term challenge" requiring a coordinated effort by governments.

"This isn't anything that's going to be over soon. This is not a threat that can be fixed by sending great armies in to invade countries," he told reporters.

France and other European governments are looking at bolstering counter-terrorism policies to prevent more attacks like the one two weeks ago in Paris, which left 17 people dead.

Western intelligence agencies are particularly concerned over foreign volunteers who join up with extremists in Syria's civil war and then travel back to Europe ready to stage an attack.

Last month, even before the attacks in Paris, the 67,000 US troops stationed in Europe were advised not to wear their uniforms off base as a precaution.

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AFRICA

13. Wider Chaos Threatens as Fighters Seize Branch of Libya's Central Bank

New York Times, Jan. 23, Pg. A9 | David D. Kirkpatrick

BAYDA, Libya — The battle for control of Libya threatened to break open its central bank on Thursday as fighters with one of the country's two warring factions seized control of its Benghazi branch, risking an armed scramble for its gold reserves that could cripple the last functioning institution in the country.

The Central Bank of Libya is the great prize at the center of the escalating armed conflicts that have consumed the country since the overthrow of Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi more than three years ago. It has also been the main shield preventing Libya's descent into utter chaos and deprivation.

The central bank is the repository for Libya's oil revenue and holds nearly \$100 billion in foreign reserves. A desire for a share of that wealth has helped motivate the violent competition among an array of militias fighting for money and influence. They have carved the country into warring fiefs, destroyed its two largest airports, bombed and

shelled civilian neighborhoods and burned down refineries and oil depots — driving the oil output that is the mainstay of Libya's economy down to less than 250 barrels a day from as much as 1.7 million a day at its peak.

As a result, Libyans across the country endure electricity blackouts for hours a day, long lines for scarce fuel at gas stations, and shortages of cooking oil despite its vast energy resources.

But the central bank has sought to remain neutral and above the fray. It has continued to pay for fuel and food subsidies as well as the salaries of bureaucrats, doctors, teachers, local officials and millions of other public employees — often regardless of whether they showed up for work.

By financing the budgets of the Interior and Defense Ministries, the same bank has even provided salaries and supplies for thousands of fighters battling one another from all sides of the struggle. But its continued distribution of paychecks and subsidies has helped communities and families across the country stay afloat despite the collapse of most other economic activity, even maintaining a semblance of order.

The bank's neutrality, though, came under increasing strain as the warring factions established rival national governments, one based in Tripoli in the west and the other in the eastern cities of Tobruk and Bayda. The central bank has two facilities, a headquarters in Tripoli and an eastern branch in Benghazi.

Its most direct challenge has come from the Tobruk-Bayda government. It includes a recently elected Parliament, but it is under the de facto control of Gen. Khalifa Hifter, who defected from Colonel Qaddafi's military and last year announced a military takeover pledging to rid the country of violent extremists.

The Tobruk-Bayda government has sought since October to replace the central bank's chairman, Sadik el-Kaber, a veteran banker, in order to take control of the bank's assets. But Mr. Kaber has refused to resign. He has kept the bank's headquarters in Tripoli, the nominal capital, which is controlled by a rival coalition of moderate Islamists, extremists and militias from the coastal city of Misurata.

Mr. Kaber has pleaded with both sides to respect the bank's neutrality and keep it above politics, to safeguard Libya's wealth. Those arguments appear to have won important support among Western nations, which have a critical voice in the bank's future because much of the bank's foreign reserves are held in Western financial centers.

Mr. Kaber flew to Washington last month for meetings with American and British diplomats, as well as with officials from the White House and the State and Treasury Departments, signaling that the West continued to regard him as the person in charge despite the Tobruk-Bayda government's efforts to replace him. Its candidate to replace Mr. Kaber — regarded by his backers as the legitimate central bank chairman — visited Washington this month but was not accorded the same status, officials here say.

The nature of the challenge changed late Wednesday night, when some of General Hifter's fighters invaded the bank's building in Benghazi, near the front lines of a continuing fight with local Islamist militants.

By Thursday morning, the fighters had posted video online that showed them in control of the premises but refraining, so far, from breaking into the vaults.

“We are the youth of the naval base, and we are here to guard the bank,” a fighter in a camouflage uniform is heard to say in a video, as he leads the camera on a tour of the bank and its flooded basement. Gunfire is audible in the background, apparently coming from the streets outside.

Pointing proudly to a parked white Toyota Camry and a closed safe numbered 835, the fighter in the video says, “There is more inside, but we don’t want to enter, so they don’t call us thieves.”

Some leaders on each side of the conflict in Libya agreed to a conditional United Nations-brokered cease-fire last Friday in Geneva, but the fighting has gone on. The Tripoli faction said Thursday that it would no longer take part in the talks.

“There has been an escalation of fighting in the past two days by troops of the wanted Khalifa Hifter,” the Tripoli government said in a statement. “This escalation peaked today with the storming of a sovereign institution, the central bank in Benghazi.”

Mohamed Hejazi, a spokesman for General Hifter’s forces, confirmed Thursday that they had taken control of the bank, and said they had also seized “80 percent” of Benghazi’s seaport.

Referring to the general’s forces as “the national army of Libya,” Mr. Hejazi called its opponents “terrorists.” “It is our duty to secure the central bank until we rid the city of those terrorists,” he said, adding that the Tobruk-Bayda government no longer considered Mr. Kaber the bank’s legitimate chairman.

Col. Farraj al-Barasi, a commander of General Hifter’s forces in Benghazi, told Reuters that the forces were forming a committee to decide what to do with the bank’s money. “We’ve moved out the technical equipment,” he told the news agency. “The cash is still in the safes.”

The seizure of the Benghazi branch raised immediate fears that militias in Tripoli might seek to seize the bank’s assets there.

In a statement, the United Nations Support Mission in Libya condemned “the reported armed attack against the Central Bank branch in Benghazi” and called for “an independent commission of inquiry” to help clarify the circumstances.

Officials in Washington said in recent days that they met with Mr. Kaber because they were focused on protecting the bank.

“We want very much to bring the conflict to a close, and to do everything we can to help the Libyans preserve the patrimony of the Libyan bank and the Libyan people,” said a senior administration official, speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss delicate diplomacy. “We want their money to be intact after the conflict, so that they can rebuild their country.”

News of the seizure in Benghazi prompted a fall in the value of the Libyan currency, which traded at 2 dinars to the dollar, compared with 1.8 before.

The conflict in Libya had already posed a serious threat to the country's assets. In a statement last week, the central bank warned that Libya had brought in only 21 billion dinars in revenue last year, almost all of it from oil sales — a figure far short of the country's projected budget of 57 billion dinars, most of it for public subsidies and wages.

The bank said the government would have to cut budgets for diplomatic missions and scholarships for Libyans studying abroad, with further austerity measures to come. The Tobruk-Bayda government has taken out large loans from commercial banks to finance its operations.

In a statement on Thursday, the central bank condemned the seizure of the Benghazi branch as "a heinous crime" and warned of "dangerous consequences that it could bring at home and abroad."

The bank called the attack "a dangerous escalation that endangers the fortunes and livelihood of the Libyan people and threatens to bring down the last defense of the Libyan state."

"The bank had worked very hard to stay away from any political disagreements and to remain an institution for all Libyans and all of Libya," the statement continued, and it urged all sides "to go to the dialogue table to negotiate, because that is the only way to steer Libya to safe shores."

--Suliman Ali Zway contributed reporting

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14. Nigeria's campaign against Boko Haram hampered by 'cowards' – aide

Reuters, Jan. 22 | Estelle Shirbon and David Clarke

Nigeria's campaign against Islamist Boko Haram insurgents is being hampered by "cowards" in its armed forces, its presidential security adviser said in a rare public sign of high-level unhappiness with the effort.

Boko Haram's bloody uprising to carve out a breakaway Islamic caliphate has seized much of Nigeria's northeast and poses the worst threat to Africa's most populous state and biggest energy producer and at least three of its neighbours.

Boko Haram claimed a Jan. 3 attack on the town of Baga that killed scores, possibly hundreds, of civilians and left the jihadists in control of the headquarters of a regional multinational force including troops from Niger, Chad and Cameroon.

Nigerian soldiers fled the area after Baga was overrun. It was the latest Boko Haram success to cast doubt on the commitment of some in the military, and 22 officers including a brigadier general are on trial over alleged sabotage in the war effort.

"Unfortunately we have a lot of cowards. We have people who use every excuse in this world not to fight," Sambo Dasuki, the top security adviser to President Goodluck Jonathan, told an audience at the Chatham House think-tank in London on Thursday.

But, he stressed, "there is no high-level conspiracy within the army not to end the insurgency."

Dasuki denied the army was under-equipped, as critics have asserted, calling this an "excuse."

He said of troops from Chad, Niger and Cameroon that were supposed to be stationed there at the time of the attack: "That wasn't that much of a multinational task force, it was by name (only), because they were all supposed to be physically there," when in fact most were not.

BOKO HARAM LEADER "STILL IN CHARGE"

Dasuki added there was international pressure to set up a multinational task force with headquarters in the Chadian capital N'Djamena, but "Nigerians don't see what the use is" of the regional force.

Returning to the subject during his talk with journalists later, Dasuki said however genuine cooperation between the forces of all four nations was essential to defeat the insurgency.

Dasuki said the leader of Boko Haram, a mysterious figure known as Abubakar Shekau whom the Nigerian army have repeatedly claimed to have killed, remained in control of the insurgent group.

A man purporting to be Shekau claimed responsibility in a new video on Tuesday for the attack on Baga.

"We believe he is present at every major operation (of Boko Haram)," Dasuki said.

Dasuki added Shekau had travelled "all over the world" to receive training from other Islamist extremist groups. He named Pakistan and Mali as training grounds for Shekau and other Boko Haram fighters.

He said he estimated Boko Haram had about 5,000 active fighters.

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POLITICS

15. Obama Not Planning to Meet With Israeli Premier

New York Times, Jan. 23, Pg. A3 | David E. Sanger, Michael D. Shear and Jodi Rudoren

WASHINGTON — The White House said on Thursday that President Obama would not meet Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel when he comes here in March to speak to a joint session of Congress and to lobby for new sanctions on Iran that Mr. Obama opposes, the latest twist in a dispute that has marked a new low in relations between the two leaders and which now threatens the chances of a nuclear deal with Tehran.

The White House statement came after Mr. Netanyahu, apparently sensing that he had committed a major diplomatic blunder, rescheduled a commitment he made to speak to Congress next month without first coordinating his visit with the White House. The House speaker, John A. Boehner, had extended the invitation to highlight Mr. Netanyahu's support for the Republican effort to enact a new round of sanctions against Iran that Mr. Obama has threatened to veto, and to bolster the critique that the president's approach to the Middle East has not been forceful enough.

Mr. Obama "has been clear about his opposition to Congress passing new legislation on Iran that could undermine our negotiations and divide the international community," Bernadette Meehan, the spokeswoman for the National Security Council, said after the White House announced that the president would not be meeting with Mr.

Netanyahu on his visit because of a longstanding policy of not seeing foreign leaders too close to their national elections — a rule that is often ignored when critical issues are on the agenda.

“The president has had many conversations with the prime minister on this matter,” she said, “and I am sure they will continue to be in contact.”

Famously, many of those conversations have been deeply uncomfortable. The two leaders have often clashed on Israel’s determination to build new settlements, which Mr. Obama viewed as a way to sabotage peace talks. Mr. Netanyahu was accused of lecturing Mr. Obama in front of the cameras in the Oval Office during an angry conversation in May 2011, after Mr. Obama suggested that the 1967 borders with Palestine should be the starting point for peace negotiations. Later that year, after former President Nicolas Sarkozy of France complained in front of an open microphone that Mr. Netanyahu was “a liar,” Mr. Obama said, “You’re fed up with him, but I have to deal with him even more often than you.”

The current dispute over Iran is hardly new, but it has two new elements: the Republican takeover of the Senate, which changes the calculus for passage of new Iran sanctions, and Mr. Boehner’s desire to win powerful allies in a confrontation with Mr. Obama over the president’s No. 1 foreign policy objective for the remainder of his term.

“There obviously is not just tension in the relationship but a lot of distrust in the relationship,” said Dennis B. Ross, a former senior adviser to Mr. Obama on the Middle East. “It’s clear that Speaker Boehner wants to make his own point. He’s trying to use the Israeli prime minister to do it.”

The battle over the proposed sanctions has heated up in recent days. In testimony on Thursday, the new deputy secretary of state, Antony J. Blinken, opposed the idea of Congress voting on an agreement if one is reached (it would not be a treaty, so no Senate consent is required) and acknowledged that the negotiations may need to be extended again at the end of June. The leading sanctions resolution in Congress would impose sanctions at that time if the current talks are inconclusive.

The White House has fumed at what it views as Mr. Netanyahu’s efforts to undercut the negotiations, first by complaining that sanctions would never bring Iran to the table, and then by arguing that the administration risked undercutting sanctions just as they were proving effective. Daniel S. Kurtzer, a professor of Middle East policy at Princeton University, said the decision by Mr. Netanyahu to accept Mr. Boehner’s invitation suggested a willingness to clearly ally with Mr. Obama’s opponents.

“The Boehner-Netanyahu gambit has taken the relationship at the top to a new low,” Mr. Kurtzer said. “It has put Netanyahu into an anti-Obama camp, a Republican camp. He may think that he gains a political advantage by showing that Congress is on his side.”

Any final nuclear accord with Iran would require the United States to agree to repeal, over time, the sanctions that Congress has already imposed over the past decade for Iran’s nuclear program. As one senior administration official deeply involved in the talks said recently, “This whole set of discussions bolsters the hardliners” in Tehran “who don’t believe we will reverse the sanctions no matter what Iran does.”

In the talks with Iran that have been underway in Vienna and Geneva, one of the key points of dispute has been Iran’s insistence that sanctions be lifted rapidly if an agreement is reached. Mr. Obama has resisted, saying he would use his own authority to suspend many of the sanctions in the early years of an accord. But those actions

could be reversed by his successor. And ultimately, Iran wants a guarantee that the economic limits that have cut their oil exports by more than half and cut them off from the global financial system will be permanently ended.

The dispute with Israel has emphasized that an accord with Iran will require not one deal but three: one between Western and Iranian negotiators, one between Mr. Obama and Congress and one between Iran's president, Hassan Rouhani, and the hard-line clerics and military officials who see the country's nuclear program as the centerpiece of Iran's ability to project power.

Mr. Netanyahu plays a major role in the second of those deals, as the shadow presence in the debate with Congress. But his effort may have also been directed at the Israeli electorate. "Netanyahu is using the Republican Congress for a photo-op for his election campaign and the Republicans are using Bibi for their campaign against Obama," said Martin Indyk, a former ambassador to Israel, using the prime minister's nickname. "Unfortunately, the U.S. relationship will take the hit. It would be far wiser for us to stay out of their politics and for them to stay out of ours."

Mr. Netanyahu's speech to Congress will now be in early March, rather than in February as Mr. Boehner had announced on Wednesday. A senior Israeli official, speaking on the condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to do otherwise, said the new date was cleared with the White House before it was made public and that it was timed to coincide with the annual meeting of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, which Mr. Netanyahu had already planned to attend.

The announcement seemed like an effort to calm the waters. It quoted Mr. Netanyahu as saying how "just last week" he had "discussed with President Obama the common challenges we face from Islamist extremism."

Israeli news reports were filled Thursday with anonymous American officials fuming about how Mr. Netanyahu had snubbed Mr. Obama with the speech only days after asking for his help. Columnists and commentators said the Israeli premier and the Republican congressional leader were both engaged in meddling. "They are helping Netanyahu defeat his rivals here, and he is helping them humiliate their rivals there," observed Nahum Barnea in Yediot Aharonot. "That is dangerous. That is toxic."

Gilad Erdan, a minister who is close to Mr. Netanyahu, tried to tamp down the crisis, telling a radio interviewer that "relations are not bad" between Israel and the United States.

"What there is, is disagreements," he said. "People and leaders have opinions."

--David E. Sanger and Michael D. Shear reported from Washington, and Jodi Rudoren from Jerusalem. Julie Hirschfeld Davis contributed reporting from Lawrence, Kan

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DEFENSE DEPARTMENT

16. Hagel: Vietnam War's lessons still echo today

MilitaryTimes.com, Jan. 23 | Andrew Tilghman

It's been 47 years since Chuck Hagel patrolled the thick jungles of Vietnam as an Army squad leader.

But even now, in his pristine office at the Pentagon overlooking the Potomac River, the defense secretary still can vividly recall the night in 1968 when his armored personnel carrier hit a 500-pound mine.

"I remember that night like it was yesterday," Hagel said in a recent interview in his office.

Hagel was a 21-year-old Army sergeant when he was hit in the chest with shrapnel, his face burned from a mine blast, his eardrums blown out. After a gunfight with Viet Cong troops, he recalls, he and other soldiers who were in "pretty bad shape" waited for a medevac helicopter.

"My brother was with me as well. They dusted us off to a field hospital. ... It has been seared into my mind," he said.

"We're products of our environments. We're products of our experiences. Certainly that experience in war in Vietnam in 1968 ... the violence, the horrors, the suffering that I saw, yes, it conditioned me."

"But," Hagel added after a brief pause, "I also recognize the realities of the world that we live in. The instrument of our military is required, unfortunately, and history is rather replete on that point. Maybe someday they will not be required, but they are.

"Then the question becomes the use of that instrument of power and force. Using it wisely, using it carefully, and using it judiciously. We have not always done that and I have been very vocal on that point," he said.

Hagel will soon step down after two years on the job, reportedly amid tension with the White House's inner circle over the U.S. response to burgeoning crises that include the rise of the Islamic State group in Iraq, new Russian aggression in Europe and the Syrian civil war.

Hagel's experience at the Pentagon has been unique in several ways. He is the first Vietnam veteran to hold the powerful post, and the first who served as a noncommissioned officer. And unlike several of his predecessors, he did not arrive with extensive experience as a national security professional, but rather with a background working with veterans and the military community - he was the number two man at the Veterans Affairs Department in the 1980s and later served as the CEO of the USO.

His legacy will be shaped in part by his caution regarding the use of military force.

"I do believe that you always have to ask the tough questions ... like, once you take this action, that is not the end of that action ... because there will be consequences that will come from this action. Now where do you want to go? What happens next? Where do you want this to end up? Those are the questions that you ask. This also applies to inaction. If you take no action, what are the consequences?" Hagel said.

His supporters say that approach is measured and prudent; he is careful to consider the full impact of military strikes and troop deployments. But his critics say he has been indecisive, hesitant to exercise America's massive military might and uncomfortable with the tough choices required of the leader of the Defense Department.

Hagel is not the first defense secretary to urge caution in using military force. In 2011, former Defense Secretary Robert Gates memorably noted that "any future defense secretary who advises the president to again send a big American land army into Asia or into the Middle East or Africa should have his head examined."

But such views have been more central to Hagel's leadership. His belief in the limits of military action comes at a time when the Pentagon is grappling to adjust to new limits on its own size and budget. In that regard, Hagel has helped map out a long-term plan for a more modest military that can be sustained under the defense spending limits that Republicans and Democrats approved and appear unwilling to change.

Shortly after taking over the Pentagon's top job in 2013, Hagel launched a "Strategic Choices and Management Review," which floated once-unthinkable proposals such as cutting the Army to 420,000 soldiers and scaling back the size of the Navy aircraft carrier fleet.

"I am the first secretary of defense who has actually had to deal with sequestration," Hagel said in the interview, referring to the legal mechanism that imposed across-the-board cuts in military spending in 2013. "I am the first secretary of defense who actually had to put together a budget, a real budget, a practical budget with the law of sequestration hanging over us.

"We had not prepared a budget for this reality," he said.

Some experts say Hagel's caution regarding the use of military force tracks with the broader military culture of the moment: Troops are weary after 13 years of war, the officer corps is questioning many decisions that guided the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and senior Pentagon officials are dealing with tough budget cuts from Capitol Hill.

"I think many [in the] military have been kind of skeptical of going back into Iraq with a large ground force," said Richard Kohn, who teaches military history at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. "They are not nearly as bellicose as some of the hawks in the Republican Party because they recognize their limitations, both in funding and capability."

Iraq creep

In 2008, when Hagel was a Republican senator from Nebraska, he bucked his party's leadership to vocally oppose the "surge" that sent thousands of additional U.S. troops into Iraq.

He visited the White House frequently last summer as the Obama administration and senior military officials were formulating a strategy and response to the rise of a new wave of Islamic extremists in Iraq. Hagel's role behind closed doors is unclear, but it is widely believed that he brought to the table a series of questions and concerns about pursuing a military solution to the crisis.

There are now 3,100 U.S. troops authorized to serve in Iraq, and an advise-and-assist mission to support Iraqi troops is underway. The U.S. and its coalition partners have dropped more than 1,700 bombs on Iraq and Syria since August.

Hagel said he worries about mission creep as he prepares to step down and hand over these policies and operations to his successor.

"I think any secretary of defense has to always be on guard that we do not inadvertently sometimes drift into a more accelerated use ... of our military," he said. "It is always a concern for me and I suspect any secretary of defense.

"Those of us responsible for this institution have to always be very clear with our leaders in Congress, our commander in chief ... What is the mission? What are the objectives? How best can we fulfill that mission? And it is easy to drift into other missions."

He said he believes those questions are especially important "at the moment of crisis ... when there is an expectation from the American people, from media, the Congress: 'What are you going to do?' Well, the military answer is not always the right answer," he said.

With his next comment, Hagel once again acknowledged that his perspective on such questions is heavily shaped by his own experience in Vietnam:

"I learned as I walked through this 12 months of war in 1968 ... you cannot impose your will, you cannot impose your values, you cannot impose your standards, your institutions on other societies in other countries. It has never worked. Never will work.

"People want freedom, want rights. But they also want respect and they want dignity. That means respecting other's cultures and other's religions and ways of life. . Nations, cultures, people come from different histories and they have to work through their own societal issues to get to where they want to be," Hagel said.

That's why, he said, the U.S. and its military are now seeking to forge partnerships with local militaries around the world.

16,000 casualties

Hagel usually shies away from speaking publicly about his time in Vietnam. According to several people who work closely with him, he consciously avoids the appearance that he is exploiting his experience for political gain.

When asked about his deployment, Hagel notes the total casualties that America suffered during his year there.

"We sent home 16,000 young men - and some women, not many, but some - who had been killed in that war. That is almost unimaginable today to think about that," he said.

"I saw the suffering of our own troops. I saw the suffering of the Vietnamese people. I saw terrible things which war always produces. So I have tried to do what I could within the jobs I had and the positions I had, to help influence that ... influence a world that maybe someday it will not require that use of force.

"But," he added, "we live in the world that we live in."

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17. Fast Track on Drug for Ebola Has Faltered

New York Times, Jan. 23, Pg. B1 | Andrew Pollack

As Ebola raged through West Africa last summer, an experimental drug was tried for the first time on two American aid workers in Liberia who were gravely ill with the virus. Both recovered, one of them rapidly.

Though it could not be said for sure that the drug, ZMapp, was responsible, patients and doctors began clamoring for it. But there was enough to treat only a handful of patients. Federal officials vowed to produce more.

Six months later, very little has been produced, diminishing the chances that the drug can be used to treat large numbers of patients in the current outbreak, which appears to be ebbing.

The delays show some gaps in preparedness and have frustrated biodefense and infectious disease experts.

“I think it’s inexcusable that they haven’t moved on it,” said Dr. Philip K. Russell, a retired major general who once ran the United States Army Medical Research and Development Command. “They’ve had months.”

Government officials announced on Thursday that a clinical trial to test whether ZMapp is effective would begin in Liberia, probably within three weeks. But that trial will involve at most 150 patients, the officials said.

Efforts to procure more of the drug have run into snags, according to federal officials, researchers and biotechnology executives. The Department of Health and Human Services asked for proposals to produce more of it to be submitted by November, but so far, no contracts have been awarded.

Facilities that Health and Human Services created, at a cost of hundreds of millions of dollars, expressly for rapidly manufacturing drugs or vaccines in a public health emergency are not being used to produce ZMapp yet. The same is true, with one exception, of facilities the Department of Defense invested in to build the capacity for rapid response.

Thomas W. Geisbert, an Ebola expert at the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston, said ZMapp and another drug also in short supply, called TKM-Ebola, were the most promising potential treatments for Ebola based on their effectiveness in treating monkeys.

“Make more of them. We know they work,” he said. “If I were exposed to the virus, those are the two things I would want.”

The government is now working with two leading biotechnology companies, Genentech and Regeneron Pharmaceuticals, and reports rapid progress. Regeneron executives say that not only can they produce ZMapp, but they have also come up with drug candidates that might be even better.

Federal officials defend their performance. “We feel with our partners that we’ve made significant progress in the Ebola crisis,” Robin Robinson, who is in charge of biodefense procurement for Health and Human Services, said in a news conference on Thursday.

By government contracting standards, the effort might be moving at a lightning pace, just not fast enough for the epidemic. And problems unique to ZMapp have made it difficult to expect mass production. The drug is owned by a tiny company, Mapp Biopharmaceutical of San Diego, which has few resources of its own. ZMapp was in a very early stage of development when the outbreak began, and Mapp was not producing more because it had all it needed for early studies.

ZMapp is a combination of three antibodies, which are immune system proteins that can home in on a virus and neutralize it. Partly because it had little money, Mapp chose to manufacture the antibodies in genetically modified

tobacco plants. That seemed to be a less expensive way to get small quantities of the drug than the usual biotechnology industry method of producing antibodies in genetically engineered animal cells grown in stainless steel vats.

But there are not many factories that can produce proteins in tobacco, limiting how much can be made now.

A research arm of the Defense Department gave money several years ago to help set up facilities to produce vaccines rapidly in tobacco in the event of a pandemic. At least one of the centers passed a “live fire” test in 2012, producing 10 million doses of a flu vaccine in a month.

But vaccines require a lot less material than antibodies. And after being formed, the tobacco production centers have had to drum up business to remain staffed and ready, and they have not always been able to do so.

Production of ZMapp began in August at one of these facilities, Kentucky BioProcessing, which is now owned by Reynolds American, the cigarette company. That output is slated for the clinical trials beginning next month.

The Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority, or Barda, which is the biodefense procurement agency in Health and Human Services run by Dr. Robinson, decided to seek additional production. It turned to three centers it had set up on its own to provide rapid production of drugs and vaccines in an emergency.

Two of the centers, one run by Texas A&M University and the other by the biotech company Emergent Biosolutions, submitted proposals by the Nov. 10 deadline. The third, run by Novartis, which is getting out of the vaccine business, did not.

But those centers had no experience manufacturing using tobacco. So they had to work with the tobacco facilities that the Defense Department had financed.

Dr. Russell, the retired Army biodefense official, said Barda might have saved time by dealing directly with the tobacco companies but probably felt a need to justify its investment in its own centers. Others say dealing with centers it was already familiar with allowed Barda to move faster.

Still, no contracts have been awarded. Some industry executives say Barda found the bids too high. While Emergent, Texas A&M and Barda say the proposals are still under evaluation, Barda is exploring alternatives.

The initial plan was to have the other centers produce ZMapp using the same technology employed by Kentucky BioProcessing. But another tobacco facility, Caliber Biotherapeutics, could not reach an agreement with Kentucky BioProcessing on licensing the technology, said a federal official who spoke on the condition of anonymity because contract discussions are continuing. Moreover, this official said, Kentucky felt it could not devote manpower to helping Caliber when it was scrambling to produce ZMapp on its own.

So Barda is now letting tobacco production companies use their own technology. Dr. Robinson said in the news conference that the agency might go through the Defense Department, which has standing contracts with these facilities, to procure the drug. One company that has produced the antibodies in tobacco is Medicago, which declined to comment.

Barda is also working with Genentech and Regeneron to see if the antibodies can be manufactured in Chinese hamster ovary cells, or CHO cells, the biotechnology industry's usual method. There is a lot of capacity available for such production.

Regeneron executives said they had developed CHO cells that can produce the ZMapp antibodies. But they have also developed their own antibodies that the company says bind to the virus more tightly and have better pharmaceutical properties.

Since both sets of antibodies are probably at least somewhat different from ZMapp, they will have to be first tested in monkeys. That will happen soon, but it will delay their possible use in people.

Dr. Robinson said hundreds or thousands of treatment courses made in tobacco could be available by the end of the year. And thousands of doses made in CHO cells could be available by then. Barda's rapid response centers could be enlisted to help manufacture using CHO cells, he said.

But it is possible that the outbreak will be over by then. In West Africa, trials have begun of other drugs that do not yet have the same results in monkeys as ZMapp but that would be available in large quantities should they prove effective.

Dr. George D. Yancopoulos, chief scientific officer of Regeneron, said the crisis had pointed up shortcomings in biodefense. "Nobody is really prepared," he said. "Nobody in the world has rapid response capabilities."

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GUANTÁNAMO

18. Hagel: Yemen unrest could affect transfers from Guantánamo

TheHill.com, Jan. 22 | Kristina Wong

Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel said Thursday that recent unrest in Yemen "has to be factored in" when deciding whether to release Yemeni detainees from the prison at Guantánamo Bay.

"Because of what's happening in Yemen, and we were well aware of — of the danger and the uncertainty and what was going on in Yemen before today, that has to be factored in," he said at a Pentagon briefing Thursday.

Yemen's prime minister, president and his cabinet abruptly resigned Thursday, after Shiite rebels known as the Houthis clashed with government forces in the capital of Sana'a and surrounded the presidential compound.

The events have raised questions about whether Yemeni detainees, who make up the majority of Guantánamo's prison population, should be released as part of President Obama's push to close the facility.

Republicans in Congress have fought the release of the Yemeni detainees, warning they are likely to return to the battlefield and participate in plots against the United States.

Hagel said Yemeni detainees — who number about 80 of the remaining population of 122 — have not been released back to Yemen, but to other countries willing to accept them.

"It's what country is willing to host these detainees. We've not sent them back to Yemen," Hagel said.

Hagel, as defense secretary, is personally responsible for signing off on detainee transfers, after an interagency certification process ensures countries receiving detainees are able and willing to monitor detainees and ensure they don't engage in future terrorist activities.

The Pentagon chief said he personally signed off on the release of 44 detainees during his tenure.

The outgoing defense secretary reportedly took heat from the Obama administration for not moving faster to approve more detainee transfers, and some said the delays contributed to the president's decision to replace him

On Thursday, Hagel defended his actions.

"I have always supported the closing of Guantanamo. ... I was probably one of the first in the United States Senate: certainly one of the first Republicans to take that position," he said.

"That said, the secretary of Defense [has] the responsibility to certify the transfer of detainees," he said.

"And I have tried diligently before I put my name on that document to assure not only myself but the people of this country that that in fact is what I have done as the certifying officer here on behalf of the people of this country," he said.

"I suspect I have not made everybody happy always, on that point," he said. "But it's too big a decision to be made quickly or politically. But it is one of many big decisions secretary of Defense has to deal with every day."

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19. Guantanamo Navy base commander relieved of duties amid probe

Reuters, Jan. 22 | David Alexander

WASHINGTON - The commander of the U.S. Navy base at Guantanamo Bay has been relieved of his duties after an investigation uncovered evidence of an inappropriate relationship between him and a civilian woman whose husband was found dead earlier this month, a U.S. official said on Thursday.

The U.S. Navy said Captain John Nettleton, commander of Naval Station Guantanamo Bay since June 29, 2012, was relieved on Jan. 21 because of a loss of confidence in his ability to command. The Navy declined to provide further details, citing the ongoing investigation.

Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel, responding to a question at a news conference on Thursday, confirmed the commander had been relieved of his duties but declined to elaborate, saying it would be inappropriate for him to comment because of the investigation.

"The base commander has been relieved. It is now in the purview of appropriate authorities, so I won't have anything to say specifically about that," Hagel told reporters. "But the commander has been relieved."

The U.S. official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said investigators looking into the death of Christopher Tur, a civilian worker at the Navy Exchange on the base, found evidence of an inappropriate relationship between Nettleton and Tur's wife.

The Coast Guard found Tur's body in the waters at the western side of the base on Jan. 11, a day after his wife reported him missing, the official said. The investigators were looking into the cause of Tur's death, which was not immediately clear, the official said.

Nettleton has been temporarily assigned to a staff job at Navy Region Southeast in Jacksonville, Florida, the Navy said.

He was not directly involved in detainee operations at Guantanamo military prison, which houses fighters captured in the U.S. war against al Qaeda and its affiliates, defense officials said.

Nettleton was in command of the Navy installation and was responsible for base logistics, but the prison is run by a joint task force.

Captain Scott Gray, the chief of staff to the commander of Navy Region Southeast, has been assigned acting commander at Guantanamo, the Navy said.

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20. Egyptian held at Guantánamo goes before parole board

Miami Herald Online, Jan. 22 | Carol Rosenberg

WASHINGTON — A chronically ill Egyptian prisoner who was brought to Guantánamo a decade ago as a suspected al-Qaida explosives expert went before an inter-agency parole board Thursday and, in the small slice the public was permitted to see, didn't say a word — and neither did his attorney.

Tariq el Sawah, 57, had at one point been a candidate for a war crimes trial as an alleged supporter and co-conspirator of al-Qaida and was so designated in 2008. But the material support for terror charge prosecutors swore out in the dwindling days of the Bush administration was subsequently ruled illegitimate at war court prosecutions.

Instead, Thursday he could be seen swiveling in an executive chair via video link from a trailer at the U.S. Navy base's Detention Center Zone in a massive brown T-shirt, flanked by two Air Force officers and civilian attorney Robert Tucker — who presumably helped him plead his case in a closed session.

Sawah has long been identified as one of Guantánamo's chronically ill, at-risk and morbidly obese captives. According to Pentagon prison camp records released under the Freedom of Information Act, he weighed in at Guantanamo in May 5, 2002 at 215 pounds and had ballooned to 411 pounds in June 2006.

Despite the charge sheet, by September 2008 the prison camps commander was recommending his release, noting he was "closely watched for significant and chronic problems" that included high cholesterol, diabetes and liver disease.

It was not known what he told the board in its secret session. But a public summary of an intelligence report released by the Pentagon at the time of the hearing said he hoped to reunite with family members who live in Egypt, Bosnia and the United States and seemed "unlikely to pursue reengagement."

It said that while he “openly admits to having taken part in terrorism, there are no indications that he is interested in reengaging in extremist activity.”

The mention of Bosnia refers to his service in the Bosnian Army 1990s, a popular cause with jihadists, before he moved on to Afghanistan and was handed off to U.S. forces in December 2001 with cluster bomb wounds to his legs, apparently from an attack in the Tora Bora region amid the U.S. invasion in the aftermath of the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks.

His lawyers have called him too sick to keep at the prison camps in Cuba following a novel federal court approach by a since released Sudanese prisoner who won a habeas corpus petition using that argument. In fact, military sources say, Sawah is confined to a special compound called Camp Echo opposite the main prison buildings for low-value detainees because of both his health condition and the fact that at some point he was quite cooperative with his captors.

A senior Egyptian diplomat observed the brief, open portion of the proceedings with a knot of reporters and representatives of human rights groups. Egypt has asked for the return of their citizen, who according to Pentagon records was born in the port city of Alexandria, joined the Muslim Brotherhood as a young man, was arrested for a time after the assassination of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and went on to become a construction contractor in Greece before being drawn to Bosnia.

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21. Lawyer for former Australian Guantanamo detainee says U.S. agrees he is innocent

Reuters, Jan. 22 | Jane Wardell

SYDNEY - The United States has agreed that Australian David Hicks, jailed on terrorism charges for five years at Guantanamo, is innocent, his lawyer said on Friday.

Hicks pleaded guilty in 2007 to providing "material support for terrorism" but his legal team claimed that he did so under duress and filed an appeal in late 2013.

Lawyer Stephen Kenny said the legal team arguing the appeal has been told the U.S. government did not dispute Hicks' innocence and also admitted that his conviction was not correct.

Kenny said he expected to hear within a month whether the Court of Military Commission Review in Washington would quash his conviction.

"We have no doubts that the Military Commission ... will make a ruling now that David Hicks' conviction should be set aside," Kenny said on Australian Broadcasting Corp radio.

The Pentagon declined to comment directly on Kenny's claims, saying any developments in the case are a matter for the military court.

"The government will make additional responses through court filings," said Army Lieutenant Colonel Myles Caggins, a Pentagon spokesman.

Hicks signed a plea bargain in 2007 in which he agreed he would never appeal his conviction. The deal made Hicks the first person convicted in a U.S. war crimes tribunal since World War Two and allowed him to return to Australia to finish his nine-month sentence.

Kenny said the former kangaroo skinner was despondent and suicidal at the time and signed the plea deal in a desperate bid to get out of Guantanamo.

Civilian courts have since ruled that providing material support for terror was not a legitimate war crime for actions that occurred before the adoption of new laws in 2006 by the administration of U.S. President George W. Bush to try to prosecute accused war criminals of al Qaeda captured after the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks.

The Military Commission earlier this month overturned the terrorism conviction through plea bargain of a Sudanese man, Noor Mohammed, who was also at Guantanamo, citing those rulings.

Hicks, now 38 and free in Australia, was captured in Afghanistan in December 2001 and was among the first group of prisoners sent to Guantanamo when the detention camp opened on Jan. 11, 2002.

Hicks has admitted he trained at paramilitary camps in Afghanistan, but said he saw no evidence of terrorism activity. The U.S. government has said they were al Qaeda camps.

During his five years at Guantanamo, Hicks was beaten, threatened with deadly violence, sexually assaulted, deprived of sleep for long periods and told that he would never again set foot in his home country, his lawyers said.

If he loses in the military appeals court, Hicks could appeal to a federal appeals court and the U.S. Supreme Court.

--Additional reporting by David Alexander in Washington

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ARMY

22. Army leaders now hope to slow the drawdown

ArmyTimes.com, Jan. 22 | Michelle Tan

The Army is considering taking measures to slow the drawdown, though the service still plans to eventually reach an end-strength of 450,000 active-duty troops.

Army Secretary John McHugh, in a Wednesday interview with Army Times, said he hopes to "retain some faces in our structure to fill out units that are undermanned."

The Army is on pace to hit 490,000 active-duty soldiers by the end of fiscal year 2015. It also is slated to cut about 20,000 soldiers every year to reach 450,000 by the end of fiscal 2017.

However, senior Army leaders are discussing extending that timeline an additional year — that is if sequestration can be avoided in 2016.

"Assuming budget relief occurs, the Army could retain some flexibility as it downsizes and slow the ramp to reach 440-450 thousand in FY18," said Lt. Col. Christopher Kasker, public affairs officer to the Army Secretary. "In any event, the end-state of 440-450 remains fixed as long as sequestration is averted. Congress would have to grant us this authority in the budget."

McHugh told Army Times that adjusting the "ramp" of the drawdown "provides us a little bit of relief, basically for readiness purposes."

"The retention will not affect the ultimate place in which we end up," McHugh stressed. "I don't want soldiers to think the end-strength is now going to be 451,000 or 452,000 or 455,000, because that hasn't changed, and unless the budget realities change, we don't expect that to."

When looking at the Army's readiness figures, there is clearly a need for some relief.

Even with the gains it has made in the last 18 months, only 36 percent of the Army's units are "appropriately ready" to respond or deploy if needed, McHugh said, and if sequestration returns in 2016, those hard-earned gains could be lost again.

"We have come some significant distance on restoring our readiness over the last two years thanks to some relief that Congress has provided us," he said. "But at '16, should sequestration return, all the progress that we've made ... will be lost. You can add to that our modernization programs, our family programs. Virtually no corner of the Army would be untouched in a negative way should sequestration remain on the books."

Optimally, the Army wants 65 percent to 70 percent of its units to be ready to respond or deploy if needed, McHugh said.

"That obviously says we've still got a long way to go, but it's important to note that the roughly 36 percent is far better than we were in '13," he said.

It could take the Army years to recover from the automatic budget cuts triggered by sequestration, McHugh said.

"It's not a light switch," he said. "You don't regain either end-strength or readiness overnight, even if someone writes a sufficiently large check."

It takes "months and months" to build a new brigade combat team or increase readiness across the force, McHugh said.

"We've got to be mindful of not just where we're going, but what it would take to get us back to a different level should that becomes absolutely essential," he said.

During the wide-ranging discussion with Army Times, McHugh addressed the challenges Army faces as it deals with shrinking budgets, new missions around the world and the potential return of sequestration in 2016.

"This remains a very busy Army, as evidenced by the number of new missions, some unforeseen as recently as a year ago, [and] the fact that we have nine of our 10 division headquarters out deployed across all corners of the globe," he said.

In recent months, the Army has been able to "step up to meet the challenge and the goal in West Africa, an unanticipated training mission in Iraq, [and] respond to, shall I say, Mr. Putin's adventurism in Ukraine and Eastern Europe," McHugh said.

"This Army remains, as it has been for more than the past decade, the greatest land force the world has ever seen," he said. "We're doing everything we can to preserve that."

If sequestration returns in 2016, it could have "very real challenges, very serious implications" to the Army's ability to meet the demands placed upon it, McHugh said.

Under sequestration, the Army could be forced to shrink to 420,000 soldiers.

While an active-duty end-strength of 450,000 soldiers "produces certain challenges, we feel that it is a sufficient number to meet the national defense strategic guidance and to adequately meet the missions that lie before us," McHugh said.

At 420,000, however, "we don't feel that we meet the defense strategic guidance and would not have sufficient numbers to continue to do the missions that we see before us today," he said. "The other reality, as we've seen over the last 12 months, is there are often things that arise that we didn't foresee. Our ability to respond to any emerging new crisis would be severely restricted."

As he travels across the force, McHugh said he hears from soldiers who are worried about the future of the Army.

"They're worried about their place in this Army and even if they'll have a place in the Army," he said.

Soldiers also see how the Army has had to cut soldiers "who have served honorably, who have met our standards, some with multiple deployments into combat," McHugh said. "And they worry if they might not be next. So until and unless we get some predictability in funding, and until and unless we have some ultimate disposition of sequestration, that angst is going to continue to turn."

McHugh, who has been secretary of the Army for more than five years, said the Army has operated under a continuing resolution for nearly half the time he's been in the job.

"What we really need is a resolution to sequestration of some sort," he said. "But also, equally important, predictable and stable funding so that we can plan across our many areas of need and send a more stable and better message for our soldiers about their future."

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23. Full Speed Ahead On Wargames – Gen. Odierno

BreakingDefense.com, Jan. 22 | Sydney J. Freedberg Jr.

ARLINGTON -- The US Army is trying to reinvent itself, much as it did during the Great Depression. Even if the steep cuts called sequestration return in 2016 — as is current law — the Army would rather get smaller than shortchange innovation, Chief of Staff Ray Odierno said Thursday. The service will hold annual wargames on new ways of fighting, Gen. Odierno said, the first of them this August on the concept formerly known as Air-Sea Battle.

“To me, it’s an exciting time in the Army because it’s a time of great change,” Odierno told an Association of the US Army breakfast this morning. “I can sit up here and talk about ‘oh, woe is us, I’m worried about sequestration’ — [and] I am worried about it...but we cannot stop innovating. In fact, a time of decreased resources requires us to do the innovation.”

The first exercise will look at how the Army fits into the concept originally called “Air-Sea Battle,” now formalized in joint doctrine as the much clunkier “Joint Concept for Access and Maneuver in the Global Commons.” The original Air-Sea Battle concept focused on how the Air Force and Navy would break open layered defenses like those of China or Iran — known as “anti-access/area denial” (A2/AD) systems. The new, broader concept also explores what you do once you get access, such as deploying ground forces.

So, said Odierno, “in the first week of August, out at the National Training Center [Fort Irwin, California], we are going to do a ‘joint early entry operation’ which includes special operations forces, conventional [land] forces, air forces, naval forces, in order to develop the concept that is necessary to ensure we can get our ground forces on the ground anywhere in the world.”

What he didn’t say was that such rapid deployments have been a chronic headache for the heavily equipped Army (and a core strength of the less well-armed Marine Corps) at least since the 82nd Airborne deployed to Saudi Arabia in 1990 as a “speed bump” against Saddam Hussein. After a decade of uparmoring everything to survive roadside bombs in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Army is looking to get lighter and faster again.

All that’s just wargame No. 1. Next year, the Army will launch a series of annual exercises specifically designed to explore the 20 “warfighting challenges” — from cyber tactics to influencing local leaders — identified in the recent Army Operating Concept. (The working title for these wargames is “Army Warfighting Assessments,” but Odierno told reporters that name will change). The first wargame will be at Fort Bliss, Texas, with “about 15” foreign militaries participating, he said.

Starting with that 2016 wargame, Odierno explained to the press, “we’re going to do annual exercises that enable us to look at new concepts — joint concepts and ground concepts — that enable us to respond across the spectrum of conflict” from training and advising missions (as in Iraq and now, Ukraine) to high-end combined-arms warfare.

“It’ll help us develop a variety of options that we give our national security leaders,” Odierno said.

The Army’s pulled this off before. In the 1920s and ’30s, junior officers like George Patton, Dwight Eisenhower, and Hap Arnold laid the intellectual and technological foundation for the force of tanks and aircraft that won World War II. In the “hollow force” era after Vietnam — to which Odierno said sequester would return us — the Army developed the “AirLand Battle” tactics that won the first Gulf War. During the post-Cold War downsizing of the 1990s, Chief of Staff Gordon Sullivan’s “digitization” programs and wargames developed the wireless command-and-control networks that enabled the blitzkrieg on Baghdad in 2003.

But this time may be different, said Gen. Sullivan, who’s now president of AUSA. Compared to his own experience in the 1990s, he told me after Odierno’s remarks, “This is much more challenging [because the Army has] many more commitments.”

“Today we have about 45,000 soldiers deployed, most people don’t understand that,” Odierno told AUSA. “So we’re busy.”

Odierno gave few details on the newest of those missions, an effort announced yesterday to train Ukrainian troops in small-unit tactics and leadership. He also declined to speculate whether the US advisor mission in Iraq would grow beyond the 3,100 currently authorized. But when pressed by the press after his public talk, Odierno said his list of worries was “pretty close” to the one outlined by Pentagon intelligence chief Mike Vickers yesterday.

“What is the existential threat to the United States? No. 1 is terrorism,” Odierno told reporters. “But I also believe Russia, China, nuclear proliferation, Iranian aggression in the Middle East, the underlying conflicts in the Middle East, all could create incredible economic instability, which affects security... and we don’t know which one is going to pop up and which one becomes most important.”

“That’s the challenge,” he said. “We have to be prepared to respond” — but we don’t know where, when, or how.

Does Congress understand the stakes?

“Last night we did a meeting over at the Pentagon with all the new senators,” Odierno told reporters. “I met with every single one of them, and every single one of them said they believe we need to end sequestration on the military. The issue is how you get there, and that’s what they have to work through.”

“We’ll see,” he said. “I have learned not to predict things in Washington.”

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AIR FORCE

24. 2 star's 'treason' comments spark call for an investigation

AirForceTimes.com, Jan. 22 | Brian Everstine

A prominent lawmaker is calling for an investigation of a major general's reported comments blasting officers as treasonous if they work with Congress against Air Force plans to retire the A-10.

Maj. Gen. James Post, vice commander of Air Combat Command, reportedly told officers at a recent meeting of the Tactics Review Board at Nellis Air Force Base, Nevada, that they were not to speak with Congress about the service's attempt to retire the attack jet.

"Anyone who is passing information to Congress about A-10 capabilities is committing treason," Post is quoted by former airman and blogger Tony Carr as saying.

Post reportedly prefaced his comments by saying "if anyone accuses me of saying this, I will deny it," according to Carr's "John Q. Public" blog.

Senate Armed Services Committee chairman Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., who wants to keep the A-10 in service, has called on Air Force Secretary Deborah Lee James to investigate the reported comments, McCain spokesman Dustin Walker told Air Force Times.

The A-10's biggest supporter on Capitol Hill, Sen. Kelly Ayotte, R-N.H., told Air Force Times in a statement that she is "deeply disturbed" by the reported comments.

"U.S. law clearly states that 'No person may restrict a member of the armed forces in communicating with a member of Congress.' The Constitution defines treason as levying war against the United States in providing aid and comfort to our enemies," Ayotte said in the statement. "How could members of the armed forces exercising their lawful right to communicate with Congress be providing aid and comfort to our enemies? If the facts are on the Air Force's side regarding its efforts to prematurely divest the A-10, what does the Air Force fear?"

Air Combat Command said it does not have a transcript of the general's comments. However, his "use of hyperbole" was intended to prove a point, the command said in a statement.

"The Air Force decision on recommended actions/strategic choices for the constrained fiscal environment has been made and the service's position communicated," ACC said in a statement. "While subsequent government debate will continue at the highest levels as those recommendations and other options are evaluated, our job as airmen is to continue to execute our mission and duties – certainly our role as individual military members is not to engage in public debate or advocacy for policy."

The general's comments recognize ACC's responsibility to organize, train and equip while "preparing for tomorrow's challenges," the statement said.

Post "is not restricting nor implying to restrict members of the Air Force in communicating with members of Congress," ACC spokeswoman Maj. Genieve David said. "Additionally we recognize there are better ways for military members to advocate for policy changes. We encourage the use of veteran service organizations to be the voice in lobbying on Capitol Hill versus individual engagements in public debate or advocacy for policy."

Last fall, the largest group of current and retired tactical air control party airmen entered the debate, publicly calling on Congress to block the retirement of the A-10 and urging the Air Force to reconsider its plan. The group's president, retired Master Sgt. Charlie Keebaugh, said a gathering of current and retired airmen opposed the planned cuts.

Air Force officials said last week that the proposed fiscal 2016 budget, expected to be released in early February, will attempt to cut entire fleets of aircraft again, though they would not specifically name the A-10. The move to cut the plane is driven by budget cuts, Chief of Staff Gen. Mark Welsh said.

"It's not about not liking or not wanting the A-10," Welsh said. "It's about some very tough decisions that we have to make to recapitalize the Air Force for the threat 10 years from now."

The A-10, however, is the best aircraft for facing the country's enemies now, Ayotte said. "The truth is that preventing the premature retirement of the A-10 does not aid our enemies, it perpetuates their worst nightmare," she said.

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25. Officer is found guilty of drug abuse

Dalmazzi dismissed from Air Force

Great Falls Tribune (MT), Jan. 22, Pg. A1 | Jenn Rowell

Second Lt. Nicole Dalmazzi was found guilty Wednesday of illegal drug use and was dismissed from the Air Force and will serve one month in confinement at Chouteau County Detention Center.

Dalmazzi, who was assigned to Malmstrom Air Force Base, had also been charged with obstruction of justice, but in a pre-trial agreement, that charge was withdrawn since she pleaded guilty to illegal drug use.

Dalmazzi elected to have her case heard by military judge. Lt. Col. Lyndell Powell of McChord AFB in Washington heard the case and issued the sentence.

Dalmazzi was commissioned through Air Force ROTC and entered active duty in August 2012. She was assigned to the 12th Missile Squadron at Malmstrom and was a missile crew member.

She told the court that she swallowed ecstasy pills on five separate occasions between January 2013 and February 2014.

During the course of the drug investigation, the Air Force Office of Special Investigation discovered that missile officers were cheating on proficiency tests, which resulted in a separate investigation.

Dalmazzi was investigated for cheating, but no charges were brought against her related to cheating.

Because the cheating investigation brought so much media and public attention to Malmstrom and the nuclear force, Dalmazzi's defense moved that the case should be dismissed due to unlawful command influence.

They argued that statements by senior Air Force and Department of Defense officials that indicated those who had cheated or done drugs should be held accountable and that commanders who didn't do so would be fired.

The defense, led by Capt. Terry Coulter of Kirtland AFB in New Mexico, said that the message was sent when nine Malmstrom commanders were fired and the wing commander was allowed to resign as a result of the cheating investigation.

Coulter argued that charges were brought against Dalmazzi because of the pressure on commanders from the top levels.

Dalmazzi's squadron commander, Lt. Col. Justin McMillan, said that he was presented with evidence in September 2014 and felt there was enough to move forward to an Article 32 investigative hearing, similar to a grand jury, was held to determine if trial by court-martial is warranted.

"I never felt any pressure from the higher ups," McMillan said.

The Article 32 hearing was headed by an investigator from Air Education and Training Command and reached the same conclusions as McMillan and the OSI investigation.

Powell denied the motion to dismiss on the basis of unlawful command influence and found that no such influence existed in this case.

In an unsworn statement, Dalmazzi told the judge through tears, "I am deeply sorry to everyone."

Her defense presented character statements from other airmen in support of Dalmazzi and her father testified that she was a hard worker and always owned up to her mistakes.

Dalmazzi and her defense asked Powell that he consider not dismissing her from the Air Force.

"I truly love putting on my uniform and serving my country," she said in her unsworn statement.

The defense also presented a written statement from Dalmazzi explaining factors in her life, including going through divorce, at the time leading up to her lapse in judgment with taking ecstasy pills.

Several airmen attended the court-martial and hugged Dalmazzi during breaks and offered support.

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'AMERICAN SNIPER'

26. Real Snipers Face Real Choices

It 'Shows The Greatest Amount Of Restraint'

USA Today (Weekend Extra), Jan. 23, Pg. A1 | Jim Michaels

WASHINGTON — For all the debate surrounding the movie American Sniper, few people know the moral choices involved in the job better than those trained to pull the trigger.

"His job is to strike a paralytic fear into the enemy," said Andrew Pedry, a Marine scout sniper section leader in Iraq in 2003.

For the sniper, killing is more personal, placing a heavy burden of responsibility on those that take up the profession. "It takes a lot of introspection, faith and care to yield that level of power," Pedry said.

Many welcome the movie, starring Bradley Cooper, for bringing a more realistic look at snipers on the modern battlefield, replacing the Hollywood myth of a rogue operator with that of a highly trained sharpshooter — and one with a conscience.

Their importance in the military has grown as they have proved their worth in Iraq and Afghanistan over the past decade.

"Snipers are the deadliest assets on the battlefield," said Dakota Meyer, a Marine scout sniper in Iraq in 2007 who received the Medal of Honor, the nation's highest award for valor, for actions in Afghanistan. "It's an asset to everybody."

But the movie has also generated criticism for "glorifying" war.

American Sniper, nominated for six Oscars, is based on the memoir of Chris Kyle, a Navy SEAL who became the deadliest sniper in U.S. military history. Kyle was later killed by a fellow veteran on a shooting range in Texas.

After the movie set box office records its opening weekend, filmmaker Michael Moore, tweeted that his uncle was killed by a sniper in World War II. "We were taught snipers were cowards," he said.

Meyer took offense. "How does a man who never served ... call the men and women who have the most skin in the game on behalf of our nation cowards," he said.

Moore's comments, which he later said were not directed at the movie, "did tap into a very long-running idea that sniping is not fair and Americans play fair," Pedry said.

Pedry said that public perception of the sniper has changed since Vietnam. Even Hollywood has picked up on it.

"From the colonial period through Vietnam, the sniper was not the hero," Pedry said. "In the John Wayne movies, he's not the sniper."

But the lengthy wars in Iraq and Afghanistan has prompted the public to recognize new military tactics of counter-insurgencies, Pedry said. Because of their precision, snipers have proven their worth in combat where insurgents often hide among civilians.

"Using snipers shows the greatest amount of restraint," said Jim Lechner, a retired Army lieutenant colonel who served alongside Kyle in Ramadi, Iraq. "Innocent people are not getting killed."

The change in public perception comes as sniper training has become more professional, and the equipment used by marksmen more sophisticated.

Sharpshooters have been around for centuries. In World War II a designated sniper might have been a farm boy who grew up hunting squirrels. But today's snipers are the product of training and technology that has made the profession as much science as art.

Some Army snipers have handheld ballistic computers that can calculate the impact of atmospherics on a bullet's trajectory.

Snipers have to calculate wind and other variables before taking a shot.

"This is a thinking man's game," said Marine Col. Tim Parker, commander of the Weapons Training Battalion, which oversees the sniper school at Quantico Marine base in Virginia.

The Marine sniper course is nearly three months long and the attrition rate averages about 50%. The course is both physically and academically demanding. "It's some of the toughest training in the world," Meyer said.

Students are taught sophisticated camouflage techniques and must crawl undetected across several hundred yards of terrain while instructors peer through binoculars in an attempt to see their movements. It can take more than five hours to move a couple hundred yards.

Students often have to replace their camouflage as the terrain and vegetation changes while crawling toward an objective.

"People who are comfortable in the woods and are used to being in the field have a natural tendency toward this craft," Parker said.

The refinements in training and technology have paid off. A sniper in World War II could be expected to hit an enemy target at about 600 yards. Today, snipers hit targets at twice that range.

Marines and soldiers are also carefully vetted before being admitted to sniper school. Officers look for mature individuals who can operate often far from their unit without constant supervision and guidance.

That doesn't mean they are rogue — they have rules of engagement drummed into them before they set out on a mission. "It's got to be very specific criteria when they can take their shot," Parker said.

Killing isn't their only job. A key part of their mission is to provide intelligence or man observation points to protect conventional units as they move along a dangerous route.

But when they do kill, it has a psychological impact on the enemy. The fear of being killed by an unseen marksman is unnerving and eats away at an enemy's morale.

"As snipers we have a saying: 'Kill one, terrorize thousands,'" Meyer said.

In Ramadi, the efforts of snipers like Kyle helped prove to insurgents that they no longer controlled the city, once an al-Qaeda stronghold in western Iraq, Lechner said.

Snipers were employed widely in the city in 2006, helping to support conventional forces and countering insurgent sharpshooters targeting Americans.

"Chris was just one of many Navy SEAL snipers who were getting huge numbers of kills," Lechner said. "He was part of a large effort."

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NOTABLE COMMENTARY

27. The Fight For Mosul

Iraq's leaders are working together against the Islamic State

Washington Post, Jan. 23, Pg. A20 | Atheel al-Nujaifi

The Jan. 16 news article "'Liberation camp' doesn't live up to its name" accurately highlighted the challenges facing those of us in Iraq who want to move swiftly to liberate Mosul, Iraq's second-largest city, where more than a million Iraqis are living under the terrorist Islamic State. The group's idea of governance includes beheadings, crucifixions and incompetence at delivering basic services, including clean water. But missing from the article was the new spirit of working together that unites the new Baghdad government of Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, a Shiite, and those of us from Mosul and Nineveh province, who are mainly Sunnis, Kurds, Yazidis and Christians, a multiethnic, multi-religious society that has lived harmoniously for centuries.

A Sunni, Khaled al-Obeidi, is the new defense minister in Baghdad. He escaped with me from the Islamic State in the same car, just minutes ahead of the group's forces as they overran Mosul, and long hours after the now-fired officers of the Iraqi army had abandoned their soldiers to save their own skin.

The prime minister and our northern leadership also agree on the urgency to attack and liberate Mosul. Time is not on our side.

The article also repeated the canard, spread by former prime minister Nouri al-Maliki and his friends, that I am "unpopular in some circles." I may be unpopular with Mr. Maliki, who was ousted last fall when everyone was fed up with his sectarian rule, but coming from him, that is a compliment.

Atheel al-Nujaifi, Irbil, Iraq

--The writer is governor of Iraq's Nineveh province

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28. The Yemen mess

Mr. Obama's 'partners' strategy to counter terrorism is crumbling

Washington Post, Jan. 23, Pg. A20 | Editorial

In devoting 250 of the 6,800 words of his State of the Union address to the fight against "violent extremism," President Obama offered a boilerplate description of his policy. "Instead of sending large ground forces overseas," he said, "we're partnering with nations from South Asia to North Africa to deny safe haven to terrorists who threaten America." As he spoke, his strategy was crumbling in a nation he failed to mention: Yemen, home to the branch of al-Qaeda that claimed credit for the recent attacks in France and has repeatedly attempted to strike the U.S. homeland.

Since 2012, the United States has tried to build a "partnership" against al-Qaeda with President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi, training selected Yemeni counterterrorism units and providing close to \$1 billion in aid. Mr. Hadi, in turn, has allowed the CIA and Pentagon to use drone strikes to directly target militants deemed to be plotting against the United States. Though cited as a model by Mr. Obama last September, the program has been foundering: Al-Qaeda has mounted an insurgency that gained territory. Meanwhile, Mr. Hadi's government has come under assault from rebels known as the Houthis, who are members of a Shiite sect.

Backed by Iran, the Houthis took control of most of the capital, Sanaa, several months ago. This week, dissatisfied with Mr. Hadi's failure to deliver on their political demands, they besieged the presidential palace, abducted Mr. Hadi's chief of staff and made the president a prisoner in his home. On Wednesday Mr. Hadi was reported to have capitulated to the rebels' demand that a proposed constitutional reform be rewritten to give the Houthis, who represent less than a third of Yemen's population, more power. On Thursday, he was reported to have resigned.

Yemen's politics are beyond byzantine, but it's not hard to understand what is happening here: Iran's clients, who happen to have adopted the same "death to America" slogan as Hezbollah, are imitating the Lebanese Shiite party's strategy of establishing a chokehold on a weak Sunni government. It's worth noting that Iran has not felt constrained from sponsoring this proxy aggression even as it continues to negotiate about its nuclear program with the United States and its allies. The Obama administration, meanwhile, claims that it dare not support Syrian rebels

against the Iranian-backed regime in Damascus, or allow Congress to approve future sanctions, lest Tehran be spooked into abandoning the talks.

The administration may be hoping that the Houthis will help defeat al-Qaeda, a Sunni organization the Houthis regard as an enemy. Predictably, however, Iran's clients have denounced the U.S. presence in the country. They could force the shutdown of training and drone operations - or they may trigger a civil war that will make those operations impossible to maintain.

The Yemen mess reveals the weaknesses of Mr. Obama's "partners" strategy, which has been too narrowly focused on drone strikes and training of specialized units, and not enough on providing security for the population, institution-building and support for moderate political forces. Unfortunately, the president's cursory and formulaic description of his counterterrorism policies this week, following a year in which jihadist forces and terrorist attacks expanded across the world, suggested that he remains uninterested in correcting his mistakes.

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29. No Confidence Votes on Iran

Wall Street Journal, Jan. 23, Pg. A13 | Editorial

President Obama is unhappy with House Speaker John Boehner for inviting Israel's Prime Minister to address Congress without consulting the White House, with spokesman Josh Earnest calling it a "departure" from protocol. What Mr. Obama should really worry about is that Members of Congress in both parties are showing a stunning lack of confidence in his Iran diplomacy.

That's the real story behind the invitation to Benjamin Netanyahu, who will be in Washington in March to address the American Israel Public Affairs Committee. Mr. Boehner, most Republicans and plenty of Democrats want to hear Mr. Netanyahu make his case on the Iran nuclear negotiations. They can see that Mr. Obama is eager, and not far from desperate, to strike a deal with Tehran, and they're worried he'll give up the store.

So is everyone else who is paying attention. That includes Robert Menendez, the New Jersey Democrat, who squared off against the President over Iran at a recent meeting of Senate Democrats. Mr. Menendez is working with Republican Mark Kirk of Illinois on legislation that would ramp up sanctions on the mullahs if no deal is struck by the latest deadline in June.

According to the New York Times, in the meeting with Senate Democrats Mr. Obama treated Mr. Menendez the way he does Republicans by questioning his motives. He suggested that supporters of the bill were worried about campaign donors—you know, American Jews. That's rich coming from a President who won't move on the Keystone XL pipeline because it might offend billionaire environmentalists.

Mr. Menendez didn't back down in the meeting, and this week in a Senate hearing he told an Administration official that "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."

Perhaps he had in mind the President's deliberately disingenuous comments in his State of the Union address that his interim agreements with Iran have "halted the progress of its nuclear program and reduced its stockpile of nuclear material." No one believes that. Iran continues to enrich uranium—lower grade than before, though it could

be returned to higher grade quickly—and it continues to produce components for nuclear centrifuges that could enrich more. It also continues to block U.N. inspectors from military sites or talking to Iran's nuclear scientists.

No wonder Congress wants to use its considerable power under the Constitution to influence foreign policy. Congress can invite anyone to speak, and Mr. Netanyahu is the elected leader of a U.S. ally. Mr. Obama had no qualms last week in asking British Prime Minister David Cameron to lobby Congress against the Kirk-Menendez bill.

Bob Corker (R., Tenn.), the new Senate Foreign Relations Chairman, is also pushing legislation to require the President to put any deal with Iran up for a vote of approval in Congress. Mr. Obama opposes such a vote, which could be considered a dodge of his responsibility to submit treaties for Senate ratification the way Ronald Reagan submitted the INF missile accord with the Soviets in his final year. Mr. Obama will call it something other than a treaty, naturally.

Congress needs to assert itself on foreign policy because it may be the only barrier to a nuclear arms race in the Middle East.

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30. Iran's emerging empire

As Gulf Arabs see a mortal threat forming, their key ally does nothing

Washington Post, Jan. 23, Pg. A21 | Charles Krauthammer

While Iran's march toward a nuclear bomb has provoked a major clash between the White House and Congress, Iran's march toward conventional domination of the Arab world has been largely overlooked. In Washington, that is. The Arabs have noticed. And the pro-American ones, the Gulf Arabs in particular, are deeply worried.

This week, Iranian-backed Houthi rebels seized control of the Yemeni government, heretofore pro-American. In September, they overran Sanaa, the capital. On Tuesday, they seized the presidential palace. On Thursday, they forced the president to resign.

The Houthis have local religious grievances, being Shiites in a majority Sunni land. But they are also agents of Shiite Iran, which arms, trains and advises them. Their slogan - "God is great. Death to America. Death to Israel" - could have been written in Persian.

Why should we care about the coup? First, because we depend on Yemen's government to support our drone war against another local menace, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). It's not clear if we can even maintain our embassy in Yemen, let alone conduct operations against AQAP. And second, because growing Iranian hegemony is a mortal threat to our allies and interests in the entire Middle East.

In Syria, Iran's power is similarly rising. The mullahs rescued the reeling regime of Bashar al-Assad by sending in weapons, money and Iranian revolutionary guards, as well as by ordering their Lebanese proxy, Hezbollah, to join the fight. They succeeded. The moderate rebels are in disarray, even as Assad lives in de facto coexistence with the Islamic State, which controls a large part of his country.

Iran's domination of Syria was further illustrated by a strange occurrence last Sunday in the Golan Heights. An Israeli helicopter attacked a convoy on the Syrian side of the armistice line. Those killed were not Syrian, however, but five Hezbollah fighters from Lebanon and several Iranian officials, including a brigadier general.

What were they doing in the Syrian Golan Heights? Giving "crucial advice," announced the Iranian government. On what? Well, three days earlier, Hezbollah's leader had threatened an attack on Israel's Galilee. Tehran appears to be using its control of Syria and Hezbollah to create its very own front against Israel.

The Israelis can defeat any conventional attack. Not so the very rich, very weak Gulf Arabs. To the north and west, they see Iran creating a satellite "Shiite Crescent" stretching to the Mediterranean and consisting of Iraq, Syria and Lebanon. To their south and west, they see Iran gaining proxy control of Yemen. And they are caught in the pincer.

The Saudis are fighting back the only way they can - with massive production of oil at a time of oversupply and collapsing prices, placing enormous economic pressure on Iran. It needs \$136 oil to maintain its budget. The price today is below \$50.

Yet the Obama administration appears to be ready to acquiesce to the new reality of Iranian domination of Syria. It has told the New York Times that it is essentially abandoning its proclaimed goal of removing Assad.

For the Saudis and the other Gulf Arabs, this is a nightmare. They're engaged in a titanic regional struggle with Iran. And they are losing - losing Yemen, losing Lebanon, losing Syria and watching post-U.S.-withdrawal Iraq come under increasing Iranian domination.

The nightmare would be hugely compounded by Iran going nuclear. The Saudis were already stupefied that Washington conducted secret negotiations with Tehran behind their backs. And they can see where the current talks are headed - legitimizing Iran as a threshold nuclear state.

Which makes all the more incomprehensible President Obama's fierce opposition to Congress' offer to strengthen the American negotiating hand by passing sanctions to be triggered if Iran fails to agree to give up its nuclear program. After all, that was the understanding Obama gave Congress when he began these last-ditch negotiations in the first place.

Why are you parroting Tehran's talking points, Mr. President? asks Democratic Sen. Bob Menendez. Indeed, why are we endorsing Iran's claim that sanctions relief is the new norm? Obama assured the nation that sanctions relief was but a temporary concession to give last-minute, time-limited negotiations a chance.

Twice the deadline has come. Twice no new sanctions, just unconditional negotiating extensions.

Our regional allies - Saudi Arabia, the other five Gulf states, Jordan, Egypt and Israel - are deeply worried. Tehran is visibly on the march on the ground and openly on the march to nuclear status. And their one great ally, their strategic anchor for two generations, is acquiescing to both.

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