



AS OF 0530 HOURS, JANUARY 29

OVERVIEW

Speaking at a farewell tribute held in his honor, outgoing Secretary Chuck Hagel said he is most proud of his time as an enlisted soldier, and praised the U.S. military as “the most admired and trusted institution in our country.” On Afghanistan, the *New York Times* reported that previously shared details on U.S. efforts to bolster the Afghan security forces are now considered classified, raising “stark questions” about the state of the fight against the Taliban. Also of note, the Pentagon has paused an effort to expand defense ties with China until the two sides can agree on rules for airborne encounters between their military aircraft, according to the *Wall Street Journal*.

NEWS HEADLINES AT 0500

- Israel says Hezbollah not interested in escalating violence
- Reports: Co-pilot was flying AirAsia Flight 8501
- Police bullets killed a hostage in Sydney cafe siege, inquest is told
- Britain says fighter jets scrambled to intercept Russian bombers
- Few fireworks at hearing of attorney general nominee Lynch
- Fort Hood gunman Hasan to appear in court
- Kyrie Irving scores 55, leads Cavs to eighth win in row

OVERSEAS HEADLINES OF NOTE

- *Daily Star*: Israel hunts for Hezbollah tunnels day after border attack
- *Hürriyet*: Land Forces chief gets Legion of Merit in U.S.
- *The Straits Times*: Signs that North Korea is restarting nuclear reactor – U.S. think tank

THIS DAY IN MILITARY HISTORY

- 1834 – Responding to unrest among Irish workers building the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal, President Andrew Jackson orders the first use of American troops to suppress a labor dispute

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2. U.S. Suddenly Goes Quiet on Effort to Bolster Afghan Forces

New York Times, Jan. 29, Pg. A4 | Matthew Rosenberg

The United States has spent about \$65 billion to build Afghanistan’s army and police forces, and until this month the American-led coalition regularly shared details on how the money was being put to use and on the Afghan forces’ progress. But as of this month, ask a question as seemingly straightforward as the number of Afghan soldiers and police officers in uniform, and the military coalition offers a singularly unrevealing answer: The information is now considered classified.

3. U.S. Pauses New China Exchanges

Wall Street Journal, Jan. 29, Pg. A10 | Julian E. Barnes and Jeremy Page

The Pentagon put on hold an effort to expand defense ties with China, saying it wouldn't agree to a major new military exchange until the two can agree on rules for airborne encounters between their warplanes.

MIDEAST

4. Hezbollah Kills Israeli Soldiers Near Lebanon

New York Times, Jan. 29, Pg. A1 | Jodi Rudoren and Anne Barnard

Hezbollah antitank missiles killed two Israeli soldiers as they drove in a disputed area along the Lebanese border on Wednesday, a sharp retaliation for Israel's deadly drone strike last week that killed six Hezbollah fighters and an Iranian general.

5. Failed Bomber is Suddenly at Center of Swap Demand by ISIS

New York Times, Jan. 29, Pg. A1 | Rod Nordland and Ranya Kadri

During the nine years that Sajida al-Rishawi, 46, has been sitting in self-imposed solitary confinement in her cell at the Juweidah Women's Prison in Jordan, refusing to mix with other prisoners, she has had hardly any visitors, other than her court-appointed lawyer. In all that time, Al Qaeda in Iraq, which had dispatched her to Jordan to kill, has only rarely mentioned her, especially after that group morphed into the Islamic State. She was that ultimate embarrassment, the suicide bomber who was unable to complete her mission, then ran away. Now the militants are suddenly demanding the release of Ms. Rishawi.

6. Pentagon: Jordan ISIS swap not the same as Bergdahl

TheHill.com, Jan. 28 | Kristina Wong

Jordan's planned prisoner exchange with the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) for a captured Jordanian pilot is raising uncomfortable questions for the Obama administration over its own hostage policy. U.S. officials on Wednesday would not say whether they supported Jordan's decision to swap a female prisoner who attempted a suicide bombing in Jordan for a pilot whose plane went down in Syria during a mission in the U.S.-led war against ISIS on Dec. 24.

7. Officials: Militant's ex-wife was money courier

Washington Post, Jan. 29, Pg. A6 | Hugh Naylor and Suzan Haidamous

For months, the ex-wife of perhaps the most wanted man in the world used Lebanon as a base to secretly transfer cash to Islamist militants, according to Lebanese military officials.

8. Middle East Crossroads: In Sinai, Egypt Faces Another Insurgency Tied to Islamic State

Wall Street Journal, Jan. 29, Pg. A8 | Yaroslav Trofimov

The video looks hard to distinguish from the ones filmed in Syria and Iraq. Islamic State gunmen arrive in a fleet of pickup trucks, set up checkpoints on a busy highway and start hauling away suspected collaborators with the "apostate" government. It ends, predictably, with forced confessions and gruesome, close-up shots of killings.

IRAQ/SYRIA

9. Kurds Scour Kobani for Bombs, Bodies

Wall Street Journal, Jan. 29, Pg. A9 | Ayla Albayrak

For five months, Kurdish market trader Mahmud Ali defended the streets of this town on the Turkish border against Islamic State fighters who used artillery and suicide bombs. Now he is savoring his part in the liberation of Kobani, but also pondering the cost.

10. As Iraqi Kurds gain ground from IS, local Sunnis are wary

Associated Press, Jan. 29 | Vivian Salama

As they retake territory from Islamic State militants, Iraqi Kurdish fighters have found surprising ambivalence in areas they freed from the jihadis' oppressive rule. Locals have swiftly shaken off the imposed Islamic lifestyle — but as Sunnis, from the same ethnic group as the militants, many are nonetheless bracing for treatment as collaborators.

AFGHANISTAN/PAKISTAN

11. Militants Driven From Pakistan Flock to Afghan Towns

Wall Street Journal, Jan. 29, Pg. A8 | Margherita Stancati and Habib Khan Totakhil

Arab and Central Asian Islamist militants have moved into Afghanistan after a military offensive by Islamabad largely eliminated havens in Pakistan's tribal areas, Afghan officials and local residents say, posing a potential new threat to the country's security.

12. Afghan president faces new hurdles as cabinet nominees rejected

Reuters, Jan. 28 | Mirwais Harooni and Jessica Donati

Afghanistan's parliament dealt a new blow to President Ashraf Ghani's efforts to assemble a government on Wednesday, approving just eight out of 25 cabinet nominees before its winter recess.

ASIA/PACIFIC

13. U.S. would welcome Japan air patrols in South China Sea

Reuters, Jan. 29 | Tim Kelly and Nobuhiro Kubo

The United States would welcome a move by Japan to extend air patrols into the South China Sea as a counterweight to a growing fleet of Chinese vessels pushing Beijing's territorial claims in the region, a senior U.S. Navy officer told Reuters.

UKRAINE/RUSSIA

14. Ukraine rebels claim new key victory is within grasp

Associated Press, Jan. 28 | Peter Leonard

Separatist forces in eastern Ukraine said Wednesday they have almost fully encircled government forces in a town that hosts a strategic railway hub, putting them within grasp of a decisive new victory.

EUROPE

15. Hotbeds of radicalism in France, long left to simmer

Washington Post, Jan. 29, Pg. A1 | Michael Birnbaum

France's prisons have a reputation as factories for radical Islamists, taking in ordinary criminals and turning them out as far more dangerous people. Here at the Fleury-Merogis prison - where Amedy Coulibaly did time alongside another of the attackers in the deadly assaults this month in and around Paris - authorities are struggling to quell a problem that they say was long threatening to explode.

AFRICA

16. Nigeria military warned before major Boko Haram attacks – Amnesty

Agence France-Presse, Jan. 28 | Not Attributed

Amnesty International on Wednesday claimed that Nigeria's military top brass were warned of brutal Boko Haram attacks on the northeast towns of Baga and Monguno this month but failed to take action.

CONGRESS

17. GOP Split On Higher Defense Spending

Wall Street Journal, Jan. 29, Pg. A4 | Kristina Peterson and Julian E. Barnes

President Barack Obama will send Congress a fiscal year 2016 budget next week proposing both military and domestic spending at levels surpassing the limits lawmakers agreed to in a hard-fought 2011 deal.

DEFENSE DEPARTMENT

18. Again, Pentagon leaders lament sequestration cuts

MilitaryTimes.com, Jan. 28 | Leo Shane III

Military leaders have already repeatedly warned Congress that looming spending cuts could jeopardize weapons buying, force readiness, battlefield capabilities and worldwide military dominance. And thus far, that hasn't really worked. So on Wednesday, in their latest invite to Capitol Hill to talk about the dangers of sequestration cuts, the Joint Chiefs emphasized another potential casualty if lawmakers don't fix the budget issue in coming months: troops' trust.

19. Kendall: U.S. Needs to Get Faster at Developing Revolutionary Weapon Systems

U.S. Naval Institute News, Jan. 28 | John Grady

The Pentagon's top acquisition official told Congress the U.S. defense complex is good at incremental evolutions in technology but has slipped in bringing about revolutionary systems to the battlefield. "What we're good at is bringing on the next generation," Frank Kendall, the Department of Defense under secretary for acquisition, technology and logistics (AT&L) told the House Armed Services Committee on Wednesday.

20. Pentagon official urges NATO to focus on innovative weapons

Reuters, Jan. 28 | Andrea Shalal

U.S. Deputy Defense Secretary Robert Work on Wednesday urged NATO allies to develop and make more innovative weapons, and said bold action was needed to stay ahead of rapid weapons development by China, Russia and other countries.

21. Defense urges expanding female guard no-touch rule

Miami Herald, Jan. 29, Pg. A3 | Carol Rosenberg

A Marine defense lawyer asked a military judge Wednesday to expand his no-female-guard touching order beyond legal meetings to include an Iraqi captive's medical, Red Cross and recreation yard visits at the prison's clandestine lockup for former CIA captives, Camp 7.

AIR FORCE

22. Sen. Ayotte: Air Force trying to ID A-10 supporters

AirForceTimes.com, Jan. 28 | Brian Everstine

Sen. Kelly Ayotte, the leading opponent of Air Force plans to retire the A-10, alleged Wednesday that the service is conducting a "reverse investigation" to identify airmen who have reached out to Congress to support lawmakers' efforts to keep the jet flying.

23. U.S. Air Force picks Boeing 747-8 to replace Air Force One

Reuters, Jan. 28 | Andrea Shalal and Alwyn Scott

The U.S. Air Force said on Wednesday it would use Boeing Co's commercial 747-8 airliner to replace its current fleet of two Air Force One presidential aircraft, one of the most visible symbols of the United States.

ARMY

24. Allyn: Sequestration creates an 'unacceptable risk' to soldiers

ArmyTimes.com, Jan. 28 | Michelle Tan

The Army will bear "unacceptable risk" if it's called to respond to new threats while struggling with budget cuts brought on by the return of sequestration, the service's No. 2 officer said Wednesday. "We know it will impact our ability to respond to emerging requirements that exceed that which we are currently structured to face," said Army Vice Chief of Staff Gen. Daniel Allyn in an interview with Army Times.

25. Commander: Army's New AH-64E Apache Surprised Enemy in Afghanistan

Military.com, Jan. 28 | Brendan McGarry

The commander of the first U.S. Army unit to fly combat missions in Afghanistan with the AH-64E Apache -- the service's newest version of the attack helicopter -- praised the performance of the aircraft. Lt. Col. John Davis, commander of the 1st Battalion, 229th Aviation Regiment, part of the 16th Combat Aviation Brigade at Joint Base Lewis McCord in Washington, said Wednesday that his unit operated in southern and western Afghanistan last year with two dozen Echo models of the Boeing-made choppers, along with 15 OH-58D Kiowa Warriors and 10 UH-60M Black Hawks.

26. Army worker charged with bribery

Washington Post, Jan. 29, Pg. B4 | Matt Zapposky

An Army contracting official was charged Wednesday with trying to extort a half-million dollars in bribes from two executives of a Fairfax, Va., company after a months-long sting operation in which one of the executives wore a wire.

NOTABLE COMMENTARY

27. Inconvenient Truths in Afghanistan

New York Times, Jan. 29, Pg. A26 | Editorial

In late December, as they do every few months, American military officials in Kabul sent a trove of data to the office of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction for its quarterly report. Over the years, such figures have told an often dispiriting story about Washington's enormous investment in the country's security forces, laying out their size, readiness, attrition level and the state of their infrastructure.

28. The Siege of Mariupol

Wall Street Journal, Jan. 29, Pg. A12 | Editorial

President Obama took a foreign-policy bow during his State of the Union speech last week, boasting that "we're upholding the principle that bigger nations can't bully the small -- by opposing Russian aggression, supporting Ukraine's democracy, and reassuring our NATO allies." Whereupon Russian-backed forces promptly expanded an offensive in Ukraine that has already claimed more than 5,000 lives.

29. How to help Ukraine

Los Angeles Times, Jan. 29, Pg. A19 | Gregory Feifer

As Western countries respond to the resumption of all-out war in Ukraine, they must ensure that the driving force behind the hostilities -- Moscow -- pays a greater cost for the rising civilian death toll. European Union foreign ministers are set to meet Thursday to discuss deepening sanctions against Russia. However, if the United States and its allies are serious about supporting Ukraine's freedom to determine its own future, they must agree on a more comprehensive approach, including the provision of effective military aid to the Ukrainian military and the training to use it.

30. RIP Air-Sea Battle?

National Interest Online, Jan. 29 | Rep. J. Randy Forbes (R-VA)

Last week, the defense media broke the news that the Pentagon's "Air-Sea Battle" concept is being renamed and absorbed into a broader multiservice effort to develop a "Joint Concept for Access and Maneuver in the Global Commons" or JAM-GC. Individual news reports have used a variety of verbs to describe what is happening to Air Sea Battle, but the headline of the first article was also the most blunt. "DoD Kills Air-Sea Battle," it said—and I fear it might be right. Maybe it is just a name change, but I am concerned that incorporating "the concept formerly known as Air-Sea Battle" into the highly bureaucratic joint concept development process could stifle innovation and dilute the concept's focus.

TOP STORIES

1. Obama salutes Hagel's ability to connect with troops

Omaha World-Herald (NE), Jan. 29, Pg. A1 | Joseph Morton

WASHINGTON — Chuck Hagel's greatest legacy as defense secretary will be the bond he's forged with the men and women in uniform, President Barack Obama said Wednesday.

“Your life experience, being down in the mud, feeling the bullets fly overhead, has allowed you to connect with our troops like no other secretary before,” Obama said during the armed services’ official farewell tribute to the first enlisted combat veteran to run the Pentagon.

Wednesday’s event at Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall in Virginia was a goodbye wrapped in dress-uniform, flag-waving military pageantry. Hagel reviewed the troops — ceremonial units from each service — who paraded around the open indoor space.

The U.S. Marine Band belted out song after song inside, while cannon booms saluted outside.

It was a stark contrast to the awkward, muted press conference last November when Hagel and Obama announced the secretary’s resignation. Hagel agreed to stay on the job until his successor, Ashton Carter, is confirmed, which should happen in the next few weeks.

Hagel, 68, has described his resignation as a mutual decision that resulted from private discussions between him and Obama. But many accounts have indicated that Hagel was pressured to resign, with members of Obama’s inner circle viewing him as disengaged and at odds with the White House over policy areas such as the approach to Syria.

Whatever the internal divisions, Wednesday was a full-throated thank you for Hagel’s service. Friends, relatives and current and former aides filled the stands.

Gen. Martin Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said Hagel had been forged by a working-class upbringing that valued hard work and perseverance.

Vice President Joe Biden praised Hagel as a man of courage, judgment, integrity and dedication.

The speakers ran through the highlights of Hagel’s life story: how he volunteered for duty in Vietnam and served alongside his brother Tom. How he pulled Tom from a burning vehicle. How he stood up at the VA for benefits to Vietnam veterans exposed to Agent Orange. Obama talked of how then-Sen. Chuck Hagel pushed for a new GI Bill for veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan.

Obama focused on how Hagel’s background helped him reach the troops. He cited Hagel’s monthly lunch with junior enlisted men and women — bull sessions where the lowest ranks could express their opinions to the top.

“And in those quiet moments when you have pinned a Purple Heart on a wounded warrior, you were there not just as secretary of defense but as an old Army sergeant who knows the wages of war and still carries the shrapnel in your chest,” Obama said. “These aren’t fleeting moments. They reflect the driving force of Chuck Hagel’s service, his love of our troops and his determination to take care of them after more than 13 years of war.”

And Hagel betrayed no regrets Wednesday about his two years on the job as he delivered his last major address as secretary.

“No high office with responsibility is easy, as everyone in this room knows,” Hagel said. “But with each difficult challenge comes the satisfaction of knowing that you are like Teddy Roosevelt’s ‘Man in the Arena,’ slugging it out, doing what you believe, doing what you like — and doing it your way. And recognizing that it is not the critics

who count or change the world or make the world better. Rather it is those who are willing to work, work very hard, toward building a better world.”

Anthony Cordesman of the Center for Strategic and International Studies has defended Hagel’s performance as secretary.

“There may be many voices who focus on the fact that President Obama dismissed him and that see him as a failure,” Cordesman said. “Other voices feel he was not assertive enough and did not openly disagree with the president in the (National Security Council). These judgments may well change over time.”

Cordesman said he understands that Hagel communicated his views to Obama in private meetings.

“He spoke for national security and not for domestic political priorities,” Cordesman said. “He also spoke for the U.S. military as people, not abstract tools.”

On Wednesday, Obama praised Hagel’s work to oversee the end of combat operations in Afghanistan, improve military hospitals, better integrate women into the ranks, address an epidemic of sexual assault and overhaul the search for and identification of missing soldiers’ remains.

Obama also spent a lot of time talking about Hagel’s Cornhusker roots.

“Chuck loves Nebraska,” Obama said. “Cornhuskers, red beer, Runzas — I don’t know what those are, but I hear they taste pretty good.”

Obama said that above all Hagel loves the people of Nebraska.

“There are just under 2 million people in Nebraska and more than 7 billion people on the planet,” Obama said. “But as so many of our troops have found out themselves, no matter where Chuck goes in the world, if you are from Nebraska, he will find you. He’ll talk with you and listen to you and ask you about your family back home, and chances are he knows them, too.”

Hagel thanked his kids and his wife, Lilibet, who got a bouquet of yellow flowers. Hagel thanked the leaders who had gathered to honor him. And he thanked the troops.

“Their individual commitment to the greater good and strength of the institution has been a complete inspiration for me in every way. They understand that it is people who build and strengthen institutions, and make the world a better place. These are the reasons why America’s military is the most admired and most trusted institution in our country.”

And Hagel harked back to his days in the Army.

“Of all the opportunities my life has given me, and I have been blessed with so many, I am most proud of having once been a soldier,” Hagel said. “The lessons from my time in uniform about trust, responsibility, duty, judgment and loyalty to your fellow soldier, these I have carried with me throughout my life.”

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2. U.S. Suddenly Goes Quiet on Effort to Bolster Afghan Forces

New York Times, Jan. 29, Pg. A4 | Matthew Rosenberg

WASHINGTON -- The United States has spent about \$65 billion to build Afghanistan's army and police forces, and until this month the American-led coalition regularly shared details on how the money was being put to use and on the Afghan forces' progress.

But as of this month, ask a question as seemingly straightforward as the number of Afghan soldiers and police officers in uniform, and the military coalition offers a singularly unrevealing answer: The information is now considered classified.

The American outlay for weapons and gear for Afghan forces? Classified. The cost of teaching Afghan soldiers to read and write? Even that is now a secret.

The military command's explanation for making the change is that such information could endanger American and Afghan lives, even though the data had been released every quarter over the past six years, and Afghan officials do not consider the information secret.

But as the Obama administration is seeking to declare the long war in Afghanistan officially over, at least from an American standpoint, the move to classify data about the Afghan forces removes one of the most crucial measures for assessing the accomplishments of the international coalition there. And it raises stark questions about the state of the fight against the Taliban, coming after a year in which the Afghan forces took record-high casualties as they battled heavy militant offensives.

The reality is that the United States is still deeply invested in Afghanistan and that it plans to spend billions of dollars to keep the Afghans armed, fed and fighting. At the same time, roughly 9,500 American service members and thousands of contractors remain in the country to help the Afghan forces with the crucial art of military logistics and to build an air force.

Through October, getting a sense of how the American-led project to build a viable Afghan military and police force was progressing could be readily gleaned from quarterly reports released by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, the American government's watchdog for spending in Afghanistan.

The inspector general's last report, released in October and covering a period through August, included data on the size of the army and the police force -- just over 181,000 soldiers and 152,000 police officers at that point. The report found that each force was at about 97 percent of its targeted strength.

It broke down the Afghan military's manpower numbers by corps, and included data on attrition for the army and police, which sustained record casualties and struggled with desertion, a problem that has persisted for years. Between September and August, for instance, 36,000 soldiers were dropped from the army's rolls because they had been killed or disabled, or had deserted or concluded their commitment for reasons honorable and dishonorable.

None of that information will be publicly updated for the final quarter of last year in the inspector general's latest quarterly report to Congress, which was provided to The New York Times ahead of its release on Thursday. Instead, the numbers will now be included in a classified appendix, viewable only by government officials with high-level security clearances.

"The classification of this volume of data," the inspector general said in its report, "is unprecedented."

Initially, the coalition also tried to classify the number of American troops in Afghanistan, a figure that was publicly announced last year by the Obama administration, said an American official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because he was discussing classified material.

Though the coalition did not end up going that far, it did classify nearly every piece of data used by the inspector general to assess the Afghan security forces.

In a letter to the inspector general, Gen. John F. Campbell, the commander of coalition forces, said the information now had to be kept secret to protect the lives of American service members and their Afghan allies, arguing that the Taliban could use the data "to sharpen their attacks."

"I cannot comment upon the precise reason why certain information was considered unclassified in the past," General Campbell wrote. "However, I am compelled to also protect the lives of those individuals who could be put at risk by the release of sensitive information."

Some of the information could certainly be seen as demoralizing, such as the attrition rates within Afghan forces. But the potential for embarrassment is not considered a legitimate rationale for classifying information, and both Republican and Democratic members of Congress have expressed skepticism about General Campbell's move.

"With few exceptions, the public's business ought to be public," said Senator Charles E. Grassley, Republican of Iowa, whose staff was briefed on the inspector general's report this week. "Suddenly classifying information that was public for years raises questions."

Senator Claire McCaskill, Democrat of Missouri, was more pointed: "I'm offended that this previously unclassified information is now being classified."

"Public access to this information is one of the most powerful tools we've got to ensure we're holding our government accountable, and these reports remain as vital as ever to oversight of taxpayer-financed Afghan infrastructure," she said.

For years, the inspector general's quarterly reports were among the few easily accessible sources for information about the state of Afghan forces, in addition to other major areas of American spending in Afghanistan.

In the latest report, that information has been reduced to a few top-line spending figures, such as how much has been spent on the transportation for the army (\$11.5 billion) or the total spent on police training and operations (\$3.5 billion).

Where the inspector general once offered breakdowns of what that money had bought, its report now includes boilerplate saying that details "can be found in Appendix E of this report" -- that is, the classified section of the report, which even many of the people who work in Congress cannot view, and is completely off limits to the general public.

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3. U.S. Pauses New China Exchanges

Pentagon Delays Decision on Aircraft Carrier Visit While it Seeks Rules on Airborne Encounters

Wall Street Journal, Jan. 29, Pg. A10 | Julian E. Barnes and Jeremy Page

The Pentagon put on hold an effort to expand defense ties with China, saying it wouldn't agree to a major new military exchange until the two can agree on rules for airborne encounters between their warplanes.

The delay, which doesn't affect existing military-to-military exchanges, reflects concerns among some U.S. politicians and military officials that an expansion of defense ties with Beijing over the past 18 months hasn't stopped China from trying to enforce its territorial claims in Asia.

Top U.S. and Chinese naval officials had proposed the U.S. send an aircraft carrier on a visit to China, but Pentagon officials have deferred any decision until work on an air-intercepts agreement is complete, officials said.

Rep. Randy Forbes (R., Va), who leads a House subcommittee on sea power, has said the Pentagon has been pushing military exchanges without clearly stating what they hope to achieve with the exchanges.

"We think if you are going to do military-to-military exchanges, you should have strategic goals for why we are doing it," he said. Mr. Forbes added that military exchanges with China risk sharing too much information, potentially including critical elements of U.S. military strategy.

In a letter to Mr. Forbes this month, Pentagon officials defended their approach, saying it has "elements of cooperation and competition."

"U.S. policy toward China is based on the premise that it is profoundly in both countries' interest that we develop a cooperative relationship that brings a rising China into that system while constructively managing the differences between our two countries," wrote Christine Wormuth, the undersecretary of Defense for policy, in the letter to Mr. Forbes.

Leaders of both countries have pushed for expanded military ties and improved communications. That objective was a key part of the deal the administration reached with Beijing during President Barack Obama's trip to China in November.

During that visit, Chinese and U.S. officials announced an agreement designed to prevent confrontations at sea, with a new set of rules for maritime encounters. The agreement followed a 2013 incident when a Chinese ship came within 100 feet of the USS Cowpens, a guided missile cruiser, in the South China Sea. China said its ship followed proper procedures.

Officials said at the time that the maritime agreement would be followed by one covering air-to-air engagements, which have been a source of friction, including an August encounter when the Pentagon said a Chinese fighter plane came within 50 feet of a Navy P-8 surveillance plane. China said its pilot kept a safe distance. It also demanded that the U.S. stop surveillance flights near its coastline.

U.S. officials remain hopeful a deal will be possible this year, but said that reaching an agreement on rules for air incidents is more complicated than the maritime agreement.

The Pentagon is beginning work on a new report mandated by Congress last month to lay out its military strategy in Asia. The defense official said that will amount to a clearly stated approach to China, and should address Mr. Forbes's concerns.

Officials said that a continuation of military-to-military exchanges between China and the U.S. would remain a cornerstone of the American approach to maintaining stability in Asia.

China's defense ministry didn't respond to a request to comment on planned exchanges this year, including the carrier visit and the air-encounter agreement.

Asked about the plans for a carrier visit for China, Lt. Col. Jeffrey Pool, a Pentagon spokesman, said he wouldn't comment on internal decision-making but that the military would "publicize our decision in the established manner."

While the decision on the aircraft carrier is on hold, other smaller exchanges are continuing, officials said. This month, 38 U.S. personnel and 50 Chinese service members participated in a humanitarian relief exercise in Hainan Island.

Hainan is where a Navy P-3 plane landed after it was disabled in a midair collision with a Chinese fighter jet in 2001.

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MIDEAST

4. Hezbollah Kills Israeli Soldiers Near Lebanon

New York Times, Jan. 29, Pg. A1 | Jodi Rudoren and Anne Barnard

JERUSALEM -- Hezbollah antitank missiles killed two Israeli soldiers as they drove in a disputed area along the Lebanese border on Wednesday, a sharp retaliation for Israel's deadly drone strike last week that killed six Hezbollah fighters and an Iranian general.

The attack was the most severe eruption of hostilities in the area since the fierce enemies' devastating monthlong war in 2006 and threatened to incite a significant escalation. But after a second Hezbollah strike of mortar shells on Mount Hermon and Israeli artillery, tank and air fire on targets in southern Lebanon, a tense quiet set in before dusk.

While both sides had domestic reasons for needing to show a strong hand, neither is eager for another all-out battle, analysts said, adding that the exchange on Wednesday appeared oddly orchestrated to signal a reluctance to escalate the conflict. They cautioned, however, that fighting along the increasingly volatile frontier, against a backdrop of Middle East chaos, could easily spiral out of control.

"It's a very delicate game, because both sides want to respond hard enough that they're not perceived as weak, but not too hard to start a war," said Benedetta Berti of Israel's Institute for National Security Studies. "It's a very, very thin line. There's plenty of room for miscalculations. If this is where it ends, we're moving on to the next chapter, with the awareness that every single time this starts again, we get closer to a proper war."

With its popularity plunging among the Sunni majority in the Arab world, Hezbollah, a Lebanese Shiite movement backed by Iran, has been under intense pressure to return its focus to its main mission of fighting Israel after two years devoted to helping the Syrian government combat a mostly Sunni insurgency. In Lebanon, several experts said Hezbollah's strikes on Wednesday seemed intended to maximize publicity to please loyalists -- and its Iranian patrons -- and exact revenge without provoking a crushing response.

"To me, the whole thing was calibrated to say, 'You did your thing, we did our thing,' " said one Western diplomat involved in talks to tamp down the possibilities of conflagration. Speaking on the condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to discuss the talks publicly, he said diplomats had heard directly from a Hezbollah official that "they intended a limited operation and they do not want war or escalation."

A Spanish member of the United Nations peacekeeping force in southern Lebanon was also killed during the clashes Wednesday.

After a closed-door meeting of the United Nations Security Council, the Spanish ambassador, Roman Oyarzun Marchesi, said that the peacekeeper had been killed by the Israeli artillery fire that followed rocket attacks from Lebanese territory. "It was because of the escalation of violence, and it came from the Israeli side," he said.

The Israeli soldiers were killed at Shebaa Farms -- known in Israel as Mont Dov -- a strip claimed by Israel, Lebanon and sometimes Syria near the intersection of all three and adjacent to the Golan Heights. Three parts of the Israeli-controlled Golan remained closed to civilians Wednesday evening. In Lebanon, Hezbollah backers celebrated with sweets and fireworks but also filled their gas tanks, to be prepared in case war breaks out.

As he convened a special security assessment at military headquarters in Tel Aviv, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel said the governments of Syria and Lebanon shared responsibility for the consequences of aggression from their territory, and promised that "those who are behind the attack today will pay the full price."

"For a while, Iran has been trying, through the Hezbollah, to form an additional terror front against us from the Golan Heights," Mr. Netanyahu said in a statement. "We are acting with resolve and responsibility against this effort."

Hezbollah issued a bare-bones statement taking responsibility for the attack, leaving it to its leader, Hassan Nasrallah, to respond more fully in a speech scheduled for Friday. But loyalists circulated a cartoon depicting Lebanon as Israel's coffin, and Al Manar, its satellite television channel, played martial music and videos between news reports all day.

For one Hezbollah loyalist in southern Lebanon whose family lost a house in the 2006 war -- a woman who asked to be identified only by her first and middle name, Aya Hussein, to avoid repercussions when abroad -- the events Wednesday ushered in a new era in which "we are the scary ones, not the scared."

Lt. Col. Peter Lerner of the Israeli military said the soldiers who were killed were in unarmored, unmarked, white vehicles -- an Isuzu D-Max truck and a Citroen Berlingo van -- on a road about a mile from the border. The first vehicle was hit by five antitank missiles fired from less than three miles away around 11:30 a.m., he said, killing Capt. Yochai Kalangel, 25, and Sgt. Dor Chaim Nini, 20. Seven other soldiers were injured.

Israel captured the small strip of former farmland at the intersection of its borders with Syria and Lebanon, along with the adjacent Golan, in the 1967 war, and later annexed both, a move not recognized by the United Nations. Lebanon views Shebaa Farms as occupied Lebanese territory, while Syria, because of a century-old dispute over the never-demarcated border, has sometimes claimed Shebaa as its own.

That the strike Wednesday was in an already contested area, that it targeted soldiers and not civilians, and that it did not include an infiltration or kidnapping attempt were all seen as signs of relative restraint on the part of Hezbollah.

"This is Hezbollah saying, 'We will respond, we're not pushovers, we can defend ourselves, but this is not a cross-border raid and bring the bodies back -- you didn't see rockets, you saw small mortars,' " noted Matthew Levitt, director of the Stein Program on Counterterrorism and Intelligence at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. "The response had to be somewhat measured because the last thing in the world they want is to open up a full second front. They're not capable of fighting two full-fledged wars on two separate fronts at the same time."

Israel had been bracing for a response since the Jan. 18 airstrike on a convoy in the Syrian part of the Golan that killed the Iranian general and the six Hezbollah fighters, including Jihad Mughniyeh, the son of its slain military commander. Kamel Wazne, a Lebanese political analyst, said that attack constituted "a major breach" of Israel's 1974 cease-fire with Syria and of a tacit agreement not to engage Hezbollah inside Syria. He said that Hezbollah felt its nemesis was changing the "rules of the game."

"Israel crossed a red line, and if Hezbollah did not react, Israel will not stop," said Mr. Wazne, who has extensive contacts in the group. The attack Wednesday, he added, "shows that Hezbollah's confrontation is with Israel, so it can get back its respected position in the Arab world" by returning focus to where, in the eyes of much of the region, "it was supposed to be the whole time."

For Israel, the exchange comes at a precarious time: seven weeks before an election, and amid American-led negotiations with Iran over its nuclear program. Israeli military officials have long been preparing for what they see as an inevitable next round with Hezbollah, and imagine it as an intense, costly battle for both sides.

Avigdor Lieberman, Israel's hard-line foreign minister, who has been faltering in the polls, called for "a very harsh and disproportionate" response.

Isaac Herzog of the Labor Party, Mr. Netanyahu's prime challenger, who was touring the area at the time of the attack, said that "if anyone in Hezbollah believes that during elections we can be threatened and divided, he is gravely mistaken."

Security is Mr. Netanyahu's strong suit, so the threat of a conflagration could benefit him at the ballot box, but he has also proved risk-averse in military operations. The 2006 war, with about 1,000 Lebanese and 160 Israeli fatalities, was widely viewed as a disaster.

"Military adventures prior to elections, of course, are a double-edged sword," said Jonathan Spyer, an international affairs specialist at the Interdisciplinary Center in Herzliya. "The Israeli public doesn't object to military operations if they're quick and clean, but the last thing you want to do is go into elections in the middle of a bloody war like the summer of 2006."

But like other experts on both sides, Mr. Spyer warned that strategic planning and balancing interests could easily give way in such a heated environment.

"Deterrence is not an exact science; it's not even a science at all -- it's an art," he said. "We're in the midst of an escalation, and we don't know where it's going to end."

--Jodi Rudoren reported from Jerusalem, and Anne Barnard from Beirut, Lebanon. Reporting was contributed by Isabel Kershner from Jerusalem, Hwaida Saad from Beirut, Raphael Minder from Madrid and Somini Sengupta from the United Nations

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5. Failed Bomber is Suddenly at Center of Swap Demand by ISIS

New York Times, Jan. 29, Pg. A1 | Rod Nordland and Ranya Kadri

AMMAN, Jordan -- During the nine years that Sajida al-Rishawi, 46, has been sitting in self-imposed solitary confinement in her cell at the Juweidah Women's Prison in Jordan, refusing to mix with other prisoners, she has had hardly any visitors, other than her court-appointed lawyer.

In all that time, Al Qaeda in Iraq, which had dispatched her to Jordan to kill, has only rarely mentioned her, especially after that group morphed into the Islamic State. She was that ultimate embarrassment, the suicide bomber who was unable to complete her mission, then ran away.

Now the militants are suddenly demanding the release of Ms. Rishawi, who spent her honeymoon helping plan a 2005 attack on a Jordanian wedding, where 27 guests were killed by her newlywed husband after he succeeded in detonating his explosive vest. The militants said they would free a Japanese hostage in exchange.

On Wednesday, Jordanian officials said they would let Ms. Rishawi go. But they put their own twist on the deal, saying they would do so only if the militants freed a Jordanian Air Force pilot shot down over Syria last month, becoming the first member of the American-led coalition fighting the Islamic State to be captured.

Less than a week ago, the Islamic State, also known as ISIS or ISIL, had valued the Japanese hostage and another captured Japanese man at \$100 million each. But after killing one of them on Saturday, the group changed its ultimatum: dropping the ransom demand and insisting instead on the trade for Ms. Rishawi. A later video, issued Tuesday and attributed to the extremists, added a new warning: that the pilot, First Lt. Moaz al-Kasasbeh, would be killed if Ms. Rishawi was not released within 24 hours.

The extremists have since appeared to extend that deadline until sunset on Thursday. But they still have not said they would free Lieutenant Kasasbeh as the Jordanians demanded, only that they would not kill him if Ms. Rishawi was released.

As the crisis dragged on, the question that baffled Jordanians and terrorism experts alike was, as one analyst put it, "Why Sajida?"

"She has no value whatsoever, no social, no political, no security value whatsoever," said Linda Maieah, a Jordanian journalist who covers extremists, and who interviewed Ms. Rishawi in prison, through her lawyer.

"If ISIS wanted her, they would have asked for her from the first day," Ms. Maieah said. "For nine years, no one ever asked for her. Even her own tribe didn't care about her."

Although the reason for the apparent change of heart by the militants remains unclear, it may be that Ms. Rishawi embodies the evolution of Al Qaeda in Iraq to its present incarnation as the Islamic State. The militants seem to be repurposing "Sister Sajida" as a hero hailing from their early days.

Ms. Rishawi was among four suicide bombers involved in the Nov. 9, 2005, attacks on three hotels in Amman, killing at least 57 people, including those attending the wedding party that she and her new husband, Ali Shumari, targeted. Jordanians refer to the attacks as their 9/11.

"She was seen as a dupe, even if she showed no remorse, it's not like she exuded a lot of ideological energy, none at all, in fact," said Joost Hiltermann, who is in charge of the Middle East for the International Crisis Group. "People see her as a very lesser person."

She is so poorly regarded, in fact, that Jordanians, in government and out, seemed to have reached a consensus that Ms. Rishawi was not worth keeping in prison when there was the possibility of saving their pilot's life by releasing her. Jordanian officials have made it clear that they would not release her to win only the Japanese hostage's freedom.

Even Ashraf al-Khaled, the groom at the wedding, said he and his entire surviving family were willing to see her swapped. "She's a nobody; I don't think she's very important," he said. "If it's 100 percent sure to get Moaz back, we support this, even though I know if she's released she will probably do this again."

Mr. Khaled lost his father in the bombing; his wife lost both her parents.

Sajida al-Rishawi hardly came across as much of a firebrand, although she told interrogators she was motivated by vengeance for deaths in her family.

She had been married once before, in her early 30s, unusually late in Anbar Province in Iraq and among the semirural Rishawi tribe she came from. According to Hassan Abu Hanieh, a scholar of Islamist movements, her first husband was a Jordanian member of Al Qaeda in Iraq named Abu Anas al-Urdoni, who was killed fighting the Americans in Fallujah in 2003 or 2004. In rapid succession in 2004, her eldest brother, Thamer, and two other brothers, Yassir and Ammar, were killed by the American military in Anbar Province.

Mr. Hanieh and Ms. Maieah both said it was her eldest brother's death that most affected her. While she was illiterate and worked at a vegetable stand, her brother Thamer had risen to become a close aide to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a Jordanian who led Al Qaeda in Iraq. Mr. Zarqawi appointed Thamer emir of Anbar Province, Mr. Hanieh said.

After the deaths of her brothers, Ms. Rishawi volunteered for a vengeance mission and was recruited by a cousin early in 2005 for the planned operation attacking hotels in Amman.

A few days in advance, Ms. Rishawi and Mr. Shumari were married in Anbar. That made it easier for them to travel together and stay in the same safe house without violating Islamic codes on sexual propriety.

At the Radisson SAS Hotel, they had to ask permission to enter the wedding, saying they were Iraqis and just wanted to see what a Jordanian wedding was like. Then they took up positions on opposite sides of a wedding hall inside the five-star hotel, amid hundreds of guests.

Ms. Rishawi tried three times to blow herself up but failed, apparently because of a technical fault in her detonator. As guests danced and whooped in the usual fashion of an Arab wedding, Mr. Shumari climbed atop a table, to give maximum effect to his vest full of high explosives and nails, shouted "Allahu akbar!" and blew up.

Dazed but unhurt, Ms. Rishawi fled. Still wearing her vest under an overcoat, she took refuge in the house of a distant relative in Jordan. The relative later testified that he discovered the vest under her bed when he bent over to pick up a pomegranate that had fallen on the floor, and then turned her in.

After the attack, Mr. Zarqawi had boasted in a message that one of the suicide attackers had been a woman; apparently he was unaware she had survived. By the next day, she was paraded on television, wearing the vest and confessing.

Ms. Maieah, the journalist, said that during the trial she never saw Ms. Rishawi express remorse -- or any other emotion. "Her face was always blank, the same facial expression, no happiness, no sadness," she said.

While Ms. Rishawi never spoke out in defense of her actions, she stuck to a refusal to join in reciting verses from the Quran in memory of the victims of the attack, when everyone else in the courtroom did so.

The Islamic State's recent demand for her release is a reminder that the group is a direct descendant of Mr. Zarqawi's Al Qaeda in Iraq. Mr. Hanieh said that after Mr. Zarqawi's death, other leaders came to the fore, including a fellow member of the group's governing shura, or council, Abu Bakr al Baghdadi, who is now the leader of the Islamic State.

"She represents the first generation of ISIS, and one of the first women suiciders," Mr. Hanieh said. "That makes her very important to them, and they revere Zarqawi."

Mr. Hiltermann, however, said he would have thought ISIS would have picked more important militants held by Jordan. About 60 other alleged Islamic State or Qaeda members are imprisoned in Jordan, including Ziad al-Karbouli, who was Mr. Zarqawi's top lieutenant at the time of the Jordanian attack and is believed to have helped plan the bombings. Like Ms. Rishawi, Mr. Karbouli has been sentenced to death.

For her part, Ms. Maieah said Ms. Rishawi was "just a malicious, sneaky lowlife," adding that "the only reason she was there is a man couldn't have gotten into a wedding alone."

Her theory is that the Islamic State is "just doing this to put Jordan in an awkward situation with Japan." Japan is a major aid donor to Jordan and has pledged \$150 million in aid to help Jordan manage more than 600,000 refugees from Syria whose presence has put a strain on the country's resources and raised the specter of unrest.

The demand for Ms. Rishawi's release has also put Jordan in an awkward situation with its own public, which has been demanding that something be done for Lieutenant Kasasbeh -- and complaining that the Japanese hostage should not get precedence.

With a growing chorus of Jordanians, led by Lieutenant Kasasbeh's father, arguing that the American-led fight against ISIS should not be Jordan's war, some analysts worry that Jordan's continued participation in the coalition could even be put into question. In that case, Ms. Rishawi's extremist supporters may finally have found a use for her -- whether or not she gets released.

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6. Pentagon: Jordan ISIS swap not the same as Bergdahl

TheHill.com, Jan. 28 | Kristina Wong

Jordan's planned prisoner exchange with the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) for a captured Jordanian pilot is raising uncomfortable questions for the Obama administration over its own hostage policy.

U.S. officials on Wednesday would not say whether they supported Jordan's decision to swap a female prisoner who attempted a suicide bombing in Jordan for a pilot whose plane went down in Syria during a mission in the U.S.-led war against ISIS on Dec. 24.

Officials reiterated their position of not making concessions to terrorists, but struggled to explain how the move would be different from the U.S. swap of five senior Taliban commanders held at Guantanamo Bay for Army Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl.

"It's a completely different situation," said Pentagon press secretary Rear Adm. John Kirby said at a press briefing on Wednesday.

Bergdahl "was a U.S. Army soldier being held in a status akin to being a prisoner of war," Kirby said. "That was not a hostage situation. He was being held in captivity by opposing forces."

When journalists pointed out that the Jordanian pilot is also being held in captivity by "opposing forces," Kirby said the difference is that the Taliban is more legitimate as an opposing force than ISIS.

"ISIS is not in the same situation or category as the Taliban in terms of legitimacy as an opposing force," he said. ISIS is "a terrorist network."

Kirby said he did not know if the Taliban was ever designated as a "terrorist organization" or not.

"The Taliban is an armed insurgency. ISIL is a terrorist group. We don't make concessions to terrorist groups," White House spokesman Eric Schultz told reporters later Wednesday, using an alternate name for the group.

Bergdahl, 28, left his post in Afghanistan in 2009, and was subsequently captured by the Taliban, and was reportedly held by the Haqqani network, a terrorist group affiliated with the Taliban.

But U.S. officials argue that they negotiated the swap of the five Taliban commanders for Bergdahl through Qatar, not directly with the Haqqani network.

The U.S. announced it was reviewing its hostage policy after ISIS beheaded three Americans, and their families complained to the media about a lack of communication with the government, as well as receiving conflicting information.

State Department press secretary Jen Psaki said that review was "ongoing."

She would not comment on what the U.S. has discussed with Jordan, but said "every country has the ability and the right to make decisions."

Rep. Duncan Hunter (R-Calif.), who has pressed the administration to review its hostage policy, said "a trade is a concession," no matter if it's done through third parties or not.

"The Administration screwed up when it traded Bergdahl for five detainees. That deal is surely what prompted ISIS and other groups to feel more emboldened with their hostage demands—and that's playing out right now with Jordan and Japan," Hunter said.

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7. Officials: Militant's ex-wife was money courier

Woman linked to Islamic State leader called 'honorary jihadi man'

Washington Post, Jan. 29, Pg. A6 | Hugh Naylor and Suzan Haidamous

BEIRUT - For months, the ex-wife of perhaps the most wanted man in the world used Lebanon as a base to secretly transfer cash to Islamist militants, according to Lebanese military officials.

She concealed her identity with fake documents, which listed her as a Syrian citizen named Mallak Abdullah, the officials said. Eventually, they said, they discovered that she was Saja al-Dulaimi, an Iraqi who had been briefly married six years ago to the man who now heads the Islamic State, Abu Bakr al- Baghdadi. In November, the army detained Dulaimi with a girl who is Baghdadi's biological daughter, the officials said.

The investigation into Dulaimi has shed light on the murky ways in which Islamist militias move funds through the Middle East. It has also illustrated how the families of Syrian and Iraqi militants are quietly settling in Lebanon, hiding in refugee camps and the occasional Christian village. And it has yielded an intriguing profile of someone who defies the image of submissive women in the jihadist world.

Dulaimi has had at least three husbands and lived in several countries in the region, according to the military officials. They described her as strong-willed and independent. Military officials said she transferred hundreds of thousands of dollars over the past year to Sunni militants operating along Lebanon's border with Syria.

"She's not your stereotypical woman" in the world of militant Islam, said Fawaz A. Gerges, a professor of Middle Eastern studies at the London School of Economics. He described her profile as that of an "honorary jihadi man" in the eyes of such groups.

More such women are carrying out suicide operations and helping to collect intelligence and distribute funds for radical groups, he said.

For Lebanon, Dulaimi's case points to the challenge posed by the families of Syrian and Iraqi militants who have moved here. Dulaimi has been charged in a Lebanese military court with financing terrorism and has been denied access to a lawyer.

A political marriage?

Dulaimi, who is in her 30s, was based in the impoverished mountain city of Aarsal on the Syrian border, military officials said. She blended in easily in a makeshift encampment for Syrian refugees, who outnumber the 35,000 locals, a resident of the city said.

"There are lots of people in these areas, so she lived anonymously while she was here," said the resident, who spoke on the condition of anonymity out of concern for his safety.

Another Lebanese resident of Aarsal said the town was home to many family members of extremists fighting in Syria.

"We all know that the wives and families of the fighters and commanders are living in Aarsal, because they don't have any other place to put them," said the resident, who spoke on the condition that she be identified only by her first name, Bahjat.

About six years ago, Lebanese military officials said, Dulaimi married Baghdadi, who is originally from Samarra, a city north of Baghdad. The marriage lasted for only about three months, said Sheik Hassan al-Dulaimi, a prominent elder from Iraq's Anbar province who is from the same tribe as Saja al-Dulaimi, speaking in a telephone interview.

Lebanese officials said the union was pushed by Dulaimi's father, Hamid al-Dulaimi. Marriages in Iraq's tribal area can be politically motivated affairs, aimed at cementing ties between families, and Hamid al-Dulaimi may have sought an alliance with Baghdadi at a time when the younger man and other militants were incensed by the U.S. occupation and were gravitating to al-Qaeda in Iraq, the precursor to the group currently occupying chunks of Iraq and Syria.

But Labib Kamhawi, an analyst based in Jordan, said that it could have been Baghdadi who pushed for the union, given the prominence of Dulaimi's tribe. He noted that Iraqi tradition allows for relatively easy divorce, making a breakup fairly simple.

The Lebanese military officials described Saja al-Dulaimi, who does not veil her face, as strikingly beautiful. She was combative during recent interrogation sessions, they said.

"It's because she's committed to her beliefs," said one of the officials involved with her case, referring to the militant Islamist cause. Like other officials interviewed for this article, he spoke on the condition of anonymity, citing a lack of authorization to discuss the issue.

According to Lebanese officials, analysts and media reports, Dulaimi had been married to another Iraqi before Baghdadi and had two sons from that relationship. Her daughter with Baghdadi is thought to be about 5 years old.

Lebanese officials said multiple members of Dulaimi's family have participated in militant activities in Iraq and Syria. Hamid, her father, eventually pledged allegiance to the Islamic State, they said. He was killed more than a year ago while fighting near the Syrian city of Homs, according to officials.

About that time, they said, Dulaimi was apprehended by Syrian government forces near Homs, where she had been living with her father and sister. In March 2014, she was among 150 people whom the Syrian government freed in a

prisoner swap with militants linked to Jabhat al-Nusra, who handed over a group of Greek Orthodox nuns, the officials said.

She then moved to Lebanon.

'Children of al-Qaeda'

Authorities said Dulaimi moved money to militants operating along Lebanon's border with Syria. In August, the militants - linked to the Islamic State and Jabhat al-Nusra, al-Qaeda's Syrian wing - besieged Aarsal while Dulaimi was living there. The militants withdrew to Syria several days later, taking more than 20 Lebanese soldiers as prisoners.

Dulaimi received at least \$200,000 via wire-transfer agencies and charity organizations, then distributed the cash to fighters, said a senior military intelligence official, who also has been involved with Dulaimi's interrogations at the Defense Ministry compound near Beirut.

Some of the money came from residents of Persian Gulf countries, he said, adding that it was sent to organizations in Lebanon that "work under the cover of aid for Syrian refugees."

Dulaimi could more easily move the money to militants because she is a woman, said Salem Zahran, a Lebanese analyst who is close to military officials. Conservative traditions make soldiers, most of them male, wary of searching women and girls at checkpoints and border crossings, he said.

"Groups like al-Qaeda use women to exploit these traditions to their advantage, just like Saja did," Zahran said.

Lebanese security agencies discovered Dulaimi's activities through a tip from a Western intelligence agency, said the military officials, who declined to identify the agency.

The senior intelligence officer said DNA tests were carried out on Dulaimi and the young girl after they were detained in November. He added that the DNA samples of Baghdadi were obtained with assistance from an unspecified U.S. agency. A decade ago, Baghdadi was imprisoned in Iraq by U.S. forces. DNA samples may have been collected from detainees at the time. Last month, Lebanese Interior Minister Nuhad Machnouk announced on local television that Dulaimi was a former wife of Baghdadi's and that the girl was his daughter.

Lebanese authorities have apprehended family members of other militants linked to organizations such as the Islamic State. They include the wife and children of an Islamic State-affiliated fighter named Anas Sharkas, known as Abu Ali al-Shishani, a nom de guerre. His family, all Syrians, were detained recently while living in a predominantly Christian village in northern Lebanon. His wife has not been charged with a crime, and it appears she was not involved in militant activities. The authorities may be holding the family as bargaining chips for the release of the Lebanese soldiers kidnapped in Aarsal, allegedly with Shishani's involvement.

Last month, Shishani threatened to kidnap Lebanese women and children if authorities did not release his family.

Baghdadi is not known to have issued any such threat after his daughter and ex-wife were detained. As for Dulaimi, she moved on to another relationship, Lebanese military officials said.

After she arrived in Lebanon last year, she linked up with a man from a Palestinian refugee camp who had a history of militant activity, Lebanese military officials said. The man has been arrested on allegations of aiding Dulaimi in financing extremists, they said, adding that she is pregnant with his child.

"What we are dealing with here are literally the children of al-Qaeda," said a high-ranking army officer.

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8. Middle East Crossroads: In Sinai, Egypt Faces Another Insurgency Tied to Islamic State

Wall Street Journal, Jan. 29, Pg. A8 | Yaroslav Trofimov

CAIRO -- The video looks hard to distinguish from the ones filmed in Syria and Iraq. Islamic State gunmen arrive in a fleet of pickup trucks, set up checkpoints on a busy highway and start hauling away suspected collaborators with the "apostate" government. It ends, predictably, with forced confessions and gruesome, close-up shots of killings.

But these videos, released by Islamic State's "Province of Sinai" last month, weren't shot anywhere near Syria or Iraq. The highway in the footage is the main road linking the Egyptian cities of el-Arish and Rafah, on the Mediterranean shore of the restive Sinai Peninsula close to the Gaza Strip.

Islamic State's self-proclaimed caliph, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, has demanded that all of the world's Muslims pledge allegiance to him -- and Sinai's main insurgent movement, Ansar Beit al-Maqdis, in November became one of the main jihadist groups outside Syria and Iraq to do so. Similar Islamic State franchises have also sprung up in parts of Yemen, Algeria and Libya -- where the "Province of Tripoli" Tuesday claimed responsibility for a deadly attack on one of Tripoli's main hotels.

How they fare represents a crucial test of the extent to which Islamic State, with its singular brutality and genocidal ideology, can metastasize beyond its home turf. While all of these groups operate autonomously, they are establishing increasingly close connections with Islamic State's leadership in Syria, diplomats and security officials say. That includes funding and expertise and travel by jihadists to Syria.

The "Province of Sinai" so far appears to be the most dangerous of these Islamic State franchises, inflicting serious casualties on the Egyptian army in what's likely to be a prolonged and increasingly vicious insurgency.

"In a way, what is happening in Sinai looks a lot like what was happening in Iraq in the mid-2000s," said Issandr El Amrani, director of North Africa at the International Crisis Group think tank. "There is a cause for alarm because Islamic State has a methodology and a network of expertise based on causing splits in society to rally people around them -- which is how it worked in Syria and Iraq."

Just as in other areas where Islamic State has found support, there is a long history of local grievances in Sinai. The vast desert area, bordering on Israel and the Gaza Strip, is culturally distinct from the rest of Egypt, with more conservative mores and historical links to Bedouin tribes of Saudi Arabia and Jordan. Resentment about underdevelopment and heavy-handed security measures has helped turn the northern part of Sinai, in particular, into a fertile ground for Islamic State militants, security analysts say.

"They know they have a foundation in Sinai region," says Maher Farghaly, a Cairo-based expert and author of several books on Egypt's Islamist militants. "But they also have groups in other Egyptian governorates. They are capable of attacks there too, anytime and anywhere, even though the security authorities pretend otherwise."

The fact that wide-scale violence outside Sinai has been rare, however, shows that Islamic State -- at least for now -- poses a local rather than systemic challenge to the government of President Abdel Fattah Al Sisi, Western diplomats and Egyptian officials argue. Mr. Sisi, who ousted the elected President Mohammed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood in 2013, has solidified his rule by cracking down on Islamist and other dissent. More than 20 people were killed in recent days as security forces dispersed demonstrations against his rule in Cairo and other Egyptian cities. Those protests aren't related to the Sinai insurgency.

Retired Maj. Gen. Sameh Seif Elyazal, chairman of the state-run Al Gomhouria Center for Political and Security Studies in Cairo and a former deputy head of Egypt's military intelligence, said recent Egyptian military operations in Sinai, coupled with the establishment of a border buffer zone that seeks to stop weapons-smuggling from the Gaza Strip, have significantly improved the security situation there.

"We will see some problems for some time, but the peninsula is much more stable than before," he said. "Right now every single square centimeter is controlled by the army."

While low-grade militancy in northern Sinai has been simmering for years, it flared as the country's new authorities freed Islamist prisoners and allowed militant exiles to return after the 2011 uprising.

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IRAQ/SYRIA

9. Kurds Scour Kobani for Bombs, Bodies

Wall Street Journal, Jan. 29, Pg. A9 | Ayla Albayrak

KOBANI, Syria -- For five months, Kurdish market trader Mahmud Ali defended the streets of this town on the Turkish border against Islamic State fighters who used artillery and suicide bombs. Now he is savoring his part in the liberation of Kobani, but also pondering the cost.

"This war has turned everybody's lives upside down," said Mr. Ali, a Kalashnikov slung over his shoulder. His face was fatigued by battle and the stress of separation from his family. "We need a lot of help to rebuild now. Just look around you," said Mr. Ali, who took up arms when the city came under attack four months ago.

A small number of refugees on Wednesday returned from Turkey, where most had fled, to inspect their homes a day after Syrian Kurdish fighters proclaimed they had ejected Islamic State militants from the town center.

What they saw was a scene of destruction inflicted during a 134-day siege that left hundreds of people dead and forced almost 200,000 refugees to flee north across the border, the biggest human flight of the four-year conflict.

Block after block of homes has been hollowed out by shellfire, bombings and airstrikes. Contorted metal bars jut from the rubble like spears. There is no electricity, no water and few signs of life. On a central square once the thriving heart of this town before the siege, the Alushan Hospital is in ruins, destroyed by an Islamic State suicide

truck bombing, according to two senior Kurdish officials and several fighters. The truck's charred wheels remain across the street, fighters noted.

As the sun set over Kobani and the thud of exploding shells echoed in the distance, Kurdish fighters said their comrades, Peshmerga fighters from Iraqi Kurdistan, were launching artillery attacks against insurgent strongholds in neighboring villages.

The victory of the Kurds at Kobani -- assisted by hundreds of airstrikes by the U.S.-led coalition -- has been hailed in Western capitals as evidence of the limits of jihadist military power and a way to hamper any expansion.

For Syria's Kurds, Kobani has become a beacon of Kurdish strength and is now referred to by many as the Kurds' Stalingrad. The Syrian Kurdish PYD political party, an offshoot of a group listed as a terror organization by the U.S. and Turkey, has developed ties with Washington, spotting airstrikes for U.S. fighter jets and gaining a seat in the coalition's joint operations center.

Those who have returned have been shocked by what they have found: destroyed homes with evidence of the jihadists who slept there during the battle. "The body of a jihadist was lying on my doorstep, shot dead. . . . He must have been the last one trying to escape," said Mohammed Bozan Ali, a 35-year-old from Kobani who returned to the refugee camp in Turkey after concluding it was impossible to bring his family home.

"It's hard to talk about any reconstruction at this stage. It will take a long time before people can safely move in, and we need help from the international community," said Idres Nassan, a senior Kobani official, who operates from an office in Turkey.

On Wednesday, Kurdish militia fighters were trawling through the town to clear the remaining bodies of dead Islamic State fighters and defuse unexploded bombs. "They had bombs even inside teapots," said one resident. Another refugee said he had found medical pills and dozens of copies of the Quran in an apartment on the city outskirts that appeared to have been used as a base.

For now, tens of thousands of Kurdish refugees are waiting on the Turkish side of the border, where officials have just completed construction of the country's largest refugee camp, with a capacity of 35,000. Some Kobani residents say they will return if they are allowed to do so by Kurdish officials, even if their homes are just a crushed pile of concrete.

"As soon as we get the sign, we will just go back and erect a tent near our house. We can't stay in somebody else's land much longer," said Semse Muhammed, a 60-year-old who has lived in a tent in the Turkish border town of Suruc for five months.

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10. As Iraqi Kurds gain ground from IS, local Sunnis are wary

Associated Press, Jan. 29 | Vivian Salama

ESKI MOSUL, Iraq — An unarmed Sunni Arab man walked along a road in a patch of northern Iraq newly liberated from Islamic State extremists, holding a white surrender flag — a signal to Kurdish fighters that he is not a militant. Cars drove by, a similar white banner flying from their windows.

As they retake territory from Islamic State militants, Iraqi Kurdish fighters have found surprising ambivalence in areas they freed from the jihadis' oppressive rule. Locals have swiftly shaken off the imposed Islamic lifestyle — but as Sunnis, from the same ethnic group as the militants, many are nonetheless bracing for treatment as collaborators.

For their part, the Kurdish peshmerga troops are suspicious about why the locals chose to stay on when the Islamic State conquered the area in a blitz last year. An Associated Press team travelling with the Kurds found the road to Mosul, a coveted prize in the battle for Iraq, strewn with suspicion and fear.

The recent Kurdish push secured several towns and villages along a critical junction that connects the town of Tal Afar to the city of Mosul — two of the IS group's biggest strongholds in Iraq. The artery, which eventually leads to Syria, has been a vital supply line for militants transporting weapons, goods and people across the lawless Iraq-Syria border.

The Kurdish fighters struggled for months to inch ahead, backed by U.S.-led coalition airstrikes. On Tuesday, at least four airstrikes hit IS positions near Eski Mosul, a village of up to about 9,000 residents some 40 kilometers (25 miles) northwest of Mosul.

Kurdish Brig. Gen. Bahjat Taymes, who led the peshmerga operation to retake the Tal Afar-Mosul junction, said seizing it was "crucial" because it also leads to the Mosul Dam, which Kurdish and Iraqi forces won back in August with the help of U.S. airstrikes.

Last week's uptick in the airstrikes marked the start of a new, broader effort to disrupt Islamic State's supply lines ahead of an expected operation later this year to take back Mosul, U.S. military officials said.

A senior U.S. military official said military leaders were watching to see how Islamic State militants respond as their supply and communications lines dry up. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to discuss the operations.

Islamic State fighters destroyed many power lines and bridges trying to slow the Kurdish advance but were eventually routed from the area. In the nearby town of Shandoukhah, bulldozers and Kurdish troops worked feverishly this week to enforce positions, piling up dirt and sandbags as deterrents against suicide bombers or shelling.

"Before we proceed further, we have to secure our backs," Kurdish Col. Marwan al-Mizouri told the AP.

The Kurdish fighters in Eski Mosul — Turkish for "Old Mosul," a name from the Ottoman rule — say they plan to leave as soon as Iraqi troops return but their enthusiasm about pressing ahead in a fight for predominantly Arab territory is half-hearted.

Last June, Iraqi forces suffered a humiliating defeat amid the IS group's lightening advance. Their commanders disappeared, pleas for more ammunition went unanswered and in some cases, soldiers stripped off their uniforms and ran. The Kurdish fighters then filled the vacuum in northern Iraq, seeing a chance to spread out from their semi-autonomous region and claim long-disputed territories in their bid for full independence.

The Iraqi military briefly returned in August for the battle to retake the Mosul Dam, "but we haven't seen them since," said Taymes, the Kurdish general.

The villagers in Eski Mosul are grateful for their Kurdish liberators, many of whom speak almost no Arabic. But the Sunni villagers also know it will take time to convince the newcomers they hold no allegiance to the Islamic State. The militants left much devastation before they fled.

Many in Eski Mosul admit they welcomed the IS when the group first arrived, resentful of what they perceive as years of neglect, discrimination and sectarian policies by the Shiite-led government in Baghdad.

"We thought they were revolutionaries coming to help us and give us our rights," said 30-year-old grocer, Salim Khudair.

Hard times followed. The village soon lost cooking gas and electricity, forcing the people to heat what little food remained over open ground fires. The cows became emaciated and many stopped giving milk. Most of the infants and the elderly became sickly.

Now, they can glimpse a better life emerging. Cigarettes — strictly banned under the Islamic State, which seized a third of both Iraq and neighboring Syria and imposed strict Sharia law — are sold and smoked freely. For the first time in months, women and young girls walk the narrow dirt streets without having to cover their faces. Young boys wrestle and play soccer without fear.

But mistrust lingers.

As several Kurdish fighters on Tuesday handed out bottled water, speaking to the villagers in broken Arabic, a group of village girls came up, timidly saying to the soldiers, "please don't blow up our homes."

Shaimaa, a resident of Eski Mosul who declined to give her full name out of fear for her safety, said her brother-in-law supported the Islamic State and so the Kurdish troops deemed her husband guilty by association and detained him.

Khudair, the grocer, claimed the peshmerga fighters confiscated some of his belongings, including a credit card machine he uses for work.

With the Islamic State still sporadically shells the village — the last time as recently as Monday — some among the Kurds worry the villagers are tipping off the militants about the Kurdish positions.

"We need them to trust us and to cooperate with us," explained al-Mizouri, the Kurdish colonel. He said he believes some villagers are still loyal to the jihadis. "Not all of them, but maybe 10 percent. It is essential that we identify those people and take care of our backs before we continue."

--Associated Press writers Lolita C. Baldor in Washington and Bram Janssen contributed to this report

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AFGHANISTAN/PAKISTAN

11. Militants Driven From Pakistan Flock to Afghan Towns

Wall Street Journal, Jan. 29, Pg. A8 | Margherita Stancati and Habib Khan Totakhil

KABUL -- Arab and Central Asian Islamist militants have moved into Afghanistan after a military offensive by Islamabad largely eliminated havens in Pakistan's tribal areas, Afghan officials and local residents say, posing a potential new threat to the country's security.

At least 400 families affiliated with militant groups -- including al Qaeda and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan -- crossed into Afghanistan in December and now live in the homes of locals in lawless parts of the country, Afghan officials say.

Afghan officials say these fighters aren't engaging in combat, but their arrival comes as a robust Taliban insurgency confronts the government in Kabul. Islamic State, which occupies territory in Syria and Iraq, has also sought a foothold here.

Haji Abdul Azizi, a tribal elder from Helmand's district of Sangin, said he hosted a family of Arabic speakers for a night last week who said they were loyal to Islamic State.

"They were six men, seven women and two children," he said. "They were speaking Arabic and two of them also understood Pashto. They came in two 4x4 cars."

The women of the group were armed and took turns keeping watch on each other during the night, Mr. Azizi said. The new arrivals in Sangin were trying to enforce an austere brand of Islam that clashed with local traditions, he added.

"They are against shrines," Mr. Azizi said. "They are removing flags from the shrines and preventing people from going there."

Afghan officials said foreign militants traveling with families have settled in provinces including Ghazni in the east, Zabul in the south and Farah in the west. The largest known settlements are in Zabul's districts of Day Chupan and Khak-e Afghan, areas that are largely under Taliban control. Officials and residents say some 150 families, which include Arabic speakers and people of Central Asian appearance, are currently living there.

"They are al Qaeda, and some of them are armed," said Ghullam Jilani Farahi, a top security official in Zabul.

A tribal elder from Day Chupan said the militants are living in houses that were previously empty, and that they were receiving protection and support from local Taliban commanders.

The arrival of these groups is a spillover effect of a Pakistani military offensive aimed at clearing the tribal areas of North Waziristan of militants, current and former Afghan officials say.

While that operation started in June, the bulk of foreign militants arrived in Afghanistan in December in the immediate aftermath of the deadly Pakistani Taliban attack on a school in the northwestern city of Peshawar. The massacre, which claimed the lives of 150 people, most of them children, prompted Islamabad to vow to redouble efforts to combat terrorism.

"The majority of them were in North Waziristan because the area was a safe zone for them," said Mansur Khan Mahsud, an analyst with the Islamabad-based FATA research center. "But when the operation started, they started to leave and they came to Afghanistan."

A senior Afghan security official said the central government is monitoring these groups.

The Afghan parliament on Wednesday approved the appointments of heads of the ministries of foreign affairs, finance and interior, and confirmed the appointment of the country's spy chief, lifting an important obstacle to President Ashraf Ghani's ambitious plans to overhaul his country's government.

Local officials say the foreign militants who arrived in the Afghan province of Farah are now branding themselves as Islamic State and setting up a training camp there.

"They haven't fought against Taliban or government yet, but they are actively busy with training," said Gul Ahmad Azimi, a senator from Farah. "After the Peshawar attack, the Pakistani government put pressure on them, and they were forced to refuge not only in Farah but also elsewhere in the country."

--Syed Shoaib Hasan in Karachi, Pakistan, Ehsanullah Amiri in Kabul and Ghousuddin Frotan in Kandahar, Afghanistan, contributed to this article

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12. Afghan president faces new hurdles as cabinet nominees rejected

Reuters, Jan. 28 | Mirwais Harooni and Jessica Donati

KABUL - Afghanistan's parliament dealt a new blow to President Ashraf Ghani's efforts to assemble a government on Wednesday, approving just eight out of 25 cabinet nominees before its winter recess.

Ghani, who took office in September promising dramatic reforms and greater transparency, must now wait until mid-March before introducing new candidates to the lower house.

The key positions of minister of the economy, defense and justice all remained vacant after the vote. The nomination of a central bank governor was also rejected by the lower house.

The lack of leadership at ministries is fueling instability at a critical time. The country is already struggling with a severe budget crisis, plummeting economic growth and a growing Taliban insurgency.

"Today, the voting process for the ministerial nominees has been completed and the budget for next year has been approved," lower house speaker Abdul Rauf Ibrahimi said. "The lower house will officially start its winter break tomorrow."

The finance ministry was among the positions approved and the spy chief was allowed to continue in his post. A statement from Ghani's office promised to introduce new candidates soon.

Part of Ghani's trouble producing a list of nominees has arisen from a need to agree on candidates with his rival-turned-partner, Abdullah Abdullah, who now has a prime minister-like post of chief executive.

The powerful vice president Abdul Rashid Dostum also holds sway over the process. Dostum was among those disappointed on Wednesday, after parliament rejected the nomination of one of his allies as minister of transport.

The vote also upset women's rights activists who had hoped to see more women represented under the new president.

Three instead of the promised four women were nominated to cabinet positions and by Wednesday just one remained on the list. She, too, was ultimately rejected.

"When I saw three females on the list I was unhappy ... but I am very sad in particular today because in the end, we got only one," parliamentarian Shukria Barakzai told Reuters ahead of the vote. "That has been the worst thing."

Allegations of corruption have also marred the process, with government and security officials accusing parliamentarians of taking bribes in exchange for votes.

Former president Hamid Karzai emerged as another loser on Wednesday, after the budget decision rejected his decree to continue paying over a hundred of his staff for five more years.

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ASIA/PACIFIC

13. U.S. would welcome Japan air patrols in South China Sea

Reuters, Jan. 29 | Tim Kelly and Nobuhiro Kubo

TOKYO - The United States would welcome a move by Japan to extend air patrols into the South China Sea as a counterweight to a growing fleet of Chinese vessels pushing Beijing's territorial claims in the region, a senior U.S. Navy officer told Reuters.

Currently, regular patrols by Japanese aircraft only reach into the East China Sea, where Tokyo is at loggerheads with Beijing over disputed islands. Extending surveillance flights into the South China Sea will almost certainly increase tensions between the world's second- and third-largest economies.

"I think allies, partners and friends in the region will look to the Japanese more and more as a stabilizing function," Admiral Robert Thomas, commander of the Seventh Fleet and the top U.S. navy officer in Asia, said in an interview.

"In the South China Sea, frankly, the Chinese fishing fleet, the Chinese coast guard and the (navy) overmatch their neighbors," Thomas said.

China's foreign ministry said it had no immediate comment on the interview.

Thomas's comments show Pentagon support for a key element of Japan Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's push for a more active military role in the region. That is crucial because U.S and Japanese officials are now negotiating new bilateral security guidelines expected to give Japan a bigger role in the alliance, 70 years after the end of World War Two.

"I think that JSDF (Japan Maritime Self Defense Forces) operations in the South China Sea makes sense in the future," Thomas said.

Japan is not party to the dispute in the South China Sea where China, the Philippines, Vietnam, Taiwan, Malaysia and Brunei have competing claims. But the waterway provides 10 per cent of the global fisheries catch and carries \$5 trillion in ship-borne trade, a large portion of which is to and from Japan.

NEW SURVEILLANCE PLANE

Abe is pushing for legislation later this year that would allow Japan's military to operate more freely overseas as part of a broader interpretation of the self-defense allowed by its pacifist constitution.

Those changes coincide with the deployment of a new Japanese maritime patrol plane, the P-1, with a range of 8,000 km (5,000 miles). That is double the range of current aircraft and could allow Japan to push surveillance deep into the South China Sea.

"This is a logical outgrowth of Abe's push for a more robust and proactive military. It is also a substantial departure from JSDF's customary operations," said Grant Newsham, a research fellow at the Japan Forum for Strategic Studies and a former U.S. Marine liaison officer to Japan's military.

Newsham said sending surveillance aircraft to the South China Sea would allow Japan to deepen its military ties with nations like the Philippines, one of Abe's goals to counter China's growing naval power.

Beijing has outlined the scope of its claims with reference to a so-called nine-dash line that takes in about 90 percent of the South China Sea on Chinese maps.

"The alleged nine dash line, which doesn't comport with international rules and norms, standards, laws, creates a situation down there, which is unnecessary friction," said Thomas, the U.S. navy commander.

The Scarborough Shoal near the Philippines is one flashpoint in the South China Sea. Manila has complained that China has kept its fishermen from fishing in the waters around the shoal. Thomas said Japan could aid the Philippines with equipment and training.

"For the Philippines, the issue is one of capacity. For the Japanese that is a perfect niche for them to help, not just in equipment, but in training and operations," the U.S. Seventh Fleet commander said.

Centered around the USS George Washington carrier battle group with its home port in Japan, the U.S. Seventh Fleet includes some 80 vessels, 140 aircraft and 40,000 sailors making it the most powerful naval force in the western Pacific.

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UKRAINE/RUSSIA

14. Ukraine rebels claim new key victory is within grasp

Associated Press, Jan. 28 | Peter Leonard

DONETSK, Ukraine — Separatist forces in eastern Ukraine said Wednesday they have almost fully encircled government forces in a town that hosts a strategic railway hub, putting them within grasp of a decisive new victory.

Eduard Basurin, the deputy commander of the separatist forces, said the highway linking the town, Debaltseve, to other government-held areas has now fallen into rebel hands. The encirclement of the town has not, however, been fully executed, Basurin said.

Ukrainian military spokesman Andriy Lysenko confirmed Debaltseve is surrounded on two flanks and is being heavily targeted with Grad multiple rocket launchers. Other officials denied government forces were close to folding and said separatist claims were exaggerated.

Debaltseve is one of multiple flashpoints that have flared up across eastern Ukraine since the start of the month, when full-blown fighting between Russian-backed rebels and government forces erupted anew following a month of relative tranquility. Since the conflict started in April, it has claimed more than 5,100 lives and displaced over 900,000 people across the country, according to Ukraine government estimates.

Advances by separatist forces threaten to definitively torpedo the chances of reviving an internationally brokered peace deal reached in September that established a line of contact between the warring sides. That agreement was signed in the Belarusian capital, Minsk, by rebel leaders and representatives from Ukraine, Russia and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Basurin said the terms of the Minsk agreement are no longer in force.

Roman Turovets, a spokesman for Ukrainian military operations in the east, said fighting is raging all along the more than 300-kilometer (190-mile) long perimeter between government and separatist territory.

Rebel offensives appear addressed at consolidating the viability of the would-be breakaway republics of Donetsk and Luhansk.

Ukraine and NATO accuse Russia of lending vast military support to the rebel cause. But few are suggesting Moscow is doing much to prop up the economy of the self-proclaimed republics, and it shows.

Anecdotal evidence suggests unemployment is rife. Tens of thousands have fled the region, most shops in the main separatist city of Donetsk are closed, and the pace of life in the war-stricken areas is a faint echo of peacetime.

Gaining control of key economic assets is become a pressing goal for the rebel command.

Turovets said Deblatseve is important for its role as a transportation hub.

"Deblatseve is a key railway link without which there can be no real connection between the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics," he said.

Another spokesman for operations in the east, Leonid Matyukhin, derided rebel claims that the fall of Deblatseve was imminent.

"These are all lies, they are dreams," Matyukhin said. "(The separatists) need to stop smoking whatever it is they are on."

Battles are also raging in areas north of Luhansk city, where government forces have had mixed fortunes in holding back rebel progress in the direction of a large power and heating plant in the town of Shchastya.

The biggest prize of all for separatists, however, would be Mariupol — a port city with a major and lucrative metalwork plant. Artillery duels have been wreaking destruction daily in the countryside east of the city.

The violence reached Mariupol itself last weekend, when rockets crashed into a densely populated eastern district, killing 30 and wounding several dozen. International observers said a preliminary assessment indicated the attack had been mounted from rebel-held areas.

Donetsk separatist leader Alexander Zakharchenko announced ahead of the attack that the rebel advance on Mariupol had begun. But as the scale of civilian deaths in Mariupol started to emerge, Zakharchenko swiftly changed tack and said no attempt would be made to storm the city.

The persisting unrest has dealt hammer blows to Ukraine's economy as a whole. Kiev has hopes foreign assistance could serve to halt its precipitous decline.

Finance Minister Natalie Jaresko said Wednesday that the United States has provided Ukraine with \$2 billion in loan guarantees and is promising a further \$1 billion following the implementation of reforms.

Jaresko made the announcement after meeting in Kiev with U.S. Treasury Secretary Jacob Lew, who seized the opportunity to commend what he called Ukraine's commitment to taking "difficult steps to unleash Ukraine's economic potential."

"The loan guarantees are provided so Ukraine could handle its social spending and protect those who will suffer from the negative impact that the reforms might have," Lew said.

Ukraine President Petro Poroshenko has said his country will require \$15 billion worth of international assistance over the coming two years.

--Yuras Karmanau in Kiev, Ukraine, contributed to this report

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EUROPE

15. Hotbeds of radicalism in France, long left to simmer

Washington Post, Jan. 29, Pg. A1 | Michael Birnbaum

FLEURY-MEROGIS, France - The man was sent to France's largest prison for armed robbery. He emerged a toughened radical who would go on to take part in the bloodiest terrorist attacks on French soil in decades.

France's prisons have a reputation as factories for radical Islamists, taking in ordinary criminals and turning them out as far more dangerous people. Here at the Fleury-Merogis prison - where Amedy Coulibaly did time alongside

another of the attackers in the deadly assaults this month in and around Paris - authorities are struggling to quell a problem that they say was long threatening to explode.

Former inmates, imams and guards all describe a chaotic scene inside these concrete walls, 15 miles from the elegant boulevards surrounding the Eiffel Tower. Militancy lurks in the shadows, and the best-behaved men are sometimes the most dangerous. French Prime Minister Manuel Valls promised last week to flood his nation's prisons with 60 more Muslim chaplains, doubling their budget to try to combat radicalization. Authorities this week raided 80 prison cells of suspected radicals, saying they found cellphones, USB drives and other contraband. Hundreds of inmates in French prisons are a potential threat, authorities say.

But critics say that these efforts are minuscule compared with the scope of the problem, with prisons so poorly controlled that a leaked French government report once described Osama bin Laden posters hanging on inmates' walls. The challenge may be compounded by the dozens of people sent to jail after the recent attacks, some for more than a year, under fast-track proceedings in which they were charged with verbal support for terrorism.

"Prison destroys men," said Mohamed Boina M'Koubou, an imam who works in the Fleury-Merogis prison. "There are people who are easy targets to spot and make into killers."

Coulibaly had told police that he met "terrorists" during his prison stints, even as he denied that he was one himself.

"If you want me to name all the terrorists I know, it will take you a while. I know them all - the Chechens, the Afghans," Coulibaly told police in 2010, according to court documents from a trial that year in which he was convicted of trying to help a man who had plotted the 1995 bombings on the Paris subway escape from jail. "I knew them back in prison, but that doesn't mean I still see them now."

The poorly staffed prisons were an ideal place to spread violent ideology - in many ways, even better than outside the prison gates. Most prisoners spend up to nine hours a day mingling relatively unsupervised, guards say, first at work and then in the prison yard. French intelligence services pride themselves for their penetration of militant networks in their country - but prisons fall under a different umbrella, experts say, in which many radicals go unchecked, and even unnoticed, by guards.

Other nations, including the United States and Britain, have also struggled with radicalization in prisons. But the issue has proved especially volatile in France, where experts estimate that Muslims make up more than half of the country's 68,000 inmates even though they are only 5 to 10 percent of the general population. But there are only about 170 imams currently ministering inside prisons.

"The number of people who work on intelligence within prisons is peanuts," said Farhad Khosrokhavar, a sociologist at Paris's School for Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences who has studied prison radicalization. And the most dangerous inmates are the ones who know how to blend in, he said.

"Most of the people who get radicalized in prison know very well they should not let their beards grow, should not go to collective Friday prayer when it exists," Khosrokhavar said. The ones who do, potentially drawing guards' attention, are usually the ones who are harmless, he said.

Prison guards, who are each typically responsible for 100 inmates, say they are able to do little about the problem.

"They adapt faster than we do," said David Dulondel, who works as a guard at the Fleury-Merogis prison and is the head of a union there.

"We don't have anyone trained for anti-radicalization," he said. "As it is today, we can't say whether someone is in the process of radicalizing or not."

Valls has proposed isolating the most dangerous inmates together rather than allowing them to mingle with the general prison population. Critics question whether it is possible to identify the right inmates, and they ask whether grouping them would simply create even stronger radicalizing cells within the prisons.

For Coulibaly, the Fleury-Merogis prison was omnipresent when he was growing up right next door in the Paris suburb of Grigny, in a housing project so violence-plagued that the post office there closed last year because it had been robbed too many times. Residents joke grimly that the prison is just another area neighborhood, since people flow in and out of it so regularly.

It was within Fleury-Merogis's barbed-wire perimeter in 2005 that Coulibaly met two men who would change his life. One was Djamel Beghal, a French Algerian inmate who had been convicted of plotting to blow up the U.S. Embassy in Paris in 2001 and was a handsome, articulate and seductive advocate of violence in the name of religion.

Beghal "was right above me" in the prison, Coulibaly told police - an ideal spot to pass messages to each other with the soda bottles tied to torn sheets that prisoners would hang out of the windows. The communication strategy worked even though Beghal, who was seen as an unusually dangerous radicalizer, was in solitary confinement. Coulibaly captured the method in video footage of prison life that he shot and then smuggled out to a French television network.

Beghal did not preach in prison, Coulibaly said, but he did answer inmates' questions about Islam.

The other man Coulibaly met in prison was Chérif Kouachi, who with his brother Said killed 12 people this month in the attack at the Paris offices of the satirical newsweekly Charlie Hebdo. At the time, Kouachi was serving time for a bungled attempt to go to Iraq to fight. His prison stint hardened him even further. Lawyers involved in the case watched the transformation from amateur jihadist to a glowering man who once resisted three days of police efforts to question him.

"A lot of my clients were radicalized in prison," said Dominique Many, a defense lawyer who was involved in the 2005 case in which Kouachi and others were convicted of attempting to go to Iraq to wage jihad.

"They are very well organized," Many said. "They know how to protect the weak to draw them into the system. They say you're their family, and then you're trapped."

The radicalization that happens inside prison remains an issue long after inmates are freed.

"When you're in jail for 10 years and in contact with such people, it's very difficult to come out and turn things around," said Myriam Benraad of the Paris university Sciences Po, an expert on militant movements who has studied Kouachi's gang.

The threat has long been appreciated by the French government - radicalized prisoners, once released, are "time bombs," according to a leaked 2005 government report about the problem.

But for M'Koubou, the prison imam, some stubborn problems are nearly hopeless to eradicate. That's why on a recent trip away from prison and into Paris's bookish Left Bank, he bought a weighty tome that he said he intended to read right away: "Al-Qaeda in France."

--Cleophee Demoustier in Fleury-Merogis and Anna Polonyi in Paris contributed to this report

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AFRICA

16. Nigeria military warned before major Boko Haram attacks – Amnesty

Agence France-Presse, Jan. 28 | Not Attributed

Amnesty International on Wednesday claimed that Nigeria's military top brass were warned of brutal Boko Haram attacks on the northeast towns of Baga and Monguno this month but failed to take action.

The January 3 onslaught against Baga is feared to have killed hundreds, if not more, and destroyed thousands of homes, while the takeover of Monguno last weekend was seen as a major setback for the security forces.

Amnesty said it received information from senior military officers and other sources indicating that defence officials were told about Boko Haram's plans to attack both towns but did not act on requests to send reinforcements.

"It is clear from this evidence that Nigeria's military leadership woefully and repeatedly failed in their duty to protect civilians of Baga and Monguno despite repeated warnings about an impending threat posed by Boko Haram," said Amnesty's Africa director Netsanet Belay.

Regarding Baga, Amnesty said troops in the town in the extreme north of Borno state reported a build-up of insurgent fighters in the area before the attack.

Islamist rebels also warned civilians about an impending strike and several hundred residents consequently fled, the group added, citing military and local sources.

A Monguno resident was quoted as saying that residents there were also warned about a looming Boko Haram offensive and that this information was passed on to the military but no action was taken.

In a statement, defence spokesman General Chris Olukolade said the Amnesty statement was "misleading."

"The misleading conclusions by Amnesty International could have been avoided if they had made meaningful efforts to verify the inciting allegations," Olukolade said in the statement.

It said that Amnesty's effort to use the activities of Islamists to find fault with the military's "counter-terrorism operations...is inaccurate and unfair."

The military has repeatedly described Amnesty as an unreliable organisation with a political agenda.

Amnesty made similar accusations concerning an April 14 attack in Chibok, also in Borno, which saw Boko Haram kidnap more than 200 schoolgirls, sparking global outrage.

Rights groups, Western diplomats and prominent leaders across Nigeria have widely criticised the security services for their handling of the six-year Boko Haram uprising.

Civilians have repeatedly been left defenceless in the face of attacks and President Goodluck Jonathan, who is standing for re-election in less than three weeks, has so far not delivered on promises to contain the violence.

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CONGRESS

17. GOP Split On Higher Defense Spending

Wall Street Journal, Jan. 29, Pg. A4 | Kristina Peterson and Julian E. Barnes

WASHINGTON -- President Barack Obama will send Congress a fiscal year 2016 budget next week proposing both military and domestic spending at levels surpassing the limits lawmakers agreed to in a hard-fought 2011 deal.

After pledging to use their new congressional majority to rein in federal spending, many Republicans are likely to criticize Mr. Obama's plan to ignore the curbs known as the sequester on nondefense spending. But on military spending, GOP lawmakers are divided over whether the Pentagon should absorb more cuts.

The debate forces Republicans to prioritize among two of the party's top goals: bolstering national security and curbing government spending. And GOP lawmakers say minimizing either issue could pose long-term threats to the nation.

Republicans have been dueling each other over military spending since the 2011 deal locked in a decade's worth of budget tightening. But the volume has diminished since a two-year bipartisan budget agreement eased the sting of across-the-board spending reductions.

Now, with the spending curbs set to resume in October, the debate has been revived. But many Democrats say they only would support a defense increase if it were accompanied by more nondefense spending.

"It's a battle between the defense hawks and the fiscal hawks," said Todd Harrison, senior fellow at the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments. "It's not clear to me how this is going to turn out."

The White House is expected to request a base Defense Department budget of roughly \$534 billion, defense officials said, including a request for additional Joint Strike Fighters. That is about \$35 billion above the \$499 billion level at which the sequester would cap spending for the department, which accounts for more than 95% of total national military spending. The budget will also include a war-funding request of \$50.9 billion. In this fiscal year, the Defense Department's budget was \$496 billion.

"Our submission will be above sequester," said a senior defense official. "The president believes he should submit the budget he believes is right for the security of the nation." Pentagon officials said the higher spending level is necessary to maintain the current military strategy.

Among those leading the GOP charge for higher military spending are the chairmen of the Senate and House Armed Services committees, both of whom have said the spending curbs are impinging on the military's ability to prepare and maintain its forces and equipment, as well as respond to an array of national-security threats.

"If we continue with these arbitrary defense cuts, we will harm our military's ability to keep us safe," said Senate Armed Services Chairman John McCain (R., Ariz.) at a hearing on the issue Wednesday.

Many Republicans agree with Mr. McCain and his House counterpart, Rep. Mac Thornberry (R., Texas). But others say the caps agreed to at the end of the 2011 fight over the debt ceiling must be respected.

"We've been spending too much on defense for years because we have a lot of waste within the Department of Defense," said Rep. Justin Amash (R., Mich.) "There's room to cut, and I think we are perfectly capable of staying within the sequester caps."

Sen. Rand Paul, (R., Ky.) a potential GOP 2016 presidential candidate favors trimming military spending. "We need a lean, mean fighting machine that doesn't waste money on a bloated civilian bureaucracy," he said.

Pentagon officials said they have looked hard at what would be needed to get the budget under sequester, including cutting the Army to 420,000 soldiers from its current 506,000.

Mr. Obama's budget is expected to include nondefense spending above the sequester level as well.

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DEFENSE DEPARTMENT

18. Again, Pentagon leaders lament sequestration cuts

MilitaryTimes.com, Jan. 28 | Leo Shane III

Military leaders have already repeatedly warned Congress that looming spending cuts could jeopardize weapons buying, force readiness, battlefield capabilities and worldwide military dominance.

And thus far, that hasn't really worked.

So on Wednesday, in their latest invite to Capitol Hill to talk about the dangers of sequestration cuts, the Joint Chiefs emphasized another potential casualty if lawmakers don't fix the budget issue in coming months: troops' trust.

"As they see we're not going to invest in them, [our soldiers] begin to lose faith," said Army Chief of Staff Gen. Ray Odierno. "Sometimes we take for granted the level of ability of our people, and the level of investment we've made in their training, which is central to everything we do. With sequestration, we are going to have to reduce that for sure."

All four service leaders said they expect to see major retention and recruiting problems in coming years if the sequestration cuts scheduled to start this fall go into effect.

Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Mark Welsh hinted that military pilots could be poached by private airlines as their training flight hours are reduced.

Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Jon Greenert predicted fewer ships, submarines and interested sailors.

Marine Corps Commandant Gen. Joseph Dunford said leaders are already seeing an erosion of trust among troops, wondering if "they'll be deployed without proper training and equipment."

Senators called Wednesday's testimony eye-opening, alarming and infuriating. They also offered no indication they're any closer to finding a solution.

Under rules passed by Congress in 2011, defense spending is scheduled to be slashed by about \$40 billion in fiscal 2016 unless lawmakers can amend the 3-year-old Budget Control Act.

Congress managed to pass a temporary fix to the decade-long mandatory spending trims last year, but not for the next seven federal budget cycles.

Conservatives are hopeful that the new Republican-controlled Senate will be able to force a change through the gridlocked legislature. But Democrats have been unwilling to accept cuts to non-defense programs without some new revenues, and GOP leaders have dismissed any alternative so far that has included new taxes.

Both sides have also fought against members who say the military needs dramatic funding decreases following the end of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and question the dire predictions of Pentagon leaders.

At Wednesday's hearing, Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman John McCain, R-Ariz., said warnings about the severe damage cuts would bring to national defense "have become frustratingly familiar" after three years of debate on the issue.

"We have heard all of this from our top military commanders before, yet there are still those that say, 'Never fear. The sky didn't fall under sequestration,'" he said. "What a tragically low standard for evaluating the wisdom of government policy."

Both he and House Armed Services Committee Chairman Mac Thornberry, R-Texas, have said they'll spend the next few months simultaneously reviewing the Pentagon's fiscal 2016 budget plans and educating new Hill members about the dangers of sequestration, in the hopes of finding a workable compromise.

McCain blamed the lack of a solution already on "political gridlock" and said now is the time to "put an end to this senseless policy."

But that's a call he has repeated many times over the last three years. Like the Joint Chiefs' repeated pleas, so far there has been little response.

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19. Kendall: U.S. Needs to Get Faster at Developing Revolutionary Weapon Systems

U.S. Naval Institute News, Jan. 28 | John Grady

The Pentagon's top acquisition official told Congress the U.S. defense complex is good at incremental evolutions in technology but has slipped in bringing about revolutionary systems to the battlefield.

"What we're good at is bringing on the next generation," Frank Kendall, the Department of Defense under secretary for acquisition, technology and logistics (AT&L) told the House Armed Services Committee on Wednesday.

But the U.S. is not as good at seeing systems that can fundamentally change the way the nation fights, as stealth did in the 1970s and that possibly directed energy, electromagnetic railguns and unmanned underwater vehicles may today.

"Directed energy is one we have talked about forever," but "we haven't quite gotten where we want to be," Kendall said.

"Where are the game-changers," Air Force Lt. Gen. Mark Ramsay, director of force structure, resources and assessments of the Joint Staff asked, in sorting through the new programs. He said that intelligence is now the most important player in the requirements process, now intertwined with other components—such as the services and combatant commander—in fielding new systems from "I have a problem, to I have a solution."

Kendall said that in the Pentagon's budget to be unveiled next Monday there is an "aerospace innovation initiative," led by the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) and involving the Air Force and Navy, to bring on the next generation air-dominance aircraft as quickly as possible.

Kendall said that the budget cuts in recent years—from \$80 billion to \$63 billion in this fiscal year—means that some necessary programs, such as electronic warfare were put on a back burner. "We neglected that area [next generation Navy jammer] for some time."

Decisions such as that also have an impact on the workforce in the defense industrial base. "You get that expertise by working on programs" and when the programs are not there the workers leave. He also noted that that defense workforce is concentrated at the upper end—those nearing retirement—or new hires.

Kendall said, "Use or lose is a real problem" in the department's spending in the last quarter of the fiscal year—particularly" in its operations and maintenance accounts and buying office. "Defense Department tends to be a culture of spending," not in watching costs.

He added that in looking at the total costs of a weapon system, life cycle spending needs to be factored in. "We really have to go after that."

That means looking at the costs in depots and industry maintenance facilities. When asked whether it would be possible to have one service depot compete for work from another service, he said, "I would like to have that flexibility," adding, "I think it would helpful in driving costs down."

Citing China's development of a suite of capabilities to defeat the way the United States fights war—employing satellites, aircraft carriers and airfields, Kendall said, "that's what changed," particularly in using cruise and ballistic missiles to overwhelm those targets.

He added that Russia and Iran are working on similar capabilities.

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20. Pentagon official urges NATO to focus on innovative weapons

Reuters, Jan. 28 | Andrea Shalal

WASHINGTON -- U.S. Deputy Defense Secretary Robert Work on Wednesday urged NATO allies to develop and make more innovative weapons, and said bold action was needed to stay ahead of rapid weapons development by China, Russia and other countries.

Work said the Pentagon has a new plan called "Defense Innovation Initiative" and a separate effort targeting longer-term projects to ensure that the United States continues to have a decisive competitive advantage against potential foes.

"We must coordinate and collaborate, avoid duplication, leverage niche capabilities, and push our establishments to innovate in technology, concepts, experimentation, and wargaming," Work told a conference hosted by the Center for a New American Security. NATO members needed to make good their vows last year to spend 2 percent of national output on defense, he said.

Work said it was critical to increase collaboration with allies in NATO, Asia and other areas, ranging from mission planning to investments in new weapons programs.

General Jean-Paul Palomeros of France, NATO Supreme Allied Commander Transformation, told the conference that NATO was looking at innovative approaches, including increased training and more joint exercises.

Work said concerns about advances by other countries were a key reason that the Pentagon's fiscal 2016 budget plan to be delivered to Congress on Monday will exceed budget caps set by Congress and reverse five years of declines in U.S. military spending.

He gave no details, but said the budget would include "significant" investments in nuclear weapons, space control capabilities, advanced sensors, missile defense and cyber, as well as unmanned undersea vehicles, high-speed strike weapons, a new jet engine, high-energy lasers and rail gun technology.

Work said the plans need to address different threats in different regions, and should leverage work by commercial firms on robotics, autonomous operations and other key technologies.

Lockheed Martin Corp, Boeing Co, and other key weapons makers have repeatedly urged the Pentagon to step up investments in key technologies.

Pentagon arms buyer Frank Kendall told the House Armed Services Committee in a separate hearing that he was deeply concerned about heavy investments by China, Russia and others in weapons designed to target critical U.S. military capabilities such as aircraft carriers and satellites.

"I am very concerned about the increasing risk of loss of U.S. military technological superiority," he said. "We're at risk and the situation is getting worse."

Kendall said the department would also earmark funds for development and prototyping of a new "next-generation X-plane" that would eventually succeed the F-35 fighter jet, and a new engine.

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21. Defense urges expanding female guard no-touch rule

Miami Herald, Jan. 29, Pg. A3 | Carol Rosenberg

GUANTANAMO BAY NAVY BASE, Cuba — A Marine defense lawyer asked a military judge Wednesday to expand his no-female-guard touching order beyond legal meetings to include an Iraqi captive's medical, Red Cross and recreation yard visits at the prison's clandestine lockup for former CIA captives, Camp 7.

To which the commander of the special prison replied in anonymous sworn war court testimony that such an order would endanger his elite guard staff and make it "operationally ineffective . . . combat ineffective."

The defense lawyer, Marine Lt. Col. Thomas Jasper, raised the stakes at a pretrial hearing Wednesday for Abd al Hadi al Iraqi, who's on trial for alleged war crimes as commander of al-Qaida's army after the 2001 U.S. invasion of Afghanistan.

Hadi says "it is a sin" to be touched by a woman other than close family, according to his Islamic faith. His U.S. military lawyers are invoking the U.S. Supreme Court's 2014 Hobby Lobby religious accommodation ruling in seeking a wider order blocking female guards from touching him.

Now, unnamed female guards at Camp 7 have filed a gender discrimination complaint against the judge, Navy Capt. J.K. Waits, for forbidding them to touch the Muslim man during transfers to and from the war court and meetings with his lawyers. They've done the same against the 9/11 case judge who followed with a similar order.

Part of the problem is that, although there are more than 2,000 troops, civilians and contractors assigned to the detention center — which now holds 122 detainees — Camp 7 is a separate, secret entity with a subset of the staff trained for duty in its elite unit, Task Force Platinum.

Women have done escort duty, clutching a shackled captive by the arm or shoulder, in the less secretive lockups for more run-of-the-mill detainees.

But testimony Wednesday showed that commanders had previously treated differently the lockup holding the alleged 9/11 mastermind Khalid Sheik Mohammed and 14 other men who were held for years by the CIA. The controversy erupted in October after a lieutenant colonel with the Massachusetts National Guard, a woman with 32 years military police experience, took charge of Camp 7 and had two of her female sergeants trained to do escort duty.

She said in Skype-like testimony from Hawaii that she found skilled women of the Massachusetts Guard were more willing to be mobilized to Guantánamo than some similarly skilled men.

Until then, the Army had only assigned male guards to be Camp 7 escorts, just like it only assigns men to strip search and pat detainee genitals and to watch male captives undress and shower.

A female soldier whose escort Hadi rebuffed in October — an Army sergeant from the National Guard who's served seven years and works as a police officer in civilian life — said, since the judge's no-touch order, her work as Escort Team Leader had become a joke. "For most of my seven years, I have been treated as a soldier and not based on my sex," she said, invoking tours in Iraq and Afghanistan. "Once I got here, it made me feel like less of a soldier, that I couldn't do my job because I was a female."

The sergeant said she understood a U.S. military policy that prevented females from searching the men and supervising their showers "to assist the person to feel more comfortable," but noted those rules aren't for religious accommodation.

"Obviously we're not here to humiliate detainees," said her current commander, a man who also testified anonymously and removed his rank from his uniform.

Waits issued the no-touch rule for legal meetings in November.

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AIR FORCE

22. Sen. Ayotte: Air Force trying to ID A-10 supporters

AirForceTimes.com, Jan. 28 | Brian Everstine

Sen. Kelly Ayotte, the leading opponent of Air Force plans to retire the A-10, alleged Wednesday that the service is conducting a "reverse investigation" to identify airmen who have reached out to Congress to support lawmakers' efforts to keep the jet flying.

The allegation comes as the Air Force Inspector General begins to investigate reported comments by Maj. Gen. James Post, vice commander of Air Combat Command, that those who talk to Congress in support of the A-10 are committing treason.

"It worries me about the climate and the tone that is set if ... airmen, airwomen are told that they would be committing treason for communicating with us," Ayotte said. "And I just want to be clear because what I'm hearing is that there's actually an investigation going on in reverse to find out who has communicated with Congress."

Ayotte, in a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing with the service chiefs on the impacts of sequestration, asked Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Mark Welsh if he supports the rights of individual airmen to reach out to Congress.

"I completely commit to the lawfulness of communication with Congress. I support any airman's right to discuss anything that you'd like to discuss with them and to give you their honest opinion," Welsh said. "In this particular case, with the investigation ongoing, my job is to wait until the facts are known, make recommendations to my secretary, and then we will report the decisions that she makes as a result of that when it's done."

Ayotte, a New Hampshire Republican, said she had heard, following Post's remarks, that some in the Air Force want to identify A-10 supporters who are speaking with lawmakers. Welsh responded that he would be "astonished" if that claim were to be true.

"I know of nothing along those lines at all," Welsh said. "I would be astonished by that. And certainly I'm not part of it, the secretary is not part of it, and I would not condone it."

Post's comments reportedly came during a meeting of the Tactics Review Board at Nellis Air Force Base, Nevada, according to the military blog John Q. Public. Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., asked Air Force Secretary Deborah Lee James to investigate the comments and the Air Force Inspector General began an investigation Jan. 22.

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23. U.S. Air Force picks Boeing 747-8 to replace Air Force One

Reuters, Jan. 28 | Andrea Shalal and Alwyn Scott

WASHINGTON -- The U.S. Air Force said on Wednesday it would use Boeing Co's commercial 747-8 airliner to replace its current fleet of two Air Force One presidential aircraft, one of the most visible symbols of the United States.

The decision comes a month after Boeing said it would slow production of the four-engine 747-8 aircraft to 1.3 a month from 1.5 a month because of declining orders.

"The Boeing 747-8 is the only aircraft manufactured in the United States (that) when fully missionized meets the necessary capabilities established to execute the presidential support mission," said Air Force Secretary Deborah James in a statement.

Boeing welcomed the Air Force's decision to skip a competition and opt for the 747-8, citing its 50-year history of building presidential aircraft.

The Air Force said it intended to award a sole source contract to Boeing, but they must still negotiate a contract and the modifications needed to adapt the jet for presidential use.

The Air Force now operates two VC-25s, specially configured Boeing 747-200Bs. Details about the new contract, including cost, were not released.

It said it planned to purchase enough of the technical baseline to permit competition for maintenance during the plane's planned 30-year life.

James said the Air Force One program would use proven technologies and commercially certified equipment to keep the program affordable.

The Air Force decision was widely expected since the only other suitable four-engine jet is the A380 built by Airbus in Toulouse, France.

The 747-8 is the only four-engine commercial jet Boeing makes, providing an extra margin of flight safety over the more standard twin-engine planes.

But the Air Force order for a few 747s might not extend the life of the 747 program, which has failed to capture much business in recent years.

Boeing was clearly trying to preserve production so it could fill the Air Force order, said Richard Aboulafia, an analyst at Teal Group in Fairfax, Virginia.

Now that the firm order is there, he said, it might be an opportunity for the program to end.

The double-decker plane entered service in 1970, undergoing a major overhaul in 2012, with new engines and a longer fuselage.

But last year, Boeing did not get orders for 747s, despite booking a record 1,432 net orders for commercial aircraft. At the end of 2014, Boeing had 36 unfilled orders for the plane, which lists at about \$370 million.

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ARMY

24. Allyn: Sequestration creates an 'unacceptable risk' to soldiers

ArmyTimes.com, Jan. 28 | Michelle Tan

The Army will bear "unacceptable risk" if it's called to respond to new threats while struggling with budget cuts brought on by the return of sequestration, the service's No. 2 officer said Wednesday.

"We know it will impact our ability to respond to emerging requirements that exceed that which we are currently structured to face," said Army Vice Chief of Staff Gen. Daniel Allyn in an interview with Army Times. "Those requirements range from a major conflict to cyberattacks to other threats to our national security that will be affected by a budget that does not match the needs of our force."

The return of sequestration, which Allyn described as his "greatest concern," would force the Army to cut the active force to 420,000 soldiers. Senior Army leaders have said that number is too low.

"The worst-case scenario is you have a major conflict arise somewhere in the world where you have to commit large numbers of soldiers to a situation," Allyn said.

The Army could be forced to deploy a unit before it's fully trained, or delay its deployment, resulting in the forces in the fight having to "hold longer before reinforcements come in," Allyn said.

"Either choice you make results in higher casualties," he said. "Untrained forces take higher casualties. Units that aren't reinforced in combat take higher casualties. When the Chief of Staff of the Army says that the risk will be borne by the blood of our soldiers, that's what he's talking about."

The Army has focused its energy on building readiness among its brigade combat teams as part of a contingency force that's prepared to respond to emerging requirements, Allyn said.

"Today we have about 13 brigades that are trained and ready. We've been able to build that readiness over time across 2014," he said. "But if a requirement looms that puts a demand signal that is bigger than those we have postured in the contingency force, we face a dilemma."

The Army is already cutting its end-strength to 490,000 soldiers by the end of fiscal 2015. That will be an 80,000-soldier reduction between 2011 and the end of this fiscal year. It also will have cut 13 brigade combat teams, leaving the active Army with 32 BCTs.

Plans call for the Army to shrink to 450,000 soldiers by the end of fiscal 2017; if sequestration returns, the Army is to be cut to 420,000 soldiers.

Allyn, who spoke to Army Times while Army Chief of Staff Gen. Ray Odierno testified alongside the other services chiefs in front of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said the Army has worked hard over the last 18 months to rebuild readiness among its BCTs.

If sequestration returns, "the last 18 months of hard work, where we have gone from 10 percent of our brigades being ready to deploy to today having over 30 percent of our brigades ready to deploy, will be sacrificed by a law which just does not make sense for a military force that is preparing for not only known but unknown challenges around the globe," he said.

The Army also will be forced to involuntarily separate more soldiers and leaders, Allyn said.

That is "an action that we do not want to take, but have been forced to take to meet the force that's budgeted for," he said.

As the Army focuses on working with Congress, some may question when the United States will become engaged in a major conflict again, Allyn said.

"Historically, no president has ever planned to do that," he said. "Those situations tend to get forced upon us as a nation, so our job as the United States military is to have capability ready to provide multiple options to our national leaders to be able to respond not only to the known crises around the world but to the unknown."

The world remains a "very, very dangerous place," Allyn said, citing the escalating tension in Europe, the growing instability in the Middle East, among other hot spots.

"There are just a lot of requirements that are out there that demand a trained and ready force, and that is what we're responsible to deliver," he said. "We will maintain our focus on developing our leaders so they can lead our force through whatever decisions are made by Congress, but we clearly are engaged in articulating what we see as absolutely unacceptable risk that will be borne by our soldiers if we are forced to respond to a situation for which we have not been able to train, prepare and resource our soldiers and our units for the missions that could come."

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25. Commander: Army's New AH-64E Apache Surprised Enemy in Afghanistan

Military.com, Jan. 28 | Brendan McGarry

The commander of the first U.S. Army unit to fly combat missions in Afghanistan with the AH-64E Apache -- the service's newest version of the attack helicopter -- praised the performance of the aircraft.

Lt. Col. John Davis, commander of the 1st Battalion, 229th Aviation Regiment, part of the 16th Combat Aviation Brigade at Joint Base Lewis McCord in Washington, said Wednesday that his unit operated in southern and western Afghanistan last year with two dozen Echo models of the Boeing-made choppers, along with 15 OH-58D Kiowa Warriors and 10 UH-60M Black Hawks.

The AH-64E features digital cockpit avionics, more powerful engines and composite rotor blades, among other features that improve the aircraft's range and loitering ability, Davis said. Taken together, the helicopters flew almost 11,000 hours over a seven-month tour in Kandahar and other areas in Regional Command-South, Southwest and West, he said.

"Short deployment? Yes, but nobody told the enemy that because the ops tempo was very, very high," Davis said on during a briefing with reporters at Boeing's new office complex in Arlington, Virginia, just across the street from the Pentagon.

The D-model of the Apache was named the Longbow. The E-model received the moniker of Guardian.

The unit headed overseas with only about 270 troops, just over half of its preferred level of personnel, yet was able to maintain the Apaches with a readiness rate of 87 percent, higher than the Army standard of 80 percent, Davis said. The figure refers to the amount of time a piece of equipment can carry out missions, known in military parlance as being fully mission capable (FMC).

The E-model flew in Afghanistan at speeds of about 155 knots, or almost 180 miles per hour, while he himself only flew the D variant in Iraq at speeds of about 125 knots, or nearly 140 miles per hour, Davis said.

The faster speeds cut the amount of time it took aviators to reach front-line troops by 57 percent, Davis said. What's more, the improved fuel efficiency helped pilots pin down enemies by loitering in the area for longer periods of time, he said. The characteristics were particularly useful at a time when the U.S. military was consolidating and closing bases, he said.

"There's no place to get gas out there anymore, so what did you need?" Davis said. "You needed something that had fuel economy. You needed something that could get there fast and stay there. That's what the Echo brought. We were able to change some of the ways we did business. I didn't have a ground launch reaction force; I put them in the air."

He added, "The enemy knew what the [tactics, techniques and procedures] were for the D model. They knew where it came from when it got gas, when it showed up on station. They knew roughly how much time it's got to get gas again. Then all of a sudden an E shows up and the E doesn't have to get gas at the same time. Now, the enemy on the ground is literally going, 'I can't move.'"

The Echo model also worked well with a number of drones, including the Army's own medium-altitude MQ-1C Gray Eagle made by General Atomics and lower-altitude systems such as the ScanEagle RQ-7 Shadow, as well as the Air Force's medium-altitude MQ-1 Predator and MQ-9 Reaper drones, Davis said. Some 60 percent of the unit's direct-fire engagements took place in conjunction with unmanned systems, he said.

"It wasn't them always finding a target, it was them maintaining positive ID of a target," Davis said, referring to drones. "They can stay up a lot longer than we can, so if they've been developing situation for a while, then it's easier for us and easier for a commander to utilize his limited assets like an Echo model, to say, 'OK, you've developed it, the target's good, send the Echo in now.' He executes his mission, services the target, and then returns and goes another priority mission."

He added, "Having an unmanned system that could get up a lot higher and still have those capabilities that it brings to the fight ... and allowing us to have the standoff where we're not seen and heard -- there's a lot to be said for that."

There were some shortcomings, however, with pairing the AH-64E and drones, Davis acknowledged. The new helicopter couldn't receive live video feeds from the Shadow because the former uses a secure communications system called the tactical common data link on a Ku frequency while the latter use an older system on the C, L and S bands, he said.

"We couldn't see everybody else's video, so you go old school: You talk to the guy -- you talk to boots on the ground," Davis said, noting that the aircraft could still receive video from the Gray Eagle. "Actually, the E is ahead of its time when it comes to having the tactical common data link. Everybody at one point will be at that band on their systems. We're just ahead of it."

Still, the Army is talking to Boeing about adding the other frequencies to the E model's data system because the rest of the joint environment and everybody else hasn't caught up to TCDL yet."

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26. Army worker charged with bribery

Washington Post, Jan. 29, Pg. B4 | Matt Zapposky

An Army contracting official was charged Wednesday with trying to extort a half-million dollars in bribes from two executives of a Fairfax, Va., company after a months-long sting operation in which one of the executives wore a wire.

James Glenn Warner, 44, of Manassas, Va., appeared briefly in federal district court in Alexandria, telling a judge that he could not afford a lawyer after prosecutors informed him he was being charged with bribery. He was ordered detained until another hearing Friday.

Detailed in a 34-page criminal complaint by FBI Special Agent Jeffrey Pollack, Warner's alleged misdeeds and efforts to avoid detection range from cunning to comical. He initially communicated his demand on a note tucked inside a restaurant menu and at one point patted down one of the executives for a recording device, according to the affidavit. But he missed it and was caught on video discussing bribe money, according to the affidavit.

Warner, a retired sergeant major in the Army who works as a civilian senior program manager and contracting officer's representative at the Pentagon, first brought up the bribes in October 2014, when he asked the two executives to go to lunch at the Pentagon City mall, according to the affidavit. He was waiting for them there at 11:30 a.m. - wearing sunglasses and drinking a margarita - and insisted that both turn off their cellphones and communicate only by typing in a notes application on his phone, according to the affidavit.

The affidavit says Warner claimed there had been malfeasance at the executives' company - which is not named - and that he could destroy files containing information about that malfeasance. By the affidavit's account, Warner also promised to help the company win an Army contract.

At the time, the company helped the Army manage its Army Training Requirements and Resources Systems - an online training-management program - although its contract for that is set to expire in August. Winning a renewal would mean \$100 million to \$120 million in work for the company, according to the affidavit.

The executives initially turned Warner down, but then they contacted their attorneys, according to the affidavit. Soon, one of the executives was wearing a wire during meetings with Warner at the FBI's request and passing off tens of thousands of dollars in bribes, according to the affidavit.

The affidavit alleges that Warner received \$50,000 over the next few months and seemed to use some of it to pay off his and his wife's credit card bills and loans. After a December meeting in which he received \$12,000, Warner bought \$1,100 in flooring from Lumber Liquidators, according to the affidavit.

Efforts to reach relatives of Warner were unsuccessful Wednesday. An Army spokeswoman referred inquiries to federal prosecutors.

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NOTABLE COMMENTARY

27. Inconvenient Truths in Afghanistan

New York Times, Jan. 29, Pg. A26 | Editorial

In late December, as they do every few months, American military officials in Kabul sent a trove of data to the office of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction for its quarterly report. Over the years, such figures have told an often dispiriting story about Washington's enormous investment in the country's security forces, laying out their size, readiness, attrition level and the state of their infrastructure.

Five days later, military officials followed up with an unusual request. Commanders in Afghanistan informed the inspector general's office that they had decided to classify the bulk of that data. The decision came after the military, late last year, classified a periodic report that the inspector general has used over the years as the primary source to assess the state of Afghan forces. The stated reason? It could give the enemy the upper hand.

"With lives literally on the line, I am sure that you can join me in recognizing that we must be careful to avoid providing sensitive information to those that threaten our forces and Afghan forces, particularly information that can be used by such opposing forces to sharpen their attacks," Gen. John Campbell, the American commander in Afghanistan, wrote to the inspector general, John Sopko, on Jan. 18.

The threats that Afghan and American troops face in Afghanistan remain all too real. But it strains credulity to believe that insurgents would become more proficient fighters by poring over lengthy inspector general reports about an increasingly forgotten war. Classifying that information unreasonably prevents American taxpayers from drawing informed conclusions about the returns on a \$107.5 billion reconstruction investment that, adjusted for inflation, has surpassed the price tag of the Marshall Plan.

Mr. Sopko, a former prosecutor who takes great pleasure in needling bureaucrats, has at times gone overboard in his protests over the state of reconstruction projects. On this issue, however, he's rightfully outraged.

"The decision leaves SIGAR for the first time in six years unable to publicly report on most of the U.S. taxpayer-funded efforts to build, train, equip and sustain" Afghan forces, the agency wrote, using its acronym, in its latest quarterly report, which was issued Thursday. Mr. Sopko last year had protested the decision to restrict dissemination of a more limited set of data that would have otherwise been included in the October report. He said there was no evidence that aggregate nationwide data on Afghan military capabilities could give militants an edge.

"Its inexplicable classification now and its disappearance from public view does a disservice to the interest of informed national discussion," Mr. Sopko wrote in the October report.

Under the new classification guidelines, the military is not publicly reporting how many Afghan policemen and soldiers are employed, how much Washington is spending on their salaries, the state of corruption in Afghan ministries or the results of an effort to recruit more women in the army. Washington's war in Afghanistan nominally ended at the turn of the year, when a campaign called Operation Enduring Freedom folded and a new mission, called Operation Freedom's Sentinel, began. While it's tempting to think that Americans troops and taxpayer dollars are no longer at war in Afghanistan, they very much are. More than 10,000 American troops are there training and supporting the Afghans.

The Obama administration has pledged to continue spending billions to keep the Afghan government afloat for years. Americans are entitled to the unvarnished truth about that daunting effort.

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28. The Siege of Mariupol

Wall Street Journal, Jan. 29, Pg. A12 | Editorial

President Obama took a foreign-policy bow during his State of the Union speech last week, boasting that "we're upholding the principle that bigger nations can't bully the small -- by opposing Russian aggression, supporting Ukraine's democracy, and reassuring our NATO allies." Whereupon Russian-backed forces promptly expanded an offensive in Ukraine that has already claimed more than 5,000 lives.

On Saturday the Ukrainian port of Mariupol, strategically located on the Sea of Azov, came under indiscriminate rocket fire from positions controlled by the so-called Donetsk People's Republic, the Moscow-sponsored militia in eastern Ukraine. Some 30 people were killed in the attacks; another hundred or so were wounded. Aleksandr Zakharchenko, since November the Donetsk Republic's "Prime Minister," had earlier promised an offensive against Mariupol, though both his militia and Moscow were quick to deny responsibility for the massacre.

None of this is surprising, though most military analysts expected the rebels to wait until spring before resuming their onslaught. It also underscores the willful disbelief of Westerners, starting with President Obama, who imagined that the combination of light sanctions on Russia and a steep drop in energy prices would force Vladimir Putin to call an end to his Ukrainian adventure.

The opposite has happened. Russia put its name to a cease-fire signed in Minsk last September. Yet by November Gen. Philip Breedlove, NATO's Supreme Commander, was reporting the movement of "Russian troops, Russian

artillery, Russian air defense systems and Russian combat troops" into Ukraine. More recent sightings of "little green men" in insignia-less uniforms suggest the presence of Russian special forces fighting alongside the rebels.

The Kremlin's likely aim for this latest offensive is to take Mariupol, which would consolidate rebel control over the Donetsk region and provide a better sea link between Russian-occupied Crimea and the Russian mainland. European leaders have lately been warning that Moscow will face a new round of sanctions should the rebel offensive continue. But given the noises French President Francois Hollande and others have been making about easing up on sanctions, Mr. Putin probably figures he can take Mariupol first and then bargain the West down.

It also doesn't hurt Mr. Putin that the Ukrainian war has further boosted his popularity -- 88% approval, according to one opinion poll late last year -- despite the economic turmoil. Russian nationalism runs deep, and dictators tend to benefit politically from splendid little wars, at least those they win.

Which is what makes it all the more imperative for the West to ensure that Russia does not win. The Ukrainian military has ringed Mariupol with a three-tiered defense, but a defeat there would put the defense of the rest of Ukraine into serious question. Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko has repeatedly asked the U.S. to assist his country with arms, but so far the Obama Administration has done nothing more than to offer limited nonlethal aid. Even Hillary Clinton, in postdove campaign mode, wants the U.S. to do more.

We're all for sanctioning the Kremlin, especially in ways that directly affect Mr. Putin and his inner circle. But if the West wants to stop the Kremlin's military offensive, military means are also required. Giving Ukraine the arms to defend its territory is the only chance of stopping Mr. Putin's siege.

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29. How to help Ukraine

It's time for the West to equip Kiev with lethal military aid

Los Angeles Times, Jan. 29, Pg. A19 | Gregory Feifer

As Western countries respond to the resumption of all-out war in Ukraine, they must ensure that the driving force behind the hostilities -- Moscow -- pays a greater cost for the rising civilian death toll. European Union foreign ministers are set to meet Thursday to discuss deepening sanctions against Russia. However, if the United States and its allies are serious about supporting Ukraine's freedom to determine its own future, they must agree on a more comprehensive approach, including the provision of effective military aid to the Ukrainian military and the training to use it.

If there were any illusions about who is fueling the violence that's laying waste to the regions of Donetsk and Luhansk in eastern Ukraine's Donbas coal basin, there should be none now. Russia essentially did nothing to honor a cease-fire it signed with Ukraine and separatist leaders in Minsk, Belarus, in September. Now all pretense is gone. The separatists began advancing along the conflict's front lines last week after sightings of what NATO calls sophisticated Russian weapons systems. And although many question Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko's claim that Moscow has deployed as many as 9,000 troops in Donbas, there's ample evidence that at least some Russian soldiers are present.

There's little doubt that Russian agents used propaganda and provocations to incite previously peaceful residents in Donbas to violence last year, or that the Russian military saved the rebels during a Ukrainian offensive last

summer, or that the separatists couldn't sustain their campaign without help from Moscow. Nevertheless, Russian President Vladimir Putin has paid negligible military costs thanks to the nature of the conflict.

The crucial fact is that Putin's overriding goal isn't a military victory in eastern Ukraine, it's to maintain pressure on the West, escalating the conflict while dividing Western opinion. In the Kremlin's warped logic of equivalence, sticking it to Western countries shows Putin to be restoring Russian power, which drives his high approval ratings and distracts the population from the corruption and authoritarianism on which his regime relies. For that, he needs only an ongoing sabotage campaign against Ukrainian statehood.

Some of those who have opposed Western sanctions may use the rebels' new offensive as another occasion to argue that punishing Putin unnecessarily provokes him, risking economic catastrophe and squandering the possibility of Russian cooperation over Syria, Iran and other strategic issues. In fact, weakening sanctions -- which prevent Russian banks and firms from raising funds on international markets -- would have little effect on a ruble crisis that is driven by a drop in oil prices. Easing sanctions would instead reward Putin for ratcheting up the fighting.

U.S. officials are right to discuss tightening sanctions and other economic measures. U.S. leadership will also be crucial for ensuring that European officials boost existing measures at this week's meeting. Britain is also urging the ministers to consider blocking Russian access to the international banking transaction system known as SWIFT. Although imperfect, sanctions will put political pressure on the Kremlin in the long term.

But more must also be done because as the Russian economist Konstantin Sonin told the New York Times, Western sanctions aren't enough: Russia "is at war with the United States, so why would you bother about the small battleground, the economy?"

Ukrainians are dying. Even before the rebels began their latest offensive, a rocket attack almost certainly launched by pro-Russia separatists killed 13 civilians on a commuter bus at a Ukrainian military checkpoint in the town of Volnovakha. Shells killed another 13 people at a bus stop in Donetsk. Last weekend, more rockets left at least 30 people dead and more than 100 injured in the Ukrainian-controlled port of Mariupol. The United Nations says that more than 5,000 people have been killed and more than 1 million displaced since the rebels began their offensive last spring.

Now Washington should fulfill President Obama's State of the Union promise to support Ukraine against Russian aggression by providing lethal military aid that would target Russian weapons. Arguments that arming the Ukrainians would only fuel the conflict don't take into account that the hostilities are being ratcheted up by a Russian leader who already invents claims about Western involvement as he goes along, time and time again pushing his advantage until confronted.

Of all the consequences of Putin's actions in Ukraine -- a new cold war with the West, the spread of a virulent nationalism, the threat to Ukrainians' political future -- Western countries must focus on the most pressing issue of the daily killing and suffering of civilians. Failing to equip the Ukrainian military to combat the rebels would only prolong the conflict, deteriorate European security and empower Putin in what is clearly a proxy war between Moscow and Kiev.

--Gregory Feifer's book "Russians: The People Behind the Power" will be published with a new afterword in paperback in February

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30. RIP Air-Sea Battle?

The fact that the strategic community is debating the right way to respond to A2/AD and China's growing military capabilities is a testament to Air-Sea Battle's success—and why the future of ASB is of critical importance

National Interest Online, Jan. 29 | Rep. J. Randy Forbes (R-VA)

Last week, the defense media broke the news that the Pentagon's "Air-Sea Battle" concept is being renamed and absorbed into a broader multiservice effort to develop a "Joint Concept for Access and Maneuver in the Global Commons" or JAM-GC. Individual news reports have used a variety of verbs to describe what is happening to Air Sea Battle, but the headline of the first article was also the most blunt. "DoD Kills Air-Sea Battle," it said—and I fear it might be right. Maybe it is just a name change, but I am concerned that incorporating "the concept formerly known as Air-Sea Battle" into the highly bureaucratic joint concept development process could stifle innovation and dilute the concept's focus.

If Air-Sea Battle has indeed been killed, it would seem appropriate to mark its passing by reflecting on the life and death of ASB: what it accomplished, what remains to be done, and what we should learn from its fate. Such a eulogy may well be premature. I hope it is, and that the concept's development will continue and benefit, like Tom Sawyer, from the discussion and debate resulting from the news of its demise. With that objective in mind, I offer my personal thoughts on the concept below.

It is difficult to eulogize Air-Sea Battle because if there is one thing that most observers can agree upon regarding Air-Sea Battle, it is that "the concept" has always been poorly understood. But one thing that most versions of ASB have had in common is an explicit focus on overcoming anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) challenges, and an implicit focus on the pacing threat posed by China's rapid development of extensive A2/AD capabilities. In my view, Air-Sea Battle's first and most significant accomplishment was in calling attention to these A2/AD challenges and, in particular, the increasingly dire need to offset the remarkable growth in China's military power and stabilize the deteriorating military balance in Asia.

The first step to recovery is admitting that you have a problem, as they say, and Air-Sea Battle came as badly needed intervention at a critical point. It is hard to believe today that less than a decade ago, these issues did not appear on most defense policy makers' radar as major planning considerations. But at the birth of Air-Sea Battle, "China" truly was what two U.S. Naval War College professors called "the Voldemort of U.S. military planning"—he who must not be named—and both the Air Force and Navy were focused on irregular warfare, as well as supporting the ongoing conflicts in Southwest Asia. The fact that the strategic community now finds itself debating the right way to respond to the challenges posed by A2/AD and China's growing military capabilities and not whether or not those challenges even exist or deserve our attention is a testament to Air-Sea Battle's success in changing the debate and to its enduring significance.

Whatever happens to the erstwhile Air-Sea Battle, the Department of Defense must not turn back the clock and return to complacency on A2/AD and the deteriorating military balance in Asia. The challenges ASB was intended to address have only solidified over the course of the concept's brief life. China remains the pacing threat, but it is not the only competitor seeking to deny our power-projection forces freedom of maneuver and action. At the same time, a new type of challenge has arisen in the form of "creeping" or "gray-zone" aggression, whether by "little green men" in the Crimea or paramilitary vessels in the East China Sea. It may be tempting to view these challenges as distinct and separate from A2/AD and the "big war" that many observers associated with ASB. But in

reality, the challenges are linked, with creeping aggressors feeling emboldened by the escalation dominance they enjoy in areas covered by their A2/AD capabilities.

It is therefore imperative that the Department of Defense sustain its intellectual, organizational and material efforts to counter and overcome A2/AD—whatever the moniker attached to them. These efforts should include the familiar tenets of ASB: sustaining operations inside the A2/AD “threat bubble,” bolstering the capability and resilience of our allies and partners on the front lines, waging C4ISR network battles, fighting from range and holding out the possibility of peripheral operations such as a distant blockade. The Pentagon and the strategic-studies community can and should debate the appropriate mixture of these elements, but all four are needed, and their combination and application must be guided by overarching strategies and operational concepts.

DoD can call these strategies and concepts whatever it desires, but words do matter, and the Pentagon should not underestimate the importance of speaking in plain terms to the broader public and civilian policy makers. Samuel Huntington argued decades ago that unless each Service articulated a “well defined strategic concept, the public and the political leaders will be confused as to the role of the service, uncertain as to the necessity of its existence and apathetic or hostile to the claims made by the service upon the resources of society.” Joint initiatives are in even greater need of a clear, compelling story about what resources they require and why, since they often compete with individual services’ own priorities. Air-Sea Battle told such a story in a way that helped civilian policy makers understand and provide what the Air Force and Navy needed to address the evolving A2/AD challenge.

I am hopeful that the JAM-GC will continue to fulfill this important function. I also am hopeful that expanding ASB into a fully joint concept under Joint Staff supervision will encourage the Army and Marine Corps to take a fresh look at A2/AD challenges and the novel and expanded roles that ground forces with cross-domain capabilities could play in mitigating them. But full, four-service jointness should not be prioritized at the expense of focus and innovation. Although Goldwater-Nichols and the quest for jointness have greatly improved the effectiveness of our military, they have also spawned what Bryan McGrath has described as “bureaucratic approaches to force structure and strategy that value consensus and collegiality over... assessing coherent risks and thinking strategically.”

Along with many others, I will be watching to see how “the concept formerly known as Air Sea Battle” fares in this environment. If it is turned into another purple booklet of little use to either the warfighter or the policy maker, it will reinforce my belief that substantial changes in the way we are organized to develop and execute national-security strategy are needed.

--Rep. J. Randy Forbes (R-VA) is the Chairman of the House Armed Services Seapower & Projection Forces Subcommittee

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