



AS OF 0530 HOURS, JANUARY 30

OVERVIEW

A shooting reportedly carried out by an Afghan soldier killed three American contractors at a military facility attached to Kabul's international airport, in the first suspected insider attack since U.S. and NATO forces formally terminated their combat mission in Afghanistan. Separately, the Pentagon expressed confidence in its ability to mitigate any threat posed by the Taliban detainees exchanged for Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl, following claims by Sen. Lindsey Graham that the men had been in contact with the Haqqani network. Also of note, proposals by a congressionally mandated commission calling for an overhaul of military entitlements will be analyzed in "full detail," Secretary Chuck Hagel said.

NEWS HEADLINES AT 0500

- Taliban claim Kabul attack that killed three Americans, one Afghan
- Three dead, dozens injured in gas blast at Mexico children's hospital
- Dartmouth banning hard alcohol from campus
- Ex-DC cab driver lands on FBI's Most Wanted Terrorists list
- McCain rips protesters during Kissinger hearing, calls them 'low-life scum'
- Key Romney donors and longtime staffer moving toward Bush

OVERSEAS HEADLINES OF NOTE

- *Al Jazeera*: African Union calls for 7,500-strong force to fight Boko Haram
- *ITAR-TASS*: Russia will strengthen troops in strategic areas – defense minister
- *Xinhua*: U.S. and China to hold defense policy talks next week – Pentagon

THIS DAY IN MILITARY HISTORY

- 1968 – In coordinated attacks all across South Vietnam, communist forces launch the Tet Offensive – their largest military campaign of the Vietnam War against the United States and its allies

Table of Contents**TOP STORIES****1. Three American contractors killed in Afghan capital**

Washington Post, Jan. 30, Pg. A1 | Sudarsan Raghavan and Missy Ryan

Three American civilian contractors and an Afghan national were killed Thursday in a shooting incident at a military base attached to Kabul's international airport, according to U.S. officials. A fourth American contractor was wounded in the attack.

2. U.S. Senator: Taliban detainees have communicated with Haqqani

Associated Press, Jan. 29 | Deb Riechmann

A U.S. Republican senator and frequent Mideast traveler said Thursday that the Taliban detainees released from Guantanamo Bay in exchange for Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl have been in touch with members of the al-Qaida linked Haqqani network, yet all five still are being monitored in Qatar. The Pentagon said Thursday that it is working with Qatar and is confident that any threat posed by the former detainees can be mitigated.

3. Panel calls for overhaul of military entitlements

Washington Post, Jan. 30, Pg. A3 | Dan Lamothe

A congressionally mandated commission called for an overhaul of the military's benefits system on Thursday, recommending changes so that future service members will contribute to their retirements and choose private-sector health-care plans.

MIDEAST

4. In a Shift, U.S. Draws Closer to Yemeni Rebels

Wall Street Journal, Jan. 30, Pg. A6 | Jay Solomon, Dion Nissenbaum and Asa Fitch

The U.S. has formed ties with Houthi rebels who seized control of Yemen's capital, White House officials and rebel commanders said, in the clearest indication of a shift in the U.S. approach there as it seeks to maintain its fight against a key branch of al Qaeda.

5. U.S. armed drone program in Yemen facing intelligence gaps

Reuters (Exclusive), Jan. 29 | Mark Hosenball, Phil Stewart and Matt Spetalnick

The United States is facing increasing difficulty acquiring intelligence needed to run its stealth drone program in Yemen, undermining a campaign against the most lethal branch of al Qaeda after Houthi rebels seized control of parts of the country's security apparatus, U.S. officials say.

6. Israel-Lebanon Border Calms After Attack

Wall Street Journal, Jan. 30, Pg. A6 | Joshua Mitnick, Nicholas Casey and Rory Jones

Tensions between Israel and Hezbollah eased after both sides stopped firing and Israel said the Lebanese militant group had asked for a cease-fire through United Nations intermediaries. The report of an unusually conciliatory message from Hezbollah on Thursday came a day after the Shiite group allied with Iran and Syria's regime claimed responsibility for killing two Israelis in a cross-border rocket and mortar attack.

7. At a Hamas camp for the young, learning 'to use the gun'

Washington Post, Jan. 30, Pg. A1 | William Booth

Judging by the orderly rows of hundreds of young wannabes lined up in crisp military fashion at their graduation ceremony here Thursday, the armed wing of the Islamist movement Hamas will have plenty of eager recruits this year.

8. Bomb Attacks at Security Sites in Sinai Kill at Least 26

New York Times, Jan. 30, Pg. A8 | David D. Kirkpatrick and Merna Thomas

A series of simultaneous bombings targeting security facilities in the Sinai killed at least 26 people Thursday night, prompting fears that the Egyptian government's campaign of home demolitions, curfews and sweeping arrests has failed to choke off a budding insurgency there. The wave of bombings was the first major outburst of violence since the main Islamist militant group operating in the Sinai pledged allegiance to the Islamic State in November.

9. Islamic State group silent as deadline passes with no swap

Associated Press, Jan. 30 | Elaine Kurtenbach and Karin Laub

The fates of a Japanese journalist and Jordanian military pilot were unknown Friday, a day after the latest purported deadline for a possible prisoner swap passed with no further word from the Islamic State group holding them captive.

IRAQ/SYRIA

10. Government Allies Are Said to Have Slaughtered Dozens of Sunnis in Iraq

New York Times, Jan. 30, Pg. A10 | Kareem Fahim

At least 72 people from a majority Sunni village in eastern Iraq were methodically singled out for slaughter this week, according to witnesses and local Sunni leaders, who said the victims were killed by Shiite militiamen who were supporting Iraqi security forces.

11. Al Qaeda in Syria attacks Western-backed rebels

Reuters, Jan. 29 | Tom Perry

The Syrian arm of al Qaeda attacked a Western-backed rebel group near Aleppo on Thursday, the rebel group and an organization monitoring the civil war said, threatening one of the few remaining pockets of the non-jihadist opposition.

UKRAINE/RUSSIA

12. Russia-backed rebels overrun another town in east Ukraine

Associated Press, Jan. 29 | Peter Leonard

Ukraine's military conceded Thursday that its forces had been overrun by Russian-backed separatist forces in another town in their battle to hold onto a strategically valuable railway hub.

13. Ukrainian forces face drones, electronic jamming – US

Agence France-Presse, Jan. 29 | Dan De Luce

Ukrainian troops are struggling to counter artillery fire and electronic jamming by pro-Russian militants, who are flying drones to target the Kiev government forces, a top US general said Thursday.

EUROPE

14. Network Aided Terror Escape

Wall Street Journal, Jan. 30, Pg. A1 | Noémie Bisserbe, Benoît Faucon and Stacy Meichtry

When a young Frenchwoman showed up early this month at an Islamic State border checkpoint in northern Syria, the extremists controlling that arid expanse were expecting her. They waved her right through and let her bodyguards accompany her, according to Western counterterrorism officials. The militants had been told to give Hayat Boumeddiene special treatment by the network of chaperones who had arranged her travel. The reason would soon be clear: The same day she crossed the border, her husband, Amedy Coulibaly, unleashed his terror spree in Paris, and she became the most-wanted woman in France.

AFGHANISTAN/PAKISTAN

15. Afghans want bigger U.S. military role than planned, poll says

Washington Post, Jan. 30, Pg. A12 | Sudarsan Raghavan

Many Afghans would like to see a greater American role after this year than is planned, while a majority believe that last year's runoff election that led to a U.S.-brokered power-sharing government was "mostly fraudulent," according to a national poll released Thursday.

AFRICA

16. Chad army retakes Nigerian town from Boko Haram

Reuters, Jan. 29 | Abdoulaye Massalaki

Troops from Chad have driven Boko Haram fighters from a northern Nigeria border town seized by the Islamist militants late last year, military sources stationed in neighboring Niger said on Thursday. Chad's involvement in retaking the town comes as the regional military heavyweight assumes an increasingly aggressive role in combating the militants and regional leaders weigh new options for containing the movement's spread.

CONGRESS

17. GOP split on Pentagon spending

Los Angeles Times, Jan. 30, Pg. A1 | W.J. Hennigan and Lisa Mascaro

President Obama revived his call Thursday to end federal spending limits linked to a last-resort deficit deal reached nearly four years ago, an appeal that fell squarely in the divide between Republicans in Congress who want to rein in costs and those who want to boost the Pentagon's budget.

DEFENSE DEPARTMENT

18. Pentagon Seeks 13 Percent Weapons Increase as Obama Urges End to Cuts

Bloomberg, Jan. 29 | Tony Capaccio

The Pentagon is seeking an increase of \$20.4 billion, or 13 percent, for weapons and research as President Barack Obama begins a push to remove defense budget caps that would force cuts in spending instead.

19. Acquisition Reforms Don't Cut Costs: Kendall Cites Study

BreakingDefense.com, Jan. 29 | Colin Clark

Most Americans think it's obvious: Change the rules to ensure the Pentagon will save money and it will save money. Congress after Congress has tried this, most recently in the form of the widely praised Weapons Systems Acquisition Reform Act. Sadly, the assumption that acquisition reform makes things better does not appear to stand up to reality, at least as analyzed in a report by the respected Institute for Defense Analyses.

20. Lawyer: Dispute on female guards a conspiracy

Miami Herald, Jan. 30, Pg. A1 | Carol Rosenberg

A war court prosecutor Thursday cast an Iraqi captive's request to not be touched by female guards as part of a wider al-Qaida conspiracy — and asked a military judge facing a discrimination complaint to rule for the women. Army Lt. Col. David Long, the prosecutor, appealed to the judge to put the American troops first, invoking the morale and safety of the guards at Guantánamo's secret prison.

AIR FORCE

21. U.S. to Give Launch Contests a Boost

Wall Street Journal, Jan. 30, Pg. B2 | Julian E. Barnes and Doug Cameron

The Pentagon will announce plans next week to open more space rocket launches to competition, paving the way for Elon Musk's Space Exploration Technologies Corp. to try to win its first military business, according to U.S. officials familiar with the plan.

ARMY

22. General: US Army Programs Hinge on Helo Swap

DefenseNews.com, Jan. 29 | Joe Gould

Key US Army aviation modernization plans — Future Vertical Lift, the Improved Engine Turbine program and digital cockpit upgrades for Black Hawks — all hinge on the service's cost-cutting Aviation Restructure Initiative (ARI), senior service officials said on Thursday.

INTELLIGENCE

23. Top paramilitary officer to lead CIA spy branch

Washington Post, Jan. 30, Pg. A4 | Greg Miller

The CIA's top paramilitary officer was named head of the agency's spying branch on Thursday, a move that may signal a broader organizational shake-up by Director John Brennan in the coming months.

NOTABLE COMMENTARY

24. The Pentagon's Growing Army of Bureaucrats

Wall Street Journal, Jan. 30, Pg. A13 | Mackenzie Eaglen

When President Obama unveils his annual budget on Monday, watch his defense priorities. His State of the Union address presented plenty of new ideas to invest in nondefense domestic programs, but the Pentagon's budget got zero mention -- even as the specter of sequestration looms again for fiscal 2016. Mr. Obama's track record as commander in chief is not encouraging: Under his stewardship, active-duty ground forces have been slashed while Defense Department civilians have flourished. For this president, it seems, bureaucracy beats combat power every time.

25. A bleak anniversary in Egypt

Washington Post, Jan. 30, Pg. A20 | Editorial

The Egyptian regime of Abdel Fatah al-Sissi again demonstrated its violent and cynical nature last weekend, as the country marked the fourth anniversary of the popular revolution that overthrew former ruler Hosni Mubarak. More than 20 protesters were killed by police, including liberal human rights activist Shaimaa al-Sabbagh, who was shot in the back as she walked toward Cairo's Tahrir Square to lay flowers. Five witnesses who tried to give testimony about her slaying were charged with staging an illegal protest.

26. As the Iranian Nuclear Talks Drag On, Congress Must Act

Wall Street Journal, Jan. 30, Pg. A13 | Sen. Tom Cotton (R-AR)

A nuclear-capable Iran is the gravest threat facing America today. The Obama administration's nuclear negotiations with Iran, the so-called P5+1 talks, were supposed to stop Iran's rush to a nuclear bomb. Regrettably, what began as an unwise gamble has descended into a dangerous series of unending concessions, which is why the time has come for Congress to act.

27. Congress and the use of force

Los Angeles Times, Jan. 30, Pg. A22 | Editorial

A puzzling aspect of President Obama's war against Islamic State, a military campaign that is now almost six months old, is his attitude toward congressional approval for the mission. In a speech in September, Obama insisted that he already possessed all the legal authority he needed to launch airstrikes against the group in Iraq and Syria, though he added vaguely: "I welcome congressional support for this effort." But in his State of the Union address, he shifted gears and called on Congress "to show the world that we are united in this mission" by passing a resolution to authorize the use of force against Islamic State.

28. Being Who We Are

New York Times, Jan. 30, Pg. A27 | David Brooks

In the middle of 2013, the United States began supporting moderate rebels in Syria. We gave them just enough support to betray them.

29. Ukraine needs the West's help now

Washington Post, Jan. 30, Pg. A19 | Steven Pifer and Strobe Talbott

The new year has brought more misery to Ukraine. Separatist fighters, supported by Russian troops, have launched attacks in Donetsk and Luhansk. Diplomatic efforts have made no progress toward a settlement - or even toward firming up a cease-fire that has all but collapsed. The West, including the United States, needs to get serious about assisting Ukraine if it does not wish to see the situation deteriorate further. That means committing real money now to aid Ukraine's defense.

30. A Huge Victory for Homeless Veterans

New York Times, Jan. 30, Pg. A26 | Editorial

The Veterans Affairs Department is going to provide housing for disabled homeless veterans on the vast property it owns in Los Angeles. On Wednesday, it announced an agreement with plaintiffs in a lawsuit "that restores the West Los Angeles V.A. campus to serving veterans in need," by housing them there, and by ending the practice of leasing parts of the 387-acre property to outside parties in deals "that do not meet the goal of serving veterans." Which raises two obvious questions: Isn't serving veterans the main -- the only -- purpose of the V.A.? Why did it have to be sued to do its job?

TOP STORIES

1. Three American contractors killed in Afghan capital

Assault on civilians at military base also left an Afghan national dead

Washington Post, Jan. 30, Pg. A1 | Sudarsan Raghavan and Missy Ryan

KABUL - Three American civilian contractors and an Afghan national were killed Thursday in a shooting incident at a military base attached to Kabul's international airport, according to U.S. officials. A fourth American contractor was wounded in the attack.

It was unclear how the contractors were attacked. Suspicion fell immediately on a possible "insider attack" perpetrated by a member of the Afghan security forces, who also have access to the military base at the airport. An unidentified Afghan air force official told the Reuters news agency that the shooter was an Afghan soldier.

When asked whether the incident was an insider attack, a U.S. military spokesman, Col. Brian Tribus, declined to comment. He said there would be no further comments on the incident until the investigation was complete.

The sprawling base where the shooting occurred is protected by tall concrete blast walls and filled with hangars, office trailers and maintenance buildings. It is a hub for the coalition's air operations, as well as the main base of the Afghan air force. As of last year, before the military drawdown, it was home to as many as 4,000 foreign military personnel and civilian contractors from more than a dozen nations, including the United States. Top U.S. commanders spent much of their time there.

Insider attacks have long plagued the relationship between Afghan forces and their U.S. and international allies, breaking down trust and reducing interaction. The assaults by rogue Afghan soldiers or police particularly rose in the last years of the NATO combat mission, which formally ended in December. Assaults reached record levels in 2012, when there were 37 such attacks that killed 51 people, including 32 U.S. troops, according to the Pentagon.

Since then, U.S. and coalition forces have tightened vetting procedures for Afghan security forces and required that all foreign troops be armed at all times. The efforts have reduced the number of insider attacks, but they nevertheless remain a major concern.

The killings were a reminder of the threats faced by the roughly 10,600 U.S. troops and tens of thousands of American contractors who remain in Afghanistan, mostly to train and advise Afghan security forces. Such tasks require close interaction with Afghans, and it remains to be seen whether the attacks will have an adverse impact or restrict such relationships.

"We can confirm that there was a shooting incident at North Kabul International Airport complex 29 January at approximately 6:40 p.m.," Tribus said in an e-mailed statement. "Three coalition contractors were killed as was an Afghan local national. This incident is under investigation."

A U.S. defense official in Washington, speaking on the condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to discuss the nationalities of those killed, said that the contractors were all Americans and that the fourth one had been wounded.

In August, a gunman wearing an Afghan army uniform opened fire at a military training school near Kabul, killing U.S. Army Maj. Gen. Harold J. Greene. He was the highest-ranking U.S. officer to be killed in 13 years of war in Afghanistan and the first general to be killed in the line of duty since the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks that prompted the United States to intervene militarily in Afghanistan, combining with Afghan resistance forces to topple the radical Islamist Taliban regime.

Virtually everyone on the base at the Kabul airport is armed. But that did not stop U.S. military officials from worrying about insider attacks during a flag-lowering ceremony in early December that marked the official end of the coalition's combat mission. Before the ceremony, the officials warned journalists that if any rockets landed, or if anyone started shooting, to run and take cover.

With the U.S. military drawdown, civilian contractors have become more visible. Even though their numbers have also sharply decreased, thousands of contractors remain in Afghanistan, most of them based in Kabul.

As of mid-2014, about 17,400 U.S. citizens were working in Afghanistan as civilian contractors for the Defense Department, according to military figures reported by the Web site Danger Zone Jobs. Other private contractors work for various international relief and development organizations. A year earlier, the Congressional Research Service put the number of Pentagon contractors at about 33,000.

No group immediately asserted responsibility for Thursday's killings, which broke a roughly three-week lull in violence in the capital. In the last two months of 2014, the Taliban intensified its attacks in Kabul and other parts of the country, targeting foreigners as well as influential Afghans and symbols of government authority.

The shooting was the first suspected insider attack since U.S. and NATO forces formally terminated their combat mission in Afghanistan. Under an agreement with the Afghan government, the previous coalition force is being replaced by a follow-on mission dubbed "Resolute Support," which began Jan. 1 and consists of about 12,000 mostly U.S. troops focused on training.

Earlier on Thursday, a roadside bomb killed a police commander and three other people in the eastern province of Laghman, and a suicide bomber targeted the commander's funeral later in the day, according to Afghan officials. They said 16 people - four policemen and 12 civilians - were killed and 39 were wounded when the bomber mingled with mourners in the town of Mehtar Lam Mihtarlam and detonated his explosives.

--Ryan reported from Washington. William Branigin in Washington contributed to this report

[RETURN TO TOP](#)

2. U.S. Senator: Taliban detainees have communicated with Haqqani

Associated Press, Jan. 29 | Deb Riechmann

WASHINGTON — A U.S. Republican senator and frequent Mideast traveler said Thursday that the Taliban detainees released from Guantanamo Bay in exchange for Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl have been in touch with members of the al-Qaida linked Haqqani network, yet all five still are being monitored in Qatar.

The Pentagon said Thursday that it is working with Qatar and is confident that any threat posed by the former detainees can be mitigated.

Sen. Lindsey Graham, who recently visited Qatar, said he had been afraid that one of the detainees had left the country, but said he was assured during his visit that all five remain in the small Gulf nation.

Qatar gained public praise from President Barack Obama for brokering the controversial deal in May 2014 that freed Army Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl from Taliban captivity in exchange for the release of the five senior Taliban officials who had been imprisoned for years at the U.S.-run Guantanamo Bay prison in Cuba.

Qatar promised Obama it would keep the five under watch for one year, although they would then be free to leave.

"It's just a year deal," Graham told The Associated Press on Wednesday. "Just as sure as we're sitting here, they're going back to the fight."

"They've had some Haqqani people come to meet with them. ... They're reaching out. The Taliban five are communicating with people inside Afghanistan."

However, Graham, a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee and a leading Capitol Hill voice on foreign policy, said all five are still in Qatar.

"I was afraid one had left, but they told me they're all still there," he said.

The Pentagon said in a statement that it would not comment on specific cases involving the detainees.

"However, we take any incidence of re-engagement very seriously, and we work in close coordination through military, intelligence, law enforcement and diplomatic channels to mitigate re-engagement and to take follow-on action when necessary," the statement said. "The Defense Department has a close security partnership with the government of Qatar. We're confident in our ability to continue to mitigate any threat that may be posed by the former Guantanamo detainees."

Haqqani operates in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region and has been one of the deadliest threats to U.S. troops in the war. The network, which the State Department designated as a foreign terrorist organization in 2012, claims allegiance to the Afghan Taliban, yet operates with some degree of autonomy.

The five detainees released were:

- Abdul Haq Wasiq, who served as the Taliban deputy minister of intelligence.
- Mullah Norullah Nori, a senior Taliban commander in the northern city of Mazar-e-Sharif when the Taliban fought U.S. forces in late 2001.
- Khairullah Khairkhwa, who served in various Taliban positions including interior minister and had direct ties to Mullah Omar and Osama bin Laden.
- Mohammed Nabi, who served as chief of security for the Taliban in Qalat, Afghanistan, and later worked as a radio operator for the Taliban's communications office in Kabul.
- Mohammad Fazl, who Human Rights Watch says could be prosecuted for war crimes for presiding over the mass killing of Shiite Muslims in Afghanistan in 2000 and 2001 as the Taliban sought to consolidate their control over the country.

--Associated Press writer Lolita C. Baldor contributed to this report

[RETURN TO TOP](#)

3. Panel calls for overhaul of military entitlements

401(k)-style retirement plans, private-sector health care pitched

Washington Post, Jan. 30, Pg. A3 | Dan Lamothe

A congressionally mandated commission called for an overhaul of the military's benefits system on Thursday, recommending changes so that future service members will contribute to their retirements and choose private-sector health-care plans.

A long-awaited report from the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission made 15 recommendations that members said would increase the financial options that troops have without reducing their overall compensation. The plan would save the U.S. government billions of dollars but also grandfather in the retirement plans of current active-duty troops and veterans - a sensitive issue for many of those who have served.

"We are confident that implementing these reforms will move the All-Volunteer Force toward a future that is in the best interest of our Nation's security and that can be fiscally sustained," the commission said in a letter jointly released with the report. "We believe, for those who serve and have served to uphold the military's highest traditions and heritage, and the families that support them, the Federal Government must fulfill its obligation with its enduring commitment in war and in peace."

The commission's plan calls for the adoption of 401(k)-style Thrift Savings Plans for all future service members while keeping in place the basic principles of the existing system that offers retirement benefits to anyone who has served 20 years. The new blended program would provide some retirement benefits to those who serve just a few years but also provide new flexibility to the services as they grapple with maintaining the mix of ranks and experiences they want, the commission said.

The report's release sets the stage for a potentially emotional debate in which proponents of change will highlight the heavy - some would say unmanageable - financial burden on the existing system, while others scrutinize what existing entitlements might be in jeopardy.

President Obama thanked the commission's members in a statement, saying he will closely review its proposals in coming weeks in concert with senior civilian and military leaders.

"I look forward to hearing their views and working with Congress to strengthen and modernize our military compensation and retirement systems," Obama said.

Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel said in a statement that the Defense Department will analyze the proposals in "full detail."

"I appreciate that the commission gathered input from over 150,000 service members and veterans across the country before formulating its recommendations," Hagel said. "I also appreciate the commission's support for grandfathering current service members and retirees with its recommended changes on retirement pay; its focus on protecting future recruitment and retention; and its attempt to propose savings to ensure our military will be able to field a ready, agile, and modern force capable of meeting present and future threats."

The nine-member panel was led by Alphonso Maldon Jr., a former Army officer and assistant secretary of defense. Other members included former senator Bob Kerrey (D-Neb.), a former Navy SEAL and Medal of Honor recipient;

retired Navy Adm. Edmund P. Giambastiani Jr., a former vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; and retired Army Gen. Peter W. Chiarelli, who retired as his service's No. 2 officer in 2012.

The Senate Armed Services Committee will take up the recommendations in hearings next week.

[RETURN TO TOP](#)

MIDEAST

4. In a Shift, U.S. Draws Closer to Yemeni Rebels

Wall Street Journal, Jan. 30, Pg. A6 | Jay Solomon, Dion Nissenbaum and Asa Fitch

The U.S. has formed ties with Houthi rebels who seized control of Yemen's capital, White House officials and rebel commanders said, in the clearest indication of a shift in the U.S. approach there as it seeks to maintain its fight against a key branch of al Qaeda.

American officials are communicating with Houthi fighters, largely through intermediaries, the officials and commanders have disclosed, to promote a stable political transition as the Houthis gain more power and to ensure Washington can continue its campaign of drone strikes against leaders of the group al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, officials said.

"We have to take pains not to end up inflaming the situation by inadvertently firing on Houthi fighters," a senior U.S. official said. "They're not our military objective. It's AQAP and we have to stay focused on that."

Washington's outreach to the Houthis, who in January routed forces loyal to President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi, a close American ally, represents a contrast from years of U.S. support for the Hadi government, which the Houthis have opposed.

The shift also could place it on the same side as Iran in the Yemen conflict. The Houthis are drawn from their country's Zaidi population. Zaidis, who by some estimates make up roughly a third of the population, practice a form of Shiite Islam and are concentrated in northwest Yemen. U.S. officials believe the militia has received funding and arms from Shiite-dominated Iran, something Houthi leaders have variously confirmed and denied.

White House and State Department officials confirmed to The Wall Street Journal the contacts, but stressed they were focused on promoting political stability in Yemen and safeguarding the security of Americans.

"In the context of talking to all of Yemen's communities about the latest political developments and ensuring the safety of our personnel and facilities, we have engaged a number of Yemeni parties," said Edgar Vasquez, a State Department spokesman. "As a participant in discussions about Yemen's political direction, the Houthis will have many reasons to talk with the international community."

U.S. officials said they also are seeking to harness the Houthis' concurrent war on AQAP to weaken the terrorist organization's grip on havens in Yemen's west and south. The U.S. has charged AQAP with overseeing a string of terrorist plots on Western targets in recent years. In January, AQAP claimed responsibility for organizing a terrorist attack in Paris against the staff of French satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo.

"There are informal contacts" with the Houthis, said a U.S. defense official. "It is not uncommon for us to have communications with them, even before all this stuff happened," the official said, referring to the militia's capture of San'a.

Military officials on Thursday said the Houthis took over a key military base south of San'a where U.S. advisers until 2012 had trained forces battling AQAP, the Associated Press reported. The base was currently led by forces loyal to former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, the AP added.

The U.S. and Iran both are backing Iraq's Shiite government in its military campaign against Islamic State fighters who have captured parts of northeast Iraq and Syria in recent months.

Houthi commanders, in recent interviews, asserted that the U.S. began sharing intelligence on AQAP positions in November, using intermediaries, as the conflict in the country intensified.

One Houthi commander said the U.S. provided logistical aid to the militants and exchanged intelligence on AQAP to support the Houthis' operations against the group and pinpoint drone strikes. The Americans passed on this information, the officer said, through Yemeni counterterrorism officials.

Senior U.S. defense and State Department officials said Washington isn't providing intelligence directly to the Houthis. They said the communication largely is an effort to "deconflict" its military operations from the Houthis'.

--Carol E. Lee, Felicia Schwartz and Hakim Almasmari contributed to this article

[RETURN TO TOP](#)

5. U.S. armed drone program in Yemen facing intelligence gaps

Reuters (Exclusive), Jan. 29 | Mark Hosenball, Phil Stewart and Matt Spetalnick

WASHINGTON -- The United States is facing increasing difficulty acquiring intelligence needed to run its stealth drone program in Yemen, undermining a campaign against the most lethal branch of al Qaeda after Houthi rebels seized control of parts of the country's security apparatus, U.S. officials say.

Gaps in on-the-ground intelligence could slow America's fight against a resurgent al Qaeda in Yemen and heighten the risk of errant strikes that kill the wrong people and stoke anti-U.S. sentiment, potentially making the militants even stronger in areas where al Qaeda is already growing.

Iran-backed Houthi rebels have taken up positions in and around several defense and intelligence installations whose teams had previously cooperated with Washington, cutting off key sources of information for drone-missile attacks, the officials told Reuters.

Turmoil in the wake of last week's collapse of a U.S.-backed Yemeni government after days of clashes in the capital Sanaa, has already forced the U.S. State Department to reduce staff and operations at the U.S. Embassy.

U.S. officials told Reuters last week that Washington has also halted some counter-terrorism operations, but described the measures as temporary.

The turmoil has also cast doubt over the future of a key partnership for Washington in the fight against al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, or AQAP. Only last September President Barack Obama touted cooperation with Yemen as a model in counter-terrorism.

AQAP claimed responsibility for shootings this month in Paris that killed 17 people and has been accused of plotting attacks against American interests.

The crisis in the Arab world's poorest country threatens to create a power vacuum that could allow AQAP to expand, while pushing Yemen toward a broader conflict between majority Sunni Muslims and minority Shi'ite Houthis, who are hostile to both the United States and al Qaeda.

U.S. officials said training of Yemeni special forces had ground to a halt in the capital, though some joint activities were continuing in the Sunni-controlled south.

Many U.S. personnel remain in place with Yemeni government forces at the southern al-Anaad air base, an intelligence post for monitoring the Al Qaeda group.

Stephen Seche, who served as U.S. ambassador to Yemen from 2007 to 2010 and now works in Washington at a law firm, said, however, he expected collaboration between U.S. and Yemeni intelligence services to suffer.

"If there's no leadership, there's no clear direction, there's no real motivation to do that," he said.

"COLLATERAL DAMAGE"

The White House and the Pentagon have said counter-terrorism efforts in Yemen will be undeterred by turmoil in the country.

"We do continue to have an ongoing security relationship with the national security infrastructure in Yemen. Some of which, much of which, is still functioning," White House spokesman Josh Earnest told reporters.

Some U.S. officials, however, privately say the reduced intelligence sharing could undermine the armed drone program.

Information has dried up from Yemeni security offices in Sanaa and there has been less cooperation from local security services outside the capital, the officials told Reuters, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Houthis have erected checkpoints at entrances at security institutions and have stationed operatives inside, Yemeni officials say. Rebels also surround the homes of the defense minister and the head of the National Security Bureau.

U.S. authorities treat some Yemeni intelligence leads with skepticism, concerned local officials might be trying to settle scores, and typically seek corroboration from multiple sources, the officials said.

But they will now be forced to rely more on surveillance drones, spy satellites and electronic eavesdropping, as well as their own "human intelligence" sources on the ground, said one official with direct knowledge of the operations.

Seeking to stabilize the country, Washington has signaled at least limited contacts with the Houthis, who oppose the American drone campaign but are also enemies of al Qaeda.

“As a new part of Yemen's leadership, the Houthis will have many reasons to talk with the international community,” said White House spokesman Alistair Baskey. He cited the need for security assurances for diplomats and to “articulate their intentions” on the country's political transition, but insisted there was no U.S. intelligence sharing with the Houthis.

With little prospect of collaborating with the Houthis, Washington will also face trouble mounting raids on al Qaeda hideouts similar to those carried out in the past by U.S.-trained Yemeni special forces working close with U.S. officials.

The United States will maintain some security cooperation in southern Yemen, an al Qaeda stronghold and where former president Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi retains some support, even while the rebels control the capital and much of the north, the officials said.

The U.S. officials added that they can continue drone strikes such as Monday's attack on a car in eastern Yemen that killed three men believed to be al Qaeda militants, including one identified as a youth by a Yemeni rights group.

The Central Intelligence Agency, which conducts the bulk of drone operations in Yemen, has no drone bases on Yemeni soil but operates from Saudi Arabia and Djibouti, U.S. officials say.

They also insist that while “collateral damage” is always a risk in counter terrorism operations, they do the utmost to avoid civilian casualties.

“There must be near-certainty that no civilians will be killed or injured – the highest standard we can set,” Baskey said.

Nineteen U.S. drone strikes killed 124 militants and four civilians in Yemen in 2014, according to the New America Foundation, which maintains a database of drone operations.

--Additional reporting by Yara Bayoumy in Dubai and Warren Strobel in Washington

[RETURN TO TOP](#)

6. Israel-Lebanon Border Calms After Attack

Israeli Minister Says Hezbollah Asked for Cease-Fire; No Intense Pressure Seen on Netanyahu to Retaliate More Forcefully

Wall Street Journal, Jan. 30, Pg. A6 | Joshua Mitnick, Nicholas Casey and Rory Jones

Tensions between Israel and Hezbollah eased after both sides stopped firing and Israel said the Lebanese militant group had asked for a cease-fire through United Nations intermediaries.

The report of an unusually conciliatory message from Hezbollah on Thursday came a day after the Shiite group allied with Iran and Syria's regime claimed responsibility for killing two Israelis in a cross-border rocket and mortar attack.

Israel responded with artillery strikes Wednesday on southern Lebanon, which is largely controlled by Hezbollah, while Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu warned of retaliation on the scale of Israel's 50-day summer war against Hamas in Gaza.

Some Israeli hard-liners were calling for a tough response. Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman kept up pressure for Mr. Netanyahu to respond with greater force, saying it was "time to take off the gloves" with terror groups.

But Mr. Netanyahu wasn't being widely pressed by politicians to retaliate further. He and his party have their sights on re-election in March, a plan that would be put at risk by a war with Hezbollah, said Mitchell Barak, a public-opinion expert.

Defense Minister Moshe Ya'alon said the message from Hezbollah was delivered on Thursday through the U.N. peacekeeping force in southern Lebanon, Unifil.

"The ones who conveyed the message to request the cease-fire were Hezbollah, and not us, via Unifil," Mr. Ya'alon told Channel 1 television. "And I hope that Hezbollah understands that you don't mess with us."

After Thursday's developments, the violence looked unlikely to escalate into full-blown war. Mr. Ya'alon said Israel wouldn't be guided by a "gut feeling" in weighing its response.

Hezbollah declined to comment and Unifil denied that it had delivered such a message, saying that it was also unaware of other communications through the U.N. "That is not part of our mandate," said Unifil spokesman Andrea Tenenti.

Calm began to settle in again along the bumpy ridge line that leads to Israel's northern border with Lebanon. Still there were lingering signs of tensions, as convoys of armored military vehicles rode north and Israelis checked their bomb shelters.

By a security fence, soldiers manned a drill used to dig half a dozen holes in the ground in search of Hezbollah cross-border tunnels. Those there said nothing had been found so far.

Israel and Hezbollah fought a 34-day war in 2006 that killed 165 on Israel's side and 1,100 in Lebanon.

Hezbollah hinted its attack was in retaliation for a suspected Israeli airstrike earlier in January near Quneitra in Syria, where Hezbollah has been fighting on the side of the Shiite-linked regime.

The airstrike killed an Iranian general and six Hezbollah fighters, according to Iranian and Hezbollah officials. Israel neither confirmed nor denied the strike.

Yaakov Amidror, a former national-security adviser under Mr. Netanyahu, said Hezbollah's de-escalation meant the probability of war was now very low. Hezbollah isn't in good shape given its overextension in the war in Syria, he said, something that would weigh against ramping up retaliation against Israel for the Quneitra attack.

Hezbollah's aim was to "show they are not ready to accept Israel actions against them in Syria or elsewhere," Mr. Amidror said, something the group may think it achieved on Wednesday.

More ambushes could draw both sides into a fight likely to result in high Lebanese casualties and fewer on the Israel side, he added. "The goal now for Hezbollah is -- we pull out of this, they pull out of this," he said.

In southern Lebanon, as in northern Israel, the atmosphere Thursday was calm yet uneasy.

The U.N. peacekeeping force said it and the Lebanese army had 10,000 troops conducting more patrols than usual to prevent an escalation of violence.

On the main commercial strip in the Lebanese border town of Bint Jbeil, residents were unfazed by the prospect of another war with Israel.

The locals shot firecrackers in the streets and passed out sweets in celebration at Hezbollah taking revenge for those killed in Quneitra.

"Everyone started filling up gas. Yesterday everyone was scared from the time that they started shelling," said Hana Bazzi, the owner of a gift shop.

But hours later, after a muted Israeli response, the feeling turned to celebration. Ms. Bazzi said she still had fireworks in stock in case of another Hezbollah attack.

"It was like a holiday," she said.

--Raja Abdulrahim and Dana Ballout contributed to this article

[RETURN TO TOP](#)

7. At a Hamas camp for the young, learning 'to use the gun'

Washington Post, Jan. 30, Pg. A1 | William Booth

Judging by the orderly rows of hundreds of young wannabes lined up in crisp military fashion at their graduation ceremony here Thursday, the armed wing of the Islamist movement Hamas will have plenty of eager recruits this year.

More than 17,000 fresh-faced teenagers and young men, ages 15 to 21, mustered at a dozen camps over the past week in the Gaza Strip to climb ropes, practice close-order drills and fire Kalashnikov rifles, all of them pledging to defend the coastal enclave and ready to fight the next war against their Zionist enemies.

They also learned how to perform first aid and throw a grenade. They watched - but did not touch - as instructors showed them the basics of improvised explosive devices.

For the first time, the Hamas military wing, the Izzedine al-Qassam Brigades, hosted the Gaza teens and young men for a week of training in the martial arts at previously off-limits Qassam bases. In the past, the military-style camps have been run by Hamas's political wing, and during the summer sessions, the camps included lots of sports, religion and playtime on the beach.

These winter camps were different, more serious, more martial. The attendees were older and the trainers were Qassam commanders dressed in khaki camouflage who barked orders like drill sergeants, answered by shouts of "Allahu akbar" by the attendees.

Qassam commanders allowed a Washington Post reporter to enter two camps, but they did not let the reporter stay more than 30 minutes or take photographs until Thursday's more-scripted graduation.

Military commanders for Hamas, which has been branded a terrorist organization by the United States and Israel, said the camps were designed to boost the Palestinian resistance and to give Gaza's frustrated and unemployed youths a way to blow off steam - and shoot some guns.

A Qassam officer who goes by the nom de guerre Abu Mujahed said the camps were not organized to recruit new cadres to the militia, although he conceded that candidates were chosen from the ranks.

"We have more than enough recruits. Too many," he said. "The camps are designed to answer the demands of the youth - to do something."

Critics of Hamas said the camps were designed to bolster the group's popularity and distract residents from the grim conditions of Gaza: the unpaid salaries, the lack of reconstruction, the closures of the strip to trade and travel.

According to initial estimates by Israeli and Palestinian groups, about 1,000 Gaza combatants may have died in the 50-day summer war between Hamas and Israel, which has the best-equipped army in the Middle East. Analysts estimate that al-Qassam, the largest and best-equipped of the half-dozen militias in Gaza, has 20,000 or 25,000 fighters in its ranks.

The heavy losses of the summer do not appear to have dimmed the zeal of Gaza's young men, who said they were ready to fight the Jewish state again. Hamas and Israel have fought three wars in the past six years, and the Hamas movement remains in control in the Gaza Strip.

Ahmad Ismail, 16, dressed in a black Qassam T-shirt, said after his graduation: "I have received training on using weapons, especially rifles, and climbing on ropes, marching, shooting, rocket-propelled grenades and mortars. We also had practical training and got to shoot the Kalashnikovs."

He said: "I wish I could join Qassam Brigades now. I want to fight Israel. I want to kick them out of our land. I am ready now."

Israeli military intelligence officers say the Hamas military wing will have no trouble recruiting more troops.

"There is no shortage of manpower in Gaza," said one Israeli officer selected to speak to the foreign news media. He spoke on the condition of anonymity because of Israeli military protocol.

The Israeli officer said Hamas was "assembling new rockets as fast as they can." He said it didn't matter if longer-range rockets and their propellants might not be available because the military-led government in Egypt has closed down most of the smuggling tunnels into Gaza.

" Hamas is making plenty of rockets," he said. Hundreds a week, thousands a month. He said the militias in the strip would be fully armed and staffed in a few months.

"The decision to go to war is a political one for Hamas," he said. "On the military side, they're ready to go today."

Ibrahim Shinbary, 15, said: "I joined the camp because I want to know how to confront the Jews when they invade our land. We have to learn how to use the gun. I want to retaliate for my friends and neighbors who were killed by Jews."

One of his friends at the camp said: "Every day we have someone from Hamas giving us a lesson on jihad and the importance of it. We have videos on the military operations that were done by Hamas in the last war."

He said he was ready to join as soon as the brigades would have him. "They are the most powerful army in Palestine," he said. "They taught the Jews a hard lesson not to come back to Gaza."

The teens were formed into squads and companies. They learned to march in close order, to count off their steps. Some squads were ordered to take a knee and watch a Qassam officer break down and reassemble a Kalashnikov rifle. Other groups were doing push-ups. The camp was hidden from the street by high sand berms but open to the skies.

A Qassam fighter in camouflage and a cap said, "We don't care what the Israeli satellites can see," and pointed in the air.

"We're trying to teach the basics," said a trainer named Abu Hamza. "One week, nothing more, not too hard."

He said that on the first day, the camps sent home hundreds of boys who were 12 or 13 years old. "They were standing on their tiptoes trying to get in. We told them come back next year. They went home crying."

Abu Hamza said that with more than 2,100 Palestinians killed in the summer war with Israel, "we have plenty who want to join. They want to retaliate. They want revenge. Especially those who lost a family member."

The graduation ceremony in Gaza City was attended by the top Hamas official in the enclave, Ismail Haniyeh.

A senior Qassam commander, Khalil Haiyah, told the audience that even though his militia "is busy getting ready for the next battle and restoring its power," the officers thought it important to train the "next generation as we prepare for Jerusalem, the West Bank and Palestine."

He saluted his comrades in Lebanon. "We are sending the greetings to the resistance in South Lebanon, especially to Hezbollah that insulted the enemy by its operation yesterday."

--Hazem Balousha in Gaza contributed to this report

[RETURN TO TOP](#)

8. Bomb Attacks at Security Sites in Sinai Kill at Least 26

New York Times, Jan. 30, Pg. A8 | David D. Kirkpatrick and Merna Thomas

CAIRO -- A series of simultaneous bombings targeting security facilities in the Sinai killed at least 26 people Thursday night, prompting fears that the Egyptian government's campaign of home demolitions, curfews and sweeping arrests has failed to choke off a budding insurgency there.

The wave of bombings was the first major outburst of violence since the main Islamist militant group operating in the Sinai pledged allegiance to the Islamic State in November.

Through a Twitter account linked to the group, now known as the Sinai Province of the Islamic State, it claimed responsibility for the attacks on more than a half-dozen locations.

The assault, involving nearly simultaneous bombings in several places around the cities of Arish and Rafah, was the most complicated and widely coordinated terrorist attack in Egypt in years. It was also the deadliest attack in the Sinai since a multistage assault on a military checkpoint killed at least 31 people on the night of Oct. 24.

Indeed, the ambition of the attack suggested either that the Sinai militants may be following the advice, or the example, of the Islamic State extremist group, or perhaps that the Sinai outfit sought a spectacular attack to advertise its new affiliation.

Residents of the Sinai and the Egyptian state news media said that attackers had deployed multiple car bombs and mortars against several government targets: the North Sinai security headquarters in Arish, the provincial capital; a nearby army base; a hotel used by the police; a security camp near the border town of Rafah; and several checkpoints.

Al Ahram, Egypt's flagship state newspaper, reported that its office in Arish had also been struck, although apparently only because it was near the security headquarters and not because it was a target.

Health officials said the bombings had injured more than 100 people, according to the state news media. "This means that the military does not control Sinai, as it claims," said Khalil al-Anani, a professor at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies who studies extremism. "The insurgency is getting stronger and stronger, and the government's strategy is a failure."

Borhan el-Beek, a resident of Arish, said his home was about 400 yards from a complex of security buildings that were attacked in four places about 7:30 p.m., not long after the start of the nightly curfew.

"Now there are soldiers and patrols filling the streets," he said, "and I can see from my balcony there are tanks making the rounds."

The army "has been fighting terrorism for a year and a half, and how are the percentages? Is it increasing or decreasing?" he asked. "In the North Sinai, we just don't know."

Islamist militants have long found a haven in the rugged and loosely governed Sinai Peninsula, capitalizing on its marginalization and the widespread resentment of the police. In the 18 months since the military ousted President Mohamed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood, however, the Sinai has become the center of a campaign of retaliatory attacks on Egyptian security forces that has become the most significant challenge to rule of Mr. Morsi's successor, President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi.

In an effort to combat the attacks, Mr. Sisi, a former defense minister, has ordered a virtual military occupation of the region. Helicopter gunships have destroyed homes and buildings believed to conceal militants. Residents describe large networks of police informants and widespread arrests.

After the embarrassment of the Oct. 24 attack, security forces announced the forced evacuation and demolition of more than 800 homes within about a kilometer of the border with the Gaza Strip and Israel. That ultimately led to the razing of much of the border town of Rafah.

The authorities said that was necessary to seal off tunnels under the border with Gaza, which they said had been used by militants to attack and escape.

But the scale of Thursday's assault indicates that the militants have retained sufficient ability to operate despite the crackdown.

"They have displaced a lot of people, and that undoubtedly creates a lot of resentment and increases the atmosphere of permissiveness for this kind of violence," said Tamara Cofman Wittes, director of the Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution and a former deputy assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs.

"It is clear that this extremely coercive approach is not working," she added.

Spokesmen for the military and the police did not respond to requests for comment. Mr. Beek, the resident of Arish, said he wished the Sinai could return to the time before the surge in violence. He lamented the forced evacuations, strict curfews and constrictions on the ability to enter or leave the Sinai.

"More increases in the pressure on the citizens of Sinai, making them feel really like seventh- and eighth-rate citizens," he said.

[RETURN TO TOP](#)

9. Islamic State group silent as deadline passes with no swap

Associated Press, Jan. 30 | Elaine Kurtenbach and Karin Laub

TOKYO — The fates of a Japanese journalist and Jordanian military pilot were unknown Friday, a day after the latest purported deadline for a possible prisoner swap passed with no further word from the Islamic State group holding them captive.

"Government institutions are working around the clock on the case of pilot Muath al-Kaseasbeh," Jordanian military spokesman Mamdouh al-Ameri said in a statement. "We will inform you of any developments in due time."

He urged Jordanians not to listen to rumors.

Japanese officials had no progress to report after a late night that ended with the Jordanian government saying it would only release an al-Qaida prisoner from death row if it got proof the airman was alive.

"There is nothing I can tell you," government spokesman Yoshihide Suga told reporters. He reiterated Japan's "strong trust" in the Jordanians to help save the Japanese hostage, freelance journalist Kenji Goto.

Suga said the government had been in close contact with Goto's wife, Rinko Jogo, who released a statement overnight pleading for her husband's life.

"I fear that this is the last chance for my husband, and we now have only a few hours left," Jogo said in a statement released through the Rory Peck Trust, a London-based organization for freelance journalists.

An audio message purportedly posted online by jihadis said the pilot, Lt. Muath al-Kaseasbeh, would be killed if Sajida al-Rishawi, the al-Qaida prisoner, was not delivered to the Turkish border by sunset on Thursday, Iraq time. It was not clear from the recording what would happen to Goto if the Iraqi woman was not returned by the deadline.

The authenticity of the recording could not be verified independently by the AP. But the possibility of a swap was raised Wednesday when Jordan said it was willing to trade al-Rishawi for the pilot.

After sundown in the Middle East, with no news on the fate of either the pilot or Goto, their families' agonizing wait dragged on.

Goto's wife said she had avoided public comment earlier to try to protect her daughters, an infant and a 2-year-old, from media attention.

Late Thursday, Goto's wife revealed that she had exchanged several emails with her husband's captors, and that in the past 20 hours she had received one appearing to be their final demand.

She urged the Japanese and Jordanian governments to finalize a swap that would free both hostages. "I beg the Jordanian and Japanese governments to understand that the fates of both men are in their hands," she said.

In the Jordanian capital, Amman, the pilot's brother Jawdat al-Kaseasbeh said his family had "no clue" about where the negotiations stood.

"We received no assurances from anyone that he is alive," he told The Associated Press. "We are waiting, just waiting."

The hostage-takers had provided no proof the pilot was still alive, Jordan's government spokesman, Mohammed al-Momani said Thursday.

Al-Rishawi, 44, faces death by hanging for her role in a suicide bombing, one of three simultaneous attacks on Amman hotels in November 2005 that killed 60 people. She survived because her belt of explosives didn't detonate. She initially confessed, but later recanted, saying she was an unwilling participant.

She is from the Iraqi city of Ramadi and has close family ties to the Iraqi branch of al-Qaida, a precursor of the Islamic State group. Three of her brothers were al-Qaida operatives killed in fighting in Iraq.

Jordan faces tough choices in the hostage drama.

Releasing al-Rishawi, implicated in the worst terror attack in Jordan, would be at odds with the government's tough stance on Islamic extremism.

However, King Abdullah II faces public pressure to bring home the pilot, who was captured in December after his Jordanian F-16 crashed near the Islamic State group's de facto capital of Raqqa in Syria. He is the first foreign military pilot to be captured since the U.S. and its allies began airstrikes against the Islamic State more than four months ago.

Jordan's participation in the U.S.-led airstrikes is unpopular in the kingdom, and the pilot is seen by some as the victim of a war they feel the country shouldn't be involved in.

Al-Kaseasbeh's relatives have expressed such views and accused the government of bungling efforts to win his freedom.

"They abandoned Muath, the son of the army!" chanted protesters gathered at a "diwan," or meeting place, in Amman for tribesmen from Karak, in southern Jordan.

The hostage drama began last week after the Islamic State group released a video showing Goto and another Japanese hostage, Haruna Yukawa kneeling in orange jumpsuits beside a masked man who threatened to kill them in 72 hours unless Japan paid a \$200 million ransom. That demand has since apparently shifted to one for the release of al-Rishawi.

The militants have reportedly killed Yukawa, 42, although that has not been confirmed.

The crisis prompted the Japanese Foreign Ministry to issue a warning Friday to journalists to avoid the border town in Turkey that could be a crossing point from Syria if a prisoner swap goes ahead.

It noted that Islamic State militants were likely aware of who was in the area. "We cannot dismiss the possibility of a kidnapping of Japanese journalists or of other risks to them," it said.

"Under such circumstances, reporting on Turkish-Syrian border, even on the Turkey side, and of course in Syria, is likely to lead to unanticipated risks and be very dangerous," the statement said, reiterating earlier warnings. "We strongly urge you to refrain from visiting or staying in the area for reporting, and to leave immediately."

--Karin Laub reported from Amman, Jordan; Associated Press writers Mohammed Daraghmeah in Ramallah, West Bank, Omar Akour in Amman, Jordan, Sinan Salaheddin in Baghdad and Miki Toda, Kaori Hitomi and Mari Yamaguchi in Tokyo contributed to this report

[RETURN TO TOP](#)

IRAQ/SYRIA

10. Government Allies Are Said to Have Slaughtered Dozens of Sunnis in Iraq

New York Times, Jan. 30, Pg. A10 | Kareem Fahim

BAGHDAD -- Some of the men were shot on their doorsteps, their bodies left crumpled in the streets. Others were lined up, led to a field and killed there. Their relatives, ordered to stay in their homes, heard the gunfire.

At least 72 people from a majority Sunni village in eastern Iraq were methodically singled out for slaughter this week, according to witnesses and local Sunni leaders, who said the victims were killed by Shiite militiamen who were supporting Iraqi security forces.

A spokesman for Iraq's prime minister said Thursday that the government was investigating the claims. Some local security officials in Diyala Province have asserted the victims were militants killed in battle by the security forces, denying that sectarian executions had occurred.

But witness accounts suggest that is what happened in the village of Barwanah starting on Monday. Several survivors described seeing a column of troops drive into the village that afternoon, quickly followed by a convoy of militia fighters. The militiamen started calling out specific names of people they were seeking, then began killing.

The murders are a potentially explosive descent into the kind of sectarian violence that led many Iraqi Sunnis to lose all trust in their government and its militia allies, even before the jihadists of the Islamic State began their rapid advance through much of northern Iraq last summer.

In recent months, the new, Western-backed government of Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi has urgently sought to regain the trust of Iraqi Sunnis, calling the effort an integral part of the campaign to defeat the Islamic State, also known as ISIS or ISIL.

But the government's conduct of the war has only deepened distrust in some Sunni areas, as Shiite militias, many with Iranian backing, and Kurdish forces have helped to lead the fight against the Islamic State after the Iraqi security forces broke and ran.

There have been multiple reports of revenge killings in the wake of militia advances in parts of Iraq, creating a troubling counterpoint to widespread accounts of Islamic State atrocities in the areas they control.

The Iraqi military and its allies have steadily gained ground against the Islamic State in Diyala Province, pushing in recent weeks to declare the province liberated from the militants. Barwanah was filled with refugees from fighting surrounding it in recent months, including from the nearby village of Sinsil, a stronghold for the Islamic State, according to local officials.

In the days before the killings on Monday, there had been intense clashes around Barwanah. The village was "a no-man's land between ISIS and the security forces," said Abdullah Musa al-Jabouri, a local tribal leader. The Iraqi security forces and militias had sustained heavy casualties, residents and officials said.

But the killings did not occur in the heat of battle, according to five witnesses in Barwanah. An Iraqi Army convoy came to the village about 3 p.m. on Monday, with soldiers reassuring residents that all was well, the witnesses said.

Then, 15 minutes to a half-hour later, another column of vehicles arrived, some of them bearing the insignia of Shiite militias, the witnesses said. Three witnesses said the soldiers left before the militiamen arrived, while another said the army was present during the killings.

The militiamen started asking for identity cards and said they were looking for residents displaced from other areas, including Sinsil.

Abdullah Hassan watched from his roof as they arrived, he said, and was stunned when they fired warning shots at him and told him to come down or they would kill him. The militiamen checked his ID card and ordered him to go back into his house.

"Then I started hearing the calling of the names, and the gunfire," he said. After the militiamen left, Mr. Hassan said he found his uncle's body on the village's main street, where there were at least 10 other bodies.

As the gunmen arrived, Ahmed al-Jabouri, 24, called his cousin Shuaib Kadoori, who is from Sinsil and was staying next door, to warn him, Mr. Jabouri said in an interview.

Mr. Jabouri heard the militiamen knock on his cousin's door. When Mr. Kadoori answered, and the gunmen had confirmed his identity, they shot him, Mr. Jabouri said. Other men were separated from their families before they were shot.

A 42-year-old man who gave his name as Abu Ahmed said he was among dozens of people who were lined up in the streets and asked to show their ID cards.

Some in the group were let go, but roughly dozens of others were taken away, with the gunmen assuring them that they would fine, Abu Ahmed said.

"We heard shooting," he said. Later, residents found bodies in a field.

A local security official, Abdullah Ameer al-Zadi, initially denied that a massacre had taken place, saying that the army and affiliated militias, responding to attacks from Islamic State militants in Barwanah, had killed only militants.

Another local military official, though, said that Shiite militias, stinging from recent losses in another battle, had carried out the killings in revenge.

Mr. Abadi has ordered an "urgent" investigation of the violence, to be led by a senior cabinet member, according to his spokesman. And on Thursday, the United Nations envoy to Iraq, Nickolay Mladenov, joined calls by Sunni leaders to hold the attackers accountable.

"It is the responsibility of the government to ensure that all armed forces are under its control, that rule of law is respected and that civilians are protected in all areas of the country, including those areas recently liberated from ISIL," Mr. Mladenov said in a statement.

After the killings on Monday, Ahmed al-Jabouri said they went to army officers and demanded to know why the military had allowed the violence to occur. The officers insisted the dead were jihadists, but said of their own allies: "They are militias. We cannot control them."

--Falih Hassan contributed reporting

[RETURN TO TOP](#)

11. Al Qaeda in Syria attacks Western-backed rebels

Reuters, Jan. 29 | Tom Perry

BEIRUT -- The Syrian arm of al Qaeda attacked a Western-backed rebel group near Aleppo on Thursday, the rebel group and an organization monitoring the civil war said, threatening one of the few remaining pockets of the non-jihadist opposition.

The Nusra Front seized positions from the Hazzm movement west of Aleppo, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said. The Nusra Front said it was forced to act after Hazzm detained two of its fighters and captured its weapons and offices.

Hazzm is one of the last remnants of non-jihadist opposition to President Bashar al-Assad in northern Syria, much of which has been seized by the Nusra Front and Islamic State - an offshoot of al Qaeda that controls a third of Syria.

Hazzm has received what it describes as small amounts of military aid from foreign states opposed to Assad, including U.S.-made anti-tank missiles. But it has lost ground to better armed and financed jihadists: Nusra drove Hazzm from the nearby Idlib province in October.

While U.S.-led air strikes have focused on pushing back Islamic State in eastern and northern Syria, the Nusra Front has deepened its influence in the northwest.

"They want to put an end to the Free Syrian Army," said a Hazzm official by telephone. "The Free Syrian Army" refers to an array of mainly Western-backed armed opposition groups that have little or no central coordination.

"There have been a number of confrontations before, but this is the biggest," said the official, who said he was speaking from northern Syria. The Nusra Front was mobilizing reinforcements, meaning Hazzm would have to withdraw fighters from front lines with government forces.

The Nusra Front said in a statement it tried to avoid escalation with Hazzm but the group recently detained two Nusra fighters. "The Front will take the final road to free its soldiers," it said.

The jihadist domination of the insurgency has complicated diplomatic efforts to end the nearly four-year conflict that has killed around 200,000 people, and frustrated U.S. efforts to train and equip fighters to contain Islamic State.

The sway of the remaining non-jihadist groups is mostly restricted to small pockets in around Aleppo and southwestern areas of Syria near Jordan.

The Syrian military has meanwhile waged its own campaign against Islamic State, making gains in the last two days near an air base in the eastern province of Deir al-Zor, said the Observatory's Rami Abdulrahman.

Kurdish forces drove the last Islamic State fighters from the border town of Kobani, also known as Ayn al-Arab, earlier this week. Abdulrahman said the Kurdish militia known as the YPG advanced into five nearby villages in the last three days.

[RETURN TO TOP](#)

UKRAINE/RUSSIA

12. Russia-backed rebels overrun another town in east Ukraine

Associated Press, Jan. 29 | Peter Leonard

ARTEMIVSK, Ukraine — Ukraine's military conceded Thursday that its forces had been overrun by Russian-backed separatist forces in another town in their battle to hold onto a strategically valuable railway hub.

A soldier wounded in combat for the town, Vuhlehirsk, said armored vehicles and tanks were used in the attack on government positions, forcing a hasty retreat.

Defense Ministry spokesman Vladislav Seleznyov said fighting is now under way to expel the rebels from Vuhlehirsk.

"We are trying to push the enemy out of the town," he said.

The loss of full control over town will further complicate efforts to resist the onslaught on Debaltseve, a nearby railway hub that sits between the two main rebel-held cities of Donetsk and Luhansk.

While clashes in east Ukraine rage, hopes are still being invested in reviving a peace process that has been undermined with every new day of fighting.

The leader of the separatists in the Luhansk region, Igor Plotnitsky, told a rebel news agency that the success of negotiations planned for Friday will hinge on lifting what he described as Ukraine's economic blockade of breakaway regions. Ukraine last year ordered the suspension of banking services in rebel territories, and stopped paying benefits to people not registered in government-controlled areas.

U.S. State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki said Washington strongly condemns the attacks on Debaltseve and underlined that the town is about 13 kilometers (8 miles) beyond a cease-fire line agreed at September's peace talks in Minsk.

"There can also be no mistake about Russia's role in the escalation of violence, which is causing suffering and death among those Russia has claimed it wants to protect," she said.

Multiple flashpoints 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 more than 900,000 people across the country, according to U.N. estimates.

Fighting also continued to rage Thursday near the main rebel-held city of Donetsk, where at least five civilians were killed by artillery shelling. Scared residents were huddling from the barrage in frigid basements, relying on humanitarian aid to survive.

"Our house is still OK, but it's really frightening to stay there, the walls are shaking," said Natasha Domyanova, who lives in the city's Petrovsky district. "It's damp and cold here. We call ourselves the children of the dungeon."

As Ukraine's military fortunes falter, the plight of civilians pinned down by fighting around Debaltseve is looking bleak.

Residents say the town has been without power, water and gas supplies for more than a week. Several hospitals in and around Debaltseve have been hit by rebel shelling in recent days, forcing the grievously sick and wounded to embark on trips of more than an hour along roads targeted by artillery.

Speaking in a hospital bed in the city of Artemivsk, 21-year-old Ukrainian army soldier Vadim Pugovetsa said the attack on Vuhlehirsk began with an apparent tactical feint.

"Some tanks tried to break through, but we repelled the first attack. But that was clearly a probing move," Pugovetsa said.

Armored vehicles and tanks charged toward the town through fields in a fresh assault two hours later, he said.

Pugovetsa said he managed to shoot two attacking infantrymen who emerged from their armored vehicles before being wounded by incoming gunfire. Regional officials loyal to Kiev said two civilians had been killed as a result of the fighting in Vuhlehirsk.

Until earlier this week, Pugovetsa might have been taken for treatment to the nearby hospital in the town of Svitlodarsk, but that was hit by rocket fire, forcing the evacuation of 48 patients.

National Guard medic Col. Ihor Ilkiv said multiple civilian hospitals have been damaged by what he called an intentional rebel attempt to strain the government's ability to provide medical treatment for troops.

Attacks on Ukrainian army position in Debaltseve have ticked up sharply since the start of the week, Ilkiv said.

"Every day, around 40 or 50 wounded guys are brought in. Two, three or more of them badly. We also get about 10 or more civilians," he said.

Eduard Basurin, the deputy commander of separatist forces in the self-styled breakaway Donetsk People's Republic, said rebel fighters were under instructions to refrain from targeting residential areas.

"When there is a war, anything can happen. But the (Donetsk People's Republic) doesn't fire on towns and villages on purpose," he said.

Basurin also claimed rebels now control the highway leading north out of Debaltseve and into government territory.

Despite claiming to rely solely on military equipment poached from the Ukrainian army, separatist forces have consistently deployed vast quantities of powerful weapons, some of which military experts say is not even known to be in Ukraine's possession.

Pugovetsa said the tanks he saw entering Vuhlehirsk appeared to be brand new and showed little sign of wear.

Ukraine and NATO say Russia directly abets rebels with manpower, arms and ammunition, all passed through the large section of border that was wrested from Ukrainian control last year. Moscow denies those claims.

On Thursday, the head of Ukraine's Joint Staff, Viktor Muzhenko, said he had intelligence proving that Russian servicemen were involved in combat alongside rebels, but said that regular Russian army units were not engaged in the fighting.

In Brussels, Dutch foreign minister Bert Koenders said the European Union had decided to extend a first set of sanctions against Russian and pro-Russia separatist officials which were due to expire in March by six months because of the continued fighting in eastern Ukraine.

Koenders said Thursday that all EU foreign ministers agreed on the decision and called it a "strong signal toward Russia."

In March, the EU imposed the first visa bans and asset freezes against officials linked to Russia's annexation of southern Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula.

Speaking to reporters in Washington, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry urged Russia to stop providing separatists with heavy weapons.

"We want to see the Minsk agreement upheld," he said. "We want the violence to end."

Psaki urged Russia and the separatists to immediately cease offensive operations in eastern Ukraine, warning that "otherwise, U.S. and international pressure on Russia and separatists will only increase."

--Associated Press journalists Yuras Karmanau in Kiev, Balint Szlanko in Donetsk, Matthew Lee in Washington, and Raf Casert and Lorne Cook in Brussels, contributed to this report

[RETURN TO TOP](#)

13. Ukrainian forces face drones, electronic jamming – US

Agence France-Presse, Jan. 29 | Dan De Luce

Ukrainian troops are struggling to counter artillery fire and electronic jamming by pro-Russian militants, who are flying drones to target the Kiev government forces, a top US general said Thursday.

The Ukrainian army's communications are hampered by the electronic warfare carried out by the separatists and they lack equipment and training to thwart artillery barrages, Lieutenant General Ben Hodges told reporters via video link from Germany.

"It is very difficult for Ukrainian forces to be able to operate on radios, telephones and other non-secure means of communications because their opponents have such an exceptional amount of jamming capability," said Hodges, commander of US Army Europe.

"Even if you can acquire where mortar or rockets are coming from, to be able to do something about it is very difficult if you can't communicate."

Surveillance drones supplied by Russia are enabling the separatists to pinpoint the location of Ukrainian troops with deadly accuracy.

"The rebels have Russian-provided UAVs (unmanned aerial vehicles) that are giving the rebels the detection capability and the ability to target Ukrainian forces," the general said, speaking from an American base at Wiesbaden.

"So they've suffered heavy casualties from heavy artillery and from rockets."

The casualties are stretching the limits of the government army's medical services, which provides quality care but lacks the capacity to keep up with the stream of wounded troops, according to Hodges.

Hodges said planned US military instruction for Kiev's forces, which is due to start in the spring, could help alleviate the impact of the jamming and artillery fire, while also helping with emergency medical care.

The training, which will focus on units from Ukraine's interior ministry, will help local forces find "ways to avoid jamming" and to adhere to special procedures when using radios, Hodges said.

The United States has accused Russia of conducting a proxy war in Ukraine but has so far ruled out arms deliveries to Kiev.

Instead, Washington has supplied the government with "non-lethal" equipment, including radar to detect mortar fire.

A different type of radar is needed to detect artillery rounds, Hodges said. But he stopped short of advocating providing weapons to the Ukrainians, as urged by some US lawmakers and the Kiev government.

Pro-Russian fighters last week withdrew from peace talks and announced a new offensive. The United Nations has estimated a death toll of 5,100 from the nine-month war in the country's east.

To reassure NATO allies anxious over a more assertive Russia, the United States has carried out high-profile exercises with Eastern European partners and sent in armored units for temporary deployments to the Baltics and Poland.

Hodges said a brigade from the US Army's 3rd Infantry Division would start arriving in March as part of the troop rotation. And in a reversal of a years-long drawdown of American forces in Europe, the brigade's entire fleet of tanks and armored vehicles will be transported to German or other European bases by the end of the year, he said.

The brigade's arsenal includes more than 200 M-1 Abrams tanks as well as Bradley fighting vehicles and Paladin 155mm howitzers, he said.

[RETURN TO TOP](#)

EUROPE

14. Network Aided Terror Escape

Paris Killer's Wife Spirited to Syria by Group Set Up to Recruit Jihadists, Officials Say
Wall Street Journal, Jan. 30, Pg. A1 | Noémie Bisserbe, Benoît Faucon and Stacy Meichtry

PARIS -- When a young Frenchwoman showed up early this month at an Islamic State border checkpoint in northern Syria, the extremists controlling that arid expanse were expecting her.

They waved her right through and let her bodyguards accompany her, according to Western counterterrorism officials.

The militants had been told to give Hayat Boumeddiene special treatment by the network of chaperones who had arranged her travel. The reason would soon be clear: The same day she crossed the border, her husband, Amedy Coulibaly, unleashed his terror spree in Paris, and she became the most-wanted woman in France.

No charges have been filed but authorities are eager to question Ms. Boumeddiene. "She is the prize -- a high-value asset -- because she knows a lot about the preparation of the attack," said a counterterrorism official.

Her journey from the gritty suburbs of Paris to the Syrian border followed a circuitous route that -- much like an underground railroad -- allowed her to slip away covertly.

Islamic State's ability to provide safe harbor to friends and family removes potential obstacles for would-be attackers in the West. They no longer need to be part of a terror group's rank-and-file to benefit from its resources, according to Western counterterrorism officials and people close to militant networks.

There isn't any evidence Mr. Coulibaly took orders from Islamic State, although he pledged his allegiance in a video that circulated online after his death.

But he didn't act in isolation either. Instead, he tapped into a grass-roots network that grew along with al Qaeda and has begun to reconfigure around Islamic State. "It's a new operating mode. The logic is different," said Daniel Fellous, a French lawyer specializing in terror cases.

Years before Mr. Coulibaly took to the streets of Paris armed with AK-47s -- killing four hostages at a kosher grocery and a policewoman -- the people suspected of shepherding his wife to Syria were cutting their teeth on a narrower mission: recruiting and sending French nationals to fight U.S. troops in Afghanistan, according to court documents.

French authorities thought they had dismantled the network.

In July 2014, a French court convicted nine members on charges of assisting an Afghan jihadist network suspected of planning terrorist attacks. Some, however, were released due to time served while awaiting trial. And some group members had logistical expertise that French police now suspect was put to use in helping Mr. Coulibaly.

Phone taps, interrogations and other documents compiled as part of that trial and reviewed by The Wall Street Journal portray a homegrown network that spread across continents.

It included Yassine Bouzid, who navigated Alpine byways to reach Italy's Adriatic coast; Zahir Chouket, whose myriad contacts in Turkey could move people through to Afghanistan; and Mohamed Belhoucine, a lanky computer programmer who went by the handle "oussama911."

During the trial, Mr. Bouzid acknowledged helping militants reach Afghanistan. For a while, he said, he viewed jihad as similar to the brigades of international volunteers during Spain's civil war in the 1930s, but would have never supported attacks on civilians.

Police recently questioned him in connection to Mr. Coulibaly's attacks, according to Mr. Fellous, who represents Mr. Bouzid. No charges have been brought, Mr. Fellous said.

Mr. Chouket was convicted in absentia and remains on the run. Police updated an existing arrest warrant to include suspicions he was involved in Ms. Boumeddiene's escape. His legal representation is unknown.

According to the court documents, Mr. Belhoucine fielded emails from Afghanistan, reporting on the status of French militants. "I was in charge of passing on messages from the men on the front," he told police.

Days after Mr. Coulibaly's attacks, SWAT teams stormed Mr. Belhoucine's apartment near Paris, according to neighbors. Police say he has fled France and is suspected of having helped Ms. Boumeddiene reach Syria. A lawyer who represented Mr. Belhoucine in the past, Eric Plouvier, didn't respond to requests for comment.

Mr. Belhoucine was held from May 2010 until April 2011 at the Villepinte prison outside Paris while under investigation for involvement in the Afghan network. At the time, Mr. Coulibaly was at the same prison as police investigated his alleged involvement in an unsuccessful plot to break a terrorist out of prison.

It is unclear whether the two first met there, but they were to meet up late last year.

Mr. Coulibaly was released from Villepinte in March 2014 after being convicted of participating in the prison-break plot.

It was obvious that the moment Mr. Coulibaly began his Paris attacks, police would come looking for his wife. So, he planned to send her to Islamic State's stronghold in Syria.

But there were obstacles. For one thing, France had enacted laws against such trips. Secondly, Ms. Boumeddiene couldn't make the voyage alone. Not only did strict forms of Islam forbid women from unaccompanied travel, the Turkey-Syria border had become one of the world's most perilous.

Mr. Belhoucine, investigators suspect, provided solutions. His brother Mehdi had no criminal record, making him a convenient chaperone to escort Ms. Boumeddiene out of Europe without arousing suspicion. Mehdi Belhoucine is believed to be in Syria now; calls to his French cellphone went unanswered.

Mohamed Belhoucine, meanwhile, could tap his Turkish network to ensure she made it safely over the border, according to French police.

On Dec. 30, the group rented a car under Ms. Boumeddiene's name, according to French police. She and Mr. Coulibaly were briefly pulled over that same day in what authorities later described as a routine traffic stop, which failed to raise any red flags.

Free to go, the couple picked up Mohamed Belhoucine, his wife Imene and their son. Together, they headed for Spain, which has no ban on trips to Syria, traveling through the night to reach Madrid the next day, according to French and Spanish authorities.

Mehdi Belhoucine traveled by bus, arriving in Madrid on Jan. 2, according to Spanish officials, and joined Ms. Boumeddiene on a Pegasus Airlines flight to Istanbul that afternoon. Mr. Coulibaly drove the rental car back to Paris to prepare his assaults. By the end of the week, police would kill him in a raid on the grocery store, where he had gunned down four shoppers.

A day earlier, Ms. Boumeddiene, shrouded in Islamic robes, had set off from the Turkish border town of Akcakale to reach an Islamic State checkpoint in Syria.

Once across, her security detail included Mehdi Belhoucine, who continued to shadow her in Islamic State territory, according to the counterterrorism official.

[RETURN TO TOP](#)

AFGHANISTAN/PAKISTAN

15. Afghans want bigger U.S. military role than planned, poll says

Survey also finds more support for Taliban, jihadists than in 2010

Washington Post, Jan. 30, Pg. A12 | Sudarsan Raghavan

KABUL - Many Afghans would like to see a greater American role after this year than is planned, while a majority believe that last year's runoff election that led to a U.S.-brokered power-sharing government was "mostly fraudulent," according to a national poll released Thursday.

The poll, conducted in November by the Afghan Center for Socio-Economic and Opinion Research in collaboration with New York-based firm Langer Research Associates, surveyed a random sample of 2,051 Afghan men and women in most parts of the country.

In the poll, 46 percent said they want to see a greater commitment by U.S. forces than is in place. The United States and its NATO allies withdrew most of their forces last year and have roughly 13,000 troops in Afghanistan. The U.S. contingent is expected to shrink to about 5,000 by the end of the year.

In recent weeks, senior Afghan officials have also indicated that they would like to see a greater U.S. presence after this year. Only 29 percent of Afghans said they prefer that fewer or no U.S. troops remain, according to the poll, which has a margin of error of plus or minus three percentage points. Two-thirds of Afghans favor a significant role for U.S. and international forces in training Afghan forces in the future, the poll found.

Six in 10 rated their security against crime and violence as at least "somewhat good" in November. But concerns about growing violence and insecurity may have increased in recent weeks as the Taliban Islamist insurgency mounted attacks in the capital, Kabul, and in other areas.

The latest assaults came Thursday, when a roadside bomb killed a police commander in Laghman province in eastern Afghanistan. Hours later, a suicide bomber detonated his explosives belt at the man's funeral, killing four policemen and 12 civilians and wounding scores, Afghan officials said.

"This is against all Islamic principles," said Gen. Naqibullha, a lawmaker from Laghman, who like many Afghans uses only one name. "The enemies of Afghanistan don't even let us bury our dead peacefully."

Although 53 percent of Afghans think the runoff election was mired in fraud, the poll found that an overwhelming majority approve of the unity government led by President Ashraf Ghani and his chief executive, Abdullah Abdullah. Three-quarters of Afghans see each as holding office legitimately. In the survey, 61 percent said Afghanistan is heading in the right direction, up from 48 percent in 2013.

Most Afghans, as expected, found persistent problems with basic services such as electricity, and they cited high unemployment and widespread corruption among government officials and police as major concerns, the poll found.

There were also troubling trends. The number of Afghans who view opium cultivation as "unacceptable in all circumstances" fell to 53 percent, the lowest on record, according to the poll. With widespread poverty, opium production reached record high levels last year.

Although the Taliban remains extremely unpopular, tolerance for it has grown. A fifth of Afghans surveyed said they support the presence of Taliban fighters, twice the number who said so in 2010, the poll found. And 31 percent said they support the presence of foreign jihadists, also an increase from 2010.

It is unclear whether such sentiments indicate a radicalization in some areas or whether the respondents felt more secure in Taliban-controlled areas. A sizeable majority support negotiating with the Taliban to find a political settlement if the Taliban agrees to stop fighting.

Large numbers said they would accept the Taliban's restrictions on women's rights in exchange for such a deal. Two-thirds would accept a ban on women leaving their homes unescorted, working, holding political office, attending school and voting.

--Mohammad Sharif contributed to this report

[RETURN TO TOP](#)

AFRICA

16. Chad army retakes Nigerian town from Boko Haram

Reuters, Jan. 29 | Abdoulaye Massalaki

NIAMEY -- Troops from Chad have driven Boko Haram fighters from a northern Nigeria border town seized by the Islamist militants late last year, military sources stationed in neighboring Niger said on Thursday.

Chad's involvement in retaking the town comes as the regional military heavyweight assumes an increasingly aggressive role in combating the militants and regional leaders weigh new options for containing the movement's spread.

Boko Haram, which has killed thousands in its struggle to create an Islamic state in northern Nigeria, seized the town of Malam Fatori in November, sending government soldiers stationed there fleeing across the nearby border into Niger.

"This morning the Chadians retook Malam Fatori. There were clashes with Boko Haram that lasted over 24 hours," said a Niger army officer deployed to the adjacent region of Diffa. "There were combat aircraft but we don't know their nationality."

A second officer said Chadian troops began massing on the shores of Lake Chad last week before crossing into Nigeria on Wednesday to retake Malam Fatori.

Nigeria's defense headquarters tweeted that Nigerian Air Force aircraft had been involved in two days of air operations over the town though it did not confirm Malam Fatori had been retaken or directly acknowledge the presence of Chadian troops.

"(Malam Fatori) is within the area of operation covered by the Multinational Joint Task Force of which Chad has always been a part," the defense headquarters' official Twitter account said.

Chadian officials were not immediately available for comment.

The four nations of the Lake Chad Basin - Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria - agreed to bring their forces together to fight Boko Haram in October, together with a contingent from Benin, which borders Nigeria to the west.

But disagreements surfaced over how to deploy the troops and a cohesive fighting force has failed to materialize.

Meanwhile, Boko Haram, which has expanded their zone of operations over the past year most notably into northern Cameroon, has stepped up attacks in the run-up to Feb. 14 elections in Nigeria.

After Cameroonian President Paul Biya appealed for help to fend off Boko Haram, Chad sent troops, armored vehicles and attack helicopters earlier this month to assist the thousands of Cameroonian soldiers already deployed to the border.

The African Union on Thursday endorsed a West African plan to set up a regional task force of 7,500 to fight Islamist Boko Haram militants, a senior official said, in a vital step towards securing U.N. Security Council backing.

--Additional reporting by Julia Payne in Abuja

[RETURN TO TOP](#)

CONGRESS

17. GOP split on Pentagon spending

Obama's revived push to end 'sequestration' budget caps divides defense and fiscal hawks in Congress

Los Angeles Times, Jan. 30, Pg. A1 | W.J. Hennigan and Lisa Mascaro

President Obama revived his call Thursday to end federal spending limits linked to a last-resort deficit deal reached nearly four years ago, an appeal that fell squarely in the divide between Republicans in Congress who want to rein in costs and those who want to boost the Pentagon's budget.

Obama has repeatedly asked Congress to "fully reverse" the so-called sequestration cuts that were part of a 2011 deal and intended to be so unpalatable they would never be enacted. But they took effect in 2013 after lawmakers failed to reach a compromise to avert them. The president's pleas to lift the restraints have produced only temporary, and partial, changes.

But changing circumstances could give new life to Obama's requests, at least on defense spending. A shrinking deficit, a new Republican-led Congress and the Pentagon's need to fund the 6-month-old fight against Islamic State militants who continue to seize land and terrorize cities across Iraq and Syria could work in the president's favor.

"This administration has been very clear, as have our military leaders, about the fact that sequestration is a bad policy," White House spokesman Josh Earnest said Thursday. "It's certainly been bad for our economy, and it's bad for our national security as well, and that's why the president proposes to end it."

Though Republicans are eager to see the Pentagon fully funded, the prospect of lifting the spending caps runs up against another core GOP tenet -- limiting government spending. An internal struggle centers on that split between defense and deficit hawks.

"There's debate going on," said Sen. Jim Risch (R-Idaho). "It's been a standoff, as you know. I have not seen either side running up the white flag."

The president is asking lawmakers for \$561 billion in defense spending, an increase of \$38 billion over the congressionally mandated budget caps, which includes the Pentagon's largest base-line budget request ever. On top of that, the military is set to receive \$51 billion in war funding.

Obama's plan also includes \$530 billion in domestic expenditures, an increase of \$37 billion over this fiscal year.

Congress' new Republican majority could be interested in repealing the spending limits, especially on national security. But few Republicans are willing to stomach Obama's proposed tax increases to pay for his expanded budget.

"Until he gets serious about our long-term spending problem, it's hard to take him seriously," said Cory Fritz, a spokesman for House Speaker John A. Boehner (R-Ohio).

Republicans prefer shifting the money around -- aiding the Pentagon by cutting into the vast system of domestic programs they say is bloated. In the past, Republicans have suggested cuts to food stamps, Obamacare and programs to help homeowners who owe more on their mortgages than their homes are worth, among others.

"The House of Representatives has passed several replacements for the president's sequester, only to have them ignored," said Rep. Mac Thornberry of Texas, the Republican head of the House Armed Services Committee.

Obama's new plan is unlikely to gain traction, budget analysts say.

"The president is facing an exceedingly difficult situation in Congress," said Ryan Crotty, the deputy director at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. "It can't try to increase spending and be everything to everyone. Because, in the end, no one's going to be happy."

Still, Obama faces a deadline to ward off the worst of the cuts.

When Obama and Congress initially agreed to slash spending, neither really thought it would happen. The cuts were considered so terrible -- \$1 trillion worth of deep reductions over the decade, across almost every aspect of government -- that they would force the parties to broker a compromise.

But they went into effect after Congress failed to reach deal.

Their full brunt never really took hold, however. A subsequent pact brokered in 2013 between Rep. Paul D. Ryan (R-Wis.) and Sen. Patty Murray (D-Wash.) temporarily undid some of the reductions.

That reprieve ends Oct. 1, when the new fiscal year begins. Without agreement by then, Washington could see another major confrontation between the White House and Capitol Hill.

"If Congress rejects my plan and refuses to undo these arbitrary cuts, it will threaten our economy and our military," Obama wrote in an op-ed in the Huffington Post.

Rep. Chris Van Hollen of Maryland, the top Democrat on the House Budget Committee, said how the budget plays out would depend on the debate within the Republican caucus over whether to relent on spending in order to support the military.

"Two years ago, there was a recognition among most Republicans that the defense caps should be readjusted, and the result of that was the Ryan-Murray agreement," he said. "So I would hope that we can move forward on some kind of similar agreement."

To warn against the negative effects of cuts, top uniformed officers of the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps testified Wednesday on Capitol Hill about how their services would be devastated.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff, as they're known, said that the spending freeze affected the military's ability to be ready for battle and slowed the modernization of weapons, which made it impossible to plan.

The last year saw a number of unforeseen national security threats, they said, including the battle against Islamic State, a resurgent Russia in Ukraine and other events that demanded military action such as the spread of Ebola in Africa.

"Sequestration will erode the trust that our young men and women in uniform, civil servants and families have in their leadership," said Gen. Joseph F. Dunford Jr., commandant of the Marines. "And the cost of losing that trust is incalculable."

In a study released in April, the Pentagon outlined the impact of spending cuts, including a reduction in the number of active-duty soldiers in the Army from 470,000 to 420,000. Other effects include the retirement of a Navy aircraft carrier and scrapping the tankers that refuel fighter and bomber jets in midair.

Obama's open-ended strategy to confront Islamic State fighters in Iraq and Syria has cost \$1.3 billion since it began in August, according to the Pentagon. Although that's a pittance compared with the total Pentagon budget, or the separate \$1.3 trillion spent for the ground wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the costs of intervention are certain to increase under the plan to step up airstrikes, intensify surveillance and conduct counter-terrorism operations.

Despite the budget uncertainty, the Pentagon has moved forward with big-ticket purchases that stretch for decades, including a \$348-billion nuclear weapons modernization effort that involves new bombers and submarines, as well as the \$400-billion F-35 Joint Strike Fighter jet program.

"The Department of Defense has not prepared the services or the contractors for any budget cuts," said Todd Harrison, defense analyst at the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments. "They seem to be in denial about the whole thing."

--Times staff writers Kathleen Hennessey in Washington and Michael A. Memoli in Philadelphia contributed to this report

[RETURN TO TOP](#)

DEFENSE DEPARTMENT

18. Pentagon Seeks 13 Percent Weapons Increase as Obama Urges End to Cuts

Bloomberg, Jan. 29 | Tony Capaccio

WASHINGTON -- The Pentagon is seeking an increase of \$20.4 billion, or 13 percent, for weapons and research as President Barack Obama begins a push to remove defense budget caps that would force cuts in spending instead.

The Defense Department blueprint for the year that begins Oct. 1 calls for \$177.5 billion in procurement and research spending. It includes funds to replenish weapons used in Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan, from Lockheed Martin Corp.'s Hellfire missiles to tactical wheeled vehicles made by Oshkosh Corp.

Obama will call for an end to sequestration, the automatic spending cuts that apply to both defense and domestic programs, in a speech to House Democrats on Thursday. Pentagon spending is popular with many Republicans and spread across hundreds of congressional districts. The prospect of averting automatic cuts in it is key to the White House strategy, said two defense officials who asked not to be identified to discuss internal deliberations.

"It's the first act in a multi-act drama that will be played out with Congress over 2015," Byron Callan, managing director of Capital Alpha Partners LLC in Washington, said in an e-mail.

Details of the Pentagon's plans are spelled out in the annual weapons cost report that will be released when Obama sends his budget proposal to Congress on Feb. 2. A final draft of the Defense Department report was obtained from an official briefed on the spending plans.

The Pentagon will propose a base defense budget of \$534 billion for fiscal 2016, about \$34 billion more than sequestration would allow. The budget totals and potential cuts are separate from procurement funds in the supplemental \$51 billion being proposed for war spending. The Defense Department has indicated that those funds also would be cut if the military had to live with sequestration.

Cutting \$20.5 Billion

A Pentagon assessment of program impacts published in April estimated that \$20.5 billion would have to be cut from weapons modernization if sequestration resumes after a two-year break, including \$16.7 billion from procurement.

Among Defense Department procurement requests that reflect major increases is \$11 billion to buy 57 F-35 jets and spare parts from Bethesda, Maryland-based Lockheed. That's up from 38 planes and \$8.57 billion this year for the Joint Strike Fighter, the costliest U.S. weapons system.

Lockheed, the biggest U.S. contractor, also would benefit from an increase of \$1 billion to \$2.58 billion for 29 C-130J transport planes bought under an existing multiyear contract, an increase from 14 this year, and \$769 million for 5,950 Hellfire missiles, including 2,081 bought with war-fighting funds. The Defense Department is buying 1,729 missiles for \$206 million this year.

Boeing Tankers

An increase of almost \$700 million over this year to \$3 billion is proposed for continued development of KC-46 refueling tankers made by Chicago-based Boeing Co. and the purchase of 12 of the planes, up from seven this year.

Oshkosh, based in the Wisconsin city of the same name, would benefit from an increase of \$43 million to \$334 million for 1,357 of its Medium Tactical Vehicles, including 1,191 bought with war funds. That's up from 550 purchased this year.

General Ray Odierno, the Army chief of staff, told the Senate Armed Services Committee on Wednesday that a resumption of sequestration would force the cancellation of the latest phase of a program by Falls Church, Virginia-based General Dynamics Corp. to fortify the hulls of wheeled Stryker infantry vehicles against improvised roadside bombs. The budget calls for \$667 million to upgrade 62 vehicles, an increase of \$73 million over this year.

Other Increases

The following is proposed funding for other major systems that would receive increases in fiscal 2016, compared with the current year:

- **Joint Light Tactical Vehicles:** The Army wants \$457 million to buy 559 new Joint Light Tactical Vehicles. The service will select a contractor in July. The vehicle is intended to replace multipurpose Humvees and could lead to as many as 17,000 vehicles for the Army and Marines. The request is an increase from \$227 million this year. Oshkosh, Lockheed, and AM General LLC, based in South Bend, Indiana, are competing for the contract.
- **Global Hawk:** \$1.42 billion, or about \$346 million more than this year, for continued development and modifications of the drones made by Falls Church, Virginia-based Northrop Grumman Corp., to include buying three of the pilotless aircraft, after none were purchased this year.

- AH-64E: \$1.45 billion, or a \$489 million increase, to upgrade 64 Boeing Apache helicopters into the latest E model, up from 35 requested this year;
- JDAM: \$559 million to buy 12,294 of the GPS guidance kits for Joint Direct Attack Munition bombs made by Boeing, with 5,953 funded from the war spending request, up from 2,973 missiles and \$101 million this year.
- VH-92A Presidential Helicopter: \$507 million to continue development of the aircraft from United Technologies Corp.'s Sikorsky unit, up from \$368 million this year.
- AIM-9X: \$424 million sought for 733 Sidewinder short-range air-to-air missiles made by Waltham, Massachusetts-based Raytheon Co., up from \$273 million and 470 this year.
- Small Diameter Bomb: \$272 million to buy 375 Raytheon bombs used against moving targets, up from 144 this year.

[RETURN TO TOP](#)

19. Acquisition Reforms Don't Cut Costs: Kendall Cites Study

BreakingDefense.com, Jan. 29 | Colin Clark

WASHINGTON -- Most Americans think it's obvious: Change the rules to ensure the Pentagon will save money and it will save money. Congress after Congress has tried this, most recently in the form of the widely praised Weapons Systems Acquisition Reform Act.

Sadly, the assumption that acquisition reform makes things better does not appear to stand up to reality, at least as analyzed in a report by the respected Institute for Defense Analyses. We're looking at this because Frank Kendall, the head of Pentagon acquisition, mentioned the study Wednesday during a House Armed Services Committee hearing on acquisition; his comments clearly caught the attention of reform-minded new Chairman Mac Thornberry, so we asked for a copy of the study.

Here's the nub of the report:

"First, there is no statistically significant improvement or worsening of PAUC [Program Acquisition Unit Cost] growth correlated with the different acquisition policy regimes... Second, PAUC growth tends to be substantially higher in a Relatively Constrained funding climate than in the Relatively Accommodating climate."

Here's how Kendall put it to the committee Wednesday: "What this is telling me is that behaviors change when we have tight budgets," Kendall told the HASC. Bureaucrats try to "hang on to things we really can't afford." and the defense industry is hungrier and pushes harder to keep revenue flowing. "This has an impact far beyond anything else we are looking at."

Initially, this would seem to lend credence to the old shibboleth — usually offered by industry — that unstable funding caused by congressional whim or executive folly leads to higher costs and schedule problems (which often incur even more costs).

The report offers a careful analysis of this idea: “Funding instability is a chronic condition, present to some degree in all periods. What this paper observes is a recurring pattern—that MDAPs that passed MS II/B during periods when the DoD topline was Relatively Constrained, on average, had much higher PAUC growth than those that passed MS II/B during a period of Relatively Accommodating funding climate.”

We offer this translation. When the Pentagon budget was tight, big weapons programs had “much higher growth.”

The report does not offer a “solution” to the patterns it spots, not that it should. But you can be sure members of Congress and the professional staff of the four defense committees will mull this compelling analysis as they tear into the 2016 defense budget. Perhaps it will help reshape both the short-term debate over sequestration — set to return in ’16 — and the long-term debate over Pentagon acquisition. We can hope, can’t we?

[RETURN TO TOP](#)

20. Lawyer: Dispute on female guards a conspiracy

A judge made no ruling in a controversy that has raged at the Camp 7 prison since a war-on-terror captive refused a female guard’s touch

Miami Herald, Jan. 30, Pg. A1 | Carol Rosenberg

GUANTÁNAMO BAY NAVY BASE, Cuba — A war court prosecutor Thursday cast an Iraqi captive’s request to not be touched by female guards as part of a wider al-Qaida conspiracy — and asked a military judge facing a discrimination complaint to rule for the women.

Army Lt. Col. David Long, the prosecutor, appealed to the judge to put the American troops first, invoking the morale and safety of the guards at Guantánamo’s secret prison. He also said war-on-terror captives like defendant Abd al Hadi al Iraqi, 54, can’t rely on the U.S. Supreme Court’s Hobby Lobby religious accommodation decision.

“This religiously offensive, unwanted touching by women violates Mr. Hadi al Iraqi’s sincerely held religious beliefs and is a sin under the Muslim religion,” replied Marine Lt. Col. Thomas Jasper, Hadi’s lawyer. He said Hadi, awaiting trial for alleged war crimes he committed as commander of al-Qaida’s army in Afghanistan from 2002-04, was only touched by men in his first seven years at Guantánamo.

The judge, Navy Capt. J.K. Waits, made no ruling in the controversy that has raged at the Camp 7 prison for former CIA captives since Hadi refused a female guard’s touch Oct. 8, and was forcibly moved from a cell.

That means until the judge makes a decision, female guards are forbidden to touch Hadi as he goes to and from court and legal meetings. They can, however, handle him during movements to other appointments such as medical checkups and International Red Cross visits.

Defense lawyers want female guards prevented from touching him altogether. The Iraqi’s religious conviction is so deep, his lawyer said, that he’ll refuse his upcoming first video chat with his wife and children if a female guard comes to shackle him up and lead him there with her hand on his shoulder.

“His Muslim faith,” said Marine Lt. Col. Thomas Jasper, “is the only thing he has left right now. It’s what he clings to.”

A day earlier, prosecutors called four soldiers — a man and three women — to testify about how Waits' November no-touch order complicated and potentially endangered operations at Guantánamo's clandestine lockup for 15 former CIA captives.

It emerged through war court testimony that Camp 7 is run by a succession of Army National Guard units, drawn each year from a different state, that have struggled to find skilled soldiers with security clearances who want to serve at Guantánamo. So last year, after years of restricting Camp 7 escort-guard duty to men, the Massachusetts National Guard trained and used two female escorts.

Once Hadi refused to be touched, other captives also followed. The five 9/11 defendants got a temporary restraining order, too, though a female guards no-touch hearing in that case is likely months away. The commander in charge of the prison warned the judge of a spillover effect.

At one point Thursday, the judge appeared perplexed by a Muslim scholar's explanation of the no-touch rule as "a precautionary measure to prevent illicit sexual intercourse."

Touching can lead to "sexual arousal," Hadi's Marine lawyer said.

"We're talking about touching on a shoulder and on a body cuff handle," the judge replied. "So it's going to possibly lead to sexual intercourse on the tier at the camp that Hadi al Iraqi is residing at right now?"

This week, prosecutors showed the court a note from the alleged 9/11 mastermind, Khalid Sheik Mohammed, advising Hadi on female guard litigation strategy — prompting the prosecutor to declare that an al-Qaida conspiracy continues to this day inside Guantánamo's most secret prison.

Hadi is accused of having troops shoot at medical-evacuation helicopters, assault convoys and set roadside bombs, killing U.S. and allied forces. He allegedly joined some Taliban in destroying the sacred Buddhist statues in Afghanistan's Bamiyan Valley following a fatwa against un-Islamic idolatrous images.

His charge sheet also alleges that Mohammed, the accused 9/11 mastermind, gave Hadi \$100,000 in 2002 and the two men conspired in an unrealized assassination plot of Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf.

The prosecutor, Long, raised those allegations and called Hadi's religious accommodation claim a continuation of the beliefs that brought him to al-Qaida, to swear an oath of allegiance to Osama bin Laden and to blow up the Bamiyan Buddhas.

"That collusion, that conspiracy, endures," Long said. "The foundation for which al-Qaida is built continues, that conspiracy continues."

Jasper dismissed the notion of an ongoing conspiracy, noting that the letter never reached Hadi. Guards found it inside a newspaper, according to court testimony, and gave it to the prosecution.

Mohammed suggests questions that Jasper should ask Hadi, were he to testify on the female guard issue — "Did they use women guards by force? Did they hurt you?"

The Marine officer said he didn't take the alleged mastermind's advice.

The potential impact of two gender discrimination complaints filed by some female guards against the judges who issued the no-touch orders was unclear.

The chief prosecutor, Army Brig. Gen. Mark Martins, said Thursday that typically local commanders have two weeks to look at a complaint — and the requested remedy — before deciding what to do.

But an ongoing criminal proceeding takes precedence, he said, meaning the equal opportunity claim could take longer.

The general said he had not seen the discrimination complaint.

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.

[RETURN TO TOP](#)

AIR FORCE

21. U.S. to Give Launch Contests a Boost

Wall Street Journal, Jan. 30, Pg. B2 | Julian E. Barnes and Doug Cameron

The Pentagon will announce plans next week to open more space rocket launches to competition, paving the way for Elon Musk's Space Exploration Technologies Corp. to try to win its first military business, according to U.S. officials familiar with the plan.

The Air Force plans to add launches of new global positioning satellites in coming years to create competition to the joint venture between Boeing Co. and Lockheed Martin Corp., known as the United Launch Alliance, which dominates existing military satellite launch missions.

Defense officials on Thursday said there are new initiatives to increase competition in space launches and new money for programs that protect satellites from cyberattacks within the military space budget proposal to be announced on Monday by the Obama administration.

Officials wouldn't detail how much additional money is being put into either the effort to increase GPS satellite launches or cyberdefenses. Overall, the Pentagon proposes to spend \$7.1 billion on military space operations, down slightly from the current fiscal year space budget of \$7.4 billion, according to budget documents reviewed by The Wall Street Journal. That spending doesn't include money for NASA's budget.

The spending plan approved by Congress late last year included two additional GPS launches, one this year and one in 2016 or 2017. The new plan will further increase the number of launches, part of an effort by the Pentagon to try to create new military satellite launches that can be bid on by SpaceX and can help build up competition.

The Pentagon previously had halved the number of potential launch competitions to seven after some satellites lasted longer than expected and didn't need to be replaced.

U.S. officials said the new budget will attempt to patch relations with SpaceX, and provide funding to help develop a U.S.-made rocket engine to take the place of the Russian-made engine used on some ULA missions.

"The Air Force is taking steps to promote the development of two commercially viable, domestically sourced space launch service providers with the objective of eliminating reliance on a foreign-made liquid rocket engine," the document reviewed by the Journal said.

SpaceX and ULA didn't immediately offer a comment.

SpaceX sparred last year with the Air Force over what it saw as an unfair deal that gave the bulk of its sensitive satellite launch business to the venture between Boeing and Lockheed. The venture has held a monopoly on sensitive launches through a multiyear deal valued at about \$11 billion.

SpaceX originally had proposed to bid on new GPS rocket launches in 2012, according to court documents but lacked the required certification.

SpaceX last week reached a settlement with the Air Force, dropping a lawsuit that sought to break up the ULA contract and charting a path to secure certification.

[RETURN TO TOP](#)

ARMY

22. General: US Army Programs Hinge on Helo Swap

DefenseNews.com, Jan. 29 | Joe Gould

WASHINGTON — Key US Army aviation modernization plans — Future Vertical Lift, the Improved Engine Turbine program and digital cockpit upgrades for Black Hawks — all hinge on the service's cost-cutting Aviation Restructure Initiative (ARI), senior service officials said on Thursday.

The plan, which has stirred controversy with National Guard advocates, is unpalatable but necessary in light of sequestration budget cuts, said Army Vice Chief of Staff Gen. Daniel Allyn, speaking at an Association of the US Army aviation event.

The restructure calls for the service to divest its fleet of OH-58 Kiowa Warrior helicopters and use the AH-64 Apache to fill the Kiowa's reconnaissance and scout role. It would pull Apaches from the Guard inventory to fill the gap, and, in turn, provide the Guard with UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters. The Army would also cut three of its 13 combat aviation brigades, while the Guard retains all 10 of its brigades.

Maj. Gen. Mike Lundy, commander of the Army Aviation Center of Excellence at Fort Rucker, Alabama, said the Army has gone through "thousands of models" to arrive at its plan.

Even as budget cuts threaten modernization programs, the goal is to field the AH-64 Apache "E" model, the UH-60 Black Hawk "M" model, as well as technologies that allow helicopter crews to see in brown-outs or other degraded visual environments (DVE), Lundy said.

"We can't wait for [Future Vertical Lift] for that capability," he said. "I challenge industry to get after that, because that will be one of our focus areas, and ARI will allow us to put money against that program, so we can bring that capability earlier than 2037."

Last week at Fort Rucker, the Army aviation's science and technology community met to discuss a number advanced technologies needed in the future, including advanced motors and rotors, jammers and countermeasures, and technology that would enable crews to not just fly through obscurants, but fight as well, Lundy said.

Allyn decried sequestration budget cuts as "devastating," and said another round would "be felt for a decade and potentially put the lives of soldiers at risk." Unlike conflicts of recent decades, there has been no room for a peace dividend, he said, as combat aviation brigades are as busy around the world as ever.

If the cuts come — and Army officials seem to argue against them in every public appearance — the service's plan is to protect its three combat training centers. Allyn challenged aviators to use their budgets to craft innovative training approaches, as the Army expands virtual training.

Still, Lundy said if sequestration is not abated, "I have some very draconian decisions to make ... across the entire [aviation] portfolio." Programs like the Joint Multirole Helicopter and Future Vertical Lift might not be derailed, but they would be slowed, and buys on legacy aircraft would get trimmed as well.

"My concern is if we go to worst case, it would impact almost every modernization program we've got," he said, adding later: "We are really counting on these technologies coming out right now. Twenty more knots of speed, right now, is what we need."

In the meantime, the 2015 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) provided the service with room to inactivate and transfer OH-58Ds, and swap its training aircraft from the TH-67 Creek to the UH-72A Lakota. The law bars the Apache transfers in fiscal 2015, allowing as many as 48 aircraft to be moved the following year, and it calls for a National Commission on the Future Structure of the Army to evaluate the ARI and the overall balance between active, Guard, and reserve forces — reporting back by Feb. 1, 2016.

"The good news is Congress gave us room to make preparatory measures, like train our aviators on the future fleet this fiscal year, so that as aircraft are moved around the force, there are trained pilots flying them," Allyn said.

The Army's overarching operating concept aligns with Future Vertical Lift technologies, ones that would allow troops to be dispersed and mass quickly, and engines that would allow legacy aircraft more range, fuel efficiency and the power to maneuver in mega-cities.

"Sixty percent of the world's population will be in mega-cities, so we should expect our aviators to be able to cozy in, make the approach to some [landing zones] ... get in there with great acceleration and great power," he said.

The Army is seeking technologies to upgrade its network, as well as technology to counter advanced shoulder-mounted rocket launchers, seen among fighters in Libya and Syria, Lundy said. Upgrades for the Chinook are necessary, Lundy said, because "they have done some extraordinary things, but they're tired."

[RETURN TO TOP](#)

INTELLIGENCE

23. Top paramilitary officer to lead CIA spy branch

Move is considered precursor to shake-up in coming months

Washington Post, Jan. 30, Pg. A4 | Greg Miller

The CIA's top paramilitary officer was named head of the agency's spying branch on Thursday, a move that may signal a broader organizational shake-up by Director John Brennan in the coming months.

The new head of the National Clandestine Service, as the spying directorate is known, served on an internal panel set up by Brennan last year to evaluate sweeping changes he has proposed that would blur, if not eliminate, long-standing boundaries between analysts and operatives.

The former head of the Clandestine Service announced his retirement abruptly this month largely because of his concerns about Brennan's overhaul, current and former U.S. officials said.

The CIA did not reveal the identity of its new espionage chief, saying that he remains undercover. But the officer's first name and middle initial - Greg V. - have appeared in numerous books cleared by agency censors, including the memoir of former CIA director George J. Tenet.

In a statement, the CIA described the new director as "one of the CIA's most gifted and versatile leaders," a person who "has developed a remarkable range of expertise throughout his career and a keen understanding of what it takes to run effective operations, even in the most difficult conditions."

The operative is best known for his repeated tours in Afghanistan after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, and his involvement in an episode at the outset of the war in which he and Hamid Karzai, who later became president of Afghanistan, narrowly escaped an accidental U.S. bombing of their location.

In many accounts, Greg was credited with saving Karzai by diving on him to shield the Pashtun leader from the blast of a GPS-guided 2,000-pound bomb that killed three Americans.

"Greg had immediately thrown himself on top of the insurgent leader when the initial blast hit," Robert Grenier, the CIA's top officer in Pakistan in 2001, wrote in a recent memoir.

Others have offered different versions of that event. Gary Schroen, who was among the first CIA operatives to be sent into Afghanistan after 9/11, said the force of the explosion launched Greg "into Karzai, tumbling the two like rag dolls across the room."

Either way, the event cemented a relationship between the CIA officer and the Afghan leader that the United States relied on over the next decade. Greg served as the agency's station chief in Kabul twice and most recently held a position as chief of the CIA's special-activities division, its paramilitary branch.

A former U.S. Marine known for his bushy mustache and lean physique, Greg was described by former colleagues as a popular figure at CIA headquarters, a veteran in his early 50s known more for strong leadership than innovative thinking.

He is "naturally charismatic," giving Brennan an important ally in pushing through overhauls that have drawn criticism from many in the agency's upper ranks, said a former colleague.

"He would be the obvious and consensus choice," said former CIA director Michael V. Hayden, who would not discuss the identity of the promoted officer but said he has a "deep background. High regard. Very experienced, down to earth."

Brennan's plans envision a reorganization that would be among the most ambitious in CIA history, aimed largely at replicating the structure of the Counterterrorism Center and other similar entities in which analysts and operatives work side by side.

Proponents say the arrangement enables analysts to have a deeper understanding of adversaries including al-Qaeda and proliferation networks. But critics warn that doing away with separate directorates for analysts and operatives will make it harder to cultivate their specialized skills, and possibly erode analysts' ability to remain independent and objective.

Greg was among several influential members of a panel that weighed Brennan's proposals and submitted recommendations to him in recent weeks. U.S. officials said the director has not made any final decisions on the matter.

[RETURN TO TOP](#)

NOTABLE COMMENTARY

24. The Pentagon's Growing Army of Bureaucrats

Wall Street Journal, Jan. 30, Pg. A13 | Mackenzie Eaglen

When President Obama unveils his annual budget on Monday, watch his defense priorities. His State of the Union address presented plenty of new ideas to invest in nondefense domestic programs, but the Pentagon's budget got zero mention -- even as the specter of sequestration looms again for fiscal 2016. Mr. Obama's track record as commander in chief is not encouraging: Under his stewardship, active-duty ground forces have been slashed while Defense Department civilians have flourished. For this president, it seems, bureaucracy beats combat power every time.

Since 2009 the Pentagon's civilian workforce has grown by about 7% to almost 750,000, while active-duty military personnel have been cut by roughly 8%. At the same time, dozens of military-equipment and weapons programs have been canceled, including a new Navy cruiser, a new search-and-rescue helicopter, the F-22 fifth-generation fighter, the C-17 transport aircraft, missile defense and the Marine Corps' Expeditionary Fighting Vehicle.

Yes, the war in Iraq is over -- U.S. military operations against Islamic State terrorists notwithstanding -- and Afghanistan operations are winding down. And it is true that people, uniformed and civilian, consume more than 50% of the \$496 billion defense budget and are the Pentagon's most-expensive weapon system and asset. But the ratio of military to civilian personnel is out of whack, skewed toward support versus what the Pentagon calls "tip of the spear" forces.

The decline in the size and capability of the armed forces has diminished the U.S. military's forward presence and reduced Washington's ability to shape world events and deter conflict. The remaining two Army brigades in Europe

didn't prevent Russian President Vladimir Putin from violating Ukraine's sovereignty. Nor has the Pentagon's "pivot" to Asia stopped China from establishing an air-defense identification zone, North Korea from sinking a South Korean warship, or Iran from pursuing regional hegemony.

Every dollar spent on the civilian workforce above what's needed cannot be invested in other priorities. The block of defense civilians has grown so large that the Air Force's civilian workforce is essentially at parity with the entire Air Force National Guard and Reserve combined. As for the Navy, civilians are the only employee group that has grown -- by nearly 9% -- since 2009.

Allowing the civilian workforce to grow is even more questionable in light of the deep military cuts demanded by the president. In 2010 Mr. Obama began a major initiative to identify more than \$100 billion in savings through "efficiency" over the next five years. Since then, the White House has asked that an additional \$240 billion in efficiency savings be identified.

In reality, many of these expected savings are not achievable in the time allotted, so the bill is being paid instead through reduced readiness and deferred modernization of aging ships, aircraft and vehicles across all of the armed forces. Meanwhile, the Defense Department's civilian workforce hasn't been asked to undertake any efficiency drill at the level demanded from those in uniform. Compare that with the drawdown of the 1990s when the Pentagon civilian workforce was reduced by 38% and active-duty forces by 34%.

Ashton Carter, the president's nominee to replace outgoing Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel, should make streamlining the Pentagon's civilian workforce a priority. If confirmed, Mr. Carter should implement a recent proposal by the Defense Business Board to take his predecessor's initiative to reduce the number of staff at military headquarters by 20% and apply it to the entire Defense Department. This would recoup more than \$20 billion that could then be reinvested in our fighting forces.

Pentagon leaders should make "right sizing" a priority and guide civilian-worker reductions to ensure an effective makeup of the total force. During the last sustained defense drawdown, after the Cold War, the Pentagon had poor data, relied too heavily on hiring freezes, and failed to produce a strategy for avoiding skill imbalances and other negative effects of downsizing.

The Pentagon must also find politically palatable recommendations that Congress will approve to rebuild the military while shrinking overhead. To date, the only proposal that has come close has been a new domestic base-closure round. After three years of "no" by Congress to base closures, defense officials should comprehensively review civilian manpower levels and determine where reductions would be most effective in supporting our men and women in uniform.

With rising threats and declining military superiority, it's about time Washington figured out that we can't prevent wars or win them with an army of bureaucrats.

--Ms. Eaglen is a resident fellow in the Marilyn Ware Center for Security Studies at the American Enterprise Institute, where she works on defense issues

[RETURN TO TOP](#)

25. A bleak anniversary in Egypt

Its autocratic ruler cracks down against public expression as the U.S. says nothing

Washington Post, Jan. 30, Pg. A20 | Editorial

The Egyptian regime of Abdel Fatah al-Sissi again demonstrated its violent and cynical nature last weekend, as the country marked the fourth anniversary of the popular revolution that overthrew former ruler Hosni Mubarak. More than 20 protesters were killed by police, including liberal human rights activist Shaimaa al-Sabbagh, who was shot in the back as she walked toward Cairo's Tahrir Square to lay flowers. Five witnesses who tried to give testimony about her slaying were charged with staging an illegal protest.

Despite a promise by Mr. Sissi to release journalists and young activists on the anniversary, none of the dozen journalists imprisoned by the regime - including Australian Peter Grete and Canadian Mohamed Fadel Fahmy - were freed. Nor were liberal leaders of the Jan. 25, 2011, demonstration that touched off the revolution, who have been jailed by the Sissi regime for violating a draconian anti-protest law. Nor were any of the 176 democratically elected members of parliament who remain imprisoned along with former president Mohamed Morsi.

Instead, two sons of Mr. Mubarak who were prosecuted on corruption charges after the revolution were released; charges against the former ruler have also been dismissed. Mr. Sissi himself gave a speech in which he warned Egyptians to "take care when you are demanding your rights," adding that, while "nobody is against human rights," they are not his priority.

Unfortunately, Mr. Sissi's view is shared by President Obama, who has repeatedly stated a policy of subordinating human rights concerns in Egypt to the U.S. security relationship with the regime. Last month the administration succeeded in winning congressional approval for a provision that will allow it to fully resume aid to Egypt even if the regime does not take steps to restore democracy or release political prisoners. It has already delivered Apache helicopters to Cairo that were held up in the aftermath of the July 2013 coup.

In justifying his new approach to Cuba, Mr. Obama has repeated the phrase that if a policy has failed for a half-century it should be abandoned. Yet the dismal 70-year history of U.S. support for Arab dictators, which has done much to produce the chaos now engulfing the region, does not deter the president from reembracing the policy for Mr. Sissi as well as Saudi Arabia's new King Salman, whom he courted Tuesday in Riyadh.

The White House might argue that Mr. Sissi's repression, though the most severe Egypt has known in decades, is preferable to the bloody anarchy of Syria or Libya. But by killing peaceful opponents like Ms. Sabbagh, silencing the media and jailing secular pro-democracy activists such as Jan. 25 leaders Ahmed Maher and Mohammed Adel, the regime is making it more likely that extreme groups will flourish. As it is, violence by militants who have sworn allegiance to the Islamic State has increased under Mr. Sissi's rule, as a big series of attacks in the Sinai Peninsula on Thursday demonstrated.

It's hard to foresee the future of the Arab Middle East at such a tumultuous moment, but one of the least likely outcomes is a return to stability under 1950s-style military strongmen such as Mr. Sissi. By ignoring his brutality and resuming bilateral business as usual, the Obama administration is making a bad bet.

[RETURN TO TOP](#)

26. As the Iranian Nuclear Talks Drag On, Congress Must Act

Wall Street Journal, Jan. 30, Pg. A13 | Sen. Tom Cotton (R-AR)

A nuclear-capable Iran is the gravest threat facing America today. The Obama administration's nuclear negotiations with Iran, the so-called P5+1 talks, were supposed to stop Iran's rush to a nuclear bomb. Regrettably, what began as an unwise gamble has descended into a dangerous series of unending concessions, which is why the time has come for Congress to act.

Our negotiating "partner," Iran, is not a rational or peaceful actor; it is a radical, Islamist tyranny whose constitution explicitly calls for jihad. Iran's ayatollahs have honored the call: Iran has been killing Americans for more than three decades.

In 1983 Iran helped finance and direct the bombing of the U.S. Embassy and Marine barracks in Beirut, killing hundreds of American military, diplomatic and intelligence personnel. Iran has also been implicated in the 1996 Khobar Tower bombings, which killed 19 American troops stationed in Saudi Arabia.

More recently and personally for me, Iran has been responsible for the killing and maiming of thousands of American troops in Iraq and Afghanistan. During my tour in Baghdad leading an infantry platoon, Iran supplied the most advanced, most lethal roadside bombs used against coalition forces. My soldiers and I knew that Iranian-supplied bombs were the one thing our armored vehicles couldn't withstand. All we could do was hope it wasn't our day to hit one. My platoon was lucky; too many others were not.

Iran also continues to terrorize the civilized world. It is the worst state sponsor of terrorism on the planet, according to President Obama's State Department. Iran is a lead financier and arms supplier of Hamas, Hezbollah and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, terrorist organizations dedicated to destroying Israel. Iran and its proxies also have a nasty habit of blowing up Jews around the world, from Argentina to Bulgaria to Israel.

Consider, too, what has happened in the past few weeks. Iranian-aligned Shiite militants have seized the capital of Yemen. Iran continues to prop up Bashar Assad's outlaw regime in Syria. An Iranian general was discovered near Israel's border preparing offensive operations with Hezbollah against Israel -- fortunately, he was discovered by an Israeli missile. Iran signed a new defense pact with Russia. And Iran proceeded with a sham prosecution against an American journalist held hostage there.

President Obama, citing the sensitivity of nuclear negotiations and Iran's continuing participation, has asked Congress to postpone new legislation dealing with the Iranian threat. One has to ask: If this is the cooperation that our forbearance has achieved, can America afford any more cooperation from Iran?

The answer is no. It is the nature of Iran's regime to kill Americans, export terror, destabilize the Middle East and foment world-wide Islamic revolution. If Iran commits these crimes against the West now, imagine what Iran would do with a nuclear umbrella.

Yet the nuclear negotiations have become an endless series of concessions to Iran. As it stands, American negotiators have conceded to Iran the right to enrich uranium, for which Iran has no legitimate need, much less a right. The negotiators have also conceded to Iran its plutonium-producing reactor and possession or development of thousands of advanced centrifuges. Nor are the negotiators even addressing Iran's ballistic-missile program. In return, Iran has received billions of dollars in sanctions relief.

To end this appeasement, the Senate Banking Committee on Thursday approved legislation that would impose new conditional and prospective sanctions on Iran if nuclear negotiations fail. The proposed legislation also calls for

congressional approval of any nuclear agreement. It would have been preferable never to have eased the economic sanctions on Iran to begin with, but 20 months of negotiations is more than enough time for a process that Secretary of State John Kerry once predicted would take three to six months.

Many Senate Democrats oppose the proposed legislation, agreeing with President Obama that it might cause Iran to "walk away" from negotiations. Yet sanctions brought Iran to the table in the first place. The threat of future sanctions would cause the Iranians to walk away only if that is what they planned to do all along. The regime in Tehran could easily avoid new sanctions by making a deal.

Perhaps the Obama administration isn't so much worried about the ayatollahs' delicate sensibilities as it is focused on avoiding any deadline for itself or congressional review of its actions. This makes congressional action all the more necessary. Congress must protect America from a bad deal -- anything less than Iran's complete nuclear disarmament. The U.S. cannot live with a nuclear Iran, whether it is achieved with a formal agreement or in slow motion through endless negotiations.

Some Senate Democrats claim to share the goal of stopping a nuclear-armed Iran. They will now have their chance to prove it when this new legislation comes to the Senate floor in a few weeks.

--Mr. Cotton, a Republican, is a U.S. Senator from Arkansas and a member of the Senate Banking and Intelligence committees

[RETURN TO TOP](#)

27. Congress and the use of force

It's past time for lawmakers to vote on President Obama's war against Islamic State

Los Angeles Times, Jan. 30, Pg. A22 | Editorial

A puzzling aspect of President Obama's war against Islamic State, a military campaign that is now almost six months old, is his attitude toward congressional approval for the mission.

In a speech in September, Obama insisted that he already possessed all the legal authority he needed to launch airstrikes against the group in Iraq and Syria, though he added vaguely: "I welcome congressional support for this effort." But in his State of the Union address, he shifted gears and called on Congress "to show the world that we are united in this mission" by passing a resolution to authorize the use of force against Islamic State.

Yet the White House hasn't provided Congress with language for such a resolution (saying it wants to get input from Congress first). Nor has it enunciated a clear position on what should happen to two previous Authorizations for Use of Military Force that it has unconvincingly cited as justification for the war against Islamic State.

Faced with the administration's passive-aggressive attitude, Congress should exercise its constitutional responsibility by authorizing and placing limits on that war. A bill introduced this week by Rep. Adam B. Schiff (D-Burbank), similar to one he proposed in the last Congress, does both.

The Schiff resolution would authorize military action against Islamic State for three years, but only in Iraq and Syria. Military action could not include the deployment of "ground forces in a combat role," though military advisors and special operations forces would be allowed. That retroactively ratifies Obama's decision to send 3,000 advisors to Iraq.

Schiff's bill also would immediately repeal the 2002 resolution allowing military action against Iraq (the authorization for President George W. Bush's invasion of that country) and would sunset after three years the 2001 resolution authorizing force against the planners of the Sept. 11 attacks. The latter has proved particularly malleable, serving as the Obama administration's legal justification for actions against a variety of militant groups as well as the targeted killing in Yemen of Anwar Awlaki, a U.S. citizen.

Given the liberties the Bush and Obama administrations have taken with the existing congressional authorizations, Schiff is right to include time limits and to codify Obama's insistence that he doesn't intend to commit "boots on the ground" to this conflict. Nothing prevents Obama or his successors from seeking additional authority later.

Even without the deployment of ground forces, the U.S. is embarked on a large-scale and long-term military campaign to "degrade and ultimately destroy" Islamic State. It's unconscionable that Congress has not yet voted on this commitment. It must expeditiously do so, with or without a script from the White House.

[RETURN TO TOP](#)

28. Being Who We Are

New York Times, Jan. 30, Pg. A27 | David Brooks

In the middle of 2013, the United States began supporting moderate rebels in Syria. We gave them just enough support to betray them.

As Adam Entous reported in The Wall Street Journal earlier this week, we promised the fighters support but then never had the will to follow through. The C.I.A. gave the rebels just 5 percent to 20 percent of the arms they requested. One trusted commander asked for more than a thousand rifles and received fewer than 36. One commander got the equivalent of 16 bullets a month per fighter. The rebels captured dozens of tanks, but the C.I.A. wouldn't provide cash for fuel or shells so the tanks just sat there.

The rebels asked the C.I.A. for ammunition to take advantage of temporary opportunities, but the C.I.A. sometimes took two weeks to decide. The U.S. gave the rebels money to pay their troops, but they only gave them \$100 to \$150 for each fighter per month. The Islamic State paid its fighters twice that.

The C.I.A. was terrified that the arms it supplied would fall into enemy hands so it maintained paralyzingly tight controls on sophisticated weaponry. Trusted commanders had to film their use of anti-tank missiles. They had to hand over spent missile launchers at a spot along the border to qualify for resupply.

"We walk around Syria with a huge American flag planted on our backs, but we don't have enough AK-47s in our hands to protect ourselves," one fighter told American lawmakers.

"Why did you give us hope if you were not going to do anything about it?" another asked.

"We thought going with the Americans was going with the big guns," another leader declared at a meeting. "It was a losing bet."

The whole Wall Street Journal report gives the impression that the Islamic State not only has more resolve than the U.S. and its intelligence agencies, it has faster and more competent leadership.

The betrayal of the rebels in 2013 and 2014 is only a small betrayal, compared with the betrayal of values that might be unintentionally happening now. It appears as though the U.S. is backing off in its opposition to Bashar al-Assad, the mass murderer whose barbaric regime is a prime cause of instability in that part of the world. In our effort to stop the Islamic State, in the hopes of smoothing the Iranian nuclear talks, we may have entered a de facto alliance with Assad.

Now, Syria is obviously a viper's pit in a region where the choices normally range from the appalling to the horrendous. But there are ways to approach problems in this region, and there are ways not to.

The way not to approach the Middle East is as a chessboard on which the grandmasters of American foreign policy can impose their designs. This is the sort of overconfident thinking that leads policy makers to squander moral authority by vowing to destroy Assad one month and then effectively buttressing him the next. This is the sort of overconfident thinking that leads to too-clever calibration of our support for the moderate rebels -- giving them enough support to give the illusion of doing something real, while not actually giving enough to do any good.

The Middle East is not a chessboard we have the power to manipulate. It is a generational drama in which we can only play our role. It is a drama over ideas, a contest between the forces of jihadism and the forces of pluralism. We can't know how this drama will play out, and we can't direct it. We can only promote pluralism -- steadily, consistently, simply.

Sticking to our values means maintaining a simple posture of support for people who share them and a simple posture of opposition to those who oppose them. It means offering at least some reliable financial support to moderate fighters and activists even when their prospects look dim. It means avoiding cynical alliances, at least as much as possible. It means using bombing campaigns to try to prevent mass slaughter.

If we do that then we will fortify people we don't know in ways we can't imagine. Over the long term, we'll make the Middle East slightly more fertile for moderation, which is the only influence we realistically have. Ideas drive history.

Right now there is bipartisan inconsistency over the effectiveness of government. Republicans think government is a bumbling tool at home but a magnificent instrument abroad. Democrats think government is a magnificent instrument at home but a bumbling tool abroad. In reality, government is best when it chooses the steady simple thing over the complex clever thing. When you don't know the future and can't control events, bet on people. Support the good, oppose the bad.

Realist half-commitments that undermine our allies and too-clever games that buttress our foes will only backfire -- and lead to betrayals that make us feel ashamed.

[RETURN TO TOP](#)

29. Ukraine needs the West's help now

Washington Post, Jan. 30, Pg. A19 | Steven Pifer and Strobe Talbott

The new year has brought more misery to Ukraine. Separatist fighters, supported by Russian troops, have launched attacks in Donetsk and Luhansk. Diplomatic efforts have made no progress toward a settlement - or even toward firming up a cease-fire that has all but collapsed. The West, including the United States, needs to get serious about

assisting Ukraine if it does not wish to see the situation deteriorate further. That means committing real money now to aid Ukraine's defense.

Following the intervention by regular Russian army units in eastern Ukraine in August, a cease-fire was hammered out in Minsk on Sept. 5. Observance of the cease-fire terms has been piecemeal at best, with regular shelling across the line of contact.

After a December lull, fighting picked up again this month. The leader of the so-called Donetsk People's Republic recently said he will take all of Donetsk. The next day, separatists, possibly augmented by Russian troops, rocketed the city of Mariupol, killing some 30 civilians.

Moscow has done nothing to promote a peaceful settlement. It did not withdraw its weapons, nor did it secure the Ukraine-Russia border, as it agreed to do in Minsk. Russian President Vladimir Putin continues to deny that his forces fight in Ukraine - even as Russian television shows soldiers in action wearing Russian insignia.

By all appearances, the Kremlin seeks to keep the conflict simmering to pressure and destabilize the Ukrainian government.

For the West, this issue goes beyond Ukraine. Russia has torn up the rule book that maintained peace, stability and security in Europe for almost 70 years, and it has now used force to change borders. If the West does not push back, it could face challenges, even armed challenges, from Russia elsewhere that will require far more costly responses.

To date, the United States and European Union have responded to Russia's aggression with economic sanctions. These have inflicted serious damage on the Russian economy but have not yet achieved their political goal: turning Moscow toward a genuine negotiated settlement.

The United States has also provided military assistance to Kiev. But it amounts thus far to only \$120 million and has been limited to nonlethal aid.

Washington needs to do more to get Russia to change course. That means giving the Ukrainian military sufficient means to make further aggression so costly that Putin and the Russian army are deterred from escalating the fight.

Eight former U.S. national security practitioners - the two of us, plus former U.S. representative to NATO Ivo Daalder, former undersecretary of defense Michèle Flournoy, former U.S. ambassador to Ukraine John Herbst, former deputy undersecretary of defense Jan Lodol, former NATO European commander James Stavridis and former U.S. European Command deputy commander Charles Wald - have come together to issue the following recommendations for immediate action. (They will be released Monday in a report called "Preserving Ukraine's Independence, Resisting Russian Aggression: What the United States and NATO Must Do.")

First, the White House and Congress must commit serious money to Ukraine's defense: \$1 billion in military assistance this fiscal year, followed by an additional \$1 billion each in fiscal year 2016 and 2017. Congress should not only authorize assistance, as it did in the Ukraine Freedom Support Act last year, but also appropriate funds.

Second, the U.S. government should alter its policy and begin providing lethal assistance to Ukraine. To be sure, most of the above funds would go to nonlethal assistance. For example, the Ukrainian army desperately needs

counter-battery radars to pinpoint the source of enemy rocket and artillery fire, which cause about 70 percent of Ukrainian casualties.

But the Ukrainians also need some defensive arms, particularly light anti-armor weapons. The antitank missiles in the Ukrainian inventory are more than 20 years old, and a large proportion of them do not work. U.S. anti-armor weapons could fill a crucial gap.

Third, the U.S. government should approach other NATO member states about assisting Ukraine, particularly those countries that operate former Soviet equipment and weapons systems compatible with Ukraine's hardware. If the United States moves to provide lethal assistance, we believe that some other NATO countries will do so as well.

Time is urgent. Spring arrives in three months in eastern Ukraine, and fighting could then achieve new intensity. We should help the Ukrainians deter that.

--Steven Pifer, who was U.S. ambassador to Ukraine from 1998 to 2000, is a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution. Strobe Talbott, who was deputy secretary of state from 1994 to 2001, is president of the institution

[RETURN TO TOP](#)

30. A Huge Victory for Homeless Veterans

New York Times, Jan. 30, Pg. A26 | Editorial

The Veterans Affairs Department is going to provide housing for disabled homeless veterans on the vast property it owns in Los Angeles. On Wednesday, it announced an agreement with plaintiffs in a lawsuit "that restores the West Los Angeles V.A. campus to serving veterans in need," by housing them there, and by ending the practice of leasing parts of the 387-acre property to outside parties in deals "that do not meet the goal of serving veterans."

Which raises two obvious questions: Isn't serving veterans the main -- the only -- purpose of the V.A.? Why did it have to be sued to do its job?

To which there is one obvious answer: Somewhere along the way, the department lost sight of its mission. The interests of wounded, destitute veterans came into conflict with those of people in Los Angeles who have power and money. The land went to corporate leaseholders, to other, apparently more urgent, commercial and civic needs -- to baseball diamonds, theater stages, hotel laundries, rental car and bus storage, even oil wells and a dog park.

The homeless, meanwhile, went to sidewalks and highway underpasses.

This was the way it had been for many years. Los Angeles has long had the largest population of homeless veterans in the country, and also one of the country's largest V.A. medical centers. But nowhere on that property was there any permanent housing to help veterans leave the streets for good. That this deplorable situation was tolerated for so long reflects the failure of the area's elected officials. Its powerful congressional delegation and V.A. officials proclaimed their support for the veterans but never managed to do right by them.

Much credit goes to Secretary of Veterans Affairs Robert McDonald, barely six months on the job, for recognizing that the Los Angeles debacle could and should be remedied quickly. He listened to the plaintiffs' lawyer Ron Olson and to Bobby Shriver, the former mayor of Santa Monica, who has pressed this issue for years, and embraced the

once radical-sounding idea that the sickest and most troubled veterans need "housing first" to receive services they deserve but cannot get without a roof and a bed.

Credit Mr. McDonald, too, for agreeing to appoint a "homeless czar" to report directly to him, so this urgent mission does not get swallowed by the agency's dead-end bureaucracy. The ambitious agreement commits the V.A. to having, by mid-February, an "action plan" on ending homelessness in Los Angeles, and to completing, by October, a new master plan for the site.

Mr. McDonald's predecessor committed the V.A. to an ambitious plan to end veterans' homelessness by the end of this year. That won't happen unless the V.A. solves Los Angeles. Mr. McDonald has just given his department a swift kick in the right direction.

[RETURN TO TOP](#)