



AS OF 0530 HOURS, FEBRUARY 1

**OVERVIEW**

A new ISIL video released Saturday purportedly shows the beheading of Japanese journalist Kenji Goto, an act Secretary Chuck Hagel said reinforces the global coalition's "commitment to degrade and ultimately destroy" the extremist group. Separately, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that recent coalition airstrikes near Mosul have helped sever key ISIL supply routes from Syria, and in coordination with Iraqi Kurdish ground forces, pushed back the militants' defensive line west of the city. Also of note, a *New York Times* Page One story said a growing number of Afghans – frustrated by government corruption and Western-inspired legal code – are turning to an informal justice system administered by Taliban insurgents.

**NEWS HEADLINES AT 0500**

- Jordan says still ready for swap with Islamic State to release pilot
- North Korea says U.S. rejects invitation to Pyongyang
- Boko Haram launches new assault on key Nigeria city Maiduguri
- Two U.S. defense contractors wounded in Saudi shooting
- Major winter storm to slam the Midwest then move east
- Patriots' Brady seeks fourth Super Bowl title as Seahawks target repeat
- Aaron Rodgers wins 2014 NFL MVP award

**OVERSEAS HEADLINES OF NOTE**

- *South China Morning Post*: U.S. agencies seem to differ over Japanese South China Sea air patrols
- *Sputnik*: North Korea stages exercise targeting imaginary U.S. 'imperialist carrier'
- *Xinhua*: Over 40 al-Shabaab militants killed in airstrike in Somalia – official

**THIS DAY IN MILITARY HISTORY**

- 1943 – Japanese forces on Guadalcanal Island, defeated by U.S. Marines, begin their withdraw after the Emperor of Japan finally gives them permission

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*New York Times, Feb. 1, Pg. A6 | Rod Nordland*

The Islamic State claimed to have beheaded a Japanese journalist in a video released Saturday night, the culmination of a two-week-long drama that appears to have cost the lives of two Japanese men.

**2. Obama condemns Japanese hostage's 'heinous murder'**

*Agence France-Presse, Jan. 31 | Not Attributed*

President Barack Obama condemned Saturday the "heinous murder" of a Japanese hostage after the Islamic State group released a video purportedly showing his beheading. "The United States condemns the heinous murder of Japanese citizen and journalist Kenji Goto by the terrorist group ISIL," Obama said in a statement, using an acronym by which the IS group is known.

**3. A perilous plan to evict Islamic State**

*Los Angeles Times, Feb. 1, Pg. A1 | W.J. Hennigan*

Working from this sun-scorched desert base, U.S. and allied commanders are beginning perhaps the most perilous phase of their fight against Islamic State: an attempt to recapture Mosul, Iraq's second-largest city, from the entrenched militant forces.

**4. Taliban Justice Gains Favor As Official Afghan Courts Fail**

*New York Times, Feb. 1, Pg. A1 | Azam Ahmed*

Frustrated by Western-inspired legal codes and a government court system widely seen as corrupt, many Afghans think that the militants' quick and tradition-rooted rulings are their best hope for justice. In the Pakistani cities of Quetta and Chaman, havens for exiled Taliban figures, local residents describe long lines of Afghans waiting to see judges.

## IRAQ/SYRIA

**5. Kurds retake oil facility in north Iraq, 15 workers still missing**

*Reuters, Jan. 31 | Mustafa Mahmoud*

Kurdish peshmerga forces retook a small crude oil station near the northern Iraqi city of Kirkuk which Islamic State insurgents seized earlier on Saturday, but the fate of 15 employees remained unclear.

**6. Western-backed rebels join Aleppo alliance – Syria monitor**

*Reuters, Jan. 31 | Sylvia Westall*

A Western-backed rebel group in northern Syria that is under pressure from al Qaeda's hardline Nusra Front has joined an alliance of mainly Islamist insurgent factions in Aleppo, a group monitoring the conflict said on Saturday.

**7. U.S. general says Syrian town of Kobani taken from Islamic State**

*Reuters, Jan. 31 | Mohammad Zargham*

Kurdish ground forces, helped by U.S. and allied air support, have retaken the Syrian town of Kobani from Islamic State militants, U.S. Lieutenant-General James Terry said on Saturday.

**8. Islamic State fighters admit defeat in Syrian town of Kobani**

*Associated Press, Jan. 31 | Bassem Mroué*

The Islamic State group has acknowledged for the first time that its fighters have been defeated in the Syrian town of Kobani and vowed to attack the town again.

**9. Destroyed, riddled with unexploded bombs, no power and no sanitation. But the people of Kobani dare to dream of a new start**

*The Observer (UK), Feb. 1, Pg. 2 | Emma Graham-Harrison*

The concrete eagle in what used to be Freedom Square still surveys Kobani imperiously. But around it almost nothing stands. Buildings have vanished during months of heavy shelling, replaced by snarls of steel and rubble, and the yawning craters left by US air strikes.

## **MIDEAST**

### **10. Suspected U.S. drone strike kills al Qaeda militants in Yemen**

*Reuters, Jan. 31 | Mohammed Mukhashaf*

A suspected U.S. drone strike on a car in Yemen killed three men believed to be al Qaeda militants on Saturday and possibly another drone crashed in a different part of the country, residents said.

### **11. Yemen president refuses to reconsider resignation**

*Associated Press, Jan. 31 | Ahmed Al-Haj*

Yemen's president will not reconsider his resignation, despite pressure for him to do so by rebels who control the capital and who he says are holding him "at gunpoint," an official close to him said Saturday.

### **12. Shadow war could intensify after report on Mughniyah**

*Washington Post, Feb. 1, Pg. A9 | Hugh Naylor*

The revelation that the CIA cooperated with Israel's Mossad spy agency in the killing of Hezbollah military commander Imad Mughniyah in 2008 is poised to intensify a shadow war with the militant Lebanese group that could involve retaliation against U.S. interests around the world, analysts said.

### **13. Tribal Loyalties Drive Jordan's Effort to Free Pilot**

*New York Times, Feb. 1, Pg. A6 | Rod Nordland and Ranya Kadri*

It is often said that in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan all politics is tribal. That goes a long way toward explaining the country's reaction to the hostage crisis involving a Royal Jordanian Air Force pilot and a Japanese journalist, including Jordan's offer to free an extremist on death row and willingness to look the other way when protesters disparaged the king in the presence of his powerful intelligence service.

### **14. Sisi Blames Brotherhood for Bombings in Sinai**

*New York Times, Feb. 1, Pg. A6 | David D. Kirkpatrick*

President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi on Saturday blamed the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood for bombings that killed at least 30 people in the North Sinai two days earlier, and declared that Egypt was "fighting the strongest secret organization" in the world.

## **AFGHANISTAN/PAKISTAN**

### **15. Afghan police clash with protesters**

*Washington Post, Feb. 1, Pg. A11 | Sudarsan Raghavan*

Police clashed with protesters at a demonstration here Saturday against the French satirical newspaper Charlie Hebdo, injuring at least two dozen people, said Afghan police officials and witnesses.

## **UKRAINE/RUSSIA**

**16. Ukrainian troops trapped, foes say**

*Los Angeles Times, Feb. 1, Pg. A3 | Victoria Butenko and Sergei L. Loiko*

Pro-Russia separatists claimed Saturday that they had trapped thousands of Ukrainian government troops in the course of fierce fighting in Ukraine's troubled east.

**EUROPE**

**17. Clashes Intensify Between Armenia and Azerbaijan Over Disputed Land**

*New York Times, Feb. 1, Pg. A10 | David M. Herszenhorn*

Overshadowed by the fighting in Ukraine, another armed conflict in the former Soviet Union -- between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh -- has escalated with deadly ferocity in recent months, killing dozens of soldiers on each side and pushing the countries perilously close to open war.

**ASIA/PACIFIC**

**18. U.S., South Korea diverge on paths toward North**

*Washington Post, Feb. 1, Pg. A12 | Anna Fifield*

Differences between the United States and South Korea over their approach to North Korea are becoming increasingly apparent, and Seoul's interest in exploring renewed contacts with its estranged Communist sibling could call into question the likely success of the Obama administration's harder line.

**AFRICA**

**19. Chadian jets bomb Nigerian town in anti-Boko Haram raid -- sources**

*Agence France-Presse, Jan. 31 | Not Attributed*

Chadian aircraft on Saturday bombed the Nigerian town of Gamboru in a raid targeting extremist group Boko Haram, security sources said, as regional efforts to combat the Islamists intensified.

**DEFENSE DEPARTMENT**

**20. Pile of daunting challenges ahead for next defense secretary**

*Associated Press, Jan. 31 | Robert Burns and Lolita C. Baldor*

As defense secretary, Ashton Carter would face a daunting pile of problems at home and abroad. And then there are the unforeseen crises, the ones that explode onto a Pentagon chief's agenda without warning.

**AIR FORCE**

**21. Tester seeks safer vehicles at Malmstrom**

*Great Falls Tribune (MT), Jan. 31, Pg. A1 | Jenn Rowell*

As budgets are tightening and changes are being implemented within the U.S. nuclear force, including at Malmstrom Air Force Base, Sen. Jon Tester, D-Mont., sent a letter to Secretary of the Air Force Deborah Lee James asking that she keep a few things in mind.

**22. Runway overhaul to begin at DAFB**

*Delaware State News (Dover, DE), Jan. 31, Pg. A1 | Craig Anderson*

Years in the making, the time for critical renovations to a Dover Air Force Base runway is nearly here. On Monday preliminary improvements begin for the \$98.3 million rebuild of a slowly decaying landing strip that's been an issue since 2005, officials said Friday when they met civilian contractors tasked with the project. Col. Michael Grismer said about giving new life to the north-south Runway 01-19: "The customer you're serving here is not just Dover Air Force Base and (its aircraft) but the Department of Defense. "This is a key hub of logistics for the Department of Defense. We are embarking on something that's pretty significant ..."

## ARMY

### **23. Exoneration sought for ex-Army officer**

*Washington Post, Feb. 1, Pg. A12 | T. Rees Shapiro*

Every morning, Clint Lorance wakes up in his Army-issued prison cell at Fort Leavenworth, Kan., and looks at a photo of two dead Afghan men. To this day, the former first lieutenant does not know their names, but he knows he is responsible for their deaths.

## NAVY

### **24. NCIS probes alleged illegal filming in women's bathroom on carrier John C. Stennis**

*NavyTimes.com, Jan. 31 | David Larter and Mark D. Faram*

A lieutenant embarked for training on board the Bremerton, Washington-based carrier John C. Stennis is under investigation for allegedly trying to videotape women inside the female officers' bathroom. It is the second investigation in the past two months into Navy personnel allegedly attempting to tape women in the bathroom while underway.

## NOTABLE COMMENTARY

### **25. Retroactively Authorizing War**

*New York Times, Feb. 1, Pg. SR8 | Editorial*

They went largely unnoticed, four words President Obama ad-libbed during the State of the Union address last month as he asked lawmakers to provide legal cover for America's military intervention in Iraq and Syria. "We need that authority," the president said, adding a line to the prepared remarks on his teleprompter that seemed to acknowledge a reality about which his administration has been inexcusably dishonest.

### **26. I met Assad. He's too delusional to make peace.**

*Washington Post, Feb. 1, Pg. B1 | Jonathan Tepperman*

In recent weeks, Western governments have begun subtly shifting their positions on Syria. The Obama administration seems to have quietly dropped its demand that President Bashar al-Assad resign as a precondition of peace talks. Instead, reports suggest it has embraced proposals that would allow Assad to be part of an interim deal. The new approach implies that the White House and its allies believe that the Syrian president might be open to a compromise that could end his country's four-year civil war.

### **27. How to get past talking with Iran**

*Washington Post, Feb. 1, Pg. A15 | Michael Singh*



If only the United States negotiated as ruthlessly with Iran as it does with itself. The interim nuclear accord - formally the Joint Plan of Action (JPOA) - between Iran and the United States and its five negotiating partners (known as the P5+1) offers moderate benefits to both sides: It limits Iran's nuclear activities in certain respects, while giving Iran time and space for economic recovery. Given these benefits, both sides appear to view the JPOA as essentially their second-best option - not as good as a final accord on terms they prefer but better than the escalating crisis it replaced.

**28. They're as vicious as ISIS. Why don't we care?**

*Washington Post, Feb. 1, Pg. B3 | Charlotte Lytton*

Americans are obsessed with the Islamic State. Yet the African Islamists of Boko Haram are just as deadly as their Middle Eastern counterparts. And few Americans are paying attention.

**29. Take back the budget**

*Washington Post, Feb. 1, Pg. A16 | Editorial*

There are few fans of the automatic, across-the-board spending limitations that prevail over roughly \$1 trillion in annual federal spending. Nor should there be. If to govern is to choose, then "sequestration," as these mandatory caps are known, is the antithesis of government. Moreover, sequestration allocates the pain 50-50 between all domestic discretionary programs on the one hand and the defense budget on the other. So it embodies a falsely precise equivalence between the two, regardless of circumstances at home and abroad.

**30. The next American century**

*Washington Post, Feb. 1, Pg. A15 | Gen. David H. Petraeus (Ret.) and Michael E. O'Hanlon*

Short-term economic trends in the United States are encouraging. Unemployment is down, growth is up, deficits are less than half what they were during the "Great Recession," gas prices have plummeted, citizens have "deleveraged" their debt considerably and consumer sentiment is very positive. For many, however, these realities are merely a soothing veneer over a troubled picture. They see America in decline, the middle class adrift, the world in shambles and political acrimony more entrenched than ever over issues ranging from immigration and U.S. policy on Iran and Cuba to taxes and health care. This pessimism is not limited to the home front. With major U.S. allies in Europe and East Asia enduring sustained economic malaise, worrisome demographics and declining power, many believe the Western world is in retreat.

## TOP STORIES

**1. ISIS Says It Has Killed Second Japanese Hostage**

New York Times, Feb. 1, Pg. A6 | Rod Nordland

AMMAN, Jordan -- The Islamic State claimed to have beheaded a Japanese journalist in a video released Saturday night, the culmination of a two-week-long drama that appears to have cost the lives of two Japanese men.

The video of the killing of the journalist, Kenji Goto, came two days after a deadline set by the extremist group expired, and the Jordanian government did not give in to its demand that a convicted would-be suicide bomber be exchanged for Mr. Goto's life.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, reacting to the release of the video, said Sunday that Japan would not give in to terrorism. President Obama issued a statement in which he said the United States "condemns the heinous murder" of Mr. Goto, whom he described as a courageous journalist.

Left unclear by the video, which was posted on a Twitter account associated with the Islamic State's media organization, Al Furqan, was the fate of a Jordanian pilot, whom the extremists also threatened to kill if Jordan did not release the would-be bomber, Sajida al-Rishawi. Japan had not yet authenticated the video. Jordan did not publicly comment.

Jordan had agreed to release Ms. Rishawi only if the extremists provided proof that the pilot, First Lt. Moaz al-Kasasbeh, was still alive. He was shot down over Syria on Dec. 24 during airstrikes on the Islamic State.

The 67-second video released Saturday showed Mr. Goto in an orange jumpsuit kneeling while a black-masked extremist, who appeared to be the man known as Jihadi John because of his British-accented English, blamed Mr. Abe for Mr. Goto's fate.

"Abe, because of your reckless decision to take part in an unwinnable war, this knife will not only slaughter Kenji, but will also carry on and cause carnage wherever your people are found," the extremist said. "So let the nightmare for Japan begin." He then began cutting Mr. Goto's neck, but the screen went black, and then showed a still shot of his apparently decapitated body, hands still handcuffed behind his back, and with his severed head placed on top.

Mr. Abe had promised \$200 million in nonlethal aid to countries fighting the Islamic State, also known as ISIS or ISIL. Speaking to reporters in Tokyo early Sunday morning, Mr. Abe said Japan would not back down from its policy.

"We will increase our humanitarian aid, including food and medical support," he said. "Japan will resolutely fulfill its responsibility to the international community in the fight against terrorism."

The extremists had produced a photograph showing the other Japanese hostage, Haruna Yukawa, also beheaded, a week before. The extremists had demanded \$200 million to release both men, but after a previous ultimatum expired, they said they had killed Mr. Yukawa. Then they changed their demand to a swap of Ms. Rishawi for Mr. Goto.

While there was widespread support in Jordan for a swap, officials insisted that they wanted their pilot released as well, or at least wanted to see evidence that he was still alive before they would release Ms. Rishawi, who was convicted for her role in a series of bombings of hotels in Amman that killed at least 57 people in 2005.

The video of Mr. Goto's apparent execution began with the extremist brandishing a knife toward the camera, while Mr. Goto knelt and stared calmly at the camera, closing his eyes just before the knife was drawn across his throat. They appeared to be in a dry streambed.

"To the Japanese government," the killer said, "You, like your foolish allies in the satanic coalition, have yet to understand that we by Allah's grace are the Islamic caliphate, with authority and power. An entire army thirsty for your blood."

The top Japanese government spokesman, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga, called the killing "a terrorist act of extreme brutality." Live television coverage in Japan showed officials rushing into the prime minister's office soon after the video was posted.

Bernadette Meehan, a spokeswoman for the United States National Security Council, said American authorities were working to confirm the authenticity of the video, and called for the release of all remaining hostages.

The Islamic State message released Sunday was uploaded with a second video, which purports to show the beheading of a man the extremists said was an intelligence agent working for Jordan in Syria.

Mr. Goto, 47, was known as a respected journalist and the author of five books who knew his way around conflict zones after having spent more than two decades covering them as a freelance television cameraman. He appeared drawn to Syria and Iraq by a lifelong idealistic zeal to cover the plight of the weak, particularly refugee children.

He was apparently captured by the militants in late October when he crossed into territory held by the Islamic State, which has taken over large swaths of Iraq and Syria, in a bid to win the freedom of Mr. Yukawa. They met in April after Mr. Goto helped negotiate Mr. Yukawa's release from detention by the rebel Free Syrian Army during an earlier trip into Syria.

"My son's final act was to go to Syria to help a fellow Japanese," Mr. Goto's mother, Junko Ishido, said Sunday. "Please understand his kindness and courage."

*--Mohammad Ghannam contributed reporting from Beirut, Martin Fackler from Tokyo, and Rukmini Callimachi from New York*

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## **2. Obama condemns Japanese hostage's 'heinous murder'**

Agence France-Presse, Jan. 31 | Not Attributed

President Barack Obama condemned Saturday the "heinous murder" of a Japanese hostage after the Islamic State group released a video purportedly showing his beheading.

"The United States condemns the heinous murder of Japanese citizen and journalist Kenji Goto by the terrorist group ISIL," Obama said in a statement, using an acronym by which the IS group is known.

"Through his reporting, Mr Goto courageously sought to convey the plight of the Syrian people to the outside world."

The claim was made in a video released online that included no mention of a Jordanian pilot also being held by IS, whom the jihadist group has also threatened to kill.

Japanese journalist Kenji Goto is seen kneeling next to a standing masked man who speaks with a British accent and blames the Japanese government for his "slaughter."



He was the second Japanese hostage beheaded by IS, after the group claimed responsibility last week for the killing of self-described contractor Haruna Yukawa, after the expiration of a 72-hour deadline during which the jihadists had asked Tokyo to pay a \$200 million ransom.

"Our thoughts are with Mr Goto's family and loved ones, and we stand today in solidarity with Prime Minister Abe and the Japanese people in denouncing this barbaric act," Obama said.

"We applaud Japan's steadfast commitment to advancing peace and prosperity in the Middle East and globally, including its generous assistance for innocent people affected by the conflicts in the region."

The apparent execution came after Japan said negotiations to win Goto's release in a prisoner exchange had stalled.

The IS group had vowed to kill Goto and Jordanian pilot Maaz al-Kassasbeh by sunset Thursday unless Amman handed over an Iraqi female jihadist.

White House National Security Council spokeswoman Bernadette Meehan said earlier that the United States was working to confirm the video's authenticity.

"Standing together with a broad coalition of allies and partners, the United States will continue taking decisive action to degrade and ultimately destroy ISIL," Obama vowed.

His Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel said Goto's execution, along with that of Yukawa, "reminds the world of the threat we confront in the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, while it reinforces our global coalition's commitment to degrade and ultimately destroy ISIL."

"The United States and its military will continue to stand alongside our Japanese allies, and we send our thoughts and prayers to Mr Goto's loved ones and all the people of Japan," Hagel added.

Secretary of State John Kerry also spoke out, condemning what he described as Goto's "barbaric killing."

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### **3. A perilous plan to evict Islamic State**

***Stakes are high as U.S. and allies weigh tactics to retake the Iraqi town of Mosul***

Los Angeles Times, Feb. 1, Pg. A1 | W.J. Hennigan

Working from this sun-scorched desert base, U.S. and allied commanders are beginning perhaps the most perilous phase of their fight against Islamic State: an attempt to recapture Mosul, Iraq's second-largest city, from the entrenched militant forces.

Military officers here say a barrage of airstrikes over the last two weeks helped sever two crucial routes that the extremist militants used to funnel fighters and supplies from the Syrian border to Mosul, their self-declared capital in Iraq and most significant battlefield prize.

U.S. commanders who help oversee the air war say the joint offensive with Iraqi Kurdish ground forces pushed back the Sunni Islamists' defensive line west of Mosul, recapturing territory and removing a key obstacle, at least for now, as military planners consider tactics for retaking the congested city as early as this summer.

American and allied advisors are training and equipping Iraqi security forces expected to lead any major ground assault. But options appear limited given the woeful state of Iraq's army, White House resistance to any plan likely to cause heavy civilian casualties, and at least some support in the Sunni-dominated city for the occupying force.

Although President Obama has repeatedly vowed not to reintroduce U.S. ground troops to Iraq, Gen. Martin Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told Congress in November that he would consider deploying a limited number of U.S. Special Forces to help direct airstrikes and assist the Iraqi army in any assault on Mosul.

Retaking the sprawling city, home to about 1.4 million people, almost certainly would require urban combat against a tenacious foe.

"Fighting inside a city like that will definitely not be easy, going street by street, house to house," said Ferhang Asandi, a Kurdish military officer. Islamic State militants are "trying to put all their effort and their fight in anticipation of the battle because they know that if Mosul is done it means the end" of a major source of prestige and recruitment.

The stakes are equally high for Iraqi Prime Minister Haider Abadi's fragile government in Baghdad, which has struggled to rebuild its army since entire divisions collapsed before the insurgent onslaught last year. Another military defeat at Mosul would undermine government authority and shift the momentum back to Islamic State.

"There is no way to create any form of unified or stable Iraq as long as Mosul is in hostile hands," said Anthony Cordesman, a senior military analyst at the nonpartisan Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington. "Lesser victories are only a prelude to retaking Mosul."

Warplanes from the U.S.-led coalition have dropped more than 6,000 bombs on Islamic State positions in Iraq and Syria since August. Combined with attacks by Iraqi government forces, Kurdish fighters and Sunni Arab tribesmen who oppose the Islamist group, the campaign has stopped the militants from seizing much new territory and pushed them back in several areas.

In the last week, Kurdish fighters backed by hundreds of coalition airstrikes broke a four-month Islamist State siege on Kobani, a Syrian town on the border with Turkey.

In Iraq, pro-government Shiite militias claimed they had taken "complete control" of Diyala province, northeast of Baghdad, after seven months of fighting the Sunni extremists.

But Islamic State has not been dislodged from any of the cities that it captured during its blitz last year.

Mosul fell quickly in June when convoys of heavily armed Islamic State fighters waving black flags stormed out of neighboring Syria and overran much of western and northern Iraq.

Declaring an Islamic caliphate, the insurgents used the city to launch an offensive that pushed nearly 250 miles south to the edge of Baghdad before government forces and Shiite militias rallied to stop them.

Many residents of Mosul, who faced discrimination from the Shiite-dominated central government and military, initially welcomed the Sunni invaders. The militants seized vast arsenals of U.S.-supplied arms and munitions and hundreds of armored vehicles from fleeing government troops.

In the deadliest single battle after the 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, U.S. Marines fought for six weeks in late 2004 to oust entrenched Sunni insurgents from Fallouja, a city less than a third the size of Mosul. The battle saw the heaviest urban combat for the U.S. military since Vietnam. More than 90 Americans were killed and nearly 600 were wounded. Fallouja fell to Islamic State fighters early last year.

A battle in Mosul could be a tougher fight.

Kurdish officials say the militants already have reinforced their fighters, blocked roads and blown up a key bridge on the city's western edge to augment their defenses. They also have forged alliances with former Iraqi military officers and local Sunni officials who supported autocrat Saddam Hussein before he was toppled in the 2003 invasion.

"We've received information that they are creating fortifications, digging trenches around the city," said Jabar Yawar, spokesman for the Kurdish armed forces in Irbil, capital of the semiautonomous Kurdish region in Iraq. "Also in every area they control, it is their custom to put bombs and booby traps."

An attacking force would need supporters or informants in the city for intelligence on the insurgents' positions and defenses. Although many Mosul residents complain of harsh edicts enforced by the extremists and shortages of basic commodities, the discontent does not appear close to a popular revolt.

For now, Iraq's security forces are concentrated on protecting Baghdad and surrounding areas.

In December, heavy clashes were reported west of the capital in Ramadi, capital of Sunni-dominated Anbar province. Photos posted by the militants showed their fighters using captured armored personnel carriers and firing rocket-propelled grenades in what appeared to be street-to-street fighting.

Iraqi Kurdish fighters known as peshmerga are far closer to Mosul. Starting on Jan. 21, they launched an offensive on both sides of the Tigris River north of the city and seized a strategic junction at Kiske on an east-west highway that links Mosul to the Islamist State-held towns of Tall Afar, Sinjar and the Syrian border.

The Kurds worked with the U.S. Air Force and other military strategists here at Al Udeid, the command post for the air war. After consulting on an attack plan, the peshmerga hit an array of insurgent positions near the Mosul dam, about 30 miles northwest of the city, forcing many fighters into the open.

"It was literally like kicking an anthill," said Air Force Col. Lynn "Woody" Peitz, deputy commander of the air operations center at Al Udeid. "A lot of dynamic targets developed out of that."

Coalition warplanes dropped precision-guided bombs on militant positions, weapons depots and armored vehicles. The Kurdish fighters ultimately took back about 300 square miles of territory, officials said, and cut the supply routes.

Pentagon officials say they are encouraged by the gains but are under no illusions about the difficulties in trying to retake Mosul.

"It's difficult terrain. It's a big city. And they are entrenched there," Rear Adm. John Kirby, the Pentagon spokesman, told reporters Tuesday. "And oh, by the way, the enemy gets a vote" in what happens.

*--Special correspondent Nabih Bulos in Amman, Jordan, contributed to this report*

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#### **4. Taliban Justice Gains Favor As Official Afghan Courts Fail**

New York Times, Feb. 1, Pg. A1 | Azam Ahmed

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan -- Matiullah Khan and Muhammad Aywaz were each dug in, their property dispute in southern Afghanistan at an impasse.

Despite paying more than \$1,000 apiece in lawyers' fees, they found no resolution in the government's judicial system. The tribal courts, informal networks of elders that most rural Afghans rely on, had also come up short.

So the two men did what a growing number of Afghans do these days when there is no other recourse: They turned to the Taliban. Within a few days, their problem was resolved -- no bribes or fees necessary.

"He would have kept my house for himself if it wasn't for the Taliban," said Mr. Khan, a resident of Kandahar City who accused Mr. Aywaz of commandeering his home. "They were quick and fair."

Frustrated by Western-inspired legal codes and a government court system widely seen as corrupt, many Afghans think that the militants' quick and tradition-rooted rulings are their best hope for justice. In the Pakistani cities of Quetta and Chaman, havens for exiled Taliban figures, local residents describe long lines of Afghans waiting to see judges.

"You won't find the same number of people in the Afghan courts as you do in the Taliban courts," said Hajji Khudai Noor, a Kandahar resident who recently settled a land dispute through the Taliban in Quetta. "There are hundreds of people waiting for justice there."

Western officials have long considered a fair and respected justice system to be central to quelling the insurgency, in an acknowledgment that the Taliban's appeal had long been rooted in its use of traditional rural justice codes. But after the official end of the international military mission and more than a billion dollars in development aid to build up Afghanistan's court system, it stands largely discredited and ridiculed by everyday Afghans. A common refrain, even in Kabul, is that to settle a dispute over your farm in court, you must first sell your chickens, your cows and your wife.

Countless training programs funded by Western allies for lawyers and judges have become bywords for waste. Laws suited to Western-style democracies have populated the books.

"The problem is we spent money on what we wanted to see, as opposed to thinking about what Afghans wanted to see," said Noah Coburn, a political anthropologist at Bennington College.

Recognizing that informal tribal law would remain the choice for most Afghans, the United States in recent years began spending money to support local councils and connect them more publicly with the government. But a review by an independent monitoring organization found that instead of bolstering the government's image, the effort mostly reinforced the primacy of the informal courts -- of which Taliban justice could be considered a radical extension, wielding a mix of Pashtun tradition and extreme interpretations of Islamic law.

President Ashraf Ghani made cleaning up the judiciary one of his first pledges in office, but it will be a daunting task. According to a poll released by Gallup in October, just 25 percent of Afghans expressed confidence in the nation's judicial system.

The Taliban have seized on this discontent. In some areas, they have set up mobile courts to reach villages outside their zones of influence. They hold hearings two days a week in the southern borderlands, requiring plaintiffs to produce evidence and witnesses. In Kunar, Taliban legal experts embed with militant commanders to provide services to locals and the fighters.

While few Afghans recall the Taliban rule from 1996 to 2001 with any fondness, the lack of corruption in justice then was seen by some as a strong suit. Bribes were uncommon. The power of litigants and their extended clans mattered less. The implementation of Islamic law, or at least the rural Afghan version of it, was standard.

But the brutality at the heart of Taliban justice has not been forgotten. Mass public executions were common. Minor offenses, like cutting beards short or listening to music, often brought fierce beatings as punishment. Yet the government system still compares unfavorably in the eyes of many Afghans. "There are no people who think that government justice is better than the Taliban's," said Amanullah, a schoolteacher from the Andar district of Ghazni. "Even if someone feels they have had their rights violated, there is an appeals procedure within the Taliban system."

Yegan, a 65-year-old farmer in Kunduz, said he went to the Taliban to resolve a dispute with his sister over their inheritance.

He admits that he did not want to share their father's land. But after reviewing the case, the Taliban forced him to adhere to Quranic law and give her a share.

"I am happy now that I am clear with God," he said. "If it were the government, I would have had to pay a bribe."

Experts say that informal justice is rarely fair to women and children, who are still sometimes bartered between families to settle disputes. But the government system is not doing much better. Lawyers complain about judges and prosecutors who do not know the law. Five men accused of rape in Paghman were hanged in October after a trial of only a few hours, highlighting a lack of due process.

There are some potentially simple fixes, especially among the personnel.

Consider the district judge of Spinbaldak, a relatively populous area on the border of Kandahar and Pakistan deep in the country's Pashtun heartland. Azizullah Rahman, the judge, does not speak Pashto, the dominant language there.

"I am trying to learn," Mr. Rahman said as he sat in the newly constructed courthouse where he usually fields two or three cases a month. "But it is difficult to understand people sometimes."



One of the biggest challenges for any justice system is enforcing rulings, and that is where the Taliban's intimidating reputation ranks as an advantage. It was a major reason that Mr. Khan, the Kandahar landowner, sought the Taliban's help in resolving his case against Mr. Aywaz.

The dispute concerned the ownership of land on the edge of Kandahar City. Mr. Khan had built a house on the plot and was renting it to Mr. Aywaz. But shortly after moving in, Mr. Aywaz told Mr. Khan that he would not be leaving -- ever. He claimed that before Mr. Khan built the house, the land belonged to him.

After giving up on the Afghan courts, they referred the matter to tribal elders, who agreed that Mr. Khan owned the property.

But Mr. Aywaz refused to acknowledge the decision.

Mr. Khan turned to the Taliban. The men brought their evidence and witnesses to a house in the border town of Chaman and presented their case.

Three hours later, the Taliban judges came back with a verdict in favor of Mr. Khan. They told Mr. Aywaz that simply placing a small sign on the land, which he claimed gave him ownership, did not establish possession.

Surprisingly, Mr. Aywaz was not bitter about the result.

"The Taliban took my land from me, but to be honest I didn't understand how Shariah worked," Mr. Aywaz said. "Now, logically looking at it, when they told me I needed to build a proper building, it makes sense to me."

--*Ruhullah Khapalwak and Taimoor Shah contributed reporting*

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## IRAQ/SYRIA

### **5. Kurds retake oil facility in north Iraq, 15 workers still missing**

Reuters, Jan. 31 | Mustafa Mahmoud

KIRKUK, Iraq - Kurdish peshmerga forces retook a small crude oil station near the northern Iraqi city of Kirkuk which Islamic State insurgents seized earlier on Saturday, but the fate of 15 employees remained unclear.

Two officials from the state-run North Oil Co told Reuters the militants had seized a crude oil separation unit in Khabbaz on Saturday morning and said 15 oil workers were missing after the company lost contact with them.

One of the officials and a Kurdish military source said the peshmerga forces had regained control of the facility on Saturday evening and were combing it for explosives.

They were unable to confirm the fate of the 15 workers or provide details about the losses incurred by either side.

"We received a call from one of the workers saying dozens of Daesh fighters were surrounding the facility and asking workers to leave the premises. We lost contact and now the workers might be taken hostage," an engineer from the North Oil Co told Reuters, using a derogatory acronym for Islamic State.

Kurdish military sources said Major General Hussein Mansour, who had mobilized a unit from Khanaqin to reinforce the Kurdish forces outside Kirkuk, was killed by a sniper in the fighting. The mayor of Khanaqin confirmed the report.

IS seized at least four small oilfields when it overran large areas of northern Iraq last summer, and began selling crude oil and gasoline to finance their operations.

Khabbaz is a small oilfield 20 km (12 miles) southwest of Kirkuk with a maximum production capacity of 15,000 barrels per day. It was producing around 10,000 bpd before the attack.

Islamic State insurgents attacked regional Kurdish forces southwest of Kirkuk on Friday, seizing some areas including parts of the Khabbaz oilfields.

Further south near Baghdad, two bombs in a central neighborhood and a farming district south of the capital killed at least seven civilians on Saturday, medics and police said.

Two soldiers were also killed when a bomb exploded close to an army patrol near Taji, a predominantly Sunni Muslim rural district north of Baghdad.

At least 24 others were wounded in the explosions.

In Falluja in the western province of Anbar, hospital sources said five people, including two children, were killed during Iraqi army shelling of Islamic State positions. They said at least 44 others were wounded, including 25 IS fighters.

It is difficult to confirm reports from hospitals in the area, which is mostly controlled by Islamic State.

The radical jihadist group has declared a medieval-style caliphate in parts of Iraq and Syria and poses the biggest challenge to the stability of OPEC member Iraq since the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003.

*--Additional reporting by Stephen Kalin and Ahmed Rasheed in Baghdad, Isabel Coles in Arbil*

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## **6. Western-backed rebels join Aleppo alliance – Syria monitor**

Reuters, Jan. 31 | Sylvia Westall

A Western-backed rebel group in northern Syria that is under pressure from al Qaeda's hardline Nusra Front has joined an alliance of mainly Islamist insurgent factions in Aleppo, a group monitoring the conflict said on Saturday.

The Western-backed Hazzm movement joined the Levant Front - Jabhat al-Shamiyya - a grouping of insurgent factions formed in December in the northern province, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said, citing a statement from the alliance.

"Hazzm is under pressure because before they refused to join Jabhat al-Shamiyya and now they accept this," said Rami Abdulrahman, who runs the Britain-based Observatory, which tracks Syria's war using a network of sources on the ground.

Forming the Levant Front was an attempt at unity among factions in Syria that have often fought each other as well as the Syrian army and hardline jihadist groups, undermining the revolt against President Bashar al-Assad.

The alliance includes Islamic Front, an Islamist coalition which includes Saudi-backed combatants and other factions.

"We urge our brothers in all factions to resolve their differences with the (Hazzm) movement via the Jabhat al-Shamiyya leadership and its judicial office by appealing to sharia law of God," the statement, which was also posted on Twitter, said.

Hazzm is one of the last remnants of non-jihadist opposition to Assad in northern Syria. It has been under attack from al Qaeda's Syria wing Nusra Front in both the Aleppo and Idlib provinces.

Clashes began on Thursday when Nusra Front seized positions from Hazzm west of Aleppo. Northern Syria is dominated by the hardline Nusra Front and Islamic State, an offshoot of al Qaeda that controls roughly 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.

The fight for the city of Aleppo, divided between insurgents and government forces, is seen as one of the most significant last fronts for non-jihadist forces in the country's north.

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## **7. U.S. general says Syrian town of Kobani taken from Islamic State**

Reuters, Jan. 31 | Mohammad Zargham

WASHINGTON - Kurdish ground forces, helped by U.S. and allied air support, have retaken the Syrian town of Kobani from Islamic State militants, U.S. Lieutenant-General James Terry said on Saturday.

Supporting what Kurdish forces said earlier this week, Terry, commander of the Combined Joint Task Force that has been leading air strikes against Islamic State, said in a statement issued by the U.S. military: "Kurdish ground forces, supported by our air component, were successful in retaking the town of Kobani."

A monitoring group and Syrian state media reported Kurdish fighters took full control of Kobani on Monday, but on Tuesday a U.S. official said the town on the Turkish border had not been fully retaken.

Saturday's statement said Kurdish forces had pushed Islamic State out of Kobani on Tuesday.

"Kurdish forces continue to expand their positions to surrounding areas outside of Kobani by seizing key terrain and access routes," it said.

The United States and allies have launched more than 700 air strikes against Islamic State in and around Kobani since Aug. 8, destroying more than 280 fighting positions, nearly 100 buildings, more than 60 technical vehicles and other equipment, it said.

Islamic State, which has seized parts of Syria and Iraq, launched an assault on the predominantly Kurdish town last year, using heavy weapons seized in Iraq and forcing tens of thousands of residents into exile.

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#### **8. Islamic State fighters admit defeat in Syrian town of Kobani**

Associated Press, Jan. 31 | Bassem Mroué

BEIRUT — The Islamic State group has acknowledged for the first time that its fighters have been defeated in the Syrian town of Kobani and vowed to attack the town again.

In a video released by the pro-IS Amaq News Agency late Friday, two fighters said the airstrikes by the U.S.-led coalition were the main reason why IS fighters were forced to withdraw from Kobani. One fighter vowed to defeat the main Kurdish militia in Syria, the People's Protection Units known as the YPG.

On Monday, activists and Kurdish officials said the town was almost cleared of IS fighters, who once held nearly half of Kobani.

An Associated Press video from inside the town showed widespread destruction, streets littered with debris and abandoned neighborhoods. The video also showed a new cemetery with fresh graves.

The town's famous Freedom Square, with a statue of an eagle spreading its wings, stood intact in the middle of the destruction. The square is near the so-called Kurdish security quarter — an eastern district where Kurdish militiamen maintained security buildings and offices, and which was occupied by IS fighters for about two months until they were forced out earlier in January.

In the newly released IS video, the militant fighters acknowledged that they have been driven from the town.

"A while ago we retreated a bit from Ayn al-Islam because of the bombardment and the killing of some brothers," said one masked fighter, using the group's preferred name for Kobani. He spoke Arabic with a north African accent.

The failure to capture and hold Kobani was a major blow to the extremists. Their hopes for an easy victory dissolved into a costly siege under withering airstrikes by coalition forces and an assault by Kurdish militiamen.

The United States and several Arab allies have been striking IS positions in Syria since Sept. 23. The campaign aims to push back the jihadi organization after it took over about a third of Iraq and Syria and declared the captured territory a new caliphate.

Now Kurdish officials are hailing the retaking of Kobani as an important step toward rolling back the Islamic State group's territorial gains.

"Kobani Canton is a representative of the resistance against terrorism in the world," said senior Syrian Kurdish official in Kobani, Anwar Muslim. "We hope that the world will support us to come through our struggle against IS."

Meanwhile the IS fighters vowed that their defeat in Kobani will not weaken them.

"The Islamic State will stay. Say that to (U.S. President Barack) Obama," said the fighter, pointing his finger toward destruction on the edge of Kobani.

The fighters both laid blame for their defeat on the coalition air campaign, seemingly downplaying the role played by Kurdish militiamen — whom they refer to as "rats."

Another IS fighter, also speaking in Arabic, said while standing on a road with a green sign with "Ayn al-Islam" sprayed on it: "The warplanes did not leave any construction. They destroyed everything, so we had to withdraw and the rats advanced."

"The warplanes were bombarding us night and day. They bombarded everything, even motorcycles," the fighter said.

IS launched an offensive on the Kobani region in mid-September capturing more than 300 Kurdish villages and parts of the town. As a result of the airstrikes and stiff Kurdish resistance, IS began retreating a few weeks ago, losing more than 1,000 fighters, according to activists.

More than 200,000 Kurds were forced from their homes. Many fled to neighboring Turkey.

Earlier this week, Kurdish officials said YPG fighters have launched a counterattack to retake some of the surrounding villages around Kobani, many of which remain in IS hands.

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**9. Destroyed, riddled with unexploded bombs, no power and no sanitation. But the people of Kobani dare to dream of a new start**

*Emma Graham-Harrison was one of the first reporters to enter Kobani after Kurdish fighters triumphed over Isis. In this eyewitness account, she sees the destruction – and hears the hopes of its people*

The Observer (UK), Feb. 1, Pg. 2 | Emma Graham-Harrison

The concrete eagle in what used to be Freedom Square still surveys Kobani imperiously. But around it almost nothing stands. Buildings have vanished during months of heavy shelling, replaced by snarls of steel and rubble, and the yawning craters left by US air strikes.

One side street is blocked by the bodies of Isis fighters, rotting where they fell – a pile of bones marked only by a foul smell. On the muddy track that marks where another road led, a series of tattered sniper screens veils the destruction of the schools and homes where sharpshooters had sheltered.

Everywhere there are bullet and shell casings, the twisted metal of spent mortar rounds and, often, the alarming outline of an unexploded shell, bulbous nose to the ground and tail fins spiking into the air.



The Kurdish forces' unexpected victory in this north Syrian town marked a huge strategic and propaganda loss for Isis, which once seemed unstoppable in their rampage across the region.

But the mountains of ruins, the shells and booby traps, the decaying corpses and shattered power and water systems means that while Kobani has been freed, it is no longer a town in anything but name. Salvation from Isis came at the price of Kobani itself.

"There are no words coming back to a destroyed city that was your home," said Shamsa Shahinzada, an architect who fled Kobani days before Isis arrived and who was our guide to the shattered remains – still off-limits to most of its former inhabitants.

"This was the main square where people crowded every week to ask for freedom," she said, eyes filling with tears as she surveyed what was left of Kobani's centre. "This was our friend's home, we used to stay there. Oh God. Beside there, there was a school – my high school."

Over half the city was destroyed, officials say. Entire blocks are pancake flattened, as if an earthquake had struck. Even in quieter areas, no building seems to have escaped unscathed – those still standing are missing windows, doors, whole sections of walls, scorched black by fire or looted during the fighting.

Some things that inexplicably survived only highlight the devastation around them: an unsold tray of snacks sat in one shop window like a perfectly preserved museum exhibit on a street littered with jagged metal, piles of rubble and the twisted bodies of cars used for suicide bombs.

Even on the streets that still look like streets, there is an eerie silence – broken only by the crackle of distant gunfire, the pop of a nearby shot from training grounds and the echoing blast of air strikes and attacks by Isis tanks – a constant reminder that while the militants have been kicked out of the city the frontline is still just a few kilometres away.

"The battle is not over yet," said Anwar Muslim, a former lawyer and head of Kobani's government who stayed in the town through the whole campaign and has already brought his wife and children back to camp amid the devastation. His joy at driving Isis out of his home is tempered by concern for the rest of the district; most of it is still under Isis control.

"As you can hear our villages are still fighting, and we will only have finished our work after we free all our countryside," he told the Observer.

"We, here in Kobani, are on the frontline, fighting against terrorists on behalf of all the people of the world ... you can see here the cost of asking for freedom."

The battles and the devastation inside Kobani mean that tens of thousands of civilians huddled in freezing refugee camps across the Turkish border, who celebrated victory last week in the hope of returning, may not be back in Syria for months.

Many no longer have homes to return to, and the town is far too dangerous and unsanitary to house them all. "We know people are waiting for us but we can't bring them back here because there will be disease – because of the bodies – and because there is no kind of service," Anwar Muslim said.

Turkish authorities are also noting down the names of any Syrians who cross, warning them that they cannot return. With Isis still just 10km away, and likely smarting at their defeat, that is a gamble that even those whose houses survived are reluctant to make.

Certainly Kurdish officials are not taking their victory for granted, at a time when there is still a steady flow of casualties into the field hospital from the nearby frontline.

Soldiers keep a wary guard on all tall buildings and main junctions, huddled round improvised braziers for warmth in driving winter rain. Many are caught between elation at their victory and grief at its cost.

“We are so happy, as if we were flying through the sky. As if God had created us again,” said 35-year-old Mahir Hamid. “But we can’t celebrate because we had so many martyrs.”

Isis lost more than 1,000 fighters, but hundreds of Kurds were also killed in the initially lopsided battle. It pitted hundreds of militants armed with heavy weapons plundered from Iraqi arsenals against the ageing Kalashnikovs and ancient Russian machine guns of the Kurds. At one point, officials warned that food stocks were dwindling dangerously low as well.

The victory was as epic as it was unexpected – to everyone except perhaps the Kurdish fighters themselves. Kobani had been all but written off by the outside world last autumn. The US came to its aid with air strikes in late September but officials in Washington warned the bombs were not enough to save it, and Turkey’s President Recep Tayyip Erdogan also forecast collapse.

Kurdish vows to hold on to their base were dismissed as poignantly, but tragically, naive. Isis was well-armed, and its fighters eager to die in battle. They poured resources and men into taking the town, and even took hostage John Cantlie there to make a propaganda video claiming that Isis was just “mopping up” the last Kurdish fighters.

Instead they were being slowly driven back by outnumbered, outgunned but disciplined forces whom the city’s leader compared to heroes of ancient Greece in their ingenuity and bravery.

They even devised a homemade version of an armoured truck to face off against Isis tanks. Steel plates and halfpipes welded to a flatbed lorry created a safe area, gun turrets and a battering ram to attack. It looked more Mad Max than modern military, and still reversed with the warning beeps of the original humble lorry, but was part of their slow slog to victory.

“We bow down before these fighters, who were like the legions of ancient Sparta, holding off terrorism, fighting Daesh against the odds,” said the city president Anwar Muslim, using another name for Isis.

He has set up a committee of architects, doctors, lawyers, engineers and other experts to look at the massive task of clearing and then rebuilding Kobani, which will take years, perhaps decades. For now, they cannot even get heavy moving equipment across the Turkish border and fear a simple clearance of the ruins would be too risky.

“We have unexploded mortars, rockets, bombs, and maybe some traps for explosion the terrorists left behind to surprise us, to kill our civilian people or fighters when they clear up or check the destruction of their houses,” said Idriss Nassan, deputy head of the government.

“There is no food, no medicine, no children’s milk. If our people come back now, there will be a humanitarian crisis on this victory ground.”

Rebuilding will inevitably be slow because even if the military campaign is entirely successful, it will stop at Kobani’s borders, so Isis will still surround its people on three sides.

The Turkish border is the only route with safe passage, so the government is lobbying for a humanitarian corridor, and the creation of new refugee camps inside Syria, where they can help with rebuilding.

They are hoping for help from the allies who sent military aid, and benefited indirectly from the blow dealt to Isis. The priority is funds for reconstruction, experts in bomb clearance to help dismantle the ruins, and pressure on Turkey to open up a humanitarian corridor into Syria.

The damage is so bad that some have questioned whether Kobani should be rebuilt on a new site, but Nassan said that would be emotionally devastating.

“Unfortunately the city is destroyed, but people have memories here and this is our land. We don’t want to move everything from here,” he told the Observer near the ruins of an institute where he once taught English, before Syria’s convulsions propelled him into another life.

“We have to just clear it, but maybe keep some parts as a museum for foreign people to come here to see how Kobani resisted the terrorists.”

The city is still full of evidence of lives dramatically interrupted by the speed of Isis’s ferocious advance; tiny children’s clothes hanging to dry on a washing line months after their owners fled to Turkey, shelves stacked with food in areas where Kurdish discipline stopped looting.

The front wall of a nearby house was ripped off by an explosion, but a display cabinet in one of the rooms sat pristine – with television and a wedding photo in pride of place and untouched stacks of china tea cups and plates, as if the owner had just popped out. Some civilians are starting to filter back despite the risks. Most are fed up with terrible conditions across the border.

“I was in Turkey four months but, for me, it felt like four years. I am taking my family and coming back,” said Fatima, queueing in the dusk to pass through the Kurdish border gates with her five children. “If we have to die here that’s OK.”

Their house had gone, she has been warned, but they were fed up with sleeping on the floor of a shop in the Turkish border town. “I will find somewhere, even if I have to sleep in the street I will come back.”

There are perhaps 400 families in the western part of town, estimates Azad, a cook for the Kurdish YPG – People’s Protection U – fighters. His home survived undamaged apart from a hole torn in one wall to allow food deliveries without risking Isis snipers in the street.

He brought his family back a month ago, including 10-month-old son Fouad. With a well, a generator and rations distributed by the military, he says they are living well, even though Kobani is a virtual ghost town without shops, neighbours or any communal life.

Two ducks, rescued from an abandoned village, quack happily in their small yard and the soundtrack of battle no longer bothers even the baby.

"He is used to it now," he says. "My wife was frightened at first but now it's normal for her, too. We are upset about the destruction but happy we got Isis out. At least we have that."

The only person leaving Kobani permanently was a Turkish member of Isis, returning to his family in a coffin after dying on the front line.

"We are telling the world those people came to kill our children, take our women. But if they ask for their bodies, we will give them," said Kobani defence minister Ismet Sheikh Hasan as the coffin was carried through the steel border gate into Turkey.

It passed beside a crowd of freshfaced recruits for the Kurdish forces, shuffling with nervous excitement. They clapped and sang until the door swung open, then raced into their battered home town with shouts of joy.

They had come from refugee camps to carry on the fight against Isis, and must have known that many of them would fall in battle, but just then, elated with victory, no one seemed to care.

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## **MIDEAST**

### **10. Suspected U.S. drone strike kills al Qaeda militants in Yemen**

Reuters, Jan. 31 | Mohammed Mukhashaf

A suspected U.S. drone strike on a car in Yemen killed three men believed to be al Qaeda militants on Saturday and possibly another drone crashed in a different part of the country, residents said.

The incidents suggest there has been no let up in the U.S. stealth programme against suspected militants despite the resignation of the president who backed the programme.

Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) is considered one of the most powerful branches of the global militant group and claimed responsibility for deadly shootings in Paris on Jan. 7.

For years, the United States has cooperated with Yemeni security forces to track and bomb AQAP members in the country's rural badlands - a strategy that rights groups have criticised for causing repeated civilian deaths.

But after Shi'ite Muslim rebels overran the capital Sanaa in September and took over President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi's residence earlier this month, he and his cabinet resigned.

Hadi was a staunch defender of the drone programme, and his exit has left the Islamist Houthi rebels, whose motto is "death to America", the de facto rulers of the country.

U.S. officials have told Reuters the Houthi takeover was depriving them of sufficient intelligence to locate AQAP targets and avoid killing civilians in the attacks.

Saturday's strike occurred in the remote desert town of al-Saeed in Shabwa province in southern Yemen. Residents told Reuters the dead men were al Qaeda militants.

Separately, residents of the al-Hada district of central Dhamar province told Reuters that a drone crashed in an open area there. It was not immediately clear if it was the same drone that conducted the deadly air strike in Shabwa.

Another drone strike on Monday, the first since Hadi's resignation, killed two suspected AQAP militants and a sixth grader.

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.

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#### **11. Yemen president refuses to reconsider resignation**

Associated Press, Jan. 31 | Ahmed Al-Haj

SANAA, Yemen — Yemen's president will not reconsider his resignation, despite pressure for him to do so by rebels who control the capital and who he says are holding him "at gunpoint," an official close to him said Saturday.

The refusal comes after representatives from Yemeni political parties met Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi at his home, where the rebels, known as Houthis, continue to hold him under house arrest and are searching all visitors.

Impoverished Yemen, home to a formidable al-Qaida affiliate, has been leaderless since Hadi resigned this month after the Houthis pressured him for a greater share of power.

The Houthis, who have controlled the capital, Sanaa, since September, and their supporters have been holding a conference in a sports stadium since Friday — saying they seek to organize "a peaceful transfer of power."

The official, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to reporters, said Hadi was willing to participate in a national dialogue session — provided that it took place outside the rebel-controlled capital. He said Hadi proposed the southern city of Taiz as an alternate venue.

Later in the day, a U.S. drone strike hit a car in Shabwa province, killing four suspected al-Qaida operatives, Yemeni tribal and security officials said.

A similar strike targeted the group last Monday, signaling Washington's determination to keep fighting the militants despite political paralysis brought on by a power grab by Shiite rebels.

The officials did not give the nationalities of the men killed. They spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to release the information otherwise.



Also Saturday, hundreds of anti-Houthi protesters formed a human chain in the city of Dhamar that was later broken up by rebels who fired automatic rifles into the air. In a statement, the demonstrators demanded a halt to all dialogue with the Houthis until they disarm and release detained activists.

Military officials said the Houthis still control most of the capital's military installations and arms depots, and have at their disposal heavy weapons including hundreds of T-72 tanks, self-propelled artillery and Katyusha rocket launchers.

The Houthis also recently captured a Republican Guard camp outside Sanaa which had been used by American experts until 2012 to train local forces battling Yemen's al-Qaida's affiliate, which Washington considers to be its most dangerous branch.

The military officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak to the press.

Since the Houthis escalated their conflict with the embattled central government in January, demonstrators have taken to the streets in several cities to protest their power grab.

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## **12. Shadow war could intensify after report on Mughniyah**

Washington Post, Feb. 1, Pg. A9 | Hugh Naylor

BEIRUT - The revelation that the CIA cooperated with Israel's Mossad spy agency in the killing of Hezbollah military commander Imad Mughniyah in 2008 is poised to intensify a shadow war with the militant Lebanese group that could involve retaliation against U.S. interests around the world, analysts said.

In an exclusive article published online Friday night and in Sunday's edition, The Washington Post reported that the U.S. intelligence agency coordinated with Mossad in carrying out a February 2008 car bombing in the Syrian capital, Damascus, that killed Mughniyah.

The militant commander was implicated in killing hundreds of Americans in attacks that included the U.S. Embassy bombing in Beirut in 1983 and assaults on American forces in Iraq by Iranian-backed militias, according to The Post, which cited multiple former U.S. officials. The killing of Mughniyah, a key figure behind attacks on scores of Israelis, was approved by officials in the George W. Bush administration, according to the report.

The report said the operation required extensive planning and cooperation between the two agencies. One official is quoted as saying that operatives detonated some 25 practice bombs at a CIA facility in North Carolina "to make sure we got it right." The real bomb was triggered remotely in Tel Aviv by Mossad agents, according to the report, but CIA operatives in Damascus acted as spotters and could have called off the attack.

Samar Hajj, a Lebanese analyst close to Hezbollah, said the report reinforced the impression among officials in the Iranian-backed group that covert Israeli operations are signed off on in Washington. She said that disclosures in the report would add urgency to desired Hezbollah attacks against Israel, after both sides exchanged fire Wednesday in a flare-up that triggered fears of war.

"We do not differentiate between CIA and Mossad. They are the two faces of the same coin," Hajj said. She added that Hezbollah probably was aware of U.S. involvement in Mughniyah's killing, which the Lebanese group had blamed on the Mossad.

She said Hezbollah was prepared to attack Israel at points around the world, which was hinted at during a speech by the group's leader, Hasan Nasrallah, given Friday before The Post's story article was first published online.

"There will be more retaliation operations," Hajj said.

During his speech, Nasrallah issued a tough warning to Israel, saying that Hezbollah would not hesitate to strike. He indicated that an attack on Wednesday - which involved an antitank missile fired at Israeli soldiers, killing two - was retaliation for an air assault in southern Syria on Jan. 18 that killed an Iranian commander and six Hezbollah fighters. One of those killed in the Jan. 18 attack was the son of Mughniyah, Jihad.

"We are not afraid of war. We will fight this war. We will achieve victory, God willing," Nasrallah said, while threatening to expand the traditional areas of conflict between Israel and Hezbollah beyond Lebanon.

Israeli officials have been alarmed by what they say is a buildup of Hezbollah's military presence along the border area. The group possesses an arsenal of rockets that can be fired at Israel cities, and its fighters are widely said to have plans to carry out incursions in Israeli border communities in the event of a war.

The two fought a devastating war in 2006, and Hezbollah's military capabilities have expanded dramatically since then, according to analysts and Israeli officials.

Yossi Melman, an Israeli journalist who has written extensively on espionage issues, said that Hezbollah would probably "try to settle this score with the U.S.," although he did not expect an immediate response from the group over the report. He added that the CIA and Mossad could have had assistance in the plot from Jordanian intelligence, speculating that the bomb "was smuggled via Jordan into Syria."

Jordanian officials could not be reached for comment, and neither officials in Hezbollah nor Israel would comment on The Post's report.

Imad Salamey, a politics professor at the Lebanese American University, said the disclosures add pressure to Hezbollah. The group probably wants to respond, but the news comes at a sensitive time: Its patron, Iran, is engaged in negotiations with the United States and other world powers over the Islamic Republic's nuclear program.

"Your leadership has been targeted by the United States, so what do you do? Hezbollah is being cornered by this information," he said.

There are questions about the timing of the disclosures, released seven years after the killing.

Talal Atrissi, an analyst who is close to Hezbollah, said that the disclosure could be interpreted by Hezbollah and Iran as an attempt by former and current U.S. officials to scuttle the nuclear talks. The United States and its allies in Europe and the Arab world, as well as Israel, say the program is intended to build nuclear weapons, but Iran denies

this. Still, he and other analysts did not think that the disclosures would derail the nuclear talks, which have had their deadline extended twice over a failure to reach an accord.

"The leak is meant to undermine the talks, and that benefits Israel because it opposes these negotiations," he said.

"Iran believes the bilateral talks on the nuclear file are more important than a story from the past, especially since Hezbollah has changed its methods and focus, becoming now different than it was in the '80s," Atrissi said, referring to the 1983 attack by Hezbollah against the U.S. Embassy in Beirut, among others, that earned it a notorious reputation in the United States, which along with the European Union classifies the group as a terrorist organization.

Mughniyah is described in The Post's report as involved in those and other attacks, including the bombing of the Israeli Embassy in Argentina in 1992 as well as a Jewish community center in the same country two years later. The latter attack killed 85 people.

In coordination with Iran, he also was involved in organizing Shiite militias in Iraq to carry out scores of attacks on U.S. forces after the 2003 invasion, the report said. Those attacks persuaded the Bush administration to approve the killing, the report said.

*--Suzan Haidamous in Beirut and Ruth Eglash in Jerusalem contributed to this report*

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### **13. Tribal Loyalties Drive Jordan's Effort to Free Pilot**

New York Times, Feb. 1, Pg. A6 | Rod Nordland and Ranya Kadri

AMMAN, Jordan -- It is often said that in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan all politics is tribal.

That goes a long way toward explaining the country's reaction to the hostage crisis involving a Royal Jordanian Air Force pilot and a Japanese journalist, including Jordan's offer to free an extremist on death row and willingness to look the other way when protesters disparaged the king in the presence of his powerful intelligence service.

It is not just that First Lt. Moaz al-Kasasbeh is a handsome young F-16 fighter pilot with a prominent social media presence, and the first member of the international coalition bombing the Islamic State to be captured by the extremists. He is also a member of a politically influential tribe, part of a crucial base of tribal support for the king.

"The social structure of Jordan is tribal more than institutional," Lieutenant Kasasbeh's father, Safi Youssef al-Kasasbeh, said as he sat in a diwan, or social hall, in Amman on Saturday waiting for word of his son's fate, surrounded by a shifting crowd of well-wishers sometimes numbering in the hundreds. "The cohesiveness is very strong, and now we feel that every tribal member is supported by every tribe in Jordan."

The monarchy has not only maintained good relations with the tribes, it has also built them into the structure of the state by heavily recruiting their members into the military and security services, analysts say. That is a legacy of Jordan's past, which has left its eight million citizens split between "East Bankers," or native Jordanians, and "West Bankers," the descendants of Palestinians displaced by the creation of Israel and its subsequent wars with its Arab neighbors.

Most Jordanians whose origins are in East Jordan belong to one of a dozen major or numerous smaller tribes, and are viewed as unquestionably loyal.

The Kasasbeh clan is part of the Bararsheh tribe from southern Jordan. As the crisis has unfolded, elders and notables from the tribe, based in the city of Karak, rushed to the capital, Amman, where they huddled together to back Lieutenant Kasasbeh's family -- and to sing the praises of its captured pilot.

Lieutenant Kasasbeh was shot down during an air raid in Syria on Dec. 24. In the first sign of the pilot's importance, Jordan's ruler, King Abdullah II, went immediately to his family's home in Karak to assure them of his concern for their son's safety.

Separately, Bararsheh tribal leaders quietly approached the government and asked officials to offer to trade Sajida al-Rishawi, a convicted would-be suicide bomber on death row, for Lieutenant Kasasbeh's freedom.

Late last month, attempts to free Lieutenant Kasasbeh became more complicated when the Islamic State, also known as ISIS or ISIL, suddenly threatened two Japanese hostages, then released a video showing the beheading of one. Although the militants had initially asked for ransom, they later changed their demand, asking to trade the second Japanese hostage for the release of the same woman, Ms. Rishawi, that the tribe hoped Jordan would swap for the pilot.

When Japanese officials announced that they were working with Jordan to win their hostage's release -- days before a video Saturday that appeared to show his death -- the reaction in Jordan was furious.

Protests began springing up, especially among members of the pilot's Bararsheh tribe, and at one point last week they even demonstrated outside King Abdullah's Royal Palace in Amman. It is a measure of the sensitivity with which tribes are treated that even though the protesters were chanting slogans calling the king a coward bought by American dollars, Jordan's usually proactive intelligence services and riot police refrained from intervening.

Instead, King Abdullah defused the situation by inviting the pilot's father, mother and wife into the palace.

"You always have to pay attention to the tribes; you can't neglect them," said the retired Maj. Gen. Ali Shukri, who ran the private office of King Hussein, King Abdullah's father.

Jordan's king takes his legitimacy, to a large degree, from the support of its tribes, most of which trace their roots to nomadic groups that roamed throughout the Arabian Peninsula. The Hashemite dynasty is built around a clan that is part of a powerful tribe in present-day Saudi Arabia, the Qureish tribe. "All these tribes are really important in the military," General Shukri said. "They have to accommodate the family as much as possible."

Tribal loyalty trumps even strongly held political views. Mustafa Rawashdeh, a member of Parliament who signed a petition against Jordan's joining the coalition against the Islamic State, was sitting on Saturday next to the pilot's father at the diwan, as a member of the same tribe. He also publicly warned against opposition members using the pilot's plight to political advantage. At one point so many tribal supporters had come to Amman that the family built a huge tent outside to accommodate overflow visitors and the news media.

The issue of the pilot's fate has been so sensitive that Jordanian officials have scarcely mentioned the Japanese journalist, Kenji Goto, although Japan is a major aid donor to Jordan and Japanese officials have been in Amman



seeking government help to try to win his release. The Islamic State eventually put the pilot's fate into the mix, saying he would be killed along with Mr. Goto if Ms. Rishawi was not released, according to a video attributed to the militants.

The video did not say the pilot would be released -- only that his life would be spared if she were freed by a deadline that expired Thursday.

Jordanian officials responded that they wanted to see proof the pilot was alive before freeing Ms. Rishawi, who had been held since 2005 after hotel bombings in Amman by Al Qaeda in Iraq. Then there was mainly silence from the two sides until Saturday, when the new video that appeared to show Mr. Goto being beheaded by a militant was released.

It is unclear what calculations the militants may be making and whether they may also factor in Jordan's powerful tribes, especially if they want to maintain a base of support there.

The Islamic State's cause had already won some sympathy in Jordan, where some back its goal of establishing an Islamic empire and chafe at the continuing autocracy of their own Western-allied government. Jordan is believed to be, after Saudi Arabia, the second-biggest outside contributor of Islamic State fighters.

Karak, Lieutenant Kasasbeh's hometown, has its own minority of pro-Islamic State young men, according to Alaa Fazzaa, an exiled Jordanian dissident who follows online extremism in the country.

"They are thinking they could use the case of Moaz to stir up disturbances in Jordan," Mr. Fazzaa said, warning other government critics to hold back -- not a position he normally takes. "Anyone who has a bare minimum of national feelings must stay quiet now," he said.

Referring to Karak, Mr. Rawashdeh, the lawmaker, said, "Some of our young men, out of ignorance or because they're suffering economically, did support ISIS, but right now we're noticing that people no longer do.

"If anything happens to Moaz, the whole street will turn against ISIS," he said.

By Saturday night, Lieutenant Kasasbeh's fate remained unknown. The video that appeared to show Mr. Goto's death on Saturday made no mention of the pilot. But many Jordanians were concerned that the reason the militants did not provide proof he was alive, as Jordan's government demanded, was that they had already killed him.

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#### **14. Sisi Blames Brotherhood for Bombings in Sinai**

New York Times, Feb. 1, Pg. A6 | David D. Kirkpatrick

CAIRO -- President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi on Saturday blamed the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood for bombings that killed at least 30 people in the North Sinai two days earlier, and declared that Egypt was "fighting the strongest secret organization" in the world.

Mr. Sisi leveled the accusation despite the fact that a Sinai-based militant group with links to the Islamic State terrorist organization claimed responsibility for the attacks and released photographs as proof.



The Brotherhood routinely denounces the Islamic State, also known as ISIS or ISIL, and the Sinai militants for their violence. Those groups, in turn, criticize the Brotherhood for its focus on bottom-up political change, mocking it as little more than a tool of secular Arab governments and the West.

The Brotherhood, Egypt's main Islamist opposition, won a general election before Mr. Sisi led a military takeover in 2013, and he often blames the group for any antigovernment violence.

In his first significant public statement since the attack, Mr. Sisi appeared shaken and angry. He insisted that Egypt was "paying the price" for ending the rule of what he called a terrorist group at the peak of its power -- a universally understood reference to the military ouster of President Mohamed Morsi, a Brotherhood leader, in July 2013.

Mr. Sisi said leaders of the Brotherhood had warned him a few weeks before Mr. Morsi's ouster "that they would be bringing people from all over the world" to fight Egyptian citizens, from "countries like Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Palestine and Libya."

Surrounded by a phalanx of uniformed military officers, Mr. Sisi also accused unnamed foreign countries of abetting the attacks. His supporters frequently accuse the Islamist-friendly governments of Qatar, Turkey and Sudan of aiding the Brotherhood.

"There are some countries that are led by leaders of this terrorist organization," he said. "Do you think these countries will leave us alone?"

Egyptian health and security officials stopped providing any accounting of the number killed in the recent attacks after the death toll reached 30. State news outlets reported that officials said it was up to the military to disclose such details.

Even at 30 killed, the episode was among the deadliest terrorist attacks in recent years in Egypt, and it followed attacks on a military checkpoint in October that killed at least 31 people.

Security forces and militants have fought each other in an escalating battle in the North Sinai since Mr. Morsi's ouster. The careful coordination of several simultaneous bombings on Thursday night -- the exact number could not be determined -- appeared intended to show that the militants could still operate with impunity despite a tight clampdown on the area by Egyptian security forces.

The bombings mainly targeted military and police facilities, as did most previous attacks.

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## AFGHANISTAN/PAKISTAN

### 15. Afghan police clash with protesters

#### *Demonstration in Kabul against Charlie Hebdo turns violent*

Washington Post, Feb. 1, Pg. A11 | Sudarsan Raghavan

KABUL - Police clashed with protesters at a demonstration here Saturday against the French satirical newspaper Charlie Hebdo, injuring at least two dozen people, said Afghan police officials and witnesses.

Since the Jan. 7 attack by gunmen on Charlie Hebdo's offices in Paris that killed 12 people, small demonstrations have continued in the Afghan capital and other parts of the country, denouncing the weekly's publication of caricatures of the prophet Muhammad.

But Saturday's protest, involving gunfire and rock-throwing youths, was believed to be the first that turned violent. At least 17 policemen and seven protesters suffered injuries after armed men among the demonstrators opened fire, said Kabul police spokesman Hashmatullah Stanikzai. Five protesters were arrested, he said.

The clashes erupted about 1 p.m. after police blocked several hundred protesters as they marched down Kabul-Jalalabad, a thoroughfare in the eastern part of the city where attacks have targeted foreigners in recent months. The protesters clutched banners that read "Down with France, down with infidels. Muhammad, our prophet, is beloved to me." Some chanted "Allah Akbar" - God is great. The highway remained closed for several hours as protesters set fire to tires and a traffic police booth, witnesses said.

Although police officials said they were fired upon first, some witnesses said the police fired upon the demonstrators after protesters began moving menacingly toward the officers.

"The angry protesters were running toward policemen," said Ahmad Ravi Naseri, 25, a shopkeeper. "There were mostly young boys, throwing stones at the policemen. The policemen were running away from the protesters, but then other policemen opened fire at the protesters."

Some demonstrators and witnesses said that two protesters were killed, but police officials said there were no deaths.

Tensions grew in many parts of the Muslim world after Charlie Hebdo's first issue following the attacks ran a cartoon on its cover depicting the prophet clutching a sign that read "Je suis Charlie" and weeping. Many Muslims saw that as a provocation, including Afghan President Ashraf Ghani. Protests have erupted in other majority-Muslim nations, including Pakistan and Niger, even as the slogan "Je suis Charlie" was embraced by many as a show of solidarity with the newspaper and support of freedom of speech.

Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, the terrorist network's Yemen branch, claimed responsibility for the attack.

Nangialay Hotak, who was among the demonstrators Saturday, said protesters were motivated to stage the rally after they heard preachers denounce Charlie Hebdo during prayers at their mosque Friday. They were given slogans to chant and ordered to march to the French Embassy to condemn the weekly in a peaceful demonstration.

"The holy prophet Muhammad is our leader and the Koran is our law," said Hotak, 35, a driver. "Being a Muslim I have to defend the holy prophet and the holy Koran."

After nearly three hours, the protesters dispersed when a community leader arrived and urged them to leave, saying that if they left, the police would release the protesters they had arrested, witnesses said.

"I support the holy prophet Muhammad, too," Bawar Hotak, who heads an Afghan body builders association, told the crowd. "If I was aware of your protest, I would have guided it, and it would have been a peaceful protest. You people didn't know that there were some protesters among you who wanted to defame our people. That's why they turned the protest to violence."

"For the sake of God, please end the protest and unblock the highway, and I will ask the district police chief to release the arrested protesters."

A few minutes later, traffic began to move again.

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## UKRAINE/RUSSIA

### 16. Ukrainian troops trapped, foes say

*Military denies that thousands of soldiers are surrounded by separatist forces*

Los Angeles Times, Feb. 1, Pg. A3 | Victoria Butenko and Sergei L. Loiko

Pro-Russia separatists claimed Saturday that they had trapped thousands of Ukrainian government troops in the course of fierce fighting in Ukraine's troubled east.

"We have practically encircled 8,000 to 10,000 Kiev junta troops in the area around" the town of Debaltseve, Eduard Basurin, chief political officer of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic armed forces, said by phone. "The only road connecting them with the other troops is under our close artillery fire day and night and they can survive only if they raise a white flag and surrender."

Ukrainian troops had refused to surrender, the separatist senior commander said, "so we will have to destroy all of them."

Basurin said both sides had sustained heavy casualties in the last three days of fighting around Debaltseve but refused to provide a specific toll. Ukrainian Defense Minister Stepan Poltorak said that 15 Ukrainian servicemen had been killed in the fighting and 30 wounded.

Twelve civilians were also killed by the artillery fire near Debaltseve, Donetsk region Police Chief Vyacheslav Abroskin told the UNIAN news agency. At least 310 residents were evacuated from the scene of the fighting Saturday, and about 1,000 had already been evacuated, UNIAN reported.

A Ukrainian senior military commander conceded that the situation at Debaltseve was complicated but said that it was "not critical."

"We are firmly holding our defense positions along the entire front lines from Donetsk to Mariupol, and none of our contingents or groups have yet been encircled," Gen.-Maj. Alexander Rozmazin said. "The enemy controls half of [the town of] Uglegorsk, where we are engaged in heavy street fighting, but there is no chance they can enter Debaltseve."

The general said the pro-Russia separatists were heavily armed and supported by Russian T-72 and T-80 tanks, along with sophisticated Russian artillery systems. He also said that hundreds of Russian soldiers were fighting alongside the separatists.

"We fully understand that today we are mostly fighting against Russian regular troops and their quite professional artillery and tank crews," Rozmazin said. "We know that they are maneuvering to entrap our forces, but we are prepared for it and they are already feeling our powerful response and retreating, sustaining heavy casualties."

A T-72 tank crew was captured Saturday and was being interrogated, Poltorak said.

Russia has repeatedly refused to acknowledge that it is providing military assistance and troops to the separatists and has insisted that Ukrainian separatists used T-64 tanks they had captured from Ukrainian military. Ukraine's army doesn't have T-72 or T-80 tanks.

The shaky truce agreed upon in Minsk, Belarus, in September had been violated many times and discarded by both sides in recent days as heavy fighting broke out, including at the Donetsk airport, where the Ukrainian army lost several key buildings.

"In the course of the last 24 hours the situation has rapidly deteriorated in eastern Ukraine impacting innocent civilians," the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe said Saturday on its website. "Lives have been lost and many have been injured."

OSCE Chairperson-in-Office Ivica Dacic expressed profound regret for the loss of lives and called upon all sides to refrain from violence and indiscriminate use of weapons, the statement said.

The United Nations said recently that the conflict in eastern Ukraine, which began in 2014, had claimed more than 5,000 lives.

--Special correspondent Butenko reported from Kiev and Times staff writer Loiko from Moscow

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## EUROPE

### 17. Clashes Intensify Between Armenia and Azerbaijan Over Disputed Land

New York Times, Feb. 1, Pg. A10 | David M. Herszenhorn

AGDAM, Azerbaijan -- Overshadowed by the fighting in Ukraine, another armed conflict in the former Soviet Union -- between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh -- has escalated with deadly ferocity in recent months, killing dozens of soldiers on each side and pushing the countries perilously close to open war.

The month of January was heavily stained by blood, with repeated gun battles and volleys of artillery and rocket fire. Two Armenian soldiers were killed and several wounded in a fierce gunfight on Jan. 23 along the conflict's northern front. That set off a weekend of violence including grenade and mortar attacks that killed at least three Azerbaijani soldiers.

The most recent clashes prompted an unusually pointed rebuke by international mediators who met on Monday in Krakow, Poland, with the Azerbaijani foreign minister, Elmar Mammadyarov.

"The rise in violence that began last year must stop," the mediators, from France, Russia and the United States, said in a joint statement, adding, "We called on Azerbaijan to observe its commitments to a peaceful resolution of the conflict. We also called on Armenia to take all measures to reduce tensions."

Instead, the violence has continued.

On Thursday, the Azerbaijani Defense Ministry said it had shot down a drone not far from Agdam, an Azerbaijani city that was once home to more than 40,000 people but has been a ghost town for more than 20 years since its occupation by Armenian forces.

Tensions are expected to grow even further this year as Armenia prepares to commemorate in April the 100th anniversary of the genocide against Armenians in Turkey.

While the fighting here often seems to be an isolated dispute over a mountainous patch of land that no one else wants -- roughly midway between the Armenian capital, Yerevan, and the Azerbaijani capital, Baku -- the conflict poses an ever-present danger by threatening to draw in bigger powers, including Russia, Turkey and Iran.

It also provides a chilling warning of what could be in store for Ukraine, where many fear Russia is intent on turning the eastern regions of Donetsk and Luhansk into a similar permanent war zone.

The recent flare in fighting has been fueled by a quiet arms race, in which both countries -- but especially oil-rich Azerbaijan -- have built up arsenals of ever more powerful weapons.

Russia is the main supplier to each side, even as it claims a leadership role in international peace negotiations, known as the Minsk Group process, which it chairs with the United States and France.

In recent weeks, President Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan has upped the ante, demanding that the Minsk Group leaders take steps to force Armenia to withdraw from Azerbaijani lands -- nearly one-fifth of Azerbaijan's internationally-recognized territory -- that it has occupied since a truce was signed in 1994.

"Measures must be taken," Mr. Aliyev said in a speech to government ministers in January. "The truth is that the continued occupation of our lands is not just the work of Armenia. Armenia is a powerless and poor country. It is in a helpless state. Of course, if it didn't have major patrons in various capitals, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict would have been resolved fairly long ago."

In his speech, Mr. Aliyev warned darkly that Azerbaijan, which has an economy seven times larger than Armenia's, planned this year to spend more than double Armenia's entire annual budget of \$2.7 billion on strengthening its military.

President Serzh Sargsyan has responded with his own threats. "The hotheads should expect surprises," Mr. Sargsyan said at a recent military ceremony.

The dangerous consequences of the arms buildup were on full display in November as Azerbaijan shot down an Mi-24 attack helicopter as it flew just north of Agdam along the cease-fire line, killing three Armenian soldiers on board.



The wreckage fell in the region near Agdam that has served as a buffer zone since the 1994 truce, and for days the three bodies lay in the open as Armenian forces seeking to recover their fallen comrades were repelled by gunfire.

"This is as bad as it has got since the cease-fire," said Thomas de Waal, a senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington, whose book "Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan Through Peace and War" is widely regarded as the most authoritative account of the Karabakh conflict.

"Fifteen years ago it was still bad but it was just a bunch of trenches with a bunch of soldiers leaning over them with some guns," Mr. de Waal said. "Now, you have this massive heavy weaponry on either side, sometimes only 100 yards from each other, with these drones and so forth."

He added, "The stakes get higher every year, and the chances of miscalculation get higher as well."

With tensions mounting, visits to each side of the front line, and interviews with senior government and military officials, as well as conversations with dozens of residents, refugees, war veterans, soldiers, local officials, academics, civic activists and even schoolchildren, found the two sides bracing for war, and neither expecting nor prepared for peace.

"We have a saying," said Col. Abdulla Qurbani, a senior official in the Azerbaijan Defense Ministry, while on a tour of the Azerbaijan side of the line of contact. "When water mixes with earth, this is mud. When blood mixes with earth, this is motherland."

Across the line in Shushi, a city whose Azerbaijani residents were forced to flee during the war, an Armenian woman, Anaida Gabrielyan, said: "Our land is soaked in blood. Every millimeter is soaked in grief."

Since fighting began in the late 1980s, it has killed tens of thousands of people and displaced more than a million, many of whom have been living as refugees for more than 20 years.

The increased firepower is not the only reason the conflict has grown more dangerous and more intractable.

The fight is rooted in religious hatreds -- real and imagined -- between Christian Armenia and predominantly Muslim Azerbaijan.

And a new generation of Armenians and Azerbaijanis, including the soldiers now serving on the front line, cannot remember when their parents and grandparents lived peacefully as neighbors -- before Armenians were purged from Azerbaijan and Azerbaijanis were forced from the areas now occupied by Armenia.

Residents of Nagorno-Karabakh, where the majority Armenian population declared an independent republic after the collapse of the Soviet Union, are hamstrung by their unrecognized status, which prohibits most international trade.

The republic is largely viewed as a puppet extension of Armenia, with its residents traveling abroad on Armenian passports and many Armenian officials, including President Sargsyan, having been born in Nagorno-Karabakh and having previously held government posts there.

In casual conversations, it was not uncommon for Azerbaijanis to deny that the Armenian genocide occurred, or for Armenians to insist that Azerbaijanis were not a real nation and had no legitimate ties to lands they had lived on for centuries.

"This is our land, our homeland, and we will always protect it," said Gayane Gevorgyan, an Armenian and the mother of two young children who now lives in Shushi, a city that before the war had a majority Azerbaijani population. "We will do it for our children. We have no place else to go."

Although the long history of Azerbaijani residents in Shushi is well documented, and the city contains two famous mosques, Ms. Gevorgyan said that Azerbaijanis expelled during the war had no right to return.

"We were part of greater Armenia even before Christ," she said in an interview at the State Historical Museum, where she works as a guide. "Shushi is not their homeland, so they don't have any right to come back."

In Azerbaijan, there is a city government-in-exile with a single-minded focus on reclaiming the city, called Shusha in Azerbaijani. "Our only goal is to come back," said Bayram A. Safarov, the head of the administration in exile. "I know every stone there."

The hardened views in the public mind make it even more difficult to broker an accord, despite Presidents Aliyev and Sargsyan's having met three times last year.

"The reality is after 20 years of inflammatory rhetoric, both presidents will admit to you that the people of the two countries are just not ready," said one Western official who has met both men, and who requested anonymity to discuss private conversations on sensitive diplomatic issues.

In Azerbaijan, tens of thousands of refugees live in substandard housing. In some cases, families have lived for years in individual college dormitory rooms, sharing a bathroom on the hall.

Armenians living in Nagorno-Karabakh are hamstrung by their unrecognized status, which prohibits most international trade.

The region's capital, called Stepanakert in Armenian and Xankendi in Azerbaijani, has no functioning airport. And officials there do not have a formal role in the peace process.

Irina Khachaturyan, who sells trinkets from a stall in the central market in Stepanakert, is Armenian but said she dreamed of returning to Baku, the Azerbaijani capital where she lived before the war.

"It was my motherland; I was born there, lived there, studied there," Ms. Khachaturyan said.

Although she lives among fellow Armenians, she said Stepanakert never became home.

"I never found my place," she said. "These 25 years, I have been living like on needles."

*--Alexandra Odynova contributed reporting*

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## ASIA/PACIFIC

### 18. U.S., South Korea diverge on paths toward North

#### *Obama toughens up, while Seoul hints at signs of rapprochement*

Washington Post, Feb. 1, Pg. A12 | Anna Fifield

SEOUL - Differences between the United States and South Korea over their approach to North Korea are becoming increasingly apparent, and Seoul's interest in exploring renewed contacts with its estranged Communist sibling could call into question the likely success of the Obama administration's harder line.

No danger of a rift between the United States and South Korea exists yet, but there's a saying in Korean that perfectly sums up their situation: same bed, different dreams.

"The U.S. is going in one direction, and South Korea is going in the other," said Choi Kang, vice president of the Asan Institute for Policy Studies, a respected Seoul think tank. "I think there may be some friction between the two sides."

Those differences have become evident in recent weeks as South Korea has made tentative moves toward rapprochement with the North, even raising the prospect of a summit between President Park Geun-hye and the North's Kim Jong Un.

Meanwhile, the United States has toughened its position, imposing a new round of sanctions since the Sony Pictures cyberattack and threatening more, while President Obama predicts the eventual collapse of the "authoritarian" state.

U.S. officials say they are not concerned that Park might meet Kim as Washington is trying to further isolate the North Korean leader.

"There is no daylight between us and South Korea," Wendy Sherman, undersecretary of state for political affairs, said in Tokyo Friday after visiting Seoul.

In fact, Washington was "completely supportive" of Park's push for greater engagement and perhaps a summit, she said. "She has said that denuclearization is the topic for these discussions, and we agree that this is the priority," Sherman said.

But Park's desire to reconnect with the North could significantly blunt the effects of America's punitive sanctions.

The Obama administration's long-standing policy of "strategic patience" - basically, waiting out North Korea - is over, Choi said. "The Sony hacking was the beginning of the end for strategic patience," he said. "Now it's all about pressure and sanctions."

But for South Korea, it's more complicated.

People here live in the specter - and within firing range - of a belligerent, highly militarized North. Among older Koreans, there remains a keen sense of being cut off from fellow Koreans, although that is fading with generational change.

Park, having taken a hard line against Kim when she assumed power two years ago, has noticeably relaxed her stance on North Korea recently.

That perhaps reflects her domestic political realities, analysts say, pointing out that she's entering the third year of her five-year term. With few successes to point to so far, they say, she could do with a boost from a summit, which generally has the effect of lessening fears of the North here.

"I am willing to meet anyone to ease this pain and for peaceful unification," Park said in a rare news conference last month. "There are no preconditions, but North Korea needs to be open-minded and have sincere intentions."

Seoul is pursuing a resumption of reunions between family members separated by the division of the Koreas, perhaps as soon as next month, but Pyongyang first wants an end to the sanctions imposed in 2010 after the North sank a Southern naval corvette, costing 50 lives.

"If the South Korean government is genuinely interested in the humanitarian issue, it should first remove the blockage measure instead of making a fuss about separated families," the regime said Friday in a statement carried by the official Korean Central News Agency.

Certainly, North Korea doesn't do anything for free. To secure the first summit between the two Koreas, in 2000, Kim Dae-jung's administration paid \$500 million to the North, and the price has apparently risen exponentially over the years.

In an 800-page memoir to be published next week, Park's predecessor, Lee Myung-bak, writes that North Korea demanded an "absurd" \$10 billion and almost a million metric tons in food aid in 2009 during discussions about a potential summit (which never happened).

In private meetings this month, Ryoo Kil-jae, Park's unification minister, has insisted that a summit will take place this year, according to participants, and has publicly said that the sanctions, which restricted Southern trade with the North, are on the table.

The divergence between the allies could hardly be more stark. With South Korea softening its position, President Obama struck a markedly hawkish tone when asked about North Korea in an interview with YouTube last month.

"It's brutal and it's oppressive," he said, adding that the United States will keep ratcheting up the pressure on the North. "Over time, you will see a regime like this collapse."

There is certainly no talk here of collapse. Indeed, South Korean planning is premised on the idea of peaceful unification through dialogue, however historically incongruous that idea may seem.

A "unification preparation committee" established by Park to run parallel with - or perhaps in competition with - the unification ministry has been meeting to draw up long-term plans for merging the two Koreas, including writing a "unification charter" and even drafting a new constitution.

At a meeting on unification preparations in January, Park told her ministers to rally the public's support for negotiations with North Korea, local media have reported. South Koreans have long been concerned about the

impact that unification with their impoverished and technologically backward neighbor would have on their fast-paced, consumer-driven lifestyle, with government estimates suggesting that about \$500 billion would be needed in the first 20 years.

Park has been trying to emphasize the positive aspects of unification, talking about the "jackpot" that will come with a new market of 26 million new Korean-speaking consumers.

But Cheong Seong-chang of the Sejong Institute, a pro- engagement think tank, said that despite the public posturing, Park did not seem overly eager for a summit.

"They are trying to work on smaller things like reunions of separated families," he said. "Once that happens, when inter-Korean relations improve, then we can talk about a summit. We have a deeply ingrained mistrust of North Korea."

Although there is a difference in mood between Seoul and Washington, it would not necessarily result in a difference in actions, said Scott Snyder, a Korea expert at the Council on Foreign Relations. For both countries, denuclearization remains a necessary requirement for an improvement in relations with North Korea.

"The South Korean side is leaning forward on engagement right now, while the U.S. is leaning back. But these differences will only emerge if North Korea decides to come to the table," he said.

Given North Korea's reluctance to discuss, let alone give up, its nuclear program, that seems like a long shot. "The key to keeping the U.S. and South Korea on the same page," Snyder said, "is North Korea's seeming inability to sustain any kind of effective engagement with either side."

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## **AFRICA**

### **19. Chadian jets bomb Nigerian town in anti-Boko Haram raid – sources**

Agence France-Presse, Jan. 31 | Not Attributed

Chadian aircraft on Saturday bombed the Nigerian town of Gamboru in a raid targeting extremist group Boko Haram, security sources said, as regional efforts to combat the Islamists intensified.

An initial raid was carried out around midday by two fighter jets on the town in Nigeria's far northeast along the Cameroon border, sources from Chad and Cameroon said on condition of anonymity.

It was followed by further bombings of areas around the town, Chadian sources said. The raids were aimed at "allowing Chadian soldiers to enter Gamboru," a Cameroon security source told AFP.

Details on damage or casualties were not immediately clear.

Boko Haram overran the town several months ago as part of its campaign to seize territory in the region and create an Islamic state.



"Senior officers from the Cameroon army are located in Fotokol," the Cameroon source said. "The Cameroon and Chadian armies met for the Gamboru operation."

The Cameroon town of Fotokol and its surroundings, just across the border from Gamboru, saw fighting between Chadian soldiers and Boko Haram extremists on Thursday and Friday.

Chad's military said three of its soldiers and 123 militants were killed in the two days of fighting in the area.

Chad has deployed soldiers to Cameroon to help in the fight against the Islamists.

The Boko Haram uprising has become a regional crisis, with the four directly affected countries -- Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria -- agreeing to boost cooperation to contain the threat.

Nigeria's military said on Thursday that its fighter jets had bombed the northeast town of Malam Fatori, also controlled by Boko Haram.

Witnesses and some media reports said troops and airforce planes from Chad were also involved in that operation on Nigerian soil but Abuja neither confirmed nor denied the claim.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on Saturday gave his backing to an African Union proposal to set up a regional five-nation force of 7,500 troops to fight Boko Haram.

Boko Haram now controls large swathes of territory across northeastern Nigeria, with the country's military having failed to stop the worsening six-year insurgency.

Nigeria heads to the polls in two weeks and the brutal conflict has played a central role in the campaigns between President Goodluck Jonathan and his challenger, former military dictator Muhammadu Buhari.

The conflict has killed more than 13,000 people since 2009, with Nigeria's military also accused of major abuses in the fight against the group. More than a million people have been forced from their homes.

Much of the world became aware of the group after it carried out the mass abduction of 276 girls from the town of Chibok in April last year.

Nigeria is Africa's most populous nation and largest economy, but most of its 170 million people live on less than \$1 per day.

UN chief Ban, while backing the proposed multi-national force, said that "military means may not be the only solution."

"There should be very careful analysis of the root causes why this kind of terrorism, and extremism, violent extremism, are spreading," he told reporters.

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## **DEFENSE DEPARTMENT**

## **20. Pile of daunting challenges ahead for next defense secretary**

Associated Press, Jan. 31 | Robert Burns and Lolita C. Baldor

WASHINGTON — As defense secretary, Ashton Carter would face a daunting pile of problems at home and abroad. And then there are the unforeseen crises, the ones that explode onto a Pentagon chief's agenda without warning.

Chuck Hagel, the man Carter would replace if confirmed, as expected, by the Senate, has noted that when he took the job in February 2013, he had no idea that U.S. troops would be back in a fractured Iraq or that the deadly Ebola virus in West Africa would require an urgent deployment of the 101st Airborne Division.

Even predictable challenges, such as pursuing and killing terrorists in the Middle East and Afghanistan, can be harder than they seemed on the outside, even for an experienced national security practitioner like the 60-year-old Carter. He served in the Pentagon under President Bill Clinton and was deputy defense secretary in 2011-2013.

Carter's confirmation hearings before the Senate Armed Services Committee are scheduled to begin Wednesday.

A sampling of the top issues facing the next defense secretary:

### **ISLAMIC STATE**

Even though President Barack Obama expected the nation to be off a war footing by 2015, among the most vexing problems Carter would inherit is the war against the Islamic State group in Iraq and Syria.

The bombing of IS targets in Syria, which began in September, probably will continue well into Carter's tenure and maybe beyond. But he may face a more rapidly changing situation on the ground in Iraq, where the U.S. now has about 2,500 troops.

The Iraqi government wants to launch a major counteroffensive to regain lost territory, particularly the northern city of Mosul, but it is unclear whether Iraqi troops can succeed without U.S. soldiers by their side to call in airstrikes. Carter may have to decide in coming months whether to recommend to Obama that he authorize U.S. troops to perform that riskier, close-in combat role in support of the Iraqis.

Carter also would manage — and assess the effectiveness of — a program designed to train members of the moderate Syrian opposition.

### **THE BUDGET**

The looming automatic budget cuts, known as sequestration, will be one of Carter's priorities because everything the military does is based on having enough money to pay for troops, equipment, weapons and training. Unless Congress takes action, the steep cuts initially approved in 2011 would be reinstated.

Defense and military leaders have insisted that deep cuts will require more reductions in the size of the force, particularly the Army, and make it more difficult to keep troops prepared to respond to threats or upheaval around the world.

Carter's main job will be as the top salesman leading the charge on Capitol Hill and persuading lawmakers not only to reverse the cuts but also bolster Pentagon spending.

## AFGHANISTAN

Obama decreed that America's combat mission in Afghanistan is over, but there are more than 10,500 U.S. troops on the ground and many are still conducting counterterrorism operations against the Taliban and other insurgents.

American and coalition forces continue to train and advise the Afghan military. Obama has said that the U.S. can continue to provide ground and air support to the Afghan forces when needed.

Carter, however, will have to deal with nagging questions about the pace of the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, which under current plans would have all U.S. troops out by the end of 2016. Afghan officials are worried about the reduction in U.S. troop support.

U.S. military commanders say they will wait until after this summer's fighting season to decide if they should request any changes to the current drawdown. Any change to the pace could be seen as Obama reneging on his promise to end the war, making such a request politically tricky for Carter.

## RUSSIA

The U.S. is relying on NATO partners to help pressure Russia to relent in its support of anti-government rebels in eastern Ukraine — a problem that aligns with Carter's long history of advocating for closer NATO ties to Ukraine.

Carter would be expected to weigh in on the question of whether to expand U.S. assistance for Ukraine to include weaponry.

Carter's background also fits another Russia problem: Moscow's reluctance to continue with a decades-long U.S. program to help secure surplus Russian nuclear materials to ensure they do not fall into terrorists' hands. Carter has focused on the problem of "loose nukes" in Russia since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

## CHINA

Improving defense relations with China is likely to rank as a Carter priority, in part because of tensions over Beijing's growing military might, regional influence and expanding cyberwarfare capability. Carter will have to key an eye on the other leading defense challenge in Asia: North Korea's nuclear weapons program.

## HEALTH OF THE FORCE

After more than a dozen years at war, America's service members have battled more than enemy insurgents. At home, suicides, sexual assaults, traumatic brain injuries and post-traumatic stress all increased as the wars dragged on. Both suicides and reported sexual assaults increased last year, compared with 2013.

The Pentagon sees the increase in reported sexual assaults as a positive sign that victims are more willing to come forward. But the military services continue to struggle to reduce assaults while also protecting victims are insuring they get proper care. It will be up to Carter to continue to pressure the services to make progress.

He also will be the final arbiter when the military services come forward later this year to say what combat jobs should not be opened to women. While thousands of front-line jobs are now open to women, many of the more difficult infantry, armor and commando jobs are still being reviewed and debated.

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## **AIR FORCE**

### **21. Tester seeks safer vehicles at Malmstrom**

Great Falls Tribune (MT), Jan. 31, Pg. A1 | Jenn Rowell

As budgets are tightening and changes are being implemented within the U.S. nuclear force, including at Malmstrom Air Force Base, Sen. Jon Tester, D-Mont., sent a letter to Secretary of the Air Force Deborah Lee James asking that she keep a few things in mind.

In the letter dated Jan. 15, Tester expresses concern that ground transportation and Humvees that airmen use to travel to the 150 intercontinental ballistic missile sites and the launch facilities spread across Montana have fast replacement rates and high maintenance needs because of the distances, highway speeds and weather conditions.

Tester writes that he's concerned for airmen and civilian safety with Humvees on the highways, especially if Montana raises the speed limit on some roads to 85 miles per hour.

Malmstrom Humvees have an authorized maximum speed of 55 mph on hard surface roads, according to base officials.

Tester writes to ask that James prioritize ground transportation, particularly Humvees, in the upcoming Air Force budget request.

"I encourage you to prioritize the procurement of new security forces vehicles in next year's budget request. ... As you know, all of the vehicles at Malmstrom are critical in ensuring America's nuclear deterrence and ensuring the safety and security of our nuclear arsenal," Tester wrote.

In December, Malmstrom received 43 new Ford F-150s and Dodge Ram 3500s that have four-wheel drive and radio equipment.

The trucks were delivered to Malmstrom and the other two missile wings at F. E. Warren in Wyoming and Minot in North Dakota as part of the Force Improvement Program, which was created after a cheating investigation was announced in January 2014.

Twentieth Air Force began delivering the trucks in October and will distribute 95 in total to the three missile wings. Tester asked James how many other vehicles still need to be replaced at Malmstrom.

The current truck fleet is aging, and trucks at Malmstrom average between 200,000 to 260,000 miles, according to base officials.

Maintaining the older, well-used trucks has also been costly.

"When the older vehicles have to haul up to four people out at a time, plus all of the winter and survival gear, it can overload the vehicle," said Art Nyberg, 5th Logistics Readiness Squadron vehicle fleet maintenance control and analysis manager at Minot. "The new pickups are four-wheel drive and half-ton; therefore, they won't be overloaded. They are a lot safer for the airmen and a much better fit for our mission."

Missile combat crews use the trucks daily to get to and from the missile field and four-wheel drive will help crews handle the winter-driving conditions at the three missile wings, known as the northern tier bases, according to Air Force officials.

Since FIP was created in February, the Air Force directed more than \$160 million from the previous fiscal year for equipment and parts for maintainers, vehicles and quality-of-life improvements in the field.

In April, Malmstrom announced it received \$2.86 million for upgrades identified through FIP, and an additional \$1 million for quality-of-life improvements was also distributed to each of the three missile wings, including Malmstrom.

Tester also asked for an update on the transition from UH-1N helicopters to less costly UH-60 helicopters.

Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel announced in November that he plans to replace the aging UH-1N helicopters, such as those operated by AFGSC at Malmstrom. AFGSC said in October that if a replacement was funded, the new helicopter platform would be provided to Malmstrom, F.E. Warren and Minot Air Force bases.

In October, the Tribune reported that AFGSC said there was a need to replace the helicopters, which date to 1969, to increase range, airspeed and lift.

"We're the last one still flying them," Wilson said during the Pentagon press briefing in November.

But on Wednesday, Gen. Mark Welsh, chief of staff of the Air Force, testified to Congress that if sequestration continues, it "would cut roughly 66 percent of currently planned funding intended to modernize nuclear systems and infrastructure."

The sequestration cut would include the UH-1N recapitalization, Welsh said, as well as plans to improve weapons storage areas at Malmstrom and Minot; and modernization programs for bombers and nuclear weapon components.

"Sequestration level funding counters our commitment to get healthier and threatens our ability to ensure nuclear readiness and unquestionable deterrence in the future," Welsh said in written testimony.

Air Combat Command, headquartered in Virginia, now operates the HH-60G Pave Hawk to provide personnel recovery capability for its own forces as well as other Department of Defense forces in hostile or isolated environments.

It's not required that the Air Force transition to a single helicopter platform, but officials said there are potential savings in training, logistics and personnel costs if the service moves to a single type of helicopter.

The Air Force vice chief of staff in July approved the system requirements to replace the UH-1N.



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## **22. Runway overhaul to begin at DAFB**

Delaware State News (Dover, DE), Jan. 31, Pg. A1 | Craig Anderson

DOVER — Years in the making, the time for critical renovations to a Dover Air Force Base runway is nearly here.

On Monday preliminary improvements begin for the \$98.3 million rebuild of a slowly decaying landing strip that's been an issue since 2005, officials said Friday when they met civilian contractors tasked with the project.

"What you're going to build here will last 75 years. I hope it will last 100 years and outlive us all," base commander Col. Michael Grismer told contractors during a presentation covering the base and its mission.

Earlier, Col. Grismer said about giving new life to the north-south Runway 01-19: "The customer you're serving here is not just Dover Air Force Base and (its aircraft) but the Department of Defense.

"This is a key hub of logistics for the Department of Defense. We are embarking on something that's pretty significant ..."

Challenges will abound during a period from June 18 to Dec. 23 when the runway will be limited to 6,000 foot approaches.

While the smaller C-17 transports not fully loaded still will be able to land, most if not all C-5 Galaxy operations temporarily will transfer to McGuire Air Force Base in New Jersey.

Personnel moved to New Jersey will be close enough to Dover to return to their families in short order and minimize the stress of separation, said Lt. Col. Mark Radio, the 436th Airlift Wing Operations Support Squadron director of operations.

The non-precision landing capability until nearly the end of the year will limit operations, and bad weather landings are no longer possible.

Thus, aerial traffic into the base will slow from the rapid pace of 4,700 aircraft loaded and unloaded in 2014.

Last year, 31 Dover air base aircraft went to 230 airfields in 62 countries.

The Runway Approved Schedule has all construction operations complete by June 15, 2016, which base officials stressed is the longest-range goal.

An earlier conclusion to the project would benefit DAFB and taxpayers alike, Col. Grismer said.

"This can be a huge success story for us all if we can get it done on time or even before," he said.

Pointing out that Air Force infrastructure needs are currently underfunded, Col. Grismer said the base is committed to being the best stewards of limited fiscal resources.

Lt. Col. Scott Bryant, the 436th Airlift Civil Engineer Squadron commander, said the improvements will put a stop to regular runway patchwork of potting and cracking concrete and asphalt that was both time consuming and costly.

The runway has been in operation since 1941.

Quality safety officers from the government and contracted companies will communicate daily to make sure no injurious mishaps occur, Lt. Col. Bryant said.

A high priority is placed on the safety concerns surrounding the project, Col. Grismer said.

"One of my primary concerns is how we de-conflict operations with runway construction (occurring) at the same time," he said.

The shortened runway will prove challenging, but Col. Grismer said personnel is readying for the task.

"We are being proactive on training our crews to get in and out of that 6,000 foot strip," he said. "Getting that precision runway back up and running is going to be key for us."

The project is being funded from the Air Force's Centralized Sustainment Restoration Modernization fund.

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## ARMY

### **23. Exoneration sought for ex-Army officer**

*Attorneys say he did not receive a fair trial in Afghan death case*

Washington Post, Feb. 1, Pg. A12 | T. Rees Shapiro

Every morning, Clint Lorange wakes up in his Army-issued prison cell at Fort Leavenworth, Kan., and looks at a photo of two dead Afghan men.

To this day, the former first lieutenant does not know their names, but he knows he is responsible for their deaths.

In August 2013, Lorange was sentenced to 20 years for murder after he ordered soldiers in his unit to kill the pair as they sped toward their platoon in Kandahar province on a motorbike and ignored commands to stop. Lorange never fired a shot, but the men would turn out to be unarmed.

Now lawyers and others working on Lorange's behalf are seeking to exonerate the 30-year-old - only the second Army officer charged with murder in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan - claiming that he did not receive a fair trial.

At Lorange's court-martial, the majority of the men in his platoon testified against him, including the two soldiers who fired their weapons during the brief engagement in July 2012. On the stand, the soldiers said that the Afghans posed no threat and that there was no reason to shoot them. Maj. Gen. Richard D. Clarke, who as commanding officer of the 82nd Airborne Division had the authority to oversee Lorange's case, recently upheld the conviction.

But John Maher, Lorange's attorney, said the jury was never informed that those soldiers were offered immunity from murder charges to testify against his client - a disclosure that Maher says could have influenced a jury. Maher, a retired Army judge advocate general officer, also said Lorange acted within the law that summer day.

"This is not a case where a depraved soldier intended to kill indiscriminately," Maher wrote in a filing to the 82nd Airborne leadership. "This is the case of a patriotic and loyal infantry officer who zealously sought to protect his paratroopers."

The case now sits with the U.S. Army Court of Criminal Appeals at Fort Belvoir, Va. In an interview, Maher said he is filing a motion to the court to have Clarke review the case a second time.

In the meantime, he and Lorange's supporters have built support for his case. An online White House petition they started to request a presidential pardon has accumulated more than 102,000 signatures. Three lawmakers - Reps. Duncan Hunter (R-Calif.), a major in the Marine Reserves; Ryan Zinke (R-Mont.), a retired Navy SEAL officer; and Matt Salmon (R-Ariz.), who serves on the House Foreign Affairs Committee - have called on Army Secretary John McHugh to examine the case.

"While the rules of engagement are in place for a reason and serve a critical purpose, any case that projects an alleged violation of the rules of engagement deserves a high level of attention and scrutiny," the congressmen wrote in a letter to McHugh. "It is our belief, based on information brought to our attention, that Lorange's case requires further review."

Lorange's new effort for clemency began after he stumbled across a book in the Leavenworth prison library about the fight to clear the name of a U.S. Army officer after he was convicted of collaborating with the enemy during the Korean War. On a lark, Lorange contacted Don Snyder, the author of "A Soldier's Disgrace," who campaigned to expunge the criminal record of Maj. Ronald Alley.

Now Snyder - in tandem with Lorange's attorney - is crusading once again on the behalf of a soldier convicted in wartime.

"We just can't turn against our soldiers when they come home," said Snyder, who added that he is not being compensated for work on Lorange's case. Snyder said he believes that Lorange has fallen victim to an Army leadership that was concerned about public perception of civilian deaths after the massacre of 16 Afghans by U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Robert Bales.

"I think Clint walked right into it," Snyder said. "He was scapegoated."

Early in his Afghanistan deployment, Lorange had been thrust into the command of a bloodied platoon. The lieutenant Lorange replaced had been hit by an improvised explosive device and was sprayed with shrapnel across his abdomen, and a private lost his right arm below the elbow and a right leg below the knee. Another soldier in the unit had been shot in the throat, and the bullet fractured his spine, paralyzing him.

Less than a week into his new command, Lorange led his men and a small coalition of Afghan troops on a patrol. Not long after stepping off post, the soldiers were maneuvering single-file through rows of grapevines when one of Lorange's men spotted three Afghans on a motorcycle traveling fast in their direction.

The rules of engagement for U.S. troops indicate that they may open fire only if they detect hostile intent or actions. Lorange quickly ordered one of his soldiers to shoot the Afghans after they refused to stop.

After the first soldier missed, Lorange ordered a second trooper manning an M240B machine gun to open fire. Two of the Afghans died in the fusillade while the third escaped.

When the soldiers located the bodies of the dead Afghans, they found no weapons, radios, cellphones or other suspicious equipment common for Taliban fighters to carry into combat. Instead, a search revealed three cucumbers, a pair of scissors, an identification card and a flashlight.

The Army charged Lorange with murder and other crimes, including obstruction of justice, after he falsely stated to commanders that the platoon did not examine the bodies because villagers had already taken them for burial. He also was charged in several unrelated incidents, including threatening to kill local farmers and ordering a marksman, for no justified reason, to shoot at a group of Afghan children.

At his trial, several soldiers in his platoon testified that Lorange had told the men before the patrol to disregard the known rules of engagement and shoot any Afghans riding motorcycles.

James Skelton, the soldier who fired the first shots, said on the stand that "there was not a reason to shoot" at the Afghan men. David Shilo, who fired the machine gun, testified that "my life wasn't threatened at the time."

The identity of the two men killed in the July shooting remains a mystery. But Maher, Lorange's attorney, said Army intelligence records cite the account of one Afghan who identified them as relatives of a known Taliban bomber. Maher said that evidence should have been entered into trial.

In a letter Lorange wrote to the 82nd Airborne commanding general, the soldier acknowledged that he thinks about the men he ordered killed every day.

"The thing that haunts me the most is that I will never know for sure who those men really were," Lorange wrote. "The way I see it is that if there is any small chance these people were not Taliban I owe it to myself to never forget their faces. And Sir, even if they were Taliban, it is important to me to remember that even the enemy are people. And human life is precious. Regardless of your decision, Sir, it will be my burden to bear."

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## NAVY

### **24. NCIS probes alleged illegal filming in women's bathroom on carrier John C. Stennis**

NavyTimes.com, Jan. 31 | David Larter and Mark D. Faram

A lieutenant embarked for training on board the Bremerton, Washington-based carrier John C. Stennis is under investigation for allegedly trying to videotape women inside the female officers' bathroom.

It is the second investigation in the past two months into Navy personnel allegedly attempting to tape women in the bathroom while underway.

According to a document obtained by Navy Times, the junior officer was caught standing outside the women's bathroom dressed in PT gear with a handheld electronic device held to a ventilation grate "positioned to view the interior of the female head."

When a woman aboard Stennis approached the 33-year-old lieutenant, he is reported to have said "sorry," and left the area.

The woman later identified the lieutenant eating in the wardroom and ship's security seized his personal electronic devices, according to the Navy message released on the incident.

The alleged incident took place on the evening of Jan. 29, while the ship was conducting training and carrier qualification operations off the Southern California coast, Cmdr. Jeannie Groeneveld, spokeswoman for Naval Air Forces, Pacific in San Diego told Navy Times.

"I am extremely disappointed in the alleged misconduct by a sailor temporarily embarked aboard our ship," said Capt. Mike Wettlaufer, the Stennis' CO in a statement released Saturday by Naval Air Forces.

"However, I am pleased a shipmate stepped up to stop unacceptable behavior and reported it — an NCIS investigation commenced immediately because our shipmate took action."

News of the alleged incident on the Stennis comes a month after allegations came to light in the submarine force of a sailor allegedly using a cell phone to video female officers in the shower over a 10-month period onboard the the Kings Bay, Georgia-based ballistic missile submarine Wyoming.

Though up to 12 have been implicated in the alleged submarine incident, no formal charges have yet been brought in the case.

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## **NOTABLE COMMENTARY**

### **25. Retroactively Authorizing War**

New York Times, Feb. 1, Pg. SR8 | Editorial

They went largely unnoticed, four words President Obama ad-libbed during the State of the Union address last month as he asked lawmakers to provide legal cover for America's military intervention in Iraq and Syria.

"We need that authority," the president said, adding a line to the prepared remarks on his teleprompter that seemed to acknowledge a reality about which his administration has been inexcusably dishonest.

As the new Congress gets settled in, the debate over the scope and legal authority of Washington's new war in the Middle East has resurfaced amid strikingly disparate views. The White House is consulting with lawmakers from both parties on the parameters that would retroactively establish ground rules for the bombing campaign against Islamic State militants in Iraq and Syria that began in September.



That task has become more complicated by irresponsible calls from some lawmakers, and the nation's top military officer, for an expansive mandate that would leave this president, and his successors, with dangerously broad authority to use military force in perpetuity.

The Islamic State, a barbaric militant group that seeks to establish a caliphate, poses a dire threat to the United States and its allies that will take a long time, and significant resources, to fight. But the group, also known as ISIL and ISIS, cannot serve as a pretext to give the executive branch what amounts to a blank check to battle an ever-shifting array of enemies around the globe.

By failing to replace the sweeping war authorizations Congress established for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan more than a decade ago, with a far narrower mandate, lawmakers are abdicating one of their most consequential constitutional powers: the authority to declare war. White House officials maintain that the current campaign in Iraq and Syria is legal under the Afghan and Iraq war resolutions, a dubious argument considering those were tailored to respond to the Sept. 11 attacks and to deal with Saddam Hussein, then the Iraqi leader, on the grounds — since proved to be false — that he had weapons of mass destruction.

While President Obama has called on Congress to draft a new authorization for the use of military force, the White House has yet to lay out a specific blueprint that could serve as a starting point for negotiations on Capitol Hill. Testifying in early December, Secretary of State John Kerry left the impression that the White House wanted broad flexibility. For instance, Mr. Kerry argued that limiting the battleground to Iraq and Syria would “advertise to ISIL that there are safe havens for them outside” those countries.

Gen. Martin Dempsey, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, indicated in an interview that he was pushing for a timeless war authorization. “All options should be on the table, and then we can debate whether we want to use them,” he told the Pentagon’s news service on Jan. 23.

Prominent Republicans in recent days have called for an even more robust campaign. Senator John McCain of Arizona, the new chairman of the Armed Services Committee, recently said that “American boots on the ground are necessary to defeat” the Islamic State. He also called for the establishment of a no-flight zone in Syria and more support for so-called moderate rebels. His position would not seem as ill-advised if the painful lessons of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan weren’t as raw.

Representative Adam Schiff, a Democrat from California, has proposed a more reasonable framework. Last week, he introduced a bill that would limit the war authorization to three years, permit the use of force only in Iraq and Syria and prohibit the deployment of American combat ground troops. Mr. Schiff’s plan would nix the Iraq war authorization and sunset the Afghan one in three years. That would give President Obama plenty of flexibility to fight the Islamic State during his remaining time in office. It also would give his successor a reasonable amount of time to take stock of the effort and do what the Constitution requires of American presidents: enlist the support of Congress to wage war.

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## **26. I met Assad. He’s too delusional to make peace.**

*Washington can’t count on his good faith, says journalist Jonathan Tepperman*

Washington Post, Feb. 1, Pg. B1 | Jonathan Tepperman

In recent weeks, Western governments have begun subtly shifting their positions on Syria. The Obama administration seems to have quietly dropped its demand that President Bashar al-Assad resign as a precondition of peace talks. Instead, reports suggest it has embraced proposals that would allow Assad to be part of an interim deal. The new approach implies that the White House and its allies believe that the Syrian president might be open to a compromise that could end his country's four-year civil war.

I met with Assad on Jan. 20 in Damascus - his first interview by an American journalist since 2013. And if there was one clear takeaway from our talk, which you can read in full in *Foreign Affairs*, it was this: Such hopes are a fantasy. Superficially, Assad said many of the right things, appearing conciliatory and eager to involve Western governments in his struggle against Islamist terrorism. But underneath the pretty words, he remains as unrepentant and inflexible today as he was at the start of the Syrian civil war four years ago. Assad seems to have no idea how badly the war is going, how impractical his proposals sound and how meaningless his purported overtures are. Which means that, whatever Western leaders might wish, the fighting in Syria will end in one of two ways. Either Assad will defeat the rebels. Or the rebels will defeat him - and string him up by his toes.

Visiting Syria today is a strange and unsettling experience. The signs of war are everywhere. Damascus is surrounded by snow-capped mountains and concentric rings of army checkpoints, manned by twitchy soldiers unsure how to respond when a solitary American - I traveled without security but hired a local driver - shows up. (Some were indifferent, others were hostile, and one grabbed my hand and declared, "The Syrian Arab Republic Army loves the American press!") High concrete blast walls shield most buildings, red-and-white-striped gun turrets loom over intersections, posters of Assad in shades and black military dress hang from lampposts, United Nations aid workers fill the hotels, and the booms and pops of artillery and mortar fire echo from the front, just a few miles away.

Yet despite the siege, cafes and markets are bustling. The streets are thronged with families out shopping, with students heading to school - and with hundreds of thousands of refugees who have more than doubled the city's population since the war began.

But the most dissonant feature is the man responsible for it all. Assad is tall, slight and birdlike, with a vanishingly weak chin, nothing like the Hollywood picture of a murderous autocrat. From the moment he greeted me - with a smile, a handshake and a high-pitched giggle - at his private office, I entered a sort of Neverland of the dictator's imagination.

His country may be burning, but all that unpleasantness vanishes at the doorstep of the president's Greek-revival villa, perched on a hill above town. The luxuriously modern suite where we talked had a huge new iMac on the desk and a model of Westminster Abbey on the sideboard (presumably a souvenir of his years spent studying ophthalmology in Britain, but one that seems jarringly incongruous now that Prime Minister David Cameron has called Assad "completely illegitimate"). Everything was designed to create an air of genteel civility, down to the cappuccino that the expensively dressed president offered. The man himself was jovial, polite and utterly relaxed.

And he was disconcertingly good at presenting himself as a reasonable, rational actor. His critique of America's Middle East policy, for example, is one shared by many lefties in the West: The U.S. role, he told me, should be "to help peace in the region, to fight terrorism, to promote secularism, to support this area economically" and "not to launch wars. Launching war doesn't make you a great power."

But behind the cheery aphorisms and the barely-there mustache is a man so unyielding and deeply deceptive - or delusional - that it's impossible to imagine him ever negotiating an equitable end to Syria's civil war.

Assad made that clear in several ways. A shrewd and crafty debater, he overwhelms interlocutors with torrents of language that combine common-sense rhetoric with wild untruths, often in a single sentence. So, for example, no sooner had he (sensibly) conceded, paraphrasing Clausewitz, that he'd never be able to triumph militarily - since "all wars anywhere in the world have ended with a political solution" - than he insisted that "the Syrian people are still with the unity of Syria; they still support the government." Given that the country's turmoil began when he savagely repressed widespread protests during the Arab Spring, sparking a popular rebellion, this analysis is more than a little implausible. Especially since his army is now suffering mass desertions and recent protests in Homs and Tartus suggest that even Assad's minority Alawite sect is turning against him.

In a similar vein, when I asked him about independent analyses showing that his government now controls a mere 45 to 50 percent of the country, Assad (sensibly) reminded me that Syria's war is not "between two countries, between two armies where you have an incursion and you lost some territory that you want to regain." But then he (nonsensically) insisted that his army remained supreme and that "wherever [it] has wanted to go, it has succeeded." Never mind that his forces have been unable to oust the rebels from Aleppo, for instance, for going on three years now.

Assad's constant pairing of the rational with the absurd was a neat rhetorical trick; it made the latter seem more credible through proximity to the former. And his utter, unblinking conviction added to the effect. Either Syria's president is an extremely competent fabulist - in which case he's merely a sociopath - or he actually believes his lies, in which case he's something much more dangerous (like a delusional psychopath). For why would he ever strike a deal to end a war he thinks he's winning?

Assad also remains blithely unapologetic, despite presiding over a brutal conflict that has gutted his country, killed some 200,000, rendered more than 7 million homeless and led to Syria's division into three sectarian mini-states. He insists that he can't think of a single mistake he's made: "I would have to go back to officials on the ground," he told me. "There's nothing in my mind." The man responsible for the mass torture of thousands and the use of chemical weapons and barrel bombs on civilians says those episodes never really took place: All the evidence has been fabricated by his enemies, he told me. "It's all allegations without evidence," funded by Qatar, he explained. So what's to regret?

Such attitudes don't exactly augur an openness to compromise.

Nor did his talk about the current negotiations, driven by the United Nations and Russia. When I asked Assad about concessions he might make to help these succeed, he either prevaricated, dismissing the value of confidence-building measures ("It's not a personal relationship. . . . You don't have to trust someone"), or rejected them outright. When I suggested prisoner exchanges, he scoffed at the idea.

While he dropped his long-standing insistence that the rebels lay down their arms as a prerequisite to talks - telling me: "We are going to meet with everyone. We don't have conditions" - he also repeatedly questioned whether there even was an opposition to talk to. And when I asked if he'd agree to any sort of power-sharing deal, he said yes but then insisted that any such deal would have to be affirmed by a referendum. This, of course, conveniently elided the fact that a divided nation (governed by a despot who "won" another presidential term last summer with 89 percent of the vote) could never conduct a fair plebiscite. So much for that, then.

At the start of our meeting, Assad implied that he'd decided to grant the interview now (I first requested it in 2013) because the recent terror attacks in Paris gave him a fresh opportunity to make the case his government has been pushing for years: that he and the West are fighting the same enemy, Islamist extremism, and so are natural allies and should join forces.

But for all his talk about comity and shared interests, Assad - once you cut through his obfuscation, dodges and appeals to reason - made it very clear that he's ready to concede absolutely nothing to bring the sides together. At the end of the day, the tyrant can imagine but one way for the conflict to end. All his enemies, in the region and in the West, must capitulate and concede the merits of his own twisted arguments. Until then, he'll keep on killing.

*--Jonathan Tepperman, the managing editor of Foreign Affairs magazine, is writing a book on how to solve the world's toughest political and economic challenges*

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## **27. How to get past talking with Iran**

Washington Post, Feb. 1, Pg. A15 | Michael Singh

If only the United States negotiated as ruthlessly with Iran as it does with itself.

The interim nuclear accord - formally the Joint Plan of Action (JPOA) - between Iran and the United States and its five negotiating partners (known as the P5+1) offers moderate benefits to both sides: It limits Iran's nuclear activities in certain respects, while giving Iran time and space for economic recovery. Given these benefits, both sides appear to view the JPOA as essentially their second-best option - not as good as a final accord on terms they prefer but better than the escalating crisis it replaced.

Perversely, however, this makes a final accord less likely. Achieving one will require painful compromises, particularly for Iranian hard-liners who view any accommodation with the United States as contrary to the Islamic Republic's core ideology. One might make those compromises if the alternative was dire. But the prospect of further extensions of the talks means that it is not.

This is the crux of the debate between the White House and Congress over sanctions legislation under consideration on Capitol Hill. Congress appears to believe that the threat of renewed sanctions is necessary to motivate the Iranian regime to agree to a final accord, just as sanctions played a role in persuading Iran to sign the JPOA, as even President Obama acknowledges.

The White House, on the other hand, seems to think new sanctions would have the opposite effect, reinforcing Iran's view that the United States cannot be trusted, undercutting Iranian negotiators and prompting Tehran and perhaps even our negotiating partners to walk away from the talks. It is out of this conviction that Obama threatened to veto the legislation and has strenuously lobbied against it.

So who is correct?

When Iran has made significant foreign policy shifts - such as ending the Iran-Iraq war in 1988 and suspending elements of its nuclear program and engaging in diplomacy in 2003 - it has been because the cost of not doing so



outweighed the benefits. If Iran consents to a nuclear accord, it will be because the cost of withholding that consent is unacceptably high, especially compared with the prospect of sanctions relief and removal of Iran's pariah status.

A veto of sanctions legislation would indicate to Iran that no further pressure is forthcoming, reducing the incentive to compromise. Additionally, it would vitiate the JPOA's negotiating deadline by signaling that an extension of the interim accord is the most likely alternative if no deal is inked. But it would also, by further souring relations between the White House and Congress, make it harder for the president to eventually gain Congress's support and deliver whatever sanctions relief he promises Iran, thus undermining the negotiating credibility that the administration purports to be protecting.

Yet Obama's veto threat also creates a conundrum for Congress, because it risks undercutting the very pressure that lawmakers are trying to increase. Even if Congress had the votes to override a veto, the effectiveness of the sanctions threat depends on the executive branch's cooperation. If the White House indicates its refusal to implement sanctions, or rushes to make what Congress would consider an unacceptable deal to avert them, legislative action could have the opposite effect from what is intended.

Despite their disagreement over sanctions, however, there is enough commonality between the White House and Congress on Iran that the Obama administration should try negotiations with the Hill rather than scorched-earth tactics. Indeed, doing so could even make a good outcome more likely.

Given that Congress's primary concern appears to be that the administration will make a bad deal, a good first step would be to stop offering Iran nuclear concessions - which have heightened congressional alarm without bringing Tehran around - and instead seek agreement with congressional leaders on what would constitute an acceptable deal.

This may, in fact, require toughening the U.S. negotiating stance on key issues such as Iran's past weaponization research, monitoring and verification, Iran's missile arsenal and the duration of an agreement. But it could also secure the congressional support required to empower the president to credibly offer sanctions relief, which Iran needs far more than it needs additional centrifuges.

At the same time, Iran must be convinced that the alternative is even greater pressure than it is experiencing now. To accomplish this, the United States and its negotiating partners should commit to no further extensions of the JPOA, warn that concessions will be rescinded and sanctions re-imposed if no deal is reached by a date certain, and counter rather than accommodate destabilizing Iranian activities in the Middle East.

The president is right that if we are going to negotiate, we should negotiate in good faith - but not forever. If Iranian leaders believe that the alternative to making a strategic choice to give up nuclear weapons is just more talks - and with them, more Western concessions - we should not be surprised if those talks stretch on inconclusively.

*--The writer is managing director of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy*

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## **28. They're as vicious as ISIS. Why don't we care?**

***Journalist Charlotte Lytton compares Boko Haram to the noisier terror group***

Washington Post, Feb. 1, Pg. B3 | Charlotte Lytton



Americans are obsessed with the Islamic State.

Ninety-one percent see the terrorist group as a threat to the vital interests of the United States, according to a September Washington Post-ABC News poll. That same month, President Obama called the Islamic State one of the greatest terrorist threats facing the country. "These are barbarians," House Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio) told ABC News later that month. "They intend to kill us. And if we don't destroy them first, we're going to pay the price."

Yet the African Islamists of Boko Haram are just as deadly as their Middle Eastern counterparts. And few Americans are paying attention.

News outlets chronicle the Islamic State's every bloody move. Between Jan. 1 and Jan. 28, America's 24 most popular news sites published 3,293 articles that mentioned the group, according to an analysis for The Washington Post run by Whitney Erin Boesel of Media Cloud, a joint project of Harvard and MIT. During that same period - which included the Baga massacre, in which Boko Haram killed as many as 2,000 Nigerian villagers - just 544 stories mentioned Boko Haram.

By membership, Boko Haram is about one-third the size the Islamic State. But it has displaced 1.5 million Nigerian citizens, nearly as many as the 1.8 million Iraqis displaced by the Islamic State. (The numbers for Syria are difficult to tally, but as many as 200,000 people fled Kobane in the four days after the Islamic State began attacking that city.)

The Nigerian terror force has killed 10,500 to 18,500 people since 2011, according to the Council on Foreign Relations. Concrete numbers are hard to come by, but experts say the Islamic State has killed at least 6,000 people in Iraq and Syria since its offensive began last year, only a slightly higher rate with a much bigger corps.

True, the groups, and their conflicts, have many dissimilarities. The Islamic State is determined to make headlines. Its ranks are full of Western fighters with a penchant for flashy violence and a native knowledge of what Western journalists cover. It boasts a slick social-media presence, uploading gruesome YouTube videos of slaughters and mass graves. The group has beheaded at least three Americans, and it operates in the same theater where many U.S. soldiers lost their lives fighting for Iraqi stability.

By contrast, the Nigerian extremists intentionally float beneath the radar. They've destroyed at least 24 base receiver stations in the country's northeast, hindering cellphone calls and the transmission of photos and videos. Fewer Western reporters work in the region, and the group hasn't directly threatened the United States. Even many Nigerian officials have been silent on Boko Haram, intent on hiding reports of homegrown terrorism. Without local media, it's even harder to expose the ugly truth of Boko Haram.

Still, the discrepancy in coverage reflects a certain hypocrisy. "Even when America's core interests are not directly threatened, we stand ready to do our part to prevent mass atrocities and protect basic human rights," Obama told the U.N. General Assembly in 2013.

But in reality, we - journalists, politicians, most Westerners - worry primarily about our own national priorities and national security. That comes at a cost. "Boko Haram is one of the most lethal terrorist groups in the world . . . [and] the lack of coverage has disincentived an international response," terrorism expert Max Abrahms said. "If

Boko Haram were front-page news regularly, it would be harder for the international community to ignore that crisis."

--Charlotte Lytton is a journalist based in London

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## **29. Take back the budget**

***Mr. Obama and Congress should work to undo sequestration***

Washington Post, Feb. 1, Pg. A16 | Editorial

There are few fans of the automatic, across-the-board spending limitations that prevail over roughly \$1 trillion in annual federal spending. Nor should there be. If to govern is to choose, then "sequestration," as these mandatory caps are known, is the antithesis of government. Moreover, sequestration allocates the pain 50-50 between all domestic discretionary programs on the one hand and the defense budget on the other. So it embodies a falsely precise equivalence between the two, regardless of circumstances at home and abroad.

What the country needs is a modern entitlement system and a tax code that efficiently produces the revenue to pay for it. Together, those reforms would open the fiscal space within which to make defense and domestic policy based on actual needs, rather than arbitrary spending caps. But congressional Republicans and President Obama have been unable to reach a compromise on these structural issues, which is why we have sequestration in the first place; it was enacted as a mechanism to force a deal in 2011, then become unwanted reality when no deal materialized by 2013.

On Monday, when he releases his annual budget proposal, President Obama will argue for an end to sequestration, White House officials have said. Mr. Obama plans to seek \$74 billion more in new spending, about 7 percent more than the spending caps in force under the so-called "sequester" law would allow. He would add initiatives such as free community college tuition, paying for the package with higher taxes on banks and capital gains.

Good for Mr. Obama for pushing to end the sequester, which is to say to resume governing. The damage has been especially severe to national defense, where the enforced austerity is "wreak[ing] havoc on our security," as retired Marine Gen. James Mattis told the Senate Armed Services Committee Tuesday. Another cheer for Mr. Obama's willingness to name the tax increases he would impose to pay for all of this, even if leaders of the Republican Congress have already said they won't accept any of them.

What will be less good is if Mr. Obama perpetuates his administration's original political calculus regarding the sequester: that treating defense and domestic programs equally, regardless of merit, is the way to maneuver the GOP, which is presumed to be the pro-defense party, into agreement. This sends the pernicious signal that the commander in chief regards national security as a partisan bargaining chip, even in a world where Mr. Obama himself is waging a war against the Islamic State in Iraq, among other pressing concerns.

The commander in chief ought to argue for the defense spending necessary for national security, regardless of political considerations. The president is entitled, separately, to make his case for more spending on infrastructure, education and other domestic needs. We support both. But he would have more credibility if he acknowledged the underlying cause of the long-term squeeze on both kinds of discretionary spending: entitlement programs which, if unreformed, will channel larger and larger shares of the budget to the older generation, including the well-off,

thereby triggering a vicious cycle in which interest payments on the growing national debt also swell. Mr. Obama used at least to acknowledge this as a problem. Now he seems content to leave it in the next president's in-box.

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### **30. The next American century**

*The U.S. has nearly all it needs to confront its problems head-on*

Washington Post, Feb. 1, Pg. A15 | Gen. David H. Petraeus (Ret.) and Michael E. O'Hanlon

Short-term economic trends in the United States are encouraging. Unemployment is down, growth is up, deficits are less than half what they were during the "Great Recession," gas prices have plummeted, citizens have "deleveraged" their debt considerably and consumer sentiment is very positive.

For many, however, these realities are merely a soothing veneer over a troubled picture. They see America in decline, the middle class adrift, the world in shambles and political acrimony more entrenched than ever over issues ranging from immigration and U.S. policy on Iran and Cuba to taxes and health care. This pessimism is not limited to the home front. With major U.S. allies in Europe and East Asia enduring sustained economic malaise, worrisome demographics and declining power, many believe the Western world is in retreat.

Those sentiments are generally unfounded, however, when it comes to the United States and North America. Recent positive headlines have not masked deeper problems so much as they have heralded the kind of future this nation can enjoy - especially if political leaders can make a few sensible, non- Herculean compromises on issues that beg attention.

The United States is, in fact, better positioned than any other country for the next 20 to 30 years - and, very likely, beyond. Together with Canada and Mexico, the United States also enjoys mutually reinforcing sources of competitive advantages in geopolitics, demographics, energy and natural resources, manufacturing and industrial competitiveness and, above all, innovation and technology. If the 20th century was the American Century, the 21st is poised to be the North American Century.

Since we first offered this view some two years ago in The Post, a number of favorable trends have solidified or even accelerated:

- The United States is now the world's largest producer of both oil liquids and natural gas, with Canada and Mexico important players in the energy arena, as well.
- U.S. manufacturing, while still far from its heyday, has added hundreds of thousands of jobs over the past two years, and Mexico is now fully competitive with China and other Asian manufacturing hubs in a variety of industries.
- The United States leads the world in high-tech sectors such as aerospace and pharmaceuticals.
- The U.S. federal budget deficit, while still too high, is below 3 percent of gross domestic product, and publicly held debt as a fraction of the GDP has stabilized at around 75 percent.
- Relative to GDP, U.S. household debt is down significantly from pre-Great Recession levels.

- U.S. small business confidence is the highest it has been in nine years, and consumer confidence is at its highest in 11 years.
- Crime rates in America are the lowest in a generation.
- America's demographics are far and away the healthiest among the developed economies, as well as Russia, China and India, with a nice and steady 1 percent annual population growth rate.
- The U.S. military, while under budgetary strain and still in harm's way, has weathered not only the brunt of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan but also the ax of "sequestration" and downward pressure on budgets for half a decade.
- The United States and Germany are, according to the World Economic Forum, neck and neck in respective claims to be the world's most competitive major economy. U.S. strengths in market size, entrepreneurial culture and financial networks roughly equal Germany's strengths in modern manufacturing and social cohesion.
- U.S. GDP growth is now exceeding 3 percent. Indeed, at present it appears that the U.S. economy may, for the first time in some nine years, grow more in absolute dollar terms than China's does. (China's growth rate, though declining, is likely to be nearly twice as fast; however, as measured in classic terms, its GDP is still only a bit over half as large as our own.)

This last point is crucial. China has recorded historic achievements, but its ascent to superpowerdom is not a given. Leaving aside the limited appeal of China's political and economic model, it faces the imperatives of transitioning from a low-cost labor provider to a value-added and services economy, reducing the world's largest debt-to-GDP ratio, cutting pollution and corruption, dealing with insufficiently competitive state-owned enterprises and addressing numerous other domestic challenges. In fact, Brookings Institution scholar David Dollar has argued that, even if China overtakes the United States in absolute GDP within a couple of decades, the United States may regain the top spot later in the century, especially if China's political model remains autocratic.

There is, of course, much that the United States needs to do. We need comprehensive immigration reform. Our education system is highly uneven in quality and requires an overhaul to prepare students for the economy of the future. Our lower and middle economic classes have seen minimal real wage growth since the Great Recession. Crime is still high by Western standards. And the U.S. deficit will get worse again within a half-decade or so if nothing is done on entitlement spending and tax reform. Beyond that, our infrastructure - which is central to future productivity gains - needs major improvement. And, of course, climate changes remain a threat, as do Islamic extremist groups and Iran, as well as Russia.

Regardless, more than any nation on Earth, and arguably more than any in history, the United States has the assets needed to confront its problems head-on. Indeed, however our nation's political parties differ on a variety of issues, Democrats and Republicans should agree on one proposition: This is another American century, and the future has seldom looked brighter. Washington policymakers do not need to rescue the nation from the precipice so much as to make reasonable, mid-size compromises on a number of policies and otherwise get out of the way.

*--David H. Petraeus is a retired U.S. Army general and chairman of the KKR Global Institute. Michael E. O'Hanlon is senior fellow and director of research in foreign policy at the Brookings Institution*

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