



AS OF 0500 HOURS, JUNE 26

OVERVIEW

The *New York Times* highlighted how Britain's historic vote to leave the European Union is raising questions about the future of the post-1945 order imposed on the world by the United States. In Somalia, at least 11 people were killed and several others wounded in an attack carried out by al-Shabaab militants on a well-known Mogadishu hotel, officials said. Also of note, U.S.-backed forces in Syria pushed further into ISIL-held Manbij, while Russian and Syrian warplanes pounded rebel-held areas in and around Aleppo city in support of a regime offensive on the rebels' sole remaining supply route, according to *Agence France-Presse*.

NEWS HEADLINES AT 0430

- UK opposition leader sacks foreign policy chief, deepens divisions
- Pope urges closer unity with Armenian church on final day of visit
- Death toll rises to 82 following Russian, regime raids in ISIS-held east Syria
- Trump says Muslim ban plan to focus on 'terrorist' countries
- Conservative columnist George Will quits GOP over Trump
- Two dead, five injured in shooting outside Texas dance hall
- Colombia beats U.S. for third place in Copa América

OVERSEAS HEADLINES OF NOTE

- *Corriere della Sera*: UK to lose EU military planning role – EU foreign policy chief
- *Kyodo*: Worker at U.S. base in Okinawa arrested on suspicion of drunk driving
- *Xinhua*: U.S. drone strike kills 16 Taliban militants in Kunduz province – Afghan army

THIS DAY IN MILITARY HISTORY

- 1950 – President Harry S. Truman authorizes the U.S. Air Force and Navy to enter the Korean War

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New York Times, June 26, Pg. A1 | Jim Yardley, Alison Smale, Jane Perlez and Ben Hubbard

Britain's historic vote to leave the European Union is already threatening to unravel a democratic bloc of nations that has coexisted peacefully together for decades. But it is also generating uncertainty about an even bigger issue: Is the post-1945 order imposed on the world by the United States and its allies unraveling, too?

[2. At least 11 dead in Somali hotel attack](#)

Washington Post, June 26, Pg. A15 | Kevin Sieff

At least 11 people were killed and several others wounded Saturday in an attack carried out by al-Qaeda-affiliated militants on a well-known hotel in the Somali capital, officials said. The assault on the Nasa Hablood hotel, near a busy intersection in southern Mogadishu, occurred in late afternoon. The hotel is frequented by politicians, lawmakers and Somali businessmen.

3. US-backed Syria fighters edge into Islamic State border hub

Agence France-Presse, June 25 / Karam al-Masri

US-backed fighters edged further into the Islamic State group stronghold of Manbij on Saturday, threatening a key stop on the jihadists' lifeline from Turkey to their "caliphate" in Syria and neighbouring Iraq.

IRAQ/SYRIA

4. Hundreds of Syrian Kurds flee Islamic State-held areas amid abductions

Associated Press, June 25 / Bassem Mroue

Hundreds of Kurds fleeing Islamic State-held villages in northern Syria amid a wave of mass abductions have come under fire, with several killed or wounded, opposition activists and a Kurdish official said Saturday.

5. The Shadow Doctors

New Yorker (Print Edition), June 27 / Ben Taub

On a recent Tuesday evening in London, the surgeon David Nott attended a dinner at Bluebird, an upscale Chelsea restaurant. The room was packed with doctors, renowned specialists who had come for the annual consultants' dinner of the Chelsea and Westminster Hospital, one of Britain's leading medical establishments. As waiters set down plates of lamb and risotto, Nott checked his phone and found a series of text messages. "Hi David," it began. "This is an urgent consultation from inside Syria." Attached was a photograph of a man who had been shot in the throat and the stomach.

6. Iraq screening 20,000 to stop Islamic State infiltrators – army

Agence France-Presse, June 25 / Ammar Karim

Iraq is screening 20,000 people leaving the Fallujah area to stop jihadists of the Islamic State group escaping among civilians displaced by fighting, the army said on Saturday.

7. Fighting in Fallujah: Down, but not yet out

The Economist (UK), June 25, Pg. 40 / Not Attributed

On June 18th Iraq's prime minister, Haider al-Abadi, declared that his forces had regained control of Fallujah, a stronghold seized by Islamic State (IS) two and a half years ago that lies just 60km (40 miles) from the capital, Baghdad. Yet the next day the thud of mortars and rockets could still be heard inside the supposedly liberated city, and armoured convoys were still rumbling into the fray. "Daesh is still here," said Qusay Hamid, an Iraqi special-forces major, using the Arabic acronym for IS as he waited on a sun-baked Fallujah street to move his men into battle near a mosque.

8. How the U.S. is working to defeat ISIS online

TheHill.com, June 25 / Kristina Wong

The Obama administration is ramping up its efforts to fight terrorism online as extremist Islamic groups seek to motivate homegrown attackers. Driving the effort is the recently set up Global Engagement Center, housed at the State Department but led by retired Navy SEAL Cmdr. Michael Lumpkin, a former top Pentagon official.

MIDEAST

[9. Who Really Killed a Playboy Terrorist?](#)

TheDailyBeast.com, June 26 / Shane Harris

Plenty of people wanted Mustafa Badreddine dead. There were the Saudis, who blamed him for terror attacks in the kingdom and against its allies abroad. The Israelis had already once tried to assassinate Badreddine, the military commander of Hezbollah and one of the most important and powerful figures in the organization. But of all Badreddine's many enemies, one had a special place for him on its most-wanted list--the United States. And that has officials in several countries speculating that Washington finally took him out in a massive explosion in Damascus last month.

EUROPE

[10. Britain's self-focus will leave a hole in world diplomacy](#)

Washington Post, June 26, Pg. A1 / Griff Witte and Dan Balz

For centuries, this modest little island in the North Sea has punched well above its weight on the international stage: It built a global empire, beat back the Nazi tide and stood shoulder to shoulder with the United States during a decades-long standoff with the Soviets. But now that Britain has stunned the world with its decision to exit the European Union, experts say it will be focused inward for the foreseeable future.

[11. Army chief fights for a smarter future](#)

The Times (UK), June 25, Pg. 82 / Allan Mallinson

Not for more than a century has the British Army in peacetime been so generally gripped by the zeal for change as now. However, unlike the celebrated reforms of the Edwardian era, when amid intense public interest the secretary for war, the Scots lawyer and philosopher Richard Burdon Haldane, took a very hands-on approach, today's reformation is internally inspired and goes largely unobserved. It is being driven with a Cromwellian sense of purpose by the youngest chief of the general staff (CGS) in 80 years, the 57-year-old General Sir Nicholas Carter.

[12. Baltics urge Nato to keep Putin at bay](#)

Sunday Times (UK), June 26, Pg. 23 / Mark Franchetti

The head of Estonia's army has urged Nato to set up "a speed bump with spikes" to deter Russia from developing military ambitions in the Baltic states.

[13. Cold War 2.0: The US military is beefing up its presence in the former Soviet Bloc](#)

VICE News, June 25 / Lucian Kim

US Army Major Christopher Rowe scanned the unfamiliar terrain as his Stryker armored vehicle sped past the Russian border, less than 15 miles away. It was just after 3:00am, but the summer sun was already rising over northeastern Poland. From the commander's hatch, Rowe looked out on a stretch of rolling farmland and thick pine forests that US military planners now consider the most vulnerable chink in the NATO alliance.

ASIA/PACIFIC

[14. China, Russia eye closer friendship amid tensions with West](#)

Agence France-Presse, June 25 / Rebecca Davis

Chinese President Xi Jinping and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin promised ever-closer cooperation and oversaw a series of deals Saturday, as the two countries deepen ties in the face of growing tensions with the West.

15. China Suspends Diplomatic Contact With Taiwan

New York Times Online, June 25 / Javier C. Hernández

In a sign of growing friction between China and Taiwan, mainland diplomats said Saturday that they had suspended contact with their Taiwanese counterparts because the island's new leader would not endorse the idea of a single Chinese nation.

16. Japanese-American relations: Rina's legacy

The Economist (UK), June 25, Pg. 35 / Not Attributed

Flowers and tributes left by angry Okinawans surround a makeshift shrine on the country road where Rina Shimabukuro's body was dumped. The only suspect in her rape and murder, Kenneth Franklin Gadson, a former American marine, led police to this remote spot after he was arrested in April. Ms Shimabukuro, who was just 20 when she was killed, has become the latest symbol in a conflict over American military bases that has raged for decades.

17. India Clears Ultra-Light Howitzers Buy from US

DefenseNews.com, June 25 / Vivek Raghuvanshi

India on Saturday cleared the purchase of 145 ultra-light howitzers at a cost of around \$750 million from the US, as well as bulk production of 18 home-grown Dhanush artillery guns and several other defense deals.

DEFENSE DEPARTMENT

18. Uncharted Territory

Sunday Capital (Annapolis, MD), June 26, Pg. A1 / Christina Jedra

Alexandra Marberry should have gone to flight school in October, but the 2015 Naval Academy graduate never made it to Pensacola, Florida. Instead, the 23-year-old aspiring aviator works as an administrative assistant in a windowless office at the academy — in a male uniform. Marberry is transgender. Her gender identity is different from the male body she was born into.

19. 'Outdated' medical regulations banned transgender service

Sunday Capital (Annapolis, MD), June 26, Pg. A1 / Christina Jedra

After the federal "Don't ask, don't tell" law was repealed in 2010, lesbians, gays and bisexuals were permitted to serve openly in the military. The change did not affect transgender personnel. Those service members are still banned by Department of Defense medical standards that prohibit a change of sex and "psychosexual conditions" including "transsexualism ... and other paraphilias." Last year, the Defense Department announced it will allow transgender people to serve openly. Now, defense officials said they plan to announce the repeal of the ban Friday. An estimated 15,500 transgender military members could be affected by the repeal, according to estimates from the Williams Institute, a think tank at the UCLA School of Law.

AIR FORCE

[20. Air Force has directed energy weapons; now comes the hard part](#)

AirForceTimes.com, June 25 | Phillip Swarts

Over the past 20 years, the military and its partners in industry have figured out how to build lasers and other directed energy weapons. The devices have changed from often-hazardous chemical lasers to more reliable solid-state lasers. The power has grown from dozens of watts to dozens of kilowatts. Now comes the hard part, Air Force leaders said Thursday in Washington, D.C., at the second annual Directed Energy Summit. Many significant hurdles remain.

[21. Dover a finalist for aerial tankers](#)

News Journal (Wilmington, DE), June 25, Pg. A1 | Quint Forgey

Dover Air Force Base is one of five finalists to receive a fleet of KC-46A Pegasus planes – a new generation of aerial tanker that will provide mid-air refueling to military aircraft and phase out the Air Force's old tanker fleet.

[22. Pentagon: Ex-AFA boss hindered investigation](#)

The Gazette (Colorado Springs, CO), June 25, Pg. 1 | Tom Roeder

The Pentagon's inspector general found that a former Air Force Academy boss hindered an investigation into athlete misconduct by shielding football coach Troy Calhoun from questioning, but determined that the issue didn't rise to the level of "impeding the investigation."

MARINE CORPS

[23. Marines reignite debate on women in combat](#)

TheHill.com, June 25 | Rebecca Kheel

Lawmakers are treading cautiously after news that a majority of female Marine recruits are failing the tests to get into newly open combat jobs. The high failure rate could indicate a tough road ahead to integrate women into combat jobs and is renewing the contentious debate.

NAVY

[24. Sex scandal exposes vetting flaws at Naval Academy](#)

Washington Post, June 26, Pg. C1 | John Woodrow Cox

In the wake of a widening sexual misconduct scandal at the U.S. Naval Academy, military officials couldn't explain how a Marine Corps officer had been assigned to teach at the school after he was investigated for having sex with a female midshipman. It's now clear, however, that Maj. Michael Pretus became an instructor not only because of a vast communication failure among military leaders, but also because of a systemic flaw in the way the Naval Academy vets dozens of its staffers, according to a Washington Post examination that also found significant errors in how the service academies and the Pentagon reports sexual assaults on students to Congress.

NOTABLE COMMENTARY

[25. Time to topple an outdated barrier to service](#)

Sunday Capital (Annapolis, MD), June 26, Pg. A12 | Editorial

Late last week, as we were doing final preparations for "Uncharted Territory," the project by reporter Christina Jedra that runs in today's and tomorrow's editions, reports came out that the Department of Defense is planning to announce the repeal of its ban on transgender service members on Friday. "Uncharted Territory" shows why this decision — the removal of one of the last barriers between service and groups of willing and patriotic Americans — is an overdue step forward. As Secretary of Defense Ash Carter acknowledged last year, when he ordered the study now being completed, the ban on transgender service is an "outdated, confusing, inconsistent approach" rooted in notions of "gender identity disorder" no longer recognized by the American Psychiatric Association or the medical profession at large.

26. Ban Animal Use in Military Medical Training

New York Times, June 26, Pg. SR10 | Editorial

For years, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals has been waging a guerrilla war against the Pentagon over its use of live goats and pigs to train combat medics. Their primary tactic: obtaining footage of training sessions to expose the barbarity of a practice that's cruel and unnecessary. The Pentagon has taken steps to phase out live-tissue training, as the practice is called, by using human-shaped simulators. But military officials have refused to do away with using animals entirely, arguing that doing so could result in more battlefield deaths.

27. An about-face on promoting veterans

Washington Post, June 26, Pg. A26 | Editorial

When members of the armed forces return to civilian life as veterans, the United States tries to give them something in return for their service. One such reward is federal hiring preference: Veterans get an advantage over civilian applicants - not just when they are applying for their first government post but also when they move between agencies or seek promotion. The Senate version of a major military policy bill would take away that second bite of the apple.

28. The Security Consequences of Brexit

New York Times, June 26, Pg. SR10 | Editorial

Apart from creating economic turmoil, Britain's calamitous vote to leave the European Union could have no less profound foreign policy consequences, weakening the interlocking web of Western institutions and alliances that have helped guarantee international peace and stability for 70 years.

29. Europe's Loss Is NATO's Gain

ForeignPolicy.com (Voice), June 25 | Adm. James Stavridis (Ret.)

The people have spoken, and United Kingdom will leave the European Union. The United States and Europe will be confronted with a raft of bad news that goes along with that decision: economic turmoil, a faltering British economy, a deeply weakened political entity in the European Union itself, the high chance of a Scottish departure from the UK, to name just a few of the challenges. The political and economic institutions of the West all seem worse off than they were just 24 hours ago. The sole exception might be the military. Brexit, counter-intuitive as it might sound, will likely produce a stronger NATO.

30. The Case for Offshore Balancing

For the first time in recent memory, large numbers of Americans are openly questioning their country's grand strategy. An April 2016 Pew poll found that 57 percent of Americans agree that the United States should "deal with its own problems and let others deal with theirs the best they can." On the campaign trail, both the Democrat Bernie Sanders and the Republican Donald Trump found receptive audiences whenever they questioned the United States' penchant for promoting democracy, subsidizing allies' defense, and intervening militarily—leaving only the likely Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton to defend the status quo.

TOP STORIES

1. A Caustic Postwar Unraveling

A Test of Western Alliances and Institutions

New York Times, June 26, Pg. A1 | Jim Yardley, Alison Smale, Jane Perlez and Ben Hubbard

LONDON -- Britain's historic vote to leave the European Union is already threatening to unravel a democratic bloc of nations that has coexisted peacefully together for decades. But it is also generating uncertainty about an even bigger issue: Is the post-1945 order imposed on the world by the United States and its allies unraveling, too?

Britain's choice to retreat into what some critics of the vote suggest is a "Little England" status is just one among many loosely linked developments suggesting the potential for a reordering of power, economic relationships, borders and ideologies around the globe.

Slow economic growth has undercut confidence in traditional liberal economics, especially in the face of the dislocations caused by trade and surging immigration. Populism has sprouted throughout the West. Borders in the Middle East are being erased amid a rise in sectarianism. China is growing more assertive and Russia more adventurous. Refugees from poor and war-torn places are crossing land and sea in record numbers to get to the better lives shown to them by modern communications.

Accompanied by an upending of politics and middle-class assumptions in both the developed and the developing worlds, these forces are combining as never before to challenge the Western institutions and alliances that were established after World War II and that have largely held global sway ever since.

Britain has been a pillar in that order, as well as a beneficiary. It has an important (some would argue outsize) place in the United Nations, and a role in NATO, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank -- the postwar institutions invested with promoting global peace, security and economic prosperity.

Now Britain symbolizes the cracks in that postwar foundation. Its leaving the European Union weakens a bloc that is the world's biggest single market, as well as an anchor of global democracy. It also undermines the postwar consensus that alliances among nations are essential in maintaining stability and in diluting the nationalism that once plunged Europe into bloody conflict -- even as nationalism is surging again.

"It's not that this, in and of itself, will completely destroy the international order," said Ivo H. Daalder, a former American representative to NATO who is now president of the Chicago Council on Global Affairs. "But it sets a precedent. It is potentially corrosive."

The symbolism was pointed in China on Saturday morning, two days after the British vote. In the packed ballroom of a Beijing hotel, China's new international development bank held its first meeting of the 57 countries that have signed up as members. The new institution, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, is designed to give China a chance to win influence away from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

"History has never set any precedent," the new bank's president, Jin Liqun, once wrote of the United States and its Western allies, "that an empire is capable of governing the world forever."

Even as European leaders held a flurry of meetings on Saturday to weigh a response to Britain's departure, President Xi Jinping of China welcomed President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia to Beijing for a brief state visit. More than China, Russia is an outlier to the American-led international system, and Mr. Putin -- at best a wary partner of China, which itself has severe economic challenges -- in recent years has worked to divide and destabilize Europe.

Mr. Putin has troubles of his own, including an economy hurt by low oil prices, that could limit his ability to exploit the moment. Still, for him, analysts say, the British vote is an unexpected gift.

Russia has nurtured discord inside the European Union by supporting an array of small, extremist political parties that foment nationalist anger in different countries. Russia's seizure of Crimea in 2014 and meddling in eastern Ukraine directly challenged the rules-based international system of respecting national borders and led to a continuing political confrontation with the United States and Europe.

"Vladimir Putin will be rubbing his hands in glee," the British historian Timothy Garton Ash wrote in *The Guardian*. "The unhappy English have delivered a body blow to the West, and to the ideals of international cooperation, liberal order and open societies to which England has in the past contributed so much."

The end of Pax Americana is not a new theme. Predictions of American decline were rampant after the global economic crisis in 2007 and 2008, amid parallel predictions of the dawning of a new Chinese century.

But the American economy steadily recovered, if imperfectly, while China has unnerved many of its Asian neighbors with a newly aggressive foreign policy. Chinese overreach opened a path for renewed American engagement in Asia, the fastest-growing region in the world, as President Obama called for a "pivot" to Asia.

Analysts disagree on whether this pivot signaled a declining American interest in European affairs and contributed to the Continent's current problems. Part of the Obama administration's rationale was to extricate the United States from decades of costly involvement in the Middle East at a time when that region was in upheaval.

There, the breakdown of the postwar political order has been more fundamental and violent than in Europe. The uprisings of the Arab Spring erupted from widespread frustrations with stagnant, autocratic politics and economic lethargy. But these rebellions failed to yield stable governments, and the borders drawn by Europeans a century ago in Syria, Lebanon and Iraq have been rendered largely irrelevant.

The nationalism surging in Europe is not the problem in the Arab world; rather, populations have retreated into greater reliance on sects, ethnic groups and militias. Jihadist groups like Al Qaeda and the Islamic State have fought national armies and won, providing a religious alternative to the nation-state that has been embraced by some.

Bassel Salloukh, an associate professor of political science at the Lebanese American University in Beirut, said the problems in the Middle East and Europe shared a common origin in the anxieties caused by tectonic shifts in the global economy. But while fear and frustration in the West have shown themselves through democratic elections, brittle Arab states lacked the flexibility to respond.

"Here, we have hyper-centralized, homogeneous, authoritarian states which, when facing these transformations, just exploded," Mr. Salloukh said.

And those explosions were not contained within the Middle East. Refugees have poured out of Syria and Iraq. Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon have absorbed several million refugees. But it is the flow of people into the European Union that has had the greatest geopolitical impact, and helped to precipitate the British vote. Stabilizing Syria and permanently curbing the refugee flow could be one of the critical factors in determining whether Europe can steady itself politically.

Before the refugee crisis, the European Union was already an unwieldy and unfinished entity. Its contradictions and imperfections were exacerbated by the economic crisis. Yet it was the onset of more than a million refugees marching through Greece and the Balkans toward Germany that may ultimately prove to be the most destabilizing event in Europe's recent history.

European countries erected border fences despite the bloc's system of open internal borders. Populist parties raged against immigrants. Britain was relatively insulated, yet British politicians campaigning to leave the European Union depicted an island under siege, mixing the very different issue of immigration from other European Union states with the perceived threat from an influx of poor Muslims. This anti-immigrant strain twinned with the economic anxieties of many Britons who felt left out of the global economy to drive support for the country going its own way.

In the wake of Britain's choice, Europe faces the parallel challenges of holding itself together and of retaining its global influence.

NATO has rediscovered its purpose in the aftermath of Russia's intervention in Ukraine. Yet the Baltic countries still worry whether the military alliance would truly defend them against Russian aggression, and the alliance has had trouble defining its role in fighting terrorism or dealing with the migrant flow.

Britain is a valued member of NATO, but if it is weakened economically by its decision to leave the European Union, its leaders might come under public pressure to pare back military spending -- even as the United States is pressuring NATO members to spend more on defense. Meanwhile, Donald J. Trump, the presumptive Republican presidential nominee, has mused about whether NATO is as necessary as it once was.

The European Union often frustrates American presidents, yet the disintegration of the bloc would be a geopolitical disaster for Washington. Even before Britain's exit, Germany was Europe's dominant power, and Chancellor Angela Merkel was Europe's dominant leader.

"Britain leaving the E.U. now poses a challenge for Germany," said Nicholas Burns, a former top American diplomat who now teaches at the Harvard Kennedy School. "It will need to provide even greater leadership to keep Europe united and moving forward."

Germany, though, has been reluctant to play a diplomatic and military role commensurate with its economic heft. Ever mindful of its Nazi past, and its four decades as a divided country, Germany often wraps its policies in the mantle of Europe and has developed a pacifist instinct that is a poor fit with the expectations that it must now lead.

"There is no point beating about the bush," Ms. Merkel said Friday. Europe has reached "a turning point," and "more and more often, we encounter basic doubts" about ever-greater union.

The markers of European decline are not hard to find. For the first time in modern history, Asia has more private wealth than Europe, the Boston Consulting Group said last year. And China will account for 70 percent of Asia's growth between now and 2019, the group said.

China's development of its own international bank partly derives from its frustrations over its role in the I.M.F. Policy makers in Beijing were infuriated that they were not granted a bigger share of power at the I.M.F. as a show of gratitude for helping stabilize world economies in 2008.

Many Asian leaders have tended to view the European experiment at unity as a proposition that could not last. Lee Kuan Yew, the former prime minister of Singapore, once called the European Union a motley crowd trying to march to a single drummer. He predicted it would fail.

--*Jim Yardley and Alison Smale reported from London, Jane Perlez from Beijing, and Ben Hubbard from Beirut, Lebanon. Yufan Huang contributed research*

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2. At least 11 dead in Somali hotel attack

Militants tied to al-Qaeda claim responsibility for assault in Mogadishu

Washington Post, June 26, Pg. A15 | Kevin Sieff

NAIROBI - At least 11 people were killed and several others wounded Saturday in an attack carried out by al-Qaeda-affiliated militants on a well-known hotel in the Somali capital, officials said.

The assault on the Nasa Hablood hotel, near a busy intersection in southern Mogadishu, occurred in late afternoon. The hotel is frequented by politicians, lawmakers and Somali businessmen.

According to witnesses and security officials, attackers detonated a car loaded with explosives at the main entrance of the hotel before a number of gunmen stormed the building.

Attacks on Mogadishu hotels have been common in recent months, as al-Shabab, a Somali Islamist extremist group, has targeted the places where high-profile government officials live and work. Some of those hotels have grown increasingly fortified, but many remain vulnerable in a city where security forces are still fighting to establish full control.

Earlier this month, the militant group attacked the Ambassador Hotel, killing about 15 people. Two Somali lawmakers were among the dead in that assault, Reuters reported.

After Saturday's attack, al-Shabab quickly claimed responsibility once again.

"Members from the raiding brigades carried out a pre-planned attack on Nasa Hablood hotel in Mogadishu, and the mujahideen fighters have managed to fully take control of the hotel," said an al-Shabab statement read on the local Radio Andalus station.

In the statement, al-Shabab referred to the hotel as a "haven for the heads and commanders of the apostate group of Somalia," referring to the Somali government.

Somali special forces entered the building some time after the attack, and witnesses said they later heard a long exchange of gunfire. The Associated Press reported that the attackers had been confined to the upper floors of the Nasa Hablood hotel, from which they tossed grenades.

Abdi Kamil Shukri, a spokesman for the Somali security ministry, told reporters late Saturday that the situation was "back to normal."

"The attack was ended by the special forces. Three gunmen were killed and 11 civilians, two of them doctors," he said.

Witnesses said they saw the bodies of five people slain in the attack but acknowledged that there could be more. Media outlets, quoting unidentified security officials, said that as many as 15 were killed.

Somalia has been racked by conflict for the past quarter of a century, and the rise of al-Shabab in 2005 signaled the start of another deadly chapter. An African Union military force and billions in foreign assistance helped push back the group from the capital and other parts of the country, but al-Shabab has been resurgent in recent months, according to top Somali officials.

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3. US-backed Syria fighters edge into Islamic State border hub

Agence France-Presse, June 25 | Karam al-Masri

ALEPPO -- US-backed fighters edged further into the Islamic State group stronghold of Manbij on Saturday, threatening a key stop on the jihadists' lifeline from Turkey to their "caliphate" in Syria and neighbouring Iraq.

But in the IS-held eastern town of Al-Quriyah, 47 people, most of them civilians, died in Russian and government bombardment, said the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

Thirty-one civilians were killed in three raids alone, but it was not immediately clear whether the 16 others were civilians or IS fighters, said the Observatory's Rami Abdel Rahman.

Russian, Syrian, and US-led coalition warplanes are all carrying out raids against IS territory in the battered country.

In Manbij, the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces overran a key road junction in the city's south after capturing nearby grain silos overnight.

"The grain silos overlook more than half of Manbij. SDF fighters can climb to the top and monitor the city," said Abdel Rahman.

The Raqa Revolutionaries Brigades -- one of the Arab components of the Kurdish-dominated alliance -- also said the SDF had seized the silos and pushed into the city.

The Mills Roundabout lies less than two kilometres (one mile) from the city centre.

Captured by IS in 2014, Manbij was a key transit point for foreign fighters and funds, as well as a trafficking hub for oil, antiquities and other plundered goods.

If it succeeds, the offensive on Manbij -- backed by intense air strikes by a US-led coalition -- would mark the most significant victory against IS for the SDF.

Across the frontier in the Iraqi city of Fallujah, security forces were poised to assault Jolan, the last neighbourhood still held by IS.

Tens of thousands of people fled the fighting, with many camped out in the open in the summer heat.

"Dozens of families are still without tents or any form of shelter inside the camps, living in miserable conditions. The majority are elderly people, women and children," said the Norwegian Refugee Council.

The SDF launched its offensive to take Manbij on May 31, driving across the Euphrates River from the east with military advice from some 200 US special forces troops.

IS has thrown large numbers of fighters into the battle, losing 463, according to the Observatory. The SDF has lost at least 89.

The jihadists have taken as many as 1,000 Kurdish civilians hostage in areas under their control west of Manbij, according to the Observatory.

Manbij lies in the eastern plains of Aleppo province, which has become a battleground between an array of competing armed groups, including Al-Qaeda, non-jihadist rebels and government forces, as well as the SDF and IS.

Aleppo was once the country's commercial hub but now lies divided between government forces in the west and rebels in the east.

A two-day freeze on fighting brokered by Moscow and Washington this month expired without renewal.

On Saturday, Russian and Syrian warplanes pounded rebel-held areas in and around the city in support of a regime offensive on the rebels' sole remaining supply route, the Observatory said.

The Castello Road has been repeatedly hit by air strikes but residents said the bombing had intensified in recent days.

An AFP correspondent in the rebel-held east of the city said the latest strikes lasted throughout the night.

"In the past two days, my kids and I haven't been able to sleep all night because of the huge blasts, the likes of which we haven't heard before," said 38-year-old shopkeeper Abu Ahmad.

A father of three, Abu Ahmad owns a small convenience store in east Aleppo.

"We haven't been able to get any products or produce for the shop over the past two days because no one can use the (Castello) road," he said.

The Observatory said government forces were also fighting rebels in northern neighbourhoods of the city in a bid to halt rocket fire on government-held districts.

The renewed government offensive around Aleppo comes a day after another key ally, Lebanese militant group Hezbollah, pledged to send more fighters to join the "greatest battle" of the war.

More than 280,000 people have been killed since the conflict began with anti-government protests in 2011.

A prominent Syrian activist and journalist died in a Turkish hospital overnight after being seriously wounded in a bomb blast in Aleppo last week.

Facebook pages managed by fellow activists said Khaled al-Issa, a Syrian photographer in his 20s, died in Antakya.

Journalist Hadi al-Abdullah, who was wounded in the same bombing that some activists have blamed on Al-Qaeda, was in stable condition in hospital.

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IRAQ/SYRIA

4. Hundreds of Syrian Kurds flee Islamic State-held areas amid abductions

Associated Press, June 25 | Bassem Mroue

BEIRUT — Hundreds of Kurds fleeing Islamic State-held villages in northern Syria amid a wave of mass abductions have come under fire, with several killed or wounded, opposition activists and a Kurdish official said Saturday.

In eastern Syria, meanwhile, airstrikes on a village controlled by the extremist group have killed at least 30 people and wounded many others, opposition activists said.

Activist Omar Abu Leila, who is from the eastern city of Deir el-Zour but currently lives in Europe, said Saturday's airstrikes targeted a mosque in the village of Qourieh, killing at least 30 people. The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights says 46 people were killed in Qourieh, including children. It says 31 of the dead were civilians and the rest have not been identified yet.

Abu Leila said the airstrikes were carried out by Russian warplanes. Russia has denied targeting civilians.

Qourieh is in the province of Deir el-Zour, which borders Iraq. Most of the province is ruled by the extremist group.

In the northern province of Aleppo, the hundreds of Kurds fled as the Syrian Democratic Forces, a U.S.-backed and predominantly Kurdish militia, clashed with IS inside Manbij, a key stronghold of the extremist group. The SDF have pushed into the town from the southern edge, capturing grain silos and flour mills, according to the Observatory.

One family who fled was struck by a mine on Friday that killed two family members and wounded the other three, Sherfan Darwish, an SDF spokesman, told The Associated Press. He said a 10-year-old girl was killed by IS sniper fire on Friday. "Civilians are defying death in order to leave areas controlled by Daesh," Darwish said, using an Arabic acronym for IS.

The exodus began after IS abducted about 900 Kurdish civilians in Aleppo province over the past three weeks and forced them to build fortifications for the extremists in retaliation for the Kurdish-led assault, which is also targeting the IS stronghold of al-Bab. Others were trying to flee Manbij, which is surrounded by SDF fighters.

Some of the abducted Kurds have been pressganged into digging trenches and shelters for IS, according to the Observatory's chief, Rami Abdurrahman. Darwish said others are being used as human shields.

Abdurrahman said some 120 more Kurds have been abducted since Friday. The extremists have warned residents who leave that they will not be allowed to return to their homes and "will be punished if they try to return," he said.

He said many of those fleeing are heading to areas that were recently captured by the SDF south of the IS-held town of Marea. Abdurrahman said IS fighters opened fire on those fleeing, killing several of them, including children.

The Local Coordination Committees, another activist-run monitoring group, said IS opened fire at people trying to flee from Manbij, killing 10 of them, including children.

The Syria Democratic Council, the political wing of SDF, called on the international community and aid groups to supply those fleeing with whatever they need, saying many of them are in open areas.

The SDC called on the world to help the SDF "prevent the occurrence of a catastrophe or a massacre," saying there were "indications" one might happen. The SDF also includes Arab and Christian forces.

Manbij lies along the only IS supply line between the Syrian-Turkish border to the north and the extremist group's self-styled capital, Raqqa, which lies to the southeast.

If Manbij is captured, it would be the biggest strategic defeat for IS in Syria since July 2015, when the extremist group lost the border town of Tal Abyad.

The U.S. has embedded 300 special forces with the SDF. The White House says they are advisers. French special forces are also embedded with the group.

In neighboring Turkey, Syrian opposition cameraman Khalid Al Eissa died late Friday in a hospital where he was brought for treatment after being wounded in an explosion last week in the northern Syrian city of Aleppo, according to several activist groups, including the Observatory.

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5. The Shadow Doctors

The underground race to spread medical knowledge as the Syrian regime erases it

New Yorker (Print Edition), June 27 | Ben Taub

On a recent Tuesday evening in London, the surgeon David Nott attended a dinner at Bluebird, an upscale Chelsea restaurant. The room was packed with doctors, renowned specialists who had come for the annual consultants' dinner of the Chelsea and Westminster Hospital, one of Britain's leading medical establishments. As waiters set down plates of lamb and risotto, Nott checked his phone and found a series of text messages. "Hi David," it began. "This is an urgent consultation from inside Syria." Attached was a photograph of a man who had been shot in the throat and the stomach.

The image had been sent by a young medical worker in Aleppo. He had removed several bullets from the patient's small intestine, but he wasn't sure what to do about the wound in the throat. For the past hour, the man had been slowly dying on the operating table while the medical worker awaited instructions.

"Sorry, didn't see your message till now," Nott typed under the table. "Is the neurology ok?" It was: a bullet had pierced the trachea and the esophagus, but it hadn't damaged the spinal cord. Nott told the medical worker to insert a plastic tube into the bullet hole, to provide an even supply of air. Then, he instructed, sew up the digestive tract with a strong suture, and, "to buttress the repair," partly detach one of the neck muscles and use it to cover the wound.

Nott returned to his lamb, which had gone cold. There were around fifty specialists in the room—many more than there are in the opposition-controlled half of Aleppo, where, in 2013 and 2014, Nott had trained medical students, residents, and general surgeons to carry out trauma surgeries far beyond their qualifications. Several had since been killed, and Nott often checked in with the others, especially when he saw reports that Syrian or Russian aircraft had attacked hospitals around the city.

In the past five years, the Syrian government has assassinated, bombed, and tortured to death almost seven hundred medical personnel, according to Physicians for Human Rights, an organization that documents attacks on medical care in war zones. (Non-state actors, including ISIS, have killed twenty-seven.) Recent headlines announced the death of the last pediatrician in Aleppo, the last cardiologist in Hama. A United Nations commission concluded that "government forces deliberately target medical personnel to gain military advantage," denying treatment to wounded fighters and civilians "as a matter of policy."

Thousands of physicians once worked in Aleppo, formerly Syria's most populous city, but the assault has resulted in an exodus of ninety-five per cent of them to neighboring countries and to Europe. Across Syria, millions of civilians have no access to care for chronic illnesses, and the health ministry routinely prevents U.N. convoys from delivering medicines and surgical supplies to besieged areas. In meetings, the U.N. Security Council "strongly condemns" such violations of international humanitarian law. In practice, however, four of its five permanent members support coalitions that attack hospitals in Syria, Yemen, and Sudan. The conditions in Syria have led to a growing sense among medical workers in other conflict zones that they, too, may be targeted.

Despite the onslaught, doctors and international N.G.O.s have forged an elaborate network of underground hospitals throughout Syria. They have installed cameras in intensive-care units, so that doctors abroad can monitor patients by Skype and direct technicians to administer proper treatment. In besieged areas, they have adapted hospitals to run on fuel from animal waste. Nott, for his part, trained almost every trauma surgeon on the opposition side of Aleppo, as part of a daring effort to spread medical knowledge as the government strives to eradicate it.

As a child, Nott constructed hundreds of model airplanes from kits and from scratch, and hung them from the ceiling of his bedroom, in Worcester. His dream was to fly commercial jets, and in secondary school he earned his pilot's license. But his father, an Indo-Burmese surgeon who had married a British nurse, wanted him to become a doctor. "He used to sit there in my room, forcing me to learn," Nott told me when I visited him at his private clinic in London, last month. Nott, who is fifty-nine, speaks softly, and has a calm, professorial demeanor. In 1978, he enrolled in the medical program at Manchester University, where he marvelled at human anatomy. "The most exciting machine is a human being," he said. "It's actually the same as an airplane or a helicopter. They both have an engine. They both require fuel."

Shortly before Christmas in 1993, Nott was working as a general surgeon at Charing Cross Hospital, in London, when he saw a television report from Sarajevo. For twenty months, the city had been under siege by the Bosnian Serb Army, and the program showed a field hospital in need of staff. The next day, Nott volunteered with Médecins Sans Frontières, and on Christmas Eve he left for a three-month stay in Sarajevo, where he worked at a facility that had been so severely damaged by shelling and sniper fire that people called it Swiss Cheese Hospital.

After that trip, Nott took long periods of unpaid leave from his jobs at various London hospitals to volunteer for humanitarian-aid agencies in other areas afflicted by war and natural disaster. He operated on thousands of patients in more than twenty countries—including Afghanistan, Sierra Leone, Haiti, and Nepal—often with rudimentary equipment and insufficient supplies of medication and donor blood. The conditions forced him to learn an array of surgical techniques that in London would all have been carried out by different specialists.

In 2008, on the day that Nott arrived at an M.S.F. hospital in Rutshuru, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, he found a sixteen-year-old orphan whose arm had been improperly amputated. The stump was infected, and the muscles were gangrenous. Without a forequarter amputation—a complicated procedure in which the entire shoulder is removed, usually as a last resort to halt the spread of cancer—the boy would die. Nott had never done the operation, so he sent a text message to Meirion Thomas, who was Lead Surgeon at the Royal Marsden Hospital, in London. Minutes later, Thomas replied, "Start on clavicle. Remove middle third." He sent nine more steps, and signed off, "Easy!" The boy recovered.

At the time, military doctors in Iraq and Afghanistan were adopting a transformative approach to the worst battlefield-trauma cases. Typically, surgeons treated life-threatening abdominal bleeds from gunshots and bomb blasts by cutting open the abdomen, searching for the damaged organs and arteries, repairing them, and stitching up the incisions. The fixes could take hours, and patients often died on the operating table after their body temperature plummeted.

American and British military surgeons started practicing "damage-control surgery," an established concept that hadn't been applied in combat zones. Practitioners do the absolute minimum to stop the bleeding and prevent sepsis

before sending patients to the intensive-care unit for warming, fluids, and resuscitation. The patient returns to the operating theatre only when his body is stable enough to handle hours under the knife.

“I wanted to be a part of this surgical revolution,” Nott told me. “And the only way to do that is actually to be there, to get the case in front of you. You can’t read it in a book.” He volunteered as a surgeon with the Royal Air Force and was quickly deployed to Basra, in Iraq, and later to Camp Bastion, in Afghanistan. At Camp Bastion, in 2010, “we had a thousand and seventeen major trauma cases in six weeks,” he recalled. “It was people with their arms and legs blown off. It was people shot in the head, people shot in the chest, people with fragmentation injuries everywhere.” Two years later, Queen Elizabeth II awarded Nott the title of Officer of the Order of the British Empire for his medical work in war zones.

In the first weeks of March, 2011, the start of the insurrection in Syria, the security forces of President Bashar al-Assad detained and tortured children who had drawn anti-regime slogans on a wall in the southern city of Dara’a. Tens of thousands of protesters took to the streets, and on March 22nd Assad’s forces stormed into the city hospital, kicked out the nonessential medical staff, and positioned snipers on the roof. Early the next morning, the snipers fired at protesters. A cardiologist named Ali al-Mahameed was shot in the head and the chest as he tried to reach the wounded. Thousands of people attended his funeral, later that day, and they, too, were attacked with live ammunition. For the next two years, the snipers remained stationed on the roof, “firing on sick and wounded persons attempting to approach the hospital entrance,” according to the U.N. commission.

As protests erupted all over the country, government-run hospitals basically functioned as an extension of the security apparatus, targeting demonstrators who dared to seek treatment. “Some doctors manage to treat simple cases and manage to let them flee without being seen or registered,” one doctor said, in testimony collected by Médecins Sans Frontières. “But if an admission is required for the patient, then the administration of the hospital is notified, and therefore it reaches security.” Pro-regime medical staff routinely performed amputations for minor injuries, as a form of punishment. Many wounded protesters were taken from the wards by security and intelligence agents, sometimes while under anesthesia. Others didn’t make it as far as the hospital; security agents commandeered ambulances and took the patients straight to intelligence branches, where they were interrogated and often tortured and killed. M.S.F. concluded that, for Syrians who opposed the President, the health-care system was “a weapon of persecution.”

In response, some doctors established secret medical units to treat people injured in the crackdown. One surgeon at Aleppo University Hospital adopted the code name Dr. White. Along with three colleagues, he identified and stocked safe houses where emergency operations could be performed. Dr. White also lectured at the university’s faculty of medicine; he suspected that seven of his most promising students shared his sympathies toward the nascent uprising. Another doctor, named Noor, recruited them to join the mission. In Arabic, noor means “light,” so the group called itself Light of Life.

At night, Noor and Dr. White gave the medical students lessons via Skype, concealing their faces and voices. The goal was to teach them the principles of emergency first aid, with an emphasis on halting the bleeding from gunshot wounds. During demonstrations, the students waited in cars and vans to shuttle injured protesters to the safe houses, then disappeared. “They had to leave the house before my arrival,” Dr. White told me during a recent Skype call from Aleppo. “They could not know who this man is.”

Similar covert medical networks sprouted up all over Syria. But the safe houses were equipped with little more than gauze, cotton, and serum. One doctor told M.S.F., “When we receive serious casualties—a patient who needs to be hospitalized—we have two options: either we let him die or we send him to hospital not knowing what will become of him.”

In the first year of the uprising, Physicians for Human Rights documented fifty-six cases of medical workers being targeted by government snipers; tortured to death in detention facilities; shot and set on fire while driving ambulances; and murdered by security agents at checkpoints, in their clinics, or at home. Several were killed while treating patients. In July, 2012, the regime enacted a new terrorism law, making it an offense to fail to report anti-government activity; according to the U.N. commission, this “effectively criminalized medical aid to the opposition.”

That summer, Noor, the founder of Light of Life, was kidnapped at his clinic by security agents and later killed. Three of Dr. White’s students were also abducted; their charred corpses were found the following week. “From that day, I changed my name another time,” he told me. “I became Abdul Aziz”—the name he uses today.

In June, 2012, M.S.F. surreptitiously opened its first Syrian field hospital, in Atmeh, a rebel-held village near the Turkish border. For a year, the organization had been asking the Assad regime for permission to operate in the country, to no avail. The hospital, code-named Alpha, was set up in six days, in a walled villa that had been donated by a local doctor. In September, 2012, David Nott travelled to Alpha with other M.S.F. staff from around the world. To make space for patients, the doctors slept on the roof, where they often heard explosions and watched jets streaking through the sky. After each attack, taxis and pickup trucks collected casualties and sped toward the villa.

Natalie Roberts, an M.S.F. doctor from Wales, directed the emergency room. “Often, a lot of patients would arrive at once,” she told me. She stood at the gate, directing the less urgent cases toward beds on the shaded patio and the worst cases inside. As she began emergency treatment, Syrian staff members managed the crowd forming at the gate, turning away friends and family members who wanted to enter. The scene was always tense and emotional, Roberts said. “Sometimes they’d arrive with dead bodies, and we’d just have to say that there’s nothing we can do.”

The dining room served as a holding area for the most serious cases, which Roberts rated Red or Yellow on triage forms. Red patients needed to go into the operating theatre—at Alpha, this was the kitchen—within the hour; Yellow patients could survive for as long as four hours without surgery; the walking wounded were marked Green. Compared with other facilities in Syria, the M.S.F. hospital was well stocked, with surgical supplies filling the kitchen cabinets. Even so, Nott told me, “when someone comes in Red, the surgeon must ask, ‘Do I have enough resources to operate on him?’ If I don’t, the patient is going to go into the Black Zone,” which means he’s going to die, and there’s no point wasting supplies to try to save him.

Every trauma center requires a large supply of fresh blood. A person has about eleven pints, and, “if you’ve lost six pints, then your heart doesn’t get enough oxygen, and your brain doesn’t get enough oxygen,” Nott explained. “That’s why you collapse and go into a coma.” In Atmeh, when the facility ran out of blood, a nearby mosque broadcast a call for donors, and locals lined up outside. Elsewhere in Syria, doctors donated their own blood, while the recipient lay on the operating table.

One day, a half-dozen people were delivered to Alpha hospital in a truck, some dead, some badly wounded. Roberts was perplexed; usually, large groups arrived only after jets had bombed houses, and she hadn't heard any planes that day. According to Nott, one of the wounded men was a rebel who, while fashioning makeshift grenades at home, had accidentally blown up his wife and child. In the operating room, the doctors cut away his pants, and Nott took a photograph of the scene, which he showed me last month, in London. "If you look here," he said, pointing to the man's sagging pants pocket, "there's the other bomb." The doctors found it when it dropped to the floor with a terrifying clink.

Inside the operating theatre, Nott often wore a GoPro camera, which he used to make surgical-training videos; for the past decade, he had been training doctors who work in conflict zones, and after six weeks in Syria he returned to London with thousands of images of grisly wounds from Alpha. Many of the victims were old men, women, and children, including a young boy who had picked up a cluster bomb that blew off his hands, and a nine-year-old girl hit by shell fragments, whose intestines dangled from her body.

As rebels captured territory, Roberts followed the front line deeper into Syria, visiting secret medical facilities and assessing their needs. Opposition fighters controlled significant portions of northern Syria, including the eastern half of Aleppo and several villages connecting it to the Turkish border. Roberts helped set up hospitals inside a cave in Idlib and a basement in Al Bab, as well as a blood bank and a vaccination program in Aleppo. However, she told me, "we couldn't find qualified doctors," especially in rural areas.

By late 2012, a number of Syrian expatriates had established medical charities. Although they sent aid and ambulances from Turkey into Syria, they rarely coordinated their efforts. "It was really chaotic," Roberts said. "You would turn up at a pharmacy with a kit of antibiotics to donate and find that they already had massive quantities of the same drug. And then you would go to another hospital and realize that they had practically no help at all, because the hospital manager didn't have experience working with international organizations." At that point, she said, the facilities that received support were "the ones that were shouting the loudest."

To handle the logistics, Aziz, of Light of Life, formed a group called the Aleppo City Medical Council. There were eight main medical facilities, and, with only twenty physicians and a handful of surgical specialists in the opposition-held half of the city, the staff used walkie-talkies to coordinate the distribution of patients. To evade detection, the doctors established sequential code names for each hospital, M1 through M8. Most of the staff had little, if any, formal training.

Eventually, the doctors built other medical centers and gave them random names, like M20 and M30, to obscure the actual number of targets. According to Aziz, the best location for a medical facility is on a narrow street, flanked by tall buildings, so that, after an air strike, helicopters and jets have difficulty tracking the movement of wounded civilians. Ambulance workers were routinely targeted by snipers and helicopters, so many of them removed sirens and medical logos, and coated their vans with mud. At night, they drove with the headlights off.

By the end of 2012, Syrian government forces had attacked medical outposts at least eighty-nine times, in eight provinces. Near Damascus, they raided and burned to the ground a clinic and three hospitals, killing all the patients and staff in one of them. In Homs, they shelled a field hospital twenty times in two days. In Aleppo, military aircraft fired rockets at a children's hospital, causing it to shut down. Ground forces spent four days shelling a

mental hospital. M1 was bombed twice, M2 once, and M4, which was attacked at least four times, finally collapsed in a pile of concrete and twisted metal, crushing to death several patients and staff.

In early 2013, Nott gave a presentation at the Royal Society of Medicine about M.S.F.'s work in Syria. After the lecture, he sat with Mounir Hakimi, a doctor who is the vice-chairman of a charity called Syria Relief, based in Manchester. Nott and Hakimi had met once before, at Alpha hospital, in Atmeh: when the Syrian doctor who had donated the villa was wounded by shrapnel, Nott treated him in his own former kitchen, and Hakimi came to pick him up. But, because Hakimi wasn't a patient, Nott wouldn't let him inside the operating theatre, and they got into a shouting match. Now, at the lecture, Nott said, "I realized he was quite a nice chap." Hakimi, who had befriended Aziz, suggested that Nott travel to Aleppo with Syria Relief.

That August, in London, Nott led a five-day surgical-training course for around thirty-five doctors who work in "austere environments" all over the world. Hakimi attended, along with Ammar Darwish, another Syrian doctor living in the U.K. The next month, Nott, Hakimi, and Darwish set off for Aleppo.

Outside the entrance to M1, there was a large decontamination tent fitted with showers to rinse off victims of chemical attacks. A few weeks earlier, Syrian government forces had fired sarin-gas rockets into densely populated neighborhoods of Damascus, killing some fourteen hundred people; Western governments spoke of retaliation, but they quickly retreated, and since then the regime has habitually used chlorine as a weapon. On roads leading to the hospital, signs on lampposts listed chemical-attack survival tips. Aziz drove Nott to Aleppo, and introduced him to the medical staff at M1, where he lived for the next five weeks.

The emergency department at M1 was run by medical students. "Before David arrived, no one knew how to cut open a chest," Abu Waseem, a young medical worker specializing in plastic and reconstructive surgery, told me. On Nott's second day in Aleppo, a sixteen-year-old boy was carried into the operating room without a heartbeat. While one Syrian physician conducted chest compressions, another sliced open the abdomen, to check for internal bleeding. The guts were intact. Nott checked on the operation and realized that the boy's heart had been pierced by shrapnel. Abu Waseem and the others crowded around the operating table to watch Nott work.

Nott grabbed a scalpel and cut between two ribs. Then he inserted a Finochietto retractor—a stainless-steel crank that, in the age of laparoscopic surgery, looks practically medieval—and spread apart the ribs to gain access to the heart, which had a hole in the right ventricle. He told one of the Syrians to reach into the cavity and pump it with his hands. Soon, the heart started functioning, spurting blood into the air with each contraction. Nott stitched up the heart as it was beating, and the boy survived.

"There were a lot of things that we didn't know how to deal with," Aziz told me. "If I had a patient with thoracic trauma, I didn't know how to fix him, because I wasn't a thoracic surgeon. If I had a patient with vascular injuries, I used to send him to another hospital, where there was a vascular surgeon." He added, "Most of the cardiac injuries died."

In the evenings, as the sun set and the shooting let up, Nott taught his course on surgery in austere environments. (Darwish translated the lectures into Arabic.) He showed hundreds of surgical photographs and videos that he had taken in distant war and disaster zones, including examples of his own deadly mistakes. He also distributed digital

copies of several hundred medical textbooks. In London, he had chopped off the bindings with an industrial paper cutter and run each page through a scanner.

Nott taught the physicians to move flaps of muscle and skin to cover exposed bone and open wounds. One day, he saw a man whose hand had been completely flayed. In lieu of amputation, he sewed the hand to a flap in the man's groin, which slowly sealed itself around the bones of the hand. After three weeks, Abu Waseem cut away the connective tissue, donating a large chunk of flesh to a hand that would otherwise have rotted. In vascular surgery, the circulatory system can be treated as a series of interchangeable tubes; when vital blood vessels were irreparably damaged, Nott sliced superficial veins out of healthy limbs and swapped them in for arteries. He did the same with injured nerves.

Nott also taught the physicians the principles of damage-control surgery, which he had learned at the bases in Iraq and Afghanistan. Because damage-control surgery calls for only minimal surgical fixes on the first pass, the practice allowed the Syrian doctors to tend to more patients after large-scale attacks. "It made a revolution in our work," Aziz told me. "Real changes. So many patients survived because of these techniques."

Some surgeons at M2 and M10 travelled to M1 for Nott's evening lectures. At the end of each class, the Syrians discussed the cases that had come in that day—"who lived, who died, and why they lived, and why they died," Nott said. "And then, because we'd get air-to-ground missiles after dark, we'd still have patients coming in. I'd carry on operating until midnight. And it would go on like that every single day."

M1 is in the neighborhood of Bustan al-Qasr, a few hundred yards from the only crossing point between the rebel and the regime sides of the city. (The route has since been closed.) Each day, thousands of locals crossed from one side to the other to buy food, visit relatives, and take school exams. Corrupt fighters on the rebel side extorted those desperate to cross; snipers on the regime side used the alley for target practice. Bystanders who dared to retrieve the victims were often shot, too.

"Every day, we'd receive about twelve to fifteen sniper wounds," Nott told me. Many of the victims were children, and the patients coming in from the crossing point arrived with eerily consistent injuries. "It was very strange," Nott said. "You'd know that, at the start of the day, if you got a patient shot in the right arm, you'd have six or seven more shot in the right arm. And if somebody got shot in the abdomen you'd have six or seven shot in the abdomen." Nott suspected that snipers were targeting specific areas of the body, as part of a sadistic game. He consulted with Aziz, who claimed that the gunmen were making bets over whom they could hit, and where. Aziz told me, "We used to sometimes listen to the walkie-talkies of the regime. And they used to listen to us." One day, he said, "we heard a man say, 'I bet for a box of cigarettes . . .'"

Even pregnant women were targeted, the doctors suspected. "This is a pregnant lady who's just about to deliver," Nott explained, in London, as he clicked through a series of ghastly photographs on his laptop. "She was forty weeks pregnant and was about to have a breech delivery, and was shot in the uterus." A Syrian physician filmed Nott performing an emergency Cesarean section. Only the mother lived; an X-ray of the fetus showed a bullet lodged in its skull.

Nott was under constant threat of abduction. ISIS had already kidnapped sixteen foreign journalists and aid workers, and the Syrian government had captured another British doctor in Aleppo, an orthopedic surgeon named

Abbas Khan, who later died in a prison cell in Damascus. Humanitarian doctors treat patients regardless of their loyalties, and, one day, as Nott was sewing up the artery that connected a man's heart and lungs, "the doors of the operating theatre just flew open, and we had about seven ISIS fighters come in," he said. They stood at the door, Kalashnikovs drawn. The leader, a Chechen, approached the table. The patient was one of his troops. Abu Abdullah, a young Syrian surgeon, stepped forward and told the man, in English, that if he disturbed the senior surgeon "your friend will die." Nott shook with fear. "I was trying to concentrate on my hands so much that I could hardly stand," he said. A commotion outside drew the guards away, but the leader stayed until the operation was complete. A month after Nott left M1, the same group of fighters returned and kidnapped a patient who had been wounded in both legs. They dragged him down the stairs, deposited him in the middle of the street, and executed him.

In January, 2014, ISIS kidnapped thirteen doctors from an M.S.F. field hospital in northern Syria. Eight were Syrian, and they were soon released, but the five foreigners remained hostages until the end of May. M.S.F. shut down its operations in ISIS-held areas and withdrew its foreign staff from the country.

Nott returned to M1 in September, 2014. Every hospital in the opposition-held eastern half of the city had been attacked. At M10, pieces of ceiling, glass, and concrete covered broken beds in a former ward, while a leftover bag of serum dangled near an electrical outlet. Medical staff at both facilities crammed equipment and patients into the basements and stacked sandbags around the entrances. The upper floors were deserted, serving only as shields against bombardment.

For almost a year, Syrian government helicopters had been lobbing barrels filled with shrapnel and TNT onto markets, apartment blocks, schools, and hospitals. Welded tail fins guide the barrels to land on top of an impact fuse. The methods of targeting are so rudimentary and indiscriminate that, in Aleppo, many residents have moved closer to the front lines, risking sniper fire and shelling, because the helicopters don't drop barrels near government troops.

When a large bomb explodes, it destroys bodies in consecutive waves. The first is the blast wave, which spreads air particles at supersonic speeds. This can inflict internal damage on the organs, because, Nott said, "the air-tissue interface will bleed. So your lungs start to bleed inside. You can't breathe. You can't hear anything, because your eardrums are all blown out." A fraction of a second later comes the blast wind, a negative pressure that catapults people into the air and slams them into whatever walls or objects are around. "The blast wind is so strong that in the wrong place it will actually blow off your leg," Nott said. He showed me a photograph of a man on the operating table, whose left leg was charred mush and mostly missing below the knee. "It'll strip everything off your leg. And that's why people have such terrible injuries. It's the blast wind that does that, followed by fragmentation injuries," from bits of metal shrapnel that rip through flesh and bone, and the flame front, which burns people to death.

In the aftermath of a barrel-bomb attack, Nott said, "as you walked down the stairs to the emergency department, you just heard screams." Barrel bombs blow up entire buildings, filling the air with concrete dust; many people who survive the initial explosion die of suffocation minutes later. Every day, patients arrived at the hospital so mangled and coated in debris that "you wouldn't know whether you were looking at the front or the back, whether they were alive or dead," he said. "Every time you touched somebody, the dust would go into your face and down into your lungs, and you'd be coughing and spluttering away as you were trying to assess whether this patient was alive."

The tiled floor of the underground emergency department at M1 was slick with blood and other fluids. Screaming men carried in headless children, as if they could somehow be saved. Hospital staffers wrapped corpses in white shrouds and stacked detached legs that still wore socks and shoes.

When barrel bombs fall on homes, they often send entire families to the ward. One day, five siblings arrived. Unable to treat any of them, Nott started filming the scene, so that he would have proof, he said, of “how terrible it was.” A baby with no feet let out a stifled cry, then died. An older brother lay silently nearby, his guts coming out. In the next room, a toddler with blood on his face shouted the name of his dying brother. Two medical workers carried in the fourth brother, who was about three years old. His pelvis was missing, and his face and chest were gray with concrete dust. He opened his eyes and looked around the room, blinking, without making a noise. There were wet, white blobs on his face, and Nott gently wiped them away. When the sister was brought into the room, he learned that a concrete block had fallen on her head, and the blobs were pieces of her brain.

The boy was dying. There was no treatment; he had lost too much blood, and his lungs had filled with concrete particles. Nott held his hand for four agonizing minutes. “All you can do is just comfort them,” he told me. I asked him what that entailed, since M1 had exhausted its supply of morphine. He began to cry, and said, “All you can hope is that they die quickly.”

A few weeks after Nott left Aleppo, he was invited to lunch at Buckingham Palace. Wild duck and vintage port were served. Janet Oldroyd Hulme, one of Britain’s most prolific growers of rhubarb, sat on his left, and the Queen sat on his right. When the Queen turned to him, he explained that he had just returned from Syria. “How was it?” she asked. “I tried to play it light, and I said it was absolutely dreadful,” he told me. The Queen pressed for details, but he couldn’t bring himself to tell her, and his bottom lip began quivering. At that point, “she summoned the corgis,” he said. For the next twenty minutes, Nott and the Queen petted the dogs and fed them biscuits under the table. As the lunch came to a close, he says, she remarked, “That’s much better than talking, isn’t it?”

Since Nott’s last trip to Aleppo, Syrian government forces have dropped barrel bombs on all three trauma hospitals in the city. In separate missile strikes, they killed several of Nott’s friends, including an anesthetic technician and a paramedic. Physicians for Human Rights has catalogued and corroborated three hundred and sixty-five attacks against Syrian medical facilities, more than ninety per cent of which were perpetrated by Syrian and Russian government forces. Many of them are “double-tap” strikes: around twenty minutes after the first bomb falls, a helicopter or a jet returns to the scene and blows up the rescuers.

In the first week of June, Syrian and Russian aircraft carried out more than six hundred air strikes on the opposition side of Aleppo, and Assad vowed to take back “every inch” of Syria. The next day, pro-Assad warplanes bombed three medical facilities, including a health center for newborn babies, in the span of three hours. M2, M3, M4, M6, M7, and M9 have been destroyed.

Aziz told me that, in the opposition-held half of Aleppo, there are now five general surgeons, two or three orthopedic surgeons, one obstetrician, and one anesthesiologist. “I’m a general surgeon working as a thoracic surgeon, working as a cardiac surgeon, working as a vascular surgeon, sometimes doing ultrasounds, sometimes doing X-rays,” he said. “And it’s the same for the rest of the guys. He is a nurse? He became an intensive-care technician. He is a worker in the hospital? He became an operating-room technician, because he learned how to deal with sterilization, how to deal with surgical equipment.”

“If you go to Aleppo and ask the doctors in any hospital, they will tell you that since David Nott came to Aleppo, there was a huge leap forward in the performance of medical practice,” Ammar Darwish told me. “He’s still saving lives down there, because he taught these doctors how to do a good job.”

Nott continues to advise the medical staff at M1 from afar. Earlier this year, he and his wife, Elly, a former Middle East researcher at the International Institute for Strategic Studies, started a foundation to run surgical-training courses for doctors who live in war zones. In April, he and Darwish travelled to southern Turkey for the first session, held at a university in Gaziantep. Thirty-two Syrians attended, coming from Aleppo, Idlib, Homs, and Latakia provinces.

One of Nott’s best students is Abu Waseem. When the war began, he was a fourth-year plastic- and reconstructive-surgery resident at a government hospital. “He sacrificed his future” to continue treating patients in Syria, Aziz told me. “He has no way to graduate, no way to do his fifth or sixth year and become a specialist.” While other physicians in Aleppo take frequent breaks and visit family members who have escaped to Turkey, Abu Waseem remains at M1, because he doesn’t have a passport.

Nott often asks Abu Waseem how he’s coping. Not long ago, he replied, “Thank you, my friend, I am fine. But I am so sad.” He sent two photographs of a young child with horrific injuries. “Look at this girl. This is one of the victims of a Russian bombing today. She lost her whole arm and her face.”

“Terrible,” Nott wrote back. “Is she going to survive?”

“Unfortunately, yes.”

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6. Iraq screening 20,000 to stop Islamic State infiltrators – army

Agence France-Presse, June 25 | Ammar Karim

BAGHDAD -- Iraq is screening 20,000 people leaving the Fallujah area to stop jihadists of the Islamic State group escaping among civilians displaced by fighting, the army said on Saturday.

Tens of thousands of people have fled as government forces fight to oust IS from Fallujah, a city 50 kilometres (30 miles) west of Baghdad.

Some of those screened have accused security forces of beating and torturing them.

Of those detained, 2,185 were suspects based on testimonies or other information, while 11,605 were released and about 7,000 were still being checked, said a spokesman for Iraq's Joint Operations Command.

When fleeing civilians reached government forces, teenaged boys and men were screened separately, with some being released after a few hours while others underwent more thorough interrogation.

Relatives mobbed Iraqi officials at a camp for displaced last week to ask about the fate of hundreds of missing males.

One man said he was held for four days without anything to drink or eat by the Popular Mobilisation forces, an umbrella organisation for volunteer fighters dominated by Iran-backed Shiite militias.

Another said detainees were beaten, and others had similar accounts of torture.

Human Rights Watch this month called for Iraq to "unravel the web of culpability underlying the government forces' repeated outrages against civilians".

HRW said it had received credible allegations that federal police and pro-government forces executed at least 17 people fleeing the fighting in Sijr, northeast of Fallujah.

The watchdog also listed reports of civilians being stabbed to death and others dying after being dragged behind cars in the Saqlawiya area, northwest of Fallujah.

Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi's office previously said that he had issued "strict orders" for prosecutions in the event of any abuses.

IS overran large areas north and west of Baghdad in June 2014, but Iraqi forces have since regained significant ground from the jihadists, who now hold only one major city in the country.

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7. Fighting in Fallujah: Down, but not yet out

A report from the front line in the war against Islamic State

The Economist (UK), June 25, Pg. 40 | Not Attributed

On June 18th Iraq's prime minister, Haider al-Abadi, declared that his forces had regained control of Fallujah, a stronghold seized by Islamic State (IS) two and a half years ago that lies just 60km (40 miles) from the capital, Baghdad. Yet the next day the thud of mortars and rockets could still be heard inside the supposedly liberated city, and armoured convoys were still rumbling into the fray. "Daesh is still here," said Qusay Hamid, an Iraqi special-forces major, using the Arabic acronym for IS as he waited on a sun-baked Fallujah street to move his men into battle near a mosque.

Lieutenant-General Abdul Wahab al-Saadi, dressed in a T-shirt and black trousers, commands the battle from a plastic table on the concrete floor of a construction site that has been turned into an improvised command post. Officers radio back grid co-ordinates to Australian counterparts, who then guide American Hellfire missiles to strike IS positions in the city.

The crash of a rocket fired towards Fallujah from a nearby sector controlled by the Iranian-backed Badr organisation punctuates the roar of fighter jets. Two years into the campaign against IS, Iraqi security forces, their Iranian-backed Shia militia allies and the American-led international coalition seem to have settled into an uneasy coexistence. The Shia militias that make up the bulk of Iraq's "popular mobilisation forces" have been relegated to a supporting role in the fight for Sunni Fallujah, which makes political sense. "Sometimes they come after we've cleared the neighbourhoods and they write their own graffiti on the walls to take credit for it," says one young special-forces fighter, already a veteran of three big battles.

Fallujah appears to have been damaged far less than Ramadi, the provincial capital, was during a much longer battle earlier this year. In neighbourhoods cleared by special forces and now being handed over to an emergency local police force, most buildings are intact. But it will be at least six months before civilians are allowed to return home. Pockets of IS fighters remain. Neighbourhoods will have to be swept house by house for weapons and explosives. Reconnecting electricity and water will take time.

Handling refugees will be another huge problem for the Iraqi authorities. Tens of thousands of civilians fled Fallujah as IS retreated last week. Dozens of people died in the process, either from drowning in the Euphrates river or from being hit by shells or bombs. One traumatised family being evacuated by the security forces tells of seeing three of their daughters and their mother torn apart by shelling as they tried to escape on foot.

Despite months of planning by the Iraqi government and foreign aid organisations, the thousands who have managed to flee have been left to fend for themselves in the desert. "There was nothing here two days ago," said Karl Schembri, of the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), looking out at a dusty field that is now home to hundreds of displaced families. The NRC, one of the few aid groups working in Anbar province, has described the relief effort as chaos. And these are people who have been living on dried dates for weeks, as IS fighters seized and hoarded food for themselves. "It was the only thing we could afford," says one woman, explaining that she would grind the date stones as a substitute for flour to make bread.

As families leave Fallujah, Iraqi security forces, relying on information from local committees, are taking their young men and older teenage boys for screening to determine whether they belonged to IS. "They have people with their faces covered come and point out who was Daesh," says one displaced Fallujah resident, who said he was spared the investigation because he was too old.

Some of the investigators are intent on revenge rather than justice. Human-rights groups say dozens of the young men taken for questioning have been beaten or tortured; and that some have been killed. Notably absent from the scene are Anbar's politicians and religious leaders, many of whom waited out the conflict in the comfort of Kurdistan in the north, or in neighbouring Jordan. "We will never again trust our politicians or tribal leaders or imams," said one Fallujah resident bitterly. "They left us here with this."

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8. How the U.S. is working to defeat ISIS online

TheHill.com, June 25 | Kristina Wong

The Obama administration is ramping up its efforts to fight terrorism online as extremist Islamic groups seek to motivate homegrown attackers.

Driving the effort is the recently set up Global Engagement Center, housed at the State Department but led by retired Navy SEAL Cmdr. Michael Lumpkin, a former top Pentagon official.

The effort comes late in the administration, and more than two years after the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria began its land-grabbing blitz across Iraq and Syria, prompting criticism from some Republicans in Congress for moving too slowly.

It also comes after the State Department set up an earlier effort, the Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications, whose government-branded videos have been widely seen as a failure.

But Lumpkin, in a recent interview with The Hill, said the goal is to get the infrastructure in place to effectively counter terrorists' messaging beyond the Obama administration.

One major difference between the new effort and the previous effort, he says, is that the GEC is an interagency body that pulls from all across government, including the intelligence community, versus just the State Department.

"We bring all the best and the brightest from the interagency coming together in a single place," he said.

The president has also given Lumpkin hiring authority that allows him to hire directly from outside the government -- "people who know the technology better than we may in social media," he said.

The office is also growing from 68 people earlier this year to about 150 now.

Its budget has grown from \$5.6 million in 2015, to more than \$15 million this year. The administration has requested \$21.5 million for 2017.

The amount, which comes out of the State Department's budget, equals less than two days worth of military operations against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, at approximately \$11.7 million a day.

That's despite agreement across government that stopping terrorist propaganda online is as important as operations on the battlefield.

"ISIS's online dominance is just as critical to the organization as the large amounts of territory it controls in Iraq and Syria," said House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Ed Royce (R-Calif.) at a hearing on ISIS's "virtual caliphate" on Thursday.

Another major difference from the previous effort is how the U.S. government is going about countering the message.

Whereas the previous effort distributed U.S. government-branded messaging, Lumpkin says the GEC is applying a lesson honed by special operators during more than 15 years of war against terrorists around the world:

"We recognize that it takes a network to defeat a network, so we're building a network of partners because we believe we have a very good message, we're not always just the most credible entity to convey that message," he said.

"So we have partners that have a tremendous amount of credibility that we're working with to make sure they have the tools and capabilities to get out the word that Daesh is indeed a vicious awful organization that is rife with hypocrisy and everything else," he said, using a derogatory Arabic term for ISIS.

So far, highlighting that hypocrisy is what's been shown to be most effective, particularly using defectors, Lumpkin said.

"There's two ways to influence people, one is through, you know, logic, and then there's emotion," he said. "I think most of our efforts have been focused on having defectors tell their story."

"It's about revealing their true nature so people understand they aren't what they say they are," he said. "They're not paying their fighters what they claim to be paying them, and nor is the quality of life what they're advocating."

Lumpkin is also applying a mentality to the job learned after 21 years of military service as a special operator that seeks to cut across bureaucracy and get things done.

"I think that we've had the most successes at building the partnership network and working with the interagency," he said.

However, he still said there are barriers within the government, even with introducing new software to communicate across agencies.

"What we're trying to do is build an innovative, agile organization, and while we're making significant inroads, it is just difficult based on the security constraints of IT networks and things of that nature," he said.

"Each department has got its own rules and regulations and review procedures, and we just need to work through," he said. "It's not that it's not working, it's just frankly, it'll take some time to work through the process."

Rep. Brad Sherman (D-Calif.) recently noted during the House Foreign Affairs Committee hearing that the State Department currently needs 14 levels of review before sending out a Tweet.

Those who receive State Department funding also have to meet a bar, albeit a lower one, of six levels of review, he added. By contrast, he said, "If you're a volunteer, you do a tweet."

So far, there is cautious optimism from the Hill on the new efforts and support for expanding those efforts.

A House Armed Services Committee aide said on background, "We've been pleased with the direction of the GEC so far. However, a lot of work remains to be done, including building the institutional foundation to ensure these efforts are able to take root and continue into the next administration."

Lumpkin acknowledges that he is a race against time to build as much of the network and infrastructure as he can during the remainder of this administration, so that it persists after it leaves office.

He also acknowledges the U.S. needs to get in front of extremist ideology sooner than later, even as the military campaign is succeeding in taking away territory from ISIS in Iraq and Syria.

And although the GEC is mandated to counter extremist messaging to audiences outside of the U.S., the lines are blurring as ISIS and other groups increasingly shift their messaging to encouraging recruits to conduct attacks at home.

Earlier this month, Omar Mateen, a 29-year-old American-born citizen, opened fire at an Orlando nightclub after consuming extremist propaganda and pledging allegiance to ISIS, killing 49 and wounding 53.

"We can't kill our way to victory here. We can't. This is the fight. We have to prevent people from joining Daesh and organizations like it abroad," he said.

"We've lost too many Americans, too many citizens of the world to groups like Daesh, Boko Haram, and things of that nature. This is the fight that needs to be won."

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MIDEAST

9. Who Really Killed a Playboy Terrorist?

One of the world's most wanted terrorists met a fiery death last month. The mystery over who killed him is now an international guessing game—with the prime suspects in Washington

TheDailyBeast.com, June 26 | Shane Harris

Plenty of people wanted Mustafa Badreddine dead.

There were the Saudis, who blamed him for terror attacks in the kingdom and against its allies abroad.

The Israelis had already once tried to assassinate Badreddine, the military commander of Hezbollah and one of the most important and powerful figures in the organization.

Even Badreddine's own Hezbollah brethren were said to have their knives out, feuding with the storied militant over where the group should devote its resources: Towards attacks against its longstanding enemy, Israel, or on the battlefields of Syria, where Badreddine had been commanding around 6,000 men in an all-out effort to prop up the regime of Bashar al-Assad. Some Hezbollah figures had also chastised Badreddine as an easily distracted womanizer who had developed a taste for the high-life, dining in fine restaurants and tooling around Lebanon in a Mercedes.

But of all Badreddine's many enemies, one had a special place for him on its most-wanted list--the United States. And that has officials in several countries speculating that Washington finally took him out in a massive explosion in Damascus last month.

Badreddine had put himself in America's crosshairs at a young age. In 1983, the 22-year old budding terrorist helped to plan the suicide bombing of the U.S. Marines barracks in Beirut, Lebanon. Even then, Badreddine was a genius with explosives and devised a means for increasing the force of the bomb by the insertion of compressed gas. Loaded onto a flatbed truck, his device ripped the hulking barracks building off its foundations and collapsed it inward, killing 241 men inside, most of them probably in their sleep. It was the deadliest day for the Marines since they stormed the beaches at Iwo Jima.

Badreddine would go on to help plan and execute a string of bombings that year, including on the U.S. and French embassies in Kuwait. But there, he was captured, tried, and imprisoned. The cunning killer seemed to have been put away.

Badreddine's cousin, however, had other plans. He made it his mission to free his brother-in-arms, and he directed a slew of kidnappings and attacks all aimed at achieving that end. In one notorious airline hijacking in June 1985, in which the assailants demanded Badreddine's release in exchange for the passengers, the cousin and his henchmen beat to death Navy diver Robert Stethem and dumped his body on the tarmac of the Beirut airport in front of rolling TV cameras.

There were other violent efforts to free Badreddine and 16 of his fellow prisoners, including at least two hijackings, which claimed the lives of four passengers, and a kidnapping spree of Americans in Beirut in the 1980s. That led President Ronald Reagan to sell arms to Iran--Hezbollah's main patron--in exchange for the Americans' release.

But then, a stroke of luck for Hezbollah: Badreddine escaped prison in 1990 amid the chaos of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. For the next quarter century, he was practically a ghost, using aliases and multiple cell phones to avoid detection.

Until one day last month.

On May 10, in a building near the Damascus airport, Badreddine met the same fiery end as so many of his victims. News accounts are sketchy but all described a huge explosion that killed Badreddine and possibly others present for a meeting of Hezbollah's forces in Syria. What was left of him was placed in a box and buried in Beirut. Thousands turned out for the funeral, and Iran's government sent messages of condolence praising the vanquished commander.

Badreddine's death was a body blow to Hezbollah, which has been losing more men in its efforts to prop up the Assad regime than it has in armed conflict with its longtime enemy Israel, according to U.S. and Israeli intelligence officials. But it was also a moment of celebration for American spies, soldiers, and diplomats. Badreddine was one of the founding fathers of the modern era of terrorism, kicked off by the barracks bombing in 1983 and an attack on the U.S. embassy in Beirut that killed 63 people and wiped out most of the CIA station in the country. It was the deadliest strike on the agency until an al Qaeda suicide bomber detonated himself at a remote outpost in Khost, Afghanistan, in 2009.

Almost immediately after the explosion that killed Badreddine in Damascus, Hezbollah pinned the blame on Israel. That was no surprise. Accusing Israeli intelligence for all manner of attacks is practically a reflex for Hezbollah. And sometimes with good reason. In fact, the U.S. and Israel had been credited with killing Badreddine's cousin, Imad Mughniyah, in 2008. Until his death, Mughniyah, who was also married to Badreddine's sister, had been Hezbollah's military chief. He was killed after a months-long operation--also in Damascus--with a bespoke bomb hidden inside a car. It detonated as Mughniyah passed, ripping him limb-from-limb and sending his torso flying through a window 50 feet away, Newsweek reported.

But almost as soon as the word went out that Israel had killed Badreddine, Hezbollah made a new claim--that he was assassinated by "takfiri" terrorists, a pejorative for Syrian rebel forces and Sunni militants, including ISIS and al Qaeda, whom Shiite Hezbollah considers apostates.

That may have been the official line. But in the U.S. and Israel, no one seemed to buy it. What's more, in the corridors of power in Tehran, senior government officials were pointing the finger somewhere else: Washington.

The U.S. certainly had the motive, and the opportunity, considering that the military's Central Command is conducting a daily barrage of airstrikes in Syria. If American spies did finally track Badreddine to that building near the airport in Damascus, it must have been the result of painstaking work by U.S. and Israeli intelligence agencies.

Badreddine was famous not just for his lethal genius, but for being practically untraceable. “Since the year 2000, there has been no mention of his name in any registry or record in Lebanon, there are no bank accounts, social security or internal revenue documentation and no property in his name,” Ronen Bergman, the journalist who is perhaps most well-sourced in Israel’s intelligence community, wrote shortly after Badreddine died.

But Badreddine didn’t exactly live a quiet life. Under another identity, Sami Issa--or alternatively Sami Samino--he struck the pose of an international man of mystery. He dined in expensive restaurants. Personal bodyguards attended his moves. He even owned a jewelry shop, boldly named “Samino,” Bergman reports.

On his various cell phones Badreddine kept in touch with his various mistresses. He risked detection by some of his oldest enemies. But not even the threat of imminent death could slake his mortal appetites, it seems.

Being hunted also didn’t blunt Badreddine terrorist ambitions, and in 2005, he proved that while he might be off the radar, he was not out of the picture. Working with top Hezbollah commanders, Badreddine orchestrated the assassination of Rafic Hariri, the ex-prime minister of Lebanon and one of the country’s most well known politicians and business leaders. Hariri’s convoy was hit by a massive bomb hidden inside a parked car near the St. George Hotel in Beirut. It was a classic Badreddine operation.

“Hariri was one of the best-guarded people in the world, with his security protocol formulated by experts from Germany and the United States,” Bergman writes. “Badreddine’s success in killing Hariri (together with 21 other people) had once again proven that apart from Mughniyah [his cousin and brother-in-law], he was the best operative in the organization.”

But within three years, Mughniyah was dead, killed in that joint U.S.-Israeli operation. Badreddine stepped into his relative’s role, and now, the hunt was on for him.

In January 2015, Israel thought they’d found their man, traveling in a convoy in Syria. An Israeli helicopter reportedly fired two missiles at the vehicles, but Badreddine wasn’t there. Mughniyah’s son, however, was among the dead.

Badreddine would have gotten the message that his trail was no longer cold. Israeli officials were onto him, which meant the Americans almost certainly were, too. The fact that Israel had tried so recently to kill Badreddine is another reason why U.S. and Israeli officials I spoke to are deeply skeptical of the theory that ISIS or al Qaeda fighters finally took him to his grave.

There has been no public claim from Hezbollah that the U.S. killed Badreddine. But at the highest levels of the Iranian regime, leaders have concluded that he was taken out in a precision U.S. airstrike, an Iranian official with knowledge of information sent to top leaders told *The Daily Beast*.

Radar that Iran had installed in Lebanon and Syria picked up signals showing a missile that was fired by what Tehran’s intelligence analysts have concluded was either a U.S. drone or a manned aircraft, said the Iranian official, who spoke on condition that he not be identified by name.

This bold allegation hasn't been officially leveled. But, the official said, Iran's supreme leader, Ali Khamenei, was so incensed by the American attack on a Hezbollah icon that he ordered Gen. Qassem Soleimani, the head of Iran's Quds Force, to begin retaliatory strikes at U.S.-backed rebels in Syria. It's not clear if those orders were carried out. But a U.S. counterterrorism source told *The Daily Beast* that there had been "chatter" since Badreddine's death that Iran had put out orders to exact some revenge.

The fog of suspicion only thickens. Speaking privately, two U.S. defense officials said they're aware of allegations in Iran that the U.S. was behind the attack. But they offered no claim about who was really responsible, other than to speculate that the explosion may have been caused by an errant artillery strike by the Syrian regime, a kind of friendly fire incident that was also a "lucky" event for the U.S., as one official put it.

A U.S. intelligence official said he was also aware that Hezbollah has publicly blamed "takfiri" terrorists. But no one in the U.S. national security community, nor in Israel, was persuaded that ISIS or al Qaeda's branch in Syria had the sophistication or the firepower to pull off the attack that killed Badreddine.

Hezbollah said in an official statement that an "artillery bombardment" caused the explosion that killed their commander. But that would seem to rule out an attack by Sunni terrorists since they're not known to possess those kinds of weapons. Syrian opposition forces, for their part, have also rejected claims that they may have been responsible.

At the same time, some Lebanese journalists with sources in Hezbollah have claimed that Badreddine "was killed by a missile possessed only by advanced countries," according to the *Times of Israel*. That would support Tehran's contention that Washington is to blame. Lebanese papers have also quoted Hezbollah parliamentarians alleging that Israel provided the technology to kill Badreddine, the *Times of Israel* reported, which leaves open the possibility that Israel tracked Badreddine to his location and then tipped off forces on the ground.

But Tehran has dismissed the notion that Sunni fighters, Israel, or anyone besides the U.S. military or the CIA were to blame, the Iranian official said. He also downplayed speculation, which has surfaced in various press accounts, that Hezbollah may have killed Badreddine as part of an internal power struggle. Hezbollah's true believers "do not kill their own people--period," the official said.

If the U.S. did kill Badreddine, it might want to keep that quiet so as not to divulge the intelligence sources used to find him. Iran may also have calculated that it's not worth antagonizing the U.S. to publicly assign the blame for Badreddine's killing, particularly now that Iran is enjoying sanctions relief following a landmark agreement with Western powers to suspend production of nuclear materials.

The lack of precise details on the nature of the explosion--was it really a missile, or could it have been a powerful bomb, maybe even of the kind that Badreddine knew how to build?--also has helped fan the flames of speculation about who's to blame. But in recent conversations, Israeli journalists and intelligence officers repeatedly said that Israel wasn't behind the assassination.

One Israeli intelligence official, speaking privately, likewise concluded that Israel was not the culprit. What's more, the official added, it was notable that Hezbollah quickly walked back initial claims that Israel was responsible. The reason? The last thing that Hezbollah's leaders want now is another fight with Israel; their forces are too stretched, having evolved from a militant group focused primarily on its home base of Lebanon to an expeditionary force that is spilling blood and treasure in Syria, this official said.

So who did it? The Israeli official smiled. "I think maybe it was you," he said, meaning the United States.

In the end, it may not matter who gets credit for killing Badreddine. The fact that he was taken down after a lifetime spent in the shadows has sent a message to Hezbollah and its patrons in Tehran, the Iranian official said: Your forces aren't as strong as you think they are.

The U.S. will count that as a win.

--With additional reporting by Nancy A. Youssef

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EUROPE

10. Britain's self-focus will leave a hole in world diplomacy

Washington Post, June 26, Pg. A1 | Griff Witte and Dan Balz

LONDON - For centuries, this modest little island in the North Sea has punched well above its weight on the international stage: It built a global empire, beat back the Nazi tide and stood shoulder to shoulder with the United States during a decades-long standoff with the Soviets.

But now that Britain has stunned the world with its decision to exit the European Union, experts say it will be focused inward for the foreseeable future.

"I don't think there will be the capacity or the infrastructure to look outward in the next five years," said Ian Kearns, director of the London-based European Leadership Network. "With all our diplomatic resources focused on extracting concessions from the E.U., we won't be in anything other than reactive mode on other issues."

That reality could bring a significantly diminished role on the great challenges facing the West, including Russia, the Islamic State, refugees and climate change.

For Washington, Britain's distraction will be acutely felt. Britain has long been the United States' closest ally, one that broadly shares American interests and values, and has always formed a crucial bridge across the Atlantic.

The United States looked to Britain when it needed to influence European decision-making. The E.U. turned to Britain when it hoped to influence the United States.

Now, the loss of Britain's voice in efforts to present a united European and American front on issues such as sanctions against Russia is particularly worrisome to U.S. officials, said Philip Gordon, a former assistant secretary of state for European affairs in the Obama administration.

"That voice will no longer be there when withdrawal is complete," Gordon said. Instead, Britain will be preoccupied with its "great domestic convulsion."

Thursday's referendum was the most dramatic blow to Britain's role in the world, but even before that, a series of events caused Washington to fret that its closest ally was pulling back from its customarily active global role.

Parliament's 2013 vote against airstrikes in Syria, Britain's absence from Ukrainian peace talks and its delay in joining the air campaign against the Islamic State all contributed to a feeling that Britain was becoming a less-reliable partner in international affairs.

A victory for the "remain" camp in the referendum vote was supposed to be a turning point: With Prime Minister David Cameron having put the country's two great existential dilemmas behind it - Scottish secession and E.U. membership - he would have a free hand to reassert Britain's role as a global power.

But Cameron's gamble of calling a referendum went badly wrong, and now Great Britain faces the very real prospect of being transformed into Little England.

Scotland is once again pressing the case for secession. Pro-Brexit voters are demanding that the country shut the door to large numbers of immigrants. And the country's political leadership and diplomatic corps are likely to spend years conducting divorce proceedings with soon-to-be former partners in the E.U.

"It's taken a step to withdraw from the world," said Tom Donilon, former national security adviser to President Obama. "It will go from being an important participant in the European decision-making mechanism to being a party on the other side of the negotiation table."

Donilon said that for as long as most people can remember, Britain has been the first call made by a U.S. president when there is a challenge in the world.

But Thursday's vote means calls between the White House and 10 Downing Street could matter less.

"They'll remain an important player in NATO and an ally of the United States. But they've diminished their leverage in Europe," he said. "Their membership in the European Union amplifies British influence. They've pulled back from that. I don't think that is good for Britain. I don't think it's good for the United States."

British politicians who campaigned for Brexit dispute that logic, arguing that a Britain freed from the shackles of the E.U. will be better able to assert its interests around the globe.

Britain's E.U. membership, they have said, diluted the country's voice rather than amplified it, and actually inhibited its ability to develop its own relations with great powers such as the United States, as well as rising ones such as China and India.

Brexit campaigner and former London mayor Boris Johnson said Friday, after the votes had been counted, that Britain's influence will be undimmed, even in Europe.

"I want to reassure everyone Britain will continue to be a great European power, leading discussions on defense and foreign policy and the work that goes on to make our world safer," Johnson said. "But there is simply no need in the 21st century to be part of a federal government in Brussels that is imitated nowhere else on earth."

But foreign-policy experts on both sides of the Atlantic dispute that logic, at least in the short and medium term.

The task of disentangling Britain from Europe will be gargantuan, given the extraordinary links across the English Channel in commerce, security and dozens of other areas. Britain will not only need to negotiate its way out of the 28-member bloc, it also must ink new trade deals and other agreements to replace the E.U. ones it has relied on to do business with the rest of the world.

The process probably will take up the rest of this decade and could reach well into the next one.

Britain also faces a threat to its very existence: Leaders in pro-E.U. Scotland said Friday that they will push for a new independence referendum. On Saturday, First Minister Nicola Sturgeon went further and said she would effectively circumvent London's authority over foreign affairs by reaching out to Brussels directly to discuss "possible options to protect Scotland's place in the E.U."

A Scottish departure would even further limit London's international clout, not least because Scotland is home to Britain's nuclear arsenal - raising thorny questions of whether London would relocate the program or abandon it altogether in the event of a Scottish vote to leave.

Britain could also be struggling economically in the years to come. On Friday, the British pound plummeted and markets tumbled worldwide. Analysts say that's just a taste of the pain to come for Britain, with a downgraded credit rating, job losses, higher interest rates and a fall back into recession all potentially on the horizon.

In that environment, the prime minister - whoever that may be following Cameron's resignation - will be hard-pressed to maintain the country's current spending on defense, diplomacy and international aid.

And if Britain thinks it will at least be free of having to worry about what's happening in Brussels, it's mistaken, said Robin Niblett, director of the London-based think tank Chatham House.

The country will still have to coordinate closely with its erstwhile E.U. partners, Niblett said, because "Britain is so tightly interlinked with Europe in terms of the problems we share - Russia, ISIS, refugees."

The only difference, he said, is that coordination will be more difficult and time-consuming because Britain will be "on the outside rather than having a seat at the table."

"The irony," Niblett said, "is that we're going to spend more time focused on Europe over the next 10 years, not less."

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11. Army chief fights for a smarter future

Register Military General Sir Nicholas Carter is determined to change Britain's land forces. He tells Allan Mallinson why

The Times (UK), June 25, Pg. 82 | Allan Mallinson

Not for more than a century has the British Army in peacetime been so generally gripped by the zeal for change as now. However, unlike the celebrated reforms of the Edwardian era, when amid intense public interest the secretary for war, the Scots lawyer and philosopher Richard Burdon Haldane, took a very hands-on approach, today's reformation is internally inspired and goes largely unobserved.

It is being driven with a Cromwellian sense of purpose by the youngest chief of the general staff (CGS) in 80 years, the 57-year-old General Sir Nicholas Carter. Next week he gives a progress report on his new model army to an international audience at the Royal United Services Institute's annual land warfare conference — in, of all places, Church House, Westminster, the headquarters of the Church of England. None of his plans were contingent on the outcome of the EU referendum.

Carter is based not at the Ministry of Defence (MoD) in London, where chiefs of the general staff have traditionally flown their flag, but at his new headquarters on the edge of Salisbury Plain. The 2011 defence organisation study by Lord Levene, the former chief of MoD procurement and chairman of the Stock Exchange, restored considerable financial autonomy to the service chiefs, but also advocated their rustication, with only a strengthened defence (tri-service) policy staff remaining in Whitehall. This met with resistance at the time, so why had General Carter, who took over as professional head of the army 18 months ago, decided to decamp to the country? "Greater financial autonomy and delegation is an exciting opportunity," he replies, "but it will only succeed if the army's Andover-based staff is able to create a strategic relationship with the MoD that enables long-term planning certainty and avoids the previous temptation for short-term tinkering — hence the importance of geographic separation. It creates the space for the army to determine its destiny."

Regaining financial autonomy means a huge reorganisation of the army's staff, and Carter is the first to concede that it is still a work in progress. He has already managed to reduce the number of posts in his own headquarters by 600, delegating functions closer to the front line. In an army that has had its numbers cut by 25 per cent since 2010, but not its functions, this is no small saving. It was achieved despite Afghanistan — a war that has taken a good deal out of the army while undoubtedly sharpening some of its thinking and practice.

The Afghan experience, and before it Iraq, is central to the army's zeal for change and particularly Carter's: he commanded a brigade in Basra, a division in Helmand and Kandahar, and was then three-star deputy to the US commander in Kabul. Despite its two decades of experience of hybrid warfare — in which the threats ranged from soft power such as cyber attacks to militias and conventional forces — first in Bosnia and Kosovo, the army had not changed fundamentally since the end of the Cold War — except that its numbers had been cut drastically. Iraq took it by surprise, as did Afghanistan, and it was too slow to adapt. The two wars made huge demands on troop rotation, leaving not enough people detached from the hurly burly to think things through. Transformation during a campaign is painful. The Americans were able to do it in Iraq — General David Petraeus's "Surge" — because they had the spare capacity for thinking, training and troop rotation, while the British Army was too quickly overstretched and had closed down its doctrine and development branch.

Carter is determined not to let this happen again, taking the pause in operations — what he calls "the headroom to effect change" — to get people thinking from first principles. Unusually for his generation of officers, he was not a graduate entrant, nor did he do an inservice degree, going straight to Sandhurst from Winchester at 18, and to his regiment, The Royal Green Jackets, 18 months later. He is, however, an uncompromising advocate of the "soldierscholar", introducing initiatives in intellectual development mirroring those of the US army. A predecessor had once said, "I want warriors", and this had been taken so literally and exclusively at times that officers had been given little encouragement to think.

The army is not short of bright officers and soldiers, says Carter, but their talent has not always been invested in, "nor are they given the opportunity to maximise their potential in a career structure that places great emphasis on command and operational experience".

Change is nothing new to Carter. As a major-general he was given the job of finding the draconian manpower cuts demanded by the 2010 Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR). For a year, working in unprecedented secrecy, he developed a blueprint for "Army 2020", preserving a strong fighting capability at divisional level that could integrate with a US armoured corps or a multinational Nato force, while creating in addition a much looser organisation of brigades able to adapt rapidly to anything from disaster relief to mid-intensity operations. An MoD report had recommended more use of the Territorial Army, or "Army Reserve", as the army prefers to call it, so Carter was able to square the circle to sustain a brigade-size intervention indefinitely by transferring much of the army's former logistic capacity to the reserve. This was risky, he argued, but it allowed him to preserve more combat units, which had greater utility, in the immediate order of battle.

The problem was that reservists had to sign up to a commitment to serve full-time for 12 months every five years. Predictably, few recruits found that they could make the commitment, and the numbers — the government had promised 30,000 to replace 20,000 regulars — fell well short of target. Fortunately, last year's mandatory five-year review, the 2015 SDSR, changed the planning assumptions: no more strategic entanglement, and therefore no requirement for the army to sustain operations indefinitely. Reservists no longer need to take the pledge, and recruiting is healthy, with more than 28,000 signed up, and 5,000 in training, although "the Reserve officer corps needs to be rebuilt at every level".

How much time the army has to rebalance itself for the next big effort is anybody's guess, but Carter sees the key to not being wrong-footed as having people on the ground continuously, ahead of conflict, no matter how few, to build contacts and understanding. The loose-knit "adaptable brigades" all therefore have a world regional focus — north Africa, the Middle East, east and west Africa — with military missions, training teams and secondments already well established.

Training exercises with local forces, from company to brigade level, is already a growth activity, building on the longer-term presence of attachés, advisers and training teams. There is indeed an unprecedented range of deployments: last year some 80,000 troops were deployed in 69 countries, with more than 26,500 foreign troops trained in 39 countries. "People notice who you train with," says Carter, by which he means enemies — and those who are not yet friends.

There is increasing emphasis on language training and cultural immersion, and there will soon be specialised infantry battalions, akin to the US Green Berets — smaller units consisting of more experienced men, with the emphasis on "engagement" rather than fighting. Carter wants the army to embrace more specialisation, instead of its traditional generalist approach, a lesson taken from the RAF.

As well as building indigenous capacity to deal with the sort of problems that have too easily overwhelmed local forces in the past, this diffuse engagement feeds into a concept of future operations that the army is developing — "Strike". As much an attitude of mind as a set of structures and equipment, Carter describes it as "the ability to adjust rapidly and decisively" especially when operating in the face of new or unforeseen circumstances, "which together with the power to strike will provide policymakers with graduated choices".

The French army's dramatic success against Islamic militants in Mali in 2013 was something of a pointer, where familiarity with the region, plus initiative and boldness, allowed greater freedom of action. Carter wants to exploit the army's high-quality and experienced junior leaders, getting them to use their instinctive grasp of complex situations, aided by state-of-the-art communications, to increase the spread and speed of decision-making in the operational area — a payoff for the past dozen years of combat in which they have routinely made tactical decisions

that can have strategic impact. However, the army faces huge challenges with repatriation of armoured troops from Germany still far from complete, and budgets ever tighter. There are, too, some in its ranks who worry about the sheer pace of change and the maintenance of ethos. Carter himself speaks of the need for "catching up on our values and standards".

In any organisation, especially one whose purpose is ultimately as ferocious as the army's, there will always be seemingly inexplicable lapses of discipline, but the chief of the general staff is adamant: "We must live by our values and standards, and we must have a culture that values every individual regardless of their background. We want parents to feel proud that their children want to serve in our army."

Emblazoned on the frieze of the assembly hall in Church House, where the General Synod of the Church of England holds its debates but where next week soldiers will discuss swords not ploughshares, is an apt quotation from the Salisbury Antiphoner, the old church service book: "Holy is the true light and passing wonderful, lending radiance to them that endured in the heat of the conflict."

The army has indeed endured a decade of conflict, and Carter is determined that the experience should enlighten rather than blind. It may be the smallest army that any CGS has led, but this has been the case for successive chiefs since 1945. Not one of them, however, served his term without the death in action of a good many soldiers — more than 7,000 in all. General Carter is well aware of it, and that the prospect for peace in his time is hardly much greater than it was in theirs.

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12. Baltics urge Nato to keep Putin at bay

Sunday Times (UK), June 26, Pg. 23 | Mark Franchetti

The head of Estonia's army has urged Nato to set up "a speed bump with spikes" to deter Russia from developing military ambitions in the Baltic states.

General Riho Terras called for the "strongest possible signal" to be sent to Russia that the alliance would respond to an attack on any of its members by invoking article 5 of its founding treaty, under which all the others would be obliged to come to its defence.

He was speaking before the Nato summit in Warsaw on July 8-9 where its 28 members are due to ratify recent proposals to station a total of four battalions in Poland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania to counter a potential threat from the east.

"Under Vladimir Putin Russia has clearly shown that it is able and willing to use its military capabilities to achieve its political goals," Terras, commander-in-chief of the Estonian armed forces, told The Sunday Times. "A signal must be sent that makes the Kremlin truly believe in article 5. To do nothing is asking for trouble. If you leave a space empty, someone will seize the opportunity to fill it. The potential threat from Russia must be taken seriously."

Terras's concern was echoed by Edgars Rinkevics, the foreign minister of Latvia, who pointed to the Kremlin's seizure of Crimea two years ago and its subsequent covert military involvement in the war in eastern Ukraine.

"We're not scared of Russia, but we're very cautious," said Rinkevics, a former defence minister. "The potential threat is there. Who could have imagined the events in Crimea and Ukraine? They seemed impossible.

"So while there's no imminent military threat from Russia, the only way to make sure that military action against the Baltics is really impossible is to strengthen Nato's presence in the region."

This month the biggest military exercise in eastern Europe since the Cold War took place in Poland. Operation Anaconda 2016 involved more than 30,000 troops from 24 countries.

The exercises greatly angered Moscow, which sees Nato's eastwards expansion as a threat to its own security.

Rinkevics said Nato's air defences and naval presence in the Baltics needed strengthening. He will argue at the summit that the alliance's chain of command and rules of engagement must be revised to ensure a swifter response to a possible Russian incursion.

The Baltic states, which gained independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, all have sizeable Russian ethnic minorities, who they fear might be exploited by the Kremlin to stir up unrest in a form of "hybrid warfare" employed in Ukraine.

In a hard-hitting recent report, *Closing Nato's Baltic Gap*, three of its former commanders urged the alliance to build up its presence in the area. "Russia aims to revise the post-Cold War international order, undermine Nato and re-establish dominance over the so-called 'near abroad' [former Soviet Union]," they wrote.

One of its authors was General Sir Richard Shirreff, Nato's former deputy supreme allied commander, who raised eyebrows last month by publishing a novel, *2017 War with Russia*, in which the Kremlin orders an invasion of the Baltic states and threatens nuclear war with the West.

Moscow rejects claims it poses a threat to the Baltics and has said it will counteract the build-up by forming three new army motor rifle divisions with a total of up to 10,000 men.

Some western experts also argue the danger is exaggerated. "All this talk of a threat is great for the alliance and for the western defence industry, not least the American," said a senior European diplomat in Moscow.

"Where would Nato be without the Russian threat? Good luck getting funds for a new nuclear submarine on the pretext of fighting Isis. Russia is the perfect bogeyman."

Germany has promised to contribute troops to the new international force to be stationed in Poland and the Baltics but its coalition government has recently sent mixed signals about Russia.

Last weekend Frank-Walter Steinmeier, the German foreign minister, accused the alliance of "warmongering and stomping boots" with the recent exercises. Steinmeier belongs to the Social Democratic party (SPD), the junior member in Chancellor Angela Merkel's coalition.

His remarks prompted talk of a row between the SPD and Merkel's Christian Democrats, expected to be further fuelled by a visit to Moscow this week by Sigmar Gabriel, the SPD leader, vice-chancellor and economics minister.

Italy, Greece and Spain are also critical of western policy towards Russia and only reluctantly supported renewal of sanctions imposed on Moscow after the seizure of Crimea.

Last week Petr Pavel, chairman of Nato's military committee, attempted to play down fears of an imminent threat from Russia and said the battalions being sent to the east would act as a political rather than a military deterrent.

"It is not the aim of Nato to create a military barrier against broad-scale Russian aggression, because such aggression is not on the agenda and no intelligence assessment suggests such a thing," he said.

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13. Cold War 2.0: The US military is beefing up its presence in the former Soviet Bloc

VICE News, June 25 | Lucian Kim

US Army Major Christopher Rowe scanned the unfamiliar terrain as his Stryker armored vehicle sped past the Russian border, less than 15 miles away. It was just after 3:00am, but the summer sun was already rising over northeastern Poland. From the commander's hatch, Rowe looked out on a stretch of rolling farmland and thick pine forests that US military planners now consider the most vulnerable chink in the NATO alliance.

Solitary horses in twilight fields and drunks teetering out of 24-hour truck stops gazed back at Rowe, 38, who was leading a Stryker column down a two-lane highway through the so-called Suwalki Gap. In the Pentagon's nightmare scenario, Russia seizes this 40-mile-wide bottleneck in a surprise attack, effectively cutting off the tiny Baltic republics — Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia — from their NATO allies. Rowe's mission was to show that the American cavalry was still capable of galloping to the rescue.

The US 2nd Cavalry Regiment's passage through the sleepy Suwalki Gap earlier this month was the anticlimactic highlight of a 1,500-mile road march that would take the regiment's Fourth Squadron from their base in southern Germany to the northern tip of Estonia.

"There's another horse," Rowe's voice crackled over the Stryker's intercom as his column approached the border with Lithuania. Thanks to passport-free travel within the European Union, motorists zipped past the boarded-up customs houses without even braking.

Achieving comparable freedom of movement for military vehicles among NATO countries has become the US Army's top priority in Europe after Russia caught the world off guard by massing tens of thousands of soldiers on Ukraine's borders and then occupying and annexing Crimea two years ago. The underlying fear is that an emboldened Kremlin may stir up trouble in the Baltics — not just to retake territory that once was part of the Soviet Union, but to prove NATO a paper tiger should the 28-member alliance fail to defend its weakest members.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, most Eastern European countries strove to join NATO as a way of safeguarding their newly won independence. Yet even as the US-led alliance grew, the Pentagon slashed its forces in Europe in the belief that the continent would settle future conflicts via political bargains or lawsuits, not weapons. Russia's invasion of Ukraine changed everything.

With little fanfare, the United States has quietly begun expanding its military footprint in a region that during the Cold War was deep inside the Soviet-controlled Warsaw Pact. Operation Atlantic Resolve is an expansive program designed to go beyond mere reassurance of new NATO allies and to provide a credible deterrent against Russia.

Next year the Pentagon plans to spend \$3.4 billion in Europe on joint exercises, prepositioning equipment, and upgrading local infrastructure. An American armored brigade is due to begin rotating through Eastern Europe in February.

The 2nd Cavalry — whose regimental motto is *toujours pret*, French for "always ready" — plays a key role in projecting American power eastward. At the beginning of June, the unit was present in 10 countries, according to regimental commander Colonel John Meyer. Dragoon Ride, as the road march through the Suwalki Gap was dubbed, passed through three overlapping military exercises conducted in Poland and the Baltic states. "It's defensive," Meyer said in an interview. "We're really doing tactical tasks that demonstrate operational capability with strategic effect."

Not surprisingly, Moscow is using the growing US military presence to bolster its narrative of encirclement by NATO. President Vladimir Putin said last week that the West had fomented unrest in Ukraine to justify the alliance's existence. "They need an external adversary, an external enemy, otherwise why is this organization necessary?" he said. "There is no Warsaw Pact, no Soviet Union, so whom is it directed against?"

Criticism has also come from Berlin, even though Germany is a leading NATO member and took part in recent exercises, including Dragoon Ride. Reflecting a strand in German politics that calls for accommodating rather than confronting Putin, Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier condemned "loud saber-rattling" and "symbolic tank parades" on NATO's eastern border.

Over the past century, Russia and Germany have repeatedly clashed in a swath of Eastern Europe that Yale historian Timothy Snyder has termed "bloodlands." As the US Army Strykers rolled through the Polish countryside, they passed road signs pointing to the sites of battles and pogroms, sieges and Nazi death camps. At the end of World War II, the 2nd Cavalry Regiment was the US unit that pushed farthest east, liberating parts of what was then Czechoslovakia from the Germans. By that time, Poland and the Baltics were already firmly under Soviet domination.

While the officers of Fourth Squadron were well aware of the region's dark history, they were preoccupied with making the road march as safe as possible. Soldiers spent their nights sleeping inside or next to their Strykers at sprawling Soviet-era military bases. Departure times were often set before daybreak to avoid clogging up highways. Because of local requirements, one 170-mile leg of Dragoon Ride turned into a 330-mile steeplechase.

The eight-wheeled Stryker, which can be fitted with a cannon, mortar, or anti-tank missiles, gained popularity in Iraq because it has thicker armor than a Humvee but doesn't chew up roads like the tracked Bradley Fighting Vehicle. A 20-ton beast that barely gets six miles to the gallon, the Stryker is also prone to the unforgiving demands of the military. On Major Rowe's truck, the long-range communications were out, as was the heating.

Besides maintenance, the second greatest challenge is complacency, said Rowe, a father of two who did one tour in Iraq and two in Afghanistan. "It does become monotonous," said the Tallahassee native. "You gotta watch your battle buddy and make sure they're staying awake and paying attention to what they're doing."

The biggest part of soldiering is waiting: for an order, for the enemy, for a meal. At pit stops along the way, soldiers refueled their Strykers from Army tanker trucks and stocked up on hotdogs, sandwiches, and soft drinks — anything to supplement the mysterious, vacuum-packed contents of MREs, "meals, ready-to-eat," the standard US military rations.

For most soldiers, contact with the civilian population was limited to roadside convenience stores and the view from a Stryker hatch. Judging by the frequency that passersby stopped to wave at the US armored columns, the mood seemed generally welcoming. But conversations with locals revealed an ambivalence toward the Americans — and a feeling of helplessness to stop the wheel of history.

"War is near, don't you think?" asked Karol Kolenkiewicz in Suwalki, the Polish town that was known for its summer blues music festival before the US military arrived. For the past year, the tattooed, 22-year-old bartender has been serving drinks to off-duty US troops. Rather than find their presence reassuring, Kolenkiewicz saw it as a sign that something was horribly wrong. "It's kind of frightening," he said.

To dispel locals' fears, advance teams of Strykers headed into the towns along the route and parked on public squares. Dressed in their combat fatigues, officers donned the regiment's black Stetsons and ceremonial spurs before mingling with crowds of curious onlookers, mostly elderly folk and families with small children. "Civic engagements are a huge part of this mission," Rowe said as he arrived in Kupiskis in northeastern Lithuania. The most threatening moment came when the town drunk briefly contemplated dropping his trousers in a supermarket parking lot.

As parents photographed their offspring posing with machine guns and American troops, a smartly dressed man observed the spectacle skeptically. "The military doesn't decide anything, the politicians do. The soldiers are just guys like me and you," said Bronius Jonuska, 56. "Threats are created artificially. We're talking big bucks; billions are spent on arms."

While Jonuska, a railway worker, said he supported Lithuania's independence 25 years ago, he missed the financial security of the Soviet system. His son and girlfriend both work in Britain, and her son found a job in Norway. Paradoxically, the price of freedom is the inability to make a decent living at home.

"If you're a big country, you can talk about independence, but if you're small, you can't be completely independent. Lithuania is little, so we'll always depend on someone," Jonuska said. "It would be better not to see soldiers from any side."

The barrel-chested mayor of Kupiskis, Dainius Bardauskas, 51, showed little patience for such anxiety. "Only old people say that we don't need to provoke Russia. They remember Siberia and the repressions, so they're cautious," he said. "I'm happy our allies came to our little town. People must feel NATO has serious intentions."

Those intentions were on display two hours to the north in neighboring Latvia, where US military aircraft — A-10 Warthog attack planes and Blackhawk helicopters — stood at Lielvarde air base. The three Baltic nations have minuscule militaries that lack tanks or fighter jets. NATO, which has been responsible for policing the region's airspace since 2004, quadrupled the number of planes patrolling Baltic skies after Russia's aggression against Ukraine.

At Lielvarde, US troops on a nine-month rotation from Fort Hood, Texas, were quartered in the barracks and popping into town to grab bacon cheeseburgers and Belgian beer at the local foodie joint. Their comrades from 2nd Cavalry had to rough it on a field adjacent to the base. Most of them hadn't taken a shower since Suwalki.

"This has ruined camping for me. I get enough of nature when I'm out here," said Staff Sergeant Gregory Hill, 28, as he hand-washed his laundry behind a Stryker. Hill, who joined the Army straight out of high school, saw combat in Iraq. "When I enlisted, my focus was on the fight in the Middle East," he said. "If you'd asked me a couple of years ago, I wouldn't have seen myself in Eastern Europe." Hill said he didn't believe that the United States was in a new cold war with Russia and attributed renewed tensions to "media hype."

How their mission was being perceived was constantly on the minds of Fourth Squadron's commanders. As officers gathered for an evening meeting, Lieutenant Colonel Jonathan Due mentioned a news report of off-duty American sailors wreaking havoc in Greece. Should soldiers get permission to drink once they arrived in Estonia, they must exercise restraint, Due said. "Two drinks is not a suggestion, it's an integer." Foreign IO, "information operations," could be at work, Due cautioned.

When Fourth Squadron reached Estonia, the country was hardly in a celebratory mood. The northernmost Baltic country was marking an annual day of mourning to remember the tens of thousands of Estonians deported by the Soviet Union in the 1940s. "We lost almost 15 percent of our nation," Romek Kosenkranius, the mayor of Parnu, told the Americans. "That's one reason why we must protect our country and independence."

The only visible opposition to the US Army came from a Russian-speaking granny who wore a reflective vest and a captain's hat. "Estonia dragged these guys here only to disturb the Russians who live here," she said. "If Putin wanted to, he'd take Estonia in 15 minutes."

The next morning, Fourth Squadron trundled on to its final destination of Tapa air base, two weeks after leaving Germany. Major Rowe, usually the stoic warrior, turned sentimental as it suddenly sunk in that his three-year tour in Europe was drawing to an end. "This could be my last trip in a Stryker," he said from the commander's hatch. "It's a little depressing, I'm not gonna lie."

The armored column pulled into the former Soviet air base and lined up on a runway. There the troops were assigned to one of eight long, white tents with 12 cots to a room. They packed up their things, cleaned out their vehicles, and set off through a field to their new quarters.

"Always ready!" shouted a soldier as he walked past and saluted. "Toujours pret!" Rowe replied.

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ASIA/PACIFIC

14. China, Russia eye closer friendship amid tensions with West

Agence France-Presse, June 25 | Rebecca Davis

BEIJING -- Chinese President Xi Jinping and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin promised ever-closer cooperation and oversaw a series of deals Saturday, as the two countries deepen ties in the face of growing tensions with the West.

In what was Putin's fourth trip to China since Xi became President in 2013, the two men stressed their shared outlook which mirrors the countries' converging trade, investment and geopolitical interests.

"Russia and China stick to points of view which are very close to each other or are almost the same in the international arena," Putin said.

The Russian leader added that the two had discussed "strengthening together the fight against international terrorism", the nuclear issue on the Korean peninsula, Syria, and stability in the South China Sea.

Russia and China have been brought together by mutual geopolitical concerns, among them wariness of the United States.

The two countries often vote as a pair on the UN Security Council, where both hold a veto, sometimes in opposition to Western powers on issues such as Syria.

China has raised tensions with its neighbours and the US over its claims to virtually all of the South China Sea, where it has built militarised artificial islands to bolster its claims in the contested but strategically vital region.

Russia's annexation of Ukraine's Crimea peninsula and support for other Ukrainian separatist movements have led to the worst East-West standoff since the Cold War.

At loggerheads with the West, Moscow is seeking to refocus its gas and oil exports from Europe -- its main energy market -- towards Asia and is diligently building an energy alliance with Beijing.

Xi emphasised that this year marked the 15th anniversary of the China-Russia treaty of friendship and hoped that the two countries might remain "friends forever".

"President Putin and I equally agree that when faced with international circumstances that are increasingly complex and changing, we must persist even harder in maintaining the spirit of the Sino-Russian strategic partnership and cooperation," he said.

The two sides signed over 30 cooperation deals in areas such as trade, infrastructure, foreign affairs, technology and innovation, agriculture, finance, energy, sports and the media.

Notably, Russian oil giant Rosneft inked a deal with China Petrochemical Corporation (Sinopec) on developing a gas processing and petrochemical plant in East Siberia, as China seeks energy to fuel its economic growth.

Xi and Putin signed two joint statements themselves, one "to strengthen global strategic stability" and one to promote the development of information and cyberspace.

Putin said that 58 different deals worth a total of around \$50 billion were currently in discussion, adding that the two countries will seek to secure an agreement on building a high-speed rail line in Russia by the end of the year.

Xi also called for closer cooperation between news agencies in Russia and China so that both countries could "together increase the influence" of their media on world public opinion.

Under Xi, Communist China has mounted crackdowns on dissidents and tightened restrictions on the media, while critics accuse Putin's Russia of rights abuses.

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15. China Suspends Diplomatic Contact With Taiwan

New York Times Online, June 25 | Javier C. Hernández

BEIJING -- In a sign of growing friction between China and Taiwan, mainland diplomats said Saturday that they had suspended contact with their Taiwanese counterparts because the island's new leader would not endorse the idea of a single Chinese nation.

Beijing said it had cut off communication because President Tsai Ing-wen of Taiwan failed to endorse the idea that Taiwan and the mainland are part of one China, a concept known as the 1992 Consensus.

The move was the latest effort by the Chinese government, led by President Xi Jinping, to increase pressure on Ms. Tsai, who took office last month and has unsettled Beijing with her reluctance to disavow calls for Taiwanese independence.

"The cross-strait communication mechanism has been suspended because Taiwan did not recognize the 1992 Consensus, the political basis for the One China principle," An Fengshan, a spokesman for Beijing's Taiwan Affairs Office, said in a statement posted on its website.

Taiwanese officials said Saturday that they would continue to try to communicate with their mainland counterparts. "We hope Taiwan and the mainland can continue to have benign interaction, which is good for both sides," said Tung Chen-yuan, a government spokesman in Taipei.

Patrick M. Cronin, a senior adviser at the Center for a New American Security, called the decision by Beijing to halt talks a "warning shot across the bow." He said mainland officials were growing increasingly nervous about an independence movement in Taiwan and were seeking to hinder Ms. Tsai's domestic agenda, including her promise to revive a slowing economy.

"China will deny carrots and signal red lines for President Tsai as she grapples with her fundamental challenge, which is righting the economy," Dr. Cronin said.

Taiwan and China have been estranged since the Communist revolution of 1949. Under Ms. Tsai's immediate predecessor, Ma Ying-jeou, the two sides forged closer economic and political ties.

Ms. Tsai has taken a more cautious approach, openly criticizing Chinese officials and warmly embracing China's historic rivals like Japan. Her party, the Democratic Progressives, has traditionally advocated Taiwanese independence, a move the mainland has threatened to counter with military force.

Ms. Tsai has said she wants to maintain the status quo in cross-strait relations, but she has stopped short of offering an unequivocal endorsement of the One China policy.

In 1992, Taiwan and the mainland agreed to consider themselves part of a single Chinese nation, but each side embraces a different interpretation of what that means.

Mainland officials treat the consensus as a prerequisite for normal relations, and threatened to suspend contact if Ms. Tsai did not endorse the principle. The state media published a series of scathing editorials, including one in

which a People's Liberation Army general suggested that Ms. Tsai, Taiwan's first female president, held extremist views because she was unmarried.

On Saturday, the Taiwan Affairs Office in Beijing revealed that talks with the Mainland Affairs Council in Taipei had been suspended since May, soon after Ms. Tsai's inauguration. The two entities represent one of the primary channels of communication between China and Taiwan, overseeing discussions related to trade, law, education and culture.

Tensions between the two sides increased in recent weeks, after Cambodia, an ally of Beijing, decided to deport to mainland China 25 Taiwanese citizens accused of participating in an internet scheme. It was the third instance in recent months of China's seeking to prosecute citizens of Taiwan on its soil.

On Saturday, Chinese officials defended their handling of the case, saying efforts to crack down on internet schemes were legitimate and supported by people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait.

Analysts said the decision to suspend talks was probably the beginning of a campaign by Beijing to increase pressure on Taiwan.

China has several methods by which it could further constrain Ms. Tsai. It could seek to lure away Taiwan's few remaining diplomatic allies with promises of lucrative infrastructure investments. It could also place restrictions on Chinese tourism to the island, which has increased significantly in recent years, becoming a bright spot for the otherwise struggling Taiwanese economy.

"The big unknown is the business community," said Jean-Pierre Cabestan, a political science professor at Hong Kong Baptist University. "China will be reaching out to all the segments that are going to be dissatisfied with Tsai's policies."

The timing of Beijing's announcement, just as Ms. Tsai departed for Latin America on her first overseas trip as president, seemed aimed at undermining her leadership, analysts said.

"By refusing to communicate, Beijing is making it more difficult for the Taiwanese government to fulfill its obligations to its citizens and as a member of international society," said Jonathan Sullivan, the director of the China Policy Institute at the University of Nottingham in England.

He added, "Beijing is saying, 'We don't care about inconvenience and are prepared to inhibit the management of cross-strait interactions if we don't get what we want.'"

--Owen Guo contributed research from Beijing

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16. Japanese-American relations: Rina's legacy
A murder by an American sparks protests in Okinawa
The Economist (UK), June 25, Pg. 35 | Not Attributed

Flowers and tributes left by angry Okinawans surround a makeshift shrine on the country road where Rina Shimabukuro's body was dumped. The only suspect in her rape and murder, Kenneth Franklin Gadson, a former American marine, led police to this remote spot after he was arrested in April.

Ms Shimabukuro, who was just 20 when she was killed, has become the latest symbol in a conflict over American military bases that has raged for decades. On June 19th an estimated 65,000 people mourned her at a stadium in Naha, Okinawa's prefectural capital. A letter from her father urged Okinawans to unite and demand that American soldiers leave. It was among the biggest such protests in years, and one of the most passionate.

America has 85 military facilities throughout Japan, but three-quarters of the area they occupy is in Okinawa. Futenma, a marine airbase, occupies nearly two square miles in the crowded centre of Ginowan, a small city. In 1996, after three American servicemen were convicted of raping a 12-year-old Japanese girl, America and Japan agreed to close the ageing facility and build a replacement near the quiet fishing village of Henoko.

Many locals dislike that plan, because it still leaves Okinawa hosting far more American troops than any other part of the country. A recent survey found that 84% of Okinawans oppose the planned Henoko base--the highest share since the government of Shinzo Abe, the current prime minister, took power in 2012. Anti-base politicians led by Takeshi Onaga, Okinawa's governor, won control of the prefectural assembly in local elections on June 5th.

A nuclear North Korea and an increasingly assertive China have boosted Okinawa's military importance. Backed by America, Japan is moving away from the pacifism that took root after the second world war. Henoko is central to Mr Abe's plans to boost military defences across Okinawa's 160-island Ryukyu chain. Gavan McCormack, a historian, says Henoko will host "the largest concentration of land, sea and air military power in East Asia".

But construction has been stalled since March, when Mr Abe agreed to accept a court proposal that he not force building over local objections. Hideki Yoshikawa, an anti-base activist, says that the winds are blowing in his side's favour now, but after next month's election he expects the government to restart construction.

Mike Mochizuki, a political scientist at George Washington University in Washington, DC, argues that would be a mistake. Passions over Ms Shimabukuro's death are running so high that if Mr Abe pushes too hard on Henoko he risks losing support for other bases. But it would be difficult for Mr Abe to give up--both for his own political standing and for the effect on Japan's alliance with America. He may instead opt for the status quo, leaving Futenma open and putting the dispute back where it was in 1995.

Peter Lee, Futenma's commanding officer, blames hostile media coverage for obscuring the strengths of the Japan-US military alliance. American soldiers commit fewer crimes per head than locals do. But perception trumps reality. In late May, military officials imposed a one-month curfew and alcohol ban on all service members. A few weeks later an off-duty sailor driving at six times the legal alcohol limit crashed into two cars.

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17. India Clears Ultra-Light Howitzers Buy from US

DefenseNews.com, June 25 | Vivek Raghuvanshi

NEW DELHI – India on Saturday cleared the purchase of 145 ultra-light howitzers at a cost of around \$750 million from the US, as well as bulk production of 18 home-grown Dhanush artillery guns and several other defense deals.

Defense Minister Manohar Parrikar, who chaired the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC), reviewed multiple defense proposals, including new defense schemes valued at \$4.1 billion, a Ministry of Defense (MoD) official said.

Earlier this month, US issued a letter of acceptance, and Saturday DAC reviewed the terms and conditions and approved the program. MoD will soon send India's response and the process for the payment of the first installment will begin.

BAE Systems of the US will also discharge offsets valued at \$200 million, taken up independently.

In 2013, MoD issued a letter of request to the US government, showing interest in procuring the M777 artillery guns to be used in high altitude terrains near the China border. The India Army will receive 25 ultra-light howitzers in fly-away condition. BAE Systems will assemble the remaining guns in India in partnership with private company Mahindra Defence Systems, the two setting up an assembly integration and test facility for M777 artillery guns near New Delhi.

In addition, DAC also cleared bulk production of 18 indigenous Dhanush artillery guns to be produced in India at a cost of \$1.8 million per piece, developed and manufactured by state-owned Ordnance Factory Board. Dhanush is an upgraded version of the original 155 mm howitzer artillery guns brought in 1987, expanding the barrel of the gun from 39 mm to 45 mm caliber.

Since 1989, the Indian Army has not inducted any type of artillery guns.

DAC also gave approval to issue domestic tenders for six next generation missile vessels under 'Buy Indian' category, valued at \$1.75 billion, and purchase of five diving support craft from domestic shipyards at a cost of \$22 million. The \$57 million modernization plan of the Indian Navy's dockyards and naval ship repair yards was also approved Saturday.

Regarding another important project, the Short Range Surface to Air Missile (SRSAM) systems, DAC decided to continue the acquisition process as a multi-vendor competition. Saab of Sweden, Rosoboronexport of Russia and Rafael of Israel qualified in field trials in India last year. The Indian Army intends to procure two regiments of SRSAM systems along with 800 missiles and complete technology transfer.

DAC also cleared purchase of homemade simulators for Jaguar aircraft at a cost of \$73.5 million and development of an electronic warfare range at a cost of \$191 million.

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DEFENSE DEPARTMENT

18. Uncharted Territory

Career of transgender Naval Academy graduate stalled by defense policy

Sunday Capital (Annapolis, MD), June 26, Pg. A1 | Christina Jedra

Alexandra Marberry should have gone to flight school in October, but the 2015 Naval Academy graduate never made it to Pensacola, Florida.

Instead, the 23-year-old aspiring aviator works as an administrative assistant in a windowless office at the academy — in a male uniform.

Marberry is transgender. Her gender identity is different from the male body she was born into.

The Department of the Defense announced last year that it intends to allow transgender people to serve openly, and the Pentagon now plans to announce the repeal of its ban Friday.

Because Marberry revealed her gender identity, her career has been on hold, and her gender transition is at an impasse. She is required to keep her hair short, use male bathrooms and meet male physical requirements, despite being on female hormones. Her trimmed eyebrows, smooth jawline and feminine silhouette don't match the required male uniform — garnering a mix of sir's and ma'am's from passers-by.

Instead of piloting airplanes, she files paperwork and helps plan academy events.

"This is my dream career," she said. "And I'm sitting here atrophying."

Marberry is one of an estimated 15,500 soldiers, airmen, Marines and sailors waiting to find out if they'll be permitted to serve their country as the gender they identify with. Medical regulations banning transgender service are still in place, but military separations have been effectively halted.

Those service members may keep their gender identity secret or work among peers and superiors who look the other way, said Paula Neira, an LGBT military expert.

The new policy "needs to happen this year," Neira said. "This has to do with national defense and finding the best and brightest to serve."

The Department of Defense's review raises questions about how the military would address preferred gender pronouns, housing arrangements, fitness standards, uniform and grooming requirements, and to what extent the military health care system would offer hormone therapy and gender-affirming surgery.

For Marberry, her aviation aspirations took a back seat to honesty.

"I was done hiding for four years," she said.

DISCOVERING HERSELF

When she was growing up, Marberry said, she knew two things for sure.

One is that she wanted to be in the military. The other was that she is female.

Raised and home-schooled by a Christian family in conservative Lubbock, Texas, Marberry battled herself. Her desire to be a girl conflicted with what she was taught about right and wrong.

"I'm the only one, I feel weird like this, and I can't tell anyone that I feel this way because it's so weird," she thought.

At first, she lacked the vocabulary for the disconnect she felt between her spirit and her body. She just knew she felt at home playing among girls.

Childhood friend Ella Uptain said the boy she knew was caring, fiercely intelligent and would do anything for a laugh. She took the latter as an indication that her friend wasn't at ease.

"He was always trying to be accepted," said Uptain, 21.

While doing homework at age 12, Marberry stumbled upon an encyclopedia entry that struck her: "transsexualism."

"I was like, 'Wait, there's other people like me?' That opened up a huge world for me. I pretty much memorized the article there because that's all I had."

That same year, she started collecting and privately wearing girls' clothes — jeans, T-shirts and bras that she found in neighbors' trash after mowing their lawns.

Those treasures were thrown away by her parents, she said. They sent her to counseling after catching her on the computer late at night. She was researching gender identity. They assumed she had a porn addiction, she said, and she didn't correct them.

"That was a lesser evil to me. I was like 'Yeah, sure, that's what I was doing.'"

At 13, her parents called her in from the backyard to talk.

"We have a question to ask you," she recalled them asking. "Do you feel like you should've been born a girl?"

"My ears started ringing. Any time I lie, my ears start ringing, my heart starts beating. I'm a terrible liar. I was like 'No, of course not.'"

Marberry didn't come out to her family until 2013, halfway through her time at the academy. Her dad was the first to know.

"I remember he didn't understand it at first, and when he started to realize I actually want to transition, this isn't just dressing up, being a very conservative Christian guy, he was like 'No this is the path to death. This is a demon we need to get out of you,'" she said. "He believed at the time, maybe even still now, that this is identical to being gay, and being gay is against the Bible."

She said her mother and two siblings didn't take the news much better.

"I've become more acquaintances with my family rather than still a family member," she said.

Marberry's family did not respond to requests for comment by The Capital.

She maintains contact with her family, but conversations are strained, and the topic of gender is avoided, she said.

"The only entities in the world now that recognize me as male are the Department of Defense and my parents."

WAITING FOR CHANGE

After the federal "Don't ask, don't tell" law was repealed in 2010, lesbians, gays and bisexuals were permitted to serve openly in the military.

Marberry recalled that some midshipmen celebrated the announcement of the repeal.

"Everyone is like 'Yay! Game over.' And I'm just sitting there like, 'Hello?'"

The military ban on transgender service is based on Department of Defense medical standards — both physical and psychological.

The standards prohibit a change of sex and "psychosexual conditions" including "transsexualism ... and other paraphilias."

The first anti-transgender U.S. military regulation was in 1983, three years after the American Psychiatric Association first recognized gender identity disorders or "transsexualism," said Aaron Belkin, director of the Palm Center, a research institute.

The regulation followed military medical rules against cross-dressing in 1942 and genital modification in 1961, Belkin said.

"The 1961 genital modification ban was intended for surgical reconstruction of ambiguous genitalia in infants or children — intersex conditions — not what we think of today as gender transition surgery," he said. "In the 1980s, however, the military started to rely on the 1961 'change of sex' rule to fortify its new ban on transgender persons (in contrast to cross-dressers), even though that was not its original purpose."

Since then, those rules have affected both accession and retention standards, said Neira — a trans woman, academy graduate and lawyer.

"If you had any idea that you were a transgender individual, that would bar you from service under the psychological regulations," she said. "If you had any history of a sex change, that would bar you from service. If you were in the process of transitioning, you were barred."

LIVING WITH HONOR

When Marberry got to the academy in 2011, she was in denial, simultaneously "hiding it and fighting it."

"This is wrong, this is evil," she believed. "I was trying to pray it away, hoping one day I'd meet a good Christian girl, settle down and have kids and all this would go away and I'd never feel this way again."

That didn't happen.

In an institution that denounces dishonesty through its Honor Concept, Marberry, her company's honor adviser in her plebe year, was forced to lie.

"I was the ambassador for the honor system to my company, and I'm lying about who I am every single day."

At that time, coming out, under Department of Defense policy, would have meant separation from the academy and the military, said Cmdr. John Schofield, an academy spokesman.

Classmates noticed Marberry was different, but they attributed it to the social awkwardness of a home-schooler going to college, said former roommate Brandon Thompson.

In the beginning, Thompson said, Marberry tended to be very masculine — in a way that didn't seem quite genuine.

"It almost seemed like at times she was trying to be more of a man and prove it to herself and her parents, who were not at all accepting," he said. "She was trying to hide who she was."

Near the end of her second year in 2013, Marberry sometimes ordered women's clothes on Amazon to indulge in brief, private moments of authenticity. She'd find a quiet bathroom in Bancroft Hall and lock the door. For 20 minutes, she'd be herself.

Getting a taste of the life she wanted made living as a man even more bitter.

"I started realizing this isn't going to go away," she said. "It made it harder to put the mask back on."

She drifted from her faith.

If God doesn't make mistakes, maybe there isn't a God.

What God would do this to someone?

As she entered her third year, Marberry's hair grew ragged, her uniform was disheveled and the room was dirty.

"She started to crack under the pressure of denying who she was really was," Thompson said.

FINDING PEACE

In September of her third year, Marberry broke.

"I told myself if I couldn't find a chaplain or counselor that day, I was going to kill myself," she said.

After a desperate search of the campus, she found a chaplain and let herself fall apart.

"I'm not going to be a statistic," she told herself. "I'm not going to let this beat me. There is always something I can do to make it better, and at that point the thing I could do was decide to stop fighting it and be myself."

In the following weeks, Marberry discovered a service that teaches trans women the basics of makeup and feminine fashion.

When she presented as a woman in public for the first time, she felt right. She soon befriended other trans women, many of whom were veterans from various services and of different ranks.

"When I was out with them, shopping or going to a restaurant, it felt amazing," she said. "A weight was lifted."

But after weekends spent with her new friends in Washington, D.C., where no one would recognize her, she packed her dresses into a duffel bag and returned to the academy — as male.

Discrimination based on gender identity is prohibited by Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, according to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. But it does not apply to the military, and therefore doesn't apply to Marberry.

"Every time I'd come back to the Yard, the weight would drop back down on me," she said.

Still, Marberry began to embrace her female identity more — at least within the confines of the dorm room she still shared with Thompson.

"I'd open the door, and Ali's in a dress putting on makeup," Thompson said. "It was her finally being able to come out of her shell and be the person she's always felt she's been."

Most of Marberry's classmates supported her or kept their opinions to themselves, Thompson said.

"It helped people at the academy who were not so comfortable with the idea," he said. "Now they realize transgender people are everywhere, even in the world's greatest military."

But Thompson was concerned, not about Marberry's gender identity, but about how the military would interpret it.

"I didn't want her to throw her career away," he said. "You can say what you want about what makes someone a good officer. I believe it's all about the character of the individual and compassion and there are few people that have that more than Ali Marberry."

Thompson, a Marine second lieutenant now stationed in Pensacola, hopes his former roommate can join him there soon.

After graduation, Marberry realized she couldn't continue living a double life. Before leaving for flight school that fall, she notified her academy superiors about her identity and was disqualified from flight school. Officials said she had "gender identity disorder," although that term is no longer recognized by the American Psychiatric Association.

With a policy announcement anticipated soon, Marberry may be the closest any transgender Naval Academy graduate has come to serving openly for her entire career.

"I need to serve with integrity or not at all," she said.

In Annapolis this spring, Marberry walked through the academy Yard in a dress, her identity and presentation in harmony.

She has female uniforms hanging in her closet at home in Glen Burnie, ready for a day when wearing them doesn't break the rules.

"The conclusion I've come to is God does not make mistakes," she said.

"And I'm not a mistake."

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19. 'Outdated' medical regulations banned transgender service

Sunday Capital (Annapolis, MD), June 26, Pg. A1 | Christina Jedra

After the federal "Don't ask, don't tell" law was repealed in 2010, lesbians, gays and bisexuals were permitted to serve openly in the military.

The change did not affect transgender personnel. Those service members are still are banned by Department of Defense medical standards that prohibit a change of sex and "psychosexual conditions" including "transsexualism ... and other paraphilias."

Last year, the department announced it will allow transgender people to serve openly. Now, defense officials said they plan to announce the repeal of the ban Friday. An estimated 15,500 transgender military members could be affected by the repeal, according to estimates from the Williams Institute, a think tank at the UCLA School of Law.

The regulations are an "outdated, confusing, inconsistent approach that's contrary to our value of service and individual merit," said Defense Secretary Ash Carter in his 2015 call for a review of the ban.

A 2014 study by the Palm Center, a research institute that studies sexual minorities, found "no compelling medical rationale" for prohibiting transgender military service.

The study, co-chaired by a former surgeon general and endorsed by two Naval Academy professors, found at least 18 countries allow transgender people to serve openly.

Researchers found that medical regulations banning transgender service in the U.S. conflict with how the military addresses non-trans medical and psychological conditions. For instance, non-trans personnel can have hormone treatment while deployed and may have reconstructive surgery.

The study states military regulations have not followed revisions to the American Psychiatric Association's latest diagnostic manual, which no longer classifies gender nonconformity as a mental illness.

A RAND Corp. study commissioned by the Defense Department and obtained by The New York Times estimated transgender health care costs to be between \$2.4 million and \$8.4 million annually. This represents an "exceedingly small proportion" of active military health care expenditures of approximately \$6 billion annually, the report states.

The RAND Corp. believes between 29 and 129 military members a year would seek gender transition-related health care.

When it comes to health care for transgender patients, "95 percent is primary care," said Raymond Martins, senior director of clinical education and training at Whitman-Walker Health in Washington, D.C.

"Not all transgender patients will want to take cross-sex hormones and an even smaller number will undergo surgery," he said.

Opening service to transgender people would be an adjustment for the military health care system, said James Gilman, the executive director of the Johns Hopkins Military & Veterans Health Institute.

Many health care providers in the service lack experience in diagnosing gender dysphoria, managing hormone therapies or performing gender reassignment surgery, he said.

"Most of our behavioral and physical health leaders get their training in the military, and this is an issue they haven't been talking about," Gilman said.

He said military health care providers may have to learn new skills on the job until partnerships are established with specialized, civilian caregivers. Doing that could take years, he said, but isn't out of the ordinary.

Gilman, a 35-year Army veteran, said officials will have to balance equality in health care with the core mission of the military.

"If they're unable to (participate in their jobs) for a significant time of their service, that's a service member that can't be ready when the country needs them," he said.

Elaine Donnelly, the president of the Center for Military Readiness, a policy organization, worries that opening service to transgender personnel will have a harmful impact on troops.

"I'm concerned about readiness, morale, everything that goes into the strongest and best military force in the world," she said.

Retired Army Lt. Col. Robert Maginnis, who advised the Department of Defense's working group on gays in the military in the 1990s, said transgender personnel would pose unnecessary challenges.

"As a commander, I would like to have 100 soldiers and be able to tell every one of them the same order and they would execute to the same level of readiness," Maginnis said. "If I only have half of them that can live up to that standard because of medical issues or personality conflicts ... that becomes a leadership nightmare."

Maginnis said the "personal preference" of physically transitioning should not be billed to the military.

"If you want to change something that will charge the taxpayer a lot of money, I don't want to have to bear that burden," he said.

Donnelly, a former member of the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services, said there could be problems if health care providers "do not want to participate in the treatment of transgenderism."

"It becomes a matter of medical conscience," she said. "What do you do with those (health care) personnel? Are they out of line?"

In close living quarters, Donnelly said, the "privacy" of non-trans service members should not be compromised to accommodate transgender service personnel.

"If you're living in the military, you can't just up and leave and change your job because you're not comfortable," she said. "The only option you have is to leave the military altogether. How will that affect retention?"

Ultimately, Donnelly said the military is "not an equal opportunity employer."

"You're creating a situation of tension that should've been avoided," she said. "The military is not something that everyone has a right to."

The Capital found no organized resistance to transgender military service — unlike the situation during the "Don't ask, don't tell" debate — and no scientific research showing transgender inclusion in the military would be detrimental.

"The opposition is half-hearted and disinterested," said Brynn Tannehill, a transgender Naval Academy graduate and defense analyst.

David Segal, the director of the University of Maryland's Center for Research on Military Organization, said he doesn't anticipate problems with an open trans policy in the military.

"There will be some sectors of the population who are against the change ... but once decisions are made and executed people in the service salute smartly and get on with business," he said. "Their concern is the people serving with them are professional, not their gender identification."

Paula Neira, a trans woman and longtime LGBT military advocate, said if she had transitioned while in the military, she would have been "undeployable" because of surgery for only four to six weeks.

She said the medical restrictions on transgender service people contradict military values.

"There's no honor in having medical regulations that have no basis in medical science and serve no military purpose other than to keep out a small number of people that you don't like because you don't understand them," she said.

Neira was a lawyer for the Service Members Legal Defense Network, which worked on the repeal of "Don't ask, don't tell."

A 2012 Palm Center study on gays in the military after the repeal of "Don't ask, don't tell" found no negative impact on military readiness, cohesion or morale.

"The military, as a culture and institution, needed to see that sexual minorities could serve and the military wouldn't break," Neira said.

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AIR FORCE

20. Air Force has directed energy weapons; now comes the hard part

AirForceTimes.com, June 25 | Phillip Swarts

Over the past 20 years, the military and its partners in industry have figured out how to build lasers and other directed energy weapons. The devices have changed from often-hazardous chemical lasers to more reliable solid-state lasers. The power has grown from dozens of watts to dozens of kilowatts.

Now comes the hard part, Air Force leaders said Thursday in Washington, D.C., at the second annual Directed Energy Summit. Many significant hurdles remain.

The conference, hosted by defense contractor Booz Allen Hamilton and the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessment, a Washington think tank, brought together the best and the brightest minds to discuss advancements on directed energy.

Top brass is itching to get the capability into the field. Directed energy weapons could shut down enemy vehicles or communication networks, destroy incoming missiles or be used for a range of other purposes.

But actually getting a laser deployed is a challenge. When the Air Force first developed a directed energy weapon in the early 2000s, it was so large it took up an entire modified Boeing 747. The Navy's test version, installed aboard the amphibious transport dock Ponce, is estimated to weigh more than could be lifted by the average aircraft.

Plus, the technology has to go through the usual testing, analysis, budgeting, purchasing, concept of operations, planning, approval and training before it can ever take off.

"You've got to have a wheelbarrow full of paper before you get a wheelbarrow full of money," joked Lt. Gen. Bradley Heithold, the head of Air Force Special Operations Command. "Well, we're busy filling the wheelbarrow full of paper."

Heithold said the Air Force needs the capability to silently and quickly sabotage enemy systems without raising alarm – an option afforded by the silent and invisible lasers.

"I'm a firm believer that it's time we take directed energy in the form of high-energy lasers and move it into the battlefield on an AC-130 gunship," Heithold said. "The next weapon is a directed energy weapon."

A lot of pragmatic challenges remain for directed energy weapons to become reality. Heithold said some of the biggest issues are the size and weight of a potential laser before it can be installed on a plane.

"You get 5,000 pounds and you get that pallet position. Design it to fit in that area," he told the conference, motioning to an area forward of the wings on a C-130.

Lt. Gen. William Etter would also like a laser, but for a different mission set than Heithold. As the commander of the 1st Air Force, it's his job to keep the skies over America safe. That could involve using a laser to knock down an incoming missile.

But using a laser to hit a missile means making sure the laser doesn't cause collateral damage.

"We've got an additional consideration, though, and this is pretty important to us: We've got to make sure that we don't hit the other folks," Etter said. "Because in the homeland we have civilian airliners, we have small aircraft, you can range even up to a satellite. ... We have to be exactly precise."

Etter also wants a laser small enough to mount on a plane, since a directed energy-equipped F-22 or F-35 could quickly travel to whichever part of the nation was under threat from incoming missiles.

Directed energy could also fill in an emerging gap in missile defense, the ability to hit fast moving targets, he said.

"We currently don't have anything that's going to shoot down a hypersonic vehicle," Etter said, referencing missiles that can travel at speeds of Mach 5.

But — like Heithold's wheelbarrow of paperwork — directed energy needs support in the terms of governing rules and regulations.

"The policy has not kept up with the threat," Etter said. "The policy's actually more difficult than the actual technology. I need rules of engagement. Are we shooting down a [small drone], are we shooting down an aircraft?"

And there's going to be a whole host of other things to consider too, not the least of which will be getting airmen trained on the systems.

"It's going to take confidence building," Lt. Gen. (ret.) Henry "Trey" Obering told Air Force Times. "It's going to take tabletops and war-games and exercises."

Obering, who now works on directed energy issues for Booz Allen Hamilton, said the technology is going to require a gradual culture shift within the Air Force and the broader military.

"You make sure [airmen] are understanding and educated on what the potential and what the capabilities are, and they in turn begin to understand how they will fit that into their tactics, techniques and procedures," he said.

It could be something as simple as getting airmen comfortable with the fact that they're firing a weapon that's invisible and makes little noise.

"If you have a pilot that's used to hearing the growl of an air-to-air missile as it sees a target, or is used to feeling the bump of the aircraft when he drops a bomb, that interaction [is] about what's the weapon doing versus what I'm doing," Obering said.

“When I was head of the Missile Defense Agency and we were flying the Airborne Laser, the crews were a little bit concerned because they would know when the laser was firing only because they could hear the vibration in the back of the plane from the generators,” he continued.

Part of that will involve training with directed energy weapons “so that when the pilot goes out he or she understands what are the effects, when is it useful,” Obering said.

Multiple defense contractors are all working on versions of directed energy laser and microwave weapons. To make the transition to the military go more smoothly, Obering said he believes there needs to be a “modular, standardized architecture,” for the systems to ensure that they will work together. That way, the Air Force won’t have to worry about attempting to cross-stitch together a working laser from a bunch of parts provided by different companies.

Heithold, meanwhile, noted that his AC-130’s already have green targeting lasers, with not much more power than a laser pointer.

“I can scare the hell out of people with a green beam,” he told attendees at the conference. “Just put that on them and watch them scatter. They’ll stop what they’re doing because they know what’s behind the green beam. What I want to do is put a little more energy in the green beam, and I don’t want them to see it and I don’t want them to hear what’s going on.”

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21. Dover a finalist for aerial tankers

Air Force seeks new home for refueling planes

News Journal (Wilmington, DE), June 25, Pg. A1 | Quint Forgey

Dover Air Force Base is one of five finalists to receive a fleet of KC-46A Pegasus planes – a new generation of aerial tanker that will provide mid-air refueling to military aircraft and phase out the Air Force’s old tanker fleet.

If the Dover base is chosen following a site survey by Air Mobility Command, it will gain up to 36 of the new tankers by 2020.

The AMC's base visits will assess the five locations "against operational requirements, potential impacts to existing missions, housing, infrastructure and manpower," according to an Air Force news release.

"It's more of a qualitative assessment of what's actually there and what works," said Air Force spokeswoman Ann Stefanek.

Results of those studies and cost estimates for each of the bases will then be presented to senior Air Force officials, who will announce their decision before the end of 2016.

Other finalists include Travis Air Force Base in California, Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst in New Jersey, Grand Forks Air Force Base in North Dakota and Fairchild Air Force Base in Washington.

Of the roughly 70 bases located across the country, Stefanek said 11 were selected as semifinalists based on the set of conditions necessary to house the fleet. All 11 were located within the continental United States, engaged in Global Mobility missions led by active duty personnel and featured runways of at least 7,000 feet.

Stefanek said in a statement those 11 bases were then narrowed to a list of five finalists after a review of four assessment areas: "mission (including proximity to air refueling receiver demand, airfield and airspace availability, fuels considerations, and the potential to establish an association), capacity (hangar, runway, ramp space and facilities considerations), environmental requirements, and cost factors."

Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Mark A. Welsh III in a statement said the KC-46A fleet will suffer less maintenance downtime than previous tankers and allow the military to respond more rapidly to humanitarian crises.

"Bringing the KC-46A online is a critical first step in recapitalizing a tanker fleet that has been at the heart of global response for more than five decades," Welsh said.

The military contracted with The Boeing Co. in 2011 to build 179 of the tankers, and the aircraft first successfully took flight in September 2015. The KC-46As have a wingspan of 157 feet and a fuel capacity of roughly 212,000 pounds, as well as the capability to fuel two planes simultaneously.

U.S. Rep. John Carney, D-Delaware, in a statement called the military personnel stationed at Dover Air Force Base "among the most qualified and prepared in the U.S. military." If chosen, he said, they will serve the new fleet well.

"I am proud of the work they do every day for our state and nation. I'm confident that, if selected, they will bring that same determination to the critical mission of retooling and improving U.S. global response preparedness," Carney said.

U.S. Sen. Tom Carper, D-Delaware, in a statement dubbed Dover's base "a first class facility" deserving of the three dozen tankers.

"Through my many visits to Dover Air Force Base, including my first one over 40 years ago as a young naval flight officer, I have been impressed by the level of professionalism and dedication shown by the men and women of Team Dover," Carper said.

U.S. Sen. Chris Coons, D-Delaware, in a statement said he was "delighted" Dover was selected as a finalist to host the aircraft, as the base has the ability to counter various security situations around the world.

"Dover has the community support, infrastructure, housing, strategic location, and workforce necessary to successfully support the vital mission of the KC-46s in the decades to come," Coons said.

Dover's base, which occupies roughly 3,900 acres southeast of Delaware's capital, employs 6,400 military personnel and 1,000 civilians. It also hosts 5,100 family members.

The total value of the base's resources amounts to roughly \$5.7 billion, and its economic impact within a 50-mile radius is \$466 million.

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22. Pentagon: Ex-AFA boss hindered investigation

The Gazette (Colorado Springs, CO), June 25, Pg. 1 | Tom Roeder

The Pentagon's inspector general found that a former Air Force Academy boss hindered an investigation into athlete misconduct by shielding football coach Troy Calhoun from questioning, but determined that the issue didn't rise to the level of "impeding the investigation."

While critical of former superintendent Lt. Gen. Mike Gould, the 32-page report obtained by The Gazette on Friday is silent on the school's cadet informant program and cleared the academy on allegations of special treatment for a football player suspected of drug use and an officer's interference in a sexual assault case.

The report was posted on the Defense Department Inspector General's website Friday morning, but was later removed without explanation. "This report has been temporarily removed and will be uploaded as soon as possible," the website said.

The report is critical of the Air Force Office of Special Investigations, an independent agency that probes misconduct across the service. OSI agents at the academy, the report says, didn't document allegations of command interference in investigations and didn't insist on quizzing Calhoun.

"Instead, through a series of missteps and miscommunications between the AFOSI field units and AFOSI headquarters, AFOSI ultimately made the decision, within its authority, not to conduct the interview of the coach," the report said. "Furthermore, we determined that AFOSI special agents and leadership did not document in the investigative case files their communications about the proposed interview or the reason they did not interview the USAFA head football coach."

In interviews with investigators Gould denied that he hampered OSI efforts.

"I, in no way, did anything to impede their investigation, or to slow it down, or anything else," Gould said, according to the report. "I don't know what else to tell you."

The finding that Gould hampered, but didn't impede, the investigation essentially clears him of regulatory violations.

The report, initiated after a 2014 Gazette investigation, reviews one of the darkest chapters in academy sports history.

At parties dating to 2010 cadets, including a core group of football players, smoked synthetic marijuana, drank themselves sick and may have used date-rape drugs to incapacitate women for sexual assault, documents obtained by The Gazette showed.

The culture was so wild that academy leaders canceled a planned 2012 sting operation out of concern that undercover agents and confidential informants at a party wouldn't be enough to protect women from rape.

Pentagon investigators found that at the height of investigation into that misconduct, now-retired Lt. Gen. Gould blocked investigators who wanted to question Calhoun, an academy graduate who has led the Falcons to bowl games in eight of his nine seasons at the helm.

"We did determine that he denied an AFOSI special agent's request to interview the USAFA head football coach, an interview we determined to be a logical investigative step," the report said.

Athletic director Hans Mueh has since retired and been replaced by former Army officer Jim Knowlton. The academy has said the school has changed how it trains athletes and launched a campaign to stamp out misconduct in the ranks.

"It is important to highlight the report concluded that there is no systemic problem here; and therefore did not make any recommendations for the academy," the academy's current superintendent, Lt. Gen. Michelle Johnson, wrote in a letter to investigators.

"While we prefer to look forward and cannot control things that happened in the past, we acknowledge the subculture of cadet behavior described was inconsistent with the culture of commitment and climate of respect we work hard to uphold here," she wrote.

While clearing Air Force Academy leaders apart from Gould, the report ripped OSI agents at the school on several fronts.

The Office of Special Investigations is an agency that exists outside the influence of local commanders and is empowered to work independently. The report found that OSI was overly deferential to Gould, complying with his bar on interviewing coaches when they could have ignored the general.

"Our evaluation found a lack of documentation at all levels within AFOSI regarding the decision not to interview the football coach and the communications pertaining to the decision," the report said. The inspector general also reviewed OSI handling of 56 drug and sexual assault cases -- including 12 involving Falcons football players -- initiated between 2011 and 2012.

"We determined that 32 had no deficiencies and 20 had minor deficiencies," the report said. "Four drug investigations had significant deficiencies."

Those investigations were tied to "Operation Gridiron" -- a string of probes that started with tips from a cadet informant, Eric Thomas. Thomas was kicked out of the academy shortly before his planned graduation for demerits -- minor disciplinary infractions.

Thomas has maintained that he picked up the demerits while complying with orders from OSI, but the agency refused to defend him at a disenrollment hearing.

This week, the Air Force turned back Thomas' final appeal to be reinstated.

"Insufficient relevant evidence has been presented to demonstrate the existence of an error or injustice," the Air Force Board for the Correction of Military Records found.

Thomas' attorney Skip Morgan, a 1972 Air Force Academy graduate, said he wasn't surprised.

"This whole thing has been a cover-up," he said.

The inspector general found that OSI botched an investigation into Thomas' most sensational claim about a 2011 party in Manitou Springs involving several members of the football team.

"The girls' drink, or Captain Morgan with the blue lid, was only for girls to drink," Ohomas told investigators in a written statement obtained by The Gazette. The blue-capped bottle, he explained, was laced with "roofies," a street term for flunitrazepam, a powerful sedative known as a date-rape drug.

Thomas told investigators that "four or five females did not recall what occurred the following day after the party."

In one bedroom during the party, "multiple male cadets had sexual intercourse with other unknown females," Thomas alleged.

The inspector general found that OSI didn't properly investigate the claim.

"Specifically, the victims alleged they ingested, without their consent, a drug that rendered them unable to recall the events of the evening," the report found. "However, AFOSI special agents did not go to the crime scene (the party location) to search for evidence or collect evidence from the victims."

Morgan said the findings show the Air Force is reluctant to take on the football team and willing to sacrifice Thomas' career to keep the misconduct quiet.

"They're not willing to look any deeper," he said.

On Friday, the academy sent The Gazette the same statement it sent to investigators in response to the report.

"Recognition of this prior cadet misconduct caused us to refocus and enhance our culture and climate," the statement said. "We have taken a number of actions to ingrain a culture consistent with our Air Force core values."

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MARINE CORPS

23. Marines reignite debate on women in combat

TheHill.com, June 25 | Rebecca Kheel

Lawmakers are treading cautiously after news that a majority of female Marine recruits are failing the tests to get into newly open combat jobs.

The high failure rate could indicate a tough road ahead to integrate women into combat jobs and is renewing the contentious debate.

But many lawmakers insist it's still too early to know how integration is going and are taking a wait-and-see approach. And supporters are holding firm, insisting more time is needed.

"It's too early to say, but we're paying very close attention to implementation," a minority spokesman for the House Armed Services Committee said Friday. "We'll be following up in the future on these statistics and others."

The Associated Press reported this week that six out of seven women who have taken the new physical fitness tests have failed.

Passing the tests means doing six pull-ups; a three-mile run in at most 24:51 minutes; 60 lifts of a 30-pound ammunition can; a half-mile run in combat boots in at most 3:26 minutes; and combat maneuvers such as belly crawling, evacuating a casualty and throwing a grenade in at most 3:12 minutes.

Six out of seven represents an 85.7 percent failure rate, much higher than the men's rate of 2.7 percent. Forty male recruits failed out of about 1,500.

Aside from giving fodder to opponents of opening the combat jobs to women, the high failure rate could present other challenges. Among them, having only one woman in a unit of men who are not used to working with the other gender.

Studies done while considering whether to open the jobs to women showed male Marines had deep-seated opposition to the prospect.

Marine Commandant Gen. Robert Neller acknowledged that it will be an adjustment for men to have a woman in the unit.

"I think a lot of the talk is more just maybe they're nervous about the unknown," he told the AP. "But there are some things we're going to have to work through."

The tests were designed after Defense Secretary Ash Carter announced in December that all combat jobs would be open to women without exception.

The Marines were the only service to request some exemptions, citing a study it conducted that found mixed-gender combat units did not perform as well as male-only units.

When Carter announced his decision, some lawmakers supported it with the caveat that physical standards not be lowered.

Military officials have repeatedly vowed not to lower standards, but the lawmakers feared there would be political pressure to do so if women fail to meet them.

One such lawmaker has been Sen. Joni Ernst (R-Iowa), the Senate's first female combat veteran.

Asked this week about the failure rate among female recruits, Ernst said her position has not changed.

"I continue to fully support women serving in any military capacity, as long as standards are not lowered and our combat effectiveness is maintained," Ernst said in a written statement.

Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.), chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, declined to comment through a spokesman, who indicated that more would be known about how implementation is going once more data is gathered.

But Rep. Duncan Hunter (R-Calif.), one of Congress' staunchest opponents of opening combat jobs to women, said the fitness test results are unsurprising.

“This is what happens when you have a military decision made for political ends,” he said. “Men and women are physically different.”

It’s just a matter of time, he added, before the results are used to lower standards and impose a quota on how many women must be in combat roles.

“They’re going to want to be able to say every two out of however many combat jobs are women,” he said. “It’s purely political. They’re going to have to [lower standards] if women can’t do it. If not, then they’ll say it’s not fair. That’s going to be the argument.”

Rep. Jackie Speier (D-Calif.), who has been a strong supporter of opening combat jobs to women, said seven people is too small a sample size to make any judgment.

“It’s pretty disingenuous to discount an entire gender based on a sample size of seven women,” Speier, ranking member on the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, said in a written statement. “Using that logic, more men than women failed the test – should we question whether men have the right to serve in combat?”

Women have already proven themselves, Speier added, such as the three who have graduated from Army Ranger School, one of whom is now the Army’s first female infantry officer.

“These are significant strides that must not be ignored or discounted,” Speier said. “It’s important to make sure both men and women meet certain physical requirements before sending them into combat, but it’s equally important that women be given the opportunity to pursue combat service careers.”

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NAVY

24. Sex scandal exposes vetting flaws at Naval Academy

Washington Post, June 26, Pg. C1 | John Woodrow Cox

In the wake of a widening sexual misconduct scandal at the U.S. Naval Academy, military officials couldn't explain how a Marine Corps officer had been assigned to teach at the school after he was investigated for having sex with a female midshipman.

It's now clear, however, that Maj. Michael Pretus became an instructor not only because of a vast communication failure among military leaders, but also because of a systemic flaw in the way the Naval Academy vets dozens of its staffers, according to a Washington Post examination that also found significant errors in how the service academies and the Pentagon reports sexual assaults on students to Congress.

The military did vet Pretus when he was selected in 2012 to get an advanced degree in history that would prepare him to teach. But during the two years and eight months between when he got the news and when he was scheduled to start working in Annapolis, Pretus faced a crisis: A former midshipman told authorities that while attending the academy in 2011, she had a threesome with him and another Marine, Maj. Mark Thompson, a former history

teacher later convicted of sexual misconduct. Her accusation against Pretus, now 40, triggered a criminal investigation that, according to military records, ended only after he refused to cooperate.

Despite the inquiry, he became an instructor in August 2014. Not until a Post story on Thompson's case did academy leaders learn about the allegations against Pretus, who was removed from his position in April.

Twenty-eight of the academy's current faculty members, including 22 Marines, arrived on campus the same way Pretus and many others have since the advanced-degree program was launched in 2006, the school said. They were selected to get a master's degree and then given two to three years to attend a college and move to Annapolis to work in the classroom. Though the military rigorously inspects their service records during the initial selection process, the academy acknowledged that they aren't formally vetted again before they're given positions of authority over midshipmen.

This means that, as in Pretus's case, the academy may never learn about serious issues that could arise during the years while officers are earning their degrees.

In a statement, Cmdr. John Schofield, a Naval Academy spokesman, called the school's failure to flag Pretus an "aberration, and not indicative of the normal and historical effectiveness of the system."

But how does the academy know others like Pretus, who also served as a mentor to aspiring Marines, aren't working with midshipmen right now?

"In short, we don't," Schofield said. "We believe the vetting process is effective. We work very hard to ensure the men and women of the Naval Academy Brigade of Midshipmen are educated and represented by only the very best faculty and staff."

Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-N.Y.), a longtime critic of how the military deals with sexual assault, called the academy's defense of its vetting process "another example of an unwillingness to change the status quo."

Sen. Claire McCaskill (D-Mo.), a former prosecutor who has worked for years to reform the military justice system, was equally critical.

"Americans rightfully expect that we should have in place the highest possible standards for vetting the instructors at those academies, and anything short of that is unacceptable," she told The Post. "I expect the Naval Academy's leaders to take that responsibility seriously and immediately get to work to close any loopholes in their vetting process."

The pervasiveness of sexual assault among cadets and midshipmen at the Naval Academy, the U.S. Military Academy at West Point and the Air Force Academy - training grounds for the country's military leaders - has come under intense scrutiny in recent years. But what has received far less public attention is the potential threat of misbehavior posed by staff.

In the past decade, at least 14 people who worked for or at the service academies were punished for committing acts of sexual misconduct against students or engaging in inappropriate relationships with them, according to military records and information provided by the three schools.

Among the cases from the past three years: A lieutenant commander who taught at the Naval Academy was expelled from the service after he fondled a female midshipman. A captain at the Air Force Academy was pulled from his position in the athletic department after he made sexual advances toward female cadets. A sergeant at West Point was sentenced to 33 months in prison after he secretly filmed female cadets in the campus's showers and bathrooms.

At the Naval Academy, which has had the most incidents since 2006, it's difficult to determine exactly how often employees victimize students. The military is required by Congress to produce annual accounts detailing sexual harassment and violence at all three schools, but The Post discovered serious inaccuracies in the reported Naval Academy cases that call into question the records' reliability.

Since at least 2007, each report has included a summary of sexual assault allegations from the previous school year. But none of them mentioned Thompson, whose case was triggered in 2012 when a student accused him of rape.

In addition to that omission, the summary covering the 2014-2015 school year stated that a commander at the Naval Academy grabbed a midshipman by the hips and tried to "put his tongue in Victim's mouth." Though the record indicated that he received what the military calls "nonjudicial punishment," academy officials now insist the man wasn't a Naval officer - as the report states - but a civilian. According to a school staff member with direct knowledge of the situation, the offender coached a women's club sports team.

One case in the 2013-2014 summary was erroneously included in the next annual report as well, the academy acknowledged. Another year, Navy midshipmen were repeatedly referred to as "cadets," a glaring mistake within the military community.

McCaskill's office described the missteps as "troubling," and Gillibrand argued that they further expose the military's inability or unwillingness to appropriately address sexual misconduct within its ranks.

"The document problem is a symptom of a larger issue that they just don't take these cases seriously," she said. "They continue to say 'We got this, we can handle this.' . . . The evidence doesn't bear that out."

Academy and Pentagon officials blamed the blunders on human error. Air Force Col. J.R. Twiford, chief of staff at the Pentagon's sexual assault prevention and response office, stressed that the military does take the issue seriously, pointing to an automated database that was created in 2014 to track such cases in a more organized way. He also noted that "none of these errors impact the victim or the justice outcome for the accused."

The Naval Academy, Schofield said, intends to do whatever it can to ensure that any reporting problems are addressed and don't continue.

Teachers at almost all U.S. universities who sleep with students could face serious consequences, but for service members at academies, it's a crime - even if the sex is consensual.

Although Pretus's case has brought more unflattering attention to the academy, he is not counted among the staff members who have engaged in sexual misconduct with students.

What led to his removal from campus began with an April 2011 trip to Annapolis, where he delivered a guest lecture to Thompson's history class. Pretus spoke to students about his harrowing combat experience in Iraq.

Afterward, according to investigators, the longtime friends went to Thompson's home and both had sex with a midshipman named Sarah Stadler. Back then, she and Thompson were in an illicit relationship prohibited by military law.

Days later, Stadler and a 21-year-old female classmate walked to Thompson's house after a long day of drinking. The women claimed that he served them shots of tequila before they played strip poker and staggered to his bedroom, where he had sex with both of them. Stadler's friend later alleged to authorities that he'd raped her because she was too drunk to give consent.

Around the time of her accusation, Pretus announced on Facebook that he'd been chosen to get a master's degree and eventually teach at the academy.

"This is a dream come true!" he wrote on Jan. 20, 2012, referring to himself as "the luckiest guy in the world."

At Thompson's trial in 2013, Pretus provided key testimony that rebutted the women's version of events. He asserted that in a call on the night of the alleged assault, Thompson told him two female midshipmen had stopped by to use the bathroom and left.

But during the court-martial, Stadler spotted Pretus and told military investigators that, though she couldn't recall his name, she knew he was the Marine who'd joined in the tryst with her and Thompson.

The Naval Criminal Investigative Service interviewed Stadler and inspected Pretus's service record, but their inquiry ended when he invoked his right to remain silent.

Academy officials probably would have never learned about the accusation had Thompson not fought so hard to clear his own name. At trial, he was acquitted of the rape but convicted of five other charges related to sexual misconduct. Thompson later brought his story to *The Post*, which discovered that he had lied under oath to an administrative board in 2014. In April, the Marines charged him with three additional crimes. Pretus, who did not respond to requests for comment on this story, has agreed to testify against Thompson in the new case and has acknowledged to prosecutors that both men had sex with Stadler.

Two months ago, Schofield, the academy spokesman, said that "under no circumstances" would Pretus have been allowed to teach there had the school known about his past. But officials in the Marine Corps, the Judge Advocate General of the Navy, NCIS and Pretus's former command in New Orleans all knew about the allegation and didn't inform the school.

Still, the academy confirmed that it is ultimately accountable for the people who work there. And, over the past decade, no fewer than a half-dozen of those people have been accused of acting inappropriately toward students.

In 2007, Navy Lt. Cmdr. John Thomas Matthew Lee, a Catholic priest, pleaded guilty to forcible sodomy, aggravated assault and other crimes committed against three servicemen, including a 20-year-old midshipman.

That same year, Navy Cmdr. Kevin J. Ronan, a doctor, was sentenced to nearly four years in prison after he secretly recorded "sex tapes" of nine midshipmen he allowed to stay at his home through a sponsorship program. Although Ronan was not on academy staff, he often treated students.

During the 2012-2013 school year, a foreign-language teacher from China was accused of sexual assault after she spanked a student who had incorrectly answered her questions, according to military records. The woman no longer teaches in Annapolis.

The Air Force Academy said that five of its staff members have been removed from their positions in the past 10 years for inappropriate behavior with students, including a female captain in 2014 and a female master sergeant in 2013 who each had sexual relationships with male cadets.

The Air Force Academy does not have an advanced-degree program comparable to that of the Naval Academy, but West Point does - and its version is much more robust.

Thousands of Army officers have joined the school's staff that way, including more than 300 working there now. West Point also doesn't re-scrutinize service members after they earn their degrees, but a school spokesman said he knew of no cases like Pretus's.

In May, after The Post asked all three academies how many staff members had been ousted from their positions because of sexual misconduct with students, West Point offered just one from the past decade: Michael McClendon, the sergeant who in 2014 was sent to prison for secretly recording cadets.

But a month later, public affairs specialist Francis J. DeMaro Jr. provided a second case.

Last year, he said in an email, an Army captain lost her job after "sexual contact while intoxicated against two male cadets at a football game in late fall 2015."

And why was that case not included in West Point's original response?

"I am told," DeMaro responded, "it was an oversight."

--Jennifer Jenkins contributed to this report

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NOTABLE COMMENTARY

25. Time to topple an outdated barrier to service

Sunday Capital (Annapolis, MD), June 26, Pg. A12 | Editorial

Late last week, as we were doing final preparations for "Uncharted Territory," the project by reporter Christina Jedra that runs in today's and tomorrow's editions, reports came out that the Department of Defense is planning to announce the repeal of its ban on transgender service members on Friday.

"Uncharted Territory" shows why this decision — the removal of one of the last barriers between service and groups of willing and patriotic Americans — is an overdue step forward. As Secretary of Defense Ash Carter acknowledged last year, when he ordered the study now being completed, the ban on transgender service is an "outdated, confusing, inconsistent approach" rooted in notions of "gender identity disorder" no longer recognized by the American Psychiatric Association or the medical profession at large.

The focus of today's main story is Ensign Alexandra Marberry, who has graduated from the Naval Academy and qualified for flight school in Pensacola, Florida — no small accomplishments — but is currently doing paperwork at the academy. While Carter has stopped the dismissal of personnel for being openly transgender, Marberry's career and gender transition from male to female are still on hold while the military decides how to proceed.

For all Marberry's difficulties, which she has faced with courage, she is likely to prove far luckier than her predecessors at the academy, a few of whose stories will be told in tomorrow's edition. For them, serving their country meant suppressing, often for many years, a gender identity fundamental to their being, even if it was not the one they were born into.

The move expected Friday is just the latest in a line that goes back at least to racial desegregation of the armed forces in 1948. When that happened, when the armed services were opened to women and when "Don't ask, don't tell" was repealed in 2010, there were dire forecasts of conflict, resignations and wholesale disruption of the effectiveness of the military — all of which failed to materialize.

Of course, there were difficulties in adjustment and occasional ugly incidents, but the armed forces not only adapted — this is not a major challenge next to fighting a war — but were the stronger for the changes.

Such forecasts, in any case, have been muted for transgender people, not just because of this record but because comparatively few are involved. There are perhaps 15,500 transgender individuals in services with 1.3 million active-duty members. The RAND Corp. estimated that extra health care costs for transgender people could come to between \$2.4 million and \$8.4 million a year, in a military that spends \$6 billion annually on health care for its members.

No, the armed forces are not a social experiment. They are an organization driven by a mission: to protect and defend the United States. But the armed services can do that most effectively if they can draw on the talents of all who are willing to dedicate their lives to that mission, of all who have a passion to serve — and if they can reflect and utilize our nation's strengths. Diversity has always been one of those strengths.

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26. Ban Animal Use in Military Medical Training

New York Times, June 26, Pg. SR10 | Editorial

For years, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals has been waging a guerrilla war against the Pentagon over its use of live goats and pigs to train combat medics. Their primary tactic: obtaining footage of training sessions to expose the barbarity of a practice that's cruel and unnecessary.

The Pentagon has taken steps to phase out live-tissue training, as the practice is called, by using human-shaped simulators. But military officials have refused to do away with using animals entirely, arguing that doing so could result in more battlefield deaths.

Until relatively recently, PETA's cause got relatively little sympathy on Capitol Hill. Representative Hank Johnson, a Georgia Democrat, introduced a bill in 2013 seeking to abolish the practice, but it hasn't come close to passing. In recent months, though, PETA has gone on the offensive, and last week, 71 members of Congress, including 16 Republicans and 10 veterans, sent a letter to the secretary of defense, Ashton Carter, seeking detailed information

about the use of animals in medic training and urging the department to hasten its adoption of simulators. The letter noted that military medical experts concluded in a 2014 study that using live animals offers no advantage over using simulators.

Representative Joe Heck, a Republican from Nevada and one of the two sponsors of the letter, has helped broaden support for the cause. Mr. Heck, a doctor, was medical director of the Casualty Care Research Center at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences from 1998 to 2003. He has served in the Army Reserve since 1991 and ran an emergency room combat hospital in Baghdad during one of his deployments. The letter's other sponsor was Representative Jackie Speier, a California Democrat.

Separately, several medical associations -- including the National Medical Association and the American Medical Student Association -- have recently endorsed Mr. Johnson's bill, which would require the Pentagon to stop using animals for medic training by 2020.

It shouldn't take an act of Congress for the Pentagon to give up this practice. Among the 28 members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 22 have banned the use of animals for medic training. The vast majority of programs in the United States that train civilian medical workers in trauma care use simulators exclusively. There's no reason the Pentagon should continue inflicting cruelty on animals.

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27. An about-face on promoting veterans

The Senate strikes a smart balance on taking care of the federal workforce

Washington Post, June 26, Pg. A26 | Editorial

When members of the armed forces return to civilian life as veterans, the United States tries to give them something in return for their service. One such reward is federal hiring preference: Veterans get an advantage over civilian applicants - not just when they are applying for their first government post but also when they move between agencies or seek promotion. The Senate version of a major military policy bill would take away that second bite of the apple.

There are plenty of good reasons to give veterans a leg up at the start of their civil service careers, in addition to gratitude. Some veterans have difficulty adjusting to civilian life, and many job-seekers may find themselves at a disadvantage after years away from the workplace. But it is harder to understand why veterans who have already made their way into federal posts should get preference over people who may be performing better in comparable positions.

Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.), chairman of the Armed Services Committee and a longtime advocate for veterans, seems to agree. So do the officials in the Defense Department who encouraged Mr. McCain to change the preference policy in this year's defense authorization bill, now in conference with the House. Advocates of the change say bumping veterans to the top of hiring lists can discourage the most qualified candidates from taking government jobs at all.

Opponents of change claim the preferences come into play only as a tiebreaker between equally qualified candidates. The reality is more complicated. Hiring managers must draw from lists of the "most qualified candidates" for a position. Veterans receive point bonuses that put them higher on those lists, and sometimes the result is a crowding out of qualified candidates who haven't served. It doesn't help that the lists are drawn up using

too-simple criteria - requiring a bachelor's degree, for example, but failing to distinguish between programs or areas of study.

Not only do some qualified candidates not make it to the interview room, but others may also feel discouraged from applying at all. Almost half of new federal hires to full-time positions in 2014 were veterans; it's not hard to see how non-vets might feel they have little chance of success.

The Senate's changes would not fully solve these problems. Preference policy might need tweaking on a larger scale: Actively recruiting especially qualified veterans instead of relying on online postings, for example, could ensure both that veterans get hired and that they're the right people for the job. Updating qualification criteria would also make a difference. For now, though, the Senate has struck a smart balance between taking care of veterans and taking care of the federal workforce.

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28. The Security Consequences of Brexit

New York Times, June 26, Pg. SR10 | Editorial

Apart from creating economic turmoil, Britain's calamitous vote to leave the European Union could have no less profound foreign policy consequences, weakening the interlocking web of Western institutions and alliances that have helped guarantee international peace and stability for 70 years.

This is also a testing moment for President Obama, who has been understandably preoccupied with building alliances in Asia, but must once again make Europe and the trans-Atlantic alliance a priority and find ways to rebuild consensus and chart a united path forward. Otherwise, the major beneficiaries will be Russia and China, both challenging the established Western-led order.

Since World War II, the United States, aided principally by Britain, has worked to reduce the potential for international conflict, with particular success in Europe; encourage democratic governance; promote free markets; and lift billions of people out of poverty. This was achieved by working with its allies to establish multiple reinforcing institutions, including NATO, the military alliance that now has 28 members; the E.U., the economic alliance that will have 27 members when Britain leaves; the World Bank; and the International Monetary Fund. In short, together America and Europe wrote the rules and norms by which much of the world now lives.

The policies pursued by the West have sometimes been flawed and sometimes failed, but the system that linked America and Europe in a common defense and common political cause ended the Cold War, reunited Germany, built a new Europe and sought in one way or another to address every other major threat. A crucial brick in that system is now in danger of being removed.

This stunning development comes at a time when these institutions were already under stress and when many people on both sides of the Atlantic had grown complacent about the relationship and its reinforcing commitments. Europe is economically battered, overwhelmed by refugees fleeing chaos in the Middle East and fearful of attacks within its borders by the Islamic State and other terrorists.

Compounding the problem is Russia's president, Vladimir Putin. Ruthlessly playing a weak hand, he has worked hard to undermine NATO and challenge the post-Cold War order by invading Ukraine, funding right-wing groups in France and elsewhere and recklessly brandishing his military power from the Baltics to Syria. European

countries have struggled to remain united on issues ranging from NATO's budget to how best to respond to Mr. Putin.

Meanwhile, China, a rising power that sometimes makes common cause with Russia, has been challenging the United States by expanding its control over the South China Sea and establishing its own Asian regional development bank as a means of wielding economic influence.

Britain's departure must be negotiated with the E.U. and could take as long as two years. Even with this break, Britain would remain in NATO, but less as a leading European power than as a more inward-looking nation consumed with national politics. That would mean a Britain less able or willing to address the economic and security challenges of Europe as a whole and less inclined to support American-led responses to crises across the globe. The referendum could also inspire nationalist forces elsewhere in Europe to step up their own assault on European integration.

The vote is a setback for President Obama, who urged Britain to remain in the E.U. when he visited London in April. On Friday, he insisted that Britain and the E.U. would both remain America's indispensable partners. Other administration officials promised to work closely with Britain to ease the E.U. transition.

It's hard to imagine that Europe could once again deteriorate into rival nation-states and that Europe and America could drift apart. Even so, Mr. Obama must work with Germany and France, the other two European powers, to understand the forces behind the Brexit vote, address the grievances that produced such a result and reaffirm and strengthen the alliance and its common agenda. Next month's NATO summit meeting is an opportunity to begin that process.

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29. Europe's Loss Is NATO's Gain

Britain is about to have more money and manpower to pour into the West's military alliance -- and more motivation to do so

ForeignPolicy.com (Voice), June 25 | Adm. James Stavridis (Ret.)

The people have spoken, and United Kingdom will leave the European Union. The United States and Europe will be confronted with a raft of bad news that goes along with that decision: economic turmoil, a faltering British economy, a deeply weakened political entity in the European Union itself, the high chance of a Scottish departure from the UK, to name just a few of the challenges. The political and economic institutions of the West all seem worse off than they were just 24 hours ago.

The sole exception might be the military. Brexit, counter-intuitive as it might sound, will likely produce a stronger NATO.

There are several reasons that the British departure from the EU portends a stronger transatlantic military alliance. First is the present state of heightened wariness among all NATO member states – and that includes EU members, as well as the United States, Canada, Norway, and Turkey — about adventurism by Putin's Russia. The Kremlin's goal has always been to be the strongest political entity on the continent, and it is likely to look for ways to further exploit the Brexit referendum's centrifugal effects on the already fractious democracies of Western Europe. Since its founding, NATO has provided the most resolute military balance against such efforts, and thus its stock can be expected to rise with publics in Europe.

Second, with the withdrawal from the European Union, the military of the UK will have more resources and manpower to support NATO. Much like Norway – a strong European economy that is not an EU member but a staunch member of NATO – the United Kingdom will have additional ships, troops, and aircraft to deploy on NATO missions because they will not have to support EU military efforts such as the counter-piracy operations off the coast of East Africa or EU missions in the Balkans. They will be able to assign more and higher caliber officers and troops to NATO billets in the Alliance’s command structure – at the moment, many are “dual hatted” into EU and NATO billets or are in EU military structures.

A third benefit for NATO will be a reduction in the quiet, but real, battlefield competition between NATO and the EU. Consider the respective anti-piracy military missions conducted off the coast of Africa for the past several years by the EU and NATO. Each has had different strategic priorities, with the EU working the “soft power” side of the equation more diligently than NATO. This competition has also manifested in Afghanistan and the Balkans, where both organizations over time have had different missions and priorities. Since the UK will no longer be obligated to support EU missions, its military will be able to focus solely on their work within the NATO alliance. And, given that European military efforts will be greatly diminished by the loss of British military muscle, the EU can be expected to defer to NATO more frequently. That will result in an increase in NATO’s workload, but also its effectiveness.

Finally, a new British government will presumably be a very motivated NATO partner. Now that it has chosen to become a relatively marginal economic player on the international stage, it will have to look for new ways to demonstrate value in its partnership with the United States if it hopes to maintain anything like the “special relationship” it has become accustomed to (and dependent on). Britain will no doubt calculate that continuing or improving its good work in NATO – where it has always been strong to begin with – will be an important show of good faith.

All of these military advantages are largely tactical, of course, and can’t be counted on to provide permanent, or long-term, strategic benefits. Indeed, it’s hard to predict how the political crisis in Europe will develop from here. There is still a looming possibility of a more widespread dissolution of the European Union, which could sow the seeds of real conflict and acrimony on the continent for the first time in a generation. And those conflicts can easily draw in the United States, as the previous century’s two world wars did. The EU has been a major part of helping keep the peace in Europe for decades. If it falls apart, the geopolitical tensions will be significant.

That raises the question of how Washington should adjust its security policies in the coming weeks. First, the United States should do all it can to reassure the rest of the EU that it still values their partnership and good work diplomatically and militarily. There are missions the EU has done quite well in the Balkans, Somalia, and Afghanistan, for example, that NATO would have been more hard-pressed to conduct. The French and Germans, who will continue the significant leadership role in the EU, should be clearly told that Washington intends to continue partnering with them on military and security matters.

In the case of Great Britain, Washington should do all it can to welcome greater involvement in NATO, as well as build strong bilateral military programs, continue with intelligence and information sharing, and partner with them across the spectrum of military activity. On the economic side, the United States needs to help the Brits construct a “Norway-like” relationship with the EU – a process that will involve encouraging the EU toward the same goal. The United States should also help Britain generally weather the economic storm the referendum will probably

unleash upon its financial markets and broader economy. That should include beginning to think about a U.S.-U.K. free trade association.

There's no doubt that we have entered a difficult era for the international system, politically, economically, and militarily. The ill effects will take several years to fully play out. But NATO stands ready, stronger probably than it was before, to help mitigate the pain.

--James Stavridis is a retired four-star U.S. Navy admiral and NATO supreme allied commander who serves today as the dean of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University

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30. The Case for Offshore Balancing

A Superior U.S. Grand Strategy

Foreign Affairs, July/August 2016, Pg. 70 | John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt

For the first time in recent memory, large numbers of Americans are openly questioning their country's grand strategy. An April 2016 Pew poll found that 57 percent of Americans agree that the United States should "deal with its own problems and let others deal with theirs the best they can." On the campaign trail, both the Democrat Bernie Sanders and the Republican Donald Trump found receptive audiences whenever they questioned the United States' penchant for promoting democracy, subsidizing allies' defense, and intervening militarily—leaving only the likely Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton to defend the status quo.

Americans' distaste for the prevailing grand strategy should come as no surprise, given its abysmal record over the past quarter century. In Asia, India, Pakistan, and North Korea are expanding their nuclear arsenals, and China is challenging the status quo in regional waters. In Europe, Russia has annexed Crimea, and U.S. relations with Moscow have sunk to new lows since the Cold War. U.S. forces are still fighting in Afghanistan and Iraq, with no victory in sight. Despite losing most of its original leaders, al Qaeda has metastasized across the region. The Arab world has fallen into turmoil—in good part due to the United States' decisions to effect regime change in Iraq and Libya and its modest efforts to do the same in Syria—and the Islamic State, or ISIS, has emerged out of the chaos. Repeated U.S. attempts to broker Israeli-Palestinian peace have failed, leaving a two-state solution further away than ever. Meanwhile, democracy has been in retreat worldwide, and the United States' use of torture, targeted killings, and other morally dubious practices has tarnished its image as a defender of human rights and international law.

The United States does not bear sole responsibility for all these costly debacles, but it has had a hand in most of them. The setbacks are the natural consequence of the misguided grand strategy of liberal hegemony that Democrats and Republicans have pursued for years. This approach holds that the United States must use its power not only to solve global problems but also to promote a world order based on international institutions, representative governments, open markets, and respect for human rights. As "the indispensable nation," the logic goes, the United States has the right, responsibility, and wisdom to manage local politics almost everywhere. At its core, liberal hegemony is a revisionist grand strategy: instead of calling on the United States to merely uphold the balance of power in key regions, it commits American might to promoting democracy everywhere and defending human rights whenever they are threatened.

There is a better way. By pursuing a strategy of "offshore balancing," Washington would forgo ambitious efforts to remake other societies and concentrate on what really matters: preserving U.S. dominance in the Western

Hemisphere and countering potential hegemons in Europe, Northeast Asia, and the Persian Gulf. Instead of policing the world, the United States would encourage other countries to take the lead in checking rising powers, intervening itself only when necessary. This does not mean abandoning the United States' position as the world's sole superpower or retreating to "Fortress America." Rather, by husbanding U.S. strength, offshore balancing would preserve U.S. primacy far into the future and safeguard liberty at home.

SETTING THE RIGHT GOALS

The United States is the luckiest great power in modern history. Other leading states have had to live with threatening adversaries in their own backyards—even the United Kingdom faced the prospect of an invasion from across the English Channel on several occasions—but for more than two centuries, the United States has not. Nor do distant powers pose much of a threat, because two giant oceans are in the way. As Jean-Jules Jusserand, the French ambassador to the United States from 1902 to 1924, once put it, "On the north, she has a weak neighbor; on the south, another weak neighbor; on the east, fish, and the west, fish." Furthermore, the United States boasts an abundance of land and natural resources and a large and energetic population, which have enabled it to develop the world's biggest economy and most capable military. It also has thousands of nuclear weapons, which makes an attack on the American homeland even less likely.

These geopolitical blessings give the United States enormous latitude for error; indeed, only a country as secure as it would have the temerity to try to remake the world in its own image. But they also allow it to remain powerful and secure without pursuing a costly and expansive grand strategy. Offshore balancing would do just that. Its principal concern would be to keep the United States as powerful as possible—ideally, the dominant state on the planet. Above all, that means maintaining hegemony in the Western Hemisphere.

Unlike isolationists, however, offshore balancers believe that there are regions outside the Western Hemisphere that are worth expending American blood and treasure to defend. Today, three other areas matter to the United States: Europe, Northeast Asia, and the Persian Gulf. The first two are key centers of industrial power and home to the world's other great powers, and the third produces roughly 30 percent of the world's oil.

In Europe and Northeast Asia, the chief concern is the rise of a regional hegemon that would dominate its region, much as the United States dominates the Western Hemisphere. Such a state would have abundant economic clout, the ability to develop sophisticated weaponry, the potential to project power around the globe, and perhaps even the wherewithal to outspend the United States in an arms race. Such a state might even ally with countries in the Western Hemisphere and interfere close to U.S. soil. Thus, the United States' principal aim in Europe and Northeast Asia should be to maintain the regional balance of power so that the most powerful state in each region—for now, Russia and China, respectively—remains too worried about its neighbors to roam into the Western Hemisphere. In the Gulf, meanwhile, the United States has an interest in blocking the rise of a hegemon that could interfere with the flow of oil from that region, thereby damaging the world economy and threatening U.S. prosperity.

Offshore balancing is a realist grand strategy, and its aims are limited. Promoting peace, although desirable, is not among them. This is not to say that Washington should welcome conflict anywhere in the world, or that it cannot use diplomatic or economic means to discourage war. But it should not commit U.S. military forces for that purpose alone. Nor is it a goal of offshore balancing to halt genocides, such as the one that befell Rwanda in 1994. Adopting this strategy would not preclude such operations, however, provided the need is clear, the mission is feasible, and U.S. leaders are confident that intervention will not make matters worse.

HOW WOULD IT WORK?

Under offshore balancing, the United States would calibrate its military posture according to the distribution of power in the three key regions. If there is no potential hegemon in sight in Europe, Northeast Asia, or the Gulf, then there is no reason to deploy ground or air forces there and little need for a large military establishment at home. And because it takes many years for any country to acquire the capacity to dominate its region, Washington would see it coming and have time to respond.

In that event, the United States should turn to regional forces as the first line of defense, letting them uphold the balance of power in their own neighborhood. Although Washington could provide assistance to allies and pledge to support them if they were in danger of being conquered, it should refrain from deploying large numbers of U.S. forces abroad. It may occasionally make sense to keep certain assets overseas, such as small military contingents, intelligence-gathering facilities, or prepositioned equipment, but in general, Washington should pass the buck to regional powers, as they have a far greater interest in preventing any state from dominating them.

If those powers cannot contain a potential hegemon on their own, however, the United States must help get the job done, deploying enough firepower to the region to shift the balance in its favor. Sometimes, that may mean sending in forces before war breaks out. During the Cold War, for example, the United States kept large numbers of ground and air forces in Europe out of the belief that Western European countries could not contain the Soviet Union on their own. At other times, the United States might wait to intervene after a war starts, if one side seems likely to emerge as a regional hegemon. Such was the case during both world wars: the United States came in only after Germany seemed likely to dominate Europe.

In essence, the aim is to remain offshore as long as possible, while recognizing that it is sometimes necessary to come onshore. If that happens, however, the United States should make its allies do as much of the heavy lifting as possible and remove its own forces as soon as it can.

Offshore balancing has many virtues. By limiting the areas the U.S. military was committed to defending and forcing other states to pull their own weight, it would reduce the resources Washington must devote to defense, allow for greater investment and consumption at home, and put fewer American lives in harm's way. Today, allies routinely free-ride on American protection, a problem that has only grown since the Cold War ended. Within NATO, for example, the United States accounts for 46 percent of the alliance's aggregate GDP yet contributes about 75 percent of its military spending. As the political scientist Barry Posen has quipped, "This is welfare for the rich."

Offshore balancing would also reduce the risk of terrorism. Liberal hegemony commits the United States to spreading democracy in unfamiliar places, which sometimes requires military occupation and always involves interfering with local political arrangements. Such efforts invariably foster nationalist resentment, and because the opponents are too weak to confront the United States directly, they sometimes turn to terrorism. (It is worth remembering that Osama bin Laden was motivated in good part by the presence of U.S. troops in his homeland of Saudi Arabia.) In addition to inspiring terrorists, liberal hegemony facilitates their operations: using regime change to spread American values undermines local institutions and creates ungoverned spaces where violent extremists can flourish.

Offshore balancing would alleviate this problem by eschewing social engineering and minimizing the United States' military footprint. U.S. troops would be stationed on foreign soil only when a country was in a vital region and threatened by a would-be hegemon. In that case, the potential victim would view the United States as a savior rather than an occupier. And once the threat had been dealt with, U.S. military forces could go back over the horizon and not stay behind to meddle in local politics. By respecting the sovereignty of other states, offshore balancing would be less likely to foster anti-American terrorism.

A REASSURING HISTORY

Offshore balancing may seem like a radical strategy today, but it provided the guiding logic of U.S. foreign policy for many decades and served the country well. During the nineteenth century, the United States was preoccupied with expanding across North America, building a powerful state, and establishing hegemony in the Western Hemisphere. After it completed these tasks at the end of the century, it soon became interested in preserving the balance of power in Europe and Northeast Asia. Nonetheless, it let the great powers in those regions check one another, intervening militarily only when the balance of power broke down, as during both world wars.

During the Cold War, the United States had no choice but to go onshore in Europe and Northeast Asia, as its allies in those regions could not contain the Soviet Union by themselves. So Washington forged alliances and stationed military forces in both regions, and it fought the Korean War to contain Soviet influence in Northeast Asia.

In the Persian Gulf, however, the United States stayed offshore, letting the United Kingdom take the lead in preventing any state from dominating that oil-rich region. After the British announced their withdrawal from the Gulf in 1968, the United States turned to the shah of Iran and the Saudi monarchy to do the job. When the shah fell in 1979, the Carter administration began building the Rapid Deployment Force, an offshore military capability designed to prevent Iran or the Soviet Union from dominating the region. The Reagan administration aided Iraq during that country's 1980–88 war with Iran for similar reasons. The U.S. military stayed offshore until 1990, when Saddam Hussein's seizure of Kuwait threatened to enhance Iraq's power and place Saudi Arabia and other Gulf oil producers at risk. To restore the regional balance of power, the George H. W. Bush administration sent an expeditionary force to liberate Kuwait and smash Saddam's military machine.

For nearly a century, in short, offshore balancing prevented the emergence of dangerous regional hegemons and preserved a global balance of power that enhanced American security. Tellingly, when U.S. policymakers deviated from that strategy—as they did in Vietnam, where the United States had no vital interests—the result was a costly failure.

Events since the end of the Cold War teach the same lesson. In Europe, once the Soviet Union collapsed, the region no longer had a dominant power. The United States should have steadily reduced its military presence, cultivated amicable relations with Russia, and turned European security over to the Europeans. Instead, it expanded NATO and ignored Russian interests, helping spark the conflict over Ukraine and driving Moscow closer to China.

In the Middle East, likewise, the United States should have moved back offshore after the Gulf War and let Iran and Iraq balance each other. Instead, the Clinton administration adopted the policy of “dual containment,” which required keeping ground and air forces in Saudi Arabia to check Iran and Iraq simultaneously. The George W. Bush administration then adopted an even more ambitious strategy, dubbed “regional transformation,” which produced costly failures in Afghanistan and Iraq. The Obama administration repeated the error when it helped topple Muammar al-Qaddafi in Libya and when it exacerbated the chaos in Syria by insisting that Bashar al-Assad “must

go” and backing some of his opponents. Abandoning offshore balancing after the Cold War has been a recipe for failure.

HEGEMONY’S HOLLOW HOPES

Defenders of liberal hegemony marshal a number of unpersuasive arguments to make their case. One familiar claim is that only vigorous U.S. leadership can keep order around the globe. But global leadership is not an end in itself; it is desirable only insofar as it benefits the United States directly.

One might further argue that U.S. leadership is necessary to overcome the collective-action problem of local actors failing to balance against a potential hegemon. Offshore balancing recognizes this danger, however, and calls for Washington to step in if needed. Nor does it prohibit Washington from giving friendly states in the key regions advice or material aid.

Other defenders of liberal hegemony argue that U.S. leadership is necessary to deal with new, transnational threats that arise from failed states, terrorism, criminal networks, refugee flows, and the like. Not only do the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans offer inadequate protection against these dangers, they claim, but modern military technology also makes it easier for the United States to project power around the world and address them. Today’s “global village,” in short, is more dangerous yet easier to manage.

This view exaggerates these threats and overstates Washington’s ability to eliminate them. Crime, terrorism, and similar problems can be a nuisance, but they are hardly existential threats and rarely lend themselves to military solutions. Indeed, constant interference in the affairs of other states—and especially repeated military interventions—generates local resentment and fosters corruption, thereby making these transnational dangers worse. The long-term solution to the problems can only be competent local governance, not heavy-handed U.S. efforts to police the world.

Nor is policing the world as cheap as defenders of liberal hegemony contend, either in dollars spent or in lives lost. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq cost between \$4 trillion and \$6 trillion and killed nearly 7,000 U.S. soldiers and wounded more than 50,000. Veterans of these conflicts exhibit high rates of depression and suicide, yet the United States has little to show for their sacrifices.

Defenders of the status quo also fear that offshore balancing would allow other states to replace the United States at the pinnacle of global power. On the contrary, the strategy would prolong the country’s dominance by refocusing its efforts on core goals. Unlike liberal hegemony, offshore balancing avoids squandering resources on costly and counterproductive crusades, which would allow the government to invest more in the long-term ingredients of power and prosperity: education, infrastructure, and research and development. Remember, the United States became a great power by staying out of foreign wars and building a world-class economy, which is the same strategy China has pursued over the past three decades. Meanwhile, the United States has wasted trillions of dollars and put its long-term primacy at risk.

Another argument holds that the U.S. military must garrison the world to keep the peace and preserve an open world economy. Retrenchment, the logic goes, would renew great-power competition, invite ruinous economic rivalries, and eventually spark a major war from which the United States could not remain aloof. Better to keep playing global policeman than risk a repeat of the 1930s.

Such fears are unconvincing. For starters, this argument assumes that deeper U.S. engagement in Europe would have prevented World War II, a claim hard to square with Adolf Hitler's unshakable desire for war. Regional conflicts will sometimes occur no matter what Washington does, but it need not get involved unless vital U.S. interests are at stake. Indeed, the United States has sometimes stayed out of regional conflicts—such as the Russo-Japanese War, the Iran-Iraq War, and the current war in Ukraine—belying the claim that it inevitably gets dragged in. And if the country is forced to fight another great power, better to arrive late and let other countries bear the brunt of the costs. As the last major power to enter both world wars, the United States emerged stronger from each for having waited.

Furthermore, recent history casts doubt on the claim that U.S. leadership preserves peace. Over the past 25 years, Washington has caused or supported several wars in the Middle East and fueled minor conflicts elsewhere. If liberal hegemony is supposed to enhance global stability, it has done a poor job.

Nor has the strategy produced much in the way of economic benefits. Given its protected position in the Western Hemisphere, the United States is free to trade and invest wherever profitable opportunities exist. Because all countries have a shared interest in such activity, Washington does not need to play global policeman in order to remain economically engaged with others. In fact, the U.S. economy would be in better shape today if the government were not spending so much money trying to run the world.

Proponents of liberal hegemony also claim that the United States must remain committed all over the world to prevent nuclear proliferation. If it reduces its role in key regions or withdraws entirely, the argument runs, countries accustomed to U.S. protection will have no choice but to protect themselves by obtaining nuclear weapons.

No grand strategy is likely to prove wholly successful at preventing proliferation, but offshore balancing would do a better job than liberal hegemony. After all, that strategy failed to stop India and Pakistan from ramping up their nuclear capabilities, North Korea from becoming the newest member of the nuclear club, and Iran from making major progress with its nuclear program. Countries usually seek the bomb because they fear being attacked, and U.S. efforts at regime change only heighten such concerns. By eschewing regime change and reducing the United States' military footprint, offshore balancing would give potential proliferators less reason to go nuclear.

Moreover, military action cannot prevent a determined country from eventually obtaining nuclear weapons; it can only buy time. The recent deal with Iran serves as a reminder that coordinated multilateral pressure and tough economic sanctions are a better way to discourage proliferation than preventive war or regime change.

To be sure, if the United States did scale back its security guarantees, a few vulnerable states might seek their own nuclear deterrents. That outcome is not desirable, but all-out efforts to prevent it would almost certainly be costly and probably be unsuccessful. Besides, the downsides may not be as grave as pessimists fear. Getting the bomb does not transform weak countries into great powers or enable them to blackmail rival states. Ten states have crossed the nuclear threshold since 1945, and the world has not turned upside down. Nuclear proliferation will remain a concern no matter what the United States does, but offshore balancing provides the best strategy for dealing with it.

THE DEMOCRACY DELUSION

Other critics reject offshore balancing because they believe the United States has a moral and strategic imperative to promote freedom and protect human rights. As they see it, spreading democracy will largely rid the world of war and atrocities, keeping the United States secure and alleviating suffering.

No one knows if a world composed solely of liberal democracies would in fact prove peaceful, but spreading democracy at the point of a gun rarely works, and fledgling democracies are especially prone to conflict. Instead of promoting peace, the United States just ends up fighting endless wars. Even worse, force-feeding liberal values abroad can compromise them at home. The global war on terrorism and the related effort to implant democracy in Afghanistan and Iraq have led to tortured prisoners, targeted killings, and vast electronic surveillance of U.S. citizens.

Some defenders of liberal hegemony hold that a subtler version of the strategy could avoid the sorts of disasters that occurred in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya. They are deluding themselves. Democracy promotion requires large-scale social engineering in foreign societies that Americans understand poorly, which helps explain why Washington's efforts usually fail. Dismantling and replacing existing political institutions inevitably creates winners and losers, and the latter often take up arms in opposition. When that happens, U.S. officials, believing their country's credibility is now at stake, are tempted to use the United States' awesome military might to fix the problem, thus drawing the country into more conflicts.

If the American people want to encourage the spread of liberal democracy, the best way to do so is to set a good example. Other countries will more likely emulate the United States if they see it as a just, prosperous, and open society. And that means doing more to improve conditions at home and less to manipulate politics abroad.

THE PROBLEMATIC PACIFIER

Then there are those who believe that Washington should reject liberal hegemony but keep sizable U.S. forces in Europe, Northeast Asia, and the Persian Gulf solely to prevent trouble from breaking out. This low-cost insurance policy, they argue, would save lives and money in the long run, because the United States wouldn't have to ride to the rescue after a conflict broke out. This approach—sometimes called “selective engagement”—sounds appealing but would not work either.

For starters, it would likely revert back to liberal hegemony. Once committed to preserving peace in key regions, U.S. leaders would be sorely tempted to spread democracy, too, based on the widespread belief that democracies don't fight one another. This was the main rationale for expanding NATO after the Cold War, with the stated goal of “a Europe whole and free.” In the real world, the line separating selective engagement from liberal hegemony is easily erased.

Advocates of selective engagement also assume that the mere presence of U.S. forces in various regions will guarantee peace, and so Americans need not worry about being dragged into distant conflicts. In other words, extending security commitments far and wide poses few risks, because they will never have to be honored.

But this assumption is overly optimistic: allies may act recklessly, and the United States may provoke conflicts itself. Indeed, in Europe, the American pacifier failed to prevent the Balkan wars of the 1990s, the Russo-Georgian war in 2008, and the current conflict in Ukraine. In the Middle East, Washington is largely responsible for several recent wars. And in the South China Sea, conflict is now a real possibility despite the U.S. Navy's substantial regional role. Stationing U.S. forces around the world does not automatically ensure peace.

Nor does selective engagement address the problem of buck-passing. Consider that the United Kingdom is now withdrawing its army from continental Europe, at a time when NATO faces what it considers a growing threat from Russia. Once again, Washington is expected to deal with the problem, even though peace in Europe should matter far more to the region's own powers.

THE STRATEGY IN ACTION

What would offshore balancing look like in today's world? The good news is that it is hard to foresee a serious challenge to American hegemony in the Western Hemisphere, and for now, no potential hegemon lurks in Europe or the Persian Gulf. Now for the bad news: if China continues its impressive rise, it is likely to seek hegemony in Asia. The United States should undertake a major effort to prevent it from succeeding.

Ideally, Washington would rely on local powers to contain China, but that strategy might not work. Not only is China likely to be much more powerful than its neighbors, but these states are also located far from one another, making it harder to form an effective balancing coalition. The United States will have to coordinate their efforts and may have to throw its considerable weight behind them. In Asia, the United States may indeed be the indispensable nation.

In Europe, the United States should end its military presence and turn NATO over to the Europeans. There is no good reason to keep U.S. forces in Europe, as no country there has the capability to dominate that region. The top contenders, Germany and Russia, will both lose relative power as their populations shrink in size, and no other potential hegemon is in sight. Admittedly, leaving European security to the Europeans could increase the potential for trouble there. If a conflict did arise, however, it would not threaten vital U.S. interests. Thus, there is no reason for the United States to spend billions of dollars each year (and pledge its own citizens' lives) to prevent one.

In the Gulf, the United States should return to the offshore-balancing strategy that served it so well until the advent of dual containment. No local power is now in a position to dominate the region, so the United States can move most of its forces back over the horizon.

With respect to ISIS, the United States should let the regional powers deal with that group and limit its own efforts to providing arms, intelligence, and military training. ISIS represents a serious threat to them but a minor problem for the United States, and the only long-term solution to it is better local institutions, something Washington cannot provide.

In Syria, the United States should let Russia take the lead. A Syria stabilized under Assad's control, or divided into competing ministates, would pose little danger to U.S. interests. Both Democratic and Republican presidents have a rich history of working with the Assad regime, and a divided and weak Syria would not threaten the regional balance of power. If the civil war continues, it will be largely Moscow's problem, although Washington should be willing to help broker a political settlement.

For now, the United States should pursue better relations with Iran. It is not in Washington's interest for Tehran to abandon the nuclear agreement and race for the bomb, an outcome that would become more likely if it feared a U.S. attack—hence the rationale for mending fences. Moreover, as its ambitions grow, China will want allies in the Gulf, and Iran will likely top its list. (In a harbinger of things to come, this past January, Chinese President Xi Jinping

visited Tehran and signed 17 different agreements.) The United States has an obvious interest in discouraging Chinese-Iranian security cooperation, and that requires reaching out to Iran.

Iran has a significantly larger population and greater economic potential than its Arab neighbors, and it may eventually be in a position to dominate the Gulf. If it begins to move in this direction, the United States should help the other Gulf states balance against Tehran, calibrating its own efforts and regional military presence to the magnitude of the danger.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Taken together, these steps would allow the United States to markedly reduce its defense spending. Although U.S. forces would remain in Asia, the withdrawals from Europe and the Persian Gulf would free up billions of dollars, as would reductions in counterterrorism spending and an end to the war in Afghanistan and other overseas interventions. The United States would maintain substantial naval and air assets and modest but capable ground forces, and it would stand ready to expand its capabilities should circumstances require. But for the foreseeable future, the U.S. government could spend more money on domestic needs or leave it in taxpayers' pockets.

Offshore balancing is a grand strategy born of confidence in the United States' core traditions and a recognition of its enduring advantages. It exploits the country's providential geographic position and recognizes the powerful incentives other states have to balance against overly powerful or ambitious neighbors. It respects the power of nationalism, does not try to impose American values on foreign societies, and focuses on setting an example that others will want to emulate. As in the past, offshore balancing is not only the strategy that hews closest to U.S. interests; it is also the one that aligns best with Americans' preferences.

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