



AS OF 0530 HOURS, JANUARY 31

OVERVIEW

ISIL militants launched a surprise attack on Iraqi Kurdish positions on the outskirts of Kirkuk, killing a senior Peshmerga commander and at least five of his men, in one of the most aggressive assaults on the city in months. Separately, Secretary Chuck Hagel, in an interview with *CNN*, said the deployment of American ground troops to Iraq “could be necessary” for non-combat roles, such as gathering intelligence and locating ISIL targets as Iraqi forces go on the offensive. Also of note, the *Washington Post* reported that the killing of Hezbollah commander Imad Mughniyeh in 2008 was carried out through an “extraordinarily close” operation between the CIA and Israel’s Mossad.

NEWS HEADLINES AT 0500

- Support waning, Romney decides against 2016 bid
- San Francisco police detain two over body parts in suitcase
- Six Hawks score in double figures against Blazers; up win streak to 18
- Islamic State seizes oil facility near Kirkuk, 15 workers missing
- Family, diplomats say no new word on Islamic State hostages
- Canada seeks to strengthen spy agency after attacks
- Philippine air force plane crashes at sea, killing two pilots

OVERSEAS HEADLINES OF NOTE

- *New Indian Express*: Agni-5 successfully test-fired
- *Press Trust of India*: No disruption in military engagement with China – Pentagon
- *Xinhua*: China asks other countries not to create tension in South China Sea

THIS DAY IN MILITARY HISTORY

- 1950 – President Harry S. Truman publicly announces his decision to support the development of the hydrogen bomb, a weapon theorized to be hundreds of times more powerful than the atomic bombs dropped on Japan during World War II

Table of Contents

TOP STORIES

1. Islamic State Attacks Set Back Iraqi Kurds

Wall Street Journal, Jan. 31, Pg. A5 | Nour Malas

Islamic State militants launched their biggest offensive yet outside Kurdish-controlled Kirkuk and tried to penetrate the city itself, part of a spate of brazen attacks by the extremist group against Kurdish forces across Iraq on Friday.

2. CNN 01/30/2015 18:09:30 (SecDef Hagel/Sgt. Bergdahl and ISIL) PART 1, PART 2

Situation Room, Jan. 30 | Barbara Starr and Wolf Blitzer

I want to get straight to Barbara Starr, our Pentagon correspondent. She finished an exclusive interview with the outgoing defense secretary Chuck Hagel.

3. CIA and Mossad killed senior Hezbollah figure in car bombing

Washington Post Online, Jan. 31 | Adam Goldman and Ellen Nakashima

On Feb. 12, 2008, Imad Mughniyah, Hezbollah's international operations chief, walked on a quiet nighttime street in Damascus after dinner at a nearby restaurant. Not far away, a team of CIA spotters in the Syrian capital was tracking his movements. As Mughniyah approached a parked SUV, a bomb planted in a spare tire on the back of the vehicle exploded, sending a burst of shrapnel across a tight radius. He was killed instantly.

IRAQ/SYRIA

4. Air strike kills IS 'chemical weapons expert' – US

Agence France-Presse, Jan. 30 | Dan De Luce

A US-led coalition air strike killed a chemical weapons specialist with the Islamic State group in Iraq who once worked for Saddam Hussein, US military officers said Friday.

5. Iraqi tribal leader, in Washington visit, sought help for his fighters

McClatchy, Jan. 30 | Hannah Allam and Mohammed al Dulaimy

Right after Sheikh Ahmed Abu Risha arrived in Washington, the Islamic State attacked his compound in Iraq's western Anbar province in a not-so-subtle message as he requested U.S. weapons for his tribesmen fighting the extremist group.

6. Iraq's ISIS Fight Could Be a Second 'Awakening'

Newsweek (Print Edition), Feb. 6 | Jonathan Broder

Just before Christmas, Atheel al-Nujaifi, a leading Iraqi politician, quietly slipped into Washington, D.C., with an urgent request that the White House provide arms and training for his 10,000-man Sunni militia. For seven months now, the United States has been bombing Iraq and Syria, trying to beat back the so-called Islamic State (ISIS). But dislodging the world's most notorious jihadist group hasn't been easy, and Nujaifi was offering to help. The governor of Iraq's Nineveh province, he was forced to flee last summer when ISIS militants overran the country's Sunni-dominated north and west. In meetings with American officials, Nujaifi warned that unless the United States and its allies can quickly liberate the parts of Iraq under ISIS control, people there may soon learn to live with the militants. "Time," he said, "is not on our side."

7. Syria battle between al Qaeda and Western-backed group spreads

Reuters, Jan. 30 | Oliver Holmes

Fighting between the Syrian arm of al Qaeda and Western-backed rebels in northern Syria spread from Aleppo province into neighbouring Idlib on Friday, the rebel group and an organisation monitoring the civil war said.

MIDEAST

8. Hezbollah Chief Issues Warning To Israel Over Military Incursions

Wall Street Journal, Jan. 31, Pg. A5 | Dana Ballout and Raja Abdulrahim

The cross-border attacks by Hezbollah that killed two Israeli soldiers this week are a warning to Israel that it will pay a price for military attacks on its neighbors, the leader of the Lebanese Shiite movement said Friday.

9. Ex-Guantanamo inmate tried to contact Taliban – US

Agence France-Presse, Jan. 30 | Dan De Luce

A former inmate at the US-run prison in Guantanamo Bay who was transferred to Qatar in exchange for an American prisoner of war has tried to make contact with the Taliban, defense officials said Friday.

AFGHANISTAN/PAKISTAN

10. Americans were slain by ‘infiltrator,’ Taliban says

Washington Post, Jan. 31, Pg. A8 | Sudarsan Raghavan and Missy Ryan

The Taliban asserted responsibility Friday for a shooting incident at a military base attached to Kabul's international airport Thursday that killed three American civilian contractors and wounded a fourth, saying the attacker had infiltrated the ranks of the security forces.

11. Explosion Kills Dozens at Shiite Mosque in Pakistan

New York Times, Jan. 31, Pg. A10 | Saba Imtiaz

An explosion ripped through a Shiite mosque in southern Pakistan during Friday Prayer, killing at least 55 people and wounding at least 59 in an apparent suicide bombing, the police said.

12. In a strategic shift, Pakistan cozies up to Russia

Washington Post, Jan. 31, Pg. A6 | Tim Craig

As the United States forges closer ties with India, neighboring Pakistan is looking for some new friends. Officials hope they have found one in Russia - a budding partnership that could eventually shift historic alliances in South Asia.

UKRAINE/RUSSIA

13. A Russian's Retreat Foreshadows Rebel Advance

Wall Street Journal, Jan. 31, Pg. A1 | Paul Sonne

All sides had selected Debaltseve in September as the headquarters for a "joint center for coordination and control," comprising Ukrainian and Russian officers and representatives from the two self-declared rebel republics. All were assigned to implement and monitor the cease-fire. But the small city -- a strategic railway hub for the region -- has turned into the hottest battlefield in the conflict, the focal point of a surge in violence this past week that has rendered the nominal cease-fire more lifeless than ever.

14. Lining Up to Receive Aid in Ukraine, Crowd Is Devastated by a Mortar Attack

New York Times, Jan. 31, Pg. A6 | Rick Lyman

Seven people were killed and at least three wounded in a pair of mortar attacks on the city's west side Friday, including one that hit a crowd of people waiting in line to receive humanitarian aid as fighting raged outside of town.

EUROPE

15. NATO to Bolster Presence Along Its Eastern Flank

Wall Street Journal, Jan. 31, Pg. A7 | Naftali Bendavid

NATO will establish command centers in six of its eastern countries in coming months, Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said, part of a beefed-up response to Russian aggressiveness.

16. Army sends tweet brigade into battle

The Guardian (UK), Jan. 31, Pg. 4 | Ewen MacAskill

The army is creating a special force of Facebook warriors, skilled in psychological operations and use of social media to engage in unconventional warfare in the information age.

AFRICA

17. African Nations Show Progress in Uniting to Beat Back Militants in Nigeria

New York Times, Jan. 31, Pg. A4 | Somini Sengupta and Adam Nossiter

African leaders are stepping up their response to Boko Haram, with Chadian soldiers chasing the militants from a northern Nigerian town and the African Union calling for a 7,500-member regional force to tackle what it called "a serious threat" to the continent.

ASIA/PACIFIC

18. As Muslim Uighurs Flee, China Sees Jihad Risk

Wall Street Journal, Jan. 31, Pg. A1 | Jeremy Page and Emre Peker

Mehmet is among hundreds, possibly thousands, of Uighurs who have fled China in recent years, often heading for Turkey via Thailand and Malaysia, say Uighur migrants, activists and government officials from countries along that route. Their flight is presenting China with many of the same fears that have plagued Western nations as they try to prevent their Muslim nationals from being radicalized or trained to fight overseas.

19. India tests long-range missile from mobile launcher

Agence France-Presse, Jan. 31 | Not Attributed

India on Saturday succeeded for the first time in using a mobile launcher to test-fire a long-range missile capable of delivering a nuclear warhead deep inside rival China.

WHITE HOUSE

20. New White House Hostage Rescue Strategy MIA

TheDailyBeast.com, Jan. 30 | Shane Harris and Nancy A. Youssef

Five months after the White House began a top-to-bottom review of its policy for rescuing hostages overseas, the congressman who spurred it and some of the families of hostages who were promised a voice in the process say they're being left in the dark.

21. White House grapples with fraught terrorism language

Associated Press, Jan. 31 | Julie Pace

Twice this month, the White House has publicly grappled with the politically fraught language of terrorism. In the days after a deadly terror spree in Paris, President Barack Obama was criticized for purposely avoiding calling the attacks an example of "Islamic extremism," settling for the more generic "violent extremism."

This week, the White House struggled to explain why the administration sometimes classifies the Afghan Taliban as a terrorist organization — and sometimes does not.

DEFENSE DEPARTMENT

22. Pentagon to use war budget to ease pain of defense cuts – analysts

Reuters, Jan. 30 | David Alexander

The 2016 U.S. defense budget being released on Monday will continue a recent trend of shifting funds from the Pentagon base budget to its supplemental war-funding request, fueling criticism of the account's use to offset spending caps, defense analysts say.

AIR FORCE

23. Sources: U-2 in USAF Budget Request, A-10 At Risk

DefenseNews.com, Jan. 30 | Aaron Mehta

The US Air Force will include both the U-2 spy plane and Global Hawk unmanned system in their FY16 budget request, but will once again ask to retire the A-10 Warthog, sources tell Defense News.

24. Air Force Ups Its Game On F-35, Names 2-Star To Coordinate

BreakingDefense.com, Jan. 30 | Colin Clark

In a clear sign of the growing importance of the F-35 to the Air Force as the aircraft nears IOC, the service is boosting the profile and office of the person working with the Joint Strike Fighter's Joint Program Office from a colonel to a two-star general.

ARMY

25. March of 'punk kid from Chicago'

Chicago Tribune, Jan. 30, Pg. A1 | Katherine Skiba

As Army Maj. Gen. Ronald F. Lewis was receiving his second star this month, he joked that he'd come a long way for a "punk kid from Chicago." But his parents said their son was anything but trouble.

SEXUAL ASSAULT

26. Lackland trainer is handed 20-year sentence

San Antonio Express-News, Jan. 31, Pg. A1 | Sig Christenson

A former Air Force basic training instructor was sentenced to 20 years in prison Friday in the rapes of two women — his wife and a recruit he trained two decades ago at Joint Base San Antonio-Lack-land.

VETERANS

27. Bill Seeks to Curb Veterans' Suicides

Wall Street Journal, Jan. 31, Pg. A4 | Ben Kesling

Sgt. Clay Hunt sought for more than a year to boost his disability coverage at the Department of Veterans Affairs as he pursued treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder after returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. The marine lost several close friends in combat and was wounded by a sniper. After coming home to the U.S., eventually settling in Houston, he showed symptoms of depression and other mental-health troubles.

Congress is expected to pass legislation in the coming days named for Sgt. Hunt that is aimed at preventing veterans' suicides.

NOTABLE COMMENTARY

28. Healthy reforms

Washington Post, Jan. 31, Pg. A14 | Editorial

The Pentagon budget is \$496 billion, which sounds like a lot of money, and it is - until you take account of the fact that an increasing share goes not for weapons, training and readiness but for health care and pension benefits of former service members. No one would dispute the need, or indeed the moral duty, to compensate adequately those who served their country. At the same time, this nation can't afford resource commitments that crowd out security needs.

29. America's Strategy Deficit

Wall Street Journal (Declarations), Jan. 31, Pg. A13 | Peggy Noonan

Something is going on here. On Tuesday retired Gen. James Mattis, former head of U.S. Central Command (2010-13) told the Senate Armed Services Committee of his unhappiness at the current conduct of U.S. foreign policy. He said the U.S. is not "adapting to changed circumstances" in the Mideast and must "come out now from our reactive crouch." Washington needs a "refreshed national strategy"; the White House needs to stop being consumed by specific, daily occurrences that leave it "reacting" to events as if they were isolated and unconnected. He suggested deep bumbling: "Notifying the enemy in advance of our withdrawal dates" and declaring "certain capabilities" off the table is no way to operate.

30. Why locking up leakers makes sense

The Economist Online (UK), Jan. 29 | David Rennie

James Risen was prepared to go to jail to protect his source. In 2006 the New York Times reporter (pictured) published a book that revealed a covert American plot, in which a former Russian scientist fed flawed nuclear component designs to Iran. It claimed the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) had bungled the operation. The Justice Department promptly began investigating who had leaked the classified information, and identified Jeffrey Sterling, a former CIA employee who was suing the agency for racial discrimination, as the likely culprit. It duly subpoenaed Mr Risen, the only witness to this illegal disclosure. But he refused to name his contact, to whom he had promised anonymity.

TOP STORIES

1. Islamic State Attacks Set Back Iraqi Kurds

Militants Strike Kurdish Forces on Several Fronts, Including in Kirkuk, Following the Extremists' Loss in Kobani, Syria

Wall Street Journal, Jan. 31, Pg. A5 | Nour Malas

Islamic State militants launched their biggest offensive yet outside Kurdish-controlled Kirkuk and tried to penetrate the city itself, part of a spate of brazen attacks by the extremist group against Kurdish forces across Iraq on Friday.

A senior Kurdish commander, Brig. Gen. Sherko Fatih, was among at least six Kurdish forces killed in the surprise attack just after midnight outside the northern Iraqi city, officials said.

As fighting raged outside the city, fighters from Islamic State, also known as ISIS, tried to break into the Kirkuk Palace Hotel after detonating a car bomb in front of the hotel, a rare incursion into the city center, officials said.

Kirkuk Gov. Najmaldin Karim said Kurdish forces and local police halted the hotel break-in, killing three militants. The Kurdish forces, known as Peshmerga, "foiled today a break-in operation by ISIS toward oil and gas installations from three directions that aimed at reaching the center of Kirkuk," he said.

After hours of fighting, Peshmerga officials also said they pushed the militants back from the areas where they had advanced southwest of Kirkuk, focusing particularly on cutting their access to roads leading to oil infrastructure.

Still, the strings of attacks on Friday are a fresh setback for Kurdish forces' front against Islamic State in Iraq. The militants have engaged the Peshmerga and other Kurdish forces around Erbil, the capital of Iraq's semiautonomous Kurdistan region, and areas farther south nearer to Baghdad. But attacks around Kirkuk, the oil-rich city under Kurdish control, are rare.

Also Friday, Islamic State suicide bombers targeted Peshmerga forces in Jalawla, a Kurdish-controlled town in Diyala province, killing seven Peshmerga fighters. Bomb attacks struck Baghdad and, north of it, the city of Samarra. In western Anbar province, an Islamic State stronghold, militants launched fresh attacks on security forces holed out in Fallujah, security officials said.

Officials in Baghdad and Erbil characterized the attacks across the country as signs Islamic State was lashing out, after losing some momentum and ground in Iraq in recent weeks.

Iraqi Parliament speaker Salim al-Jabouri said the Islamic State offensive on Friday came as "cover for the repeated defeats suffered by ISIS." Mr. Jabouri called the Kirkuk attacks "a desperate attempt to undermine stability and social peace witnessed by Kirkuk."

U.S. officials say the U.S.-led bombing campaign against Islamic State has recently begun to wear on the leadership and operational structure of the militant group, which seized chunks of Iraq and Syria last year.

In Syria, Kurdish fighters backed by Syrian rebels and months of coalition airstrikes took back the Kurdish city center of Kobani on the Turkish border, in a symbolic victory for both the Kurds and the international coalition against Islamic State.

In Iraq, security forces and Shiite militias battling the Sunni extremist group have made progress in some provinces, but Islamic State controls much of Anbar province in the West and has kept control of Mosul, Iraq's second-largest city.

In the north, the militants are still lodged in villages some 18 miles on the outskirts of Erbil. Islamic State attacked the area southwest of Kirkuk, the same area under attack on Friday, about two months ago but with less force, local officials said. In recent weeks, the group had gathered suicide bombers and foreign fighters in the same area, in apparent preparation for the new attack, the officials said.

Early Friday, under the cover of dark and a particularly foggy night, Islamic State launched the Kirkuk attack from three areas south and west of the city, local officials said: Tal al-Ward, al-Khalid, and Maryam Beik. Airstrikes by the international coalition to fight Islamic State militants began to hit their vehicles in the area shortly after, the officials said.

Peshmerga sent in reinforcements and were joined by special counterterrorism forces from the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan -- an Iran-allied Kurdish force -- in southern Kirkuk for counterattacks, said Wista Rasool, operations commander in southern Kirkuk province.

By Friday afternoon, the Kurdish forces resealed key villages and roads leading to oil infrastructure in the city, Mr. Rasool said. Another local security official said the Islamic State commander leading Friday's offensive was killed in the counterattack.

Dozens of residents across Kirkuk fired guns into the air to celebrate the apparent success of the counterattack by Kurdish forces, witnesses said.

--Ghassan Adnan in Baghdad contributed to this article

[RETURN TO TOP](#)

2. CNN 01/30/2015 18:09:30 (SecDef Hagel/Sgt. Bergdahl and ISIL) PART 1, PART 2

Situation Room, Jan. 30 | Barbara Starr and Wolf Blitzer

BLITZER: We've got breaking news. I want to get straight to Barbara Starr, our Pentagon correspondent. She finished an exclusive interview with the outgoing defense secretary Chuck Hagel. Barbara, he was very candid with you about your reporting on the swap of the prisoners, the five Taliban prisoners for Bowe Bergdahl, the U.S. Army sergeant. The pressure he has been under. Tell us what he told you.

STARR: Wolf, the secretary is just a few days away from leaving office. Tonight he gave us this interview and surprised us with his candor. We started by talking about that swap five for one for Bowe Bergdahl and the program that he is in charge of to release prisoners, detainees from Guantanamo Bay. He had an awful lot to say.

BEGIN CLIP

STARR: The five for one still the right decision in your mind?

HAGEL: Absolutely it was the right decision. It was the right decision, Barbara, because we don't leave our troops behind. That has been the culture of the American military since George Washington. We don't do that. In this case it was clear that Bergdahl was a prisoner of war. The circumstances surrounding that we have investigated. That investigation is over. I am absolutely as committed to that decision today as when the decision was made. It was the right decision. Are you concerned when you release any detainee from Guantanamo? Of course. Because there is no 100% guarantee of anything. And I think I've got a pretty clear record on this. In fact, not everyone at the White House agreed with how I handled some of this. I have made it clear I will not certify, sign anything to release a detainee as long as I'm secretary of defense unless I am convinced it's in the best interest of the country and the substantial mitigation of risk can be verified as closely as we can verify.

STARR: You just brought up -- you said it, not everyone at White House agrees with you. Tell us what you mean.

HAGEL: Well, I think the press has been pretty clear on that.

STARR: Let's hear it in your own words.

HAGEL: What I have said is what I just said. Not everyone at the White House has agreed with me.

STARR: On what part of this?

HAGEL: Probably on the pace of releases.

STARR: Because you have been cautious?

HAGEL: Because I have the responsibility and I play my own game here. And that is because by law I am the one - the one official in government charged with certification of release of detainees. I take that responsibility very seriously.

STARR: Have you had pressure?

HAGEL: We have had a lot of conversations.

STARR: With the White House?

HAGEL: Yes. And congress. And the press.

STARR: You don't seem too fussed by the notion that maybe there has been pressure from the White House. You're not fussed by that.

HAGEL: Barbara, I have been in this town a long time. There is pressure all the time in every job that come from a lot of different directions. If you are not prepared to deal with pressure every day in the job you are in coming from a lot of different directions, then you shouldn't be in the job.

END CLIP

STARR: Look, I have to tell you, we have covered Secretary Hagel since the day he took office. He has never publically been this candid about that pressure from the White House. What is the pressure? We know that he is confirming that the White House wanted him to move faster on approving the release of detainees from Guantanamo Bay and the White House wanted him to approve more of them. Chuck Hagel says, "Look, I'm responsible for national security on this. I'm not going to sign any of the transfers unless I'm convinced it's right thing to do." On the Bergdahl one he is convinced. He says he still thinks the problem with the one detainee can be handled. But truly, Wolf, an extraordinary admission from the secretary in his last few days in office that, yes, he was pressured by the White House.

BLITZER: He certainly very, very blunt by the outgoing defense secretary. Barbara, we will certainly revise all of those suggestions at the time of his announcement of his resignation that he wasn't very happy with what was going on, the pressure he was getting from the White House, right?

STARR: I think that this now is a big hint, perhaps even just straight up an acknowledgement by Chuck Hagel in his final days that he will say what he thinks. He has been under huge pressure since all of the kerfuffle, was he fired, was he pushed out, did he resign? It's clear there were differences with the White House. He was a real gentleman about it trying not to say too much. But we know in the last few days in office, we now know his view is he can be more candid, can he say what he thinks, he can offer his views, his opinions and really nobody can do anything to him now. He is leaving.

BLITZER: He certainly is. I want you to stand by, Barbara. We want to run more of this interview you had. He is very blunt, the outgoing defense secretary.

PART 2

BLITZER: We're back with Ed Royce. Congressman, we are getting more of Barbara Starr's exclusive interview with the outgoing defense secretary Chuck Hagel. I want to go back to Barbara at the Pentagon right now. Barbara, you had a chance to sit down exclusively with the defense secretary. What else did he tell you?

STARR: Wolf, a couple of minutes ago we were talking about his candor as he is in his last few days in office. Also, that candor extended to the current coalition campaign to fight ISIS in Iraq and Syria. One of the big issues on the table is would there be a recommendation to President Obama that a small number of U.S. ground forces might have to go into Iraq, not the advisers and trainers that we have now, but actual ground forces to go help the Iraqi forces as they make their advances. These people would help collect intelligence, point out targets, go right to the front lines. The secretary was unusually candid, let me say. He had a few caveats, but he also had a bottom line.

BEGIN CLIP

HAGEL: He said it to his combatant commanders, specifically General Dempsey and General Austin, if you believe, if you want to recommend, you think you should recommend to me to the president that we should look at other options, then I want you to bring those recommendations to me. That, so far, has not happened. Whether that would happen in the future, again, the president has said to his commanders, if you think this is what's going to be required, I need to know it. You need to make the recommendation. I will listen.

STARR: What do you think?

HAGEL: Well, I think just as the president has said and it is the advice have I given the president, it is what General Dempsey has, is that we have to look at all the options. I think it may require a forward deployment of some of our troops, not doing fighting, not doing the combat work that we did at one time for six years in Iraq and we did for many, many years in Afghanistan. But to help air strike --

STARR: Locate targets, intelligence?

HAGEL: Those are things we continue to support. I would say that we're not there yet. Whether we get there or not, I don't know. Whether that's something that our military commanders would recommend into the future, I don't know. But I think just as the president has made clear, I need to know your honest opinion. He has been very forthright about that. What you think, if that's something that you think --

STARR: You are saying -- you are saying you think it could be necessary.

HAGEL: It could be. But I'm not willing to say that it will be necessary. I say it could be necessary.

END CLIP

STARR: He is saying, I think it may require forward deployed U.S. troops. He is caveating that. But what we are seeing for the first time is an insight into his direct advice to President Obama. Let's keep in mind where we are on this- now we know Defense Secretary Hagel, outgoing but still, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs General Dempsey, the head of the U.S. Central Command General Lloyd Austin all have talked about this, that this could be on the table for president Obama to decide. Wolf?

BLITZER: Excellent work Barbara. I'm glad you followed up and you pressed him for answers. That's what you are supposed to do and did you it well. Thanks very much.

[RETURN TO TOP](#)

3. CIA and Mossad killed senior Hezbollah figure in car bombing

Washington Post Online, Jan. 31 | Adam Goldman and Ellen Nakashima

On Feb. 12, 2008, Imad Mughniyah, Hezbollah's international operations chief, walked on a quiet nighttime street in Damascus after dinner at a nearby restaurant. Not far away, a team of CIA spotters in the Syrian capital was tracking his movements.

As Mughniyah approached a parked SUV, a bomb planted in a spare tire on the back of the vehicle exploded, sending a burst of shrapnel across a tight radius. He was killed instantly.

The device was triggered remotely from Tel Aviv by agents with Mossad, the Israeli foreign intelligence service, who were in communication with the operatives on the ground in Damascus. "The way it was set up, the U.S. could object and call it off, but it could not execute," said a former U.S. intelligence official.

The United States helped build the bomb, the former official said, and tested it repeatedly at a CIA facility in North Carolina to ensure the potential blast area was contained and would not result in collateral damage.

"We probably blew up 25 bombs to make sure we got it right," the former official said.

The extraordinarily close cooperation between the U.S. and Israeli intelligence services suggested the importance of the target — a man who over the years had been implicated in some of Hezbollah's most spectacular terrorist attacks, including those against the U.S. Embassy in Beirut and the Israeli Embassy in Argentina.

The United States has never acknowledged participation in the killing of Mughniyah, which Hezbollah blamed on Israel. Until now, there has been little detail about the joint operation by the CIA and Mossad to kill him, how the car bombing was planned or the exact U.S. role. With the exception of the 2011 killing of Osama bin Laden, the mission marked one of the most high-risk covert actions by the United States in recent years.

U.S. involvement in the killing, which was confirmed by five former U.S. intelligence officials, also pushed American legal boundaries.

Mughniyah was targeted in a country where the United States was not at war. Moreover, he was killed in a car bombing, a technique that some legal scholars see as a violation of international laws that proscribe “killing by perfidy” — using treacherous means to kill or wound an enemy.

“It is a killing method used by terrorists and gangsters,” said Mary Ellen O’Connell, a professor of international law at the University of Notre Dame. “It violates one of the oldest battlefield rules.”

Former U.S. officials, all of whom spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the operation, asserted that Mughniyah, although based in Syria, was directly connected to the arming and training of Shiite militias in Iraq that were targeting U.S. forces. There was little debate inside the Bush administration over the use of a car bomb instead of other means.

“Remember, they were carrying out suicide bombings and IED attacks,” said one official, referring to Hezbollah operations in Iraq.

The authority to kill Mughniyah required a presidential finding by President George W. Bush. The attorney general, the director of national intelligence, the national security adviser and the Office of Legal Counsel at the Justice Department all signed off on the operation, one former intelligence official said.

The former official said getting the authority to kill Mughniyah was a “rigorous and tedious” process. “What we had to show was he was a continuing threat to Americans,” the official said, noting that Mughniyah had a long history of targeting Americans dating back to his role in planning the 1983 bombing of the U.S. Embassy in Beirut.

“The decision was we had to have absolute confirmation that it was self-defense,” the official said.

There has long been suspicion about U.S. involvement in the killing of Mughniyah. In “The Good Spy,” a book about longtime CIA officer Robert Ames, author Kai Bird cites one former intelligence official as saying the operation was “primarily controlled by Langley” and it was “a CIA ‘black-ops’ team that carried out the assassination.”

In a new book, “The Perfect Kill: 21 Laws for Assassins,” former CIA officer Robert B. Baer writes how he had considered assassinating Mughniyah but apparently never got the opportunity. He notes, however, that CIA “censors” — the agency’s Publications Review Board — screened his book and “I’ve unfortunately been unable to write about the true set-piece plot against” Mughniyah.

The CIA declined to comment.

“We have nothing to add at this time,” said Mark Regev, chief spokesman for the prime minister of Israel.

A theory of self-defense

The operation in Damascus highlighted a philosophical evolution within the American intelligence services that followed the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks. Before then, the U.S. government often took a dim view of Israeli assassination operations, highlighted by the American condemnation of Israel’s botched attempt in 1997 to poison

the leader of Hamas, Khaled Meshal, in Amman, Jordan. The episode ended with Mossad agents captured and the Clinton administration forcing Israel to provide the antidote that saved Meshal's life.

The Mughniyah killing, carried out more than a decade later, suggested such American hesi-ta-tion had faded as the CIA stretched its lethal reach well beyond defined war zones and the ungoverned spaces of Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia, where the agency or the military have deployed drones against al-Qaeda and its allies.

A former U.S. official said the Bush administration relied on a theory of national self-defense to kill Mughniyah, claiming he was a lawful target because he was actively plotting against the United States or its forces in Iraq, making him a continued and imminent threat who could not be captured. Such a legal rationale would have allowed the CIA to avoid violating the 1981 blanket ban on assassinations in Executive Order 12333. The order does not define assassination.

In sanctioning a 2011 operation to kill Anwar al-Awlaki, a U.S. citizen and an influential propaganda leader for al-Qaeda's affiliate in Yemen, the Justice Department made a similar argument. Noting that al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula had targeted U.S. commercial aircraft and asserting that Awlaki had an operational role in the group, government lawyers said he was a continued and imminent threat and could not feasibly be captured.

"It's fairly clear that the government has at least some authority to use lethal force in self-defense even outside the context of ongoing armed conflict," said Stephen I. Vladeck, a professor of law at American University's Washington College of Law. "The million-dollar question is whether the facts actually support a determination that such force was necessary and appropriate in each case."

The CIA and Mossad worked together to monitor Mughniyah in Damascus for months prior to the killing and to determine where the bomb should be planted, according to the former officials.

In the leadup to the operation, U.S. intelligence officials had assured lawmakers in a classified briefing that there would be no collateral damage, former officials said.

Implicated in multiple cases

At the time of his death, Mughniyah had been implicated in the killing of hundreds of Americans, stretching back to the embassy bombing in Beirut that killed 63 people, including eight CIA officers. Hezbollah, supported by Iran, was involved in a long-running shadow war with Israel and its principal backer, the United States.

The embassy bombing placed Hezbollah squarely in the sights of the CIA, a focus that, in some respects, foreshadowed the targeting of Mughniyah. In his 1987 book "Veil," Washington Post journalist Bob Woodward reported that CIA Director William Casey encouraged the Saudis to sponsor an attempt to kill a Hezbollah leader. The 1985 attempt on the life of Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah with a car bomb failed, but killed 80 people, and he fled to Iran. Mughniyah's brother was among those killed.

Former agency officials said Mughniyah was involved in the 1984 kidnapping and torture of the CIA's station chief in Lebanon, William F. Buckley. The officials said Mughniyah arranged for videotapes of the brutal interrogation sessions of Buckley to be sent to the agency. Buckley was later killed.

Mughniyah was indicted in U.S. federal court in the 1985 hijacking of TWA Flight 847 shortly after it took off from Athens and the slaying of U.S. Navy diver Robert Stethem, a passenger on the plane. Mughniyah was placed on the FBI's Most Wanted Terrorists list with a \$5 million reward offered for information leading to his arrest and conviction.

He was also suspected of involvement by U.S. intelligence and law enforcement officials in the planning of the 1996 Khobar Towers bombing in Saudi Arabia that killed 19 U.S. servicemen.

For the Israelis, among numerous attacks, he was involved in the 1992 suicide bombing of the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires that killed four Israeli civilians and 25 Argentinians, and the 1994 attack on a Jewish community center in the city that killed 85 people.

"Mughniyah and his group were responsible for the deaths of many Americans," said James Bernazzani, who was chief of the FBI's Hezbollah unit in the late 1990s and later the deputy director for law enforcement at the CIA's Counterterrorism Center.

The Bush administration regarded Hezbollah — Mughniyah, in particular — as a threat to the United States. In 2008, several months after he was killed, Michael Chertoff, then secretary of homeland security, said Hezbollah was a threat to national security. "To be honest, they make al-Qaeda look like a minor league team," he said.

Beginning in 2003, Hezbollah, with the assistance of Iran, began to train and arm Shiite militant groups in Iraq, which later began attacking coalition forces, according to Matthew Levitt, who recently wrote a book about Hezbollah and is director of the Washington Institute's Stein Program on Counterterrorism and Intelligence.

The Hezbollah-trained militias proved to be a deadly enemy, wounding or killing hundreds of American troops. As the situation in Iraq deteriorated and coalition casualties spiked in 2006, the United States decided it had to stanch the losses.

The Bush administration issued orders to kill or capture Iranian operatives targeting American troops and attempting to destabilize Iraq. It also approved a list of operations directed at Hezbollah, officials said. The mandate applied directly to the group's notorious international operations chief.

"There was an open license to find, fix and finish Mughniyah and anybody affiliated with him," said a former U.S. official who served in Baghdad.

In January 2007, Bush, in an address to the nation, singled out Iran and Syria, two countries with the closest ties to Hezbollah.

"These two regimes are allowing terrorists and insurgents to use their territory to move in and out of Iraq," Bush said. "Iran is providing material support for attacks on American troops. We will disrupt the attacks on our forces. We will interrupt the flow of support from Iran and Syria. And we will seek out and destroy the networks providing advanced weaponry and training to our enemies in Iraq."

Shortly after Bush's speech, Hezbollah's involvement in Iraq became clearer. On Jan. 20, 2007, five American soldiers were killed in Karbala. That March, Ali Mussa Daqduq, a senior Hezbollah operative with ties to Mughniyah, was captured by the British along with two others and turned over to U.S. forces.

While in U.S. custody, Daqduq confessed to playing a key role in the killing of the soldiers and provided the United States with a deeper understanding of Hezbollah's networks, said Peter Mansoor, a retired Army colonel who served as executive officer to Gen. David H. Petraeus, the top American commander in Iraq.

"In interrogations with these folks, we finally discovered the full nature of Iranian and Hezbollah involvement in Iraq," Mansoor said, noting that by then Iran had "outsourced the advisory effort to Hezbollah." Mansoor said he had no knowledge of the operation that killed Mughniyah.

U.S. officials said Mughniyah played a pivotal role in linking Hezbollah to the Shiite militias that were working with Iran. It remains unclear if he ever entered Iraq. One former U.S. senior military official said there was information he traveled to Basra in southern Iraq in 2006, but it was not confirmed.

Ryan C. Crocker, the U.S. ambassador in Iraq when Mughniyah was killed, said: "All I can say is that as long as he drew breath, he was a threat, whether in Lebanon, Iraq or anywhere else. He was a very intelligent, dedicated, effective operator on the black side."

Crocker said that he didn't know anything about the operation to kill the Hezbollah operative and had doubts about Mughniyah traveling to Iraq. That said, he added: "When I heard about it, I was one damn happy man."

Terrorism discussion widens

U.S. officials had explored ways to capture or kill Mughniyah for years. Those scenarios gained new urgency in the years after the Sept. 11 attacks when the Bush administration turned to the CIA and the U.S. military's elite Joint Special Operations Command for stepped-up plans to stop major terrorist operatives — including those without ties to al-Qaeda or the 9/11 plot.

A former U.S. official described a secret meeting in Israel in 2002 involving senior JSOC officers and the chief of the Israeli military intelligence service. Amid a broader discussion of counterterrorism issues, the JSOC visitors raised the prospect of killing Mughniyah in such an offhanded fashion that their Israeli hosts were stunned.

"When we said we would be willing to explore opportunities to target him, they practically fell out of their chairs," the former U.S. official said. The former official said that JSOC had not developed any specific plan but was exploring scenarios against potential terrorism targets and wanted to gauge Israel's willingness to serve as an evacuation point for U.S. commando teams.

The former official said that the JSOC approach envisioned a commando-style raid with U.S. Special Operations teams directly involved, not the sort of cloak-and-dagger operation that occurred years later.

"It never went anywhere," said the former official, who was unaware of the CIA-Israeli operation to kill Mughniyah.

Still, the 2002 encounter suggests that Mughniyah continued to be a focus for U.S. counterterrorism officials even after their overwhelming attention had shifted to al-Qaeda.

“We never took our eye off Hezbollah, but our plate was full with al-Qaeda,” said Bernazzani, who retired from the FBI in 2008 and said he had no knowledge of the operation to kill Mughniyah.

A window of opportunity

It is not clear when the CIA first realized Mughniyah was living in Damascus, but his whereabouts were known for at least a year before he was killed. One of the former U.S. intelligence officials said that the Israelis were first to approach the CIA about a joint operation to kill him in Damascus.

The agency had a well-established clandestine infrastructure in Damascus that the Israelis could utilize.

Officials said the Israelis wanted to pull the trigger as payback. “It was revenge,” another former official said. The Americans didn’t care as long as Mughniyah was dead, the official said, and there was little fear of blowback because Hezbollah would most probably blame the Israelis.

Amos Yadlin, the former head of Israeli military intelligence until 2010, said Mughniyah was positioned right under the group’s leader Hassan Nasrallah.

“He was the commander and chief of all military and terror operations,” Yadlin said, who declined to discuss Mughniyah’s demise. “He was the agent of the Iranians.”

The operation to target Mughniyah came at a time when the CIA and Mossad were working closely to thwart the nuclear ambitions of Syria and Iran. The CIA had helped the Mossad verify that the Syrians were building a nuclear reactor, leading to an Israeli airstrike on the facility in 2007. Israel and the United States were actively trying to sabotage the Iranian nuclear program.

Once Mughniyah was located in Damascus, the intelligence agencies began building a “pattern of life” profile, looking at his routine for vulnerabilities.

Mossad officials suggested occasional walks in the evening — when Mughniyah was unescorted — presented an opportunity. CIA officers with extensive undercover experience secured a safe house in a building near his apartment.

Planning for the operation was exhaustive. An Israeli proposal to place a bomb in the saddlebags of a bicycle or motorcycle was rejected because of concerns that the explosive charge might not project outward properly. The bomb had to be repeatedly tested and reconfigured to minimize the blast area. The location where Mughniyah was killed was close to a girls’ school.

One official said the bomb was tested many times at Harvey Point, a facility in North Carolina where the CIA would later construct a replica of Osama bin Laden’s compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan. Officials eventually concluded they had a bomb that could be used with no risk of others being killed or injured.

Mughniyah wasn’t alone in his confidence to operate freely in Damascus. During the operation, the CIA and Mossad had a chance to kill Qassem Soleimani, commander of Iran’s Quds Force, as he and Mughniyah walked together. Soleimani was an archenemy of Israel and had also orchestrated the training of Shiite militias in Iraq.

“At one point, the two men were standing there, same place, same street. All they had to do was push the button,” said one former official.

But the operatives didn’t have the legal authority to kill Soleimani, the officials said. There had been no presidential finding to do so.

When the bomb used to target Mughniyah was detonated, officials estimated the “kill zone” extended approximately 20 feet. The bomb was “very shaped and very charged,” an intelligence official recalled.

There was no collateral damage. “None. Not any,” the official said.

Facial recognition technology, another former official said, was used to confirm Mughniyah’s identity after he walked out of a restaurant in his neighborhood and moments before the bomb was detonated.

After the attack, Hezbollah leader Nasrallah blamed Israel for the killing and swore revenge: “Zionists, if you want an open war, let it be an open war anywhere.”

In fact, the damage to Hezbollah may have been compounded by the fact that the man charged with exacting revenge on Israel was a suspected Israeli asset. He was recently reported to be on trial in a Hezbollah court in Lebanon, but the group’s leader has downplayed the spy’s importance.

In a statement in 2008 after Mughniyah’s death, the office of then Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert’s office said: “Israel rejects the attempt by terror groups to attribute to it any involvement in this incident. We have nothing further to add.”

State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said at the time: “The world is a better place without this man in it. He was a coldblooded killer, a mass murderer and a terrorist responsible for countless innocent lives lost.”

Inside the intelligence community, a former official recalled, “It wasn’t jubilation.”

“We did what we had to,” the official said, “and let’s move on.”

--William Booth in Jerusalem and Greg Miller, Karen DeYoung, Anne Gearan and Julie Tate in Washington contributed to this report

[RETURN TO TOP](#)

IRAQ/SYRIA

4. Air strike kills IS 'chemical weapons expert' -- US

Agence France-Presse, Jan. 30 | Dan De Luce

A US-led coalition air strike killed a chemical weapons specialist with the Islamic State group in Iraq who once worked for Saddam Hussein, US military officers said Friday.

The air raid carried out last Saturday near Mosul took out Abu Malik, whose training "provided the terrorist group with expertise to pursue a chemical weapons capability," the military said in a statement.

Malik had worked at a chemical weapons production plant under Saddam's regime and later forged an affiliation with Al-Qaeda in Iraq in 2005, before joining the extremist IS group, according to Central Command.

"His death is expected to temporarily degrade and disrupt the terrorist network and diminish ISIL's ability to potentially produce and use chemical weapons against innocent people," it said.

US officials had not publicly referred to Malik previously as a key figure.

There has been no sign that the IS group possesses a major chemical weapons arsenal. But there have been allegations the jihadists have employed chlorine gas, which is classified as a "choking agent," though not as lethal as nerve agents.

Abu Malik, also known as Salih Jasim Mohammed Falah al-Sabawi, had been "involved in operations to produce chemical weapons in 2005, and planned attacks in Mosul with AQI (Al-Qaeda in Iraq)," said a defense official.

"Based on his training and experience, he was judged to be capable of creating harmful and deadly chemical agents," said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

"We know ISIL is attempting to pursue a chemical weapons capability, but we have no definitive confirmation that ISIL currently possess chemical weapons," the official said.

The US-led coalition has carried out more than 2,000 air raids against the IS group in Syria and Iraq since August 8, including some bombing runs that targeted senior militants.

[RETURN TO TOP](#)

5. Iraqi tribal leader, in Washington visit, sought help for his fighters

McClatchy, Jan. 30 | Hannah Allam and Mohammed al Dulaimy

WASHINGTON — Right after Sheikh Ahmed Abu Risha arrived in Washington, the Islamic State attacked his compound in Iraq's western Anbar province in a not-so-subtle message as he requested U.S. weapons for his tribesmen fighting the extremist group.

This week, as Abu Risha prepared to return to Iraq, he was briefed on more troubling news: the alleged massacre of more than 70 unarmed Sunni Muslim men at the hands of Shiite Muslim militiamen in the volatile eastern province of Diyala.

The violence that bookended Abu Risha's trip shows the grave challenges he faces as he tries to rebuild a program that U.S. officials have long credited with defeating the insurgents in the days of al Qaida in Iraq, the precursor to the Islamic State.

Many U.S. and Iraqi officials say that a Sunni fighting force, preferably in a National Guard-style role, is the missing element in the anti-Islamic State coalition. Yet plans to build one are tangled up in sectarian politics in Baghdad and hesitation from Washington about arming any group in Iraq after the American-trained military collapsed over the summer and the Islamic State ended up with millions of dollars' worth of U.S.-supplied weapons.

Abu Risha was in Washington to warn that the U.S.-led operation will never succeed without well-equipped Sunni partners leading the ground push against the Islamic State, which is sometimes referred to as ISIS. Seven months of U.S. airstrikes haven't loosened the extremists' grip on much of western and northern Iraq. And unless the recently formed government of Prime Minister Haider al Abadi reins in the powerful Shiite militias, Abu Risha said, Sunni recruits will become even harder to muster.

"We are optimistic about seeing good out of this government," he said of Abadi's administration. "No one can defeat ISIS without Sunnis. This is what the whole international community has said."

Abu Risha was a central figure in the Awakening movement, which created an effective anti-jihadist Sunni force during the U.S.-led occupation but petered out after the U.S. military handed it over to the Shiite-led Iraqi government. His brother, Abdul Sattar Abu Risha, founded the Awakening movement and was killed by an al Qaeda in Iraq attack in 2007.

Reviving the program is a hard sell in today's Iraq, with scarcer U.S. paymasters, Iranian-backed militias carrying out state security functions and more than a third of the country claimed as part of the Islamic State's caliphate.

From any vantage point, the pitch to would-be Sunni recruits isn't exactly appealing: either succumb to a merciless band of head-chopping jihadists, or fight them in tandem with the same Iranian-backed militias that used power drills to kill Sunni captives only a few years ago.

Shiites, meanwhile, worry that any guns they give to Sunni tribesmen to fight the Islamic State will one day be trained on them; extremist infiltrators have killed countless Iraqi security forces and civilians in the past decade. Plans for a new guard force are stuck in Parliament, where there's little appetite for the risks in creating a Sunni paramilitary to add to Iraq's mosaic of armed groups.

U.S. officials, too, are keenly aware of the potential perils of arming forces from either sect; the weapons could end up with either Iranian-backed paramilitaries or Sunni insurgents, as they have numerous times in the past.

Abu Risha insists that his men – he claims he can rally 30,000 – are up for the challenge, but only if both Baghdad and Washington make a leap of faith. He said his fighters were ready to confront the Islamic State but lacked the snipers and diverse arsenals of the jihadist foot soldiers.

"If you want to duplicate the Awakening experience, but tell the men to go fight with bare chests, then we're sending them to be massacred," he said.

Abu Risha arrived in Washington in mid-January as part of a Sunni delegation that included other tribal and provincial leaders. The Iraqis met with Vice President Joe Biden at the White House and visited the home of retired Gen. John Allen, the special envoy to the coalition against the Islamic State. They also caught up with U.S. diplomatic and defense officials they'd gotten to know during the U.S. military presence in Iraq.

Hikmat Sulaiman, the delegation's spokesman and a political adviser to the governor of Anbar province, said the challenge they faced in Baghdad was evident from the moment the trip was announced.

Sulaiman said Abadi publicly supported the Sunni delegation and met with members before they left. Almost immediately afterward, however, a member of the prime minister's political party denounced the U.S. trip – a reflection of the divisions over how to incorporate Sunnis into the anti-Islamic State campaign.

The delegation got criticism from both Sunnis and Shiites, judging from Iraqi media coverage and social media postings about the Washington trip. Some Shiite politicians called it a violation of the constitution because only the Iraqi government is authorized to procure weapons for the country. Several headlines suggested the Sunnis were tattling in Washington rather than talking in Baghdad.

While there were pockets of support, many Sunnis, too, were suspicious of the visit. The Awakening program, though effective against the insurgency, lost legitimacy when it faltered after the American handover. Its leaders are often criticized as lackeys for Washington, Baghdad or both. One commenter on a Facebook thread about the visit chided: “How do we ask America for help when it is the one behind the destruction of the country? What will history say about you?”

Members of the delegation say there's little official acknowledgment of what's at stake for their fighters as compared with Shiite volunteers who truck to battle from the south. They've all paid a steep cost for their opposition to al Qaida and its latest incarnation; each can tell of assassinated relatives and mortared homes.

“No one feels safe for their families. We live here,” Sulaiman said. “People from Nasiriyah and Babil can come and fight, and feel fine about their families and go back to them. We cannot.”

He said the government must do more in response to the increasing allegations of sectarian transgressions by the Shiite militias. Abadi has announced an investigation into the reported Diyala massacre, which the Reuters news agency described in chilling detail based on witness accounts. Sunnis say many other, smaller-scale slaughters go unreported.

In some Sunni areas where the militias have retaken control from the Islamic State, Sulaiman said, the gunmen still forbid the locals from returning and reclaiming their property. The looting allegations have become so widespread that even the Shiite clergy was compelled to issue reminders that such conduct is unacceptable.

“This is not liberation for me,” Sulaiman said.

Then there are the galling photos of Qassem Suleimani, the head of the Quds Force unit of Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps, popping up on the Iraqi battlefield, mingling with the Shiite militiamen whose advances were made possible largely by U.S. air cover. Sulaiman called such images “frustrating but expected,” though he added that such a stunt in Anbar province likely would spell the end of local cooperation against ISIS.

“I told this directly to (National Security Adviser) Falih al Fayadh: If Qassem Suleimani appears in Anbar, everything will break down,” Sulaiman recalled.

Abu Risha was just as clear-eyed about the challenges, but he sounded more confident in Abadi's resolve. He said the prime minister had taken good steps so far, clearing nonexistent “ghost soldiers” from security forces' rosters and taking aim at corruption. He said U.S. officials had told him they wanted to give more assistance and had “put the ball in Abadi's court.”

Now, Abu Risha said, he's counting on the prime minister to stand up to critics and force through a plan that equips Sunni fighters in the same manner as Kurdish and Shiite militias, by giving him a letter of support for a formal request for arms that he can present to the Americans. Without Sunni partners, he said, victory against ISIS will remain elusive.

"We don't want to send our sons to a battle they're not prepared to fight," Abu Risha said.

--*Dulaimy is a McClatchy special correspondent*

[RETURN TO TOP](#)

6. Iraq's ISIS Fight Could Be a Second 'Awakening'

Newsweek (Print Edition), Feb. 6 | Jonathan Broder

Just before Christmas, Atheel al-Nujaifi, a leading Iraqi politician, quietly slipped into Washington, D.C., with an urgent request that the White House provide arms and training for his 10,000-man Sunni militia. For seven months now, the United States has been bombing Iraq and Syria, trying to beat back the so-called Islamic State (ISIS). But dislodging the world's most notorious jihadist group hasn't been easy, and Nujaifi was offering to help. The governor of Iraq's Nineveh province, he was forced to flee last summer when ISIS militants overran the country's Sunni-dominated north and west. In meetings with American officials, Nujaifi warned that unless the United States and its allies can quickly liberate the parts of Iraq under ISIS control, people there may soon learn to live with the militants. "Time," he said, "is not on our side."

Other Sunni leaders appear to be following his lead and asking the U.S. to support their militias, which they claim are willing to take up arms against the jihadist group. The White House is still weighing Nujaifi's request, but in a sign of where things may be headed, U.S. and Canadian special forces are training some 5,000 former Sunni policemen from Mosul at a camp that Nujaifi set up near Erbil, in Iraq's autonomous Kurdish region.

The scramble to join the fight recalls the vaunted *sahwa*, or "awakening" of 2005, when Sunnis joined forces with the U.S. to root out Al-Qaeda's affiliate in Iraq, the precursor to ISIS. And it comes as U.S. and coalition forces are training thousands of members of the Iraqi Army and Kurdish forces for a ground offensive this spring. Many American veterans of the first awakening say a second round isn't a bad idea. "We need allies," said James F. Jeffrey, who served as the charge d'affaires, then ambassador to Iraq during the American occupation. "If you're looking for a Sunni face to put on any kind of offensive, this is helpful." Patrick Skinner, who served as a CIA officer in Iraq, agreed. "Right now, there are a lot of bad options in Iraq," he said. "This might be one of the better ones."

A second awakening also would help advance an important U.S. goal in Iraq: Integrating Sunnis back into the Iraqi military and government. A minority group in Iraq, Sunnis have long feared that leaders in Baghdad are doing the bidding of their Shiite neighbors in Tehran. After U.S. combat troops withdrew in 2011, sectarian tensions flared as former Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki reneged on his promise to incorporate Sunni fighters into the army, cracked down on Sunni politicians and allowed Shiite militias to terrorize Sunni towns. When ISIS fighters stormed into Iraq last summer, the group exploited local anger and alienation, and convinced some Sunni former military commanders to join its ranks. With Washington now pushing for a nuclear accord with Iran, and cooperating with its longtime adversary in the war against ISIS, some Sunnis remain highly suspicious of allying with the Americans.

Since Iraqi Prime Minister Haidar al-Abadi has been in office, the U.S. has pushed a plan to form national guard brigades in Iraq's 18 provinces, largely to encourage Sunnis in the western and northern parts of the country to defend their territory. A bill to create these brigades has been bottled up in the country's Shiite-dominated parliament, so in the short-term, some experts say, a new awakening could help bring Sunnis into the fold. "What Nujaifi and the other Sunnis are effectively saying is, 'OK, if we can't go the national guard route yet because it's getting hung up in Parliament, let's do this informally and get Sunnis into the battle, fighting and feeling like they're part of the reconquest of Iraq,'" said Kenneth M. Pollack, an Iraq expert at the Brookings Institution who met with Nujaifi in Washington.

Nujaifi isn't the only influential Sunni looking to take part in this reconquest. Last month, a group of political and tribal leaders from Anbar Province in Iraq's Sunni heartland met with Vice President Joe Biden at the White House to discuss ways they could help combat ISIS. The delegation included Anbar Governor Sohaib Al-Rawi and Sheikh Abu Risha, the head of the Iraq Awakening Council.

Another prominent Sunni leader joining the fray is Mudhar Shawkat, a former member of Parliament and an old-line patrician. Now living in London, where he fled in 2012 to escape death threats from Shiite supporters of Maliki, Shawkat says his followers include Sunni luminaries such as former Lieutenant General Ra'ad al-Hamdani and former Major General Nouri al-Dulaimi, both highly respected Iraqi commanders now living in exile in Jordan. "We can put forward a really big force very, very easily," he told Newsweek. "All we need to do is get these generals to go on the radio and ask people to sign up as recruits, and there will be tens of thousands of them."

Shawkat said he plans to hold a conference in Erbil later this winter that will include hundreds of former Sunni Iraqi officers, along with the leaders of Iraq's largest and most influential Sunni tribes. Shawkat said that, during an upcoming visit to Washington, he will ask the Obama administration to send an observer to the event. Eventually, he said, he would like the U.S. to endorse his militia to win funding from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. "The American role is essential," he said. "I don't think anything can happen without the Americans."

But a second Sunni awakening is only a good idea if the U.S. can be sure the Iraqi warlords appealing for arms, money and training can muster the necessary strength to defeat their jihadist foe. In Shawkat's case, it's not clear if the former military commanders and prominent tribal figures he claims as allies are on his side. "If I were the U.S. government and I were assessing this, I would ask, does this guy really have a force?" Pollack said. "I'd say, 'You want us to arm, equip and train your men? Show me the men. Give us the names.'" Pollack said U.S. officials also need to determine if the Sunnis seeking American assistance are proxies for other regional players, like Turkey, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and even Iran. "There are a lot of different questions you want to ask before you start training these guys," he said.

Pentagon planners say 50,000 troops, backed by U.S. airpower, are needed to break ISIS's hold. They hope to do this by cutting off ISIS supply lines from Syria, besieging the militants in Mosul and other Iraqi strongholds, and then systematically picking the jihadis apart. But since the Iraqi army and Kurdish units now being trained amount to a force about half the necessary size, adding more men to the mix is critical. The 5,000 Sunni policemen now being trained outside Erbil are a good start. And given the Sunnis' eagerness to join the fight-and the White House's aversion to sending U.S. combat troops back to Iraq-there's a good chance other Sunni militias may bring the anti-ISIS force up to full strength.

Sunni leaders know that a savage battle lies ahead, and many warn that if the counteroffensive works, they won't repeat the mistake they made after the first awakening, when they stood by as Maliki ran roughshod over them. This time, these Sunni leaders say, they'll demand a quasi-autonomous region, defended by their own militia, much like the arrangement the Kurds enjoy with the federal government.

Shawkat envisions an Iraq composed of self-governing Sunni, Shiite and Kurdish regions, with Baghdad serving as the country's capital inside a federal zone. It's an idea that President Barack Obama rejects, but Biden and many Iraq experts have long championed. "There is no other solution," Shawkat insists. "There has been too much blood, too much destruction. Now we need to make the best of what we have."

Pollack agrees with the idea of breaking Iraq into three federal regions, but strongly doubts Abadi and the ruling Shiites would ever allow the Sunnis to form a semi-autonomous area. Any such move would effectively remove a third of the country from Baghdad's control, yet still require the Iraqi government to pay all its bills. Unlike the Kurdish region, the Sunni areas have no oil and therefore little means to contribute to the treasury. "It's a terrible deal," Pollack says. Yet without separation, he says, Iraq's Shiites and Sunnis could remain locked in a sectarian war.

Nujaifi, however, remains committed to the old Iraq. Though he's a prominent Sunni figure, he rejects the idea of a semi-autonomous state, saying he's confident Abadi will work to make Sunnis feel part of the country. "This isn't the time to talk about autonomy," he says. "First, we Iraqis all have to come together to defeat ISIS."

[RETURN TO TOP](#)

7. Syria battle between al Qaeda and Western-backed group spreads

Reuters, Jan. 30 | Oliver Holmes

BEIRUT - Fighting between the Syrian arm of al Qaeda and Western-backed rebels in northern Syria spread from Aleppo province into neighbouring Idlib on Friday, the rebel group and an organisation monitoring the civil war said.

Clashes began on Thursday when the al Qaeda Syria wing, the Nusra Front, seized positions from the Hazzm movement west of Aleppo, threatening one of the few remaining pockets of the non-jihadist insurgency.

A Hazzm official said by telephone clashes had spread to Idlib and that his group had retaken some areas previously controlled by Nusra.

"There is now fighting in Idlib, in the Jabal al-Zawiya area," he said. He said in Aleppo province the two groups were also fighting in Atarib, a town 20 km (12 miles) from the Turkish border.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said heavy fighting overnight focused on the Regiment 46 base in western Aleppo and overlapping areas between Aleppo and Idlib province, where the Nusra Front pushed out rebels from many areas in October.

The Observatory, which monitors the war, said Hazzm had captured some small checkpoints in Idlib.

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

FIGHTERS CAPTURED

The Nusra Front said it was forced to act after Hazzm detained two of its fighters and captured its weapons and offices. It said its forces had captured the Sheikh Suleiman base from Hazzm, about 25 km west of Aleppo, on Thursday.

"It's probably most accurate to view this as the latest instance of Nusra efforts to expand their areas of dominance in Idlib and Aleppo at the expense of Western-backed factions, which they are gradually seeking to eliminate from the north," said Noah Bonsey, senior analyst on Syria with International Crisis Group.

The Syrian Islamist militant Ahrar al-Sham, which has worked with both groups, called for an end to the clashes and said the disagreement should be settled in an independent sharia court.

"We are ready to bring back the rights that our brothers in Nusra claimed (were taken) by Hazzm," the statement, posted on the group's Twitter account, said.

Both Hazzm -- part of the Free Syria Army (FSA) collection of mainstream rebel groups -- and Nusra fight the government.

In Aleppo, the FSA's 16th division said Nusra had captured 11 of its fighters as they were heading to fight in the city's embattled Ashrafiyah district, the Observatory said citing a statement. The division called on Nusra to release them by sunset and adhere to a local truce.

The Observatory said Nusra and other Islamist militants also fought the Syrian army in the al-Arbaeen mountain area of western Idlib on Friday. Syrian state television said the Syrian army repelled what it said were several terrorist attacks in the area.

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

The weakness of the mainstream Syrian opposition has complicated diplomatic efforts to end the conflict that has killed around 200,000 people.

--Additional reporting by Omar Fahmy in Cairo, Tom Perry in Beirut

[RETURN TO TOP](#)

MIDEAST

8. Hezbollah Chief Issues Warning To Israel Over Military Incursions
Wall Street Journal, Jan. 31, Pg. A5 | Dana Ballout and Raja Abdulrahim

BEIRUT -- The cross-border attacks by Hezbollah that killed two Israeli soldiers this week are a warning to Israel that it will pay a price for military attacks on its neighbors, the leader of the Lebanese Shiite movement said Friday.

The televised comments by Hassan Nasrallah, made from an undisclosed location to a crowd of enthusiastic supporters in the southern Beirut suburb of Dahyieh, were his first since Hezbollah militants were killed in a Jan. 18 attack by Israel in Syria. On Wednesday, Hezbollah responded with rocket and mortar fire on an Israeli army unit. Seven Israeli soldiers were also wounded in the attacks.

Mr. Nasrallah said Hezbollah was left with no choice but to retaliate after the deaths of an Iranian general and six Hezbollah fighters near the city of Quneitra. Israel has neither confirmed nor denied it carried out the strike.

"This is to tell Israel that you cannot kill people and feel safe . . . soldiers prancing around the border as if you killed flies," Mr. Nasrallah said. "From the first hours it was clear . . . we must respond."

In the hours following the Hezbollah attacks and Israeli artillery shelling on southern Lebanon, in which one Spanish U.N. peacekeeper was killed, there were widespread fears that fighting would escalate.

In 2006, a Hezbollah attack on an Israeli armored unit along the Lebanese-Israeli border led to a 34-day war that killed some 1,100 people on Lebanon's side and 165 on Israel's.

But by the time Mr. Nasrallah spoke on Friday, tensions on both sides had already eased and there was little concern that a war was imminent. A day earlier, Israel's defense chief said that the Lebanese militant group had requested a cease-fire through United Nations intermediaries.

A Hezbollah spokesman declined to comment on whether the group had sent the conciliatory message.

Mr. Nasrallah made clear that the Tehran-backed militant group would continue to respond to any attack by Israel and that it would no longer recognize previous rules of engagement between Hezbollah and Israel.

Analysts were divided over the significance of Mr. Nasrallah's statement over the rules of engagement, an informal -- and previously violated -- understanding between Hezbollah and Israel that the two sides won't attack civilian areas nor fire from them.

"It's not empty rhetoric, they keep showing that they are able to respond any time," said Timur Goksel, ex-spokesman for the U.N. Interim Forces in Lebanon.

But Hilal Khashan, a political-science professor at the American University of Beirut, said the bluster of Mr. Nasrallah's speech was meant mostly to placate his constituency rather than to escalate the confrontation.

[RETURN TO TOP](#)

9. Ex-Guantanamo inmate tried to contact Taliban – US

Agence France-Presse, Jan. 30 | Dan De Luce

A former inmate at the US-run prison in Guantanamo Bay who was transferred to Qatar in exchange for an American prisoner of war has tried to make contact with the Taliban, defense officials said Friday.

The former detainee, one of five released to Qatar from Guantanamo in a swap for Sergeant Bowe Bergdahl, "attempted to communicate" with fellow Taliban fighters, a defense official told AFP.

The episode is sure to aggravate the bitter political argument in Washington over last year's exchange for Bergdahl. Lawmakers on the right have accused President Barack Obama of releasing dangerous extremists who pose a threat to Americans.

The Obama administration acknowledged the incident but said Qatar, in cooperation with the United States, was taking steps to prevent the five men from trying to rejoin the Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan.

"We remain confident, as we were when we sent them there, that the assurances we received are sufficient enough to help us mitigate any future threat that these individuals might pose," Pentagon spokesman Rear Admiral John Kirby told reporters.

"And I would hasten to remind that it was because of the process we have in place and the strong relationship that we have with the government of Qatar, that we were able to identify this particular activity," said Kirby, referring to the ex-inmate's bid to contact the Taliban.

"And I can assure you that steps are being taken to mitigate any activity in the future."

Kirby suggested that it was the United States that informed Qatar about the ex-detainee's activity, saying the US government had raised with Qatar the detainee's "potential reengagement" with the Taliban.

"And we communicated with the government of Qatar over that activity, and again, proper steps are being put in place to further limit it," the admiral said.

But Kirby declined to disclose further details about the former detainee or what security measures were being carried out.

The White House said the five former detainees remained in Qatar and had not traveled to Afghanistan to rejoin the insurgency.

"None of these individuals has returned to the battlefield, none of them has been allowed outside of Qatar and none has engaged in physical violence," spokesman Josh Earnest said.

"In fact, each of them at this moment is still in Qatar and each of them is subject to monitoring and other mitigation measures that limit their activities," he said.

Bergdahl was captured by insurgents in eastern Afghanistan in 2009 and released last May in an exchange for the five Taliban inmates at Guantanamo.

The circumstances of Bergdahl's disappearance have prompted accusations he deserted his post. A US Army general is currently weighing whether he should face charges.

[RETURN TO TOP](#)

AFGHANISTAN/PAKISTAN

10. Americans were slain by 'infiltrator,' Taliban says
Group claims attack that left 3 contractors dead at base in Kabul
Washington Post, Jan. 31, Pg. A8 | Sudarsan Raghavan and Missy Ryan

KABUL - The Taliban asserted responsibility Friday for a shooting incident at a military base attached to Kabul's international airport Thursday that killed three American civilian contractors and wounded a fourth, saying the attacker had infiltrated the ranks of the security forces.

The Pentagon said the three contractors were aircraft mechanics but provided no other details. They worked for Praetorian Standard Inc., or PSI, a small firm based in Fayetteville, N.C., with offices in Maryland and Virginia. According to its Web site, the firm "specializes in providing innovative strategic planning, logistics, operational and security management support services in challenging environments around the world."

In a statement Friday, the company confirmed that three of its employees had been killed and one other wounded in the attack. The victims, whose names were not released, were working out of the firm's Kabul office.

"We are shocked by the tragic nature of these deaths and offer our deepest condolences to the families of these brave men," the statement said.

PSI has worked in Afghanistan since 2010, mostly providing logistics, transportation and security support to a Defense Department and U.S. Geological Survey program that is exploring potential mineral deposit sources in Afghanistan.

Immediately after Thursday's attack, suspicion fell on a possible "insider attack" perpetrated by a member of the Afghan security forces who also had access to the military base at the airport. An unidentified Afghan air force official told the Reuters news agency that the shooter was an Afghan soldier.

On Friday, a Taliban spokesman seemed to give credence to that, saying in Twitter messages and a statement that the shooter had joined the Afghan security forces in anticipation of a chance to attack Americans. The attacker was working at Kabul's airport, the spokesman said.

Taliban spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid referred to the attacker as an "infiltrator," a term often used by the Taliban for an insurgent who had penetrated the Afghan army or police for months or years, waiting for an opportunity to strike.

"He managed yesterday evening to attain his goal and opened fire with his rifle on a group of American occupiers," Mujahid said.

When asked Thursday whether the incident was an insider attack, a U.S. military spokesman, Col. Brian Tribus, declined to comment.

The Pentagon press secretary, Rear Adm. John Kirby, said Friday that the man who killed the U.S. contractors was wearing an Afghan uniform. Speaking to reporters, Kirby said the circumstances of the attack are under investigation, and he could not discuss the details on the motivation and identification of the attacker.

"It's our understanding, though, that the assailant was killed in the midst of the attack," Kirby said.

Insider attacks have long plagued the relationship between Afghan forces and their U.S. and international allies, breaking down trust and reducing interaction. The assaults by rogue Afghan soldiers or police reached record levels in 2012, when there were 37 such attacks that killed 51 people, including 32 U.S. troops, according to the Pentagon.

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

--Ryan reported from Washington. Daniela Deane in London and William Branigin in Washington contributed to this report

[RETURN TO TOP](#)

11. Explosion Kills Dozens at Shiite Mosque in Pakistan

New York Times, Jan. 31, Pg. A10 | Saba Imtiaz

KARACHI, Pakistan -- An explosion ripped through a Shiite mosque in southern Pakistan during Friday Prayer, killing at least 55 people and wounding at least 59 in an apparent suicide bombing, the police said.

The bombing in Shikarpur, about 300 miles north of Karachi, was the country's worst sectarian attack in months. It offered further proof that extremists are spreading deeper into Sindh Province, into areas that had previously escaped the worst of Pakistan's violence.

Television images from the scene showed bloodied worshipers being carried from the mosque in the city's Lakh Dar district.

The attack appeared to have been carried out by a suicide bomber, said Abdul Quddus, a police officer in Shikarpur.

Jundullah, a splinter group of the Pakistani Taliban, claimed responsibility for the attack. "Our target was the Shiite community," Fahad Marwat, a spokesman for the group, told Reuters. "They are our enemies."

Although sectarian violence has risen across Pakistan in recent years, such attacks have been relatively rare in Sindh, which has a long tradition of tolerance among religious groups.

But that harmony has come under threat with a recent expansion of sectarian groups across the province, which use mosques and seminaries to spread hatred of Shiites. One of the most prominent such groups, Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat, was banned by the Pakistani government in 2012.

In a statement, former President Asif Ali Zardari, who comes from Sindh Province, said he was "shocked and grieved beyond measure" by the bombing.

Though leaders in Sindh openly acknowledge the growing threat of sectarianism, they seem helpless to stop its expansion, drawing criticism from Shiites.

"It seems like the killing of Shiites makes no difference to them," said Ali Hussain Naqvi, a senior official with Majlis Wahdat-al-Muslimeen, a Shiite political party.

The bombing on Friday coincided with a visit to Karachi, the provincial capital, by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, in an attempt to resolve the turbulent security situation in that city.

--*Salman Masood contributed reporting from Islamabad, Pakistan*

[RETURN TO TOP](#)

12. In a strategic shift, Pakistan cozies up to Russia

Closer U.S. bond with arch rival India triggers a search for new friends

Washington Post, Jan. 31, Pg. A6 | Tim Craig

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan - As the United States forges closer ties with India, neighboring Pakistan is looking for some new friends. Officials hope they have found one in Russia - a budding partnership that could eventually shift historic alliances in South Asia.

In recent months, Pakistani military and political leaders have reached out to Moscow, seeking to warm ties that have been frosty since the Cold War. In November, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu visited Islamabad and signed a military cooperation agreement with Pakistani generals. Pakistan is now hoping to finalize plans to buy three dozen Russian Mi-35 helicopters and more closely coordinate efforts to counter terrorism and narcotics. Pakistan also wants Russian assistance to stabilize chronic energy shortages.

The moves come as Pakistani leaders grow increasingly nervous that their traditional alliances could erode, if not crumble, in the coming years. For much of its history, Pakistan has been an ally of the United States, while Russia had stronger ties to India, even backing it during that country's 1971 war with Pakistan. But now that most NATO troops have left next-door Afghanistan - and the Pakistani army is straining to overcome Islamist militants on its western border - officials here fear that the United States' regional interest is tilting toward India, Pakistan's eastern neighbor and arch rival.

"Of course we are concerned," said one senior Pakistani military leader, who spoke on the condition of anonymity. "The balance of power is being tipped toward India, and that is not good, and it's been done with the help of the Western world. That is why we are looking at various markets, because conventional [military] parity is the only recipe for peace and stability."

Pakistan's efforts to kindle ties with Moscow come as relations between the West and Russia continue to worsen, which may prompt Russia to look for new trading partners in Asia. Pakistanis are also worried the Indian army is moving toward dominance in the conventional arms race.

Those concerns were magnified this week, when President Obama met in New Delhi with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Obama and Modi vowed to strengthen cooperation on defense and energy matters, and they announced a deal that they said should smooth the way for American companies to invest in Indian civilian nuclear plants.

Since Pakistan was partitioned from India in 1947, the two nuclear-armed countries have fought three major wars. So when Obama was the guest of honor at an elaborate military parade in New Delhi this week, it was viewed with skepticism on this side of the border.

"To be very honest, we think Obama has gone one step too far," said Maria Sultan, chairwoman of the Islamabad-based South Asian Strategic Stability Institute, an organization with close links to Pakistani military and intelligence.

In another sign of the unease, Pakistan's powerful army chief, Raheel Sharif, traveled to China last weekend to solidify long-standing military and economic ties between the two countries. China is Pakistan's largest arms supplier, having sold or transferred nearly \$4 billion in weapons to it since 2006, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), which monitors arms sales.

The United States, with about \$2.5 billion in arms sales to Pakistan over the past nine years, is the country's second-largest arms supplier. In December, Congress authorized \$1 billion in additional funds to Pakistan for its continued support of counterterrorism operations. But it is unclear how much U.S. aid will flow to Pakistan in the coming years.

Tasnim Aslam, spokeswoman for Pakistan's Foreign Ministry, said Pakistan doesn't want to "put all of its eggs in one basket."

"It's a multipolar world, and it's in our interest to engage all the poles and forge relationships," said Aslam, who earlier this month led a high-level Pakistani delegation to Moscow to discuss future ties.

Noting that U.S. Secretary of State John F. Kerry had a productive visit to Islamabad two weeks ago, Aslam said Washington shouldn't read too much into Pakistan's outreach to Russian President Vladimir Putin. But some Pakistani lawmakers offered a more pointed view of Pakistan's rapprochement with Russia.

"Pakistan's historical mistake after its inception was to establish close ties with the United States but to ignore the Russians," said Haji Muhammad Adeel, a lawmaker who chairs the Pakistani Senate's foreign relations committee. "We went to war with Russia in Afghanistan, and that brought us gifts of terrorism, extremism and drugs. Now Pakistan is trying to forge friendly ties with Russia to correct the mistakes of past."

Despite that outreach, it remains unclear whether Pakistan's efforts to bolster ties with Russia will pay off.

Russian diplomats in Islamabad declined to comment on the two countries' relations. But Russia is India's largest arms supplier, with \$18 billion in sales since 2006, according to SIPRI.

Yury Barmin, a Russian foreign policy expert based in the United Arab Emirates, said he doubts that Russia would risk its relationship with India by also selling arms to Pakistan. He said he suspects Putin, who visited New Delhi in December, is using Pakistan as leverage over the Indian government so it doesn't get too close to the United States.

"It's the way Russian diplomacy works," Barmin said. "They find a pressure point, but then they go to India and release the pressure and say, 'Hey, we are not developing that relationship anymore.' "

But Rifaat Hussain, an Islamabad-based defense expert, said the West should not underestimate the potential for a realignment of strategic ties in Asia.

"There is now a visible strain with Moscow's relationship with the United States, and Moscow has moved much closer to China, which I think facilitates Pakistan's relationship with Russia," Hussain said.

--Shaiq Hussain contributed to this report

[RETURN TO TOP](#)

UKRAINE/RUSSIA

13. A Russian's Retreat Foreshadows Rebel Advance

Wall Street Journal, Jan. 31, Pg. A1 | Paul Sonne

SOLEDAR, Ukraine -- Gen. Oleksandr Rozmaznin was taken aback when his Russian counterpart, assigned to help oversee the cease-fire in eastern Ukraine, announced on Jan. 20 that he would no longer show up at their joint office.

There was too great a security threat, Gen. Alexander Vyaznikov said, pointing to Grad rockets that had fallen nearby the day before, the latest in months of attacks.

"I said, 'Well, I'm there. So if you know something I don't know, maybe you can let me in on it,'" Gen. Rozmaznin said, recounting their exchanges. The Russian replied that he wanted to temporarily relocate because "there is a distinct threat to the life and health of my staff," adding, "I invite you to follow my example."

Soon enough, Russia-backed separatists launched a broad campaign to surround and seize the Ukrainian-held frontline city of Debaltseve, where the two were based. The Russian delegation's pullout began to compute.

"They know the plans without a doubt," Gen. Rozmaznin said.

Russia's Defense Ministry didn't respond to a request to interview Gen. Vyaznikov or to a list of emailed questions.

All sides had selected Debaltseve in September as the headquarters for a "joint center for coordination and control," comprising Ukrainian and Russian officers and representatives from the two self-declared rebel republics. All were assigned to implement and monitor the cease-fire.

But the small city -- a strategic railway hub for the region -- has turned into the hottest battlefield in the conflict, the focal point of a surge in violence this past week that has rendered the nominal cease-fire more lifeless than ever.

Though the rebels have since trumpeted their offensive, Russian President Vladimir Putin has blamed the new fighting on Kiev, describing Ukrainian forces as "a foreign NATO legion, which is of course not pursuing Ukraine's national interests."

In the latest round of attacks, seven civilians were killed Friday by artillery fire in Debaltseve in their homes, regional police chief Vyacheslav Abroskin said on Facebook. Another seven civilians were killed in nearby rebel-held Donetsk, after shells landed near a bus stop and a humanitarian-aid distribution center.

Five members of the Ukrainian military were killed in the same 24-hour period, a spokesman said. Dozens were wounded on both sides.

Diplomats are scrambling to revive a new round of cease-fire talks over the weekend in the Belarusian capital of Minsk, hoping to bring a respite from the renewal of full-scale fighting.

Refusing to give up on the agreement, Gen. Rozmaznin says he hasn't broken contact with his Russian counterpart and is trying to remain diplomatic. Meanwhile he says the rebels won't succeed in their new offensive.

"With or without artillery, they won't take Debaltseve," the general said in an interview on Wednesday. "Because I'm telling you, we won't let them do it. We won't give it up."

But the threat has grown by the day. On Friday, rebel leader Alexander Zakharchenko appeared on Russian state television amid burning buildings and artillery fire to claim his forces had taken the town of Vuhlehirsk, 6 miles down the road.

"Today, we tightened the ring around Debaltseve," Mr. Zakharchenko said.

The transport hub, situated between the two largest rebel-held cities, Donetsk and Luhansk, is seen as vital to rebel efforts to restart their battered economy.

Ukrainian military spokesman Col. Andriy Lysenko denied that rebel forces had control of Vuhlehirsk and said a battle was underway. Authorities scrambled to evacuate thousands of remaining Debaltseve residents by bus.

Gen. Rozmaznin said that at first, implementation of at least part of the September cease-fire rules seemed plausible.

Ukrainian authorities provided accommodation and food for the Russian military's working group representatives in Soledar, a salt-mining town, and work facilities in Debaltseve, about an hour's drive away.

"It was written into the protocol that us two -- the general from Russia and the general from Ukraine -- would travel in the same car," Gen. Rozmaznin said.

So for weeks, every workday morning they would sit together for the commute to Debaltseve along with a security detail, despite the veritable state of war between their countries.

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, which has the job of monitoring the activities of the implementation group, said the Russian representative voiced safety concerns after at least 30 Grad rockets hit Debaltseve on Jan. 19, killing three civilians and wounding 12.

The OSCE said the Russian delegation later handed an official letter to the Ukrainian team announcing its evacuation to Soledar. The OSCE conducted a crater analysis at the attack site and determined the missiles came from the direction of rebel-held territory to the west.

These days, Gen. Rozmaznin takes the car and goes to Debaltseve on his own. He says Gen. Vyaznikov stays behind in Soledar and gets around on foot. The security detail has split up so both generals remain guarded at all times.

"The Russians' main task was to influence 'those territories' so they behaved themselves adequately," Gen. Rozmaznin said. "But unfortunately . . . those comrades stopped behaving themselves adequately and started to intensify their efforts."

He said the rebels regrouped, rearmed and decided to show Ukrainian forces their new strength.

Gen. Rozmaznin held up a chart of recent violations. He said there were 34 on Jan. 1. One day this week he said there were 126. The amount of destruction in the area would suggest even more. He said the bulk were from the rebel side, but the Ukrainians were also on the chart.

For the 60-year-old general, the fight in east Ukraine is personal. Though he spent much of his life moving around the Soviet Union with the Red Army, he grew up in the Luhansk region, a center of the separatist revolt. His wife comes from Donetsk, the neighboring region and the rebels' other stronghold.

Gen. Rozmaznin led Ukrainian troops last summer in an attempt to secure the border there with Russia -- a critical part of the cease-fire agreement that remains unfulfilled. He said coming under fire in a place where he used to run around as a boy was a "kind of moral trauma."

"It wasn't so much disappointment as pain and anger that weighed on me," he said.

If the West were to supply arms to the Ukrainian military, he said, that could level the playing field, potentially creating an equilibrium that would force Russia to negotiate.

"If we had precision antitank weapons, for example, then it would mean their tanks would be destroyed in such quantities that it would probably bring them to their senses," he said.

Western governments have consistently ruled out providing lethal military aid to Ukraine, which is not a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, to avoid provoking a bigger confrontation with Russia. They have accused Russia of providing troops and materiel, charges Moscow has denied.

Like many top Ukrainian officials, Gen. Rosmaznin presents the conflict as a sort of civilizational battle.

"Europe should understand that Ukraine stands on frontier defending democracy and European values," he said. "That is where we stand. That is what we're defending. If we surrender, I have no doubt that the Baltics will be next."

--Nick Shchetko in Kiev, Ukraine, contributed to this article

[RETURN TO TOP](#)

14. Lining Up to Receive Aid in Ukraine, Crowd Is Devastated by a Mortar Attack
New York Times, Jan. 31, Pg. A6 | Rick Lyman

DONETSK, Ukraine -- Seven people were killed and at least three wounded in a pair of mortar attacks on the city's west side Friday, including one that hit a crowd of people waiting in line to receive humanitarian aid as fighting raged outside of town.

The carnage ended nearly a day and a half of relative calm in the region controlled by pro-Russian separatists, where fighting between the rebels and the Ukrainian military has spiked sharply since a shaky cease-fire broke down this month.

Officials of the Donetsk People's Republic were quick to attribute the attacks to Ukrainian "saboteurs" who they said had infiltrated the city. "Once again we have the baseness and the meanness of the Ukrainian sabotage groups," they said in a statement.

Ukraine's government, meanwhile, blamed provocateurs trying to derail the peace process for the attack. "The Ukrainian Army didn't conduct any hostilities near the city of Donetsk today and had nothing to do with the fire on the humanitarian aid point," said Vladimir Polevoy, deputy chief of the Information and Analysis Center of Ukraine's Safety and Defense Council.

Sounds of heavy shelling and rocket fire emanated from the ruined airport, the site of almost continuous hostilities despite a cease-fire that was declared on Sept. 5. Fighting was also reported around the town of Debaltseve, a railroad hub where a contingent of Ukrainian soldiers is surrounded on three sides by rebel troops.

The first mortar strike in Donetsk landed shortly before 1 p.m. along Matrosova Street in a neighborhood of middle-class apartment blocks and small industrial facilities a few miles west of the city center.

Lyudmila Inozemtseva, 55, said she had just gone into the bathroom to comb her hair when she heard three or four loud blasts. A few minutes later, there was another series of explosions a short distance away, she said.

The initial strikes hit a trolley bus just outside Ms. Inozemtseva's building and went into a neighboring apartment.

Maria, 36, who declined to give her last name, said she had been drinking tea in the kitchen with her 3-year-old child when she heard a loud explosion. "There was all of a sudden a lot of smoke and dust," she said, "and I was only half-conscious when I grabbed my child and went to another apartment where I thought it would be safer."

When she returned, she saw that the shell had gone through the window into her living room and a piece of shrapnel was embedded in the kitchen door.

The body of an elderly man lay on the sidewalk just outside her apartment, while another man was sprawled beside a trolley bus stop down the block. The temperature hovered just above freezing so the blood pooled in ice crevices along the debris-covered sidewalk and turned the slush to pink.

The second series of explosions hit about a half-mile away, in a parking lot shared by a neighborhood cultural center and the Hotel Europe. Several hundred people had been lined up there, or waiting in parked cars, to pick up humanitarian aid for children and the elderly.

One woman who had been waiting near the head of the relief line, who would give only her first name, Lyudmila, said she had heard a series of explosions a short distance away followed quickly by an enormous blast very near her

in the parking lot. Armed guards monitoring the crowd rushed her and several other people inside the hotel, she said.

"I had come to pick up aid for my 82-year-old mother, who cannot get out of her apartment," she said. "But I will never come again, not after this."

The body of one man lay slumped inside his blue sedan while four others lay beneath blankets in the glass-and-debris covered lot. Three other vehicles were twisted and shattered by the explosions.

Rimma Fil, coordinator of the humanitarian center for the Rinat Akhmetov charity fund, which had been distributing the aid, said the group was closing its distribution locations for the day, but hoped to reopen them as early as Saturday morning.

The crowd at the attack site was so large, she said, because other centers for dispersing aid near the airport and in other dangerous neighborhoods had been closed in recent days, forcing people from several parts of the city to come there for aid.

"We are not military people, we do not know what is going on," Ms. Fil said. "We are just trying to organize humanitarian aid to people who are suffering."

The sounds of a few more explosive bursts could be heard later in the afternoon in the same Kuybyshevsky district, but there were no further reports of casualties.

[RETURN TO TOP](#)

EUROPE

15. NATO to Bolster Presence Along Its Eastern Flank

Wall Street Journal, Jan. 31, Pg. A7 | Naftali Bendavid

BRUSSELS -- NATO will establish command centers in six of its eastern countries in coming months, Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said, part of a beefed-up response to Russian aggressiveness.

The outposts will form a chain of potential command centers for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's already announced rapid-response force, which will consist of roughly 5,000 troops. Details are to be finalized at a meeting this coming week of NATO defense ministers.

The centers also will provide a link between NATO and the armed forces of the six countries where they will be located -- Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia.

Mr. Stoltenberg announced the new centers at a news conference Friday in Brussels, where he also urged NATO allies to spend more on defense to counter Russia's military budget.

Mr. Stoltenberg said he would meet with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on the sidelines of a security conference in Munich in two weeks. "Especially when times are difficult, as they are now, it is important to meet and to discuss difficult issues," Mr. Stoltenberg said.

The command centers are intended partly as a warning to Russia and a reassurance to NATO allies who have become increasingly jittery following Moscow's aggressive actions in Ukraine and elsewhere.

The creation of the spearhead rapid-response force, designed to mobilize within two days in case of a belligerent move by an adversary, is the highest-profile move by NATO to bolster its defenses in the aftermath of Russia's takeover of Crimea and its incursions into eastern Ukraine, which Moscow denies.

"This will be the biggest reinforcement of our collective defense since the end of the Cold War," Mr. Stoltenberg said.

Each command center will likely be staffed by about 50 military personnel from various NATO countries. The outposts are in a sense a compromise between NATO's eastern countries, some of whom want full-scale NATO bases on their territory, and other members wary of building expensive new installations that could provoke Moscow.

The six centers will also help manage the greatly increased NATO exercises being conducted in these countries near Russia. And they will ensure that NATO forces are deeply familiar with their military landscape should they have to deploy there in a crisis.

The command centers will open by 2016, when the spearhead force is scheduled to be in full operation. In the meantime, an interim rapid-response force is being headed by Germany, the Netherlands and Norway.

At the upcoming meeting of NATO defense ministers, individual countries are expected to announce they will take responsibility for coordinating one of the spearhead force's units. When the force is full operation, one unit will be on full alert status at any given time, while another will be gearing up and a third will be standing down.

Mr. Stoltenberg said it is critical that NATO's European members spend more on defense. In 2014 NATO countries spent about \$852 billion on defense, he said, \$7 billion less than the year before.

[RETURN TO TOP](#)

16. Army sends tweet brigade into battle

Force will try to control social media narrative Unit to follow example of US and Israeli forces

The Guardian (UK), Jan. 31, Pg. 4 | Ewen MacAskill

The army is creating a special force of Facebook warriors, skilled in psychological operations and use of social media to engage in unconventional warfare in the information age.

The 77th Brigade, to be based in Hermitage, near Newbury, in Berkshire, will be about 1,500-strong and formed of units drawn from across the army. It will formally come into being in April.

The brigade will be responsible for what is described as non-lethal warfare. Both the Israeli and US army already engage heavily in psychological operations. Against a background of 24-hour news, smartphones and social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, the force will attempt to control the narrative.

The 77th will include regulars and reservists and recruitment will begin in the spring. Soldiers with journalism skills and familiarity with social media are among those being sought.

An army spokesman said: “77th Brigade is being created to draw together a host of existing and developing capabilities essential to meet the challenges of modern conflict and warfare. It recognises that the actions of others in a modern battlefield can be affected in ways that are not necessarily violent.”

The move is partly a result of experience in counter-insurgency operations in Afghanistan. It can also be seen as a response to events of the last year that include Russia’s actions in Ukraine, in particular Crimea, and Islamic State (Isis).

Nato has so far been unable to find a counter to what the US and UK claim is Russia creating unrest by sending in regular troops disguised as local militia, allowing president Vladimir Putin to deny responsibility. Isis has proved adept at exploiting social media to attract fighters from around the world.

The Israel Defence Forces have pioneered state military engagement with social media. The IDF is active on 30 platforms – including Twitter, Facebook, Youtube and Instagram – in six languages. “It enables us to engage with an audience we otherwise wouldn’t reach,” said an Israeli army spokesman.

It has been approached by several western countries, keen to learn from its expertise. During last summer’s war in Gaza, Operation Protective Edge, the IDF and Hamas’s military wing, the Qassam Brigades, tweeted prolifically.

The new brigade is being named the 77th in tribute to the Chindits, the British guerrilla force led by Maj Gen Orde Wingate against the Japanese in Burma during the second world war. Wingate adopted unorthodox and controversial tactics that achieved successes completely disproportionate to the size of his forces, sending teams deep into Japanese-held territory, creating uncertainty in the Japanese high command and forcing it to alter its strategic plans.

The creation of 77th Brigade comes as the commander of Nato special operations headquarters, Lt Gen Marshall Webb, speaking in Washington this week, expressed concern about Russia and about Isis. “Special operations headquarters is uniquely placed to address this,” he said. “We tend to take an indirect approach. We can engage without being escalatory or aggressive.”

[RETURN TO TOP](#)

AFRICA

17. African Nations Show Progress in Uniting to Beat Back Militants in Nigeria

New York Times, Jan. 31, Pg. A4 | Somini Sengupta and Adam Nossiter

African leaders are stepping up their response to Boko Haram, with Chadian soldiers chasing the militants from a northern Nigerian town and the African Union calling for a 7,500-member regional force to tackle what it called “a serious threat” to the continent.

A communiqué adopted by the peace and security council of the African Union, which is meeting this week in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, calls on Nigerian soldiers and their counterparts from four neighboring countries -- Benin, Cameroon, Chad and Niger -- to “prevent the expansion of Boko Haram,” search for those abducted by the group and conduct joint patrols at their borders. It does not specifically authorize the most sensitive step: cross-border operations.

According to a Chadian military spokesman, Nigerian news media reports and officials in Niger, Chadian forces took control on Thursday of Malam Fatori, a northern town that Boko Haram had held since October.

If confirmed, the recapturing of the town would indicate a breakthrough in regional military cooperation in the fight against the insurgents, which the Nigerian military has long viewed warily. A Nigerian Army spokesman said his troops had been involved in the operation, too, and another Nigerian official said his country "has never objected to cross-border operations in the fight against Boko Haram."

Boko Haram, an Islamist extremist group, has dug its heels into a swath of northeastern Nigeria and continues to spread havoc across an already fragile region. The International Organization for Migration estimates that a million Nigerians have fled their homes, and that an additional 100,000 have sought shelter in Cameroon, Chad and Niger. This has created "risks of tension" between refugees and residents, the African Union communiqué said.

In a Twitter post on Friday, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, the chairwoman of the African Union Commission, wrote, "Terrorism, in particular of #BokoHaram, requires a response that is collective, decisive & effective to achieve the desired results."

The need for a regional force to tackle insurgents based inside its territory is something of an anomaly -- some say an embarrassment -- for Nigeria. Nigeria has the continent's largest military and contributes large numbers of troops to United Nations peacekeeping missions worldwide.

One United Nations diplomat said the country's "fragility" in the face of Boko Haram had prompted other countries in Africa to act. "There is a serious concern that if nothing is done, this Boko Haram terror group could affect a huge chunk of the continent," the diplomat said. "What the region needs to do is to address this head on."

Nigeria's neighbors, particularly Chad and Cameroon, have already mobilized their troops to push back Boko Haram. Regional rivalries, however, have hindered agreement on whether soldiers from one country can pursue the insurgents across borders. Cameroon, which has had longstanding territorial disputes with Nigeria, had strongly objected to operations that could lead to having Nigerian soldiers on its soil, diplomats said.

In October, Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria agreed to the idea of a joint force, which was to have its headquarters in a northern Nigerian town called Baga. Disputes among the troop-contributing countries delayed full deployment, and in mid-January, Boko Haram insurgents stormed the town, killing scores of people and destroying buildings, according to satellite images published by Human Rights Watch.

Ministers from the five countries, along with African Union and United Nations officials, are due to meet in early February to work out the details of the regional force. The African Union would then seek the blessing of the United Nations Security Council -- as well as a trust fund to pay for it.

Human Rights Watch cautioned the African Union this week to safeguard human rights as part of the new regional force, specifically to "take all feasible precautions to minimize harm to civilians, including by not exposing civilians to retaliatory attacks."

Chadian troops were accused of committing rights abuses last year during an African Union-led peacekeeping mission in the Central African Republic. The Chadian government withdrew its troops from the force last year,

acknowledging that its soldiers had been accused of siding with Muslim militias in sectarian clashes with Christian fighters. The Chadians had said they acted in self-defense after one particularly deadly attack.

Chad has emerged as a crucial partner to Western powers in the fight against terrorism in Africa. Its soldiers have served alongside French forces to root out Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb from Mali's northern deserts.

Chad said its soldiers had pushed the Islamists from Malam Fatori in remote semidesert scrub near the Niger border. "We confirm it," a Chadian military spokesman, Col. Abouna Azem, said on Thursday. "It's been retaken."

Malam Fatori is about 90 miles from Maiduguri, the regional capital of northeastern Nigeria and home to more than two million people. Maiduguri sustained a significant attack this week and is thought by officials to be Boko Haram's ultimate target.

A local government official in Niger, just across the Komadugu River from Malam Fatori, confirmed that Chadian forces had been at the forefront of the fight against Boko Haram, including by bombing the insurgents' camps on islands in nearby Lake Chad.

A Nigerian military spokesman refused to confirm, however, that it was the Chadians alone who had retaken Malam Fatori.

"It's not the Chadian forces solely that are operating there," said the spokesman, Chris Olukolade, adding in a subsequent text message that Malam Fatori is part of the area where the multinational regional force is authorized to operate jointly. Mr. Olukolade said the Nigerian Air Force had also been engaged in the fight for the town.

--Somini Sengupta reported from the United Nations, and Adam Nossiter from Maiduguri, Nigeria

[RETURN TO TOP](#)

ASIA/PACIFIC

18. As Muslim Uighurs Flee, China Sees Jihad Risk

Wall Street Journal, Jan. 31, Pg. A1 | Jeremy Page and Emre Peker

KAYSERI, Turkey -- In hindsight, it was a soccer match that kindled Mehmet's hatred of Chinese rule and set him on the path to exile.

In 2002, Mehmet was at university in Xinjiang, the northwest corner of China that is home to his Uighur ethnic group and the source of a wave of deadly violence in the past two years. He and some other Uighurs decided to support Turkey in the soccer World Cup, he said.

Most Uighurs are Muslim, speak a Turkic language and consider themselves part of a broad family of ethnic Turks.

But students from China's ethnic Han majority were offended, Mehmet said. A fight erupted, leading university authorities to expel six of his friends.

So began a political awakening that led Mehmet to a prison labor camp in Xinjiang and ultimately to Turkey, following a perilous two-month voyage, mostly without a passport, through Central and Southeast Asia.

Mehmet is among hundreds, possibly thousands, of Uighurs who have fled China in recent years, often heading for Turkey via Thailand and Malaysia, say Uighur migrants, activists and government officials from countries along that route.

Their flight is presenting China with many of the same fears that have plagued Western nations as they try to prevent their Muslim nationals from being radicalized or trained to fight overseas.

Fearing Uighur separatists are adopting the ideology and tactics of jihadists, China wants to shut down what state media call the "underground railway," which Beijing says Uighurs are using to join Islamic State in Syria and Iraq or to escape after committing crimes.

China blamed one attack -- a mass knifing at a railway station in the southwestern city of Kunming in March that killed 29 civilians -- on Xinjiang separatists trying to flee to Southeast Asia. Beijing has often accused Uighur militants of training in Pakistan or Afghanistan, and fears that those fleeing abroad could return to launch fresh attacks or recruit others via the Internet.

Uighur groups like the World Uyghur Congress say they don't condone such attacks. They and other human-rights groups say China exaggerates risks posed by fleeing Uighurs and that most are escaping brutal policing and systematic discrimination in Xinjiang. Chinese officials deny they discriminate against Uighurs and say Beijing's policies bring stability to Xinjiang.

Few Uighurs will discuss the issue publicly in Xinjiang, where police surveillance is strong. Those outside China resist speaking openly, fearing deportation or reprisals against relatives back home.

Mehmet said he changed his name to avoid reprisals. A fluent Mandarin speaker in his 30s who once worked for a state-owned company, he said he rejects jihadist ideology but admitted to meeting in Turkey with a pan-Islamist group banned in China and some other countries.

He made no secret of wanting to resist Chinese rule. "If somebody gave me a gun, I would fight," he said, sitting outside a Uighur activist center in the central-Turkish city of Kayseri. "China only gives us two options -- either we must be exactly like them, or we will be destroyed."

Over the past year, Beijing has increased pressure on foreign governments to help track Uighur militants, telling some there are roughly 300 Chinese Uighurs fighting with Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, say people briefed on those discussions.

China's foreign ministry didn't respond to inquiries for this article. Asked about the figure in December, Chinese foreign-ministry spokesman Qin Gang told a news briefing he had no specifics, but "with international terrorists crossing borders, China urges countries to join forces" to combat terrorism.

Malaysia's Home Minister, Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, told reporters on Jan. 21 that a Chinese vice minister of public security told him some Chinese fighting with Islamic State had transited Malaysia.

Other governments haven't publicly corroborated China's assertions, although the Iraqi defense ministry published a photograph in September purportedly showing a captured Chinese militant. Chinese terrorism experts have cited a

speech by Islamic State leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi listing China among countries where Muslim rights had been violated.

The issue is particularly delicate in Turkey, which has granted Chinese Uighurs sanctuary since the 1950s as part of a policy to welcome ethnic Turks from Eurasia. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan once described the Chinese Uighurs' plight as "genocide" after 2009 ethnic riots in Urumqi.

Turkey has since forged closer commercial and military ties with China. Chinese firms have won big deals to build rail lines in Turkey and launch its intelligence satellite.

Turkish officials say China's influence hasn't eroded their commitment to help Uighurs on humanitarian grounds. They also say Turkey is ready to help China's counterterrorism efforts, just as it cooperates with Western governments to stem the flow of Western jihadists through Turkey to Syria and Iraq.

"It's a very sensitive issue and public opinion plays a critical role," said a Turkish official familiar with negotiations on the subject. "We don't have a specific policy, encouraging Uighurs to come here. Of course, if someone shows up at our doors, we won't turn them away."

Asked if there was evidence of Uighurs joining Islamic State through Turkey, the official leafed through a list of countries that provided names of concern. China hadn't provided any, he said.

In recent weeks, though, tensions between China and Turkey have burst into the open. In mid-January, Turkey's foreign ministry said 10 Turkish nationals faced trial in China on allegations they helped people illegally cross borders or sold travel documents. The ministry didn't say who was being assisted, but China's state-run Global Times said they were Uighurs.

That announcement followed demonstrations in Turkey calling on the Ankara government to protect Uighurs in China.

Chinese and Turkish officials have clashed over roughly 300 suspected Uighurs detained in Thailand since March, whom Thai police said they found hiding on a rubber plantation.

Beijing has pressed Thailand to return the suspected Uighurs, who have no identification documents but claim Turkish descent and ask to go to Turkey, say people involved in those discussions. Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu in November said publicly that Turkey informed Thailand it wished to take them in.

China's foreign ministry, responding to a question about Mr. Cavusoglu's statement, said: "We urge Turkey to immediately stop interfering in the handling of the relevant case" and "not to send mistaken signals to the outside world that connive in, and even support, illegal immigration activities."

Sek Wannamethee a Thai-foreign-ministry spokesman, said his government knew the Chinese and Turkish positions but needed time to identify the detainees -- men, women and children.

China has long controlled foreign travel by Uighurs, some of whom have for decades waged low-level, but often violent, resistance against Chinese rule in their homeland, which they call East Turkestan.

Uighurs fleeing Xinjiang used to cross illegally into Central Asia. That has become harder as China has boosted cooperation with Central Asian nations, Chinese experts and Uighur activists say.

Beijing tightened restrictions following deadly attacks that indicate a change in tactics by separatists, including hitting civilian targets outside Xinjiang and incorporating jihadist imagery.

China in May launched a counterterrorism campaign in Xinjiang, where hundreds have been arrested, 21 executed and 12 more sentenced to death, according to state-media reports. As a result, growing numbers of Uighurs are fleeing to Southeast Asia, say Uighur activists, Chinese experts and Western rights campaigners.

On Jan. 19, Chinese state media said police shot dead two Uighurs and arrested another who "violently resisted arrest" while trying to illegally enter Vietnam. Rights groups and Uighur activists say it is possible that some attack participants escape this way but that most migrants appear to be fleeing the violence or China's response.

Many obtain Turkish travel documents -- fake or legal -- in Thailand or Malaysia, say Uighur migrants and officials along the route.

In September, Indonesian authorities said they arrested four men believed to be Uighurs with fake Turkish passports allegedly trying to link with an Islamic militant leader. The men's lawyer said they are in detention in Indonesia and deny all charges.

Some Southeast Asian nations have deported Uighurs to China. Cambodia announced deportations in 2009 of Uighurs it said entered illegally. Malaysian police say they have deported to China at least 18 suspected Uighur militants.

"Most of the individuals we know about who have been sent back from a wide variety of countries in recent years have effectively, alarmingly simply vanished into the notoriously abusive vortex of Xinjiang's judicial system," said Sophie Richardson, China Director of Human Rights Watch.

China's foreign ministry has said in news conferences that Uighur deportees to China were criminal suspects.

Those who make it to Turkey often settle in Uighur communities in Istanbul's Zeytinburnu neighborhood or in Kayseri, where Turkish authorities settled a group of Chinese Uighurs who escaped via Afghanistan in 1965.

An elderly Uighur in Zeytinburnu said that after years in prison in Xinjiang for separatist activities, he escaped via Myanmar, Laos, Thailand and Malaysia in 2013. He flew to Turkey after obtaining a Turkish travel document in Malaysia for about 5,000 yuan (\$800).

Some Uighurs -- mostly women -- reach Turkey legally after receiving passports in China. A Uighur in Kayseri said she flew from China in 2014 to seek fertility treatment but dared not return, as her husband was detained in Xinjiang when he applied for a passport to join her.

Mehmet, who reached Kayseri, said that after the 2002 soccer-match fight he began spending more time looking at websites about Uighur issues.

After graduation, he joined a state-owned company -- a coveted job in Xinjiang -- but became disillusioned that few Uighurs were employed there. And he resented pressure to drink with prospective business partners, because Islam forbids alcohol consumption.

By the time of the 2009 Urumqi riots, he felt such pent-up anger that he joined the violence. He wouldn't say what he did but said he was jailed for three years.

He shared a prison cell with ethnic-Han members of Falun Gong, the spiritual group banned in China. "There, I realized that not all Han people were bad, and that many of them suffer in the same ways that Uighurs do," concluding his only option was to flee China.

In 2013, after prison, he borrowed from friends and family to fund his escape. He had no passport, so friends smuggled him into Kyrgyzstan. From there, he said, a people-smuggling network took him through Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand and Malaysia.

He crossed borders in vehicles, on foot and by boat over nine weeks. "Sometimes we had to run across borders at night, sometimes high in the mountains."

In Malaysia, he obtained a Turkish travel document via an ethnic-Chinese agent. He didn't know if it was genuine, but it got him into Turkey. He spent some 90,000 yuan (just under \$15,000), paying a different person for each leg.

He said he rents a room with another Uighur and does odd jobs in a restaurant while considering his next move. He said he doesn't believe in jihad but could understand why some do. "Uighurs are looking for a savior," he said.

In Turkey, he said, he attended a meeting of Hizb ut-Tahrir, the pan-Islamic group banned in China. He left disillusioned after they said they couldn't provide arms to Uighur separatists.

Hizb ut-Tahrir advocates an Islamic caliphate but only sanctions peaceful means, said Mahmut Kar, the organization's spokesman in Turkey. The group is active in Xinjiang, he said, but "we have not encountered Uighur Muslims who took refuge in Turkey and sought support for an armed struggle against China, or to go to Syria and Iraq."

Mehmet said he has spoken online with Uighurs in Turkey who want to join Islamic State but said he wants to head to Europe to work for the Uighur cause.

"Why would I risk my life fighting in Syria or Iraq?" he asked. "If I am going to fight, I want to fight for East Turkestan."

--Celine Fernandez in Kuala Lumpur, Warangkana Chomchuen in Bangkok and I Made Sentana in Jakarta contributed to this article

[RETURN TO TOP](#)

19. India tests long-range missile from mobile launcher
Agence France-Presse, Jan. 31 | Not Attributed

India on Saturday succeeded for the first time in using a mobile launcher to test-fire a long-range missile capable of delivering a nuclear warhead deep inside rival China.

Although Saturday's launch was the third test of the Agni V missile, it was the first time the weapon had been fired from a so-called canister mounted on a truck rather than from a concrete launchpad used in previous trials.

The new delivery mechanism gives the armed forces increased operational flexibility.

"Successful test-firing of Agni V from a canister makes the missile a prized asset for our forces," Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Twitter after the test on an island off the eastern state of Orissa.

The Agni V -- developed by India's Defence Research and Development Organisation -- was first tested in April 2012.

Analysts say the Agni V has the range to strike any target on the Chinese mainland, including military installations in the far northeast.

India sees the rocket, which has a range of 5,000 kilometres (3,100 miles), as a key boost to its regional power aspirations and one that narrows -- albeit slightly -- the huge gap with China's missile systems.

Agni, meaning "fire" in Sanskrit, is the name given to a series of rockets India developed as part of a guided missile development project launched in 1983.

While the shorter-range Agni I and II were mainly developed with traditional rival Pakistan in mind, analysts say later versions with a longer range reflect the shift in India's focus towards China.

India and China, each with a population of more than one billion, have prickly relations and a legacy of mistrust that stems from a brief but bloody border war in 1962.

India, the world's biggest arms importer, is in the midst of a \$100-billion defence upgrade programme.

The new right-wing government has cleared long-delayed projects worth over \$16 billion since storming to power at elections in May.

Modi has pushed for greater indigenisation of its defence industry, saying India must build up its military might to the point that no other country "dare cast an evil eye" on the South Asian nation.

[RETURN TO TOP](#)

WHITE HOUSE

20. New White House Hostage Rescue Strategy MIA

The Obama administration promised to overhaul how it brought captives home—and dealt with their parents. Five months in, and those interactions still 'suck'

TheDailyBeast.com, Jan. 30 | Shane Harris and Nancy A. Youssef

Five months after the White House began a top-to-bottom review of its policy for rescuing hostages overseas, the congressman who spurred it and some of the families of hostages who were promised a voice in the process say they're being left in the dark.

The White House had pledged that families of Americans captured or killed by terrorists would be "integral" to discussions on how to bring those Americans home safely. But the administration's interactions with the family members "sucks. It's been horrible," Rep. Duncan Hunter told *The Daily Beast* in an interview.

The California Republican has been a frequent critic of the administration's hostage-rescue policies and urged an overhaul after the beheading of journalist James Foley by ISIS in August. Since then, he said, "We haven't been told anything on how the review is going."

The Daily Beast spoke to several families whose relatives have been taken hostage and who've been dealing with the government for several months. Most of them asked to speak on the condition of anonymity when discussing their interactions with U.S. officials, so that they could speak candidly without potentially jeopardizing the cases of Americans who are still alive and haven't been rescued.

Some of the hostages' families said they still don't understand which policies on hostage rescue are actually being examined. Some families said they are being told not to air their concerns publicly.

"The administration has asked us not to speak to the media about this," said Barak Barfi, the spokesman for the family of journalist Steven Sotloff, who was beheaded by ISIS last September. "We want to give the president and his staff the opportunity to repair the damage they caused by refusing to create proper channels during Steve's incarceration. For this reason, we are honoring the request."

Hostages' families have complained that the administration didn't do enough to both keep them informed about their loved ones' cases or to work with them on rescue efforts. Following Foley's death, his parents said they had been ignored by U.S. officials, including at the White House, the State Department, and the FBI, when they tried to share information on their son's whereabouts.

Another individual, who asked not to be identified, said he had given information to U.S. officials on one hostage's possible whereabouts, based on leads he'd gathered from non-governmental sources. But to his knowledge, no one in the government followed up on the information, this person said.

Families have been frustrated that they've had to communicate with different government agencies, each with its own priorities, and that there is no single point of contact that coordinates the entire government's rescue efforts, from law enforcement to diplomacy to intelligence and the military.

It was the administration's treatment of hostage families, including a warning to the parents of Foley and Sotloff that they could be prosecuted if they attempted to pay ransoms, that helped launch the review, which was first reported by *The Daily Beast* last November.

The administration reached out to the families in December with a generic form letter sent through the mail and addressed to "Dear Families," rather than to individuals whose children were either dead or still in captivity. The letter, signed by Lisa Monaco, the White House counterterrorism adviser, stressed that the review would stay within the bounds of the law. But officials haven't made clear what laws apply to civilian hostages, families said, apart

from warning that the families can't pay ransoms, even though the government has never prosecuted an American for making a ransom payment.

The administration has urged families to trust the outcome of the review, which officials say they hope to finish in the spring, and has told families that any further details are classified.

Some families have met with officials at the White House or in their homes. Others said they are still ironing out the logistics for such a meeting.

"We are involved in this review because we are committed to ensuring that [it] is comprehensive, legitimate, and truly beneficial to any family that finds itself in this horrible situation," said Debra Tice, whose son Austin will have been missing for 900 days as of this Friday.

The White House has not met with the family members as a group, leading to concerns, some families say, that the administration is pursuing a "divide and conquer" approach and trying to keep them from speaking as a single bloc, which could give them more influence over the hostage-review process.

Some family members, particularly those whose loved ones are still believed to be alive, have said they're reluctant to criticize the government publicly for fear of losing whatever limited access they have to information on their cases.

The families have said they want access to more information in the hostages' official files, some of which has been classified, so they can see what efforts the government is making to win their release. The government is close to granting some family members security clearances to see the information, a bureaucratic process that can take months and involve background checks.

"The FBI thinks by letting the families know the situation of their family members they're somehow going to jeopardize a rescue," Hunter said. "To make them get a security clearance to know the situation their son or daughter is in? That's just stupid."

The White House didn't comment on the letter sent to families or the security clearances. But Alistair Baskey, a spokesman for the National Security Council, told *The Daily Beast* in a statement, "We have heard concerns expressed by some family members about their interaction and communication with U.S. government officials and the amount of information that can be shared about these efforts. We have therefore invited family members' input as an integral part of the administration's review of its response to hostage cases."

Hunter said that the hostage-rescue process has been stymied largely by the FBI, which has the primary responsibility for managing civilian hostage cases. Hunter accused the bureau of failing to collaborate with other parts of the government that have expertise in hostage rescue, particularly within the Defense Department.

"When you're talking about hostages held overseas, especially in Afghanistan, the FBI has a super-limited presence. Why in the world would they be in charge of trying to take care of the hostages?" Hunter said. "It's a big turf war for them. Instead of worrying about the people we have to rescue, they're worried about [the Defense Department] and others encroaching on their turf."

An FBI spokesman didn't respond to a request for comment on Hunter's criticism.

Hunter, a member of the Armed Services Committee and a reserve Marine Corps officer, argued that the decision of which agency is in charge of a hostage rescue should depend upon who has “the most information and is able to bring the most resources to bear.” In the case of hostages held by ISIS and al Qaeda, he said, that may be the CIA, the Defense Intelligence Agency, or military Special Operations units that have years of experience on the ground with informants and “captor networks”—groups that can produce leads and open communications channels to the terrorists holding Americans.

Hunter has also argued for appointing a single individual to be in charge of coordinating all U.S. hostage policy. But the administration has already stated that at the end of the review, the FBI and the State Department will continue to play their current lead roles in hostage negotiations, so the review may not end up with dramatic changes.

Another controversial point in the hostage-policy review has been whether to pay ransoms to terrorist groups. Several of them have repeatedly made demands for money as well as prisoner swaps, most recently when ISIS said it would release a Japanese captive and a Jordanian pilot for a would-be suicide bomber now imprisoned in Jordan.

The administration has said it will not change its policy against ransom payments. But under an executive order signed by President George W. Bush in February 2002, which Obama hasn’t repealed, the government is allowed to pay ransoms if it could help generate information on the whereabouts of a hostage or lure captors into the open.

Former officials who’ve been directly involved in hostage negotiations said that provision has rarely been used, but the administration isn’t being completely honest when it says that under no circumstances will the government pay ransoms.

Indeed, other governments have facilitated ransoms in negotiations for American hostages, most notably when Qatar intervened to help free journalist Peter Theo Curtis. According to two individuals involved in Curtis’ case, Qatar arranged for a ransom payment to win his release from al Qaeda’s branch in Syria in last year.

Several families have also seen a double standard in the administration’s decision to trade five Taliban fighters who’d been held in Guantanamo Bay for Army Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl last year. The White House says that the swap was part of a longstanding tradition of trading prisoners in time of war. But the administration has drawn a hard line against trading prisoners for civilians, arguing that’s a concession to terrorist groups.

[RETURN TO TOP](#)

21. White House grapples with fraught terrorism language

Associated Press, Jan. 31 | Julie Pace

WASHINGTON — Twice this month, the White House has publicly grappled with the politically fraught language of terrorism.

In the days after a deadly terror spree in Paris, President Barack Obama was criticized for purposely avoiding calling the attacks an example of “Islamic extremism,” settling for the more generic “violent extremism.” This week, the White House struggled to explain why the administration sometimes classifies the Afghan Taliban as a terrorist organization — and sometimes does not.

The rhetorical wrangling underscores the extent to which a president who pledged to end his predecessor's war on terror is still navigating how to explain the threats that persist to the American public, while also being mindful of the impact his words can have abroad.

"They do believe that the part of the roots of terrorism comes from the way the United States acts and talks and is perceived globally," said Trevor McCrisken, a professor at Britain's University of Warwick who has studied Obama's foreign policy rhetoric.

The early January attacks on a French satirical newspaper and kosher deli put a fresh spotlight on what Obama's supporters see as his appropriately careful language and his critics see as overly cautious.

French Prime Minister Manuel Valls said the attacks that left 17 people dead suggested the world was "waging a war against Islamist extremists." And British Prime Minister David Cameron, on a visit to Washington two weeks ago, said Europe and the U.S. face a "very serious Islamist extremist terrorist threat."

Obama, however, assiduously avoided associating the attacks with Islam, a decision White House spokesman Josh Earnest said was made for the sake of "accuracy."

"These are individuals who carried out an act of terrorism, and they later tried to justify that act of terrorism by invoking the religion of Islam and their own deviant view of it," Earnest said. "We also don't want to be in a situation where we are legitimizing what we consider to be a completely illegitimate justification for this violence, this act of terrorism."

Obama's conservative opponents quickly seized on the president's rhetorical choice and cast it as an example of the White House downplaying the root cause of the terror threat. At least one Democrat — Hawaii Rep. Tulsi Gabbard, an Iraq war veteran — agreed, saying the president's terror terminology matters, particularly as Congress weighs a new authorization for military action in Iraq and Syria.

"By his not using this term 'Islamic extremism' and clearly identifying our enemies, it raised a whole host of questions in exactly what Congress will be authorizing," Gabbard said on Fox News. "Unless you understand who your enemy is, unless you clearly identify your enemy, then you cannot come up with a very effective strategy to defeat that enemy."

Similarly, retired Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn, who until last year was director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, told a conference in Washington last week that "you cannot defeat an enemy you do not admit exists."

The president has long tried to shift his administration's terror rhetoric away from what he saw as the hyperbolic terminology used by his predecessor, George W. Bush, particularly his declaration in the aftermath of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks that the U.S. was engaged in a "war on terror."

In a high-profile national security address in 2013, Obama declared, "We must define our effort not as a boundless 'global war on terror,' but rather as a series of persistent, targeted efforts to dismantle specific networks of violent extremists that threaten America."

Under Obama's narrower definition, his advisers say the U.S. is at war with terror groups like al-Qaida and its affiliates, as well as the Islamic State group.

Given the U.S. policy of not making concessions to terrorists, the White House has refused to negotiate with Islamic State militants to free American hostages and opposes Jordan's ongoing efforts to orchestrate a prisoner swap with the group. However, the U.S. did negotiate with the Taliban through an intermediary last year to free American Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl in exchange for five Afghan detainees at the Guantanamo Bay prison.

The White House insisted anew this week that those negotiations did not violate U.S. policy because the administration does not classify that Taliban as a terrorist organization — though officials said there are overlapping characteristics.

"They do carry out tactics that are akin to terrorism. They do pursue terror attacks in an effort to try to advance their agenda," Earnest, the White House spokesman, said. The difference, he said, is that the Taliban threat to the U.S. is mainly confined to interests in Afghanistan, while a group like al-Qaida has broader ambitions.

Yet even the administration's classifications of the Taliban have some contradictions.

The Afghan Taliban is not on the State Department's list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations, thereby allowing the White House to engage in the negotiations for Bergdahl. Yet the Treasury Department does list the Afghan Taliban on the list of specially designated terrorists, giving the U.S. the ability to freeze the assets of the group and its members.

--Associated Press writers Ken Dilanian in Washington and Sylvie Corbet in Paris contributed to this report

[RETURN TO TOP](#)

DEFENSE DEPARTMENT

22. Pentagon to use war budget to ease pain of defense cuts – analysts

Reuters, Jan. 30 | David Alexander

WASHINGTON - The 2016 U.S. defense budget being released on Monday will continue a recent trend of shifting funds from the Pentagon base budget to its supplemental war-funding request, fueling criticism of the account's use to offset spending caps, defense analysts say.

The Obama administration is expected to seek \$51 billion for so-called Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO), primarily the wars in Afghanistan and the Middle East, when it submits the president's budget request for the 2016 fiscal year.

The large war-funding request, which is on top of a proposed Pentagon base budget of \$534 billion, comes despite a drop in U.S. troop levels in Afghanistan from about 38,500 last January to 10,600.

Analysts say the war-funding request remains high because both Congress and the Pentagon use the account to ease the impact of the 2011 budget cuts known as sequestration, which aim to reduce projected defense spending nearly \$1 trillion over a decade.

"OCO is a politically expedient way ... for all parties to ensure that there's some funding, particularly for readiness and other near-term requirements, while you are not able to resolve the sequestration problem," said Kathleen Hicks, a senior vice president at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

"The reality that we're facing for the next few years is that you'll have OCO used as a relief valve," said Hicks, the former principal deputy undersecretary of defense for policy.

Todd Harrison, an analyst at the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, said on Friday the war-funding account did not count toward defense spending caps under the law. As a result it represents a loophole that is being used to offset the impact of spending cuts.

"The incentive ... is to reclassify anything you can as being OCO funding," Harrison told reporters. "Both DoD (the Defense Department) and Congress have been doing this."

Harrison said between 2005 and 2013, the average cost per U.S. troop in Afghanistan was about \$1.2 million a year. Since the 2014 fiscal year, the average cost per troop has ranged far higher. This year it is more than \$4.5 million per service member and next year it is expected to be about \$3.8 million.

"How much base budget funding is DoD actually getting through the OCO appropriations? If it's to the tune of \$30 billion or so per year, as this data would suggest, then that largely offsets the reductions they've had," he said.

[RETURN TO TOP](#)

AIR FORCE

23. Sources: U-2 in USAF Budget Request, A-10 At Risk

DefenseNews.com, Jan. 30 | Aaron Mehta

WASHINGTON — The US Air Force will include both the U-2 spy plane and Global Hawk unmanned system in their FY16 budget request, but will once again ask to retire the A-10 Warthog, sources tell Defense News.

Both the Global Hawk and the U-2 perform the high-altitude intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) mission, and for several years the Air Force attempted to retire the Global Hawk in favor of the U-2, claiming the older platform was still cheaper and had greater capabilities than the Global Hawk.

In its FY15 request, the Air Force flipped, arguing that per-flying hour costs had come down enough on the Global Hawk that the unmanned system was now the cheaper option. The service claimed that retiring the U-2 could save \$2.2 billion. Those savings dropped dramatically, however, when factoring in the costs for needed upgrades to the Global Hawk that would allow it to fill current U-2 capabilities.

It appears the service has now given up on plans to retire either aircraft, and instead will request funding for both.

"In the budget they got the topline relief to keep both U-2 and Global Hawk," one source with knowledge of the budget said. "OSD put it in for the FY16 budget proposal."

Also included in the budget request are "modest" upgrades to the U-2 technologies, the source said.

A second source, also familiar with the budget, noted that the number of current and potential conflicts around the world, from Russia's invasion of Ukraine to ongoing operations against ISIS and the continued growth of China as a military power, may have made the case for the service that both high-altitude assets are needed.

"Of all the areas to be cutting, specialized high-altitude reconnaissance would not be near the top of my list to cut," the second source said. "I think Global Hawks are really important, really necessary. U-2 seems to be getting a lot of use and it's amazing they keep it going. I would far rather see cuts someplace else than those two systems.

"So if we don't waste time on sparring between Global Hawk and U-2 this year, that's a good thing."

While the U-2 may be saved, the A-10 Warthog remains on the cutting board, sources also said.

That is not a major surprise, as the Air Force has spent a significant amount of its political capital on trying to retire the jet, which remains very popular in Congress. Speaking in January, service Secretary Deborah Lee James hinted that the service remains likely to retire fleets of planes.

"The Air Force will take another run at retiring A-10," the first source said. "It's in the category of, 'no one thinks this is a great idea,' but under the pressures of sequestration it does the least harm."

That same source added that the KC-46A tanker, F-35 joint strike fighter and Long Range Strike-Bomber programs will remain on track in the new budget request. The service has identified those as its three biggest recapitalization priorities.

The sources all agreed that the FY16 budget will look very similar to the FY15 budget request.

"We would expect the Air Force to not be making any dramatic changes at this point, because they said last year this was all based on analysis they had done out to 2023," the second source said. "Expect to see a lot of continuity from the Air Force in this budget."

That argument was laid out by Gen. Mark Welsh, service chief of staff, in an August interview with Defense News.

"If something is the right answer one year, it is probably the right answer the next year," Welsh said then. "If you try to change the right answer each year, all you do is run into a different group of resistance."

The biggest question now is whether Congress will work to change the budget caps put in place by the Budget Control Act (BCA). The Air Force's portion of the budget request is expected to be \$152.9 billion, \$16 billion over the enacted amount for 2015; the overall Pentagon budget is expected to blow well past BCA levels at \$534 billion.

With Congress not showing much hope for changing BCA levels, the Air Force could find itself having to make more difficult cuts. A source familiar with Air Force thinking said that could include cuts for the the KC-10 tanker fleet or, potentially, future Global Hawk procurement.

"There will be a lot of rhetoric, a lot of debate, but not a lot of progress toward relief of BCA funding," that source said. "The services will have to comply with reduced funding and they are going to put more things on the table that the Congress won't like, and the services won't like. But what can you do? If we, as a nation, want a first class military, then it takes resources to do that. It is really that simple."

[RETURN TO TOP](#)

24. Air Force Ups Its Game On F-35, Names 2-Star To Coordinate

BreakingDefense.com, Jan. 30 | Colin Clark

PENTAGON -- In a clear sign of the growing importance of the F-35 to the Air Force as the aircraft nears IOC, the service is boosting the profile and office of the person working with the Joint Strike Fighter's Joint Program Office from a colonel to a two-star general.

The service announced today that Maj. Gen. Jeffrey Harrigian will serve as the director of a larger Air Force F-35 Integration Office, effective Feb. 1. The F-35 is scheduled to achieve Initial Operating Capability (IOC) no later than the end of 2016.

The office will triple in size from four to 12 and work closely with the service's major commands, such as Air Combat and Air Education and Training commands.

"This organizational change will help ensure a unified voice for operational integration of the F-35 across the Air Force as we collectively work towards bringing this remarkable new aircraft into our combat inventory," Harrigian said in a statement.

Harrigian is the Air Force's assistant deputy chief of staff for operations, plans and requirements. He replaces Col. Carl Schaefer, who heads to Edwards Air Force Base in March to command the 412th Test Wing in March.

Perhaps the most important but obscure bit of this change is that the Air Force's voting authority in the JPO moves from Air Combat Command to the F-35 Integration Office. That gives the service's senior leadership a tighter rein on the program. As the statement notes, "all senior leader communication within the Air Force will flow through the integration office."

"Assigning a general officer on the Air Staff will ensure we have a single point of contact with the Joint Program office empowered to speak on behalf of the Air Force for any aspect of the F-35 program," Gen. Mark Welsh, Air Force Chief of Staff, said in the statement.

[RETURN TO TOP](#)

ARMY

25. March of 'punk kid from Chicago'

Two-star general rose through ranks with values taught by Beverly parents

Chicago Tribune, Jan. 30, Pg. A1 | Katherine Skiba

As Army Maj. Gen. Ronald F. Lewis was receiving his second star this month, he joked that he'd come a long way for a "punk kid from Chicago."

But his parents said their son was anything but trouble.

"He never started any fights, but he could end one," father Richard Lewis said. "He always looked out for his younger brothers. He was that kind of guy: I don't think he knew what fear was."

Richard and Emma Lewis, who still live in the South Side's Beverly neighborhood where they raised their family, received special mention from their son during his promotion ceremony at the Pentagon. The general said being their son was key because they set him on a path to success.

"They created an environment of no ceilings, no caps," the general told the Tribune. "Achievement is what it's about, and that's what gets rewarded."

Lewis, 49, the only black Army general from Chicago, is a battle-tested commander and attack helicopter pilot who served three tours of duty in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Of the 318 generals in the active-duty Army, 34 are African-American. They include three who have four stars -- notably, Lloyd Austin III, leader of Central Command -- plus three with three stars, 16 like Lewis with two stars and 12 with a single star.

Lewis was born in Kittery, Maine, while his father wrapped up 12 years in the Air Force. The father, a sergeant at the old Pease Air Force Base, worked on B-47s and B-52s as a bomb navigation technician, before leaving in 1966 for Chicago, where he had a job waiting at AT&T.

Ronald Lewis was not even 2 years old when his parents, natives of Mississippi, adopted Chicago as their home. The father spent 25 years with the phone company and began substitute teaching for Chicago Public Schools, where he still teaches a couple of days a week.

His son was an athletic and mechanically oriented Boy Scout and a "good Christian boy," said his father. The family attended Seventh Presbyterian Church, and the parents still do.

Lewis graduated from Vanderpoel Elementary School in Chicago and ran track and was a top student at the old Mendel Catholic Preparatory High School before heading to West Point.

His father said he created financial incentives to encourage the couple's five children to get good grades.

"You got a dollar for an A, 50 cents for a B and you got nothing for a C but chewed out: 'Why didn't you do better?'" said Richard Lewis, 80. "We set high standards for our kids and we spent time with them."

Emma Lewis, 77, said her son learned to read before he started school. He loved building and fixing things, and when he entered science fairs, "if he was not the winner, he was second," she said.

She was a stay-at-home mom until she began hosting Tupperware parties and became a manager for the company. She now is retired.

The parents said they had rules: Their children couldn't use the phone, watch TV or invite friends over for backyard basketball until they finished their homework.

Gen. Lewis, a wiry man who stands 5 feet, 10 1/2 inches, recalled his Chicago years in an interview at his Pentagon office, which is filled with military coins, battle flags and other colorful memorabilia -- including a tribute from a military unit with the motto "Too Tough to Die."

He recalls learning to ski at Alpine Valley Resort in Wisconsin and going to a church-run summer camp in Michigan.

He said his first job -- selling men's clothing at the old Henry C. Lytton & Co. store in Evergreen Plaza -- gave him enough money to fuel up his father's gas guzzler, a 1977 Chrysler New Yorker.

Lewis is married with two children, including a son, R.J., who attends East-West University in Chicago and tends bar in the Hyde Park neighborhood.

He said he tries to get back to Chicago twice a year, except when he's deployed. He's a fan of the Chicago Bulls ("way before Jordan -- Artis Gilmore days") and Blackhawks and likes to golf.

When he arrived at West Point in 1983, he said, he and other cadets aspired to be infantry soldiers, having a tough-guy mindset: "You've got to be a Special Forces-Airborne-Ranger snake eater."

But while Lewis was studying mechanical engineering, a mentor steered him to aviation, which looked "pretty dang-on good," the general said. Now he's a master aviator with about 2,200 flight hours, about 1,000 of those in combat.

The general is big on team-building. For every two pilots who jump into an Apache helicopter, he observed, there are about eight other soldiers performing tasks such as arming, refueling, intelligence-gathering, running a command post and maintaining ground vehicles.

Lewis tries to get the "most and best out of everyone" on his team by listening and making sure soldiers know they're appreciated. "I prefer to have people not want to let the team down," he said, "as opposed to fearing, 'I'm going to get hammered if I don't do this.' "

Having worn a uniform since he was 17, he said he is proudest for "leading America's sons and daughters, having the opportunity to train them up, to care for them, to provide just good mentorship and good leadership for them, and then take them to combat."

His first combat tour was in Iraq in 2004-05, a time marked by bloody insurgencies. A lieutenant colonel with the 1st Cavalry Division, he commanded a battalion of 500 troops and 48 helicopters, both Apaches and Kiowa Warriors.

"He personally led in all our major battles in Najaf, in Fallujah, in Sadr City," said Lt. Gen. James McConville, his commanding officer on all three deployments. "He's just the complete officer when it comes to leading soldiers in combat."

Lewis was at Taji airfield in Iraq when another helicopter pilot, Tammy Duckworth, was whisked out on a medevac after her Black Hawk was hit by a rocket-propelled grenade in November 2004. Duckworth, who lost both her legs in the attack, is now a member of the U.S. House from Chicago's northwest suburbs.

In 2006-07, Lewis received a master's degree in national security and strategic studies from the Naval War College.

He left the states in 2008 for a year in Afghanistan with the 101st Airborne Division, commanding a brigade with about 5,000 soldiers and about 200 aircraft, including helicopters, fixed-wing aircraft and unmanned vehicles.

In 2013, he returned for another year in Afghanistan, still fighting a stubborn insurgency, as a deputy commanding general with the 101st Airborne. Its mission was to train, advise and assist Afghan security forces as the U.S. shrank its footprint.

Lewis said he commanded about 18,000 troops at the start and about 8,000 when the deployment ended last February.

"It was a very tough job, training and assisting a foreign army and trying to build the Afghan army out of the history of Afghanistan," said retired Gen. Dick Cody. "That's a job we give to guys who have the maturity and toughness and street smarts to get it right."

Lewis, chief of Army public affairs since June, is the voice of what he calls the "million-person Army." About half that number are on active duty; about 350,000 in the National Guard and 200,000 in the Army Reserve.

McConville called Lewis "extremely competent" and added: "He's exactly the type of leader that we want at the highest levels of the Army."

Lewis is now part of a small team helping a former boss, Ashton "Ash" Carter, prepare to take the reins of the Defense Department. The team is introducing Carter to key senators and preparing him for his Senate confirmation hearing Wednesday.

Cody, a former Army vice chief of staff who met Lewis years ago and remains a mentor, saluted his protegee's military know-how, leadership skills and lack of ego.

"He's always focused on taking care of his troops and his unit," Cody said. "He wasn't worried about the next rung on the ladder. He was worried about doing the right thing every day.

"I think the sky's the limit with this fellow," Cody added. "He's that talented."

[RETURN TO TOP](#)

SEXUAL ASSAULT

26. Lackland trainer is handed 20-year sentence

San Antonio Express-News, Jan. 31, Pg. A1 | Sig Christenson

A former Air Force basic training instructor was sentenced to 20 years in prison Friday in the rapes of two women — his wife and a recruit he trained two decades ago at Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland.

Master Sgt. Michael Silva appeared to show no emotion as a military jury handed up its sentence, closing a trial that ran nearly two weeks.

His sister, Catherine Silva, broke down after the jury president, a colonel, revealed the verdict.

A 23-year Air Force veteran, Silva, 44, was charged with three rapes but was found not guilty in an assault prosecutors said occurred in North Carolina between 1991 and 1993. He was convicted of raping the recruit in 1995, and his then-wife in 2007.

Prosecutors said he choked them during the assaults, and that Silva had raped the recruit twice.

Capt. Christopher Porter, one of the prosecutors, sought a life sentence, telling jurors the victims were choked, raped and overpowered.

A defense attorney, Capt Theresa Hilton, echoed testimony by Silva and his sister, noting he was a father, the son of a career soldier and an Air Force veteran on the rise who had been selected for promotion to senior master sergeant.

“What the government has recommended is completely inappropriate,” she said, noting the jury had “a huge range of options” that included no punishment at all.

Silva could be eligible for parole after serving one-third of his sentence, or just under seven years. He maintained his innocence throughout the trial and Friday expressed sorrow to the Air Force, his family and the jury — but not to the victims.

“I definitely apologize to you for having to be away from your families and having to deal with this,” Silva told jurors in an unsworn statement, which allowed him to take the stand without being cross-examined.

He did not testify during the trial.

The case was the oldest yet in a scandal at Lackland that has seen 35 basic training instructors investigated for misconduct with 68 recruits and technical training students since 2011. It pitted a senior NCO against victims who had remained silent for years.

As testimony unfolded in the punishment phase, Catherine Silva tearfully told the jury her brother was a good father and so devoted to his parents that he returned home from an overseas tour to care for his father, who was badly injured in an accident. His mother has lived with him since suffering a heart attack.

“He’s always been taking care of everybody,” she said.

Michael Silva grew up as the son of an Army sergeant major. Once in the Air Force, he quickly made crew chief.

But the recruit who he raped in 1995 also was outstanding, throwing two paper routes as a kid, taking advanced classes in school, playing guitar and singing in a choir. She also had family in the military and couldn’t wait to serve.

At 17, she joined the Air Force and went to basic training after turning 18.

Her mother described her as “vivacious,” “strong” and “determined when she went to basic training 20 years ago, but “was not the same girl” after coming home.

“She just didn’t know what she was going to do anymore,” and that was not like her,” her mother told the court.

Her husband and mother described her as paranoid and hypervigilant, staying in her house more often than not, struggling to sleep and distant from her children — fearing Silva or someone else was observing her.

Now 38, the victim said she “knew the enemy could do bad things” but felt betrayed by Silva. She also told the panel of five officers and three senior NCOs that “he is not the Air Force,” and that with a guilty verdict rendered, she no longer has to be scared.

“I used to have a hate for Michael Silva in my heart, and I don’t like that,” she said.

His ex-wife, the other victim, wrote in an unsworn statement read to the jury that she “was extremely anxious around authority figures,” made a lot of mistakes in her job and struggled to be intimate with her husband.

“I became emotionally flat,” she wrote.

Testimony revealed the ex-wife filed for divorce May 3, 2007, only months after the attack. It’s not clear where the pleading was filed or when the divorce was final.

[RETURN TO TOP](#)

VETERANS

27. Bill Seeks to Curb Veterans' Suicides

Wall Street Journal, Jan. 31, Pg. A4 | Ben Kesling

Sgt. Clay Hunt sought for more than a year to boost his disability coverage at the Department of Veterans Affairs as he pursued treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder after returning from Iraq and Afghanistan.

The marine lost several close friends in combat and was wounded by a sniper. After coming home to the U.S., eventually settling in Houston, he showed symptoms of depression and other mental-health troubles.

The VA finally approved Sgt. Hunt's request and upgraded him to 100% disability coverage in 2011. But it was too late: The 28-year-old had committed suicide a few weeks before the VA, unaware of his death, boosted his coverage.

Congress is expected to pass legislation in the coming days named for Sgt. Hunt that is aimed at preventing veterans' suicides.

The bill would expedite treatment for veterans suffering from mental-health issues, help to ensure that veterans have access to support as soon as they leave the service, and give the VA more resources to hire mental-health experts.

"This bill would have helped our son," said Sgt. Hunt's mother, Susan Selke, who lives in Katy, Texas, and has testified before the House and Senate on the issue. "Especially with mental health, time is of the essence."

The bill, supported by veterans groups and VA Secretary Robert McDonald, could be the first piece of legislation sent to President Barack Obama for his signature in 2015.

Key features of the measure -- passed by the House earlier this month and scheduled to face a Senate vote soon -- include peer support for veterans seeking mental-health care and a pilot program to help the VA recruit psychiatrists. The bill includes up to \$30,000 a year in student debt forgiveness for psychiatrists who accept VA jobs. It also mandates an annual assessment of the department's mental-health and suicide-prevention programs.

"We really like that it's asking for accountability for mental-health care," said Jean Somers, whose son, National Guardsman Daniel Somers, committed suicide after returning home.

An average of 22 veterans commit suicide every day, a number that has held steady since 2009, according to the VA's most recent Suicide Data Report, gathered in 2012. Since 2009, more female veterans have been taking their own lives, and the VA says rates among male veterans aged 18 to 25 also are increasing.

The bill was introduced last year but stalled in the Senate when former Sen. Tom Coburn (R., Okla.) blocked it. At the time, Mr. Coburn said the VA already had the tools necessary to help veterans and needed to use them properly. He said the agency could leverage the more-than \$16 billion Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act that Congress authorized last year to execute many of the programs advanced in the bill under consideration.

"We gave them the authority in the Veterans Choice Act to do all that stuff," Mr. Coburn said. "There's nothing in this bill that they can't do already."

A VA spokeswoman didn't respond to Mr. Coburn's comments, but said the agency has been making changes to tackle mental-health issues. Mr. McDonald said the Clay Hunt Act, as the bill is known, complements those efforts.

"Coburn's block in December actually galvanized the issue," said Paul Rieckhoff, chief executive of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America.

By putting these requirements in writing, it will force the VA to act quickly, Mr. Rieckhoff said.

"We have to get some sort of suicide bill passed," said Bob Wallace, executive director at the Veterans of Foreign Wars. "Sometimes you have to put it in writing."

The VA has added staff to its crisis hotline and bolstered education for its employees as well as instituted a system that allows any provider, not just mental-health professionals, to flag veterans who are believed to be a suicide risk.

The new law would train veterans to provide outreach and recommend mental-health support programs and providers. That would create a crucial bridge to veterans who are unsure of where to look for help or don't trust civilian providers, advocates say.

The act would fund a website that would provide a comprehensive listing of mental-health providers and mandate a pilot program to help troops leaving active duty to transition more easily to VA care.

"Peer support would have been a great asset to Daniel," said Ms. Somers, who lives with her husband in Coronado, Calif. "He felt he could really only talk to other veterans."

[RETURN TO TOP](#)

NOTABLE COMMENTARY

28. Healthy reforms

Reasonable changes would curb the soaring cost of military benefits

Washington Post, Jan. 31, Pg. A14 | Editorial

The Pentagon budget is \$496 billion, which sounds like a lot of money, and it is - until you take account of the fact that an increasing share goes not for weapons, training and readiness but for health care and pension benefits of former service members. No one would dispute the need, or indeed the moral duty, to compensate adequately those who served their country. At the same time, this nation can't afford resource commitments that crowd out security needs.

Alas, as a political matter, objective discussion of these trade-offs is nearly impossible. President Obama found that out when military retiree lobbies shot down his modest trims to retiree health benefits, which are the main reason that health costs went from 6 percent of the defense budget to 10 percent between 2000 and 2012, on their way to 11 percent, according to a 2014 Congressional Budget Office study. A 1 percentage-point reduction in military pension annual cost-of-living increases (savings: \$6 billion over 10 years) made it into a comprehensive two-year House-Senate budget agreement last year. But retiree lobbies have vowed to undo it and have much support in both parties.

Now comes the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission, a blue-ribbon panel established by Congress in 2013, with the latest package of proposed reforms. The panel has clearly done its homework, as demonstrated by the sheer mass of its 302-page report. In one respect, however, its work disappoints: The panel recommends no change to the so-called Tricare for Life program, essentially a free Medigap plan for military retirees age 65 and older that the CBO has repeatedly identified as a major cost center - and which is all but untouchable politically. It also recommended no change in the active-duty compensation system.

More encouraging was the commission's proposal to revamp the versions of Tricare that apply to the families of active-duty personnel and working-age retirees. The former group could enroll in private health insurance plans at government expense. The latter would see an increase in cost-sharing of 1 percent per year for the next 15 years. The changes would leave working-age retirees paying less for health care than civilian federal retirees but save \$26.5 billion over the next half-decade, according to the commission.

Additionally, it recommends offering new recruits a 401(k)-like retirement plan in combination with a slightly reduced defined-benefit pension plan for those who serve 20 years or more. Current rules offer everyone either a generous pension after 20 years or nothing, so the commission's hybrid proposal is fairer and well designed to appeal to a new generation that expects portable, defined-contribution plans. Some object that this will give recruits less incentive to stay in the military as a career. But the vast majority leave before 20 years and get no pension, while others feel "locked in" by the need to qualify for one.

Few public-policy issues are more fraught with emotion than that of rewarding long-serving military personnel appropriately, without shortchanging other public interests. To this hot topic, the commission has brought a welcome dose of cool reason.

[RETURN TO TOP](#)

29. America's Strategy Deficit

Wall Street Journal (Declarations), Jan. 31, Pg. A13 | Peggy Noonan

Something is going on here.

On Tuesday retired Gen. James Mattis, former head of U.S. Central Command (2010-13) told the Senate Armed Services Committee of his unhappiness at the current conduct of U.S. foreign policy. He said the U.S. is not "adapting to changed circumstances" in the Mideast and must "come out now from our reactive crouch." Washington needs a "refreshed national strategy"; the White House needs to stop being consumed by specific, daily occurrences that leave it "reacting" to events as if they were isolated and unconnected. He suggested deep bumbling: "Notifying the enemy in advance of our withdrawal dates" and declaring "certain capabilities" off the table is no way to operate.

Sitting beside him was Gen. Jack Keane, also a respected retired four-star, and a former Army vice chief of staff, who said al Qaeda has "grown fourfold in the last five years" and is "beginning to dominate multiple countries." He called radical Islam "the major security challenge of our generation" and said we are failing to meet it.

The same day the generals testified, Kimberly Dozier of the Daily Beast reported that Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn, a retired director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, had told a Washington conference: "You cannot defeat an enemy you do not admit exists." The audience of military and intelligence professionals applauded. Officials, he continued, are "paralyzed" by the complexity of the problems connected to militant Islam, and so do little, reasoning that "passivity is less likely to provoke our enemies."

These statements come on the heels of the criticisms from President Obama's own former secretaries of defense. Robert Gates, in "Duty," published in January 2014, wrote of a White House-centric foreign policy developed by aides and staffers who are too green or too merely political. One day in a meeting the thought occurred that Mr. Obama "doesn't trust" the military, "doesn't believe in his own strategy, and doesn't consider the war to be his." That's pretty damning. Leon Panetta, in his 2014 memoir, "Worthy Fights," said Mr. Obama "avoids the battle, complains, and misses opportunities."

No one thinks this administration is the A Team when it comes to foreign affairs, but this is unprecedented push-back from top military and intelligence players. They are fed up, they're less afraid, they're retired, and they're speaking out. We are going to be seeing more of this kind of criticism, not less.

On Thursday came the testimony of three former secretaries of state, Henry Kissinger (1973-77), George Shultz (1982-89) and Madeleine Albright (1997-2001). Senators asked them to think aloud about what America's national-security strategy should be, what approaches are appropriate to the moment. It was good to hear serious, not-green, not-merely-political people give a sense of the big picture. Their comments formed a kind of bookend to the generals' criticisms.

They seemed to be in agreement on these points:

We are living through a moment of monumental world change.

Old orders are collapsing while any new stability has yet to emerge.

When you're in uncharted waters your boat must be strong.

If America attempts to disengage from this dangerous world it will only make all the turmoil worse.

Mr. Kissinger observed that in the Mideast, multiple upheavals are unfolding simultaneously -- within states, between states, between ethnic and religious groups. Conflicts often merge and produce such a phenomenon as the Islamic State, which in the name of the caliphate is creating a power base to undo all existing patterns.

Mr. Shultz said we are seeing an attack on the state system and the rise of a "different view of how the world should work." What's concerning is "the scope of it."

Mr. Kissinger: "We haven't faced such diverse crises since the end of the Second World War." The U.S. is in "a paradoxical situation" in that "by any standard of national capacity . . . we can shape international relations," but the complexity of the present moment is daunting. The Cold War was more dangerous, but the world we face now is more complicated.

How to proceed in creating a helpful and constructive U.S. posture?

Mr. Shultz said his attitude when secretary of state was, "If you want me in on the landing, include me in the takeoff." Communication and consensus building between the administration and Congress is key. He added: "The government seems to have forgotten about the idea of 'execution.'" "It's not enough that you say something, you have to do it, make all the pieces work."

When you make a decision, he went on, "stick with it." Be careful with words. Never make a threat or draw a line you can't or won't make good on.

In negotiations, don't waste time wondering what the other side will accept, keep your eye on what you can and work from there.

Keep the U.S. military strong, peerless, pertinent to current challenges.

Proceed to negotiations with your agenda clear and your strength unquestionable.

Mr. Kissinger: "In our national experience . . . we have trouble doing a national strategy" because we have been secure behind two big oceans. We see ourselves as a people who respond to immediate, specific challenges and then go home. But foreign policy today is not a series of discrete events, it is a question of continuous strategy in the world.

America plays the role of "stabilizer." But it must agree on its vision before it can move forward on making it reality. There are questions that we must as a nation answer:

As we look at the world, what is it we seek to prevent? What do we seek to achieve? What can we prevent or achieve only if supported by an alliance? What values do we seek to advance? "This will require public debate."

All agreed the cost-cutting burdens and demands on defense spending forced by the sequester must be stopped. National defense "should have a strategy-driven budget, not a budget-driven strategy," said Mr. Kissinger.

He added that in the five wars since World War II, the U.S. began with "great enthusiasm" and had "great national difficulty" in ending them. In the last two, "withdrawal became the principal definition of strategy." We must avoid that in the future. "We have to know the objective at the start and develop a strategy to achieve it."

Does the U.S. military have enough to do what we must do?

"It's not adequate to deal with all the challenges I see," said Mr. Kissinger, "or the commitments into which we may be moving."

Sequestration is "legislative insanity," said Mr. Shultz. "You have to get rid of it."

Both made a point of warning against the proliferation of nuclear weapons, which Mr. Shultz called "those awful things." The Hiroshima bomb, he said, was a plaything compared with the killing power of modern nuclear weapons. A nuclear device detonated in Washington would "wipe out" the area. Previous progress on and attention to nuclear proliferation has, he said, been "derailed."

So we need a strategy, and maybe more than one. We need to know what we're doing and why. After this week with the retired generals and the former secretaries, the message is: Awake. See the world's facts as they are. Make a plan.

[RETURN TO TOP](#)

30. Why locking up leakers makes sense

The Economist Online (UK), Jan. 29 | David Rennie

James Risen was prepared to go to jail to protect his source. In 2006 the New York Times reporter (pictured) published a book that revealed a covert American plot, in which a former Russian scientist fed flawed nuclear component designs to Iran. It claimed the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) had bungled the operation. The Justice Department promptly began investigating who had leaked the classified information, and identified Jeffrey Sterling, a former CIA employee who was suing the agency for racial discrimination, as the likely culprit. It duly subpoenaed Mr Risen, the only witness to this illegal disclosure. But he refused to name his contact, to whom he had promised anonymity.

The last time prosecutors tried to make a reporter reveal a source, Judith Miller, who also wrote for the Times, spent 85 days in jail in 2005 for keeping mum. Barack Obama's administration has pursued leakers with unprecedented aggression: the government has charged nine alleged leakers on his watch, compared with three under all previous presidents. Mr Risen challenged the subpoena, claiming that freedom of the press exempted journalists from the obligation to testify required of any other citizen. But judges found otherwise: last year the Supreme Court let stand a ruling that the constitution offered reporters no special protection.

The stage seemed set for another journalist to become a martyr. But this case offered two surprises. The first was that after securing a precedent that the government had the power to make reporters sing, Eric Holder, the outgoing attorney general, decided not to use it. True to his vow that "no reporter who is doing his job is going to go to jail" on his watch, he instructed prosecutors not to make Mr Risen unmask his source. That appeared to doom the case.

However, on January 26th the jury defied expectations and convicted Mr Sterling anyway. Even without Mr Risen's testimony, the prosecutors amassed a strong circumstantial case. They used phone records to show that the two were frequently in contact, and convinced the jury that Mr Sterling was the only person with access to the information and the ability and desire to leak it. In theory, Mr Sterling could face decades in prison, though the judge is likely to impose a more lenient sentence and his lawyer promises an appeal.

If upheld, the verdict will dramatically change the unwritten rules of the cat-and-mouse game played by reporters, sources and prosecutors. On the one hand, potential leakers should be reassured that journalists are unlikely to have to choose between their vow of confidentiality and their freedom. On the other, that is no longer a guarantee that sharing prohibited information will go unpunished. Reporters will need to take extra care not to leave a digital trail, which will make finding and approaching sources harder. And the threat of jail time will make the people they contact think twice about whether they are blowing the whistle on grave misconduct, or leaking sensitive information for less lofty reasons.

The conflict between society's desire for a vigorous free press that holds government to account and its need for the state to keep secrets from foreign enemies can never be resolved. But Mr Risen's reprieve and Mr Sterling's conviction could shift the balance in the right direction.

[RETURN TO TOP](#)