OVERVIEW

The U.S. strike on rebel radar facilities in Yemen represents the first "public evidence" for Houthi fighters and other Yemenis who believe that the United States has been waging an extended military campaign in the country, according to the *New York Times*. Separately, officials told the *Washington Post* that future U.S. military assistance to Saudi Arabia will be partly dependent on whether the gulf kingdom embraces an American-backed cease-fire with the Houthis in Yemen. Also of note, *Reuters* reported that President Obama and his top advisers are expected to meet on Friday to consider a range of military and diplomatic options in Syria as pro-government forces there continue to target Aleppo and other rebel positions.

NEWS HEADLINES AT 0430

- Trump accuses Clinton of guiding global elite against U.S. working class
- Bob Dylan awarded Nobel Prize in literature
- Dodgers down Nationals in Game 5 to advance to NLCS against Cubs
- Putin ratifies deal on 'indefinite' Syria deployment
- Gripped by grief, Thais mourn death of beloved monarch

OVERSEAS HEADLINES OF NOTE

- *Daily Star*: Algerian forces kill commander of Islamic State affiliate behind French murder
- *Komsomolskaya Pravda*: Assad says Aleppo to serve as springboard for liberation
- *RIA Novosti*: Russia completes delivery of S-300 air defense missiles to Iran

THIS DAY IN MILITARY HISTORY

- 1947 – Air Force test pilot Chuck Yeager breaks the sound barrier as he flies the experimental Bell XS-1 rocket plane over Muroc Dry Lake in California

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New York Times, Oct. 14, Pg. A1 | Mark Mazzetti, Ben Hubbard and Matthew Rosenberg

For the United States, it was simple retaliation: Rebels in Yemen had fired missiles at an American warship twice in four days, and so the United States hit back, destroying rebel radar facilities with missiles. But for the rebels and many others in Yemen, the predawn strikes on Thursday were just the first public evidence of what they have long believed: that the United States has been waging an extended campaign in the country, the hidden hand behind Saudi Arabia's punishing air war.

2. U.S. reviewing military aid to Saudis after Yemen strike

Washington Post, Oct. 14, Pg. A9 | Missy Ryan

Future American military assistance to Saudi Arabia will hinge partly on whether the gulf kingdom embraces a U.S.-backed cease-fire with Houthi rebels in Yemen, officials said Thursday, as the Obama administration intensifies efforts to distance itself from a bloody bombing campaign.

3. **Obama, aides expected to weigh Syria military options on Friday**

Reuters (Exclusive), Oct. 13 | Arshad Mohammed and Jonathan Landay

U.S. President Barack Obama and his top foreign policy advisers are expected to meet on Friday to consider their military and other options in Syria as Syrian and Russian aircraft continue to pummel Aleppo and other targets, U.S. officials said.

IRAQ/SYRIA

4. **Syria activists say more than 65 killed in three days in Aleppo**

Associated Press, Oct. 13 | Bassem Mroue and Qassim Abdul-Zahra

Shelling and over a dozen airstrikes on rebel-held parts of the Syrian city of Aleppo killed at least 11 people, bringing the death toll over the last three days in the embattled city to at least 65, activists said Thursday. In other developments in Syria's multi-layered conflict, two Iraqi militia commanders said Thursday they have started withdrawing some of their elite forces from Syria, where they are fighting on the side of President Bashar Assad's government, to Iraq in preparation for the battle to retake the city of Mosul from the Islamic State group.

5. **Turkey's tilt to Russia changes dynamics of Syrian battlefield**

Financial Times Online (UK), Oct. 13 | David Gardner

Rebel-held eastern Aleppo looks as though it will either fall or be razed to the ground in the face of relentless Russian bombardment from the air and under siege from Iran-backed militia on the ground. But it is not just Vladimir Putin's ruthlessness that will bring this about. It is Turkey's tilt towards Russia and, to a degree, Iran, which is the main change in the strategic equation on the crowded battlefield of north-west Syria.

6. **Turkey says botched assault on Iraq's Mosul would trigger refugee wave**

Reuters, Oct. 13 | Tulay Karadeniz

Any mistake in a planned U.S.-backed operation to drive Islamic State from the Iraqi city of Mosul could result in hundreds of thousands of refugees, Turkish presidential spokesman Ibrahim Kalin said on Thursday.

MIDEAST

7. **Navy's Top Admiral on Yemen Strikes: 'Enough Was Enough'**

Military.com, Oct. 13 | Hope Hodge Seck

On Thursday, the 241st birthday of the U.S. Navy, Chief of Naval Operations Adm. John Richardson drew a connection between the service's first major fight with the African Barbary Pirates in the early 1800s and sea-launched missile strikes Wednesday that destroyed radar sites used by Houthi rebels in Yemen to target Navy ships.

8. **Iran sending ships to Yemeni coast after U.S. ship fires at Houthi sites**

The Hill Online, Oct. 13 | Kristina Wong

Iran announced Thursday it had deployed two warships to the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, where a U.S. Navy destroyer recently fired retaliatory strikes against Iran-backed Houthi rebel sites in Yemen.

9. Egypt Juggles Its Allegiances as Russian Influence Surges

Wall Street Journal (Middle East Crossroads), Oct. 14, Pg. A7 | Yaroslav Trofimov

Balancing acts are precarious by definition and, as Egypt is finding out, even a small move can have cascading consequences. Until recently, Cairo managed to maintain strong relations with Saudi Arabia and other Gulf monarchies that provide it with tens of billions of dollars in aid, while also cultivating warm ties with Russia and staying away from Saudi-led efforts to topple the Syrian regime. Then last Saturday, Egypt had to vote on a Russian-sponsored United Nations Security Council resolution favored by the Syrian regime.

ASIA/PACIFIC

10. South Korea, U.S. military chiefs agree to develop effective response measures against North Korea threats

Yonhap News Agency (South Korea), Oct. 13 | Chang Jae-soon

The military chiefs of South Korea and the United States agreed Thursday to develop "effective response measures" in order to deter and counter additional provocations from North Korea, the Pentagon said.

11. Philippines Wants U.S. to Remain Top Military Ally, Yasay Says

Bloomberg News, Oct. 13 | Andreo Calonzo and Cecilia Yap

The U.S. will remain the most important partner for the Philippines even as Rodrigo Duterte improves ties with China, his foreign secretary said ahead of the president's trip to Beijing.

12. Thai king's death adds to uncertainty about Obama's faltering Asia pivot

Reuters, Oct. 13 | David Brunnstrom

The death of Thailand's King Bhumibol Adulyadej on Thursday adds a new layer of uncertainty to U.S. President Barack Obama's faltering "pivot" to Asia less than a month before the Nov. 8 U.S. presidential elections.

13. Russia says to sign S-400 air defence deal with India

Agence France-Presse, Oct. 13 | Gabrielle Tetrault-Farber

Russian President Vladimir Putin will seal a deal with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi during an upcoming visit to deliver Moscow's most advanced air defence system, the Kremlin said Thursday.

EUROPE

14. From 'Sleepy Hollow' to war-fighting footing, EUCOM muscles up

Stars and Stripes, Oct. 13 | John Vandiver

For years, U.S. European Command's headquarters, which focused in the post-Cold War era on training and fostering relationships, had the informal nickname of Sleepy Hollow. Now, EUCOM is pivoting from a peacetime footing to one in which the command can lead in a high-end fight.

15. Montenegro PM accuses Russia of financing anti-NATO campaign

Reuters (Interview), Oct. 13 | Aleksandar Vasovic

Russia is pouring money into Montenegro's election campaign in an attempt to derail the country's progress towards joining NATO, the country's Prime Minister Milo Djukanovic said on Thursday, three days ahead of an election.

AFRICA

16. Boko Haram Frees 21 Girls Kidnapped in Nigeria

New York Times, Oct. 14, Pg. A3 | Chris Stein

Two and a half years after nearly 300 girls were kidnapped from a school in northeastern Nigeria, the government said on Thursday that 21 of them had been freed, the biggest breakthrough in an ordeal that has shocked the world and laid bare the deadly instability gripping large parts of the country.

POLITICS

17. Clinton says U.S. could 'ring China with missile defense'

Associated Press, Oct. 14 | Nomaan Merchant

Hillary Clinton privately said the U.S. would "ring China with missile defense" if the Chinese government failed to curb North Korea's nuclear program, a potential hint at how the former secretary of state would act if elected president.

18. Ex-nuclear launch officers pen letter to keep Trump's finger off the button

Washington Post, Oct. 14, Pg. A6 | Carol Morello

Ten former nuclear launch control officers who once held the keys needed to fire on the president's order have signed an open letter saying they think Donald Trump should not be entrusted with the nation's nuclear codes.

DEFENSE DEPARTMENT

19. Pentagon's No. 2 Needs to Slash Overhead, Says Defense Business Board

Defense News Online, Oct. 13 | Joe Gould

The Defense Business Board is recommending that the next presidential administration run the Pentagon more like a business and turn the deputy defense secretary into a cost-cutting, efficiency-hunting chief management officer.

20. Defense Innovation Unit Announces Contracting Results

National Defense Magazine Online, Oct. 13 | Jon Harper

An office established by Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter to build bridges between the U.S. military and commercial technology hubs awarded $36.3 million in contracts in the last quarter of fiscal year 2016, the director told reporters Thursday.

21. Gitmo prisoner found ineligible for release

Miami Herald, Oct. 14, Pg. A13 | Carol Rosenberg

The interagency parole board has declared the younger brother of an alleged 9/11 plotter too dangerous to release, essentially rebranding Hassan Bin Attash as Guantánamo's 24th "forever prisoner."

AIR FORCE

22. Air Force's pioneering approach to diversity

Christian Science Monitor Online, Oct. 13 | Anna Mulrine Grobe

Air Force Secretary Deborah James can clearly remember the moment she was forced to acknowledge her own unconscious biases about people. She was asked to look at pictures of two men. "One had tattoos all over his body, huge muscles – the way he was dressed reminded me of a gang person," Secretary James recalls in an interview with the Monitor. "I thought to myself, 'Wow, perhaps this is a prison convict.' "

23. Air Force Hardening Its 'Flying Networks' Against Cyber Threats

Bloomberg News, Oct. 13 | Nafeesa Syeed

As the U.S. Air Force deploys pilots for combat, including the campaign targeting Islamic State, it's accelerating efforts to harden the computer networks that control everything from warplanes' navigation to weapons systems from cyber threats.

ARMY

24. Army soldiers provide aid in deadly Metrobus crash in DC

Associated Press, Oct. 13 | Lolita C. Baldor

The top U.S. Army officer and several of his staff and aides were among the first to go to the aid of motorists in a bus crash in southeast Washington Wednesday night that left one person dead and three others injured.

MARINE CORPS

25. Neller tells Okinawa Marines they must adapt for new adversaries

Stars and Stripes, Oct. 13 | Matthew M. Burke

The Marine Corps commandant told his forces on Okinawa they must adapt to face new adversaries as the United States shifts from combat in Iraq and Afghanistan to preparations for potential future foes like North Korea, China, Russia and Iran.

NAVY

26. Secretary of the Navy stops at EB, touts shipbuilding under his tenure, work by EB employees

The Day Online (New London, CT), Oct. 13 | Julia Bergman

With the aft section of the future USS South Dakota behind him, Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus on Thursday highlighted the shipbuilding that has happened during his tenure, and he credited Electric Boat employees for building "the best submarines in the world."

27. Cruise missile attacks on Navy ships will likely warrant rare combat ribbons

Military Times Online, Oct. 13 | Andrew Tilghman

It's been more than 25 years since the Navy officially recognized a ship crew at sea for coming under enemy fire. Yet the recent attacks from the Red Sea – when an enemy cruise missile came within one minute of impacting a ship – will likely make thousands of sailors eligible for Combat Action Ribbons, a citation the Navy has not bestowed on the crew of a ship underway since the Gulf War in 1991.

NOTABLE COMMENTARY

28. Obama's Iran Missile War

Wall Street Journal, Oct. 14, Pg. A10 | Editorial

The White House doesn't want Americans to notice, but the tide of war is not receding in the Middle East. The Navy this week became part of the hot war in Yemen, with a U.S. warship launching missiles against radar targets after American vessels were fired on this week. Just when President Obama promised that American retreat would bring peace to the region, the region pulls him back in.

29. North Korea, our next big worry

Washington Post, Oct. 14, Pg. A15 | David Ignatius

When South Korean officials talk about the growing nuclear challenge from North Korea, they use red-alert phrases such as "existential threat," "imminent danger" and "dagger at the throat." They want Americans to understand that this long-running story of brinkmanship has entered a new phase.

30. Extend European sanctions to keep Russia in check

Financial Times Online (UK), Oct. 13 | Anders Fogh Rasmussen

Few in 2014 would have thought the west - and especially the EU - would have maintained sanctions on Russia over its actions in Ukraine for more than two years.

TOP STORIES

1. Yemenis View Strikes as Proof of Role of U.S.

New York Times, Oct. 14, Pg. A1 | Mark Mazzetti, Ben Hubbard and Matthew Rosenberg

WASHINGTON -- For the United States, it was simple retaliation: Rebels in Yemen had fired missiles at an American warship twice in four days, and so the United States hit back, destroying rebel radar facilities with missiles.

But for the rebels and many others in Yemen, the predawn strikes on Thursday were just the first public evidence of what they have long believed: that the United States has been waging an extended campaign in the country, the hidden hand behind Saudi Arabia's punishing air war.

For the Obama administration, the missile strikes also highlighted the risks of a balancing strategy it has tried to pursue in Yemen since a bitter sectarian war engulfed the country two years ago. The United States has not formally joined the Saudi-led coalition that intervened in support of Yemen's deposed government -- and has tried to push the warring factions toward a peace deal -- but it has refueled coalition bombers, trained Saudi pilots and provided intelligence to the bombing campaign.

A year and a half of bombing -- along with the deaths of thousands of Yemeni civilians -- has stoked anger in Yemen not only toward the Saudis, but also toward their perceived patrons in Washington. This week's attacks on the Mason, an American destroyer, and the Pentagon's response show how rapidly the United States can go from being an uneasy supporting player to an active participant in a chaotic civil war.

"The Americans have been patronizing and directing the war from the very beginning," said Brig. Gen. Sharaf Luqman, a spokesman for the rebel alliance.

Yemen's conflict started in 2014, when Shiite rebels from the north, the Houthis, seized the capital, Sana, and sent the government into exile. They now control much of the country's north and west, along with army units loyal to former President Ali Abdullah Saleh. An international military coalition led by Saudi Arabia began a bombing campaign in March 2015 in an effort to restore the government of Abdu Rabbu Mansour Hadi, the exiled president.

The Obama administration gave its immediate support to the campaign -- despite skepticism about whether the coalition would be able to dislodge the Houthis from Sana -- in part because it needed Saudi support for the nuclear deal it was negotiating with the kingdom's archenemy, Iran.

That support has come under greater scrutiny amid reports that coalition forces have been striking residential areas, markets, medical facilities and weddings. On Saturday, an attack on a funeral reception in Sana killed more than 100 people.

The United States has also kept warships in the region to guard a sea lane through which four million barrels of oil pass each day. There, in the narrow strait at the mouth of the Red Sea, the dizzying mix of warships, cargo vessels and insurgent forces this week yielded precisely what the Obama administration had spent 18 months trying to avoid.

The American strikes, launched at rebel-held territory, came after two unsuccessful missile attacks on the Mason in four days, the Pentagon said Thursday, and were intended solely to protect American forces and other shipping in Bab el Mandeb, the strait separating Yemen from Eritrea and Djibouti.

More attacks would invite further retaliation, Peter Cook, the Pentagon spokesman, said Thursday. American and allied warships will continue to patrol the strait, he said, but "we don't seek a wider role in the conflict."

That may be the case, but the United States now finds itself facing a dangerous situation in a narrow stretch of water where even small incidents run the risk of inciting a broader conflict.

After the American strikes, Iran said it was sending two warships to the strait, presumably to support the Houthis, an indigenous Shiite group with loose connections to Iran. Saudi Arabia has portrayed the Houthis as an Iranian proxy force and has said that it needed to intervene in Yemen to protect Saudi national security by preventing the rise of a belligerent militia on its southern border.

Foreign diplomats and analysts say Iran's ties to the Houthis are murkier, although Iran has provided the group with some military support.

Michael Knights, a fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy who studies Yemen, said most of the arms used by the Houthi-Saleh alliance were "legacy matériel," meaning that they were in the country before the conflict started. Yemen has for a long time been awash in arms, and much of the rebels' armory came from the Yemeni Army.

But as the conflict has gone on, there has been more evidence of Iranian military support, he said. Along the Yemen-Saudi border, rebels have begun using anti-tank missiles, shoulder-launched rockets and sniper rifles of the same type used by Iranian-backed militias in Iraq and Lebanon.

Pentagon officials could not say whether it was Houthi rebels themselves who had launched the missiles at the Mason or whether they had been fired by allied military units loyal to Yemen's former president, Mr. Saleh, who are fighting alongside the insurgents.

But Mr. Cook said Thursday that the main issue was the threat to American forces and that the retaliatory strikes had disabled the radar installations that had targeted the Mason.

"These targets were chosen based on our assessment that they were involved in missile launches in recent days, and they were struck in order to defend our ships and their crews and to protect freedom of navigation through a waterway that is vitally important to international commerce," Mr. Cook told reporters.

Gerald M. Feierstein, a former ambassador to Yemen who was the State Department's second-ranking diplomat for the Middle East until May, said the rebels most likely acquired the anti-ship missiles in the past few months, probably from Iran.

"This is a relatively new phenomenon," Mr. Feierstein said, acknowledging that it was unclear whether the decision to launch them at an American warship had been made by senior Houthi leaders or a rogue commander.

On Oct. 1, the Houthis claimed a successful attack on a vessel being used by the United Arab Emirates. While that strike -- and the two attacks on the Mason this week -- killed no one, they raised the specter that the chaos in Yemen would increasingly threaten international navigation.

"That is why these missile strikes are so significant," said Mr. Knights, the analyst. "It might be the indication that the Houthis have said, 'You know what, if we get nothing from the West, then we have nothing to lose.'"

According to the United Nations, more than 4,000 civilians have been killed in Yemen since the bombing campaign began. Even though the Obama administration provides extensive support for the military coalition, the administration's public position is that it is not a party to the conflict, a stance that rings hollow for many Yemenis.

"In Yemen, this is seen as a U.S. bombing campaign," said Senator Christopher S. Murphy, the Connecticut Democrat and critic of the war who led an effort in the Senate last month to block a $1.15 billion arms deal with Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Murphy said that the White House should use its leverage over the Saudis, and use the threat of dialing back some of this support to try to rein in a campaign that has been widely condemned as reckless.

"The Saudis have to know that they can't conduct this campaign without U.S. support," he said.

--*Eric Schmitt contributed reporting from Vilnius, Lithuania, and Shuaib Almosawa from Sana, Yemen*

RETURN TO TOP

2. U.S. reviewing military aid to Saudis after Yemen strike

Washington Post, Oct. 14, Pg. A9 | Missy Ryan

Future American military assistance to Saudi Arabia will hinge partly on whether the gulf kingdom embraces a U.S.-backed cease-fire with Houthi rebels in Yemen, officials said Thursday, as the Obama administration intensifies efforts to distance itself from a bloody bombing campaign.

"It's not going to help sustain any support ... if they don't accept the unconditional cessation of hostilities that we think is absolutely, urgently needed, now more than ever," a senior official said, speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations.

In a sign of tensions with a core Middle Eastern ally, officials issued the blunt warning to Saudi Arabia as the White House begins a top-to-bottom review of military aid for the kingdom, including both a massive, long-standing program of arms sales and more-limited assistance for the extended air war over Yemen.

The review follows a grisly Oct. 8 bombing in the Yemeni capital, Sanaa, which capped a series of apparent Saudi strikes on civilian targets and deepened U.S. concerns about involvement in a war that has killed more than 4,000 noncombatants.

The Oct. 8 strike, which killed more than 100 people at a funeral, appeared to be a final straw for administration critics of Saudi Arabia's handling of the campaign, which they believe has ranged far beyond its original mission to defend the kingdom's border from Houthi attack.

"We are telling the Saudis that supporting their territorial integrity, their sovereignty, that's one thing. But their campaign inside Yemen is something else, particularly if they're not prepared to accept the unconditional, immediate cessation of hostilities that we've called for," the official said. "That will obviously be a factor in our assessment."

Officials spoke about the review hours after the Pentagon launched Tomahawk cruise missiles against Houthi targets in Yemen, a response to a series of attacks this week on nearby U.S. ships. The Obama administration has blamed those shore-to-sea missile attacks, which inflicted no damage, on the Houthis; the rebels have denied involvement.

The officials said the exchange of missile fire, while potentially complicating efforts to secure an immediate cease-fire between the two parties, would not affect the deliberations about future support to Saudi Arabia.

They signaled determination to continue a gradual reduction in U.S. military aid to the Saudi air campaign that has taken place in recent months. Since the campaign's start last year, U.S. tanker planes have conducted more than 1,400 missions, offloading tens of millions of pounds of fuel. U.S. personnel also have advised their Saudi counterparts on targeting rebels and avoiding civilian casualties.

But U.S. support has dropped off since a now-abandoned cease-fire earlier this year, officials say. According to U.S. military statistics, the frequency of U.S. refueling missions, which has fluctuated throughout the campaign, fell in late summer from a peak earlier in 2016. Today, only four U.S. personnel remain at the Saudi command center in Riyadh.

"[We are] distancing ourselves both in terms of what we say but also in terms of what we've done," the official said.

U.S. personnel do not approve Saudi targets beyond providing a "no-strike" list of civilian and off-limits targets, officials say.

A spokesman for the Saudi military was not available for comment.

For administration critics of the Saudi campaign, the Sanaa strike, which Human Rights Watch labeled "an apparent war crime," provided an opportunity to press the case that the U.S. support for the campaign must be curtailed even further.

Officials said reductions in or changes to arms sales, not just to support to the Yemen campaign, would be under discussion during the high-level review.

"Everything is on the table," the official said. The United States has already halted new sales of cluster munitions to Saudi Arabia.

Officials are open to exploring additional restrictions, but a number of approved sales are already in the pipeline. No matter what the review concludes, officials said, some assistance will continue for defense of the Saudi border, in keeping with a pledge from President Obama.

While support for change appears to be growing, some officials within the Pentagon and State Department continue to stand up for Saudi Arabia, stressing the severity of the Houthi threat the country faces on its borders. Neither will it be easy for the Obama administration to impose further stress on a relationship already damaged by new legislation exposing Riyadh to lawsuits over the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks in the United States.

According to the State Department, the Saudi government agreed in principle after the Sanaa airstrike to accept a 72-hour cease-fire, if that proposal is also embraced by the Houthis. But previous efforts to broker a lasting cease-fire and peace agreement have faltered.

"We encourage the Yemeni government and Houthi-General People's Congress factions to agree to a cease-fire immediately and without preconditions," State Department spokesman John Kirby said.

If a lasting cease-fire can be established, Kirby said, political talks can resume.

Ilan Goldenberg, a senior fellow at the Center for a New American Security, said the Obama administration may be stuck with support for a campaign many officials have disliked from the beginning, but which was seen as necessary to mitigate Saudi opposition to the nuclear deal with Iran.

"It's disturbing when you see these types of bombings," he said. "But what are you going to do, walk away from the U.S.-Saudi relationship?"

-Dan Lamothe contributed to this report

RETURN TO TOP

3. Obama, aides expected to weigh Syria military options on Friday

Reuters (Exclusive), Oct. 13 | Arshad Mohammed and Jonathan Landay

WASHINGTON -- U.S. President Barack Obama and his top foreign policy advisers are expected to meet on Friday to consider their military and other options in Syria as Syrian and Russian aircraft continue to pummel Aleppo and other targets, U.S. officials said.

Some top officials argue the United States must act more forcefully in Syria or risk losing what influence it still has over moderate rebels and its Arab, Kurdish and Turkish allies in the fight against Islamic State, the officials told Reuters.

One set of options includes direct U.S. military action such as air strikes on Syrian military bases, munitions depots or radar and anti-aircraft bases, said one official who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations.

This official said one danger of such action is that Russian and Syrian forces are often co-mingled, raising the possibility of a direct confrontation with Russia that Obama has been at pains to avoid.

U.S. officials said they consider it unlikely that Obama will order U.S. air strikes on Syrian government targets, and they stressed that he may not make any decisions at the planned meeting of his National Security Council.

One alternative, U.S. officials said, is allowing allies to provide U.S.-vetted rebels with more sophisticated weapons, although not shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missiles, which Washington fears could be used against Western airliners.

The White House declined to comment.

Friday's planned meeting is the latest in a long series of internal debates about what, if anything, to do to end a 5-1/2 year civil war that has killed at least 300,000 people and displaced half the country's population.

The ultimate aim of any new action could be to bolster the battered moderate rebels so they can weather what is now widely seen as the inevitable fall of rebel-held eastern Aleppo to the forces of Russian- and Iranian-backed Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

It also might temper a sense of betrayal among moderate rebels who feel Obama encouraged their uprising by calling for Assad to go but then abandoned them, failing even to enforce his own "red line" against Syria's use of chemical weapons.

This, in turn, might deter them from migrating to Islamist groups such as the Nusra Front, which the United States regards as Syria's al Qaeda branch. The group in July said it had cut ties to al Qaeda and changed its name to Jabhat Fatah al-Sham.

ANOTHER TRY AT DIPLOMACY

The U.S. and Russian foreign ministers will meet in Lausanne, Switzerland on Saturday to resume their failed effort to find a diplomatic solution, possibly joined by their counterparts from Turkey, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Iran, but

U.S. officials voiced little hope for success.

Friday's planned meeting at the White House and the session in Lausanne occur as Obama, with just 100 days left in office, faces other decisions about whether to deepen U.S. military involvement in the Middle East -- notably in Yemen and Iraq -- a stance he opposed when he won the White House in 2008.

Earlier Thursday the United States launched cruise missiles at three coastal radar sites in areas of Yemen controlled by Iran-aligned Houthi forces, retaliating after failed missile attacks this week on a U.S. Navy destroyer, U.S. officials said.

In Iraq, U.S. officials are debating whether government forces will need more U.S. support both during and after their campaign to retake Mosul, Islamic State's de facto capital in the country.

Some officials argue the Iraqis now cannot retake the city without significant help from Kurdish peshmerga forces, as well as Sunni and Shi'ite militias, and that their participation could trigger religious and ethnic conflict in the city.

In Syria, Washington has turned to the question of whether to take military action after its latest effort to broker a truce with Russia collapsed last month.

The United States has called for Assad to step down, but for years has seemed resigned to his remaining in control of parts of the country as it prosecutes a separate fight against Islamic State militants in Syria and in Iraq.

The U.S. policy is to target Islamic State first, a decision that has opened it to charges that it is doing nothing to prevent the humanitarian catastrophe in Syria and particularly in Aleppo, Syria's largest city.

Renewed bombing of rebel-held eastern Aleppo has killed more than 150 people this week, rescue workers said, as Syria intensifies its Russian-backed offensive to take the whole city.

Anthony Cordesman of Washington's Center for Strategic and International Studies think tank suggested the United States' failure to act earlier in Syria, and in Aleppo in particular, had narrowed Obama's options.

"There is only so long you can ignore your options before you don't have any," Cordesman said.

--*Additional reporting by John Walcott*

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IRAQ/SYRIA

4. Syria activists say more than 65 killed in three days in Aleppo
Associated Press, Oct. 13 | Bassem Mroue and Qassim Abdul-Zahra

BEIRUT — Shelling and over a dozen airstrikes on rebel-held parts of the Syrian city of Aleppo killed at least 11 people, bringing the death toll over the last three days in the embattled city to at least 65, activists said Thursday.

Meanwhile, rebel shelling of government-held areas in the divided city killed two girls at a school. The airstrikes came a day after an air raid hit eastern Aleppo's biggest market, killing at least 15 people and leveling buildings.

Aleppo's unabating violence has given additional urgency to the upcoming meeting between Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry on efforts to find a peace deal in Syria in Switzerland on Saturday. It will be the first face-to-face contact between the two men since Washington broke off bilateral diplomatic contact with Moscow on Syria over the violence in Aleppo earlier this month.

In other developments in Syria's multi-layered conflict, two Iraqi militia commanders said Thursday they have started withdrawing some of their elite forces from Syria, where they are fighting on the side of President Bashar Assad's government, to Iraq in preparation for the battle to retake the city of Mosul from the Islamic State group.

The battle for Mosul is expected to be the most complex yet for Iraqi forces, backed by U.S.-led coalition air-power. Since Mosul first fell to IS in June 2014, the extremists have been pushed from more than half of the territory they once held in Iraq, according to figures released by Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi's office.

Iraqi Shiite militias are not expected to take part in the operation, although they are likely to be part of the offensive to capture areas nearby such as the town of Tal Afar, which used to have a large Shiite population.

The two commanders, from Iraq's powerful Asaib Ahl Haq and Kataib Hezbollah militias, said more than 2,000 of their fighters have been withdrawn from Syria, mostly from in and around Aleppo, for redeployment near Mosul and the IS stronghold of Hawija. The two spoke to The Associated Press in Baghdad on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss military tactics.

But two Syrian opposition activists — Rami Abdurrahman of the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights and Turkey-based Ahmad al-Ahmad — said they were unaware of the withdrawal, adding that Iraqi Shiite militias have recently sent reinforcements to Syrian government forces in the Aleppo area.

Earlier this month, an official with the Iraqi Shiite al-Nujaba militia said it sent some 4,000 fighters to Syria, also to the Aleppo area. The two Iraqi commanders said the al-Nujaba militiamen were not part of the pullout. The militia's leader, Sheikh Akram al-Kaabi, recently visited his fighters on Aleppo's front lines, vowing to continue to fight Sunni extremists.

According to the Observatory, over than 20 airstrikes overnight and into Thursday in eastern Aleppo killed seven people while shelling killed four. The activist group also said that clashes were taking place between government forces and rebels on the city's northern edge. The Halab Today TV channel reported "intense" airstrikes on rebel-held parts of Aleppo, adding that cluster bombs were being dropped.

Ibrahim Alhaj, a member of the Syrian Civil Defense, gave a higher toll, saying the airstrikes killed 13 and wounded 25. He said some people remained buried under the rubble and rescue and search operations were underway.

Syrian state media said two girls were killed and five were wounded in rebel shelling that hit a school in Aleppo's western government-held neighborhood of Suleimaniyah.

The Observatory said on Wednesday that at least 358 civilians have been killed in eastern Aleppo since a U.S. and Russian-brokered truce collapsed on Sept. 19. The U.N. says over 100 children have been killed in the campaign, which has also included a limited ground offensive.

Near the capital of Damascus, rebel fighters and civilians agreed to leave the suburbs of Qudsaya and Hammah as part of an arrangement to allow the government to retake control of the two areas. On Thursday evening, government buses set off from the suburbs with the 1,297 people, including women and children, to the rebel-held northwestern province of Idlib, the Observatory and state news agency SANA reported.

The pro-government newspaper Al-Watan reported earlier in the day the government would grant partial amnesty to some 300 remaining fighters as part of the deal.

In August, a similar deal saw the complete evacuation of the Daraya suburb — which a U.N. aid official compared to "forced displacement." Under-Secretary-General Stephen O'Brien warned at the time that the arrangement could not be a precedent for other areas.

In Geneva, Ramzy Ramzy, the top deputy to U.N. envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, said al-Qaida's affiliate in Syria — the Fatah al-Sham Front, previously known as the Nusra Front — rejected a recent offer to withdraw from the city of Aleppo under de Mistura's personal escort.

"Not surprisingly, (they gave a) negative response," Ramzy said.

Also Thursday, the Russian military denied its warplanes targeted Aleppo's residential areas, saying they have only struck militant facilities outside Syria's largest city.

Lt. Gen. Sergei Rudskoi said Russian airstrikes follow a thorough analysis of data gathered by satellites, drones and agents on the ground to identify militant targets and insisted that facilities located close to residential areas, schools, hospitals, street markets and mosques are never targeted.

Russia's air raids in support of Syrian army's offensive on Aleppo have drawn international outrage, and both the U.S. and France called for investigating Russia for possible war crimes in Syria. Moscow has rejected the accusations as unfounded.

--Abdul-Zahra reported from Baghdad. Associated Press writers Vladimir Isachenkov in Moscow and Philip Issa in Beirut contributed to this report

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5. Turkey's tilt to Russia changes dynamics of Syrian battlefield

Erdogan has made up with Putin and now hopes to prevent Syrian Kurds from securing territory near its border

Financial Times Online (UK), Oct. 13 | David Gardner

BEIRUT -- Rebel-held eastern Aleppo looks as though it will either fall or be razed to the ground in the face of relentless Russian bombardment from the air and under siege from Iran-backed militia on the ground.

President Vladimir Putin will then have got his way: saving the regime of Bashar al-Assad inside a rump Syria, with the ruins of Aleppo marking its northern perimeter, as part of his reassertion of Russia's credentials as a regional and global rival to the US.

But it is not just Mr Putin's ruthlessness that will bring this about. It is Turkey's tilt towards Russia and, to a degree, Iran, which is the main change in the strategic equation on the crowded battlefield of north-west Syria.

During five years of civil war that has killed up to 500,000 Syrians and displaced half the population, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Turkey's president, sought to topple Mr Assad, backing rebel forces against him and allowing jihadi volunteers to use Turkish territory as a launch pad into Syria.

That sharp focus is fading out as Ankara has turned to more pressing considerations - especially since the violent attempted coup against Mr Erdogan in mid-July.

Turkey's main goal in Syria now is to prevent Syrian Kurdish fighters from consolidating an autonomous territory below its border. Ankara fears the Syrian Kurds will link up with their Kurdistan Workers' party (PKK) allies waging an insurgency in south-east Turkey from bases inside the Kurdistan Regional Government autonomous territory of northern Iraq.

Ankara has also moved to mop up Isis cells and sympathisers inside Turkey and push the jihadis away from its borders. In late August, the Turkish army launched its first real incursion into Syria, spearheading a rebel force officials in Ankara say numbered 3,000. This thrust pushed Isis out of the so-called Manbij pocket of north-west Syria, with Turkey regaining control of 98km of its porous border. But the primary aim was to prevent the Syrian Kurds fighting Isis from moving westwards across the river Euphrates to join up their eastern and western territories.

Before making this tricky military move, Mr Erdogan made up with Mr Putin, ending a rift opened when Turkey shot down a Russian jet that strayed over its border from Syria last November. Russia gave Turkey a free hand against Syrian Kurdish forces to whom it had offered temporary and opportunistic support. Turkey deployed Syrian rebel forces needed to defend Aleppo to take Jarabulus on the west bank of the Euphrates and push on southwards.

Turkish officials say this new warmth towards Russia does not seal the fate of Aleppo and the Syrian rebellion. But it does extend to a transactional relationship with Iran, the Assad regime's other international patron, which is cracking down on its own Kurdish minority. "We are neighbours and we can do many things together," says a senior official in Ankara. Better relations with Russia and Iran are a precondition for ending the regional crisis. "If we make all bilateral relations hostage to the Syrian crisis then it's lose-lose-lose," he says.

One element in this new equation is that Moscow and Tehran were quicker to condemn July's attempted coup than Washington and most European capitals, even though Turkey is a Nato ally and EU candidate member.

But as far as Syria is concerned, Turkey long ago concluded that the west has abandoned mainstream Sunni rebels. The US, with a lame-duck president and distracted by an intense electoral contest, is focused narrowly on Isis - angering Turkey by using Syrian Kurdish militia as a strike force. The EU, scorned by Mr Erdogan as impotent, can muse about punishing Russia for its behaviour in Syria but may struggle to renew the sanctions for Mr Putin's annexation of Crimea and intervention in Ukraine at the end of this year.

For now, therefore, it looks as though Russia can continue to pulverise rebel Aleppo. "They are fighting, we are not, they are winning", is the curt summary of one European envoy in the region. "This is the worst of the scenarios we envisaged: that we get left with Assad and Daesh [Isis]".

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6. Turkey says botched assault on Iraq's Mosul would trigger refugee wave

Reuters, Oct. 13 | Tulay Karadeniz

ANKARA -- Any mistake in a planned U.S.-backed operation to drive Islamic State from the Iraqi city of Mosul could result in hundreds of thousands of refugees, Turkish presidential spokesman Ibrahim Kalin said on Thursday.

Turkey is locked in an escalating row with Iraq over who should take part in the Mosul assault and Kalin voiced concern that Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) militants, viewed by Ankara and Western allies as terrorists, could be involved.

"Reports that the PKK may take part in the Mosul operation greatly worry us," he told a news conference, saying Turkey had no "secret agenda" in Iraq and favored solving problems with Baghdad through dialogue.

The PKK has fought a 32-year insurgency in Turkey, in which more than 40,000 people have been killed, and its leadership is based in the mountains of northern Iraq.

Mosul, home to up to 1.5 million people, has been at the heart of Islamic State's self-declared caliphate in Iraq since 2014. The battle for the city is seen beginning this month.

"A mistake made there could result in hundreds of thousands of people becoming refugees," Kalin said. "A mistake in the Mosul operation will not be limited to Iraq, it will impact the whole region."

REGIONAL CONFLICT

Turkish soldiers have been training Sunni Muslim and allied Kurdish Peshmerga units at Iraq's Bashiqa camp, near Mosul, and want them involved in the assault.

But Baghdad's Shi'ite-led government objects to the Turkish military presence and wants its own forces at the forefront. Turkey fears the use of Shi'ite militias, which Iraqi army units have relied on in the past, will stoke sectarian unrest.

"It is better for Iraq if the national army liberates Mosul and distances sectarian militias from the battle," Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir told reporters in Riyadh after a meeting with his Turkish and Gulf counterparts.

A joint statement after the meeting between Turkey and the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) raised concern about "plans to involve militia forces which perpetrated revenge attacks, mass killings, torture and clear human rights abuses against local populations" in the Mosul operation.

The Baghdad government has condemned the continued Turkish military presence at the Bashiqa camp and Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi has warned Turkey risked triggering a regional war.

Turkey, part of the U.S.-led coalition against Islamic State, says its troops are there as part of an international mission to train Iraqi forces to fight jihadists.

The United States has said any foreign forces in Iraq should have the approval of the Baghdad government.

--Additional reporting by Tuvan Gumrukcu in Ankara, Nael Shyoukhi in Riyadh

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MIDEAST

7. Navy's Top Admiral on Yemen Strikes: 'Enough Was Enough'

Military.com, Oct. 13 | Hope Hodge Seck

On Thursday, the 241st birthday of the U.S. Navy, Chief of Naval Operations Adm. John Richardson drew a connection between the service's first major fight with the African Barbary Pirates in the early 1800s and sea-launched missile strikes Wednesday that destroyed radar sites used by Houthi rebels in Yemen to target Navy ships.

Speaking at a town hall meeting with sailors at Naval Support Activity Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, Richardson said the strike this week was evidence that the Navy continued to do the same mission for which it was founded.

"As you know, our Navy was stood up in 1775 ... to defend freedom of navigation, freedom of trade against the Barbary pirates in the Strait of Gibraltar," Richardson said. "Fast-forward 241 years, what were we doing last night. You had USS Mason and USS Nitze in a geographic choke-point in the Bab-el-Mandeb, protecting freedom of navigation and our national interests around the world."

Richardson provided new details about the strike on three radar sites in rebel-controlled territory on the coast of Yemen. The strike totaled five missiles, he said.

While defense officials yesterday declined to specify what kind of missiles were used, multiple media outlets have reported they were Tomahawk subsonic cruise missiles, launched from the Arleigh Burke-class destroyer Nitze from its position within the Red Sea.

The five-missile strike came after the destroyer Mason and another ship, the amphibious transport dock Ponce, had been targeted by missiles originating from those radar sites on the Yemeni coast, days apart.

According to a policy analysis published by experts at the Washington Institute on Wednesday, all three U.S. ships were told to patrol the area north of the Bab-el-Mandeb strait, between Yemen and the Horn of Africa, after rebels apparently targeted and damaged the United Arab Emirates-operated catamaran HSV-2 Swift, a vessel previously operated by the U.S. Navy.

"After defending themselves against a couple of coast cruise missile shots this last weekend and then again yesterday, they decided enough was enough," Richardson told the sailors. "In 241 years, much has changed, but the fundamentals stay the same."

Richardson has said the Navy plans to keep the ships in the region to continue with planned patrol operations.

The Navy's actions, carried out with authorization from President Obama, drew praise from the chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee on Thursday.

In a statement, Sen. John McCain, a Republican from Arizona, congratulated the sailors who executed countermeasures to thwart missile attacks and later carried out the planned strikes.

"If not for the skill of the crew of the USS Mason in defending their ship and others nearby, hundreds of American sailors could have been harmed, or worse, by Houthi rebels armed with missiles likely provided by the Iranian regime," he said. "Thanks to the successful strikes carried out in response by the USS Nitze, the United States Navy has delivered a strong message that aggression of this kind will not be tolerated."

McCain also warned that the attacks on Navy ships were a symptom of greater "chaos engulfing the Middle East" that includes terrorist groups such as the Islamic State as well as the Iran-backed Shiite Houthi rebels in Yemen.

It's not clear if further U.S. actions are planned in response to the rebels' missile attacks. A defense official told Military.com on Thursday the strikes were carried out in keeping with international law and were not in coordination with the Saudi-led coalition executing airstrikes on the rebels.

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8. Iran sending ships to Yemeni coast after U.S. ship fires at Houthi sites

The Hill Online, Oct. 13 | Kristina Wong

Iran announced Thursday it had deployed two warships to the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, where a U.S. Navy destroyer recently fired retaliatory strikes against Iran-backed Houthi rebel sites in Yemen.

The move is the latest escalation in U.S.-Iran tension related to a proxy war in Yemen, where the two are backing opposing sides. The U.S. in March 2015 joined a Saudi-led military coalition to support the embattled Yemeni government against Iranian-backed Houthi rebels.

Although the semi-official Iranian Tasnim News Agency reported that the Iran ship deployments were to "protect the country's trade vessels against piracy in the unsafe zone," it also noted that it "coincides with the US decision to directly get involved in a Saudi-led war against Yemen."

Late Wednesday evening, the USS Nitze, a Navy destroyer, fired cruise missiles from the Red Sea at three radar sites in "Houthi-controlled territory" in Yemen that U.S. officials say were used to launch two missile attacks at U.S. ships operating off the coast of Yemen on Sunday and Wednesday.

The U.S. strikes raised the prospect that the U.S. would move toward deeper military engagement in the civil war.

The U.S. so far has provided advice and logistical and intelligence support for the Saudi-led coalition conducting airstrikes against the Houthi rebels, who ousted the government from the capital of Sanaa in September 2014. The White House announced over the weekend it would review that support due to concerns about mounting civilian casualties and a humanitarian crisis in the country.

Pentagon and White House officials on Thursday both refrained from commenting on the Iranian ship deployments and tried to disavow the notion that the U.S. strikes had anything to do with the broader civil war in Yemen, saying they were narrowly in response to the missile launches against U.S. ships.

"These strikes were, again, a response to threats to our vessels and to freedom of navigation, which is a core U.S. national security interest. These strikes are not connected to the broader conflict in Yemen," Pentagon press secretary Peter Cook said.

The White House described the strikes as a "purely self-defense action."

"The intent of our strikes [was] to deter future attacks and to reduce the risk to U.S. and other vessels. We are prepared to respond if necessary to any future missile launches," White House deputy press secretary Eric Schultz said Thursday.

U.S. officials also avoided attributing blame for the missile firings despite repeated questions from the press, only saying the missiles were fired from "Houthi-controlled territory."

"We don't know who was pulling the trigger, if you will, specifically," Cook said. "All I know is these strikes originated from Houthi-controlled territory. If somebody else is carrying this out in Houthi-controlled territory then I would encourage the Houthis to try and get that under control."

It was a stark contrast with comments from earlier in the week, when the Pentagon pledged to find out who fired the missiles and acknowledged that Iran has supplied the Houthis with weapons in the past.

"We want very much to get to the bottom of what happened. We're going to find out who did this, and we'll take action accordingly," Pentagon spokesman Navy Capt. Jeff Davis said Monday.

"It's no secret that Iran has been supplying them with the tools of war," he later added in reference to the Houthis.

On Thursday, Cook also avoided speculating on any role in the missile firings by Iran, who some experts believe supplied the Houthis with the missiles.

"Iran has played a role and has been supportive of the Houthi rebels more broadly in the conflict in Yemen and our message to those involved in that separate conflict is that they should return to the negotiating table consistent with where they were just a few months ago," he said.

Experts at The Washington Institute noted in a recent piece that an Oct. 1 missile attack against an Emirati ship by Houthi rebels in the same region likely employed a radar-guided C-802 antishipping missile supplied by Iran.

Sen. Mark Kirk (R-Ill.), a leading advocate of a tough foreign policy toward Iran, said it was unacceptable that the Obama administration continues to relax financial sanctions on Iran while it supports the Houthi rebels in Yemen.

“I am relieved the crew of the U.S.S. Mason remain safe and unharmed in the Red Sea after Iran-backed Houthi rebels repeatedly launched missile attacks at them," Kirk said in a statement.

"It’s counterproductive, absurd and unacceptable that the White House keeps unilaterally relaxing financial sanctions against the Iranian terror-sponsoring regime while Iran continues to actively support Houthi militants in Yemen that are trying to kill American servicemen and servicewomen in the Middle East," he said.

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9. Egypt Juggles Its Allegiances as Russian Influence Surges

Wall Street Journal (Middle East Crossroads), Oct. 14, Pg. A7 | Yaroslav Trofimov

Balancing acts are precarious by definition and, as Egypt is finding out, even a small move can have cascading consequences.

Until recently, Cairo managed to maintain strong relations with Saudi Arabia and other Gulf monarchies that provide it with tens of billions of dollars in aid, while also cultivating warm ties with Russia and staying away from Saudi-led efforts to topple the Syrian regime.

Then last Saturday, Egypt had to vote on a Russian-sponsored United Nations Security Council resolution favored by the Syrian regime.

Alone among Muslim nations on the Security Council, it decided to support the Russian draft, which received only four out of 15 votes and failed to pass.

The same day Russia vetoed a separate resolution drafted by France and backed by 11 Council members.

The Saudis hardly contained their fury, with the kingdom's envoy to the U.N. pointing out that non-Arab countries have proven closer to the "Arab consensus" on Syria than Egypt.

While it isn't clear how much the two moves were related, the Saudi oil giant Aramco also informed Cairo it wouldn't supply Egypt with subsidized petroleum products this month, dealing a heavy blow to an Egyptian economy already reeling from a currency crash.

"The government of Egypt is failing. People are seeing Egypt as a black hole, and we aren't getting a return on investment," said Jamal Khashoggi, a prominent Saudi commentator who is setting up the Al-Arab News TV channel.

"On Syria, the Saudi position refuses the Iranian victory and presence in Syria, and sees as a strategic threat an Iranian corridor to the Mediterranean. But Egypt sees Syria in a very simplistic manner -- a military regime just like they have in Egypt that is also refusing democracy and Islamists," Mr. Khashoggi said.

Egyptian officials claimed that Cairo, which also voted for the French draft, was merely supporting any moves to halt the bloodshed in the Syrian city of Aleppo.

But as the spat escalated, several Egyptian state newspapers engaged in Saudi-bashing, playing on Egyptians' longstanding aversion to the much wealthier Gulf Arabs. That hostility was already inflamed by President Abdel Fattah Al Sisi's decision in April, since halted by an Egyptian court, to transfer to Saudi Arabia two strategic Red Sea islands controlled by Egypt.

On Thursday, Mr. Sisi denied that the Aramco decision was politically motivated yet added: "There are attempts to pressure Egypt but it won't kneel before anyone but God."

To be sure, Egypt's U.N. vote had as much to do with recognizing Russia's new prominence in the region as it did with Cairo's complicated relationship with Saudi Arabia and its view of the Syrian conflict.

Criticized in the West for widespread human-rights abuses, Mr. Sisi has grown increasingly close to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Still one of the biggest recipients of U.S. military aid, Egypt recently purchased Russian KA-52 attack helicopters and this month is hosting Russian paratroop units for joint drills.

Russian officials even announced this month that Moscow is seeking to re-establish its Cold War-era naval base in the Mediterranean city of Sidi Barrani near Libya, a plan denied by Cairo.

"All the states in the region want to balance off the U.S. It is clear that Gen. Sisi doesn't want to put all his eggs in one basket, especially considering that Washington didn't hesitate for a second in abandoning his predecessor, President [Hosni] Mubarak, who did put all his eggs in one basket," said Andranik Migranyan, a professor at the Moscow State Institute for International Relations who has advised Russian leaders.

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ASIA/PACIFIC

10. South Korea, U.S. military chiefs agree to develop effective response measures against North Korea threats

Yonhap News Agency (South Korea), Oct. 13 | Chang Jae-soon

WASHINGTON -- The military chiefs of South Korea and the United States agreed Thursday to develop "effective response measures" in order to deter and counter additional provocations from North Korea, the Pentagon said.

Gen. Lee Sun-jin, chairman of South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff, and his U.S. counterpart, Gen. Joseph Dunford, reached the agreement at their annual Military Committee Meeting (MCM) in Washington, denouncing Pyongyang's nuclear and missile provocations, the Pentagon said in a statement.

"The generals agreed to continuously develop effective response measures in order to deter, and if necessary, respond to additional provocation from North Korea," the statement said.

Dunford affirmed that despite the nuclear and missile threat from the North, the Korea-U.S. alliance will "continue to grow firmer and stronger, and the U.S. will continue its ironclad commitment to the defense of the Korean Peninsula," the statement said.

Lee stressed that the South and U.S. will continue its proactive cooperation, including establishment of a practical collaboration system and deployment of the THAAD missile defense system in order to effectively respond to North Korean nuclear and missile threats, it said.

Other South Korean and U.S. officials in attendance included Rear Adm. Chung An-ho, acting chief director of strategic planning at South Korea's JCS, U.S. Pacific Command Adm. Harry B. Harris and U.S. Forces Korea Commander Gen. Vincent Brooks.

Earlier in the day, Lee and Dunford paid a joint visit to the Korean War Veterans Memorial in Washington.

It was the first time the JCS chairmen of the two countries paid a joint visit to the memorial, an official said.

"Your sacrifices 66 years ago helped the Republic of Korea become what it is today," Lee said of the 1950-53 Korean War in which the U.S. fought alongside the South. "We will overcome North Korea's nuclear and missile threats with the strength of the Korea-U.S. alliance forged in your blood and sweat."

During the visit, Lee handed Dunford an "Ambassador For Peace" medal to be awarded to Dunford's father, Joseph F. Dunford Sr., a Korean War veteran who as a young Marine participated in the landmark landing operation in the western port of Incheon that turned the tide during the war.

Lee, who has been on a visit to the U.S. since Tuesday, is scheduled to hold trilateral talks with his U.S. and Japanese counterparts on Saturday to discuss ways to deal with North Korean threats.

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11. Philippines Wants U.S. to Remain Top Military Ally, Yasay Says
Bloomberg News, Oct. 13 | Andreo Calonzo and Cecilia Yap

MANILA -- The U.S. will remain the most important partner for the Philippines even as Rodrigo Duterte improves ties with China, his foreign secretary said ahead of the president's trip to Beijing.

"We have a special relationship with the U.S.," Perfecto Yasay, the country's top diplomat, said in an interview Thursday in his office in Manila. "They are our only military ally. You could not put the United States, in that sense, in equal footing with China."

The U.S. has been the Philippines' closest ally since independence in 1946, and the nations are linked by formal defense treaties. But those ties have been strained since Duterte took office three months ago, with the tough-talking leader frequently calling the relationship into question.

Yasay, 69, himself delivered a scathing attack on the U.S. in an essay posted on his Facebook page last week, accusing the U.S. of holding onto "invisible chains that reined us in towards dependency and submission as little brown brothers not capable of true independence and freedom."

On Thursday, Yasay backed Duterte's recent tirades, saying the president's strong words and attacks had made the U.S. take notice of the Philippines instead of taking the country for granted.

Yasay, who was Duterte's roommate at university, is a newcomer to international diplomacy. He is a lawyer by trade and served as head of the Securities and Exchange Commission from 1995 to 2000. He is also relatively new to politics, having never held elected office, with an unsuccessful bid for the vice presidency in 2010.

While he has often supported Duterte's call for closer relations with China and his desire to hold direct talks with Beijing about territorial disputes in the South China Sea, he and other senior ministers have at other times sought to calm fears that overtures toward China will weaken the alliance with the U.S.

Yasay said the Philippines was open to further military exercises with the U.S. "if these joint exercises are designed to help us build our own capabilities in defense and in enforcement, disaster response and so on." Duterte had said last month the latest joint maritime drills would be the last.

'Without Strings'

The foreign secretary also sought to explain Duterte's call earlier this month for U.S. President Barack Obama to "go to hell," saying it was frustration with what the Philippine leader believed was Washington's refusal to sell weapons to his nation because it disapproved of Duterte's deadly drug war. According to police data, as many as 3,700 suspects may have been killed since July 1.

"If you want to help us," Yasay added, referring to the U.S., "then you help us without strings attached."

Yasay will accompany Duterte on next week's state visit to China, along with up to 400 business leaders. The diplomat said the Philippines wanted better ties with China after it had been neglected under the previous administration led by Benigno Aquino.

"I'd like to let everyone know that this trip is not to engage China in bilateral negotiations with respect to our disputes in the South China Sea," Yasay said, adding his nation would proceed with caution on pledges of business and investment from China.

For an explainer on how China's maritime push confronts international law, click here

"You don't want to place your eggs in one basket when you engage any country for that matter, in so far as trade relationships are concerned," he said. "You would always want to make sure that when you do something, decide on something, it is always be for the purpose of national interest."

China angered the Aquino administration in 2012 when it seized Scarborough Shoal, a rocky outcrop located around 240 kilometers off the coast of the Philippines. Aquino subsequently challenged China's claims to more than 80 percent of the South China Sea before the Permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague. The tribunal ruled in favor of the Philippines in July, after China had already reclaimed some 3,200 acres (1,290 hectares) on rocks and reefs.

"I do not believe at this point in time that China is intending reclamation projects in the Scarborough Shoal," Yasay said. "I could be wrong but this is what I believe in."

Yasay said it was time to give China a breather. "Let's give them a face-saving mechanism," he said. "As much as we would like them also to give us some face-saving mechanism. Let's work together in making sure that these provisional arrangements can come about."

Trade, Investment

Yasay said the Philippines was seeking support from China related to infrastructure development, agriculture and trade. He said the Philippines was also interested in reviving talks related to Chinese investment in rail and telecommunications that had fallen apart under previous administrations, and would consider possible arms purchases from China.

"This is something that we have to take into very serious consideration," Yasay said. "For the most part, it will just be a window shopping on these things, maybe for small things with respect to our fight against violent extremism."

--*With assistance from Clarissa Batino and Chris Blake*

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12. Thai king's death adds to uncertainty about Obama's faltering Asia pivot
Reuters, Oct. 13 | David Brunnstrom

WASHINGTON -- The death of Thailand's King Bhumibol Adulyadej on Thursday adds a new layer of uncertainty to U.S. President Barack Obama's faltering "pivot" to Asia less than a month before the Nov. 8 U.S. presidential elections.

The king was important in cementing the long-standing alliance between the United States and Thailand after World War Two, in a reign that spanned the Vietnam War and development of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which Washington still considers vital to maintaining its influence in the region.

King Bhumibol's death coincides with faltering momentum in Obama's signature policy of rebalancing the U.S. diplomatic and security focus to the Asia-Pacific region in the face of China's rapid rise.

The main economic pillar of the rebalance, the 12-nation Trans-Pacific Partnership trade deal, is languishing in the U.S. Congress with no guarantee that Obama will be able to push it through before leaving the presidency to Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump, both of whom say they oppose the deal.

Clinton, as secretary of state under fellow-Democrat Obama from 2009-13, was one of the architects of the policy but Republican Trump has questioned the extent to which he would maintain the U.S. security commitment to East Asia.

Obama's efforts to boost security ties with Southeast Asia have come in response to China's pursuit of territorial claims in the South China Sea, a vital strategic waterway.

However, a torrent of anti-American rhetoric from new Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte has cast doubt on the U.S. military relationship with Manila just months after Washington reached an agreement on rotating access to bases in the country.

Other Southeast Asian countries, such as Indonesia and Malaysia, are focused on internal political issues and are avoiding playing any leadership role in ASEAN, while even traditionally reliable regional ally Australia is treading carefully to avoid jeopardizing its economic ties with Beijing.

Thailand was already occupying a back seat in regional affairs following a 2014 military coup seen as a means to maintain stability during the king's long illness. Thailand is expected to turn further inward during a prolonged mourning period and potentially politically fragile royal succession.

King Bhumibol's son, Crown Prince Maha Vajiralongkorn, who is expected to become Thailand's new king, lacks the strong connection to the United States of his father, who was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Obama offered condolences to the Thai people and the King's family, calling King Bhumibol "a tireless champion of his country's development."

Obama's former top Asia adviser, Evan Medeiros, now at the Eurasia Group, said the mourning process would likely slow a return to democratic government and Prince Vajiralongkorn was a source of "profound uncertainty."

"He's such an unknown, unpredictable figure," he said.

U.S. State Department spokesman Mark Toner said the United States and Thailand had been close friends for two centuries.

"Our friendship and our partnership have weathered many challenges … we expect it to continue to grow stronger," Toner told a regular news briefing.

While the United States backed a return to democracy, Toner said it would be "premature... to lay our expectations for the near term" as Thailand mourned.

MUCH HAS CHANGED

While Washington condemned the 2014 coup, it has kept security ties with Bangkok, particularly through annual military exercises called Cobra Gold.

"The fact that we have been able to remain closely tethered and stayed largely on track with Cobra Gold and other cooperative efforts, notwithstanding the military takeover ... is testament to the strong roots we have put down and the work that we're doing," the senior U.S. diplomat for Asia, Assistant Secretary of State Daniel Russel, said on Wednesday.

Murray Hiebert of Washington's Center for Strategic and International Studies think tank, said much had changed since Obama announced his pivot policy in 2011.

"The king's death adds to uncertainty in Southeast Asia, a region in considerable flux already. This makes the U.S. rebalance to Asia more difficult because the situation in so many countries is that of 'wait and see.'

"When the pivot started, you had Thailand engaged, a new leader in Malaysia who wanted to engage, you had Aquino coming in the Philippines and very forward-leaning internationally and very open to the U.S.; you had an internationalist president in Indonesia. It was a rather different dynamic."

King Bhumibol's death means Washington finds itself having to rely even more on former foe Vietnam for any kind of strategic ballast in the region.

"The Vietnamese are providing the dynamism when it comes to strategic thinking," U.S. Ambassador to Vietnam Ted Osius said in Washington on Tuesday.

"Indonesia is very internally focused right now ... Thailand is very internally focused, and Malaysia has a rolling political crisis," he continued.

"I don't know exactly what direction the Philippines is headed; Singapore has a lot of strategic thinkers but it's a city state; I don't think you can really count on Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar to provide the strategic engine for ASEAN."

There appears little prospect for now, however, that Vietnam would be willing to open its doors further to the U.S. military should the deal with the Philippines run into problems, given past animosities and concerns about China.

"I do not expect the Vietnamese calculation to be, 'Oh, the Philippines is doing whatever it's doing, let's race full steam ahead with the United States.' No, that's not about to happen," Osius said.

"The Vietnamese have been very measured in the pace at which they have expanded the security relationship."

Hiebert said Asian countries remain keen on the U.S. pivot, given their worries about China, but the pace was likely to flag further, presenting a tougher task to revive the initiative once Obama leaves power.

"I wouldn't declare the pivot dead ... I think there's still quite a bit of interest in the U.S., but some of the sort of dynamism that we saw earlier about building the region is a little bit diminished right now," he said.

--*Additional reporting by Matt Spetalnick*

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13. Russia says to sign S-400 air defence deal with India

Agence France-Presse, Oct. 13 | Gabrielle Tetrault-Farber

NEW DELHI -- Russian President Vladimir Putin will seal a deal with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi during an upcoming visit to deliver Moscow's most advanced air defence system, the Kremlin said Thursday.

"An agreement on the delivery of S-400 'Triumph' anti-missile defence systems and other deals will be signed as a result of the talks," Russian news agencies quoted Putin aide Yuri Ushakov as saying, without specifying a timeframe.

Putin will meet Modi in the Indian state of Goa on Saturday on the sidelines of the BRICS Summit involving the leaders of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.

The Kremlin earlier this week said the talks with Modi would focus on "a wide range of matters of bilateral relations, especially trade and economic ties."

The S-400 is Russia's most modern air defence system and has been deployed to Syria, where Moscow is conducting a bombing campaign in support of long-time ally Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

The system can track some 300 targets and shoot down around three dozen simultaneously over a range of several hundred kilometres.

India has signed a series of key defence deals under Modi as part of a $100 billion upgrade of its Soviet-era military hardware, making it an attractive proposition for arms exporters.

In September, after nearly a decade of discussions and setbacks, India signed a deal to acquire 36 French Rafale fighter jets for 7.9 billion euros ($8.8 billion) to bolster its military against an increasingly assertive China.

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EUROPE

14. From 'Sleepy Hollow' to war-fighting footing, EUCOM muscles up

Stars and Stripes, Oct. 13 | John Vandiver

STUTTGART, Germany — For years, U.S. European Command's headquarters, which focused in the post-Cold War era on training and fostering relationships, had the informal nickname of Sleepy Hollow.

Now, EUCOM is pivoting from a peacetime footing to one in which the command can lead in a high-end fight.

"We are transitioning this headquarters and really the entire command to more of an operational focus and to really train toward some of our key warfighting tasks," said Maj. Gen. Mark Loeben, EUCOM's director of exercises and assessments.

High-profile tank convoys along NATO's eastern edge, the deployment of warships in the Black Sea and stepped-up rotations of Air Force fighters in the Baltics over the past two years have garnered much attention.

But perhaps as significant is the behind-the-scenes work, often done at computers and in briefing rooms at EUCOM's Patch Barracks. There, leaders are working through a series of simulated warfighting scenarios to speed the conversion to a headquarters capable of commanding in a conflict.

Russia's annexation of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula two years ago and its increasingly aggressive posture has upended the security landscape in Europe, U.S. military leaders say, and the goal now is to recapture the kind of fluency with command and control in a crisis that defined the Cold War era.

Already, recent exercises have revealed key EUCOM gaps, including a headquarters in need of more cyberspecialists, intelligence analysts and targeting experts. Requests for more personnel have recently been made to the Joint Staff, Loeben said.

When the Cold War ended after the collapse of the Soviet Union, EUCOM's mission shifted focus from combat readiness to training with allies and fostering relationships — softer missions that had skeptics questioning the need for a significant number of troops in Europe. The numbers were significantly reduced from a high of about 300,000 at the end of the Cold War to 62,000 today.

Amid post-Cold War calm, EUCOM's warfighting command skills atrophied along with the readiness of forward-stationed troops.

"U.S. European Command is a command in transition," EUCOM's chief, Gen. Curtis M. Scaparrotti, said in a statement. "The strategic environment is changing rapidly across the entire area of operations. From the staff and components to tactical level units, we must actively shift our mind-set, vigilance, plans, and posture in order to be prepared for today's challenges, and those in the future."

EUCOM this year is terminating several mainstay legacy exercises, typically small bilateral drills focused on relationship building that distract from the headquarters' new overarching aims of building a war fighting command structure.

Austere Challenge 2017, a massive exercise that started this month and will culminate in February, is designed to enhance EUCOM decision making. A simulated war game involving 5,000 U.S. troops in Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom and the U.S., it will test leaders' ability to confront unfolding crises that require marshaling forces with speed.

Several combatant commands and all the services are to be pulled into the exercise, with EUCOM in the lead.

The details of scenarios for Austere Challenge are classified, military officials said, but the exercise will involve juggling several crises to test the chain of command's can manage a simulated "full-spectrum" fight.

It is perhaps the most complex headquarters test since the end of the Cold War. In the year ahead, EUCOM has 20 joint exercises planned, with a primary focus on the development of EUCOM as an operational headquarters, Loeben said.

More than two years after Russia annexed Crimea, there is little sign that tensions are easing. With Washington and Moscow also divided over the conflict in Syria and charges by U.S. intelligence services that Russia is meddling in the American presidential election with a series of hacks, relations are at a low point.

Russia has warned that moves to increase NATO's presence in the Baltics are a dangerous provocation that would be met with countermeasures. Recently, Moscow said it had started moving nuclear-capable Iskander missiles into Kaliningrad, a Russian enclave on the Baltic Sea that is wedged between Lithuania and Poland.

"If these reports are true, this would mark an unfortunate and unnecessary event that could lead to unintended escalation and destabilization," said Lt. Col. David Faggard, a EUCOM spokesman.

The Pentagon has upped the ante in Europe, with plans to quadruple spending on deterrence efforts to $3.4 billion this year. These plans hinge on Congress' passage of a budget. Since the start of the fiscal year on Oct. 1, the Pentagon has been operating under a stop-gap continuing resolution that caps spending to last year's levels. At some point, the Pentagon will be forced to scale back its plans for Europe without a proper budget.

For now, EUCOM officials say the budget impasse hasn't hindered their plans.

"I think people are cautiously optimistic" the budget will get resolved, Loeben said.

"The European Reassurance Initiative has been fully funded every year, and we are fully committed to all our exercise with our allies and partners while operating under the Continuing Resolution," he added.

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15. Montenegro PM accuses Russia of financing anti-NATO campaign

Reuters (Interview), Oct. 13 | Aleksandar Vasovic

PODGORICA -- Russia is pouring money into Montenegro's election campaign in an attempt to derail the country's progress towards joining NATO, the country's Prime Minister Milo Djukanovic said on Thursday, three days ahead of an election.

Djukanovic, who has led the tiny Balkan country as president or prime minister for more than 25 years, is facing his toughest ever electoral challenge from opposition parties that accuse him of cronyism and of treating Montenegro as a personal fiefdom.

In an interview with Reuters, he said opposition parties were being financed by Moscow, which saw Sunday's parliamentary vote as a final opportunity to stop the Balkan region's rush to integrate with the European Union and the Atlantic alliance.

"Russia has engaged a serious financial potential, which is I assume, made possible through its oligarchs and funneled through secret channels through Serbia and Republika Srpska," Djukanovic said, referring to the Serbian part of Bosnia, Montenegro's northern neighbor.

"Traditional opposition, pro-Serb parties are now proponents of Russian interests in the Balkans," he added.

"These elections are the last chance for opponents of Montenegro and the Balkans adopting European values," he said.

Russia and opposition parties have denied allegations that Moscow has intervened in the election campaign, though Russia's foreign minister has dubbed as "irresponsible" NATO's planned admission of Montenegro.

Sunday's vote pits Djukanovic's Democratic Party of Socialists against two major opposition alliances, containing a mixture of pro-Serb and pro-Western parties.

They accuse Djukanovic of using scare tactics to stay in power.

"He labels every opponent a danger to Montenegro and its state interests," Nebojsa Medojevic, a senior figure in the opposition Democratic Front alliance, said on Thursday.

He also accused Djukanovic of being the one most closely aligned with Moscow's interests.

"Russian interests and influence entered Montenegro during Djukanovic's (rule). In 2005, Djukanovic communicated closely with Russian official politics, informal centers of power, the Russian mafia and intelligence structures," Medojevic said.

He pledged to hold Djukanovic to account for alleged corruption if he took power.

The Adriatic republic of 620,000 people has strong economic and traditional ties with Russia, another predominantly Orthodox Christian country. But Djukanovic said Montenegro had to look westwards.

"The stability of the Western Balkans and (European) integration go hand in hand," he said.

The European Union and the US see closer integration with Europe's political and economic alliances as the best way of maintaining peace in a region, which was wracked by war in the 1990s when Yugoslavia broke up into seven successor states.

Croatia and Slovenia have already joined NATO and the EU, while Serbia and Bosnia are both pursuing EU membership.

NATO membership is a sensitive issue in Montenegro, which was bombed by NATO in 1999 when it and Serbia were all that remained of Yugoslavia. Nonetheless, it is nearing the end of the accession process. Ten countries have already ratified its accession treaty.

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AFRICA

16. Boko Haram Frees 21 Girls Kidnapped in Nigeria

New York Times, Oct. 14, Pg. A3 | Chris Stein

LAGOS, Nigeria -- Two and a half years after nearly 300 girls were kidnapped from a school in northeastern Nigeria, the government said on Thursday that 21 of them had been freed, the biggest breakthrough in an ordeal that has shocked the world and laid bare the deadly instability gripping large parts of the country.

Boko Haram, the radical Islamist group that has killed thousands of civilians, overrun villages and terrorized the region, seized the girls from a school in the town of Chibok on April 14, 2014. For many around the globe, the mass abduction provided a stunning introduction to a militant group that had been waging war against Nigerians for years.

Soon after the girls were kidnapped, an international campaign began urging the Nigerian government to do more to secure their release, using the hashtag #BringBackOurGirls and drawing support from Michelle Obama and others.

For more than a year, the Nigerian government has negotiated with Boko Haram to get the girls back. But the talks fell apart multiple times, in one case at the last minute, after the president had agreed to free imprisoned Boko Haram fighters. Another time, the talks failed because central members of Boko Haram's negotiating team were killed.

Finally, the government said Thursday, the negotiations bore fruit. Still, most of the girls remain in captivity, their whereabouts, health and circumstances unknown.

"The release of the girls, in a limited number, is the outcome of negotiations between the administration and the Boko Haram, brokered by the International Red Cross and the Swiss government," Garba Shehu, a spokesman for President Muhammadu Buhari, said in a series of messages posted on Twitter. "The negotiations will continue."

The girls were released around 5:30 a.m. on Thursday, the government said. In addition to the 21 girls, a 20-month-old boy born to one of them in captivity was released, it said.

At a news conference in the capital, Abuja, the girls sat in rows in a room packed with government ministers, officials and journalists. Wearing colorful dresses, the girls listened to Vice President Yemi Osinbajo speak from behind a table, flanked by his ministers.

"We can imagine what they've gone through," he said. "So much needs to be done to get them back to living a normal life after so much trauma in captivity."

Mr. Osinbajo described the girls as being in "reasonably good health considering the circumstances they've been held in." He added that they would stay in a medical facility "for some time, until we're reasonably satisfied of their health condition."

As for the other girls held by Boko Haram, Mr. Osinbajo suggested that "in the next few days, the next few months, we should be able to bring in more of these girls, along the same lines, using exactly the same negotiations."

But he warned that the government, which is waging an aggressive campaign to fight Boko Haram and regain territory seized by the group, had the fate of the nation to consider as well.

"We want to ensure that we bring these girls back alive," Mr. Osinbajo said. "At the same time we, of course, balance this against the overall safety and security of the country."

Relatives of the girls rejoiced, even before they knew whether their kin were among those freed.

Lawan Zanna, the father of Aisha Zanna, one of the abducted girls, said by telephone that he hoped his daughter had been freed. All of the parents are "very happy hearing that they have released our daughters," he said. "All are our daughters."

Another parent, Esther Yakubu, said by telephone that she was praying that her daughter Dorcas was among those released. "They say it's only 21," she said. "Most of them are still out there, and we want them to come back."

Manasseh Allen, a native of Chibok whose cousin was abducted, said in a phone interview that he hoped more girls could be rescued. "Once we have 21 parents now linked up with daughters, at least we have solved a good part of the problem," he said. "So many will be hopeful that their daughters have been brought back."

Asked if he thought a ransom was involved, he said: "Whether it's a ransom, whether it's a prisoner swap, the government knows how best to get these girls back. All we are after is to get the girls back."

Earlier in the day, Lai Mohammed, the minister of information and culture, denied preliminary reports that Boko Haram fighters might have been released in exchange for the girls.

"Please note that this is not a swap," he said. "It is a release, the product of painstaking negotiations and trust on both sides. We see this as a credible first step in the eventual release of all the Chibok girls in captivity."

The Bring Back Our Girls campaign thanked the Nigerian security services on Facebook and added: "We trust that our government will continue to work to keep the safety, security and well-being of the other girls a high priority."

The abductions, during exam time at a boarding school, increased pressure on the government to fight Boko Haram, which has raged through parts of northern Nigeria for years, burning entire villages and carrying out rape, beheadings, looting and other acts of violence.

Some girls managed to escape shortly after the fighters stormed their school and hauled away their classmates, and in May, the authorities announced that one girl, Amina Ali, had been found; she was wandering in the forest when members of a vigilante group came across her as they prepared to ambush a Boko Haram camp.

But a majority of the girls are still missing, and it is feared that many may never return. In August, Boko Haram released a video purporting to show the bodies of several kidnapped schoolgirls who fighters said were killed by Nigerian airstrikes.

The girls still in captivity are thought to be held by a faction controlled by the Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau, rather than a newer faction that has been endorsed by the Islamic State. The latter faction split from Mr. Shekau's group after an ideological dispute over killings that targeted Muslims.

Western intelligence officials have said they believe the girls are scattered in small groups, another hurdle to rescuing them.

The Nigerian military, with help from troops from neighboring nations and from the United States, Britain and France, has made big advances against Boko Haram in recent months. But it has had trouble holding towns once liberated from Boko Haram control, and Boko Haram fighters have also taken the fight to neighboring countries like Niger.

--*Dionne Searcey contributed from Brasov, Romania; Sewell Chan from London; and Ubale Musa from Abuja, Nigeria*

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POLITICS

17. Clinton says U.S. could 'ring China with missile defense'

Associated Press, Oct. 14 | Nomaan Merchant

BEIJING — Hillary Clinton privately said the U.S. would "ring China with missile defense" if the Chinese government failed to curb North Korea's nuclear program, a potential hint at how the former secretary of state would act if elected president.

Clinton's remarks were revealed by WikiLeaks in a hack of the Clinton campaign chairman's personal account. The emails include a document excerpting Clinton's private speech transcripts, which she has refused to release.

A section on China features several issues in which Clinton said she confronted the Chinese while leading the U.S. State Department.

China has harshly criticized the U.S. and South Korea's planned deployment of a missile-defense system against North Korea, which conducted its fifth nuclear test this year. But Clinton said she told Chinese officials that the U.S. might deploy additional ships to the region to contain the North Korean missile threat.

If North Korea successfully obtains a ballistic missile, it could threaten not just American allies in the Pacific, "but they could actually reach Hawaii and the west coast theoretically," Clinton said.

"We're going to ring China with missile defense. We're going to put more of our fleet in the area," Clinton said in a 2013 speech. "So China, come on. You either control them or we're going to have to defend against them."

China is North Korea's economic lifeline and the closest thing it has to a diplomatic ally, and has been criticized by the U.S. and others for not doing enough to rein in Pyongyang's nuclear ambitions. Chinese officials and state media have responded by saying that North Korea is not solely China's responsibility, and that Beijing has limited influence with secretive leader Kim Jong Un's hard-line communist regime.

Clinton also privately criticized China's position on another sensitive issue, the South China Sea. China claims almost the entirety of the strategically vital waterbody and has lashed out at an international tribunal's July ruling rejecting its claims.

Clinton told a different audience in 2013 that by China's logic, the U.S. after World War II could have labeled the Pacific Ocean the "American Sea."

"My counterpart sat up very straight and goes, 'Well, you can't do that,'" she said. "And I said, 'Well, we have as much right to claim that as you do. I mean, you claim (the South China Sea) based on pottery shards from, you know, some fishing vessel that ran aground in an atoll somewhere."

In another remark revealed in the Wikileaks hack, Clinton called Chinese President Xi Jinping "a more sophisticated, more effective public leader" than his predecessor, Hu Jintao. She noted Xi's plans for economic and social reforms, but blamed what she called "a resurgence of nationalism" on the Chinese government.

China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs did not immediately respond Friday to faxed questions about Clinton's remarks.

As secretary of state, Clinton visited China seven times and engineered Washington's "pivot" to Asia, which has long been viewed with suspicion by Beijing. The policy shift has seen a tighter focus on the region along with an increased military presence and fortified alliances with allies such as Australia and the Philippines, although the latter has been cast in doubt with the election of China-friendly President Rodrigo Duterte.

She also drew condemnation from Chinese state media last year after describing Xi as "shameless" as he prepared to speak on women's rights at the United Nations, shortly after China detained five young feminists who'd campaigned against domestic violence.

--*Associated Press writer Christopher Bodeen contributed to this report*

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18. Ex-nuclear launch officers pen letter to keep Trump's finger off the button
Washington Post, Oct. 14, Pg. A6 | Carol Morello

Ten former nuclear launch control officers who once held the keys needed to fire on the president's order have signed an open letter saying they think Donald Trump should not be entrusted with the nation's nuclear codes.

The letter, issued Thursday, says the decision to use nuclear weapons requires "composure, judgment, restraint and diplomatic skill" - all qualities that the former Air Force officers who signed it said Trump lacks.

"On the contrary, he has shown himself time and again to be easily baited and quick to lash out, dismissive of expert consultation and ill-informed of even basic military and international affairs - including, most especially, nuclear weapons," the letter says. "Donald Trump should not be the nation's commander-in-chief. He should not be entrusted with the nuclear launch codes. He should not have his finger on the button."

The letter is the latest in an extraordinary series of missives signed this year by diplomats and national security experts warning of the dangers they think a Trump presidency would pose. Last month, in a break from the trend, 88 retired military leaders endorsed the Republican presidential nominee. But most of the letters have reflected the views of those who consider Trump unfit to be commander in chief.

The former missileers who signed Thursday's letter served at the nation's four underground launch centers in the Great Plains from as long ago as the 1960s to, most recently, 2013. They do not endorse Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton, or even mention her name, in the letter.

"No one who signed the letter wanted to disclose a position who they would vote for," said Bruce Blair, who organized the letter and said he is a Democrat who will vote for Clinton but has no idea which candidate the others support. "The letter is focused entirely on Trump."

Blair said the signatories are part of a circle of friends and acquaintances who were "flabbergasted and flummoxed" by the prospect of Trump winning the election. He said they decided several weeks ago to release an open letter, when polls showed Trump and Clinton much closer than more recent numbers do.

"It sort of snuck up on us," he said. "They were at a virtual tie in the polls. You kind of woke up one day and realized it's very possible that this person, this pathological liar, who lacks self-control, who knows very little about anything and is angry and aggressive, who might lash out with nuclear weapons if he's elected, could win. That sort of dawned on everyone. We felt we needed to weigh in."

The nation's nuclear-armed missiles are kept at Air Force bases in Cheyenne, Wyo., Minot, N.D., and Great Falls, Mont. A fourth base's nuclear facility, in Grand Forks, N.D., has been decommissioned.

If a president orders a missile launch, Blair said, five crews are equipped with keys used to fire a total of 50 missiles. Although the keys are interconnected, the missiles can be launched if just two crews carry out the order.

"Only the president can order a nuclear launch," the letter states. "That order cannot be vetoed and once the missiles have been launched, they cannot be called back. The consequences of miscalculation, impulsive decision-making or poor judgment on the part of the president could be catastrophic."

Blair said the officers are trained to put aside any personal doubts and trust in the system and the leadership.

"The presumption is, the commander in chief is acting in the national interest, and his decision should be grounded in knowledge and good advice," he said. "Everyone would have to assume that, even though they had doubts - very strong doubts, if Trump were president."

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DEFENSE DEPARTMENT

19. Pentagon's No. 2 Needs to Slash Overhead, Says Defense Business Board

Defense News Online, Oct. 13 | Joe Gould

WASHINGTON — The Defense Business Board is recommending that the next presidential administration run the Pentagon more like a business and turn the deputy defense secretary into a cost-cutting, efficiency-hunting chief management officer.

The board, a DoD advisory committee comprised of private-sector executives, says the role should focus more on reining in overhead and less on substituting for the defense secretary. The board made the recommendation in a recent, 112-page report on the presidential transition, which comes as Congress and the Pentagon are pursuing their own agendas for DoD reform.

“In the past, it has been quite normal for the Deputy to spend significant time away from the Pentagon, either ‘filling in’ for the Secretary or on matters requiring coordination with other agencies, international partners, or the White House," DBB chair Michael Bayer said in a letter accompanying the report. “The adverse consequence of this has been an insufficient attention to the important primary function of managing the Department. The management challenges of this, the largest institution on the planet, require the full-time attention of a Chief Management Officer.”

The Defense Department is the nation’s largest enterprise, and if its expenditures were gross national product it would be the seventeenth largest nation, the report notes. It is the nation’s largest employer, with more than 1.3 million people on active duty, more than 700,000 civilian personnel and roughly 600,000 contractors. Another 1.1 million serve in the National Guard and Reserve forces, and about 2 million military retirees and their family members receive earned benefits.

The current deputy defense secretary, Bob Work, has championed a vision for a Defense Department that is more technologically agile and globally engaged, and spearheaded its so-called "Third Offset Strategy." Work also has called for cost cutting, and, pointing to estimates that the department has 22 percent more in installations and real estate than it needs, urged lawmakers to consider a new round of the politically unpopular base-closure process.

As envisioned by the advisory board, the deputy defense secretary would take bold action to tame the costs associated with overhead, personnel, benefits and unnecessary work, all of which Bayer considers necessary for DoD to “swiftly and shrewdly adapt to maintain its superiority over determined adversaries.”

“Without major surgery, our overhead and personnel costs will continue to eat away at our modernization and readiness,” Bayer’s letter reads. “This is not about policy; it is about running the Department like a modern business.”

The report argues DoD must look closely at off-limits budget areas like intelligence, classified programs and their overhead, the combatant commands and the armed services, and bring in specialized expertise to lead a re-structuring review of the Pentagon. This would ultimately cut entire organizations, activities and contracts, as opposed to picking around the edges of the budget.

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20. Defense Innovation Unit Announces Contracting Results
National Defense Magazine Online, Oct. 13 | Jon Harper

An office established by Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter to build bridges between the U.S. military and commercial technology hubs awarded $36.3 million in contracts in the last quarter of fiscal year 2016, the director told reporters Thursday.

The Defense Innovation Unit-Experimental, known as DIUx, is headquartered in Silicon Valley, with additional outposts located in Boston and Austin. The initiative, created last year, is intended to cut through bureaucratic red tape that often plagues the Pentagon's procurement system, and fast-track contracts with high-tech commercial firms.

"Core to our value and our approach here … is to help non-traditional vendors work with the department so we get access to their technology earlier and more directly than we normally would," DIUx managing director Raj Shah told reporters during a conference call where he provided the first quarterly update on the initiative since the new leadership team took over.

In the fourth quarter of fiscal year 2016, which ended Sept. 30, DIUx awarded 12 contracts. The average time between solicitation response to contract award was less than 60 days, Shah noted. The $8.3 million initial spend by DIUx was augmented by $28 million that the services and other Defense Department agencies kicked in to support the initiative.

Following a leadership shakeup in May, DIUx launched the "commercial solutions opening" contracting mechanism to provide a shot in the arm to the initiative, which in its early days was criticized for being ineffective.

The mechanism "facilitates fast, flexible and collaborative work between DoD and technology companies that traditionally have not done business with the department. This enables us … to work at the speed of business," Shah said.

Projects funded to date include prototyping efforts in areas such as high-speed drones, autonomy, cybersecurity and wireless technologies.

An additional 13 projects are moving through the pipeline, according to a DIUx fact sheet. They include multifactor authentication for data access, cyber protection toolkits, micro-satellites and advanced analytics.

"These are things that the private sector is investing hundreds of millions, if not billions of dollars towards, and for us to leverage and harness that investment will be critical to our national defense," Shah said.

The Pentagon requested $30 million for research, development, test and evaluation for DIUx in fiscal year 2017. If Congress approves that level of spending, the office expects to combine it with funds contributed by other Defense Department organizations, he said.

For many small commercial companies, there are several impediments involved in the traditional contracting process that dissuade them from doing business with the Pentagon, he noted.

DIUx has used new authorities granted by Congress in the 2016 National Defense Authorization Act to break down some of those barriers.

"It's not really exclusive to us but we have leveraged it to great use," Shah said.

The commercial solutions opening mechanism has increased speed and transparency in the contracting process. Upon the success of a prototype, the process enables a "quick translation or transition" into procurement contracts that enable the services or other Defense Department organizations to scale the prototype if it meets their needs, he said.

DIUx also requires less cumbersome accounting standards, and intellectual property and data rights are negotiable on project-by-project basis, Shah noted.

He hopes that other Defense Department organizations will follow his office's lead when it comes to using new contracting authorities.

"Whenever you try something new there has got to be someone that's first that goes through the motions and irons out the wrinkles and makes it into a reputable process, so we're happy to have played that role," Shah said.

"We're in fact spending time educating others in the department of how they might use this capability and authority, and I'm very optimistic that others in the department will follow suit," he added.

The DIUx initiative has been Carter's pet project. Shah said he's confident that it will survive well past the Pentagon chief's tenure, which is expected to end when a new administration takes office next year.

"I'm quite optimistic that … the subsequent secretary and the subsequent secretary after that will see the value of this engagement and will be pleased to have DIUx in his or her quiver of tools to achieve their mission and goals," he said.

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21. Gitmo prisoner found ineligible for release
Miami Herald, Oct. 14, Pg. A13 | Carol Rosenberg

GUANTÁNAMO BAY NAVY BASE, Cuba -- The interagency parole board has declared the younger brother of an alleged 9/11 plotter too dangerous to release, essentially rebranding Hassan Bin Attash as Guantánamo's 24th "forever prisoner."

"The detainee refused to acknowledge that he was affected by his extremist upbringing and indoctrination at an early age," the six-agency U.S. government board said in its Oct. 11 decision declaring Bin Attash, 31 or 34, ineligible for release.

"The Periodic Review Board, by consensus, determined that continued law of war detention of the detainee remains necessary to protect against a continuing significant threat to the security of the United States," it also said.

The two-paragraph decision described the Saudi-born Bin Attash as an explosives specialist and an aide to several senior al-Qaida members, who was responsible for "supporting numerous plots against the U.S. and other Western targets in Afghanistan, Pakistan, the Middle East, and North Africa."

Left unsaid was that he is the younger brother of Walid Bin Attash, who is awaiting a death-penalty trial as an alleged deputy in the 9/11 plot. The brothers have never seen each other here, according to their lawyers; they are held in two different prison buildings — the older brother in Camp 7, reserved for "high-value detainees," and Hassan in Camp 6, a medium-security prison building where captives live communally.

Hassan Bin Attash was captured in Pakistan on Sept. 11, 2002, with another alleged Sept. 11 conspirator, Ramzi bin al Shibh, and according to the so-called Senate Torture Report was held for 120 days or more by the CIA. He was brought to the prison camps in September 2004.

His lawyer, David Remes, calls Bin Attash Guantánamo's youngest detainee, a man who left home in Saudi Arabia around age 13, was captured in his teens and probably got to the prison in Cuba at age 19. A leaked 2008 prison profile said he was born in 1985. His latest profile put his date of birth at some time in 1982.

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AIR FORCE

22. Air Force's pioneering approach to diversity

The Air Force has become a leader in adopting reforms to promote diversity. In many ways, it's a move born of necessity

Christian Science Monitor Online, Oct. 13 | Anna Mulrine Grobe

WASHINGTON — Air Force Secretary Deborah James can clearly remember the moment she was forced to acknowledge her own unconscious biases about people.

She was asked to look at pictures of two men. "One had tattoos all over his body, huge muscles – the way he was dressed reminded me of a gang person," Secretary James recalls in an interview with the Monitor. "I thought to myself, 'Wow, perhaps this is a prison convict.' "

The other was a picture of a "clean-cut, attractive man."

The question: Who would you rather have your daughter date?

"Naturally I and everyone else in the room went for the clean-cut man because of his appearance," she says.

The tattooed man, it turns out, was the mayor of a very successful small city. The clean-cut man was Ted Bundy, the serial killer.

The moment came during a diversity training session, and this month the Air Force is making them mandatory for all its boards that govern promotion.

The reform speaks to how the Air Force has become the most aggressive military service in addressing diversity in its ranks. From required recruiting goals to more flexible guidelines around maternity leave, the Air Force is adopting policies that, in some cases, put it on a par with companies such as Facebook and Amazon.

To a large degree, the changes are born of necessity. The Air Force is overwhelmingly white and male. Of the Air Force's 280 generals, 18 are minorities. Of the Air Force's roughly 9,000 combat pilots – the field from which the service tends to draw its leaders – at least 87 percent are white and nearly 94 percent are men. Overall, the force is 85 percent male.

The concern is not purely about greater gender and racial equality. It is that women and minorities are joining the force but then dropping out at higher rates. That represents not only a loss of investment but also a failure to expand the force's potential talent pool.

"As a general proposition, we recruit a decent number of women and minorities into the force," James says. "Where we don't do so well is that we have women [leave] at mid-career at twice the rate of men." It's a similar story when it comes to minorities, she adds. "So we're losing them at a higher rate. Why is that so?"

How the Air Force is changing

Answering that question has been a central focus of James's three-year tenure as the service's top civilian, and it's showing the first signs of bearing fruit.

She first instituted simple changes. She made it easier for people under 5-foot-4 to become pilots. She also required recruiters to start upping the pool of women – from one quarter to 30 percent. Today, the Air Force Academy class of 2020 is up to 29 percent women; for Air Force ROTC programs, it's up to 33 percent female.

James also required promotion boards for big-deal career jobs – in the military, positions like aides-de-camp and executive officers – to include "at least one qualified, diverse candidate" in the interview pool.

The requirement draws on the National Football League's "Rooney Rule," which mandates that the slate of candidates being interviewed for top coaching jobs must include a minority. Similar programs are in place at Facebook and Amazon.

"These are very visible, key developmental positions, so I think sending a signal that this model is out front for different races or ethnicities or genders is important," says Katherine Kidder, a fellow in the Military, Veterans, and Society program at the Center for a New American Security.

In this regard, the Air Force is leading the way within the Pentagon, she adds. President Obama released a statement last week calling for more diversity in the government, and "the Air Force was right out there with its plan, which we haven't necessarily seen from the rest of the services," she says.

The need for such programs was further brought home for James at another diversity training session. Both male and female actors playing the role of job applicants had memorized a script as part of an interview.

"The words they uttered, the background they described was identical," James says. But focus groups overwhelmingly selected the man, "even though the words out of their mouths were the same." Similar studies found focus groups tended to consider the men "confident" and the women "conceited."

In the military, other challenges in getting women into top jobs have arisen, Ms. Kidder says. For example, in an era of intense scrutiny of sexual assault, many senior leaders pass over women as aides-de-1camp, since the position includes lots of traveling and closed-door conversations.

Why many women drop out

Then there are hurdles that cause many women to leave the force after only a few years. A primary one is career flexibility.

When the question raising a family comes up, many women will leave, in part because current Air Force rules require them to opt out of their military service commitment before their baby is born.

"This has the effect of requiring women to make a separation choice before childbirth, which may potentially undermine retention of quality airmen," an Air Force document notes.

Under a new initiative instituted this month, women will have a year after their baby's birth to decide on their career path, in order "to better understand and assess how they can juggle a military career and family," the Air Force document adds.

"See how it is before you make such a decision – and oh, by the way, we will match you up with a mentor in the same situation – someone who is doing what you're about to do," James adds.

This push for balance can clash with demands for readiness. In August 2015, the Navy expanded paid maternity leave to 18 weeks, which at the time was the Defense Department's most generous policy and in line with companies like Google. The Air Force and Army were considering similar 18-week paid leaves, but in February Defense Secretary Ash Carter ordered all services to adopt a 12-week policy.

The move sparked disappointment among some, but such leave policies are costly, and the armed forces "have to answer Congress" on their budgets, Kidder says.

In the meantime, the Air Force is looking into not just maternity but "parental" leave, in another effort to help couples share responsibility for child-rearing.

"We are all in a battle for talent," James says. "If everyone has the same background and experience, you tend to get the same solutions over and over again."

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23. Air Force Hardening Its 'Flying Networks' Against Cyber Threats
Bloomberg News, Oct. 13 | Nafeesa Syeed

WASHINGTON -- As the U.S. Air Force deploys pilots for combat, including the campaign targeting Islamic State, it's accelerating efforts to harden the computer networks that control everything from warplanes' navigation to weapons systems from cyber threats.

A plane is a "flying network" with multiple systems that could be targeted by hackers, according to Todd Probert, vice president of mission support and modernization at Raytheon Co., whose Air Force contracts include helping beef up cyber defenses on F-16 warplanes and Global Hawk surveillance aircraft.

"If some piece of cyber malware gets in there, it can take that plane out for the duration," Probert said in a phone interview. "The threat is changing literally daily. The best you can do is make something harder or more resilient."

Boosting cyber defenses, which have to adjust to changing tools employed by adversaries, is a process unfolding across the service's weapons and systems, Peter Kim, the Air Force's senior information security officer, said in an interview Tuesday in Washington.

'Core Network'

"That's going to take a long time to get to, but we've started that journey and it's going to get there" in the next few years, Kim, 49, said. "They need to be secured and defended in the same manner, if not more than, like we do our core network."

Kim, a former Air Force colonel, also must embed cybersecurity requirements into new contracts of next-generation aircraft being built by Lockheed Martin Corp., Boeing Co. and Northrop Grumman Corp.

"The contractors are working hard to ensure that we have cybersecurity baked in for F-35, KC-46, the long-range strike bomber," he said. "They're all our three top priorities. They're going to have a level of resilience that's going to be good."

In addition, the Air Force relies on many unclassified logistics systems to transport cargo around the world, with details on plane locations and where they're flying, Kim said. "How do we as a military, partnering with commercial industry, ensure that the logistics enterprise and mobility air force can do their mission unhindered through a cyber event?"

Keep it Simple

The Air Force is also collaborating with tech companies to put unclassified information into cloud services on its system, Kim said. Yet he cautions about depending on some emerging technologies, as seen with risks related to self-driving vehicles.

"Less automation is best in terms of functionality," he said. "When you think of a mission-planning system you don't want the full software suite on the box that can do everything under the sun. You want it to do certain things and that's all it does."

Beyond nation-states and criminals, the top cyber threat to the Air Force now is "people who don't know that there's a threat out there," Kim said. "The thing that keeps me up at night is the people part of it," he said.

The "biggest vulnerability" is not sharing enough about the scope and what's at stake, he said. That means expanding airmen's understanding of cybersecurity from merely running antivirus software on computers to how breaches occur.

"We still have people plugging iPhones into computers; we still have people using thumb drives, hard drives; downloading things they shouldn't be downloading onto their laptops; and plugging things into things they shouldn't be plugging into. We have people going to websites they're not supposed to go to," Kim said. "So I need to reach those people and say, 'it's a different world now.'"

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ARMY

24. Army soldiers provide aid in deadly Metrobus crash in DC

Associated Press, Oct. 13 | Lolita C. Baldor

WASHINGTON — The top U.S. Army officer and several of his staff and aides were among the first to go to the aid of motorists in a bus crash in southeast Washington Wednesday night that left one person dead and three others injured.

Gen. Mark Milley, the chief of staff of the Army, was traveling from Joint Base Andrews to Fort Myer in Virginia in a two-car convoy and came upon the accident.

Police said a Metrobus and a car collided on Suitland Parkway near Stanton Road.

According to Army Lt. Col. Rob Shaw, two soldiers helped pull one person from the car before it caught fire, and two others provided first aid to that person until the ambulance arrived.

According to a person familiar with the incident, Milley helped direct the response and assisted with the first aid. The soldiers were unable to pull the other victim from the car because it was in flames, said the person, who spoke on condition of anonymity because the person was not authorized to speak publicly about the incident.

District Fire and EMS officials said a person inside the car was pronounced dead at the scene. Another passenger in the car was taken to the hospital with what authorities said were critical and life-threatening injuries.

Officials said two people on the bus were also transported to the hospital with non-life-threatening injuries

Shaw said the soldiers involved in assisting the crash victim want to remain anonymous and "were simply doing what they believed was the right thing to do — using their military training to help others."

The roadway was shut down due to the crash as crews dealt with a fuel leak from the bus.

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MARINE CORPS

25. Neller tells Okinawa Marines they must adapt for new adversaries

Stars and Stripes, Oct. 13 | Matthew M. Burke

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — The Marine Corps commandant told his forces on Okinawa they must adapt to face new adversaries as the United States shifts from combat in Iraq and Afghanistan to preparations for potential future foes like North Korea, China, Russia and Iran.

Last November, Gen. Robert Neller told Marines here it was up to the politicians in Washington to decide what would come after the defeat of the Islamic State. During a town hall Thursday at Camp Kinser, he remained cognizant of the extremist group but looked toward future and emerging threats.

"We have a very good Marine Corps, but we've been at war for 15 years," Neller said. "In the future that I think we're going face, fighting different types of adversaries means we have to change."

Neller said potential future adversaries have been studying the U.S. military during the Iraq and Afghanistan campaigns and have modernized based on the lessons they have learned. He said the next conflict will likely feature electronic and space warfare and will be all about technology. He cited areas that need — and will receive — attention: people, readiness, training, naval modernization and technology.

"We're going to leverage technology in everything we do," he said. "Change is inevitable. Embrace it."

Neller said that even the Islamic State is using personal drones to scope troop positions in Iraq and deliver explosives.

Neller said Marines on Okinawa are the tip of the spear for potential future conflicts. He asked the audience if they were ready to fight tonight.

"I'm not looking to pick a fight with anybody, but you have to be ready to go," he said.

Neller also touched on a number of topics, including suicide, hazing, sexual assault and alcohol abuse.

"I've been doing this for 40 years, and I keep reading the same stuff," he said after telling several tragic stories about Marines abusing alcohol. "We've got to do better. Alcohol is killing us — literally. It's killing us. I need your help. I can't fix this. Only you can fix this."

Neller said the Islamic State would soon be defeated on the battlefield, but the fight against its ideology would continue, with hope and economic opportunities needed for those most vulnerable to recruitment.

He questioned whether most Filipinos agree with new President Rodrigo Duterte's anti-American comments and calls to end joint exercises, but "I don't see how we have any other choice but to comply." He added that relations have cooled in the past, only to improve with changes in political leadership.

Neller said it remains unclear how humanitarian and relief cooperation would work if exercises end. However, he said the U.S. always stands ready to help in a crisis.

He acknowledged that plans have been pushed back for the relocation of Marine Corps Air Station Futenma to Camp Schwab in Okinawa's remote north. He didn't elaborate, but it is most likely due to the fervent opposition by

Okinawa's Gov. Takeshi Onaga and concessions by Tokyo after a string of high-profile crimes linked to American servicemembers and civilian base workers.

Neller told Stars and Stripes after the meeting that the Marine Corps would adjust to delays and any other issues that may arise.

"It's just part of the landscape," he said. "We'll see what the Japanese courts say after the first of the year and how that works between the Okinawan prefecture and the mainland Japan government, Prime Minister [Shinzo] Abe, and we'll address it."

Neller said the Marines have refrained from making improvements to barracks and other facilities on Futenma because of the impending move but now will proceed because of the significant delays. He asked Marines to make do with aging facilities in the meantime.

Regarding the nuclear capabilities of potential future adversaries, Neller said the Marine Corps is supportive of U.S. efforts to recapitalize its nuclear capabilities as a deterrent. Marines will likely see more training in the future for biological, chemical and nuclear attacks, he said.

"It's almost kind of back to the future, like we were during the Cold War, when we were addressing the Soviet Union," he said.

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NAVY

26. Secretary of the Navy stops at EB, touts shipbuilding under his tenure, work by EB employees
The Day Online (New London, CT), Oct. 13 | Julia Bergman

GROTON — With the aft section of the future USS South Dakota behind him, Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus on Thursday highlighted the shipbuilding that has happened during his tenure, and he credited Electric Boat employees for building "the best submarines in the world."

"I like building ships," Mabus said to applause.

The visit was Mabus' third to EB's shipyard and likely his last, as he will probably be leaving the position when the new administration comes in. He was appointed by President Barack Obama in 2009, and he is the longest-serving secretary of the Navy since World War I.

From 2001 to 2008, the Navy put 41 ships under contract, but "that wasn't enough to keep our fleet from shrinking more, and it wasn't enough to keep the work at places like Electric Boat," Mabus said of the years before his tenure.

From 2009 to 2016, 86 ships were under contract.

"We are growing the fleet," he said, noting that the Navy will get back to 300 ships by 2019 and get "back to what we need today" — 308 ships by 2021.

There are 3,375 more people working at EB than the day he took office, Mabus said.

Mabus thanked U.S. Rep. Joe Courtney, D-2nd District, who was present Thursday, for his support of the Navy and the submarine program, referring to him as "Two Sub Joe," the nickname Courtney earned for helping to secure an $18 billion contract awarded to EB to build 10 submarines for the price of nine. He also referenced a gift Courtney gave him: A Connecticut license plate with the words "Ten Sub Ray" on it.

Mabus held up a large punch card with the words "Buy 9 Subs, get the 10th One Free!"

"You saved the taxpayers $2 billion with the kind of work you do here," he told the EB workers.

He acknowledged for the sailors in the crowd that deployments have become longer and more unpredictable, and he said the Navy is working on that and other issues such as the prevention of suicides and sexual assaults.

Several employees and sailors got the opportunity to ask Mabus questions, many of which revolved around keeping steady work in the shipyard and how EB can maximize shipbuilding and maintenance opportunities.

The last question, posed by a sailor, was what sailors can do "on the deck plates" to minimize suicides and alcohol abuse.

When somebody has a problem, Mabus told him, speak up and help them get help.

In a brief interview with the press afterward, Mabus responded to a question about the decision to scrap enlisted ratings after 241 years.

The decision has been met with widespread criticism from current and former sailors, who feel that a part of their identity has been taken away and that they weren't able to provide their input.

The idea came from the Navy's former Master Chief Petty Officer Mike Stevens who "got a lot of input, particularly from chiefs around the fleet," Mabus said.

The main reason for the decision, he said, is to make promotions quicker and easier. The ratings were "so narrow" that at times "you couldn't promote because there was a bottleneck at the top."

"Sometimes your next duty station, there was only one place you could go," Mabus said.

"Now, while you'll still have specialization, while you're doing that, you can also become qualified in (others). If you can't promote in one specific rating, you can in another," he added, noting that sailors will also have more flexibility with their duty stations.

As part of the shakeup, the Navy is matching its qualifications with those of the private sector. Someone who works in aviation who leaves the Navy to work for an airline "would have to start over as far as FAA qualifications," Mabus said.

"The way we're doing it now is we're lining up qualifications in aviation with the FAA qualifications so when you walk out you'll be certified," he added. "So you can just walk across the street and get a job."

Most of the criticism has come from retirees, Mabus said, "and I understand that."

"Everything was perfect when they were there; now you've gone and messed it up," he continued.

"We're not doing it for the sake of change, we're doing it to make promotions easier, so that you can promote quicker, and we're doing it so that you have more choices for duty stations, and we're doing it so that when you leave the Navy, you can walk right into another job instead of having to start over in terms of qualifications," he said.

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27. Cruise missile attacks on Navy ships will likely warrant rare combat ribbons
Military Times Online, Oct. 13 | Andrew Tilghman

It's been more than 25 years since the Navy officially recognized a ship crew at sea for coming under enemy fire.

Yet the recent attacks from the Red Sea – when an enemy cruise missile came within one minute of impacting a ship – will likely make thousands of sailors eligible for Combat Action Ribbons, a citation the Navy has not bestowed on the crew of a ship underway since the Gulf War in 1991.

"If I was on that ship, I would feel like I warranted it," said a defense official familiar with the preliminary investigation, referring to the first attack on Sunday when two missiles were fired at the afloat forward staging base Ponce. He spoke on condition of anonymity because the incidents remain under review.

The two cruise missile attacks, the first occurring Sunday and the other Wednesday, targeted three U.S. Navy ships, the destroyer Mason and the Ponce and amphibious transport dock San Antonio, according to several defense officials. The high-speed, guided missiles came from Yemen, where Houthis rebels backed by Iran control a large swath of coastline.

"The splash point was within 10 [miles]," the defense official said, referring to the distance from the ships that the cruise missiles reached before crashing into the water.

"So when you're talking about something traveling at 500 to 600 miles per hour, that is not a lot of time," the defense official said. It would take about 60 to 80 seconds for a cruise missile at that speed reach a target 10 nautical miles away.

The first attack specifically targeted the Ponce, an official said. The nearby Mason, which was serving as the Ponce's heavily-armed escort, activated its missile defense system and fired interceptor missiles. Neither ship was hit by the incoming missile; it's unclear if the interceptor missiles destroyed or deflected the cruise missile or whether it struck the water on its own.

The Oct. 12 attack involved a single missile shot that appeared to put both the Mason and the San Antonio at risk. "It's not really clear whether they were targeting the Mason or San Antonio. They were very close to each other," the official said. In response, the Mason again fired up its missile-defense systems and the incoming explosive struck the water and was disabled.

On Thursday, the destroyer Nitze fired Tomahawk missiles into southern Yemen, where the cruise missile attacks originated. The U.S. rockets destroyed three radar sites in the area controlled by Houthis rebels, who receive support from Iran. The coastal radar systems provided key targeting data to the cruise missiles fired from Houthis-controlled area.

Cruise missiles are designed to slam a high-explosive warhead of roughly 350 pounds into a ship's hull at 600 miles per hour, a substantial blow that will likely kill crewmembers and could render a ship combat ineffective. It's many times more dangerous to a warship than rockets and mortars, which were fired at Navy ship 11 years ago.

Under official Navy policy, the Combat Action Ribbon is intended for sailors who "rendered satisfactory performance under enemy fire while actively participating in a ground or surface engagement."

Navy officials say it's too early to determine what individual or unit awards may be appropriate for the ships that came under attack.

The two attacks were the first known instances of a U.S. Navy ship engaging its Standard Missile-2 air defense system outside of training situations. The SM-2 system uses interceptors to destroy incoming missiles at long-range before using last-resort self-defense systems, like the shorter-range Sea Sparrow missiles or the Close-In Weapons System 20mm gun.

Enemy targeting of the U.S. ships likely involved radar as well as small boats sent out into the water to help track and identify the American warships.

"There is some speculation that there were some spotter boats that were out there," said the U.S. official who spoke on condition of anonymity because the attacks remain under investigation.

"Does that mean they knew what they were shooting at? And they knew what each ship does? We're not sure," the official said.

Many military officials believe were missiles were C-802 anti-ship cruise missiles, originally made by China but widely replicated. The missile has been a part of the Iranian military's arsenal for decades. Experts say they can travel more than 600 miles per hour with an estimated range of 60 nautical miles.

The military services have awarded many Combat Action Ribbons for ground combat for operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. But the award is rare for entire ship's crew. Twice in recent years, the Navy has approved the awards for incidents involving terrorism targeting ships in port.

That includes the 2000 attack on the destroyer Cole, which was struck by suicide bombers while in port in Yemen, killing 17 sailors.

In 2005, the Navy approved Combat Action Ribbons for the crew of the amphibious assault ship Kearsarge and the amphibious dock landing ship Ashland after militants fired several rockets at the ship while pier-side at the Red Sea port of Aqaba, Jordan. The rockets did not strike the ships.

The latest attacks on U.S. Navy ships are the first attacks on ships in operating in open international waters since the Gulf War in 1991. More than two dozen ships received unit citations for coming under enemy fire in those operations.

For many of today's sailors, the recent attacks in the Red Sea are the first time they've seen surface warfare.

Chief of Naval Operations Adm. John Richardson spoke to sailors at an "all-hands" event Thursday and clearly said the ships were under fire.

"After defending themselves against a couple of coastal-defense cruise missile shots this last week and then again yesterday, [U.S. commanders] decided enough was enough and they launched five missile strikes into Yemen to take out the radars that control those cruise missiles."

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NOTABLE COMMENTARY

28. Obama's Iran Missile War

He doesn't want to talk about America's new proxy war in Yemen

Wall Street Journal, Oct. 14, Pg. A10 | Editorial

The White House doesn't want Americans to notice, but the tide of war is not receding in the Middle East. The Navy this week became part of the hot war in Yemen, with a U.S. warship launching missiles against radar targets after American vessels were fired on this week. Just when President Obama promised that American retreat would bring peace to the region, the region pulls him back in.

The destroyer USS Nitze fired Tomahawk cruise missiles to take out three radar sites on the Yemen coast believed to be manned by Houthi rebels. Though the Houthis deny it, the Pentagon believes they were responsible for the multiple-missile attack on Sunday against the USS Mason, another destroyer patrolling in international waters. This was no mere warning shot. The Mason had to use active defenses, including interceptor missiles, to prevent a strike that could have killed dozens of sailors.

Pentagon spokesman Peter Cook called the USS Nitze's response Thursday "limited self-defense strikes [that] were conducted to protect our personnel, our ships, and our freedom of navigation in this important maritime passageway." That's another way of saying this was the minimum the U.S. could do to defend our sailors and get the Houthis to stop firing, and we hope it works.

But there's more to this story because the Houthis are one of Iran's regional proxy armies. They are fighting to control Yemen against a Saudi-led coalition that is trying to restore the former Sunni Arab government in Sana'a. The U.S. has been quietly backing the Saudis with intelligence and arms, though the Saudi coalition has been fighting to a draw with the Houthis, who are supplied by Iran. The cruise missiles used against the USS Mason are also used by Hezbollah, another Iran proxy army.

Don't expect the White House to acknowledge this because the ironies here are something to behold. Mr. Obama is backing the Saudis in Yemen in part to reassure them of U.S. support after the U.S.-Iran nuclear deal that the Saudis opposed. Mr. Obama's Iran deal was supposed to moderate Iran's regional ambitions, so Mr. Obama could

play a mediating role between Tehran and Riyadh. But the nuclear deal has emboldened Iran, and fortified it with more money, so now the U.S. is being drawn into what amounts to a proxy war against Iran. Genius.

A Saudi air strike last week mistakenly killed civilians at a funeral in Yemen, and the White House is now leaking that Mr. Obama is rethinking U.S. support for the Yemen campaign. But the U.S. has made similar targeting errors in many conflicts, and Saudi bombing won't get more precise if the U.S. bugs out. The U.S. ought to be helping the Saudis with enough support that they can win in Yemen.

Pulling support from the Saudis now would be seen as one more betrayal of a longtime ally. Iran's leaders would take it as a sign that they can move even more aggressively against the House of Saud. If you think the Middle East is a mess now, imagine what it would look like with Sunni jihadists competing against radical Shiites for control of the Kingdom and its oil fields.

Two years ago Mr. Obama called U.S. policy in Yemen of model of counterinsurgency. But it has since become, like Syria and Iraq, another catastrophic civil war that is another front in the Iranian campaign to become the dominant power in the Middle East.

Mr. Obama doesn't want Americans to figure this out during the election campaign, or as he exits the White House, which is one reason he's responded so feebly to this blatant act of war against U.S. ships. Mark Yemen down as one more hot mess that this President is leaving to his successor.

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29. North Korea, our next big worry
Washington Post, Oct. 14, Pg. A15 | David Ignatius

SEOUL -- When South Korean officials talk about the growing nuclear challenge from North Korea, they use red-alert phrases such as "existential threat," "imminent danger" and "dagger at the throat." They want Americans to understand that this long-running story of brinkmanship has entered a new phase.

One senior South Korean official told me starkly: "A nuclear missile from the North can land on this office in four to five minutes. We don't have the luxury of thinking twice. ... This is no longer a dark cloud on the horizon. It's a threat at our doorstep."

A few miles away at U.S. Army Garrison Yongsan, where U.S. troops are headquartered, a senior U.S. military officer offered a similar warning. He noted that the base, like most of Seoul, has lived for decades under threat from North Korean artillery across the demilitarized zone, but he said the nuclear menace is different: "This is not just a throwback to the Korean War. It's an evolving threat that is becoming dangerous outside the Korean Peninsula."

These conversations illustrate why the North Korean nuclear issue may top the security worries of the next U.S. president. There's a sense here, among South Korean and American officials alike, that Kim Jong Un, the mercurial leader in Pyongyang, is racing through the warning lights to gain nuclear weapons and missile capabilities to attack his neighbors, and also the United States. The next U.S. president will have to decide what to do about it.

"What North Korea wants is what it can't get, which is acceptance as a nuclear weapons state," argued Christopher Hill, a former U.S. ambassador who headed the unsuccessful six-party talks with North Korea in 2005-2007. He was speaking at the World Knowledge Forum conference here.

The frustration voiced by U.S. and South Korean officials is that nothing has succeeded in checking North Korea's relentless advance toward nuclear weapons. Diplomatic talks, U.N. economic sanctions and threats of military force have all failed. North Korea is a pitifully backward country, except in its nuclear and missile programs.

Even China seems to have limited leverage. Many analysts think Beijing could successfully pressure North Korea. But although the Chinese sent a special emissary last year to warn against a fourth nuclear test, the regime went ahead with a test in January. Beijing then supported a U.N. Security Council resolution in March condemning North Korea and imposing sanctions, and Kim responded with a fifth nuclear test last month.

How should the United States work with Seoul to combat this intractable problem? Some leading South Korean officials offered useful suggestions.

Tightening sanctions is a first step. U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Samantha Power was just here discussing a new resolution to do that. South Korea hopes the United Nations will close the "livelihood" exemption that allows North Korea to export coal to China. Coal exports totaled about $1 billion last year and are a major source of foreign exchange to finance the nuclear program. The Chinese have so far balked at squeezing their neighbor harder.

Driving a wedge between Kim and members of his government elite is another South Korean proposal. President Park Geun-hye told her cabinet this week that a recent increase in high-level defections shows the fragility of Kim's regime - and that South Korea should encourage even more defectors. Seoul's message is that if Kim keeps subordinating all other concerns to his nuclear ambition, the regime will eventually implode.

Deterring North Korea militarily is what South Korea wants most from the United States. Park has agreed to installation of the U.S. THAAD missile-defense system, but that won't be ready until December 2017. South Korean officials hope the United States can reassure a jittery public about the reliability of its nuclear umbrella - politely termed "extended deterrence." That could mean more overflights by B-52 and B-1 bombers, more visits by top U.S. officials and more joint defense talks like those scheduled in Washington next week.

Restarting diplomacy with Pyongyang gets little public support here, but South Korea and the United States have left the door open. One face-saving approach would be secret, preliminary U.S. talks with North Korea that would lead later, in concert with China, to public talks about denuclearization. But there's no sign North Korea wants such a dialogue.

What happens if all these efforts fail, and Kim deploys nuclear-tipped missiles that could hit U.S. territory? "We should have a euphemism for 'preemption,'" commented one former senior U.S. official at the conference here.

But whatever word is used, an unpalatable military choice may confront the next president - for the simple reason that nothing else seems to have worked.

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30. Extend European sanctions to keep Russia in check

Despite the EU's resolve on Crimea, Moscow remains largely unfazed, writes Anders Fogh Rasmussen

Financial Times Online (UK), Oct. 13 | Anders Fogh Rasmussen

Few in 2014 would have thought the west - and especially the EU - would have maintained sanctions on Russia over its actions in Ukraine for more than two years.

Yet, despite Europe's resolve until now, the reality is that Moscow remains largely unfazed. Look at Russia's escalation over Crimea in the past few months. It is firmly in Moscow's grip; the Kremlin feels free to run parliamentary elections in a territory that is illegally under its control. Serious human rights violations against ethnic Ukrainians and indigenous Crimean Tatars occur systematically on its watch. In Ukraine's eastern Donbas region, the Kremlin keeps supporting anti-Kiev forces, undermining important provisions agreed in the Minsk II peace process in 2015.

Russia is playing at will with the security of its neighbours. In some cases, it even exports the same disruptive tactics through the domestic politics of western democracies. The reason for this is simple: it knows it can. The sanctions regime agreed by EU leaders has done too little to deter Moscow. This is why, when they meet next week at the European Council to discuss relations with Russia, they should at the very least consider extending the term of existing sanctions for another 12 months instead of six.

Such an extension would not change the substance of the various sanctions packages - those aimed at individuals and entities, and at specific Russian economic sectors. This has been a complex construct for European governments to agree. Unless a dramatic event unfolds, finding the consensus for augmenting sanctions would be close to impossible. Nonetheless, it is high time to recognise that the existing review cycle does not go far enough.

The original aim of the six-month timeline was to sync it with the objectives of the first Minsk agreement - for Russia to pull out foreign fighters and military equipment, and restore control of borders to Ukraine - signed in September 2014. At the time, there was some hope that all parties, including Russia, would follow through. It has become clear Russia holds no such intent. We must therefore be ready to hold firm for the long haul.

The tools available to the EU must be adapted to this new reality - especially as the six-month timeline is slowly becoming self-defeating. Every time sanctions have come up for renewal, the unity of European leaders has appeared a little weaker. Each time, Russia has focused its efforts on dividing EU governments and increased or decreased the pressure in Donbas at its will.

Some might argue such an extension would be a disincentive for Russia to implement its part of Minsk. However, Moscow's actions to date do not support this; it has, after all, acted unobstructed since its 2008 invasion of Georgia, when no sanctions were imposed. Moreover, should Russia return to Kiev full control of its eastern border, EU leaders can lift sanctions ahead of schedule.

A longer timeframe for the sanctions would also have domestic political benefits in several EU states. As counterintuitive as it might sound, a 12-month extension would help many leaders who are under pressure. It would remove the sanctions discussion from forthcoming difficult electoral campaigns in France and Germany.

It would help present a united transatlantic front, too. Indeed, the EU would align itself more closely with the US, which renews its Russia sanctions on an annual basis. In this time of doubt, and a temptation to retrench, transatlantic unity is ever more important.

Ultimately, a 12-month extension of the sanctions against Russia's actions in Ukraine would send a powerful message. It would demonstrate to those like President Vladimir Putin who challenge a rules-based order, that

European governments, alongside the US, can still find the resolve to respond to the big challenges of our difficult decade.

--*The writer is former secretary-general of Nato*

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