



AS OF 0500 HOURS, JANUARY 30

OVERVIEW

U.S. Special Operations Forces launched a raid against al-Qaeda's affiliate in Yemen, killing at least 14 jihadists in a mission in which an American service member also died, the Pentagon said. In Washington, Jordan's King Abdullah will hold talks with top Trump administration officials on how to bolster the kingdom's domestic security amid the growing risk of ISIL attacks, according to *Reuters*. Also of note, *Bloomberg News* reported that U.S. intelligence agencies and the military's Strategic Command are working on a new evaluation of whether the Russian and Chinese leadership could survive a nuclear strike and continue operating.

NEWS HEADLINES AT 0430

- White House defends immigration order in face of protests
- Australia says Trump will honor one-time deal to accept refugees
- Philippine military belies Duterte claim about U.S. arms depots
- Turkey urges Germany to deny asylum to coup-linked soldiers
- Quebec mosque shooting kills at least six; two suspects arrested

OVERSEAS HEADLINES OF NOTE

- *Jerusalem Post*: U.S. drones target two suspected al-Qaeda militants in Yemen – officials
- *Nikkei*: Japanese think they pay enough for U.S. military bases – poll
- *Radio Kulmiye*: Somali forces claim killing of leading al-Shabaab commander

THIS DAY IN MILITARY HISTORY

- 1968 – The Tet Offensive begins during the Vietnam War as Communist forces launch surprise attacks against South Vietnamese provincial capitals

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New York Times, Jan. 30, Pg. A1 | Eric Schmitt

One American commando was killed and three others were wounded in a fierce firefight early Sunday with Qaeda militants in central Yemen, the military said on Sunday. It was the first counterterrorism operation authorized by President Trump since he took office, and the commando was the first United States service member to die in the yearslong shadow war against Al Qaeda's Yemen affiliate.

[2. Jordan's Abdullah to press Trump administration to step up war on Islamist militants](#)

Reuters, Jan. 29 | Suleiman al-Khalidi

Jordan's King Abdullah will hold talks with U.S. President Donald Trump's administration in Washington on Monday on how to bolster the kingdom's domestic security amid the growing risk of Islamic State militant attacks, officials and diplomats said.

3. Nuclear Strike Survival for Russia, China Get New U.S. Review

Bloomberg News, Jan. 29 / Tony Capaccio

U.S. intelligence agencies and the Pentagon's Strategic Command are working on a new evaluation of whether the Russian and Chinese leadership could survive a nuclear strike and keep operating, even as President Donald Trump seeks to reshape relations with both nations.

IRAQ/SYRIA

4. U.S. Immigration Policy May Alienate Iraqis, Crucial Allies Against ISIS

New York Times, Jan. 30, Pg. A13 / Michael R. Gordon and Eric Schmitt

President Trump's executive order on immigration is straining relations with the partner the United States needs most to reclaim the Islamic State's stronghold in Mosul: the Iraqis.

5. Iraq to oppose U.S. travel curbs, keen to work together against Islamic State

Reuters, Jan. 29 / Maher Chmaytelli, Isabel Coles and Ahmed Rasheed

Iraq will lobby against new travel limits to the United States by Iraqis, arguing both countries need to uphold their fight against Islamic State (IS), Iraqi parliamentarians said on Sunday.

6. Shock and indifference to Trump ban on Mosul frontline

Associated Press, Jan. 29 / Mstyslav Chernov and Susannah George

U.S. President Donald Trump's executive order temporarily banning citizens from Iraq and six other Muslim-majority countries from entering the United States was met with mixed reactions in Mosul, where Iraqi soldiers are working closely with a U.S.-led coalition in a tough fight against the Islamic State group.

7. Iraqi Local Authorities Evict and Hold Members of ISIS Fighters' Families

New York Times, Jan. 30, Pg. A6 / David Zucchino

Under a new collective punishment policy by the provincial government here, at least 345 families accused of ties to the Islamic State have been evicted and confined to Al Shahama camp outside Tikrit this month, according to provincial leaders. Officials said about 200 other families had been evicted and held in a school and at a separate camp called Rubaidha.

8. Refugee flows part of Islamic State's strategy

Washington Times, Jan. 30, Pg. A1 / Rowan Scarborough

The Islamic State has planned to infect refugee flows to the West with mass killers, and it has had some violent successes.

MIDEAST

9. Heads of Muslim Nations Not Targeted Are Conspicuously Silent

New York Times, Jan. 30, Pg. A1 / Declan Walsh

The Germans criticized it. The British voiced their discomfort. The French, the Canadians and even some Republican senators in Washington stood in open opposition. But in Cairo and Riyadh, in the heart of the

Muslim world, President Trump's decision to bar millions of refugees and citizens of seven Muslim-majority countries from the United States was met with a conspicuous silence.

10. Saudi king agrees in call with Trump to support Syria, Yemen safe zones – White House

Reuters, Jan. 30 | Steve Holland, Samia Nakhoul, William Maclean and Reem Shamseddine

Saudi Arabia's King Salman, in a telephone call on Sunday with U.S. President Donald Trump, agreed to support safe zones in Syria and Yemen, a White House statement said.

11. U.N. experts warn Saudi-led coalition allies over war crimes in Yemen

Reuters, Jan. 29 | Michelle Nichols

A Saudi Arabia-led military coalition has carried out attacks in Yemen that "may amount to war crimes," U.N. sanctions monitors reported to the world body's Security Council, warning coalition allies including the United States, Britain and France that they are obligated to respect international humanitarian law.

12. Clashes on Yemen west coast kill more than 100 – medics

Agence France-Presse, Jan. 29 | Fawaz al-Haidari

Fierce battles between Yemeni government forces and Shiite rebels on the country's west coast have killed more than 100 fighters in the past 24 hours, officials said on Sunday.

ASIA/PACIFIC

13. Trump reiterates 'ironclad commitment' to defend South Korea – White House

Yonhap News Agency (South Korea), Jan. 30 | Song Sang-ho

U.S. President Donald Trump reaffirmed Washington's "ironclad commitment" to South Korea's defense and agreed to take steps to bolster joint defense capabilities, the White House said Sunday.

14. North Korea likely to launch mid-range missile

Yonhap News Agency (South Korea), Jan. 30 | Choi Kyong-ae

North Korea looks set to launch a Musudan intermediate-range ballistic missile (IRBM) instead of a long-range one as it still has to master the related technologies, military officials said Monday.

15. Japan, U.S. defense chiefs to affirm bilateral pact covers Senkakus

Kyodo News (Japan), Jan. 29 | Not Attributed

The Japanese and U.S. defense chiefs will reaffirm during their meeting this week that the countries' security pact covers defense of the Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea that are administered by Japan and claimed by China, Japanese and U.S. government sources said Sunday.

16. Officials tell conference U.S. will remain a Pacific power

Associated Press, Jan. 30 | Rod McGuirk

The United States will stay committed to remaining a Pacific power despite potential policy changes under President Donald Trump's new administration, officials told a conference Monday on U.S. alliances with Australia and Japan.

17. Duterte accuses U.S. of building 'permanent' arsenal in Philippines

Reuters, Jan. 29 / Martin Petty

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte accused the United States on Sunday of risking regional stability by building permanent arms depots in his country, and threatened to respond by scrapping a security treaty between them.

EUROPE

18. Three Ukrainian soldiers killed in separatist offensive – military

Reuters, Jan. 29 / Alessandra Prentice

Three Ukrainian servicemen were killed when pro-Russian rebels attacked government positions in Avdiyivka on Sunday, cutting off power supplies to the eastern frontline town, Ukrainian officials said.

19. Greek, Turkish warships in brief faceoff near Greek islets

Agence France-Presse, Jan. 29 / Katerina Nikolopoulou

Greek and Turkish warships were involved Sunday in a brief faceoff near a group of disputed Greek islets in the Aegean, coinciding with renewed tensions between Athens and Ankara.

AFGHANISTAN/PAKISTAN

20. Former warlord's return could shake up Afghan politics

Associated Press, Jan. 29 / Kathy Gannon

The only insurgent leader to sign a peace pact with Afghanistan's government will return to the country within weeks, his chief negotiator says, in a move that could shake up Afghan politics and complicate the much wider war against the Taliban.

VETERANS

21. Riled veterans leap to Muslims' defense

Los Angeles Times, Jan. 30, Pg. A7 / Matt Pearce and Shashank Bengali

Jeffrey Buchalter was reflooring his foyer in Chesapeake Beach, Md., and listening to MSNBC when he heard the news: An Iraqi who had worked with American forces as an interpreter had been blocked from entering the U.S. under a new executive order on immigration from President Trump. The story stopped him cold. Buchalter, an Army veteran who works as a law-enforcement instructor at the Department of Homeland Security, had served multiple tours of duty as a military police officer in Iraq, service that cost him dearly.

WHITE HOUSE

22. Adviser Seizes a Security Role From Generals

New York Times, Jan. 30, Pg. A1 / Glenn Thrush and Maggie Haberman

A defining moment for Stephen K. Bannon came Saturday night in the form of an executive order giving the rumpled right-wing agitator a full seat on the "principals committee" of the National Security Council -- while downgrading the roles of the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the director of national intelligence, who will now attend only when the council is considering issues in their direct areas of responsibilities. It is a

startling elevation of a political adviser, to a status alongside the secretaries of state and defense, and over the president's top military and intelligence advisers.

23. Officials fear move will set back efforts to fight terrorism

Washington Post, Jan. 30, Pg. A1 | Greg Miller and Missy Ryan

Though cast as measures meant to make the country safe, the Trump administration's moves during its first week in office are more likely to weaken the counterterrorism defenses the United States has erected over the past 16 years, several current and former U.S. officials said.

24. In a Week, Trump Reshapes Decades of Perceptions About America

New York Times, Jan. 30, Pg. A11 | David E. Sanger

By some measures, President Trump has altered the perception of American foreign policy more in the past seven days than his predecessors did in the past seven decades.

NOTABLE COMMENTARY

25. An Opportunity to Rebuild Our Dangerously Weakened Military

Wall Street Journal, Jan. 30, Pg. A15 | Sen. John McCain (R-AZ)

As he assumes the awesome responsibilities of the presidency, Donald Trump has inherited a world on fire and a U.S. military weakened by years of senseless budget cuts. I am encouraged that he recognizes these problems and has pledged to rebuild the military. The work to get the armed forces back up to speed must begin now.

26. An alarming national security shake-up

Washington Post, Jan. 30, Pg. A21 | David J. Rothkopf

While demonstrators poured into airports to protest the Trump administration's draconian immigration policies, another presidential memorandum signed this weekend may have even more lasting, wide-ranging and dangerous consequences. The document sounds like a simple bureaucratic shuffle, outlining the shape the National Security Council will take under President Trump. Instead, it is deeply worrisome.

27. Allies in Combat, Now Unwanted

New York Times, Jan. 30, Pg. A21 | Zachary Iscol

During much of 2004, an Iraqi man whom I'll call Frank, to protect his identity, served with my Marine Corps unit with great distinction. While our platoon lived among Iraqi soldiers in a village outside Falluja, our interpreters were our bridge to the surrounding community. Our relationships with local religious and tribal leaders kept us safe. Although the area was dangerous and attacks on United States troops were frequent, in that town, my unit was never touched. That was thanks to the efforts of Frank and other local interpreters.

28. Trump's order makes U.S. safer

USA Today, Jan. 30, Pg. A7 | Rep. Marsha Blackburn (R-TN)

President Trump issued an executive order on Friday to do exactly what he promised -- protect the American people. The order, titled "Protecting The Nation From Foreign Terrorist Entry Into The United States," pauses

the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program for 120 days, with Syrian refugee admissions being suspended indefinitely, in order to closely examine the refugee application and adjudication process.

29. Assad's mouthpiece in Washington

Washington Post, Jan. 30, Pg. A21 | Josh Rogin

The Bashar al-Assad regime in Syria has had a quiet but well-funded lobbying effort in Washington since well before he began murdering his own people. But that influence campaign's clearest triumph came only this month, when it succeeded in bringing Rep. Tulsi Gabbard (D-Hawaii) to Damascus and having her parrot Assad's propaganda on her return.

30. 'Comfort Women' and Asian Security

Wall Street Journal, Jan. 30, Pg. A13 | Kiyoshi Odawara

On Dec. 28, 2015, Japan reached a historic agreement with the Republic of Korea on the comfort-women issue, in which the honor and dignity of many women were at stake. In the agreement, the issue is "resolved finally and irreversibly," thereby removing an obstacle to better Japan-ROK relations. This breakthrough won praise from many countries, including the U.S.

TOP STORIES

1. American Dies in Yemen Raid on Al Qaeda

Trump Authorizes First Antiterror Operation

New York Times, Jan. 30, Pg. A1 | Eric Schmitt

WASHINGTON -- One American commando was killed and three others were wounded in a fierce firefight early Sunday with Qaeda militants in central Yemen, the military said on Sunday. It was the first counterterrorism operation authorized by President Trump since he took office, and the commando was the first United States service member to die in the yearslong shadow war against Al Qaeda's Yemen affiliate.

Members of the Navy's SEAL Team 6 carried out the surprise dawn attack, and the military said that about 14 Qaeda fighters were killed during a nearly hourlong battle. A Qaeda leader -- a brother-in-law of Anwar al-Awlaki, the American-born cleric and top Qaeda leader in Yemen, who died in a drone strike in 2011 -- was believed to have been killed.

After initially denying that there were any civilian casualties, American officials said they were assessing reports that women and children had died in the attack.

The military's Joint Special Operations Command had been planning the mission for months, according to three senior American officials. Obama administration aides had deliberated extensively over the proposed operation, weighing the value of any information that might be recovered against the risk to the Special Operations forces plunging into hostile territory. But administration officials ultimately opted to hand the decision on the mission to their successors.

Mr. Trump, who has vowed to increase pressure on militant groups worldwide, was quickly persuaded that the rewards were worth the gamble, and he authorized the mission last week, military officials said. Commandos waited for a moonless evening on Saturday to exploit their advantage of fighting at night.

As helicopter gunships and armed Reaper drones provided cover, the commandos carried out the attack against the home of the Qaeda leader in the rugged mountainous region of Bayda Province, a part of Yemen that has been a focal point of United States military operations over the past month. The main target was computer materials inside the house that could contain clues about future terrorist plots.

In a statement on Sunday, Mr. Trump called the raid "successful" and said that it had captured "important intelligence that will assist the U.S. in preventing terrorism against its citizens and people around the world." He also lamented the loss of the American service member "in our fight against the evil of radical Islamic terrorism."

The military's Central Command said in an earlier statement on Sunday that "similar operations have produced intelligence on Al Qaeda logistics, recruiting and financing efforts." In previous raids in Iraq, Syria and Somalia, commandos have recovered laptop computers, thumb drives and cellphones that yielded important information about militant leaders' locations, activities and associates.

A United States military aircraft helping with the operation experienced a "hard landing" near the site of the raid, resulting in injuries to two other service members, military officials said. That aircraft, identified by a senior American official as an Osprey that was evacuating the troops wounded in the firefight, was unable to fly after the landing and was deliberately destroyed by American airstrikes. The wounded troops and the Osprey's crew were lifted to safety by another American aircraft.

American officials and analysts said the Qaeda leader who was believed to have been killed was Abdulrauf al Dhahab.

The raid took place in Yemen around the time that Mr. Trump was signing a directive in Washington on Saturday afternoon ordering Defense Secretary Jim Mattis to devise within 30 days a more aggressive plan to defeat the Islamic State.

The Islamic State was born from Al Qaeda's branch in Iraq, but the two terrorist organizations are now sworn rivals not only in Iraq and Syria, but also in other hot spots like Yemen and Afghanistan, where both groups have affiliates.

Because Mr. Trump had been explicit about his intention to ask for the review to accelerate the fight against the Islamic State, also known as ISIS or ISIL, American military planners had begun drafting classified options to present to the new commander in chief. Some of those options, like pushing more authority to conduct strikes to commanders in the field or loosening restrictions designed to limit the risk to civilians, could also be applied to attacks against Qaeda fighters and Islamic State insurgents.

There were no immediate indications that the rules of engagement had been loosened for the mission in Yemen, military officials said. The Central Command's statement did not elaborate on details of the raid or identify the commando who was killed.

A local resident who witnessed the raid, speaking by phone, said he had seen warplanes bombing several houses in the village around 2 a.m. Sunday. The man said he had seen at least three buildings being struck before he fled. He did not want to be identified because he feared that speaking out would endanger his life.

A Yemeni government official in Bayda Province said the targeted buildings belonged to the Dhahab family, which is known for its ties to Al Qaeda. Two male members of the family have been killed in drone strikes over the past two years.

The Yemeni official said that at least eight women and seven children, ages 3 to 13, had been killed in the raid. Qaeda supporters said that Mr. Awlaki's young daughter was among the dead and denied that any senior Qaeda leaders had been killed, according to the SITE Intelligence Group, which monitors extremist communications.

Faisal Mohamed, a Bayda official whose two sons witnessed the attack, said it severely damaged a school, a health facility and a mosque.

"I was on the way back to town when they called and said that there were Americans everywhere, so I knew I should not go," Mr. Mohamed said by phone from nearby Marib Province. "My kids told me that the sky was crowded with helicopters and that they saw people jumping out of planes."

"The last thing they said to me was that the whole town is devastated now," Mr. Mohamed said.

Just over a week ago, United States drone strikes killed three other men suspected of being Qaeda operatives in Bayda Province, the first such killings reported in the country since Mr. Trump assumed the presidency.

Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, the group's branch in Yemen, has long been seen by American intelligence and counterterrorism officials as among the most dangerous branches of the global terrorist network, and the one posing the most immediate threat to United States territory. The group's leaders have sought in at least three cases to detonate bombs hidden aboard American commercial jetliners. All of those plots were thwarted.

The raid on Saturday night was the latest in a series of Special Operations drone strikes and ground attacks in Yemen in recent years.

In November 2014, helicopter-borne Special Operations commandos and Yemeni troops rescued eight hostages being held in a remote part of eastern Yemen by Al Qaeda's affiliate there. After landing, the commandos hiked some distance in the dark to a mountainside cave, where they surprised the militants holding the captives.

A month later, in December 2014, United States commandos stormed a village in southern Yemen in an effort to free an American photojournalist held hostage by Al Qaeda. But the raid ended in tragedy, with the kidnappers killing the journalist and a South African held with him.

--Nour Youssef contributed reporting from Cairo; Saeed al-Batati from Al Mukalla, Yemen; and Shuaib Almosawa from Sana, Yemen

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2. Jordan's Abdullah to press Trump administration to step up war on Islamist militants

Reuters, Jan. 29 | Suleiman al-Khalidi

AMMAN -- Jordan's King Abdullah will hold talks with U.S. President Donald Trump's administration in Washington on Monday on how to bolster the kingdom's domestic security amid the growing risk of Islamic State militant attacks, officials and diplomats said.

They said the monarch, who will be the first Arab leader to hold talks with the new administration, is scheduled to meet congressional leaders, senators and senior officials including Defense Secretary James Mattis in coming days.

A meeting was expected to be arranged with Trump, one official said, but there was no official confirmation.

The king will address top administration officials about his country's fears of Islamic State fighters descending southward to its borders at the end of a U.S.-led campaign whose goal is to drive them out of their de facto capital of Raqqa in northern Syria.

"The king will seek a stepped-up campaign against the extremists and secure extra resources to help ensure the militants would not be allowed to move towards our borders," one official told Reuters on condition of anonymity.

Abdullah, a former special operations commander, shares Trump's views about the priority of fighting the hardline group, warning repeatedly of its threat to a kingdom that borders Israel to the west, Syria to the north and Iraq to its east.

The kingdom is among the few Arab states that have taken part in a U.S.-led air campaign against Islamic State militants holding territory in Iraq and Syria. The country has pockets of support for the militants and has been eager not to trumpet its military role in a neighboring Arab country.

Jordanian militants embracing Islamic State ideology killed at least 10 people in an attack in the southern city of Karak last December.

A Jordanian guard killed three U.S. servicemen last November in an attack that Washington did not rule out was politically motivated and signaled risks of radicalization from within the U.S.-equipped Jordanian armed forces.

Two officials said Abdullah was heartened by a new Republican administration whose emphasis on traditional security would be a refreshing change from the former Obama administration's concern over the pace of political reforms, which was seen in Jordan as interference.

The monarch hopes Mattis will be more responsive to the extra military funding and equipment the Obama administration had turned down for one of its key regional allies.

U.S. officials say the kingdom is one of the largest recipients of its foreign military financing.

U.S. Patriot missiles are stationed in Jordan and the U.S. Army has hundreds of trainers. Since the start of the Syrian conflict in 2011, Washington has spent millions of dollars to set up an elaborate border defense system.

But Washington has been dismayed by the mishandling of a series of security lapses in the past year, including an attack by an Islamic State suicide bomber on a U.S.-funded military outpost on the Syrian border.

'WHAT ARE OUR OPTIONS?'

The king will also seek to ease U.S. concerns over his strong support of the Russian military campaign in Syria, where the shift towards Moscow has been interpreted as coming at the expense of Washington, Jordan's main donor.

Abdullah, who has warm personal ties with Russian President Vladimir Putin, went to Moscow last week ahead of Washington in a sign of Russia's rising role in the Middle East

Officials defend Jordan's strong embrace of Moscow's diplomatic and military drive to reach a political settlement in Syria that could keep President Bashar al-Assad in power for years in the absence of a strong counterbalancing U.S. role.

"Without Russia, we will not be able to find solutions to not only the Syrian problem but other regional problems in the Middle East," Abdullah told reporters in Moscow, adding he shared with Putin "the same vision of bringing stability to our region."

Abdullah had accused the Obama administration of failing to act decisively and leaving Moscow to fill the vacuum.

"What are our options? You have no choice in the absence of someone else to rely on," said one official in reference to the Jordanian shift towards Moscow.

In a kingdom whose destiny has been shaped by successive Arab-Israeli wars, Abdullah will also raise concerns about Trump's pledge to move Washington's embassy to Jerusalem.

Jordan fears that could bury hopes of a two-state solution and jeopardize a peace settlement. Officials say it could unleash a new bout of violence in Palestinian territories with a spillover into the kingdom where a majority of the population is of Palestinian origin.

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3. Nuclear Strike Survival for Russia, China Get New U.S. Review

Bloomberg News, Jan. 29 | Tony Capaccio

WASHINGTON -- U.S. intelligence agencies and the Pentagon's Strategic Command are working on a new evaluation of whether the Russian and Chinese leadership could survive a nuclear strike and keep operating, even as President Donald Trump seeks to reshape relations with both nations.

The new study, ordered by Congress before Trump took office, drew bipartisan support from members who harbor deep concern about China's increasing military boldness and distrust of Russian President Vladimir Putin's intentions.

While Trump has pledged to "greatly strengthen and expand" U.S. nuclear capabilities, he also has predicted he can make deals with Putin that may include reducing U.S. sanctions in return for future cuts in nuclear arsenals. The two leaders talked by phone for about an hour on Saturday.

Under the little-noticed provision in this year's defense authorization measure, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence and the U.S. Strategic Command -- which plans and would execute nuclear strikes -- will evaluate the

post-attack capabilities of the two nuclear powers. The law mandates a report on Russian and Chinese “leadership survivability, command and control and continuity of government programs.”

The review is to include “the location and description of above and underground facilities important to the political and military” leadership and which facilities various senior leaders “are expected to operate out of during crisis and wartime.”

U.S.’s Own Plans

The Strategic Command is also directed to “provide a detailed description” for “how leadership survivability” and “command and control” in Russia and China are factored into the U.S.’s own nuclear war planning. The directive was championed by Republican Representative Michael Turner of Ohio, a member of the House Armed Service Committee’s Strategic Forces panel.

“Our experts are drafting an appropriate response,” Navy Captain Brook DeWalt, a spokesman for the Strategic Command, said in an e-mail. While “it’s premature to pass along any details at this point, we can update you further at a later date.”

Trump has signaled support for upgrading the U.S. nuclear arsenal. In a memorandum on Friday, he ordered Defense Secretary James Mattis to “initiate a new Nuclear Posture Review to ensure that the United States nuclear deterrent is modern, robust, flexible, resilient, ready, and appropriately tailored to deter 21st-century threats and reassure our allies.”

The government already was planning what arms control advocates say may be a trillion-dollar modernization of the air-sea-land triad over 30 years starting in the mid-2020s when operations and support are included. Those plans were approved under former President Barack Obama.

“The United States must greatly strengthen and expand its nuclear capability until such time as the world comes to its senses regarding nukes,” Trump wrote in a Dec. 22 Twitter posting. Also in December, Mika Brzezinski, co-host of MSNBC’s ‘Morning Joe’ show, said Trump told her in a phone call: “Let it be an arms race. We will outmatch them at every pass and outlast them all.”

In addition, Trump and his national security team have vowed to confront China on issues from trade to its territorial claims in the South China Sea.

‘Doomsday Clock’

Last week, the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists cited “nuclear volatility” along with climate change as reasons it has moved up its symbolic “Doomsday Clock” by 30 seconds to two and a half minutes to midnight, the closest to a potential global disaster since 1953.

Representative Turner said in an e-mail that the U.S. “must understand how China and Russia intend to fight a war and how their leadership will command and control a potential conflict. This knowledge is pivotal to our ability to deter the threat.”

Russia and China “have invested considerable effort and resources into understanding how we fight, including how to interfere with our leadership’s communication capabilities,” he said. “We must not ignore gaps in our understanding of key adversary capabilities.”

Targeting “leadership and relocation locations is part of long-standing U.S. strategy to make clear that potential enemy leaders understand they cannot win a nuclear war,” Franklin Miller, a former senior Pentagon official who served under seven defense secretaries and as the National Security Council’s senior director for defense policy and arms control, said in an interview.

Command Bunkers

Because such issues have been part of U.S. nuclear planning for decades, Turner is probably raising more specific issues he can’t talk about publicly, Hans Kristensen, director of the Nuclear Information Project at the Federation of American Scientists, said in an e-mail.

Nuclear leaders in Russia and China “plan to direct nuclear forces from inside command bunkers buried deeply beneath the earth or deeply inside mountains,” said Bruce Blair, a Princeton University research scholar on nuclear security policy and co-founder of Global Zero, a group devoted to eliminating nuclear weapons.

Turner’s statement implies that “detering them requires U.S. strategic cruise missiles that can maneuver around the mountains to strike the bunkers from any angle,” Blair said.

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IRAQ/SYRIA

4. U.S. Immigration Policy May Alienate Iraqis, Crucial Allies Against ISIS

New York Times, Jan. 30, Pg. A13 | Michael R. Gordon and Eric Schmitt

WASHINGTON -- President Trump's executive order on immigration is straining relations with the partner the United States needs most to reclaim the Islamic State's stronghold in Mosul: the Iraqis.

Iraqi officials were taken aback by the directive, which they learned about through the American news media because they had not been consulted first.

The order blocks citizens from Iraq and six other predominantly Muslim countries from entering the United States for 90 days. That lumps Iraq together with Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen, nations with no strategic alliance with Washington.

"The effect is that many Iraqis will feel that the United States does not want a long-term relationship with Iraq," said Lukman Faily, who completed a three-year stint as Iraq's ambassador to Washington in June. "We hope it is a blip. It makes it difficult for us to decipher what President Trump is up to with regard to Iraq."

Mr. Faily has been directly affected by the order. Though he holds dual British and Iraqi citizenship, he said information he had received from the American Embassy in Baghdad indicated that he would not be allowed to travel to the United States in the coming weeks to participate in a long-planned conference, he said in a telephone interview from Iraq.

The edict followed inflammatory comments that Mr. Trump made during a visit to the C.I.A. this month, in which he said that the United States should have "kept" Iraq's oil after the American-led invasion and might still have a chance to do so.

More broadly, it clashes with a memo that Mr. Trump issued on Saturday calling on the Pentagon to submit a new plan for stepping up operations against the Islamic State, including by empowering "coalition partners."

With Iraq furnishing the ground forces for the coming assault on western Mosul, and with more than 5,000 American troops in the country, the political support of Baghdad is essential. But current and former American officials are worried that the directive will have a corrosive effect on American-Iraqi relations at a critical stage in the fighting.

"My brothers in Iraq's Army, who I proudly fought with, are fighting ISIS tonight," Mark Hertling, a retired Army lieutenant general who led American forces in northern Iraq, wrote on Twitter. "The Iraqi govt is now winning. And we ban their citizens?"

The order, which administration officials said was drafted without the input of Defense Secretary Jim Mattis and Middle East experts at the State Department, has offended the Iraqis in several respects.

During the Bush administration, the United States and Iraq signed a Strategic Framework Agreement, which calls for close diplomatic, economic and security ties and is still in effect.

"If I were an Iraqi, I would be waving this signed agreement in the face of the current administration," said Ryan C. Crocker, who negotiated the accord and served as the United States ambassador to Iraq under Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama. "It is totally inconsistent."

Iraqis who are already skeptical about Washington have also seized on the order to stir up opposition against the United States. Moktada al-Sadr, the fiery cleric whom many Iraqi Shiites support, accused the United States of "arrogance."

"So get out U.S. citizens from Iraq before you expel communities from U.S.," he said on Twitter.

To contain the political damage, officials said a long-planned call between Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi of Iraq and Mr. Trump might be arranged for this week. Mr. Trump spoke on Sunday with King Salman of Saudi Arabia and with the crown prince of the United Arab Emirates, but neither Saudi Arabia nor the Emirates are covered by the new order.

Iraqi officials who are close to the Americans worry that the Islamic State will exploit the policy in its propaganda to recruit new volunteers. As of early Sunday, the terrorist group had made no official pronouncement. However, individual members and supporters have been sharing the order and news articles about it.

Yet another worry has been expressed by veterans, and even members of Mr. Trump's own party: that the order will interrupt the flow of former Iraqi interpreters and cultural advisers who have worked closely with the Americans and have sought special visas to move to the United States for their own protection.

"The people we need to accomplish the mission are nervous, and rightly so, that our country is going to turn our backs on them," said Steve Miska, a retired Army colonel, who spent 40 months and three deployments in Iraq.

Senators John McCain of Arizona and Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, Republicans who have been strongly supportive of the military, expressed concern that a strict application of the order might even block Iraqi pilots from coming to the United States for training.

"This executive order bans Iraqi pilots from coming to military bases in Arizona to fight our common enemies," they wrote in a statement issued Sunday.

The more fundamental question is whether the White House can balance the fulfillment of a campaign promise to carry out "extreme vetting" of citizens from Muslim countries with the need to maintain strong ties with Muslim partners in its fight against the Islamic State. The air bases that the United States uses to bomb the group are all in Turkey or Arab countries, as are American troops.

"The president's actions on refugees and immigration are certain to backfire," said Matthew G. Olsen, a former director of the National Counterterrorism Center. "The policies validate the terrorists' claim that we are at war with Islam, and will alienate our Middle East allies and isolate American Muslims here at home."

--*Falih Hassan and Omar al-Jawoshi contributed reporting from Baghdad, and Rukmini Callimachi from New York*

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5. Iraq to oppose U.S. travel curbs, keen to work together against Islamic State

Reuters, Jan. 29 | Maher Chmaytelli, Isabel Coles and Ahmed Rasheed

BAGHDAD/MOSUL, Iraq -- Iraq will lobby against new travel limits to the United States by Iraqis, arguing both countries need to uphold their fight against Islamic State (IS), Iraqi parliamentarians said on Sunday.

The Iraqi government has so far declined comment on an executive order signed by new U.S. President Donald Trump on Friday that suspends the entry of travelers from Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen for at least 90 days.

The order stirred angry reactions in Iraq, where more than 5,000 U.S. troops are deployed to help Iraqi and regional Kurdish forces in the war against IS insurgents.

Some members of parliament said Iraq should retaliate with similar measures against the United States.

"Iraq is in the front line of the war on terrorism ... and it is unfair that the Iraqis are treated in this way," parliament's foreign affairs committee said in a statement.

"We call on the Iraqi government to retaliate for the decision taken by the U.S. administration," it added after a session on Sunday in Baghdad.

Baghdad plans to lobby Washington to review the decision, according to two lawmakers who declined to be identified.

One of them told Reuters that the government will "explain that Iraq as a sovereign country will be forced to apply similar treatment, and that would affect negatively cooperation, including military cooperation", in the conflict with IS.

Popular Mobilization, a coalition of mainly Shi'ite Muslim paramilitary groups armed and trained by Iran to fight Islamic State, urged Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi's government to expel U.S. nationals.

Influential Shi'ite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr said on Sunday American citizens should leave Iraq. "It would be arrogance for you (Americans) to enter Iraq and other countries freely while barring them entrance to your country ... and therefore you should get your nationals out," he said on his website.

CRITICAL U.S. SUPPORT AGAINST ISLAMIC STATE

The U.S.-led coalition is providing critical air and ground support to Iraqi forces in the ongoing battle to wrest Mosul, the largest city in northern Iraq, from Islamic State.

Mosul is the last major Iraqi city still under the control of Islamic State, the ultra-hardline Sunni group that declared a self-styled "caliphate" over parts of Iraq and Syria in 2014.

The government announced on Tuesday that Iraqi forces had recaptured all of Mosul east of the Tigris River that splits the city, and were girding for an onslaught on the jihadists on the western bank.

Meanwhile, an Iraqi who worked four years as a translator for U.S. forces in the hope of obtaining a Special Immigration Visa (SIV) felt betrayed by the Trump administration's decision and said he now feared for his life.

The man said he was hired by U.S. forces after he tipped them off about a house where insurgents were making car bombs in Mosul. He said that while employed by the Americans, he saved the life of a serviceman after U.S. troops came under militant attack in Mosul.

"My life is (now) in danger," said the translator, who spoke in eastern Mosul and asked not to be identified or photographed. He told Reuters he used to consider the Americans to be "brothers but I don't trust those guys anymore".

He added that bureaucratic and personal problems delayed his applications to the U.S. Special Immigrant Visa program designed for those employed by the U.S. military and U.S. civilian agencies until their withdrawal from Iraq in 2011.

"Please, please, please get me out of this country," he said.

"There are currently fewer than 500 Iraqis in the SIV pipeline," said a State Department official. Overall, "more than 20,000 Iraqis have received immigrations benefits" from this program, he added.

Among the Iraqis barred from traveling to the U.S. over the past 48 hours was Fuad Sharef's family, who embarked on the trip after selling their home and quitting their jobs and their school.

The parents and their three children were barred on Saturday from boarding a connecting flight in Cairo to New York.

Speaking by phone from Cairo airport, Sharef said the family was still in shock for having been detained there, their passports confiscated and being forced to go back to Iraq.

--With assistance by Arwa Gaballa and Eric Knecht in Cairo

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6. Shock and indifference to Trump ban on Mosul frontline

Associated Press, Jan. 29 | Mstyslav Chernov and Susannah George

MOSUL, Iraq — U.S. President Donald Trump's executive order temporarily banning citizens from Iraq and six other Muslim-majority countries from entering the United States was met with mixed reactions in Mosul, where Iraqi soldiers are working closely with a U.S.-led coalition in a tough fight against the Islamic State group.

But while many Iraqi soldiers said they were shocked by the news, others brushed it aside, explaining that in the long run it may be better for their country to prevent the highly educated from immigrating abroad.

"When he made this decision he destroyed us," said Iraqi special forces Cpl. Ali Latif, whose unit works closely with U.S.-led coalition forces in the fight against IS in Mosul. "I heard the news, that many people were stopped in airports, why would (the United States) do this?"

Meanwhile, the foreign relations committee of Iraq's parliament is asking the government to impose a similar visa ban on Americans trying to enter Iraq, according to member Hassan Shwerid.

Influential Iraqi cleric Muqtada al-Sadr has also spoken out against the ban, suggesting all Americans should be forced out of Iraq in retaliation, according to a statement from his office.

In the more than three months since the operation to retake Mosul was officially launched, Latif says he's lost six close friends in the fight against the militants. Moving forward he doesn't believe Trump's order will dramatically alter the fight against IS, but he says it's already caused mild friction with his U.S. counterparts.

"This (decision) it makes us feel a little bad," he said.

Deeper inside Mosul a unit of Iraqi soldiers admitted they hadn't heard the news.

"Have they stopped giving visas to Iraqi people? Does this mean we cannot enter America? Why?" a man yelled from the top of a supply truck.

"Honestly I love Trump!" said another Iraqi special forces soldier, Sgt. Maj. Diar Al-Khair.

"We don't want our doctors and professors to keep going to another country and make it greater than our own," he said.

Iraq has suffered from severe brain-drain for over a decade as many of the country's educated elite have fled the instability in the country that followed the 2003 U.S.-led invasion.

State media reported that Jordan's King Abdullah II will visit Washington on Monday. The king will meet with administration officials and members of Congress, according to state media who did not mention a White House visit.

Pro-Western Jordan isn't among the countries slapped with the travel ban, but views refugee resettlement to the U.S. and other countries as a way of easing its own burden; Jordan hosts more than 650,000 displaced Syrians.

--Associated Press writers Karin Laub in Amman, Jordan, and Qassim Abdul-Zahra and Sinan Salah in Baghdad contributed

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7. Iraqi Local Authorities Evict and Hold Members of ISIS Fighters' Families

New York Times, Jan. 30, Pg. A6 | David Zucchini

TIKRIT, Iraq -- Udbais Musa says he punched his son and threatened to disown him when the 19-year-old announced last year that he was leaving home to join the Islamic State.

Ultimately, Mr. Musa lost both his son and his house.

To punish the son, Iraqi security forces evicted Mr. Musa and his family from their home on Tikrit's outskirts on Jan. 4. He said they had been transported by military truck to a windswept displaced persons camp with only the clothes they were wearing and a few tattered personal papers.

Under a new collective punishment policy by the provincial government here, at least 345 families accused of ties to the Islamic State have been evicted and confined to Al Shahama camp outside Tikrit this month, according to provincial leaders. Officials said about 200 other families had been evicted and held in a school and at a separate camp called Rubaidha.

Mr. Musa, 60, now shares a blue-and-white tent with nine family members whose only crime was to have a relative who had joined the Islamic State, also known as ISIS, ISIL or Daesh.

Several women evicted from their homes and trucked to the Shahama camp said Iraqi security forces demolished their houses with explosives after accusing their sons or husbands of joining the terrorist group.

The authorities of Salahuddin Province say the punishment against the families of ISIS members is intended to force the group's recruits to pay a painful personal price.

"Our aim is to defy the terrorists and send a stern message to the families," Amar Hekmat, the deputy governor, said inside the barricaded provincial government center.

But the evictions have set off a rancorous dispute between officials in Tikrit and politicians in Baghdad. Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, in a letter to the provincial governor last week, sharply criticized the removals and ordered provincial and Baghdad officials to resolve the issue.

The tensions raised by the Salahuddin officials' actions cut to the heart of sectarian grievances across the whole country, where tens of thousands of Sunni families have been displaced either by the Islamic State or by government

offensives against the group. Even as Mr. Abadi's national government has tried to address reports of abuses by the Shiite-dominated security forces and their militia allies, deep distrust persists in Iraq's Sunni communities.

In an interview, Mishan al-Jiboori, a member of Parliament from Salahuddin Province, accused the provincial security commander of human rights violations against "the innocent and the repressed."

The Salahuddin operations commander, Brig. Gen. Juma Enad Sadoon, called critics like Mr. Jiboori "barking dogs and mercenaries" and said they should not interfere in security matters in Tikrit. In an interview, General Sadoon did not indicate whether the removals would be halted.

The evictions have evoked unwelcome comparisons to collective punishments, including home demolitions, imposed by Israel against families of Palestinians accused of attacks. Collective punishment is prohibited under the Third and Fourth Geneva Conventions and is generally considered illegal under international law.

Officials in Tikrit cited extraordinary security concerns for the evictions.

"This is a very difficult situation for us because of the terrible suffering caused by Daesh," Mr. Hekmat said. "We are under great pressure to rebuild our city and impose civil order" after almost a year under Islamic State occupation in 2014 and 2015, he said.

Khazhal Hamad, the province's first deputy governor, said the removals protected families from retaliation by neighbors who lost family members to ISIS attacks. "There are hostile feelings toward these people, and these feelings can affect the civil peace we are trying to achieve," Mr. Hamad said.

The Tikrit evictions are perhaps a prelude to postcombat frictions in the city of Mosul, 140 miles north, if government forces can uproot Islamic State forces there.

Tikrit is a potent symbol of Sunni dominion in central Iraq. Saddam Hussein was born in Awja, just outside Tikrit, and his palaces still tower over the landscape here. Yet Shiite Muslim militias, backed by Iran and known as popular mobilization forces, led the charge to evict the Islamic State from the city in April 2015.

The main highway into Tikrit is now festooned with posters featuring the faces of Shiite militiamen killed in battle and images of the revered Shiite imams Hussein and Ali. Some of the posters are mounted next to Iraqi government military compounds.

But local Sunni militiamen, along with Iraqi security forces, have themselves carried out some of the evictions -- all targeting Sunnis. Thousands of Sunni tribal fighters had joined the fight against ISIS in Tikrit.

Today, pockets of Islamic State fighters remain in Tikrit districts west of the Tigris River. Security officials said the small militant cells occasionally fired mortars from Sunni neighborhoods where many of the evictions have occurred.

Hussein Ahmed Khalaf, director of the Shahama camp, said none of the 345 evicted families -- 1,111 people -- had been permitted to return home. All will undergo security screenings to determine their fates, he said.

Several of those evicted said security forces had confiscated their cellphones and interrogated them about family members' ties to the Islamic State. They said they had not been told when, or whether, they would be allowed to return home.

Several acknowledged that fathers or sons had joined ISIS, but they insisted that they supported the Iraqi government. They said their children had been removed from school and compelled to endure a harsh existence in the forlorn Shahama camp.

"What is the guilt of my children? They don't know anything about Daesh," said Eman Khalil Hamad, 34. She said she and her seven children had been evicted and their five-room home demolished to punish her husband, an Islamic State fighter she said she had not seen for months.

Ms. Hamad said the family had suffered under the Islamic State's harsh social codes. But now, she said, she was abused by security forces who slapped and insulted her as she was forced onto a military truck this month.

Hussein al-Gibory, 55, a Sunni Muslim tribal sheikh and a commander of a Sunni militia force that helped restore Tikrit to government control, said collective punishment was counterproductive.

"It will only turn people away from the government and strengthen Daesh," said Mr. Gibory, who wore combat fatigues with military insignia of the popular mobilization forces -- the collective name for militia forces in Iraq.

He said authorities should use "social rehabilitation" to convince families of Islamic State members that "Daesh is more dangerous than a nuclear bomb."

"We are tribal people," Mr. Gibory said. "We should turn to dialogue rather than dragging women and children from their homes."

Mr. Musa, the father of the ISIS fighter, said he felt betrayed by his government. He said he had alerted the tribal sheikh in his village, on Tikrit's west side, after his son joined the group, and disavowed both his son and the Islamic State.

The sheikh signed and stamped a letter attesting to Mr. Musa's innocence. But the security forces who evicted him refused to read the document, Mr. Musa said, clutching the worn letter inside his camp tent.

Hadia Ibrahim, 44, a mother of 11 children, said two of her sons -- one an Iraqi police officer -- had been killed by the Islamic State. But she said she and her four daughters were now confined to the Shahama camp after her husband joined ISIS in 2014, she said.

When security forces descended on her home three weeks ago, Ms. Ibrahim said, they told her, "You are the family of Daesh -- leave!"

Mr. Hamad, the first deputy governor, said evicted families ultimately might be moved to other areas, or even other provinces. "That is to be determined by security agencies," he said.

Some families with Islamic State relatives have fled Salahuddin Province altogether to avoid evictions, Mr. Hamad said.

"Those people," he said, "will never be allowed to come back."

--*New York Times* journalists are in the field in central and northern Iraq to assess the humanitarian impact of battles between the government and Islamic State fighters. Falih Hassan contributed reporting

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8. Refugee flows part of Islamic State's strategy

Terrorists succeed with infiltrators

Washington Times, Jan. 30, Pg. A1 | Rowan Scarborough

The Islamic State has planned to infect refugee flows to the West with mass killers, and it has had some violent successes.

The CIA said last year that the terrorist group's official strategy is to hide its operatives among refugees entering Europe and the United States via human flows out of the Middle East and North Africa.

The Islamic State, also known as ISIL and ISIS, has inspired followers to commit atrocities in San Bernardino, California; Orlando, Florida; and the Fort Lauderdale airport in Florida. Scores of U.S. residents have been charged with or suspected of providing material support to the Islamic State. Some have left the U.S. to commit war crimes in Syria and Iraq.

As President Trump places a 120-day ban on immigration from what he considers high-risk Muslim-majority countries, the history of the mass migration shows that some took part in the Nov. 13, 2015, massacre in Paris — two posed as refugees from Syria — and the Christmastime truck carnage in Berlin.

Two of the airport and Metro attacks in Brussels last year had fought in Syria and gained entry back into Belgium. The German press has reported refugee knife and ax attacks on innocents.

"ISIS has claimed on multiple occasions the intent to infiltrate terrorists into the refugee flow," said Robert Maginnis, a retired Army officer and terrorism analyst. "One can argue that the Tunisian who drove the truck into the Berlin Christmas market was an immigrant tagged as influenced by ISIS. Certainly ISIS will do whatever it can to infiltrate those coming to this country as well. Time will tell whether they are successful, and meanwhile we are vulnerable." In August, the deputy head of Bavaria's intelligence service told the BBC that the Islamic State has injected "hit squads" via migrants entering Germany.

"We have to accept that we have hit squads and sleeper cells in Germany," said Manfred Hauser, vice president of the Bavaria region's intelligence-gathering agency, BayLfV.

"We have substantial reports that among the refugees there are hit squads. There are hundreds of these reports, some from refugees themselves. We are still following up on these, and we haven't investigated all of them fully," Mr. Hauser said.

Months earlier, Hans-Georg Maassen, chief of German domestic intelligence, told ZDF public television that officials in Europe have "seen repeatedly that terrorists are being smuggled in, camouflaged as refugees. That is a fact that security authorities must always see to recognize and identify."

In June, CIA Director John O. Brennan told a Senate committee: “We judge that ISIL is training and attempting to deploy operatives for further attacks. ISIL has a large cadre of Western fighters who could potentially serve as operatives for attacks in the West. And the group is probably exploring a variety of means for infiltrating operatives into the West, including refugee flows, smuggling routes and legitimate methods of travel.”

Shortly before he left his post as NATO commander, Air Force Gen. Philip Breedlove said in March that the Islamic State had injected 1,500 fighters into Europe.

“I think every refugee flow needs to be looked at with an eye towards it could be taken advantage of by those who seek to do us harm,” Gen. Breedlove told the Senate Armed Services Committee.

Committee Chairman John McCain, Arizona Republican, responded, “Logic then compels us to assume the risk of attacks on the United States of America or European countries is significantly increased.”

James R. Clapper, as director of national intelligence, in 2015 called the infiltration of refugee flows “a huge concern of ours.”

That year, a Syrian Islamic State operative told Britain’s Daily Express that more than 4,000 fighters had already been smuggled into Europe.

Also that year, FBI Director James B. Comey talked about the difficulty of vetting Syrian refugees for which the bureau had no official data.

“If we don’t know much about somebody, there won’t be anything in our data,” Mr. Comey said. “I can’t sit here and offer anybody an absolute assurance that there’s no risk associated with this.”

This weekend, an Islamic State follower posted a message on the Telegram app that said Mr. Trump was wasting his time by blocking refugees from Syria.

“Trump is preventing the entrance of the citizens of [seven] countries to protect America from terrorism,” said the message captured by the Middle East Media Research Institute. “Your decision will not do anything to prevent the attacks; they will come from inside America, from Americans born in America, whose fathers were born in America and whose grandparents were born in America.”

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MIDEAST

9. Heads of Muslim Nations Not Targeted Are Conspicuously Silent

New York Times, Jan. 30, Pg. A1 | Declan Walsh

CAIRO -- The Germans criticized it. The British voiced their discomfort. The French, the Canadians and even some Republican senators in Washington stood in open opposition.

But in Cairo and Riyadh, in the heart of the Muslim world, President Trump's decision to bar millions of refugees and citizens of seven Muslim-majority countries from the United States was met with a conspicuous silence.

King Salman of Saudi Arabia, home of Islam's holiest sites, spoke to Mr. Trump by telephone on Sunday but made no public comment. President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi of Egypt, whose capital, Cairo, is a traditional seat of Islamic scholarship, said nothing.

Even the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, a group of 57 nations that considers itself the collective voice of the Muslim world, kept quiet.

Leaders in Iran and Iraq, two of the countries targeted by Mr. Trump's order, issued furious denunciations on Sunday and vowed to take retaliatory measures. But the silence in the capitals of Muslim-majority countries unaffected by the order reflected a lack of solidarity and an enduring uncertainty about the direction that Mr. Trump's foreign policy might take in some of the world's most volatile corners.

Will he move the American Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem? Designate Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization? Fall in line with Russia in dealing with the conflict in Syria?

"Trump has promised to do all kinds of things, but it's not clear what he will move on immediately," said Nathan J. Brown, a Middle East expert at George Washington University. "Nobody seems to know. It's not even clear if Trump knows."

The lack of unity stems from an old problem: Muslim leaders pay lip service to the "ummah," or global community of Muslims, but are more often driven by narrow national interests -- even when faced with grave actions seen as an affront to their own people.

"They don't have a strong basis of legitimacy at home," said Rami G. Khouri, director of the Issam Fares Institute at the American University of Beirut. "They are delicately perched between the anger of their own people and the anger they might generate from the American president."

Still, Mr. Trump's executive order -- which froze all refugee arrivals in the United States and barred the entry of citizens of Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen for 90 days -- has sent a whirlwind of confusion, anxiety and fury across the Middle East and Africa. Refugees have been turned back at airports, families separated indefinitely and long-planned trips upended.

"I thought in America, there were institutions and democracy," said Fuad Sharef, 51, an Iraqi Kurd bound for New York who was turned away from the Cairo airport with his wife and three children on Saturday morning. "This looks like a decision from a dictator. It's like Saddam Hussein."

On Sunday, Trump administration officials backtracked on one aspect of the order, saying green-card holders would be allowed to return to the United States. In a Facebook post on Sunday evening, Mr. Trump insisted that his policy was not a "Muslim ban" and accused the news media of inaccurate reporting. Hours earlier, he had characterized the conflict with the Islamic State in starkly sectarian terms, asserting on Twitter: "Christians in the Middle East have been executed in large numbers. We cannot allow this horror to continue!"

In fact, a majority of the Islamic State's victims have been Muslims, many of them shot, burned or beheaded. Among the Muslims who managed to escape Islamic State territory are the refugees Mr. Trump has now excluded.

In a phone conversation with Mr. Trump on Saturday, Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany cited the 1951 Refugee Convention, which calls on signatories to take in people fleeing war, according to Steffen Seibert, Ms. Merkel's spokesman. Yet in much of the Middle East, Mr. Trump is less likely to get such a scolding.

He has drawn close to Mr. Sisi of Egypt, whom he called a "fantastic guy," and is considering designating the Muslim Brotherhood, Mr. Sisi's sworn enemy, a terrorist organization. In a call last week, the two leaders discussed a possible visit to the White House by Mr. Sisi, whose administration faces accusations of human rights abuses -- an unthinkable prospect during the Obama administration.

In his order on Friday, whose stated aim is to keep extremists out of the United States, Mr. Trump invoked the Sept. 11 attacks three times. Yet Saudi Arabia, which was home to 15 of the 19 attackers, was not included on the list of countries whose citizens would be shut out. That reflects the deep economic and security ties between the United States and Saudi Arabia. Mr. Trump also has a personal financial link: In August 2015, just as his campaign was gathering steam, the Trump Organization registered eight companies in Saudi Arabia that were linked to a hotel development in the city of Jidda.

Pakistan, another country whose citizens have carried out attacks in the United States, also ducked Mr. Trump's list. Although Mr. Trump had a chummy phone call with Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif shortly after the election in November, Pakistanis are nervously waiting to see if Mr. Trump will pull American troops from neighboring Afghanistan.

"There's a lot of concern," said Zahid Hussain, a political analyst in Islamabad, Pakistan. "For now, they want to keep quiet and see how things go."

On Monday, King Abdullah II of Jordan is scheduled to meet in Washington with members of the Trump administration and Congress, the first Arab leader to do so since the executive order was issued.

Muslim solidarity once existed. As recently as the early 2000s, most Muslim-majority countries agreed on issues like the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and sanctions against Iraq. Now, after several regional wars and a surge in sectarian strife, that consensus has been shattered.

Multinational organizations that represent Muslims are viewed as toothless entities. The head of the Organization for Islamic Cooperation, which has headquarters in Saudi Arabia, was forced to quit last fall after he made a joke at the expense of Mr. Sisi of Egypt.

In the early days of Mr. Trump's campaign, the Islamic scholars at Al Azhar, the ancient seat of Islamic learning in Cairo, spoke out against the "smear campaigns being launched against Muslims in America." But the scholars have yet to weigh in on Mr. Trump's executive order, and even if they do, few observers expect them to stray from official Egyptian government policy.

For many citizens of those countries, the docility of their leaders is frustrating. Samer S. Shehata, of the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies in Qatar, said that many of his students had already canceled their plans to study in the United States. "I don't think anyone is under any illusion that if you are a Muslim or an Arab, you're going to be treated different in this Trump presidency," he said.

Mr. Khouri, of the American University of Beirut, said the disconnect between rulers and civilians in some countries spoke to the underlying anger that fueled the Arab Spring uprisings in 2011. "Even when this American move is insulting Muslims and Islam, they do nothing about it," he said. "That's going to create more anger, and more pressure, in the Arab world. It's terrible."

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10. Saudi king agrees in call with Trump to support Syria, Yemen safe zones – White House

Reuters, Jan. 30 | Steve Holland, Samia Nakhoul, William Maclean and Reem Shamseddine

WASHINGTON/RIYADH -- Saudi Arabia's King Salman, in a telephone call on Sunday with U.S. President Donald Trump, agreed to support safe zones in Syria and Yemen, a White House statement said.

Trump, during his presidential campaign last year, had called for Gulf states to pay for establishing safe zones to protect Syrian refugees.

A statement after the phone call said the two leaders agreed on the importance of strengthening joint efforts to fight the spread of Islamic State militants.

"The president requested, and the King agreed, to support safe zones in Syria and Yemen, as well as supporting other ideas to help the many refugees who are displaced by the ongoing conflicts," the statement said.

The Saudi Press Agency, in an initial readout of the call, made no specific mention of safe zones, but said the two leaders had affirmed the "depth and durability of the strategic relationship" between the two countries.

The agency later said "the custodian of the Two Holy Mosques had confirmed his support and backing for setting up safe zones in Syria", but did not mention Yemen, where a Saudi alliance is fighting against the Iran-aligned Houthi group.

A senior Saudi source told Reuters the two leaders spoke for more than an hour by telephone and agreed to step up counter-terrorism and military cooperation and enhance economic cooperation.

But the source had no word on whether the two leaders discussed Trump's order to put a four-month hold on allowing refugees into the United States and temporarily ban travelers from Syria and six other Muslim-majority countries.

The source said Saudi Arabia would enhance its participation in the U.S.-led coalition fighting to oust Islamic State from its strongholds in Iraq and Syria.

The White House statement said the two leaders also agreed on the need to address "Iran's destabilizing regional activities." SPA confirmed the report but made no specific mention of Iran.

Both countries share views about Iranian policies in the region, the Saudi source said, suggesting Trump agreed with Riyadh's suspicion of what it sees as Tehran's growing influence in the Arab world. Iran denies it meddles in Arab countries.

The White House statement said the two also discussed what it called an invitation from the king for Trump "to lead a Middle East effort to defeat terrorism and to help build a new future, economically and socially," for Saudi Arabia and the region.

The two also discussed the Muslim Brotherhood, the senior Saudi source said, adding in a reference to the late al Qaeda leader, "it was mentioned that Osama bin Laden was recruited at an early stage" by the organization.

Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates designated the Brotherhood a terrorist organization. Riyadh fears the Brotherhood, whose Sunni Islamist doctrines challenge the Saudi principle of dynastic rule, has tried to build support inside the kingdom since the Arab Spring revolutions.

U.S. officials and people close to Trump's transition team have said a debate is under way in the Trump administration whether the United States should also declare the Brotherhood a terrorist organization and subject it to U.S. sanctions.

Trump also spoke with Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan. In what appears to have been a reference to the Muslim Brotherhood, the Crown Prince was cited by UAE state news agency WAM as saying "groups that raise fake slogans and ideologies aim to hide their criminal truth by spreading chaos and destruction."

The White House said Trump had also "raised the idea of supporting safe zones for the refugees displaced by the conflict in the region, and the Crown Prince agreed to support this initiative."

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11. U.N. experts warn Saudi-led coalition allies over war crimes in Yemen

Reuters, Jan. 29 | Michelle Nichols

UNITED NATIONS -- A Saudi Arabia-led military coalition has carried out attacks in Yemen that "may amount to war crimes," U.N. sanctions monitors reported to the world body's Security Council, warning coalition allies including the United States, Britain and France that they are obligated to respect international humanitarian law.

The annual report by the experts who monitor sanctions and the conflict in Yemen, seen by Reuters on Saturday, investigated 10 coalition air strikes between March and October that killed at least 292 civilians, including some 100 women and children.

"In eight of the 10 investigations, the panel found no evidence that the air strikes had targeted legitimate military objectives," the experts wrote in a 63-page report presented to the Security Council on Friday.

"For all 10 investigations, the panel considers it almost certain that the coalition did not meet international humanitarian law requirements of proportionality and precautions in attack," the report said. "The panel considers that some of the attacks may amount to war crimes."

The experts said Saudi Arabia is leading a military coalition made up of Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Sudan.

Saudi U.N. Ambassador Abdallah Al-Mouallimi said the accusations in the report were unfounded, that the coalition has been "exercising maximum restraint and rigorous rules of engagement," and that there had been transparent investigations into any incidents.

"In some cases errors were acknowledged and responsibility accepted. Corrective measures including compensation to victims were taken," he told Reuters.

The U.N. experts said U.S. officers were supporting coalition logistical and intelligence activities, while the coalition's chief of joint operations told the experts that officers from France, Malaysia and Britain were also present at the Riyadh headquarters.

"All coalition member states and their allies also have an obligation to take appropriate measures to ensure respect for international humanitarian law by the coalition," the U.N. experts wrote.

"The panel finds that violations associated with the conduct of the air campaign are sufficiently widespread to reflect either an ineffective targeting process or a broader policy of attrition against civilian infrastructure," the report said.

'WIDESPREAD, SYSTEMATIC VIOLATIONS'

The U.N. experts said that although they were unable to travel to Yemen, they have "maintained the highest achievable standard of proof."

A spokesman for the British U.N. mission declined to comment on a leaked document, but added: "We take reports of alleged violations of international humanitarian law by actors in the conflict very seriously."

A senior U.S. State Department official said: "We urge all sides to take steps to prevent harm to civilians. Ending the conflict in Yemen requires a durable cessation of hostilities and a comprehensive political solution."

The French Foreign Ministry and the Malaysian U.N. mission did not immediately respond to requests for comment. Malaysia has said that its armed forces are not involved in the Saudi-led campaign in Yemen. It said Malaysian troops in Saudi Arabia were only part of training exercise.

The outcry over civilian casualties has led some lawmakers and rights activists in the United States and Britain to push for curbs on arms sales to Riyadh.

The Saudi-led coalition began a military campaign in support of Yemeni government forces nearly two years ago to prevent Houthi rebels, whom it sees as a proxy for Iran, from taking complete control of Yemen after seizing much of the north.

The Houthis, who are allied with forces loyal to former Yemen president Ali Abdullah Saleh, deny carrying out any crimes in their war effort and say they are defending the country and its civilians from Saudi-led foreign "aggression."

"There have also been widespread and systematic violations of international humanitarian law, international human rights law and human rights norms by officials and security forces affiliated (with) the (Yemen) government and (with) the Houthis," the U.N. report said.

The U.N. experts said it was "highly likely that the Houthi and Saleh forces did not comply with international humanitarian law in at least three incidents when they fired explosive ordnance at a market, a house and a hospital."

Yemen and Saudi Arabia blame Iran for supplying weapons to the Houthis, but Tehran denies that. The U.N. experts said they had identified 2,064 weapons seized from boats off Yemen that "could be directly linked to Iranian manufacture of origin."

"The panel has not seen sufficient evidence to confirm any direct large-scale supply of arms from the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran, although there are indicators that anti-tank guided weapons being supplied to the Houthi or Saleh forces are of Iranian manufacture," the experts said.

Iran's mission to the United Nations did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

--Additional reporting by Lesley Wroughton, Praveen Menon, Noah Browning

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12. Clashes on Yemen west coast kill more than 100 – medics

Agence France-Presse, Jan. 29 | Fawaz al-Haidari

ADEN -- Fierce battles between Yemeni government forces and Shiite rebels on the country's west coast have killed more than 100 fighters in the past 24 hours, officials said on Sunday.

The bodies of at least 90 Huthi rebels were taken to a hospital in the Red Sea city of Hodeida, which is controlled by the insurgents, while 19 dead soldiers were taken to the southern port city of Aden, the medical and military sources said.

Deadly clashes have shaken the area around the key Red Sea town of Mokha since the start of the year when loyalist fighters launched an offensive to oust the Iran-backed Huthis and their allies.

Loyalists backed by the firepower of a Saudi-led Arab coalition advanced Saturday into the town after having captured its port on Monday, despite strong rebel resistance.

Clashes raged in the town on Sunday, a military official said.

Air strikes by coalition warplanes hit rebel supplies along the route between Mokha and Hodeida, the official said.

Huthi forces had controlled Mokha since they overran the capital Sanaa in September 2014 and advanced on other regions aided by troops loyal to former president Ali Abdullah Saleh.

Forces supporting President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi, backed by the coalition, launched a vast offensive on January 7 to retake the coastline overlooking the strategic Bab al-Mandab Strait.

Mokha was Yemen's main port serving as its export hub for coffee until it was overtaken by Aden and Hodeida in the 19th century.

Nearly 370 combatants have been killed since government forces launched their drive up the Red Sea coastline.

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ASIA/PACIFIC

13. Trump reiterates 'ironclad commitment' to defend South Korea – White House

Yonhap News Agency (South Korea), Jan. 30 | Song Sang-ho

WASHINGTON/SEOUL -- U.S. President Donald Trump reaffirmed Washington's "ironclad commitment" to South Korea's defense and agreed to take steps to bolster joint defense capabilities, the White House said Sunday.

Trump made the remark when he spoke by phone with South Korea's Acting President and Prime Minister Hwang Kyo-ahn and discussed the importance of the alliance between the two countries, the White House said in a statement.

"President Trump reiterated our ironclad commitment to defend the (Republic of Korea), including through the provision of extended deterrence, using the full range of military capabilities. The two leaders agreed to take steps to strengthen joint defense capabilities to defend against the North Korean threat," the statement said.

The two leaders also discussed U.S. Defense Secretary James Mattis' upcoming trip to South Korea next week and noted the trip "reflects the close friendship between our two countries and demonstrates the importance of the U.S.-ROK alliance," the White House said.

Trump and Hwang "pledged to advance mutual security and prosperity," it said.

Hwang congratulated Trump on his inauguration and Trump wished Hwang and the South Korean people a prosperous and happy Lunar New Year, the White House said.

The phone conversation came amid heightened tensions on the Korean Peninsula after North Korean leader Kim Jong-un threatened in his New Year's Day address to test-fire an intercontinental ballistic missile apparently capable of reaching the U.S.

Hwang has been serving as the acting president since President Park Geun-hye was impeached by parliament over corruption allegations on Dec. 9.

In a separate press release, Hwang's office quoted Trump as saying the U.S. will always be with South Korea "100 percent," and that the South Korea-U.S. relationship will be "better than ever before."

During the 30-minute conversation, Hwang called on Trump to work together to further strengthen what he termed the comprehensive strategic alliance.

The acting president also stressed the need for joint efforts to induce North Korea's denuclearization and for a strong response if Pyongyang engages in yet another provocation.

Hwang, in addition, told Trump about Seoul's position on the planned deployment of a U.S. missile defense system to South Korea, which China, along with some liberal politicians, has strongly opposed. Hwang has defended the deployment plan as a "necessary self-defense" measure.

The acting president also voiced hopes that Trump will visit South Korea as soon as possible, while Trump said he wants to meet Hwang in the near future.

Observers said the phone talks helped ease lingering concerns that the impeachment of the president would have a negative impact on policy coordination between the allies, particularly at a time when the North's military threats continue to escalate.

"It seems that the U.S. side looked at Acting President Hwang in terms of a system rather than an individual," a diplomatic source told Yonhap News Agency, declining to be named.

"I think the talks helped ease worries about whether communication between the leaders of the two nations will be smooth under the acting president," he added.

A series of remarks that Trump made during the conversation also underscored the significance he attaches to the bilateral alliance and joint efforts to tackle security threats from the North, some analysts said.

Long before Trump's inauguration on Jan. 20, senior Seoul officials contacted Trump's key security aides such as National Security Advisor Mike Flynn to highlight the importance of the alliance and bilateral cooperation in handling Pyongyang's nuclear conundrum.

Alarmed by a series of campaign remarks by Trump that were skeptical of military alliances and trade deals with American allies and partners, Seoul has been trying to maintain close ties with Washington.

Trump's mention of the extended deterrence was welcomed by security officials here. Extended deterrence is Washington's state commitment to mobilizing all of its military assets, both conventional and nuclear, to defend its Asian ally.

"The concern that the alliance could waver following the inauguration of President Trump is, for now, a misplaced one," an official at Seoul's Ministry of National Defense said on condition of anonymity.

The two sides are expected to further strengthen their policy coordination in the upcoming ministerial-level talks. Aside from the defense ministers' meeting planned for next month, their foreign ministers are also expected to meet early this year.

Meanwhile, some observers cautioned against the possibility that Trump's phone diplomacy with the leaders of Japan, Russia and South Korea could be part of his plan to encircle an increasingly assertive China.

Tensions have been building between the U.S. and China over a series of issues, including trade and territorial disputes in the South China Sea.

Trump already had a phone conversation with Park on Nov. 10 (Korea time), days after his election victory. During the conversation, the Republican leader said the United States will be "steadfast and strong" in defending against a provocative North Korea.

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14. North Korea likely to launch mid-range missile

Yonhap News Agency (South Korea), Jan. 30 | Choi Kyong-ae

SEOUL -- North Korea looks set to launch a Musudan intermediate-range ballistic missile (IRBM) instead of a long-range one as it still has to master the related technologies, military officials said Monday.

"There are no signs of an imminent test firing of an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) by North Korea. But we are closely monitoring any new military activities in the country as it could launch an IRBM at any time if leader Kim Jong-un gives the order," an official at the defense ministry said.

This year, North Korea has said that it is ready to fire off an ICBM.

In his New Year's Day address, Kim said that the country has entered the final stage of preparations to test-fire an ICBM, an apparent threat that the communist state is close to developing a nuclear-tipped missile capable of striking the continental U.S.

Last week, the South and the U.S. picked up indications that the North has placed two ICBMs on mobile launchers, an indication that the test could come earlier than expected.

But the ministry interpreted the move as part of the North's efforts to draw attention from the new Donald Trump administration. It added that any launch will probably be aimed at mastering know-how linked to the Musudan.

Pyongyang test-fired a total of eight Musudan missiles between April and October last year, with only one flying any distance.

Experts said Pyongyang's first test of an ICBM, whose main engine has only recently been seen on the ground, will almost certainly end in failure, referring to the two mobile ICBMs.

The predictions are based on North Korea's past track record and the fact that Pyongyang has never flight-tested the KN-08 or KN-14 long-range missiles.

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15. Japan, U.S. defense chiefs to affirm bilateral pact covers Senkakus

Kyodo News (Japan), Jan. 29 | Not Attributed

TOKYO -- The Japanese and U.S. defense chiefs will reaffirm during their meeting this week that the countries' security pact covers defense of the Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea that are administered by Japan and claimed by China, Japanese and U.S. government sources said Sunday.

With concern growing that Washington's commitment could falter under President Donald Trump, Tokyo and Washington will seek to underline the robustness of the security alliance by confirming the Senkakus fall under Article 5 of the Japan-U.S. security treaty, amid China's growing maritime assertiveness in the region, the sources said.

The uninhabited islands, which are also claimed by Taiwan, have long been a major source of friction between Japan and China. China and Taiwan call the islands Diaoyu and Tiaoyutai, respectively.

U.S. Defense Secretary James Mattis will meet with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in Tokyo on Friday and with Defense Minister Tomomi Inada on Saturday.

Abe is also set to meet with the U.S. president in Washington on Feb. 10, their first meeting since Trump took office on Jan. 20. The two held unofficial talks in New York last November shortly after Trump won the U.S. presidential election.

In 2014, Barack Obama became the first said U.S. president to publicly state that the Senkakus fall under the security treaty.

Mattis is likely to maintain the Obama administration's stance on China's military buildup in disputed waters of the South China Sea and to affirm the strengthening of cooperation on ballistic missile defense to address North Korea's nuclear and missile development, the sources said.

Last Wednesday, Trump's nominee for secretary of state, Rex Tillerson, also reaffirmed the United States' commitment to defending Japan.

"We've made a commitment to Japan in terms of a guarantee of their defense," Tillerson said during his Senate confirmation hearing.

Concern in Japan over ties with the United States has grown since Trump withdrew from the 12-country Trans-Pacific Partnership free trade pact, initiated by his predecessor and championed by Abe, and Trump's accusation that Japanese trade practices in the automobile sector are "not fair" to U.S. companies.

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16. Officials tell conference U.S. will remain a Pacific power

Associated Press, Jan. 30 | Rod McGuirk

CANBERRA, Australia — The United States will stay committed to remaining a Pacific power despite potential policy changes under President Donald Trump's new administration, officials told a conference Monday on U.S. alliances with Australia and Japan.

The U.S. Embassy to Australia's political counselor John Hennessey-Niland said U.S. allies in the Asia-Pacific region can be reassured that the Pacific will remain key to U.S. interests under the new administration. Joint training and information-sharing will increase, he said.

"We are in a period of time of change and transition, U.S. national interests do not change. It remains in the U.S. interest to be a Pacific power and to support and strengthen the bilateral, trilateral and multilateral relationships that knit this region together," Hennessey-Niland told the conference at the Australian National University.

While campaigning, Trump called on U.S. allies to invest more on defending themselves and described the North Atlantic Treaty Organization as obsolete, although British Prime Minister Theresa May said last week after meeting Trump that he was "100 percent" behind NATO.

Amy Searight, the U.S. deputy assistant of defense for South and Southeast Asia until 2016, said Trump "does appear ... to be backing off the campaign rhetoric" toward U.S. allies. She welcomed Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's visit to Washington, DC, in early February.

Trump's plans to expand the U.S. Navy from 270 to 350 ships could lead to more U.S. warships in the Indo-Pacific region and create more opportunities for alliance collaboration, Searight said.

The reasons behind Obama administration pivot to Asia — the need for the United States, Japan and Australia to respond to a more assertive China — remain relevant, she said.

"The logic of the rebalance to Asia remains very strong, it's based on enduring national interest in the United States and it has strong bipartisan support, so I think we can expect a commitment and focus on the Asia-Pacific region," said Searight, now a director at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, DC.

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17. Duterte accuses U.S. of building 'permanent' arsenal in Philippines

Reuters, Jan. 29 | Martin Petty

MANILA -- Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte accused the United States on Sunday of risking regional stability by building permanent arms depots in his country, and threatened to respond by scrapping a security treaty between them.

Duterte, who has made no secret of his disdain for the U.S. troop presence in the Philippines, said Washington was bringing weapons into three provinces of his country to store permanently, which he said was a dangerous breach of a defense deal between them.

"They're unloading arms in the Philippines now ... I'm serving notice to the armed forces of the United States. Do not do it, I will not allow it," Duterte told a televised news conference.

"Provisions of the Visiting Forces (Agreement), there shall be no permanent facilities. A depot is by any other name a depot. It's a permanent structure to house arms."

He added: "I do not even know if there is a nuclear tip (missile) now, that they are unloading."

His comments come after the Pentagon gave the green light to build warehouses, barracks and runways this year under a 2014 Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) between the two longtime allies.

If U.S. arsenals were built in the Philippines, Duterte said he would consider a review of treaties "and maybe ultimately abrogate, since it is an executive order."

EDCA allows the expansion of rotational deployment of U.S. ships, aircraft and troops at five bases in the Philippines as well as the storage of equipment for humanitarian and maritime security operations.

Duterte has repeatedly threatened to tear up security deals with the United States, while also giving guarantees those would be honored, muddying the picture in a relationship that prior to his election was one of Washington's most crucial Asian alliances.

He also chided the United States for pressuring the Philippines to enforce a ruling last year by the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague that invalidated most of Beijing's claims to the South China Sea.

Duterte has done the opposite and has sought to create warm ties and secure investment from China rather than confront it. In a stunning about-face in Manila's foreign policy, he has put the arbitration award on the back burner.

He said Washington was putting regional stability at risk and its actions could put the Philippines in "extreme danger" because of the posturing between the United States and China.

"You are egging us ... egging us (on) to force the issue of arbitral judgment," he said, referring to the United States.

"The missiles of China are pointed at the American expeditions," he said, referring to its naval patrols. "A depot would serve as a supply line."

Duterte said he had an "urgent" message to China, asking it to help provide precision-guided missiles so Philippine troops could fight Islamic State-linked militants in the south.

He said the court ruling on the South China Sea would be discussed with China when the time was right.

"I made a commitment to President Xi Jinping, I made a solemn commitment that we will talk about this arbitral award during my term. When, I really do not know, but we will talk hard," he said.

--Additional reporting by Manuel Mogato

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EUROPE

18. Three Ukrainian soldiers killed in separatist offensive – military

Reuters, Jan. 29 | Alessandra Prentice

KIEV -- Three Ukrainian servicemen were killed when pro-Russian rebels attacked government positions in Avdiyivka on Sunday, cutting off power supplies to the eastern frontline town, Ukrainian officials said.

The two-year-old Minsk peace agreement has failed to stop fighting in eastern Ukraine with each side accusing the other of violating the terms of a ceasefire on a near-daily basis.

Ukrainian military spokesman Oleksandr Motuzyanyk said troops had repelled an early-morning attack by rebels seeking to storm their positions in Avdiyivka's industrial zone.

"The situation remains very tense. The enemy continues to fire artillery and mortars at our positions, although it is not on the offensive for now. Ukrainian troops along the whole front line are in a state of higher alert," he said in a regular daily briefing.

The latest shelling also left much of Avdiyivka, which had a pre-conflict population of around 35,000, without electricity as of 1130 GMT, the news agency Interfax Ukraine quoted local official Pavlo Malykhin as saying.

As a result, only one of four power feeds at Avdiyivka Coking Plant - one of Europe's largest producers of fuel for the steelmaking industry - is currently running, chief executive Musa Magomedov said on Facebook.

Meanwhile separatist officials said Ukrainian forces had fired from tanks and artillery more than 900 times at rebel positions on the other side of the front line near Avdiyivka.

One rebel fighter was killed and another wounded, separatist website DAN reported.

Close to 10,000 people have been killed since fighting between Ukrainian troops and rebels seeking independence from Kiev erupted in April 2014.

Kiev and NATO accuse the Kremlin of supporting the rebels with troops and weapons and the United States and the European Union have imposed sanctions on Russia over the conflict, as well as for its annexation of Crimea.

The latest clashes come ahead of a visit by President Petro Poroshenko to Berlin on Monday to discuss the state of the conflict with Chancellor Angela Merkel, who helped broker the much-violated Minsk peace deal.

Kiev is anxious that international resolve to hold Russia to account not waver following the inauguration of U.S. President Donald Trump. Trump has expressed a desire to improve ties with Moscow and spoken of possibly lifting sanctions.

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19. Greek, Turkish warships in brief faceoff near Greek islets

Agence France-Presse, Jan. 29 | Katerina Nikolopoulou

ATHENS -- Greek and Turkish warships were involved Sunday in a brief faceoff near a group of disputed Greek islets in the Aegean, coinciding with renewed tensions between Athens and Ankara.

The Greek defence ministry said a Turkish navy missile boat, "along with two special forces rafts," entered Greek territorial waters near the Imia islets.

Located just off the Turkish coast and claimed by Ankara, the uninhabited rocky specks are an historic flarepoint in a long-running demarcation dispute.

Greek coastguard vessels and a navy gunboat shadowed the Turkish group, notifying them of the violation, and the Turks left the area after about seven minutes, it said.

In Turkey, the local media initially reported that the Turkish warship -- with Chief of Staff General Hulusi Akar onboard -- was blocked by Greece from approaching the islets.

The private Dogan news agency reported that there were "tense moments" for half an hour before the Turkish ship returned to the Turkish peninsula of Bodrum.

But Turkish armed forces, quoted by the state-run news agency Anadolu, denied that the ship had been blocked, and said a small Greek coastguard vessel had watched from afar.

It added that General Akar was onboard the ship to "review and inspect" Turkish vessels in the Aegean.

The Imia islets -- called Kardak in Turkey -- lie just seven kilometres (4.5 miles) from Bodrum.

A row over their sovereignty islets flared in January 1996, when the two countries sent marines to two neighbouring islands in a sign of an imminent armed confrontation.

They then withdrew their troops after heavy diplomatic pressure by the United States, a fellow member of NATO.

Sunday's incident comes amid fresh tension between the two countries, after the Greek Supreme Court on Thursday blocked the extradition of eight former army officers who had fled to Greece after the failed July 15 coup.

Turkey lashed the ruling as "political" and threatened to scrap a "readmission agreement" under which Turkey has been taking in migrants landing illegally in Greece.

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AFGHANISTAN/PAKISTAN

20. Former warlord's return could shake up Afghan politics

Associated Press, Jan. 29 | Kathy Gannon

KABUL, Afghanistan — The only insurgent leader to sign a peace pact with Afghanistan's government will return to the country within weeks, his chief negotiator says, in a move that could shake up Afghan politics and complicate the much wider war against the Taliban.

Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a former warlord who battled U.S. forces after the 2001 invasion and nursed a bitter rivalry with other Afghan factions, agreed to lay down arms last year. Amin Karim, his chief negotiator, told The Associated Press earlier this week that he would return to the capital in "a matter of weeks, not months."

Hekmatyar is seen as a potential rival to President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah, who have governed the country through a shaky, U.S.-brokered power-sharing agreement since the disputed elections of 2014. His return could inject new political uncertainty as the government struggles to confront a reinvigorated Taliban that has been advancing on several fronts.

The former warlord battled the Soviets in the 1980s and then took part in the civil war that erupted after their withdrawal, clashing with the so-called Northern Alliance, in which Abdullah was a leading figure. Hekmatyar was driven out when the Taliban seized power in 1996, but returned after the American invasion, vowing to resist the foreign "occupation."

His forces were largely confined to just two provinces, however, and have carried out few attacks in recent years. He is believed to be in hiding somewhere in the eastern Kunar province, where he enjoys popular support, and to make occasional trips into Pakistan across the nearby border.

Last year he became the only insurgent leader to sign a peace agreement with the Afghan government, in what many hoped would provide a model for a wider reconciliation with the Taliban. But he has yet to return to the fold.

His Hezb-e-Islami party wants his name taken off the U.N. and the U.S. Treasury lists of wanted terrorists. Karim declined to say whether Hekmatyar would return to Afghanistan without first being removed from the lists, and there

has been no indication that the U.N. or Washington is considering his removal. Both Canada and Britain consider Hezb-i-Islami to be a terrorist group.

Hekmatyar, like Ghani, hails from Afghanistan's ethnic Pashtun majority, and a revitalized Hezb-e-Islami could become a powerful player in the 2019 parliamentary elections, says Andrew Wilder, vice president of the Asia Program at the U.S. Institute of Peace.

"Hekmatyar's return to Kabul would certainly be significant," he said. "But the significance of his return, if it happens, will have a lot more to do with the impact of an influential Pashtun political figure who had been sidelined re-entering the political fray, and much less to do with moving the peace process forward.

The prospect of his return has already caused Abdullah's fractured Jamiat-e-Islami Party to try to unify its ranks in order to better compete, Wilder said in an email interview. Abdullah and Ghani are also political rivals, and traded accusations of fraud after the hard-fought election three years ago.

No one expects Hekmatyar's return to end the 15-year-old war with the Taliban, who control large swathes of rural territory in the south and east, and rule eight districts outright. A three-way struggle for power among Ghani, Abdullah and Hekmatyar could further divide the government at a critical time.

"The Taliban has ample momentum on the battlefield and is gaining territory, while Hezb-i-Islami is a shadow of its former self and not particularly active," said Michael Kugelman, deputy director of the Washington-based Wilson Center's South Asia program. "I simply don't think the Taliban will pay much mind to Hekmatyar and his peace deal with Kabul."

Karim, who negotiated the peace pact, lives behind two cordons of security in a heavily guarded Kabul villa. He accused unnamed Afghan rivals and regional countries of trying to sabotage Hekmatyar's return, saying several Hezb-e-Islami commanders who ventured into the capital have been arrested.

The government says it remains committed to the peace deal and Hekmatyar's return, which government spokesman Mohammad Haroon Chakhansuri said would be a "positive" step.

--Kabul writer Amir Shah contributed to this report

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VETERANS

21. Riled veterans leap to Muslims' defense

Military members offer support to Iraqi interpreters blocked by Trump's order

Los Angeles Times, Jan. 30, Pg. A7 | Matt Pearce and Shashank Bengali

Jeffrey Buchalter was re-flooring his foyer in Chesapeake Beach, Md., and listening to MSNBC when he heard the news: An Iraqi who had worked with American forces as an interpreter had been blocked from entering the U.S. under a new executive order on immigration from President Trump.

The story stopped him cold. Buchalter, an Army veteran who works as a law-enforcement instructor at the Department of Homeland Security, had served multiple tours of duty as a military police officer in Iraq, service that cost him dearly.

He was decorated for injuries sustained from gunfire and improvised explosive devices. Exams revealed he'd suffered herniated discs, traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress disorder, and he spent 2 1/2 years at Walter Reed Army Medical Center.

But he was still alive, and now the married father of two children. And he believes that's thanks in part to the work of Iraqi interpreters who acted as guides during his work in their country. So he told his younger daughter and son they were going to take a trip: a two-hour drive to Dulles International Airport outside Washington, where, for the first time in his life, Buchalter would join a protest.

"This is not what we fought for, having been in Iraq and working with these interpreters," Buchalter said in a phone interview Sunday. When he saw an Iraqi family emerge from detention, he presented them with something he hoped would convey America's goodwill -- a Purple Heart.

"Knowing their culture and how they view America, for me, it was a way to send a message to them: What they believe America was, it is," Buchalter said. "It's the greatest place in the world."

Trump's executive order Friday to block travelers from seven Muslim-majority nations triggered confusion, fear and anger around the nation as protesters and attorneys gathered at airports to try to force the release of at least dozens of travelers who had unexpectedly become detainees. Many of America's veterans were among those frustrated by the order, inspired largely by the story of Iraqi interpreter Hameed Khalid Darweesh.

Darweesh, 53, was detained after arriving at John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York, despite holding a special immigrant visa granted to American military interpreters following a decade of what one U.S. official had deemed "faithful and valuable service to the United States" in Iraq, according to the American Civil Liberties Union.

Darweesh had worked for the U.S. as an interpreter, engineer and contractor from 2003 to 2013, continuing even as Iraqi colleagues were assassinated for their work supporting the American invasion. Now he wanted to immigrate to the U.S. It had taken Darweesh two years of interviews and security screenings to obtain the visa, but, for the moment, all that appeared to be suddenly worthless.

Veterans were infuriated by his story. "The idea that we would be detaining Iraqi interpreters who put their lives on the line to help troops like myself in Iraq is disgraceful," wrote veteran Jon Soltz, chairman of an Iraq veterans' political action committee, VoteVets. The group launched a petition calling on Trump to rescind the visa restrictions and to provide aid for U.S. military interpreters.

Those frustrated by Darweesh's treatment included one of his former American colleagues in the 101st Airborne division, Brandon Friedman, who had met Darweesh as an infantry lieutenant when the division swept into Baghdad to drive out the forces of Iraqi autocrat Saddam Hussein.

"He was anti-Saddam and wanted to help us," said Friedman, who would go on to work in the Obama administration, recalling how Darweesh accompanied platoons on dangerous missions. "The guy was absolutely fearless."

Not only was Darweesh's work essential for soldiers to navigate Iraqi communities, but when a car bomb detonated near the unit's base, "he was wounded himself, and he pulled wounded soldiers to safety," Friedman said. And now veterans who knew Darweesh were upset.

"If you could see all the Facebook posts from guys in the unit this week, everybody loved him. He was just such an integral part of the unit," Friedman said. He called the ban "deplorable" and said it gives interpreters less incentive to help U.S. troops in the future.

As public scrutiny grew Saturday, protesters and immigration attorneys massed at airports around the nation, and the American Civil Liberties Union filed a federal lawsuit against the Trump administration on Darweesh's behalf.

Darweesh was freed earlier in the day, and his ACLU lawsuit later led to a late-night ruling from a federal judge in New York, who temporarily barred American officials from deporting arriving travelers who otherwise had legal travel documents.

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WHITE HOUSE

22. Adviser Seizes a Security Role From Generals

New York Times, Jan. 30, Pg. A1 | Glenn Thrush and Maggie Haberman

WASHINGTON -- The whirlwind first week of Donald J. Trump's presidency had all the bravura hallmarks of a Stephen K. Bannon production.

It started with the doom-hued inauguration homily to "American carnage" in United States cities co-written by Mr. Bannon, followed a few days later by his "shut up" message to the news media. The week culminated with a blizzard of executive orders, mostly hatched by Mr. Bannon's team and the White House policy adviser, Stephen Miller, aimed at disorienting the "enemy," fulfilling campaign promises and distracting attention from Mr. Trump's less than flawless debut.

But the defining moment for Mr. Bannon came Saturday night in the form of an executive order giving the ruffled right-wing agitator a full seat on the "principals committee" of the National Security Council -- while downgrading the roles of the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the director of national intelligence, who will now attend only when the council is considering issues in their direct areas of responsibilities. It is a startling elevation of a political adviser, to a status alongside the secretaries of state and defense, and over the president's top military and intelligence advisers.

In theory, the move put Mr. Bannon, a former Navy surface warfare officer, admiral's aide, investment banker, Hollywood producer and Breitbart News firebrand on the same level as his friend, Michael T. Flynn, the national security adviser, a former Pentagon intelligence chief who was Mr. Trump's top adviser on national security issues before a series of missteps reduced his influence.

But in terms of real influence, Mr. Bannon looms above almost everyone except the president's son-in-law, Jared D. Kushner, in the Trumpian pecking order, according to interviews with two dozen Trump insiders and current and former national security officials. The move involving Mr. Bannon, as well as the boost in status to the White House

homeland security adviser, Thomas P. Bossert, and Mr. Trump's relationships with Cabinet appointees like Defense Secretary Jim Mattis have essentially layered over Mr. Flynn.

Sean Spicer, the White House press secretary, said Mr. Bannon -- whose Breitbart website was a magnet for white nationalists, antiglobalists and conspiracy theorists -- always planned to participate in national security. Mr. Flynn welcomed his participation, Mr. Spicer said, but the general "led the reorganization of the N.S.C." in order to streamline an antiquated and bloated bureaucracy.

Former White House officials in both parties were shocked by the move.

"The last place you want to put somebody who worries about politics is in a room where they're talking about national security," said Leon E. Panetta, a former White House chief of staff, defense secretary and C.I.A. director in two Democratic administrations.

"I've never seen that happen, and it shouldn't happen. It's not like he has broad experience in foreign policy and national security issues. He doesn't. His primary role is to control or guide the president's conscience based on his campaign promises. That's not what the national security council is supposed to be about."

That opinion was shared by President George W. Bush's last chief of staff, Josh Bolten, who barred Karl Rove, Mr. Bush's political adviser, from N.S.C. meetings. A president's decisions made with those advisers, he told a conference audience in September, "involve life and death for the people in uniform" and should "not be tainted by any political decisions."

Susan E. Rice, President Barack Obama's last national security adviser, called the arrangement "stone cold crazy" in a tweet posted Sunday.

Mr. Spicer said the language the Trump White House used in its N.S.C. executive order is, with the exception of Mr. Bannon's position -- which was created during the transition -- almost identical in content to one the Bush administration drafted in 2001. And Mr. Obama's top political operative, David Axelrod, sat in on some N.S.C. meetings, he added.

There were key differences. Mr. Axelrod never served as a permanent member as Mr. Bannon will now, though he sat in on some critical meetings, especially as Mr. Obama debated strategy in Afghanistan and Pakistan. "It's a profound shift," Mr. Axelrod said. "I don't know what his bona fides are to be the principal foreign policy adviser to the president."

But Mr. Bannon's elevation does not merely reflect his growing influence on national security. It is emblematic of Mr. Trump's trust on a range of political and ideological issues.

During the campaign, the sly and provocative Mr. Bannon played a paradoxical role -- calming the easily agitated candidate during his frequent rough patches and egging him on when he felt Mr. Trump needed to fire up the white working-class base. The president respects Mr. Bannon because he is independently wealthy and therefore does not need the job, and both men ascribe to a shoot-the-prisoners credo when put on the defensive, according to former Trump campaign manager Corey Lewandowski.

Mr. Bannon is a deft operator within the White House, and he has been praised by Republicans who view him skeptically as the most knowledgeable on policy around the president. But his stated preference for blowing things up -- as opposed to putting them back together -- may not translate to his new role.

The hasty drafting of the immigration order, and its scattershot execution, brought a measure of Mr. Bannon's chaotic and hyperaggressive political style to the more predictable administration of the federal government. Within hours of the edict, airport customs and border agents were detaining or blocking dozens migrant families, some whom had permanent resident status, until John F. Kelly, the new homeland security secretary, intervened.

Mr. Kelly's department had suggested green card holders be exempted from the order, but Mr. Bannon and Mr. Miller, a hard-liner on immigration, overruled him, according two American officials.

Mr. Priebus, speaking on NBC's "Meet the Press" on Sunday indicated a softening of the stance, saying the order would not block "green card holders moving forward" -- but said anyone seeking to enter the country from the listed countries would be subjected to tighter scrutiny.

People close to Mr. Bannon said he is not accumulating power for power's sake, but is instead helping to fill a staff leadership vacuum created, in part, by Mr. Flynn's stumbling performance as national security adviser.

Mr. Flynn still communicates with Mr. Trump frequently, and his staff has been assembling a version of the Presidential Daily Briefing for Mr. Trump, truncated but comprehensive, to be the president's main source of national security information. During the campaign, he often had unfettered access to the candidate, who appreciated his brash style and contempt for Hillary Clinton, but during the transition, Mr. Flynn privately complained about having to share face time with others.

Mr. Flynn "has the full confidence of the president and his team," Hope Hicks, a spokeswoman for Mr. Trump, said in an in email. Emails and phone calls to Mr. Flynn and his top aide were not returned.

A president who likes generals and abhors political correctness, Mr. Trump found in Mr. Flynn -- who joined Trump backers in an anti-Clinton "lock her up!" chant during the campaign -- perhaps the most politically incorrect general this side of his hero, Gen. George S. Patton.

But Mr. Flynn, a lifelong Democrat sacked as head of the Pentagon's intelligence arm after clashing with Obama administration officials in 2014, has gotten on the nerves of Mr. Trump and other administration officials because of his sometimes overbearing demeanor, and has further diminished his internal standing by presiding over a chaotic and opaque N.S.C. transition process that prioritized the hiring of military officials over civilian experts recommended to him by his own team.

Mr. Flynn's penchant for talking too much was on display on Friday in a meeting with Theresa May, the British prime minister, according to two people with direct knowledge of the events.

When Mrs. May said that she understood wanting a dialogue with Mr. Putin but stressed the need to be careful, Mr. Trump asked Mr. Flynn when the two were scheduled to speak.

Mr. Flynn replied it was Saturday -- he had delayed it to fit in Mrs. May's meeting for "protocol" as a United States ally, adding at length that Mr. Putin was impatient to chat.

Mr. Trump, the person said, appeared irritated by the response.

Still, the episode that did the most damage to the Trump-Flynn relationship occurred in early December when Mr. Flynn's son, also named Michael, unleashed a series of tweets pushing a discredited conspiracy theory that Clinton associates had run a child sex-slave ring out of a Washington pizza restaurant.

Mr. Trump told his staff to get rid of the younger Mr. Flynn, who had been hired by his father to help during the transition. But Mr. Trump did so reluctantly because of his loyalty during the campaign, when dozens of former military officials were dismissing Mr. Trump as too unstable to command.

"I want him fired immediately," Mr. Trump said in a muted rendition of his "You're fired!" line in "The Apprentice," according to two people with knowledge of the interaction.

That has not stopped the general's son from spouting off: On Saturday, at a time when Trump surrogates were pushing back on the idea that the executive order did not discriminate against any religion, the younger Mr. Flynn tweeted his approval of the policy, adding "#MuslimBan." The tweet was subsequently deleted; his entire account disappeared later in the day.

Still, the national security adviser has also continued to dabble in the kind of bomb-throwing behavior that concerns Mr. Trump's allies, such as planning to attend an anti-Clinton "Deploraball" event at the time of the inauguration. He was urged to skip it by Trump allies, and ultimately agreed.

Both Mr. Trump and Mr. Bannon still regard Mr. Flynn as an asset. "In the room and out of the room, Steve Bannon is General Flynn's biggest defender," said Kellyanne Conway, another top adviser to the president.

But it is unclear when the maneuvers to reduce Mr. Flynn's role began. Two Obama administration officials said Trump transition officials inquired about expanded national security roles for Mr. Bannon and Mr. Kushner at the earliest stages of the transition in November -- before the younger Mr. Flynn became a liability -- but after Mr. Flynn had begun to chafe on the nerves of his colleagues on the team.

Mr. Flynn's reputation has raised questions among some in the cabinet. Two weeks ago, both men held a meeting with Rex W. Tillerson, Mr. Trump's pick to run the State Department, Mr. Mattis and Mike Pompeo, now the C.I.A. director, to discuss coordination -- Mr. Flynn was invited but did not attend.

Part of the meeting was devoted to discussing concerns about Mr. Flynn, according to an official with knowledge of it.

--David Sanger, Mark Mazzetti and Matthew Rosenberg contributed reporting from Washington

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23. Officials fear move will set back efforts to fight terrorism

Washington Post, Jan. 30, Pg. A1 | Greg Miller and Missy Ryan

Though cast as measures meant to make the country safe, the Trump administration's moves during its first week in office are more likely to weaken the counterterrorism defenses the United States has erected over the past 16 years, several current and former U.S. officials said.

Through inflammatory rhetoric and hastily drawn executive orders, the administration has alienated allies, including Iraq, provided propaganda fodder to terrorist networks that frequently portray U.S. involvement in the Middle East as a religious crusade and endangered critical cooperation from often-hidden U.S. partners - whether the leader of a mosque in an American suburb or the head of a Middle East intelligence service.

An executive order - issued Friday and titled "Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry Into the United States" - bans entry to people from a list of Muslim-majority nations including Iraq, where U.S. military and intelligence agencies have for years relied on cooperation from Iraqi and Kurdish authorities, not to mention thousands of individual translators and contractors.

"Ultimately, we fear this executive order will become a self-inflicted wound in the fight against terrorism," Republican Sens. Lindsey O. Graham (S.C.) and John McCain (Ariz.) said Sunday in a statement. "This executive order sends a signal, intended or not, that America does not want Muslims coming into our country. That is why we fear this executive order may do more to help terrorist recruitment than improve our security."

Already, supporters of the Islamic State, also known as ISIS, quickly claimed the travel ban as a victory. Postings on social-media sites linked to the terrorist group predicted that President Trump's order would galvanize Muslims and claimed that it showed that the United States is at war with Islam.

The White House did not respond to a request for comment. In tweets Sunday, Trump said, "The joint statement of former presidential candidates John McCain & Lindsey Graham is wrong - they are sadly weak on immigration. The senators should focus their energies on ISIS, illegal immigration and border security instead of always looking to start World War III."

Separately, in a statement, Trump said the "seven countries named in the Executive Order are the same countries previously identified by the Obama administration as sources of terror," and he noted that Obama had barred refugees from Iraq for six months in 2011.

Trump's inauguration vow to put America first and "only America" rattled allies. A leaked draft of an order on U.S. detention policies compounded those concerns by raising the prospect of rebuilding the CIA's network of notorious "black site" prisons around the world. The immigration measures imposed late Friday were seen by U.S. counterterrorism officials and analysts as particularly counterproductive and poorly conceived.

"The whole order is and will be read as another anti-Islam, anti-Muslim action by this president and his administration," said Paul Pillar, a former top official at the CIA's Counterterrorism Center. "It is not targeted at where the threat is, and the anti-Islam message that it sends is more likely to make America less safe."

Absent from the Trump list: Saudi Arabia or any of the other countries connected to the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks. Nor does the president's action limit travel from Pakistan, where al-Qaeda's leadership still resides.

Former CIA director Michael V. Hayden said that the order and other possible measures have probably forced U.S. diplomats, military commanders and agency station chiefs abroad into damage-control mode.

"We've got good people who will work hard at it, but there is no question that this has already created an irretrievable cost," Hayden said. The refugee order "inarguably has made us less safe. It has taken draconian measures against a threat that was hyped. The byproduct is it feeds the Islamic militant narrative and makes it harder for our allies to side with us."

Despite acute concerns about the impact overseas, analysts said much of the damage may happen in the United States. Counterterrorism officials have for years cast the successful integration of Muslims in the United States as a major security advantage over countries in Europe, where Muslims are more likely to be isolated and marginalized.

Those who study extremism fear that the sense of belonging among U.S. Muslims may begin to fray, increasing the likelihood that a U.S. citizen or resident becomes radicalized, and complicates the already-difficult task for the FBI and local authorities to cultivate relationships with Muslim community leaders.

"It was already an uphill climb," said Seamus Hughes, a former National Counterterrorism Center official who frequently traveled the country to meet with Muslim community members after terrorist attacks.

Tips to the FBI or local police from concerned parents, religious leaders and concerned Muslim citizens have been "the lifeblood of most terrorism investigations" in the United States, said Hughes, who is now at George Washington University. "I don't see anyone hesitating to report an imminent threat," he said, but adding, "I can't see these orders as helping."

But Rep. Devin Nunes (R-Calif.), chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, said in a statement, "In light of attempts by Islamic militant groups to infiltrate fighters into refugee flows to the West, along with Europe's tragic experience coping with this problem, the Trump Administration's executive order on refugees is a common-sense security measure to prevent terror attacks on the homeland."

In terms of overseas partnerships, no relationship has been placed under more immediate strain than that of the United States and Iraq.

Trump used his speech at CIA headquarters on his first day in office to declare that it was a mistake for the United States not to have seized Iraq's oil reserves after the U.S. invasion in 2003, and to hint that there might be another chance to do so.

The executive order sparked confusion and condemnation in Baghdad. Iraqis who had worked with the U.S. military for years, often at great risk, were among the first people affected by the regulations.

Even before the new measures were issued, Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi told reporters that his country's oil "is for Iraqis."

The comment also explicitly confirmed widely held suspicions in the Middle East of U.S. geopolitical motivations. "It's about oil and it's a plot to destroy Islam," said Dan Byman, a terrorism expert at Georgetown University. "If you want to combine conspiracy theories, [Trump] is doing a good job."

Iraqi lawmakers over the weekend insisted that Iraq impose similar measures on the United States. Moqtada al-Sadr, an influential Shiite cleric, called the decision to block Iraqi entry while Americans still come and go "arrogance," and he demanded that U.S. nationals leave the country.

Iraqis also have questioned the omission from the travel ban of certain Gulf and North Africa countries, whose nationals have been involved in high-profile terrorist attacks

Saad al-Hadithi, a spokesman for Abadi, said that the U.S. security partnership with Iraq, including American support for operations against the Islamic State and a robust arms sales program, should make the relationship with Iraq different from other countries on the list.

The new measures take place as the Pentagon continues to rely closely on Iraq in its campaign to defeat the Islamic State. More than 6,000 U.S. troops are stationed in the country, advising Iraqi forces during a major battle in Mosul, the militant-held northern city.

The decision undermines Abadi, straddled between a Western ally whose support he needs to fight militants and Shiite political peers who view the U.S. presence with hostility. Lukman Faily, who served as the Iraqi ambassador in Washington until last year, said that Abadi would try to draw a distinction between Iraq's security partnership with the United States and the perceived snub contained in Trump's new order

"It will certainly put the prime minister in the most awkward position," Faily said. "It will not help him navigate his politics while he's completing [a major battle] and while he has an oil crisis to deal with."

Hadithi sought to stress the temporary nature of the order. "We will have a discussion with the American side," Hadithi said. "If it's only for a short time to reorganize their visa and refugees work, we will understand it and take it positively."

It's not yet clear, however, whether the 90-day period stipulated in the executive order will be extended.

--Joby Warrick, Julie Tate and Mustafa Salim in Baghdad contributed to this report

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24. In a Week, Trump Reshapes Decades of Perceptions About America

New York Times, Jan. 30, Pg. A11 | David E. Sanger

WASHINGTON -- By some measures, President Trump has altered the perception of American foreign policy more in the past seven days than his predecessors did in the past seven decades.

A nation that built its brand around the world as open to the world's needy and ambitious is now viewed, after Mr. Trump's immigration executive order, as closing its doors in a way it never did even after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks. Twenty years of stop-and-go efforts to rebuild a relationship with Mexico -- on trade, counterterrorism and drug interdiction -- crashed into an avoidable blowup with the Mexican president, Enrique Peña Nieto, who canceled his visit here.

When Prime Minister Theresa May of Britain came for what appeared to be a largely successful visit, Mr. Trump's first by the leader of a close ally, she spoke of maintaining sanctions on Russia until it met its commitments on

Ukraine. Mr. Trump stayed silent. After he spoke the next day to President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia, the official readout provided by the White House made no mention of Ukraine, or of the information-warfare operation to influence the American election that led President Barack Obama, in his last days in office, to issue new sanctions.

Perception is different from reality. It is possible that when viewed from a distance of a few years, Mr. Trump's pronouncements about "extreme vetting" and his rush to push some of America's most experienced career diplomats out of their jobs will look like a first-week blitz intended to send a message to the world that he meant what he said when he talked about "America First."

In a statement on Sunday, Mr. Trump appeared to try to soften his action, arguing that "this is not a Muslim ban, as the media is falsely reporting." He promised to "find ways to help all those who are suffering," words that were missing on Friday when he announced that all refugees from Syria would be barred from entry to the United States, indefinitely.

"It's one week in," Robert M. Gates, the former secretary of defense and C.I.A. director, said on ABC's "This Week" on Sunday. "Every administration I've worked for begins with a flurry of executive orders" meant to distinguish itself from its predecessor.

But Mr. Gates, who has served eight presidents, of both parties, quickly added that Mr. Trump risks accelerating a sense of an America that is pulling back and putting up walls, leaving a power vacuum around the globe.

"That vacuum will not be filled by benign forces," he said. Two other prominent, establishment Republicans, Senators John McCain of Arizona and Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, called the lumping together in the immigration order of a major adversary, Iran, with an ally, Iraq, one of many reasons that the moves are "a self-inflicted wound in the fight against terrorism."

Mr. Trump is hardly the first president to announce shifts in policy that surprised allies and upturned the existing order. President Richard M. Nixon's decision to abandon the gold standard and to recognize China were shocks to the system. So was President George W. Bush's decision to invade Iraq, though it was telegraphed for more than a year, as was Mr. Obama's decision to strike a nuclear accord with Iran and to reopen diplomatic relations with Cuba.

But in the case of Mr. Trump, there is a sense that the rush for change has superseded a study of unintended consequences.

The ban on immigration and visitors from seven nations came with minimal, if any, input from the State Department about the regional fallout -- as did Mr. Trump's declaration that he intends to move the American Embassy in Israel to Jerusalem. The absence of advance thinking about how to deal with green card holders and Iraqi interpreters who were promised entry to the United States in return for their service to American troops forced the White House to amend its interpretations of the order less than 48 hours after Mr. Trump signed it.

It was all symptomatic of a new president eager to tweet first and work out details later. "This is policy by thunderbolt," said Joseph Nye, a Harvard professor who served as the head of the National Intelligence Council and has written extensively on how the United States can gain leverage from its "soft power" -- the attractiveness of its culture and democracy. "You don't want to tear up 70 years of foreign policy until you think hard about what replaces it."

But inside the halls of the State Department, where Rex W. Tillerson, the pick for secretary of state, has just begun to find his way around, there is definitely the sense among career diplomats that this is Year Zero.

Last week, the "landing team" of Trump designees told several of the department's most senior diplomats -- career officials, some with decades of service -- to clear out of their offices. Almost all had submitted their resignations, the protocol when administrations changed, but had volunteered to stay on for a month or two until successors were appointed, to ensure that State Department facilities were safe, American citizens were evacuated from perilous places and passports were issued.

The Trump team made it clear it had no interest in transitions. (Mr. Tillerson also never met one-on-one with his predecessor, John Kerry, before the inauguration.)

It was not exactly a purge, but the fact remains that some of the government's most experienced diplomats have moved on -- including some of the highest-ranking women in the department. Among them is Anne Patterson, 67, the assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs and a former ambassador to Pakistan and Egypt, two of the biggest tinderboxes Mr. Trump will face. Victoria J. Nuland, 55, one of the department's top Russia experts and former ambassador to NATO, who dealt with the Ukraine crisis, decided to retire after concluding there was probably no place for her in Mr. Trump's administration.

Such a housecleaning leaves open the question of whether Mr. Tillerson, who has extensive experience abroad as chief executive of Exxon Mobil but none as a diplomat, will have the kind of help he needs in a very different kind of enterprise than negotiating on behalf of the world's largest oil company.

In such an atmosphere, even seemingly routine moves -- like the reorganization of the National Security Council -- take on a political air. On Sunday, Mr. Trump's chief strategist, and chief ideologue, Stephen K. Bannon, was designated a permanent member of the "principals committee" of the National Security Council, putting a political aide on par with the secretaries of state and defense. Meanwhile, the director of national intelligence and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff appeared to be downgraded, told to attend only when their issues were on the table.

"This is stone cold crazy," Susan E. Rice, the national security adviser until earlier this month, wrote in a Twitter post. "Who needs military advice or intell to make policy on ISIL, Syria, Afghanistan, DPRK?" she said, using acronyms for the Islamic State and North Korea.

Mr. Trump's answer is simple: When you have come to upend the establishment, the establishment must vacate the premises.

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NOTABLE COMMENTARY

25. An Opportunity to Rebuild Our Dangerously Weakened Military

I'm ready to work with President Trump to undo the damage of the 2011 budget 'sequester'

Wall Street Journal, Jan. 30, Pg. A15 | Sen. John McCain (R-AZ)

As he assumes the awesome responsibilities of the presidency, Donald Trump has inherited a world on fire and a U.S. military weakened by years of senseless budget cuts. I am encouraged that he recognizes these problems and has pledged to rebuild the military. The work to get the armed forces back up to speed must begin now.

The world order America has led since the end of World War II -- which has benefited the American people most of all -- is now under unprecedented strain. The U.S. has entered an era of great-power competition, even as it continues to face an enduring conflict against Islamist extremist groups.

Yet many Americans have forgotten that the world order is not self-sustaining. Not all threats have purely military solutions, but they all have military dimensions. Hard power matters: It is what gives the U.S. leverage to deter aggression and achieve peace through strength.

The Budget Control Act of 2011, which cut and arbitrarily capped military spending for a decade, epitomizes this country's forgetfulness about its role in the world. The provision, known as the "sequester," was designed to be so harmful to the military that Congress would be forced to enact reforms to control federal spending. Reforms never came, so the cutting and capping of military spending did. The military has paid a terrible price.

From 2010 through 2014, the defense budget was cut by 21%, according to analysis from the Center for Strategic and Budget Assessments. Across the board, the military got smaller and less capable. Critical investments in new technologies were deferred, which helped adversaries like Russia and China close the gap. The combination of rising threats, declining budgets, aging equipment, shrinking forces and high operational tempo has produced a military readiness crisis.

President Trump is now commander in chief of a military that is underfunded, undersized and unready to meet the diverse and complex array of threats confronting our nation. That is why every member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff has testified to Senate Armed Services Committee that years of budget cuts have placed the lives of the men and women of our armed forces at greater risk.

President Trump has committed to eliminating the defense sequester and rebuilding the military. I fully agree, and we need to get started right away. There are two main tasks.

The first is modernizing the military for the new realities of deterring conflict and competing with great powers that possess advanced capabilities. For too long, the U.S. has taken for granted that its forces could operate anywhere and dominate any environment with minimal effort. That assumption no longer holds. However, with greater investments in technology such as hypersonic munitions and artificial intelligence, the military can become much more capable over the next five years.

The second priority is regaining capacity for the military to perform its current missions at acceptable levels of risk. Today the armed forces simply do not have enough ships, aircraft, vehicles, munitions, equipment and personnel. Adding capacity alone is not the answer, and increasing capacity, especially personnel, must be done deliberately and sustainably. But this is a yearslong process that should begin immediately.

The military has to become not only bigger but more efficient. There is room to cut wasteful spending at the Defense Department. And patience remains important: The harm that has been done to the military over eight years will not be reversed quickly. But the longer the wait, the longer it will take to reform.

This won't come cheap. It will require a base defense budget for fiscal year 2018, excluding current war costs, of \$640 billion. That's \$54 billion above current plans, and sustained growth will be required for years thereafter.

Defense is the country's No. 1 priority. It must be a political priority on par with repealing and replacing ObamaCare, investing in public-works projects, and reforming the tax code.

I was a humble foot soldier in the Reagan Revolution. The 40th president is remembered as one of the greatest because he embraced his role as commander in chief, rebuilt America's military and secured peace through strength. President Trump has a similar opportunity. If he is committed to seize that opportunity, I will be a committed partner in that effort.

--Mr. McCain, a Republican from Arizona, is chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee

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26. An alarming national security shake-up

Washington Post, Jan. 30, Pg. A21 | David J. Rothkopf

While demonstrators poured into airports to protest the Trump administration's draconian immigration policies, another presidential memorandum signed this weekend may have even more lasting, wide-ranging and dangerous consequences. The document sounds like a simple bureaucratic shuffle, outlining the shape the National Security Council will take under President Trump. Instead, it is deeply worrisome.

The idea of the National Security Council (NSC), established in 1947, is to ensure that the president has the best possible advice from his Cabinet, the military and the intelligence community before making consequential decisions, and to ensure that, once those decisions are made, a centralized mechanism exists to guarantee their effective implementation. The NSC is effectively the central nervous system of the U.S. foreign policy and national security apparatus.

Trump's memorandum described the structure of his NSC - not unusual given that the exact composition shifts in modest ways from administration to administration. The problem lies in the changes that he made.

First, he essentially demoted the highest-ranking military officer in the United States, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the highest-ranking intelligence officer in the United States, the director of national intelligence. In previous administrations, those positions or their equivalent (before the creation of the director of national intelligence, the CIA director occupied that role) held permanent positions on the NSC.

Now, those key officials will be invited only when their specific expertise is seen to be required. Hard as it is to imagine any situation in which their views would not add value, this demotion is even harder to countenance given the threats the United States currently faces and the frayed state of the president's relations with the intelligence community. A president who has no national security experience and can use all the advice he can get has decided to limit the input he receives from two of the most important advisers any president could have.

The president compounded this error of structure with an error of judgment that should send shivers down the spine of every American and our allies worldwide. Even as he pushed away professional security advice, Trump decided to make his top political advisor, Stephen K. Bannon, a permanent member of the NSC. Although the White House chief of staff is typically a participant in NSC deliberations, I do not know of another situation in which a political adviser has been a formal permanent member of the council.

Further, Bannon is the precisely wrong person for this wrong role. His national security experience consists of a graduate degree and seven years in the Navy. More troubling, Bannon's role as chairman of Breitbart.com, with its racist, misogynist and Islamophobic perspectives, and his avowed desire to blow up our system of government, suggests this is someone who not only has no business being a permanent member of the most powerful consultative body in the world - he has no business being in a position of responsibility in any government.

Worse still, it is an omen of other problems to come. Organizing the NSC this way does not reflect well on national security adviser Michael Flynn - whether the bad decision is a result of his lack of understanding of what the NSC should do or because he is giving in to pressure from his boss.

Moreover, elevating Bannon is a sign that there will be more than one senior official in Trump's inner circle with top-level national security responsibility, an arrangement nearly certain to create confusion going forward.

Indeed, rumors are already circulating that Bannon and senior adviser Jared Kushner are the go-to people on national security issues for the administration, again despite the lack of experience, temperament or institutional support for either. Kushner has been given key roles on Israel, Mexico and China already. History suggests all this will not end well, with rivalries emerging with State, Defense, the Trade Representative and other agencies.

Combine all this with the president's own shoot-from-the-lip impulses, his flair for improvisation and his well-known thin skin. You end up with a bad NSC structure being compromised by a kitchen cabinet-type superstructure and the whole thing likely being made even more dysfunctional by a president who, according to multiple reports, does not welcome advice in the first place - especially when it contradicts his own views.

The executive order on immigration and refugees was un-American, counterproductive and possibly illegal. The restructuring of the NSC, and the way in which this White House is threatening to operate outside the formal NSC structure, all but guarantees that it will not be the last bad decision to emerge from the Trump administration.

--David J. Rothkopf is chief executive and editor of the FP Group, which publishes Foreign Policy magazine. He has written two histories of the NSC, "Running the World" and last year's "National Insecurity"

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27. Allies in Combat, Now Unwanted

New York Times, Jan. 30, Pg. A21 | Zachary Iscol

During much of 2004, an Iraqi man whom I'll call Frank, to protect his identity, served with my Marine Corps unit with great distinction. While our platoon lived among Iraqi soldiers in a village outside Falluja, our interpreters were our bridge to the surrounding community. Our relationships with local religious and tribal leaders kept us safe. Although the area was dangerous and attacks on United States troops were frequent, in that town, my unit was never touched. That was thanks to the efforts of Frank and other local interpreters.

That November, my platoon of 30 Marines and 30 Iraqi National Guard soldiers pushed into Falluja for the second day of the fierce battle to retake the city from insurgents. As one of my squads assaulted a building, my platoon sergeant and Frank were shot and had to be evacuated by helicopter. To this day, Frank feels pain in his leg.

His willingness, and the willingness of many other Iraqis like him, to brave battle and help American forces put them and their families in grave danger from militants.

In 2006, another one of my interpreters, Abood, and his family were forced to flee Iraq after militants left a dog's head outside their door with a note saying that they would be next. I owed my life to Abood and cannot count the number of times he put himself in harm's way to protect "his" Marines. Two of Abood's four daughters also served as interpreters. At the time, there was no way for them to immigrate to the United States, so he and his family fled to Jordan, where they waited with faint hopes that America would open its doors.

Upset with the plight of these close allies, I testified before the Senate in January 2007 about the need to protect our interpreters. In an odd twist of fate, I met with Gen. John Kelly, now President Trump's secretary of homeland security, who was then in charge of legislative affairs for the Marine Corps. Officially, he needed to ensure that I wasn't going to embarrass the Marine Corps. But I'll never forget his words to me: Abood had worn the Marine Corps uniform in combat, and we had an obligation to keep him safe.

Following that hearing, Congress created a special visa program for Iraqis who helped the United States during the war. (A similar program was later created for Afghans.) This was not a partisan issue, but an issue of national honor and responsibility, and thousands of people have come to the United States on those visas.

Seven months after I testified, Abood and his family arrived in the United States, as refugees. He passed away five years ago from cancer, but his daughters and wife are here. One daughter is a New York City police officer, and another is applying to join the force. Abood, like Frank and many other interpreters, joined our ranks because he believed America stood for something bigger than itself. They believed America was an exceptional country.

Two months ago, I got an email from Frank. He was still living in Baghdad with daily fears for his and his family's safety. After six years of vetting, including what seemed like countless interviews and background checks by various government agencies, he had finally been cleared to come to the United States with his pregnant wife and 18-month-old son. My wife and I began to prepare our guest room for their arrival.

But now, because of a new executive order by President Trump, Frank is no longer welcome.

And he is far from alone. The order Mr. Trump signed on Friday suspended entry of all refugees to the United States for 120 days, barred Syrian refugees indefinitely and blocked entry into the United States for 90 days for citizens of seven predominantly Muslim countries, including Iraq. Almost immediately my phone lit up with emails and texts from other military veterans who had been fighting to get their Iraqi or Afghan interpreters to the United States. Some were already on flights to New York and San Francisco. Now those people, including Frank and his family and hundreds of others in the special visa pipeline, are in limbo.

When he signed the order, Mr. Trump declared that his action would keep Islamic terrorists out of America. "We don't want them here," he said. "We want to ensure that we are not admitting into our country the very threats our soldiers are fighting overseas."

But his measure is keeping out the very Muslims we do want here. Frank and thousands of other Iraqis and Afghans who worked with our forces in combat embody so much of what we stand for as a nation. And like so many past immigrants to America, like so many of our ancestors, they are fleeing repression for the hopes of a better life.

More important, they did something that fewer and fewer Americans have chosen to do: They wore, at great risk, the uniform of our military. Frank fought and bled alongside us. And now, in his time of need, we have turned our backs on him, and on the very ideals that make this country great.

--Zachary Iscol, a former Marine infantry officer, is on the board of the International Refugee Assistance Project

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28. Trump's order makes U.S. safer

USA Today, Jan. 30, Pg. A7 | Rep. Marsha Blackburn (R-TN)

President Trump issued an executive order on Friday to do exactly what he promised -- protect the American people. The order, titled "Protecting The Nation From Foreign Terrorist Entry Into The United States," pauses the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program for 120 days, with Syrian refugee admissions being suspended indefinitely, in order to closely examine the refugee application and adjudication process.

In December 2015, intelligence officials advised Congress that Islamic extremists were targeting our refugee program to infiltrate America. The president's common-sense approach simply imposes a security test for entering our country at a time of heightened terrorist activity.

There were 11,774 terrorist attacks worldwide resulting in over 28,000 deaths in 2015, according to the State Department. There was also a 39% increase in Islamic State-related attacks in Syria. Then- CIA Director John Brennan chillingly testified before Congress last June that ISIL "is probably exploring a variety of means for infiltrating operatives into the West, including refugee flows."

Despite overwhelming evidence that Islamic extremists are looking to infiltrate our refugee program, the Obama administration accelerated refugee admissions -- a counterintuitive approach. The U.S. admitted 84,994 refugees with 12,587 coming from Syria in fiscal 2016. The announcement in September to increase the refugee cap in fiscal 2017 to 110,000 was reckless and delusional. Further, the Office of Refugee Resettlement has struggled with transparency by failing to timely produce annual reports to Congress as required by law.

President Trump's decision to temporarily suspend refugee admissions is a responsible approach, as I filed legislation last Congress calling for the same. Our intelligence and security agencies must ascertain the scope of the Islamic terror threat in order to develop proper refugee vetting protocols -- if possible. The president's executive order is a security test, not a religious one. Democrats lived by "a pen and a phone" for the past eight years, and their misguided policies will meet their demise in a similar fashion.

--Rep. Marsha Blackburn, R-Tenn., serves on the House Energy and Commerce Committee

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29. Assad's mouthpiece in Washington

Washington Post, Jan. 30, Pg. A21 | Josh Rogin

The Bashar al-Assad regime in Syria has had a quiet but well-funded lobbying effort in Washington since well before he began murdering his own people. But that influence campaign's clearest triumph came only this month, when it succeeded in bringing Rep. Tulsi Gabbard (D-Hawaii) to Damascus and having her parrot Assad's propaganda on her return.

Gabbard was not the first U.S. elected official to meet Assad. In the early years of Assad's presidency, several senior U.S. lawmakers publicly traveled to see the young English-speaking optometrist-turned-ruler, in the hope that he might be a reformer, break with Iran and even make peace with Israel. Then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) visited Assad in 2007. Then-Sen. John F. Kerry (D-Mass.) led a delegation in 2009.

After the killing began in 2011, however, Assad's friends in Washington largely went underground and a covert influence and intimidation campaign blossomed. The FBI began investigating Syrian ambassador Imad Moustapha, due to evidence he was keeping tabs on Syrian Americans who showed disloyalty so the Syrian government could threaten their families back home. Moustapha departed for Beijing in 2012, but he left in place a network of friends, Syrian Americans who nurtured close ties to the regime and worked on Assad's behalf.

One Syrian American who was close to Moustapha and would often visit his Washington residence was Cleveland businessman Bassam Khawam, according to three Syrian Americans who saw them together but do not wish to be identified for fear of retribution. Five years later, Moustapha is nowhere to be seen, but Khawam is still active. He organized and joined the trip to Damascus for Gabbard and arranged a meeting with Assad.

"This guy has been lobbying on behalf of Bashar Assad in the U.S. even before there was a revolution, and we are deeply troubled he would try to help a war criminal build relationships with sitting members of Congress," said Mohammed Alaa Ghanem, director of government relations for the Syrian American Council, a nongovernmental organization that works with the Syrian opposition.

Former congressman Dennis Kucinich (D-Ohio) also joined the trip, which is no mere coincidence. Khawam arranged for Kucinich to meet Assad multiple times, most recently in 2013. He donated to Kucinich's campaigns and in related Federal Election Commission filings listed himself as a self-employed physician.

In other FEC filings, Khawam has listed himself as executive director of ACCESS Ohio, which presents itself as a branch of the Michigan-based Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services. Gabbard says that ACCESS Ohio paid for her trip. The problem is, ACCESS Ohio hasn't existed for several years.

"I can assure you [Khawam] has never been an employee of the organization and he is not at all affiliated with ACCESS," Rana Taylor, director of communications for the entire ACCESS organization, told me.

She explained that ACCESS had set up a national network for Arab American communities and that there had been an Ohio member organization many years ago, but said it was long defunct. "They don't have any type of structure or governing body," said Taylor. "They are non-functioning, not active as a member in any way."

Gabbard, in a press release, called Bassam Khawam and his brother, Elie, who also joined the trip, "longtime peace advocates." Her office told me she had "no prior knowledge or relationship" with the pair and directed all inquiries to the organization or Kucinich. Messages left for Khawam and Kucinich were not returned.

The actual source of the funding for the trip is murky, too. But there's no doubt the Assad regime facilitated it. Not only did the group get an audience with the president, but they also received access to sensitive areas under the protection of government forces. In several arranged meetings, Syrians told Gabbard that Assad is a benevolent ruler fighting terrorists and that the U.S. policy of opposing him is unjust.

Upon her return, Gabbard referenced those Syrians in interviews and op-eds to reinforce her long-held opposition to what she calls the U.S. "regime change" policy in Syria. She also asserted there are no moderate rebels in Syria and that the United States is funding and arming al-Qaeda and the Islamic State. Neither is true, but both match the talking points that the Assad regime has been pushing for the entirety of the war.

Principled opposition to U.S. intervention in Syria is one thing. Becoming a tool of a mass murderer's propaganda and influence campaign is another. Gabbard's cooperation with the Syrian regime damages her effort to promote herself as a legitimate foreign policy voice.

If Gabbard really didn't know the men who sponsored her "fact-finding mission" to Syria, she should have. To many, the entire affair proves that Assad's Washington influence campaign is alive and well and now has a sitting congresswoman for a mouthpiece, whether she realizes it or not.

--Josh Rogin is a columnist for the *Global Opinions* section of *The Washington Post*

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30. 'Comfort Women' and Asian Security

Highly regrettable actions in South Korea threaten not only a historic agreement with Japan but also our hard-earned friendship

Wall Street Journal, Jan. 30, Pg. A13 | Kiyoshi Odawara

On Dec. 28, 2015, Japan reached a historic agreement with the Republic of Korea on the comfort-women issue, in which the honor and dignity of many women were at stake. In the agreement, the issue is "resolved finally and irreversibly," thereby removing an obstacle to better Japan-ROK relations. This breakthrough won praise from many countries, including the U.S.

Japan literally has implemented its responsibilities based on this agreement. In August 2016, the government contributed one billion yen (\$8.8 million) to a newly established foundation for the purpose of providing support for former comfort women.

Using these funds, in October the foundation began its projects. Of the 46 surviving former comfort women at the time of the agreement, 34 agreed to the projects and 29 have already received medical treatment, nursing care and other support.

We also expected that the ROK would strive to solve the issue of the comfort-woman statue in front of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul, in accordance with the agreement. By so doing, we believed that we would be able to celebrate the anniversary of this agreement on Dec. 28, 2016, together with the ROK.

A situation occurred that threatens to shake the essential foundation of the agreement. On Dec. 30, a new comfort-woman statue was installed in front of the Consulate General of Japan in Busan by a Korean activist group with the approval of the municipality.

That such a situation occurred despite the agreement to resolve the comfort-women issue finally and irreversibly is highly regrettable. The installation is also problematic in light of the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations.

This agreement is the second on this issue since 1965, when the two countries completely and finally settled the problems concerning property and claims. At a time when the people of both countries are concerned about the peace and prosperity of the region, it is difficult to accept the actions of activists undermining the trust and expectation of friendship that we have built up.

On Jan. 6, the government of Japan had no choice but to take measures including the temporary recall of its ambassador to the ROK and its consul general in Busan. It is a bitter disappointment that we had to protest when our two countries should have been celebrating the anniversary of this agreement.

The ROK is Japan's most important neighbor with common strategic interests. Now more than ever, when North Korea continues nuclear tests and ballistic missile launches, Japan and the ROK should be working together to deter these reckless provocations. This must be recognized as a new level of threat, capable of reaching even the mainland of the U.S. In response, coordination among Japan, the ROK, and the U.S., is absolutely necessary.

There are many other areas in which Japan and the ROK can cooperate. Both are energy-importing countries, and face common issues such as a rapidly declining birthrate and an aging society. Japan and the ROK have worked closely together both bilaterally and globally in the past to address these common challenges.

Execution of the agreement is the foundation of trust and cooperation between the two countries and, thus, the duty of both governments. Japan is determined to continue to contribute to peace and stability in the international community through cooperation with the Republic of Korea.

--Mr. Odawara is Japan's parliamentary vice minister for foreign affairs

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