From:	Loeblein, James T RADM OLA, LA-00
To:	Spencer, Richard V HON SECNAV; Richardson, John M ADM CNO
Cc:	Modly, Thomas HON Under Secretary of the Navy; Moran, William F ADM, OPNAV, VCNO; Mate, EmilyGrace SES SECNAV, FO; (b) (6) ; (b) (6) ; (b) (6) , OPNAV, VCNO; Dollaga, Butch C Director, FMBE OASN, FM&C FMBE
Subject:	(U//FOUO) Leahy-Reed Letter regarding military parade
Date:	Wednesday, February 07, 2018 16:29:50
Attachments:	Leahy Parade.pdf

Mr. Secretary/CNO - FYSA...

VR/Jim

RADM James T. Loeblein, USN
Navy Chief of Legislative Affairs

From: Frank Thorp
To: Moran, William F ADM, OPNAV, VCNO
Subject: [Non-DoD Source] Parade
Date: Saturday, February 24, 2018 13:23:18

Bill,

If there's a parade on Veterans Day, let's fill the Navy Memorial plaza with Navy stuff! CRUITCOM? Static Displays? Etc.! We have great relations with the local Park Service and can work it! If you would like to pursue, please tell me who to work with.

Frank

Frank Thorp IV

Rear Admiral, USN (retired)

President & CEO

US Navy Memorial

701 Pennsylvania Ave., NW

Washington, DC 20004-2608

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The Navy Memorial mission is to honor, recognize and celebrate the men and women of the sea services and the important contributions made by them while serving in the United States Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard and Merchant Marine. The Navy Memorial serves to educate and inspire the American people about the vital role that the Sea Services play in our national security and the rich maritime history of the United States.

From: CHINFO, OI-3
Subject: CHINFO NEWS CLIPS 08 FEB 18
Date: Thursday, February 08, 2018 6:05:13
Attachments: 20180208-CHINFO_News_Clips.docx

On This Day In The Navy:
1890 - A detachment of USS Omaha Sailors and Marines comes ashore at the town of Hodogaya, Japan, to assist in fighting an extensive fire.

Executive Summary:
National news headlines include House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi's filibuster-style speech that topped eight hours in a bid to force immigration votes, and continued anticipation of the Winter Olympics. Chief of Naval Operations Adm. John Richardson addressed the San Diego Military Advisory Council on Wednesday over the Navy's focus towards great power competition, which dovetails with the NSS and NDS, reports the San Diego Union-Tribune. Richardson laid out his vision for an agile, innovative and adaptable 355-ship Navy capable of countering the resurgent Chinese and Russian navies. The New York Times reports that the Senate reached a bipartisan spending agreement on Wednesday that would fund the government and increase spending caps on military and domestic spending over the next two years. The deal would increase the limit on military spending by $80 billion in 2018 and $85 billion in 2019. The bill now goes to the House where its passage is not certain. Additionally, speaking at WEST 2018, the head of Space and Naval Warfare Systems Command Rear Adm. Christian “Boris” Becker said that the military and industry must find ways to innovate quickly in order to maintain U.S. military supremacy.

TOP STORIES:
1. Navy's Top Sailor Plans For 'Great Power Competition' On World Stage
(SAN DIEGO UNION-TRIBUNE 07 FEB 18) ... Carl Prine
In a major Wednesday address before the San Diego Military Advisory Council, the Navy’s top officer sketched out the future of America’s maritime power as it confronts rising powers such as Russia and China.

2. Senate Leaders Agree To A Deal To Lift Spending
(NEW YORK TIMES 08 FEB 18) ... Thomas Kaplan
WASHINGTON — Senate leaders struck a far-reaching bipartisan agreement on Wednesday that would add hundreds of billions of dollars to military and domestic programs over the next two years while raising the federal debt limit, moving to end the cycle of fiscal showdowns that have roiled the Capitol.

3. SPAWAR To Industry: ‘We’ve Got To Go Faster’ To Maintain Military Edge
(USNI NEWS 07 FEB 18) ... Gidget Fuentes
SAN DIEGO, Calif. – The days of U.S. military supremacy might be over, but not if the military services and industry find ways to quickly innovate and rapidly deliver solutions to the fleet, the head of Space and Naval Warfare Systems Command told a defense industry audience on Tuesday.

ASIA – PACIFIC:
4. Pence, In Tokyo, Threatens Tough Penalties For North Korea
(NEW YORK TIMES 08 FEB 18) ... Mark Landler
WASHINGTON — Vice President Mike Pence, dispatched to Asia to blunt a North Korean charm offensive at South Korea’s Olympic Games, said Wednesday that the United States planned to levy the toughest sanctions yet on the North over its nuclear and missile programs.

5. China Poses A New Type Of Challenge
(AFCEA.ORG 08 FEB 18) ... Robert K. Ackerman
War with China is not inevitable, but the United States is in a competition with which it is unfamiliar, U.S. Navy Pacific Fleet Commander Adm. Scott H. Swift, USN, told the audience at the keynote luncheon at West 2018. China is using its own means to coerce others as it pursues its long-term goals, the admiral said at the conference, taking place February 6-8 in San Diego.

6. West 2018: Commander Says US-China Not On Path To Conflict
(SHEPHARD MEDIA 08 FEB 18) ... Scott Gourley
Adm Scott Swift, Cdr of the US Pacific Fleet said that he does not view the US and China as being on a path to armed conflict.

7. Malcolm Turnbull's White House Visit Elevated To Status Not Seen Since John Howard
(SYDNEY MORNING HERALD 08 FEB 18) ... David Wroe
Malcolm Turnbull's Washington trip will be highest-level visit by an Australian leader in more than a decade, in a signal the United States is eager to keep its key allies such as Australia close.

8. Myanmar's Place At US Military Drills In Asia Draws Ire
(ASSOCIATED PRESS 07 FEB 18) ... Matthew Pennington
WASHINGTON — Lawmakers are demanding Myanmar's exclusion from U.S.-led military exercises in neighboring Thailand next week amid pressure for more American sanctions in response to atrocities against Rohingya Muslims.

MIDEAST - CENTRAL/SOUTH ASIA:
9. U.S. Strikes Pro-Assad Forces In Syria
Military Says American And Coalition Troops And U.S.-Backed Forces Came Under Attack In Country's East
(WALL STREET JOURNAL 07 FEB 18) ... Nancy A. Youssef
The U.S. military launched an airstrike and aimed artillery fire against forces fighting for the Syrian regime Wednesday, in response to what it called an "unprovoked attack" on U.S. and coalition personnel and the local forces they back.

10. Facing Trump's Demands, NATO To Consider Larger Iraq Training Mission
(REUTERS 07 FEB 18) ... Robin Emmott
BRUSSELS - The United States is renewing pressure on its European NATO allies to establish a long-term train-and-advise mission in Iraq, diplomats said, reviving a divisive issue for an alliance wary after more than a decade in Afghanistan.

11. Afghanistan Now Main Effort For US Airpower
(MILITARY TIMES 07 FEB 18) ... Tara Copp
The U.S. has modified bombers and added aircraft to Afghanistan to return focus to its campaign against the Taliban, the top general for the air campaign there said.

EUROPE:
12. EU, NATO Face Growing Threat Of Inadvertent Military Clash, Report Says
(REUTERS 07 FEB 18) ... Andrea Shalal
BERLIN - The erosion of arms control agreements, deployment of additional weapons and tensions over military exercises have increased the risk of an inadvertent armed clash between Europe and Russia, according to the annual Munich Security Report.

AFRICA:
13. US-Led Cutlass Express Boosts Policing Of East Africa's Waters
(STARS AND STRIPES 07 FEB 18) ... Scott Wyland
A U.S.-led exercise aimed at helping East African and Indian Ocean nations thwart piracy, illegal fishing and other seaborne crimes is set to end on Thursday.

CONGRESS / BUDGET:
14. Two-Year Budget Deal Would Raise Caps, Give Pentagon $700B In 2018
(DEFENSE ONE 07 FEB 18) ... Caroline Houck And Marcus Weisgerberg
The deal comes with a new continuing resolution to give House and Senate lawmakers time to work out details.

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE:
15. Mattis On Two-Year Budget Deal: 'We Will Spend The Money Wisely'
(MILITARY.COM 07 FEB 18) ... Richard Sisk
The White House brought in Defense Secretary Jim Mattis Wednesday to press for a sweeping budget deal that

would realize a long-sought Pentagon goal of lifting the caps on defense spending under the sequester process.

CYBER:
16. 'Fancy Bear' Hackers Took Aim At US Defense Contractors
(ASSOCIATED PRESS 07 FEB 18) ... Jeff Donn, Desmond Butler and Raphael Ssatter
WASHINGTON — Russian cyberspies pursuing the secrets of military drones and other sensitive U.S. defense technology tricked key contract workers into exposing their email to theft, an Associated Press investigation has found.

17. Too Busy To Train? The Navy's Cyber Dilemma
(BREAKING DEFENSE 07 FEB 18) ... Sydney J. Freedberg Jr.
SAN DIEGO: The Navy's overworked IT teams need new "virtual training tools" and more time to train, especially for all-out cyber/electronic warfare against a high-end adversary, the commander of Naval Information Forces said here Tuesday.

AVIATION:
18. Panel: Helos Can Do More To Share Data
(USNI NEWS 07 FEB 18) ... Ben Werner
SAN DIEGO, Calif. – The Navy's rotary wing community is at a crossroads where the promise of unmanned systems intersects with the limits of piloted aircraft.

PERSONNEL:
19. Navy Information Warfare Effort Set To Expand, Evolve
(USNI NEWS 07 FEB 18) ... Gidget Fuentes and Megan Eckstein
SAN DIEGO, Calif. -– As it moves into its fourth year, the Navy's force of information warfare professionals continues to expand and evolve into a greater role supporting tactical warfighters, Vice Adm. Matthew Kohler said on Tuesday.

20. Navy Mistakenly Tells 4,850 Sailors That Their Orders Are Canceled
(NAVY TIMES 07 FEB 18) ... Geoff Ziezulewicz
A software error caused nearly 5,000 sailors to mistakenly receive notices this week informing them that their orders had been cancelled.

21. Misbehavior By Top Officials And Officers Is On The Decline, Pentagon Leaders Say
(USA TODAY 07 FEB 18) ... Tom Vanden Brook
WASHINGTON -- Pentagon officials have substantiated 590 allegations of misconduct among generals, admirals and senior civilian officials from 2013 to 2017 with trends showing a steady decline in misbehavior, according to figures released Wednesday by the Defense Department Inspector General.

22. Navy Admiral: New Measures In Place To Thwart Another 'Fat Leonard' Corruption Scandal
(STARS AND STRIPES 07 FEB 18) ... Claudia Grisales
WASHINGTON — Adm. Bill Moran, vice chief of naval operations, said Wednesday that the Navy is addressing new policy reforms in the wake of the "Fat Leonard" fraud and corruption scandal.

LEGAL:
23. Hearings For Fitz And McCain COs Scheduled For Next Month
(NAVY TIMES 07 FEB 18) ... Geoff Ziezulewicz
The Navy will present its argument early next month for why the captains of two warships involved in fatal collisions last summer should be held liable for the deaths of 17 sailors who were crushed and drowned in the disasters.

COMMENTARY:
24. The Guns And Butter Budget
Democrats Exact A High Price For Agreeing To Boost The Military.
(WALL STREET JOURNAL 08 FEB 18) ... Editorial Board
Congress announced the outline of a two-year bipartisan budget deal on Wednesday, and no doubt Members want to avoid another pointless government shutdown. The deal has the virtue of starting to fix a weakening military. But

the delusion is that the U.S. can continue to deny the trade-off between guns and butter, or defense and the entitlement state.

25. Stand Up To Erdogan's Brutality
The Turkish President Has The Insolence To Style His Ethnic-Cleansing Campaign 'Operation Olive Branch.'
(WALL STREET JOURNAL 08 FEB 18) ... Bernard-Henri Lévy
In Syria as in Iraq, the Kurds have been the West's most steadfast allies against Islamic State. Their victory over ISIS complete, Kurdish fighters were naive enough to think they would be allowed to live in peace on the land they had defended and on which their brothers and sisters are buried. As the price of that innocence they are being pursued, tortured and assassinated once again, this time in Afrin, a Syrian city close to the Turkish border.

26. America Needs To Prepare For A Great Power War
Planning For Mobilization Is Cheap, But Failing To Do So Could Be Outrageously Expensive.
(NATIONAL INTEREST 07 FEB 18) ... Alan L. Gropman
Mobilization of American society for World War II was a major factor in the Allied victory. More importantly, it was the foremost reason for the extreme disparity between American military deaths and those of our enemies. Germany lost ten times more military killed in action than the United States, and Japan lost nine times as many. The raw figures are 292,000 Americans and 2,900,000 Germans—and Germany had a population only 60 percent of that of the United States. The ratio with Japan was similar. The United States also out produced both enemies, building double the combined Axis output. That industrial output (a generous part of which went to our allies) mattered immensely, as the figures above indicate.

27. The Discrimination Problem: Why Putting Low-Yield Nuclear Weapons On Submarines Is So Dangerous
(WAR ON THE ROCKS 08 FEB 18) ... Vipin Narang
The United States has the most diverse and potent nuclear force on the planet, capable of deterring and, if necessary, defeating and destroying any military and any nation on earth. The Trump administration's recently released Nuclear Posture Review doesn't think that's enough. Going beyond the modernization program that upgrades and maintains the existing force, the document calls for a variety of capabilities and missions for American nuclear forces that have long been on Republicans' wish list. Specifically, the document places a renewed emphasis on expanding the role and size of the low-yield nuclear weapon force (with low yields not being all that low since they include 20 kiloton nuclear weapons, the same as those dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki).

28. Instead Of Parading Tanks, Let's Honor Our Post-9/11 Veterans Instead
(MILITARY TIMES 07 FEB 18) ... Editorial Board
President Donald Trump wants a grand military parade to showcase America's military might.

TOP STORIES:
1. Navy's Top Sailor Plans For 'Great Power Competition' On World Stage
(SAN DIEGO UNION-TRIBUNE 07 FEB 18) ... Carl Prine

In a major Wednesday address before the San Diego Military Advisory Council, the Navy's top officer sketched out the future of America's maritime power as it confronts rising powers such as Russia and China.
"If you think about the last time we were really in a great power competition, we have to go back almost 25 years. We're talking the Cold War and the Soviet Union," said Adm. John M. Richardson, chief of naval operations since 2015.
"Right now, we not only have a different set of competitors, if you think about the competition, but the rules of the game have changed since the last time we did this. If we don't understand the rule changes — the character of the environment — we're just going to be out of position and not competitors."
Richardson's remarks dovetailed with new defense and security strategy reviews released by President Donald Trump's administration over the past two months.
Together, these documents are designed to direct America's military posture in the coming years, shifting to great power competition after nearly two decades fighting counter-insurgency wars overseas.
During his Wednesday address at Naval Base Point Loma, Richardson, 57, pointed to both those guidebooks and the

evolving characteristics of ocean trade and warfare.
Trade borne on the world's waters has quadrupled over the past quarter century and nearly all international internet traffic flows along undersea cables. A shrinking icecap increasingly opens the Arctic Ocean to commerce and warships, including those sailed by resurgent Chinese and Russian navies.
Congress has vowed to build a 355-ship Navy, up from the 280 vessels capable of deploying today. Richardson wants them to be more agile and carry better arms and sensors.
They will need to confront potential enemies in a wide variety of domains, he said, including the electro-magnetic spectrum where the enemy wants to jam, degrade and destroy American sensors and communications.
Richardson also wants his aircraft, warships, submarines and a growing fleet of undersea and aerial robots to be networked, capable of moving, shooting and communicating together even while foes try to jam them.
He envisions a future fleet of nimble vessels, with hulls and propulsion systems designed to last decades and on-board technology switched out like Legos — a "plug-and-play" way of keeping up with the latest innovations.
He hopes that their designs can cut the amount of maintenance they need, an upgrade he hinted will be part of the new frigate the Navy wants to buy.
Richardson bemoaned a procurement program for weapons that is subject to 10,000 briefings — instead of the 10,000 experiments he'd like inventors to try. His modernization plans also have been hamstrung by budget woes.
Over the past decade, Congress has balked at giving the armed forces a steady funding stream. Instead, lawmakers leaned on a series of temporary resolutions to pay the military's bill, a problem exacerbated by defense spending caps instituted in so-called "sequestration" legislation passed in 2011.
"It has a strategic impact, particularly on the Navy and capital-intensive businesses," said Richardson, a distinguished submariner who also ran the Navy's nuclear propulsion program. "You've got to have some programs that are a little bit predictable or well-funded over a period of time to really achieve that competitive pace."
Richardson is slated to appear Thursday alongside Coast Guard commandant Adm. Paul Zukunft and Marine Corps commandant Gen. Robert Neller at West 2018, the U.S. Naval Institute's gathering of many of the military's top brass at San Diego's Convention Center.
In an interview after his speech, Richardson defended the ouster last month of Vice Adm. Tom Rowden, the commander of Coronado-based Naval Surface Forces, following a string of Western Pacific warship collisions that killed 17 sailors last year.
Multiple internal investigations sprinkled blame across the entire surface warfare fleet. The probes also sparked disciplinary proceedings against crew members, and investigators have threatened possible court-martial trials for their commanders.
Rowden is spared that, but he asked Richardson in September to retire early, with a scheduled change of command ceremony in February. The Navy moved his exit to Jan. 18.
"The decision was the right thing for the Navy," said Richardson, noting that Rowden was not only his Naval Academy classmate but a longtime friend. "I don't think we should spend too much time on that."
Rowden was widely credited with fixing the Navy's embattled littoral combat ship program, hiking tactical training for sailors and developing "distributed lethality," a set of combat operations designed to beat a maritime power like China.
"We send good people to San Diego and Tom was as good as we get," Richardson said. "It's important to keep this in balance and appreciate his 36-year-career."
Richardson expects nearly all the reforms needed to shore up shoddy safety in the surface fleet completed this year.
When asked about the Navy's role in a large-scale military parade through the streets of Washington, D.C., ordered by President Trump for November, Richardson declined comment.
http://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/military/sd-me-john-richardson-20180207-story html

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2. Senate Leaders Agree To A Deal To Lift Spending
(NEW YORK TIMES 08 FEB 18) ... Thomas Kaplan

WASHINGTON — Senate leaders struck a far-reaching bipartisan agreement on Wednesday that would add hundreds of billions of dollars to military and domestic programs over the next two years while raising the federal debt limit, moving to end the cycle of fiscal showdowns that have roiled the Capitol.
The accord between Senators Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, the majority leader, and Chuck Schumer of New York, his Democratic counterpart, would raise strict caps on military and domestic spending that were imposed in 2011 as part of a deal with President Barack Obama that was once seen as a key triumph for Republicans in Congress.

The deal would raise the spending caps by about $300 billion over two years. The limit on military spending would be increased by $80 billion in the current fiscal year and $85 billion in the next year, which begins Oct. 1. The limit on nondefense spending would increase by $63 billion this year and $68 billion next year.

But the accord was not without dramatics, and its passage in the House is not a foregone conclusion. As proof of that, Representative Nancy Pelosi of California, the House Democratic leader, took the House floor on Wednesday morning in opposition, protesting that the deal did nothing to bring lawmakers closer to protecting young immigrants brought to the country illegally as children. She then delivered a record-breaking speech that tied up the House for the entire day and into the night.

The budget agreement, coming a day after President Trump threatened to shut down the government, would effectively negate Mr. Trump's demands to broadly reorder government with deep cuts to nondefense programs like environmental protection, foreign aid and health research that were to offset large increases in military spending.

Mr. Trump is to release his second budget request on Monday, but the deal — championed by the top congressional leaders from his own party — amounts to an unequivocal rebuke of many of the budgetary demands he has put forth.

The deal would give Mr. Trump military bragging rights. "The bottom line is that, thanks to President Trump, we can now have the strongest military we have ever had," the White House press secretary, Sarah Huckabee Sanders, said on Wednesday.

At least for now, it could put an end to the fiscal crises that Mr. Trump has at times seemed to welcome.

Nonetheless, the president threw his weight behind the accord, writing on Twitter, "Republicans and Democrats must support our troops and support this Bill!"

If the deal passes on Thursday, lawmakers would then put together a long-term spending package over the coming weeks that would fund the government through September, granting a measure of peace to Washington as attention turns to the midterm elections in November. Heading into the midterm elections, it would also enable lawmakers to go home and claim success at delivering funding for pressing needs, like fighting the opioid epidemic.

By setting overall spending levels through September 2019, the deal would ease passage of spending legislation in the next fiscal year, as well.

The agreement will cause federal budget deficits to grow even larger, on top of the effects of the sweeping tax overhaul that lawmakers approved in December. But because the deal gives long-sought victories to both parties, the deficit effect appears to be of little concern. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis and Speaker Paul D. Ryan of Wisconsin both quickly embraced it.

From the increase in domestic spending, Mr. Schumer said the deal includes $20 billion for infrastructure, $6 billion for the opioid crisis and mental health, $5.8 billion for child care and $4 billion for veterans hospitals and clinics. In addition, the deal includes almost $90 billion in disaster relief in response to last year's hurricanes and wildfires.

The agreement includes an additional four-year extension of funding for the Children's Health Insurance Program, on top of the six-year extension that Congress approved last month.

The deal also lifts the debt limit until March 2019, pushing any future confrontation over that issue until after the midterm elections. The Congressional Budget Office recently projected that the Treasury would probably run out of cash in the first half of March if the limit were not raised.

"I hope we can build on this bipartisan momentum and make 2018 a year of significant achievement for Congress, for our constituents and for the country that we all love," Mr. McConnell said.

Mr. Schumer was similarly effusive. "After months of legislative logjams, this budget deal is a genuine breakthrough," he said. "After months of fiscal brinkmanship, this budget deal is the first real sprout of bipartisanship."

Mr. Ryan urged his members to vote for it: "America will be safer and stronger because of this agreement." His embrace boosted its chances in the House, where conservatives were cool to it, if not hostile.

Hard-line conservatives were unsparing in their assessment.

"This is a dead-end path that will cause great hardship to Americans," proclaimed Representative Mo Brooks, Republican of Alabama. "And if you really look it out long term and see the cascading effects, it is going to cost a lot of Americans their lives."

Senator Mike Lee, Republican of Utah, called the deal "a betrayal of everything limited government conservatism stands for."

The agreement also incited opposition from Ms. Pelosi, who said she could not agree to any budget deal that was not accompanied by a promise to vote on legislation in the House to protect young immigrants brought to the country illegally as children, or "Dreamers."

"Without that commitment from Speaker Ryan, comparable to the commitment from Leader McConnell, this package does not have my support, nor does it have the support of a large number of members of our caucus," Ms. Pelosi said on the House floor, where she delivered a marathon speech about Dreamers that stretched for more than

eight hours.
She was referring to a promise by Mr. McConnell to begin debate on immigration soon, a commitment not matched by Mr. Ryan. But Mr. Ryan did not rush to offer the assurance that Ms. Pelosi sought.
“Speaker Ryan has already repeatedly stated we intend to do a DACA and immigration reform bill — one that the president supports,” a spokeswoman for Mr. Ryan, AshLee Strong, said, referring to the Obama-era program that shields Dreamers from deportation known as Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA.
The budget deal would be paired with a stopgap spending measure that would keep the government open past Thursday, when the current funding measure is set to expire. Lawmakers would then have six weeks, until March 23, to pass a long-term funding package.
The Senate was expected to vote on the deal on Thursday, with the House to follow afterward. It was not clear if enough Democrats would oppose the deal to imperil its passage in the House, given the likely opposition from at least some fiscal conservatives. If lawmakers cannot pass a temporary funding measure by the end of Thursday — either tied to the budget pact or by itself — the government would shut down for the second time this year.
Only on Tuesday, Mr. Trump was trying to engage in fiscal brinkmanship, threatening another government shutdown if his hard-line demands on immigration were not met.
“I’d love to see a shutdown if we don’t get this stuff taken care of,” Mr. Trump said then. “If we have to shut it down because the Democrats don’t want safety,” he added, “then shut it down.”
But budget negotiators seemed to pay him little heed.
“While President Trump threatens shutdowns and stalemates, congressional leaders have done the hard work of finding compromise and consensus,” Mr. Schumer said. He added, “At the end of the day, I believe we have reached a budget deal that neither side loves, but both sides can be proud of.”
The deal had eluded negotiators for months, as it became intertwined with delicate negotiations on other matters, particularly the contentious issue of immigration.
But after last month’s three-day government shutdown, Senate Democrats were willing to finalize a budget deal separately from the debate over immigration.
The deal made for another lonely day for lawmakers concerned about the budget deficit, which was already expected to reach $1 trillion in the next fiscal year, according to the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, a fiscal watchdog group.
The tax overhaul is projected to add $1.5 trillion to the deficit over a decade, and the budget agreement will balloon the deficit even further.
“This deal represents budgeting at its worst — each party is giving the other its wish list with all the bells and whistles included and asking future generations to pick up the tab,” said Maya MacGuineas, the president of the watchdog group.
The deal drew scorn from conservative groups angered by the big increase in spending.
Jason Pye, the vice president of legislative affairs for FreedomWorks, said the deal “isn’t just fiscally irresponsible, it’s an abomination.”
“No one in Congress who claims that they’re a deficit hawk or a fiscal conservative can justifiably vote for this deal,” he said.
Nicholas Fandos contributed reporting from Washington, and Patricia Mazzei from New York.
https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/07/us/politics/budget-deal-trump html

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3. SPAWAR To Industry: ‘We’ve Got To Go Faster’ To Maintain Military Edge
(USNI NEWS 07 FEB 18) ... Gidget Fuentes

SAN DIEGO, Calif. – The days of U.S. military supremacy might be over, but not if the military services and industry find ways to quickly innovate and rapidly deliver solutions to the fleet, the head of Space and Naval Warfare Systems Command told a defense industry audience on Tuesday.
“Strategic competition is driving the urgency for us to find our way to deliver, to modernize, to enable the joint force with a more lethal force, and to reach out for our allies and partners to be part of that lethal force,” Rear Adm. Christian “Boris” Becker, the SPAWAR commander, told an audience at the WEST 2018 conference, co-hosted by the U.S. Naval Institute and AFCEA.
It’s “strategic competition with a sense of urgency,” said Becker, echoing a theme in the 2018 National Defense Strategy signed by Defense Secretary Jim Mattis. “It’s all about competition – competition that is closing the gap,” he added.
“There is no guarantee that we will have superiority or supremacy unless we make it so, unless we deliver on the

capability," Becker said, "…and we follow through to put that capability and capacity in the hands of our warfighting so that we can create that superiority at the space, at the time, for the duration and for the scope of what we need to affect our mission."
"Whether that battlefield is on the ground, whether the battlefield is at sea, in the air, in space, or on the network, we are facing strategic competition. What are we going to do – what are you going to do – to make sure we can face that competition, that we can compete and win?" he said. In the audience were dozens of industry representatives, representing major defense firms and small businesses, the latter which received nearly 32 percent of the $5.2 billion in contracts issued by SPAWAR last year. "Let's make it happen," Becker said.
Becker, who took command of SPAWAR in March 2017, last fall issued SPAWAR's "Strategic Vision, 2018-2027," an update to a 2015 document.[http://www.public navy.mil/spawar/Documents/Strategic_Vision.pdf]
"It's not a technical vision. It's a strategic vision," he said, noting the rapid speed of technological advances. "And it's not a tactical competition we are in today, it's a strategic competition. We need to be better, faster, stronger."
"We've got to take that cycle, and make it happen faster," he said, especially with getting innovation, technology and systems the fleet needs, in hand and operational.
That includes delivering cyber resiliency – "meaning we can take a hit and still fight through it," he said – against attacks that undoubtedly occur constantly and often. "Are we going to be ready and move forward through that? The answer is: We'd better be."
"We have to deliver on this vision," he added. "If we get to the ability to move at the speed that if we see a threat, if we see a need, if we see a problem, we can change that capability, we can test and integrate that capability. We can deploy that capability securely at the speed at which the fleet needs it – measured in days, maybe hours – not in fiscal years."
https://news.usni.org/2018/02/07/spawar-industry-weve-got-go-faster-maintain-military-edge

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ASIA – PACIFIC:
4. Pence, In Tokyo, Threatens Tough Penalties For North Korea
(NEW YORK TIMES 08 FEB 18) ... Mark Landler

WASHINGTON — Vice President Mike Pence, dispatched to Asia to blunt a North Korean charm offensive at South Korea's Olympic Games, said Wednesday that the United States planned to levy the toughest sanctions yet on the North over its nuclear and missile programs.
Mr. Pence's threat, delivered in Tokyo, came two days after he had signaled openness to meeting with North Korean officials at the Games, somewhat muddying the harsh message he had been sent to project.
But in Japan, the vice president quickly reverted to form. Speaking alongside Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, Mr. Pence said he planned to "stand with our allies and remind the world that North Korea is the most tyrannical and oppressive regime on the planet."
"We will continue to intensify our maximum pressure campaign until North Korea takes concrete steps toward complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearization," Mr. Pence said. He did not detail the precise timing or content of the sanctions. Analysts said they could target Chinese firms that do business with North Korea.
The Olympics, which open Friday in the South Korean town of Pyeongchang, are likely to showcase the diplomatic thaw between North and South, with the two teams marching together in the opening ceremony under a single flag and competing together in women's ice hockey.
On Friday, North Korea announced it would send the only sister of its leader, Kim Jong-un, to South Korea as a member of its official delegation. That sets up at least the possibility of a landmark meeting with Mr. Pence, though Mr. Kim's sister, Kim Yo-jong, is under Treasury Department sanctions for her role in North Korea's human rights abuses, which would make a meeting highly unlikely.
Indeed, Mr. Pence is drawing attention to abuses in North Korea at every stop of his Asia trip. He is bringing as a guest to the Games the father of Otto F. Warmbier, the Ohio college student who was imprisoned in Pyongyang and fell into an irreversible coma. Mr. Warmbier died soon after being returned to his parents, Fred and Cindy, in Cincinnati.
"We will not allow North Korean propaganda to hijack the message and imagery of the Olympic Games," Mr. Pence said. "We will not allow North Korea to hide behind the Olympic banner the reality that they enslave their people and threaten the wider region."
Last week, Mr. Trump paid tribute to Mr. Warmbier's parents, as well as a North Korean defector, Ji Seong-ho, during his State of the Union address. He later gathered Mr. Ji and other defectors in the White House, where they

shared harrowing tales of imprisonment, abuse and escape from the North.
“The human rights issue is creeping into their strategy,” said Evan S. Medeiros, a former top Asia adviser to President Barack Obama. “The reason this is important is because it raises the question of the regime’s legitimacy.”
Mr. Medeiros played down the significance of Mr. Pence’s remark on Monday in which he said of the North Koreans: “I have not requested a meeting, but we’ll see what happens.”
“In retrospect,” Mr. Medeiros said, “it seems he was just being coy because he’s doubling down and tripling down on maximum pressure and the alliance buildup.”
On Thursday, North Korea seemed to take the possibility of a meeting off the table. “We have never begged for dialogue with the U.S., and will be the same in the future,” Jo Yong-sam, a North Korean Foreign Ministry official, was quoted as saying by the North’s official Korean Central News Agency.
White House officials did not return phone calls requesting comment on Mr. Pence’s plans. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, when asked at a White House briefing about the possibility of a meeting, demurred on whether he supported one.
“Vice President Pence is quite capable of making the call on that there while he’s in Korea,” Mr. Mattis said.
Asked whether the United States had drawn closer to war with North Korea during the Trump administration, Mr. Mattis said that American policy “is firmly in the diplomatic lane,” and that “we have seen much stronger diplomatic action.”
Still, he added that the Pentagon was supplying the White House “with viable military options” to deal with North Korea — an issue that has nettled some White House officials, who believe that the Pentagon has dragged its feet in providing options for striking the North.
During his visit to Tokyo, Mr. Pence inspected a Japanese Patriot antimissile battery, which would be used to try to shoot down an incoming North Korean missile. There was little talk of economic issues, even though Mr. Pence has in the past conducted an economic dialogue with Japan’s finance minister, Taro Aso.
Mr. Pence’s tough words about North Korea could widen fissures between the Trump administration and South Korea’s president, Moon Jae-in, who has pursued a more conciliatory approach to the North. Analysts said that the North Koreans, if they began to fan the possibility of talks with Mr. Pence again, could try to exploit those gaps.
“When the Olympics are over, and the U.S. wants to resume military exercises, the North Koreans can say, ‘We made this unprecedented offer of a meeting,’” said Michael J. Green, who served as a top Asia adviser to President George W. Bush.
Choe Sang-Hun contributed reporting from Seoul, South Korea.
https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/07/us/politics/pence-north-korea-sanctions.html?rref=collection%2Fsectioncollection%2Fus

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5. China Poses A New Type Of Challenge
(AFCEA.ORG 08 FEB 18) ... Robert K. Ackerman

War with China is not inevitable, but the United States is in a competition with which it is unfamiliar, U.S. Navy Pacific Fleet Commander Adm. Scott H. Swift, USN, told the audience at the keynote luncheon at West 2018. China is using its own means to coerce others as it pursues its long-term goals, the admiral said at the conference, taking place February 6-8 in San Diego.
“China is applying national law in international space … including economic coercion,” Adm. Swift declared. That includes ignoring international laws and organizations while imposing its own wishes on any nations it chooses. The United States must meet this competition lest it lead to war. “If it comes to a military conflict between two great powers, the consequences will be enormous,” he warned.
Speaking to news media after the luncheon, Adm. Swift elaborated on this challenge. The United States must engage in a discussion about addressing this challenge. China’s economic coercion is having an effect, and the United States must decide if it wants to accept China’s “lawfare” economic model or work extensively with multinational organizations to support the rule of international law.
He added that China is a revanchist power that wants to correct “perceived wrongs that happened over a century ago.” The United States must campaign accordingly, or else it may find itself having to put in place mechanisms to deal with reality after reality comes to pass.
https://www.afcea.org/content/china-poses-new-type-challenge

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6. West 2018: Commander Says US-China Not On Path To Conflict
(SHEPHARD MEDIA 08 FEB 18) ... Scott Gourley

Adm Scott Swift, Cdr of the US Pacific Fleet said that he does not view the US and China as being on a path to armed conflict.
At West 2018, Swift commented that the relations between the two countries could be envisaged as competitive and this does not always have to equate to conflict.
'Competition isn't a bad thing,' Swift said. 'And competition doesn't necessarily mean conflict. We shouldn't approach this in a foregone conclusion that we're on a path to conflict.
'I disagree with those that characterise the frictions and tensions that occur between the United States and competitors out there as being on a path to war; on a path to conflict.'
That said, Swift did acknowledge that recently in the Indo-Pacific region there have been power plays occurring.
'There is a great power competition that has returned to the Indo-Pacific… And what's at stake is a challenge of the rules-based order that has ensured the stability of the region since the end of World War 2.'
He continued: 'This rules-based order was negotiated with winners and losers that came out of that conflict. And what's more important is that, not only did we get the rules-based order, but also the institutions that were established to resolve differences in the application of that rules-based order.'
Swift explained that some countries within the region are utilising their national law in the global domain.
He explained: 'What's happening now is, with respect to China and others as well, that they are challenging that rules-based order. They are applying national law in international space, displacing the sovereignty of other nations. And they are doing it across the whole of government.'
He characterised the current level of peer competition as 'new to us as individuals,' adding further, 'Any time you enter a competition you want to enter it from a position of strength. And the first strength that you need to have is mental strength; that mindset of readiness and why that readiness is so critical.
'And you have to think of it in terms at the strategic level first – not at the tactical level. And after you've thought about the strategic level and you've developed a strategy of how you want to continue to apply your national power to continue the global stability that we have enjoyed these last 70 years, the next step is to apply that at the operational level.'
Offering an analogy to homeowners who buy fire insurance when they never expect a house fire to occur, he highlighted the need to plan for low probability and high consequence events, and stated, 'If it came to a military conflict between two great powers, the consequences are going to be significant.'
https://www.shephardmedia.com/news/defence-notes/pacific-fleet-commander-says-us-china-not-path-con/

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7. Malcolm Turnbull's White House Visit Elevated To Status Not Seen Since John Howard
(SYDNEY MORNING HERALD 08 FEB 18) ... David Wroe

Malcolm Turnbull's Washington trip will be highest-level visit by an Australian leader in more than a decade, in a signal the United States is eager to keep its key allies such as Australia close.
Fairfax Media has been told Mr Turnbull's visit later this month will include lunch with President Donald Trump at the White House and will be badged as an "official" visit - the first at such level since John Howard met with George W. Bush in 2006.
The status of the 2018 trip stands in contrast to early 2017, when details of a fiery phone call between the pair were leaked to the media.
Mr Turnbull is also expected to meet with top US defence and intelligence officials, including Defence Secretary James Mattis and the Director of National Intelligence, Dan Coats.
Defence and security will be a central focus of the trip from February 21 to 24. One leading expert, Ashley Townshend from the United States Studies Centre at the University of Sydney, said Mr Turnbull would likely be seeking a clearer understanding of the implications of Washington's recent defence and national security strategy papers.
Together, these papers made it clear the US regards China as a strategic competitor rather than a country that will necessarily become a trustworthy and benign player within the existing set of international rules.
"One of the main things the PM will be seeking in Washington is a detailed understanding of the national defence strategy and its implications for Australia," Mr Townshend said.
"The key issue in the Australia-US alliance is what role Australia is willing and able to play as the US charts a

competitive strategy in the Indo-Pacific. This will require Australians in and out of government to take stock of our position between the US and China in a way that we haven't had to until now."
It is widely expected that the US will announce the appointment of hawkish US Pacific commander Admiral Harry Harris as the next ambassador to Canberra. His strong views on China, which include recent remarks that "they are the owner of the trust deficit" in Asia, mean his appointment is likely to provoke Beijing's condemnation.
On Admiral Harris' expected nomination to the ambassadorship, Mr Townshend said he was "very much the ambassador for these times" in that he specialised in Indo-Pacific security, but his known hawkishness could backfire if not properly managed.
"He's been at the forefront of US efforts to increase the region's response to Chinese assertiveness, particularly in the maritime domain," he said.
"Canberra will need to fight the narrative that any new or more robust measures it takes against China in maritime Asia are the product of Harris' influence, rather than that of independent Australian deliberations."
The US's most senior military figure, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Joseph Dunford, has been in Australia in recent days for talks with Australian Defence chief Mark Binskin. This included a visit to Darwin where the US has marines stationed along with high-end military hardware.
Fairfax Media understands Mr Turnbull will be given special treatment in Washington, including symbolic gestures to underscore the strength of the alliance. There was discussion about his addressing a joint session of the Congress but the idea was abandoned because the timing of the visit could not be made to coincide with a sitting of the legislature.
He will attend a cyber security meeting at the prestigious think tank, the Centre for Strategic and International studies.
He is expected also to discuss the economy and trade with Mr Trump. The President recently opened the door a crack to the US joining the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade pact despite previously withdrawing. This is expected to be a topic of conversation.
State premiers aside from those of South Australia and Tasmania - who are fighting election campaigns - will also visit the US to attend the annual meeting of the National Governors' Association. Mr Turnbull will also address the meeting.
Mr Turnbull's office declined to comment on the detail of the visit.
http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/malcolm-turnbull-s-white-house-visit-elevated-to-status-not-seen-since-john-howard-20180207-p4yzlh html

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8. Myanmar's Place At US Military Drills In Asia Draws Ire
(ASSOCIATED PRESS 07 FEB 18) ... Matthew Pennington

WASHINGTON — Lawmakers are demanding Myanmar's exclusion from U.S.-led military exercises in neighboring Thailand next week amid pressure for more American sanctions in response to atrocities against Rohingya Muslims.
Myanmar's planned participation in the Cobra Gold exercise, which starts Feb. 13, comes as its security forces are accused of killing hundreds if not thousands of civilians and burning down villages after Rohingya militant attacks last summer. More than 680,000 Rohingya — loathed in majority Buddhist Myanmar and denied citizenship — have fled to Bangladesh, joining hundreds of thousands more already sheltering there. They are unlikely to return any time soon.
That makes the country's involvement in Cobra Gold, America's largest, annual multi-nation drills in the Asia-Pacific, all the more controversial, although Myanmar has taken part before. Up to three officers from Myanmar are being invited to observe the humanitarian assistance and disaster relief portion of the drills, Pentagon spokesman Marine Lt. Col. Christopher Logan said. He said the identity and ranks of the officers participating is still under discussion.
"Simply put, militaries engaged in ethnic cleansing should not be honing their skills alongside U.S. troops," Sen. John McCain, the Republican chair of the Senate Armed Services Committee, told The Associated Press.
The criticism by Democrats and Republicans in Congress reflects the souring view of the Southeast Asian nation's transformation from decades of army rule to democracy as evidence of widespread abuses has mounted. Myanmar's siege-like denial it's done anything wrong has only furthered its estrangement from much of the world. Before last year's crackdown, McCain was advocating more U.S.-Myanmar military ties, not less. Now he's one of the sponsors of a new sanctions bill.
The Trump administration already has imposed sanctions on the chief of Myanmar's western military command and

says it's considering blacklisting others. It maintains restrictions on visas and assistance to Myanmar's military.
But the Senate's bipartisan bill, approved Wednesday by the Foreign Relations Committee, would turn the screw by pushing for more targeted sanctions and by reinforcing restrictions on military engagement with Myanmar, also known as Burma. A partner bill has been introduced in the House.
"We need to bridge the impunity gap that protects Burma's military," said Democratic Sen. Ed Markey of Massachusetts.
Secretary of State Rex Tillerson has described the attacks on Rohingya as "ethnic cleansing." U.N.-appointed investigator Yanghee Lee has gone further, saying it "bears the hallmarks of a genocide," which the world body defines as acts committed with intent to destroy a national, ethnic or religious group. Unlike ethnic cleansing, genocide is a crime under international law.
Rep. Ed Royce, the House Foreign Affairs Committee's Republican chairman, and Democrat Sen. Patrick Leahy of Vermont, architect of a law prohibiting U.S. assistance to foreign military units implicated in serious human rights abuses, also said Myanmar had no business taking part in the drills in Thailand. They include 29 nations. About 20 are observers.
"We should not be rewarding those who flagrantly violate international law with impunity," Leahy said.
The plight of the Rohingya has highlighted the Myanmar military's unchallenged authority over security operations despite ceding power to a civilian government after 2015 elections.
Myanmar staunchly denies that its security forces have targeted civilians in its "clearance operations" in Rakhine State on Myanmar's west coast. Even civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi, a Nobel peace laureate, has bristled at the international criticism. But Myanmar's denials have appeared increasingly tenuous as horrific accounts from refugees have accumulated.
The Associated Press last week documented through video and witness accounts at least five mass graves of Rohingya civilians. Witnesses reported the military used acid to erase the identity of victims. The government denied it, maintaining that only "terrorists" were killed and then "carefully buried."
Defense Secretary Jim Mattis added his voice to the U.S. criticism. Visiting Asia late last month, he said the Rohingya have suffered "a tragedy that's worse than anything" the media have been able to portray.
And yet the Pentagon sees benefits in sustaining lower-level ties with Myanmar's military. Although the U.S. primarily engages Myanmar's civilian leaders, it still hopes to shape the attitudes of military officers and help counter China's strategic influence, said Murray Hiebert, a Southeast Asia expert at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.
Katina Adams, a State Department spokeswoman for East Asia, said the Cobra Gold invite reflected a U.S. effort to "save lives" by improving regional coordination for disasters like Cyclone Nargis. The storm killed more than 100,000 Burmese in 2008.
Thailand extended the invite, Pentagon spokesman Logan said.
"That's a dodge," retorted John Sifton of Human Rights Watch, who wants Myanmar treated as a pariah again. "If the U.S. had strongly objected to their participation, they wouldn't have been invited. Everyone knows that."
Associated Press writer Richard Lardner contributed to this report.
https://www.militarytimes.com/flashpoints/2018/02/08/myanmars-place-at-us-military-drills-in-asia-draws-ire/

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MIDEAST - CENTRAL/SOUTH ASIA:
9. U.S. Strikes Pro-Assad Forces In Syria
Military Says American And Coalition Troops And U.S.-Backed Forces Came Under Attack In Country's East
(WALL STREET JOURNAL 07 FEB 18) ... Nancy A. Youssef

The U.S. military launched an airstrike and aimed artillery fire against forces fighting for the Syrian regime Wednesday, in response to what it called an "unprovoked attack" on U.S. and coalition personnel and the local forces they back.
It was the third known strike by the U.S. military on pro-regime forces to defend U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces or coalition personnel since the Syrian war started and the first east of the Euphrates River, showing the geographic span of the U.S. strikes against pro-regime forces.
The strike, around 3 p m. local time, occurred after U.S. personnel watched pro-regime forces as they approached an area known as a deconfliction zone in the Middle Euphrates River Valley, roughly 5 miles east of the eastern city of Deir Ezzour, a U.S. military official said.
The pro-regime forces, in vehicles, approached what the official called a "well-established" SDF outpost and then

fired artillery, the official said.
“Coalition service members in an advise, assist, and accompany capacity were co-located with SDF partners during the attack,” a U.S. Central Command statement said.
Dozens of coalition troops were at the site, the official said, including Americans. None were injured, the official said.
The official couldn’t say whether the U.S. military used a manned or unmanned aircraft, how many pro-regime forces were involved in the assault on the outpost or the number of SDF it protected with the strike.
Military officials said they were trying to ascertain who was on the ground. Media outlets reported that some of the pro-regime forces may have been contractors from Russia, which supports the Syrian regime.
The U.S. military has said American-backed forces at the strike site are engaged in the most intensive fighting against the Islamic State, in an area that it calls one of the last bastions for the terror group. Many extremist fighters that were based in the Syrian city of Raqqa, the onetime ISIS capital, have fled to that area, the U.S. military has said.
The U.S. military has said it has roughly 2,000 troops in Syria.
https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-strikes-pro-assad-forces-in-syria-1518051978

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10. Facing Trump's Demands, NATO To Consider Larger Iraq Training Mission
(REUTERS 07 FEB 18) ... Robin Emmott

BRUSSELS - The United States is renewing pressure on its European NATO allies to establish a long-term train-and-advise mission in Iraq, diplomats said, reviving a divisive issue for an alliance wary after more than a decade in Afghanistan.
U.S. Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis sent a letter to NATO headquarters in January calling for a formal NATO mission to Iraq with a semi-permanent or permanent command to train Iraqi forces, according to five senior NATO diplomats.
After a three-year war with Islamic State, Washington wants to ensure the militants do not re-emerge. While NATO does have trainers in Iraq already, they number less than 20. NATO defense ministers are expected to discuss the U.S. request in Brussels next week, with a possible decision at a summit in July.
In his letter, Mattis left many details open but suggested developing military academies and a military doctrine for the Iraqi defense ministry, diplomats said. Other ideas cited by diplomats include bomb disposal training, maintenance of Soviet-era vehicles and medical training.
“The United States is pushing hard for a NATO role in Iraq, not in a combat role, but for a long-term assignment,” said one senior NATO diplomat on condition of anonymity.
“This looks suspiciously like another Afghanistan,” the diplomat said, referring to the long-running conflict where NATO is funding and training Afghan forces. “Few allies want that.”
Pentagon spokesman Johnny Michael declined to discuss whether Mattis had sent a letter to NATO but said: “The administration continues to look for ways allies can do more to counter terrorist organizations.”
U.S. Navy Admiral James Foggo, commander of NATO’s Allied Joint Force Command, Naples, Italy, visited Baghdad on Thursday and told Reuters he was there to discuss more support for Iraq, including a “center of excellence” in explosives ordinance and language training.
“NATO can do more, and I think, if you ask me, we should, but that decision is really up to the political leadership in Brussels,” Foggo said.
NATO defense chiefs will provide ministers with a range of options for an Iraq mission, while NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg has discussed the issue with Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, who supports a mission, diplomats said.
The U.S. push is also part of President Donald Trump’s demand that the Western alliance go beyond its core task of defending its territory and help stem Islamic militancy.
Trump scolded allies last May at a summit in Brussels, warning of more attacks in Europe if NATO did not do more to stop militants. Even his predecessor Barack Obama sought a greater NATO role in the Middle East.
Then, U.S. officials had raised the possibility of NATO taking over the running of the U.S.-led coalition against Islamic State, as it did of the U.S.-led mission in Afghanistan in 2003.
The United States sees NATO’s long experience in Afghanistan as putting it in an ideal position to help build up Iraqi forces after recapturing territory taken by Islamic State. The United States has more than 5,000 troops in Iraq.
But European allies fear being pulled into another open-ended foreign assignment that is costly, unpopular at home and potentially dangerous.

In a gesture to Trump, the 29-nation alliance agreed last year to join the coalition. However, France and Germany insisted that the decision was mainly symbolic.
Iraq Election, Letter
The size of any potential NATO mission has not been debated, but the diplomats said they would need to be substantially more than the current team to mollify Trump. They could involve regional training centers outside Baghdad.
"This is an area where we could demonstrate relevance," a second diplomat said, noting that allies were well aware of Trump's campaign criticism in 2016 that NATO was "obsolete" because it did not do more to combat militants.
Creating a formal NATO mission would mean greater funding, so-called force generation to drum-up troops and a structure to keep them in the field for longer.
Difficult issues include whether military trainers would require protection and who would provide it.
Iraq would need to formally request the NATO mission, diplomats said. That would likely rely on Abadi winning re-election in May, as rival candidates backed by Iran are hostile to U.S. troops remaining in the country.
But the pressure is also greater because NATO has not yet been able to follow up on a similar train-and-advise request from Libya's U.N.-backed government in Tripoli, diplomats said, because the country is still controlled by rival factions.
Additional reporting by Idrees Ali in Washington and Ahmed Aboulenein in Baghdad; Editing by Matthew Mpoke Bigg and Toby Chopra
https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-nato-iraq-exclusive/exclusive-facing-trumps-demands-nato-to-consider-larger-iraq-training-mission-idUSKBN1FR1BB

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11. Afghanistan Now Main Effort For US Airpower
(MILITARY TIMES 07 FEB 18) ... Tara Copp

The U.S. has modified bombers and added aircraft to Afghanistan to return focus to its campaign against the Taliban, the top general for the air campaign there said.
"Afghanistan has become CENTCOM's main effort," said Air Force Maj. Gen. James B. Hecker, the top U.S. and coalition air commander in Afghanistan. As major combat operations against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria have ended, "this has allowed CENTCOM to shift more assets our way, which will significantly improve our ability to assist the Afghans."
In recent weeks CENTCOM has deployed an A-10C Thunderbolt II squadron to Kandahar, received additional MQ-9 Reapers, including armed variants, and added combat search-and-rescue assets to Afghanistan, Hecker said.
During a video conference with Pentagon reporters, DoD aired several video clips of airstrikes in the past several days that they said were part of the ramped-up effort. One clip showed a B-52 Stratofortress that had been modified with a rotary launcher to allow it to carry 24 precision guided munitions instead of its previous maximum load of 16. The modification allowed the bomber to strike three different Taliban sites, Hecker said.
The Afghan air force is similarly ramping up, Hecker said. It now has 12 A-29 Super Tucanos and will have 25 total; and three Afghan pilots are now trained to fire laser-guided munitions. The Afghan air force also has received the first eight of 159 total UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters. Their first Black Hawk pilots are in training and will be ready for combat operations by May, Hecker said.
The U.S. is also preparing to shift maintenance responsibilities onto the Afghans, Hecker said. In the past, shortcomings in Afghan capabilities to provide maintenance have resulted in U.S.-provided aircraft and equipment going to waste, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction reported.
https://www.navytimes.com/news/your-military/2018/02/07/afghanistan-now-main-effort-for-us-airpower/

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EUROPE:
12. EU, NATO Face Growing Threat Of Inadvertent Military Clash, Report Says
(REUTERS 07 FEB 18) ... Andrea Shalal

BERLIN - The erosion of arms control agreements, deployment of additional weapons and tensions over military exercises have increased the risk of an inadvertent armed clash between Europe and Russia, according to the annual Munich Security Report.

The report, entitled “To the Brink - and Back?”, cited growing pressure on nuclear disarmament treaties like the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) and ongoing security concerns in eastern and central Europe.
NATO insists it does not want a new arms race with Russia, but the current situation could “lead to a further deterioration of the security situation in Europe,” said the report, which will be formally released on Thursday before next week’s Munich Security Conference.
“In this dire state of affairs, miscalculations and misunderstandings could well lead to an inadvertent military clash,” it said.
About 500 senior government and military leaders from Europe, Africa, the United States, Russia and the Gulf will debate security challenges at the annual event in Munich from Feb. 16-18.
The conflict in Ukraine also posed a huge stumbling block to de-escalation of tensions between Russia and the West, the report said, noting that a U.S. decision to provide lethal arms to Ukraine would probably cement the current stalemate.
It said countries in eastern Europe were struggling in “an environment of contested security,” caught between the European Union and NATO on one side and Russia on the other, at a time when the EU’s Eastern Partnership policy had “lost its steam” and there was little chance of NATO taking in more members in the near future.
Some EU member states were increasingly skeptical about further EU integration, with Hungary and Poland in direct confrontation with Brussels. Germany - usually a force for EU integration - had been largely absent from the debate for domestic reasons.
The news was not all bad, however, the report said. Economic growth and improved public opinion offered “more than a glimmer of hope” for the EU on the economic front.
In addition, Military cooperation on NATO’s eastern flank had progressed, and the alliance was now overhauling its military command structure.
It also lauded a decision by 25 EU member states to launch the Permanent Structure Cooperation (PESCO) to advance defense cooperation, as well as a decision by Germany and France to jointly develop a new generation of fighter jets.
“The coming year will show whether attempts to compromise and ambitious reform proposals will translate into concrete actions and decisions to mend the cracks in the EU,” it said.
Reporting by Andrea Shalal, editing by Larry Kin
https://www.reuters.com/article/us-germany-security-europe/eu-nato-face-growing-threat-of-inadvertent-military-clash-report-says-idUSKBN1FR2UH

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AFRICA:
13. US-Led Cutlass Express Boosts Policing Of East Africa’s Waters
(STARS AND STRIPES 07 FEB 18) ... Scott Wyland

A U.S.-led exercise aimed at helping East African and Indian Ocean nations thwart piracy, illegal fishing and other seaborne crimes is set to end on Thursday.
The 16 participating countries worked together to spot, raid and search suspicious ships during simulations near Djibouti and Seychelles in the weeklong Cutlass Express. U.S. Africa Command and the Navy’s 6th Fleet hosted the exercise.
“Today we see cooperation between countries with diverse foreign policies unified around the common theme of maritime security,” J. Alexander Hamilton, U.S. deputy chief of mission in Djibouti, said in a statement.
Cutlass is one of three yearly exercises designed to strengthen cooperative policing in waters where criminal activity is a constant problem, especially near vital shipping routes. The other two exercises are Obangame Express in West Africa and Phoenix Express in the Mediterranean.
Better policing protects U.S. goods from going in and out of African waters but also curtails drug smuggling, human trafficking and other crimes that can spur corruption and fund extremists, said Christopher Jasparro, national security affairs professor at the Naval War College.
Working together with East African nations also helps secure military and commercial access to regional ports and seaways, blocking China and other adversaries from courting these countries, he said.
“This has become more important recently as China and other nations expand their naval operation and presence into the Indian Ocean,” Jasparro said.
Besides the United States, participating countries in Cutless Express were: Australia, Canada, Comoros, Denmark, Djibouti, France, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles, Somalia, the Netherlands, Tanzania and

Turkey.
This year, countries with operation centers all used the SeaVision 2.0 computer program, which gave them the same electronic picture of activities occurring on the ocean.
Jasparro said helping African countries reduce crime on their regional waters make the seaways safer for all.
"The ocean is a big place and (neither) the U.S. nor any other power can police it on its own," he said.
https://www.stripes.com/news/us-led-cutlass-express-boosts-policing-of-east-africa-s-waters-1.510515

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CONGRESS / BUDGET:
14. Two-Year Budget Deal Would Raise Caps, Give Pentagon $700B In 2018
(DEFENSE ONE 07 FEB 18) ... Caroline Houck And Marcus Weisgerberg

The deal comes with a new continuing resolution to give House and Senate lawmakers time to work out details.
Senators struck a budget deal Wednesday that would provide steep increases in U.S. defense spending over the next two years — up more than 15 percent in 2018 alone, the largest boost in more than a decade and a half.
The full agreement remains to be hammered out between the House and Senate, but Defense Secretary James Mattis pronounced himself "very happy with $700 [billion] for this year, and $716 [billion] for next."
Those numbers appear to be the rough totals of base and overseas contingency operations funding. Under the deal, lawmakers' aides told the New York Times, base funding would be about $80 billion higher than the $549 billion limit set by the 2011 Budget Control Act — that is, about $629 billion. They also said that in 2019, the base would top the caps by $85 billion. And the deal reportedly includes $140 billion in war funding, which is not subject to BCA caps, split between the two years.
White House Press Secretary Sarah Sanders also appeared to confirm that 2018 spending would be in the rough area of $700 billion. "Defense spending will match the request made by the Pentagon and will reflect what the president signed into law with the National Defense Authorization Act," Sanders told reporters Wednesday. The 2018 NDAA, which was signed about two months ago, authorizes spending of $693 billion.
Talking to reporters at the same White House press conference, Mattis hailed the deal as a must-pass agreement.
"For too long, we have asked our military to carry on stoically with a 'success at any cost' attitude," said the secretary, who was the only Cabinet-level official rolled out after news of the deal broke. "We need Congress to lift the defense spending caps and support a two-year budget agreement for our military. America can afford survival."
As did defense leaders on the Hill. Sen. John McCain and Rep. Mac Thornberry, the chairmen of the two Armed Services Committee released a joint statement backing the agreement.
"This budget agreement is indispensable for our national security," they said. "After nearly a decade of asking our troops to do more with less, we hope this agreement will allow the military to begin to rebuild and ensure that process can continue into next year."
The deal would increase defense spending nearly $100 billion in 2018, a more-than-15 percent increase over 2017 base-plus-OCO spending. It's the largest year-over-year increase to the Pentagon's budget since it jumped more than 25 percent in 2003, when hundreds of thousands of U.S. troops were deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan.
Even though the deal's broad strokes appear to have won the 60 Senate votes needed to lift the spending caps, many details about specific appropriations remain to be settled. A six-week continuing resolution, already passed by the House, would give appropriators time to do so.
A multi-year deal is something Mattis and other Pentagon officials have beseeched Congress for. After years of uncertainty and continuing resolutions, they say, a long-term funding agreement will give them the ability to rebuild readiness and invest in new weapons and platforms.
Budget uncertainty "hangs over you like a cloud," Gen. Robert Neller, the commandant of Marine Corps, said two weeks ago. "The amount of money is important, but it's probably not as important as having a budget — a budget that's going to go beyond the end of the fiscal year."
Along with the proposed defense hike, the budget deal adds $63 billion and $68 billion for non-defense discretionary spending over the next two years. Since, some House conservatives are already saying they won't vote for the Senate deal, it will likely require Democratic support to pass the lower chamber.
Assuming it passes, what does the Pentagon plan to do with the extra money? Name a priority from the National Defense Strategy or service leaders' talking points of the last few years, and it's probably in there.
"Driven by this strategy, next week you will see in our FY19 budget investments the following: space and cyber, nuclear deterrent forces, missile defense, advanced autonomous systems, artificial intelligence, and professional military education to provide our high-quality troops what they need to win," Mattis told the House Armed Services

Committee yesterday. “We will prioritize rebuilding readiness while modernizing our existing force.”
In December, Deputy Defense Secretary Pat Shanahan cautioned that Trump’s promised military buildup might not occur until the 2020 budget because the administration hadn’t yet finalized its guiding strategic documents.
“[Fiscal year] ‘19 is a step up,” he said. “But, when you think about threading the National Defense Strategy into the details of the POM [an internal DoD six-year spending plan], you’ll see it much more…in POM-20.”
Next week, the Pentagon is expected to send to Congress its spending request for 2019. Mattis recently confirmed the request would total $716 billion, which includes the Pentagon’s base and war budgets, as well as nuclear-weapons spending by the Energy Department. The Washington Post first reported the budget number.
http://www.defenseone.com/politics/2018/02/two-year-budget-deal-would-raise-caps-give-pentagon-700b-2018/145795/

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DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE:
15. Mattis On Two-Year Budget Deal: 'We Will Spend The Money Wisely'
(MILITARY.COM 07 FEB 18) ... Richard Sisk

The White House brought in Defense Secretary Jim Mattis Wednesday to press for a sweeping budget deal that would realize a long-sought Pentagon goal of lifting the caps on defense spending under the sequester process.
The proposal reportedly calls for about $700 billion in defense spending in fiscal 2018 and $716 billion in fiscal 2019 -- levels well above the sequestration caps mandated by the 2011 Budget Control Act.
Mattis pledged that "we will spend the money wisely" if a deal taking shape in the Senate is enacted that would guarantee defense spending above the sequester caps for two years and get around the stopgap funding of continuing resolutions that have mired the appropriations process for nearly a decade.
"I am optimistic" that the House and Senate will approve the deal, Mattis said in a rare appearance in the White House briefing room, though House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, D-California, warned that the proposal would face opposition unless immigration reform was included in the package.
The breakthrough proposal surfaced as the House and Senate faced another midnight Thursday deadline on a government shutdown, unless agreement was reached on either the budget deal or a continuing resolution that would put off agreement -- likely into next month.
White House Press Secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders said earlier of the proposed deal, "The bottom line is that, thanks to President Trump, we can now have the strongest military we have ever had.
"This deal achieves our top priority -- a much-needed increase in funding for our national defense," she added. "This deal also increases budget caps, ends the sequester, and provides certainty for the next two years."
The proposed deal also included raising the debt ceiling and increases for domestic spending, which could make the package problematic for House Republicans.
"It also ensures funding for our other critical priorities, including rebuilding America's crumbling infrastructure, tackling the opioids epidemic, and taking care of our great veterans," Huckabee Sanders said.
Republican fiscal hawks were already lining up to announce their opposition to a deal agreed to by Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Kentucky, and Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-New York, that they said would balloon the deficit.
"This budget deal is a betrayal of everything limited government conservatism stands for and I will be voting 'no,'" said Sen. Mike Lee, R-Utah.
McConnell said the agreement was "the product of extensive negotiations among Congressional leaders and the White House."
Anticipating opposition from deficit hawks, McConnell said in a Senate floor speech that "No one would suggest it's perfect, but we worked hard to find common ground and stay focused on serving the American people."
Huckabee Sanders said the proposal would give the military nearly $700 billion for Fiscal Year 2018. The $700 billion for defense was included in the National Defense Authorization Act passed last year by Congress and signed by Trump.
The money has been held up by a series of Continuing Resolutions that Congress passed because of its failure to reach agreement on the budget.
In addition to guaranteeing the $700 billion for fiscal 2018, the McConnell-Schumer proposal would give the military $85 billion more in fiscal 2019, which begins on Oct. 1. Non-defense spending would increase by $63 billion in this fiscal year and $68 billion next year, according to the New York Times.
Sen. John McCain, R-Arizona, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, and Rep. Mac Thornberry, R-

Texas, chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, had both argued for de-linking defense and non-defense spending, but they both endorsed the budget deal proposal coming out of the Senate.
In a joint statement, McCain and Thornberry said "This budget agreement finally does what we knew needed to be done from the beginning and funds our military at the level authorized in the National Defense Authorization Act" of nearly $700 billion.
"After nearly a decade of asking our troops to do more with less, we hope this agreement will allow the military to begin to rebuild and ensure that process can continue into next year," McCain and Thornberry said.
https://www.military.com/dodbuzz/2018/02/07/mattis-possible-two-year-budget-deal-i-am-optimistic.html

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CYBER:
16. 'Fancy Bear' Hackers Took Aim At US Defense Contractors
(ASSOCIATED PRESS 07 FEB 18) ... Jeff Donn, Desmond Butler and Raphael Ssatter

WASHINGTON — Russian cyberspies pursuing the secrets of military drones and other sensitive U.S. defense technology tricked key contract workers into exposing their email to theft, an Associated Press investigation has found.
What ultimately may have been stolen is uncertain, but the hackers clearly exploited a national vulnerability in cybersecurity: poorly protected email and barely any direct notification to victims.
The hackers known as Fancy Bear, who also intruded in the U.S. election, went after at least 87 people working on militarized drones, missiles, rockets, stealth fighter jets, cloud-computing platforms or other sensitive activities, the AP found.
Employees at both small companies and defense giants like Lockheed Martin Corp., Raytheon Co., Boeing Co., Airbus Group and General Atomics were targeted by the hackers. A handful of people in Fancy Bear's sights also worked for trade groups, contractors in U.S.-allied countries or on corporate boards.
"The programs that they appear to target and the people who work on those programs are some of the most forward-leaning, advanced technologies," said Charles Sowell, a former senior adviser to the U.S. Office of the Director of National Intelligence, who reviewed the list of names for the AP. "And if those programs are compromised in any way, then our competitive advantage and our defense is compromised."
"That's what's really scary," added Sowell, who was one of the hacking targets.
The AP identified the defense and security targets from about 19,000 lines of email phishing data created by hackers and collected by the U.S.-based cybersecurity company Secureworks, which calls the hackers Iron Twilight. The data is partial and extends only from March 2015 to May 2016. Of 87 scientists, engineers, managers and others, 31 agreed to be interviewed by the AP.
Most of the targets' work was classified. Yet as many as 40 percent of them clicked on the hackers' phishing links, the AP analysis indicates. That was the first step in potentially opening their personal email accounts or computer files to data theft by the digital spies.
James Poss, who ran a partnership doing drone research for the Federal Aviation Administration, was about to catch a taxi to the 2015 Paris Air Show when what appeared to be a Google security alert materialized in his inbox. Distracted, he moved his cursor to the blue prompt on his laptop.
"I clicked on it and instantly knew that I had been had," the retired Air Force major general said. Poss says he realized his mistake before entering his credentials, which would have exposed his email to the hackers.
Hackers predominantly targeted personal Gmail, with a few corporate accounts mixed in.
Personal accounts can convey snippets of classified information, whether through carelessness or expediency. They also can lead to other more valuable targets or carry embarrassing personal details that can be used for blackmail or to recruit spies.
Drone consultant Keven Gambold, a hacking target himself, said the espionage could help Russia catch up with the Americans. "This would allow them to leapfrog years of hard-won experience," he said.
He said his own company is so worried about hacking that "we've almost gone back in time to use stand-alone systems if we're processing client proprietary data — we're FedEx'ing hard drives around."
The AP has previously reported on Fancy Bear's attempts to break into the Gmail accounts of Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign, American national security officials, journalists, and Kremlin critics and adversaries around the world. U.S. intelligence agencies have concluded the hackers worked for the Kremlin and stole U.S. campaign email to tilt the 2016 election toward Donald Trump — all of which Russian leader Vladimir Putin has denied.
But the hackers clearly had broader aims. Fifteen of the targets identified by the AP worked on drones — the single

largest group of weapons specialists.
Countries like Russia are racing to make better drones as the remote-control aircraft have moved to the forefront of modern warfare. They can fire missiles, hunt down adversaries, or secretly monitor targets for days — all while keeping human pilots safely behind computer controls.
The U.S. Air Force now needs more pilots for drones than for any other single type of aircraft, a training official said last year. Drones will lead growth in the aerospace industry over the next decade, with military uses driving the boom, the Teal Group predicted in November. Production was expected to balloon from $4.2 billion to $10.3 billion.
So far, though, Russia has nothing that compares with the new-generation U.S. Reaper, which has been called "the most feared" U.S. drone. General Atomics' 5,000-pound mega-drone can fly more than 1,000 miles (1,600 kilometers) to deliver Hellfire missiles and smart bombs. It has seen action in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria.
The hackers went after General Atomics, targeting a drone sensor specialist. He did not respond to requests for comment.
They also made a run at the Gmail account of Michael Buet, an electronics engineer who has worked on ultra-durable batteries and high-altitude drones for SunCondor, a small South Carolina company owned by Star Technology and Research. Such machines could be a useful surveillance tool for a country like Russia, with its global military engagements and vast domestic border frontier.
"This bird is quite unique," said Buet. "It can fly at 62,000 feet (18,600 meters) and doesn't land for five years."
The Russians also appeared eager to catch up in space, once an arena for Cold War competition in the race for the moon. They seemed to be carefully eyeing the X-37B, an American unmanned space plane that looks like a miniature shuttle but is shrouded in secrecy.
In a reference to an X-37B flight in May 2015, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin invoked the vehicle as evidence that his country's space program was faltering. "The United States is pushing ahead," he warned Russian lawmakers.
Less than two weeks later, Fancy Bear tried to penetrate the Gmail account of a senior engineer on the X-37B project at Boeing.
Fancy Bear has also tried to hack into the emails of several members of the Arlington, Virginia-based Aerospace Industries Association, including its president, former Army Secretary Eric Fanning. It went after Lt. Gen. Mark Shackelford, who has served in the military and aerospace industry as a corporate board member. He has been involved with major weapons and space programs like SpaceX, the reusable orbital rocket company founded by billionaire tech entrepreneur Elon Musk.
Along another path, the hackers chased people who work on cloud-based services, the off-site computer networks that enable collaborators to easily access and juggle data.
In 2013, the CIA signed a $600 million deal with web giant Amazon to build a system to share secure data across the U.S. intelligence community. Other spy services followed, and the government cleared them last year to move classified data to the cloud at the "secret" level — a step below the nation's most sensitive information.
Fancy Bear's target list suggests the Russians have noticed these developments.
The hackers tried to get into the Gmail accounts of a cloud compliance officer at Palantir and a manager of cloud platform operations at SAP National Security Services, two companies that do extensive government work. Another target was at Mellanox Federal Systems, which helps the government with high-speed storage networks, data analysis and cloud computing. Its clients include the FBI and other intelligence agencies.
Yet of the 31 targets reached by the AP, just one got any warning from U.S. officials.
"They said we have a Fancy Bear issue we need to talk about," said security consultant Bill Davidson. He said an Air Force cybersecurity investigator inspected his computer shortly after the 2015 phishing attempt but found no sign that it succeeded. He believes he was contacted because his name was recognized at the Air Force Office of Special Investigations, where he used to work.
The FBI declined to give on-the-record details of its response to this Russian operation. Agency spokeswoman Jillian Stickels said the FBI does sometimes notify individual targets. "The FBI takes ... all potential threats to public and private sector systems very seriously," she said in an email.
However, three people familiar with the matter — including a current and a former government official — previously told the AP that the FBI knew the details of Fancy Bear's phishing campaign for more than a year. Pressed about notification in that case, a senior FBI official, who was not authorized to publicly discuss the hacking operation because of its sensitivity, said the bureau was overwhelmed by the sheer number of attempted hacks. "It's a matter of triaging to the best of our ability the volume of the targets who are out there," he said.
A Pentagon spokeswoman, Heather Babb, said she could release no details about any Defense Department response, citing "operational security reasons." But she said the department recognizes the evolving cyber threat and continues to update training and technology. "This extends to all of our workforce — military, civilian and contractor," she added.

The Defense Security Service, which protects classified U.S. technology and trains industry in computer security, focuses on safeguarding corporate computer networks. “We simply have no insight into or oversight of anyone’s personal email accounts or how they are protected or notified when something is amiss,” spokeswoman Cynthia McGovern said in an email.
Contacted by the AP, Lockheed Martin, Raytheon, Boeing, Airbus and General Atomics did not respond to requests for comment.
Jerome Pearson, a space system and drone developer, acknowledged that he has not focused on security training at his company, Star Technology, where Buet has consulted. “No, we really haven’t done that,” he said with a nervous laugh. “We may be a little bit remiss in that area.” He said they may do training for future contracts.
Cybersecurity experts say it’s no surprise that spies go after less secure personal email as an opening to more protected systems. “For a good operator, it’s like hammering a wedge,” said Richard Ford, chief scientist at the Forcepoint cybersecurity company. “Private email is the soft target.”
Some officials were particularly upset by the failure to notify employees of cloud computing companies that handle data for intelligence agencies. The cloud is a “huge target for foreign intelligence services in general — they love to get into that shared environment,” said Sowell, the former adviser to the Office of the Director of National Intelligence.
“At some point, wouldn’t someone who’s responsible for the defense contractor base be aware of this and try to reach out?” he asked.
Even successful hacks might not translate into new weapons for Russia, where the economy is weighed down by corruption and international sanctions.
However, experts say Russia, while still behind the U.S., has been making more advanced drones in recent years. Russian officials have recently been bragging as their increasingly sophisticated drones are spotted over war zones in Ukraine and Syria.
At a 2017 air show outside Moscow, plans were announced for a new generation of Russian combat drones. Rogozin, the deputy prime minister, boasted that the technological gap between Russia and the United States “has been sharply reduced and will be completely eliminated in the near future.”
Donn reported from Plymouth, Massachusetts; Butler, from Washington; Satter, from Paris.
https://www.defensenews.com/industry/2018/02/07/fancy-bear-hackers-took-aim-at-us-defense-contractors/

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17. Too Busy To Train? The Navy’s Cyber Dilemma
(BREAKING DEFENSE 07 FEB 18) ... Sydney J. Freedberg Jr.

SAN DIEGO: The Navy’s overworked IT teams need new “virtual training tools” and more time to train, especially for all-out cyber/electronic warfare against a high-end adversary, the commander of Naval Information Forces said here Tuesday.
As the new National Defense Strategy refocuses the entire military from counterinsurgency in Iraq and Afghanistan to great-power warfare against Russia or China, cyber warriors have one advantage: They’re already there. It’s Russian and Chinese hackers, not the Taliban or ISIS, who are probing Defense Department networks every day — what insiders call the Advanced Persistent Threat (APT). But just because you face an adversary every day, that doesn’t mean you’re trained for everything they could do the day they decide to go all-out. Think of submariners: They shadow Russian and Chinese subs all the time, but they aren’t doing torpedo runs. The same holds true in cyber/electronic warfare, where an enemy may save his most powerful software exploits or radio jamming for a major crisis.
Unfortunately, it’s all too easy to forget that distinction until it’s too late, said Vice Adm. Matthew Kohler, head of NAVIFOR, at the AFCEA-USNI WEST conference here. The situation of the Navy’s information technology workforce, he said, reminds him all too much of the Japan-based 7th Fleet before a string of accidents last year killed 17 sailors.
7th Fleet ships were almost constantly at sea to meet high demand for naval presence in tense waters of the West Pacific. Because they were operating all the time they earned a reputation for having the most experience in the Navy. In fact, in order to meet all the demand for missions, they were cutting corners on training and waiving safety certifications. The assumption was “since they’re always operating they don’t need to train as much,” he said. That was proven lethally wrong when the destroyers USS Fitzgerald and USS McCain, in two separate incidents two months apart, crashed into civilian ships because of failures in basic seamanship. (And if 7th Fleet ships couldn’t handle basic seamanship, argue retired captains and the former deputy secretary of defense, how could they handle a war with China?).

Navy IT professionals — sailors and civilians — are likewise operating all the time, Kohler said. It's likewise all too easy to assume they're getting all the practice they need, so formal training can go on the backburner. That would be a mistake, he said.

"They're part of the fight. These sailors man their systems 24-7," Kohler told me and a fellow reporter after his public talk. Besides IT sailors aboard US warships, he said, the Navy has some "80 operational commands ashore" that report to Kohler. These are our communications centers, our intel centers, our information operations centers," he said. "They have tremendous capability that stays connected to the fleet," provided constant, often real-time support to forward operations.

"How do we ensure that their training is maintained (and) carve some time out with these forces that are always operating?" asked Kohler, who is responsible for these forces' readiness. "We can't pull them off the line" and, say, devote a communications center to training exercises for weeks. Instead of the fixed cycle of reset, train, and deploy that warships follow, he said, training for cyber must be "adaptable" and work with the busy schedules of information warfare units.

One tool is special training teams that visit and test IT units' response to specific scenarios, so no one is "grading their own homework," Kohler said. This was a major problem in 7th Fleet, where the same commanders were responsible for both providing ships to conduct missions and certifying they were ready for those missions.

Another major need is for new simulations and other virtual training tools, Kohler said. On the most basic level, having virtual training easily accessible wherever you are could let IT sailors stay current on the latest technology, rather than get trained on one version of software at a schoolhouse and then later get assigned to a ship with an updated version. Space & Naval Systems Command (SPAWAR) is working on just such a system for the CANES network used aboard ships, Kohler said.

When it comes to high-end threats, simulations let troops train for extreme situations that would be prohibitively expensive — or dangerous — to replicate on real-life systems. No one is likely to risk crashing the Navy's communications networks for real as part of a training exercise, for example. And while simulations can never capture the raw feel of physical combat, that's not an issue for cyber sailors who fight their battles with a keyboard.

"We can't walk away from live training," Kohler emphasized, "(but) not all training has to be live."

https://breakingdefense.com/2018/02/too-busy-to-train-navys-cyber-dilemma/

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AVIATION:

18. Panel: Helos Can Do More To Share Data

(USNI NEWS 07 FEB 18) ... Ben Werner

SAN DIEGO, Calif. – The Navy's rotary wing community is at a crossroads where the promise of unmanned systems intersects with the limits of piloted aircraft.

A panel of helicopter pilots, speaking at the WEST 2018 conference, discussed the various pulls and pushes facing their community as the Navy continues finding ways to work unpiloted aircraft into air wings.

"It seems more likely to me that rather than see a tremendous amount of growth in terms of new missions, it's far more likely we'll see some transformational evolution in terms of existing missions," said panelist Cmdr. Chris Richards, a requirements officer for the MH-60R Seahawk program.

As processing capability gets faster, equipment gets lighter, and new mission areas open, Richards said the future of the community will be shaped by the vast amount of data collected and how it can be quickly distributed.

Speaking of the MH-60, Richards said this was probably the Navy's most widely distributed aviation asset right now, but they're not being used to their full potential. The aircraft are not networked together so valuable information they collect is not used as much as it could be. The problem for the Navy right now is ships at sea can't easily share this data with other ships or shore-based operations due to bandwidth restrictions.

"The capability of the helicopter in some ways surpasses our ability to process the data post-mission," Richards said.

But as technology continues to improve, Richards said he expects the Navy to better use this data within the next few years. When this happens, he suspects the MH-60s will be asked to collect data more often.

This is where unpiloted aircraft fit into the equation of fulfilling missions, said Cmdr. Aaron Taylor, requirements officer for the MH-60S Knighthawk program. The unpiloted Northrop Grumman MQ-8 Fire Scout, for example, can perform over-the-horizon targeting, threat detection, intelligence gathering and real-time battle damage.

"The sense that we're getting from the surface community is that they're looking for range and consistency that I don't think we will be able to achieve with the MH-60 or any subsequent generation," Taylor said.

While the MH-60 is still the Navy's workhorse, Taylor and Richards both said at some point it will need to be

replaced. The helicopter of the future, Taylor said, could be a chassis and a propulsion system which has different equipment put onboard depending on mission needs.
Richards said, “I don’t begin to know what the next vertical lift aircraft will look like, but I have a pretty good idea of some of the things it will have to do.”
https://news.usni.org/2018/02/07/data-collection-steering-the-future-of-rotary-wing-community

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PERSONNEL:
19. Navy Information Warfare Effort Set To Expand, Evolve
(USNI NEWS 07 FEB 18) ... Gidget Fuentes and Megan Eckstein

SAN DIEGO, Calif. -– As it moves into its fourth year, the Navy’s force of information warfare professionals continues to expand and evolve into a greater role supporting tactical warfighters, Vice Adm. Matthew Kohler said on Tuesday.
Kohler, who has commanded Naval Information Forces (NAVIFOR) since its establishment in 2014, highlighted three initiatives in the information warfare community to create Warfare Tactics Instructors, establish a training group to oversee unit-level IW training, and formalize a position of “IW commander afloat.”
Those initiatives follow on last year’s creation of the Naval Information Warfighting Development Center, established in March 2017. The goal of NIWDC “is to produce more talented as well as a more agile and a more ready Navy,” he said at the WEST 2018 event cohosted by the U.S. Naval Institute and AFCEA.
The Navy continues to build the center, which Kohler said is only 50-percent manned but has been involved in all major fleet exercise or certification events and remains at the core of information warfare “innovation” both at afloat and operational shore commands.
Kohler said the NIWDC commander, Capt. John Watkins, “has been instrumental in centralizing information warfare advanced training across the community, bringing together efforts to update and develop new information warfare tactics techniques and procedures and getting them out to the fleet and to serve as a catalyst for maturing the information warfare training continuum.” He added that he expects NIWDC will be led by a flag officer by year’s end.
The center has been partnering with other WDCs. In fact, Watkins said, NIWDC will be working with the Naval Surface and Mine Warfighting Development Center (SMWDC) and its Surface Warfare Advanced Tactical Training (SWATT) through the in-port phase and two underway at-sea training periods with amphibious assault ship USS Essex (LHD-2), based in San Diego.
With NIWDC stood up and operating, the next focus for NAVIFOR and NIWDC leadership is establishing an Information Warfare Tactics Instructor program. The first baseline WTI course already is underway, Kohler said.
“These will be the TOPGUN, patch-wearing experts equivalent,” Kohler said. Information warfare WTIs – pronounced “Witties” – will come from intelligence, cryptologic warfare, information warfare, meteorology and space.
“Our WTIs will be officers; they can also be enlisted, and I envision also they will be civilians,” he said. The “baseline” course, 18-1, kicked off last week with 20 candidates, all officers, “so we are off to the races.”
A second baseline course, 18-2 will start in July, and a third class might follow before the end of the year, Watkins said.
“I’m looking forward to our first enlisted weapons Tactics Instructor. I absolutely see the skills our enlisted sailors bring to qualify as WTIs,” Kohler said, telling USNI later that he’d “like to see” some enlisted personnel in the next class.
NAVIFOR also is moving close to establishing an Information Warfare Training Group, which will be focused on “unit basic- and intermediate-level training for information warfare,” Kohler said. The effort will parallel the Navy’s Afloat Training Group and will realign IW training focus under the new IWTG.
It will be established “in the next few weeks,” Kohler said, with the final decision awaiting signature at the Director of Navy Staff level. Capt. Chris Slattery, currently commander of Navy Information Operations Command Norfolk, already is tapped to be the first commander.
“This IWTG will fill a critical gap for us on very granular but highly needed skills for afloat units as well as our shore commands,” Kohler said.
The Information Warfare training function, which often has been managed by the NIOCs in Norfolk, Va., and San Diego, “just wasn’t aligned properly,” Kohler later told USNI.
“Once we have that structure, I can now work closely with the TYCOMs” and ensure focused IW training for sailors

on ships such as destroyers and others.
“We saw gaps, and we need to focus on that basic training,” he added.
NAVIFOR also is on the cusp of establishing the Information Warfare Commander Afloat as a formal composite warfare commander at the tactical level.
The move “will put the IW commander in a better position,” Kohler said, compared with previous ad hoc attempts by carrier strike groups to assign someone as the CWC that, “in some cases, weren’t filled by an IW professional.”
“Those days are long past,” Kohler added, noting IW professionals now are assigned to CSG staffs and most are “responsible for all of the information warfare employed in the strike group.” The second IW command screening board met last year, he said, providing screened officers to be trained and assigned into those positions.
Vice Adm. Jan Tighe, deputy chief of naval operations for information warfare and director of naval intelligence, said in a different panel at the conference that the carrier strike group information warfare commander will be a post-major command captain from various information warfare areas: intelligence, information personnel, cryptology or oceanography.
These CSG IW commanders will “bring together the information warfare part of the fight in the strike group. As additional capabilities come in, that fight will be harder and more complex.”
The CSG IW commanders will go through a 100-day training course to ensure the officers from multiple specialties are cross-trained and ready to help strike group leadership handle the full range of electromagnetic maneuver warfare and cyber warfare operations they may face.
https://news.usni.org/2018/02/07/navy-information-warfare-effort-set-expand-evolve

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20. Navy Mistakenly Tells 4,850 Sailors That Their Orders Are Canceled
(NAVY TIMES 07 FEB 18) ... Geoff Ziezulewicz

A software error caused nearly 5,000 sailors to mistakenly receive notices this week informing them that their orders had been cancelled.
The database error was first discovered Monday, according to a Navy Personnel Command release.
The error caused messages to be sent to 4,850 sailors, notifying them that their Letters of Intent, or LOI, had been canceled.
The system was restored by Tuesday and the Navy started notifying affected sailors on Wednesday.
“I want to make clear that no orders were actually cancelled,” Rear Adm. John Meier, director of personnel command’s Career Management Department, said in the release. “My team is reaching out to those Sailors who received the erroneous notifications to assure them that their orders remain on track.”
Human error was the culprit Saturday during data entry of a regularly scheduled manpower management system update, causing a corrupt file to be uploaded to the system, command spokeswoman Katie Suich said in an email.
The Navy introduced the LOI last summer as a way for sailors to begin scheduling moves and other needs before they formally received their permanent change of station, or PCS, orders.
Recurring budget uncertainties and funding shortfalls had led the Navy to cut orders with onerously short lead times. At the time the Navy announced the LOI program in June, sailors were receiving their orders just two months ahead of their move, on average.
The LOI procedure aims to give sailors the four-to-six-month lead time of regularly scheduled PCS orders.
“We are dedicated to providing our Sailors the best customer service possible and remain committed to ensuring system errors such as this do not occur in the future as we bring our new personnel management processes online as part of our overall personnel transformation initiatives,” Meier said.
https://www.navytimes.com/news/your-navy/2018/02/08/navy-mistakenly-tells-4850-sailors-that-their-orders-are-cancelled/

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21. Misbehavior By Top Officials And Officers Is On The Decline, Pentagon Leaders Say
(USA TODAY 07 FEB 18) ... Tom Vanden Brook

WASHINGTON -- Pentagon officials have substantiated 590 allegations of misconduct among generals, admirals and senior civilian officials from 2013 to 2017 with trends showing a steady decline in misbehavior, according to figures released Wednesday by the Defense Department Inspector General.

However, the overall number of complaints against senior officials has more than doubled since 2008. Investigators received 395 complaints in 2008 against generals, admirals and senior civilians. In 2017, there were 803 complaints. Personal misconduct and ethical violations accounted for most of the substantiated violations with 277 from 2013 to 2017, according to the data released during testimony of military officials appearing before the House Armed Services Committee's personnel subcommittee. However, Glenn Fine, the inspector general, told the panel that inappropriate relationships among senior officials with subordinates remain a cause for concern.

The number of substantiated allegations of misconduct peaked in 2013 at 167 cases and dropped to its lowest point in 2017 with 58. In fiscal year 2017 there were 963 generals and admirals in the ranks and another 1,364 senior civilian officials with an equivalent rank.

Rep. Mike Coffman, R-Colo., who chairs the personnel subcommittee, acknowledged that the vast majority of senior officers conduct themselves honorably. But he said misbehavior among senior leaders has an outsize effect on the military.

"The negative effects are even greater," Coffman said of cases of misconduct.

The military's struggles with sexual assault and harassment mirror those of society. Leaders in industry, Hollywood and the media have resigned after sexual harassment and assault scandals have erupted in recent months.

Rep. Jackie Speier, D-Calif., and the ranking member of the committee, blasted the military for failing to mete out discipline to top officers. She highlighted the cases of five officers, including retired Army major generals John Custer and David Haight, whose inappropriate relationships were detailed by USA TODAY.

"It is clear that the current system of deterrence is not working," Speier said.

Speier said generals and admirals often receive lighter punishment than enlisted troops for similar offenses, referred to in military circles as "different spanks for different ranks."

Army Lt. Gen. David Quantock, the Army Inspector General, disputed that senior officers receive leniency. Often, they are treated more harshly, losing large sums of money in pension when they are reduced in rank for misbehavior.

"We crush general officers," Quantock said.

https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2018/02/07/pentagon-officials-say-misbehavior-top-officials-and-officers-decline/314507002/

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22. Navy Admiral: New Measures In Place To Thwart Another ‘Fat Leonard’ Corruption Scandal (STARS AND STRIPES 07 FEB 18) ... Claudia Grisales

WASHINGTON — Adm. Bill Moran, vice chief of naval operations, said Wednesday that the Navy is addressing new policy reforms in the wake of the “Fat Leonard” fraud and corruption scandal.

Moran, who said he couldn’t comment directly on the case because it remains an ongoing investigation, said there are changes and policy efforts underway to thwart a repeat of one of the biggest scandals to hit the Navy.

Among the changes, Moran, who made the comments during a congressional hearing, said the service has installed new layers of oversight in its contracting process for overseas ports.

“Most of the issues involve contracting for services on overseas ports,” he told a House Armed Services Committee subpanel. “So we have taken a very strong turn on the process by which we do that. We put layers of oversight into how those contracts are issued and who is issuing them.”

The massive Justice Department case involves Malaysian defense contractor Leonard Glenn Francis, also known as “Fat Leonard,” who traded money, travel, gifts and prostitutes with officers in the 7th Fleet for classified material about U.S. ship and submarine schedules. More than two dozen have been criminally charged in the case, including a former Navy commander who pleaded guilty last week to a federal bribery charge.

The case is the biggest facing the Defense Criminal Investigative Service, which is the criminal investigative arm of the Department of Defense Office of Inspector General, said Glenn Fine, the DOD’s principal deputy inspector general. Francis’ contract firm, Glenn Defense Marine Asia, orchestrated a scheme to defraud the Navy of tens of millions of dollars by routinely overbilling for goods and services, Fine said.

The Navy has established a Consolidated Disposition Authority, or CDA, to determine whether hundreds of Navy officers should be charged under the Uniform Code of Military Justice or receive administrative action, Fine said. The CDA has already adjudicated more than 300 cases, he said.

“This is one of the largest and most complex public corruption criminal cases in DOD history,” Fine said. “And it involves disturbing and widespread ethical lapses throughout the Navy’s 7th Fleet.”

The comments on the case Wednesday came during a wide-ranging hearing before the House Armed Services subcommittee on military personnel that focused on a slew of senior officer misconduct problems.

Rep. Jackie Speier, D-Calif., the ranking Democrat on the subpanel, expressed concern that a whistleblower didn't report the scandal early on since it entailed such a large network.
"It is probably the most egregious case in the history certainly of the Navy if not the military in general," Speier said. "Because so many people were involved and so many people corrupted by this individual, I'm stunned there weren't any bystanders that spoke up."
In an exchange with Speier, Moran agreed there will be an examination once the case is closed to identify the holes in the chain of command that allowed the corruption plan to move forward.
"We're hopefully getting to the very end of this now," he said of the case. "When it is done and all the files are turned over to us, we will do that. There is a process in place to make sure we evaluate every single case that comes to the Navy, whether they are handled by the Department of Justice or not, they come to us for final resolution."
https://www.stripes.com/news/navy-admiral-new-measures-in-place-to-thwart-another-fat-leonard-corruption-scandal-1.510606

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LEGAL:
23. Hearings For Fitz And McCain COs Scheduled For Next Month
(NAVY TIMES 07 FEB 18) ... Geoff Ziezulewicz

The Navy will present its argument early next month for why the captains of two warships involved in fatal collisions last summer should be held liable for the deaths of 17 sailors who were crushed and drowned in the disasters.
That case against the skippers of the destroyers Fitzgerald and John S. McCain will be made at public hearings that will for the first time reveal the service's rationale behind the unprecedented charges.
It will also offer new insight into what happened in the disasters, which took place about two months apart in the West Pacific waters of 7th Fleet.
The collisions and sailor deaths have shaken the Navy's surface fleet to its core, prompting congressional scrutiny and questions about the community's training and readiness.
The Fitz's skipper at the time, Cmdr. Bryce Benson, and McCain's then-leader, Cmdr. Alfredo Sanchez, also face dereliction of duty and hazarding a vessel charges, according to the Navy.
Three other unidentified Fitz officers face the same trio of charges, and the Navy plans to pursue dereliction of duty charges against a McCain chief petty officer.
But before a court-martial can begin, the Navy will hold Article 32 hearings, where an officer will hear the prosecution's evidence and rule on whether the case is strong enough to go to trial.
The Article 32 hearings are scheduled for early March — Sanchez's on March 6 and Benson's on March 7 — at the Navy Yard in Washington, D.C.
The three unidentified officers will be the subject of a joint hearing on March 8. The Navy has not yet specified when proceedings against the McCain chief will commence, as the decision on the forum remains pending.
The Fitz was steaming off the coast of Japan on June 17 when it was struck on its starboard side by the hulking Philippine-flagged ACX Crystal merchant ship, flooding a section of the ship's living quarters below the surface and drowning seven sailors.
On Aug. 21, the McCain was entering busy sea traffic in the Straits of Malacca near Singapore when it collided with the Alnic MC tanker. Ten sailors were drowned and crushed in their racks.
Chief of Naval Operations Adm. John Richardson released a comprehensive review in November that laid out what went wrong in each incident.
Later, Navy Secretary Richard Spencer released a strategic review that pointed out cultural problems and the normalization of shortcuts over a span of decades in the surface community.
A review board led by Vice Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Bill Moran recently held the first meeting of a Readiness Reform and Oversight Council that is tasked with assessing the recommendations for change in both reviews and charting a future path.
Moran said last week that some of the recommendations are relatively quick fixes, while others that involve changing the Navy's culture could take years.
https://www.navytimes.com/news/your-navy/2018/02/07/hearings-for-fitz-and-mccain-cos-scheduled-for-next-month/

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COMMENTARY:
24. The Guns And Butter Budget
Democrats Exact A High Price For Agreeing To Boost The Military.
(WALL STREET JOURNAL 08 FEB 18) ... Editorial Board

Congress announced the outline of a two-year bipartisan budget deal on Wednesday, and no doubt Members want to avoid another pointless government shutdown. The deal has the virtue of starting to fix a weakening military. But the delusion is that the U.S. can continue to deny the trade-off between guns and butter, or defense and the entitlement state.

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First, the good news: The budget outline would lift defense spending by $80 billion in fiscal 2018 and $85 billion in 2019, honoring a central GOP campaign promise. This busts the "sequester caps" that forced useful restraint on domestic accounts for a few years but damaged the military and did nothing on entitlements.

Military leaders have all but invaded Capitol Hill to say that unreliable and lower funding has eroded readiness in every area from aircraft to munitions. Some of this is not a matter of fixing old equipment: Training delayed by shutdowns or other shortfalls leads to personnel who miss opportunities to build proficiency and skill, which Defense Secretary Jim Mattis explained to reporters at the White House Wednesday. Training accidents and deaths have increased in recent years well above the normal risks of service.

This renovation is sorely needed, though it comes at a high price. Democrats backed up the truck for funding on everything from community health centers to billions on child-care grants to $20 billion for infrastructure. The tally comes to $131 billion more in discretionary spending over the next two years. Democrats wanted dollar for dollar parity with defense spending. So in the silver-lining department the GOP at least managed to get more for the Pentagon, where cuts have been harsher.

On the long list of the Democratic haul: An additional four-year extension for the children's health insurance program, or CHIP, which was recently extended for six years. That means 10 more years of a separate health program for children, though many Democrats said that ObamaCare would provide affordable coverage that would make the CHIP program unnecessary. Now we get both for the long run.

Speaker Paul Ryan noted in a press-release pitch that the GOP steered some of the funding toward Republican priorities, including maintenance backlogs at veterans hospitals. Also $2 billion for research at the National Institutes of Health, and a better flu vaccine is looking like a good idea this month. Add to this about $90 billion in disaster relief. That money to rebuild Texas, Florida and other areas would have been whooped through Congress sooner or later, even if plenty of it is sure to be wasted.

The deal also includes $6 billion for the opioid crisis, though it's hardly clear that communities or the health-care system are prepared to absorb more cash. Congress allocated $1 billion for state grants in a 2016 law, and little is understood about what this funding has accomplished. For now this spending is a bipartisan hall pass for not having to think about tougher problems like why so many Americans are declining treatment and overdosing multiple times.

One good development is that Republicans managed to include the repeal of ObamaCare's Independent Advisory Payment Board, known as IPAB. The Obama central planners created this panel of bureaucrats to impose price controls on Medicare and it represents everything Americans hate about the Affordable Care Act: political rationing over individual choice.

IPAB was designed so its decisions would be nearly impossible for Congress to overrule. Repeal gives Republicans another health-care achievement to tout in the 2018 midterms, in addition to zeroing out the law's penalty for declining to buy insurance as part of tax reform. Oh, and the deal raises the debt limit into 2019, which avoids another useless melodrama.

The politics of passing this deal could nonetheless get ugly. The Freedom Caucus is already squawking, and they have a point. The id of their membership is less spending, whether on defense or food stamps makes little difference. The problem is that their opposition hands leverage to Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, who is trying to blow it up because it doesn't include an immigration deal over the young adult "Dreamers" brought to the U.S. illegally as children.

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The larger fiscal reality is the continuing failure to reform entitlements, which absorb an ever-rising share of GDP and federal budget and present the true threat to national defense. President Obama blocked reform, and then the GOP missed the best chance in a generation to fix Medicaid by replacing the Affordable Care Act. The politics of

reforming that entitlement is easy compared with Medicare and Social Security.
The annual budget deficit is cruising toward a cool $1 trillion, yet some Republicans are flirting with adding another new entitlement called paid family leave. The GOP's best hope is that tax reform can deliver at least 3% growth and delay the fiscal reckoning. Republicans have to handle the urgent task of rebuilding the military in a dangerous world, but one certainty: Entitlement reform must happen, or we'll be defending ourselves against Kim Jong Un's nuclear missiles with Medicare checks.
https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-guns-and-butter-budget-1518048574

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25. Stand Up To Erdogan's Brutality
The Turkish President Has The Insolence To Style His Ethnic-Cleansing Campaign 'Operation Olive Branch.'
(WALL STREET JOURNAL 08 FEB 18) ... Bernard-Henri Lévy

In Syria as in Iraq, the Kurds have been the West's most steadfast allies against Islamic State. Their victory over ISIS complete, Kurdish fighters were naive enough to think they would be allowed to live in peace on the land they had defended and on which their brothers and sisters are buried. As the price of that innocence they are being pursued, tortured and assassinated once again, this time in Afrin, a Syrian city close to the Turkish border.
The Kurds, who had been the seawall holding back the Islamist tide, are now being hunted by Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan —that bouncer at the gates of hell—who is turning his country into an instrument of blackmail to be wielded against the West. But in the face of Mr. Erdogan's cynicism, the international community is behaving like the three monkeys who see no evil, hear no evil, and speak no evil.
Western diplomats are blind to the martyrdom of Kurdish fighters they find alternately admirable and dispensable. They cover their ears so as not to hear the artillery of the new sultan, who has stretched sarcasm, insolence, and his middle finger so far as to style his ethnic cleansing "Operation Olive Branch. " Hands over their mouths, they accept Ankara's propaganda: Nothing happened in Afrin—nothing happened there.
Some—in Moscow—perceive in the shroud of shame that Turkish irregulars have spread over Syrian Kurdistan the price of a squalid strategic victory against Islamic State. Others—in Washington—act like suave lobbyists embracing a new plan to win the peace without having waged the war.
Elsewhere the same long and excruciating silence reigns, occasionally punctuated by meaningless words and cheap sentiments. It's "a complex region" plagued by "incomprehensible shifts in borders and alliances." Why should the West "risk a falling-out with Russia?" While pretending to study the tea leaves and refusing to raise their faces for fear of encountering their own cowardice, the talk-show strategists, cynics and shirkers say it makes no more sense to die today for Afrin than yesterday for Danzig.
It is the eternal tale—a classic, alas, among democracies—of the powerful betraying the weak. What is new is the Faustian bargain that the West has made with Mr. Erdogan. It's a bargain that, quite simply, is no longer sustainable. Turkey cannot continue to exist simultaneously within NATO and outside it.
Turkey has cozied up to the Atlantic alliance while brazenly liquidating NATO's best ally in the fight against ISIS. Mr. Erdogan has felt confident enough to make, through his ministers, outrageous statements about the massacre of the Kurds (not that any massacre occurred, mind you!) being nothing next to the colonization of Algeria, which deprives France of any right to lecture Turkey. Moreover, Ankara has deployed the most heinous jihadists, keeping them on stipends before surreptitiously sending them back into combat.
All the while Turkey poses as a civilized country that, like Switzerland, Norway or Bosnia, affirms its strategic partnership with the European Union. This sad farce has gone on too long. Unless the West comes to its senses, 2018 will live in infamy as the year that Turkey dropped an iron curtain over the Kurdish people.
What coming to our senses means today is breaking off—not freezing—negotiations on Turkey's EU accession, dissolving the EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee that continues to operate within the European Parliament, expelling Turkey from the Council of Europe (which has, incidentally, through the European Court of Human Rights, condemned the country 2,812 times since 1959), and reopening, in a serious way, the question of whether Turkey belongs in NATO.
Mr. Erdogan leaves the West no choice. If we fail to muster this basic degree of resolve, then the horror of the massacre of the Kurds will be added to the shame of watching their killer gloat atop the ruins of our honor.
Mr. Lévy is director of the documentary films "Peshmerga" and "The Battle of Mosul." Translated from French by Steven B. Kennedy.
https://www.wsj.com/articles/stand-up-to-erdogans-brutality-1518046582

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26. America Needs To Prepare For A Great Power War
Planning For Mobilization Is Cheap, But Failing To Do So Could Be Outrageously Expensive.
(NATIONAL INTEREST 07 FEB 18) ... Alan L. Gropman

Mobilization of American society for World War II was a major factor in the Allied victory. More importantly, it was the foremost reason for the extreme disparity between American military deaths and those of our enemies. Germany lost ten times more military killed in action than the United States, and Japan lost nine times as many. The raw figures are 292,000 Americans and 2,900,000 Germans—and Germany had a population only 60 percent of that of the United States. The ratio with Japan was similar. The United States also out produced both enemies, building double the combined Axis output. That industrial output (a generous part of which went to our allies) mattered immensely, as the figures above indicate.

In both theaters America also supplied its allies (especially Soviet Russia and China) fighting Germany and Japan with weapons and other necessities. The Soviet Union, for example, killed almost 80 percent of all the Germans who died in uniform during World War II. The Soviets were given 10,000 tanks to fight the Nazis, and the British received 20,000 tanks from America. Both allies received more than 10,000 airplanes from the United States. The Soviets also received millions of tons of armor plate to build tanks.

The Soviets built 54,000 tanks with that armor plate—the Germans fewer than 20,000—while the British built 20,000 tanks and the United States 88,000. America gave the Soviets more trucks for logistics in three years of Lend-Lease than the Germans produced in the six years of the war.

Hitler sunk United cargo ships to stop America's Lend-Lease efforts, but the America built Liberty ships faster than German submarines could sink them. Over the course of the war, the United States manufactured two cargo ships per day, ten Missouri-sized battleships, seventeen Midway-sized aircraft carriers, and more than 600 destroyers to escort and guard the Liberty ships (Germany built no aircraft carriers or battleships after we entered the war).

America formed a mobilization planning division in the War Department in 1924 when the world was at peace because it believed its losses during World War I would have been lower had the United States been better prepared to mobilize its industrial base. From 1924 until the early 1990s this country maintained a mobilization planning entity.

After the forty-three-day victory over Iraq in 1991, President George H. W. Bush doubted the necessity of retaining a mobilization planning organization. Bush's successor, Bill Clinton, followed his lead. The last whole-of-government mobilization exercise occurred in the early '90s. But the world has changed since then.

The government's mobilization planning organization continued from the 1950s through the 1970s. These deep roots in the national defense organization helped the country to mobilize to fight in Korea and Vietnam. It became a part of the Federal Emergency Planning Agency (FEMA) in 1979.

In 1990, when tensions were growing in the Middle East, the mobilization unit consisted of 360 people (the size of a military band). When Iraq occupied Kuwait in August 1990 the office ballooned with people from many essential government agencies—people who exercised together annually for decades.

This organization under FEMA's supervision, drove the mobilization effort for Desert Storm and Desert Shield. The result was victory with American losses in the single digits (fewer than fifty killed in action) versus the tens of thousands that Iraq lost. The agency in FEMA no longer exists!

There is one mobilization planner (who has no staff) in FEMA, now a part of the Department for Homeland Security (DHS). He is busy seeing the most important mobilization law and extant Executive Orders are kept up to date. These documents were written when the government took mobilization seriously. Since there have been no mobilization exercise for twenty-five years, people with mobilization responsibilities have not worked together for a quarter of a century.

We need to resurrect a mobilization planning office, today. Russia and China are expanding their military power, but Beijing poses the larger threat—it is now the world's second largest economy, which is growing at triple the rate of the United States. Both powers, especially Moscow, are openly threatening U.S. allies and partners.

I am not calling for a World War II mobilization-size organization, just for a post–Korean War mobilization planning entity. This office would be able to keep up with the defense industrial base, help arrange for materiel replacements, monitor raw material shortages, pay attention to demographics that could affect wartime capabilities, and exercise all of the offices in our vast government responsible for mobilization (at least) annually. Planning for mobilization is cheap, failing to do so could be outrageously expensive.

Dr. Alan Gropman is the Emeritus Professor of National Security Policy at National Defense University and an Adjunct Professor at George Mason. He accumulated four-thousand flying hours mostly in the C-130 and had two combat tours in Vietnam.

http://nationalinterest.org/feature/america-needs-prepare-great-power-war-24392?page=show

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27. The Discrimination Problem: Why Putting Low-Yield Nuclear Weapons On Submarines Is So Dangerous (WAR ON THE ROCKS 08 FEB 18) ... Vipin Narang

The United States has the most diverse and potent nuclear force on the planet, capable of deterring and, if necessary, defeating and destroying any military and any nation on earth. The Trump administration's recently released Nuclear Posture Review doesn't think that's enough. Going beyond the modernization program that upgrades and maintains the existing force, the document calls for a variety of capabilities and missions for American nuclear forces that have long been on Republicans' wish list. Specifically, the document places a renewed emphasis on expanding the role and size of the low-yield nuclear weapon force (with low yields not being all that low since they include 20 kiloton nuclear weapons, the same as those dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki).

The most notable low-yield capabilities on the wish list include submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) and sea-launched cruise missiles (SLCMs), which could be based on surface ships or submarines. The administration seeks to deploy low-yield nuclear weapons on both missiles to achieve the ultimate mission of the Nuclear Posture Review: to generate more flexible and tailored nuclear responses to a wide spectrum of nuclear and non-nuclear attacks against the United States and its allies. Proponents argue that incorporating more low-yield nuclear weapons into the force posture gives the United States the ability to respond to various forms of aggression with more calibrated responses on the so-called escalation ladder (and in theory, deter or defeat that aggression without escalation to the strategic nuclear level). In other words, the Trump administration hopes to generate options beyond "suicide or surrender."

Although the aim of the low-yield SLBM and SLCM is to close this perceived "deterrence gap," proponents of these capabilities have elided one key problem: how the adversary may perceive and react to their use. I call this the "discrimination problem." Right now, all the SLBMs in the American inventory carry multiple — up to eight! — thermonuclear warheads. Mixing these missiles with one or several of the proposed low-yield warheads creates a very real problem: How will the adversary know which of the two is coming its way? It cannot. If the adversary sees a single SLBM headed toward it — even if that missile turns out to only be carrying a low-yield warhead — it must react as if it is facing the full brunt of American strategic nuclear use. It would be catastrophic—potentially nation-ending—to hope otherwise and be wrong.

The new low-yield, or nonstrategic, nuclear weapons envisioned in the Nuclear Posture Review would not be the first in the American inventory. There are already four types of aircraft-delivered tactical nuclear weapons in the force posture (three variants of the B-61 gravity bomb and an air launched cruise missile).

So why does the review call for additional low-yield options? In a word: Russia. The administration's basic concern is that Russia may try to use a low-yield nuclear weapon on American or allied forces without the United States being able to successfully respond in kind. This forces America into the "suicide or surrender" dilemma of either not responding at all or escalating directly to the strategic thermonuclear level by retaliating against the adversary's cities (or against all its nuclear forces directly). The perceived gap in American capabilities is because U.S. aircraft-delivered B61s are vulnerable to Russian air defenses, limited by the range of the aircraft on which they are deployed, and cannot deliver a retaliatory blow as swiftly as ballistic missiles can. Therefore, the Nuclear Posture Review argues, the United States needs a new capability that can penetrate Russian defenses and deliver a low-yield nuclear weapon from anywhere within minutes. The basing mode that achieves this, without requiring a host nation, is at sea. In the near term this would involve modifying existing SLBMs to carry a low-yield variant of an existing warhead (for a variety of reasons, I assume the W76), while working in the long term to deploy a nuclear SLCM. The theory is that fielding this capability will deter Russia from its so-called "escalate to deescalate" nuclear strategy (insofar as that even exists), which is premised on the notion that using nuclear weapons early in a conflict, but in a limited way, will lead the United States to back down. If deterrence fails, low-yield nuclear options deliverable from American submarines provide a flexible and tailored response option to defeat Russian aggression.

Here's why it would be so dangerous to deploy the low-yield SLBM in particular. America presently fields one type of ballistic missile on its 14 nuclear weapons-designated Ohio-class submarines: the Trident II D5 missile. Each Trident missile can carry up to 8 independently targetable warheads, some combination of the W76 thermonuclear warhead (100 kilotons) or the W88 thermonuclear warhead (455 kilotons). Currently, if an adversary were to detect a launch of a Trident missile from an American ballistic missile submarine, there would be no uncertainty about what is coming its way: a strategic nuclear launch of at least about a megaton of yield, perhaps 3.6 megatons. This is, without question, a strategic nuclear launch by the United States aimed at destroying the adversary's high-value cities, or perhaps its strategic nuclear force itself (also known as a counterforce strike). By reserving the SLBM for

strategic nuclear use — and only strategic nuclear use — there is no ambiguity about what a Trident launch means for both the United States and the adversary: all-out nuclear war.

But if the United States starts deploying some Tridents with a single low-yield warhead and others with eight thermonuclear warheads, all on the same submarine, how will the adversary know what is coming its way? There is literally no way to tell which warhead yield is atop the missile — no early warning system can discriminate between the low-yield warhead and the strategic nuclear warheads at launch or in flight. Early warning systems can detect the point of launch and perhaps the type of missile fired. But not even the most sophisticated system can discriminate between a W76 or W88 warhead that is set to deliver hundreds of kilotons and a warhead that looks exactly the same but is set to deliver just 20 kilotons. The only thing an adversary sees is a Trident missile launch, which could now be anywhere from 20 kilotons of damage (designed to destroy a military base, for example) all the way up to 3.6 megatons (enough to destroy multiple cities and kill millions of civilians). Even if the early warning system could see that there was only a single warhead instead of eight, how confident are we that the adversary will believe their radars instead of fearing the worst?

What does this mean? If the adversary detects even a single missile launch, it has no choice but to react as if the United States has decided to escalate to the strategic nuclear level. Even if the other side may hope or believe that the incoming warhead might just be a low-yield weapon, it must assume the worst, because the risks of guessing wrong include losing millions of people or potentially its entire nuclear force. It is unrealistic to assume and hope — in the thick fog of a nuclear war —that the adversary will wait until the warhead has landed, do a detailed yield assessment (even if 20 kilotons hits, how are they to know it wasn't just because the second stage of a thermonuclear weapon fizzled?), and then choose not to respond because it was "only" 20 kilotons instead of 3.6 megatons.

Think about it this way: if the United States detected that Russia had launched a missile off a submarine, that carried either a low-yield nuclear weapon or 8 strategic nuclear weapons, how would it react? Would it assume it is the low-realyield option and wait for it to hit the continental United States before reacting and retaliating? Of course not. Yet this is what America is hoping its adversaries will do.

When it comes to waging a nuclear war, it is simply unrealistic to base a whole strategy on hoping that an adversary assumes the best-case scenario. The adversary's most logical move is to respond as though full-scale nuclear war has started — which means that even if they were wrong, the end result and the consequences are the same. The use of a low-yield SLBM, supposedly built for a "small" nuclear conflict and to calibrate escalation, has now leapt to strategic nuclear war because of how the adversary is forced to react.

Furthermore, mixing low- and high-yield nuclear weapons on Trident missiles, one of the key systems the United States would use in a counterforce mission targeting an adversary's nuclear forces, poses a particular problem if an adversary is worried about the survivability of its arsenal (even Russia may worry about this given America's persistent emphasis on counterforce and damage limitation capabilities). Such an adversary may experience "use-them-or-lose them" pressures at the sight of a single Trident launch (doubts about their early warning system could lead them to believe many more are headed their way). An adversary which fears that the United States is about to wipe out its arsenal may have no choice but to launch everything it has before even knowing what is actually incoming. This is certainly the case if the adversary is North Korea, it might be the case for China, and could plausibly be the case for Russia.

The argument that an adversary might be nonchalant about "only one or two" Trident missiles headed its way makes delusional assumptions about how a state facing the most potent nuclear force on the planet might react. For many nations, "one or two" Trident missiles with eight to 16 strategic nuclear warheads would be life-ending. They cannot afford to be complacent or assume best-case scenarios. This is why it is so important to load only strategic nuclear warheads on SLBMs, so there is no ambiguity about American intentions and about what is being launched at the adversary. The virtue of keeping SLBMs (and intercontinental ballistic missiles) single-assigned strictly with strategic nuclear warheads is that these missiles are the signal that the United States has escalated to the strategic nuclear level.

The discrimination problem outlined here applies very specifically to mixing low-yield and strategic nuclear weapons on the same missile and same system, deployed on the same platform (in this case submarines). The same concern would apply equally to a proposal to load low-yield nuclear weapons onto intercontinental ballistic missiles. The low-yield cruise missile may be a less bad option in this regard, since cruise missiles have different flight profiles and only carry a single nuclear warhead. An adversary is less likely to mistake a single cruise missile launch for full strategic retaliation. However, proponents still need to explain why it is necessary — other than to try to develop a bargaining chip to force Russia back into compliance with the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty. It's unclear what deterrence gap the new SLCM capability will fill after the long-range standoff cruise missile with a low-yield option is developed to replace the current air-launched cruise missiles.

In trying to deter more — and lower — forms of aggression with nuclear weapons and broaden the deterrence

spectrum, the Nuclear Posture Review generates real risks of spirals of nuclear escalation in a crisis or war. It tries to reintroduce the idea of a calibrated “escalation ladder” — the notion that in a conflict the United States and the adversary can have various “rungs” of very precise and controlled nuclear exchanges of varying intensities without unintentional escalation. The heroic assumptions made by the idea of such a “ladder” are too numerous to address here. But a primary one is that it erroneously assumes the United States can alone control the climbing of that ladder without the enemy getting a vote. The concept fails to consider how the very existence of ambiguous nuclear systems — is it low-yield or thermonuclear? — can blow up the ladder. While the idea of a low-yield SLBM may be attractive in a sterile game theory seminar, in a real conflict with real decision-makers, it is a recipe for uncontrollable nuclear escalation.

Vipin Narang is associate professor of political science and a member of the Security Studies Program at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

https://warontherocks.com/2018/02/discrimination-problem-putting-low-yield-nuclear-weapons-submarines-dangerous/

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28. Instead Of Parading Tanks, Let's Honor Our Post-9/11 Veterans Instead
(MILITARY TIMES 07 FEB 18) ... Editorial Board

President Donald Trump wants a grand military parade to showcase America’s military might.

“The president wants to do something that highlights the service and sacrifice of the military and have a unifying moment for the country,” an administration official told The Washington Post.

So far, so good.

But reports that the president wants to see tanks and other military hardware rolling down Pennsylvania Avenue, emulating a French Bastille Day parade he saw last summer, are somewhat disturbing, if true.

This form of saber-rattling would do nothing to unify the country at this moment in history. And the cost of such a display would provide bad optics at a time when the military is begging the American people for more money.

More, with at least half the country worried about the authoritarian bent of this administration, the idea of President Trump atop a reviewing stand, a la North Korea’s Kim Jong Un, as instruments of America’s might roll by would likely engender as much protest as applause.

But here’s an idea the entire country could rally behind: How about a grand parade that honors combat veterans who have served in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria since Sept. 11, 2001?

That would put the focus of such a parade exactly where it belongs: On the men and women who have rushed to the defense of our country. It could also include the so-called Dreamers — the undocumented immigrants who arrived in the U.S. as children — who have served on the battlefield for their adopted nation.

There are some who see this grand parade as an opportunity to show adversaries, by way of tanks and planes and missiles, that America remains strong, even if readiness and military shortfalls dominate news cycles at home.

Our adversaries need no such reminders.

Instead, let’s honor our veterans, the real strength behind American principles and American resolve.

https://www.navytimes.com/opinion/editorials/2018/02/07/editorial-instead-of-parading-tanks-lets-honor-our-post-911-veterans-instead/

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From: CTR CHINFO, OI-3
Subject: CHINFO NEWS CLIPS 09 FEB 18
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On This Day In The Navy:
1942 - While undergoing conversion at New York City pier 88, USS Lafayette (AP 53) catches fire resulting in the total loss of the ship.

Executive Summary:
National news headlines today are dominated with continued coverage of Rob Porter resigning from his White House following allegations of past domestic abuse, and preparations for the Winter Olympics' opening ceremony in South Korea today. The San Diego Union-Tribune reports that Chief of Naval Operations John M. Richardson, Marine Corps commandant Gen. Robert Neller and Coast Guard commandant Adm. Paul Zukunft met Thursday in a rare discussion chaired by retired Navy Adm. James Stavridis. During the discussion, CNO Richardson called on the Pentagon to reform the procurement process to keep pace with the Chinese Navy which is building increasingly sophisticated warships, aircraft and missiles. Additionally, speaking at WEST 2018, CNO Richardson stated that the FY 2019 budget, keeping in line with the six dimensions that he had previously described, aims to address capacity, capability, networks, sailor training, agile operations and readiness reports USNI News. According to the Hill, the House approved a sweeping budget deal early Friday morning that would fund the government through March 23, sending legislation to President Trump that would end a brief shutdown of the government that began at midnight.

TOP STORIES:
1. Military's Top Leaders Gather For Rare San Diego Meeting
(SAN DIEGO UNION-TRIBUNE 08 FEB 18) ... Carl Prine
A generation of sailors and Marines who waged counterinsurgency wars overseas must adapt quickly to a changed world, where rising powers such as Russia and China threaten to usurp America’s once impervious military.

2. CNO: 2019 Budget Aims For ‘Whole’ Fleet, Faster Construction Of 355-Ship Navy
(USNI NEWS 08 FEB 18) ... Megan Eckstein
SAN DIEGO, Calif. — The upcoming Fiscal Year 2019 budget request will support Navy efforts to begin building a 355-ship fleet while also balancing capability upgrades and readiness, the chief of naval operations said on Thursday.

3. House Passes Deal To End Shutdown
(THE HILL 09 FEB 18) ... Melanie Zanona and Cristina Marcos
The House approved a sweeping budget deal early Friday morning that would fund the government through March 23, sending legislation to President Trump that would end a brief shutdown of the government that began at midnight.

ASIA – PACIFIC:
4. 'We're Ready, If Our Nation Calls.' A Top U.S. Navy Commander In The Pacific On China, North Korea And More
(TIME.COM 08 FEB 18) ... Feliz Solomon / U.S. Fleet Activities Yokosuka, Japan
Vice Admiral Phillip G. Sawyer has come a long way from his hometown of Phoenix, Ariz., to command America’s largest forward-deployed maritime force, the U.S. Navy’s 7th Fleet based in Japan.

5. China Sends Advanced Fighter Jets To South China Sea For First Time
(MILITARY TIMES 08 FEB 18) ... Victoria Leoni
China has deployed advanced fighter jets to the South China Sea for the first time on public record, Japan Times reported.

6. U.S., China Reaffirm Commitment To Pressure North Korea: State Department
(REUTERS 08 FEB 18) ... David Brunnstrom, Arshad Mohammed, Mohammad Zargham and Katanga Johnson
WASHINGTON - U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and China’s top diplomat Yang Jiechi reaffirmed their

countries' commitment to exert pressure in Pyongyang over its nuclear weapons on Thursday, the U.S. State Department said.

7. Pence Blasts N. Korea, Lauds US Military Strength During Troop Talk At Yokota
(STARS AND STRIPES 08 FEB 18) ... Seth Robson
YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — Vice President Mike Pence slammed North Korea for human-rights abuses and touted American military strength during a speech to troops Thursday at the home of U.S. Forces Japan and the 5th Air Force in western Tokyo.

MIDEAST - CENTRAL/SOUTH ASIA:
8. U.S.-Backed Coalition in Syria Strikes Pro-Assad Forces
(NEW YORK TIMES 08 FEB 18) ... Anne Barnard And Richard Pérez-Peña
BEIRUT, Lebanon — The American-backed coalition in Syria said Thursday that it had repelled an attack by forces supporting the Assad government, carrying out deadly strikes in a rare confrontation between competing factions that have both fought the Islamic State.

9. U.S. Troops In Syria May Be At Risk Of 'Mission Creep' After Deadly Battle
(WASHINGTON POST 09 FEB 18) ... Liz Sly
BEIRUT — Syria and Russia condemned the United States' military presence in Syria as "illegal" Thursday after an overnight confrontation in which U.S. warplanes bombed pro-Syrian-government forces as they approached an American-supported base.

10. Mattis Calls Attack In Syria On U.S.-Backed Forces 'Perplexing'
(REUTERS 08 FEB 18) ... Phil Stewart and Idrees Ali
WASHINGTON - U.S. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis on Thursday called a thwarted attack on U.S. and U.S.-backed forces in Syria overnight "perplexing," saying he had no idea what motivated pro-Syrian government forces to attempt the coordinated strike.

11. U.S. Engaged Iran On Prisoner Swaps
Iranians So Far Have Spurned Trump Administration's Overture
(WALL STREET JOURNAL 09 FEB 18) ... Farnaz Fassihi and Felicia Schwartz
The Trump administration secretly reached out to Iran in December to propose creating a direct channel to negotiate the release of prisoners held by each side, U.S. officials and people briefed about the discussions said, marking the first U.S. diplomatic overture to Iran on the issue under President Donald Trump.

12. U.S. Forces In Afghanistan Attack Anti-China Militants
(REUTERS 08 FEB 18) ... Robert Birsel
KABUL - U.S. forces in Afghanistan have attacked networks of anti-China militants in action likely to please Beijing which had called for Western cooperation in its fight against the group it says wants to split off its Xinjiang region.

13. A New China Military Base In Pakistan?
Reports About Beijing Trying To Acquire Another Facility There Could Have Significant Consequences For The Region.
(THE DIPLOMAT 08 FEB 18) ... Rajeswari Pillai Rajagopalan
A recent report about China trying to acquire a military base in Pakistan has created new concerns about Beijing's long-term strategic plans in the Indian Ocean. The new base is supposed to go up in Jiwani, about 80 kilometers to the west of the better-known Gwadar port.

EUROPE:
14. Fearing Russia, United States, Germany Offer To Host New NATO Commands: Officials
(REUTERS 08 FEB 18) ... Robin Emmott, Andrea Shalal, Phil Stewart
BRUSSELS/BERLIN/WASHINGTON - The United States and Germany have offered to host two proposed new NATO commands aimed at deterring Russia, diplomats and officials said, in a show of support for the alliance's military build-up that has echoes of the Cold War.

AFRICA:

15. In Somalia—Or Afghanistan—Can Insurgent Defections Change A War's Course?
An Al-Shabaab Defection Raised Hopes In Mogadishu, But Violence, And Lessons From Another Conflict, Suggest Little Has Changed
(WALL STREET JOURNAL 08 FEB 18) ... Yaroslav Trofimov
MOGADISHU, Somalia—When a former deputy head of al-Shabaab turned up last August in a Mogadishu hotel to denounce the extremist armed group, government officials were exuberant.

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE:
16. Mattis: Dreamers In The Military Are Protected From Deportation
(STARS AND STRIPES 08 FEB 18) ... Corey Dickstein
WASHINGTON — Defense Secretary Jim Mattis said Thursday that the roughly 900 undocumented immigrants serving in the U.S. military need not fret over their immigration status even if the program protecting them from deportation expires next month.

17. Pentagon Unveils Policy To Combat Misconduct, Harassment In The Ranks
(MILITARY.COM 08 FEB 18) ... Oriana Pawlyk
The Pentagon has put forth a new policy that aims to deter misconduct and harassment among servicemembers, reaffirming it does not tolerate any kind of harassment by any service member, either in person or online.

18. GAO Says Nuclear Warhead Office Still Can't Afford Planned Modernization
(DEFENSE NEWS 08 FEB 18) ... Daniel Cebul
Washington — The National Nuclear Security Agency continues to underestimate how much funding it needs to update and maintain the U.S. nuclear arsenal, according to an updated government watchdog report.

CYBER:
19. Navy's New Weapon Of Choice? Information
(NAVY TIMES 08 FEB 18) ... Amber Corrin
In 2017, the Navy saw two deadly ship collisions at sea. First, the destroyer Fitzgerald collided with a container ship near Japan in June, and then again two months later the destroyer John S. McCain collided with an oil tanker near Singapore.

AVIATION:
20. Report: Trump To Request 24 Boeing Super Hornets In 2019 Budget
(BLOOMBERG NEWS 08 FEB 18) ... Tony Capaccio
President Donald Trump's fiscal 2019 budget will request 24 Super Hornet jets built by Boeing, reversing an Obama administration decision to stop buying the fighter after this year, according to two people familiar with the decision.

SURFACE FLEET:
21. After Providing Hurricane Relief, USS Oak Hill To Leave Virginia Beach For Middle East
(VIRGINIAN-PILOT 08 FEB 18) ... Brock Vergakis
After extending a helping hand in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, the USS Oak Hill is preparing to ship out to a more volatile part of the world: the Middle East.

22. Engineering Issues Delay USS Sterett's Deployment To Western Pacific
(STARS AND STRIPES 09 FEB 18) ... Tyler Hlavac
YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — A San Diego-based destroyer is back on track toward the Western Pacific after engineering issues forced it to delay its deployment.

SHIPBUILDING:
23. Navy Releases RFP for Multi-Year Flight III Arleigh Burke Destroyer Buy
(USNI NEWS 08 FEB 18) ... Ben Werner
SAN DIEGO, Calif. – The Navy released the final request for proposal today for a multi-year contract to build the Flight III Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer said the service's chief weapons buyer on Thursday.

COMMENTARY:
24. The Military Is Not A Political Prop
(NEW YORK TIMES 08 FEB 18) ... Phillip Carter

The power of the president, as commander in chief of the armed forces, has evolved over more than two centuries, constrained by congressional action, the emergence of a standing military establishment after World War II and a more complex world.

25. Testing Trump's Chemical Red Line
Assad Uses Gas Against Civilians, And The U.S. Begs Moscow For Help.
(WALL STREET JOURNAL 09 FEB 18) ... Editorial Board
President Trump sent a powerful early message of U.S. resolve last year when he bombed a Syrian air base after the Assad regime used sarin gas against civilians. He may need to send another because Syria has been testing his red line with multiple uses of chlorine gas in recent weeks.

26. How To Untangle The Mess In Syria
(WASHINGTON POST 09 FEB 18) ... David Ignatius
MANBIJ, Syria – Wednesday was a strange and scary day in Syria, even by Middle East standards:

TOP STORIES:
1. Military's Top Leaders Gather For Rare San Diego Meeting
(SAN DIEGO UNION-TRIBUNE 08 FEB 18) ... Carl Prine

A generation of sailors and Marines who waged counterinsurgency wars overseas must adapt quickly to a changed world, where rising powers such as Russia and China threaten to usurp America's once impervious military.
That was the urgent message delivered Thursday afternoon at San Diego's convention center during a rare public gathering of three service leaders: Chief of Naval Operations John M. Richardson, Marine Corps commandant Gen. Robert Neller and Coast Guard commandant Adm. Paul Zukunft.
In an hourlong discussion moderated by retired Navy Adm. James G. Stavridis before a packed audience, they described the vital need for a steady funding stream to retrain and rearm services straining from nearly 17 years of constant counter-terror operations.
Hoping to avert another government shutdown, lawmakers on Capitol Hill struggled Thursday to pass a stop-gap spending measure along with a long-term budget that sends $165 billion to the Pentagon over the next two years and increased the federal debt more than $1 trillion.
Over the past decade, Congress paid the military's bills with a series of continuing resolutions, with fewer funds for the services due to spending caps enacted in 2011's so-called "sequestration" legislation.
"I'm hopeful that it'll pass and it's a lot of money," Neller said. "But we're going to get that money like we did last year, with about half the fiscal year left to spend it. That's not any way to run a business."
Although both he and Zukunft fretted about the national debt and its economic effects in coming years, Neller said that the influx of military spending was important to preserve the nation's survival.
"The adversary out there is making big bets, big investments, in their capacity. And their capabilities have grown," Neller said. "Whether they want to take us on or not, we have to be able to go and display the capability to deter them."
Richardson said his top priority was revamping the Navy's ballistic submarine fleet. The underwater Navy carries 70 percent of America's nuclear warheads.
"Without that strategic deterrent, we're really in a different world," said Richardson, a career submariner and the former director of the Navy's nuclear propulsion program. "Everything becomes impossibly harder. That's got to succeed."
Neller said the Navy needs more attack subs, too. The fleet is supposed to deploy 66 of them but today there are only 50 left, a number expected to fall to 43 before shipyards begin churning out two Virginia-class replacements annually in the next decade.
The silent hunters of the deep sail ahead of carrier and amphibious strike groups, sniffing out enemy subs and spying on a foe's battle fleets.
"We need more attack submarines, OK? I need to get where I'm going," Neller said.
"When was the last time we had to fight to get to the fight? We just went. We didn't have to fight to get there," he continued, pointing to the guerrilla wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.
"We're going to have to fight to get to the fight."

Once in the thick of battle, Neller will need newer aircraft, swapping out his aging fleet with fifth-generation jets, tilt-rotor vehicles and high-tech helicopters.
He also wants more reliable and resilient command and control systems. That's the technology that helps Marines know where their units are in relation to the enemy, clearing the fog of war. The challenge is keeping those networks up while the foe tries to jam, degrade or destroy them.
"We're trying to create a modern Marine Corps," Neller said. "The stuff we have we take good care of, but there are Marines over here wrenching on vehicles older than they are."
Watching an increasingly wealthy Beijing build increasingly sophisticated warships, aircraft and missiles, Richardson said the Pentagon needs to reform the procurement process so that the Navy can more quickly and cheaply deploy vessels.
To contain costs, those ships need smaller crews but can make up the difference with better automated systems, sensors and weapons packing a more powerful punch from longer distances, he added.
They'll be helped by underwater and aerial drones, plus new directed energy weapons like lasers, he said, but Congress also has mandated a 355-ship Navy. Today he can deploy 280. The problem is America's industrial base. Shipbuilding capacity today is a third of what the Navy could get in 1955.
"There are 14 shipyards that build ships that shuttered or got out of the defense business," Richardson said. "So you can see these two conflicting trends — the need to grow the number of ships and yet we just don't have the industrial capacity to do it."
Although Zukunft is finally getting the first large icebreaker built for the Coast Guard in four decades, his aging fleet of patrol boats on inland waterways struggles to keep $4.6 trillion in American commerce flowing.
Modern replacements will cost more than $15 million each but the commandant needs them to cost less to maintain and fuel, saving money in the long run.
"Some are 73 years old now," he said. "It's not a huge ask but it's a huge return on investment."
http://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/military/sd-me-commandants-cno-20180207-story.html

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2. CNO: 2019 Budget Aims For 'Whole' Fleet, Faster Construction Of 355-Ship Navy
(USNI NEWS 08 FEB 18) ... Megan Eckstein

SAN DIEGO, Calif. — The upcoming Fiscal Year 2019 budget request will support Navy efforts to begin building a 355-ship fleet while also balancing capability upgrades and readiness, the chief of naval operations said on Thursday.
CNO Adm. John Richardson recently spoke of a six-pronged approach to creating naval power and what he has dubbed "the navy the nation needs."
Asked by USNI News about how the FY 2019 budget request, set for release to Congress and the public on Monday, would reflect a balance of those six needs – capacity, capability, networks, sailor training, agile operations and readiness – Richardson said, "when that budget is delivered, one of the things that you can anticipate is that it will be informed by the strategic direction we are talking about, it will be consistent with the (six) dimensions of the navy the nation needs."
Richardson said in a town hall discussion at the WEST 2018 conference, co-hosted by the U.S. Naval Institute and AFCEA, that the FY 2018 budget – which has still yet to be passed into law – "represents a pretty whole budget, particularly when it comes to funding those accounts that sometimes are not as visible but very important in terms of maintaining readiness. And so it funds readiness to really the maximum that is either required or executable. 2019 continues on that," he said.
The 2019 budget will also be accompanied by a 30-year shipbuilding plan, unlike the 2018 budget. The Navy has been pushing for a 355-ship fleet since December 2016 but has put out relatively little public information on how it would achieve that goal. Lawmakers have been increasingly vocal in recent weeks about wanting the service to explain not just that it needs a larger fleet, but what that larger navy would do, and why it needs to contain a particular balance of ships.
Asked by USNI News if the 2016 studies were still relevant to answer those types of questions for lawmakers 14 months after their release, Richardson said they were.
"That's a good starting point still, is my point. Let's get building. First and foremost, let's get building. We can argue whether 355 is the eventual right number, or is it 360, 370," he said. The world continues to grow more complicated by the week, he said, "but in the near-term, we're at 280 against a target of 355. Let's get building."
"The great consensus is that we need more naval power," he continued.

“We can dive into several studies that justify that in different ways, but there’s a convergence there, so I think we’re on pretty solid ground.”
Richardson said the 30-year ship plan would include historical information on shipbuilding dating to 1955.
“The shipbuilding industrial base is now one-third the industrial base it was in 1955. There are 14 shipyards that build ships that have just shuttered or gotten out of the defense business. So you can see these two conflicting trends: the need to grow the number of ships, and you just don’t have the industrial base capacity to do it,” he said.
The ability to reach a 355-ship fleet is “very realistic, but I’ll tell you what, it’s going to be a matter of commitment in terms of resources. So we have sort of a family of plans: some sort status quo, it takes a long time to get to 355. If you want to get there faster, there’s the current limit of the current industrial base, and that can go so fast. And if you want to go faster than that, we’re going to have to build shipyards or think differently.”
Also at the town hall event were Commandant of the Marine Corps Gen. Robert Neller and Commandant of the Coast Guard. Adm. Paul Zukunft. They spoke of the prospects of a two-year budget deal in Congress that would provide higher toplines and greater funding stability and predictability.
“We are looking very optimistically at the deal that’s being cut that will fully fund an icebreaker, that will not just restore our infrastructure from a ravaging hurricane season but make it so it won’t fall down – build a house of bricks instead of straw, if you will, approach to the service. But making meaningful investments in a service that the sun never sets on,” Zukunft said. He noted that 40 percent of the Coast Guard’s capital ships bought, manned and maintained with Coast Guard dollars go to the Pentagon’s geographic combatant commanders around the globe, but 96-percent of the Coast Guard’s budget falls into the nondefense discretionary account, which was subject to even stricter spending caps than was the military’s budget since the 2011 Budget Control Act.
Zukunft said the service needed a predictable budget so that it could manage risk appropriately, and it needed a higher topline for medium- and heavy-icebreaker design and construction.
“We clearly need to build new icebreakers, and with the budget deal this will finally put real money to at least build the first one,” he said.
Neller said of the pending budget deal, “I’m hopeful that they’ll pass it. It’s a lot of money. It’s a lot of money. And we’re going to get that money like we did last year, with about half the fiscal year left to spend it, and that’s not any way to run a business. If they can do a multiyear [budget] without having to deal with the Budget Control Act, that will help us because then we can actually project and we can be more efficient.”
Neller said the force has been operating nonstop since 2001, with operational requirements growing for the maritime force.
“The gear’s gotten older, and we’re trying to recapitalize and maintain readiness and get ready for what we think might come and maintain our legacy equipment – and that takes money,” the general said.
Even as the budget deal’s higher topline would allow the Marine Corps to more easily balance its needs – paying salaries, buying new platforms like the F-35B Joint Strike Fighter and Joint Light Tactical Vehicle, improving infrastructure like hangars and housing, and more – he made clear the Marine Corps and its sister services needed to ensure they were being smart with every dollar they spend. To that end, he praised new Pentagon and Navy leadership for pushing the services to do just that.
“I find it quite refreshing to deal with [Deputy Defense Secretary Patrick] Shanahan and Ms. [Ellen] Lord at [under secretary of defense for acquisition, technology and logistics] and our own service secretary, Secretary [Richard V.] Spencer, because they take a very different view, they take a business view, and then they’re asking us some very hard questions: they’re asking really hard questions about, okay, what did you get out of that money, what value did you get out of that, how did you spend that money,” Neller said.
“It’s forcing us to be, in a positive way, more introspective and analytical about what we’re doing and the processes we’re using and how we spend this money so we can get a maximum benefit out of it.”
https://news.usni.org/2018/02/08/cno-2019-budget-aims-whole-fleet-faster-construction-355-ship-fleet

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3. House Passes Deal To End Shutdown
(THE HILL 09 FEB 18) ... Melanie Zanona and Cristina Marcos

The House approved a sweeping budget deal early Friday morning that would fund the government through March 23, sending legislation to President Trump that would end a brief shutdown of the government that began at midnight.
The bill passed in a 240-186 vote despite opposition from most Democrats, who had sought a firmer commitment from Speaker Paul Ryan(R-Wis.) that he will bring immigration legislation to the floor for a vote that would protect immigrants who came to the United States as children from deportation.

House Democrats just barely made up for the defections on the GOP side. A total of 73 Democrats voted for the legislation, while 67 Republicans voted against it.
Democrats nonetheless tried to make GOP leaders sweat. They held out their votes until the final minutes, until it was clear that a majority of the GOP conference supported it.
At first, Republicans were the only ones casting votes as Democrats sat largely in silence. Then the "no" votes ominously began piling up, only for enough Democrats to eventually neutralize the GOP defections.
Gamesmanship from both parties was repeatedly on display, with Democrats warning Republicans they could not count on the minority delivering votes.
Republicans, for their part, repeatedly played it cool in public, offering confidence the measure would pass despite opposition from conservative Republicans who said the new spending added too much to the deficit.
In his closing remarks, Ryan noted the bipartisan 71-28 Senate tally, and said that 75 percent of Senate Democrats and 68 percent of Senate Republicans had voted for it.
Before Ryan spoke, House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) again called on him to commit to a vote on immigration, saying he acts more as a Speaker of the White House than a Speaker of the House.
The early vote took place because of Sen. Rand Paul (R-Ky.), who blocked action in the Senate for must of Thursday with a demand on an amendment leaving previous ceilings on federal spending in place.
"What you're seeing is recklessness trying to be passed off as bipartisanship," Paul said in a Senate floor speech.
Paul used Senate rules to delay a vote in the Senate until early Friday morning, angering his colleagues in the process.
In an extraordinary exchange on the Senate floor, the No. 2 Senate Republican, Sen. John Cornyn (Texas), accused Paul of pushing to "effectively shut down the federal government for no real reason."
"I don't know why we are basically burning time here while the senator from Kentucky and others are sitting in the cloakroom wasting everybody's time and inconveniencing the staff," Cornyn said.
Sen. John Thune (R-S.D.), a typically even-keeled lawmaker who said he passed the time by watching Netflix and the NBA, called Paul's tactics a "colossal waste of everyone's time."
In the House, Republicans warned that Democrats would own the shutdown if enough of them voted against the spending deal.
The debate took place just a few weeks after Democrats in the Senate blocked a House stopgap bill funding the government, triggering a three-day shutdown in January. That fight was also instigated by the battle over immigration — and specifically Democratic demands for legislation to replace the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program that President Trump is unwinding.
The deal passed by Congress sets the stage to boost federal spending for both defense and nondefense programs by $300 billion over the next two years and will suspend the debt ceiling for one year, knocking two major to-do items off lawmakers' list.
The bill will fund the government until March 23, which will give lawmakers time to write an omnibus spending bill for the rest of the fiscal year and break the pattern of gridlock that has led to five temporary funding patches since September.
The deal also includes a number of other priorities for both parties, including nearly $90 billion for disaster relief, $6 billion to address the opioid crisis, a four-year extension of the Children's Health Insurance Program and more than $7 billion for community health centers.
Yet for all the sweeteners that were loaded onto the agreement, moving the deal through Congress wasn't without its share of drama.
As part of the deal to end the previous shutdown last month, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) pledged to allow floor debate on immigration as soon as next week.
But Ryan would not make any assurances that the House would take up any bipartisan bill passed by the Senate or allow open-ended debate on immigration.
"We will bring a solution to the floor, one the president will sign," Ryan said during a news conference on Thursday.
But Ryan expressed reluctance to move forward with legislation lacking Trump's support.
"I don't want to just risk a veto," Ryan said.
Pelosi set the record on Wednesday for the longest continuous floor speech demanding a commitment to allow a vote on bipartisan legislation to protect Dreamers. She opposed the budget deal — which she helped negotiate with other congressional leaders — but indicated to her caucus that they could vote as they saw fit.
Just as the shutdown began at midnight Thursday night, House Democratic leaders again urged Ryan to make a public statement committing to open floor debate on a variety of immigration proposals.
"We strongly believe that Members of the House and their constituents deserve the same dignity that Leader McConnell has extended to Members of the Senate by allowing for a vote on this issue," Pelosi, Minority Whip

Steny Hoyer (D-Md.) and Assistant Minority Leader James Clyburn (D-S.C.) wrote in a letter to Ryan.
Meanwhile, Ryan was also facing a revolt from within his own ranks, as scores of House conservatives slammed the budget deal as fiscally irresponsible and vowed to oppose the legislation.
Ryan and his leadership team were forced to lean on both Democrats and GOP defense hawks to largely supply the votes for the budget deal.
At a press conference earlier in the day, Ryan – flanked by a number of House Armed Services Committee members – touted the budget deal's boost for the U.S. military.
Even Defense Secretary Jim Mattis joined the last-minute push to wrangle up support from defense hawks, making phone calls to lawmakers in the hours before the midnight deadline, according to one source.
In the Senate, Paul spent most of the late-night vote series ducked in the cloakroam, largely avoiding his colleagues whom he forced to be there until around 2 a m.
Several senators were seen yawning inside the chamber, while Sen. Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa) bowed his head down and closed his eyes for a few minutes. Sen. John Kennedy (R-La.) told reporters he was so tired that he may even skip watching "Frasier" reruns.
In a sign of how unusual the night was, Sen. Jim Inhofe (R-Okla.) was forced to go change after showing up to the vote wearing jeans and a raincoat.
On the way to the chamber, Sen. Angus King (I-Maine) asked reporters: "Don't we look awful?"
Jordain Carney contributed
http://thehill.com/homenews/house/373094-house-passes-deal-to-end-shutdown-sending-to-trump

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ASIA – PACIFIC:
4. 'We're Ready, If Our Nation Calls.' A Top U.S. Navy Commander In The Pacific On China, North Korea And More
(TIME.COM 08 FEB 18) ... Feliz Solomon / U.S. Fleet Activities Yokosuka, Japan

Vice Admiral Phillip G. Sawyer has come a long way from his hometown of Phoenix, Ariz., to command America's largest forward-deployed maritime force, the U.S. Navy's 7th Fleet based in Japan.
It's a tough job at a tense time in the Asia Pacific. The Trump administration is zeroing in on strategic competition from what it calls "revisionist powers" China and Russia, while North Korea poses an escalating threat to the U.S. and its regional allies.
Even as demands increased, the Navy faced its own tragedies last year, when two warship collisions resulted in the deaths of 17 sailors and an estimated $500 million in damages. Investigators determined that the accidents involving the USS Fitzgerald and the USS John McCain, both Arleigh Burke-class destroyers, were preventable. Sawyer assumed command after his predecessor was dismissed in the wake of the collisions.
In late January, TIME traveled to the 7th Fleet's headquarters in Yokosuka, near the outskirts of Tokyo, to speak with Sawyer about the Navy's combat credibility and the challenges waiting on the Pacific horizon.
What is the immediate challenge you face now that you've taken on the job?
Since the 1990s, our number of operational units has gone steadily down while our operational demand signal has increased. So our job at large is to be able to prioritize what we can do based on the supply of people and ships that I have. There is an insatiable demand for the United States military, and in my case the U.S. Navy. People, organizations will always want more than we can provide, that's just a fact of life.
When we talk about strategic waterways around here, this is what we've been doing for decades. I would argue that economic development out here in the Pacific has been largely underwritten by the U.S. Navy. We have been able to provide regional stability and security since the end of World War II, and that security and stability has enabled the countries out here to focus internally on their own economic and populace development. We have many alliances and many partners out here and that's a good spot to be in.
Are those alliances as strong as they used to be?
I look at this from a purely Naval standpoint. When we talk about alliances, we're talking about Navy-to-Navy engagement with our allies — South Korea, Japan, the Philippines, Thailand and Australia. We have a very, very robust working relationship and exercise relationship with those countries. So from my viewpoint as a Naval officer, I think those alliances continue and they get better and better. There's always gonna be some twists and turns in any relationship. But from my viewpoint I consider them strong allies. It's where our objectives overlap that strengthen us and allow us to work together.
Can you keep the the South China Sea free and open?

In the foreseeable future I don't see the sea-lanes closing down. It's not just about our interests — you've got Vietnam, Thailand, all the ASEAN countries, we all have the same stake in this — the amount of merchandise, global trade, commerce that goes through there is huge. So I don't see anybody trying to close down the South China Sea. Many of our actions there are in furtherance of international norms, standards and laws. That's why we continue to sail, fly and operate everywhere international law allows. So I don't even see that as a possibility that the South China Sea would be closed to free trade.
The National Defense Strategy that came out recently talks about China being a strategic competitor. I think it's important to recognize that the military is just one part of government. You've got diplomatic, economic and other aspects of our government that come into play throughout the world. I think those aspects are equally if not more important on a day-to-day basis than the military. I provide space and options for our leadership well before they want to call me in. I recognize there have been territorial issues in the South China Sea that many would argue are not in compliance with international law. That's a valid description. But I don't see anyone trying to close down the international waterways as we see them.
How concerned are you about Chinese militarization in the South China Sea?
Well, I think even [Chinese President] Xi Jinping said they were not going to militarize these islands on the South China Sea. He said it on the South Lawn of the White House, if I'm not mistaken.
We do see progress being made, buildings being constructed and other things. They've come out and said what they will not do, so at the government level we need to check their homework and make sure they abide by their commitments.
What can you do if they don't abide by those commitments?
We want to resolve these issues diplomatically. I'd push that to the State Department and see what they could do. From a military standpoint, I'm a hammer if you've got a nail. I'm one tool, but there are many that can be used before you want to use the hammer. We're not even close to a conflict out here, in particular with China. They don't want to go to war with me, and the United States doesn't want to go to war with China. That said, my job is to be ready with whatever our government needs.
What are the lessons to be learned from the two tragic collisions last year?
I think it's important to recognize that the accidents, while they were tragic, were also preventable. We should not forget as we move forward that we lost 17 sailors' lives, and that's one of the motivators for getting things right. As a military leader, the treasures we have are the sons and daughters, mothers and fathers, the nieces and nephews of the American populace. There's a covenant; families provide their treasure to us as a military, and our job is to defend the homeland and to make sure we take care of the people that are entrusted to us. That's critically important. We didn't get here overnight, therefore the important part is accurately identifying causes and the right corrective actions. What I'm doing with my team out here in the very near term on those things that I can uniquely control, is scheduling; making things deliberate and predictable, to make sure we carve out time for maintenance, training and certification.
In the event of war with North Korea, what's the scale of conflict that you need to be prepared for?
My goal is to be ready for anything from a natural disaster like a typhoon, all the way to the highest end of kinetic warfare that you can envision. That's what I'm paid for. If I don't focus on the highest levels of warfare, you're not getting your money's worth out of me. By focusing on the highest levels, I can accomplish anything less than that. We're ready, if our nation calls.
What would be the role of the 7th Fleet in nuclear warfare?
I don't really have a role in nuclear conflict, which is up to Strategic Command in Nebraska and our leadership back in D.C. I don't envision a nuclear conflict at any time in the foreseeable future. I just don't think that's a plausible scenario.
When the false alarm was sent out in Hawaii, where were you and what went through your mind?
I was actually traveling that day to Hawaii. I found out just after the fact, I certainly understand the angst it caused.
If the alarm were real, what would have happened?
Well, without getting into classified information, there are procedures. Clearly, if the U.S. was attacked, it changes whatever I had planned to do that day.
http://time.com/5133119/us-navy-admiral-phillip-sawyer-japan/

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5. China Sends Advanced Fighter Jets To South China Sea For First Time
(MILITARY TIMES 08 FEB 18) ... Victoria Leoni

China has deployed advanced fighter jets to the South China Sea for the first time on public record, Japan Times

reported.
The People's Liberation Army Air Force announced the operation online Wednesday and released a video of Russian-built Su-35s flying over the contested waterway.
The announcement did not indicate when the exercise took place or how many of the single-seat, twin-engine, highly maneuverable aircraft were involved. It claimed the fighter jets were conducting "joint combat patrol" exercises to enhance the air force's long-range operational capability, although it was not clear what made them joint.
The move is thought to be a response to continued U.S. "freedom of navigation" operations in the region. The South China Sea has crucial shipping lanes, rich fishing grounds and potential oil, gas and other mineral deposits.
China claims control of nearly all the South China Sea, and has carried out extensive land reclamation work on many of the islands and reefs it claims, equipping some with air strips and military installations, including its man-made islands in the Spratly Island chain. But the U.S. has maintained the right of all countries to sail through or overfly what it considers to be international waters.
Last month, China responded aggressively to a U.S. freedom of navigation operation near the Scarborough Shoal, a territory disputed by China and the Philippines.
Under President Trump, the Navy has increased the number of freedom of navigation operations in the South China Sea. The region continues to be a source of tension in relations between Washington and Beijing.
https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-navy/2018/02/08/china-sends-advanced-fighter-jets-to-south-china-sea-for-first-time/

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6. U.S., China Reaffirm Commitment To Pressure North Korea: State Department
(REUTERS 08 FEB 18) ... David Brunnstrom, Arshad Mohammed, Mohammad Zargham and Katanga Johnson

WASHINGTON - U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and China's top diplomat Yang Jiechi reaffirmed their countries' commitment to exert pressure in Pyongyang over its nuclear weapons on Thursday, the U.S. State Department said.
Yang was on a two-day visit to Washington that began on Thursday. His talks were also expected to cover the sensitive U.S.-China economic relationship after recent tit-for-tat actions that have raised fears of a trade war between the world's two largest economies.
"Both sides reaffirmed President Trump's and President Xi's commitment to keep up pressure on North Korea's illegal weapons and nuclear programs," State Department Spokeswoman Heather Nauert told a news briefing.
Nauert said Tillerson and Yang "agreed on the importance of continuing a constructive and productive relationship aimed at cooperation on mutual challenges and addressing our differences forthrightly."
"They discussed the need to achieve a fair and reciprocal bilateral economic relationship and shared approaches to stemming the flow of deadly narcotics," Nauert said, adding that the two looked forward to continuing discussions at an annual diplomatic and security dialogue in the first half of 2018.
Yang said at the start of his meeting with Tillerson that he would seek to "push forward our very important relationship."
He said in a statement released by China's Foreign Ministry trade and business relations between the two countries were mutually beneficial.
Both sides should open up each other's markets and handle differences appropriately, Yang said.
Beijing and Washington share concerns about North Korea's development of nuclear missiles capable of hitting the United States.
China has backed successive rounds of U.N. sanctions on North Korea but has been wary of U.S. efforts to toughen these further and has been accused by U.S. officials of not fully implementing existing U.N. steps.
"We expect, we hope that China will do more, because we know they can do more in terms of adhering to U.N. Security Council resolutions," Nauert said.
Yang said the international community should support the improvement in relations between North and South Korea, which has come as South Korea hosts the Winter Olympics that will be formally opened on Friday.
The latest trade data showed China's massive goods surplus with the United States narrowed last month, but not to the extent necessary to appease Washington.
"Our president has made very clear our concerns about trade imbalances," Nauert said.
U.S. President Donald Trump slapped steep tariffs on imported washing machines and solar panels last month and is considering recommendations on import restrictions for steel and aluminum or other trade sanctions against China over its intellectual property practices.

In response, China's commerce ministry launched an anti-dumping and anti-subsidy probe at the weekend into imports of sorghum from the United States.
Tillerson upset Beijing last week when he accused China of behaving like an imperial power in Latin America.
China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi said earlier on Thursday Beijing hoped North and South Korea could maintain the momentum of their current rapprochement and gradually open the door to peace.
Washington has welcomed a resumption of intra-Korean talks that has led to North Korea's participation in the Winter Olympics.
However, both the United States and North Korea have said they have no plans to meet during the Olympics, dampening hopes that the Games will help ease tensions.
Reporting by David Brunnstrom, Arshad Mohammed, Mohammad Zargham and Katanga Johnson; Additional reporting by Ben Blanchard in BEIJING; Editing by Eric Beech, Susan Thomas and Paul Tait
https://www.reuters.com/article/us-northkorea-missile-usa-china/u-s-china-reaffirm-commitment-to-pressure-north-korea-state-department-idUSKBN1FS345

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7. Pence Blasts N. Korea, Lauds US Military Strength During Troop Talk At Yokota
(STARS AND STRIPES 08 FEB 18) ... Seth Robson

YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — Vice President Mike Pence slammed North Korea for human-rights abuses and touted American military strength during a speech to troops Thursday at the home of U.S. Forces Japan and the 5th Air Force in western Tokyo.
Flanked by a pair of F-35 Lightning II stealth fighters inside one of Yokota's massive hangars, Pence got a warm welcome to the stage from U.S. Forces Japan commander Lt. Gen. Jerry Martinez and 374th Airlift Wing commander Col. Kenneth Moss. A day earlier, after meeting Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, the vice president had warned that "the toughest and most aggressive round of economic sanctions" would soon be imposed on North Korea.
On Thursday, standing in the same spot where President Donald Trump spoke to servicemembers in November, Pence blasted Pyongyang's treatment of its own people.
"As we speak, an estimated 100,000 North Korean citizens labor in modern-day gulags," he said. "Those who dare raise their voices in dissent are imprisoned, tortured and even murdered, and their children and grandchildren routinely punished for their family's sins against the state."
Pence said Yokota's servicemembers are part of a long line of warriors who have sacrificed for freedom in the region. He told them about a young 45th Infantry Division officer who was awarded a Bronze Star in the Korean War.
"He's been gone now almost as long as I had the chance to know him, but that medal sits on my desk in the West Wing of the White House and bears the name of [2nd] Lt. Edward J. Pence, my dad," he said.
Yokota is a "citadel of strength," said Pence, who toured operations centers at the base where personnel keep tabs on North Korean military moves. U.S. and Japanese troops gathered there represent the greatest concentration of combined military might anywhere in the world, he added.
"All across these lands and skies America's matchless strength is on display every day," he said.
He cited the Yokosuka-based USS Ronald Reagan aircraft carrier and supporting ships, forward-deployed F-18 and F-35B fighters and submarines as assets that are "positioned to respond to dangers and threats with overwhelming force."
A Nuclear Posture Review will make American forces more flexible and deter any strategic attack on the U.S. or its allies and make the world's strongest military even stronger, he said.
"Thanks to the president's leadership and bipartisan support in the U.S. Senate, Congress has passed a two-year budget deal that includes the largest investment in our national defense since the days of Ronald Reagan," he said.
The budget adds $80 billion to defense spending including the largest pay increase for servicemembers in eight years, Pence added.
After his speech, Pence traveled to South Korea, where he is scheduled to attend opening ceremonies for the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics on Friday.
https://www.stripes.com/news/pence-blasts-n-korea-lauds-us-military-strength-during-troop-talk-at-yokota-1.510645

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MIDEAST - CENTRAL/SOUTH ASIA:
8. U.S.-Backed Coalition in Syria Strikes Pro-Assad Forces
(NEW YORK TIMES 08 FEB 18) ... Anne Barnard And Richard Pérez-Peña

BEIRUT, Lebanon — The American-backed coalition in Syria said Thursday that it had repelled an attack by forces supporting the Assad government, carrying out deadly strikes in a rare confrontation between competing factions that have both fought the Islamic State.

The clash, on Wednesday night, occurred in an area of eastern Syria where government troops and their allies have competed with the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces, allied with the United States, to seize territory rich in oil and natural gas.

There were unconfirmed and conflicting reports about the number of casualties from the airstrikes.

The fighting offered a glaring example of the new risks posed by a host of combatants in the region, including Iran, Russia, Syria, Turkey and the United States, who, though wary of one another, had a shared interest in defeating the Islamic State. Now that the militant group has been driven from most of its territory, the conflicting interests are leading to increasing friction and unpredictable escalations, like Turkey's recent assault on aKurdish-controlled region.

The United States military's Central Command said on Thursday that "Syrian pro-regime forces initiated an unprovoked attack against well-established Syrian Democratic Forces." It said that at the time of the clash, international coalition troops were with the S.D.F., a mix of Kurdish, Arab and other fighters, but it did not say whether any were American.

"In defense of coalition and partner forces, the coalition conducted strikes," it said.

The Syrian state news agency, Sana, described the strikes as aggression by the coalition against "popular forces that were fighting" the Islamic State. It said they had left "scores of persons dead and others injured."

A Syrian military officer, reached via online chat, said that at least 100 pro-government fighters had been killed. He said they were members of a militia loyal to President Bashar al-Assad, called the Bakr group, part of a small Shiite population in southeast Syria's Deir al-Zour Province.

Syrian state media said scores had been killed, but other news accounts put the death toll far lower. A pro-government commander quoted by Reuters said seven had been killed and 27 wounded.

An American official said the precise identity of the pro-government militia force was unclear but that it had been massing for about a week. The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, also said the Americans had stayed in constant communication with Russian military counterparts, who had made no effort to stop the airstrikes.

Middle East experts said that direct fighting between Americans and Russians would represent a dangerous escalation in the Syrian fighting.

Kremlin officials said that no Russians had been involved. In a statement, Russia's Defense Ministry said that the coalition strike had been carried out by helicopters.

The Russian Defense Ministry also appeared to partly blame the pro-government militia members for the episode, saying they had not coordinated their movements with the Russians ahead of time. But the ministry also said it showed that "the true aim of the illegal presence of American forces on Syrian territory is not the fight against the Islamic State," but the "capture and retention of economic assets."

At the United Nations, Ambassador Vassily A. Nebenzia of Russia said he intended to raise the American airstrikes during closed consultations of the Security Council. But there was little or no expectation that the council, long divided over the Syria conflict, would issue a statement on the airstrikes.

Speaking to reporters, Mr. Nebenzia rejected the American explanation that the airstrikes had been carried out for defensive reasons.

"We were invited by the government of Syria to fight terrorists since 2015," he said. "The U.S. was never invited to Syria. So who is the aggressor, tell me?"

Aaron David Miller, a Middle East analyst at the Wilson Center, said the forces backing the Syrian government seemed to be testing the coalition's resolve. But, he added, it was not clear whether the clash marked a new phase of the war in which the United States and its allies would enter more direct confrontation with forces loyal to Mr. Assad.

"We're now protecting a territory the size of Indiana and deepening our commitment to the S.D.F., with no sense of where this is going, no sense of strategy, no sense of endgame," said Mr. Miller, who was a State Department official in Republican and Democratic administrations.

The fighting in Deir al-Zour Province happened between the Euphrates River and the Iraqi border.

The United States Central Command said the pro-Assad forces had attacked about five miles east of "the agreed-upon Euphrates River de-confliction line."

The area has developed into a potential flash point, with the S.D.F. and international coalition holding most of the territory northeast of the river — including a significant portion of Syria's oil production — and the pro-Assad alliance holding most of the land to the southwest.
Tensions heightened recently when the United States announced that it would help to stabilize the S.D.F.-controlled areas, ensure that the Islamic State could not make a comeback, and deter expanding Iranian influence. That angered enemies and allies alike, with the Turks accusing the United States of cementing a Kurdish autonomous zone — as well as de facto Kurdish control over adjacent majority-Arab areas.
Turkey then invaded Afrin, an area farther west that is controlled by another Kurdish group, the Y.P.G., which Ankara considers a terrorist threat. The United States did not intervene, but Turkey has threatened to attack S.D.F. forces in the eastern town of Manbij, where American advisers are present.
American military officials warned on Wednesday that they would defend the area, creating a tense standoff with a NATO ally.
Elsewhere in Syria on Thursday, the government continued attacks on two of the main remaining rebel-held areas that escalated over the past month and have reached a crescendo in recent days.
At least 60 people were killed in the besieged, rebel-held Damascus suburbs of Eastern Ghouta, according to rescue workers known as the White Helmets. The toll has reached more than 400 since late December, among them more than 100 children.
Heavy bombardment also continued in the northern rebel-held province of Idlib, where at least 12 people died, adding to scores killed in recent days.
In the capital, Damascus, rebel shelling hit the government-controlled Old City for a third consecutive day, apparently in retaliation for the Eastern Ghouta attacks. At least 13 people have been killed in recent shellings, according to state media, shattering what had been a relative calm in recent months.
https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/08/world/middleeast/syria-us-assad.html?rref=collection%2Fsectioncollection%2Fworld

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9. U.S. Troops In Syria May Be At Risk Of 'Mission Creep' After Deadly Battle
(WASHINGTON POST 09 FEB 18) ... Liz Sly

BEIRUT — Syria and Russia condemned the United States' military presence in Syria as "illegal" Thursday after an overnight confrontation in which U.S. warplanes bombed pro-Syrian-government forces as they approached an American-supported base.
U.S. forces targeted the pro-government troops with airstrikes and artillery after they launched an attack against a base belonging to the U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces in the eastern province of Deir al-Zour, according to Col. Thomas F. Veale, a U.S. military spokesman. He said U.S. military personnel advising the Kurdish-led SDF were at the base at the time.
The Syrian government accused the United States of "aggression" in launching the strikes, which it said killed "scores" of people. Russia denounced the U.S. presence in Syria as "illegal" and accused the United States of seeking to seize Syria's oil.
"The recent incident once again shows that the United States' illegal military presence in Syria is actually aimed at taking control of the country's economic assets and not at fighting against the ISIS international terror group," the Russian Defense Ministry said in a statement, referring to the Islamic State.
There were no U.S. casualties, and one SDF fighter was injured in the three-hour battle, during which the United States called on Apache helicopters, AC-130 gunships and F-15 fighter jets to repel the assailants, U.S. military officials said.
In Washington, Defense Secretary Jim Mattis described the situation as "perplexing," and said he had "no idea why they would attack" the base. Both Russian and Syrian-aligned forces on the ground had long known the U.S. and allied forces were there, he said. Russia was immediately contacted via existing lines of communication, but "we've always known that there are elements in this complex battle space that Russia did not have control of," Mattis said.
It was the most serious clash involving the United States and Syria since U.S. troops began deploying to northeastern Syria in late 2015 in support of Kurdish and Arab fighters against the Islamic State. It illustrated the complexity of the battlefield now that the war against the extremist group is winding down, leaving the United States in overall control of about a quarter of Syria.
The Syrian government and its ally Iran have repeatedly called for U.S. troops to leave Syria now that the fight against the Islamic State is nearly over, and they have regularly threatened to wage war to push the Americans out if they do not leave.

However, the Trump administration announced a new Syria strategy last month under which U.S. troops will remain in northeastern Syria until there is a peace settlement regarding the wider war that includes a transition away from the rule of President Bashar al-Assad.

With no sign of such a peace deal in sight, the U.S. military is now committed to a potentially indefinite presence in Syria that is opposed by all of the main players in the country.

The prospect that U.S. troops will remain in Syria while shoring up Kurdish efforts to secure self-rule has provoked a convergence among countries opposed to any form of Kurdish autonomy, uniting Turkey, Russia, Iran and the Syrian government in a de facto alliance against the U.S. presence.

The United States "is now in mission-creep mode," said Robert S. Ford, a former U.S. ambassador to Syria who is now a senior fellow at the Middle East Institute.

"The Americans have managed through their diplomatic strategy to isolate themselves to the point where Turkey, Iran and Syria all agree that what the U.S. is doing in Syria is bad," he said.

Many in Congress also are starting to question whether the extended U.S. presence in northeastern Syria risks embroiling the United States more deeply in Syria's war. The confrontation "raises serious questions about our continued presence in Syria," Sen. Tim Kaine (D-Va.), a member of the Armed Services Committee, said in a statement. "I am gravely concerned that the Trump Administration is purposefully stumbling into a broader conflict, without a vote of Congress or clear objectives."

Mattis denied that the attack and the U.S. response constituted American engagement in the Syrian civil war. "We are there to fight ISIS," he said. "That's what those [U.S.] troops were doing in that position." If the Americans were "getting involved in the broader conflict, we would have moved to the other side" of the river and continued to engage the pro-government forces. He said the remaining attackers retreated to the western side of the Euphrates.

But the war continues to become ever more complicated. The attack on the southernmost flank of the SDF-controlled area in northeastern Syria came as Turkey pressed ahead with its nearly three-week-old offensive against the Kurdish enclave of Afrin in northwestern Syria. The enclave is controlled by the same Kurdish force that dominates the SDF, but it does not have direct U.S. support.

Turkey also has been threatening to attack the U.S.-backed forces farther east, around the town of Manbij, where U.S. troops mount regular patrols. The attack in Deir al-Zour coincided with a visit by Lt. Gen. Paul E. Funk II, commander of U.S. forces in Iraq and Syria, to the front lines in Manbij, where he offered assurances to the SDF of U.S. support.

The Kurdish-led force is feeling increasingly "under attack from all sides," said Kino Gabriel, a spokesman for the SDF in northeastern Syria. "This is an attack on the political project we are trying to establish in Syria."

If the tensions persist, the SDF and its U.S. military advisers could soon find themselves fighting a war on three fronts — against Turkey, the Islamic State and the Syrian government alliance. But, Gabriel said, the SDF is confident that the force has enough fighters to confront the Turkish incursion and hold its lines in Deir al-Zour.

He said the attack on the SDF base was conducted by members of the National Defense Forces, a Syrian militia that is loyal to the Syrian government and which has received arms and supplies from Iran and the Lebanese Hezbollah movement. The likely goal, he said, was to attempt to halt any more SDF advances farther east, where only a few Islamic State-held villages lie between SDF positions and the Iraqi border.

"We assume it is because they want to divert our attention from the ongoing operations against Daesh in the Euphrates Valley," he said, using an Arabic acronym for the Islamic State. "We only have a few more towns and villages to be cleared of ISIS. They are completely surrounded, and we are just waiting to finish our operations and clear the ¬Iraqi-Syrian border."

Since last year, the Euphrates River has served as a deconfliction line, separating the United States and its SDF allies on one side, and Russia and its Syrian government allies on the other. Negotiated between the U.S. and Russian militaries last year, until now it has served mostly to keep the rival armies apart.

Veale, the U.S. military spokesman, said the hostilities erupted after several hundred infantry troops backed by tanks and artillery began advancing on an SDF position in the town of Khasham, about five miles east of the deconfliction line. It lies near some of Syria's biggest oil fields under SDF control, and he speculated that the pro-government forces were trying to take them back.

When the advancing forces unleashed a volley of 20 to 30 tank and artillery rounds toward the base, U.S. warplanes and artillery struck back, Veale said in an emailed statement. "This action was taken in self-defense," he said.

Channels of communication between the U.S. military and Russia remained open throughout the clash Thursday night, U.S. officials said, and the Americans informed Russia before they opened fire on the pro-government force.

The Russian Defense Ministry, however, said the battle occurred when a reconnaissance party made up of Syrian militia fighters crossed the Euphrates River to hunt down an Islamic State position, only to be attacked unprovoked by U.S. warplanes. The militias had neglected to inform the Russian military of their plan in advance, the Russian statement added

Missy Ryan and Karen DeYoung in Washington contributed to this report.
https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/syria-accuses-us-of-aggression-after-its-warplanes-strike-pro-government-forces/2018/02/08/bab1502a-0cb4-11e8-8890-372e2047c935_story html?utm_term=.8fa45ddda3ab

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10. Mattis Calls Attack In Syria On U.S.-Backed Forces 'Perplexing'
(REUTERS 08 FEB 18) ... Phil Stewart and Idrees Ali

WASHINGTON - U.S. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis on Thursday called a thwarted attack on U.S. and U.S.-backed forces in Syria overnight “perplexing,” saying he had no idea what motivated pro-Syrian government forces to attempt the coordinated strike.
“It’s perplexing,” Mattis told reporters, adding initial information did not reveal any Russian forces among the attackers. “Why they chose to initiate this attack, you’ll have to ask them.”
Reporting by Phil Stewart and Idrees Ali; Editing by James Dalgleish
https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-usa-syria-mattis/mattis-calls-attack-in-syria-on-u-s-backed-forces-perplexing-idUSKBN1FS349

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11. U.S. Engaged Iran On Prisoner Swaps
Iranians So Far Have Spurned Trump Administration’s Overture
(WALL STREET JOURNAL 09 FEB 18) ... Farnaz Fassihi and Felicia Schwartz

The Trump administration secretly reached out to Iran in December to propose creating a direct channel to negotiate the release of prisoners held by each side, U.S. officials and people briefed about the discussions said, marking the first U.S. diplomatic overture to Iran on the issue under President Donald Trump.
However, Iran didn’t respond and, despite at least three subsequent offers from Washington, so far has refused to engage with U.S. officials on the offer, the people briefed on the discussions said. The apparent impasse leaves uncertain the fate of at least four Americans currently in Iranian detention.
The U.S. offer in December represented the first time since Mr. Trump took office that the administration had signaled its willingness to engage in a potential prisoner swap. For most of the year, the administration had been reviewing and toughening its Iran policy, ultimately advancing a harder line toward Tehran’s missile tests and support for militant groups in the Middle East.
On the sidelines of an international meeting held in Vienna in mid-December concerning the 2015 Iran nuclear agreement, Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Tom Shannon raised the issue of foreign detainees with Iranian officials, U.S. officials said.
Others were subsequently briefed about those discussions, including relatives of Americans in Iranian custody.
“They [State Department] said that they had opened the door and reached out to Iran several times but there is no response,” said Hua Qu, wife of Xiyue Wang, a Princeton University scholar arrested in 2016 and sentenced to 10 years on charges of spying during a research trip to Iran.
The State Department didn’t comment specifically on the outreach to Iran. An official who has served as a contact for families of detainees at the White House National Security Council didn’t respond to an inquiry.
“We look for every opportunity we can to bring attention to the fact that we would like to see American prisoners held unjustly in Iran released and that is done through a variety of mechanisms,” said Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs Steve Goldstein.
One official briefed on the discussions said the U.S. is pursuing discussions about prisoners, but isn’t proposing a swap.
Iranian officials blamed the Trump administration for the absence of talks.
“The Trump administration needs to learn how to properly interact with Iran,” an Iranian official familiar with the cases said. “They cannot threaten and attack Iran and then also reach out or ask for negotiations.”
Mr. Trump has been highly critical of the latest U.S.-Iranian prisoner swap, when the Obama administration in January 2016 released seven Iranians in exchange for four dual-national Americans detained in Iran. On the day of the swap, the U.S. released a $400 million cash payment to Iran that was part of Iranian funds frozen by Washington since the 1970s. Mr.Trump called it a “ransom” payment.
Mr. Trump has questioned the validity of the 2015 nuclear deal, has declined to certify Iran’s compliance with the provisions of the deal and said he would terminate U.S. sanctions relief required under the agreement unless Europe

and Congress address what he called flaws in the accord.
“Despite the Trump administration’s outward bluster toward Tehran, they’ve shown a surprising willingness to try to engage the Iranians behind the scenes,” said Karim Sadjadpour, an Iran expert with Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
Mr. Wang is an American citizen of Chinese descent. There also are at least three dual American-Iranian citizens imprisoned in Iran: Baquer and Siamak Namazi, who are father and son; and Karan Vafadari, whose wife, Afarin Nayssari, an American green card holder, also is jailed.
Iranian officials didn’t address how many Iranian dual nationals current in U.S. prisons might be sought by Iran in negotiations. Iranian activists have said as many as a dozen Iranians are currently jailed in the U.S. on charges related to evasion of sanctions.
One Iranian, Ahmad Sheikhzadeh, a former employee of Iran’s United Nations mission, was sentenced in New York federal court to three months in prison for tax fraud and evading sanctions. Mr. Sheikhzadeh at his sentencing disputed the charges. Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif has referred to him as one of the prisoners at the top of Iran’s list for a potential swap, people familiar with the case said.
The case of the imprisoned Americans appeared dormant in Washington for much of the year as Washington toughened its Iran policy.
Iranian President Hassan Rouhani and Mr. Zarif said in September during an annual gathering of world leaders at the U.N. that Iran was ready then to negotiate a swap, but that the U.S. wasn’t engaging. “It takes two to tango,” Mr. Zarif said then. He didn’t respond to a request for comment.
State Department spokeswoman Heather Nauert said in October that Iranian officials turned down a U.S. request for a meeting between senior U.S. officials and Iranian officials at the September U.N. gathering. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and Mr. Zarif met for the first and only time as part of a larger group meeting there.
Iranian media reported at the time that Mr. Rouhani turned down a request to meet with Mr. Trump, but the Trump administration has declined to identify the officials involved.
Families of the detained Americans said they urged the administration to separate the contentious issues with Iran from the humanitarian cause of bringing Americans home.
By December, the administration appeared ready to address the question of direct talks over prisoners, issuing its proposal in Vienna. But, for reasons not clear to families and their contacts in the Trump administration, Iran had withdrawn.
“It sounds like they [Iran and the U.S.] may want to get going on this process but they have no intention of doing it,” said Cyrus Vafadari, the son of Karan Vafadari. The elder Mr. Vafadari was a wealthy engineer and owner of an art gallery in Tehran who was sentenced in January to 27 years in prison and subjected to confiscation of his assets.
The senior Mr. Namazi, 81 years old and in ailing health, was ordered back to prison on Tuesday despite recommendations by Iran’s medical examiner’s office that he be granted a three-month medical leave from prison.
Iran’s hard-line faction and Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei have increasingly toughened their tone and posture in response to Mr. Trump’s policies.
Messrs. Rouhani and Zarif, who represent the milder, reformist faction, said they are open to a prisoner swap, though Mr. Khamenei could block it. One former Iranian official said Mr. Khamenei has forbidden any direct contact with Americans on any issue other than the nuclear deal.
Mr. Trump is demanding that European parties to the deal—the U.K., France, Germany and European Union—commit to ways to address his concerns about Iran. American officials have begun meeting with European counterparts, including a first formal meeting in London in January, after beginning informal discussions late last year.
An American delegation will return to Europe next week for additional conversations on what steps they could take to address Mr. Trump’s concerns ahead of the deadline.
https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-secretly-offered-iran-a-channel-for-talks-on-prisoners-1518085950

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12. U.S. Forces In Afghanistan Attack Anti-China Militants
(REUTERS 08 FEB 18) ... Robert Birsel

KABUL - U.S. forces in Afghanistan have attacked networks of anti-China militants in action likely to please Beijing which had called for Western cooperation in its fight against the group it says wants to split off its Xinjiang region.
The strikes in northern Afghanistan’s Badakhshan province destroyed Taliban training camps which support militant operations in Afghanistan as well as operations by the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) in the border

region with China and Tajikistan, Afghanistan's NATO-led mission said in a release on Thursday.
"The U.S. strikes in support Afghanistan in reassuring its neighbors that it is not a safe sanctuary for terrorists who want to carry out cross-border operations," it said.
The force gave no more details about the attacks or any estimate of casualties but it said the ETIM was behind attacks both inside and outside China and two of its members had been involved in a 2002 plot to bomb the U.S. Embassy in Kyrgyzstan.
"They pose a threat to China and enjoy support from the Taliban in Badakhshan and throughout the border region," the force said.
The group is drawn from members of China's Uighur minority, a mostly Muslim Turkic-speaking people who inhabit the Xinjiang region in China's far west.
China has long been concerned that instability in Afghanistan could spill over into Xinjiang.
Hundreds of people have been killed in violence in recent years in Xinjiang. Beijing blames the bloodshed on Islamist militants and separatists, though rights groups say the unrest is more a reaction to repressive Chinese policies.
The United States, Britain and the United Nations have listed the ETIM as a terrorist group.
Reporting by Robert Birsel; Editing by Alison Williams
https://www.reuters.com/article/us-afghanistan-usa-china/u-s-forces-in-afghanistan-attack-anti-china-militants-idUSKBN1FS23S

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13. A New China Military Base In Pakistan?
Reports About Beijing Trying To Acquire Another Facility There Could Have Significant Consequences For The Region.
(THE DIPLOMAT 08 FEB 18) ... Rajeswari Pillai Rajagopalan

A recent report about China trying to acquire a military base in Pakistan has created new concerns about Beijing's long-term strategic plans in the Indian Ocean. The new base is supposed to go up in Jiwani, about 80 kilometers to the west of the better-known Gwadar port.
If China does establish a military base here, it will be its second foreign military base, after Djibouti, which was set up in August 2017. The Hambantota port in Sri Lanka given to China on a 99-year lease could possibly be added to the facilities available to China, though Sri Lanka has reportedly promised India that it will not allow the port to be used for military purposes.
All of this appears to fit with a concerted Chinese push to establish a long-term presence in Indian Ocean as well as to extend Beijing's power projection capabilities. The proposed air and naval facility in Jiwani will come up next to Gwadar in Baluchistan, where China has already established what appears to be a long-term maritime presence. The new base is also fairly close to Chahabar port in Iran on the Gulf of Oman. Chahabar was jointly developed by Iran, India, and Afghanistan.
Gwadar is an important part of the China's strategic plans, and it seems primarily to be driven by Beijing's fear of a potential naval blockade of its sea lanes of communication (SLOCs). Irrespective of how serious such a threat of a blockade is, China has justified its interest in Gwadar as driven by its need for alternate shipping routes. More recently, China has linked its interest in Gwadar with the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), one of the vital corridors of Xi Jinping's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Despite the insurrection in Baluchistan, in which both Gwadar and Jawani lie, China seems intent on doubling down on its Pakistan bet.
The Washington Times report, which originally reported on the base, indicated that a group of Chinese army officers met with Pakistan military officers in Pakistan to finalize the plans for the base. For Pakistan, this may be a knee-jerk reaction to the Trump administration's policy of what Pakistanis consider the "abandonment" of Pakistan. But if the reports are true, China clearly is looking at the longer term. This involves major upgrades of Jiwani airport so as to handle large Chinese military aircraft, with the airport renovation set to start in July this year. Establishing a joint naval and air base would mean relocating thousands of local Baluchis, which could create additional social and economic disturbances in the region and could further spur Baluchi unrest.
China, meanwhile, has officially called these reports as "unnecessary" and denied any plans to set up a military base in Pakistan. On the other hand, a Chinese military analyst, Zhou Chenming, claims that "China needs to set up another base in Gwadar for its warships because Gwadar is now a civilian port." He added that "It's a common practice to have separate facilities for warships and merchant vessels because of their different operations. Merchant ships need a bigger port with a lot of space for warehouses and containers, but warships need a full range of maintenance and logistical support services." But some Chinese analysts have questioned this logic. Lin

Minwang of Fudan University, for example, has argued that the base "is unnecessary at this time," suggesting that it will be needed only if Washington's Indo-Pacific strategy gains traction.
Even as China has called these reports purely speculative, it is prudent to be assessing the strategic consequences of "Chinese militarization of Pakistan" and of the growing speed of Chinese outward expansion. The most important consequence is that it will add another dimension to the growing competition between India and China. China's encirclement of India through its "string of pearls" has already been of concern but the recent Chinese proactive approaches in the Indian Ocean and Bay of Bengal are likely to heighten the concerns in New Delhi. This will lead to other spiraling effects: a more worried India is likely to get closer to the US and to other powers in Asia that also worry about China.
There is also the possibility of China getting embroiled in the Baluchistan rebellion, a consideration that Beijing simply does not appear to take very seriously. Finally, as the United States refocuses attention on "great power conflict," as has been referred to in strategic documents released by the Trump administration over the past few months, China's expanding footprint seems to underscore the necessity for the shift in American grand strategy.
https://thediplomat.com/2018/02/a-new-china-military-base-in-pakistan/

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EUROPE:
14. Fearing Russia, United States, Germany Offer To Host New NATO Commands: Officials (REUTERS 08 FEB 18) ... Robin Emmott, Andrea Shalal, Phil Stewart

BRUSSELS/BERLIN/WASHINGTON - The United States and Germany have offered to host two proposed new NATO commands aimed at deterring Russia, diplomats and officials said, in a show of support for the alliance's military build-up that has echoes of the Cold War.
Part of NATO's response to Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea, allies are considering a North Atlantic planning and strategy command to keep shipping lanes safe from enemy submarines, as well as a logistics command focusing on moving troops more quickly across Europe in any possible conflict.
No decisions have been taken, but U.S. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis will join other allied defense ministers next week in Brussels to discuss plans for both commands, setting the stage for NATO leaders to take a formal decision at a summit in July.
"Germany and the United States have both offered and that's a good sign of their support, particularly from (U.S.) President (Donald) Trump," said a senior NATO diplomat. "Many other allies had been waiting for them to come forward."
Many allies are keen to lock in U.S. support given Trump's early doubts about the alliance he now says he strongly backs.
The commands bring prestige and investment, so other allies are interested, including Portugal and Poland, diplomats said.
But the German and U.S. offers carry more weight because of their status of two of the biggest militaries in NATO.
A NATO official said that the location of the commands: "will be assessed in the coming months."
According to two allied diplomats and three officials briefed on the plans, the United States has offered to host the command in Norfolk, Virginia, where NATO already has operations.
The German-hosted command could be in Ulm, in southern Germany, or possibly Cologne, two places were the country already has NATO and multinational facilities, they said.
Creating two new commands, which diplomats said would have up to 1,500 personnel in total, would be the first expansion in two decades after NATO sharply cut back in 2011.
That is strong in symbolism for eastern European allies, while the German offer comes at a time when Berlin has faced pressure from Washington to spend more on defense.
German Sensitivities
While the strategy will not revive a much larger Cold War-era Atlantic Command disbanded in 2002, it would broaden NATO's new deterrent against Russia, which involves rotating forces in the Baltics, Poland and in the Black Sea region.
Russia's Crimea annexation, its direct support for separatists in eastern Ukraine and what the West says is a deliberate disinformation campaign to undermine U.S. and European democracies have unnerved governments.
Many in the West were also alarmed by Moscow's war games in September that massed tens of thousands of troops and may have tested electronic warfare on Latvia, NATO officials say.
Ben Hodges, who recently retired as commander of U.S. Army in Europe, had long called for Germany to take on a

bigger role in managing logistics and transportation needs for the alliance.
National and European Union border regulations make moving military equipment and soldiers slow and costly.
The issue is sensitive, however. Germany wants to keep talking to Moscow and has chafed at a proposed name of 'Rear Area Operations Command' for the logistics base that could imply that NATO was preparing for war.
They want to see the name of the command changed to 'Allied Command Operations Support Command'.
Hosting the command will include responsibility for air defense and cybersecurity, as well as the training and movement of follow-on forces, one official said.
"This is not just a matter of making sure the trains run on time," the official said.
Additional reporting by Sabine Siebold, writing by Robin Emmott; Editing by Toby Chopra
https://www.reuters.com/article/us-nato-russia/fearing-russia-united-states-germany-offer-to-host-new-nato-commands-officials-idUSKBN1FS2OX

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AFRICA:
15. In Somalia—Or Afghanistan—Can Insurgent Defections Change A War's Course?
An Al-Shabaab Defection Raised Hopes In Mogadishu, But Violence, And Lessons From Another Conflict, Suggest Little Has Changed
(WALL STREET JOURNAL 08 FEB 18) ... Yaroslav Trofimov

MOGADISHU, Somalia—When a former deputy head of al-Shabaab turned up last August in a Mogadishu hotel to denounce the extremist armed group, government officials were exuberant.
Mukhtar Robow, after all, was among the most notorious leaders of Somalia's al Qaeda affiliate. Luring senior insurgents like him to switch sides is a major war aim for the Western-backed Somali government—and for the U.S. military, which has deployed more than 500 American troops to fight al-Shabaab.
"Defections in general, including by Robow, show that the government's strategy is working, that people are realizing that this government is the best hope for Somalia," Prime Minister Hassan Ali Khayre said in an interview this week. "It shows that the Shabaab are weakened and are being defeated—not only militarily but politically, economically, judicially and ideologically, and that public support is on the side of the government."
Yet, though a few dozen al-Shabaab fighters joined the government since Mr. Robow's August defection, and despite frequent U.S. airstrikes, the tide of war has hardly turned. Al-Shabaab, which continues to dominate much of rural central and southern Somalia, carried out Africa's deadliest bombing two months after Mr. Robow's surrender, killing more than 500 people in Mogadishu.
The Somali movement—like Afghanistan's Taliban—still holds sway over one of the world's largest jihadist footholds.
Last month, al-Shabaab finally broke its silence about Mr. Robow—who, in the Mogadishu hotel appearance, had condemned the group's ideology as "not in the interest of the religion, people and the country." Mr. Robow, al-Shabaab retorted, was "deluded" to think the group could be undermined.
The question of whether defections by militants, including senior leaders, really matter has been hotly debated by military commanders, intelligence officials and policy makers ever since the U.S. became embroiled in counterinsurgency campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq following the 2001 attacks.
The U.S. military's Africa Command said last year that its policy is "to support Somalia-led efforts to encourage members of al-Shabaab and ISIS to defect and pledge support to the Somali Government."
A similar effort, deployed for several years at great cost, has proved largely futile in Afghanistan, a conflict that bears many parallels to Somalia.
There, the Taliban insurgency—like al-Shabaab in Somalia—controls a large chunk of the countryside and retains the ability to carry out devastating attacks in the capital city. The fighters who defected to the Afghan government often did so for opportunistic personal reasons and usually didn't represent forces that the Taliban couldn't easily replenish.
"There certainly have been some individuals who have been reconciled or reintegrated as a result of that effort," said Laurel Miller, an expert at Rand Corp. who served as acting U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan until last June. "But I have never seen any indications that one can draw a line between any results that have been achieved via that effort and any fluctuation in the conflict on the battlefield."
In Somalia, Mr. Robow's defection quickly proved controversial. In his home South West state, where much of the countryside is under al-Shabaab control, officials embraced the former militant as a potential savior. "Mukhtar Robow is a very good tool. He can reach out to the young people because he knows their language," said Ali Ali, the

state president's chief of staff.
But many other Somalis—especially those whose friends and relatives had been killed by al-Shabaab when Mr. Robow helped lead the group—were dispirited.
"It's as if bin Laden was suddenly named a minister or security chief. It's not a good thing when we give such credit to those who have killed innocent people," said a Somali lawmaker—who, like several other such critics, feared retribution for speaking out against Mr. Robow in public. Mr. Robow himself couldn't be reached.
Such anger over al-Shabaab's atrocities means that, so far at least, there is no effort to negotiate an end to the conflict between the Somali government and the militant group. That is a contrast to Afghanistan, where—despite the Taliban's murderous record—the central government and the U.S. have been pursuing negotiations with Taliban leaders about a possible political settlement for several years.
Asked about a possible diplomatic engagement with al-Shabaab, Mr. Khayre, the prime minister, suggested that wouldn't be necessary.
"I see now that my government is winning this war, and it's just a question of time," he said.
What is really needed, he added, is greater international assistance to the Somali government, especially by writing off its debt and resuming access to international financial institutions.
Many Western officials disagree with such optimistic assessments of the campaign, and say that—at some point—talking to al-Shabaab may become a necessity, in part because al-Shabaab is mostly a homegrown movement deeply rooted in the country's clan politics.
"It suits both al Qaeda and al-Shabaab to say they are associated with each other, but actually al-Shabaab is primarily a Somali phenomenon. Very few foreigners have any positions of authority," said Michael Keating, the head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia and a former deputy U.N. representative in Afghanistan.
"I do think there is a scope for communication, if not formal engagement, with al-Shabaab," Mr. Keating added.
"The problem is that al-Shabaab right now seems to be in the hands of those who have a very aggressive approach to advancing their political agenda, and I have seen no indication from their side that they see a political track."
https://www.wsj.com/articles/in-somaliaor-afghanistancan-insurgent-defections-change-a-wars-course-1518085802

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DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE:
16. Mattis: Dreamers In The Military Are Protected From Deportation
(STARS AND STRIPES 08 FEB 18) ... Corey Dickstein

WASHINGTON — Defense Secretary Jim Mattis said Thursday that the roughly 900 undocumented immigrants serving in the U.S. military need not fret over their immigration status even if the program protecting them from deportation expires next month.
"They will not be subject to any kind of deportation," Mattis told reporters at the Pentagon. Adding later, "We would always stand by one of our people."
Servicemembers who were brought to the United States illegally as children and are registered in the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA, program would be allowed to remain in the nation unless they were convicted of a "serious felony" or a federal judge had already ordered them deported, Mattis said Thursday after speaking with Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen about the issue. Those protections also extend to the about 1,000 DACA program enrollees – known as "Dreamers" – who have committed to military service and are awaiting orders to ship to boot camp, as well as reservists and former servicemembers who have been discharged honorably.
The President Barack Obama-era DACA protections, which grant quasi-legal status to its enrollees, are set to expire March 5, leaving hundreds of thousands of undocumented immigrants brought to the United States as children vulnerable to deportation if Congress fails to forge an agreement to protect them.
Dreamers have been allowed to serve in the military since 2009 under a program entitled Military Accessions Vital to National Interest, or MAVNI, which places immigrants with in-demand skills such as language or medical training into the military. They must past stringent background checks to enter the program.
The Pentagon has said some 10,400 individuals, primarily with legal immigration statuses, have served through that program, which can provide them a pathway to citizenship. The Pentagon has not said how many total undocumented immigrants have served in the program.
Mattis' assurances issued Thursday come after undocumented servicemembers have for months expressed concerns about their statuses in the military and the United States as President Donald Trump's administration and the Pentagon failed to effectively communicate whether troops would be protected should the program end.

Earlier Thursday, in an essay published by Politico, one future servicemember expressed concerns about his immigration status, urging the military to ensure Dreamers could serve.
William Medeiros, a 25-year-old undocumented immigrant whose Brazilian parents brought him to the United States when he was 6, wrote he fears deportation to a country of which he has little memory, even as he awaits shipment to Army boot camp as part of the MAVNI program.
“I have no ties to my home country and have nothing to fall back on if I would ever have to go back to Brazil,” he wrote of the nation he has not visited since arriving in America. “… I want to fight for this country. I’m willing to die for it. Do the right thing.”
Mattis said the protections for military-related Dreamers have been in place for some time and the concerns were the result of a misunderstanding.
“I want to make sure we do not have any more problems with it,” he said.
https://www.stripes.com/news/mattis-dreamers-in-the-military-are-protected-from-deportation-1.510773

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17. Pentagon Unveils Policy To Combat Misconduct, Harassment In The Ranks
(MILITARY.COM 08 FEB 18) ... Oriana Pawlyk

The Pentagon has put forth a new policy that aims to deter misconduct and harassment among servicemembers, reaffirming it does not tolerate any kind of harassment by any service member, either in person or online.
Under direction from Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, the Defense Department on Thursday unveiled DoD Instruction 1020.03 Harassment Prevention And Response in the Armed Forces, which goes into effect immediately, Pentagon spokeswoman Dana White announced.
"One of the secretary's main priorities is increasing the lethality of our force," White told reporters during a briefing. "Something that affects lethality and readiness is harassment in all forms," she said.
The 23-page comprehensive policy dictates the department's definitions of what is considered harassment and the proper response to attacks on individuals via social media, as well as misconduct on bases. The policy will supersede any past department policies on sexual harassment for service members.
Each service -- Army, Air Force, Navy, Marine Corps -- will be in charge of planning its implementation, outlining steps and milestones in order to comply with the instruction, White said.
"It's just the beginning," White said. "It's a framework for military services to address unacceptable behaviors such as offensive jokes, stereotyping, violence, and discrimination."
Violations of the new policy may constitute violations of specific articles of the Uniform Code of Military Justice, or UCMJ, and may result in administrative or disciplinary action, according to the guideline.
White added, "Harassment has no place in our military."
In the guideline, DoD says that harassment may include "offensive jokes, epithets, ridicule or mockery, insults or put-downs, displays of offensive objects or imagery, stereotyping,
intimidating acts, veiled threats of violence, threatening or provoking remarks, racial or other
slurs, derogatory remarks about a person's accent, or displays of racially offensive symbols."
"Activities or actions undertaken for a proper military or governmental purpose, such as combat
survival training, are not considered harassment," it said.
Other types of harassment include:
1. Discriminatory: based on race, color, religion, sex (including gender identity), national origin, or sexual orientation;
2. Sexual: unwanted sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and deliberate or repeated offensive comments or gestures of a sexual nature to include forced or coerced submission, either online or in person. Those who condone this behavior will be subject to punishment as well;
3. Bullying: harassment that includes acts of aggression either online or in person for either physical or psychological harm;
4. Hazing: physically or psychologically injuring or creating a risk of physical or psychological injury to service members for the purpose of initiation into, admission into, affiliation with, change in status or position within, or a condition for continue membership in any military or DoD civilian organization.
5. Retaliation: illegal, impermissible, or hostile actions taken by a service member's chain of command, peers, or coworkers as a result of making or being suspected of making a protected communication in accordance with DoDD 7050.06, or the military's whistleblower policy;
6. Reprisal: taking or threatening to take an unfavorable personnel action, or withholding or threatening to

withhold a favorable personnel action, for making, preparing to make, or being perceived as making or preparing to make a protected communication outside the chain of command.
When asked whether the far-reaching policy alarms the department over freedom of speech issues, White said the goal nonetheless is to address harassment.
This "is to ensure we have a safe workplace," White said. "No one should feel intimidated. No one should feel as though they can't do their job without being discriminated against -- this goes to hazing, this goes to political beliefs, religions beliefs -- but those details will be developed by the services."
An overall DoD "working group," White said, will then take the service definitions to ensure consistency.
The latest guideline follows a hearing that took place Wednesday on Capitol Hill about senior officer misconduct, where each of the services and lawmakers couldn't comprehensively agree how to hold leaders accountable for various misconduct in the ranks.
It also follows a recent report that the number of reported sexual assaults at the U.S. Military Academy in West Point, New York, roughly doubled during the last school year, according to the Associated Press.
https://www.military.com/daily-news/2018/02/08/pentagon-unveils-policy-combat-misconduct-harassment-ranks.html

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18. GAO Says Nuclear Warhead Office Still Can't Afford Planned Modernization
(DEFENSE NEWS 08 FEB 18) ... Daniel Cebul

Washington — The National Nuclear Security Agency continues to underestimate how much funding it needs to update and maintain the U.S. nuclear arsenal, according to an updated government watchdog report.
The Government Accountability Office on Feb. 6 released an updated version of a previous report, which addresses the misalignment of NNSA's expected nuclear modernization costs and budgetary requests. The NNSA is a quasi-independent branch of the Department of Energy that manages the U.S. nuclear stockpile.
In some cases, the difference between projected funding and expected modernization costs is billions of dollars. Those concerns are in line with the original April 2017 version of the report, which warned "budget estimates for some modernization programs for fiscal years 2018 through 2021 are more than $5 billion below the funding levels NNSA has identified needing."
In the near-term, this means that the NNSA will have to defer modernization work which "could increase modernization costs and schedule risks," according to the GAO. If the NNSA had to defer this work, the result would be what the GAO identified as a "bow wave" — an increase in future years' estimated budget needs that occurs when an agency undertakes more programs than their resources can support.
According to Frank Klotz, the recently retired former head of the NNSA, these are exactly problems the agency faces right now.
"We've never done more than one [warhead] life extension program (LEP) at a time, since the end of the Cold War. We're now doing essentially four," Klotz told Defense News in an exclusive exit interview.
"We're pretty much at capacity in terms of people, although we're hiring more. We're pretty much at capacity in terms of the materials that we need to do this work. And pretty much at capacity in terms of hours in the day at our facilities to do this work," he added.
Moreover, the GAO notes the NNSA previously shifted the modernization bow wave beyond current Future-Years Nuclear Security Program (FYNSP) for FY 17 to FY21 to the FYNSP out-period in each of its last four Stockpile and Nuclear Management Plans.
Kicking this can down the road only exacerbates future budget shortfalls. As delayed programs strain future budgets, important LEPs are likely to be severally underfunded. The GAO reports that LEPs for the B61-12, W80-4, and W88 Alteration 370 are all underfunded by at least $1 billion.
This updated report follows the release of the Nuclear Posture Review, which was criticized by some members of the nuclear community for leaving out U.S. nuclear modernization programs on certain graphs (p. 8), as well as including Taiwan as part of China and omitting the Russia-administered Kuril Islands.
https://www.defensenews.com/pentagon/2018/02/08/gao-says-nuclear-warhead-office-still-cant-afford-planned-modernization/

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CYBER:
19. Navy's New Weapon Of Choice? Information
(NAVY TIMES 08 FEB 18) ... Amber Corrin

In 2017, the Navy saw two deadly ship collisions at sea. First, the destroyer Fitzgerald collided with a container ship near Japan in June, and then again two months later the destroyer John S. McCain collided with an oil tanker near Singapore.

Both incidents were, per comprehensive Navy investigations, due to human error. The findings quieted speculation that a network-based attack could have disabled onboard navigation or other critical systems — but the report didn't end discussion of the possibilities of such scenarios.

As a result, top Department of Defense leadership ordered new training and safety procedures throughout the Navy; meanwhile, internally, Navy officials called for the service's key IT and cyber elements to routinely be part of incident investigations in the future.

Navy leaders say the decision to include cyber elements in the incident investigation is a sign of the service's greater emphasis on stitching together operational domains.

The goal is to better equip naval forces to take on emerging threats and a changing threat landscape, regardless of location or specific mission.

"You can see what's happened over the past year and a half, where information has been a weapon of choice," Vice Adm. Michael Gilday, Fleet Cyber/10th Fleet commander, said in an interview with C4ISRNET.

"The way we view the environment now is in the domains of space, cyberspace and the electromagnetic spectrum all merged together. And that invisible battle space is an area that we have to optimize to win in the future. We're starting to do that now by organizing those functions … so that we're taking advantage of all of those disciplines."

As evidence of their progress, Navy leaders point to the establishment of carrier strike group cyber teams and new information warfare leadership, as well as the launch of facilities like the Information Warfighting Development Center.

A New Mission

"We take this very seriously. There's a responsibility on our part to be a contributor to addressing findings in a comprehensive review," said Rear Adm. Christian Becker, commander of Space and Naval Warfare Systems Command.

"We've been positioning ourselves and our resources and our people to fight on the digital battlefield for some time, and as such, we were able to respond to request for information regarding what may have occurred or could have occurred on the networks associated with those ships. We have a capability and a capacity that is unique in the Navy with people and facilities that can conduct the kinds of forensic investigations that were necessary to assess what could have occurred in those mishaps. That's a tremendous resource for our Navy."

According to Gilday, cyber investigations into incidents like last summer's ship collisions involve defensive cyber operations. There, teams must effectively prove a negative: that malicious cyber activity was not a factor.

Furthermore, it involves investigating complicated systems that aren't the usual networks the teams are used to, particularly on a ship with a complex system of systems. That can include weapons, engineering, steering, navigation or other systems — or the confluence of some or all of them.

"If we're not organized correctly to take advantage of all the information out there in an integrated fashion, we're not going to be able to make decisions faster than the adversary," Gilday said.

"And that's really going to be important in the future because cyber is going to play a leading role, space is going to play a leading role, and the electromagnetic spectrum is going to play a leading role.

"So instead of those functions being stovepiped, it is having situational awareness across that invisible battle space and integrating all of those functions together."

Here, integration between naval forces emerges as a key factor. In the cases of the McCain and Fitzgerald investigations, Gilday said his teams partnered with specialists from Naval Sea Systems Command that could bring deeper system-specific knowledge to a composite team of network-centric cyber operators.

"The first step is understanding what systems do we possibly have to look at, and then assembling the right people as quickly as we can and deploying them on-site. And that's what we did," Gilday said.

"In some cases … you may have evidence up front that it was cyber-related, or there's a big enough question in your mind that cyber could have been involved, that you do have to send in a team to rule out the negative. And that's really a call that whoever is the lead on that investigation needs to make that call, and then Fleet Cyber Command would respond and provide a team to take a look at the cyber aspects."

Deploying Information Warfare

With the high-priority goal of integrating information warfare and cyber into the broader Navy, particularly at sea, service leaders last year established a new information warfare commander role deployed on carriers with the strike

group commander.

Furthermore, defensive cyber teams are deployed with all carrier strike groups as well as expeditionary strike groups, Gilday said.

“We’ve taken collections of intel, of signals intelligence and cyber as well as communications — typically what would be known as the N2, the N39 and the N6 — and we’ve combined those functions under a single commander that’s deployed on the carrier with the strike group commander,” he said.

“All of the big decks that deploy get a cyber element that has the capabilities or the tool kit to get a defensive cyber work out there [protecting] those ships that are out there deployed better than they would have been before.”

The goal, Navy leaders say, is to improve integration at the tactical level as information is seeing a dramatic rise as combat currency. But it’s also critical in linking the physical domain with the cyber and electromagnetic domains, as well as creating a more holistic view of internal and adversarial command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance.

“A common question I hear concerning this emerging [information warfare commander] construct is: What problem are we trying to solve? I believe the answer is simple: We are improving the application of information-related capabilities and execution of IW and [electromagnetic warfare maneuver] at the tactical level of war,” wrote Capt. Bryan Braswell, information warfare commander of Carrier Strike Group 10, in the July-September 2017 CHIPS issue.

“A failure to fully integrate all aspects of information warfare before integrating IW across physical warfare domains suboptimizes EMW execution and undermines the effectiveness of tactical situation management as an essential element of Navy combat operations.”

Perhaps at the core of the information warfare commander’s mission is to ensure the U.S. “OODA” loop — the strategic decision-making cycle of observe, orient, decide and act — is faster than that of the enemy. In an era dominated by information overload and the so-called data deluge, the OODA loop becomes more complicated to execute, but doing so provides the decisive edge.

It’s an ethos Navy leaders plan to push down the ranks moving forward.

“We’ve instituted the information warfare commander at three carrier strike groups, and that will continue to build over the next couple of years. We’ll have all our carrier strike groups covered. And the other thing we’re looking at doing is how do we organize at the fleet staff level to do business in the same manner,” Gilday said.

“It’s optimizing those functions in an integrated fashion across each of those three domains, under one commander, and then integrating into other naval operations.”

Across the board, Gilday said the developments across the Navy have improved operations and put the service in a better place than even just a year ago. And while he acknowledged there is still progress to be made in integration throughout the Navy, he’s encouraged by steady improvement and by positive feedback he’s received from operational commanders.

“What we do in terms of signals intelligence, in terms of operations and defense of networks, and in terms of offensive cyber into what they do on a day-to-day basis … our mission sets arguably years ago were much more stovepiped and are now much more integrated into the rest of naval operations,” Gilday said.

“They see the value of it. They understand how technology is advancing. They understand how in the fight today and in the future, we’re going to have to leverage that invisible battle space more and more.”

Training Next-Gen Information Warriors

With the emphasis on integrating information warfare taking root in the upper echelons of the Navy, leaders now are turning their attention toward training and education at the operator level. While most agree there’s been progress in cyber training and education, there’s also recognition that there’s much work to be done to arm operators for information warfare.

“We all participate in the mandatory series of cybersecurity training that helps us understand the baseline, but I think we as a service … have got to go beyond that to understand innately that whenever we log on, we are in a space that’s contested. And if we think about it in those terms, that changes behavior,” said Rear Adm. Christian Becker, commander of Space and Naval Warfare Systems Command.

“It’s up to us … to deliver systems that have greater focus on human and machine interface, so that not only are they more capable, but they’re more operable. It’s on us to reduce complexity so that sailors can train to, operate and maintain complex capabilities in a contested environment.”

To that end, the Navy is taking steps such as launching the Information Warfighting Development Center, analogous to similar warfare development commands in areas such as aviation. The IWDC’s mission is to create integrated doctrine to tie information warfare with the other domains and disciplines, and to train sailors in advanced information warfare tactics, techniques and procedures [TTPs].

“One of the most important things we’ve done in the past two years is stand up the Navy IWDC,” said Vice Adm. Jan Tighe, director, naval intelligence and deputy chief of naval operations for information warfare.

“It’s not enough for us to sit up here at the Pentagon and think about what’s the workforce that we’re going to need, think about the capabilities we need to arm them with. But the connective tissue ultimately gets down to how are we going to train them, what are the TTPs that they must use to take advantage of these things and even feedback into the requirements process of what is it that we’re missing, because it’s where the rubber meets the road and how you apply those techniques and capabilities. That organization is our first step in codifying those TTPs, [concepts of operations] and allowing the flow back into the requirements process in a more mature way.”
The Navy is also standing up information warfare training groups in Norfolk, Virginia, and San Diego, California, providing carrier strike and amphibious readiness groups with training in communications, cyber operations, electronic warfare and space. The training will apply to sailors deploying on ships and in aircraft squadrons to integrate those functions into their core missions, Gilday said.
“They go through some high-end training before they’re certified to deploy,” he said. “So, we’re including information warfare training as part of that that training and certification. The common theme here is integration, whether it’s a warfare development piece, whether it’s a training piece, whether it’s the organization piece.”
https://www.navytimes.com/it-networks/2018/02/07/navys-new-weapon-of-choice-information/

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AVIATION:
20. Report: Trump To Request 24 Boeing Super Hornets In 2019 Budget
(BLOOMBERG NEWS 08 FEB 18) ... Tony Capaccio

President Donald Trump's fiscal 2019 budget will request 24 Super Hornet jets built by Boeing, reversing an Obama administration decision to stop buying the fighter after this year, according to two people familiar with the decision.
The Navy has argued that it needs more of the planes designated F/A-18E/F to fill a shortage in its inventory until more of Lockheed Martin's newer F-35s are deployed. Before Trump even took office, he'd promoted the Super Hornet as a less costly alternative to the F-35, though the two planes have different capabilities.
The proposal in the budget due to be presented Feb. 12 is likely to be welcomed in Congress, which has consistently added more Super Hornets than requested and resisted Pentagon plans under former President Barack Obama to phase it out. Lawmakers approved 12 of the aircraft in fiscal 2016 when none were requested and 12 more in fiscal 2017 when two were requested. This fiscal year, House and Senate appropriators have proposed adding 10 aircraft to the 14 requested.
If Boeing "can get the cash for this, it's very good news" because 24 aircraft per year is the minimum economic production rate to keep Boeing's plant in St. Louis operating, Richard Aboulafia, military aircraft analyst for the Teal Group, said in an email. Boeing also is working with the Kuwaiti government to build as many as 32 F/A-18s for Kuwait over the next few years.
"The big question is: How long will the Navy sustain the line?" Aboulafia said. "But in the 'here and now,' this is very good news for one of Boeing's most profitable programs."
The people familiar with the budget request asked not to be identified in advance of its release. Lt. Seth Clarke, a Navy spokesman, said in an email, "I can't confirm a specific number" for any aircraft procurement in the coming budget.
The fiscal 2019 request for the Super Hornets will be the largest since fiscal 2012, when the Navy asked for funds to buy 28 of the fighters.
As president-elect in 2016, Trump upended years of Pentagon procurement practices with a tweet announcing he'd asked Boeing to price an upgraded Super Hornet as a potential replacement for what he called "the tremendous cost and cost overruns of the Lockheed Martin F-35."
While Defense Secretary Jim Mattis ordered a review the next month pitting the F-35C against "an advanced Super Hornet," no results were ever announced. Trump later switched to praise of the F-35, taking credit for cost reductions in a contract that was already under negotiation when he took office.
https://www.stripes.com/news/us/report-trump-to-request-24-boeing-super-hornets-in-2019-budget-1.510719

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SURFACE FLEET:
21. After Providing Hurricane Relief, USS Oak Hill To Leave Virginia Beach For Middle East
(VIRGINIAN-PILOT 08 FEB 18) ... Brock Vergakis

After extending a helping hand in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, the USS Oak Hill is preparing to ship out to a more volatile part of the world: the Middle East.
The amphibious dock landing ship is scheduled to leave Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek-Fort Story today on a regularly scheduled, six-month deployment that will include parts of Europe.
The Oak Hill has 400 sailors and is part of the USS Iwo Jima Amphibious Ready Group, which includes 2,500 sailors and Marines from the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit based at Camp Lejeune, N.C., when it goes out on patrol.
The Oak Hill, Iwo Jima and the transport dock ship USS New York participated in hurricane relief efforts for two months after Hurricane Maria devastated the Caribbean.
The crew of the Oak Hill initially helped with search and rescue but later assisted with clearing roadways for transportation of food, medicine and doctors.
The Oak Hill returned to Virginia Beach in late October, while the Iwo Jima and New York returned to Naval Station Mayport in Florida. The Oak Hill will meet with the Iwo Jima and New York at sea. Both ships left Florida on Wednesday.
The amphibious ready group also will have components of the Norfolk-based Fleet Surgical Team 4 and Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron 28, as well as the Virginia Beach-based Tactical Air Control Squadron 22, Naval Beach Group 2 and the staff of Amphibious Squadron 4.
https://pilotonline.com/news/military/local/article_a3673ced-4e1c-5222-81e3-51274bfe1ccf.html

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22. Engineering Issues Delay USS Sterett's Deployment To Western Pacific
(STARS AND STRIPES 09 FEB 18) ... Tyler Hlavac

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — A San Diego-based destroyer is back on track toward the Western Pacific after engineering issues forced it to delay its deployment.
The USS Sterett, which departed Naval Base San Diego along with the USS Dewey on Feb. 6, returned to port after sailors heard unusual noises in the ship's main reduction gear, Naval Surface Forces spokesman Lt. Andrew DeGarmo told Stars and Stripes on Thursday.
The crew resolved the issue and the ship departed again on Thursday. The Navy did not provide further details regarding the mechanical issues.
DeGarmo said the Dewey's departure was not affected by the Sterett's delay.
Both destroyers are scheduled to link up with the Japan-based USS Wasp Expeditionary Strike Group to operate under the Navy's "Up-Gunned ESG" — a concept that pairs troop-carrying amphibious ships with surface vessels like the Sterett and Dewey.
The Wasp — an amphibious-assault ship that recently arrived at its new homeport at Sasebo Naval Base and can handle F-35B stealth fighters capable of short takeoff and vertical landings — also bolsters the group's offensive capabilities.
"Surface ships like Dewey and Sterett enhance an amphibious force's ability to conduct its primary mission of ship-to-shore movement in the littorals, particularly in a contested environment," said a Navy statement. "Dewey and Sterett possess important sensors and weapons to detect and neutralize undersea, surface, and air threats that are vital to protecting the amphibious force."
The Sterett and Dewey are the latest 3rd Fleet ships to deploy the Western Pacific, an area usually patrolled by the 7th Fleet. The San Diego-based USS Carl Vinson strike group began a deployment to the region last month. In addition to the aircraft carrier, the group includes Carrier Air Wing 2, a pair of guided-missile destroyers, a guided-missile cruiser and more than 6,000 sailors.
The Dewey last made headlines last October after it suffered a mechanical failure that led to a fuel spill near San Diego. It leaked 700 gallons of lubricating oil approximately 4 miles off the coast of Imperial Beach.
Last May, Dewey conducted a freedom-of-navigation operation, sailing within 12 nautical miles of Mischief Reef, a disputed South China Sea island controlled by China.
https://www.stripes.com/news/pacific/engineering-issues-delay-uss-sterett-s-deployment-to-western-pacific-1.510803

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SHIPBUILDING:
23. Navy Releases RFP for Multi-Year Flight III Arleigh Burke Destroyer Buy
(USNI NEWS 08 FEB 18) ... Ben Werner

SAN DIEGO, Calif. – The Navy released the final request for proposal today for a multi-year contract to build the Flight III Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer said the service's chief weapons buyer on Thursday.
James Geurts, assistant secretary of the Navy for research, development, and acquisition, announced the release while speaking at the WEST 2018 conference. The competition for the congressionally approved multi-year contract is limited to two vendors – General Dynamics – Bath Iron Works and Huntington Ingalls Industries.
"I'm very confident they will be creative in the competitive process to give us really great options to build those ships," Geurts said.
The contract, which starts in fiscal year 2018 and runs through fiscal year 2022, continues the Flight III configuration and incorporates the more powerful Raytheon-built AN/SPY6(V)1 Air and Missile Defense Radar into the design.
"We've got a mature Flight III design now which is going to give us great increases in lethality on those ships," Geurts said.
"Now we're looking to the shipbuilders looking at how they can build those ships as effectively and quickly as possible."
This procurement will continue production of the DDG-51 class shipbuilding program, which so far has delivered 65 ships to the Navy.
In December, Capt. Casey Moton, program manager for the Arleigh Burke-class destroyer program, told USNI news the Flight III upgrade affected about 45 percent of the ship's drawings zones. Most of 2017 was spent finalizing the designs for the Flight III upgrade, a process including creating 3D models.
During his remarks at WEST 2018, Geurts called the new Flight III design process a great example of how the Navy can deliver lethal capacity while working to reduce production costs. The 3D modeling was a key component of this effort, and something he's promoting for use throughout the department.
When full ship designs use 3D modeling, Geurts said the enhanced designs help production teams speed up production and inspections of large projects by helping identify redundancies to eliminate and improve workflow management. Geurts said even something as simple sounding as drilling holes in steel plates can be sped up and made precise using this technology.
"We've got to figure out how to get those kinds of technologies in so we can drive out the costs of these mega projects," Geurts said.
https://news.usni.org/2018/02/08/navy-releases-rfp-multi-year-flight-iii-arleigh-burke-destroyer-buy

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COMMENTARY:
24. The Military Is Not A Political Prop
(NEW YORK TIMES 08 FEB 18) ... Phillip Carter

The power of the president, as commander in chief of the armed forces, has evolved over more than two centuries, constrained by congressional action, the emergence of a standing military establishment after World War II and a more complex world.
Some of the most important constraints on presidential power have been shaped in the form of norms of civil-military relations observed from George Washington to Barack Obama. These norms — respect for the military's culture, its role in society and its separation from partisan politics — have been bolstered in recent decades by a professional military ethic that requires troops to avoid politics and focus on their missions.
Enter Donald Trump, our 45th president. Since taking office, he has shattered countless norms of civil-military relations — for example, by appointing many retired or active generals to high office, by politicking before military audiences and by summarily dismissing military advice on Afghanistan.
Mr. Trump's proposal for a grand military parade in Washington — conceived in Paris after watching the pageantry of a French parade for Bastille Day — represents one more broken norm. In ordering the troops to march on Constitution Avenue, for no apparent military reason, Mr. Trump further politicizes the military, turning it into both a political prop and an issue to further divide the country in ways that politically benefit him. The march would also send an unmistakably autocratic message to Mr. Trump's political enemies in Washington: Congress, the courts and the press, who have no armies of their own to parade in such fashion.

It's understandable why a president enjoying historically low approval ratings would seek cover behind the troops and the public confidence they enjoy. Proposing a parade like this fits a broader pattern for Mr. Trump of using patriotism as a wedge issue. Whether he's attacking the National Football League and its players for their protests during the national anthem or proposing costly and unnecessary military parades, the net effect is to rally his base and force opponents to choose between appearing to love America and opposing Mr. Trump. Fortunately, our service members (like all government employees) swear their oaths to the Constitution, not to the president.

All of these actions corrode the professional ethic of the military. In asking service members to support him politically, Mr. Trump presents troops with a dilemma: support their commander in chief or follow the rules, regulations and norms of the service. In most cases, this choice falls short of the threshold for disobeying an unlawful order, because it's not strictly illegal for service members to support Mr. Trump politically or plan a parade for him.

But making that choice leads the military down a dark path that clouds its mission focus, diminishes its bipartisan admiration among Americans and tarnishes its institutional integrity, established over more than two centuries.

In that time, the United States military has evolved from a small, irregular force of wartime volunteers to a sprawling permanent establishment, with the greatest change happening during and after World War II. As this occurred, the apolitical professional military ethic took root within the senior ranks of the military. Gen. George C. Marshall epitomized this ethic, going so far as to not even vote; Gen. Douglas MacArthur stood out for his frequent flirtations with domestic politics that ultimately contributed to his downfall.

The apolitical, professional ethic is codified today in military criminal law that prohibit officers from speaking ill of political officials and regulations that proscribe service members from most political activity.

For at least the past seven presidential election cycles, candidates on both sides have sought to use veterans, military leaders and the military itself to validate their credentials as potential commanders in chief. In 1992, Bill Clinton received the endorsement of retired Adm. William Crowe, a former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Each election cycle has escalated this use of veterans as stage props, or useful attackers, such as in 2004 with the deployment of Swift boat veterans to attack John Kerry. To some extent, this politicization of the military has carried forward into office, with presidents from each party carefully using military audiences or imagery to frame policy statements or political activities.

But there is a difference between giving a speech on Afghanistan in front of a military audience and what Mr. Trump has done during his first year in office. He has appointed more active and retired generals to serve as political appointees than any president in recent memory. In a public speech shortly after his inauguration, Mr. Trump delivered a blistering attack on the press before an audience of intelligence officers at the C.I.A. headquarters. Seven days later, Mr. Trump used the Pentagon's Hall of Heroes, with Defense Secretary Jim Mattis standing by, to sign his controversial travel ban. Last February, he politicked before a crowd of troops at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, Fla., the home of the military's headquarters for Middle East operations and special operations. In July of last year, during the commissioning of the aircraft carrier Gerald Ford, Mr. Trump told the assembled sailors that "I don't mind getting a little hand, so call that congressman and call that senator and make sure you get it," referring to his budget, adding, "And by the way, you can also call those senators to make sure you get health care."

Vice President Mike Pence followed the president's lead last month in a speech before American troops in Jordan, on the border with Syria, attacking Democrats in the middle of a budget fight that caused a brief government shutdown.

Mr. Trump's proposed parade fits this pattern of politicizing the military and using it to further his political interests — not those of the military or the nation.

Our service members have better things to do than march in Washington, at a time when we remain committed in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, and face increased tensions with Russia and North Korea.

But beyond the costs and distraction of a parade, we should be wary of its long-term corrosive effects on our military, which must continue to serve and defend our country long after the Trump presidency ends.

https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/08/opinion/trump-military-political-prop html?rref=collection%2Fsectioncollection%2Fopinion

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25. Testing Trump's Chemical Red Line

Assad Uses Gas Against Civilians, And The U.S. Begs Moscow For Help.

(WALL STREET JOURNAL 09 FEB 18) ... Editorial Board

President Trump sent a powerful early message of U.S. resolve last year when he bombed a Syrian air base after the Assad regime used sarin gas against civilians. He may need to send another because Syria has been testing his red

line with multiple uses of chlorine gas in recent weeks.
The State Department said this week that the United States is “gravely alarmed” by reports that the Syrian government has launched six chemical attacks against civilians over the past 30 days. Assad has dropped chlorine gas on his political opponents for years, but who’s going to stop him?
In August 2012 Barack Obama warned of “enormous consequences” if Assad used chemical weapons, dubbing it a “red line.” The next year the dictator killed more than 1,400 people with sarin gas. Mr. Obama responded by signing a deal with Russia to seize Damascus’s chemical arsenal. Chlorine wasn’t included, and U.S. intelligence concluded Assad had retained some chemical stockpiles.
Sure enough, the regime used sarin gas against civilians again last April, killing at least 85 people. Mr. Trump explained his missile launch in response as “in the vital national security interest of the United States to prevent and deter the spread and use of deadly chemical weapons.”
But lately the Administration has turned, almost Obama-like, to pleading with Russia to make Assad stop his latest assaults. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson devoted a speech in January to the theme, noting that Moscow “pressed for, negotiated and agreed” to a September 2013 deal to destroy Syria’s “entire chemical weapons stockpile,” and supported a 2015 United Nations Security Council resolution to hold chemical weapons users “to account.” Foggy Bottom repeated those pleadings on Monday and again on Thursday.
Good luck with that. Last year Russia blocked the renewal of the U.N. panel that was established to investigate Syria’s chemical weapons. Russia now denies that Assad is using chlorine gas, and the U.N. panel isn’t around to document the truth.
Moscow also hasn’t fulfilled a single agreement it has made with Mr. Trump. The Kremlin has failed to enforce a “deconfliction” zone in southwestern Syria as it promised to do as part of a 2017 U.S.-Russia agreement, and it is trying to negotiate its own settlement to the civil war outside of the U.N. process in Geneva it previously agreed to use. Moscow wants to keep Assad in power, maintain bases in Syria from which to threaten NATO, and thwart U.S. goals in the Middle East.
Meanwhile, in a statement that echoes of Mr. Obama’s hashtag outrage, the State Department said Monday that “the people of Syria are suffering; the rest of the world is watching.” And doing nothing.
https://www.wsj.com/articles/testing-trumps-chemical-red-line-1518135422

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26. How To Untangle The Mess In Syria
(WASHINGTON POST 09 FEB 18) ... David Ignatius

MANBIJ, Syria – Wednesday was a strange and scary day in Syria, even by Middle East standards:
In the early afternoon, American military commanders, nearly victorious against the Islamic State, were standing at a hilltop observation post here complaining about harassing fire on their Syrian Kurdish partners— from a rebel force that is backed by Turkey, our NATO ally.
And then a few hours later, about 100 hundred miles to the southeast, ground troops supporting the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad struck a headquarters of Syrian Kurdish fighters and their partners from U.S. Special Operations forces, five miles east of the Euphrates and possibly near Syrian oil fields. The American-led coalition hit back hard with airstrikes.
The U.S. military wouldn’t provide any details, but Russian forces have been backing the Syrian regime in the Deir al-Zour area. The firefights continued well into the night and could mark a significant escalation of the war here.
Wednesday’s lesson, on both fronts, is that this battlespace is way too crowded and slipping dangerously close to a much wider conflict.
America and Turkey have been moving in slow motion toward their collision since the United States decided to destroy the Islamic State 3½ years ago. The only Syrian partners able to do the job were the Kurds, who dubbed themselves the Syrian Democratic Forces. Turkey was furious, claiming that the Kurdish group was “terrorist.” But Ankara could never offer a credible alternative to conquer the Islamic State, so the United States pushed on.
When the Russians entered the fray in 2015, the United States tried to establish clear deconfliction lines. But this has proved a delicate and uncertain business. Those Russia contacts are more essential now than ever.
How can the United States untangle this mess so it can finish the job against the Islamic State? America needs “dialogue” and “de-escalation” quickly with Turkey, explains Lt. Gen. Paul Funk, the commander of U.S. forces in Syria and Iraq. The campaign against the Islamic State is “slowing down,” he warns, and the lull could “allow these people to escape” into Turkey and then to Europe.
Funk speaks to reporters here at an outpost manned by the SDF. A mile and a half west, you can see the berm that

marks the forward position of the Turkish-backed rebels. About 40 miles farther west is the Kurdish zone called Afrin, which Turkish warplanes and artillery have been pounding since late last month.

U.S. Special Operations forces have done wonders here, working with the SDF, shattering Islamic State control of eastern Syria. But we're nearing the end of what military power can do. The next step requires diplomacy. It's encouraging that national security adviser H.R. McMaster is heading to Ankara this weekend. He would be wise to treat the crisis with Turkey as an opportunity — and start the quiet discussions that could lead to an eventual reconciliation of Turkish and U.S. interests.

Manbij illustrates how the battle against the Islamic State was turned by the United States and its SDF partners — and what post-Islamic State recovery looks like.

The sidewalks of Jalla Street in the center of town were so crowded with shoppers Wednesday that it was easier to walk in the road. In a little stall selling men's cologne, Fawaz al-Khannem remembers that the favorite scent of Islamic State fighters was a musky fragrance called "Sultan." Inside the covered market, where the Islamic State once built car bombs, the shops are packed. Women are buying colorful dresses, sparkling with sequins, and ripped jeans.

Perhaps the brightest spot in this liberated town is a girls' school, where students have returned after years in hiding from the Islamic State. Interrupted in the middle of French class, high school seniors talk animatedly about their plans. They're wearing makeup and vibrant clothes; a girl named Aisha is wearing a pink hijab.

Nothing in the Middle East is ever precisely what it appears. Each victory opens the door to a new problem, but no obstacle is quite as insurmountable as the bellicose rhetoric suggests.

On Wednesday, as Turkish-backed forces were firing at an SDF checkpoint, scores of trucks were queued up to cross from Manbij into the Turkish-controlled zone. The Syrian regime allowed Kurdish protesters to traverse regime territory to reach Afrin; later in the day, pro-regime forces were attacking the Kurds elsewhere. Meanwhile, as Turkish politicians were snarling at America, the Turkish and U.S. militaries continued their regular liaison.

Syrian Kurdish forces have been a brave partner for America but also an inconvenient one. Abandoning them would be a bad mistake, but it would also be wrong to let this hydra-headed conflict keep festering. The U.S. military did its job in Syria. Now it's time for hard-nosed diplomacy.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/its-time-to-untangle-the-mess-in-syria-heres-how-to-do-it/2018/02/07/20b976dc-0c55-11e8-8b0d-891602206fb7_story.html?utm_term=.ddfa68e438c2

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Subject: CHINFO NEWS CLIPS 23 APR 18
Date: Monday, April 23, 2018 5:41:21
Attachments: 20180423-CHINFO_News_Clips.docx

On This Day In The Navy:
1953 - After five UN personnel are wounded on the island of Tee-do, Korea, USS Henderson (DD 785) is sent to suppress gunfire and USS Owen (DD 536) evacuates the wounded to USS Manchester (CL 83).

Executive Summary:
Top national headlines included the shooting at a Waffle House in Tennessee that killed four, as well as previews of French President Emmanuel Macron's visit to the U.S. In written testimony to the Senate Armed Services committee, USPACOM nominee Adm. Phil Davidson warned Congress over a rising China reports the Honolulu Star-Advertiser. Davidson said that the U.S. must continue innovating with next generation capabilities as "China has undergone a rapid military modernization over the last three decades and is approaching parity in a number of critical areas." At the upcoming summit, administration officials say that President Trump will urge North Korea to quickly dismantle its nuclear arsenal and that the U.S. will not grant substantial sanctions relief for a freeze of North Korea's nuclear and missile tests reports the Wall Street Journal. Additionally, the Portland Tribune reported on the commissioning of USS Portland. Deputy Secretary of Defense Patrick Shanahan provided the keynote, noting that "your city now has a ship worthy of its industrious heritage and creative spirit."

TOP STORIES:
1. USPACOM Nominee: Bolster Forces In Pacific
(HONOLULU STAR-ADVERTISER 22 APR 18) ... William Cole
China "is no longer a rising power but an arrived great power and peer competitor," and the U.S. should respond by adding military forces in the Pacific, the likely next leader of the U.S. forces in the Pacific said.

2. Trump Will Tell Kim Jong Un That Dismantling Nuclear Arsenal Must Precede Economic Benefits
North Korea Will Have To 'Earn' Lifting Of Sanctions, Senior Trump Administration Official Says
(WALL STREET JOURNAL 22 APR 18) ... Michael R. Gordon, Jonathan Cheng and Michael C. Bender
President Donald Trump will urge North Korea to act quickly to dismantle its nuclear arsenal when he meets North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and isn't willing to grant Pyongyang substantial sanctions relief in return for a freeze of its nuclear and missile tests, administration officials said.

3. Pacific Power' Hailed As Navy Commissions USS Portland
(PORTLAND TRIBUNE 21 APR 2018) ... Zane Sparling
The only ship named solely in honor of the Rose City was commissioned at Terminal 2 on Saturday.

CNO:
4. Interview: Adm. John Richardson
Chief of Naval Operations, U.S. Navy
(DEFENSE NEWS 23 APR 18) ... David Larter
The U.S. Navy's top officer made clear from the time he came into office in late 2015 that his job is to prepare the service for an era of renewed great power competition with Russia and China.

INDO - PACIFIC:
5. South Korea Silences Propaganda Loudspeakers On Border With North
(NEW YORK TIMES 22 APR 18) ... Choe Sang-Hun
SEOUL, South Korea — South Korea turned off loudspeakers blaring bouncy music and other propaganda into North Korea on Monday, silencing weapons of psychological warfare so annoying to the North that its military once fired shots across the border.

6. N. Korea's Testing Freeze Throws Ball In Us Court Ahead Of Summits
(STARS AND STRIPES 22 APR 18) ... Kim Gamel
SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea's declaration that it will freeze nuclear and intercontinental ballistic missile

tests throws the ball in Washington's court as the sides prepare for a historic summit.

MIDEAST - CENTRAL/SOUTH ASIA:

7. Suicide Bomber Kills At Least 57 Afghans At Voter Registration Site In Kabul
(NEW YORK TIMES 23 APR 18) ... Mujib Mashal and Jawad Sukhanyar
KABUL, Afghanistan — A suicide bomber killed at least 57 people on Sunday as they lined up at a government office in Kabul to register to vote, raising new concerns about the potential for violence to undermine Afghanistan's long-delayed parliamentary elections.

8. Syrian Military Pummels ISIS-Held Districts In Damascus
(ASSOCIATED PRESS 22 APR 18) ... Zeina Karam
BEIRUT — Syrian government forces used warplanes, helicopters and artillery on Sunday to pound districts of the capital held by the Islamic State group, in a bid to enforce an evacuation deal reached with the militants earlier in the week.

9. Iran, Israel Play Down Prospects They'll Go To War Over Syria
(REUTERS 22 APR 18) ... Dan Williams
JERUSALEM - Iran and Israel traded blame on Sunday for an unprecedented, weeks-long surge in hostilities between their forces over Syria but played down prospects of a spillover into war.

10. How Strong Is ISIS In Afghanistan?
(ASSOCIATED PRESS 22 APR 18) ... Kathy Gannon
ISLAMABAD — An upstart Islamic State affiliate that first appeared in Afghanistan in 2014 is becoming increasingly deadly and their attacks on the country's minority Shiites have grown bolder. In Sunday's devastating bombing, a suicide bomber walked up to a crowd outside a voter registration office and blew himself up killing 57 people.

EUROPE:

11. US Weighs Keeping Carrier Strike Group In Europe As A Check On Russia
(DEFENSE NEWS 20 APR 2018) ... David B. Larter
WASHINGTON —In a break with recent history, the U.S. military is weighing whether to withhold the Truman Carrier Strike Group from deploying to the Middle East, opting instead to keep the carrier in the Mediterranean and the European theater.

12. Macron Visit To Focus On Iran
French President Is Europe's Envoy; U.S. Decision On Nuclear Deal Is Due By May 12
(WASHINGTON POST 23 APR 18) ... Karen DeYoung
The last time they met face to face, at the United Nations in September, French President Emmanuel Macron was puzzled when President Trump and his delegation seemed to have no agenda, carried no papers and took no notes.

13. Russian Navy Receives Upgraded Ballistic Missile Sub
A Retrofitted Soviet-Era Ballistic Missile Sub Was Delivered To The Russian Navy This Month.
(THE DIPLOMAT 20 APR 18) ... Franz-Stefan Gady
The Russian Navy took delivery of an upgraded Project 667 BDRM Delta IV-class nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines (SSBN) this month, according to Russian Deputy Minister of Defense Yuri Borisov.

AMERICAS:

14. Colombia's Transandino Pipeline Halted After Bomb Attack
(REUTERS 22 APR 18)
BOGOTA - Colombia's southern Transandino pipeline was halted after a bomb attack by an illegal armed group spilled crude oil into a river, state-run oil company Ecopetrol said on Sunday.

SURFACE FLEET:

15. New Data Link To Allow LCS To Simultaneously Get Imagery From More Than One Aircraft
(DEFENSE NEWS 20 APR 2018) ... Valerie Insinna
WASHINGTON — Today, a littoral combat ship can only receive surveillance data from one aircraft at a time. That is about to change due to new communications gear that will be fitted on LCS 25, 26 and 28, officials from L3

Technologies told Defense News.

16. USS Bonhomme Richard Returns To U.S. After 6 Years In Forward Deployed Naval Forces Japan
(USNI 20 APR 2018) ... Ben Werner
After six years serving as the forward-deployed flagship of Amphibious Force 7th Fleet, amphibious assault ship USS Bonhomme Richard (LHD-6) is heading back to the U.S. and its new homeport of San Diego.

17. Navy, Marine Leadership Looking At LPD Flight II Missiles, Additional Virginia-Class Buys
(USNI NEWS 20 APR 18) ... Megan Eckstein
CAPITOL HILL – Navy and Marine Corps leaders are mulling if and how to up-gun the San Antonio-class LPD Flight II ships; whether to buy more attack submarines and how to extend the lives of a handful of Los Angeles-class; and other ideas to increase the size and the lethality of the fleet in the near- to mid-term.

AIRCRAFT CARRIERS:
18. USS Enterprise Recycling Work Still Undecided After Reactor Defueling Completed
(KITSAP SUN 21 APR 2018) ... Julianne Stanford
Although the USS Enterprise now rests dormant after the completed defueling of the aircraft carrier's nuclear reactors, the Navy has not yet decided if the vessel's metal remains will be towed to the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard for reactor compartment recycling.

INNOVATION:
19. Pentagon Aims To Win Global Race For New Hypersonic Technologies
(MILITARY.COM 22 APR 18) ... Oriana Pawlyk
If the great Space Race that began in the 1950s helped define technologies that would take satellites and mankind into space, a new kind of global competition today will define technologies that move at more than five times the speed of sound.

20. Navy Anti-Mine Program Reaches Milestone
(SAN DIEGO UNION-TRIBUNE 20 APR 18) ... Carl Prine
The Navy announced Friday that it has taken another step forward in a $34 million anti-mine program that relies on flying robots to help Marines hit the beach.

OUTREACH:
21. NOLA Navy Week: Take An Inside Look At The USS Kearsarge
(WGNO.COM 20 APR 2018)
NEW ORLEANS -- Do you ever wonder what goes on in one of the navy's largest amphibious ships?

COMMENTARY:
22. Countering China’s Militarization Of The Indo-Pacific
(WAR ON THE ROCKS 13 APR 18) ... Michael J. Green and Andrew Shearer
Two weeks ago, Australians were startled by media reports that China intended to establish a military base in Vanuatu. This small island nation sits less than 1,500 miles from Australia’s northeastern coast in an area of the Pacific long thought free from great power rivalry.

23. America Struck Flawlessly, But The Big Question Is What Comes Next
(THE HILL 22 APR 18) ... Michael Hayden
With all the to-ing and fro-ing, unprecedented name calling and personal attacks that characterize today’s American discourse, I was quietly comforted by the voice of Marine Lt. Gen. Kenneth McKenzie the morning after the April 13 airstrikes on Syria. He is director of the Joint Staff, kind of the chief operating officer of the Joint Chiefs chairman. He was briefing the results of the attack with the precise, confident, fact-based style that I had become accustomed to hearing in nearly four decades in uniform.

24. North Korea Is Not Denuclearizing
The Trump administration shouldn’t get too excited about Kim Jong Un’s pledge to limit his weapons program.
(THE ATLANTIC 22 APR 18) ... Adam Mount and Ankit Panda
Over the past four months, North Korea has been saying all the right things. After weeks of silence regarding his intentions for upcoming summits with South Korea and the United States, Kim Jong Un, the leader of North Korea,

made a dramatic announcement on Saturday morning, pledging unilateral limits on his nuclear weapons and missile programs. Though the announcement has been widely hailed as encouraging—President Donald Trump declared it a sign of “big progress”—it does not, in fact, set up a path to denuclearization. It does, however, open the door to capping Kim’s arsenal, keeping America and its allies safer while talks are underway.

25. Why A U.S-China War Over Taiwan Won't Be Anything Like The Syria Strikes
(NATIONAL INTEREST 22 APR 18) ... James Holmes
Great powers have a habit of intervening to shield weak allies from rival great powers and advance their own purposes. Last week it was Russia vowing to shoot down American missiles bound for Syrian chemical-weapon sites. Judging from recent Chinese words and deeds, next week could see the U.S. Navy attempting to repulse a Chinese assault on nearby Taiwan.

TOP STORIES:
1. USPACOM Nominee: Bolster Forces In Pacific
(HONOLULU STAR-ADVERTISER 22 APR 18) ... William Cole

China “is no longer a rising power but an arrived great power and peer competitor,” and the U.S. should respond by adding military forces in the Pacific, the likely next leader of the U.S. forces in the Pacific said.
Adm. Phil Davidson, nominee to lead U.S. Pacific Command at Camp H.M. Smith and the current head of the Navy’s Fleet Forces Command on the East Coast, also noted ballistic missile challenges from North Korea and a militarily modernizing Russia.
Davidson testified on Tuesday before the Senate Armed Services Committee and is expected to be approved to lead the command that covers about half the globe.
Davidson said in written responses to Senate questions that the U.S. has the capability today to deter North Korean aggression, but given where the North’s missiles may be in five years, “we must continue to explore, improve and resource our entire missile defense capabilities.”
He said he supports improvements including a planned “homeland defense” radar for Hawaii, the purchase of additional ground-based interceptors, “and a detailed study that ascertains the efficacy of positioning interceptors in Hawaii.”
On Saturday, North Korea announced it was stopping nuclear and missile tests.
Davidson testified that he is increasingly concerned about China.
“China has undergone a rapid military modernization over the last three decades and is approaching parity in a number of critical areas; there is no guarantee that the United States would win a future conflict with China,” Davidson said.
The U.S. still maintains “significant advantages” in quality of personnel and training and ability to plan and integrate forces. To prevent a situation in which China is more likely to win a conflict, Davidson said the U.S. “must resource” high-technology capabilities, preserve its network of allies and partners, and continue to recruit and train high-quality service members.
Pacific Command is “heavily dependent” on high-end warfare capabilities including stealth aircraft, munitions capable of breaching China’s defenses, and submarine dominance, he said.
Davidson said the U.S. should continue to invest in next-generation capabilities such as long-range hypersonic missiles “while simultaneously recognizing that China is already weaponizing space and cyber.”
Pacific Command has only “about a quarter” of what it needs in the region for intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities. New National Defense Strategy priorities “make it clear that the Indo-Pacific will require additional capability and capacity from all services,” he said.
Davidson said he would closely examine the number and types of ships and infrastructure to support them in the Pacific.
Fleet Forces Command in Norfolk, Va., trains, certifies and provides combat-ready Navy forces. Davidson’s official biography says the surface warfare officer “has deployed across the globe in frigates, destroyers, cruisers and aircraft carriers.”
Davidson, who was asked by Hawaii U.S. Sen. Mazie Hirono about his experience to take on the job, said he had two tours on the U.S. Pacific Fleet staff, operational deployments to the region, and engagement with Southwest and South Asia during time spent with the U.S. State Department.

He would replace Adm. Harry Harris in the Pacific's top military job. Harris is retiring and expected to become the next ambassador to Australia. A confirmation hearing is scheduled for Tuesday.
About 375,000 U.S. military and civilian personnel are assigned to Pacific Command. Its subordinate Pacific Fleet, which is based at Pearl Harbor, has 200 ships and submarines, nearly 1,200 aircraft and more than 130,000 sailors and civilians.
https://www.stripes.com/news/navy/uspacom-nominee-bolster-forces-in-pacific-1.523443

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2. Trump Will Tell Kim Jong Un That Dismantling Nuclear Arsenal Must Precede Economic Benefits
North Korea Will Have To 'Earn' Lifting Of Sanctions, Senior Trump Administration Official Says
(WALL STREET JOURNAL 22 APR 18) ... Michael R. Gordon, Jonathan Cheng and Michael C. Bender

President Donald Trump will urge North Korea to act quickly to dismantle its nuclear arsenal when he meets North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and isn't willing to grant Pyongyang substantial sanctions relief in return for a freeze of its nuclear and missile tests, administration officials said.
Those two closely related questions—the pace of Pyongyang's nuclear dismantlement and the timetable for sanctions relief—stand to be the major issues of the summit.
"When the president says that he will not make the mistakes of the past, that means the U.S. will not be making substantial concessions, such as lifting sanctions, until North Korea has substantially dismantled its nuclear programs," a senior Trump administration official said on Sunday.
"If North Korea is willing to move quickly to denuclearize, then the sky is the limit. All sorts of good things can happen," the official added.
Mr. Kim announced Saturday after a meeting of the central committee of North Korea's ruling party that his country would close its nuclear test site and suspend long-range missile tests. The statement has been hailed as an important move to establish a good atmosphere for a summit meeting that is expected to be held outside northeast Asia in late May or June.
Mr. Trump himself described it as "big progress" in a tweet on Friday, though in a Twitter message Sunday he added a note of caution. "We are a long way from conclusion on North Korea, maybe things will work out, and maybe they won't—only time will tell."
In his address Saturday, Mr. Kim also offered hints that he wouldn't be giving up nuclear weapons. During Mr. Kim's meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping in Beijing last month, the Chinese Foreign Ministry quoted the North Korean leader as saying that he favored "phased, synchronized measures to achieve peace."
In a meeting in Pyongyang over the Easter weekend, Mr. Kim tried to push Central Intelligence Agency Director Mike Pompeo toward a phased agreement in which each side would make paired concessions on a timetable that could stretch out for years, according to a person familiar with the matter.
But the Trump administration is wary of making economic and diplomatic concessions upfront for steps to dismantle the North Korean arsenal that would only to be taken later. The administration favors what one person called a "big bang" approach, in which major concessions would be made by each side early on.
"A freeze in itself is easily reversed," the senior Trump administration official said. "When it comes to allowing economic activity to resume, that is something North Korea is going to have to earn."
Some experts say there may be ways to make sure that the steps taken during the initial phase cannot be easily reversed. Joel S. Wit, a former State Department official, said officials from the two sides could negotiate procedures that would make the shuttering of North Korea's nuclear test site irreversible. This might also involve visits by international monitors to the site.
Given the decades of enmity between the two sides, Mr. Wit said a phased process to build up trust before taking ambitious steps is logical.
"There has to be a period of confidence-building between the two countries," Mr. Wit said. "That is one of the advantages of a phased approach. Each side can monitor the other, and if the U.S. finds North Korea is not living up to its promises, it can stop before moving to the next phase."
But there is also a widespread perception among officials in Washington that North Korea has used previous rounds of negotiations to pursue economic benefits and sanctions relief without abandoning its nuclear weapons program and agreeing on the difficult question of verification arrangements.
"I have a hard time imagining everything happening all at once because it is too big a step to take," said Robert L. Gallucci, a professor at Georgetown University and the chief negotiator with North Korea during the Clinton administration. "A successful outcome will require some staging. But I think everybody, the United States and others, will not want any serious sanction relief to be given to the North until we are confident they have dismantled

their fissile material production capability and extended range ballistic missile capability as well."
North Korean officials have urged a phased approach to denuclearization before. In a meeting in Europe in 2013 with former U.S. officials, North Korean government officials described a three-phase process. The first phase would involve a freeze of the North's nuclear activities to be followed by a stage in which the Pyongyang's nuclear programs would be disabled. In the final stage, they would be dismantled.
Under the North Korean approach, the U.S. would take reciprocal economic, diplomatic and security steps during each phase. The two sides would spell out the ultimate objectives in a declaration that would be drafted at the start of the process.
While a moratorium on missile and nuclear tests would have some security benefits, the administration is seeking a more far-reaching agreement. "They are not going to get the sort of relief from economic sanctions I am sure they are looking for in the absence of dramatic progress in dismantling their programs," the senior administration official said.
Mr. Pompeo's visit to Pyongyang meant to gauge North Korea's willingness to abandon its nuclear weapons. Messrs. Pompeo and Kim also discussed the possible release of three U.S. citizens detained in North Korea and the location options for a possible summit of the two leaders, according to people familiar with the trip. Mr. Pompeo's trip lasted just a day, and he didn't stay overnight in the city, these people said.
Tensions over the pace of denuclearization could have important implications for U.S. allies. The South Korean government could be frustrated if talks falter over a disarmament schedule.
Nor is it clear that China would be prepared to continue tough sanctions if progress was stymied over the pace of disarmament. But Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who met last week with Mr. Trump, praised North Korea's missile and nuclear testing moratorium while stressing that Tokyo would continue to put pressure on Pyongyang until it gives up its "weapons of mass destruction, nuclear arms and missiles."
https://www.wsj.com/articles/trump-will-tell-kim-jong-un-that-dismantling-nukes-must-precede-economic-benefits-1524433979

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3. Pacific Power' Hailed As Navy Commissions USS Portland
(PORTLAND TRIBUNE 21 APR 2018) ... Zane Sparling

The only ship named solely in honor of the Rose City was commissioned at Terminal 2 on Saturday.
With the blast of cannons and a roll from the drums, the USS Portland formally enlisted for duty inside its namesake port — cementing the Rose City's status as a fearsome "Pacific power."
Hundreds of sailors hustled aboard, lining the decks of the Landing Platform Dock as the crowd clapped and the band played a martial tune. Soon the colors red, white and blue snapped in the wind.
"Your city now has a ship worthy of its industrious heritage and creative spirit," U.S. Deputy Secretary of Defense Patrick M. Shanahan told the assembly. "To allies, have no fear. To adversaries — don't even think about it."
More than 5,000 people — including veterans, soldiers, Navy personnel and their families — gathered for the commissioning ceremony on Saturday, April 21 at Terminal 2 on Front Avenue along the west bank of the Willamette River.
There was no need for a smash of champagne across the bow, as the ship has borne the name Portland since May, 2016, when it was christened by ship sponsor Bonnie Amos, the wife of the retired Commandant of the Marine Corps, James F. Amos.
"The sponsor of a ship is the woman who gives her spirit to the ship, and will remain with it wherever it sails," Bonnie Amos explained, noting that the seafaring custom dates back to the ancient Phoenicians.
Yet there was no shortage of pomp and circumstance, as Naval tradition demands the setting of the first watch and the "breaking" of the pennant, a special flag hoisted to the mast until the vessel leaves service.
The commissioning also officially affixes the acronym United States Ship (USS) to the Portland. On this occasion, the flag was raised to half mast in honor of former First Lady Barbara Bush, who died on April 17.
Accepting the commission was Capt. Jeremy "J.R." Hill, who will now take command of the 371 crewmembers aboard the San Antonio-class amphibious transport ship, which will also be known as LPD 27.
"Keep the bottom wet and don't scratch the paint," advised Pacific Fleet Vice Admiral Richard Brown.
The 684-foot-long vessel is equipped with a 24-bed medical ward, four diesel engines, a battery of machine guns and anti-air missile systems as well as a flight deck that can accommodate a variety of helicopters. Its motto will be "First Responders, Brave and Determined."
Striking a patriotic tone, Gov. Kate Brown noted that "freedom isn't free" and praised Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler for ensuring the "wonderful weather."

"I have incredible respect and admiration for those who serve," Gov. Brown said. "Thank you so much for your service."
Seated in the first row were two guests of honor who served during World War II, U.S. Marine Corps hospital corpsman Joe Bruer and Women's Reserve control tower operator Margaret Lutz.
"We're the ones that went on the battlefield and brought in the boys that were shot up," said Bruer, a 95-year-old Portlander. "They lost arms and legs. Too many of them died right there."
Lutz, a 96-year-old former teacher, was stationed at a naval air station in Astoria after she joined the Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service, better known as WAVES.
"Everybody wanted to be something for the service," she recalled. "I felt I was totally capable."
The USS Portland, constructed in Mississippi at a cost of $1.6 billion, is the third Navy craft to be dubbed Portland, though the first to solely honor the Rose City. Its home base will be at San Diego.
The first USS Portland — a heavy cruiser named after the city in Maine — saw combat in the Battle of Coral Sea in 1942, crucially picking up survivors from the sunken carrier Lexington. Both previous Portlands, and perhaps the third as well, have been given the affectionate nickname "Sweet Pea."
https://portlandtribune.com/pt/9-news/393137-285760-pacific-power-hailed-as-navy-commissions-uss-portland#disqus_thread

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CNO:
4. Interview: Adm. John Richardson
Chief of Naval Operations, U.S. Navy
(DEFENSE NEWS 23 APR 18) ... David Larter

The U.S. Navy's top officer made clear from the time he came into office in late 2015 that his job is to prepare the service for an era of renewed great power competition with Russia and China.
Key to that effort has been his belief that getting new technologies to the fleet can no longer take a decade to complete. In an age when advances in technology can happen overnight, the Navy has to be adaptable and agile to keep pace with the threat.
Defense News sat down with Adm. John Richardson, chief of naval operations, to discuss speeding up the acquisition process, some of his key projects and his vision for where competition is headed.
***
You've spoken about the Navy's unmanned aerial tanker, the MQ-25 Stingray, as being a test bed for where the Navy can find efficiencies in the acquisition system. What have you learned going through this process?
Agile acquisition has been a big emphasis area during my time as CNO. We've stood up this accelerated acquisition program, and there are really two elements to that: One, if there is a problem out there for which we don't have a solution, let's get rapid prototyping going and get to a solution fast. And then for those things where we have a solution, either through rapid prototyping or off the shelf, what can we do to get that in production and in the fleet as fast as we can?
With using those two elements, given that we are in this competition, a position strengthened by the National Defense Strategy, the need to go faster was never more important.
The MQ-25 was really a signature program to test the limits and plow new ground in that direction. And so we brought industry in way earlier.
I think that's key to getting the acquisition cycle faster, even in the refinement of the requirements phase. If I put people together in a room and they are not fully informed - if they come out and say, "We've done the full analysis, and what we need is a time machine;" OK, that's great, but that's going to be a lot of money. If you have industry in the room, they can say: "Well, we don't have time travel just yet, but I can get you 80 percent of it with something I've got that's mature." And so that's where we've been with MQ-25, is to bring them in, see what they've got and see how fast they can get a prototype together to fly.
One thing we did do was we locked down on requirements. We could probably get agreement from everybody that we need something to tank. It liberates a lot of our strike fighters from doing that mission and it's something that we can get done - its relatively straightforward.
What has made the difference in speeding up acquisition from where you sit?
Part and parcel with the acquisition approach has been: Let's get empowerment as far down as we can. And you can see this manifesting down at Naval Air Systems Command where we've allowed a lot of those decisions to be made, at least in the prototyping phase.

There have been some areas where you take a look at the traditional approach to doing things and you find out, well, wait a second, that's for a manned aircraft; this is an unmanned aircraft, so maybe we don't need to do that. The operational testing and those sorts of things, I think there are a lot of interesting opportunities there.
The response from industry has been overall positive. I think they are enjoying being part of it. To date, it's been smooth.
What are your thoughts on the reported initial operational capability date for MQ-25 of 2026?
I'd like to see it as fast as possible. 2026 is out there, but there is a pretty keen sense that we can drive this left, maybe by a significant amount. So I'll just say as fast as possible. We're going to continue to accelerate. There are some in the Future Years Defense Program already. If we can move it left, that would be good.
There were questions earlier in the process about whether the requirements for MQ-25 were stable. Are you comfortable with the requirements and do you know precisely what you want?
Yes, I think we're pretty set right now. It was such new ground for us in terms of opening this conversation up so early. So there was a bit of exploration that needed to be done. And that back and forth, that refinement phase, I think was new and important.
So maybe when [industry] said: "Are you sure this is really what you want?" Boy, I welcome that question because that's where you find all the knees and the curves, the cost-performance curves. And by asking us, "Is this what you really meant?" I think it sharpens us.
Moving on to Ohio-replacement: It's a very tight schedule, and the Navy is reportedly eating into the schedule. Where do you think you can buy back some time?
If you ask anyone in that program, the thing that I've been driving is that we have to get as much schedule margin into that program as possible. The technological risk is understood, the mission and the requirements are certainly understood, we have an experience industrial base in this regard. I feel confident we are going to be at about 83 percent design maturity before we start to build. So that helps a lot in terms of controlling costs. All of that is trending in the right direction.
Having said that, it's complicated. And while it is on schedule, we need to get ahead of schedule. Because inevitably something will happen, we'll discover something in test. And it's such a critical mission that we need to retire risk and pull everything to the left as aggressively as we can.
There is going to be a lot of strain on suppliers with two Virginia-class submarines in Columbia-class years, and perhaps even three Virginias in off years. And then the Columbia is equivalent to, what, a submarine and a half when compared to a Virginia?
More like two.
Are you comfortable with where the supply chain is in building all these submarines? What can the Navy do to make sure those suppliers are staying around and keeping up with demand?
You bring up this comfort level thing again. Nothing I do makes me comfortable. I'm kind of a naturally uncomfortable person.
I suppose Adm. Rickover didn't train people to be comfortable with the way things are.
No, we don't go to copacetic very well.
But you're right, where we were with fiscal restraints have leaned out that industrial base a tremendous amount. It's the second- and third-tier suppliers - some of these are very small shops making valves or circuit boards or things like that. And because things are so leaned out, there is not a lot of room for any of those teams to fail.
And so where we are working with the primes, folks like Newport News or Electric Boat shipbuilding. We're going to have great insight into those suppliers to make sure they are delivering quality on time, [the] first time because a delay in a shipment of valves can now delay the delivery of a major nuclear-powered warship.
Stable, predictable funding is the most important thing we can do to send a signal to the suppliers that their work is valued, we're making the investments, stick with us, there are business opportunities. When we don't have that, often times their margins are a lot smaller and they can't absorb this uncertainty or these delays. So it makes it all pretty fragile.
What is your overall vision for where the surface fleet is going to go in this era of increased competition?
You have to think about what do we define as a platform. What are those technologies that define what a platform is? Networking for sure because unmanned might be something we really want to lean into. What are the qualities and characteristics of an unmanned platform so that we can call it a platform instead of just a robot that floats?
It has to be networked so we can tie back in. It probably has to have some autonomy for when the networks degrade. Sensors for sure. Maybe weapons. Maybe it could go with a small crew; and as the risk goes up we could pull that crew off and take it from there in an unmanned way - looking at all those. It's getting harder and harder to completely disappear. So, there is a value to stealth - that's lowering your signal. But there is also a value to deception, decoys and those sorts of things where you are raising the noise. So you can see this new concept emerging where it's all about controlling the signal-to-noise ratio for the threat. What can you do to lower your

signature as much as possible and create a lot of noise? So you're starting to see the role for electromagnetic maneuver warfare and those sorts of things rolling in.
https://www.defensenews.com/

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INDO - PACIFIC:

5. South Korea Silences Propaganda Loudspeakers On Border With North
(NEW YORK TIMES 22 APR 18) ... Choe Sang-Hun

SEOUL, South Korea — South Korea turned off loudspeakers blaring bouncy music and other propaganda into North Korea on Monday, silencing weapons of psychological warfare so annoying to the North that its military once fired shots across the border.

The South's Defense Ministry said it switched off all batteries of the propaganda loudspeakers along the inter-Korean border, known as the Demilitarized Zone, days before its president, Moon Jae-in, is to join the North's leader, Kim Jong-un, there on Friday for a summit meeting.

It said the decision was made to help "ease military tensions and create a peaceful mood for the meeting." The venue — Panmunjom, a "truce village" inside the DMZ — is within the earshot of propaganda broadcasts from both sides.

"We hope that our move today will result in South and North Korea ending mutual slandering and propaganda against each other and creating a peaceful new beginning," the ministry said in a statement.

The silencing of the loudspeakers was another sign of easing tensions on the divided Korean Peninsula, as Mr. Kim prepared for his meeting with Mr. Moon and for a separate one later with President Trump, which would be the first summit meeting between North Korea and the United States.

Over the weekend, Mr. Kim announced an end to all nuclear and long-range missile tests and the shutting down of his country's only known nuclear test site.

South Korean officials said the North was expected to reciprocate the South's initiative by turning off its own propaganda loudspeakers. Because of electricity shortages in the North, its loudspeakers have not been as powerful as the South's, South Korean military officials said.

For decades, loudspeakers have been a fixture along the border, beckoning soldiers to defect to the other side. In November, a North Korean soldier defected to the South in Panmunjom, fleeing through a hail of gunfire by fellow North Korean soldiers.

Day and night, songs eulogizing the North's "fatherly" leader and communist propaganda lamenting "depraved capitalist" lifestyles have drifted across the border to the South.

For their part, South Korean loudspeakers denounced hunger and human rights violations in the North, highlighting the number of cars and other signs of affluence in the South. Lately, it added K-pop music to the mix. South Korea hoped that its propaganda barrage would undermine the personality cult surrounding the ruling Kim family in the North.

In 2015, Mr. Kim ordered his front-line military units to go on a "semi-war state" after the two Koreas exchanged rocket and artillery fire. He ordered his front-line units to prepare to attack South Korean loudspeakers along the border unless they stopped blaring propaganda.

The two Koreas decommissioned their loudspeakers after their ties improved following their first summit meeting in 2000. But they switched them on again as their relations soured. The propaganda war across their heavily armed border escalated after the North conducted its fourth nuclear test in early 2016.

But anti-North Korean activists in the South vowed to continue to send propaganda balloons, which carry dollar bills, transistor radios, CDs containing Western movies and leaflets that call Mr. Kim a pig.

Some of the activists complained that the police tried to stop their balloon campaign as South Korea cultivated its rapprochement with the North.

In the past, the South Korean authorities have tried to discourage the balloon campaign when relations with Pyongyang have improved or the North has threatened to fire across the border to shoot down the balloons.
https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/22/world/asia/south-korea-propaganda-loudspeakers-north-korea html?rref=collection%2Fsectioncollection%2Fworld

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6. N. Korea's Testing Freeze Throws Ball In Us Court Ahead Of Summits

(STARS AND STRIPES 22 APR 18) ... Kim Gamel

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea's declaration that it will freeze nuclear and intercontinental ballistic missile tests throws the ball in Washington's court as the sides prepare for a historic summit.

Diplomatic efforts to resolve the crisis over the North's nuclear weapons program will be put to their first test Friday when North Korean leader Kim Jong Un meets with South Korean President Moon Jae-in in the heavily fortified border area.

That meeting is largely seen as a precursor to Kim's summit with President Donald Trump, expected to be in May or early June.

North Korea made its first move when it said it will stop test-firing intercontinental ballistic missiles and will dismantle its northeastern nuclear test site.

Experts noted the North can likely afford to take a break from testing after demonstrating alarming progress with dozens of missile launches and its sixth and most powerful nuclear test last year.

The moratorium also didn't mention short- to medium-range missiles that could target U.S. bases in South Korea and Japan. And there was no mention of plans to cut its nuclear arsenal.

Satellite images also suggest the mountainous Punggye-ri nuclear test site, where the North has conducted all six underground blasts since 2006, is already on the verge of collapse.

Instead, Kim pointed to his country's "miraculous victory" in developing nuclear weapons and said it was time to shift to economic development.

That was underscored by a resolution adopted by the central committee of the ruling Workers' Party last Friday promising not to use nuclear weapons unless faced with a nuclear threat or provocations itself.

"It's not a shift in policy at all," said Duyeon Kim, a senior visiting fellow with the Seoul-based Korean Peninsula Future Forum. "They're also basically declaring that they're a nuclear power."

She said it was more likely a public relations ploy aimed at showing the regime is willing to compromise as it prepares to seek concessions in the upcoming talks.

"It's all part of his plan … to try and wow Washington and the world and weaken Washington's demands before the summit," she said. "The North is going to play a tough negotiating hand with a lot of tricks and traps to try to get away with keeping its nuclear weapons."

Cautious Welcome

Trump, Moon and the leaders of China and Japan welcomed the North's statement as a positive signal after weeks of official silence on the upcoming meetings.

The U.S. president called the North's announcement "very good news" and said "progress being made for all" in a pair of tweets.

But some Trump aides privately expressed skepticism about the North's declaration, according to the Washington Post. It quoted them as saying Kim Jong Un may be trying to offer relatively modest promises that could be easily reversed to show himself as a reasonable negotiating partner.

The U.S. administration has long insisted that it will maintain its "maximum pressure" campaign of tough economic sanctions and other diplomatic measures until the North agrees to abandon its nuclear weapons.

Broken Promises

North Korea, which has been ruled by the Kim family dynasty since it was founded in 1948, has a track record of breaking promises in past negotiations over its nuclear ambitions.

The Clinton administration reached a so-called "Agreed Framework" with the North in 1994. The North halted construction of two reactors believed to be for nuclear weapons production in return for two alternative nuclear power reactors that could be used for electricity and shipments of fuel oil.

But the deal collapsed after U.S. officials alleged the North was conducting a clandestine uranium enrichment program and newly elected President George W. Bush labeled the North part of an "axis of evil" with Iran and Saddam Hussein's Iraq.

Subsequent six-party talks that included the two Koreas, the United States, China, Japan and Russia also failed when Pyongyang refused to accept U.S.-proposed verification methods.

Shortly after taking power, Kim reached a wide-ranging deal with the Obama administration in 2012 to suspend tests of nuclear weapons and missile tests as well as uranium enrichment.

He also agreed to allow international inspectors to monitor the country's nuclear activities in exchange for food aid.

The U.S. ended that arrangement after the North launched a long-range rocket it claimed was for delivering satellites.

South Korea has held working-level talks with the North since the communist state agreed to join the Olympics, setting off the current whirlwind of diplomacy.

Moon said the North has agreed to discuss denuclearization without preconditions, including a longstanding demand

the that U.S. remove troops from the divided peninsula.
Moon also has welcomed the opportunity for improved relations with the North and raised the prospect of beginning talks on signing a formal peace treaty to replace the armistice.
Kim didn't mention either item in the state-run media report about his remarks.
Analysts say that at the very least the engagement has tamped down fears of a nuclear war after months of saber rattling that saw Trump call Kim "little rocket man" and threaten to "totally destroy" North Korea if forced to defend the U.S. and its allies.
There could be more modest gains even if the sides fail to reach an agreement on denuclearization.
The two Koreas could agree to restore tourism and economic exchanges, and to allow more reunions of families left divided after the peninsula was split in two.
The U.S. also is pressing for the release of three Americans who have been detained in the North.
"The administration needs to start sweating the details on how it'll take what Kim's given up here and turn it into a winner of a deal — one with some degree of verifiability," security analyst Ankit Panda wrote in an article published in the Daily Beast.
"If Trump shows up to a meeting with Kim expecting the North Korean leader to turn over the keys to his nuclear program, he'll leave sorely disappointed — maybe even furious and inclined toward war," said Panda, an adjunct senior fellow at the Federation of American Scientists.
https://www.stripes.com/news/n-korea-s-testing-freeze-throws-ball-in-us-court-ahead-of-summits-1.523424

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MIDEAST - CENTRAL/SOUTH ASIA:
7. Suicide Bomber Kills At Least 57 Afghans At Voter Registration Site In Kabul
(NEW YORK TIMES 23 APR 18) ... Mujib Mashal and Jawad Sukhanyar

KABUL, Afghanistan — A suicide bomber killed at least 57 people on Sunday as they lined up at a government office in Kabul to register to vote, raising new concerns about the potential for violence to undermine Afghanistan's long-delayed parliamentary elections.
The attacker detonated his explosives as the Afghan authorities distributed national identity cards in the western part of Kabul, the capital, part of a push by the government to get more people to register to vote. Wahidullah Majrooh, a spokesman for the Afghan Health Ministry, said the attack also wounded at least 119 others.
Among the dead were 25 men, 22 women and eight children, while two bodies were not identifiable, Mr. Majrooh said.
Public interest in the October elections has been alarmingly low because of voter fatigue after successive fraudulent elections and concerns about the threat to safety at polling stations posed by suicide bombers and other violence from groups opposing the government.
Soon after the Taliban denied responsibility, the Islamic State said that it was behind the carnage, according to the group's Amaq news agency. Although the group's area of control and number of fighters in Afghanistan have largely been reduced through heavy airstrikes and commando operations, the militants still continue to claim attacks in urban centers.
At the scene of the attack, relatives of the victims tried to go past the police cordon for news of their loved ones. Windows of some of the nearby homes were blown out. Firefighters tried to wash away the blood and human remains from the sidewalks and walls, the drainage canals flooded with bloody water.
Among the victims were children in uniform who were on their way to a nearby school. A picture circulating on social media showed one young child in the morgue still wearing her pink schoolbag, pulled up as a pillow to her hair, which was covered in blood.
"I have carried so many bodies that I cannot even talk," said Mohammad Karim, 47, who lives nearby. "What is our pain? It is an ongoing pain and misery. They are attacking us and we are being martyred. I carried about 12 bodies. I carried a daughter and mother. The daughter's brain was smashed out, the mother's abdomen was cut open."
A separate explosion near a voter registration center in the northern province of Baghlan killed five people and wounded four others, officials there said.
In the week since voter registration began, staff members have been abducted in the western province of Ghor, and at least one registration center came under rocket fire in Badghis Province in the country's northwest. In the eastern city of Jalalabad, gunmen on a motorcycle shot and killed two police officers guarding a voter registration center.
Officials said that even provincial capitals were struggling to open all voter registration centers. "There are 55 voter

registration centers in Kunduz city and the villages that belong to the center, and 20 of them are closed because those villages are under Taliban control," said Gen. Abdul Hamid Hamidi, the police chief of Kunduz Province.
The country's parliamentary elections have been delayed by three years as the leaders of the coalition government, which came out of a messy presidential election that almost tore the country apart, debated measures to prevent the fraud that had marred previous elections.
After public disagreements that added to the voter fatigue, the leaders announced an October date for the elections. They also decided to declare void the millions of voter identification cards already in circulation, which have been used in vote rigging in the past.
Instead, they asked people to return to their local polling centers and register with their national ID cards. Officials and party leaders have expressed concern about the low response, especially after recent attacks targeting registration centers or their staff. In the first week of voter registration, just 190,000 people signed up — from what political parties estimated is a pool of about 14 million eligible voters.
"We are concerned about the rate of voter registration," said Bashir Ahmad Tayanj, a spokesman for the Junbish party, an Uzbek group. "If people don't take part in the election, it will be meaningless."
Security officials have said that close to 1,000 polling stations are completely beyond government control, while more than 2,000 others are in areas that are described as medium or high security risks. In total, there are about 7,355 polling stations in Afghanistan.
Fatima Faizi contributed reporting from Kabul, and Najim Rahim from Mazar e Sharif, Afghanistan.
https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/22/world/asia/suicide-bomber-afghanistan-elections html?rref=collection%2Fsectioncollection%2Fworld

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8. Syrian Military Pummels ISIS-Held Districts In Damascus
(ASSOCIATED PRESS 22 APR 18) ... Zeina Karam

BEIRUT — Syrian government forces used warplanes, helicopters and artillery on Sunday to pound districts of the capital held by the Islamic State group, in a bid to enforce an evacuation deal reached with the militants earlier in the week.
The militants agreed to give up their last pocket in southern Damascus on Friday but have yet to begin surrendering to government forces and relocating to IS-held areas elsewhere in the country.
State-run al-Ikhbariya TV showed thick gray smoke billowing from the IS-held Hajar al-Aswad neighborhood on Sunday, and government warplanes streaking overhead amid heavy bombardment of the area. Hundreds of IS fighters and allied militants are holed up in Hajar al-Aswad and the nearby Yarmouk Palestinian refugee camp.
Residents of Damascus reported hearing loud booms throughout the night and Sunday morning.
President Bashar Assad has escalated his military campaign to retake all remaining enclaves in the capital and surrounding areas. The IS-held areas in southern Damascus are the last holdouts, after rebels evacuated the eastern Ghouta suburbs following a fierce government offensive and an alleged poison gas attack in the town of Douma.
Chemical weapons inspectors collected samples from Douma on Saturday, two weeks after the suspected gas attack there prompted retaliatory strikes by Western powers on the Syrian government's chemical facilities.
The site visit, confirmed by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, will allow the agency to proceed with an independent investigation to determine what chemicals, if any, were used in the April 7 attack that medical workers said killed more than 40 people. The OPCW mission is not mandated to apportion blame for the attack.
Douma was the final target of the government's sweeping campaign to seize back control of eastern Ghouta from rebels after seven years of revolt. Militants gave up the town days after the alleged attack.
The Syrian government and its ally Russia denied responsibility for the suspected chemical attack.
Meanwhile, rebels have begun evacuating three towns in the eastern Qalamoun region in the Damascus countryside. Al-Ikhbariya TV said that 35 buses left the towns of Ruhaiba, Jayroud, and al-Nasriya on Saturday carrying hundreds of rebels and their families to opposition-held territory in northern Syria.
The station said the evacuations would continue for three days.
On Sunday, Sweden's Ambassador to the United Nations said that he and other Security Council envoys had agreed to work on a "meaningful mechanism" to work out who was behind the alleged use of chemical weapons in Syria. Olof Skoog spoke in southern Sweden after an annual, informal working meeting with the U.N. Security Council ambassadors.
The meeting comes just a week after the U.S., France and Britain bombed suspected Syrian chemical weapons

facilities, after accusing Assad's government of being behind the attack in Douma.
https://www.stripes.com/news/middle-east/syrian-military-pummels-isis-held-districts-in-damascus-1.523417

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9. Iran, Israel Play Down Prospects They'll Go To War Over Syria
(REUTERS 22 APR 18) ... Dan Williams

JERUSALEM - Iran and Israel traded blame on Sunday for an unprecedented, weeks-long surge in hostilities between their forces over Syria but played down prospects of a spillover into war.
A showdown between the arch-foes has loomed since Feb. 10, when Israel said an armed Iranian drone launched from a Syrian base penetrated its territory. Israel downed the drone and, during a reprisal raid, lost an F-16 jet to Syrian ground fire.
On April 9, an air strike killed seven Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps members at the Syrian base. Tehran blamed Israel and vowed unspecified retaliation, drawing Israeli counter-threats to broaden attacks on Iranian military assets in Syria.
Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said in a U.S. television interview that further Israeli sorties in Syria would have “consequences”. But he deemed major escalation as unlikely.
“I do not believe that we are headed towards regional war but I do believe that unfortunately, Israel has continued its violations with international law, hoping to be able to do it with impunity because of the U.S. support and trying to find smokescreens to hide behind,” Zarif told CBS News.
“The easiest answer would be to stop - to stop these acts of aggression, to stop these incursions.”
Iran, Lebanon’s Hezbollah militia and Russia have been reinforcing Damascus against a 7-year-old Syrian rebellion. The Israelis worry that Iran’s garrison will remain, linking with Hezbollah to form a broad Syrian-Lebanese front against them.
Israeli Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman reiterated his government’s policy of preventing Iranian entrenchment in Syria.
“No matter the price, we will not allow a noose to form around us,” he told Israel Radio in an interview.
Deterrence
But asked if that meant war was imminent, he said: “I hope not. I think that our primary role is prevent war, and that requires concrete, real deterrence as well as readiness to act.”
Israel Katz, the Israeli intelligence minister, suggested world powers might intervene to curb Iranian activity in Syria.
Israel is “not interested” in escalation, Katz told the Ynet news site. But Israeli power-projection, he said, “can challenge the Iranians, can clarify to the Russians, who seek stability, that it is worth it for them to apply their influence, and the same goes for the United States, for France and all the others”.
The Syria face-off comes as the Trump administration mulls reimposing U.S. economic sanctions against Tehran by May 12, a move that could deal a blow to an international 2015 deal under which the Iranians capped their nuclear projects.
Zarif said Iran might respond to any unraveling of the deal by “resuming at a much greater speed our nuclear activities”.
Israel has savaged the deal and encouraged a U.S. review, but Katz appeared to acknowledge the outcome could be costly.
“The United States is changing policy. Israel is determined to prevent this (Iranian nuclear) red-line, a crossing of this red-line,” he said. “These are testing times for us. I hope that we won’t pay prices.”
Writing by Dan Williams, Editing by William Maclean
https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-iran-israel/iran-israel-play-down-prospects-theyll-go-to-war-over-syria-idUSKBN1HT0U3

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10. How Strong Is ISIS In Afghanistan?
(ASSOCIATED PRESS 22 APR 18) ... Kathy Gannon

ISLAMABAD — An upstart Islamic State affiliate that first appeared in Afghanistan in 2014 is becoming increasingly deadly and their attacks on the country's minority Shiites have grown bolder. In Sunday's devastating bombing, a suicide bomber walked up to a crowd outside a voter registration office and blew himself up killing 57

people.
Most of the dead were ethnic Hazaras, who are Shiites Muslims. Another 119 people were wounded, many of them seriously.
It was the latest in a series of attacks by ISIS against the country's minority Shiites. Following last year's attack on the Iraq Embassy in Kabul, the extremist group issued a warning to Shiites that they were coming for them. Since then, they have carried out a number of horrific assaults targeting their places of worship in Kabul and Herat in western Afghanistan.
Like their counterparts in Syria and Iraq, insurgents belonging to Afghanistan's Islamic State group are radical Sunni Muslims who revile Shiites as apostates and believe that the entire Muslim world should be ruled by a single caliphate. In Afghanistan, it is known as the Islamic State in Khorazan province, the ancient name of an area that included parts of Iran, Afghanistan and Central Asia.
How Strong Is The Islamic State In Afghanistan, And Who Is Active In It?
When the Islamic State group first appeared in Afghanistan its ranks were mostly culled from among the most ferocious of Pakistani Taliban from Pakistan's Bajaur tribal region, driven out by a military offensive, as well as from among disgruntled Taliban, who were frustrated with a leadership reigning in its violence and considering negotiations to end fighting.
At its outset, the Islamic State was mostly confined to eastern Afghanistan's Nangarhar province, but in recent years it has gained ground in the north and northeast of Afghanistan. Their ranks quickly swelled with Uzbek fighters, mostly from Central Asia's Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, many of whom were driven out of Pakistan's South Waziristan tribal region by a military offensive.
Analysts say the movement brutality's was unmatched and, as outsiders to Afghanistan, the Uzbek fighters show no compunction about carrying out mass killings. ISIS, with the aid of Uzbeks, has made inroads into northern Afghanistan where Afghan Uzbeks mostly live. There have been several reports of open recruitment by IMU members. The size of ISIS in Afghanistan is unknown, but estimates generally run between 3,000 and 5,000 fighters.
What Do They Want?
The ISIS in Khorazan province shares the Syrian and Iraqi ISIS goal of establishing a caliphate that governs the entire Muslim world. Their only stated goal for Afghanistan, however, is to rid it of Shiite Muslims, who make up roughly 15 per cent of the country's 35 million people. The overwhelming majority are Sunni Muslims, who historically have lived in peace with their Shiite brethren. Shiites have stepped up security around their places of worship but Afghanistan's security forces seem confounded on how to prevent the relentless attacks.
Do They Have Significant Support In The Population?
There is little support among Afghans for a movement whose sole goal is killing Shiite Muslims. While Afghanistan is a conservative Muslim country that has been alternately ruled by radical religious groups — first anti-Soviet mujahedeen groups and later the Taliban — there is practically no support for rule by caliphate. Afghanistan's rulers, even the radical religious ones, have been nationalists, ready to go to war to protect their sovereignty.
What Is Their Relationship To The Taliban?
ISIS and Taliban are battlefield adversaries which has prompted countries like Russia to confer with the Taliban, who they see as a bulwark against a formidable ISIS on its southern border. While loosely constructed, the Taliban since the death of its supreme leader Mullah Mohammed Omar several years ago are mostly comprised of ethnic Pashtuns and Arab-speaking nationals with ties to al-Qaida. They have condemned IS and the two groups have fought each other in eastern Nangarhar province where both seek full control, and where U.S. and Afghan security forces have been carrying out offensives against IS hideouts.
https://www.stripes.com/news/middle-east/how-strong-is-isis-in-afghanistan-1.523444

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EUROPE:
11. US Weighs Keeping Carrier Strike Group In Europe As A Check On Russia
(DEFENSE NEWS 20 APR 2018) ... David B. Larter

WASHINGTON —In a break with recent history, the U.S. military is weighing whether to withhold the Truman Carrier Strike Group from deploying to the Middle East, opting instead to keep the carrier in the Mediterranean and the European theater.
Three defense officials with knowledge of the deliberations said the move would be a response to Russian activities in the region and aligns with the new National Defense Strategy that calls on the military to be less operationally

predictable.
No decision has been made yet, but the move is “under discussion,” according to one defense official, who spoke on background to discuss internal deliberations.
Keeping the Norfolk, Virginia-based Truman in Europe, forgoing a trip through the Suez Canal and into U.S. Central Command territory, would be a major departure from the normal rotational presence missions the Navy has conducted since Operation Desert Storm, in which a trip through “The Ditch” is almost a foregone conclusion. But the move would track with a renewed focus on great power competition as the military seeks new ways to employ its forces to meet what it sees as a rising challenge from Russia and China.
The plan, which is being weighed at the highest levels of the military, would serve both to reassure allies nervous about what they perceive as an increasingly assertive Russian presence in the region and would free up other U.S. assets to perform patrols in hot spots such as the Baltic and the Black Sea, said Jerry Hendrix, a retired Navy captain and analyst with the Center for a New American Security.
“Nothing says ‘I love you’ quite like a carrier,” Hendrix said.
It would also serve as an imposing reminder of President Donald Trump’s warning to Syrian President Bashar Assad that any further use of chemical weapons against civilian populations in Syria would be met with renewed strikes.
Truman entered the Mediterranean this week after departing Norfolk on April 11.
A dedicated Europe deployment for a carrier strike group would be remarkable but would not be a unique occurrence. Truman conducted strikes on the Islamic State group in Syria from the Mediterranean Sea during its 2016 deployment, as did the George H.W. Bush in 2017.
The military has been increasingly willing to stomach gaps in carrier presence in the Arabian Gulf and the surrounding region. Beginning in 2015, the Gulf has intermittently been without a carrier strike group for months at a time as land-based aircraft have backfilled the strikes on ISIS targets.
Keeping a carrier close to Russian strategic interests also tracks closely with the Defense Department’s recently released National Defense Strategy that declared that “inter-state strategic competition, not terrorism, is now the primary concern in U.S. national security.”
‘No way to run a navy’
Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, in testimony April 12 before the House Armed Services Committee, that his department was looking to shake up how it employed its carrier strike groups.
In recent years the Navy saw its rotational deployments skyrocket from six months to as many as 10 months as it met onerous presence demands for combatant commanders, including Mattis, who as the head of CENTCOM employed two carriers in the Arabian Gulf between 2011 and 2013. That requirement sent the Navy spiraling into a readiness ditch that it has struggled to dig out of ever since.
Now, Mattis is looking at ways to move away from the standard carrier presence rotations and into a less rigid model.
“The way you do this is we ensure that preparation for great power competition drives not simply a rotational schedule that allows me to tell you, three years from now, which aircraft carrier will be where in the world,” Mattis told lawmakers. “That’s a great way to run a shipping line. It’s no way to run a navy.
Mattis said the schedules for carriers were going to be less regimented and could include shorter deployments that take less of a toll on the big decks and their escort.
“When we send them out, it may be for a shorter deployment. There will be three carriers in the South China Sea today, and then, two weeks from now, there’s only one there, and two of them are in the Indian Ocean,” Mattis said. “They’ll be home at the end of a 90-day deployment. They will not have spent eight months at sea, and we are going to have a force more ready to surge and deal with the high-end warfare as a result, without breaking the families, the maintenance cycles — we’ll actually enhance the training time.”
https://www.defensenews.com/naval/2018/04/20/us-weighs-keeping-carrier-strike-group-in-europe-as-a-check-on-russia/

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12. Macron Visit To Focus On Iran
French President Is Europe’s Envoy; U.S. Decision On Nuclear Deal Is Due By May 12
(WASHINGTON POST 23 APR 18) ... Karen DeYoung

The last time they met face to face, at the United Nations in September, French President Emmanuel Macron was puzzled when President Trump and his delegation seemed to have no agenda, carried no papers and took no notes.
"It was like a good discussion with a buddy in a bar," a French official recalled. "At the end, you don't know exactly

what it means." Now that Trump has been in office longer, the official mused, "maybe the process is different."
Macron arrives here Monday, on the first official state visit Trump has hosted for any leader, with a clear agenda. Iran is at the top of a to-do list that includes trade, climate change, Russia, North Korea and counterterrorism. After the U.S.-French-British attack on Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's chemical weapons facilities this month, Macron is also seeking reassurance that Trump will not follow through with his pledge for an early withdrawal of U.S. troops from Syria.
"The day we finish this war against ISIS, if we leave . . . we will leave the floor to the Iranian regime" and to Assad, Macron told "Fox News Sunday," using an acronym for the Islamic State. "They will prepare the new war. They will fuel the new terrorists."
But Iran's activities in Syria are overshadowed by the dispute about the nuclear agreement that the United States and five other countries signed with Iran in 2015. Trump has called it a bad deal and said the United States will withdraw unless it is "fixed." Signatories France, Britain and Germany vehemently disagree, saying there can be no changes to the agreement, and have pledged they will not follow Trump's lead.
The U.S. decision deadline is May 12. Failure to work out a compromise between the United States and its closest European allies that will keep the nuclear accord alive could lead to the most significant transatlantic breach in decades.
Enter Macron. By consensus among his counterparts in Europe, if there is accommodation to be reached with Trump on Iran, he is the man to close the deal.
Senior French, British and German officials have been negotiating for months with a State Department team led by Brian Hook, director of policy planning, to come up with a way to meet Trump's demands without altering the deal itself or driving the other signatories - Russia, China and, of course, Iran - to cry foul.
Speaking Sunday on CBS's "Face the Nation," Iran's foreign minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, said Tehran would be likely to resume and accelerate its "nuclear activities" if the United States were to pull out of the accord. Iran, Zarif said, has never intended to develop nuclear weapons, and never will. The United States, not Iran, has violated the deal, he said.
According to officials involved in the U.S.-European talks, significant progress has been made on addressing concerns about the deal's sunset clauses, its verification rules, and the absence of restrictions on Iranian ballistic missile testing and development, as well as new measures to counter Iran's "malign" activities in Syria and beyond in the Middle East. Four documents have been drafted that they believe are responsive to Trump's criticisms.
An overall declaration and three sub-texts are to outline their joint understanding that other international conventions will prohibit Iran from developing nuclear weapons beyond restrictions that expire in the next decade; push the International Atomic Energy Agency to expand its monitoring; and promise strict sanctions if Iran moves forward with intercontinental ballistic missile development.
Mike Pompeo, Trump's nominee for secretary of state, was a harsh critic of the deal when it was signed and spoke openly about bombing Iran's nuclear installations. But at his confirmation hearing last week, Pompeo assured lawmakers that "there is no doubt that this administration's policy, and my view, is that the solution to preventing Iran from getting nuclear weapons, to finding ourselves in the same place we are in North Korea in Iran, is through diplomacy." He also agreed with the Europeans and the IAEA that Iran has so far complied with the terms of the deal.
"I am confident that the issue will be discussed at great length" during Trump's upcoming meetings with European leaders, including a one-day visit here by German Chancellor Angela Merkel on Friday, following Macron's departure late Wednesday, Pompeo said. "It's important to them, and I know they'll raise their hopes and concerns."
In his interview with Fox, Macron acknowledged that the nuclear deal was not perfect.
"But what do you have for a better option?" he asked. "I don't see it."
Neither Macron nor the White House expects a final decision by Trump during the French president's visit, officials from both countries said. For their part, the Europeans worry that the mercurial U.S. president, who railed against the deal during his presidential campaign and has continued to do so, will ultimately decide to trash it even if his State Department recommends otherwise.
But Macron has been working toward this moment for months. "What I told him was not to tear up the deal," he told journalists in October.
"It's a very long shot, but it's the only one we have," François Heisbourg, a former French presidential adviser on defense and national security, said of the Macron offensive. "You might as well try."
The special bond that seems to have developed between the 71-year-old American president and Macron, a 40-year-old political novice elected just a year ago, is no accident. While Merkel is clearly turned off by Trump, and British Prime Minister Theresa May's Parliament and population have indicated they don't even want him to visit, Macron has gone far out of his way to cultivate him.
Their first handshake, a virtual arm-wrestle at an international meeting in Germany in June, produced a globally

viral video. "He is a specialist," Macron said on Fox, referring to Trump's apparent attempt at establishing physical dominance by forcibly yanking Macron's hand toward his own body. "Seeing [Japanese] Prime Minister Abe and some of the different victims, I resisted." It was, he said, laughing, a "friendly moment. Don't worry."

In July, Macron invited Trump to Bastille Day in Paris, treated him as a senior statesman and impressed him with a front-row seat at a massive military parade that Trump now plans to emulate in Washington this fall. In addition to the September U.N. meeting, the two have near-weekly telephone conversations.

"It's Macron's nature," said William Drozdiak, author of "Fractured Continent: Europe's Crises and the Fate of the West" and an upcoming biography of the French president. "He walks into a room, sees a chair and tries to seduce it."

"He looks at Trump and says, 'Okay, we've got our interests, and the best way of securing them is for me to flatter this guy, pat him on the back and get along with him so that I can manipulate him,' " Drozdiak said. Macron is "the ultimate pragmatist . . . that's why he's the only Western leader now with an open dialogue to [Russian President Vladimir] Putin," as well as Trump.

The French look down their noses at media descriptions of a "bromance" between the French and U.S. presidents. "Macron is not the friend of Trump," said the French official, speaking on the condition of anonymity to candidly discuss the relationship. "We don't believe all this stuff about bromance, that they're buddies."

"Macron is doing this because he knows that he has to be close to our closest ally, the president of the most powerful country in the world. It's in our interest to have a good relationship. He doesn't go as a friend," the official said.

The length and depth of the U.S.-French relationship will be spotlighted during the visit, an extravaganza of activities clearly designed to match Trump's reception in Paris last summer. After his midday Monday arrival, Macron and his wife will travel by helicopter with the Trumps to Mount Vernon, George Washington's home about 15 miles south of Washington, for dinner, weather permitting, on the broad terrace overlooking the Potomac River.

"President Trump is eager to host" the Macrons at Mount Vernon, "as he remembers fondly the dinner [Macron] hosted at the Eiffel Tower on the eve of Bastille Day" for Trump and the first lady, said a senior administration official who briefed reporters Friday on the visit, on a White House-imposed condition of anonymity.

On Tuesday morning, Trump and Macron will hold a one-on-one meeting, followed by expanded talks with their delegations. U.S. officials will include Vice President Pence, the treasury, defense and commerce secretaries, the acting secretary of state, White House Chief of Staff John F. Kelly, Trump national security adviser John Bolton, and economic adviser Larry Kudlow.

Macron will attend a State Department lunch hosted by Pence and a state dinner at the White House on Tuesday. He addresses a joint meeting of Congress on Wednesday morning, the anniversary of a 1960 address there by former French president Charles de Gaulle. In the afternoon, after a visit to Arlington National Cemetery, he will hold a town hall meeting with students at George Washington University, followed by a solo news conference before his departure.

On Syria, the two leaders will try to develop a joint response to kick in if Assad persists in using chemical weapons. Trump is expected to press Macron - as he has other allies and partners - to increase the French contribution to Syrian stabilization, while the French leader is seeking clarity on Trump's plans for U.S. troop withdrawal and an overall U.S. strategy, including toward Iran. Europe's focus is on preventing another wave of Middle Eastern migrants, a phenomenon that has already pushed the European political center toward the right.

The visit is also an "opportunity to start forging a more unified front" toward Chinese economic expansion, the administration official said, as well as an agreed approach to Putin, whom Macron will visit next month in St. Petersburg.

On Thursday, Macron and Merkel met in Berlin to discuss their shared concerns about Trump's trade policies, and particularly the May 1 U.S. deadline for imposing tariffs on steel and aluminum imports. The European Union is preparing a proposal, for presentation to Trump before the deadline, to head off the levies.

"I'm an easy guy. I'm very simple. I'm straightforward," Macron said on Fox. "It's too complicated if you make war on everybody. You make trade war on China, trade war against Europe. War in Syria. War against Iran. Come on, it doesn't work. You need allies. We are the ally."

On each issue of the agenda, Macron's overall goal is to pull the United States closer to Europe, something his partners on the continent believe he is uniquely situated to do.

After Merkel first met Trump here early last year, the chancellor returned to Germany aghast at what she saw as the new U.S. president's disregard for the oldest U.S. allies and his apparent retreat from global leadership. In public speeches and private meetings, she told the French, British and others that perhaps it was time for Europe to take "our fate into our own hands."

But "as they started analyzing" what that would mean in security and other terms, "it just didn't compute," Drozdiak said. "Their conclusion was, you've got to keep the U.S. engaged."

James McAuley in Paris and Anne Gearan in Washington contributed to this report

https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/as-macron-arrives-to-meet-trump-fate-of-iran-nuclear-deal-is-front-and-center/2018/04/22/797d5ad8-44bb-11e8-bba2-0976a82b05a2_story html?utm_term=.5c8afd6a7b7b

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13. Russian Navy Receives Upgraded Ballistic Missile Sub
A Retrofitted Soviet-Era Ballistic Missile Sub Was Delivered To The Russian Navy This Month.
(THE DIPLOMAT 20 APR 18) ... Franz-Stefan Gady

The Russian Navy took delivery of an upgraded Project 667 BDRM Delta IV-class nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines (SSBN) this month, according to Russian Deputy Minister of Defense Yuri Borisov.
The Delta IV-class SSBN Tula (K-114), commissioned in October 1987, has spent two years undergoing repairs and modernization work as part of a service life extension program at the Severodvinsk shipyard in northern Russia. Upgrades include the submarine's radio electronic, sonar, and combat systems. The SSBN completed its post refit trials in December 2017.
During a previous overhaul in 2004, the Tula was refitted to carry the new the R-29RMU Sineva (Nato designation: SS-N-23 Skiff) liquid-fueled submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) capable of carrying four multiple, independently targeted re-entry vehicles (MIRV). The Sineva SLBM officially entered service in 2007.
The Tula is now expected to be armed with a newer derivative of the Sineva SLBM, the R-29MU2 Layner, purportedly capable of carrying up to 12 MIRVs with a 100-kiloton yield each. The Layner SLBM, equipped with improved anti-ballistic missile defense countermeasures, has reportedly been in service since 2014. The Tula successfully test fired a Layner SLBM in 2011.
Delta IV-class boomers can carry up to 16 SLBMs and reportedly can fire them in single salvo under the water while moving. In addition, Delta IV-class SSBNs can launch heavy weight torpedoes or the nuclear-capable RPK-2 Vyuga (NATO designation: SSN-N-15 Starfish) anti-submarine missile system from four 533-milimeter torpedo launch tubes.
The Russian Navy currently operates six Delta IV-class SSBNs in its Northern Fleet stationed at the Saida Guba Naval Base. (One Delta IV-class boat, relaunched in 2015, has been converted into a mothership for unmanned underwater vehicles for intelligence gathering.) Delta III and Delta IV-class boomers are expected to remain in service until the 2030s.
In the years ahead, Delta-class boomers of all variants will slowly be phased out and replaced by a new generation of SSBNs, the Project 955 Borei-class ("North Wind") aka Dolgoruky-class, the future mainstay of Russia's sea-based nuclear triad. The Russian Navy will also operate an improved variant of the new boomers, the Borei II-class (also designated Borei-A).
The Navy plans to operate eight Borei-class SSBNs – three Borei-class and five improved Borei II-class boats – by 2o25, although multi-year delays can be expected until the entire fleet is operational. The first Borei II-class boomer Knyaz Vladimir (Prince Vladimir) was launched at the Severodvinsk shipyard in November 2017.
"Three Borei-class SSBNs have been commissioned to date with one submarine, the Yuri Dolgoruky, serving with the Northern Fleet and the remaining two – Alexander Nevsky and Vladimir Monomakh — deployed with Russia's increasingly more active Pacific Fleet," I reported in June 2017.
https://thediplomat.com/2018/04/russian-navy-receives-upgraded-ballistic-missile-sub/

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AMERICAS:
14. Colombia's Transandino Pipeline Halted After Bomb Attack
(REUTERS 22 APR 18)

BOGOTA - Colombia's southern Transandino pipeline was halted after a bomb attack by an illegal armed group spilled crude oil into a river, state-run oil company Ecopetrol said on Sunday.
The attack, which occurred on Saturday near the city of Tumaco in Narino province, has not affected exports or crude production at fields in the southern jungle zone along the border with Ecuador, Ecopetrol said.
The 306-kilometer (109-mile) Transandino has the capacity to transport 85,000 barrels of crude per day.
Ecopetrol did not say which group was responsible for the attack. The National Liberation Army (ELN) has

frequently been behind attacks on oil pipelines.
The ELN had been negotiating a peace accord with the government in Ecuador, but that nation's President Lenin Moreno last week said he would no longer host the talks.
His decision came after the killing of three media workers kidnapped late in March by another insurgent group.
Reporting by Luis Jaime Acosta; Writing by Helen Murphy; Editing by Cynthia Osterman
https://www.reuters.com/article/us-colombia-ecopetrol/colombias-transandino-pipeline-halted-after-bomb-attack-idUSKBN1HT12C

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SURFACE FLEET:
15. New Data Link To Allow LCS To Simultaneously Get Imagery From More Than One Aircraft
(DEFENSE NEWS 20 APR 2018) ... Valerie Insinna

WASHINGTON — Today, a littoral combat ship can only receive surveillance data from one aircraft at a time. That is about to change due to new communications gear that will be fitted on LCS 25, 26 and 28, officials from L3 Technologies told Defense News.
The Navy has selected L3 to provide its Maritime Surface Terminal aboard Freedom-class LCS Marinette and Independence-class LCSs Mobile and Savannah, John Van Brabant, L3's vice president of business development for Navy programs, said during an April 10 interview at the Navy League's Sea-Air-Space Exposition.
L3 beat out competitor Cubic for the opportunity, and the company is moving into contract negotiations with Naval Air Systems Command with an award expected sometime this summer.
Like the T-Series Model S Surface Terminals — the L3-manufactured communications terminals for the first 24 LCS hulls — the Maritime Surface Terminal, or MST, operates on the Ku-band and allows Navy pilots of platforms like the MQ-4 Triton or MH-60S to share full-motion video and other data with the ship.
However, the MST is almost 700 pounds lighter than the older system and can transmit 45 megabits a second compared to 22 megabits, VanBrabant said.
It also has two data links instead of just one, meaning that up to two aircraft can share data at the same time, a departure from the current construct where aircraft have to take turns.
"What it does is give the ship's captain … it extends their eyes and ears, frankly," Van Brabant said. "Now they get a radar picture of the aircraft 120 miles away, and the radar is seeing another 80 miles that they've essentially extended their vision 200 miles."
That will also help support the LCS's manned-unmanned teaming construct, whereby MH-60S helicopters are paired with MQ-8 Fire Scout drones. The aircraft are intended to work together, with the Fire Scout passing intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance data and targeting information to the MH-60 and back to the ship. MST will allow both platforms to send full-motion video to the LCS at the same time.
Increasing the reach of ships has been a major goal of Chief of Naval Operations Adm. John Richardson, who has said interoperability and networking will be a focus in future competitions.
"How do all these platforms work together?" Richardson said in 2017. "In the extreme, I'd want to network everything to everything."
In 2016, the Navy awarded contracts to Lockheed Martin for the Freedom-class LCS Marinette and to Austal for Independence-class LCS Mobile. A contract for the Savannah followed in 2017.
https://www.defensenews.com/digital-show-dailies/navy-league/2018/04/20/new-datalink-to-allow-lcs-to-get-imagery-from-more-than-one-aircraft-at-a-time/

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16. USS Bonhomme Richard Returns To U.S. After 6 Years In Forward Deployed Naval Forces Japan
(USNI 20 APR 2018) ... Ben Werner

After six years serving as the forward-deployed flagship of Amphibious Force 7th Fleet, amphibious assault ship USS Bonhomme Richard (LHD-6) is heading back to the U.S. and its new homeport of San Diego.
Bonhomme Richard left Sasebo, Japan, on Wednesday, after completing its final patrol in the region as the forward-deployed flagship.
"Bonhomme Richard has been the shining example of why we forward-deploy U.S. Navy ships in the Indo-Pacific,"

Rear Adm. Brad Cooper, the commander of Amphibious Force 7th Fleet, said in a Navy news release.
"The ship and its crew have achieved a high level of readiness, met every operational commitment, extended a warm hand of friendship to so many here in Sasebo and has reinforced relationships with allies in this vital region. I wish them all a heartfelt fair winds and following seas."
Replacing Bonhomme Richard as the amphibious force flagship in Sasebo is USS Wasp (LHD-1), which arrived in January. Before its move to the Forward Deployed Naval Forces in Japan, Wasp had significant upgrades made to its flight deck to accommodate the F-35B Lightning II Joint Strike Fighter vertical liftoff and landing variant used by the Marine Corps.
Last month, six F-35B aircraft from the "Green Knights" of Marine Fighter Attack Squadron (VMFA) 121 landed on the deck of Wasp, marking the first time the Marines deployed a squadron of F-35s for operational use. The F-35 will eventually replace the Marine Corps' fleet of F/A-18C Hornet, EA-6B Prowler and AV-8B Harrier jets used to support Marines operating onshore.
Once in San Diego, Bonhomme Richard is scheduled for similar flight deck upgrades to accommodate F-35B aircraft, according to the Navy news release.
While based in Japan, Bonhomme Richard participated in numerous annual exercises, including Talisman Saber with the Australian Defence Force and the Ssang Yong exercise with the Republic of Korea. Bonhomme Richard was also sent to help South Korean search and rescue operations after a deadly ferry sinking in 2014.
https://news.usni.org/2018/04/20/after-six-years-of-forward-deployment-uss-bonhomme-richard-returns-to-the-u-s

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17. Navy, Marine Leadership Looking At LPD Flight II Missiles, Additional Virginia-Class Buys
(USNI NEWS 20 APR 18) ... Megan Eckstein

CAPITOL HILL – Navy and Marine Corps leaders are mulling if and how to up-gun the San Antonio-class LPD Flight II ships; whether to buy more attack submarines and how to extend the lives of a handful of Los Angeles-class; and other ideas to increase the size and the lethality of the fleet in the near- to mid-term.
Top Navy leadership testified at two hearings with the Senate Armed Services Committee this week and addressed several ship classes that are important to fleet operations today and going forward.
LPD Flight II Amphibs
The Navy just last week announced that its LX(R) effort to replace the Whidbey Island-class dock landing ships (LSD-41/49) would be formally named LPD Flight II, a nod to the San Antonio-class amphibious transport dock (LPD-17) design upon which these ships will be based.
With that detail determined, two questions quickly arose: how fast can the Navy buy them, and how much can the Navy and Marine Corps up-gun them?
Commandant of the Marine Corps Gen. Robert Neller frequently talks about Marines having to "fight to get to the fight" in the future, with Marines supporting sea control however they can while sailing to the ground fight, rather than passively transiting on amphibious ships and not having to do any real work until they arrive at their destination. To support this notion, Neller and others have suggested the Marines would do whatever they could – up to and including firing their Light Armored Vehicles (LAVs) from the amphibious ships, if they had to – to participate in a naval battle.
During a Thursday hearing, Sen. Roger Wicker (R-Miss.) asked Neller about the role of amphibs.
"I think every surface combatant is exactly that, it's a warship. And there's capabilities that we can leverage on the LPD hull form, for example," Neller began to say.
"What if we put the vertical launch system (VLS) on the Flight II LPDs?" Wicker asked.
"I think that's a great idea," Neller replied.
"You agree, Secretary Spencer?" Wicker asked, turning towards Navy Secretary Richard V. Spencer, who was also testifying at the hearing.
"Most definitely," Spencer agreed.
After the hearing, Spencer told USNI News that the VLS idea was only one being floated. Something akin to the over-the-horizon missile that the Littoral Combat Ship program is in the process of acquiring – which can be bolted on to the deck of the ship rather than installed underneath the deck – would be a less intrusive option to consider.
Chief of Naval Operations Adm. John Richardson, who also testified at the hearing, told USNI News that "the key to delivering things on-time and on-schedule is stable design before we start building. So as we move forward … this system the secretary described is attractive because it's a canister, you load it on, it's almost a standalone system. You don't have to change the ship's design a lot."

With the LPD Flight II program, Richardson said a focus is "how do we get the best ship at the best value and the best schedule for that" – which could point to a bolt-on option rather than a redesign to incorporate VLS.

The LCS's over-the-horizon missile competition is still ongoing, with a contract award expected in the third quarter of this fiscal year, and whichever missile system is selected may be one option for the LPD Flight II program for the sake of commonality. Another option being discussed is a BAE Systems angled "VLS-like" launcher that is fully compatible with missile canisters developed for the Mk-41 VLS system. Much like Boeing's Harpoon missile that USS Coronado (LCS-4) has used to hit over-the-horizon surface targets, the BAE Systems "Adaptable Deck Launcher" would be bolted on to the deck and controlled through the ship's combat system. Charlie McCullough, director of maritime business development at BAE Systems' Platforms & Services, told USNI News earlier this month that the Adaptable Deck Launcher could fire the Standard Missile, Tomahawk, Evolved SeaSparrow Missile and others that can be fired from a VLS cell.

During a Tuesday hearing of the SASC seapower subcommittee, Wicker asked Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Research, Development and Acquisition James Geurts about the LPD Flight II acquisition plan.

"It's a derivative design, so that will be a high-confidence acquisition," Geurts said.

Lawmakers included funding in the recently-passed Fiscal Year 2018 spending bill for an LPD-30 hull, which Geurts decided earlier this month would be the first of the Flight II ships. The Navy had already put in a request for FY 2019 by the time the 2018 spending bill was passed, and the 2019 request did not include any funds for the LPD program.

"Our current strategy is award that '18 ship as quickly as we can to ensure we support … the Marine Corps, and then I think we'll look closely – it would appear to me that the serial production opportunities for the continuous production of that LPD-17 would be right for either a multiyear or a block buy," Geurts told the seapower subcommittee.

"Currently our next buy is in '20. … If you were to add some economic order quantity or long-lead funding in '19, that could accelerate delivery of those. If that's not available, we could do a block buy or a multiyear in FY '20. Putting some money in FY '19 would help schedule a little bit, but we could execute in either manner."

The first 13 LPDs were bought one at a time – no multi-ship deals were ever used – partly due to quality issues in the early ships and partly due to instability within the program in terms of requirements and total program quantity. With the design proven and stable – except for the discussion around the VLS cells – the Navy and Ingalls Shipbuilding in Pascagoula, Miss., would be in a strong position to negotiate a multi-ship buy.

DDG and SSN Life Extensions

After announcing last week that the Navy would extend the service life of every single Arleigh Burke-class destroyer out to 45 years as a means of boosting the size of the fleet and reaching the Navy's 355-ship goal faster, Spencer said on Thursday that "we also have some other plans we're working on, so stand by."

The Navy is considering a number of options to reach 355 ships even faster – so long as the plan reaches the right balance of ship types – submarines, destroyers, small surface combatants, amphibious ships, and so on – balances new ship procurement with the ability to man and maintain existing ships, and considers industrial base needs, he said.

During the Tuesday seapower subcommittee hearing, Vice Adm. Bill Merz, the deputy chief of naval operations for warfare systems, said extending the entire Arleigh Burke class to a 45-year life – including the ships under construction today and that have not even been built yet – has been done with previous ship classes and would be considered again down the road as an efficient way to retain more ships in the fleet.

"This is not without precedence: we did it with the Ohio class (SSBNs and SSGNs). Probably aren't any other classes right now, they're all too new –Virginia (SSNs) may be a candidate, depending on her fuel usage over her life; and then of course the small surface combatants are all relatively new, that may be another candidate later on in the shipbuilding plan as we get more data back on how the ship is performing," Merz said.

Though the Los Angeles-class attack submarines cannot be extended as a whole class, as many as five boats will be given new reactor cores and extended, with the Navy planning to re-core and extend the life of the first sub in FY 2019.

With the size of the attack submarine force declining for many more years until it eventually begins to grow again – even as combatant commander demand for the SSNs far exceeds the Navy's capacity – Geurts said, "we think we can extend the life of five of those. That will not solve the problem, it will mitigate a little bit the worst part of the dip, so that's something we're studying closely."

Attack submarines are projected to hit a low of just 42 boats in FY 2028, and destroyers would hit a low of 88 in FY 2035, as older hulls retire, according to the Navy's most recent long-range ship plan. Overall the Navy is bracing for a dip in fleet size from about 2025 to 2032 – but moves like extending all the DDGs' lives and extending up to five SSNs change the timing and the depth of that dip in fleet size.

Merz said the Navy is closely looking at years where it could buy a third Virginia-class attack submarine –

something industry has made clear it wants – in between buying the Columbia-class ballistic-missile submarine, which is the Navy's top acquisition priority and, with a hefty cost, will put a strain on the rest of the shipbuilding budget during the 2020s.

"Where we sit today is, we can't build ships and deliver them in time to fill in that dip," Merz said, partly due to the lengthy nature of shipbuilding and partly due to the looming Columbia-class bill.

"However, extending the class of DDG-51 is the only lever we've pulled so far; we are still looking at candidate years for a third SSN, and then all the other ship lines that we identified excess capacity that, working with Congress, we may be able to continue to bolster those lines more rapidly. It will help recover from the dip, but there will still be a dip outside the [five-year Future Years Defense Program] to a degree."

LCS Operations

After USNI News reported last week that no Littoral Combat Ships would deploy this year as a result of most of the LCS fleet being in maintenance now and a need to "reset" while transitioning to a new training and crewing model, Merz, Richardson and Spencer were asked about the LCS program by Sen. Tom Cotton (R-Ar.).

Richardson acknowledged that the LCS is "a program that has been through some troubled times, and I would say that in the past we probably pushed that ship out forward-deployed a little bit ahead of its time, before the program had stabilized and we had done the appropriate testing and gained the confidence. As soon as I got in as the chief of naval operations I directed the commander of naval surface forces to take a look at that program, rationalize it, and make it look a lot more like a normal shipbuilding program and a ship operating program. So this is what led to changes in the maintenance approach, changes in the blue-gold crewing, the way that we are going to homeport these squadrons and forward-deploy them.

"2018 is really a reflection of that shift, and so starting in 2019 we're going to start forward-deploying those: they'll be sustainable, they'll be more lethal by virtue of the enhancements we're putting on those Littoral Combat Ships," Richardson continued.

"We have 24 deployments planned between '19 and '24, and so really '18 is a reset year to get maintenance and manning in place so that we can deploy these in a sustainable fashion."

https://news.usni.org/2018/04/20/navy-leadership-looking-at-lpd-flight-ii-missiles-additional-virginia-class-buys

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AIRCRAFT CARRIERS:

18. USS Enterprise Recycling Work Still Undecided After Reactor Defueling Completed
(KITSAP SUN 21 APR 2018) ... Julianne Stanford

Although the USS Enterprise now rests dormant after the completed defueling of the aircraft carrier's nuclear reactors, the Navy has not yet decided if the vessel's metal remains will be towed to the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard for reactor compartment recycling.

Huntington Ingalls Industries' Newport News Shipbuilding division in Virginia completed the Enterprise's inactivation in December, with a final sign-off and certification of the work coming from the government contracting office on April 11.

During the four-year process to inactivate the ship, more than 1,000 shipbuilders worked to defuel the carrier's eight nuclear reactors, deactivate the propulsion systems and prepare the hull for a final tow, according to a press release from Huntington Ingalls.

But where exactly the carrier's skeleton will be towed for recycling has yet to be decided.

"The Navy is exploring various options for disposal of ex-Enterprise, including its defueled reactor plants, to determine the best approach to accomplish this work," said Naval Sea Systems Command spokesman William Couch.

The carrier will be held in storage in the Hampton Roads area in Virginia until the Navy reaches a decision on a method of disposal, Couch said.

For the past few years, the Navy has debated whether the carrier will be commercially recycled after coming to Bremerton for reactor compartment removal at the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard, where nuclear-powered vessels have gone to meet their endfor decades.

Instead, the Navy is weighing the prospect of having a private company scrap the ship entirely, including the reactor compartments that still bear a low level of radioactivity after defueling. That alternative could be a more cost-effective disposal method for the Navy's first nuclear-powered aircraft carrier and alleviate some of the pressure on the shipyard's busy work schedule.

Since 2000, 70 percent of maintenance availabilities at PSNS have been completed behind schedule because of a

facilities restoration and modernization backlog found at all four Navy shipyards, according to a report published by the Government Office of Accountability in September.
The Navy originally planned to tow the Enterprise around South America to Bremerton, where the carrier would be recycled at PSNS. Shipyard crews would remove the reactor compartments and prepare them for transfer to the Department of Energy's Hanford Site, according to a 2012 environmental assessment.
Under that plan, the Enterprise was expected to arrive in Bremerton in 2017. It would have taken an estimated six to eight years to scrap the ship.
But in 2014, the Navy reversed course on that decision and began exploring the possibility of commercial recycling.
Couch confirmed PSNS is still in the running for the job to recycle the reactor compartments, but he declined to discuss any particulars of where the Navy is in the decision-making process.
"Until the process concludes, it would be inappropriate to speculate on the likelihood of any options being explored," he said.
PSNS spokeswoman Kellie Randall deferred comment to Naval Sea Systems Command.
The Navy is weighing the proposed recycling options through a study of its possible environmental, public health and safety effects. A third considered alternative is to store the carrier for the time being and defer a decision until a later time.
The findings of that study will be published in an Environmental Impact Statement, which the Navy is working to release "as soon as possible," Couch said.
After the statement is released, Couch said interested community members would have an opportunity to weigh in on the Navy's preferred disposal method through a comment period that will include meetings and hearings open to the public.
"The Navy remains committed to an open process, with opportunities for the public to provide feedback as the EIS is developed," he said.
The Enterprise was decommissioned in 2012 at Naval Station Norfolk in Virginia after 51 years of service, during which the carrier aided in the response to the Cuban Missile Crisis, Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation New Dawn.
Newport News Shipbuilding has already begun advance construction for the future USS Enterprise, the third of the newest Ford-class carriers and the ninth U.S. Navy ship of that name.
The Bremerton-based USS Nimitz, which is 43, is the fleet's oldest active-duty aircraft carrier and is the next in line to retire. Nimitz-class carriers have an estimated service life of 50 years.
Unlike the Enterprise, which has eight smaller reactors, Nimitz-class carriers have two larger nuclear reactors that would need to be defueled during inactivation.
https://www.kitsapsun.com/story/news/local/2018/04/21/uss-enterprise-recycling-work-still-undecided-after-reactor-defueling-completed/532559002/

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INNOVATION:
19. Pentagon Aims To Win Global Race For New Hypersonic Technologies
(MILITARY.COM 22 APR 18) ... Oriana Pawlyk

If the great Space Race that began in the 1950s helped define technologies that would take satellites and mankind into space, a new kind of global competition today will define technologies that move at more than five times the speed of sound.
The U.S. Air Force this week awarded Lockheed Martin Corp. a contract to develop a prototype hypersonic cruise missile, or the Hypersonic Conventional Strike Weapon. The project -- one of two hypersonic weapon prototyping efforts the service is pursuing -- could cost as much as $928 million over the course of its lifetime.
The award comes as Pentagon officials say they fear the U.S. may be lagging behind in hypersonics, while rivals Russia and China have made hypersonic technologies national programs of record and have made recent advances.
Like nuclear weapons, officials have said speedy weapons can act as deterrents, as well as game changers, in responding to conflict from hundreds of miles away.
"The Air Force is using prototyping to explore the art of the possible and to advance these technologies to a capability as quickly as possible," spokeswoman Ann Stefanek said in a statement.
The service did not specify a timeline for the contract, as "funds are not obligated on this contract vehicle until task orders are issued and awarded," Stefanek said on Wednesday.
Aside from additional concepts underway from the Air Force Research Lab and DARPA, the Air Force is also

setting funds aside for its Air Launched Rapid Response Weapon, known as "Arrow." According to the fiscal 2019 budget request, the Air Force is asking for roughly $260 million for the Arrow experiment.

'It Just Means It Goes Fast'

One company that specializes in rockets, engines, missiles and spacecraft has been rapidly prototyping a variety of concepts in hopes of gaining more footing in the hypersonics game.

Aerospace and defense tech company Orbital ATK has in recent months tested a partially 3-D printed hypersonics warhead and a 3-D printed supersonic combustion ramjet, or scramjet, engine part.

The company deemed both to be successful, and is waiting until the Defense Department chooses what type of weapons it may someday want to procure.

In its research and development phase, Orbital has been designing a hypersonic warhead to start preparing for "that day when somebody will want a hypersonic" mission, said Bart Olson, vice president of strategy and business development for Orbital ATK's defense group.

"They went from design to production to test in 60 days," said Michael Kahn, president of Orbital ATK's defense systems group.

In late March, the company for the first time tested a 50-pound warhead partially made with additive manufacturing, known as 3-D printing.

With the help of 3-D printing, engineers can work faster and make parts much more cheaply, Olson and Kahn said.

Military.com sat down with both executives on April 10 during the annual Sea-Air-Space conference in National Harbor, Maryland.

"Three-D printing is a big deal for us, especially from the engineering perspective because you can design something ... that you can't build with conventional machines," Kahn said.

The challenges for any weapon going beyond Mach 5 speeds has been to prevent overheating and control how the weapon strikes a target, Kahn said.

Olson said its common to tailor the warhead to the effects needed. But in hypersonics, there's more of an emphasis on fragmentation at such high speeds.

Depending on launch platform -- air, land or sea -- the company is testing payloads from as small as 7 inches to 40 inches in diameter.

"We're involved in the entire tradespace," Olson said.

The 'secret sauce' to hypersonics? Their engines and propulsion, they say.

"We've been building hypersonic engines for many years, for NASA, the Air Force," Olson said. "We currently hold the record for the fastest air-breathing demonstration in history, which was a Mach 10-plus."

"We have motors that come in all shapes and sizes," he continued. "On the propulsion front, we've had numerous tests of solid propellant solutions and ... on the air-breathing side, all across the spectrum of need."

Kahn added how it's propelled shouldn't matter. "Hypersonics just means it goes fast," he said.

In January, the company announced a partnership with DARPA to study a possible integration of turbine and hypersonic engine technologies under DARPA's Advanced Full Range Engine (AFRE) program.

Orbital said they're encouraged by recent commentary from Mike Griffin, undersecretary of defense for research and engineering, who has zeroed in on hypersonics, but also other emerging technologies in an era where Russia and China continue to make vast strides ahead of the U.S.

The U.S.'s "earlier research work in hypersonic systems development was basically what our adversaries have used to field their own systems," Griffin told lawmakers this week.

"It is time for us to renew our emphasis on and funding of these areas in a coordinated way across the department, to develop systems which can be based on land for conventional prompt strike, can be based at sea, and later on can be based on aircraft," he said during a House Armed Services committee hearing on innovation.

There has been more of an "energy from DoD" to get hypersonics involved in major systems beyond just design phases, Kahn said.

"Up until now there's been a lot of design, a lot of testing, not a lot of fielding," Kahn said.

Olson added, "We're very encouraged by ... the new philosophy from new leadership to go on past it."

https://www.military.com/daily-news/2018/04/22/pentagon-aims-win-global-race-new-hypersonic-technologie html

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20. Navy Anti-Mine Program Reaches Milestone

(SAN DIEGO UNION-TRIBUNE 20 APR 18) ... Carl Prine

The Navy announced Friday that it has taken another step forward in a $34 million anti-mine program that relies on flying robots to help Marines hit the beach.

On April 6, the San Diego-based littoral combat ship Coronado successfully completed second-phase operational testing of the Coastal Battlefield Reconnaissance and Analysis system.
Scientists won't have COBRA ready for service for at least four more years, but the Coronado's crew proved they can deploy a drone from sea to a potentially hostile shore to ferret out lethal minefields before Marines storm ashore, a milestone in a program that's spanned three decades.
"The crew onboard was the perfect fit to conduct this testing," said Danny Lunden, a test director at the Naval Surface Warfare Center in Ventura County, in a prepared statement emailed to The San Diego Union-Tribune. "We all worked so well together and did so in such a short amount of time."
Testing by the Coronado's crew on the highly-classified COBRA system began on Feb. 22 and leaned on help from the "Blackjacks" of North Island-based Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron 21 and Mine Countermeasure Detachment 6 out of Naval Base San Diego.
"It is incredible how all three different entities came together to accomplish this mission," said Cmdr. Karl McCarthy, the Coronado's skipper. "It took an ample amount of time, dedication and teamwork from all parties to make this successful."
The Coronado returned four months ago from a tour of the Far East that began in mid-2016. It's been tagged as a testing vessel to help the Navy develop the latest technology and tactics for the littoral combat ship's three missions: Hunting and killing enemy surface warships, anti-submarine warfare and minesweeping.
"The Coronado was waiting to undergo maintenance in the shipyard and there was some time to do the testing," Lt. Miranda V. Williams, spokeswoman for Littoral Combat Ship Squadron 1, said by phone. "They were assessing the crews, the equipment and the overall effectiveness of the system. They feel like it went very well."
The Pentagon hopes littoral combat ships like the Coronado eventually replace the aging fleet of Avenger-class minesweepers, with one of their key missions locating bombs on a beach.
That starts with a littoral combat ship launching an MQ-8B Fire Scout drone over a coastline. A multi-spectral camera mounted on it scans the beach and surf zone for minefields and obstacles. Software on the ship later sifts huge amounts of data to map minefields before grunts walk into them.
What began as a Marine program in the 1990s was transferred to the Navy in 2004. Because it relied on incremental development of the latest technology, Pentagon planners divided it into blocks.
During Block I, COBRA was supposed to find unburied mines and obstacles on a beach during the day. Block II, at nighttime. Block III, at all hours, buried and unburied, in the sand and the surf.
In 2011, Arete Associates won a $26 million deal to engineer and make three COBRAs and the Pentagon added $8.5 million for the Arizona company to rig it to work on a littoral combat ship.
There have been problems along the way.
In 2015, the Pentagon disclosed that COBRA's gimbal was unable to fix on a single spot while shooting several images at the same time, potentially losing large portions of data that had to be analyzed later.
In a 2017 report, analysts reported that COBRA showed "marginal capability" but that it was still "better than any existing beach reconnaissance capability" and the Pentagon greenlighted further testing.
After similar experiments aboard the littoral combat ship Independence, in July the Navy declared COBRA's Block I system initially capable.
All they needed was for the Coronado to come home and try it out some more.
The Navy hopes to have the Block II system working by 2022 but has set no deadline for implementing the Block III technology.
http://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/military/sd-me-lcs-cobra-20180420-story html

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OUTREACH:
21. NOLA Navy Week: Take An Inside Look At The USS Kearsarge
(WGNO.COM 20 APR 2018)

NEW ORLEANS -- Do you ever wonder what goes on in one of the navy's largest amphibious ships?
Well we got a behind the scenes look inside of the USS Kearsarge during an overnight stay on the ship.
After taking a military helicopter ride out to the middle of an undisclosed location in the Gulf of Mexico, we landed on the giant grey vessel and immediately began traipsing through the ship's narrow corridors.
Rear Admiral, Brad Skillman, was on board and heading up the migthy Mississippi River with the sailors and marines for Navy Fleet Week.
"Sailors that we are getting today are more talented than ever in our history," says Rear Admiral Skillman.

The deployments are generally seven months long away from friends and family.
That's why Captain David Guluzian says, he wears more than just the skippers hat.
"It's almost like a city mayor, everything you need in a city you need on a ship," says captain Guluzian.
To keep life as normal as possible, the ship is equipped with a library, a barber shop, a gym, a chapel, and even a Starbucks.
It doesn't get more American than that.
Don't be fulled by the side activities, but remember that this is a warship designed to support the marine corps and capable of entering rapid combat.
"They get this huge sense of pride and service to the nation because every day, especially on an amphibious ship with the marines, you see the benefits of what you do. From an engineer who is making steam down in the engineering plant to turn the shafts, to the young sailor on the flight deck who's landing on the helicopter you flew in on, they all know what their role is and they know that additively we do the missions and we do them well," says Rear Admiral Skillman.
"We can carry 2,000 marines and all of their stuff to places where people don't want the marines. We can partially sink ourselves by putting water in ballis tanks and lowering the ships stern into the water so that we can get the landing craft in and out of the ship," says captain Guluzian.
They are considered the blue-green team.
The United States Navy and the Marines are working in tandem and ready to face any opposition.
If you are around the city and see anyone in uniform during Fleet Week, be sure to say thank you for your service.
https://wgno.com/2018/04/20/navy-fleet-week-take-an-inside-look-at-the-uss-kearsarge/

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COMMENTARY:
22. Countering China's Militarization Of The Indo-Pacific
(WAR ON THE ROCKS 13 APR 18) ... Michael J. Green and Andrew Shearer

Two weeks ago, Australians were startled by media reports that China intended to establish a military base in Vanuatu. This small island nation sits less than 1,500 miles from Australia's northeastern coast in an area of the Pacific long thought free from great power rivalry. Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull responded to the news unambiguously, declaring that his country "would view with great concern the establishment of any foreign military bases in those Pacific Island countries and neighbors of ours." Just as it was a surprise for Australia to hear that the People's Liberation Army was exploring military facilities in its strategic backyard, it was a surprise for India to learn about potential Chinese bases in Pakistan and it was a surprise for the United States to find Chinese companies offering to build casinoson the exact locations in Micronesia where the U.S. Air Force and Marine Corps had been planning new facilities as part of the Pentagon's rebalance strategy to the Asia-Pacific. Having broken Xi Jinping's promise not to militarize Chinese man-made islands in the South China Sea and then gotten away with it, Beijing now appears poised to establish a string of bases and dual-use ports from Hainan to Djibouti. It is not too late for the maritime democracies of the "Quad" (the United States, Japan, India, and Australia) to act. First, however, they must recognize what is at stake.
China's military penetration into the South Pacific would challenge one of the oldest and most fundamental tenets of Australian strategic doctrine, the exclusion of outside military powers from its island approaches. The federation of the Australian colonies in 1901 was motivated by "fear, national sentiment and self-interest," as put by leading federalist Sir Robert Garran. For three decades prior to federation, Australians had watched nervously as the leading colonial empires moved to annex the remaining territories in Oceania and the Western Pacific. In 1883, the colonial Queensland government sought to annex the portion of Papua New Guinea that was not Dutch territory in order to forestall a feared German land grab. In May 1918, with World War I still raging in Europe (and almost exactly 100 years before Turnbull's declaration), Australian Prime Minister Billy Hughes visited the United States and proclaimed "an Australasian Monroe Doctrine" in the South Pacific. Hughes said
[T]he position of Australia is such that it is essential to its territorial integrity that it should either control these islands itself or that they should be in the hands of friendly and civilized nations. … To allow another nation to control them would be to allow it to control Australia.
Hughes pursued this doctrine trenchantly at the subsequent Paris peace conference, insisting that Australia retain control over New Guinea and clashing with U.S. President Woodrow Wilson (who wanted former German colonies placed under League of Nations trusteeship). During World War II, Australian and American forces fought to

uphold it at the Battle of the Coral Sea, at Kokoda, and in the subsequent campaign to push Japanese forces out of New Guinea. The echoes of Hughes' declaration reverberate to the present. Australia's current Defence White Paper states:

Australia cannot be secure if our immediate neighborhood … becomes a source of threat to Australia. This includes the threat of a foreign military power seeking influence in ways that could challenge the security of our maritime approaches.

The Vanuatu government has denied discussions are under way with Beijing about establishing a military base, but China's activities in the country fit a broader picture. The Chinese government provided a $54 million concessional loan for a Chinese company to build a 360-meter wharf at Luganville. The wharf is ostensibly to accommodate visiting cruise liners, but at some point in the future — under a different Vanuatu government — it could support large naval vessels. Commercial satellite imagery, provided by the CSIS Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative/DigitalGlobe, suggests there is room to expand the existing facility.

The same is true of Vanuatu's main airfield, where the government of Vanuatu signed a contract with the Chinese state-owned enterprise, the China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation, to expand Bauerfield International Airport, the main aviation gateway to Vanuatu. This airport has been in desperate need of rehabilitation, with the China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation contracted to lengthen and widen the runway to handle long-haul commercial aircraft such as the Boeing 787 and Airbus A330 (but potentially also large military aircraft). Already Vanuatu's external debt amounts to approximately one third of its GDP, with around half of that owed to China – giving Beijing economic leverage and risking future debt entrapment. This is the fate that recently befell Sri Lanka when it lost control of the port of Hambantota to Chinese government-controlled interests as a result of inability to service debts. Hambantota is strategically located to support not only Chinese trade but increasing deployments of Chinese naval vessels in the Indian Ocean. In a nice piece of historical irony, Sri Lanka was compelled to grant a 99-year lease to China, evocative of the 99-year lease China was forced to give the British Empire for Hong Kong in the 19th century.

One of the hallmarks of Xi's high-profile Maritime Silk Road initiative is the development of extensive maritime infrastructure in Southeast Asia, the South Pacific and around the Indian Ocean littoral. This network of facilities has a genuine commercial dimension in supporting China's large merchant fleet, as Beijing seeks to build a web of economic connections linking China with Central Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Europe. But much of it could also be used to support increasing power-projection operations in the region by the People's Liberation Army-Navy. The United States and its regional allies and partners need to pay attention and develop a more coherent and effective response.

Chinese military forces are consolidating their formidable access denial capabilities in their "near seas," within the first island chain from Japan through the Philippines to Malacca and the other vital maritime chokepoints between the Pacific and Indian Oceans. As this happens, China is investing more in the long-range power projection capabilities needed for what the People's Liberation Army calls "open seas protection." This includes surface combatants and support vessels, nuclear-powered attack submarines, and aircraft carriers. China already has almost 100 vessels capable of deploying well into the Indian Ocean. There is no sign its naval shipbuilding program is about to slow down.

Supporting those far-flung deployments will require a network of facilities, and China is well on its way to building this network. Beijing's efforts on this front are at their most advanced in Djibouti, where China has established its first formal overseas military base — conspicuously adjacent to the U.S. military facility that supports operations in the Horn of Africa. There is strong evidence that the People's Liberation Army is violating its status of forces agreement with Djibouti by conducting live fire exerciseson the base. Moreover, neighboring U.S., Japanese, and other bases depend on infrastructure currently operated by Dubai World Ports, but there are rumors in the market that Chinese firms are preparing to buy these commercial concessions. In addition to Djibouti in East Africa and Hambantota in Sri Lanka, China is constructing major port facilities at Gwadar in Pakistan, has a substantial stake in the deep water Kyaukpyu port in Myanmar, and is seeking to negotiate access agreements around the region.

The facilities at Hambantota, Gwadar, and Kyaukpyu are not yet being used by the People's Liberation Army. But Beijing's militarization of its man-made South China Sea facilities — including, most recently, the deployment of radar jamming equipment, as well as the sudden prospect of a base in Vanuatu — demonstrate how quickly dual-use infrastructure could be turned to military logistical support. The vulnerability of countries like Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and Vanuatu to Chinese debt traps associated with these infrastructure projects was recently highlighted by International Monetary Fund Director Christine Lagarde and suggests how easily Beijing might tighten the financial screws to obtain strategic access.

To be clear, China has legitimate interests in sea-lane security, counter-piracy operations, and non-combatant evacuation operations that would require logistical support. Nor would a string of Chinese military bases pose a major problem for the United States and its allies in the event of a major regional conflict. Chinese vessels operating

nearer to its coastline enjoy the protection of land-based airpower, but the People's Liberation Army-Navy is operating on exterior lines in the Indian Ocean and will continue to lack adequate organic air power for some time to come.

In situations short of military conflict, however, China will be able to exploit the network of military and dual-use facilities it is establishing to support an enhanced military presence and shape the Indo-Pacific maritime security environment in ways that are deleterious to U.S. and allied interests. It will be better positioned to collect intelligence and to influence — and potentially coerce — host governments. It could also gain the ability to block or complicate U.S. military access in a crisis and to severely disrupt the logistics that are vital to American power projection. The result would be to reduce Washington's capacity to deter threats and reassure allies, and hence to maintain regional stability.

China's activities in Djibouti merit particular scrutiny in this regard, since a more significant Chinese military presence there would complicate the ability of the Bahrain-based U.S. Fifth Fleet to swing across the Indian Ocean in support of U.S. Pacific Command in a contingency in the Western Pacific. U.S. access to the strategically located base at Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean could also come under jeopardy. The United States leases the facility from the United Kingdom, which recently extended the lease to 2036. But British possession of the territory is contested by Mauritius, and Chinese influence operations could seek to exploit pressure for "decolonization." The return of Diego Garcia to Mauritius may resonate with someone like Jeremy Corbyn at the helm at 10 Downing Street.

Beijing may not yet be positioned to dominate the Indian Ocean or South Pacific, but a strategy of denial backed by infrastructure spending, debt traps, and expanded Chinese naval and air force presence would be enormously advantageous to its strategy of control over the first island chain and the East and South China Seas.

Whilst China's maritime infrastructure play across the Indo-Pacific could present a major challenge to American and allied interests in the region, this is far from a foregone conclusion. The United States continues to enjoy what Secretary of State Dean Acheson called "situations of strength" in the Indo-Pacific and can join with allies and partners to build on these strengths. Turnbull's firm stand against a permanent Chinese military presence in the South Pacific shows the way. The return of the Quad security dialogue in 2017, after a ten-year hiatus, presents a useful framework to begin pushing back against any Chinese efforts at coercive or subversive establishment of military infrastructure across the Indo-Pacific. Together, these maritime democracies can take the lead with seven lines of effort:

First, they should spotlight and push back against Chinese military facility construction that is aimed at disrupting longstanding allied and partner access arrangements in the South Pacific or Indian Ocean. Parallel to this, these four countries can offer expanded support for civil society-building, transparency, and accountability in littoral states participating in China's Maritime Silk Road to ensure greater attention to anti-corruption, labor and the environment.

Second, members of the Quad should develop a more attractive alternative to the Maritime Silk Road through the Asia Development Bank, the Japan Bank for International Cooperation, the U.S. Overseas Private Investment Corporation and other institutions committed to quality infrastructure projects that have better economic impact and lower life-cycle costs.

Third, it is important to continue U.S., Australian, Japanese, and New Zealand diplomatic and economic support for South Pacific states. The U.S. Congress and the Trump administration recently took a positive step in this direction by providing $124 million towards funding the Palau Compact Agreement in the 2017 defense bill. Under the 2010 agreement, the United States commits to providing financial assistance to Palau until 2024, in return for which U.S. Pacific Command continues to enjoy unchallenged access to the archipelago's Exclusive Economic Zone.

Fourth, it is time to step up Quad-centered maritime presence and military capability-building in the Indian Ocean. Two cost-effective ways to do this would be to increase interoperability through an expanded Malabar exercise series and to establish a rotational presence of U.S. surface combatant vessels at HMAS Stirling in Western Australia (and consider the possibility of investing in the nuclear support infrastructure necessary for basing of attack submarines as well).

Fifth, the United States, Japan, and Australia should work with India to build greater maritime domain awareness in the Indian Ocean, including by building up and networking the capacity of littoral countries.

Sixth, members of the Quad should establish a combined joint task force for low-intensity operations such as counter-piracy and humanitarian and disaster relief for the Indo-Pacific that would be inclusive of all regional navies and would establish clearer norms and communication with the People's Liberation Army-Navy and Chinese Coast Guard.

Finally, it is important that all members of the Quad encourage Beijing to make the Belt and Road Initiative and the Maritime Silk Road converge with established international practices designed to ensure transparency and accountability. Pressure from Australia and other members of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank established by China helped to move the new institution closer to the norms associated with the World Bank and Asia

Development Bank.
These steps will be important if the United States and other maritime allies and partners want to avoid a situation where Beijing suddenly flips a switch to turn its string of infrastructure projects into a new military reality that upturns longstanding assumptions about the Indo-Pacific region remaining free and open.
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https://warontherocks.com/2018/04/countering-chinas-militarization-of-the-indo-pacific/

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23. America Struck Flawlessly, But The Big Question Is What Comes Next
(THE HILL 22 APR 18) ... Michael Hayden

With all the to-ing and fro-ing, unprecedented name calling and personal attacks that characterize today's American discourse, I was quietly comforted by the voice of Marine Lt. Gen. Kenneth McKenzie the morning after the April 13 airstrikes on Syria. He is director of the Joint Staff, kind of the chief operating officer of the Joint Chiefs chairman. He was briefing the results of the attack with the precise, confident, fact-based style that I had become accustomed to hearing in nearly four decades in uniform.
McKenzie had a good story to tell: Just over 100 weapons, all on target, including missiles from American surface combatants, a submarine and bombers, supplemented by some French and British stand-off weapons. There was no Russian defensive response at all, and little Syrian reaction until after all weapons had struck their targets. Militarily, it was a good news story, a demonstration of an on-call, long-range precision strike, something that all presidents take for granted as a naturally occurring phenomenon, but which takes a great deal of effort to create.
There also seemed to be some more good news in how the policy discussions that led to this particular action were conducted. After all, the departure point for the interagency process was a presidential promise that Syria would pay a "big price" followed by some pregame trash talk aimed at Vladimir Putin, as President Trump tweeted about the missiles: "Get ready Russia, because they will be coming, nice and new and smart!"
By all accounts, Defense Secretary James Mattis and the military leadership pushed back against a spasmodic response, and there were reports that Trump was frustrated that their recommended and prudent military options didn't fit his preferred, more dramatic approach. Getting some allies on board was also a plus, even if they were the former colonial powers in the region and the architects of the 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement, which set up the now-failed states of Iraq and Syria.
In the end, the United States, Britain and France struck three chemical weapons-related facilities. The physical damage they inflicted sets back future Syrian chemical weapons production. If the president's "Mission Accomplished" declaration meant anything, it was in terms of iron on target. Whether it will deter future Syrian actions is unknowable.
Like the airfield strike a year ago following Syria's use of the nerve agent sarin, this latest bombardment really angered some of Trump's more extreme base supporters. A distraught Alex Jones tearfully complained on Infowars, "He's crapping all over us … Trump's now a fraud." Based on the president's campaign and the expectations he created, Jones had a point. Trump, operating in the best traditions of American internationalism, has now twice taken a leadership role in defense of an international norm prohibiting chemical weapons, not exactly an "America first" posture.
There seemed to be genuine human emotion in the president's responses. Trump had been particularly struck by the images of dead children in last year's sarin attack. But I think there was also a fair dose of his wanting to put distance between himself and his predecessor, not unlike his actions on the Paris Climate Treaty, the Trans Pacific Partnership, the Iran nuclear deal and the Affordable Care Act. The decision to launch U.S. airstrikes seemed to scream, "I'm not Obama!"
But, the Alex Jones panic attack aside, round two of American airpower over Syria didn't really seem to be signaling any broader change in American policy. Defense Secretary Mattis was quick to point out that this round was over, even as the president exalted over the strikes, and the United States went back to the mean business of killing what is left of ISIS.
There were no commitments to stop the killing of civilians in Syria when conducted by means that did not include chemicals. The same goes with regard to any commitments to help the people of Syria by admitting them into the United States. Indeed, the number of Syrians arriving here dropped from 15,000 in 2016 to only 3,000 last year and, so far in 2018, a scant 11 have been permitted entry.
There were also no commitments of American resources and energy toward a political solution in Damascus. That

has seemingly been outsourced to Russia, Iran and Turkey, whose leaders meet periodically on their joint project. Trump recently froze $200 million earmarked for recovery efforts in Syria. All that has alarmed his military commanders who view what happens next in Syria — the “stabilization phase” in Pentagon speak— as critical to making sure the United States don’t have to go back and fight there again.

Trump’s commander in the region, Gen. Joseph Votel, recently told an audience in Washington that the next steps have to be “stabilizing these areas, consolidating gains, getting people back into their homes, addressing long-term issues of reconstruction.” But he is working for a reluctant and stubborn president. As Lt. Gen. McKenzie assured us, last Friday’s airstrikes were near flawless, tactically. Our doing it, especially with some friends, also upheld an important international norm.

But on the morning of April 14, everyone retreated to their respective corners, with a relieved Bashar Assad back to brutalizing his countrymen and expanding his regime’s control, the Russians back to increasing their influence in the region, the Iranians back to building a land bridge from Tehran to Beirut, and the Americans, back to arguing among themselves about “should I stay or should I go.”

--Gen. Michael Hayden, a former director of the CIA and of the National Security Agency, is a visiting professor in the Schar School of Policy and Government at George Mason University. His next book is “The Assault on Intelligence: American National Security in an Age of Lies”

http://thehill.com/opinion/national-security/384308-america-struck-flawlessly-in-mideast-but-big-question-is-what-comes

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24. North Korea Is Not Denuclearizing

The Trump administration shouldn’t get too excited about Kim Jong Un’s pledge to limit his weapons program. (THE ATLANTIC 22 APR 18) ... Adam Mount and Ankit Panda

Over the past four months, North Korea has been saying all the right things. After weeks of silence regarding his intentions for upcoming summits with South Korea and the United States, Kim Jong Un, the leader of North Korea, made a dramatic announcement on Saturday morning, pledging unilateral limits on his nuclear weapons and missile programs. Though the announcement has been widely hailed as encouraging—President Donald Trump declared it a sign of “big progress”—it does not, in fact, set up a path to denuclearization. It does, however, open the door to capping Kim’s arsenal, keeping America and its allies safer while talks are underway.

Speaking before the central committee of his country’s governing party, Kim described six so-called “decisions” on nuclear-weapons policy. These included a declaration that North Korea was satisfied with its existing nuclear warhead designs, and that it had discontinued all nuclear and intercontinental-range ballistic missile (ICBM) tests and closed its nuclear test site at Punggye Ri. Kim also announced that North Korea would suspend nuclear testing, and reiterated his commitment not to use nuclear weapons “unless there is [a] nuclear threat,” and to stop the proliferation of nuclear technology. In addition, he said that North Korea would concentrate on developing its economy and improving dialogue with neighboring countries.

Suspension of nuclear and ICBM testing would represent significant restrictions on North Korea’s nuclear activities. But these are proposals to shape the arsenal rather than eliminate it—meaning that North Korea still has yet to say anything publicly about its intent to denuclearize. While Kim did say that Pyongyang supported the vision of “global disarmament,” this is a common trope in North Korean propaganda and suggests that North Korea will soon call for tit-for-tat arms control with the United States.

All this implies that Trump’s “maximum pressure” campaign has not brought Kim to heel. Instead, Kim essentially made a declaration of his regime’s nuclear policy—the act of a confident nuclear power.

In truth, Kim’s announcement represents an opening bid that would allow him to keep his nuclear and missile forces intact. Despite his claims, North Korea has not, by most military and technical standards, created an advanced, survivable, reliable arsenal. Suspending testing would effectively prevent the deployment of new, more efficient, or more compact warhead designs.

But Kim’s proposed cap is only partial. He has said nothing about North Korea’s production of fissile material, which continues today at a frightening pace: The U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency has found that North Korea may be producingenough material for 12 nuclear weapons each year. In his speech, Kim made no mention of submarine-launched missiles, or of short- or medium-range missiles fired from land, which could threaten U.S. allies in the region. Furthermore, North Korea may circumvent its own limits simply by re-classifying long-range missile tests as space launches, a trick it pulled to scuttle the most recent agreement back in 2012. There are signs of ongoing work on a satellite launcher based on its most advanced ICBM, the Hwasong-15. In short, even if North Korea adheres to the commitments it just set out, it could still produce and test more warheads and missiles.

Furthermore, North Korea may not adhere to these commitments—it's easy to break a self-enforced, unverified moratorium as soon as that moratorium becomes inconvenient. Pyongyang could reverse any of its commitments at a moment's notice, just as it did in 2006 when it broke a 1999 moratorium on missile launches.

The key for Trump in his upcoming meeting with Kim, then, will be to convert these commitments from a partial cap to a hard cap. To do so, American negotiators will have to to codify, clarify, and verify Kim's proposed limits during the summit. This means imposing limits on all missile tests, including satellite-launch vehicles and fixed-engine tests. Putting a hard cap on the program would make Americans safer if negotiations on a comprehensive agreement drag on into the summer and fall.

Aside from Kim's commitments to limit testing and launches, his pledge to refrain from proliferating nuclear technology is perhaps the most intriguing. If this commitment could be verified, it would deflate much of the case for military action and assuage one major U.S. concern about North Korea's nuclear-weapons program.

Yet, the commitment itself is hardly worth the paper it is printed on, as North Korea has previously proved willing to export reactor designs and expertise to Syria. Pyongyang would have to surrender sensitive information about the location and purpose of its nuclear facilities so that U.S. intelligence agencies or international inspectors could narrow their search rather than inspect every piece of cargo that crossed North Korea's borders. If the United States and North Korea could agree to such limits, this would represent a major accomplishment.

With his announcement on Saturday, Kim unveiled measures that many observers were hoping for as outcomes at the upcoming summit with Trump. But the United States cannot accept these measures as a victory—they're a starting point for forging a verifiable cap on Pyongyang's arsenal. A hard cap can keep America and its allies safer while Trump negotiates a more comprehensive agreement—something that can only happen if the president does not give in to overconfidence and optimism.

https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/04/north-korea-kim-jong-un-trump-nuclear-summit-weapons-missiles/558620/

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25. Why A U.S-China War Over Taiwan Won't Be Anything Like The Syria Strikes
(NATIONAL INTEREST 22 APR 18) ... James Holmes

Great powers have a habit of intervening to shield weak allies from rival great powers and advance their own purposes. Last week it was Russia vowing to shoot down American missiles bound for Syrian chemical-weapon sites. Judging from recent Chinese words and deeds, next week could see the U.S. Navy attempting to repulse a Chinese assault on nearby Taiwan.

The Chinese Communist Party depicts the island as a wayward province and has pledged to restore mainland sovereignty there—by force if necessary. As China amasses military power, improving its chances of imposing a solution at manageable cost, it may define necessary more expansively. Power begets ambition.

The prospect of maritime war is nothing new to the Western Pacific. Sometimes the possibility of a U.S.-China war hovers in the background. Sometimes it vaults into the foreground, as in recent days. On Wednesday China's navy held live-fire drills in the Taiwan Strait at short notice, ostensibly to "deter separatists" and "draw a red line to the U.S. and Taiwan." The exercise came on the heels of a South China Sea naval parade ballyhooed as China's biggest in 600 years.

That is, the parade was the biggest since the age of Admiral Zheng He and the Ming Dynasty, when China (briefly) ruled the Asian seas. President-for-Life Xi Jinping likes keeping company with grand figures from China's past—and using them for branding and messaging in the here and now.

The standard line is that Zheng He reestablished Chinese diplomacy vis-à-vis Southeast and South Asia, and thus scored a triumph of nonviolent naval strategy. And so he did. That's the smiling visage Beijing likes to put on its regional diplomacy. But Ming benevolence constitutes only part of the tale. Zheng He also crushed a hostile fleet near Malacca, sent troops into combat on the island of Ceylon, and staged shows of force during his voyages.

He prevailed without fighting when possible but fought when need be—at sea or on land. By casting today's People's Liberation Army Navy (PLA Navy) as the heir to the Ming admiral's "treasure fleet," Xi Jinping puts the region on notice that—now as six centuries ago—a mailed fist nestles within the velvet glove of Chinese diplomacy. Message received!

Suppose Taipei and Washington step over Beijing's red line, setting armed strife in motion. How would a Taiwan Strait clash unfold? Well, since Xi evidently intended the live-fire exercise in part as a rejoinder to American actions against Russian client Syria, let's compare a hypothetical cross-strait war to the Eastern Mediterranean imbroglio. Three glaring differences leap out. And all three portend ill for America and Taiwan.

First of all, the strategic setting in East Asia is at once more and less permissive for U.S. naval and air forces than in

the Eastern Mediterranean. More permissive because the vast emptiness of the Pacific Ocean to Taiwan's east affords naval task forces ample maneuver space. Denizens of Europe, the Levant, and North Africa who once styled the middle sea the "Great Sea" never got a load of the Pacific.

Off Syria, threats to U.S. forces could emanate from any point of the compass, not to mention the wild blue above and the depths beneath. By contrast, Pacific waters resemble a featureless plain. Navies thrive on the open sea, where they can flit hither and yon. With cunning and some luck, they can elude foes' efforts to detect, track, and target them. In theory, then, the Western Pacific is a combat theater made for the U.S. Navy.

But in practice the surroundings are far more forbidding than the Mediterranean Sea. Any naval action will take place within reach of PLA Navy ships of war. Chinese commanders will array shore-based firepower—mainly missiles and missile-toting warplanes—to back up the fleet. A detachment of U.S. and allied forces squared off against a Russian detachment in Syria. The encounter was modest in scale. A detachment of U.S. forces will confront the combined might of China's armed forces in the Pacific. An encounter there could sprawl across East Asia.

Only snake-oil salesmen would prophesy with confidence that a fraction of one armed force—even a stronger one—will vanquish the whole of a near-peer force. It's even more doubtful when the battle takes place on the latter's home ground. After all, the pugilist protecting its turf lies close to scenes of action, knows the physical and cultural terrain better than any outsider can, and has the option of hurling the bulk of its forces into the fray to overpower antagonists fighting far from home.

Second, the politics of a cross-strait war is likewise sobering. The great powers that smote Syria—the United States, France, and Great Britain—saw only a limited stake in the action. They only wanted to punish the Assad regime for using chemical arms. They had no desire to overturn the regime. Such a goal would have mandated that they invade Syria in full force, defeat the Syrian military and its Russian protectors, and install a viable replacement regime in Damascus. Judging from hard experience in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya, that would be an expensive, open-ended grind fraught with peril.

But that wasn't the case last week. Almost any measure can qualify as punishment. Western leaders reserved themselves the liberty to order a volley of missiles, halt the action afterward, and declare victory. Even one round on target would let them claim to have meted out retribution.

A cross-strait conflict wouldn't be such a token affair. The great power that would smite Taiwan—namely China—would set what strategists term an "unlimited" aim. China, that is, would put an end to the Republic of China's (ROC) political existence. Imposing sovereignty on a self-governing society like Taiwan would involve destroying the ROC armed forces, and then the democratic regime in Taipei. That's a serious goal and would summon forth maximum resistance from the island's defenders. In turn Beijing would have to commit as many forces as necessary to the endeavor for as long as it took.

China would have to be all in.

And so would America if it hoped to defeat China. That being the case, the United States must prize Taiwan's independence at least as much as China prizes extinguishing it. Think about the plight that would have beset Russia had NATO, rather than administer a few strikes, mounted a full-scale assault against the Assad regime last week. That would have pitted Russian forces against a united Western alliance, far from Russian home bases. Preserving the Assad regime against such an onslaught would have demanded that Moscow expend massive financial and military resources.

Whether it would—or could—have done so is doubtful.

Such are the hazards of expeditionary ventures. That thought experiment reveals something about the hardships awaiting the U.S. Navy and affiliated joint forces off Taiwan. Americans must ask themselves whether they want it—it being the independence of a free people on Taiwan—enough to take on China under the mainland's shadow, and to invest lives, treasure, and military hardware in the enterprise for long enough to beat back a cross-strait offensive.

Upholding the U.S. commitment to Taiwan would not come cheap or easy. If the leadership in Washington finds such an effort is worthwhile, it should start educating the electorate about the issues at stake now—lest Joe Six-Pack be caught-off guard by a Chinese attack, and withhold his support from the endeavor. Any effort will falter without fiery zeal from the American people.

And third, Taipei must take ownership of its own destiny. Geography and politics will be moot if it doesn't. That's because the war will be over before U.S. forces can fight their way to the battleground in the face of PLA anti-access and area-denial (A2/AD) defenses. There will be no U.S.-China war—just a China-on-Taiwan brawl in which the mainland is a heavy favorite.

I've likened anti-access to China's offshore "crumple zone." Rather than a rigid defensive shield, it's a sacrificial component designed to collapse in a controlled way, much as the engine compartment and trunk in your car are designed to collapse in a controlled way should you get in an accident. These mechanical buffers absorb the shock

of a collision, protecting what really matters—you, and any passengers sitting in the cabin with you.

Taiwan and the waters and skies adjoining it are what will really matter to PLA commanders in a cross-strait conflagration. If Chinese warplanes, missiles, surface craft, and submarines can engage U.S. naval forces at long range, they can help absorb the shock from the American offensive—and, if successful, slow it to a halt before it reaches the combat zone. At a minimum A2/AD will grant PLA forces time to subdue the island's defenders.

Taipei must give U.S. rescuers that time back, and it must help keep American losses down, and fighting strength up. Missile-armed ROC Navy patrol craft can work in concert with shore-based rocketeers to mount a delaying action in the Taiwan Strait. Taiwanese air and sea forces can fan out to the island's east, helping open a corridor for U.S. reinforcements to steam into the theater. They can keep China from winning quickly—and give the U.S. Navy time to puncture China's offshore crumple zone.

Devising forces, doctrine, and tactics to stall a cross-strait blitz should be the constant aim for Taiwan's defenders. They may yet prevail if they take an active hand in protecting their island.

So much for the differences between Taiwan and Syria. As it ponders strategy for the Far East, the U.S. military might take a page from the Russian playbook in Syria. Moscow's deterrent threats carried considerable weight during the run-up to the Western strikes, in large measure because U.S., British, and French commanders and officials feared harming Russian soldiers or airmen as a byproduct of the action. They feared triggering a larger war through the collateral damage that is part of all martial undertakings.

As Nassim Nicholas Taleb might put it, Moscow made it known it had skin in the game in the Eastern Mediterranean. President Vladimir Putin and his lieutenants talked big about the dire repercussions of an assault on the Syrian regime, to be sure. But they also stationed Russians on the scene, serving notice that Moscow cared enough about Assad's survival to put Russian lives in harm's way. They were committed to the cause—and prepared to share in its dangers and costs as well as its geopolitical benefits.

Or think back to the Cold War. Washington kept a military garrison in West Berlin throughout that twilight struggle. Few deluded themselves that Berlin could ride out an assault, encircled as it was by communist East Germany. The U.S. Army's Berlin Brigade was a tripwire force, deterring the foe by showing the United States had skin in the game in West Berlin. In other words, Washington used force deployments to convey that it regarded an assault on Berlin as an assault on NATO as a whole—and would reply accordingly.

The city would fall should Soviet or East German forces attack it. But at the same time communist bloc leaders knew they would embroil themselves in a much larger war. Thankfully, that was a war Moscow proved loath to fight.

Geography, political resolve, and the military balance will line up on Beijing's side during a cross-strait war. Taipei must deploy artful strategy to balk China's advantages—and Washington must broadcast that it has skin in the game.

Tripwires, anyone?

James Holmes is J. C. Wylie Chair of Maritime Strategy at the Naval War College and coauthor of Red Star over the Pacific (second edition forthcoming this October). The views voiced here are his alone.

http://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/why-us-china-war-over-taiwan-wont-be-anything-the-syria-25492?page=show

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From: (b) (6) CTR CHINFO, OI-3
Subject: CHINFO NEWS CLIPS 24 APR 18
Date: Tuesday, April 24, 2018 5:57:26
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On This Day In The Navy:
1884 - USS Bear leaves New York Naval Shipyard on its way to the Arctic as part of the Greely Relief Expedition. USS Thetis and USS Alert join USS Bear on the mission. On June 22, the relief ships rescue the remaining seven members of the 27-man Greely Expedition at Cape Sabine.

Executive Summary:
Top national news includes former president George H.W. Bush being hospitalized the day after his wife's funeral, the capture of the Waffle House shooting suspect in Nashville, and the Senate Foreign Relations committee narrowly endorsing secretary of state nominee Mike Pompeo. The USS Wasp finished its inaugural patrol of the western Pacific reports Stars and Stripes. The patrol, which included the USS Dewey and USS Sterett, saw the Wasp strike group practice raiding a beach with small boats and amphibious-assault vehicles, evacuating civilians, treating wounded, providing disaster relief, and seizing a smuggler's vessel. Navy undersecretary Thomas Modly announced the formation of the Education for Seapower study in a memo on Monday reports USNI News. The study is expected to alter how Department of the Navy training is conducted. Additionally, Defense Secretary Jim Mattis expressed optimism on Monday over Kim Jong Un's pledge to cease testing long range missiles and nuclear weapons.

TOP STORIES:
1. Wasp Strike Group Wraps Up Inaugural Patrol Of Western Pacific
(STARS AND STRIPES 23 APR 18) ... James Bolinger
MARINE CORPS AIR STATION IWAKUNI, Japan -- Two thousand, three hundred Marines are back on Okinawa after more than a month at sea accompanying the USS Wasp amphibious warship and F-35B stealth fighters on their first patrol of the Western Pacific.

2. Service Leaders Rethinking Navy And Marine Corps Education
(USNI NEWS 23 APR 18) ... Ben Werner
A clean sheet review of how the Navy educates sailors and Marines is now underway, with results expected to alter the way Department of the Navy training is conducted.

3. Mattis Sees 'Reasons For Optimism' After North Korea Pledges Weapons Testing Halt
(STARS AND STRIPES 23 APR 18) ... Corey Dickstein
WASHINGTON – Defense Secretary Jim Mattis expressed optimism Monday about North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's promise to cease testing long-range missiles and nuclear weapons ahead of his expected upcoming summits with the presidents of South Korea and the United States.

INDO - PACIFIC:
4. For Trump And Kim, High Stakes And Mismatched Motives
(NEW YORK TIMES 24 APR 18) ... Max Fisher
When Alex Wellerstein, a nuclear historian who has studied crises and breakthroughs dating to the earliest Cold War arms races, tried to imagine the possible outcomes of President Trump's planned meeting with Kim Jong-un, the North Korean leader, he found himself, like many experts, at a loss.

5. Short Of War, China Already Controls The South China Sea: US Admiral
Pick To Take Over As Pacific Command Chief Calls For Maintaining US Presence
(ASIA TIMES 23 APR 18)
If Chinese leaders thought that saying goodbye to their least favorite US military commander, current US Pacific Command chief Admiral Harry Harris, would mean a more amenable replacement is on the way, they had better guess again.

6. China's First Homemade Carrier Out For Maiden Sea Trial

Unnamed Carrier Seen Moving Out Of Dalian Shipyard In Northeast China With Its Deck Cleared
(ASIA TIMES 23 APR 18)
Photos and video clips appearing online since Monday morning confirm that China's first domestically built aircraft carrier has started its maiden voyage.

7. Chinese Aircraft Carrier Leads Live-Fire Drills In East China Sea
(STARS AND STRIPES 24 APR 18) ... Tyler Hlavac
A Chinese carrier group conducted a series of live-fire drills Sunday in the East China Sea, part of the communist nation's latest show of military force in the region.

8. Military Convoy Delivers Construction Material To THAAD Base Despite Protests
(STARS AND STRIPES 23 APR 18) ... Kim Gamel and Yoo Kyong Chang
SEOUL, South Korea — A convoy delivered construction material and other equipment to the military base housing a controversial U.S. missile-defense system Monday after riot police scuffled with protesters trying to block the road, according to officials and witnesses.

MIDEAST - CENTRAL/SOUTH ASIA:
9. Who Learned More From The Strikes In Syria — America Or Russia?
(DEFENSE NEWS 23 APR 18) ... Aaron Mehta
WASHINGTON — When the U.S., France and Britain launched 105 cruise missiles at a trio of Syrian targets April 13, all eyes were on how the vaunted air defense network in Syria would handle the weapon.

10. Syrian Opposition Says U.S. Cannot Afford To Leave Syria Yet
(REUTERS 23 APR 18) ... Sarah Dadouch
RIYADH - Syria's chief opposition negotiator said the United States cannot afford to leave Syria as it has yet to achieve any of its goals in the region, even though President Donald Trump said recently Washington would withdraw its troops.

11. U.S. Allies Press Trump To Keep Iran Nuclear Deal Alive
(REUTERS 23 APR 18) ... Steve Holland, David Ljunggren
WASHINGTON/TORONTO - Western allies stepped up pressure on U.S. President Donald Trump on Monday to keep alive an international nuclear deal with Iran, with French President Emmanuel Macron due to urge him in person not to tear up the 2015 agreement.

EUROPE:
12. Macron Bringing Tribute To Belleau Wood Marines To White House
(MILITARY.COM 23 APR 18) ... Richard Sisk
French President Emmanuel Macron said Sunday that he is bringing a living tribute to "Devil Dog" Marines who fell in the World War I battle of Belleau Wood to the White House this week as a symbol of the two nations' enduring ties.

AFRICA:
13. US Builds Drone Base In Niger, Crossroads Of Extremism Fight
(ASSOCIATED PRESS 23 APR 18) ... Carley Petesch
AGADEZ, Niger — On the scorching edge of the Sahara Desert, the U.S. Air Force is building a base for armed drones, the newest front in America's battle against the growing extremist threat in Africa's vast Sahel region.

CONGRESS / BUDGET:
14. Sen. Kaine: Larger Navy Will Be A Boost For Hampton Roads If Area Can Train Enough Workers
(VIRGINIAN-PILOT 23 APR 18) ... Bill Bartel
If Hampton Roads wants to benefit from the planned Navy buildup to 355 ships, the region has to develop a larger population of skilled workers – even reaching into its elementary schools to find future talent – U.S. Sen. Tim Kaine said Monday.

15. Congresswoman Wants Navy To Help Fight Mexican Sewage Spills
(SAN DIEGO UNION-TRIBUNE 23 APR 18) ... Carl Prine
Rep. Susan Davis wants the Navy to study the impact of Mexican sewage spills on the new $1 billion SEAL training

center.

16. Senate Postpones Jackson Hearing
(WASHINGTON POST 24 APR 18) ... Seung Min Kim, Lisa Rein and Josh Dawsey
Senate lawmakers have postponed the confirmation hearing for Ronny L. Jackson, President Trump's nominee to lead the Department of Veterans Affairs, after top Republicans and Democrats raised concerns about his qualifications and oversight of the White House medical staff, White House and other administration officials were told Monday.

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE:
17. Defense Intelligence Chief: 'A Lot Of Technology Remains Untapped'
Kernan: Project Maven So Far Has Been 'Extraordinarily' Useful In Processing Intelligence But More Capabilities Are Needed
(SPACE NEWS 23 APR 18) ... Sandra Erwin
TAMPA, FLA. -- Undersecretary of Defense for Intelligence Joseph Kernan, a retired Navy vice admiral, is rarely seen or heard at public events. But he decided to step on the stage and address the nation's largest gathering of geospatial intelligence professionals to relay a message that the military is in the market for cutting-edge technology.

18. Pentagon Says Cloud Winner Must Stay Ahead To Extend Contract
(BLOOMBERG NEWS 23 APR 18) ... Anthony Capaccio
The winner of the U.S. military's competition for broad cloud computing services will be evaluated after an initial two-year contract for how well it's kept up with industry innovations including on cost, data transfer, security and compatibility among systems, Pentagon officials said.

AVIATION:
19. Navy's P-8As Unaffected By FAA's Boeing 737 Engine Inspection Requirement After Fatal Southwest Incident
(USNI NEWS 23 APR 18) ... Megan Eckstein
The Navy's fleet of P-8A Poseidon aircraft are not in any immediate risk of facing the same engine failure that caused the April 17 emergency landing of a Boeing 737 – which the P-8 design is derived from – a Navy spokeswoman told USNI News.

SHIPBUILDING:
20. US Navy Gearing Up For Boost In Submarine Production
(NEW LONDON DAY 23 APR 18) ... Julia Bergman
GROTON, Conn. — The U.S. Navy is working to build three attack submarines in some years as opposed to two, and wants to keep five of its attack submarines in service longer than expected to address a dip in the number of nuclear-powered attack submarines in coming years.

UNMANNED SYSTEMS:
21. The US Navy Wants Undersea Gas Stations For Underwater Drones
Access To Undersea Gas Stations Could Allow Gavias And Other Underwater Drones To Spend More Time Scanning The Seabed, Searching For Crash Survivors Or Locating Enemy Mines.
(MOTHERBOARD 23 APR 18) ... David Axe
A California company is working on an underwater refueling station that can top off the fuel cells of undersea surveillance drones, allowing the vehicles to venture farther and work longer.

PERSONNEL:
22. Special Report: Heavy Impacts And Hidden Scars
(WAVY-TV NBC NORFOLK 23 APR 18) ... Chris Horne
VIRGINIA BEACH, Va. -- When you're a SEAL, you don't have to be at war to feel the effects of war. Ever since their beginning in the early 1960s, they've worked with underwater demolition, weapons, the potential for hard landings from aircraft, and the jostling of boats on rough seas.

NAVAL ACADEMY:
23. Naval Academy Head Says Court-Martial Possible In Drug Case

(ASSOCIATED PRESS 23 APR 18) ... Brian Witte
ANNAPOLIS, Md. — A drug investigation at the U.S. Naval Academy could result in a court-martial of a midshipman who is “a suspected distributor,” the academy’s superintendent said Monday.

24. Naval Academy Sees Big Boost In Cybersecurity Majors
(ASSOCIATED PRESS 23 APR 18) ... Brian White
ANNAPOLIS, Md. — The U.S. Naval Academy has seen a big increase in cyber operations majors, and a U.S. senator said Monday that midshipmen could be useful in working on cyber challenges before they graduate.

COMMENTARY:
25. USS Firebolt (PC10): Remembering Heroic Coastal Patrol Ship Sailors And Looking Forward To Our Future
(THE SEXTANT 24 APR 18) Lt. Cmdr. Roger young, commanding officer of USS Firebolt (PC 10)
April 24, 2004

26. What To Do If The Talks With North Korea Succeed
(WASHINGTON POST 24 APR 18) ... Nunn and Richard Lugar
As the United States prepares for historic discussions between President Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un , the Trump administration and its international partners have a lot of work ahead of them . A successful summit, if it can be achieved, will be only the start of a long and complicated process. Eliminating the nuclear threat and achieving stability and security on the Korean Peninsula will require unconventional thinking and steps that are much broader than denuclearization. Just as we should prepare for the summit to go wrong, we should also prepare for it to “go right.”

TOP STORIES:
1. Wasp Strike Group Wraps Up Inaugural Patrol Of Western Pacific
(STARS AND STRIPES 23 APR 18) ... James Bolinger

MARINE CORPS AIR STATION IWAKUNI, Japan -- Two thousand, three hundred Marines are back on Okinawa after more than a month at sea accompanying the USS Wasp amphibious warship and F-35B stealth fighters on their first patrol of the Western Pacific.
The Wasp Expeditionary Strike Group dropped the Marines off Saturday at White Beach Naval Facility, Okinawa, after a patrol that included air-defense exercises with Air Force F-35A and Navy F-18 aircraft, live-fire drills, simulated Tomahawk missile strikes and anti-submarine warfare training, a Navy statement said.
The Wasp, which arrived at its new homeport of Sasebo Naval Base in January, also trained alongside a Japanese amphibious transport dock ship in the East China Sea.
Sailors and Marines with the strike group practiced raiding a beach with small boats and amphibious-assault vehicles, evacuating civilians, treating wounded, providing disaster relief, and seizing a smuggler’s vessel, the statement said.
The patrol, which included the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyers USS Dewey and USS Sterett, was a “proof of concept” for the Navy and Marine Corps, Task Force 76 commander Rear Adm. Brad Cooper told Stars and Stripes last week.
“[It’s] not your grandfather’s amphibious readiness group,” he said. “It’s a lethal, capable, integrated naval force that is designed to conduct both the sea-control mission, which is what we do in the Navy, as well as project power ashore.”
Combining the F-35B with destroyers is a big advantage, giving the strike group the ability to hunt enemy submarines and ships and engage in surface-to-surface combat, Cooper said.
Sensors on the destroyers’ Tomahawk missiles are able to detect enemy aircraft at long range, while the F-35B can defend amphibious forces. Meanwhile, sensors aboard the ships give commanders a robust picture of the battlespace, he said.
Capt. Ed Thompson, who led the strike group as commodore of Amphibious Squadron 11, said in the statement that his ships, aircraft, sailors and Marines “created a highly capable, flexible force ready for the spectrum of operations at sea.”
The destroyers have left the strike group and will eventually return to their homeport in San Diego, the statement

said.
Navy leaders are already reviewing lessons learned on the patrol, and will incorporate those into future deployments, he said.
The Wasp has replaced the USS Bonhomme Richard, which is heading to San Diego for upgrades after spending six years based at Sasebo.
https://www.stripes.com/news/wasp-strike-group-wraps-up-inaugural-patrol-of-western-pacific-1.523527

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2. Service Leaders Rethinking Navy And Marine Corps Education
(USNI NEWS 23 APR 18) ... Ben Werner

A clean sheet review of how the Navy educates sailors and Marines is now underway, with results expected to alter the way Department of the Navy training is conducted.
The wide-ranging study is to explore how the Navy can upgrade its education methods in order to maintain a competitive edge at a time when adversaries are increasing their technical know-how, according to a memo released Monday by Thomas Modly, undersecretary of the Navy.
"Continuous learning — and sharing hard-won knowledge – represents a combat-proven key to victory for our naval services," Modly writes in his memo announcing the formation of his Education for Seapower study. "Our flagship educational institutions, including the United States Naval Academy, Naval Postgraduate School, Marine Corps University, and Naval War College, along with the many outstanding national colleges and universities associated with the Reserve Officers Training Corps, have long and well served the nation in educating our future leaders. They inculcate not only the finest sense of honor and integrity, but also creativity and deep rigor in thinking about the future of naval warfare, especially in times of great change."
Evaluating the way sailors and Marines are educated has been a priority for Modly since he was sworn into office in December. When delivering speeches or prepared remarks, Modly frequently mentions his alma mater, the U.S. Naval Academy, motto — Ex Scientia Tridens, which roughly translates to mean through knowledge, sea power.
"As we think about education and its role in the future of our Navy and Marine Corps no words seem more relevant than these. While we surely must invest in more ships, and aircraft, and submarines, and armored vehicles, and new missile systems, nothing will be more important than the investment that we make in knowledge—and on creating a force made up of people who thirst for it," Modly said two weeks ago while addressing the annual Navy League Sea Air Space exposition.
Conducting the study for Modly is a high-profile team including several form military leaders and thought provokers, including:

- Gen. John Allen, USMC (Ret.), who is currently president of the Brookings Institute, and is the former commander of the NATO International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and U.S. Forces in Afghanistan
- Amb. Barbara Barrett, currently an Aerospace Corp. board of trustees member, and is the former US Ambassador to Finland. Barrett has served on a variety of science and technology boards and is an instrument-rated pilot. In 2009, she trained at the Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Center in Star City, Russia, and in Kazakhstan, culminating in certification for space travel.
- Adm. Mike Mullen, USN (Ret.), is the former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the former Chief of Naval Operations.
- Vice Adm. Ann Rondeau, USN (Ret.), the former president of the National Defense University (NDU).
- Dr. Harlan Ullman, a senior adviser at the Atlantic Council, and author. His most recent book Anatomy of Failure; Why America Loses Every War It Starts was released in November by the US Naval Institute Press.

The team is expected to spend the next several months meeting with both military and civilian educators, private industry experts, and active duty personnel to determine education methods that work and areas to improve. Their study is due to Modly in December, and he plans to present a final report to Secretary of the Navy Richard V. Spencer in January.
In his memo establishing the study, Modly is clear about wanting input to come from all aspects of Navy and Marine Corps education. The process is to be transparent, with Modly saying he wants to consider every viewpoint. "Good ideas have no rank," Modly states in his memo.
https://news.usni.org/2018/04/23/33115

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3. Mattis Sees 'Reasons For Optimism' After North Korea Pledges Weapons Testing Halt

(STARS AND STRIPES 23 APR 18) ... Corey Dickstein

WASHINGTON – Defense Secretary Jim Mattis expressed optimism Monday about North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's promise to cease testing long-range missiles and nuclear weapons ahead of his expected upcoming summits with the presidents of South Korea and the United States.

"Right now, I think there is a lot of reasons for optimism that the negotiations will be fruitful, and we'll see," Mattis said Monday in response to a reporter's question just before he met with Thailand's Defense Minister Prawit Wongsuwon at the Pentagon.

The defense secretary did not further elaborate on the issue. Earlier Monday, Pentagon officials declined to respond to questions about Kim's announcement on April 20 that he would suspend his nuclear weapons and intercontinental ballistic missile programs to focus on economic development.

Some Pentagon officials have privately expressed skepticism about Kim's sincerity, noting North Korea's long history of failing to live up to deals negotiated with the United States, including accords struck by the administrations of former Presidents Bill Clinton and Barack Obama.

Kim is set to meet Friday with South Korean President Moon Jae-in in the heavily fortified border area between their two countries. Kim is also expected to meet in late May or early June with President Donald Trump.

Trump expressed optimism about Kim's announcement via Twitter, noting April 20 "progress [was] being made," and writing Sunday, in a tweet that also disparaged an NBC News anchor, that "we haven't given up anything & they have agreed to denuclearization (so great for World), site closure, & no more testing!"

North Korea has neither publicly announced that they are willing to give up their nuclear weapons stockpiles nor that the topic was one that they would consider discussing. South Korean officials have said denuclearization would be discussed when Kim and Moon meet. The United States maintains its long-held goal "for the complete, irreversible and verifiable denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula," said Army Col. Rob Manning, a Pentagon spokesman.

White House Press Secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders said Monday that the United States was not convinced Kim was ready to part with his weapons programs. But like Mattis, she expressed optimism.

"We're not naive in this process," she told reporters. "We've seen some steps in the right direction but we have a long way to go."

Sanders said U.S. policy of "maximum pressure" – stringent economic sanctions alongside diplomatic negotiations – would continue until Kim agreed to surrender his nuclear weapons.

The United States maintains more than 28,000 troops in South Korea, a presence that has remained on the peninsula since the Korean War ended in a cease fire in 1953. Their presence in South Korea is not expected to be among the bargaining chips that the United States would consider ceding to North Korea.

American and South Korean troops regularly conduct joint training, including defensive drills to rehearse the nations' reactions should North Korea attack. Manning said Monday that the United States has not adjusted its force posture since it began negotiations with North Korea in recent months.

"From a military perspective from the Department of Defense, there has been no change in our posture and our determination to be ready to fight tonight," he said.

https://www.stripes.com/news/mattis-sees-reasons-for-optimism-after-north-korea-pledges-weapons-testing-halt-1.523591

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INDO - PACIFIC:

4. For Trump And Kim, High Stakes And Mismatched Motives

(NEW YORK TIMES 24 APR 18) ... Max Fisher

When Alex Wellerstein, a nuclear historian who has studied crises and breakthroughs dating to the earliest Cold War arms races, tried to imagine the possible outcomes of President Trump's planned meeting with Kim Jong-un, the North Korean leader, he found himself, like many experts, at a loss.

"What's the game plan? Is it negotiating on sanctions? Is it stalling to defuse tensions in that time-honored DPRK way?" he asked on Twitter, using North Korea's formal initials. "I don't know."

The meeting will bring together two personalities whose tendencies have already proved destabilizing: Mr. Trump, whose unpredictability and defiance of norms has led him to take on high-stakes issues with which he has little experience, and Mr. Kim, whose youthful boldness and willingness to embrace risk give him the swagger, perhaps

unearned, of a major nuclear power.

But the meeting will also exemplify a world that is less constrained by the usual guardrails of international norms or policy processes — a world in which virtually anything can happen.

As if to underscore the growing uncertainty over how talks will proceed and what they will produce — the opposite of standard procedure, in which months of pre-negotiations align expectations and telegraph the response to victory or failure — both sides already appear to misunderstand one another on basic terms.

Mr. Wellerstein is worried over the Trump administration's fixation on hints that North Korea would consider "denuclearization," which North Koreans tend to mean as gradual and mutual easing of tensions but which Americans read as complete North Korean disarmament — an expectation that Mr. Wellerstein called "bizarro" in his Twitter feed.

The countries are already treating the meeting less as the start of a long and difficult process, in which both would need to make painful compromises for narrow gains, but as the culmination of what each seems to see as its glorious triumph over the other.

But those two imagined victories are mutually exclusive and, barring a drastic strategic shift by either country, categorically unacceptable to the other side.

If both leaders are setting themselves up to fall short of the lofty expectations on which each has staked his reputation and ego, Mr. Wellerstein tweeted, "what happens when this (inevitably) becomes clear?"

Clashing Realities

Statements by both governments suggest they are not only driving at conflicting goals but also operating within parallel realities.

On Friday, North Korea announced that it would pause certain nuclear tests and development programs, which its statement portrayed as a result of the country having achieved its technological ambitions. Vipin Narang, a scholar at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, translated the meaning of the statement as: "This is what we will look like as a nuclear weapons power. Get used to it."

But American officials greeted the testing pause as the first of many expected North Korean concessions. Two days later, Mr. Trump wrote on Twitter that North Korea had already "agreed to denuclearization (so great for World), site closure, & no more testing!"

This confusion appears to extend beyond differing interpretations of terminology, setting up both sides for nasty surprises when they meet.

The North Koreans seem to believe that their nuclear breakthroughs forced Mr. Trump to accede to a leaders' summit meeting, something they have long desired as a way to prove themselves a peer of the major powers.

But American officials have said Mr. Kim was the one forced to the table, compelled there by American sanctions and military threats.

North Korea's statements suggests that the country sees itself as on the verge of forcing the world to accept it as it is, finally securing its long-term survival.

American statements, which appear written to fend off critics who say Mr. Trump is getting ahead of himself, imply that Mr. Kim will surrender his nuclear arsenal, which virtually no expert believes the country would do.

Each country is hoping for a dramatic — and unlikely — win over the other. When their realities collide, it is difficult to predict how either leader will respond.

One part of the table will be occupied by Mr. Kim, a young despot atop an insular and impoverished country whose degree of political stability remains a mystery. In the early years of his rule, Mr. Kim cemented power by making risky purges at home and provocative attacks abroad, which he may feel compelled to repeat if he suffers a loss of face at the meeting.

At the table's other end will be Mr. Trump, who tends to see negotiations as zero-sum — that is, the other side must lose for him to win. He has proved capricious and temperamental, at times lashing out when negotiations falter, as he has done in Congressional talks over tax or health care bills. And he can be maximalist and impulsive, for instance blowing up trade talks with China and Canada.

Clashing Strategies

These contradictory realities have long filtered through the two countries' approach to their relations. Each has, for decades, been laser-focused on a narrow — and increasingly far-fetched — vision of success and plan for how to get there.

Since the fall of the Soviet Union, the United States has expected that North Korea will collapse as well. The theory was, the country would save itself by surrendering to American demands, including nuclear disarmament, for relief from economic sanctions and diplomatic isolation.

In the meantime, few believed the hermit kingdom could develop advanced missiles to carry nuclear weapons to the American mainland.

This led to severe American demands, which only fed North Korea's conviction that it required a nuclear deterrent

to survive. And it allowed the United States, confident full victory was inevitable, to miss earlier opportunities for partial victory through an agreement to freeze North Korea's nuclear program when it was smaller and less advanced.

In the American view, the coming meeting is the result of sanctions and pressure, so surely Mr. Kim is prepared to discuss the degree of his nuclear surrender.

The North Koreans, though, have long patterned their strategy on what they see as China's path: international pariah in the 1950s, rogue nuclear state in the 1960s, and, finally, accepted global power in the 1970s.

That was when the United States embraced the Beijing government and withdrew troops and security guarantees from its longtime ally in Taiwan — a possible precedent, in North Korean eyes, for partial American withdrawal of support for South Korea. For China, economic prosperity followed, securing the future of a communist government once seen as unlikely to survive the modern world.

In reality, China won acceptance by playing the United States against the Soviet Union. Its size and power, which North Korea lacks, made it impossible for other nations to ignore.

But that history is why, for Mr. Kim, his meeting with Mr. Trump could seem like an echo of President Richard M. Nixon's 1972 summit with Mao Zedong, where the former accepted the latter as the leader of a fellow great power. It is also why he seems to expect, like the Americans, a kind of victory that might not be realistic.

Clashing Expectations

With Mr. Trump unconstrained by the international norms he disdains or the diplomatic institutions he has largely circumvented, and with Mr. Kim's domestic political considerations almost entirely unknown, it is difficult to articulate even the range of possible outcomes.

"We have misunderstood North Korea's promises before (and they have broken them)," Melissa Hanham, an analyst at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies, warned on Twitter.

Mr. Kim "can go back on his promises really easily," she wrote of his pledges to stop testing. He might secure a high-level meeting, a major achievement in its own right, while offering little concrete in return.

Mira Rapp-Hooper, who works on Asian security issues at the Center for New American Security, has argued that Mr. Trump will feel pressured to return with a deal.

Mr. Trump's skepticism of alliances, she has written, could lead him to offer partial American withdrawal from the region and acceptance of a North Korean nuclear program in exchange for Pyongyang's halting development on the long-range missiles that can reach the continental United States.

There are perhaps a dozen such scenarios, some more drastic than others. They have little in common other than at least potentially reconciling the contradictions in what each country expects to achieve.

Perhaps even more important and even less certain is what happens if these clashing expectations cannot be reconciled, leading the talks to collapse in angry disagreement.

Mr. Narang, the M.I.T. professor, warned that the mile-wide gaps in the countries' goals and even their understandings of basic terminology leaves "either lots of room for a bargain, or lot of room for a war."

https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/23/world/asia/kim-trump-north-korea-meeting html

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5. Short Of War, China Already Controls The South China Sea: US Admiral Pick To Take Over As Pacific Command Chief Calls For Maintaining US Presence (ASIA TIMES 23 APR 18)

If Chinese leaders thought that saying goodbye to their least favorite US military commander, current US Pacific Command chief Admiral Harry Harris, would mean a more amenable replacement is on the way, they had better guess again.

The nominee to take the spot when Harris becomes ambassador to Australia is sounding the alarm bells about China's operations in the South China Sea, calling for the US to maintain a strong presence in the region and step up advanced weapons development.

In written testimony to the US Senate Armed Services Committee released last week, the likely pick, Admiral Philip Davidson, said that China has already taken control of the South China Sea.

"In short," he wrote, "China is now capable of controlling the South China Sea in all scenarios short of war with the United States."

"Once occupied, China will be able to extend its influence thousands of miles to the south and project power deep into Oceania," Davidson said of forward operating bases that have already been completed. "The PLA will be able to use these bases to challenge US presence in the region, and any forces deployed to the islands would easily overwhelm the military forces of any other South China Sea-claimants."

News Corp Australia noted the admiral's statements on Sunday in the context of the news that Australian warships had been "challenged" in the waters. The meeting of the two navies was downplayed by the Australian Navy, but hyped in the media as a sign of China's growing assertiveness. Chinese state media took offense.
"If Australia considers exchanges between countries as interference, it should lock itself up in the dark room," China's Global Times quoted the Chinese foreign ministry as saying about what has been described as a "standoff" between the Chinese and Australian ships.
"People who have such a mindset need to reflect," foreign ministry spokesman Hua Chunying was quoted as saying. "If there is no mutual trust, there's no room for co-operation. China hopes Australia takes practical action and corrects its prejudice against China."
In response to questions for how to respond to China's increased military presence in the region, Admiral Davidson advocated a sustained US military presence and investing in weapons technology.
"US operations in the South China Sea—to include freedom of navigation operations—must remain regular and routine. In my view, any decrease in air or maritime presence would likely reinvigorate PRC expansion."
Regarding military technology, Davidson outlined a number of crucial areas in which to invest. "A more effective Joint Force requires sustained investment in the following critical areas: undersea warfare, critical munitions stockpiles, standoff weapons (Air-Air, Air-Surface, Surface-Surface, Anti-Ship), intermediate range cruise missiles, low cost / high capacity cruise missile defense, hypersonic weapons, air and surface lift capacity, cyber capabilities, air-air refueling capacity, and resilient communication and navigation systems."
http://www.atimes.com/article/short-war-china-already-controls-south-china-sea-us-admiral/

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6. China's First Homemade Carrier Out For Maiden Sea Trial
Unnamed Carrier Seen Moving Out Of Dalian Shipyard In Northeast China With Its Deck Cleared
(ASIA TIMES 23 APR 18)

Photos and video clips appearing online since Monday morning confirm that China's first domestically built aircraft carrier has started its maiden voyage.
The date of the launch was no surprise – Monday is the day the People's Liberation Army Navy was established.
The yet-to-be-named vessel set off from its berth at Dalian Shipyard in northeast China, where Liaoning, the country's first carrier, underwent a seven-year retrofit after a hulk was bought from Ukraine. The latter has now begun service as China's first seagoing airbase.
Liaoning provincial maritime department gazetted a no-entry zone last Friday, barring ships from entering roughly 1,500 square kilometers of water in the Yellow Sea, off the coast of Dalian from April 20 to 28.
The Beijing-based Global Times has said the first locally made carrier, not yet christened, is likely to be ready for combat "within two years" after its expected delivery to the navy by the end of this year.
Pictures posted online show that scaffolding around the new carrier has been removed, with an active phased-array radar system clearly visible on the bridge. The flight deck and curled-up bow had also been cleared of items.
The picture below shows workers using water cannons to clean the deck while the carrier's anchor is lifted. Several cranes were also spotted on the deck in another picture taken earlier this month when equipment and food and fuel supplies were believed to be transferred on to the carrier.
Beijing started building the carrier in late 2013, and overseas observers believed that it could be a copy of the Liaoning, as Chinese engineers and shipbuilders sought to use the diagrams obtained along with the Soviet-built hull.
Yet the speed with which China has allegedly replicated the Soviet design for a new carrier with indigenous technology input has still surprised analysts. The sea trial comes just a year after the carrier's dry dock was flooded for the first time in April 2017.
Known specifications of the home-built carrier include a displacement of around 65,000 tons, conventional diesel and steam propulsion, plus a steam-powered catapult launching system for planes on board.
Meanwhile, the Liaoning, was in a convoy over the weekend together with missile destroyers and ship-borne fighters, en route from the South China Sea to the western Pacific for a long voyage to help its crew adapt to coordinated offensives on the high seas, Xinhua reported.
Liaoning is now in waters east of the Bashi Channel, between the Philippines and Orchid Island off Taiwan, in a mock combat with two PLA Navy Type 052C destroyers, according to the PLA Daily.
http://www.atimes.com/article/chinas-first-homemade-carrier-maiden-sea-trial/

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7. Chinese Aircraft Carrier Leads Live-Fire Drills In East China Sea
(STARS AND STRIPES 24 APR 18) ... Tyler Hlavac

A Chinese carrier group conducted a series of live-fire drills Sunday in the East China Sea, part of the communist nation's latest show of military force in the region.
China's only operational aircraft carrier — the Liaoning — and an unspecified number of ships conducted anti-aircraft and anti-submarine warfare training that included detecting enemy aircraft with radar and launching jets and anti-aircraft missiles, the state-run Xinhua news agency reported Tuesday.
The vessels "successfully detected and dodged an attack range from enemy submarines," said the report, which added the exercise was the latest in a series of military drills that have taken place over the past 10 days in the Western Pacific, including the East and South China seas.
The People's Liberation Army Navy, which marked its 69th anniversary this week, has been showcasing its military capabilities recently, beginning last month with a carrier-led formation of nearly 40 ships in the South China Sea.
China has laid claim to a huge swatch of the sea, and has spent the past several years building up tiny islets and building military facilities, including airstrips, on them.
Earlier this month, the Liaoning and six other warships conducted drills more than 200 miles south of Japan during which aircraft were launched, Japan's Defense Ministry said.
Chinese activity in the East China Sea has been an issue for Japan. Tokyo protested to Beijing in January after a submarine, presumed to be Chinese, was detected near Okinawa and the disputed Senkaku Islands — an uninhabited chain surrounded by resource-rich waters between Okinawa and Taiwan — that is claimed by both countries but is administered by Japan.
Vice Foreign Minister Shinsuke Sugiyama expressed "great concern" over the issue and urged China not to repeat the incursion.
The Liaoning is about 60 percent lighter and 30 meters shorter than the USS Ronald Reagan — the U.S. Navy's forward-deployed carrier in the Pacific — and carries about 24 fixed-wing aircraft compared to the Reagan, which can handle more than 55, according to a Center for Strategic and International Studies analysis of the ship.
China's second aircraft carrier — the Shandong — is being prepared for its first sea trial, the Global Times reported last month.
China's first aircraft carrier was intended to be used primarily for training and collecting data, while the second is "made for combat missions," an unidentified military expert told the Global Times in the report.
https://www.stripes.com/news/chinese-aircraft-carrier-leads-live-fire-drills-in-east-china-sea-1.523642

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8. Military Convoy Delivers Construction Material To THAAD Base Despite Protests
(STARS AND STRIPES 23 APR 18) ... Kim Gamel and Yoo Kyong Chang

SEOUL, South Korea — A convoy delivered construction material and other equipment to the military base housing a controversial U.S. missile-defense system Monday after riot police scuffled with protesters trying to block the road, according to officials and witnesses.
South Korea's Ministry of National Defense said it decided to make the move despite continued protests because of an urgent need to improve living conditions of the U.S. and South Korean soldiers on the former golf course-turned-base in the remote southeastern area of Seongju.
"The MND decided it couldn't delay the construction anymore," it said Monday in a statement. "We have decided to begin transporting personnel, material and equipment necessary for construction today in cooperation with police."
Ministry officials have tried to persuade the protesters to allow peaceful passage of the trucks, saying the equipment is needed to fix leaky roofs, build sewage treatment facilities and do other maintenance. But residents and activists, who fiercely object to the missile battery known as THAAD suspect it's a ruse to build military infrastructure.
The Yonhap News Agency reported that 22 vehicles carrying construction material, equipment and workers entered the THAAD base about three hours after police began removing about 200 protesters staging a sit-in on a bridge. Police placed four air mattresses under it in case of falls.
About 1,500 riot police were deployed to provide security, and several protesters and officers were injured in scuffles but none seriously, according to a local officer, who spoke on condition of anonymity because he wasn't authorized to talk to the media.
No U.S. military forces or vehicles were involved, he said.
Several conservative groups also traveled to the village to show support for THAAD, which was initially agreed to

by former President Park Geun-hye before she was ousted in a corruption and influence-peddling scandal.
The effort to station a Terminal High Altitude Area Defense system in the melon-farming area has faced several hurdles since it began in 2016, with Seoul and Washington saying the anti-missile battery was needed to face the growing threat from North Korea.
Villagers in the area said they fear adverse health and economic effects from the system, which includes six truck-mounted launchers and a powerful radar. Peace activists also object to its presence, saying it makes the area a target by threatening the North.
The 4th Air Defense Artillery Regiment assumed the THAAD mission in October after it was realigned with the 35th Air Defense Artillery Brigade in South Korea.
U.S. Forces Korea has said contractors have conducted site surveys for basic maintenance and routine repairs and no construction was being done to enhance THAAD operations.
https://www.stripes.com/news/military-convoy-delivers-construction-material-to-thaad-base-despite-protests-1.523521

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MIDEAST - CENTRAL/SOUTH ASIA:
9. Who Learned More From The Strikes In Syria — America Or Russia?
(DEFENSE NEWS 23 APR 18) ... Aaron Mehta

WASHINGTON — When the U.S., France and Britain launched 105 cruise missiles at a trio of Syrian targets April 13, all eyes were on how the vaunted air defense network in Syria would handle the weapon.
But the crown jewel of that system, Russia's highly regarded S-400, never fired. And while the older Syrian systems did appear to launch some munitions, the Pentagon claims those systems were not used until after the Western weaponry had already impacted their targets.
"Russian air defenses were energized. They were scanning.... They did not choose to engage," Marine Corps Lt. Gen. Kenneth McKenzie, the director of the Joint Staff, said during an April 19 press event. "I can tell you though that the rest of Syrian air [defense] capability, which is completely Russian-made, Russian-designed, Russian-supported, engaged extensively and comprehensively failed."
The obvious question that remains unanswered is whether Russia chose not to engage S-400s, or was simply unable to, whether because of American nonkinetic capabilities impacting those system or some other reason. Given the pre-attack notice given by the Pentagon to Russian forces through a deconfliction line, as well as the fact that no strikes were targeted at the air defenses themselves, analysts lean toward the former.
Regardless, the fact the S-400 was not engaged means drawing hard conclusions about Syria's air defense network from the strikes is difficult, said Tom Karako of the Center for Strategic and International Studies.
"The logic tree suggests we should avoid any hard conclusions, or be a little too triumphal about our ability to penetrate the S-400," Karako said. "We don't know what their passive defense measures were. I certainly caution against a hard triumphalist [conclusion] about the Russian [integrated air defense systems]."
Anton Lavrov, an analyst who tracks Russian military thinking and capabilities, said it wouldn't have made much sense to engage the Russian systems, as the "S-400 in Syria can't make a difference anyway. There are too few launchers (no more than two battalions) to intercept all or at least a majority of the hundred-missile salvo."
Because the S-400 wasn't actually used, it is unlikely the U.S. will be able to turn around and use the strikes as proof that its NATO ally Turkey should not go through with plans to purchase the system, although Pentagon spokeswoman Dana White recently said those conversations are ongoing.
But while the U.S. likely can't draw many conclusions about the S-400 from this exercise, it is possible Russia learned a lot.
"If I'm Russia, and I know you're coming, I have a choice — do I show you my hand and show you my capabilities, or do I keep my powder dry for another day?" Karako asked. "I speculate that perhaps they kept their powder dry."
Lavrov agrees the attacks on Syria could provide Moscow a wealth of information.
"It was the best-ever opportunity for Russia to closely observe a real-life NATO massed cruise missile strike from the first row," Lavrov said. "And Russian military will learn a lot from this. Tactics, flight patterns, radar signatures of [the stealthy JASSM weapon] and so on."
One thing both sides can conclude: that the allied weapons — 66 sea-launched Tomahawks, 19 JASSM air-launched cruise missiles, eight British Storm Shadow air-launched cruise missiles, nine French Scalp air-launched cruise missiles, and two French naval missiles — all seemed to succeed during their flights.
"The fact you shot 105 missiles and all of them seemed to survive to their targets, that's frankly a statement of the

reliability of our off-the-shelf family of weapons," Karako said. "A 1 percent failure out of the 100 wouldn't have been surprising in the least, even without being shot down, so that's impressive if indeed they all reached their targets."
https://www.navytimes.com/pentagon/2018/04/20/who-learned-more-from-the-strikes-in-syria-america-or-russia/

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10. Syrian Opposition Says U.S. Cannot Afford To Leave Syria Yet
(REUTERS 23 APR 18) ... Sarah Dadouch

RIYADH - Syria's chief opposition negotiator said the United States cannot afford to leave Syria as it has yet to achieve any of its goals in the region, even though President Donald Trump said recently Washington would withdraw its troops.
"I personally think the U.S. is not capable of withdrawing its fighters from Syria," Nasr Hariri told Reuters on Friday.
Washington for years supported rebels militarily against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, but ended its train-and-equip program last year after changing its focus to the fight against Islamic State.
It helped an alliance of Kurdish and Arab militias drive the jihadists from swathes of northern and eastern Syria last year, including the group's Syrian capital of Raqqa, and has deployed about 2,000 U.S. troops in the country.
Trump said this month he wanted to bring them home soon but later agreed they should stay a little longer after his advisers argued they were needed to stop Islamic State re-emerging and to prevent Iran gaining a bigger foothold.
The U.S. led limited air strikes against the Syrian government along with Britain and France on April 14 in retaliation for a suspected chemical weapons attack, which Assad denies.
"Daesh is not finished," Hariri said, using an Arabic acronym for Islamic State.
"If we don't treat the reasons that birthed Daesh, then these would be temporary victories like shifting sands that disappear here and pop up somewhere else. And fighting Daesh is at the top of American priorities."
The only way to end the Syrian crisis is by reaching a political solution that replaces Assad because he is only interested in military solutions, said Hariri. But there can only be a political solution if the U.S. and Russia have serious resolve to reach one, he said.
"It needs an international consensus that begins with a U.S.-Russian agreement," he said.
Russia's entry into the Syrian war in 2015 turned the tide in Assad's favor, but Hariri said Moscow would struggle to restore the government's pre-war power.
"Russia will not be able to take military control of Syrian lands, and the Syrian situation is much more complex than expanding military influence or achieving military gains," Hariri said.
Last week, Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir said the kingdom would be prepared to send troops into Syria as part of the U.S.-led coalition if a decision was taken to widen it.
Hariri said he believes Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries still want a political solution and had stopped giving military support to the rebels because of U.S. policy.
"Military support stopped last year, not because of a Saudi, Turkish, or Jordanian decision," he said. "(It) happened because of an international decision, and when I say international decision I mean a decision by the United States."
"We know, and the Syrian people know, that when the U.S. seriously wants to reach a political solution and put real weight against the table of negotiations, it can make a change," Hariri said.
Reporting by Sarah Dadouch; Editing by Angus McDowall and Matthew Mpoke Bigg
https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-opposition/syrian-opposition-says-u-s-cannot-afford-to-leave-syria-yet-idUSKBN1HU14A

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11. U.S. Allies Press Trump To Keep Iran Nuclear Deal Alive
(REUTERS 23 APR 18) ... Steve Holland, David Ljunggren

WASHINGTON/TORONTO - Western allies stepped up pressure on U.S. President Donald Trump on Monday to keep alive an international nuclear deal with Iran, with French President Emmanuel Macron due to urge him in person not to tear up the 2015 agreement.
Trump has said that unless European allies fix what he has called its "terrible flaws" by May 12, he will restore U.S. economic sanctions on Iran, which would be a severe blow to the pact.

Macron, who arrived in Washington on Monday for a state visit, said on Sunday there was no “Plan B” for keeping a lid on Iran’s nuclear ambitions.

Minutes after Macron’s plane touched down, the White House said it had no announcements on the Iran deal. White House spokeswoman Sarah Sanders added, “The president has been extremely clear that he thinks it’s a bad deal. That certainly has not changed.”

The agreement between Iran, the United States, China, Russia, Britain, France and Germany was born of longstanding concern among major powers that Iran was seeking to develop an atomic weapon and imposed curbs on Iran’s nuclear program in exchange for sanctions relief for Tehran. Critics of the pact, including Trump, have said it does not adequately contain Iran.

Trump sees three defects: a failure to address Iran’s ballistic missile program; the terms under which international inspectors can visit suspect Iranian nuclear sites; and “sunset” clauses under which limits on the Iranian nuclear program start to expire after 10 years.

German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said both Macron and German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who is due to meet Trump in Washington on Friday, would urge the U.S. president to stay in the deal, which is formally called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

“We believe it is extremely important to uphold this agreement. Were it to fail or the U.S. to drop out, we would not have anything comparable to it and we fear that the situation would significantly deteriorate with everything that goes with it,” Maas told reporters.

He was speaking at a meeting in Toronto of foreign ministers from the Group of Seven leading industrialized nations.

Britain’s foreign minister, Boris Johnson, echoed this, telling reporters in Toronto, “There is a strong view around the (G7) table that we need to make the case for the JCPOA.”

“We accept that Iranian behavior has been disruptive in the region, we accept the president (Trump) has some valid points that need to be addressed, but we believe they are capable of being addressed (inside the deal),” Johnson said.

‘Encourage’ Trump To Stay

Iran has said it will stick to the accord as long as the other parties respect it, but will “shred” it if Washington pulls out. Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif called on European leaders on Monday to support it.

“It is either all or nothing. European leaders should encourage Trump not just to stay in the nuclear deal, but more important to begin implementing his part of the bargain in good faith,” Zarif wrote on Twitter.

On a visit to Beijing, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said he had agreed with his Chinese counterpart to block any U.S. attempt to sabotage the deal.

Trump’s opposition to the deal has been welcomed by Israel, which has rejected the pact since it was being hammered out under former U.S. President Barack Obama’s administration.

“Israel will not allow regimes that seek our annihilation to acquire nuclear weapons. This is why we opposed so resolutely the Iran deal, because it gives Iran a clear path to a nuclear arsenal,” Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said in a speech to foreign diplomats on Monday in Jerusalem.

Listing objections, Netanyahu added, “This is why this deal has to be either fully fixed or fully nixed.”

At a nuclear non-proliferation conference in Geneva on Monday, there were repeated calls for parties to the deal to ensure its implementation and preservation.

U.N. High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Izumi Nakamitsu said it “continues to be the best way to ensure the exclusively peaceful nature of Iran’s nuclear program and to realize the promised tangible economic benefits for the Iranian people.”

Trump’s threat to restore U.S economic sanctions on oil-producing Iran have been one factor helping drive up global oil prices this month to their highest since late 2014.

Reporting by Steve Holland in Washington and David Ljunggren in Toronto; Additional reporting by Yara Bayoumy and Doina Chiacu in Washington, Tom Miles in Geneva, Maria Kiselyova in Moscow, Michel Rose and Richard Lough in Paris, Parisa Hafezi in Ankara, Sabine Siebold and Lesley Wroughton in Toronto, Ori Lewis in Jerusalem; Writing by Frances Kerry; Editing by Alistair Bell and Will Dunham

https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-nuclear/u-s-allies-press-trump-to-keep-iran-nuclear-deal-alive-idUSKBN1HU28R

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EUROPE:

12. Macron Bringing Tribute To Belleau Wood Marines To White House

(MILITARY.COM 23 APR 18) ... Richard Sisk

French President Emmanuel Macron said Sunday that he is bringing a living tribute to "Devil Dog" Marines who fell in the World War I battle of Belleau Wood to the White House this week as a symbol of the two nations' enduring ties.

The oak sapling from the battle site will be presented to President Donald Trump in hopes that it will be planted in the White House garden, Macron said in an interview on the "Fox News Sunday" program from the Elysee Palace in Paris.

Macron arrives in the U.S. Monday on a three-day visit that is expected to focus on the way forward in Syria following the April 13 missile strikes, and on France's concern that Trump next month may pull the U.S. out of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action to halt Iran's nuclear programs.

"Retreat? Hell, We Just Got Here"

The battle of Bois de Belleau, or Belleau Wood, about 60 miles north of Paris near the Marne River in the Champagne region, has entered Marine Corpslore. It’s best known among Marines as the place where they were first called "Devil Dogs" for their fierce defense in June 1918 that blunted the German spring offensive.

A dispatch from the German front lines to higher headquarters described the Americans blocking their way and mounting counter-offensives as fighting like "Teufel Hunden," or "Hounds of Hell."

At one point, French forces moving to the rear to regroup urged the Marines to join them. The response from a Marine, attributed to either Capt. Lloyd W. Williams of the 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines, or Maj. Frederic Wise, was, "Retreat? Hell, we just got here."

Once they consolidated their positions, the Marines would attack six times through mustard gas and withering machine-gun fire before the Germans were driven from the wood. An estimated 2,000 Marines were killed.

An official German report later described the Marines as "vigorous, self-confident, and remarkable marksmen."

Army Gen. John J. "Black Jack" Pershing, commander of the American Expeditionary Force on the Western Front, marveled at the tenacity of the "Devil Dogs" of Belleau Wood in a quote that has also become part of the Marine legend.

"The deadliest weapon in the world is a United States Marine and his rifle," Pershing said.

He added that, "the battle of Belleau Wood was for the U.S. the biggest battle since Appomattox and the most considerable engagement American troops had ever had with a foreign enemy" to that time.

The oak sapling Macron will give to Trump was taken from a site near the so-called "Devil Dog Fountain," where U.S. troops gathered after the battle of Belleau Wood. The fountain's spout is in the shape of the head of a bull mastiff.

The gift of the sapling is not the first time Macron has sought to firm up relations with a world leader by playing to their affections for the armed forces and military pageantry.

During a state visit to China earlier this year, Macron gave Chinese President Xi Jinping a horse from the elite French Republican Guard. Macron had remembered that Xi was impressed with his official escort of 104 horsemen during a visit to Paris in 2014.

Last July in Paris, Trump was similarly impressed by the military formations and fly-bys at the annual Bastille Day Parade. The parade in France was believed to have been a factor in Trump's decision to order a military parade in Washington, D.C. on this coming Veterans Day.

On Monday, Macron and his wife, Brigitte, will join Trump and First Lady Melania Trump for a private dinner at the historic Mount Vernon, Virginia, estate of George Washington. Macron will also address Congress and attend an official state dinner at the White House.

Although they have had differences on climate change, tariffs, and Syria, Macron said he was committed to working with Trump and he sidestepped the possible repercussions from the long-running special counsel investigation swirling around the White House.

"I never wonder [about] that," Macron said of the investigation by special counsel Robert Mueller. "I mean, I work with him. I work with him because both of us are very much at the service of our country on both sides," Macron said on "Fox News Sunday."

"Here, in this office, I'm not the one to judge and in certain way, to explain to your people what should be your president," Macron said. "I'm here to deal with the president of the United States. And people of the United States elected Donald Trump."

https://www.military.com/daily-news/2018/04/23/macron-bringing-tribute-belleau-wood-marines-white-house html

AFRICA:
13. US Builds Drone Base In Niger, Crossroads Of Extremism Fight
(ASSOCIATED PRESS 23 APR 18) ... Carley Petesch

AGADEZ, Niger — On the scorching edge of the Sahara Desert, the U.S. Air Force is building a base for armed drones, the newest front in America's battle against the growing extremist threat in Africa's vast Sahel region.
Three hangars and the first layers of a runway command a sandy, barren field. Niger Air Base 201 is expected to be functional early next year. The base, a few miles outside Agadez and built at the request of Niger's government, will eventually house fighter jets and MQ-9 drones transferred from the capital Niamey. The drones, with surveillance and added striking capabilities, will have a range enabling them to reach a number of West and North African countries.
Few knew of the American military's presence in this desperately poor, remote West African country until October, when an ambush by Islamic State group-linked extremists killed four U.S. soldiers and five Nigeriens.
The $110 million project is the largest troop labor construction project in U.S. history, according to Air Force officials. It will cost $15 million annually to operate.
Citing security reasons, no official will say how many drones will be housed at the base or whether more U.S. personnel will be brought to the region. Already the U.S. military presence here is the second largest in Africa behind the sole permanent U.S. base on the continent, in the tiny Horn of Africa nation of Djibouti.
The drones at the base are expected to target several different al-Qaida and Islamic State group-affiliated fighters in countries throughout the Sahel, a sprawling region just south of the Sahara, including the area around Lake Chad, where the Nigeria's Boko Haram insurgency has spread.
As the U.S. puts drones at the forefront of the fight against extremists, some worry that civilians will be mistaken for fighters.
"We are afraid of falling back into the same situation as in Afghanistan, with many mistakes made by American soldiers who did not always know the difference between a wedding ceremony and a training of terrorist groups," said Amadou Roufai, a Nigerien administration official.
Civic leader Nouhou Mahamadou also expressed concerns.
"The presence of foreign bases in general and American in particular is a serious surrender of our sovereignty and a serious attack on the morale of the Nigerien military," he said.
The number of U.S. military personnel in Niger has risen over the past few years from 100 to 800, the second largest concentration in Africa after the 4,000 in Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti. About 500 personnel are working on the new air and drone base and the base camp is marked with an American and Nigerien flag.
Intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance are crucial in the fight against extremism, U.S. Africa Command spokeswoman Samantha Reho said.
"The location in Agadez will improve U.S. Africa Command's capability to facilitate intelligence-sharing that better supports Niger and other partner nations, such as Nigeria, Chad, Mali and other neighbors in the region and will improve our capability to respond to regional security issues," Reho said.
The intelligence gathered by the drones can be used by Niger and other U.S. partners for prosecuting extremists, said Commander Brad Harbaugh, who is in charge of the new base.
Some in Niger welcome the growing U.S. military presence in the face of a growing extremist threat in the region.
"Northern Mali has become a no man's land, southern Libya is an incubator for terrorists and northeastern Nigeria is fertile ground for Boko Haram's activities ... Can Niger alone ensure its own security? I think not. No country in the world can today alone fight terrorism," said Souleymane Abdourahmane, a restaurant promoter in the capital, Niamey.
Threats include al-Qaida-linked fighters in Mali and Burkina Faso, Islamic State group-affiliated fighters in Niger, Mali and Nigeria and the Nigeria-based Boko Haram. They take advantage of the vast region's widespread poverty and countries' often poorly equipped security forces.
Foreigners, including a German aid worker kidnapped this month in Niger, have been targeted as well.
The U.S. military's use of armed drones comes as its special forces pull back from the front lines of the fight. The focus is changing to advising and assisting local partners higher up the chain of command, said U.S. Special Command Africa commander Maj. Gen. Marcus Hicks.
Ibrahim Maiga, a Mali-based researcher for the Institute for Security Studies, said more needs to be known about the U.S. military presence in the region.
"The U.S. military footprint in the Sahel is difficult to grasp, just as it is not easy to assess its effectiveness," he said. "There isn't nearly enough information in the public space on this presence."
Mud homes line the barbed wire fence at the edge of the main airport in Agadez. Residents watch the U.S. forces

come and go with curiosity.
Shebu Issa, an assistant at a Quranic school, stood in one doorway as goats and children roamed the sandy roads. "It's no big deal to us, they come and they don't bother us. We appreciate they want to help in the fight," he said. "We live a hard life, and don't make much money, so we hope maybe this will help us get more."
Associated Press writer Dalatou Mamane in Niamey, Niger contributed.
https://www.military.com/daily-news/2018/04/23/us-builds-drone-base-niger-crossroads-extremism-fight html

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CONGRESS / BUDGET:

14. Sen. Kaine: Larger Navy Will Be A Boost For Hampton Roads If Area Can Train Enough Workers
(VIRGINIAN-PILOT 23 APR 18) ... Bill Bartel

If Hampton Roads wants to benefit from the planned Navy buildup to 355 ships, the region has to develop a larger population of skilled workers – even reaching into its elementary schools to find future talent – U.S. Sen. Tim Kaine said Monday.
Kaine said the demand for more electricians, metal workers, welders and other skilled trades in ship construction, repair and maintenance will be immense in the coming decades should the White House and Congress press forward with plans to enlarge the Navy.
“We can’t just assume automatically that the workforce will be there,” Kaine said after speaking at an education conference at Thomas Nelson Community College. “You can’t just run a want-ad and hope that there’s people who will respond. The 355 buildup is going to take awhile. We ought to be in the elementary schools, and middle schools and high schools. We ought to be working with the unions that have organized the shipyards to look at their apprentice programs.”
President Donald Trump and Congress agreed in the 2018 budget policy legislation to embark on a multiyear effort to expand the Navy’s current fleet of about 275 vessels to 355. Building that many more ships could take until the 2050s, but a Pentagon official told a congressional committee earlier this month that it’s possible to do it by the 2030s by increasing the shipbuilding budget and postponing the decommissioning of some ships.
James Geurts, assistant secretary of the Navy for research, development and acquisition, told lawmakers that fewer new ships would be needed if several Arleigh Burke-class guided missile destroyers were kept on duty, as well as other vessels, including some Los Angeles-class submarines.
Craig Quigley, executive director of the Hampton Roads Military and Federal Facilities Alliance, acknowledged that Congress still has to approve future spending for a larger Navy. But, he said, there’s still a problem of not having enough trained people to build, repair and sail the ships, and enlarging the Navy by the 2030s makes the issue more pressing.
“You can throw all the money in the world at it,” Quigley said, “but if you don’t have properly trained and adequately sized workforce to take advantage of those dollars, you’re dead in the water.” It can’t be left up to trade schools or post-high-school training, he said.
Kaine said he and Rep. Bobby Scott, a Newport News Democrat, are organizing a symposium next month that will include Navy officers and industry officials to talk about how to generate a larger skilled workforce.
The Democrat said region needs to have an “interconnected system” to expose people from the early grades through high school and beyond to the jobs open to those with the right training.
The focus cannot just be on Newport News Shipbuilding, the state’s largest industrial employer, and other shipyards in the region, Kaine said. It also has to focus on the needs of the multitude of subcontractors who provide parts and services to the yards, he said.
Reuters contributed to this report.
https://pilotonline.com/news/government/nation/article_2c8a7e96-471c-11e8-83be-4f5aacf7c332 html

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15. Congresswoman Wants Navy To Help Fight Mexican Sewage Spills
(SAN DIEGO UNION-TRIBUNE 23 APR 18) ... Carl Prine

Rep. Susan Davis wants the Navy to study the impact of Mexican sewage spills on the new $1 billion SEAL training center.
Davis, a San Diego Democrat on the House Armed Services Committee, has grown concerned about untreated

sewage leaking from Tijuana's aging and overworked wastewater collection and treatment system, a problem exacerbated by surges of fecal contamination when Mexican pipes break, pumps fail and rain falls.
In February 2017, a sewage trunk line south of the border ruptured. Over 17 days it spewed as much as 230 million gallons of raw sewage into the Pacific Ocean.
Repairing the pipes spilled more wastewater into the Tijuana River channel, which empties into the sea near Imperial Beach, near the home of the new 600-acre Silver Strand SEAL center.
Over the past three years, Imperial Beach alone has suffered 160 days of closures because of the pollution.
"We need a whole government solution to the sewage spills," Davis said in a news release. "We know the environmental and economic impact these spills have. What we don't know, with the Navy planning to stage training operations in potentially contaminated waters, are the national security concerns. The Navy should take a look at this and coordinate with relevant agencies to assess what can be done to prevent future spills."
Officials at Coronado-based Naval Special Warfare said that they were aware of the congresswoman's concerns and vowed to work with her and other Navy departments to address them.
Because they are working with San Diego-based Navy Region Southwest and other commands on an official response, SEAL leaders said that they could not speak on the record.
Davis is contemplating inserting language into next year's defense spending bill to force the Navy to detail any national security concerns caused by the spills.
Her idea is to help the Pentagon coordinate with the U.S. State Department, the Environmental Protection Agency, Homeland Security, Department of the Interior and the International Boundary Water Commission to find ways to prevent or mitigate future sewage headaches.
"The last thing we want is our elite Navy SEALs training in water contaminated with sewage. Nor do we want training operations delayed," she said.
But it's not just SEALs who train in or near Imperial Beach's waters. The Navy's explosive ordnance disposal technicians routinely use the ocean, including fast-roping practice off the coast of Imperial Beach and static-line parachuting into San Diego Bay near Coronado.
In May 2017, another member of the Armed Services Committee, Rep. Duncan Hunter, R-Alpine, wrote a letter to EPA director Scott Pruitt and then-Secretary of State Rex Tillerson about his concerns that the sewage spills would hurt the health of sailors training at sea and Border Patrol agents guarding the beaches.
Several agents already had fallen ill from the contamination, putting their families at risk of sickness, too, he wrote.
EPA followed up quickly with Hunter's staff but conceded their jurisdiction stopped at the border.
"Obviously, that's where the State Department came in but they weren't as communicative as the EPA has been," said Michael Harrison, Hunter's deputy chief of staff. "We have a meeting this week in D.C., and we want to see what that produces.
"We'd like to see more proactive help from Mexico because, as Rep. Hunter says, this is a national security issue for us. It's black and white to him."
Harrison said that this isn't a partisan issue and that Hunter and the rest of the San Diego delegation echo the concerns Davis raises.
http://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/military/sd-me-davis-sewage-20180423-story.html

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16. Senate Postpones Jackson Hearing
(WASHINGTON POST 24 APR 18) ... Seung Min Kim, Lisa Rein and Josh Dawsey

Senate lawmakers have postponed the confirmation hearing for Ronny L. Jackson, President Trump's nominee to lead the Department of Veterans Affairs, after top Republicans and Democrats raised concerns about his qualifications and oversight of the White House medical staff, White House and other administration officials were told Monday.
The development came just two days before Jackson, the White House physician, was scheduled to testify before the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs and threw what was looking to be a difficult confirmation process into further jeopardy.
In addition to Jackson's lack of management experience, the former combat surgeon had come under fire for his glowing appraisal of Trump's health following his annual physical in January. Jackson said then that the president might live to the age of 200 with a healthier diet. In recent days, fresh concerns arose about Jackson's management of the White House medical office, said the officials, who declined to provide details.
"I can tell you we're vetting out Jackson," said Sen. Jon Tester (Mont.), the committee's ranking Democrat. "I can't get into specifics, but we're doing our job to make sure he's fit for the job."

Aides to committee Chairman Johnny Isakson (R-Ga.) declined to comment.
Sen. Jerry Moran (R-Kan.), another committee member, said he had raised concerns about Jackson's lack of management background to the White House and requested to speak with Chief of Staff John F. Kelly on the matter.
"This job is so difficult," Moran said Monday. "Nothing about this is easy, and it takes a very unique person to be able to lead an organization that is so difficult to lead, and I need to be convinced that's the case regardless of the sense of his experience."
The White House also is assessing whether questions that have been raised about Jackson have validity, officials said.
Committee Democrats gathered Monday evening to discuss the issues surrounding Jackson's nomination. Following the meeting, Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.) said in a brief interview that "there is a need for a very serious and exacting scrutiny, as with any presidential nominee."
It's unclear whether lawmakers have chosen an alternate date for Jackson's hearing — or whether it will be postponed indefinitely. Three White House officials said Monday that they worried the nomination was in peril.
In recent days, Isakson called the White House to express his concern that Jackson was unqualified, White House officials said,and vouched instead for his ally and former top aide Thomas Bowman, VA's deputy secretary.
Jackson was a surprise nominee to succeed David Shulkin, an Obama-era holdover and once a favorite of Trump's who was fired by the president March 28. While Shulkin was an experienced hospital executive who had run VA's massive health system, his support from the White House waned following an internal investigation into his business travel and clashes over his commitment to outsourcing veterans' health care, which is among the administration's priorities.
From the start, Jackson had little support from Democrats and Republicans on Capitol Hill, where lawmakers were taken aback by the president's choice to run the government's second-largest agency. A one-star Navy admiral, Jackson has served three administrations as White House physician. But his résumé shows little management experience. VA's sprawling health, benefits and cemetery system has 360,000 employees and an annual budget of $186 billion.
Few Republicans on the committee have committed publicly to backing Jackson, although Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) has said he would support him. Senate aides have said Jackson's testimony at the hearing would be crucial to showing them whether he was up to the job of running the agency.
Democratic senators oppose the administration's push to outsource more medical care out of concern that it will strip the agency of funding. Jackson has tried to assuage those concerns by pledging privately that he would oppose such efforts, but Democrats want him to say that publicly.
In recent weeks, the White House sent senior career and political officials from different VA offices to brief Jackson on issues confronting the agency. But the process seemed poorly coordinated, according to current and former administration officials.
Jackson is well liked among senior White House officials, who had worked with him on a daily basis. But the administration has not put its full weight behind his nomination, according to people familiar with the matter, appointing mid-level aides to oversee Jackson's briefing by VA experts and sending a junior media aide from the White House to help him make the rounds on Capitol Hill. With the recent departure of Darin Selnick, the White House's most seasoned expert on veterans' issues, Trump has few aides with deep knowledge of how the agency works.
"He was walking into an ambush," a veterans advocate close to the White House said of the Senate hearing. "He is just not ready."
Amy Gardner, Emily Wax-Thibodeaux and Alice Crites contributed to this report.
https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/senate-postpones-confirmation-hearing-for-ronny-jackson-to-head-veterans-affairs/2018/04/23/8d2bfd14-471d-11e8-ad53-d5751c8f243f_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.43f3b4076751

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DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE:
17. Defense Intelligence Chief: 'A Lot Of Technology Remains Untapped'
Kernan: Project Maven So Far Has Been 'Extraordinarily' Useful In Processing Intelligence But More Capabilities Are Needed
(SPACE NEWS 23 APR 18) ... Sandra Erwin

TAMPA, FLA. -- Undersecretary of Defense for Intelligence Joseph Kernan, a retired Navy vice admiral, is rarely

seen or heard at public events. But he decided to step on the stage and address the nation's largest gathering of geospatial intelligence professionals to relay a message that the military is in the market for cutting-edge technology.

"The reason I agreed to speak is that a lot of capacity and technology remains untapped," Kernan said in a keynote speech on Monday at the GEOINT symposium.

DoD collects loads of data from satellites, drones and Internet-of-things devices. But it needs help making sense of the intelligence and analyzing it quickly enough so it can be used in combat operations. It needs powerful artificial intelligence software tools that the tech industry is advancing at a past pace.

The most promising AI effort the Pentagon has going now is Project Maven. Military analysts are using Google-developed AI algorithms to mine live video feeds from drones. With machine learning techniques, software is taught to find particular objects or individuals at speeds that would be impossible for any human analyst.

Kernan said Project Maven only started a year ago and so far has been "extraordinarily" useful in overseas operations. "I would have liked to have had it in my past," said Kernan, a former special operations commander.

There is such heightened interest in AI that the Pentagon got Project Maven approved and under contract in two months. More importantly, said Kernan, the "capability was tested overseas. Not in the Pentagon." For AI algorithms to be valuable to the military, they have to produce relevant intelligence, he cautioned. "Don't be developing capability to serve warfighters while sitting in the Pentagon. Make sure you address their needs by working with the forces out there. That's key to Project Maven. It works with users."

Software, no matter how advanced, will not replace human analysts, said Kernan. "It's about enabling analysts to use their cognitive process so they don't have to jam and finger push things into a computer."

What annoys Kernan? "That we really haven't taken all the advantage we can of technology."

That may be about to change as DoD ramps up AI efforts. Defense procurement chief Ellen Lord said the Pentagon will start bringing together AI projects that already exist but do not necessarily share information or resources. "We have talked about taking over 50 programs and loosely associating those," Lord told reporters. "We have many silos of excellence." Undersecretary of Defense for Research and Engineering Michael Griffin will oversee a new AI office that will bring in "elements of the intelligence community," he said. But many details remain to be worked out.

The speed at which the Pentagon moved with Project Maven is "truly groundbreaking," said Mike Manzo, director of intelligence, threat and analytic solutions at General Dynamics Mission Systems. The company provides training and advisory services to the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency.

"This community is not accustomed to rapid acquisition, and rapid deployment," Manzo told SpaceNews. "I applaud the Project Maven staff, the government, and everybody who is involved with that."

Another reason Project Maven is "disruptive" is that it shows that analysts are beginning to trust new sources of intelligence and nontraditional methods, Manzo said. "What's encouraging is that the outputs of these systems are being trusted by the users," he said. "A machine comes up with an answer and the human gives the thumbs up or down," he said. "If DoD is trusting this, it's a tremendous step." Even though a human is supervising, the focus doesn't have to be on "making sure the machine is doing the things I asked the machine to do."

None of this means decisions are being made by computers, Manzo said. "But these technologies help optimize the human analyst to do what they are really good at: intuition." As the Pentagon seeks ways to bring AI into the battlefield, "Maven has a lot of promise."

http://spacenews.com/defense-intelligence-chief-a-lot-of-technology-remains-untapped/

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18. Pentagon Says Cloud Winner Must Stay Ahead To Extend Contract
(BLOOMBERG NEWS 23 APR 18) ... Anthony Capaccio

The winner of the U.S. military's competition for broad cloud computing services will be evaluated after an initial two-year contract for how well it's kept up with industry innovations including on cost, data transfer, security and compatibility among systems, Pentagon officials said.

"You have to be performing well, but what we want to be looking at is where is the market?" Pentagon Chief Management Officer Jay Gibson told reporters Monday. "If you haven't kept up with the market then, arguably, how well are you performing?"

Rivals are complaining that the Defense Department's winner-take-all approach for the cloud contract -- which will provide online data storage for its 3.4 million users and 4 million devices -- favors Amazon.com Inc., the biggest supplier of such services. They've said there's little chance the department will start all over with a new provider after the initial two years.

The two-year award, tentatively scheduled for September, will provide two options that could extend it for eight more years.
But Gibson said the priority is “the ability to stay current” in the fast-evolving market for remote platforms. “There would be multiple options available for us at that two-year period,” he said.
While companies that win defense competitions with options usually are awarded the extensions, Robert Daigle , the Pentagon’s director of independent weapons costs analysis, said Monday that “the department could start a new acquisition process to acquire a second or a third provider” because it “does not want to be locked in.”
https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-04-23/pentagon-says-cloud-winner-must-stay-ahead-to-extend-contract

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AVIATION:
19. Navy’s P-8As Unaffected By FAA’s Boeing 737 Engine Inspection Requirement After Fatal Southwest Incident
(USNI NEWS 23 APR 18) ... Megan Eckstein

The Navy’s fleet of P-8A Poseidon aircraft are not in any immediate risk of facing the same engine failure that caused the April 17 emergency landing of a Boeing 737 – which the P-8 design is derived from – a Navy spokeswoman told USNI News.
The Federal Aviation Administration on Friday issued an emergency airworthiness directive mandating that any plane whose CFM56-7B engine had conducted more than 30,000 takeoff-and-landing cycles must be inspected within 20 days. This would affect 352 engines in the U.S. and 681 engines worldwide, according to the FAA statement.
However, the Navy’s P-8s are not among them. Though the P-8 – which is built on the same 737 production line as the commercial planes but then pulled aside for the addition of military-specific gear – uses the same CFM56-7B engine, “there is no immediate risk to or action to be taken by the P-8A community. The Navy’s P-8A engines remain well below the cycle limit for required inspections of fan blades,” P-8 program office spokeswoman Denver Beaulieu-Hains told USNI News today.
“The FAA mandates inspection [for commercial aircraft] to start at 20,000 cycles, while the current high-time P-8A has accrued 5,175 cycles (as of 13 Apr 18) since it entered service in 2012. At the current cycle rate, the first engine in the P-8A fleet will hit the 20,000 cycle point in about 10 to 15 years.”
Beaulieu-Hains said that Naval Air Systems Command had previously determined that the P-8 engines’ fan blades – the component that failed in the Southwest Airlines Flight 1380 incident at more than 30,000 feet altitude that killed one passenger and forced an emergency landing – would be inspected when the planes are brought in for their first scheduled depot maintenance visit, which would occur “no later than the 6,000-cycle threshold, with a recurring 6,000-cycle inspection interval through 20,000 cycles. After 20,000 cycles have accumulated, the engine will be inspected at a 3,000-cycle interval,” she said.
Boeing has sold its P-8A to the U.S. Navy, the Royal Australian Air Force and the United Kingdom Royal Air Force, and its P-8I variant to the Indian Navy. The Navy has 64 planes in its inventory as of January and is slated to buy 111 total, according to NAVAIR.
https://news.usni.org/2018/04/23/navys-p-8as-unaffected-faas-boeing-737-engine-inspection-requirement-fatal-southwest-incident

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SHIPBUILDING:
20. US Navy Gearing Up For Boost In Submarine Production
(NEW LONDON DAY 23 APR 18) ... Julia Bergman

GROTON, Conn. — The U.S. Navy is working to build three attack submarines in some years as opposed to two, and wants to keep five of its attack submarines in service longer than expected to address a dip in the number of nuclear-powered attack submarines in coming years.
The U.S. attack submarine fleet is expected to shrink by 20 percent over the next decade. There are 52 attack

submarines today; by 2028, that number is expected to dip to 42. The Navy has said it needs a fleet of 66 attack submarines, but that isn't expected to happen until 2048 under current plans.
Meanwhile, the Navy continues to drive down the construction timeline for the Virginia-class attack submarine program. At the outset, the boats were built in 84 months. Then the Navy reduced the construction timeline to 74 months, and now the goal is to build them in 66 months.
The Navy wants to knock off even more time, which means pressure is mounting on Electric Boat and hundreds of submarine suppliers in Connecticut to keep on schedule. Already, EB has been busy building two Virginia-class submarines a year with Newport News Shipbuilding and thousands of suppliers across the country. The submarines cost about $2.7 billion each to build.
"Everybody has, I think, reached consensus that this part of the fleet is more and more prized by combatant commanders, and now that the dip in fleet size is getting imminent, time and delivery is even more of a priority," said U.S. Rep. Joe Courtney, D-2nd District.
The Navy is negotiating the contract for the next group of attack submarines it wants to build from 2019 to 2023. Congress authorized the production of up to 13 Virginia submarines during that period, but the Navy has indicated it wants to build 12. That would mean building three submarines in 2022 and 2023, respectively. Costs still are being figured out, and Congress would have to approve any funding.
"I'm still committed to having options in that contract for additional submarines in '22 and '23, should that be something we jointly decide to do and can afford," Assistant Secretary of the Navy James Geurts said at a recent congressional hearing.
The Navy also is proposing to extend for up to 10 years the service life of five Los Angeles-class attack submarines, which the Virginia submarines are replacing. At this point, no Groton-based submarines are being considered for service life extension.
The Virginia program has been hailed for boats being delivered on time and within budget, but there have been setbacks. Some boats were affected by welding issues, causing delays in their getting out into the fleet, and in some cases there's been delays in getting parts, which has slowed down construction.
The 15 Virginia submarines currently in the fleet were delivered within 5 percent of the contracted deadline, according to Capt. Chris Hanson, the Navy's new Virginia program manager.
"To do this work, we have to ensure the vendor base, our 5,000 vendors, is feeding the system with quality parts on time," Hanson said.
Keith Macdowall, vice president of Prime Technology LLC in North Branford, which makes display systems for submarines similar to those seen on car dashboards, said EB has been proactive about alerting its suppliers what to expect with the ramp-up in submarine production.
"The nuclear shipbuilding supply base is poised to ramp up production capacity to support the increased demand associated with the Navy's Shipbuilding Plan," Liz Power, spokeswoman for EB, said in an emailed statement. "We have developed strategic plans to ensure we have the workforce, facilities and supply chain in place to respond to current and potential needs, and have shared these plans with the Navy."
The biggest concern for suppliers is getting materials on time and ensuring they have the equipment and employees in place to do the work, according to Macdowall. Federal lawmakers have appropriated tens of millions of dollars to help suppliers prepare for the ramp-up, such as buying parts in advance.
Macdowall, who is co-chairman of the Submarine Industrial Base Council, said the organization had a record turnout for its annual summit in Washington in March. He estimated 400 people attended, which shows the level of interest in this work, he said.
https://www.navytimes.com/news/your-navy/2018/04/23/us-navy-gearing-up-for-boost-in-submarine-production/

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UNMANNED SYSTEMS:
21. The US Navy Wants Undersea Gas Stations For Underwater Drones
Access To Undersea Gas Stations Could Allow Gavias And Other Underwater Drones To Spend More Time Scanning The Seabed, Searching For Crash Survivors Or Locating Enemy Mines.
(MOTHERBOARD 23 APR 18) ... David Axe

A California company is working on an underwater refueling station that can top off the fuel cells of undersea surveillance drones, allowing the vehicles to venture farther and work longer.
Needless to say, the US Navy is interested in that kind of technology. The sailing branch is even exploring ways to

tap sea-bottom thermal vents in order to keep power flowing to underwater gas stations.
Teledyne, based in Thousand Oaks, California, showed off its undersea power station alongside Gavia, the company's popular underwater surveillance drone, at the Sea-Air-Space Exposition in Maryland in April.
The underwater fuel-cell station stores 200 kilowatts of power and works down to a depth of nearly two miles, according to Defense News. An undersea drone could hook up to the station and charge its own fuel cells. A Gavia can operate for up to five hours on one 1.2-kilowatt charge.
Teledyne is a world leader in undersea electrical equipment that's popular with the oil industry, including water- and pressure-resistant power plugs. The company also builds a wide range of torpedo-like submersible drones that are compatible with different sensors, including sonars and laser scanners.
Teledyne is proposing the seven-inch-diameter Gavia for the Navy's oceanographic fleet, which maps the sea floor. But the drone, which travels at speeds up to four miles per hour down to a maximum depth of around 10,000 feet, can also help with search-and-rescue and minehunting missions, the company points out in its marketing materials.
"The Gavia AUV can carry a variety of sensors that are especially well-suited for military and security applications," Teledyne states, using the acronym for "autonomous underwater vehicle." The Navy bought at least one Gavia for testing in 2003. Back then a Gavia costaround $150,000.
Access to undersea gas stations could allow Gavias and other underwater drones to spend more time scanning the seabed, searching for crash survivors or locating enemy mines. Teledyne told Defense News that the refueling stations could be deployed by ship or helicopter.
The Navy announced more than a decade ago that it would need to be able to refuel its growing fleet of unmanned underwater vehicles, or UUVs. "Advanced energy and propulsion, in combination with other UUV technologies, will enable the use of smaller vehicles (reducing cost) in the long term, and will provide greater performance," the Navy stated in its Unmanned Undersea Vehicle Master Plan from 2004.
In 2016, the Office of Naval Research launched the Persistent Renewable Energy for Undersea Systems program, aiming to develop systems that can "effectively recharge undersea surveillance sensor nodes and UUVs by energy harvesting from hydrothermal vents on the ocean bottom."
The same year, the Navy told Congress that it anticipated be able to install underwater power stations by 2025. At that time, undersea drones "will operate where manned submarines and ships can't or shouldn't."
https://motherboard.vice.com/en_us/article/qvxmv3/the-us-navy-wants-undersea-gas-stations-for-underwater-drones

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PERSONNEL:
22. Special Report: Heavy Impacts And Hidden Scars
(WAVY-TV NBC NORFOLK 23 APR 18) ... Chris Horne

VIRGINIA BEACH, Va. -- When you're a SEAL, you don't have to be at war to feel the effects of war. Ever since their beginning in the early 1960s, they've worked with underwater demolition, weapons, the potential for hard landings from aircraft, and the jostling of boats on rough seas.
And that's just the training.
The commanding officer of about 900 SEALS based at Joint Expeditionary Base – Little Creek in Virginia Beach says the tradition has always been to push forward.
“Before, if you got what we call ‘get your bell rung’ and you're a little dizzy after a blast or something that happened, you might just say well I'm not gonna tell anybody about that and keep going,” said Captain Jamie Sands. “I don't want to be viewed as weak, or I don't want to slow down the train.”
Dr. David Cifu says he has seen that attitude too. He studies brain injury among veterans for the Veterans Administration and the VCU Medical Center.
“Sometimes in the heat of battle or activity or peer pressure, (SEALs) will brush off what clearly to everyone else in the world would be a traumatic event and they'll say ‘no, I'm good.’ “
But now with greater awareness of the need to monitor brain health the Navy has begun neuro-cognitive awareness testing, or NCAT.
“The biggest change was our senior leadership in the force, they just get it. “
Some of the testing involves questions about self-awareness, matching numbers and symbols, and recognizing visual patterns. Every SEAL, based both here and in San Diego, must get baseline brain metrics, and then get re-checked every two years.
“The NCATs are screening devices,” said Captain Gary Hoyt, a Navy psychologist based in San Diego. “They do not take the place of any clinical evaluation. They're purely screening devices to track change over time.”

The re-check would happen sooner if the operator is involved in a blast exposure or other traumatic event. Cifu says the program would be even better if the regular screenings happened more often.
“I would advocate no less than once a year for these evaluations.”
When a SEAL from Little Creek gets a concussion he would go to Portsmouth Naval Hospital. Sands says the Navy has streamlined that process.
“We want to make it agile, so that individual can move quickly between the hospital, and not have to come off the proverbial train and maintain his status as a warfighter.”
Officers say the new ethic from the head of Special Warfare, Admiral Tim Szymanski -- that people are more important than hardware -- is changing minds.
“He has said hey 50 percent of the force is family. And he's really talking about we want to make sure that you're doing well after your career,” Hoyt said.
http://www.wavy.com/news/local-news/virginia-beach/special-report-heavy-impacts-and-hidden-scars/1135321962

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NAVAL ACADEMY:
23. Naval Academy Head Says Court-Martial Possible In Drug Case
(ASSOCIATED PRESS 23 APR 18) ... Brian Witte

ANNAPOLIS, Md. — A drug investigation at the U.S. Naval Academy could result in a court-martial of a midshipman who is “a suspected distributor,” the academy’s superintendent said Monday.
Vice Adm. Ted Carter gave an update on the investigation during a Board of Visitors meeting. Carter said in an interview during a break in the meeting that the suspected distributor was a student and that he couldn’t say much more because the case is ongoing.
“We’re still waiting on investigation results,” Carter said. “We should have that here by the next few weeks”
By the time the investigation ends, Carter said it will involve between six and eight midshipmen. So far, two students have left the academy voluntarily, and three have been dismissed, he said.
The illicit drugs involved were cocaine, ecstasy, ketamine and hallucinogenic mushrooms. The Naval Criminal Investigative Service has been investigating for more than three months.
Carter said the academy conducted a full review and made slight changes to urinalysis drug testing at the academy.
“Every midshipman will get tested at least three times a year, and they won’t know when it is,” Carter said.
The superintendent also said he didn’t believe there was a wider problem at the school.
“I have full confidence that we don’t have a drug issue at the Naval Academy,” Carter told the board, calling it a case of “some bad actors” to which the academy has responded.
Carter also noted that midshipmen brought the drug use to the attention of school officials.
“The thing I will tell you right up front is we were made aware of this drug incident through some very responsible midshipmen,” Carter said. “They’re the ones who let us know that there was something bad happening.”
https://www.navytimes.com/news/your-navy/2018/04/23/naval-academy-head-says-court-martial-possible-in-drug-case/

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24. Naval Academy Sees Big Boost In Cybersecurity Majors
(ASSOCIATED PRESS 23 APR 18) ... Brian White

ANNAPOLIS, Md. — The U.S. Naval Academy has seen a big increase in cyber operations majors, and a U.S. senator said Monday that midshipmen could be useful in working on cyber challenges before they graduate.
The academy’s Board of Visitors, which acts as a board of trustees at civilian colleges, received an update on construction of the academy’s $106 million cybersecurity building. The meeting was held on the third floor of Nimitz Library, overlooking an active construction site.
Vice Adm. Ted Carter, the superintendent, said classes could begin in Hopper Hall in 2020.
The freshmen class has 110 cyber operations majors, or nearly 10 percent of the class. That’s up from 22 cyber majors in the class of 2018.
“The increase in interest has skyrocketed,” said Paul Tortora, a retired Navy captain and director for the academy’s Center for Cyber Security Studies.
The first cyber majors graduated from the academy in 2016. All midshipmen are required to take two semesters of

cyber studies, including a semester in the freshman year and another in the junior year.
Sen. Ben Cardin, a Maryland Democrat who is a board member, asked academy officials to keep in mind that midshipmen who get the specialized training in a cutting-edge facility could help solve important cyber problems before they graduate.
“I just urge you to think about our current challenges that we have in cyber and the fact that your students may very well be at the cutting edge, and we can’t wait for their graduation in order to deal with some of these events,” Cardin said.
The academy already partners with the nearby National Security Agency on summer internships for students.
Tortora told the board that the academy also is working with NSA on the cyber curriculum.
Andrew Phillips, the academic dean and provost at the academy, said school officials hope the building will become a center for people in cybersecurity.
“We are really hoping that people sort of gravitate our way to use the building for much more than the courses we’re teaching,” Phillips told the board.
The academy also is working to develop the capability to teach with classified content, Tortora said.
“I think in the first year as we get used to putting midshipmen in a classified environment on a regular basis, we’ll probably have some guest speakers that might talk about what’s going on in the world, and then we might build maybe an elective or research lab” for upper-level midshipmen, Tortora said.
The building is named after Grace Hopper, a pioneering computer scientist and U.S. Navy rear admiral.
https://www.navytimes.com/dod/navy/2018/04/23/naval-academy-sees-big-boost-in-cybersecurity-majors/

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COMMENTARY:
25. USS Firebolt (PC10): Remembering Heroic Coastal Patrol Ship Sailors And Looking Forward To Our Future (THE SEXTANT 24 APR 18) Lt. Cmdr. Roger Young, Commanding Officer Of USS Firebolt (PC 10)

April 24, 2004
The sun is setting on an April night in Bahrain. U.S. 5th Fleet ships are conducting typical maritime security operations in the region.
But tonight, April 24, 2004, is anything but typical.
USS Firebolt (PC 10), a coastal patrol (PC) ship, is conducting routine patrol duties northwest of Khor Al Amaya Oil Terminal (KAAOT) in Iraq, when her crew spots two dhows near the boat’s platform. Following protocol for a maritime interdiction operation (MIO), the crew deploys a rigid hull inflatable boat (RHIB) to investigate, manned by a crew of seven U.S. Navy and Coast Guard Sailors.
As the RHIB approached the first dhow, the dhow exploded in an apparent suicide bombing, taking three service members’ lives.
Remembering Our Past
Three service members lost their lives in the line of duty.
Coast Guardsman Damage Controlman 3rd Class Nathan B. Bruckenthal, 24, of Smithtown, New York.
Boatswain’s Mate 1st Class Michael J. Pernaselli, 27, of Monroe, New York.
Signalman 2nd Class Christopher E. Watts, 28, of Knoxville, Tennessee.
As USS Firebolt’s commanding officer, the story of these three men is not lost on me—or my crew. Every year we honor their lives and reflect on what it means to be here, in Bahrain, on the same ship, in the same seas, walking the same decks as these men did before us.
Every morning I put on my uniform and glance at the three stars that grace my cover. These stars represent Bruckenthal, Pernaselli, and Watts’ heroism and willingness to make the ultimate sacrifice. Each member of USS Firebolt’s crew wears these stars that physically remind us of the legacy of those who passed. Every morning I swallow the understanding of what it means to be a junior officer in the Navy, commanding an incredible crew in the most fast-paced area of operations. The past is never far from my mind as we support maritime security in the U.S. 5th Fleet area of operations. Though time changes some aspects of the job, our mission stays the same.
Looking Forward to Our Future
USS Firebolt is one of 10 Cyclone-class coastal patrol (PC) ships forward-deployed to Bahrain to provide regional maritime security and conduct numerous operations and exercises to preserve the freedom of navigation and the free flow of commerce in the region.
Coastal patrol ships play a critical role in maritime security operations in the U.S. 5th Fleet. A typical day might include routinely patrolling local waters to enhance mariner-to-mariner relations while determining pattern of life in

the maritime. In turn, these relationships allow the U.S. Navy and its partners to deter and disrupt the transport of illicit cargo that often funds terrorism and unlawful activities, while also reassuring law-abiding mariners in the region.
Coastal patrol ships also participate in numerous exercises and training evolutions with partners and allies in the region to build capacity, capability and interoperability. Just in the last quarter, Firebolt has participated in two multilateral exercises.
In February, Firebolt, along with USS Hurricane (PC 3) and island-class patrol boats USCGC Wrangell (WPB 1332) and USCGC Aquidneck (WPB 1309), participated in Khunjar Haad, an Omani-led surface, air, and explosive ordinance disposal exercise with the Royal Navy of Oman, France's Marine Nationale, and United Kingdom's Royal Navy. The exercise was part of a routine theater security cooperation engagement plan and an opportunity for all participating partner nations to focus on increasing defensive proficiency in critical mission areas while supporting long-term regional stability and freedom of navigation.Later in February, Firebolt worked alongside USS Tempest (PC 2), USS Hurricane (PC 3), USS USCGC Baranof (WPB 1318), and Iraqi and Kuwaiti vessels in a trilateral exercise, focusing on search-and-rescue operations, maritime infrastructure protection operations, and high value unit protection operations. This exercise was the third of its kind executed since March 2017 with the mission of strengthening regional partnerships, developing proficiency, improving long-term regional cooperation, safety and security, and enhancing interoperability in the mutual defense of the maritime domain in the Northern Arabian Gulf.
U.S. 5th Fleet is an incredibly busy area of operations as it's responsible for approximately 2.5 million square miles of area including the Arabian Gulf, Gulf of Oman, North Arabian Sea, Gulf of Aden, and the Red Sea. It's also no surprise that PCs are meeting the mission to conduct maritime security operations, theater security cooperation efforts, and strengthen partner nations' maritime capabilities in order to promote security and stability in the U.S. 5th Fleet AOR.
As we patrol these seas, the memory and legacy of those service members lost on April 24, 2004, is not lost on the crew of Firebolt.
http://usnhistory navylive.dodlive mil/2018/04/23/uss-firebolt-pc10-remembering-heroic-coastal-patrol-ship-sailors-and-looking-forward-to-our-future/

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26. What To Do If The Talks With North Korea Succeed
(WASHINGTON POST 24 APR 18) ... Nunn and Richard Lugar

As the United States prepares for historic discussions between President Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un , the Trump administration and its international partners have a lot of work ahead of them . A successful summit, if it can be achieved, will be only the start of a long and complicated process. Eliminating the nuclear threat and achieving stability and security on the Korean Peninsula will require unconventional thinking and steps that are much broader than denuclearization. Just as we should prepare for the summit to go wrong, we should also prepare for it to "go right."
The stakes are high. The Korean Peninsula is the most militarized region in the world. North Korea has nuclear weapons and long-range missiles that can reach the United States, as well as South Korea and Japan — two allies the United States has pledged to defend. The entire world has an interest in ensuring the security of North Korea's nuclear, chemical and biological weapons and weapons-usable materials. The North also has thousands of artillery tubes located within 30 miles or so of Seoul, a formidable conventional threat to the South Korean capital and its population, including thousands of Americans living there.
Even if the two leaders reach an agreement, achieving security and stability and reducing catastrophic risks on the peninsula will require intensive, expert-level negotiations and comprehensive, step-by-step implementation over many months, or perhaps years. This cannot be viewed as a bilateral U.S.-North Korean discussion — it must also include China, South Korea, Japan and Russia, and it must address regional security and the political concerns of all the parties, including economic and humanitarian matters.
A successful negotiation requires that all those involved benefit from the outcome. It means all sides must give as well as get. Economic, military and diplomatic pressure helped bring the North Koreans to the table, but reaching a successful agreement will require carrots as well as sticks. The United States has announced it will insist that nuclear dismantlement precede economic benefits. North Korea will likely insist that substantial economic benefits be upfront. Can we develop tools that incentivize dismantlement and verification, as well economic benefits, to occur concurrently? History shows the answer is yes.
As the United States and its international partners develop a negotiating strategy and tools for North Korea, there are

vital lessons to be learned by looking back to the early 1990s following the breakup of the Soviet Union.

In 1991, as the Soviet Union was disintegrating, we wrote legislation to provide technical and financial assistance for the inventory, destruction, and disposal of nuclear and chemical weapons and their delivery vehicles in Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Ukraine. This became law as the Nunn-Lugar Soviet Nuclear Threat Reduction Act of 1991 — also known as the Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR) program.

The initiative also helped to fund productive, peaceful scientific work for scientists who had worked in the weapons complex, and also helped to prevent the proliferation of their know-how to other states and nonstate actors — including the extraordinary lab-to-lab program in which Russian and American scientists worked cooperatively to secure materials usable in nuclear weapons. The United States and Russia learned to cooperate on threat reduction by working together in implementing the program from 1991 to 2012. With this valuable joint experience, if we are going to rebuild cooperation between Washington and Moscow, North Korea is a good place to start.

We believe this concept should be a critical component of any effort to verifiably and irreversibly dismantle North Korea's nuclear weapons and related programs, as well as prevent future proliferation of weapons, material or know-how. Such cooperation can also be used to engage thousands of North Korean scientists and engineers, who are now employed in making weapons of mass destruction, in peaceful scientific and technical work. This would also diminish the risk of proliferation of their deadly knowledge to other states or terrorists.

In the context of a more stable Korean Peninsula, we can look broadly to CTR as a model. A broad-based plan for cooperative activities in North Korea would provide incentives for the Kim regime to comply with the difficult commitments and strict verification and monitoring that will necessarily be part of a serious denuclearization agreement.

Though there are significant differences between North Korea in 2018 and the former Soviet Union in 1991, the cooperative threat-reduction concept could be a powerful tool to support the verifiable reduction and elimination of North Korea's nuclear arsenal, its other weapons of mass destruction, and their delivery systems. Such a program could be developed, funded and implemented jointly with our allies and other members of the international community.

There is certainly no guarantee that there will be a diplomatic breakthrough, but we must be prepared to seize the opportunity. We hope Congress and the Trump administration will use the lessons learned from Cooperative Threat Reduction to develop a more peaceful and secure future for the Korean Peninsula.

Sam Nunn and Richard Lugar are former U.S. senators who serve on the Board of Directors of the Nuclear Threat Initiative.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/were-all-preparing-for-the-trump-kim-summit-to-go-wrong-but-what-if-it-goes-right/2018/04/23/77ada258-472c-11e8-9072-f6d4bc32f223_story html?utm_term=.feb99463f4bb

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Sent: Saturday, March 31, 2018 4:59:15 AM
Subject: Morning News of Note 31 Mar 2018

MORNING NEWS OF NOTE
AS OF 0400 HOURS, MARCH 31

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TWEETS OF NOTE

U.S. Ambassador to NATO Kay Bailey Hutchison said: "Excited to welcome [Sens. Richard Shelby (R-AL), Patrick Leahy (D-VT), John Boozman (R-AR), and John Kennedy (R-LA), and Rep. John Culberson (R-TX)] to Truman Hall as we continue discussing the critical role of bipartisan support for #NATO." Turkish Presidential Spokesperson Ibrahim Kalin tweeted: "Turkey's position on PKK/PYD/YPG, which seeks to legitimize itself as SDF, is perfectly clear. We reject as frivolous any efforts to suggest 'dialogue', 'contact' or 'mediation' between Turkey and those terrorist organizations." And the Russian Embassy in the U.S. wrote: "[Russian Ambassador to the U.S. Anatoly Antonov]: I have offered my colleagues from the [State Department and Defense Department] to sit together and to discuss all outstanding issues. It was four or five months ago. And I got [an] answer: silent."

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DEFENSE DEPARTMENT

1. An exclusive look behind the scenes of the U.S. military's cyber defense
PBS NewsHour, Mar. 30 | Mike Cerre
Judy Woodruff: But, returning to the murky world of cyber-attacks, and defense, the newest U.S. military command is responsible not for a piece of land or air, but cyberspace. Special correspondent Mike Cerre has this exclusive inside view of the men and women protecting the military's digital networks at United States Cyber Command.

2. China's AI ambitions are driving U.S. innovation. So what's America's hold up?
Defense News Online, Mar. 30 | Joe Gould China's drive to lead the world in artificial intelligence is spurring American efforts keep its technological edge, especially when it comes to national security.

3. Contractors wonder how DOD will enforce supply chain security requirements
InsideDefense.com, Mar. 30 | Justin Doubleday Senior Defense Department officials are calling on industry to better protect their supply chains from cyber threats, but uncertainty surrounding DOD's implementation of stringent network security requirements has companies wondering how the department will enforce compliance moving forward.

4. On board the 'Doomsday' plane that can wage nuclear war
CNN.com (Exclusive), Mar. 30 | Jamie Crawford and Barbara Starr If Russia aimed a long range missile like the "Satan 2" it just tested or North Korea suddenly targeted the headquarters of the US nuclear arsenal, top commanders would have a small window to get to safety. But the US is ready for such a scenario and the four-star general tasked with executing the US response to a nuclear strike would take to the air within minutes. He'd be able to carry out the President's orders and launch a nuclear attack in response from the safety of a specially equipped jet, known as the "Doomsday" plane.

AIR FORCE

5. Wilson outlines progress on acquisition, regulatory oversight efforts
InsideDefense.com, Mar. 30 | Rachel Karas Air Force Secretary Heather Wilson this week pointed to additional actions under way to make the service's requirements-building, acquisition and regulatory processes more integrated and flexible.

6. New Wings for A-10 May Keep it Flying Past 2030: Air Force Secretary

Military.com, Mar. 30 | Richard Sisk
Air Force Secretary Heather Wilson said Friday that new wings for the workhorse A-10 Thunderbolt will keep the close-air support aircraft in the inventory for another dozen years or more.

7. Goldfein: Rebuilding end strength key to fixing Air Force morale troubles
Air Force Times Online, Mar. 30 | Stephen Losey Undermanned and under-resourced bases in the continental United States are the biggest morale trouble spots in the Air Force, Chief of Staff Gen. Dave Goldfein said Thursday. And the first step toward fixing those stateside morale problems lies in rebuilding the service's end strength, he said at a breakfast with journalists in Washington, D.C.

ARMY

8. Army Secretary expects big things from Watervliet Arsenal
Times Union Online (Albany, NY), Mar. 30 | Larry Rulison The Watervliet Arsenal will play a critical role as the Army pursues long-range missile-firing cannons and other futuristic weapons to counter increasingly aggressive Russian and Chinese militaries, the Secretary of the Army said during a visit Friday.

9. Skeptics Ask: Can Army Field Armed Robots By 2024?
BreakingDefense.com, Mar. 30 | Sydney J. Freedberg Jr.
Can the Army develop a Robotic Combat Vehicle within six years? Some of the experts we spoke to were deeply skeptical, including veteran congressional staffers badly burned by past acquisition disasters. Some, however, said the Army's goal was achievable - but the early models will require a lot of human oversight, especially when it's time to pull the trigger.

VETERANS

10. Female vets fight to write themselves into history
Washington Post, Mar. 31, Pg. A1 | Emily Wax-Thibodeaux When Jenny Pacanowski took the floor, she stood tall, looked straight into the crowd and told her story just like this: When she - a former combat medic in Iraq - goes to veterans' events, she gets "that crossover handshake." "You know the one, right?" she said. "When some guy reaches right over me to shake hands with a nearby guy. 'Thank you for your service,' they say to the man next to me!" "Even though I'm the Iraq War veteran," she said, her voice rising almost like a preacher's. "I'm the one who drove a military ambulance through the Sunni Triangle." Pacanowski, a poet and writing coach, is part of a growing national movement to bring the unvarnished experiences of women who have served into mainstream popular culture. As a result, more female veterans are attending memoir-writing retreats, learning new storytelling skills at workshops for stand-up comedy, screenwriting and improv, and performing in poetry slams and plays.

IRAQ/SYRIA

11. American soldier dies in Syria after Trump promises to remove U.S. troops
Washington Post, Mar. 31, Pg. A8 | Paul Sonne, Josh Dawsey and Louisa Loveluck An American service member was killed Thursday by an improvised explosive device in Syria, a U.S. military official confirmed, marking the second American killed in action there since the United States began backing local forces in a conflict President Trump has vowed to leave.

12. Trump Freezes Syria Funds
Wall Street Journal, Mar. 31, Pg. A1 | Felicia Schwartz President Donald Trump froze more than $200 million in funds for recovery efforts in Syria as his administration reassesses Washington's broader role in the protracted conflict there.

13. At volatile Syrian front line, U.S., Turkey on opposing sides
Associated Press, Mar. 31 | Sarah El Deeb Down the hill and across a stream are the rival forces: Syrian opposition fighters. They have taken positions on a crossroads in the village of Halawanji and on rooftops with views up to the hill. Beyond them, on another hill, Turkish troops have a base, ready to back up their allies if needed.

14. Turkey says France could become 'target' for backing Syria Kurds
Reuters, Mar. 30 | Tuvan Gumrukcu

Turkey said on Friday that a French pledge to help stabilise a region of northern Syria controlled by Kurdish-dominated forces amounted to support for terrorism and could make France a "target of Turkey".

15. Syrians quit Ghouta as talks for last pocket stutter
Agence France-Presse, Mar. 30 | Maya Gebeily Hundreds more Syrian rebels and civilians prepared Friday to leave Eastern Ghouta under a negotiated withdrawal, as Russia unilaterally announced a similar deal to empty the final pocket of the battered enclave.

MIDEAST

16. Saudi Crown Prince Says U.S. Troops Should Stay In Syria
Time Online, Mar. 30 | W.J. Hennigan
Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman wants the U.S. military to maintain a presence in Syria, despite President Donald Trump's declaration that American forces will be pulled from the war-torn country in the near future.

ASIA/PACIFIC

17. Trump, Lacking Leverage on North Korea, Aims at South
New York Times, Mar. 31, Pg. A7 | Choe Sang-hun South Korea settled disputes with the Trump administration over steel tariffs and the revision of a free-trade agreement this week. With those stumbling blocks cleared, it hoped the two governments could focus on the more pressing crisis of North Korea's nuclear weapons.

18. U.N. Imposes Sanctions on North Korea for Fuel Smuggling
Wall Street Journal, Mar. 31, Pg. A9 | Farnaz Fassihi The United Nations Security Council announced sanctions against North Korea on Friday despite plans for summit talks. The sanctions target one individual and 21 shipping companies and 27 ships for helping North Korea evade international sanctions through maritime smuggling of oil and coal.

19. China envoy tells Moon all sides must advance talks on Korean peninsula
Reuters, Mar. 30 | Michael Martina
Senior Chinese diplomat Yang Jiechi told South Korean President Moon Jae-in on Friday that all parties must seize the moment to advance talks between leaders of North and South Korea, and between North Korea and the United States.

20. China vows to end 'retaliatory measures' against THAAD deployment soon
Yonhap News Agency (South Korea), Mar. 30 | Not Attributed China will end what are believed to be retaliatory measures over South Korea's deployment of a U.S.-developed missile shield in the near future, a top Chinese official said Friday.

AFGHANISTAN/PAKISTAN

21. Afghan strategy facing new test
Washington Post, Mar. 31, Pg. A1 | Missy Ryan The U.S. military is racing to demonstrate it is making progress in Afghanistan during a critical period that will test President Trump's strategy and, potentially, political support for the war. Military leaders say the arrival of new troops and aircraft, along with a renewed mission to advise local operations more closely, will help reverse a Taliban resurgence that has exposed the fragility of the long American project in Afghanistan.

22. Saudis to Help Reboot Afghan Peace Effort
Wall Street Journal, Mar. 31, Pg. A8 | Margherita Stancati and Jessica Donati Saudi Arabia agreed to play a leading role in starting a new peace process in Afghanistan, part of the latest U.S.-led strategy to find a political solution to America's longest war.

23. Task Force Commander: More Confident Afghan Forces Taking the Fight to the Taliban
Seapower Magazine Online, Mar. 30 | Otto Kreisher The Marine Corps advise-and-assist unit saw a demoralized and inactive Afghan security force when it arrived in volatile Helmand Province last year, but "over the course of

time we enabled our partners to steal the initiative from the Taliban," the commander of the task force said.

24. As Afghan forces squeeze in Helmand, Taliban focus shifts
Reuters, Mar. 30 | Mohammad Stanekzai
Last week, the Afghan air force dropped its first laser-guided missile on a Taliban compound in Farah, the western Afghan province that has seen increasing fighting since the beginning of the year.

25. Afghanistan sets October date for much-delayed elections
Reuters, Mar. 30 | Abdul Aziz Ibrahimi
Afghanistan aims to hold parliamentary and local district elections in October, more than three years late, a senior election official said, although much work needs to happen quickly to meet that timeline in the war-ravaged country.

EUROPE

26. Trump Is Urged To Get Tougher On Russia Policy
New York Times, Mar. 31, Pg. A1 | Peter Baker, Andrew Higgins and Steven Erlanger Some senior Trump administration officials are pressing for more aggressive action toward Russia, hoping to persuade a reluctant President Trump to change his approach after a week of mass diplomatic expulsions that have driven the relationship with Moscow to its lowest point in decades.

27. Could enemies target undersea cables that link the world?
Associated Press, Mar. 30 | Deb Riechmann Russian ships are skulking around underwater communications cables, causing the U.S. and its allies to worry the Kremlin might be taking information warfare to new depths.

AFRICA

28. IS claims anti-Haftar attack in Libya that killed eight
Agence France-Presse, Mar. 30 | Imed Lamloum The Islamic State group on Friday claimed responsibility for a suicide bombing in eastern Libya the previous day that killed eight people, including civilians.

NOTABLE COMMENTARY

29. A Colder War With Russia?
New York Times, Mar. 31, Pg. A20 | Editorial To all outward appearances, Russia's retaliatory expulsions of American and other diplomats followed the old Cold War pattern: A Soviet deed would prompt Western punitive measures. Moscow would blithely deny any wrongdoing, declare itself victimized by a two-faced West and strike back with equivalent measures. So it was, for example, when the United States boycotted the Moscow Olympics in 1980 over the invasion of Afghanistan and the Soviet Union led an Eastern Bloc boycott of the Los Angeles Games four years later. And so it is now again, in Vladimir Putin's Russia.

30. Pompeo and Bolton: Don't Expect Trump's New Hawks to Save Syria
Bloomberg View, Mar. 30 | Eli Lake
The conventional wisdom in Washington these days says that Secretary of Defense James Mattis is the one man who can save the nation from war. The new secretary of state, Mike Pompeo, is a hawk's hawk. And don't get the foreign policy establishment started on incoming National Security Adviser, John Bolton. President Donald Trump himself pines for military parades and asserts that torturing terrorists "works." Like most conventional wisdom in the Trump era, however, this is all wrong -- for a number of reasons. But the first and most important one is Syria. Trump actually wants to cut and run from this tragic country. This is why there is no real strategy for the moment to counter the Russian-Iranian led campaign to unify the country for the dictator in Damascus, Bashar al-Assad. U.S. forces are in Syria only to destroy the Islamic State.

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TWEETS OF NOTE
Twitter, Mar. 30

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 7, 2018

The Honorable James Mattis
Secretary of Defense
The Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Mattis:

We are concerned by press reports that the "highest levels" of the Department of Defense have been directed by the President to plan and execute a military parade in Washington, D.C. Reportedly, the order came during a discussion in the Pentagon's Tank, a secure location normally reserved for the most sensitive defense conversations, during what should have been a discussion of the impact of budget negotiations on the Department. It is unclear what military need this event would fulfill.

The United States Armed Forces make up the finest military in the world. It is the solemn duty of those of us in positions of leadership to ensure that they receive our country's full support. In addition to local community activities, Washington, D.C. holds regular ceremonies at each of its military bases, at Arlington National Cemetery for Veterans Day, and major celebrations on the National Mall for Memorial Day and Independence Day that honor the service and sacrifice of our nation's veterans and servicemembers.

Yesterday, you testified to Congress, "Our military remains capable, but our competitive edge has eroded in every domain of warfare—air, land, sea, space, and cyber. Under frequent continuing resolutions and sequester's budget caps, our advantages continue to shrink. The combination of rapidly changing technology, the negative impact on military readiness resulting from the longest continuous stretch of combat in our nation's history, and insufficient funding have created an overstretched and under-resourced military."

In light of these concerns, we ask that you respond to the following questions no later than February 23:

1) What is the anticipated total budget for the parade, including but not limited to, the cost of planning the parade, securing the route and viewing areas, transporting personnel and equipment, the salaries of participants, and ancillary costs of such an event, such as the cost of local police, sanitation, and other matters?
2) What routine Defense Department training, operations, or functions would be cancelled, rescheduled, or otherwise impacted in order to plan and execute the parade?
3) What is the anticipated total number of hours spent by all personnel participating in the planning and execution of the parade?

4) How does this cost and military priority rank relative to the military services annual unfunded requirements list, which outline each service's most important "next available dollar" needs?

At a time of war, with American servicemembers serving in harm's way, such a parade seems to be inappropriate and wasteful. Every penny of the millions of dollars that the parade would cost and every second of the tens of thousands of personnel hours its execution would require, should be devoted to the most essential missions of the Department of Defense – protecting the American people and our security interests.

Thank you for your cooperation, and we look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,

Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator

Jack Reed
United States Senator

Patrick Leahy
United States Senator

Gary C. Peters
United States Senator

Meyers, Abigail L LCDR

From: Loeblein, James T RADM OLA, LA-00
Sent: Wednesday, February 07, 2018 16:30
To: Spencer, Richard V HON SECNAV; Richardson, John M ADM CNO
Cc: Modly, Thomas HON Under Secretary of the Navy; Moran, William F ADM, OPNAV, VCNO; Mate, EmilyGrace SES SECNAV, FO; Wikoff, George M CAPT OPNAV, N00; Tabler, Andrew H CIV UNSECNAV; Brabazon, John CAPT OPNAV, VCNO; Dollaga, Butch C Director, FMBE OASN, FM&C FMBE
Subject: (U//FOUO) Leahy-Reed Letter regarding military parade
Attachments: Leahy Parade.pdf
Signed By: (b) (6)

Mr. Secretary/CNO - FYSA...

VR/Jim

RADM James T. Loeblein, USN
Navy Chief of Legislative Affairs
(b) (6)

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 7, 2018

The Honorable James Mattis
Secretary of Defense
The Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

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Thank you for your cooperation, and we look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,

Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator

Jack Reed
United States Senator

Patrick Leahy
United States Senator

Gary C. Peters
United States Senator

Meyers, Abigail L LCDR

From: (b) (6)
Sent: Tuesday, March 13, 2018 17:00
To: Richardson, John M ADM CNO
Subject: [Non-DoD Source] Letter to The President
Attachments: Letter to TRUMP.022618.pdf

John,

As you can see, I used your name as a reference with the President for a proposed BBQ on Veterans Day. I hope you don't mind and hope you will give a thumbs up if he asks. This event is for only for the military and their families. (b) (6)

March 9, 2018

Donald J. Trump
President of the United States
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

I recently read with interest a story in the Washington Post reporting that you hope to have a parade honoring our military on Veterans Day. Cost was declared to be a factor.

If the parade takes place on Veterans Day, the Cooks from the Valley offer to barbeque, for the men and women of our services who march, ride in or fly over the parade, as well as their families. I have attached a history of the Cooks from the Valley. We will deliver enough 12oz choice New York center cut steaks to all in the parade for free. We only require the BBQ units, briquettes, starter, side dishes, deserts you all wish to serve and a place to serve these fantastic folks.

We and the Navy have worked closely together for years. We have cooked for as many as 18,000 – all at sea in the Persian Gulf – on the same day. Please consult with Admirals Bob Natter, Jon Greenert, John Richardson, as well as Generals Petraeus and Dempsey and the approximately 200,000 men and women whom we have served since 2002.

I hope this offer is favorably considered. The Country can't get it cheaper. It's free!

[redacted] is probably going to kill me because I have written directly to you. Oh well.

Very truly yours,

(b) (6) [redacted]

cc:
cc: (b) (6) [redacted]

From: OSD Pentagon PA Mailbox Media Analysis
Subject: Morning News of Note 8 Feb 2018
Date: Thursday, February 08, 2018 5:09:31
Attachments: Morning News of Note 8 Feb 2018.pdf

OVERVIEW

In a press conference at the White House, Secretary James N. Mattis said that he supports a Senate budget deal that would realize a long-sought Pentagon goal of lifting the caps on defense spending under the sequester process, according to Military.com. In Syria, the U.S.-led coalition carried out strikes in "self-defense" against forces loyal to President Bashar al-Assad, leaving an estimated more than 100 pro-regime personnel dead, after an "unprovoked attack" against the Syrian Democratic Forces, the U.S. military said. Also of note, Vice President Pence met with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in Tokyo, and said that the United States soon planned to levy the toughest sanctions yet on North Korea over its nuclear and missile programs.

TWEETS OF NOTE

President Trump tweeted: "The Budget Agreement today is so important for our great Military. It ends the dangerous sequester and gives Secretary Mattis what he needs to keep America great. Republicans and Democrats must support our troops and support this bill!" U.S. Ambassador to NATO Kay Bailey Hutchison wrote: "Good discussion with new @USArmy Europe commander LTG Cavoli @NATO HQ. His focus on readiness & interoperability is critical to @USArmyEurope's success in strengthening the Alliance through increased presence, training & prepositioning equipment." And U.S. Envoy to the Counter-ISIS Coalition Brett McGurk said: "U.S. military forces responded and stopped an unprovoked attack by pro-Regime forces against #SDF units in eastern #Syria, an active theater against #ISIS. We will act to defend ourselves and our partners working to ensure the enduring defeat of ISIS."

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Table of Contents

TOP STORIES

1. Mattis on Two-Year Budget Deal: 'We Will Spend the Money Wisely'
Military.com (DoD Buzz), Feb. 7 | Richard Sisk
The White House brought in Defense Secretary Jim Mattis Wednesday to press for a sweeping budget deal that would realize a long-sought Pentagon goal of lifting the caps on defense spending under the sequester process.

2. US-led strikes kill 100 pro-regime personnel in Syria – military
Agence France-Presse, Feb. 8 | W.G. Dunlop
The US-led anti-jihadist coalition carried out strikes in "self-defense" against forces loyal to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, leaving an estimated more than 100 pro-regime personnel dead, the US military said.

3. Pence, in Tokyo, Threatens Tough Penalties for North Korea
New York Times, Feb. 8, Pg. A6 | Mark Landler
Vice President Mike Pence, dispatched to Asia to blunt a North Korean charm offensive at South Korea's Olympic Games, said Wednesday that the United States planned to levy the toughest sanctions yet on the North over its nuclear and missile programs.

DEFENSE DEPARTMENT

4. How Mattis succeeds in turbulent White House
Washington Post, Feb. 8, Pg. A1 | Greg Jaffe and Missy Ryan
Throughout his 40-year career as a Marine, Defense Secretary Jim Mattis built a reputation as an aggressive warrior, leading a blitz on Baghdad and pushing a reluctant Obama administration to hit back against Iran. Over the past

year, he has learned to play a different role: acting as a check on an impulsive president. The big question is how long Mattis can continue to act as a force for continuity and caution and still retain influence with a president impatient to hit back at America's enemies and swiftly win wars.

5. SpaceX success lifts Pentagon hopes of ending launch pad monopoly
Financial Times Online (UK), Feb. 7 | Katrina Manson
The Pentagon is eyeing the successful launch of Elon Musk's Falcon Heavy rocket as a way to erode the monopoly that has held sway over US military space launches for the past dozen years.

6. Misbehavior by top officials and officers is on the decline, Pentagon leaders say
USA Today Online, Feb. 7 | Tom Vanden Brook
Pentagon officials have substantiated 590 allegations of misconduct among generals, admirals and senior civilian officials from 2013 to 2017 with trends showing a steady decline in misbehavior, according to figures released Wednesday by the Defense Department Inspector General.

ARMY

7. Pentagon taps Army to lead planning for Trump's military parade
Washington Examiner Online, Feb. 7 | Jamie McIntyre
The Army has been tapped to lead plans for President Trump's military parade, a Pentagon spokesman said, adding that the goal is to tie the parade to a significant, historical event.

MARINE CORPS

8. Women prove they're up to the challenge of Marine Corps rigorous boot camp
USA Today Online, Feb. 7 | Jim Michaels
Drill instructors dashed between the ranks, shouting orders as recruits repeatedly pressed 30-pound ammunition cans over their heads or slung their buddies over their shoulder and took off running against the clock. It could have been any early morning at the Marine Corps' legendary boot camp, where generations of recruits endured physical hardships and stress to earn the Corps' coveted symbol: the eagle, globe and anchor. But today many of the drill instructors shouting orders at frightened recruits are women. It's a cultural shift for the Marine Corps, the most male-dominated of the military services, as it deliberately expands gender integration in its boot camp and opportunities for women throughout its ranks.

NAVY

9. Navy's top sailor plans for 'great power competition' on world stage
San Diego Union-Tribune, Feb. 8, Pg. B4 | Carl Prine
In a major Wednesday address before the San Diego Military Advisory Council, the Navy's top officer sketched out the future of America's maritime power as it confronts rising powers such as Russia and China. "If you think about the last time we were really in a great power competition, we have to go back almost 25 years. We're talking the Cold War and the Soviet Union," said Adm. John M. Richardson, chief of naval operations since 2015.

WHITE HOUSE

10. The Trump Administration Plans To Announce And Defend A New Transgender Military Policy
BuzzFeed News, Feb. 7 | Chris Geidner
Justice Department lawyers have told a federal judge that they will be defending a new policy regarding transgender military service that will be "disclosed" by the Trump administration on Feb. 21, the federal judge wrote in an order this week.

11. Trump Wants a Military Parade, but Not Everyone Is in Step
New York Times, Feb. 8, Pg. A11 | Thomas Gibbons-Neff
Tanks, jets and other killing machines painted olive-drab and tan could be rolling the routes of the nation's capital later this year for a peacetime parade inspired by President Trump. The Pentagon is in the planning stages for an event that was last held in Washington in the summer of 1991, after the end of the 41-day gulf war was celebrated with a $12 million dollar victory parade. But on Wednesday, Defense Secretary Jim Mattis avoided the word

"parade" when tersely responding to reporters at the White House who asked about the possible show of force.

LEGISLATIVE

12. Senators Close In on a Budget Deal
Wall Street Journal, Feb. 8, Pg. A1 | Kristina Peterson and Siobhan Hughes
Congressional leaders were on the cusp of striking a two-year budget deal Tuesday to boost federal spending levels for both the military and domestic programs, after separating for now a stalled immigration fight from efforts to keep the government funded. The emerging agreement is expected to increase military spending by $80 billion a year and nondefense spending by $63 billion a year, according to lawmakers and congressional aides, though the numbers were still being negotiated.

IRAQ/SYRIA

13. At U.S. outpost in Syria, U.S. general backs Kurdish fighters
Associated Press, Feb. 7 | Susannah George and Sarah El Deeb
On the ground in Syria, the top U.S. general in the coalition fighting the Islamic State group pledged on Wednesday that American troops would remain in the northern Syrian town of Manbij despite Ankara's demands for a U.S. pullout.

14. Anger and fear along Turkey's border
Washington Post, Feb. 8, Pg. A9 | Louisa Loveluck
As Turkey presses its long-anticipated offensive against Kurdish fighters across the border in northern Syria, frontier towns like Reyhanli have found themselves along the fault line between the region's warring rivals. Mortar strikes apparently launched by Kurdish forces are landing daily, setting communities already transformed by Syria's war on edge and hardening support for Turkey's military operation.

15. In Northern Syria, U.S. and Turkey Head Into Face-Off
New York Times, Feb. 8, Pg. A4 | Rod Nordland
Two senior American generals came to the front line outside the Syrian city of Manbij on Wednesday flying outsized American flags on their vehicles, in case pro-Turkish forces just the other side of the no man's land, 20 yards away, did not realize who they were. "We're very proud of our positions here, and we want to make sure everybody knows it," said Maj. Gen. Jamie Jarrard, the Special Operations commander for the American-led coalition in Iraq and Syria. If the message to Turkey was not clear already, the overall coalition commander accompanying General Jarrard, Lt. Gen. Paul Funk, elaborated. "You hit us, we will respond aggressively. We will defend ourselves."

16. Third day of deadly Syrian regime raids on rebel enclave
Agence France-Presse, Feb. 7 | Hasan Mohammed and Maya Gebeily
Dozens of civilians were killed by renewed government strikes in a rebel-held enclave near Damascus, where overwhelmed medics were still treating survivors of the Syrian conflict's bloodiest day in months.

17. Facing Trump's demands, NATO to consider larger Iraq training mission
Reuters (Exclusive), Feb. 7 | Robin Emmott
The United States is renewing pressure on its European NATO allies to establish a long-term train-and-advise mission in Iraq, diplomats said, reviving a divisive issue for an alliance wary after a decade in Afghanistan. U.S. Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis sent a letter to NATO headquarters in January calling for a formal NATO mission to Iraq with a semi-permanent or permanent command to train Iraqi forces, according to five senior NATO diplomats.

MIDEAST

18. Saudi Forces Inch Forward in Yemen as Chaos Spreads Behind Lines
Bloomberg News, Feb. 7 | Glen Carey
Somewhere on the other side of a desert valley, General Nasser Al-Thebyani's enemies are dug into trenches. On handheld radios, his men pick up taunts and insults from the rebels. This is the front line of the war in Yemen -- and, some say, of Saudi Arabia's wider struggle with Iran. The fighting is tough. After capturing one strategic hilltop

under heavy fire, Al-Thebyani's men dubbed it "Sniper's Mountain.'' In a more recent battle, the general says he lost 300 soldiers. Still, his Saudi-backed force is inching forward. It's now within about 30 miles (48 kilometers) of the country's rebel-held capital -- close enough that he's starting to think about what comes next.

AFGHANISTAN/PAKISTAN

19. General: U.S. Moving More Airpower to Afghanistan in Strategy Shift
Military.com, Feb. 7 | Oriana Pawlyk
The U.S. military has begun shifting resources to Afghanistan as the war against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria winds down, a top official said Wednesday.

20. Commanders show readiness for cooperation with US
Dawn (Pakistan), Feb. 8, Pg. 1 | Baqir Sajjad Syed
Military's top brass on Wednesday signalled cooperation with the United States and at the same time reassured the nation that there would be no compromise on national interest while doing so.

ASIA/PACIFIC

21. Pence says U.S. wants peaceful solution to North Korea crisis, but warns not to underestimate U.S.
Reuters, Feb. 8 | Tim Kelly and Linda Sieg
U.S. Vice President Mike Pence said on Thursday the United States wants to peacefully dismantle North Korea's nuclear programme but warned Pyongyang not to underestimate U.S. military strength or resolve.

22. Ties warming between U.S., Thailand
Washington Times, Feb. 8, Pg. A10 | Richard S. Ehrlich
In a clear sign the Obama-era chill in relations is over, Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Joseph F. Dunford arrived in Bangkok on Wednesday vowing to improve military ties with Thailand's armed forces which seized control in a 2014 coup. The U.S. general praised plans for national elections later this year — which the junta has not confirmed — and met with the embattled defense minister at the center of a corruption scandal that has rocked the government.

23. Top status for Turnbull trip to US
Sydney Morning Herald, Feb. 8, Pg. 8 | David Wroe
Malcolm Turnbull's Washington trip will be the highest-level visit by an Australian leader in more than a decade, in a signal the US is eager to keep its key allies close. The Herald has been told Mr Turnbull's visit this month will include lunch with President Donald Trump at the White House and will be badged an "official" visit - the first at such a level since John Howard met George W. Bush in 2006. Mr Turnbull is also expected to meet with top US defence and intelligence officials, including Defence Secretary James Mattis and the director of National Intelligence Dan Coats.

24. Myanmar's place at U.S. military drills in Asia draws ire
Associated Press, Feb. 7 | Matthew Pennington
Lawmakers are demanding Myanmar's exclusion from U.S.-led military exercises in neighboring Thailand next week amid pressure for more American sanctions in response to atrocities against Rohingya Muslims.

AFRICA

25. Al Qaeda trying to regroup in Tunisia after Islamic State setbacks – sources
Reuters, Feb. 7 | Tarek Amara and Lamine Chikhi
The killing of a senior Algerian militant by special forces soon after he slipped into Tunisia has raised concern that al Qaeda is trying to regroup in the North African state as rival Islamic State has suffered major setbacks, security sources say.

NOTABLE COMMENTARY

26. The Guns and Butter Budget
Wall Street Journal, Feb. 8, Pg. A16 | Editorial
Congress announced the outline of a two-year bipartisan budget deal on Wednesday, and no doubt Members want to

avoid another pointless government shutdown. The deal has the virtue of starting to fix a weakening military. But the delusion is that the U.S. can continue to deny the trade-off between guns and butter, or defense and the entitlement state.

27. A spending plan that denies reality
Washington Post, Feb. 8, Pg. A18 | Editorial
Senate leaders on Wednesday struck a far-reaching, two-year budget deal that would dispense with a bundle of issues that have bedeviled Washington for years, and they immediately took a victory lap. Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) called it "a significant bipartisan step forward," and Minority Leader Charles E. Schumer (D-N.Y.) hailed it as "very good for the American people." The deal would, indeed, do some good. And Senate leaders deserve credit for talking to one another and dealing in good faith, a model the House and the White House have resisted. Too bad it all had to come at the cost of more debt, confirming yet again that the only time Washington's leaders appear able to shake hands on big deals is when both sides agree to run up the national tab.

28. Stand Up to Erdogan’s Brutality
Wall Street Journal, Feb. 8, Pg. A17 | Bernard-Henri Lévy
In Syria as in Iraq, the Kurds have been the West's most steadfast allies against Islamic State. Their victory over ISIS complete, Kurdish fighters were naive enough to think they would be allowed to live in peace on the land they had defended and on which their brothers and sisters are buried. As the price of that innocence they are being pursued, tortured and assassinated once again, this time in Afrin, a Syrian city close to the Turkish border. The Kurds, who had been the seawall holding back the Islamist tide, are now being hunted by Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan -- that bouncer at the gates of hell -- who is turning his country into an instrument of blackmail to be wielded against the West. But in the face of Mr. Erdogan's cynicism, the international community is behaving like the three monkeys who see no evil, hear no evil, and speak no evil.

29. Continuity and Change in U.S. Nuclear Policy
RealClearDefense.com, Feb. 7 | John R. Harvey, Franklin C. Miller, Keith B. Payne and Bradley H. Roberts
Each of us considers the 2018 Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) recently issued by Secretary of Defense Mattis to be clearly in the mainstream of U.S. nuclear policy as it has evolved through nearly eight decades of the nuclear age. The 2018 NPR reflects much more continuity than change. It affirms the necessity of a strategic Triad of land- and sea-based missiles and bombers, along with European basing of U.S. nuclear bombs carried by NATO aircraft. These capabilities provide the basis for deterring war and assuring threatened allies of continued U.S. commitments to their security.

30. Mr. Trump’s Lousy Parade Idea
New York Times, Feb. 8, Pg. A22 | Editorial
The United States has the world's most capable fighting force. But do we really want to spike the ball at a time when the country is embroiled in two wars, with no end in sight?

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TWEETS OF NOTE
Twitter, Feb. 7-8

From: OSD Pentagon PA Mailbox Media Analysis
Subject: Morning News of Note 24 Feb 2018 (UNCLASSIFIED)
Date: Saturday, February 24, 2018 4:59:46
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CLASSIFICATION: UNCLASSIFIED

OVERVIEW

President Trump announced new sanctions to pressure North Korea to give up its nuclear missile program and warned of a "phase two" that could be "very, very unfortunate for the world" if the steps did not work. Separately, senior U.S. officials told Reuters that Washington has been talking to regional partners about coordinating an effort to halt North Korea's use of seagoing trade to support its nuclear missile program, a plan that could include the U.S. Coast Guard deploying to intercept ships suspected of violating sanctions and the strengthening of PACOM's naval and air power. Also of note, the Pentagon said Secretary James N. Mattis has made his recommendations to the White House on what to do about transgender people serving in the military.

TWEETS OF NOTE

Vice President Pence tweeted: "The US intensifies the MAXIMUM pressure on North Korea to denuclearize. Two weeks ago in Japan, at [President Trump's] direction, I announced the US would impose the toughest & most aggressive economic sanctions on North Korea ever. Today, [President Trump] delivered." U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Nikki Haley said, "Unbelievable that Russia is stalling a vote on a ceasefire allowing humanitarian access in Syria. How many more people will die before the The Security Council agrees to take up this vote?" And Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari wrote: "The entire country stands as one with the families, and with the government and people of Yobe State. This is a national disaster."

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TOP STORIES

1. Trump Announces Harsh New Sanctions Against North Korea
New York Times, Feb. 24, Pg. A1 | Mark Landler
President Trump announced on Friday harsh new sanctions against North Korea, signaling a return to his aggressive attempt to put pressure on the government of Kim Jong-un after an Olympic Games that had brought a brief lull in the tensions on the Korean Peninsula.

2. U.S. prepares high-seas crackdown on North Korea sanctions evaders - sources
Reuters (Exclusive), Feb. 23 | Matt Spetalnick, Phil Stewart and David Brunnstrom
The Trump administration and key Asian allies are preparing to expand interceptions of ships suspected of violating sanctions on North Korea, a plan that could include deploying U.S. Coast Guard forces to stop and search vessels in Asia-Pacific waters, senior U.S. officials said.

3. Pentagon makes recommendations to White House on transgender individuals
Reuters, Feb. 23 | Idrees Ali
U.S. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis has made his recommendations to the White House on transgender individuals serving in the military, the Pentagon said on Friday, after President Donald Trump's call last year for a ban on such service.

DEFENSE DEPARTMENT

4. Trump directs Pentagon to schedule military parade for Veterans' Day
Politico Online, Feb. 23 | Eliana Johnson

President Donald Trump's plans for a White House-backed military parade are beginning to take shape.

5. Trump hints at allowing more troops to carry personal weapons on military bases
Military Times Online, Feb. 23 | Leo Shane III
President Donald Trump on Friday said he would re-examine federal policies restricting troops from carrying private firearms on military bases, calling it an important safety issue.

6. Army Munitions, Air Force Bombers Hampered by Stopgap Measure
Bloomberg Government, Feb. 23 | Roxana Tiron and Cameron Leuthy
Production of rockets used to fight militants in Afghanistan and improvements to the bomber used to deter North Korea are being hampered by the latest spending patch funding the government through March 23.

7. How Jeff Bezos was selected for, but never joined, the Defense Innovation Board
Washington Post Online, Feb. 23 | Christian Davenport and Dan Lamothe
The list of luminaries selected for the Defense Innovation Board, an advisory council designed to help the Defense Department become more technologically adept and efficient, included some of the country's most distinguished entrepreneurs, thinkers and innovators.

AIR FORCE

8. Air Force Wants Platforms Built with Connectivity in Mind
National Defense Magazine Online, Feb. 23 | Vivienne Machi
The Air Force is sending a clear message to industry for future platform designs: If it doesn't connect, share and distribute information or perform in a disaggregated battlespace environment, the service is not interested.

NAVY

9. The Navy's cutting-edge method of launching aircraft faces reliability issues
Los Angeles Times Online, Feb. 23 | Samantha Masunaga
For more than 60 years, the U.S. Navy has relied on steam power to catapult planes off the decks of aircraft carriers, leaving behind a telltale trail of steam rising from the track.

10. A mission of Mercy sets sail for the Indian Ocean
San Diego Union-Tribune Online, Feb. 23 | Carl Prine
The Navy's hospital ship Mercy sailed out of San Diego Bay on Friday, its white bow pointed toward Hawaii but dragging in its wake concerns about the future of its unique fleet of vessels.

LEGISLATIVE

11. Who will watchdog Trump's massive Pentagon budget while McCain is absent?
Washington Post Online, Feb. 23 | Christian Davenport
Sen. John McCain was his usual irascible self, frustrated with the nonanswers he was getting from the witness, whom he was increasingly treating as hostile.

ASIA/PACIFIC

12. US to boost Marine forces in Australia
Sydney Morning Herald (Australia), Feb. 24, Pg. 6 | David Crowe
Donald Trump's top military commander is planning to ramp up the number of US Marines at a key base in Australia after talks with Malcolm Turnbull to prepare a new show of force in the Pacific.

13. South Korea, U.S. to begin negotiation on U.S. troop costs in early March
Yonhap News Agency (South Korea), Feb. 23 | Not Attributed
South Korea and the United States are expected to begin talks on sharing costs for U.S. Forces Korea (USFK) early next month, a foreign ministry official said Friday.

IRAQ/SYRIA

14. ISIS fighters escape from US-backed detention in Syria
CNN.com, Feb. 23 | Barbara Starr
A small number of ISIS detainees have "recently" escaped from detention by US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces, according to a US official with direct knowledge of the program. The official described the incident as involving "less than five ISIS fighters."

15. Deaths mounts in Syria as U.N. weighs cease-fire resolution
Associated Press, Feb. 23 | Bassem Mroue and Edith M. Lederer
Syrian government warplanes carried out a sixth day of airstrikes Friday in the rebel-held suburbs east of Damascus, killing 32 people, activists said, as the death toll from a week of bombardment soared over 400.

MIDEAST

16. Russia rejects UN condemnation of Iran over missiles to Yemen
Agence France-Presse, Feb. 23 | Not Attributed
Russia rejected a draft resolution Friday that would condemn Iran for failing to block supplies of missiles to Yemen's Huthi rebels and call for measures against Tehran, diplomats said.

AFGHANISTAN/PAKISTAN

17. At least 23 killed in multiple attacks in Afghanistan
Agence France-Presse, Feb. 24 | Not Attributed
At least 23 people were killed and more than a dozen wounded in multiple suicide bombings and attacks in Afghanistan on Saturday, officials said, the latest in a series of assaults in the war-torn country.

18. Pakistan could evict, rather than kill, militants - U.S. official
Reuters, Feb. 23 | Jonathan Landay and Arshad Mohammed
Pakistan need not kill or capture militants such as members of the Haqqani network that use its territory to launch attacks in Afghanistan but could push them across the border instead, a senior U.S. official said on Friday.

19. With U.S. Push, Pakistan Placed on Terror Finance List
Wall Street Journal, Feb. 24, Pg. A14 | Saeed Shah and Ian Talley
Saudi Arabia backed down under pressure from the U.S. and allowed Pakistan to be placed on an international terror-financing watch list, officials from countries involved in the decision said Friday, dealing a blow to the South Asian country's struggling economy.

AFRICA

20. Special Forces troops train Nigerian infantry for fight against Boko Haram, ISIS
Army Times Online, Feb. 23 | Meghann Myers
A dozen U.S. troops just wrapped up a seven-week trip to Nigeria, where they trained local soldiers in advanced infantry tactics that, in all likelihood, they'll use to beat back religious extremist terror in their country.

21. Pentagon partners with Germany on Tunisia border security
Al-Monitor, Feb. 23 | Jack Detsch
The Pentagon plans to add nearly $20 million in high-tech sensors to Tunisia's border, doubling down on US and European investments to stop migrants, extremists and drug traffickers from crossing from Libya.

22. EU Increases Military and Development Aid for Troubled Sahel Region
Wall Street Journal Online, Feb. 23 | Laurence Norman and Julian E. Barnes
The European Union announced a boost in military and development aid for the West African Sahel region Friday, part of European efforts to cooperate in stabilizing a neighboring trouble spot.

23. Jihadist group claim Mali attack that killed two French soldiers
Agence France-Presse, Feb. 23 | Not Attributed
A powerful jihadist alliance has claimed an attack on a French military vehicle in Mali that left two soldiers dead,

Mauritanian media reported on Friday.

24. Two car bombs explode in Somali capital and kill 18 people
Reuters, Feb. 23 | Abdi Sheikh and Feisal Omar
Twin car bombs killed 18 people in Somalia's capital Mogadishu on Friday in an attack by the Islamist militant group al Shabaab, but security forces shot dead five assailants, officials said.

25. '105 girls missing' in northeast Nigeria after Boko Haram school attack
Agence France-Presse, Feb. 23 | Not Attributed
More than 100 girls are reported missing after a Boko Haram school attack in northeast Nigeria this week that President Muhammadu Buhari on Friday called a "national disaster".

EUROPE

26. Citing Russia, Swedish armed forces seek doubled budget by 2035
Reuters, Feb. 23 | Johan Ahlander
Sweden needs to more than double military spending by 2035 to ensure the country is adequately protected, the armed forces said on Friday, noting Russia had no qualms about using force for political ends.

NOTABLE COMMENTARY

27. Mr. Trump and Transgender Troops
New York Times, Feb. 24, Pg. A22 | Editorial
Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, perhaps the Trump administration's most responsible national security official, may have thrown the president a political lifeline by proposing this week that transgender members of the United States military be allowed to continue serving.

28. Russia's Attack on U.S. Troops
Wall Street Journal, Feb. 24, Pg. A12 | Editorial
The truth is starting to emerge about a recent Russian attack on U.S. forces in eastern Syria, and it deserves more public attention. The assault looks increasingly like a botched attempt to bloody the U.S. and intimidate President Trump into withdrawing from Syria once Islamic State is defeated. The U.S. military won this round, but Vladimir Putin's forces will surely look for a chance at revenge.

29. Climate and national security: Unchanging
The Economist (UK), Feb. 24 | Not Attributed
Until America gets a grand military parade, a drive along the wharf at Naval Station Norfolk, in Virginia, is the next-best thing. Destroyers, missile-cruisers, nuclear-powered submarines and, most fearsome of all, two 333-metre (1,092-foot) Nimitz-class aircraft-carriers, are enough to make Americans' spines tingle and enemies shudder. But the menace that most concerns Captain Dean VanderLey, the chief civil engineer for the navy in the mid-Atlantic region, is one that is undeterred by military might. In the 100 years since the base was first built, the sea level has risen by half a metre. In a major hurricane, he says, while surveying the piers and a road linking them to an airfield, "a lot of this would probably be flooded".

30. The conquest of Yemen: Gobbling up southern Arabia
The Economist (UK), Feb. 24 | Not Attributed
Brightly painted dhows bob on the waves of the Arabian Sea. Fishermen auction the morning's catch of swordfish, tuna and manta rays. Sardines dry in the sun, fodder for the camels that pad through the street. Life used to be simple in the port of Ghayda, the capital of Mahra governorate, tucked in Yemen's far east.

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TWEETS OF NOTE
Twitter, Feb. 23-24

From: OSD Pentagon PA Mailbox Media Analysis
Subject: Morning News of Note 25 Feb 2018 (UNCLASSIFIED)
Date: Sunday, February 25, 2018 5:00:38
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OVERVIEW

The Taliban staged three attacks in southern Afghanistan, killing at least 20 Afghan soldiers as a high-level NATO delegation was visiting the country to discuss the peace process. On Syria, the U.N. Security Council unanimously approved a resolution demanding a 30-day cease-fire across the country "without delay," but added an exemption for military operations against terrorist groups such as ISIS, the Nusra Front, and Al Qaeda affiliated groups. Also of note, President Trump said he is eyeing Veterans Day for a military parade, adding that it would be "something great" for the country's spirit and "the generals would love to do it."

TWEETS OF NOTE

Sen. John McCain (R-AZ) said: "#Assad's continued slaughter in #Syria - backed by #Russia & #Iran - is appalling, yet unsurprising given years of brutality. What's shocking is the admin still has no strategy to change course. The deadline Congress imposed for that strategy has come and gone. We must do better." The Russian Embassy in the U.S. tweeted: "#Nebenzia: The purpose of the fight against #terrorists must not become a shield for pursuing certain geopolitical goals with dubious legitimacy. And this is exactly what the #US is doing in #Syria." And Afghan Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah wrote: "I strongly condemn the terrorist attacks in #Kabul and #Helmand. I share the sorrows of our people & the honor of heroes in uniform who sacrificed their lives to save countless others of their countrymen & women. Our forces will chase enemies and avenge the blood of our people."

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TOP STORIES

1. More than 20 killed in attacks in Afghanistan
Reuters, Feb. 24 | Mohammad Stanekzai
A series of militant attacks in Afghanistan killed more than 20 people, officials said on Saturday, ahead of an international meeting next week aimed at building diplomatic support for hoped-for peace talks with the Taliban.

2. U.N. Council Backs Immediate Cease-Fire in Syria
New York Times, Feb. 25, Pg. A10 | Megan Specia
The United Nations Security Council voted unanimously on Saturday in favor of a 30-day cease-fire in Syria, after days of bombardment by the Syrian government on a Damascus suburb left hundreds of civilians dead.

3. Trump opens up about military parade plans, says it would be good for the 'spirit of the country'
Washington Examiner Online, Feb. 24 | Daniel Chaitin
President Trump delivered his first explanation of what he would like to see in a military parade tentatively being planned for this year and said that such an event would be good for the "spirit of the country" and has strong support from his generals.

DEFENSE DEPARTMENT

4. Military on front line of battle with sea level rise
Northwest Florida Daily News Online (Fort Walton Beach, FL), Feb. 24 | Tom McLaughlin
Politicians in Tallahassee and Washington D.C. may choose to ignore the potential menace of sea level rise, but the United States military doesn't have that luxury.

5. Arsenal missile base decision coming soon
Record-Courier Online (Kent, OH), Feb. 25 | Jessica Wehrman
Ohio's congressional delegation is in the midst of what one congressman calls a "full court press" to land an East Coast Missile Defense site at Camp Ravenna in eastern Portage County.

6. Special Operations Command asks for more troops, biggest budget yet
Military Times Online, Feb. 24 | Todd South
Special operations forces numbers are higher than they have ever been, but leaders in that community want Congress to approve their highest budget request ever made to increase the force by more than 1,000 troops.

7. New court ruling jeopardizes military's ability to pursue old rape cases
Washington Post Online, Feb. 24 | Dan Lamothe
A ruling by a U.S. military appeals court jeopardizes the Pentagon's ability to prosecute sexual assaults committed before 2006, just as more people are coming forward with years-old allegations as part of the #MeToo movement.

AIR FORCE

8. Air Force Wants to Decrease Manning for Its UAVs
Military.com, Feb. 24 | Oriana Pawlyk
The Air Force wants to operate its fleet of unmanned aerial vehicles more efficiently, and is looking for ways to reduce the number of airmen needed to manage them while still getting better intelligence collection.

ASIA/PACIFIC

9. High-level North Korean delegates arrive in the South
Agence France-Presse, Feb. 25 | Jung Hawon
A blacklisted North Korean general arrived in the South on Sunday for the Winter Olympics closing ceremony, which will also be attended by US President Donald Trump's daughter Ivanka.

10. North Korean media says nuke arsenal only aimed at U.S.
Yonhap News Agency (South Korea), Feb. 24 | Not Attributed
North Korea's state run media said Saturday that the country's nuclear arsenal is only aimed at the United States and suggestions that it will be used to reunify the Korean Peninsula by force are a ploy to disrupt efforts to improve cross-border relations.

11. China says new U.S. sanctions threaten cooperation over North Korea
Reuters, Feb. 24 | Ben Blanchard
China reacted with anger on Saturday to new U.S. sanctions aimed at increasing pressure on nuclear-equipped North Korea, saying the unilateral targeting of Chinese firms and people risked harming cooperation on the problem.

12. US seeks UN ban on 33 ships, 27 firms over North Korea smuggling
Agence France-Presse, Feb. 24 | Carole Landry
The United States is seeking to have the United Nations ban 33 vessels from ports worldwide and blacklist 27 shipping businesses for helping North Korea circumvent sanctions.

13. Pyongyang's U.S. prisoners
Washington Post, Feb. 25, Pg. A18 | Anna Fifield
As the Winter Olympics wrap up in PyeongChang this weekend with another North Korean delegation headed to the Closing Ceremonies, South Korea will be feeling as though it's made some progress with its errant neighbor. The United States, too, appears to have become slightly more amenable to talks with Kim Jong Un's regime.

14. Australian Navy could help 'tighten the vice' on North Korea, says PM
Australian Financial Review Online, Feb. 25 | Phillip Coorey
Malcolm Turnbull has flagged an increased military contribution to regional stability as he pledged Australia would co-operate with a US-led push to tighten sanctions on North Korea that involves the interception of ships.

15. 'Reticent' Wei Set To Be Defence Minister
South China Morning Post (Hong Kong), Feb. 25, Pg. 3 | Minnie Chan
A “reticent” general who was instrumental in the break-up of the strategic missile force he headed - even though it was not in his interests - is expected to become China's new defence minister, sources said, after being named as one of the members of the Communist Party's powerful Central Military Commission (CMC) on October 25, 2017.

IRAQ/SYRIA

16. Regime strikes in Syria enclave despite ceasefire call – monitor
Agence France-Presse, Feb. 25 | Not Attributed
Syria's regime carried out new air strikes Sunday on the rebel enclave of Eastern Ghouta, a monitor said, despite a UN Security Council demand for a ceasefire "without delay".

17. Women Are Free, and Armed, in Syria’s Kurdish-Controlled North
New York Times, Feb. 25, Pg. A10 | Rod Nordland
Radwan, a 30-year-old Arab man, came with four male witnesses and a grievance with an ex-wife to a place called the Women’s House here in Manbij, in northern Syria.

18. Iraq's ethnic, religious groups fragmented as elections near
Associated Press, Feb. 25 | Qassim Abdul-Zahra and Sinan Salaheddin
Long beset by toxic divisions, Iraq seems to be growing even more fragmented ahead of national elections scheduled for May, with Iranian influence set to grow and the minority Sunnis seething as they fend for themselves in areas of the country shattered by the three-year war against the Islamic State group.

MIDEAST

19. Massive joint IAF-USEUCOM exercise to begin March
Yedioth Ahronoth Online (Israel), Feb. 24 | Yoav Zitun
More than 2,500 American soldiers and officers from United States European Command (USEUCOM) have recently arrived to Israel to participate in Juniper Cobra, a joint exercise with the Israel Air Force to commence March 4 in southern Israel and last for two weeks.

20. Trump’s nuclear drama in the Saudi desert
Washington Post, Feb. 25, Pg. G5 | Steven Mufson
Next month, Saudi Arabia will announce the finalists of a sweepstakes. The prize? Multibillion-dollar contracts to build a pair of nuclear power reactors in desolate stretches of desert along the Persian Gulf.

21. At least 14 dead in attack on Yemen counter-terrorism base
Reuters, Feb. 24 | Mohammed Mukhashaf
At least 14 people were killed and 40 wounded when Islamist car suicide bombers and gunmen tried to storm the headquarters of a counter-terrorism unit in the southern port city of Aden on Saturday, security and medical sources said.

EUROPE

22. Fear of Russian aggression driving US military sales to Europeans
CNN.com, Feb. 24 | Ryan Browne
Concerns about Russian aggression is driving billions of dollars in US arms sales to European nations. The weapons deliveries are also part of the Trump administration's wider efforts to confront Russia in the region.

23. RAF jets spy on Russian missiles
Sunday Times (UK), Feb. 25, Pg. 18 | Mark Hookham and Tim Ripley
RAF spy planes have been monitoring the deployment of nuclear-capable ballistic missiles in Kaliningrad.

24. EU and Russia vie for influence in volatile Balkans region
Associated Press, Feb. 24 | Dusan Stojanovic
For years, Russia has worked to gain influence in Southeast Europe, using Serbia as a foothold to establish a

friendly pocket on a hostile continent.

25. In Russia, Bringing Home the Children Raised by ISIS
New York Times, Feb. 25, Pg. A6 | Andrew E. Kramer
Every day, Belant Zulgayeva gets a knot in her throat watching her grandchildren play their violent games, what she calls their “little war.” They talk very little, but they run around, hide and, occasionally, slam one another to the ground with a disturbing ferocity.

AFRICA

26. Death toll from Somalia blasts rises to 45 – government official
Reuters, Feb. 24 | Abdi Sheikh and Feisal Omar
The death toll from twin car bomb blasts in the Somali capital late on Friday has risen to 45 from the initially reported 18, a senior government official said on Saturday.

27. South Sudan military officers may have committed war crimes – U.N.
Reuters, Feb. 24 | Not Attributed
U.N. investigators said on Friday they had identified more than 40 South Sudanese military officers who may be responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

NOTABLE COMMENTARY

28. Iran Among the Ruins
Foreign Affairs Online, March/April 2018 | Vali Nasr
Over the last seven years, social upheavals and civil wars have torn apart the political order that had defined the Middle East ever since World War I. Once solid autocracies have fallen by the wayside, their state institutions battered and broken, and their national borders compromised. Syria and Yemen have descended into bloody civil wars worsened by foreign military interventions. A terrorist group, the Islamic State (also known as ISIS), seized vast areas of Iraq and Syria before being pushed back by an international coalition led by the United States.

29. Israel's Coming War With Hezbollah
Foreign Affairs Online (Snapshot), Feb. 21 | Mara Karlin
Another war between Israel and Hezbollah is almost inevitable. Although neither side wants a conflict now, the shifting balance of power in the Levant and shrinking areas of contestation are indicators of a looming showdown. The real questions are how and where—not if—the impending conflagration will occur.

30. America Washes Its Hands of Syrian Civilians
The Atlantic Online, Feb. 24 | Krishnadev Calamur
The Security Council approved Saturday a resolution calling for a 30-day ceasefire in Syria “without delay.” But there are few signs that a truce will hold; fewer indications that Russia, which supports the regime of President Bashar al-Assad, will persuade him to stop the atrocities in Eastern Ghouta; and scant public signaling that the U.S. will do more for Syrian civilians than blame Moscow for the carnage.

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TWEETS OF NOTE
Twitter, Feb. 24

CLASSIFICATION: UNCLASSIFIED

From: OSD Pentagon PA Mailbox Media Analysis
Subject: Morning News of Note 27 Feb 2018
Date: Tuesday, February 27, 2018 5:00:59
Attachments: Morning News of Note 27 Feb 2018.pdf

OVERVIEW

A Pentagon spokesperson told reporters that senior American and South Korean defense officials are hashing out details on the latest iteration of an annual, large-scale military exercise on the peninsula, despite North Korean warnings to cease such operations in the wake of the recent Olympic Games. Separately, the U.S. State Department's special representative for North Korea policy, Joseph Yun, plans to retire on Friday, just as signs are emerging that Pyongyang may be willing to talk with Washington, according to Reuters. Also of note, Russia said that it had ordered a daily five-hour truce for eastern Ghouta, even as a more extensive cease-fire approved by the U.N. Security Council this weekend has failed to quiet Syria's warring parties.

TWEETS OF NOTE

U.S. Ambassador to NATO Kay Bailey Hutchison wrote: "Proud to have joined my fellow #NATO Ambassadors from [Germany, Italy, and Turkey] as framework nations in Afghanistan. We were encouraged by progress made in building the capacity & capabilities of [Afghan] security forces and expressed our continued support for @ResoluteSupport." On the Middle East, Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-SC) said: "President Trump has done a good job against ISIL but there is no coherent strategy when it comes to pushing back the drivers of the Syrian war -- Iran and Russia. The time to deal with the increasing Iranian menace in Syria is running out, particularly for Israel." And the Estonian Defense Ministry tweeted: "[Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Defense] Vseviov talked to USAF @AirWarCollege students today about the wide consensus in #Estonian society about the importance of defense and security based on lessons from history."

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Table of Contents

TOP STORIES

1. U.S., South Korea to hold post-Olympics military drills
Washington Times Online, Feb. 26 | Carlo Muñoz
Senior defense brass in Washington and Seoul are hashing out details on the latest iteration of an annual, large-scale military exercise on the peninsula, despite North Korean warnings to cease such operations in the wake of the recent Olympic Games.

2. Senior U.S. diplomat for North Korea to retire
Reuters, Feb. 27 | Josh Smith and David Brunnstrom
The U.S. State Department's special representative for North Korea policy, Joseph Yun, plans to retire on Friday, just as signs are emerging that Pyongyang may be willing to talk with Washington.

3. Putin orders a daily 'humanitarian pause' in Syria fight
Washington Post, Feb. 27, Pg. A9 | Erin Cunningham
Russia said Monday that it had ordered a daily five-hour truce for a rebel-held enclave outside Damascus, even as a more extensive cease-fire approved by the U.N. Security Council this weekend has failed to quiet Syria's warring parties.

DEFENSE DEPARTMENT

4. Pentagon spokesman: Planning for parade requested by Trump still in early stages
Stars and Stripes Online, Feb. 26 | Stephen Carlson
A top Pentagon spokesman said Monday that he did not know which generals support the military parade requested

by President Donald Trump and that planning for the event is still in the early stages.

5. Pentagon: No orders to review arming of troops in the workplace
Washington Examiner Online, Feb. 26 | Jamie McIntyre
The Pentagon said Monday it has not received any order to review its policy on allowing military personnel to be armed while on bases or other facilities, after President Trump indicated he wants to change current procedures.

6. First transgender recruit signs up to join US military
CNN.com, Feb. 26 | Ryan Browne
The Pentagon confirmed Monday that the first transgender person has signed a contract to join the US military, a development made possible after a federal judge ruled that the military must accept transgender recruits. The ruling came after President Donald Trump announced his desire to prevent transgender people from serving in a July tweet.

7. Pentagon: Russian Military Policy 'Actively Considers' Limited Use of Nukes
Washington Free Beacon Online, Feb. 26 | Natalie Johnson
The Trump administration's new nuclear policy aims to counter an evolving Russian military strategy that appears to more readily envisage the limited use of nuclear weapons, a senior defense official said Monday. "We have been extremely concerned with what we have seen as the evolution of Russian military policy as it relates to potential use of nuclear weapons," David Trachtenberg, the deputy undersecretary of defense for policy, said at the Heritage Foundation on Monday.

8. U.S. defense-industrial base study team on target to make recommendations, DoD official says
Defense News Online, Feb. 26 | Joe Gould
U.S. President Donald Trump and Congress are on track to receive recommendations aimed at strengthening the health of the defense-industrial base, a top Pentagon industrial base policy official said Monday.

9. Sept. 11 trial judge orders Secretary of Defense to explain firing of war court overseer
Miami Herald, Feb. 27, Pg. A9 | Carol Rosenberg
The judge in the Sept. 11 terror case said in court Monday that he would order Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis to explain in writing why he suddenly fired the top official overseeing the war court.

10. This Tri-City doctor gives away what he makes. Defense Secretary Mattis thought that deserved a medal
Tri-City Herald Online (Kennewick, WA), Feb. 26 | Wendy Culverwell
Secretary of Defense James Mattis brought a welcome spotlight to one of Washington's most unusual manufacturers Monday when he presented Dr. Lewis Zirkle with the department's Medal for Distinguished Public Service.

ARMY

11. U.S. Army's war-gaming is under-resourced, three-star says
Defense News Online, Feb. 26 | Jen Judson
The U.S. Army will likely rely heavily on experimenting with concepts in order to better define future weapons systems requirements for a force that will be expected to operate across multiple domains against peer adversaries.

LEGISLATIVE

12. Elijah Cummings wants to subpoena the Pentagon for hurricane documents
Washington Examiner Online, Feb. 26 | Travis J. Tritten
The top Democrat on the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee said Monday he had run out of patience with the Defense Department and wants to subpoena it for documents on hurricane relief operations in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands last year.

13. Wicker, McCain Introduce Surface Navy Reform Bill
U.S. Naval Institute News, Feb. 26 | Sam LaGrone
Two top Senate Armed Services Committee Republicans have introduced legislation that covers a wide swath of Navy-suggested reforms for the surface forces.

ASIA/PACIFIC

14. White House writes off ‘bloody nose’
Washington Post, Feb. 27, Pg. A8 | David Nakamura and Greg Jaffe
No phrase is more closely associated with the Trump administration's North Korea strategy than "bloody nose." The two words, captured in news articles and cited by people close to the administration, have quickly become shorthand for all manner of preemptive strikes designed to demonstrate American resolve and prevent Pyongyang from developing nuclear weapons that can hit the United States.

15. Trump sees talks with North Korea only under ‘right conditions’
Associated Press, Feb. 26 | Darlene Superville
President Donald Trump on Monday responded to an overture from North Korea for talks with the U.S., saying that will happen only "under the right conditions."

16. Trump officials weigh interdiction of North Korean ships
Washington Times, Feb. 27, Pg. A1 | Guy Taylor
The White House is weighing a proposal to create a “coalition of the willing” among international navies to interdict ships suspected of violating U.N. sanctions on supplying North Korea, according to sources close to the Trump administration.

17. China Leaps to Front of a New Authoritarian Era
New York Times, Feb. 27, Pg. A1 | Steven Lee Myers
There was a time, not so long ago, when a Chinese leader setting himself up as ruler for life would have stirred international condemnation for bucking the global trend toward greater democracy. Now, such an action seems fully in keeping with moves by many countries in the other direction.

MIDEAST

18. Saudi military leaders replaced amid stalemated war in Yemen
Associated Press, Feb. 27 | Jon Gambrell
Saudi Arabia replaced its military chief of staff and other defense officials early on Tuesday morning in a shake-up apparently aimed at overhauling its Defense Ministry during the stalemated and ruinous war in Yemen.

19. Success of US-funded Israeli missile defense system sparks interest in use inside America
Al-Monitor, Feb. 26 | Jack Detsch
The growing nuclear threat from North Korea has rekindled American interest in looking for backup missile defense options, but several obstacles hinder the adoption of Israel’s US-funded, battle-tested system by the Pentagon.

20. Europeans Move To Save Iran Deal
New York Times, Feb. 27, Pg. A1 | Mark Landler, David E. Sanger and Gardiner Harris
President Trump’s threat to rip up the Iran nuclear deal has touched off an urgent scramble in European capitals to preserve the agreement — not by rewriting it, but by creating a successor deal intended to halt Iran’s ballistic missile program and make permanent the restrictions on its ability to produce nuclear fuel.

21. Russia Vetoes U.N. Measure Against Iran
New York Times, Feb. 27, Pg. A5 | Rick Gladstone
Russia blocked a resolution at the United Nations Security Council on Monday that would have pressured Iran over the illegal use of Iranian-made missiles by Houthi insurgents in Yemen. The Russian veto drew angry rebukes from the United States and its allies.

IRAQ/SYRIA

22. Russia Says It Isn’t Ready to Implement Syria Truce
Wall Street Journal, Feb. 27, Pg. A9 | Laurence Norman and Thomas Grove
Russia said it wasn't prepared to implement a cease-fire in Syria endorsed by the U.N. Security Council, even as European and U.S. officials demanded an immediate end to the fighting.

23. Turkey gains control of border strip inside Syria’s Afrin, sends special forces

Reuters, Feb. 26 | Tuvan Gumrukcu and Ellen Francis
The Turkish army on Monday took control of the outer edge of Syria's Afrin region, state media said, as Ankara said it was readying for a "new battle" by deploying police special forces.

AFGHANISTAN/PAKISTAN

24. Taliban wages fierce fight in remote western Afghanistan
Washington Post, Feb. 27, Pg. A7 | Sharif Hassan
A convoy of armored vehicles moved toward this mud-walled village in Farah province, gunners firing nonstop. From a nearby command post, an Afghan army colonel trained his binoculars and called out enemy positions. Outside, soldiers and police officers milled impatiently in ankle-deep dust, waiting for orders to move in. Taliban fighters had captured a village police post several weeks before. Now, about 250 Afghan soldiers and police were here to take it back.

25. Afghan Taliban renew call for dialogue with U.S. to end war
Reuters, Feb. 26 | James Mackenzie
The Taliban urged the United States on Monday to begin talks to end almost 17 years of war in Afghanistan, adding to a series of signals that suggest a greater willingness to explore options for dialogue.

EUROPE

26. State Department touts counter-propaganda funds without mentioning Russia
CNN.com, Feb. 26 | Nicole Gaouette
The State Department will get $40 million in new funding to fight disinformation from foreign countries, the agency said Monday in a long-awaited announcement that avoided mentioning Russia by name.

AFRICA

27. Veteran commander vies for power in Libya’s shifting sands
Reuters, Feb. 26 | Aidan Lewis
When Khalifa Haftar flew to Tunis in September, the veteran commander and possible future leader of Libya brought masked troops armed with automatic rifles and grenade launchers in a show of force that drew censure from U.N. experts.

28. US focusing on Mali in hunt for Niger ambush attackers
CNN.com, Feb. 26 | Barbara Starr
US military and intelligence officials believe that the ISIS fighters that ambushed and killed four US troops in Niger last October fled back across the border into Mali and have remained there since, according to an administration official directly familiar with the latest assessment.

NOTABLE COMMENTARY

29. Mr. Xi, dictator for life
Washington Post, Feb. 27, Pg. A14 | Editorial
When Xi Jinping became China's president five years ago, there was reason for hope that Communist Party rule was gradually moving toward pluralism and the rule of law. Some criticism of government policies was permitted in the press and social media; scores of independent lawyers advocated for justice in the courts. A report titled "China 2030," written by government experts in cooperation with the World Bank and issued months before Mr. Xi took power, concluded that "the government will need to transform itself into a lean, clean, transparent and highly efficient modern government that operates under the rule of law."

30. It’s time to get out of Afghanistan
Washington Post, Feb. 27, Pg. A15 | Richard Cohen
In 2010, diplomat Richard Holbrooke wrote a secret memo to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton regarding the war in Afghanistan. The title was "How Does This Thing End?: In Search of a Policy." Holbrooke died later that year, Clinton was gone by 2013 and the Trump team has now taken over - mostly pursuing a strategy that had already failed over and over again. The war is in its 16th year and still no one can answer Holbrooke's question except to say

that it seems the policy is merely to avoid defeat - hardly a cause worth dying for.

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TWEETS OF NOTE
Twitter, Feb. 26

From:	(b) (6) on behalf of Hicks, Gregory CAPT CHINFO, OI-00
To:	Spencer, Richard V HON SECNAV; Richardson, John M ADM CNO
Cc:	Modly, Thomas HON Under Secretary of the Navy; Moran, William F ADM, OPNAV, VCNO; Giordano, Steven S MCPON OPNAV, N00D
Subject:	PA END OF DAY 16 FEB 18
Date:	Friday, February 16, 2018 17:32:18
Attachments:	Defense.gov 16 FEB 18_Navy awarded contracts for Guided Missile Frigate.....docx VA Pilot Online 16 FEB 18_A transgender Navy sailor"s 7-year odyssey.pdf CHINFO Weekly Media Analysis 9-15FEB18.pdf

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Mr. Secretary and CNO,

C7F/USS CONSTITUTION -- Vice Adm. Sawyer will speak at the USS Constitution Museum in Boston TUESDAY as part of a leadership speaker series for the 203rd commemoration of the USS Constitution's victory over HMS Levant and HMS Cyane.

FFG(X) -- The conceptual design award for the FFG(X) was released TODAY. The announcement (attached) posted to Defense.gov. Link to release:
https://www.defense.gov/News/Contracts/Contract-View/Article/1444724/

STENNIS HOMEPORT SHIFT -- Kitsap Sun (WA) reporter queried Naval Air Forces based on recently released budget documents and USS John C. Stennis' mid-life refueling overhaul and homeport shift to Norfolk in 2021. As the OCR has not been approved, a response noting the review and a decision on the timing of USS John C. Stennis' RCOH has yet to be finalized and when approved, an announcement will be made.

SWO CAREER PATH -- Defense News (Larter) is expected to publish TODAY an article on SWO career path, focusing on having more time at sea. The article will be based off VADM Brown's remarks at CSIS discussing a single longer tour or two division officer tours on ships and an increase to the number of second-tour department heads on ships.

NO TURNING BACK -- Virginian-Pilot (Mabeus) posted the first of a three-part feature story (attached) on a Hampton Roads transgender Sailor TODAY. The feature includes written stories and an associated video documentary; all posted online over the next week. Link to story:
https://pilotonline.com/news/military/local/article_7208dd8e-1346-5a22-ab73-8bd255856c7c html

WEEKLY MEDIA ANALYSIS -- Attached is the weekly media analysis from 9 FEB to 15 FEB, 8,484 articles mentioned the U.S. Navy, which represents a 35 percent decrease in total coverage compared to the previous three weeks. Coverage of DON's FY19 budget submission (5 percent) highlighted PB19's investment in growing capacity and increasing lethality. Coverage of tensions with China and North Korea represented 11 percent of coverage and demonstrated the importance of presence in the region. FTZ/MCCAIN collision coverage represented less than one percent and focused on CDR Sanchez being found guilty of dereliction of duty. However, while coverage focused specifically on the collisions was limited, several other storylines mentioned the incidents, including stories on the Harris and Aquilino nominations and a drug investigation of Japan-based Sailors, which presented the collisions as examples of past failures by the Navy and/or senior leaders. Coverage of VADM Aquilino's nomination as PACFLT Commander represented two percent of coverage, and reporting on an investigation of possible drug use by Japan-based Sailors represented one percent. Other topics included the modernization of USS Philippine Sea (1 percent) and comments made by an ex-Navy SEAL criticizing Trump's plan to have a military parade (4 percent).

MEDIA SNAPSHOT ON DOD POLICY CHANGE --As of 1000 16 FEB, eleven (11) articles reported on the new DoD personnel policy change which was discussed during the 14 FEB SASC-Personnel hearing. Six (6) defense trade outlets (e.g. USNI, Navy Times), three (3) national outlets (ABC, Fox, Federal News Radio), one (1) local outlet (Action News Jax), and one (1) international outlet (Daily Mail) reported. Coverage was predominately balanced/neutral, focusing on the issue of non-deployable forces within DoD at-large, and asserting that this new personnel policy change is in alignment with Secretary Mattis's directive to enhance readiness and "ensure our military is ready to fight today and in future." Of the three (3) articles that mentioned the Navy, two were neutral in sentiment. However, criticism of the Navy was present in one (1) article (Action News Jax) which quoted a

wounded Navy veteran who disagrees with the "cutthroat" memo and believes "the military should do better. The people that fight wars for them, they should treat them better, not make them feel used because of an injury."

NAVY WEEK -- San Antonio Navy Week begins MONDAY and continues through SUNDAY, 25 FEB. Participants include Vice Adm. McCollum (CNR), Rear Adm. Bolivar (CNRSE), Navy Band Southeast, NRD San Antonio, NOSC San Antonio, BUMED Navy Medicine Ambassadors from NMETC, Navy History and Heritage Command, Navy Ceremonial Guard Drill Team, USS San Antonio (LPD 17) and USS Constitution Sailors, EODGRU1 divers and EOD technicians, Navy Office of Small Business Programs, USNA Office of Admissions, Navy Meteorology and Oceanography Command scientists and Sailors and CNRC's Nimitz STEM property.

MEDIA OUTREACH -- Highlights from the American Connections Media Outreach Program:
+ Kinston Native Serves Aboard One of Navy's Most Versatile Combat Ships The Kinston Free Press, Kinston, N.C.
http://www.kinston.com/news/20180213/kinston-native-serves-aboard-one-of-navys-most-versatile-combat-ships
+ Ogdensburg's Drew Larock proudly serving on Navy guided-missile destroyer The Journal, Ogdensburg, N.Y.
http://www.ogd.com/ogd/ogdensburgs-drew-larock-proudly-serving-on-navy-guided-missile-destroyer-20180213
+ Two Prescott Sailors Doing Great Work in the Navy KAFF News, serving Flagstaff, Prescott, Prescott Valley, Sedona, Williams and Cottonwood, Ariz.
https://gcmaz.com/two-prescott-valley-sailors-doing-great-work-in-the-navy/

Vr,
Greg

CAPT Greg Hicks
Acting Chief of Information
Navy Office of Information
Navy Pentagon- 4B463
(b) (6)

OSD WEEK AHEAD

Saturday, Feb. 17
-- SD travel (Munich to JB Andrews)

Monday, Feb. 19
-- Washington's Birthday (aka President's Day) Federal Holiday

Tuesday, Feb. 20
-- Resolute Support update brief w/Army MG Linder, NSOCC-A, via Skype/DVIDs, PBR - 11 a.m.

Wednesday, Feb. 21
-- SD travel (CONUS)
-- DSD travel (CONUS through 22 Feb)
-- DASD(SE) Baldwin hosts and Chief of Engineers Army LTG Semonite speaks at the 13th annual Engineers Week celebration, @ PLCC - 1 p m.
-- SECAF Wilson, CSAF Gen. Goldfein, VCSAF Wilson, and CMSAF Wright conduct media roundtables @ AFA Air Warfare Symposium, Orlando, FL

Thursday, Feb. 22
-- Navy PEO for submarines RADM Jabaley speaks @ Navy League breakfast, Ritz-Carlton Pentagon City, Arlington, VA - 8 a.m.
-- SECAF Wilson, other DoD officials speak @ AFA Air Warfare Symposium, Orlando, FL - 8:10 a m.
-- Chief Pentagon Spokesperson White press briefing, PBR - 12 p.m.

Friday, Feb. 23
-- CSAF Goldfein, other DoD officials speak @ AFA Air Warfare Symposium, Orlando, FL - 8:20 a.m.

-- MG David Glaser, Provost Marshal General and CG of U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Command, speaks @ grand opening for the Biometrics Technology Center, Clarksburg, WV - 9 a m.

-- NORAD/NORTHCOM Gen. Robinson speaks @ Ottawa Conference on Security and Defence - 4 p m.

From: Moran, William F ADM, OPNAV, VCNO
To: Frank Thorp
Cc: (b) (6) OPNAV, VCNO
Subject: RE: Parade
Date: Saturday, February 24, 2018 20:48:00
Importance: High

Good idea Frank, let me give this some thought and also see what kind of direction we get from OSD. Also, looking at some date options for a Bridge Wing Chat. Cheers, Bill

-----Original Message-----
From: (b) (6)
Sent: Saturday, February 24, 2018 1:23 PM
To: Moran, William F ADM, OPNAV, VCNO
Subject: [Non-DoD Source] Parade

Bill,

If there's a parade on Veterans Day, let's fill the Navy Memorial plaza with Navy stuff! CRUITCOM? Static Displays? Etc.! We have great relations with the local Park Service and can work it! If you would like to pursue, please tell me who to work with.

Frank

Frank Thorp IV

Rear Admiral, USN (retired)

President & CEO

US Navy Memorial

701 Pennsylvania Ave., NW

Washington, DC 20004-2608

(b) (6)

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(b) (6)

The Navy Memorial mission is to honor, recognize and celebrate the men and women of the sea services and the important contributions made by them while serving in the United States Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard and Merchant Marine. The Navy Memorial serves to educate and inspire the American people about the vital role that the Sea Services play in our national security and the rich maritime history of the United States.