

U.S. steps up in Somalia as al-Shabab proves a stubborn foe

MOGADISHU, Somalia (AP) — With frequent suicide bombings and assaults on Somalia's hotels and military targets, the Islamic extremist group al-Shabab has proved more resilient than expected, leading President Donald Trump's administration to pursue wider military involvement here as current strategies, including drone attacks, are not enough, security experts say.

Senior U.S. officials have said the Pentagon wants to expand the military's efforts to battle the al-Qaida-linked group. Recommendations sent to the White House would allow U.S. special forces to increase assistance to the Somali National Army and give the U.S. military greater flexibility to launch more pre-emptive airstrikes.

The U.S. is likely to find counterterrorism efforts in Somalia difficult and expensive, analysts say — especially with the recent emergence of fighters pledging allegiance to the Islamic State group.

"The concern in Washington has been mounting for some time now. The Trump administration is simply reit-



In this Feb. 2016 file photo, a Somali government soldier walks near destroyed buildings, after a suicide car bomb in Mogadishu, Somalia.

erating what has been policy, with slight variations," said Rashid Abdi, a Horn of Africa analyst with the International Crisis Group. "U.S. special forces are already on the ground. Drone attacks have been scaled up."

Currently about 50 U.S. commandos rotate in and out of this Horn of Africa nation to advise and assist local troops. The commandos have accompanied Somali forces in several raids against al-Shabab fighters in which dozens of militants were killed, according to

Somali intelligence officials, who insisted on anonymity because they were not authorized to speak to the press.

Somalia, which has been without an effective central government since the fall of dictator Siad Barre in 1991, was one of the seven predominantly Muslim countries included in Trump's recent travel ban. That executive order has since been suspended by federal courts.

Al-Shabab emerged amid Somalia's years of chaos. A regional military effort several years ago pushed

the extremist group from the capital, Mogadishu, and most other urban centers. But experts say that push against al-Shabab then weakened, allowing it to regroup and adapt to operating in the country's vast rural areas. It recently stepped up attacks in the capital and elsewhere.

The U.S. already has military bases in Somalia, although it has not publicly acknowledged them. They are often used for drone attacks against al-Shabab targets. One of the largest bases is at Baledogle airfield, a former Somali air force base in Lower Shabelle region where U.S. military experts also train Somali officials.

In the past year the U.S. launched 14 airstrikes — nearly all drone strikes — killing some top al-Shabab leaders, including Hassan Ali Dhore and Abdullahi Haji Daud, according to a Somali intelligence official who coordinated with the U.S. on some of them.

The attacks have helped combat al-Shabab but have not brought the group to its knees, the official said.



North Korean Ri Jong Chol, center, who was arrested in connection with the death of Kim Jong Un's half-brother, is transferred from Sepang district police station in Sepang, Malaysia Friday.

Deported Korean says Malaysia threatened to harm his family

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia (AP) — A North Korean chemist deported from Malaysia accused police of threatening to kill his family unless he confessed to the assassination of North Korea's leader, calling it a plot to tarnish his country's honor.

Ri Jong Chol spoke to reporters in Beijing early Saturday while on his way to Pyongyang. Malaysian authorities have said there's insufficient evidence to charge Ri over Kim Jong Nam's killing at Kuala Lumpur's airport on Feb. 13.

Ri was detained four days after the attack but police never said what they believed his role was. Two women — one Indonesian, one Vietnamese — have been charged with murder after police said they smeared Kim's face with VX, a banned nerve agent considered a weapon of mass destruction.

Ri said he wasn't at the airport the day Kim was killed but that police accused him of being a mastermind and presented him with "fake evidence." He said they showed him a picture of his wife and two children, who were staying with him in Kuala

Lumpur, and threatened to kill them.

"These men kept telling me to admit to the crime, and if not, my whole family would be killed, and you too won't be safe. If you accept everything, you can live a good life in Malaysia," Ri said. "This is when I realized that it was a trap ... they were plotting to tarnish my country's reputation."

Police did not immediately respond to a request for comment Saturday.

Immigration Director-General Mustafar Ali said Friday that Ri has been blacklisted from re-entering Malaysia.

Malaysia is looking for seven other North Korean suspects, four of whom are believed to have left the country on the day of the killing. Three others, including an official at the North Korean Embassy and an employee of Air Koryo, North Korea's national carrier, are believed to still be in Malaysia.

Police on Friday issued an arrest warrant for the Air Koryo employee, Kim Uk Il, but didn't say why he is a suspect. Police say he arrived in Malaysia on Jan. 29, about two weeks before Kim was killed.

Thousands flee Mosul overnight, as fighting rages on

MOSUL, Iraq (AP) — Thousands of civilians fled Mosul overnight as Iraqi forces advanced north of a sprawling military base near the city's airport on Friday.

Iraq's special forces pushed into the Wadi Hajar district in western Mosul and retook the area from the Islamic State group Friday, according to Brig. Gen. Yahya Rasool, spokesman of the Joint Military Operations.

Special forces Brig. Gen. Haider al-Obeidi said clearing operations were ongoing in the area and his forces were close to linking up with the militarized federal police forces who were pushing up along the western bank of the Tigris river.

Iraqi forces, including special operations forces and federal police units, launched an attack on the western part of Mosul nearly two weeks ago to dislodge IS. Since the offensive began, more than



Iraqi federal police forces man a position on a roof of a house in the edge of Mosul's Mamun neighborhood on Friday.

28,000 people have been displaced by the fighting, according to the United Nations.

Nahla Ahmed, 50 fled Mosul late Thursday night, walking more than five kilometers (three miles) from her home in the Shuhada neighborhood.

"All the families were hiding behind a wall," she said, explaining how they escaped an IS-held part of the city. "We gave the children valium so they wouldn't cry and (the IS fighters) wouldn't catch us."

Ahmed, like most of the civilians who have escaped

Mosul in the past week, fled through Mamun neighborhood. The district is partially controlled by Iraq's special forces.

Maj. Saif Ali, who is stationed in Mamun, said huge crowds of civilians began pouring into the area from neighboring districts just after midnight. Ali said civilians in western Mosul are becoming increasingly desperate as food and water supplies begin to run out.

"In total 7,000 people fled through this area last night," he said. "We were up all night trying to control the crowds."

U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric said Friday "the latest figures we have of people recorded leaving western Mosul is 28,400 and that's since operations in west Mosul started on Feb. 19. However we're also tracking down reports thousands more people are on the move."

BRIEFLY

Pentagon: More than 30 airstrikes in Yemen since Thursday

WASHINGTON (AP) — As part of a sustained assault on the extremist group known as al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula, U.S. warplanes have launched more than 30 airstrikes in Yemen the past two days, a Pentagon spokesman said Friday.

Navy Capt. Jeff Davis told reporters that U.S. airstrikes have targeted members of the group as well as their facilities, equipment, fighting positions and heavy weapons such as artillery. Davis said strikes numbering in the "mid-20s" had been launched on Thursday, followed by several more Friday, putting the combined total at more than 30.

Without specifying plans, Davis said the U.S.

is undertaking a sustained campaign in areas of Yemen where AQAP is most active. He said no U.S. ground troops have been involved in, or even in the vicinity of, firefights there since a late-January special operations raid that resulted in the death of a Navy SEAL, Senior Chief William "Ryan" Owens.

"U.S. forces will continue to target AQAP militants and facilities in order to disrupt the terrorist organization's plots, and ultimately to protect American lives," Davis said, adding that the group is at least as worrying as the Islamic State group that the U.S. has been attacking with daily airstrikes in Iraq and Syria for more than two years.

"AQAP is the organization that has more American blood on its hands," Davis said. "It is a deadly terrorist organization that has proven itself to be

very effective in targeting and killing Americans, and they have intent and aspirations to continue doing so. We are working to stop them from that."

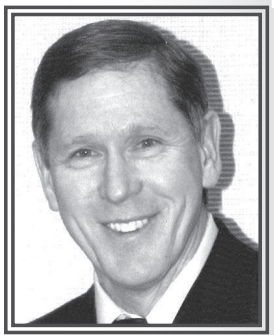
European Parliament pushes for reimposition of visas for U.S.

BRUSSELS (AP) — The European Parliament is pushing for the bloc's executive to temporarily reimpose visa requirements for U.S. citizens visiting the European Union in a standoff over Washington's failure to grant visa-free travel for nationals of five EU countries.

The legislature on Thursday urged the European Commission to act within two months. The Commission was legally bound to propose by last April that visas be reintroduced for U.S. citizens for 12 months but the 28-nation bloc's member countries preferred to take no action.

U.S. citizens can travel to all EU countries without visas but the U.S. hasn't granted visa-free travel to citizens of Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Poland and Romania. The Commission has cautioned that suspending the visa waiver for Americans would also hurt trade, tourism and the European economy.

The family of Dr. Hibbert would like to express their gratitude to the Pendleton community for the privilege of serving you the last 34 years. We received many letters of sympathy after his sudden passing.



We want to give a special thanks to the following dentists who gave generously of their time over the last few months: Dr. Loc Vuu, Dr. Blair Smith, Dr. Robert Pratt, Dr. Edward Dolan, and Dr. Nate Bushman. Their kindness allowed us to continue serving our loyal patients.

Sincerely,

Debbie Hibbert, Jennifer Hibbert, Carley Hibbert, Eli Hibbert, Lori Howard, and Eric Hibbert

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NEWS - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 2017

The Oregon State Weed Board awarded Umatilla County Weed Department \$9643.00 to treat tansy ragwort within Umatilla County

For More Information:
Umatilla County Weed Department
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Salem - The Oregon State Weed Board (OSWB) awarded \$9643.00 to Umatilla County Weed Department (UCWD) for tansy ragwort control at their February 9 and 10, 2017, board meeting in Salem.

The award was one of 50 grants totaling \$1.24 million provided to local organizations statewide to fund projects that restore, protect fish and wildlife habitat, watershed function, water quality and overall watershed health from invasive noxious weed impacts.

Umatilla County has two known sites of tansy ragwort located in Umatilla County: One on Saddle Mountain above Milton-Freewater and the other on Bear Creek above Pilot Rock. "Tansy ragwort is toxic to cattle and these two sites are used primarily for grazing. Our goal is to reduce the seed bank, eradicate, and control the spread of tansy ragwort throughout the county" says Teddy Orr, UCWD Supervisor.

The 2017 UCWD Tansy Grant will treat 90 gross acres of Tansy; 60 acres in the Saddle Mountain area above Milton-Freewater, and 30 acres in Bear Creek Drainage. The Weed Department will continue survey 2500 gross acres between two sites and surrounding areas. Support the landowners with education, identification, and control of tansy ragwort. It is expected to begin June 1st and be completed by September 15th. If you believe you have tansy ragwort on your property you are encouraged to contact the UCWD for identification and control options.

OSWB grants are funded through partnership with OWEB from Oregon Lottery funds.

Since 1999, the Oregon Lottery has provided over \$500 million to OWEB's grant program that helps restore, maintain and enhance Oregon's watersheds. Combined, the Lottery has earned over \$9 billion for watershed enhancements, public education, state parks and economic development. For more information about the Oregon Lottery visit www.oregonlottery.org

For additional information about this project contact Teddy Orr by email at theodore.orr@umatillacounty.net. For additional information about OSWB Noxious Weed Grant Program, contact Tristen Berg at tberg@oda.state.or.us.