

Nuclear Market Seeks IS Extremists

CHISINAU, Moldova (AP) — Over the pulsating beat at an exclusive nightclub, the arms smuggler made his pitch to a client: 2.5 million euros for enough radioactive cesium to contaminate several city blocks.

It was earlier this year, and the two men were plotting their deal at an unlikely spot: the terrace of Cocos Prive, a dance club and sushi bar in Chisinau, the capital of Moldova.

"You can make a dirty bomb, which would be perfect for the Islamic State," the smuggler said. "If you have a connection with them, the business will go smoothly."

But the smuggler, Valentin Grossu, wasn't sure the client was for real — and he was right to worry. The client was an informant, and it took some 20 meetings to persuade Grossu that he was an authentic Islamic State representative. Eventually, the two men exchanged cash for a sample in a sting operation that landed Grossu in jail.

The previously unpublicized case is one of at least four attempts in five years in which criminal networks with suspected Russian ties sought to sell radioactive material to extremists through Moldova, an investigation by *The Associated Press* has found. One investigation uncovered an attempt to sell bomb-grade uranium to a real buyer from the Middle East, the first known case of its kind.

Coast Guard Ends Search For 33 Missing

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (AP) — The Coast Guard officially ended its search Wednesday for the missing crew members from a U.S. cargo ship that sank off the Bahamas during Hurricane Joaquin.

Petty Officer Mark Barney said the search for survivors from the El Faro ended at 7 p.m.

Earlier Wednesday, the Coast Guard broke the news to grieving family members that it was abandoning the search for the 33 mariners, and investigators turned their attention to finding the vessel's data recorder 3 miles down at the bottom of the sea.

An intensive search by air and sea over tens of thousands of square miles turned up one unidentified body in a survival suit and a heavily damaged lifeboat but no sign of survivors from the 790-foot El Faro, which was last heard from nearly a week ago as it was being tossed around in rough seas.

By preparing to end its search at sunset, the Coast Guard all but confirmed family members' worst fears — that all hands were lost. On board were 28 crew members from the U.S. and five from Poland.

Clinton Opposes Pacific Trade Deal

MOUNT VERNON, Iowa (AP) — Hillary Rodham Clinton declared her opposition to the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade accord on Wednesday, marking her most significant break with President Barack Obama and the policies she once promoted as his chief diplomat.

"I think there are still a lot of unanswered questions," she said of the sweeping trade deal in an interview with PBS' "Newshour." "As of today, I am not in favor of what I have learned about it."

Her push-back against the chief economic proposal of Obama's second term is a blow to the president, undermining his efforts to win congressional approval of a deal years in the making. It also underscores the ways Clinton must break from her work in the Obama administration to appeal to a party base seeking a new liberal standard bearer.

Clinton joins the rest of the Democratic field in challenging a trade pact that's enraged the labor unions, environmentalists and other liberal constituencies whose support will be crucial to her electoral success. The now-united opposition from the party's presidential contenders leaves Obama in the uncomfortable position of watching a Democratic debate next week in which none of the major candidates are willing to defend a deal that the White House sees as a key piece of his presidential legacy.

A potential exception is Vice President Joe Biden, who has yet to say whether he will join the race. His office said Wednesday that he supports the agreement and will work to get it approved in Congress.

Syrians Chart Path To European Asylum

CRETEIL, France (AP) — Her slain husband, bombed-out Damascus home and refugee life are behind her. The recipient of a coveted asylum-seeker visa, Syrian teacher Amena Abomosa is settling into a new life in France with her family. But now what?

They are among the few amid a sea of desperate Syrians to arrive in Europe with prior approval to seek haven. British Prime Minister David Cameron and other European leaders would prefer for all refugees to come this way — applying at European embassies abroad, undergoing careful screening and entering the EU legally. Everyone else, they argue, should stay away, instead of risking perilous journeys.

Those fleeing Syria's war don't want to stay away, and demand for special asylum visas far outstrips supply.

And even those fortunate enough to have the proper paperwork and persistence to win those visas face challenges in their new European homes.

After flying to France last month from Jordan, the Abomosas were sent to a spartan transit center full of other refugees. Lacking French or English, they missed the train they were meant to take to their new home. And Abomosa, a former middle school science teacher, was unable to get medical attention for her 62-year-old mother, suffering from half-treated colon cancer.

Budget Deficit Drops To \$435 Billion

WASHINGTON (AP) — Congressional budget analysts said Wednesday that the federal government ran a deficit of \$435 billion in the just-completed budget year, the smallest deficit since 2007 and well below the record shortfalls of President Barack Obama's first term.

The Congressional Budget Office report says it's the sixth consecutive drop in a row for the deficit, when measured against the size of the economy, since the \$1.4 trillion deficit of Obama's first term.

The improved deficit figures come as Washington is grappling with the need to increase the government's borrowing cap in early November. The White House and lawmakers on Capitol Hill are also seeking a separate agreement on a budget to keep the government open past a Dec. 11 deadline.

During Obama's first term, the deficit was greater than \$1 trillion for four years in a row in the wake of the Wall Street bailout, a huge stock market drop and a major recession.

The budget office does nonpartisan analysis for Congress; the official government estimate from the White House budget office and Treasury Department typically is released in mid-October.

Iran Lobbied For Russian Campaign In Syria

BY QASSIM ABDUL-ZAHRA
Associated Press

BAGHDAD — Iran played an integral role leading up to Russia's move to launch its air campaign in Syria and play a stronger role in Iraq, with one of Tehran's most powerful generals meeting for three hours with President Vladimir Putin to push for intervention, Iraqi government officials tell *The Associated Press*.

Gen. Qassem Soleimani, head of Iran's elite Quds Force, went to Moscow in August with the message that Russian airstrikes against the Islamic State group in Syria were imperative, said the two senior officials, who were later briefed on the meeting. Soleimani and Putin reviewed maps and surveillance photos and shared intelligence, all suggesting the militant group would expand its reach to Russia's doorstep in the Caucasus if Moscow didn't act, the two officials said.

The meeting also covered plans to create a joint intelligence-sharing center between Iraq, Syria, Iran and Russia in Baghdad, which began operating later the same month. Soleimani also met with senior Russian military officials during his visit, the officials said. The two officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to talk about the secret meeting.

The Iranian role points to the powerful influence of the country, which is the strongest backer of Syrian President Bashar Assad and is close to the Shiite-led leadership in Iraq's U.S.-backed government. Russia's dive into the Mideast's conflicts marks a shifting of alliances, particularly with Iraq, where officials have grumbled that the U.S.-led coalition's air campaign against IS has not been as effective as they hoped and the prime minister has said he'd welcome Russian airstrikes.

Asked on Wednesday about the reported Putin-Soleimani meeting, Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov shrugged it off by saying that there are too many statements from unidentified officials. At the time, Russia's deputy foreign ministry spokesman said he has "no information whatsoever" that Soleimani



TASS/ZUMA PRESS/TNS

Pictured in this video screen grab is the Caspian Flotilla of the Russian Navy firing Kalibr cruise missiles against remote Islamic State targets in Syria, a thousand kilometres away, on Oct. 7. The targets include ammunition factories, fuel depots, command centres, and training camps.

visited Russia, which would be a violation of U.N. travel sanctions against the general. The Iranian government on Wednesday did not respond to requests for comment on the reported meeting.

Russian military jets launched the airstrike campaign in Syria on Sept. 30, targeting what Moscow said were positions of the Islamic State group and al-Qaida's branch. But it has also heavily hit rebels on the front-line against Syria's military, raising accusations that it is intervening to boost Assad in the civil war, now in its fifth year, after a series of losses by his military. Russia denies this, saying its campaign is solely intended to stop the spread of militants.

The U.S. meanwhile has had to navigate around regional alliances and enmi-

ties in trying to roll back IS's spread across large parts of Iraq and Syria. In Syria, Washington refuses to work with Assad's government in the air campaign, saying Assad needs to leave power, and it has been wary of appearing to help Syrian troops with strikes against IS.

In Iraq, the U.S. has been wary of helping to deepen Iran's influence and has avoided coordinating with the Shiite militias, trying instead to boost the Iraqi military, while pressing the Shiite-led government to ease sectarian tensions with the Sunni minority. Washington and Tehran refuse to work with each other directly, even as Iran takes a powerful role in fighting IS.

Soleimani, Tehran's point man in both the Syrian and Iraq conflicts, has been key in organizing Shiite militias

in Iraq and Syria, which have had a leading role in fighting IS. Meanwhile, the U.S.-trained Iraqi military crumbled in the face of the IS advances last year and has struggled to gain ground ever since. When IS took the western city of Ramadi in May, a top U.S. general complained that Iraqi forces didn't have the will to fight. U.S. airstrikes have been key in pushing back IS on several fronts in Iraq and Syria, often in coordination with the Iraqi military or Kurdish fighters on the ground.

Last month, Iran granted permission for Russian planes to fly over its territory en route to Syria, Russian news agencies said on Sept. 9. After Bulgaria rejected Moscow's overflight request for Sept. 1-24, a path via Iran and Iraq appeared to be the only one left, as Russia apparently sought to avoid flying over Turkey, which in 2012 grounded a Syria-bound plane carrying radar parts from Moscow.

Defense Secretary Ashton Carter said Russia's airstrikes in Syria in support of the Assad regime were "pouring gasoline on the fire" and called for Moscow to pursue a political solution.

In an interview with France, 24 last week, Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi said he would "welcome" military strikes by Russia in his country if Moscow made such a proposal but that hasn't happened yet.

"Our aim is to bring everybody to fight Daesh, not to fight among themselves," he said, using the Arabic acronym for the Islamic State group.

He also sharply criticized President Barack Obama, accusing him of a lack of "will" in the fight against IS. He called the U.S. support in the fight "limited" and said he had expected "massive air power."

France interviewed in New York last week where al-Abadi was speaking at the United Nations General Assembly.

Karim al-Nouri, the spokesman for the Popular Mobilization Forces, the paramilitary force in Iraq made up predominantly of Shiite militias, said the Russians are "more serious in eliminating Daesh" than the Americans.

South Carolina Still On Edge From Floods; 2 Die

BY ADAM BEAM
Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. — It could take until the weekend for the threat of flooding to ease in storm-tattered South Carolina, where a senator warned of a potential billion-dollar cleanup bill, two more people died in the floodwaters and the flagship university sent a home football game 700 miles away.

Rivers rose and dams bulged as storm water from days of heavy rains made its way to the Atlantic Ocean, causing a second round of flooding downstream.

Gov. Nikki Haley paid a visit to the coast, which she said would still be in danger for another 24-48 hours.

"We're holding our breath and saying a prayer," she said.

U.S. Senator Lindsey Graham warned the disaster could "break the bank" of federal emergency funds, possibly topping more than \$1 billion.

In another image of the storm's otherworldly toll, state officials said caskets have popped out of the ground in 11 instances in six counties.

At least 19 people in South Carolina and North Carolina have died in the storm, while many survivors returned home to discover they'd lost everything.

Wendy Dixon burst into sobs after realizing her wedding album and dozens of photos of her two sons and three grandchildren were destroyed.

Overcome with emotion and barely able to walk across her waterlogged carpet, Dixon grasped the arm of a niece inside the Columbia apartment.

"Everything is gone!" she wailed. "My clothes and all can be replaced. But my little things, my pictures, are all gone."

It was another anxious day of waiting for floodwaters to recede around the capital city.

About 1,000 residents near the compromised Beaver Dam were told to evacuate Wednesday morning, though the order was lifted several hours later when crews shored up the dam.

Haley said 62 dams across the state were being monitored, and 13 had already failed. However, she said South Carolina was fortunate that those represented only a small fraction of 2,000 or so dams regulated by the state.

At a news conference, Haley and other officials were asked repeatedly about whether the state had spent enough in previous years to maintain dams and other infrastructure.

"I think the analysis of this can be done after" the danger from the floods passes, she said in one testy response.

But Graham said the federal lifeline must be treated with care to avoid a "pork-laden monstrosity" like the federal government's aid package to the Northeast after Hurricane Sandy in 2012. He warned state and county officials not to use the disaster as an opportunity to ask for money unrelated to flood damage.

He also said it would take weeks to get a reliable damage assessment.

"We're talking hundreds of millions (of dollars), maybe over a billion," he said while visiting a shelter in Columbia.

As they waited for floodwaters to drop, officials also struggled to preserve Columbia's water supply. That supply was threatened earlier this week when a portion of the Columbia canal collapsed. Workers have been trying to build a dam and have dumped giant sandbags into the water to plug the breach. But when a second portion of the canal collapsed

Wednesday afternoon, they were forced to look at other options, Mayor Steve Benjamin said.

Benjamin said contingency plans include pumping water from the canal to the reservoir that feeds the water plant and working with the National Guard to pump water directly from the Broad River. In the meantime, he asked the city's 375,000 water customers to conserve water.

And in an extraordinary move for the football-crazy South, the University of South Carolina announced it was moving Saturday's football game against No. 7 LSU some 700 miles to Baton Rouge, Louisiana. The university said more than 80,000 fans expected for the game in Columbia would have put too much stress on weakened infrastructure.

In the most recent storm-related deaths, a group of five railroad workers were in a pickup truck when it drove past a barricade and plunged into the water where pavement was washed out. Three men in the pickup managed to get to safety around 3 a.m. Wednesday and divers later found the bodies of two men, authorities said.

The workers were in town to help repair washed out tracks.

Sheriff's spokesman Lt. Curtis Wilson said the barricade was in the wrong lane, but regardless, the railroad workers should not have been out because there was a city-wide curfew in place.

Richland County Sheriff Leon Lott said all nine deaths in the county have come from people trying to drive in flooded areas. Officers have located the cars belonging to several other missing people.

"I'm fearing the worst on that," Lott said.

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