

Russia Displays Its Military In Syria

HEMEIMEEM AIR BASE, Syria (AP) — As Russia unleashed waves of warplanes Thursday from this air base in western Syria to pound militant targets, President Vladimir Putin pushed diplomatic efforts with the West, stressing the need “to consider each other as allies in a common fight.”

Russia put its military muscle on display, bringing Moscow-based reporters to view a day’s worth of fighter jets roaring off a runway in dozens of sorties as helicopter gunships patrolled the edges of the sprawling facility.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry will meet Friday in Vienna, joined by their counterparts from Saudi Arabia and Turkey, both staunch critics of President Bashar Assad.

Lavrov said he wanted to provide “firsthand information” about the Russian air campaign against Islamic State militants in Syria, but also talk about a future political process in the country that is now in its fifth year of civil war.

The U.S. and other Western powers have questioned Russia’s primary motive in the airstrikes that began Sept. 30 and have backed up a Syrian government offensive in central and northwestern regions. Moscow says it is fighting IS and other extremist groups like the al-Qaida-linked Nusra Front, but Washington and others say the intervention is to prop up Assad and is likely to fan the violence.

Paul Ryan Will Seek Job Of Speaker

WASHINGTON (AP) — Rep. Paul Ryan formally declared his candidacy for speaker of the U.S. House Thursday evening, pledging in a letter to GOP colleagues, “We have an opportunity to turn the page.”

“Instead of rising to the occasion, Washington is falling short, including the House of Representatives. We are not solving the country’s problems; we are only adding to them,” he wrote. It is time, he said, “to start with a clean slate, and to rebuild what has been lost.”

Ryan will face elections next week in a closed-door House GOP meeting on Wednesday and then on the House floor Thursday. His success is assured.

Awaiting him will be a mess of trouble: a Nov. 3 deadline to raise the federal borrowing limit or face unprecedented default, and a Dec. 11 deadline to act on must-pass spending legislation or court a government shutdown.

Despite initial reluctance, Ryan told colleagues he was excited for the opportunity at hand.

Teacher, Student Killed In Stabbing

COPENHAGEN, Denmark (AP) — A sword-wielding masked man who students thought was playing a Halloween prank stabbed four people at a school with a large immigrant community in southern Sweden on Thursday, killing a teacher and a student before being shot dead by police.

The 21-year-old assailant, who posed with students before beginning his deadly rampage, roamed the halls of the Kronan school in the industrial town of Trollhatan, knocking on the doors of two classrooms and slashing those who opened them, authorities said.

The identity of the assailant was not released, though a police investigator, Thord Haraldsson, told reporters that a racist motive was “part of the picture.” He did not elaborate.

The attack stunned Sweden, where violent crime is relatively rare, though there has been a recent spate of arson attacks on asylum centers in the south of the country as the influx of migrants has surged. Immigration officials estimate that some 190,000 will arrive this year, second only to Germany in western Europe.

“This is a black day for Sweden,” Prime Minister Stefan Lofven said of the attack, the deadliest ever to target a school in Sweden. “It is a tragedy that hits the entire country.”

EPA Missed Prevention Of Mine Spill

BILLINGS, Mont. (AP) — Government investigators squarely blamed the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency on Thursday for a 3 million-gallon wastewater spill from a Colorado gold mine, saying an EPA cleanup crew rushed its work and failed to consider the complex engineering involved, triggering the very blowout it hoped to avoid.

The spill that fouled rivers in three states would have been avoided had the EPA team checked on water levels inside the Gold King Mine before digging into a collapsed and leaking mine entrance, Interior Department investigators concluded.

The technical report on the causes of the Aug. 5 spill has implications across the United States, where similar disasters could lurk among an estimated hundreds of thousands of abandoned mines that have yet to be cleaned up. The total cost of containing this mining industry mess could top \$50 billion, according to government estimates.

The root causes of the Colorado accident began decades ago, when mining companies altered the flow of water through a series of interconnected tunnels in the extensively mined Upper Animas River watershed, the report says.

EPA documents show its officials knew of the potential for a major blowout from the Gold King Mine near Silverton as early as June 2014. After the spill, EPA officials described the blowout as “likely inevitable” because millions of gallons of pressurized water had been bottling up inside the mine.

Bond Lowered For Man Who Didn’t Tell

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — A federal magistrate on Thursday lowered bond for a man accused of failing to tell authorities all he knew about the suspect in the massacre of nine black people at a Charleston church last June.

U.S. Magistrate Judge Shiva Hodges lowered the bond for Joey Meek after his attorneys urged the judge to reduce his \$100,000 bond set last month. His lawyers asked for the lower bond based on a pretrial report on Meek’s finances and criminal history. Hodges set the new bond at \$25,000.

Authorities say Meek lied and failed to report to law officers all he knew about Dylann Roof’s plans to shoot parishioners at Emanuel AME Church.

His attorneys have argued that Meek’s bond should be lowered because he has been in solitary confinement since his Sept. 17 arrest, is not a flight risk and has a limited, nonviolent criminal history. Meek is on probation, having pleaded guilty earlier this year to possessing a stolen vehicle, according to Lexington County court records.

Meek, his attorneys and his family declined to comment as they left the courthouse.

Cop Killing Puts Drug Courts Under Probe

NEW YORK (AP) — Arrested in a 19-person drug sweep, Tyrone Howard was one of only three who got sent to drug court, which offered him treatment instead of prison.

Eight months later, Howard is behind bars on murder charges, accused of putting a bullet in the head of a police officer who was chasing him Tuesday.

Officer Randolph Holder’s slaying has raised questions about the risks and potential shortcomings of drug courts, or drug diversion programs, that have been embraced nationwide as a way to ease jail overcrowding and reduce crime by attacking it at one of its sources: drug abuse.

New York’s mayor and police commissioner have branded Howard a career criminal who had once been arrested in a 2009 gunfight on an East Harlem basketball court and should not have been out on the streets.

“He would have been the last person in New York City I would’ve wanted to see in the diversion program,” Police Commissioner William Bratton said.



OLIVIER DOULIERY/ABACA PRESS/TNS
Former Secretary of State and Democratic presidential hopeful Hillary Clinton testifies before the House Select Committee on Benghazi on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., on Thursday, Oct. 22.

Under GOP Grilling, Clinton Seeks To Close Book On Benghazi

BY BRADLEY KLAPPER
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Hillary Rodham Clinton strove to close the book on the worst episode of her tenure as secretary of state Thursday, battling Republican questions in a marathon hearing that grew contentious but revealed little news about the 2012 attacks in Benghazi, Libya. She firmly defended her record while seeking to avoid any mishap that might damage her presidential campaign.

Pressed about events before and after the deaths of four Americans, Clinton had confrontational exchanges with several GOP lawmakers but also fielded supportive queries from Democrats. The most combative moments focused on accusations about the Obama administration’s shifting public accounts of the attacks.

However, there were few questions for the Democratic presidential front-runner about the specific events of Sept. 11, 2012, which Clinton said she continues to lose sleep over. “I have been wracking my brain about what more could have been done or should have been done,” she told the House Benghazi Committee.

The hearing, which began at 10 a.m., continued deep into the evening.

The panel’s chairman, Trey Gowdy, portrayed the investigation as focused on the facts after fellow Republicans recently described it as designed to hurt Clinton’s presidential bid. Democrats have pounced on those remarks and pointed out that the probe has now cost U.S. taxpayers more than \$4.5 million and, after 17 months, lasted longer than the 1970s Watergate investigation.

Gowdy, a former federal prosecutor, said the Republicans’ efforts were not a prosecution.

Contradicting him, Rep. Adam Smith, a Democrat from Washington, told Clinton: “The purpose of this committee is to prosecute you.”

In one tense moment, Republican Rep. Jim Jordan of Ohio accused Clinton of deliberately misleading the public by linking the Benghazi violence at first to an Internet video insulting the Muslim

Prophet Muhammad.

Clinton, stone-faced for much of the hearing, smiled in bemusement as Jordan cut her off from answering. Eventually given the chance to comment, she said only that “some” people had wanted to use the video to justify the attack that killed Ambassador Chris Stevens and three other Americans, and that she rejected that justification.

The argument went to the origins of the disagreement over Benghazi and how President Barack Obama and his top aides represented the attack in the final weeks of his re-election campaign. And it reflected some of the raw emotion the deadly violence continues to provoke, something Clinton will have to face over the next year of her White House bid even if the Republican-led special investigation loses steam.

For Clinton, the political theater offered opportunity and potential pitfalls. It gave her a high-profile platform to show her self-control and command of foreign policy. But it also left her vulnerable to claims that she helped politicize the Benghazi tragedy.

“There were probably a number of different motivations” for the attack, Clinton said, describing a time when competing strands of intelligence were being received and no clear picture had yet emerged. Speaking directly to Jordan, she said: “I’m sorry that it doesn’t fit your narrative. I can only tell you what the facts were.”

As the hearing neared its conclusion, the Republican questioning became increasingly aggressive. Rep. Martha Roby of Alabama, however, drew laughter from Clinton by asking if she was alone “the whole night” of the attacks after returning home.

Challenged that she didn’t care enough about the attack victims, Clinton choked up while recounting a conversation with a guard wounded in Benghazi. “Please do everything you can so that I can go back in the field,” Clinton recalled him asking her. “And I told him I would. He was determined to go back, to protect our diplomats, to protect you when you travel,” she added, directing the last

words at the lawmakers.

There were no gaffes for Clinton. And she never raised her voice as she had at a Senate hearing on Benghazi in January 2013, when she shouted: “What difference, at this point, does it make?” Given that Republicans campaigned off that oft-repeated sound bite, the lack of an indelible image from Thursday’s hearing would suit Clinton’s campaign fine.

Thursday’s appearance came at a moment of political strength for her. A day earlier, a potential rival for the Democratic nomination, Vice President Joe Biden, announced he would not join the race. Clinton also is riding the momentum of a solid debate performance last week.

Gowdy said important questions remain unanswered: Why was the U.S. in Libya, why were security requests denied, why couldn’t the military respond quickly on the 11th anniversary of 9/11 and why did the administration change its explanations of the attacks in the weeks afterward?

Clinton focused on the bigger picture, starting with a plea for the U.S. to maintain a global leadership role despite the threat to its diplomats. She said that perfect security can never be achieved, drawing on the various attacks on U.S. diplomatic and military installations overseas during the presidencies of her husband, Bill Clinton, in the 1990s and Ronald Reagan a decade earlier.

“In Beirut we lost far more Americans, not once but twice within a year,” she said of the 1983 attacks in Lebanon that killed more than 250 Americans and dozens of others. “People rose above politics. A Democratic Congress worked with a Republican administration to say, ‘What do we need to learn?’”

Wearing a dark suit, Clinton held her chin in her hand while Gowdy interrogated her. At other times, the effort to restrain herself from a fight was more apparent. She also nodded occasionally, as when the committee’s top Democrat, Rep. Elijah Cummings of Maryland, described the probe as a partisan campaign replete with implausible conspiracy theories.

US Military Member Killed In Raid To Free Iraqi Hostage

IRBIL, Iraq (AP) — Acting on word of an “imminent mass execution” by Islamic State militants, dozens of U.S. special operations troops and Iraqi forces raided a northern Iraqi compound Thursday, freeing approximately 70 Iraqi prisoners in an operation that saw the first American killed in combat in the country since the U.S. campaign against IS began in 2014, officials said.

The raiders killed and captured a number of militants and recovered what the Pentagon called a trove of valuable intelligence about the terrorist organization.

The U.S. service member who died was not publicly identified pending notification of relatives. Officials said this was the first American combat death in Iraq since the U.S. began its counter-IS military campaign in August 2014.

Pentagon press secretary Peter Cook said the target of the raid was a prison near the town of Hawija and that

the raid was undertaken at the request of the Kurdish Regional Government, the semi-autonomous body that governs the Kurdish region of northern Iraq. He said U.S. special operations forces sup-

ported what he called an Iraqi peshmerga rescue operation.

The peshmerga are the Kurdish region’s organized militia. The U.S. has worked closely with them in training and advising roles, but this

was the first known instance of U.S. ground forces operating alongside Iraqi forces in combat since launching Operation Inherent Resolve last year.



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