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The Homeland Security News Briefing

TO: THE SECRETARY AND SENIOR STAFF

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Leading DHS News:

UNDOCUMENTED FAMILIES CROSSING SOUTHWESTERN US BORDER AT “RECORD PACE.”

The [Washington Times](#) (4/24, Dinan, 285K) reports “families traveling together – usually mothers and their children” are “surg[ing] across the southwestern border at a record pace, posing more challenges for an Obama administration still struggling to figure out how to handle them.” Remote areas of Texas and Arizona are seeing an increase in families crossing the border in what analysts say is a signal “that new cartels are involved in trafficking.”

The [Los Angeles Times](#) (4/24, Hennessy-Fiske, 4.1M) says that according to the Border Patrol, “33,335 people were caught crossing the southern border illegally,” last month, which is “7,259 more than in February, a 28% increase.” Of that number, “4,452 were members of families traveling together, 46% more than the month before,” while “another 4,240 were unaccompanied youth, 37% more than the previous month.”

Transportation Security Administration:

SCREENERS SET “NEW RECORD” FOR FIREARMS DISCOVERIES. [Fox News](#) (4/24, 9.42M) reports, “Airport screeners established a new record last week when they stopped passengers from boarding planes with 73 firearms in carry-on luggage.” TSA officials “said the number was reached in the seven days ending April 21 and the haul surpassed the previous high of 68 set in October.” The Pittsburgh Tribune Review is cited reporting the “startling” discovery that “68 of the weapons were loaded and more than two dozen had a round in the chamber.” Bob Burns of TSA is quoted saying, “Unfortunately, these sorts of occurrences are all too frequent, which is why we talk about these finds. ... It’s great to share the things that our officers are finding, but at the same time, each time we find a dangerous item, the line is slowed down and a passenger that likely had no ill intent ends up with a citation or in some cases is even arrested.”

Federal Emergency Management Agency:

FLOOD RECOVERY PROCESS UNDERWAY IN HOUSTON. [ABC World News Tonight](#) (4/22, story 6, 1:05, Llamas, 14.63M) broadcast that Houston residents got a break from heavy rainfall on Friday, after a storm that recently caused many flood-related problems in the city headed toward the eastern part of the country. The [Houston Chronicle](#) (4/22, Balch, 1.99M) reported that residents of Texas' flood-damaged Montgomery County recently began to dry out and start the recovery process. County officials hope that FEMA aid will help fund that process. The [AP](#) (4/22, Lozano, Warren) reports the flood damage estimate for Texas' Harris County "has exceeded \$14.4 million." That figure "is the county's threshold for requesting federal disaster relief."

In a separate article, the [Houston Chronicle](#) (4/22, Zaveri, 1.99M) reported that because the "flood threat across much of the Houston region lessened" on Friday, local leaders turned their attention to the recovery process. Two Houston congressmen, meanwhile, announced legislation that would fund regional flood control projects.

ILLINOIS APPEAL FOR FEDERAL DISASTER ASSISTANCE TURNED DOWN. The [AP](#) (4/22) reported that according to a Friday news release from the Illinois Emergency Management Agency, FEMA officials have turned down the state's disaster recovery assistance appeal. The AP added that the money would have been used "to help local governments recover from flooding and storms in December and January."

US Citizenship and Immigration Services:

VERMONT HOUSE TO DEBATE RELEASE OF RECORDS "POSSIBLY RELATED" TO EB-5 PROJECTS. The [AP](#) (4/25) reports, "The Vermont House is set this week to resume debate on competing resolutions addressing records possibly related to state and federal fraud investigations into a series of development projects in northern Vermont" which were funded through EB-5. State attorney general William Sorrell "has put a hold on releasing emails about the projects to and from Gov. Peter Shumlin's former staff members," and "Shumlin's office recently sought to delete some emails, which it says were unrelated to EB-5." However, "Burlington Progressive Rep. Chris Pearson wants those emails released."

Immigration:

NAVARRETTE: ARGUMENTS AGAINST EXECUTIVE ACTIONS "NEITHER STRONG NOR PERSUASIVE." Ruben Navarrette writes in the [Washington Post](#) (4/23, 8.98M) that "the arguments made to the Supreme Court by conservatives who oppose" the Administration's immigration executive actions "were neither strong nor persuasive." Navarrette argues that "prosecutorial discretion is a real thing" and that the provision of state services to undocumented immigrants is not an "unfunded mandate," as opponents have argued. Navarrette theorizes that critics "are actually afraid of having to pay a price at the ballot box for their tolerance of demagogues like Donald Trump," and "think the best way to avoid being held accountable is to fight any attempt to let the immigrants remain in this country." Navarrette goes on to discuss his own change of opinion, as he "was once a supporter" of the executive actions, but now has "come to realize that these executive actions represent a major step backward for those of us who want a permanent fix to our broken immigration system."

OBAMA PRAISES MERKEL'S HANDLING OF SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS. [Reuters](#) (4/24) reports during a news conference with German Chancellor Angela Merkel on Sunday, the President lauded her handling of Europe's migrant crisis, saying, "She is on the right side of history on this. ... In this globalized world, it is very difficult for us to simply build walls." The [Washington Times](#) (4/24, Boyer, 285K) reports the President, who is "under fire...for his program to accept 10,000 Syrian refugees this year," said he is "proud" of Merkel and the German people "for accepting far more migrants from the war-torn country." The President said, "For her to take on some very tough politics in order to express not just a humanitarian concern but a practical concern that in this globalized world, it is very difficult for us to simply build walls, she is giving voice to the kinds of principles that I think bring people together rather than divide them."

[USA Today](#) (4/24, Korte, 5.45M) says the President said he does not "envy" Merkel "for not having term

limits,” adding, “I have come to appreciate, at least in the United States, the wisdom of our founders. I think it’s healthy for a big, diverse country like ours to have some turnover. To use a phrase from basketball, to have some fresh legs come in.” Merkel, who has been in power since 2005, is “reportedly mulling a campaign for a fourth term in 2017.” The President said, “I’m glad that Angela’s still sticking around, because I think the world benefits from her steady presence. ... And she is to be admired for her remarkable endurance.”

MIGRANTS, REFUGEES TAKE NEW ROUTES TO BALKANS FROM GREEK CAMPSITES. [Reuters](#) (4/24, Grulovic) reports as many as 70 migrants and refugees were seen crossing into Macedonia after trekking 12 miles through forests from a migrant campsite in Idomeni, Greece. A Reuters witness said the people crossed the border at a point that has not been sealed. Others are also considering leaving the camp – where more than 10,200 people are living out of tents in deplorable conditions, according to human rights organizations – and taking irregular routes to the Balkans.

US Coast Guard:

PARENTS OF MISSING TEEN SAY BOAT, PERSONAL EFFECTS FOUND. The [AP](#) (4/23) reports, “The parents of one of two teenagers lost at sea last summer say their boat and an iPhone ha[ve] been found.” Last July, Perry Cohen and Austin Stephanos left Jupiter Inlet, Florida “in the boat and never returned. Lengthy searches by the Coast Guard and private pilots turned up no clues.” The AP adds, “The Coast Guard initially located the boat off New Smyrna Beach, but the company hired by the Coast Guard to bring the boat back couldn’t find it.”

NTSB: COAST GUARD AUXILIARY CRASH “PROBABLY CAUSED” BY MAINTENANCE FAILURE. The [AP](#) (4/23) cites the National Transportation Safety Board as saying “the crash of a Coast Guard Auxiliary plane near busy New Jersey athletic fields last year was probably caused by a maintenance failure,” specifically “a failure of a maintenance crew to properly install engine cylinder nuts and bolts.” The NTSB “says that failure resulted in the loosening of components, loss of lubrication and eventually to a total loss of engine power.”

COAST GUARD RESCUES LONG-DISTANCE RUNNER IN “HYDROPOD.” The [AP](#) (4/24) reports that long-distance runner Reza Baluchi, who was “bidding to reach Bermuda in an inflatable bubble” called a “hydropod,” was “voluntarily rescued by the US Coast Guard.” Coast Guard Petty Officer Mark Barney “says the man set out from Pompano Beach on Saturday despite receiving an April 15 letter from the Coast Guard warning him not to depart,” as the service deemed Baluchi’s plan unsafe.

Secret Service:

CONTRACTS DETAIL SECRET SERVICE EQUIPMENT RENTAL FROM TRUMP ORGANIZATION. [BuzzFeed](#) (4/22, 8.95M) reports that the Secret Service’s guarding of Donald Trump “wasn’t the Republican presidential candidate’s first time dealing with the agency,” as “government contracts reveal that the Secret Service has paid a total of \$152,578.92 over five years to Trump Palace Condominiums.” Contracts reportedly refer to “‘lease or rental of equipment,’ as well as ‘communication, detection, and coherent radiation equipment,’ suggesting the rental of some kind of antenna.” BuzzFeed adds that the contracts “are publicly available” and “follow the template for all products or services bought by any federal agency.”

CONNECTICUT MAN ARRESTED FOR TWEETING TRUMP RALLY BOMB THREAT. [Reuters](#) (4/24) reports that Sean Morkys of Waterbury, Connecticut was arrested for allegedly sending Twitter threats to bomb a Donald Trump rally. The Secret Service alerted the Connecticut State Police counterterrorism office to a tweet saying, “Is someone going to bomb the trump rally or am I going to have to?” The account was linked to Morkys. State police are quoted saying, “The USSS determined that Morkys did not pose an immediate threat to any protectees or the public.”

The [New York Daily News](#) (4/24, 3.7M) reports, “Police say that tweet was followed by another warning a friend to have his family members leave the rally so they wouldn’t get hurt.”

Terrorism Investigations:

DOJ ENDS ACTIVE LITIGATION AGAINST APPLE AFTER GAINING ACCESS TO IPHONE IN NEW YORK CASE. [ABC News](#) (4/22, Date, Thomas, Shin, 4M) reported online that the Justice Department withdrew an All Writs Act filing against Apple in the Eastern District of New York seeking to unlock an iPhone after an individual on Thursday provided the government with the passcode, ending active litigation against the tech giant. Department spokeswoman Emily Pierce said in a statement, "As we have said previously, these cases have never been about setting a court precedent; they are about law enforcement's ability and need to access evidence on devices pursuant to lawful court orders and search warrants." She added, "Because we now have access to the data we sought, we notified the court of this recent development and have withdrawn our request for assistance." ABC, citing a DOJ "official," said there are "about a dozen other All Writs Act orders for Apple's assistance with opening for other devices that are unresolved, but are not in active litigation."

[NBC News'](#) (4/22, Helsel, 3.58M) website reported that in a letter sent Friday to US District Judge Margo Brodie in Brooklyn, US Attorney Robert Capers said: "Yesterday evening, an individual provided the passcode to the iPhone at issue in this case. Late last night, the government used that passcode by hand and gained access to the iPhone." [USA Today](#) (4/22, Mccoy, 5.45M) reported the case was "focused on Jun Feng," a defendant from the New York City borough of Queens "who pleaded guilty to methamphetamine conspiracy last year." Federal prosecutors "sought access to the phone's data in part of an effort to determine if others were involved in the alleged plot." [Ars Technica](#) (4/22, 705K) reported that following his arrest, Feng had claimed to have forgotten the passcode to his iPhone.

According to [Reuters](#) (4/24, Raymond, Menn), though the case over San Bernardino shooter Syed Rizwan Farook's iPhone garnered more media attention, the New York case may prove more significant for setting precedent. The case, Reuters said, left standing a Federal magistrate judge's ruling that the government lacks the authority to require that technology companies assist investigators' efforts to unlock devices. The [Wall Street Journal](#) (4/22, Barrett, Subscription Publication, 6.74M) characterized the dropping of the case as a defeat for the Justice Department. It is likely, the Journal said, the case's withdrawal will spark further backlash from privacy advocates.

The [AP](#) (4/24) notes that on Thursday, prior to the case's withdrawal, "several law enforcement groups filed arguments in Brooklyn federal court saying they feared the public will stop aiding police if Apple is allowed to refuse to give up information from the phone in the drug case." According to the groups, the public may be more reluctant to aid authorities if Apple is allowed to refuse to furnish information in the drug case.

This story was additionally covered by [The Hill](#) (4/22, Rupert, 862K), [NPR](#) (4/22, Campbell, 1.81M), the [San Francisco Chronicle](#) (4/23, Sposito, 3.37M), [Yahoo! Good Morning America](#) (4/23, Date, 1.55M), the [Financial Times](#) (4/23, Bradshaw, Subscription Publication, 1.36M), [Bloomberg News](#) (4/23, Smythe, 2.92M), and a second [Reuters](#) (4/22, Raymond) article. [Business Insider](#) (4/22, 2.64M) also posts Reuters' coverage to its website.

Former National Security Officials Supporting Apple In Encryption Fight. The [New York Times](#) (4/22, Lichtblau, Subscription Publication, 12.03M) reported that a roster of more than a half-dozen former top national security officials, including former NSA Director Michael Hayden and former Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff, who now work with tech firms in the private sector, are "backing Apple – and not the FBI, with which they once worked – in its fight to keep its iPhones encrypted and private." While their "former jobs in the government are always featured prominently in their public appearances, their current business affiliations often go unmentioned." However, some law enforcement officials are "surprised and angered" by their "barrage of support" for Apple, and "question whether the business relationships that some of the former officials now have with Apple and other Silicon Valley companies – jobs that usually pay far above their former government salaries – are behind their enthusiastic advocacy of privacy and encryption."

Some Experts Doubt Independent Hackers Helped Crack Farook's Phone. [Fast Company](#) (4/22, Sullivan, 2.45M) reported that some in the cybersecurity community doubt recent reports that an independent team of hackers helped the FBI breach Farook's iPhone. They claim that the FBI's "mysterious helper might yet be Cellebrite, the Israeli security company originally thought to have cracked the phone for the FBI." According to sources, an absence of chatter about the FBI hack on the so-called darkweb suggests that an established company was behind the breach. The FBI, [Fast Company](#) reports, has contracted with Cellebrite in the past.

Continued Coverage Of Congressional Hearing On Encryption. In a 1,880 word article, [TechTarget](#) (4/22, Loshin, 90K) continued coverage of last week's House Energy and Commerce Committee hearing on encryption. The website noted the testimony of FBI Executive Assistant Director for Science and Technology Amy Hess and several other law enforcement and industry experts. In her testimony, the website reported, Hess said that 30 percent of the phones seized by the FBI over the past six months were protected by passcodes.

Editorial: Companies, Not Government Fighting For Privacy. In an editorial, the [Des Moines \(IA\) Register](#) (4/23, 320K) argues that private companies and not the government are championing the privacy rights of American citizens. This, the Register says, is illustrated by the DOJ's ongoing battles against Microsoft and Apple. The newspaper calls upon Congress to intervene to rein in government requests for information about Americans from tech companies.

CAR SALESMAN HELD FOR 14 MONTHS FOR ALLEGEDLY SKYPING WITH JIHADISTS. In a 2,078-word article, the [New York Times](#) (4/23, Shane, Subscription Publication, 12.03M) reported on how Internet communications have provided people with "easy portals to distant, sometimes dangerous worlds," as happened with car salesman Toby Lopez when he began "sparring" on "Skype with a man who claimed – falsely, as it would turn out – to be a top ISIS military commander." Lopez "landed in federal prison, where he was held for nearly 14 months without trial," after contacting the FBI to report he was "trying to negotiate the release of hostages." Lopez was "shuttled among federal facilities," examined by psychologists who evaluated him without case files, and was released after the US Attorney Office dropped the charges. The article provides in-depth coverage of his experience.

The [AP](#) (4/22, Chase) reported that an FBI spokesman referred questions on Lopez's case to Kim Reeves, spokeswoman for the US Attorney's Office in Delaware. "When new information, facts or analysis becomes available that affects the viability of a case, justice requires that prosecutors evaluate that information and, in some instances, dismiss charges," Reeves said. "While dismissing a charged case is exceedingly rare, we have not hesitated to do so when the facts and law support such a decision." The [Rochester \(MN\) Post-Bulletin](#) (4/24, 28K) also posts the AP's coverage to its website.

GRAHAM: WHITE HOUSE COULD DECIDE ON RELEASING CLASSIFIED 9/11 REPORT PAGES BY JUNE. Former Sen. Bob Graham told [NBC's Meet the Press](#) a decision from the White House on whether to release some classified material from the 9/11 Commission Report could come by June. [Reuters](#) (4/24, Bartz) reports the section in question has bearing on a dispute over whether Americans can sue the government of Saudi Arabia for damages. Graham told NBC, "The president's staff at least has said that they will make a decision by June, and I hope that decision is to honor the American people and make it available." The [AP](#) (4/24, Riechmann) reports Graham [said](#), "The most important unanswered question of 9/11 is, did these 19 people conduct this very sophisticated plot alone, or were they supported?"

RENZI: EUROPE MUST CONFRONT HOME-GROWN TERRORISM. On [CNN's Fareed Zakaria GPS](#) (4/24, Zakaria, 410K), Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi argued that terrorism is not connected to the current migrant crisis, stating that recent attacks show that terrorists have grown up in Europe. He calls for investment into educational and cultural approaches to addressing this problem in addition to destroying ISIL militarily.

RIGHTS GROUPS SEEK ADMINISTRATION FRAMEWORK BANNING MUSLIM MONITORING. [The Hill](#) (4/22, Hattem, 862K) reports that "more than two dozen civil liberties and human rights groups on Friday pressed the White House to make sure anti-terrorism efforts don't infringe on people's ability to freely practice their religion in peace." The group wrote that, "especially given the 'current climate of

scapegoating and anti-Muslim bigotry,” the Obama Administration “should be sure to implement policies making it difficult for a future president to use current policies to monitor Muslims. ‘It is all too easy to imagine a subsequent administration seizing on CVE [countering violent extremism] programs that are now in development as vehicles for systematic and large-scale profiling, patrolling and surveillance of American Muslim and communities presumed to be Muslim,’ the 27 organizations wrote in the letter to White House counterterrorism adviser Jen Easterly.”

Cyber News:

US DIRECTING COMPUTER NETWORK ATTACKS AT ISIL. The [New York Times](#) (4/24, Sanger, Subscription Publication, 12.03M) reports that in “a new line of combat against” ISIL, the US military’s Cyber Command has been directed for the first time “to mount computer-network attacks that are now being used alongside more traditional weapons.” The effort, which reflects the President’s “desire to bring many of the secret American cyberweapons that had been aimed elsewhere...into the fight against the Islamic State,” is aimed at disrupting the group’s ability “to spread its message, attract new adherents, circulate orders from commanders and carry out day-to-day functions, like paying its fighters.” Officials said a “benefit of the administration’s exceedingly rare public discussion of the campaign” is to “rattle the Islamic State’s commanders, who have begun to realize that sophisticated hacking efforts are manipulating their data.” In addition, it may deter “potential recruits...if they come to worry about the security of their communications with the militant group.”

NSA DEPUTY WARNS US INFRASTRUCTURE VULNERABLE TO CYBER ATTACKS. The [Washington \(DC\) Times](#) (4/22, Blake, 285K) offered coverage of NSA Deputy Director Richard Ledgett Jr.’s comments Thursday during a cybersecurity summit at West Point, at which he “[asserted that] systems used by utility companies, telecommunication providers and other critical infrastructure components are increasingly susceptible to cyberattacks.” [Daily Caller](#) (4/22, Read, 443K) report that Ledgett “warned the U.S. infrastructure is far too dependent on what are called industrial control systems, or ICS.” [ExecutiveGov](#) (4/24, Edwards, 548) reports Ledgett urged the Internet of Things device industry to “work to address emerging network vulnerabilities with the launch of new software and hardware platforms.”

RESEARCHERS FIND VULNERABILITIES IN ARMY’S MOBILE INTERNET NETWORK. [Bloomberg News](#) (4/22, Capaccio, 2.92M) reports researchers from John Hopkins University and the Army Research Laboratory found “significant cybersecurity vulnerabilities” in the WIN-T Increment 2 network during “combat testing.” Bloomberg News says the network, created by General Dynamics Corp., “is designed for secure on-the-move voice, data and image transmissions from brigade commanders down to company-level vehicles tearing through terrain.” Bloomberg News reports that the Army and General Dynamics Corp. “are working to improve the systems already in the field and to embed updates into networks that will be deployed through 2028.”

CONGRESSMAN LIEU URGES USE OF ENCRYPTED COMMUNICATIONS APP TO AVOID CELL PHONE NETWORK VULNERABILITIES. [The Hill](#) (4/24, Bennett, 862K) reports Rep. Ted Lieu is urging fellow members of Congress to use “end-to-end encrypted chatting apps, such as WhatsApp,” to avoid the cybersecurity vulnerabilities of the SS7 cell phone network. The Hill says telecoms companies use SS7 to “direct mobile communications around the world,” but the “problem is that anyone who can gain entry to the SS7 system can also repurpose these signals and intercept calls and texts.” The Hill adds that “specialists believe countries like China, Russia and Iran have all likely exploited the deficiency to record calls, pilfer phone data and remotely track high-value targets.”

LITHUANIAN GOVERNMENT NETWORK HACKED FOR THIRD TIME THIS MONTH. The [AP](#) (4/24) reports the Lithuanian government’s network was hacked for the third time this month, and the hack “disrupted the websites of Parliament and the ministries of finance, defense, agriculture and others for about 30 minutes on Thursday.” The AP says Lithuanian police are investigating what are believed to be “coordinated attacks.”

DHS FOCUSING ON FIVE “PILOT” PROGRAMS TO IMPROVE TECHNOLOGY IMPLEMENTATION

PROCESS. [Federal News Radio \(DC\)](#) (4/24, Miller, 11K) reports DHS CIO Luke McCormack and DHS chief procurement officer Soraya Correa are focused on turning DHS' "approach to buying and implementing technology on its head," by using "agile development, open source software, and other leading edge ideas." Federal News Radio says that DHS will study the effectiveness of the new strategies with five pilot programs that are in different stages of development and have different components. Federal News Radio adds that McCormack "said real-time access, good competition, the ability to consume the technology by the drink or by the slice, and the ability to update technology when necessary are the hallmarks of the approach."

HACKERS BREACH BRITISH DEFENSE COMMUNITY NETWORK TO STEAL PERSONAL DATA.

The [Washington Times](#) (4/22, Blake, 285K) reports hackers breached the Niteworks forum, which is a "government-affiliated business networking group," in November and stole the personal data of "831 members of Britain's defense community." The Times adds that the data "consisted of only names, affiliations, and email addresses," but "cybercriminals could nonetheless capitalize off of a list of defense contractors by using the information to launch targeted attacks specifically crafted to be attractive to military members."

DUTCH POLICE SHUT DOWN ENCRYPTED COMMUNICATIONS NETWORK. [Reuters](#) (4/22, Sterling, Lou) reports Dutch Police shut down Ennetcom, an encrypted communications network, and arrested the owner, Danny Manupassa, on Friday for money laundering and weapons possession. Reuters says that police believe the network, which has 19,000 customers, was used for organized crime.

TECH PROJECT TO ENCRYPT WEBSITES FOR FREE COVERS "MILLIONS" OF SITES. [The Hill](#) (4/22, Bennett, 862K) reports the tech initiative "Let's Encrypt," which was created by the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF), and "offers encryption certificates to websites, free of charge," has "issued two million certificates" as of Thursday.

NBC NEWS ANALYSIS: HOSPITALS CAN EXPECT MORE RANSOMWARE ATTACKS. [NBC News](#) (4/23, Wagstaff, 3.58M) analyzes ransomware attacks on the healthcare sector following several high-profile ransomware attacks on hospitals in recent months. NBC News says that hackers may be more interested in attacking hospitals after the "\$17,000 payday" made by Hollywood Presbyterian Medical Center to unlock its systems made the headlines. NBC News adds that "it falls on the leadership of hospitals to make sure cybersecurity is a priority, because there really isn't much patients can do to protect themselves."

Countering Violent Extremism:

STAR TRIBUNE: ORGANIZATIONS AIDING "VULNERABLE" YOUNG SOMALI-AMERICANS NEED MORE SUPPORT. In an editorial, the [Minneapolis Star Tribune](#) (4/24, 1.25M) reports that, "with poverty plaguing" the "impoverished" Somali community in the Twin Cities area "and terrorist recruiters preying on its young people, the lagging support for organizations directly aiding vulnerable young people is a national security crisis requiring swift remedy." The Star-Tribune says, "Congress and the Obama administration need to work together to get past gridlock and boost funding that has fallen far short of the rhetoric from President Obama and others about countering radicalization. But given federal inaction, and the economic challenges facing Somali-Americans here, a Minnesota-made solution also is needed." The Star-Tribune adds, "Much of the progress is due less to coordinated federal support than to local officials and organizations stepping up on their own."

National Security News:

OBAMA CALLS FOR REINSTATEMENT OF CEASEFIRE, RESTATES OPPOSITION TO CREATING "SAFE ZONES." [Bloomberg Politics](#) (4/24, Sink, 289K) reports the President on Sunday reiterated his doubts about the creation of "safe zones" for refugees in Syria, even as German Chancellor Angela Merkel stood by the idea as part. During a news conference in German, the President and Merkel "sought to smooth over any differences," but "the proposal for such a protected zone has been a persistent difference between the close allies." The President said, "As a practical matter, sadly, it is very

difficult to see how it would operate short of us being willing to militarily take over a chunk of that country. ... And that requires a big military commitment.”

[Reuters](#) (4/24) reports Merkel said instead of classic “safe zones” that would require protection from foreign forces, peace talks in Geneva should include efforts to reach agreement on areas where fleeing Syrians could feel safe. Said Merkel, “I believe that if you had followed what I said yesterday in Turkey, it is something that has to come out of the Geneva peace talks; it is not about classical safe zones. ... Can one, when one speaks about a ceasefire, identify regions in the talks between the negotiating partners in Geneva where people can feel particularly safe. It is not about some influence from the outside but rather from within the talks.” [USA Today](#) (4/24, Hjelmggaard, 5.45M) notes the President “said he agreed with that version of the proposal being part of peace negotiations, saying it demonstrated that ‘there’s no space between us’ over Syria and trying to find a political resolution.”

[AFP](#) (4/24) reports the President on Sunday urged Syria’s “warring parties to ‘reinstate’ a troubled ceasefire.” Speaking to reporters in Germany, the President said, “I spoke to President Vladimir Putin early last week to try to make sure that we could reinstate the cessation of hostilities.” Meanwhile, the [AP](#) (4/24, Aji, Issa) reports “two young siblings and at least 24 others” were killed Sunday as “air strikes and shelling pounded Aleppo for a third straight day.”

US TO SEND ADDITIONAL TROOPS TO SYRIA. The [CBS Evening News](#) (4/24, lead story, 2:00, Glor, 11.17M) noted briefly in its lead story that President Obama will announce Monday that the US is sending up to 250 additional military personnel to Syria. Those troops, according to [NBC Nightly News](#) (4/24, story 5, 1:50, Snow, 16.61M), “will be sent to the region to support Syrian and Iraqi forces fighting ISIS.” The [Wall Street Journal](#) (4/24, A1, Lubold, Entous, Subscription Publication, 6.74M) says the additional personnel will bring the number of US military personnel on the ground in Syria to about 300.

The [Washington Post](#) (4/24, Ryan, 8.98M) cites a US defense official who said “the decision is aimed in part at helping to grow the ranks of Arab fighters in a network of rebel groups, now dominated by Kurdish fighters, that the United States is backing as it battles the Islamic State.” The US personnel “will advise those troops as they seek to isolate Raqqa, the militants’ de facto capital in Syria.” The [AP](#) (4/24, Superville) says while the President “has said he remains opposed to large-scale U.S. military intervention in either Iraq or Syria,” he has “incrementally deepened US involvement in both countries.”

CLASHES ERUPT BETWEEN KURDISH, SHIITE FIGHTERS IN IRAQ. The [Washington Post](#) (4/24, Morris, Salim, 8.98M) reports Kurdish troops and Shiite forces exchanged “mortar and machine-gun fire” Sunday in fighting that killed “at least 12 people and raised concerns” about Iraq’s “ability to control an array of armed militia groups as areas are freed” from ISIL. As the fighting escalated Sunday, Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi ordered the army to “take all necessary measures to control the situation.”

KURDISH FORCES TO KEEP AREAS TAKEN FROM SYRIAN FORCES. [Reuters](#) (4/24) reports that under a truce announced Sunday, Kurdish forces will keep territory taken from Syrian forces during a rare outbreak of violence near the Turkish border. Fighting broke out last Wednesday in Qamishli, and the truce appeared to be holding on Sunday.

ASSASSINATION OF ISIL CRITIC IN TURKEY SHOWS SCOPE OF GROUP’S REACH. The [Washington Post](#) (4/24, Naylor, 8.98M) reports on the assassination of Zaher al-Shurqat, “a charismatic rebel and outspoken enemy” of ISIL, who became the fourth prominent Syrian critic of the group to be killed by its militants in the past six months in southern Turkey. Shurqat often appeared on television to “pick apart the Islamic State’s religious justifications for its brutality.” His twin brother, Anas, said ISIL “feared him because he showed how their practices are not Islamic. They’re just violent animals.” The Post says Shurqat’s death shows how, despite mounting military losses in Iraq and Syria, ISIL “can still strike beyond its center of gravity.”

ROCKET ATTACKS KILL ONE, WOUND 26 IN TURKISH TOWN NEAR SYRIAN BORDER. [Reuters](#) (4/24, Bektas, Aytekin) reports one person was killed and 26 others were injured by rocket attacks in the Turkish town of Kilis near the Syrian border on Sunday, a day after Turkey’s government vowed to protect the area from continuous attacks by ISIL fighters. One rocket attack Sunday hit a mosque that was 100

meters from the governor's office, where Deputy Prime Minister Yalcin Akdogan was speaking. He told a news conference, "All measures will be taken" in response to the attacks, adding that those measures would be announced Monday after a cabinet meeting.

DOCUMENTS SHOW HOW ABU SAYYAF RAN ISIL'S OIL OPERATIONS. The [Wall Street Journal](#) (4/24, A1, Faucon, Coker, Subscription Publication, 6.74M) reports documents seized in the May 2015 raid which killed Abu Sayyaf, who had a leading role in managing the group's oil operations, show how he built and ran his division of the group's oil business, which, for the six month period ending in February 2015, provided 72% of the \$289.5 million in total ISIL natural-resource revenues.

SANDERS OPPOSES AUMF LEADING TO "PERPETUAL WAR" IN MIDDLE EAST. Bernie Sanders was asked on [CNN's State Of The Union](#) (4/24, Tapper) if Congress needs to pass a new authorization for use of military force in the Middle East. Sanders said, "I would like to see an authorization. The question, obviously, is what is in that authorization and... I will oppose any authorization that gives us just a wide open approach to getting involved into perpetual war in the Middle East. I think the President has done a good job in trying to balance the need to destroy ISIS. We've got to put together a coalition of the Muslim nations. I voted against the war in Iraq – one of the differences that I have with Secretary Clinton. I'll do everything that I can to make sure that our men and women in the military are not sucked in to perpetual war there."

THREE UKRAINIAN TROOPS KILLED AMID ESCALATING FIGHTING WITH SEPARATISTS. [AFP](#) (4/24) reports Ukrainian military spokesman Oleksandr Motuzyanyk said three Ukrainian soldiers were killed and six others wounded on over the weekend as he accused pro-Russian rebels of escalating attacks against the Kiev military. He also alleged that the separatists are "using mortars and armoured vehicles along the entire frontline."

OBAMA DISMISSES NORTH KOREA'S OFFER ON HALTING NUCLEAR TESTS. During a news conference with German Chancellor Angela Merkel on Sunday, the President dismissed North Korean Foreign Minister Ri Su Yong's claim that his country is prepared to stop its nuclear tests if the US suspends military exercises with South Korea, saying the US is not taking the comments seriously. The [AP](#) (4/24, Talmadge) reports the President "dismissed North Korea's latest overture," saying, "We don't take seriously a promise to simply halt until the next time they decide to do a test these kinds of activities [sic]. ... What we've said consistently... is that if North Korea shows seriousness in denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula, then we'll be prepared to enter into some serious conversations with them about reducing tensions and our approach to protecting our allies in the region. But that's not something that happens based on a press release in the wake of a series of provocative behaviors. They're going to have to do better than that."

[Bloomberg Politics](#) (4/24, Sink, 289K) says the President said North Korea will "'have to do better' than announcing 'via press release' that it intends to step back from nuclear weapons development." The US, he said, will continue "strengthening its military alliances and defenses against North Korea until the country 'shows seriousness' toward eliminating nuclear weapons from the Korean peninsula."

The [Wall Street Journal](#) (4/24, Nelson, Jun, Subscription Publication, 6.74M) says the President argued while North Korea's nuclear tests fail more frequently than they succeed, it enhances its knowledge with every attempt. The [Washington Times](#) (4/24, Boyer, 285K) quotes him as saying, "Although more often than not they fail in many of these tests, they gain knowledge each time they engage in these tests." The President added that "such behavior is 'why we've cultivated cooperation with the Chinese to put more pressure on North Korea.'" However, [AFP](#) (4/24) reports the President "urged China to increase pressure on North Korea after another 'provocative' weapons test," noting that he said cooperation with the Chinese "is not where we would completely like it to be."

The President's comment came as North Korea said Sunday a submarine-based ballistic missile test was a "great success" which gave the North "one more means for powerful nuclear attack," [Reuters](#) (4/24, Park) reports. While North Korea's official news agency did not say when or where the launch took place, Reuters cites a South Korean Defense Ministry official who said the North fired the missile from a submarine off its east coast on Saturday. [USA Today](#) (4/24, Bacon, 5.45M) says the North "dismissed a

South Korean report that Saturday's test failed," saying the test "confirmed and reinforced' the reliability of the North's underwater launching system."

CHINA PLANS TO BUILD FLOATING NUCLEAR POWER PLANTS IN SOUTH CHINA SEA. The [Washington Times](#) (4/24, Wood, 285K) reports China has plans to build "up to 20 floating nuclear power plants for remote locations, including the South China Sea," adding that while the buildup "is ostensibly for civilian purposes, the projects could easily mask a military agenda."

Modernization Reaches China's Dulong River Valley. The [New York Times](#) (4/24, Wong, Subscription Publication, 12.03M) reports on modernization in China's Dulong River Valley, saying the "changes that have transformed so many parts of China are unfolding at warp" in the region, which is "home to almost all of the country's 7,000 ethnic Dulong, or Drung." While the Gaoligong mountain range "has kept the Dulong valley secluded," the mountains "no longer cut off this valley," as a "new road and tunnel...now connect residents here to the outside world," and China Mobile "has set up 4G cellular data service across much of the valley, and is not shy about advertising this on billboards."

Hiatt: Daughter Seeks Government Help After Father's Apparent Abduction By China. [Washington Post](#) (4/24, Hiatt, 8.98M) columnist Fred Hiatt reports on the mysterious disappearance of Gui Minhai, a publisher of "gossipy volumes about China's leaders." Gui went missing last November while his company was working on a biography of Chinese President Xi Jinping. Hiatt said it is "fairly certain that he is in a prison somewhere inside China." Gui's daughter, Angela Gui, has received only one text from her father and believes "somebody was controlling him." She also believes a televised claim from her father in January that he had returned to China to take responsibility for a 2003 hit-and-run was false because, "That's just not the way he talks." Hiatt says she has been contacting US and Swedish officials, "hoping that governments eager for smooth relations with China will stir themselves to object to such egregious behavior."

GOP BILL WOULD "SLASH" NSC STAFF, GRANT CONGRESS OVERSIGHT. According to a [Washington Post](#) (4/24, Demirjian, 8.98M) "Power Post" blog report appearing in today's print edition, House Republicans plan to introduce an amendment "as soon as this week" to the annual defense policy bill that would "restrain White House control over foreign policy planning, amid mounting complaints that the roles of the Pentagon and other national security agencies are being curtailed by West Wing micromanaging." A bill set to be offered by Armed Services Chairman Mac Thornberry would "slash" the National Security Council staff to "well below" its estimated current level of 400, "give Congress more oversight over the council and subject the president's national security adviser to the Senate confirmation process, according to committee aides." The Post notes that a "similar fight almost killed last year's defense authorization bill," but Speaker Ryan on Thursday "said he supports Thornberry's approach and would have the Appropriations Committee follow his lead."

BACKED BY SAUDI-LED COALITION, YEMENI TROOPS RETAKE CITY FROM AL QAEDA. In what the [Washington Post](#) (4/24, Al-Mujahed, 8.98M) calls a "major shift in Yemen's grinding civil war," Saudi-backed forces on Sunday mounted a "large-scale offensive" to drive al Qaeda-linked militants out of their strongholds in the south. Under cover of airstrikes, Yemeni troops "pushed toward the city of Mukalla, which has become the de facto capital" of al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). Yemeni military sources told [AFP](#) (4/24) that the city was recaptured on Sunday by troops that "were met by no resistance," and [Reuters](#) (4/24, Mukhashaf, Ghobari) reports residents said the militants were withdrawing westward to neighboring Shabwa province.

HAMMOND: BRITAIN WON'T RULE OUT SENDING TROOPS TO LIBYA. [Reuters](#) (4/24) reports British Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond said Sunday that he could not rule out sending troops to Libya if they are requested by the Libyan government, but stressed that any deployment would need to be approved by parliament. "It wouldn't make sense to rule anything out because you never know how things are going to evolve," Hammond told the [Sunday Telegraph](#). "But if there were ever any question of a British combat role in any form – ground, sea or air – that would go to the House of Commons," he added.

DURING IRAN VISIT, ZUMA PRAISES 1979 REVOLUTION. [AFP](#) (4/24) reports South African President Jacob Zuma "praised" Iran's 1979 revolution Sunday at the start of a three-day state visit, which he said

could “dramatically expand trade” with Tehran. “South Africans were inspired by the 1979 revolution, which showed that emancipation is possible, whatever the odds,” said Zuma.

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