

PRESIDENT CEDES
AFGHAN STRATEGY
TO THE PENTAGON

A QUIET SHIFT OF POWER

Sending More Troops as
Plan for a Long War
Remains Unclear

**By MARK LANDLER
and MICHAEL R. GORDON**

WASHINGTON — When President Trump made his first major decision on the war in Afghanistan, he did not announce it in a nationally televised address from the White House or a speech at West Point.

Instead, the Pentagon issued a news release late one afternoon last week confirming that the president had given the defense secretary, Jim Mattis, the authority to send several thousand additional troops to a war that, in its 16th year, engages about 8,800 American troops.

Mr. Trump, who writes avidly on Twitter about war and peace in other parts of the world, said nothing about the announcement. But its effect was unmistakable: He had outsourced the decision on how to proceed militarily in Afghanistan to the Pentagon, a startling break with how former President Barack Obama and many of his predecessors handled the anguished task of sending Americans into foreign conflicts.

The White House played down the Pentagon’s vaguely worded statement, which referred only to setting “troop levels” as a stopgap measure — a tacit admission of the administration’s internal conflicts over what to do about the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan.

With a president who ran for office almost never having talked about the war, a coterie of political advisers who bitterly oppose deeper American engagement in it, and a national security team dominated by generals worried

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SYRIA FIGHT An American jet shot down a Syrian warplane on the same day Iran launched missiles into Syria. PAGE A10

Trump Lawyer
Denies Inquiry,
Reversing Boss

**By MICHAEL D. SHEAR
and NOAH WEILAND**

WASHINGTON — A member of President Trump’s legal team said on Sunday that the president was not under investigation by the special counsel looking into Russia’s election-year meddling, contradicting Mr. Trump’s assertion in a Friday morning tweet that he is a subject of the widening inquiry.

The denial on Sunday by Jay Sekulow, one of several personal lawyers Mr. Trump has hired to represent him in the Russia case, is the latest of many examples in which the president’s aides and lawyers have scrambled to avert a public-relations mess created by Mr. Trump’s tweets, off-script remarks or leaked private conversations.

Advisers have been forced to perform postpresidential cleanup in the wake of Mr. Trump’s tweet claiming he had been wiretapped by the Obama administration, his Oval Office comments to Russian diplomats about the former F.B.I. director, his private musings about the possibility of firing the Russia special counsel, his suggestion that there might be

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PATRICIA DE MELO MOREIRA/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE — GETTY IMAGES

Over 60 Die in Portugal Wildfire
Many of those killed were trapped in cars as flames engulfed the Pedrógão Grande area. Page A8.

The Used Car Was Repossessed,
But the Lender Is Still Collecting

By JESSICA SILVER-GREENBERG and MICHAEL CORKERY

More than a decade after Yvette Harris’s 1997 Mitsubishi was repossessed, she is still paying off her car loan.

She has no choice. Her auto lender took her to court and won the right to seize a portion of her income to cover her debt. The lender has so far been able to garnish \$4,133 from her paychecks — a drain that at one point forced Ms. Harris, a single mother who lives in the Bronx, to go on public assistance to support her two sons.

“How am I still paying for a car I don’t have?” she asked.

For millions of Americans like Ms. Harris who have shaky credit and had to turn to subprime auto loans with high interest rates and hefty fees to buy a car, there is no getting out.

Many of these auto loans, it turns out, have a habit of haunting people long after their cars have been repossessed.

The reason: Unable to recover the balance of the loans by repossessing and reselling the cars, some subprime lenders are aggressively suing borrowers to collect what remains — even 13 years later.

Ms. Harris’s predicament goes a long way toward explaining how lenders, working hand in hand with auto dealers, have made billions of dollars extending high-interest loans to Americans on the financial margins.

These are people desperate enough to take on thousands of dollars of debt at interest rates as high as 24 percent for one simple reason: Without a car, they have no way to get to work or to doctors.

With their low credit scores, buying or leasing a new car is not an option. And when all the interest and fees of a subprime loan are added up, even a used car with mechanical defects and many miles on the odometer can end up costing more than a new car.

Subprime lenders are willing to take a chance on these risky borrowers because when they default, the lenders can repossess their cars and persuade judges in

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YUI MOK/PRESS ASSOCIATION, VIA ASSOCIATED PRESS

Crash Puts London on Edge
A van drove into a crowd near a mosque, killing a man. Page A10.

Spyware Meant to Foil Crime
Is Trained on Mexico’s Critics

Attacks Hit Activists, Journalists and Their Families

By AZAM AHMED and NICOLE PERLROTH

MEXICO CITY — Mexico’s most prominent human rights lawyers, journalists and anti-corruption activists have been targeted by advanced spyware sold to the Mexican government on the condition that it be used only to investigate criminals and terrorists.

The targets include lawyers looking into the mass disappearance of 43 students, a highly respected academic who helped write anti-corruption legislation, two of Mexico’s most influential journalists and an American representing victims of sexual abuse by the police. The spying even swept up family members, including a teenage boy.

Since 2011, at least three Mexican federal agencies have purchased about \$80 million worth of spyware created by an Israeli cyberarms manufacturer. The software, known as Pegasus, infiltrates smartphones to monitor every detail of a person’s cellular life — calls, texts, email, contacts and calendars. It can even use the microphone and camera on phones for surveillance, turning a target’s smartphone into a personal bug.

The company that makes the software, the NSO Group, says it sells the tool exclusively to governments, with an explicit agreement that it be used only to battle terrorists or the drug cartels and criminal groups that have long kidnapped and killed Mexicans.

But according to dozens of messages examined by The New York Times and independent forensic analysts, the software has been used against some of the government’s most outspoken critics and their families, in what many view as an unprecedented effort to thwart the fight against the corruption infecting every limb of Mexican society.

“We are the new enemies of the state,” said Juan E. Pardinas, the general director of the Mexican Institute for Competitiveness, who has pushed anti-corruption legislation. His iPhone, along with his wife’s, was targeted by the software, according to an independent analysis. “Ours is a society where democracy has been eroded,” he said.

The deployment of sophisticated cyberweaponry against citizens is a snapshot of the struggle for Mexico itself, raising profound legal and ethical questions for a government already facing severe criticism for its human rights record. Under Mexican law, only a federal judge can authorize the surveillance of private communications, and only when officials can demonstrate a sound basis for the request.

It is highly unlikely that the government received judicial approval to hack the phones, according to several former Mexican intelligence officials. Instead, they said, illegal surveillance is standard practice.

“Mexican security agencies wouldn’t ask for a court order, because they know they wouldn’t get one,” said Eduardo Guerrero, a former analyst at the Center for Investigation and National Security, Mexico’s intelligence agency

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Welcome for Migrants Reveals a Farm Town Rift

By MIRIAM JORDAN

WILLARD, Ohio — Migrant workers arrive here every spring to work in the “muck,” which is what everybody calls the fertile soil that makes this part of Ohio the perfect place to grow radishes, peppers, cucumbers and leafy greens. The temporary workers can be seen planting, weeding and, later in the season, harvesting crops that will be sold at national supermarket chains.

But there’s trouble in the muck this growing season.

The first sign of discontent came when the Willard Area Chamber of Commerce was planning a welcome-back party for the migrants, most of whom come from Mexico and other countries farther south. Vendors were to sell food and drink. A soccer tournament, rides and singers were to entertain the crowd. At the chamber’s February meeting, everyone seemed on board.

“Our community is very fortunate we have a group of people who come here every year to work,” Cari McLendon, the chamber president, said. “We all ramp up for the season.”

But after a local newspaper published an article about the



FABRIZIO COSTANTINI FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Daniel Young of Willard, Ohio, raised objections to a planned event to welcome migrants returning to work in the local fields.

event in March, a far less welcoming response emerged, one rooted in the vigorous national debate over illegal immigration that brought President Trump to office. Some Willard residents complained that Hispanic workers did not deserve any special treatment, and that those without papers ought to be met not with open arms, but rather with handcuffs. Daniel Young, a Vietnam War veteran, wrote a letter to the editor of

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A Frenzy to Save a Ship Struck as Sailors Slept

By SCOTT SHANE

As an American destroyer cruised off the waters of Japan in clear weather after 2 a.m. Saturday, only a few dozen of the crew of 350 were likely to be awake: standing watch, keeping the engines running, manning the bridge.

Then, Navy officers with decades of experience at sea say, there were probably minutes of sheer terror aboard the Fitzgerald before the collision with an enormous container ship that killed seven sailors.

“My guess is they suddenly saw the lights of the other ship coming toward them and tried to veer off,” said retired Adm. James G. Stavridis, whose book “Destroyer Captain” recounts his time commanding a similar ship in the mid-1990s. “Suddenly your ship is sinking under you. It’s terrifying.”

Navy leaders on Sunday hailed the efforts of the surviving sailors who struggled to seal off compartments and pump out the water that poured in through gaping holes torn in the starboard side.

“Heroic efforts prevented the flooding from catastrophically spreading, which could have caused the ship to founder or sink,” said Vice Adm. Joseph P. Aucoin, commander of the Navy’s Seventh Fleet. “It could have been much worse.”

With the aid of tugboats, the Fitzgerald returned on Saturday to its port, the American base at Yokosuka, Japan, south of Tokyo. As hundreds of anxious spouses, children and fellow sailors waited for word, Navy divers entered flooded compartments below decks and recovered the bodies of seven sailors, according to former Navy officials.

The Navy released the names on Sunday night of the sailors killed, all of whom were in flooded berths, the Navy said.

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Reborn Juneteenth in Houston
Emancipation Park has reopened after a \$34 million renovation. But there’s a new worry: gentrification. PAGE A11

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A Frontier Town in China
A picturesque town, with broad valleys and hot springs near China’s border with Kazakhstan, has begun highlighting its proud Mongolian heritage. PAGE A4

Parliament Victory for Macron
President Emmanuel Macron’s party and its allies won a solid majority in the French National Assembly. PAGE A5



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As a Lake Spills, a Blame Game
Residents along Lake Ontario deal with recurring floods, and little agreement on what’s causing them. PAGE A15

Albany Saves Schools for Last
Mayor Bill de Blasio’s control of New York City schools will dominate the state legislative session’s end. PAGE A15

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YouTube to Curb Extremism
The service’s parent company says it will make it harder to find videos that are deemed offensive. PAGE B1

Univision’s Sense of Purpose
The network is the main news source for Hispanics who fear new immigration policies, Jim Rutenberg writes. PAGE B1



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Gabriele Grunewald is always out to win, but a fearsome shadow is never far behind, Michael Powell writes. PAGE D1

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Brooks Koepka became the seventh consecutive first-time winner in golf’s major championships. PAGE D1

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Barcelona’s music festival was larger than ever. Jon Pareles highlights the 15 best performances. PAGE C1

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