

DRONE MISSIONS CURBED BY OBAMA EXPAND IN AFRICA

C.I.A. SET FOR STRIKES

Targeting Insurgents in Libya From a Remote Air Base in Niger

This article is by Joe Penney, Eric Schmitt, Rukmini Callimachi and Christoph Koettl.

DIRKOU, Niger — The C.I.A. is poised to conduct secret drone strikes against Qaeda and Islamic State insurgents from a newly expanded air base deep in the Sahara, making aggressive use of powers that were scaled back during the Obama administration and restored by President Trump.

Late in his presidency, Barack Obama sought to put the military in charge of drone attacks after a backlash arose over a series of highly visible strikes, some of which killed civilians. The move was intended, in part, to bring greater transparency to attacks that the United States often refused to acknowledge its role in.

But now the C.I.A. is broadening its drone operations, moving aircraft to northeastern Niger to hunt Islamist militants in southern Libya. The expansion adds to the agency's limited covert missions in eastern Afghanistan for strikes in Pakistan, and in southern Saudi Arabia for attacks in Yemen.

Nigerien and American officials said the C.I.A. had been flying drones on surveillance missions for several months from a corner of a small commercial airport in Dirkou. Satellite imagery shows that the airport has grown significantly since February to include a new taxiway, walls and security

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New Strategy To Save Lives: Bullet Control

By IAN URBINA

SACRAMENTO — Sold from vending machines in Pennsylvania, feed depots in Nevada, pharmacies in Georgia and jewelry stores in Texas, ammunition is in many states easier to buy than cold medicine. But in California, which already enforces some of the nation's most restrictive gun laws, there is a movement underway against the unfettered sale of bullets.

Gun control advocates here have pushed to limit internet sales, ban large-capacity magazines, require sellers to have licenses, raise taxes on bullets, and mandate serial numbers or other traceable markings on ammunition so that the police can more easily track them.

Such regulations, several of which have been enacted and take effect this year and next, are inspired by the view that the best way to limit gun violence is to approach it as a "bullet control" problem. As Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, a Democrat from New York, told the Senate 25 years ago, when he introduced legislation that would have imposed a 10,000-percent tax on hollow-tip ammunition, "guns don't kill people; bullets do."

Across the country, bullets remain subject to far fewer federal restrictions than the weapons that fire them. Buying ammunition typically requires no form of identification, is handed over with no questions asked and, in most of the country, can be ordered online and delivered to doorsteps. In con-

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A Turncoat Spy Went Free. Putin Never Forgave Him.

By MICHAEL SCHWIRTZ and ELLEN BARRY

MOSCOW — Sergei V. Skripal was a little fish.

This is how British officials now describe Mr. Skripal, a Russian intelligence officer they recruited as a spy in the mid-1990s. When the Russians caught Mr. Skripal, they saw him that way, too, granting him a reduced sentence. So did the Americans: The intelligence chief who orchestrated his release to the West in 2010 had never heard of him when he was included in a spy swap with Moscow.

But Mr. Skripal was significant in the eyes of one man — Vladimir V. Putin, an intelligence officer of the same age and training.

The two men had dedicated their lives to an intelligence war between the Soviet Union and the West. When that war was suspended, both struggled to adapt.

One rose, and one fell. While Mr. Skripal was trying to reinvent himself, Mr. Putin and his allies, former intelligence officers, were gathering together the strands of the old Soviet system. Gaining power, Mr. Putin began settling scores, reserving special hatred for those who had betrayed the intelligence tribe when it was most vulnerable.

Six months ago, Mr. Skripal was found beside his daughter, Yulia, slumped on a bench in an English city, hallucinating and foaming at the mouth. His poisoning led to a Cold War-style confrontation between Russia and the West, with both sides expelling diplomats and wrangling over who tried to kill him and why.

Last Wednesday, British officials offered specifics, accusing Russia of sending two hit men to smear Mr. Skripal's front door handle with a nerve agent, an accusation vigorously denied by Moscow. British intelligence chiefs claim they have identified the men as members of the same Russian military intelligence unit, the G.R.U., or Main Intelligence Directorate, where Mr. Skripal once worked.

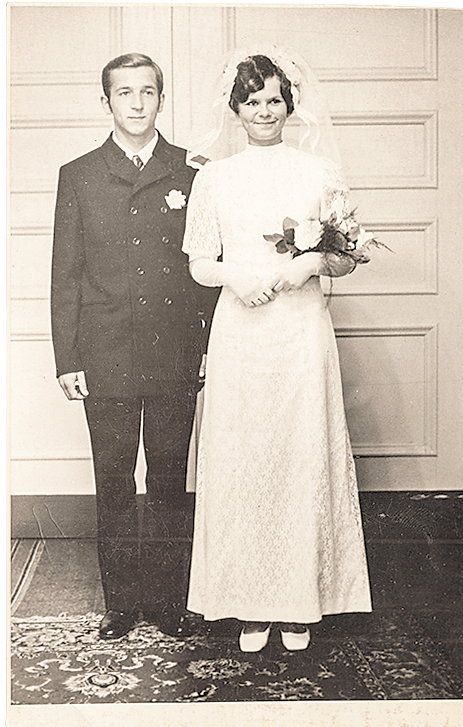
It is unclear if Mr. Putin played a role in the poisoning of Mr. Skripal, who survived and has gone into hiding. But dozens of interviews conducted in Britain, Russia, Spain, Estonia, the United States and the Czech Republic, as well as a review of Russian court documents, show how their lives intersected at key moments.

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POOL PHOTO BY MAXIM MARMUR

Both raised to fight against the West, they went opposite ways as the Soviet Union collapsed.



Family photos of the former Russian spy Sergei V. Skripal with his wife, Lyudmila, in 1972 and his daughter, Yulia, in the late 1980s. Mr. Skripal and Vladimir V. Putin, top, were both intelligence officers for the former Soviet Union.

WHITE HOUSE MEMO

Whose Surging Economy Is It? 2 Presidents Joust Over Credit

By PETER BAKER

WASHINGTON — The economy is doing quite well, thank you very much, and the president would naturally like to take credit. Both of them.

Barely a day passes without President Trump boasting about the growing economy, claiming with a mix of hyperbole and fact that it is "booming like never before." But former President Barack Obama finds all the Trumpian chest-thumping more than a little grating, given that the "booming" started on his watch.

The economic contest between the 44th and 45th presidents went public in recent days when Mr. Obama expressed his irritation and Mr. Trump fired back. At stake are more than ordinary political bragging rights. Central to Mr. Obama's historical legacy is the economy's recovery after its plummet to the brink of a new Great Depression. And central to Mr. Trump's current political standing is its further expansion. Never mind that the nation's

economic fortunes depend on more than the occupant of the Oval Office and his policies, driven as well by interest rates, technological innovation and the health of the global economy — trends beyond the control of any president. Voters and historians nonetheless assign credit and blame to presidents for the state of the economy. When it comes to economics, presidents would rather be remembered as Ronald Reagan or Bill Clinton than Herbert Hoover.

With midterm elections coming, the economy is Mr. Trump's trump card, the most unalloyed note of success in an otherwise herky-jerky presidency. Plagued by scandal, investigations, dysfunction in the West Wing and stalemate in Capitol Hill, Mr. Trump is making the surge of new jobs and business activity his most powerful argument for keeping Congress in Republican hands. Even with his own popu-

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Foe of Abortion Changes Focus For Senate Bid

By ELIZABETH DIAS

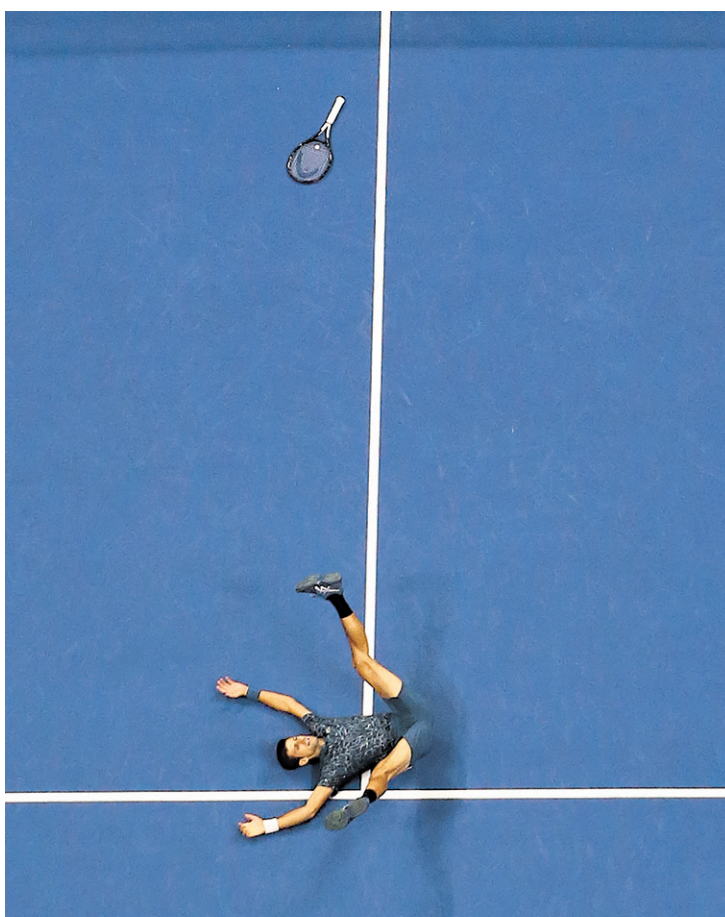
KINGSPORT, Tenn. — Inside the Kingsport Chamber of Commerce one morning last month, a few dozen voters sipped coffee and listened for 45 minutes to Representative Marsha Blackburn tick off all the reasons that this traditionally Republican stronghold in northeastern Tennessee should support her in one of the most high-stakes Senate races this year.

She praised President Trump. She warned of an invasion of liberal policies and a Democratic takeover of committees if Republicans lose the Senate. She stressed securing the border, fighting MS-13 and lowering taxes. She highlighted her work as a Republican House member to "get government off your back."

But one issue was entirely absent — the one that had made Ms. Blackburn famous in Washington, and infamous in Democratic circles: abortion.

Even as the Supreme Court confirmation hearings for Judge

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CHANG W. LEE/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Last Man Standing, Kind Of

Novak Djokovic claimed the men's singles title at the U.S. Open on Sunday, adding to his triumph at Wimbledon in July. Page D1.



INTERNATIONAL A4-11

Sharing a Bit of America

In rural areas of Guatemala that have sent a steady stream of migrants north, the U.S. looms large. PAGE A4

Muddle in Swedish Vote

Elections put a center-right bloc and the ruling center-left coalition neck and neck, and a far-right party rose. PAGE A8

NEW YORK A18-21

Cuomo on the Defensive

Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo said a bridge named for his father was not rushed, and he sought to distance himself from an attack aimed at his rival. PAGE A18

SPORTSMONDAY D1-10

Giants Fall in Coach's Debut

Flubs and missed opportunities doomed Coach Pat Shurmur's team in a 20-15 home loss to the Jaguars. PAGE D1

A Tarnished U.S. Open Final

Serena Williams's tirade during the title match made the right point at the wrong time, Juliet Macur writes. PAGE D1



NATIONAL A12-17

A Giant Trap for Ocean Trash

Organizers hope their system will collect 150,000 pounds of plastic from the Great Pacific Garbage Patch. PAGE A12

Anger at California's D.M.V.

A state that embraces expansive government is fumbling a basic service, as lines extend down sidewalks. PAGE A12

BUSINESS DAY B1-6

VW Goes to Trial

A hedge fund is financing a lawsuit by shareholders who want the automaker to reimburse them for losses caused by the diesel scandal. PAGE B1

ARTS C1-7

Netflix's Comedy Takeover

The streaming service neutralized Comedy Central and HBO by relying on "taste clusters" and by signing big stars and creating new ones. PAGE C1

EDITORIAL, OP-ED A24-25

David Leonhardt

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FASHION C8

Celebrating Ralph Lauren

A star-studded crowd, including Hillary Clinton and Oprah Winfrey, gathered at Central Park during Fashion Week to honor the designer's 50-year career.



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