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TITOLI:

SOUTHERN FLANK/ NAME:

-KRG seeks \$5 billion lifeline

<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/06/iraq-kurdistan-government-loans-international-banks.html>

-Grisly ISIS Video Seems Aimed at Quashing Resistance

http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/24/world/middleeast/grisly-isis-video-seems-aimed-at-quashing-resistance.html?emc=edit_tnt_20150623&nid=68055448&tntemail0=y&_r=1
ISIL blows up ancient shrines near Syria's Palmyra

-ISIL blows up ancient shrines near Syria's Palmyra

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/06/isil-ancient-shrines-syria-palmyra-150623234538378.html>

-Today EU launches “intelligence gathering “ mission against migrant smuggler gangs

<http://www.islamedianalysis.info/today-eu-launches-intelligence-gathering-mission-against-migrant-smuggler-gangs/>

-Jihadis enter Europe disguised as refugees fear terrorism experts

<http://www.islamedianalysis.info/jihadis-enter-europe-disguised-as-refugees-fear-terrorism-experts/>

-Emails to Hillary contradict French tale on Libya war

<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/06/libya-gadhafi-french-spies-rebels-support.html>

-Libya's air force warns Europe over naval plan for migrants

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/06/23/us-europe-migrants-libya-idUSKBN0P312B20150623>

RUSSIA – UKRAINE CRISIS

- Some Ukraine refugees in Russia yearn to return, others settle

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KRG seeks \$5 billion lifeline

Author: Mohammed A. Salih Posted June 23, 2015

ERBIL, Iraq — Burdened by a severe budget deficit and an ongoing war against the Islamic State (IS) along a frontier of over 1,000 kilometers (621 miles), Iraq's Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) is seeking to borrow up to \$5 billion from private international banks.

The move has sparked an uproar among Kurds, demonstrated by the weak support the move garnered during a parliament session to pass the loan bill.

It only secured 39 votes during the session June 2, attended by only 59 out of the 111 members of parliament. That is one of the lowest approval rates, if not the lowest, of any legislation passed in the Kurdish parliament since its establishment in 1992, a number of members of parliament and officials told Al-Monitor. On June 16, the parliament put to vote four other articles of the law as it had become clear that the legal quorum was not reached for voting on those articles during the June 2 meeting, Izzat Sabir, head of the Finance and Economic Affairs Committee in the Kurdistan parliament, told Al-Monitor.

Islamic blocs that make up around 15% of the seats in the Kurdish legislature unanimously boycotted the voting session largely on the grounds that the interest rate on any foreign loan will make it religiously prohibited.

“We believe the [Kurdish] government has other options such as reducing the waste of public funds, transparent collection of domestic revenues or selling oil and receiving its payment in advance,” Abubaker Haladani, a parliamentarian from the Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU) — a party with a Muslim Brotherhood-inspired ideology — told Al-Monitor.

"We believe the KRG does not meet the requirements to receive loans given its administrative and economic system and the weak financial oversight that exists," Haladani said.

No date has been set yet for when the KRG will receive the loans, as it depends on negotiations with the lending bodies.

Some parliamentarians told Al-Monitor that the KRG has already approached major banking firms, such as US-based Goldman Sachs and German Deutsche Bank.

An official from the Deutsche Bank's regional office in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) declined to comment on the matter "due to internal policies." Al-Monitor's attempts to solicit comments from Goldman Sachs did not bear fruit either.

The bill passed by the Kurdish parliament has to be approved by KRG President Massoud Barzani to legally take effect. After it is submitted to him, the president has 15 days to approve or reject the legislation. Many of those opposed to the measure say they are against the government incurring hefty loan sums that the population will have to pay for.

The government is said to be indebted to various local and international firms as well as some foreign countries, with some members of parliament telling Al-Monitor that the KRG has borrowed from countries such as Turkey and the UAE.

Sabir said that up until early 2015, the KRG had borrowed 8 trillion Iraqi dinars, approximately \$6 billion at current exchange rates. He believes that the KRG's borrowing is justified and voted for the recent bill. “It's important to overcome this crisis,” Sabir told Al-Monitor. “The money has to be spent with the knowledge of the parliament for investment and infrastructure projects.” He added that the

duration set by parliament for repaying the prospective \$5 billion debt will be up to 10 years.

Government officials are hoping that once the money arrives, it will stimulate the economy.

“Investment projects have their own returns. Such projects will cause economic growth and expand business movement, while tax and custom tariffs will increase and this will mean revenues,” Ahmed Khder Aga, spokesman of the KRG's Ministry of Finance, said.

The Kurdish government relies on the federal government in Baghdad for its budget. Iraqi government's coffers have been dealt a heavy blow by the plummeting oil prices since last year. Iraq's Ministry of Oil had announced late last year that the country expected its revenues would be 27% lower than expected in 2014.

The economy of Iraqi Kurdistan has slowed down significantly after the former Iraqi government of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki cut the KRG's share of the Iraqi budget in February 2014. The exact cutoff amount is not announced but could be up to several billion given that the KRG was not paid for most of last year. Iraq's 2014 budget stood at \$102 billion, of which 17% goes to the KRG after certain sovereign expenses are reduced.

Budget distributions have resumed since late 2014, after Maliki was replaced earlier in the year, but the amount given to the KRG has been well short of its share.

In May 2015, for instance, the KRG received only 508 billion Iraqi dinars (roughly \$420 million), less than half the budget amount it was owed by Baghdad.

A major reason behind the minimal support among members of parliament for the KRG's borrowing efforts is due to concerns about corruption, according to those opposing the borrowing move. The government has faced strong criticism over the years for what many see as rampant corruption.

"I rejected the bill and believe this is a game and a money-laundering attempt by the government and some people within it," said Bestun Fayaq, a parliament member from Gorran (Movement of Change), which used to be in the opposition up until last year but now controls the powerful Ministry of Finance.

In an attempt to create transparency and oversight, the ratified bill stipulates that parliament will decide on which projects the future loans will be spent.

Critics such as Fayaq are also concerned about the impact of the “massive” loan the KRG has been discussing. “The government is in a lot of debt already, up to \$17 billion. ... It will be a heavy burden on the government and people now and in the future, particularly given the interest rates,” Fayaq said.

Amid the debate surrounding the KRG's rising borrowing levels, some believe that for the loans to have a more positive impact on the local economy, it would be better if the lenders were local entities.

“If they borrow from local banks, the interest would go back to Kurdistan's economy ... if they are genuinely local banks, not just stationed here,” Anwar Anaid, a political economist and professor at the University of Kurdistan Hewler in Erbil, told Al-Monitor.

He said that the Kurdish economic model is a “confused” one that has inherited elements of the past socialist systems prevalent in Iraq, coupled with “extreme market economy” policies applied in recent years.

“If the loan is for the [current] crisis, then the KRG should borrow as little as possible to repay as quickly as possible and borrow from reputable lenders because that way you establish a credit-worthiness rate ... meaning better borrowing conditions in the future,” Anaid said.

If due to lower budget handouts from Baghdad the KRG opts to sell its own oil directly, as it has threatened to do, it might not need to take the loan. KIU and Gorran members of parliament with whom Al-Monitor spoke support this kind of measure instead of borrowing large sums of money.

Read More: <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/06/iraq-kurdistan-government-loans-international-banks.html>



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MIDDLE EAST

Grisly ISIS Video Seems Aimed at Quashing Resistance

By **BEN HUBBARD** JUNE 23, 2015

BEIRUT, Lebanon — Propagandists for the Islamic State released a video on Tuesday showing the group’s fighters incinerating, drowning and blowing up men accused of helping the United States and American allies bomb its bases.

The video was one of the Islamic State’s most gruesome and appeared to suggest internal concern that civilians living in areas under the group’s control could be actively working against it.

The propagandists included a personal message in the video intended for a lieutenant in the Iraqi police force, Bassem Mohammed, who has been struggling for months to obtain salaries and arms for a group of former policemen wanting to fight the Islamic State jihadists in Nineveh Province. Mosul, Nineveh’s provincial capital, is the largest city controlled by the Islamic State, also known as ISIS or ISIL.

In a telephone call from northern Iraq on Tuesday, Lieutenant Mohammed said that he knew about half of the 16 prisoners seen being killed in the video and that he was related to many of them.

“It was my father, my cousin, my uncle and others,” he said, adding that they had lived in Islamic State territory but had not acted against it.

“They are civilians, without exception,” he said. “If someone is not a civilian, he can’t live in their areas.”

The naming of Lieutenant Mohammed in the video and the killing of his relatives highlighted how the Islamic State works locally to undermine

the morale of its enemies.

The video opens with scenes of fighters from the Islamic State pulling the remains of dead civilians from piles of rubble, while a narrator curses the United States-led coalition that is bombing the group in Syria and Iraq and the spies who help the coalition.

Then a series of prisoners dressed in red jumpsuits say they were recruited by Lieutenant Mohammed and others to spy on Islamic State fighters, to form groups to kill Islamic State leaders and to film its bases.

Interspersed are scenes depicting the execution of the prisoners. One group is locked in a car that is set afire. They burned to death. Others are locked in a cage lowered into a swimming pool. They drowned. The final group, which included Lieutenant Mohammed's father, were killed after explosives placed on them were detonated.

"It is the group's most savage video to date," said Hassan Hassan, co-author of the book "ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror." "A lot of thinking went into it."

While the video was particularly graphic, Mr. Hassan said public executions were common in areas under Islamic State control.

"ISIS carries out brutal executions in a regular way as a constant reminder to local populations and to deter people from cooperating with its enemies," he said.

In an interview in northern Iraq late last year, Lieutenant Mohammed said he had joined the Iraqi police force after the American-led invasion in 2003 and worked in a tactical unit that had been trained by American special forces to fight Al Qaeda.

He showed photos on his iPad of his unit in their gear, posing with American soldiers, as well as certificates he had received for completing training programs financed by the United States government.

All that stopped after the United States withdrew from Iraq in 2011 and his unit was put under the local governor, who he said liked to call out the SWAT team for show when he had important meetings but gave them little support for real police work.

When Islamic State fighters stormed Mosul a year ago, Lieutenant Mohammed fled for the Kurdish-controlled region in northern Iraq, where

he and others from the province's police force founded a camp to gather their men in the hope that someone would arm them to fight the group.

Many of his relatives chose to stay in areas taken over by the Islamic State instead of living as displaced persons elsewhere.

About a month ago, the Islamic State arrested one of the men seen in the video, who had been in touch with Lieutenant Mohammed, and apparently used him to find the others.

"Anyone who had Bassem's number, anyone who had talked to him, they would take away," said a close relative of Lieutenant Mohammed's, who spoke on the condition of anonymity for fear of angering his relatives.

"They were not giving any information," the relative said. "It was all because they were related to him."

In one of the video's last scenes, a captive addresses Lieutenant Mohammed directly. "Nothing you do will work, and all you are doing is harming civilians," the captive says. "The Islamic State is fighting 60 countries, and you came to fight the Islamic State?"

The jihadists were said to have suffered a setback in Syria on Tuesday, when Kurdish fighters and Arab rebels seized an ISIS-held army base and village, Ein Essa, between the Turkish border and Raqqa, the largest ISIS-controlled city in Syria.

That advance, reported by the Kurdish fighters and the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a monitoring group, came after the seizure by Kurdish fighters and Arab rebels last week of the Syrian town of Tal Abyad on the Turkish border, a strategic area that the Islamic State has long used to smuggle fighters and supplies.

The seizure of Ein Eissa by Kurdish-led forces put them about 30 miles from Raqqa, but Kurdish leaders have said they have no plans to attack the city.

Also on Tuesday, United Nations investigators condemned Syria's government and opposition armed groups for deliberately targeting civilians.

Maher Samaan contributed reporting from Beirut, and Nick Cumming-Bruce from Geneva.

A version of this article appears in print on June 24, 2015, on page A6 of the New York edition with the headline: Grim ISIS Video Seems Meant to Cow Civilians .



ISIL blows up ancient shrines near Syria's Palmyra

Destruction of tombs raises fears that Palmyra's extensive Roman ruins are also in danger.

24 Jun 2015 04:27 GMT | [War & Conflict](#), [Middle East](#), [Syria](#), [Syrian crisis](#), [ISIL](#)

The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) group says it has destroyed two ancient shrines close to the Syrian city of Palmyra, seized by the armed group a month ago.

Photographs posted online appeared to show the shrines, 4km from Palmyra, being blown up and reduced to rubble on Saturday.

It was the first reported damage to ancient sites since ISIL captured Palmyra, known as Tadmur in Arabic and famed for its UNESCO-listed Roman ruins.

Pictures showed smoke rising from the hilltop tomb of Mohammed Bin Ali, a companion of the Prophet Muhammad's cousin, Imam Ali.

The second shrine was built over 500 years ago for a Sufi scholar known as Nizar Abu Bahaa Eddine.

In a statement, ISIL vowed to destroy statues and shrines, which it regards as idolatrous.

[Read more: ISIL 'plants mines' in ancient Syrian city of Palmyra](#)

ISIL's takeover of Palmyra has caused international concern about the fate of the city's historical treasures since the group has destroyed heritage sites in areas under its control in neighbouring Iraq.

In March, ISIL used a bulldozer to destroy a 3,000-year old [Assyrian city near Mosul](#), after also smashing artefacts in the city's museum.

The group has blown up dozens of shrines in Iraq and Syria, many belonging to the Sufi sect.

A few days ago, ISIL reportedly placed explosives at Palmyra's ruins as government forces stepped up their assault to recapture the city.

Hundreds of civilians have been killed in the city since it was captured in May, activists say, and thousands have fled.

Source: Al Jazeera

Today EU launches “intelligence gathering” mission against migrant smuggler gangs

23 GIUGNO 2015 BY ANDREA SPADA



One person was killed and another seriously injured when a rubber dinghy carrying migrants headed for [Italy](#) came under fire off the Libyan coast on Monday,

Its not clear who was responsible for the shooting but Libya’s coastguard has denied survivor reports that one of its patrol boats was involved. The incident happened just as EU foreign ministers meeting in Luxembourg agreed to use submarines, warships, and drones to gather intelligence against gangs who smuggle asylum seekers to [Europe](#) from Libya.

The operation which is launched today is limited to intelligence gathering until it has UN authorisation to capture and destroy smugglers’ ships.

The EU’s so called “Quick Response to the crisis” has been heavily criticised by Human Rights Organisations with Asylum Aid calling for safe legal routes to be the priority.

There has also been little “movement on a “quota” system”;<http://www.euronews.com/2015/05/20/eu-refusal-to-accept-migrant-quotas-unacceptable/> suggested as a way to share the burden of those countries on the front line of the migration crisis.

The [U.N.](#) estimates that around 100,000 migrants have arrived in Italy, [Greece](#) and Malta since the beginning of the year. At least 3,000 have died in the attempt.

Jihadis enter Europe disguised as refugees fear terrorism experts

23 GIUGNO 2015 BY ANDREA SPADA



Scores of [Islamic State terrorists](#) are believed to have smuggled their way into Europe among the migrants fleeing North Africa.

And it is feared the [IS bombers](#) could launch an attack within months.

Experts think the extremists have posed as asylum seekers after travelling on boats trafficking people from Africa to Italy.

A counter-terrorism source said: "It is widely believed that terrorists in groups and individually have been able to stow themselves on trafficking vessels and make the journey across the Mediterranean. Once in Europe they can go through the asylum process or disappear off the radar of the authorities by linking up with even more smuggling networks.

"This means they can penetrate deeper into Europe and avoid detection from the police and security services. Nobody knows just how many there are."

With a further 500,000 desperate people gathering in war-torn Libya and preparing to risk a hazardous journey to the Italian coast it is feared that even more IS terrorists could be on their way.

Emails to Hillary contradict French tale on Libya war

Author: Julian Pecquet Posted June 23, 2015

French spies secretly organized and funded the Libyan rebels who defeated Moammar Gadhafi, according to confidential emails to Hillary Clinton that were made public on June 22.

The memos from Clinton adviser Sidney Blumenthal contradict the popular French narrative about its intervention in Libya, raising fresh questions about a war that toppled a dictator but left chaos and radicalism in his stead. They were allegedly written by retired CIA operative Tyler Drumheller and released by a special congressional panel investigating the 2012 attack on the US mission in Benghazi.

The oft-repeated media tale in France holds that then-President Nicolas Sarkozy was outraged by Gadhafi's crackdown on protesters in February 2011 but had no clear idea who to support. Enter a swash-buckling "intellectual," Bernard-Henri Levy, who met with Transitional National Council leader Mustafa Abdul Jalil on March 4, immediately called Sarkozy, and had the French president invite Jalil to the Elysee Palace — and recognize the council as the country's official government by March 10.

The emails to Clinton tell a distinctly less heroic story.

According to one entry from March 22, 2011, "officers" with the General Directorate for External Security — the French intelligence service — "began a series of secret meetings" with Jalil and Gen. Abdul Fatah Younis in Benghazi in late February and gave them "money and guidance" to set up the council, whose formation was announced Feb. 27. The officers, "speaking under orders from [Sarkozy] promised that as soon as the [council] was organized France would recognize [it] as the new government of Libya."

"In return for their assistance," the memo states, "the DGSE officers indicated that they expected the new government of Libya to favor French firms and national interests, particularly regarding the oil industry in Libya."

The email goes on to state that Jalil and Younis "accepted this offer" and "have maintained contact with the DGSE officers in Cairo." The memo is titled, "How the French created the National Libyan Council, ou l'argent parle."

Another memo dated May 5 asserts that individuals close to the council stated "in strictest confidence" that as early as mid-April 2011 French humanitarian flights also included "executives from the French company TOTAL, the large construction firm VINCI and the European Aeronautic Defence and Space Company N.V. (EADS)." Subsequent flights have allegedly carried representatives "from the conglomerate THALYS and other large French firms, all with close ties to [Sarkozy]."

"After meeting with the [council] these French business executives leave discreetly by road, via Tobruk to Egypt," the memo states. "These convoys are organized and protected by para-military officers [from the DGSE]."

The memo adds that Levy himself came up with the idea and obtained the council's signature on an agreement to give French firms "favorable consideration" in business matters. He is said to have used "his status as a journalist to provide cover for his activities."

A later memo, from September 2011, asserts that Sarkozy urged the Libyans to reserve 35% of their

oil industry for French firms — Total in particular — when he traveled to Tripoli that month. In the end, however, Italy's Eni came out ahead with Russian and Chinese firms biding their time, even as the Libyan oil production plummeted because of the civil war.

The veracity of the memos' content is difficult if not impossible to ascertain.

While Levy has long been a controversial figure in France, the council was riven by internal rivalries. Younis himself was assassinated in July 2011 — at Jalil's urging according to an Aug. 8 memo to Clinton. And Drumheller himself has courted controversy for his role in the run-up to the 2003 Iraq war, with liberals celebrating him as a truth-teller and conservatives saying he helped concoct some of the false information he later debunked.

The French Embassy in Washington declined to comment, not even to refute the allegations. The French Defense Department, which oversees the DGSE, also declined to comment.

“Our press office has received your query and thanks you for your interest in Defense matters,” the agency told Al-Monitor in an emailed statement. “Surely you must realize the Department of Defense isn't going to answer your question.”

The State Department also declined to comment on the contents of the Clinton emails, which were sent to a private email account that she maintained when she was secretary of state. Republicans have latched on to the controversial email use to undermine Clinton's presidential run and accused the State Department of failing to turn them over to the special committee.

“These emails should have been part of the public record when Secretary Clinton left office and at a bare minimum included when the State Department released Clinton's self-selected records on Libya,” committee Chairman Trey Gowdy, R-S.C., said in a statement June 22. “For that reason, the committee has made the decision to release the latest set of Clinton's public records unearthed by the committee.”

French spymasters' role in Libya has been alluded to before, most notably in the 2012 book “The Truth About our War in Libya” by French historian Jean-Christophe Notin. That book said Henry-Levy's role in the French decision to go to war had been overblown.

“All has not been said about this war, because it has only had one narrator: Bernard-Henri Levy,” Notin told L'Express magazine. “Yes, he was one of the Libyans' interlocutors. But his telling glosses over not only the coalition's military exploits, but also the underground work of diplomatic and military officials on the ground, sometimes for quite some time, in Libya.”

Other memos released June 22 give credence to the notion that Sarkozy was determined from the start of the uprising to get rid of Gadhafi, despite earlier efforts to court him after he abandoned his weapons program and sought closer ties with the West. A March 20 memo, for instance, states that Sarkozy “plans to have France lead the attacks on [Gadhafi] over an extended period of time” and “sees this situation as an opportunity for France to reassert itself as a military power.”

Read More: <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/06/libya-gadhafi-french-spies-rebels-support.html>



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Libya's air force warns Europe over naval plan for migrants

BENGAZI, LIBYA



Illegal migrants who attempted to sail to Europe sit in a boat returning them to Libya as it is docked, after their boat was intercepted at sea by the Libyan coast guard, at Khoms, Libya May 6, 2015.

REUTERS/AYMEN ELSAHLI

The air force commander of Libya's internationally recognized government has warned European countries that any vessels entering Libyan waters without permission would be targeted by air strikes.

The warning came after European Union foreign ministers agreed on Monday to launch a naval operation to combat people-traffickers who have brought thousands of migrants on perilous journeys across the Mediterranean Sea to Europe.

Securing consent from Libya, where two rival governments and their armed forces are battling for control, has been a major concern for European powers trying to stem an increasing flow of migrants from Libya's shores.

"Any vessel found in Libyan waters without previous cooperation or permission will be targeted by the air force," Libyan air force commander Saqr Al-Jaroushi told

Reuters late on Monday.

The self-declared National Salvation government, set up last summer when an armed faction called Libya Dawn took over the capital, has also expressed its "deep concern" over the EU plan.

In a statement on Tuesday, the Tripoli government interior ministry said the EU had not taken into consideration the difficult situation within Libya nor how to coordinate with Libyan authorities for example on returning migrants.

The EU naval initiative will be limited to intelligence-gathering - using submarines, warships, drones and helicopters - for now because it has yet to obtain the United Nations' authorization for a wider scope of operations.

The initial plan was to disrupt the traffickers' business and to capture and destroy their ships, possibly even in Libyan waters.

But the EU would need a U.N. Security Council resolution and consent from the Libyan authorities to operate in Libyan territorial waters and coastal areas and it has neither so far.

The United Nations is trying to broker a ceasefire and power-sharing deal between the two factions as Western governments worry Libya is becoming a safe haven for militants as well as for smugglers ferrying illegal migrants into Europe.

Some Ukraine refugees in Russia yearn to return, others settle



By **Max Delany**
14 hours ago



Primorka (Russia) (AFP) - Marina Balatskaya watched as her three children played in the Russian holiday camp that has become their home since they fled the fighting in east Ukraine.

For some seven months the single mother, 35, and her family have been living alongside refugees from the conflict in the government-run settlement on the shore of the Azov Sea.

And despite the Ukraine border being just 50 kilometres (31 miles) away, with deadly clashes rumbling on there and east Ukraine in turmoil, she has no idea when they will be going home.

"We want to go home of course. I want to go home, my kids want to go home. Whatever problems there might have been, it is still our home," she told AFP.

Her sister is still living in Ukraine and she hopes she can take her kids back but, despite Ukraine's insistence she is free to return, she says she is scared to head to government-held territory.

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"I can't go back because the Ukrainians are in control of my town," she says.

"As I decided to come to Russia to seek refuge, that means that I would be considered an enemy of the people."

- Some stay, more move -

Since the fighting in east Ukraine -- that Kiev accuses Moscow of instigating -- erupted last April, local officials in Russia's border region of Rostov say some 260,000 people have crossed into the country and not gone back.



Injured former Ukrainian rebel fighters rest on a bench on June 8, 2015 outside a makeshift rehabili ...

In the district where Balatskaya's camp is, of the 15,000 refugees from Ukraine who passed through here just 600 -- mainly elderly couples or mothers with young children -- are now left.

While a significant number have gone back and those who remain hope to follow them some day, thousands of others have signed up for a government programme to settle them across Russia.

Pensioner Galina -- along with her 90-year-old mother, husband, daughter and granddaughter -- chose to stay put in the camp because she can't bring herself to cut the threads with the life she left behind.

But -- much to her disappointment -- the retired teacher's younger daughter and her husband opted to head to a remote region in Siberia, over 5,000 kilometres away.



Injured former Ukrainian rebel fighters rest on beds on June 8, 2015 at a makeshift rehabilitation c ...

"I told them not to go but they went," she told AFP, sitting on a bed in one of the rooms her family occupies.

Now her daughter's family is living in a camp for refugees as her husband tries to eke out a living as a part-time plumber.

"They had some distant acquaintances who convinced them to go but it hasn't worked out."

- Applying for citizenship -

Some from Ukraine, however, have managed to set themselves up in Russia and say that they are not planning to return to their homeland.

Roman Bobrovnikov, 51, sits in his new office in a poultry plant some 60 kilometres from the border where he managed to find himself work independently.

Despite the fact that he's gone from being a director of a similar factory in Ukraine to a bookkeeper now, he says he feels "lucky" to have a job that provides a house for his wife and 26-year-old daughter.



A picture taken on June 9, 2015 shows a woman and her children, Ukrainian refugees, playing on swing ...

"I have just handed in our documents to the migration services to start the process of getting Russian citizenship for us all, hopefully something will get done in a year or 18 months," he said.

"What is waiting for me back in Ukraine? A pension? My parents don't receive their pensions there now."

But while Bobrovnikov has decided to make the shift definitively, others insist they will go home one day.

Ksenia Kanashina, 33, has made herself the unofficial head of the refugees left behind in the holiday camp.

Kanashina's husband is fighting with the pro-Russian rebels against the government in east Ukraine and she says she wants to be ready to return when she can.

She has seen ceasefires between the two sides signed and collapse and a current truce has not stopped shooting at frontline flashpoints.

But despite her earlier hopes of going back being shattered -- she still believes she will return one day soon.

"The war can't go on forever," she said.

"It has to finish somehow and then hopefully we can go back."

U.S. sending tanks and armor to Europe

By **Brad Lendon, CNN**

Updated 2326 GMT (0626 HKT) June 23, 2015



U.S. troops in European exercises 11 photos

U.S. soldiers fire ceremonial rounds from M1A2 Abrams tanks at the A November.

1 of 11



Story highlights

Defense Secretary Ash Carter makes announcement in Estonia

250 tanks, Bradley armored fighting vehicles and self-propelled howitzers will be sent

(CNN)The U.S. military will be sending dozens of tanks, Bradley armored fighting vehicles and self-propelled howitzers to allied countries in the Baltics and Eastern Europe in response to Russian actions in the Ukraine, Defense Secretary Ash Carter said Tuesday.

The equipment, enough to arm one combat

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Armor going to Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Bulgaria, Romania and Poland

brigade, will be positioned in Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Bulgaria, Romania and Poland, Carter announced at a press conference with U.S. allies in Estonia.

Carter said the equipment will be moved around Europe for training and exercises.

[RELATED: Carter embarks on European tour with attention fixed on Russia](#)



U.S. to send tanks to Europe to counter Russia 02:15

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The U.S. defense chief also said Washington and its NATO allies will be boosting cyber defense efforts.

"We must prepare NATO and our allies for cyber challenges, particularly from Russia," Carter said in prepared remarks.

Carter's announcement comes during a week-long tour of Europe.

"We need to explain to those who doubt the value of our NATO commitments that the security of Europe is vital to everything else we hold dear," [Carter said at a press event with his German counterpart](#) Monday.

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While Carter won't be visiting Russia on this trip, Russian President Vladimir Putin's influence looms over the tour's discussions.

"One of [Putin's] stated views is a longing for the past and that's where we have a different perspective on the world and even on Russia's future," he told reporters en route to Germany, in response to a question about whether Putin is a rational actor. "We'd like to see us all moving forward, Europe moving forward, and that does not seem to be his stated perspective."

Carter also addressed comments Putin made last week, announcing the addition of 40 intercontinental ballistic missiles to Russia's nuclear arsenal, a move Carter said reflected "posturing" on the Russian leader's part.

"Nuclear weapons are not something that should be the subject of loose rhetoric by world leadership," Carter said. "We all understand the gravity of nuclear dangers. We all understand that Russia is a long established nuclear power. There is no need for Vladimir Putin to make that point."

Carter's comments are just the latest in an escalating war of words between U.S. and Russian officials.

Speaking at the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum on Friday, Putin denied his government is behaving aggressively.

"We are not aggressive," Putin said. "We are persistent in pursuing our interests."

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Last week [U.S. Air Force Secretary Deborah James addressed Russian actions](#).

"The biggest threat on my mind is what's happening with Russia and the activities of Russia," James said during a visit to the Paris Air Show. "It's extremely worrisome on what's going on in the Ukraine."

Like what Carter said is planned for the U.S. Army's tanks, U.S. Air Force planes have been rotating through Europe under Operation Atlantic Resolve.

Participating in those exercises and rotations have been B-2 and B-52 bombers, F-15Cs and A-10 attack planes.

James said the F-22 Raptor, the Pentagon's premier fighter, could join that list.

"I could easily see the day -- though I couldn't tell you the day exactly -- when the F-22, for example, rotates in is a possibility. I don't see why that couldn't happen in the future," James said,

The Army, too, has been active in these exercises. In March, the Army sent a convoy of armored vehicles on an 1,100-mile trek from the Baltics through Poland and the Czech Republic to Germany.

Analysts said the size of the armor deployment Carter announced Tuesday was showed it was more symbolic than strategic.

During the Cold War, the U.S. had the same amount of armor, a brigade, stationed in just one small part of what was then West Germany, said retired Brig. Gen. Mark Kimmit, the former military assistant to the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe.

"We are now talking about taking one brigade combat team and splitting it among these six countries. That should hardly be seen as a threat to Russia," Kimmit said.

But the symbolism was important, he said.

"We're sending a message of assurance to our NATO allies. We have obligations, under the NATO treaty, to defend those countries if attacked. I think those countries in the region are going to be welcoming the positioning of these - this equipment into their countries," Kimmit said.

Orysia Lutsevych, an analyst with the Chatham House think tank in London, said the U.S. and its NATO allies should have been making these kind of statement to Moscow sooner.

The Obama administration "should have pushed the Kremlin before reaching to the kind of moment of escalation we are having right now," Lutsevych said. "By trying to appease the Kremlin too long, we will be facing with a higher cost every day."