

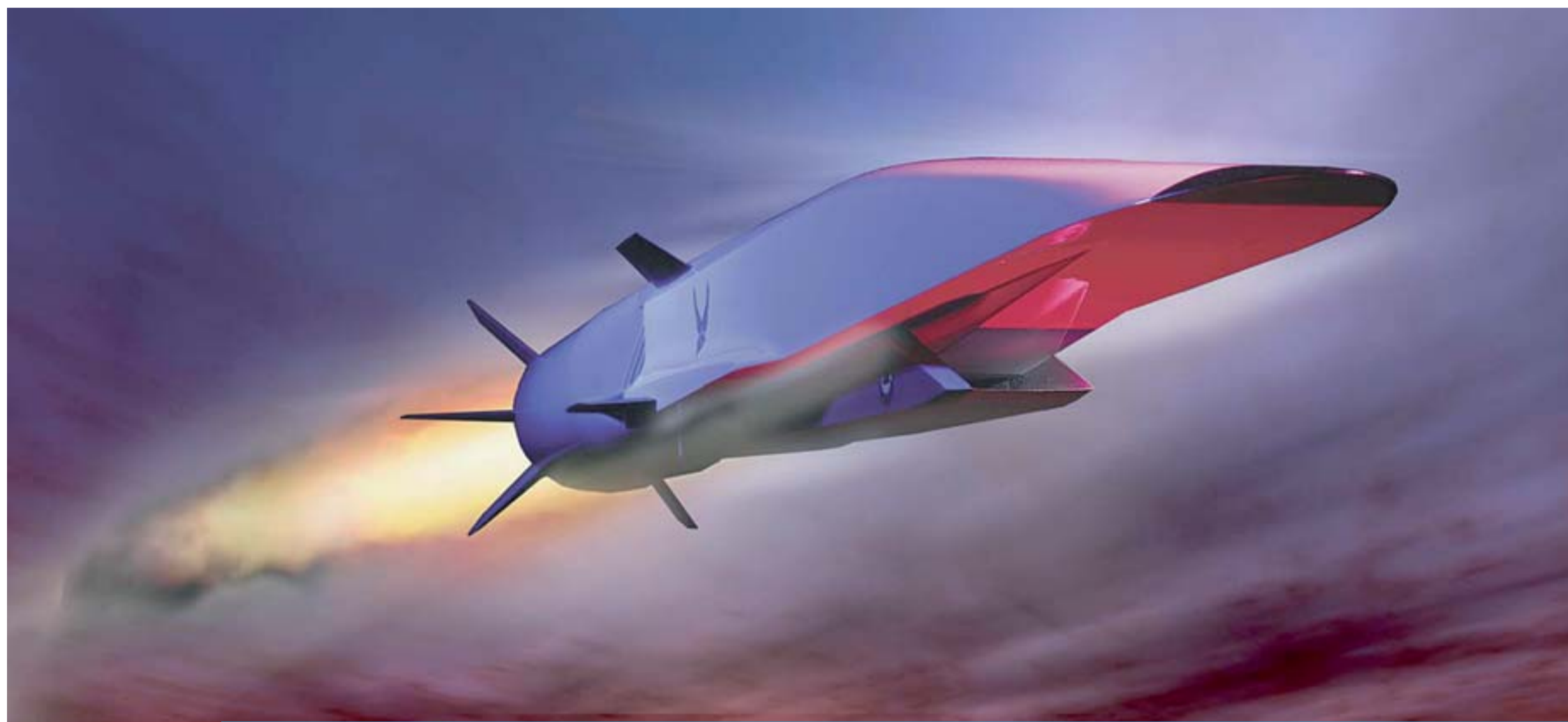


US indicts 13 Russians for vote interference

## Cameroon's separatists prepare for guerrilla war

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CALIFORNIA: This undated photo illustration shows the X-51A Waverider set to demonstrate hypersonic flight, powered by a Pratt & Whitney Rocketdyne SJJ61 scramjet engine. —AFP

# Pentagon to counter rivals' hypersonic missiles

## Authorities turning attention to a new generation of threat

WASHINGTON: Even as the Pentagon hustles to ensure that its defenses keep pace with North Korea's fast-growing rocket program, US officials increasingly are turning attention to a new generation of missile threat. These weapons under development by China and Russia—as well as by the United States—can fly at many times the speed of sound and are designed to beat regular anti-missile defense systems. The hypersonic missiles could change the face of future warfare, as they can switch direction in flight and do not follow a predictable arc like conventional missiles, making them much harder to track and intercept.

"China's hypersonic weapons development outpaces ours... we're falling behind," Admiral Harry Harris, who heads the military's Pacific Command, warned lawmakers on Wednesday. "We need to continue to pursue that and in a most aggressive way in order to ensure that we have the capabilities to both defend against China's hypersonic weapons and to develop our own offensive hypersonic weapons," he added. In its proposed \$9.9

billion requested budget for 2019, the Missile Defense Agency (MDA) is asking for \$120 million to develop hypersonic missile defenses, a big increase from the \$75 million in fiscal 2018.

MDA Director of Operations Gary Pennett told Pentagon reporters this week that the potential deployment by America's rivals of hypersonic weapons—which could be launched from planes, ships or submarines and carry either nuclear or conventional payloads—would create a "significant" gap in US sensor and missile interceptor capabilities. "The key challenge to US national security and the security of US friends and allies is the emergence of new threats

designed to defeat the existing" ballistic missile defense system, Pennett said.

### So, why the sudden alarm?

According to reports in the Japan-based Diplomat magazine, China has developed—and last year tested—a new type of hypersonic missile called the DF-17. The US Office of the Director of National Intelligence this week stated China "has tested a hypersonic glide vehicle." Russia too is

believed to be developing its own hypersonic weapon called the Zircon. According to Russian news agency Tass, it is to go into serial production this year.

### A mile a second

Though the Pentagon is warning about hypersonics, the United States has been developing the technology for years. The Air Force says its X-51A Waverider cruise missile, tested in 2012, could travel at speeds faster than Mach 6 (3,600 miles per hour, 5,800 kilometers per hour). That's more than one mile a second, and future iterations are expected to go much faster. Part of the reason China has been able to advance its hypersonic missile programs is that it is not subject to anti-missile treaties signed between the United States and Russia. The 1987 Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty banned short- and intermediate-range ground-launched missiles. "Over 90 percent of China's ground-based missiles would be excluded by INF if they were now in it," Harris said. Still, by far the lion's share of the MDA's budget continues to go towards improving existing missile-defense systems. Various sensors and radars can track an incoming missile hurtling towards a target, then blast interceptor rockets toward it to pulverize it with kinetic energy. —AFP



Hypersonic missiles could change the face of future warfare

## Counting the homeless in the City of Light

PARIS: Of Emmanuel Macron's many bold promises since sweeping to power last year, his pledge to completely banish homelessness from the streets of France was perhaps the boldest. The president gave himself until the close of 2017 to end rough-sleeping once and for all—but a midnight stroll through Paris shows that goal to be distant dream.

"We've failed there," Macron admitted last week, pointing to a continuing influx of African and South Asian migrants who often end up camping out. Visitors are often shocked by the grim poverty in pockets of the City of Light, the constant begging on the metro and the migrants' tents perched in the freezing cold along the scenic Canal St Martin. Charities estimate the homeless population of Paris to be about 3,000. Many are foreign, often from Eastern Europe. But there's no official data—an issue that city hall, under pressure to tackle one of the capital's most visible problems, is now trying to fix. After two blazing rows sparked by politicians' offhand remarks about homelessness, Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo carried out the city's first-ever homeless census on Thursday night. Some 2,000 volunteers and officials fanned out until 1 a.m., counting the bodies huddled in doorways and surveying those awake about their housing and health problems. Rail workers counted those sheltering at metro stations. Taking her cue from similar initiatives in New York, Brussels and Athens, Hidalgo hopes this "snapshot of reality" will lead to better policies to help those living in indignity as the city passes them by.

### Heartbreak

Early figures will be released next week ahead of the full census next month. But what the figures won't show is the human misery behind them. "Welcome to the Hotel California," a stocky man slurred from his damp mattress near the lush Buttes Chaumont park. Barefoot as he huddled by a warm air vent, Danilo, a Croatian Serb who fought in the 1990s Balkan wars, gave his age as 44. But he looked a decade older. Beside him lay a friend with a badly bruised face, the pain numbed by alcohol. Danilo's is the story of a life spun out of control. An electrician who once worked for Siemens in Germany installing hospital machines, he moved to France two years ago after a painful divorce. Irregular work dried up. He spends his days drinking on his mattress and jovially greeting the neighbours. "Spring will come and I will change my life," he said. He pulled out a large silver cross from beneath his jumper. "I'm asking him for a little helping hand," he said, nodding heavenwards.

Ruth Owen, policy coordinator at the EU federation of homeless organisations FEANTSA, said rough sleeping had soared in Paris since the financial crisis, a phenomenon seen in other European cities like London, Dublin and Athens. "On a basic level, it's due to house prices rising faster than incomes," she said, adding that despite France having the strongest housing rights in Europe, this doesn't always amount to much. An estimate by statistics agency INSEE put France's national homeless count at 141,500 in 2012, but charities say this has likely rocketed due to a housing crunch and the migrant crisis. —AFP

## Ethiopia declares state of emergency

ADDIS ABABA: Ethiopia announced a state of emergency on Friday, a day after the prime minister resigned, as pressure mounted on the country's ruling coalition. The coalition decided emergency rule was "vital to safeguarding the constitutional order", state-run Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation said. The announcement gave no further details. The defence minister was expected to hold a news conference yesterday morning giving further details, but it was delayed. Ethiopia only fully lifted its last state of emergency in August following months of curfews, restrictions on movement and the detention of 29,000 people.

Those measures followed two years of anti-government protests in which security forces killed hundreds of people in Amhara and Oromiya, the nation's two most populous provinces. The imposition of a new state of emergency may indicate that Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn's resignation on Thursday was the result of tensions among the four parties in the ruling coalition. The coalition has been in power since 1991 and controls all 547 seats in parliament. But cracks have appeared since the outbreak of unrest, with some senior officials resigning and others being sidelined.

### Opposition demands

The two largest ethnic groups in the Horn of Africa country, the Oromo and Amharic, complain they are under-represented in the country's corridors of power. Mulatu Gemechu, deputy secretary of the opposition Oromo Federalist Congress, said on Friday Ethiopia needed a completely new political system. The Congress is one of seven parties that make up the biggest opposition coalition, MEDREK. "Ethiopians now need a gov-



ADDIS ABABA: Ethiopian journalist Eskinder Nega (center), who was given an 18-year prison sentence in 2012 on accusations of links to the banned Ginbot 7 group, reacts with people after being released from Kaliti Prison in Addis Ababa. —AFP

ernment that respects their rights, not one that keeps beating and killing them," he told Reuters. Mulatu's views are echoed in the Oromo heartlands that surround the capital Addis Ababa. It was there that protests against an urban development plan in 2015 sparked larger demonstrations demanding more freedom and civil rights.

"Oromos should not be jailed for exercising their rights," said Dinkissa, a university student in Ambo, a town in the region. "Oromos have been always mistreated. His (the prime minister's) resignation will not mean anything unless our rights are respected. Whoever comes to power should know that. Otherwise, we will not stop protesting." Rights advocates have frequently criticised Ethiopia's government for mass arrests and long jail terms handed to political opponents and journalists.

### Prisoners freed

But more than 6,000 prisoners have been freed since January as the government strug-

gles to calm discontent. Most were detained during the mass protests; some were charged with terrorism offences. As well as tensions in its Oromo and Amharic regions, the government has grappled with several armed groups in the past decade. Among them is the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), which has fought the government since 1994 and draws support from some of the country's ethnic Somali population. Somalia and Ethiopia share a long and porous border.

This week the ONLF and Ethiopian authorities held private talks in Nairobi, an observer present at the discussions told Reuters on condition of anonymity. A tentative accord was reached on a ceasefire, prisoner releases, boundaries between the Somali and Oromiya regions of Ethiopia, and economic development, the observer said. But a final deal was not signed because the ONLF wanted a signatory from Ethiopia's central government, rather than the leader of the Somali region who represented the government at the talks. —Reuters