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Ukrainian soldiers of the 117th Separate Mechanized Brigade being briefed before heading out to the southeastern front lines.

Why Iowa Turned Into a Beacon That Burns Red After Deep Blue

By JONATHAN WEISMAN
DES MOINES — With the Iowa caucuses six days away, politicians will be crisscrossing the state, blowing through small-town Pizza Ranches, filling high school gyms, and flipping pancakes at church breakfasts.
What Iowans will not be seeing are Democrats. President Biden spoke Friday in Pennsylvania, and he and Vice President Kamala Harris both were in South Carolina over the weekend and on Monday. But Iowa, a state that once sizzled with bipartisan politics, launched Barack Obama to the presidency in 2008 and seasawed between Republican and Democratic governors, has largely been ceded to the G.O.P. as part of a remarkable sorting of voters in the Upper Midwest.
There is no single reason that over the past 15 years the Upper Midwest saw Iowa turn into a beacon of Donald J. Trump’s popu-

A Remarkable Swing in Midwestern Views on the G.O.P.

lism, North and South Dakota shed storied histories of prairie populism for a conservatism that reflected the national G.O.P., and Illinois and Minnesota moved dramatically leftward. (In between, Wisconsin found an uncomfortable parity between its conservative rural counties and its more industrial and academic centers in Milwaukee and Madison.)
No state in the nation swung as heavily Republican between 2012 and 2020 as Iowa, which went from a six-percentage-point victory for Barack Obama to an eight-point win for Mr. Trump in the last presidential election.
Deindustrialization of rural

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Weary Soldiers at ‘Hell’s Gate’ Endure Fierce Russian Attacks

By CARLOTTA GALL and VLADYSLAV GOLOVIN
ZAPORIZHZHIA REGION, Ukraine — Under the cover of darkness, leaning forward under the weight of packs and rifles, a squad of soldiers walked along a muddy lane and slipped into a village house.
They were Ukrainian infantrymen of the 117th Separate Mechanized Brigade, assembling for a last briefing and roll call several miles from Russia positions before heading to the trenches on the front line. Stolid men in helmets and rubber boots, they listened in silence as an intelligence officer briefed them on a new route in to their positions.
“Morale is all right,” said the deputy battalion commander, who uses the call sign Shira, standing nearby to see the men off. “But physically we are exhausted.”
Ukrainian troops along most of the 600-mile front line are offi-

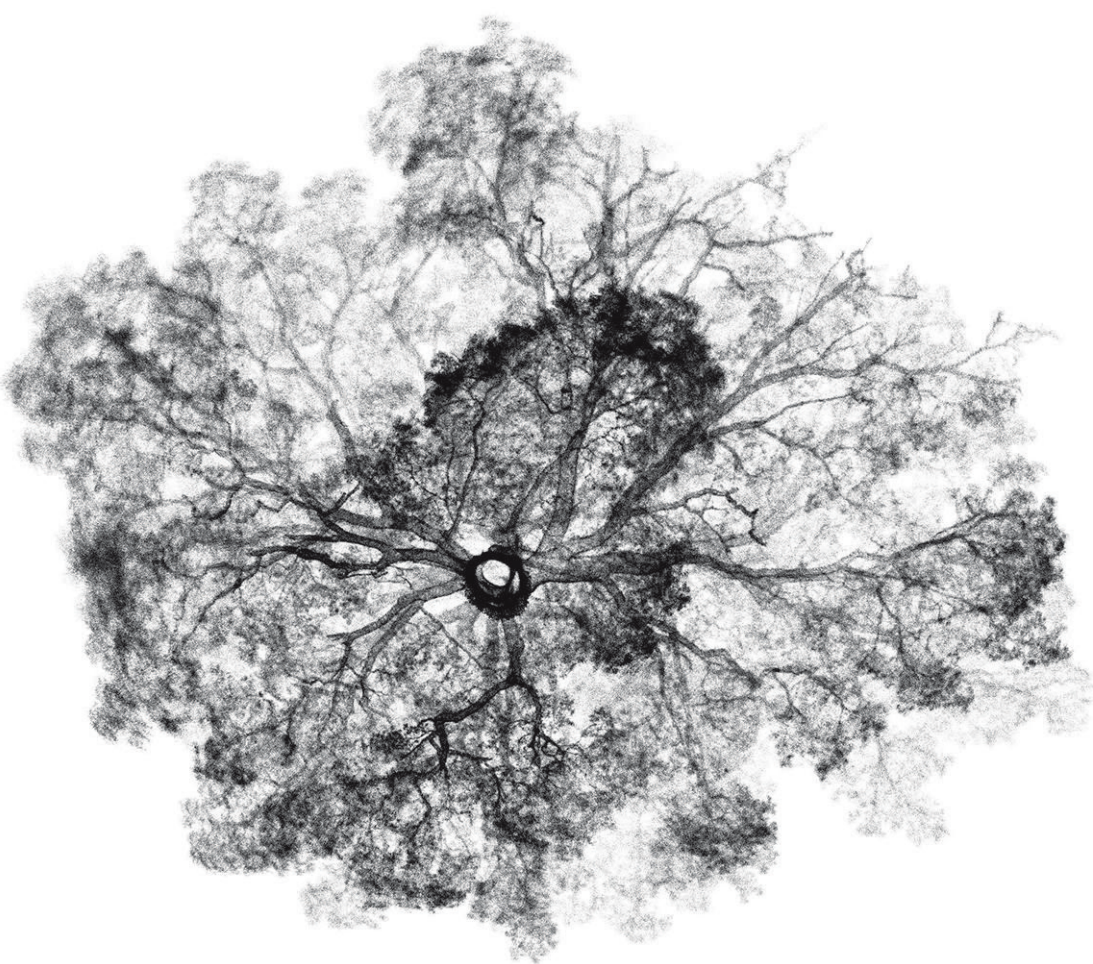
Troops Say the Front Line Has Never Been More Dangerous

cially in defensive mode. Only in the southern region of Kherson are they still on the offensive in a tough assault across the Dnipro River.
But the fighting has not eased and Russian forces are now on the offensive.
The capture of the town of Robotyne in the southeastern Zaporizhzhia region was as far as Ukrainian troops managed to advance in their summer counteroffensive. No breakthrough occurred. Now, in the trenches around Robotyne, Russian units are attacking daily. Ukrainian troops try to counterattack immediately if they lose ground, com-

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Spending Deal Gets Pushback From Far Right

By CARL HULSE
WASHINGTON — Congress on Monday began an uphill push to pass a new bipartisan spending agreement in time to avoid a partial government shutdown next week, with Speaker Mike Johnson encountering stiff resistance from his far-right flank to the deal he struck with Democrats.
Ultraconservative House Republicans have panned the \$1.66 trillion agreement Mr. Johnson made with Senator Chuck Schumer, the New York Democrat and majority leader, saying it is unacceptable. The agreement essentially hews to the bargain that Congress passed last year to suspend the debt ceiling, which the hard right opposed at the time and had hoped to scale back. It also includes \$69 billion in spending that was added as a side deal, money that conservatives sought to block altogether.
“This is a total failure,” the far-right House Freedom Caucus, a group of Republicans who have proved a thorn in the side of a series of G.O.P. speakers, wrote on social media.
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FOREST DESIGN

Delicate Lines of Life

A laser scan of a beech tree in Romania, as individual as a fingerprint, allows scientists keen to conserve the trees to track how it grows and changes. Page D8.

A Strike Kills A Commander Of Hezbollah

Militia Blames Israelis for Death in Lebanon

This article is by Euan Ward, Isabel Kershner and Thomas Fuller.
BEIRUT, Lebanon — Israel launched strikes into southern Lebanon on Monday against Hezbollah, the Iranian-backed militia, which said one of its senior commanders had been killed there, adding to concerns that Israel’s fight against Hamas in Gaza could erupt into a wider regional war.
Hezbollah and Israel have fired shells and rockets at each other frequently over the past three months, in some of the most intense fighting along the Lebanese border since Israel and Hezbollah were at war in 2006.
The commander was killed during Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken’s latest trip to the Middle East, part of the Biden administration’s efforts to prevent the Israel-Hamas war from spreading to other fronts, and as Israeli officials issued new warnings to their adversaries.
During a visit to northern Israel on Monday, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told soldiers guarding the border that Israel was ready “to do whatever is necessary to restore security to the north.”
“Hezbollah got us wrong in a major way in 2006 and is getting us seriously wrong even now,” he said, referring to Israel’s last war with Hezbollah, according to a statement by his office.
Concerns over a wider war have preoccupied the United States and its allies since the Oct. 7 Hamas-led attacks in Israel that killed about 1,200 Israelis and touched off the conflict in Gaza. Those concerns largely center on three Iranian-backed groups: Hezbollah in Lebanon; the militias in Iraq and Syria; and the Houthis in Yemen, who have attacked commercial ships in the Red Sea and prompted the United States to send two aircraft carriers to the Eastern Mediterranean in October.
During a visit to Saudi Arabia on Monday, Mr. Blinken met briefly with Josep Borrell, the European Union’s top diplomat, to “discuss efforts to prevent the conflict from spreading and secure a lasting peace for the region,” according to a spokesman, Matthew Miller. Like Mr. Blinken, Mr. Borrell was in Saudi Arabia to meet with the kingdom’s de facto ruler, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.
“The Israelis have been very clear with us that they want to find a diplomatic way forward, a diplomatic way forward that creates the kind of security that allows Israelis to return home — nearly

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ISRAEL BEGINNING TO NARROW FOCUS OF GAZA CAMPAIGN

NEW PHASE IN THE WAR

Shifting to Fewer Troops on Ground and More Targeted Missions

This article is by Patrick Kingsley, Adam Entous and Edward Wong.
JERUSALEM — Israel said its military was starting to shift from a large-scale ground and air campaign in the Gaza Strip to a more targeted phase in its war against Hamas, and Israeli officials have privately told their American counterparts that they hope the transition will be completed by the end of January, U.S. officials said.
Israel’s disclosure came as Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken was expected in Israel to press officials there to curtail their campaign in Gaza and to prevent the war from spreading across the region, particularly in the aftermath of an Israeli strike last week that killed senior Hamas leaders in Lebanon and as Hezbollah said one of its commanders was killed in a strike in the country.
Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari, the



A.F.P., VIA GETTY IMAGES

An Israeli strike on Monday in Khan Younis in southern Gaza.

chief spokesman for the Israeli military, said the new phase of the campaign involved fewer troops and airstrikes. U.S. officials said they expected the transition to rely more on surgical missions by smaller groups of elite Israeli forces that would move in and out of population centers in the Gaza Strip to find and kill Hamas leaders, rescue hostages and destroy tunnels.
“The war shifted a stage,” Admiral Hagari said Monday in an interview. “But the transition will be with no ceremony,” he added. “It’s not about dramatic announcements.”
He said Israel would continue to reduce the number of troops in Gaza, a process that began this month. The intensity of operations in northern Gaza has already begun to ebb, he added, as

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Calls to Block Bid for U.S. Steel Put Biden in Bind With Japan

By JIM TANKERSLEY
WASHINGTON — U.S. Steel is an iconic example of the lost manufacturing muscle that President Biden says his economic policies will bring back to the United States.
But last month, the storied-but-diminished company announced plans to be acquired by a Japanese competitor. That development has put Mr. Biden in an awkward bind as he tries to balance attempts to revitalize the nation’s industrial sector with his efforts to rebuild international alliances.
Mr. Biden’s administration has expressed some discomfort with the deal and is reviewing the proposed \$14.1 billion takeover bid by Japan’s Nippon Steel. The company is offering a hefty premium

for U.S. Steel, which has struggled to compete against a flood of cheap foreign metal and has been weighing takeover offers for several months.
The proposal has quickly become a high-profile example of the difficult political choices Mr. Biden faces in his zeal to revive American industry, one that could test the degree to which he is willing to flex presidential power in pursuit of what is arguably his primary economic goal: the creation and retention of high-paying union manufacturing jobs in the United States.
Mr. Biden is under pressure from the United Steelworkers union and populist senators from

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Migrant Surge Strains E.M.T.s
Many who cross the border into Texas are in urgent need of medical attention when they arrive. PAGE A10

A Beautiful Blast-Off

The Vulcan rocket’s debut launch was flawless, showing its future utility for the Space Force. PAGE A15



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Comparing Two Capitol Riots
In strikingly different outcomes, Brazil united in rejecting its insurrection last year, while the United States remains deeply divided over Jan. 6. PAGE A4

Pope Urges Ban on Surrogacy

Calling surrogate motherhood “despicable,” Pope Francis denounced the “commercialization” of pregnancy. PAGE A9

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N.F.L. Decision Day, for Some
The Commanders and Falcons fired their coaches; Bill Belichick and the Patriots stayed, for now, together. PAGE B10

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Loose Bolts on Boeing Jets
Installation problems on United Airlines planes and pressurization warnings on the Alaska Airlines jet add to safety concerns for the 737 Max 9. PAGE B1

Hold On Tight

In 2024, A.I. is set to advance rapidly, becoming more powerful and spreading into the physical world. PAGE B1

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Painter of New York Vistas
With deceptively simple expanses of color, Martha Diamond influenced younger artists. She was 79. PAGE B12

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No Orchestra Needed
Digging into what has made the 1994 single “Insomniac” something of a sensation for a cappella groups. PAGE C1

Best and Worst of the Globes

Lily Gladstone made history, Jo Koy did not, and “Oppenheimer” soared. Below, Margot Robbie of “Barbie.” PAGE C1



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Filling Up the Sky
Even the most powerful telescopes are in peril as orbits above Earth get thousands of new satellites. PAGE D1

Less Sex for Flowers

As the number of bees and other pollinators falls, field pansies are adapting by fertilizing their own seeds. PAGE D3

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Paul Krugman PAGE A19

