



MICHAEL REYNOLDS/EPA-EFE/SHUTTERSTOCK

President Biden and Jill Biden at Dover Air Force Base on Friday for the transfer of slain U.S. soldiers' remains. Friday's operation was "the start of our response," Pentagon chief Lloyd Austin said.

U.S. strikes back after deadly attack

BY MISSY RYAN,
DAN LAMOTHE,
ALEX HORTON
AND MUSTAFA SALIM

U.S. forces launched a broad attack against Iran's military and affiliated militias in Iraq and Syria on Friday, delivering a blow to armed groups that Washington has blamed for killing American troops in Jordan and a toxic surge of violence across the Middle East. U.S. Central Command said that American forces, using B-1 bombers flown from the United States and other aircraft, hit more than 85 targets affiliated with the Quds Force, a powerful unit of the

SCORES OF TARGETS IN IRAN'S ORBIT HIT

Move follows the killing of three American troops

Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), and local militias that it supports. Among the locations hit at four sites in Syria and three sites in Iraq were command and control posts, intelligence centers and drone storage facilities, officials said.

The operation marked the opening of what officials say will

be a multiday campaign aimed at various targets close to Iran, which the Biden administration has blamed for the spiraling bloodshed that has erupted since the start of Israel's war in the Gaza Strip, including a drone attack Sunday that killed three U.S. service members and injured dozens more at a remote outpost in Jordan.

"Our response began today. It will continue at times and places of our choosing," President Biden, who oversaw the repatriation of the slain soldiers' remains earlier on Friday, said in a statement. "Let all those who might seek to do us harm know this: If you harm an

American, we will respond."

The moment marks an intensification in Washington's long-running standoff with Tehran, which the Biden administration has labeled responsible for scores of recent attacks in Iraq and Syria — where U.S. troops remain as part of a mission to prevent a resurgence of the Islamic State — and in Yemen, where Houthi militants have fired on ships off the Arabian peninsula.

The strikes, which began at 4 p.m. Washington time on Friday, are an attempt to inflict greater damage on Iran and its proxies than they suffered in previous re-

SEE STRIKES ON A10

Strong job growth continues amid layoffs

Economy adds 353,000 jobs in January, doubling experts' predictions

BY LAUREN KAORI GURLEY

The U.S. economy added 353,000 jobs in January, a shockingly strong pickup, even as higher interest rates continue to ripple through the economy.

The unemployment rate held at 3.7 percent, and has now been below 4 percent for two years, the longest stretch since the 1960s.

Job gains were roughly double economists' predictions of 177,000, underscoring that the labor market is propelling the economy forward, despite some high-profile layoffs at technology and media companies in January.

Robust consumer spending has allowed employers to hire at a rate that's fast enough to keep up with population growth, including a surge in immigrant arrivals, and accelerating wage growth continues to outpace inflation, boosting workers' spending power.

"This was a blockbuster jobs report," said Jason Furman, an economist at Harvard University and former adviser to the Barack Obama White House. "The continued strength of the labor market is truly stunning. It's yet more evidence that we're not close to having been in a recession."

The data also indicated that the labor market in 2023 was even stronger than previously thought, with upward revisions of 126,000 jobs gained in November and December combined.

The report is a major victory for President Biden, especially

SEE JOBS ON A13

Inflation: Lower prices are in short supply at the supermarket. **A13**



IAN TEH FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

China steadily absorbing Hong Kong

Boundary is eroding as both governments plan mammoth development projects that will hasten integration

BY SHIBANI MAHTANI, THEODORA YU AND IAN TEH
IN HONG KONG

Dissolving borders

The Northern Metropolis and Kau Yi Chau development projects, unprecedented in scale and cost, will accelerate efforts to physically integrate mainland China and Hong Kong.

● Border control points ... Hong Kong-China border



LAUREN TIERNEY/THE WASHINGTON POST

mainland China.

Over the next decade, new rail links, bridges, logistics facilities, schools, office buildings and residential towers will transform Hong Kong's outer fringes and remake the quiet towns and wetlands of the New Territories into an extension of Shenzhen, a Chinese technology hub. The property arm of a Chinese state-owned conglomerate, China Resources Group, has established a joint venture with a Hong Kong company to build residential units in what is being called the Northern Metropolis — signaling Beijing's support.

The overall project will cover nearly 75,000 acres, almost 90 times the size of New York's Central Park. Some \$13 billion has already been put aside from government reserves for development, though the total cost will be many multiples more.

At the same time, the Hong Kong government is pursuing a grand land reclamation scheme known as the Kau Yi Chau Artificial Islands, a \$75 billion project in the ocean waters off the city that will see the creation of three new islands. The project will result in nearly 2,500 acres of new territory for a business district, with apartment complexes that can accommodate 550,000 people. The

SEE HONG KONG ON A8

Montgomery superintendent resigns

Exit follows scrutiny of district over allegations against former principal

BY NICOLE ASBURY

Montgomery County Schools Superintendent Monifa B. McKnight stepped down Friday amid questions about how the district handled sexual harassment, bul-

lying and other allegations involving a former principal.

McKnight — the first woman to serve as the head of Maryland's largest school system — said that she reached "a mutually agreed separation" with the county school board, effective Friday. She is departing about two years into a four-year contract with the district that was set to end in 2026.

"I have felt over the past few



McKnight

months, there has been a distraction," McKnight said. "When the focus is no longer on whom I have agreed to serve, I must control my fate."

The Montgomery school board met in closed session Friday afternoon to receive legal advice and get information on the status of an unnamed employee. Later, the board said it wished McKnight well in the next chapter

SEE MCKNIGHT ON A2

Willis admits personal relationship

BY HOLLY BAILEY
AND AMY GARDNER

ATLANTA — Fulton County District Attorney Fani T. Willis (D) acknowledged that she had a personal relationship with an outside prosecutor she appointed to manage the election interference case against former president Donald Trump and his allies. But she denied claims that the relationship had tainted the proceedings.

In a 176-page court filing on

Trump case in Ga. isn't tainted, she says, but bid to disqualify her looms

Friday, Willis called the claims against her "meritless" and "salacious." She asked a judge to reject motions from Trump and other co-defendants that seek to disqualify her and her office from the case — and to do so without

an evidentiary hearing. Willis denied claims of misconduct and said there was no evidence that the relationship between her and special prosecutor Nathan Wade had prejudged the case.

The filing included a sworn affidavit from Wade, who said there was "no personal relationship" between him and Willis "prior to or at the time" he was

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Trump: Case over hush money is likely to be the first criminal trial. **A5**

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