

NATION/WORLD DIGEST

U.S.: Top al-Qaida Leaders Killed In Raid

BAGHDAD (AP) — The U.S. and Iraq claimed a major victory against al-Qaida on Monday, saying their forces killed the terror group's two top figures in this country in an air and ground assault on their safehouse near Saddam Hussein's hometown.

Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki announced the killings of Abu Omar al-Baghdadi and Abu Ayyub al-Masri at a news conference and showed photographs of their bloody corpses. U.S. military officials later confirmed the deaths, which Vice President Joe Biden called a "potentially devastating blow" to al-Qaida in Iraq.

The organization has proven resilient in the past, showing a remarkable ability to change tactics and adapt — most notably after its brutal founder, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, was killed nearly four years ago in a U.S. airstrike. Still, some analysts contend, the group was far stronger then and would likely have a harder time now replenishing its leadership and sticking to a timetable of attacks.

"The death of these terrorists is potentially the most significant blow to al-Qaida in Iraq since the beginning of the insurgency," Gen. Raymond Odierno, the top U.S. commander in Iraq, said in a statement.

Al-Qaida in Iraq has remained a dangerous force as the U.S. prepares to withdraw most of its troops. The terror group has launched repeated attacks on civilian targets in Baghdad in an attempt to sow chaos and exploit political deadlock in the wake of the inconclusive March 7 parliamentary elections.

Gun Rights Advocates Protest During Rallies

ARLINGTON, Va. (AP) — Carrying loaded pistols and unloaded rifles, dozens of gun-rights activists got as close as they could Monday to the nation's capital while still bearing arms and delivered what they said was a simple message: Don't tread on me.

Hundreds of like-minded but unarmed counterparts carried out a separate rally in the nation's capital.

The gun-carrying protesters in Virginia rallied on national park land, which is legal thanks to a new law signed by President Barack Obama that allows guns in national parks. Organizers said it's the first armed rally in a national park since the law passed.

The District of Columbia's strict gun laws, however, generally make it illegal to carry a handgun, so rally participants there were unarmed.

Daniel Almond, who organized the "Restore the Constitution" rally in Virginia, said he wanted to convene in a place where "we can exercise our rights." He pointed in the direction of Washington and said, "Over there, the Constitution is being violated in that we cannot bear arms."

Dems Use Fraud Lawsuit To Push Regulation

WASHINGTON (AP) — A fraud lawsuit against Goldman Sachs became a political weapon for Democrats Monday as they fought for Republican support for a sweeping financial regulatory bill. Republicans remained unswayed in opposition.

Democrats argued that the legislation, aimed at avoiding a recurrence of the 2008 financial crisis, would help prevent financial firms from misleading investors — the charge made by the Securities and Exchange Commission in a lawsuit against Goldman on Friday.

But the legislation would have only an indirect affect, at best, on such activities.

The proposed overhaul would change the way investors buy and sell derivatives — complex products whose values are based on the values of other investments. At the heart of the Goldman charges were deals involving numerous derivatives.

The largely Democratic-written bill coming before the Senate this week would merely make the buying and selling of those derivatives more open. It would not prevent the kind of complex bundling that many believe contributed to the national mortgage bust and subsequent financial crisis and recession.

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OKC Marks 15 Years Since Bombing

Family Members Of Victims Say Time Has Not Made Their Mourning Easier

BY TIM TALLEY
Associated Press Writer

OKLAHOMA CITY — It's been 15 years since a terrorist's bomb destroyed the Oklahoma City federal building, killing 168 people and injuring more than 600 others.

The passage of time hasn't made mourning any easier for many victims' family members. "Time heals nothing," said Debi Burkett Moore, whose brother, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development worker David Burkett, was killed. She and other family members placed flowers on an empty chair meant to honor her brother that's among a field of chairs at the Oklahoma City National Memorial.

"It makes it a little more bearable, but it heals nothing," Moore said. About 2,000 people gathered at the memorial Monday to honor those killed and injured in the April 19, 1995, bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building. At the time, it was the deadliest terrorist attack on U.S. soil.

For many in attendance, a visit to the memorial is an annual rite — a way to pause and remember a loved one, former colleague,

friend or neighbor who died in the attack.

During a ceremony for bombing victims and survivors, U.S. Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano said the city's spirit in the wake of the tragedy served as an example to the nation.

Napolitano also said the bombing anniversary was a reminder of "the continued need for vigilance against the violent ideologies that led to this attack, so that we can recognize their signs in our communities and stand together to defeat them."

"We cannot put a glass dome over our country. We cannot guarantee there will not be another attack. No one can," Napolitano said. "But we are a strong and resilient country. And we can resolve that even a successful attack will not defeat our way of life."

Across Oklahoma City, people observed 168 seconds of silence to honor the dead. Some dabbed away tears as the ceremony closed with family members reading a roll call of those who died.

"What defines us as a nation, as a people and as communities is not what we have suffered, but how we have risen above it, how

we've overcome," Napolitano said. "We can resolve that the Oklahoma Standard becomes the national standard."

Attending the ceremony was Charlie Hangar, the Oklahoma Highway Patrol trooper who stopped bomber Timothy McVeigh on Interstate 35 the day of the blast because his 1977 Mercury Marquis did not have a license plate.

Hangar, now the Noble County sheriff, read the memorial's mission statement at the start of the service. U.S. Rep. Mary Fallin, R-Okla., the state's lieutenant governor at the time of the bombing, read a congressional resolution commemorating the anniversary.

Prosecutors said McVeigh's plot was an attempt to avenge the deaths of nearly 80 people in the government siege at the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas, exactly two years earlier.

McVeigh was convicted on federal murder charges and executed in 2001. McVeigh's Army buddy, Terry Nichols, was convicted on federal and state bombing-related charges and is serving multiple life sentences at a federal prison in Colorado.

Toyota Recalls SUVs, Agrees To Massive Fine

WASHINGTON (AP) — Toyota hurriedly ordered recalls of nearly 10,000 Lexus SUVs for possible rollover dangers Monday and agreed to a record \$16.4 million fine for a slow response in its broader earlier recall, scrambling to fix safety worries that threaten the Japanese auto giant's reputation.

The fine, the maximum under law, could hurt Toyota Motor Corp.'s image more than its financial bottom line. The penalty is the equivalent of a little more than \$2 for every vehicle the company sold around the globe in 2009.

Addressing new safety concerns, Toyota said it would recall all 9,400 of the 2010 Lexus GX 460s that went on sale in late December — 5,600 that have been sold and 3,800 still at dealers or elsewhere

in the distribution pipeline. The announcement came less than a week after Consumer Reports issued a warning about the SUVs, a sharp contrast to the government's contention that Toyota took four months to order its huge recall of other models over sticking gas pedals.

For the Lexus recall, Toyota said dealers would update software in the stability control system, which is supposed to help prevent rollovers.

The government accused the company of hiding the earlier defects involving gas pedals, a contention Toyota rejected though it agreed to pay the fine.

Toyota said it agreed to the fine to avoid a lengthy legal battle but denied the government's allegation that it broke the law. In a state-

ment, Toyota acknowledged "that we could have done a better job of sharing relevant information within our global operations and outside the company, but we did not try to hide a defect to avoid dealing with a safety problem."

The fine does not free Toyota

from potential civil and criminal penalties. The automaker still faces dozens of personal injury and wrongful death lawsuits in federal courts while federal prosecutors and the Securities and Exchange Commission are conducting investigations related to the recalls.



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