

Another Major Setback

Air Force Nuclear Unit Fails Key Security Test

BY ROBERT BURNS

AP National Security Writer

WASHINGTON — An Air Force unit that operates one-third of the nation's land-based nuclear missiles has failed a safety and security inspection, marking the second major setback this year for a force charged with the military's most sensitive mission, the general in charge of the nuclear air force told The Associated Press on Tuesday.

Lt. Gen. James M. Kowalski, commander of Air Force Global Strike Command, said a team of "relatively low ranking" airmen failed one exercise as part of a broader inspection, which began last week and ended Tuesday. He said that for security reasons he could not be specific about the team or the exercise.

"This unit fumbled on this exercise," Kowalski said by telephone from his headquarters at Barksdale Air Force

Base, La., adding that this did not call into question the safety or control of nuclear weapons at Malmstrom Air Force Base in Montana.

"The team did not demonstrate the right procedures," he said, and as a result was rated a failure.

To elaborate "could reveal a potential vulnerability" in the force, Kowalski said. In a written statement on its website, Kowalski's command said there had been "tactical-level errors" in the snap exercise, revealing "discrepancies."

Without more details it is difficult to reliably judge the extent and severity of the problem uncovered at Malmstrom, home of the 341st Missile Wing, which is one of three nuclear missile wings. Each wing operates 150 Minuteman 3 intercontinental ballistic missiles, or ICBMs, on alert for potential launch against targets around the globe.

On Capitol Hill, a spokesman for Rep. Howard "Buck" McKeon, R-Calif., chair-

man of the House Armed Services Committee, said that "two troubling inspections in a row at two different missile wings is unacceptable" to McKeon.

"It is his sense that the Air Force must refocus on the nuclear mission," spokesman John Noonan said. "The Air Force should hold failed leadership at the group and wing level accountable, recommit itself from the top down to the nuclear deterrent mission, and ensure a daily focus on its centrality to our nation's security."

Asked whether the Air Force intends to take disciplinary action against anyone for the inspection failure, Kowalski said the Air Force is "looking into it." Overall, the 341st wing "did well," he said, earning ratings of excellent or outstanding in the majority of the 13 areas in which it was graded by inspectors. Those areas include management, administration, safety, security, emergency exercises, worker reliability and other facets of a mission that relies on teams of officers and enlisted personnel.

Study: Half Who Now Buy Own Health Plan To Get Aid

BY RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — About half the people who now buy their own health insurance—and potentially would face higher premiums next year under President Barack Obama's health care law—would qualify for federal tax credits to offset rate shock, according to a new private study.

Many other people, however, earn too much money to be eligible for help, and could end up paying more.

The estimate, being released Wednesday by the non-partisan Kaiser Family Foundation, tries to answer one of the biggest remaining questions about the impact of Obama's law on American families: Will consumers wince — or even balk — when they see the premiums for the new plans?

The study found that 48 percent of families currently buying their own coverage would be eligible for tax credits next year, averaging \$5,548 per family, or 66 percent of the average cost of a benchmark "silver" policy offered through new state insurance markets.

"About half of the people won't be paying the sticker price," said Gary Claxton, director of the health care marketplace project at Kaiser, an information clearinghouse on the health care system. "The people who get help will get quite a lot of help."

"Many, but certainly not all, of the people who don't get tax credits will pay more," he said. "How much more will be a function of a lot of different things."

For example, some people who don't qualify for tax credits may get jobs that offer coverage, added Claxton, a co-author of the study. And the bottom line on premiums may not be clear until sometime this fall, after the Health and Human Services Department releases rates for more than 30 states where the federal government is taking the lead setting up new insurance markets for individuals and small businesses.

People can enroll starting Oct. 1, and coverage becomes effective Jan. 1. Most people currently covered by employer plans are not affected.

Taking A Break



MATTHEW HEALY/ABACA PRESS/MCT

U.S. President Barack Obama shakes hands with onlookers in front of Nancy's Restaurant in Oak Bluffs, Massachusetts on the island of Martha's Vineyard on Tuesday. President Obama and his family are spending the week on the island for their summer vacation.

Israel-Palestine Deal Faces Even Worse Odds Than In 2008

BY KARIN LAUB
AND JOSEF FEDERMAN
Associated Press

JERUSALEM — The same negotiators, the same issues, a familiar venue: The sense of déjà vu is overwhelming as Israelis and Palestinians start Wednesday on their third attempt in 13 years to draw a border between them.

But they face even longer odds than in the last round, which ended in 2008.

Since then, at least 40,000 more Israelis have settled in areas the Palestinians want for a state, making it even harder to partition the land. The chaos of the Arab Spring has bolstered Israeli demands for ironclad security guarantees, such as troop deployments along Palestine's future border, widening a dispute that seemed near resolution five years ago.

The talks come after months of prodding by U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, who made six visits to the region since taking office in his

bid to bring together Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Despite U.S. cheerleading, expectations have been low on both sides. Ahead of Wednesday's talks at Jerusalem's King David Hotel, the atmosphere soured further after Israel said in a series of announcements in the past week that it is advancing plans for more than 3,000 new homes for Jews in the occupied West Bank and east Jerusalem.

"It's not just deliberate sabotage of the talks, but really the destruction of the outcome," said senior Palestinian official Hanan Ashrawi. "Israel has transformed the negotiations into a cover and a license to steal land."

Israel argued that it's mainly building in areas it wants to keep in any border deal. "This construction that has been authorized in no way changes the final map of peace," said government spokesman Mark Regav.

In Israel, attention focused on anguish over the expected release Tuesday of 26 long-held Palestinian prisoners, part of a U.S.-brokered deal that persuaded the Palestinians to resume negotiations. In all, 104 veteran prisoners are to be freed in four stages, depending on progress in the border talks, for which the U.S. has allotted nine months.

Most of the prisoners have already served more than 20 years, many for deadly attacks on Israelis. Angry relatives of some of the victims spoke on TV and radio news programs, protesting the release of convicted killers in what they considered a pointless gesture. Israel's Supreme Court on Tuesday rejected their appeal, clearing the way for the release.

Rubio: Obama Could Act On Immigration

WASHINGTON (AP) — Florida Republican Sen. Marco Rubio warned Tuesday that if Congress doesn't pass immigration overhaul legislation, President Barack Obama may act on his own to legalize the 11 million immigrants already in the U.S. illegally.

Rubio, a potential presidential candidate and an author of the sweeping immigration bill that passed the Senate in June but stalled in the House, noted that the Obama administration took action a year ago to give legal status to many immigrants brought here illegally as children. He said without congressional action, the president might well be tempted to do the same for everyone else here illegally, too.

"I believe that this president will be tempted, if nothing happens in Congress, he will be tempted to issue an executive order like he did for the DREAM Act kids a year ago where he basically legalizes 11 million people by the sign of a pen," Rubio said on "The Morning Show with Preston Scott" on Tallahassee radio station WFLA.

Rubio said the possibility highlighted the need for congressional action because the alternative would be legalization without benefits like border security and an E-Verify system to require employers to check their workers' legal status.

Nigerian Village Wants Guns For Defense

KONDUGA, Nigeria (AP) — Residents of a village in north-eastern Nigeria where suspected Islamic extremists gunned down 47 worshippers praying in a mosque demanded on Tuesday that the government give them weapons to defend themselves.

Earlier reports about Sunday's attack in Konduga village had given a lower death toll, 44. Another 12 civilians died in a simultaneous attack on a nearby village, security agents said.

The violence has been blamed on the Boko Haram terrorist network, and district head Yale Zannah Masu told The Associated Press that his village of Konduga was besieged for hours by "terrorists" — including women who set ablaze 51 homes.

Terrorist attacks by women would be unusual in Nigeria, but its military has reported arresting suspected women members of the banned Boko Haram as well as male suspects disguised in women's robes and veils.

Zannah Masu spoke during a visit to Konduga by governor of Borno state, Kashim Shettimma, who drove under military escort the 35 kilometers (22 miles) from his base in the state capital, Maiduguri, to the nearly deserted village.

Pro-Morsi Sit-In Gets Permanent Look

CAIRO (AP) — Instead of rushing for the exits, Islamist supporters of Egypt's ousted president are replacing tents with wooden huts in their sprawling Cairo encampment. Barbershops have sprung up and many tents now have satellite dishes.

There's little sign of alarm over the potential for violence if security forces move to clear this ground zero of resistance to the coup six weeks ago. On Tuesday, solar power panels were added to the encampment's several generators in case authorities cut off power.

The post-coup government has repeatedly warned that the sit-ins outside the Rabaah al-Adawiya mosque and a smaller one on the other side of the city cannot stay. They portray them as a threat to national security and launch pads for terrorism. The protesters say their vigils are peaceful and will end only when Mohammed Morsi is reinstated as president.

As the faceoff has dragged on, participants in the larger of the two vigils have had time to weave a narrative about their cause immersed in religious fervor, revolutionary rhetoric and martyrdom. Thrown into the mix is the evolution of the protest camp into a sort of autonomous entity with its own institutions and social order.

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