

Captive Ukrainian Soldiers Jeered

DONETSK, Ukraine (AP) — To shouts of "Fascists!" and "Hang them from a tree!" captured Ukrainian soldiers were paraded through the streets of the rebel stronghold of Donetsk on Sunday as bystanders pelted them with eggs, water bottles and tomatoes.

The spectacle of the bruised and filthy soldiers being marched hands bound and surrounded by gun-toting pro-Russian insurgents came as Ukrainians in Kiev celebrated their country's independence from the Soviet Union — a stark display of the growing divisions between east and west.

While support and mobilization for Kiev's campaign against the separatists has grown in many parts of the country, resentments fester in much of the east, where civilian casualties and shelling have become a part of daily life.

Illustrating the divisions, an ostentatious procession of tanks and weaponry rumbled through downtown Kiev to mark Ukraine's 23rd anniversary of independence from Moscow — a highly publicized event accompanied by speeches and a vow by President Petro Poroshenko to boost defense spending to defeat the rebels.

In Donetsk, thousands gathered in the main square as the insurgents staged their own spectacle mocking the national army. To jeers and catcalls, dozens of captive soldiers, some wearing tattered Ukrainian military uniforms and some in torn and dirty civilian clothing, were forced to march past as nationalistic Russian songs blared from loudspeakers. They were flanked by rebels pointing bayoneted rifles.

Top Islamic Authority Challenges Group

CAIRO (AP) — The top Islamic authority in Egypt, revered by many Muslims worldwide, launched an Internet-based campaign Sunday challenging an extremist group in Syria and Iraq by saying it should not be called an "Islamic State."

The campaign by the Dar el-Ifta, the top authority that advises Muslims on spiritual and life issues, adds to the war of words by Muslim leaders across the world targeting the Islamic State group, which controls wide swaths of Iraq and Syria. Its violent attacks, including mass shootings, destroying Shiite shrines, targeting minorities and beheadings including American journalist James Foley, have shocked Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

The Grand Mufti of Egypt, Shawki Allam, previously said the extremists violate all Islamic principles and laws and described the group as a danger to Islam as a whole. Now, the Dar el-Ifta he oversees will suggest foreign media drop using "Islamic State" in favor of the "al-Qaida Separatists in Iraq and Syria," or the acronym "QSIS," said Ibrahim Negm, an adviser to the mufti.

This is part of a campaign that "aims to correct the image of Islam that has been tarnished in the West because of these criminal acts, and to exonerate humanity from such crimes that defy natural instincts and spreads hate between people," Negm said according to Egypt's state news agency MENA. "We also want to reaffirm that all Muslims are against these practices which violate the tolerant principles of Islam."

Egypt's President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi also weighed in. On Sunday, speaking to editors of Egyptian newspapers, he said the extremist group is part of a plot aiming to "undermine Islam as a belief."

Palestinian Chief Eyes Statehood Plea

RAMALLAH, West Bank (AP) — Aides to the Palestinian president said Sunday that he will soon appeal to the international community to set a deadline for Israel to end its occupation of lands captured in the 1967 Mideast war and make way for an independent Palestinian state.

President Mahmoud Abbas was expected to unveil his proposal as part of a "day after" plan following the current war in the Gaza Strip, likely at a meeting of the Palestinian leadership on Tuesday, said the aides, who spoke on condition of anonymity because the plan has not yet been made public.

Abbas is plotting his move even as the fighting continues to rage. Israel's prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, warned Sunday that the 7-week-old military campaign in Gaza would stretch into September — despite growing anger among residents in southern Israel over the military's inability to halt rocket and mortar fire out of the Palestinian territory following the death of a 4-year-old Israeli boy over the weekend.

In new fighting Sunday, the Israeli air force flattened a seven-floor office building and severely damaged a shopping center in southern Gaza, signaling a new escalation.

Palestinian officials said 13 people were killed in Israeli airstrikes, bringing the death toll to more than 2,100 Palestinians since fighting erupted on July 8. Sixty-eight Israelis have also died, all but four of them soldiers.

'Vacation' Over, Obama Returns To WH

EDGARTOWN, Mass. (AP) — President Barack Obama's summer vacation off the Massachusetts coast is nearing an end.

The president was due back at the White House late Sunday after spending two weeks with his family on the island of Martha's Vineyard.

What a break it turned out to be. His attempt at rest and relaxation was largely overtaken by events involving Islamic State militants in Iraq and Syria, including the videotaped execution of an American journalist they had been holding hostage, and the unrest in Ferguson, Missouri, following the fatal police shooting of an unarmed black man.

Obama broke from his vacation to deliver statements on Iraq, Missouri and journalist James Foley on four separate occasions, including one delivered during two days he spent back at the White House in the middle of the getaway. The unusual midvacation return to Washington had been scheduled before those issues came to dominate the news.

Still, in the midst of daily briefings on these and other matters, telephone consultations with world leaders and other responsibilities, Obama squeezed in nine rounds of golf on the island he has made his summer presidential retreat while shunning off criticism about how he was spending the time away from Washington.



The Alexandria Building in downtown Napa, Calif., was severely damaged by the 6.0 earthquake that struck the Bay Area on Sunday.

California

Strong Quake Causes Damage In Bay Area

BY ELLEN KNICKMEYER AND LISA LEFF
Associated Press

NAPA, Calif. — The San Francisco Bay Area's strongest earthquake in 25 years struck the heart of California's wine country early Sunday, igniting gas-fed fires, damaging some of the region's famed wineries and historic buildings, and sending dozens of people to hospitals.

The magnitude-6.0 quake, centered near the city of Napa, an oasis of Victorian-era buildings nestled in the vineyard-studded hills of northern California, ruptured water mains and gas lines, hampering firefighters' efforts to extinguish the blazes that broke out after the temblor struck at 3:20 a.m.

Dazed residents who had run out of their homes in the dark and were too fearful of aftershocks to go back to bed wandered through Napa's historic downtown, where boulder-sized chunks of rubble and broken glass littered the streets. Dozens of homes and buildings across the Napa Valley were left unsafe to occupy, including an old county courthouse, where a 10-foot wide hole opened a view of the offices inside.

College student Eduardo Rivera said the home he shares with six relatives shook so violently that he kept getting knocked back into his bed as he tried to flee.

"When I woke up, my mom was screaming, and the sound from the earthquake was greater than my mom's screams," the 20-year-old Rivera said.

Gov. Jerry Brown declared a state of emergency for southern Napa County, directing state agencies to respond with equipment and personnel. President Barack Obama was briefed on the earthquake, the White House said, and federal officials were in touch with state and local emergency responders.

The temblor struck about six miles south of Napa and lasted 10 to 20 seconds, according to the United States Geological Survey. It was the largest to shake the San Francisco Bay Area since the magnitude-6.9 Loma Prieta quake

struck in 1989, collapsing part of the Bay Bridge roadway and killing more than 60 people, most when an Oakland freeway collapsed.

Queen of the Valley Medical Center in Napa, where an outdoor triage tent was set up to handle the influx, reported treating 172 people in the emergency room, although hospital officials could not say how many of them were there for bruises and cuts suffered in the quake and how many for more routine injuries and illnesses.

Twelve people were admitted for broken bones, heart attacks and other problems directly related to the earthquake, including an adult who remained in critical condition on Sunday night and a 13-year-old boy.

The teen was hit by flying debris from a collapsed fireplace and had to be airlifted to the children's hospital at the University of California Davis hospital for a neurological evaluation. He condition was listed as serious, hospital spokeswoman Phyllis Brown said.

Napa Fire Department Operations Chief John Callanan said the city had exhausted its own resources trying to extinguish at least six fires after 60 water mains ruptured, as well as transporting injured residents, searching homes and collapsed carpools for anyone trapped and responding to 100 reports of leaking gas.

Two of the fires happened at mobile home parks, including the one where four homes were destroyed and two others damaged, Callanan said. A ruptured water main there delayed efforts to fight the blaze until pumper trucks could be brought in, he said.

Nola Rawlins, 83, was one of the Napa Valley Mobile Home Park residents left homeless by the fire. No one was injured in the blaze, but Rawlins said she lost all her jewelry, papers and other belongings.

"There were some explosions, and it was burning. Everybody was out in the street," she said. "I couldn't get back in the house because they told everybody to go down to the clubhouse, so I didn't get anything out of the house."

Missouri Shooting

Father Of Slain Teen Asks For Peace Ahead Of Funeral

BY SARA BURNETT
Associated Press

ST. LOUIS — The father of a black 18-year-old shot to death by a white police officer in Ferguson pleaded Sunday for a "day of silence" as he lays his son to rest Monday.

"Tomorrow all I want is peace," Michael Brown Sr. told hundreds of people in St. Louis' largest city park during brief remarks at a festival that promotes peace over violence. "That's all I ask."

The more than two weeks since Michael Brown's death have been marked by nightly protests, some violent and chaotic, although tensions have eased in recent days.

Brown Sr. told the crowd that he and his son's mother appreciate the love and support they've received from the

community. The Rev. Al Sharpton, who will speak at the funeral, echoed his request for peace.

"We don't want anything tomorrow to happen that might defile the name of Michael Brown," Sharpton said. "This is not about our rage tomorrow. It's about the legacy and memory of his son."

Peace Fest 2014 was already in the works before Officer Darren Wilson shot Brown Aug. 9 in a St. Louis suburb, but it took on new resonance in the aftermath.

The parents of slain Florida teen Trayvon Martin also spoke, urging the crowd to channel his anger into action by pushing to strengthen families and better educate youth and expressing support for the Brown family and the people of the St. Louis area.

"We're going to stand tall with you all," Trayvon's Martin's father, Tracy Martin, said.

Trayvon Martin, 17, was also unarmed when he was shot and killed in 2012. George Zimmerman, a neighborhood watch volunteer who said he shot Martin in self-defense, was acquitted.

The nightly protests in Ferguson have been mostly peaceful in recent days, a contrast to images of police in riot gear firing tear gas canisters at angry protesters in the days after the Brown shooting. Tensions briefly flared then subsided late Saturday night and early Sunday.

Niesha Thomas, who attended Peace Fest, said she hopes the event marks "a new start" in which people put "irrelevant, unproductive" disputes behind them.

American Held In Syria Is Freed

BY JIM KUHNHENN AND RYAN LUCAS
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — An American journalist kidnapped and held hostage for nearly two years by an al-Qaida-linked group in Syria was released Sunday, less than a week after the horrific execution of American journalist James Foley by Islamic militants.

The freed American is 45-year-old Peter Theo Curtis of Massachusetts, who wrote under the byline Theo Padnos.

White House national security adviser Susan Rice said Curtis is now safe outside of Syria. Secretary of State John Kerry said Curtis was held by Jabhat al-Nusra, also known as the Nusra Front, an al-Qaida-linked militant group fighting the government of Syrian President Bashar Assad.

Curtis was not believed to be among the hostages held by the Islamic State group that executed Foley. Islamic State was formally disavowed by al-Qaida earlier this year after being deemed too brutal.

President Barack Obama, who was wrapping up a vacation in Massachusetts, was briefed Sunday morning on Curtis' release.

"The president shares in the joy and relief that we all feel now that Theo is out of Syria and safe," said White House spokesman Eric Schultz. "But we continue to hold in our thoughts and prayers the Americans who remain in captivity in Syria, and we will continue to use all of the tools at our disposal to see that the remaining American hostages are freed."

A senior administration official said Curtis was released in the Golan Heights, where he was met by U.S. government personnel who were transporting him to Tel Aviv. The official was not authorized to speak by name and discussed the release on the condition of anonymity.

Qatar's Foreign Ministry confirmed late Sunday that the Gulf emirate succeeded in gaining Curtis' release. A government statement released by the official Qatar News Agency said he was kidnapped in Syria in 2012 and said Qatar "exerted relentless efforts to release the American journalist out of Qatar's belief in the principles of humanity and out of concern for the lives of individuals and their right to freedom and dignity." The agency said Curtis was handed over to United Nations representatives.

In a video obtained by The Associated Press and dated July 18, 2014, Curtis sits cross-legged on a floor with his hands bound, and appears to read from a sheet placed in front of him on the floor. Addressing the U.S. and European governments, he pleads for them to contact a named intermediary before it is too late.

"They have given me three days to live," he says as a man holding an assault rifle and dressed in camouflage stands next to him. "If you don't do anything, I'm finished. I'm dead. They will kill me. Three days. You have had 20 days, and you've done nothing."

He does not specify any demands, only urges Western governments to make contact with the intermediary.

It was not known which, if any, of the captors' demands were met.

The energy-rich Gulf nation of Qatar, which is a leading supporter of the Syrian rebels fighting to oust President Bashar Assad, has been involved in mediating hostage releases in Syria over the past year.

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