

## Syrian Rebels Close In, But Assad Has Clout

BEIRUT (AP) — With rebels trying to penetrate Syria's capital, Damascus, President Bashar Assad may appear to be heading for a last stand as his weakened regime crumbles around him.

But the Syrian leader is not necessarily on his way out just yet. He still has thousands of loyal troops and a monopoly on air power. A moribund diplomatic process has given him room to maneuver despite withering international condemnation. And the power of Islamic extremists among the rebels is dashing hopes that the West will help turn the tide of the civil war by sending heavy weapons to the opposition.

"The West, for all its rhetorical bombast, has restricted the flow of important weapons," said University of Oklahoma professor Joshua Landis, who runs an influential blog called Syria Comment. "They have not brought down this regime because they are frightened of the alternative."

There is no appetite for intervening actively against Assad — as NATO did against Moammar Gadhafi in Libya — and run the risk of having him replaced by an Islamist regime hostile to the West. Those concerns have deepened after the attack on the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi, Libya, and political turmoil in Egypt where a bid to promote an Islamist agenda threatens to tear the nation apart.

## Egypt: Violence, Tension Mar Campaigning

CAIRO (AP) — Waving swords and clubs, Islamist supporters of Egypt's draft constitution clashed with opponents in the Mediterranean port city of Alexandria on Friday as tempers flared on the eve of the referendum on the disputed charter — the country's worst political crisis since the ouster of Hosni Mubarak.

Both sides stepped up their campaigns after weeks of violence and harsh divisions that have turned Saturday's vote into a fight over Egypt's post-revolutionary identity. Highlighting the tension that may lie ahead, nearly 120,000 army soldiers will deploy to protect polling stations. A radical Islamist group also said it will send its own members to defend the stations alongside the army and police.

The referendum pits Egypt's newly empowered Islamists against liberals, many apolitical Christians and secular-leaning Muslims. President Mohammed Morsi's supporters say the constitution will help end the political instability that has gripped Egypt since February 2011, when the autocratic Mubarak was overthrown in a popular uprising. Clerics, using mosque pulpits, defend the constitution as championing Islam.

Morsi's opponents say minority concerns have been ignored and the charter is full of obscurely worded clauses that could allow Islamists to restrict civil liberties, ignore women's rights and undermine labor unions. They charge the constitution will enslave Egyptians.

Critics have raised concern over the legitimacy of the document after most judges said they would not supervise the vote. Rights groups warned of opportunities for widespread fraud, and the opposition said a decision to stretch the vote two rounds to make up for the shortage of judges left the door open for initial results to sway voter opinions.

## With Sales Slowing, Stores May Slash Prices

NEW YORK (AP) — If shoppers don't show up in stores soon, more "70 percent off" sale signs will.

After a promising start to the holiday shopping season over the four-day Thanksgiving weekend, sales have slowed, according to an analysis of data done for The Associated Press by sales tracker ShopperTrak. Worries about weak U.S. job growth and other concerns are likely to blame for Americans spending less.

That puts pressure on J.C. Penney, Macy's and other stores, which had been offering fewer discounts this season than they did last year, to step up promotions to lure shoppers like Ron Antonette from Long Beach, Calif.

Antonette so far has spent about half of what he planned to spend during this holiday season on gifts such as Legos, a Wii U game console and Apple's iPad Mini tablet computer for his two young children. Antonette stopped shopping after spending \$1,000 over fears that Congress and the White House won't reach a budget deal by January. A stalemate would trigger tax increases and spending cuts known as the "fiscal cliff."

"I basically stopped moving forward in buying," said Antonette, 44, who runs a small public relations business and worries that he might not be able to take mortgage deductions on his house next year. "I feel like we're in financial limbo."

## Wash., Colo., Pot Proponents Hopeful, Wary

SEATTLE (AP) — Backers of new laws that legalized marijuana in Washington and Colorado were cautiously optimistic after President Barack Obama said Uncle Sam wouldn't pursue pot users in those states.

Following the November votes in Washington and Colorado, the Justice Department reiterated that marijuana remains illegal under federal law, but had been vague about what its specific response would be.

In a Barbara Walters interview airing Friday on ABC, President Barack Obama said: "It does not make sense from a prioritization point of view" to focus on drug use in states where it is now legal.

Marijuana activists were relieved at Obama's comments, but still had questions about how regulation will work. They said even if individual users aren't charged with crimes, marijuana producers and sellers could be subject to prosecution, civil forfeiture and other legal roadblocks.

## Connecticut Shooting

**\*BY THOMAS PEIPERT**  
 Associated Press

LITTLETON, Colo. — A lone police cruiser outside Columbine High School was the only outward reaction Friday to an even deadlier attack at a Connecticut elementary school.

But in a state that was rocked by the 1999 Columbine school massacre and the Aurora movie theater shooting less than six months ago, Friday's shootings renewed debate over why mass shootings keep occurring and whether gun control can stop them.

"Until we get our acts together and stop making these ... weapons available, this is going to keep happening," said an angry Tom Teves, whose son Alex was killed in the theater shooting last July in the Denver suburb of Aurora.

Teves was choked up as he answered a reporter's call Friday. A work associate of his lives in Newtown, Conn., where a gunman killed 26 people, including 20 children, at Sandy Hook Elementary. The connection chilled and angered him.

The 20-year-old killer, identified by a law enforcement official as Adam Lanza, carried out the attack with two handguns. A .223-caliber rifle was found in the back of a car.

The official was not authorized to speak on the record about the unfolding investigation and spoke on the condition of anonymity.

The shooting has once again stoked the never-ending debate over gun control laws.

This week, Colorado Gov. John Hickenlooper generated a storm of debate after declaring that it was time to start talking about gun control measures.

After Friday's school shooting, Hickenlooper told reporters there's no use waiting until news coverage fades.



KRISTOFFER TRIPPLAAR/SIPA PRESS VIA ABACA PRESS/MCT  
**President Barack Obama delivers remarks in response to Friday's school shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut. Twenty-seven people, including 18 children, have been killed in a shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn.**

"We can't postpone the discussion on a national level every time there's a shooting. They're too often," he said.

A visibly emotional President Barack Obama seemed willing to renew debate, calling for "meaningful action" to prevent similar shootings.

New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg, an advocate of greater limits on guns, responded directly to the president's remarks: "Calling for 'meaningful action' is not enough. We need immediate action. We have heard all the rhetoric before."

Also Friday, Mark Kelly, the astronaut husband of former U.S. Rep. Gabrielle Giffords, who was shot in the head during an attack that killed six people in Tucson, Ariz., last year, said the Connecticut shooting should "sound a call for our leaders to stand up and do what is right."

"This time our response must

consist of more than regret, sorrow, and condolence," Kelly said on his Facebook page, calling for "a meaningful discussion about our gun laws and how they can be reformed and better enforced to prevent gun violence and death in America."

Tom Sullivan, whose son Alex also died in the Aurora theater shooting, welcomed the discussion. Sullivan and his wife spent part of the morning making sure relatives who live in the area were OK.

Sullivan said mental health, not gun control, is a more pressing concern.

"We all need someone in our lives to care," Sullivan said. "If we see a friend, a colleague, a co-worker and they're having a hard time, we need to reach out."

Sean Graves, who as a student was wounded at Columbine, said he was "disgusted" by the shootings but he didn't believe laws can

prevent such violence.

If people "want to find a way to harm people, they're going to find a way to do it," Graves said.

Former U.S. attorney Troy Eid, who was part of a government panel that examined the Columbine shooting, said more must be done to examine what motivates such criminals.

"It's something that's become part of our culture. We have to study it and see what we can do to prevent it," Eid said.

Some shoppers interviewed at Oregon's Clackamas Town Center, where a gunman killed two people Tuesday before killing himself, had similar reactions.

"We need to pay more attention to the people close to us, because I think there's a lot of signs prior to things," said shopper Sierra Delgado of Happy Valley, Ore.

Mental health screenings alone aren't enough, other Colorado shooting survivors said.

Tom Mauser, who became a gun control advocate after his son Daniel was killed at Columbine, urged officials to stop "playing defense" on gun control.

"Let's not say once again, 'Oh, this is not the right time to talk about it.' It is the right time to talk about it."

"We are better than a nation that has people killing children and has people cowardly shooting people in shopping malls and schools and nursing homes. We're better than this."

Such emotional appeals didn't come only from gun control supporters. Friday's responses from both sides foretold a heart-wrenching debate.

"They're going to use the bodies of dead children to push their agenda," predicted Dudley Brown of the Denver group Rocky Mountain Gun Owners.

# Hospice

From Page 1

Thanks to ASHH's hospice care program, he could keep that promise, he said.

"I wouldn't have known what to do," he said. "But hospice stepped right in, and made things much easier for me."

Working with the ASHH hospice care program, John and Judy had access to a team of professionals, including nurses, social workers, a chaplain and volunteers, along with her own physician. Care providers made regularly scheduled visits, and a nurse was also on call 24 hours a day.

"It isn't just the patient, they're all in this together," Pistulka said. "We recognize it impacts everyone, so we provide a team that provides that kind of support."

John said he was especially grateful for the help he received from nurse Peg Stratman, social worker Megan Zweber and hospice aide Deb Caba.

"If I needed anything, I called Peg and she would be right there. And if I didn't know how to do something, they'd show me," he said. "They were with me from the day it started until the day Judy died."

Stratman said that, as with all the other families who have used

ASHH's hospice care, it was an honor for her and the rest of the team to be with the Wescott family during such a time.

"You practically become part of that family as you sit with them and talk about what to expect," she said. "You share those tears with them. It's just a heartwarming privilege."

Stratman added that she was amazed at the job John did in caring for his wife, who was unable to move her legs by the time she was receiving care in her home.

"You don't often see guys that are able to do the care that he was able to do. He did it all. And if she wanted to go outside at three in the morning and go outside to the deck, he'd get her up," she said. "Every family is different. Some families can't do that hands-on care, but he was determined he was going to do it. He did just a magnificent job."

After her long fight with cancer, Judy died Sept. 30 in her home.

As part of the hospice care program, John still receives support from ASHH professionals, who keep in contact with family members following a patient's death.

"It's the patient and the family that are in this together, and we want to support that family through at least that first year of grieving," Pistulka said.

Stratman said she and Zweber

have visited John since Judy's death, and they will also speak on the phone whenever John needs to talk to someone.

"Some families don't reach out like that, but it's good when they do," Stratman said.

While the Wescotts were able to take advantage of the hospice care available to them, many families do not, oftentimes because they are unaware they can, Pistulka said.

"People think that hospice care is just for cancer patients, and it's not," she said. "It's for people in the end stages of any kind of illness."

Pistulka also said hospice care is available much earlier than many people believe, as it is typically offered to patients who have a life expectancy of six months or less.

"You'd like to have hospice care months before death, not just a few days, which often happens because people have misconceptions about it and think, 'Oh I'm not ready for that yet,'" she said. "But sooner is better."

Pistulka said that early hospice care can also have positive effects on a patient's illness.

"Some people are actually discharged from hospice care — we say they graduate — because their condition improves so from much

the extra support," she said.

In addition to a patient's home, the hospice care program can also provide assistance at a long-term care center and some assisted living facilities, Pistulka said.

She added that financial help is also available for hospice care, as most care is covered by Medicare and most insurance policies. Even if it is not covered, the hospital will help find a solution.

"We don't want that to get in the way of them having the support they need, so we will work with them to find a way to provide the care," she said.

John encouraged anyone who qualifies for hospice care to look into the program, as the assistance he received made a substantial difference during his wife's final days.

"I'm very thankful that I had help," he said. "If it hadn't been for them, I'd have never made it through it."

For more information on the ASHH hospice care program, contact Pistulka at 605-668-8309.

You can follow Derek Bartos on Twitter at twitter.com/d\_bartos

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## OBITUARIES

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Arrangements are pending with Wintz & Ray Funeral Home and Cremation Service, Yankton.

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