

# Obama Aims To Ease Concerns About Terror-Fighting Strategy

BY JOSH LEDERMAN  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Fears of terrorism are hanging over America's holiday season, so President Barack Obama is planning a series of events this week aimed at trying to allay concerns about his strategy for stopping the Islamic State group abroad and its sympathizers at home.

Obama's visits to the Pentagon and the National Counterterrorism Center are part of a push to further explain his terrorism-fighting strategy, White House officials said, after a prime-time Oval Office address last Sunday that critics said failed to do much to reassure the public. Another goal is to draw a contrast with Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump and his inflammatory remarks about Muslims. The Obama administration has warned Trump's rhetoric emboldens extremists looking to pull the U.S. into a war with Islam.

"Terrorists like ISIL are trying to divide us along lines of religion and background," Obama said Saturday in his weekly radio and Internet address, using an acronym for the extremist group. "That's how they stoke fear. That's how they recruit."

In the coming week, he said, "we'll move forward on all fronts."

The public relations campaign, one week before Christmas, comes as the public is jittery about the specter of terrorism after the mass shooting in San Bernardino, California this month and the Paris attacks a few weeks before. Seven in 10 Americans rated the risk of a terrorist attack in the U.S. as at least somewhat high, according to an Associ-



WALLY SKALI/LOS ANGELES TIMES/TNS  
**A woman consoles a man during a funeral service for San Bernardino shooting victim Isaac Amanios at the St. Minas Orthodox Church in Colton, Calif., Saturday.**

ated Press-GfK poll. That was a sharp increase from the 5 in 10 who said that in January.

U.S. officials have insisted there are no specific, credible threats to the United States. But the apparent lack of warning before San Bernardino has fueled concerns about whether the U.S. has a handle on potential attacks, especially during high-profile times such as the end-of-year holidays.

Obama, who is scheduled to leave Friday for his annual family vacation in Hawaii, had to interrupt that trip in 2009 when a would-be attacker tried to blow up a plane on Christmas Day.

Obama's schedule includes a Monday stop at the Pentagon for a rare meeting outside the White House by his National Security Council, followed by a public update from the president about the fight against IS. White House press secretary Josh Earnest said Obama did not intend to announce any major changes in approach.

"If there's an opportunity for us to intensify efforts behind one aspect of our strategy, then that is something that he wants his team to be prepared to do," Earnest said.

On Thursday, at the National Counterterrorism Center, which analyzes intelligence at its facility in suburban Virginia, Obama plans to address reporters after a briefing by intelligence and security agencies on threat assessments. Obama receives a similar briefing each year before the holidays.

Concerns about extremism emanating from the Middle East have taken center stage in the presidential race. Obama has tried to use his bully pulpit as a counterpoint to GOP front-runner Trump and his widely condemned proposal to bar Muslims from entering the U.S., and to push back on other politicians insisting on halting resettlement of Syrian refugees in the U.S.

The White House scheduled a conference call Monday with religious leaders

about ways to fight discrimination and promote religious tolerance.

Aiming to put a human face on the issue, Obama is to speak Tuesday at the National Archives Museum, where 31 immigrants from Iraq, Ethiopia, Uganda and 23 other nations will be sworn in as U.S. citizens. Obama planned to use that occasion to reframe the national conversation about immigrants around the country's founding values of tolerance and freedom.

Despite Obama's reassurances, Republicans say Obama has failed to grasp the severity of the risk.

Rep. Will Hurd, R-Texas, said the threat from IS and other terrorist groups presents "a clear and present danger to the United States."

"We can't contain this threat. We have to defeat it," Hurd said in the weekly GOP address. "To defeat ISIS, we have to be in this for the long haul."

## President's Optimism Over Climate Pact Tempered By GOP Opposition

BY KEVIN FREKING  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama and Secretary of State John Kerry hailed the newly passed international climate change agreement as a major achievement that could help turn the tide on global warming, but got a quick reminder that Republicans will fight it all the way.

Obama said the climate agreement made Saturday night by almost 200 nations "can be a turning point for the world" and credited his administration for playing a key role. He and Kerry predicted it would prompt widespread spending on clean energy and help stem carbon pollution blamed for global warming.

"We've shown that the world has both the will and the ability to take on this challenge," Obama said from the White House. He said the climate agreement "offers the best chance we have to save the one planet we have."

"In short, this agreement will mean less of the carbon pollution that threatens our planet and more of the jobs and economic growth driven by low-carbon investments," Obama said.

Obama said the world leaders meeting in Paris "met the moment" and that people can be more confident "the planet will be in better shape for the next generation." Obama said the agreement is not perfect, but sets a framework that will contain periodic reviews and assessments to ensure that countries meet their commitments to curb carbon emissions.

The immediate reaction of leading Republican critics was a stark reminder of the conflict that lies ahead.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky said Obama is "making promises he can't keep" and should remember that the agreement "is subject to being shredded in 13 months." McConnell noted that the presidential election is next year and the agreement could be reversed if the GOP wins the White House.

And Republican Sen. James Inhofe of Oklahoma said that Americans can expect the administration to cite the agreement as an excuse for establishing emission targets for every sector of the U.S. economy.



Obama

I just personally cannot believe that any person who doesn't understand the science and isn't prepared to do for the next generation what we did here today and follow through on it cannot and will not be elected president of the United States."

In an interview taped for CBS' "Face the Nation," Kerry called the climate pact "a breakthrough agreement" that will change how countries make decisions and "spur massive investment."

He acknowledged that a Republican president could undo the agreement, but said there is already plenty of evidence that climate change is having a damaging and expensive impact with more intense storms, wildfires and melting glaciers.

Several Democratic lawmakers applauded Obama's efforts.

House Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi hailed it as a "monumental moment" and praised Obama for his leadership on the issue.

Sen. Harry Reid, the Senate Democratic minority leader, said climate change poses one of the greatest threats the world has ever known, and that no country acting alone can stem the tide.

"The time to act is now," the Nevada lawmaker said.

Obama took credit for the successful negotiations. "Today, the American people can be proud — because this historic agreement is a tribute to American leadership. Over the past seven years, we've transformed the United States into the global leader in fighting climate change."

## Gun Rights Expanded After Sandy Hook

IOWA CITY, Iowa (AP) — The 2012 massacre at Sandy Hook Elementary School, in which a mentally troubled young man killed 26 children and educators, served as a rallying cry for gun-control advocates across the nation.

But in the three years since, many states have moved in the opposite direction, embracing the National Rifle Association's axiom that more "good guys with guns" are needed to deter mass shootings.

In Kansas, gun owners can now carry concealed weapons without obtaining a license. In Texas, those with permits will soon be able to carry openly in holsters and bring concealed weapons into some college classrooms. And in Arkansas, gun enthusiasts may be able to carry weapons into polling places next year when they vote for president.

Dozens of new state laws have made it easier to obtain guns and carry them in more public places and made it harder for local governments to enact restrictions, according to a review of state legislation by The Associated Press. The number of guns manufactured and sold and the number of permits to carry concealed weapons have also increased, data show.

The trend has been discouraging to some gun-control advocates, even as other states have adopted stricter background checks. Other gun-control supporters say their movement is emboldened by the recent rise of Everytown for Gun Safety, a well-funded group backed by former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg that is becoming influential in some state capitols.

## Large Field Has NH GOP Leaders On Edge

MANCHESTER, N.H. (AP) — The Republican establishment has flexed its muscle in New Hampshire's presidential primaries for years. But in the unpredictable 2016 election, the state's standard political playbook faces challenges on two fronts.

Donald Trump's brash brand of populism is resonating with voters, and he's sustained a commanding lead in statewide preference polls for months. While several experienced politicians are well-liked, some party elites fear none will emerge as a consensus choice in time for the Feb. 9 primary, allowing Trump to win a plurality.

"If the center-right doesn't coalesce here, it runs the risk of allowing a far-right, ideological candidate to go unchecked," said Tom Rath, a New Hampshire-based Republican strategist backing Ohio Gov. John Kasich.

Kasich is competing most directly for support with New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush and Florida Sen. Marco Rubio. Some centrist voters are fond of former Hewlett-Packard chief executive Carly Fiorina, but she is lagging behind the others.

A decisive victory in New Hampshire could reset a race dominated by Trump's unexpected durability. A weak showing would leave the establishment — generally understood to mean party leaders and insiders, mainstream donors and other influential figures who avoid the ideological extreme — with few options for a quick rebound.

## Candidates Prepare For Tuesday Debate

WASHINGTON (AP) — Nine Republicans hopefuls meet Tuesday in the next prime-time presidential debate, with a familiar slate of candidates looking to wrangle over what to do about the threat of terrorism and who has the right temperament and judgment to lead the nation.

At center stage will be front-runner Donald Trump, fending off a challenge from Ted Cruz. The Texas senator has surged ahead in Iowa seven weeks before the state's 2016 caucuses. New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie returns to the main stage after a downgrade to the undercard event in November. And Kentucky Sen. Rand Paul, who debate host CNN said was "on the bubble" of qualifying just days ago, gets to stay in prime time. Also appearing in the main debate will be Florida Sen. Marco Rubio, former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush, Hewlett Packard CEO Carly Fiorina, former neurosurgeon Ben Carson and Ohio Gov. John Kasich.

## Sikhs, Muslims Work To Combat Backlash

CHICAGO (AP) — Pardeep Kaleka spent several days after 9/11 at his father's South Milwaukee gas station, fearing that his family would be targeted by people who assumed they were Muslim. No, Kaleka explained on behalf of his father, who wore a turban and beard and spoke only in broken English, the family was Sikh, a southeast Asian religion based on equality and unrelated to Islam.

But amid a new wave of anti-Islamic sentiment since the terror attacks in Paris and San Bernardino, Kaleka is vowing to take an entirely different approach.

"For us it does not matter who they're targeting," said Kaleka, a former Milwaukee police officer and teacher whose father was one of six people killed in 2012 when a white supremacist opened fire at a Sikh temple in Oak Creek, Wisconsin. "This time we cannot differentiate ourselves; when hate rhetoric is being spewed we cannot be on the sidelines."

Across the U.S., Sikhs and Muslims are banding together to defend their respective religions. Someone bent on harming Muslims wouldn't understand — or care — about the distinction between the two faiths, they say, and both also deserve to live in peace.

So they plan educational sessions and rallies. They successfully pushed the FBI to track hate crimes against Sikhs. They speak to lawmakers and support each other's legal action, including a lawsuit filed over a New York City police surveillance program targeting New Jersey Muslims.

## Saudi Voters Elect 20 Women Candidates

RIYADH, Saudi Arabia (AP) — Saudi voters elected 20 women for local government seats, according to results released to The Associated Press on Sunday, a day after women voted and ran in elections for the first time in the country's history.

The women who won hail from vastly different parts of the country, ranging from Saudi Arabia's largest city to a small village near Islam's holiest site.

The 20 female candidates represent just one percent of the roughly 2,100 municipal council seats up for grabs, but even limited gains are seen as a step forward for women who had previously been completely shut out of elections. Women are still not allowed to drive and are governed by guardianship laws that give men final say over aspects of their lives like marriage, travel and higher education.

Though there are no quotas for female council members, an additional 1,050 seats are appointed with approval by the king who could use his powers to ensure more women are represented.

Around 7,000 candidates, among them 979 women, competed in the election for a seat on the municipal councils, which are the only government body elected by Saudi citizens. The two previous rounds of voting for the councils, in 2005 and 2011, were open to men only.

## French Far Right Collapses In Regional Runoff Elections

PARIS (AP) — Marine Le Pen's far-right National Front collapsed in French regional elections Sunday, failing to take a single region after dominating the first round of voting, pollsters projected. The conservatives surged against the governing Socialists, changing the political map of France.

The failure of the National Front to gain any of the six regions where it was leading didn't stop the anti-immigration party from looking to the 2017 presidential election — Le Pen's ultimate goal.

Le Pen had been riding high after extremist attacks and an unprecedented wave of migration into Europe, and the party came out on top in the voting in France's 13 newly drawn regions in the first round a week ago. But projections by France's major polling firms suggested the party lost in all of the regions Sunday, including decisive losses for both Le Pen and her popular niece.

"Here we stopped the progression of the National Front," said conservative Xavier Bertrand, who was projected to beat Le Pen in the Nord-Pas de Calais region.

Le Pen supporters in a hall in the gritty northern town of Henin-Beaumont booed his image on a big screen as he spoke.

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