

Obama Tells Pentagon To Plan For Afghan Pullout

Withdrawal Eyed For End Of Year If No Security Agreement Is Signed

BY JULIE PACE

AP White House Correspondent

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama has ordered the Pentagon to plan for a full American withdrawal from Afghanistan by the end of this year should the Afghan government refuse to sign a security agreement with the U.S., the White House said Tuesday.

However, in a call with Afghan President Hamid Karzai, Obama also said the U.S. could still keep a limited troop presence in Afghanistan after 2014 if the agreement is ultimately signed. He acknowledged that Karzai was unlikely to sign the bilateral security agreement himself, leaving the fate of the continued U.S. troop presence in Afghanistan to the win-

ner of the country's April elections.

"We will leave open the possibility of concluding a BSA with Afghanistan later this year," the White House said in a summary of the call between the two leaders. However, the White House added that "the longer we go without a BSA, the more likely it will be that any post-2014 U.S. mission will be smaller in scale and ambition."

Tuesday's call was the first direct contact between Obama and Karzai since last June, underscoring the White House's frustration with the Afghan leader's refusal to sign the security agreement. The pact would give the U.S. a legal basis for having forces in Afghanistan after 2014, and also allow it to use bases across the country.

The White House has repeatedly said it

would not leave American troops in Afghanistan without the agreement.

Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel called Obama's order to the Pentagon "a prudent step" given the likelihood that Karzai will not sign an agreement. However, he said the Pentagon would also continue to make plans for a possible U.S. mission in Afghanistan after this year, which would focus on counterterrorism and training Afghan security forces.

The Pentagon has long had contingency plans for multiple options in Afghanistan. However, Navy Rear Adm. John Kirby said Tuesday that until now, the military was "not actively planning for a complete withdrawal."



Obama

"Now we will," the Pentagon press secretary said.

Joint Chiefs Chairman Gen. Martin Dempsey was traveling to Afghanistan Thursday to visit U.S. military leaders in the country and assess the security situation. Dempsey said he continues to prefer keeping an American troop presence in the country because of the continued threat of al-Qaida, but said the options for doing so "are far more constrained than we're currently recommending."

Obama has been weighing options from the Pentagon that would keep as many as 10,000 troops in the country after this year, contingent on the security agreement. However, some White House officials are believed to support keeping a smaller troop presence.

The U.S. currently has about 33,600 troops in Afghanistan, down from a high of 100,000 in 2010.



MANDI WRIGHT/DETROIT FREE PRESS/MCT

Protesters picket outside Federal Court in Detroit on Tuesday as a trial challenging the ban on gay marriage is about to get started.

Mich. Gay-Marriage Ban At Stake In Trial

BY ED WHITE

Associated Press

DETROIT — Children need good parents, no matter their gender or sexual orientation, a psychologist testified Tuesday at a trial challenging Michigan's ban on gay marriage.

David Brodzinsky, an expert in adoption and foster care and a former Rutgers University professor, said there are no "discernible differences" in children who are raised by same-sex couples and youth raised by heterosexuals.

"It's not the gender of the parents that's the key. It's the quality of the parenting," said Brodzinsky, based in Oakland, Calif.

Two Detroit-area nurses who together are raising three adopted children are seeking to overturn a Michigan constitutional amendment that recognizes marriage only between a man and a woman. Jayne Rowse, 49, and April DeBoer, 42, also are targeting a state law that prevents them from jointly adopting each other's kids because they're not married.

It's the first U.S. trial over a gay-mar-

riage ban since a California trial in 2010, although federal judges in other ways recently have struck down similar bans in Utah, Oklahoma and Virginia. At least 17 states and the District of Columbia now allow marriage by same-sex couples.

The Michigan trial, which could last two weeks, will have testimony from experts in areas of economics, marriage and child-rearing. The issue for U.S. District Judge Bernard Friedman is whether there's a rational state interest in restricting marriage to a man and a woman.

The state attorney general's office is defending the 2004 constitutional amendment, which was approved by 59 percent of voters.

To scratch the amendment, the judge would have to find that it's "inconsequential" to have children raised by a man and a woman, Assistant Attorney General Kristin Heysie said in her opening remarks.

"This court should not be rushed to embrace a position that mothers and fathers are interchangeable," she said.

The election result nearly a decade

ago, Heysie said, "was not a whim of the few but a vote of the majority, the will of the people."

Rowse and DeBoer claim the amendment violates their rights under the Equal Protection Clause of the U.S. Constitution. They are raising three adopted children with special needs at their Hazel Park home.

"Nothing says family like a marriage license," DeBoer told reporters before entering the courthouse hand-in-hand with Rowse, her partner of eight years.

They walked past more than a dozen people who marched peacefully on the sidewalk with signs declaring, "We support traditional marriage. One man, one woman."

The couple's attorney, Carole Stanyar, said she would present evidence to show there's no rational basis to single out gays and lesbians who want to marry — a key legal standard in the case.

"We would like this to be the last trial in America where same-sex parents will have to defend themselves," she told the judge.

Survey: Few Women Want Combat Jobs

FORT EUSTIS, Va. (AP) — Only a small fraction of Army women say they'd like to move into one of the newly opening combat jobs, but those few who do say they want a job that takes them right into the heart of battle, according to preliminary results from a survey of the service's nearly 170,000 women.

That survey and others across the Army, publicly disclosed for the first time to The Associated Press, also revealed that soldiers of both genders are nervous about women entering combat jobs but say they are determined to do it fairly. Men are worried about losing their jobs to women; women are worried they will be seen as getting jobs because of their gender and not their qualifications. Both are emphatic that the Army must not lower standards to accommodate women.

Less than 8 percent of Army women who responded to the survey said they wanted a combat job. Of those, an overwhelming number said they'd like to be a Night Stalker — a member of the elite special operations helicopter crews who perhaps are best known for flying the Navy SEALs into Osama bin Laden's compound in 2011.

Last year top Pentagon officials signed an order saying women must have the same opportunities as men in combat jobs and the services have been devising updated physical standards, training, education and other programs for thousands of jobs they must open Jan. 1, 2016. The services must open as many jobs to women as possible; if they decide to keep some closed, they must explain why.

The Army says that about 200,000 of its 1.1 million jobs are either direct combat or related jobs such as field artillery, combat engineers and so on. That's roughly 20 percent of the force, though the direct-combat front-line fighters make up roughly half of that or about 9 percent.

Tensions Soar In Pro-Russian Crimea

SEVASTOPOL, Ukraine (AP) — Dozens of pro-Russian protesters rallied Tuesday in the Ukrainian peninsula of Crimea against "the bandits" in Kiev who are trying to form a new government — with some even speaking of secession. A lawmaker from Russia stoked their passions further by promising them that Russia will protect them.

As a Russian flag flew Tuesday in front of the city council building in Sevastopol — a key Crimean port where Russia's Black Sea Fleet is based — an armored Russian personnel carrier and two trucks full of troops made a rare appearance on the streets of the city.

The Crimean Peninsula — a pro-Russian region about the size of Massachusetts or Belgium — is a tinder pot in the making.

Protesters had torn down the Ukrainian flag a day ago, pleading with Moscow to protect them from the new authorities in Ukraine who have forced President Viktor Yanukovich to flee Kiev, the capital, and go into hiding.

"Bandits have come to power," said Vyacheslav Tokarev, a 39-year-old construction worker in Sevastopol. "I'm ready to take arms to fight the fascists who have seized power in Kiev."

Ariz. Gov. Brewer Jets Home Amid Furor

PHOENIX (AP) — Arizona Gov. Jan Brewer headed home Tuesday after five days in Washington to a state that has become embroiled in a national debate over religious and gay rights because of a bill on her desk.

The Republican governor is expected to arrive in Phoenix in the afternoon and likely will spend the next day or more pondering Senate Bill 1062 before deciding whether to sign or veto the legislation.

The bill allows businesses whose owners cite sincerely held religious beliefs to deny service to gays. It allows any business, church or person to cite the law as a defense in any action brought by the government or individual claiming discrimination.

There is widespread speculation that Brewer will veto the bill, but she has not said how she'll act, as is her longtime practice with pending legislation.

Political observers in Arizona cautioned that the governor is deliberate and not prone to act hastily, despite the growing calls from business, politicians of all stripes, and civil rights groups for a veto.

Mistrust Surrounding Bitcoin Grows

TOKYO (AP) — The sudden disappearance of one of the largest bitcoin exchanges only adds to the mystery and mistrust surrounding the virtual currency, which was just beginning to gain legitimacy beyond the technology enthusiasts and adventurous investors who created it.

Prominent bitcoin supporters said the apparent collapse of the Tokyo-based Mt. Gox exchange was an isolated case of mismanagement that will weed out "bad actors." But the setback raised serious questions about bitcoin's tenuous status and even more tenuous future. At least one supporter said the blow could be fatal to bitcoin's quest for acceptance by the public.

A coalition of virtual currency companies said Mt. Gox went under after secretly racking up catastrophic losses. The exchange had imposed a ban on withdrawals earlier this month.

By Tuesday, its website returned only a blank page. The collapse followed the resignation Sunday of CEO Mark Karpeles from the board of the Bitcoin Foundation, a group seeking wider use of the exotic currency.

San Francisco-based wallet service Coinbase and Chinese exchange BTC China sought to shore up confidence in the currency by saying the Mt. Gox's situation was isolated and the result of abusing users' trust. They offered no details.

Calif. Couple Uncovers Rare Gold Coins

LOS ANGELES (AP) — A Northern California couple out walking their dog on their property stumbled across a modern-day bonanza: \$10 million in rare, mint-condition gold coins buried in the shadow of an old tree.

Nearly all of the 1,427 coins, dating from 1847 to 1894, are in uncirculated, mint condition, said David Hall, co-founder of Professional Coin Grading Service of Santa Ana, which recently authenticated them. Although the face value of the gold pieces only adds up to about \$27,000, some of them are so rare that coin experts say they could fetch nearly \$1 million apiece.

"I don't like to say once-in-a-lifetime for anything, but you don't get an opportunity to handle this kind of material, a treasure like this, ever," said veteran numismatist Don Kagin, who is representing the finders. "It's like they found the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow."

Kagin, whose family has been in the rare-coin business for 81 years, would say little about the couple other than that they are husband and wife, are middle-aged and have lived for several years on the rural property in California's Gold Country, where the coins were found. They have no idea who put them there, he said.

Study: Obesity In Pre-Schoolers Drops

BY MIKE STOBBE

AP Medical Writer

ATLANTA — A new study may be another signal of a national decline in childhood obesity.

The finding comes from a government study considered a gold-standard gauge of trends in the public's health. The researchers found that obesity among children ages 2 to 5 dropped — to 8 percent, from 14 percent a decade ago.

It's not enough to say the nation has clearly turned the corner. The only decline was seen in preschoolers, not in older children. Some experts note that even the improvement in toddlers wasn't a steady decline, and say it's hard to know yet whether preschooler weight figures are permanently curving down or merely jumping around.

But it's enough of a decline to be optimistic, said Cynthia Ogden, one of the study's authors.

"There's a glimmer of hope," said Ogden, an epidemiologist with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The report was published online Tuesday in the Journal of the American Medical Association.

Health officials have long been hoping for more substantial evidence that they've turned a corner in the fight against childhood obesity.

Obesity is seen as one of the nation's leading public health problems — health officials call it a longstanding epidemic. A third of U.S. children and teens and more

than two-thirds of adults are obese or overweight.

Officials are particularly worried about the problem in young children. Preschoolers who are overweight or obese are five times more likely than other children to be heavy as adults, which means greater risks of high cholesterol, high blood sugar, asthma and even mental health problems.

After decades on the rise, childhood obesity rates recently have been flat. But a few places — including New York City and Mississippi — reported improvements in the last couple of years. Seattle joined that list last week, with a report of recently declining obesity in older school children in low-income school districts.

More broadly, health officials last year reported at least slight drops in obesity for low-income preschoolers in 18 states. But they mainly were children enrolled in the federal Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program, which provides food vouchers and other services. Experts attributed the improvement to WIC policy changes in 2009 that eliminated juice from infant food packages, provided less saturated fat, and made it easier to buy fruits and vegetables.

The new study is a national survey of about 9,100 people — including nearly 600 infants and toddlers — in 2011-2012, in which participants were not only interviewed but weighed and measured. The results were compared to four similar surveys that stretched back to 2003.

Gay rights in Africa

Uganda's president has signed a harsh anti-gay bill. Homosexuality was already illegal in Uganda, but the new legislation imposes a 14-year prison sentence for first-time offenders and life sentences for repeat offenders.

■ Consensual same-sex relationships legal
■ Consensual same-sex relationships illegal
□ Legislation unclear



Uganda Tabloid Prints List Of 'Top' Homosexuals

KAMPALA, Uganda (AP) — A Ugandan newspaper published a list Tuesday of what it called the country's "200 top" homosexuals, outing some Ugandans who previously had not identified themselves as gay one day after the president enacted a harsh anti-gay law.

Many of those named fear violence, and some want to leave the country, an activist said.

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry said Monday's signing of the bill by President Yoweri Museveni marked "a tragic day for Uganda and for all who care about the cause of human rights" and warned that Washington could cut aid to the government of the East African nation.

"Now that this law has been enacted, we are beginning an internal review of our relationship with the Government of Uganda to ensure that all dimensions of our engagement, including assistance programs, uphold our anti-discrimination policies and principles and reflect our values," Kerry said in a statement.

The Red Pepper tabloid published the names — and some

pictures — of alleged homosexuals in a front-page story under the headline: "EXPOSED!"

Red Pepper news editor, Ben Byarabaha, said they published the full names of only the well-known activists and had tried to use nicknames for those not publicly gay. Others, such as a retired Anglican cleric who supports gay rights, are listed as sympathizers. Byarabaha offered no details about how the full list was compiled.

The list included prominent Ugandan gay activists such as Pepe Julian Onziema, who has repeatedly warned that Uganda's new anti-gay law could spark violence against homosexuals. A popular Ugandan hip-hop star and a Catholic priest are also on the list.

But Onziema said the tabloid had sufficiently identified many who had not yet come out publicly as gay.

"They are scared and they need help," he said. "Some want to leave the country and they are asking to be helped. Some of the employers have read the paper, and from the descriptions they can tell who these people are."