

Obama Searching For Ways To Offset Losses

WASHINGTON (AP) — Four months from Election Day, President Barack Obama has an edge in support among women, African-Americans, Hispanics and young people, groups that could swing the race in November.

He retains the power of incumbency and people generally like him. But there are indications that Obama's supporters aren't as enthusiastic about him as they once were, and the Democrat no longer is in a fundraising league of his own, with Republican Mitt Romney and GOP-leaning groups raking in the campaign cash.

Plus, the shaky economy, which crashed in fall of 2008 and helped Obama capture the presidency, is a huge vulnerability. Come November, it could trump all his other advantages.

Romney Fases Summer Of Hurdles In Election

WASHINGTON (AP) — As the White House challenger, Mitt Romney can seize on the attention that accompanies the selection of a running mate. When the London Olympics get under way, he can use that spotlight to play up his leadership of the 2002 Winter Games in Salt Lake City.

His candidacy also is benefiting from the fundraising power of outside GOP-aligned political groups that are spending millions on TV ads to promote him and undercut President Barack Obama. The weak economic recovery offers the chance for Romney to make inroads among unhappy voters.

Not all is rosy, however, for the former Massachusetts governor. Health care is the last thing Romney wants to talk about. As he appeals to independent voters, he has to fend off charges that by moving to the middle, he's changing core positions for political purposes.

Feds To Reroute Ship Traffic Because Of Whales

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Scientists studying the carcass of a 47-foot fin whale that washed up on a beach in the Point Reyes National Seashore last month found the creature's spine and ribs severed, likely from the propeller of one of the huge cargo ships that sail those waters.

There have been many victims of such accidents in recent years as migrating blue, fin and humpback whales have been lured close to California's shore by plentiful krill, the shrimp-like organisms they eat. All three species are endangered.

Now, after a two-year effort spurred by the uptick in accidents, federal maritime officials have approved a plan to protect whales in and around San Francisco Bay. It includes rerouting shipping traffic and establishing better ways to track whale locations.

The changes crafted by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, shipping industry representatives, whale researchers and the Coast Guard will likely take effect next year, after a final review by the United Nations International Maritime Organization.

"In 2010 it really struck home when a female blue whale carrying a calf was found dead on the beach," said Maria Brown, NOAA's superintendent for the Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary. "And blue whales' numbers are so small — to lose a female and a new whale coming into the population really sent home the message that we needed to look at the whale strike issue."

London In Mad Dash To Get Ready For Olympics

LONDON (AP) — With the opening ceremony less than two weeks away, there's a mad dash to the finish line at the Olympics and it has nothing to do with sprinters.

Hundreds of construction workers are toiling away inside the Olympic Park, laying cables, installing seats and adding the last layers of sparkle and polish to the venues.

There's plenty to do. "It's looking a bit industrial isn't it?" said Chris Allen, a Londoner who came to the edge of the park to have a look. "I am not seeing England's green fields. I do hope it's going to look better."

Shades of Athens, where chronic delays pushed workers to the brink to complete preparations in time for the games to start in 2004? Hardly, say London organizers who have prided themselves on finishing their massive construction project ahead of time and on budget. Things may look a bit messy now, they say, but all will be fine by the time the curtain goes up, on July 27, when the torch is lit.

Syria

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ported killed in a regime assault. After a second visit to Tremseh on Sunday, the team said Syrian troops went door-to-door in the small farming community, checking residents' IDs and then killing some and taking others away.

According to the U.N., the attack appeared to target army defectors and activists.

"Pools of blood and brain matter were observed in a number of homes," a U.N. statement said. Syria denied U.N. claims that government forces had used heavy weapons such as tanks, artillery and helicopters during the attack Thursday.

Syrian Foreign Ministry spokesman Jihad Makdissi said the violence was not a massacre — as activists and many foreign leaders have alleged — but a military operation targeting armed fighters who had taken control of the village.

"What happened wasn't an attack on civilians," Makdissi told reporters Sunday in Damascus. He said 37 gunmen and two civilians were killed — a far lower death toll than the one put forward by anti-regime activists, some of whom estimated the dead at more than 100.

"What has been said about the use of heavy weapons is baseless," Makdissi added.

The U.N. has implicated President Bashar Assad's forces in the assault. The head of the U.N. observer mission said Friday that monitors stationed near Tremseh saw the army using heavy

weaponry and attack helicopters.

The fighting was some of the latest in the uprising against Assad, which activists say has killed more than 17,000 people. Violence continued Sunday, with more clashes reported around the capital, Damascus.

The bloodshed appeared to be escalating. On Sunday, the International Committee of the Red Cross said it now considers the Syrian conflict a civil war, meaning international humanitarian law applies throughout the country.

Also known as the rules of war, humanitarian law grants all parties in a conflict the right to use appropriate force to achieve their aims. The Geneva-based group's assessment is an important reference for determining how much and what type of force can be used, and it can form the basis for war crimes prosecutions, especially if civilians are attacked or detained enemies are abused or killed.

"We are now talking about a non-international armed conflict in the country," ICRC spokesman Hicham Hassan said.

War crimes prosecutions would have been possible even without the Red Cross statement. But Sunday's pronouncement adds weight to any prosecution argument that Syria is in a state of war — a prerequisite for a war crimes case.

Previously, the Red Cross committee had restricted its assessment of the scope of the conflict to the hotspots of Idlib, Homs and Hama. But Hassan said the organization concluded that the violence was widening.

"Hostilities have spread to other areas of the country," Hassan said. "International humanitarian law applies to all areas where

ing of more than 500 Republicans.

When Democrats call her "a welfare rancher (for holding) a federal livestock grazing lease," Fischer said, they're saying "farm programs and conservation programs are welfare. Really?"

Paul supporters won their two slots in the 2nd Congressional District after controlling early county conventions in Douglas and Sarpy counties. Romney won the other seven delegate seats decided by congressional district, and a Romney slate of 23 at-large delegate candidates was elected en masse.

The three remaining seats in the delegation go to a trio of state party leaders, all of whom will vote for Romney.

Clinton's Calls Fall Flat In Egypt Political Fight

BY HAMZA HENDAWI AND
 BRADLEY KLAPPER

Associated Press

CAIRO — The head of Egypt's military took a tough line Sunday on the Muslim Brotherhood, warning that he won't let the fundamentalist group dominate the country, only hours after U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton urged him to work with Egypt's elected Islamist leaders.

Clinton's visit to Egypt underscored the difficulty Washington faces in trying to wield its influence amid the country's stormy post-Hosni Mubarak power struggles. Protesters chanting against the U.S. — sometimes reaching several hundred — sprung up at several sites Clinton visited this weekend. On Sunday, protesters threw tomatoes, water bottles and shoes at her motorcade as she left a ceremony marking the opening of a new U.S. consulate in the Mediterranean city of Alexandria.

Islamist Mohammed Morsi, a longtime Brotherhood figure, was sworn two weeks ago as Egypt's first democratically elected president. Led by Field Marshal Hussein Tantawi, the military handed over power to him June 30 after ruling Egypt for 16 months. The military, however, dissolved the Brotherhood-led parliament and stripped Morsi of significant authorities in the days before his inauguration, while retaining overwhelming powers for itself,

including legislative power and control of the writing of a new constitution.

The United States is in a difficult spot when it comes to dealing with post-Mubarak Egypt — eager to be seen as a champion of democracy and human rights after three decades of close ties with the ousted leader despite his abysmal record in advancing either.

This has involved some uncomfortable changes, including occasional criticism of America's longtime faithful partners in Egypt's military as it grabs more power and words of support for Islamist parties far more skeptical of U.S. intentions in Egypt and the rest of the Middle East.

That has fueled accusations among some Egyptians who back the military or oppose Islamists that Washington is promoting the rise of the Brotherhood to power.

At the ceremony in Alexandria, Clinton denied the U.S. supports any particular party. She also called for religious tolerance and respect of minorities in the new Egypt — a major concern among the Christian minority, women and secular liberals who fear restrictions if the fundamentalist Brotherhood wields power.

"Democracy is not just about reflecting the will of the majority," she said. "It is also about protecting the rights of the minority."

"Real democracy means that no group or faction or leader can impose their will, their ideology,

their religion, their desires on anyone else."

Still, Clinton does want the military to work with Morsi and his Islamist allies on a full transition to civilian rule. But with the U.S. having already approved another massive delivery of military aid, it was unclear what leverage Washington has as it seeks to stabilize Egypt and build a new relationship with America's once ironclad Arab ally.

This weekend, she tried to stake out a middle ground. Meeting with Morsi on Saturday for the first time, she called for consensus. Without taking a position on the specific disputes, she urged Tantawi to return the armed forces to a "purely national security role," as she termed it.

But her criticism of the military was muted. She commended it defending lives during the Jan. 25-Feb. 11, 2011 revolution against Mubarak and for the progress Egypt made under its interim leadership, which included free and fair elections.

Still, after talks with Clinton on Sunday, Tantawi made clear the military will not allow the Brotherhood to hold sway, though he didn't specify the group by name.

"Egypt will never fall. It belongs to all Egyptians and not to a certain group — the armed forces will not allow it," he warned in comments to

reporters after a handover ceremony for the transfer of command of the armed forces' 2nd Field Army in the Suez Canal city of Ismailia.

"The armed forces will not allow anyone, especially those pushed from outside, to distract it from its role as the protector of Egypt," he said. "The army will never commit treason and will continue to perform its duties until Egypt reaches the shores of safety."

The U.S. is looking to safeguard its interests in the region — from counterterrorism cooperation to Arab-Israeli peace efforts. But the deepening paralysis and lack of clarity over the leadership in Egypt has put much of its agenda on hold. Clinton headed Sunday evening to Jerusalem, where she is tackling another realm where Washington's influence has failed to bring a breakthrough, reviving Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.

Egypt's military and the Muslim Brotherhood, the country's strongest political force, are in a competition over power that has intensified with Morsi's winning of the presidency last month. Days before he was sworn in, the Brotherhood-led parliament was dissolved and the generals gave themselves legislative and budgetary authority and control over the process of drafting a new constitution, while severely limiting the president's authority.

LOSING HIS LUSTER



ABBY DREY/CENTRE DAILY TIMES
 Visitors point to where a halo that was above the image of Joe Paterno has been painted over on the mural by Michael Pilato on Hiester Street in downtown State College, Pennsylvania, on Saturday.

N. Korean Army Chief Relieved Of Posts

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — Kim Jong Un's top military official — a key mentor to North Korea's new young leader — has been removed from all posts because of illness, state media said Monday.

The decision to relieve Ri Yong Ho of his duties was made at a Workers' Party meeting Sunday, according to the North's official Korean Central News Agency. It was not immediately clear who would take Ri's place, and the North Korean media dispatch did not elaborate on Ri's condition or future.

Ri was vice marshal of the Korean People's Army and the military's General Staff chief, as well as a top figure in the Workers' Party.

He has been at Kim Jong Un's side since the young man emerged as father Kim Jong Il's successor in 2010, often standing between father and son at major events. That role appeared to deepen after Kim Jong Il's death in December, helping Kim to solidify support among the military.

Kim Jong Il's "military first" policy made the army North Korea's most powerful institution. Ri wielded power from his position at the intersection of three crucial institutions: the Korean People's Army, the Central Military Commission of the ruling Workers' Party and the Standing Committee of the party's influential Political Bureau.

hostilities are taking place."

Although the armed uprising in Syria began more than a year ago, the committee had hesitated to call it a civil war — though others, including United Nations officials, have done so.

That is because the rules of war override and to some extent suspend the laws that apply in peacetime, including the universal right to life, right to free speech and right to peaceful assembly.

When the Red Cross says something "it's always very persuasive," said Louise Doswald-Beck, a professor of international law at the Geneva Graduate Institute. In legal terms, that means a court would be unlikely to decide differently.

As an internal conflict officially becomes a civil war, the security environment shifts from regular law enforcement to a situation in which international law permits the government to attack rebel fighters, Doswald-Beck said.

"That's why this whole business of Tremseh is interesting," she said.

Stephen M. Saideman, professor at the Norman Paterson School of International Affairs in Ontario, Canada, doubted whether the Red Cross declaration would change anything significant on either side.

Assad and his supporters won't stop fighting or change their tactics because they have too much to lose, Saideman said. The opposition "can have their spirits lifted by this, but they have been fighting a civil war for quite a while. So it is not clear how this announcement improves much their ability to recruit or to reduce divisions among the many rebel groups."

On Saturday, U.N. observers entered Tremseh, a community of 6,000 to 10,000 people in a farming region along the Orontes River northwest of the city of Hama. They found pools of blood in homes, along with spent bullets, mortars and artillery shells. The evidence added to the emerging picture of what anti-regime activists have called one of the deadliest events of the uprising.

Dozens of bodies have already

been buried in a mass grave or burned beyond recognition, and activists were struggling to determine the number of people killed. Estimates range from 100 to more than 150 dead.

Activists expect those figures to rise since hundreds of residents remain unaccounted for. Locals believe some bodies are still in nearby fields and others were probably dumped in the river.

Some of the evidence suggested that, rather than the outright shelling of civilians depicted by the opposition, the violence in Tremseh may have been a lopsided fight between the army pursuing the opposition and activists and locals trying to defend the village. Nearly all of the dead are men, including dozens of armed rebels.

Independent verification of the events is nearly impossible in Syria, one of the Middle East's strictest police states, which bars most media from working independently within its borders. The observers are in the country as

part of a faltering peace plan by U.N. special envoy Kofi Annan, who has been trying for months to negotiate a solution to Syria's crisis.

Although much of the international community has turned on Assad, Damascus still has some key allies — including Russia and Iran. The Kremlin announced Sunday that Annan will meet President Vladimir Putin on Tuesday.

Also Sunday, Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi said Tehran is ready to invite Syrian opposition groups and government envoys for talks, the semiofficial ISNA news agency reported.

Any proposal from Iran is likely to be rebuffed by rebel groups, which have rejected negotiations with Assad's government and have criticized Tehran for standing by its allies in Damascus. But the offer suggested Iran is seeking a more active role in mediation efforts after Annan's visit last week to Tehran.

Paul

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Party needs you (and) welcomes folks who come in to make us a stronger party."

Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal and Arizona Sen. Jon Kyl headed the list of speakers at the convention, arguing for the need to defeat President Barack Obama in November.

But all the speeches were a prelude to Republican Senate nominee Deb Fischer, who held top billing at the convention.

"Nebraskans want a senator who's going to represent Nebraska," Fischer told the gather-

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