

Israelis, Palestinians To Meet Again

WASHINGTON (AP) — Pressing ahead in a new U.S.-backed push for Middle East peace, Israeli and Palestinian negotiators agreed Tuesday to meet again within two weeks to start substantive talks in hopes of reaching a long-elusive settlement within nine months.

Speaking after the two sides wrapped up an initial two days of talks at the State Department and visited President Barack Obama at the White House, Secretary of State John Kerry said Israel and the Palestinians were committed to sustained and serious negotiations on the “core issues” that divide them. The next round will take place in either Israel or the Palestinian territories before mid-August, he said.

Kerry said he was aware of the deep doubts surrounding the new peace effort and acknowledged that the road would be difficult. Yet, he said, “While I understand the skepticism, I don’t share it. And I don’t think we have time for it.”

All issues, including contentious disputes over the status of the territories and Jerusalem, are “on the table for negotiation, and they are on the table with one simple goal: a view to ending the conflict,” Kerry said.

The U.S. had already said the negotiations would continue for at least nine months — roughly until the end of April 2014 — but that had not been set as a timeframe for reaching a deal. Kerry and both sides agreed that neither would walk away from the talks or take actions that could disrupt them for that period, two senior U.S. officials said. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they weren’t authorized to discuss diplomatic talks.

Probe: Train Driver Was On Phone

MADRID (AP) — The driver was on the phone with a colleague and apparently looking at a document as his train barreled ahead at 95 mph (153 kph) — almost twice the speed limit. Suddenly, a notorious curve was upon him.

He hit the brakes too late. The train, carrying 218 passengers in eight carriages, hurtled off the tracks and slammed into a concrete wall, killing 79 people.

On Tuesday, investigators looking into the crash announced their preliminary findings from analysis of the train’s data-recording “black boxes,” suggesting that human error appears to be the cause of Spain’s worst railway disaster in decades.

The derailment occurred near Santiago de Compostela, a city in northwestern Spain, late last Wednesday. Some 66 people injured in the crash are still hospitalized, 15 of them in critical condition.

Pentagon: Afghan Forces Will Need Help

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Pentagon said Tuesday it is offering no “zero option” for the number of troops that would remain in Afghanistan after the U.S. combat mission ends in December 2014. It said in a report to Congress that “substantial” long-term military support will be needed to ensure that Afghans can hold off the Taliban insurgency.

The White House has not ruled out leaving no troops behind after 2014, although officials say the most likely option is a residual training force of roughly 9,000.

In its twice-a-year report to Congress on war progress, the Pentagon said Afghanistan’s military is growing stronger but will require a lot more training, advising and foreign financial aid after the American and NATO combat mission ends.

The Pentagon’s assessment was an implicit rejection of the “zero option.” Zero is considered an unlikely choice by President Barack Obama, not least because his administration has pledged to stand with the Afghans for the long term. But Obama has grown frustrated in his dealings with Afghan President Hamid Karzai.

Peter Lavoy, the Pentagon’s top Afghan policy official, told a news conference that a number of post-2014 options have been developed, taking into account the Afghans’ need for additional training and advising, as well as what the Pentagon views as a longer-term requirement for U.S. counterterrorism forces in Afghanistan.

CBO: Delay Of Health Law Costly

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Obama administration’s surprise decision to delay a key requirement of the health care law for employers will cost the government \$10 billion, the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office said Tuesday.

While that’s a big number, the report from the official budget scorekeeper for Congress put the administration’s recent move within a wider perspective: It adds up to an increase of less than 1 percent in the 10-year cost of the law.

Earlier this month, the White House announced earlier that it would delay a health law requirement for employers with 50 or more workers to offer affordable coverage, or face fines. Instead of going into effect next year, the provision was put off to 2015. A major concession to business groups, the delay took administration allies and adversaries by surprise.

Republican critics seized on the delay as evidence that the law is not working, and spent over an hour in coordinated speeches in the Senate attacking it as a threat to the economy.

Sens. Mike Lee of Utah, Ted Cruz of Texas and Marco Rubio of Florida have all signed a letter opposing any must-pass spending bill at the end of the budget year in September that includes funding for the health care law, and used their remarks to appeal to the public to swing behind them.

San Diego City Council To Sue Mayor

SAN DIEGO (AP) — The San Diego City Council voted Tuesday to sue Mayor Bob Filner over any costs the city must pay from a sexual harassment lawsuit filed by his former communications director, dealing another setback to the leader of the nation’s eighth-largest city amid mounting calls that he resign.

The Council voted unanimously to ask that a court require the mayor to pay the city for any damages and attorney fees if the city is found liable. The decision behind closed doors came hours before the Council was to consider a request by the mayor’s attorney to have the city pay his legal expenses.

“This is part of due process,” said City Attorney Jan Goldsmith. “If Bob Filner engaged in unlawful conduct and the city is held liable, he will have to reimburse us every penny the city pays and its attorney fees.”

Irene McCormack Jackson sued the mayor and the city July 22, alleging the mayor asked her to work without panties, demanded kisses, told her he wanted to see her naked and dragged her in a headlock while whispering in her ear. Since then, six other women have offered detailed accounts of Filner’s advances, including touching and forcible kisses.

Seven of nine City Council members have urged the city’s first Democratic leader in 20 years to resign, ensuring stiff opposition to paying his legal expenses even before Filner’s attorney asked that the city pay his bills.

Manning Guilty Of 20 Charges

WikiLeaks Defendant Escapes Most Serious Charge Of Aiding Enemy

BY DAVID DISHNEAU
AND PAULINE JELINEK

Associated Press

FORT MEADE, Md. — In a split decision, U.S. Army Pfc. Bradley Manning was acquitted Tuesday of aiding the enemy — the most serious charge he faced — but was convicted of espionage, theft and nearly every other count for giving secrets to WikiLeaks, a verdict that could see him spend the rest of his life in prison.

The judge, Army Col. Denise Lind, deliberated over three days before delivering a decision that denied the government a precedent that freedom of press advocates had warned could have broad implications for leak cases and investigative journalism about national security issues.

From the courtroom to world capitals, people struggled to absorb the meaning of a ruling that cleared the soldier of a charge of aiding the enemy, which would have carried a potential life sentence, but convicted him of 20 of 22 counts that, together, could also mean life behind bars.

Manning faces up to 136 years in prison if given maximum penalties in a sentencing

“This was a massive hemorrhage of government records, and it’s not too surprising that it elicited a strong reaction from the government.”

STEVEN AFTERGOOD

hearing that starts Wednesday. It is expected to last most of August.

The 25-year-old soldier stood quietly at attention in his dress uniform as the verdict was delivered, flanked by his attorneys. He appeared not to react, though his attorney, David Coombs, smiled faintly when he heard “not guilty” on the aiding the enemy charge.

When the judge was done, Coombs put his hand on Manning’s back and whispered something to him, bringing a slight smile to the soldier’s face.

“We won the battle, now we need to go win the war,” Coombs said later, outside the courtroom. “Today is a good day, but

Bradley is by no means out of the fire.”

Transparency advocates and legal experts had mixed opinions on the implications for the future of leak cases and investigative journalism in the Internet age.

The advocacy group Reporters Without Borders said the verdict was a chilling warning to whistleblowers, “against whom the Obama administration has been waging an unprecedented offensive,” and threatens the future of investigative journalism because intimidated sources might fall quiet.

However, another advocate of less government secrecy, Steven Aftergood of the Federation of American Scientists, questioned whether the implications will be so dire, given the extraordinary nature of the Manning case.

“This was a massive hemorrhage of government records, and it’s not too surprising that it elicited a strong reaction from the government,” Aftergood said.

“Most journalists are not in the business of publishing classified documents, they’re in the business of reporting the news, which is not the same thing,” he said. “This is not good news for journalism, but it’s not the end of the world, either.”

Massive Explosions Rock Central Fla. Gas Plant

BY MIKE SCHNEIDER
AND TAMARA LUSH

Associated Press

TAVARES, Fla. — After hearing two explosions, maintenance worker Gene Williams looked outside to see a 20-by-20 foot fireball rising above an outdoor storage area at the Blue Rhino propane plant.

Moments later, a forklift worker stumbled into the building with flesh hanging off his hands. His legs and face were burned. Exploding 20-pound canisters of propane began raining down around them during the series of explosions late Monday night.

Bright orange flames would grow as high as 200 feet, fueled by the exploding canisters that shot through the air like fireworks. Houses nearby shook and residents awakened to the sound of “boom after boom after boom.”

No one died, but eight workers were injured, including one worker who was hit by a car on a nearby road while fleeing the explosions. Officials said the damage could have been significantly worse if three 30,000-pound propane storage containers had caught fire at the plant that refills propane tanks for gas grills and other home uses. About



TOM BENITEZ/ORLANDO SENTINEL/MCT

Firefighters continue to work a fire at a Blue Rhino propane plant in Tavares, Florida on Tuesday, July 30, 2013. Explosions lit up the sky for miles as thousands of propane canisters burned and detonated late Monday night.

50 nearby houses were temporarily evacuated, though none was ultimately damaged.

If the large tanks had exploded, “it would have wiped us out,” said Lake County Battalion Chief Chris Croughwell, one of the first responders to the explosions in the town northwest of Orlando.

The cause of the explosion was under investigation by federal and state authorities.

Williams said it appeared to begin about 100 yards from the loading dock in an area where some of the plant’s 53,000 20-pound propane canisters are stored on plastic pallets.

Tavares Fire Chief Richard Keith said possible causes of the explosion may be either equipment malfunction or human error. Sabotage was not suspected.

The plant’s two-dozen workers were preparing to go home when the explosions started Monday night, said Williams, who works the third shift. Based on what the forklift operator told him, the explosion was likely caused by a “combination of human error and bad practices, possibly. I don’t want to speculate any further, that’s what the forklift driver was telling me.”

TRAVIS TINSLEY

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MORNING COFFEE

WEEKDAYS MONDAY-FRIDAY

Wednesday, July 31

7:40 am MVCA

(Dana Forbes)

8:20 am Hy-Vee Foods

(Chef Staci)

Thursday, August 1

7:40 am Yankton Conv/Vis

(Lisa Scheve)

8:20 am Yankton Chamber

(Carmen Schramm)