

Lawyer: No Evidence On Attack

WASHINGTON (AP) — A lawyer for a Libyan militant charged in the 2012 Benghazi attacks said Wednesday that she had seen no evidence tying her client to the violence, but a judge nonetheless directed Ahmed Abu Khattala to remain in custody as the Justice Department builds its case against him. The lawyer, Michelle Peterson, conceded that Abu Khattala had no reasonable chance of being released at the moment, given the terrorism-related charge he faces and his lack of ties to the United States. But she also argued that prosecutors had failed to show, in their broad and initial outlines of the case, that he was in any way connected to the Sept. 11, 2012 attacks that killed Ambassador Chris Stevens and three other Americans.

“What’s been filed has shown, quite frankly, an utter lack of evidence of Mr. Khattala’s involvement in the incident in Benghazi,” said Michelle Peterson, an assistant federal public defender. “We are left to glean from press reports what the government’s evidence is.”

Abu Khattala appeared in court wearing a green prison jumpsuit and with a long, graying beard. He listened to the proceedings through headphones as an interpreter translated the conversation into Arabic. Peterson requested that while in jail he be served a halal diet and be provided a copy of the Quran.

The court appearance was the second in four days for Abu Khattala, who was captured more than two weeks ago by U.S. special forces and then transported to the United States aboard a Navy boat where federal agents interrogated him. He has pleaded not guilty to a charge of conspiring to provide support to terrorists, a crime punishable by up to life in prison, but the Justice Department has said it expects to bring additional charges soon that could reveal more information about the case.

East Coast Keeps An Eye On Storm Path

CHARLESTON, S.C. (AP) — As one of the year’s busiest travel weekends approaches, so does another visitor: Tropical Storm Arthur, expected to grow into a hurricane by the Fourth of July and hit most harshly at North Carolina’s Outer Banks, a popular getaway spot of thin barrier islands along the shore.

The first named storm of the Atlantic hurricane season prompted a hurricane warning for a wide swath of the North Carolina coast and had officials, hotel owners and would-be vacationers as far north as New England carefully watching forecasts.

The Outer Banks will be especially vulnerable, forecasters said. The area’s tourism agency expects about 250,000 people to travel there and stay in hotels and rental homes for the long holiday weekend.

“We want everybody to be safe and prepared, but we are not overly concerned at this point,” said Lee Nettles, the executive director of the Outer Banks Visitors Bureau. He noted that forecasters were predicting the storm would move fast and be less severe than others in locals’ memories.

But flooding concerns remained: Twice in recent years, storm-driven waves have sliced North Carolina Route 12, the main road along the islands, rendering it unpassable. On Ocracoke Island, accessible only by ferry, a voluntary evacuation was announced.

Stem Cell Studies Withdrawn

NEW YORK (AP) — U.S. and Japanese scientists who reported that they’d found a startlingly simple way to make stem cells withdrew that claim Wednesday, admitting to “extensive” errors in the research.

In two papers published in January in the journal Nature, the researchers said that they’d been able to transform ordinary mouse cells into versatile stem cells by exposing them to a mildly acidic environment. Someday, scientists hope to harness stem cells to grow replacement tissue for treating a variety of diseases.

While researchers have long been able to perform such transformations with a different method, the newly reported technique was far simpler, and the papers caused a sensation — and some skepticism — in the research community. They were also widely reported in the media, including by The Associated Press.

But before long, the government-funded Riken Center for Developmental Biology in Japan accused one of its scientists, Haruko Obokata, of falsifying data in the research. Obokata, the key author of the papers, defended the results during a televised news conference in April while apologizing for using wrong and altered images in the published reports. She also said she opposed withdrawing the papers, a process called retraction, and the 30-year-old attributed her mistakes to inexperience.

On Wednesday, Nature released a statement from Obokata and the other authors of the papers that retracted the papers, a rare occurrence for the prestigious journal. The scientists acknowledged “extensive” errors that meant “we are unable to say without a doubt” that the method works. They noted that studies of the simpler method are still going on by other researchers.

Police Clear Hundreds From Protest

HONG KONG (AP) — In a rare scene of disorder, Hong Kong authorities cleared out hundreds of protesters who blocked part of the city’s financial district early Wednesday, a high-profile reflection of rising anxiety over Beijing’s tightening grip on the little enclave of incomplete democracy at the southeastern edge of Communist China.

Police arrested 511 people who staged an unauthorized overnight sit-in on an avenue running through the heart of the city after a rally the day before in which tens of thousands of demonstrators marched in the streets to push for the right to elect their leader free of limits Beijing wants to impose.

The protesters wanted to “occupy” the street until 8 a.m., just before the height of rush hour, as a rehearsal for a larger demonstration planned by the group Occupy Central with Peace and Love to shut down the financial district if the Hong Kong government fails to come up with satisfactory democratic reforms.

Police started moving in at around 3 a.m. to take people away from Chater Road after they ignored warnings. One by one, demonstrators who had locked arms with each other were forcibly removed by hundreds of officers and taken away, some carried off their feet, to waiting police vans.

The protest’s messy aftermath is the latest sign of worries that, with Hong Kong only a third of the way through a 50-year period in which mainland China is supposed to stay largely hands-off from the city’s affairs, Beijing is failing to keep its end of the bargain.

Ship Carrying Weapons Leaves Port

GIOIA TAURO, Italy (AP) — A United States cargo vessel loaded with hundreds of tons of Syria’s chemical weapons left an Italian port Wednesday to destroy the arms at sea as part of the international effort to rid Syria of its chemical weapon stockpile.

The *MV Cape Ray* steamed out of the southern Italian port of Gioia Tauro after a 12-hour operation to transfer the chemicals from a Danish ship, the *Ark Futura*.

It is expected to head into the open sea where it will neutralize the chemicals — including mustard gas and the raw materials for sarin nerve gas — with special machinery outfitted in its cargo hold.

The chemicals had crossed the Mediterranean aboard the *Ark Futura*, which steamed into Gioia Tauro as the sun rose Wednesday. Throughout the day 78 containers were transferred, with cranes lifting each container onto a flatbed truck that then drove into the cargo hold of the U.S. vessel.

Italy’s environment minister, Gian Luca Galletti, proclaimed the mission a proud moment for Italy, tweeting that the country was contributing to international security in a “transparent and environmentally secure operation.”

Militants Try To Tighten Grip In Iraq, Syria

BY RYAN LUCAS AND ZEINA KARAM
Associated Press

BAGHDAD — Fresh from success in Iraq, a Sunni extremist group tried to tighten its hold Wednesday on territory in Syria and crush pockets of resistance on land straddling the border where it has declared the foundation of an Islamic state.

Embattled Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki warned that the entire region is endangered by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, whose gunmen have rampaged across his country in recent weeks. Facing pressure to step aside, al-Maliki said the focus must be on countering the threat — not wholesale leadership changes.

The militant group has fed off the chaos and supercharged sectarian atmosphere of Syria’s civil war to seize control of a large chunk of territory there. With its recent blitz across Iraq, it has expanded its gains while also effectively erasing the border between the two countries and laying the groundwork of its proto-state.

Led by an ambitious Iraqi militant known as Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the group this week unilaterally declared the establishment of an Islamic state, or caliphate, in the land it has seized. It also proclaimed al-Baghdadi the head of its new self-styled state governed by Shariah law and demanded that all Muslims pledge allegiance to him.

Its assault in Iraq appears to have slowed after sweeping across the predominantly Sunni Arab areas and encountering stiff resistance in Shiite-majority regions. But in Syria, al-Baghdadi’s group has forged ahead with an offensive against towns and villages held by rival rebels along the Euphrates River in the eastern province bordering Iraq. Militants stormed houses in the

frontier town of Boukamal, rounding up people suspected of opposing them, the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said. The extremist group captured Boukamal on Tuesday, after fighters from the al-Qaida-linked Nusra Front defected.

Al-Baghdadi’s fighters also were battling rival factions at the northern entrance to the nearby town of Sheheil, a Nusra Front stronghold, forcing thousands of residents to flee.

The group — which has changed its name simply to the Islamic State — is reviled by most Syrian rebel groups, and many of them have been locked in a bloody six-month battle with it across northern Syria that has killed more than 7,000 people. A few smaller rebel factions have pledged loyalty to al-Baghdadi’s organization out of fear or convenience, but most factions in Syria oppose it.

On Wednesday, nine Syrian rebel groups, including a powerful coalition called the Islamic Front, rejected al-Baghdadi’s declaration of a caliphate. In a statement posted on Islamic websites, they said the declaration was “void” and pledged to continue the fight.

In Raqqa, the Syrian stronghold of al-Baghdadi’s group, activists said the extremists displayed more heavy weaponry believed to have been looted from Iraqi military bases.

Video posted by activists showed what appeared to be an Islamic State leader asking a group of people in a mosque, including children, to pledge loyalty to al-Baghdadi. The video appeared genuine and corresponded to other Associated Press reporting.

“Before, it was enough if you showed them support; now they’re asking people to swear allegiance,” said a Raqqa-based activist who spoke on condition of anonymity because he fears retribution. He and other activists said the group also

was punishing and jailing people suspected of breaking the traditional dawn-to-dusk fast for the holy month of Ramadan, which began Sunday.

In his weekly address, Iraq’s prime minister warned that the group’s self-proclaimed caliphate meant “no one in Iraq or any neighboring country will be safe from these plans.” The group’s declaration was “a message to all the states in the region that you are inside the red circle now,” al-Maliki said.

The failure of al-Maliki’s Shiite-led government to promote reconciliation is being blamed for fueling the Sunni insurgency. Sunnis and Kurds, both of whom accuse him of breaking promises and trying to monopolize power, demand that he be replaced.

Al-Maliki did not directly address calls to step down, but he did say the focus should be on turning back the militants — and not political changes.

“The priority today in the battle is security and the security challenges and the plots being formed by the terrorist organizations leaning on a sectarian program. The battle today is first before everything,” he said. “It is a battle for security, a battle to protect Iraq, and Iraq’s unity and identity, and the identity of the public and their security and economy.”

The new parliament met Tuesday for the first time since April’s elections amid hopes for the swift formation of a government. But lawmakers deadlocked less than two hours into the meeting, and Sunnis and Kurds walked out.

Al-Maliki acknowledged the failure of the first session, but expressed hope for a quick resolution when parliament meets next week.

“God willing, in the next session, we will overcome it through cooperation and openness and reality in choosing people and a mechanism that would lead us to a solid political process,” he said.

Palestinians: Israeli Extremists Killed Teen

BY JOSEF FEDERMAN
Associated Press

JERUSALEM — The Palestinians accused Israeli extremists of abducting and killing an Arab teenager and burning his body Wednesday, sparking hours of clashes in east Jerusalem and drawing charges that the youth was murdered to avenge the killings of three kidnapped Israeli teens.

Seeking to calm the explosive situation, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu urged a swift inquiry into the “reprehensible murder” and called on people to respect the rule of law. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas said it was clear extremist Jewish settlers were responsible and called on Israel to bring the killers to justice.

“The settlers have killed and burned a little boy. They are well known,” Abbas said, accusing Israel of tolerating settler violence toward Palestinians. “I demand that the Israeli government hold the killers accountable.”

The death added to the already heightened tensions caused by the killings of the three Israeli teenagers, whose bodies were discovered Monday just over two weeks after they disappeared in the West Bank. Israel accused Hamas, the Islamic militant group that controls Gaza, of being behind the abductions, which led to the largest ground operation in the West Bank in nearly a decade, with Israel arresting hundreds of Hamas operatives as part of a broad manhunt.

The discovery of the bodies led to a national outpouring of grief, with tens of thousands of people attending a funeral Tuesday in which the teens were laid to rest side-by-side. As the burial took place, hundreds of young, right-wing Israelis marched through downtown Jerusalem screaming for revenge.

Hours later, relatives of Mohammed Abu Khdeir said the 17-year-old was forced into a car in a neighborhood of east Jerusalem that quickly sped off. A burned body believed to be his was found shortly afterward in a Jerusalem forest, though police said late Wednesday they were still awaiting forensics tests to make a

positive identification. Police spokesman Micky Rosenfeld said authorities were looking at “a number of different directions” in the killing, including nationalist or criminal motives. “We are waiting for the final results of the autopsy,” he said.

But Abu Khdeir’s family said they had no doubt about the killers, accusing extremist Israelis of killing him to avenge the deaths of the Israeli teenagers.

“Who else could do this? There’s no one else,” said the teen’s father, Saed Abu Khdeir. He said he spent the day with police and gave DNA samples to help identify the body.

As of Wednesday evening, police said the testing was still ongoing. Police were also reviewing security camera footage taken from the scene. Relatives said the video showed a car nearing the youth, people stepping out and forcing him into the vehicle and speeding away.

The family of one of the Israeli teens condemned the death of the Palestinian youth. “There is no difference between (Arab) blood and (Jewish) blood. Murder is murder,” said Yishai Fraenkel, an uncle of one of the teens.

As news of the youth’s disappearance spread, hundreds of Palestinians in east Jerusalem took to the streets, torching light-rail train stations and hurling stones at Israeli police, who responded with stun grenades and rubber-coated bullets. Israel captured east Jerusalem, home to virtually all of the city’s Palestinian population, in the 1967 Mideast war and annexed the area. The Palestinians seek the area as the capital of a future state, and tensions in the volatile eastern sector often boil over into violence.

The clashes continued throughout the day, emptying streets in east Jerusalem’s normally bustling Beit Hanina neighborhood. Masked Palestinians hiding in alleyways and a neighborhood mosque hurled rocks toward Israeli forces, who occasionally responded with stun grenades. Two people were taken to a hospital with light injuries, police said, and the clashes left a main road littered with stones, debris and burning tires that spewed black smoke into the air.

The atmosphere in east Jerusalem remained tense well past midnight. Hundreds of Palestinians, many of their faces covered, occupied a main road leading into Beit Hanina and the neighborhood of Shuafat. Three

train stops were charred. Police continued to patrol the area. Women and children poked their heads out of windows and were repeatedly ordered by Palestinian men to stay inside.

Netanyahu called on authorities to swiftly investigate the “reprehensible murder” and urged all sides “not to take the law into their own hands.”

But international condemnations came quickly.

In Washington, the Obama administration denounced the killing as a “heinous murder” and called for the perpetrators to be brought to justice.

“There are no words to convey adequately our condolences to the Palestinian people,” said Secretary of State John Kerry, calling the killing “sickening.”

The U.N. Security Council condemned the “heinous” killing “in the strongest terms” in a press statement, and U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called for the perpetrators of the “despicable act” to be promptly brought to justice and a lowering of tensions.

In a statement, the European Union condemned the killing “in the strongest terms” and welcomed Israel’s pledge to investigate. It urged all parties to show “maximum restraint.”

RTEC Announces Dates for Next CDL, Welding Trainings

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Take advantage of Mitchell Technical Institute’s truck driving training and earn your Class A CDL. Sign up for the classroom portion to be held at RTEC from **8 a.m. - 5 p.m. on July 15 & 16, 2014**. Classroom instruction (CDL Prep portion) will prepare you to obtain learner’s permit. Driving times for those taking full CDL program will be arranged with instructor and held in Mitchell at a time TBD.

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