

Obama Urgently Asks \$3.7 Billion For Border Crisis

BY ERICA WERNER
AND JIM KUHNHENN
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama appealed to Congress on Tuesday for \$3.7 billion in emergency spending to deal with the immigration crisis on the nation's southern border, where unaccompanied children have been showing up by the thousands in a human drama that's causing a political storm in Washington and beyond.

Obama himself was flying to Texas on Wednesday, a trip designed mostly for political fundraising for Democrats but now including a meeting on immigration with religious and local leaders in Dallas. He rejected pressure from Republican Gov. Rick Perry to visit the border for a firsthand look.

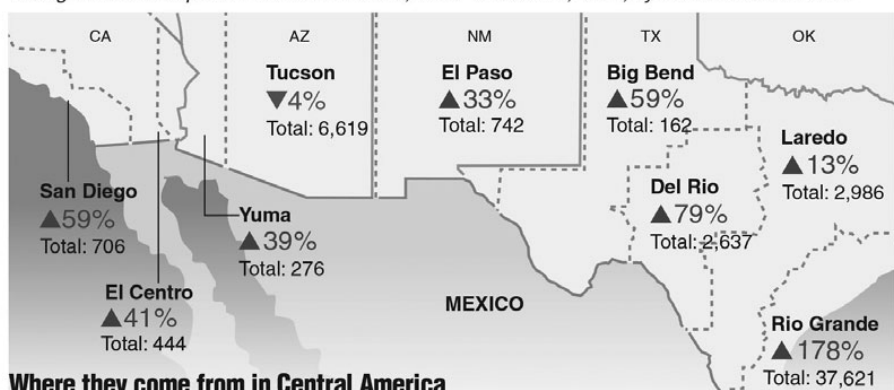
In Washington, Democrats and some Republicans on Capitol Hill seemed open to approving the emergency money, which would go toward hiring more immigration judges and asylum officers, building more detention facilities, boosting deterrence and enforcement and increasing surveillance along the border with Mexico. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., said the Senate would act on it this month.

Obama said in a formal letter of request that the money was needed to "address this urgent humanitarian situation."

But Senate Democrats voiced skepticism about other options the White House has said it wants that would send the minors back to Central America more quickly, partly by limiting their existing rights to court

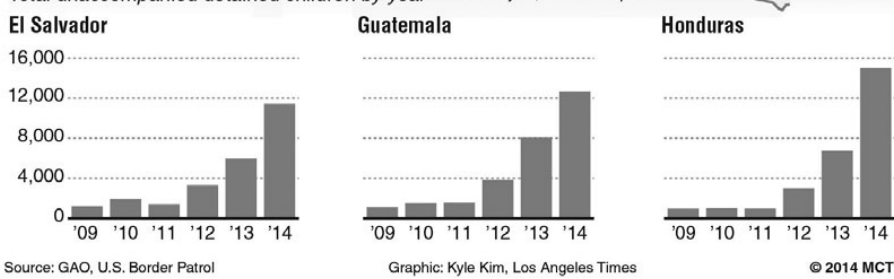
Young migrants flood toward Southwestern U.S.

Change in unaccompanied detained children, 2013* to June 15, 2014, by Border Patrol section.



Where they come from in Central America

Total unaccompanied detained children by year* *Fiscal year, Oct. 1 to Sept. 30



hearings. Those proposals, which are not part of Tuesday's request, have infuriated immigrant advocates who say they would result in harsher treatment of kids and eliminate their legal protections.

"Everybody's very concerned. I'm one of them," said Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill. "I just want to make sure that at the end of the day we're being fair, humane and doing this in an orderly way."

At the same time Republicans criticized Obama for stepping back from asking for those legal changes, which the White House initially had said would come in concert with the emergency spending request. The White House now says those proposals will come later.

"He just decided not to

do that because of the push-back he got from some in his own political base," said Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas. "We need to solve the problem, but you don't need to just ignore the cause of the current crisis. And that requires more than just appropriating \$3.7 billion for additional judges and the like."

The back-and-forth came as lawmakers reconvened on Capitol Hill after a weeklong July 4 recess and suggested political struggles ahead over the unfolding situation at the border. More than 50,000 young people have showed up unaccompanied since last fall, many fleeing oppressive violence in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, but also drawn by rumors that once in the U.S. they would be allowed to stay.

Lawmakers are now beginning to confront the full dimensions of the crisis, and their responsibility to act, with midterm elections around the corner. It all comes with comprehensive immigration legislation dead in Congress for the year and Obama preparing to take steps by his executive authority to change the nation's faulty immigration system where he can — plans that could be complicated by the border crisis.

Cornyn and other Republicans kept up their criticism of Obama's decision not to include a border visit in his Texas trip, but the White House held firm, instead adding the meeting on immigration to Obama's schedule in Dallas. Perry announced plans to attend.

Iraq: 'Terrorists' Seize Ex-Chemical Weapons Site

BY EDITH M. LEDERER
Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS — The Islamic State extremist group has taken control of a vast former chemical weapons facility northwest of Baghdad, where remnants of 2,500 degraded chemical rockets filled decades ago with the deadly nerve agent sarin are stored along with other chemical warfare agents, Iraq said in a letter circulated Tuesday at the United Nations.

The U.S. government played down the threat from the takeover, saying there are no intact chemical weapons and it would be very difficult, if not impossible, to use the material for military purposes.

Iraq's U.N. Ambassador Mohamed Ali Alhakim told U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in a letter that "armed terrorist groups" entered the Muthanna site on June 11, detained officers and soldiers from the protection force guarding the facilities and seized their weapons. The following morning, the project manager spotted the looting of some equipment via the camera surveillance system before the "terrorists" disabled it, he said.

The Islamic State group, which controls parts of Syria, sent its fighters into neighboring Iraq last month and quickly captured a vast stretch of territory straddling the border between the two countries. Last week, its leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, declared the establishment of an Islamic state, or caliphate, in the land the extremists control.

Alhakim said as a result of the takeover of Muthanna, Iraq is unable "to fulfill its obligations to destroy chemical weapons" because of the deteriorating security situation. He said it would resume its obligations "as soon as the security situation has improved and control of the facility has been regained."

Alhakim singled out the capture of bunkers 13 and 41 in the sprawling complex 35 miles (56 kilometers) northwest of Baghdad in

the notorious "Sunni Triangle."

The last major report by U.N. inspectors on the status of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction program was released about a year after the experts left in March 2003. It states that Bunker 13 contained 2,500 sarin-filled 122-mm chemical rockets produced and filled before 1991, and about 180 tons of sodium cyanide, "a very toxic chemical and a precursor for the warfare agent tabun."

The U.N. said the bunker was bombed during the first Gulf War in February 1991, which routed Iraq from Kuwait, and the rockets were "partially destroyed or damaged."

It said the sarin munitions were "of poor quality" and "would largely be degraded after years of storage under the conditions existing there." It said the tabun-filled containers were all treated with decontamination solution and likely no longer contain any agent, but "the residue of this decontamination would still be a hazard."

According to the report, Bunker 41 contained 2,000 empty 155-mm artillery shells contaminated with the chemical warfare agent mustard, 605 one-ton mustard containers with residues, and heavily contaminated construction material. It said the shells could contain mustard residues which can't be used for chemical warfare but "remain highly toxic."

U.S. State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki expressed concern on June 20 about the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant seizing the complex, but played down the importance of the two bunkers with "degraded chemical remnants," saying the material dates back to the 1980s and was stored after being dismantled by U.N. inspectors in the 1990s.

She said the remnants "don't include intact chemical weapons ... and would be very difficult, if not impossible, to safely use this for military purposes or, frankly, to move it."

Rockets Hit Israeli Heartland

BY JOSEF FEDERMAN
AND NAJIB JOBAIN
Associated Press

JERUSALEM — Israel on Tuesday launched its largest offensive in the Gaza Strip in nearly two years, carrying out a blistering aerial assault on scores of targets and killing 25 people in what officials called an open-ended operation aimed at ending weeks of heavy rocket fire. As Gaza militants unleashed salvos on cities including Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, Israel mobilized forces along the border for a possible ground invasion.

The offensive set off the heaviest fighting between Israel and the Islamic militant group Hamas since an eight-day battle in November 2012. The militants fired about 160 rockets at Israel, including a strike that reached the northern city of Hadera for the first time, while Israel said it attacked more than 150 sites across Gaza.

Palestinian medics reported at least 25 dead, including six killed in an airstrike that flattened an apartment building in southern Gaza and set off widespread panic.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said continued rocket attacks on Israeli communities would not be tolerated.

"Therefore I have ordered the military to significantly broaden its operation against Hamas terrorists and against the other terrorist groups inside Gaza," he said on national TV. "I call on you to display patience because this operation could take time."

Israel and Hamas are bitter enemies that have engaged in numerous rounds of fighting over the years. But until recently, they had been observing a truce that ended the previous hostilities in 2012.

Tensions have been rising since Palestinian militants kidnapped three Israeli teenagers in the West Bank on June 12. Accusing Hamas of being behind the abductions, Israel launched a crackdown on the group's members in the West Bank and arrested hundreds of people. Hamas, which controls Gaza, responded by stepping up rocket fire.

The situation deteriorated

last week after the bodies of the Israeli youths were found, and a Palestinian teenager in Jerusalem was abducted and burned to death in what Palestinians believe was a revenge attack. Six Jewish Israelis have been arrested in the killing, and the rocket fire from Gaza has increased in recent days.

The fighting raged throughout the day. In its fiercest attack, an airstrike flattened the home of a Hamas militant in the southern Gaza town of Khan Younis, reducing the concrete structure into a smoldering pile of rubble.

Panicked residents fled, shouting "God is great." Some had bloody faces, and crying mothers held small children as they ran away. Screaming Palestinians took away motionless bodies. Palestinian medical officials said six people, including two children, were killed. Israel's military said it had called the home shortly before the airstrike to warn civilians to leave, something it has done in past fighting as well.

The normally bustling streets of Gaza City were deserted late Tuesday. Fearing an Israeli ground operation, many residents from areas near the border moved to stay with relatives living deeper inside Gaza.

In southern Israel, hundreds of thousands of citizens were ordered to stay close to home because of the rockets. Israeli streets were also quieter in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem after attempted rocket strikes set off air-raid sirens in Israel's two largest cities. The Jerusalem municipality said it was opening special bomb shelters.

Militants twice fired rockets at Tel Aviv, Israel's commercial capital, sending people scurrying for cover. Both were intercepted by the "Iron Dome" rocket defense system, with the second shown on live TV, as a winding plume of smoke followed the interceptor into the black skies, culminating with a flash.

Late Tuesday, Hamas said it fired four rockets toward Jerusalem, and two distant booms were heard from the city's center. Three rockets landed in the Jerusalem area, officials said, and police said there were no injuries.

Hopes For Ukraine Talks Look Slim

DONETSK, Ukraine (AP) — Ukraine's government took an increasingly aggressive stance Tuesday toward the pro-Russia separatists, vowing to expunge them from their reduced area of control and imposing new conditions before peace talks can restart.

But as the military moves to encircle the rebel-held territory in eastern Ukraine, the government also said it would stop using the air and artillery strikes that drove the rebels from other towns so as to avoid terrorizing civilians.

Ukraine has displayed growing confidence in recent days after driving the insurgents from Sloviansk, a city that had been the heart of the armed resistance since mid-April. Security officials said Tuesday the area held by the rebels has now been reduced by half.

This apparent rout has forced hundreds of militants to regroup in Donetsk, the regional capital, where they occupy government buildings and move freely around the city.

Andrei Purgin, deputy prime minister of the self-proclaimed independent Donetsk People's Republic, said the rebels have an estimated 15,000 fighters and are focusing their efforts on defending Donetsk, a major industrial hub of 1 million.

Somali Government: Compound Secured

MOGADISHU, Somalia (AP) — Somali troops retook the presidential palace in the capital of Mogadishu after militants forced their way in and exchanged heavy gunfire with troops and guards Tuesday, the latest attack underscoring the threat posed by Islamic extremist group al-Shabab in east Africa.

Smoke billowed from inside the heavily-fortified presidential compound, and loud explosions and gunfire could be heard as troops tried to repel the intruders. After more than two hours of fighting, Somalia's presidency said in a Twitter update that "the shameful attack" had been foiled by Somalia's armed forces fighting alongside African Union peacekeepers.

Al-Shabab claimed responsibility for the attack. Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud was not inside the palace at the time of the attack, but the prime minister and the speaker of parliament were, said Capt. Mohamed Hussein, a senior police official.

The presidency said both President Mohamud and Prime Minister Abdiweli Sheikh Ahmed were safe.

Forgotten Vials Of Smallpox Found In US

ATLANTA (AP) — A government scientist cleaning out an old storage room at a research center near Washington made a startling discovery last week — decades-old vials of smallpox packed away and forgotten in a cardboard box.

The six glass vials were intact and sealed, and scientists have yet to establish whether the virus is dead or alive, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said Tuesday.

Still, the find was disturbing because for decades after smallpox was declared eradicated in 1980, world health authorities said the only known samples left were safely stored in super-secure laboratories in Atlanta and in Russia.

Officials said this is the first time in the U.S. that unaccounted-for smallpox has been discovered. At least one leading scientist raised the possibility that there are more such vials out there around the world.

The CDC and the FBI are investigating.

NYPD Arrests Abandoned Baby's Mother

NEW YORK (AP) — Security video showed nothing amiss when Frankea Dabbs — wearing dark glasses, pushing a baby stroller and pulling a rolling suitcase — entered a busy Manhattan subway station Monday night.

But after riding uptown to another stop, police say Dabbs purposely left her most precious possession behind on the subway platform: her baby girl.

Dabbs, 20, who has a record of petty crimes in North Carolina, was arrested near Central Park on abandonment charges Tuesday after someone recognized her from the video released by police. The name of her attorney wasn't immediately available.

In a preliminary interview with detectives, Dabbs described herself as a homeless widow from North Carolina who had arrived in New York on July 2, said Stephen Davis, spokesman for the New York Police Department.

"She felt she couldn't take care of the baby and thought she was leaving her in a safe public space," Davis said.

Retaliation Complaints Jump At VA

WASHINGTON — A federal investigative agency is examining 67 claims of retaliation by supervisors at the Department of Veterans Affairs against employees who filed whistleblower complaints — including 25 complaints filed since June 1, after a growing health care scandal involving long patient waits and falsified records at VA hospitals and clinics became public.

The independent Office of Special Counsel said 30 of the complaints about retaliation have passed the initial review stage and were being further investigated for corrective action and possible discipline against VA supervisors and other executives. The complaints were filed in 28 states at 45 separate facilities, Special Counsel Carolyn Lerner said.

Lerner provided the figures in testimony prepared for a Tuesday night hearing before the House Veterans Affairs Committee. The Associated Press obtained copies of her testimony and other witnesses in advance.

Lerner said her office has been able to block disciplinary actions against several VA employees who reported wrongdoing, including one who reported a possible crime at a VA facility in New York.

The counsel's office also reversed a suspension for a VA employee in Hawaii who reported seeing an elderly patient being improperly restrained in a wheelchair. The whistleblower was granted full back pay and an unspecified monetary award and the official who retaliated against the worker was suspended, Lerner said.

In a related development, the VA said Tuesday it was restructuring its Office of Medical Inspector following a scathing report by Lerner's agency last month.

Acting VA Secretary Sloan Gibson said the department would appoint an interim director of the medical inspector's office from outside the current office and was suspending the office's hotline immediately. All complaints would be referred to the VA's Office of Inspector General.

The head of the medical inspector's office retired June 30 following a report by the Office of Special Counsel saying that his office played down whistleblower complaints pointing to "a troubling pattern of deficient patient care" at VA facilities.

"Intimidation or retaliation — not just against whistleblowers, but against any employee who raises a hand to identify a problem, make a suggestion or report what may be a violation in law, policy or our core values — is absolutely unacceptable," Gibson said in a statement. "I will not tolerate it in our organization."

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