

Growing Chorus Of Dems: Obama Could Lose

WASHINGTON (AP) — In growing numbers, once-confident Democrats now say President Barack Obama could lose the November election.

The hand-wringing reflects real worries among Democrats about Obama's ability to beat Republican rival Mitt Romney, who has proven to be a stronger candidate than many expected. But it's also a political strategy aimed at rallying major donors who may have become complacent.

Interviews with a dozen Democratic strategists and fundraisers across the country show an increased sense of urgency among Obama backers. It follows a difficult two weeks for the president, including a dismal report on the nation's unemployment picture, a Democratic defeat in the Wisconsin governor recall election and an impressive fundraising month for Romney and Republicans.

"We've all got to get in the same boat and start paddling in the same direction, or we're going to have some problems," said Debbie Dingell, a Democratic National Committee member and the wife of Michigan Rep. John Dingell.

"We can't take this for granted," said Peter Burling, a DNC member from New Hampshire. "I intend to be running scared from now until November."

Prosecutors Drop Case Against Edwards

GREENSBORO, N.C. (AP) — Federal prosecutors dropped all charges Wednesday against John Edwards after his corruption trial ended last month in a deadlocked jury.

Jurors in North Carolina acquitted the former presidential candidate on one count of accepting illegal campaign contributions and deadlocked on five other felony counts. The judge declared a mistrial.

Prosecutors will not seek to retry Edwards on the five unresolved counts, according to a U.S. Justice Department statement.

Assistant Attorney General Lanny A. Breuer, who oversees the agency's criminal division, said prosecutors knew the case, like all campaign finance cases, would be challenging. But he said it is "our duty to bring hard cases" when warranted.

"Last month, the government put forward its best case against Mr. Edwards, and I am proud of the skilled and professional way in which our prosecutors.... conducted this trial," he said.

Texas Jury Gets Stand-Your-Ground Case

HOUSTON (AP) — A Texas man who claims the state's version of a stand-your-ground law allowed him to fatally shoot a neighbor after a verbal confrontation at a 2010 party is an "angry, aggressive, gun-hungry person" who is twisting the law to get away with murder, prosecutors told jurors on Wednesday.

But a defense attorney for Raul Rodriguez countered that a 2007 expansion of the law allowed the retired Houston-area firefighter to use deadly force because his client, who was not doing anything illegal, felt his life was in danger when his neighbor and two other men came at him.

Rodriguez videotaped the incident and is heard on the recording claiming he feared for his life, saying "I'm standing my ground."

Though the shooting happened two years before the February shooting death of Trayvon Martin in Florida and will be decided under a different kind of self-defense doctrine, Rodriguez's statement calls to mind the law that has come under increased scrutiny since Martin was killed.

Rodriguez is on trial for murder and faces up to life in prison if convicted. His attorneys did not present any witnesses in his defense.

Body's Bacterial Zoos Keep People Healthy

WASHINGTON (AP) — They live on your skin, up your nose, in your gut — enough bacteria, fungi and other microbes that collected together could weigh, amazingly, a few pounds.

Now scientists have mapped just which critters normally live in or on us and where, calculating that healthy people can share their bodies with more than 10,000 species of microbes.

Don't say "eeww" just yet. Many of these organisms work to keep humans healthy, and results reported Wednesday from the government's Human Microbiome Project define what's normal in this mysterious netherworld.

One surprise: It turns out that nearly everybody harbors low levels of some harmful types of bacteria, pathogens that are known for causing specific infections. But when a person is healthy — like the 242 U.S. adults who volunteered to be tested for the project — those bugs simply quietly coexist with benign or helpful microbes, perhaps kept in check by them.

The next step is to explore what doctors really want to know: Why do the bad bugs harm some people and not others? What changes a person's microbial zoo that puts them at risk for diseases ranging from infections to irritable bowel syndrome to psoriasis?

Police: Surgeon 'Person Of Interest' In Death

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — A person familiar with the investigation says a 33-year-old receptionist at a Buffalo hospital was the victim of a fatal shooting.

The person, who spoke on condition of anonymity because the investigation is continuing, said the victim was Jacqueline Wisniewski. She had a young son.

Police are searching for a trauma surgeon as a "person of interest" in connection with Wisniewski's death. She was shot four times just after 8 a.m. Wednesday in a stairwell at a building on the Erie County Medical Center.

The surgeon, 49-year-old Timothy Jorden, is a former U.S. Army Special Forces weapons expert. Police, including SWAT units, have converged on his suburban home and say he may be armed and dangerous.

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Syria Overruns Rebellious Village

BY ELIZABETH A. KENNEDY
Associated Press

BEIRUT — Syrian forces overran a mountain enclave near the Mediterranean coast Wednesday, seizing the territory back from rebels as a serious escalation in violence signaled both sides are using more powerful weapons.

With the bloodshed ramping up, France joined the U.N. peacekeeping chief in declaring Syria was in a state of civil war.

"When many groups belonging to the same people tear each other apart and kill each other, if you can't call it a civil war, then there are no words to describe it," French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius told a news conference in Paris.

The battle for Haffa, in the mountains of Latakia province, raged for eight days as regime forces shelled the village to drive out rebels. The operation apparently was part of a larger offensive to retake areas that had fallen into rebel hands.

State television said regime forces had "cleansed" Haffa of "armed terrorist groups" and the Foreign Ministry urged U.N. observers to immediately head there "to check what the terrorist groups have done."

It wasn't immediately clear whether the U.N. observers would be able to reach Haffa. On Tuesday, an angry crowd hurled rocks and sticks at the U.N. mission's vehicles, forcing them to turn back. None of the observers was hurt.

Sausan Ghosheh, a spokeswoman for the observers, said they have been trying to reach Haffa since June 7.

Hundreds of rebel fighters believed to have been holed up in Haffa and nearby villages pulled out overnight, said Rami Abdul-Rahman, director of the British-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, citing a network of activists on the ground.

On another front, fireballs of orange flames exploded over the central city of Homs, where Syrian forces fired a continuous rain of shells that slammed into the rebel-held neighborhoods of Khaldiyyeh, Jouret al-Shayyah and the old city.

Recovering Haffa was particularly significant to the regime because the town is about 20 miles (30 kilometers) from President Bashar Assad's hometown. Latakia province is the heartland of the Alawite minority to which Assad and the ruling elite belong.

As the violence spiked, both sides in the conflict appeared to be using heavier weapons. U.N. observers reported Syrian helicopters were firing on Haffa and other restive areas, and amateur videos posted online by activists suggest the opposition is using powerful anti-tank missiles.

"There are arms being delivered, and on both sides," Fabius said.

Although the Syrian rebels are outgunned by the well-armed Syrian army, weapons have been flowing across the country's borders from neighboring Turkey, Iraq and Lebanon. The

rebels also say they buy weapons from Syrian soldiers looking to make a profit.

Tensions over the issue flared Wednesday between the U.S. and Russia as they traded blame for the violence in Syria.

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton held to her explosive accusation that the "latest information" in U.S. hands is that Russia is sending attack helicopters to Assad's regime. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov fired back by alleging the U.S. has sent military support to the region.

"We have repeatedly urged the Russian government to cut these military ties completely and to suspend all further support and deliveries," Clinton told reporters in Washington. "We know, because they confirm, that they continue to deliver and we believe that the situation is spiraling toward civil war. It is now time for everyone in the international community, including Russia ... to speak to Assad in unified voice and insist that the violence stop."

Lavrov rejected the charge, saying his government was completing earlier weapons contracts with Syria for air defense systems to be used exclusively for self defense against "an armed attack from the outside."

"We are not supplying either to Syria or anywhere else things that are used in fighting with peaceful demonstrators, in contrast to the United States, which regularly supplies such special means to countries in the region," Lavrov said during a trip to Iran.

Bombs Target Pilgrims In Iraq, Killing Scores

BY KAY JOHNSON
AND SINAN SALAHEDDIN
Associated Press

BAGHDAD — Car bombs ripped through Shiite and Kurdish targets in Baghdad and other cities Wednesday, killing at least 66 people, wounding more than 200 and feeding growing doubts that Iraq will emerge as a stable democracy after decades of war and dictatorship.

The latest bloodshed comes against a backdrop of sharpening political divisions that show Iraq has made little progress in healing the breach among its religious and ethnic communities that once pushed the country to the brink of civil war. The coordination, sophistication and targets of the attack bore the hallmarks of al-Qaida and its Sunni militant allies seeking to exploit these tensions.

Iraqi authorities played down any suggestion that the devastating attacks that have taken place every few weeks or so since the U.S. military withdrew in mid-December portend a return to the all-out, tit-for-tat violence that tore the nation apart in 2006-2007.

"Iraqis are fully aware of the terrorism agenda and will not slip into a sectarian conflict," said Baghdad military command spokesman Col. Dhia al-Wakeel.

But Iraqi authorities have been unable to prevent such wide-scale attacks, even though they were on high alert during a major Shiite pilgrimage. And the

Attacks in Iraq

Bombing across Iraq have killed more than 70 people and wounded nearly 300.



number and distribution of these bombings demonstrate the strength and resilience of the Sunni militants.

Altogether, 17 explosions struck Baghdad and six other cities and towns some 300 miles (500 kilometers) apart, from Mosul in the vast deserts of the north to Hillah in the fertile plains of the south. Most targeted Shiite pilgrims between 5 a.m. and 8 a.m. as hundreds of thousands were making their way on foot to the capital.

"I fell on the ground. Then so many people fell on me" said Falah Hassan, who was being treated for wounds at Sheikh Zayid Hospital in Baghdad.

Hours after the bombing in Hillah, puddles of blood and shards of metal still clogged a drainage ditch. Soldiers and dazed onlookers wandered near the charred remains of the car that exploded, gazing at the gaping holes in nearby shops.

Wednesday's blasts were the third this week targeting the annual pilgrimage to observe the eighth-century death of Imam Moussa al-Kadhim, a revered saint who was the Prophet Muhammad's great-grandson.

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