

## Afghanistan

# U.S., Taliban To Start Talks On Ending War

BY PATRICK QUINN  
 Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — The Taliban and the U.S. said Tuesday they will hold talks on finding a political solution to ending nearly 12 years of war in Afghanistan, as the international coalition formally handed over control of the country's security to the Afghan army and police.

The Taliban met a key U.S. demand by pledging not to use Afghanistan as a base to threaten other countries, although the Americans said they must also denounce al-Qaida.

But President Barack Obama cautioned that the process won't be quick or easy. He described the opening of a Taliban political office in the Gulf nation of Qatar as an "important first step toward reconciliation" between the Islamic militants and the government of Afghanistan, and predicted there will be bumps along the way.

Obama, who was attending the G-8 summit in Northern Ireland, praised Afghan President Hamid Karzai for taking a courageous step by sending representatives to discuss peace with the Taliban.

"It's good news. We're very pleased with what has taken place," U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry said in Washington. British Prime Minister David Cameron, whose country has the second-largest contingent of troops in Afghanistan after the U.S., called opening the office "the right thing to do."

Officials with the Obama administration said the office in the Qatari capital of Doha was the first step toward the ultimate U.S.-Afghan goal of a full Taliban renunciation of links with al-Qaida, the reason why America invaded the country on Oct. 7, 2001, shortly after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks against the United States.

The officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak on the record, said U.S. representatives will begin formal meetings with the Taliban in Qatar in a few days.

The top U.S. commander in Afghanistan, Marine Gen. Joseph Dunford, said the only way to end the war was through a political solution. "My perspective has always been that this



AHMAD MASSOUD/XINHUA/ZUMA PRESS/MCT  
**Afghan president Hamid Karzai (right) shakes hands with NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen after a press conference in Kabul, Afghanistan on Tuesday. Afghan national forces will lead all military operations in the country from June 19, Afghan President Hamid Karzai said on Tuesday.**

war is going to have to end with political reconciliation, and so I frankly would be supportive of any positive movement in terms of reconciliation, particularly an Afghan-led and an Afghan-owned process that would bring reconciliation between the Afghan people and the Taliban in the context of the Afghan constitution," he said.

Dunford added that he was no longer responsible for the security of the country now that Afghan forces had taken the lead.

"Last week I was responsible for security here in Afghanistan," he said, adding that now it was Karzai's job. "It's not just a statement of intent — it's a statement of fact."

The transition to Afghan-led security means U.S. and other foreign combat troops will not

be directly carrying the fight to the insurgency, but will advise and back up as needed with air support and medical evacuations.

The handover paves the way for the departure of coalition forces — currently numbering about 100,000 troops from 48 countries, including 66,000 Americans. By the end of the year, the NATO force will be halved. At the end of 2014, all combat troops will have left and will be replaced, if approved by the Afghan government, by a much smaller force that will only train and advise.

Obama has not yet said how many soldiers he will leave in Afghanistan along with NATO forces, but it is thought that it would be about 9,000 U.S. troops and about 6,000 from its allies.

## NSA Director Says Plot Against Wall Street Foiled By Surveillance

BY KIMBERLY DOZIER  
 AND DONNA CASSATA  
 Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The U.S. foiled a plot to bomb the New York Stock Exchange because of the sweeping surveillance programs at the heart of a debate over national security and personal privacy, officials said Tuesday at a rare open hearing on intelligence — a set-piece for supporters of the spying.

The House Intelligence Committee, led by lawmakers sympathetic to the extraordinary surveillance, provided a venue for officials to defend the once-secret programs. There was limited probing of claims that the collection of people's phone records and Internet usage has disrupted dozens of terrorist plots, and few details were volunteered.

Army Gen. Keith Alexander, director of the National Security Agency, said the two recently disclosed programs — one that gathers U.S. phone records and another that is designed to track the use of U.S.-based Internet servers by foreigners with possible links to terrorism — are critical. But details about them were not closely held within the secretive agency. Alexander said after the hearing that most of the documents accessed by Edward Snowden, a 29-year-old former systems analyst on contract to the NSA, were on a web forum available to many NSA employees. Others were on a site that required a special credential to access. Alexander said investigators are studying how Snowden did that. He told lawmakers Snowden's leaks have caused "irreversible and significant damage to this nation" and undermined the U.S. relationship with allies.

When Deputy FBI Director Sean Joyce was asked what is next for Snowden, he said, simply, "justice." Snowden fled to Hong Kong and is hiding.

Intelligence officials last week disclosed some details on what they said were two thwarted attacks, one targeting the New York subway system, one a Danish newspaper office that had published the cartoon depictions of the Muhammad. On Tuesday, Alexander said more than 50 terrorist acts were averted because of the surveillance programs in question.

In one example, Joyce said the NSA was able to identify an extremist in Yemen who was in touch with Khalid Ouazzani in Kansas City, Mo., enabling authorities to identify co-conspirators and thwart a plot to bomb the New York Stock Exchange.

Ouazzani pleaded guilty in May 2010 in federal court in Missouri to charges of conspiracy to provide material support to a terrorist organization, bank fraud and money laundering. Ouazzani was not charged with the alleged plot against the stock exchange. Joyce said the arrest was made possible by the Internet surveillance pro-

### Terror plots NSA says it foiled

National Security Agency officials say controversial surveillance programs helped to thwart more than 50 terror plots around the world. Four examples:

#### Bomb N.Y. Stock Exchange

NSA identified extremist in Yemen who contacted person in Kansas City, Mo.; co-conspirators were identified; Kansas City man pleaded guilty in 2010 to providing material support to al-Qaida

#### Bomb New York subways

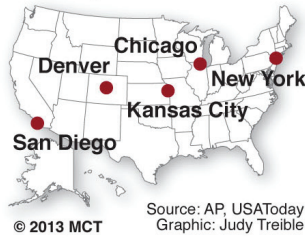
In 2009, NSA intercepted email from suspected terrorist in Pakistan to someone in U.S.; FBI tracked Afghan-born Najibullah Zazi from Denver to New York and broke up plot to attack subways

#### Attack on Danish newspaper

Data mining helped capture an American who scouted locations for the 2008 terror attack in Mumbai, India; he was plotting an attack on a Danish newspaper that had published a cartoon of the Prophet Mohammed, but was stopped at Chicago's O'Hare Airport in 2009

#### Financing terrorist group

In 2007, a terrorist financier in San Diego was identified and arrested thanks to phone records provided by the NSA; calls were going to known terrorist group in Somalia



gram disclosed by Snowden.

Joyce also said a terrorist financier in San Diego was identified and arrested in October 2007 because of a phone record provided by the NSA.

The individual was making phone calls to a known designated terrorist group overseas, Joyce said. He confirmed under questioning that the calls were to Somalia.

Alexander said the Internet program had helped stop 90 percent of the 50-plus plots he cited. He said just over 10 of the plots thwarted had a connection inside the U.S. and most were helped by the review of phone records. Still, little was offered to substantiate claims that the programs have been successful in stopping acts of terrorism that would not have been caught with narrower surveillance. In the New York subway bombing case, President Barack Obama conceded the would-be bomber might have been caught with less sweeping surveillance.

## Plans Would Put Women In Most Combat Jobs

BY LOLITA C. BALDOR  
 Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Declaring "the days of Rambo are over," a top general said Tuesday that cultural, social and behavioral concerns may be bigger hurdles than tough physical fitness requirements for women looking to join the military's special operations units.

Maj. Gen. Bennet Sacolick, director of force management for U.S. Special Operations Command, said having seen women working alongside commando teams in Afghanistan, he is less concerned about their physical strength than the social issues that could arise. His comments came as military leaders mapped out plans Tuesday to develop physical and mental standards for thousands of combat jobs and slowly bring women into front-line positions, including possibly Navy SEAL teams or Army Ranger units, where they historically have been banned from serving.

"I'm actually more concerned with the men and their reaction to women in their formations, quite frankly," Sacolick said, reflecting concerns about whether men would accept women in units that have long operated as small, male-only teams working in close quarters and harsh environment for extended periods of time.

He said the military has moved beyond the Hollywood stereotype of a commando, instead looking for special operators who "can speak and learn a foreign language, who understand culture, who can work with indigenous populations and HAVE culturally attuned manners," Sacolick said. "When people fail in the special forces qualification course, predominantly they fail because they're not doing their homework."

Under details the military laid out Tuesday, women could start training as Army Rangers by mid-2015 and as Navy SEALs a year later. U.S. Special Operations Command is coordinating the studies of what commando jobs could be opened to women, what exceptions might be requested and when the transition would take place.

The proposals could mean that women are still excluded from some jobs if research and testing find that women could not be successful. But the services would have to defend such decisions to top Pentagon leaders.

Still, Sacolick said he could foresee a commando team of 11 men and one woman, if only a single female sought the job and qualified.

The military services have mapped out a schedule that includes reviewing and possibly changing the physical and mental requirements for certain infantry, armor, commando and other front-line positions across the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines. Under the plans there would be one common requirements for men and women for each post, and it would be based on specific tasks troops need to do in order to perform those jobs. Officials say standards will not be lowered in order to bring women into certain posts.

In his memo to the services, Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel said "the department remains committed to removing all gender barriers, wherever possible, and meeting our missions with the best qualified and most capable personnel." He also said that the military will ensure that all women entering the newly opened jobs will be able to "meet the standards required to maintain our war fighting capability."

Critics have questioned whether the change would result in any erosion of the military's readiness for battle.

Elaine Donnelly, head of the conservative Center for Military Readiness, has been a vocal critic of the proposed changes. She questioned efforts to review standards for military jobs, saying that, "Due to physical differences that have been affirmed by more than 30 years of studies and reports on the subject, all possible options for implementing 'gender-neutral standards' would have the effect of lowering requirements."

Military leaders have suggested bringing senior women from the officer and enlisted ranks into special forces units first to ensure that younger, lower-ranking women have a support system to help them get through the transition.

## U.S. Supervises War Games In Jordan

ZARQA, Jordan (AP) — Under the watchful eye of stern-faced American advisers, hundreds of U.S.-trained Jordanian commandos fanned across this dusty desert plain, holding war games that could eventually form the basis of an assault in Syria.

With the recent deployment of Patriot missiles near the Syrian border, and the mock Syrian accents of those playing the enemy, the message was clear: There is fear of spillover from the Syrian war in this U.S.-allied kingdom, and the potential for a Jordanian role in securing Syria's chemical weapons stockpiles should Bashar Assad's regime lose control.

Dubbed Eager Lion, the 12-day exercise involves combined land, air and sea maneuvers across the country. It brings together 8,000 personnel from 19 Arab and European nations to train on border security, irregular warfare, terrorism and counterinsurgency.

Marine Corps Lt. Col. Duke Shienle said Syria "is a concern that all our regional partners share."

The Syrian crisis is "causing all military in the region to increase intensity," he said as he supervised masked commandos in black uniforms from Jordan and two other Syria neighbors — Iraq and Lebanon — in a mock exercise to free a hijacked aircraft on an airstrip in the eastern Jordanian desert.

## Immigration Bill Would Cut Deficits By \$197B

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Congressional Budget Office says a sweeping immigration bill before the Senate would cut deficits by \$197 billion over 10 years.

The bill would add \$262 billion in new spending and tax credits over 10 years, a sum more than covered by \$459 billion in increased revenues, according to the report Tuesday by Congress' nonpartisan scorekeepers.

The bill would cut deficits by an additional \$700 billion in the second 10 years after taking effect, CBO says.

Some 8 million people in the U.S. illegally would initially gain legal status under the legislation, according to the CBO analysis. That's compared with a population of about 11 million immigrants now in the country illegally.

## Syrian Warplanes Strike Rebel Posts In Aleppo

BEIRUT (AP) — Syrian warplanes struck rebel positions near a besieged military air base and other rebel-held areas in the country's north Tuesday as regime forces stepped up attacks against opposition fighters in the key province of Aleppo, activists said.

Rebels fighting to topple President Bashar Assad have for months been trying to take Kweiras and two other military air bases nearby without success. The government has recently gone on the offensive in the province and in areas in the country's heartland to recapture rebel-held territory.

Activists said warplanes also struck targets in the villages of Atareb and Kfar Hamra in Aleppo province, and troops clashed with rebels inside the provincial capital of the same name. There were no immediate reports of casualties. The regime has gone on the offensive in Homs and Aleppo, the country's largest city, to build on the momentum from its victory at the strategic town of Qusair earlier this month.

The violence also continued to spill over the border. Heavy clashes erupted between pro-Hezbollah gunmen and followers of a radical Sunni cleric in southern Lebanon, killing two people, officials said.

Lebanon has been on the edge for months and bursts of violence between supporters and opponents of Assad have become frequent.

## Hoffa Mystery Still Fascinates After 4 Decades

OAKLAND TOWNSHIP, Mich. (AP) — The latest possible resting place of Teamsters boss Jimmy Hoffa is an overgrown farm field where the normal calm of chirping crickets is being drowned out by a beeping backhoe, the chop of an overhead news helicopter and the bustle of reporters and onlookers.

Over nearly four decades, authorities have pursued multiple leads into Hoffa's death that yielded nothing. Yet the mystery endures, fueled by a public fascination with mobsters and murder.

"It's one of those things you've always heard about," said Nicki Grifka, who, at 37, was just an infant when Hoffa vanished.

Over the past day and a half, Grifka and a few dozen other Oakland Township residents gathered a couple of hundred yards from where FBI agents wearing hard hats and carrying shovels sifted through about a half-acre of red dirt for the remains of a man who became as large in death as he was leading one of America's most powerful labor unions.

Hoffa's rise in the Teamsters, his 1964 conviction for jury tampering and his presumed murder are Detroit's link to a time when organized crime, public corruption and mob hits held the nation's attention.

Hoffa was last seen July 30, 1975, outside an Oakland County restaurant where he was supposed to meet with a New Jersey Teamsters boss and a Detroit Mafia captain. His body has never been found. But over the years, authorities have received various tips, leading the FBI to possible burial sites near and far.

In 2003, a backyard swimming pool was dug up 90 miles northwest of Detroit. Seven years ago, a tip from an ailing federal inmate led to a two-week search and excavation at a horse farm in the same region. Last year, soil samples were taken from under a concrete slab garage floor north of the city. And detectives even pulled up floorboards from a Detroit house.

No evidence of Hoffa was found.

# planet Heart

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