

# Iraq's Militia Leader Calls Iranian Support 'Unconditional'

BY QASSIM ABDUL-ZAHRA  
Associated Press

TIKRIT, Iraq — The commander of Iraq's powerful Shiite militias accused the U.S. of falling short on promises to help Iraq in its battle against the Islamic State group and called Iranian assistance to Iraqi security forces "unconditional."

In an interview on the battlefield near the Iraqi city of Tikrit Friday, Hadi al-Amiri, who is also head of the Badr Organization political party, criticized those who "kiss the hands of the Americans and get nothing in return," adding that "help from Iran is unconditional."

Iraqi forces entered Tikrit for the first time on Wednesday from the north and south. On Friday, they fought fierce battles to secure the northern Tikrit neighborhood of Qadisiyya and lobbed mortars and rockets into the city center, still in the hands of IS. Iraqi military officials have said they expect to reach the center of Tikrit within two to three days.

The Iranian-backed Shiite militias have played a crucial role in regaining territory from the Islamic State group, supporting Iraq's embattled military and police forces in battle. An Iraqi government official told The Associated Press that Iran sold Iraq nearly \$10 billion worth of weapons and hardware, mostly weapons for urban warfare like assault rifles, heavy machine-guns and rocket launchers. He spoke anonymously as he was not authorized to brief the media.

In November, President Barack Obama authorized the deployment of up to 1,500 more American troops to bolster Iraqi forces, which could more than double the total number of U.S. forces to 3,100. The Pentagon has made a spending request to Congress of \$1.6 billion, focusing on training and arming Kurdish and Iraqi forces. According to a Pentagon document prepared in November, the U.S. is looking to provide an estimated \$89.3 million worth of weapons and equipment to each of the nine Iraqi brigades.

The U.S.-led coalition of eight countries has launched more than 2,000 airstrikes to date in Iraq alone, and the U.S. is also striking the militant group from the air in Syria. Iraqi and U.S. officials have acknowledged the role airstrikes have played in rolling back the militant group — saying they were an essential component in victories at the Mosul Dam, in Amiri, and more recently, in the crucial oil refinery town of Beiji.

But the U.S. is not taking part in the operation in Tikrit; U.S. officials say they were not asked by Iraq to participate.

Al-Amiri warned that Iraq should not sacrifice its sovereignty for the sake of receiving weapons and assistance from the U.S., suggesting that the Iraqi government is taking instructions from Washington.

"Our sovereignty is more important than U.S. weapons," he said. "We can bring weapons from any country in the world."

## Diplomat To Return To Cuba For More Negotiations

BY PETER ORSI AND  
MICHAEL WEISSENSTEIN  
Associated Press

HAVANA — Cuba and the United States will hold a surprise third round of talks about restoring full diplomatic relations and still hope to open embassies in Washington and Havana before a key regional summit in April, the U.S. State Department announced Friday.

The State Department said Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Roberta S. Jacobson would fly to Havana Sunday for meetings with Josefina Vidal, Cuba's top diplomat for U.S. affairs.

In contrast with the first two rounds of diplomatic talks, which were announced well in advance and each lasted a single day, the third round that begins Monday has no set ending point and Jacobson could be in Havana through the middle of the week, the State Department said.

The U.S. has said it hopes that full embassies can be opened before April's summit of the Organization of American States in Panama, which presidents Barack Obama and Raul Castro both are expected to attend.



DANIELLA CHESLOW/MCLATCHY DC/TNS  
Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is battling to retain his seat in the coming Tuesday elections. His main rival Isaac Herzog's relative anonymity has made elections a referendum on Netanyahu.

## Netanyahu's Party Trails In Polls Before Election

JERUSALEM (AP) — The last polls just days before Israel's election show Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud party trailing behind the center-left opposition.

Poll results in the Yediot Ahronot newspaper on Friday gave the Zionist Union, comprised of labor and a center-left party, 26 seats over 22 for Netanyahu's hawkish Likud party.

It polled 1,032 people with a margin of error of 2.5 percent. Other polls had similar results.

The March 17 election is widely seen as a

vote of confidence in Netanyahu, whose campaign mainly focuses on security. But after years of rapidly increasing living costs, many Israelis are turning to dovish and centrist parties that focus on social and economic issues.

Netanyahu showed concern over the declining numbers in local media this week and called on his supporters to turn out.

In a sign of internal discontent in Likud, Dan Meridor, a former leading Likud politician, told Yediot he will not vote for Netanyahu.

## More Work Lies Ahead In Ferguson

BY JIM SUHR  
Associated Press

FERGUSON, Mo. — The protesters who spent eight months pressing for changes in Ferguson's police practices after the fatal shooting of Michael Brown take credit for this week's resignations of the city manager and the police chief.

And they insist they still have unfinished business, with many planning to stay in the streets until the mayor of the St. Louis suburb is forced out and the entire police force dissolved.

"We will protest until we see everything in our favor. This movement has legs," Derrick Robinson, a protest organizer, declared Friday. "We're out here fighting for justice and equality, and that's what we'll continue to fight for."

Part of the movement has also been channeled into legislative change. On Wednesday, about two dozen people from the Don't Shoot Coalition and the American Civil Liberties Union traveled to the Missouri Capitol in support of the "Fair and Impartial Policing Act," a measure that would strengthen state laws about racial profiling by police and require law officers to undergo "anti-bias" training.

The Justice Department fueled the sense of achievement among activists, announcing in a scathing report last week that it had found widespread racial bias in the city's policing and in a municipal court system driven by profit extracted from mostly black and low-income residents.

That same report also cleared former Ferguson officer Darren Wilson in the

Aug. 9 death of Brown, the unarmed 18-year-old who for protesters became a symbol of unjustified use of force and unfair treatment of minorities by police.

The Justice Department's conclusions drew a muted response among activists. Only a few dozen protesters gathered that night outside Ferguson's police station — the nexus of many demonstrations. That was in sharp contrast to the throngs that turned out there and across the nation in the days after Brown's death and in November, when a Missouri grand jury declined to indict Wilson.

The comparatively sparse turnout raised questions about whether the movement had lost momentum. Organizers said the federal

government's conclusions had been expected after some of the findings were leaked in the weeks before the formal announcements.

Rasheen Aldridge, a 20-year-old regular at the protests, considers Ferguson his generation's civil-rights movement. That idea, he said, seemed to gain resonance in the last week after the killing of an unarmed biracial man by a white officer in Madison, Wisconsin, and the suspension of a University of Oklahoma fraternity chapter that was caught on video singing a racist chant.

Aldridge, head of Young Activists United St. Louis, said he did not expect the protest movement "to grow into the energy that it has, empowering young people

not to be silent anymore and to take action and fix it."

"This is the new time to make changes," added Aldridge, also a member of the Ferguson Commission, a group tasked by Missouri's governor to address underlying social and economic problems. "This is our time."

In the months after Brown's death, some demonstrations were marred by looting and arson fires that targeted businesses. Organizers blamed those incidents on outside agitators.

That was the case again Thursday, when two police officers helping monitor protests outside the police department were shot in an attack that was still under investigation. The officers were later released from the hospital.

## Marine Killed Trying To Save Friend

CAMP LEJEUNE, N.C. (AP) — Just four days before he was killed in a helicopter crash, Staff Sgt. Andrew Seif was awarded one of the military's highest honors for heroism, a commendation he earned for his efforts to save a mortally wounded friend in heavy gunfire in Afghanistan.

Seif, 26, was given the Silver Star in a room full of his fellow Marines, walking arm in arm with his wife after the ceremony. The boy who grew up playing soldier in his Michigan backyard was hailed by one of his superiors, Maj. Gen. Joseph L. Osterman, as a selfless person who put himself in the line of fire so that Sgt. Justin Hansen wouldn't be left behind.

He and Hansen came under heavy fire as they closed in on a bomb expert in Afghanistan. His comrade was wounded; Seif moved him to safety, treated his wounds and fired back. At the ceremony, he deflected praise.

"There are definitely some individuals out there who deserve (the medal) just as well," Seif said. "But it's an honor to accept it on the behalf of the unit and on behalf of the rest of the men."

The young Marine's story emerged Friday when the Marines killed in the crash were publicly identified, some three days after the crash. The deceased had been students and husbands, officers and sons.

## The Price Of Oil Is Heading Down Again

NEW YORK (AP) — The price of oil is tumbling again, rattling an already-shaken oil industry and heralding lower prices for consumers.

The price of oil fell 10 percent this week, approaching its lowest price in six years. Many expect it to fall further in the coming weeks because supplies are rising and the summer driving season is still months away.

The lower crude prices will mean gasoline prices will slide lower in the coming weeks, and many drivers will likely pay under \$2 a gallon in the summertime for the first time since 2004.

Oil prices had appeared to stabilize in a range nearly 15 percent higher than the depths they had reached in late January. But on Friday the International Energy Agency called a recent rise in oil prices a "head fake" and a "facade of stability."

"The rebalancing (of supply and demand) triggered by the price collapse has yet to run its course," the agency wrote in its monthly oil market report.

## Criticism Of GOP Letter Has Escalated

WASHINGTON (AP) — Criticism of 47 Republican senators' letter to Iranian leaders escalated Friday, and one of the lawmakers expressed misgivings about writing directly to an adversary to raise doubts about President Barack Obama's nuclear negotiations.

Several newspapers that had endorsed the senators' elections were harshly critical. A handful of conservative commentators and former GOP aides joined legions of liberals in calling the letter ill-advised.

Republican Sen. Ron Johnson of Wisconsin, who may face a tough re-election next year, defended the letter, but added, "If there was any regret, tactically, it probably would have been better just to have it be an open letter addressed to no one."

Another signer, Sen. Pat Roberts of Kansas, expressed similar thoughts. The letter "could have been addressed to other folks and gotten the message out," Roberts said. "But I think the message is more important than who we send it to."

All but seven of the Senate's Republicans signed the letter, but no Democrats did. The letter warns Iran's leaders that any negotiated agreement on their nuclear program could expire when Obama leaves office.

## Computer Search-Warrant Change Sought

WASHINGTON (AP) — A Justice Department proposal that could make it easier to locate and hack into computers that are part of criminal investigations is raising constitutional concerns from privacy groups and Google, who fear the plan could have broad implications.

Federal prosecutors say their search warrant proposal is needed at a time when computer users are committing crimes in online anonymity while concealing their locations. But civil libertarians fear the rule change, under consideration by a federal advisory committee, would grant the government expansive new powers to reach into computers across the country.

The proposal would change existing rules of criminal procedure that, with limited exceptions, permit judges to approve warrants for property searches only in the districts where they serve. The government says those rules are outdated in an era when child pornographers, drug traffickers and others can mask their whereabouts on computer networks that offer anonymity. Such technology can impede or thwart efforts to pinpoint a suspect's geographic location.

The Justice Department wants the rules changed so that judges in a district where "activities related to a crime" have occurred could approve warrants to search computers outside their districts. The government says that flexibility is needed for cases in which the government can't figure out the location of a computer and needs a warrant to access it remotely, and for investigations involving botnets — networks of computers infected with a virus that spill across judicial districts.

"There is a substantial public interest in catching and prosecuting criminals who use anonymizing technologies, but locating them can be impossible for law enforcement absent the ability to conduct a remote search of the criminal's computer," Justice Department lawyers wrote in one memo explaining the need for the change.

## Today Is Pi Day, An Annual Math Holiday

WASHINGTON (AP) — Today is the day when love of math and a hankering for pastry come full circle. Today is Pi Day, a once-in-a-year calendar date that this time squares the fun with a once-in-a-century twist.

Saturday is 3-14-15, the first five digits of the mathematical constant pi: 3.141592653. The best times to celebrate are at 9:26 and 53 seconds, morning and evening. The next time that happens is in March 2115.

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