

Germany Decides To Shut Down Nuclear Plants

BERLIN (AP) — Europe's economic powerhouse, Germany, announced plans Monday to abandon nuclear energy over the next 11 years, outlining an ambitious strategy in the wake of Japan's Fukushima disaster to replace atomic power with renewable energy sources.

Chancellor Angela Merkel said she hopes the transformation to more solar, wind and hydroelectric power serves as a roadmap for other countries.

"We believe that we can show those countries who decide to abandon nuclear power — or not to start using it — how it is possible to achieve growth, creating jobs and economic prosperity while shifting the energy supply toward renewable energies," Merkel said.

Merkel's government said it will shut down all 17 nuclear power plants in Germany — the world's fourth-largest economy and Europe's biggest — by 2022. The government had no immediate estimate of the transition's overall cost.

The plan sets Germany apart from most of the other major industrialized nations. Among the other Group of Eight countries, only Italy has abandoned nuclear power, which was voted down in a referendum after the 1986 Chernobyl disaster.

Bombings Targeting Italian Base Kill 5 Afghans

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — A suicide bomber blew up an explosives-packed car at the gates of an Italian military base Monday in one of two attacks on the relatively secure western city of Herat, killing at least five Afghans in a major commercial center slated to be handed over by NATO to Afghan control in July.

The bombings claimed by the Taliban were the second major attack in three days as insurgents expand their targets outside the southern and eastern theaters that were the focus of American offensives last winter. In other violence around Afghanistan, four NATO service members were killed Monday.

Taliban attacks inside Herat are rare, though there are violence-prone districts on the city's outskirts. But insurgents have been increasing attacks around the country since the group announced its spring offensive in late April and reaching into areas that had been fairly quiet until now.

The expansion of Taliban assaults into new areas suggests that the insurgents are making a statement about their reach just as NATO is trying to shift some more secure areas of the country to Afghan control. The international alliance aims to transition cities or provinces piecemeal to reach the goal of total Afghan control by 2014.

Herat, western Afghanistan's largest city, is one of seven areas scheduled to be handed over to Afghan control in July as the first step of the transition of nationwide security responsibility to Afghan troops. Support for the Afghan war has been waning in allied countries after nearly 10 years of fighting and many NATO nations are sketching drawdown plans. Some have argued that the death of Osama bin Laden means that there is less need to spend money and lives in Afghanistan.

Report: Toll From Haiti Quake Overestimated

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) — Far fewer people died or were left homeless by last year's devastating earthquake than claimed by Haitian leaders, a report commissioned by the U.S. government has concluded — challenging a central premise behind a multibillion-dollar aid and reconstruction effort.

The report, a copy of which was obtained Monday by The Associated Press, estimates that the death toll was between 46,000 and 85,000, far below the Haitian government's official figure of 316,000. The report was prepared for the U.S. Agency for International Development but has not yet been publicly released.

The report has inconsistencies, however, and won't be released publicly until they are resolved, U.S. State Department spokeswoman Preeti Shah told the AP.

"The first draft of the report contained internal inconsistencies with its own findings," Shah said in a telephone interview from Washington. "We are reviewing these inconsistencies ... to ensure information we release is accurate."

Wildfires Destroy 12 Homes In Texas

AMARILLO, Texas (AP) — Two wildfires have destroyed at least 12 homes on the outskirts of the Texas Panhandle city of Amarillo.

Texas Forest Service spokesman Marq Webb says the fires began burning early Sunday evening but were contained by Monday night. He says low humidity, temperatures in the 100s and high winds created favorable conditions for fires.

He says firefighters are still battling wildfires across Texas on Monday. About 2.8 million acres have burned in the state since November.

Dempsey To Head Joint Chiefs

BY ROBERT BURNS AND DARLENE SUPERVILLE
 Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama moved Monday to seal an overhaul of his national security team, selecting Army Gen. Martin Dempsey as the next Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman amid protracted battle in Afghanistan, U.S. involvement in the NATO-led effort against Libya's Moammar Gadhafi and a winding down of the war in Iraq.

Obama announced a new lineup of his top military leadership group in the Rose Garden of the White House just before venturing across the Potomac to pay tribute to the nation's war dead at Arlington National Cemetery. The Memorial Day announcements had been expected, although there was no immediate indication what the military leadership moves might imply for possible changes in military strategy.

Already, the president had turned, in late April, to CIA Director Leon Panetta to succeed Robert Gates as secretary of defense and chose to move Army Gen. David Petraeus from his command of the Afghanistan war effort to the

United States to replace Panetta at the CIA.

Marine Gen. James Cartwright had long been rumored to be Obama's favorite, and the president singled him out for praise at the announcement. But he turned instead to Dempsey, an accomplished veteran of the Iraq war, to succeed Adm. Mike Mullen as his top military adviser, calling Dempsey "one of our nation's most respected and combat-tested generals."

The president also announced he has chosen Navy Adm. James Winnefeld to succeed Cartwright as vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs and Army Gen. Ray Odierno as his candidate to replace Dempsey as Army chief of staff.

The nominees have to be approved by the Senate, and Obama voiced hope that could happen in a timely fashion.

At the White House, Obama called America's servicemen and women "the best our nation has to offer, and they deserve nothing but the best in return, and that includes leaders."

Later on, Obama placed a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknowns at the venerable Arlington burial grounds. And in a speech at the Arlington amphitheater in front of a flag-draped wall, the president, who had met earlier in the

day with families of troops killed in war, said: "To those of you mourn the loss of a loved one today, my heart goes out to you."

"We remember that the blessings that we enjoy as Americans came at a dear cost," he said. "Our nation owes a debt to its fallen heroes that we cannot ever fully repay. But we can honor their sacrifice, and we must." After his remarks, Obama and his wife, Michelle, visited a section of the cemetery that is the final resting place for many veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Preceding Obama at the amphitheater, Gates said the country "must never forget" its men and women in the military.

"As I come to the end of my time in this post," Gates said, "... I will keep these brave patriots and their families in my heart and in my prayers."

Dempsey, who began a four-year term as Army chief of staff on April 11, will have to be confirmed by the Senate, as will Winnefeld and Odierno.

Gates said that Dempsey, Winnefeld and Odierno are excellent choices.

MEMORIAL DAY

Holiday Celebrated With Parades, Flyovers, Flags

BY ERIC TUCKER
 Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Americans from the nation's capital to Alaska marked Memorial Day with parades, somber reflection and even a climbing expedition in a holiday infused with fresh meaning by the approaching 10th anniversary of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

The National Memorial Day Parade in Washington honored veterans and America's war dead but also featured special tributes to Sept. 11 first responders, victims and their families. Also fresh in the minds of parade participants and watchers was the killing less than a month ago of Osama bin Laden, who masterminded the attacks.

Elsewhere, military jets thundered through the sky above New York after a wreath-laying ceremony aboard an aircraft carrier that's been turned into a museum, while hundreds of volunteers put small flags on the 25,000 graves at a sprawling military cemetery near Las Vegas. U.S. troops fighting in Afghanistan also took time out to remember fallen comrades.

Along the parade route in Washington, children sat on parents'

shoulders and throngs cheered the passing high school marching bands and floats of war veterans. Special guests included Medal of Honor recipients, astronaut and Korean War veteran Buzz Aldrin and actor Gary Sinise, a veterans advocate who played Lt. Dan in the Oscar-winning film "Forrest Gump."

Hamilton Peterson, who lost his father and stepmother when the hijacked United Airlines 93 crashed into a field in Shanksville, Pa., said the looming anniversary of the terror attacks should serve as a reminder to Americans to be vigilant.

"Obviously, bin Laden's death is a highlight of the 10th anniversary. However, we recognize that future attacks are imminent and that, absent using 9/11 as a model for how to respond, all Americans need to get involved. It can't just be the military," said Peterson, 51.

Sgt. James Patrick McMichael of the Arlington County, Va., sheriff's office was among the first responders to the Pentagon and was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder about two years later. He said that even though the anniversary was dredging up painful mem-

ories, it's still critical that the public never lose memory of the attacks — especially to make sure they don't happen again.

A commercial jet crashed into the Pentagon on Sept. 11, killing 184 people at the sprawling Defense Department headquarters.

"Reliving the event is not something that I look forward to, but I don't think it should be something that's not brought up to the public," said McMichael, who attended the parade in Washington. "I don't think people should forget about what occurred."

President Barack Obama participated in a wreath-laying ceremony

at the Tomb of the Unknowns at Arlington National Cemetery near Washington.

"Our nation owes a debt to its fallen heroes that we cannot ever fully repay," Obama said in a speech. "But we can honor their sacrifice, and we must."

In New York, Lynn Berat dressed her young daughters in matching red, white and blue sundresses for a ceremony at the Intrepid Sea, Air & Space Museum on the west side of Manhattan.

"I think it's important that they understand the spirit of Memorial Day instead of just barbecuing," she said.

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