

Obama Flies To Estonia To Comfort Baltics

WASHINGTON (AP) — Confronted by a Kremlin-backed military offensive in Ukraine, President Barack Obama and Western allies will approve plans this week to position at least 4,000 troops and military equipment in Eastern Europe, bolstering NATO's security commitments to nervous member states near the Russian border.

Ahead of a high-stakes NATO summit that begins Thursday, Obama will also make a symbolic show of solidarity with Eastern Europe when he visits Estonia for meetings with Baltic leaders. He was due to arrive in the Estonian capital of Tallinn Wednesday morning.

Russia's months-long conflict with Ukraine comes at a time when members of the NATO defense alliance have been cutting military spending and reassessing the organization's role after years of peace in Europe. While Ukraine is not part of NATO, alliance members in Eastern and Central Europe fear they could be Russia's next targets, prompting the 28-nation bloc to seek a more robust response.

"The current situation shows that the principle of collective territorial defense hasn't gone away — on the contrary," Estonian President Toomas Hendrik Ilves said Sunday, marking the 20th anniversary of the exit of the last Russian troops from Estonian territory.

Ukrainian officials say their country's armed forces are now locked in a conflict with not only Moscow-backed separatists, but also the Russian army. Officials said Tuesday that Russian military forces had been spotted in two major rebel-held cities in eastern Ukraine, though that could not be independently verified.

Juvenile Detention Center Teens Escape

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — Thirty teens "overwhelmed" their minders at a juvenile detention center by simultaneously breaking out of four dormitories and then crawling under a weak spot in a chain-link fence. By late Tuesday, eight were still on the run.

Police caught up with some walking along roads or coming out of the woods. Some turned themselves in. And some were swiftly returned to the detention center by their own families for their own good.

"He broke loose, he was gone, but he's back now," said LaWanda Knowles, whose nephew joined the escape. "I just want to know that he's here safely and he's OK — I don't want the police jumping on him, nobody beating on him or nothing."

The teens — ages 14 to 19 — left their rooms at the Woodland Hills Youth Development Center at about 11 p.m. Monday night and gathered in common areas. With just 16 unarmed adults to keep watch over 78 youths in 12 dormitories, the staff was "overwhelmed," said Tennessee Department of Children's Services spokesman Rob Johnson.

"Staffing was lighter during the overnight hours, so presumably they had planned for that," Johnson said.

Peruvian Hackers Embarrass Politicians

LIMA, Peru (AP) — The Peruvian hackers have broken into military, police and other sensitive government networks in Argentina, Colombia, Chile, Venezuela, defacing websites and extracting sensitive data to strut their programming prowess and make political points.

Now the team calling itself LulzSecPeru has created a national political uproar. Emails the hackers stole from the Peruvian Council of Ministers' network and dumped online last month fueled accusations that top Cabinet ministers have acted more like industry lobbyists than public servants. That helped precipitate a no-confidence vote last week that the Cabinet barely survived. The hackers, who describe themselves as two young men, are a homegrown version of the U.S. and U.K.-based LulzSec "black hat" hacker collective that has attacked the Church of Scientology and agitated on behalf of the WikiLeaks online secret-spillers and Occupy Wall Street.

Obama Educates West Africa On Ebola

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Barack Obama urged West Africans on Tuesday to wear gloves and masks when caring for Ebola patients or burying anyone who died of the disease. He also discouraged the traditional burial practice of directly touching the body of someone who died of Ebola, which is one way the disease has been spreading in the region.

"You can respect your traditions and honor your loved ones without risking the lives of the living," Obama said in a brief video message to residents of hard-hit Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea and Nigeria. The video was posted on the White House website. "Stopping this disease won't be easy but we know how to do it."

The Ebola outbreak in West Africa has killed more than 1,500 people in the four countries.

In the video, Obama said the first step to slowing the disease is to know the facts, and then delivered a tutorial on how Ebola is and isn't spread.

Obama said the disease isn't spread through the air, like the flu, or through such casual contact as sitting next to someone on a bus. People also cannot get Ebola from another person until that individual shows symptoms of the disease, like fever, he said.

Obama said the most common method of infection is from touching the body fluids — sweat, saliva or blood — of someone who is ill or has died of the disease. Contact with a contaminated item, such as a needle, is another common infection method, he said.

US Strike Targets Leader Of Somali Extremist Group

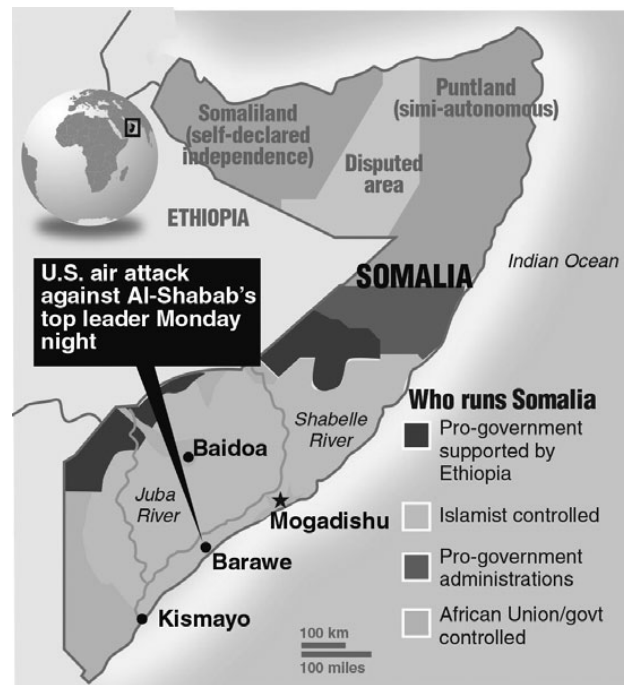
BY ABDI GULED
Associated Press

MOGADISHU, Somalia — U.S. airstrikes in Somalia may have killed the leader of the Islamic extremist group al-Shabab, with a militant commander saying Tuesday that he was in a car that was struck and that six people died.

The leader, Ahmed Abdi Godane, has no heir apparent. If he has been killed, it would be a "significant blow" to al-Shabab's organization and abilities, said U.S. Navy Rear Adm. John Kirby, a Pentagon spokesman, who confirmed the strikes targeting Godane.

But Godane's death could also lead the group to ditch its association with al-Qaida and align itself with the Islamic State group in Syria and Iraq, analysts said. Al-Shabab gained international notoriety a year ago this month when it attacked the upscale Westgate Mall in Nairobi, Kenya, killing at least 67 people.

Godane was in one of two vehicles hit by the U.S. military strikes Monday night, said Abu Mohammed, an al-Shabab commander and spokesman. He said six militants were killed, but would not say if Godane was among them. The two vehicles were heading toward the coastal town of Barawe, al-Shabab's main base, Mohammed told



Source: Reuters, BBC
Graphic: Greg Good © 2014 MCT

The Associated Press. The U.S. strikes hit Godane after he left a meeting of the group's top leaders, said a senior Somali intelligence official. Intelligence indicated Godane "might have been killed along with other militants," said the Somali official, who spoke on condition of anonymity since he was not authorized to speak to the press.

Kirby, the Pentagon spokesman, said the U.S. launched the operation based on "actionable" intelligence, and the strikes "hit

what we were aiming at." But commanders were waiting to determine the outcome of the attack.

The strikes on an encampment and a vehicle were conducted by special operations forces using manned and unmanned aircraft, according to Kirby. They struck using several hellfire missiles and precision-guided munitions.

A witness in Somalia described ground-shaking explosions. Somali government and African Union forces heading to a town in the dis-

trict heard what sounded like an "earthquake," said the governor of Somalia's Lower Shabelle region, Abdiqadir Mohamed Nor.

The attack took place 105 miles (170 kilometers) south of Mogadishu in a forested area where al-Shabab trains its fighters, he said.

Godane, also known as Mukhtar Abu Zubeyr, is al-Shabab's spiritual leader under whose direction the Somali militants forged an alliance with al-Qaida. In 2012 the U.S. offered a reward of up to \$7 million for information leading to his arrest.

If Godane has been killed, the leadership upheaval could bring al-Shabab to break away from al-Qaida and instead pledge allegiance to the Islamic State group in Syria and Iraq, according to two security experts.

Godane has no obvious successor and there are reports of a rift within al-Shabab over which global terror group to align with, said Matt Bryden, the head of Sahar Research in Nairobi. A struggle for power seems likely, he said.

"Advanced splintering seems like a probable outcome," terrorism analyst J.M. Berger said. "If Shabab ends up exiting al-Qaida, there will be global implications for that ... but it's hard to say right now which way that will go."

Ukraine Military Routed As Russia Talks Tough

BY PETER LEONARD
Associated Press

NOVOKATERYNIVKA, Ukraine — The Ukrainian soldiers were an easy target as they launched a desperate run to safety. Pounded by a gauntlet of rocket shells, blown up in their vehicles, they died by the dozens.

In fields around the eastern Ukrainian village of Novokaterynivka, more than thirty army vehicles lay charred and pulverized into twisted piles of metal Tuesday — the result of a devastating weekend ambush by separatist forces.

The route marked a major intensification in the separatists' offensive in eastern Ukraine — one that the government in Kiev, NATO and the United States say has been sustained by Russia's direct military support.

Moscow's aggressive stance toward Ukraine has come in both words and deeds of late, fueled by attacks like those in Novokaterynivka as well as a leaked report that EU Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso said Vladimir Putin told him that

Russia could take over Kiev "in two weeks" if it wished.

The separatists, after having a month of setbacks in which government troops regained territory, have been inordinately successful in the last 10 days just as columns of Russian tanks and armored vehicles have been seen crossing the border. President Barack Obama and other NATO leaders will be attending a summit in Wales on Thursday to create a rapid-response military team to counter the Russian threat.

Yuri Ushakov, Putin's foreign policy adviser, told reporters that the Russian leader's statement on Kiev was "taken out of context and carried a completely different meaning."

Yet on the ground, the results of much deadlier weapons of war could not be denied.

The smashed tanks,

APCs and trucks were part of a massive column fleeing Saturday night after being encircled in the town of Ilovaisk, which the government was compelled to concede after weeks of bitter battles. Judging by how close together the stricken vehicles were, the incoming fire was precise and extremely intense.

"They were going to surrender and they began to bomb them," said Novokaterynivka resident Anatoly Tyrn.

Ukrainian army personnel have been allowed to travel to Novokaterynivka and surrounding rebel-held areas to retrieve their soldiers' bodies, a few of which still lie in the open.

Villagers and the Russian-backed rebels say the number of Ukrainian military dead was huge, although the government has maintained a tight lid on the precise figure.

Tyrn said he believed more than a hundred had died. Various rebel fighters separately gave estimates, all ranging into the dozens. AP reporters saw at least 11 bodies in the area over the last two days, although it was clear that was only a portion of the overall toll. Most of the dead were removed Monday, the rebels said.

One body was flung over an overhead high-voltage power line, apparently after his armored personnel carrier was hit by a shell. Another was quickly buried by rebels under a thin layer of dirt, but the summer heat bloated the body, pushing it up through the soil.

The turret of one tank blown several meters (yards) clear of its vehicle, landing beside Tyrn's home.

"Only a few homes in the village have been left untouched," he said.

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