

# Leaders Debate Middle East Threats

BY JULIE PACE

AP White House Correspondent

NEWPORT, Wales — NATO leaders grappled Thursday with whether the alliance has a role in containing a mounting militant threat in the Middle East, as heads of state converged in Wales for a high-stakes summit also focused on the crisis in Ukraine and next steps in Afghanistan.

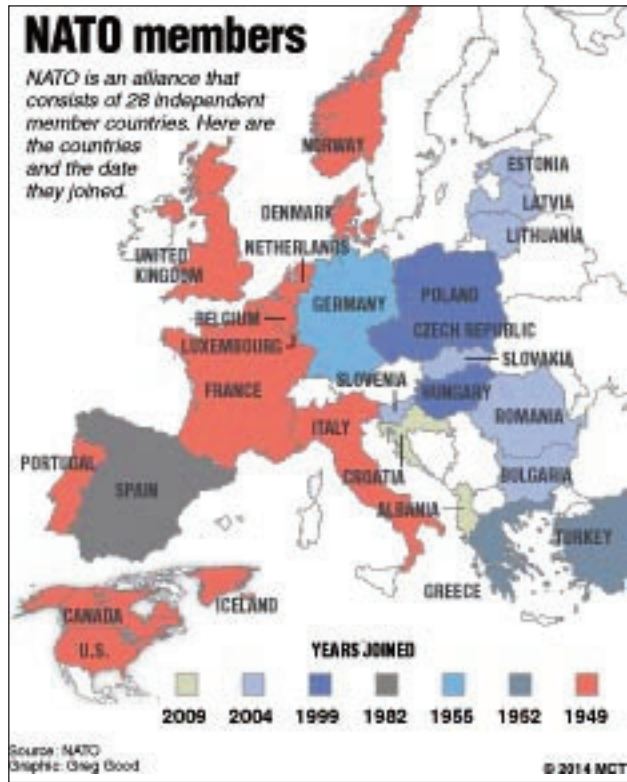
President Barack Obama and British Prime Minister David Cameron declared that their nations would “not be cowed” by extremists from the Islamic State group who have claimed responsibility for killing two American journalists. They also challenged NATO to not turn inward in the face of the threat.

“Those who want to adopt an isolationist approach misunderstand the nature of security in the 21st century,” Obama and Cameron wrote in a joint editorial in the Times of London. “Developments in other parts of the world, particularly in Iraq and Syria, threaten our security at home.”

Obama, Cameron and dozens of other NATO leaders met on a golf resort in Wales for the two-day summit. Leaders here also planned to commit to a more robust rapid response force on its eastern flank, which would aim to serve as a deterrent to Russian aggression.

Yet much of the action was to take place on the sidelines of the summit, where the American and British leaders were expected to drum up support for an international response to confronting the Islamic State militants in Iraq and Syria.

Arriving at the summit site on Thursday, NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen said he believes the broader international



community “has an obligation to stop the Islamic State from advancing further,” but noted that the alliance hasn’t received any request for help.

“I’m sure that if the Iraqi government were to forward a request for NATO assistance, that would be considered seriously by NATO allies,” Rasmussen said.

The militants have claimed responsibility for murdering two American journalists, releasing gruesome videos of their beheadings. Both the U.S. and Britain are deeply concerned about the potential threat to their homelands that could come from the foreign fighters who have joined the violent Islamic State group.

Cameron on Monday proposed new laws that would give police the power to seize the passports of Britons suspected of having traveled abroad to fight with terrorist groups.

The U.S. began launching

airstrikes against Islamic State targets in Iraq last month, and both the U.S. and Britain have been making humanitarian aid drops to besieged minority groups there. Cameron said that he hadn’t ruled out joining the U.S. in airstrikes, but added that the priority was to support those already fighting the militants on the ground.

“We need to show real resolve and determination, we need to use every power and everything in our armory with our allies — with those on the ground — to make sure we do everything we can to squeeze this dreadful organization out of existence,” Cameron told the British network ITV.

Also facing Obama is a decision about whether to expand U.S. military action against the extremists to Syria. While Obama has said he’s considering that step, he has suggested in recent days that it’s not imminent. U.S. officials say Obama is

reluctant to delve into Syria’s quagmire on his own. He’s expected to use some of his discussions in Wales to try to build a coalition that could join him in confronting the Islamic State through a combination of military might, diplomatic pressure and economic penalties.

Obama and Cameron visited a local school Thursday morning, where they greeted students learning about NATO before sitting down for a private meeting. Later, the two met with their counterparts from France, Germany and Italy to discuss the crisis in Ukraine. In a show of Western solidarity, new Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko also joined the discussion.

Ukraine and Russia have been locked in a standoff for months, with pro-Moscow forces stirring instability in eastern Ukrainian cities. On the eve of the NATO summit, Russia and Ukraine said they were working on a deal to halt the fighting, but Western leaders expressed skepticism — noting it wasn’t the first attempt to end the deadly conflict.

A centerpiece of the NATO summit was to be the announcement of the rapid response force. Officials said the alliance could position at least 4,000 forces and military equipment in the Baltics and elsewhere in Eastern Europe.

“We must use our military to ensure a persistent presence in Eastern Europe, making clear to Russia that we will always uphold our Article 5 commitments to collective self-defense,” Obama and Cameron wrote.

Under Article 5 of the NATO charter, an attack on one member state is viewed on an attack on the whole alliance. Obama reiterated his support for that principle Wednesday during a visit to Estonia, one of the newer NATO members set on edge by Russia’s provocations.

## Median Income Drops For 90 Percent

WASHINGTON (AP) — A Federal Reserve report says the richest 10 percent of Americans were the only group whose median incomes rose in the past three years.

The Fed’s report says incomes declined for every other group from 2010 to 2013, widening the gap between the richest Americans and everyone else.

The report, which adjusted for inflation, finds that median income for the top 10 percent rose 2 percent, to \$223,200 from \$217,900. Median income fell 4 percent for the bottom 20 percent, to \$15,200 from \$15,800.

For the middle 20 percent, incomes dropped 6 percent, to \$48,700 from \$51,800.

The information was contained in the Fed’s latest “Survey of Consumer Finances.”

## Comedian Joan Rivers Dead At 81

NEW YORK (AP) — Joan Rivers, the raucous, acid-tongued comedian who crashed the male-dominated realm of late-night talk shows and turned Hollywood red carpets into danger zones for badly dressed celebrities, died Thursday. She was 81.

Rivers died at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York, surrounded by family and close friends, daughter Melissa Rivers said. She was hospitalized Aug. 28 after going into cardiac arrest in a doctor’s office following a routine procedure. The New York state health department is investigating the circumstances.

Under the immobile, plastic surgery-crafted veneer that became Joan Rivers’ unapologetic trademark as she aged, her wit remained as vibrantly raw and unruly as when she first broke her way into a comedy world belonging largely to men.

In a 2010 “Late Show” interview, David Letterman broached the plastic surgery issue: “You don’t look exactly like the Joan Rivers I used to know.” Rivers was unapologetic.

## Judge: BP Negligent In Gulf Spill

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — BP could be looking at close to \$18 billion in additional fines over the nation’s worst offshore oil spill after a federal judge ruled Thursday that the company acted with “gross negligence” in the 2010 Gulf of Mexico disaster.

U.S. District Judge Carl Barbier concluded that the London-based oil giant showed a “conscious disregard of known risks” during the drilling operation and bears most of the responsibility for the blowout that killed 11 rig workers and spewed millions of gallons of oil over three months.

In the next stage of the case, set to begin in January, the judge will decide precisely how much BP must pay.

Under the federal Clean Water Act, a polluter can be forced to pay a maximum of \$1,100 in civil fines per barrel of spilled oil, or up to \$4,300 per barrel if the company is found grossly negligent. Barbier’s finding exposes BP to the much higher amount.

Even as the oil giant vowed to appeal, BP stock fell \$2.82, or nearly 6 percent, to \$44.89, reducing the company’s market value by almost \$9 billion.

## Ex-Va. Gov. Convicted Of Corruption

RICHMOND, Va. (AP) — Former Virginia Gov. Bob McDonnell and his wife were convicted Thursday of taking bribes to promote a dietary supplement in a corruption case that derailed the career of the onetime rising Republican star and laid bare the couple’s broken marriage.

A federal jury in Richmond convicted Bob McDonnell of 11 of the 13 counts he faced; Maureen McDonnell was convicted of nine of the 13 counts she faced. Both bowed their heads and wept as the court clerk read a chorus of “guilty” verdicts. Widely considered a possible running mate for Mitt Romney in the 2012 presidential campaign, McDonnell was reduced to living with the family’s priest in a church rectory during the trial. Now he and his wife face up to 30 years in prison on most counts, including conspiracy, fraud and bribery. Sentencing was scheduled for Jan. 6.

The couple’s defense strategy depended in large part on persuading jurors that their marriage itself was a fraud and that they were unable to speak to each other, let alone conspire to accept bribes. They left the courtroom separately — first Bob and then Maureen, who hugged one of her daughters and wept loudly on the way out.

## Report: Executioners Need Training

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — Oklahoma turned to a 15-year physician and a medical technician with 40 years’ experience to put Clayton Lockett to death, yet his execution still went awry.

Now, investigators are recommending more training for executioners, blaming Lockett’s flawed, lengthy lethal injection on April 29 on poor placement of intravenous lines and a warden’s decision that modesty was more important than monitoring Lockett for signs of trouble. The three drugs administered were not a factor, the state said.

The findings and recommendations of the governor-requested, state-handled investigation highlight the difficulty that death penalty states face in making sure the people performing a grim medical procedure are properly prepared to see it through.

“Is there some things that need to be improved? Absolutely,” Oklahoma Department of Public Safety Commissioner Michael C. Thompson said Thursday after his agency released the findings of its investigation. “We think that the IV was a big issue with the execution.”

Out of modesty, no one monitored an intravenous line that had been placed in Lockett’s groin before the start of his execution, a job that is the normal duty of Oklahoma State Penitentiary Warden Anita Trammel, who decided to cover Lockett’s body — and the IV — with a sheet.

# Mistaken U.S. Bombing Blamed On Miscommunication

BY ROBERT BURNS

AP National Security Writer

WASHINGTON — A “friendly fire” incident in Afghanistan that killed five U.S. soldiers and one Afghan in June was caused by a series of avoidable miscommunications among air and ground forces, according to a military investigation report released Thursday.

The report from U.S. Central Command, which oversees operations in Afghanistan, cited a collective failure by soldiers, commanders and air crew members to execute the fundamentals of the mission. As a result, the five Americans and one Afghan were mistaken for enemy forces and were attacked with two laser-guided bombs.

Many details of the report were blacked out before its public release.

The incident was one of the deadliest friendly fire episodes of the entire war, which began 13 years ago next month.

The crew of the Air Force B-1 bomber were executing an authorized order, but they were faulted by investigators for not taking reasonable precautions to ensure they knew where friendly forces were located. Despite discrepancies

in reported U.S. troop locations — suggesting that something may have been amiss — the air crew did not take necessary steps to validate its information before launching the bombs, the report said.

Unidentified members of the ground forces, which included an Army Special Forces unit, were faulted for incorrectly communicating some troops’ positions and for not knowing that the B-1 bomber’s targeting gear is incapable of detecting friendly marking devices of the type used by U.S. ground forces in the June 9 operation. These failures led to the mistaken conclusion that the targeted U.S. and Afghan soldiers were insurgents.

In response to the Central Command report, the Army said it is considering whether any tactics should be changed to minimize chances of repeating mistakes that led to this tragedy. It also forwarded the investigation report to the commander of Army Special Operations Command to decide whether any punitive action should be taken.

The Air Force said it would study the report before deciding on any disciplinary action.

The June incident happened in Zabul province in southern Afghanistan at the end of an operation led by the Afghan army and supported

by Army Special Forces. Their aim was to disrupt insurgents and improve security for local polling stations in the Arghandab district in advance of the June 14 Afghan presidential runoff election.

From an altitude of about 12,000 feet, the B-1 bomber was providing what the military calls close air support while U.S. and Afghan ground troops were moving out of the area at the conclusion of their operation.

The six soldiers who were killed had moved from their group’s main position in a valley to higher ground on a ridgeline in order to maneuver on insurgent forces. Muzzle flashes seen at their position on the ridgeline were mistaken for signs of rifle fire from insurgents, in part because the movement of the six was not properly communicated to those coordinating with the B-1 crew. And when the B-1 crew said their targeting pods had detected no U.S. marking devices at that location it was decided that targets must be insurgents.

“While this complex combat situation presented a challenging set of circumstances, had the team understood their system’s capabilities, executed standard tactics, techniques and procedures and communicated effectively, this

tragic incident was avoidable,” the partially censored report concluded.

The five Americans killed were Staff Sgt. Jason A. McDonald, 28, of Butler, Georgia; Staff Sgt. Scott R. Studenmund, 24, of Pasadena, California; Spc. Justin R. Helton, 25, of Beaver, Ohio; Cpl. Justin R. Clouse, 22, of Sprague, Washington, and Pvt. Aaron S. Toppen, 19, of Mokena, Illinois.

The Afghan killed in the attack was identified by Central Command as Sgt. Gulbuddin Ghulam Sakhri.

The tragedy was an example of how battlefield mistakes caused by confusion or miscalculations can have profound consequences. Friendly fire is a problem as old as warfare, and although technological advances, training and combat experience have lessened the frequency, it still poses a threat to U.S. and allied forces.

“War is a very human endeavor, and mistakes inevitably will occur,” retired Army Col. Peter Mansoor, an Iraq war veteran and now professor of military history at Ohio State University, said after the June incident.



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