

Worries About Buildup Prompts Call

WASHINGTON (AP) — American and Russian military chiefs began talks Friday over Moscow's buildup in Syria, signaling the U.S. is resigned to Russia's emerging plans but anxious to avoid dangerous misunderstandings on the battlefield.

A 50-minute phone call between U.S. Defense Secretary Ash Carter and Russia Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu marked the first military-to-military conversation between the two countries in more than a year. And it came as Russia continued to send aircraft, troops and military equipment into Syria and the U.S.-led coalition kept up its assault against Islamic State militants.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov broached the idea of direct talks earlier this week in a phone call with U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, and Shoigu initiated the call to Carter on Friday.

U.S. officials are increasingly worried that Russia's plan to defend and support the government of Syrian President Bashar Assad could conflict with coalition airstrikes and other military operations against the Islamic State. The main focus of the phone call, according to a senior defense official, was to talk about how the fight against IS will go forward without miscalculations.

Russia has called for a broad coalition to fight the Islamic State group and has indicated that helping Assad's military is the best way to do that. However, U.S. policy has centered for the duration of the civil war in Syria on the idea that Assad must step down to make way for a new government. Until recently, Russia had seemed to agree with that policy.

Bergdahl Left Post As Part Of Plan

SAN ANTONIO (AP) — The officer who led the investigation of Bowe Bergdahl's disappearance and capture in Afghanistan six years ago testified Friday that the Army sergeant said he walked away from his post as part of a plan to spark a search and get the attention of a general so he could express his concerns about his unit's leadership.

Maj. Gen. Kenneth Dahl told a packed courtroom at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio that Bergdahl felt the problems were so severe that they put his platoon in danger, but that Bergdahl's perceptions were "completely off the mark."

Dahl said Bergdahl had an elaborate plan to head from his post to the forward operating base roughly 19 miles away, expecting to arrive while a search was underway and to create a "PR event" that might get a general to listen to him.

"He felt it was his duty to intervene," said Dahl, who described Bergdahl as having few friends but who seemed motivated to help others. He said he doesn't think Bergdahl should go to prison.

Bergdahl was captured by the Taliban after leaving his post on June 30, 2009, and held until last year, when he was exchanged for five Taliban commanders being held at the U.S. detention center at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. His commanding officers in Afghanistan testified Thursday about the grueling 45-day search for Bergdahl, saying it put other soldiers in danger.

Prosecutor: Mom Of Baby Doe Arrested

BOSTON (AP) — A mother has been arrested and her boyfriend is charged with murder in the death of a little girl whose body was found inside a trash bag on a Boston Harbor island this summer, a prosecutor said Friday, after a monthslong campaign to learn the child's identity.

Suffolk District Attorney Daniel Conley said he authorized a murder charge for Michael McCarthy, 35, and the girl's mother, Rachelle Bond, 40, is under arrest for accessory to murder after the fact.

"At just shy of three years old, Bella Bond was a true innocent," Conley said at a news conference announcing the charges.

"This child, whose very name means beauty, was murdered," he said.

The girl was known as Baby Doe as investigators launched a massive social media campaign to find out who she was and how she died.

GOP Continues Fight Over Funding

WASHINGTON (AP) — Seeking to avert a government shutdown, Republican leaders drove a bill blocking Planned Parenthood's federal funds through the House on Friday, hoping to contain conservatives' demands for a politically risky showdown with President Barack Obama by striking a quick blow against abortion.

The nearly party-line 241-187 vote followed a no-holds-barred debate that included a graphic, poster-sized photo of a scarred, aborted fetus and underscored how abortion has resurfaced as a white-hot political issue. The battle has been rejoined just in time for the 2016 election campaign and next week's historic address to Congress by Pope Francis.

The issue's re-emergence followed the release of secretly recorded videos of Planned Parenthood officials offhandedly discussing how they sometimes procure tissue from aborted fetuses for medical research. The anti-abortion activists who made the videos say they show that Planned Parenthood is illegally profiting from fetal organ sales.

"What does it say about this Congress that today we're here on the House floor debating the killing and harvesting of aborted babies?" said Rep. Marlin Stutzman, R-Ind. "How can there possibly be two sides to this?"

Democrats said the true GOP goal was to whip up conservative voters with legislation that would make it harder for women to get health care. Planned Parenthood, whose clinics provide sexual disease tests, contraception and abortion, says it's done nothing illegal and is being victimized by misleadingly edited videos.

Europeans Shut Borders, Block Bridges, To Halt Migrant Surge

DANICA KIRKA
Associated Press

ZAGREB, Croatia — Thousands of migrants were trapped Friday in a vicious tug-of-war as bickering European governments shut border crossings, blocked bridges and erected new barbed-wire fences in a bid to stem the wave of humanity fleeing conflict and poverty in the Middle East and Africa.

Asylum-seekers who fled westward after being beaten back by tear gas and water cannon on the Hungarian-Serbian border just days earlier found themselves being returned to Serbia, where their ordeal began, after Croatia declared it could not handle the influx.

The EU's failure to find a unified response to the crisis left this tiny Balkan nation, one of the poorest in the European Union, squeezed between the blockades thrown up by Hungary and Slovenia and the unending flood of people flowing north from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan.

With more than 17,089 migrants arriving in just three days, Croatian Prime Minister Zoran Milanovic declared that his nation of 4.2 million could no longer cope and the asylum-seekers could not stay.

"What else can we do?" Milanovic said at a news conference. "You are welcome in Croatia and you can pass through Croatia. But go on. Not because we don't like you, but because this is not your final destination."

"Croatia has shown it has a heart," he said. "We also need to show we have a brain."

Across eastern Europe, barriers to the migrants' passage were thrown up as nations tried to shift the burden of handling the influx onto their neighbors, leaving asylum-seekers ever more desperate and confused.

Croatia declared itself overwhelmed and began busing migrants to Hungary and closing its border crossings with Serbia. Slovenia halted rail service to Croatia and was sending migrants back there, while Hungary began building yet another razor-wire border fence, this time on its border with Croatia.

Caught in the middle of this high-stakes game of hot potato were the masses of miserable men, women and children who have found their way to the wealthier European nations they wish to settle in blocked at every turn.

"We are seeing the result of haphazard policies," said Maurizio Albahari, a social anthropologist at the University of Notre Dame and author of "Crimes of Peace: Mediterranean Migrations at the World's Deadliest Border."

"The situation is largely due to the

lack of a coordinated approach toward the reception of these displaced persons."

Most migrants don't want to stay in Croatia — only one woman with children has requested asylum, the country's foreign minister said. Instead, they are trying to reach Western European countries like Germany that have said they are welcome.

While Croatia is happy to let people pass through, Hungary and Slovenia say allowing the migrants to cross their borders would violate European Union rules.

Croatia is part of the EU but not a party to the Schengen treaty, which allows people to travel freely between 26 European countries without showing their passports. Slovenia and Hungary are treaty members and say they are protecting Europe's borders.

Events in the Balkans have underscored the failures of the EU's common asylum policy, which calls for a "joint approach to guarantee high standards of protection for refugees."

Though the EU says "asylum must not be a lottery," scenes from Croatia on Friday showed it isn't working out that way.

"The emergency is being actively reproduced by the refusal to acknowledge the reality on the ground. Migrants and refugees have a goal in mind — to reach Germany, France, the Netherlands, Britain, Sweden and so forth," Albahari said.

"Many have gone through political violence, exploitation by smugglers, and the peril of crossing the Mediterranean. Fences are not only proving futile: They are actively contributing to exasperation and to needless, additional suffering for families and vulnerable persons."

The finger-pointing among leaders has become vicious. Croatia and Hungary bickered into the night, with Croatia saying the two countries had agreed to create a corridor for the migrants and the Hungarian Foreign Ministry calling that a "pure lie."

Hungary's foreign minister, Peter Szijarto, called the Croatian prime minister's handling of the migrant crisis "pathetic."

"Hypocrisy rules in Europe today. No one is saying honestly how big a challenge this is," Szijarto told the MTI news agency. "This will not end soon."

It is also causing tremendous strain on relations between neighbors in a region with a volatile past. Croatia, Serbia and Slovenia are all products of the break-up of Yugoslavia in the 1990s. Even before the latest crisis, many efforts to restore normalcy have been

hard won.

In a sign of the discord, Hungarian authorities seized a Croatian train carrying 1,000 migrants as it crossed into Hungary, accusing its neighbor of failing to coordinate the transport. The train's conductor was taken into custody and 40 Croatian police officers escorting it were disarmed, said homeland security adviser Gyorgy Bakondi.

Hungary denied assertions by Croatian officials that the transport had been coordinated by the two governments. "These people were coming toward the border without prior consultation, without respecting official channels," government spokesman Zoltan Kovacs said.

The U.N. refugee agency warned the crisis was being worsened by the contradictory national policies.

"The crisis is growing and being pushed from one country to another," said Adrian Edwards of UNHCR. "You aren't going to solve these problems by closing borders."

The human misery was evident in Croatian towns like Beli Manastir, near the border with Hungary. Migrants slept on streets, on train tracks and at a local gas station. People scrambled to board local buses without knowing where they were going.

Hundreds of others were stranded Friday on a large Danube River bridge in the Serbian town of Bezdin after Croatian authorities closed all but one border crossing. A large truck lifted barriers onto the bridge. The group, which included many women and children, stood in a no-man's land in the middle in the scorching heat for hours with little water or food.

Finally Serbian authorities began busing them 120 kilometers (75 miles) to the south, near the Serbian town of Sid, so they could enter Croatia illegally through unguarded cornfields.

Elsewhere, 19 Croatian buses carried migrants across the border to Beremend, Hungary, where they were put on Hungarian buses for transportation to registration centers. Croatia also put some 800 on trains to Hungary.

UNHCR says more than 442,440 people have crossed the Mediterranean Sea to Europe this year and 2,921 have died trying. The International Organization for Migration puts those figures at 473,887 and 2,812.

The Vatican, meanwhile, took one Syrian refugee family in the tiny Roman Catholic city-state, as promised by Pope Francis. The family belongs to the Melkite Greek Catholic Church, an Eastern rite church, and is waiting on a asylum application decision from Italy.

Japan Enhances Military's Role As Security Bills Pass

MARI YAMAGUCHI
Associated Press

TOKYO — Japan's parliament early Saturday approved contentious legislation that enhances the role of the country's military by loosening post-World War II constraints, after the ruling bloc defeated opposition parties' last-ditch effort to block a vote.

The upper house's approval makes the legislation into law, reinterpreting Japan's constitution and fundamentally changing the way it uses its military. Opponents say it violates Japan's constitution and puts the country at risk of becoming embroiled in U.S.-led wars.

The legislation has sparked sizeable protests and debate about whether Japan should shift away from its pacifist ways to face growing security challenges. Rallies have spread across the nation especially after the ruling parties approved the bills in July in the more powerful lower house.

Japan's military can now defend its allies even when

the country isn't under attack — for the first time since the end of the World War II — and work more closely with the U.S. and other nations. Japan will also be able to participate more fully in international peacekeeping, compared to its previous, mostly humanitarian, missions.

"The legislation is necessary in order to protect the people's lives and their peaceful livelihood, and it is to prevent a war," Prime Minister Shinzo Abe told reporters after the passage of a total of 11 bills — one related to international peacekeeping and a package of 10 others designed to allow Japan's military to defend its allies in an action called "collective self-defense."

Dozens of constitutional scholars, lawyers and other legal experts have joined protests, saying the legislation allowing Japan to use force to settle international disputes violates its U.S.-drafted postwar constitution that renounces a right to wage war.

China said it and other

Asian neighbors are closely watching the vote because of Japan's wartime aggression.

"We demand that Japan genuinely listen to just appeals from both at home and abroad, learning from historical lessons and adhering to the path of peaceful development," said Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Hong Lei.

Previous postwar governments had all made the notion of collective self-defense unconstitutional. But Abe's Cabinet last year decided to allow it by unilaterally adopting a new interpretation of the constitution, instead of formally revising the charter, saying it must be adapted to today's increasingly challenging security environment. The constitutional reinterpretation triggered public criticism that Abe's government undermined democracy. Opponents also say the change would cause Japan to do more in the bilateral alliance with the U.S.

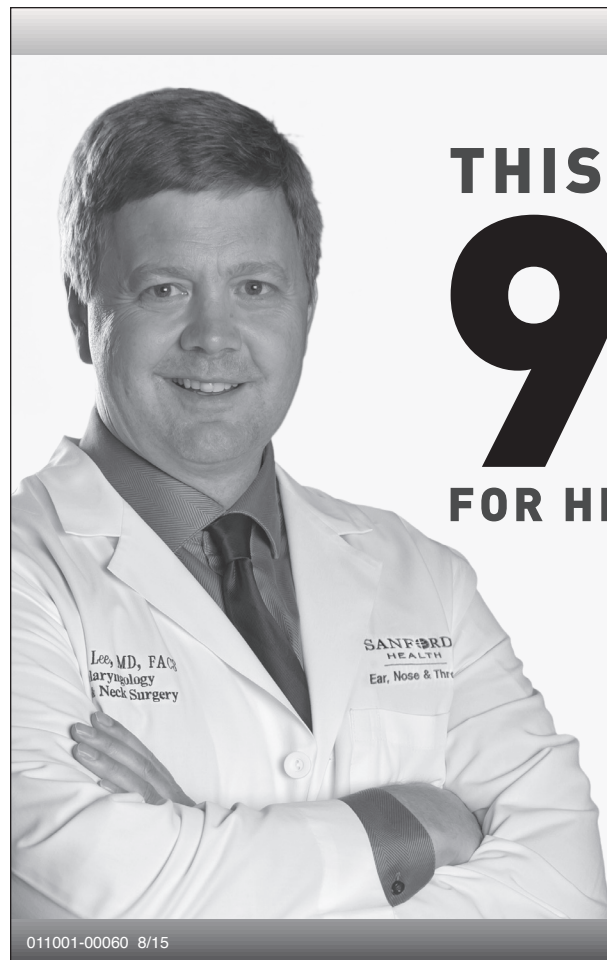
In Washington, leaders of Senate committees overseeing U.S. defense and foreign policy welcomed

the legislation's passage, saying it would contribute to international peace and security and strengthen the U.S.-Japan alliance.

"We welcome a larger role for Japan in regional and global security affairs and look forward to our country working with Japan to implement these new measures," the Republican and Democratic committee leaders said in a joint statement Friday.

Even though many Japanese acknowledge growing security risks and have grown accustomed to sending peacekeepers overseas, many remain wary of a greater military role. Media surveys have consistently shown a majority of respondents oppose the legislation.

"This legislation betrays the constitutionalism, pacifism and democracy that Japan has built over the past 70 years since the end of World War II," said Tetsuro Fukuyama, a senior lawmaker representing the



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