

## Iraq war is ending, his promise is kept

Obama says

REUTERS, President Barack Obama said yesterday Iraq could "chart its own course" and told Americans the drawdown of US troops helped fulfil a promise he made during the 2008 presidential campaign.

Obama, who is vacationing on the Massachusetts island of Martha's Vineyard, declared in his weekly radio and Internet address that "the war is ending" and pledged to take care of troops who are returning home.

The US military recently cut its strength to under 50,000 troops in Iraq, helping to make good on Obama's promise to end the war launched 7-1/2 years ago by his Republican predecessor, George W. Bush.

Obama's Saturday remarks may be a preview of a rare, televised address the president plans on Tuesday evening from the White House Oval Office about the troop drawdown.

"On Tuesday, after more than seven years, the United States of America will end its combat mission in Iraq and take an important step forward in responsibly ending the Iraq war," Obama said.

## China seeks nuke talks with N Korea

REUTERS, Beijing/Seoul

China is lobbying neighbours to sign up to a road map for renewed nuclear disarmament talks with North Korea, whose leader Kim Jong-il is visiting China amid conciliatory words and threats of "holy war."

The details of Beijing's plan for restarting stalled six-party nuclear talks came from a South Korean diplomatic source, who spoke yesterday after discussion in Seoul with Wu Dawei, China's top envoy in the talks.

But the source, as well as a Japanese official speaking in Beijing, stressed that big obstacles remained, even if the secretive Kim's trip to China yields another vow of North Korea's willingness to sit down and discuss a dormant deal to scrap its nuclear weapons in return for aid.

"We don't want to restart six-party talks for the sake of talks," the South Korean diplomatic source said. "North Korea should change its attitude and show seriousness in denuclearising."

China's regional lobbying, and courting of the reclusive Kim, highlight the pressures that North Korea -- isolated, poor and with a brace of primitive nuclear bombs -- has brought to bear on northeast Asia, home to the world's second and third biggest economies and a big US military presence.

Kim, 68, and his son and heir apparent, Kim Jong-un, were in China to visit the school of senior Kim's father and founder of North Korea, Kim Il-sung, a source with knowledge of the secretive trip told Reuters.

"Trust me, it's 100 percent both are here," the source said, declining to give details when asked. Kim Il-sung attended the Yu Wen High School in the northeastern Chinese city of Jilin in the 1920s. The school houses a memorial hall to Kim which is not open to the public.

The museum was renovated recently ahead of a visit by a group of North Korean dignitaries,

a second source said.

Classes were suspended on Thursday amid tight security and a school choir performed for the dignitaries, the second source added, but did not know if the Kims were among the guests.

"They sang 'The song of General Kim Il-sung' in Chinese and Korean. It's the school song," the second source said.

There had been no conclusive sightings in China of Kim, who has appeared frail and gaunt since reportedly suffering a stroke in 2008.

Neither source wanted to be identified because of the political sensitivity of the trip. The two neighbours do not disclose much information about Kim's travels, and then only after he has left for home.

**DIPLOMAT'S WARNING**  
On Friday, a North Korean diplomat brashly discussed the possibility of nuclear war with South Korea and the United States.

"If Washington and Seoul try to create conflict on the Korean peninsula we respond with a holy war on the basis of our nuclear deterrent forces," North Korea's ambassador to Cuba, Kwon Sung-chol, said in Havana, according to a report from there by China's official Xinhua news agency.

North Korea staged nuclear test blasts in 2006 and 2009, drawing international condemnations and UN sanctions backed by China, the biggest economic and diplomatic backer of Pyongyang.

China's envoy, Wu, proposed a three-stage process to restart the multilateral talks aimed at coaxing Pyongyang to give up its nuclear weapons in return for aid and other assurances, the South Korean diplomatic source told Reuters.

Former US President Jimmy Carter returned home from Pyongyang on Friday with an American who had been sentenced to eight years of hard labour for illegally entering North Korea. The North's state media said number two leader, Kim Yong-nam, had told Carter that Pyongyang wanted the nuclear talks resumed.

## US considers fresh approach to North

AFP, Washington

The United States, looking for a diplomatic breakthrough on the Korean Peninsula, has begun weighing a fresh effort at engagement with the government of North Korea, The New York Times reported.

Citing unnamed officials and analysts, the newspaper said a new overture to Pyongyang would be preceded by additional pressure tactics.

But it suggests that the administration of President Barack Obama has concluded that pressure alone will not be enough to move North Korea's dictator, Kim Jong-il.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton solicited ideas from outside experts and former officials about the next steps in policy toward North Korea at a high-level meeting last week, the report said.

The consensus, even among the hawks, was that the United States needed to resume some form of contact with Kim, the paper said.

Hillary expressed impatience with the current policy, which is based on ever more stringent economic sanctions and joint US-South Korean naval exercises, which have been launched in response to the sinking in March of a South Korean warship, for which South Korea blamed the North, The Times said.



British Prime Minister David Cameron holds yesterday his baby daughter, Florence Rose Endellion Cameron, who was born on August 24 during the premier's summer holiday in Cornwall. Cameron will become the first British prime minister to take statutory paternity leave, his deputy confirmed on Friday.



A woman holds a placard during a demonstration organised by French Women's rights association "Ni putes ni soumises" (Neither whores nor submissive) yesterday in front of the Eiffel tower in Paris in support of Sakineh Mohammadi-Ashtiani, 43, sentenced to death by stoning after an Iranian court found her guilty of adultery and complicity in her husband's murder. As France called on the European Union to threaten new sanctions, Iranian Foreign ministry said that execution of the sentence has been stayed pending a review by the judiciary. The banner reads "feminism never killed anyone, machismo kills everyday".

## Lead investigator in Mexico massacre goes missing

CNN ONLINE, Mexico City

A lead investigator and another official looking into the massacre of 72 migrants whose bodies were found this week in northern Mexico are missing, President Felipe Calderon said Friday.

Calderon, who was giving a speech on drug violence, initially said the body of one of the men had been found. But he was handed a note few minutes later and corrected himself, saying the investigator was missing but there was no information about his death.

Mexican media reported Friday morning that two bodies had been found and that one of them belonged to the investigator.

The attorney general's office in Tamaulipas state, where the bodies of the 72 migrants were found Tuesday, identified the investigator as Roberto Jaime Suarez Vazquez. The news release did not name the other man other than to say he is a municipal police officer in San Fernando.

Both men disappeared Wednesday afternoon, the attorney general's office said.

Authorities have identified 31 of the 72 migrants whose bodies were found on a ranch near San Fernando, the attorney general's statement said. Of those identified, 14 came from Honduras, 12 were from El Salvador, four were from Guatemala and one from Brazil, the official said.

A young man from Ecuador who led navy personnel to the scene of the massacre said he escaped after pretending he was dead. He suffered a neck wound and remained hospitalised Friday.

Officials are investigating whether the Zetas drug cartel carried out the killings, as the young man reportedly told police.

Images of the scene show the bodies lying along the inside walls of a grain barn. The migrants are blindfolded and their hands are bound. All are fully clothed.

Central American migrants travelling through Mexico on their way to the United States are often the victims of violence and other crimes.

## Iraq on highest alert for terror attacks

AP, Baghdad

The Iraqi prime minister put his nation on its highest alert for terror attacks, as insurgents hammer Iraqi security forces preparing to take over for a US combat mission that formally ends on Tuesday.

Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki said Iraqi intelligence indicated that an al-Qaida front group and members of Saddam Hussein's outlawed Baath party are collaborating to launch attacks "to create fear and chaos and kill more innocents."

"We direct the Iraqi forces, police and army and other security forces, to take the highest alert and precautionary measures to foil this criminal planning," al-Maliki said in a statement to state-run television on Friday night. He did not give details of the intelligence.

The alert was issued days before the Aug. 31 deadline for US forces to end combat operations after seven years of war and transition to primarily training and advising Iraqi troops. American troops can still go on combat patrols with Iraqi soldiers and police if asked.

## 30 YEARS AFTER COLD WAR World yet to wake up: Walesa

AFP, Gdansk

Three decades after Polish trade union Solidarity rocked the Soviet bloc, the world has yet to come to terms with the end of the Cold War, the movement's iconic founder Lech Walesa says.

"Solidarity brought to an end a period of division, paving the way for the unification of Germany and of Europe," Walesa told AFP in an interview in the Baltic port city of Gdansk, where the union was born.

A watershed August 31, 1980 deal between Poland's regime and strikers at the city's Lenin shipyard led by electrician Walesa allowed the creation of the first free labour union in the communist bloc.

The authorities backtracked in 1981 and imposed martial law to crush Solidarity, which had snowballed into a movement of 10 million members, or over one Pole in four.

Solidarity kept alive underground and returned to the spotlight in 1989, negotiating an election deal with the regime and scoring a victory that was to speed the demise of the entire bloc over the next two years.

The problem, Walesa claimed, is that the world has failed to keep up.

"We still have structures left over from the old days which still need to be reorganised and updated," he said, pointing to Nato, which lacks its Cold War-era Warsaw Pact adversary.

He also cited a system of "capitalism, which looks at the money and not the man".

"As long as we don't do anything about this, we'll be working on the basis of an outmoded vision and the world won't safe," he said. Europeans, meanwhile, need to get their act together once and for all, he insisted.

"They have to understand that the nation state's finished. In many fields there's no France, no Poland, be it ecology, information or the economy," he said, adding: "Every state has a different health service or tax system. That can't go on!"

"And there's no Europe without Turkey," the fervent Catholic said, brushing aside French and German wariness about letting the Muslim-majority nation of 75 million into the 27-nation European Union.

Walesa gave up the helm of Solidarity after becoming post-World War II Poland's first democratically-elected president in December 1990.

After one term, he lost office to ex-communist Aleksander Kwasniewski in a knife-edge 1995 poll, and saw his popularity wither.

But he bounced back, and remains an influential figure at home and abroad.

## Insurgents kill five in troubled Thai south

AFP, Yala

Suspected Islamist militants shot and killed two women and three men in a spike of violence in Thailand's restive south during the holy Muslim month of Ramadan, local police said yesterday.

A Thai Buddhist man, aged 60, and his 52-year-old wife were killed in a drive-by shooting early Friday evening as they returned home from a market in Pattani province. Both died at the scene, police said.

Later that night in the same province, a 21-year-old Muslim man was shot and killed as he travelled by motorcycle with a village chief, who was also wounded, on their way to guard a local school.

In Yala province, a 26-year-old Muslim woman was also shot dead on Friday night on her return from a market.

A 40-year-old army sub-lieutenant died in hospital early Saturday after he was shot in the head while he met local residents in Narathiwat province on Friday afternoon, police said.

The bloodshed comes after authorities warned of the potential for a large-scale attack during Ramadan, which began on August 12 in Thailand. In previous years, violence has intensified during the holy month.

## Australian PM woos 'kingmaker' MPs

AFP, Sydney

Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard courted one of five minority lawmakers key to resolving the nation's political stalemate yesterday, as polling showed their voters favoured her rival.

Julia held private talks with independent MP Andrew Wilkie, a former soldier and spy who resigned over Australia's role in the Iraq war, hoping to win his support for her to form government.

The prime minister and conservative rival Tony Abbott both failed to take a majority at last weekend's elections, resulting in the nation's first hung parliament in 70 years.

Both leaders are desperate to curry favour with Wilkie, Greens MP Adam Bandt and three rural independents in order to secure the 76 seats needed to take power, with Abbott holding 73 seats outright to Julia's 72.

Wilkie said the talks had focused on the need for gambling law reform, an issue he is passionate about, while Julia had stressed the strength of her ruling Labor party's position.

"She feels confident that she can form a government. She's very very keen to get the support of all the independents so she has a little bit of a buffer. She's very keen to get a resolution very quickly," Wilkie said.

Julia did not answer questions as she left the meeting, telling reporters only that it had been a "good discussion".

The outspoken Wilkie famously blew the whistle on the lack of evidence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, and his 2003 revelations sparked a political storm.

He is widely regarded as the most unpredictable of the minority candidates, having warned that he may not side with either major party but he confirmed Saturday that he would not hold the country to ransom or force another election.

"The most important issue for me is the public interest and that we get very very quickly a stable, competent, ethical government," he said.

The talks came as polling showed the majority of voters who brought rural independents Tony Windsor, Rob Oakeshott and Bob Katter to power wanted them to side with Abbott's Liberal-National coalition, not Julia.

A Newspoll of 1,396 voters in the trio's electorates found more than 50 percent supported Abbott, compared with about 35 percent for Julia.

Wilkie said the independents had an "important responsibility to the national interest" and should be looking beyond their own electorates.

"It's not about grandstanding, it's not about pork-barrelling, it's about quickly helping to stand up the next government of this country and making sure that it lasts the whole three years (of its term)," he said.

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