

Mattis says further Taliban assaults likely

By ROBERT BURNS
Associated Press

Western-backed Afghan defenses will not break under the weight of Taliban violence in advance of scheduled parliamentary elections in October, Defense Secretary Jim Mattis said.

In his most detailed comments on the Taliban's assault on the eastern city of Ghazni since it began Aug. 10, Mattis said the Taliban had six objectives in and around the city and failed to seize any of them. He would not specify the six sites.

In Ghazni, provincial police chief Farid Mashal said Thursday that roads were being cleared of mines planted by Taliban who temporarily held entire neighborhoods of the city that they had besieged. The fighting continued for five days with more than 100 members of the Afghan National Security forces killed and 20 civilians. Scores of Taliban were also killed, according to Afghan officials.

Mattis said Thursday some Taliban fighters were still



AP Photo/Rahmat Gul

Men carry the coffin of a relative who died in a deadly suicide bombing that targeted a training class in a private building in western Kabul, Afghanistan.

holed up in houses in the city "trying to get resupplied." He said businesses are reopening, and overall, "it's much more stable" in Ghazni, showing that the Taliban have fallen short.

"They have not endeared themselves, obviously, to the

population of Ghazni," Mattis said. "They use terror. They use bombs because they can't win with ballots."

The Taliban operation followed a familiar pattern, Mattis said in remarks to reporters flying with him Thursday

evening to Bogota, Colombia, where he was winding up a weeklong tour of South America.

The insurgents likely were trying to gain leverage in advance of an expected cease fire offer by Afghan President

Ashraf Ghani, he said. And they likely were hoping to sow fear in advance of the October elections, he added.

"They achieved a degree of disquiet," he said, but nothing more.

"So we'll continue to see

this sort of thing," he said, even though the Taliban lack the strength to hold territory they seize for brief periods. "They will never hold against the Afghan army."

The Afghan war has been stalemated for years. The Taliban lack the popular support to prevail, although they benefit from sanctuary in Pakistan. Afghan government forces, on the other hand, are too weak to decisively break the insurgents even as they develop under U.S. and NATO training and advising.

Mattis has said he believes the Afghan security forces are gaining momentum and can wear down the Taliban to the point where the insurgents would choose to talk peace. So far that approach has not produced a breakthrough.

Next week will mark one year since President Donald Trump announced a revised war strategy for Afghanistan, declaring there would be no time limit on U.S. support for the war and making a renewed push for peace negotiations.

WORLD IN BRIEF

Associated Press

Trump nixes \$92M military parade, blames DC for high cost

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump said today he had canceled plans for a Veterans Day military parade, citing the "ridiculously high" price tag — a day after U.S. officials said the November event could cost \$92 million, more than three times the price first suggested by the White House.

Trump on Twitter accused local Washington, D.C., politicians of price-gouging. But preliminary estimates from the Pentagon showed that roughly \$50 million would cover military aircraft, equipment, personnel and other support. The remainder would be borne by other agencies and largely involve security costs.

D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser shot back on Twitter today that she was the one who "finally got thru to the reality star in the White House with the realities (\$21.6M) of parades/events/demonstrations in Trump America (sad)."

The Defense Department had announced Thursday there would be no parade in 2018. Trump tweeted that perhaps something could be scheduled next year when the price "comes WAY DOWN." He did not explain how the costs would be reduced.

Col. Rob Manning, a Pentagon spokesman, said Thursday that the military and the White House had "agreed to explore opportunities in 2019," an announcement that came several hours after reports about the projected parade price tag.

Defense Secretary Jim Mattis told reporters traveling with him to Bogota, Colombia, that whoever leaked the \$92 million number to the press was "probably smoking something that is legal in my state but not in most" — a reference to his home state of Washington, where marijuana use is legal.

The parade's cost has become a politically charged issue, particularly after the Pentagon canceled a major military exercise planned for August with South Korea, in the wake of Trump's summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. Trump said the drills were provocative and that dumping them would save the U.S. "a tremendous amount of money." The Pentagon later said the Korea drills would have cost \$14 million.

The parade was expected to include troops from all five armed services — the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps and Coast Guard — as well as units in period uniforms representing earlier times in the nation's history. It also was expected to involve a number of military aircraft flyovers.

Bodies of missing wife, daughters found in Colorado

FREDERICK, Colo. — After his pregnant wife and two daughters disappeared, Christopher Watts stood on his porch in Colorado and lamented to reporters how much he missed them.

He longed for the simple things, he said, like telling his girls to eat their dinner and gazing at them as they curled up to watch cartoons.

"Last night, I had every light in the house on. I was hoping that I would just get ran over by the kids running in the door, just barrel-rushing me, but it didn't happen," he told Denver TV station KMGH.

On Thursday, Watts was in jail after being arrested on suspicion of killing his family, probably before he spoke those words. Authorities did not offer a motive.

The body of 34-year-old Shanann Watts was found on property owned by Anadarko Petroleum, one of the state's largest oil and gas drillers, where Christopher Watts worked, police said. Investigators found what they believe are the bodies of 4-year-old Bella and 3-year-old Celeste nearby on Thursday afternoon.

"As horrible as this outcome is, our role now is to do everything we can to determine exactly what occurred," John Camper, director of the Colorado Bureau of Investigation, said at a news conference in Frederick, a small town on the grassy plains north of Denver, where fast-growing subdivisions intermingle with drilling rigs and oil wells.

Watts, 33, has not been formally charged. A judge ordered him held without bail and told prosecutors to file charges by Monday afternoon. He set a Tuesday hearing to review the case.

Remains found in New Mexico desert tunnel are missing boy

SANTA FE, N.M. — Forensic investigators said Thursday they identified the remains of a Georgia boy whose father is accused of abducting him and performing purification rituals on the child as he died at a remote New Mexico desert compound. The cause of the child's death remained unknown.

The body of Abdul-ghani Wahhaj was found Aug. 6 in an underground tunnel. It was so severely decomposed that investigators could not yet determine how the severely disabled boy reported missing in December had died, New Mexico's Office of the Medical Investigator said in a statement.

A spokeswoman for the

office said it will be examining both the body and where the remains were located to seek to determine a cause and manner of death. A prosecutor said no charges regarding the death are imminent because officials don't yet know how the boy died.

"All we have is a positive ID," Donald Gallegos, the district attorney for Taos County in northern New Mexico, said in an interview. "We'll need something else, actual cause of death, manner of death."

Authorities have said they believe Abdul-ghani died in February, when he was 3.

The boy's father, Siraj Ibn Wahhaj, was among five people arrested on suspicion of child abuse at the compound near the Colorado state line, where authorities say 11 hungry children were found living in filth during a raid earlier this month. A search a few days later turned up the body in a tunnel.

Prosecutors seeking to keep Siraj Ibn Wahhaj and four members of his extended family behind bars said in court on Monday that he had been training some children at the compound to use firearms and carry out attacks on an anti-government mission that might target schools.

An FBI agent, citing interviews with two children from the compound, said Abdul-ghani died as relatives performed a ritual on the boy to cast out demonic spirits while reading from the Quran.

Police work to stop overdoses after 76 fall ill

Police swarmed a Connecticut park near Yale University and searched people's homes for drugs Thursday in an effort to prevent more overdoses from a batch of synthetic marijuana blamed for sending more than 70 people to the hospital.

Social workers and mental health professionals also responded to the New Haven Green, where most of the overdoses happened Wednesday. Authorities described a chaotic scene where people were dropping to the ground unconscious, others vomiting and some becoming lethargic.

Officials said 76 people overdosed Wednesday and 17 more fell ill Thursday. Officials weren't certain whether Thursday's overdoses involved the same batch of "K2" synthetic marijuana. No deaths were reported, and most of those brought to local hospitals have been discharged.

Synthetic marijuana, called "spice" and other names, usually is plant material sprayed with chemicals or other substances that is sold in small, colorful packets. It has been blamed for other mass overdoses across the country.

Vatican in 'shame and sorrow' over abuses in Pennsylvania

By FRANCES D'EMILIO
Associated Press

VATICAN CITY — The Vatican expressed "shame and sorrow" Thursday over a scathing Pennsylvania grand jury report about clergy who raped and molested children in six dioceses in that state, calling the abuse "criminally and morally reprehensible" and says Pope Francis wants to eradicate "this tragic horror."

In a written statement using uncharacteristically strong language for the Holy See even in matters like the long-running abuse scandals staining the U.S. church, Vatican spokesman Greg Burke sought to assure victims that "the pope is on their side."

Pope Francis himself wasn't quoted in the statement, and there was no mention of demands in the United States among some Roman Catholics for the resignation of Cardinal Donald Wuerl, the archbishop of Washington.

The grand jury report made public this week accused the cardinal of helping to protect some molester priests while he was bishop of the Pennsylvania city of Pittsburgh. Wuerl has defended his actions in Pittsburgh while apologizing for the damage inflicted on victims.

Burke said the incidents of abuse graphically documented in the report were "betrayals of trust that robbed survivors of their dignity and their faith."

"The church must learn hard lessons from its past, and there should be accountability for both abusers and those who permitted abuse to occur," he said.

Victims and their advocates for decades have



L'Osservatore Romano

Pope Francis, left, talks in 2010 with Cardinal Donald Wuerl, Archbishop of Washington, D.C., at the Vatican. On Tuesday, a Pennsylvania grand jury accused Cardinal Wuerl of helping to protect abusive priests when he was Pittsburgh's bishop.

lamented that top Catholic churchmen repeatedly put the reputation of the church ahead of obligations to protect children from harm from pedophile priests.

In a sign that Pope Francis wants to end that pervasive mind set among church hierarchy, including bishops and cardinals, he recently accepted the resignation from cardinal's rank of former Washington archbishop Theodore McCarrick amid allegations that the American prelate had engaged in sexual misconduct.

Resignations by cardinals are extremely rare, and McCarrick's was the first time a prelate lost his cardinal's rank in a sexual abuse scandal.

Burke said Francis "understands well how much these crimes can shake the faith and the spirit of believers and reiterates the call to make every effort to create a safe environment for minors and vulnerable adults in the church and in all of society."

The grand jury report documented how pedophile priests were often pro-

tested by church hierarchy or moved to other postings without the faithful being told of the priests' sexual predatory history.

The long-awaited grand jury report was full of vivid examples of horrendous abuse. In one such example, a young girl was raped by a priest visiting her while she was in a hospital following surgery to remove her tonsils. In another, a priest tied up a victim with a rope in a confessional booth, and when the victim refused to perform sex, the priest assaulted him with a crucifix.

Speaking about Francis, Burke said: "Those who have suffered are his priority, and the church wants to listen to them to root out this tragic horror that destroys the lives of the innocent."

Even before the report was released, a series of scandals over the last few decades involving pedophile priests and systematic attempts by pastors and bishops to cover up the abuse by shuttling offenders to new parishes had rocked the faith of many Catholics in the United States.

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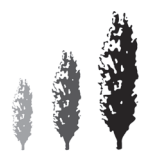
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