

# Top general recommends keeping more U.S. troops in Afghanistan

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The top U.S. commander in Afghanistan recommended on Tuesday that President Barack Obama revise his plan and keep more than 1,000 U.S. troops in the country beyond 2016, just days after a deadly U.S. airstrike “mistakenly struck” a hospital during fierce fighting in the north.

Gen. John F. Campbell told Congress that conditions on the ground have changed since Obama announced his plan in 2014 to cut the current U.S. force of 9,800 to an embassy-based security contingent of about 1,000 in Kabul post-2016. Obama has vowed to a war-weary nation to end the U.S. war in Afghanistan and get American troops out by the time he leaves office in January 2017.

Campbell said, however, that Afghanistan remains engaged in a violent battle against the Taliban, military operations in Pakistan have pushed fighters, including those linked to al-Qaida, into eastern and northern Afghanistan and the emergence of Islamic State fighters has further complicated the conflict.

Campbell, the top commander of U.S. and allied forces in Afghanistan, said that dropping to 1,000 troops would leave the United States with limited ability to train and assist the Afghan forces and even less capacity to conduct counterterrorism operations. He said the different options he has provided to his superiors are for troop levels beyond a normal embassy presence of about 1,000.

Campbell refused to discuss the numbers of troops he is recommending. But when Sen. Angus King, I-Maine, asked Campbell if he thought the president should revise his troop withdrawal plan, Campbell replied: “I will stomp my foot. Yes, sir.”

Both Defense Secretary Ash Carter and Secretary of State John Kerry have



AP Photo/Carolyn Kaster

**U.S. Forces-Afghanistan Resolute Support Mission Commander Gen. John Campbell pauses before taking his seat on Capitol Hill in Washington on Tuesday, prior to testifying before the Senate Armed Services Committee hearing on the Situation in Afghanistan.**

stressed the importance of continuing counterterrorism missions in Afghanistan, even into 2017.

In his opening remarks to the Senate Armed Services Committee, Campbell offered details about the airstrike on a medical clinic that Doctors Without Borders ran in Kunduz. He said a U.S. Special Operations unit that was close by was “talking to the aircraft that delivered” the firepower, which killed at least 22 people.

“To be clear, the decision to provide (airstrikes) was a U.S. decision, made within the U.S. chain of command,” Campbell said. “The hospital was mistakenly struck. We would never intentionally target a protected medical facility.”

In a possible indication that the attacking aircraft was given an improper go-ahead to open fire on the hospital, Campbell said he is requiring that every U.S. service member in Afghanistan be retrained on the

circumstances in which U.S. air power can be used.

The airstrike occurred as Afghan forces were retaking Kunduz from the Taliban. The insurgents staged a surprise attack from multiple sides of the city and held it for three days before Afghan security forces recaptured it with help from the U.S.-led coalition.

Campbell said Afghan forces have faltered at times, but they have shown no evidence of “fracturing.”

White House press secretary Josh Earnest said the future U.S. troop presence in Afghanistan would be determined by a variety of factors, including conditions on the ground in Afghanistan, remaining threats and what resources the U.S. can provide. He said Obama would consider input from his diplomatic and intelligence advisers, along with the views of the civilian leadership at the Pentagon and NATO allies.

## BRIEFLY

### U.S. government deports fewest immigrants in nearly a decade

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Obama administration deported fewer immigrants over the past 12 months than at any time since 2006, according to internal figures obtained by The Associated Press as Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Rodham Clinton called Obama’s deportation policies too harsh.

Deportations of criminal immigrants have fallen to the lowest levels since President Barack Obama took office in 2009, despite his pledge to focus on finding and deporting criminals living in the country illegally. The share of criminal immigrants deported in relation to overall immigrants deported rose slightly, from 56 percent to 59 percent.

The overall total of 231,000 deportations generally does not include Mexicans who were caught at the border and quickly returned home by the U.S. Border Patrol. The figure does include roughly 136,700 convicted criminals deported in the last 12 months. Total deportations dropped 42 percent since 2012.

In a statement Tuesday evening, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement spokeswoman Jennifer Elzea said the agency “has refined its priorities to improve the quality of its removals by focusing on the most serious public safety and national security threats as well as recent border crossers.”

### Chicago gun laws not as strict as they once were

CHICAGO (AP) — The mass shooting at an Oregon community college last week thrust the debate over the nation’s gun laws to the center of the presidential race. At least some of the Republicans who are running have pointed to Chicago as proof that gun control does not work.

The city has a reputation for having some of the country’s strictest gun laws but has experienced an increase in homicides and shootings this year, which Republican presidential hopefuls Donald Trump, Chris Christie and Carly Fiorina say proves their point.

“You look at Chicago, it’s got the toughest gun laws in the United States. You look at other places where they have gun laws that are very tough, they do — generally speaking — worse than anybody else,” the billionaire businessman Trump said on ABC’s “This Week” on Sunday.

Christie, who is New Jersey’s governor, echoed the sentiment Sunday, telling ABC News’ George Stephanopoulos that homicides are up in cities like Chicago and New York, which he said have “some of the most aggressive gun laws.”

But Chicago’s gun laws aren’t as tough as their reputation suggests. They once were, but courts have overturned or gutted many of them in recent years, forcing a city that once banned handguns and gun shops to allow both.

### Search for answers begins in sinking of U.S. cargo ship

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (AP) — On board the 790-foot El Faro when it set out on its doomed voyage into the path of Hurricane Joaquin were five Polish workers whose job was to prepare the engine room for a retrofiting.

Could that work have caused the loss of power that led to the U.S. container ship’s sinking?

The vessel’s owners say they don’t believe so, but the question — along with the captain’s decision to plot a course near the storm — will almost certainly be part of an investigation launched Tuesday by the National Transportation Safety Board into the disaster near the Bahamas that may have claimed 33 lives.

# Nuclear smugglers sought terrorist buyers

CHISINAU, Moldova (AP) — In the backwaters of Eastern Europe, authorities working with the FBI have interrupted four attempts in the past five years by gangs with suspected Russian connections that sought to sell radioactive material to Middle Eastern extremists. The Associated Press has learned. The latest known case came in February this year, when a smuggler offered a huge cache of deadly cesium — enough to contaminate several city blocks — and specifically sought a buyer from the Islamic State group.

Criminal organizations, some with ties to the Russian KGB’s successor agency, are driving a thriving black market in nuclear materials in the tiny and impoverished Eastern European country of Moldova, investigators say. The successful busts, however, were undercut by striking shortcomings:

Kingpins got away, and those arrested evaded long prison sentences, sometimes quickly returning to nuclear smuggling, AP found.

Moldovan police and judicial authorities shared investigative case files with the AP in an effort to spotlight how dangerous the nuclear black market has become. They say the breakdown in cooperation between Russia and the West means that it has become much harder to know whether smugglers are finding ways to move parts of Russia’s vast store of radioactive materials — an unknown quantity of which has leached into the black market.

In wiretaps, videotaped arrests, photographs of bomb-grade material, documents and interviews, AP found a troubling vulnerability in the anti-smuggling strategy. From the first known Moldovan case in 2010 to the most recent

one in February, a pattern has emerged: Authorities pounce on suspects in the early stages of a deal, giving the ringleaders a chance to escape with their nuclear contraband — an indication that the threat from the nuclear black market in the Balkans is far from under control.

Moldovan investigators can’t be sure that the suspects who fled didn’t hold on to the bulk of the nuclear materials. Nor do they know whether the groups, which are pursuing buyers who are enemies of the West, may have succeeded in selling deadly nuclear material to terrorists at a time when the Islamic State has made clear its ambition to use weapons of mass destruction.

The cases involve secret meetings in a high-end nightclub; blueprints for dirty bombs; and a nerve-shattered undercover investigator who slammed

vodka shots before heading into meetings with smugglers. Informants and a police officer posing as a connected gangster penetrated the smuggling gangs.

The operations were built on a partnership between the FBI and a small team of Moldovan investigators.

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