

INTERNATIONAL SECURITY / MIDDLE EAST UPDATE
December 19 - 31, 2013

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1. [DOD Announces Transfer of 3 Guantanamo Detainees](#) (12-31-2013)

American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Dec. 31, 2013 – The Department of Defense today announced the transfer of Yusef Abbas, Saidullah Khalik and Hajiakbar Abdul Ghuper from the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay to the government of Slovakia, according to a DOD news release.

These three detainees are the last ethnic Uighur Chinese nationals to be transferred from the Guantanamo Bay detention facility, the release said. These detainees, the release said, were subject to release from Guantanamo as a result of a court order issued on Oct. 7, 2008, by the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, and are voluntarily resettling in Slovakia.

As directed by the president's Jan. 22, 2009, executive order, the interagency Guantanamo Review Task Force conducted a comprehensive review of these cases, the release said. As a result of that review, which examined a number of factors, including security issues, these individuals were designated for transfer by unanimous consent among all six agencies on the task force, the release said.

In accordance with statutory reporting requirements, the administration informed Congress of its intent to transfer these individuals, the release said.

The United States is grateful to the government of Slovakia for this humanitarian gesture and its willingness to support U.S. efforts to close the Guantanamo Bay detention facility, the release said.

The United States coordinated with the government of Slovakia to ensure the transfer took place in accordance with appropriate security and humane treatment measures, the release said.

This transfer and resettlement constitutes a significant milestone in our effort to close the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay, the release said.

Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel remains grateful to the Defense Department's Special Envoy Paul Lewis, and Department of State Special Envoy Cliff Sloan, for their and their respective teams' many efforts that facilitated this successful transfer, the release said.

Today, 155 detainees remain at Guantanamo Bay, according to the release.

Related Sites:

[Detainee Transfer Announced](#)

2. Kerry on Assassination of Former Lebanese Cabinet Minister (12-27-2013)

U.S. Department of State, Office of the Spokesperson, December 27, 2013

Statement by Secretary Kerry

Terrorist Attack and Assassination of Mohamad Chatah

On behalf of President Obama and the United States, I condemn in the strongest possible terms today's abhorrent terrorist attack and assassination of former Lebanese Cabinet Minister Mohamad Chatah in Beirut.

This is a terrible loss for Lebanon, the Lebanese people and for the United States.

I had the privilege of spending many hours with Chatah during my visits to Beirut as a United States Senator, and I know he was a voice of reason, responsibility and moderation. His presence will be missed, but his vision for a united Lebanon, free from sectarian violence and destabilizing interference, will continue to guide our efforts.

Indeed, his tragic end reminds all of us just why his vision remains so imperative.

The Obama Administration supports Lebanon as its leaders work to bring those responsible for this heinous and cowardly attack to justice under the rule of law.

Such actions cannot be allowed to take place with impunity.

This is why we fully support the work of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon and its efforts to find and hold accountable those responsible for these reprehensible and destabilizing acts.

These acts only reinforce the strength and resolve of our commitment to support legitimate, unifying security forces in Lebanon, such as the Lebanese Armed Forces.

It also shows the importance of all parties adhering to the Taif and Baabda agreements and U.N. Security Council Resolutions 1559 and 1710, and fulfilling their commitments to all of those principles, so that Lebanon maintains its sovereignty and stability.

We stand with the Lebanese people at this time and will continue to do so.

3. Kerry on Violence in Central African Republic (12-27-2013)

U.S. Department of State, Office of the Spokesperson, December 26, 2013

Statement by Secretary Kerry

Violence in the Central African Republic

The United States is alarmed by the December 24 and 25 attacks in the Central African Republic (CAR) by both Seleka and Anti-Balaka fighters against civilian populations in the capital Bangui. These attacks resulted in dozens of deaths, including several MISCA troops, and the large-scale displacement of those living in the northern part of the city.

We were deeply disturbed by the discovery on December 26 in Bangui of a mass grave containing over 20 bodies. The continued sectarian fighting only deepens the country's wounds and makes reconciliation more difficult. The United States calls on the CAR transitional authorities to immediately end the violence, end the use of torture, and investigate and prosecute all those implicated in grave human rights abuses.

The United States believes that this crisis can only be resolved through a political process that leads to fair and inclusive elections as soon as possible, but not later than February 2015, so that CAR can have a legitimate government that represents the will of the people.

The United States commends the African Union-led stabilization mission in the CAR, MISCA, and the French forces operating as part of Operation Sangaris, for their commitment to ending the violence and establishing an environment in which a political transition to a democratically elected government can take place. We are confident the French and MISCA forces will act robustly to protect equally all civilian populations, regardless of ethnic or religious affiliation.

We call on the CAR transitional authorities to take every possible step to end violence and promote reconciliation and to provide all necessary support to MISCA and French troops in their efforts to disarm both Seleka and Anti-Balaka groups and to allow for unhindered humanitarian access to those in need.

As President Obama said, "Every citizen of the Central African Republic can show the courage that's needed right now. You can show your love for your country by rejecting the violence that would tear it apart. You can choose peace."

4. State Dept. Fact Sheet on U.S.-Iraqi Efforts to Destroy Weapons (12-26-2013)

Iraq: Decade of U.S. Support for Conventional Weapons Destruction Saves Lives and Builds Capacity

In 2013, we mark ten years of U.S. Government assistance to Iraq for Conventional Weapons Destruction, including Humanitarian Mine Action, and are proud of the programs and partnerships that enable countless Iraqi citizens to live and work in their communities more safely. The United States has invested more than \$235 million in Iraq since 2003 toward the clearance and safe disposal of landmines, unexploded ordnance, and excess conventional weapons and munitions. This

assistance, directed through several Iraqi and international nongovernmental organizations, has made significant progress toward protecting communities from potential risks, restoring access to land and infrastructure, and developing Iraqi capacity to manage weapons abatement programs independently over the long term.

The Landmine/Unexploded Ordnance Challenge

Iraq faces a significant challenge from landmines and unexploded ordnance as a result of conflicts dating back to the 1940s. In addition, large stocks of abandoned ordnance and unstable, poorly-secured munitions stockpiles also remain a threat to communities across the country. In FY 2009, the Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement in the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Political-Military Affairs invested \$4.3 million with the Iraq Mine/UXO Clearance Organization (IMCO) to conduct a CWD program that included the destruction of 37,939 weapons, ranging from pistols to 120mm mortars.

Explosive remnants of war, such as unexploded artillery shells, mortars, and other munitions still present daily hazards to Iraqi citizens across the country. Information Management and Mine Action Programs (iMMAP) conducted two Landmine Impact Surveys in 2006 and 2011 that estimated 1,513 million square meters (585 square miles) of land in Iraq contain as many as 20 million landmines and millions more pieces of unexploded ordnance.

As many as 1,430 Iraqi cities, towns and villages remain at risk from explosive hazards. Landmines and unexploded ordnance contaminate significant acreage of agricultural land, making clearance an economic necessity for communities to regain their livelihoods as well as a security priority for Iraq's future. Additional surveys will determine the full extent of the challenge facing Iraq in the years to come.

FY 2012 Accomplishments

During Fiscal Year 2012 (the last fiscal year for which complete data is available), the Department of State's Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement in the Bureau of Political-Military Affairs provided \$25 million in Iraq for Conventional Weapons Destruction (CWD) efforts that:

- Safely cleared landmines and unexploded ordnance from more than 687 million square meters (265 square miles) of land across Iraq, which has revitalized economic and agricultural development throughout the nation.
- Destroyed more than 135,430 pieces of unexploded ordnance, and abandoned or otherwise at-risk munitions.
- Provided outreach education to more than 40,000 Iraqi men, women and children about potential dangers from landmines and unexploded ordnance in their communities.

U.S.-funded partner initiatives include:

- Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD): With U.S. support and funding, the GICHD completed an assessment of Iraq's mine action capabilities and developed a two- to three-year development plan for Iraqi training and capacity development. GICHD also led a course with the Ministry of Defense and Directorate for Mine Action staff on quality assurance (QA) and quality control and on the use of demining machines in October 2012.

- Information Management and Mine Action Programs (iMMAP): With U.S. financial support, advisors continue to provide operational management, strategic planning, and Victims' Assistance support. In FY 2012, iMMAP delivered six workshops, 13 training courses, and trained 128 students in information management, data collection, and mapping. In addition, iMMAP also trained 50 rehabilitation technicians to treat thousands of landmine/unexploded ordnance and improvised explosive device survivors.
- Iraq Mine/UXO Clearance Organization (IMCO) Central/Southern Iraq: IMCO supported four technical advisors and provided landmine and unexploded ordnance clearance remediation in central and southern Iraq. Since May 2012, IMCO has returned over 3,300,000 square meters (815 acres) of land to communities through quality control checks and clearance methodologies. In addition, IMCO conducted technical and non-technical surveys of over 1,800,000 square meters (450 acres) of land, and located and handed over almost 2000 landmines and pieces of UXO to the Iraqi Ministry of Defense.
- MAG (Mines Advisory Group) Northern and Central CWD: As a result of minefield and Battle Area Clearance in FY 2012, MAG has returned more than two million square meters (507 acres) of land to local communities for agriculture and economic development.
- Marshall Legacy Institute (MLI): In partnership with IMCO, in FY 2012 MLI expanded its mine detection dog program in southern Iraq and linked three American schools to three Iraqi schools through its Children Against Mines Program to promote mine risk education in schools and provide medical assistance to young survivors.
- MLI and the Polus Center for Social and Economic Development: Working together, MLI and the Polus Center oversaw the Partnership for Iraq Program, which is establishing a cost-sharing program to create a center to provide vocational and medical rehabilitation for thousands of mine and war survivors in Basrah and the surrounding area.
- Norwegian Peoples Aid (NPA): NPA provided technical advisors to the Regional Mine Action Center - South (RMAC-S) to assist the RMAC-S in fulfilling its role as a regulatory body that is able to coordinate and monitor mine action activities. This project has enabled the RMAC-S to implement a Non-Technical Survey (NTS) designed to provide a more accurate picture of the mine/ERW situation in southern Iraq.
- Spirit of Soccer (SoS): Spirit of Soccer expanded its landmine/unexploded ordnance risk education projects throughout Iraq. Spirit of Soccer is implementing innovative projects using soccer as a means to promote education and outreach to children about risks from landmines and unexploded ordnance.

U.S. Government FY 2013 Conventional Weapons Destruction funding allocated for Iraq totals \$23.75 million. The Bureau of Political-Military Affairs is using that funding to continue humanitarian mine action programs similar to those described above and will continue these efforts in FY 2014.

The United States is the world's single largest financial supporter of efforts to clear landmines and unexploded ordnance. Since 1993, the United States has contributed more than \$2.1 billion to more than 90 countries around the world to reduce the harmful worldwide effects of at-risk, illicitly proliferated, and indiscriminately used conventional weapons of war. For more information on U.S.

humanitarian demining and Conventional Weapons Destruction programs, check out the latest edition of our annual report, *To Walk the Earth in Safety*.

For further information, please contact David McKeeby in the Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, Office of Congressional and Public Affairs at PM-CPA@state.gov.

5. President, First Lady Salute Troops, Vets, Families (12-25-2013)

American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Dec. 25, 2013 – President Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama today wished all Americans a Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays and provided special holiday greetings and thanks to U.S. military members, veterans, and their families for their service and sacrifice to the nation.

The Obamas also employed the president’s weekly address to the nation to remind Americans to visit the Joining Forces website to find ways to give back to military families. The first lady and Dr. Jill Biden, wife of Vice President Joe Biden, launched the Joining Forces campaign in April 2011 to rally national support from all sectors of society to honor and support service members, veterans and their families.

The president is currently in Hawaii on vacation with the first lady and other family members. Prior to his family’s Christmas Eve dinner yesterday, according to a White House official, the president made holiday telephone calls to U.S. military members stationed around the globe from each service branch, including personnel who were wounded during the attempted Dec. 21 aerial evacuation operation in the town of Bor in South Sudan.

Also, on Christmas Day, the president and the first lady traveled to Marine Corps Base Hawaii to visit with service members and their families. The president and first lady thanked the military members and their families for their service to the nation. The president had individual photos taken with the nearly 600 service members and their families.

The president and the first lady also said in the weekly address that during this holiday season all Americans should come together to find ways to support U.S. service members, veterans and their families, and to keep working to be good parents, friends, neighbors and citizens in their communities.

Here is the text of the president’s and first lady’s weekly national address remarks:

THE PRESIDENT: “Hello everybody, and Happy Holidays.”

THE FIRST LADY: “We know how busy this time of year is for everyone, so we’re not going to take much of your time.

“But we did want to take a moment to wish you all a Merry Christmas, from our family to yours.”

THE PRESIDENT: “This is a season for millions of Americans to be together with family, to continue long-held holiday traditions, and to show our gratitude to those we love. And along the way, some of us might even watch a little basketball or eat some Christmas cookies, too.”

THE FIRST LADY: "Here at the White House, over the past few weeks, we've had about 70,000 people from all across the country come visit us and look at our holiday decorations.

"This year's theme was, 'Gather Around: Stories of the Season.'

"And in every room of the house, we tried to tell a story about who we are as Americans and how we celebrate the holidays together.

"And we made certain to highlight some of the most powerful stories we know -- the stories of our outstanding troops, veterans, and military families and their service and sacrifice for our country."

THE PRESIDENT: "Our extraordinary men and women in uniform are serving so that the rest of us can enjoy the blessings we cherish during the holidays. But that means many of our troops are far from home and far from family. They're spending some extra time on the phone with their loved ones back home. Or they're setting up video chats so they can watch as the presents are opened. So today, we want all of our troops to know that you're in our thoughts and prayers this holiday season.

"And here's the good news: For many of our troops and newest veterans, this might be the first time in years that they've been with their families on Christmas. In fact, with the Iraq war over and the transition in Afghanistan, fewer of our men and women in uniform are deployed in harm's way than at any time in the last decade."

THE FIRST LADY: "And that's something we all can be thankful for.

"And with more and more of our troops back here at home, now it's our turn to serve -- it's our turn to step up and show our gratitude for the military families who have given us so much.

"And that's why Jill Biden and I started our Joining Forces initiative -- to rally all Americans to support our military families in ways large and small.

"And again and again, we have been overwhelmed by the response we've gotten as folks from across the country have found new ways to give back to these families through their schools, businesses, and houses of worship."

THE PRESIDENT: "That's the same spirit of giving that connects all of us during the holidays. So many people all across the country are helping out at soup kitchens, buying gifts for children in need, or organizing food or clothing drives for their neighbors. For families like ours, that service is a chance to celebrate the birth of Christ and live out what He taught us -- to love our neighbors as we would ourselves; to feed the hungry and look after the sick; to be our brother's keeper and our sister's keeper. And for all of us as Americans, regardless of our faith, those are values that can drive us to be better parents and friends, better neighbors and better citizens."

THE FIRST LADY: "So as we look to the New Year, let's pledge ourselves to living out those values by reaching out and lifting up those in our communities who could use a hand up."

THE PRESIDENT: "So Merry Christmas, everyone. And, from the two of us, as well as Malia, Sasha, Grandma, Bo ..."

THE FIRST LADY: "And Sunny, the newest Obama."

THE PRESIDENT: "We wish you all a blessed and safe holiday season."

THE FIRST LADY: "Happy holidays everybody, and God bless."

6. Budget 'Step in the Right Direction,' Hagel Says (12-19-2013)

By Claudette Roulo
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Dec. 19, 2013 – The budget deal that passed Congress yesterday means the page is turning on a prolonged period of fiscal uncertainty, Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel said today during a joint news conference with Army Gen. Martin Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

The deal, still to be signed by President Barack Obama, eases sequestration's hold on the defense budget during fiscal years 2014 and 2015, Hagel said.

"It gives us some predictability for those two years," the defense secretary explained, before noting that the deal is an encouraging step in the right direction.

At least in the short term, the bipartisan budget agreement gives the department three things it needs: certainty, time and flexibility, Dempsey said.

"And in so doing, it will allow us to address most of our near-term readiness challenges and restore some readiness that we had lost over the past year-and-a-half or so," he added.

"But, even with this agreement ... DOD still faces very difficult budget decisions," Hagel said.

The agreement reduces the original \$52 billion sequestration cut in fiscal year 2014 by roughly \$21 billion -- about a 1.2 percent reduction compared to fiscal 2013 instead of the expected 6 percent reduction. The fiscal year 2015 cuts are reduced by about \$10 billion, Hagel said.

"We'll use those funds to restore spending on readiness," the defense secretary said. "We will also work to minimize disruption to our most critical modernization efforts."

While these cuts are less than originally mandated under sequestration, they are still about \$70 billion deeper than the president's budget request, he said.

However, the department was prepared for this scenario, Hagel said.

The Strategic Choices and Management Review conducted earlier this year examined several potential budget situations, providing a baseline for DOD to work from as it sets future defense spending priorities, he said.

"We will continue to press ahead with our efforts to cut DOD's overhead and infrastructure costs, improving our acquisitions enterprise, and continue to make the tough choices on force structure," Hagel said.

The department can no longer put off military compensation reform, he continued. As they are currently structured, military compensation programs are unsustainable, Hagel said. Allowing the growth in military compensation costs to continue unchecked would force the department to make disproportionate cuts to military readiness and modernization, the defense secretary said.

“We will work with Congress to bring the rate of growth of our compensation and benefits programs in line with budget limitations and fiscal realities,” he said.

Although such cuts are unpopular, tough decisions must be made, he added. “The leadership of DOD is prepared to engage the Congress in achieving compensation reform. But any changes to cost-of-living adjustments should not apply to medically disabled retirees,” Hagel added.

“Of course, the remainder of sequestration still lurks on the horizon beyond these two years,” Dempsey said. “And so, some of the force structure changes -- force structure reductions -- that we had planned based on sequestration will march on.”

“I hope that in the time we've just now bought for ourselves, this two-year period, we can continue to have a conversation, a discussion, a debate, and an understanding about what full sequestration would do to the military forces of the United States,” the chairman said.

(Follow Claudette Roulo on Twitter @rouloafps)

Biographies:

[Chuck Hagel](#)

[Army Gen. Martin E. Dempsey](#)

Related Story:

[Hagel, Dempsey Continue Focus on Afghanistan](#)

[Transcript](#)

7. Hagel, Al-Sisi Discuss U.S.-Egypt Relationship (12-19-2013)

American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Dec. 19, 2013 – Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel called Egyptian Minister of Defense Gen. Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi this morning to provide an update on his recent visit to the Middle East and to discuss the United States-Egypt relationship, Pentagon Press Secretary Navy Rear Adm. John Kirby said in a statement issued today.

Kirby’s statement reads as follows:

Secretary Hagel called Egyptian Minister of Defense General Al-Sisi this morning to provide an update on his recent visit to the Middle East and to discuss the United States-Egypt relationship.

Secretary Hagel conveyed that the United States is committed to the U.S.-Egypt defense relationship and wants to continue working with Egypt to support a stable inclusive political transition.

He told Minister Al-Sisi that, on his visit to the Gulf region, he encouraged regional partners to continue playing a role in improving Egypt's economy and to play a constructive role in supporting Egypt's transition.

Secretary Hagel noted that the United States looks forward to Egypt's constitutional referendum in mid-January. They discussed the importance of a transparent process, in which the freedom of

expression is protected for all citizens during the campaign period, regardless of whether they support or oppose the constitution.

Secretary Hagel also expressed concern over the recent charges involving former President Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood, as well as the recent violence against a Non-Governmental Organization. The Secretary noted that civil society organizations play a vital role in any democracy and that incidences such as these can undermine confidence in the interim government's commitment to a non-violent, inclusive and sustainable democratic transition.

Secretary Hagel and Minister Al-Sisi agreed to continue to talk frequently to continue to engage on these important issues in the U.S.-Egypt relationship.

Biographies:

[Chuck Hagel](#)

Related Sites:

[Readout of Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel's Call with Egyptian Minister of Defense General Al-Sisi](#)
