

# US aid to rebels will fuel more violence

Says Russia; regime accused of new massacre

AFP, Damascus

Syria and its ally Russia yesterday denounced a US pledge to provide direct aid to rebel fighters, saying it will fuel more violence in the nearly two-year war that has killed at least 70,000 people.

The opposition, meanwhile, accused Syrian regime forces of carrying out a new "massacre" at a village in the northern province of Aleppo, with 72 people executed and burned in a raid this week.

On Thursday, the United States said it would provide direct aid to the rebels in the form of food and medical assistance, but not the weapons they hoped for, as well as \$60 million in funding for the political opposition.

US Secretary of State John Kerry announced the aid package alongside Ahmad Moaz al-Khatib of the opposition National Coalition, after talks in Rome of the Friends of Syria group of Arab and Western nations.

Kerry said the goal was to give the opposi-

tion the means to control areas it has seized, to prove to President Bashar al-Assad he cannot "shoo this way out" of the conflict.

The move is a significant shift in US policy but falls short of rebel demands for Western backers to supply the rebellion with weapons or non-offensive military equipment, such as vehicles and body armour.

Russian said the decision would backfire and encourage "extremists".

"The decisions made in Rome as well as the statements, both in letter and spirit, give direct encouragement to extremists to take power by force, despite the unavoidable suffering of ordinary Syrians," said its foreign ministry.

Also on Thursday, the European Union renewed wide-ranging sanctions against Syria's regime while leaving the door open to providing technical assistance, including training, to the opposition.

The United Nations says the conflict has cost the lives of at least 70,000 people and uprooted hundreds of thousands.

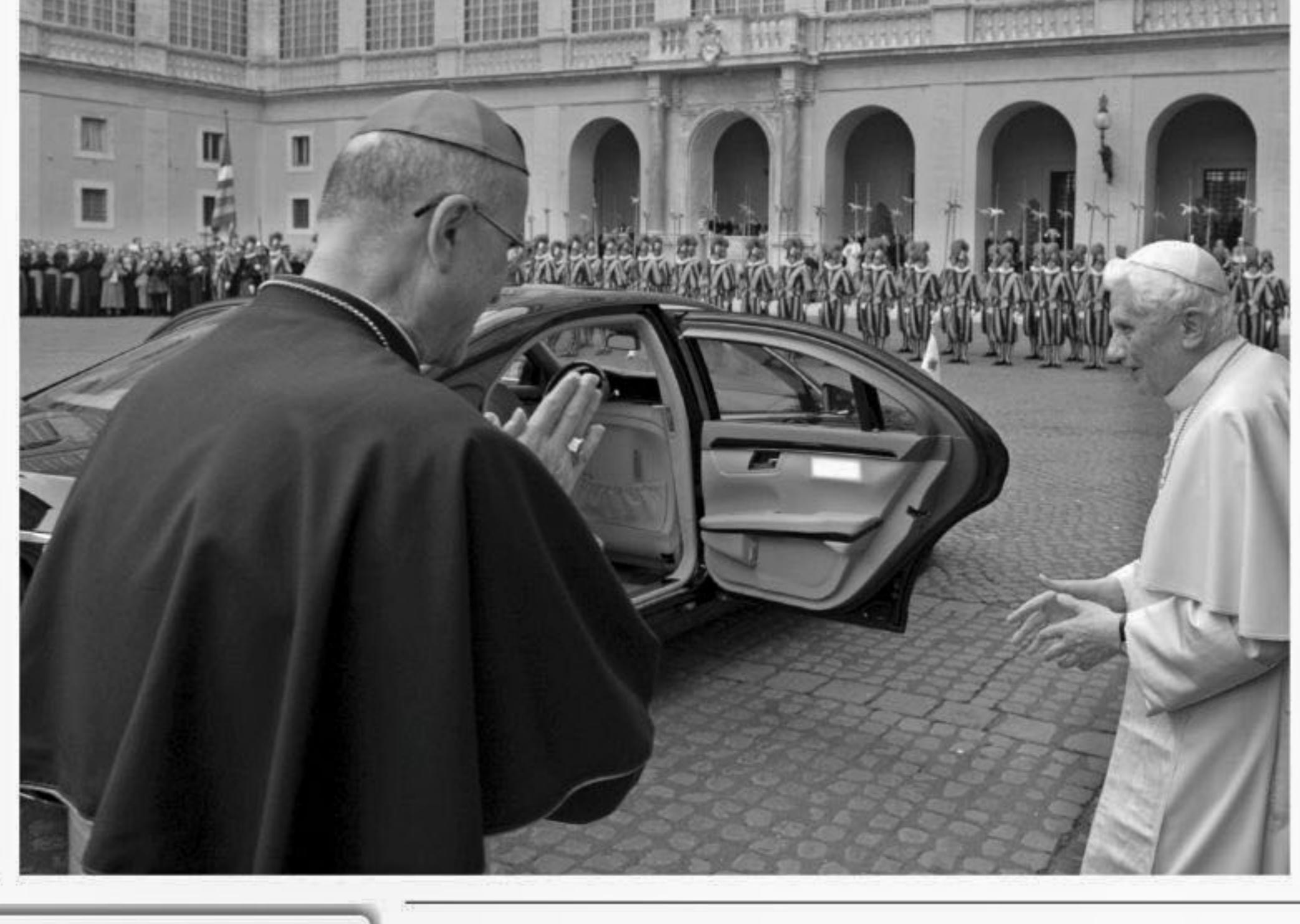
## Blasts kill eight in Iraq

AFP, Diwaniyah

Bombings in Iraq, including two car bombs at a sheep market, killed at least eight people and wounded dozens more yesterday, security and medical officials said.

The blasts came a day after at least 26 people were killed and more than 60 wounded in a series of bomb attacks in the Baghdad area and shootings in northern Iraq.

Violence in Iraq is down significantly from its 2006-2007 peak, but attacks still occur almost every day.



This picture shows Pope Benedict XVI boarding a car on his way to the heliport at the Vatican. Pope Benedict XVI has become the first pope to resign in over 700 years, telling a tearful crowd of faithful that he will now be "a simple pilgrim" as cardinals yesterday began preparing for a conclave in the Sistine Chapel to elect his successor.

PHOTO:  
AFP

## Shocking brutality

AFP, Pretoria

South Africa's police commissioner yesterday suspended eight police officers accused of dragging an immigrant taxi driver behind their patrol car and killing him, prompting an international outcry.

Twenty-seven-year-old Mozambican taxi driver Mido Macia was filmed being manhandled, handcuffed and dragged by a police van through the streets to a police station east of Johannesburg.

Just over two hours later he was found dead in custody. A post mortem found the cause of death was head injuries with internal bleeding.

The Independent Police Investigative Directorate has opened a murder investigation.

South African President Jacob Zuma earlier condemned the killing as "horrific, disturbing and unacceptable".



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## Americans had to know the 'true cost of war'

Manning reveals why he leaked secrets to WikiLeaks

THE GUARDIAN ONLINE

Bradley Manning, the soldier accused of the biggest unauthorised disclosure of state secrets in US history, has pleaded guilty to being the source of the leak, telling a military court that he passed the information to a whistleblowing website because he believed the American people had a right to know the "true costs of war".

Sitting at the defence bench in a hushed courtroom, Manning said he was sickened by the apparent "bloodlust" of a helicopter crew involved in an attack on a group in Baghdad that turned out to include Reuters correspondents and children.

Manning said: "We were obsessed with capturing and killing human targets on lists and ignoring goals and missions. I believed if the public, particularly the American public, could see this it could spark a debate on the military and our foreign policy in general [that] might cause society to reconsider the need to engage in counter-terrorism while ignoring the human situation of the people we engaged with every day."

In a highly unusual move for a defendant in such a serious criminal prosecution, Manning pleaded guilty to 10 lesser charges out of his own volition – not as part of a plea bargain with the prosecution. The charges to which the soldier pleaded guilty carry a two-year maximum sentence each, committing Manning to a possible upper limit of 20 years in military prison. But the plea does not avoid a long and complex trial for the soldier, that is currently scheduled to begin on 3 June.



## 63 Rohingyas rescued off Indonesia

AFP, Idi Rayeuk

Fishermen in western Indonesia rescued more than 60 ethnic Rohingya asylum-seekers from Myanmar found adrift in a wooden boat, police said yesterday, in the second such arrival this week.

The vessel with no engine had 23 children on board and was found drifting off the eastern coast of Sumatra island.

Fishermen in Sumatra rescued 121 Rohingya on Tuesday, with one claiming Thai authorities had shot at them and taken their food and petrol supplies to sabotage their boat as they crossed Thai waters. The UN considers the Rohingya one of the most persecuted minorities in the world.

## EGYPT CRISIS Opposition refuses to meet Kerry

AFP, Cairo

An Egyptian opposition head said he and colleague Mohamed ElBaradei have turned down invitations to meet Secretary of State John Kerry when he visits Cairo because of US pressure.

Hamdeen Sabahi, a leader of the National Salvation Front (NSF), said late Thursday that he and ElBaradei objected to Washington's call for the opposition to reconsider its boycott of Egypt's parliamentary election in April.

Kerry is expected in Egypt over the weekend.

An aide of another NSF leader, former foreign minister Amr Mussa, said Mussa would also not attend a meeting with Kerry.

The opposition has sought to ratchet the pressure on Islamist President Mohamed Morsi with a combination of street protests and a boycott of the upcoming election.

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## NEWS IN brief

### Pak-Iran pipeline work to begin

AFP, Islamabad

A consortium will start work next week on a much delayed \$7.5 billion gas pipeline from Pakistan to Iran despite American warnings of possible sanctions, Pakistani officials said yesterday.

The official said the ceremony would mark the start of work by an Iranian-Pakistani consortium on the 780-kilometre (485-mile) pipeline earmarked for the Pakistani side of the border, which is said to cost some \$1.5 billion.

Pakistan suffers from a crushing energy crisis, but the United States says it is providing Islamabad with alternative means to help avoid

### Poachers kill 13 rhinos in India

AFP, Guwahati

Poachers in northeast India have slaughtered 13 endangered one-horned rhinos in the last two months, officials said as another death added to worries about a recent surge in killings.

The attacks have taken place around the Kaziranga National Park in Assam state, home to more than two-thirds of the world's one-horned rhinos where heavily-armed poachers shoot dead the giant herbivores. At least 21 rhinos were killed last year.

On Thursday, forest rangers deployed to protect the species were engaged in a gun battle for more than seven hours but failed to prevent the

### US sailors jailed for Okinawa rape

AFP, Tokyo

Two US sailors who raped a Japanese woman in Okinawa last October were jailed yesterday for a crime that reignited long-smouldering anger against the American military in Japan.

The Naha District Court in Okinawa said Seaman Christopher Browning, 24, should go to prison for 10 years for the brutal rape of the young woman, from whom he also stole \$75. Petty officer 3rd class Skyler Dozierwalker, 23, was jailed for nine years, also for raping the woman before

### Israeli army fire wounds 3 Gazans

AFP, Gaza City

Israeli tank fire wounded three Palestinians near central Gaza's border with the Jewish state yesterday, a Palestinian medical official said.

"Three farmers, around 20 years of age, were moderately wounded by a tank shell and taken to Shifa hospital in Gaza City," health ministry spokesman Ashraf al-Qudra told AFP, adding the men had been working in fields east of east of El-Bureij refugee camp when they were hurt.

Under the terms of a November ceasefire agreement between Israel and Gaza's Hamas rulers, Palestinians are supposed to have access to arable land in a buffer zone up to 100 metres (yards) from the border fence.