

Obama's IS Strategy

DEGRADE AND DESTROY
"Our objective is clear: we will degrade, and ultimately destroy, ISIL through a comprehensive and sustained counter-terrorism strategy."

ACTION IN SYRIA
"I have made it clear that we will hunt down terrorists who threaten our country, wherever they are. That means I will not hesitate to take action against ISIL in Syria, as well as Iraq. This is a core principle of my presidency: if you threaten America, you will find no safe haven."

MORE STRIKES IN IRAQ
"Working with the Iraqi government, we will expand our efforts beyond protecting our own people and humanitarian missions, so that we're hitting ISIL targets as Iraqi forces go on offense."

NO GROUND TROOPS
"I want the American people to understand how this effort will be different from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. It will not involve American combat troops fighting on foreign soil."

HELP TO SYRIAN OPPosition
"Across the border, in Syria, we have ramped up our military assistance to the Syrian opposition. Tonight, I again call on Congress to give us additional authorities and resources to train and equip these fighters."

MORE ADVISORS IN IRAQ
"We will send an additional 475 service members to Iraq. As I have said before, these American forces will not have a combat mission - we will not get dragged into another ground war in Iraq."



US Secretary of State John Kerry meets with Prince Saud al-Faisal, foreign minister of Saudi Arabia, at King Abdulaziz International Airport Royal Terminal in Jeddah, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

MISSION TO 'DEGRADE, DESTROY IS'

On 9/11, US steps up campaign

Arabs back anti-IS move; Syria, Russia warn Washington over Syria strikes

AGENCIES

On the 13th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, Arab nations yesterday rallied behind US President Barack Obama's call to expand operations against jihadists in Iraq and Syria, as Damascus warned it would consider any action on its territory as an attack.

Ten states, including heavyweight Saudi Arabia, "agreed to do their share in the comprehensive fight" against Islamic State, said a statement after a meeting between US Secretary of State John Kerry and his Arab counterparts.

Iraq's new unity government and the Syrian opposition welcomed Obama's plan, but Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's regime and powerful ally Russia condemned it.

Obama has set out his administration's strategy for military action against the Islamic State (IS) in a televised address to the American public.

On the morning of September 11, 2001, nineteen Middle Eastern terrorists hijacked four American passenger jets and used the planes as guided missiles to attack symbolic targets on the Eastern Seaboard of the United States killing some 3,000 Americans. On September 20, President George W Bush outlined America's response to the events of September 11. In the speech, televised live around the nation and the world, Bush announced: "Our war on terror

US CONCERNED OVER SYRIA CHLORINE REPORT

The United States said it was "deeply troubled" after the world's chemical watchdog confirmed the systematic use of chlorine as a weapon in war-torn Syria.

A mission by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons found "compelling confirmation" that a toxic chemical was used "systematically and repeatedly" as a weapon in villages in northern Syria earlier this year.

begins with al-Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped, and defeated."

Less than three weeks after Bush's speech, American forces launched a military campaign in Afghanistan to capture bin Laden and overthrow Afghanistan's Taliban government. That campaign culminated with the killing of Osama bin Laden in 2011 and weakening al-Qaeda considerably.

On Wednesday, Obama announced another war against another terrorist outfit which, experts say, are more dangerous than al-Qaeda.

Obama said he had ordered the US military to expand its operations against IS in Syria, which has seized a swathe of Iraq and Syria and committed horrifying atrocities.

He said he was sending another 475 military personnel to help train Iraqi forces, but stressed that the campaign would not be a repeat of the exhausting ground wars fought by US troops in the past decade.

Instead, Washington is looking to empower partners on the ground like Iraqi and Kurdish forces, as well as Syrian rebels. US combat aircraft will soon start flying out of a base in the Kurdish region of Iraq as part of the campaign, the Pentagon said.

Kerry told reporters that Arab partners will play a "leading role" in the coalition.

Along with the Saudis, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, as well as Egypt, Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon were Arab parties to the agreement.

A final statement declared a "shared commitment to stand united against the threat posed by all terrorism, including the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant".

The fight will include "stopping the flow of foreign fighters through neighbouring countries, countering financing of ISIL and other violent extremists, repudiating their hateful ideology, ending impunity and bringing perpetrators to justice".

WORLD REACTION



Syria: Strike without consent an attack

US air strikes on Syrian territory without permission from the government in Damascus would be an "attack" on the country, a Syrian minister said. "Any action of any kind without the consent of the Syrian government would be an attack on Syria," National Reconciliation Minister Ali Haidar said when asked about US plans to widen its operations against Islamic State jihadists with air strikes on Syrian territory.

Britain: Won't join US air strikes

Britain won't join the United States in air strikes against Islamic State jihadist fighters in Syria, Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond said, without ruling out similar action in Iraq. "Let me be clear Britain will not be taking part in any air strikes in Syria," he said in Berlin.

Russia: Unilateral US strikes 'crude violation' of law

Russia said that unilateral US airstrikes on jihadists in Syria would be a crude violation of international law. "In the absence of an appropriate decision of the UN Security Council, such a step would become an act of aggression, a crude violation of the norms of international law," said Alexander Lukashevich, a spokesman for the Russian foreign ministry.

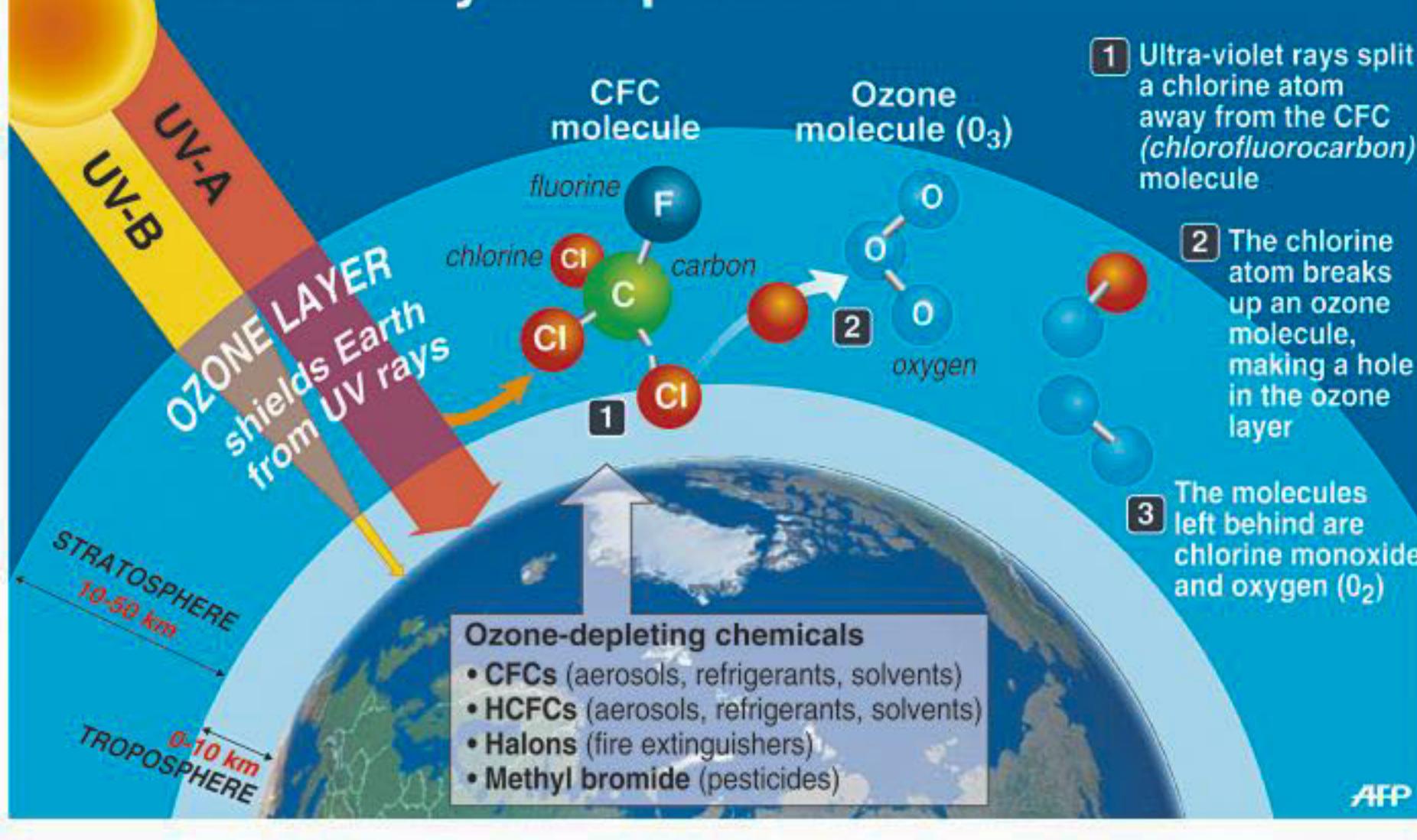
Turkey: Won't allow US to use land

Turkey will refuse to allow a US-led coalition to attack jihadists in neighbouring Iraq and Syria from its air bases, nor will it take part in combat operations against militants, a government official told AFP. "Turkey will not be involved in any armed operation but will entirely concentrate on humanitarian operations," the official said on condition of anonymity. Ankara also refused Washington permission to use its air bases to attack Saddam Hussein's regime.

Iran questions 'sincerity' of coalition

Iran doubted on the "seriousness and sincerity" of an international coalition the United States is building against the jihadist Islamic State. "Its (anti-IS coalition) seriousness and sincerity to tackle the root causes of terrorism is fundamentally questionable," foreign ministry spokeswoman Marzieh Afsham said in statements carried by official news agency IRNA.

SOURCE: AFP



Ozone layer shows first sign of recovery: UN

AFP, Paris

In some rare good news for the environment, the UN on Wednesday said Earth's damaged ozone layer was "well on track" for recovery by mid-century, although fixing it over Antarctica would take longer.

In their first review in four years on Earth's vital shield, UN agencies said a 1987 treaty to protect the ozone layer was so successful it was indirectly adding to problems in another area -- global warming.

Without the landmark Montreal Protocol, two million extra cases of skin cancer would have occurred each year by 2030 and levels of ozone-damaging compounds could have increased tenfold by 2050, the report said.

The pact had also averted ultra-violet damage to human eyesight and to plants and animals, it said.

"The Earth's protective ozone layer is well on track to recovery in the next few decades," the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) said.

Recovery to a benchmark level of 1980 "is expected to occur before mid-century in mid-latitudes and the Arctic, and somewhat later for the Antarctic ozone hole," their report said, standing by estimates made in 2010.

UNEP chief Achim Steiner hailed the Montreal Protocol, which set a timetable for scrapping chemicals that deplete the ozone, as "one of the most successful environmental treaties" in history.

Ozone is a three-atom molecule of oxygen. In the stratosphere, a layer of the atmosphere that lies at between 10 and 50 kilo-

metres in altitude, it is a natural shield for life on Earth's surface.

It filters out harmful ultra-violet light from the Sun that can cause sunburn, cataracts and skin cancer and damage vegetation.

Its thinning -- the "ozone hole" -- is caused by extreme cold temperatures at high altitude but also by man-made chlorine compounds, such as coolants in air conditioners and refrigerators, insulation foams and propellants in hair sprays.

Most of these substances, notably chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) and halons, are being phased out on schedule under the Protocol, which has been ratified by all 197 UN members.

Although it said the news for the ozone layer was generally good, the 110-page report, authored by 300 scientists, also warned of potential pitfalls.

It pointed to an ozone-eroding compound, carbon tetrachloride, whose production continues to rise, even though it is covered by the treaty.

The problem is that industries have substituted CFCs for hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs), which do not attack the ozone layer but can also be powerful trappers of solar heat.

At present, HFC emissions are the equivalent of about 500 million tonnes per year of carbon dioxide.

But they are rising at a rate of about seven percent per year, and could reach up to 8.8 billion tonnes of CO2-equivalent annually by 2050, close to that of the peak of 9.5 billion tonnes reached by CFCs in the late 1980s.

Safer substitutes that are less effective greenhouse gases do exist. Bringing these into production would "essentially" wipe out HFC's contribution to climate change, the UN experts said.

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Syria rebels free UN troops

AFP, Golan Heights

Al-Qaeda linked rebels in Syria yesterday released a group of 45 Fijian UN peacekeepers they kidnapped two weeks ago in the Golan Heights and they were transferred to Israel, officials said.

The Fijians were serving in the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force, which is monitoring a 1974 ceasefire between Israel and Syria in the Golan Heights.

All the 45 peacekeepers are in good condition, a UN statement said.

The Fijians were captured on August 28 by fighters from the Al-Nusra Front who stormed a Golan Heights crossing and forced them to surrender their weapons.

The rebels also besieged a second group of peacekeepers, Filipinos, who refused to disarm and managed to escape.

Indirect talks between Hamas and Israel are to take place mid-September in Cairo, Palestinian officials say.

Hamas itself reiterated its policy was not to talk with Israel.

Asked if Hamas would contemplate negotiating directly with Israel, Muhammed Abu Marzouq, the movement's exiled deputy leader, said it might be needed.

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HRW accuses Israel of Gaza war crimes

Tel Aviv wary of new violence if talks fail in Cairo

AFP, Jerusalem, Gaza City

Israel is likely to have committed war crimes in Gaza, Human Rights Watch said yesterday, a day after the army announced five criminal investigations into incidents involving its forces.

Meanwhile, Hamas's exiled deputy leader yesterday said the group could be forced to negotiate directly with Israel, ahead of planned talks in Cairo to consolidate a truce, while Israel's deputy foreign minister warned yesterday that Hamas was likely to resume "violence" if it feels it has made no political gains from upcoming talks in Cairo.

"There are chances that Hamas will restart its routine of violence, this is a possibility we can't ignore," Tzahi Hanegbi told Israeli army radio.

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has been little change on the ground.

Following weeks of indirect, Egyptian brokered negotiations, Israel and Hamas agreed to halt their fire in Gaza on August 26 after 50 days of war, their deadliest confrontation in years which killed more than 2,100 Palestinians, most of them civilians, and 73 people on the Israeli side, 67 of them soldiers.

The New York-based rights

watchdog said in a statement that in three cases it examined, Israel caused "numerous civilian casualties in violation of the laws of war".

The incidents were the separate shellings of two UN schools in northern Gaza on July 24 and 30, and a guided missile strike on another UN school in the southern city of Rafah on August 3.

The attacks killed a total of 45 people including 17 children, HRW said.

"Two of the three attacks Human Rights Watch investigated... did not appear to target a military objective or were otherwise unlawfully indiscriminate. The third attack in Rafah was unlawfully disproportionate if not otherwise indiscriminate."

"Unlawful attacks carried out wilfully -- that is, deliberately or recklessly -- are war crimes," it said.

Russia draws up new anti-West sanctions

EU ready to unveil new measures today

AFP, Warsaw

Moscow has drawn up new anti-Western sanctions targeting imports of consumer goods and second-hand cars, President Vladimir Putin's economic aide said yesterday, as the EU agreed to slap new punitive measures on Russia.

"As far as I know, right now the economic development ministry has already put together a list of these goods," Putin's aide Andrei Belousov was quoted as saying by the state RIA Novosti news agency.

"We have a number of non-agricultural goods where our partners -- particularly in Europe -- depend on Russia more than Russia does on them."

EU member states have agreed to bring a new round of sanctions into effect against Russia today, sending the ruble plunging to a record low against the dollar.

Belousov said companies targeted by Western sanctions would be propped up by the state. "Forms of support are now being worked out," he said.

Last month Russia banned most food imports from US and the EU in retaliation for Western sanctions.

Moscow has also threatened to block flights of European airliners over its airspace.

The new EU sanctions came as fighting in eastern Ukraine rumbles on despite a ceasefire agreed between Ukraine and separatists last week.

Meanwhile, Poland's PGNiG gas utility yesterday said its gas deliveries from Russia's Gazprom had now been cut by half, against a background of tension over the Ukraine crisis.

This was two days after it announced that the supply of gas had been cut by 24 percent.

"PGNiG has not received to date any information from Gazprom about the reasons for the reduction in gas supplies," the aide added, saying it did not know whether the cause was technical or commercial.

Tensions are running high between the countries over the escalating Ukraine conflict, where Poland has backed the government forces battling separatists in the country's east.

Amazon deforestation up 29pc in 2013

AFP, Brasilia

Deforestation in the Amazon rose 29 percent between August 2012 and July of last year to 5,891 square kilometers (2,275 square miles), Brazilian officials said Wednesday, posting an amended figure.

Last year, authorities indicated a slightly lower figure of 5,843 square kilometers for a 28 percent rise.

That reversed several years of decline despite being the second lowest annual increase since records began in 1988.

The worst year on record was 2004, with 27,000 square kilometers of forest destroyed.