

Turkey MPs back military action against ISIS

Jihadists near Kurd town despite air strikes; UN slams ISIS 'war crimes'

Turkey's parliament yesterday authorised military action in Syria and Iraq against the so called Islamic State jihadist group, whose fighters have battled their way to the doorstep of a key Kurdish border town.

The move allows the deployment of Turkish armed forces in the two neighbouring countries, as well as the transit of foreign forces in Turkish territory for operations against ISIS militants.

The broad mandate does not commit Turkey to sending soldiers into Syria and Iraq, where ISIS has captured large areas, declaring an Islamic "caliphate" and committing widespread atrocities.

The United States is pressing Ankara for the use of its Incirlik air base in southern Turkey by US jets launching assaults against IS in Syria. But it is unclear if Turkey will allow the transit of lethal weaponry and may restrict the authorisation to humanitarian aid and non-lethal supplies.

In Iraq ISIS launched attacks on two police and army bases that left dozens dead, mostly militants. At least 17 members of the Iraqi security forces were killed along with 40



A Syrian Kurdish girl holds her sister in the southeastern town of Suruc in the Sanliurfa province after they crossed the border between Syria and Turkey, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

jihadists in the overnight attacks.

It came as Kurdish militiamen backed by US-led air strikes were locked in fierce fighting to prevent the besieged Syrian border town of Kobane from falling to ISIS.

"There are real fears that the IS may be able to advance into the town of Kobane itself very soon," the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights warned.

A Kurdish official inside Kobane acknowledged that the better armed IS fighters had advanced during the night.

Meanwhile, the UN human rights chief described the array of violations and abuses perpetrated by IS and associated groups as "staggering".

"Many of their acts may amount to war crimes or crimes against human-

ity," Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein said.

His office accused the jihadists of crimes "on a massive scale," including beheadings, abductions, torture and forcing women and young girls into sexual slavery.

Kobane would be a major prize for ISIS, giving it unbroken control of a long stretch of the Syrian-Turkish border.

Washington is counting on defeating ISIS fighters first in Iraq through a combination of Kurdish forces, Iraqi army troops, Shia volunteers and a militia or "national guard" of Sunni Arab tribes -- which does not yet exist.

In Syria, the US is pinning its hopes on training and arming a new rebel army composed of vetted "moderate" recruits, at a rate of about 5,000 fighters a year.

Meanwhile, US officials kept up their warnings that fighting and defeating the militants may take long time.

Retired US general John Allen, who is leading the international effort against ISIS, told CNN "it could take years" to train a Syrian rebel force to take on the jihadists.

Even in Iraq, the fightback is proving slow, despite coalition air support.

Stopping Ebola 'world's highest priority': UN

AFP, Monrovia

The UN yesterday launched a mission to prevent the global spread of Ebola, describing the epidemic as the world's "highest priority" as the US scrambled to limit its own outbreak to one patient.

Anthony Banbury, head of the UN Mission on Ebola Emergency Response (UNMEER), began a tour of the three hardest-hit nations in the Liberian capital Monrovia setting out an ambitious goal to eradicate the deadly virus.

The agency will work on health and education, Banbury said. But it will also make more vehicles available in the response and helping Ebola-free neighbouring countries defend themselves against a possible spread.

President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf had told Banbury on his arrival in Liberia, the worst-hit nation with almost two-thirds of the 3,338 deaths in west Africa, that the virus had spread to all 15 of its counties.

The UN envoy said he was intent on contributing to "the highest priority for the international community -- for the whole world, not just the United Nations".

On Friday, he is to move on to Sierra Leone and then Guinea on Sunday.

The statement came after Save the Children yesterday warned that five people are being infected with Ebola every hour in Sierra Leone.

If the current "terrifying" rate of infection continues, 10 people will be infected every hour with the deadly virus in the country by the end of October, the London-based group warned.

EBOLA IN AFRICA

3,338 DEATHS 7,178 CASES



Country	Deaths	Cases
Liberia	1,998	3,696
Guinea	622	1,157
Sierra Leone	8/20	2,304

Many cases undeclared. Situation deteriorating, especially in Monrovia. Senegal: 1 case, cured. D.R. Congo: 42/70 Separate outbreak. SOURCE: WHO

BOSNIA WAR CRIMES TRIAL 'Karadzic was unaware of Srebrenica massacre'

AFP, The Hague

Former Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic "did not know" of the 1995 massacre of thousands of Muslims at Srebrenica, his lawyer said yesterday, seeking an acquittal in his genocide trial.

"There is not a single piece of evidence that Dr Karadzic planned or ordered the execution of prisoners (at Srebrenica), or that he knew about it," his legal advisor Peter Robinson told the Hague-based UN Yugoslav war crimes court.

"In fact they (events) were concealed from him and therefore he is not guilty of genocide," Robinson said in the second and final day of closing arguments before the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY).

Once one of Europe's most wanted men, Karadzic, 69, denies charges of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity for his role in the 1990s Balkan conflict.

Karadzic is accused of being one of the masterminds of ethnic cleansing during Bosnia's brutal civil war that claimed more than 100,000 lives and uprooted 2.2 million others.

The president of the former self-proclaimed Bosnian Serb republic faces a total of 11 charges, most notably that of genocide for his alleged role in the Srebrenica massacre.

Almost 8,000 Muslim men and boys were slaughtered and their bodies dumped in mass graves after Bosnian Serb forces overran the UN-protected enclave in eastern Bosnia in July 1995. The slaughter is deemed one of the bloodiest crimes committed on European soil since World War II.

A final verdict in the marathon five-year trial is not expected before late 2015.

"If Dr Karadzic was truly guilty of the Srebrenica killings you would have heard something more than what the prosecution has presented in five years of trial," Robinson told a four-judge bench.

"Not a single witness has testified that Radovan Karadzic planned, ordered, was even informed of the execution of prisoners from Srebrenica," he said.

On Wednesday, he told judges he was a "true friend" to Bosnia's Muslims. Although he has taken "moral responsibility" for the atrocities committed by Bosnian Serbs during the war, Karadzic denies the criminal charges.

Despite still claiming his innocence, Karadzic also apologised to victims of the crimes, accepting responsibility as the serving president at the time.

Prosecutors wrapped up their arguments on Tuesday saying life behind bars "would be the only appropriate sentence".



(From top, clockwise) Pro-democracy demonstrators attend a protest near the government headquarters early today; defiant messages are stuck on a wall of a government building; a pro-democracy protester sleeps on a road landmark. Tensions rose in Hong Kong yesterday as the government urged demonstrators to "disperse peacefully as soon as possible" after police were seen unloading boxes of rubber bullets.

'Here I am, alive'

Says Boko Haram leader in new video

AFP, Kano, Nigeria

Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau dismissed Nigerian military claims of his death in a new video obtained by AFP yesterday and said the militants had implemented strict Islamic law in captured towns.

"Here I am, alive. I will only die the day Allah takes my breath," Shekau said, adding that his group was "running our... Islamic caliphate" and administering strict sharia punishments.

Nigeria's military said last week that Shekau was dead and that a man who had been posing as the group's leader in the videos had been killed after fighting with troops in the far northeast.

Security analysts and the United States questioned the credibility of the military's claim.

There was no indication of where or when the video was shot. The heavily bearded Shekau, who appeared to be the same as those in previous clips, said the military's claim that he was dead was propaganda.

There have been two previous claims by Nigeria's security forces that Shekau was dead -- once in 2009 during unrest in Maiduguri -- and again in 2013. Following each previous claim Boko Haram has issued denials in video messages.

EU worried by Ukraine fighting despite truce

AFP, Brussels

The European Union yesterday expressed concern about new fighting in eastern Ukraine that has killed both civilians and soldiers despite a truce agreed last month between pro-Russian rebels and government troops.

The EU referred to the "tragic deaths" of several civilians Wednesday near a school in Donetsk as well as the deaths of many Ukrainian soldiers in recent weeks, mainly as a result of the shelling of Donetsk airport.

The statement called for "strict observation" of the September 5 ceasefire and implementation of a September 19 memorandum,

which was designed to reinforce the truce by creating a demilitarised zone and leading to the withdrawal of all foreign fighters.

Yesterday, pro-Russian rebels launched a fresh attack on Donetsk airport, which is held by Ukrainian troops, while the centre of the city was shelled for the first time since the truce, killing a Swiss Red Cross worker.

Nearly 70 Ukrainian troops and civilians -- along with an undisclosed number of pro-Russian separatist gunmen who control swathes of eastern Ukraine -- have been killed since Moscow and Kiev signed the 12-point peace pact on September 5.

US Secret Service chief quits

AFP, Washington

The US Secret Service director resigned Wednesday, paying the price for a string of security lapses by the elite presidential protection branch, including one in which an armed intruder ran into the White House.

Julia Pierson stepped down a day after enduring a withering public grilling by lawmakers, who pronounced themselves baffled at failures by Secret Service agents, another of which saw an armed former felon get on an elevator with President Barack Obama.

Pierson had been brought into the agency as a new broom after the reputation of its sharp-suited agents took a hit from drinking and prostitution scandals.

But she leaves with the Secret Service facing searching questions from critics who have even warned the lives of the president and his family are not safe, due to several high-profile failures.

Bowing to rising political pressure, Pierson offered her resignation and it was accepted by Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson.

Johnson appointed Joseph Clancy -- who formerly headed the presidential protection branch of the Secret Service as an interim replacement.

An independent panel will be named to probe a September 19 incident, which saw knife-carrying homeless US army veteran Omar Gonzalez allegedly jump the White House fence and run into the residence. In another incident last month, an armed security contractor with a criminal record was allowed into an elevator with Obama when he visited the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, Georgia.



Julia Pierson

Dalai Lama in 'informal' talks to return to Tibet

AFP, Dharamshala

The Dalai Lama indicated yesterday he was in informal talks with China to make a historic pilgrimage to Tibet after more than half a century in exile.

The Tibetan spiritual leader said he had "made clear" his desire to undertake the pilgrimage to a sacred mountain in his homeland to contacts in China, including retired Communist Party officials.

"It's not finalised, not yet, but the idea is there," the 79-year-old told AFP in an interview in the northern Indian hill station of Dharamshala, where he lives.

"Not formally or seriously, but informally... I express, this is my desire, and some of my friends, they are also showing their genuine interest or concern," he added.

"Recently, some Chinese officials, for example the deputy party secretary in the autonomous region of Tibet, he also mentioned the possibility of my visit as a pilgrimage to that sacred place."

The Dalai Lama has long expressed a desire to visit the Wutai Shan mountain, considered sacred by Tibetans.

spiritual leader as a "splittist" and accused him of seeking secession.

The exiled monk, who retired from politics in 2011, says he is fighting for greater autonomy for Tibetan areas.

Last month, an anonymous blog post appeared briefly on a Chinese-run website describing the Dalai Lama's return in positive terms, before it was taken down.

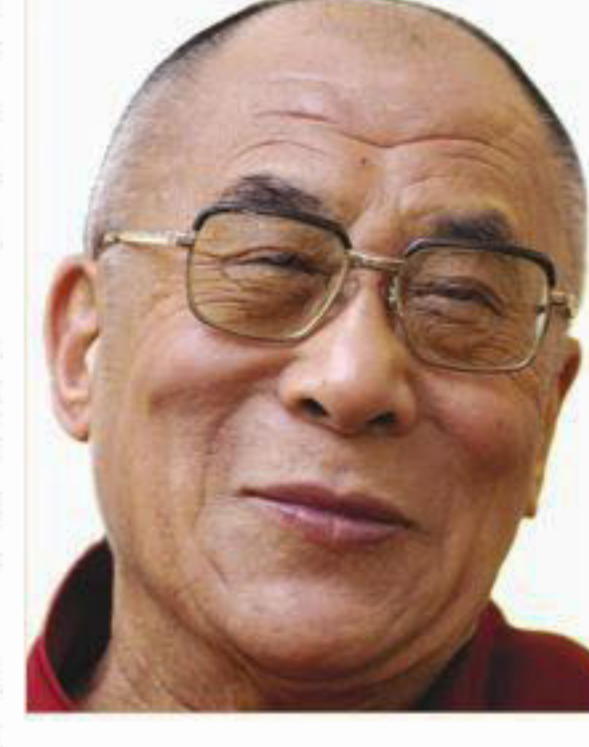
It was seen by some experts as an indication that China's tone may be softening -- a view shared by the Dalai Lama.

Yesterday, he welcomed recent comments by China's President Xi Jinping on the importance of Buddhism in Chinese society and said he was "optimistic" about the current leadership in Beijing.

"This is something very new, a Communist Party leader saying something about spirituality," said the exiled leader, who recently described Xi as "more open-minded" than his predecessors.

The Dalai Lama, who enjoyed a close relationship with Xi's father before he fled Tibet in 1959 after a failed uprising, also praised the Chinese leader for a crackdown on official corruption.

"These things show he (Xi) is approaching these problems more realistically," said the Dalai Lama.



Failing sense of smell predictor of death!

AFP, Washington

A declining sense of smell in older people is a strong predictor of death within just five years, according to research published Wednesday.

Thirty-nine percent of study subjects who failed a simple smelling test died during that period, compared to 19 percent of those with moderate smell loss and just 10 percent of those with a healthy sense of smell, the journal PLOS ONE reported.

The hazards of smell loss were "strikingly robust," according to researchers,



who said that olfactory dysfunction was better at predicting mortality than a diagnosis of heart failure, cancer or lung disease.

Only severe liver damage was a more powerful predictor of death, they said.