

SYRIA CRISIS

# Russian missiles 'fell on Iran'

BBC ONLINE

Four Russian cruise missiles fired at Syria from the Caspian Sea landed in Iran, unnamed US officials say.

It was unclear whether the missiles caused any damage, they said.

On Wednesday, Russia said it had launched 26 cruise missiles at targets in north and north-west Syria. It has reiterated comments made at the time that all reached their targets.

The news came as Nato renewed assurances to defend its allies in view of Russia's "escalation" in Syria. Nato is boosting its response forces to be able to deploy troops speedily.

The US officials provided no details of where the missiles might have landed.

However, Iran's Irna news agency reported on Wednesday that an unknown flying object had crashed in the village of Ghoghghan in the Iranian province of West Azerbaijan, said to be under the missiles' flight path.

The Islamic State militants have seized swathes of territory in Syria and Iraq.

The Russian air strikes had "weakened" IS, Syrian Army Chief of Staff Gen Ali Abdullah Ayoub said yesterday, enabling the army to start a "big attack" to retake towns and villages.

Heavy fighting was reported in areas of Idlib, Hama and Latakia provinces, where a coalition of rebels -- including the al-Qaeda-linked Nusra Front - operates.



A civil defence member from the demining unit attempts to dismantle unexploded cluster bomblets that activists say were fired on Wednesday by the Russian air force at Maasran town, in the southern countryside of Idlib, Syria yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## 33 men still missing after US air strike

Says MSF; Nato urges Kunduz probe  
AFP, Kabul

Thirty-three people are still missing five days after a catastrophic US air strike on a hospital in the Afghan city of Kunduz that has prompted international outrage, medical charity Doctors Without Borders (MSF) said yesterday.

Of the missing, nine are patients and 24 are staff according to Guilhem Molinie, country representative for MSF in Afghanistan.

"We are still in shock," Molinie told a press conference in Kabul. "We lost many colleagues and at the moment it's clear that we don't want to take the risk for any of our staff. We don't control the hospital."

Meanwhile, Nato Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg called yesterday for a full and transparent investigation into the air

## Nato renews pledge

BBC ONLINE

Nato has renewed assurances to defend allies in view of the "escalation of Russian military activities" in Syria, the alliance's secretary-general says.

Jens Stoltenberg yesterday said defence ministers had decided to boost response forces to be able to deploy troops speedily. Nato member Turkey has complained that Russian jets have violated its airspace recently.

Russia has used cruise missiles as well as air strikes in Syria. The Nato chief said Moscow's position was "unhelpful". Stoltenberg urged Moscow to stop backing Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

Jens Stoltenberg spoke of "a troubling escalation in Russia's military activities in Syria".

Moscow's support for the Assad regime, he insisted, was not a constructive policy. While there's been plenty of condemnation of Moscow here in Brussels, Nato has few options to influence Russian behaviour.

It stands ready to assist Turkey to maintain the integrity of its airspace if requested and Nato is reviewing its naval presence in the eastern Mediterranean, where the Russians already have a small naval flotilla off the Syrian coast.

Vladimir Putin's more assertive stance - first in Ukraine and now in Syria - continues to worry Nato members who share borders with Russia.

Nato ministers expressed their solidarity with Turkey as well as to address increased concern among Baltic member states following Russia's involvement in eastern Ukraine.

The UK is to station about 100 troops in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania amid tensions with Moscow. It is also



Jens Stoltenberg

## Syria army in 'vast offensive' backed by Russian strikes

Retakes key mountain range; 27 new 'terrorist' targets hit, claims Moscow; Russia will suffer, says US

AFP, Beirut

Government troops backed by Lebanon's Hezbollah and Russian air raids advanced yesterday in western Syria in a "vast offensive" against rebels, as Nato voiced alarm at Moscow's escalating military activity in the country.

Russia has dramatically stepped up its nine-day-old air war against foes of President Bashar al-Assad, with heavy bombing by warplanes and cruise missile strikes from the Caspian Sea.

A Syrian military source told the AFP that the army, backed by Russian raids and allied militia including the Hezbollah, had advanced in a key mountain range.

"They have seized most of the hilly region of Jeb al-Ahmar" which overlooks the strategic Sahl al-Ghab plain to the east and Assad's coastal stronghold of Latakia to the west, the source said.

The plain has been the focus of a months-long offensive by a rebel alliance including Al-Qaeda's Syrian affiliate, Al-Nusra Front.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a British-based monitoring group, confirmed that regime forces had advanced in the area.

In Moscow, the defence ministry said Russia's air force hit 27 "terrorist" targets in

central and northern Syria on Wednesday night.

The ministry in a statement said it had destroyed eight Islamic State strongholds near populated areas in Homs province, and hit 11 training camps linked to the group in Hama and Raqa provinces.

US Defence Secretary Ashton Carter, however, forecast yesterday that Russia would soon begin to suffer casualties of its own.

"In coming days, the Russians will begin to suffer from casualties," Carter said at a Nato defence ministers meeting in Brussels.

The Russian air war has provided cover for Assad's ground troops.

The army appeared to regain ground yesterday, after its chief of staff General Ali Abdullah Ayoub announced "a vast offensive to defeat the terrorist groups" and restore control over opposition-held areas.

Syrian state TV reported that the army had targeted "terrorist positions" in the central province of Hama, killing 32 militants and destroying four armoured vehicles.

Backed by allied militia and Russian air cover, regime troops have retaken around a dozen villages in Hama province, according to the Syrian daily Al-Watan, which is close to the government.

## Airstrikes kill 30 at Yemen wedding

Saudi-led coalition denies strikes allegation

AGENCIES

Airstrikes hit a wedding celebration in a rebel-held portion of Yemen, killing at least 30 people, local officials said, amid a months-long conflict in which a Saudi-led coalition has bombed rebel areas.

It wasn't initially clear who had carried out Wednesday's strikes in the southwestern town of Sanabani. Dozens were unaccounted for after the bombing, and hospitals have been overwhelmed with victims, three local security officials said.

The Saudi-led coalition fighting Iran-backed rebels in Yemen denied yesterday that its warplanes bombed the wedding for the second time in days, dismissing the report as rebel propaganda.

"We did not conduct any operation in Dhamar," the rebel-held province south of the capital Sanaa where the alleged strike took place, coalition spokesman Brigadier General Ahmed al-Assiri told AFP.

"No strikes there. Definitely."

The Houthi rebels are locked in a bitter conflict with forces loyal to the government of deposed Yemeni President Abdu Rabu Mansour Hadi. The pro-government fighters have the support of a Saudi-led coalition that has been bombing Houthi-held areas since March.

Coalition forces said they have no ongoing operations in the southwestern Yemeni province where Wednesday's bombing happened, reports CNN.

"Not every explosion that takes place in Yemen is an airstrike -- it could be a missile, car bomb or weapons cache," coalition spokesman Ahmed Asseri said.

## New stabbing attacks in Israel

AFP, Jerusalem

Three new stabbings wounded Israelis yesterday and one of the assailants was shot dead as a spate of such attacks spread fear and defied attempts by authorities to contain Palestinian unrest.

There have been at least eight stabbing attacks since Saturday, when a Palestinian killed two Israelis in Jerusalem's Old City, helping to prompt a security crackdown.

Riots have also spread in east Jerusalem and the West Bank.

The first attack yesterday saw a Palestinian stab a 25-year-old Jewish man in Jerusalem, leaving him in serious condition. The attacker was arrested.

Later in the day, an Israel soldier and three passers-by were stabbed in Tel Aviv and the attacker was killed.

The suspect stabbed the victims, who were lightly wounded, with a screwdriver before another soldier in the area shot him dead, police said.

## NEWS IN brief

### Wikileaks offers reward for Kunduz strike video

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Wikileaks has offered a \$50,000 award for footage from the US aircraft that bombed an MSF hospital in Afghanistan last week. In an appeal to raise the funds posted on their website yesterday the international organisation says it is raising the money to "obtain the footage, the cockpit audio, the inquiry report and other relevant materials such as the Rules of Engagement active at the time."

### Pak police arrest militant with celebrity hitlist

AFP, Karachi

Police in the Pakistani city of Karachi have arrested a suspected militant who was carrying a hitlist of celebrities, models and fashion designers, a senior official said yesterday. The list, seen by AFP, was discovered while the suspect was being interrogated by police earlier this week.

### Kyrgyzstan jails imam for supporting IS

AFP, Bishkek

Kyrgyzstan has sentenced a leading imam to five years in prison on extremism charges and for alleged support to the Islamic State group. Imam Rashot Kamalov, who is from the country's volatile south, was sentenced on charges of inciting religious hatred and distributing extremist material, the regional court in the town of Kara-Suu confirmed yesterday.



Mahmud, 28 and his bride Firal, 25, from the Syrian city of Kobane show their rings, as they arrive with other refugees and migrants on the Greek island of Lesbos, after crossing the Aegean sea from Turkey yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

### MH17 CRASH

## Missile pieces found in bodies of victims

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Pieces of missile have been found in the bodies of victims from the Malaysian Airlines Flight 17 crash last year, it has been claimed.

The fragments are believed to be from a Buk missile, Vasyil Vovk, a senior officer of the Ukrainian Security Service (SBU) who worked on the case for nearly a year, told Dutch news site NOS.

"The fragments found in the bodies of the victims and the remains of the aircraft, are elements that resemble samples from Buds given to experts for comparative research," he said, according to The Telegraph.

Vovk told NOS there was evidence the BUK "was ordered by the terrorists", adding that "Russian politicians and high-ranking military knew [it was] brought to Ukraine in July last year, aiming to knock down a plane", the Mirror reported.

But the Joint Investigation Team working on the case told NOS that other scenarios could not be excluded.

Western nations believe there is evidence the plane was hit by Russian-backed rebels. Russia has denied responsibility and has instead blamed Ukrainian government forces for the disaster.

On October 13, an international investigation led by the Dutch Safety Board will release its findings into the causes of the disaster in which 298 people died after the passenger plane was downed in July 2014.

The Boeing 777 has been travelling from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur when it crashed into Ukraine's Donetsk region, near the country's border with Russia. Among the victims were also 10 Britons.

### UN accused

## of killing 5 in DR Congo

AFP, Kinshasa

The governor of North Kivu province in the troubled eastern Democratic Republic of Congo told AFP yesterday that five civilians had been killed in a UN helicopter attack against rebel fighters this week.

The MONUSCO force, the United Nations' largest peacekeeping mission worldwide, on Tuesday announced it had carried out a helicopter-backed raid on rebels Monday under "its mandate to protect civilians" in the central Pinga region.

The raids were targeted at the Nduma Defense of Congo group, blamed for setting villages on fire in the region in recent days.

Governor Julien Paluku told AFP by phone that he had met with "a delegation" that had visited the scene.

### MIGRANT CRISIS

## EU seeks to speed up deportations

Almost 300 refugees arrested in Libya

AFP, Luxembourg

EU ministers pushed yesterday to speed up the deportation of failed asylum seekers in a bid to curb Europe's migration crisis, ahead of key talks with officials from the Balkans and nations bordering Syria.

In a sign of a tougher approach to the worst migration crisis since World War II, European interior ministers want a dedicated programme to send back "economic" migrants who are largely from African nations.

"We need to crack down on people abusing our asylum system," British Home Secretary Theresa May said as she arrived at the talks in Luxembourg.

The meeting comes a day after German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Francois Hollande both called for an overhaul of the EU's asylum system, as they made a rare joint speech to the European Parliament.

Merkel said the current Dublin regulations -- which put the burden on Mediterranean states like Greece and Italy by saying asylum applications must be handled by the first state in which a migrant lands -- were "obsolete."

However Austrian Chancellor Werner Fayman said planned EU "hotspots" on Europe's outer borders to better deal with the influx of thousands of migrants are far from ready, after he visited one such site in Greece.

Libyan authorities said almost 300 migrants, a third of them from Senegal, were arrested yesterday as they prepared to board boats for the Mediterranean crossing to Europe.

"After having received information on their meeting place, we managed to apprehend 289 migrants preparing to cross the Mediterranean headed for Europe," said Taher el-Naas, a senior official in Libya's anti-illegal immigration unit.

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