

60pc Britons back action against IS

AGENCIES

About 60 per cent of the British public back air strikes on Isis and sending in soldiers as part of an international force, according to a new poll published yesterday.

Some 24 per cent were against air strikes, the ComRes survey for the Daily Mail found. The RAF has been involved in air strikes on Isis in Iraq but extending the campaign to attack targets in Syria has proved controversial.

However David Cameron is believed to be becoming confident that he will win a vote in the Commons that would sanction British air strikes on IS targets in Syria.

The poll found 50 per cent were in favour of sending British troops to attack Isis, with 31 per cent against. But the support for such military action rose to 59 per cent if soldiers were sent as part of a broader international coalition including countries such as the US and France. It was even higher – 68 per cent – if the move was backed by the United Nations.

Meanwhile, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan yesterday called for a united front by Muslim leaders to fight extremism after the Paris attacks, warning that otherwise jihadists will commit further atrocities.

"We are at a crossroads in the fight against terrorism after the Paris attacks," Erdogan told a meeting of the Atlantic Council think-tank in Istanbul.

"I strongly condemn the terrorists, who believe in the same religion as me, and I am calling on all leaders of Muslim countries to put up a united front," he said. Turkey has supported rebel groups throughout the over four years of conflict in Syria in the hope they can help oust President

France warns of chem attack

Experts urge West to intensify air strikes 20 times to contain militants in Syria, Iraq

AFP, Paris

Prime Minister Manuel Valls yesterday warned that France was at risk of a chemical or biological weapons attack, as lawmakers voted to extend a state of emergency imposed after the Paris carnage.

Valls warned of the dangers still faced by France as he opened a parliamentary debate that later saw lawmakers extend an extraordinary package of security measures for three months.

"We must not rule anything out," Valls said. "There is also the risk from chemical or biological weapons."

He called on France's European Union partners to urgently adopt measures to share airline passenger information.

"More than ever, it's time for Europe to adopt the text... to guarantee the traceability of movements, including within the union. It's a condition of our collective security," he said.

The state of emergency will be in place from November 26.

At least 129 people were killed in the shootings and suicide bombings that targeted a concert hall, bars and restaurants and the Stade de France national stadium, Europe's second deadliest terror attack in history.

As the Paris probe widened to countries across Europe, Belgian police staged six raids in the Brussels area linked to a suicide bomber who blew himself outside the French stadium, prosecutors said.



Italy was also looking for five suspects after an FBI tip-off about possible jihadist attacks on landmark sites including St Peter's cathedral in the Vatican, the foreign minister said.

Under one of the measures being adopted in France, police officers will be allowed to carry weapons when they are off duty.

Officers will be allowed to use their guns in the event of an attack providing they wear a police armband to avoid "any confusion", according to a directive seen by AFP.

France is coming to terms with being attacked for a second time in less than year. In January, jihadist gunmen killed 17 people at Charlie Hebdo satirical magazine, on the streets and in a Jewish supermarket.

Citing security fears, the government has

cancelled two mass rallies scheduled for November 29 and December 12 -- the days before and after a key UN climate summit to be held outside Paris.

Meanwhile, Western powers must ramp up air strikes by 10 to 20 times to have any hope of disrupting the Islamic State group, which risks turning Europe into an urban guerrilla warzone, warned one of the world's leading counter-terrorism experts.

David Kilcullen, an Australian army veteran, became the senior counter-insurgency advisor to US General David Petraeus during the Iraq War and is considered a key architect of the "Awakening" strategy that helped turn the conflict around.

In an exclusive interview, he told AFP the Paris attacks showed the Islamic State group (IS) was morphing from a terrorist threat into a "structured organisation" like the IRA in Ireland or ETA in Spain during the 20th century.

"It's early days but I think we are starting to see the emergence of a fairly widespread paramilitary underground movement in Western Europe," he told AFP from Washington, where he now leads research firm Caerus Global Solutions.

Kilcullen rejected suggestions from some analysts and politicians that the West should deploy tens of thousands of troops.

What is really needed, said Kilcullen, is "a serious air campaign".

AFTERMATH OF PARIS CARNAGE

'6,000 jihadists on Interpol radar'

AFP, Madrid

Interpol has identified only 5,800 foreign fighters of the roughly 25,000 believed to have joined jihadist groups in conflict zones like Syria and Iraq, the head of the global police body said Wednesday. Law enforcement and counter terrorism officials from around the world have gathered in Seville for a three-day conference to address ways to fight Islamic State and other extremist groups.

US warned France on 'mastermind'

AFP, Washington

US intelligence warned in May that the Islamic State had developed the capability to carry out the kind of attack claimed by the extremist group in Paris and explicitly picked out the alleged mastermind. The report, citing European media called Abdelhamid Abaoud the purported leader of the Belgian plotters and said he directed operations from a safehouse in Athens using a cell phone, possibly in a bid to hide his involvement.

France bans Paris climate rallies

AFP, Paris

France Wednesday banned two citizens' rallies planned for a crunch climate conference due to open in Paris just two weeks after terror attacks killed 129 people in the French capital. Climate activists reacted with a mix of disappointment and understanding and vowed to find alternative ways to make their voice heard at the summit tasked with delivering a climate rescue pact.



US President Barack Obama and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (L) hold a bilateral meeting on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) Summit in Manila yesterday. Trudeau vowed to remain a "strong" partner in the fight against the Islamic State group.

PHOTO: AFP

Syria peace hope dims

Assad says transition can start only after terrorists' defeat

AFP, Beirut

Hopes for a quick political transition in war-ravaged Syria dimmed Thursday as embattled President Bashar al-Assad threw cold water on an ambitious timetable agreed at international talks in Vienna.

At the same time, the US held firm to its calls for Assad's departure, with President Barack Obama insisting Thursday that the war could not end unless the Syrian leader steps down.

"I do not foresee a situation in which we can end the civil war in Syria while Assad remains in power," Obama said on the sidelines of a trade summit in Manila.

Top diplomats from 17 countries met in Vienna Saturday to discuss a way out of Syria's nearly five-year conflict, which has left more than a quarter of a million people dead.

They produced a two-year timetable: a transitional government would be formed and a new constitution written within six months, to be followed by internationally monitored elections within 18 months after that.

But in a television interview with Italy's Rai television, Assad said there could be no

transition schedule for elections while swathes of Syria remained out of government control.

"This timetable starts after starting defeating terrorism. You cannot achieve anything politically while you have the terrorists taking over many areas in Syria," he said.

"If we talk after that, one year and a half to two years is enough for any transition."

Damascus refers to all opponents -- fighters and activists alike -- as terrorists.

Syria's government has insisted that combatting "terrorist groups" including the Islamic State (IS) jihadist organisation should come ahead of any political solution.

Assad also rejected the idea of UN observers monitoring elections, saying the world body had "lost all credibility".

Meanwhile, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Moscow would be ready to work with the Western coalition striking IS if its members respect Syria's sovereignty.

The remarks by world leaders have rolled back hopes that a political solution was on

ISRAEL-PALESTINIAN VIOLENCE

Five more killed

AFP, Jerusalem

A gun and car-ramming attack near a Jewish settlement in the occupied West Bank on Thursday killed at least three people and wounded others, the military said.

The dead included at least one Israeli. The attack saw at least one assailant open fire from a car before crashing into a group of pedestrians.

It was the second attack of the day, with a Palestinian having earlier stabbed to death two Israelis in Tel Aviv.

Details of the West Bank attack were still emerging. The army spoke of shots being fired, then of the attacker "intentionally" ramming his car into the pedestrians.

"Forces on sight fired towards the vehicle, identifying a hit," an army statement said.

Police said one Israeli was killed by gunfire.

Thursday's violence shattered a lull in a weeks-long wave of Palestinian gun, knife and car-ramming attacks.

The last significant attack had occurred on November 13, when an Israeli rabbi and his son were shot dead in an ambush as they drove in an area near Hebron, the focus of much of the recent violence.

Violence since October 1 has killed 84 people on the Palestinian side, including one Arab Israeli, as well as 12 Israelis.

Many of the Palestinians killed have been alleged attackers, while others have been shot dead in clashes with Israeli security forces.

World on cusp of 'post-antibiotic era'

Study says 'invincible' bacteria threatens global epidemic

AFP, Paris

Medicine's final line of defence against deadly disease has been breached, raising the spectre of a global epidemic, scientists say, after finding bacteria resistant to last-resort antibiotics.

The discovery could herald a virtual return to the Dark Ages, with doctors unable to control common germs like E. Coli, rolling back centuries of medical progress.

"These are extremely worrying results," said Liu Jian-Hua, a professor at China's Southern Agricultural University and co-author of a new study.

Liu and his colleagues found a gene, called MCR-1, that allows bacteria to become resistant to a class of antibiotics known as polymyxins, which are used to fight superbugs.

The gene, which was detected in common but deadly bacteria such as E. Coli and K. Pneumoniae -- the cause of pneumonia and blood diseases -- effectively makes bacteria invincible.

Most worryingly of all, the gene is easily spread from one strain to another, said the study, which was published in The Lancet Infectious Diseases journal, prompting warnings they could have "epidemic potential".

Until now, rare cases of resistance occurred only through mutation in individual organisms, severely limiting transmission.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has already warned antimicrobial resistance may result in "a return to the pre-antibiotic era," where even small infections -- or cuts -- could prove fatal.

The superbugs were detected during routine testing of pigs and chickens in southern China, where animals were found to be carrying bacteria resistant to colistin, a drug widely used in livestock farming.

A team of researchers then examined E Coli and K Pneumoniae samples collected from pork and chicken sold in dozens of markets

across four provinces.

They also analysed lab results from patients at two hospitals in Guangdong and Zhejiang provinces.

More than 20 percent of bacteria in the animal samples, and 15 percent of the raw meat samples, had the telltale mcr-1 gene. It was also found in 16 of the 1,322 specimens taken from hospitals.

The lower infection rate among humans almost certainly means that the resistant bacteria passed from animals to humans, the study found.

It said that while mcr-1 was "currently confined to China" it was like to spread globally.

Other types of drug resistance -- such as for tuberculosis -- show that "this likely paves the way for it to spread throughout the world," she added.

Some 480,000 people contracted multi-drug resistant tuberculosis in 2014, according to the WHO. The disease killed 190,000 in the same year.

World's second-largest diamond 'found'

BBC ONLINE

The world's second-largest gem quality diamond has been discovered in Botswana, the Lucara Diamond firm says.

The 1,111-carat stone was recovered from its Karowe mine, about 500km north of the capital, Gaborone.

It is the biggest diamond to be discovered in Botswana and the largest find in more than a century.

"The significance of the recovery of a gem quality stone larger than 1,000 carats, the largest for more than a century... cannot be overstated," William Lamb, the CEO of Lucara Diamond, a Canadian diamond producer, said in a statement.

Lucara says two other "exceptional" white diamonds - an 813-carat stone and a 374-carat stone - were also found at the Karowe mine.

"I am truly at a loss for words. This has been an amazing week for Lucara with the recovery of the second largest and also the sixth largest gem quality diamonds ever mined," Mr Lamb said.

Botswana is the world's largest producer of diamonds and the trade has transformed it into a middle-income nation.



An Afghan migrant carries her baby after arriving by a raft on the Greek island of Lesbos yesterday. Balkan countries have begun filtering the flow of migrants to Europe, granting passage to those fleeing the conflict in the Middle East and Afghanistan but turning back others from Africa and Asia, the United Nations and Reuters witnesses said yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

'Can't play Russian roulette with national security'

Republicans lash out at Obama over Syria refugees

AFP, Washington

US lawmakers forged ahead Wednesday with efforts to freeze White House plans to resettle Syrian refugees after the Paris attacks, despite President Barack Obama's veto threat.

Seizing upon fears one of the attackers may have entered Europe posing as a Syrian migrant, Republican leaders introduced legislation requiring assurances of more robust background checks and vetting before the White House can go ahead with its plan to welcome 10,000 refugees from the conflict in the coming year.

A vote on the measure, unveiled by House Homeland Security chairman Michael McCaul, could come Thursday.

"Given the lives at stake and the critical importance to our partners in the Middle East and Europe of American leadership in addressing the Syrian refugee crisis, if the President were presented with H.R. 4038, he would veto

the bill," the White House said.

The measure is aimed at strengthening vetting procedures for Syrian as well as Iraqi refugees in the wake of Friday's attacks that killed 129 people in Paris.

"I don't think we can afford to play Russian roulette with our national security," McCaul said.

But the White House countered that the legislation would "introduce unnecessary and impractical requirements that would unacceptably hamper our efforts to assist some of the most vulnerable people in the world, many of whom are victims of terrorism, and would undermine our partners in the Middle East and Europe in addressing the Syrian refugee crisis."

McCaul said lawmakers were also drafting legislation that would tighten the existing visa waiver program. The program allows citizens of certain countries to travel to the United States

without a visa.

Congress is under extraordinary pressure to act after at least 27 US state governors voiced opposition to taking in further Syrian refugees.

McCaul's plan would require the director of the FBI, the Secretary of Homeland Security and the Director of National Intelligence to certify that each refugee is not a security threat.

House Speaker Paul Ryan backs the bill, telling colleagues that it would pause the refugee program until it was certain "beyond any doubt" that the new Syrian and Iraqi settlers do not pose a threat.

The president has insisted the screening in place was enough to weed out jihadists and keep Americans safe, accusing Republicans of demonizing "widows and orphans."

Keeping it operating would promote American values, argued Obama, who has also accused Republicans of "hysteria."