

62 Syria troops killed in US-led strikes: Russia

Regime says strikes are in support of IS

More than 60 Syrian government soldiers were killed and dozens of others injured yesterday in US-led coalition air strikes on an air base in the east of the war-torn country, the Russian army said.

"Warplanes from the international anti-jihadist coalition carried out four air strikes today against Syrian forces surrounded by the Islamic State group in the Deir Ezzor air base," the army said in a statement.

"Sixty-two Syrian soldiers were killed and a hundred others were injured in these strikes." The Russian military said two F-16 and two A-10 jets flew into Syrian air space from neighbouring Iraq to carry out the strikes.

"Straight after the coalition's strikes, IS militants launched an offensive," said the statement, adding that "fierce fighting against the terrorists" ensued nearby.

"If these strikes were due to an error in the target coordinates, that would be a direct consequence of the US' refusal to coordinate with Russia its fight against the terrorist groups in Syria," it said.

Syria's army general command accused US of aiding Islamic State fighters to overrun the airport.

The air strike killed Syrian soldiers and was "conclusive evidence" that the U.S. and its allies support the jihadist group, the Syrian army said in a statement, noting that the strike was "dangerous and blatant aggression".

A strike list issued by the US yesterday said it had carried out a strike at Deir al-Zor against five Islamic State supply routes, as well as strikes near Raqqqa and elsewhere in Syria.

Syria's army controls Deir al-Zor airport and parts of the city which are otherwise entirely surrounded by territory held by Islamic State.



Syrian children play on swings, made from the remnants of exploded rockets in the rebel-held town of Douma, on the eastern edges of the capital Damascus, during the Eid-ul-Azha holidays.

PHOTO: AFP

ISRAEL-PALESTINIAN VIOLENCE

Tension high as violence spikes

AFP, Hebron

A Palestinian stabbed an Israeli soldier yesterday in the flashpoint West Bank city of Hebron before he was shot dead, the army said, in the fourth attack on Israelis in less than 24 hours.

A military statement said the attacker drew a knife during a routine security check in Hebron's Tel Rumeida neighbourhood, wounding the soldier.

"In response to the immediate threat, forces at the scene shot the assailant, resulting in his death," the statement said.

The Palestinian health ministry named the man killed as Hatem al-Shaloudi, 25.

He was a resident of Tel Rumeida, as was 16-year-old Mohammed Rajabi, shot dead during an attack on Friday. Rajabi was one of three alleged assailants killed Friday while carrying out attacks on Israelis, two in and around occupied Hebron and one in Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem.

Since October, 228 Palestinians, 34 Israelis, two Americans, one Eritrean and a Sudanese have been killed in ongoing violence, according to an AFP count.

Israel has occupied the West Bank since capturing it in the 1967 Six Day War.

In the Gaza Strip on Friday, a Palestinian medical official said that Israeli troops at the border fence east of Gaza City shot and slightly wounded three Palestinian youths.

Syria situation worsening

Russia blames US, says Washington will be 'responsible' if ceasefire collapses

AGENCIES

Russia and Syrian rebels cast doubt over the prospects for an increasingly shaky five-day-old ceasefire yesterday, with Moscow saying the situation was worsening and a senior insurgent warning that the truce "will not hold out".

The ceasefire is the result of an agreement between Russia, which backs Syrian President Bashar al-Assad with air power, and the United States, which supports some rebel groups. It has reduced the fighting since coming into effect on Monday.

However, some violence has persisted across Syria, and promised aid deliveries to besieged areas remain blocked, with both sides accusing the other of bad faith.

Russia's Defence Ministry said conditions in Syria were deteriorating, adding that it believed the ceasefire had been breached 199 times by rebels and saying the United States would be responsible if it were to collapse.

In New York, the UN Security Council cancelled an urgent meeting that had been called to discuss whether to endorse the ceasefire, billed as the "last chance" to end the five-year war that has killed 300,000 people.

The closed-door consultations were scrapped after Moscow and Washington failed to agree over disclosing details of the ceasefire to the council.

Earlier on Saturday, Russian President Vladimir Putin cast doubt over Washington's commitment to the deal, but also said he believed that securing a ceasefire was a common goal for the two countries, which both agreed to extend it on

DEVELOPMENTS

Putin casts doubts on Washington's commitment for peace

UNSC meet cancelled over disagreements

Senior rebel source says truce may not hold

Friday. He accused Syrian rebels of using a fragile ceasefire to regroup.

Insurgents say they only reluctantly accepted the initial deal, which they believe is skewed against them, because it could relieve the dire humanitarian situation in besieged areas they control, and blamed Russia for undermining the truce.

Moscow has itself accused rebels of breaking the truce and said Washington

needs to do more to make them abide by its terms, including separating from the jihadist Jabhat Fateh al-Sham, which only broke formal allegiance to al-Qaeda in July.

The five-year-old civil war has killed hundreds of thousands and displaced half the country's population, drawing in global and regional powers, causing an international refugee crisis and inspiring jihadist attacks around the world.

turn say they saw no sign of government forces ever leaving their positions.

Two convoys of aid for Aleppo have been waiting at the Turkish border for days. The UN has said both sides in the war are to blame for the delay of aid to Aleppo, where neither has yet withdrawn from the Castello Road into the city.

Warplanes strafed or bombed rebel-held areas in the northwestern province of Idlib, as well as positions north of the city of Homs and east of the city of Hama overnight, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

The Britain-based war monitoring group also reported clashes between the army and rebels or shelling overnight in the capital's Eastern Ghouta suburbs, in Ramousah south of Aleppo and in the southern province of Deraa.

Meanwhile, Israel's Iron Dome missile defence system yesterday destroyed two rockets fired from Syria at the Israeli-held zone of the Golan Heights in an apparent rise in tension between the uneasy neighbours.

Under the US-Russia deal, if the truce lasts seven days and humanitarian access is granted, Moscow and Washington are to work together to target jihadists including the Islamic State group (IS).



Both sides have accused the other of being responsible for aid deliveries being stuck far from Aleppo, where army and rebel forces were supposed to pull back from the Castello Road which leads into besieged, insurgent-held eastern districts.

Russia on Friday said the Syrian army had initially withdrawn but returned to its positions after being fired on by rebels, who in

Saudi 'royal' involved in 9/11 terror attack: Gitmo prisoner

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

An accused al-Qaeda bomb-maker who went to college in Arizona has claimed to military officials at the US base in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, that he believed an unnamed member of the Saudi royal family was part of an effort to recruit him for violent extremist acts before the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, according to a newly released transcript.

Chassan Abdallah al-Sharbi said a religious figure in Saudi Arabia used the term "your highness" during a telephone conversation with a man, just before urging al-Sharbi to return to the U.S. and take part in a plot against the US that would involve learning to fly a plane.

The Sept. 11 commission found there was no evidence to indicate that the Saudi government was an institution or Saudi senior officials individually had supported the attacks, and the kingdom's government has consistently denied it had any role in the plot. It was early 2001, and al-Sharbi had only

recently returned from the United States, where he had taken some flight school courses in Phoenix with two men who would become hijackers in the 9/11 attacks.

Al-Sharbi described the conversation in June to the Periodic Review Board, which assesses whether Guantanamo prisoners can be released. The Pentagon on Thursday posted a transcript, with parts blacked out, on the website of the board, which includes representatives from six U.S. agencies and departments.

The statement is convoluted and lacks important details, such as whether the "religious figure" might be close to any Saudi officials. It does not indicate who the Saudi royal might be. The term can be used for thousands of members of the Saudi royal family; al-Sharbi did not say he met the man.

The Saudi Embassy in Washington declined to comment on the al-Sharbi transcript. In the past, the Saudis have pointed to the 9/11 Commission, FBI investigations and other probes that found no Saudi government or royal family involvement in the attacks.



Members of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) attend the opening ceremony of the September 17-23 10th National Guerrilla Conference at the camp in Llanos del Yari, Caqueta department, Colombia, yesterday. After 52 years of armed conflict, Farc rebels open what leaders hope will be their last conference as a guerrilla army, where they are due to vote on a historic peace deal with the Colombian government.

PHOTO: AFP

Belgium reports first case of euthanasia for a minor

REUTERS, Brussels

A 17-year-old has been euthanised in Belgium in what is the first application of rules adopted by the country in 2014 allowing doctor-assisted death for minors of all ages, the head of the national committee for euthanasia said on Saturday.

Wim Distelmans, who chairs Belgium's Federal Control and Evaluation Committee on Euthanasia, said in an emailed statement that the first case was reported to his committee by a local doctor last week.

He told Reuters the minor was 17, but gave no other details. Belgium legalised euthanasia in 2002, and two years ago amended the rules to permit doctor-assisted death for minors in a hopeless medical situation and with their explicit consent.

It is the only country in the world allowing euthanasia on minors of all ages. In the neighbouring Netherlands the practice is legal for children aged at least 12.

The Belgian law allows euthanasia for minors under strict conditions. Minors have to be conscious and able to make rationale decisions when they request assisted death. Psychologists or psychiatrists must be consulted and the authorisation of the parents is required.

To undergo euthanasia, the minor must also be in a "terminal medical situation with constant and unbearable physical pain which cannot be assuaged and that will cause death in the short term," the law says.

Between 2003 and 2013, the number of patients being euthanised in Belgium rose nearly eight-fold to a total number of 8,752 cases, according to records of the national euthanasia control committee.

UN: Paris climate deal 'will enter into force by 2016'

REUTERS, Barcelona

UN officials have said they are confident the Paris climate change agreement will enter into force by the end of 2016, with at least 20 countries indicating they will join it at a UN event on Sept 21, adding to the 27 that have already done so.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has invited states to deposit their instruments of ratification or approval of the Paris deal at the one-hour event on Wednesday morning.

Leaders whose countries are not yet ready to join but plan to do so this year have been invited to contribute videos expressing their commitment, said Selwin Hart, director of the U.N. chief's climate change support team.

"When we start to look at the countries that are joining the... agreement and the countries that are going to commit to join before the end of the year, we are absolutely certain that we will have the Paris Agreement on climate change entering into

force by the end of 2016," said David Nabarro, Ban Ki-moon's special advisor on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

To take effect, the Paris climate agreement needs ratification by at least 55 parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, representing at least 55 percent of global emissions.

The officials told journalists in New York on Thursday that the United Nations had so far received 27 ratifications covering 39 percent of global emissions, including from the world's top two greenhouse gas emitters, the United States and China.

Among those expected to join formally next week are Mexico and Brazil.

Brazil completed its domestic process on Monday, but while it produces around a tenth of global carbon pollution, its share of global emissions that will count towards the Paris threshold is only 2.48 percent, as it is based on 2010 data.

UK may begin Brexit by early 2017: EU's Tusk

REUTERS, Bratislava

British Prime Minister Theresa May has signalled that she could be ready to launch formal Brexit negotiations in January or February next year, European Council President Donald Tusk said on Friday, citing a recent talk with May.

The prime minister herself has ruled out giving formal notification this year of Britain's intention to leave the European Union under Article 50 of the EU treaty.

But beyond that, she has been vague about when her government might trigger the process, which would set in motion a two-year countdown to Britain's exit.

"Prime Minister May was very open and honest with me," Tusk said of his visit to London on Sept 8.

"She declared it's almost impossible to trigger Article 50 this year but it's quite likely that they will be ready maybe in January, maybe in February next year."

The remarks in English by the former Polish premier left open whether May had indicated she would launch the process then or would simply be in a position to do so, having secured agreement in her cabinet on what Britain wants to achieve and having set up the negotiating teams London will need to deal with Brussels.

Senior officials in Brussels and national capitals say they are very anxious that Britain complete its divorce by mid-2019. Failure to hit that deadline would complicate elections to the European Parliament and the appointment of a new EU executive, the Commission, that year as well as hobble negotiations on a new seven-year EU budget.

However, Britain is wary of triggering Article 50 because this could weaken its leverage. It would then be at the mercy of an extremely tight two-year timeline to negotiate the divorce, risking a loss of preferential access to its main export market.

