



Pressure mounts on IS in Mosul

Reports say jihadists shaving beards, changing hideouts fearing assault

Islamic State group fighters were shaving their beards and changing hideouts in Mosul, residents said, as Iraqi forces moved ever closer to the city yesterday and civilians fled in growing numbers.

Reached by AFP inside Mosul, several residents said the jihadists seemed to be preparing for an assault after recent advances on the eastern front brought elite Iraqi forces to within five kilometres (three miles) of city limits.

"I saw some Daesh (IS) members and they looked completely different from the last time I saw them," said a resident of eastern Mosul who gave his name as Abu Saif.

"They had trimmed their beards and changed their clothes," the former businessman said. "They must be scared... they are also probably preparing to escape the city."

Residents and military officials said many IS fighters had relocated from eastern Mosul to their traditional bastions on the western bank of the Tigris river, closer to escape routes to Syria.

The sounds of fighting on the northern and eastern fronts of the Mosul offensive could now be heard inside the city, residents said, and US-led coalition aircraft were flying lower over the city than usual.

Tens of thousands of Iraqi fighters have been advancing on Mosul from the south, east and north after an offensive was launched on October 17 to retake the last major Iraqi city under IS control.

Some 3,000 to 5,000 IS fighters are believed to be inside Mosul, Iraq's second city, alongside more than a million trapped civilians.

Aid workers have warned of a major potential humanitarian crisis once fighting begins inside the city itself.

An Iraqi minister yesterday said that more than 3,300 civilians fleeing the fighting had sought help from the government the day before, the most for a single day so far.

As the noose tightened on Mosul, 13 defence chiefs from the 60-nation coalition meeting in Paris set their sights on Syria's Raqa, which would be the last major city under IS control if it loses Mosul.

Yesterday, US Defence Secretary Ashton Carter and his British counterpart Michael Fallon said that offensive will begin in the next few weeks. Carter said the idea of simultaneous operations against Mosul and Raqa "has been part of our planning for quite a while."

US, UK expect Raqa offensive in next few weeks



Top, Newly displaced people sit at a check point in Qayyara, east of Mosul. (Bottom pictures) Displaced Iraqi's who fled from the city of Mosul cry as they are reunited with their relatives who came two years ago to the refugee camp in the Khazer. More than 3,300 civilians fled Mosul on Tuesday, the most for a single day so far. PHOTO: AFP

SYRIA WAR

Air strikes on school kill 22

At least seven children were among 22 civilians killed yesterday in air strikes that hit a school and the surrounding area in Syria's northwestern Idlib province, a monitor said.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said "warplanes -- either Russia or Syrian -- carried out six strikes" in the village of Hass, including on a school complex.

The raids hit the village around 11:30 am, an activist with the opposition Idlib Media Centre told AFP.

"One rocket hit the entrance of the school as students were leaving to go home, after the school administration decided to end classes for the day because of the raids," the activist said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Other activists from the province circulated a gruesome photograph on social media of a child's arm, seared off above the elbow, still clutching the strap of a dusty black rucksack.

Idlib province is controlled by the Army of Conquest, an alliance of rebel groups and jihadists including the Fateh al-Sham Front, which changed its name from Al-Nusra Front after breaking off ties with al-Qaeda earlier this year.

Clinton policy on Syria would lead to WWII

Says Trump; Clinton warns supporters against complacency

US Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump said on Tuesday that Democrat Hillary Clinton's plan for Syria would "lead to World War Three," because of the potential for conflict with military forces from nuclear-armed Russia.

Meanwhile, Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton warned her supporters on Tuesday against complacency as opinion polls show her holding a clear lead over Republican rival Donald Trump with exactly two weeks left until the Nov 8 election.

Clinton received a further boost when Colin Powell, who served as Republican President George W Bush's secretary of state, said he would vote for her, according to media reports.

"I hope you will come out and vote because it's going to be a close election. Pay no attention to the polls. Don't forget, don't get complacent, because we've got to turn people out," she said in Florida, one of the key swing states that will decide the outcome of the election.

In an interview focused largely on foreign policy, Trump said defeating Islamic State is a higher priority than persuading Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to step down, playing down a long-held goal of US policy.

Trump questioned how Clinton would negotiate with Russian President Vladimir Putin after demonizing him; blamed President Barack Obama for a downturn in US relations with the Philippines under its new president, Rodrigo Duterte; bemoaned a lack of Republican unity behind his candidacy, and said he would easily win the election if the party leaders would support him.

On Syria's civil war, Trump said Clinton could drag the United States into a world war with a more aggressive posture toward resolving the conflict.

Clinton has called for the establishment of a no-fly zone and "safe zones" on the ground to protect non-combatants. Some analysts fear that protecting those zones could bring the United States into direct conflict with Russian fighter jets.

"What we should do is focus on ISIS. We should not be focusing on Syria," said Trump as he dined on fried eggs and sausage at his Trump National Doral golf resort. "You're going to end up in World War Three over Syria if we listen to Hillary Clinton."

Clinton's campaign dismissed the criticism, noting that both Republican and Democratic national security experts have denounced Trump as unfit to be commander-in-chief.

RACE TO WHITE HOUSE
12 DAYS TO GO



CLINTON LEADING AMONG YOUNG VOTERS: POLL
COLIN POWELL TO VOTE FOR DEMOCRATS

Gambia joins African queue to leave ICC

AFP, Dakar

The Gambia has become the latest African nation to announce its withdrawal from the International Criminal Court, accusing the war crimes tribunal of persecuting Africans.

The move by the poor West African nation follows similar decisions this month by South Africa and Burundi to abandon the troubled institution, set up to try the world's worst crimes.

Gambian Information Minister Sheriff Bojang said on state television that the ICC had been used "for the persecution of Africans and especially their leaders" while ignoring crimes committed by the West.

He singled out the case of former British prime minister Tony Blair, who the court decided not to indict over the Iraq war.

"The ICC, despite being called International Criminal Court, is in fact an International Caucasian Court for the persecution and humiliation of people of colour, especially Africans".

The ICC, set up in 2002, is often accused of bias against Africa and has also struggled with a lack of cooperation, including from the United States, which has signed the court's treaty but never ratified it.

COUNTERING NATO THREATS ON ITS DOORSTEPS

Russia beefs up Baltic Fleet with missiles

Criticises US troop plans in Norway

REUTERS, Moscow/stockholm

Russia is reinforcing its Baltic Fleet in Kaliningrad with two small warships armed with long-range cruise missiles to counter what it sees as a worrying Nato build-up in the region, Russia's daily Izvestia reported yesterday.

There was no official confirmation from Moscow, but the report will raise tensions in the Baltic already heightened since Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea and is likely to cause particular consternation in Poland and Lithuania which share land borders with Kaliningrad.

The reported deployment comes at a time when Nato is planning its biggest military build-up on Russia's borders since the Cold War to counter Moscow and Russian military analysts said the move looked like a direct response to Nato.

RUSSIA UNVEILS 'SATAN 2' MISSILE

A Russian missile design company has unveiled the first image of a new weapon in Russia's arsenal: the Sarmat intercontinental ballistic missile, nicknamed "Satan 2." The RS-28 Sarmat rocket "is capable of wiping out parts of the earth the size of Texas or France," Russian state news outlet Sputnik reported in May. The missile will have a range exceeding 11,000 kilometers, TASS said. The warhead will weigh 100 tons.

Norway announced Monday that 330 US Marines, to be stationed on rotation around 1,000 kilometres from the Russian border, will be engaged in training and manoeuvres from January 2017. Russia strongly condemned the move.

Izvestia cited an unnamed military source as saying that the two ships, the Serpukhov and the Zeleny Dol, had already entered the Baltic Sea and would soon become part of a newly formed division.

The Buyan-class corvettes are armed with nuclear-capable Kalibr cruise missiles, which the Russian military says have a range of at least 1,500 kilometres.

It said the Baltic Fleet's coastal defences would also be beefed up with the Bastion and Bal land-based missile systems. The Bastion is a mobile defence system armed with two anti-ship missiles with a range of up to 300 km. The Bal anti-ship missile has a similar range.



US author Paul Beatty wins Man Booker Prize

AFP, London

Paul Beatty has become the first US author to win the Man Booker Prize for his novel "The Sellout", which the novelist said should not be read as a "mono-directional" take on race.

The jury behind the world's most prestigious English-language literary award said the novel was a "shocking and unexpectedly funny" portrayal of Beatty's native Los Angeles, using satire to explore racial equality in a fictional neighbourhood.

Beatty said readers should think of the novel as a work of fiction rather than solely focusing on race.

The winner of the Man Booker receives £52,500, (\$64,100, 59,000 euros), although the real prize is seen as the huge sales prompted the moment judges announce their decision.

The Man Booker was launched in 1969 and has awarded writers including Ian McEwan, Iris Murdoch and Salman Rushdie.

IS gaining foothold in Afghanistan

kills 30 civilians in Ghor province; Pakistan says IS militants got help from Afghan LeJ on Quetta attack

AFP, Kabul

Militants linked to Islamic State jihadists abducted and killed around 30 civilians, including children, in central Afghanistan, officials said yesterday, raising concerns about the group's expanding presence beyond its eastern stronghold.

The killings occurred late Tuesday north of Firoz Koh, the capital of Ghor province, with the local government calling it a revenge attack after a local IS commander was gunned down.

IS, which controls territory across Syria and Iraq and is making steady inroads in Afghanistan, has so far not officially claimed responsibility for the attack.

"Our security forces with the help of local shepherds conducted an operation and killed a Daesh (IS) commander yesterday," Ghor Governor Nasir Khazeh told AFP.

Islamic State said on Tuesday that fighters loyal to its movement attacked a police training college in Quetta in southwest Pakistan in a raid that officials said killed 61 people.

Pakistani authorities have blamed another militant group, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), for the late-Monday siege, though the Islamic State claim included photographs of three alleged attackers.

General Sher Afgan, a senior military commander in Baluchistan, told media that calls intercepted between the attackers and their handlers suggested they were from the LeJ, a sectarian Sunni militant group.

"We came to know from the communication intercepts that there were three militants who were getting instructions from Afghanistan," Afgan said, adding a faction of LeJ was behind the attack.

MIGRANT CRISIS IN MED

25 found dead in boat off Libya coast

AFP, Rome

The French aid group Doctors without Borders (MSF) said yesterday it had found a pile of 25 migrants who died in apocalyptic conditions, perishing in a pool of fuel and seawater aboard a crowded dinghy off Libya.

The find adds to the grim evidence of the hazards of crossing the Mediterranean -- a journey that the UN said has claimed more than 3,800 lives so far this year, a record.

MSF said its chartered rescue ship, the Bourbon Argos, picked up 107 people aboard the inflatable boat on Tuesday.

The Bourbon Argos was then called away to another rescue operation nearby, saving 139 people aboard another vessel.



CALAIS MIGRANT 'JUNGLE' CAMP EVICTED

People try to move a caravan as smoke rises from fires at the "Jungle" migrant camp in Calais, northern France, yesterday, during a massive operation to clear the squalid settlement where 6,000-8,000 people have been living in dire conditions. France said it has completed an operation to move thousands of migrants out of the camp, which became a key symbol of Europe's migration crisis. PHOTO: AFP