INTERNATIONAL

Death toll hits 19 in US strikes on Syria's Iranlinked groups

AFP, Beirut

The death toll from retaliatory US strikes on Iran-linked groups in Syria following a deadly drone attack has risen to 19, a war monitor said yesterday, as Washington insisted it is not seeking conflict with Tehran.

Further rocket attacks by Iran-backed militias took place late Friday, prompting more strikes by coalition warplanes, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported.

Washington carried out the initial strikes after the Pentagon said a US contractor died — and another contractor and five military personnel were wounded — by a drone "of Iranian origin" that struck a US-led coalition base near Hasakeh in northeastern Syria on Thursday.

US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said that, at President Joe Biden's direction, he had ordered the "precision air strikes... in eastern Syria against facilities used by groups affiliated with Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps".

On Saturday, the Britain-based Observatory, which has a wide network of sources on the ground, said 19 people were killed in the first wave of US strikes: three Syrian regime soldiers and 16 members of Iran-backed forces, including 11 Syrian nationals.

Following the strikes, Biden sought to lower the temperature saying the United States "does not seek conflict with Iran, but is prepared to act forcefully to protect our people".



Protesters, surrounded by tear gas, clash with riot mobile gendarmes during a demonstration called by the collective "Bassines non merci", the environmental movement "Les Soulevements de la Terre" and the French trade union 'Confederation paysanne' to protest against the construction of a new water reserve for agricultural irrigation, in Sainte-Soline, central-western France, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFR

Water needs to be at centre of global political agenda

Says UN chief as water conference ends in New York

AFP, United Nations

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Friday delivered an urgent call for the world to modify and safeguard water resources to avert conflict and ensure future global prosperity.

Water is "the most precious common good," and "needs to be at the center of the global political agenda," Guterres said at the end of a three-day UN conference that experts said held a measure of promise.

"All of humanity's hopes for the future depend, in some way, on charting a new science-based course to bring the water action agenda to life," Guterres said.

"Now is the time to act."

Resource about a impact."

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The world is not on track to meet its 2030 water goals, including access to safe drinking

water and sanitation for all.

NGOs, governments and the private sector offered nearly 700 commitments before and during the three days of the UN gathering that drew some 10,000 participants. Pledges ranged from the construction of toilets to the restoration of 300,000 kilometers (186,400 miles) of degraded rivers and massive areas of wetlands.

Less than a third of the commitments have funding, said Charles Iceland of the World Resources Institute think tank, adding that about a third "are going to have substantial impact"

Despite this, "these voluntary commitments are a good start," he told AFP, referring in particular to a project led by Germany on the management of the Niger River basin which

touches nine nations in Africa.

"It's probably the part of the world that is the most fragile, and where we're starting to see actual violent conflict over water between different groups," he said.

But at the global level, the issue of water "is a huge problem and one conference is not going to do it," Iceland added, pleading for annual conferences on water.

"You hear a lot of pledges," Stuart Orr of WWF told AFP. "But this feels somehow quite different."

While it "is not all rosy," Orr added, "a lot of the commitments that have been made this week are very good."

He said he was "pleasantly surprised," in part, at the variety of institutions and organisations now talking about water.

Beijing yet to send arms to Moscow: Biden

AFP, Ottawa

US President Joe Biden on Friday said he believed China has not sent arms to Russia after President Vladimir Putin's forces invaded Ukraine.

"I've been hearing now for the past three months (that) China is going to provide significant weapons to Russia... They haven't yet. Doesn't mean they won't, but they haven't yet," he told a news conference during a visit to Canada.

"I don't take China lightly. I don't take Russia lightly," he added, while also suggesting that reports of their rapprochement had probably been "exaggerated."

Conversely, Biden stressed the strong ties among Western democracies, saying "if anything's happened, the West has coalesced significantly more."

He pointed to US security alliances in the Pacific

He pointed to US security alliances in the Pacific region such as the Quad which also includes Australia, India and Japan and as well as AUKUS with Australia and Britain.

During a visit by Chinese President Xi Jinping to Moscow this week, China's leader pledged a trade lifeline and some moral support, but did not commit to providing arms for Russia's depleted forces in Ukraine.

THAI ELECTION PM Prayuth nominated to run

REUTERS, Bangkok

Thailand's Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha was officially nominated yesterday for re-election as his party's first candidate for the country's next leader in polls set for May 14.

Prayuth, 69, is running with the new United Thai Nation Party, and will likely face Pheu Thai party's Paetongtarn Shinawatra, daughter and

niece of two former premiers.

The incumbent, in power since 2014 when the military toppled a civilian government, was elected as a civilian leader in 2019.

The military veteran has lagged rivals in opinion polls, but hopes to win over supporters. Pirapan Salirathavibhaga was nominated as the party's No. 2 candidate for PM.



A wildfire burns parts of rural areas in Fuente de la Reina, Spain, Friday. Firefighters yesterday said they had stopped Spain's first major wildfire of the year from spreading further through the eastern Valencia region, where it destroyed more than 4,000 hectares (9.884 acres) of forest and forced 1,500 residents to abandon their homes.



