

## Arab coalition hit legitimate military targets in Yemen's Dhamar says spokesman

Sun, 2019-09-01 14:39

DUBAI: The Arab coalition attacked a legitimate "military target" in Yemen's Dhamar, to "neutralize Houthi capabilities," coalition spokesman Col. Turki Al-Maliki said Sunday.

He said the Houthi militia were placing the lives of Yemeni people in danger by "changing the narrative" of militia positions in the area.

Maliki said the coalition had taken all measures to prevent civilian casualties while targeting a Houthi site in Dhamar

"We have proof that the site targeted at Dhamar was a Houthi military site," Maliki added.

He said the ongoing development of the weapons used by the Houthi militia "proved the presence of elements of the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard."

And Maliki said the Houthis continued to use the port of Hodeidah, despite international agreements to the contrary, to import their weapons



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[Col. Turki Al-Maliki](#)

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## [Russia accuses US of risking Idlib cease-fire with missile strike](#)

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Sun, 2019-09-01 10:26

MOSCOW: Russia accused the United States Sunday of having "compromised" a fragile cease-fire in the Syrian province of Idlib by launching a missile strike against jihadist leaders there.

The Americans hit the region "without advance notice to Russia or Turkey," which both have troops on the ground in Idlib, the Russian military said. It described the attack as "indiscriminate." The strike caused "great losses and destruction," the Russian defense ministry added in a statement, accusing Washington of having "compromised the cease-fire in the de-escalation zone of Idlib."

The US strike, which targeted leaders of Al-Qaeda in Syria, killed at least 40 jihadists, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. It came as renewed Syrian regime bombardment of Idlib killed a civilian in the first violation of a Russian-backed truce for the region that came into effect just hours before.

Syrian government air strikes on the jihadist-run Idlib region had halted earlier Saturday, after the regime agreed to a Moscow-backed cease-fire following four months of deadly bombardment that killed more than 950 civilians, the monitor said. Saturday's truce is the second such agreement between Syrian President Bashar Assad's regime and jihadists since August 1.

The Idlib region is home to some three million people, nearly half of whom have been displaced from other parts of Syria. The United Nations says the violence there has displaced more than 400,000 people.



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## [US blacklists Iranian oil tanker Adrian Darya I](#)

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Sat, 2019-08-31 04:16

WASHINGTON: The United States on Friday sanctioned an Iranian oil tanker previously held for weeks by Gibraltar and released despite Washington's efforts to keep it detained.

The US Department of Treasury said the vessel, previously known as the Grace

1, is “blocked property” under an anti-terrorist order, and “anyone providing support to the Adrian Darya 1 risks being sanctioned.”

Tensions between Tehran and Washington have risen since US President Donald Trump withdrew from a landmark 2015 nuclear deal between major powers and Iran last year and reimposed crippling unilateral sanctions.

Two weeks ago, the United States threatened a visa ban on the crew of the tanker.

Washington says the vessel is carrying crude ultimately benefiting Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Quds Force, which it has listed as a terrorist organization.

“Vessels like the Adrian Darya 1 enable the IRGC-QF to ship and transfer large volumes of oil, which they attempt to mask and sell illicitly to fund the regime’s malign activities and propagate terrorism,” said Sigal Mandelker, Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence.

Treasury said the Adrian Darya’s captain, Akhilesh Kumar, is also sanctioned under the order, which generally prohibits dealings with the blocked property by US persons.

“In addition, persons that engage in certain transactions with the individuals and entities designated today may themselves be exposed to sanctions or subject to an enforcement action,” Treasury said.

Faced with the US warnings, the tanker has been bouncing around the Mediterranean with its cargo of 2.1 million barrels of crude.



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US says anyone who allows Iran tanker Adrian Darya I to dock risks sanctions  
No docking request from Iran tanker, says Lebanon

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## US strikes Al-Qaeda leaders in Syria as regime violates Idlib ceasefire

Sat, 2019-08-31 01:19

BEIRUT: US forces attacked extremist leaders in Syria Saturday, the Pentagon said, in what a battlefield monitor called a missile strike that left at least 40 dead.

The US Defense Department said the attack targeted leaders of Al-Qaeda in Syria north of Idlib. It did not say what kind of weapon was used or give any details.

The missiles targeted leaders of terrorist groups and allied factions near Idlib, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

“A missile attack targeted a meeting held by the leaders of Hurras Al-Deen, Ansar Al-Tawhid and other allied groups inside a training camp” near Idlib city, said Rami Abdel Rahman, head of the Observatory.

The attack killed at least 40 extremist leaders, the Britain based monitor said.

The US Central Command said in a statement that the attack targeted leaders of Al-Qaeda in Syria (AQ-S) “responsible for attacks threatening US citizens, our partners and innocent civilians. Additionally, the removal of this facility will further degrade their ability to conduct future attacks and destabilize the region.”

An AFP correspondent saw clouds of black smoke rising over the area after blasts rocked the extremist stronghold.

Ambulances rushed to the site of the attack, which was closed off to journalists, he said.

It was not immediately clear if the missiles were launched from war planes or positions on the ground, the monitor said.

CENTCOM declined to say what kind of weaponry was used.

Regime bombardment on Syria’s northwest province of Idlib on Saturday killed a civilian just hours after a Russian-backed truce for the area started, Abdel Rahman also said.

The truce that came into effect on Saturday is the second such agreement between the Syrian regime and extremists since an August 1 ceasefire deal covering the Idlib region broke down only days after going into effect.

Russia-backed regime forces have been pressing an offensive against the major opposition stronghold in Idlib since April.

But Russia and Damascus are not the only players with a history of strike activity in the area.

On July 1 the United States said it had carried out a strike on Hurras Al-

Deen in northwestern Syria, in its first such operation there in two years. Al-Qaeda-linked Hurras Al-Deen was established in February 2018 and has some 1,800 fighters, including non-Syrians, according to the Observatory. The group and its ally Ansar Al-Tawhid both operate in the Idlib region and are members of a joint extremist operation room that also includes Al-Qaeda's former Syria affiliate, Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham.

Most of Idlib province and parts of neighbouring Aleppo and Latakia provinces are controlled by HTS.

Syrian state news agency SANA on Saturday said the government agreed to the Idlib ceasefire deal, which Russia said aimed "to stabilise the situation" in the anti-government bastion.

But the army "reserves the right to respond to violations" by extremists and allied rebel groups, SANA added, citing a Syrian military source.

The Idlib region is home to some three million people, nearly half of whom have been displaced from other parts of Syria.

Air strikes by Damascus and Russia have killed more than 950 civilians since the end of April, according to the Observatory.

The United Nations says the violence has also displaced more than 400,000 people.

The Idlib region is supposed to be protected from a massive government offensive by a Turkish-Russian deal struck in September 2018 that was never fully implemented as extremists refused to withdraw from a planned demilitarised cordon.

Turkey backs rebels in northwestern Syria.

"Russia and the Syrian government may be willing to give Turkey another opportunity to implement the terms of its September 2018 bilateral agreement with Russia," said Sam Heller of the International Crisis Group.

"Alternately, this ceasefire may just be an operational pause for Damascus and Moscow to consolidate their territorial gains and prepare for the next phase of their offensive," the Syria expert added.

Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad, whose forces control around 60 per cent of territory, has vowed to reclaim the rest of the country, including Idlib. Saturday's truce is the latest attempt to avert a full-blown offensive, which the UN has said would result in one of the worst humanitarian "nightmares" in Syria's eight-year conflict.

Only a few hours before it went into effect, a Russian air strike hit a health facility in Aleppo's western countryside, putting it out of service, the Observatory said.

The UN has said 43 hospitals and clinics and 87 educational facilities have been impacted by fighting since April.

"The attacks we have seen on health facilities, educational facilities and water points is one of the highest in the world," Panos Moutzis, the UN's Syria humanitarian chief, told AFP.

The Syrian conflict has killed more than 370,000 people and driven millions from their homes since it started with the brutal repression of anti-government protests in 2011.



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UN to 'facilitate' evacuations from Syria desert camp  
Russia announces ceasefire in Syria's Idlib from Saturday

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## [Daraa – cradle of Syria's uprising turns into 'chaotic' south](#)

Author:

Sat, 2019-08-31 01:12

BEIRUT: Bombings, gun violence and mysterious assassinations: In Syria's southern province of Daraa, an experiment to use surrendering opposition fighters as regime proxies has seen the area descend into lawlessness.

Unlike other parts of Syria retaken by the regime, the army has not deployed across the whole province, relying instead on its unlikely partners to ensure security.

But the surrender deal “has failed to usher in stability, and chaos reigns,” according to Salam, a former Daraa resident who left the province last month.

“The assassinations and explosions are increasing day by day,” the man in his thirties added, asking to use a pseudonym for fear of reprisals.

Some fighters and their families started evacuating Daraa in July 2018 under a surrender deal brokered by regime ally Russia after weeks of fierce bombardment.

Their loss of the province dealt a symbolic blow to the uprising, which started with massive protests in Daraa in 2011 after a group of teenagers were arrested over anti-regime graffiti.

Under the 2018 deal, opposition fighters who chose to remain were granted amnesty on condition they hand over heavy weapons. Light firearms were exempt.

After a series of victories against fighters and militants, Bashar Assad’s regime now controls around 60 percent of the country.

Regime institutions have returned to Daraa. But unlike in other parts of Syria back under regime control, from which most opposition fighters withdrew, many former opposition fighters stayed behind in Daraa.

They retain control over large rural areas to its south, west and east, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

They also hold southern parts of Daraa’s provincial capital, known as Daraa Al-Balad, the Britain-based monitor says.

Some have started working with state institutions or joined a Russian-backed contingent of the Syrian army.

Syrian military and security forces man checkpoints on the outskirts of these areas, the Observatory says.

Daraa province lies on the frontier with Jordan, which used to back opposition in the province before last year’s detente between Amman and Damascus.

It also borders Israel, which is suspected of working with Russia to prevent Iranian-backed forces from deploying near its frontier, according to analysts.

The region’s “uniqueness lies in the degree to which opposition structures have remained intact,” said Alex Simon of the Synaps network, a Beirut-based research group.

The regime’s “comparatively hands-off approach” to the province reflects an “effort to economise what remains of a depleted military apparatus,” he said.

Simon said former opposition factions “make convenient proxies for the

Russians and the regime" in areas where the army is absent.

"But they're also a liability: Residual weapons and simmering anti-Assad sentiment create the potential for violent flareups," he added.

Loyalists in Daraa routinely face the menace of explosions and gunfire, says the Observatory, which has documented 60 such attacks since June.

Omar Al-Hariri, an opposition activist, said the proliferation of weapons in a province still bubbling with anti-Assad sentiment "will naturally result in the formation of sleeper cells."

"This is why operations against the regime have started to intensify," the Daraa-born activist told AFP.

But, Rifaat, another Daraa resident, said it was impossible to determine who is responsible.

"There are weapons in every house," he told AFP, also using a pseudonym.

"Anyone can murder anyone for whatever reason."

The UN says civilians working with state institutions, as well as former opposition fighters, have been hit by seemingly targeted killings.

In March, dozens took part in a rare protest after a statue of Assad's late father, Hafez Assad, was erected to replace one destroyed by protesters at the start of the uprising.

And last month, anti-regime graffiti re-appeared on a Daraa wall.

Daraa is similar to other former opposition bastions in that hundreds there have been detained and forcibly conscripted into Assad's army despite the so-called "reconciliation deals."

Between July 26 last year and the end of March, at least 380 people were arrested or detained, the UN says.

"Many of those arrested were humanitarians, army defectors or people affiliated with anti-government forces," said Sara Kayyali, Syria researcher at Human Rights Watch.

Such abuses have transformed reconciliation promises into "empty words," she said.

To avoid arrest or conscription, Rifaat said he does not leave Daraa Al-Balad.

"There are many others just like me," he told AFP.

"As long as we don't cross regime checkpoints outside the area, nobody can reach us."

Rifaat said he sometimes feels as if he is under siege.

But, he said, that is “a million times better than fighting with the regime or being imprisoned.”



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