

## So Far US Avoids Syria's Civil War

WASHINGTON (AP) — The United States has avoided military involvement in Syria's three-year-civil war thus far. Faced with an Islamist extremist group making gains across the region and the beheading an American journalist, the Obama administration's resistance may be weakening.

The White House said Friday that the president has received no military options beyond those he authorized earlier this month for limited airstrikes in Iraq and military aid to Iraqi and Kurdish forces. But a top adviser raised the possibility of a broader American military campaign that targets the Islamic State group's bases in Syria, saying the U.S. would take whatever action is necessary to protect national security.

"We're not going to be restricted by borders," said Ben Rhodes, President Barack Obama's deputy national security adviser.

Rhodes spoke a day after Obama's top military adviser warned the extremists cannot be defeated without "addressing" their sanctuary in Syria.

Many prominent Republicans and some Democrats have called on Obama to hit back harder at the Islamic State.

## Sunni Freeze Take After 64 Killed

BAGHDAD (AP) — Gunmen attacked a Sunni mosque during Friday prayers and killed at least 64 people, prompting Sunni lawmakers to withdraw from talks on forming a new, more inclusive government capable of confronting the Islamic extremists who have overrun large swaths of Iraq.

It was not immediately clear if the attack was carried out by Shiite militiamen or insurgents of the Islamic State group, who have been advancing into mixed Sunni-Shiite areas in volatile Diyala province and have been known to kill fellow Sunni Muslims who refuse to submit to their harsh interpretation of Islamic law.

However, Sunni lawmakers quickly blamed the carnage on powerful Shiite militias out to avenge an earlier bombing, and two major Sunni parliamentary blocs pulled out of talks on forming a new Cabinet. The move creates a major hurdle for prime minister-designate Haider al-Abadi as he struggles to reach out to disaffected Sunnis to form a government that can confront the Islamic State extremists.

Both al-Abadi and outgoing Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki condemned the attack and called for an investigation.

The onslaught on the Musab bin Omair Mosque in the village of Imam Wais began with a suicide bombing near its entrance, followed by a raid by gunmen who stormed the building, opening fire on worshippers, security officials said.

## Gaza Militants Kill 18 Alleged Spies

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip (AP) — Gaza militants Friday gunned down 18 alleged spies for Israel in an apparent attempt to plug security breaches and deter others, a day after Israel killed three top Hamas military commanders in an airstrike likely guided by collaborators.

In one incident, masked gunmen lined up seven men, their heads covered by bags, along a wall outside a Gaza City mosque and shot them to death in front of hundreds of people, witnesses said. A note pinned on the wall said they had leaked information about the location of tunnels, homes of fighters and rockets that were later struck by Israel.

In Israel, a 4-year-old boy was killed when a mortar shell hit two cars in the parking lot of Nahal Oz, a small farming community near Gaza. Five Israelis were hurt, one seriously, in several rocket strikes, the military said. One rocket damaged a synagogue.

The child's death was bound to raise pressure on Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu from an increasingly impatient public to put an end to rocket and mortar fire from Gaza — something Israel's military has been unable to do after 46 days of fighting with Hamas.

Netanyahu's office said he expressed his condolences and vowed that Hamas would pay a "heavy price."

## Ebola Outbreak Widens In Nigeria

ABUJA, Nigeria (AP) — Two alarming new cases of Ebola have emerged in Nigeria, widening the circle of people sickened beyond the immediate group of caregivers who treated a dying airline passenger in one of Africa's largest cities.

The outbreak also continues to spread elsewhere in West Africa, with 142 more cases recorded, bringing the new total to 2,615 with 1,427 deaths, the World Health Organization said Friday.

Most of the new cases are in Liberia, where the government was delivering donated rice to a slum where 50,000 people have been sealed off from the rest of the capital in an attempt to contain the outbreak.

New treatment centers in Liberia are being overwhelmed by patients that were not previously identified. One center with 20 beds opened its doors to 70 possibly infected people, likely coming from "shadow-zones" where people fearing authorities won't let doctors enter, the U.N. health agency said.

"This phenomenon strongly suggests the existence of an invisible caseload of patients who are not being detected by the surveillance system," the agency said. This has "never before been seen in an Ebola outbreak."

## UN Aid Program At Risk In N. Korea

WASHINGTON (AP) — The World Food Program may have to shut down its operations in North Korea by early next year unless it gets more funding from international donors by this fall, the U.N. agency's director for Asia said Friday.

WFP, which has the largest presence of any U.N. agency in the isolated country, has already scaled back its planned two-year, \$200 million program to feed 2.4 million people because it has only enough funds to cover about a quarter of the cost.

Regional director Kenro Oshidari told The Associated Press by phone from Bangkok, Thailand, that to run a credible nutritional program, aimed at preventing stunting in children, it needs about \$50 million more. That would target about 670,000 children under 2 years of age and pregnant and lactating mothers.

Without a replenishment of funds by October or November, WFP could be forced to shut down operations by January or February 2015, he said. The existing program is due to run until June. North Korea has alienated much of the international community over its pursuit of nuclear weapons even as it struggles to feed its own people.

# Tensions Between Russia And Ukraine Escalate Drastically

BY MSTYSLAV CHERNOV  
AND PETER LEONARD  
Associated Press

LUHANSK, Ukraine — Tensions between Russia and Ukraine escalated sharply on Friday as Moscow sent more than 130 trucks rolling across the border in what it said was a mission to deliver humanitarian aid. Ukraine called it a "direct invasion," and the U.S. and NATO condemned it as well.

In another ominous turn in the crisis, NATO said it has mounting evidence that Russian troops are operating inside Ukraine and launching artillery attacks from Ukrainian soil — significantly deeper involvement in the fighting than the West has previously alleged.

The trucks, part of a convoy of 260 vehicles, entered Ukraine without government permission after being held up at the border for a week amid fears that the mission was a Kremlin ploy to help the pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine.

By late afternoon, trucks had reached the city of Luhansk, whose war-reduced population of a quarter-million people has suffered under intense fighting over the past several weeks between Ukrainian forces and the separatists.

Russia said the white-tarped vehicles were carrying food, water, generators and sleeping bags.

Some of the trucks were opened to reporters a few days ago, and at least some of those items could be seen. But Associated Press journalists following the convoy across rough country roads heard the trucks' contents rattling and sliding around Friday, suggesting many vehicles were only partially loaded.

The arrival of the trucks instantly raised the stakes in the crisis: An attack on the convoy could give Russia a pretext to intervene more deeply in the war. And a pause in the fighting to allow the convoy safe passage could hamper further battlefield advances by Ukrainian forces, which have reported substantial in-

roads against the rebels over the past week.

In sending in the convoy, Russia said it had lost patience with Ukraine's stalling tactics and claimed that soon "there will no longer be anyone left to help" in Luhansk, where weeks of heavy shelling have cut off power, water and phone service and made food scarce.

At the United Nations in New York, Russian Ambassador Vitaly Churkin hotly denied any Russian troops were inside Ukraine. Russia has also steadfastly denied supporting and arming the rebels.

Moscow's decision to move unilaterally, without Red Cross involvement, raised questions about its intentions. Suspicions were running high that the humanitarian operation may instead be aimed at halting Kiev's momentum on the battlefield.

Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk declared that the trucks were half-empty and were not going to deliver aid but would instead be used to create a provoca-

tion. He said Russia would attack the convoy itself, creating an international incident.

Ukrainian security services chief Valentyn Nalyvaichenko called the convoy a "direct invasion" and said the half-empty trucks would be used to transport weapons to rebels and spirit away the bodies of Russian fighters killed in eastern Ukraine. He said the men operating the trucks were Russian military personnel trained to drive combat vehicles, tanks and artillery.

Nalyvaichenko insisted, however, that Ukraine would not shell the convoy.

NATO's secretary-general condemned Russia for sending in a "so-called humanitarian convoy." Anders Fogh Rasmussen said Russia committed "a blatant breach" of its international commitments and "a further violation of Ukraine's sovereignty."

The Pentagon demanded Russia withdraw the convoy immediately, warning: "Failure to do so will result in additional costs and isolation."

The White House said President Barack Obama and German Chancellor Angela Merkel spoke and said the presence of Russian troops in Ukraine represents a dangerous escalation of tensions by Moscow.

NATO spokeswoman Oana Lungescu said that since mid-August, the military alliance has seen multiple reports of direct involvement of Russian forces in Ukraine, along with transfers of tanks and other heavy weapons to the separatists, and "an alarming build-up of Russian ground and air forces in the vicinity of Ukraine."

"Russian artillery support — both cross-border and from within Ukraine — is being employed against the Ukrainian armed forces," she said. Previously, the West accused Russia of cross-border shelling only.

The Red Cross, which had planned to escort the convoy to assuage fears that it was a cover for a Russian invasion, said it had not received enough security guarantees to do so, as shelling had continued overnight.

## Chicago Flooding



FRIDAY. HEATHER CHARLES/THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE/MCT  
Alex Bal sits on his car in the flood water near the corner of 83rd Place and Narragansett Ave. in Burbank, Ill.

## US Won't Let Borders Hamper Fight Vs. Extremists

BY ROBERT BURNS  
AP National Security Writer

WASHINGTON — A senior White House official raised the possibility Friday of a broader American military campaign that targets an Islamic extremist group's bases in Syria, saying the U.S. would take whatever action is necessary to protect national security.

"We're not going to be restricted by borders," said Ben Rhodes, President Barack Obama's deputy national security adviser.

The White House said the president has received no military options beyond those he authorized earlier this month for limited airstrikes against the Islamic State group in Iraq and military aid to Iraqi and Kurdish forces. Thus far, the United States has avoided military involvement in Syria's three-year civil war. But faced with the Islamic State making gains across the region and the beheading of an American journalist, the administration's resistance may be weakening. Rhodes spoke a day after Obama's top military adviser warned the extremists cannot be defeated without "addressing" their sanctuary in Syria. Many prominent Republicans and some Democrats have called on Obama to hit back harder at the Islamic State militants.

Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla., a prospective 2016 presidential candidate, said in an interview Friday that attacking their supply lines, command and control centers and economic assets inside Syria "is at the crux of the decision" for Obama. The risk of "getting sucked into a new war" is outweighed, he said, by the risk of inaction.

To hit back at the group, Obama has stressed military assistance to Iraq and efforts to create a new, inclusive government in Baghdad that can persuade Sunnis to leave the insurgency. He also has sought to frame the Islamic State threat in terms that convince other countries — not just in the Mideast but also in Europe — of the need to create a broad coalition against the extremists.

In an op-ed for The Washington Post, Vice President Joe Biden said the U.S. was prepared to help Iraq pursue a federal system that would decentralize power away from Baghdad. While saying that Iraq is making progress in forming a new government, Biden warned that sectarian divisions were fueling extremist movements like the Islamic State.

Lukman Faily, the Iraqi ambassador to Washington, said in an interview this week that Baghdad's new leadership has been told to expect additional military help once the new government is seated, possibly in early September. But an Iraqi counteroffensive may yield only temporary gains if the Islamic State retreats to areas of Syria beyond the government's control.

"The U.S. can't defeat the Islamic State terrorist army in Iraq if it does not strike its leadership and core base in Syria simultaneously," said Oubai Shahbandar, a Washington-based senior strategist for the Western-backed opposition Syrian National Coalition group. "A real strategy requires linkage of the military effort in Iraq with Syria," he said.

Rhodes said the U.S. was

"actively considering what's going to be necessary to deal with that threat." Speaking on the Massachusetts island of Martha's Vineyard, where Obama is on vacation, Rhodes said: "We've shown time and again that if there's a counterterrorism threat, we'll take direct action against that threat, if necessary."

The recent execution of journalist James Foley could be seen as a turning point in a long-running battle against the group, whose origins are in an al-Qaida offshoot that U.S. forces faced in Iraq several years ago, he said. Foley's killing, he added, was "an attack on our country."

Obama faces tough decisions. He can continue helping Iraqi forces try to reverse the group's land grabs in northern Iraq by providing more arms and American military advisers and by using U.S. warplanes to support Iraqi ground operations. On Friday, the Pentagon announced that U.S. warplanes made three more airstrikes against Islamic State targets near the Mosul Dam, including a machine gun position that was firing on Iraqi forces.

But what if the militants pull back, even partially, into

Syria and regroup, as Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel on Thursday predicted they would, followed by a renewed offensive?

"In a sense, you're just sort of back to where you were," said Robert Ford, a former U.S. ambassador to Syria who quit in February in disillusionment over Obama's unwillingness to arm moderate Syrian rebels.

"I don't see how you can contain the Islamic State over the medium term if you don't address their base of operations in Syria," he said in an interview before intensified U.S. airstrikes this week helped Kurdish and Iraqi forces recapture the Mosul Dam.

Gen. Martin Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said Thursday the Islamic State militants can be contained only so long and at some point their Syrian sanctuary will have to be dealt with.

"Can they be defeated without addressing that part of their organization which resides in Syria? The answer is no," he told a Pentagon news conference where Hagel called the group a dire threat that requires an international, not just an American, response.

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