

Turkey Warns Syria Away From Its Border

BY ELIZABETH A. KENNEDY
Associated Press

BEIRUT — Turkey warned Syria on Tuesday to keep its forces away from the countries' troubled border or risk an armed response — a furious reply to the downing of a Turkish military plane last week by the Damascus regime.

NATO backed up Turkey and condemned Syria for shooting down the plane but stopped short of threatening military action, reflecting its reluctance to get involved in a conflict that could ignite a broader war.

Near the capital of Damascus, meanwhile, Syria's elite Republican Guard forces battled rebels in some of the most intense fighting involving the special forces since the uprising against President Bashar Assad's regime began in March 2011, according to activists.

Assad appeared to acknowledge the seriousness of the situation while addressing his new Cabinet on Tuesday in a statement broadcast on Syrian state TV. He said his country is in a "genuine state of war." Up to now Assad has described the uprising against him as run by terrorists carrying out a foreign agenda.

More than 14,000 people have been killed in the last 15 months. Despite global outrage over the crackdown by the Assad regime, the international response has been focused entirely on diplomacy and sanctions, not intervention, as the violence escalates.

In a speech to parliament, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Syria shot down the unarmed reconnaissance plane in international airspace without warning in a "deliberate" and "hostile" act.

"Any military element that approaches the Turkish border from Syria and poses a security risk and danger will be regarded as a threat and treated as a military target," Erdogan said.

Syria-Turkey relations

Relations between Turkey and Syria, which share a long border, have soured since Syria's uprising began in 2011.

Boiling over

- June 2011 Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan for the first time accuses Syrian President Bashar Assad's regime of committing atrocities in putting down revolt
Nov. 12-13 Pro-regime protestors in Syria attack Turkish diplomatic missions
Nov. 30 Turkey says it is cutting trade relations with Syria
March 15, 2012 Turkey advises its nationals to leave Syria
March 26 Turkey closes embassy in Damascus
May 30 Turkey says it is expelling Syrian diplomats from its territory
June 22 Turkish fighter plane shot down near joint border

Seeds of tension

- Friction in 1990s over Kurdish separatist presence in Syria
Water disputes over Turkey's construction of dams on the Euphrates and Tigris rivers
Turkey backs Arab League stance on Syria sanctions
Relations had been improving until Syrian unrest

He said border violations in the region were not uncommon and Syrian helicopters had violated Turkish airspace five times recently without a Turkish response. The two countries share a 566-mile (910-kilometer) frontier.

Turkey's limited response to Friday's incident suggested there was no appetite for a violent retaliation. Still, Erdogan cautioned Syria against testing his resolve.

"No one should be deceived by our cool-headed stance," he added. "Our acting with common sense should not be perceived as a weakness."

Syrian officials insist the plane violated its airspace, saying a Syrian officer shot it down with anti-aircraft fire after spotting an unidentified jet flying at high speed and low altitude.

Turkey disputes that. Turkey says although the RF-4E jet had unintentionally strayed into Syrian airspace, it was inside international airspace when it was brought down over the Mediterranean. Its two pilots are still missing.

The RF-4E is the reconnaissance version of the U.S.-built Phantom fighter-bomber which was used heavily in the Vietnam War. Most of the RF-4Es were unarmed, although some have been equipped with cannons and racks for bombs.

Erdogan has said Syrian forces also fired on a search-and-rescue plane Friday following the downing of the jet. It was not clear if the second plane was hit.

The incident renewed fears of an escalation of the violence that

could draw in neighboring countries. The Turks have launched pre-emptive attacks in the past, notably in 2007 and 2008 against Kurdish rebels in Iraq who used Iraqi territory to strike targets inside Turkey as part of their war for Kurdish self-rule.

The head of NATO called the downing of the jet unacceptable after Turkey briefed NATO's North Atlantic Council about it. The talks were held under Article 4 of NATO's founding treaty, which allows a member to request consultations if its security has been threatened.

The meeting was the first time a country has invoked Article 4 in nearly a decade. In 2003, Turkey also invoked Article 4 when tensions escalated ahead of the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq.

NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen said the alliance condemned the Syrian attack "in the strongest terms" and expressed solidarity with Turkey — but he did not speak of any possible armed action against Syria.

"It's my clear expectation that the situation won't continue to escalate," Fogh Rasmussen told reporters after the meeting. "What we have seen is a completely unacceptable act, and I would expect Syria to take all necessary steps to avoid such events in the future."

The uprising against Assad has obliterated the once-close ties between Syria and Turkey. Turkey has repeatedly called for Assad to step down as 33,000 Syrians have sought refuge in Turkey from the violence.

Turkey also is also hosting civilian opposition groups as well as members of the Free Syrian Army, which is fighting to bring down the Assad regime.

"We will continue to support the struggle of our brothers in Syria at any cost," Erdogan said. Turkey denies harboring armed Syrian rebels.

Obama Campaign Preps Lawyers For Election

OLYMPIA, Wash. (AP) — President Barack Obama's campaign has recruited a legion of lawyers to be on standby for this year's election as legal disputes surrounding the voting process escalate.

Thousands of attorneys and support staffers have agreed to aid in the effort, providing a mass of legal support that appears to be unrivaled by Republicans or precedent. Obama's campaign says it is particularly concerned about the implementation of new voter ID laws across the country, the possibility of anti-fraud activists challenging legitimate voters and the handling of voter registrations in the most competitive states.

Republicans are building their own legal teams for the election. They say they're focused on preventing fraud — making sure people don't vote unless they're eligible — rather than turning away qualified voters.

Since the disputed 2000 presidential election, both parties have increasingly concentrated on building legal teams — including high-priced lawyers who are well-known in political circles — for the Election Day run-up. The Bush-Gore election demonstrated to both sides the importance of every vote and the fact that the rules for voting and counting might actually determine the outcome. The Florida count in 2000 was decided by just 537 votes and ultimately landed in the Supreme Court.

Sandusky's Son Matt Details Abuse On Tape

STATE COLLEGE, Pa. (AP) — Jerry Sandusky's son told police he was sexually abused starting when he was 8, a decade before the former Penn State assistant football coach adopted him, according to a police interview recording obtained by NBC News.

Matt Sandusky, who was adopted by Jerry Sandusky as an adult, described for investigators showering with the ex-coach and trying to avoid being groped in bed. He also said he was undergoing therapy, that his memories of abuse were only now surfacing and that he was coming forward so his family would know what happened.

"If you were pretending you were asleep and you were touched or rubbed in some way you could just act like you were rolling over in your sleep, so that you could change positions," the now-33-year-old Matt Sandusky said in an excerpt played Tuesday on NBC's "Today."

His attorneys confirmed the recording's authenticity to The Associated Press.

High Court Ruling Offers Chances At Freedom

DETROIT (AP) — The Supreme Court ruling that banned states from imposing mandatory life sentences on juveniles offers an unexpected chance at freedom to more than 2,000 inmates who have never been able to seek release and had virtually no hope that their prospects would change.

In more than two dozen states, lawyers can now ask for new sentences. And judges will have discretion to look beyond the crime at other factors such as a prisoner's age at the time of the offense, the person's background and perhaps evidence that an inmate has changed while incarcerated.

"The sentence may still be the same," said Lawrence Wojcik, a Chicago lawyer who co-chairs the juvenile justice committee of the American Bar Association. "But even a sentence with a chance for parole gives hope."

Virtually all of the sentences in question are for murder. When Henry Hill was an illiterate 16-year-old, he was linked to a killing at a park in Saginaw County and convicted of aiding and abetting murder.

Hill had a gun, but he was never accused of firing the fatal shot. Nonetheless, the sentence was automatic: life without parole. He's spent the last 32 years in Michigan prisons.

CDC Trying Out Free Rapid AIDS Test At Pharmacies, In-Store Clinics

BY MIKE STOBBE
AP Medical Writer

ATLANTA — Would you go to a drugstore to get tested for AIDS? Health officials want to know, and they've set up a pilot program to find out.

The \$1.2 million program will offer free rapid HIV tests at pharmacies and in-store clinics in 24 cities and rural communities, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention announced Tuesday.

Drugstores now offer blood pressure checks, flu shots and a few other types of health services. Officials are hoping testing for the AIDS virus will become another routine service.

"By bringing HIV testing into pharmacies, we believe we can reach more people by making testing more accessible and reduce the stigma associated with HIV," CDC's Dr. Kevin Fenton said in a statement. He oversees the agency's HIV prevention programs.

The tests are already available at seven places, and the CDC will soon pick 17 more locations.

The HIV test is a swab inside the mouth and takes about 20 minutes for a preliminary result. If the test is positive, customers will be referred to a local health department or other health-care providers for a blood test to confirm the results, counseling and treatment.

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DR. KEVIN FENTON

When the project ends next summer, CDC officials will analyze what worked well and what didn't, said Paul Weidle, the epidemiologist who is heading up the project.

An estimated 1.1 million Americans are infected with HIV, but as many as 20 percent of them don't know they carry the virus, according to the CDC. It can take a decade or more for an infection to cause symptoms and illness.

Since 2006, the CDC has recommended that all Americans ages 13 to 64 get tested at least once, not just those considered at highest risk: gay men and intravenous drug users.

On special occasions, health organizations have sent workers to some drugstores to offer HIV testing. This week, Walgreens — the nation's largest chain of pharmacies — is teaming with local health departments and AIDS groups to offer free HIV testing at stores in 20 cities.

But this CDC pilot program is different: It's an effort to train staff at the pharmacies to do the testing themselves, and perhaps make it a permanent service.

"I'm excited. It's such a new and novel thing for us," said Sarah Freedman, who manages a Walgreens in Washington, D.C., that is participating in the pilot program.

At her pharmacy, the testing is done in a private room. They've also taken steps to make sure that a customer can very quietly request the test. For example, they've put out stacks of special test request cards — they look like business cards — at George Washington University and other nearby businesses. Anyone seeking a test can simply hand the card to the clerk, she said.

Only three or four customers have gone through with a test in the first few weeks. "We get a lot of questions," she said. "Usually they get the information and they go and sit on it and think about it."

There's a second Walgreens in Washington offering the test, as well as branches in Chicago and Lithuania, Ga. Other test sites: East Pines Pharmacy in Riverdale, Md., Mike's Pharmacy in Oakland, Calif. and a federal Indian Health Service location in Billings, Mont.

Each of the locations will get enough tests to check 200 to 300 people.

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