

## APNewsBreak: Syrians Suffer In Civil War

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — Nearly 650,000 Syrians are living in besieged communities in the country's civil war, more than three times the U.N. estimate, according to a new report that offers a graphic account of hundreds of deaths in areas the world has struggled for years to reach.

The report says Syria's government is responsible for the overwhelming amount of siege tactics that have led to deaths by starvation, dehydration and the lack of medical care. The document does not look at what it calls the short-term siege tactics used by the Islamic State group, which has beheaded and massacred its opponents in the vast area straddling the Syria-Iraq border currently under its control.

The "Slow Death" report, obtained in advance by The Associated Press, is by the Syrian American Medical Society, which supports medical workers in besieged areas. The organization presented its findings Thursday to U.N. officials and to a closed-door meeting sponsored by the United States, Britain, France and other states and organized by Qatar.

The U.N. estimates that 212,000 Syrians live in besieged areas beyond the reach of humanitarian aid.

But the new report, to be released next week, says the U.N. is too narrowly defining "besieged" and is inadvertently underplaying the crisis. It says more than 640,200 people are besieged. It also echoes claims by an increasing number of aid groups that the international response to the overall conflict, particularly by the deeply divided U.N. Security Council, has failed.

## Defiant Tunisians Fete National Holiday

TUNIS, Tunisia (AP) — Radicalized, trained in Libya and already in police files, the two young men who shot dead 21 people at a renowned Tunisian museum embody what many see as the main threat to this North African country bent on building democracy.

Celebrating the 59th anniversary of its independence Friday, Tunisia was coming to grips with the hundreds of disaffected youths who have sought training in weapons and battle skills in its chaotic eastern neighbor and elsewhere and are returning to threaten the country.

"Tunisia has taken important steps in the political and democratic arena, which have been praised by the entire world. We must continue on this path," said President Beji Caid Essebsi in a televised holiday address.

The Wednesday attack on the National Bardo Museum, which left 20 foreigners, a Tunisian special forces officer and the two gunmen dead, was a "great disaster," he said, but pointed out that security measures were already being set up to prevent similar attacks in the future.

The gunmen, Hatem Khachnaoui and Yassine Laabidi, had slipped across the border in December to reach one of many militia camps in Libya, Rafik Chelli, a top Interior Ministry official said in a TV interview. Since the ouster of Moammar Gadhafi three years ago, Libya has fallen into chaos and is now awash in well-armed militias fighting for control.

## Black Man Found Hanging In Tree

PORT GIBSON, Miss. (AP) — An FBI agent appealed for patience Friday after a black man was found hanging from a tree in Mississippi, saying 30 federal, state and local agents were working intensively to determine whether he was killed or committed suicide.

"Everybody wants answers and wants them quickly. We understand that," FBI Special Agent Don Alway told a crowd outside the Claiborne County Courthouse. "We are going to hold off on coming to any conclusions until the facts take us to a definitive answer."

The county coroner confirmed that the man found hanging from a white sheet Thursday was Otis Byrd, an ex-convict reported missing by his family more than two weeks ago. Byrd lived just 200 yards from the spot where his body was found, in a wooded area off a dirt road that ran behind his house.

Alway said investigators are interviewing Byrd's family and friends and searching his rental home and a storage unit for clues, and will not reveal any evidence along the way.

"We are trying to paint a picture of Byrd's life. We are trying to find out what was going on with him personally and professionally," he said.

## At Least 2 Attackers Kill 21 In Tunisia

TUNIS, Tunisia (AP) — Around lunchtime, the crackle of gunfire broke the leisurely calm of a visit to one of Tunisia's best-known museums: At least two attackers went on a rampage targeting tourists. By the end, after police traded fire with the gunmen and special forces barreled in, the duo and 21 others were dead.

Tunisia's deadliest terror attack in more than a decade jolted locals out of their daily routines and took the lives of visitors to this democracy-minded North African country of 11 million, according to Associated Press interviews with witnesses, victims and a police official.

Wednesday's attack at Tunis' National Bardo Museum, claimed by the Islamic State group that has sought to spread its bloodthirsty influence beyond its base in Syria and Iraq, drew immediate condemnation from many world leaders and promises from Tunisian officials and citizens that they won't bow to terror.

Miami resident Giovanna Gonzalez had just finished a brief bathroom break at the end of a museum tour when the attackers "started shooting everybody."

"Everyone ran in different directions," Gonzalez told reporters after disembarking from her cruise ship Friday in Barcelona. Gonzalez, 46, and her husband were on a cruise to celebrate their 25th wedding anniversary.

BY AHMED AL-HAJ  
Associated Press

ADEN, Yemen — Suicide bombers attacked a pair of mosques Friday in the Yemeni capital, unleashing monstrous blasts that ripped through worshippers and killed 137 people in the deadliest assault yet targeting Shiite rebels who have taken over large parts of the rapidly fragmenting nation. At least 13 children were among the dead.

A purported affiliate of the Islamic State group claimed responsibility for the bombings, which also wounded 357 people — raising the alarming possibility the extremist group has expanded its presence to Yemen after already setting up a branch in Libya. Earlier this week, the group claimed responsibility for a bloody attack on Western tourists in Tunisia that authorities said was carried out by militants trained in Libya.

If the claim is true — and the U.S. expressed skepticism — Friday's attacks would be the first by the Islamic State group in Yemen, adding a frightening new layer to the country's turmoil.

Shiite rebels known as Houthis have taken over the capital, Sanaa, and nine of the country's 21 provinces over the past six months, raising fears of a civil war tinged with sectarianism. The government of the internationally backed president, Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi, has fled to the southern port city of Aden.

Yemen is already home to the most powerful branch of the al-Qaida network, which has been battling the Houthis for months. On Friday, al-Qaida militants seized control of a southern provincial capital, al-Houta, in the group's most dramatic grab of territory in years. However, it denied carrying out the mosque bombings, citing instructions from the terror network's leader, Ayman al-Zawahiri, not to strike mosques or markets.

Friday's blasts left scenes of bloody devastation in the Badr and



al-Hashoosh mosques, located across town from each other in Sanaa. Both mosques are controlled by the Shiite Houthis, but they are also frequented by Sunni worshippers.

Images from the scene showed a number of children among the dead. In footage from the al-Hashoosh mosque, screaming volunteers were seen using bloodied blankets to carry away victims as a small child lay among the dead on the mosque floor.

"Blood was running like a river," said one survivor, Mohammed al-Ansi, who said he was thrown six feet by one of the blasts at the Hashoosh mosque, where the floor was strewn with body parts.

The mosques were targeted by two suicide bombers each during midday prayers, when large crowds turn out to attend weekly sermons. The state news agency SABA put the toll at 137 dead and 357 wounded. Among the dead were 13 children, according to the Interior Ministry. A prominent Shiite cleric, al-Murtada al-Mansouri, and two senior Houthi leaders were also killed, the rebel-owned Al-Masirah TV channel said.

## A Spring Storm



NABIL K. MARK/CENTRE DAILY TIMES/TNS  
An overturned vehicle is abandoned along I-99 South just past the Shiloh Road exit on Friday in Centre County, Pa. A spring snow storm hit the area causing numerous motor vehicle accidents.

## Guilty Verdicts For Two In Train Terror Plot

BY CHARMAINE NORONHA  
Associated Press

TORONTO — Two men accused of plotting to attack a passenger train travelling from New York to Toronto were found guilty of several terror-related charges and could spend the rest of their lives in prison.

Prosecutors had argued during the trial that the men were motivated by Islamic extremism and spent months plotting to kill as many people as they could. Investigators said the men received guidance from members of al-

Qaida, in what they called the first known attack planned by the terrorist network in Canada.

Raed Jaser, a Canadian citizen of Palestinian descent, and Tunisian-born Chiheb Esseghaier were arrested in 2013. Jaser, 37, and Esseghaier, 32, had pleaded not guilty.

On Friday, the 10th day of deliberations, the jury found both men guilty of conspiring to commit murder in association with a terrorist group.

Esseghaier appeared unruffled as the Toronto jury found him guilty on all five

terrorism charges against him. He calmly repeated that he hadn't participated in the trial and didn't want to take part in sentencing arguments either.

Jaser looked at the ceiling at one point after the jury delivered their verdicts, finding him guilty of three out of the four charges he faced. He then kept his right hand up to his face through the rest of the proceeding, biting his knuckles at one point.

The men, who will be sentenced April 10, could face maximum punishment of up to life in prison.

## Obama To Announce Slower Afghan Withdrawal

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Barack Obama is meeting next week with Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah and is expected to announce plans to slow down the pace of troop withdrawals between now and the end of 2016 to maintain security in Afghanistan.

Current plans call for a U.S. drawdown to 5,500 troops by year's end. But the Obama administration has said previously it might keep more troops in Afghanistan next year.

Jeff Eggers of the White House's National Security Council said Friday the U.S. still intends to pursue its longer-term withdrawal strategy, which calls for a U.S. security cooperation office in Kabul beyond 2016 of about 1,000 U.S. troops, but no major troop presence.

Eggers appeared to leave open the possibility that the U.S. role after 2016 could also be reconsidered. "The question of the post-2016 plan will, of course, flow from that, and it's fair to say that will need to be considered in the same way given the intent to maintain this ongoing dialogue with President Ghani and his team," he said.

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