

US Officials Say Iran Is Firing Artillery

WASHINGTON (AP) — Iran has entered the fight to retake a major Iraqi oil refinery from Islamic State militants, contributing small numbers of troops — including some operating artillery and other heavy weapons — in support of advancing Iraqi ground forces, U.S. defense officials said Friday.

Two U.S. defense officials said Iranian forces have taken a significant offensive role in the Beiji operation in recent days, in conjunction with Iraqi Shiite militia. The officials were not authorized to discuss the matter publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

One official said Iranians are operating artillery, 122mm rocket systems and surveillance and reconnaissance drones to help the Iraqi counteroffensive.

The Iranian role was not mentioned in a new U.S. military statement asserting that Iraqi security forces, with U.S. help, had managed to establish a land route into the Beiji refinery compound. The statement Friday by the U.S. military headquarters in Kuwait said Iraqis have begun reinforcing and resupplying forces isolated inside the refinery compound.

Iran's role in Iraq is a major complicating factor for the Obama administration as it searches for the most effective approach to countering the Islamic State group. U.S. officials have said they do not oppose contributions from Iran-supported Iraqi Shiite militias as long as they operate under the command and control of the Iraqi government.

40 Killed As Police And Suspects Battle

ECUANDUREO, Mexico (AP) — About 40 people were killed Friday in what authorities described as a fierce gunbattle between suspected drug traffickers and federal forces on a ranch in western Mexico, the deadliest such confrontation in recent memory.

Almost all the dead were suspected criminals, said a Federal Police official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to talk with journalists. Unconfirmed reports said at least one police officer died.

Few details on the reported gunbattle had been released, but photographs from the scene show bodies, some with semi-automatic rifles and others without weapons, lying in fields, near farm equipment and on a blood-stained patio strewn with clothes, mattresses and sleeping bags.

Video obtained by The Associated Press showed federal police coming under fire and bodies strewn throughout a ranch, known as Rancho del Sol, according to a local police official in the town of Puerto de Vargas. The official wouldn't give his full name to the AP but said his department received a report of the confrontation from fellow police in the neighboring town of Ecuandureo and was told to keep residents calm.

The confrontation started when federal police officers tried to pull over a truck on the highway near the ranch, and as they got close people inside the truck opened fire, Michoacan Gov. Salvador Jara told Radio Formula.

Extremists Hunt Down Syrian Troops

BEIRUT (AP) — Islamic State group militants hunted down Syrian government troops and loyalists in the newly captured town of Palmyra, shooting or beheading them in public as a warning, and imposing their strict interpretation of Islam, activists said Friday.

The purge, which relied mostly on informants, was aimed at solidifying the extremists' grip on the strategic town that was overrun Wednesday by IS fighters.

It also was part of a campaign to win the support of President Bashar Assad's opponents, who have suffered from a government crackdown in the town and surrounding province in the last four years of Syria's civil war.

The strategy included promises to fix the electricity and water grids — after Palmyra is cleared of regime loyalists, according to an activist in the historic town. The man is known in the activist community by the nom de guerre of Omar Hamza because he fears for his security.

The capture of Palmyra has raised alarm that the militants might try to destroy one of the Mideast's most spectacular archaeological sites — a well-preserved, 2,000-year-old Roman-era city on the town's edge — as they have destroyed others in Syria and Iraq. For the moment, however, their priority appeared to be in imposing their rule, with activists saying there were no signs the group moved in on the ancient ruins.

Authorities Believe Ex-Con Had Help

WASHINGTON (AP) — An ex-convict denied bond on a murder charge Friday had help from others holding a family captive inside their mansion for at least 18 hours, authorities said, and their investigation is continuing.

During their ordeal, the business executive and his wife told others to stay away — even ordering a pizza deliverer to leave two pies at the door — as they frantically arranged for \$40,000 in cash to be dropped off at the home.

But once four neat stacks of \$100 bills were left on the seat of a red sports car in the family's garage, Daron Dylon Wint brutally struck and stabbed Savvas Savopoulos, the CEO of the American Iron Works company where he had once worked as a welder, Wint's charging document said.

Savopoulos's wife Amy, their 10-year-old son Philip and their housekeeper Verallia Figueroa also were killed, and then the house was set on fire with matches and a flammable liquid.

The fire began on the queen-sized mattress where the boy's body was stabbed and burned, authorities said.

Clinton Received Sensitive Info On Private Email Account

BY LISA LERER, MATTHEW LEE
AND JACK GILLUM
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Former Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton received information on her private email account about the deadly attack on U.S. diplomatic facilities in Benghazi that was later classified "secret" at the request of the FBI, according to documents released Friday, underscoring lingering questions about how responsibly she handled sensitive information on a home server.

The nearly 900 pages of her correspondence released by the State Department also contained several messages that were deemed sensitive but unclassified, detailed her daily schedule and contained information — censored in the documents as released — about the CIA that the government is barred from publicly disclosing.

Taken together, the correspondence

provides examples of material considered to be sensitive that Clinton, the front-runner for the 2016 Democratic presidential nomination, received on the account run out of her home. She has said the private server had "numerous safeguards."

Clinton's decision while secretary of state to opt out of a State Department email account has become a political problem for her, as the Republican-led House committee investigating the Benghazi attacks has used the disclosures of her email usage to paint her as secretive and above standard scrutiny.

Clinton, campaigning in New Hampshire, said Friday she was aware that the FBI now wanted some of the email to be classified, "but that doesn't change the fact all of the information in the emails was handled appropriately."

Asked if she was concerned it was on a private server, she replied, "No."

State Department spokeswoman Marie

Harf said, "It was not classified at the time. The occurrence of subsequent upgrade does not mean anyone did anything wrong."

It's not clear if Clinton's home computer system used encryption software to communicate securely with government email services. That would have protected her communications from the prying eyes of foreign spies, hackers, or anyone interested on the Internet.

Last year, Clinton gave the State Department 55,000 pages of emails that she said pertained to her work as secretary sent from her personal address. Only messages related to the 2012 attacks on the U.S. diplomatic post in Benghazi, Libya, that killed four Americans, including U.S. Ambassador Christopher Stevens, were released by the department on Friday. The 296 emails had already been turned over to the House Benghazi committee.

A Graduation Celebration



PAUL W. GILLESPIE/BALTIMORE SUN/TNS

Graduates toss their hats as the U.S. Naval Academy holds its 2015 Commissioning Ceremony at Navy-Marine Corps Memorial Stadium in Annapolis, Md.

Myanmar Should Share Responsibility For Crisis

BY ROBIN MCDOWELL
AND JOCELYN GECKER
Associated Press

YANGON, Myanmar — Navy ships were scouring Southeast Asian waters for boats believed to be carrying thousands of migrants with little food or water, and a top U.S. diplomat said Myanmar needs to shoulder some responsibility for the crisis. That's something it has been reluctant to do.

U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Anthony Blinken said Friday that Rohingya Muslims fleeing the predominantly Buddhist nation were risking perilous journeys and putting their lives in the hands of human traffickers because "they are in despair and don't see a future" at home.

They have been denied citizenship and chased off their land in the latest bout of ethnic violence that left them with little access to education, medical care or freedom to move around.

The persecution has sent them fleeing to neighboring Southeast Asian countries, but recently, the exodus has erupted into a humanitarian crisis. Because of arrests after a crackdown on human trafficking networks in the region, captains earlier this month started abandoning boats that were packed with Rohingya Muslims as

well as Bangladeshis escaping poverty.

More than 3,600 migrants have washed ashore in Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand since May 10, and thousands more are believed to be trapped at sea. The United Nations has warned that time is running out to save them.

"The root of the problem for those leaving Myanmar is the political and social situation on the ground," Blinken told reporters at a news conference in Yangon.

He said Rohingya Muslims "should have a path to citizenship," adding: "The uncertainty that comes from not having any status is one of the things that may drive people to leave."

He said he made that point when he met with President Thein Sein, the army commander-in-chief and other top officials.

At first, Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand were reluctant to help, worried that accepting even a few refugees would open the floodgates for more. But on Wednesday, Indonesia and Malaysia agreed to shelter new arrivals as long as the international community promised to help resettle them to third countries within a year.

In the first official rescue operation, four Malaysian navy ships started searching for boats Friday, said navy chief Abdul Aziz Jaafar. He said three helicopters and

three other ships were on standby.

Myanmar's navy found two fishing trawlers filled with 208 men during a patrol off Rakhine state, the main point of departure for fleeing Rohingya.

Zaw Htay, director of the presidential office, said the men were identified as Bangladeshi and would be sent to the neighboring country.

Rohingya, numbering at around 1.3 million, have been identified by the United Nations as one of the most persecuted minorities in the world.

After Myanmar moved from dictatorship toward democracy in 2011, newfound freedoms of expression gave voice to Buddhist extremists who spewed hatred against the religious minority and said Muslims were taking over the country. Attacks that followed left up to 280 people dead. Another 140,000 Rohingya were driven from their homes and are now living under apartheid-like conditions in crowded displacement camps.

The government refuses to recognize them, regarding them as illegal migrants from Bangladesh, even though many have lived in Myanmar for generations.

It has expressed skepticism that those fleeing are actually from Myanmar and insists it is not to blame for the current crisis.

TLC Pulls '19 Kids And Counting'

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (AP) — TLC pulled the reality series "19 Kids and Counting" from its schedule on Friday, a move that follows reports of sexual misconduct allegations against one of the stars, Josh Duggar, stemming from when he was a juvenile.

In a statement, the channel said it was "deeply saddened and troubled by this heart-breaking situation, and our thoughts and prayers are with the family and victims at this difficult time." The statement didn't elaborate.

Also Friday, Arkansas police said they had destroyed a record outlining a nearly decade-old investigation into Duggar, a day after the 27-year-old resigned his role with a prominent conservative Christian group amid reports about the allegations.

The Northwest Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, which obtained the offense report before its destruction, reports Duggar was accused of fondling five girls in 2002 and 2003. Duggar issued an apology Thursday on Facebook for unspecified bad behavior

as a youth and resigned his role as executive director for FRC Action, the tax-exempt

legislative action arm of the Washington-based Family Research Council.

A Salute to Our Soldiers

• Past • Present • Future

We salute the men and women who have served in our Armed Force. Those who serve today, and the future generations who will carry on the honorable duties of protecting and preserving America's freedom. Their dedication, patriotism, sacrifice and courage will always be remembered.

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