

Turkey Fires At Syria After Deadly Shelling

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Associated Press

BEIRUT — Turkish artillery fired on Syrian targets Wednesday after shelling from Syria struck a border village in Turkey, killing five civilians, sharply escalating tensions between the two neighbors and prompting NATO to convene an emergency meeting.

“Our armed forces at the border region responded to this atrocious attack with artillery fire on points in Syria that were detected with radar, in line with the rules of engagement,” the Turkish government said in a statement from the prime minister’s office.

The artillery fire capped a day that began with four bombs tearing through a government-held district in Syria’s commercial and cultural capital of Aleppo, killing more than 30 people and reducing buildings to rubble.

Along the volatile border, a shell fired from inside Syria landed on a home in the Turkish village of Akcakale, killing a woman, her three daughters and another woman, and wounding at least 10 others, according to Turkish media.

The shelling appeared to come from forces loyal to Syrian President Bashar Assad’s regime, which is fighting rebels backed by Turkey in an escalating civil war.

“Turkey, acting within the rules of engagement and international laws, will never leave unreciprocated such provocations by the Syrian regime against our national security,” the office of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan said in a statement.

Turkish media said Turkey has prepared a parliamentary bill for Syria that is similar to one that authorizes the Turkish military to intervene in northern Iraq in pursuit of Kurdish militants who have bases there. The bill is expected to be discussed in parliament on Thursday, *Anadolu* agency reported.

If approved, the bill could more easily open the way to unilateral action by Turkey’s armed forces inside Syria, without the involvement of its Western and Arab allies.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said the U.S. was “outraged that the Syrians have been shooting across the border,” adding that she would speak with Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu on the matter.

“It’s a very, very dangerous situation,” Clinton said. “And all responsible nations need to band together to persuade the Assad regime to have a cease-fire, quit assaulting their own people and begin the process of a political transition.”

NATO’s National Atlantic Council, which is composed of the alliance’s ambassadors, held an emergency meeting in Brussels Wednesday night at Turkey’s request to discuss the cross-border incident.

The meeting ended with a statement strongly condemning the attack and saying: “The alliance continues to stand by Turkey and demands the immediate cessation of such aggressive acts against an ally.” It also urged the Syrian regime to “put an end to flagrant violations of international law.”

NATO also held an emergency meeting when a Turkish jet was shot down by Syria in June, killing two pilots.

Turkey wants to avoid going into Syria on its own. It has been pushing for international intervention in the form of a safe zone, which would likely entail foreign security forces on the ground and a partial no-fly zone. However, the allies fear military intervention in Syria could ignite a wider conflict, and few observers expect robust action from the United States, which Turkey views as vital to any operation in Syria, ahead of the presidential election in November.

According to Turkey’s NTV station, the Syrian information ministry said it had launched an investigation into Wednesday’s shelling and expressed sorrow for the deaths of Turkish civilians. But it urged Turkey to prevent the cross-border infiltration of what it called terrorists.

Turkey, which has moved military reinforcements to the border in recent months, has more than 90,000 Syrian refugees in camps along its border, and also hosts Syrian opposition groups.

There is concern in Turkey that the Syrian chaos could have a destabilizing effect on Turkey’s own communities; some observers have attributed a sharp rise in violence by Kurdish rebels in Turkey to militant efforts to take advantage of the regional uncertainty.

Calling Wednesday’s shelling “yet another example of the depraved behavior of the Syrian regime and why it must go,” Pentagon press secretary George Little said the U.S. would continue to monitor the situation closely.

One senior U.S. official said that while the exchange of fire between Syria and Turkey is problematic, it will not necessarily trigger a NATO response under Article 5, which states that an attack against one NATO member shall be considered an attack against all members.

The official said that NATO action is unlikely given the scale of the shellings so far between the two nations. But, the official said that could change if the violence begins to greatly escalate. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to comment publicly on the sensitive deliberations.

Turkey’s Anadolu news agency quoted the governor of Sanliurfa province, Celattin Guven, as saying three or four shells fell on the border village and one hit a house, killing the women and children. The wounded included two police officers who were shown in television footage lying in the street as colleagues tended to them.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the Aleppo bombings earlier in the day, but the government blamed its opponents, saying the huge explosions were caused by suicide attackers. The technique is a signature of al-Qaida-style jihadist groups, some of which are known to have entered Syria’s civil war to fight against the regime.

“It was like a series of earthquakes,” a shaken resident told The Associated Press, asking that his name not be used out of fear for his personal safety. “It was terrifying, terrifying.”

The Syrian government said the bombings killed 34 people and injured 122 — although death tolls have been difficult to verify. The

Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which relies on a network of activists on the ground, said at least 40 people were killed.

The state-run Ikhbariya TV channel showed massive damage around Saadallah al-Jabri Square, which also houses a famous hotel and a coffee shop that had been popular with regime forces. One building appeared to have been leveled and the facade of another was torn away.

The station broadcast video of several bodies, including one being pulled from a collapsed building. Rescuers stood atop piles of concrete and debris, frantically trying to pull out survivors.

Activists could not reach the area, which is controlled by security forces and sealed off with checkpoints.

The uprising against Assad began in March 2011 and gradually became a bloody civil war. The conflict has killed more than 30,000 people, activists say, and has devastated entire neighborhoods in Syria’s main cities, including Aleppo.

After Wednesday’s blasts in Aleppo, regime forces unleashed shelling on rebel-held areas and fired machine guns from aircraft, according to an Associated Press journalist in the city, Syria’s largest with a population of 3 million.

At least 15 people wounded by shelling arrived with serious injuries at the city’s Shifa Hospital. All but one were civilians. Three bodies — an old man, a woman and a middle school-age boy — also were taken to the hospital.

Rebel fighters, many with only light weapons, advanced slowly, moving building by building. The heavier weapons, such as rocket-propelled-grenade launchers, were sent to the front lines to prevent the regime from retaking areas seized by rebels in the past two months.

Wednesday’s attacks were the latest turn in the deadly — and increasingly chaotic — fight for control of Aleppo, one of the world’s oldest continuously inhabited cities.

Not surprisingly, the two men disagreed over Medicare, a flash point since Romney placed Wisconsin Rep. Paul Ryan on his ticket.

The president repeatedly described Romney’s plan as a “voucher program” that would raise out-of-pocket costs on seniors.

He continued, directly addressing the voters at home: “If you’re 54 or 55 you might want to listen because this will affect you.” Romney said he doesn’t support any changes for current retirees or those close to retirement.

“If you’re 60 or 60 and older you don’t need to listen further,” he said, but he contended that fundamental changes are needed to prevent the system from becoming insolvent as millions of baby boom generation Americans become eligible.

The Blame Game As Libyan Attack Probe Opens

WASHINGTON (AP) — Past investigations into attacks on U.S. diplomatic missions have blamed both the administration and Congress for failing to spend enough money to ensure that the overseas facilities were safe despite a clear rise in terror threats to American interests abroad.

An Associated Press examination of two reports that are easily accessible to the public — those created after the devastating Aug. 7, 1998, bombings of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania — may offer clues to the possible outcome of the current investigation begun by Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton into last month’s attack on the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi, Libya.

That attack by what is now believed to be al-Qaida-linked militants has become fraught with election-year politics as Republicans accuse administration officials of dissembling in the early aftermath on what they knew about the perpetrators and for lax security at the diplomatic mission in a lawless part of post-revolution Libya.

Two House Republican leaders this week accused the administration of denying repeated requests for extra security at the Benghazi consulate, where Ambassador Chris Stevens and three other Americans were killed on the 11th anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the U.S.

A five-member accountability review board appointed by Clinton will begin this week looking at whether security at the consulate was adequate and whether proper procedures were followed before, during and immediately after the attack.

Rare Meningitis Cases Rise To 26; Four Dead

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — An outbreak of a rare and deadly form of meningitis has now sickened 26 people in five states who received steroid injections, health officials said Wednesday. Four people have died.

Eighteen of the cases are in Tennessee where a Nashville clinic received the largest shipment of the steroid suspected in the outbreak. The drug was made by a specialty pharmacy in Massachusetts that has since issued a recall.

Three cases have been reported in Virginia, two in Maryland, two in Florida and one in North Carolina. Two of the deaths were in Tennessee; Virginia and Maryland had one each, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said.

More new cases are almost certain to appear in the coming days, said Tennessee Department of Health Commissioner John Dreyzehner. Cases in that state began in July and five new cases were confirmed over the past 24 hours, he said Wednesday.

Investigators have been looking into at least three different products used for the back injections that could have been tainted by the fungus that appears to be behind the illnesses. None of the products have been ruled out. However, the primary suspicion is on steroid medication, which is commonly used for back pain.

Lawmakers Divided On Post-9/11 Program

WASHINGTON (AP) — Stinging criticism from Congress about a counterterrorism effort that improperly collected information about innocent Americans is turning up the heat on the Obama administration to justify the program’s continued existence and putting lawmakers who championed it on the defensive.

The administration strongly disagrees with the report’s findings, and leaders of the Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee are distancing themselves from the report. The review criticized the multibillion-dollar network of “fusion centers” as ineffective in fighting terrorism and risky to civil liberties.

The political maneuvering by Sens. Joe Lieberman, I-Conn., and Susan Collins, R-Maine, is unusual because the bipartisan report was issued by their own subcommittee.

The intelligence reports reviewed by the subcommittee were produced by officials in the Homeland Security Department’s Intelligence and Analysis division, which was created after the Sept. 11 attacks with the hope of connecting the dots to prevent the next terrorist strike. This division has never lived up to what Congress initially hoped for.

Lieberman and Collins were the driving forces behind the creation of the department. Fusion centers, the analytical centers intended to spot terrorism trends in every state, are held up by many as the crown jewel of the department’s security efforts.

Debate

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figures that were difficult to follow. The men argued over oil industry subsidies, federal spending as a percentage of the GDP, Medicare cuts, taxes and small businesses and the size of the federal deficit and how it grew.

Obama sometimes seemed somewhat professorial. Romney was more assertive and didn’t hesitate to interrupt the president or the moderator.

Despite the wonky tone of the debate, Romney managed to make some points by personalizing his comments with recollections of people he said he had met on the campaign trail. In another folksy reference, Romney told Lehrer, a veteran of the Public Broadcasting Service, that he would stop the federal subsidy to PBS even though “I love Big Bird.”

Generally polite but pointed, the two men agreed about little if anything.

Obama said his opponent’s plan to reduce all tax rates by 20 percent would cost \$5 trillion and benefit the wealthy at the expense of middle income taxpayers.

Shot back Romney: “Virtually everything he just said about my tax plan is inaccurate.”

The former Massachusetts governor and businessman added that Obama’s proposal to allow the expiration of tax cuts on upper-level income would mean tax increases on small businesses that create jobs by the hundreds of thousands.

The two campaign rivals clasped hands and smiled as they strode onto the debate stage at the University of Denver, then

waved to the audience before taking their places behind identical lecterns.

There was a quick moment of laughter, when Obama referred to first lady Michelle Obama as “sweetie” and noted it was their 20th anniversary.

Romney added best wishes, and said to the first couple, “I’m sure this is the most romantic place you could imagine, here with me.”

Both candidates’ wives were in the audience.

The two men debated before a television audience likely to be counted in the tens of millions. They will meet twice more this month, and their running mates once, but in past election years, viewership has sometimes fallen off after the first encounter.

Without saying so, the two

rivals quickly got to the crux of their race — Romney’s eagerness to turn the contest into a referendum on the past four years while the incumbent desires for voters to choose between his plan for the next four years and the one his rival backs.

Romney ticked off the dreary economic facts of life — a sharp spike in food stamps, economic growth “lower this year than last” and “23 million people out of work or stopped looking for work.”

But Obama criticized Romney’s prescriptions and his refusal to raise taxes and said, “if you take such an unbalanced approach then that means you are going to be gutting our investment in schools and education ... health care for seniors in nursing homes (and) for kids with disabilities.”

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