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# **Al-Qaida Militants Capture Town In Northern Syria**

BY ZEINA KARAM AND BASSEM MROUE Associated Press

BEIRUT — Al-Qaida militants seized a town near the Turkish border Thursday after expelling Western-backed rebels from the area, demonstrating the growing power of jihadis as they seek to expand their influence across opposition-held Syrian territory.

The infighting — now engulfing many parts of northern Syria — threatened to further split opposition forces outgunned by President Bashar Assad's troops and strengthen his hand as he engages with world powers on relinquishing his chemical weapons.

Opposition forces who had been hoping that U.S.-led military strikes would help tip the balance in the civil war are growing increasingly desperate after the Obama administration shelved those plans in favor of a diplomatic solution.

Many rebels blame jihadis in their ranks for the West's reluctance to intervene militarily in Syria or give them the advanced weapons they need. There is

**Egypt** 

BY AHMED ABDEL FATTAH

AND MOHAMMED WAGDY

KERDASA, Egypt — Egyptian security forces backed by

combat vehicles and helicopters stormed a town near the Pyramids, famed among

tourists for its traditional rugs

and dresses, aiming to drive out Islamist militants who held

sway there for over a month,

brandishing their weapons as

residents of Kerdasa greeted

the forces with cheers, women

ululating, and others handing

them out soft drinks, one witness said. The assault, in which a police general was shot to

death by militants, highlighted

authorities' stepped-up resolve

to move against strongholds of

who was ousted by the military

But Kerdasa residents ex-

pressed fear that the security

crackdown will only drive out the militants temporarily. They

said nearby villages on Čairo's

western outskirts, which are

home to some of Egypt's wellknown families with a history of militancy, will continue to provide cover for those who took control of the town.

i wish this had happened a month ago," said Youssef Hussein, a resident of Kerdasa, hailing the early morning raid on his hometown. "We have been living in a bubble. We thought we could die every day. Kerdasa has really been wrecked." The offensive showcases an Egyptian society still in turmoil over Morsi's ouster. The new

military-backed leadership has

been a wide-scale crackdown

on his supporters, while the

most hard-core elements of Morsi's Islamist backers have unleashed a campaign of violence ranging from car bombs

to attacks on Christians. No side appears interested in a po-

Militants took control of

Kerdasa in mid-August, when a mob attacked the local police station, killed 15 policemen and mutilated their bodies, drag-

ging some by cars, scalping at

least one and pouring acid on

another. It was part of a wave

of retaliatory violence after se-

curity forces cracked down on

camps in Cairo with heavy as-

Earlier this week, a large

army-police force stormed an-

On Thursday, they turned

to Kerdasa, with a large force of

cling the town at around 6 a.m.

The police general fell in

troops and policemen encir-

the first moments. On a high-

way overpass on Kerdasa's

edge, Gen. Nabil Farrag had

just addressed his men to rev

them up for the fight, telling

came under a hail of gunfire

from nearby rooftops, accord-

ing to an Associated Press pho-

tographer and video journalists

Army soldiers and police-

body armor he was wearing. He

men ducked for cover. Farrag

fell with a bullet wound in his

lay in the street for nearly 15

until his men could reach him,

hicle that took him to a hospi-

is in charge of the police, later

announced Farrag's death.

carrying him into a military ve-

The Interior Ministry, which

right side, getting past the

minutes, blood soaking

through his white uniform,

ward martyrdom.

at the scene

them, "Let's go, men! Go in, to-

Almost immediately, they

the main pro-Morsi protest

saults that killed hundreds.

other town where militants

took control after the coup -

Dalga, in southern Egypt.

litical settlement.

armed supporters of Islamist President Mohammed Morsi,

After troops swept in, many

they roamed its streets.

Associated Press

also growing concern that the dominant role the extremists are playing is discrediting the rebellion.

Yet the jihadis, including members of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, an al-Qaida offshoot, have been some of the most effective forces on the battlefield, fighting alongside the Western-backed Free Syrian Army to capture military facilities, strategic installations and key neighborhoods in cities such as Aleppo and Homs.

But the two sides have turned their guns on each other. Turf wars and retaliatory killings have evolved into ferocious battles in what has effectively become a war within a war in northern and eastern Syria, leaving hundreds dead on both sides.

"The moderates realized that they're losing a lot of territory to the Islamists and jihadi fighters, and so they're more desperate," said Aaron Zelin, a fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East

The battles for control of Azaz, a town only few kilometers from the Turkish border, represents some of the

Troops Move On Islamist Stronghold

worst infighting in recent months. Members of ISIL overran the town Wednesday evening, killing several

fighters from the Free Syrian Army rebel umbrella group, before forcing them to pull out.

Amateur video showed dozens of gunmen with heavy machine guns on pickup trucks gathering at the border with Turkey with reinforcements. The Associated Press was able to verify the footage based on interviews and other

reporting on the events depicted. A relatively moderate Islamist group with influence in the region, the al-Tawheed brigade, was mediating Thursday to get the al-Qaida-linked militants to leave Azaz, but fighting was continuing.

The prospect of al-Qaida militants so near the frontier is worrisome for the Turkish government, which closed the nearby border crossing of Bab al-Salameh, according to a Foreign Ministry official speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to talk to the media.

#### **House To Vote On Stopgap Funding Bill**

WASHINGTON (AP) — Congressional Republicans struggled to tamp down a family feud Thursday as they approached a politically charged showdown with the White House that combines the threat of a government shutdown, a possible first-ever federal default and the GOP's bid to repeal the nation's three-year-old health care law.

One day after conceding that the Democratic-controlled Senate probably would prevail on the last part, Sen. Ted Cruz still vowed to do "everything and anything possible to defund Obamacare." That includes a possible filibuster of legislation to prevent a partial government shutdown, added the Texas Republican.

That was a step further than Sen. Mike Lee of Utah — Cruz's partner in a summertime run of "Defund Obamacare" television commercials — was willing to go. President Barack Obama's health care law "is not worth causing a shutdown over," he said.

The two men spoke at a news conference with several House Republicans where lawmakers stressed they were unified and thanked Speaker John Boehner for agreeing to tie the anti-shutdown and anti-Obamacare provisions into

That bill is on track for House passage on Friday, with a Senate showdown to follow.

#### **Court Overturns 2010 DeLay Conviction**

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — A Texas appeals court tossed the criminal conviction of former U.S. House Majority Leader Tom DeLay on Thursday, saying there was insufficient evidence for a jury in 2010 to have found him guilty of illegally funneling money to Republican candidates.

The Texas 3rd Court of Appeals said prosecutors failed to prove that the money being laundered was illegally obtained, which the court said was required for a money laundering conviction. Prosecutors alleged that DeLay illegally channel \$190,000 in corporate donations though his political action committee and into Texas legislative races, where corporate money is barred.

The fundamental problem with the State's case was its failure to prove proceeds of criminal activity," the court wrote in a 2-1 decision.

Justices on the appeals court suggested that even jurors appeared confused during deliberations, based on questions they asked about whether the charge required that the money be illegally obtained in the first place.

DeLay was meeting with religious conservatives in Washington when he learned of the court's ruling.

#### Minn. DQ Manager Praised For Goodwill

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Joey Prusak was appalled when he saw a customer at the suburban Minneapolis Dairy Queen store where he works pick up someone else's \$20 bill and slip it into her purse.

So when the woman got up to the counter to order, Prusak refused to serve her unless she returned the money. When the woman refused, the 19-year-old store manager went a step further: He gave the visually impaired customer who hadn't realized he'd dropped the money \$20

"I was just doing what I thought was right," Prusak said Thursday as he recalled the incident from earlier this month. "I did it without even really thinking about it. ... Ninety-nine out of 100 people would've done the same

Even so, Prusak has received loads of praise since a customer's email about him to Dairy Queen was posted

Now, people are calling the store, thanking Prusak and even offering him jobs. Customer traffic at the Hopkins Dairy Queen has doubled, and many people are leaving large tips — money that Prusak says he will donate to charity.



AMINA ISMAIL/MCT

Waleed sits in the middle of police officers who detained him during a street battle between government forces and residents Thursday in Kerdasa, Egypt. The officers disagreed about Waleed's charges.

## **Pope Francis Criticizes Church Emphasis On Abortion, Gays**

**AND RACHEL ZOLL** 

Associated Press

VATICAN CITY — Signaling a dramatic shift in Vatican tone, Pope Francis said the Catholic Church had become obsessed by "small-minded rules" about how to be faithful and that pastors should instead emphasize compassion over condemnation when discussing divisive social issues of abortion, gays and contraception.

The pope's remarkably blunt message six months into his papacy was sure to reverberate in the U.S. and around the globe as bishops who have focused much of their preaching on such hot-button issues are asked to act more as pastors of wounded souls.

In interviews published Thursday in Jesuit journals in 16 countries, Francis said he had been "reprimanded" for not pressing church opposition to abortion in his papacy. But he said "it is not necessary to talk about these issues all the time.

'The church's pastoral ministry cannot be obsessed with the transmission of a disjointed multitude of doctrines to be imposed insistently," Francis said.

We have to find a new balance; otherwise even the moral edifice of the church is likely to fall like a house of cards, losing the freshness and fragrance of the Gospel.



mercy above all.'

**Francis** 

views conducted by a fellow Jesuit. the Rev. Antonio Spadaro, editor of La Civilta Cattolica, a Rome journal for the

the pope said in the 12,000-

word article,

based on inter-

religious order. The church sometimes has locked itself up in small things, in small-minded rules," Francis said. "The most important thing is the first proclamation: Jesus Christ has saved you. And the ministers of the church must be ministers of

The comments contained no change in church teaching, and the pope said reform should not happen quickly. Still, it was the pope's clearest declaration yet of a break in tone and style from his immediate predecessors.

John Paul II and Benedict XVI were both intellectuals for whom doctrine was paramount, an orientation that guided the selection of a generation of bishops and cardinals who now face making a dramatic turnabout in how they preach.

The interviews were conducted by Spadaro over three days in August at the Vatican hotel where Francis has chosen to live rather than in the papal apartments. The Vatican vets all content in Civilta Cattolica, and the pope approved

the Italian version of the article, which America magazine, the Jesuit journal in the U.S., translated into English.

The admonition will especially resonate in the United States, where some bishops have already publicly voiced dismay that Francis hasn't hammered home church teaching on abortion, contraception and homosexuality areas of the culture wars where U.S. bishops often put themselves on the front lines. U.S. bishops were behind Benedict's crackdown on American nuns, who were accused of letting doctrine take a backseat to their social justice work caring for the poor — precisely the priority that Francis is endorsing.

"I think what Francis is doing when he's talking about these hot-button issues, he's not saying one side is right or the other side is right. He's saying that arguing over these things gets in the way of the work that Catholics are supposed to be doing," said David Cloutier, a theologian at Mount St. Mary's University in Maryland.

This suggests a really different vision of what the church should look like in the world. It's not a defensive vision. He comes out and forthrightly says we don't have to talk about these issues all the time. I can't help but see this as a potential rebuke to American leaders who have focused

on these issues.



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