

Strikes Hit Oil Sites In Syria

BY DIAA HADID
Associated Press

BEIRUT — U.S.-led airstrikes targeted Syrian oil installations held by the extremist Islamic State group overnight and early Thursday, killing at least 19 people as more families of militants left their key stronghold, fearing further raids, activists said.

The strikes aimed to knock out one of the militants' main revenue streams — black market oil sales that the U.S. says earn up to \$2 million a day for the group. That funding, along with a further estimated \$1 million a day from other smuggling, theft and extortion, has been crucial in enabling the extremists to overrun much of Syria and neighboring Iraq.

The United States and its Arab allies have been carrying out strikes in Syria for the past three days, trying to uproot the group, which has carved out a self-declared state straddling the border, imposed a harsh version of Islamic law and massacred opponents. The U.S. has been conducting air raids against the group in neighboring Iraq for more than a month.

On the ground, Syria's civil war raged on unabated, with government forces taking back an important industrial area near Damascus from the rebels, according to Syrian activists and state media. Activists also accused President Bashar Assad's troops of using an unspecified deadly chemical substance.

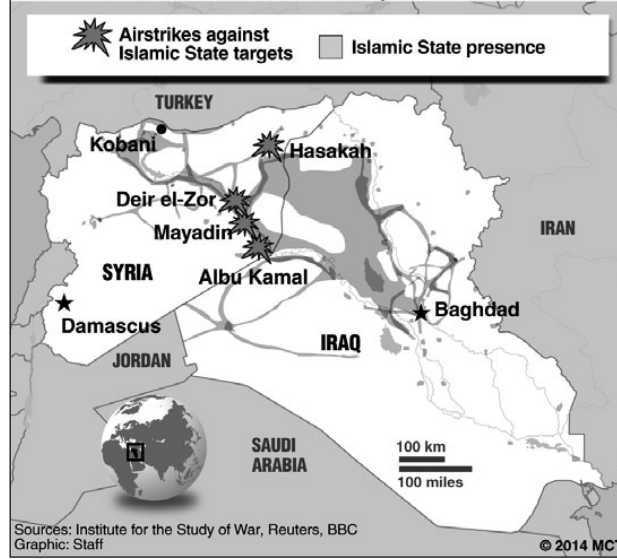
The Islamic State group is believed to control 11 oil fields in Iraq and Syria. The new strikes involved six U.S. warplanes and 10 more from the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, mainly hitting small-scale refineries used by the militants in eastern Syria, Pentagon spokesman Rear Adm. John Kirby said.

At least 14 militants were killed, according to the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which monitors the Syrian conflict through a network of activists on the ground.

The Observatory and two independent activists said

Thursday airstrikes

Overnight, U.S.-led airstrikes in eastern Syria killed 14 Islamic State fighters. On the ground, Kurdish forces were reported to have pushed back an advance by the Islamists toward the border town of Kobani. The United States and its allies targeted Islamic State-controlled oil refineries in eastern Syria.



another five people who lived near one of the refineries were also killed, likely the wives and children of the militants.

Kirby said the Pentagon is looking into reports that civilians were killed but has no evidence yet.

Other strikes hit checkpoints, compounds, training grounds and vehicles of the Islamic State group in northern and eastern Syria. The raids also targeted two Syrian military bases that had been seized by the Islamic State group. In the eastern Syrian town of Mayadeen, a building used by the militants as an Islamic court was also hit.

Apparently fearing more strikes, the militants reduced the number of fighters on their checkpoints, activists said. Many of the casualties the group has sustained in the American-led air raids have been at checkpoints. Activists also said that more families of Islamic State militants were clearing out of the city of Raqqa, the group's de facto capital, on Thursday, heading eastward.

For some Syrians, the airstrikes were bitter justice. "God has imposed on you just a part of what you have done, but you are even more criminal," wrote Mahmoud Abdul-Razak on an anti-Islamic

State group Facebook page, saying that the airstrikes were divine punishment.

But other Syrians see coalition strikes as serving Assad's interests because they do not target government forces and because some have hit the Nusra Front, Syria's al-Qaida affiliate that has battled both the Islamic State and Assad's forces.

Some opposition activists saw the strikes on the Nusra Front as a sign of a wider operation targeting other Syrian militants among the anti-Assad rebellion seen as a potential threat by the United States.

"All of this is to serve Bashar, and yet people believe the Americans are protecting the Syrians," said Saad Saad, writing on the same Facebook page.

A rebel fighter in the northern Aleppo province who only identified himself by his nom de guerre, Ramy, said the U.S. airstrikes appear coordinated with the flights of Syrian military planes, which would disappear from the skies shortly before the U.S.-led coalition aircraft show up.

"It's like they coordinate with each other," Ramy told The Associated Press over Skype. "The American planes come and they go."

The Observatory reported fewer Syrian airstrikes in the past three days — likely because of the presence of the coalition aircraft. Still, bombing continued in a rebel-held area near Damascus, killing at least 8 people, including children, reported the Observatory and activist Hassan Taqluden.

Syrian Kurdish fighters also reported three airstrikes near a northern Kurdish area, which Islamic State militants have been attacking for nearly a week, prompting more than 150,000 people to flee to neighboring Turkey.

The Kurdish fighters said the U.S.-led coalition was likely behind the strikes in the area known as Ayn Arab, or Kobani to the Kurds. A spokesman for the fighters, Reydoor Khalil, pleaded again that the coalition coordinate with them, claiming that the overnight strikes were not effective and struck abandoned bases.

"We are willing to cooperate with the U.S. and its alliance" by providing positions and information about the militants' movements, Khalil said.

Elsewhere in Syria, Assad's forces wrested back the rebel-held industrial area of Adra near Damascus after months of clashes.

On a government-organized tour of the area Thursday, the smell of dead bodies hung in the air amid the bombed-out buildings and torched cars. An unnamed commander accompanying the journalists said that the military dismantled 17 car bombs, and that soldiers were working to disarm more of them.

The government forces seized the Adra industrial zone after rebels accused them of using chemical explosives there on Wednesday. Footage of the wounded from the incident, in which six people were killed, showed men jerking uncontrollably and struggling to breathe before their bodies went limp.

The footage, posted on social networks, appeared genuine and consistent with The Associated Press reporting of the event depicted. But the footage did not suggest what chemical — if any — was used on the men.

345 Refugees Refuse To Leave Ship

LIMASSOL, Cyprus (AP) — A cruise line official says more than 300 people, apparent refugees fleeing from Syria, are refusing to disembark from a cruise ship that rescued them from a small boat stranded off Cyprus.

Salamis Cruise Lines Managing Director Kikis Vasiliou told reporters at the east Mediterranean island's main port of Limassol Thursday that the people are insisting that they be taken to Italy instead.

Cypriot officials said that the 345 people, including 52 children, were to be taken to a reception center near the capital Nicosia where they would be given shelter and medical attention until authorities determine what will happen to them.

The Cypriot Defense Ministry said the boat issued a distress call early Thursday amid bad weather and had "most likely" set sail from Syria loaded with "civilian refugees."

Strikes Causing Disarray Among Factions

BEIRUT (AP) — When the United States opened its aerial campaign against the Islamic State group in Syria this week, its first salvo also hit an al-Qaida cell it says was planning terrorist attacks — a move that has injected more chaos into the conflict and could help President Bashar Assad.

Amid fears they could be targeted next, two rebel factions already have evacuated their bases, and residents in areas under the control of other Islamic brigades cower at home, wondering whether their districts will be hit.

While al-Qaida's branch in Syria, known as the Nusra Front, is considered a terrorist group by the United States, among the Syrian opposition it has a degree of support and respect because its fighters are on the front lines alongside other rebels battling Assad's forces.

To them, the U.S. strikes, which hit several Nusra Front facilities and killed dozens of its fighters, appeared to signal an American move to take out any rebel faction that adheres to an Islamic ideology — a large segment of the rebellion against Assad.

U.S. officials say the strikes were aimed at a cell of hardened jihadis within the Nusra Front called the Khorasan Group, which Washington says poses a direct and imminent threat to U.S. and Western interests.

Despite Arrest, VA Student Still Missing

CHARLOTTESVILLE, Va. (AP) — Investigators still have "no idea whatsoever" where a missing University of Virginia student might be despite the arrest of a fugitive who was seen walking off with her, Charlottesville's police chief said Thursday.

The search for Hannah Graham has expanded to rural areas outside the college town of 40,000, Chief Timothy Longo said. Meanwhile, Jesse Leroy Matthew Jr. agreed to be escorted to Virginia after fleeing to Texas, where he was arrested while camping out on a beach.

Matthew, a 32-year-old is charged with "abduction with intent to defile" the 18-year-old sophomore, and should be back in Charlottesville by Saturday, Longo said.

Matthew allegedly sped away after being questioned by police in Graham's disappearance. He made it as far as the Texas beach town of Gilchrist, 1,260 miles from home and about a seven-hour drive from the border.

Authorities had been concerned he would try to cross into Mexico, according to a person familiar with the search.

Video: Trooper Shoots Unarmed Driver

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — A South Carolina state trooper's dashboard video shows an unarmed driver being shot just seconds after he was stopped for a seatbelt offense — and the trooper, who was fired last week, has now been charged with assault.

Groubert's boss, state Public Safety Director Leroy Smith, called the video "disturbing" and said "Groubert reacted to a perceived threat where there was none" as he fired the officer Friday.

The 31-year-old former trooper is charged with assault and battery of a high and aggravated nature.

Navajo To Get \$554M In Largest Single Tribe Settlement

BY LAURIE LILES
Cronkite News (MCT)

WASHINGTON — The federal government will pay the Navajo Nation \$554 million to settle the tribe's 8-year-old lawsuit claiming that the government mismanaged royalties on tribal mineral resource contracts for decades.

The settlement, scheduled to be signed Friday in a ceremony in Window Rock, calls for the largest government payout ever to an individual tribe.

Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly said in an emailed statement that the deal is "a victory for tribal sovereignty." Administration officials, meanwhile, cited it as further proof of President Barack Obama's efforts to honor relationships between U.S. and tribal governments.

"The Navajo Nation has worked tirelessly for many years to bring this issue to a close," Shelly's statement said. "I am pleased that we have finally come to a resolution on this matter to receive fair and just compensation for the Navajo Nation."

The tribe sued in 2006, charging that the federal government had mishandled royalties since at least 1946 from oil, gas, coal, uranium and other mineral leases it held in trust for the tribe.

That lawsuit originally sought \$900 million in damages as well as detailed reporting on tribal accounts. But in agreeing to the settlement deal in May, the Navajo Nation Council said continuing to press the suit presented "significant" risks.

That agreement, signed in early June, gave the government 120 days to pay up.

There are no restrictions on how the money can be spent. Shelly's statement said the tribe would host town hall meetings across the Nation to decide how to best utilize and invest the funds.

Under the deal, neither the government nor the Navajo Nation admits any liability or wrongdoing and both agree to ask the court to dismiss the lawsuit. The tribe agrees it will not sue the government for trust-related harms that occurred before the settlement was reached.

But the settlement preserves the

tribe's right to pursue water-rights claims and to pursue relief for environmental or health impacts from historical uranium mining on or near the Navajo reservation.

The settlement also does not diminish the tribe's hunting, fishing, trapping and gathering rights, among other provisions.

Officials from the departments of Justice and Interior and the Bureau of Indian Affairs are scheduled to be on hand Friday to sign the agreement.

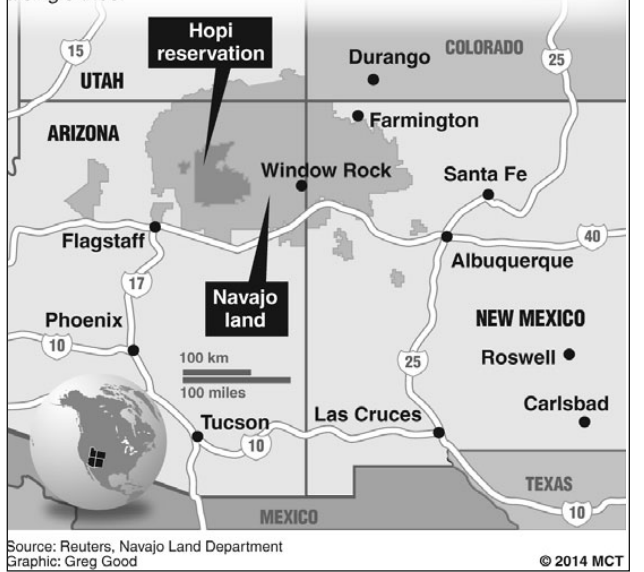
"This settlement is yet another example of the administration's promise to strengthen the ties between the United States and the Navajo Nation," said Acting Assistant Attorney General Sam Hirsch in an email.

Rep. Ann Kirkpatrick, D-Ariz., whose district includes the Arizona portion of the Navajo Nation said in an email she was pleased by the settlement.

"It's important that mistakes of the past are made right," she said. "This will bring critical resources to the Navajo people."

Navajo tribe wins \$554 million

The Navajo Nation won a record \$554 million settlement claiming the U.S. government mishandled its funds and natural resources for more than 50 years. It will mark the biggest U.S. legal settlement with a single tribe.



United Nations: Obama Urges World To Do More To Tackle Ebola

BY JULIE PACE
AP White House Correspondent



Obama

UNITED NATIONS — President Barack Obama, in a sober assessment of international efforts to stem a deadly Ebola outbreak, warned a high-level United Nations gathering Thursday that there is a "significant gap" between what's been offered so far and what is actually needed to stem the health crises in West Africa.

The leaders of the hardest-hit nations also appealed for more help, with the president of Sierra Leone calling the Ebola virus "worse than terrorism."

The emergency U.N. session on Ebola reflected the deep concern about an outbreak that has so far killed nearly 3,000 people. U.S. health officials have warned that the number of infected people could explode to at least 1.4 million by mid-January, though they have also cautioned that the totals could peak well below that if efforts to control the outbreak are ramped up.

Despite the grim warnings, Obama said interna-

tional aid simply is not flowing into West Africa fast enough.

"The outbreak is such where at this point, more people will die," Obama said as he closed out three days of diplomacy at the annual gathering of the U.N. General Assembly. "So this is not one where there should be a lot of wrangling and people waiting to see who else is doing what. Everybody has got to move fast in order for us to make a difference."

On Thursday, top lawmakers in Congress also approved the use of leftover Afghanistan war money to begin funding Obama's \$1 billion request to help fight the outbreak.

Obama has come under criticism from some in West Africa for a slow response to the outbreak. He outlined a more robust plan last week, announcing that the U.S. would dispatch 3,000 U.S. troops to Liberia to set up facilities and form training

teams to help with the response. The Pentagon mission will involve airlifting personnel, medical supplies and equipment, such as tents to house Ebola victims and isolate people exposed to the virus.

European Commission chief Jose Manuel Barroso announced Thursday that the European Union was increasing aid to tackle the outbreak by nearly \$40 million.

The Ebola outbreak has hit Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea the hardest, leaving aid groups in the region have scrambled desperately for resources.

"Our 150-bed facility in Monrovia opens for just 30 minutes each morning. Only a few people are admitted, to fill beds made empty by those who died overnight," the president of Doctors Without Borders, Joanne Liu, told the U.N. meeting.

As leaders from West Africa appealed for more help from the international community, they also cast the outbreak as far more than a health crisis.

Liberian President Ellen

Johnson Sirleaf, addressing the conference via video, cited a "precipitous decline in economic activity" as well as the "loss of income and jobs" for people in her country.

President Ernest Bai Koroma of Sierra Leone, who also spoke on a video feed, said his country was facing "life and death challenges" that were worse than the threat of terrorism. His comments appeared to be a veiled reference to the degree to which the threat from Middle East extremists — most notably the Islamic State group in Iraq and Syria — has dominated the discussions at the U.N. this week.

Koroma took the dramatic step Thursday of sealing off districts where more than 1 million live in order to try to contain the outbreak.

The fears around the outbreak have spread far beyond West Africa, and one African leader made a plaintive appeal Thursday during his address at the U.N. for the world not to stigmatize the entire continent.

"Not all countries in Africa have disease," Tanzan-

ian President Jakaya Kikwete said, to rare applause from the chamber. "In fact, the affected countries are closer to Europe than they are to Kenya, Tanzania or South Africa in eastern and southern Africa. ... To cancel visits to these parts of Africa is incomprehensible."

While Obama touted the assistance the U.S. is providing, he said America alone

cannot solve the problem and urged other nations to take similar action.

"We don't have the capacity to do all of this by ourselves," he said. "We don't have enough health workers by ourselves. We can build the infrastructure and the architecture to get help in, but we're going to need others to contribute."

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