



CAIRO (PRESS TV) – The Egyptian army has killed twenty-five al-Qaeda-affiliated militants during airborne attacks in the violence-plagued Sinai Peninsula of the North African country.

A security source said Egyptian AH-64 Apache attack helicopters on Friday pounded two houses in the town of Sheikh Zuweid, situated 334 kilometers (214 miles) north-east of the capital, Cairo.

The Ansar Bait al-Maqdis terrorists were planning attacks against Egyptian government forces. Some 20 other militants were also wounded in the airstrikes.

The development comes a week after Egyptian security officials said at least 44 people were killed and over 80 others injured after militants carried out attacks on army and police targets as well as an office of a daily newspaper in the strife-stricken Sinai Peninsula.

Ansar Bait al-Maqdis militant group claimed responsibility for the attacks.

On January 31, Egypt's President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi vowed to defeat militants fighting against government forces in the Sinai Peninsula.

He said his government is ready to brace for a long fight to defeat extremists, noting that the fight will be long but Egyptian forces will not give Sinai to the militants.

A state of emergency has been declared in the northern part of the Sinai Peninsula since a militant attack on an Egyptian army checkpoint killed more than 30 soldiers in October 2014.

The Egyptian military considers the Sinai Peninsula a safe haven for gunmen, who use the region as a base for their "acts of terror."

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KIEV (Reuters) – Convoys of buses converged from two sides on the town of Debaltseve in eastern Ukraine on Friday after separatist rebels and government forces appeared to have patched together a truce to allow civilians to be evacuated.

A Reuters correspondent outside the town of Horlivka, west of Debaltseve, said around 30 empty buses were heading towards Debaltseve under an escort from monitors from the OSCE security watchdog and rebel police and military.

Another Reuters witness said a similar convoy, controlled by Ukrainian forces, was heading to Debaltseve from Artemivsk, east of the town.

Government forces have been holding on to Debaltseve, a strategic rail hub linking the two separatist-held regions of the east, for several weeks despite prolonged artillery and tank attacks by the separatists.

The temporary truce was declared as German and French leaders pressed forward with a new peace plan to end the crisis in Ukraine.

More than 5,000 people have been killed in a conflict which has caused the biggest crisis between Russia and the West since the end of the Cold War.

The rebels said the truce came into force at 9 a.m. Moscow time and witnesses said there was no firing between the two sides as the convoys moved towards Debaltseve.

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ABUJA (PRESS TV) – Boko Haram Takfiri militants have attacked a town in Niger near the border with Nigeria.

The Nigeria-based militants raided Bosso early Friday, said Abba Hassan, a pharmacist local resident.

He added that Niger's soldiers managed to repel the militants after fighting them for an hour.

The attack came on the second day of a three-day meeting in the Cameroonian capital, Yaounde, with the aim of finalizing plans to establish a 7,500-strong force from Chad, Nigeria, Cameroon, Niger and Benin.

"Niger and Chadian planes are conducting surveillance at the moment in town and troops on the ground are combing through the streets," Hassan was quoted by AP as saying.

Niger is Nigeria's second neighboring country, after Cameroon, where Boko Haram-related violence has escalated over the past days.

Cameroonian officials said that on February 4-5, Boko Haram militants raided Cameroon's border town of Fotokol, killing nearly 100 people and wounding 500 others.

The region of Niger where recent violence took place is an area where refugees already have arrived by the thousands seeking safety from Boko Haram attacks.

Boko Haram, whose name means "Western education is forbidden," controls parts of northeastern Nigeria and says its goal is to overthrow the Nigerian government.

## China Criticizes Obama for Meeting With Dalai Lama

BEIJING (PRESS TV) – China says it is opposed to foreign meddling in the country's domestic affairs a day after US President Barack Obama held a meeting with the Dalai Lama, the exiled Tibetan spiritual leader.

On Friday, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Hong Lei slammed the United States for having the Dalai Lama at a high-profile prayer breakfast in Washington.

"We are against foreign countries interfering in China's domestic affairs under the pretext of Tibet-related issues," said the Chinese official.

Hong further accused the spiritual leader of seeking support from foreign countries "in order to realize his political end."

During the breakfast, Obama welcomed the Nobel Peace Prize winner, calling him "a

good friend."

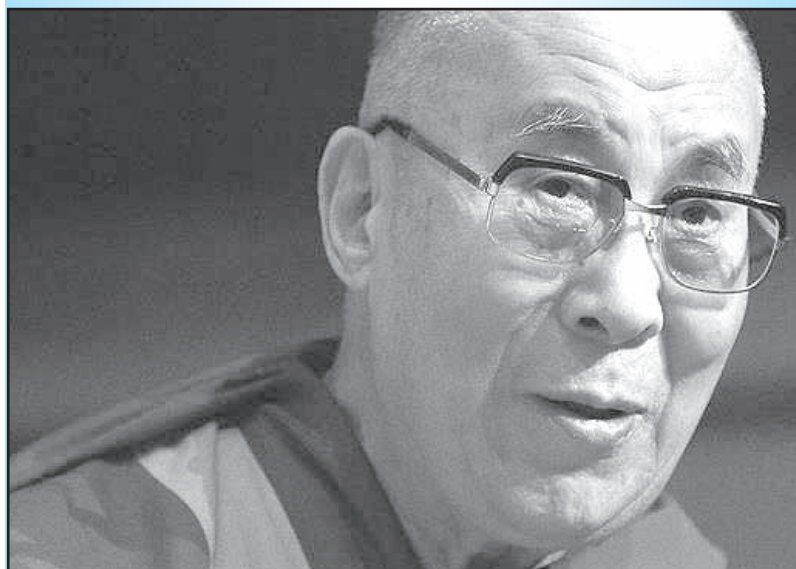
The event marked the first time the two met in public.

China has long opposed the Dalai Lama's meeting with different heads of states as well as his visit to other countries that depend on Beijing for investment.

China has accused the 79-year-old Buddhist leader of being a separatist who supports the use of violence to set up an independent state. He is also accused of fueling unrest in the Himalayan region.

Beijing says the unrest in Tibet, which is incited by the West, is a plan by Beijing's opponents to tarnish the image of the country.

The Dalai Lama fled a failed uprising in Tibet in 1959 and retired from politics in 2011. However, he maintains that he seeks only greater autonomy for



Tibetan spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama

good friend." He also said the Dalai Lama was "a powerful example of what it means to prac-

Tibetan areas in China. Beijing regards Tibet as an integral part of its territory.

## German, French Leaders Head for Moscow to Press for Ukraine Peace

MOSCOW (Reuters) – The leaders of Germany and France will fly to Moscow on Friday on a dramatic initiative to try to end fighting in Ukraine that they fear could threaten peace elsewhere in Europe.

The planned trip by Chancellor Angela Merkel and President Francois Hollande to see Russia's Vladimir Putin on Friday evening follows five hours of late-night talks with Ukrainian leader Petro Poroshenko in snow-bound Kiev on Thursday.

Back in their respective capitals in between, Hollande called the talks "the first step", while Merkel said it was unclear whether the meeting in Moscow would secure a ceasefire.

Their initiative follows fierce fighting and territorial gains in eastern Ukraine by Russian-backed separatists since a peace blueprint was agreed in Belarus in September.

The conflict has killed more than 5,000 people and the Ukrainian military reported that two more soldiers had been killed in the past 24 hours in the east, with 26 wounded.

The growing military pressure has shaken the Ukrainian economy and driven a debate over the possibility of the United States providing Kiev's hard-pressed army with arms.

Merkel said she and Hollande were not on the road as neutral mediators but were representing European interests. "These interests are peace, maintaining Europe's peaceful order."

Her spokesman Steffen Seibert said there "was no sign whatsoever" of a breakthrough so far.

A statement on Poroshenko's website said the sides had expressed the hope that "Russia had an interest in" a peaceful settlement of the conflict.

# UK Tribunal Says Intelligence-Sharing With U.S. Was Unlawful



Satellite dishes are seen at GCHQ's outpost at Bude, southwest England in this photograph dated June 23, 2013.

LONDON (Reuters) - A British tribunal ruled on Friday that some aspects of intelligence-sharing between security agencies in Britain and the United States were unlawful until December 2014, in a ground-breaking case brought by civil liberties groups.

The Investigating Powers Tribunal ruled that Britain's GCHQ had acted unlawfully in accessing data on millions of people in Britain that had been collected by the U.S. National Security Agency (NSA), because the arrangements were secret.

Campaign groups Liberty, Privacy International, Amnesty International and others brought the case following revelations about mass surveillance made by former NSA contractor Edward Snowden.

It was the first time in its 15-year his-

tory that the tribunal, which deals with legal challenges to Britain's GCHQ, MI5 and MI6, had issued a ruling that went against one of those security agencies.

The legal challenge forced the British government to reveal some details about the previously secret rules governing how GCHQ accessed data collected as part of the NSA's Prism and Upstream programs, first revealed by Snowden in June 2013.

The tribunal ruled that "the regime governing the soliciting, receiving, storing and transmitting by UK authorities of private communications of individuals located in the UK, which have been obtained by U.S. authorities pursuant to Prism and ... Upstream" contravened human rights laws until the government's disclosures about how the ar-

rangements worked.

A spokeswoman for Prime Minister David Cameron said the rules on intelligence-sharing were now fully lawful, adding: "The judgment will not require GCHQ to change what it does."

"VIOLATED OUR RIGHTS" Material revealed by Snowden and cited by the civil liberties groups showed Prism allows the NSA to access data handled by the world's largest Internet companies, including Google, Yahoo, Facebook and others.

The groups hailed Friday's ruling as a major victory.

"We now know that, by keeping the public in the dark about their secret dealings with the National Security Agency, GCHQ acted unlawfully and violated our rights," Liberty's legal director James Welch said in a statement.

## U.S. Pressing Cuba to Restore Ties Before April: Officials

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The United States is pressing Cuba to allow the opening of its embassy in Havana by April, U.S. officials told Reuters, despite the Communist island's demand that it first be removed from the U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism.

A refusal by Cuba to allow the United States to quickly establish an official embassy for the first time in half a century could complicate talks between the Cold War foes, reflecting enduring mis-

trust as they move to end decades of confrontation.

Striking Cuba from the terrorism list could take until June or longer, although the White House is pushing officials to move quickly, said two U.S. officials with direct knowledge of the State Department's review to take Cuba off the list.

Washington is eager to re-establish diplomatic ties before a regional summit in Panama in April, when President Barack Obama will

meet Cuban leader Raul Castro for the first time since 2013, the officials said.

The two leaders announced a historic deal on Dec. 17 to restore relations. U.S. and Cuban diplomats will meet this month or in early March in Washington for a second round of talks.

While ending diplomatic relations could happen quickly, the process to normalize, including removing the U.S. trade embargo, will take far longer.

## EU Pledges 1 Bln Euros to Fight ISIL

BRUSSELS (PRESS TV) – The



EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini

in funding to deal with the threat of ISIL terrorist group in conflict-stricken Syria and Iraq over the next two years.

"This package will strengthen our actions to help restore peace and security in a region that is so close to us and that has been devastated by terrorism and violence for too long," EU foreign policy chief, Federica Mogherini, said in a statement on Friday.

"We are now better equipped to do more together – with our Member States, regional partners and the international community – in political and diplomatic terms as well as through aid and on security. We can now better tackle the root causes of instability and violence," she added.

She pointed to the ruthless killing of the Jordanian pilot, Moaz al-Kassasbeh, at the hands of the ISIL last Tuesday and said his murder once again proved that "terrorism has no boundaries and that Muslims are the first victims of" the Takfiri group.

A video released last Tuesday showed 26-year-old Kassasbeh dressed in an orange jumpsuit and surrounded by flames of fire inside a metal cage. The pilot had been captured last December by ISIL militants when his plane went down in northern Syria during a mission against the terrorist group.

Jordanian King Abdullah II pledged to step up the fight against the ISIL and other militant groups.

European Union has promised one billion euros (USD 1.14 billion)