

Russia Open to Coordinating Strikes With US



Russian warplanes strike deep inside Islamic State's heartland

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Russia says it is ready to coordinate with the United States in airstrikes against positions of the Takfiri Daesh terrorists in Syria.

Russia's Deputy Defense Minister Anatoly Antonov said Tuesday that the Russian military "in principle" agrees with proposals made by the US military on coordinating airstrikes in Syria, Russia's Tass news agency reported.

Russia has been targeting positions of Daesh in western and northern Syria since September 30. The United States and its allies, including Turkey, have been involved in the so-called campaign against purported Daesh positions in the east.

The comments by Antonov came about a week after defense officials from the US and Russia held a one-hour video teleconference to discuss ways to "deconflict" the Syrian airspace, or prevent unintended air incidents, including collisions. The two sides reportedly failed to reach an agreement and made no clear hint that such a consensus could emerge in the future.

US Army Defense Department spokeswoman Lt. Col. Michelle Baldanza said earlier Tuesday that Washington would not coordinate coalition activities in Syria with Russia on the grounds that Russians have ignored a "proposal" on the issue.

The US and its allies in NATO have been critical of Russia's targeting of the so-called moderate opposition in Syria, although Mos-

cow has denied the charges. The criticism hit a new high on Monday after NATO officials gathered for an emergency meeting in Brussels to discuss Russia's two reported violations last weekend of Turkey's airspace, which is a NATO member.

In a separate development, Vladimir Komoyedov, who heads the Defense Committee of Russia's State Duma (lower house of parliament), said Tuesday that Russia may use its naval forces to establish a blockade along the Syrian coastline to facilitate the delivery of armaments into Syrian territory.

"Regarding the large-scale use of the Black Sea Fleet in this operation, I don't think it will happen, but in terms of a coastal blockade, I think that it's quite [possible]," he said, adding, "The delivery of artillery strikes hasn't been excluded; the ships are ready for this, but there is no point in it for now. The terrorists are in deep, where the artillery cannot reach."

Russia is currently running a naval facility in the western Syrian province of Tartus, which provides Moscow with access to the Mediterranean Sea. Four Russian warships, including a missile cruiser and a destroyer, are currently deployed in the eastern Mediterranean.

NATO Rejects Russia Explanation on Turkish Air Space

NATO on Tuesday rejected Moscow's explanation that its warplanes violated the air space of alliance member Turkey at the weekend by

mistake and said Russia was sending more ground troops to Syria and building up its naval presence.

With Russia extending its air strikes to include the ancient city of Palmyra, Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan said he was losing patience with Russian violations of his country's air space.

"An attack on Turkey means an attack on NATO," Erdogan warned at a Brussels news conference.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said the alliance had reports of a substantial Russian military build-up in Syria, including ground troops and ships in the eastern Mediterranean.

"I will not speculate on the motives ... but this does not look like an accident and we have seen two of them," Stoltenberg said of the air incursions over Turkey's border with Syria. He noted that they "lasted for a long time".

The incidents, which NATO has described as "extremely dangerous" and "unacceptable", underscore the risks of a further escalation of the Syrian civil war, as Russian and U.S. warplanes fly combat missions over the same country for the first time since World War Two.

The Russian Defense Ministry had said that an SU-30 warplane had entered Turkish air space along the border with Syria "for a few seconds" on Saturday, a mistake caused by bad weather. NATO says a plane also entered Turkish air space on Sunday, an incident Russia says it is looking into.

Venezuela Hits Back at U.S. for Questioning Its Democracy

CARACAS (Dsiaphtches) - Venezuela's foreign minister on Monday blasted her U.S. counterpart John Kerry for questioning the country's democratic credentials ahead of legislative elections the ruling socialists are forecast to lose.

The spat follows a nascent rapprochement earlier this year between the two ideologically-opposed nations.

In an interview broadcast by CNN en Espanol on Monday, Kerry described Venezuela as "troubled" and said December's elections would be a "measure of the type of democracy that exists in the country."

Responding on Twitter on Monday night, Foreign Minister Delcy Rodriguez said Venezuela rejected Kerry's comments. "The electoral register in the United States is founded on discrimination... Our political system is founded on democracy."

Venezuela and the United States have had difficult relations since

late president Hugo Chavez was elected in 1998.

They came to a nadir in 2006 when Chavez described his then U.S. counterpart George W. Bush as "the devil."

The two countries have not had ambassadorial ties since 2010.

On Sunday, Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro said President Barack Obama was delaying consent for his proposed new ambassador in Washington.

The United States has not named a proposed ambassador to Venezuela and U.S. officials in Caracas did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Relations began to warm earlier this year though the process appears to have been set back when Leopoldo Lopez, a jailed opposition leader, was sentenced to nearly 14 years in prison in September on charges of fomenting anti-government violence.

Washington had been pressing for Lopez's release.

Big U.S. Firms Hold \$2.1 Trillion Overseas to Avoid Taxes: Study

LONDON (Reuters) - The 500 largest American companies hold more than \$2.1 trillion in accumulated profits offshore to avoid U.S. taxes and would collectively owe an estimated \$620 billion in U.S. taxes if they repatriated the funds, according to a study released on Tuesday.

The study, by two left-leaning non-profit groups, found that nearly three-quarters of the firms on the Fortune 500 list of biggest American companies by gross revenue operate tax haven subsidiaries in countries like Bermuda, Ireland, Luxembourg and the Netherlands.

The Citizens for Tax Justice and the U.S. Public Interest Research Group Education Fund used the companies' own financial filings with the Securities and Exchange Commission to reach their conclusions.

Technology firm Apple was holding \$181.1 billion offshore, more than any other U.S. company, and would owe an estimated \$59.2 billion in U.S. taxes if it tried to bring the money back to the United States from its three overseas tax havens, the study said.

The conglomerate General Electric has booked \$119 billion offshore in 18 tax havens, software firm Microsoft is holding \$108.3

billion in five tax haven subsidiaries and drug company Pfizer is holding \$74 billion in 151 subsidiaries, the study said.

"At least 358 companies, nearly 72 percent of the Fortune 500, operate subsidiaries in tax haven jurisdictions as of the end of 2014," the study said. "All told these 358 companies maintain at least 7,622 tax haven subsidiaries."

Fortune 500 companies hold more than \$2.1 trillion in accumulated profits offshore to avoid taxes, with just 30 of the firms accounting for \$1.4 trillion of that amount, or 65 percent, the study found.

Fifty-seven of the companies disclosed that they would expect to pay a combined \$184.4 billion in additional U.S. taxes if their profits were not held offshore. Their filings indicated they were paying about 6 percent in taxes overseas, compared to a 35 percent U.S. corporate tax rate, it said.

"Congress can and should take strong action to prevent corporations from using offshore tax havens, which in turn would restore basic fairness to the tax system, reduce the deficit and improve the functioning of markets," the study concluded.



The pilot who collapsed and died on an American Airlines overnight flight from Phoenix to Boston has been identified.

Cpt Michael Johnston, 57, was flying the plane with 147 passengers and five crew on board when he "passed away while at work", the airline said.

The first officer took over and made an emergency landing in Syracuse.

Johnston's wife told local TV she had been told her husband had probably died of a heart attack. He had had double heart bypass surgery in 2006.

Cpt Johnston had been flying as a first officer and then as a captain since 1990.

Medics waiting on the tarmac pronounced him dead at the scene.

COATESVILLE, Pa. (AP) — A suburban Philadelphia woman repeatedly injected her 14-year-old daughter and another teen with heroin, even tying a string around their arms to isolate their veins, prosecutors said Monday.

The Chester County district attorney's office alleged that Jessica Lynn Riffe, 34, of West Caln Township, supplied the 14-year-old girl and a 16-year-old boy with heroin and injected them multiple times last month.

Riffe was charged with corruption of minors, endangering the welfare of children and drug delivery. She was jailed in lieu of \$50,000 pending a preliminary hearing Friday. Online court records didn't list a lawyer who could comment on the charges and a message left at a number listed in her name wasn't immediately returned Monday.

Hong Kong (AFP) - A homeless woman lay dead at a Hong Kong McDonald's restaurant for hours surrounded by diners who failed to notice her, sparking concern over the city's "McRefugees".

The woman, who police say was between 50 and 60, was found dead Saturday morning and has been held up as an example of the growing number of homeless people who seek shelter in 24-hour restaurants.

"Officers arrived upon a report from a female customer (that a person was found to have fainted)," police said in a statement.

"The subject was certified dead at the scene."

Local media said the woman was slumped at a table, 24 hours after she first entered the restaurant in the working class district of Ping Shek.

She had not moved for seven hours before fellow diners noticed something was wrong, according to Apple Daily, citing CCTV footage.

The woman was thought to have regularly spent nights in the McDonald's, the South China Morning Post said.

The city's Social Welfare Department said it was "highly concerned" about the incident.

"We endeavour to support street sleepers to enhance their self-reliance... the subject is a complex social problem," a department spokeswoman said.

Nigeria's Takfiri Boko Haram militants have attacked a Chadian base near the border, killing 11 soldiers and injuring over a dozen others.

"This surprise attack claimed the lives of 11 soldiers and wounded 13 (and) 17 Boko Haram fighters were killed," said a Chadian security source on Tuesday.

"Boko Haram members attacked our positions at 4:30 a.m. (0330 GMT) in Kaiga Ngouboua, about two kilometers (1.2 miles) from the Nigerian border," the source said.

The assault near Lake Chad is the deadliest incident in the recent past.

95 Refugee Bodies Washed Ashore in Libya

TRIPOLI (Dispatches) - The Libyan Red Crescent says the bodies of nearly 100 refugees have washed up on the North African country's shores over the past few days.

On Sunday, a spokesman for the Libyan Red Crescent, Mohamed al-Masrati, said 95 bodies had been found over the last five days on Libyan shores.

Masrati said 85 corpses had washed up near the Libyan capital, Tripoli, and another 10 near the Libyan coastal city of Sabartha.

A spokesman, most of the victims were refugees from other African countries, attempting to enter European states by setting off from Libya.

In recent months, thousands of refugees, mostly from Africa and the Middle East, have fled war and unrest in their countries in order to gain entry to wealthier European countries.

Many bodies belonging to asylum seekers have been washing up on the shores of Libya, Greece, and Turkey in recent months.

A number of EU member states, such as Hungary, have so far closed their borders or suspended crossing points to stop the refugee influx.

EU leaders have agreed to provide the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and the World Food Program (WFP) with one billion euros in a bid to address the worsening refugee crisis.

Figures released by the United Nations (UN) indicate that some 500,000 people have entered Europe so far this year. Some 3,000 have lost their lives at sea.

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