

13 Civilians Killed by Mortars in Afghanistan

KABUL (Dispatches) – At least 13 people, including women and children, have been killed when a pair of mortar blasts ripped through their house in Afghanistan’s northern province of Faryab, a local official says.

The deadly incident occurred in Dawolat Abad district, said General Dilawer Shah Dilawer, the Faryab provincial police chief, on Saturday, adding that the blasts also inflicted injuries to at least three other civilians.

However, he said that at the time it was not clear whether the Taliban militant group, which is active in the region, was behind the shelling. The terror outfit has not commented yet on the incident.

Dilawer further said a security team had been dispatched to the site to probe the deadly attack.

In the past few months, the restive Faryab province has witnessed a fresh wave of violence as the gov-

ernment troops are trying to contain the Taliban insurgency in the region.

Meanwhile, the U.S. military denied reports that an air strike in the eastern Afghan province of Nangarhar had killed as many as 16 civilians, saying the operation had killed only militant fighters.

“The militants were observed loading weapons into a vehicle and were under surveillance until the vehicle was destroyed by an air strike,” said Bob Purtiman, a spokesman for the U.S. military in Afghanistan.

“The strike was conducted in the middle of open terrain. There was zero chance of civilian casualties,” he said.

Earlier in the day, the district governor of Haska Mena district, Saaz Wali, told reporters that as many as 16 civilians, including women and children had been killed when a



Taliban militants stand with their weapons in Ahmad Aba district on the outskirts of Gardez, the capital of Pakitia province, Afghanistan, July 18, 2017.

passenger van and a nearby house were hit by a U.S. air strike.

The war in Afghanistan is the longest in U.S. history with a cost of about \$1 trillion. More than 2,400 Americans have died and another

20,000 have been wounded in the country since the beginning of the invasion. The U.S. currently has about 8,400 soldiers in Afghanistan with another 5,000 troops from NATO allies.

Tillerson Demands Delay of Iraqi Kurdistan Referendum



Leader of Iraq’s semi-autonomous region Kurdistan region Massoud Barzani

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) – The U.S. secretary of state has called on the leader of Iraq’s semi-autonomous region Kurdistan region, Massoud Barzani, to delay a controversial referendum on independence from the mainland slated for next month.

In a telephone call on Friday, Rex Tillerson said Washington “would want for the referendum to be postponed and that the issues between the Kurdis-

tan region and the federal government in Baghdad should be addressed through dialogue,” Barzani’s office said in a statement.

The statement further said, “On the issue of the postponement of the referendum, the President (Barzani) stated that the people of the Kurdistan Region would expect guarantees and alternatives for their future.”

It, however, did not elaborate on Barzani’s reaction to the demand by the senior American official concerning the referendum that is due to take place on September 25.

However, Reuters on Saturday quoted Hoshiyar Zebari, Barzani’s advisor, as saying that Iraq’s Kurds will maintain their plan to hold the referendum.

“The date is standing, Sept. 25, no change,” the Iraqi Kurdish official.

The developments came on the backdrop of the U.S. State Department’s expression of concern back in June that the referendum will distract from “more urgent priorities” such as the fight against Daesh terrorists.

Senior officials in Baghdad as well as in neighboring states of Iran and Turkey have voiced concerns over the planned vote, warning against largely Western-backed attempts to partition Iraq.

In June, Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi described as

untimely the decision by Barzani to hold the referendum.

“Every part of Iraq has aspirations and has a dream, and we respect that, even if we disagree with it,” Abadi said on June 13. “We live in one homeland and they are our partners.”

“We have a constitution that we’ve voted on, we have a federal parliament and a federal government...The referendum at this time is not opportune,” he added.

His remarks came after Barzani announced in a Twitter message that the northern territory would hold an independence referendum in September not only in the three provinces that make up the Kurdish region but in the areas that are disputed by the Kurdish and the central Iraqi governments.

Following the announcement, the Iraqi government also issued a statement saying that it would reject any unilateral move by regional Kurdish authorities to push for independence.

Erdogan:

Ankara-Berlin Ties to Improve After German Elections

ANKARA (Dispatches) – Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has predicted that the country’s strained ties with Berlin will improve after Germany’s parliamentary election in September.

In a Saturday televised speech in the western city of Isparta, Erdogan said, “criticism from Europe is about their internal politics.”

“France and Austria did this before, we see that Germany follows the same strategy. I believe that this situation will improve after elections,” he added.

Germany is set to hold parliamentary election on September 24, with Chancellor Angela Merkel running for a fourth term.

German-Turkish relations have been strained over the past year since the coup attempt of July 2016 in Turkey and Ankara’s crackdown on opposition since then.

Turkey is angry at Germany for granting asylum to officers Turkey says were behind the failed coup.

Ankara has also leveled accusations against Berlin over giving sanctuary to outlawed Kurdish militants and allowing their sympathizers to stage anti-Turkey rallies across Germany.

Berlin, for its part, has toughened its stance toward Ankara following the arrests of 22 German citizens who have been taken into custody in the ensuing crackdown. Nine of those are still in prison, including the recently jailed journalists Deniz Yucel and Mesale Tolu.

The row intensified after Turkey refused to allow German lawmakers to visit military personnel at Incirlik Air Base and another base in Konya, located some 50 kilometers south of the Turkish capital Ankara.

Turkey’s refusal to grant access to German lawmakers came after Berlin blocked visits and speeches by senior Turkish officials to members of Turkish diaspora in Germany ahead of an April referendum in Turkey.

On July 20, German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel said that Germany would review state guarantees for foreign investment in Turkey and would urge businesses against putting their money there. Gabriel said that Berlin would also review its support for EU financial flows to the long-time aspirant to membership of the bloc.

Ankara has been engaged in suppressing the media, activists and opposition groups, who are believed to have played a role in the failed putsch.

U.S. F-18 Fighter Jet Crash Lands at Bahrain Airport

MANAMA (Dispatches) – A twin-engine supersonic and multirole McDonnell Douglas F/A-18 Hornet combat jet has crash landed at Bahrain International Airport, disrupting flights to and from the tiny Persian Gulf kingdom.

Social media pictures of the crash showed the plane leaning back on its tail with its nose tipped into the air.

The grey fighter jet seemed largely intact and the pilot ejected from the aircraft. It is not im-

mediately clear whether anyone was injured in the incident.

Video footage of the crash, which took place at around 2 p.m. local time (1100 GMT) on Saturday, showed smoke billowing from the cockpit.

Dozens of flights were diverted after the incident. Bahrain, which is home to the U.S. Fifth Fleet, has recently stepped up a crackdown on critics, barring two main political groups, re-

voking the citizenship of the spiritual leader of the Shia community, Sheikh Isa Qassim, and jailing rights activists.

Back in May and less than 48 hours after US President Donald Trump left Saudi Arabia, where he had met Bahrain’s King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifah, Manama regime troops attacked supporters of Sheikh Qassim in the northwestern village of Diraz, killing at least five people and arresting 286 others.

Saudis...

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been prepared to host the Taliban but claimed they had imposed three conditions - that the Taliban denounce Al-Qaeda; that they recognize the Afghan constitution; and that the Taliban must lay down their weapons. This is contradicted by MEE sources.

Anas knows one thing. Somewhere along the line, the governments he attempted to bring in to the process ruined it with their own agendas.

“I recognized later on, even though the words ‘reconciliation’ or ‘peace talks’ were accepted by all, that that does not mean they wanted real peace talks. I recognize the agendas of politicians and governments. Even though they accept the principle, in reality they were not necessarily working for the peace I want.”

Iraqi...

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... When (Daesh) invaded parts of Iraq and attacked Kurdistan, once again we were told it’s a time of war so it’s not the right time. Now that (Daesh) is on the verge of collapse we are again being told it is not the right time,” he said.

The U.S. and other Western powers are concerned that the vote could turn into another regional flashpoint. Turkey, Iran and Syria, which together with Iraq have sizeable Kurdish populations, all oppose an independent Kurdistan.

On Saturday, Kurdish officials told Reuters that that September date for the vote would be maintained.

Muqtada al-Sadr, the influential Iraqi Shia cleric, said on Friday that he had urged Kurdish leaders to postpone the referendum.

“Kurds are part of Iraq, and we want them to stay that way, but some issues accumulated from Iraqi governments have led them to depart and reach a level to secede,” Sadr told Arsaq al-Awsat.

The referendum, which was called in June, has been a bone of contention among the Kurds themselves over what territory states will be included in a future Kurdish state.

Sinjar has seen repeated clashes between forces loyal to the KRG and forces linked to the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) who oppose the KRG system of government.

The Gorran movement, an Iraqi Kurdish opposition party with 20 out of 111 seats in the KRG, has said the poll amounts to a power grab by Barzani and would be “illegal” if it goes ahead without the support of other parties.

Europe...

(Continued From Page 2)

The U.S. Senate and Treasury Department have imposed new sanctions against the Islamic Republic and several Iranian companies and individuals in recent months over its national missile program, which is not in breach of the JCPOA.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said on Friday that the Trump administration’s skepticism about the “successful” nuclear deal was a pity.

Speaking in a meeting with students broadcast live by state television, Lavrov expressed regret that “our American partners” call the JCPOA into question.

“In the Trump administration they continue calling these agreements wrong and erroneous, and it’s a pity that such a successful treaty is now somewhat being cast into doubt,” the Russian foreign minister said.

The Iranian parliament is set to vote on a motion which incorporates a host of retaliatory measures in the face of U.S. “acts of terror” and “adventurism” in the region.

The bill, which was passed by the parliament’s Committee on National Security and Foreign Policy on Wednesday, is scheduled to be put on the parliament’s agenda next Sunday.