

# Airstrikes kill 19 civilians in northwest Syria

Author:

Sat, 2019-12-07 23:57

AL-BARA, Syria: Syrian regime and Russian airstrikes on Saturday killed 19 civilians, eight of them children, in the country's last major opposition bastion, a war monitor said.

The air raids in the rebel-run northwestern region of Idlib also wounded several others, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

Airstrikes by regime ally Russia killed four civilians including a child in the village of Al-Bara in the south of the region, the Observatory said.

An AFP correspondent at the scene saw rescue workers pick through the rubble of a two-story home whose concrete roof had collapsed.

Rescuers carried away the body of a victim wrapped in a blanket on a stretcher.

Russian raids also killed nine civilians including three children in the nearby village of Balyun, the Observatory said.

Crude barrel bombs dropped by government helicopters killed five civilians including three children in the village of Abadeeta, also in the same area.

In the southeast of the embattled region, a raid by a regime aircraft killed another child in the village of Bajghas, the Observatory said.

The Britain-based monitor, which relies on a network of sources inside Syria, says it determines the provenance of an airstrike by looking at flight patterns and the aircraft and munitions involved.

The airstrikes on Idlib province have intensified over the past few weeks as the government appears to be preparing for an offensive on rebel-held areas east of the province to secure the main highway that links the capital Damascus with the northern city of Aleppo, Syria's largest and once commercial center.

The Idlib region, which is home to some 3 million people including many displaced by Syria's civil war, is controlled by the country's former Al-Qaeda affiliate.

The Damascus regime has repeatedly vowed to take back control of Idlib.

Bashar Assad's forces launched a blistering military campaign against the region in April, killing around 1,000 civilians and displacing more than 400,000 people from their homes. A cease-fire announced by Moscow has largely held since late August.

But the Observatory says deadly bombardment and skirmishes have persisted, with more than 200 civilians killed in the region since the deal.

Syria's war has killed over 370,000 people and displaced millions from their homes since beginning in 2011 with the brutal repression of anti-Assad protests.

Earlier, the Observatory and the opposition's Syrian Civil Defense said four people, including a child and two women, were killed in airstrikes on the opposition-held village of Bara.

The Observatory said five others were killed in the village of Ibdeita and a child in another village nearby.

Different casualty figures are common in the immediate aftermath of violence in Syria, where an eight-year conflict has killed about 400,000 people, wounded more than a million and displaced half the country's prewar population.

Syrian troops launched a four-month offensive earlier this year on Idlib, which is dominated by al-Qaida-linked militants. The government offensive forced hundreds of thousands of civilians to flee their homes.

A fragile cease-fire halted the government advance in late August but has been repeatedly violated in recent weeks.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[syria airstrikes](#)

[Northwest Syria](#)

[Idlib](#)

Syrian airstrikes intensify in northwestCar bomb claims lives of 17 people in northern Syrian village of Tal Halaf

---

## [Are US sanctions on the way for Turkey?](#)

Sat, 2019-12-07 23:47

ANKARA: The crisis over Turkey's acquisition of the S-400 air defense system from Russia may come to a head with the threat of US sanctions, according to sources in Ankara.

Despite the close relationship between Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his US counterpart Donald Trump, the CAATSA (Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act) sanctions package promoted by the US Senate is expected to bring political and financial repercussions for Turkey.

The increasing congressional anger is mainly related to the country's insistence on purchasing Russian-made weapons and its growing military incursions into Syria targeting Syrian Kurdish YPG militia, longtime partners of the US against Daesh.

Images provided to the media showing Turkey allegedly testing the radar of the missile defense system it bought from Russia accompanied with US-made F-16 fighter jets has been the final straw for the US Senate, which is pressing for immediate sanctions, five months after delivery of the Russian system.

Ali Cinar, a US-based foreign policy expert, expects US sanctions within the coming weeks and said that these will further damage the bilateral relationship.

"The US Senate Foreign Relations Committee has scheduled for next week deliberations on legislation that would penalize Turkey's S-400 purchase," he told Arab News.

Last week, US Senators Republican Lindsey Graham and Democratic Chris Van Hollen wrote a letter to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo urging the Trump administration to impose sanctions on Turkey.

"It is time you applied the law. Failure to do so is sending a terrible signal to other countries that they can flout US laws without consequence," they wrote in the letter.

The committee will elaborate on the bill just a week after the meeting

between Trump and Erdogan under the auspices of the NATO leaders' summit in London. The general feeling in the US is that after several meetings between the US and Turkish leaders, with seemingly no breakthrough on the S-400, Ankara appears not to be changing course.

According to Cinar, if Turkey continues on its path to activate the S-400 system, the US is right to impose sanctions and expel Turkey from the F35 program under CAATSA.

"I think the sanctions would be lighter at the beginning but sending a strong message to Turkey is key for the Senate so sanctions on some officials would be one of the options," he said.

## **FASTFACT**

**Despite the close relationship between Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his US counterpart Donald Trump, the sanctions package promoted by the US Senate is expected to bring political and financial repercussions for Turkey.**

But Cinar also underlined that the US president has the power to waive the sanctions for 180 days, after which he must submit another waiver for another 180 days, and that the president can do this consecutively.

"The president also has the right to waive one or more sanctions, for instance impose one package of sanctions and waive the rest," he said.

The law provides the president, who signed it in August 2017, with the opportunity to select from a list of 12 possible sanctions to punish countries taking possession of Russian military hardware. Among these options, preventing access to loans from financial institutions and denying US visas to government officials are considered as hard ones.

CAATSA became US law in July 2017, and sanctions have so far been imposed on Iran, Russia and North Korea. Being a manufacturing and financial partner of the program, Turkey is already disengaged from Lockheed Martin's colossal F-35 fighter jets program for buying the Russian system, and the last Turkish manufacturer is expected to be removed from the multinational program by March. Ankara has expressed its intention to buy the Kremlin's Su-35 fighter jets in retaliation.

Beyond harming its ties with Washington, possible sanctions are likely to oblige Turkey to search for alternative markets and supplies for defense equipment.

For Ozgur Unluhisarcikli, Ankara office director of the German Marshall Fund of the US, it was clear that CAATSA sanctions would be imposed on Turkey as a consequence of it making a major weapons acquisition from Russia.

"President Trump tried to defer this decision for as long as possible and it appears that the US Congress is getting impatient and may take matters into

its own hands in case Trump does not impose the sanctions soon,” he told Arab News.

Unluhisarcikli added: “While Trump is expected to impose the sanctions before 2020, he will likely formulate a package that will have a minimum impact on the Turkish economy. As the risk-averse foreign investors have already left the Turkish market, citizens are already dollarized, there is shortage of liquidity and the current accounts deficit has decreased as a consequence of stagnation, the impact of the sanctions on the financial markets can be lower than generally anticipated.”

For Unluhisarcikli, the impact on the Turkish economy will be felt in the medium and long term as it will become even less attractive for real investment.

“The sanctions will unavoidably point to a new low in US-Turkey relations and lead to a new wave of anti-Americanism. It will be surprising if President Erdogan does not choose to surf this wave and create a rally around the flag-or-president sentiment,” he said.

This process will have an indirect affect on the fate of millions of refugees currently living in Turkey.

As the Turkish economy deteriorates, Unluhisarcikli predicted, the job market will contract, including for refugees, and some of these refugees may start looking elsewhere to rebuild their lives.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Turkey](#)

[US sanctions](#)  
[Russia-Turkey deal](#)  
[S-400](#)  
[Ankara](#)

NATO leaders ramp up pressure on Turkey over S-400 missile system  
Erdogan: Turkey's efforts to solve S-400 missile row with US to continue until April

---

## [Lebanon PM widens plea to secure food imports](#)

Author:

Sat, 2019-12-07 23:39

BEIRUT: Lebanon's caretaker Prime Minister Saad Hariri on Saturday added Germany, Britain and Spain to the list of countries he has asked for help securing imports of food and raw materials amid an acute dollar shortage.

The Lebanese leader's appeal to German Chancellor Angela Merkel, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and Spanish PM Pedro Sanchez follows an earlier plea to Saudi Arabia, France, Russia, Turkey, the US, China and Egypt.

Lebanon's call for help highlights the dire state of its economy, which is plunging deeper into recession with warnings by the World Bank of "increasing economic and financial pressures."

Hariri has called on "friendly countries" to help "address the liquidity shortage, and provide credits for imports to preserve food security and provide raw materials for production."

The year-long financial crisis in the country has been made worse by strict bank limits on dollar withdrawals and transfers abroad.

Widespread civil unrest and anti-corruption protests directed at the authorities led to the resignation of the government 40 days ago. With no agreement on a replacement PM, the country has been in a state of political deadlock for more than a month.

It is not clear whether parliamentary consultations on Monday will lead to the appointment of a new PM following disagreement between President Michel Aoun and Hezbollah, which want a techno-political government, and Hariri, who wants a government of experts.

Activists on Saturday highlighted the country's growing economic woes by organizing donations in front of the central bank to help the needy.

The economic stagnation can be felt in Beirut markets, with dozens of shops

closed and supermarket shelves lying empty as people prepare for the holiday season.

More than 260 food establishments have been forced to close in the past two months, according to a management syndicate, with the number expected to rise to 465 by the end of the month.

"The crisis is not recent," said Tony Eid, head of the Beirut Traders Association. "Lebanon is witnessing a lack of liquidity among banks and consumers, and recent developments have aggravated the crisis.

"Hundreds of establishments, including clothing stores and restaurants, are closing, while major importers are struggling to import from abroad," he said.

"Lebanon is sick and is being treated with painkillers with no signs of early recovery."

Pierre Achkar, head of the Hotel Owners Association, said that the hotels occupancy rate outside Beirut is "zero," while it ranges between 7 and 12 percent in the capital.

"This is the sector's worst crisis in its modern history," he added.

"Beirut was trying to restore its importance before the crisis, but with reduced banking facilities, we cannot expect tourists to come to Lebanon," he said. "We are working on a campaign to encourage tourism, but we still have no hotel reservations, which means they have booked somewhere else."

Achkar said that hotels had shut down 80 percent of their operations, closing some floors and restaurants, in a bid to stay afloat.

Meanwhile, Kamil Abu Suleiman, the caretaker government's labor minister, formed an emergency committee to oversee legal disputes following collective dismissals.

The ministry considered that "any dismissal carried out without its permission is considered an arbitrary dismissal," he said. "All those who fall victim to such measures and do not receive their legal compensation should consult the ministry."



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Lebanon](#)

[Lebanon protests](#)

[Saad Hariri](#)

[Lebanon economy](#)

Lebanese women march in Beirut against sexual harassment  
Lebanon's journalists suffer abuse, threats covering unrest

---

## [Algeria's presidential debate falls flat, as anger simmers](#)

Author:

Sat, 2019-12-07 23:25

ALGIERS: Algeria's first-ever presidential debate seems to have failed to persuade the country's pro-democracy protesters to take part in next week's election.

The five candidates recited their platforms instead of sparring over ideas in the Friday night debate – and they did not even look at each other.

Members of Algeria's 10-month-old protest movement shrugged off the exercise as a farce. They pushed out long-serving President Abdelaziz Bouteflika



earlier this year, and now want a whole new political system. They oppose the election altogether because it is organized by Algeria's power structure, and they see the candidates as part of a corrupt and out-of-touch elite.

Students plan new protests Tuesday ahead of the first round of the election Thursday.

In the debate, the candidates – including former Prime Ministers Ali Benflis and Abdelmadjid Tebboune – responded to the same questions posed by four journalists.

The questions concerned their political and economic plans, unemployment, Algerians who risk their lives to migrate to Europe, education, health and foreign policy.

"We saw five candidates answering like automatons ... as if it were an oral examination," said journalism professor Djamel Mouafia.

Other commentators called it a missed opportunity for Algeria's leadership to show they're trying to be more transparent and democratic.

Criticism exploded on social media, notably from protesters.

"Before promising to defend freedoms, the candidates should have first denounced the mass arrest of protesters of the people's movement," activist Hirak Abdelmadjid Benkaci wrote on his Facebook page.

The candidates had kind words for the peaceful movement, without directly addressing its demands for wholesale change.

Benflis said he chose to seek the presidency "knowing that all conditions are not met."

"But if I am elected, my top priority would be to engage in a dialogue with the opponents of the presidential election. They have the right to have a point of view contrary to mine, but we must come together to reflect on political reforms," according to the former prime minister.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Algeria](#)

[Algiers](#)

[Abdelkader Bengrina](#)

Huge protest days ahead of contentious Algeria vote  
Algeria tries top figures for corruption as opposed election looms

---

## [Lebanese women march in Beirut against sexual harassment](#)

Author:

By OMAR AKOUR | AP

ID:

1575736018920970500

Sat, 2019-12-07 16:04

BEIRUT: Scores of women marched through the streets of Beirut on Saturday to protest against sexual harassment and bullying and demanding rights including the passing of citizenship to children of Lebanese women married to foreigners.

The march started outside the American University of Beirut, west of the capital, and ended in a downtown square that has been witnessing daily protests for more than seven weeks.

Nationwide demonstrations in Lebanon broke out Oct. 17 against proposed taxes on WhatsApp calls turned into a condemnation of the country's political elite, who have run the country since the 1975-90 civil war. The government resigned in late October, meeting a key demand of the protesters.

"We want to send a message against sexual harassment. They say that the revolution is a woman, therefore, if there is a revolution, women must be part of it," said protester Berna Dao. "Women are being raped, their right is being usurped, and they are not able to pass their citizenship."

Activists have been campaigning for years so that parliament drafts a law that allows Lebanese women married to foreigners pass their citizenship to their husbands and children.

Earlier this year, Raya Al-Hassan became the first woman in the Arab world to take the post of interior minister. The outgoing Cabinet has four women ministers, the highest in the country in decades.

Lebanon is passing through a crippling economic and financial crisis that has worsened since the protests began.

During the women's protest in Riad Solh Square, a man set himself on fire before people nearby extinguished the flames. His motivation was not immediately clear and an ambulance came shortly afterward and evacuated him.

Also on Saturday, outgoing Prime Minister Saad Hariri appealed to more countries to help Lebanon in its crisis to import essential goods. The request made in a letter to the leaders of Germany, Spain and Britain, came a day after Hariri sent similar letters to other countries including Saudi Arabia, US, Russia and China.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Lebanon protests](#)

Lebanon's journalists suffer abuse, threats covering unrest  
People with special needs protest in Lebanon