

# Fierce clashes kill 55 combatants in Syria

Sat, 2019-08-10 23:20

BEIRTU: Clashes between regime loyalists and insurgents in northwest Syria killed 55 combatants on Saturday, as regime forces continued to nibble away at territory held by its opponents, a war monitor said.

Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS) has since January controlled most of Idlib province as well as parts of neighboring Hama, Aleppo and Latakia provinces. Several other armed opposition groups also operate in the area.

Fighting in various parts of the region on Saturday claimed the lives of 23 pro-regime forces as well as 32 opposition and allied fighters, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said. The regime also launched dozens of airstrikes against northern Hama and southern Idlib, the Britain-based monitor added.

The latest violence came as forces loyal to Damascus pushed a days-long advance toward a strip straddling the provinces of Hama and Idlib, it said. They aim to capture Kafr Zita – one of the largest towns in northern Hama – and the nearby village of Al-Latamneh from opposition fighters, said Observatory head Rami Abdel Rahman.

Both lie on the southern edge of the opposition-run bastion of Idlib, one of the last centers of opposition to Syria's Bashar Assad after eight years of civil war.

## **SPEEDREAD**

Fighting in various parts of the region on Saturday claimed the lives of 23 pro-regime forces as well as 32 opposition and allied fighters.

Regime forces have closed in Kfar Zeita and Latamneh over the past week, after capturing a string of nearby towns and villages, the Observatory said. They are also trying to surround the nearby town of Khan Sheikoun in order to wrest it from the opposition, Abdel Rahman said.

The latest advances come after the Syrian regime on Monday scrapped a brief three-day cease-fire for the Idlib region, accusing its opponents of refusing to abide by the truce.

The region was supposed to be protected from a massive regime offensive by a Turkish-Russian buffer-zone deal that was reached in September last year. But it has come under increasing bombardment by Damascus and its backer Moscow since the end of April.



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## [Arab coalition calls for ceasefire in Aden, Yemen](#)

Sat, 2019-08-10 23:09

JEDDAH: The Arab coalition supporting the government in Yemen called Saturday for a ceasefire in Aden where government troops and southern separatists have clashed for days.

The two forces are meant to be working as allies to defeat the Iran-backed Houthi militia, which control the capital Sanaa.

Shortly after the coalition statement, the Saudi foreign ministry called for an emergency meeting in the Kingdom.

“The coalition is calling for an immediate ceasefire in the Yemeni interim

capital (Aden)... and asserts that it will use military force against anyone who violates this," the coalition spokesman said.



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Yemen government blames separatists for Aden clashes

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## [\*\*WATCH: Middle East Airlines pilot praised for high-wind Heathrow landing\*\*](#)

Sat, 2019-08-10 22:16

LONDON: A Lebanese airline pilot has been praised for calmly landing a Middle East Airlines plane in strong winds at Heathrow Airport.

A video posted by the Middle East Airlines Fan Club shows Rola Hoteit, who was the airline's first female pilot, touching down in London in "heavy crosswinds," according to the club's Facebook page.

WATCH: A video posted by the Middle East Airlines Fan Club shows Rola Hoteit, the airline's first female pilot, touching down in London in "heavy crosswinds" <https://t.co/uFXuceS5UP> (Video by Wael Al-Qutub via MEA fans club) <pic.twitter.com/v5i30dccxD>

– Arab News (@arabnews) [August 10, 2019](#)

As her Airbus A330 approached the runway it lurches sideways as its buffeted by the winds before she calmly brings the wheels into contact with the tarmac.

"If they had ever asked you about MEA pilots, then there is no need to answer them," the Facebook post said.

The UK has been buffeted by a summer storm since Friday which has brought high winds and heavy rain.

Hoteit, a mother of two, has been a pilot with MEA for 25 years and is credited with blazing a trail for other female pilots in the country.



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## [Turkey-US deal: End to Turkish ambitions for an offensive into Syria?](#)

Author:

Fri, 2019-08-09 23:50

ANKARA: Ankara's agreement with Washington to set up a so-called safe zone in northeastern Syria, along with a joint coordination center, has sparked debate about whether it will completely prevent a Turkish offensive into the region.

A day after the announcement of the deal, Damascus criticized it harshly, saying that it is a violation of Syria's sovereignty and accused Ankara of "expansionist ambitions," according to the state-run SANA news agency.

As the deal is meant to resolve Turkey's security concerns, experts think it

may lead Ankara to halt its plans for an incursion into Syria, at least for now, although no details were given about the scope of the safe zone and timetable for its implementation.

The US State Department said it welcomed the results of its recent talks with Turkey on setting up a "peace corridor" in northern Syria.

"The talks seem to me like a pretty good outcome under the circumstances. The agreement on establishing a new process buys time and space, which ideally can be used to shift from arguing over tactical steps to arguing over more substantive ones," Daren Khalifa, senior Syria analyst at International Crisis Group, told Arab News.

Ankara's main priority is to push back US-allied Syrian Kurdish YPG militia from the region. Turkey's National Security Council met last week over a possible military offensive into Syria against the YPG, which it believes is affiliated with the PKK terror group that has been waging a decades-long insurgency against the Turkish state.

According to Khalifa, the prospects for a rapprochement between Ankara and Damascus are clearly fading, especially after the statement of Syria's Foreign Ministry.

Turkish soldiers were killed in opposition-held Idlib province by regime forces and "Ankara's control over swaths of Aleppo and their support to the opposition are all contributing factors," she said.

Khalifa also noted that "it is not clear that there was an agreement over permanent Turkish forces in the north east."

In its statement, Damascus urged Syrian Kurds to align with the Assad government to prevent the implementation of the "aggressive US-Turkish project."

Yasin Kucukkaya, a Syria expert from the Global Political Trends Center think tank in Istanbul, said Turkey preferred an "unarmed diplomacy" with the US for a certain time in northern Syria.

"I think all relevant parties, including the Syrian Democratic Forces which include the YPG, were satisfied by the outcome of the negotiations between American and Turkish delegations, because any unilateral move of Turkey would bring damage on the ground," he told Arab News.

Ankara had blamed Washington for dragging its feet over its security concerns, and had insisted on it breaking its ties with the YPG militia, which controls a large part of northern Syria.

Kucukkaya said that the deal halted Turkey's possible intervention into the region for now.

"Although Turkey's target is to eradicate the YPG and its offshoots, it also prioritizes any withdrawal of the support given to this group," he added.

However, experts are cautious in any medium-term assessment of Turkey's plans into the region.

"It is premature to consider whether this deal has definitely ended Turkish ambitions for an offensive. The bilateral negotiations only prevented an extensive war potential on the ground," Kucukkaya said.



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## [‘I thought I would be there forever,’ says Canadian freed from Syria](#)

Author:

AFP

ID:

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Fri, 2019-08-09 12:19

BEIRUT: Canadian Kristian Lee Baxter, 44, who was detained for nine months in Syria, was released after Lebanese officials stepped in to ensure his freedom.

Baxter appeared at the General Security Headquarters in Beirut with the Canadian Ambassador to Lebanon Emmanuelle Lamoureux and the director-general of the Lebanese General Security Directorate, Maj. Gen. Abbas Ibrahim. Baxter appeared to be slender and highly emotional.

"The Syrian state has cooperated with us by releasing a former American hostage (journalist Austin Tice, who was held in Syria from 2012) and today a Canadian citizen," said Ibrahim.

He added: "Baxter was detained in Syria last year for violating their laws, and I renew my thanks to the Syrian state for cooperation and shortening his detention."

Ibrahim said his mediation with Syria was based on "the request of Canada, which asked Lebanon to intervene to release him. I informed President Michel Aoun and Prime Minister Saad Hariri on Thursday about the results of the process."

Ibrahim said the successful release is "in Lebanon's interest because it brings us back to the world map."

Commenting on Lebanese journalist Samir Kassab and Archbishops John Ibrahim and Paul Yazji, who have been missing in Syria for years, Ibrahim said: "The issue is being followed up, but we have no information that we can announce at the moment."

Ibrahim was asked about the sentence issued against Lebanese businessman Qassem Tajeddine, 63, in the US. "Things have become clear with the court ruling," he said, adding that he had visited Tajeddine while he was on an official visit to the US and that "he was in difficult health conditions. I hope he has improved."

On Thursday, a US court sentenced Tajeddine to five years in prison and a \$50 million (SR185m) fine for circumventing sanctions imposed on him as a "significant financial contributor to Hezbollah," according to the US Justice Department.

Lamoureux expressed her country's gratitude to Ibrahim and the role he played in bringing Baxter to his family. "Today is a glorious day for Canadians," she said.

The envoy declined to give any details of the negotiations or to comment on the case "because of Canada's privacy laws."

Baxter tried to speak to journalists, but he was lost for words: "I thought I would be there forever. I didn't know if anyone knew if I was alive."

He thanked the Canadian Embassy and the Lebanese authorities for their assistance in his release.



He looked very emotional and burst into tears. The Canadian ambassador also became emotional before she ended the press conference.

Baxter, who is from British Columbia, had gone to Syria “in search of adventure in a war-torn country,” according to the Canadian Press.

His mother, Andrea Leclair, said at the time that her son was a “world traveler, adventurer, history lover and uses a metal detector as a hobby, but he didn’t realize it was not allowed across the border.

“He told me he was meeting nice people and that he was offered food, tea and coffee everywhere he went. He was having a great time before he went missing,” she said.

Leclair added that she lost contact with her son on Dec. 1. He had arrived in Syria on Nov. 26 and was contacting her daily, but after she received the last message from him she discovered that “there was no Canadian Embassy operating in Syria.”

The Canadian government has warned its citizens not to travel to Syria since the war started in 2011. Canada severed diplomatic relations with the country in 2012 and closed its embassy.



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