



Palestinians clash with Israeli security forces in the town of Surda, the home-town of Palestinian Mohannad Shafiq Halani who carried out an attack in which two Israelis were killed and two others wounded in the Old City of Jerusalem on Oct 3. (AFP)

Netanyahu vows 'fight to death'

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu pledged "a fight to the death against Palestinian terror" as clashes spread after two deadly attacks, while Jerusalem's Old City was closed to Palestinians for a second day Monday.

The Israeli premier's comments late on Sunday came as he convened security chiefs immediately after landing back from the United States to discuss the clashes in east Jerusalem and the West Bank.

Palestinian youths throwing stones and firebombs have faced off against Israeli security forces using both live rounds and rubber bullets. Jewish settlers have also clashed with Palestinians.

The rioting has followed three attacks in recent days that have killed four Israelis and wounded several others, including a two-year-old child.

Threatening to further stoke the flames, Israeli troops shot dead an 18-year-old Palestinian during clashes in Tulkarem in the West Bank on Sunday, Palestinian police and medics said. Dozens of others have been wounded.

There have been fears that the sporadic violence could spin out of control, with some warning of the risk of a third Palestinian intifada, or uprising. Netanyahu, facing pressure from right-wing members of his governing coalition to respond forcefully, announced a package of new measures "to prevent terror and deter and punish the attackers".

They included swifter demolition of the homes of those accused of attacks, broader use of detention without trial for suspects, and police and troop reinforcements for Jerusalem and the West Bank.

He also spoke of using restraining orders to keep "inciters" away from the flashpoint Al-Aqsa mosque compound, the site of repeated clashes in recent weeks.

Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas, who said in a UN speech last week that he was no longer bound by previous accords with Israel, accused the Israeli government of escalating tensions. It was not clear what Abbas's UN declaration would mean in practice, including whether he would act to end security cooperation with Israel. (AFP)

Pressure mounts on US as MSF demands 'probe' into Kunduz

Afghan forces regain most of besieged city: residents

KABUL, Oct 5, (Agencies): Pressure mounted on Washington Monday to come clean over the apparent US airstrike on an Afghan hospital that killed 22, an incident the Pentagon chief said was "confused and complicated" but which medical charity MSF branded a war crime.

Doctors Without Borders (MSF) said Sunday it has closed the trauma centre, seen as a lifeline in a war-battered region with scant medical care, and demanded an independent probe into Saturday's devastating air raid.

President Barack Obama has promised a full investigation but the international outrage over the deadly incident has piled pressure on Washington for a more transparent probe.

"Under the clear presumption that a war crime has been committed, MSF demands that a full and transparent investigation into the event be conducted by an independent international body," MSF general director Christopher Stokes said.

Stokes also hit out at claims by Afghan officials that insurgents were using the hospital as a position to target Afghan forces and civil-

ians. "These statements imply that Afghan and US forces working together decided to raze to the ground a fully functioning hospital with more than 180 staff and patients inside because they claim that members of the Taliban were present," he said.

"This amounts to an admission of a war crime. This utterly contradicts the initial attempts of the US government to minimise the attack as 'collateral damage'."

The group said Afghan and coalition troops were fully aware of the exact location of the hospital, having been given GPS coordinates of the facility which had been providing care for four years.

NATO said US forces carried out the bombardment in the "vicinity" of the hospital to protect American special forces on the ground who came under enemy fire, but MSF said the surrounding area was largely unscathed.

The charity said that despite frantic calls to military officials in Kabul and Washington, the main building housing the intensive care unit and emergency rooms was "repeatedly, very precisely" hit almost every 15 minutes for more than an hour.

US Defense Secretary Ashton Carter expressed sadness over the "tragic loss of life" but warned that the investigation will not be swift.

"The situation there is confused and complicated so it may take some time

to get the facts, but we will get the facts, but we will be full and transparent about sharing them," he told reporters on a flight to Madrid at the start of a European tour.

However MSF's Stokes stressed the need for an independent probe, saying "an internal investigation by a party to the conflict would be wholly insufficient".

The air raid came five days after Taliban fighters seized control of the strategic northern city of Kunduz, in their most spectacular victory since being toppled from power by a US-led coalition in 2001.

Afghan forces, backed up by their NATO allies, claim to have wrestled back control of the city.

At least 60 people are known to have died and 400 to have been wounded in the past week's fighting.

Saturday's raid left the hospital's main building completely gutted. Some of the bodies of those trapped inside were charred beyond recognition.

The dead included 12 MSF staff and 10 patients, among them three children.

MSF's withdrawal from Kunduz comes as the region grapples with a humanitarian crisis, with food and medicine shortages affecting thousands of civilians caught in the cross-fire between government forces and insurgents.

The hospital was the only medical facility in the whole northeastern

region of Afghanistan that can deal with major war injuries. Its closure, even temporarily, could have a devastating impact on local civilians.

Kate Stegeman, a spokeswoman for the charity, told AFP she could not confirm whether the trauma centre will reopen.

The incident has renewed concerns about the use of US air strikes in Afghanistan, a deeply contentious issue in the 14-year campaign against Taliban insurgents.

UN rights chief Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein has also called for a full and transparent probe, noting: "An air strike on a hospital may amount to a war crime."

"This event is utterly tragic, inexcusable and possibly even criminal," he said on Saturday.

Human Rights Watch also said the strike raises "grave concerns" about whether US forces took sufficient precautions to identify and avoid striking the facility.

Meanwhile, police and residents said Afghan government forces had regained control of most of the besieged city of Kunduz on Monday, and some shops in the centre of the provincial capital opened for the first time since it fell to Taliban fighters a week ago.

Residents said it was the first time in eight days that they had not heard gun battles and were able to leave their homes to buy food and take stock of the damage done.

14 Kurdish militants dead

Kurdish PYD fighting DAESH 'terror group'

BRUSSELS, Oct 5, (RTRS): Syrian Kurdish militants backed by the United States in the fight against Islamic State belong to a terrorist organisation and are collaborating with the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), President Tayyip Erdogan said on Monday.

The Democratic Union Party's (PYD) role supporting the US-led coalition's battle against Islamic State does not give the group legitimacy, Erdogan said in remarks broadcast live from Brussels.

The autonomy-seeking PKK, which has close links with the PYD, has waged a war against Turkey since 1984 that flared anew this summer. Turkey, the European Union and the United States all list the PKK as a terrorist organisation.

Meanwhile, Turkey's prime minister condemned dissemination of a video purporting to show a dead Kurdish militant dragged through the streets tied by the neck to an armoured police vehicle, images that could further inflame tension in the country's southeast.

"It is unacceptable to treat any corpse this way, even if it is a dead terrorist," Ahmet Davutoglu said, while not explicitly confirming the veracity of the video and photographs widely posted on Twitter.

Also:

DIYARBAKIR: Fourteen members of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) were killed and three were caught in clashes in Nusaybin in Mardin province as the border town remained under curfew, a statement from Mardin's governor office said on Sunday.

Turkish forces carried out air strikes on PKK targets in Hakkari province on the border with Syria, the northeastern province of Kars and in northern Iraq, the Anadolu Agency said, citing security sources. The raids on Saturday evening and early Sunday destroyed shelters, camps and caves.

Fighting also continued in Semdinli district in Hakkari following a simultaneous attack on a number of government and police buildings. Exit and entry into the town was being regulated.

Turkey's crackdown on the PKK began in July after a two-and-a-half year ceasefire collapsed and has escalated ahead of a national election on Nov. 1.

Daily clashes have so far killed more than 120 security personnel and hundreds of militants.

News in Brief

Boko Haram claims Abuja bombings: Boko Haram has claimed responsibility for twin bomb attacks on the outskirts of Nigeria's capital, Abuja, the group said in a message posted on social media on Sunday evening.

At least 18 people were killed and 41 injured in the bombings on Friday night, in Kuje, to the west of Abuja, and in Nyanya, to the east, the authorities said.

Suspicion immediately fell on the Islamist militants, who last year said they were behind two attacks in Nyanya that left more than 90 dead. The claim of responsibility on Twitter was signed by Islamic State in West Africa Province, used by Boko Haram since its pledge of allegiance to the militants in Syria and Iraq in March. It showed photographs of three men in combat fatigues, holding automatic weapons and in front of the group's insignia, and claimed they had carried out "martyrdom operations".

The police on Saturday said "preliminary investigations revealed the bomb blasts were carried out by two suicide bombers — a male and a female".

The Arabic message said the trio's targets were police stations in Nyanya and Kuje, calling them "strongholds of the apostates (non-believers)", according to the SITE Intelligence Group. (AFP)

AKP backs presidential system: Turkey's ruling AK Party promised a new constitution with a strong executive presidency in its manifesto unveiled on Sunday ahead of a Nov 1 snap election.

The AKP, which has Islamist roots and has been in power for more than a decade, lost its parliamentary majority in a June election and many say its lobbying for an executive presidency was to blame for its setback. "We support the presidential system to prevent the instability which is caused by the parliamentary system," Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu said, announcing the election manifesto in the capital Ankara.

Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan, a founder of the AKP and a strong advocate of the constitutional change, called the snap election following failed coalition negotiations this summer between the party and its rivals. Some opinion polls suggest the AKP will again fail to win a majority in November.

Political deadlock since the election, coupled with renewed conflict in southeast Turkey with Kurdish militants, has damaged the country's credibility in the eyes of investors, sending the lira currency to record lows against the US dollar. (RTRS)

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