



EURASIA SECURITY WATCH

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Related Categories: Caucasus; Central Asia

EXPLOSION KILLS 28 AT SOUTHERN TURKISH BORDER TOWN

Some 30 people were killed and 76 injured in an explosion in the southern Turkish city of Suruc on Monday. According to the Financial Times "The blast occurred outside a Kurdish cultural centre during a press conference held by a socialist group on its way to take aid to the Syrian Kurdish town of Kobani, 10km to the south." Turkey's prime minister, Ahmet Davutoglu, told reporters that the incident was a "terror attack, most likely a suicide bomb," a claim corroborated by witnesses interviewed on the CNN's Turkish television channel. No group has claimed responsibility, although "[i]f Isis is shown to be responsible, it will be its first such attack on Turkish soil and will increase pressure on Ankara to take more direct action against the group." Senior Turkey analyst at International Crisis Group, Nigar Goksel, issued a warning: "Ankara cannot afford to let down its guard regarding [Isis] otherwise this could spiral into a Turkish conflict." (*Financial Times* July 20, 2015)

FRANCE DELIVERS FIGHTER JETS TO EGYPT

Egypt received three Rafale fighter jets from France on Monday, the first of 24 planes sold to Cairo in a \$5.6 billion deal inked earlier this year. According to Al Arabiya, "Egyptian authorities took charge of the planes at an airbase in southern France, and they will be flown to Cairo by specially trained pilots on Tuesday." With an unstable Libya in the west and jihadi violence escalating in the Sinai Peninsula, Cairo is hoping to boost its military presence. Egypt also wants to break the American monopoly over arms sales to the country. On the other side of the deal, cash-strapped France hopes that by showcasing its military technology, it will receive more orders for its warplanes. Despite the benefits for France and Egypt, "the deal has sparked concern from campaign groups worried about Cairo's human rights record," in the wake of the regime's continued crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood. (Al Arabiya July 20, 2015)

ISIS USES CHEMICAL WEAPONS AGAINST KURDISH FORCES

According to the Conflict Armament Research (CAR) group and Sahan Research, ISIS fighters have been using chemical weapons against Kurdish troops in Syria and Iraq. The groups documented the use of chemical agents in an incident near Mosul Dam on June 21 or 22 and in two others on June 28 in Syria's northeastern Hasakeh province. In a statement, the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) said, "Upon impact, the projectiles released a yellow gas with a strong smell of rotten onions...Our troops exposed to the gas experienced burning of the throat, eyes and nose, combined with severe headaches, muscle pain, and impaired concentration and mobility. Prolonged exposure to the chemicals also caused vomiting." The CAR and Sahan Research ran tests on the urine of Kurdish fighters affected by the gas, which tested positive for a compound usually found in agricultural pesticides. They noted that the characteristics and clinical effects of the chemical were "consistent with a chlorine chemical agent." Despite ISIS' alleged deployment of chemical weapons, the YPG said that they had captured industrial-grade gas masks from ISIS and were prepared to fight on. (*Daily Mail* July 19, 2015)

YEMEN DEATH TOLL FROM REBEL SHELLING NEARLY 100

According to the head of an international aid group, the death toll in a town near Yemen's southern port city of Aden rose to nearly 100 on Monday. The aid group leader described it "as 'the worst day' for the city and its surroundings in over three months of fighting." The town has been the target of heavy rebel shelling since Houthi rebels lost control of much of the Aden district of Tawahi, which, according to officials, is now under a security lockdown. Violence has also continued in other cities in Yemen. On Monday, shelling continued in Taiz, Yemen's third largest city, killing eight residents, and a car bomb detonated near the house of a Houthi rebel near Sana'a, killing seven. While several ministers from Yemen's government in exile have returned to the country, it is unclear whether they will be able to restore order amidst increasing violence. (Associated Press July 20, 2015)

U.S. WARNS KYRGYZSTAN THAT STRAINED TIES THREATEN AID

The Kyrgyz foreign ministry handed a protest note to the American Chargé d'Affaires Richard Miles on Friday over the awarding of the U.S. Department of State's 2014 Human Rights Defender Award to Kyrgyz journalist and activist Azimjon Askarov, stating that he was "creating a threat to civil peace and stability in society." According to Reuters, "Askarov, an ethnic Uzbek, was convicted of 'organizing mass disturbances' and stirring up ethnic hatred leading to the killing of a policeman during inter-ethnic clashes in southern Kyrgyzstan in June 2010 when over 400 people were killed." Local and international human rights groups have called for his release from prison and UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon "urged authorities to hold an impartial investigation into ethnic clashes." Kyrgyzstan stated that it might renounce its 1993 Bilateral Agreement with the U.S. over Askarov's award. In a statement published by the U.S. embassy in Bishkek, the U.S. government was studying "the technical impact of such a decision, which could put assistance programs that benefit the Kyrgyzstani people in jeopardy." The deterioration of relations between the U.S. and Kyrgyzstan has come at a time when the Central Asian nation of 5.5 million is being "drawn deeper into the orbit of its former imperial master, Russia." Kyrgyzstan has recently joined the Moscow-led Eurasian Economic Union and hosts a Russian military base near Bishkek. (Reuters July 20, 2015)