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Titoli:

1. Nato per fare il generale "Noi soldati italiani siamo i più apprezzati"

Il Giorno Ed. Legnano, pag. XX

2. EU, NATO try to counter Russian propaganda

<http://news.yahoo.com/eu-nato-try-counter-russian-propaganda-094355588.html; ylt=AwrC1ClbnkRV7RQAYAXQtDMD; ylu=X3oDMTByaWg0YW05BGNvbG8DYmYxBHBvcwM4BHZ0aWQDBHNiYwNzcg==>

3. Israeli veterans say permissive rules of engagement fueled Gaza carnage

http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/israeli-veterans-say-permissive-rules-of-engagement-fueled-gaza-carnage/2015/05/04/ab698d16-f020-11e4-8050-839e9234b303_story.html

4. Negotiation Alongside Operation Works

http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/editorialdetail.php?post_id=12075

5. Stumbling Into a Wider War

<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/03/opinion/sunday/stumbling-into-a-wider-war.html? r=0>

6. Two UN peacekeepers hit by Syria fire on Israeli-occupied Golan

<http://www.islamedianalysis.info/two-un-peacekeepers-hit-by-syria-fire-on-israeli-occupied-golan/>

7. Rescued migrants arrive in Italy port

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/05/thousands-rescued-libyan-coast-150504051430611.html>

8. Syrian Forces Kill Attackers in Damascus

<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/05/world/middleeast/damascus-syria-civil-war-clash-insurgents.html>

9. Analysis: Syria's al-Assad regime in trouble

<http://edition.cnn.com/2015/05/03/world/analysis-assad-regime-possible-trouble/>

10. Perceptions of security in Libya – Institutional and revolutionary actors: USIP report

<http://www.libyaherald.com/2015/05/03/perceptions-of-security-in-libya-institutional-and-revolutionary-actors-usip-report/#axzz3ZAkR12fl>

11. Upswing in fighting in Ukraine sends civilians fleeing and puts truce in doubt

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/03/upswing-fighting-ukraine-civilians-fleeing-truce-doubt-soldiers-killed-russia-separatists>

Nato per fare il generale «Noi soldati italiani siamo i più apprezzati»

Luca Fontana dirige il comando di Solbiate

di **LUCA DI FALCO**

— **LEGNANO** —

È TRA I PIÙ GIOVANI generali del nostro Paese e di sicuro il più giovane legnanese a raggiungere questo grado. Luca Fontana è al comando Nato di Solbiate Olona con guida italiana e contribuisce a tenere alta la tradizione militare con professionismo e preparazione, non dimenticando le radici nella città del Carroccio.

Cosa l'ha portato ad abbracciare la carriera militare?

«La tradizione di famiglia: il nonno materno Virginio Rotelli ha combattuto nel secondo conflitto mondiale; mio padre Giorgio è stato in servizio al 2° Battaglione Bersaglieri alla caserma Cadorna. Da lì derivano i miei natali a Legnano e l'attaccamento alla contrada di Sant'Erasmo».

La vita di un militare è spesso con la valigia in mano...

«È stato molto bello avere come prima nomina da tenente dopo l'Accademia militare di Modena l'assegnazione a Legnano: ci sono tornato da ufficiale formato con un'ottima esperienza. Sono stati anni di servizio molto belli, con un trampolino di lancio importante visto la tradizione militare legnanese e l'importanza di quella caserma. Non dimentichiamoci

che poi da lì al comando dell'allora tenente colonnello Bruno Tosselli è partita la prima missione all'estero del dopoguerra con l'impegno in Libano che ha aperto la strada a questo tipo di interventi di pacificazione, in cui il nostro soldato è sempre apprezzato anche per la sua umanità perché dietro la divisa c'è sempre il cittadino italiano con i suoi valori».

Il comando di Solbiate tiene molto al rapporto con l'Altomilanese

«Siamo vicini e teniamo molto al territorio, alle relazioni con le istituzioni locali, con la società civile, con l'associazionismo d'arma locale: io stesso sono iscritto per le tradizioni di famiglia alla sezione Marco Gola dei paracadutisti di Legnano e a quella intitolata ad Aurelio Robino per i bersaglieri. Proximamente verrò anche a tenere una conferenza».

Un radicamento con sguardo internazionale...

«Qui siamo in dodici nazioni, siamo un reparto interforze, una forza di reazione rapida, pronta ad andare dove la Nato riscontra la necessità della nostra presenza».

Per chi ha fatto il servizio militare non era usuale trovare generali molto giovani, cosa sta cambiando?

«Nel mio corso di Modena siamo i più giovani ad aver già raggiun-

UNIFORME
Il generale
terrà presto
una conferenza
nella sua
Legnano

LUCA FONTANA

**La caserma di Legnano ha una grande tradizione alle spalle
Dietro la nostra divisa c'è l'umanità del cittadino**

to questo grado: siamo un piccolo gruppo. Si tratta di un cammino non scontato ma fatto di dedizione. Le Forze Armate si sono modernizzate come tutti i comparti dello Stato. La tendenza nella selezione è quella di individuare nelle persone la passione, la tenacia, la preparazione che devono scandire tutte le tappe per arrivare ad un certo grado. L'aggiornamento e lo studio devono essere continui e per me l'aver già compiuto un triennio alla Nato di Bruxelles è un vantaggio per la conoscenza delle dottrine e saper lavorare in un approccio multinazionale e interforze».



CURIOSITÀ

Biografia

Il generale Fontana è nato a Legnano nel marzo del 1965. Ha frequentato la Scuola Militare Nunziatella a Napoli e poi l'Accademia Militare di Modena. Promosso a generale nel luglio 2014

Amore Palio

«Spero di venire al Palio, manco dal '98. Il Palio è coniugazione delle diversità. So che i bimbi cantano l'Inno: vista la citazione della battaglia nell'Inno spero che possano tornare a sfilare i soldati»

EU, NATO try to counter Russian propaganda



By **Alix Rijckaert**
May 2,
2015 5:43
AM



Brussels (AFP) - Western powers are getting set to counter an expertly crafted Russian disinformation campaign over Ukraine which has left them wrong-footed too many times for comfort.

The aim is to win the daily battle for the news headlines, to get the EU and NATO story out to show that Russia's message falls well short of the truth.

"In Russia, the EU is described as though it is a conspiracy of homosexuals ... the old myths of the Cold War are back," Robert Pszczel, spokesman in Moscow for NATO, told AFP.

"Propaganda is so pervasive. About 90 percent of Russians get news from national television and the segment of Russians who are critical don't watch the news at all," Pszczel said.

"It is a relentless narrative which portrays the outside world as basically a threat to Russia."

Russia's annexation last year of Ukraine's Crimea peninsula as Kiev pledged its future to the European Union has plunged relations with Moscow into deep freeze, with no sign of any improvement soon.

It also jolted the 28-nation bloc and the US-led NATO military alliance out of their post-Cold War complacency, showing they needed to come to terms with a much more assertive Russia led by a no-holds barred President Vladimir Putin.

A key part of that Russian effort is a sophisticated propaganda machine which, analysts and Western officials say, tries to cast doubts on Western "mainstream media" and even seeks to undermine the very idea of objective truth itself.



About 90 percent of Russians get news from national television (AFP Photo/Alexander Utkin)

In early April, several Russian television channels carried reports about a young girl they said had been killed by Ukrainian artillery fire, violating a tenuous truce accord.

The BBC investigated the story but could not track it down and find the girl's body until a Russian journalist finally admitted that she had "never existed."

Then there are the Russian "trolls" who plant stories on social media casting Moscow in a favourable light while the authorities in Kiev are "fascists" and Western leaders ridiculous, figures to be mocked.

Modern technology means there are no boundaries and such stories are easily accessed by EU citizens, including Russian speakers in the Baltic states who were once ruled as Soviet satellites from Moscow and are now among the most suspicious of Putin's intentions.

- EU summit action plan -

The Lithuanian government banned Russian TV station RTR Planeta for "inciting disorder, aggressive behaviour and carrying tendentious information."



A TV journalist prepares to do a piece to camera in front of an armoured vehicle on the frontline ne ...

EU leaders will discuss an action plan at their June summit designed "to counter the disinformation campaign waged by Russia" but there are fears that a shortage of resources will

leave the bloc at a serious disadvantage.

"What is clear is that we do not have the same means as the Russians," said an EU diplomatic source, but the aim has to be to follow Moscow's news output more closely so as to respond much quicker and, if possible, in Russian.

"It is not about counter-propaganda, it is meant to state more clearly certain facts and truths," one EU official said.

NATO may provide the model, with its Brussels press centre of some 20 staff on the watch constantly.

Alliance spokeswoman Oana Lungescu tries to set the record straight via emails, tweets and the alliance website over what she sees as inaccurate and misleading Russian news stories.

But there are limits to what can be done.

"It would take up too much time and energy to deal with each and every lie so we try to deal with the basic myths and with the big lies," Lungescu told AFP.

There are also dangers, especially of going too far which could play into Russia's hands, said Nick Cull, at the University of South Carolina, stressing the need for restraint.

"The worst thing the West could do right now is fall into the role scripted for them by the Kremlin's spin-doctors of Russophobes who disrespect Russian and Orthodox (church) culture and history and have no interest in a shared future," Cull said.

Middle East

Israeli veterans say permissive rules of engagement fueled Gaza carnage

By William Booth May 4 at 5:00 AM

TEL AVIV — The war last summer between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip left more than 2,100 Palestinians dead and vast areas reduced to rubble. On Monday a group of Israeli veterans released sobering testimony from fellow soldiers that suggests permissive rules of engagement coupled with indiscriminate artillery fire contributed to the mass destruction and [high numbers of civilian casualties](#) in the coastal enclave.

The organization of active and reserve duty soldiers, called Breaking the Silence, gathered testimonies from more than 60 enlisted men and officers who served in Gaza during [Operation Protective Edge](#).

The soldiers describe reducing Gaza neighborhoods to sand, firing artillery at random houses to avenge fallen comrades, shooting at innocent civilians because they were bored and watching armed drones attack a pair of women talking on cellular phones because they were assumed to be Hamas scouts.

The director of the group, Yuli Novak, called the rules of engagement in Operation Protective Edge “the most permissive” they have seen and amounted to an “ethical failure ... from the top of the chain of command.” Novak called for an independent investigation.

The 240-page report [“This is How We Fought in Gaza 2014”](#) was released Monday and accompanied by videotaped testimony that aired on Israeli news programs.

The soldiers describe how they were told by commanders to view all Palestinian in the combat zones as a potential threat, whether they brandished weapons or not. Individuals spotted in windows and rooftops — especially if they were speaking on a cellular telephone — were often considered scouts and could be shot.

A first sergeant serving in the Mechanized Infantry in Deir al-Balah in Gaza told the group, “If we don’t see someone waving a white flag, screaming, ‘I give up’ or something — then he’s a threat and there’s authorization to open fire.”

The leaders of the Breaking the Silence group also charged that Israeli Defense Forces reduced whole neighborhoods of Gaza to ruins without any clear operational justification but instead to “demonstrate presence in the area.” Gaza is some of the most densely populated real estate on Earth with 1.8 million people.

A first sergeant in an infantry unit in northern Gaza Strip recalled that armored combat bulldozers, known as

D9s, “didn’t rest for a second. Nonstop, as if they were playing in a sandbox. Driving back and forth, back and forth, razing another house, another street. And at some point there was no trace left of that street. It was hard to imagine there even used to be a street there at all.”

The soldiers also testified that their commanders wanted them to level buildings near the Gaza border or on hilltops that could be used by Hamas in future conflicts. More than [18,000 homes were severely damaged](#) or destroyed in the conflict and civilian infrastructure was frequently targeted, including power stations and factories.

The Israelis charge that Palestinian militants brought most of this on themselves and their people by firing thousands of unguided rockets at Israeli cities, employing human shields and caching weapons [in schools, hospitals, mosques and other public buildings](#).

A top Israeli officer told the Washington Post that new ways of judging anti-terror offensives must be found, because the current battles take place in dense urban areas where enemies such as Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in Lebanon [use the local population for cover](#).

“How can you fight without collateral damage?” he asked. “The Americans and the Europeans face the same challenges we do in Gaza.”

The testimonies in the report are anonymous and impossible to independently verify.

Members of Breaking the Silence are viewed by many Israelis as “anti-military.” The group says its mission is to tell the Israeli public what the IDF spokesmen hide, what serving in the occupied West Bank and in wars in Gaza and Lebanon are really like. Immediately after graduating from high school, all Israeli men and women — except those who get deferments because of religious study or for medical reasons — must serve in the military, and so time in the armed services is a shared experience for most citizens.

The Israeli Defense Forces declined to address details in the group’s report and complained that Breaking the Silence “does not provide IDF with any proof of their claims.”

“This pattern of collecting evidence over an extended period of time and refusing to share it with the IDF in a manner which would allow a proper response, and if required, investigation, indicates that contrary to their claims this organization does not act with the intention of correcting any wrongdoings they allegedly uncovered,” the Israeli military stated.

Breaking the Silence provided reporters with a March 23 letter they sent to chief of the general staff of the IDF requesting an urgent meeting to discuss the report.

The testimonies are spoken in the voices of soldiers — filled with military jargon and occasional expletives —

about how they did their jobs, what they saw, sometimes what they felt.

The Israeli combatants reveal acts of both kindness and savagery — how they sheltered a family from harm and how they appear to have executed a wounded Palestinian.

In an interview with the Washington Post, a young tank gunner whose testimony is included in the report, described how he and others fired cannon and machine gun bursts at random travelers on a main north-south highway in the Gaza Strip simply because they were bored and wanted to prove how good their aim was.

“I am ashamed of this,” said the 21-year-old tank gunner who served in the central Gaza in a Hamas hotspot near the town of Al Bureij.

The gunner said he fired his Browning machine gun at a man pedaling a bicycle, but missed because of the distance and his ultimate unwillingness to adjust his fire.

“War crime is a big word,” he said in an interview in a Tel Aviv apartment on Sunday. “I didn’t rape and kill anybody, but yeah, I shot at random civilian targets sometimes, just for fun, so yeah.”

The same soldier described how a friend in his unit was killed by shrapnel to the neck from a Palestinian mortar round; how rocket-propelled grenades whizzed by his tank and how one time a burst of small-arms fire breezed by his own head.

In other testimonies, soldiers recall that doors and houses and even sheep were booby-trapped with explosives and that once an old man was sent toward the troops as a suicide bomber.

Advertisement

Yehuda Shaul, a leader of the Breaking the Silence, conceded that Gaza was a dangerous, chaotic landscape for Israeli troops. But he said that IDF had contributed to needless death and destruction with “a guiding military principle of minimum risk to our forces, even at the cost of harming innocent civilians.”

According to United Nations and Palestinian human rights organizations, almost 70 percent of the more than 2,100 Palestinian deaths were civilian, including more than 500 children. Israelis have not produced a detailed breakdown, but researchers and politicians here have suggested that about half were combatants.

When the ground offensive began and Israeli armored battalions entered the Gaza Strip, the IDF would first drop leaflets warning civilians to flee the area; then they would launch artillery and aerial strikes to destroy buildings that intelligence suggested could harbor militants and weapons, and “soften targets” to deter Hamas from counter-attack.

Those who remained in the area could find themselves in the crosshairs. “While official military orders allow for fire only after identifying a weapon, intent, and the enemy’s realistic capability, many soldiers testified that they were told to shoot at any threat, imminent or suspected,” the report concluded.

A first sergeant in the Infantry in the Northern Gaza Strip testified, “They told us: ‘There aren’t supposed to be any civilians there. If you spot someone, shoot. Whether it posed a threat or not wasn’t a question, and that makes sense to me. If you shoot someone in Gaza, it’s cool, no big deal.’”

Ruth Eglash contributed to this report.

William Booth is The Post’s Jerusalem bureau chief. He was previously bureau chief in Mexico, Los Angeles and Miami.

Negotiation Alongside Operation Works

May 04, 2015

We should imbibe it that peace is not the absence of conflict, but the way conflict is lead to an agreeable but peace owning ending. The harms inflicted to poverty stricken Afghanistan can not be reciprocated with endless butchery of the misled and betrayed militants and terrorists. Certainly, the segregation of militants intended to serve the vested interests from the one unknowingly fighting for the installment of peace, is timely necessity.

The dual approach (negotiation and operation) exercised by National Unity Government (NUG) to seek an end to decade long bloody conflict, is justifiably agreeable. The government proposing peace talks to the disgruntled faction of militants' amidst executing military operation to inflict crushing defeat to those challenging the writ of government. Nonetheless, the government falling short of widening the security net, created security vacuum which is duly filled by emerging militants of ISIS. The growing activities of ISIS in the wake of Taliban's "spring offensive" multiplied governments concerns. Earlier president Ghani admitted that the group poses a serious threat to regional security whilst terming it worse than al-Qaeda. Apparently, the targeted attacks by twin groups fortify government complications.

Following the aforesaid course the Afghans longing for eternal peace turns nightmare, despite years of infighting that have claimed awful toll. Purposeful, negotiations renders the sole political solution to put an end to this predicament. Previously, the efforts were underway to stage talks with Taliban. Reportedly, Pakistan enjoys good ties with Afghan Taliban, who disbanded their ties with Pakistani faction of Taliban. Pakistan can play a significant role, narrowing down the understanding gap by mediating talks between the two factions; government and Taliban. Nevertheless, with emergence of Daesh, query awaiting proper reply is, should the government tempt talk them too? Or, the government should draw out of the disparity of interests between Daesh and Taliban given both are fighting a similar religio-political dominance; the latter being local and former foreign elements. Drawing the favor of Taliban through tangible peace talks, the other insurgent group of ISIS can be pushed back.

Previously it was reported by credible media that Afghan government and the Taliban were preparing to hold face-to-face talks in the following days as a result of efforts by Pakistan and other stakeholders. Taliban never relied Kabul government to be the sole authority that should be talked, to chart out the future course of action. The in-depth trust deficit found between disgruntled factions, served a dominant factor restraining this settlement.

The encouragements to initiate talks were well received by US, China and formerly India. In this course the efforts were made to arrange the talks in Kabul in an effort to show that the process is Afghan-led and Afghan-owned.

Following the successive developments, Afghan Taliban and the government are about to devise a roadmap to finalize peace talk. The Pakistani army and diplomatic officials in their former visit to Afghanistan had declared Afghan Taliban have signaled their willingness to initiate peace talks. According to report surfaced the venue is still undecided; preferably out of Islamabad, Kabul, Beijing or Dubai one might be chosen where talks could further.

The aforesaid progression bridges the credibility of the former report stating the Government of National Unity had offered posts to senior former Taliban leaders in the new cabinet which were not formally announced. It is said that the Government of National Unity had considered offering posts of the Ministry of Rural Affairs, the borders and Hajj and Religious Affairs, besides appointing Taliban governors to three southern provinces –Nimruz, Kandahar and Helmand. It's a good omen that broad based reconciliation between Afghan government and Taliban could bring true

the "peace" dream of ordinary masses of this piece of land.

There are vital developments witnessed echoing even in constitutional avenues of US and elsewhere. It should be to none surprise, US tempts not to call Taliban, terrorists then onward, given, earlier the White House issues statement, reiterating that the Taliban were not a terrorist outfit while Al Qaeda is. The distinction carved underlines; the US's deep-rooted global interests are endangered by later than former. Broadly speaking it seems to be a sub plan of another master plan where Taliban are given space to join back the political domain and disband militancy.

There are some hard born reservations Taliban still assert to be primarily considered on peace talks agenda; they eye constitution to be Islamized, Taliban be given greater share in the new setup. The government displayed complete silence about over all developments. Earlier, the presidential palace had said the nation would be informed about major developments in talks with the armed opponents.

Even if talks were to be used as a last resort to install peace then some serious breakthrough must have worked out that could soothe the insurgents to an agreeable demand prior to sitting. The most significant are the demonstration of shift instilled in Taliban's resolve to disband militancy, dissociate Al-Qaida and surrender to constitution of the country. This move practically is unachievable given that Taliban deem to having upper hand in the fight, never surrender to government's demands instead dreams of ousting Kabul government.

Stumbling Into a Wider War

By THE EDITORIAL BOARD MAY 2, 2015

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It should come as no surprise that the United States and its coalition partners are discussing widening the war against the Islamic State beyond the borders of Iraq and Syria. Wider wars have become almost habitual in recent years, as military conflicts have expanded with little public awareness or debate. President George W. Bush's "war on terror" began in Afghanistan, then moved to Iraq and elsewhere. Fourteen years after the Sept. 11 attacks, President Obama is still deploying American troops and weapons to fight Al Qaeda and other extremists in far-flung parts of the world, including Pakistan.



This story is included with an NYT Opinion subscription. [Learn more »](#)

The fight against the Islamic State has focused largely on Iraq and Syria, where the group, also known as ISIS or ISIL, has seized large swaths of land and established a firm presence. But some regional members of the anti-ISIS coalition of more than 60 nations, according to a [report](#) in The Times, are now pressing the administration to carry the fight to other terrorist groups that have declared themselves "provinces" of the Islamic State.



Egyptians inspected the damage of an attack in January by a group allied with the Islamic State.

In theory, that could involve the United States and the coalition in Libya, where ISIS has sent a small number of fighters to help organize militants. It could also mean moving against Ansar Beit al-Maqdis, an ISIS-supported terrorist group in the Sinai Peninsula that greatly worries Egypt. Intelligence officials estimate that ISIS may have as many as 31,500 fighters in Syria and Iraq; at least a couple of hundred other extremists in Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia

Alaa Elkamhawi/Almasry Alyoum, via European Pressphoto Agency

and other countries have also made less formal pledges of support for ISIS.

It is essential that further expansion of the campaign against ISIS and other militant groups be debated rigorously and openly by Washington and its coalition partners. For one thing, it is dangerous and unwise to assume that “affiliates” pledging support for ISIS are controlled by ISIS, share its resources or can duplicate its ruthless skills. Many cannot do so, and the coalition would make a serious mistake if it treated all splinter groups as the same kind of threat.

In any case, the problem is far more complicated than just going after ISIS and its affiliates. There are many threats ravaging and destabilizing the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia, including not only extremistists (some allied with ISIS, many not) but also stubborn, long-standing sectarian conflicts and, in some failed states like Yemen and Libya, the near-total collapse of governmental authority and civil order. That makes finding a coherent and effective strategy — or more likely strategies — to deal with these challenges much harder.

What is manifestly clear is that while America can and should play a leading role, the main responsibility for confronting extremist groups and ending sectarian wars lies with countries in the region, including Saudi Arabia and Iran. That will require them to put aside enmities, cooperate and take on more of the fight. It will also require many of them to make reforms at home, where radical ideology and repressive governance foster extremism.

A Pentagon official played down the possibility of an expanded war. But the fact that it is under discussion should be of more than passing interest to a public grown tired of war. The spread of extremism will be the focus of several meetings in the next few months, including a summit meeting of Arab leaders called by President Obama for this month and a

meeting of coalition military commanders to be convened by the United States Central Command.

In some ways, Mr. Obama has sought to limit the American role in the anti-ISIS fight by ruling out ground troops and, at first, limiting military involvement in Iraq to air strikes and keeping force levels down, just enough to provide intelligence and to help train and advise Iraqi units. But he has since increased troop levels in Iraq and expanded air strikes into Syria. He also recently [asked Congress](#) to approve legislation that would give him, and his successors, what appears to be an open-ended mandate to wage war against ISIS and “associated persons or forces.”

It is long past time for Congress to set firm parameters so America does not stumble blindly into another morass. Sadly, even as the administration contemplates broader engagement, Congress remains unable or unwilling to confront the issue.

RECENT COMMENTS

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Thank you New York Times editors for this essay. The time is long past for the United States to end our fighting in the Middle East and...

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Two UN peacekeepers hit by Syria fire on Israeli-occupied Golan

4 MAGGIO 2015 BY ANDREA SPADA



Two UN peacekeepers were wounded today when mortar rounds fired from Syria hit their base in the Israeli-held sector of the Golan Heights, an army spokesperson said.

“Mortar shells hit the Golan in Ein Zivan and in the Zivanit UNDOF base. Two UN peacekeeping soldiers were evacuated to Israel for medical care,” Lieutenant Colonel Peter Lerner wrote on his official Twitter account.

Israel public radio said the two were lightly wounded.

The army said the fire was not deliberately aimed at the Israeli side of the plateau, but was stray fire from the ongoing conflict in Syria.

Since the Syrian conflict erupted in 2011, the plateau has been tense, with a growing number of rockets and mortar rounds hitting the Israeli side, mostly stray, prompting the occasional armed response.

In January, a Spanish UN peacekeeper was killed on the Israel-Lebanon border during an exchange of fire between Israeli troops and Hezbollah militants.

Rami Abdel Rahman, head of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, told *AFP* that fighting has been taking place since last week between rebel groups in an area close to the ceasefire line.

“There is still infighting going on among rebel groups in Qahtaniya near the ceasefire line with the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights. They’re exchanging shellfire,” he said.

Israel seized 1,200 square kilometres (460 square miles) of the Golan Heights in the Six-Day War of 1967 and

later annexed it in a move never recognised by the international community.

Rescued migrants arrive in Italy port

Nearly 5,800 people, rescued from Mediterranean Sea off Libyan coast over the past 48 hours, have reached Pozzallo.

04 May 2015 07:04 GMT | [Human Rights](#), [Humanitarian crises](#), [Europe](#), [Africa](#)

Nearly 5,800 migrants rescued from boats off the coast of Libya over the past 48 hours have arrived on the Italian port of Pozzallo, according to coastguard officials.

The development comes as part of European coastguard agencies' biggest rescue operation this year.

Al Jazeera's Stephanie Dekker, reporting on Monday from Pozzallo, on the island of Sicily, said that while the boats had docked almost five hours ago, most of the occupants had yet to disembark.

"We're being told that there is a rigorous one-by-one medical check-up going on to ensure that people do not carry transmittable diseases," she said.

"You can see that people are getting agitated. It has been a very stressful journey for them."

She said that only about five people out of 900 people had been allowed to disembark during the night on Sunday. These included women with young children and one wounded man.

Our correspondent said the authorities would decide where they would be sent to once they had disembarked.

Seven bodies were found on two large rubber boats packed with migrants, and rescuers picked from the sea the corpses of three others who had jumped into the water when they saw a merchant ship approaching, the Italian coastguard said.

Two weeks after nearly 900 boat people drowned in the worst Mediterranean shipwreck in living memory, the flow of people desperate to reach a better life in Europe has accelerated as people smugglers take advantage of calmer seas.

Italy's coastguard has coordinated the rescue efforts by its own navy and coastguard, a French ship acting on behalf of the European border control agency, merchant ships and one vessel run by the privately funded Migrant Offshore Aid Station.

Separately, authorities in Egypt said that three people died when a migrant boat attempting to reach Greece sank off its coast. They said 31 people were rescued.

Source: Al Jazeera and agencies

Syrian Forces Kill Attackers in Damascus

By ANNE
BARNARD MAY
4, 2015

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BEIRUT, Lebanon — Security forces battled armed men in Damascus on Monday, killing the attackers as one blew himself up, state news outlets reported, in a type of clash that remains rare in the capital even after more than four years of war in [Syria](#).

Pro- and antigovernment websites displayed photographs of a column of smoke towering above six-story apartment houses in Rukineddine, a northern district of central Damascus.

A pro-government radio station reported that opposition fighters had crossed an agricultural area from insurgent-held suburbs, perhaps to carry out an attack on Berniah Street, a major thoroughfare near the scene of the clash. A Twitter account associated with the Nusra Front, Al Qaeda's affiliate in Syria, said that three members of the group had carried out the attack, on a military supplies and logistics headquarters. The Nusra Front has in the past claimed responsibility for bomb attacks on government and military headquarters.

The conflict in Syria, which began with protests against President Bashar al-Assad and morphed into war, has heated up in recent weeks. Insurgents are making new gains in the north and south, with the government stepping up bombing campaigns in insurgent-held districts in the northern cities of Aleppo and Idlib, and in the Damascus suburbs.

On Sunday in Aleppo, for instance, videos posted by antigovernment activists showed distraught parents pulling the bodies of children from a school that residents said was hit by a bomb dropped from a government helicopter.

Details of the attack in the capital on Monday remained murky, with different sides giving conflicting versions.

Antigovernment activists, including the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a group based in Britain that monitors the conflict through a network of contacts inside Syria, reported that there were two explosions. They said the attack involved two bombs planted at a military logistics department, aimed at Brig. Gen. Mohammad Eid, who oversees arms supplies there.

Damascus Reporter, the Twitter account associated with the Nusra Front, suggested that there were three attackers, posting that "three lions" from the group "were able to infiltrate in the building of supplies and logistics."

Antigovernment sites also said that the general was reported to be taken to a military hospital and that one of his bodyguards was killed, but state news media did not mention the general or his department. The pro-government website Damascus Now said that six people had been wounded

and were taken to nearby Sinan Hospital.

The area is near the suburb of Barzeh, where insurgents and government forces have largely maintained a locally agreed cease-fire for more than a year.

Hwaida Saad and Maher Samaan contributed reporting from Beirut, and an employee of The New York Times from Damascus, Syria.

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Analysis: Syria's al-Assad regime in trouble

By **Nick Paton Walsh**, CNN

🕒 Updated 1952 GMT (0252 HKT) May 3, 2015



SAMI ALI/REUTERS IMAGES

Bashar-al-Assad's grip on Syria tested 02:55

Story highlights

Islamist rebel victories against the Syrian regime are changing the war momentum for Bashar al-Assad

Analyst: "Two years ago they (rebels) were fighting each other, now they are fighting together"

(CNN)—A series of victories by Islamist rebels against the [Syrian regime](#) is raising the prospect of a sea change in the momentum of a war in which the endurance of Bashar al-Assad has for years seemed to many as a given.

Substantial territorial losses by the regime in the northern city of Jisr-el-Shugur and

Analyst: Internal tensions are raising conflict and weaken the regime

spent the past years fighting each other for supremacy, to the detriment of their campaign against al-Assad. The rise of ISIS had also provided another obstacle to more moderate rebels in their fight against the Syrian regime.



Rebels are making advances in key cities like the coastal supply town of Latakia and the strategic city of Aleppo.

EXPAND IMAGE ↘

beyond, after the city of Idlib also fell to rebels, coupled with a relatively successful series of advances around the southwest of Damascus, are the result of new levels of cooperation among rebel groups that have

This change may more broadly assist U.S. foreign policy goals by raising the likelihood of the al-Assad regime -- or those within it -- being willing to contemplate a political solution to the now four-year war. Yet it comes with a substantial downside: Many of the rebel groups seeing success now are allied with and fighting alongside the [Nusra Front](#) -- al Qaeda's franchise in Syria.

The rebel storming of Jisr-el-Shugur in late April provided many analysts with evidence the rebels' recent success in taking Idlib was part of a broader improvement in strategy. The same rebels now film themselves with heavy weapons in what appear to be the

mountains between Jisr el-Shugur and the coastal city of Latakia, a port of great strategic significance for both sides which the rebels now have in their sights.

The change in territorial control does leave the rebels potentially with a larger swath of northern Syria more firmly under their control and, if sustained, will eventually pressure the parts of Syria's largest city, Aleppo, that the regime still holds. Rebels can now also project force southward down the main highway toward Hama, challenging the key roads that are the vital supply channels in this war of attrition.

Around Damascus, the regime is in a better position but has seen significant losses to the south. Rebels took a key border crossing with Jordan recently and have since been reported to have made gains to the southwest of the capital.

Analysts put this change in the dynamics down to both cooperation between rebel groups who once fought each other and also greater coordination between their Sunni and Gulf backers -- Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Turkey.

Elias Hanna, a former Lebanese army general who now teaches at the American University of Beirut, said, "Two years ago they were fighting each other, now they are fighting



Syrian rebel groups say tactics are justified 01:31

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together. Moreover there is a major shift in the regional issue in Turkey, Qatar and Saudi Arabia. I think they are preparing something

and helping indirectly with weapons, training, and backing."

Joshua Landis, associate professor in the School of International and Area Studies at the University of Oklahoma, said the change in regional postures was a result of the new King of Saudi Arabia, King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, deciding that Iran was a more pressing challenge to his state than the House of Saud's other long-term foe, the Muslim Brotherhood.

"This allows him to coordinate with Turkey and Qatar taking down Assad, even if it means arming Nusra and other Islamist forces," he said. Landis said he believes the U.S. has "acquiesced" to this new position.



Improved weaponry also appears to be taking its toll on the regime forces, with a proliferation of social media videos of the advanced TOW anti-tank missile system causing substantial damage to regime armor in the hands of rebels relatively proficient in its use.

Opposition General: Assad regime 'is falling apart' 05:54

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But many observers note a key issue determining this change is the slow erosion of the regime's manpower and resources. There have been repeated reports of tensions in the regime, including a widely reported spat between two intelligence chiefs that led to one of them being hospitalized, and even tensions

between the Syrian Arab Army and the local militias the regime often uses to bolster manpower, the National Defense Force.

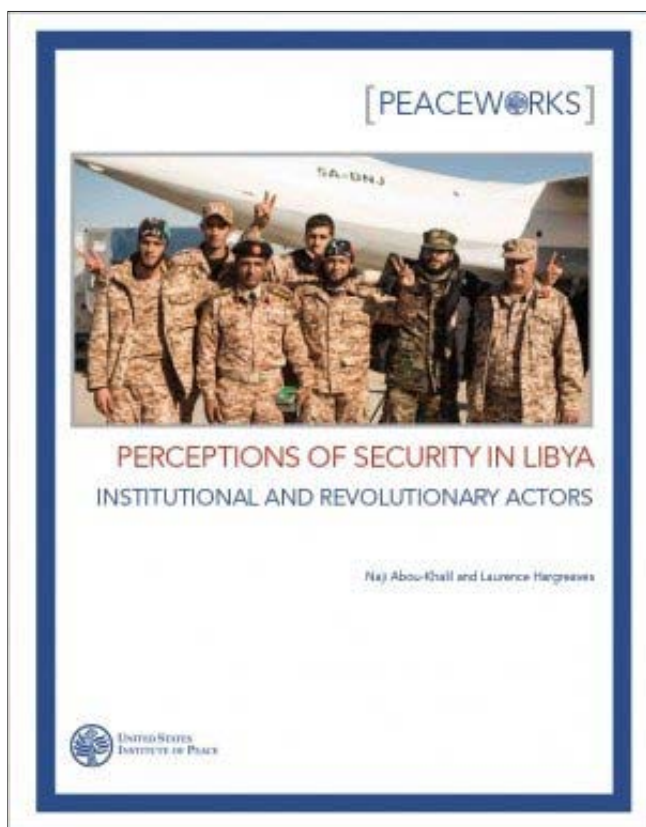
The Syrian currency has also experienced another crash in the past weeks. Hanna noted that the monthly cost of the war to the regime was \$1 billion, and that it may be significantly dependent on Iran for this financial support.

In the background, too, are the ongoing moves toward a nuclear deal between Washington and Tehran. Observers note this might provide a tight window for rebels and their backers to establish new gains on the ground before a deal releases Iranian money that might bolster the al-Assad regime. If the talks fail, analysts suggest Tehran may be markedly more confrontational in backing a regime it sees as strategically vital for its regional influence.

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Perceptions of security in Libya – Institutional and revolutionary actors: USIP report

By Libya Herald reporter.



Tunis, 3 May 2015:

The report assesses the popular legitimacy of Libya’s current security providers and identifies their vectors of local, religious, and legal legitimacy to better understand Libyan needs in terms of delivery of security services.

“Libya’s security sector landscape is characterized by a myriad of security actors of differing political orientations and areas of geographic control and by the relatively minor role of prerevolutionary security institutions, such as the National Police and National Army”.

“The two key sector dimensions are the nature of the actors’ de jure command and control lines and religious-political orientations”.

“One of the main causes of the fragmentation within the sector is the struggle between those who support the substitution of institutional actors by Islamist-leaning revolutionary brigades and those who want to exclude them”, the report explains.

“Libyans still seek state-sponsored security forces. Support for the National Police dropped to 19 percent in the summer of 2014, yet 52 percent support its being in charge of security provision”, reveals the report.

“Short-term security solutions have had little impact on citizen desires to see development of a modern and institutionalized police and army. Libyan Shield Forces and other post-revolutionary security actors are unpopular and considered by a small minority to be part of the National Army”.

“Four conclusions are clear: Libya’s security landscape has further fragmented in 2014, public confidence in the security situation has decreased, support for institutional actors remains strong, and auxiliary

actors have become more visible”, concludes the report.

Upswing in fighting in Ukraine sends civilians fleeing and puts truce in doubt

Eight Ukrainian soldiers killed in past week, and another 40 wounded in attacks by pro-Russia separatists, in most intense clashes since Minsk ceasefire

The remains of a residential building destroyed in a shelling attack in the city of Horlivka in Ukraine's Donetsk region. Photograph: Nikolai Muravyev/ITAR-TASS Photo/Corbis

Alec Luhn in Kramatorsk

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[Ukraine](#) is experiencing its most serious increase in fighting in three months, sending more civilians fleeing and raising fresh doubts about the viability of a shaky February truce.

Another Ukrainian soldier was killed this weekend bringing the death toll in the past week to eight, with another 40 wounded in attacks in eastern Ukraine by pro-Russia separatists, the most intense clashes since the ceasefire agreed in Minsk.

Even if the conflict does not escalate again into war, civilians are continuing to flee the conflict area, adding to the country's humanitarian crisis. More than 1.2 million people have been internally displaced by the conflict, in which more than 6,200 people have died since April 2014.

A representative of Kiev's "anti-terrorist operation" said on Saturday that eight soldiers were wounded in one 24-hour period at the end of last week. The day before, two Ukrainian service personnel were killed and a two others wounded.



'There was heroism and cruelty on both sides': the truth behind one of Ukraine's deadliest

The casualties are the latest in a surge of fighting that began a week ago, when the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in [Europe](#) reported the "most intense shelling in Shyrokyne since fighting began in the area in mid-February 2015". The village is 12.5 miles east of Mariupol, a key port and metallurgical centre, where both sides have attempted to strengthen their positions.

The next day, OSCE monitors reported 550

days

[Read more](#)

explosions outside Donetsk and warned of a “seriously deteriorated” security situation at its rebel-controlled airport. The Ukrainian military said last week that the geographical spread of ceasefire

violations had increased.

On Wednesday, the Ukrainian president, Petro Poroshenko, told a meeting of district administrations that separatist forces planned to begin an offensive in the second half of May. [Nato](#)military chief Gen Philip Breedlove said the next day that separatist forces had been making preparations “consistent with the possibility of an offensive”.

Although Kiev and the self-declared separatist republics both claimed that the withdrawal of heavy weapons from the frontline had been completed, OSCE monitors reported eight tanks near the line on the government-controlled side and a self-propelled howitzer near the line on the rebel side on Wednesday.

Konstantin Mashovets of InfoResist, a group of analysts with close ties to the Ukrainian military, told the Guardian that he expected isolated flareups to continue this month, rather than a full-scale offensive.

“We can expect an escalation of the conflict on a tactical level, a seizure of certain points in certain areas, a village here, a crossroads there,” he said. “Ukrainian forces could also respond, they could also take this or that crossroads or village.”

Any large campaign by the rebels would almost certainly require the support of the Russian military, which has reportedly kept up a flow of ammunition to eastern Ukraine and deployed troops to lead key operations there.

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Such a move could provoke a response from Nato and the US. Russia's economy is already sagging under western sanctions and low oil prices. Legislation passed by the US House of Representatives this week would allocate \$200m (£132m) for the lethal weapons that Barack Obama has so far been unwilling to give Ukraine.

“Many said [Vladimir Putin] might want a big victory before 9 May, but that’s unlikely,” said Kiev-based analyst Oleksiy Melnik. “It’s unlikely he could do that without a huge operation and the cost of this question rises every day.”

Moscow will observe the 70th anniversary of the Red Army’s victory over the Nazis with a military parade redolent of Soviet times. Kiev, on the other hand, will reportedly commemorate the end of the war on 8 May, as western Europe does.

Judging by recent clashes, rebel forces nonetheless appear to be trying to push Ukrainian forces back from their two major strongholds of Donetsk and Luhansk. Donetsk rebel leader Alexander Zakharchenko told journalists on Friday: “We will have to take those territories that can guarantee the security of our lands.”

As the number of artillery exchanges and firefights has increased, civilians have continued to flee.

“Almost every day I find myself registering people from Donetsk and Horlivka, mostly families. There’s up to 10 a day easily,” said Tatiana Lugova, who works for the humanitarian aid organisation Caritas in Ale, a government-controlled city in the Donetsk region.

Local news site 06242 on Wednesday reported heavy artillery fire in Horlivka in a battle it said was the “most intensive since the so-called ceasefire began”.

More than 1.2 million have registered with the government as internally displaced. But the actual number is likely to be far higher. In total, more than 5 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance, according to the UN, and the government cannot fully meet these demands.

“The conflict affects the whole of Ukraine. People that fled the violence are all across Ukraine,” Barbara Manzi, country head of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, told the Guardian. “Communities have accepted them very generously but they are affected also by the hryvnia devaluation and the economy. Their ability to cope with the influx has decreased over time.”

The Kharkiv region north of Donetsk has taken in the most internally displaced people. The emergency ministry and local volunteers are providing people with food and temporary shelter and sending them on to other regions, since there is virtually no housing left there.

Vova, a car mechanic, fled to Kharkiv from the town of Amrosivka near the Russian border with his wife and one of his four children last week. They had gone to Russia when their house was destroyed by shelling in July, only to return after they could not obtain refugee status or find housing and work.

Vova left his three other children with relatives and took a bus and train to Kharkiv after rebel fighters threatened to force him to join their ranks. He said he could not remain at the mercy of armed men and sporadic shelling in Amrosivka.

“If you want, you can wait and they’ll come take you from your bed and take you to fight,” he said at Kharkiv train station, where he had spent the night on a mattress while his wife and son slept for free at the station hotel. “If you want, you can wait and they’ll frame you. If you want, you can wait and a shell will hit.”

Even more people are in need on the rebel side of the lines, where jobs are scarce and supplies are limited. According to Manzi, food prices in Luhansk are six times higher than in government-controlled territory. But the government and the rebels have reportedly hindered some shipments of food and other supplies from reaching these areas.

Any surge in fighting could spark another huge wave of displaced people, as happened during the battles of Debaltseve in January and February, according to UN estimates. “If there’s as much as a 30km push, maybe in Mariupol or somewhere else, then 600,000 people will be moving in one day,” said Petro Matiaszek, director of programming at Caritas Ukraine.