

Deadly airstrikes hit hospitals, school in northern Syria

BEIRUT (AP) — Airstrikes blamed on Russia hit at least two hospitals and a school in northern Syria on Monday, killing and wounding dozens of civilians and further dimming hopes for a temporary truce, as government troops backed by Russian warplanes pressed a major offensive north of Aleppo.

The raids came days after Russia and other world powers agreed to bring about a pause in fighting that would allow for the delivery of humanitarian aid and the revival of peace talks.

The projected truce agreed on Friday in Munich was to begin in a week, but there was no sign that would happen.

On Monday, Syrian state TV reported that pro-government forces have entered the northern town of Tel Rifaat, where they were fighting "fierce battles" against insurgents. Tel Rifaat is a major stronghold of militants fighting to overthrow President Bashar Assad.

Capturing Tel Rifaat would bring government forces closer to their target of Azaz, near the Turkish border.

In Idlib province, an airstrike destroyed a makeshift clinic supported by Doctors Without Borders. The international charity, also known by its French acronym MSF, said the hospital in the town of Maaret al-Numan



This image taken from video provided by the Syrian activist-based media group Maara Media Center, which has been verified and is consistent with other AP reporting, shows Syrian Civil Defense rescuers running from the site of a second explosion near a hospital run by an international medical charity, also known by its French acronym MSF in Maaret al-Numan, Idlib, Syria, Monday. Doctors Without Borders says an attack on a clinic in northern Syria supported by the group has killed several people and that more are presumed dead.

was hit four times in attacks that were minutes apart. It said seven people were killed and eight others were "missing, presumed dead."

"The destruction of the hospital leaves the local population of around 40,000 people without access to medical services in an active zone of conflict," said MSF mission chief Massimiliano Rebaudengo.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said Russian warplanes targeted the hospital, destroying it and killing nine people. The

opposition group, which tracks both sides of the conflict through sources on the ground, said dozens were wounded in the attack.

"The entire building has collapsed on the ground," said opposition activist Yahya al-Sobeih, speaking by phone from Maaret al-Numan. He said five people were killed near the MSF clinic and "all members of the medical team inside are believed to be dead."

The Observatory and other opposition activists said another hospital in Maaret al-Numan was also

hit Monday, most likely by a Syrian government airstrike.

In the neighboring Aleppo province, a missile struck a children's hospital in the town of Azaz, killing five people, including three children and a pregnant woman, according to the Observatory. A third air raid hit a school in a nearby village, killing seven and wounding others.

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said close to 50 civilians were killed and many more wounded in missile attacks on at least five medical facilities and two schools in northern Syria.



AP Photo/Charles Rex Arbogast, File U.S. Supreme Court justice Antonin Scalia looks into the balcony before addressing the Chicago-Kent College Law justice in Chicago.

Obama's political puzzle in naming Scalia successor

WASHINGTON (AP) — For most presidents, choosing a Supreme Court nominee is a puzzle. For President Barack Obama, the chance to pick a successor to Justice Antonin Scalia is more like a Gordian Knot.

As the White House carries out a rare election-year search for a nominee, the president's lawyers and top advisers are sorting through a tangled web of political, legal and personal factors.

A smart pick and nomination strategy could determine whether Obama gets to reshape the highest court for the next generation. The wrong pick could cede that opportunity to his successor.

Democrats view this as a moment decades in the making. Recent Republican presidents have gotten more chances to fill seats, tilting the court in to the right.

"The Supreme Court has not reflected where the American people have been on issues," said Gregory Craig, who served as White House counsel early in Obama's first term. "This is the first opportunity in many, many years to bring the court more in line with the American people."

For Obama, the clock is ticking. The sooner he picks a name, the longer he has to try to force the Republican-led Senate to hold a vote.

At the heart of Obama's dilemma is how to manage the fierce Republican opposition to his decision to name a nominee. Within hours of Scalia's death on Saturday, Republicans began arguing Obama should let his successor fill the open seat.

Obama brushed that argument aside, but it is undoubtedly weighing on his decision. Given the election-year timing, Obama would likely have been inclined to name the nominee most likely to appeal to Republican senators.

But if Republicans object to Obama even trying to fill the post — and remain united in that position — the president may see little point in bending too far to appease the other party. He

may feel the pull to focus more on ginning up his own party's base. Then key question becomes: What are the chances of getting a vote?

This wouldn't be "the first time Republicans have come out with a lot of bluster only to have reality sink in," White House spokesman Eric Schultz said Monday.

Refusing to allow a vote has consequences for the court, Schultz said, pointing to the prospects for tie votes that would allow lower court decisions to stand.

Schultz said the president will use the same criteria he used when he nominated Sonia Sotomayor, who became the first Hispanic on the court, and Elena Kagan, then-solicitor general.

In those instances, and in his appointments to lower courts, Obama has shown a desire to expand ethnic and racial diversity and to elevate more women.

His nominee would almost certainly support abortion rights, consideration of race in college admissions and other areas of public life, limits on campaign contributions and stronger rights of labor unions — all issues that have divided the court's liberal and conservative justices on a 5-4 margin.

In all likelihood, those cases where the conservatives prevailed, with Scalia in the majority, would come out the other way if Obama gets to pick Scalia's successor.

Obama also has prioritized young candidates — people likely to hold the seat for decades. He's aimed for relatively uncontroversial personalities, people with views that fall into the category of mainstream liberal jurisprudence.

Obama will also be mindful of the clock. He has said there is "plenty of time" for Republicans to consider his choice. The more time he gives them before them — particularly before the height of campaign season — the stronger his argument. The time crunch may lean in favor of candidates who've already been vetted for administration jobs or recent court appointments.

ENERGY: Half must come from renewable power by 2040

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Oregon emits in one year, according to data from the state Department of Environmental Quality.

Gov. Kate Brown, whose administration instructed utility officials not to go public with concerns about the bill last month, said last week the bill would have to meet several criteria in order for her to support it.

"What's important is that we continue to move Oregon forward towards meeting our greenhouse gas emission reduction goals, that the bill does not stymie economic development in our communities throughout the state, and that it does not cost taxpayers, ratepayers substantially," Brown said late last week.

House Bill 4036, which was written by PacifiCorp and Portland General Electric and environmental groups, would require those utilities

to use renewable power sources such as wind and solar to serve at least 50 percent of their customers' energy demand in Oregon by 2040. The current state mandate is for 25 percent renewable energy by 2025.

The bill would also require the investor-owned utilities to stop using coal to serve Oregon customers, but there are questions about whether the bill would actually do much to impact the phase-out of coal power in Oregon.

Earlier this month, a Portland General Electric representative said the company already has plans to phase out coal and the bill would actually have a greater impact on the degree to which utilities replace coal with natural gas.

The utilities negotiated the legislation in an attempt to avoid ballot measures planned by the politically active nonprofit Renew Oregon, which represents a coalition of environmental groups,

renewable energy companies and other businesses. The environmental groups agreed to drop their efforts to get voters to pass several new renewable energy mandates in November, including an initiative that would eliminate coal power, if lawmakers and the governor approve House Bill 4036.

Brown described those negotiations last week as "a good thing" and said "that's how we like to solve problems in Oregon." Critics of the deal have said the ratepayers who will pay for the new renewable energy projects were not at the table during negotiations.

But Rep. Jessica Vega Pederson, D-Portland, who carried the bill, pointed out the group Citizens' Utility Board of Oregon did represent residential ratepayers during the negotiations. "They were there representing ratepayer interests," Vega Pederson said ahead of

the vote on Monday.

An employee of the Citizens Utility Board who helped to negotiate the deal has been lobbying lawmakers to pass the bill, albeit in a new capacity. Jeff Bissonnette, who was the utility board's policy director during the negotiations, took a new job as executive director and a registered lobbyist for the Oregon Solar Energy Industries Association in late January, according to the state lobbying database.

Bob Jenks, executive director of the Citizens Utility Board, said he and Bissonnette were both involved in the negotiations. "I was sort of the lead for (Citizens Utility Board)," Jenks said in an interview last week. Jenks said the groups had mostly finished negotiating the legislation by early December, and "it was later in December and January where the offer from the solar industries happened."

ROBOTS: Science club started about a year and a half ago

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alliance-based floor game. Team MALE competed in the Oregon FTC Super-Qualifiers in Hillsboro this weekend, and Monday, the high schoolers passed that knowledge on.

"We're here to show kids that robotics is awesome, but also to get people into it — especially girls," sophomore Makenzie Noggle said. "Engineering is a male-dominated field, and we want to change that."

Science Club offered an opportunity to do just that. In addition to the seven high schoolers on Team MALE, half of the science club participants were girls, who built side-by-side with boys.

"Little kids this young can absorb a lot of information, so we could be teaching the next great engineering experts," senior Esmerelda Morelos said. "We want to show them anything can happen with hard work

and teamwork."

Matthew Campbell, STEM teacher and robotics coordinator for PHS, said the school now has four FTC teams and is looking at opportunities to bring robotics and other STEM-focused activities to younger children.

Campbell is working with Liz Woodiwiss, programming coordinator for CMEO, on future opportunities for STEM education. Science Club, and other STEM programming at CMEO, is funded through a grant from the Oregon Community Foundation aimed at increasing extracurricular activities in Eastern Oregon.

The science club started about a year and a half ago to help meet that need. The monthly program brings local scientists and teachers into the children's museum to teach the different aspects of science through fun and hands-on learning activities.

Past classes have covered topics from chemical reactions to color science.

"We started Science Club in 2014, and a lot of kids have really loved it," Woodiwiss said. "We get together once a month, and I usually try to get a teacher from around the community who has a specialty in some area of science and share their expertise with the kids."

The next science club will focus on water quality and will feature a guest presenter from the Umatilla County Watershed Council. For more information about Science Club, contact CMEO at 541-276-1066.

Jennifer Colton has returned to the EO Media Group this week as a reporter in the Hermiston office.

An experienced journalist and freelance writer, Jennifer has been a staff reporter for the Argus Observer in Ontario, Ore., the Index-Journal in Greenwood, S.C., and the Hermiston Herald. For the past three years, she has worked at Cayuse Technologies and has written for local, regional, and national publications.

She will cover education and public safety for the East Oregonian and Hermiston Herald.

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