## U.S. launches airstrikes targeting Islamic State militants in Libya

WASHINGTON (AP) — The United States launched multiple airstrikes against Islamic State militants in Libya on Monday, opening a new, more persistent front against the group at the request of the United Nations-backed government, Libyan and U.S. officials

Fayez Serraj, the head of Libya's U.N.-brokered presidency council, said in a televised statement that American warplanes attacked the IS bastion of Sirte on the Mediterranean in northern Libya. No U.S. ground forces will be deployed, he said.

The precision strikes, which targeted an Islamic State tank and vehicles, come amid growing concerns about the group's increased threat to Europe and its ability to inspire attacks across the region, even though its numbers have been shrinking because of attacks from local forces and allied international troops.

presidency "The council, as the general army commander, has made a request for direct U.S. support to carry out specific airstrikes," Serraj said. "The first strikes started today in positions in Sirte, causing major casualties."

The strikes mark the start of a more intense American role in the fight against IS in Libya, as the U.S. steps in to assist the fragile, U.N.backed government. They were the first strikes by the U.S. on the group in Libya since February, and they are expected to continue. But officials said they expect the air campaign will last weeks, not months.

Obama's authorization for action in Sirte covers strikes, intelligence and surveillance, but not ground operations, according to a White House official, who wasn't authorized to speak publicly about the strikes and requested anonymity.

Serraj said his government is joining the coalition against IS, adding, "This is the time for the international community to live up to its promises to the Libyan people."

He also noted that the strikes will not go beyond Sirte and its surroundings. He said any other foreign intervention is not allowed without coordination.

His warning comes after several French commandos were killed fighting Islamic State militants. U.S., French, British and Italian special operations forces and military experts have been assisting Libyan troops fighting IS militants in eastern and western Libya.

Pentagon press secretary Peter Cook said President Barack Obama authorized the strikes following a recommendation from Defense Secretary Ash Carter and Gen. Joseph Dunford, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Cook told reporters that U.S. Africa Command will coordinate any strikes with the Libyans and that the new air campaign will last as long as the Libyans request assistance to eliminate IS from Sirte. The U.S. is also providing airborne surveillance and intelligence. And a small team of U.S. special operations forces is in an operations center in Libya outside of Sirte — to help coordinate the airstrikes, according to U.S. officials who were not authorized to discuss the matter publicly so spoke anonymously.

Mohammed al-Ghasri, the commander of a pro-government militia, said his forces gave target coordinates of Islamic State positions to the

While there are no U.S. ground forces being used in connection with the latest strikes, Cook would not comment on whether other American special operations forces are currently in Libya. They have been routinely moving in and out of the country, meeting with Libyan

U.S. officials earlier this year estimated there were as many as 6,000 Islamic State insurgents in Libya, including some who have abandoned Syria. But in recent months, officials say, their numbers in Libya have dropped and the group is weakening there under pressure from local militias and the U.N.-brokered government.

Two weeks ago, U.N. Secretary-General Ki-moon said Islamic State fighters in Libya are facing the "distinct possibility" of defeat in their last stronghold.

And Dunford estimated in mid-July that there were only a few hundred militants still inside Sirte, which the group has used as a headquarters.

"I don't think there is any doubt that the Islamic State in Libya is weaker than it was some months ago," said Dunford, adding, "They've suffered significant casualties in and around the Benghazi

## **PERS:** New rates in September

Continued from 1A

the problem in the long term. "It's a systemic problem," he said. "Everything is predicated on a linear 7.5 percent investment return, and that has not been sustainable. It's a whole different paradigm to what we've been used to in the past."

The shortfall leaves school districts facing a \$335 million increase in costs next biennium, which some Republican lawmakers have equated to hiring 2,000 new teachers.

"Unsustainable and escalating PERS costs will not lead to reducing class sizes, adding school days, or making our communities safer," Senate Republican Leader Ted Ferrioli of John Day said in a news

release sent out Friday. "We need fair and constitutional PERS solutions that reduce costs, ensure the long-term stability of the system to protect retirees, and allow for investments in education."

State agencies will see their PERS bill increase by \$260 million, and other public employers will have \$290 million in new expenses.

Republican lawmakers have compiled a list of moneysaving pension reforms, but Gov. Kate Brown and Democratic lawmakers did not take up any of the proposals in the 2015 legislative session or this year's short session.

The PERS Board will send employers their new rates in September. The rates will take effect July 1, 2017.

## **ACCIDENT:** Hospital released Harris Monday

Continued from 1A

Health District, which ambulance provides service to the Helix area. Harris said their wives are good friends. He also remembered the accident was on Saturday because emergency workers kept asking if he knew the day.

The ambulance took Harris to Providence St. Mary Medical Center, Walla Walla, then a helicopter flew him to Sacred Heart Medical Center, Spokane. He said the hospital was releasing him Monday, but first an orthopedic surgeon

who is an expert in facial reconstruction change the dressing on his left ear and consult with him. Harris said he would return to the Spokane hospital for surgery next

week. He also said he met Simer about a month ago and the two were coworkers but had not had the time to get to know

Rowan said the sheriff's office continues to investigate the incident.

one another.

Contact Phil Wright at pwright@eastoregonian. com or 541-966-0833.





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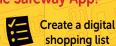
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