

# US Military Hid Airstrikes That Killed Dozens Of Civilians In Syria: Report



WASHINGTON: The US military covered up 2019 airstrikes in Syria that killed up to 64 women and children, a possible war crime, during the battle against Islamic State, the New York Times reported on Saturday.

The two back-to-back airstrikes near the town of Baghuz were ordered by a classified American special operations unit tasked with ground operations in Syria, according to the report.

The newspaper said that U.S. Central Command, which oversees U.S. air operations in Syria, acknowledged the strikes for the first time this week and said they were justified. In a statement on Saturday, Central Command reiterated the account it gave the news-

paper that 80 people were killed in the strikes including 16 ISIS fighters and four civilians. The military said it was unclear if the other 60 people were civilians, partly because women and children could have been combatants.

In Saturday's statement, the military said the strikes were "legitimate self-defense," proportional and that "appropriate steps were taken to rule out the presence of civilians."

"We abhor the loss of innocent life and take all possible measures to prevent them. In this case, we self-reported and investigated the strike according to our own evidence and take full responsibility for the unintended loss of life," Central Command said. The number of civil-

ians among the 60 fatalities could not be determined because "multiple armed women and at least one armed child were observed" in video of the events, it said, adding that the majority of the 60 were likely combatants.

Central Command said the strikes took place while Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) were under heavy fire and in danger of being overrun and the SDF had reported the area clear of civilians.

The Defense Department's inspector general launched an inquiry into the March 18, 2019, incident, but its report was ultimately "stripped" of any mention of the bombing and a thorough, independent probe never took place, according to the Times. The newspaper said its report was based on confidential documents and descriptions of classified reports, as well as interviews with personnel directly involved.

An Air Force lawyer present in the operations center at the time believed the strikes were possible war crimes and later alerted the Defense Department's inspector general and the Senate Armed Services Committee when no action was taken, the Times said.

# Saif Al-Islam, Son Of former Libyan Ruler Gaddafi, Runs For President

TRIPOLI: The son of Libya's late dictator Muammar Gaddafi appeared for nearly the first time in a decade on Sunday to register as a presidential candidate for a December vote planned to help end the years of chaos since his father was toppled.

Saif al-Islam al-Gaddafi, 49, appeared in an electoral commission video in traditional brown robe and turban, and with a grey beard and glasses, signing documents at the election centre in the southern town of Sebha. Gaddafi is one of the most prominent - and controversial - figures expected to run for president, a list that also includes eastern military commander Khalifa Haftar, Prime Minister Abdulhamid al-Dbeibah and parliament speaker Aguila Saleh. However, while his name is one of the best known in Libya, and though he once played a major role in shaping policy before the 2011 NATO-backed uprising that destroyed his family's regime, he has barely been seen for a decade.

His formal entry into an election whose rules are still contested by Libya's squabbling factions may also cast new questions over a contest that features candidates viewed in some regions as unacceptable.

Despite the public backing of most Libyan factions and foreign powers for elections on Dec. 24, the vote remains in doubt as rival entities bicker over the rules and schedule. A major conference in Paris on Friday agreed to sanction anyone who disrupt or prevent the vote, but with less than six weeks to go, there is still no

agreement on rules to govern who should be able to run. While Gaddafi is likely to play on nostalgia for the era before the 2011 NATO-backed uprising that swept his father from power and ushered in a decade of chaos and violence, analysts say he may not prove to be a front runner.

The Gaddafi era is still remembered by many Libyans as one of harsh autocracy, while Saif al-Islam and other former regime figures have been out of power for so long they may find it difficult to mobilise as much support as major rivals. Muammar al-Gaddafi was captured outside his hometown of Sirte by opposition fighters in Oct. 2011 and summarily shot. Saif al-Islam was seized days later by fighters from the mountainous Zintan region as he tried to flee Libya for Niger.

Just over a decade later, Saif al-Islam is now something of a cipher for Libyans. The Zintan fighters kept him for years out of public sight and his views on the crisis are not known. He gave an interview to the New York Times earlier this year, but has not yet made any public appearance speaking directly to Libyans. Complicating his presidential ambitions, Gaddafi was tried in absentia in 2015 by a Tripoli court at which he appeared via videolink from Zintan, and which sentenced him to death for war crimes including killing protesters during the 2011 revolt.

He would likely face arrest or other dangers if he appeared publicly in the capital Tripoli. He is also wanted by the International Criminal Court.

# COP26 Deal Clinched As Nations Rally To Compromise

GLASGOW, UNITED KINGDOM: Nearly 200 nations came together Saturday on a global deal to combat climate change after two weeks of painful negotiation, but fell short of what science says is needed to contain dangerous temperature rises.

Rich countries stood accused of failing at the COP26 summit in Glasgow to deliver much-needed finance to vulnerable states that are at risk of drought, rising seas, fire and storms.

Britain's COP26 president Alok Sharma rounded up the marathon negotiations telling delegates: "It is now decision time. And the choices you are set to make are vitally important."

But there was last-gasp drama as China and India insisted that language on fossil fuels be weakened in the final summit decision text. As the final deal was clinched, a tearful Sharma said "I apologise for the way this process has unfolded. I am deeply sorry," before banging down his gavel.

Delegates entered the talks charged with keeping the 2015 Paris Agreement goal of limiting temperature rises to 1.5-2C degrees within reach. They were also tasked with finding the funding for nations most at risk of climate-related droughts, floods and storms supercharged by rising seas.

Observers said the agreement fell far short of what is needed to avert dangerous



warming and help countries adapt or recoup damages from the disasters already unfolding globally.

Laurence Tubiana, the architect of the Paris deal, told AFP that "COP has failed to provide immediate assistance for people suffering now."

Sharma earlier told delegates in the final throes of marathon talks that they faced a "moment of truth for our planet, for our children and our grandchildren."

- Survival -

The final text urged nations to accelerate efforts to "phase down" unfiltered coal and "phase out" inefficient fossil fuel subsidies.

Large emitters China and India had opposed the mention of the polluting fuels, and the language in the final text was significantly more nuanced than earlier drafts.

The deal also called on all countries to accelerate their emissions cuts by submitting new national plans by 2022, three years earlier than agreed in Paris.

But after resistance from rich nations led by the United States and EU, the text omitted any reference to a specific finance facility for the loss and damage climate change has already caused in the developing world. It instead only promised future "dialogue" on the subject.

"For some loss and damage may be the beginning of conversation and dialogue,"

said Shauna Aminath, the Maldives environment minister. "But for us this is a matter of survival."

Although host Britain said it wanted COP26 to keep the 1.5C temperature cap in reach, a UN scientific assessment last week said countries' latest climate plans put Earth on course to heat 2.7C.

The text noted "with deep regret" that wealthy nations had also failed to stump up a separate annual sum of \$100 billion they promised over a decade ago. It urged countries to pay up "urgently and through 2025".

It also promised to double finance to help developing countries adapt to rising temperatures by the same date.

- 1.5C on life support -

But developing nations said it was unfair for the summit to produce an unbalanced agreement heavily weighted toward "mitigation" -- how economies can ditch fossil fuels and reach net-zero emissions by 2050.

They wanted specific instruction on how they can meet the bill of decarbonising while also adapting to the natural disasters supercharged by global warming.

"We were told that COP26 was the last best chance to keep 1.5C alive but it's been placed on life support," Amanda Mukwashi, CEO of Christian Aid.

# UN Climate Deal "A Big Step Forward": UK's Boris Johnson

Fake emails purportedly from the US Department of Homeland Security warning of cyberattacks were sent out Saturday from a secure FBI computer server, computer security experts said.

The FBI confirmed independent security group Spamhaus's report that a large number of fake emails were sent in two waves early Saturday from an address on the government's Law Enforcement Enterprise Portal, which is used by multiple government agencies.

Some of the emails, sent in the name of the Homeland Security cyber threat detection group, were headlined: "Urgent: threat actor in systems."

They warned recipients that they were the target of a "sophisticated" hacking attack from a known extortion gang, according to Spamhaus.

Independent cyber security expert Brian Krebs said he, too, had

received a fake email from the FBI address, though with a different message.

In a statement, the FBI and the DHS Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Agency confirmed the incident, without offering details.

"The FBI and CISA are aware of the incident this morning involving fake emails from an @ic.fbi.gov email account," they said in a statement.

"This is an ongoing situation and we are not able to provide any additional information at this time. The impacted hardware was taken offline quickly upon discovery of the issue. We continue to encourage the public to be cautious of unknown senders and urge you to report suspicious activity," it added.

There was no indication of how the emails were sent -- whether by someone using legitimate access to the server or a hacker from outside.

# Japan's Former Princess Mako Moves To New York With Husband

Japan's former princess Mako Komuro departed for the United States on Sunday with her husband, swapping ancient imperial rites for the bright lights of New York after leaving the royal family.

The pair tied the knot in Tokyo last month in muted fashion, following years of tabloid gossip and online sniping over their union that Komuro said caused her "sadness and pain".

A move to the United States had long been rumoured. The two 30-year-olds finally boarded a commercial flight Sunday from Tokyo to New York, where Kei Komuro attended law school and now works.

Heavily guarded by police and airport officials, the couple passed before some 100 journalists and cameramen without responding to questions.

Mako, the niece of Emperor Naruhito, lost her royal title when she married a commoner under post-war succession laws that also only allow male members of the imperial family to ascend the throne. After announcing their engagement in 2017, the Komuros were confronted with a barrage of reports



alleging that Kei's family had run into financial difficulties.

Japan's royals are held to exacting standards, and the Imperial Household Agency said Mako developed complex post-traumatic stress disorder because of the media attention.

"I have been scared, feeling sadness and pain whenever one-sided rumours turn into groundless stories," Mako said at a press conference after their marriage.

Kei said he felt "very sad that Mako has been in a bad condition, mentally and physically", declaring: "I love Mako. We only get one life, and I want us to spend it with the one we love."

The controversy surrounding the pair, and their US move, has drawn inevitable comparisons with another royal couple: Britain's Prince Harry and Meghan Markle.

Japanese media said the Komuros, who met at university in Tokyo, have already secured a place to live in the Big Apple.

The original plan had been for Kei to travel to the United States ahead of Mako, with the former princess joining him after she got her first passport, reports said.

But Kei stayed in Japan longer than expected to attend the funeral of Mako's grandfather. Japan's emperor holds no political power, but is an important symbolic figurehead.

With a dwindling supply of male royals, there has been some debate over changing the rules in Japan, with polls showing the public broadly support women being allowed to rule.

But any change is likely to be slow, with traditionalists vehemently opposed.

# Europe hits highest weekly COVID-19 cases since pandemic began

GENEVA: The World Health Organization (WHO) has informed that almost two million cases of COVID-19 were reported in Europe last week, the most in a single week in that region since the pandemic started. Almost 27 thousand deaths were reported in the continent last week, more than half of all COVID-19 deaths globally, UN News reported WHO data. WHO Director-General Tedros Ghebreyesus, while speaking to journalists in Geneva, explained that the virus is not only surging in countries with lower vaccination rates in Eastern Europe, but also in nations with some of the world's highest vaccination rates in Western Europe. "It's another reminder, as we have said again and again, that vaccines do not replace the need for other precautions," Tedros said. "Vaccines reduce the risk of hospitalization, severe disease and death, but they do not fully prevent transmission". The UN News report said that WHO continues to recommend the proportionate use of testing, masks, physical distancing, improved ventilation, and other measures.

# UN Climate Deal "A Big Step Forward": UK's Boris Johnson

LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson on Saturday called the deal struck at the UN COP26 climate change summit "a big step forward" but warned there was "a huge amount more to do".

"There is still a huge amount more to do in the coming years," Johnson said after the Glasgow summit.

"But today's agreement is a big step forward and, critically, we have the first ever international agreement to phase down coal and a roadmap to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees," he added.

Nearly 200 nations came together on the global deal to combat climate change after two weeks of painful negotiation, but fell short of what science says is needed

to contain dangerous temperature rises.

British leader Johnson, whose government hosted the event, said "we asked nations to come together for our planet at COP26, and they have answered that call."

"I hope that we will look back on COP26 in Glasgow as the beginning of the end of climate change, and I will continue to work tirelessly towards that goal," he added.

Britain's COP26 president Alok Sharma rounded up the marathon negotiations telling delegates: "It is now decision time. And the choices you are set to make are vitally important."

But China and India insisted that language on fossil fuels be weakened in the final summit decision text.

# US Warns China Over Pressure On Taiwan Ahead Of Biden-Xi Summit



The United States has warned China over its pressure on Taiwan, the State Department said Saturday as the two powers gear for a hotly awaited summit.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke with Foreign Minister Wang Yi and "expressed concern regarding the PRC's continued military, diplomatic, and economic pressure against Taiwan," the department said in a statement. President Joe Biden and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping are set to hold a virtual summit Monday evening Washington time.

Blinken and Wang spoke Friday to discuss preparations for the summit, with the secretary reported to have "urged Beijing to engage in meaningful dialogue to resolve cross-strait issues peacefully and in a manner consistent with the wishes and best interests of the people on Taiwan."

Relations between the world's two largest economies have deteriorated, in part over Taiwan, a self-ruling democracy claimed by Beijing, but also over trade, human rights and other issues.

China's military last month made a record number of incursions into the island's air defense zone.

Washington has repeatedly signaled its support for Taiwan in the face of what it has described as Chinese aggression.

The State Department said Monday's summit "presents an opportunity for the two leaders to discuss how to responsibly manage competition between the United States and the PRC while working together in areas where interests align."

Biden and Xi have talked by phone twice since the veteran Democrat moved into the White House. The pair

# UK's Queen Elizabeth Suffers 'Sprained Back': Buckingham Palace

LONDON: Queen Elizabeth II has a "sprained back" and will miss Sunday's Remembrance service -- her first planned public appearance since resting on medical advice, Buckingham Palace said.

The ceremony honouring fallen troops is close to the monarch's heart and her absence will deepen concerns over her health after she stepped back on medical advice and spent a night in hospital undergoing unspecified tests at the end of last month.

She then resumed "light duties", but pulled out of a scheduled attendance at the UN climate change summit in Glasgow after being advised to rest.

"The Queen, having sprained her back, has decided this morning with great regret that she will not be able to attend today's Remembrance Sunday Service at the Cenotaph," a palace statement said.

"Her Majesty is disappointed that she will miss the service."

Her son Prince Charles will lay a wreath on her behalf, as in previous years.

Charles and his son Prince William represented the family in Glasgow, making a series of speeches.

A two-day trip to Northern Ireland was also shelved as was her appearance Tuesday at the General Synod, the national assem-

# 'Blah, Blah, Blah': Activist Greta Thunberg On UN Climate Deal

STOCKHOLM, SWEDEN: UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres warned of an impending "climate catastrophe", while environmental campaigner Greta Thunberg dismissed Saturday's COP26 climate conference deal as "blah, blah, blah".

And even those who welcomed the deal in Glasgow said a huge amount of work remained to be done.

Guterres acknowledged the shortcomings of the agreement, in a statement following the deal reached on Saturday evening at the Glasgow conference. "The #COP26 outcome is a compromise, reflecting the interests, contradictions and state of political will in the world today," he tweeted.

"It's an important step, but it's not enough."

"Our fragile planet is hanging by a thread," he warned, adding "we are still knocking on the door of climate catastrophe." In a follow-up tweet, the UN chief sent a message to "young people, indigenous communities, women leaders, all those leading on #ClimateAction."

"I know you might be disappointed. But we're in the fight of our lives & this fight must be won."

Thunberg, arguably the world's best known environmental campaigner, was more blunt in her assessment.

"The #COP26 is over," she tweeted. "Here's a brief sum-

mary: Blah, blah, blah.

"But the real work continues outside these halls. And we will never give up, ever."

During the conference, Thunberg and other activists had denounced the way it was playing out, arguing that world leaders had failed to match their words with real action.

"Hard work ahead" British Prime Minister Boris Johnson remained relatively upbeat.

"There is still a huge amount more to do in the coming years," Johnson said.

"But today's agreement is a big step forward and, critically, we have the first ever international agreement to phase down coal and a roadmap to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees."

A European Commission statement said the deal kept the targets of the 2015 Paris climate agreement alive, "giving us a chance of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius."

Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said delegates to the conference

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made progress on commitments to cut back on dangerous emissions, and on raising \$100 billion a year to help developing and vulnerable countries. "But there will be no time to relax: there is still hard work ahead," she added.

During the final negotiations, China and India insisted that language on fossil fuels be weakened in the final summit decision text. In recent days, the Australian government has vowed to sell coal for decades to come.

But Kevin Rudd, Australia's former prime minister, now the president of the Asia Society, remained hopeful.

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