

Beat: News

U.S., Arab allies launch airstrikes against ISIS in Syria

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USPA News - The U.S. military, along with forces from a number of Arab allies, have launched a significant air campaign against the Islamic State group in northern Syria, the Pentagon said on early Tuesday as witnesses reported hearing large explosions in Raqqah. "I can confirm that U.S. military and partner nation forces are undertaking military action against ISIL terrorists in Syria using a mix of fighter, bomber and Tomahawk Land Attack Missiles," Pentagon Press Secretary Rear Admiral John Kirby said in an emailed statement.

"Given that these operations are ongoing, we are not in a position to provide additional details at this time," Kirby said the decision to conduct the strikes in Syria was made on Monday by the U.S. Central Command commander under authorization granted to him by President Barack Obama, who announced earlier this month that the U.S. would expand its air campaign from Iraq to Syria in an effort to stop the Islamic State. "We will provide more details later as operationally appropriate," Kirby added. Syrian activist Abdulkader Hariri, who lives in the northern Syrian city of Raqqah, reported hearing large explosions on early Tuesday morning. "Huge explosions shook the city in what might be the beginning of US airstrikes on ISIS HQs (headquarters) in Raqqah," he wrote on Twitter, about half an hour before Kirby announced the start of U.S. operations in Syria. Hariri added that the airstrikes appeared to concentrate on targets near the so-called governorate building at the main headquarters of the Islamic State, which claims Raqqah as its capital. "The sky is full drones over Raqqah now," the activist reported, adding that there were unconfirmed reports of airstrikes elsewhere in the region. Pentagon spokesman Lt. Col. Jeffrey Pool said he could not yet confirm the partner nations involved in Tuesday's air campaign, but Fox News - citing U.S. officials - identified the partner countries as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Jordan. U.S. Central Command said it was also unable to confirm the report. The Islamic State, which was previously known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/ISIS), is an al-Qaeda splinter group which declared itself an Islamic caliphate earlier this year after seizing much of northeastern Syria and making huge gains in parts of Iraq. Their rule has been marked with brutal violence - such as beheadings and crucifixions - of anyone opposing the "caliphate." Since early August, U.S. air forces have carried out a total of 190 airstrikes across Iraq to protect U.S. interests and to assist Iraqi forces as they attempt to fight off the Islamic State. The most recent airstrikes in Iraq, which took place on Monday, destroyed two vehicles plus a tank and damaged a Humvee vehicle in four separate airstrikes west-southwest of Kirkuk.

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