

Search for missing sub fails to find any clues

Buenos Aires

A vast search by a multinational task force for an Argentinian submarine that went missing in the South Atlantic with 44 crew members four days ago has so far failed to provide any clues as to its possible location.

The hope that arose from seven failed satellite calls detected Saturday morning, which Argentina's defence ministry at first said could be from the missing submarine, is also dimming fast. The government said yesterday said it cannot confirm that the attempts came from the ARA San Juan.

"Regrettably, we have not yet had any contact with the submarine," Argentinian navy spokesman Enrique Balbi said yesterday morning. The satellite call attempts were registered between 9am and 3pm on Saturday, lasting between four and 36 seconds, but there was no voice contact. "There were seven attempts with a very weak signal that failed to connect," the officer said. "We are trying to squeeze that information to obtain some concrete data and a geolocation."

Argentina's defence ministry said it was working on tracing the location of the calls with



A picture of the Argentinian submarine ARA San Juan hangs on the fence of the Mar del Plata naval base, reading- 'Come on steel men. We will wait for you at home.'

an unnamed US company that specialized in satellite communications.

The families of the ARA San Juan's crew are deeply distressed, and urged the

government to clarify the situation. "We want the government to confirm if the calls were from the submarine," said Claudio Rodríguez, brother of crew member Hernán Rodríguez, who was travelling yesterday from his home in the western province of Mendoza to the submarine's home port in Mar del Plata to join other relatives gathering there in desperate search of news.

A total of 13 ships and six aeroplanes are braving strong winds and high waves over an area of 66,000 sq km (25,500 sq miles) more than 400 km (250 miles) east of the bay of San

Jorge off the coast of Patagonia in southern Argentina.

The Argentinian navy lost radio contact with the San Juan after its last scheduled transmission on Wednesday morning. It was on a 10-day voyage from Argentina's southernmost port, Ushuaia, to the naval base at Mar del Plata, 400km (250 miles) south of Buenos Aires.

Argentina's navy said it was not sure what happened to the submarine or why it lost contact but that it was now convinced the ship was beneath the surface and not adrift on choppy seas, as was previously thought. (*The Guardian*)

IS militants defeated in final stronghold



Syrian forces gestures as they carry the national flag near the border town of Albu Kamal.

Beirut

The Syrian army and its allies took complete control over Albu Kamal, Islamic State's last significant town in Syria, a military news service run by Hezbollah said yesterday.

The army had declared victory over Islamic State in Albu Kamal earlier this month but the jihadists then staged a counter-attack using sleeper cells hidden in the town.

Driving Islamic State from Albu Kamal means only a few villages along the Euphrates and patches of nearby desert, as well as isolated pockets in other parts of the country, remain in Syria of the caliphate it declared in 2014.

Most of the forces battling Islamic State in Syria and Iraq have said they expect it to go underground and turn to a guerrilla insurgency using sleeper cells and bombings.

Western intelligence agencies have said it will still be able to inspire attacks on civilians around the world.

"The Syrian Army and its allies in the axis of resistance have expelled Daesh from its last stronghold on Syrian soil," the Hezbollah news service reported.

The "axis of resistance" is used by those in it to describe the alliance of Iran, Syria and Shi'ite militias including Hezbollah.

The British-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said on Sunday that most IS members withdrew from the town, with fighting continuing in the perimeter of Albu Kamal.

Islamic State's area of rule in Syria has crumbled this year under two rival military campaigns.

The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) alliance of Kurdish and Arab militias, backed by a U.S.-led coalition has driven it from much of its territory in the north, including its former Syrian capital Raqqa.

Syria's army and its allies have waged an offensive across central and eastern Syria backed by Russian air and missile power.

The two offensives have mostly avoided conflict with each other through communication between the United States and Russia. However, Syrian and Iranian officials have said that Damascus seeks to regain control over areas held by the SDF. (*Reuters*)

Palestine 'to cut US ties' over office

Ramallah

The Palestinians will freeze their ties with the US if it follows through on a threat to close the Palestine Liberation Organisation's office in Washington, a senior PLO official warned.

The surprise American move and Palestinian backlash came as US President Donald Trump seeks bargaining chips in his bid to broker an elusive Israeli-Palestinian peace deal.

Trump has a 90-day window to avert the closure if he deems progress has been made.

But PLO Secretary General Saeb Erekat said his organisation had officially told Washington that "we would put on hold all our communications with this American administration" if the office were closed.

The PLO, which the international community sees as representing all Palestinians, must have its permission to operate its premises in the American capital renewed every six months.

Palestinian foreign minister Riyad al-Malki said it was the first time since the 1980s that the State Department had refused to renew it.

Malki said Palestinian officials had received a letter from Washington "saying that the Secretary of State had not found enough reasons to keep the office open".

"This has not happened in the past, and we have



Donald Trump with Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas in Washington in May.

demand clarifications from the State Department and the White House," he said.

"They told us that there would be a meeting of senior legal experts on Monday. Then they would give a clear answer," he said, adding that Palestinian leaders would then meet to discuss their response.

A US State Department official cited "certain statements made by Palestinian leaders" about the International Criminal Court as the reason behind the non-renewal.

Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas, in his latest speech at the UN General Assembly, suggested taking the issue of Israeli settlements

to the ICC.

In 2015 Congress issued a resolution barring Palestinians from seeking to wield influence over the ICC regarding investigations into Israeli nationals.

Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas was "deeply surprised" by the State Department's move, his spokesman Nabil Abu Rudeina said in remarks carried by official Palestinian news agency Wafa on Saturday.

He said the decision "represents an unprecedented step in the history of the Palestinian-American relationship, and has dangerous consequences for the peace process and the

American-Arab relations."

It "represents a blow to attempt to build peace", he said.

The State Department official said Trump had 90 days to decide whether to waive the decision if he deems "the Palestinians have entered into direct, meaningful negotiations with Israel".

The peace process has been deadlocked since April 2014 following the collapse of indirect negotiations led by then US secretary of state John Kerry.

The office of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the decision was "a matter of US law." (*AFP*)