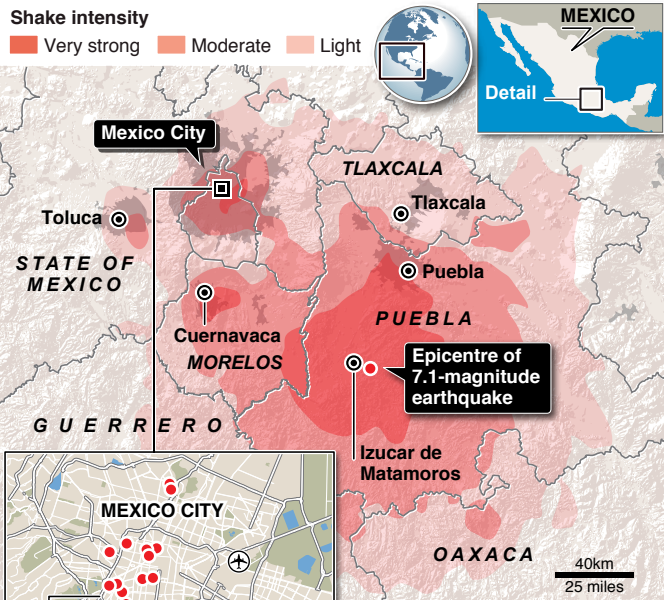


Mexico earthquake death toll rises

Rescuers are searching for earthquake survivors throughout central Mexico, where the death toll has risen above 200



Sources: USGS, INEGI © GRAPHIC NEWS

Madrid ramps up pressure on Catalonia

Spain's Guardia Civil police have detained a dozen senior Catalan officials and raided regional government ministries ahead of a planned referendum on independence, which Madrid insists is illegal



- 2010: Spain's constitutional court strikes down key terms of Catalonia's autonomy statute
- 2011: Sep 27, 2015: Pro-sovereignty forces win majority of seats in Catalan parliament
- 2012: Sep 11, 2012: 1.5m people take part in independence rally in Barcelona
- 2013: Sep 20: Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy rejects Catalonia bid for greater fiscal independence
- 2014: Nov 9, 2014: Catalan authorities stage symbolic poll on secession, despite strong opposition from Madrid. More than 80% vote in favour, but turnout is only 40%
- 2015: Mar 2017: Former Catalan president Artur Mas banned from public office for two years over 2014 vote
- 2016: Jun 9: New Catalan president Carles Puigdemont calls unilateral referendum on Oct 1
- 2017: Sep 20: After police raids, Puigdemont accuses Madrid of "de facto" suspension of Catalan autonomy and imposing state of emergency

Sources: DIPLOCAT, Wire agencies Pictures: Associated Press, Getty Images © GRAPHIC NEWS

Victory near in Raqa, says US-backed Syria forces

A displaced Syrian child who fled the Islamic State (IS) group's Syrian stronghold of Raqa



Raqa Syrian fighters backed by US special forces battled yesterday to clear the last remaining Islamic State group jihadists holed up in their crumbling stronghold of Raqa.

"Victory is near" and would be declared in coming weeks, a spokeswoman for the operation to capture Raqa said in the city where US-led air strikes sent clouds of grey smoke into the air.

Across the border in Iraq, security forces were attacking all remaining territory held by the extremists, who are fighting to prevent the all-out collapse of their self-proclaimed "caliphate".

Most of Raqa, long a byword for the jihadists' most gruesome atrocities, is now in the hands of the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces, supported by waves of heavy air strikes by a military coalition led by Washington.

"We control 80 percent of Raqa and the other 20 percent is in the firing line of our forces," said Jihan Sheikh Ahmed, spokeswoman for the "Wrath of the Euphrates"

operation. "We're in the final stage and will deliver victory to our people in Raqa within weeks," she said.

She said the Kurdish-Arab alliance was still fighting the jihadists around grain silos in the north of the city and the Raqa sports stadium, where IS fighters are believed to be storing weaponry.

"But victory is near," she said.

SDF spokesman Talal Sello said the militia was battling jihadists in "20 percent of the city".

"That sector is not under the control of Daesh... our forces are present there," he said.

In the city Thursday, a correspondent heard US-led coalition warplanes carrying out air strikes around the silos.

The sound of gunfire from running battles could also be heard as a journalist travelled across parts of the city.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitor said the SDF and US special forces were engaged in a "mopping up

operation."

But the operation was being slowed down by large numbers of mines planted by the jihadists in the city, where they have been under siege for three months, it said.

Exact estimates of the percentage of the city held by the SDF vary, with the Observatory putting it at 90 percent, but the US-led coalition saying that 70 percent had been "cleared."

IS seized Raqa in early 2014, making it their de facto Syria capital. They are thought to have used the city to plan attacks abroad. (AFP)

Children flash the victory gesture as a military convoy carrying US-made Oshkosh armoured vehicles, bulldozers, and arms headed for Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) fighting in Raqa



UAE Exchange in association with Xpress Money and Air Arabia held the Final draw for "Send & Fly promotion" on 17th September 2017. Officials from MOIC, Xpress Money, Air Arabia and UAE Exchange were present during the event. Winners were rewarded with 20 Air tickets and 20 gift vouchers (Promotion period: 10th July- 09th September 2017).