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world**US service members killed in Syria attack: coalition**  
Beirut, Lebanon

US service members were among those killed in a suicide attack yesterday in the flashpoint Syrian city of Manbij, the US-led coalition said without specifying how many.

"US service members were killed during an explosion while conducting a routine patrol in Syria today," a coalition spokesman said in a statement posted on social media.

"We are still gathering information and will share additional details at a later time."

According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, at least two US members of the coalition were killed in the attack targeting their patrol.

The Britain-based monitoring group relies on a network of sources inside Syria for its information.

The attack, the first of its kind against the coalition in Manbij in 10 months, was claimed by the Islamic State jihadist group.

**US will ensure ISIS defeat, says Pence**

Washington, United States

Vice President Mike Pence said the United States would fight to ensure the defeat of the Islamic State movement but reiterated plans to pull troops out of Syria after an attack there killed US service members.

"We'll stay in the region and we'll stay in the fight to ensure that ISIS does not rear its ugly head again," Pence, using another name for IS, told a gathering in Washington of US ambassadors stationed around the world.

"We will protect the gains that our soldiers and our coalition partners have secured," he told the meeting at the State Department.

Despite the pledge of support, Pence double-downed on President Donald Trump's



US Vice President Mike Pence

controversial declaration in December that the United States would pull all of its 2,000 troops from Syria.

"Thanks to the leadership of this commander-in-chief and the courage and sacrifice of our coalition partners, we're now actually able to hand off the fight against ISIS in Syria to our coalition partners and we are bringing our troops home," he

said.

"The caliphate has crumbled and ISIS has been defeated," he said, without referencing the attack earlier Wednesday.

The US-led coalition said US service members were among the dead in the suicide attack in the flashpoint city of Manbij, the first there against the international forces in 10 months.

**Indonesia vows to push Palestinian rights**

Jakarta, Indonesia

Indonesia will do everything possible to advance the rights of Palestinians when it assumes its position on the United Nations Security Council, the foreign ministry said yesterday.

Ministry official Febrian Ruddyard said the world's largest Muslim-majority country would make sure issues facing the Palestinians were

not buried, and it would offer unwavering support for their bid to become a full member of the UN. Palestinians have the status of non-member observer state at the world body. Full membership would amount to international recognition of Palestinian statehood.

"We have always reiterated that once we are elected we will push the Palestine issue in any form," Ruddyard said.

**Kremlin says 'stupid' to suggest Trump a Russian agent**

Moscow, Russia

A top Kremlin aide yesterday dismissed as ridiculous claims that US President Donald Trump has acted as an agent for Russia amid mounting controversy over his alleged ties to Moscow.

"Why comment on something stupid? How can the US president be an agent of another country?" President Vladimir Putin's foreign poli-

cy advisor Yuri Ushakov told a briefing after a journalist if Trump was a Russian agent.

Ushakov said Russia's relations with the US were "at rock bottom" and "nothing has happened in the context of developing them."

Trump himself said on Monday that he "never worked for Russia" and told reporters: "It's a disgrace that you even ask that question."

**Russia and Japan 'far from partners': Lavrov**

Moscow, Russia

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said yesterday that Moscow and Tokyo are still "far from being partners" despite renewed efforts to resolve a decades-old conflict over disputed islands.

Russian President Vladimir Putin and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe are to meet in Moscow next week for talks on The four strategic islands seized by the Soviet army in the final days of World War II.

Lavrov, speaking during an annual conference, set a confrontational tone ahead of the talks. "We are still far not only from being partners in international relations but also in finding constructive ways to make our relations better," Lavrov said.

"Why is Japan the only country in the world that cannot accept the results of World War II in their entirety?"

He said recognising the results of the war was not an ultimatum, but "an unavoidable part of the modern international system".

Lavrov met this week with his Japanese counterpart Taro Kono and demanded that Tokyo recognise Moscow's sovereignty over the Kuril islands for talks on ending hostilities to continue.

On Wednesday he said that, as well as the islands dispute, Japan's pro-Western position was also harming relations between Moscow and Tokyo.

"Japan votes not with us but against us on all the resolutions that interest Russia in the



Lavrov attends a meeting with his Japanese counterpart in Moscow



The two leaders agreed last year to increase efforts to finally sign a treaty ending World War II-era hostilities.

UN," he said.

The disputed Kuril islands, one of which lies less than 10 kilometres (six miles) from Japan's Hokkaido, consist of Kunashir, Iturup, Shikotan and Habomai. Three are inhabited while Habomai is a group of islets with only the presence of a border patrol.

In 1956 Japan and the Soviet Union signed a document which stipulated that the USSR was willing to cede Shikotan and Habomai following a signed peace agreement, but Japan demanded all four islands.

**'Upskirting' becomes illegal across UK**

London, United Kingdom

British lawmakers have outlawed the practice of "upskirting" -- secretly taking pictures up women's skirts -- following an 18-month campaign by a victim.

Those found guilty face up to two years in jail, leading campaigner Gina Martin to praise the bill as "politics and society at its best".

Members of the upper House of Lords on Tuesday gave the bill the final seal of approval, and it now only requires the formality of Royal Assent.

Prime Minister Theresa May personally backed the legislation, saying the practice left victims "feeling degraded and distressed".

The bill was briefly held up last year when a single MP blocked it by shouting "Object!"



Gina Martin

during a parliamentary vote.

Christopher Chope, a member of May's Conservative Party, claimed he was objecting to the manner in which the bill

was introduced, but was met with cries of "shame" from MPs.

Martin tweeted that she was "over the moon" about the vote, adding "I AM EXHAUSTED AND SO HAPPY!".

From Liverpool in northwest England, Martin was attending a music festival in London's Hyde Park when a man rubbed against her while his friend lurked nearby.

"Five minutes later, I saw that his friend... was watching a picture taken very close to a woman's c\*\*\*\*," she said earlier. "I knew it was me immediately."

Martin grabbed the phone and showed the image to police officers, but "they said 'we can't really help you'."

She then decided to campaign to make it illegal, collecting more than 100,000 signatures of support in an online petition.

**Kenya says Nairobi attack over, all five gunmen killed**

Nairobi, Kenya

Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta said yesterday that gunmen who stormed a luxury hotel complex, killing 14 people, had been "eliminated" after an almost 20-hour operation in which hundreds of civilians were rescued. The attack was claimed by the Al-Qaeda-linked Somali group Al-Shabaab, which has targeted Kenya.

At least one suicide bomber blew himself up and others swapped gunfire with security forces as the assault on DusitD2, a complex which includes a 101-room hotel, spa, restaurant and offices. "There were five terrorists and all of them are no more," Kenyan police chief Joseph Boinnet said.

**The curious case of an American in Syria**

Washington, United States

An American teacher captured by Kurdish-led forces in Syria acknowledged in an interview aired Tuesday that he was drawn to the Islamic State movement but said he did not fight.

NBC News broadcast an interview with Warren Christopher Clark, one of five foreigners, including another American, whom the Syrian Democratic Forces last week said they had seized as they battled remnants of the Islamic State group in eastern Syria.

Clark, a 34-year-old Texan who converted to Islam and



Warren Christopher Clark (Courtesy of NBC News)

took the alias Abu Mohammed al-Ameriki, said of the extremists: "I wanted to learn more about their ideology."

"I wanted to go see exactly what the group was about, and what they were doing," he said.

Clark said he entered Syria in 2015 and had previously watched videos of beheadings by the Islamic State group, also known as ISIS.

"I'm from the United States, from Texas. They like to execute people, too. So I really don't see any difference. They might do it off camera, but it's the same," he said.

But Clark insisted that he never fought for the group, which he said detained him numerous times for not taking up arms.

Instead Clark, who had worked as a substitute teacher in Sugar Land, near Houston, said he offered his services as an English instructor in Islamic State-controlled territory.

US officials have yet to reveal what they will do with Clark and another US citizen purportedly arrested by Kurdish-led forces, Zaid Abed al-Hamid.

President Donald Trump has in the past vowed tough punishment against extremists detained overseas.