

Washington announces air strikes on ISIL targets in Syria after al-Assad's fall

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A U.S. Boeing B-52 Stratofortress strategic bomber, used in the latest attacks against Syria by the United States. [Raul Arboleda/AFP]

Washington, December 9 (RHC)-- The United States says it has carried out dozens of air strikes on ISIL (ISIS) targets in Syria following the collapse of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's government.

The U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) said on Sunday that it had struck more than 75 targets, including ISIL (ISIS) leaders, operatives and camps, to supposedly ensure that the armed group does not take advantage of the end of al-Assad's rule.

CENTCOM said it was carrying out damage assessments following the strikes, which involved warplanes including the Boeing B-52 Stratofortress and McDonnell Douglas F-15 Eagle, but there were no indications of civilian casualties.

"There should be no doubt – we will not allow ISIS to reconstitute and take advantage of the current situation in Syria," CENTCOM Commander General Michael Erik Kurilla said in a statement.

"All organizations in Syria should know that we will hold them accountable if they partner with or support ISIS in any way."

The strikes came as outgoing US President Joe Biden described al-Assad's fall as a "moment of risk" and "historic opportunity".

In a televised address from the White House, Biden said that al-Assad's fall at the hands of rebel group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) was a chance for Syria's long-suffering people to "build a better future for their proud country."

"It's also a moment of risk and uncertainty. As we all turn to the question of what comes next, the United States will work with our partners and the stakeholders in Syria to help them seize an opportunity to manage the risk," Biden said.

Seeking to claim partial credit for al-Assad's downfall, Biden said his demise had been made possible by a decline in support for his government from Russia, Iran and Hezbollah.

"For years, the main backers of Assad have been Iran, Hezbollah and Russia. But over the last week, their support collapsed – all three of them – because all three of them are far weaker today than they were when I took office," Biden said.

The sudden end of the Syrian government has cast a pall of uncertainty over the security situation in the Middle East, including the presence of an estimated 900 U.S. troops in Syria.

U.S. President-elect Donald Trump, who ordered the number of U.S. troops in Syria to be reduced by half during his first term after being dissuaded against a complete withdrawal, on Saturday indicated that his administration would not get involved in any conflict in the country.

"Syria is a mess, but is not our friend," Trump wrote on Truth Social, before switching to all uppercase letters for emphasis.

"THE UNITED STATES SHOULD HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH IT. THIS IS NOT OUR FIGHT. LET IT PLAY OUT. DO NOT GET INVOLVED!"

In his first public appearance since seizing Damascus, HTS leader Abu Mohammed al-Julani, a former leader of the Syrian branch of al-Qaeda, described al-Assad's fall as an opportunity to turn Syria into a "beacon for the Islamic nation" and the beginning of a "new history" for the region.

"God will not fail you," al-Julani said in a victory speech at the symbolic Umayyad Mosque in the Syrian capital.

“This victory is for all Syrians; they were all part of this victory.”

[SOURCE: PRESS TV and NEWS AGENCIES]

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