



ISIS Ambushes U.S. Troops in a Surprise Attack in Syria

Three Americans stationed in Syria were recently killed in an ambush against U.S. and Syrian forces by a lone gunman affiliated with ISIS, who himself was then subsequently killed during the attack. The victims of the incident – which occurred in the town of Palmyra – were two U.S. soldiers and a civilian interpreter, while several other American and Syrian personnel were injured as well. This was the first fatal attack on U.S. forces in Syria since the fall of the Assad regime just over a year ago and marks the deadliest one against American personnel in the country since 2019. For analysts and experts, the incident underscores that despite the territorial defeat of ISIS in Syria, security vulnerabilities still exist as the extremist group's sleeper cells remain active and possess the capability to launch isolated but potentially deadly attacks – particularly in remote desert areas in central Syria. As such, the United States and its partners including the new Syrian government continue to conduct regular counter-ISIS missions in an effort to prevent the resurgence of ISIS and bolster overall regional stability.

The assailant behind the attack was revealed to be a relatively new recruit to the Syrian internal security forces who had raised suspicions of having ties to extremist groups. Leaders of the Syrian internal security forces had become wary that there was an infiltrator leaking information to ISIS among them and thus recently began evaluating members in Syria's Badia region. This probe raised alarms about the perpetrator and prompted officials to reassign him to guard duty away from leadership and coalition forces as a precautionary measure. At the same time, they continued to monitor him to determine if he was an active member of ISIS and to try to identify the network that he was communicating with. Unfortunately, however, the ambush was carried out last weekend against U.S. and Syrian officials as this process was unfolding. Following the attack, Syrian forces conducted sweeps in the Badia region against alleged ISIS cells and detained a handful of suspects, while both Syrian and U.S. officials pledged coordinated retaliation. At least three of the five individuals who were arrested by Syrian security forces are specifically suspected of being involved in and having links to the recent attack. Furthermore, the United States itself is conducting an active investigation into how the gunman who carried out the attack was able to infiltrate the meeting where the incident occurred.

The deadly ambush comes at a delicate and consequential time, as the U.S. military is in the midst of expanding its cooperation with Syrian security forces. Last month in November, during

Syrian President Ahmed Al-Sharaa's landmark visit to the White House, transitional Syrian authorities officially joined the U.S.-led global coalition to combat ISIS – becoming the 90th member country to do so. This has seen U.S. forces engage in intelligence sharing, logistical support, and conduct multiple joint field operations and patrols with the new Syrian government in an attempt to eliminate ISIS camps, target leaders, and destroy weapons caches. There have also been missions aimed at stabilizing areas formerly controlled by ISIS and securing critical infrastructure in order to prevent its recapture. Additionally, discussions are ongoing regarding the Syrian government assuming responsibility for ISIS detention centers in the northeast part of the country.

In light of the attack, both U.S. and Syrian officials have stated how it reinforces the need for and importance of their partnership against ISIS. U.S. Special Envoy for Syria Tom Barrack expressed that the incident “underscores, rather than undermines” the current cooperative efforts and noted that maintaining a limited U.S. presence empowers local partners to counter ISIS on the ground – preventing the need for wider American involvement and potential entanglement. Officials from the two countries also agreed and acknowledged that the ambush was specifically intended to disrupt the increasingly strengthening security ties. Therefore, it is critical that the attack not be allowed to derail cooperation and on the contrary, it should deepen the commitment to further bolstering coordination in counterterrorism and regional stability initiatives. An incident like this ultimately demonstrates the significance and relevance of the new Syrian government's cooperative efforts with the United States and its international coalition to combat ISIS.