

Sunday, 21 April 2013

## Jordan arrests eight Syrian refugees in troubled camp



Police have arrested eight Syrians on suspicion of inciting riots at a refugee camp near the Jordan-Syria border, a Jordanian security official said Sunday.

The unrest in the harsh, sprawling camp accompanied renewed fighting in Syria itself between forces of President Bashar al-Assad and rebels trying to bring down his regime, along with a meeting in Turkey led by the U.S. aimed at securing more aid for the rebels.

About 100 Syrian refugees threw stones at Jordanian police on Friday for preventing some of them from sneaking out of their desert camp. Ten police officers were wounded, including two who remain in critical condition.

The security official, who requested anonymity in line with regulations, said a military prosecutor was set to question the eight suspects later Sunday.

If convicted, they face up to three years in jail.

The Zaatari camp houses 150,000 refugees from the Syrian civil war. Another 350,000 Syrians have found shelter in Jordanian communities.

Conditions in the overcrowded camp have worsened since it opened last July, and there have been several riots.

### On the ground in Syria

In Syria on Sunday, troops backed by pro-government gunmen pounded rebel-held areas near the Lebanese border, activists and state media said.

The Britain-based Observatory for Human Rights said there was no immediate casualty report from the fighting in Basatin in Homs province. The state television said the army was trying to “uproot all the terrorists from the area” - the Syrian regime’s usual term for the rebels.

Elsewhere, the Observatory said fighting was reported in the northern province of Aleppo and three areas in the suburbs of Damascus. It said the fiercest was in the northern province of Idlib, where at least five people, including children, were killed in an airstrike on a school in a village.

In the past two weeks, the Syrian military, supported by pro-government fighters backed by the Lebanese militant Hezbollah group, has pursued a campaign to regain control of areas near the Lebanese border.

The frontier region, near the provincial capital of Homs, holds strategic value because it links Damascus with the coastal enclave that is the heartland of Syria’s Alawite minority, and includes the country’s two main seaports, Latakia and Tartus.

Syria’s regime is dominated by Assad’s Alawite sect, an offshoot of Shiite Islam, while the rebels are primarily Sunni Muslims.

### **Iran, Hezbollah and the Syrian crisis**

The Syrian National Coalition called on Lebanon’s Hezbollah to withdraw its fighters from Syria, warning that fighting between the Iranian proxy group and the Free Syrian Army would lead to greater risks in the area.

In a statement Sunday, the group also urged the Free Syrian Army in Homs for “self-restraint and to respect Lebanon’s sovereign borders.”

Hezbollah is a close ally of Assad and gets weapons and support from Iran.

In Damascus Sunday, an Iranian lawmaker expressed support for Assad, saying the U.S.-led battle against him has failed.

Alaeddin Boroujerdi, head of Iran’s parliamentary committee on national interest and foreign policy, spoke to Iranian state TV before talks with Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Moallem.

“We are happy that the U.S., with its abilities and regional allies, has failed despite efforts” to oust Assad, he said. “Today, they are the losers in the game, no doubt.” Iran is Syria’s chief regional ally.

Moallem said Syria was victim of a foreign conspiracy hatched by the United States in cooperation with