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NGO says Syrian warplanes pound Damascus



Syria's air force launched several air strikes on rebel enclaves in and around Damascus, while fresh clashes between troops and rebels raged to the east of the capital, a monitoring group said on Monday. "At least one civilian was killed in an air strike on Qaboon" in northeastern Damascus, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said, "while regime troops pounded the district of Jubar" in the east. Amateur video distributed by the Syrian Revolution General Commission, a network of activists on the ground, showed a cloud of grey smoke rising after the air raid in a Damascus neighborhood identified as Qaboon.

Assad forces blocked the Damascus-Homs highway and surrounded all entrances leading to Qaboon, Al Arabiya's correspondent reported Monday.

She added that residents were not allowed to leave the area "just minutes after airstrikes" began. The regime also used warplanes to bombard the rebel-held towns of Yabroud, Douma and Harasta east of Damascus, as well as Sbeineh southwest of the capital, according to the monitoring group, which relies on a broad network of activists, doctors and lawyers for its reports. Meanwhile, "fierce clashes raged on the edges of Jubar [in eastern Damascus], near Abbasiyeen square," said the group. Rebels view the square as a strategic target because it lies well within the confines of the capital, the regime's main bastion of power. The SRGC meanwhile reported the army's use of heavy artillery fire on Yarmuk in southern Damascus, with tanks also striking other rebel enclaves nearby. Violence rages daily in southern Damascus, with rebels holding the outer edges of several districts, while the regime tries to push them out. Elsewhere in Syria, warplanes also hit targets in the northeastern city of Raqa as well as an area near the regime-held Base 17 in the same province. Raqa's provincial capital fell into rebel hands in early March, and insurgents have since been fighting to gain control of Base 17, one of the army's few remaining bastions in the province. Monday's violence came a day after at least 151 people were killed in violence across Syria, according to the Observatory. Among the dead were 72 civilians, 45 rebels and 34 soldiers, and 32 of the civilians killed were children.