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AP photo

Report: South Sudan leaders profit in war

By JUSTIN LYNCH
Associated Press

AWEIL, South Sudan — South Sudan's government is challenging a new report by a U.S.-based watchdog group that says the country's leaders have amassed wealth abroad amid a conflict in which tens of thousands have been killed.

A spokesman for President Salva Kiir says the allegations by The Sentry report "can only jeopardize the pursuit of peace and stability in my country where mutual distrust and lack of authority are key factors of violence."

Ateny Wek Ateny's statement questions whether the

report's sources really exist, and he says the allegations will be challenged.

The report by The Sentry, which was co-founded by actor George Clooney, charged that the civil war is being fueled by competition among rivals over national resources such as oil.

The report said Kiir, former deputy Riek Machar and those close to both men have looted the country in accumulating wealth that includes mansions, luxury cars and stakes in a number of businesses abroad. It included images of what it described as the properties abroad.

On Wednesday, a South Sudan newspaper, *The Na-*

tion Mirror, said the government had ordered its shutdown the day it published a front-page story on the watchdog report.

South Sudan, which gained independence from Sudan in 2011, plunged into conflict soon after Kiir fired Machar from his post as vice president in 2013. A peace deal reached a year ago under international pressure has been violated repeatedly by fighting, and Machar fled the country in recent weeks.

The United Nations on Friday announced that South Sudan conflict has produced a million refugees, a "very sad milestone" reached only by Syria, Afghanistan and Somalia.

FARC rebel army seeking role in peaceful Colombia

By CESAR GARCIA
Associated Press

YARI PLAINS, Colombia — The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia kicked off its last conference as a rebel army Saturday as it looks to transition into a political movement following the signing of a peace accord to end more than a half-century of hostilities.

The FARC's top leader, Rodrigo Londoño, addressed about 500 mostly unarmed and semi-uniformed guerrillas who had arrived from all parts of Colombia to attend the meeting in which top commanders will ratify a peace accord reached with the government last month and debate political strategy going forward.

Speaking from a giant concert stage dropped in the middle of southern Colombia's desolate plains, the bearded leader known by his alias Timochenko told the guerrillas, many of whom stood in formation with their hands behind their backs, that in pursuing peace there are neither victors nor vanquished.

"If our adversaries want to tout they won the war, that's up to them," Timochenko said in his inaugural address, surrounded by

all seven members of the FARC's secretariat, its top decision-making body. "For the FARC, our greatest satisfaction will always be that peace has won."

Timochenko and President Juan Manuel Santos will sign the accord Sept. 26 in the city of Cartagena. A week later Colombians will be asked to ratify or reject the deal in a referendum. Polls show it is expected to

overwhelmingly pass.

This the FARC's 10th conference as a rebel army and the first not held in secret. Instead of discussing battlefield strategy, the FARC must settle on a new name for their political movement and deliberate on who it wants to represent it in 10 specially reserved seats in congress created for the group in exchange for laying down its weapons.

Syrian troops possibly caught in U.S. strike

By SARAH EL DEEB
Associated Press

BEIRUT — The U.S. military said it may have unintentionally struck Syrian troops while carrying out a raid against the Islamic State group on Saturday, threatening an already fragile U.S. and Russian-brokered cease-fire that has largely held despite dozens of alleged violations on both sides.

If confirmed, it would mark the first known direct American strike on Syrian President Bashar Assad's forces. The United Nations Security Council scheduled a closed emergency meeting for Saturday night at Russia's request to discuss the airstrike.

U.S. Central Command said the strike was immediately halted "when coalition officials were informed by Russian officials that it was possible the personnel and vehicles targeted were part of the Syrian military."

The Syrian military said the deadly airstrike hit a base in the eastern city of Deir el-Zour that is surrounded by IS, allowing the extremists to advance and overrun Syrian army positions in the area. Russia's military said it was told by the Syrian army that at least 62 soldiers were killed in the air raid and more than 100 wounded.

The apparently errant strike could deal a crushing blow to the fragile cease-fire that has largely held for five days despite dozens of alleged violations on both sides. The cease-fire, which does not apply to attacks on IS, has already been the subject of disputes between Moscow and Washington, with each accusing the other of failing to fully implement it.

"Coalition forces would

not intentionally strike a known Syrian military unit," the U.S. military statement said.

The Syrian military said the airstrikes enabled an IS advance on a hill overlooking the air base. It called the strike a "serious and blatant attack on Syria and its military," and "firm proof of the U.S. support of Daesh," using the Arabic acronym for IS.

A Syrian military spokesman told a briefing early Sunday that the U.S. airstrike destroyed three tanks, three infantry fighting vehicles, four mortars and an anti-aircraft gun, Russia's TASS news agency reported. The unnamed spokesman said the IS advance on the base was stopped after Russian warplanes were called in to hit IS positions.

Russia called for an emergency session of the U.N. Security Council and demanded "full and detailed explanations about whether this was deliberate support of the Islamic State or another mistake."

Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova was quoted by the state news agency TASS as saying that "after today's attack on the Syrian army, we come to the terrible conclusion that the White House is defending the Islamic State."

The Syrian Foreign Min-

istry said it sent an urgent message asking the Security Council to "condemn the U.S. aggression," TASS reported, citing a statement released by Syria's SANA news. The statement claimed five U.S. aircraft took part in the airstrike.

A senior Obama administration official said the United States has "relayed our regret" for the unintentional loss of life of Syrian forces fighting the IS.

The official says the notification was sent through Russia. The official also said the U.S. will continue to pursue compliance with the cessation of hostilities as it continues military action against IS and an al-Qaida-affiliated group. The official was not authorized to discuss the notification by name and requested anonymity.

A Russian Defense Ministry official said Syria has informed them that 62 of its soldiers were killed in the airstrike. Russia has been waging a year-old air campaign on behalf of Assad's forces and closely coordinates with them.

He added that if the coalition attack was launched by mistake, the reason for it was a "stubborn reluctance by the American side to coordinate its action against terrorist groups in Syria with Russia."

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