

HRW says Turkey's north Syria 'safe zone' not safe

Thu, 2019-11-28 01:50

BEIRUT: Human Rights Watch on Wednesday denounced abuses including executions and home confiscations in a Turkish-controlled swathe of northern Syria, where Ankara says it wants to resettle Syrian refugees.

Turkey last month established what it has dubbed a "safe zone" in a 120-km-long strip of land it seized from Syrian Kurdish fighters along its southern border.

The New York-based watchdog urged Turkey and its Syrian proxies to investigate "human rights abuses, in many cases potential war crimes," in the area running 30 km deep into Syrian territory.

"Executing individuals, pillaging property and blocking displaced people from returning to their homes is damning evidence of why Turkey's proposed 'safe zones' will not be safe," said Sarah Leah Whitson, Middle East director at HRW.

Ankara claims it wants to resettle some of the 3.6 million Syrian refugees it hosts on Turkish soil in the area grabbed through a deadly offensive and subsequent deals.

"Contrary to Turkey's narrative that their operation will establish a safe zone, the groups they are using to administer the territory are themselves committing abuses against civilians and discriminating on ethnic grounds," Whitson said.

The group also said that Turkey-backed fighters had failed to account for aid workers who disappeared while working in the "safe zone."

Turkey's Oct. 9 invasion was the latest in a series of military operations on Syrian soil against Kurdish fighters it views as "terrorists."

Another Turkey-led offensive early last year saw pro-Ankara fighters take the northwestern region of Afrin from Kurdish combatants, with rights groups also reporting similar abuses in that region.

Turkish state media on Friday said around 70 Syrians, including women and children, crossed the border to the Syrian town of Ras Al-Ayn in the first of such returns.

But analysts have cast doubt on President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's claims that Turkey can repatriate up to two million Syrians to the "safe zone."



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113 Syrian refugees welcomed in Italy
Car bomb claims lives of 17 people in northern Syrian village of Tal Halaf

[Egypt military court condemns high-profile militant Ashmawy to death](#)

Author:

Wed, 2019-11-27 23:40

CAIRO: An Egyptian military court on Wednesday condemned a high-profile militant, Hisham Ashmawy, to death by hanging over his alleged involvement in terror attacks, the army said.

Ashmawy was convicted for his role in 14 “crimes” including a deadly firefight with police in Egypt’s Western Desert in October 2017, an army spokesman said. The verdict is subject to appeal before a military court, a judicial source told AFP.

Ashmawy was initially sentenced to death in absentia in 2017 over an ambush in which gunmen killed 22 soldiers at a checkpoint near the porous border

with Libya in 2014.

The court ruled on Wednesday that Ashmawy was also “involved in the tracking, planning and filming of the security detail for then-Interior Minister Mohamed Ibrahim on Sept. 5, 2013,” the spokesman said in a statement.

Ibrahim survived a suicide car bombing near his Cairo home but some 20 policemen and civilians were wounded.

Dubbed Egypt’s “most wanted man” by local media, Ashmawy was returned to Cairo in May after his capture last year by forces of Libyan military strongman Khalifa Haftar in the city of Derna, eastern Libya.

Egypt’s President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi had asked for the militant to be handed over. “We want him to serve time in prison,” he said.

A former special forces officer, Ashmawy was dismissed in 2012 over his religious views. He joined Ansar Beit Al-Maqdis based in the restive Sinai of eastern Egypt but broke off after the group pledged allegiance to Daesh in November 2014.

Known by his nom de guerre “Abu Omar Al-MuHajjir,” Ashmawy announced the formation of Al-Mourabitoun in Libya, in July 2015.

Egypt has for years been fighting an insurgency in North Sinai that escalated after the military’s 2013 ouster of President Muhammed Mursi following mass protests.

In February 2018, the army and police launched a nationwide operation against militants focused on North Sinai.



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Blast in northern Sinai kills 3 Egyptian troops
Egypt army kills 83 militants in North Sinai

[Iran 'deliberately' suppressing death, arrest tolls: Rights group](#)

Wed, 2019-11-27 23:32

BEIRUT: Human Rights Watch (HRW) on Wednesday accused the Iranian authorities of "deliberately covering up" deaths and arrests during a crackdown on demonstrations across the country earlier this month.

Protests broke out across sanction-hit Iran on Nov. 15, hours after a shock announcement of fuel price rise of up to 200 percent.

Reports of deaths and arrests emerged as security forces were deployed to rein in demonstrations, which turned violent in some areas, with dozens of banks, petrol pumps and police stations torched.

The extent of the crackdown is unclear, however, primarily due to an internet

outage imposed during the unrest in a step seen as aimed at curbing the spread of videos of the violence.

HRW said the authorities were “deliberately covering up the scale of the mass crackdown against protesters” and called on them to “immediately announce the number of deaths, arrests, and detentions ... and permit an independent inquiry into alleged abuses.”

Its deputy Middle East director, Michael Page, censured Iran for having so far “refused to provide an accurate death toll and instead threatened detainees with death.”

Rights groups, including Amnesty International, have estimated at least 140 people were killed and up to 7,000 arrested in the protests, HRW said in a statement.

Officials have confirmed five people were killed and have so far announced the arrest of about 500 others, including some 180 “ringleaders.”

“Keeping families in the dark about the fate of their loved ones while ratcheting up an atmosphere of fear and retribution is a deliberate government strategy to stifle dissent,” Page said.

Internet connectivity has returned to much of the country in recent days, except for on mobile telephone networks, said NetBlocks, a site that monitors internet disruptions.

The US said Tuesday that it had received thousands of messages from Iran about protests after appealing to demonstrators to defy restrictions on the internet.

“We’ve received to date nearly 20,000 messages, videos, pictures, notes of the regime’s abuses through Telegram messaging services,” Secretary of State Mike Pompeo told reporters, referring to the encrypted app.

Iranian officials have blamed the violence during demonstrations on the intervention of “thugs” backed by royalists and Iran’s archenemies – the US, Israel and Saudi Arabia.

Long-fraught links between Tehran and Washington plunged to a new low in May last year when the US unilaterally withdrew from an international accord that gave Iran relief from sanctions in return for curbs on its nuclear program.



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Iran supreme leader claims protests a US-backed 'conspiracy' Iraqi protesters set fire to Iranian consulate in Najaf

[Iraqi protesters set fire to Iranian consulate in Najaf](#)

Wed, 2019-11-27 22:10

NAJAF, Iraq: Iraqi protesters torched the Iranian consulate in the holy city of Najaf on Wednesday in a dramatic escalation of anti-government demonstrations that have left more than 350 people dead.

Tall flames and thick clouds of smoke rose from the entrance of the consulate in the southern city, AFP's correspondent there said.

"Victory to Iraq!" and "Iran out!" protesters chanted, outraged at the country they blame for propping up a government they've been demonstrating against for nearly two months.

[#BREAKING](#): Iraqi protesters have set fire to the Iranian consulate in Najaf [#Iraqprotestshttps://t.co/0wY9f25pyP](#)
[pic.twitter.com/9HZ9y3GVrQ](#)

– Arab News (@arabnews) [November 27, 2019](#)

Iraq's capital and its Shiite-majority south have been gripped by the largest grassroots protests since the US-led invasion that toppled Saddam Hussein in 2003.

The change of regime 16 years ago opened the door for Baghdad's eastern neighbour to develop tremendous economic, political and military sway, now slammed by protesters as overreach.

Iran's consulate in Iraq's second holy city of Karbala was targeted earlier this month, and security forces defending the site shot four demonstrators dead at the time.

In Najaf on Wednesday, units fired tear gas that wounded several dozen but ultimately retreated as hundreds of people encircled the consulate and lit tyres, blankets, cardboard and other items, AFP's correspondent said.

The protesters broke into the building itself, which had been apparently evacuated of its Iranian staff.

The fires capped a deadly day in Iraq, where two protesters were shot dead in the capital, according to medical and security sources.

In Baghdad's colonnaded streets, young demonstrators donned helmets and medical masks to face off once more against security forces unleashing tear gas.

An AFP correspondent reported volleys of gunfire from behind concrete barricades where the security forces were deployed.



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Protesters storm key Najaf facilities as demonstrations escalate in Iraq
Iraqi protesters storm Iranian consulate in Karbala

[Dubai court reduces sentence for editor who killed his wife](#)

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Wed, 2019-11-27 11:50

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates: A British newspaper editor convicted of killing his wife with a hammer had his sentence reduced by Dubai's Court of Appeal on

Wednesday.

The court ordered that former Gulf News editor Francis Matthew must serve a seven-year sentence for manslaughter in the 2017 killing of his wife, Jane.

Matthew had received as much as a 15-year sentence for the killing. A series of appeals has seen his sentence change and his case go before Dubai's Court of Appeal.

Matthew's lawyer Ali Al-Shamsi had previously asked the court to reduce his client's sentence to two years in prison, saying evidence proves the crime was not premeditated and Matthew had no previous intent to kill.

On Wednesday, the court changed Matthew's charge to manslaughter but reduced the sentence to seven years rather than two, followed by deportation. Such a charge carries a maximum sentence of 10 years under UAE law.

Matthew and his wife of 30 years were prominent members of the United Arab Emirates' large British expatriate community.

Dubai police were called to the Matthews' three-bedroom villa in Dubai's Jumeirah neighborhood on July 4, 2017, where they found Jane dead. Matthew told the police that robbers had broken into the home and killed her.

During a later interrogation, however, police say Matthew told them his wife had grown angry with him because they were in debt and needed to move, and that he got angry when she called him a "loser" and told him "you should provide financially."

Matthew told police his wife pushed him during the argument. He then got a hammer, followed her into the bedroom and struck her twice in the head, killing her, according to a police report. The next morning, Matthew tried to make it look like the house had been robbed and later went to work like nothing had happened, throwing the hammer in a nearby trash can, police said.



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Israeli soldier who shot dead prone Palestinian guilty of manslaughter
Man arrested on suspicion of manslaughter over Emiliano Sala death