

'Biggest terrorism sponsor' Iran spends \$1 billion a year on global proxies: US report

Author:

Reuters

ID:

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WASHINGTON: Iran remained a top state sponsor of terrorism around the world in 2018, the State Department said in its annual terrorism report on Friday. A briefing by the department's counter-terrorism spokesman Nathan Sales showed the regime funnels nearly a billion dollars a year to support its proxies in the region despite Washington having significantly ramped up its sanctions against Tehran.

The report also showed global presence of Daesh continued to advance in 2018 through networks and affiliates, even though the Trump administration declared it defeated the jihadi group in Syria and killed its leader last month in a US raid.

Terrorism tactics and the use of technologies have also evolved in 2018, while war-hardened fighters from groups such as Daesh returning to their home countries began raising fresh threats, the report said.

Today, [@StateDeptCT](#) Ambassador Nathan Sales briefed the media on the release of the Country Reports on Terrorism 2018. Watch his full remarks. <https://t.co/re88smFd4I> [#CRT2018](#)
pic.twitter.com/2jNTN1epTF

– Department of State (@StateDept) [November 1, 2019](#)

“Even as Daesh lost almost all its physical territory, the group proved its ability to adapt, especially through its efforts to inspire or direct followers online,” said Sales using an acronym for Daesh, the US counter-terrorism coordinator, whose office produced the congressionally mandated report.

“Additionally, battle-hardened terrorists headed home from the war zone in Syria and Iraq or traveled to third countries, posing new dangers,” he said. Daesh declared its so-called “caliphate” in 2014 after seizing large swathes of Syria and Iraq. The hard-line group established its de facto capital in the Syrian city of Raqqa, using it as a base to plot attacks in Europe.

In 2017, Daesh lost control of Mosul in Iraq and Raqqa in Syria, and quickly thereafter almost all of its territory as a result of operations by US-backed forces. Its leader, Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, was killed last month in Syria in a raid by US Special forces.

World leaders welcomed his death, but they and security experts warned that

the group, which carried out atrocities against religious minorities and horrified most Muslims, remained a security threat in Syria and beyond. The group on Thursday confirmed his death in an audio tape posted online and said a successor, identified as Abu Ibrahim Al-Hashemi Al-Quraishi, had been appointed. It vowed revenge against the US.



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US targets Iran construction sector with new sanctionsUS and Gulf countries sanction individuals and businesses linked to Iran and Hezbollah

[Lebanese man sentenced to death in 2013 mosque bombing](#)

Author:

AP

ID:

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Fri, 2019-11-01 16:50

BEIRUT: A Lebanese court has sentenced a man to death for twin car bombings in 2013 that targeted two mosques in the northern city of Tripoli, killing 47 people.

State-run National News Agency says the Judicial Council sentenced Youssef Diab on Friday.

NNA gave no further details regarding the sentence over the near-simultaneous bombings that targeted Sunni mosques in Lebanon's second largest city. Police said at the time that the bombings wounded some 300 others.

The coordinated bombings in the predominantly Sunni city came amid sectarian violence in Lebanon at the time that spilled over from neighboring war-torn Syria.

According to the indictment released years ago, Diab detonated one of the bombs remotely.



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Lebanon sentences UK diplomat's murderer to death 'Loyal' Tripoli turns its back on Lebanon's Hariri

Turkey drafting law to restrict powers of Istanbul municipality

Author:

Fri, 2019-11-01 01:28

ANKARA: The Turkish presidency is drafting a law that will remove power from the opposition-held Istanbul metropolitan municipality. Many suspect that the motive behind the legislation is retaliation against Istanbul Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu, the Nation Alliance candidate who won office in a landslide victory in June against Binali Yildirim, the candidate from the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP).

According to local press reports, the new law – currently being prepared by the Ministry of Environment and Urban Planning – will shift jurisdiction over development along the Bosphorus from the Istanbul metropolitan municipality to a “Bosphorus presidency” whose members will be appointed by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and will also restrict the municipality’s power to make amendments to development plans in the city, allowing the Bosphorus presidency to assign the city’s “green areas” – effectively allowing it to decide where construction can or cannot take place in Istanbul.

“The unilateral transfer of powers to the presidency illustrates just how imbalanced Turkey’s division of power is,” Nate Schenkkan, director for special research at US NGO Freedom House, told Arab News.

Turkey’s once-booming construction sector, which is seen by many as one of the main factors behind the AKP’s uninterrupted electoral success, has come to a grinding halt in recent months, mainly due to the collapse of the Turkish currency. A number of planned urban-redevelopment projects, slated to run into billions of dollars, are now in need of government subsidies to remain viable.

For 2019, Erdogan had promised to start the construction of a 43-km canal near Istanbul, along with a number of new towns along its banks. The opening of Istanbul airport last year was also seen as a megaproject intended to back the ailing construction sector.

Supporters of the new draft law say it will resolve confusion about overlapping authorities and help combat illegal housing in the city.

But Imamoglu has strongly criticized the draft law, telling Euronews that the municipality will “claim its rights” if the law passes.

Schenkkan believes that is likely. “The judicial system is also under strong presidential influence, which grows by the month as the president has more opportunities for appointments,” he said. “So successfully challenging (it) in the courts is a difficult task.

“Under the new constitution, the president can essentially transfer powers to himself and then dare other institutions to have it overturned in the courts. Combined with the continued use of trustees to replace mayors in the southeast, this shows the limits of the opposition’s success at the local level in this year’s elections,” he continued.

In mid-August, trustees were appointed to four pro-Kurdish HDP municipalities in Turkey’s southeast, because of the areas’ alleged links to terrorism. The mayors of Diyarbakir, Mardin and Van, all from the HDP, were suspended over suspected terror links, and there is mounting speculation that Imamoglu could also be removed from office.

According to Seren Selvin Korkmaz, cofounder and executive director of the independent StanPol Institute in Istanbul, the government’s attempts to centralize power and remove responsibilities from local municipalities is typical of the AKP.

“The ruling AKP has followed a neo-liberal populist agenda combined with increasing nepotism and clientelism,” she told Arab News. “It is (obvious) that the loss of major cities including Istanbul, Ankara, and İzmir is a major blow for AKP’s rent-seeking economy.”

Korkmaz also added that the ruling party had been in charge of the country’s largest cities and central government for almost two decades, and had used urban space and municipality services to establish rent mechanisms that best suited it.

“Commodification of land, urban transformation projects and clientelist redistribution mechanisms created a chain of patronage relationships which ensure continuous support (for the AKP),” she said, adding that the AKP’s losses in recent local elections meant that chain’s “flawless mechanism” had been broken.

Korkmaz said that while the Bosphorus area is clearly an attractive proposition for developers looking to construct high-yield rental accommodation, the government’s plans could backfire if it continues to remove power from local non-AKP authorities – a move that could strengthen the opposition’s “victimized position” and unite supporters of the opposition parties.

“That always has the potential to turn the vote in Turkish politics,” she said. “Also, it may compel the opposition to be more creative in its strategies for reaching voters.”



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Turkey releases 18 Syrian soldiers captured in Syria
Turkey summons US ambassador, condemns House resolutions

[Frontline clashes ebb and flow as Libya's war hits impasse](#)

Author:

Fri, 2019-11-01 01:22

On the outskirts of Tripoli, days of silence are broken by bursts of heavy artillery fire. Fighters camped out for weeks in abandoned houses watch for movement on enemy lines. A drone buzzes overhead and strikes, causing brief panic.

The nervy ebb and flow of the battle for Libya's capital shows no sign of changing soon.

Nearly seven months after Commander Khalifa Haftar launched an offensive against the city, the war has reached an impasse that foreign support on both sides has failed to unlock.

Thousands of people have been killed in sporadic fighting since 2014 between factions in the east and west. The violence has allowed militants and migrant smugglers to flourish, hit Libya's oil industry and divided the country's key institutions.

Leaders on both sides appear to be ruling out compromise.

FASTFACTS

- Battle for Tripoli began in April, upending peace push.
- Frontlines beyond buffer zone have rarely shifted.
- Both sides dependent on foreign drones.

For those in Tripoli, Haftar must withdraw to his stronghold in the east before any cease-fire.

"We hope this war ends today, but the political leadership clarified that for talks on a cease-fire the invader should return to where he came from," Osama Al-Juweili, a top military commander of forces aligned with the internationally recognized government in Tripoli, said in an interview.

Haftar has said he is willing to seek a political solution but only once the capital is rid of the armed groups that provide the Tripoli government with its core support.

Lacking momentum to bring local groups to his side, Haftar may be playing a long game, waiting for splits among previously fractured forces fighting against him, said Tarek Megerisi, a policy fellow at the European Council of Foreign Relations.

"The state of war that they're in is becoming more normalized," he said. "That makes further wars more likely."

Shifting alliances

Forces on both sides are drawn from locally based armed groups that have made up Libya's shifting alliances since the NATO-backed uprising that overthrew Muammar Qaddafi in 2011.

Those fighting with the Government of National Accord (GNA) in Tripoli were often at odds before this year's war mobilized them against Haftar, whom they accuse of seeking to return Libya to one-man rule.

Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA) has extended its reach through tenuous local alliances, and struggled to control parts of the east despite support from abroad.

UN experts said much of that backing came from the United Arab Emirates and Egypt, and Haftar has been received on official visits by both. The UAE and Egypt have either not responded to UN requests for information or denied material support.

Reluctant to engage in full-blown combat and risk heavy casualties, both sides have looked to foreign backers to turn the tide in their favor around Tripoli by deploying drones with precision-guided missiles.

Turkey has provided and operated Bayraktar drones for the Tripoli government, while the LNA uses Chinese-made Wing Loon drones operated by the UAE, analysts and diplomats say.

Emirati and Turkish officials did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Mobilizing for a major operation is made harder because of the threat from the air, said Megerisi.

A drone strike witnessed by Reuters reporters earlier this month hit close to a checkpoint in south-eastern Tripoli, on the edge of a buffer zone where most civilians have been evacuated.

Men in military uniforms near a burning vehicle frantically waved people away for fear of a follow-up strike as ambulances rushed to the scene, but within an hour nearby streets had returned to normal.

Civilian casualties

Life in central Tripoli continues largely as before, though the fighting has strained a city worn down by years of turmoil.

More than 100,000 people have been displaced from the city's outskirts.

Scores of civilians have been killed and maimed as both sides try to pick off targets in residential areas, often using inaccurate, decades-old rockets and artillery, rights group Amnesty International said in a report last week.

Wary of foreign meddling, many Libyans have lost hope the conflict can be resolved internally.

"Libyans don't understand each other," said Mariam Ali, a 26-year-old teacher walking with a friend in the city center. "There's no solution in Libya."

The offensive by Haftar, a former general under Qaddafi who lived in the US and gained citizenship there before returning to Libya in 2011, upended a diplomatic peace push.

He launched his campaign on April 4, but its slowing momentum has raised

questions over his military capability and future, analysts and diplomats say.

Path to peace unclear

Juweili said private military contractors from Russia had been killed in a recent, failed attempt to cut the road to Azaziya in southern Tripoli. Their journey into Libya and to the frontline by air and through Syria had been tracked, he added.

An LNA spokesman denied the presence of Russian fighters in its ranks, and the use of any foreign aircraft.

Haftar's forces have expressed confidence that they can still achieve a swift victory.

Tripoli commanders counter that they have centralized their military operations, and could mobilize thousands of extra fighters if needed.

If Haftar took Tripoli, "he would be left in charge of a raging insurgency and insurrection," said a senior US diplomat. "I think even a number of his patrons have great concerns about what it would actually mean for him to 'win'."

The path to political negotiations is unclear.

An international conference on Libya is expected in Germany, though preparations have been slow and no date has been announced.

Western diplomats say the aim is limited to trying to persuade the UAE, Egypt and Turkey to deescalate the conflict.

"I'd say the dynamic is to get people to act in the spirit of enlightened self-interest, and there's nobody in a position to bludgeon anybody into changing their behavior right now," the US diplomat said.



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Rival Tripoli government restricts Libya's oil revenues: Benghazi-based PMLibya coast guard intercepts dozens of Europe-bound migrants

[How theft at home turned Thabet into first dog trainer of Gaza](#)

Fri, 2019-11-01 00:50

GAZA: When Talia Thabit decided to raise a guard dog following a theft at her family home, she did not know that she would become the first dog trainer in the Gaza Strip.

Thabit, 33, a psychologist, lives in Nussirat camp in the center of the strip, where dog breeding and training are not common. But recently, there has been a growth in dog ownership among young people.

"My family decided to raise a guard dog after we were repeatedly targeted by thieves," Thabit said.

"At first I had no knowledge of how to deal with dogs, but my mother's death has made me retire from public life and spend most of my time with the dog."

She added: "I was not content with one dog, so I now have a number of them. I make sure to wake up early to train, feed and reassure them.

"They have helped me get back to life and remove negative emotions."

Thabit became the first dog trainer in Gaza and a reference for kennel enthusiasts, who ask her for advice through a Facebook page.

"Dog breeding needs a lot of attention, especially in terms of health and hygiene, in order to get the best qualities, the most important of which is innate guarding," she added.

But training dogs is harder than raising them. Training is based on understanding the dog's psychology and the way they think.

"I joined groups on Facebook selling dogs during my journey to find my second dog, which is a German Shepherd," she said. "I was gradually gaining knowledge of breeds, behavior and attributes.

Unemployment in the Gaza Strip is high among youth and reaches 90 percent among young women, according to UN statistics.

Thabit now has the ability to train dogs in guarding and searching for weapons and explosives.

Though she has become famous in Gaza, Thabit does not see herself as a professional and hopes to deliver a training course on the psychological and military aspects of dog training.

She is concerned about the lack of veterinary laboratories and animal medicine in Gaza, and hopes that there will be a surge to change this. "We suffer a lot when dogs, our loyal friends, are sick and many die from the wrong medication," she said.

Thabit went to international organizations concerned with animals and their rights, asking them to send veterinarians to Gaza "instead of turning our animals into an experimental field for different types of medicines and antibiotics."

The Four Paws Association normally transports animals from the Gaza Strip to Jordan, South Africa and Israel as zoo owners are unable to care for them.

Dog breeders in Gaza say they have to use human laboratories to analyze urine and blood samples and try human medicines on their dogs because of the lack of veterinary laboratories and animal medicines.

Thabit advises anyone to research before deciding to acquire a dog, so that they can be properly reared according to their physical and psychological needs.

She has a lot of support from her family and neighbors, and is proud that as a girl her name has become associated with breeding and training dogs.

“Even street children stop me to ask me about dogs, they ask me to watch my training, and I teach them the culture of dealing with animals,” she said.



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Man's best friend: The dogs who sniff out explosives in Kabul
Doggy-do study points to canine 'inner compass'