

Over 500 foreign Daesh men 'convicted' in Iraq

Author:

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BAGHDAD: The Iraqi judiciary has tried and sentenced more than 500 foreigners since the start of 2018 for joining Daesh, the country's Supreme Court announced on Wednesday.

It said: "514 verdicts were issued, for both men and women, while another 202 accused are still being interrogated and 44 are still being tried." Another 11 were acquitted and released, it said. The statement referred to "different nationalities" but did not list any specific countries.

It said interrogations were taking about six months for those simply accused of Daesh membership, but anyone accused of actively taking part in the militant group's operations could be questioned for up to a year.

Iraq declared victory over Daesh in late 2017 and began trying foreigners accused of joining the militant faction the following year.

It has condemned many to life in prison, including 58-year-old Frenchman Lahcen Ammar Gueboudj and two other French nationals.

It has also issued death sentences for other foreign Daesh members, although they have not yet been carried out.

Among those awaiting trial in Baghdad are 12 accused French Daesh members, who were caught in Syria and transferred to Iraqi custody in February.

Government source have told AFP that Baghdad would be willing to try all foreigners currently held in Kurdish detention in northeast Syria for a price.

Around 1,000 suspected foreign Daesh militants are in detention in northeast Syria, in addition to around 9,000 foreign women and children in camps there.

Rights groups including Human Rights Watch have criticized the trials, which they say often rely on circumstantial evidence or confessions obtained under torture.

Wednesday's statement by the court "urged all trials of foreign terrorists to be moved to Baghdad, as most of the embassies are in the capital and so embassy representatives from the terrorists' countries can attend the sessions."

Iraq has also already tried thousands of its own nationals arrested on home soil for joining Daesh, including women.

It has begun trial proceedings for nearly 900 Iraqis repatriated from Syria

and sentenced four to death last month under its counter-terrorism law.

The country remains in the top five “executioner” nations in the world, according to an Amnesty International report released last month.

The number of death sentences issued by Iraqi courts more than quadrupled from 65 in 2017 to at least 271 last year.

But fewer were actually carried out, according to Amnesty, with 52 executions in 2018 compared to 125 in 2017.



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Daesh leader Al-Baghdadi appears in new propaganda video Iraq says Daesh leader Baghdadi filmed video in ‘remote area’

[Anti-Kurdish demonstrations grow in Syria’s Deir Ezzor](#)

Author:

Wed, 2019-05-08 22:10

AMMAN: Arab inhabitants of Syria's Deir Ezzor began a third week of protests against Kurdish rule, the largest wave of unrest to sweep the oil-rich region since US-backed forces took over the territory from Daesh nearly 18 months ago, residents, and tribal figures said.

The protests which erupted weeks ago in several towns and villages from Busayrah to Shuhail have now spread to remaining areas where most of the oilfields are located in the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)-controlled part of Deir Ezzor, east of the Euphrates.

Arab residents under People's Protection Unit (YPG) who have been complaining about a lack of basic services and discrimination against them in local administrations run by Kurdish officials have been growing restive in recent months.

The forcible conscription of youths into the SDF, as well as the fate of thousands imprisoned in their jails, have been major bones of contention, according to residents and tribal figures.

"Their repressive rule has turned many against them," said Abdul Latif Al-Okaidat, a tribal leader.

The protests took a violent turn when angry mobs took to the streets and disrupted the routes of convoys of trucks loaded with oil from nearby fields that cross into government-held areas. In some villages, SDF forces fired at angry protesters.

"No to the theft of our oil!" chanted demonstrators in the town of Greinej, part of the Arab-Sunni tribal heartland seized over a year ago by the Pentagon-backed SDF and spearheaded by the Kurdish YPG militia.

The YPG has long sold crude oil to the Syrian regime of Bashar Assad, with whom it maintains close economic ties and exports wheat and other commodities through several crossings between their territory.

The stepping up of oil sales to alleviate a fuel crunch facing Damascus has infuriated the local Arab protesters, with many holding placards saying they were being "robbed" of their wealth.

"We are deprived of everything while the Kurds are selling our oil to help the regime and enriching themselves," said Abdullah Issa, a protester from Al-Tayaneh town.

Syria's most productive fields are now in Kurdish hands since the YPG extended control over large swathes of northeastern Syria after capturing the city of Raqqa from Daesh in late 2017.

The Syrian regime controls areas west of the Euphrates river that are less endowed with oil resources.

Diplomats say Washington has also in recent weeks tightened efforts to clamp down on small shipments of oil by smuggler networks that are exported across the Euphrates river to traders working on behalf of the Syrian government.

The SDF has not publicly commented on the most serious challenge so far to its rule over tens of thousands of Arabs.

The YPG has sought to redress decades of repression against minority Kurds under Syria's Arab Ba'ath party.

SDF commander in-chief Mazloum Kobani, in remarks that seem to refer to the unrest, said his group was the only "institution that had "steered away from any form of racism."

The protests persisted after YPG commanders failed to make significant concessions to tribal figures who gathered at their invitation last Friday in the city of Ain Issa, two attendees said.

Among the Arabs demands were ending forcible conscription, releasing detainees and stopping oil sales from their region to the Syrian government.

The risks of wider confrontation were now growing, analysts say.

"The protests are now more organized and wider with a higher ceiling and developing gradually to a popular uprising where people are asking to be ruled by themselves and ending Kurdish hegemony," said Feras Allawi, a political analyst from the area.

"The response of SDF to the popular demands will dictate whether this leads to a more violent confrontation," he added.



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Arabs in Syria's Deir Ezzor protest against ruling Kurdish militia - residents
At least 84 die fleeing Daesh in Deir Ezzor in east Syria: UN

[Gaza artists call on Eurovision singers to boycott Israel](#)

Author:

Wed, 2019-05-08 21:51

GAZA, GENEVA: Palestinian artists are calling on Eurovision singers to boycott the international music competition that Israel is hosting next week.

The Gaza Strip-based Palestinian Artists Association said on Wednesday that Israel was using the event to "perpetuate oppression, promote injustice or whitewash a brutal apartheid regime."

The artists cited the killing of over 60 Palestinians during Gaza border protests on May 14 last year, the same day Israel won the Eurovision. The association held a sit-in outside the EU's Gaza office and wrote a letter of protest.

At least 25 Palestinians, including 10 militants and four Israeli civilians, were killed after hundreds of rockets were fired at Israel over the weekend. Israel retaliated with airstrikes.

Food crisis

Separately, the UN warned on Wednesday that its agencies providing food assistance to Gaza must raise tens of millions of dollars within weeks to avoid significant aid cuts.

The United Nation's World Food Program (WFP) and its agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, currently provide food assistance to more than one million people in Gaza.

But the UN humanitarian coordinator for the Palestinian territories, Jamie McGoldrick, warned that the agencies were facing "a serious funding crisis."

They needed to raise money fast to be able to make a looming order for the food needed for the remainder of the year, he told journalists in Geneva.

"We envisage that if WFP and UNRWA don't get around 40 million dollars by the end of May – beginning of June, they will not be able to order the pipeline," he said.

UNRWA is planning to host a donor's conference next month and another one in September, as it struggles to fill the void after Washington, traditionally its largest donor, withdrew its support.

Last year, a number of countries stepped up to generously compensate for the lacking US funding, but McGoldrick said that this year a huge shortfall remained.

"If they don't get the funding, clearly they can't order the food," he said, adding that this would mean that in the second half of the year, either the number of people receiving aid will be cut or rations will be slashed, or both.

In Gaza, where unemployment stands at 54 percent and is much higher for young people, people do not have the purchasing power to fill in the gaps, McGoldrick said.

"There is no alternative," he said, describing the situation as "very, very serious."

It is not only the UN agencies providing food aid who are facing a shortfall.

McGoldrick said that the \$350 million requested for UN's overall humanitarian response plan for the West Bank and Gaza so far this year was so far only 14-percent funded.

"There is something happening in terms of donor support to the Palestinian situation, which we have to better understand," he said.



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Israel's Eurovision champ heads to Europe with empowerment message
Netta, the voice of #MeToo at Eurovision

[US accuses Iran of 'nuclear blackmail' as Trump places new sanctions on metal sector](#)

Wed, 2019-05-08 21:40

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump on Wednesday ordered new sanctions on Iran, this time targeting export revenues from its industrial metals sector, and vowed to keep squeezing Tehran unless it "fundamentally alters" its policies.

The announcement was made on the anniversary of Trump's unilateral withdrawal of the United States from a 2015 landmark deal between Tehran and world powers to curb its nuclear program in exchange for easing some sanctions and hours after Tehran said it would no longer fully comply with the accord. Tensions were already high between Washington and Tehran when the Trump administration said last weekend that it was deploying a carrier strike group and bombers to the Middle East, in response to what it said were "troubling indications and warnings" from Iran.

Before Trump's executive order for the sanctions, a senior White House official said Washington would impose more economic curbs on Tehran 'very soon' and had warned Europe to stop doing business with Iran.

"Today's action targets Iran's revenue from the export of industrial metals – 10 percent of its export economy – and puts other nations on notice that allowing Iranian steel and other metals into your ports will no longer be tolerated," Trump said in a statement.

"Tehran can expect further actions unless it fundamentally alters its conduct," Trump said.

The Trump administration says the nuclear deal, negotiated by his predecessor Barack Obama, was flawed as it is not permanent, does not address Iran's ballistic missile program and does not punish it for waging proxy wars in other Middle East countries.

Leading Democratic lawmakers such as Chris Murphy, the top Democrat on the Senate's Middle East subcommittee, said Iran's halting compliance to some parts of the deal was "disastrous news" and accused Republican Trump's administration of making America much less safe through its policies. House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi requested a briefing on Iran for members.

Hours before the fresh US sanctions, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani

announced Tehran was reducing curbs to its nuclear program with steps that for now stopped short of violating the 2015 accord. But it threatened more action if countries did not shield it from sanctions.

Tehran halting compliance with some elements of the nuclear deal was "nothing less than nuclear blackmail of Europe," Tim Morrison, special assistant to the US president and senior director for weapons of mass destruction, told a conference.

"Now is the time for the community of nations to strongly condemn Iran's nuclear misconduct and increase pressure on the regime to comply with US demands," Morrison said, adding that Washington was not 'done' with sanctions on Iran.

Morrison said the United States would move quickly against any attempt by European countries to undermine Washington's sanctions pressure on Iran. He advised them against using the so-called Special Purpose Vehicle to facilitate non-dollar trade to circumvent US sanctions.

"If you are a bank, an investor, an insurer or other business in Europe you should know that getting involved in the ... Special Purpose Vehicle is a very poor business decision," Morrison said.

Spearheaded by national security adviser John Bolton, the Trump administration has taken several unprecedented steps to squeeze Iran such as demanding the world halt all Iranian oil imports and designating Iran's elite Revolutionary Guard Corps as a foreign terrorist organization, which Iran has cast as an American provocation.

"We have made our focus diplomatic isolation and economic pressure and that policy is working," Brian Hook, Special Envoy for Iran, said in a briefing. Hook said that more nations now, compared with a year ago, were in agreement with the United States on Iran.

Washington's European allies opposed Trump's decision to withdraw from the nuclear deal and have failed so far to find ways to blunt the economic impact of new US sanctions.



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Iran threatens uranium enrichment, suspend 'some' nuclear deal commitments
Europe warns of 'consequences' to Iran's nuclear deal threats

[Health funding gap means 1,700 in Gaza may face amputations](#)

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GENEVA: A lack of health funding in Gaza means 1,700 people shot by Israeli security forces may have to have amputations in the next two years, Jamie McGoldrick, the UN Humanitarian Coordinator for occupied Palestinian territory, said Wednesday.

McGoldrick said 29,000 Palestinians had been wounded in protests in the past year, and 7,000 of them had gunshot wounds, mostly in the lower legs.

"You've got 1,700 people who are in need of serious, complicated surgeries for them to be able to walk again," McGoldrick said.

"These are people who have been shot during the demonstrations and who are in need of rehabilitation, and very, very serious and complex bone reconstruction surgery over a two year period before they start to rehabilitate themselves."

Without those procedures, all these people are at risk of needing an amputation, he said.

The UN is seeking \$20 million to fill the gap in health spending.

A lack of funding to the World Food Programme and UNRWA, the UN humanitarian agency that supports Palestinians displaced by the 1948 war of Israel's founding, also meant there could be an interruption of food supplies for 1 million people.

"If that stops, there is no alternative for people to bring food in from any other sources, because they don't have purchasing power," McGoldrick said.

WFP spokesman Herve Verhoosel said a severe lack of funds meant WFP had cut aid for 193,000 people this year in the West Bank and Gaza, with 27,000 getting nothing and the rest getting only \$8 per month instead of the usual \$10.

Some 2 million Palestinians live in Gaza, the economy of which has suffered years of Israeli and Egyptian blockades as well as recent foreign aid cuts and sanctions by the Palestinian Authority, Hamas' West Bank-based rival.

People's prospects were "precarious," McGoldrick said. Gaza families averaged \$4,000 of debt, while salaries averaged \$400 per month, but 54 percent of the population was unemployed.

The health system was impoverished, with unpaid salaries and dilapidated equipment, and many medical professionals had left if they could find opportunities elsewhere.

One teaching hospital was now only teaching trauma medicine, McGoldrick said, but the doctors on the ground did not have the technical ability to carry out the treatment required for the people at risk of amputation.

There have already been 120 amputations, 20 of them in children, in the past year, he said.



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