

# Iraq begins trial proceedings for 900 militant suspects

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Sun, 2019-04-14 13:22

BAGHDAD: Iraq has begun trial proceedings for nearly 900 Iraqi suspected members of the Daesh group caught fleeing extremist territory in neighboring Syria, a judicial source told AFP on Sunday.

They were handed over to Iraqi authorities by the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces, which ousted Daesh from swathes of eastern Syria including territory bordering Iraq.

"We received the interrogation files of nearly 900 Iraqi Daesh members coming from Syria," the court official said, speaking anonymously because he was not authorized to talk to the media.

"The specialized terrorism court has begun setting dates for their trial in batches," the source added.

The nearly 900 suspected militants were transferred by the SDF to Iraqi custody in recent months as the remnants of Daesh' once sprawling self-declared "caliphate" collapsed in neighboring Syria.

Additional Iraqi suspects are in SDF custody and awaiting transferral, a security source told AFP Sunday.

"They will be handed over in batches on the Syrian-Iraqi border. They include very influential leaders, but IS had sought to keep them hidden," the security source said using another acronym for Daesh.

One of those destined to be handed over was deeply involved in Daesh' efforts to develop chemical weapons, he said.

Iraq has already tried thousands of its own nationals arrested on home soil for joining Daesh – including women – and has sentenced hundreds to death.

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

The number of death sentences issued by Iraqi courts more than quadrupled from 65 in 2017 to at least 271 in 2018.

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

In addition to locals, Iraq has also tried hundreds of foreigners, condemning many to life in prison and others to death, although no foreign Daesh members have yet been executed.

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

Baghdad has offered to try all foreign fighters in SDF custody – estimated at around 1,000 – in exchange for millions of dollars, Iraqi government sources have told AFP.

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



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## [Egypt's Sisi meets Libyan commander Haftar in Cairo](#)

Author:

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1555240048083725900

Sun, 2019-04-14 10:46

CAIRO: Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi met Sunday with Libyan commander Khalifa Haftar, whose forces are fighting for control of the capital Tripoli, state media reported.

They "are discussing the latest developments in Libya" at the presidential palace in Cairo, state newspaper Al Ahram said.

A presidential spokesperson did not return AFP's calls for confirmation.

El-Sisi has been an ardent supporter of Haftar's forces, which control swathes of eastern Libya and launched an offensive on April 4 to take the capital.

Fighting near Tripoli has killed 121 people and wounded 561, the World Health Organization said on Sunday.

Haftar has defied international calls to halt his battle against fighters loyal to the UN-backed Government of National Accord based in Tripoli.

Earlier this month, Egyptian foreign minister Sameh Shoukry cautioned that the conflict could not be solved militarily.

His remarks came at a Cairo press conference with his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov, who also called for a political solution among all sides in Libya.

The Libyan commander has modelled his political style of authoritarian leadership after El-Sisi, himself an army general turned president.

Egypt has provided funding and arms to his Libyan National Army, seeing him as a bulwark against Islamist militants.

Haftar, who was exiled in the United States for two decades, returned to Libya in 2011 when the revolution erupted, commanding forces that eventually toppled dictator Muammar Qaddafi.

The oil-rich north African country has been in turmoil ever since with successive weak governments in place and several Islamist militias battling for territorial control.



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## [Struggle over leadership deepens](#)

# divisions in Tunisia president's party

Author:

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Sat, 2019-04-13 22:41

TUNIS: Tunisia's ruling party Nidaa Tounes on Saturday elected two leaders, one of them the president's son, in two parallel congresses, deepening the division that has hit the party in recent years.

The new crisis that hit Nidaa Tounes comes months ahead of parliamentary and presidential elections expected in October and November, which could complicate its competition against the rival Ennahda moderate Islamist party. Although the slogan of the first electoral congresses of Nidaa Tounes which started last week was "unity," it ended by dividing into two congresses. The first congress elected the lawmaker Sofian Toubel as head of the party's central committee. The second elected Hafedh Caid Essebsi, the son of the president Beji Caid Essebsi.

The divisions have shaken the party since 2015, as Essebsi's son has been criticized for seeking to control the party, prompting many of its leaders to resign.

The prime minister Youssef Chahed also entered into a row with Hafedh Caid Essebsi and accused him of exporting the party's problems to the state. "The congresses of Monastir (in which Essebsi's son was elected) is illegal and an attempt to deflect legitimacy," said party official Ons Hattab.

Essebsi's son denied the accusations and said he was surprised by the behavior of some leaders who went to a parallel conference, adding that this could affect the party.

The parliamentary race is expected to be fought closely by the moderate Islamist Ennahda party, the more secular Tahya Tounes party of Prime Minister Chahed, and the Nidaa Tounes.

The parties rule the North African country together but their coalition has been hit by infighting that has hampered decision-making and slowed economic reforms demanded by foreign donors.

No prominent figure has so far declared their candidacy for the presidency this year.

Tunisia has won widespread praise for its democratic transition since 2011, but nine Cabinets have failed to resolve economic problems that include high inflation and unemployment.



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## [Iraq unearths mass grave of Kurds killed by Saddam Hussein](#)

Author:

Reuters

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1555234828543410700

Sun, 2019-04-14 09:07

SAMAWA, Iraq: Iraq must never forget Saddam Hussein's crimes or allow his party to return, President Barham Salih said on Sunday after attending the unearthing of a mass grave of Kurds killed by the former leader's forces three decades ago.

The grave, found in the desert about 170 km west of the city of Samawa, contained the remains of dozens of Kurds made to “disappear” by Saddam’s forces, Salih’s office said.

They were among up to 180,000 people who may have been killed during Saddam’s “Anfal” campaign that targeted Iraqi Kurds in the late 1980s when chemical gas was used, villages were razed and thousands of Kurds were forced into camps.

“He killed them because they did not accept the continuation of this regime, because they wanted to live a free and dignified life,” Salih, a Kurd, told a news conference at the grave site.

“He brought them to Samawa to bury them but our people in Samawa embraced them,” Salih added. Iraq’s southern provinces are predominantly inhabited by Shiite Arabs, who also suffered oppression and mass killings under Saddam, a Sunni Arab.

“The new Iraq must never forget these crimes that were committed against Iraqi people from all groups,” he said.



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# [Israeli delegation cancels visit to Bahrain on security concerns](#)

Sun, 2019-04-14 12:34

DUBAI: An Israeli delegation of businessmen and government officials planning to take part in a business conference in Bahrain has canceled its visit on security concerns, a statement from the organizers said on Sunday.

The group had been planning to attend a congress organized by the Global Entrepreneurship Network from April 15.

“While we advised the Israeli delegation they would be welcome, they decided this morning not to come due to security concerns and a wish not to cause disruption for the other 180 nations participating,” the organization’s president Jonathan Ortman said in a statement sent to Reuters.

The cancelation came after the kingdom’s parliament issued a statement rejecting the visit, and some protests against it in the streets of the capital Manama.



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Palestinian teen killed by Israeli fire in border clashes: Gaza ministry