

15 Syrian army troops killed in Daesh attack on military bus near Palmyra

Author:

Reuters

ID:

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BEIRUT: Fifteen soldiers died Sunday in an Daesh group attack on an army bus in the central Syrian desert, a war monitor said, as state media reported a "terrorist attack."

Despite the fall of Daesh's "caliphate" in 2019, the group continues to launch deadly attacks from hideouts in the Syrian desert, which extends from the outskirts of the capital Damascus to the Iraqi border.

Daesh cells "attacked a military bus" in the Palmyra desert, "killing 15 soldiers and wounding 18 others," the British-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

State news agency SANA had reported 13 dead "including officers" and 18 wounded in a "terrorist attack" on a military bus on Sunday afternoon.

The Observatory, which relies on a network of sources across the country, said the death toll could rise as most of the soldiers were "seriously wounded."

Daesh did not immediately claim responsibility for the attack.

Sunday's violence came after three regime soldiers died Friday east of Palmyra when the vehicle they were traveling in came under attack, the Observatory added.

So far this year 61 pro-regime soldiers and Iran-affiliated militiamen had been killed in Daesh attacks in the desert of Syria, it said.

About half a million people have been killed and millions have been displaced since the Syrian conflict erupted in 2011, after nationwide protests against the government were met with a brutal crackdown.

It escalated into a devastating war that drew in regional and international powers.

Daesh leader Abu Ibrahim Al-Hashimi Al-Qurashi blew himself up in early February during a raid by US forces on his house in Syria's northwest region of Idlib, Syria's last major opposition bastion.

Qurashi had taken over with Daesh weakened by years of assaults by US-backed local forces and the loss of its self-proclaimed "caliphate" in Syria and northern Iraq.

Daesh ruled with brutality over the “caliphate” which it had proclaimed in 2014.

The majestic ancient city of Palmyra, a World Heritage site, became the scene of public executions, where Daesh also blew up ancient monuments and looted other treasures.

In January Daesh fighters launched their biggest assault in years, attacking a prison in the Kurdish-controlled northeast Syrian city of Hasakah, aiming to free fellow extremists.

Almost a week of intense fighting left more than 370 dead, according to the Observatory.

Earlier in January, nine Syrian soldiers and allied fighters were killed in an attack on a military convoy in Syria’s east, while in November last year, the Observatory said another eastern Syria attack left a general and four soldiers dead.

Two bombs planted on an army bus in central Damascus killed 14 people in October last year, SANA had reported.

That was the deadliest attack in the capital since a bombing claimed by Daesh targeted the Justice Palace in March 2017, killing at least 30 people.





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Syrian war monitor says Israeli strike near Palmyra kills 9 Pro-Iran militias
warn of 'very cruel' response after Israeli strike on Palmyra

[Houthis agree to allow UN to offload decaying oil tanker in Red Sea](#)

Sun, 2022-03-06 18:59

AL-MUKALLA: The Iran-backed Houthis have agreed to allow the UN to empty the rusting Safer oil tanker in the Red Sea which threatened to cause a major catastrophic disaster, a leader from the terrorist group said.

After years of reluctance and unfulfilled promises, Mohammed Ali Al-Houthi, head of the Houthi movement's supreme revolutionary committee, said on Saturday that they signed an agreement with the UN that would allow the

international body to offload the floating tanker.

"A memorandum of understanding has been signed with the United Nations for the Safer tanker," the Houthi leader said on Twitter.

In New York, Farhan Haq, a deputy spokesman for Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, told Arab News that the UN's official resident in Yemen, David Gressly, is currently discussing the deal with the Houthis in Sanaa: "Discussions continue on the SAFER. David Gressley is in Sana'a right now, discussing the matter with the authorities there."

Anchoring with its cargo of over 1 million barrels of crude oil off Yemen's western city of Hodeidah, the four-decades-old floating tanker has not undergone regular upkeep since early 2015 when the Houthis tightened their grip on the country's western coasts, prompting international engineers to flee the country.

The rust has eaten out parts of the tanker, allowing seawater to leak into the ship's sections. Local and international organizations have long warned of a major environmental disaster in the Red Sea if the tanker exploded or leaked oil.

"The abandoned tanker, with its toxic cargo of crude oil, poses a grave threat to the communities and environment of the Red Sea," Ahmed El-Droubi, campaigns manager at Greenpeace MENA, said in January.

Yemeni government officials believe that the Houthis are using the tanker as a bargaining chip to extract concessions from the Yemeni government and the international community. Local reports said that the Houthis are seeking to replace the decaying tanker with a new one and receive the cargo's sales.

The internationally-recognized government of Yemen also demanded that the sales are used to pay government salaries in Houthi-controlled areas, warning that the Houthis would use the money to fund their deadly military operations across the country.

Separately, unidentified armed men kidnapped on Saturday two workers of the international medical organization Medecins Sans Frontieres in the southeastern province of Hadramout, the organization and media reports said.

In a brief email sent to Arab News, the charity confirmed it had lost contact with some of its staff in Yemen, without giving more details.

"Out of concern for the safety of our colleagues we cannot share more details at this point," the organization said.

Local media said that the armed men set up an ambush for the workers in a desert area called Khoushem Al-Ain between Seiyun city and Al-Aber.

The Aden-based Al-Ayyam daily newspaper reported on Sunday that the armed men wore a military uniform and set up a fake checkpoint and asked the Yemeni and foreign workers to leave their car.

At nearly 6 a.m. on Saturday, the workers were blindfolded and taken on a pickup truck to an unidentified location in the desert, the paper said, adding that the Yemeni workers were released six hours later.

Local government officials did not respond to Arab News requests for comment.

Last month, suspected Al-Qaeda militants kidnapped five UN workers in the province of Abyan and are still holding them in a mountainous area in the province's Moude'a district.

Local tribal leaders and social dignitaries have failed to convince the kidnappers to release the workers as they insist on swapping them with militant prisoners in Aden. They are also demanding a ransom of hundreds of thousands of dollars.

A local official told Arab News last month that the militants threatened to execute the hostages if the army or security services attempted to use force to release them.



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Houthis condemned for storing weapons in housing complex as blasts kill residents
Houthis pay a heavy price as coalition airstrikes hit convoy

Egypt and EBRD launch new country cooperation strategy

Sun, 2022-03-06 18:03

CAIRO: A new country cooperation strategy has been launched between the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and Egypt for the period 2022 to 2027.

The minister of international cooperation in Egypt, Rania Al-Mashat, announced the launch in the presence of the EBRD's deputy director Mark Bowman and government ministers during a conference in Cairo.

Al-Mashat said the new strategy was based on three main axes that were in line with the country's priorities and plans to achieve sustainable development.

The first axis was to support Egypt's efforts to achieve comprehensive economic and sustainable growth. The second was to accelerate the country's green transformation, and the third was to enhance competitiveness, increase growth rates, and stimulate the role of the private sector in development.

Egypt's total agreements with the bank during 2021 amounted to more than €1 billion (\$1.17 billion) for the public and private sectors.

They included funds for the implementation of an energy efficiency improvement program at the Suez Petroleum Manufacturing Company, supporting the first development phase of the first line of the metro, and a project developing the Abu Qir railway to convert it into an electric metro.

They also included the financing of the 6th of October Dry Port project, supporting startups to enhance Egypt's entrepreneurial environment, and implementing solar power plants for the private sector.

Al-Mashat said the new EBRD partnership was based on the innovative foundations and rules established by the ministry to enhance development cooperation through transparency, inclusiveness and integration, with the aim of maximizing the benefits and results of development finance to serve the priorities of the Egyptian economy.

The EBRD has invested more than €8.7 billion in Egypt since 2012, supporting 145 projects. More than 76 percent of these projects were in the private sector.

Egypt topped the bank's list as the largest country of operations in the southern and eastern Mediterranean region during 2020 and 2021. It was also the bank's largest country of operations in 2018 and 2019.

The new cooperation strategy took into account the presidential initiative "A Decent Life," the National Human Rights Strategy, the National Sustainable Energy Strategy 2035, and the National Strategy To Empower Egyptian Women, as well as the government's actions and plans to enhance competitiveness and digital transformation.

During the past year, the ministry implemented a roadmap for preparing the new EBRD strategy with the participation of more than 20 national bodies as well as the private sector and civil society.



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Egyptian minister discusses clean energy plans with EU bank VPEgypt received \$5.5bn from EBRD during 2017-2022

Blair admits he 'may have been wrong' about Iraq, Afghanistan invasions

Author:

Sun, 2022-03-06 17:01

LONDON: Former British Prime Minister Sir Tony Blair has admitted that he "may have been wrong" about the decision to invade Iraq and Afghanistan but remained steadfast in his view that he thought it was "the right thing" to do.

In conversation with the Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby, as part of the BBC's "The Archbishop Interviews" series, Blair provided a defense of his decision to invade Iraq and Afghanistan in support of former US President George W. Bush.

"People often say over Iraq or Afghanistan that I took the wrong decision, but you've got to do what you think is right," the 68-year-old said.

He added: "Whether you are right or not is another matter. In those really big decisions, you don't know what all the different component elements are, and you've got to follow, in the end, your own instinct."

He told Welby that he "may have been wrong" but reaffirmed that he thought it was the right thing to do.

Blair's comments come after he was appointed a knight companion of the Most Noble Order of the Garter, the most senior chivalric honor in Britain, which is offered solely by the monarch, in the New Year's Honors list.

More than 1 million people have signed a petition online calling for the honor to be rescinded, with the organizer claiming that "Tony Blair caused irreparable damage to both the constitution of the United Kingdom and to the very fabric of the nation's society."

The petition specifically refers to his actions in the Middle East, writing: "He was personally responsible for causing the death of countless innocent civilian lives and servicemen in various conflicts. For this alone he should be held accountable for war crimes."

It added: "Tony Blair is the least deserving person of any public honour, particularly anything awarded by Her Majesty the Queen."



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Petition to strip Blair of knighthood reaches 1m signatures
Blair's defense secretary says he was ordered to burn crucial document ahead of Iraq war

[Yemen troops repulse 'major' Houthi attacks in Hajjah](#)

Sat, 2022-03-05 21:29

AL-MUKALLAH: Heavy fighting between government troops and Iran-backed Houthis broke out early on Saturday at flashpoint sites in the northern province of Hajjah, Yemen's Defense Ministry said.

Houthi counterattacks on government forces in the Abes and Haradh districts sparked fierce clashes that left dozens dead or wounded on both sides.

The latest Houthi attacks are part of continuing efforts by the militia to

retake strategic sites in the two districts controlled by government troops.

Major military reinforcements from Saada, the Houthis' heartland, and the other areas under the militia's control arrived in Haradh and Abes last week as the rebels prepared to launch their latest strike against government troops.

The Defense Ministry said that government troops repulsed the Houthi attacks, killing and wounding dozens of fighters.

Intense air raids by the Coalition to Restore Legitimacy in Yemen struck the militia's locations, military vehicles and deployments of fighters.

The coalition said on Saturday that it carried out 17 airstrikes in the provinces of Hajjah and Marib that killed many Houthis and destroyed 11 military vehicles in the past 24 hours.

The latest round of fighting in Hajjah began early last month when government forces mounted an offensive to take control of the city of Haradh and surrounding areas close to the border with Saudi Arabia.

Clashes between government troops and rebel fighters on Saturday took place in contested areas south of the central city of Marib, local media reports said.

The Houthis have intensified attacks on Marib from the south after failing to breach government defenses to the north and west of the strategic city.

Rebel fighters have been attacking the city, the government's last major bastion in the northern half of the country, since earlier last year in a bid to take full control of Marib province, along with its oil and gas fields and a power station.

Yemeni officials and human rights activists condemned the Houthis for targeting civilians after a young engineer was shot and killed in the densely populated city of Taiz.

Abdul Basit Al-Baher, a military officer, told Arab News on Saturday that Mahfouz Dael was hit by a sniper's bullet outside his house in Al-Osifra, north of Taiz.

Dael, a petroleum engineer who had returned to Yemen from abroad to see his family, was killed while entering his house after being targeted by a Houthi sniper stationed on a hillside outside the city, Al-Baher said.

"He was an unarmed civilian, wearing a suit with a tie, who was killed on his doorstep while entering the house to greet his parents," Al-Baher said.



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Saudi Shoura Council speaker welcomes UN designation of Yemen's Houthis as terrorist group Yemeni authorities destroy large quantities of hashish, pills linked to Houthi gangs in Hajjah