

Syrian Kurdish forces end mop-up operations in Daesh-hit jail

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HASAKEH: US-backed Kurdish forces on Sunday said they had defeated all Daesh fighters left inside the Syrian jail that the extremists stormed 10 days ago sparking battles that left over 330 dead.

The Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) announced the end of its mopping-up campaign inside the prison "after ending the last pockets in which IS terrorists were present," it said in a statement.

Daesh fighters on January 20 launched their biggest assault in years on the Ghwayran prison in the Kurdish-controlled northeastern Syrian city of Hasakah, aiming to free fellow militants.

After six days of intense fighting, the SDF announced on Wednesday they had recaptured the prison, but intermittent clashes continued until Saturday between Kurdish fighters and extremists near the jail.

Several Daesh fighters had been holed up in "northern dormitories" inside the prison, but the SDF on Sunday said they been defeated.

Daesh gunmen had been hiding in prison "cellars that are difficult to target with air strikes or infiltrate," the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

The war monitor, which relies on a network of sources inside Syria, said operations were still ongoing near the prison hunting for escaped Daesh fugitives.

"Dozens of IS members managed to escape from Ghwayran prison... in the early hours of the attack," the war monitor said.

It reported that 20 Daesh fighters had surrendered on Saturday, while the SDF killed another five in an exchange of fire inside the prison.

The Britain-based group said that 332 people had been killed since the onset of the attack, including 246 Daesh militants, 79 Kurdish-led fighters and seven civilians.

The death toll rose overnight on Sunday after the SDF found over 50 more bodies in prison buildings and nearby areas, the war monitor said.

"The newly discovered bodies were inside and outside the prison," Rami Abdel Rahman, who heads the Observatory, told AFP.

He said the death toll was likely to rise further, because "there are dozens of people who are wounded, others who are still missing, and information about more casualties" on both sides.

On Saturday, an AFP correspondent saw a truck carrying away piles of bodies from an area near the prison, believed to be those of Daesh fighters.

A bulldozer dumped more corpses onto the truck, which then headed to an unknown location.

Farhad Shami, who heads the SDF's media office, told AFP that the bodies would be buried in "remote, dedicated areas" under SDF control.

The violence prompted 45,000 people to flee Hasakah, the United Nations said. Many took refuge in relatives' homes, while hundreds more slept in the city's mosques and wedding halls.

The war in Syria, which broke out in 2011, has killed close to half a million people and spurred the largest conflict-induced displacement since World War II.



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Syrian fighters search for Daesh sleeper cells near prison
Iraqi airstrikes kill 9 Daesh militants, including 4 Lebanese

[Iraqi airstrikes kill 9 Daesh militants, including 4 Lebanese](#)

Author:

By QASSIM ABDUL-ZAHRA | AP

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BAGHDAD: Iraqi airstrikes killed nine suspected Daesh fighters, including four Lebanese, in retaliation for an attack on Iraqi army barracks earlier this month, officials said Sunday.

Daesh gunmen in Iraq broke into a barracks in the mountainous Al-Azim district outside the town of Baqouba on Jan. 21, killed a guard and shot dead 11 soldiers as they slept. It was one of the boldest attacks by the militants in recent weeks and came amid an uptick in violence that stoked fears the group has been re-energized.

Yehia Rasool, the spokesman for Iraq's commander in chief, said the joint military operations room and the air force identified the cell behind the attack as its members hid in Al-Azim, north of Baghdad.

Three airstrikes were launched that killed the nine militants, he said.

A security official told The Associated Press that four among the killed were Lebanese, natives of the northern town of Tripoli. He spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to reporters.

Tripoli is Lebanon's second largest city and the country's most impoverished. It has been prone to violence and militants who, inspired by the extremist Daesh group, launched attacks against Lebanon's army in 2014 in the most serious bout of violence in the city. As Lebanon faces an unprecedented convergence of crises, including a swift descent into poverty, many fear militants may seek to exploit discontent among the city's majority Sunni residents.

Lebanon's Al-Jadeed TV gave a higher death toll, saying that five Lebanese were killed in Iraq. One family member appealed in the broadcast to Lebanese authorities to facilitate return of the bodies.

Also Sunday, Iraqi anti-terrorism units carried out an inspection campaign in seven prisons in Iraq holding Daesh militants. The campaign comes after a brazen prison attack Daesh militants carried out in northeastern Syria that lasted for over a week and in which an unknown number of suspects escaped, the anti-terrorism unit said in a statement.

Daesh was largely defeated in Iraq in 2017. The group was dealt a final blow in 2019 when it lost its last territory in southeast Syria during the US-led military campaign in cooperation with Syrian Kurdish-led forces.

But thousands of militants melted into the desert and have continued to wage attacks, frequently hitting security forces and military with roadside bombs and firing on military convoys or checkpoints in both countries.



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US woman charged with leading all-female Daesh battalion that targeted colleges
Two years of stalemate show a military solution in Syria is an illusion, says UN envoy

[Iran regime condemns attack on Baghdad airport as 'destabilizing'](#)

Author:

Sun, 2022-01-30 01:38

TRIPOLI: Iran's Foreign Ministry on Saturday condemned a rocket attack against Baghdad airport that took place the previous day as an act that seeks to "destabilize" Iraq.

Six rockets were fired on Friday at the Iraqi capital's airport, causing damage to one runway and two civilian planes but no casualties. It was the latest in a string of attacks that the US blames on Iran-linked armed groups.

The attack was not immediately claimed.

Iran condemns "the targeting of Baghdad airport" in an attack that aims to "destabilize" Iraq, Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said in a statement.

"Such suspicious actions have created insecurity and unrest in Iraq, paving the way for the ill-wishers and the insurgents, and affecting the government's services to the Iraqi citizens," he added.

The rockets fell around civil installations at the airport, damaging an out-of-service Boeing 767 belonging to state-owned Iraqi Airways.

The attack prompted Kuwait Airways to suspend its flights to Iraq, the airline said on Twitter.

Recent months have seen rocket and drone attacks target the US Embassy in Baghdad's high-security Green Zone, a US diplomatic facility at the airport and troops belonging to a US-led coalition stationed at Iraqi bases.

Such attacks mounted after the US assassinated the commander of the Quds Force of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, Maj. Gen. Qassem Soleimani, and his Iraqi lieutenant Abu Mahdi Al-Muhandis, in a January 2020 drone strike near Baghdad airport.

The attacks are rarely claimed but they are routinely pinned on pro-Iran factions, who demand that US troops deployed to help Iraqi forces fight Daesh leave the country.

The US-led coalition ended its combat mission in Iraq in December, but has kept roughly 3,500 of its soldiers in the country to offer training, advice and assistance to national forces. Recent attacks in Iraq have also come amid a tense domestic political situation there.

Violence has lately targeted Iraqi politicians and parties, mainly consisting of grenade attacks, but also extending to one rocket assault near the home of a key politician, amid tensions surrounding the formation of a new government.

"The Islamic republic of Iran has always supported the establishment and maintenance of security in Iraq ... and supports the actions of the Iraqi government in ensuring stability," Khatibzadeh added.



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Iraqi 'super app' Baly raises \$10.5m in funding round

[Erdogan threatens media with reprisals over 'harmful' content](#)

Sun, 2022-01-30 01:31

ANKARA: President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Saturday threatened Turkish media with reprisals if they disseminated content that damaged the country's core values, in a move that might be a prelude to further censorship in the sector.

In a notice published in the Official Gazette, he said measures were needed to protect Turkey's "national culture" and prevent its children's development "from being adversely affected as a result of exposure to harmful content on all written, verbal and visual media."

Erdogan did not specify what such content was, but said legal action would be taken against "overt or covert activities through the media aimed at undermining our national and moral values and disrupting our family and

social structure.”

Erdogan has been in power for nearly 20 years and has often criticized media content that is out of step with the Islamic values espoused by his AK Party. Turkey has in recent years also moved to increase media oversight, with around 90 percent of major media now owned by the state or close to the government.

BACKGROUND

Erdogan has been in power for nearly 20 years and has often criticized media content that is out of step with the values espoused by his AK Party.

Its Western allies and critics have said Erdogan has been using a 2016 failed coup attempt to muzzle dissent and erode social rights and tolerance.

The government has denied this, saying the measures are necessary due to the gravity of the threats Turkey faces and that freedom of religious expression has been restored in a once strongly secular republic.

The RTUK radio and television watchdog has sweeping oversight over all online content, which it also has the power to remove.

It has fined TV stations over footage it says violates Turkish values, such as music videos it has labeled “erotic” or content it deems to have insulted the president.

Tens of thousands have been prosecuted under the latter law including Sedef Kabas, a well-known journalist jailed last week pending trial after posting a proverb about Erdogan’s palace on her Twitter account and repeating it on an opposition television channel.

In another development, Erdogan has sacked the head of the state statistics agency, according to a decree published on Saturday, after releasing data showing last year’s inflation rate hit a 19-year high of 36.1 percent.

Sait Erdal Dincer was just the latest in a series of economic dismissals by Erdogan, who has sacked three central bank governors since July 2019.

Erdogan has railed against high interest rates, which he believes cause inflation – the exact opposition of conventional economic thinking. The 2021 inflation figure released by Dincer angered both the pro-government and opposition camps.

The opposition said it was underreported, claiming that the real cost of living increases was at least twice as high.

Erdogan meanwhile reportedly criticized the statistics agency in private for publishing data that he felt overstated the scale of Turkey’s economic malaise. Dincer seemed to sense his impending fate.

“I sit in this office now, tomorrow it will be someone else,” he said in an interview with the business newspaper *Dunya* earlier this month.

“Never mind who is the chairman. Can you imagine that hundreds of my colleagues could stomach or remain quiet about publishing an inflation rate very different from what they had established?”

“I have a responsibility to 84 million people,” he added.

Erdogan did not explain his decision to appoint Erhan Cetinkaya, who had served as vice-chair of Turkey’s banking regulator, as the new state statistics chief.

“This will just increase concern about the reliability of the data, in addition to major concerns about economic policy settings,” Timothy Ash of BlueBay Asset Management said in a note to clients. The agency is due to publish January’s inflation data on Feb. 3. In December, opposition leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu was refused an appointment with Dincer and turned away by security guards when he sought to enter the statistic agency’s headquarters in Ankara. He had accused the agency of “fabricating” the numbers to hide the true impact of the government’s policies and slammed it as “no longer a state institution but a palace institution,” in reference to Erdogan’s presidential complex. Also on Saturday, Erdogan appointed a new justice minister, naming former Deputy Prime Minister Bekir Bozdog to replace veteran ruling party member Abdulhamit Gul. “I have resigned from my duties at the Ministry of Justice, which I have been serving since July 19, 2017,” Gul wrote on Twitter. “I would like to express my gratitude ... for accepting my request,” he added, without explaining his decision. Ali Babacan, former deputy prime minister who left the ruling AKP party and founded the Deva Party, took to Twitter to vent fury over the changes. “The justice minister is being replaced, (statistics agency) TUIK chairman is being dismissed before the inflation data is published. Nobody knows why,” he said.



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Presidential visit to Ankara could start 'new period' in Israel-Turkey relations: Erdogan
Turkish court orders imprisonment of journalist Sadaf Kabas for 'insulting' Erdogan

Clashes near Syria prison attacked by Daesh

Author:

Sun, 2022-01-30 01:11

HASSAKAH: Clashes broke out Saturday between Kurdish forces and Daesh group fighters near a Syrian prison where dozens of jihadists are still holed up, a war monitor said.

A Daesh assault on the sprawling Ghwayran Prison complex near the northeastern Syrian city of Hassakah on Jan. 20 sparked days of heavy fighting that has left some 260 people dead.

The US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces announced they had recaptured the prison on Wednesday, but that mop-up operations continued.

On Saturday, there were "clashes in the vicinity of the prison between the Syrian Democratic Forces and Kurdish security forces on the one hand, and members of IS (Daesh) who are hiding in the area," the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

The war monitor, which relies on a network of sources inside Syria, said that four Daesh fighters are holding a local official and three civilians hostage in a residential building near the prison.

The SDF said on Wednesday some 3,500 Daesh members had surrendered, but that holdout Daesh fighters had barricaded themselves inside the prison facility. The Daesh gunmen are in "cellars that are difficult to target with airstrikes or infiltrate" the observatory said.

SDF officials estimate that between 60 and 90 Daesh fighters were still in the basement and the ground floor above it.

An AFP correspondent reported that US troops and Kurdish-led forces have surrounded the building and deployed snipers on nearby rooftops, reporting there was intermittent shooting.

Kurdish forces have repeatedly called for Daesh gunmen to surrender. "Our forces have not used force with them so far," Farhad Shami, who heads the SDF's media office, said on Saturday.

Kurdish-led forces have banned journalists from accessing the Ghwayran neighborhood or approaching the prison since the start of the attack.

The fighting has killed more than 260 people, including around 180 jihadists, 73 Kurdish-led fighters and seven civilians, the observatory said, adding that the death toll is likely to increase.



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Syrian fighters search for Daesh sleeper cells near prison Jordan troops kill 27 drug smugglers in Syrian border shootout