

Egypt officials say Daesh militants attack kills 5 troops in Sinai

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By ASHRAF SWEILAM | AP

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Sat, 2021-07-31 16:48

CAIRO: Daesh militants ambushed a checkpoint in the restive northern part of Egypt's Sinai Peninsula on Saturday, killing at least five troops from the security forces, officials said.

At least six other troops were wounded in the attack in the town of Sheikh Zuweid and taken to a military hospital in the Mediterranean city of El-Arish, they said.

Security personnel killed three militants in the firefight, and the area was reinforced, the officials added, speaking on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to brief the media.

Egypt has been battling militants in the northern part of Sinai Peninsula for years. Violence and instability there intensified after the 2013 military ouster of Muhammad Mursi, an elected but divisive Islamist president, amid nationwide protests against his brief rule.

The militants carried out numerous attacks, mainly targeting security forces, minority Christians and those who they accuse of collaborating with the military and police.

The pace of Daesh attacks in Sinai's main theater and elsewhere has slowed to a trickle since February 2018, when the military launched a massive operation in Sinai as well as parts of the Nile Delta and deserts along the country's western border with Libya.

The fight against militants in Sinai has largely taken place hidden from the public eye, with journalists, non-residents and outside observers barred from the area. The conflict has also been kept at a distance from tourist resorts at the southern end of the peninsula.



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British Daesh returnee pleads guilty to terrorism charges
Daesh Briton recruited dozens of fighters in London

[US official lands in Sudan to support democratic transition](#)

Author:

By SAMY MAGDY | AP

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Sat, 2021-07-31 14:43

CAIRO: The US official who wrote a Pulitzer Prize-winning book on genocide landed Saturday in Khartoum, aiming to support Sudan's fragile transition to democracy before traveling to Ethiopia to press the government there to allow humanitarian aid to the war-torn Tigray region.

Samantha Power, administrator of the US Agency for International Development, is set to meet with top Sudanese officials including Gen. Abdel-Fattah Burhan, head of the ruling sovereign council, and Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok, the civilian face of Sudan's transitional government.

She will also travel to Sudan's western region of Darfur where she said she investigated atrocities in the its civil war in the 2000s.

"I first visited Sudan in 2004— investigating a genocide in Darfur perpetrated by a regime whose grip on power seemed unshakeable. I couldn't imagine Sudan would one day be an inspiring example to the world that no leader is ever permanently immune from the will of their people," Power wrote on Twitter upon her arrival in Khartoum.

Power's visit to Khartoum is meant to "strengthen the US Government's partnership with Sudan's transitional leaders and citizens, explore how to expand USAID's support for Sudan's transition to a civilian-led democracy," USAID said.

Sudan is now on a fragile path to democracy and is ruled by a military-civilian government after a popular uprising led to the military's ouster of longtime autocrat Omar Al-Bashir in 2019. The Khartoum government, which seeks better ties with the US and the West after nearly three decades of international isolation, faces towering economic and security challenges that threaten to derail its transition into chaos.

The US official would also meet with Ethiopian refugees in Sudan who recently fled the conflict and atrocities in the Tigray region which borders Sudan. Since the Tigray war began in November, tens of thousands of Ethiopians have crossed into Sudan, adding to the country's economic and security challenges. Power's five-day trip will also take her to Ethiopia as part of international efforts to prevent a looming famine in Tigray, a region of some 6 million people that has been devastated by the months-long war.

Power will meet with Ethiopian officials "to press for unimpeded humanitarian access to prevent famine in Tigray and meet urgent needs in other conflict-affected regions of the country," USAID said.

The world's worst hunger crisis in a decade is unfolding in Tigray, where the US says up to 900,000 people now face famine conditions and international food security experts say the crucial planting season "has largely been missed" because of the war.

Ethiopia's government has blamed the aid blockade on the resurgent Tigray forces who have retaken much of the region and crossed into the neighboring Amhara and Afar regions, but a senior official with the US Agency for International Development this week told the AP that is "100 percent not the case."



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Sudanese judoka sent home from Olympics for not facing Israeli athlete
Sudan said to seek debt reduction from Gulf lenders

[HRW slams Iranian crackdown on Khuzestan protests](#)

Author:

Fri, 2021-07-30 21:57

LONDON: Human Rights Watch (HRW) on Friday condemned Iran's violent crackdown on protests in Khuzestan province.

Amnesty International and UN Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet have also expressed condemnation in the past week.

HRW reported hundreds arrested and at least nine deaths, including a child. "Unconfirmed reports indicate the number of deaths and arrests may be

higher," it added.

On July 15, massive protests broke out in Khuzestan over water shortages, spearheaded by the province's Arab community demonstrating against government negligence and anti-Arab discrimination.

Iranians in several other provinces have joined in solidarity. Iranian officials have blamed "rioters" for the killing of protesters.

But HRW said: "Videos shared on social media from protests in cities in Khuzestan show security officials shooting firearms and teargas toward protesters."

Karim Dahimi, a London-based Ahwazi human rights activist, told Arab News that the death toll could go higher since many protesters "haven't gone hospital for fear of being arrested and returned home with heavy injuries."

He said Iranian authorities have set conditions for the return of victims' bodies to families, including "protesters' mobile number, information on who they were in contact with, who was with them, and who informed the parents."

Another condition is that the fathers of victims go on camera and claim that "the protesters killed my son, and my son had no involvement in the demonstrations," Dahimi added.

"Some families are under pressure and want to take the bodies, so they've accepted the government's conditions. Other families haven't."

Eight of the protesters killed are Ahwazi Arabs and the ninth is Bakhtiari, Dahimi said. The crackdown on the mass protests is disproportionately impacting Iran's Arab minority.

Shadi Sadr, a lawyer and co-founder of London-based NGO Justice for Iran, tweeted that the hundreds of protesters and activists arrested are "mostly of Arab Ahwazi ethnicity." They have been arrested "in their homes and workplaces," he added.

HRW said Iranian authorities "should immediately and unconditionally release peaceful protesters, provide information about deaths, and allow an independent international investigation into security agencies' alleged use of lethal force. All those responsible for abuses should be held to account."



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US to hit Iran with more sanctions for missile, drone program
One killed in Iran water shortage protests: state media

[Foreign fighters in Libya must be held accountable for rights abuses, say UN experts](#)

Fri, 2021-07-30 21:07

NEW YORK: Human rights abuses committed by foreign mercenaries and private contractors in Libya must be investigated and the perpetrators held accountable, UN experts said on Friday.

The departure of foreign fighters from the country is a “vital precondition” for the peaceful staging of elections scheduled for December, they added.

The UN estimates there are more than 20,000 foreign fighters seeking to profit from the conflict in Libya, the majority of them from Syria, Turkey, Chad and Sudan.

The members of the UN Security Council have agreed that they must be repatriated. However two of the council's permanent members, the US and UK, accuse another, Russia, of being responsible for some of the foreign fighters. In particular they point to the Wagner Group, a Kremlin-backed private-security firm that UN experts say is involved in the fighting in Libya.

Moscow has repeatedly denied any role on the country's battlefields. Jelena Aparac, chair of the UN working group on the use of mercenaries, said that well-armed private contractors from Russia, Syria, Sudan and Chad threaten the security and stability not only of Libya but also other countries in the region.

"Nine months after the ceasefire agreement calling for withdrawal of foreign forces and mercenaries from Libya, mercenaries and private military and security contractors continue to operate in the country," she said.

"Their continued recruitment and presence in Libya impedes progress in the peace process and constitutes an obstacle for the upcoming elections."

The working group's experts said these mercenaries must leave the country immediately and "there must be an immediate end to the transfer of military weapons and materiel into Libya."

Aparac appealed to the international community "to take concrete steps" to move the repatriation process forward.

During the UN-facilitated Libyan Political Dialogue Forum, representatives of both sides in the conflict agreed a road map to "credible, inclusive and democratic national elections" that are due to take place on Dec. 24 this year.

If foreign fighters remain in the country at that time, Libyans will not be able to vote in a safe and secure environment, Aparac warned.

Her working group concluded more than a year ago that a reliance on mercenaries since 2019 contributed to the escalation of the conflict in Libya, undermined the peace process, and constituted a breach of the Security Council's arms embargo on the country. Since then, the experts have repeatedly urged governments to investigate all allegations of violations of human rights and humanitarian law.

"A year on, and looking forward to elections, we remain concerned that any political process aiming to establish sustainable peace has to include a genuine commitment to human rights," the experts said on Friday.

"There must be real accountability for abuses committed by mercenaries, mercenary-related actors, and private contractors."

Working groups and special rapporteurs are part of what is known as the special procedures of the UN Human Rights Council. They are independent experts and work on a voluntary basis. They are not members of UN staff and are not paid for their work.



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Libya headed back to 'square one' of post-Qaddafi turmoil if polls delayed, warns parliament speaker
Libyan election talks get underway in Rome

[Wildfires sweep Turkey as government slammed over emergency response](#)

Author:

Fri, 2021-07-30 21:01

ANKARA: Emergency services in Turkey were on Friday desperately battling to contain more than 60 wildfires that had broken out in just one day across 17 provinces.

The raging fires have devastated homes and livelihoods, killed thousands of

animals, and destroyed huge tracts of forest, forcing many residents to flee.

At least four people are reported to have died and dozens have been hospitalized as the blazes continued for a fourth consecutive day in the country's Aegean and Mediterranean regions.

And Turkey's civil aviation agency has come under public criticism for its handling of the crisis. Although wildfires during summertime are common in Turkey, this year the fires have reached an unprecedented level.

Turkish Forestry Minister Bekir Pakdemirli said strong winds and hot weather had made it difficult to bring the fires under control and prevent them moving toward settlements.

The mayor of the southern resort town of Marmaris blamed "sabotage" for the fires and said an investigation had been launched. A number of buildings and hotels in tourist zones of Marmaris and Bodrum were evacuated after separate fires.

Countries including Azerbaijan, Russia, Ukraine, and Greece have offered emergency help. Three planes, nine drones, 38 helicopters, 680 firefighting vehicles, and more than 4,000 personnel have been deployed to put out the fires.

Turkey has only three planes available to fight forest fires, but all are leased from Russia for 1.3 million liras (\$154,350) per day.

Alpay Antmen, a lawmaker from the southern Mersin province and a member of the main opposition Republican Peoples' Party (CHP), told Arab News: "We have been monitoring the situation on the ground since the beginning. Fortunately, they contained the fire from reaching the settlements. But this tragic case has shown once again the weakness of state apparatus in such emergency situations."

He, along with other opposition parliamentarians, have been lobbying the Turkish government for a year to upgrade the country's firefighting capacity.

"Nobody replied to our parliamentary inquiries, and we all witnessed the result of this incapacity. The Turkish president has 13 private planes in his possession, but why couldn't they buy one single firefighting plane so far?" Antmen said.

Tolga Ozbek, general coordinator of the aviation sector website kokpit.aero, told Arab News that Turkey had increased its annual water carrying capacity to 148,000 tons this year from 80,000 tons in 2018.

"Fighting wildfires requires an integrated approach, using different types of planes and helicopters based on the geographical conditions. Turkey has been leasing its firefighting helicopters for the last 35 years. This has turned out to be costlier than buying some," he said.

He pointed out that Turkey needed a permanent fleet of firefighting planes and should allocate a reasonable budget for such emergency situations.

“Whatever you invest in fighting fires, it always falls short because the fires can erupt anywhere anytime. While formulating specific policies in this regard, one should always consider the implications of global warming and the ongoing drought in the country,” Ozbek added.



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