

Yemeni Christian priest detained, tortured by Houthis for four years

Author:

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DUBAI: Yemeni Christians, alongside the country's Baha'i adherents and what is left of its Jewish community, face great oppression at the hands of the Houthi militia, with no better example than the fate of Mushir Khalidi.

The 50-year-old priest has been imprisoned by the group's intelligence services for four years, as part of a campaign of arrests launched by the group against the estimated 2,000 Christians in territory it controls.

The presence of Yemen's ancient Jewish community is all but over, with the Houthis' insistence on deporting the last two families left in Sana'a. The militia has also deported the leaders of the Baha'i sect, while continuing to prosecute 19 members, despite its claim last year that it would pardon them after four years of detentions.

Sources in the Sana'a told Asharq Al-Awsat daily that the Houthi militia specifically targeted Yemeni Christians and arrested many of them, including Khalidi, a convert, who was allegedly subjected to torture in prison. Houthi intelligence continues to investigate others whose religious beliefs have not yet been disclosed, especially since most of the Yemeni converts to Christianity have already left the country.

Khalidi's family have avoided talking about his imprisonment for fear of repercussions against him, but one former prisoner, recently released from a Houthi jail, told Asharq Al-Awsat that he met Khalidi and others in detention, and said that the priest was arrested after the militia took control of Sana'a, saying his jailers kept him in solitary confinement for weeks at a time. He added that other Christian prisoners had been forced to recant their religious beliefs under torture.

Two of Khalidi's friends told Asharq Al-Awsat, on condition of anonymity, that he converted to Christianity in the mid-1990s, and that the Yemeni Christian community, having previously performed religious rituals secretly in various locations in Sana'a, Taiz and Ibb, and mostly fled to Lebanon, Cyprus and elsewhere since the outbreak of war.

According to these sources, the Khalidi's wife and his five children currently live in a rented apartment in Sana'a, and they live in fear for their lives because of the Houthi's intolerance of other religions.

The sources say that a Houthi leader called Khaled Al-Madani handles the file of what the group describes as "manifestations of Westernization," and his duties include, in addition to prosecuting followers of other religions, controlling the nature of work women are permitted to carry out, the regulations on wearing clothes, and gender-mixing in universities and

institutes.

The Baha'i International Community issued a statement saying Houthi authorities continue to harass the minority in Yemen, terrorizing them, endangering their lives and seizing their property, citing the case of the 19 members of the sect currently on trial.

"What is happening to these 19 people is outrageous, but it has become very familiar to us," said Diane Alaei, the representative of the Baha'i International Community to the UN in Geneva, referring to a previous case of six Yemeni Bahai's imprisoned between 2013 and 2017, who were freed after a UN-backed campaign led to them being released, but then deported and classed as "fugitives."



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Orthodox priest shot in Lyon, suspect held in France's third attack in two weeks
Houthis step up attacks on Marib despite resistance, condemnation

UN Yemen envoy demands rebels halt Marib attack

Author:

Tue, 2021-02-09 21:19

AL-MUKALLA: The UN Yemen envoy on Tuesday demanded Iran-backed Houthis halt their large-scale offensive on the central city of Marib, saying the attack threatened diplomatic efforts to bring peace to the country.

Martin Griffiths tweeted that he was “extremely concerned about the resumption of hostilities in Marib, especially at a time of renewed diplomatic momentum to end the war and resume the political process.”

The envoy added that “a negotiated political settlement that meets the aspirations of the Yemeni people is the only sustainable solution to end this conflict.”

Griffiths’ comments came as the Yemeni army announced it had killed or captured dozens of rebels.

The envoy’s criticism of the Houthis follows a two-day visit to Iran where he discussed the Yemen conflict with Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif and leading officials.

The two men discussed the urgent need for a nationwide cease-fire, the opening of Sanaa airport and the easing of restrictions on Hodeidah ports, Stephane Dujarric, spokesman for the UN chief, said in New York on Monday.

The Yemeni army on Tuesday said it had killed and captured dozens of the Houthis while repelling attacks on Marib.

Houthi rebels have resumed their push to recapture the oil and gas-rich city that hosts thousands of troops and key Arab coalition camps as well as thousands of people who have fled fighting in the country.

“We have pushed back their attacks and incursions in Murad, Al-Makhdara, Helan, Serwah and Al-Mashja’a,” army spokesman Brig. Gen. Abdu Abdullah Majili told Arab News by telephone on Tuesday.

Troops and allied tribesmen, backed by air support from Arab coalition warplanes, halted Houthi advances, and seized weapons and ammunition abandoned by the rebels, he said.

“We managed to thwart their attacks and launch counterattacks thanks to cohesion between the national army and resistance fighters, and military support from the Arab coalition,” Majili said.

Sultan Al-Arada, governor of Marib, vowed to defeat the Houthis, saying the rebels have never taken calls for peace seriously.

In neighboring Jouf, fierce fighting broke out on Monday and Tuesday as the Houthis launched a simultaneous attack on government forces in Dahedha and other contested areas, local officials said.

In Sanaa, Houthi leaders called on supporters to donate funds to support the attacks on Marib, reiterating the rebels' determination to seize the city despite international calls to halt the offensive.

Mohammed Al-Bukhaiti, a Houthi official, urged followers to head to local banks, post offices and mosques to give money to help the offensive, promising an "imminent victory" that would bring the city of Marib under their control.

Separately, a Houthi-controlled court on Tuesday sentenced 11 pro-government MPs to death and ordered the confiscation of their properties inside and outside Yemen after they took part in a parliamentary session in the city of Seiyun in April 2019, local media said.

The condemned MPs include oil, banking and telecom businessman Hamed Abdullah Al-Amer, and Insaf Mayo, chairman of the Arab Parliament Economic Commission.

The Houthis previously have convicted hundreds of army generals, security officers, politicians, human rights activists and journalists for supporting the internationally recognized government and the Arab coalition military operations in Yemen.



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Houthis step up attacks on Marib despite resistance, condemnation France condemns Houthi air attacks on Saudi Arabia, demands end to Yemen offensive

Ankara defends S-400 purchase to Washington

Tue, 2021-02-09 21:12

ANKARA: Turkey's recent purchase of a Russian missile defense system has caught the attention of the US while Turkey is trying to justify its future aspirations by leaning toward an old rival.

Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar reiterated the country's plans to use the controversial S-400 Russian missile defense system in the same way Greece deployed its S-300 system, within the NATO alliance, during a crisis between Turkey and Cyprus in the late 1990s.

According to Karol Wasilewski, an analyst at the Polish Institute of International Affairs in Warsaw, this is not the first time the Turkish decision-makers have used a false parallel between Greece's S-300 and Turkey's S-400 systems.

"I think we should be very cautious here," he told Arab News. "If minister Akar really means that Turkey would operate S-400s exactly like Greece and outside Turkey's territory, then we may interpret his words as an initial offer of compromise directed to the American administration."

Caglar Kurc, a researcher on defense and armed forces, draws attention to the timing differences between the purchase of S-400s by Turkey and the installment of the S-300s on the Greek island of Crete.

"Russia was not such a big threat to the US and American-Russian relations were better in the 1990s," Kurc told Arab News. "However, now they are considered main rivals. Therefore, the outcome varies depending on the changes of American interests."

Akar was referring to Greece's two S-300 PMU-1 battalions in Crete that are kept as a standalone system within NATO and implied that Greece never received such criticism for its purchase of the older S-300 missile system from Moscow.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan had criticized the possession of the S-300s by Athens and claimed it is an obvious double standard.

Greece originally acquired the S-300s from Moscow to dissuade Turkish flights over its airspace. The crisis was temporarily resolved after Cyprus transferred the systems to Greece, which deployed them on Crete, where they remain today in storage. The S-300 missile system has been used only in NATO military drills without being integrated into the Greek air defense network.

Now the question is whether the past procurement of the S-300s is comparable with the “new generation” S-400s.

Washington stands against its NATO ally Turkey and its acquisition and operationalization of the Russian air defense system on its soil. The US kicked Turkey out of its F-35 fighter jet program, finding the S-400s were a significant threat to the stealth fighter jets and would not be interoperable with the Western-built hardware.

In response, Turkey offered a joint working group about the interoperability of the S-400s and F-35s.

Aaron Stein, director of research at the Foreign Policy Research Institute, thinks this is the most tangible suggestion he has ever seen from the Turkish side on this issue.

“It could be something that both sides discuss, but I think US officials will ask for more,” he told Arab News. “It is clearly a walk back from Ankara, so I guess that’s progress.”

Kurc also finds the Turkish offer as a good compromise.

“If the US wants to continue its partnership with Turkey instead of further alienating it, the offer would be accepted,” he said. “However, it is still unclear whether Washington will endorse it absolutely without any pre-condition.”

Turkey received the first components of the S-400 in July 2019. In October 2020, Turkey tested the Russian system for the first time in the northern city of Sinop – a move that was harshly condemned by the US State Department.

In December 2020, the US punished Ankara with sanctions under the Countering America’s Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA), while the issue ranks top on the agenda of the Joe Biden administration.

“The S-300 in Crete was meant for Cyprus. It ended up in Crete because Ankara objected so vociferously to its original deployment site. The US Air Force (USAF) does train against it,” Stein said.

“However, the USAF has lots of air defense goodies in the continental US including high-end Russian systems. It is not absolutely necessary to train in Crete to familiarize pilots with the system, nor do I expect it vital to train against a Turkish S-400,” he added.

Wasilewski instead suggests a solution in which the S-400s are kept in storage in, for example, Northern Cyprus.

“It would require both Turkey’s willingness to compromise and very skillful diplomacy on the US side,” he said. “It would also require solving the worries of Cyprus, yet I still see this as the best solution.”

In this way, Wasilewski thinks that on one hand, the US would get rid of a

problem with its ally, and on the other, Turkish decision-makers could sell such a deal to their nationalist electorate more easily.

Ankara, however, pledged to proceed with talks for the procurement of a second batch of the missiles from Moscow despite the US opposition. However, during his phone meeting with Erdogan's top adviser Ibrahim Kalin last Tuesday, Jake Sullivan, US national security adviser, expressed his country's concern about Turkey's acquisition of the S-400s that "undermines the alliance's cohesion and effectiveness."

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken will hold a phone call with Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu on Wednesday, and the S-400s top the US agenda this time.



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S-400s still an issue for US-Turkish ties under Biden Turkey says turning back on S-400s 'problematic', seeks US dialogue

[UAE added to UK 'red list' of countries with travel restrictions](#)

Author:

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LONDON: The UAE has been added to a British list of countries with additional travel restrictions designed to limit the spread of COVID-19.

The UK government on Tuesday announced the measures following growing concerns that imported variants of COVID-19 could be resistant to the country's main vaccine produced by AstraZeneca.

Downing Street is expected to introduce mandatory hotel quarantines for 33 countries on the list, which includes the UAE.

Quarantines in hotels, or similar government-approved locations where travelers must self-isolate, have been touted as a successful strategy for reducing COVID-19 transmission following successful efforts in Singapore, Taiwan, Australia and New Zealand.

The so-called "red list" applies to countries deemed to be high risk due to rates of COVID-19 infections. The new measures will mean that flights to the UK from these destinations are suspended.

The only arrivals permitted from "red list" countries are British and Irish nationals or those with UK residence rights.

The hotel quarantine will come into effect from Feb. 15, with room booking available from Feb. 11.



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Dubai updates entry requirements as UAE COVID-19 cases surge
UAE COVID-19 pandemic toll climbs to 520 as 1,214 new cases confirmed

[France condemns Houthi air attacks on Saudi Arabia, demands end to Yemen offensive](#)

Tue, 2021-02-09 17:47

LONDON: France has strongly condemned recent attempted air strikes by Yemen's Houthi militia against Saudi Arabia.

The Iran-backed Houthis launched a series of armed drones toward the Kingdom's southern region on Sunday and Monday with eight intercepted and destroyed by the Arab coalition.

"The proliferation and use of drones undermines the stability of the region,"

the French foreign ministry said in a statement, while reaffirming its “firm commitment to the security of Saudi territory.”

France also said it was “very concerned” about the militia group’s ongoing offensive in Yemen’s Marib governorate.

On Monday, the Houthis launched a three-pronged offensive on the oil-rich, government-controlled province, triggering clashes with army troops and allied tribesmen backed by air cover from Arab coalition warplanes, Yemeni government officials said.

Yemeni Prime Minister Maen Abdulmalik Saeed said the Houthis were targeting residential neighborhoods in Marib and Jouf with ballistic missiles and drones, despite international calls and efforts to reach a political solution. Several civilians have been killed in the offensive.

“The ongoing escalation, both in Yemen and against Saudi Arabia, must end immediately,” the French foreign ministry added.

Paris called on the Houthi militia to end their offensive in Yemen, as well as their destabilizing regional actions, and to engage constructively in a political process to end the crisis in the war-torn country.

France also said it was “in favor of a cessation of hostilities in Yemen and a relaunch of discussions with a view to a comprehensive political agreement involving all components of the country, under the aegis of the UN.”



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