

Morocco warns of Sahel 'time bomb' after Daesh-linked cell busted

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Fri, 2020-09-11 16:16

SALÉ, Morocco: The Sahel region of Africa is a ticking "time bomb" of terrorism and organized crime, a Moroccan police chief told AFP on Friday, a day after a suspected Daesh group-affiliated cell was busted.

"It was a dangerous cell primed to go into action at any moment," Abdelhak Khiame, head of the Central Bureau of Judicial Investigation (BCIJ), said in an interview at its offices in Sale, near Morocco's capital Rabat.

Five "extremists," aged between 29 and 43, were detained Thursday in simultaneous operations at sites in Tangiers and the Rabat region, said the Central Bureau of Judicial Investigations.

Explosive belts, three kilograms (6.6 pounds) of ammonium nitrate, electronic equipment and bladed weapons were seized in raids on homes and businesses of the suspects, the bureau said.

Khiame said the Daesh-affiliated group was plotting suicide attacks targeting "public personalities, military figures and the headquarters of security services" in the North African kingdom.

Three kilos (6.5 pounds) of ammonium nitrate, the chemical behind the August 4 cataclysmic Beirut blast, was also netted.

Pledges of allegiance to the Daesh were discovered. Two of the suspects put up "fierce resistance," leaving a policeman with serious knife wounds.

The alleged head of the group, a 37-year-old fish salesman, had been convicted of a common law crime in 2004 and radicalized since.

Khiame said it was the first such large-scale bust since the 2003 Islamist suicide attacks in Casablanca, Morocco's economic capital, that left 33 dead.

He warned that Daesh "has developed in the Sahel-Sahara region, with the conflict in Libya and in countries like Mali which do not control not their security."

The Sahel covers western and north-central Africa.

"Terrorist cells and terrorism are growing in the region but also organized crime networks, drug trafficking, weapons and human beings," said the BCIJ chief.

"All of this... makes the Sahel region, in my opinion, a time bomb."

Khiame said the dismantled cell had apparently had no direct contact with the extremists of Daesh.

But "even if Daesh was defeated in the Levant, in the region of Syria and Iraq, its ideology... does not need territory, it can develop where it finds sympathizers," he said.

Daesh-inspired "cells underground act like sleeper cells which in most cases have no relationship to each other," he said.



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Macron 3,000-strong African force planned against Sahel extremism

[Explosion at a military installation in the Jordanian city of Zarqa](#)

Fri, 2020-09-11 01:12

RIYADH: An electrical short circuit at a military warehouse on the outskirts of the Jordanian city of Zarqa caused a massive explosion on Friday morning. The installation, east of the city, contained idle mortar bombs belonging to the armed forces, said Amjad Adaileh, minister of state for media affairs. The Army said that an explosion occurred in one of the munitions depots under dismantling and that there were no casualties.

[#BREAKING](#): Explosions heard in the Jordanian city of Zarqa. Initial reports say it was ammunition stores at a military installation. (Video: Social media) <https://t.co/N6WUcougWn>
pic.twitter.com/87PoKfxHBv

– Arab News (@arabnews) [September 10, 2020](#)

The installation is located away from civilian areas and it was reported that the blast could be heard 30 km away.

The army has cordoned off the area of the explosion and Civil Defense teams are at the scene trying to fight the flames, sources told Arab News.

A committee has been formed to determine the causes of the explosion.

The army has asked citizens to “shun circulating untrue information, adding that further details will be issued later.”





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[Kuwaiti Emir health is stable, Emiri Diwan says](#)

Fri, 2020-09-11 00:20

KUWAIT CITY: Kuwait's Emiri Diwan said in a statement on Thursday that the Emir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah's health is stable and that the Emir is receiving the scheduled medical treatment following surgery, state news agency KUNA cited the Diwan statement.

Emir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah is in the US completing medical treatment following surgery for an unspecified condition in Kuwait.

The Emiri Diwan called for reports on the Emir's health to be accurate with complete information from official sources, and urged people not to pay attention to unfounded news reports.

(With Reuters)



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Saudi crown prince inquires about health of Kuwait emir
Saudi King sends letter to deputy emir of Kuwait

[3 jailed journalists released amid tough media landscape in Turkey](#)

Author:

Thu, 2020-09-10 23:12

ANKARA: After spending almost six months behind bars, orders for the release from prison of three Turkish journalists accused of disclosing national security secrets were issued on Wednesday.

Critical news site Oda TV's editor-in-chief, Baris Pehlivan, reporter Hulya Kilinc and dissident Yenicag newspaper columnist Murat Agirel were behind bars for reporting on the death of a Turkish intelligence officer in Libya in February, although the agent's name had been previously publicized in a speech by a lawmaker in the Turkish Parliament.

They were released with travel restrictions, with appeals for their sentences pending.

Pehlivan, who faced physical assault during his detention period, said during his testimony that the trial was an attempt to punish his journalistic work.

“No one should doubt this: We will keep writing for a just future, starting where we just left off,” he said.

However, not everything is rosy in the country’s media sector, where 20 journalists faced trials this week, with free speech increasingly under restriction and censorship in the face of eroding judicial independence from political interference.

Four other defendants who were tried over terror charges on the same day in Istanbul for their journalistic activities in the leftist pro-Kurdish Ozgur Gundem newspaper had their trial adjourned until Dec. 24, while the trial of two other journalists affiliated with the socialist Etkin News Agency (ETHA) was deferred to Dec. 22 as they did not attend the hearing.

A local journalist, Oktay Candemir, was briefly detained on Monday in the eastern province of Van for allegedly “defaming a dead person’s memory” under Turkish Penal Code Article 130 for a critical remark made on social media about a popular Ottoman-era television series shown by the state-run TRT channel. He was released on Wednesday on probation.

Reporters Sans Frontiers ranks Turkey 154 of 179 countries on its World Press Freedom Index, placing the country among the world’s leading jailer of journalists.

“The AKP government has long pushed media magnates into submission and has intimidated journalists who strive to keep their autonomy from political pressure,” Berk Esen, assistant professor of political science from Sabanci University, told Arab News.

“That is why the government has targeted the few independent voices left in the country, especially when they cover controversial stories that challenge the government propaganda,” he added.

According to Esen, in such cases, journalists are investigated and kept in prison for several months to break their resolve and send a message to their colleagues not to follow their path. Independent reporting on Turkey’s military campaigns in Libya and Syria as well as corruption cases in Turkey are generally off limits to journalists.

An Ankara court on Sept. 8 rejected the appeal against the custody of Oda TV Ankara News Editor MUYESSER YILDIZ, who was imprisoned in June over espionage charges. She was accused of revealing state secrets in two articles about Ankara’s military involvement in Libya.

“Obviously, the room available for independent journalists has shrunk further as the regime turned more authoritarian over the last few years. There are very few independent media venues left in the country as a result and most are owned by foreign media groups that still have room for independent journalism,” Esen said.

However, he added, these tactics had not completely stifled investigative reporting in the country.

“In contrast to post-communist regimes in Eastern Europe and Balkans, Turkish media has a relatively strong tradition of investigative and critical journalism that goes back decades. Those reporters who follow this tradition can still find room in online venues, international media, and the few independent newspapers left in the country,” Esen said.

At the same trial, another dissident journalist and Oda TV news director, Baris Terkoglu, was acquitted of disclosing information related to intelligence operations, and judicial control measures on him were lifted.

Terkoglu’s lawyer, Kazim Yigit Akalin, said it was a “bitter victory” after the unfair captivity he faced.

“From the very beginning, these journalists didn’t disclose anything secret. Even a parliamentarian gave a detailed description of the slain agent during his press briefing. Oda TV only covered the funeral after 13 days. Nobody could have explained why they remained behind bars over something that was already disclosed,” he told Arab News.

According to Akalin, the journalists were arrested because authorities wanted to silence Oda TV.

“Everything that Terkoglu and Pehlivan wrote in the past was disturbing the judiciary. They triggered the reflex of the judicial authorities about their critical journalism. They are brave boys; they don’t care anything but journalism. It explains everything, I assume,” he said.

Turkey’s Interior Minister Suleyman Soylu made a bitter press statement about Terkoglu on Thursday. “I am not the man of someone like you, the man of the other; I am the man of this nation. It is also clear who you are, with whom you are hiring and whom you are serving as a servant,” he said.



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Turkey urged to release rights defender after European court ruling

[‘Historic’ Palestinian factions’ reconciliation meeting puts smiles on faces](#)

Thu, 2020-09-10 23:04

GAZA CITY: The general secretaries of the Palestinian factions held an “historic” reconciliation meeting in Beirut, nine years after a similar get-together in Cairo ended in fall out and disagreement.

Last week’s gathering, chaired virtually by President Mahmoud Abbas from

Ramallah, included 12 factions of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), in addition to Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

Smiles, friendship, and courtesy were in plentiful supply, producing a generally optimistic outlook from the meeting, even from polar-opposite political rivals Fatah and Hamas.

Secretary-general of the PLO's executive committee, Saeb Erekat, told Arab News: "The meeting represents an historic event, and an important step on the road to achieving the unity of the Palestinian political and struggle position, and the embodiment of political partnership and agreement on clear work mechanisms and a timetable to end the division, which weakens the Palestinian position in the face of challenges."

Husam Badran, head of national relations for Hamas and a member of the organization's political bureau, told Arab News that staging the meeting had been a necessary step in bringing sides together.

It had been an important and long-awaited event brought about as a result of "detailed discussions between Hamas and Fatah about what is to come, and the dangers facing our national cause," he said.

"We believe, in Hamas, that our unity as Palestinian people with all its components give us more power, and we are talking about the Palestine Liberation Organization in this context, which we believe is the inclusive home for all Palestinians.

"But it should include everyone with all the factional components, civil society institutions, and balanced national figures," Badran added.

Erekat said that Abbas' approval of committees' recommendations from the meeting was a key mandate and clear confirmation of the Palestinian leadership's interest in the success of the unity mission.

Delegates set a five-week timetable for committees to finalize the recommendations and present them to the next meeting that, according to Erekat, would be attended by the secretaries of the factions, members of the PLO executive and central committees, and political and religious figures.

The committees discussed the three main issues of peaceful popular resistance, the national and political project, and political partnership and the rebuilding of the PLO.

Since the split in 2007, the PLO file has remained an obstacle to the success of many of the understandings and agreements signed by the two factions.

Badran said the presence of a strong, unified PLO representing all Palestinians would block the road to "stalkers" and close the door to parties that justified their policies by claiming "the Palestinians are not represented by anyone."

In the new positive atmosphere of cooperation, a ministerial delegation consisting of five ministers from the West Bank visited the Gaza Strip to

follow up on efforts to contain the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak in Gaza.

However, political science professor, Ibrahim Abrash, told Arab News that the success of last week's meeting would be judged on results rather than the smiles of the leaders.

He said that correcting the Palestinian reality required "continuing efforts from everyone, and not only meeting the secretary-generals of the factions or waiting for the outputs of the committees that have been formed."

Hani Al-Masri, a political analyst and the director general of the Masarat center for policy research and strategic studies, said while some Palestinians remained skeptical about the true intentions of the meeting the gathering in itself had been significant and a step on the road to strengthening fragile Palestinian unity.



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