

# Yemen court begins trial of Houthi Leaders

Author:

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AL-MUKALLA: A Yemeni military court in the government-controlled city of Marib held the initial session of the trial of Iran-backed Houthi leaders on Tuesday, accused of masterminding the coup against the internationally recognized government of President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi in 2015 and the subsequent military campaign.

The defendants faced charges of forming a terrorist armed group called Ansar Allah, colluding with the Lebanese group Hezbollah and Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), revolting against the republican system, putting Masur Hadi under house arrest and trying to kill him.

Along with the movement's leader, Abdul Malik Al-Houthi, among the 175 accused figures were Mohammed Al-Houthi, a member of the country's Supreme Political Council, Abdullah Yahiya Al-Hakim, a senior military commander, the Houthi ambassador to Iran, Ibrahim Mohammed Al-Daylami, and dozens of ministers, intelligence, military and political officials.

According to the official Saba news agency, the prosecution demanded the maximum available punishments for the defendants, including the death penalty.

By the end of the session, the court decided to publish the names of the accused figures in local newspapers and demanded that they appear the same court on Sept. 25, or face prosecution in absentia.

With the help of former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, Houthi militias seized control of the capital Sana'a in September 2014, and placed Mansur Hadi under house arrest, dismissing his government and replacing it with their allied Revolutionary Committees. The Houthis killed Saleh in late 2017 after leading a brief military uprising in Sana'a.

## **Dismantled Houthi cell**

Also in Marib, Yemen's defense and interior ministries said on Tuesday that the Houthi cell that was dismantled in Marib's Wadi Abeda area late last month was responsible for masterminding many attacks against government, military and security targets in Marib.

In a joint statement, the two ministries said the cell, led by Mohsen Saleh Subayan, planned and carried out attacks against local security forces and Saudi-led coalition troops in Marib, planted landmines and improvised explosive devices, assassinated military and security officers and smuggled weapons. The statement noted that Subayan, along with several of his associates, were killed when they resisted security forces that came to

capture them, and that drones, weapons and munitions were found in the area.

Local security and military officers believe that Houthi sleeper cells were involved in directing drone and missile strikes that targeted military camps in Marib since late 2015. The deadliest Houthi attack was in January 2020, when a drone and missiles fired by the Houthis landed at a camp, killing more than 110 soldiers, triggering heavy clashes between government forces and the Houthis, which disrupted diplomatic efforts to reach a peace deal led by the UN Yemen envoy Martin Griffiths.

Official media reported on Tuesday that Prime Minister Maeen Abdul Malik Saeed called the governor of Marib, Sultan Al-Arada, to congratulate him on dismantling the cell and foiling plots to undermine security and stability. Marib has hosted thousands of Yemeni army troops and coalition forces since the beginning of the Saudi-led military operation in Yemen in March 2015.



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# US military commander stresses the importance of Lebanon's stability

Author:

Zaynab Khojji

ID:

1594235169482936100

Wed, 2020-07-08 22:23

BEIRUT: Gen. Kenneth McKenzie, commander of the US Central Command (USCENTCOM), has stressed the importance of the strong partnership between the US and the Lebanese Armed Forces.

He reaffirmed the importance of preserving Lebanon's security, stability, and sovereignty, and underscored the importance of the strong partnership between the US and Lebanese militaries.

Gen. McKenzie arrived in Beirut amid protests against this visit organized by supporters of Hezbollah on the road leading to Rafic Hariri International Airport, while Lebanese troops took extreme measures to prevent protesters from approaching McKenzie's convoy.

The Information Office of the Lebanese Presidency issued a statement noting: "(General) McKenzie met with President Michel Aoun who praised the cooperation between the Lebanese and US armies in matters of training and armament, and hoped to further develop the military cooperation between Lebanon and the US."

Aoun pointed out to "the support that the Lebanese Army received from the US Army in 2017 during the battle of Aarsal against Daesh and Al-Nusra," and added "the (Lebanese) army succeeded in eliminating terrorist dormant cells and continues pursuing them."

The statement noted that McKenzie confirmed the "continuous support of the US military command to the Lebanese army that is defending Lebanon's independence and sovereignty at all levels including combat and continuous high-level training."

Gen. McKenzie was accompanied by USCENTCOM officials and officers, as well as the US Ambassador to Lebanon Dorothy Shea, and US Defense Attaché Robert Meine.

The US Embassy in Lebanon said: "The one-day visit to Lebanon also included meetings with senior Lebanese political and defense leaders, including representatives of the Ministry of Defense and the Lebanese Armed Forces, office calls at the US Embassy, and a brief stop at memorials honoring the memory of those who have perished in service to their country."

Since 1997, the US has classified Hezbollah as a terrorist organization. Hezbollah's influence on state affairs has increased since the formation of Hassan Diab's government last January.

This was McKenzie's fourth visit since he assumed his duties on March 28, 2019 as successor to Gen. Joseph Votel, commanding US military operations in several countries, including Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, and Afghanistan.

The visit of the general coincided with the announcement by the Lebanese army command of the closure of three roads in Hermel region, used to smuggle goods between Lebanon and Syria. In addition, it announced the closure of two

illegal crossings and five roads that are used to smuggle stolen cars and goods.

Smugglers between Lebanon and Syria operate under the protection of Hezbollah, which asserts that it is not capable of curtailing smuggling. Sheikh Naim Qassem, deputy secretary-general of Hezbollah, said on Tuesday "Hezbollah is unable to close illegal crossings and holds the army responsible for achieving the task."

On Wednesday, opposition lawmakers and activists ridiculed the Hezbollah chief, Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah, after he called for "an industrial and agricultural jihad to cultivate the land to avoid starvation."

Nasrallah's opponents called it a "sign of impotence," given his additional call for "negotiations with the International Monetary Fund (IMF)."

Nasrallah did not mention any specific reforms, while he continued his campaign against the US ambassador, calling on her to: "Stop interfering (in Lebanese affairs)." He also renewed his calls for "opening up to China, Iran, and Syria."

Lawmaker Rola Al-Tabash, member of the Future Parliamentary bloc, said that Nasrallah's words were like those of a man "who kills a man and (then attends) his funeral."

Former lawmaker Fadi Karam, member of the Lebanese Forces bloc, said that Hezbollah's leadership "depict national meltdown as if the solution was only confined to securing foodstuffs from rooftops, balconies, or from the bankrupt axis. For us, life is not only about eating and sleeping, but it is also about education, culture, institutions justice, citizenship, and independent judiciary."

Meanwhile, Qassem Tajeddine, 64, recently returned to Lebanon after his release from a US prison. The US State Department warned that any US citizen who did business with him would "be subject to severe sanctions."

Al-Hadath news channel quoted a State Department official saying: "Tajeddine, who provides financial support to Hezbollah, will remain on the US sanctions list and the State Department objects to his release from prison, but respects the court's decision. Sanctions will be imposed on any American who deals with Tajeddine."

Tajeddine spent three years in prison, and was released two years before the end of his five-years sentence. In May 2009, Tajeddine was first accused of being an important contributor to Hezbollah; he was arrested in 2017 in Casablanca, Morocco, at the request of US authorities, and was extradited to the US where he was accused of "circumventing the US sanctions against terrorist groups and money laundering."



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## [Pompeo hints at Iran links in killing of Iraq expert](#)

Wed, 2020-07-08 19:21

WASHINGTON: US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Wednesday demanded justice over the killing of a prominent Iraqi extremist expert and highlighted threats against him by Iran-linked groups.

Hisham Al-Hashemi, an internationally known scholar whose vast contacts inside Iraq made him a mediator among rivals, was gunned down outside his Baghdad home late Monday by masked assailants on motorcycles.

"In the days leading up to his death he was repeatedly threatened by Iran backed armed groups," Pompeo told a news conference in Washington, without

explicitly blaming Tehran.

“The United States joins partner nations in strongly condemning his assassination and call(ing) for the government of Iraq to bring to justice the perpetrators of this terrible crime... swiftly,” he said.

Hashemi was an authoritative voice on extremist movements including Daesh, which are violently opposed to Iran.

But he infuriated Tehran-backed factions in Iraq’s Hashed Al-Shaabi military network through his support of popular protests last year against a Baghdad government seen as too close to Iran.

Some experts have voiced fear of a new violent phase in Iraq and believe the turning point may have come in January when a US strike in Baghdad killed a top Iranian general, Qasem Soleimani.

President Donald Trump’s administration has sought to check Iran’s regional activities and choke its economy and frequently seeks to throw a spotlight on purported nefarious activities backed by the clerical state.



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Iraqi analyst Hisham Al-Hashimi killed in Baghdad after pro-Iran militia threats

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# Wedding season brings new virus outbreak in West Bank

Author:

By MOHAMMED DARAGHMEH | AP

ID:

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RAMALLAH: By the end of May, the Palestinian Authority appeared to have quashed a coronavirus outbreak in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, with only around 400 confirmed cases and just two fatalities in the territory, following a nearly three-month lockdown.

Then the wedding invitations went out.

Over the last few weeks, infections have skyrocketed across the West Bank, with more than 4,000 new cases and an additional 15 deaths. Authorities blame the surge on widespread neglect of social distancing and mask-wearing – and on the summer wedding season.

Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh told a Cabinet meeting on Monday that 82% of cases in the West Bank were linked to weddings and funerals, saying that such large public gatherings must stop “immediately” or security forces would start breaking them up.

The Palestinian Authority imposed a strict five-day lockdown on Friday, forcing nearly all businesses to close and heavily restricting travel between towns and cities. The stay-at-home orders were renewed for another five days on Tuesday.

The epicenter of the renewed outbreak is in Hebron, the largest Palestinian city and a commercial hub of the territory. It accounts for around 75% of all active cases and more than two-thirds of all deaths, according to Ali Abed Rabu, a Palestinian Health Ministry official.

Palestinian weddings, usually held in the summer months, are major community events in which large families typically invite hundreds of guests. They feature lavish meals, often served buffet-style, as well as dancing and music late into the night.

“Hebronites are proud of their traditions and maintain them even at risky times like these,” Abed Rabu said. “They brag about how many people attend and how many sheep they slaughter to feed them.”

The virus causes mild to moderate flu-like symptoms in most patients, who recover within a few weeks. But it can cause severe illness or death, particularly among the old or infirm. The virus is highly contagious and can be spread by those showing no symptoms.

That makes weddings and other large public gatherings particularly risky. A major outbreak could overwhelm the Palestinian health sector, which has just 350 ventilators for a population of more than 2.5 million people.

Hebron’s mayor, Tayseer Abu Snaineh, points to other potential vectors, including the fact that large numbers of workers and merchants in Hebron travel back and forth from Israel, which is battling a much larger outbreak

that has also surged in recent weeks.

Abu Snaineh said the Palestinian Authority, which governs parts of the Israeli-occupied West Bank, has tried to prevent large gatherings. But Palestinian security forces are not allowed to operate in a large part of downtown Hebron known as H2, which under past agreements is under complete Israeli military control.

Several hundred hard-line Jewish settlers live in H2, protected by Israeli troops. The area is also home to more than 30,000 Palestinians.

With the PA barred from the area and the Israeli military focused on securing the settlements, Abu Snaineh said there is no authority to impose virus restrictions. As a result, residents have held large weddings and other gatherings in recent weeks that appear to have accelerated the outbreak.

"People celebrate, hug each other and eat together in this area with no restrictions," he said.

Odeh Al-Rajabi, the head of an informal local committee that administers H2, says it has been reaching out to people and has convinced many to hold small family weddings rather than the usual massive feasts.

"Some people feel it is embarrassing to not hold a feast and invite people, but we tell them not to feel embarrassed, that we all understand, it's an emergency situation," he said.

The committee hopes to convince most large families to sign a code of conduct in the coming days that would prohibit such gatherings.

Abu Snaineh, the mayor, said ultra-conservative Muslims have also defied restrictions in order to pray in mosques. One group, known as Hezb Al-Tahrir, has openly called on people to defy restrictions on group prayers, accusing the PA of "using coronavirus as a pretext to fight Islam." The group is particularly influential in Hebron, where the population is more conservative than in other parts of the West Bank.

Alaa Abu Diab, a popular Palestinian comedian, posted a video this week in which he criticized people for holding weddings during the pandemic.

"I've just seen a video of a wedding party in which people are dancing and hugging as if there is no coronavirus," he said. "Why are you hugging and kissing each other in these sweaty, crowded gatherings?"

He also mocked those trafficking in conspiracy theories about the restrictions. "Who in the hell is conspiring against who? The whole world is collapsing, and you say it's a conspiracy."





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## [Pompeo: We are trying to prevent Iran from selling crude oil to Hezbollah](#)

Wed, 2020-07-08 17:13

LONDON: The US is trying to prevent Iran from selling crude oil to Hezbollah, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said on Wednesday.

Pompeo added that the US is working against the “terrorist organization” Hezbollah and is supporting Lebanon to be a country that is not subordinate to Iran.

Hezbollah, which is supported, armed and funded by Iran, is classified as a terrorist group by the United States and many other countries.

The group is now a dominant force in Lebanese politics and supports the government of Prime Minister Hassan Diab.

The Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah said on Tuesday that his group was in discussion with the government about Iran supplying refined oil products to Lebanon in exchange for Lebanese pounds to ease pressure on the plummeting currency. The pound has lost 80 percent of its value since October as the country's economic crisis has escalated.

The secretary of state also urged the UN Security Council to extend an arms embargo on Iran and said the US and partner forces last month seized a vessel carrying arms to the Houthis in Yemen.

"The Security Council must extend the arms embargo on Iran to prevent further conflict in the region," Pompeo told a State Department news conference.

"No serious person can possibly believe Iran will use any weapon it receives for peaceful ends."

He added that Iran continues to supply the Houthis with weapons.



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