

# [UAE says 7 Emiratis, 2 Egyptians detained by Iran were freed](#)

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Associated Press

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1552501380456617400

Wed, 2019-03-13 15:40

DUBAI: The United Arab Emirates says seven Emiratis and two Egyptians held by Iran since January after being detained in the Gulf have been freed.

The Emirati Foreign Ministry said in a statement Wednesday the nine were detained while on a fishing trip.

It said those detained were released into the care of the UAE Coast Guard.

Iranian media quoted Emirati media on the release, without elaborating on the case.



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Karen Pence, wife of US vice president, visits the UAE

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# Syrian forces and Russian jets intensify attacks on last rebel bastion

Author:

Reuters

ID:

1552499893306442700

Wed, 2019-03-13 17:47

AMMAN: The Syrian army, aided by Russian warplanes, attacked rebel-held towns in northwestern Syria on Wednesday in the most extensive bombardment in weeks against the last remaining rebel bastion in the country, rebels, rescuers and residents said.

Rebels who have fought to topple President Bashar Assad for eight years are now largely confined to the enclave in the northwest near the Turkish border. Around four million people now live there, including hundreds of thousands of opponents of Assad who fled there from other parts of the country.

The enclave is protected by a "de-escalation zone" agreement brokered last year by Assad's main international backers Russia and Iran, and Turkey which has supported the rebels in the past and has sent troops to monitor the truce.

Residents said at least 12 aerial raids had hit Idlib city, including a civilian prison on its outskirts, where they said dozens of prisoners escaped. At least four civilians were killed.

Russia's defense ministry confirmed it had hit Idlib in coordination with Turkey, targeting drones and weapons stores of the Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS) militants it said were intended for use in an attack on a major Russian air base near the Mediterranean coast.

The Syrian army has escalated its shelling of the enclave since early February. The attacks have killed dozens of civilians and injured hundreds, and led to tens of thousands of people fleeing frontline areas to camps and towns closer to the Turkish border, rescuers and aid agencies said.

The Syrian army denies targeting civilians and says the army is responding to stepped-up attacks staged by Al-Qaeda-inspired fighters who aim to wreck the truce and control the area.

Residents along the border area with Turkey could hear heavy overnight aerial strikes that covered a wide stretch of territory from rebel-held areas near government-held Latakia province on the Mediterranean to Idlib city toward the east and extending to adjoining opposition-held parts of northern Hama. "They burnt the land... The sounds were heard very clearly," said Ibrahim al Sheikh, a father of five in the border town of Atmeh. He quoted relatives as saying the shelling was the heaviest yet in the two weeks of escalation.

The escalation in the northwest is taking place as a US-backed Kurdish-led militia has launched a separate assault on the final bastion of Islamic State fighters on the opposite, eastern end of the country, creating turning points

on both major fronts of Syria's multi-sided civil war.

In the northwest, residents said white phosphorous munitions were fired overnight on the town of al Tamana in northwestern Idlib countryside, where rescue workers on Wednesday said they put out several fires caused by more than 80 rocket strikes.

Among the targets of the aerial campaign was a makeshift tent camp in Kfr Amim, east of Idlib city, that shelters displaced families, where two women were killed and at least 10 children injured when bombs landed after midnight.

"Whoever did this is a beast, truly a beast. It's a camp with only women and children. There is nothing we can say except that this Russian beast is coming to kill," said Laith al Abdullah, a civil defense worker in Sarqeb town who helped in the rescue effort, reached by mobile phone.

Rocket shelling from a major army base in Joreen, in Hama province, escalated a week-long bombardment of rural areas near the town of Jisr al Shaqour, said Ahmed Abdul Salam, a rebel commander in the Turkey-backed National Liberation Front.

A Russian army base, south of government-controlled Halafaya town, also targeted Kafr Zeita in northern Hama countryside while cluster bombs hit several rebel-held towns in southern Idlib, rebels said.

The stepped-up bombardment has depopulated opposition-held towns in the buffer zone that straddles parts of Idlib to northern Hama and parts of Latakia province.

The opposition-held city of Khan Sheikhon had become a ghost city with most of its more than 70,000 people fleeing, said Yousef al Idlibi, a former resident who moved to Idlib city.

Turkey, which began patrols in the buffer zone on Friday, has condemned what it said were increasing provocations to wreck the truce, and warned that a bombing campaign by the Russians and the Syrian army would cause a major humanitarian crisis.

Many residents are exasperated by the failure of Turkish forces to respond to the bombardments. The Syrian army has called for Turkish forces to withdraw.



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Daesh suicide bombers thwarted in last-stand battle for Baghouz: SDFaid groups appeal for Syria funds as donors head to Brussels

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## [US report drops the word 'occupied' from reference to Palestinian territories](#)

Wed, 2019-03-13 18:21

WASHINGTON: A US State Department report has dropped the words "occupation" or "occupied" before a section on the Palestinian territories of West Bank and Gaza.

The annual global human rights report also describes the Golan Heights as "Israeli-controlled" rather than "occupied," Reuters reported.

The three territories are considered occupied by Israel under international law.

Gaza, the West Bank, and the Golan heights were annexed by Israel during the 1967.

A State Department official said there had been no change in US policy on the status of Palestinian territories. The official told Reuters the word "occupied" was not used because the report was on human rights issues and not legal issues.



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Israeli fire kills Gaza protester; clashes in West Bank  
Israel shuts Jerusalem Al-Aqsa mosque compound after unrest

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[\*\*Iraqi admits killing German girl, 14,\*\*](#)

# denies rape

Author:

Tue, 2019-03-12 23:20

WIESBADEN: An Iraqi man confessed in a German court Tuesday to the murder of a teenage girl which last year inflamed anti-immigrant tensions.

He denied raping her.

“My vision went black and then it happened,” Ali Bashar, 22, told the court through an interpreter. “I don’t know how it could have happened.”

Bashar left Germany for northern Iraq shortly after the May 2018 crime but was arrested and brought back in a mission joined personally by Germany’s federal police chief.

His trial for the rape and murder of 14-year-old schoolgirl Susanna Maria Feldman started Monday under tight security in Wiesbaden, the city where the killing took place.

Around a dozen people held a vigil for the victim outside the courthouse.

For the murder alone, Bashar faces a likely life prison term, which in Germany usually translates to 15 years behind bars.

He denied rape and claimed in court that the two had consensual sex before she fell, got angry and threatened to call the police.

To Germany’s far right, Bashar, who is also accused of twice raping an 11-year-old girl in a separate case, has become a symbol of the threat allegedly posed by a wave of mostly Middle Eastern newcomers.

Before the trial, the Alternative for Germany (AfD) party again blamed Chancellor Angela Merkel’s grand coalition or “GroKo” government for Susanna’s death.

The AfD became the biggest opposition party when it entered Parliament in 2017, riding a wave of public anger over sexual assaults and other violent crimes committed by some recent migrants.

In another case last year, the fatal stabbing of a German man in the eastern city of Chemnitz, allegedly by immigrants, sparked outbursts of mob violence in which far-right extremists hunted people of foreign appearance through the streets.

Bashar, along with his parents and five siblings, first arrived in Germany in 2015, the peak year of the influx which would bring more than one million people to Europe’s biggest economy. His request for asylum was rejected in December 2016, but – in a case critics label as symptomatic of an overwhelmed and dysfunctional system – he obtained a temporary residence permit pending his appeal.

Merkel later conceded in a TV interview that “the case shows how important it is that people who don’t have residency rights quickly face a court and can be speedily sent back home.”

In May last year, Bashar allegedly beat, raped and strangled Susanna to death in a wooded area near his refugee shelter.

Her body was then buried in a shallow grave covered with leaves, twigs and soil, near railway tracks.

When her remains were found two weeks later, Bashar and his family had left Germany for Irbil, northern Iraq.

However, he was arrested by Kurdish security forces and, despite the absence of a formal extradition treaty between Baghdad and Berlin, taken back to Germany.

In a controversial operation personally joined by federal police chief Dieter Romann, Bashar was put on a flight back to Germany, with pictures of him disembarking under heavy police guard making front pages.

Bashar also faces charges for a park robbery in which he allegedly beat, strangled and threatened a man with a knife to steal his watch, bag, phone and bank card. He faces a separate trial from March 19, accused of having twice raped an 11-year-old girl – once in April 2018 after locking her in his room, and again near a supermarket carpark the following month.

Prosecutors have also laid charges against an Afghan youth, Mansoor Q., who was believed to be aged at least 14 at the time, also for the rape of the 11-year-old girl. Prosecutors have said Bashar’s younger brother – who is believed to be in Iraq, according to media reports – also took part in a sexual assault against the younger girl.



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Hundreds of Iraqi Daesh child suspects arrested: human rights group  
Iraq says it can help return Daesh fighters to their countries

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## [Iran rights lawyer Sotoudeh to face additional 10 years in jail](#)

Author:

AFP

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1552419376568495200

Tue, 2019-03-12 16:13

TEHRAN: Iranian human rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh has been sentenced to an extra 10 years in jail on top of the five-year term she is already serving, her husband said Tuesday.

Sotoudeh is an award-winning rights activist who was arrested last June and told she had been found guilty in absentia of espionage charges and sentenced to five years.



The new 10-year sentence was the longest of seven different verdicts totalling 33 years bundled together in a case and communicated to Sotoudeh in prison, according to her husband Reza Khandan.

"But only the longest sentence will be served, which is 'encouraging corruption and debauchery and providing the means'," he told AFP by telephone.

He said Sotoudeh had also been sentenced to a total of 148 lashes for appearing in court without the hijab Islamic head covering and for another offense.

She had been found guilty of "colluding against the system, propaganda against the system... disrupting public order" and several other counts.

On Monday, a judge at Tehran's Revolutionary Court said she had been sentenced in her latest conviction to five years for colluding against the system and two years for insulting Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

But Khandan said that to the best of his knowledge his wife had not been charged with insulting the leader.

The United Nations' top expert on human rights in Iran, Javaid Rehman, said the reported conviction was "a crystal-clear illustration of an increasingly severe state response."

"There is an increasing concern that the civil space for human rights lawyers and defenders is being reduced," he told journalists in Geneva.

Amnesty International condemned the latest case against Sotoudeh as an "outrageous injustice" and called for her immediate and unconditional release.

"Nasrin Sotoudeh has dedicated her life to defending women's rights and speaking out against the death penalty – it is utterly outrageous that Iran's authorities are punishing her for her human rights work," it said.

Before her arrest, Sotoudeh, 55, had taken on the cases of several women arrested for appearing in public without headscarves in protest at the mandatory dress code in force in Iran.

Sotoudeh won the European Parliament's prestigious Sakharov Prize in 2012 for her work on high-profile cases, including those of convicts on death row for offenses committed as minors.

She spent three years in prison after representing dissidents arrested during mass protests in 2009 against the disputed re-election of ultra-conservative president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.



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