

# Baghdad to repatriate Iraqi Daesh militants held in Syria

Author:

Wed, 2019-02-13 22:21

BAGHDAD: Iraq will repatriate Iraqi members of Daesh held by US-backed fighters in Syria as well as thousands of their family members, Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi said.

Abdul Mahdi told reporters late Tuesday that families of those militants will also be brought back and that tent settlements will be prepared to host them.

Abdul Mahdi's comments came after a meeting he held in Baghdad with acting US Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan.

A senior Iraqi intelligence official said up to 20,000 Iraqis, including Daesh militants, their families and refugees will be brought back home by April where many of them will live in a tent settlement in western Anbar province.

The official, who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to the media, said Daesh members will be interrogated by Iraqi security agencies.

Abdul Mahdi's announcement came a week after the US called on other nations to repatriate and prosecute their citizens who traveled to Syria to fight with Daesh and who are now being held by Washington's local partners.

The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) say they detained more than 900 foreign fighters during their US-backed campaign against Daesh in northeastern Syria.

The SDF has warned they may not be able to continue to hold the Daesh militants after the withdrawal of American forces from Syria ordered by President Donald Trump in December.

A US State Department official said last week that if the fighters can't be repatriated, though, the detention center on the US base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, could be used to hold them "where lawful and appropriate."

A US official said Guantanamo is the "option of last resort." The official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the US has identified about 50 people among the more than 900 held by Syrian forces as "high value" suspects that could be transported to Guantanamo if they are not repatriated.

Sending Daesh prisoners to Guantanamo would open up new legal challenges, according to experts. Last month, France's Interior Minister Christophe Castaner told French media that a handful of French militants had already returned home and more would follow soon after the departure of American

troops.

Britain refuses to take back citizens who joined Daesh and has reportedly stripped them of their citizenship.

Other European countries have remained largely silent about the fate of men and women whom many see as a security threat. More than 20,000 people have left the Daesh-held area and most of them have been moved to Al-Hol camp settlement in Syria's northeastern province of Hassakeh

Since the latest push began on the village of Baghouz and nearby area, 19 SDF fighters and 27 Daesh gunmen, including eight suicide attackers, have been killed, according to the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

More than 20,000 people have left the Daesh-held area and most of them have been moved to Al-Hol camp settlement in Syria's northeastern province of Hassakeh, where human conditions are miserable and more than two dozen children have died in recent weeks.



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Iraqi armed factions hit Daesh targets inside SyriaRussia 'repatriates' 27 Daesh children from Iraq

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## Hundreds flee as ferocious battle in Syria's Daesh holdout enters 5th day

Author:

Wed, 2019-02-13 22:15

NEAR BAGHOUZ, SYRIA: The ferocious battle for Daesh's last bastion in eastern Syria entered its fifth day on Wednesday, as exhausted families left the ever-shrinking scrap of land where holdout militants have been boxed in by Kurdish-led forces.

Hundreds fled day and night from Baghouz, near the enclave where diehard Daesh militants are making their last stand, as plumes of grey smoke billowed into the sky over the flat, desolate town.

After a pause of more than a week to allow out civilians, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) declared a final push to retake the pocket of land from the extremists on Saturday, aided by the warplanes and artillery of a US-led coalition.

SDF spokesman Mustafa Bali said on Tuesday that 600 civilians had fled the combat zone overnight and the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based war monitor, said another 350 made it out that day. The SDF have built up a pair of sand embankments on a scrubby plateau overlooking Baghouz.

Most of the neighborhoods visible along the hazy horizon are under their control, but the southernmost parts of the small town – from which sounds of a firefight can be heard – are still held by Daesh.

Suddenly, black dots appeared on the dirt road that snakes across the plain from the ruins of the town.

The SDF watched them warily at first, but as the group of about 25 people got closer, members of the Free Burma Rangers volunteer medical group scrambled down the hill to meet them.

There are no other NGOs or UN agencies at the site.

Half a dozen among the new arrivals were adult men. The rest were women, panting after their long trudge out of Baghouz, and young children with dirty hair. About half were Ukrainian or Russian women and their children, while most of the others were Syrian.

A 34-year-old woman from Crimea tore pieces of bread to give her three children. She identified herself as Umm Khaled and said she came to Syria five years ago after divorcing her Tatar husband.

Once there, she married an Azeri Daesh member and had two other children.

"They are all fatherless now," she told AFP in broken Arabic, her voice shaking.

Coalition spokesman Sean Ryan said US-backed forces were facing a fierce fightback.

"The progress is slow and methodical as the enemy is fully entrenched and" Daesh militants continue to conduct counter attacks, he said. On Monday, the Observatory said a coalition airstrike killed 16 civilians.

An Italian journalist was also wounded as he covered the clashes and evacuated for treatment, a colleague said on Twitter.

The SDF launched the battle to expel Daesh from the eastern Syrian province of Deir Ezzor in September, slowly tightening the noose around the militants and their families since December.

In the past two months, more than 37,000 people, mostly wives and children of Daesh militants, have fled into SDF-held areas, the Observatory says.

That figure includes some 3,400 suspected militants detained by the SDF, according to the monitor.

At a gathering point for new arrivals, dozens of men knelt on the ground.

Iraqi and Syrian women and children prepared to make the journey north to a Kurdish-held camp for the displaced, after spending the night in tents.

A very thin child with dark circles around his eyes stumbled onto a truck, as other children screamed out for water and their mothers asked how long the drive would take.

"Six hours? In the cold?" shouted a wrinkled Iraqi woman.

The SDF on Saturday said up to 600 militants could still be inside the pocket, adding their leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi was likely not there.

At the height of their proto-state, Baghdadi's followers implemented their brutal implementation of Islamic law in an area the size of Britain.

Once the "caliphate" is declared over, the fight will continue to tackle Daesh sleeper cells, the SDF and their allies have said.

US President Donald Trump on Monday said the coalition may declare victory over Daesh in the region within days.

During an unannounced visit to Baghdad on Tuesday, acting Pentagon chief Patrick Shanahan met Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdel Mahdi but the possibility of US troops in Iraq deploying into Syria for operations against Daesh "just did not come up" during their talks, Shanahan told reporters.

Separately on Tuesday, the Syrian government and rebels exchanged prisoners in the country's north as part of a peace process brokered by Russia, Iran

and Turkey, the Turkish government said.



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Hundreds flee US-backed Syria battle for last Daesh holdout SDF fighters close in on last Daesh-held village in Syria

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## [World powers gather for Warsaw Middle East summit expected to pile pressure on Iran](#)

Wed, 2019-02-13 20:37

WARSAW: US, Arab and Israeli leaders gathered Wednesday in Warsaw for a conference expected to pile pressure on Iran.

The event is attended by about 60 countries and the agenda also covers the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the fight against Daesh, Syria and Yemen.

But the bulk of the focus will be on Iran, and how to curtail the regime's aggressive foreign policy in the region.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Polish Foreign Minister Jacek Czaputowicz greeted the attendees at the opening ceremony, including Saudi Arabia's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Adel Al-Jubeir.

We join the [#WarsawSummit](#) to take a firm stand against forces that threaten the future of peace&security in the region, especially the world's leading sponsor of terrorism: the Iranian regime that continues to destabilize our region and launch ballistic missiles against civilians

– Khalid bin Salman خالد بن سلمان (@kbsalsaud) [February 13, 2019](#)

The Kingdom's ambassador to the US, Prince Khalid bin Salman, said Saudi Arabia joined the conference "to take a firm stand against forces that threaten the future of peace and security in the region."

"Especially the world's leading sponsor of terrorism: the Iranian regime that continues to destabilize our region and launch ballistic missiles against civilians," Prince Khalid said.

Ahead of the two-day meeting, hundreds of people took part in an Iranian opposition demonstration in Warsaw on Wednesday. Speakers at the event included the former New York mayor, Rudy Giuliani.

"The Iranian regime has been facing a popular uprising in Iran for a year and has not been able, despite using all kinds of repression, to control or quell this uprising, so it has once again started to export terrorism to the world and plan terrorist operations," Sanabargh Zahedi, Chairman of the Judicial Committee of the National Council of Resistance of Iran, told Arab News.

"We now want to confront this phenomenon and call upon the international community to take firmer steps against this regime."

Pressure has been growing on Iran since Donald Trump last year withdrew the US from a deal designed to curb Tehran's nuclear ambitions.

European powers stuck with the accord and their unhappiness at Trump's move was reflected by a reduced presence in Warsaw.

Predictably, Iran also voiced its disapproval at the meeting. Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad said: "It is another attempt by the United States to pursue an obsession with Iran that is not well-founded."

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and US Vice President Mike Pence will headline the conference on Thursday.

Netanyahu is keen to build closer ties with Arab countries which share his

concern of the Iranian threat in the region, particularly the presence of Iranian proxy militias in Syria where Israel carried out further strikes on Monday.

“We are operating every day ... against Iran and its attempts to establish its presence in the area,” said Netanyahu.

Ahead of the summit he met with Oman’s foreign minister Yousuf bin Alawi bin Abdullah, in rare public talks with an Arab leader.

The Omani minister said people in the Middle East have “suffered a lot” because they stick to the past. He said Wednesday’s meeting reflects a “new era” for the region.

The US is also hoping to make progress with a peace plan for Israel and Palestine. Trump adviser Jared Kushner will make a rare speaking appearance at the conference, possibly to offer hints of what the deal may include.

Nathan Tek, US State Department spokesman in the Middle East, told Arab News that the broad agenda of the conference, will reinvigorate efforts to address the region’s many challenges by “revitalizing our alliances and partnerships.”

“From weapons proliferation and humanitarian crises, to terrorism and energy security, these issues and others pose serious threats to stability in the region and to security around the world,” he said.

“(The conference) will provide countries an opportunity to share their assessments of the region and offer ideas on how to solve our shared problems.”

British Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt, who is attending the event, said he wanted to focus on ending the crisis in Yemen, AFP reported.

Hunt met Tuesday evening in Warsaw jointly with US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and senior officials from Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which are both supporting the Yemeni government against the Iran-backed Houthis as part of a regional military coalition.

Hunt said he hoped to expand on a seven-week ceasefire that has largely held in the crucial port city of Hodeida.

“We now have a shortening window of opportunity to turn the ceasefire into a durable path to peace – and stop the world’s worst humanitarian crisis,” Hunt said.

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**Day one of the Warsaw Middle East Conference as it happened**

*All times in GMT*

**6 p.m.**

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Polish Foreign Minister Jacek Czaputowicz greet the attendees including Saudi Arabia's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Adel Al-Jubeir.

**5.45 p.m**

The opening ceremony for the two day conference gets under way in Warsaw.

**5.40 p.m.**

Saudi Arabia's ambassador to the US, Khalid bin Salman, said Saudi Arabia joins the Warsaw Summit "to take a firm stand against forces that threaten the future of peace and security," in particular Iranian.

We join the [#WarsawSummit](#) to take a firm stand against forces that threaten the future of peace&security in the region, especially the world's leading sponsor of terrorism: the Iranian regime that continues to destabilize our region and launch ballistic missiles against civilians

– Khalid bin Salman خالد بن سلمان (@kbsalsaud) [February 13, 2019](#)

**3 p.m.**

Hundreds of people attend an anti -Iran demonstration in Warsaw.

Sanabargh Zahedi, Chairman of the Judicial Committee of the National Council of Resistance of Iran, told Arab news:

"The Iranian regime has been facing a popular uprising in Iran for a year and has not been able, despite using all kinds of repression, to control or quell this uprising, so it has once again started to export terrorism to the world and plan terrorist operations.

"We now want to confront this phenomenon and call upon the international community to take firmer steps against this regime."



2.45 p.m.

Israeli [Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu](#) meets [Oman's foreign minister Yousuf bin Alawi bin Abdullah](#) ahead of the Warsaw meeting.

In a video released by Netanyahu's office, the Omani foreign minister, said people in the Middle East have "suffered a lot" because they stick to the past. He said Wednesday's meeting reflects a "new era" for the region.







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[Middle East Conference](#)

[Adel Al-Jubeir](#)

[Mike Pompeo](#)

Israel's Netanyahu meets Oman's foreign minister in Warsaw  
Palestinian chief

negotiator Erekat says will not attend Warsaw conference

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## Turkey detains more than 700 over alleged links to coup bid

Author:

AFP

ID:

1549998613242871000

Tue, 2019-02-12 15:24

ANKARA: Turkish authorities detained 729 people in nationwide raids Tuesday over alleged links to a group blamed for a failed coup in 2016, the Ankara public prosecutor's office said.

Officials had sent to authorities in 75 provinces the names of 1,112 people under investigation over suspected ties to US-based preacher Fethullah Gulen and his movement, it said.

Gulen is accused of ordering the attempted putsch, a claim he strongly denies.

Forty-five of those arrested were in the capital Ankara, a judicial source, who did not wish to be named, told AFP.

"We do not know whether the provincial authorities detained or summoned all of the individuals whose names were given," the source added.

The Ankara public prosecutor's office, which leads the coup investigation, said 130 people on the list of suspects were deputy police chiefs still on active duty.

They are suspected of having obtained questions before sitting the 2010 exam to become inspectors, it added in a statement.

Turkish officials defend the crackdown by pointing to what it describes as the Gulen group's "virus"-like infiltration of key institutions, including the police.

Members of the movement are accused of cheating on entry exams to gain access to important public bodies.

Turkish Interior Minister Suleyman Soylu said Sunday that authorities "were planning a big operation" against the movement.

"Devils wouldn't even conduct the tricks that they did," Soylu said, adding that Turkey would "finish them off in this country."

There have been regular raids across Turkey in recent weeks against alleged members of the movement, despite criticism from human rights defenders and Ankara's Western allies over the scale of the crackdown.

Tens of thousands of people have been taken into custody over suspected links to Gulen since 2016 while over 100,000 – including teachers, police officers, and judges – have been sacked or suspended from the public sector.

Turkish Justice Minister Abdulhamit Gul said last month that 31,088 people have been convicted or jailed over suspected Gulen links.



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Tags:

[Turkey](#)

[Fethullah Gulen](#)

Turkey orders 1,112 people arrested over Gulen links  
Turkey targets military over alleged Gulen links

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## [Fresh protests in Sudan call for removal of Al-Bashir](#)

Author:

Tue, 2019-02-12 21:34

KHARTOUM: Security forces arrested 14 professors who were gathering to protest outside Khartoum University on Tuesday, witnesses said, as anti-government demonstrations neared the end of their eighth week.

Doctors also rallied outside state and private hospitals in Sudan's capital and other cities against the rule of President Omar Al-Bashir, witnesses added.

Union members, students, opposition activists and others, frustrated with economic hardships, have held near daily protests since Dec. 19, 2018, in the most sustained challenge to Al-Bashir's three decades in power.

Photos posted online on Tuesday showed people holding banners marked with “Freedom, justice and peace,” “No to torturing and killing protesters” and other slogans.

Rights groups say at least 45 people have been killed in the protests since they began on Dec. 19, while the government puts the death toll at 31.

Bashir has blamed the unrest on unnamed foreign powers and showed no signs of bowing to demands to quit. But he and some senior officials have adopted a more conciliatory tone in recent weeks and promised to free detained protesters.

On Sunday, police used tear gas to disperse hundreds of Sudanese protesters who marched on a women’s prison in Omdurman calling for the release of detainees arrested in anti-government protests, witnesses said.

“We are fighters, we will complete our mission,” protesters chanted as women ululated and men flashed the victory sign, according to the witnesses.

The protesters called for the release of women arrested in ongoing demonstrations against Al-Bashir’s rule, the witnesses said.

The march was called by the Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA), which is spearheading the protest campaign.

The SPA, an umbrella body of doctors, engineers and teachers, called Sunday’s march a “Rally for Women Detainees.”

“Women are taking the lead in the protest movement,” a female protester taking part in Sunday’s rally said without revealing her name for security reasons.



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Group urges UN to probe Sudan's use of force in protests  
Sudan protesters rally against death of teacher in custody