

Houthis sign UN plan to end recruitment of child soldiers

Mon, 2022-04-18 20:05

NEW YORK: Yemen's Houthi militia has signed an action plan with the UN to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict, the killing and maiming of boys and girls, attacks on schools and hospitals and other grave violations, a UN spokesman said on Monday.

Stephane Dujarric added that the Houthis have committed to identify and release children from their ranks within six months.

"As of today, the main parties to the conflict have all signed commitments to end and prevent grave violations against children," he said.

Nearly 1,500 children recruited by the Iran-backed militia died in combat in 2020, and over 500 hundred more the following year, a UN report revealed in January. More than 10,000 children have been killed in the war that began in 2015.

UN experts have repeatedly said the Houthis were recruiting children, using summer camps and mosques to indoctrinate them and teach them how to handle weapons.

Virginia Gamba, UN special representative for children in armed conflict, signed the action plan as a witness from New York and welcomed the measure to protect children in Yemen.

She called on all parties to the conflict to "use the opportunity of the current truce to prioritize the rights of children and their needs." She reiterated the UN's willingness to support the Houthis in implementing the agreement.

The truce between the Houthis and the internationally recognized government came into effect on the first day of the holy month of Ramadan. It is meant to last two months, with a possibility for renewal.

The parties had agreed to halt ground, air and cross-border strikes, allow oil tankers to enter Hodeidah port, reopen Sanaa airport for commercial flights and lift the siege of Taiz.





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Yemen calls for international pressure against Houthi recruitment of child soldiers
Yemeni minister slams Houthi militias' recruitment of child soldiers

[UAE issues new system for residency visas, entry permit categories](#)

Mon, 2022-04-18 19:07

LONDON: A new residence visa and entry permits system for the UAE was announced on Monday, the country's media office reported.

The new system offers new types of residence permits for skilled employees, investors, self-employed people, as well as family members of current residents.

According to the UAE Media Office, residents can now sponsor their family

members including spouses and children up to the age of 25 and in the case of an unmarried daughter, her parents will be able to sponsor her visa regardless of age.

[#UAE](#) adopted a new Entry and Residence Scheme including new categories and expanding the scope of beneficiaries. A step that supports the country's competitiveness in the tourism, economic and educational sectors. pic.twitter.com/BKApLKixJz

– UAEGOV (@UAEmediaoffice) [April 18, 2022](#)

Green Residency holders will also now be able to sponsor first-degree relatives, and disabled children will be granted a permit regardless of age.

“The duration of family members residence shall be the same as their sponsor's residence duration,” the media office posted in a tweet on Monday.

The media office also said residence permits would be allowed in some humanitarian cases.

According to the UAE federal government, a female resident whose husband of Emirati nationality passes away in the country and has one child or more will be eligible for a residence permit.

The new Entry and Residence Scheme offers 10 types of entry visas with simplified requirements and more benefits. New visas require no host or sponsor, offer more flexibility, multi entry, 60 days validity and one unified platform to apply at pic.twitter.com/0PsCJYaoyR

– UAEGOV (@UAEmediaoffice) [April 18, 2022](#)

Also included in this category are parents or children of a UAE citizen who holds foreign passports, as well as spouses and children of Gulf Corporation Council (GCC) state citizens who hold foreign passports.

Freelancers and self-employed people will be entitled to Green Residency, as will skilled employees, who will be required to renew their residency every five years but without the need for a sponsor or employer.

The media office added that Standard Employment Residence permits will need to be renewed every two years.

Investors, who are eligible for the Green Residency, will be able to hold a five-year visa and do not need a sponsor.

The new system for residence visas and entry permits offers new types of residence permits for investors, skilled employees, self-employment and family members. The new types provide customized benefits to each category. pic.twitter.com/7JI8qjMsKm

– UAEGOV (@UAEmediaoffice) [April 18, 2022](#)

Students enrolled at educational institutions in the UAE will be eligible to hold a visa for two years and sponsorship (by a licensed educational established in the country) will be required to uphold their residency status.

“The new system for residence visas and entry permits offers new types of residence permits for investors, skilled employees, self-employment and family members. The new types provide customized benefits to each category,” the UAE Media Office said in a tweet.



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Saudi Arabia launches visa app for Hajj, Umrah pilgrims in Tunisia

Yemen's new leader Abdullah Al-Alimi warns Houthis

Mon, 2022-04-18 01:02

RIYADH: Yemen's new leaders are "ready for war" should the latest push for peace with Houthis fail, but a senior official said they genuinely want the years-long conflict to end soon.

"Our first option is peace, but we are ready for war," Abdullah Al-Alimi said in his first interview since being named to an eight-member leadership council tasked with running the country after President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi stepped down earlier this month.

"We believe the council is in a position, with the coalition support, to score a decisive military victory," Al-Alimi said in Riyadh.

Hadi's April 7 announcement handing power to the council came at the end of talks in Riyadh that brought together all anti-Houthi factions.

The developments followed the start of a renewable two-month truce.

"We hope the dire situation in Yemen will make people have a desire to leave personal and partisan interests behind in pursuit of peace," said Al-Alimi, formerly Hadi's chief of staff.

He said council leaders are due to meet in the coming days with UN special envoy to Yemen Hans Grundberg.

The new council has not yet decided how long it will give the Houthis to join talks, Al-Alimi said.

If the push for peace goes no-where, the newly aligned anti-Houthi forces are positioned to pursue "a concerted multifront campaign" against the militia, said Peter Salisbury, senior Yemen analyst for the International Crisis Group.

"They (the leadership council) have the potential to more aggressively pursue peace and more aggressively pursue war, and the most likely outcome is they do a little bit of one and a little bit of the other," he said.



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Economic stability, alleviating citizens' suffering key priorities: Yemen's presidential council
Houthi missile hits Marib as Yemen's new leader vows to end war

Dozens of mothers of prisoners in Gaza denied access to sons

Mon, 2022-04-18 00:15

GAZA CITY: As she gets older, the Palestinian Fayza Abu Al-Qumboz becomes more afraid of dying before she can once more embrace her son, Majed, who has been in Israeli prisons for 16 years.

On April 17, when Palestinians commemorate Prisoners' Day Abu al-Qambuz, 73, along with dozens of mothers of prisoners in Gaza who have been denied access to their children in Israeli prisons for nearly 6 years, feels more grief.

The last time Abu Al-Qambuz visited her son, Majed, in Nafha prison was in 2016.

Israeli forces arrested Majed, his two brothers, his brother-in-law and about 40 members of his family and neighbors during their invasion of Al-Shojaeya neighborhood, east of Gaza City, in August 2006. They released most of them at different times, but sentenced Majed to 19 years in prison, on charges of belonging to the military wing of Hamas.

SPEEDREAD

On April 17, when Palestinians commemorate Prisoner's Day, Abu Al-Qambuz, 73, along with dozens of mothers of prisoners in Gaza who have been denied access to their children in Israeli prisons for nearly six years, feels more grief.

Majed's mother said that she was able to visit him for the first time in 2012 after the so-called "dignity strike" that the prisoners held. She went in accompanied by his daughter Zina and his son Youssef, and recalls with pain that visit: "Majed was shocked and in disbelief that Youssef, who had not yet been born at the time of his arrest, was brought to the prison at the age of six, while his feelings were more emotional towards Zina, whom he had last seen as a baby."

Although human rights institutions have obtained a judicial decision to re-allow visits to prisoners after they were stopped during the pandemic, the decision excluded about 70 Palestinian prisoners belonging to Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

For many years, Majed's mother participated in weekly activities in front of the headquarters of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Gaza in solidarity with the prisoners, but illness and the inability to walk have prevented her from participating recently. "I am afraid to die before seeing Majed free," she said.

Various institutions and organizations organize special events on Prisoners' Day in support of Palestinian detainees in Israeli prisons.

Israel prevents visits to Hamas and Islamic Jihad prisoners in an attempt to pressure Hamas to release four Israelis it has been holding.

Najat Al-Agha, longs for the embrace of her son Diaa, who has been in Israeli prisons for 30 years.

Diaa, now aged 46, belongs to the Fatah movement led by President Mahmoud Abbas. He was supposed to be released in March 2014, under an agreement that paved the way for the resumption of Palestinian-Israeli negotiations, but Israel did not abide by it.

Despite the past three decades, which have exhausted her health by moving between visiting prisons and participating in activities in support of prisoners, Al-Agha, 71, is still clinging to the hope of freedom for her son.

"The occupation forces arrested Diaa, who was 16 years old, and sentenced him to life imprisonment, and since then I miss the true joy of any occasion. Even food no longer has any flavor due to his long absence behind bars," she said.

She was one of the few mothers who were able to visit their sons in prisons last month. "Israel prevented me from visiting him for five years, and although I was sick on the day scheduled for the visit, I told myself I will visit him even if I had to crawl. My wish is to kiss and cuddle him before I die."

About 5,000 Palestinian prisoners are held in the Israel's prisons, including about 220 prisoners from Gaza, most of who were arrested before the signing of the Oslo agreement between the Palestine Liberation Organization and Israel in 1993.



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Israel police enter flashpoint Jerusalem holy site, arrest 2

[How serious is the threat of Daesh resurgence in northeast Syria?](#)

Sun, 2022-04-17 22:47

QAMISHLI, Syria: This year, the world watched in horror as the Syrian Democratic Forces and the US-led coalition rapidly mobilized to prevent what many observers viewed as Daesh's boldest attempt yet to re-establish its short-lived "caliphate" in northern Syria.

Since its territorial defeat in Iraq in 2017 and Syria in 2019, Daesh had appeared to be a spent force, its leaders hunted and forced into hiding, its followers either detained, dead or disenchanted, and its once-sizeable war chest depleted or out of reach.

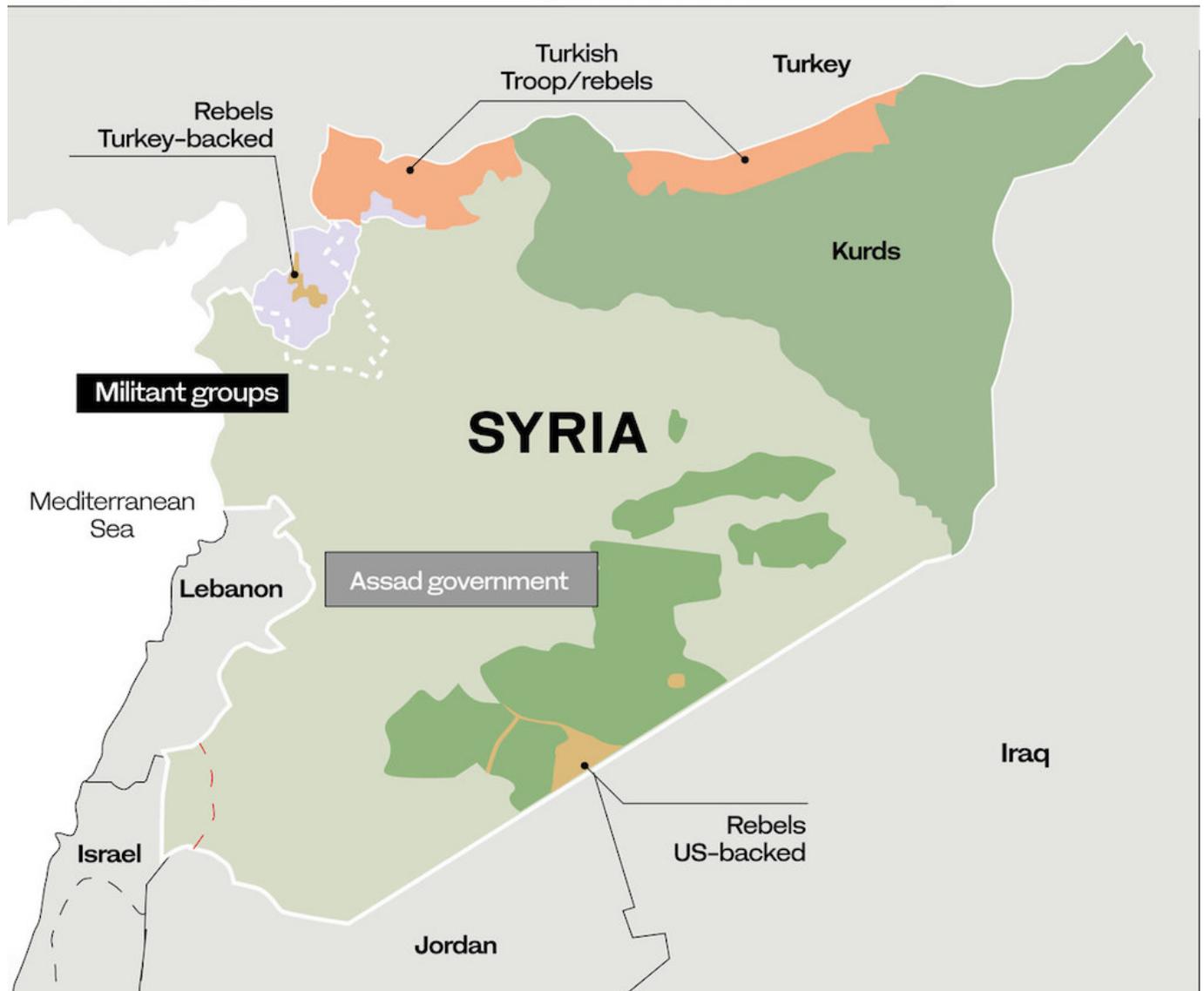
That is until January this year, when remnants of the group launched a

massive and highly sophisticated attack on a prison in northeast Syria where thousands of its former combatants were being held under guard by the SDF.

With the West now focused single-mindedly on Ukraine, and the Syrian regime's Russian allies preoccupied with activities closer to home, those on the ground in Syria warn that the threat posed by Daesh is far from over and that a resurgence could easily occur while the world's back is turned.

THE SITUATION IN SYRIA

Map showing who controls what region



Source: Jane's Conflict Monitor, The Economist

ARAB NEWS

On the evening of Jan. 20 the relative calm in Hasakah, a city of about 400,000 people in the eponymous Syrian governorate, was suddenly shattered by a thunderous blast when a truck laden with explosives detonated at the gates of Al-Sina'a Prison.

Moments later, hundreds of armed men attacked the facility from all sides with the clear intention of releasing about 5,000 Daesh-affiliated prisoners that were being held inside and returning them to the battlefield.

For several days, local forces clashed with the militants in the biggest battle the city had seen since Daesh was ousted six years earlier. The US-led coalition intervened using jets and drones, striking buildings where the militants were holed up. In response, Daesh fighters seized civilian properties near the prison, using their occupants as human shields.

“It wasn’t the kind of war where you know where the terrorists’ base is and you can go attack them,” Serhat Himo, a member of the local commando force that intervened on the first night of the attack, told Arab News.

“They took positions among civilians and because of this many civilians were killed by Daesh. We had to pull civilian bodies out of the homes.”

Some reports suggest that 374 militants were killed during the attack, along with 77 prison staff, 40 members of the SDF and four civilians. About 400 inmates remain unaccounted for, indicating that a significant number escaped.



Female members of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) deploy outside Ghwayran prison in Syria’s northeastern city of Hasakeh. (AFP)

In the Jan. 27 edition of An-Naba, Daesh’s online propaganda outlet, the militants claimed “several groups managed to get out of the (Hasakah) area safely and were transferred to safe areas.”

From the perspective of the SDF, which is responsible for defending the multi-ethnic populace of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria, the extremist threat was obvious long before Daesh’s highly coordinated prison attack.

More than a decade after the 2011 uprising against the regime of President Bashar Assad thrust Syria into a state of civil war, large swaths of the country have fallen into the hands of armed groups.

Syria's north and northwest, for instance, is controlled by an assortment of factions under the banner of the Syrian National Army, formerly known as the Free Syrian Army, and the Al-Qaeda-linked Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, or HTS.



Members of the SDF deploy outside Ghwayran prison in Syria's northeastern city of Hasakeh after having declared over the facility following its takeover by Daesh forces. (AFP)

The SNA controls the district of Afrin, having seized the area from the AANES in 2018 with the help of Turkish armed forces. It also controls Ras Al-Ain and Tel Abyad, having taken these towns in 2019, also with Turkish assistance.

Turkey intervened on both occasions to remove the Kurdish-majority People's Protection Units, known as the YPG, from areas straddling its southern border.

Ankara considers the YPG, the main contingent force within the SDF, to be the Syrian affiliate of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, which has fought a decades-long guerrilla war against the Turkish state in an effort to gain greater political and cultural rights for Kurds in Turkey.

Both the SNA and the HTS are known to have extremist elements among their ranks. According to local sources, Daesh remnants have used areas under rebel control to regroup and evade detection.

In October last year, a US drone strike killed Abdul Hamid Al-Matar, a senior Al-Qaeda operative, in the SNA-held town of Suluk in Raqqa province. Days later, a British Royal Air Force drone killed Daesh arms supplier Abu Hamza Al-Shuhail in Ras Al-Ain.

FASTFACTS

*** On Jan. 20, 2022, Daesh militants attacked Al-Sina'a Prison in Hasakah in northeast Syria.**

*** 374 militants died in the attack, along with 77 prison staff, 40 SDF fighters and 4 civilians.**

In October 2019, just months after the group's defeat in Baghouz, Daesh's former leader and erstwhile caliph, Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, was tracked down to the village of Barisha in an area of Idlib controlled by HTS. He killed himself and three of his children with a suicide vest rather than surrender to US special forces.

Just a matter of weeks after the attack in January on Al-Sinaa Prison, the SDF and US special forces traced Al-Baghdadi's successor, Abu Ibrahim Al-Qurayshi, to the town of Atmah, also in Idlib. During the course of the operation, Al-Qurayshi detonated a bomb, killing himself and his family.

Daesh announced its new leader, Abu Al-Hassan Al-Hashemi Al-Quraishi, in a recorded audio message distributed online on March 11. According to Iraqi and Western security sources quoted by Reuters, he is the brother of Al-Baghdadi.

"We defeated Daesh territorially but the mentality remains," Nouri Mahmoud, the YPG's official spokesman, told Arab News.

"Radical terrorists from Daesh, Al-Qaeda, Levant Front, the Muslim Brotherhood and others settled in Afrin, Sere Kaniye (Ras Al-Ain) and Gire Spi (Tel Abyad)."



This screen grab from AFPTV shows US soldiers gathering in an area near the Kurdish-run Ghwayran prison in the northern Syrian city of Hasakeh. (AFP)

A report published in June 2021 by Syrians for Truth and Justice, a local human rights monitor, found there to be at least 27 former Daesh militants, including senior operatives, serving in the ranks of the SNA.

“After Daesh was defeated territorially at Baghouz, many of them fled to Iraq, regime-held areas and to areas held by Turkish-backed groups, particularly Ras Al-Ain and Tel Abyad,” Kenan Barakat, co-chair of the AANES interior ministry, told Arab News. “There, they simply changed their affiliation and joined other radical groups.”

Despite the clear threat posed by these groups, the SDF and AANES have found their resources squeezed by the closure of UN-recognized border crossings and the imposition of diplomatic and trade embargoes by Turkey, which have decimated the local economy.

“As long as there is a political and economic embargo on northeast Syria, Daesh will remain,” said Mahmoud.

“As long as these other terrorist factions continue their attacks on our regions and use these areas under occupation as a rear base, Daesh will continue to seize opportunities to reorganize itself.”



More than a decade after the 2011 uprising against the regime of President Bashar Assad thrust Syria into a state of civil war, large swaths of the country have fallen into the hands of armed groups. (AN Photo/Ali Ali)

The terror group's recent attempts at a resurgence are not confined to the incident at Al-Sina'a Prison. In the days and weeks since the attack on the jail, residents of Al-Hol detention camp, also in Hasakah, have staged repeated escape attempts.

Known as "a ticking time bomb" and "the world's most dangerous camp," Al-Hol is home to about 56,000 people. More than half them are Iraqi and about 8,000 are foreign nationals or the wives and children of militants from Europe and elsewhere.

The camp's population grew rapidly in early 2019 following Daesh's territorial defeat in Baghouz. Since then, the residents of Al-Hol have made repeated attempts at creating a kind of pseudo-caliphate within the camp.

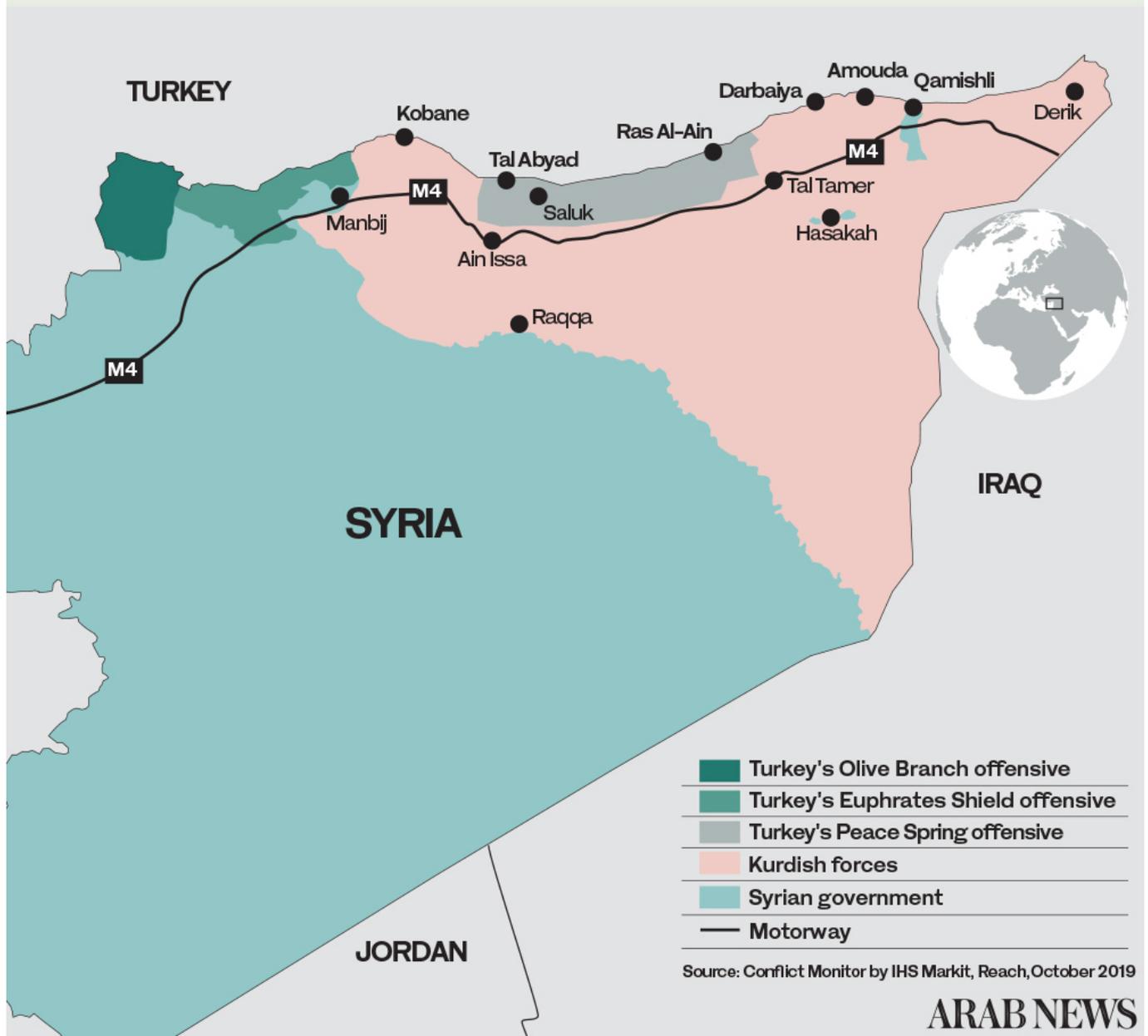
"Those in the camp, both men and women, have tried many times to start a war in the camp," said Barakat.

"They have started uprisings, burned tents and killed members of the Internal Security Forces. They wanted to recreate the scenario at Ghweiran (Al-Sina'a) Prison in the camp but our forces interfered and stopped them."

Many of the children in the camp are now reaching their teenage years, having been raised with Daesh ideology imparted by their mothers. Camp administrators fear they are witnessing the coming of age of a resentful and highly-radicalized new generation of militants.

TURKISH-CONTROLLED AREAS INSIDE SYRIA

Kurdish forces were pushed back from the border when Turkey and its Syrian proxies launched Operation Peace Spring in October 2019



Many in the local administration believe it is only a matter of time before a major escape attempt succeeds, unless the international community acts immediately.

The AANES and SDF have repeatedly called on Western governments to repatriate their citizens from the camp and to establish special courts to try foreign Daesh members so that they can be placed into proper detention facilities.

“These Daesh members are from many countries – nearly 50 nationalities can be found among them,” said Barakat. “This is not just a Syrian issue. It is an international issue. Daesh threatens many states around the world.”

He fears there is a high probability of a Daesh resurgence unless the world sits up, takes notice and takes action.

“Victory against Daesh is a victory for everyone,” he added.



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