

Saudi Court Gives Death Sentences to 14 Shia Activists

RIYADH (Dispatches) – A Saudi court has given death sentences to over a dozen young Shia activists from the restive Qatif region, which has been the scene of peaceful protest rallies against the ruling Al Saudi regime in recent years.

Lebanon's al-Manar television channel reported that 14 activists were sentenced to death on Thursday by the Supreme Court in Riyadh for taking part in the anti-regime protests gripping the kingdom's Eastern Province, where the Qatif region is located.

According to the report, the trial process preceding the verdicts took place at the criminal court dealing with terrorism-related cases, a tribunal viewed by legal experts as an Interior Ministry tool to suppress opposition activists.

This is while some of the defendants had said during the hearing sessions that they were forced into false confessions through physical and psychological torture.

The rulers in Riyadh have been under fire by international rights group for using the so-called "anti-terrorism law" to silence critical voices in the kingdom. Riyadh adopted a revised version of the law in 2014, enabling tougher penalties for those found guilty of terrorism.



The file photo shows anti-regime protesters chanting slogans in Qatif, Saudi Arabia.

In May, the UN's special rapporteur on human rights and counter-terrorism, Ben Emmerson, urged Saudi Arabia to stop using the law against people peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly.

The tough verdicts were issued amid the latest wave of unrest in the Shia town of Awamiyah in Qatif, which

has repeatedly come under attack by regime forces over the past weeks.

Qatif was home to Shia cleric Sheikh Nimr Baqir al-Nimr, an outspoken critic of the Saudi policies whose execution in 2016 by the Riyadh regime sparked angry protests at home and abroad as well as widespread international condemnations.

The Shia-populated Eastern Province

has been the scene of peaceful demonstrations since February 2011.

Protesters have been demanding reforms, freedom of expression, the release of political prisoners, and an end to economic and religious discrimination against the oil-rich region, but the marchers have been met with a heavy-handed crack down by the Saudi military.

Taliban Militants Kill 15 Afghan Soldiers in Kandahar

KABUL (Dispatches) – Taliban militants have killed at least 15 Afghan soldiers during an attack on an army base in Afghanistan's southern province of Kandahar.

Dawlat Waziri, a spokesman for the Afghan Defense Ministry, said on Friday that the militants "launched a coordinated assault on an army base last night (Thursday) in the Shah Wali Kot district of Kandahar province."

"Fifteen Afghan army soldiers were martyred and five others wounded," he added.

However, a provincial official,

who asked not to be named, put the death toll at 20.

The assault is the second of its kind in less than a week.

At least 10 Afghan soldiers were killed in a Taliban attack on the Achakzai camp of army corps 205 in the same district on May 22.

The number of Taliban attacks across Afghanistan climbs every spring, when the militants increasingly target government officials and U.S.-led foreign forces in the country. Many ordinary people often fall victim to such attacks as well.

In another development, at least three people have lost their lives when a U.S. drone carried out a strike in the eastern part of Afghanistan on the border with Pakistan.

Kamran Afridi, a local official in the Pakistani border town of Miran Shah, said the deadly drone strike was carried out on the Afghan village of Grouwek in Khost province.

According to the Associated Press, militant sources confirmed the attack, saying a compound targeted in the strike belonged to a local

Taliban commander.

The CIA spy agency has used hundreds of drones to conduct surveillance flights and airstrikes since Washington and its allies invaded Afghanistan in 2001.

The U.S. military is considering whether to deploy 3,000 to 5,000 more military advisers to help train and assist Afghan security forces battling a 16-year militancy by the Taliban.

The United States and its allies invaded Afghanistan in 2001. The invasion did remove the Taliban from power, but has failed to stop its terror campaign to this day.

More Civilians Killed in U.S. Raid on Yemen

SANAA (Dispatches) – A London-based human rights group says five civilians were among the victims of a recent U.S. raid on Yemen, challenging the American version of the attack that says only militants were slain.

The U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) claimed in a statement that it had conducted an operation against Yemen's central province of Ma'rib, killing seven members of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) militant group.

The attack was carried out "through a combination of small arms fire and precision airstrikes" in a bid to "provide insight into AQAP's disposition, capabilities and intentions," the statement read.

Reprieve rights group said that local sources in Ma'rib's al-Jubah village had reported civilian casualties.

It quoted the sources as saying that the U.S. raid went wrong from the start as US Navy SEALs opened fire on a 70-year-old partially blind man, identified as Nasser al-Adhal, who had stepped out to welcome the arrivals, thinking they were guests.

Four other men also emerged from their homes after the shooting of the old man, but they were fatally shot by the U.S. forces, the sources were further cited as saying.

Kate Higham, who leads investigations into assassinations at Reprieve, said the rights group was "still trying to get a really full picture of exactly what

happened."

In another development, airstrikes by Saudi Arabia and a number of its vassal states on residential buildings in Yemen's south have killed six civilians, including women and children.

The indiscriminate airstrikes hit houses in the southern Yemeni city of Ta'izz on Friday, killing the six people and injuring a number of others, Yemen's al-Masirah TV reported.

Saudi Arabia has been leading an invasion of Yemen from the air, land, and sea since March 2015. The war has been killing increasingly large numbers of civilians, raising concerns among international rights organizations and the United Nations (UN).

Those organizations have been

repeatedly calling on Saudi Arabia and the countries it has been shepherding in the war to end the indiscriminate targeting of areas in impoverished Yemen.

The aggressor regimes have also imposed a total embargo on Yemen, causing severe shortages of food and medicine. A recent cholera epidemic has been blamed on those shortages.

On Friday, warplanes from the Saudi-led coalition also pounded the east-central city of Ma'rib, although no casualty figures were available from those strikes.

A Yemeni movement called Ansarullah has teamed up with loyal army forces, and they have been fighting the invaders together, including by launching retaliatory strikes.

and could not be appealed according to the rules of the Military Field Tribunal.

Fuqahaa was shot in the head four times at the entrance to a residence in the Tal al-Hawa neighborhood of Gaza City on March 24. The assassination was carried out with a gun equipped with a silencer.

Palestinian security forces in the besieged enclave had detained Fuqahaa's assassin in early May.

Iran's ...

(Continued From Page One)

Iran's Defense Minister Brigadier General Hussein Dehqan on Thursday hailed the country's self-sufficiency in producing ballistic and cruise missiles.

"All efforts in the region today are directed at weakening Iran, and preserving Israel's security and the U.S. arms market, but Iran is standing strong," he said.

Dehqan said, "Turning Saudi Arabia into a stockpile for American weapons is not a thing for them to be proud of," the minister said.

"We tell Arab rulers to submit to the demands of their nations," Dehqan said, reminding them of the fate of the former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein, and urging them to abandon "servitude" to big powers.

Iran has learned that acceding to the hegemonic powers equals a negation of national identity, the minister said.

Qassemi, meanwhile, said Saudi leaders will take their wish to provoke a military attack against the Islamic Republic to their graves.

The strong-worded reaction came after Saudi Deputy Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman said in a recent interview that his country "will work to have the battle in Iran."

"Some have been entertaining such wishes for quite a long time, but they will take them to their graves," Qassemi said, describing Saudi leaders' remarks against Iran "unwise and wrong".

"They are trying to buy security for themselves with these methods and such statements but security to be bought is not enduring and will be of no consequence," the spokesman said.

Qassemi was referring to a \$110-billion arms deal which U.S. President Donald Trump clinched with Saudi Arabia during his recent visit to the kingdom.

"Naturally, security will not be achieved by purchasing numerous weapons. Contemporary history is witness that countries with a large arsenal and military capabilities had their situation totally changed in the end and this can happen to others as well," he said.

The Saudi kingdom could only achieve lasting security by relying on its own people and establishing democratic mechanisms that enable popular electoral participation, Qassemi added.

U.S. ...

(Continued From Page One)

The Thursday evening airstrike in Mayadeen killed at least 35 civilians, including family members of Daesh terrorists, said the Observatory.

The deaths bring the total number of people killed in two days of aerial bombardment in Mayadeen to 115 said the monitor.

Residents saw reconnaissance aircraft and warplanes circling the city at 7.25pm local time before they fired missiles which struck two buildings, one of which was a four-storey block housing Syrian and Moroccan families of Daesh militants.

Daesh is losing ground in both Syria and Iraq under assault from an array of sometimes rival forces in both countries. Many of its terrorists who have retreated from other fronts are amassing in Syria's Euphrates basin area.

Between 23 April and 23 May the Observatory reported that at least 225 civilians had been killed in U.S. strikes.

On Thursday, the U.S. confirmed that one of its airstrikes in Mosul in March killed at least 105 civilians.

The U.S. bombed a concrete building in Mosul's western Jadida district, where Iraqi forces were fighting against terrorists, on March 17. The deadly aerial assault caused the building to collapse.

A Pentagon investigation found that a 500-pound U.S. GBU-38 bomb triggered secondary explosions from devices clandestinely planted by Daesh in the building, causing the structure to collapse.

U.S. military officials said 36 civilians were still unaccounted for. Local officials and eyewitnesses say as many as 240 people may have been killed in the U.S. air raid.

The death toll is one of the highest in the military camping led by the U.S. against what are said to be Daesh targets.

The U.S. and some of its allies have been carrying out airstrikes in Iraq since June 2014. They have done little to dislodge Daesh but have claimed many civilian lives and heavily damaged the Iraqi and Syrian infrastructure.

Takfiri ...

(Continued From Page One)

Suicide bombers with the Takfiri group struck a Cairo church on December 11, next to the seat of the Coptic pope, killing 29 people.

On April 11, bombers attacked two churches north of Cairo on Palm Sunday, killing 45 people, in the deadliest strike in living memory against the Copts.

The bombings prompted President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi to declare a three-month state of emergency.

The Egyptian affiliate of Daesh has also killed several Copts in North Sinai, forcing dozens of families to flee the province in January.

Friday's shooting came after a historic visit to Egypt by Roman Catholic Pope Francis to show solidarity with the country's Christians.

Al-Azhar, Egypt's top religious authority, condemned Friday's shooting which took place on the eve of the start of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

"The Minya incident is unacceptable to Muslims and Christians and it targets Egypt's stability," Al-Azhar's Grand Imam Ahmed al-Tayeb said in a statement.

Sisi has defended the performance of his security forces and accused extremists of trying to divide Egyptian society by attacking vulnerable minorities.

Iran ...

(Continued From Page 2)

The ambassador cited tragedies, such as the U.S. bombing of the Médecins Sans Frontières hospital in Kunduz, Afghanistan in October 2015 and declaring it as a mistake, which ended without any military personnel involved being convicted.

Khoshroo said the Saudi-led aggression in Yemen since March 2015 "has led to many well documented war crimes, including the destruction of much civilian infrastructure, including medical facilities and this aggression continues unabated under the watch of this council."

"Worse even, this unfortunate misadventure is enjoying the ever increasing military, logistical and training support of the United States and its air force," he said.

Khoshroo said there needs to be greater efforts to document and analyze all incidents that affect the security and wellbeing of health-care workers and facilities, and ensure that impartial, independent and prompt investigations are carried out and that those who are found to be perpetrating such acts are brought to justice.

The UN Security Council, he said, "must abandon its double standards when it comes to bombing humanitarian and health facilities and workers."

"By highlighting some attacks and remaining silent on others, the Council discredits its own resolutions, especially 2286," he said.

Pakistan ...

(Continued From Page 2)

The so-called Jaish ul-Adl terrorist group claimed responsibility for the attack in a statement. The assailants escaped into Pakistani territory immediately after the attack.

Shamkhani undefined the need for boosting security in border areas between Iran and Pakistan to prevent activities of terrorist groups.

The Pakistani official, for his part, welcomed further promotion of bilateral ties and said the Iranian foreign minister's recent visit to Islamabad had resulted in more coordination between the two countries in fending off any act of violence at border areas.

Earlier this month, Mohamamd Javad Zarif visited Islamabad, where he held talks with senior Pakistani officials following the attack on the Iranian border guards.

Separately, Shamkhani also met with Meng Jianzhu, the secretary of the Central political and Legal Affairs Commission of China's Communist Party.

Shamkhani said the U.S. was helping Takfiri terrorism in Syria by making up excuses and fabricating lies regarding last month's suspected chemical attack on the town of Khan Shaykhun in the northwestern province of Idlib.

The Chinese official, for his part, expressed concern about U.S. unilateralism in the region and said a recent U.S. deal to sell Saudi Arabia arms worth billions of dollars undermined peace and security in the region.

On the first day of U.S. President Donald Trump's visit to Saudi Arabia, Washington sealed a nearly \$110 billion arms deal with Riyadh.

The Chinese official also praised Iran's role in the fight against terrorism and extremism, and underlined the need for constant consultations between Beijing and Tehran on the issue.

Shamkhani also held separate talks with his Turkish and North African counterparts.

Three Executed Over Assassination of Top Hamas Commander

GAZA STRIP (Dispatches) – The Palestinian resistance movement Hamas has executed three men convicted of assassinating one of its high-ranking military commanders in the Gaza Strip earlier this year.

Two men were hanged in Gaza City for killing 38-year-old military commander Mazen Fuqahaa in March, while a third was executed by a firing squad.

The executions came after a

tribunal on Sunday found Ashraf Abu Leila, the prime suspect in the assassination of Fuqahaa, guilty of premeditated murder, treason and conspiracy with hostile foreign parties, and sentenced him to death by hanging.

The others were identified as Hisham al-Aloul, 44, who was also sentenced to death by hanging, and Abdallah al-Nashar, who was to face the firing squad. They were all

convicted of collaborating with the Zionist regime.

Aloul was convicted of conspiracy and treason as well as involvement in the killing of the senior Hamas commander.

Nashar was found guilty of treason and conspiracy, and leaking information about Fuqahaa's movements and his hangouts.

Judicial sources had earlier said that Sunday's verdicts were final