

'CIA Sought Syria's Help to Free U.S. Hostage'

DAMASCUS (Dispatches) – The U.S. Central Intelligence Agency has set up a back channel to Syria in an attempt to free an American hostage there, according to a new report.

The move to free former Marine officer Austin Tice came after Mike Pompeo was elected to lead the CIA during the early days of President Donald Trump's time in the White House, The New York Times reported, citing administration officials.

Pompeo even talked to Ali Mamlouk, the head of Syria's National Security Bureau intelligence service, over the phone, the highest-level contact between Washington and Damascus in years.

The phone call, followed by more high-profile communications between the two governments, raised hopes for Tice's freedom, officials noted.

However, the effort fell flat after Trump's authorization in April of a Tomahawk cruise missile attack on a Syrian airbase that Washington claimed was being used to carry out chemical attacks on civilians, a claim that was never backed up by evidence.

Syria has firmly denied the unsubstantiated claims by former White House officials that Tice was being held by the government of President Bashar al-Assad.

"Austin Tice is not in the hands



U.S. Central Intelligence Agency Director Mike Pompeo

of Syrian authorities, and we don't have any information about him at all," Syria's Deputy Foreign Minister Faisal Mekdad told the media last year.

Tice, a Texan, traveled to Syria before his final year in Georgetown Law School and worked as a freelance journalist before being abducted by unknown parties in August 2012.

Later on, video footage emerged showing him blindfolded and

surrounded by terrorists.

According to the report, some former U.S. officials tried to brief Trump on his team on Tice's situation after the Republican president's January 20 inauguration.

They discussed the matter with Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner and White House chief strategist Steve Bannon only to be met with a cold response. The latter even asked why Tice had traveled to Syria in the

first place.

The issue of U.S. hostages and prisoners abroad jumped to the spotlight after the last week death of Otto Warmbier, an alleged American spy in North Korea who returned to the U.S. while comatose and died shortly after.

The Daesh terrorist group has released several propaganda videos appearing to show a number of U.S. citizens being executed.

UAE Abuse in Yemen Secret Prisons 'Will Be Investigated'



A Yemeni man looks at the rubble of houses destroyed in a Saudi coalition air strike in Sana'a on June 9, 2017.

SANAA (Dispatches) – Former President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi's government said on Saturday it was investigating reports that forces backed by the United Arab Emirates were running secret prisons in southern Yemen where detainees are subjected to torture and abuse.

The UAE is part of a Saudi-led Arab alliance that launched Yemen's war in 2015.

Reports of secret prisons where

detainees are abused relate to areas of the south where UAE forces and its allies have also swooped against al-Qaeda militants, who have exploited the war to try to carve out areas of control and influence.

Last week, New York-based Human Rights Watch reported that it had documented the cases of 49 people, including four children, whom it said were arbitrarily detained or forcibly disappeared in

Aden and Hadramout over the last year.

Yemeni Prime Minister Ahmed bin Daghr said he had set up a six-member committee headed by the justice minister to investigate "human rights allegations in liberated areas".

"The committee starts work from today and sends its report to the prime minister within 15 days," the order, dated June 22, said. The committee's duties were to investigate the abuse allegations, ways to respond to them and to put forth mechanisms to deal with any such issues in the future.

The Associated Press documented at least 18 secret jails across southern Yemen run by the UAE or by Yemeni militia loyal to the former Yemeni government, where prisoners face extreme abuse and torture on a routine basis.

On Wednesday, senior U.S. defense officials confirmed that the American forces have been involved in interrogations of detainees in Yemen but denied any participation in or knowledge of human rights violations.

Several torturing methods are being used at the jails, including the "grill" in which the victim is tied to a spit like a roast and spins in a circle of fire, according to the report.

Former inmates released from one main detention facility at Riyan airport in the southern city of Mukalla, said they were crammed into shipping containers covered with feces and blindfolded for weeks. They said they were beaten, trussed up on the "grill," and sexually abused.

"The entire place is gripped by fear. Almost everyone is sick, the rest are near death. Anyone who complains heads directly to the torture chamber," said a former detainee held for six months at Riyan airport.

So far, over 400 men have disappeared after being swept up in Mukalla.

The UAE secret jail network in Yemen was established during former U.S. president Barack Obama's administration and still continues its operations, according to the report.

French Journalist Dies of Wounds Sustained in Iraq's Mosul

PARIS (Dispatches) – French journalist Véronique Robert has died from wounds she sustained in a mine explosion in the western part of Mosul earlier this week as she was covering Iraqi government forces' advances to retake the country's second largest city from Daesh terrorists.

Sophie Pommier, a spokeswoman for the French Embassy in Baghdad, said Robert lost her life at a hospital in the French capital Paris on Saturday.

The journalist had been repatriated and transferred to the hospital on Friday after being operated in Baghdad.

State-owned France Television said Robert had covered numerous



This photo taken on November 13, 2007, shows French journalist Véronique Robert in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates.

conflicts.

French video journalist Stephan Villeneuve and Iraqi Kurdish journalist Bakhtiyar Haddad, who were working with Robert, were killed in the June 19 explosion in Mosul. Haddad died moments after the blast and Villeneuve died hours later from his wounds.

They were reporting for investigative news program Envoye Special broadcast by France 2 national television channel.

Reporter Samuel Forey, who worked for a number of French media organizations, including French daily Le Figaro, also suffered light injuries in the act of terror.

Zionist ...

(Continued From Page One)

Citing militant commanders and people familiar with Israel's thinking, the paper said Israel's "secret engagement" in the war aims to install a buffer zone on the Syrian border with elements friendly to Tel Aviv.

The Syrian army has on several occasions confiscated Israeli-made arms and military equipment from terrorists fighting the government forces. There are also reports that Israel has been providing medical treatment to the extremists wounded in Syria.

In April, Israel's former minister of military affairs Moshe Ya'alon admitted to a tacit alliance with Daesh, saying the terrorist group had "immediately apologized" to Tel Aviv after firing "once" at Israeli targets.

Iran ...

(Continued From Page One)

Meanwhile, the Lebanese resistance movement of Hezbollah denounced as a "sinful crime" the Mecca incident, saying it is part of a series of atrocities committed by terrorists across the Arab and Muslim world.

In a statement, Hezbollah's Media Relations said the attempted attack proved once again that the Takfiris' criminal ideology "pays no respect to a sacred place or a holy time."

Images posted on social media showed an alley filled with bricks and other debris apparently from the Mecca explosion.

Before surrounding the bomber, Saudi police arrested five suspected militants, including a woman, in raids on Mecca and the port city of Jeddah.

Terrorists ...

(Continued From Page One)

Hundreds of Pakistanis have gone to fight in Syria to defend the country against foreign-backed terrorists.

The market bombings in Parachinar late on Friday afternoon came on a particularly deadly day for Pakistan as both Sunni and Shia Muslims prepared to mark the Eid al-Fitr holiday marking the end of the holy fasting month of Ramadan.

Another bombing in the southwestern city of Quetta killed 13 people and a drive-by shooting killed four police officers in the southern megacity of Karachi on Friday.

Both of those attacks were claimed by another militant group, the Jamaat ur Ahrar faction of the Pakistani Taliban.

Daesh also claimed the Quetta attack through a messaging network. It had not commented on the Parachinar attack by Saturday afternoon.

Pakistan's military said late Friday it had tightened security across the country, including at the Afghan border, following the attacks.

"Enemy trying to mar festive mood of nation through such coward acts. Shall fail against resilience of Pakistan," Pakistan army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa was quoted as saying in a tweet from the chief military spokesman.

Iran's ...

(Continued From Page 2)

The Trump administration is planning to step up its lobbying against parts of the bipartisan Senate bill slapping new sanctions on Russian and Iran, a senior official said, quoted by U.S. newspapers on Friday.

The White House opposes provisions that could be seen as preempting the president's powers, the official said. Of particular concern is a congressional review process that would allow the House and Senate to block the president from lifting sanctions.

The House blocked progress on the Senate-passed bill against Iran earlier this week, arguing that it flouted the constitutional provision requiring revenue-raising bills to originate in the House. That prompted accusations from Democrats that the House Republican leaders were trying to stall the bill at Trump's request.

While the procedural snag could be cleared as soon as next week, it remains unclear when the House will take final action.

The Trump administration has publicly warned against impeding presidential prerogatives to relieve sanctions.

The White House official said the administration's concern is one of separation of powers and not policy toward Russia and Iran.

Nasrallah ...

(Continued From Page 2)

"This doesn't mean there are states that might intervene directly. But this could open the way for thousands, even hundreds of thousands of fighters from all over the Arab and Islamic world to participate - from Iraq, Yemen, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan," he said.

Nasrallah has repeatedly warned the occupying regime of Israel against attacking Lebanon. Experts on the group say the warnings are part of a policy of deterrence that has also included revealing some of its military capabilities.

Nasrallah said in recent months Hezbollah's rocket arsenal can hit any military target in Occupied Palestine, which is Lebanon's southern neighbor.

He said any Israeli war with Lebanon or the Gaza Strip, which is run by the Palestinian resistance movement Hamas, would be "very costly" and that the occupying regime would not be able to win.

Israel has targeted senior Hezbollah commanders in air raids on Syrian soil. But there has been no major confrontation between Hezbollah and the Zionist regime in Lebanon since a month-long war between the two sides in 2006.