

‘Wounded Terrorist Commander Undergoes Surgery in Turkey’

ANKARA (Dispatches) – The commander-in-chief of the Takfiri Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) terrorist group has reportedly been transported to Turkey and underwent a surgery there, after being seriously wounded at a double bomb attack in Syria’s northwestern city of Idlib.

According to a report published by the Turkish-language service of Russia’s Sputnik news agency, Ahmed Hussein al-Shar’a, better known by the nom de guerre Abu Mohammad al-Julani, was wounded when a shrapnel struck his head on Monday.

He was then rushed to a hospital in the southern Turkish city of Antakya, where he was treated for his concussion-like symptoms.

“The person brought to Antakya State Hospital is the terrorist Abu Mohammad al-Julani,” an unnamed Turkish medical source told Sputnik.

The report was later cited in Turkey’s media outlets, including up-market daily newspaper Cumhuriyet, Aydinlik newspaper of the Patriotic Party, Memleket daily newspaper, Haber newspaper, news portal Sol as well as online Turkish language newspaper Diken.

The so-called Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said at least 15 people, including four children, lost their lives and more than 50 others suffered injuries when twin car bombs rocked Idlib.

The UK-based monitor group said the first blast was caused by an explosive device planted under a car in Qusour neighborhood during rush



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hour.

A motorcycle bomb then detonated after ambulances arrived at the scene of the first blast, the Observatory added.

Idlib has been hit by a series of bombings in recent months that have killed or wounded scores of people.

HTS, which is a coalition of different factions

of terror outfits, largely composed of the Jabhat Fateh al-Sham terrorist group, holds a large part of the city.

Syria has been gripped by foreign-backed militancy since March 2011. The Syrian government says the Israeli regime and its Western and regional allies are aiding terrorist groups wreaking havoc in the country.

Bahrain Court Gives Life Sentence to Nine Anti-Regime Activists

MANAMA (Press TV) – A court in Bahrain has sentenced nine anti-regime protesters to life imprisonment and handed down prison sentences to several others as the ruling Al Khalifah regime presses ahead with its heavy-handed clampdown on political dissidents and pro-democracy campaigners in the Persian Gulf kingdom.

Bahrain’s attorney general Ahmad al-Hamadi said the Fourth High Criminal Court sentenced six defendants to life in prison on Tuesday after finding them guilty of “having received training in the use of munitions, possession of explosive devices and weapons for terrorist purposes, hiding

convicted citizens and entering and leaving Bahrain.”

Hamadi added that six defendants were sentenced to ten years in jail, one was given a five-year jail term and three others received three-year prison sentences. The court also stripped three of the political dissidents of their citizenship, and ordered a dozen of them to pay a fine of 500 dinars (\$1,326).

Separately, the same court found three anti-regime protesters guilty of “having received training in Iran and Iraq” and sentenced them to life imprisonment. The trio were also ordered to pay a fine of 300 dinars (\$795).

It also sentenced a dissident to seven years in prison and handed down five-year jail terms to two others. The court revoked the citizenship of five of the convicts as well.

Thousands of anti-regime protesters have held demonstrations in Bahrain on an almost daily basis ever since a popular uprising began in the country in mid-February 2011.

They are demanding that the Al Khalifah regime relinquish power and allow a just system representing all Bahrainis to be established.

Manama has gone to great lengths to clamp down on any sign of dissent. On March 14, 2011, troops from Saudi Ara-

bia and the United Arab Emirates were deployed to assist Bahrain in its crackdown.

Scores of people have lost their lives and hundreds of others sustained injuries or got arrested as a result of the Al Khalifah regime’s crackdown.

On March 5, 2017, Bahrain’s parliament approved the trial of civilians at military tribunals in a measure blasted by human rights campaigners as being tantamount to imposition of an undeclared martial law countrywide.

Bahraini monarch King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifah ratified the constitutional amendment on April 3, 2017.

Syrian Army Finds U.S., Israeli-Made Weapons Near Damascus

DAMASCUS (Dispatches) – The Syrian army has discovered weapons made by the U.S. and the Zionist regime left behind by terrorists in the region around Damascus, the Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA) reported.

Terrorist groups fighting the Syrian government left many weapons caches behind as they were retreating from the Syrian army; these are now being discovered in sweeping operations being conducted by the Syrian Army.

Earlier in December, Syrian Security Forces discovered another big warehouse loaded with weapons left behind by terrorist groups in Daraa province in the south of the country. It contained numerous rifles, mortars, U.S.-made Tao anti-tank missiles and recon drones.

In another development, Badran Jiakurd, an adviser to the so-called Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (NES), a semi-autonomous region, told Sputnik the U.S. is likely to retain control over the Kurdish-populated areas in northeastern Syria by keeping its troops

in neighbouring Iraqi Kurdistan and reserving the right to intervene if needed..

“We believe that the withdrawal will take a long time, and there could be a presence of the American military in the Iraqi Kurdistan near the border with northern Syria. This U.S. military presence could be strategic to allow the U.S. air force to intervene when necessary, so that NES would remain under the U.S. control. In our judgment, we think that there is a plan in this direction,” Jiakurd said.

According to the official, after the full victory over the last pocket of the Daesh in Syria’s Dayr al-Zawr is finally announced, “the U.S. strategy, goals, and areas of military deployment in the region would be clearer.”

He said that Kurds did not support the troop withdrawal because such a sudden move would create a power vacuum and lead to terrorists flocking to the area.

Egypt Executes Nine Men Over Killing of Public Prosecutor

CAIRO (Dispatches) – Egyptian authorities have executed nine men convicted over the 2015 killing of the country’s chief prosecutor, a prison source and a lawyer said on Wednesday.

The men were among a group of 28 who were sentenced to death in the case in 2017. Public prosecutor Hisham Barakat was killed in a car bomb attack on his convoy in the capital, Cairo.

Rights group Amnesty International had appealed on Tuesday for authorities to halt the executions, citing testimony by the defendants that they had been secretly de-

tained and tortured into confessing.

Amnesty International had issued a warning on Tuesday.

“There is no doubt that those involved in deadly attacks must be prosecuted and held accountable for their actions,” said Najia Bounaim, Amnesty’s North Africa campaigns director. “But executing prisoners or convicting people based on confessions extracted through torture is not justice.”

The convicts had appealed the death sentences, but Egypt’s top court upheld the

ruling in November last year.

Nineteen others were sentenced to varying prison terms in the case.

Of the total convicts, 13 were tried in absentia. Officials say they will be entitled to a new trial if they are ever located and apprehended by law enforcement.

Since 2013, the year that then-army chief Abdel Fattah al-Sisi military ousted President Mohamed Mursi of the Muslim Brotherhood, Egyptian criminal courts have issued hundreds of death sentences.

U.S. ... (Continued From Page One)

predicted a military pronouncement in favor of Guaido as early as Jan. 23, the day he proclaimed himself president at a rally in Caracas. Yet only a handful of active officers backed Guaido.

“I don’t think (Washington) understood the complexities of the target, of Venezuela: all the overlapping security that Maduro has available; the things at his disposal,” said one former U.S. administration official in touch with current officials.

The West’s fear is that a standoff will drag on for months, disillusioning opposition supporters while allowing Maduro to prove that an escalating economic crisis is due to the U.S. sanctions.

“The longer times passes and the opposition doesn’t pose a legitimate threat to Maduro, the more confident he will get,” said Raul Gallegos, an analyst with the consultancy Control Risks. He noted that Cuba, Zimbabwe and Iran all resisted international opprobrium and sanctions for decades.

“Chavistas are willing to drive this country into a level of despondency and reduce the economy to a level Venezuela hasn’t seen in decades as long as they can remain in power,” he said.

On Tuesday, Venezuela’s military said it was on alert at its frontiers following threats by U.S. President Donald Trump and suspended air and sea links with the island of Curacao ahead of a planned aid shipment.

Guaido has vowed to bring “aid” in from various points Saturday “one way or another”. But commanders doubled down on their allegiance to President Maduro after Trump urged them to abandon him.

“The armed forces will remain deployed and on alert along the borders... to avoid any violations of territorial integrity,” said Defense Minister Vladimir Padrino.

The U.S. package is being stored in Colombia near the Venezuelan border and Guaido aims also to bring in consignments via Brazil and Curacao, which is off the coast of Venezuela.

A Brazilian presidential spokesman said the country was cooperating with the United States but would leave it to Venezuelans to take the goods over the border.

Maduro says the aid plan is a smokescreen for a U.S. invasion. He blames American sanctions and “economic war” for Venezuela’s crisis.

Plan ... (Continued From Page One)

An initial report by the committee said that “strong private commercial interests have been pressing aggressively” to transfer sensitive technology to Saudi Arabia.

“These commercial entities stand to reap billions of dollars through contracts associated with constructing and operating nuclear facilities in Saudi Arabia -- and apparently have been in close and repeated contact with President Trump and his administration to the present day,” the report said.

The United States cannot legally transfer nuclear technology to countries without reaching so-called Section 123 agreements, which provide assurances of peaceful energy use.

The House committee voiced fear that Saudi Arabia -- the world’s top oil exporter -- could convert U.S. knowhow into making a nuclear bomb.

The committee said that the leading proponent of building nuclear plants in Saudi Arabia has been IP3 International, a company whose subsidiary in 2016 listed retired Army lieutenant general Michael Flynn as an advisor.

Flynn served briefly as Trump’s national security adviser before resigning over lying about alleged secret communications with Russia, for which he was convicted and is awaiting sentencing.

The Trump administration in its very first week tried to rush through approval of IP3’s bid to build nuclear plants in Saudi Arabia until a legal adviser ruled that Flynn had a

conflict of interest, the committee said, citing whistleblowers.

IP3’s influence has apparently not ended, with the committee voicing alarm at a report by news site Axios that Trump personally met with representatives of the company among other firms just last week.

Another key proponent of transfers to Saudi Arabia, according to the committee, has been Thomas Barrack, a businessman with longstanding interests in the Arab world who organized Trump’s inauguration.

He recently drew controversy for playing down Saudi Arabia’s killing of Khashoggi, an incident that has hardened views in the U.S. Congress against Prince Muhammad.

Barrack told a forum that “the atrocities in America are equal, or worse” to those in Saudi Arabia, whose agents strangled and dismembered the Washington Post contributor after he was lured into the kingdom’s consulate in Istanbul, according to officials. Barrack later apologized.

U.S. lawmakers, including some Republican allies of Trump, have been pushing for the United States to distance itself from the Saudi crown prince in the wake of Khashoggi’s killing and the devastating Saudi-led, U.S.-backed war on Yemen, where millions are on the brink of starvation in what the United Nations calls the world’s most serious humanitarian crisis.

A group of senators including Marco Rubio, a Republican of Florida, last year jointly appealed to Trump to freeze talks on a 123 agreement with Saudi Arabia, questioning the judgment of the kingdom’s policymakers.

The United States in 2009 completed a 123 agreement with the United Arab Emirates in which the U.S. ally pledged not to enrich domestic uranium or reprocess spent fuel, steps that could be used to build a nuclear bomb.

Saudi Arabia has walked back from similar promises, with reports even that the occupying regime of Israel might be helping the kingdom with its nuclear quest.

Iran... (Continued From Page 2)

denunciations of terrorism by senior clerics in favor of justifications by junior or marginal juristsprudents they claim to find more persuasive, the article said. It also makes it difficult for Iran’s opponents to deploy religion as a politically unifying, integrating factor in a regional coalition that includes non-state actors and militias. The last time this was systematically attempted, by the U.S., Pakistan and Saudi Arabia during the Afghan war in the 1980s, it helped defeat the Soviet Union, but also produced Qaeda and the Taliban, the article said.

Instead, “Iran and its small but potent coalition do enjoy some clear advantages, including much stronger unity and relative integration” and as Warsaw demonstrated so clearly, the utter disarray on the other side, it added.

Pakistan... (Continued From Page 2)

Three Iranians from Sistan and Baluchestan province in south-east Iran were also part of the cell and two of them have been arrested, according to Pakpour. The guards announced three arrests in the case on Monday.

“Today Saudi Arabia is the heart of evil in the region and the world,” Brigadier General Hussein Salami, the deputy head of the IRGC, said on Tuesday at a ceremony commemorating those martyred in the attack.

Remnants of the car used in the suicide attack were given to the police, Pakpour said. Once the owner of the car was identified, intelligence and security forces carried out arrests.

The terrorists had planned to carry out multiple attacks, Pakpour said: “This group had prepared a lot of ammunition and equipment.”