

# More Evacuees Flee Daesh Holdouts in Northeast Syria

UNITED NATIONS (Dispatches) – In a fresh displacement, some 2,500 people, mainly women and children, fled fighting in Hajin and Baghouz, both Daesh holdouts, to an already overcrowded camp in northeastern Syria, a UN spokesman says.

Fleeing besieged sites in Dayr al-Zawr governorate, the evacuees arrived in Al-Hol camp in Hassakeh governorate late Thursday, bringing the total number of internally displaced people in the camp to over 43,000, said Stephane Dujarric, spokesman for UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres.

“The conditions in the camp are extremely dire as the camp has surpassed by far its accommodation capacity,” the spokesman said. “Thousands more may arrive at the camp in the coming hours and days.”

The UN refugee agency known as UNHCR, which runs the Al-Hol camp, has expressed its deep concern by reports of mounting civilian casualties – including many women and children – and large-scale civilian displacement amid renewed fighting in the Hajin enclave.

UNHCR said in January that for the past six months, clashes and air strikes in southeast part of Dayr al-Zawr had forced about 25,000 people to flee.



*Suspected Daesh terrorists, who fled from the frontline Syrian village of Baghouz, near the Iraqi border, stand in a queue as they wait to be blindfolded after being taken into custody by the so-called Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) for screening, near the Omar oil field in the countryside of the eastern Syrian province of Dayr al-Zawr on January 30, 2019.*

It said those fleeing reported increasingly diminishing services and extremely high desperate conditions they left behind, with prices for basic foods.

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“We have information that companies from the U.S. and its NATO allies are considering the possibility of buying a large batch of weapons in one of Eastern European countries in order to provide them to the Venezuelan opposition,” she told the media in Moscow.

“The batch will reportedly include heavy machine guns, grenade launchers, portable missile launchers and ammunition for light weapons and artillery systems. So this is what they mean when they talk about delivering humanitarian aid,” Zakharova added.

Zakharova said Friday the plan to use aid shipments as a cover allowed Washington to move special forces and military equipment “closer to Venezuelan territory” by causing tensions at the border.

Guido’s intentions to bring the supplies across the border were aimed at provoking violence, she further noted.

On Friday, deadly clashes erupted near the border with Brazil, where at least two people were killed and several others injured after trying to confront Venezuelan troops in the southern town of Kumarakapay.

Venezuelan troops were forced to open fire on a group of people who tried to block a road with the aim of preventing military vehicles from passing, according to witnesses.

Maduro blames the country’s dire situation on U.S. sanctions that have blocked the country from obtaining financing and have hobbled the OPEC nation’s oil industry.

## Iran... (Continued From Page One)

military and financial costs on the U.S.”

Although a number of Arab states have formed an alliance against Iran, many other countries in the region have “friendly ties” with the Islamic Republic, Shamkhani said.

“Many Arab countries, even at Persian Gulf southern side, have friendly ties with Iran and do not perceive any necessity for creating a military or security alliance in the face of Iran,” he said.

“On the contrary, countries like Oman, Qatar and Kuwait seek to prevent false tensions and have also appropriate efforts on the agenda. Even the (United Arab) Emirates’ stances are not identical with those of Saudi Arabia either, and there are rulers inside the United Arab Emirates who send signal of cooperation and removal of misunderstandings,” he added.

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fundraiser. “Access to high-quality care and education during the first five years of a child’s life shouldn’t be a privilege reserved for the rich. It should be a right for every child.”

The Massachusetts senator delivered her remarks during her second visit to the state since announcing her presidential bid.

Warren would pay for universal child care with a 2 percent tax annually on households’ net worth greater than \$50 million. Under the plan, no family would pay more than 7 percent of its income for child care, and families earning below 200 percent of the federal poverty line — about \$51,000 a year for a family of four — would pay nothing.

Warren said her plan would give all families access to the kind of child care the federal government currently provides military families.

“When a working family here in New Hampshire is paying a quarter of their income to cover child care, a Republican-controlled Congress decided it was more important to pass a trillion-dollar giveaway to the wealthiest and giant corporations,” Warren said, referring to the 2017 tax overhaul.

Local communities would oversee their child care, preschool and in-home providers under Warren’s plan, but they would be held to national standards. Warren said her plan would benefit women especially because they, more often than men, give up jobs and careers when families can’t find child care.

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The U.S. has earlier said it was looking for allies to deploy hundreds of troops to Syria following the withdrawal of American soldiers.

U.S. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Joseph Dunford has reportedly begun talks with his European counterparts about establishing a “safe zone” in northeastern Syria.

The Syrian government has rejected an offer by the country’s Kurds to establish a self-rule in the territory under their control in northern Syria.

“Autonomy means the partition of Syria. We have no way to partition Syria,” Bouthaina Shaaban, a senior adviser to President Bashar al-Assad, said this week.

“Syria is a country that is a melting pot for all people and all people are equal in front of Syrian law and in front of the Syrian constitution,” she told Reuters on the sidelines of a Middle East conference in Moscow on Thursday, calling the Kurds “a precious and very important part of the Syrian people.”

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State Departments officials claimed that happened organically and said it was not “purely” a bot-driven activity.

Yet the Iran digital strategy -- flooding the zone with anti-Iran messaging -- has also confused citizens in countries that are U.S. allies.

The way the administration has used Facebook to post anti-Iranian messages is another departure from the traditional use of that platform by the State Department. The Trump administration posted notices about U.S. Iran sanctions on the Facebook pages of U.S. embassies around the world in November -- primarily in the Middle East. The Facebook pages have historically been used as forums to draw attention to U.S. educational programs in the country or cross-cultural events, rather than sanctions rollouts. The posts provoked an angry response and career diplomats took notice.

In some cases the political appointees’ brainstorming for digital content and messaging have gone so far overboard that they have been shut down completely.

Last year one of the political appointees called up the Iran desk with an idea to find a Persian bakery in Washington, have it make rocket-shaped cookies and send them to all the countries within missile-launching range of Iran. The idea was rejected before it turned into anything, but State Department diplomats tell CNN they have had to shut down many similar ideas.

Tweets from the personal accounts of political appointees have also made many career diplomats uncomfortable.

Former State Department officials were shocked. John Kirby, a CNN national security analyst who was a State Department spokesperson during the Obama administration, said using social media for snarky comments “cheapens” diplomacy and would not have been accepted during the Obama administration.

“If I had posted something about him like this on social media, Secretary Kerry would have -- rightly -- been incensed. I might even have been fired,” said Kirby.

# Bahraini FM Draws Ridicule by Hailing bin Salman as Wall of China

MANAMA (Press TV) – Bahraini Foreign Minister Khalid bin Ahmed Al Khalifah has sparked international ridicule by drawing a parallel between Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and the Great Wall of China.

On his Twitter account, Khalifah posted a photo of bin Salman on the Great Wall of China, saying, “Like the Chinese who have a wall, we have bin Salman.”

He also described the heir to the Saudi throne as a tall wall that no aggressor could ever reach it.

The praise comes amid mounting criticism of bin Salam over the years-long Saudi war on Yemen and the killing of dis-

sident Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

This week, the Saudi crown prince traveled to Pakistan, India and China in his first major, multi-destination tour outside the Middle East since Khashoggi’s murder last October.

He signed investment agreements worth \$20 billion during his trip to cash-strapped Pakistan and cemented a \$10 billion deal for a refining and petrochemical complex in China. The prince also vowed a \$100 billion Saudi investment in India.

Bin Salma’s Asian tour is widely believed to be aimed at rehabilitating his image months after the assassination of Khashoggi inside the Saudi

consulate in Istanbul.

Bahrain, a staunch Saudi ally, has long been following in Riyadh’s footsteps in its foreign and domestic policies.

The Bahraini people has been holding regular pro-democracy protests since February 2011, demanding that the Al Khalifah family relinquish power and establish a just system representing all Bahrainis.

Bahrainis have also complained against widespread discrimination against the Shia majority in the tiny Persian Gulf kingdom.

Manama has responded to the demonstrations with an iron fist. In March 14, 2011, troops from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates were de-

ployed to Bahrain to assist the regime in quashing the dissent.

Scores of protesters have lost their lives and hundreds of others sustained injuries or put behind bars as a result of the Al Khalifah regime’s crackdown.

The regime also has detained rights campaigners, broken up major opposition political parties and revoked the nationality of pro-democracy activists.

In recent months, the Bahraini regime has also stepped up its attempts to normalize relations with Israel.

On Friday, people took to the streets of the Bahraini villages of Ma’ameer, Abu Saiba, Shakhurah to express their anger at any normalization of ties with Tel Aviv.

# 11 Militants Killed, 14 Arrested in Afghanistan

KABUL (Dispatches) – At least 11 militants have been killed and 14 others arrested by Afghan army personnel as fighting rages in the country, military sources said Saturday.

“Eleven terrorists were killed and 10 others arrested following Afghan Air Force airstrikes and a military operation in Andar district, Ghazni province Friday,” Afghan Ministry of Defense said in a statement.

Afghan army personnel also seized weapons and ammunition after the raid in Andar, the statement noted.

In addition, four militants were arrested after Special Operations Corps

of the Afghan army conducted a raid against a Taliban hideout, being used as a guest house in Chahar Bolak district of northern Balkh province overnight, Hanif Rezai, spokesman of army Corps 209 Shaheen based in the region, told Xinhua.

The Afghan security forces have increased ground and air offensives against militants within the past few months as the Taliban militant group has been attempting to take territory and consolidate its positions during the winter in the mountainous country.

The Taliban militant group has yet to make comments on the reports.

## ‘I Was Like a Prisoner’

# Saudi Sisters Trapped in Hong Kong Recall Beatings

HONG KONG (Dispatches) – Two sisters from Saudi Arabia who fled the conservative kingdom and have been hiding out in Hong Kong for nearly six months said they did so to escape beatings at the hands of their brothers and father.

The pair arrived in the Chinese territory from Sri Lanka in September. They say they were prevented from boarding a connecting flight to Australia and were intercepted at the airport by diplomats from Saudi Arabia.

Asked about the case, Hong Kong police said they had received a report from “two expatriate women” in September and were investigating, but did not elaborate.

The Saudi consulate in Hong Kong has not responded to repeated requests from Reuters

for comment.

The case is the second high-profile example this year of Saudi women seeking to escape their country and spotlights the kingdom’s strict social rules, including a requirement that females seek permission from a male “guardian” to travel.

The sisters, aged 18 and 20, managed to leave Hong Kong airport but consular officials have since revoked their passports, leaving them stranded in the city for nearly six months, their lawyer, Michael Vidler, said.

Vidler, one of the leading activist lawyers in the territory, also confirmed the authenticity of a Twitter account written by the two women describing their plight.

The development also comes as Crown Prince

Mohammed is on a tour of Asia in an attempt to partially repair Saudi Arabia’s image in the wake of international scandals, including the state murder of one of his critics.

The sisters, who have adopted the aliases Reem and Rawan, were intercepted by officials during their stopover in Hong Kong, before they managed to escape and enter the city as visitors, their lawyer further said.

He quoted the women as saying that their connecting flight to Australia was canceled and the officials “attempted to deceive the sisters” into boarding a flight back to Saudi Arabia.

According to the lawyer, the sisters later learned that the men were in fact Saudi Arabia’s consul general and vice consul general in Hong Kong.