

Iraqi Forces Thwart Terrorist Attacks in Kirkuk

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) – Nearly a dozen members of the Daesh terrorist group have been killed after Iraqi security forces, supported by pro-government fighters from Popular Mobilization Units, foiled their attacks in the country's northern oil-rich province of Kirkuk.

A joint force from Hawija police and voluntary fighters, better known by as Hashd al-Sha'abi in Arabic, repelled terrorist attacks on the villages of Gharib and Hanaf, south of the provincial capital city of Kirkuk, killing 11 extremists in the process, Arabic-language al-Taghier television network quoted Iraqi Joint Operations Command (JOC) spokesman Brigadier General Yahya Rasool as saying.

Rasool added that five Takfiris clad in explosive vests were among the slain terrorists.

A policeman and a Hashd al-Sha'abi fighter were killed during the clashes as well.

Meanwhile, the JOC announced in

a statement that Iraqi F-16 fighter jets had bombarded Daesh positions and a weapons cache in Syria's Hegeen region, located 40 kilometers from the border town of al-Qa'im in Iraq's western province of al-Anbar.

The statement added that the terrorist sites were completely destroyed in the aerial attacks.

Iraqi authorities have on several occasions stated that they work closely with the Syrian government to monitor and target terrorist targets based on the efforts of intelligence and information departments of the security coordination committee formed between Baghdad, Damascus, Tehran and Moscow years ago, as well as coordination with the so-called U.S.-led anti-Daesh coalition.

In an earlier incident, at least seven people lost their lives and several others sustained injuries in a bomb attack that struck a Shia district of the Iraqi capital, Baghdad, officials said.

Security officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, said a bomber



Iraqi security forces check the damage at the site of an attack involving a moped laden with explosives against a convoy carrying an Iraqi election candidate in the city of Kirkuk, located some 250 kilometers (155 miles) north of Baghdad, on April 15, 2018.

detonated his explosives at the entrance of the Saqlawiyah park in Shoala district in northern Baghdad late on Wednesday, leaving at least seven people dead.

At least 16 people were also wounded in the terrorist attack, which comes just days after the start

of the holy month of Ramadan when Iraqi families often stay out late after breaking their daily fast.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the attack, but such assaults bear the hallmarks of those carried out by Takfiri Daesh terrorists.

Muslims Angrily React to Obliterated al-Aqsa Poster



U.S. Ambassador David Friedman standing next to the controversial photo, May 22, 2018

WEST BANK (Dispatches) – U.S. Ambassador to the Israeli-occupied territories David Friedman has come under fire for posing with a doctored aerial photo of al-Quds, which replaced the al-Aqsa Mosque — Islam's third holiest site — and the Dome of the Rock, known as al-Haram al-

Sharif, with an imaginary temple. Friedman received the poster as he was visiting Bnei Brak, a city located just east of Tel Aviv, during a tour organized by a radical Zionist organization.

The controversial image soon made the rounds on the social me-

dia, prompting widespread fury.

Egypt's Al Azhar, the Sunni Muslim world's foremost religious institution, condemned the move on Thursday, calling it "inappropriate and irresponsible."

In a statement, the organization blasted Friedman and the Zionist organization, Achiya, for continuing "the policy of the Zio-American provocation and damaging the feelings of a billion and a half Muslims around the world."

Referring to the city's status as the capital of a future Palestinian state, the statement stressed that the move "will not change history and al-Quds will remain the capital of the Palestinian people." Al Azhar said the al-Aqsa Mosque "will remain in the hearts of Muslims."

Wary that the backlash was going to further fuel Palestinian anger over the relocation of the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to al-Quds, the U.S. diplomatic mission rushed to criti-

cize the move in a statement.

Claiming that Friedman was not aware of the alteration at the time, the U.S. embassy demanded an apology later in the day and said the U.S. supported the status quo at the holy site.

"Ambassador Friedman was not aware of the image thrust in front of him when the photo was taken," the embassy said in a statement. "He was deeply disappointed that anyone would take advantage of his visit to Bnei Brak to create controversy."

Friedman, who oversaw the much-criticized embassy move last week, tried to contain the damage in a separate statement, saying he was "mortified more than any Palestinian" over the issue.

The Zionist organizers at Achiya also attempted to distance themselves from the matter by issuing an apology to Friedman and downplaying the incident as a "cheap political act" by an employee.

Lebanese MPs Designate Hariri as PM

BEIRUT (Dispatches) – The office of Lebanon's president says a majority of lawmakers in parliament have endorsed Sa'ad al-Hariri, designating the Western-backed politician as prime minister for a third time.

Hariri won the backing of 111 out of 128 members of Lebanon's new parliament during official consultations with the president earlier in the day, the office of Michel Aoun said in a statement that

Lebanon's post of prime minister is reserved for a Sunni Muslim politician. Lebanon's Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri said on Thursday the consultations on forming the new government would take place on Monday.

Despite losing more than a third of his MPs in a May 6 election, Hariri was still the leading Sunni figure and a clear frontrunner for the post.

Local media said Hariri would swiftly launch negotiations with other parties on forming a coalition government.

Mohammed Raad, head of Hezbollah's parliamentary bloc, said after meeting Aoun that the movement would cooperate "positively" with whoever was designated.

Hezbollah as well as groups and individuals affiliated to it won 70 seats in the 128-member legislature.

An anti-Hezbollah alliance led by Hariri and supported by Saudi Arabia had won a majority in the Lebanese parliament in 2009, but it has since disintegrated.

Hariri acknowledged his bloc's defeat in the elections and vowed that he would cooperate with all political factions in order to fulfill the wishes of the Lebanese people who "voted for security and stability of Lebanon."

In remarks after Aoun designated him to be prime minister, Hariri said that the new national unity government he has been tasked to form must commit to the state's policy of staying out of regional conflicts.

Turkey Detains Dozens Suspected Daesh Members

ISTANBUL (Dispatches) – Turkish police detained 51 suspected members of Daesh terrorist group in Istanbul on Friday, anti-terrorist police said.

The suspects were believed to be planning to travel back to conflict zones in Syria, they said in a statement, adding that all those detained were foreign nationals.

Daesh has carried out numerous bombings across Turkey in recent years, including an attack on a club in Istanbul on Jan. 1, 2017, in which 39 people were killed and a bombing in the city's historic heart that killed 12 in 2016.

Turkish operations against Daesh suspects intensified at the end of last year ahead of the anniversary of the club shooting.

In another development, Turkish police forces arrested 49 people on suspicion of affiliation to a movement led by the U.S.-based opposition cleric Fethullah Gulen, whom the Ankara government accuses of having masterminded the July 2016 coup attempt against President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

A judicial source, speaking on condition of anonymity, said on Thursday that twelve suspects, sought by arrest warrants, were detained in the western provinces of Izmir and

Canakkale, the eastern province of Van and the capital Ankara.

The source added that 22 suspects, including serving army personnel, were rounded up by police in the southern province of Adana.

Additionally, 14 former police officers and one teacher were arrested over their alleged links to the Gulen movement in the central province of Tokat.

During the botched putsch, a faction of the Turkish military declared that it had seized control of the country and the government of Erdogan was no more in charge. The attempt was, however, suppressed a few hours later.

Iran...

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can continue to sell its oil on world markets, have international banking access and broad protection for ongoing trade, among other things.

"We cannot continue the deal ... unless the remaining participants will compensate and take countermeasures against U.S. sanctions and continue economic relations with Iran," the official said.

He said Iran was looking for "specific mechanisms and practical solutions" to convince companies to continue doing business with them.

"We believe Iran's economy is attractive enough to bring companies and banks and businesses into Iran," he said. "What we need is a safe atmosphere for them to do business with Iran and we expect Europeans to provide them that security," adding that China and Russia also needed to contribute.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo last week called for the negotiation of a new deal that would go far beyond the single focus of the 2015 agreement and would have the status of a formal treaty - a suggestion Iran flatly rejects.

"There is no trust at all to engage with the U.S. on any subject," the official said. "We made the JCPOA in good faith and we remained committed to the JCPOA and they just pulled out... so name me a single reason why we should enter into a new negotiation with the U.S. or a new deal? One president signs, the other president nullifies; I don't think anybody can negotiate with the U.S. with such behavior."

The official noted that the International Atomic Energy Agency on Thursday reported Iran had complied with limits on the level to which it can enrich uranium, its stock of enriched uranium and other items. IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano was invited by the JCPOA on Friday to address the group on his agency's findings.

If it pulls out of the deal, Iran would likely revert to its nuclear doctrine before the agreement or maybe even escalate its activities, the official said.

"We would have all options available," he said.

Trump ...

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mocked Kim as "little rocket man" and in address at the United Nations threatened to "totally destroy" North Korea if necessary. Kim had called Trump mentally deranged and threatened to "tame" him with fire.

Kim rarely leaves North Korea and his willingness to meet and Trump's acceptance sparked hope but it had faded in recent days.

Trump's letter to Kim also referred to the possibility of war.

"You talk about your nuclear capabilities, but ours are so massive and powerful that I pray to God that they will never have to be used," he said. The reference to Pence that offended the White House came in a statement released by North Korean media and citing Vice Foreign Minister Choe Son Hui. She had called Pence a "political dummy" for comparing North Korea - a "nuclear weapons state" - to Libya, where Muammar Gaddafi gave up his unfinished nuclear development program, only to be later killed by NATO-backed fighters.

"Whether the U.S. will meet us at a meeting room or encounter us at nuclear-to-nuclear showdown is entirely dependent upon the decision and behavior of the United States," Choe said.

U.S. national security adviser John Bolton first advocated a Libya as a model of disarmament. That incensed North Korea, which said the reason it had its nuclear arms was to ensure it did not end up like Libya and its then-leader.

The White House official said back channels for discussions with North Korea remained open and there still was hope for peace but Pyongyang must first change its rhetoric.

South Korea's presidential Blue House appeared taken off guard by Trump's letter and an official said it was "trying to figure out what President Trump exactly meant." South Korean President Moon Jae-in had met with Trump at the White House Tuesday to urge him to follow through on the summit and not let a rare opportunity with reclusive North Korea slip away. A few hours before Trump announced the cancellation, a small group of international media selected by North Korea witnessed the demolition of tunnels at the Punggye-ri site on Thursday, which Pyongyang said was proof of its commitment to end nuclear testing. The apparent destruction of what North Korea said was its only nuclear test site has been widely welcomed as a positive, if largely symbolic, step toward resolving tension over its weapons. Kim has declared his nuclear force complete, amid speculation the site was obsolete anyway.

The outlook for the Trump-Kim meeting had suffered a setback this month after North Korea angrily rejected the notion that would agree to unilateral nuclear disarmament as the United States has demanded. Trump responded by raising his own doubts as to whether the summit would go forward but seeking to placate Kim by pledging that Thursday that Kim's security would be guaranteed in any deal.

At the same time, Trump insisted on concrete steps before any easing of sanctions and warned that failure to reach a denuclearization agreement could lead to "decimation" of Kim's rule.

New...

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Mnuchin accused the Iran and Turkey-based "facilitators" of providing services to four Iranian airlines already on the U.S. sanctions list.

Among those airlines listed are Mahan Air, Caspian Air, Meraj Air and Pouya Air.

He said the actions of those individuals on behalf of the airlines "extend a lifeline" to the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC).

Mnuchin also warned that countries and companies around the world could risk punishment by granting landing rights and providing aviation services to those Iranian airlines.

A total of 31 aircraft affiliated with those airlines have also been added to the sanctions list.

Last week, US designated two top officials of the

Central Bank of Iran as "terrorists". This week, it also announced sanctions against top officials of the IRGC.

On Monday, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced a new policy towards Iran, declaring that unless Iran complies with American demands, it will face "the strongest sanctions in history" and "unprecedented financial pressure" from Washington.

In response, Rouhani denounced the U.S. demands saying, "Who are you to decide for Iran and the world?"

Iran's Civil Aviation Organization said Friday the new U.S. sanctions against Iranian airlines will fail to hinder the country's aviation industry because Tehran is well-equipped to work around them.

"The issue of sanctions has been around for years in different forms but the aviation industry has managed it," Reza Jafarzadeh, a CAO spokesman, told Iran's state news agency IRNA.

"Ignoring the U.S. sanctions, Iran will use its past experiences to keep its aviation industry thriving," he added.

Leader...

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animosity, do it but it is not realized through flexibility and compromise."

Iran's another bitter experience related to Europe's cooperation with the U.S. on important issues, the Leader said. "We do not want to fight with Europe, but these three countries (France, Britain and Germany) have proved that, on the most sensitive issues, they follow the U.S. The immoral behavior of France as the bad cop in nuclear negotiations and the obstructionism of the UK in producing yellow cake were some examples." "The sixth experience is to never rely on the JCPOA and foreign matters for our domestic matters... we should not attach domestic matters to some affairs which are out of our control," Ayatollah Khamenei said.

"We must learn from our mistakes, and from our experience, and must not be satisfied with marginal effects. For example, it is said that the U.S. lost face in this JCPOA business. That is right. But did we negotiate so that they lose face, or did we negotiate to lift the sanctions? Now they are saying that there will be secondary sanctions."

"Or, it is said that the relationship between the U.S. and Europe has deteriorated. But did we sit at the negotiations table for this? Of course, Europe will not stand in the United States' way. Let's be realistic and not count on probabilities. It was said at the beginning of the negotiations that \$100 billion would enter the country. This was not true. Now, the insolent president of the United States sometimes even says that \$150 billion was given to Iran by them. What nonsense. When did you ever give us anything?" the Leader added.

Ayatollah Khamenei also said Iran's economic problems cannot be resolved with the Europeans staying in the JCPOA.

"There is much evidence. Some European companies have left. Some of them are leaving, or they say they are not sure if they will remain. The heads of European countries say different things. For our economy, we cannot rely on the JCPOA and the Europeans. These three countries acted against their word some thirteen or fourteen years ago; in the nuclear negotiations, they promised and didn't keep their promise, now they should prove that they won't repeat the same untruthfulness and prevarication this time."

Ayatollah Khamenei said if the nuclear is to survive, Russia, China, Britain, France and Germany should provide Iran with seven concrete guarantees.

"During the last two years, the U.S. violated the JCPOA several times, and Europe remained silent. Europe must compensate for that silence."

"The U.S. has rejected the Resolution 2231 (establishing the nuclear deal); Europe needs to issue a resolution against the U.S. violation of it."

"Europe must promise not to raise the issues of missiles and regional affairs of the Islamic Republic."

"Europe must encounter any sanction against the Islamic Republic and explicitly stand to U.S.'s sanctions. "Europe must guarantee that Iran's oil will be completely sold. If the U.S. can manage the sale of our oil, we must be able to sell as much oil as we want. Europeans must guarantee that they compensate for the loss, and that they buy Iran's oil."

"European banks must guarantee transactions with the Islamic Republic. We have no conflicts with regard to these three countries; but we do not trust them, based on previous experience. "If the Europeans linger over our demands, Iran has the right to resume its nuclear activities. When we see that the JCPOA was useless, one way forward is to restart those halted activities."

The Leader also said, "Our enemy has placed the war room in the Treasury Department, instead of the Defense Department. In the same way, we must place the entity for countering the malignancy of this enemy in the economic center of the government, and the foreign ministry must cooperate."

Morocco's...

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Bourita first made the accusations against Iran early this month as he announced Morocco's decision to sever diplomatic ties with the Islamic Republic over what he called Tehran's support for the Polisario Front. The Polisario is a guerrilla movement fighting for independence for the Sahrawi people in Western Sahara which is claimed by Morocco after colonial Spain left the territory.

In his interview with Fox News aired on Wednesday, Bourita claimed that Hezbollah members had met with senior Polisario military leaders recently and that the Iranian embassy in Algeria was used to fund the Polisario. "The Moroccan authorities' insistence on repeating their false claims for cutting diplomatic ties with Iran and repeatedly raising baseless allegations against our country is merely a bid to please certain third parties," Qasemi said.

Bourita also claimed that Iran was in part trying to destabilize the area due to Morocco's good relations with the U.S. and Europe.

Earlier this month, he had said that Iran and Hezbollah were supporting Polisario by training and arming its fighters, via the Iranian embassy in Algeria. Algeria, Iran and Hezbollah were all quick to reject the claims as baseless.