

'Terrorists Preparing Chemical Attack in Syria's Idlib'

DAMASCUS (Dispatches) – The terrorists of the al-Qaeda-linked groups and the so-called White Helmets are preparing to stage a chemical attack in Syria's northwestern province of Idlib, state news agency SANA reported on Tuesday.

The official news agency said it cited sources in Idlib as confirming that the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), the umbrella group of the al-Qaeda-linked Nusra Front, as well as the White Helmets group are preparing to launch a chemical attack in Idlib to frame the Syrian army.

It said the groups have evicted the town of Jurjanas in the southern countryside of Idlib as a prelude to launching the attack in order "to justify a pretext for a U.S. aggression on Syria."

According to the sources of SANA, the terrorists are planning to use chlorine gas in their anticipated attack.

The U.S. struck Syria over such pretext last year when the terrorists in the formerly terrorist-held Douma district east of Damascus accused the Syrian forces of using toxic gas in the attack against the



In this file picture, Syrian children and adults receive treatment for a suspected chemical attack at a makeshift clinic on the militant-held village of al-Shifuniyah in the Eastern Ghouta region on the outskirts of the capital Damascus.

city last April.

In the past several years, militants have launched dozens of chemical attacks in Syria. Damascus has called on the United Nations to take action in this regard.

The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), a global watchdog, has documented systematic use of nerve agent sarin and chlorine during Syria's eight-year conflict.

Under a deal reached following a meeting between Turkish Presi-

dent Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin in the Black Sea resort city of Sochi on September 17, all militants in a demilitarized zone, which surrounds Idlib and also parts of the adjacent provinces of Aleppo and Hama, were supposed to pull out heavy arms by October 17, and Takfiri groups had to withdraw by October 15.

The National Front for the Liberation of Syria is the main Turkish-backed militant alliance

in the Idlib region, but the HTS terrorist group, which is a coalition of different factions of terror outfits, largely composed of the Jabhat Fateh al-Sham Takfiri terrorist group, holds a large part of the province and the zone.

The HTS, which is said to be in control of some 60 percent of Idlib Province, has yet to announce its stance on the buffer zone deal.

It is estimated that between 10,000 and 15,000 members of different factions of armed groups, which Syria, Russia and Turkey consider terrorists, are active in the volatile province, which is home to around three million inhabitants.

Russia believes that a buffer zone would help stop attacks from Idlib-based militants on Syrian army positions and Russia's military bases in the flashpoint region.

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.

'U.S. Military Propping Up Daesh in Afghanistan'



People inspect the site of a bombing outside a voter registration center in Kabul, Afghanistan, April 22, 2018.

KABUL (Dispatches) – The U.S. military has been allowing Daesh terrorists and their weapons into Afghanistan following the terrorist group's recent defeats in Syria and Iraq, a new report suggests.

According to the report by the Economic Times, while Afghanistan's skies remain under full control of American and NATO forces stationed in the country, sources are claiming that weapons are often being transferred to the country by helicopters that bear no identifying insignia.

The report estimated that around 10,000 members of the terrorist group were present in Afghanistan and the number was growing on Washington's watch.

The suspected ties between Daesh and the U.S. military in Afghanistan is nothing new.

On April 11, 2017, the U.S. military dropped the GBU-43/B Massive Ordnance Air Blast (MOAB), dubbed the "mother of all bombs", on alleged Daesh hideouts in Afghanistan's Nangarhar Province, killing nearly a hundred people, whom the U.S. insists were all militants.

Former Afghan president Hamid Karzai told Al Jazeera in 2017 that the U.S. was colluding with Daesh in Afghanistan and helping it cement its grip on areas in the eastern parts of the country.

"In my view, under the full [U.S.] presence, surveillance, military,

political, intelligence, Daesh has emerged," he said. "And for two years, the Afghan people came, cried loud about their suffering, of violations. Nothing was done."

Karzai further noted that America had specifically used Daesh as an excuse earlier that year to drop the largest non-nuclear bomb ever built in Afghanistan.

"And the next day, Daesh takes the next district in Afghanistan," he said. "That proves to us that there is a hand in it and that hand can be no one else but them [the U.S.] in Afghanistan."

Daesh's rise in Afghanistan comes at a time when the Trump administration is engaged in peace talks with the Taliban militant group, claiming that the war -- which began in 2001 -- has run its course and it is time to bring US troops back home.

Today, around 14,000 U.S. troops remain in Afghanistan, half of them assigned to what Washington insists are counter-terrorism missions.

The Taliban's five-year rule over at least three quarters of Afghanistan came to an end following the 2001 US-led invasion, but 17 years on, the militant group has mounted a comeback.

According to an official U.S. report last year, the central government in Kabul is currently controlling a little more than 50 percent of the country, down from 72 percent in 2015.

U.S. Congress Urged to Recognize Palestine State

RAMALLAH (Dispatches) – Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Mohammed Ishtaye has urged the U.S. Congress to recognize Palestine as a state.

Ishtaye's office said in an emailed statement following his meeting with U.S. Senator Ron Wyden that he urged him to lift the ban on the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).

The statement said that the U.S.-Palestinian relations must be dealt with separately from that in the peace process, adding that the Palestinians should not be punished or blackmailed by the U.S. administration.

"We want it (U.S. administration) to be an honest broker and partner of peace," it added.

Ishtaye reiterated the Palestinian Authority (PA)'s rejection to the U.S. "Deal of the Century," as well as its cuts on

aid to the UN refugee body and its recognition of al-Quds as the so-called capital of the Zionist regime.

He also warned against annexing parts of the West Bank under so-called settlement blocks, adding that the move would undermine the establishment of a Palestinian state on the 1967 borders.

The Palestinians have boycotted the American administration since it recognized al-Quds as the regime's "capital" and moved its embassy in the occupied territories to al-Quds last May.

They said in several statements that the U.S. "Deal of the Century" falls way short of their expectations and aspirations for lasting and just peace settlement and called for an international multilateral mechanism to overlook negotiations.

'Over \$60 Million in Public Funds Embezzled in Iraq's Mosul'

BAGHDAD (Press TV) – Iraq's anti-corruption body has accused officials in the northern province of Nineveh of embezzling more than \$60 million in public funds, saying the crime was committed after the governor was sacked last month.

According to a statement by the anti-corruption Integrity Commission on Monday, officials from Nineveh, of which Mosul is the capital, had stolen a total of \$64 million in public funds.

It added that of this huge sum, nearly \$40 million had been allocated to rebuild Mosul, Iraq's second largest city, which was ravaged by the

Takfiri Daesh terrorist group.

Daesh had turned Mosul to its de facto capital in the country from mid-2014 to July 2017, when the city was finally liberated from the grips of the terror outfit, following several months of fierce fighting.

The statement added that the embezzlement occurred in the aftermath of a ferry sinking in the province in March that claimed the lives of more than 100 people.

The tragic incident prompted the parliament to unanimously fire Governor Nawfel Akoub, who has since been on the run, thought to be hiding out in Ir-

bil, the capital of Iraq's Kurdish region.

The statement did not accuse the governor directly, but said the accused officials were "close to Akoub."

It added that 14 officials had been arrested earlier this month after the anti-corruption body's investigation found that "checks and wire transfers of public funds had been made out to the personal accounts of senior officials."

Of the missing money, "just six million dollars" were recovered by the government, a commission member told AFP.

The Iraqi parliament has been probing accusations of

massive corruption among officials in the province, and their results came out amid public anger over the ferry sinking.

Graft is reported to be endemic across the Arab country, which ranks among the world's worst offenders in Transparency International's annual Corruption Perceptions Index.

According to Iraq's parliament, a total of \$228 billion has been embezzled by shady politicians and businessmen since 2004, a year after the United States and a group of its allies invaded the country to oust Saddam Hossein, Iraq's former dictator.

Opponents of Egypt's Constitutional Reforms Call for 'No' Vote

CAIRO (Reuters) – Opponents of constitutional amendments that could see Egypt's President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi stay in power until 2030 urged people to vote "no", the third and final day of a referendum on the proposal.

The amendments would also bolster the role of the military and expand the president's power over judicial appointments. The constitutional changes were approved by parliament last week.

While the amendments are expected to be passed in the referendum, observers say the turnout will be a test of Sisi's popularity, which has been dented by austerity measures since 2016. He was re-elected last year with 97 percent of votes cast.

Sisi's supporters say he has stabilized Egypt and needs more time to reform and develop the economy. Critics fear changing the constitution will shrink any remaining space for political competition and debate, paving the way for a long period of one-man rule.

Ahmed al-Tantawi, one of a small number of opposition members of parliament, said the referendum was being held against a backdrop of intimidation and "vote buying".

The electoral commission said it had not received any formal complaints so far about any irregularities.

"We can say that the first two days of voting were held under the slogan, the 'ticket and the cardboard box'," Tantawi said, referring to

reports that grocery boxes were being handed out to people in exchange for casting a vote.

"But there is a chance on the third day of voting for Egyptians, particularly the youth, to return things to their natural course," he said.

Activists have posted photos on social media that appeared to show white cardboard boxes packed with groceries being handed out to people after they voted.

A Reuters reporter saw some voters receiving vouchers for groceries after leaving a central Cairo polling station, which they then exchanged for packages of cooking oil, pasta, sugar and tea at a nearby charity.

It was not immediately possible to verify who was distributing the food.