

Nearly 60 Killed in 10 Days of Militant Clashes in Northern Syria

BEIRUT (AFP) – More than a week of infighting between foreign-backed militants in Syria's north has killed 58 people, a flareup that has allowed Al-Qaeda-linked terrorists to gain ground, a war monitor said Tuesday. The clashes since October 8, in a volatile area near the Turkish border, have been among the deadliest in years, killing 48 militants and 10 civilians, the so-called Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said. Among the 48 militants killed, 28 were members of the Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham alliance (HTS), which is led by Al-Qaeda's former Syria affiliate, according to the Britain-based war monitor.

Reuters: Maritime Deal Proved Hezbollah's Pragmatism

BEIRUT (Dispatches) – Before Lebanon's government approved a U.S.-brokered deal settling a decades-long maritime dispute with the Zionist regime, the powerful Hezbollah resistance movement had scrutinized the final draft line by line and given a crucial nod of acceptance.

But behind the scenes, the resistance movement was being briefed on the details and expressing its views on the negotiations over the dispute, according to sources familiar with Hezbollah's thinking, a Lebanese official and a Western source familiar with the process.

An unprecedented compromise between the arch foes, the deal opens the way for offshore energy exploration and defuses one source of potential conflict between the Zionist regime and Hezbollah.

Observers say the deal was all the more significant for the pragmatism shown by Hezbollah.

"The Hezbollah leadership scrutinized the understanding line by line before agreeing to it," said one of the sources familiar with the movement's thinking.



A woman walks past a poster depicting Lebanon's Hezbollah leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah in the town of Yaroun, southern Lebanon, August 13, 2022.

Hezbollah has said offshore oil and gas are the only way for Lebanon to emerge from a financial meltdown that has hit all Lebanese hard.

Though Hezbollah says it does not fear war with the Zionist regime, the group has also said it does not seek one with a formidable foe that was defeated after invasions of Lebanon in 1978 and 1982.

An offshore energy discovery - while not enough on its own to resolve Lebanon's deep economic problems - would be a major boon, providing badly needed hard currency and possibly one day easing crippling blackouts.

Two Hezbollah lawmakers told Reuters the group was open to the

idea of a deal as a pathway to alleviate some of Lebanon's economic woes.

"They had to deal with it pragmatically," said Sami Atallah, executive director of the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies, describing Hezbollah's role as critical. "They knew they had the power to cause havoc if they wanted to - but it would have come at such a high cost."

U.S. proposals were communicated to Hezbollah's leadership by senior Lebanese security official Abbas Ibrahim, who also met U.S. envoy Amos Hochstein, according to the Lebanese official and the Western source familiar with the process.

At one point, Hezbollah conveyed its frustration at the slow pace of the talks to Hochstein via Ibrahim, the Western source said.

Asked about Hezbollah's role, the head of its media office Mohamed Afif said the state had carried out the negotiations and "we stood behind it". "Our concern was for Lebanon to secure its rights to its resources," he said.

Zionists Vexed, Palestinians Overjoyed After Australia Rescinds Recognition of Al-Quds



Australia's new Labor government has rescinded the country's recognition of West Al-Quds as the so-called capital of the Zionist regime.

WEST BANK (Dispatches) – The Zionist regime's ministry of foreign affairs on Tuesday summoned the Australian Ambassador to Tel Aviv, Paul Griffiths, after his country retracted its recognition of Al-Quds as the capital of the occupying regime's so-called capital.

Israeli Army Radio and the i24 news website reported that "Australian Ambassador Paul Griffiths was summoned to clarify the step taken by his country."

During a media briefing on Tuesday, Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong said the government "recommits Australia to international efforts in the responsible pursuit of progress towards a just and enduring ... solution" to the issue of Palestine.

She added that the status of Al-Quds should be decided through talks between Zionists and Palestinians and not through unilateral decisions.

Zionist prime minister Yair Lapid criticized the policy reversal by Australia's center-left government as a "hasty response".

Meanwhile, the Palestinian Authority commended the Australian government's decision to reverse the previous administration's decision on al-Quds.

"We welcome Australia's decision with regards to Al-Quds & its call for a two-state solution in accordance with international legitimacy," PA's civil affairs minister Hussein al-

Sheikh said on Twitter on Tuesday.

Sheikh also hailed Australia's affirmation that the future of sovereignty over Al-Quds "depends on the permanent solution based on international legitimacy."

The regime occupied the western part of the city during a Western-backed war in 1948. It also occupied the Palestinian territory of the West Bank, including East Al-Quds, in another war in 1967.

Ever since, the Zionist regime has dotted the territory with hundreds of illegal settlements that have come to house hundreds of thousands of settlers.

Palestinians want the West Bank as part of a future independent state with East Al-Quds as its capital. The Zionist regime, however, lays claim to the entire city as its so-called capital.

In 2018, a conservative government in Australia led by Scott Morrison followed then-U.S. president Donald Trump's lead in naming Al-Quds as the occupying regime's "capital".

The move caused a domestic backlash in Australia and led to friction with neighboring Indonesia - the world's most populous Muslim-majority nation - temporarily derailing a free trade deal.

The decision was also denounced by Palestinians as an obstacle to achieving peace in the region. They urged Arab countries to review their trade and political ties with Australia.

U.S. Forces Smuggle 92 Tankers of Oil, Wheat From Syria to Iraq

DAMASCUS (Xinhua) – The U.S. forces have smuggled 92 tankers and trucks of stolen Syrian oil and wheat from northeastern Syria to U.S. bases in neighboring Iraq, state news agency SANA reported.

The oil tankers and wheat trucks were sent to Iraq through illegal border crossings set up by the U.S.-led so-called Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).

The report said two separate convoys of U.S. military trucks and tankers carried tons of grain and crude oil from the northeastern province of Hasakah to the semi-autonomous Kurdistan region in northern Iraq, as part of Washington's systematic smuggling of basic commodities out of Syria.

After entering Syria in 2014, the U.S. forces, under the pretext of fighting terrorist groups, established military bases in oil-rich areas in northeastern and eastern Syria, and started systematic stealing of Syrian oil.

The Syrian Oil Ministry said in August that the U.S. forces were

stealing 80 percent of Syria's oil production, causing direct and indirect losses of about 107.1 billion dollars to Syria's oil and gas sectors.

On September 21, China called on the United States to stop plundering Syria's national resources and respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Arab country.

"We call on the United States to respect Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity, unilaterally lift sanctions, and end the theft

of Syria's national resources," China's Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin told a news briefing.

Wang said, "This is not the first time that the United States military has stolen oil from Syria and they seem to be becoming more and more uncontrollable."

The Chinese spokesman also said the U.S. government has a duty to investigate robberies committed by intervening military forces, as well as to compensate for the damages caused.

Report: Taliban Killed Captives in Restive Afghan Province

ISLAMABAD (AP/AFP) – The Taliban captured, bound and shot to death 27 men in Afghanistan's Panjshir Valley last month during an offensive against resistance fighters in the area, according to a report published Tuesday, refuting the group's earlier claims that the men were killed in battle.

One video of the killings verified by the report shows five men, blindfolded with their hands tied behind their backs. Then, Taliban militants spray them with gunfire for 20 seconds and cry out in celebration.

The investigation by Afghan Witness, an open-source project run by the UK-based non-profit Center for Information Resilience, is a rare verification of allegations that the Taliban have used brutal methods against opposition forces and their supporters, its researchers said. Since taking power in August 2021, the Taliban have imposed a tighter and harsher rule, even as they press for international recog-

nition of their government.

David Osborn, the team leader of Afghan Witness, said the report gives the "most clear-cut example" of the Taliban carrying out an "orchestrated purge" of resistance fighters.

Afghan Witness said it analyzed dozens of visual sources from social media — mostly videos and photographs — to conclusively link one group of Taliban militants to the killings of 10 men in the Dara District of Panjshir, including the five seen being mowed down in the video.

It said it also confirmed 17 other extrajudicial killings from further images on social media, all showing dead men with their hands tied behind their backs. Videos and photos of Taliban militants with the bodies aided geolocation and chrono-location, also providing close-ups of the militants at the scene. These were cross-referenced with other videos suspected to feature the group.

In another development in the country, about 30 Afghan women protested in front of Kabul University on Tuesday after authorities expelled students from the dormitories allegedly for breaking rules.

The protesters claimed that all the evicted students were women in a move that comes as the Taliban have increasingly restricted girls' access to education.

"Today's protest was for girls who have been expelled," organizer Zholia Parsi told AFP after Taliban forces dispersed the rally.

Organizers also called for the reopening of girls' secondary schools, which have been shut since the Taliban returned to power last year.

In several cities, women have staged sporadic protests against harsh restrictions imposed by the Taliban.

The rallies are usually swiftly put down -- often harshly -- and journalists have increasingly been prevented from covering them.

Son: Elderly Man Jailed for 16 Years in Saudi Arabia Over Tweets Tortured

RIYADH (Middle East Eye) – The son of an elderly U.S. citizen who was sentenced in Saudi Arabia earlier this month to 16 years in prison over tweets he posted criticizing the kingdom has said his father has been tortured in jail.

Ibrahim Almadi, the father of Saudi-American Saad Ibrahim Almadi, 72, told the Washington Post that the U.S. State Department had been both neglectful and negligent over the case.

Ibrahim said no one from the U.S. embassy in Saudi Arabia had visited his father until six months after his arrest in November last year and that no U.S. officials had attended his sentencing despite having notified them of the hearing.

Saad, a project manager from Florida, was detained last year at Riyadh airport when he trav-

elled to Saudi Arabia to visit family.

He was charged with harboring a terrorist ideology, trying to destabilize the kingdom, as well as supporting and funding terrorism over 14 tweets he had posted on his account while in the U.S. over the previous seven years.

One of the tweets made reference to Jamal Khashoggi, a Washington Post columnist who was murdered by Saudi agents in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul in 2018.

Other tweets included criticism of corruption inside the kingdom.

Ibrahim told the U.S. newspaper that the State Department had told him not to speak publicly about his father's case, but that he no longer believed that staying quiet would secure his

father's freedom.

During the meeting between embassy officials and his father in May, Saad declined to ask Washington to intervene as Saudi jailers threaten to torture prisoners who involve foreign governments in their cases, Ibrahim added.

Saudi Arabia is regularly accused by rights groups over the torture and ill-treatment of prisoners in its jails, something they say has become worse since Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman became de facto ruler of the kingdom in 2015.

Last week, Middle East Eye reported that one of several Saudi Arabian men sentenced to death earlier this month for resisting their tribe's displacement over the kingdom's Neom megaproject was tortured in prison.