

Report: U.S. Killed Civilian in Recent Syria Strike

QORQANYA, Syria (AP) – The U.S. military is investigating reports that it killed a civilian in a recent strike in northwest Syria that meant to target a senior Al-Qaeda leader, a military official said in a statement.

Relatives and neighbors of a 60-year-old man killed in the May 3 strike in the village of Qorqanya, a rural area in northern Idlib province, told The Associated Press that he was a farmer who raised sheep, chickens and cattle and had no involvement with terrorist groups.

In an initial statement released the day of the strike, U.S. Central Command, or CENTCOM, said its forces had “conducted a unilateral strike ... targeting a senior Al-Qaeda leader.” It did not provide any further details.

Maj. John Moore, a CENTCOM spokesperson, said that U.S. forces “are in the process of confirming



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the identity of the individual killed in the strike.”

“We are aware of the allegations of a civilian casualty and the outcome of the confirmation process will inform if further investigation is necessary and how it should proceed,” he said.

A local civil defense group in northwest Syria said in a statement that it had responded to the site after hearing sounds of an explosion and found that a drone strike had killed 60-year-old Lutfi Hassan Masto, a local resident who was tending his sheep at the time. Three of the animals were also killed, the statement said.

Masto’s brother, Mohamed Masto, told The Associated Press that reports that his brother was involved in Al-Qaeda were “absolute lies” and that his killing was “an injustice and an aggression.”

“He had nothing to do with the war. ... He had nothing to do with the Al-Nusra Front or with the Daesg” or any of the other armed groups involved in Syria’s 12-year-old foreign-backed war, Masto said.

Fayad Jamil Raji, a neighbor, said he had known Lutfi Masto — or “Abu Hassan,” a nickname meaning “father of Hassan” — for many years.

“The man was a civilian. He had a farm with poultry, cows and sheep,” he said.

Axis... (Continued From Page One)

over the United States as the world’s largest economy, and its desire to invest across Asia and some parts of Africa and Europe clearly show that a new geometry of world order is taking shape.

Russia’s mistrust of the West, its staunch opposition to the expansion of the U.S.-led North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) at the cost of getting involved in the Ukraine war, and U.S. insistence on the prolongation of the conflict at the expense of demolition of Ukraine’s critical infrastructure will doubtlessly push Moscow to pursue a “Look East” policy at last, Baqeri said.

Baqeri also emphasized that the U.S. is no longer considered a trailblazer in advanced technologies and is moving downward, warning Europe and other allies of Washington against plunging into a downward spiral if they continue to back U.S. policies blindly.

He stressed that Asia and the Eastern camp are on the same wavelength to stand up to U.S. hegemony.

The top general said Iran welcomes further military cooperation among member states of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in order to form a peacekeeping force, and appreciates the production of joint military hardware.

He termed the presence of U.S.-led military forces in West Asia detrimental to the security and stability of the region, underscoring that Iran will continue to support Palestinians’ right to recognition firmly.

Gaza ... (Continued From Page One)

that the surprise attack was planned far in advance. Haaretz reported that a senior Israeli minister told the paper that “prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu revealed a few months ago that he decided to return to the policy of targeted assassinations.”

While Israel undoubtedly always makes such contingency plans, the specific timing of Tuesday’s attack on the three Islamic Jihad figures and their families is odd even in light of Tel Aviv’s frequently irrational behavior.

As Haaretz’s Anshel Pfeffer notes, “no one in Israel is pretending they were ‘ticking bombs’ about to launch another imminent attack.”

In similar circumstances, Pfeffer observes, Netanyahu has generally avoided choosing this kind of extrajudicial execution even when presented with the option by his military and intelligence commanders.

Why Israel would try to provoke such an escalation so soon after may have to do with its domestic politics. Netanyahu’s decision-making in this case, Pfeffer asserts, “has to be seen in light of his political circumstances.”

Ultra-far-right security minister Itamar Ben-Gvir had suspended his Jewish Power party’s participation in the cabinet to protest what he considered its insufficiently hardline policies against Palestinians.

Following the bloodbath in Gaza early Tuesday, Ben-Gvir happily returned to the fold — avoiding another day of crisis in Netanyahu’s coalition.

The Jewish Power party announced that it would resume its participation “following the acceptance of our position and the transition from containment to attack in the targeted killings of senior Islamic Jihad figures.”

Ben-Gvir himself called the slaughter of sleeping families a “nice start,” adding, “it’s time we change our policy regarding Gaza.”

The fresh Israeli aggression comes a week after a brief exchange of fire between the Zionist regime and Palestinian groups in Gaza left one Palestinian martyred and two Zionists wounded.

It is largest attack mounted by the occupying regime of Israel against Gaza since August last year, when the Zionist military assassinated senior PIJ commander Tayseer al-Jabari, triggering a three-day exchange of fire.

At least 49 Palestinians were martyred in the 2022 Israeli bombardment, including 17 children, and 360 others were wounded.

More than two million Palestinians are packed into Gaza, one of the world’s most densely populated areas. Under blockade by Israel since 2006, the besieged coastal enclave has been described as “the world’s largest open-air prison.”

The Zionist military has martyred at least 129 Palestinian this year, 109 of whom were shot dead in the West Bank.

Palestinians have killed at least 16 Zionists in the same period.

Russia... (Continued From Page 2)

Russia has encouraged reconciliation with Ankara. But Damascus demands full withdrawal of Turkish troops for relations to be restored.

Foreign Minister Hussein Amir-Abdollahian said Iran is ready to help promote negotiations between Syria and Turkey toward their reconciliation.

The ministry also said any political solution for issues related to Syria must take into consideration Syria’s full sovereignty over its territory, adding that Turkey can play a key role in this regard.

He said Syria’s neighbors, especially Turkey, can cooperate with the Arab country so that it would be able to gain full control over its national sovereignty “because it will be in favor of Syria’s stability and security and is also in line with security and border stability of the neighboring countries.”

The top Iranian diplomat added that the deployment of the Syrian army on the borders and the establishment of security in cooperation with the neighbors can allay the security concerns of Ankara and other neighboring countries and prevent the activities of terrorists and separatists.

It could also restore the neighborly and strategic relations between the two sides and prepare the ground for the withdrawal of the Turkish military forces from joint border areas with Syria based on a mutually-agreed timetable, he noted.

“We believe that a strong and independent Syria will be able to overcome terrorism, separatism, and the U.S. forces’ occupation and plunder of the country’s national resources,” Amir-Abdollahian added.

Amir-Abdollahian pointed to the current “special and unique” situation in international relations and said, “All indications and variables testify to the transition process in the world order, the decline of the U.S. power, and the strengthening of regionalism.”

Envoy... (Continued From Page 2)

The U.S. will not allow Iran to obtain nuclear weapons is “a distortion of reality and another cynical attempt” to advance the American political agenda, urging Washington to stop “propagating false allegations and misinformation” about Tehran’s nuclear activities.

“Iran reiterates the peaceful nature of its nuclear program and adherence to international obligations. The Islamic Republic has always maintained that its pursuit of nuclear technology is exclusively for peaceful purposes, and it has never sought, nor will it ever seek, to develop nuclear weapons,” he said.

“This is a firm and unwavering decision of the government and ... any claim to the contrary is completely unfounded and invalid,” he added.

Iravani further stressed Iran’s right to defend itself against any attack on its nuclear facilities.

“Iran warns against any possible miscalculation or adventurist acts against its peaceful nuclear program and reserves its inherent and legitimate right under international law to take all necessary measures to protect and defend its citizens, interests, installations, and sovereignty against any aggression, including any terrorist, military, or sabotage acts,” he said.

Secretary of Iran’s Supreme National Security Council Ali Shamkhani said on Friday that the United States would be blamed for all of the Tel Aviv regime’s acts of terror targeting the Iranian nuclear facilities and the people working for the Islamic Republic’s nuclear program.

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani also responded to Sullivan’s remarks, saying they were not compatible with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)’s 15 reports which confirmed Iran’s adherence to its nuclear commitments.

“Unfortunately, the U.S. government, directly and indirectly, bears the responsibility for the destructive measures of the Zionist regime in the region, especially in connection with Iran,” he asserted.

“Iran’s nuclear activities are peaceful and we are a member of the IAEA and the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)... We do not accept baseless claims about Iran’s nuclear activities. Iran will not tolerate any aggression against its interests, security and assets and will deliver a decisive and regret-inducing response.”

Insiders: Turkey Economy Faces ‘Lost Year’ No Matter Who Wins Election

ANKARA (Reuters) – Turkey’s economy is bracing for a “lost year”, no matter who wins landmark elections on Sunday, political insiders say, even if the opposition pledges to tear down President Tayyip Erdogan’s unorthodox policies.

The main opposition alliance, which is leading in some opinion polls, promises to free up the economy and financial markets from state controls and return independence to a Central Bank that would then aggressively raise interest rates to cool inflation.

Erdogan’s ruling party said it would press on with its low-rates and high-growth program, despite inflation at 44 percent and depleted FX reserves after years of authorities stabilizing the lira currency.

An opposition government could face economic and market instability

as an overvalued lira weakens and as monetary stimulus is removed, analysts say. On the other hand, they say the current government could face its own volatility as its policy program runs out of steam and could need a revamp.

An official from Erdogan’s ruling AK Party (AKP) said the economy, especially the cost-of-living crisis facing Turks, presented difficulties for its election campaign.

“I admit, the budget is not doing great. Election years are difficult. It will be like a lost year,” the AKP official said, adding stronger economic growth would be expected in 2024.

The official noted that the AKP could pivot to a more balanced program if it wins the vote, given Erdogan’s recent comments that former Finance Minister, Mehmet Simsek, could return to help shape policies.

Simsek, who is well known internationally, also worked as a banker at UBS on Wall Street and Merrill Lynch in London.

“I believe that Simsek will come and provide support ... and there would be a very serious forex inflow if he comes,” the official said.

Simsek could not be reached for comment. Erdogan’s office did not respond to a query about a “lost year” for the economy.

Financial markets are bracing for volatility after the presidential and parliamentary votes on 14 May. A runoff between Erdogan and opposition challenger, Kemal Kilicdaroglu, is likely on 28 May, polls show.

A senior opposition official said it would inherit the “wreckage” of Erdogan’s economy that would take time to fix because “there is no magic wand”.

A second opposition official said the new government would reform the bureaucracy as it seeks to understand the economic problems.

“It has become clear that 2023 will be a lost year but 2024 is not a year we can lose,” the official said.

The stakes are high after Erdogan’s drive to cut rates sparked a historic currency crisis in late 2021, and sent inflation as high as 85.5 percent last year. Economists expect inflation to rise from a low of 44 percent last month.

The election “will make or break macroeconomic stability in Turkey,” said Liam Peach, senior EM economist at Capital Economics.

Erdogan has prioritized growth, investments and exports by cutting rates and stabilizing the lira currency via regulations and foreign reserves.

Families Urge Release of 51 UAE Detainees Held Past Jail Terms

ABU DHABI (Middle East Eye) – The families of more than 50 people sentenced for plotting to overthrow the United Arab Emirates government are calling on Abu Dhabi to release them, saying they are being held months and years after their jail terms have ended.

According to a list compiled by the Emirates Detainees Advocacy Centre and seen by Reuters, 51 people are being held beyond their terms, which began expiring in 2019.

The detainees were a part of the “UAE 94” case, which was a mass trial in 2013 involving 94 people accused of trying to overthrow the Emirati government, a charge the defendants vehemently denied.

Two years earlier, the 94 individuals had reportedly signed a petition calling on the Emirati government to institute a set of democratic reforms.

The signatories were said to have called for an elected Federal National Council with full regulatory powers and universal suffrage, a retreat of the security state, and basic human rights within the existing framework of a constitutional monarchy.

The case resulted in the conviction of 69 people - eight in absentia - who received sentences as long as 15 years. While more than three-quarters of the prisoners have completed their sentences, they still remain in arbitrary detention because

authorities refuse to release them.

“We will not accept this injustice for our people. We want those people to be released immediately,” Ahmed al-Nuaimi, whose brother was sentenced to ten years, told Reuters.

He said his brother was set to be released in March 2023, but he is still in detention.

Jenan al-Marzooqi, whose father still remains in detention after the end of his ten-year sentence, told Reuters that her family has been subject to various restrictions.

“The UAE not only punishes those who peacefully dissent, but harasses even those related to them,” she said.

Abdulsalam Mohamed Darwish

al-Marzooqi, who previously served as head of the family counseling section of the Dubai courts, was handed a 10-year prison sentence for being a part of the petition and has been held at al-Razeen prison in Abu Dhabi since March 2013.

On Monday, a small number of countries raised the issue of detainees at a UN Human Rights Council meeting in Geneva.

Last week, 42 organizations called on the UAE to “immediately and unconditionally” release jailed human rights defenders, activists and political dissidents. Their statement came ahead of the Cop28 UN climate change conference which the UAE will host in late November.

Iraq Recovers 6,000 Antiquities From Britain After Century

BAGHDAD (Xinhua) – Iraqi has recovered 6,000 antiquities that Britain ‘borrowed’ 100 years ago ‘for scholarly purposes.’

In a press conference held at the Baghdad airport, Iraqi President Abdul Latif Rashid told reporters that these antiquities have been in Britain since 1923, and their return resulted from the cooperation with the British Museum.

“The return of these antiquities from the United Kingdom is the second largest recovery of antiquities in the history of Iraq,” Rashid said, adding that this reflects Iraq’s keenness to protect the cultural heritage that represents

national identity and civilization.

The move came after Rashid visited the United Kingdom to attend the coronation ceremony of King Charles III.

Rashid handed the antiquities over to the Iraqi National Museum.

In July 2021, Iraq recovered about 17,000 looted artifacts from the United States, making it the largest number of smuggled Iraqi antiquities ever returned to Iraq, which included 4,500-year-old tablets bearing cuneiform writing documenting trade exchanges during the Sumerian civilization.

According to the official statistics, about

15,000 pieces of cultural relics from the Stone Age, the Babylonian, Assyrian, and Islamic periods were stolen or destroyed by looters after Saddam Hussein’s regime was toppled in 2003.

The Mosul Museum and the ancient cities of Hatra and Nimrud were destroyed and a large number of antiquities were smuggled after the Daesh terrorists took control of many parts of northern and western Iraq in 2014.

More than 10,000 sites in Iraq are officially recognized as archaeological sites, but most of them are not safeguarded and many are still being looted.