

UN experts: Daesh aims for resurgence in Iraq, Syria

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UNITED NATIONS: Leaders of the Daesh extremist group are aiming to consolidate and create conditions for an “eventual resurgence in its Iraqi and Syrian heartlands,” UN experts said in a new report.

The panel of experts said in a report to the Security Council this week that the process is more advanced in Iraq, where Daesh leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi and most of the militant group’s leadership are now based following the fall of the so-called “caliphate” that he declared in the two neighboring countries.

In Syria, where the last Daesh stronghold was toppled in March, the Daesh covert network is spreading and sleeper cells are being established at the provincial level, mirroring what has been happening in Iraq since 2017, the report said.

As for Al-Qaeda, the panel said the extremist group “remains resilient” though its immediate global threat is not clear, with its leader, Ayman Al-Zawahiri, “reported to be in poor health and doubts as to how the group will manage the succession.”

The report said “the most striking international developments” during the first six months of 2019 include “the growing ambition and reach of terrorist groups in the Sahel and West Africa,” where fighters from Daesh and Al-Qaeda are collaborating to undermine fragile countries. “The number of regional states threatened with contagion from insurgencies in the Sahel and Nigeria has increased,” said the experts, who monitor UN sanctions against both extremist groups.

In a video message in late April, Al-Baghdadi said Daesh “still aspires to have global relevance and expects to achieve this by continuing to carry out international attacks,” the panel said.

The experts said Daesh is currently dependent on attacks that it inspires like the Easter Sunday church bombings in Sri Lanka. Al-Baghdadi mentioned the bombings but the panel said Daesh leaders “clearly knew nothing” in advance.

Whether or not the Sri Lankan attacks were motivated by a previous attack on Muslims at mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, in March, “the narrative of interfaith conflict is concerning,” the panel added.

Looking ahead, the experts said the Daesh group “will reinvest in the capacity to direct and facilitate complex international attacks when it has the secure space and time to do so.” The panel added, “The current abatement of such attacks, therefore, may not last long, possibly not even until the end of 2019.”

The panel said up to 30,000 foreign fighters and others who traveled to the so-called “caliphate” that Daesh established in parts of Iraq and Syria may

still be alive, “and their future prospects will be of international concern for the foreseeable future.”

Outside Syria and Iraq, the experts said, Daesh and Al-Qaeda are contending “for dominance and international relevance.” They said that in Afghanistan, concerns remain about short-term and long-term threats posed by groups affiliated with both Daesh and Al-Qaeda as well as “foreign terrorist fighters who have established themselves on Afghan territory.”

Here are the experts’ assessments of threats posed by Daesh and Al-Qaeda in other regions:

ARABIAN PENINSULA – Regional member states say the temporary strategy of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula is to prioritize the fight against the Daesh affiliate in Yemen to maintain its dominant position, rather than fight Houthi Shiite rebels who are in a war with the government, which is backed by a Saudi-led coalition. An unidentified country reported that Al-Qaeda has been unable to establish itself in Saudi Arabia.

AFRICA – Daesh activity in southern Libya gained momentum as a result of preoccupation with fighting around the capital of Tripoli, and the extremist group is assessed to have substantial financial resources seized when it controlled the city of Sirte. A sharp rise in violence and recruitment efforts in West Africa, motivated by Daesh or Al-Qaeda affiliates, has been exacerbated “by porous borders and authorities ill-equipped to confront the growing threat.” In Somalia, Al-Qaeda affiliate Al-Shabab has shifted from high-impact attacks to sustained, frequent and eventually daily multiple attacks.

EUROPE – Online propaganda encouraging low-tech, Daesh-inspired attacks is still available but member states report a reduced incidence of successful attacks. Nonetheless, European countries “assess that the risk remains high.”

ASIA – Countries in central Asia see the greatest threat from their nationals returning from Iraq and Syria, and to a lesser extent from Afghanistan. In Southeast Asia, a series of successful and thwarted attacks attributed to Daesh-affiliated groups “underscores the persistent nature of the threat in the region.”



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[Algeria independence war veteran to stay in prison: lawyers](#)

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ALGEIRS: Algeria's judiciary has refused to provisionally release a well-known independence war veteran detained for allegedly insulting the army, his lawyers said.

Lakhdar Bouregaa, 86, was arrested at the end of June for "insulting a state body" and "taking part in a scheme to demoralize the army with the aim of harming the nation's defense."

His supporters have put his detention down to his criticism of army chief Ahmed Gaid Saleh, Algeria's de facto strongman since longtime president Abdelaziz Bouteflika's fall in early April.

"The investigating magistrate... has rejected the request for provisional release made by the Lawyers Collective for Change and Dignity on behalf of

Lakhdar Bouregaa,” the lawyers’ group said Wednesday on Facebook. The request to release the octogenarian was based on “health reasons, backed up by a medical file,” the lawyers said. The charges – which could carry a sentence of up to 10 years in jail – have provoked widespread indignation in Algeria. Bouregaa was a commander of the National Liberation Army (ALN) – which fought the French colonial power – and a founder in 1963 of the Front for Socialist Forces, one of Algeria’s oldest opposition parties. Ahead of his arrest, he had taken part in the demonstrations that have rocked Algeria since February – initially against Bouteflika, and then the wider establishment, after the president was forced to resign. Bouregaa is one of many alleged “prisoners of conscience” that the protest movement is demanding be freed.



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[UK FM to Iran: There will be no tanker](#)

swap

Thu, 2019-08-01 15:42

BANGKOK: Britain on Thursday ruled out exchanging an Iranian tanker detained by Gibraltar for a British-flagged tanker seized by Iran in the Gulf, Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said while on a trip to the Thai capital Bangkok.

“We are not going to barter: if people or nations have detained UK-flagged illegally then the rule of law and rule of international law must be upheld.”

“We are not going to barter a ship that was detained legally with a ship that was detained illegally: that’s not the way that Iran will come in from the cold,” he said. “So I am afraid some kind of barter or haggle or linkage is not on the table.”

Tensions have spiked between Iran and Britain since after Iranian commandos seized a British-flagged tanker last month. That came after British forces captured an Iranian oil tanker near Gibraltar, accused of violating sanctions on Syria.

Meanwhile, Russia’s foreign ministry said the US and European nations attempts to create a naval coalition to patrol the Strait of Hormuz is merely an attempt to pressurize Iran.

(With Reuters)



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[US has intelligence that Osama bin Laden's son is dead](#)

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WASHINGTON: US intelligence has received information that Al-Qaeda founder Osama bin Laden's son Hamza has died, NBC News reported Wednesday. NBC said three US officials had confirmed they had information of Hamza bin Laden's death, but gave no details of the date or place, and did not indicate if they had confirmed the information.

Questioned by reporters in the Oval Office, President Donald Trump did not confirm or deny the report.

"I don't want to comment on it," he said.

In February the US government put a \$1 million bounty on Bin Laden's head, saying the man sometimes dubbed the "crown prince of jihad" was "emerging as a leader in the Al-Qaeda franchise."

He had put out audio and video messages calling for attacks on the United States and other countries, especially to avenge his father's killing by US forces in Pakistan in May 2011.

Documents seized in the raid on his father's house in Abbottabad suggested Hamza was being groomed as heir to the Al-Qaeda leadership, according to the US State Department.

US forces also found a video of the wedding of Hamza, who was thought to have been 30, to the daughter of another senior Al-Qaeda official that is believed to have taken place in Iran.

Hamza bin Laden's whereabouts have never been pinpointed. He was believed to have been under house arrest in Iran but reports suggest he also may have resided in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Syria.

The group behind the deadly September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States, Al-Qaeda's prominence as a radical Islamist group has faded over the past decade in the shadow of the Daesh group.

But branches and associated jihadist groups in Afghanistan, Yemen, Syria and

elsewhere have underscored its continuing potency.



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Author:

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US Treasury department imposes sanctions on Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif.



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