

# Jordan links deadly blasts to militant cell

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AMMAN: Jordan said Friday that two deadly explosions which rocked the Salt region northwest of the capital Amman were apparently linked to a militant cell.

A security source had previously told AFP that old mines were behind Thursday's blasts which killed a farmer and three members of the security forces.

But analysis of the site found the blasts were caused by "homemade explosives buried in the ground matching the type used by a terrorist cell in Al-Fuhais" last August, government spokeswoman Jumana Ghneimat said.

She was referring to an August 11 bomb attack on a security patrol in the nearby town of Al-Fuhais that killed a police sergeant and wounded six others.

The Salt region was the scene of heavy clashes between gunmen and security forces after the attack which targeted a security patrol at a music festival. Four security force members and three "terrorists" were killed during a raid on a militant hideout a day after the blast.



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Mine blasts kill farmer, 3 security personnel in Jordan  
Lawmaker who changed Jordan's rape law takes on child marriage

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## [Egypt official: Home-made bomb explodes near mosque, 3 hurt](#)

Author:

By MAGGIE MICHAEL | AP

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Fri, 2019-02-15 12:55

CAIRO: An Egyptian security official says a home-made bomb has exploded near a mosque in Cairo's district of Giza, leaving three people wounded. The official says the blast took place during Friday prayers near Al-Istaqama mosque in a busy square in the heart of Giza. Police sealed off the entire district and diverted traffic as security forces searched for the culprits. An Interior Ministry statement blamed members of the Muslim Brotherhood for the attack, which it said targeted a security checkpoint. The Islamist group has been banned in Egypt since 2013. The official says the wounded, including a policeman, were rushed to a nearby hospital. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because he wasn't authorized to speak to the media. No group immediately claimed responsibility for the bombing.



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Egypt's presidential term set to be extended

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## [Shanahan: We have destroyed Daesh's capabilities, it is no longer able to detain civilians](#)

Fri, 2019-02-15 17:06

LONDON: Daesh's capabilities have been destroyed and it is no longer able to detain civilians, Acting US Secretary of Defense Patrick Michael Shanahan said Friday at the Munich Security Conference.

Shanahan also said that the global coalition to defeat Daesh has "eliminated the group's hold over 99 percent of the territory it once claimed as part of

its so-called caliphate.” “We have ensured ISIS no longer holds the innocent people of Syria or Iraq in its murderous iron fist.”

Daesh has been defeated but has not disappeared and may take on a new form, the Acting US Secretary of Defense Patrick Michael Shanahan added.

Shanahan said he envisioned a “bigger and stronger” coalition to fight Daesh globally. “We will continue to support our local partners’ ability to stand up to the remnants of ISIS.”

US President Donald Trump’s announcement in December that he was withdrawing all 2,000 US troops from Syria surprised and rattled allies. US officials have crisscrossed the Middle East in recent weeks to reassure them that Washington remains committed to the region.



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[Patrick Shanahan](#)

[Daesh](#)

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US-backed Syrian forces clearing Daesh remnants from villages  
Pompeo meets EU’s top diplomat after Pence’s Iran statement

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# New UN Syria envoy seeks Syria constitution talks, no firm timeframe

Author:

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Fri, 2019-02-15 12:31

GENEVA: The new UN envoy tasked with forging peace in Syria hopes to convene a constitutional committee in Geneva "as soon as possible," he said on Friday, without giving a firm timeframe for the latest attempt to end the country's devastating war.

Formation of a constitutional committee is key to political reforms and new elections meant to unify Syria and end an almost eight-year-old war, which has killed hundreds of thousands and displaced about half of Syria's pre-war 22 million population.

Geir Pedersen, the fourth Syria mediator after Kofi Annan, Lakhdar Brahimi and Staffan de Mistura, said he also had ideas about how to build trust and confidence between the two sides, who have previously attended nine rounds of largely fruitless talks as the war rumbled on.

"I think we have identified the challenges and we have agreed on how we should move forward and that I see as a very, very positive sign," Pedersen told reporters.

"My hope (is) that they will be able as soon as possible to have the constitution committee to meet in Geneva."

Syria's opposition last year agreed to join a process of rewriting the constitution under UN auspices following a peacemaking conference in the Russian city of Sochi.

But President Bashar Assad, who is emerging triumphant in the conflict and has sworn to retake every inch of Syria still outside his control, has objected to the world body naming members of the committee.

Pedersen said he could not be more specific about the timeframe for a meeting of the committee, but he said his discussions with relevant parties were good.

Asked if he would have failed if he had not presided over an end to the war by the end of his tenure, Pedersen said the aim was to negotiate an agreement between the two parties.

"To be able to get to a situation where you can say that we have been able to put eight years of conflict behind us and that we as Syrians agree that we will begin the process of creating a future for coming Syrians, that... would be the definition that we have been successful."

Pedersen met the opposition Syrian National Coalition (SNC) in Riyadh last month, shortly after a visit to Damascus, where Assad's forces have made large territorial gains on the battlefield, largely thanks to Russian and Iranian support.

Russia, Iran and Turkey, supporters of the main sides left in Syria's complex war, have so far failed to agree on the make-up of the constitutional committee.

But chief opposition negotiator Nasr Haririr said on Jan. 19 after talks with Pedersen that Syria had a good opportunity to reach a political solution to its war because cease-fires have brought calm to many areas of the country. Pedersen added that he saw the constitutional committee as “a potential door opener” for the political process.

In parallel with this, work was also needed on other issues and he hoped to discuss this in more detail with the Syrian parties, including the government and SNC, he said.

As a sign of increasing confidence, Pedersen said he hoped to see more prisoner exchanges, and clarity on missing persons, following a swap between the government and rebel forces a few days ago, where each side handed over 20 prisoners.



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Syrians act in playback theater to heal war trauma  
Russia tells Turkey to get Assad's 'green light' for safe zone in Syria

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# Yemen FM says seated next to Netanyahu in 'error'

Author:

AFP

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DUBAI: Yemen's top diplomat said a "protocol error" landed him next to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at a conference in the Polish capital Warsaw and that his country's stance on the Palestinian issue remained unchanged.

"Protocol errors are the responsibility of the organizers, as is always the case in international conferences," Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Yamani wrote on Twitter late Thursday.

Yamani was already seated when Netanyahu took his place earlier the same day at an international conference in Warsaw focused on security in the Middle East, with a strong emphasis on Iran.

The two nodded at each other and exchanged brief smiles as Netanyahu sat down.

During a part of the session closed to the press, Yamani lent Netanyahu his microphone when the Israeli premier's was not working properly.

US President Donald Trump's Middle East peace envoy Jason Greenblatt hailed the exchange on Twitter, calling it a "lighthearted moment" that could be the sign of "new cooperation" between the Jewish and Arab states.

Yemen and Israel have never had diplomatic relations, and Yamani's friendly interaction with Netanyahu drew criticism on social media.

"The stance of Yemen and President (Abdrabbo Mansour) Hadi on the Palestinian issue and its people its people and leadership is firm," Yamani insisted.

He said Yemen's attended the Warsaw conference not to discuss the Israeli-Palestinian conflict "but to mobilize the international community to confront the Iranian expansion in Yemen."

Its participation was also "part of the battle to restore" his internationally-recognized government, he added.



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