

International

US helicopter raid in Syria targets senior IS group leader: Centcom

Target of the strike was 'responsible for planning terror attacks in ME and Europe'

BEIRUT: A US helicopter raid on Monday targeted a senior Islamic State group leader in Syria suspected of plotting attacks in Europe and the Middle East, US Central Command said. "US Central Command forces conducted a unilateral helicopter raid in northern Syria in the early morning... targeting a senior ISIS Syria leader and operational planner," Centcom said in a statement, using another acronym for IS.

The target of the strike was "responsible for planning terror attacks in the Middle East and Europe", it alleged. "The raid resulted in the probable death of the targeted individual" while "two other armed individuals were killed", the statement said, without identifying any of them.

No civilians or US troops were hurt, the statement added. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the strike "targeted the building where an IS member was present" in Al-Suwaydah, a village about 25 kilometres (15 miles) west of the town of Jarabulus on Syria's northern border with Turkey.

The Observatory, a Britain-based war monitor that relies on sources on the ground, said the strike killed the main target and two other fighters. The IS member had previously been imprisoned in Kurdish-held Manbij, south of Jarabulus, according to the Observatory.

He had taken refuge in the Al-Suwaydah area around six months earlier under the protection of a pro-Turkish group, it added. Local residents told AFP that the man was killed as he was trying to flee and that his body was handed over to one of his brothers.

A Turkish-backed rebel group deployed in the Al-Suwaydah area said in a statement that two of its fighters were killed after they went to the site of the raid. Many former IS militants joined pro-Turkish groups after the jihadists lost their last scraps of territory in Syria in March 2019, Observatory chief Rami Abdel Rahman said.

Earlier this month, the US military said it had launched a strike in Syria killing senior IS leader Khalid Aydd Ahmad al-Jabouri, who Centcom said was responsible for planning attacks in Turkey and Europe. In October 2019, Washington announced it had killed IS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in an operation in northwestern Syria.

His two successors have also been killed: The first in a US operation in northwestern Syria and the second in an operation by former Syrian rebels in the country's south. Some 900 US troops remain in Syria, most in the Kurdish-administered northeast, as part of a US-led coalition battling remnants of IS, which remains active in both Syria and neighbouring Iraq, operating out of hideouts in desert and mountain areas.

IS "remains able to conduct operations within the region with a desire to strike beyond the Middle East", Centcom chief General Michael Kurilla was quoted as saying in Monday's statement. In separate attacks on Sunday, suspected IS fighters killed at least 36 truffle hunters and five shepherds in Syria, the Observatory reported, with 17 pro-regime fighters among the dead. — AFP



AS SUWAYDAH: A man walks past the sign of Soueida near Jarabulus, in the north-east of Syria's Aleppo province, on April 17, 2023, following a US helicopter raid on an Islamic State group leader in the village. — AFP

Sudan's Daglo, feared Darfuri general fighting for power

KHARTOUM: Feared Sudanese paramilitary commander Mohamed Hamdan Daglo went from a militia chief in war-torn Darfur to the country's second-in-command -- to now battling the regular army for control of the country. Daglo, leader of the large and heavily-armed paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), collaborated with his now arch-rival, army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, in a 2021 military coup that derailed a transition to civilian rule following the 2019 ouster of hardline president Omar al-Bashir.

Often dressed in desert fatigues, the tall and slightly stooped Daglo -- widely known by his nickname Hemeti, short for Mohamed -- has crafted a distinct image for himself and his troops, positioning the RSF as autonomous from the military. An experienced battlefield commander, he has in recent months also deployed a savvy use of social media with posts on Facebook, Instagram and TikTok to address the country's overwhelmingly young population, with two thirds of Sudanese aged under 30.

Darfur upstart to statesman

Born in around 1975, a camel and sheep trader with little formal education, he rose to prominence when Khartoum's hardline government under Bashir began arming nomadic Arab raiders to counter an ethnic minority rebellion that broke out in the western Darfur region in 2003.

The groups known as Janjaweed were sent to attack villages on camel and horseback as part of a campaign of terror that saw Bashir indicted for war

crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide by the International Criminal Court. The war in Darfur left hundreds of thousands dead and more than two million displaced. By 2013, Bashir had appointed him commander of a new force made up of former, mostly Arab, militiamen as Khartoum once again sought to crush the insurgency -- the RSF. But many in Khartoum looked down at the rise of the Darfuri, who hails from the Arab Rizeigat people.

"The old guard, dominated by the old Sudanese elite around Khartoum, very much view Hemeti as an illiterate, upstart thug whom they first armed to do their dirty work in the war in Darfur," said Alan Boswell, Horn of Africa director at the International Crisis Group.

Closer to power

For nearly a decade, Daglo used his reputation as a ruthless militiaman and street-smart leader to maneuver his way closer to power, all the while growing richer off lucrative RSF-controlled gold mines. The RSF were deployed in Yemen when Sudan joined the Saudi-led coalition fighting in the civil war there in 2015, in what proved a major boon for both Daglo and his future coup partner, army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan.

"It allowed him, alongside Burhan, to meet United Arab Emirates officials and Saudi officials and present themselves as possible successors of Bashir," researcher Jerome Tubiana said. According to experts, the force has also been involved in the conflict in neighbouring Libya.

When the military toppled Bashir in 2019, Daglo became the second most powerful man in the country, but accusations of RSF atrocities continued in the ensuing security crackdown. When security personnel attacked pro-democracy demonstrators camped out in the heart of the capital in June 2019, it was the RSF that witnesses said were at the forefront of the bloodshed, killing at least 128 people.



PORT SUDAN: Photo shows Sudanese army soldiers, loyal to army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, posing for a picture at the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) base in the Red Sea city of Port Sudan. — AFP

His sights were set still higher, and experts warned he was a man with massive forces at his disposal and lofty political ambitions, whose actions should be closely watched. Since the coup, Daglo's power has only grown, as he sought to craft a more palatable image -- working on his heavily-accented Arabic, for instance -- while building key alliances.

Though experts have long drawn links between the RSF and Russian mercenary group Wagner, Daglo gained new access as second-in-command, landing in Moscow the day after its invasion of Ukraine. As the rift with Burhan grew, Daglo came to call the coup he had helped lead a "mistake" that had failed

to bring about change and invigorated remnants of Bashir's Islamist regime.

After battles erupted on Saturday -- with fighting still raging through densely-populated streets of Khartoum -- Daglo has portrayed himself and the RSF on social media and international TV as the saviours of Sudan.

In regular posts in both Arabic and English, the RSF claim to be safeguarding democracy against "the putschist forces" led by Burhan, who Daglo slammed as a "criminal" and "a radical Islamist". In turn, Burhan has called Daglo a "criminal" and the RSF a "rebel militia". — AFP

Another 104 freed in Yemen prisoner swap

RIYADH: More than 100 prisoners of war were flown from Saudi Arabia to Yemen on Monday, further buoying peace hopes a day after a major exchange of 869 captives ended, the ICRC said. Two International Committee of the Red Cross planes carrying 48 prisoners each flew to Sanaa, Yemen's rebel-held capital, while a third with eight captives headed for government-controlled Aden in the

south, the humanitarian group said.

The "unilateral" release is outside the terms of the three-day exchange that was negotiated between Yemen's Houthi rebels and government officials and finished on Sunday, ICRC media adviser Jessica Moussan told AFP. "We welcome this initiative and are pleased to see that humanitarian considerations are being taken for the sake of reuniting families," Moussan said. "This will bring immense relief to the families of the detainees," she added.

The ICRC is "facilitating" the transfer by providing air transport and logistical support, and by interviewing the captives, Moussan said. The release of 104 captives, days before the major Muslim festival of Eid Al-Fitr, takes the total number to 973 freed since Friday. — AFP

Shuwaikh and Shuaiba ports with weekly flights - in addition to transporting refrigerated containers. The Emirati ambassador to Kuwait, Dr Matar Al-Neyadi, said in a press statement that the launch of this new shipping service would contribute more to enhancing trade exchange and expanding economic cooperation.

Al-Neyadi pointed out that the launch of this new navigation service will provide the private sector with more options for transporting goods and commodities, reflecting the vision and aspirations of the wise leadership in both brotherly countries.

The Abu Dhabi Ports Group was established in 2006 and specializes in the management and operation of local ports and a number of international ports. It also has a maritime sector specialized in shipping and the management and operation of waterways in Abu Dhabi, in addition to the management of warehouses and industrial cities. — KUNA

actually fasting, that saves us from a fate we probably deserve, but which Allah doesn't want for us.

Muslims have a lot of faith in Allah's Mercy. We believe His Words that His Mercy is greater than His Wrath. We can see the thousands of simple good deeds that we can do to compensate for our sins. So, we place full confidence in His Promise of fasting being a shield from the Hellfire, and we wholeheartedly seek it out, year after year, to the extent that we, actually, look forward to this time of sacrifice and mourn its passing. — Courtesy of the TIES

Sudan death toll surpasses 100...

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The ministry further pointed out that it is communicating with the embassy to make sure of the safety of nationals and provide them with public guidelines to guarantee their security and safety in such difficult and unstable conditions.

Explosions rocked the Sudanese capital Khartoum Monday as fighting between the army and paramilitary forces led by rival generals raged for a third day with the death toll surpassing 100. The violence erupted Saturday after weeks of power struggles between the two generals who seized power in a 2021 coup, Sudan's army chief Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan and his deputy, Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, who commands the powerful paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

The intense conflict, which has seen air strikes, tanks on the streets, artillery fire and heavy gunfire in crowded neighborhoods both in Khartoum and other cities across Sudan, has triggered international demands for an immediate ceasefire. "The death toll among civilians... has reached 97," the doctors' union said, adding later that "dozens" of fighters had been killed. The figure does not include all casualties as many could not reach hospitals due to difficulties in movement amid the fighting.

The Central Committee of Sudan Doctors, a separate pro-democracy organization, had also reported dozens of deaths among security forces, and some 942 wounded. Amid wide appeals by medics for safe routes to move casualties, the two sides agreed to a UN proposal for a window on Sunday to evacuate the wounded, but the heavy gunfire did not stop. UN Special Representative Volker Perthes, who is in Khartoum, said he was "extremely disappointed" by the failure of both sides to abide by the humanitarian pause.

The World Health Organization warned that "several" of Khartoum's nine hospitals receiving injured civilians "have run out of blood, transfusion equipment, intravenous fluids and other vital supplies". The violence has forced terrified Sudanese civilians to shelter in their homes with fears of a prolonged conflict that could plunge the country into deeper chaos, dashing hopes for return to civilian rule.

The RSF was created under former autocratic pres-

ident Omar Al-Bashir in 2013, emerging from the Janjaweed militia that his government unleashed against non-Arab ethnic minorities in Darfur a decade earlier, drawing accusations of war crimes. The fighting broke out after bitter disagreements between Burhan and Daglo over the planned integration of the RSF into the regular army - a key condition for a final deal aimed at ending a crisis since the 2021 military coup they orchestrated together.

The two sides accuse the other of starting the fighting, and both claim the upper hand by declaring control of key sites, including the airport and the presidential palace - none of which could be independently verified. Three UN staff from the World Food Program are among those killed in fighting in the western region of Darfur, forcing a "temporary halt" to all operations in a country where one-third of the population needs aid. On Monday morning, loud gunfire and deafening explosions again shook buildings and echoed across the streets of Khartoum as street fighting continued, AFP journalists said.

Power has been off across swathes of Khartoum, and the few grocery stores remaining open warn they will only last a few days if no supplies can enter the city. Appeals to end the fighting have come from across the region and the globe, including the African Union, Arab League and East African bloc IGAD. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has warned an escalation in the fighting would "further aggravate the already precarious humanitarian situation". US Secretary of State Antony Blinken urged the warring rivals to agree an "immediate cessation of violence" and start talks.

'Unprecedented' violence

Despite the wide calls for a ceasefire, the two generals have appeared in no mood for talks with each one calling the other "criminal". Medics have repeatedly pleaded for safe corridors for ambulances and a ceasefire to treat the victims, because the streets remain too dangerous for transporting casualties to hospital. While Sudan has endured since independence decades of multiple bitter civil wars, coups and rebellions, Sudanese analyst Kholood Khair said the level of fighting inside the capital was "unprecedented". "This is the first time in Sudan's history - certainly in its independence history - that there has been this level of violence in the centre, in Khartoum," she said. — Agencies

Kuwait, UAE open direct maritime...

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Ammar Al-Shaiba, told KUNA that the inauguration of the route with Al-Shuwaikh Port and Al-Shuaiba Harbor would contribute to increasing the trade exchanges, logistical operations, and maritime shipping between the UAE and Kuwait. Al-Shaiba expressed his happiness with the arrival of "the first container ship to Shuwaikh Port based on the vision of the wise leadership of UAE and Kuwait."

He explained that the Abu Dhabi Ports Group also announced the start of a direct line to transport (rolled goods) for cars, trucks, and others from Khalifa Port to

Fasting is a shield...

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The statement of the Prophet (PBUH), that fasting is a shield, gives that final push. We know that this deed, even if it doesn't fully make-up for what we have committed of sins, will serve as a shield from the hellfire. It could be the act, because it is done sincerely for Allah and because no one but us & Allah can ever truly know whether we are