

BATTLE FOR MOSUL US-trained unit 'carried out executions'

AFP, Baghdad

An Iraqi army division trained by American forces summarily executed prisoners in west Mosul, Human Rights Watch said yesterday, calling for US assistance to the unit to be suspended.

The latest report of executions comes after the release of videos allegedly shot in the Mosul area that appeared to show Iraqi forces executing one detainee and brutally beating others.

Iraq declared victory in Mosul on July 11, but abuses by security forces and the anger they stoke could pose a potentially major threat to long-term stability in an area that was only just recaptured from the Islamic State group.

"An Iraqi army division trained by the United States government allegedly executed several dozen prisoners in Mosul's Old City," HRW said in a statement, referring to an area on its western side.

The international US-led coalition against IS has provided training, advice and other assistance to various Iraqi units.

Earlier in July, HRW found a series of videos posted online that appeared to show other abuses by Iraqi forces in the Mosul area.

In one clip, men in Iraqi army uniforms beat a bearded detainee, drag him to the edge of a cliff, throw him off and shoot him and another body at the bottom. Three other videos show men in army and police uniforms beating detainees.

Earlier in the Mosul operation, an Iraqi journalist embedded with the Rapid Response Division reported that members of the special forces unit carried out torture, rapes and killings.

The journalist, who has since left Iraq, documented some of the abuses on film.



Palestinians react as a stun grenade explodes at the Haram al-Sharif compound after Israel removed all security measures it had installed at the compound, in Jerusalem's Old City, yesterday. Story on page 16. PHOTO: REUTERS

'Not going anywhere'

Tillerson rejects resignation rumours

AFP, Washington

US Secretary of State on Wednesday Rex Tillerson denied suggestions that he plans to resign because of disagreement with the White House.

"I'm not going anywhere," Tillerson told reporters said as received Qatari Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani.

Tillerson described his relationship with President Donald Trump as "good" and he would remain in his job "as long as the president lets me."

Tillerson's job status has been the subject of much speculation this week in Washington following a report from CNN.

CNN said that among Tillerson's growing differences with the White House were fresh debate over Iran policy and the process of naming White House personnel, as well as Trump's chaotic and confusing foreign policy approach.

The network quoted anonymous sources as saying Tillerson told people close to him that he would leave his job by the end of the year.

Since taking the helm of the State Department in February, the former ExxonMobil chair has come under fire for his ultra-low profile, and his plan to slash by 30 percent the budget of an agency that employs more than 70,000 people in Washington and around the world.

When he returned from the Gulf on July 13, Tillerson, a 65-year-old Texan, said he was tired.

He also said his life was easier when he ran ExxonMobil from 2006 to 2016 because was "the ultimate decision-maker" in a process that was disciplined and structured at the oil giant.



TRUMP'S WHITE HOUSE

Infightings highlight rift in key aides

AFP, Washington

Feuding within Donald Trump's inner circle appeared to burst out on Twitter late Wednesday, when one White House aide tagged another in a tweet calling on the FBI to investigate the leak of his financial information.

After details of his financial holdings were made public, White House Communications Director Anthony Scaramucci appeared to point the finger of blame at White House chief of staff Reince Priebus.

"In light of the leak of my financial disclosure info which is a felony, I will be contacting @FBI and the @TheJusticeDept #swamp @Reince45," Scaramucci tweeted.

He later deleted the tweet and denied calling for his colleague's prosecution.

Trump's White House has been beset by infighting, as different ideological factions leak damaging information about rivals in their war for dominance.

Don't fight Assad, fight IS

Discontent in allies as Washington says they must only fight militants

AGENCIES

The US-led coalition fighting IS has told its local Syrian allies that they must be exclusively focused on fighting ISIS and not fight the Syrian regime, a directive that prompted one rebel group to depart a joint coalition base in Southern Syria, several coalition and US defense officials told CNN.

"The coalition supports only those forces committed to fighting ISIS," coalition spokesman US Army Col Ryan Dillon told CNN.

But one US-backed group which calls itself "the Shohada Al Quartyan" has balked at the restriction, opting to leave the base to carry out independent operations against Syrian regime troops several US and coalition officials told CNN. The officials added that other local allies remain at the garrison and continue to cooperate with coalition advisers.

The tensions between the rebel group and the US military over fighting Assad comes days after the head of Special Operations Command, Gen Tony Thomas, appeared to confirm a Washington Post report that the Trump Administration had ended a classified CIA program to arm anti-Assad rebels in Syria.

In another development, a ceasefire deal has been reached that will see

jihadi fighters withdraw from the Syria-Lebanon border, a top Lebanese official said yesterday after a week-long operation there by the Hezbollah movement.

The powerful Shia militant group began the assault on fighters from al-Qaeda's former Syrian affiliate, previously known as the Al-Nusra Front, in the Jurud Ars al border region last week.

The report came as Syrian

Abdel Rahman, head of the observatory, told AFP.

The SDF assault has been backed by air strikes, special forces advisers, equipment and weapons from the US-led coalition fighting IS in Syria and neighbouring Iraq.

On Wednesday, a barrage of US-led air strikes across the city left at least 29 civilians dead, the British-based Observatory said.



WAR IN SYRIA

US-backed force ousts IS from half of Raqa

Ceasefire deal reached on Lebanon-Syria border

Putin cements Russia's presence in Syria with base deal

Observatory for Human Rights said a US-backed alliance has ousted Islamic State group jihadists from half of their Syrian bastion Raqa.

The Syrian Democratic Forces have been fighting for several months to capture the northern city, which has become infamous as the Syrian heart of IS's so-called "caliphate."

The SDF "are now in control of 50 percent of Raqa city despite the fierce resistance mounted by IS", Rami

Meanwhile, President Vladimir Putin has signed a law ratifying a deal with the Syrian government allowing Russia to keep its air base in Syria for almost half a century, official documents show.

The original deal, signed in Damascus in January, sets out the terms under which Russia can use its Hmeymim air base in Latakia Province which it has used to carry out air strikes against forces opposing President Bashar al-Assad.



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