

ARAB DISPATCH

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North Africa

#Mauritania – French President meets Mauritanian President to discuss jihadism in the Sahel



Source: VOA Afrique

Last week the French President, Emmanuel Macron, discussed with Mauritania's President Mohamed Ould Ghazouani the expansion jihadism in the region. France, who launched in June a coalition of West Africa and European allies to fight against terrorism, have recently met the Leaders of G5 Sahel group

to discuss the latest achievements in the area, also in light of the Libyan war and the risk of terrorism expansion with possible repercussions in Europe.

The French President, who condemned several times his country's colonial past and described colonization as a "crime against humanity", had recently increased his operations in the area.

Since 2013 France have been sending thousands of soldiers in the area; last January the President announced a new strategy in Sahel and the creation of a new political military structure, the International Coalition for the Sahel, that will include French forces (4.500 troops) and G5 Security Forces of West Africa.

During his last meeting in Mauritania, he expressed positive expectations regarding the war against jihadism and he agreed with Mauritania's President that a "victory is possible in Sahel". On the other hand one of the factors that have led to expansion of terrorism groups in the area is indeed the pressure exerted by the French troops, insufficient coverage of the area and a lack of a political strategy.

Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have expressed their support in fighting terrorism in the region and will provide military equipment and financial aid.

To know more about this topic:

- RFI, Fight against Jihad back on track as Macron meets Sahel leaders in Mauritania, 07/1/20, available at: <https://www.rfi.fr/en/africa/20200701-fight-against-jihad-back-on-track-as-macron-meets-g5-sahel-leaders-in-mauritania-france-mali>
- Al Jazeera, Macron says new tactics 'shifted the dynamic' in Sahel fight, 06/30/20, available: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/06/macron-tactics-shifted-dynamic-sahel-fight-200630180156175.html>
- African Bulletin, Jihadist groups extend their operations in the Sahel, 06/11/20, available at: <http://www.african-bulletin.com/10299-jihadist-groups-extend-their-operations-in-the-sahel.html>

Levant

#Syria - Water as means of pressure



Source: Arab News

Mismanagement and scarcity of water, causing agricultural crop failures and dislocation of the Syrian rural population, have been a crucial issue in the 2011 Syrian mass protests, leading to a bloody civil war. Turkey, that after Hafez al-Assad's death had been using the fluvial resources as a tool of cooperation with Syrian authorities to centralize all dam projects on the Euphrates-Tigris river, is now using water to control the Syrian conflict and the Kurdish factions at the Turkish-Syrian border.

In October 2019, Turkey and Turkish-backed forces took control of the Allouk water purification station that distributes water to the Hasaka Governorate, on the Syria-Turkey border. Since the 2019 offensive, water pumping has been interrupted several times in the Kurdish-led areas, depriving civilians to access water resources that are used to generate electricity and to irrigate fields.

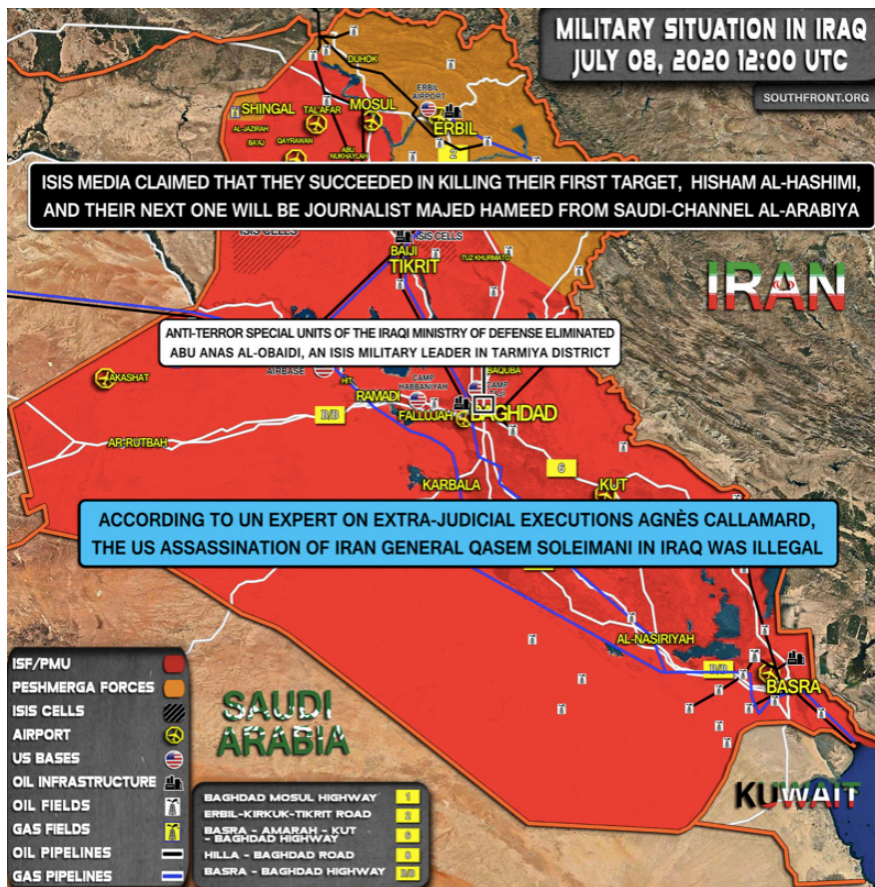
Successively these forces lost control of the Mabrukah electric station in favour of the Syrian Arab Army and local Kurdish forces; an agreement was brokered by Russia ensured the electrical supply to the Allouk water station from al-Mabrukah. This did solve the problem, since the water flow was repeatedly interrupted at least till May 2020 under reciprocal recriminations of weaponising water or of insufficient electricity to pump water.

To know more about this topic:

- *Human Rights Watch*, Turkey/Syria: Weaponizing water in global Pandemic, 03/31/20, available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/03/31/turkey/syria-weaponizing-water-global-pandemic>
- *Al Arabiya*, Turkey limits Euphrates water flow into Syria, Depriving hundreds of usable water, 07/07/20, available at: <https://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2020/07/07/Turkey-limits-Euphrates-water-flow-into-Syria-depriving-hundreds-of-usable-water.html>
- *Al-Monitor*, Turkey throttles water as pandemic looms over northeast Syria, 05/07/20 available at: <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2020/05/turkey-weaponize-water-northeast-syria-covid19-coronavirus.html#ixzz6RiV2HFOr>

Gulf

#Iraq – Rising tensions between Shiite militias and Iraq's government



Source: South Front.org

On Monday, July 6th, Hisham al-Hashimi, one of the top experts on Daesh and other armed groups related to international terrorism, has been killed in Baghdad.

Al-Hashimi was also an advisor to the US Coalition to defeat ISIS. His latest research focused on the Hashd al-Shaabi forces (Popular Mobilization Unit), an armed group formed in 2014 to fight against Daesh.

The group, mostly composed by Iranian militias and supported by Tehran, was reorganized in 2018 by the former Prime Minister Adil Abdul-Mahdi, who incorporated the armed group into the Iraqi regular forces, as a leading unit in counter terrorism operations.

One of the militias operating under the umbrella of the Hashd al-Shaabi are the Kataib Hezbollah (Brigades of the Party of God), a Shiite militia led by Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, which counts more than

1,000 fighters with 400 deployed in Iraq. It is a powerful militia with strong ties with Iran's supreme leader. It has strongly opposed the nomination of Prime Minister al-Kadhimi.

The killing of al-Hashimi may be interpreted as a warning to PM al-Kadhimi, for the detention of 14 members of this militia. At the end of June, the Iraqi Counter Terrorism force carried out an operation against the group, for plotting another attack in the Green Zone and against the Baghdad Airport, in response to the latest bilateral relations established by the PM al-Kadhimi with the United States.

After the murder of General Qassem Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis in a US airstrike, and the recent operations against Shiite Militias, tensions between pro-Iran factions and the Iraqi government are quickly growing.

To know more about this topic:

- *Asbarq Al-Ansat*, Killing of Iraq's Hashemi stirs fear on new violent phase, 07/08/20, available at: <https://english.aawsat.com/home/article/2377326/killing-iraqs-hashemi-stirs-fear-new-violent-phase>
- *Middle East Institute*, Al Kadhimi and the https: //www.mei.edu/publications/al-kadhimi-and-kataib-hezbollah-raid
- *The Guardian*, Killing of Islamic State expert in Baghdad marks critical moment for Iraq, 07/07/20, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jul/07/killing-of-islamic-state-expert-in-baghdad-reveals-cost-of-speaking-out>
- *Global Security*, Hashd al-Shaabi, 07/01/20, available at: <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/hashd-al-shaabi.htm>

#ArabInsight

By Maria Bagnara

#Lebanon – An economic ticking bomb scenario



Source: Jadaliyya

The political discourse on Lebanon bankrupt is mainly the economic crisis and social impact of the Syrian civil war. According to the World Bank, about 1,5 million Syrians, a quarter of the Lebanese population, have fled for their lives in Lebanon since the conflict erupted in March 2011, threatening Lebanon's economy. Due to the high number of Syrian refugees, 200.000 additional Lebanese have found themselves in poverty. The Lebanese middle class has almost disappeared. Moreover, the already critical economic situation has been pushed by the global pandemic into a collapse.

The living standard has strongly deteriorated during Hassan Diab government, with extremely high food price and the value of the Lebanese currency collapsing against the dollar (6.000 Lebanese pounds to the dollar).

Prices of essential goods have increased about 100% during the last two weeks, and about 500% since the financial crisis began at the end of last year, forcing consumers to by immediately to avoid inflation.

Not to mention that Lebanon had also benefited from the political and economy protection by the USA and the Gulf. About 350.000 Lebanese lived and worked in the Gulf countries and Lebanon represents

an important tourist attraction for the Gulf. However, the relations between the Gulf and Lebanon started to falter, thus, the Lebanese economy based on GCC investments, bank deposits and Lebanese expats remittances started to fall.

Source:

- *Asbarq al-Ansat*, تدهور لبناني متسارع في ظل حكومة دياب (Quick deterioration in Lebanon under Diab's government), available at: <https://aawsat.com/home/article/2371211/-تدهور-لبناني-متسارع-في-ظل-حكومة-دياب>

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