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US elite killed IS leader in northwest Syria near Turkish border; no US casualties

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150 troops enter camp of Temple terrorist's home & kill the Africa immigrant in clash

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US elite killed IS leader in northwest Syria near Turkish border; no US casualties

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Biden says U.S. forces killed IS leader during raid in Syria

'We have taken off the battlefield Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi,' POTUS announces; leader died by exploding a bomb that killed himself and members of his family; 13 reported dead in Special Force op, including 6 children, 4 women

Associated Press| Published: 02.03.22, 15:54

An elite U.S. military force killed one of the world's most wanted terrorists, the leader of the Islamic State group, during an overnight raid in Syria's northwestern Idlib province, President Joe Biden said Thursday.

The raid targeted Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi, who took over as head of the militant group on Oct. 31, 2019, just days after leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi died during a U.S. raid in the same area. A U.S. official said al-Qurayshi died as al-Baghdadi did, by

exploding a bomb that killed himself and members of his family, including women and children, as U.S. forces approached.

The operation came as IS has been trying for a resurgence, with a series of attacks in the region, including a 10-day assault late last month to seize a prison.

U.S. special forces landed in helicopters and assaulted a house in a rebel-held corner of Syria, clashing for two hours with gunmen, witnesses said. Residents described continuous gunfire and explosions that jolted the town of Atmeh near the Turkish border, an area dotted with camps for internally displaced people from Syria's civil war.

First responders reported that 13 people had been killed, including six children and four women.

Biden said in a statement that he ordered the raid to "protect the American people and our allies, and make the world a safer place." He planned to address the American public later Thursday morning.

"Thanks to the skill and bravery of our Armed Forces, we have taken off the battlefield Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi — the leader of ISIS," Biden said in a statement. He said all Americans involved in the operation returned safely.

The two-story house, surrounded by olive trees in fields outside Atmeh, was left with its top floor shattered and blood-spattered inside. A journalist on assignment for The Associated Press and several residents said they saw body parts scattered near the site. Most residents spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisals.

The Pentagon did not initially identify the target of the raid. "The mission was successful," Pentagon press secretary John Kirby said in a brief statement. "There were no U.S. casualties."

Idlib is largely controlled by Turkish-backed fighters but is also an al-Qaida stronghold and home to several of its top operatives. Other militants, including extremists from the rival IS group, have also found refuge in the region.

"The first moments were terrifying, no one knew what was happening," said Jamil el-Deddo, a resident of a nearby refugee camp. "We were worried it could be Syrian aircraft, which brought back memories of barrel bombs that used to be dropped on us," he added, referring to crude explosives-filled containers used by President Bashar Assad's forces against opponents during the Syrian conflict.

The top floor of the low house was almost totally destroyed; a room there had collapsed, sending white bricks tumbling to the ground below.

Blood could be seen on the walls and floor of the remaining structure. A wrecked bedroom had a child's wooden crib and a stuffed rabbit doll. On one damaged wall, a blue plastic baby swing was still hanging. The kitchen was littered with debris, with a blood splatter on the wall where the door was blown off its hinges. Religious books, including a biography of Islam's Prophet Mohammad, were in the house.

The opposition-run Syrian Civil Defense first responders — also known as the White Helmets — said 13 people were killed in shelling and clashes that ensued after the U.S. commando raid. They included six children and four women, it said.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an opposition war monitor, also said the strike killed 13 people, including four children and two women. Ahmad Rahhal, a citizen journalist who visited the site, reported seeing 12 bodies.

The Pentagon provided no details on casualties in the raid.

The Observatory said the troops landed in helicopters. Residents and activists described witnessing a large ground assault, with U.S. forces using megaphones urging women and children to leave the area.

Omar Saleh, a resident of a nearby house, said he was asleep when his doors and windows started to rattle to the sound of low-flying aircraft at 1:10am local time. He ran to open the windows with the lights off, and saw three helicopters. He then heard a man, speaking Arabic with an Iraqi or Saudi accent through a loudspeaker, urging women to surrender or leave the area.

"This went on for 45 minutes. There was no response. Then the machinegun fire erupted," Saleh said. He said the firing continued for two hours, as aircraft circled low over the area.

Taher al-Omar, an Idlib-based activist, said he witnessed clashes between fighters and the U.S. force. Others reported hearing at least one major explosion during the operation. A U.S. official said that one of the helicopters in the raid suffered a mechanical problem and had to be blown up on the ground. The U.S. official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss details of the military operation.

The military operation got attention on social media, with tweets from the region describing helicopters firing around the building near Atmeh. Flight-tracking data also suggested that multiple drones were circling the city of Sarmada and the village of Salwah, just north of the raid's location.

The U.S. has in the past used drones to kill top al-Qaida operatives in Idlib, which at one point was home to the group's biggest concentration of leaders since the days of Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan. The fact that special forces landed on the ground suggests the target was believed to be of high value.

Last month, it carried out its biggest military operation since it was defeated and its members scattered underground in 2019: an attack on a prison in northeast Syria holding at least 3,000 IS detainees. The attack appeared aimed to break free senior IS operatives in the prison.

It took 10 days of fighting for U.S.-backed, Kurdish-led forces to retake the prison fully, and the force said more than 120 of its fighters and prison workers were killed along with 374 militants. The U.S.-led coalition carried out airstrikes and deployed American personnel in Bradley Fighting Vehicles to the prison area to help the Kurdish forces.

A senior SDF official, Nowruz Ahmad, said Monday that the prison assault was part of a broader plot that IS had been preparing for a long time, including attacks on other neighborhoods in Kurdish-run northeastern Syria and on the al-Hol camp in the south, which houses thousands of families of IS members.

A December 2021 report by the Wilson Center, noted that al-Mawla hasn't shown his face and the group has released almost no biographical details about him.

"Al-Mawla has not even given an audio address in which Islamic State members might hear his voice's sharp break in precedent," the report said. "Some disaffected former members of the group have argued that it is contrary to the Sharia to pledge allegiance to a ghost, but that does not seem to have swayed opinion. If there was opposition to al Mawla's ascension, it has not manifested on the battlefield."

The U.S.-led coalition has targeted high-profile militants on several occasions in recent years, aiming to disrupt what U.S. officials say is a **secretive cell** known as the Khorasan group that is **planning external attacks**. A U.S. airstrike killed al-Qaida's second in command, former bin Laden aide Abu al-Kheir al-Masri, in Syria in 2017.

02.03.22

Gantz & Bahrain co-signed agreement that promotes defense intelligence sharing

02.03.22

Gantz meets Bahrain king, signs defense cooperation agreement

Historic MOU signed by **defense minister** and Bahraini counterpart, **promotes intelligence sharing**, joint military drills and closer ties between the defense industries; **Gantz praises king** and expresses gratitude for hospitality

Liad Osmo | Published: 02.03.22, 16:54

Defense Minister Benny **Gantz met** on **Thursday with King** Hamad Bin Isa al Khalifa **of Bahrain in his palace**, during his first official visit to the kingdom, where he signed a defense cooperation agreement.

Gantz also met with Crown Prince and Prime Minister Salman Bin Hamad al Khalifa, as well as the commander of the Bahrain armed forces and Defense Minister, Abdulla bin Hasan AlNuaimi who **co-signed** the historic **Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)** between the **defense establishments** of the two countries.

The MOU comes 18 months after the Abraham Accords formalizing Israel's relations with Bahrain and the UAE and will promote intelligence sharing, joint military drills and closer ties between the defense industries in both nations and was the pinnacle of the visit along with the successful meeting with the king and the Bahraini leaders. Sources close to Gantz expressed their optimism that the visit will help advance a close and intimate relationship between Israel and Bahrain.

Gantz who **was received with honors**, thanked the king for his hospitality and his support of broadening bi-lateral ties and the economic and civilian agreements signed thus far, solidifying the defense cooperation.

"The strategic cooperation that we are bringing to a new high point today with the signing of this agreement and with the important meeting with the king is the continuation of the historic Abraham Accords and of the developing relationship between our nations and people," Gantz said at the ceremony."

“Only a year after the signing of the accords, we are already here signing a significant security agreement, which will allow robust cooperation and strengthen the security of both countries and of the entire region,” the defense minister said.

Speaking at a joint Israeli-Emirati-Bahraini panel during an annual conference of the Institute for National Security Studies last month, Bahrain's Foreign Minister Abdullatif ben Rashid Al Zayani said the country saw eye to eye on many aspects of the Iranian expansion in the region.

"A common regional position on these issues will allow us to have greater influence over the United States," he said, stressing that the issues were of high importance for regional stability.

"Any future agreement with Iran must reflect the new reality in the region and be acceptable to all states in the region," he added.

02.03.22

Police illegally used Pegasus to snoop Netanyahu phones; originating Case 4000

02.03.22

Police unlawfully spied on key individual in Netanyahu case, reports claim

Investigators allegedly made unauthorized use of powerful hacking tool to extract large amounts of data from person's phone, estimated to be one of key witnesses; Netanyahu calls report 'Israeli Watergate'

Ynet| Published: 02.03.22, 10:53

Israel Police has made unauthorized use of spying tools to hack into the phone of a key individual in the criminal cases against former prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu and extracted a large amount of data, Hebrew media reports published on Wednesday claimed.

According to Channel 13, the data was extracted without a court order and included photos, phone numbers, correspondence history and various applications.

Channel 12 estimated that person may have been Shlomo Filber, a Netanyahu confidant who has served as director-general of the Communications Ministry under the Likud chairman and who is a state's witness in Case 4000.

As part of the case, the prosecution alleges that Netanyahu promoted regulations worth hundreds of millions of dollars for Shaul Elovitch, the owner of the country's largest telecommunications company Bezeq, in return for broad editorial control over his Walla! news website.

Channel 12 also aired a patchy sound bite from a conversation recorded before one of Filber's investigations in 2018 in which police investigators were purportedly caught on mic by accident mentioning an application that may "supposedly be illegal."

The Netanyahu ally, who has been sharing veiled criticism about the purity of the investigations against him online in recent months, took to Twitter to throw another jab at law enforcement after the airing of the report.

"My wife in response: Somebody is finally listening to your yammering'," he wrote. The report comes just days after Israel Police conceded it had made unauthorized use of NSO Group's powerful Pegasus spyware to snoop on Israeli citizens' phones weeks after denying such allegations.

Channel 13 reported that the revelation was made as part of an ongoing Justice Ministry inquiry into the NSO affair but did not specify whether investigators employed Pegasus to spy on the individual or different spyware.

The new revelations may help Netanyahu score a more favorable plea deal if he seeks one in the future after negotiations with the prosecution fell out due to his insistence against the conviction including a "moral turpitude" clause, which would ban the 72-year-old from political life for years.

Jack Chen, who represents Elovitch and his wife Iris in Case 4000, called the allegations a "grave crime" that must have "far-reaching consequences."

A response on Netanyahu's behalf called the revelation the "Israeli Watergate," referring to a major political scandal involving a massive political spying and sabotage campaign on behalf of U.S. President Richard Nixon, which ultimately led to his resignation in 1974.

"It was revealed tonight that police illegally hacked phones in order to bring down a strong right-wing prime minister," a statement read.

Israel Police refused to provide further details as the probe into the allegations was still ongoing.

Netanyahu, who lost power in June after 12 consecutive years as prime minister and now serves as leader of the opposition, has pleaded not guilty to charges of bribery, breach of trust and fraud in three cases for which he was indicted in 2019. All are being tried together.

He has denied any wrongdoing and accused prosecutors of colluding with allies in media, law enforcement and the political system to carry out a politically motivated witch-hunt in order to oust him from power.

02.02.22

Israel joins naval exercise in the Middle East, IMX 22, with 60 countries

02.02.22

Israel participates in huge U.S. Mideast naval exercise alongside Saudi, Oman

In first-ever, Israel to take part in the International Maritime Exercise alongside some 60 countries, including several Gulf states with which it has no diplomatic ties

Reuters| Published: 02.02.22, 22:15

Israel is taking part in a huge U.S.-led naval exercise in the Middle East, for the first time publicly joining Saudi Arabia and Oman, two countries it has no diplomatic relations with despite its normalization of ties with some Gulf states.

The International Maritime Exercise 2022 (IMX 22) includes around 60 countries and comes amid heightened Gulf tensions after missile attacks on the United Arab Emirates by Yemen's Iran-aligned Houthi movement, including a foiled attack aimed at a base hosting U.S. forces.

Israel normalized relations with Gulf states the UAE and Bahrain in 2020, brought together by shared worries about Iran, and first held a joint naval drill with those two countries in November.

But this is the first time Israel has participated in an IMX exercise, and publicly alongside Saudi Arabia with which it has no diplomatic ties.

Gulf neighbors Kuwait and Qatar, who also have no formal relations with Israel, did not participate, according to U.S. Navy information.

Bahrain hosts the U.S. Navy Fifth Fleet's headquarters as well as some operations for CENTCOM, a U.S. military coordination umbrella organization for the Middle East. Israel last year was included in CENTCOM.

A U.S. Navy spokesperson on Wednesday said exercise planners were aware of the geopolitical context of participating countries, but cooperation had been high. "Here in the region we have had nothing but positive results in terms of planning efforts," he said.

The IDF said on Monday that some units would participate in the Red Sea exercise with the U.S. Fifth Fleet.

"For the past few months Israel has been exercising not only with us but other partner nations in this region," Fifth Fleet spokesperson Tim Hawkins told reporters on Wednesday.

In its seventh year, IMX 22 began on Monday from the Fifth Fleet in Bahrain and will cover the Arabian Gulf, Arabian Sea, Gulf of Oman, Red Sea and North Indian Ocean.

02.02.22

Law enforcement allowed use of phone tracking to monitor protesters

02.02.22

Israel upholds use of surveillance technology on protesters

Human rights watchdog laments attorney general's decision to allow law enforcement to use mobile-phone tracking technology to monitor and threaten Palestinian protesters

Associated Press| Published: 02.02.22, 21:29

Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit has upheld the Shin Bet security agency's use of mobile-phone tracking technology to monitor and threaten Palestinian protesters at Jerusalem's most sensitive holy site last year.

The decision, which came on Tuesday, drew harsh criticism from the civil rights group that challenged the use of the technology. The group warned that it would have a "chilling effect" on the country's Arab minority.

The attorney general's move was in response to a complaint about a series of text messages sent out last May during a series of clashes between Palestinian protesters and police at the Al Aqsa Mosque, which helped spark an 11-day war between Israel and Hamas.

Using its tracking technology, the Shin Bet sent a text message to people who were determined to be in the area of the clashes and told them "we will hold you accountable" for acts of violence.

The recipients included both Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem, as well as Palestinian citizens of Israel, some of which simply lived, worked or prayed in the area where the violence took place.

The Association for Civil Rights in Israel, a civil-society group, filed a complaint to Mandelblit's office, urging him to halt the use of the technology.

In its response, the attorney general's office acknowledged there had been problems with the message. But it said the use of the technology was a legitimate security tool and that the security service has revised its procedures to avoid similar mistakes in the future.

"After discussions with us on this subject, lessons were learned in the security agency and guidelines formulated in various aspects with the goal of preventing a recurrence of problems like this," said the opinion. It said the office planned no further intervention in the matter.

The Association for Civil Rights in Israel, or ACRI, expressed disappointment with the ruling.

"They say they have the authority to continue sending this kind of texts to people," said Gil Gan-Mor, who heads the group's unit on human rights in the digital age. "We think differently."

"Obviously this will have a chilling effect, to say the least, on practicing legitimate activities, like going to a protest or going to pray somewhere," he said.

ACRI has previously filed legal challenges to the government's use of the same Shin Bet tracking technology as a contact-tracing tool to prevent the spread of the coronavirus early in the pandemic.

02.01.22

Iranian hacker group 'Moses Staff' encrypts as leverage for ransomware

02.01.22

'Politically motivated' Iranian hacker group that hit Israeli companies exposed

Moses Staff targets a variety of industries, including finance, travel, energy, manufacturing, and the utility industry as well as the government; the group also targeted organizations in Italy, India, Germany, Chile, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, and the U.S.

TPS| Updated: 02.01.22, 15:57

The Cybereason Nocturnus Team has been tracking the Iranian hacker group known as Moses Staff in recent months, after it was first spotted in October 2021. The group's motivation is to harm Israeli companies by leaking sensitive, stolen data.

Aside from Israel, which appears to be the main target of the group, Moses Staff was observed targeting organizations in other countries, including Italy, India, Germany, Chile, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, and the US.

The group targets a variety of industries, among them the Government, Finance, Travel, Energy, Manufacturing, and the Utility industry.

Following recently published research detailing the group's Tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs), the Cybereason Nocturnus team discovered a previously unidentified Remote Access Trojan (RAT) in the Moses Staff arsenal dubbed Strife Water.

"The StrifeWater RAT appears to be used in the initial stage of the attack and this stealthy RAT has the ability to remove itself from the system to cover the Iranian group's tracks," Cybereason explained. "The RAT possesses other capabilities, such as command execution and screen capturing, as well as the ability to download additional extensions. Usually, once hackers infiltrate an organization and steal sensitive data, they deploy ransomware to encrypt the infected machines.

Unlike financially motivated cybercrime ransomware groups who encrypt the files as leverage for a ransom payment, the encryption of the files in the Moses Staff attacks serves two purposes: inflicting damages by disrupting critical business operations, and covering the attackers' tracks.

"The end goal for Moses Staff appears to be more politically motivated rather than financial," Cybereason underscored. "Analysis of the group's conduct and operations suggests that Moses Staff leverages cyber espionage and sabotage to advance Iran's geopolitical goals by inflicting damage and spreading fear."

"Moses Staff's goals seem aligned with Iran's cyber warfare doctrine, seeking to sabotage the government, military, and civilian organizations related to its geopolitical opponents. Unlike criminal cybercrime groups that use ransomware to coerce their victims to pay a ransom fee, it is assessed that the Moses Staff group will leak sensitive

information without demanding a ransom fee, and it was previously assessed that their goals are political in nature," the report said.

Iran and Israel have been engaged in cyber warfare in recent years, with Iran attacking a broad array of targets, and Israel focusing on Iran's nuclear program.

Israel has also reportedly carried out several successful cyberattacks against critical Iranian infrastructure.

02.01.22

150 troops enter camp of Temple terrorist's home & kill the Africa immigrant in clash

02.01.22

Clashes erupt after police enter East Jerusalem neighborhood to seal terrorist's home
At least 150 troops enter camp to seal fourth floor apartment of Fadi Abu Shkhaydam who killed Eliyahu Kay, after Supreme Court rejected family's appeal
Einav Halabi | Updated: 02.01.22, 10:38

Clashes broke out on Tuesday after a large police force entered the Shuafat refugee camp in Jerusalem to seal the home of Fadi Abu Shkhayda, who killed Eliyahu Kay and wounded two others, in a shooting attack in the Old City last November

He was shot dead by police troops on the scene.

Kay, 26, was an immigrant from South Africa. He worked as a tour guide for the Western Wall Heritage Foundation. He was to be wed to his fiancée in six months.
Some 150 Border Police troops entered the camp while a police chopper hovered above.

The Supreme Court on Monday rejected the family of Abu Shkhaydam appeal against the move, and the apartment, on the fourth floor will be sealed.

The terrorist was the father of four, a teacher and preacher and had often called for a resistance to police presence on Temple Mount.
He was a member of the political wing of the Hamas terror group.

Hamas issued a statement shortly after the attack, praising the gunman.

"The Holy City continues to fight against the foreign occupier, and will not surrender to the occupation," the group said. "The youth continues their legitimate fight until they achieve their freedom, liberate their land, and retrieve their holy places," Hamas said in a statement after the attack but did not claim responsibility for it.

Before his attack, his wife traveled to Jordan and was questioned by security forces, upon her return.