Beat: Miscellaneous

Iraq hangs senior al-Qaeda leader, three other men

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USPA News - Iraqi authorities on Monday hanged a senior al-Qaeda leader and three other men convicted of terror-related offenses, the country`s justice ministry said on Tuesday. It follows two mass executions last month in which eighteen people were hanged.

One of those executed was Munaf Abdul Rahim Abdul Hamid al-Rawi, who once served as the "governor of Baghdad" for the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), an armed insurgent group affiliated with al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). The three other men are said to have worked for him in carrying out the group`s operations. A justice ministry official, speaking on the condition of anonymity, said al-Rawi and the other men were accused of carrying out a large number of attacks, including bombings in the provinces of Baghdad and Anbar, killing a number of people. They were also accused of carrying out armed robberies on jewelers and banks. Following the latest executions, Martin Kobler, the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for Iraq (SRSG), expressed his "deep concern" that Iraqi authorities are continuing to implement the death penalty. He urged the Iraqi government to immediately suspend all pending death sentences and to issue a public and permanent moratorium on the use of death penalty. The executions on Monday follow two mass executions last month. A justice ministry official revealed on March 27 that eight men were hanged on March 14 and that ten other men were hanged on March 17. Details about the cases for which the men were convicted were not released, but the official said they had all been sentenced to death for terrorism-related offenses. Also in March, Al Qaeda`s Iraqi affiliate claimed responsibility for a wave of attacks on March 19 that killed at least 56 people and injured more than 220 others. The statement from the group, posted on Islamist Internet forums, threatened "revenge" for those executed by Iraqi authorities. At least 22 people have been executed in Iraq so far this year, following no less than 123 executions in 2012. "I deeply regret that the authorities have chosen to re-start executions now, when the Iraqi government had committed to re-examining the cases of prisoners and detainees," European Union (EU) foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton said last month, urging the Iraqi government to introduce a moratorium on the use of the death penalty. "Iraq is aware of the EU`s unequivocal position against the death penalty." Iraq lists 48 crimes for which the death penalty can be imposed, including crimes such as terrorism, kidnapping and murder, but also a number of non-fatal offenses such as damage to public property. The United Nations (UN) believes at least 1,200 people have been sentenced to death since 2004, but the Iraqi government is reluctant to release official figures. In January 2012, Human Rights Watch warned that Iraq risks falling back towards authoritarian rule amid allegations that security forces have tortured detainees at a secret prison, cracked down on freedom of expression and attacked peaceful protesters as well as journalists. Executions were commonly used by the government of Saddam Hussein. The opposition in Iraq previously compared Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki to a dictator as he failed to appoint defense, interior, and national security affairs ministers, giving him full control over those ministries. He appointed Saadoun al-Dulaimi as acting defense minister in August 2011, but he retains control over the other two ministries.

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