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**'BLOODY INFIGHTING' PREDICTED AS SENIOR ISIS MEMBER 'DECLARES HIMSELF NEW CALIPH' IN NORTHERN IRAQ FOLLOWING REPORTS OF ABU BAKR AL-BAGHDADI'S DEATH**

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Daily Mail (12 July 2017)

A senior member of Islamic State has declared himself the new caliph following reports of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's death, a news agency in Iraq has reported.

Abu Haitham al-Obaidi, the terrorist group's deputy mayor in Hawija in northern Iraq, is said to have declared himself the new leader.

Yesterday the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said it had 'confirmed information' that Baghdadi had been killed after Russia claimed last month to have hit the self-proclaimed caliph in an airstrike on the outskirts of Raqqa, Syria.

According to Iraqi News, Jabbar al-Maamouri, a leader of the government-sanctioned militia group Popular Mobilization Forces, said: 'Abu Haitham al-Obaidi, deputy to the (Islamic State's) mayor of Hawija, dissented from the group and named himself a new Caliph after Baghdadi's death reports were confirmed.'

He added that Obaidi, a senior military commander within the group, had withdrawn his dozens of loyal followers to the west of Hawija - which is in Kirkuk province - in preparation for a conflict with other IS members.

Maamouri explained: 'Hawija is bracing for a bloody infighting among IS members, the most violent since the group took over Hawija in June 2014.'

It has also been reported that IS has confirmed the death of Baghdadi in a statement as conflict between the group's senior figures broke out.

IS has carried out arrests and imposed a curfew in an attempt to suppress the fighting, Alsumaria News reported.

On Monday Iraq's prime minister, Haider al-Abadi, declared a final victory over IS in Mosul, the biggest city it held in the country and the place where Baghdadi first declared the caliphate in 2014.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights director Rami Abdel Rahman said yesterday that 'top tier commanders' from IS had confirmed Baghdadi's death.

'We learned of it today but we do not know when he died or how,' he said.

The Pentagon said that it had no information to corroborate the claims.

'We take any report of this nature with a large dose of salt,' Sebastian Gorka, deputy assistant to President Donald Trump, told Fox News.

'We will verify it. We will look at the intelligence available ... and we will give a statement when we have the requisite facts.'

Coalition spokesman Colonel Ryan Dillon added: 'We cannot confirm this report, but hope it is true.

'We strongly advise ISIS to implement a strong line of succession, it will be needed,' he added.

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Kaynak/Source: