

China says killing of Islamic State leader Baghdadi is progress, much work remains

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Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was killed during a US raid last weekend. (AP)

Beijing: The United States' killing of Islamic State's leader is important progress, but the world should not rest on its laurels in the fight against terrorism, China's special envoy to the Middle East said on Friday.

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Speaking to reporters following a visit to Saudi Arabia, Iran and Egypt last month, Zhai Jun said last month's killing of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi by U.S. forces was "important progress in the fight against terrorism".

"But that does not mean the Islamic State has been completely wiped out," Zhai, an Arabic speaker and former Chinese ambassador in Tripoli and Paris, said.

"The ideological tide of terrorism lives on," he added. "We must not lower our vigilance."

Affiliates of Islamic State, as well as other militant organisations were still active in other countries, Zhai said.

Zhai's remarks on Baghdadi's death were the most high profile to date on the issue from China, which had previously only said it was closely monitoring the situation.

China has been looking to bolster its traditional low-profile diplomatic role in the Middle East, where it has key energy and business interests, though has made little noticeable impact so far with its special envoys for the region.

China has close economic and energy relations with both Saudi Arabia and its regional foe Iran, and has long had to tread carefully in its ties with both.

President Xi Jinping is likely to visit the region next year as Saudi Arabia "China's top oil supplier" is the host of the 2020 G20 summit.

Saudi Arabia's King Salman visited Beijing in 2017, and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman came to China this year.

- Reuters