

Saudi committee in Aden to oversee forces withdrawal

Sun, 2020-08-16 23:07

AL-MUKALLA: A Saudi committee met on Sunday in the southern city of Aden with senior military officers from the Southern Transitional Council (STC) to discuss the withdrawal of forces from Aden and Abyan, local media and officials said.

Assigned by the Saudi government to oversee the implementation of the Riyadh Agreement, the committee touched down in Aden last week where members met with Gen. Ahmed Saeed Ben Break, the acting president of the STC, and other local officials.

Mohammed Al-Jaber, Saudi ambassador to Yemen, said that the Saudi Coordination and Liaison Team, led by Mohammed Al-Rubaie, in cooperation with Saudi-led troops in Aden, will supervise the withdrawal of STC military units from the region. They will also visit the southern province of Abyan to monitor the withdrawal of government and STC forces to previous locations under the Riyadh Agreement.

Yemeni President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi appointed a new governor and chief security for Aden and mandated Prime Minister Maeen Abdul Malik Saeed to form a new government as the STC abandoned self-rule in southern Yemeni provinces.

Yemeni government and STC officials pledged to comply with the Saudi committee despite trading accusations about breaches to the truce. Mohammed Al-Naqeeb, a spokesperson for the STC forces in Abyan, told Arab News by telephone that their forces would adhere to the cease-fire announced in Riyadh and other terms of the Riyadh Agreement.

SPEEDREAD

The Saudi Coordination and Liaison Team in cooperation with Saudi-led troops in Aden will supervise the withdrawal of STC military units from the region, as their exit from southern Yemen paves way for peace.

“We are committed to the Riyadh Agreement and we will work on smoothing the way for the success of the Saudi committee,” Al-Naqeeb said. Yemeni military officials also say their commanders asked them to follow the truce and comply with Saudi monitors that will visit contested areas in Abyan.

Consultations

In Riyadh, the prime minister met with senior members of the General People’s Congress Party (GPC) as part of his discussions with political parties in Yemen to form the new government.

The official Saba news agency reported that the prime minister's consultations focused on the cabinet formation, its new priorities and the Riyadh Agreement. The GPC had ruled Yemen for more than three decades during the reign of Yemen's former president Ali Abdullah Saleh.

Also in Riyadh, US Ambassador to Yemen Christopher Henzel congratulated new Aden Gov. Ahmed Hamid Lamlis on his new post, describing his appointment as an important step towards peace and stability in Yemen.

"US Ambassador Christopher Henzel met Gov. of Aden Ahmed Lamlas and congratulated him on his appointment, which is an important step in implementing the Riyadh Agreement and towards restoring stability and security to Yemen," the embassy said.

Fighting in Jawf

Heavy fighting broke out on Saturday and Sunday in the northern province of Jawf after government forces launched an offensive aimed at clearing Iran-backed Houthis from areas in Khab and Shaaf district.

Yemen's Defense Ministry said that army troops and allied tribesmen liberated a number of locations in the district during the early hours of the offensive after killing and capturing dozens of Houthis.

Rabia Al-Qurashi, the army's spokesman in Al-Jawf, said that government forces seized seven abandoned military vehicles as a Saudi-led coalition aircraft destroyed three others and targeted Houthi gatherings and reinforcements, killing dozens of rebels.

Similar heavy fighting between government forces and Houthis broke out in the mountainous Nehim district, near Houthi-held Sanaa. The army posted a video of government forces firing at fleeing Houthi fighters on a battlefield in Nehim.



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[Beirut counts the cost of devastating blast](#)

Sun, 2020-08-16 23:02

BEIRUT: Residents and businesses are counting the cost of a devastating blast that destroyed vast swathes of the city, as relief work continues in the affected areas.

The Aug. 4 explosion in the Port of Beirut killed at least 170 people and injured thousands. More than 80,000 homes have been damaged.

On Sunday people were removing wreckage from the main streets of Beirut's neighborhoods that were either destroyed or damaged by the explosion. The relief work has focused on clearing out houses, shops and other businesses that are still filled with rubble.

But the repair and restoration work has not yet started as it is waiting on a

field survey from engineers' committees and NGOs.

Residents affected by the blast said they no longer needed food aid, but help to repair their homes before winter. They have replaced windows with nylon coils, or blocked the doors of their damaged homes with wooden panels and temporary locks. Some are staying in their homes despite the damage caused because they have nowhere else to go.

The head of the Lebanese Order of Physicians in Beirut, Sharaf Abu Sharaf, said that 2,000 doctors had been affected, either through direct physical injury or severe damage to their clinics.

There are 13,000 doctors affiliated to the syndicate, and he feared the departure of doctors and nurses from Lebanon, saying: "Some of them have already begun to emigrate."

Three major hospitals were destroyed by the explosion, while three others were partly damaged. Geitaoui Hospital was one of those that was badly affected and it is the only hospital in Lebanon that specializes in treating burns. It is the first time the hospital has been damaged, as it has survived all the wars in Lebanon since 1975.

NUMBER

80,000 Homes have been damaged in the Aug. 4 explosion in the Port of Beirut that also killed at least 170 people and injured thousands.

Abu Sharaf announced the establishment of a crisis unit, in cooperation with the World Health Organization, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the World Bank, to receive aid after conducting a field study on the damage to doctors and their clinics.

As the dust settled from the destruction of Beirut's seafront and its surrounding neighborhoods, it also revealed the destruction of thousands of businesses including 1,408 restaurants, clubs, and patisseries in Greater Beirut. According to a national syndicate representing them, some of these places were completely destroyed while others were partly damaged.

The head of the Syndicate of Owners of Restaurants, Cafés, Nightclubs and Pastries in Lebanon, Tony Ramy, estimated the losses at \$315 million.

"On the 25th of this month, the syndicate will launch an initiative to obtain regional and international assistance, because the owners of these institutions are unable to repair and renovate their stores," he told Arab News. "There is a need for fresh dollars, and nobody can secure this liquidity in light of the banking restrictions imposed on depositors and because of the collapse of the local currency against the dollar, in addition to the halt of business and therefore the lack of income."

The Lebanese Army said that 30 foreign countries have so far provided aid and

that dozens of planes were landing daily at Beirut airport. These countries include poorer nations such Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, which send hundreds of their nationals to work in Lebanon.

A top US official described the tragic event of Aug. 4 as a “symptom of the illnesses that lay in Lebanon.”

US Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs David Hale made the remark at the end of a three-day visit to Beirut, reiterating the international community’s calls for a credible and transparent investigation into the explosion’s circumstances.

“These illnesses have lasted for a very long time, and almost everyone in power bears a certain extent of responsibility for them. I am talking about decades of mismanagement, corruption, and the repeated failure of Lebanese leaders to enact meaningful and sustainable reforms.”

He urged political leaders to respond to the demands of the Lebanese people for “good governance, sound economic and financial reform, and an end to the rampant corruption” that had stifled Lebanon’s energy.

“There should be no (financial) bailout for Lebanon,” he added. “America and its international partners will respond to systemic reforms with sustained financial support when they see Lebanese leaders committed to real change in word and deed. But we cannot, and will not, try to dictate any outcome. This is Lebanon’s moment to define a Lebanese – non-foreign – vision for Lebanon. What kind of Lebanon do you have and what kind of Lebanon do you wish for? Only the Lebanese can answer this question.”



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Lebanon president hedges over eventual peace with Israel in interview

[Iran threatens to attack UAE over Israel deal](#)

Author:

Sun, 2020-08-16 00:04

DUBAI/PARIS/ANKARA: Iran issued an explicit threat on Saturday to launch an attack against the UAE over its agreement to normalize ties with Israel.

President Hassan Rouhani said the UAE had made a “huge mistake” and condemned what he called a betrayal.

The Iranian hard-line daily Kayhan, whose editor in chief is appointed by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, went further. “The UAE’s great betrayal of the Palestinian people ... will turn this small, rich country, which is heavily dependent on security, into a legitimate and easy target,” it said in a front-page editorial.

Iran has already targeted Saudi civilians with missiles launched by its proxy forces in Iraq and Yemen, and security analyst Dr. Theodore Karasik told Arab News the new threat should be taken seriously.

“Iranian missiles could hit the UAE in eight minutes,” said Karasik, a senior adviser to Gulf State Analytics in Washington, D.C. “They can target critical infrastructure, or they can simply target the desert in an act of psychological warfare.

“Recent Iranian naval exercises featured missiles that came from an underground launcher. This was new and set off an alarm. Nevertheless, Dubai and other urban centers are still considered safe zones.”

Last week’s agreement, brokered by US President Donald Trump, established diplomatic relations between the two countries for the first time, while Israel halted plans to annex swaths of the West Bank.

Ali Abdullah Al-Ahmed, the UAE ambassador to France, told the French-language edition of Arab News there was more to come. “What will follow will not be confined to the political level but will equally cover the economic, technological, and academic levels,” he said.

“It is highly possible that the tempo of the development of these relations will be faster, we will see.”

The ambassador rejected claims that the Palestinians had been betrayed. “We do not negotiate in the name of the Palestinians and it is not up to us to do so,” he said.

“Our position regarding the Palestinian cause is in line with the Arab consensus regarding Jerusalem and other parameters of Arab unanimity, we adhere to them and we do not relinquish them.”

Meanwhile Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan was accused of double standards after he threatened to sever relations with the UAE over the agreement, while maintaining diplomatic and trade ties with Israel.

“Turkey has a hypocritical stance,” said Seth J. Frantzman, executive director of the Middle East Center for Reporting and Analysis. It was a deliberate choice by Ankara to distract attention from economic failure, he said.

“Ankara, guided by its current ruling party, is moving toward becoming the most anti-Israel regime in the region.”

Opinion

This section contains relevant reference points, placed in (Opinion field)

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[Missing boy's death exposes Houthi child recruitment](#)

Sat, 2020-08-15 22:53

AL-MUKALLA: When 15-year-old Abdul Aziz Ali Al-Dharhani went missing, his family visited the local Houthi officials of their small village in Yemen's Dhale province to ask for information. The Iranian-backed rebels said they knew nothing about their son's whereabouts.

The family were certain the officials were lying, because their son had attended Houthi religious sessions at a local mosque before he went missing. Family members circulated Al-Dharhani's image on social media and asked people to help find him.

A local Houthi figure, despite claiming to not know about the child, called the family 10 days later to congratulate them on the "martyrdom" of their son.

Abdurrahman Barman, a Yemeni human rights advocate and director of the American Center for Justice, investigated the boy's disappearance and said Al-Dharhani was brainwashed by Houthis and sent to battle where he was killed.

Barman added that his investigation revealed that Houthis actively recruit child soldiers.

"Before joining them, the boy was friendly and got on with people," he told Arab News.

After joining sessions at the mosque, where he was lectured on jihad and Houthi movement founder Hussein Al-Houthi, Al-Dharhani isolated himself from family and friends. He left home without telling anyone, leaving his family in fear and panic.

"The Houthis give recruited children nicknames to convince them they are men and can fight," Barman said, adding that he learned the boy was sent to the front line without any military training.

“He was killed shortly after,” Barman said.

NUMBER

7,000 Children are reported to have been recruited by Houthis, according to the Yemeni Coalition to Monitor Human Rights Violations

Houthis held a long funeral procession where his body was wrapped in slogans. Houthi media quoted local officials as saying that Al-Dharhani was a “hero” who fought Israel, the US and other enemies.

Barman said the Houthis have never been ashamed of their recruitment of children despite local and international criticism.

“The Houthi movement boasts about the deaths of their child soldiers. Even some Houthi-affiliated rights activists describe dead children as heroes and martyrs.”

Yemeni government officials, human rights groups and experts said the story of Al-Dharhani represents only the tip of the iceberg. Houthis are alleged to have recruited thousands of children over the last five years to shore up troop numbers amid the increasingly costly war.

The Yemeni Coalition to Monitor Human Rights Violations, known as the Rasd Coalition, recently reported that Houthis had recruited 7,000 children from heavily populated areas under their control.

Nadwa Al-Dawsari, a Yemeni conflict analyst, told Arab News that Houthis are responsible for most child soldiers in Yemen and use specific strategies to draw children to the front line.

“Houthis are aggressive when it comes to recruiting children. They are responsible for over 70 percent of child soldiers in Yemen according to the UN. They lure children to fight with them by brainwashing them through mosques and religious activities, sometimes without the knowledge of their families,” she said.

On the battlefield, the recruited children take part in fighting or logistical work, while some operate as spies. Al-Dawsari said Houthi ideology helps explain why they brag about recruiting children.

“They are a radical Jihadist group that doesn’t hesitate to spill blood to achieve their political objectives. They want to ensure Abdulmalik Al-Houthi and the Hashemite bloodline rule Yemen for good,” she said.

Rehabilitation center

In the central city of Marib, the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center founded a institute to rehabilitate soldiers in Yemen in 2017. The center has rehabilitated about 480 child soldiers. Mohammed Al-Qubaty, the

center's director, told Arab News that children are usually lured into joining through financial and social incentives. Enlisted children are given salaries, arms and food, while others are forced to take up arms, he said. "Children are cheap and easily influenced. They quickly learn how to use arms and are obedient to their commanders," he added.



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[Ankara burns bridges with UAE but maintains ties with Israel: Why?](#)

Sat, 2020-08-15 22:38

JEDDAH: After Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan threatened on Friday to suspend diplomatic relations with the UAE following a breakthrough deal between the Gulf state and Israel, without making reference to any downgrading of its own diplomatic relations with Tel Aviv, the move was

criticized by many as hypocrisy.

The deal between Israel and UAE requires that Israel suspend its planned annexation of parts of the West Bank in exchange for a normalization of ties with Abu Dhabi. In response, the Palestinian Authority announced the "immediate" recall of its ambassador to the UAE.

The Turkish Foreign Ministry described the deal as a betrayal of the Palestinian cause.

Although it is a strong advocate of the Palestinians as far as Israeli actions in the Gaza Strip and West Bank are concerned, Turkey continues to maintain its diplomatic ties with Israel.

"Turkey has a hypocritical stance, slamming the UAE for discussing relations with Israel, while Turkey also has relations with Israel," said Seth J. Frantzman, executive director of the Middle East Center for Reporting and Analysis.

Turkey has had diplomatic relations with Israel since 1949. Despite deep mistrust between the two countries, especially since the Mavi Marmara incident in 2010, when Israeli commandos boarded a Turkish aid boat and killed ten Turkish activists, bilateral trade between two countries reached to \$6 billion last year. Israel is among Turkey's top 10 export markets.

In the past two years, the bilateral diplomatic representation has been at the level of chargé d'affaires rather than ambassador in response to the transfer of the US embassy to Jerusalem and to Israeli policies in the Gaza Strip.

According to Frantzman, this rhetoric is part of a deliberate choice by Ankara to distract from economic failure at home.

NUMBER

\$6bn Worth of bilateral trade between Turkey and Israel was conducted last year.

"Ankara, guided by its current ruling party, is moving towards becoming the most anti-Israel regime in the region. Recent bombastic announcements about 'liberating Al-Aqsa after Hagia Sophia' seek to fan religious extremism as part of an agenda by Ankara to try to re-ignite populist, religious and nationalist views across the region rooted in the previous century's mentalities and wars," he said.

On Aug. 13, the British Daily Telegraph alleged that Turkey is granting citizenship to seven senior operatives of Hamas and voiced concerns about the potential repercussions of such moves to give the group more freedom to stage attacks on Israeli citizens around the world. The allegations were denied by a spokesman for the Turkish government.

Hamas is listed by the US and the EU as a terrorist group, but Ankara considers it a legitimate political movement. Western allies have warned Turkey several times about Hamas' presence on Turkish soil.

Frantzman thinks that Turkey's ruling party, which supports Hamas and is growing closer to Iran's regime, only maintains its current relations with Israel because of Washington and because of its desire to exploit NATO and the EU.

"Ankara's real agenda is to try to dominate the Arab world, and it thinks anti-Israel views will gain it support, the same way Iran seeks to exploit Palestinian suffering for the regime's own ends. Neither Turkey or Iran have succeeded so far in bringing Palestinians more rights, all they have done is led to false hopes and ruined chances at peace and tolerance," he said.

But Frantzman finds it unfortunate that Turkey pursues this policy rather than engagement because Ankara once played a role in Israel-Syria discussions and other productive work in the region.

The "technical" and "functional" relationship between Israel and Turkey still go on. Israel's flagship carrier El Al, which suspended its flights to Turkey a decade ago following the Mavi Marmara crisis, landed in Istanbul this May to operate twice a week between Istanbul and Tel Aviv.

"Turkey was the first majority Muslim country to extend diplomatic recognition to Israel, and that has not changed under the AKP (the ruling Justice and Development Party). So, all the UAE is doing is what Turkey has done for almost 70 years – recognize Israel," said Bill Park, a visiting research fellow at King's College London.

Furthermore, as Turkey's trade with Israel has continued to increase under the AKP in Turkey's favor, Park doubts that Erdogan could really put this trade at risk for this reason.

If it is little more than a war of words, why does Erdogan engage in these threats?

"He is already in conflict with the UAE over Libya, Qatar and Turkey's regional backing for Islamist and Muslim Brotherhood elements," Park said. "So Erdogan's rhetoric is part of this ongoing tension. He doesn't like Israel and its plans to annex the West Bank, so maybe he is trying to achieve the moral and/or political high ground at home and in the region."

Park thinks that if other Arab states, such as Oman, Bahrain and even KSA follow the UAE example, this would isolate Erdogan still further.

"The UAE is in large measure driven by fear of and hostility towards Iran, a sentiment shared by Israel. This now looms larger for many Arab governments than the plight of the Palestinians. Turkey again finds itself at odds with much of the region. Although there is a degree of mutual suspicion between Tehran and Ankara, there is little hostility, and Turkey has been crucial in enabling Iran to reduce the impact of US-inspired sanctions," Park said.

Park said Erdogan could be either engaging in rhetoric for its own sake, or playing to the gallery of public opinion, or willing to damage Turkey's economic interests, or simply adding to Turkey's stark regional isolation.

"What his stance will not do is solve any problem that the region, or Turkey, faces," he said.



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Turkey may suspend ties with UAE over Israel deal, Erdogan says