

US warship seizes suspected Iran missile parts set for Yemen

Wed, 2019-12-04 23:26

WASHINGTON: A Navy warship has seized a “significant cache” of suspected Iranian guided missile parts headed to the Houthi militia in Yemen, US officials said Wednesday, marking the first time that such sophisticated components have been taken en route to the war there.

The seizure from a small boat by the US Navy and a US Coast Guard boarding team happened last Wednesday in the northern Arabian Sea, and the weapons have been linked to Iran.

Officials said the incident illustrates the continuing illegal smuggling of weapons to the Houthis and comes as Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu were meeting, with Iran as the main topic.

The officials spoke on condition of anonymity to describe a sensitive military mission.

The US has consistently accused Iran of illegally smuggling arms to Houthi militia battling the Yemeni legitimate government and has seized smaller and less sophisticated weapons in transit.

According to officials, the USS Forrest Sherman was conducting routine maritime operations when sailors noticed a small wooden boat that was not displaying a country flag. The Navy and Coast Guard personnel stopped, boarded the boat for inspection and found the weapons.

Officials did not provide the exact number of missiles or parts but did describe it as a significant cache. They said the small boat was towed into port, and the people on the boat were transferred to the Yemeni Coast Guard. The weapons are still on board the US ship.

Smuggling weapons into Yemen is a violation of a U.N. Security Council resolution.



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Rights group say Houthis continue to commit atrocities in Yemen
Clashes continue between Yemeni army and Houthis in Saada

[Algeria tries top figures for corruption as opposed election looms](#)

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Wed, 2019-12-04 15:56

ALGIERS: Algeria began the corruption trial of senior officials including two former prime ministers on Wednesday, a week before a presidential election opposed by a huge protest movement.

Fighting corruption in the entrenched ruling hierarchy is one of the main goals of the protesters, but they have not yet been mollified by the arrest of dozens of senior figures including officials, former officials and businessmen.

Wednesday's trial is the second of top figures since the start of the protest movement in February, with long prison terms handed to a former spy chief and other once powerful figures in October.

It comes at a pivotal moment in the months-long struggle between the large but leaderless protest movement, known as the "Herak," and the military-backed authorities.

Next week's election has been pushed by the army as the only way to end the standoff with the opposition, but the protesters have rejected the vote, saying it cannot be free or fair while the ruling elite, including the military, stay in power.

The Herak had already been mobilizing tens of thousands of demonstrators every Friday for months, but since the start of the official campaign period, it has also begun protests on other days, ramping up pressure on the authorities.

Though the demonstrations have so far been mostly free from violence, there was some scuffling between protesters and riot police during a march in an eastern town last week and the government has started arresting more opposition figures.

On Tuesday, Interior Minister Salah Eddine Dahmoune attacked people opposing the election as "traitors, mercenaries and homosexuals."

He later said his comments were aimed at people based overseas, rather than at the protest movement, but many supporters of the Herak were angered.

"The remarks will only complicate things," said Ahmed Bachichi, who has been taking part in the weekly protests.

In the court on Wednesday, former prime ministers Ahmed Ouyahia and Abdelmalek Sellal faced charges of "misappropriation of public funds, abuse of office and granting undue privileges."

They and most of the other officials and businessmen on trial were closely linked to the former president, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, who was forced from office in April.

Wednesday's session included evidence of corruption in the car assembly business, a sector encouraged by the government after 2015 in an effort to improve the trade balance in response to lower energy revenue.

"You acted with favoritism when you granted authorizations to set up car assemblies," the judge told Ouyahia, who denied the charge, saying all permits were granted in accordance with the law.

The prosecution accused Sellal, who was campaign manager for Bouteflika when he planned to stand for another term of office early in the year, of involvement in illegal funding of the campaign. He denied it.

No verdict is expected in the trial this week.



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Lebanese president calls for consultations with lawmakers to name PM

Wed, 2019-12-04 17:56

BEIRUT: Sunni businessman Samir Khatib looks set to be nominated as Lebanon's next prime minister when consultations with lawmakers to name a premier are held on Monday, political sources said on Wednesday. More than a month since Saad al-Hariri quit as prime minister, prompted by protests against the ruling elite, President Michel Aoun scheduled the binding consultations with MPs to designate the new premier on Monday. Lebanon is deep in the throes of an economic crisis that has shaken confidence in the country's banks and worsened since the protests erupted on Oct. 17. It needs a new government to enact urgent reforms to get the economy back on track.

Lawmakers from the Future Movement, which is headed by Sunni politician Hariri, as well as powerful Shi'ite groups Hezbollah and Amal are all expected to back him at the consultations, sources familiar with their positions said.

With the support of Lebanon's main Sunni and Shi'ite Muslim political forces and no other declared candidate so far, Khatib appeared under the current circumstances likely to win the nomination.

Several hundred protesters blocked one side of a main roadway in central Beirut following Aoun's call for consultations. Some protesters have rejected Khatib's candidacy and consider him part of an elite they have sought to oust.

Hariri said last week that he did not wish to return as prime minister of a new government, which will face the worst economic crisis since the 1975-90 civil war.

Efforts to agree a new government have been mired in political differences between Hariri, who is aligned with Western and Gulf Arab states, and the Iran-backed Hezbollah and its allies, including Aoun.

Hezbollah, which had more influence in the Hariri-led cabinet than any previous administration, has accused the United States of meddling in the formation of a new Lebanese government. It had backed Hariri's return. Hariri had been willing to return as prime minister but on condition he could lead a cabinet of expert ministers he believed would be best placed to steer Lebanon out of crisis, win international support, and satisfy protesters. But Hezbollah and its allies, including Aoun, had insisted the cabinet be a

mix of technocrats and politicians.

Hariri said on Tuesday that he backed Khatib to head the next cabinet but added that "some details" still had to be hashed out. He said his party would only name technocrats as ministers.

Aoun is constitutionally required to designate the candidate with the greatest support among Lebanon's 128 lawmakers. The prime minister must be a Sunni Muslim according to Lebanon's sectarian system of government.

Ali Hassan Khalil, a senior figure in Amal, told reporters the government would most likely comprise 24 ministers and it would be up to each party to name a political representative in the cabinet or not.

Khatib's candidacy appeared to suffer a setback earlier on Wednesday when three former prime ministers criticised the talks around Khatib, saying they had violated the constitution. The former ministers have supported Hariri's return.

Khatib is executive vice-president and partner of Khatib & Alami, a construction and contracting business with projects in countries including Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and North Africa, according to its website.

He has no track record in Lebanon's sectarian politics but is known to have good ties with many of the main parties, including Saad al-Hariri and his late father, Rafik, who was assassinated in 2005.

His daughter is married to Major General Abbas Ibrahim, the Shi'ite head of Lebanon's most powerful internal security agency, General Security. He is seen to have good ti



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Lebanon's outgoing PM backs businessman to replace him
Trump administration lifts hold on Lebanon security aid

[Pentagon official gives indication that potential Iranian 'aggression' could occur](#)

Wed, 2019-12-04 16:46

WASHINGTON: A senior Pentagon official said on Wednesday that there were indications that Iran could potentially carry out "aggressive" actions in the future, amid simmering tensions between Iran and the US.

John Rood, the Pentagon's No. 3 official, told reporters that the US was concerned about potential Iranian behavior but did not provide details about what information he was basing that concern on or any timeline.

Tensions in the Gulf have risen since attacks on oil tankers this summer, including off the coast of the UAE, and a major assault on energy facilities in Saudi Arabia.

Washington has blamed Iran, which has denied being behind the attacks on global energy infrastructure.



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[Former Lebanese PMs' statement seen as blow to chances of government led by Khatib](#)

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Wed, 2019-12-04 10:37

BEIRUT: Any candidate for the post of Lebanese prime minister who engages in

talks over the make-up of the cabinet before being formally designated premier is violating the constitution, three former prime ministers said. The statement on Wednesday from former prime ministers Fouad Siniora, Tamman Salam and Najib Mikati was seen as a blow to efforts underway to form a new government led by Sunni businessman Samir Khatib. The post of prime minister is reserved for a Sunni Muslim in Lebanon's sectarian system of government. Statements from Lebanese politicians on Tuesday had appeared to signal progress toward agreeing a new government led by Khatib, though a deal had yet to be done. Lebanon is facing its worst economic crisis since its 1975-90 civil war. Caretaker Prime Minister Saad Hariri said on Tuesday he backed Khatib for the post but added that "some details" still had to be hashed out. He said his party would only name technocrats as ministers.



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