

Egypt probes images of naked couple atop pyramid

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Tue, 2018-12-11 16:05

CAIRO: Egyptian authorities have launched an investigation into images said to show a naked couple who scaled the Great Pyramid that has sparked outrage in the conservative Muslim country, an official said Tuesday.

In a video titled "Climbing the Great Pyramid of Giza," Danish photographer Andreas Hvid appears to scale the 4,500-year-old tomb on the outskirts of Cairo at night with an unidentified woman who is later seen taking off her top.

Hvid says the video was taken in late November but it was published on YouTube on December 8.

A photograph released by Hvid appears to show the couple completely naked on top of each other while looking in the direction of a nearby pyramid with the horizon illuminated.

"The public prosecution is investigating the incident of the Danish photographer and the authenticity of the photos and video of him climbing the pyramid," Mostafa Waziri, the secretary general of Egypt's supreme antiquities council, told AFP.

If the video was actually filmed at the top of the pyramid, that would make it a "very serious crime," Waziri said.

The nearly three-minute video has taken social media by storm and has been the subject of late night talk shows. It has notched up almost three million views on YouTube alone.

"A 7,000-year-old civilization has turned into a bed sheet," a Twitter user in Egypt lamented.

Another protested that "they want to soil the dignity and pride of Egyptians because the pyramid reflects the glory and grandeur of the Egyptian people."

The authenticity of the images has been disputed with some arguing the photograph showing the pair naked appears to be very bright whereas the video showed them scaling the pyramid at night.

Antiquities Minister Khaled el-Enany told government newspaper Al-Ahram that the video has stirred "anger and outrage among Egyptians," and that officials in charge of guarding the pyramids would be punished if found to have been negligent.

Hvid, 23, explained back home to the Danish newspaper Ekstra Bladet that he had "dreamed for many years of climbing the Great Pyramid" as well as of taking a naked photograph.

"I'm sad that so many people have got angry but I've also received a lot of positive responses from many Egyptians," he said in an interview.

The young Norwegian, who runs his own YouTube channel, said he had absolutely no interest in stirring up a crisis such as that triggered by cartoons in Western newspapers of the Prophet Muhammad.

As for the girl in the video, she was not his girlfriend. "It was just a pose. We did not have sexual relations," Hvid said.

The Great Pyramid, also known as the Khufu pyramid, is the largest in Giza, standing at 146 meters (480 feet) tall, and the only surviving structure of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world.

Climbing pyramids is forbidden in Egypt.

In 2016, a German tourist was barred from entering the country for life after he posted online footage of climbing one of the ancient structures.



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[Lebanon's Aoun says Israeli anti-tunnel action no risk to peace](#)

Author:

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Tue, 2018-12-11 16:06

BEIRUT: Lebanese President Michel Aoun said on Tuesday he saw no risk to peace from an operation by Israel's military to disable cross-border tunnels it says were dug into its territory by Hezbollah guerrillas.

Israel says Hezbollah, Lebanon's most powerful armed group, dug the tunnels with the aim of launching attacks into Israel with backing from its regional sponsor Iran. Hezbollah has yet to comment.

"We certainly took this issue seriously – the presence of tunnels at the border – and Israel informed us via the United States that it does not have aggressive intentions and it will continue to work on its (territory)," Aoun told a news conference.

"We also do not have aggressive intentions... We are ready to remove the causes of the dispute, but after we obtain a final report and we set out the matters that need to be dealt with."

During a televised visit to the border, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Israel was "methodically dismantling the tunnel weapon," and warned Hezbollah not to re-establish the front.

"If Hezbollah makes the big mistake of deciding in any way to strike at us or resist the (anti-tunnel) action we have undertaken, it will get hit with blows that it cannot even imagine."

The UN peacekeeping force in Lebanon, UNIFIL, last week confirmed the presence of one tunnel near the Israeli town of Metulla. The force's head, Major General Stefano Del Col, said on Tuesday that a second one had been found while Israel's military said it had discovered a third.

Del Col, in a statement issued after meeting Aoun, said the matter was "serious." UNIFIL was making "every effort to maintain clear and credible channels of communication with both sides so that there is no room for misunderstanding."

Israel has said it is up to UNIFIL to deal with the tunnels on the Lebanese side of the border, and its military said it held the Beirut government responsible for "another blatant breach" of a UN resolution that ended a 2006 war between Hezbollah and Israel.

Aoun, a political ally of Hezbollah, said in a separate statement that Lebanon was committed to implementing that resolution.

Israel and Hezbollah have avoided major conflict across the Lebanese-Israeli border since 2006, though Israel has mounted attacks in Syria targeting what it said were advanced weapon deliveries to the group.



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[EU agency: More Iranian, Turkish citizens seeking asylum](#)

Author:

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1544523051270478100

Tue, 2018-12-11 (All day)

BRUSSELS: The European Union's asylum office says people from Iran and Turkey are increasingly applying for international protection throughout the EU. EASO said Tuesday that "Iran and Turkey have both been among the top five countries of origin over the past few months."

It says that 3,170 Iranians applied for asylum in the EU in October, the highest number for more than two years. More than one in three Iranian applicants received protection in the past six months.

October saw a record 2,880 asylum applications lodged by Turkish citizens. Over the past six months, around 44 percent of Turkish applicants were

granted refugee status.

EASO says more than 60,500 people applied for asylum in October, the highest monthly figure this year. Most were nationals of Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq.



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Iran sentences 3 rights lawyers to prison
Iran can expand range of ballistic missiles: Guards commander

[Work underway to clear land mines from Jesus baptism site](#)

Author:

Mon, 2018-12-10 21:36

QASR AL-YAHUD, Palestinian Territories: Efforts to clear thousands of land mines and other ordnance around the site where many believe Jesus was baptized have reached a milestone and officials allowed a rare glimpse Sunday

of abandoned churches there.

The church grounds around the site in the occupied West Bank have sat empty and decaying for around 50 years, though pilgrims have been able to visit a nearby restricted area at the traditional baptismal spot on the banks of the River Jordan.

Work at the site just north of the Dead Sea is being overseen by Israel's Defense Ministry, de-mining charity Halo Trust and Israeli firm 4CI.

According to the ministry, the project covers around 1 square kilometer (250 acres) as well as some 3,000 mines and other explosive remnants.

It is expected to cost 20 million shekels (\$5.3 million, €4.7 million).

The work began in March and would require another eight months to a year to complete, said Moshe Hilman of Israel's Defense Ministry.

Mines and other ordnance have been cleared from Ethiopian and Greek Orthodox monastery sites as well as a Franciscan chapel, organizers said.

Other grounds belonging to Russian, Syrian, Romanian and Coptic Orthodox churches are yet to be cleared.

The plan once complete is to return the plots to the various church denominations and allow visits. At the crumbling, brick-and-concrete Ethiopian monastery on Sunday, a fading fresco of Jesus being baptized by John the Baptist could still be seen inside.

Signs hung on the walls with notifications that the location had been cleared of explosives.

A collection of pieces of mortars and other explosive remnants sat alongside a nearby roadside as a demonstration of some of what had been found.

"The Halo Trust has reached a pivotal point in our work to clear the baptism site of land mines and other remnants of war," the charity's CEO James Cowan said in a statement.

He added that "we have completed clearance of the Ethiopian, Greek and Franciscan churches."

The majority of the mines were laid by Israeli forces after the country seized control of the West Bank in 1967 from Jordanian troops. Other unexploded ordnance from both Israel and Jordan has remained lodged in the ground, including around the churches, which were evacuated by Israel in the 1970s.

Israel's control of the West Bank has never been recognized by the international community, which considers the land occupied Palestinian territory.



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Israel urged to reverse confiscation of church land
Christian leaders urge Israeli PM to nix church lands bill

[UN envoy to Yemen says agreement on de-escalation in Taiz and Hodeidah 'not there yet'](#)

Mon, 2018-12-10 19:13

LONDON: United Nations Envoy to Yemen, Martin Griffiths, said on Monday that agreement on the de-escalation in Taiz and Hodeidah are 'not there yet'. Speaking at a press conference in Stockholm, during the first round of the UN sponsored peace talks between the legitimate Yemeni government and the Iranian-backed Houthi militia, Griffiths told reporters that they will continue to discuss Hodeidah and Taiz, which he described as "two major population zones in Yemen caught in war."

The warring parties are in Sweden for weeklong talks expected to last until Dec. 13, the first since more than three months of negotiations collapsed in 2016.

"I'm hopeful that we can reach agreements on the de-escalation to reduce the fighting in both places. I'm hoping that we can. We're not there yet."

"If we are able to achieve progress on those two places and lift the threat of war to the people in those two places, I think we'll have done a great service to Yemen," Griffiths said.

Initial drafts of the proposals on the rebel-held port city of Hodeidah and Taiz call for a mutual cease-fire between the two parties.

The Hodeidah draft stipulated that the Arab coalition supporting the legitimate Yemeni government would cease an offensive on the rebel-held city in exchange for a Houthi withdrawal.

The area would then be put under the control of a joint committee and supervised by the United Nations. The document does not propose the deployment of UN peacekeeping troops.

Griffiths said the UN had simplified the Hodeidah draft, which is still under study by the Yemeni delegations.

"We are always redrafting, so some of those documents that you've seen" have changed, Griffiths told reporters.

"We're working on simpler draft," he added. "The details of that are in deep discussion."

The two sides are also looking at a draft UN proposal on the southwestern city of Taiz, under the control of pro-government forces but besieged by the rebels.

The initial draft stipulated an unconditional cease-fire, a joint working group that includes the UN to monitor the cease-fire, and the reopening of all roads and Taiz airport for humanitarian operations.

The Yemeni government, which is backed by the Arab coalition, has been battling the Iran-backed Houthi militia for control of Yemen for nearly four years, pushing the impoverished country to the brink of famine.

He also said they are still working to find a common ground for the reopening of Sanaa airport.

During the talks, the two sides discussed a broad prisoner swap, which Griffiths said had proved the least contentious issue, adding that he hoped it "will be very very considerable in terms of the numbers that we hope to get released within a few weeks." He said the numbers of prisoners to be released by the warring parties will be announced soon.

The UN envoy said he expects to present a detailed plan for the next round of talks and hopes for an agreement from warring factions to hold the next round of talks early next year.

(With AFP)



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