

Houthi strike leaves 11 dead in Shabwa

Thu, 2021-12-30 17:43

AL-MUKALLA: At least 11 Yemeni government troops were killed and 17 others wounded on Thursday when an explosion caused by a Houthi missile or drone strike rocked their military base in the southern province of Shabwa, local officials and media reports said.

Soldiers from the Giants Brigades were regrouping inside a military base in the Markha Al-Soufla district when a large explosion ripped through the base, a local government official told Arab News.

"The Giants Brigades were getting ready to advance toward other areas in Markha Al-Soufla to defend them against Houthi incursions," the official, who asked to remain anonymous, said.

Local media reports said the explosion was caused by a ballistic missile fired by the Houthis, but other sources said that an explosives-rigged, Houthi-controlled drone attacked the base.

On Tuesday night, two ballistic missiles fired by the Houthis landed inside Ataq airport in the provincial capital of Shabwa, shortly after the Giants Brigades took charge of the airport from local military units.

The newly appointed governor of Shabwa, Awadh Mohammed Al-Wazer, visited the wounded soldiers in Ataq hospital.

Yemeni military analyst Khaled Al-Nasi said that the military commanders were expecting Houthi attacks on the new troops in Shabwa and had taken precautionary measures.

"This is the nature of war, but this (Houthi attack) will not affect the work of the Giants' forces and their mission in Shabwa," he said on Twitter.

Hundreds of troops from the Joint Forces, an umbrella term for three major military units including the Giants Brigades, were relocated from government-controlled areas in Taiz and Hodeidah to the southern province of Shabwa to reinforce government troops battling the Houthis.

Local military officials say the Giant Brigades forces in Shabwa will take part in an offensive to expel the Houthis from Bayhan, Ain and Ouselan districts.

In Riyadh, the Arab coalition said it had carried out 22 air raids in support of government troops in the central province of Marib over the past 24 hours, killing 150 Houthis and destroying 15 military vehicles.

Hundreds of Houthi fighters have been killed by coalition airstrikes in the provinces of Marib, Jouf, and Hodeidah in the past two months as the coalition intensified its attacks to prevent the Houthis from seizing control of new areas and to pave the way for government troops to advance.



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Houthis target airport in Shabwa with several missiles
Houthis must end 'hostile activity' in Yemeni capital Sanaa: Arab coalition

[Economy, security meetings will not settle Palestine-Israel conflict: Analysts](#)

Thu, 2021-12-30 17:28

GAZA CITY: Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas made a rare visit to Israel on Tuesday for a meeting with Israel Defense Minister Benny Gantz.

Gantz approved a raft of measures aimed at improving relations with the Palestine on Wednesday.

It was the second meeting between the two following their talks at the headquarters of the Palestinian presidency in Ramallah in August. That meeting focused on what the Israeli media described as "routine security

issues.”

Some Palestinian factions denounced Tuesday’s talks, labeling them a “reinforcement of internal divisions.”

But the Abbas-led Fatah movement said that it was “a serious attempt to put an end to the escalatory practices against the Palestinian people, and to open a political path based on international legitimacy.”

Palestinian Civil Affairs Minister Hussein Al-Sheikh, who accompanied Abbas, said that the meeting focused on the importance of “finding a political horizon that leads to a political solution under international legitimacy resolutions.”

Al-Sheikh tweeted that the two sides also discussed “the tense field conditions, due to the settler practices and attacks, as well as many security, economic and humanitarian issues.”

A statement issued by Gantz’s office said that the two-hour meeting discussed “maintaining security and stability, and preventing terrorism and violence,” besides civil and economic issues.

Gantz told Abbas that he will work to strengthen security coordination.

After the meeting, the Israeli Kan TV channel quoted a senior Palestinian official as saying: “The gap is very large and there is currently no opportunity for a political breakthrough.

“First of all, there must be a political horizon, without which everything we do can explode in a minute.”

The meeting came after years of political deadlock under former US president Donald Trump, who reportedly had a bad relationship with President Abbas.

The Palestinian leadership views President Joe Biden differently and has demanded that he fulfill promises made during his election campaign, including opening a political path to achieve a two-state solution, pressuring Israel to halt settlements and reopening the US Consulate in East Jerusalem, which Trump closed in 2018.

Washington has resumed financial and economic support for the Palestinian Authority, and, after a joint economic meeting on Dec. 14, announced a new package of projects.

The Abbas-Gantz meeting was preceded by a meeting between the Palestinian president and US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan and an accompanying delegation, and another with Yael Lempert, US acting assistant secretary of state for near eastern affairs.

Although Palestinian officials said that the meetings were aimed at creating paths to a political solution, some observers warned that they were only held to prevent the collapse of the Palestinian Authority.

Last November, Israeli newspaper Haaretz said that Israel had asked the Biden administration to pressure Arab and European countries to increase financial aid to the crisis-hit Palestinian Authority, in order to prevent the deterioration of security in the West Bank.

Wasel Abu Yousef, a member of the executive committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization, stressed that the Palestinian leadership believes in finding a political solution based on “the two-state option and international legitimacy,” and that “the economic track cannot be a substitute for the political track.”

He added: “Trump tried to promote an economic solution, pump billions to end the Palestinian political cause, and held a conference in Bahrain for this goal, but he failed.

“Without a just political solution, all movements, including Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett’s attempts to manage the conflict, not resolve it, are a waste of time and will fail, and will not achieve stability in the region.”

Bilal Al-Shobaki, a professor of political science at Hebron University in the West Bank, said that the Abbas-Gantz meeting was based on the “economic and security track, without any political solutions.”

He said Washington and Tel Aviv are “keen to save the Palestinian Authority and support it financially and economically to prevent its collapse, but without any political solutions that could lead to a Palestinian state.”



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Find political solution or 'West Bank will explode,' Abbas warns Israel
Abbas, Israel's Gantz hold new high-level talks, urged by US

[Two die of wounds from Israeli strike on Syria port](#)

Author:

Thu, 2021-12-30 01:04

BEIRUT: At least two members of a pro-government militia were killed in an Israeli strike on the Syrian port of Latakia, a war monitor said on Wednesday.

The strike before dawn on Tuesday marked the second time that Israel has hit the key cargo hub since the outbreak of Syria's civil war in 2011.

The Israeli attack – one of nearly 30 that have hit Syria this year – caused significant damage with stacks of containers catching fire.

“Two members of a pro-regime militia were killed in the Israeli strike,” the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

“They had suffered serious wounds and succumbed to their injuries” in hospital in Latakia on Wednesday.

Three other militia fighters were also wounded.

Syrian state media said the containers hit in the strikes carried “engine oil and spare parts for cars and other vehicles.”

But the observatory said the cargo was “arms and munitions.”

Syrian government ally Iran condemned the airstrikes, describing them as “inhumane and immoral” and an example of Israel's “provocation of crisis in the region.”

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh accused Israel of “making a mockery of all international laws, regulations and norms by carrying out repeated attacks on Syrian territory on false pretexts.”

Since the start of the conflict, Israel has routinely carried out air strikes on its strife-torn neighbor, mostly targeting Syrian government troops as

well as allied Iran-backed forces and Hezbollah fighters.

So far this year, Israel has targeted Syria nearly 30 times, killing 130 people including five civilians and 125 loyalist fighters, according to Observatory figures.



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Syrian port ablaze as Israeli airstrikes hit Iran arms cache
Life in ruins:
Ancient sites shelter Syria's displaced

[Iraq vote victor Moqtada Sadr meets pro-Iran rivals](#)

Author:

Thu, 2021-12-30 00:55

NAJAF: The winner of Iraq's October parliamentary election, Shiite cleric Moqtada Sadr, met on Wednesday with rivals from the pro-Iran Hashd Al-Shaabi former paramilitary alliance ahead of the opening of parliament.

The Oct. 10 vote was rejected by the Fatah Alliance, the political arm of the

pro-Tehran Hashd, but Iraq's top court on Monday dismissed their allegations of voter fraud and ratified the results.

It paves the way for parliament to meet and elect a president – who will then name a prime minister tasked with forming a new government.

In multi-confessional and multi-ethnic Iraq, the formation of governments has involved complex negotiations ever since the 2003 US-led invasion toppled dictator Saddam Hussein.

On Wednesday, leaders including Fatah Alliance chief Hadi Al-Ameri, senior Hashd official Faleh Al-Fayyad and Qais Al-Khazali, head of the Asaib Ahl Al-Haq force – a key component of the Hashd – were hosted by Sadr at his home in the Iraqi shrine city of Najaf, according to state news agency INA.

The leaders discussed “the political situation” and the “formation of the next government,” INA reported.

Sadr, a political maverick and former anti-US militia leader who opposes all foreign interference, had already met leaders from pro-Iran parties earlier this month.

Iraq is trying to recover from years of war and jihadist violence but remains hobbled by political divisions, corruption and poverty.

Parties from Iraq's Shiite majority have previously struck compromise deals to work together, but Sadr is insistent he wants to forge a coalition capable of forming a parliamentary majority.

Sadr's movement won more than a fifth of the seats, 73 out of the assembly's total of 329. The Fatah Alliance took 17 seats, sharply down from its 48 seats in the past assembly, and Hashed leaders rejected the result.

Sadr, a self-styled defender against all forms of corruption, has repeatedly said that the next prime minister will be chosen by his movement.

The scion of an influential clerical family who led a militia against the US-led occupation of Iraq, Sadr has distinguished himself from other Shiite factions by seeking to distance himself from both Iranian and US influences.



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Iraqi cleric Moqtada Sadr's bloc declared biggest election winner
Iraq Shiite leader Sadr cautions vote 'losers'

[Lebanon seizes Captagon shipment in fake oranges](#)

Author:

AFP

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Wed, 2021-12-29 19:00

BEIRUT: A shipment of fake oranges hid millions of Captagon pills intercepted by Lebanese authorities, the interior minister said Wednesday, in the latest regional seizure of the stimulant drug.

Customs officers seized "nearly nine million Captagon tablets" at Beirut's port, Bassam Mawlawi said at a press conference, noting that the cargo was heading for a Gulf country.

Captagon is an amphetamine-type stimulant manufactured mostly in Lebanon and Syria.

A customs officer confirmed to AFP that this cargo was en route to Kuwait. The Captagon tablets were placed in small bags hidden in fake oranges among a real fruit shipment.

An investigation has been opened to determine its source.

Lebanon – which is suffering political paralysis and economic crisis – has boosted efforts to thwart Captagon trafficking through its ports following criticism from Gulf countries over lack of cooperation.

This was the second regional seizure in a week of Captagon hidden in fruit.

On December 23, Dubai police said they arrested four men “of Arab nationality” for trying to smuggle millions of dollars worth of Captagon into the United Arab Emirates.

The more than one million pills were concealed in plastic lemons among a shipment of real lemons.

Saudi Arabia announced in April the suspension of fruit and vegetable imports from Lebanon after the seizure of more than five million Captagon pills hidden in fruit.

Captagon is a brand name for the amphetamine-type stimulant fenethylamine.

According to a European Union-funded report by the Center for Operational Analysis and Research, “Captagon exports from Syria reached a market value of at least \$3.46 billion” in 2020.

In November the Syrian army said it seized half a ton of Captagon concealed in a spaghetti shipment before it could be smuggled out of the country.





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Attempt to smuggle Captagon pills into Saudi Arabia thwarted Lebanon's drug trade booms with help from Hezbollah's Captagon connection