

Hospitality's next generation envisions a more ethical and sustainable hotel industry

Fri, 2021-10-15 22:56

DUBAI: What attracts guests to a hotel? Fine dining, Egyptian cotton sheets and 24-hour room service, certainly. But that model of hospitality may be changing – at least if a new generation of hoteliers, bar owners and restaurateurs has its way.

Rather than reviewing the contents of the minibar or revising the coffee shop menu, this new breed of hotel operator is intent on combating loneliness, sourcing from local farmers, fighting climate change and building a sense of community.

In 2014, Hotelschool the Hague, a training institute, created the Sustainable Hospitality Challenge to provide a platform for the next generation of hospitality professionals who want to reinvent what hotels and restaurants have to offer.

These students are seen as future drivers of taste by their willingness to challenge the industry's status quo. NEOM, the futuristic smart city in northwest Saudi Arabia, sponsored this year's competition.



Saudi Arabia's natural beauty is matched by the opulent interiors of Riyadh's premium hotels (Courtesy of The Ritz-Carlton, Riyadh/ Expedia.com)

“The NEOM giga-project, which we all call ‘the city of the future,’ aims to

incorporate smart-city technologies and innovation with a focus on sustainability,” Marloes Knippenberg, CEO of Kerten Hospitality and chair of the jury, told Arab News.

“It comes as no surprise that NEOM has sponsored the challenge this year, bringing all finalists to the event in the UAE.”

The event invited 30 universities from across the globe to submit ideas that would help the industry play its part in reaching the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals. Last month, six finalists presented their concepts to a jury of hospitality industry investors in Dubai.

Eve Mignot, a member of the winning team from Switzerland’s Ecole Hoteliere de Lausanne, said hospitality is at a crossroads. The sector has historically lagged behind other industries when it comes to embracing change, she said.

“It is time to reverse this stereotype and stigma and become leaders in sustainable innovations. With our concept, we anticipate the hospitality industry of 2050 to be a community builder, innovator and a responsible and ethical member of society.”



Marloes Knippenberg CEO Kerten Hospitality. (Supplied)

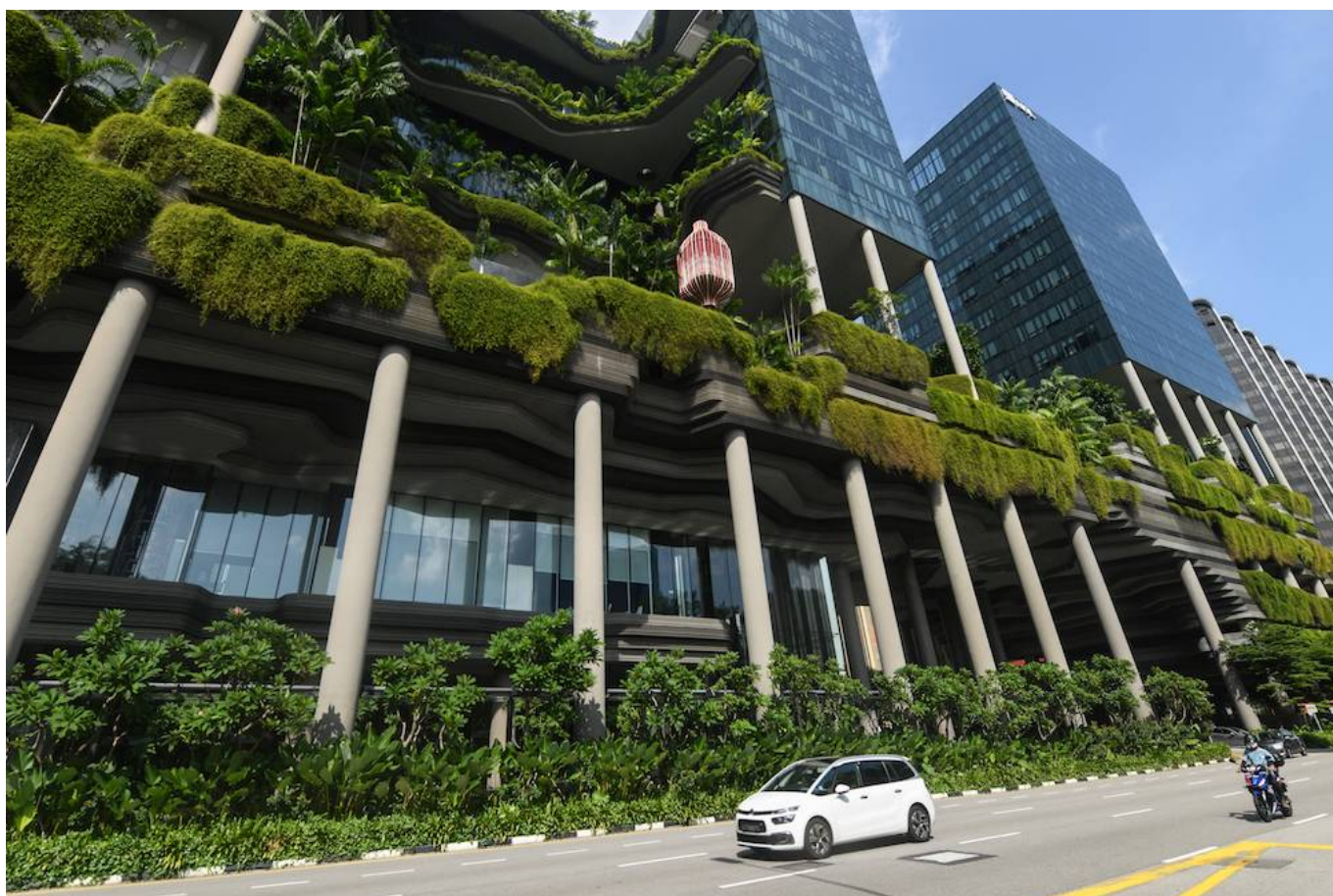
The winning team proposed a concept dubbed “Shared Economic Value through Co-living Cooperative Opportunities,” or SEVCCO, which aims to incorporate sustainability through communal living operated by hospitality companies, for

which they see immense potential in growing cities.

This will require a reimagining of lifestyles, business models and strategies. "There has never been a more pressing time to reinvent the industry," Mignot said.

The team hopes this concept of "neo-hospitality" will transform societies and become a driving force that inspires communities and other industries to engage in the transformation of the world by 2050.

Lukas Lauber, another team member, said that while oil has accelerated growth and development in the Middle East, secondary consumption of oil has had negative consequences in terms of climate change and its effects on the environment.



This photograph taken on July 23, 2021 shows a view of the Park Royal Collection Hotel at Pickering Street in Singapore. (AFP)

However, in recent years, many countries in the region have adopted diversification strategies to their national economies as well as introduced policies to reduce their dependence on oil reserves and promote renewable energy. This is where SEVCCO comes in.

"Countries in the Middle East are hoping to attract foreign investment. A large part of this strategy involves tourism and hospitality, as seen by the re-branding of Dubai as a tourism hub and Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 strategy whereby it seeks to develop cities and destinations," Lauber told Arab News.

As countries in the region develop, he said sustainable communities and

cities must be built to promote a more cyclical and regenerative society. "This is where we promote SEVCCO, the creation of co-living environments for tomorrow," said Stefano Abedum de Lima Hanzawa, a third team member.

"It is imperative that the Middle East incorporates sustainability and regenerative growth into their strategy for economic diversification and development."

FASTFACTS

*** NEOM, the futuristic smart city in northwest Saudi Arabia, sponsored this year's Sustainable Hospitality Challenge competition.**

*** Some 30 universities were invited to submit ideas that would help the hospitality industry play its part in achieving the UN's SDGs.**

These concerns are made more pressing as the 2030 deadline for the UN Sustainable Development Goals draws nearer. By then, national economies must mobilize to prevent a 1.5 Celsius increase in global temperatures and implement strategies to shift away from fossil-fueled economies.

The team developed the SEVCCO concept to empower individuals and communities to come together and co-create a city of the future that complies with these goals.

"The concept of cognitive cities is gaining traction, as seen by the NEOM development in Saudi Arabia, and this acceleration and momentum will continue to grow," Hanzawa said.

"We believe cyclical and sustainable co-living has incredible potential to change the way we behave and live for a better tomorrow. We wish to tackle the most pressing issues such as urban loneliness – exacerbated by the pandemic."



Muslim pilgrims add food to their plates from the buffet of a restaurant at a luxury hotel overlooking the Kaaba, Islam's holiest shrine, and its encompassing Grand Mosque in Saudi Arabia's holy city of Makkah ahead of the annual Hajj pilgrimage. (AFP/File Photo)

Other ills listed by the competitors include unsustainable production and consumption of scarce resources, resource inefficiencies, housing shortages experienced by generations Y and Z, growing elderly care home demand, the difficulties of waste management and the challenges of reducing carbon footprints by 2030.

"SHC brings forth innovative ideas about sustainable, implementable projects. The corporate world launches and brings them to life only if and when they are presented to them," said Knippenberg. "The challenge (has) become a platform that reaches decision-makers today and is not just a school engagement."

This year, the initiative brought together the student community, the corporate world, and investors. As 70 percent of the Middle East's population are younger than 35, the competition is relevant to the region, the organizers said, as governments invest heavily in shifting toward knowledge-based economies.

"Especially in the Middle East, there is a great opportunity to implement 'out of the box' ideas," said Paul Griep, director of industry and alumni relations at Hotelschool The Hague and founder of the challenge.

"As the region grows exponentially, it is of utmost importance for the region to become the showroom of the world when it comes to implementing sustainable

solutions. Sustainability projects are the core of the multiple giga-projects in Saudi Arabia, (such as) NEOM.”



Picture from the stage from the award ceremony on stage at AHIC, in September 2021, with members of the jury and the winners. (Supplied)

Aside from EHL, the Hotel Institute Montreux in Switzerland, the Hotel Management School Maastricht Zuyd and the Hotelschool The Hague, Ryerson University from Canada, and CY Cergy Paris University in France took part, as did students from the Middle East.

The judges said the SEVCCO concept developed by EHL won out because it looked long term.

“Their concept was unique, well thought of and very 2050,” Knippenberg said. “Their idea seems like a natural evolution – community build, supporting the locality and the local supply chain and doing things with a truly sustainable mindset.”

Griep said that the younger generation coming into management is especially passionate about sustainability. “In fact, they no longer wish for it but actually require it,” he said.

“It has been proven that, thanks to this mindset, innovative solutions have already been developed. The challenge provides an opportunity for these students to work with industry partners, universities and companies alike, which help them make their concepts become real hospitality projects.”

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Saudi Tourism Development Fund partners with prestigious hospitality institute
Saudi energy minister, PIF head, NEOM CEO to lead Saudi Green Initiative forum

[19 arrested after Beirut clashes leave 7 dead](#)

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Fri, 2021-10-15 20:57

BEIRUT: The Lebanese Army on Friday set up checkpoints in the Tayouneh area and on roads leading to Beirut's northern and southern suburbs after gunfights left seven people dead on Thursday.

Investigations by specialized military units have not identified the direct cause of the clashes between armed members from Hezbollah and the Amal Movement on one side, and opposing gunmen that the two parties claimed were from the Lebanese Forces Party.

"The army command's statement about Thursday's events left things ambiguous until further investigations," a military source told Arab News. "But what we are sure of is that the sniper shots fired at Hezbollah and Amal targeted the head, chest, and abdomen areas as most injuries were among those."

The shootout lasted more than three hours and also left 32 people injured, including two soldiers.

What was supposed to be a peaceful demonstration on Thursday quickly turned into anarchy. Hezbollah and the Amal Movement had hit the streets demanding the removal of Judge Tarek Bitar from the investigation of the Beirut port blast before bullets and rocket-propelled grenades started flying.

On Friday, the military source said "13 persons were arrested, including concierges of the buildings that snipers used to shoot at the demonstrators in the streets from their rooftops. Members affiliated with the Lebanese Forces party, who were spotted on the battlefield, were also arrested. The army resorted to CCTV footage for evidence."

Later in the evening, state National News Agency said Lebanon had detained 19 people in relation to recent gunfire in Beirut.

A national day of mourning for the victims was declared on Friday as schools, banks, and government offices across Lebanon were shut down. Guns were fired in the air during funerals for the victims in Beirut's southern suburbs and Bekaa.

The full extent of damage caused to buildings, properties, and parked cars during the shootout was revealed on Friday. People who returned to their homes expressed deep anger at the events and asked, "Who will compensate us for the human and material losses?"

Signs of destruction were left by the B7 grenades while bullet holes were very clear on the buildings in the Tayouneh area. An uneasy calm reigned on Friday as shops were closed and very few people walked in the streets. All cars and motorcycles that passed through the area were searched by authorities.

In order to prevent more escalation, a military source said the airborne division was assisting the army in Ain Remaneh and Chiyah, "in case something happens, given that this area has become very sensitive."

Faisal bin Farhan, Saudi Arabia's foreign minister, said he is "certainly worried" about the political and economic situation in Lebanon as it requires action "now." He said the events over the past two days showed that Lebanon needs real, serious change and that the responsibility lies with the country's leaders.

The Saudi Foreign Ministry said in a statement that the Kingdom is following

events in Lebanon closely. The Kingdom hopes the situation will stabilize as soon as possible and that Saudi Arabia stands with the people of Lebanon, the statement said.

According to their sources, Hezbollah and the Amal Movement have requested to remove Bitar from the investigation into the Beirut port blast on Aug. 4, 2020, which killed more than 200 people and wounded thousands.

"The judiciary must find a formula that can restore the constitutional order and declare that the defendants, who are former ministers and deputies, should be prosecuted before the Court of Ministers and Presidents," An official source from Amal Movement told Arab News.

Lawmaker Jalal Abdullah said the case is very sensitive and requires accurate follow-up.

"Why did a demonstration, which was supposed to be peaceful, turn into an armed clash? The truth needs to come out," he said. "The demarcation lines carry a bloody history in the memories of the Lebanese, and we do not want to reminisce these memories regardless of what happened."

Abdullah told Arab News that "after what happened on Thursday, all kinds of immunity of the highest-ranking to the lowest-ranking security officials must be lifted to allow the truth to come out. Some are very concerned about this investigation and the role of Judge Bitar in his investigations. What is needed today is for everyone to abide by the process of the law."

Mohanad Hage Ali, director of communications and a fellow at the Malcolm H. Kerr Carnegie Middle East Center in Beirut, said the Tayouneh crime might be used politically to counter the port crime.

"I do not think that Hezbollah was not expecting blood by getting its supporters into this sensitive area," he said. "Hezbollah is very concerned about the investigations and the possibility of being accused by Judge Bitar. This is only a possibility. But what we know so far at face value, is that Hezbollah is defending its allies, the Amal Movement and Marada Movement, whose ministers are defendants in the port explosion case."

Ali expressed concern about Hezbollah's behavior and feared assassination attempts in the near future.

"Just like what happened after the assassination of (former premier) Rafic Hariri until the assassination of (author and activist) Luqman Slim," he said.

The EU condemned the use of violence and expressed its condolences to the families of the victims, calling for "utmost restraint to avoid further senseless loss of life."



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Lebanese hold funerals for 7 killed in Beirut gunbattlesSix killed in Beirut clashes as tensions soar over port blast investigation

[Iraqi elections were competitive and 'surprisingly' well-managed, observers say](#)

Fri, 2021-10-15 01:22

LONDON: Despite some lack of clarity, low voter turnout, the exclusion of several groups and the overarching security, the Iraqi elections this week

were “surprisingly” well run and managed and were genuinely competitive, according to experts.

“It was a special experience being the first chief observer of the European Union Election Observation Mission to Iraq,” said Viola Von Cramon-Taubadel, a member of the European Parliament.

“Coming from a, let’s say, very civil society in Germany and even more-robust political environments in a post-Soviet world, something like this I have never experienced or seen before.”

She was speaking on Thursday during a panel discussion, organized by UK think tank Chatham House, about the Iraqi elections last Sunday and what they mean for the government. Only about 9 million of 22 million eligible voters cast a vote, a turnout of just over 40 percent.

Cramon-Taubadel said observers’ preliminary statement was fairly critical and that the low voter turnout was in part due to structural problems, including a lack of access and services for people with special needs, including those with vision and hearing impairments and in wheelchairs. The high level of security at polling stations also hindered access and several sections of the population were excluded, such as internally displaced persons, she added, and there were technical issues with voter cards that did not work and biometric systems that failed to recognize fingerprints.

However she compared this with election experiences in Berlin, where significant problems have also been encountered. And in terms of the fundamentals, Iraq fared relatively well, she added.

“In terms of administration, in terms of having everything, people knew what they were doing and the technology worked, mainly – I cannot say this for Berlin, honestly,” said Cramon-Taubadel.



(L to R) Head of the European Parliament’s delegation Domenec Ruiz Devesa, Chief Observer of the EU Election Observation Mission to Iraq Viola von Cramon, and deputy chief Alexander Matus hold a press conference to announce their preliminary report in Baghdad’s Green Zone on Oct. 12, 2021. (AFP)

Many democratic countries are experiencing increasingly low levels of voter turnout, even the US, she added, but rather than comparing Iraq’s elections with those in the West she suggested that a more relevant comparison was with the previous elections in Iraq, in 2018.

“The level of security, the level of professionalism...in general, if you look through the process how it went in 2018 and now, I would say this was a huge upgrade,” said Cramon-Taubadel. “And I have only heard that people were surprised by how many independent candidates in the end have made it, and they kind of regretted their decision to boycott (the election) because they didn’t believe, they didn’t trust the institution and there was no confidence in the IT system.”

Authorities ran election simulations before and after the vote and have precautionary measures in place to prevent fraud or tampering, she explained, and eradicated a number of loopholes in the past month.

Cramon-Taubadel said she saw highly-sophisticated precautionary measures in place at a warehouse in Basra where ballots were being stored, to protect it and avoid a repeat of incidents such as a warehouse fire in Baghdad during the 2018 election in which votes were destroyed. Staff at polling stations

were well trained and committed, she added, but they were sad and frustrated because they had hoped for higher turnouts that would have given them more to do, especially in urban areas.

Regarding accusations of fraud and ballot-rigging, Cramon-Taubadel said the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq has access to the raw election data and has not found any evidence of this. Expressing her trust in Iraq's Independent High Electoral Commission, she said any indications of fraudulent activity should be submitted to it so that their and EU observers can implement the proper legal mechanisms and investigate.

She said the main thing now is for the government to listen to the people and include the views of protest movements in the political process, focus on rebuilding the nation's infrastructure, particularly the "awful" schools, and try to capitalize on oil and other resources while it can because the Iraqi people "deserve better."

Harith Hasan, a non-resident senior fellow at the Malcolm H. Kerr Carnegie Middle East Center, said the low turnout had favored some parties and hurt others.

Muqtada Al-Sadr's bloc was the biggest winner, taking more than 70 seats, followed by Mohammed Al-Halbousi's Progress Party, Masoud Barzani's Kurdistan Democratic Party, and Nouri Al-Maliki's State of Law, all of whom won more than 30 seats. The most notable loser was the Fatah bloc, pro-Iranian Shiite parties with links to armed groups, affiliated with the Popular Mobilization Forces (Hashd Al-Shaabi).



Iraq's populist cleric Muqtada Al-Sadr shows his ink-stained finger after casting his vote at a polling station in the central Iraqi shrine city of Najaf on Oct. 10, 2021. (AFP)

Hasan said Iran is the country with the biggest stake in the outcome of Iraq's election, because of the influence it exerts over its neighbor.

"The Iranians have three interests in Iraq," he explained. "The first is, of course, the ending of the US military presence and making sure there are no threats coming from Iraq.

"The second is maintaining the Hashd Al-Shaabi, and the third is keeping the Iraqi markets open for Iranian products."

Tehran would prefer an Iraqi government dominated by its allies, which they believe would secure their interests much better than a government dominated by Al-Sadr, Hasan said, but much will depend on who is responsible for Iraqi policy in President Ebrahim Raisi's government.

Hanaa Edwar, the founder and general secretary of the Iraqi Al-Amal Association, a non-political, non-sectarian organization of volunteers that works to improve the lives of all Iraqis, said that if there is an effort to "really build an opposition for the first time inside the parliament," that would be a positive first step.

"And if they really can confront cutting MPs' privileges, materially and funding and so on, I think this is also something we can take into consideration as a positive step," she added.

She said this will depend on how established national parties and MPs cooperate with new parties, as well as civil society, intellectuals and "the movement in the street," which have a large role to play "in the development

of this new era in the country.”



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Iraqi voters turn their backs on Iran-backed armed groups
Record low turnout in Iraq parliamentary election
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Collective action is key to fighting corruption in Lebanon, experts say
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[**UN condemns armed violence outside of**](#)

state authority in Beirut

Thu, 2021-10-14 23:52

NEW YORK: UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon Joanna Wronecka expressed deep concern over the people killed during clashes in Beirut on Thursday and condemned the use of “armed violence outside of state authority.”

In a statement, she underscored “the need for restraint, for maintaining calm and stability and ensuring the protection of civilians.”

At least six people were killed and dozens injured in Lebanon’s capital amid a protest organized by Hezbollah and its ally Amal movement against the judge who is investigating last year’s Beirut port explosion.

Tensions are high around the probe. Protesters accused Judge Tarek Bitar of being politically biased, but many Lebanese, including victims’ families, see him as an incorruptible judge, taking on a corrupt political elite.

Wronecka noted the “dangerous increase in polarization” in the context of the Beirut port explosion investigation. She also called on the Lebanese leaders to shoulder their responsibilities and place the interests of the country first at this critical juncture.

“Lifting Lebanon out of its current crisis and moving forward on reforms requires the efficient functioning of the state’s legislative, executive and judicial institutions,” Wronecka said.

“Now is the time for all sides to support judicial independence in the interest of the people.”

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres reiterated the need for “an impartial, thorough and transparent investigation” into the explosion on Aug. 4, 2020, when some 2,750 tons of highly explosive ammonium nitrate blew up in the port of Beirut after being inadequately stored there since 2013. The blast killed more than 200 people and wounded thousands.

Guterres called on “all concerned to immediately cease acts of violence and to refrain from any provocative actions or inflammatory rhetoric,” spokesperson Stephane Dujarric told reporters in New York.



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Six killed in Beirut clashes as tensions soar over port blast investigation
Lebanon president says people behind violence will be held accountable, PM announces day of mourning

[Pro-Iran militias warn of 'very cruel' response after Israeli strike on Palmyra](#)

Author:

Thu, 2021-10-14 23:40

AMMAN: Iran-backed forces in Syria said on Thursday they would respond forcefully to an Israeli strike over Syria's Palmyra area in the province of Homs on Wednesday evening in the second such strike within a week.

The Syrian Defense Ministry said in a statement that one soldier was killed in the attack that took place at 11:34 p.m. (2034 GMT) and targeted a

communications tower and caused some material losses.

Israel has kept silent about the strikes that came days after Damascus reported its air defenses intercepted an Israeli missile attack above the Homs countryside, wounding six Syrian soldiers and causing some material damage.

Israeli missiles flew over Jordanian airspace above US forces based in the Tanf area at the Syrian-Iraqi border, the Syrian ministry statement said.

The latest strikes are part of an escalation of what has been a low-intensity conflict in recent years that has seen hundreds of Israeli raids whose goal was to slow down Iran's growing entrenchment in Syria, Israeli and regional military experts say.

Tehran-backed forces including Lebanon's Hezbollah have built a presence since deploying to help President Bashar Assad in the Syrian conflict that erupted in 2011.

A statement by the so-called operations room of Assad's Iran-backed allies said the response to the strike would be "very cruel," adding casualties would have been much higher had its forces not been well spread across the desert area.

"As a result of this attack a number of martyrs and injured from our Mujahedeen brothers have fallen," the statement said without elaborating.

"We have taken a decision to respond to this attack in revenge for the martyrs and the blood of the injured and the response will be very cruel," said the statement published on pro-Iranian news outlets whose authenticity Reuters verified.

A senior military source who requested anonymity said the strikes hit among other targets the T4 airbase where Iran-backed militias launched drone strikes in recent months against US bases in northern Syria.

The source said unidentified drones believed to be Israeli also hit this week Tehran-backed bases in the eastern province of Deir Ezzor along the Iraqi border, a strategic supply route for Iranian-backed militias who regularly send reinforcements from Iraq into Syria

Israel's Defense Minister Benny Gantz earlier last month accused Tehran of providing foreign militias with drone training at an airbase in Iran.

Two military sources familiar with the affair say the site that was hit on Wednesday was near a secret facility that Tehran was using to transfer "know-how" on unmanned aerial vehicles technology.

The Palmyra area where the strikes were conducted is close to a major concentration of Russian bases and where its troops conducted in recent days maneuvers with Syrian troops, military experts say.

Israel wants Iranian and Iran-backed forces kept away from its border and

more broadly, removed from Syria entirely.



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Israel PM urges UN to hold Iran to account for nuclear moves
Syrian war monitor says Israeli strike near Palmyra kills 9