

Yemen's Houthi militia reject US call to stop Marib offensive

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ALEXANDRIA: The Iran-backed Houthis have rebuffed the latest US call to stop their deadly military offensive on the central Yemeni city of Marib, accusing the Americans of supporting their opponents.

Houthi spokesman Mohammed Abdul-Salam lashed out at the US on Wednesday for calling for the offensive to cease, and for renewing support for the internationally recognized government, accusing Washington of fueling the war in Yemen and imposing a "blockade."

The latest Houthi statement was part of a series of criticisms of other countries and rights groups for rebuking them for refusing to stop military operations in the area, which have claimed the lives of thousands of combatants and civilians.

On Wednesday, the US special envoy for Yemen, Tim Lenderking, slammed the Houthis for attacking the city, warning that their offensive in the province would aggravate the already miserable humanitarian crisis in Yemen.

In a tweet sent by the US State Department's Near Eastern Affairs branch, Lenderking and Yemeni Prime Minister Maeen Abdul Malik "condemned the Houthi offensive on Marib for exacerbating humanitarian suffering and sacrificing Yemen's young men, and agreed on the need to restore political stability in southern Yemen."

The US envoy also echoed his concerns about the impact of the Houthi attacks on Marib during a meeting with the Acting UN Special Envoy for Yemen Muin Shreim.

The Yemeni government said on Thursday that it would keep resisting Houthi attempts to seize control of new areas whilst complying with peace efforts to end the war.

Speaking to a gathering of government officials in Yemen's Seiyun city on Thursday, Yemen's Parliament Speaker Sultan Al-Barkani stated that tens of thousands of Yemenis who fled Houthi repression and sought refuge in Marib would not allow the militia to capture the city.

"We will continue to seek peace, but at the same time, we will not abandon fighting," Al-Barkani said.

"The Houthis will not reach Marib. This is impossible for the Yemenis since Marib hosts hundreds of thousands (of people) who escaped from Houthi

oppression and tyranny,” said Al-Barkani.

The government’s renewed pledges to defend Marib against Houthi incursions came as fighting raged on Thursday between government troops and the Houthis in several locations outside the city, near a military base in the west of the province and in mountainous areas and valleys in Rahabah to the south.

Yemen’s Defense Ministry said on Wednesday that 11 Houthis were killed in the southern city of Taiz after an attack on government-controlled areas in the northwest were foiled.

In the western province of Hodeidah, a landmine planted by the Houthis killed three civilians and wounded 11 on Thursday in Al-Durihimi district, the Yemeni Landmine Monitor said.

Yemen’s President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi on Thursday returned to the Saudi Arabian capital Riyadh from Cleveland, Ohio after a medical checkup, official news agency SABA said.

For almost a decade, Hadi has traveled frequently to the US to receive medical treatment for heart problems.



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[Houthis](#)

Arab coalition intercepts drone launched by Houthis toward Saudi Arabia Arab coalition intercepts several missiles, drones launched by Yemen’s Houthis toward Saudi Arabia

Turkey accelerates security wall construction along Iranian border amid migrants' flow

Author:

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ANKARA: In a bid to stop the flow of migrants, Ankara has decided to expand the construction of a security wall along its border with Iran to cover the entirety of the 295-km frontier amid rising public discontent after an increased number of Afghan migrants entered the country from Iran.

The Turkish government has reportedly been pursuing its wall project since 2017.

So far, 149 km have been completed, spanning several border cities, including Agri, Hakkari, Iğdir and Van.

Over the recent weeks, thousands of Afghan migrants, as well as smugglers, have been increasingly using Turkey's eastern border province of Van to reach Europe, and authorities have now focused their attention on constructing the wall along this city.

"So far, only a 3.5-km section of the structure has been completed," said Van Gov. Mehmet Emin Bilmez.

More security measures, like watchtowers, wireless sensors and trenches, will also be installed across the length of the Iranian border after the rise in Afghan asylum-seekers fleeing the Taliban amid instability following the US withdrawal from Afghanistan. More soldiers have also been deployed for border checks.

Sixty-four km of the wall between Van and Iran are set to be completed by the end of the year.

In the past, Turkey has accused Iran of providing a safe harbor for the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) members inside its territory and for turning a blind eye to their illegal crossing and smuggling attempts from the land border.

The hi-tech security wall is also related to Turkey's cooperation with the EU to stifle immigration flows into EU countries under the 2016 EU-Turkey refugee deal. Brussels agreed last month to allocate €3.5 billion (\$4.2 billion) to help refugees in Turkey until 2023.

In a bid to halt new migration flows from Syria, Turkey has already built a land wall along its border with Syria, considered the world's third-longest

wall after the Great Wall of China and the US-Mexico border wall.

Turkey hosts more than 4 million refugees, mostly Syrians, but Afghans comprise the second-largest refugee population.

The new wave of migration from Afghanistan via Iran has triggered reactions from Turkish society's anti-refugee segments and sparked debate on the effectiveness of border security policies.

Ankara-based Research Center on Asylum and Migration President Metin Corabatir believes that building walls will not solve the problem of illegal immigration.

"It is a disincentive to a certain extent, but it is impossible to cover the entire 295-km border with Iran with walls, considering the physical characteristics of the region. People take all sorts of risks to reach Greece despite the border control mechanisms of the EU," he told Arab News.

From a humanitarian perspective and considering international refugee rights, Corabatir noted that it is not possible to deny people fleeing repressive regimes a sanctuary, although the international community asserts that they are mainly economic migrants seeking decent living standards.

"In addition to Afghans, Iranians fleeing from their regime, as well as Iraqis, are also attempting to cross the border from Van. We cannot push them back if they have a reasonable asylum request," he said.

"There is a need for controlled management and identification of those who are escaping security risks. We cannot close our doors to them," said Corabatir.

Although there are no official statistics regarding Afghan migrants in Turkey, the number is believed to be more than 500,000 with the recent flows, with hundreds more crossing the border each day.

Unlike Syrian refugees, most Afghans are mainly trying to reach European shores rather than settling in Turkey, a fact that concerns the EU.

"The Turkish government committed to improving conditions in the removal centers for refugees in its latest human rights action plan," Corabatir said.

"There are also plans to encourage the voluntary return of Afghan refugees by providing them with a certain amount of money to help them establish a life back in their home country," he added.

Turkish authorities caught over 25,000 Afghan migrants in the first half of this year. The situation is becoming more and more polarized, however, with leaders of the opposition parties urging the government to send them back to their country and blaming the government for "turning Turkey into an open prison for refugees."

Experts also note that ensuring the security of the Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul is of key importance in order to be able to

deliver humanitarian aid to the country and to prevent Taliban insurgents from expanding their zones of influence as US troops pull out.

Negotiations over Turkey's proposal to operate and secure the key international airport in Afghanistan continue.



Main category:

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[Austria rejects EU military cooperation with Turkey](#)

Author:

Wed, 2021-07-28 22:23

ANKARA: Austria has rejected a formal request by Turkey to join a powerful EU security and defense cooperation program.

Ankara's May bid to be included in the bloc's Permanent Structured Cooperation Framework (PESCO) was given the cold shoulder by Vienna over its concerns about Turkish backsliding on democratic values and ties with Brussels.

PESCO covers 46 joint defense projects in partnership with 24 EU member states and is one of the union's key defense and security policies.

Since autumn last year, membership has been opened up to non-EU countries that fulfilled a set of political and legal criteria such as democratization, respect of common security and defense policies, and maintaining good relations with their EU neighbors.

However, the ongoing standoff between Ankara and Athens about the situation of Greek islands, and rising tensions over Turkey's recently announced settlement project on the divided island of Cyprus, are considered a barrier to good neighborliness.

Marc Pierini, a former EU ambassador to Turkey and now analyst at Carnegie Europe, told Arab News: "Austria's position may be expressed in stark terms, but it probably reflects the overall EU stand on the matter of Turkey's participation in PESCO.

"The overall reason is that Turkey's current rule-of-law architecture has not much to do with Europe's anymore and nobody sees much of a prospect for improvement," he said.

On Tuesday, Turkey's defense minister said that his country expected Greece to opt for peaceful political solutions and called for the disarmament of Greek islands that had non-military status.

Greece's recent purchase of Rafale fighter jets from France was criticized by Turkey as an attempt to begin an "arms race."

But the presence of Russian S-400 missile systems on Turkish soil has been viewed as a contradictory stance with the common security and defense interests of the EU.

The admission of non-EU countries to PESCO aims at increasing cooperation between NATO partners, improving military mobility within and beyond the EU, and standardizing cross-border military procedures such as the movement of military equipment across the union in times of crisis.

Although Turkey's application to PESCO is not seen as timely, its participation in the project would likely boost its air, land, sea, and cyber capabilities in a military sense, and would provide the country with a new avenue to improve cooperation with the EU and normalize its relations with bloc members.

Pierini pointed out that Turkey's interest in being associated with PESCO

would signal a lasting anchorage to the West. But, he added, the latest visit of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to Northern Cyprus, and the massive geopolitical gain given to Russia through the purchase of S-400 weapon systems, all pointed to a different direction.

“So, we are clearly in a dead-end alley at the moment,” he said.

Dr. Selmin Seda Coskun, a foreign policy analyst, told Arab News that Turkey had taken important foreign policy steps, especially during June, to meet the EU’s requirements for good neighborly relations.

So far, Turkey and Greece have held three consultative rounds of talks and a number of deconfliction meetings under NATO.

“However, it is obvious that it cannot achieve the same progress at the domestic sphere,” Coskun said.

She noted that Ankara was attempting to boost military cooperation with the Western community to avoid backing itself into a corner over the S-400 impasse.

“The sale of Turkish-made unmanned aerial vehicles to Ukraine and Poland in order to consolidate its presence in the alliance, Turkey’s participation into NATO’s Black Sea ships exercise, as well as assuming a more prominent role in Afghanistan, especially as US troops gear up to exit in September, prove that Turkey is capable of doing this reconciliatory move in its foreign policy,” she added.

However, Coskun pointed out that to take part in PESCO, Turkey needed to prove a willingness to tackle its poor human rights record and convince the EU about impending domestic democratic progress.

“Either PESCO’s members would consider Turkey’s latest foreign policy moves and not expect too much from Ankara, or Turkey would understand that it would be more advantageous to follow EU values in its domestic policy preferences,” she said.



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[Yemen braces for third COVID-19 wave amid vaccine shortage](#)

Author:

Wed, 2021-07-28 21:57

ALEXANDRIA: Yemen's internationally recognized government has put health facilities and workers on high alert and demanded that people follow COVID-19 restrictions as the country braces for a third wave of the virus.

"Our trained health workers are on the ground, ready to deal with the third wave as they did with previous waves," Ishraq Al-Subaee, a spokesman for the Aden-based National Coronavirus Committee, told Arab News on Wednesday, adding that the government is working on boosting the supply of oxygen and applying more health measures to mitigate the impact of the new wave.

Prompted by a sudden surge in the number of coronavirus cases in government-controlled areas, Yemen's Health Minister Qasem Buhaibeh said on Twitter on Tuesday that the Yemeni government has ordered health workers to "get ready for a new wave" and to "prepare health facilities and quarantines for a possible influx of cases," urging Yemenis to abide by health precautions.

"We call on citizens to be careful and take the necessary precautionary health measures, as we have field indicators of an increase in coronavirus cases," Buhaibeh said.

The government's coronavirus committee on Tuesday recorded 10 new infections in five Yemeni provinces and zero deaths, bringing the total number of confirmed cases to 7,022. There have been 1,374 deaths and 4,168 recoveries. On Monday, the committee announced the recording no new cases, one death and two recoveries.

Ishraq said that Yemen would receive in August thousands of AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccines as part of the international COVAX scheme, and that priority would be given to Yemenis who would receive their first shot.

Health experts argue that it is hard to predict the trajectory of the coronavirus pandemic in the country, given the fact that two-thirds of the Yemeni population live in areas under the Houthis control, where officials conceal information about the pandemic and obstruct the distribution of vaccines.

"The epidemiological situation in Yemen is ambiguous," Abdulla bin Ghouth, a professor of community medicine and epidemiology at Hadramout University's College of Medicine, and an adviser to the health minister, told Arab News on Wednesday, adding that the country has a "weak surveillance and diagnosis process" and a "crumbling health system."

Despite not ruling out the possibility of a third wave, Bin Ghouth said that Yemen is experiencing a post-second wave period due to the stable level of new cases and deaths. "Through my weekly follow-up to the epidemiological curve, there is a constant continuation of a low level of cases, not a sharp decrease or a double rise," he said.

In April, Yemen kicked off vaccination campaigns in government-controlled areas, three weeks after receiving the first shipment of COVID-19 shots.

At the beginning of the campaign, the turnout was very poor, until Saudi Arabia and other countries said that they would only allow fully vaccinated people to enter into their countries.

Thousands of Yemenis showed up at vaccination centers, consuming the country's stock of the vaccines within a short period.

Yemeni health officials said that almost 320,000 Yemenis were vaccinated during the first and second rounds of the jab rollout and about 72,000 people have already registered on the ministry's news site to receive vaccines.

At the same time, thousands of Yemeni travelers who were left stuck at home due to a shortage of vaccines have demanded that the government swiftly administer new doses, complaining that many Yemenis have lost jobs since they could not get a vaccine on time.

Mohammed Abdul Kareem, a Yemeni expatriate in a Gulf country, said that he waited three months to receive a second shot of a COVID-19 vaccine and that his visa would expire if he did not get it next month.

“As my visa expires soon, please tell us will the vaccines arrive at the beginning of August or in the middle,” Abdul Kareem said, commenting on the health minister’s post on Twitter.

Double-jabbed Yemenis also complained that they have not yet received electronic certificates proving their vaccination from the ministry. The health minister justified the delays in issuing the certificates, citing “huge pressure” from thousands of vaccinated people, and added that the ministry is “working on addressing the issue.”



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Yemeni government demands ‘effective’ pressure on Houthis to accept peace efforts
Houthi artillery shells kill 3 civilians in Yemen’s Taiz

Greece, Cyprus win Jordan backing against Erdogan 'ghost town' plan

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ATHENS: Greece, Cyprus and regional ally Jordan on Wednesday called for a "comprehensive and viable settlement of the Cyprus problem" after Turkey said it would reopen a former resort in the disputed north of the island. Leaders of the three countries, speaking at a summit in Athens, were responding to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's announcement last week of plans to reopen Varosha.

The former resort has been a fenced-off ghost town since a 1974 invasion by Turkey resulted in a UN-monitored standoff that divided the Mediterranean island.

According to a joint statement issued after the summit, the three leaders said they were committed to a "comprehensive and viable settlement of the Cyprus problem in line with the relevant UN Security Council resolutions and international law."

Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis called the recent developments on Cyprus "deplorable."

In opening remarks, he said that the summit between the three leaders "reflects the commitment of our countries to promote peace stability and prosperity in our wider region."

Cypriot President Nicos Anastasiades said he briefed the other leaders "on the Cyprus problem especially after the recent announcements that have been condemned by the UN Security Council, as well as by the EU."

The EU, of which Cyprus is a member state, condemned "Turkey's unilateral steps and the unacceptable announcements" and demanded Ankara reverse a decision that threatens the delicate status quo in the region.

Erdogan vowed that "life will restart in Varosha" during a controversial visit to mark 47 years since the invasion that split Cyprus.

Greece and Cyprus have been seeking to expand cooperation with other countries in the region with an eye on Turkey's more nationalist and expansionary policies under Erdogan.

"We are nations that share the Eastern Mediterranean (region) and I think we will continue to play a vital role and look for wider cooperation," King Abdullah II of Jordan said during Wednesday's trilateral meeting.



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