

Lebanese security forces foil attempt to smuggle fuel across Syria border

Author:

Sat, 2021-05-08 20:27

BEIRUT: Lebanese security forces have foiled a bid to smuggle 8,000 liters of fuel into Syria.

The Internal Security Forces (ISF) arrested a four-member gang of Lebanese smugglers, who had stashed the subsidized fuel in two secret tanks that were hidden inside pick-up trucks.

ISF said an informant had tipped off intelligence and information teams about the smugglers' intent to conceal the fuel and smuggle it through one of the Akkar-Hermel routes to Syria.

An ISF squad stopped and impounded three vehicles in a sting operation at Bayno-Al Oyoum highway, leading to Hermel, on Thursday.

The three impounded cars were the pick-up trucks and a white Mercedes, which was used to monitor the route.

"Unfortunately, while law enforcement bodies are working vigilantly to curtail smuggling of subsidized products by smugglers to Syria, many of those are covered up by politicians or influential figures," an unnamed senior lieutenant said. "Smuggling subsidized goods (mainly petrol and diesel) has prospered recently, especially with smugglers purchasing fuel products here for around LBP40,000 (\$26.53) per tank and selling them in Syria for three or four times that price."

Fuel prices have soared in recent months due to shortages, which Energy Minister Raymond Ghajar blamed on smugglers exporting subsidized supplies to Syria.

If drivers are lucky enough to find petrol stations that are open they are forced to queue for hours. Stations have caps on the amounts of fuel permitted per person, with nobody allowed a full tank. Many stations remain closed.

Ghajar told the media recently that the need for petrol in Syria had encouraged Lebanese smugglers to illegally export subsidized materials for massive profits.

Media reports have said a 20-liter tank of subsidized Lebanese petrol costs nearly \$4 dollars per liter according to the market rate, while smugglers were exporting smuggled fuel to Syria where people were willing to pay up to \$25 rather than queue for hours.

The Lebanese Army said on Saturday that it had seized four cars, including a black hearse, that were being smuggled to Syria.

The black hearse had been stolen a week previously from the funeral services association in the Sad El Bouchrieh area.

"The stolen vehicles were being prepared to be smuggled to Syria," said the army.

Two Lebanese suspects were apprehended in Al-Hermel, 10 kilometers away from the Syrian border, for stealing the cars and arranging them to be smuggled.



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[Lebanese Internal Security Forces' \(ISF\)](#)

[Smugglers](#)

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Lebanon: woman and lover arrested for stashing drugs in husband's car in bid to frame him
As Lebanese cry for justice, politics paralyzes the system

[Egypt, Arab League condemn Israel's role in Al-Aqsa Mosque clashes](#)

Sat, 2021-05-08 19:41

CAIRO: Egypt's Foreign Ministry and the Arab League have condemned Israeli forces' involvement in violent clashes outside Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem.

More than 160 Palestinians and at least six Israeli police officers were injured in a series of confrontations at the mosque late on Friday.

The Egyptian Foreign Ministry said that it condemned Israeli forces' "storming of the mosque and assault on worshippers there."

A ministry statement called on Israeli authorities to "shoulder their

responsibility in accordance with international law in providing the required protection for the Palestinian civilians and their right to perform their religious rituals.”

The ministry also highlighted the need to “halt any activities that violate the sanctity of the mosque, the holy month of Ramadan, and the Islamic and Christian Arab identity of Jerusalem city.”

Foreign Ministry spokesman Ahmed Hafez reiterated Egypt’s rejection of any illegal activities that seek to undermine the rights of the Palestinian people, particularly the construction or expansion of settlements on Palestinian territory, as well as confiscation of lands and displacement of Palestinians.

This “represents a violation of international law, undermines the chances of achieving the two-state solution, and represents a threat to the pillars of security and stability in the region,” said Hafez.

He denounced Israeli attempts to evict Palestinian families in the Sheikh Jarrah district in east Jerusalem, saying that this “represents a violation of international humanitarian law and a continuation of the policy of forced displacement.”

Arab League Secretary General Ahmed Aboul Gheit also condemned the violence at the mosque, and the targeting of unarmed Palestinians with sound and gas bombs as well as rubber bullets.

Warning of the consequences of escalation, Aboul Gheit said that the assault “provokes the feelings of Muslims around the world and reflects the intended Israeli policy of escalation.”

The violence follows recent “provocations and irresponsible actions against the Palestinian people,” he said.

Aboul Gheit called for immediate international action to halt the assaults, warning of an irreversible escalation in the occupied territories.

An official source in the Arab League Secretariat quoted Aboul Gheit as saying that the timing of the Israeli assault reveals “a premeditated intention to provoke the Palestinians.”

It “also demonstrates recklessness with the feelings of Muslims and their right to perform their rituals in Al-Aqsa Mosque during Ramadan,” he said.

The Arab League chief held the Israeli government accountable for what he described as “dangerous, irresponsible escalation.”



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Medics: 200 Palestinians hurt in Al-Aqsa clashes with police Saudi Arabia, UAE reject Israeli measures to evacuate Palestinian homes in Jerusalem

[Palestinian worshippers, Israeli police clash in Jerusalem](#)

Author:

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Fri, 2021-05-07 22:06

JERUSALEM: Palestinian worshippers clashed with Israeli police on Friday evening at Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem's Old City as weeks-long tensions between Israel and the Palestinians over Jerusalem soared again.

Fourteen people were injured in the violence, according to the Palestinian Red Crescent rescue service. It said most of the injuries were from metal pellets covered with rubber.

The clashes were the latest in a deadly day that saw Israeli forces shoot and kill two Palestinians after three men opened fire on an Israeli base in the occupied West Bank.

They erupted when Israeli police deployed heavily as Muslims were performing evening prayers at Al-Aqsa during the holy month of Ramadan.

Video footage from the scene shows worshippers throwing chairs, shoes and rocks toward the police and officers responding by opening fire. Israeli police also closed gates leading to Al-Aqsa inside the walled Old City.

Dozens of Palestinians in an east Jerusalem neighborhood are at risk of being evicted following a long legal battle with Israeli settlers, and Palestinian protesters have clashed with Israeli police in the city on a nightly basis since the start of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

The unrest has drawn attention from across the region, with neighboring Jordan warning Israel against further "provocative" steps, and Iran seizing on the sensitivities around Jerusalem and encouraging the violence.

In the attack on Friday morning, Israeli police said three attackers fired on the base near the northern West Bank town of Jenin. The Border Police and an Israeli soldier returned fire, killing two of the men and wounding the third, who was evacuated to a hospital.

Some 70,000 worshippers attended the final Friday prayers of Ramadan at Al-Aqsa, the Islamic endowment that oversees the site said. Thousands protested afterwards, waving the green flags of the Islamic militant group Hamas and chanting pro-Hamas slogans before dispersing peacefully.

Israelis and Palestinians are bracing for more violence in the coming days. Sunday night is "Laylat Al-Qadr" or the "Night of Destiny," the most sacred in the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. Worshippers will gather for intense nighttime prayers at the Al-Aqsa mosque compound in Jerusalem's Old City, a flashpoint site sacred to both Muslims and Jews, who refer to it as the Temple Mount.

Sunday night is also the start of Jerusalem Day, a national holiday in which Israel celebrates its annexation of east Jerusalem and religious nationalists hold parades and other celebrations in the city. On Monday, an Israeli court is expected to issue a verdict on the evictions.

Israel's archenemy Iran was meanwhile marking its own Quds, or Jerusalem, Day on Friday. The national holiday typically features anti-Israel protests and fiery speeches by Iranian leaders predicting Israel's demise.

"The downward and declining movement of the Zionist regime has begun and will not stop," Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said in a televised address. He called for continuing armed "resistance" in the Palestinian territories and urged Muslim nations support it.

This year, Ramadan has coincided with an uptick in Israeli-Palestinian violence focused on Jerusalem, where Palestinian protesters have repeatedly clashed with Israeli police over restrictions on outdoor gatherings at the Damascus Gate leading into the Old City.

On Thursday, Israeli forces arrested a Palestinian suspected of carrying out

a drive-by shooting earlier this week in the West Bank that killed an Israeli and wounded two others.

On Wednesday, Israeli troops shot and killed a 16-year-old Palestinian during a confrontation near the West Bank city of Nablus. The military said several Palestinians had thrown firebombs toward soldiers.

In recent days, protesters have scuffled with police and settlers over the threatened eviction of dozens of Palestinians in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood in east Jerusalem. Several Palestinian families in Sheikh Jarrah have been embroiled in a long-running legal battle with Israeli settler groups trying to acquire property in the neighborhood north of the Old City. Israel captured east Jerusalem, along with the West Bank and Gaza – territories the Palestinians want for their future state – in the 1967 Mideast war. Israel annexed east Jerusalem in a move not recognized internationally and views the entire city as its capital.

The Palestinians view east Jerusalem – which includes major holy sites for Jews, Christians and Muslims – as their capital, and its fate is one of the most sensitive issues in the conflict.

Neighboring Jordan, which made peace with Israel in 1994 and is the custodian of Al-Aqsa, weighed in on Friday, saying “Israel’s continuation of its illegal practices and provocative steps” in the city is a “dangerous game.” “Building and expanding settlements, confiscating lands, demolishing homes and deporting Palestinians from their homes are illegal practices that perpetuate the occupation and undermine the chances of achieving a just and comprehensive peace, which is a regional and international necessity,” Jordan’s Foreign Minister Ayman Al-Safadi tweeted.

The Islamic militant group Hamas, which rules the Gaza Strip, has egged on the violence, and Palestinian militants in Gaza have fired rockets in support of the protesters.



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[Houthis to force virginity test on abducted Yemeni model, says Amnesty International](#)

Author:

Fri, 2021-05-07 20:37

AL-MUKALLA: A Yemeni model who was abducted by the Houthis is going to be subjected to a virginity test, Amnesty International said on Friday.

The rights group urged the militia to immediately halt its plans.

“Yemen’s Houthi de facto authorities must immediately halt all plans to subject Entesar Al-Hammadi to forced virginity testing,” Lynn Maalouf, deputy director for the Middle East and North Africa at Amnesty International, said. “She is being punished by the authorities for challenging the social norms of Yemen’s deeply patriarchal society which entrench discrimination against women.”

The Houthis have banned media outlets in areas under their control and social

media users from publishing or sharing information related to Al-Hammadi's case.

They have also banned her lawyers from speaking to international news outlets.

"The Houthi de facto authorities have a deplorable track record of arbitrarily detaining people on baseless charges – to silence or punish critics, activists, journalists and members of religious minorities – as well as subjecting them to torture and other forms of ill-treatment," Maalouf added.

Khaled Mohammed Al-Kamal, the model's lawyer, said a Houthi prosecutor had ordered the ban on media coverage and banned him or any other person from speaking to the media.

"This is against the law," he told Arab News. "But there is no problem if this will lead to her release."

The 20-year old model and actress and two other actresses were on their way to a movie shoot on Feb. 20 when armed rebels abducted them and imprisoned them in Sanaa.

Their abduction provoked condemnation and drew media attention, with rights activists demanding that the militia be designated a terrorist organization.

Irritated by media coverage of the case, the Houthis dismissed a prosecutor who had ordered the model's release, put Al-Hammadi into solitary confinement and pressured Al-Kamal into dropping the case.

But he vowed to keep defending her and called for her release, even on bail, saying she was always crying and had threatened a hunger strike to force the Houthis into freeing her.

"I am her lawyer and will keep defending her until the last moment," he added. He said that other local lawyers had agreed to join him in defending the model.

The Houthis have not presented clear charges against Al-Hammadi, but locals said the abduction was part of a moral crackdown on artists and actresses as well as spaces where there was mixing between women and men.

Meanwhile, fighting intensified in the provinces of Marib, Jouf, Hodeidah and Taiz, days after the UN Yemen envoy Martin Griffiths announced that peace efforts to end the war were crumbling.

In Hodeidah, government forces clashed with the Houthis in Hays and in contested areas inside the city of Hodeidah, local media said on Friday.

The Joint Forces, three major military units on the country's west coast, said that 68 Houthis were killed and 176 were wounded.

A truce under the Stockholm Agreement, signed in late 2018, has largely

failed to stop hostilities in Hodeidah. Local rights groups that document war casualties said that hundreds of civilians have been killed due to landmines and shelling.

In Marib, Yemen's Defense Ministry said on Friday that troops had clashed with the Houthis in Mashjah and Al-Kasara as the rebels advanced toward Marib city.

State media showed dozens of military vehicles and fighters heading to the battlefield to push back the Houthis.

Thousands of combatants have been killed since early February, when the Houthis resumed an offensive to seize control of Marib.



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[Entesar Al-Hammadi](#)

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Abducted Yemeni model in Houthi prison threatens hunger strike

Turkey reopens consulate in northern Iraq

Fri, 2021-05-07 18:53

ANKARA: Turkey has reopened its consulate in Mosul, in northern Iraq. The consulate has been closed for the past seven years, since Daesh seized control of the city.

At that time, Daesh held 49 consulate staff – including then-Consul General Ozturk Yilmaz – hostage for over three months.

Ankara has announced several times in recent years that it intended to reopen its consulate in Mosul, a city that was once part of the Ottoman Empire.

Turkey recently appointed a new ambassador to Iraq as part of its efforts to boost its relations with its neighbor, and Turkish Interior Minister Suleyman Soylu recently announced plans to set up a military base in Iraq's northern Dohuk region, in addition to a number of military outposts that Turkey has held in the Kurdistan Region since the mid-Nineties.

The aim of the new base is to restrict the movement of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Dohuk lies on a strategic route to the Qandil Mountains, where the militants' hideouts are based.

On April 14, a missile hit a Turkish military base in Bashiqa, near Mosul, killing a Turkish soldier. On the same day, Erbil International Airport, which hosts US coalition forces, was hit by an explosives-laden drone.

In late April, the Turkish army launched a new offensive against PKK bases in northern Iraq, and Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar visited a military base in the Kurdistan Region.

However, that operation and Akar's visit – which took place "without coordination or prior approval from authorities" – sparked anger from Baghdad. The Iraqi government sent a formal letter of protest to Turkey's ambassador on May 3.

Nicholas A. Heras, senior analyst at the Newlines Institute in Washington, said Turkish military operations in areas south of the Kurdistan Region are problematic because Baghdad is strongly opposed to a larger and more active Turkish military footprint in Iraq.

"Baghdad might be open to intelligence cooperation with Ankara for counter-Daesh operations in areas around Mosul, but that cooperation would likely need to be on terms dictated by Baghdad," Heras told Arab News.

To what extent Turkey's expanded military presence in northern Iraq will enable it to launch its long-rumored operation against the PKK in Sinjar is

still a matter of concern, considering the geopolitical dynamics of the region.

For Heras, any Turkish move against Sinjar would be a non-starter for Baghdad because there is a large People's Mobilization Forces (PMF) presence in that area.

"Many PMF groups are powerful in Baghdad and are resolutely opposed to any moves by Turkey to expand its military reach in Iraq," he said.

The PMF, an Iranian-backed Iraqi militia umbrella group which employs local PKK militias in its cadres, is active in northern Iraq and has claimed responsibility for numerous attacks in recent times.

Ankara has repeatedly announced that it will not allow Sinjar to become a second Qandil – a stronghold for the PKK.

Turkey's February 10 military operation against the PKK on Gare Mountain in Iraqi Kurdistan raised concerns that it was planning an operation in Sinjar, threatening the existence of Iran-backed groups in the area.

It is no secret that Iran strongly opposes Turkey's military presence in Iraq and sees Turkey's potential operation in Sinjar as opposing its own geopolitical interests.

Iran-backed militias are concerned by the growing rapprochement between Ankara and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) that controls the Sinjar area. Both parties have urged the PKK and Iran-backed militias to leave the region.

"The Iranians view Turkey, especially (Turkish President Recep Tayyip) Erdogan, as a rival for influence in the Levant. There's expanding Turkish influence in Iraq, Lebanon, and Syria that the Iranians want to limit," Heras said. "Whenever and wherever possible, the Iranians will try to position local forces, such as those in Sinjar, to box Ankara out of more influence in the Levant."



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Turkey, Iraq draw closer over terror threat Iraqis slowly rebuild Mosul, with little aid from government