

# Iran fuel tanker attacked off Syria: Monitor

Sat, 2021-04-24 18:27

BEIRUT: An Iranian tanker was attacked off the coast of war-torn Syria Saturday, sparking a fire but not causing any casualties, the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

State news agency SANA quoted the oil ministry as saying the fire erupted after "what was believed to be an attack by a drone from the direction of Lebanese waters".

The fire was extinguished, it said.

The Observatory was unable to say whether it was a drone attack or a missile fired from a warship.

It was not immediately clear who was behind the attack near the Baniyas refinery in the regime-controlled coastal province of Tartus.

"It's the first such attack on an oil tanker, but the Baniyas terminal has been targeted in the past," Observatory head Rami Abdel Rahman said.

Iran's Al-Alam television said the oil tanker that was hit on Saturday near Baniyas in Syria was one of three Iranian tankers that arrived a while ago at the oil terminal.

Early last year, Damascus said divers had planted explosives on offshore pipelines of the Baniyas refinery but the damage had not halted operations. Israel has carried out hundreds of air strikes on Syrian soil since 2011, mostly targeting Iranian and Lebanese Hezbollah forces as well as allied Syrian government troops.

On Thursday, Israeli strikes killed a Syrian officer east of Damascus, in apparent retaliation for a missile fired hours earlier from Syria towards a secretive nuclear site in southern Israel.

Before Syria's war, the country enjoyed relative energy autonomy, but production has plummeted during the war, pushing the government to rely on importing hydrocarbons.

Western sanctions on oil shipping, as well as US punitive measures against Iran, have complicated these imports.

Pre-war production was 400,000 barrels per day (bpd) in Syria.

But it stood at just 89,000 bpd in 2020, Syria's oil minister said in February, of which up to 80,000 came from Kurdish areas outside government control.



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[Iran](#)

Syrian missile exploding in Israel not intentional: US general  
UN reiterates it is not involved in Syrian presidential election

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## [Protests shed light on Jerusalem's status in upcoming elections](#)

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Sat, 2021-04-24 18:20

AMMAN: The sudden escalation and spread of Palestinian protests in reaction to racist incitement by Jewish groups have brought the issue of the status of

occupied Jerusalem to center stage.

Majdi Khalidi, the senior diplomatic adviser to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, told Arab News that contacts have been made with other Arab and Islamic countries around the world, calling on them to make public statements on the importance of elections that should take place in Jerusalem.

Khalidi said that no one can bypass the people of Jerusalem.

"What is happening reminds the world that East Jerusalem is an occupied territory and the capital of the Palestinian state," he said. "It shows that Jerusalem Palestinians must be allowed to participate in the elections."

Tor Wennesland, UN special coordinator for the Middle East peace process, condemned "all acts of violence" and called upon "all sides to exercise maximum restraint and avoid further escalation, particularly during the holy month of Ramadan and this politically charged time for all."

The UN coordinator's statement, which said that efforts are being made to de-escalate the situation, failed to condemn the racist calls for the death of Arabs, nor did it reiterate the rights of Jerusalem Palestinians to participate in the upcoming Palestinian legislative elections.

Ayman Safadi, Jordanian deputy prime minister and foreign minister, called on Israel not to play with fire.

"Jerusalem is a red line," he said. "Any attempts against it are tantamount to playing with fire. The Israeli occupiers have an international obligation to stop the racist violations against the people of the old city of Jerusalem."

Safadi described the attackers as representing "hatred and racism."

The Israeli media reported a high-level security meeting for the defense ministry in Tel Aviv concluded that there is a need for Israel to prepare for escalation that could take a long time and spread throughout the occupied territories. The chief of the army staff, Aviv Kohavi, who headed the security meeting, canceled a planned trip to the US because of the escalation of tensions and violence.

Anees Sweidan, director of the Arab Affairs department in the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) believes that the protests in Jerusalem will strengthen the hands of those calling for Jerusalemites to be included in the May 22 elections.

However, Radi Jirai, a former Fatah prisoner who believes that the future now is for Palestinians and Israelis to agree on a single state with equal rights, told Arab News that the explosion that was initiated in Jerusalem will not be good news for Abbas.

"President Abbas is in an unenviable position," he said. "His support to the protesters will mean that he will have a hard time if pressed by Israelis to calm the situation down."

Khalil Assali, the publisher of the East Jerusalem news site Akhbarelbalad, told Arab News that politicians should not interfere or try to hijack the protests.

"Leave the youth of Jerusalem to oppose Israeli racism and to Jerusalemites, who called for holding the tarawih (post-isha prayers) at the steps of Damascus gate in defiance of Israel's unilaterally imposed ban against the use of the stairs by the Palestinians of the city," he said.

Aviv Tataraski, of the Ir-Amim NGO, which is focused on the human rights situation in East Jerusalem, told Arab News that the real problem is the police.

“If the police wanted, they could easily disperse or keep them at bay,” he said.

Tataraski said Israeli police turned a blind eye to calls for the death of Arabs by the extremist groups while brutally attacking Palestinians who just came for prayer, shopping, or were protesting with calls of Allah-o-Akbar. He said that the real power of Palestinians is their numbers.

“When the Israeli police decided to block people from sitting and gathering at the Damascus gate without any justification, the motive was clear,” Tataraski said. “The police wanted to show Palestinians that even in this central place they have to bow down to Israeli whims.”

Tataraski, who was an eyewitness to the events over the past few days, said the actions against Palestinians have backfired.

Wadie Abu Nassar, director of the Haifa-based International Center for Consultations, told Arab News that Israel has no intention to approve or disapprove Palestinian elections in Jerusalem.

Abu Nassar insists that “nobody is pressing Israel seriously, even not Hamas, to allow Palestinian elections in Jerusalem.”



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Jerusalem tension triggers Gaza-Israel fire exchange

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# 130 Europe-bound migrants feared dead off Libyan coast

Author:

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1619205056425440000

Fri, 2021-04-23 22:23

CAIRO: More than 100 Europe-bound migrants are feared dead in a boat wreck off Libya, independent rescue groups said, in the latest loss of life as attempts to cross the Mediterranean increase during the warmer months. Humanitarian organizations have accused the Libyan coast guard and European authorities of failing to meet their responsibilities to save lives.

A Libyan coast guard official told The Associated Press that they searched for the boat but could not find it with their limited resources.

SOS Mediterranee, which operates the rescue vessel Ocean Viking, said late Thursday that the capsized rubber boat, which was initially carrying around 130 people, was spotted in the Mediterranean Sea northeast of the Libyan capital, Tripoli.

The aid vessel did not find any survivors, but could see at least ten bodies near the wreck.

"We think of the lives that have been lost and of the families who might never have certainty as to what happened to their loved ones," it said in a statement.

The migrant traffic has raised the question among European Union countries and Libya over who is responsible for saving those at sea.

The European humanitarian organization said that those missing will likely join the 350 people who have drowned in the sea so far this year.

It accused governments of failing to provide search and rescue operations. In the years since the 2011 NATO-backed uprising that ousted and killed longtime dictator Muammar Qaddafi, war-torn Libya has emerged as the dominant transit point for migrants fleeing war and poverty in Africa and the Middle East. Smugglers often pack desperate families into ill-equipped rubber boats that stall and founder along the perilous Central Mediterranean route.

"These are the human consequences of policies which fail to uphold international law and the most basic of humanitarian imperatives," tweeted Eugenio Ambrosi, Chief of Staff for the International Organization for Migration.

Alarm Phone, a crisis hotline for migrants in distress in the Mediterranean, said that it had been in contact with the boat in distress for nearly ten hours before it capsized.

Alarm Phone said in a statement that it had notified European and Libyan authorities of the GPS position of the boat but only non-state rescue groups actively searched for it.

Alarm Phone accused European authorities of refusing to coordinate a search operation, leaving it solely in the hands of the Libyan Coast Guard.

Libya Coast Guard Spokesman Commander Masoud Ibrahim Masoud described allegations that they had been negligent as untrue.

“We coordinated the search operation,” he told The Associated Press. “The ships kept searching in the sea for more than 24 hours but the waves were very rough.”

Masoud told the AP that the Libyan coast guard had received around noon on Wednesday two rescue alerts from two different rubber boats in distress to the east of Tripoli. A patrol vessel was immediately dispatched and rescued 106 migrants, including women and children, who were aboard one of the two boats. Two bodies were also pulled out of the water near the capsized boat. He said the same vessel continued to search, but visibility was low and seas rough. He said the vessel eventually returned to port so that the other migrants onboard could receive medical attention.

In the meantime, he said Libyan authorities asked three merchant ships and Ocean Viking to look for the missing rubber boat, until the Libyan patrol vessel could join them again.

In recent years, the European Union has partnered with Libya’s coast guard and other local groups to stem such dangerous sea crossings. Rights groups, however, say those policies leave migrants at the mercy of armed groups or confined in squalid detention centers rife with abuses.

“We are not as equipped as the US coast guard and the support we get from the EU does not meet our needs,” said Masoud.



Flavio Gasperini / SOS MEDITERRANEE

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[Mediterranean sea](#)

34 migrants dead after boat capsizes off Djibouti: IOMUN says 41 Europe-bound migrants drown in Mediterranean

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## [Panic in Lebanon as desert locust swarms hit farmland](#)

Fri, 2021-04-23 19:42

BEIRUT: The arrival of locust swarms in Lebanon has caused panic among the country's farmers.

Videos showing the insects flying over farmland in the towns of Ersal and Ras Baalbek in Bekaa circulated on social media, with the hashtag #locust trending in Lebanon on Friday as people made sarcastic comments about the latest crisis to hit the beleaguered country.

The Lebanese military said that helicopters had begun spraying pesticides over Baalbek and Ras Baalbek to "fight and eradicate" the desert locusts.

Ersal Mayor Bassel Al-Hujairi recounted seeing "millions" of locusts flying and attacking cherry trees and crops.

"Locusts have invaded one-third of Ersal," he told Arab News. "As we rushed to find out the size of the disaster, locust swarms had already gone across the town, which means that in the early hours of Friday locusts were able to cross 15 km, heading from barren areas toward Ersal. If these swarms multiply, they can cover the sun."

Ersal was home to more than two million cherry, apple and apricot trees that were located on the town's southern and eastern sides, said the mayor, and locusts were still on the northern side of the town.

"I hope wind will not take them to other directions," he added.

The swarms arrived in Lebanon after invading Syria, Iraq and Jordan.

The UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) said the appearance of desert locusts in Syria and Jordan was an "unusual and rare" event caused by several days of strong southerly winds and high temperatures that brought the adult groups to these areas.

It added that while the swarms did not represent a "large-scale invasion" and could be controlled, it feared that some of the mature adults may lay eggs and reproduce.

The ministries of agriculture and defense have mobilized to address the problem as Lebanon is a member of the FAO's Commission for Controlling the Desert Locust in the Central Region.

Agriculture Minister Abbas Mortada inspected Ersal and said that ministry teams had witnessed "locust waves" and were able to define their approximate scope.

"But we still have fears that these locusts may reproduce and invade fields and farms. People are filming the locust swarms, but they are still relatively far."

Ras Baalbek Mayor Menhem Mhanna reported "huge numbers" of locusts over the town's barren areas and expressed his fears about these swarms reaching inhabited areas.

"Locusts will not find anything in Lebanon since the politicians have devoured everything," said one person on social media, while another said: "Lebanon's politicians are more dangerous than these swarms."

"Locusts are the cherry on the top to be added to Lebanon's economic collapse, political gridlock and starvation," read another comment.

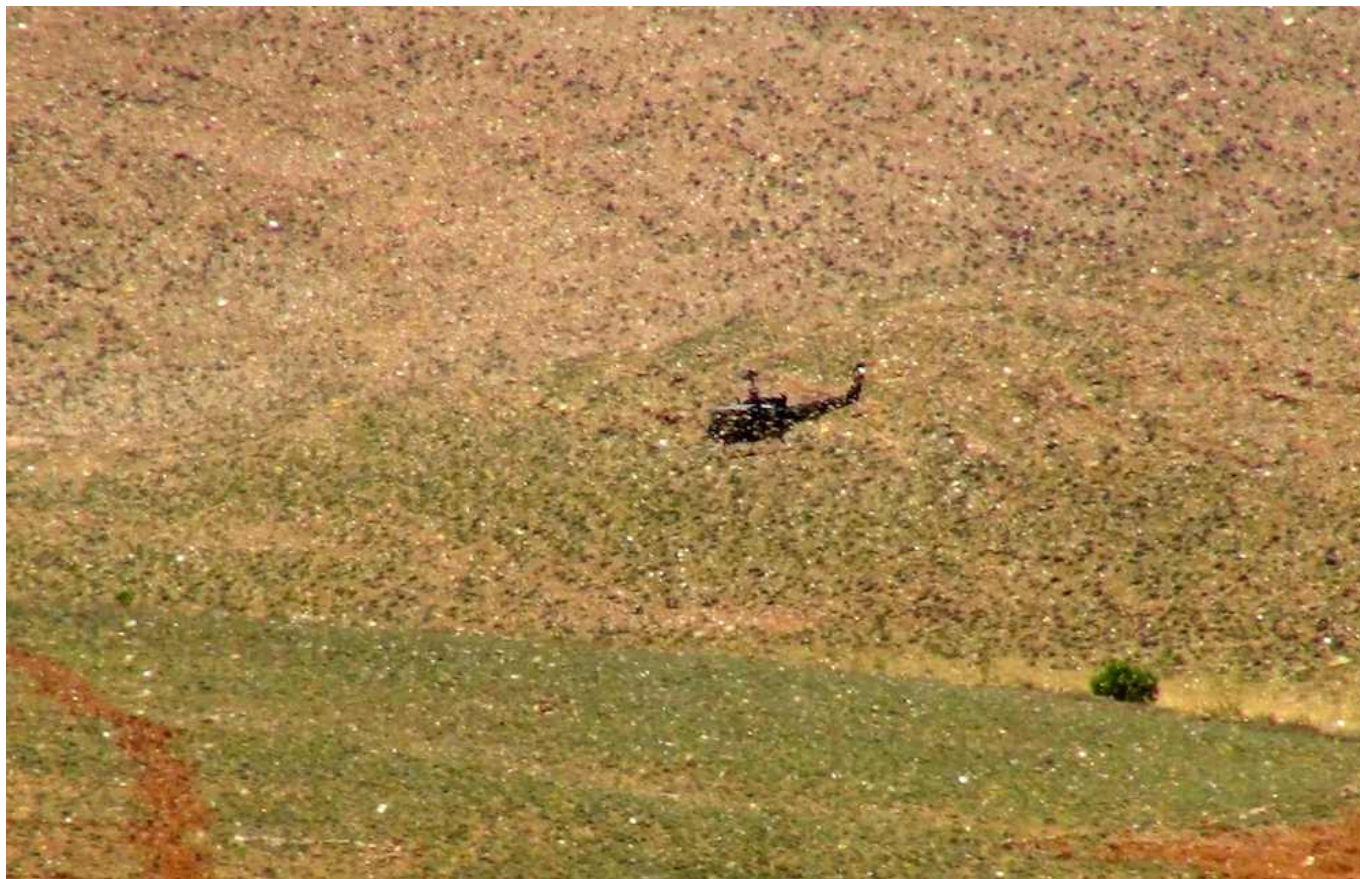
The crisis has brought the Lebanese back to the beginning of the 20th century, when swarms stripped the country of almost all its vegetation.

At that time Lebanon was already grappling with economic hardship and a double blockade by both the Ottoman Empire and the Allied Forces, resulting in a famine that led to more than a third of the population dying.

In 2013, historians and researchers Dr. Christian Taoutel and Father Pierre Wittouck released a book compiling the previously unpublished French chronicles of Jesuit priests during the famine called "The Lebanese people in the turmoil of the Great War of 1914-1918."

According to the book, "famine started with a hungry swarm of locusts that devoured everything, where the Lebanese called the year of 1915 'The Year of Locusts' which were impossible to control."





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[Food and Agriculture Organization \(FAO\)](#)

Disaster looms as locusts threaten livelihood of millions in region  
Plague to protein: Israeli firm seeks to put locusts on the menu

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## [Cyprus to impose partial lockdown to stem virus surge](#)

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1619191135024329900

Fri, 2021-04-23 15:08

NICOSIA: Cyprus on Friday announced a two-week partial lockdown as hospitals struggle to cope with surging coronavirus cases, with restrictions covering the key Orthodox Easter holidays.

“The growing number of infections, combined with intense pressure on the health system, cannot leave us indifferent and requires difficult decisions,

drastic measures,” Health Minister Constantinos Ioannou told reporters. The new restrictions, running from April 26 to May 9, mean that people are encouraged to work from home and must seek authorization for only one non-work-related trip daily.

Non-essential shops will close, and a 9:00 p.m. to 5:00 am curfew will be imposed, tightening the start time from 11:00 pm.

Restrictions will be slightly eased for Orthodox Easter at the start of May. After May 9, people wanting to gather – such as in a restaurant – must provide either a negative Covid-19 test result with 72 hours or proof they have either had their first vaccine jab or have contracted the virus within the past three months.

Ioannou said the measures would help the Mediterranean island’s vaccination rollout play catch up and ease pressure on hospitals, witnessing record patient admissions.

Local daily the Cyprus Mail reported Friday a record high number of coronavirus patients in state hospitals, with the western town of Paphos opening a second Covid-19 ward to cope.

“We are in a very difficult phase of the pandemic,” Ioannou said.

Cyprus is facing a third wave of Covid-19 infections fueled by the more contagious British variant, with daily cases peaking at a record 941 on Tuesday.

The situation marks a stark deterioration from September last year, when reported cases were often close to or at zero per day.

Cyprus detected 668 new cases per 100,000 people over the seven days to April 22 – the highest population-adjusted rate of any country in the world, AFP’s database shows.

Uruguay was second highest worldwide on this measure, with 558 detected infections per 100,000 people.



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