

Egyptian president says 'all mercenaries' must be removed from Libya

Author:

Mon, 2021-03-29 20:57

CAIRO: Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi stressed the need to clear Libya of mercenaries and undermine illegal foreign interference in Libyan affairs, during a call from French President Emmanuel Macron.

He also said that Egypt was prioritizing the issue of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam.

He explained the importance of defending the country's historical Nile rights through a comprehensive and binding legal agreement between the three countries involved – Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia – regarding the rules for filling and operating the dam.

Macron praised the vital role that Egypt was playing in resolving the Libyan crisis and El-Sisi's personal efforts in the matter.

El-Sisi's efforts strengthened the political path to solve the Libyan issue, while reinforcing Egypt's role as a significant aspect in the security and stability of the region and the Middle East, said Macron.

The French president expressed his hope of reaching a solution regarding the Renaissance Dam that would meet the interests of all parties involved.

Macron stressed his country's pride in the extended and close ties linking it with Egypt, as well as his keenness to strengthen those ties.

He also expressed his appreciation for the prominent political role that Egypt played at the regional level in the Arab world, and in African and Mediterranean countries.

Bassam Rady, a spokesman for the Egyptian presidency, said that the call discussed ways to enhance joint bilateral cooperation in many fields, especially the economy and military. This was in addition to the activity of French companies working in various development projects in Egypt.



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Egypt orders eight arrests over fatal train crash
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[Archaeologists dismiss claims recent Egyptian disasters caused by pharaohs' curse](#)

Mon, 2021-03-29 20:52

CAIRO: Claims that a series of recent disasters in Egypt have been brought about by a pharaohs' curse were on Monday dismissed by archaeologists.

Plans over the coming days to move 22 royal mummies from the Egyptian Museum in Tahrir to a permanent exhibition space in the National Museum of Egyptian Civilization have coincided with a string of major incidents in the country.

And some reports have suggested that the serious occurrences are linked to the pending transfer of the preserved ancient monarchs.

Egypt has been in the international spotlight after a giant cargo ship ran aground and blocked the Suez Canal, preventing billions of dollars-worth of trade per day passing through the strategic waterway.

The country has also witnessed a fatal train crash in Sohag, the collapse of a 10-storey property at Suez Bridge, a shops fire at Zagazig railway station, the collapse of a concrete pillar on a bridge under construction in Mariotia, and blazes at the Maadi Tower and a house in Minya.

All the events have taken place as the Egyptian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities prepares to shift the mummified pharaohs as part of the nation's ongoing efforts to develop and modernize Cairo and other cities through the completion of various archaeological and cultural activities.

Some social media users put the timing of the incidents down to a curse of the pharaohs quoting the ancient leaders as warning that, "death will come on quick wings for those who disturb the king's peace."

However, former Egyptian Minister of Antiquities Zahi Hawass poured cold water on the claims. "The occurrence of these accidents is just fate and there is no connection between them and the mummies at all," he said.

The archaeologist pointed out that he had supervised the discovery of some of the tombs of ancient Egyptians and had not been harmed.

Among the museum exhibits to be transferred are the mummies of kings Ramesses II, Seqenenre Tao, Thutmose III, and Seti I, and queens Hatshepsut, Meritamen, the wife of King Amenhotep I, and Ahmose-Nefertari, wife of King Ahmose.

Egyptian historian and writer, Bassam El-Shammaa, also rejected rumors of a pharaohs' curse on the country. He said that phrases and shapes carved on the walls of temples simply expressed the imagination of ancient Egyptians.

He added that some mummies were moldy, causing a build up on tomb walls of bacteria which could attack the respiratory system and be fatal.

He also pointed out that ammonia gas could also leak from coffins, resulting in burning to the eyes and nose, pneumonia, and sometimes death, and that bat excrement found inside some graves carried a fungus that could bring on respiratory disease similar to influenza.



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Suez Canal reopens after Ever Given is finally freed

[**A Lebanese businessman recalls the bittersweet experience of rebuilding after the Beirut blast**](#)

Mon, 2021-03-29 20:39

DUBAI: One Lebanese man has worked day and night since the devastating Beirut blast of Aug. 4 last year to ensure his lifetime's work is salvaged from the rubble. In less than six months, Robert Paoli became the first trader to reopen a warehouse in the Port of Beirut Logistic Free Zone following the disaster.

"I've worked in the freight-forwarding business all my life," the 57-year-old told Arab News. "I always believed in Lebanon from the beginning, and I

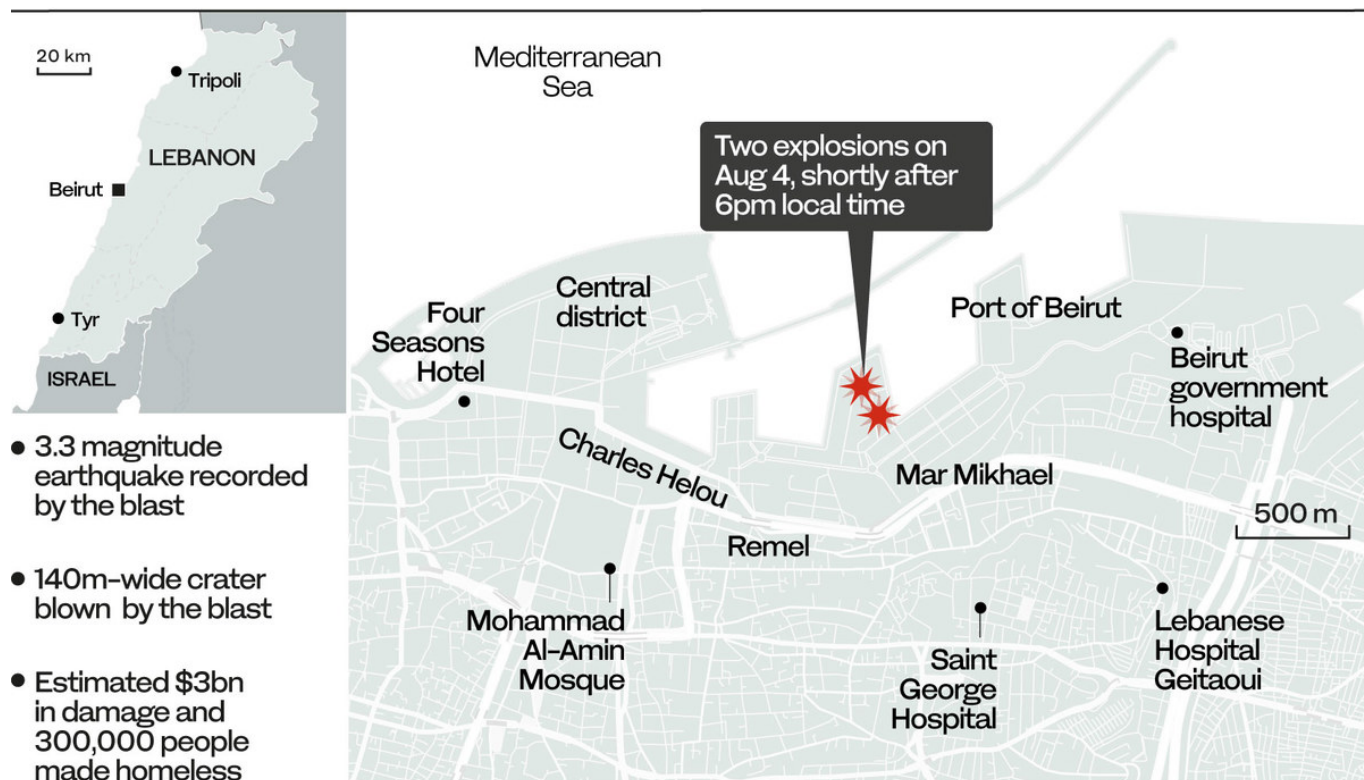
worked very hard to create my units in the free zone here.”

Beirut’s strategic location on the Eastern Mediterranean coastline made the port a thriving economic asset. But all that changed one Tuesday afternoon when a nearby warehouse containing nearly 3,000 tons of highly volatile ammonium nitrate caught fire.

The resulting two explosions sent an enormous shockwave through the port and surrounding districts – taking Paoli’s warehouses with it.

THE BEIRUT PORT EXPLOSIONS

The Aug. 4, 2020 blast was apparently triggered by a warehouse fire



Source: pubchem.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov

ARAB NEWS

Paoli had spent upward of \$1.5 million and poured years of hard work into his new warehouse, which had been due to open for business in just a matter of weeks. All types of goods were already stored there, from electrical appliances and tires to chemical agents.

Recalling that horrific day, Paoli said he was lucky to have left his office early, a decision necessitated by COVID-19 restrictions in place at the Logistic Free Zone. As he joined his son for a game of tennis at his club 20 minutes out of town, Paoli received an alarming phone call from a friend about a fire at the port.

“Having three units there and a new warehouse in the Karantina area very close to the port, I was anxious” Paoli said. “My other friend who lived across the port couldn’t see anything. But five minutes later, I heard the explosion.”

The blast was heard as far away as in Cyprus, at a distance of more than 200 kilometers. About 210 people were killed and 7,500 injured as the shockwave flattened nearby buildings and overturned vehicles.



Robert Paoli has spent millions rebuilding devastated warehouse units after the Beirut explosion on August 4, 2020. (Supplied)

“I thought a bomb had hit my club,” Paoli said. “We were far away, but it flooded us and the windows broke.”

As a gigantic black cloud rose from the faraway port, Paoli jumped into his car and raced back to the city. Before he arrived, the gatekeeper from the Karantina warehouse called to say everything was gone.

“I was shocked,” he said. “I asked if there were any injuries and there were none, thankfully. My wife called me crying, saying she saw on TV my warehouse in the free zone totally destroyed.”

When he arrived, Paoli found a nightmarish scene, with what remained of his cargo stock trapped beneath tons of rubble. “All my employees came and wept,” he said. “Just thinking about it makes me relive the moment. When I realized how extensive the damage was, the reality of the situation sank in.”

The Lebanese army soon arrived to prevent looters from taking what remained of Paoli’s stock. It was at that moment Paoli resolved to rebuild. “It felt like a challenge for me, thinking we will not go down,” he said. “It was

impossible for me to not rebuild.”

That night, Paoli’s first priority was securing his stock, spread across various sites. To supplement the army’s presence, he also placed his staff on round-the-clock guard duty.

BEIRUT EXPLOSION INVESTIGATION

*** Investigating judge Fadi Sawan has brought charges against 37 people since Aug. 2020.**

*** Of them, 25 are detained under conditions that appear to violate their due process rights, according to HRW.**

*** Among those charged with negligence are two former ministers and caretaker PM Hassan Diab.**

*** Diab has refused to appear for questioning, calling it “diabolical” to single him out.**

*** The ministers asked the top court to replace Sawan, bringing the inquiry to a halt since Dec. 2020.**

“It was our duty to protect it for our clients,” Paoli said. “My team is incredible. I really felt how much this company meant to them and how much they respected me.”

When the sun rose the following day, the reconstruction effort began. Averaging just four hours of sleep per night, Paoli arrived at 6:30 a.m. every single day for the next six months to clear the debris and salvage what he could.



Robert Paoli, his wife Mona, daughter Andrea and son Philippe, have lost hope in their country after the Beirut explosion on August 4, 2020, devastated their warehouse units. (Supplied)

“It was a big responsibility on my shoulders, because our warehouse units were fully loaded with merchandise,” he said. “We had 80 to 90 40-foot containers. It was hell.”

What cargo they could be saved was removed and either delivered to clients or stored safely. But the trouble was far from over. A month later, another fire broke out at a neighbor’s warehouse.

“The army tried to stop us from entering to try to contain the fire, but we managed to do it within three to four hours,” Paoli recalled. “All the neighboring warehouses burned but ours. We were lucky we were able to save it.”

To add insult to injury, Paoli was taken in for questioning in relation to the fire, but released 24 hours later, angry and demoralized.



Recalling that horrific day, Paoli said he was lucky to have left his office early, a decision necessitated by COVID-19 restrictions in place at the Logistic Free Zone. (Supplied)

“I was exhausted and down because I was trying to do something good and I got arrested,” he said. “I felt like I had gone back to zero. I was really affected but I had this constant drive to rebuild, and this gave me the strength to keep going.”

Soon enough, Paoli’s industry and toil paid off when his warehouse reopened for business in the free zone.

What upset him, however, was the lack of support from government and aid agencies. “Nobody cared or asked about us,” he said. “Associations came to help people, but not us, although we were in the most affected area and we had employees who were at risk of losing their jobs.”

His children, Andrea and Philippe, are proud of their father’s stamina during those grueling months.



Paoli's industry and toil paid off when his warehouse reopened for business in the free zone. (Supplied)

"I was impressed by his attitude," said Philippe, a former professional footballer. "He was the only one expressing gratitude that everyone was safe, and rebuilding was like an everyday task for him."

“Looking back, we were the only ones who were able to rebuild in this time thanks to this attitude. This dedication towards his employees really opens your heart. They’re part of our family.”

Andrea, a former national taekwondo champion, praised her father for taking responsibility for rebuilding his business and caring for his staff when no one else would.

“It would have been much easier to do nothing, give up, put the blame on others and, eventually, fire employees,” she said.



The destroyed silo is pictured on October 26, 2020 at Beirut’s port following the August 4 massive chemical explosion at the site which that caused severe damage across swathes of the Lebanese capital. (AFP/File Photo)

“What my father did was take a difficult path, following his strong integrity, care, and outstanding crisis-management skills. I can only hope it inspires others around him at a time when the country has plunged into a never-ending nightmare.”

By all accounts, Lebanon’s handling of the disaster’s aftermath leaves a lot to be desired. Eight months on, the blast investigation is still going on, because of which Paoli has not seen a cent from his insurance company.

As he struggles to absorb his share (\$3 million) of the free zone’s collective \$50 million loss, Paoli says his view of his country has completely changed.

“Before the blast, I always believed that, whatever happens, I will continue growing and working in Lebanon. It’s our country and we have to remain here,”

he said.

“But right now, I am saying no more. I will protect what I have, my business and my employees because they’re like my family, but no more expansion plans in this country. For the first time in my life, I am starting to think of doing something outside of Lebanon.”

Paoli’s wife Mona agrees the faith they once had in Lebanon has run out of road.

“Robert’s positivity is contagious,” she said. “But for us, the adventure stops here, and a new page is opening in our life.”

Twitter: [@CalineMalek](#)



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'We have no bread': Beirut protesters' plea to minister 'Memory Box' is a haunting look at love in battered Beirut

[Middle East weighs agri-tech solutions as pandemic underscores urgency of food security](#)

Sun, 2021-03-28 23:01

DUBAI: In an age of plentiful food, it is often easy to forget just how fragile supply chains are until disaster strikes. One bloc taking stock of its pantry is the GCC, whose members import some 90 percent of their food.

Although the GCC countries managed to avoid the nightmare scenario of mass shortages during the worst days of the coronavirus pandemic, the crisis has certainly given Arab capitals plenty to chew over concerning their long-term food security.

"Ministries really got a wake-up call during this time of distress and are trying to escalate their own initiatives, being able to have more local produce and be more food secure in the years to come," Atle Idland, general manager of Desert Control Middle East, told Arab News.

"The pandemic has been a catalyst for many countries and governments to get their plans up from the table and into action."

Desert Control is among a crop of agri-tech firms that will showcase their innovations at Expo 2020 Dubai in October this year.

The Norwegian start-up has patented Liquid NanoClay (LNC), an agri-technology that binds a mineral-rich solution to grains of desert sand, converting once unusable land into arable soil, reducing water irrigation by 50 percent and radically improving crop yields.



Famine is a realistic concern, as food production struggles to keep up with population growth. (AFP)

“The region has been producing a very limited number of agricultural crops, due to the climate itself, and also due to the water scarcity in the region,” Idland said.

“Give that both Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries are running low on their aquifers of fresh water, and that agriculture is using 75 percent of the world’s freshwater resources, this is not a sustainable process. It cannot continue.”

According to the UN, some 135 million people could lose their homes and livelihoods to creeping desertification by 2030. Inhabitants of the Middle East and North Africa are more vulnerable than most.

Unless societies change their farming practices, Idland warns, the world has just 60 years of agricultural opportunities left before fresh water runs dry and desertification claims the last of its fertile soils.

“Adopting new technologies for agriculture and food security is definitely something that is on the table right now and is being implemented as we speak,” he said.



Atle Idland, general manager of Desert Control Middle East

Growing food at a local level has the added benefit of reducing the industry's carbon footprint by cutting the amount of air freight needed to meet demand.

Idland claims LNC is radical in the sense that it is a low energy and purely mineral-based product containing zero chemical agents. "It's only clay, water and oxygen that is mixed together to produce a Liquid NanoClay solution," he said.

The Middle East is described by Idland as a major potential marketplace for LNC to lay down roots. "We are one, and not the only one, that can be a catalyst for utilizing unused desert land and sandy soils to do large scale agriculture," he said.

In its initial commercial trials in the UAE, according to Idland, Desert Control's product was found to produce 20 percent more watermelons and 60 percent more pearl millet compared with traditional means, while using just half the water.

Saudi Arabia is next in line.

"I came back from the Kingdom in early February and we are having some interesting discussions there, both within the agricultural sector and the sporting field sector," Idland told Arab News.

"Everybody has the need to go greener, more sustainable and with water savings. Water scarcity is really the main driver for this trend."

INNUMBERS

75% – Proportion of global freshwater used by agriculture.

135 million – Livelihoods imperiled by desertification by 2030.

10 billion – Projected global population by the year 2050.

On the downside, agri-technologies such as vertical farming and greenhouse cultivation, which allow non-native crops to grow closer to sources of demand, are known to consume a lot of energy for lighting and warmth and to desalinate water for irrigation.

Scientists believe desertification and climate change are intricately connected, although human mismanagement is also responsible. Increasing atmospheric greenhouse-gas concentrations reduce the amount of heat radiation escaping to space and thus lead to a gradual increase in global temperatures.

Rising temperatures, coupled with changing precipitation patterns, are expected in turn to increase the rates of dryland degradation and desertification. Already, every year the world's deserts encroach upon an area roughly 20 times the size of Denmark, swallowing up the rich biodiversity that lives in the soil.

"We will be in big trouble," Idland said. "Based on research, knowledge, intent and visions, everybody now is putting serious effort into this. We are glad to be part of that journey and, hopefully, to be a part of that solution. Making Earth green again – that's our slogan."

By 2050, the world's food systems will need to feed an estimated 10 billion people. But at the current rate of production, only half that number will be fed. Widespread famine is a real possibility.

At the same time, outmoded agricultural practices are a significant emitter of greenhouse gases.

"With climate change affecting food production, it's not hard to see that we are in a vicious cycle," said Mariam Almheiri, UAE minister of state for food security, while taking part in a recent pre-Expo 2020 Dubai Thematic Week session.

"In short, nothing short of an entire paradigm shift in how we produce food and deliver it from farm to fork is needed if we are to create sustainable

food systems, no hunger, and food security for the world.”



LNC is aiming to help bridge the gap in food production and population growth. (Supplied)

The concerns were echoed by Reem Al-Hashimy, UAE minister of state for international cooperation and managing director of the Expo 2020 Dubai bid committee.

“Today, food security stands as a hallowed and unassailable tenet of true human dignity,” she said. “The capacity of all nations was tested in the early weeks and months of the COVID-19 pandemic, which exposed the vulnerability of our global food value chain.

“Yet in the wake of that harsh examination, now we are presented with an opportunity to reimagine our chain and learn to eat and earn cleaner and smarter, and in a more sustainable fashion.”

Later this year, Expo 2020 Dubai will bring together stakeholders from every part of the chain, from producers to facilitators to consumers.

“Expo will be a marketplace for ideas and innovation, a chance to absorb best practice from more than 190 countries, and take it home with you, and apply it into pastures – learning global and practicing local, overcoming shared challenges through intelligent and transferable solutions,” Al-Hashimy said.

Another challenge is food waste, whereby one in three mouthfuls is wasted by producers, retailers and consumers. Poor farming practices are also responsible for deforestation, land degradation and pollution.

ALSO READ: [How the Arab region can catch up with the future of food](#)

“We know we must do better,” Al-Hashimy said. “We will actively seek fertile alternatives to antiquated practices that strip larger and larger stretches of arable land, while reaping ever decreasing economic benefits.

“We are already paying the price for encroaching too vigorously on the natural world, in the form of the zoonotic disease COVID-19 that has decimated lives and economies around the world.”

Future economic models must work for the benefit of billions of people whose quality of life depends on an equitable system that rewards responsible and productive practices and protects the land these communities call home, said Al-Hashimy.

“This is a moment in which meaningful and effective international cooperation can entirely recast antiquated structures founded on centuries-old imbalances – imbalances we can no longer sustain and under which we will never truly thrive.”

• **Twitter:** [@CalineMalek](https://twitter.com/CalineMalek)





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Saudi project aims to make Kingdom self-sufficient in seafood productionWorld must transform food production, scientists say

Yemen's president meets UN and US envoys to discuss Saudi peace initiative

Sun, 2021-03-28 21:44

LONDON: Yemen's President Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi has held meetings with the UN and US envoys to Yemen to discuss developments in the country and efforts to end the six-year war, with the Saudi initiative at the forefront. The new peace plan announced by the Kingdom last week includes a nationwide cease-fire, opening Sanaa airport, allowing fuel and other commodities into Yemen through Hodeidah, and resuming the political process. Hadi told UN envoy Martin Griffiths that the Houthi militia's continued escalation in Marib and other provinces confirmed the Iran-backed group's lack of intention to commit to peaceful options to end the war, Yemen's Saba News Agency reported.

Griffiths met today with [@HadiPresident](#) in Riyadh. He briefed him about his meetings in Muscat & discussed efforts to agree on a nationwide ceasefire, opening Sana'a airport, allowing fuel & other commodities into [#Yemen](#) through Hudaydah ports & resuming the political process.

– @OSE_Yemen (@OSE_Yemen) [March 28, 2021](#)

Hadi said that the “Yemeni people will not accept the reproduction of the Iranian experience and the return of defunct priestly rule in Yemen no matter the cost,” adding that his government had made many concessions that have been met with intransigence from the Houthis. Hadi called on the international community to financially support the government to be able to carry out its duties and humanitarian tasks and complete the steps to implement the Riyadh Agreement, stressing the importance of the efforts of the UN envoy. Griffiths said that the humanitarian situation was extremely difficult, and required concerted efforts to end the bloody conflict and suffering. He praised the “positive steps” taken by the Yemeni government in response to the Saudi initiative, and the efforts of the president and the international community to establish peace in Yemen and bring an end to the war. Griffiths also met Yemen's Foreign Minister Ahmed Awad bin Mubarak.

Griffiths met with Foreign Minister [@BinmubarakAhmed](#) in Riyadh today. They discussed ongoing efforts to resume the political process in [#Yemen](#). Griffiths stressed the importance of seizing the current momentum for peace which is supported by the international community.

– @OSE_Yemen (@OSE_Yemen) [March 28, 2021](#)

Earlier on Sunday, Hadi had a meeting with US envoy, Tim Lenderking, during which he affirmed support for his efforts.

“Unfortunately, the Houthi militia, with Iran’s backing, have not complied with the peace endeavors, the most recent of which was the Stockholm Agreement,” Hadi said. “Rather, they persisted in targeting innocent civilians, besieging Marib with Iranian missiles and drones, and increasing attacks on civilian objects in Saudi Arabia.”

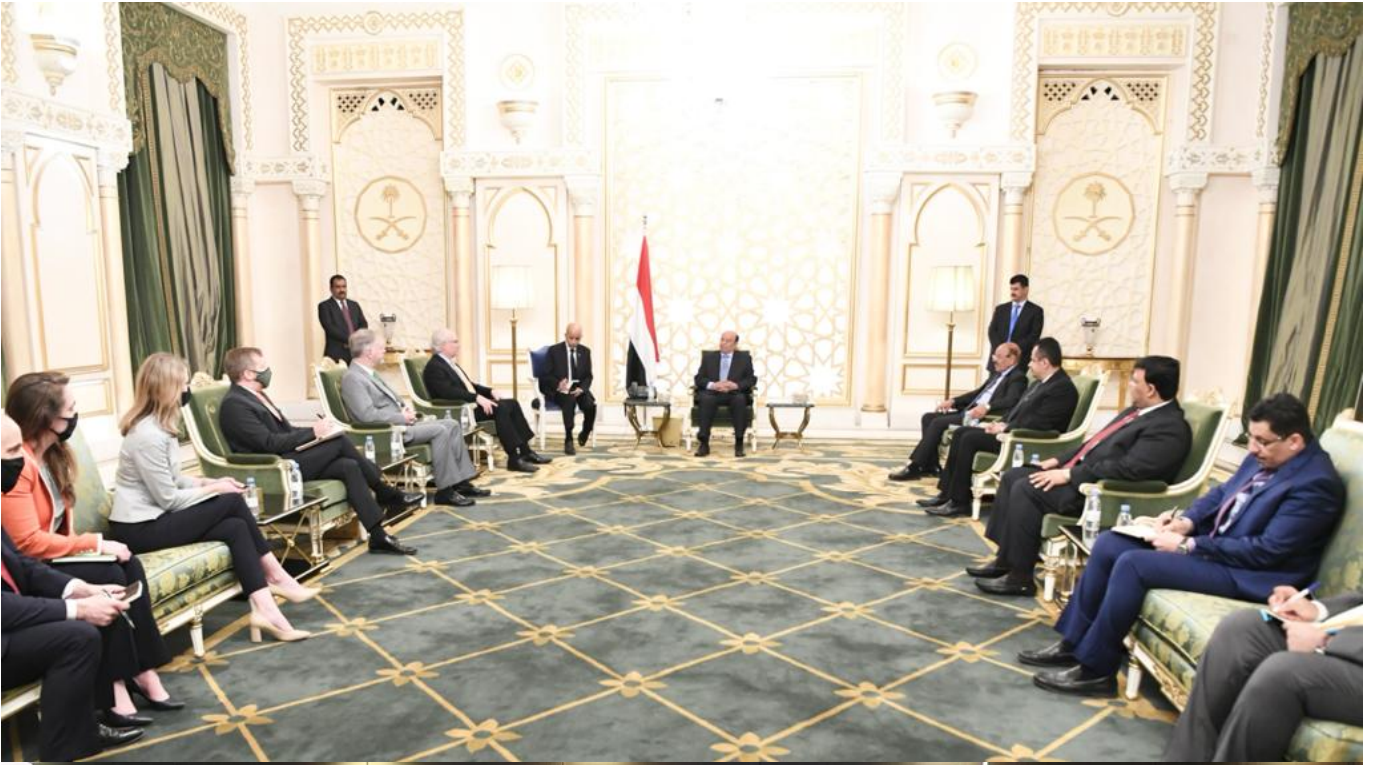
Hadi stressed the depth of the strategic relations that bind Yemen and the US in various files, including combating terrorism, security, stability and promoting the unity of Yemen, protecting waterways and international navigation, and confronting Iranian interference in the region.

Prime Minister Maeen Abdulmalik Saeed stressed the importance of peace and economic support, and Washington’s role, which in turn reflects positively on the peace process and development and stability.

Lenderking reiterated US support for the legitimate government and its stance toward peace. He told Hadi that he hoped the Saudi initiative would succeed, in the interests of the Yemeni people, and bring an end to the war, in cooperation with all partners to preserve Yemen’s unity, security and stability.

He called for strengthening the strategic relationship with Yemen in facing all challenges, including combating terrorism, protecting international corridors and interventions in the region.

Griffiths and Lenderking also both met with Saudi Arabia’s ambassador to Yemen Mohammed bin Saeed Al-Jaber to discuss the Kingdom’s peace initiative and joint efforts to reach a comprehensive political solution to end the crisis in Yemen.





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Saudi envoy discusses Yemen peace initiative with his UN counterparts