

# Yemeni army opens new front in Taiz, makes 'great gains' against Houthis

Author:

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AL-MUKALLA, Yemen: Yemen's army on Wednesday made "great gains" in a major new offensive to break the Iran-backed Houthi siege of Taiz.

Troops liberated several strategic locations and villages southeast of the city after launching a fresh drive against the rebel group, army spokesman Abdul Basit Al-Baher told Arab News.

He said soldiers opened a new front in Taiz to distract Houthi fighters while pressing ahead with another offensive in areas west of the city, in southwestern Yemen. "This is a new offensive that has taken the Houthis by surprise and enabled the national army to make great gains," he added.

In retaliation to Yemeni army successes in Taiz, the Houthis launched ground and missile strikes on recently liberated areas in Jabal Habashy and Taiz's western countryside.

Since Tuesday, at least 18 Houthis had been killed, including two provincial military leaders, as troops pushed back attacks, said Al-Baher, adding that a Katyusha rocket fired by the Houthis ripped through a residential area in Jabal Habashy district, west of Taiz, killing a civilian and wounding two more, including a child.

Under the orders of Yemeni President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi, the army recently ended months of military stalemate in Taiz, the country's third-largest city, after launching a new push to end the Houthi siege there, weaken the group, and take control of new areas.

During the early days of the offensive, the army announced it had partially broken the siege after taking control of a key mountain road that links the city with western areas in Taiz province. Hadi told local military commanders to press on with the offensive until the province had been fully liberated.

The focus of the current fighting in Taiz is a mountain chain that overlooks another strategic road linking Taiz with Hodeidah via the town of Al-Bareh.

On Wednesday, Taiz Gov. Nabil Shamsan met with local dignitaries assigned to mobilize fighters and raise funds for the current offensive in Taiz, and he hailed the "great" support for the army from inside and outside of the province.

The governor urged the people of Taiz to actively take part in mobilization efforts and seize the chance to get rid of the Houthis and end the siege.

Meanwhile, fighting between the Houthis and government troops on Wednesday raged in different areas in the central province of Marib amid reports of

heavy casualties on both sides.

Yemen's Defense Ministry and local media reports said that dozens of rebel fighters were killed during clashes in Al-Kasara and Helan, west of Marib city, as warplanes from the Arab coalition hit Houthi military reinforcements and locations. Local media showed videos of thick smoke billowing from targeted Houthi military vehicles.

Speaking to state TV from Al-Kasara battlefield, Defense Minister Mohammed Ali Al-Maqdashi thanked the coalition for its military support and air cover to government forces and vowed to confront the "Persian project" in Yemen and its tools in the country. "The victory is near," he said.

In Marib city, two civilians were killed and at least 12 others wounded on Tuesday when a missile fired by the Houthis landed in a market. A video posted on social media showed drivers in a queue outside a fuel station fleeing their cars in panic shortly after the explosion.



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Yemeni army kills 18 Houthi militants in an ambush near Taiz

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# Libya arms embargo 'totally ineffective': UN report

Author:

Thu, 2021-03-18 01:20

NEW YORK: The arms embargo imposed on Libya since 2011 is “totally ineffective,” say UN experts in a stark report released Tuesday which underscores “extensive, blatant” violations by actors including its own member states.

The six experts charged with monitoring the embargo on the civil war-torn state pointed the finger at an array of international backers on both sides of its conflict, plus private mercenaries and non-state actors – including the Russian Wagner group as well as former Blackwater head Erik Prince.

They used photos, diagrams and maps to support their accusations in the more than 550-page report, which covers the period from October 2019 to January 2021.

“The arms embargo remains totally ineffective. For those member states directly supporting the parties to the conflict, the violations are extensive, blatant and with complete disregard for the sanctions measures,” they wrote.

“Their control of the entire supply chain complicates detection, disruption or interdiction,” the report continued, explaining that both factors “make any implementation of the arms embargo more difficult.”

The experts have been denouncing violations of the embargo for years.

Libya has been torn by civil war since a NATO-backed uprising led to the toppling then killing of dictator Muammar Qaddafi in 2011.

The country has in recent years been split between a Government of National Accord (GNA) in Tripoli, and an eastern-based administration, backed by strongman Khalifa Haftar.

Haftar’s international supporters – including the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Russia, Syria, and Egypt – have all been singled out in previous UN reports or in the one published Tuesday.

Turkey and Qatar, which support the authorities in Tripoli, have also been named by the experts.

They have identified Russian mercenaries from the private Wagner group, as well as up to 13,000 Syrian rebels and Chadian or Sudanese groups, all acting for one side or the other.

Tuesday's report strongly reinforces the earlier accusations and adds more, such as the one aimed at Erik Prince, founder of the now-defunct Blackwater security company and a fierce supporter of former American president Donald Trump.

Prince has denied the accusation he sent or wanted to send a force of foreign mercenaries and weapons to Haftar in 2019.

The experts estimate that up to 2,000 Wagner mercenaries have been deployed in Libya.

"Notwithstanding the cease-fire agreement of 25 October 2020, there have been no indications of any withdrawal from Libya by ChVK Wagner," they wrote.

Another private Russian company, Rossiskie System Bezopasnosti Group, is cited for its role in refurbishing fighter jets; while the Turkish military contractor SADAT, which has denied any illegal activity in Libya, is also on the list of those incriminated.

The experts reached an identical conclusion when it came to economic sanctions leveled at individuals or entities, citing a "persistent lack of transparency."

"Implementation of the assets freeze and travel ban measures with regard to designated individuals remains ineffective," they wrote.

They also say that officials in Libya's east "have continued their efforts to illicitly export crude oil and to import aviation fuel."

Refined petroleum products continue to be illicitly exported by land, the report said, adding that while the activity is small it has increase compared to previous years, particularly in western Libya.

The UN experts recommended that the Security Council impose "flag deregistration; a landing ban; and an overflight ban" on aircraft identified as having violated the embargo.

They also asked it to "authorize member States to inspect, on the high seas off the coast of Libya, vessels ... that they have reasonable grounds to believe are illicitly exporting or attempting to export crude oil or refined petroleum products."



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## [Lebanon President Aoun asks PM designate Hariri to form government or leave](#)

Author:

AFP

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1616005283090811000

Wed, 2021-03-17 16:13

BEIRUT: Lebanese President Michel Aoun made a televised address Wednesday night and called on Prime Minister-designate Saad Hariri to visit the presidential palace to form a new cabinet immediately or else make way for someone who is able to.

"If Prime Minister-designate Hariri finds himself unable to form a



government, he should make way for those who are," Aoun said.

"My call is determined and truthful to the prime minister-designate to choose immediately one of the two choices, as silence is not an option after today."

Aoun also challenged accusations against him of obstructing the formation of the government.

"There is no use in all positions and blame-shifting if the country collapses and the people become prisoners of despair and frustration," he said. "There is no escape for them but anger. Everything subsides in front of the people's suffering, which has reached levels that they cannot bear."

Aoun and Hariri have been fighting over government formation since his nomination in October.

Hariri hit back, saying he was surprised to hear the president's comments. "After many weeks of introducing an integrated lineup to a non-partisan specialist government capable of implementing the reforms required to stop the collapse and start reconstruction of what was destroyed by the port explosion in Beirut, I am awaiting a call from the president to discuss the proposed lineup," he said.

He said he visited the president 16 times since being assigned the task of forming a new government, and would be honored to visit Aoun for the 17th time, when his schedule permits, to discuss the government formation. Hariri said Aoun should allow early presidential elections if he cannot sign the decrees allowing the formation of a new government.

Earlier on Wednesday, protesters tried to storm the economy ministry building in Beirut and laid siege to a government minister's home after Lebanon's spiraling currency hit a new low.

The protests came as the Lebanese pound continued its slide, plunging to a record 15,000 to the US dollar on the black market.

"Popular suffering will not show mercy to those responsible for obstruction, exclusion and perpetuating the caretaking," Aoun said.

"Silence and remaining in fortified homes will not benefit after today. Hopefully, we can save Lebanon."

The country is facing political deadlock, with no new government agreed some seven months after premier Hassan Diab resigned over an August 4 explosion that killed more than 200 people and disfigured swathes of the capital.







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## [Sex abuse allegations pile up against Israeli rescue chief](#)

Author:

Wed, 2021-03-17 01:49

JERUSALEM: For decades, Yehuda Meshi-Zahav was one of Israel's most recognizable faces, widely respected for founding an ultra-Orthodox rescue service that cared for victims of Palestinian attacks and bridged the divide between religious and secular Israelis.

But in recent days, Meshi-Zahav has faced a growing list of accusers who say he committed horrendous acts of sexual abuse of men, women and children over



several decades.

The scandal has all but destroyed the reputation of a man who just weeks ago received the Israel Prize, the country's highest civilian honor, for his lifetime achievements. It also has shined a light on the scourge of sexual abuse in the insular world of Israel's ultra-Orthodox community.

"When it comes to the ultra-Orthodox in particular, there is a very strong code of silence," said Manny Waks, an advocate for victims of sex abuse in Jewish communities and himself a survivor of abuse in his native Australia. "There is a closed community mentality, us vs. them. Putting all those things together is a recipe for disaster, in the context of child sexual abuse in particular," he said.

While Meshi-Zahav has denied the allegations, his accusers have delivered similar accounts. They say Meshi-Zahav exploited his public prominence to molest and sexually exploit women, boys and girls alike, and that the ultra-Orthodox community shielded him with a wall of silence.

A victim identified by the letter "N" told the Yedioth Ahronot daily on Sunday that he first met Meshi-Zahav in 1996 when he was 16 and Meshi-Zahav was 20 years his senior.

"All the people close to him during those years knew that I was his escort boy. I turned into a prostitute in the full meaning of the word," he said. Meshi-Zahav was once a member of a radical ultra-Orthodox sect that opposed Israel's existence, believing a Jewish state could only be established after the arrival of the Messiah. His views changed after a devastating 1989 bus attack near Jerusalem killed 16 people.

Meshi-Zahav joined volunteers who helped collect the remains of the victims, in line with the Jewish custom of honoring the dead. He has said the experience taught him that everyone's pain was equal.

Those efforts led to the formation in 1995 of ZAKA, whose volunteers helped identify the victims of disasters and suicide bombings and collected their remains for a Jewish burial. Over time, the group expanded to include first response paramedics and gained widespread respect in Israel.

Meshi-Zahav has received numerous honors and became a symbol of moderation in the often strained relations between Israel's secular and ultra-Orthodox Jews.

He was invited to light a ceremonial torch at Israel's Independence Day celebrations and recently implored fellow members of the ultra-Orthodox community to respect coronavirus safety precautions after both of his parents died of COVID-19. At the time, he said the rabbis who encouraged followers to ignore the safety rules had "blood on their hands."

Early this month, Meshi-Zahav, 61, was awarded the Israel Prize for Lifetime Achievement. He broke down in tears as Education Minister Yoav Gallant delivered the news, saying the award belonged to ZAKA's thousands of volunteers.

That recognition appears to have been the trigger that has led his accusers to come forward after years of silence.

It began last Thursday, when the Haaretz daily published accounts from six alleged victims accusing Meshi-Zahav of rape, sexual molestation and harassment.

In response, Meshi-Zahav wrote a letter saying "these libels are baseless and appear more as gossip and closing of accounts against me." He said he was taking a break as director of ZAKA and relinquished the Israel Prize, but

denied any wrongdoing.

Since then, the trickle of testimonies has turned into a torrent.

On Sunday, Israeli police announced its major crimes unit, Lahav 433, had opened a formal investigation. On Monday, Hebrew media reported the police had investigated similar allegations against him in 2013, but had closed the probe for lack of evidence.

ZAKA, meanwhile, issued a statement expressing "shock and astonishment," saying the allegations against Meshi-Zahav "arouse deep abhorrence, shock and disgust, light years away from the values that characterize the organization."

Statistics on sexual abuse in the ultra-Orthodox world are difficult to come by.

Waks, who leads the advocacy group VoiCSA, said the general estimate in Israeli society is that one in six boys and one in four girls has experienced sexual abuse. He said there is nothing to suggest the numbers are different in the ultra-Orthodox world.

"Many of us would argue that there are increased vulnerabilities which would translate to increased numbers of abuse," he said. These include the lack of sex education, the inability to keep close tabs on children because of large families and the general level of trust among adults in the tight-knit communities.

He called the allegations against Meshi-Zahav "shocking but not surprising," and said he hoped they would encourage other alleged victims to come forward. He also urged Israel to abolish the statute of limitations in such cases.

The current statute of limitations for sex abuse in the family or with a close community member, such as a teacher or doctor, is set at 20 years from the time the victim turns 18. For other instances, the statute of limitations for molestation is three to five years, and 10 years in cases of rape.

In a landmark case that shined a light on abuses in the ultra-Orthodox world, Israel in January extradited Malka Leifer, an ultra-Orthodox former teacher wanted on 74 counts of child sex abuse, to Australia after a protracted legal battle.

Shana Aaronson, executive director of Magen for Jewish Communities, an Israeli advocacy group for survivors of sexual abuse, said at least six people have approached the organization about Meshi-Zahav. She said the first inklings of accusations surfaced about six years ago.



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Lebanese activist released after 10 months in jail for collaborating with Israel

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## [Sudan and Ethiopia border clashes fuel wider tensions](#)

Author:

Wed, 2021-03-17 01:41

KHARTOUM: A decades-old border dispute over fertile farmland between Sudan and Ethiopia is feeding regional rivalry and even sparking fears of broader conflict, analysts say.

The border quarrel is over Ethiopian farmers cultivating land claimed by Sudan – but it is also stoking wider tensions over Ethiopia's Blue Nile mega-dam, which downriver Khartoum and Cairo view as a threat to their water supply.

The territorial argument also comes amid the fallout from unrest in Ethiopia's troubled Tigray region, with tens of thousands of refugees having fled into Sudan.

Arguments over Al-Fashaqa, an agricultural area sandwiched between two



rivers, where Ethiopia's northern Amhara and Tigray regions meet Sudan's eastern Gedaref state, date back decades.

With the zone contested, the exact area is not clear, but Al-Fashaqa covers some 12,000 square kilometers (4,630 square miles), an area claimed by both Sudan and Ethiopia.

But analysts and observers point to a flashpoint zone directly along the border, covering some 250 square kilometers (just under 100 square miles). On paper, according to colonial-era treaties from 1902 and 1907, the international boundary runs east of Al-Fashaqa, meaning the land belongs to Sudan, according to Alex de Waal, a professor at Tufts University in the US and an expert on the region.

But on the ground, over the years, thousands of Ethiopian farmers have entered the region to cultivate land during the rainy season.

At times, Sudanese forces have sought to expel the farmers, only for them to return.

Tensions soared in 1995, according to analysts, when relations between Khartoum and Addis Ababa soured after a failed assassination attempt against Egypt's then-president Hosni Mubarak while he was in Addis Ababa.

Ethiopia blamed Sudan for the attack, and then pushed into Al-Fashaqa, allowing its farmers to cultivate land there.

Since then, thousands of Ethiopian farmers have settled in the area, working the land and paying taxes to Ethiopian authorities.

Khartoum and Addis Ababa have held border talks over the years, but no clear demarcation lines were ever marked out.

## **BACKGROUND**

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Al-Fashaqa lies close to Ethiopia's troubled Tigray region, where deadly conflict erupted in November between Ethiopia's federal and Tigray's regional forces.

The fighting sent some 60,000 Ethiopian refugees fleeing into Sudan.

As violence in Ethiopia came closer, Khartoum sent troops into the Al-Fashaqa region, "to recapture the stolen lands and take up positions on the international lines," Sudan's state media reported.

"Authorities feared the situation in Tigray would slip out of control, and armed fighters infiltrate into the country," Sudanese military expert Amin Ismail said.

Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed has leaned heavily on security forces from his country's Amhara region during the fighting in Tigray.

Amhara officials view Al-Fashaqa as rightfully theirs, and there are fears Abiy will struggle to keep expansionist elements in check.

In December, Khartoum dispatched reinforcements to Al-Fashaqa after "Ethiopian forces and militias" allegedly ambushed Sudanese troops, killing at least four soldiers.

Tensions escalated, although Addis Ababa sought to downplay the fighting. A string of deadly clashes followed, with both sides trading accusations of violence and territorial violations.

Sudan has in recent weeks claimed to have regained control of large swathes of the region, insisting it had always fallen within its boundaries.

Meanwhile, Addis Ababa accused Khartoum of having "invaded land that is part of Ethiopia's territory," warning it would resort to a military response if needed.

Both Sudan and Ethiopia face their own domestic challenges, including economic woes and deadly conflicts.

Sudan is navigating a rocky transitional period following the April 2019 ouster of dictator Omar Al-Bashir.

Aside from Tigray, Ethiopia faces internal unrest including in the Benishangul-Gumuz and Oromia regions.

The border tensions have intensified strains in relations between Khartoum and Addis Ababa, who, along with Egypt, have failed to strike a deal over the filling and operation of Ethiopia's Blue Nile mega-dam.

The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, set to be Africa's largest hydroelectric project, has been a source of tension in the Nile basin ever since Ethiopia broke ground on it nearly a decade ago.

Sudan views the barrage as a threat to its own dams without a binding deal over the filling and operation of Ethiopia's dam.

Khartoum is nowadays diplomatically close to Cairo. This month, top Egyptian and Sudanese army officials signed a deal on bilateral military cooperation. Egypt, which depends on the Nile for about 97 percent of its irrigation and drinking water, sees the dam as an existential threat.

The border dispute is a local issue separate from the dam, but it feeds into wider politics.

Sudanese military expert Ismail believes Sudan and Ethiopia will have to find a diplomatic resolution to the border crisis, saying "there cannot be an all-out military confrontation.

"It is simply not in the interest of both countries," Ismail said. "It will be a major risk for both sides."



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