

Russian missile attacks in Syria defy cease-fire with Turkey

Tue, 2021-03-16 00:12

ANKARA: Russian ballistic missile strikes in northern Syria on Monday in defiance of the cease-fire with Turkey in March 2020 could have broader repercussions, experts say.

The Russian attack from Kweyris base in regime-controlled Aleppo targeted oil refineries under Turkish control in northwestern Syria. It was the second such attack in nine days.

As Syria marks a decade of civil war, this region is considered vital for providing households, farmers, bakeries, and other businesses with oil.

The refineries here are used to refine about 40 percent of the crude oil that comes from the region controlled by the Syrian Kurdish YPG forces, which is mostly used for generators, heating or running machines.

Ankara immediately sent a notification to the Russian Federation to stop firing, and it put its troops in the region on alert.

Some experts believe that Russia is looking to consolidate its geopolitical interests in the region, while warning Ankara about any potential rapprochement with the United States.

However, the attacks may push Ankara into searching for allies in any standoff with Russia.

"The Biden administration should keep its promises and work with us to end the tragedy in Syria and protect democracy," Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said yesterday.

Emre Ersen, an expert on Turkey-Russia relations at Marmara University in Istanbul, said the latest incident once again shows the fragility of the geopolitical balance in Syria, since it came only a few days after the meeting held between the foreign ministers of Turkey, Russia and Qatar regarding the solution of the Syrian crisis.

On March 11, the three countries launched a new trilateral consultation process to contribute for a lasting political solution in Syria.

"It has also reminded everyone that despite the development of a special relationship between Ankara and Moscow in the last few years, their differences regarding the solution of the regional conflicts could easily trigger a new crisis in the bilateral relations," Ersen said.

According to Ersen, such tensions could also affect the outcome of the Russian Su-35 jet negotiations, even though Turkey has so far sought to compartmentalize these issues in its relations with Russia.

"The two countries still need each other in order to realize their objectives in Syria. That is why the so-called Turkish-Russian "marriage of convenience" in Syria is going to be maintained at least in the short term," he said.

Navvar Saban, from the Istanbul-based Omran Center for Strategic Studies, said Russia and Turkey still have joint fronts in Idlib, the Euphrates Shield and eastern Syria, and each front has its own characteristics and goals.

He thinks that the latest Russian attack aims to test how much the Turkish side wants to advance by targeting these refineries.

"It is a direct message to show what they can target and to understand the Turkish response," he said.

"It is a fragile agreement on different fronts. Russians have the upper hand for now and Turkey needs to send a clear and direct message to maintain the balance of power," he added.

"Russia wants Turkey to ensure the security of the M4 highway and to eliminate the extremist groups in that area. On the eastern side, Russia wants a ceasefire agreement to prevent Turkey from advancing any more in that area," Saban said.

However, there is disagreement among experts over how far Damascus can undertake military action against Turkey independently from Russia.

Anton Mardasov, a nonresident scholar at the Middle East Institute's Syria program, does not think that the new missile attack is related to any warning from the Russian side.

"The last few missile strikes were an independent initiative by Damascus," he said. "Outside observers grossly exaggerate Russia's influence on the Syrian army," Mardasov added.

According to Mardasov, Moscow is not interested in a new scandal over Syria.

"The main thing for Moscow is to remove its economic burden, so it prefers to act quietly," he said. "Damascus is interested in PR before the elections and a new scandal in order to drag Russia into reconstruction.

"Russia is interested in constantly testing Turkey's position for strength, but not during this period of time."



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Civilians wounded in Syrian missile strike: Turkish ministry
Thousands rally in Syria's Idlib to mark 10 years since uprising

[Shoppers brawl as Lebanon's currency collapse sparks store closures](#)

Author:

Tue, 2021-03-16 00:23

BEIRUT: Fighting has broken out in Lebanon's shops after the country's continuing currency collapse sparked store closures.

There have been scenes of people rushing into supermarkets to snap up subsidized oil and cleaning supplies, with customers shouting and clashing with each other and retail staff.

Footage of squabbling in a supermarket in Beirut's southern suburbs circulated online, with weapons appearing as some people tried to stop the

fighting and insults leveled at Hezbollah.

The black market dollar exchange rate jumped to LBP13,500 on Monday noon, from LBP12,000 on Sunday, with politicians fearing that current events were a prelude to a "social catastrophe."

Shopkeepers put small stickers on the door to say they were shut because they did not want to raise prices.

Nabil Fahd, who heads the Supermarket Owners Syndicate, denounced what was happening because it was not helping consumers, especially when it came to accessing subsidized items.

He said that the collapse of the Lebanese pound exposed people to danger.

"We will not be able to continue to buy goods to replace those that were sold to stack the shelves again. The instability of the exchange rate reflects a decline in the operating capital of institutions."

He added that food stores should display their prices in dollars, just as other retailers had adopted this practice to maintain sustainability and for people to be able to buy goods at their real prices.

"But we cannot adopt this method currently in light of the existing financial and monetary chaos with four or five prices for the dollar, including the official rate, the platform rate, the parallel market rate and the bank rate," he said.

In the Tariq Al-Jadida area, one of the capital's popular neighborhoods affiliated with Prime Minister-designate Saad Hariri's Future Movement, protesters went out on motorbikes and roamed neighborhoods, forcing exchange shops to close.

Many protesters went to Martyrs Square, in the center of Beirut.

People in Tripoli also protested the decline of the dollar exchange rate, while others blocked vital roads in Bekaa and the south.

Economic bodies called for a meeting with the General Labor Union, as some factories announced a suspension in production until further notice because of their inability to continue amid the volatile exchange rate.

Bechara Al-Asmar, leader of the General Labor Union, said it had been agreed during the meeting that it was necessary to lay "new foundations" for the relationship between employers and workers, including a pay boost to meet the high cost of living in Lebanon.

He and the other attendees met Hariri and briefed him on the current situation.

"He (Hariri) confirmed that he is working hard to form the government, but obstacles are standing in the way," Al-Asmar told Arab News.

"The situation is very uncomfortable. What do we tell the workers? We need a government. Sixty to 70 percent of the Lebanese people now need relief."

MP Yassine Jaber said the country was "crying out" for help.

"What is required is a decision-making authority in Lebanon, that is, the formation of an independent government that implements a reform program."

He said the reserves of the Banque du Liban were declining monthly, and that everyone was calling for subsidy rationalization. "Nevertheless, there is no real effort to achieve this rationalization."

Parliamentary committees will meet Tuesday to give a LBP1,500 billion (\$995.02 million) Treasury advance payment to the national electricity company. Lebanon will otherwise enter darkness at the end of this month, Energy Minister Raymond Ghajar has warned.



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[Suspect threatens to kill Dubai former boss through Lebanese political connections](#)

Mon, 2021-03-15 22:28

DUBAI: An employee accused of threatening to have his former boss killed by political associates in Lebanon, pleaded not guilty to the charge at a Dubai court on Monday.

The Lebanese man made the threat after he was fired in 2018 over financial irregularities. He had worked for his 40-year-old compatriots company in Dubai for three years.

Shortly after losing his job, the accused told his ex-boss's business sponsor that when the businessman visited Beirut, his associates connected to two

influential political parties, would kill him.

According to court papers obtained by Arab News, Dubai prosecutors charged the accused with threatening to have his ex-boss killed if he lodged a breach of trust case against him.

The businessman told prosecutors he discovered the accused was involved in smuggling people out of the UAE who were wanted by police.

“I paid his dues and terminated his contract and cancelled his connection to my company,” the businessman said. “Later some people visited my company to complain that the suspect had swindled them and embezzled their money.

“The suspect refused to repay money he took from one victim, who was in my office ... then he shouted at me and stormed out angrily.

“Later my sponsor told me over the phone not to go to Beirut because the suspect had threatened in words to have me killed there.”

The sponsor told prosecutors: “I warned the victim about what happened and advised to be careful and try settle the issue with the suspect amicably.”

The Dubai Criminal Court will rule in the case next month.



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Man pleads guilty to killing ex-lover in DubaiDubai court rules against superyacht freeze order in divorce battle

US seeks to reinvigorate diplomatic effort alongside UN in Yemen – State Department

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Reuters

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Mon, 2021-03-15 02:23

WASHINGTON: The United States plans to reinvigorate diplomatic efforts, alongside the United Nations and others, to end the war in Yemen, Secretary of State Antony Blinken told UN Special Envoy for Yemen Martin Griffiths, a State Department spokesperson said on Sunday.

“He highlighted that the United States supports a unified, stable Yemen free from foreign influence, and that there is no military solution to the conflict,” State Department Spokesman Ned Price said in a statement.

A Saudi Arabia-led military coalition intervened in Yemen in 2015 after the Iran-allied Houthi group ousted the country’s government from the capital Sanaa. The Houthis say they are fighting a corrupt system.

The United Nations describes Yemen as the world’s worst humanitarian crisis.



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[Deadly fire in Sanaa 'was all your fault,' UN tells Iran-backed militia](#)

Author:

Mon, 2021-03-15 01:14

AL-MUKALLA, Yemen: The Iran-backed Houthi militia in Yemen were wholly responsible for conditions in an overcrowded migrant detention center in Sanaa where dozens died in a fire, the UN migration agency said on Sunday.

“Conditions in the holding facility, which was three times over capacity, were inhumane and unsafe,” said Antonio Vitorino, director general of the International Organization for Migration.

The agency chief rejected attempts by the Houthis to deflect blame on to the

UN, and he denied the militia's claims that his organization had neglected the center and failed to install safety equipment, and had refused to send the migrants back to their home countries.

"The IOM does not establish, manage or supervise detention centers in Yemen or anywhere else in the world," he said. "Our teams provided migrants essential services like food, healthcare and water that they otherwise would not have received."

Dozens of local rights groups, activists and government officials have called for an international investigation into the deadly fire on March 7. They accuse the Houthis of hastily burying the dead and intimidating survivors and their families to hide the truth.

The official death toll from the blaze is 43, all migrants from Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Somalia and Sudan. Many survivors are being treated in hospital for burns and the effects of smoke inhalation.

However, the true number of deaths is thought to be far higher, possibly in the hundreds. Under local and international pressure to disclose the number of dead, the Houthis forced leaders of east African communities in Sanaa to issue a statement that blamed the UN migration agency.

Dozens of African migrants took part in a protest on Sunday outside the offices of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in Aden to demand information about the dead, improvements in their conditions, and for those responsible for the fire to be brought to justice.

"We are so tired, young people died for no reason. There are still lots of injured people in hospital," one migrant said. A survivor displayed his injuries from the fire and other migrants showed graphic images of charred corpses.



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Migrants demand international probe into deadly Yemen fire at Houthi-run detention center
Envoys, rights groups shocked by fire at Houthi-run migrant center fire in Yemen