

Morocco PM denounces Polisario 'media war'

Author:

Fri, 2021-02-12 02:49

RABAT: Morocco's Premier Saad-Eddine El-Othmani has rejected as propaganda a claim made this week by pro-independence rebels fighting over disputed Western Sahara that they had killed three of the kingdom's soldiers. The Algeria-backed Polisario Front said on Tuesday it had killed three Moroccan soldiers in the southern Ouarkziz area in the Akka region the previous day in a raid on a garrison that saw it overrun then destroyed. The Moroccan prime minister on Wednesday rejected the claim in a tweet. "It's yet another example of the media war, backed by 'fake news,' that the Polisario separatists are waging to make people believe in imaginary victories," he wrote.

The Far-Maroc unofficial website dedicated to military news said the Polisario claim was "malicious rumor of enemies of the Moroccan nation." "There is no way to attack Akka except from Algerian soil and under the eyes of the Algerian army, which would mean an explicit declaration of war by Algeria against the kingdom," it said on Facebook.

The claim is the first time the Polisario have said they inflicted losses on the Moroccan army on the kingdom's soil since mid-November, but it could not be verified independently.

Tensions rose sharply between the two sides on November 13 when Morocco sent troops into a buffer zone to reopen the only road leading from Morocco to Mauritania and the rest of West Africa, after the separatists had blocked it the previous month.

The Polisario responded by declaring a 1991 United Nations-backed cease-fire null and void, arguing the road had not existed when the truce was signed and was therefore illegal.

The two sides have since exchanged regular fire along the demarcation line. The 1991 cease-fire deal was meant to lead to a referendum on self-determination for the Britain-sized territory, home to about one million people.

Morocco has offered autonomy but maintains the territory is a sovereign part of the kingdom.

The Polisario, which fought a war for independence from Morocco from 1975 to 1991, has said it is still willing to join UN talks on the territory's future – but would not lay down its arms.

The talks ground to a halt in March 2019.

Rabat has won the recognition of its claim to sovereignty over the entire disputed territory from numerous countries, which have opened consulates in Western Sahara.



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Morocco receives 4 mln doses of AstraZeneca vaccine from India
Flood kills 24 people in illegal factory in Morocco

[Moscow calls on Iran for 'restraint' after uranium metal production](#)

Author:

Fri, 2021-02-12 02:25

MOSCOW: Russia has urged Iran to show restraint after it started producing uranium metal in a new breach of limits laid out in Tehran's nuclear deal with world powers.

"We understand the logic of their actions and the reasons prompting Iran. Despite this it is necessary to show restraint and a responsible approach," Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov told state news agency RIA Novosti. The Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said on Wednesday that it had verified the production of 3.6 grams of uranium metal at a plant in Iran.

The landmark deal – reached in 2015 by the US, China, Russia, Germany, France and Britain – contained a 15-year ban on "producing or acquiring plutonium or uranium metals or their alloys."

Iran said last month it was researching uranium metal production, a sensitive issue because uranium metal can be used as a component in nuclear weapons. Ryabkov said Iran's move demonstrated Tehran's "determination not to put up with the current situation," after it warned that time was running out for US President Joe Biden's administration to save the agreement. In 2018, US President Donald Trump dramatically withdrew from the Iran nuclear deal and reimposed crippling economic sanctions on Tehran. Trump's successor Biden is seeking to revive the agreement, but the two sides appear to be in a standoff over who acts first. Ryabkov's remarks came as Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard on Thursday began a ground forces drill near the Iraqi border, state TV reported. The report said the annual exercise was ongoing in the southwest of the country and had aimed at readiness and assessment of forces. Drones and helicopters will be used in the drill, too. In recent months, Iran has increased its military drills as the country tries to pressure President Biden over the nuclear accord. In January, the Guard conducted a drill and launched anti-warship ballistic missiles at a simulated target in the Indian Ocean. A week before that, Iran's navy fired cruise missiles as part of a naval drill in the Gulf of Oman, state media reported, under surveillance of what appeared to be a US nuclear submarine. That came after speedboats parade in the Gulf and a massive drone exercise across the country.



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France warns Iran against further nuclear breaches, jeopardising diplomacy
Iran's Revolutionary Guard begins ground forces drill near Iraqi border

Opposition Turkish lawmaker regains seat after jail

Author:

Fri, 2021-02-12 02:07

ANKARA: Enis Berberoglu, a deputy in Turkey's main opposition party, the Republican People's Party (CHP), officially regained his position as an MP on Thursday after an Istanbul court halted criminal complaints against him. Berberoglu had been convicted of disclosing confidential state documents related to Syria.

The Istanbul 14th High Criminal Court dropped charges against Berberoglu on Monday following a ruling by the country's Constitutional Court which decided unanimously on Jan. 21 that Berberoglu's rights to stand for elections and engage in political activities had been violated by lower courts because legal proceedings against him should have been suspended due to his re-election as a member of parliament during the country's June 2018 elections. Berberoglu, a former journalist, was sentenced by a lower court to five years and 10 months in jail in 2017 for his role in leaking confidential documents about National Intelligence Organization trucks allegedly carrying weapons bound for Syria.

He was found guilty of espionage and providing footage of the trucks to a dissident journalist.

Although he was reelected to parliament in June 2018, he was not released from jail until September that year, when the Court of Cassation postponed his sentence due to his reelection.

In June 2020, the Turkish parliament stripped parliamentary immunity from Berberoglu for the parliamentary term 2015-2018, and he was placed under house arrest to serve the rest of his initial sentence.

But rights activists and lawyers consistently repeated that his reelection in 2018 meant his parliamentary immunity still applied, a claim that has now been upheld by Turkey's highest court.

"While the Constitutional Court's ruling on Enis Berberoglu and his subsequent return to parliament are positive first steps, they should be the rule, not the exception," Gina S. Lentine, senior program officer for Europe and Eurasia at Freedom House, told Arab News.

Freedom House emphasizes that this same precedent should be applied to other politicians who have been jailed for their roles in the opposition, including Leyla Guven and Selahattin Demirtas, former lawmakers from the HDP.



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US State Department says policy on Turkey's S-400 remains unchanged Turkey's Syria strategy in doubt after US policy shift

[Police in the UAE impose tighter COVID-19 measures](#)

Fri, 2021-02-12 01:51

DUBAI: As the death toll from the coronavirus creeps closer to the 100,000 mark in the UAE, police forces from the different emirates have approved new precautionary measures to combat the disease.

In Abu Dhabi, the country's capital, the police were forced to break up 11 weddings.

Limiting the number of people in social gatherings is just one of the challenges facing Abu Dhabi, where the local police force announced organizers of such events would be fined AED10,000 (\$2,722) while participants would receive a AED5,000 fine.

The financial penalties have not had the effect the police were hoping for. In Abu Dhabi alone, officers reported 1,688 violations as they referred 47 organizers and 1,641 participants to the emirate's Emergency, Crisis and Disasters Prosecution Team.

#أخبارنا | #شرطة_أبوظبي تشدد الحملات الضبطية لرمذ مخالفات الإجراءات الاحترازية #أخبار_شرطة_أبوظبي
<https://t.co/MKY2vJk3M0>
<pic.twitter.com/DJhiWwAIm>

شرطة أبوظبي (@ADPoliceHQ) [February 11, 2021](#)

Dubai Police said anyone who wants to enter a police station or other official buildings within the emirate are now required to present a negative PCR test before entering. Those who have received two doses of the coronavirus vaccine are exempt.

The Ajman Emergency, Crisis and Disaster Management Team approved a new package of preventive measures that include banning concerts, festivals and events, while reducing the capacity at cinemas, gyms, parks and beaches to 50 percent. That emirate's new measures were implemented Thursday and also include the limiting of people attending weddings to 10 and funerals to 20.

فريق إدارة الطوارئ والازمات والكوارث بعجمان يعتمد حزمة من الإجراءات الوقائية الجديدة للحد من انتشار فيروس كورونا اعتمد

Posted by [AjmanPoliceghq](#) on [Thursday, February 11, 2021](#)

Similar measures were introduced in Ras Al-Khaimah, with concerts and events canceled and operating capacities in other public places significantly reduced.

The Sharjah Emergency, Crisis and Disaster Management Team, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and the Sharjah Special Education Authority, said all students in public and private schools, as well as all nurseries, would switch to remote learning until the end of the month.

The Department of Human Resources in Sharjah also instructed all employees within the emirate to work from home starting Sunday, with some exceptions permitted.

The UAE reported 3,525 new cases on Thursday, bringing the national total to 339,667 people infected with COVID-19. The death toll reached 974 after another 18 people died from the virus.

Elsewhere, Kuwait reported 1,048 new cases, raising the country's total to 175,031. The death toll rose to 985 after five deaths were reported in the past 24 hours.

تعلن [#وزارة_الصحة](#) عن تأكيد إصابة 1,048 حالة جديدة، وتسجيل 631 حالة شفاء، و 5 حالات وفاة جديدة بـ [#فيروس_كورونا_المستجد](#) COVID-19 ، ليصبح إجمالي عدد الحالات 175,031 حالة <pic.twitter.com/LhrQswaEwF>

وزارة الصحة - الكويت (@KUWAIT_MOH) [February 11, 2021](#)

Oman's Health Ministry said that its total number of cases reached 136,622 after registering 245 additional cases on Thursday. Two more patients died, raising the death toll to 1,539.

[#Statement](#) No. 287

February 11, 2021 pic.twitter.com/ppqFoyEqZ0

– وزارة الصحة – عُمان (@OmaniMOH) [February 11, 2021](#)

In Bahrain the death toll stands at 393 after two new deaths were reported. The number of confirmed cases in the country increased by 812.

Out of 13727 COVID-19 tests carried out on 11 February 2021, 812 new cases have been detected among 324 expatriate workers, 481 new cases are contacts of active cases, and 7 are travel related. There were 526 recoveries from [#COVID19](#), increasing total recoveries to 103251 pic.twitter.com/tGBa8bIAUM

– مملكة البحرين | وزارة الصحة (@MOH_Bahrain) [February 11, 2021](#)



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Dubai 'surges' health care capacity as virus cases spike Saudi Arabia announces 5 more COVID-19 deaths

[How Houthi war tactics impede vital aid flow to Yemen's needy](#)

Fri, 2021-02-12 00:06

DUBAI: Among the first steps taken by the new US administration was the reversal of the State Department's designation of Yemen's Houthi militias as a foreign terrorist organization.

The argument made by President Joe Biden's advisers and many aid agencies is that not calling the Houthis (Ansar Allah) "terrorists" would facilitate the flow of humanitarian aid into Yemen.

Trouble is, for long the Iran-backed Shiite militia has prevented UN assistance from reaching the needy, regardless of how the US administration chose to label it.

Many see the pleas by the US now to the Houthis to stop behaving like a terrorist organization as too little too late. Backed by a regime (Iran) eager to be wooed by the Biden administration, the Houthis likely think they are on a winning streak and therefore should be dialing up the action, not down.

YEMEN'S DEEPENING FOOD CRISIS

The Iran-backed Houthi militia is accused of impeding the flow of humanitarian aid



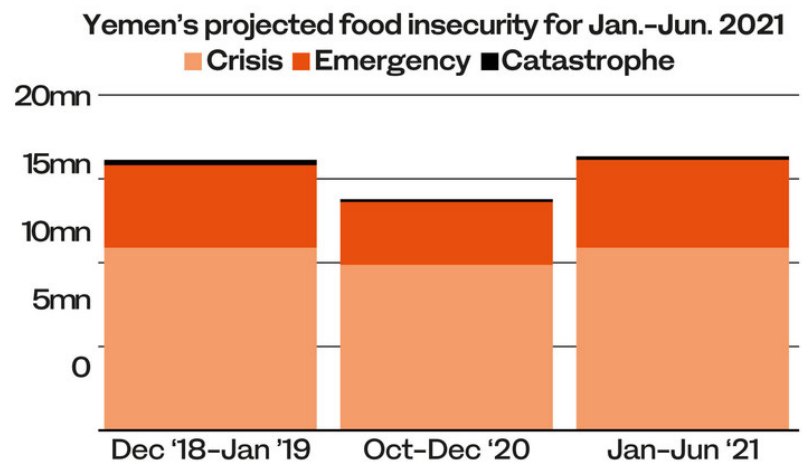
Phase 5: In catastrophe
47,000

Phase 4: In emergency
5,058,000

Phase 3: In crisis
11,042,000

Phase 2: Stressed
8,644,500

Phase 1: Secure
5,258,000



Source: WFP ARAB NEWS

For evidence of this mentality, one need look no further than the near daily drone and missile attacks on civilian facilities in Saudi Arabia, although thanks to the Kingdom's robust air defenses, the casualties have been minimal.

Since they launched an offensive against the UN-recognized government and took control of the capital, Sana'a, and other parts of northern Yemen in 2014 and early 2015, the Houthis have used banned antipersonnel landmines, fired artillery into Yemeni cities, and indiscriminately launched ballistic missiles into Saudi Arabia.

Noting that Wednesday's drone attack on Abha airport in the Kingdom's southwest, which set a civilian aircraft ablaze, happened just days after Martin Griffiths, the UN special envoy for Yemen, visited Tehran, political analyst Hamdan Al-Shehri said Iran is pushing the Houthis to carry out attacks "because Tehran is not looking for any solution to the crisis.



Wreckage of a drone used in the Houthi attack on Abha International Airport in Asir province. (Saudi Ministry of Media photo)

“It would be very strange if the Biden administration keeps the Houthis off the terror list because over the past three weeks, we have seen many attacks from the Houthi side toward Saudi Arabia and also inside Yemen,” he told Arab News.

Indeed, with the surge in Houthi attacks on population centers, one can see a pattern of behavior that undoubtedly constitutes terrorism in its purest form.

Consider the militia’s well-documented tactic of delaying permission for distribution of aid and holding prospective recipients hostage to its demands.

At the beginning of 2020, according to an AP report, the Houthis blocked half of the UN’s aid-delivery programs in Yemen, “a strong-arm tactic to force the agency to give them greater control over the massive humanitarian campaign, along with a cut of billions of dollars in foreign assistance.”

INNUMBER

16.2 million Yemenis facing food insecurity.

With the economy in free fall, the UN aid effort is a major source of foreign currency into Yemen. The UN received about \$3 billion in 2019 in

international donations for its campaign.

The Houthis had made granting access to areas under their control contingent on a number of conditions that would have given them greater sway over who received aid, the AP report said.

The Houthi demand for two percent of that budget would have diverted \$60-\$80 million into the coffers of its so-called aid-coordination agency, SCMCHA. "Harassment, intimidation and suspected embezzling of funds by Houthis have been going on for years, aid workers said, and have gotten worse since the rebels created their aid coordination agency in early 2018," AP reported.

Houthi extortion and interference came under renewed scrutiny toward the end of 2020, in a report titled "Deadly Consequences," in which Human Rights Watch (HRW) blamed the militia in particular for creating numerous obstacles for humanitarian groups operating in Yemen.



Obstacles posed by the Houthi militia has often prevented international food aid from reaching people displaced by the conflict in Yemen. (WFP photo)

"Efforts to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and respond to other urgent health needs in Yemen have been severely hampered by onerous restrictions and obstacles that the Houthi and other authorities have imposed on international aid agencies and humanitarian organizations," the HRW said.

"Since May, the Houthis have blocked 262 containers in Hodeidah port belonging to the World Health Organization as well as a large shipment of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for the COVID-19 response.

The Houthis have tried to use some of the shipments as bargaining chips in negotiations relating to the lifting of other aid obstacles and agreed to release 118 of the containers in late August or early September.”

Not mincing words, the HRW said: “The Houthis have a particularly egregious record of obstructing aid agencies from reaching civilians in need, at least in part to divert aid to Houthi officials, their supporters, and Houthi fighters. In 2019 and 2020, aid workers had to push back against Houthi officials insisting that aid groups hand over assets, such as cars, laptop computers, and cellphones to the Houthis at the end of projects.”

Four months after the HRW report came out, when Mike Pompeo, the outgoing US secretary of state, announced on Jan. 10 the designation of the Houthis as a global terrorist entity, the US Treasury Department’s Office of Foreign Asset Control issued several general licenses and exemptions aimed at mitigating the humanitarian and commercial impacts of the decision.

This was important as Yemen depends on imports to bring in 90 percent of its food and 80 percent of the population of 29 million are in need of aid.

However, the challenges for aid agencies remain daunting as the Houthis control areas where most of Yemen’s population lives and the need for aid is greatest.



WFP is aiming to reach 1.7 million children and mothers at more than 3,000 health centers across Yemen. malnutrition rates have increased with each year of war in Yemen. (WFP photo)

As the HRW’s “Deadly Consequences” pointed out: “The Houthi authorities’

onerous bureaucratic aid requirements without justification have blocked millions of Yemenis from life-saving aid. Although not the recognized government of Yemen, the Houthis should nonetheless act to protect the human rights of all people in territory they control.”

In the past, the Houthis have withheld visas and permissions for equipment and supplies and refused to grant clearances for UN missions to move through areas controlled by them.

Agency management’s willingness to concede to some Houthi demands invariably emboldened its leaders to push for more. Now, with the removal by the Biden administration of the militia from the US terrorist list in return for no concessions, the gloves are definitely off.

“I believe, in sum, that it is a message sent by Iran to the US, that Iran controls the militia’s decisions and it doesn’t want any relations between the Houthis and the US,” Badr Al-Qahtani, Yemen editor of Asharq Al-Awsat newspaper, told Arab News, referring to the attack on Abha airport, some 120 kilometers north of the Yemen border.



An estimated 16 million Yemenis are going hungry and almost 50,000 people are projected to be under famine by June this year. (WFP photo)

“When Washington takes positive steps towards the Houthis, even if the Houthis wish to reply positively, they can’t, because they don’t have a say in making decisions.

Al-Qahtani believes Iran wants Yemen to be part of the agenda if it can get the US back to the negotiating table. “I believe that UN envoy (Griffiths) as

well as the US special envoy (Timothy Lenderking) will seek to separate the two issues," he told Arab News, "because they can't ignore the fate of 29 million Yemenis, while they are the main victims of war, conflict and crisis. Or for this fate to be merely a file among many other files."

Al-Qahtani added: "I believe that this is the (real) conflict that we are currently witnessing, a conflict of files, so to speak." Meanwhile, an estimated 16 million Yemenis are going hungry and almost 50,000 people are projected to be under famine by June this year.







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